

# CLEARING THE WATERS

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## Ute Park Fire

By Chris Cudia, Environmental Scientist,  
Implementation and Restoration Team Leader

Dave Kenneke, Range Manager with the Philmont Scout Ranch was out gathering a couple stray bison when he noticed a smoke plume rising from the direction of Ute Park. It was a typical spring afternoon in the greater Cimarron Watershed. Clear skies, low humidity, no rain in sight, with breezy to windy conditions. Winter snow-pack in New Mexico was well below average in 2017/18 and spring runoff had not produced much of a blip on the hydrograph. Rivers and streams were already flowing at base level with months to go before the summer monsoon typically sets up. Stephen Townsend, an archaeological consultant who was conducting a survey in the Moreno Valley at the time, described the conditions he encountered as "crispy". He noted that fuel moistures even at higher elevations, near 10,000 feet, were exceptionally low.

The combination of extremely dry conditions and ubiquitous spring winds led the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to begin imposing restrictions early on the Cibola, Carson, and Santa Fe National Forests (NF). The Santa Fe NF issued Stage 2 fire restrictions on May 7th and the Carson NF followed suit by issuing Stage 1 fire restrictions the same day. Conditions did not improve appreciably as the month progressed, so all public access to the Santa Fe NF was closed on June 1st.

One of the deciding factors leading up to the closures was the fact that USFS enforcement patrols kept finding abandoned campfires. Despite extreme conditions and multiple warnings, over 120 aban-

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*Ute Park Fire 6-1-2018*

done campfires were reported on the Santa Fe National Forest in May 2018. Eighty-four of them were recorded by USFS Law Enforcement over the Memorial Day weekend alone.

Dave Kenneke's radio was abuzz with activity as the incident unfolded so he decided to drive up to the Village of Ute Park and see the situation firsthand. Upon arrival, Dave could clearly see the fire burning on the ridge but it didn't appear to pose a broad threat at that point. He spent the rest of the day moving stock and contemplated moving more, but the fire was a long way from threatening their location so he finished up his day and went home. At about 6:00pm as Dave sat down to dinner, he received a call telling him the fire had jumped U.S. 64 and was now moving into an area he previously thought would be safe. Dave, who is no stranger to wildfire in these watersheds, was stuck by the speed with which the fire had traveled. He instantly understood the magnitude of the situation, got back in his truck, and headed back to headquarters.

The Ute Park Fire began that Thursday afternoon, May 31, on the Philmont Scout Ranch property near the Village of Ute Park. Zack Seeger, a Forest Manager with Philmont Scout Ranch, recalls the fire was first identified as a structure fire but that first responders quickly discovered otherwise. The origin of the fire is still under investigation but Zack indicated that the ignition source may have been a small thunderstorm that had moved quickly through the area a few days earlier. Driven by gusty winds and dry fuels, the fire quickly expanded to over 4,000 acres by the time Dave Kenneke sat down to dinner that Thursday evening.

The following day, Friday June 1st, the National Weather Service issued a critical fire weather warning for Colfax and Taos Counties. This contributed to a mandatory evacuation order for the village of Cimarron and surrounding communities. State Road 21 and 58 were closed as was US 64 through Cimarron Canyon. By the evening of the second day, the fire had again doubled in size to approximately 8,000 acres and was zero percent contained.

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## ***Ute Park Fire continued from page 2***

The Philmont Scout Ranch staff consulted for this article all commented on how dynamic the situation was on May 31st and how quickly that dynamic changed. The sky over Cimarron Canyon turned black with smoke as the situation went from bad to worse and within hours of becoming aware of the fire, staff went from protecting property to hurriedly bussing staff out of harm's way. By Tuesday the following week the fire had grown to 27,000 acres and was still zero percent contained. Fire fighters finally received a break in mid-June when favorable weather brought much needed rain to the area and on June 19th, after burning 36,750 acres, the Ute Park Fire was declared 100% contained. Fortunately, property losses were not catastrophic and no one lost their life but everyone is well aware of the risk that remains.



*Ute Park Fire debris near Sawmill Canyon 8-3-2018*

Complex Fire (2002) and the Track Fire (2011), the Surface Water Quality Bureau's Watershed Protection Section (WPS) will work with effected parties to address water quality impacts related to this event. Watersheds impacted by wildfire remain vulnerable to post-fire flooding, debris flows, and potential mass movement long after the fire is out. Unfortunately, the first few rain storms after a wildfire typically generate ash-laden flows that are devastating to aquatic communities. Some of these impacts are unavoidable to some degree but mid to long-term impacts can be greatly reduced if burnt surfaces are stabilized within a reasonable period of time.

The WPS and Philmont Scout Ranch are currently developing a scope of work to address mid to long-term impacts associated with this forest fire. The project will focus on efforts to protect water quality, infrastructure threatened by post fire flooding, and accelerate the natural healing process. The circumstance leading up to this project are far from optimal but past collaborations have been effective and the WPS looks forward to working with our partners through the recovery period.

**Thanks to Philmont staff who contributed to this article including  
Dave Kenneke, John Celley, Zach Seeger, and Michael Crockett.**

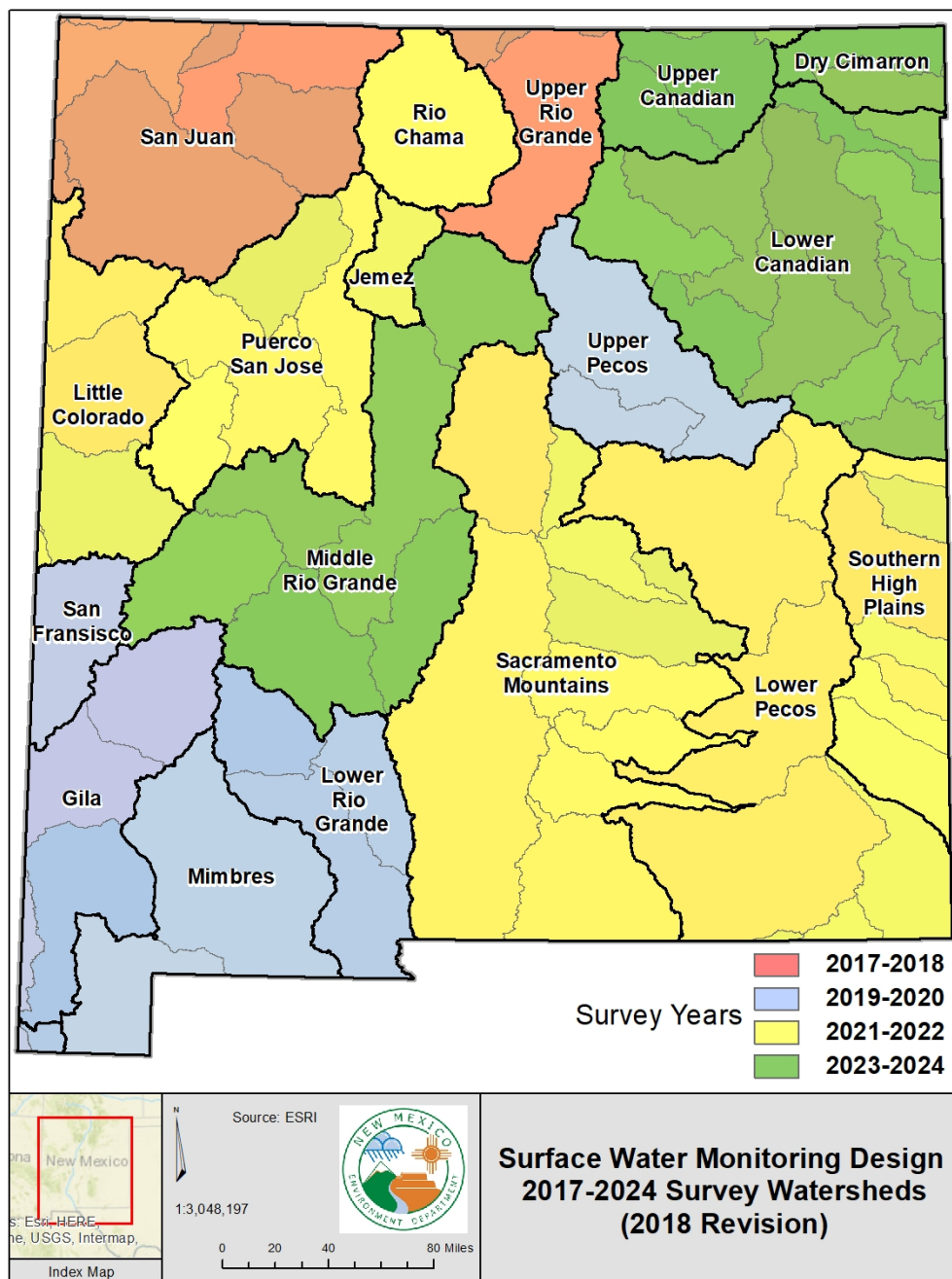
In response to the fire, the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management conducted an emergency procurement to hire the environmental consulting firm SWCA to produce a plan for post-fire rehabilitation, called the *Ute Park Fire Damage Assessment and Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Plan*. The resulting document lists projects to reduce flooding and erosion. The plan provides sediment load reductions, estimated costs, and programs that could support implementation. The document is available for download at [www.allabout-watersheds.org/](http://www.allabout-watersheds.org/).

As with previous wildfires in the Cimarron Watershed, namely the Ponil

# UPDATES FROM THE SWQB MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDS SECTION (MASS)

## MONITORING TEAM NEWS:

Starting in the 2019 field season, MASS will conduct two years of water quality monitoring on waterbodies in the following drainage basins (shown in purple on the map below): Upper Pecos, Lower Rio Grande, Mimbres, Gila, and San Francisco. Pre-survey public meetings will be scheduled at locations within the survey area for February of 2019.



*Surface Water Monitoring Design for the watersheds in the State of New Mexico.*

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In addition to our usual targeted monitoring at established water quality stations, the 2019-2020 survey will include a probabilistic monitoring project in one selected watershed. Probabilistic design generates statistically-based information which will allow us to reach conclusions about surface water quality status as a whole.

### TMDL/ASSESSMENT TEAM NEWS:

The 2018-2020 *State of New Mexico Clean Water Act §303(d)/§305(b) Integrated List & Report* has received final EPA approval. The report serves as a source of basic information on water quality and water pollution control programs in New Mexico. The Integrated List identifies whether or not a particular surface water of the state is currently meeting its designated uses as detailed in the NM Water Quality Standards. The report is posted at the link provided: <https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/2018-2020-ir/>.

A Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for water temperature in Tecolote Creek (I-25 to Blue Creek) has also been approved by EPA: [https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Tecolote-TMDL\\_EPA-approved-091318.pdf](https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Tecolote-TMDL_EPA-approved-091318.pdf). TMDL approval means that CWA Section 319 funding may be available for watershed-based planning. Where a Watershed-Based Plan (WBP) or WBP alternative has been approved, Clean Water Act §319 funds may be available to carry out implementation projects.

### STANDARDS TEAM NEWS:

A new Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) webpage is now posted on the SWQB website: <https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/protocols-and-planning/>.

It shows the legal requirements for QA/QC documents, as well as examples of approved Quality Assurance Project Plans and Quality Management Plans, by project type.

A revision of the SWQB Water Quality Management Plan/Continuing Planning Process is in the works. A public comment period will be scheduled during spring of 2019.

*Protocols and Planning (webpage)*

## Protocols and Planning



The Monitoring, Assessment, and Standards Section of SWQB is charged with coordinating NMED's ongoing development cycle for **surface water quality management strategies** that insure federal Clean Water Act requirements are met. The basic authority for water quality management in New Mexico is provided through the state's [Water Quality Act](#). This statute establishes the New Mexico Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) and specifies its duties and powers. The WQCC delegates the responsibilities for water quality management activities involving surface waters to SWQB. SWQB is responsible for the development of most elements of the WQMP-CPP. The overarching goal of these planning documents is to move forward with the objectives of the federal CWA's mandate to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the New Mexico's waters.

### Key planning documents and links

<a href="#">Water Quality Management Plan/Continuing Planning Process (WQMP-CPP)</a>	<a href="#">Quality Assurance</a>	<a href="#">Quality Management Plan (QMP)</a>
<a href="#">Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)</a>	<a href="#">Hydrology Protocol</a>	<a href="#">Water Quality Standards (WQS)</a>
<a href="#">Comprehensive Assessment and Listing Methodology (CALM)</a>	<a href="#">EPA Regulatory Information</a>	<a href="#">10-Year Monitoring and Assessment Strategy (2016)</a>



# New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) Habitat Handbook

*Bridge and Culvert Construction Guidelines for Stream, Riparian,  
and Wetland Habitats - now available*



The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) has released a new habitat guideline; *Bridge and Culvert Construction Guideline for Stream, Riparian, and Wetland Habitats*. NMDGF Habitat Handbooks “provide conservation measures to minimize impacts of land use and development projects on wildlife and wildlife habitats. This Habitat Handbook addresses stream crossing design for aquatic life movement.”

This guideline handbook was partially adapted and condensed from *STREAM SIMULATION, An Ecological Approach to Providing Passage for Aquatic Organisms at Road-Stream Crossings*, a 2008 publication of the USDA Forest Service Stream Simulation Working Group. The handbook explains the use and movement animals require through stream corridors and the negative effects barriers that are incorrectly designed, executed, and not properly maintained can create.

It also provides general design recommendations to avoid impacts when designing stream crossings, ideas for the construction and maintenance phases, pollution control, and re-vegetation guidelines.

The *Bridge and Culvert Construction Guideline for Stream, Riparian, and Wetland Habitats* can be accessed and downloaded by following this link: <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/conservation/habitat-handbook/project-guidelines/feature/Bridge-and-Culvert-Construction-Guidelines-for-Stream-Wetland-and-Riparian-Habitats-2018.pdf>.



# New Mexico River Stewardship Program

## *RFP released!*

The New Mexico Legislature appropriated \$500,000 in fiscal year 2019 capital outlay funds for the River Stewardship Program, "to plan, design and construct projects that improve surface water quality and river habitat state-wide." This appropriation was in response to the NMED's request to fund the River Stewardship Program to address a critical surface water quality need for New Mexico and to ensure that New Mexico continues to receive federal Clean Water Act funds.

NMED and the State Purchasing Division released a Request for Proposals (RFP) on **December 20th** for River Stewardship Program projects to be funded with the FY 2019 funds mentioned above. NMED requested that \$1.5 million in capital outlay funds for the River Stewardship Program be included in NMED's FY 2020 budget and, pending approval by the 2019 New Mexico Legislature, FY 2020 funds will be allocated to projects through the same RFP.

Please check our website in the 'What's New?' section for the release; <https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/> or contact Karen Menetrey at [karen.menetrey@state.nm.us](mailto:karen.menetrey@state.nm.us). To download the full request for proposal: <https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/90-667-18-27657-River-Stewardship-Program.pdf>.



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Kristine Yurdin, Non-Discrimination Coordinator  
New Mexico Environment Department  
1190 St. Francis Dr., Suite N4050  
P.O. Box 5469  
Santa Fe, NM 87502  
(505) 827-2855  
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If you believe that you have been discriminated against with respect to a NMED program or activity, you may contact the Non-Discrimination Coordinator identified above or visit our website at <https://www.env.nm.gov/non-employee-discrimination-complaint-page> to learn how and where to file a complaint of discrimination.

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### January

**Now - January 5th - Various locations statewide.** Join Audubon for the NM Christmas Bird Count. This winter, at nearly 50 locations in New Mexico, groups of bird-watchers will be counting every bird they see or hear! As participants in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, they will be a part of the more than 70,000 counters at more than 2,300 locations stretching from the Arctic Circle to the tip of South America. Since 1900, the Christmas Bird Count has provided scientists with critical data about bird populations in the Americas. Visit the Audubon website for more information and to view the schedule: <http://nm.audubon.org/conservation/audubon-new-mexicos-christmas-bird-count>.

**January 10th - Albuquerque.** New Mexico Water Dialogue invites you to The Dialogue's 25th Annual Statewide Meeting - *HONORING OUR PAST/PLANNING OUR FUTURE*. 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM. Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, 2401 12th St NW, Albuquerque, New Mexico. To register and more details please visit: <https://www.regonline.com/builder/site/Default.aspx?EventID=2529294>.

**January 31st - Proposal Deadline.** The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Wildlife Habitat Council, in cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, FedEx, Southern Company, Shell Oil Company and BNSF Railway are pleased to solicit applications for the 2019 Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration program. The Five Star and Urban Waters program will award approximately \$1.7 million in grants nationwide. The Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration grant program seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to diverse local partnerships focused on improving water quality, watersheds and the species and habitats they support. Projects include a variety of ecological improvements along with targeted community outreach, education and stewardship. For more information please visit: <https://www.nfwf.org/fivestar/Pages/2019rfp.aspx>.

### February

**February 5th - 7th - Phoenix, AZ.** 2019 Riparian Restoration Conference. RiversEdge West's 17th Annual Conference, in partnership with the Desert Botanical Garden, at the Desert Botanical Gardens. Session topics include: Adapting to Change, Restoration Tools and Technology, Restoration on Tribal Lands, Bio-control: Population Distribution, Restoration and Ecological Responses, Impacts of Heat Waves, Drought and other Global Change Processes on Riparian Cottonwoods and their Communities in the Western US, Russian Olive, and many more interesting topics. Early bird pricing ends on January 5th. The conference is limited to the first 200 participants. For more information please visit: <https://riversedgewest.org/events/2019-riparian-restoration-conference>.

**February 21st - 5:00 PM MST. Proposal deadline - NMED SWQB** Request for Proposals for New Mexico River Stewardship Program projects. For more information and instructions: <https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/> or download the full request for proposal: <https://www.env.nm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/90-667-18-27657-River-Stewardship-Program.pdf>.

**February 28th - March 1st - Albuquerque.** The 2019 Land & Water Summit. This years theme is: *Left Brain/Right Brain: Working Together for Whole Brain Solutions*. Join Xeriscape Council of New Mexico and the Arid Low Impact Development Coalition. For more information and to register <https://landandwatersummit.org/>.