

New Mexico

2025 Year in Review



From the Director

Dear Friends,

2025 was a year that brought great change and challenges. We are seeing our natural systems and wildlife experience the profound impacts of budget and personnel cuts to federal land management agencies, as well as the loosening or elimination of legal conservation protections on public lands and the expansion of energy development projects throughout our state and our country. Despite all of this, we have endured.

For nearly 50 years, The Nature Conservancy has been working throughout New Mexico, creating a legacy of conservation. And yet, I believe that this is the most important moment in my 40-year career in conservation, and I have no doubt that there is no other

organization more well positioned to protect our ecosystems and communities than TNC.

As you will see in the following pages, over the past year we have continued our work to protect rivers through innovative water management tools. We are working on the ground to protect and restore forests and watersheds. And we are purchasing and permanently conserving large tracts of land to create vast protected areas for wildlife. The unifying principles for all our work continue to be our commitment to utilizing the best science, and our unwavering commitment to working with Indigenous communities to support their vision for conservation.

With the challenges that we are facing, we recognize that this is our time to stand up for nature and for people. We are committed to our vision of protecting our lands and waters for future generations, so that our great-grandchildren will have the same opportunities to hike, to fish and bird-watch, or simply to revel in nature.

Thank you for your support, it means so much to us—especially at this time.

All the best,

Terry Sullivan, State Director

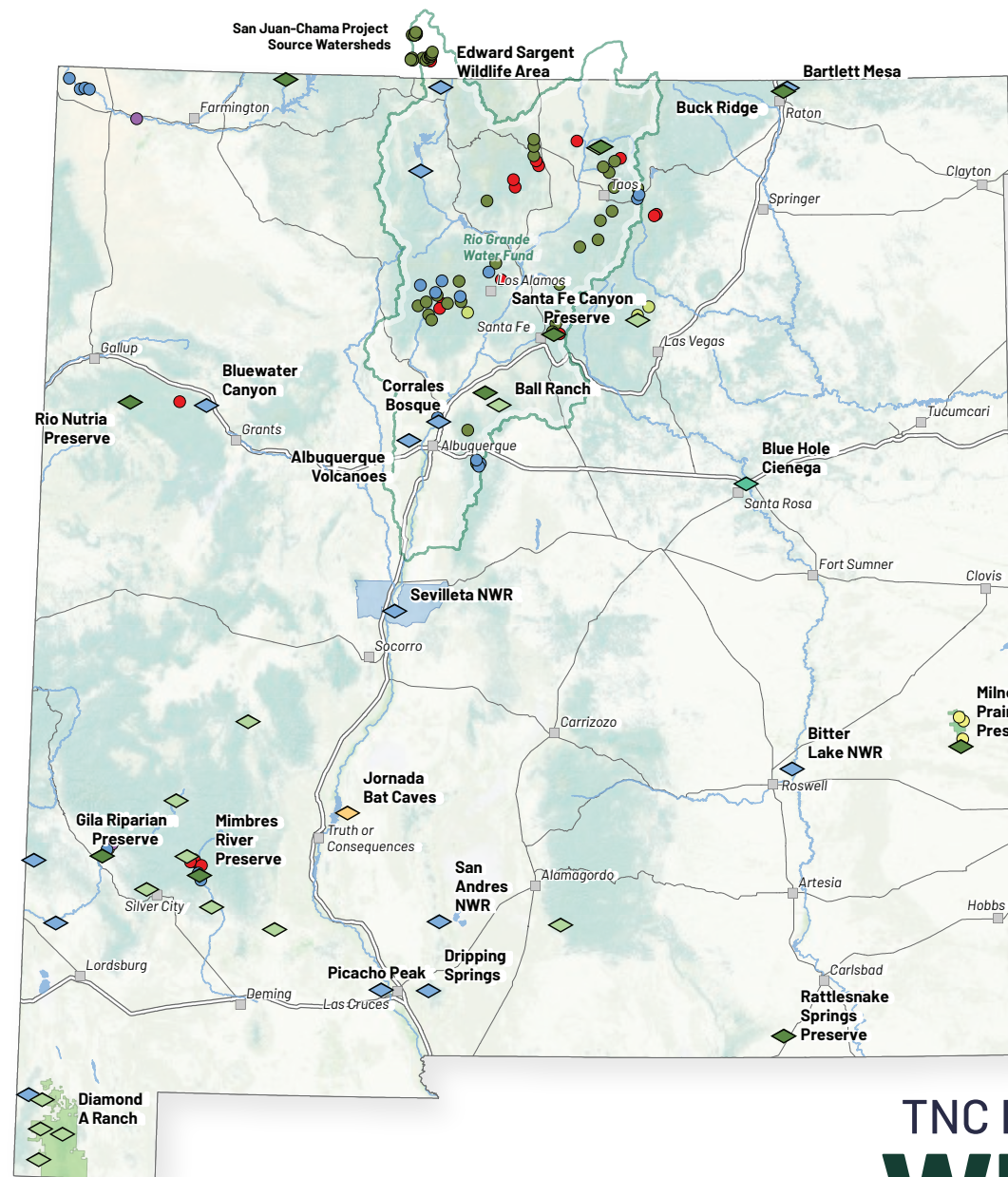
The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico

Board of Trustees

Jamie Aranda Lopez <i>Treasurer</i>	Jennifer Parks <i>Secretary</i>
Devendra Contractor	Terese Richmond
Eileen Grevey Hillson	Sabino Rivera
Nicole Hixon	Nancy Sauer
Marilyn Holscher	Wilson Scanlan
Julie Melton	<i>Vice Chair</i>
Robert Moss <i>Board Chair</i>	Chris Staggs
	Phoebe Suina

Chapter Staff

Terry Sullivan, *State Director*
 Erica Andersen, *Conservation Planner*
 Steve Bassett, *Director of Conservation Programs*
 Elle Benson, *External Affairs Associate*
 Martha Cooper, *Freshwater Program Director*
 Bowen Gibson, *Interim Director of Development*
 Alberto Granados, *Director of Finance and Operations*
 Rose Gildersleeve, *Indigenous Partnerships Manager*
 Gregor Hamilton, *Southwest Field Representative*
 David Hernandez, *Land Stewardship Manager*
 Aaron Jones, *Spatial Scientist*
 AJ Jones, *Forest and Watershed Health Mgr.*
 Will Joy, *Prescribed Fire Specialist*
 Danielle Kagan, *Digital Marketing Coordinator*
 Cheryl Marino, *Development Specialist*
 Sullivan Peraino, *Associate Director of Development*
 Cat Petersen, *Operations Manager and HR Liaison*
 Lena Rueck, *Media Relations Manager*
 Lindsay Schlageter, *Assoc. Dir., Mktg. & Comms.*
 Jason Scullion, *Forest Strategy Director*
 John Waconda, *Indigenous Partnerships Program Dir.*



TNC New Mexico Where We work:

Cover: © Buck Ridge Ranch © Fauna Creative; This spread top to bottom: New preserve signage at Santa Fe Canyon Preserve now includes information in English, Spanish and Braille. © HyunjuBlemelPhotography; A bobcat caught on camera at Rattlesnake Springs Preserve © TNC; Rio Nutria Preserve © Cat Petersen



How Protecting Forests in Colorado can Help Secure Water for New Mexico

In southern Colorado's forests, landowners, water utilities, contractors and conservation groups are joining forces to protect one of the Southwest's most vital resources: water.

This year, thanks to The Nature Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund, forest thinning and watershed restoration projects are happening in the upper and lower Navajo River Watershed. These efforts aim to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, which can severely impact water quality and supply for communities downstream, including Albuquerque, Santa Fe and the Jicarilla Apache Nation.

Led by The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico, Chama Peak Land Alliance and a network of local partners, the work is part of a broader strategy to restore 15,000 forested acres in the three source watersheds of the San Juan Chama Project that play a vital role in the Rio Grande water system.

"About 75 percent of Albuquerque's water and half of Santa Fe's comes from these watersheds," says Caleb Stotts, executive director of Chama Peak Land Alliance. "So, protecting this area from wildfire not only benefits people living locally, but it also helps secure water for hundreds of thousands of people living hundreds of miles away."

The project in the lower Navajo River watershed includes approximately 60 to 70 acres that will undergo restoration efforts, supported by drone imagery captured before and after the work to

help evaluate results. Nearby, the upper Navajo Headwaters project spans 48 acres and is guided by similar conservation goals. Success is measured not just in acres treated, but in outcomes, like the absence of severe wildfire, improved wildlife habitat and increased snowpack.

Funding for the projects—approximately \$200,000 this year—comes from the Rio Grande Water Fund, which pools support from a mix of grants, private donors and partnerships with entities like the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority. The Nature Conservancy acts as a conduit, sub-awarding funds to local implementers that work directly with landowners.

"Many of these landowners see their role as caretakers of the land," says AJ Jones, forest and watershed health manager for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico. "And they understand that what happens upstream affects everyone downstream."

As the American Southwest faces reduced snowpack and more extreme weather due to severe drought and a changing climate, protecting water at its source has never been more urgent. The Rio Grande Water Fund helps connect funding and support from communities downstream, like Albuquerque and Santa Fe, reach the mountain areas where their water originates and where restoration work is needed most. By investing in forest health in these regions, the Fund helps safeguard clean, reliable water for many generations to come.



**About 75 percent of
Albuquerque's water
and half of Santa Fe's
comes from these
watersheds.**



Prescribed Fire at Black Lake:

A Collaborative Effort to Restore Forests and Protect Communities

After being suppressed for more than a century, prescribed fire is being reintroduced to the landscape in the high country of northern New Mexico, as a carefully planned tool for forest restoration. At Black Lake, prescribed burns are helping to reduce wildfire risk and protect nearby communities, thanks to a long-standing collaboration between The Nature Conservancy, the Forest Stewards Guild and local fire departments. The prescribed burns at Black Lake have evolved from early training exchanges into a community-based fire management event.

“The State Land Office doesn’t have its own prescribed fire program,” says Will Joy, prescribed fire specialist for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico. “So, partnerships are essential. We rely on groups like Angel Fire Fire Department, Moreno

Valley Fire Department and the Forest Stewards Guild to get the job done. These relationships matter because they help build trust with the community and ensure fire is used safely and with care.”


This past year, the team was able to conduct its sixth burn together near Black Lake. This burn was part of a maintenance phase that reintroduces fire to an area that was previously treated. This second round mimics natural fire intervals and helps maintain the ecological benefits of earlier work.

Prescribed fire is a proven tool to improve forest health and mitigate wildfire. It works by clearing out vegetation that fuels dangerous wildfires, improving wildlife habitat and helping restore the natural integrity of forest ecosystems.

“These burns are safe, effective, and essential for long-term forest health,” says Joy.

Historically, fire was a natural part of landscapes across the United States, sparked by lightning or intentionally set by Indigenous communities to manage the land. However, after a century of fire suppression, when wildfires spark today, they are often intense. With homes, roads, and infrastructure scattered across fire-prone areas, large-scale natural fires pose serious safety risks.

“Prescribed burns let us choose the timing, conditions and location of the fire, so we can reduce the risk of large scale wildfires in the future. Instead, it lets us use fire as a tool to protect both nature and communities,” adds Joy.



"Prescribed burns let us choose the timing, conditions and location of the fire, so we can reduce the risk of large-scale wildfires in the future."

—Will Joy, prescribed fire specialist for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico

Protecting the Hi-Lo Country and Growing Public Lands for the Future

A dream to grow tourism and recreation opportunities while also conserving beautiful and important landscapes, has moved one step closer to fruition with the recent transfer of Bartlett Mesa Ranch from The Nature Conservancy to the state of New Mexico.

Bartlett Mesa Ranch sits just outside of Raton in northeastern New Mexico, right across the border from Colorado. The property is mostly high-elevation grasslands, reaching 8,500 feet with seasonal wetlands and volcanic rock sprinkled throughout the property. There are dramatic clifftop views down into Sugarite Canyon and endless vistas across the mountains and

plains across two states. It's also home to incredible native wildlife including elk, mule deer, mountain lion and black bear. Many bird species live on or migrate through the area including mallards, redtail hawks and ravens.

The Nature Conservancy purchased the 2,224-acre ranch in 2022 as part of a broader vision with the city of Raton of regional connectivity for hikers, wildlife watchers and outdoor enthusiasts. That collective vision is to build a sustainable outdoor recreation economy while also conserving outdoor spaces and protecting a key portion of the city's watershed.

Earlier this year, the state of New Mexico officially acquired Bartlett Mesa from TNC, establishing it as a Wildlife Management Area and completing one piece of the larger conservation and recreation puzzle.

"This acquisition will help preserve Bartlett Mesa and the wildlife that call it home for generations to come," says Mike Sloane, director of New Mexico

Department of Game and Fish. "But this WMA is also about access and outdoor recreation—expanding the public's ability to hike, hunt, view wildlife and explore the rugged beauty of northern New Mexico."

The state of New Mexico will be working with partners, including New Mexico State Parks, The Nature Conservancy and the City of Raton, to determine future management of the property to best serve wildlife and conservation needs, as well as outdoor recreation interests.

"We are thrilled to complete this property transfer to the state as we work toward this larger vision for the spectacular Hi-Lo Country of northeastern New Mexico," says Terry Sullivan, New Mexico state director for The Nature Conservancy. "Working to develop collaborative solutions for people and nature is at the heart of our work, and this project truly embodies that ethic as it enables us to conserve a network of lands and waters across state boundaries to support the wildlife and communities that depend on them."

Bartlett Mesa © Fauna Creative



CHECK IT OUT

Grassland Guardians: Stories from the Southern
High Plains, a documentary featuring TNC's
grasslands work, is now streaming on [PBS.org](https://www.pbs.org)

© Fauna Creative



Wildfire Rescue:

Salvaging Endangered Species During the Trout Fire

The Nature Conservancy's Mimbres River Preserve, located 30 minutes east of Silver City in southwestern New Mexico, offers a home to two important endangered species: the Chiricahua leopard frog and Chihuahuan chub. These species became the subject of a rescue effort earlier this year that demonstrates how conservation efforts are enhanced through partnership and planning.

The Mimbres River Preserve is an irreplaceable riparian area covering 600 acres and 5 river miles. The river is a closed-basin desert stream—meaning its surface water never flows out of the Mimbres River Basin. But over its 90-mile length, the Mimbres covers a wide and diverse landscape, from its headwaters near 10,000 feet in the Aldo Leopold Wilderness of the Gila National Forest to its terminus in the Chihuahuan Desert grasslands near the Mexican border.



Because of its unique habitat and restoration work that TNC has conducted over the years, the Mimbres River Preserve offers a thriving environment to support the endangered Chiricahua leopard frog and Chihuahuan chub. Once found in more than 400 aquatic sites in the Southwest, the frog is now found at fewer than 80 locations, while the chub is so rare its entire known population in the United States lives in a few deep pools in the Mimbres River, most of which are on land owned and protected by the Nature Conservancy in New Mexico.



Last summer, the Trout Fire burned 47,294 acres across the Gila National Forest, prompting widespread evacuations. As the fire grew, the highest severity portion of the fire began to threaten the Mimbres River Preserve with extreme fire weather, pushing the fire toward the river. It also sparked the need to move quickly to protect the endangered species that depend on the Mimbres River and might be threatened should the fire burn through the property.

"We knew as we watched the fire spread and become more severe that we needed to start thinking about how we were going to protect these rare species that were threatened by their proximity to the fire," says Gregor Hamilton, TNC's southwest New Mexico field representative.

Post-fire flooding puts aquatic species at risk because ash-laden water removes oxygen and

kills aquatic organisms. These ash and debris floods also restructure habitats by filling in pools and riffles, which can negatively affect species like the chub and frog. So it is important to be able to act swiftly to preserve the species and then continue to work on habitat restoration in the long term to ensure the populations can thrive after the immediate threat is gone.

Working together with partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Gila National Forest, The Nature Conservancy put together a "species salvage" plan to capture and move as many frogs and chubs as possible to a nearby spring and out of the Mimbres River.

The plan was approved, but mandatory evacuations were called for the area on the day of the proposed salvage as the fire approached the property. These were quickly followed by monsoon rains, which

caused a flash flood. With the potential for uncertain weather to continue, TNC and our agency partners were able to move quickly and protect eight fish and four tadpoles during the short window of time they had before another post-fire flash flood hit the area.

"While the salvage numbers may sound low, it was important to get as many as we could before a large-scale fish die-off occurred. It was also significant that the various agencies were able to coordinate with each other throughout the state to get on the ground ASAP," adds Hamilton. "I'm proud of the work we did to salvage these fish and frogs because it was a truly collaborative effort. It is an example of how we are stronger when we work together, especially in extreme conditions. We definitely could not have done this alone, and now we are more prepared in the event we have to do this again in the future."

Empowering Indigenous Leadership:

Reflecting on a Year of Collaboration

Indigenous Peoples are among the Earth's most important stewards. Their leadership is essential to conservation and the sustainable management of lands, waters and ecosystems globally. At The Nature Conservancy, this commitment is grounded in the Voice, Choice, and Action (VCA) Framework, which centers around equity, inclusion and respect for Indigenous sovereignty. Listening to learn, increasing capacity and convening leaders are at the heart of this approach—and they guide work happening across New Mexico today.

For Rose Gildersleeve (Tlingit & Inupiaq), The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico's Indigenous partnerships manager, this work is deeply personal. Raised in the remote native coastal village of Yakutat, Alaska, where glaciers, rainforests and oceans shaped her way of life, Rose grew up in a place where water was—and remains—sacred. Moving more than 2,200 miles to Santa Fe, New Mexico, she's found resonance in the Southwest's own deep reverence for water as a lifeblood resource. "Back home, we say that water connects everything. Here I often hear that 'water is life.' That shared value makes the transition feel natural. It's a privilege to work alongside Tribal Nations whose relationships with land and water are as enduring as they are vital."

Over the past year, Rose has focused on building and nurturing relationships with Indigenous partners across New Mexico to create enabling conditions for Tribal-led conservation. A cornerstone of this work has been her involvement with the Tribal Fire & Forestry Working Group (Tribal Working

Group), an Indigenous-led collaborative space that brings together New Mexico's Pueblos, Tribes, government agencies and NGOs to exchange knowledge and strengthen stewardship practices.

"The Tribal Working Group was originally formed as a Reserved Treaty Rights Lands group," says John Waconda (Isleta Pueblo), a founding member and the director of TNC in New Mexico's Indigenous Partnerships Program who's been working in fire and forestry in New Mexico for more than 35 years. This federal program, administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, helps to protect Tribal natural and cultural resources on non-tribal lands like National Forests that are at high wildfire risk. While the program created the foundation, the group has evolved into a collaborative learning space where Tribal voices lead the conversation and where traditional knowledge and Indigenous science inform collective action.

Rose sees this model as vital for the future of conservation. "This is a place where Tribal leaders are at the forefront," she says, "sharing the podium and shaping the conversation alongside governmental agencies and partners."

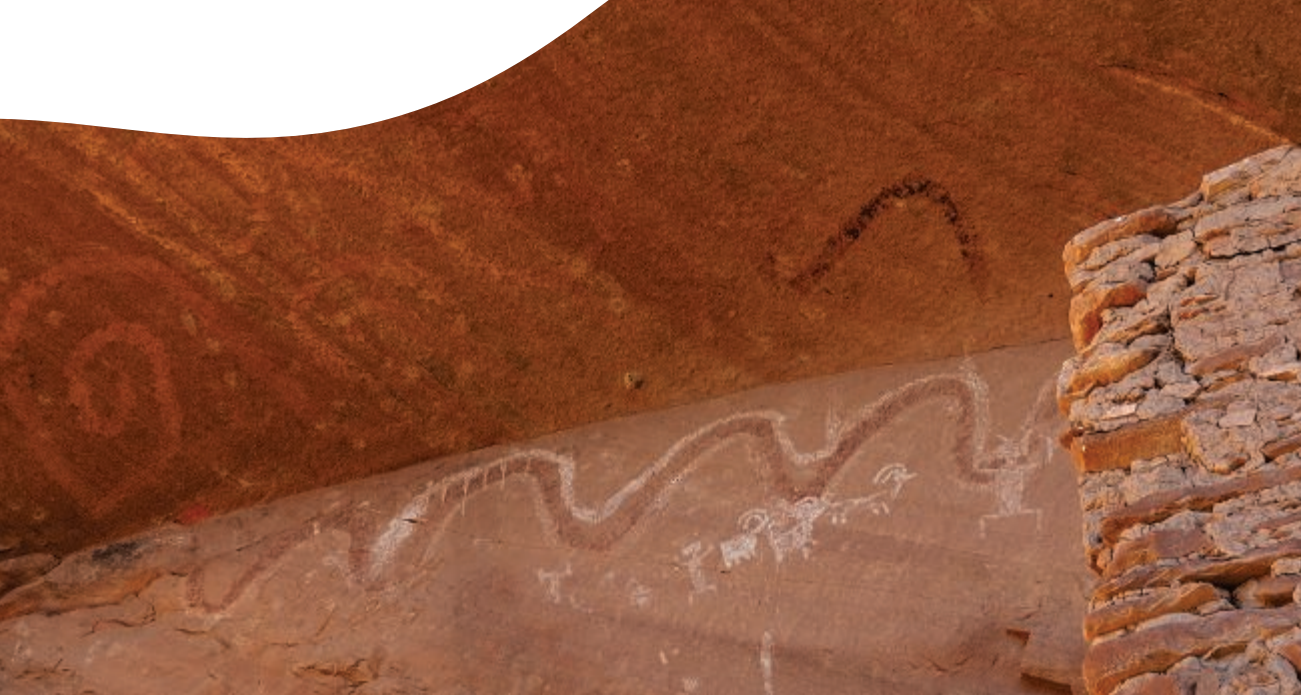
This year, the Tribal Working Group, along with the Pueblo of Jemez's Department of Natural Resources, organized a powerful field trip to the Valles Caldera National Preserve in northern New Mexico. The visit highlighted the Pueblo's journey to reclaim stewardship of ancestral lands and develop co-management plans rooted in their cultural and ecological priorities.

"We're not only restoring ecosystems," Rose reflects, "we're restoring relationships. It's important for Tribes to learn from and inspire each other on their journeys to reclaim stewardship and connection to ancestral lands."

This work is especially critical given historical suppression of Indigenous practices. For more than a century, federal policies prohibited cultural burning—a traditional practice that sustained ecosystems, supported food and water systems, and connected people to ceremony and community. Today, the Tribal Working Group is helping to bring those practices back. Rose is researching and advocating for state policies that recognize cultural burning as a vital tool for forest restoration and watershed health.

The group's momentum continues to grow, meeting quarterly and culminating in an annual two-day summit each spring. This year's summit took place in the homelands of the Mescalero Apache Tribe, where Tribal and community leaders came together and explored topics such as post-fire recovery, risk management and trust-based philanthropy.

This type of collaboration is expanding beyond forests to rivers. In September, TNC and Tribal Nations with connections to the San Juan River basin co-hosted a three-day river trip funded by the America the Beautiful Act. The gathering created space for 25 participants to build enduring partnerships, discuss climate impacts, exchange knowledge on river history and Indigenous science, and envision a healthier river system through shared stewardship.



“These relationships create space for Indigenous Leadership. Tribal ecological knowledge isn’t just valuable—it’s central to a winning strategy for conservation efforts across the Land of Enchantment.”

— Rose Gildersleeve (Tlingit & Inupiaq)

Clockwise from top left: Pictographs along the San Juan River
© Dave Showalter; Rose Gildersleeve © Lindsay Schlageter;
Floating down the San Juan River © Joe Trungale/TNC

Meet Celene Hawkins

TNC's New Colorado River Program Director



Celene Hawkins is the new director of TNC's Colorado River Program. Celene has been working in the Colorado River Basin for more than 15 years and has extensive experience in water law and working with Tribal Nations. She brings a passion for partnership, as well as a critical understanding of projects and policies that will be paramount to the role as she leads the program at an extremely pivotal time for the entire basin.

We asked her a few questions about her connection to the Colorado River, her excitement about her new role and her hopes for the future of the river.

Tell us about your background and what brought you to The Nature Conservancy?

I grew up in northern Nevada and Northern California (in the eastern Sierras) before heading east to the intermountain west to study and work. I have always lived in places experiencing water scarcity and that are in or connected to management of the Colorado River Basin. During my childhood, I got to have a lot of kitchen table discussions with family friends who were active in the Quincy Library Group (an early multi-stakeholder collaboration that addressed some really tough local forest management and endangered species issues). I knew from an early age that I wanted to focus on conservation work, and this early exposure to collaborative conservation really shaped my life and career path.

I came to The Nature Conservancy because of the organization's non-partisan and solutions-oriented approach to work in the Colorado River Basin. I wanted to be part of an organization that was building a better future for the Colorado River Basin (and that worked to protect the Basin for both nature and people).



What are you most excited about in your new role as program director?

I am really excited to work with The Nature Conservancy's staff across the Colorado River Basin to care for the Colorado River. TNC has amazing teams working in every U.S. state in the Basin, with many Tribal Nation partners, and in Mexico in the Colorado River Delta. It is such an honor to lead our Colorado River Program and help these teams make a difference across such a large landscape!

What gives you hope for the future of the Colorado River Basin?

I have hope for the future of the Basin because of how many different people, governments, communities and organizations care about the Colorado River and are willing to work together for a better future. I am also raising my family in the headwaters of the Colorado River Basin, and I think a lot about how our work today will matter for future generations and how to mentor and empower the next generation of water leaders in the Basin. Spending time with future water leaders gives me so much hope for the Basin's future!

Reviving our Rivers

Every year in New Mexico, we follow the snowpack in the winter to see how much water we will have for the rest of the year. As our ongoing drought continues, snowpack continues to diminish, and we are experiencing hotter and drier conditions each year; 2025 has been no different.

This past summer, we saw stretches of the Gila and Rio Grande rivers run dry for weeks or months at a time. When this happens, farmers aren't able to irrigate their fields, people don't walk the floodplain and the river goes eerily quiet as birds and other wildlife seek water elsewhere.

In the face of this, local communities and people who work on water are working hard to create and use flexible tools to support our rivers and people who depend on them. A gathering in May, hosted by The Nature Conservancy and partners, facilitated conversations between agencies and organizations about how to keep water in rivers to benefit the environment and people. The Strategic Water Reserve, a program in NM that enables the state to lease or buy water from willing offerers, is a great example of one tool. The water can be used for obligations downstream, benefit threatened and endangered species, and support aquifer recharge.

"I was heartened to see the collaboration and enthusiasm that came out of this meeting," says Martha Cooper, freshwater program director for The Nature Conservancy in New Mexico. "It truly represents how committed people are to working together to find and test flexible and creative solutions to mitigate the impacts of our drier future, improve our water resilience, and care for our rivers and one another."





The Nature Conservancy
New Mexico Chapter
1613 Paseo de Peralta, Suite 200
Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87501
nature.org/newmexico

NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 2216

f facebook.com/New.Mexico.Nature.Conservancy
x x/nature_newmexico
i instagram/nature_newmexico



A Unique Opportunity for Giving

"It's a family tradition," says Andy Eiseman, whose family has been supporting The Nature Conservancy for at least 50 years.

For Brian Braa, it's The Nature Conservancy's "intentional and strategic approach to projects and use of donor dollars" that sparked his commitment to giving.

Together, Andy and Brian support TNC through a TNC-hosted Donor Advised Fund that can provide significant tax advantages. Once established, this type of fund allows donors to manage their charitable giving simply and efficiently and

make distributions to TNC and other charitable organizations based on their recommendations.

"We feel confident that our money is stewarded in a way that will have a positive impact for TNC, while also supporting issues we care about. We couldn't be more pleased with our experience and would definitely recommend this way of giving, in addition to a legacy gift."

For more information about establishing a TNC-hosted Donor Advised Fund, or other gift-planning opportunities, please contact Sullivan Peraino, Sullivan.Peraino@tnc.org



Andy and Brian © Courtesy of Andy Eiseman and Brian Braa