

United States

Collaborating to halt the devastation of wildfires in New Mexico

As climate change increases the risk of wildfires in New Mexico, multiple groups and stakeholders are working together to invest in solutions to help protect water sources.

The context

In 2011, New Mexico's largest ever wildfire burned through more than 63,000 hectares in one week. Known as Las Conchas, the fire was not the first extreme event New Mexico had experienced, and climate change is projected to exacerbate incendiary conditions. As average temperatures increase, high-density forests dry out and die creating a vast source of fuel. Reducing the risk of wildfires has become ever more important for New Mexico; not only to prevent catastrophic destruction from burns, but also to protect water sources. Shortly after the Las Conchas fire, New Mexico experienced downpours that quickly washed all the wildfire debris and ash into the Rio Grande. Ash-laden water ultimately prevented Albuquerque from receiving its supply of water from the Rio Grande for 40 days.

The action

In order to protect the water supply for the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, tribal lands, surrounding communities and other water users, The Nature Conservancy began developing the Rio Grande Water Fund in 2013. The fund brought together over 50 new partners

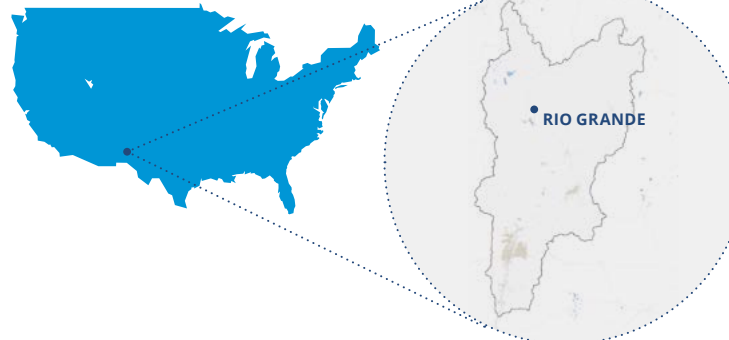
such as businesses, water utilities and government forest managers. While the initiative is focused on tangible activities such as tree thinning, stream restoration, flood control and wildfire management, the scale of natural ecosystems restoration requires direct collaboration among stakeholders.

The future

Uniting multiple water users under the Water Fund model has helped align mandates across diverse stakeholders and overcome jurisdictional accountability challenges. The fund is expected to restore 688,000 hectares of fire-prone ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forest across the Rio Grande watershed stretching some 320 kilometers from Belen all the way to the Colorado border. The fund has leveraged funding sources to create greater efficiency of resources, and mobilized a collaborative, multi-partner approach. Watersheds and water supplies across a landscape of almost 700,000 hectares are now protected by the fund's activities.



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The impact of wildfire on just one acre (0.4 hectares) can have a price tag of up to US\$2,150, while thinning one acre as a preventative measure costs only US\$700 on average.

Read the full story at: global.nature.org/content/beyond-the-source

Lead the way to a secure water future with the Water Funds Toolbox

What are Water Funds?

A Water Fund is a framework that enables cities, communities and companies to invest in the management of the landscapes where their water is sourced; so that upstream forests and wetlands are protected to continue naturally cleaning and filtering water. Upstream communities can benefit from enhanced livelihoods and improvements to health and wellbeing whilst downstream communities experience improved water quality and, in many cases, fewer disruptions and shortages.

What is the Water Funds Toolbox?

The Water Funds Toolbox is a step-by-step online guide for developing a Water Fund. It features videos, testimonials, templates, tools, case studies and much more. The heart of the toolbox is the Water Fund Project Cycle, which outlines the five phases that take a Water Fund from feasibility through to maturity.



Ready to make a difference?

Develop your knowledge

Through the Water Funds Toolbox you can access the state of the art curriculum for developing Water Funds. Authored by Water Funds practitioners for practitioners.

Curriculum includes:

- Water Funds 101
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Action Planning
- Courses specific to governance, science, finance, implementation and communications

[nature.org/WaterFundsTraining](https://www.nature.org/WaterFundsTraining)

Build your network

Join the global community of Water Funds practitioners working to apply and refine the Water Fund model around the world.

Network activities:

- Webinars
- Discussion boards
- News
- Member profiles
- Recognition programs
- Network-wide competitions
- Peer learning & review

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Water Fund Project Cycle

1

Feasibility

Defining the problem, attracting partners and hiring the WF Director

2

Design

Developing a strategic plan with solutions and establishing the WF governance

3

Creation

Formalizing the WF structure and official launching

4

Operation

Developing and implementing annual work plans

5

Maturity

Securing the WF's long-term viability and creating large-scale impacts