

THE WILD RIVER SPEAKS: 8TH ANNUAL GILA RIVER FESTIVAL

by Richard Mahler, Newsletter Editor

Stories that connect us to New Mexico's last free-flowing river are the focus of the Eighth Annual Gila River Festival, unfolding at various locations along the river and in nearby communities from Thursday, September 13, through Sunday morning, September 16. *The Wild River Speaks* is this year's theme for the four-day event, during which participants will tell classic Gila-related tales as well as create new ones. Events are co-sponsored by members of the Gila Conservation Coalition, which includes GRIP.

As always, the Festival program includes field trips, workshops, speakers, downtown art walk, image exhibitions, performances, socializing, and conversation. Many offerings have limited space, are likely to fill up quickly, and require pre-registration and payment by September 6. Words to the wise are: Don't wait to sign up for things.

It is stories, Festival organizers remind us, "that connect us to place and community. They allow us to inhabit the natural world emotionally and to feel a visceral bond that moves us to protect that world...They shape the way we live and think."



CRAIG CHILDS (COURTESY PHOTO)

R e n o w n e d Southwest storyteller Craig Childs is the Festival's keynote speaker, delivering a 7:45 p.m. multimedia presentation at Western New Mexico University's Fine Arts Center Theater on September 14 entitled *Watercourse: A Conversation With a Moving Element*. Childs is the

acclaimed author of several books related to our region, including *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, *House of Rain*, *Animal Dialogues*, and *Finders Keepers*. An Arizona native and Colorado resident, some of his writings explore ancient civilizations of the Four Corners while others describe his remarkable modern-day adventures in the outdoors. A book signing and sale of books by Childs (including his newest) will follow his presentation. Suggested donation for admission to the talk is \$12 for adults and \$5 for students.

Childs will also teach a workshop for aspiring writers, *Writing the World*, on September 13 from 1 to 4 p.m. and dine at a private GCC fundraising dinner with five top bidders on September 15. (See the Gila Conservation Coalition's Facebook page for details on how to participate in the latter.)

Artist Elli Sorenson has created and donated a beautiful quilt to be raffled as a Festival fundraiser for the Upper Gila Watershed Alliance and Gila Conservation Coalition. Raffle tickets are being sold for \$5 each (\$20 for five) during various events, with the last chance to purchase tickets at a brunch on Sunday morning.

New in 2012 is a horseback trip with Apache outfitter Joe Saenz, who will relate Native American stories as accompanying riders ramble through the Gila watershed. On the evening of September 15 at WNMU, Saenz will join writers Sharman Apt Russell, Patrick Toomay, and Michael Casaus in a roundtable discussion of the Gila's role in our lives.

Also new to the Festival this year is a "three-minute film fest" featuring a selection of original video productions that tell individual stories about the Gila River. Submitters were asked to focus on thematic elements related to the role of the Gila in our lives, such as the river's capacity for connecting us to nature, its role in human culture, and its influence as an integral part of human spirituality. Prizes will be awarded following the premier screening of entries at Silver City's Silco Theater on Saturday afternoon, September 15.

Separately, a performance piece called *The Singularity* will be offered at 6:30 p.m. on September 14 at WNMU's Fine Arts Center Theater. The piece raises fundamental questions about human beings and nature while incorporating aspects of the river, technology, and future visions. The presentation by the Expressive Arts Interdisciplinary Program will use sound, video, and live actors. In addition to *The Singularity*, a multi-media juried art exhibition, *Electro Gila: The Power of Water*, is being presented September 15 in partnership with WNMU at its McCray Gallery.

Returning to the Festival this year are Cynthia Wolf's tracking workshop, the Gila River bus tour, a Monsoon Puppet Theatre parade, and a kayak trip. Expert-guided field trips for 2012 include an herbal plant walk with Monica Rude, birding with Brian Dolton, a geology hike with Dave Menzie, and an archaeology-themed outing with Marilyn Markel.

There will be a brunch on Sunday morning, September 16, at Silver City's Seedboat Galley that will honor author-fisherman-activist M.H. "Dutch" Salmon.

A final reminder: carpooling is encouraged and pets are not allowed at Festival events. For more information—including a complete schedule, on-line registration, and a 30-page brochure—call 575.538-8078 or go to www.gilaconservation.org.

PHOTOGRAPHER MICHAEL BERMAN'S NEW BOOK ON THE GILA TO BE RELEASED DURING FESTIVAL



Acclaimed landscape photographer and GRIP board member Michael Berman will release his newest book of photography, *Gila: Radical Visions / The Enduring Silence*, during this year's Gila River Festival. The book release party and opening reception is scheduled for Thursday, September 13, from 4 to 7 p.m. at Silver City's Bear Mountain Lodge. The new volume explores the untouched specialness of the Gila through Berman's photographs as well as 15 essays by noted writers, natural historians, and environmentalists.

Berman's large black-and-white photographs of the Gila Wilderness offer a wordless exploration into this complex and subtle landscape. He has explored the area for more than 30 years. Fascinated by the land and how people use and value it, Berman has wandered deep into the forest with his large-format camera, searching for untrammelled and solitary ecosystems, allowing the Gila to reveal itself. A former Guggenheim fellow, Berman's works have been exhibited throughout the U.S. and are displayed in numerous public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Amon Carter Museum. The photographer lives in the Mimbres Valley, near the Gila wilderness.

A selection of Berman's photographs from the book will be displayed during the opening reception. Autographed copies of a two-volume slip-cased edition will be available for purchase. All proceeds from book sales will benefit the Gila Conservation Coalition's advocacy for a free-flowing Gila River. Refreshments will be provided by Bear Mountain Lodge.