

Asombro Insights

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



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Translating Cutting-Edge Science Into New Lessons

We often say that Asombro is a translator, converting cutting-edge science discoveries, methods, and data into hands-on lessons for K-12 students and teachers. This seemingly simple task requires that we are fluent in both science and in the needs of the K-12 community. And it requires a lot of hard work!

This summer, the Asombro team is putting our translation skills to work for two very different lesson development projects.

In the first project, we are working with scientists from New Mexico State University, the University of New Mexico, and Western New Mexico University to translate what they are learning about carbon and water dynamics in New Mexico forests and watersheds. The project is funded by the National Science Foundation. Asombro is working with the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program in Albuquerque to create three engaging lessons about the project for middle and high school students.

Students will participate in a Watershed Data Jam, converting data about 500 watersheds in New Mexico into creative projects like poems, drawings, and physical models. In the second lesson, students will work in teams to learn how fire and management practices affect soil and plant health. Finally, students will install schoolyard plots to investigate the role that biochar (a material produced by burning organic matter like wood in a low-oxygen environment) might play in restoring damaged forests.

In the second project, our focus is on younger students. We're developing a new Schoolyard Field Trip for kindergarten and 1st grade students. Following the model of our Schoolyard Field Trips for older elementary school students, we're creating four hands-on activity stations that Asombro will

teach in students' schoolyards. Schoolyard Field Trips allow all students to get the benefit of outdoor learning without some of the logistical challenges that can prevent many teachers from taking their students on off-campus field trips. No bus? No problem! This project is funded by a grant to Asombro from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Outdoor Equity Fund.



2nd graders investigate microclimates in the schoolyard. With a new Schoolyard Field Trip developed by Asombro this summer, younger students will explore and discover outside in the upcoming school year.



Asombro staff learned about New Mexico forest management before developing new lessons for middle school students.

Asombro on the Road

While the majority of Asombro education programs are delivered in Las Cruces classrooms, schoolyards, and at Asombro's Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, we're being invited more often to deliver our award-winning programs outside Las Cruces too. In just the last three months, our team has given 16 classroom lessons and Schoolyard Field Trips to more than 250 students in Cliff, Cloudcroft, Hatch, La Luz, Silver City, and Vado.

We love bringing our lessons to students who don't have programs like Asombro's in their region. The students are enthusiastic participants and delight in the knowledge they gain about this spectacular ecosystem we are all lucky to call home.

"Cliff's teachers and summer students were absolutely engaged in living science the entire time Asombro was on campus. We were so pleased to have teachers with great energy, knowledge, and connection to the kids.... Having students interact with the toad, the soil experiments, and creek explorations will be lessons they remember."

-Cliff Schools Principal



Science Educator Tara Russell teaches Cliff Elementary School students about New Mexico spadefoot toads in their beautiful schoolyard.

TEACHERS GO BACK TO SCHOOL WITH ASOMBRO



On June 24, Asombro collaborated with the NMSU Los Lunas Agricultural Science Center to deliver a teacher workshop for middle school teachers. The workshop focused on research by the USDA-ARS and NMSU on agrivoltaics, the simultaneous use of land for agriculture and solar energy production.

Teachers started the workshop with a field trip with Dr. Marisa Thompson (see photo at left) to learn about agrivoltaics and other research at the Agricultural Science Center. We then headed into the classroom to practice three classroom-ready, hands-on lessons Asombro developed about agrivoltaics. The lessons are intentionally aligned with science standards used in every science class, allowing all teachers, not just agriculture teachers, to use the new lessons.

Teachers left with a kit of all the supplies they need to teach the lessons, and we look forward to hearing about their use of the lessons with their students this fall.

WONDER AWARD

for Volunteer Service

Our Wonder Award for this quarter goes to board member **Tom Williams**. Tom started serving on the board in 2025 and has been a great addition to Asombro. He saw the need for more communication, so he started a marketing working group to help spread the word about Asombro, our events, and fundraising opportunities.

For the past two years, Asombro has participated in a fundraiser at Raising Cane's. Tom has volunteered both times, talking to folks about what we do and convincing them to mention Asombro at the register (which helped us earn a portion of the sales for that day). He not only manned the table, but he did so in the Las Cruces heat!

Tom is a WONDER-ful asset to our organization, and we are so grateful to have him serving on our board. Thank you, Tom, for all of your hard work and dedication!



Tom Williams

Volunteer Celebration

We love our volunteers! On July 27, we got to show our volunteers some love during a volunteer celebration at the Asombro office.



Volunteers enjoyed snacks and camaraderie. They then enjoyed a fascinating talk on local medicinal plants by Dr. Ivette Guzman from the Department of Plant and Environmental Sciences at NMSU.

Are you interested in joining Asombro's talented and much appreciated volunteer corps? We have many ways you can give back, from attending monthly volunteer gatherings at the Asombro office to assisting Asombro staff in classrooms to joining committees run by the Board of Directors on marketing and nomination. Contact LuAnn Kilday (luann@asombro.org) for more information.



NEWS FROM THE NATURE PARK



Asombro has added many great new features to the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park this year, including a new amphitheater, a slowly growing rock snake named Caliche Carlos, and 50 new plant identification signs throughout the park.

The new plant signs were funded by a grant to Asombro from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. Installation of the signs also served as an Eagle Scout project for a local student. The new sign holders have many benefits. First, we can edit, print, and laminate the signs at our office, saving a lot of money and time. Second, we can update and replace the signs quickly, as needed. Third, the signs have more space, allowing us to include basic information like local common names and some desert adaptations.

Each sign also includes a QR code that takes guests who want to learn more to the iNaturalist page for the species. iNaturalist is a free, community science app that helps people identify plants and animals. When visitors upload photos from the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, they automatically add to our species log from the Nature Park (Biodiversity of the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park). Asombro staff members and Park visitors have contributed nearly 3,000 observations, including 547 species so far! You are invited to download the iNaturalist app and add to our community.



Vote to Support Asombro Through Target Circle

Are you part of the Target Circle program? If so, you can help Asombro raise money through September 30, 2026 with the Target Circle Charitable Giving program.

Every time you shop at Target, you earn a vote to help direct Target's charitable giving to worthy nonprofits. Visit the Target app or use your browser to visit

<https://www.target.com/circle/community-voting> to cast your votes!

Target will donate a minimum of \$500 to Asombro, and we can increase this amount with more votes. Remember, the voting ends on **September 30**. Thanks for your help!



THANK YOU! *We are grateful to our generous donors from April-June 2026*

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Save the Date - October 16

Come enjoy Nightlife of the Desert on Friday, October 16 from 6 PM - 7:30 PM at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. Learn about the many nocturnal animals of the desert, including great horned owls, bats, scorpions, and more. This is a free event, but donations to support Asombro programs are appreciated.

**YES! I want to support the
Asombro Institute for Science Education!**

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*Have you considered putting Asombro in your estate plan? Please contact
Steph Bestelmeyer (575-524-3334) if you are interested in learning more.*

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