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BLM gets wildlife guzzlers

Bill Papich, BLM Farmington District Office

Four wildlife water guzzlers provided by Devon Energy Corp. are being placed on Bureau of Land Management land north, east and west of Navajo Lake, to improve wildlife habitat by providing animals additional water sources.

A guzzler is a 2,250-gallon tank with an upside down umbrella shaped fixture on top that is 18 feet in diameter, to catch rainwater that is funneled into the tank. A pipe leads from the tank to a water box 75 feet away. The box is about the size of a medium size cooler, open on top so wildlife can get a drink. A float inside, similar to a toilet float, keeps the water at a constant level just below the top of the box.

Devon provided \$40,000 for the guzzlers and is helping the BLM install them. The first guzzler was installed last week (July 31) north of Navajo Dam.

"It's an honor for Devon to have an opportunity to give back to the wildlife," said Devon drilling and completion foreman Robert Jordan.

The guzzlers will provide water for deer, elk and other wildlife, including mountain lions, bears, coyotes, grey fox and wild turkeys. To keep out cows, each guzzler will be fenced with smooth wire so wildlife can crawl through or under the wire. Deer and elk can jump over the fence while other animals just fly in.

"The number of songbirds that come in and use the guzzlers is just incredible, and there are the raptors, hawks, the owls," said BLM wildlife biologist John Hansen, project supervisor. Hansen said it is not unusual for a guzzler to fill to capacity from rain and melting snow.

"Once water is captured in these tanks the evaporation is nil," Hansen said. "So when everything else dries up these guzzlers provide a reserve and emergency source of water for wildlife."

Hansen said guzzlers also give deer and elk a better chance of surviving predators because multiple water sources that are spread out also help spread out the predators. Other BLM manmade wildlife water sources include developed springs, drainage areas with small dams, ground catchment areas that funnel water to a tank, solar operated wells and sumps dug where the water table is so low that water is exposed.

Last week's guzzler installation followed much preparation of an 80-acre area surrounding the tank. A prescribed burn was conducted last fall on the land, in preparation for seeding the area with grasses and forbs beneficial to wildlife. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation contributed

\$5,000 for the preparation and the New Mexico Sikes Act provided another \$5,000. Sikes Act funds are from the \$5 a hunter pays for a stamp on his state hunting license, allowing hunters to hunt on public land in New Mexico.

Hansen said the BLM Farmington Field Office has approximately 140 manmade wildlife water sources.