

Conservation Corner
By Jim Nellessen

Results of our US 62-180 Plant Rescue Project

The final tally of rescued plants was 2,430. The total number of different species rescued was 71 and consisted of 28 cacti species, 5 yucca and agave species, and 38 other species. Of the 2,430 plants rescued, 80% (1,955 plants) were cacti, 5% were yuccas and agaves (133 plants), and 14% (342 plants) were other species. There were 18 trips to the project area by various NPSNM Chapters and volunteers to rescue and salvage plants. Five NPSNM Chapters made it to the project site: Gila, Otero, Albuquerque, El Paso, and Las Cruces. The top 3 collecting groups with the greatest number of plants rescued: 1) El Paso, 2) Albuquerque, and 3) Rio Grande Botanic Gardens. These trips included a total 61 people who have spent more than 750 hours towards rescuing and salvaging plants along the highway corridor. Additional volunteers who did not go to the field helped manage plants post-rescue. At least another 500 hours was spent by volunteers managing plants after removal from the highway corridor. Four plant sales were held: Gila, Otero, and Albuquerque-2 (1 was by the Cactus and Succulent Society). In addition plants have been distributed to seven different public garden facilities: Oliver Lee State Park (on behalf of Otero Chapter), NM Museum of Space History (on behalf of Otero Chapter), Rio Grande Botanic Gardens (in Albuquerque), NM Museum of Natural History and Science (on behalf of Albuquerque Chapter), El Paso Water Utility reservoirs (on behalf of El Paso Chapter), Western New Mexico University (on behalf of Gila Chapter), and Silva Creek Botanical Gardens (on behalf of Gila Chapter). Chapters and volunteers have been reporting plant survival ranging from 78% to 98% with an average of 88.5%.

Grading began this spring after we finished our salvage efforts and highway reconstruction is well underway at this point. I have a few plants saved for the possibility of being returned as landscaping around a potential rest area, but the construction of a rest area is not known for sure at this point. We thank NMDOT personnel in both the District 2 Office (Roswell) and the main office in Santa Fe, as well as BLM staff for their cooperation in making this whole project even possible in the first place. We also extend much thanks the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for their financial support of this project. Jim Nellessen wants to make his own special thanks to Sandra Lynn for being the initial "seed for thought" that started the ball rolling in the first place.