

Rio Grande Water Fund

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RIO GRANDE WATER FUND

A WILDFIRE AND
WATER SOURCE
PROTECTION PROJECT

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The Rio Grande Water Fund will

- ◆ Generate sustainable funding for a 20 year program of large-scale forest and watershed restoration treatments; including thinning overgrown forests, restoring streams & rehabilitating areas that flood after wildfires.

Isleta Collaborative Landscape Restoration Project (Isleta Project)

The Isleta Project is located on the crest of the Manzano and Manzanita Mountains and spans three headwater streams that provide downstream drinking water to rural Hispanic and Native American communities residing in the Chilili and Tajique Land Grants and Isleta Pueblo. This area is located roughly 40 miles southeast of Albuquerque, New Mexico, and visible to a larger community of approximately 900,000 people. Because of the proximity to Albuquerque, there is high recreational use.



Pueblo of Isleta Crew ~ 2015

Large scale wildfires adjacent to tribal reservation boundaries during the 2008 fire season, initiated efforts by the Pueblo of Isleta Tribal Council, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Forest Service and Chilili Land Grant and other adjacent land owners to collaboratively develop mutually beneficial, cross-jurisdictional fuels treatments. These landscape scale treatments are designed to reduce the potential risk of wildfires and loss of important community, cultural, and natural resources and values.

This 10,420-acre project will thin forested lands on Isleta Pueblo, Chilili Land Grant and on the Cibola National Forest; which will protect water quality and drinking water supply for the communities of Isleta, Chilili and the Tajique Land Grant and adjacent private homeowners. It will also provide fuel wood which is important to these minority communities, create local employment opportunities with Hispanic and Native American youth and young adults and increase the small-scale wood

products industry. An important aspect of this project is to employ and train local crews under the Tribal Forest Protection Act. The Pueblo of Isleta and Chilili Land Grant are implementing activities on their lands by developing and training local thinning crews comprised of a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds including Native Americans and Hispanic community members. The Cibola has also developed agreements to utilize these crews on National Forest System lands through Stewardship Authorities and workforce development programs. In addition to the work funded through the Joint Chief's Initiative the Pueblo has continued restoration on the south eastern corner of their land, while Chilili has continued to thin and remove material from 290 acres of their adjacent to the Cibola. The Pueblo and Chilili have executed their work by developing and training local thinning crews comprised of a diverse mix of ethnic backgrounds including Native Americans and Hispanic community members.

Spring Growth and Summer Planning

by Laura McCarthy

Our partnerships have continued to grow since our first meeting held three years ago. We are grateful to Dekker/Perich/Sabatini for furnishing space for our Water Fund meetings. We are appreciative of their hospitality and beautiful space they provide.

With the number of Rio Grande Water Fund Charter signatories pushing 50, we will be holding the semi-annual meeting at the Bow and Arrow Brewery, which is co-owned by UNM professor and Water Fund partner, Dr. Mark Stone. We hope you will be able to join us for the first meeting on April 29.

It has been a busy year planning for “on-the-ground” work for this summer field season. It is exciting to see projects submitted through the Statement of Interest process and moving to the implementation phase. Contracts and agreements are in place, and specific activities will include:

- Tree thinning to complete the Isleta Project in the northern Manzano Mountains, Cibola National Forest
- Restoration of the San Antonio wetland meadow in the Jemez Mountains, Santa Fe National Forest
- Tree thinning in Taos on the El Salto Land Association property
- Tree thinning and prescribed burning on ranch properties in the San Juan-Chama headwaters
- Forest inventory on Taos Pueblo lands
- Archeology surveys to complete the NEPA process for:

- ◆ Tres Piedras landscape restoration project, Carson National Forest
- ◆ Golondrino controlled burn in an area near Abiquiu Reservoir, Santa Fe National Forest
- ◆ American Park adjacent to the Southwest Jemez project area, Santa Fe National Forest
- ◆ Pueblo Ridge on the north side of Taos Canyon, Carson National Forest



Williams Lake basin collects snow on the high Sangre De Cristo Mountains

With all this activity, it is time to get the monitoring crews out on the ground. Rob Strahan with the NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute is hiring four students from NM Highlands University to be the roving monitoring crew. They will visit all of the sites to collect baseline information before treatment starts, create a database to store information, and return during and after the project to collect the final data. Community members will also have opportunities for planned monitoring field trips throughout the summer with Krista Bonfantine, Arid Land Innovations.

As last year's projects begin implementation, new projects are being planned. Two landscape restoration strategies are in development; these are in the San Juan-Chama headwaters, and the other in the Santa Fe Fireshed. Both involve diverse partnerships and are on the cutting edge of collaborative, science-based planning for targeted conservation action.

The Rio Grande Water Fund partners are doing incredible work to support watershed resiliency and improve water security for future generations. Read on for details of some of the partners work, and think about submitting an article about your project for the next newsletter! All are welcome to contribute to the Rio Grande Water Fund partnership. Together we are having an impact that is greater than any of us could achieve alone.

Forest Health & Resiliency in the San Juan – Chama Watershed

by Monique DiGiorgio Executive Director, Chama Peak Land Alliance

Fire Ecology and Landscape Resiliency ~ What do southern Colorado and northern New Mexico have in common? In addition to sharing a border, the southern Colorado landscape of the South San Juan Mountains contains forested watersheds of high value to both states. The area supports traditional agricultural operations, substantial wildlife populations, tourism-based economies, and public recreation, including internationally renowned hunting and outfitting opportunities.

Located in the center of the region is the Bureau of Reclamation's San Juan-Chama Diversion. This project moves 110,000 acre-feet of water annually from the San Juan Basin to the central Rio Grande Valley, providing approximately 50% of Santa Fe County's and 90% of Bernalillo County's water supply. Three watersheds - the Navajo, Little Navajo, and the Blanco - are tapped for water that is then transferred over the continental divide to the Chama River, and then to the Rio Grande. The waters of the San Juan-Chama Diversion support nearly a million people, as well native fish and migratory birds. However, the Navajo-Blanco watersheds are at risk of large wildfires, and the subsequent post-fire debris and sediment flows that threaten communities and the consistent delivery of clean water to downstream water-users.

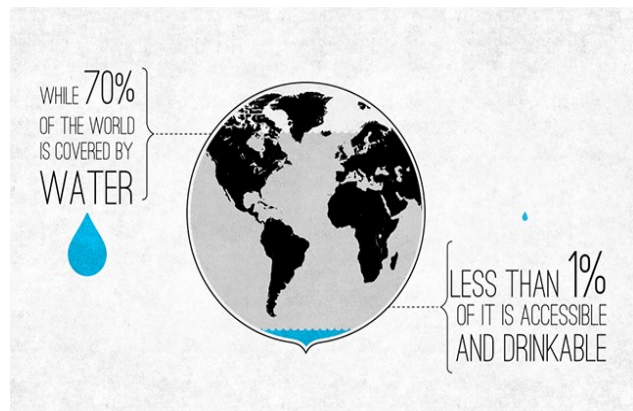
To proactively address these issues, the Chama Peak Land Alliance and The Nature Conservancy have teamed up under the auspices of the Rio Grande Water Fund. Forest treatments will be conducted over 800 acres, through prescribed fire and thinning, to improve forest health and restore wildlife habitat over the next three years. The goals of this project are: 1) Create fire plans for private lands, and coordinate fire management activities across jurisdictional boundaries, including private lands; local, state, federal agencies; and tribal and other jurisdictions in the project area responsible for fire management, including the U.S. Forest Service, 2) Share lessons learned from cross-boundary management in this forested landscape with others restoring forests in the Rio Grande Water Fund area, and with other members of the national Fire Learning Network, and 3) Increase the ability of local ranchers, community members, and local, tribal, state and federal government partners to conduct prescribed burns through trainings and workshops in the region.

Chama Peak Land Alliance ~ The Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA) is a diverse group of conservation-minded landowners committed to embracing and practicing responsible land, water and wildlife stewardship in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico for the benefit of our tri-cultural heritage for generations to come. Members of CPLA represent a land area that ranges from 7,000 feet to over 12,000 feet in elevation including portions of the Continental Divide covering approximately 250,000 acres. CPLA's conservation efforts are further enhanced by the participation of the Jicarilla Apache Nation as an official cooperator. CPLA was launched in 2010 and has quickly developed as an effective group of landowners working across traditional property boundaries to:

- Share ideas and help educate one another in areas of land management;
- Promote the conservation of open space and help deter landscape fragmentation;
- Coordinate landscape-scale management efforts such as forestry, prescribed fire and wildlife.

The Fire Ecology and Resiliency project described in this article is a fantastic on-the-ground example of the Chama Peak Land Alliance's goal of cross-jurisdictional land, water, and wildlife stewardship. Both organizations hope to build on this project with future investments and additional resiliency work. The development of a Navajo-Blanco Resiliency Plan will guide these efforts and is building additional partnerships for landscape-scale treatments for years to come.

"The Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA) is a diverse group of conservation-minded landowners committed to embracing and practicing responsible land, water and wildlife stewardship in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico for the benefit of our tri-cultural heritage for generations to come."



Legislative Success for Forestry Bills

by Eddie Tudor; State Forester–New Mexico State Forestry

Two bills with significant impacts on New Mexico's forest and watershed health were passed with bi-partisan support during the 2016 legislative session. The Revenue for Forest and Watershed Projects (SB 110) and Interstate Compact for Forest Fires (SB 128) Bills target different stages of wildfire mitigation; the former expands the scope of preventative measures, and the latter speeds up access to suppression resources during a fire emergency.

The first achievement, the Revenue for Forest and Watershed Projects Bill, enables New Mexico to accept additional funds to offset the cost of managing forest thinning projects. It was sponsored by Sen. Carlos Cisneros, D-Questa, and received public support from many of our statewide partners, including The Nature Conservancy. The bill amends the restrictions of the Forest Land Protection Revolving Fund. Originally, use of that fund was limited to covering costs associated with forestry law enforcement.

With our state's declining watershed health and increased migration to the wildland urban interface, restoration efforts are vital to protect these vulnerable areas. New Mexico has over 10 million acres of federal forested lands, producing a great need for targeted treatments. This bill will increase public lands restoration projects throughout the state, potentially mitigating wildfires around communities at risk and in critical watersheds. This growth will also support job creation for forest industry and the Returning Heroes Wildland Firefighter Program. Notably, the bill also bolsters collaborations between New Mexico State Forestry and our valuable partners. We will accelerate the progress of our interagency projects, including those championed by the organizers of the Rio Grande Water Fund.

The other accomplishment was the Interstate Compact for Forest Fires Bill, sponsored by Sen. Benny Shendo, Jr., D-Jemez Pueblo. It allows New Mexico to join the Great Plains Compact with Colorado, Wyoming, and the Dakotas. Compact members are able to directly provide one another with additional firefighting personnel and equipment during an urgent wildfire emergency.

Previously, requests for out-of-state support had to be filtered through a federal process that allocated resources nationally, resulting in delays. In an emergency situation, each minute is precious. Saving time reduces the spread of wildfire and damage to our lands and communities. The Great Plains Compact offers a net of security for New Mexico, potentially reducing the amount of time it could take to control an escalating wildfire.

As State Forester, it was a privilege to lead these efforts throughout the legislative process, and it was gratifying to finally have the bills passed. Gov. Martinez signed them into law on March 8, 2016. Now known as the "Interstate Compact for Forest Fires Act" and the "Revenue for Forest and Watershed Projects Act", their establishment made this year's legislative session a success for our state's forested lands and connected communities.

"As State Forester, it was a privilege to lead these efforts throughout the legislative process, and it was gratifying to finally have the bills passed."

THE RIO GRANDE WATER FUND GOAL IS TO GENERATE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING OVER THE NEXT 20 YEARS TO PROACTIVELY INCREASE THE PACE AND SCALE OF FOREST RESTORATION, INCLUDING THE MOST HIGH-RISK AREAS IN THE RIO GRANDE WATERSHED.

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newmexico/new-mexico-rio-grande-water-fund-2015-highlights.xml>

Visit the link below to view the 2015 Water Fund Annual Report

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/newmexico/howwework/rio-grande-water-fund-annual->

The Edgewood Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) received a Collaborative Forest Restoration Project (CRFP) Grant to treat 414 acres in the Isleta Project on the Cibola Nation Forest and 441 acres on the Pueblo of Isleta.

The project is in the first phase in accomplishing a larger restoration vision. The Cibola has made restoration in this area a Forest Service priority and will continue to implement treatments on a landscape scale while collaborating with partners and communities to design mutually beneficial projects. The emphasis of these projects are cross-jurisdictional efforts that will provide for protection of communities, cultural resources, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and improving overall watershed health while creating and sustaining local jobs. These treatments will directly protect water quality and supply in primary water source areas for the Pueblo of Isleta, Chilili Land Grant, and the Tajique Land Grant as well as private homeowners living adjacent to the area. In addition it will protect upland forest areas that have direct impacts on water quality and supply for a larger area within the Rio Grande Basin Watershed (as delineated by the Army Corps of Engineers) the Estancia Basin and the cattle and agricultural producers within the Basin.

Funding of approximately \$4.7 million is needed in Fiscal Years 2015-2019 to accelerate the pace of treatments on the Isleta Project.



Isleta Project ~ 2015

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The “Science in the Sandias Project” was created by Krista Bonfantine, Arid Land Innovation; LLC, to encompass the education and outreach for the David Canyon CFRP project.

A free mobile app has been created which allows users to take and share photos of the natural world.

Visit the iNaturalist website at:

(<http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/science-in-the-sandias>).

A blog has also been started at:

www.scienceinthesandias.org