

## Update from the Save Our Bosque Task Force Chair

Happy New Year everyone!

I wanted to be able to share some highlights from last year's work and efforts. The Task Force has come a long way from its beginnings as a group of different agency staff that wanted to work together on projects like Escondida Lake improvements and developing the Socorro Nature Area. Early efforts include work to get some wildfire protection along the river and offer parks and then a trail to our community members and visitors.



For the last 22 years, we have been an active nonprofit group that has worked with these same agencies and others to continue to improve our natural areas along the Rio Grande. This last year was our Program Director's first full year, she's Sarah Anderson, and she and our many partners deserve most of the credit for our accomplishments.

We completed the first step in a three-part process to update our conservation plan for Socorro County's Rio Grande. We need this product to make sure that what we are doing on the ground reflects what is resilient in the future Rio Grande. This process is open to all and we would greatly appreciate assistance and involvement from our community.

We continue to work with Socorro County on the Wildfire Risk Reduction Program projects. Bosquecito area is a priority for us with its history of large wildfires in the area, homes at risk, and past work that benefits our efforts. We are in the second year of what we hope will be a long-term project with the County and landowners.

We also completed the first full year of a five-year cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation's Albuquerque Area office. Our part of the agreement is monitoring and maintenance of six river projects to benefit the Rio Grande silvery minnow, an endangered species. We work with agencies and contractors to monitor the sites and contract with businesses to complete maintenance activities. Projects were planned and constructed by the Interstate Stream Commission and Reclamation.

We are working with New Mexico Department of Game and Fish at their management areas in the Bernardo area and with Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge at their wetland areas, both in the northern part of our county. We are monitoring and providing input to important projects on their lands. These natural

areas are jewels in our county and, along with Bosque del Apache NWR, bring many visitors to Central New Mexico.

We assisted the New Mexico State Forestry Division and others to complete the fire rehabilitation plan following the 2017 Tiffany Fire and were part of the team that implemented a large tamarisk control project within the burn scar. This work was funded through the Bureau of Reclamation and led by State Forestry.

We signed an exciting new agreement between the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, recognizing the past projects we have accomplished together and looking to continuing shared efforts. In case you didn't know, the District owns much of the bosque lands within the levee on the west side of the river, at least in the Socorro Valley. With the importance of farmland to our economy, our open spaces, and to our wildlife, having the District working closely, even serving on the board, has always been important to our group. The Task Force is receiving much needed funds to continue work with landowners along the river including the District for wildlife, our neighbors, and us!

And we have a new agreement with the City of Socorro as well. The City and the District were part of that founding agency group way back in 1993. Now we can upgrade some of the tables and fire pits at the parks and work on the trail within the city limits and on District lands. It is great to continue working with the City and with the District to make improvements that are easy to access when you want to picnic or go for a walk, run, bike ride. As part of these improvements to the picnic areas, we are also installing wheelchair accessible picnic areas to increase accessibility for people of all ability to enjoy the Rio Grande and its bosque. I hear from people in Socorro that they are getting out to the river and that our efforts to control trash and protect and improve the bosque are appreciated! It is a chance for us to get close to our local forest, our beautiful river, and just get outdoors. It's so close!

We continue our internship program, last year was the fourth year, that brings recent college graduates to our county to learn about the Rio Grande. Interns work on all the projects listed above and much more. We are hoping to give a future generation experience working in rural areas on important community issues like river ecosystems, building partnerships, restoration projects from designing to monitoring what was accomplished, plants, birds, water and land management, river sediment and so much more!

Although a rather long process, we are hoping to share an update on the possible Rio Grande Trail segment in our area. Our work with the National Park Service was halted for much of the year due to circumstance that were out of our control. Please look for that update this spring!

We always appreciate individual and organizational contributions. And this past year we received many generous donations. As you can imagine, bringing together the funds necessary to work on all of this as a team takes some time and effort. Please know we value your interest in the importance and beauty of Central New Mexico and our Rio Grande. Acknowledging that it wasn't a normal year for us but not as bad as others have weathered in 2020, we are glad that we were able to continue our important work this past year!

We are so grateful to our partners and communities along the river! We all deserve opportunities to contribute to and share the credit for its continued health.

So, keep in touch. Again, happiest of new year.

Gina