

**Final Report
December 2021
Wetlands Standards, Wetlands Action Plans, and Improved Non-
Regulatory Program Elements for New Mexico
Assistance Agreement No. CD-01F10901-D (FY2016)**



Riverine Wetlands near Blue Springs, Eddy County, New Mexico (credit CEHMM from Black River Wetlands Action Plan.

**New Mexico Environment Department
Surface Water Quality Bureau
Wetlands Program**

Wetlands Standards, WAPs, and Non-Reg Elements Phase 4
December 2021

Project Goals and Objectives

This project achieved key capacity-building activities of the New Mexico Wetlands Program Plan for a comprehensive wetlands program:

- 1) Wetlands Water quality standards and designated uses for the Southern High Plains playas in NM.** Currently, wetlands are included in the definition of Surface Waters of the State in New Mexico's Water Quality Standards codified in 20.6.4 NMAC. However, site specific criteria are currently not applied to wetlands and unclassified waters are presumed to support designated uses that are not always a best fit for all wetland types. Under this project a Wetlands Standards Team was developed including Maryann McGraw (WPC), Emile Sawyer (WPO) and Rachel Jankowitz (SWQB TMDL and Assessment Team) to research and develop a white paper for Wetlands Narrative Standards for Playas of the Southern High Plains (SHP). The Wetlands Program chose to develop a narrative standard that is targeted by wetland subclass rather than for all wetlands in NM as a test case. In addition, the Wetlands Program has developed a New Mexico Rapid Assessment Method (NMRAM) for assessing Playas of the SHP that can be tested for use in meeting wetlands narrative standards needs. Playa Wetlands are included in National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) mapping and the Wetlands Program is completing remapping of these wetlands and using additional classifications that allows them to be labeled with discreet assessment unit names and codes for this group of more than 4000 isolated wetlands in NM. Using the EPA wetland narrative standard template and other information sources, a draft of a narrative standard and designated uses for Playa Wetlands of the SHP wetland subclass was developed. This includes proposing the refining the definition of SHP playas classified segment in the New Mexico Administrative Code, developing a justification for a narrative standard, providing defensible data, preparing draft narrative language for the water quality standards and list of proposed designated uses. Two new additional designated uses, groundwater recharge and biodiversity, were proposed as derived from the EPA wetland standard templates. A Summary of Recommendations was also included for further development and approval of this wetlands water quality standard.
- 2) The framework for incorporating data into our SWQB database will be improved by a protocol for specifying wetlands assessment units (AUs).** Emile Sawyer (WPO) worked with Saint Mary's University of Minnesota Geospatial Services to develop a method for naming mapped wetlands as assessment units under a separate grant CD #00F906-01-0 "Fire and Water: The Interplay Between Wetlands and Fire Management." This project continued the assessment unit naming effort, particularly naming conventions for playa wetlands. The discussion used playas of the SHP as an example of wetlands not associated with other water bodies as they are isolated depressional wetlands. The outcome was that the assessment units would be based on HUCs and latitude-longitude locations so that each playa would

have a unique identifier. Including the HUCs would provide a general location and the latitude-longitude provides a specific playa within a unique name. The outcome is a naming convention and a map of playas with assessment unit identifiers.

- 3) Development of three Wetlands Action Plans.** This Project developed three additional Wetlands Action Plans (WAPs) for watersheds or regions in New Mexico. WAPs were developed for Arid-Land Spring Ciénegas of New Mexico statewide, for the Black River Watershed in southern New Mexico, and for the Santa Rosa area in central New Mexico. These WAPs can be accessed at [Wetland Action Plans \(nm.gov\)](http://WetlandActionPlans.nm.gov).

The findings of the WAP for Arid-Land Spring Ciénegas is that 169 arid-land spring ciénegas are documented for New Mexico. However, only 114 are considered still functional or restorable. Numerous land use and climate change impacts are endangering these rare wetlands. The most pernicious are aquifer capture and depletion, water diversion and excavation of impoundments, erosion and arroyo cutting, non-native weeds, and overutilization by livestock. The known arid-land spring ciénegas are scattered throughout the state and within a variety private, tribal and government ownerships. There are huge knowledge gaps, not only in the locations of arid-land spring ciénegas, but also in their individual hydrology, biota, and ecology within the local landscape.



Figure 1. Lang Ciénega, Hidalgo County, New Mexico, with Chihuahua sedge, flatsedge, alkali muhly and scattered Goodding's willow trees. (Credit B. Sivinski, Wetlands Action Plan for Arid-Land Spring Ciénegas)

The Black River has been substantially impacted by water impoundments, oil and gas development, historical land uses and increasingly, climate change. As with most freshwater systems, the Black River Watershed provides many important ecosystem services to the residents of southeastern New Mexico. Changes to historical flow regimes and water quality, however, have negatively impacted the native species of the watershed like the Texas hornshell mussel (*Popenaias popeii*), a federally endangered mollusk and Pecos gambusia (*Gambusia nobilis*) a federally endangered fish; and thus the community at large. Currently there are 36 state listed species and 7 federal listed species with known populations or a range that includes the Black River Watershed. These species as well as other wildlife that uses wetlands are considered within the restorative and protective priorities for the Black River Wetlands Action Plan.

The Santa Rosa wetlands are unique in the arid Southwest where water resources are sparse and critical for the needs of the environment and people. The wetlands are so extraordinary that they meet most criteria for designation as “wetlands of international importance”. Robert Sivinski (wetland expert) explored a Ramsar designation and determined that the Santa Rosa Wetlands meet 7 of 9 criteria for Ramsar designation. Only one of the nine criteria is necessary which further highlights the remarkable nature of Santa Rosa wetlands. The purpose of this Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan is to bring together members of the Santa Rosa community to begin articulating and documenting a comprehensive approach to preserving and restoring their notable wetland resources. The WAP includes background information and prioritizes wetlands in the project area where activities should be designed and implemented when funds become available. A school curriculum was also developed for Santa Rosa Schools as part of the Santa Rosa WAP.

These exceptional plans unique to the regions and communities they represent have proved invaluable to engage stakeholders, expedite restoration, and improve protection of wetlands in their areas of coverage. In addition, stakeholders use the plans for fund raising and grant applications including River Stewardship state funding and CWA Section 319 watershed protection federal funds. All completed WAPs are now included as acceptable watershed plans for applying for CWA Section 319 funds for watershed restoration in New Mexico.



Figure 2. Pecos Sunflowers in the Blue Hole Cienega Nature Preserve near Santa Rosa, NM. (Credit B. Sivinski).

The WAP Program involves the integration of wetlands issues into the watershed mission and promotes a new level of stewardship of wetlands through cooperative approaches. This Project continues progress establishing a self-sustaining mechanism for localized involvement to monitor, manage, protect, and restore wetlands throughout New Mexico. Natural and existing conditions of wetlands are better recognized and understood by watershed groups, landowners, land managers, communities, and stakeholders, who in turn engage in activities to protect and restore wetlands and increase overall wetland area in their watersheds.



Figure 3. Wetlands along the Black River (credit CEHMM from Black River Wetlands Action Plan).

4) Improve and Expand Wetlands Program Non-Regulatory Element. The Task was modeled after the Cross-Regional Collaboration exchange of information to increase voluntary conservation and restoration developed by Montana, Oregon and Wisconsin. Because key partners of the Wetlands Conservancy Project were no longer available to participate with New Mexico, the Wetlands Program developed a new approach following the guidance of the Final Report for the Wetlands Conservancy Project to improve multi-stakeholder activities. The Wetlands program participated in the Rio Grande Water Fund Consortium as an approach to expanding the non-regulatory capacity of the Wetlands Program. The Rio Grande Water Fund is a consortium of over 100 Charter Signatories (including NMED) that work to improve the upper watershed of the Rio Grande in New Mexico to make it more resilient to catastrophic fire and climate change and for water quality benefits. The Rio Grande Water Fund headed by the Nature Conservancy provides funding for watershed improvements including Stream, Wetland and Riparian improvements. EPA defines voluntary restoration and protection as “activities not required by statutes or regulations,” and recognizes that voluntary projects and programs provide opportunities to build partnerships, share data, pool resources among agencies and organizations, and educate the public about the value of wetlands and water resources. The Wetlands Program devoted the Spring Northern and Southern Wetland Roundtables in 2020 to activities that improve and promote collaboration and partnerships to protect and restore wetlands and increase wetland acreage in New Mexico. In 2020, the Wetlands Program participated in planning calls for a Beaver Summit headed by the Defenders for Wildlife non-profit organization, to expand the non-regulatory program elements of the Wetlands Program. Ultimately, the Summit was conducted as a webinar with attendance of approximately 100 people on October 27, October 30, November 2, and November 14, 2020. It was originally planned for an in-person meeting in June 2020, which changed due to covid restrictions.

Other activities that built partnerships, promoted the sharing of data and educated the public included the following:

- Wetland activities were coordinated with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF). This included discussions about project scopes of work and potential restoration contractors and assisting NMDGF with pre-implementation monitoring for anticipated riparian restoration by NMDGF. SWQB staff assisted NMDGF in the creation of “Bridge and Culvert Construction Guidelines for Stream, Riparian and Wetland Habitats.” Malia Volke (NMDGF) also participated as a member of the Technical Advisory Team for the Arid-Land Cienega WAP.
- The Wetlands Program contributed information to a statewide group that was presenting a case to the State Legislature regarding a Statewide water data collection repository.
- The Wetlands Program participated in WOTUS meetings and provided comments on the Federal legislation that would significantly reduce protection of New

Mexico's waters and wetlands. The Wetlands Program also engaged speakers about WOTUS at both the Southern and Northern Wetlands Roundtables in December 2019, so that participants would be informed and able to comment on the changes to the Clean Water Act. Emile Sawyer (WPO) provided comments on WOTUS letter for the Santa Fe River Commission.

- 5) Trainings.** Two tasks under this project provided significant trainings to partners and agencies in New Mexico - two trainings for roads/transportation personnel, and a training for crew leaders for volunteer restoration.

A contract with Natural Channel Design for "Planning and Conducting Two Roads Workshops for the Protection of Wetlands, Floodplains and Surface Water Quality" provided the two roads and wetlands trainings - one in Clovis, NM for roads and playa wetlands on the east side of New Mexico, and one in Farmington on the northwest side of New Mexico. The Clovis training included county and state DOT maintenance crews from New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma for the first roads workshop. The training was conducted in conjunction with the Wetlands Across Borders Meeting: Playas of the Southern High Plains and facilities were shared for both the meeting and the Roads Workshop. Sixteen participants from state (Texas and New Mexico) agencies, Oklahoma tribes, Departments of Transportation, county maintenance crews and watershed groups attended the two and one half-day training on December 13-15, 2017. The training focused on roads and playas and included field review of road impacts on four playa sites and the restoration design of the Woods Playa that was completed as a demonstration in a previous Wetlands Program Development grant awarded to NMED Wetlands Program. The attendees were transported by van to the playa sites so that training could continue during the ride to the playa sites. Notebooks were created for the attendees with the training materials.

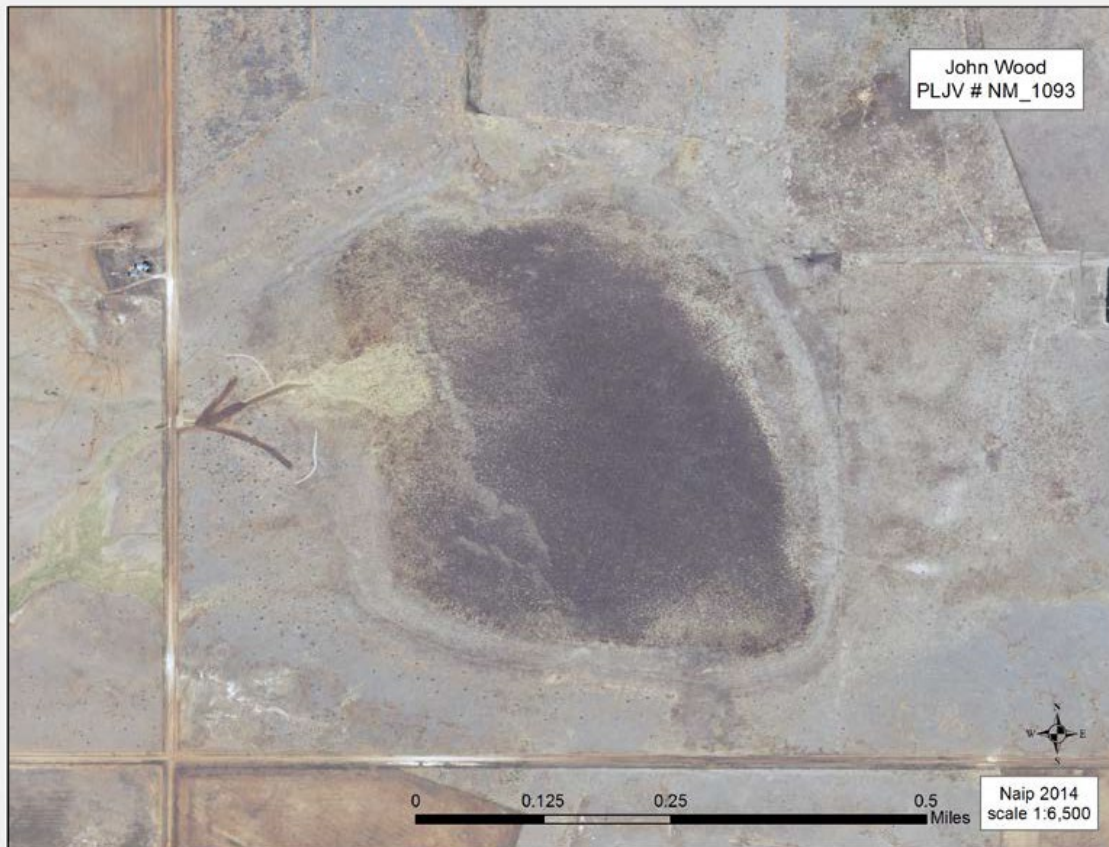


Figure 4. Wood's Playa in Curry County was visited during the Playas Roads Workshop in December 2017. Flow was directly entering the playa through a degraded channel and creating a fan that was filling in the playa. Restoration diversion structures that carried the flow away from the main channel to side channels that filter the sediment was presented to the attendees. The main channel was filled in with excavation materials from the shallower side channels. Filters made of recycled cement cobbles prevent more sediment entering the large playa.

The second roads training was conducted in the Farmington Area on April 10-12, 2018 with 26 participants in attendance. There was a wait list for this workshop and it was completely at capacity. The Training was held at San Juan Community College in Farmington to target attendees from western New Mexico, however attendance was represented from all over the state and included some from Arizona (Navajo Nation and USFWS) and Denver Colorado (Department of Transportation). Handouts were created for the participants including a CD of roads, wetlands and stream practices developed by Bill Zeedyk. The Training included a field portion.

The construction of transportation infrastructure has historically had a detrimental impact on wetlands by reducing wetland size, stability and ecological function. Traditionally designed roads, bridges, culverts and road maintenance have resulted in altered natural wetland hydrology and function. Reduced functionality results in loss of important wetlands and riparian habitat, creates long-term instability, and increases maintenance and costs. However, road design can work with rather than against existing hydrologic processes. This task answered the demand for more

wetlands design information and training to reach more agency personnel, to test and utilize methods to design and maintain road systems that do not have a negative effect on wetlands.

Raised Culvert Inlet

- Restore or create upstream wetlands and wet meadows
- Install culvert elbows or by construct dike around the culvert

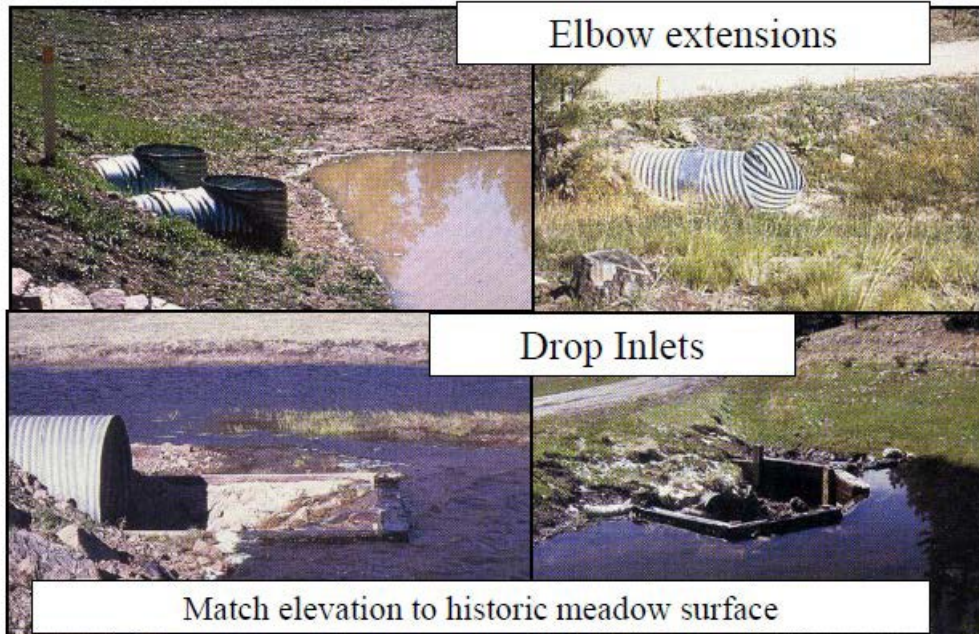


Figure 5. Example of restoration practices explained during the roads trainings. (from Natural Channel Design and Keystone Restoration Ecology)

New Mexico has seen a growing interest in volunteer work weekend participation to restore wetlands. Groups like Trout Unlimited, Quivira Coalition and Albuquerque Wildlife Federation provide hundreds of volunteer hours consistently to restore wetlands each year. However, the interest and effectiveness of volunteers is lost when there are not enough leaders to provide guidance, instruction and safety during restoration and monitoring efforts. Volunteer weekends attract large numbers of volunteers to remote sites and scenic landscapes to restore and learn about wetlands.

A contract with Wildland Restoration Volunteers provided an excellent 3-day training for volunteer crew leaders on May 16-18, 2019. The training was conducted at the Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge in Mora, New Mexico with Bill Zeedyk and the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation participating and eleven trainees in attendance. Trainees were taught how to work with volunteers and teach to

different styles of learning, conflict resolution, safety with tools and at the site, planting and wetland restoration techniques, and other important information that was included in a Manual distributed to the attendees. An optional potluck dinner wrapped up the three-day training. Participants were encouraged to provide leadership roles in volunteer restoration for wetlands restoration in 2019. In 2020, Covid 19 restrictions prevented volunteer opportunities where trainees could lead to be postponed. Trained group leaders will make future restoration efforts even more successful.



Figure 6. Planting techniques are demonstrated at Crew Leader Training at Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge.



Figure 7. Participants are taught how to design and lead volunteers in installing restoration structures by Bill Zeedyk at Crew Leader Training at Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge.

6) **“All Hands” New Mexico Rapid Assessment Method (NMRAM).** This Task involved the recruitment, coordination, training and support of voluntary teams to conduct "All Hands" volunteer data collection campaign using the NMRAMs developed to date for Lowland Riverine and Montane Riverine wetlands. In preparation for the “All Hands” effort, the SWQB Wetlands Program and its contractor, University of New Mexico Natural Heritage New Mexico conducted an “All Hands Partners Planning Meeting” for groups interested in using NMRAM for data collection for their projects or watersheds in August 2019 in Albuquerque (classroom portion) and in the Jemez Mountains (metrics refresher) with 14 participants attending. Este Muldavin and Elizabeth Milford of UNM Natural Heritage presented NMRAM to the attendees to gauge interest and participation in the data collection effort. Preparation of groups to participate in All Hands was offered to interested groups and organized by the Wetlands Program and UNM staff. The goal of the All Hands was to help groups use NMRAM to collect data from their project sites, or as an alternative, to collect data from sites considered high quality to add to the suite of reference sites for New Mexico.

Two groups participated in the All Hands data collection at sites of their selection in late summer 2019, and All Hands was planned to again be presented in Spring 2020. The New Mexico Environment Department switched to teleworking in March 2020 due to Covid-19 so the All Hands MOA with UNM was amended to on-line outreach tasks because all field work was suspended. Presentations about All Hands was

made at two NM Wetlands Roundtables to create a dialogue about monitoring and decision-making using NMRAM. A Survey Monkey was distributed as part of outreach, and an “All Hands, Phase 2” was planned for future training and data collection efforts under a future Wetlands Program Development Grant. The goal is the “All Hands” data collection using NMRAM will become a recurring annual event.



Figure 8. Participants on Redondo Creek at the Valles Caldera National Preserve conduct Montane Riverine Wetlands NMRAM on October 15, 2019. Este Muldavin, Yvonne Chauvin and Amy Urbanovski from UNM Natural Heritage provided guidance during the data collection effort.

All Hands provides agency personnel, tribal personnel, NGOs and contractors with incentives, skills and information to perform assessments using the NMRAM to ensure a quality baseline in data collection and foster a sense of community and cooperation between UNM, the SWQB Wetlands Program and the participants. The assessment information gathered by the participants helps target resources more successfully to restore and protect vulnerable wetlands, to achieve a net increase in wetlands resources. Assessment of wetlands provides insight to appropriate BMPs to maintain, protect and improve wetland condition and to avoid further degradation to wetlands.

- 7) Outreach and Technical Transfer through additions and improvements to the SWQB Wetlands Program website.** During the course of this project, Wetlands Action Plans, updates to NMRAM Field Guides, wetlands mapping data, Technical Guides, Storymaps, useful links and other important information were added to the SWQB Wetlands Program website. The newest version of the Wetlands Program website can be found at [New Mexico Wetlands Program \(nm.gov\)](http://New Mexico Wetlands Program (nm.gov)).
- 8) Attend and/or present at wetlands conferences and training sessions.** This Project also supported the training of SWQB staff through attendance and giving presentations/posters at Northern New Mexico Climate Research Symposium and Climate Adaptation Roundtables in Pojoaque, NM (2016), Quivira Coalition Conference (2019), New Mexico Virtual Beaver Summit (2020), Association of State Wetland Manager’s Annual State and Tribal Coordination Virtual Meeting (2020), and attendance and presenting at local meetings such as the Rio Fernando de Taos Revitalization Collaborative Group Meeting (2018), Amigos Bravos Strategic Planning Meeting in Taos NM (2019), La Cienega Valley Association Community Breakfast (2020), Santa Rosa Sunflower Festival and Santa Rosa County Fair (2021).

Project Outcomes

- The SWQB Wetlands Program has made considerable progress toward the development of narrative water quality standards for playa wetlands of the southern High Plains region of New Mexico and the development of naming conventions for wetlands assessment units as a part of this Project. This effort increased the SWQB in familiarity with wetlands standards development and is fostering institutional change to incorporate wetland-specific water quality standards. The naming of wetlands Assessment Units will improve database entry and access, improve tracking of wetland resources, and applying water quality standards for New Mexico wetlands.
- This Project developed three new WAPs. An analysis of the contents of these plans and the many previously developed plans, is providing the foundation for statewide wetlands conservation and Wetlands Protection Act for New Mexico that will incorporate the recurring and innovative themes, strong and informed partnerships, unique and effective ideas, and sustainable funding and other resources that are a successful product of the Wetlands Action Plan planning process. The Wetlands Action Plan Program continues to engage watershed groups and stakeholders throughout the state. As more and more WAPs are developed, protection and restoration of wetlands becomes a certainty.
- This project engages partners to more effectively restore wetlands by training volunteers and watershed groups, by improvements in road design/wetland interactions, and by regularly assessing wetland condition. The technical training

of volunteer crew leaders increases coordination and effectiveness of restoration by volunteers. The Roads and Wetlands trainings promote institutional change in road construction, maintenance, creating healthier wetlands and increasing acreage. Participation in “All Hands” increases wetlands assessment data available for decision-making and provides each participating team wetlands assessment data for their own use.

- Updating the Wetlands Program Website with current wetland project information and resources improves communication and access to Wetlands Program information and increases the effectiveness of the SWQB Wetlands Program.

Original Timeframe

The Award for this grant CD #01F10901, includes five projects that originated in October 2015. The Notice of Award for this project (Cooperative Agreement CD #01F10901-D) was issued on May 10, 2016. On January 5, 2018, EPA approved a no-cost grant extension for the Award to September 30, 2020. In September 2019, a no-cost grant extension was requested specifically to accommodate two other projects in the Award but affected the end date for all projects in the Award and the new end date of April 30, 2021, was approved on October 4, 2019. On October 2020 the Wetlands Program requested a no cost extension to September 30, 2021 because NMED was experiencing project delays due to COVID-19, specifically the final two Wetlands Action Plans experienced delays in contract funding and needed additional time because outreach events and in-person meetings with stakeholders were suspended.

Partners Involved

Successful partnerships were forged with our principal partners including:

Quivira Coalition and Santa Rosa Stakeholders

CEHMM and Black River Watershed Stakeholders

RCS Southwest and Arid-Land Springs Cienega Wetlands Action Plan Steering Committee members

UNM Natural Heritage New Mexico and All Hands participants

Natural Channel Design, Inc. and Keystone Restoration Ecology, Inc., and Roads Workshop participants

Wildland Restoration Volunteers, Inc, Bill Zeedyk Consulting, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation, Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge and volunteer restoration team leader trainees.

EPA Region 6 Wetlands and Water Quality Protection Division

Outreach and technical assistance were conducted for the following groups to promote the WAP process.

- San Juan Watershed Group
- Isleta Reach Stewardship Association
- Santa Fe River Commission
- A.T. Cole to form a coalition representing arid land spring cienegas
- Amigos Bravos to present to Rio Fernando de Taos Revitalization Collaborative Group
- Trout Stalker Ranch to promote WAP for the Chama Watershed
- Association of State Wetlands Managers
- La Cienega Valley Association

Additional partners who contributed to this project:

Malia Volke (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Riparian Ecologist) created a GIS layer of known Arid-Land Spring Cienegas.

Toni Ott (EPA Region 8) supplied the Final Report and guidance for the Wetlands Conservancy Project.

Abe Franklin (SWQB Watershed Protection Section Manager) suggested looking into using WAPs as alternative to Watershed-based plans under the information on “alternatives to watershed-based plans,” of the Nonpoint Source Guidelines, with particular attention to the “five elements”.

Collin Haffey (The Nature Conservancy) for the Rio Grande Water Fund and Stream, Wetland and Riparian Improvement projects.

Bob Sivinski (RCS Southwest) to identify and describe wetlands for Wetlands Action Plans.

Rachel Jankowitz (SWQB MASS) for assistance with the development of wetlands water quality standards.

EPA representatives Kerryann Weaver (EPA Headquarters), Wanda Boyd (EPA Region 6) and Dr. Eliodora Chamberlain (EPA Region 7) guidance for the Wetland Standard for Playas of the Southern High Plains.

Funding

The original project amount was **\$254,686.00 federal** and **\$94,825.00 match**. The final **federal amount was spent** the final non-federal match amount was **\$170,622.93** which was **\$75,797.93 overmatched**. See semi-annual reports for details.

Project Highlights and Chronology

- SWQB Wetlands Program was awarded federal assistance for this project. Signatures on the Cooperative Agreement between NMED and EPA were completed on May 10, 2016, and project work commenced.
- Maryann McGraw (Wetlands Program Coordinator (WPC)) is the Project Officer for this project.
- WPC presented “Steps in the Development of Wetlands Standards – New Mexico” in an ACWA/ASWM webinar on July 26, 2016.
- EPA published the 100 Anniversary edition of Non-Point News Notes in October 2016, and the WPC is quoted regarding the development of water quality standards for wetlands.
- The WPC met with A.T. Cole (private landowner) and Malia Volke (New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Riparian Ecologist) on November 10, 2017 to discuss the organization of a group to represent cienegas in southern New Mexico.
- The WPC met with stakeholders and groups to promote and implement Wetlands Action Plans (WAPs), including WAPs for the Animas Watershed and for the Rio Ferndando di Taos Watershed.
- Lynda Saul, Montana Wetlands Program Coordinator, and a key Wetlands Conservancy Project contact for non-regulatory program elements task retired from her position. The WPC requests the Final Report for the Wetlands Conservancy Project to continue work on this task.
- The Wetlands Program Team met on November 16, 2016, to assign Tasks for small contract awards.
- The WPC has populated a shared file with all WAPs developed to date for inclusion on the NMED Wetlands Program website.
- The WPC attended the Northern New Mexico Climate Research Symposium and Climate Adaptation Roundtables at the Buffalo Thunder Resort in Pojoaque, New Mexico on November 15-16, 2016.
- The updated Wetlands Program Plan for New Mexico has been approved by EPA on March 14, 2017.
- Maryann McGraw (WPC) participated in two meetings with the Troutstalker Ranch Wetlands Restoration Project Team for wetlands planning on the Chama and promoted the WAP process.
- Malia Volke (NMDGF) distributed a GIS Map that she created of known Cienegas in New Mexico in December 2016 as a follow-up to discussions in November 2016.
- The WPC contacted Toni Ott in EPA Region 8 for the final report of the Wetlands Conservancy Project to draw guidance on land trusts, local governments and

multi-stakeholder collaboration. The report was finalized and forwarded to the WPC on March 31, 2017.

- Because key partners of the Wetlands Conservancy Project were no longer available to participate with New Mexico, the WPC proposed alternatives for completing this task following the guidance of the Wetlands Conservancy Project final report.
- On February 2, 2017, March 6, 2017 and April 20, 2017, the WPC met with Natural Heritage New Mexico to discuss the “All Hands NMRAM” initiative.
- An RFQ for developing WAPs was distributed to interested stakeholders in May 2017.
- The Current WAP Guidance document was distributed internally at SWQB for input and comments. Abe Franklin, SWQB Watershed Protection Section Manager, suggested looking into using WAPs as alternative to Watershed-based plans under the information on “alternatives to watershed-based plans,” of the Nonpoint Source Guidelines, with particular attention to the “five elements”.
- The WPC is populating a shared file with all WPDG Final Reports to be included on the Wetlands Program website.
- On April 3, 2017 Emile Sawyer attended the Santa Fe Generating Station Hydrogeologic Framework presentation by Dr. John Hawley. Emile attends the Santa Fe River Commission monthly meetings to promote and implement the WAP for Santa Fe County.
- A contract with RCS Southwest was completed for a WAP for New Mexico’s arid-land cienega wetlands.
- A Steering Committee meeting for the Cienega Wetlands Action Plan was conducted on August 11, 2017.
- A contract was executed with Natural Channel Design on October 2017 for conducting two Roads and Wetlands training workshops.
- Karen Menetrey is participating in the Rio Grande Water Fund Consortium as an approach to expanding the non-regulatory capacity of the Wetlands Program. As a member of the Rio Grande Water Fund, Karen Menetrey reviews and ranks stream, wetland and riparian projects for annual funding through the Rio Grande Water Fund.
- Wetlands Action Plan pages are linked to Watershed Protection Watershed-based plan pages as a website update and also in preparation for promoting WAPs as an alternative to watershed-based plans for 319 funding.
- The first Roads and Wetlands training workshop was held December 13-15, 2017 in Clovis, New Mexico in conjunction with the Wetlands Across Borders Workshop.
- The WPC, Emile Sawyer and Kris Barrios (SWQB Monitoring, Assessment and Standards Program Manager) met on December 20, 2017 to discuss naming conventions for wetlands.
- The second Roads and Wetlands training workshop was conducted in Farmington, New Mexico on April 10-12, 2018.

- Web developers are updating the URLs to make it easier to find documents under the SWQB Wetlands Program.
- Two stakeholder field meetings were conducted as part of the WAP development for arid-land cienegas, one at the Blue Hole Cienega in Santa Rosa, NM on September 14, 2018, and one at the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve south of Santa Fe, NM.
- A list of known arid-land cienegas in New Mexico was developed by RCS Southwest for the WAP for New Mexico's arid-land cienega wetlands. The List added over 100 New Mexico cienegas and a shapefile of the cienegas sites was developed.



Figure 9. Attendees at Blue Hole Cienega Stakeholder Field Meeting and springbrook through Blue Hole Cienega, Santa Rosa, NM on September 14, 2018.

- Karen Menetrey attends Rio Grande Water Fund meeting to expand capacity of non-regulatory program elements on November 1, 2018.
- A Steering Committee Meeting was held on December 5, 2018, in Santa Fe to discuss the Arid-Land Cienega WAP draft.
- Collin Haffey (TNC) gave a presentation about the Rio Grande Water Fund and Stream, Wetland and Riparian Improvement projects at the Northern Wetlands Roundtable in December 2018.
- Under the Non-Regulatory Program Elements task, the Wetlands Program coordinated wetland activities with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF). This included discussions about project scopes of work and potential restoration contractors and assisting NMDGF with pre-implementation monitoring for anticipated riparian restoration by NMDGF.
- The WPC was invited by Amigos Bravos to present the Wetlands Program and WAP process to the Rio Fernando de Taos Revitalization Collaborative group on November 28, 2018 in Taos, New Mexico.
- Hard copies of NMRAM Field Guides were printed for use during All Hands NMRAM field data collection.
- The WAP for Arid-Land Cienegas was completed by RCS Southwest in January 2019.
- The SWQB Wetlands Program printed 60 copies of the Arid-Land Cienega Wetlands Action Plan and the Plan is posted on the SWQB Wetlands Program website.

- Karen Menetrey attends Rio Grande Water Fund meeting to expand capacity of non-regulatory program elements on February 8, 2019 to submit comments and final recommendations on two new wetlands/riparian projects.
- The WPC provided Wetlands Program assessment and monitoring descriptions for the development of a Statewide water data repository and data sharing initiative (Water Data Bill) presented to the State Legislature.
- The Wetlands Action Plan for Arid Land Spring Cienegas was presented by Bob Sivinski at both the Southern Wetlands Roundtable (March 12, 2019) in Las Cruces and the Northern Wetlands Roundtable (April 1, 2019) in Santa Fe, NM.

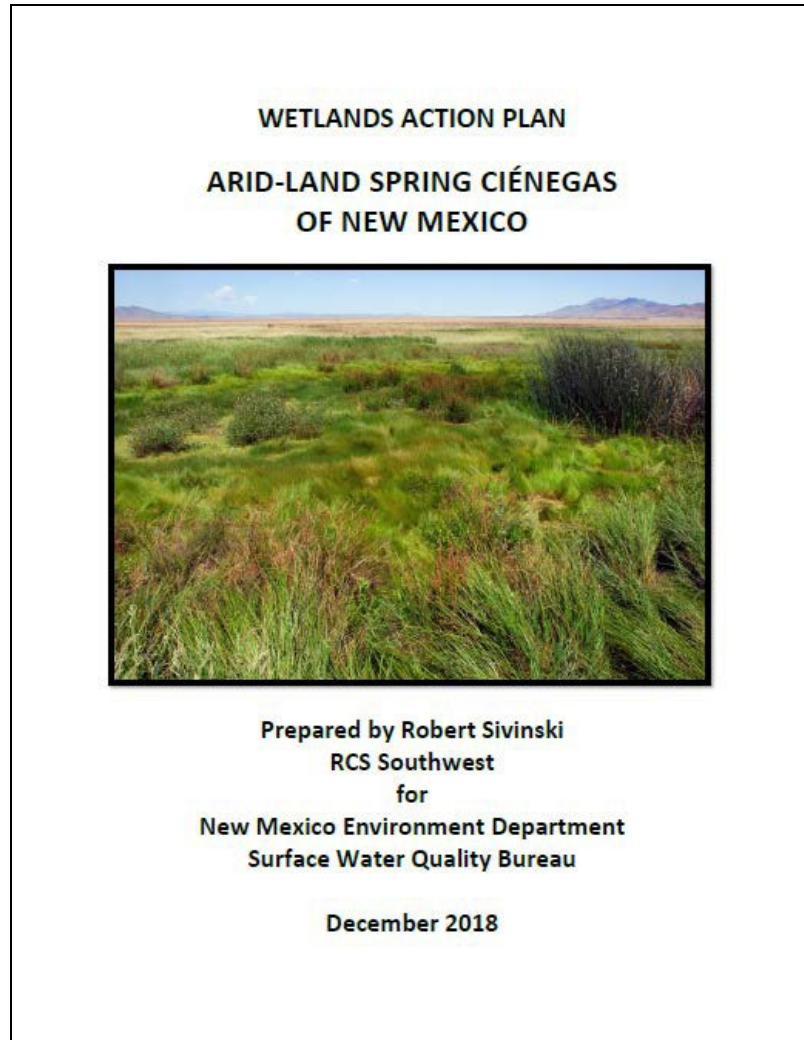


Figure 10. Cover for Wetlands Action Plan for Arid-Land Spring Ciénegas of NM.

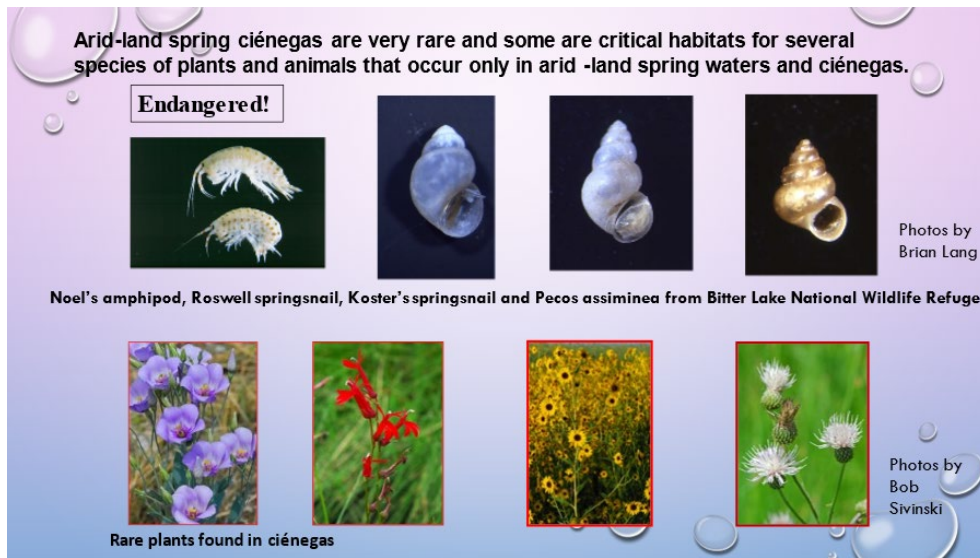


Figure 11. Slide from presentation about arid-land spring ciénegas given for the La Cienega Association breakfast.

- The WPC updated the Wetlands Program Plan for New Mexico 2019 and it was approved by EPA on April 9, 2019. The updated Wetlands Program Plan was added to the SWQB Wetlands Program website.
- The WPC and Emile Sawyer (Wetlands WPO) attended a landowner meeting with Grasslans Trust and the UFWS Partners for Wildlife representative in Roosevelt County on April 2, 2019. At the meeting, the WPC discussed the Wetlands Action Plan program, the potential to create a “playa cluster” watershed group, and the attendees visited approximately six playas to evaluate a cluster of playas for restoration potential.
- Karen Menetrey attends Rio Grande Water Fund meeting to expand capacity of non-regulatory program elements on February 8, 2019 to submit comments and final recommendations on two new wetlands/riparian projects.
- The contract for a “Crew Leader Training” Workshop was awarded to Wildland Restoration Volunteers and the Notice to Proceed was issued on March 25, 2019.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator attends EPA/ACOE-sponsored WOTUS meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico on March 26, 2019 and provides comments on NMED and ASWM comment letters.
- The MOA with UNM Natural Heritage for conducting an “All Hands” New Mexico Rapid Assessment data collection effort was signed on April 19, 2019 and work has begun.
- The Crew Leader Training was conducted on May 16-18, 2019 at the Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge in Mora, NM.



Figure 12. Participants discuss leading wetland restoration crews at Crew Leader Training at Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge.

- Emile Sawyer (WPO) provides comments on WOTUS letter for the Santa Fe River Commission and attends meetings to promote the Santa Fe County Wetlands Action Plan.
- Karen Menetrey (WPO) participated in an ASWM Beaver Webinar Committee to expand the non-regulatory program elements of the Wetlands Program.
- A planning meeting with UNM Natural Heritage for conducting an “All Hands” New Mexico Rapid Assessment data collection effort was held on June 26, 2019.
- Rachel Jankowitz from the SWQB TMDL Team has been assigned to work with Wetlands Program staff to help research and develop a draft wetlands standard for Playa Wetlands.
- A map of areas covered by WAPs in New Mexico was created and submitted to the SWQB website. Emile Sawyer (WPO) worked on Wetlands Mapper for the Wetlands Program Website.
- The WPC wrote an article for the SWQB quarterly newsletter, Clearing the Waters, about the Wetlands Action Plan for Arid-Land Spring Cienegas.
- The WPC attended a Strategic Planning meeting lead by Amigos Bravos in Taos New Mexico June 28 through June 30, 2019 to promote WAP development and wetlands restoration by Amigos Bravos in the Upper Rio Grande Watershed and the Rio Fernando de Taos Watershed.
- A second Request for Quotes is distributed for Wetlands Action Plan development on July 11, 2019.

- Two contractors were selected to develop two new wetlands WAPs, CEHMM for the Black River in southern New Mexico and the Quivira Coalition for the Santa Rosa Cienega in central New Mexico.
- The WPC planned and led a visit to the Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve for EPA Region 6 personnel to learn about New Mexico’s arid-land spring cienegas on August 7, 2019.



Figure 13. EPA Visit to Leonora Curtin Wetland Preserve, an example of a groundwater dependent spring cienega wetland. Attendees included Leslie Rauscher EPA R6, Brian Fontenot EPA R6, Wendy Pierard SWQB, Abe Franklin SWQB, Maryann McGraw SWQB, Bob Sivinski (RCS Southwest), Emile Sawyer SWQB, Dan Guevara SWQB, Davena Crosley SWQB, Scott Canning (Santa Fe Botanical Garden), Zac Carlson (Santa Fe Botanical Garden).

- The WPC worked with Abe Franklin to include all completed WAPs in the Solicitation for Applications as acceptable watershed plans for applying for 2020 CWA Section 319 funds for watershed restoration in New Mexico.
- On August 19, 2019, the WPC met with faculty and students at Highland University about implementing portions of the Curry County Playas Wetlands Action Plan.
- The All Hands Partners Planning Meeting was conducted on August 29, 2019 in Albuquerque (classroom portion) and in the Jemez Mountains (metrics refresher) with 14 participants attending.
- The QAPP for All Hands data collection was approved by EPA on September 5, 2019 (QTRAK #19-412).

- The WPC attended the kick-off meeting for the development of a watershed group around the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande on October 4, 2019 in order to promote the Wetlands Action Plan concept.
- A no-cost extension for this project was approved by EPA on October 4, 2019 to extend the end date until April 30, 2021 to accommodate the completion of the two new WAPs.
- UNM Natural Heritage provided field assistance for “All Hands” data collection to two field teams on October 15 and 17, 2019.
- WPO attends Rio Grande Water Fund meeting on November 1, 2019 to expand capacity of non-regulatory program elements. The Rio Grande Water Fund Group now has over 100 signatories participating.
- The Wetlands Narrative Standards Development Team (Maryann McGraw, Emile Sawyer and Rachel Jankowitz) was created to develop a white paper for Wetland Standard for Playas of the Southern High Plains. The Team met on December 4, 2019 to outline the development of wetlands water quality standards and review the narrative wetlands standards template developed by EPA.
- The WPC attended meetings on December 10, 2019 and March 5, 2020, for the development of a watershed group around the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande in order to promote the Wetlands Action Plan concept.
- The WPC gave a presentation to about 35 attendees at the La Cienega Valley Association Community Breakfast meeting on Saturday, February 1, 2020.



Figure 14. Attendees at the La Cienega Valley Association Community Breakfast February 1, 2020.

- The Wetlands Standards Team met on February 24, 2020, to review progress on wetlands standards development for Playas of the Southern High Plains as a trial.
- The 2020 CWA Section 319 Solicitation for Applications was advertised in early 2020 and the WPC was on the review committee. Two out of ten applications received were for work under existing WAPs.
- On March 2 and March 25, 2020, Karen Menetrey (WPO) participated in planning calls for a Beaver Summit to expand the non-regulatory program elements of the Wetlands Program.
- NMED switched to teleworking on March 16, 2020 in response to the Governor's Stay-at-Home orders to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Since that time all meetings for this project are being conducted remotely.
- The SWQB Wetlands Program conducted two NM Wetlands Roundtables by webinar focused on presentations that expand initiatives for non-regulatory activities to protect, assess, and restore wetlands statewide including the development of a centralized repository of water data for the state.
- The First Webex NM Wetlands Roundtable was conducted on March 24, 2020. The New Mexico Northern Wetlands Roundtable was conducted by the SWQB Wetlands Program as a daylong Webex Webinar with more than 128 participants in attendance. This was the largest number of attendees ever at a Wetlands Roundtable.
- UNM Staff Este Muldavin provided a presentation on "All Hands" at the Northern Wetlands Roundtable on March 24, 2020.
- The contract to develop the WAP for the Black River in southern New Mexico was awarded to CEHMM on March 24, 2020.
- A contract to develop a WAP for Santa Rosa Cienega in central New Mexico was awarded to Quivira Coalition on March 24, 2020.
- Rachel Jankowitz (SWQB TMDL Officer) attended one day of the Association of State Wetland Manager's Annual State and Tribal Coordination Meeting that was conducted as a virtual meeting due to travel restrictions on April 7-9, 2020.
- The WPC Attended the Isleta Reach of the Middle Rio Grande virtual meeting now called the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA) on April 7 and May 5, 2020, to promote the Wetlands Action Plan concept.
- The Story Map for the Wetlands in the Sacramento Mountain Region was added to the Wetlands Website and can be accessed at <https://smumn.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=ced60f87d9b3493e8c874397826538bc> .
- The Wetlands Standards Team met on April 15, 2020 to review progress, research literature and comment on developing White Paper for Wetlands Standards for Playas of the Southern High Plains.
- The MOA with UNM to conduct "all Hands" data collection was amended to change the Tasks that included on-the-ground data collection to on-line outreach tasks because of Covid-19 restrictions for meeting in groups for field work. The amendment was approved on April 20, 2020.

- The first Steering Committee Meeting for Black River Wetlands Action Plan development was conducted as a WEBEX virtual meeting on April 23, 2020 with 18 participants in attendance.
- On April 30, 2020, the New Mexico Southern Wetlands Roundtable was conducted by the SWQB Wetlands Program. This was the second day-long WEBEX Webinar Roundtable during the COVID-19 stay-at-home order and more than 82 participants attended. The Southern Wetlands Roundtable webinar was successful in attracting many new participants that normally cannot travel but have a keen interest in the topics presented.
- UNM Staff Este Muldavin provided a presentation on “All Hands” at the Southern Wetlands Roundtable on April 30, 2020.
- The first Santa Rosa Wetland Action Plan Steering Committee Meeting was conducted by webinar on May 18, 2020.
- On May 27, 2020, the Wetlands Narrative Standards Development Team conducted a Skype meeting with EPA representatives Kerryann Weaver (EPA Headquarters), Wanda Boyd (EPA Region 6) and Dr. Eliodora Chamberlain (EPA Region 7) to present the Wetland Standard for Playas of the Southern High Plains draft white paper to date.
- Emile Sawyer prepared naming convention materials for creating wetland assessment units for a presentation to EPA representatives on May 27, 2020.
- The WPC submitted an abstract for the Society of Wetlands Scientists Rocky Mountain Chapter meeting about Arid-Land Spring Cienegas, however the meeting was cancelled due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.
- A final Report for the All Hands Task was submitted by the Contractor on June 30, 2020.
- The Wetlands Narrative Standards Development Team met in June, July and November 2020 to work on Wetland Standards for Playas of the Southern High Plains, and a draft white paper was updated.
- The WPC attended meetings of the Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (IRSA) on June 9, 2020, June 26, 2020, August 6, 2020, and October 15, 2020.
- A No-cost extension to September 30, 2021 for Grant Award CD# 01F10901-4 was approved by EPA on October 20, 2020.
- In October 2020, Karen Menetrey (WPO) and Contractor Quivira Coalition toured wetlands with the City of Santa Rosa Administrator and State Forestry Division of NM Energy Mineral and Natural Resources Department and met with other members of the Steering Committee outdoors and in compliance with all COVID-19 related restrictions.
- The movie “Saving Beauty” about the Santa Rosa Cienega was premiered at the Quivira Coalition Conference in November 2020, as part of the outreach strategy for the Santa Rosa WAP with over 233 participant views.
- Karen Menetrey (WPO) participated in planning meetings for the NM Beaver Summit on July 9 and September 3, 2020 and attended the Summit which was conducted as a webinar with attendance of approximately 100 people on October 27, October 30, November 2, and November 14, 2020.

- A no-cost extension for CEHMM contract to develop the Wetlands Action Plan (WAP) for the Black River in southern New Mexico was approved on January 15, 2021.
- A no-cost extension for Quivira Coalition contract to develop a WAP for Santa Rosa Cienega in central New Mexico was approved on January 15, 2021.
- In February 2021, The Native Plant Society on behalf of Bob Sivinski suggested that the WAP steering committee look into nominating the Santa Rosa Wetlands as a RAMSAR Wetland of international importance. Research and promotion of the idea will be included in the WAP.
- CEHMM conducted the Second WAP Steering Committee meeting for the Black River WAP on April 22, 2021.
- The Wetland Narrative Standards for Playas of the Southern High Plains draft white paper final version under this project is completed with recommendations for further standard development.
- Under a contract with TEKsystems, NMRAM datasheets to include wetland Assessment Unit Names, Assessment Unit Codes, improving the functionality of other relevant cover page information for entering data that is associated with the wetland, and improving compatibility with SQUID was completed.
- Emile Sawyer (WPO) completed a draft model for assessment unit naming and coding of wetlands for Water Quality Standards.
- In June 2021, JT Jones was hired as a Wetlands Program Project Officer and took over managing the Santa Rosa WAP.
- CEHMM conducted two working group sessions with steering committee members to review and edit the WAP.
- On June 7, 2021, the Quivira Coalition conducted a steering committee meeting outdoors at Santa Rosa Lake State Park.
- JT Jones (WPO) helped staff a table and the Guadalupe County Fair promoting the Santa Rosa WAP on July 31, 2021.
- Morika Hensley gave a presentation about Santa Rosa Wetlands at the Santa Rosa Sunflower Festival on September 18, 2021.
- The Quivira Coalition staff, the Institute for Applied Ecology and Estella Thompson, Santa Rosa Science Teacher, developed a Cienega Science curriculum as part of the Santa Rosa WAP.
- The Wetlands Action Plan (WAP) for the Black River in southern New Mexico was completed by CEHMM and approved by the Wetlands Program and is available at Wetland Action Plans (nm.gov).



Figure 15. Slope wetlands near Black River, Eddy County, NM. (Credit CEHMM Black River WAP.

- The WAP for Santa Rosa Cienega in central New Mexico was completed by the Quivira Coalition, approved by the Wetlands Program and is available at [Wetland Action Plans \(nm.gov\)](https://www.nm.gov/wetlands).

List of Major Deliverables (on file at NMED)

“Black River Wetlands Action Plan” (2021)

“Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan” (2021)

“Wetland Action Plan for Arid-Land Spring Cienegas of New Mexico” (2018)

New Mexico Wetlands Action Plans map on NMED website

“New Mexico Playa Wetlands Naming in Maps” Powerpoint presentation

“Version 2.2 Playas Standard” white paper

Crew Leader Training Manual/Workshop materials

Crew Leader Training Final Report

Clearing the Waters article about Arid-Land Spring Cienegas by Maryann McGraw

“All Hands” Coordination Meeting Presentations

“All Hands” Final Report

“All Hands” QAPP

Rio Grande Water Fund notes

La Cienega Valley Association Community Breakfast presentation

TEKsystems contract to work on SQUID Wetlands Temporary database.
Northern and Southern Wetlands Roundtables agendas, presentations and sign-in sheets
Wetlands Roundtables Introductory Presentation for each Roundtable
All Hands NMRAM Roundtable Presentation
Two WOTUS presentations for Northern and Southern Wetlands Roundtables
Rio Grande Water Fund Presentation for the Northern Wetlands Roundtable (hard copy only)
SWS Rocky Mountain Chapter Meeting Abstract for a presentation
Grant Amendments
Contracts, contract amendments and reimbursements
Documentation of project match
Final Report

Lessons Learned

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a snow-ball effect that delayed our well-developed plans for all the projects in this Wetlands Program Development Grant. NMED staff travel was restricted in 2020 by order of the New Mexico Governor. In addition, an emergency Legislative session in June 2020 diverted agency attention from routine financial and administrative processes so that FY21 purchase orders that were supposed to be issued on July 1, 2020, were not available for 8-10 weeks after the start of the fiscal year. NMED required that our contractors stop work until these purchase orders were approved. This and the fact that our Wetlands Action Plan contractors and Wetland Program staff could not meet in person with stakeholders hindered the outreach tasks and delayed the completion of the Wetlands Action Plans. In areas like the Black River Watershed and outlying areas around Santa Rosa, internet access is still sketchy or not available so in-person outreach is important in those areas.

The positive side of stay-at-home orders due to Covid-19 was the ability to pivot quickly to conducting meetings, roundtables and other tasks remotely. The Wetlands Program saw a significant increase in participation from remote attendees at all meetings and workshops conducted by the Wetlands Program. This included many new attendees who were not able to travel to these meetings in the past. The Wetlands Program also changed our agendas and outreach to serve these remote participants.

The Wetlands Action Plan process invigorates watershed groups to do more work in the watershed. The focus on the wetlands portion of the watershed as part of the planning process is invaluable in terms of stakeholder buy-in, future planning, using a more holistic approach to improving water quality, seeking new funding opportunities, and creating a forum about wetland activities and opportunities.

"All Hands" volunteer data collection campaign using the NMRAMs developed to date for Lowland Riverine and Montane Riverine wetlands is the beginning of what is hoped to be a recurring effort to collect wetlands assessment data by trained practitioners throughout New Mexico. While this first effort was inhibited by Covid restrictions, there were many lessons learned about recruiting trained volunteer groups early to participate in growing season "All Hands" data collection days. Also, "All Hands Phase 2" plans to use video trainings for volunteers and refreshers so that training can be at the convenience of the volunteer team participants.

What Made the Project Successful

SWQB Wetlands Program has made systematic and significant progress towards wetlands narrative standards development and the assignment of Assessment Units to all mapped wetlands in New Mexico.

The Wetlands Program expanded participation and capacity in volunteer approaches to restoration of wetlands and improving water quality by our participation in several state or region-wide initiatives. These voluntary projects and programs provide opportunities to build partnerships, share data, pool resources among agencies and organizations, and educate the public about the value of wetlands and water resources.

In New Mexico, there was a keen interest in trainings for road maintenance, design and construction contractors, engineers, and technicians that protect wetlands and water quality. The training held in Farmington was at capacity and the training in Clovis provided innovative techniques for understanding road/depressional wetlands interactions and how to protect playa wetlands from road, sediment, and pollutant impacts.

The Crew Leader Training taught necessary skills for wetlands restoration crew leaders such as safety, restoration and planting techniques and leadership skills. The workshop design, materials and agenda were based on the principles that restore wetlands, waterbodies, watercourses and floodplains to natural conditions while teaching volunteers about the outcomes of the restoration measures that they are implementing. The volunteer participation experience is more satisfying and enjoyable and restoration outcomes are more successful through the utilization of trained crew leaders for assisting volunteers.

"All Hands" volunteer data collection campaign using the NMRAMs developed to date is the beginning of what is hoped to be a recurring effort to collect wetlands assessment data by trained practitioners throughout New Mexico.

What Made the Project Not So Successful

Each task in this project had successful outcomes in spite of delays and changes due to Covid-19 restrictions during the project period.

Technical Transfer

The information developed during the project period was provided to stakeholders on the local, state, regional and national levels:

- Three new Wetlands Action Plans are available to stakeholders and the public on the SWQB Wetlands Website. During the development of the Arid-Land Spring Cienega WAP, on-site outreach meetings were conducted for stakeholders at examples of arid-land spring cienega locations. Also, the Wetlands Program wrote a Clearing the Waters article about Arid-Land Spring Cienegas which was distributed statewide. For the Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan, a storymap and Youtu.be movie "Saving Beauty" by Christina Selby about Santa Rosa Wetlands was presented at the 2020 Quivira Coalition Conference and over 400 people to date have seen the movie. The four virtual Steering Committee meetings for the Black River Wetlands Action Plan were well attended by over 20 attendees.
- The two Roads and Wetlands trainings were held in the eastern and western regions of New Mexico to engage stakeholders in their locale. Out of state participation from neighboring states were also invited and attended.
- Considerable outreach was conducted for the "All Hands" including a survey monkey, emails, a coordination meeting, and presentations at Wetlands Roundtables. Two teams were provided guidance during their data collection by UNM Natural Heritage staff.
- This project was also included in the NPS Annual report to EPA in 2021.
- This Final Report can be accessed at [Wetlands Projects \(nm.gov\)](https://www.nm.gov/wetlands-projects).

EPA Feedback Loop

What would you suggest that EPA do to improve the process regarding this project?

EPA was very supportive in all aspects of this project during the project period, especially allowing grant period extensions to complete high quality and meaningful work and providing guidance for wetland standards development at the national level.

EPA also attended and presented at Wetlands Roundtables providing important support to this statewide forum.

On May 27, 2020, the Wetlands Narrative Standards Development Team conducted a Skype meeting with EPA representatives Kerryann Weaver (EPA Headquarters), Wanda Boyd (EPA Region 6) and Dr. Eliodora Chamberlain (EPA Region 7) to present the Wetland Standard for Playas of the Southern High Plains draft white paper to date. Ultimately, it is EPA who approves the final versions of a State's standards and participation and feedback on the process is critical for State's to make progress on groundbreaking and innovative initiatives.

These types of projects that foster State's Progress in Wetlands Program Development on multiple Core Elements should continue to be wholeheartedly supported by EPA Region 6.

Future Activity Recommendations

Progress towards Wetlands Standards development will continue in New Mexico. A Summary of recommendations was prepared with the white paper for the narrative standard for Playa Wetlands of the Southern High Plains:

- Revise (NMAC) 26.6.4.7 Definitions to define playas as water bodies rather than lakes.
- For playas maintained in inundated condition for recreational use, retain the existing WQS for marginal warmwater ALU, with a segment-specific limit for *E. coli*.
- For playas with a more natural hydroperiod, retain the existing WQS for intermittent waters of the state, with a segment-specific use of limited aquatic life.
- Adopt two new designated uses, groundwater recharge and biodiversity, as derived from the EPA wetland standard templates.
- Adopt the NMRAM for Playas as an assessment tool for the new designated uses.
- Modify the NMRAM for Playas, for the purposes of assessment of the new designated uses, to account for the benefit of vegetated buffer zones.
- Modify the NMRAM for Playas, for the purposes of assessment of the biodiversity use, to account for the habitat benefit of playas occurring in clusters.

The Wetlands Program is currently working on these recommendations and will work on narrative standards for other subclasses of wetlands using the lessons learned from this current effort.

SWQB Wetlands Program will continue to develop and improve the Wetlands Action Plan (WAP) Program. New tools and information including wetlands mapping, wetlands assessment, innovative wetland restoration techniques and the incorporation of Wetlands Action Plans into eligible CWA Section 319 funding proposals will provide additional incentives for Watershed Groups and others to develop Wetlands Action Plans. The Wetlands Action Plan Guidance will continue to be updated and improved as experience and more information and data becomes available.

As more modules and subclasses of wetlands are included in NMRAM development (through other WPDGs), additional NMRAM trainings, and more “All Hands” data collection effort statewide will be conducted to increase wetlands condition data available and start to collect trends data in New Mexico.

Trainings and workshops are a great way to motivate and educate stakeholders in ways to protect and restore wetland and water resources. The Wetlands Program will continue to provide important trainings and workshops either virtually, as videos, or in-person to interest groups and stakeholders.