NEWS RELEASE
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EPA Recognizes Comanche Creek as a Water Quality Success Story: Collaborative Restoration Efforts Reduce Sediment And Improve Habitat for Native Cutthroat Trout

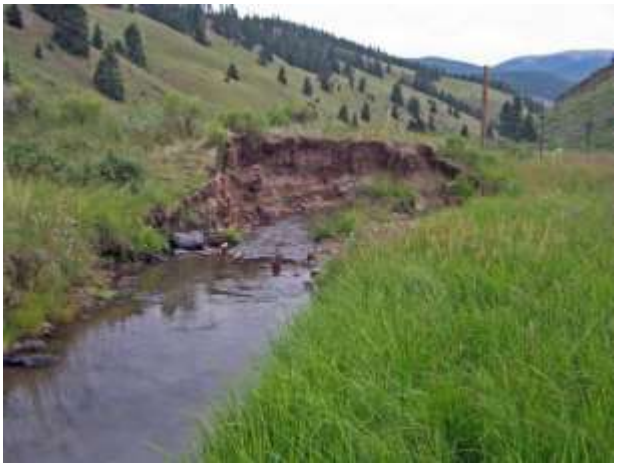
(Santa Fe, NM) – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently recognized Comanche Creek as a Water Quality Success Story due to collaborative restoration efforts of the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and other organizations conducted between 2001 and 2008. Earlier this year, NMED presented EPA with monitoring data and a history of restoration efforts which lead to the official recognition in late April.

Comanche Creek is a scenic trout stream within Carson National Forest's Valle Vidal unit of northern New Mexico. The 10.3-mile-long creek drains a 43-square-mile watershed and empties into the Rio Costilla, a tributary to the Rio Grande.

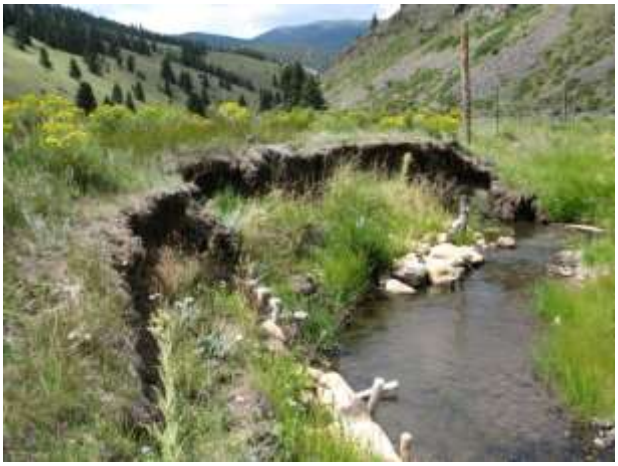
Historic grazing by cattle and elk herds had damaged riparian areas and stream banks along Comanche Creek. Stream habitat analyses conducted by NMED in the 1990s found a high percentage of fine sediment and a water quality survey in 2000 showed that because of such excessive sediment, the creek was failing to support its high-quality aquatic life such as the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. As a result, NMED added the creek to the state's Clean Water Act (CWA) section 303(d) list of impaired waters for sedimentation and temperature following water quality surveys done in 2000 and 2002.

Reduced cattle stocking rates permitted by the Forest Service and restoration projects using grazing exclosures and in-stream structures have reduced the number of elk and cattle in the riparian area and improved water quality and habitat for the native cutthroat trout which has been re-introduced to Comanche Creek. Surveys conducted in 2006 documented improved water quality and habitat such that NMED was able to remove sedimentation as a cause of impairment of Comanche Creek on the 2008 CWA section 303(d) list. The creek still exceeds the 20°C

criterion for temperature, but recent data show a reduction during the summer following the restoration projects.



A cut bank on Comanche Creek, before treatment.



The same cut bank on Comanche Creek, after installation of post vanes.

In 2001 and 2004, NMED awarded CWA section 319 grants to the Quivira Coalition, a local nonprofit organization, to implement restoration work in Comanche Creek. The projects included installation of streambank and upland erosion control structures including exclosures to restrict elk and cattle grazing, and posts to deflect water flow away from the streambank. Project partners also improved drainage and culverts on eight miles of road, planted willows and sedges, and conducted planning, design, coordination, and monitoring. The Quivira Coalition conducts annual workshops that engage volunteers in maintaining the exclosures and other structures.

In 2008, similar restoration work in Comanche Creek continued under the River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (RERI), a state-funded program patterned after the CWA section 319 program. The RERI project realigned the channel away from the bank to stop erosion on a very high cut bank along a meander bend. In addition, the Quivira Coalition initiated a new project in 2012 to improve and protect wetlands on slopes within the headwaters of Comanche Creek.

For more details on the history and restoration efforts of Comanche Creek, visit the EPA Section 319 Nonpoint Source Success Stories website at:
http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/nps/success319/nm_comanche.cfm

Key partners in the restoration efforts were the Carson National Forest, NMED, and the Quivira Coalition. Other partners included the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation, New Mexico Game and Fish, Trout Unlimited, the Santa Clara Fire Crew, and the Gallup Youth Conservation Corps.

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