

Rio Grande Water Fund

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The Rio Grande Water Fund is a ground-breaking project that is engaging private and public partners in protecting vital watersheds in northern New Mexico.

The Rio Grande Water Fund: Comprehensive Plan for Wildfire and Water Source Protection is the culmination of a collaborative partnership among more than 40 organizations and agencies and more than two years of research and planning guided by a diverse advisory board.

The Comprehensive Plan uses the best available data to describe the current wildfire threat to water sources and forested watersheds, setting forth a path for New Mexico's future water security.

The focus is on water as the primary resource that people value, and that originates in forested headwaters at high risk of damaging wildfire.

The Rio Grande Water Fund will generate sustainable funding for a 10-30 year program of large-scale forest and watershed restoration treatments which include restoring streams, thinning overgrown forests, and rehabilitating areas that flood after wildfires.

For more details, see the Executive Summary, which is available online at:

http://www.nmconservation.org/rgwf/rgwf_compplan_exec.pdf

"TVWC is an active coalition with a diverse set of partners representing a variety of interests in the Taos area."

Working Across Jurisdictional Boundaries to Connect Landscape and Community in Taos

By Gabe Romero, Carson National Forest East Zone Silviculturist & Ernie Atencio, Rio Grande Water Fund Program Associate

The Taos Valley Watershed Coalition (TVWC) was recently awarded \$225,000 through the Rio Grande Water Fund for restoration planning and implementation. This is a cross jurisdictional project with Carson National Forest, Taos Pueblo, and part of a former land grant called the El Salto de Agua Land Association. Taos County will serve as fiscal agent for El Salto de Agua Land Association on this project. Each jurisdiction will receive \$75,000 from the total award. Contracts will be awarded to perform archaeological surveys on approximately 2,140 acres of national forest land on the Pueblo Ridge project. Taos Pueblo will be conducting a comprehensive forest inventory on its portion of Pueblo Ridge. The El Salto Land Association will be thinning approximately 50 acres and providing fuelwood to the local community as part of Phase I in a “shovel-ready” project.

TVWC has been active since 2015 with a diverse set of partners representing a variety of interests in the Taos area. The goal is to protect and restore local headwaters of the Rio Grande Watershed. The Coalition developed a comprehensive Landscape Restoration Strategy (LRS), based on forest conditions and strategic fire management considerations, to identify and prioritize critical areas in need of treatment throughout a 280,000-acre planning area. The Camino Real Ranger District of the Carson National Forest and Taos Pueblo has taken a multijurisdictional approach to treating the landscape across boundaries. The Pueblo Ridge analysis area is approximately 24,000 acres which will perform restoration work on the watershed to protecting forest land and sacred sites in the Pueblo's Blue Lake Wilderness infrastructure along with homes and properties scattered throughout Taos Canyon.

Based on the strength of the LRS and a list of priority projects for the foreseeable future, the Coalition has been actively involved in applying for additional funding to assist with planning efforts, including applications to the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership and as part of the statewide HUD National Disaster Resilience Competition.

See the Landscape Restoration Strategy online at:

<http://allaboutwatersheds.org/library/inbox/tvwc-landscape-restoration-strategy/view>



TVWC Fieldtrip-August 2015



RGWF Semi-Annual Meeting

By Laura McCarthy,

Conservation Program Director for the Nature Conservancy

Rio Grande Water Fund Signatories convened their semi-annual meeting on October 23. Fifty people were in attendance. A video clip of the Isleta Fire Crew working on the Isleta Project in the Cibola National Forest was shown.

With 43 organizations active; the charter will no longer meet as an advisory board and the semi-annual meetings will be focused on the signatories.

Laura reviewed the allocations of over \$600,000 in private funding from the LOR Foundation.

Presentations by the Education & Outreach, Monitoring & Adaptive Management, Watershed Response and Networking & Communication work groups were presented.

A portion of the meeting was devoted to the process for setting priorities for the RGWF investments. Anne Bradley shared the lessons learned from the Requests for Statements of Interest (RSI) process.

Landscape restoration strategies from two projects on the Candidate List were presented. Ian Fox discussed the East Mountains strategy for the northern Manzano and Sandia Mountains, and Ray Corral and Gabe Romero shared the Taos Valley Watershed Coalition strategy. Cal Joyner, Regional Forester, explained the Southwest Region's priorities and priority setting process, and Kent Reid described the database project administered by the NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute that seeks to capture all recently completed and planned projects in forests and watershed across the state; which will be a critical tool for cross-boundary collaboration. Tony Delfin, State Forester, explained the State investment of FY14 and FY15 capital outlay funding and how it has been leveraged with federal, private, and other state funds, much of it through NM Department of Game and Fish. Both Cal and Tony cited the Cohesive Strategy for Wildland Fire Management oriented around three themes 1) landscape resilience 2) effective fire response and 3) fire adapted communities; all which fit well with the RGWF vision and goals.

Conclusions of this discussion and the meeting follow include:

- Capture the opportunity to coordinate the Forest Plan revision process now underway with the State regional water planning process.
- Take the lessons learned from the RSI process -- that mid-scale landscape planning through a collaborative, science-based process can help identify clear strategic priorities if they are lacking; and that the "match-making" process for funding requires projects that meet specific funder's interest -- to revise the RGWF process for fund allocation.



RGWF Semi Annual Meeting Attendees

"The 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."

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT

<http://www.forestsandrangeands.gov/strategy/>

Learning in Taos, New Mexico

A Passionate and Motivated CWPP Core Team

By Eytan Krasilovsky, *Forest Stewards Guild*

We had an unseasonably wet summer in northern New Mexico, which led to a fairly quiet fire season. As a result, the Forest Service was able to manage several naturally ignited fires for resource benefit. For those of us working to promote fire adapted communities, it has been a good opportunity to take stock of our mitigation and planning efforts.

Recently, I participated in an informative field trip in Taos County. The field trip was convened by the New Mexico Wildlife Federation and brought together many members of the Taos County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) core team, including representatives from Taos Pueblo, the Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, the Camino Real Ranger District of the Carson National Forest, Ron Gardiner—who is leading the CWPP update project, and Maya Hermann, a legislative assistant to Senator Martin Heinrich.

We met in Taos Canyon, a narrow canyon containing a series of high-fire-risk communities, and drove up to the boundary between the Carson National Forest and the Taos Pueblo wilderness. Renee, a former smokejumper, now the head of the Environment Department at Taos Pueblo, began describing his vision of forest and watershed management on Taos Pueblo lands. We learned that his vision dovetails with that of his neighbors, who also want to reduce wildfire risk, restore streams and improve watershed health.

Renee highlighted the sacred nature of the mountains and streams, as well as the challenges of employing forest thinning and prescribed fire on his land. In 1970, 48,000 acres were returned to Taos Pueblo from the federal government to be managed as wilderness. Renee described this as a hurdle that adds to planning complexity and can delay needed forest thinning and prescribed fire.

Since Taos County began their CWPP planning effort in 2006, I've been impressed with the passion of the core team, the consistency of their meetings and the success of their fund-raising efforts.

Ron Gardiner described his efforts on the Taos County CWPP update. He was interested to learn more about the FAC Learning Network, and how others are crafting CWPPs currently. We agreed to meet again to talk in-depth about CWPPs.

Link to second blog post: <http://facnetwork.org/learning-in-taos-new-mexico-part-2-cwpp-updates-and-leveraging-resources/>