

**Final Report  
December 2011  
New Mexico Wetlands and Riparian Corridors – From Plan to  
Action Phase 2 Project  
Assistance Agreement No. CD-966349-01-0B (FY2006)**



*Outstanding National Resource Waters Nomination – Wheeler Peak Wilderness*

### **Project Goals and Objectives**

The New Mexico Wetlands and Riparian Corridors – From Plan to Action Phase 2 project was developed to achieve additional components of the New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau’s Wetlands Program: 1) incorporating a Wetlands Program Element into the State’s Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP); 2) as part of the Wetlands Action Plan Program, continue to facilitate and provide technical assistance to watershed groups throughout the State to develop wetlands projects and proposals on a voluntary basis as an additional component of their Watershed Implementation Plans; 3) target the Playa Lakes region of eastern New Mexico for stakeholder involvement and the development of a plan to protect playas.

New Mexico has made substantial progress through this project in the development of a full and robust program that focuses on restoring and protecting its wetlands. The first Task within this project was to advance the integration and establishment of

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a supported sustainable Wetlands Program within the Surface Water Quality Bureau by inclusion of Wetlands Program elements in documentation that guides the activities and policies of the Surface Water Quality Bureau. The long term goal that these project steps are moving toward would be recognition by the State of the importance of wetlands protection through a New Mexico Wetlands Protection Act.

Additional tasks focused on strengthening partnerships and activities by watershed groups using the Wetlands Action Plan process. Watershed groups have been working on water quality improvements without recognition of the important role wetlands play in water quality protection and prevention of water quality impacts. The Wetlands Action Plan Program provides an opportunity and support for these established watershed groups to focus planning and resource improvement efforts on the wetlands, riparian and buffer portions of their watersheds. Four Wetlands Action Plans and three more projects that will complete Wetlands Action Plans were part of the outcome of this project.

The Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC) Decision has had severe implications for important wetlands, including isolated and those within closed basins within greater than 20% of NM land area. Over 4000 playa lakes isolated wetlands have been identified by Playa Lakes Joint Venture inventories in New Mexico. Tasks focused on the Playa Lakes region of New Mexico included an outreach effort to stakeholders, a planning element to produce Wetlands Action Plans for playas areas and the development of a proposal to involve playa owners to improve playas natural wetland conditions.

This project has directly increased the State's ability to protect, manage, restore and increase its wetlands resources especially vulnerable wetlands resources in the Playa Lakes region.

## **Project Location**

This project has Statewide application and also site-specific outcomes. The map below shows the location of the New Mexico Southern High Plains where Playa Lakes Region is located. Wetlands Action Plans were completed for Lea and Curry Counties and a demonstration project was developed for Curry County Playas. The map also shows in yellow two other areas where Wetlands Action Plans were completed including Silver City and Lower Rio Grande. Promotion of the Wetlands Action Plan process led to the creation of proposals and projects for Santa Fe County, Cebolla Closed Basin, Comanche Creek and La Cienega de San Vicente (which was included in the Silver City Wetlands Action Plan). The Santa Fe County, Comanche Creek and Cebolla Closed Basin will have Wetlands Action Plans as part of their project deliverables.



## Original Timeframe

A timeline was created for this project that began in September 2006 and was to be completed by December of 2008. The project was amended in 2008 to complete value added subtasks and deliverables including Wetland Action Plans, nomination of wetlands as Outstanding National Resource Waters and the New Mexico Wetlands Program Plan.

## Cooperators Involved

Numerous stakeholder groups were involved in the Wetlands Action Plan process and Playa Lakes Prairie Partnership.

### **New Mexico/Colorado Wetlands Across the Border Meeting**

Wetland Ecological Services Team  
 Quivira Coalition  
 San Luis Valley NWR Complex  
 US Senator Ken Salazar  
 USACE Durango Regulatory Office  
 Zeedyk Ecological Consulting  
 San Luis Valley Wetlands Focus Area Committee  
 NM Game and Fish  
 Jicarilla Apache Nation  
 San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District  
 Truchas Trout Unlimited  
 Earth Works Institute  
 Environmental Health Consultants  
 EPA Region 6  
 EPA Region 8

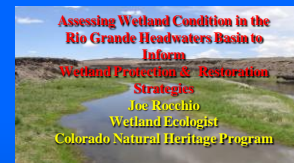
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Ute Mountain Ute Tribe  
 Rio Grande Association of Conservation Districts  
 BLM  
 USDA/NRCS Aztec  
 NRCS Wetlands (WRP)  
 International Water Resource Law University of the Pacific  
 UNM Natural Heritage Program  
 Colorado Natural Heritage Program  
 Hub RC&D  
 River Reach Foundation  
 The Nature Conservancy  
 San Juan Watershed Group  
 Colorado Division of Wildlife  
 Private Citizens

## ***Core Element: Public/Private Partnerships***

### ***Colorado/New Mexico Border Meeting***



### **Wetland Partnerships Across the CO/NM Border**

**Adams State College,  
 Alamosa, CO  
 October, 16-17, 2007**



#### **San Juan/Animas Watershed Group**

San Juan Water Commission  
 San Juan Citizen's Alliance  
 APS – Four Corners Power Plant  
 Cedar Hill Citizen Group  
 Nelson Consulting  
 City of Farmington  
 PNM- San Juan Generating Station  
 River Reach  
 USDA/NRCS Aztec  
 City of Bloomfield  
 B.U.G.S. Consulting  
 Aztec Open Space and Trails

BLM- Farmington Office  
La Bola Center for Sustainability  
Ecosphere Environmental'  
San Juan Colorado RC&D  
City of Aztec

**Mora Watershed Partnerships**

Wind River Ranch  
Piojo Ranch  
USFWS  
Mora Acequia Association

**Rio Puerco Watershed Group (Cebolla Closed Basin Cooperators)**

Bureau of Land Management  
Zeedyk Consulting  
Rio Puerco Alliance  
Rio Puerco Management Committee (numerous members represented including Tribes)  
Albuquerque Wildlife Federation

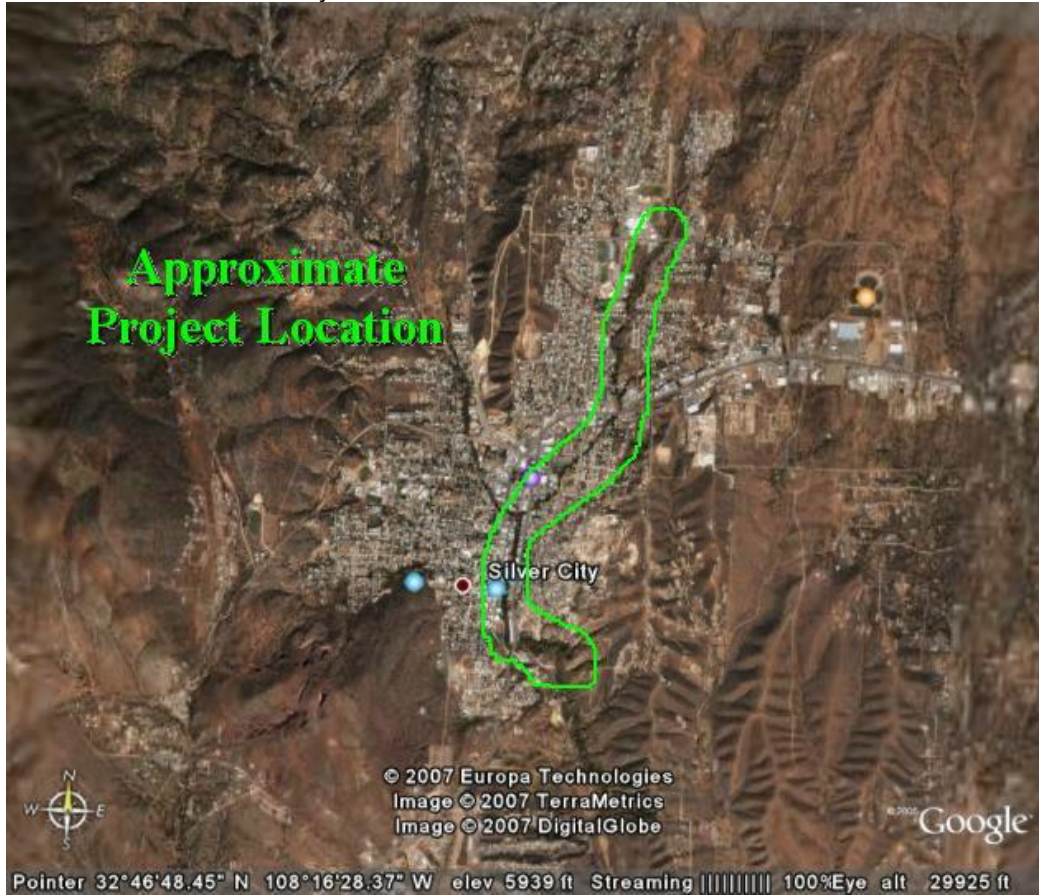


***Springs at Cebolla Closed Basin Project***

**Silver City Watershed Group**

Town of Silver City  
Southwestern New Mexico Audubon Society  
Gila Native Plant Society  
Gila Conservation Education Center  
The Nature Conservancy  
WNMU Department of Natural Sciences  
Grant Soil and Water Conservation District  
Gila National Forest

US Fish and Wildlife Service  
Youth Conservation Corps  
New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee  
National Park Service  
NM Forest and Watershed Institute  
Northern Arizona University



*La Cienega de San Vicente Project Location – Silver City Wetlands Action Plan*

**Comanche Creek Watershed**

Carson National Forest  
Quivira Coalition  
ACOE  
Trout Unlimited  
Albuquerque Wildlife Federation  
Philmont Scout Ranch  
Game and Fish  
Vermejo Park Ranch  
CS Ranch



*Headcuts in Comanche Creek Slope Wetlands*

**Santa Fe County**

Santa Fe County  
Earth Works Institute  
Santa Fe Watershed Association  
Galisteo Watershed Association  
Office of the State Engineer  
Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources  
USFWS Southwest Regional wetlands Coordinator  
City of Santa Fe  
La Cienega  
Santo Domingo Pueblo  
Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
ACOE  
Partners for Fish and Wildlife  
UNM  
UNM Natural Heritage Program  
Los Alamos National Labs  
El Dorado Community Improvement Association  
Commonweal Conservancy  
NMDOT  
Galisteo Basin Preserve



***Springs where Russian olives have been removed – Escalante Springs, Santa Fe County***

**Playa Prairie Partnership**

Sureste RC&D  
Lea Soil and Water Conservation District  
The Nature Conservancy  
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife  
USFWS Southwest Regional Wetlands Coordinator  
NRCS  
Game and Fish  
Carlesbad Soil and Water Conservation District  
Audobon Society  
Playa Lakes Joint Venture  
NM State Land Office  
CEHMM  
MARBOB  
BLM  
FSA  
Numerous private ranchers and local residents  
Central Curry Soil and Water Conservation District  
Ducks Unlimited  
New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee  
City of Clovis  
Clovis Schools  
Ogallala Commons  
New Mexico Tech



Mayor of Lovington



***Playa overgrazed, excavated and nutrient discharge – Playas of Lea County Wetlands Action Plan***

**Lower Rio Grande**

World Wildlife Fund  
Bureau of Reclamation  
The Nature Conservancy  
Elephant Butte Irrigation District  
NM G&F  
NM State Parks  
SW Environmental Center  
City of Las Cruces  
USFWS  
Trust for Public Lands  
Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District  
Jornada Soil and Water Conservation District  
New Mexico Audubon Society  
New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission  
Dona Ana Soil and Water Conservation District  
Caballo Soil and Water Conservation District  
USACOE  
BLM  
Mesilla Valley Audubon Society



*Docent class examining recent sprouts of hardstem bulrush and Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park – Lower Rio Grande Wetlands Action Plan*


## **Funding**

The original Federal amount was **\$101, 663** which was spent and \$45,845 match. The **final match amount** was **\$51,097.84 (33%)**. See quarterly and semi-annual reports for details.

## Major Project Highlights and Chronology

- The first meeting of the Sandhill Partnership (new name for proposed Playas Assembly) took place on October 4, 2006.

# sandhill Partnership



**The Sandhill Partnership envisions sustaining the natural integrity of eastern New Mexico and the western panhandle of Texas through conserving, enhancing, and restoring prairie and wetland/playa habitats.**

### MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The Sandhill Partnership would like to invite you to join us for our first meeting in Lovington, NM at the Lea County Electric Cooperative, 1301 West Avenue D. on October 4<sup>th</sup> from 10:00-2:30 (lunch will be catered). This is the first of several "Round Table Talks" we plan to conduct throughout eastern New Mexico. The purpose of this meeting is to enable local resource managers, local producers, and local conservationists to discuss funding needs and opportunities specific to their communities. If you plan to attend please RSVP by September 29<sup>th</sup> to Lori at (505) 396-0707.

What is the Sandhill Partnership?	Do you have to be a member to participate?
The Sandhill Partnership is collaboration between state, federal, and private partners designed to encourage and support voluntary, proactive conservation of prairie, wetland/playa habitats and our prairie heritage.	No, the Partnership is a voluntary alliance involving public and private individuals, state and federal agencies, and organizations.
Why was the Partnership established?	Stakeholders:
The Partnership was created to facilitate the development of prairie and wetland conservation projects that provide ecological, wildlife, and societal benefits and address growing concerns about land management within eastern New Mexico and the western panhandle of Texas.	The Nature Conservancy NM Department of Game & Fish New Mexico Environment Department Playa Lakes Joint Venture USFWS USDA-NRCS New Mexico State Land Office BLM Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

- The Wetlands Program Coordinator made the first presentation to the Gila Watershed Group about the Wetlands Action Plan Program in December 2006.
- Julie Walker (Wetlands Program Project Officer) presents the Wetlands Action Plan Program to the San Juan Watershed Group in December 2006.
- Julie Walker meets with the City of Aztec to identify a potential Wetlands Restoration Project site on City of Aztec owned land.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator meets with Brian Miller of the Mora Watershed to talk about Wetlands Action Plan Program for the Mora

Watershed. Potential Wetlands Restoration sites are identified and a proposal is developed in 2007 for Wetlands Action Plan development and Wetlands Demonstration for the Mora Watershed.

- A second proposal is developed for Wetlands Restoration and training for DOT personnel in the Gila Watershed.
- The first Playas Wetlands Action Plan was initiated by Wetlands Intern, Maria Milanés Murcia for Lea County and it was determined that a local meeting for the Lea County Prairie Partnership would be planned (offshoot of Sandhill Partnership). Maria visits many Lea County agencies and resources for the Wetlands Action Plan.
- Wetlands Monitoring components have been included in the revision of the draft SWQB QAPP.
- The Wetlands Program is included in a section of the 2006-2008 CWA Sections 303(d)/305(b) Integrated Report.
- The Wetlands Program is incorporated into the draft 2006 version of the 10-year Monitoring and Assessment Strategy for New Mexico in the Future Direction Sections.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator (WPC) serves on the Board of the Association of State Wetland Managers, and is a member of the EPA National Wetlands Program Strategic Planning Committee and the EPA National Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Work Group.
- In March 2007, a Wetlands Booth was developed for the Xeriscape Conference in Albuquerque and a new display unit for outreach was purchased under this grant.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator attends the ASWM State/Tribal/Federal Coordination Workshop March 27-29, 2007, held in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Networking with other Wetlands Program Coordinators greatly facilitates Wetlands Program integration steps.
- In April 2007, the Wetlands Program Coordinator makes a second presentation to the Gila Watershed stakeholders.
- The Lea County Prairie Partnership meeting is held in Lovington on May 22, 2007. The Wetlands Action Plan concept and draft is presented to the attendees by Maria Milanés Murcia, Wetlands Intern.
- A proposal was submitted to EPA for the development of Elements 1 and 2 of a State Monitoring and Assessment Program for Wetlands to further the integration of Wetlands Program Core elements into the Surface Water Quality Bureau's activities.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator was invited to attend the Wildlife Action Plan Coordination Workshop by the Environmental Law Institute on July 15-17 2007. Invitations to meetings such as these, provides recognition for the New Mexico Wetlands Program.
- New Mexico is a key western state supporting the Clean Water Restoration Act to restore authority to CWA to protect all surface waters. The Secretary of the Environment has testified two times in Washington D.C. in support of CWRA legislation.
- Wetlands outreach materials including three posters and an updated Wetlands Program brochure and handout were developed for the 2008 Legislative Session.
- During 2007, Jill Turner, SWQB Outreach Coordinator presented at 15 outreach events including 8 for children and in which wetlands were emphasized.

- A meeting of the Roosevelt County Prairie Partnership was held on September 29, 2007. The Wetlands Action Plan concept was presented by the Maryann McGraw, WPC, and a presentation on the recently completed NWI maps for playas in Curry, Quay, and Roosevelt counties was presented by Jim Dick, USFWS Regional Wetlands Coordinator.
- The Nature Conservancy, our partner in the Playa region, and the NMED Natural Resources Trustee placed 10 playas into protection agreements for 10 years using NRT remediation funds. TNC also was awarded a North American Waterfowl Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant for the restoration of two playas in Curry County. The Wetlands Action Plan for Curry County is in draft form.
- The WPC works with Earthworks Institute staff (non-profit Santa Fe County watershed coordinators) to develop a list of potential wetlands restoration projects and other activities on Santa Fe County-owned land and open-space. Santa Fe County agrees to partner with SWQB Wetlands Program and Earthworks to develop a project, fund restoration, participate in a geohydrology study and develop a Wetlands Action Plan for Santa Fe County.
- Proposals were developed for wetlands restoration on the West Fork of the Gila and for Santa Fe County. A Wetlands Action Plan for Santa Fe County will be completed during the course of that project.
- A Wetlands Action Plan for Silver City is currently in draft form, and an update to the Lower Rio Grande Wetlands Action Plan is being completed.
- In October 2007, The "Wetland Partnerships Across the Colorado/New Mexico Border" meeting was conducted. This 2-day meeting strengthened partnerships as information was shared to develop ways to join forces to improve wetlands monitoring, management and restoration in watersheds that cross the CO/NM Border. Targeted watersheds included the San Juan, Conejos and Upper Rio Grande. 45 invitees attended.



***Attendees at Wetland Partnerships Across the Co/NM Border meeting***

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***Breakout Groups at Wetlands Partnerships Across Co/NM Border Meeting***

- In early 2008, Outreach events included a poster session and booth for the 2008 Legislative Session and a booth and the Xeriscape Conference in Albuquerque New Mexico.
- Julie Walker and Abe Franklin continue to meet with the San Juan Watershed Group in early 2008, to develop demonstration projects and a Wetlands Action Plan for the San Juan Watershed and also the Animas Watershed. Julie Walker went on maternity leave and these activities went on hold in March 2008.
- In early 2008, the WPC makes two presentations to the Rio Puerco Management Committee – one in Albuquerque and one in Grants, NM, about a potential wetland project and Wetlands Action Plan for the Cebolla Canyon Wilderness area in the Cebolla Canyon closed basin. The WPC also made a presentation to the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation in December 2008 to help develop a Cebolla Canyon Wetlands Action Plan since this organization already adopted this area to help restore wetlands.
- Erin Trujillo conducts a review of New Mexico Water Quality Standards to note where applicability of standards to wetlands needs clarification.
- Preparation for petition to include headwater streams to be designated as Outstanding National Resource Waters and the Wetlands Program begins preparation for inclusion of wetlands in the designation.



***ONRW Wetlands in the Cruces Basin Wilderness***

- The New Mexico Legislature approves funding for River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (RERI) that restores the State's waters including wetlands in February, 2008. Some wetland projects selected for funding were included in the Wetlands Action Plan for the watershed.
- The Wetlands Program has created public files of other State's Wetland protection Acts, Wetlands Water Quality Standards and State Wetlands Plans for reference for the development of our Program and protection measures.
- SWQB Bureau Chief, Marcy Leavitt and WPC request State funding for the SWQB Wetlands Program but the request did not rank high enough to be funded in 2008.
- The Wetlands Program Coordinator continues to meet with stakeholders and Silver City Staff to review potential projects and project sites in the Silver City area.
- In March 2008, members of the Rio Puerco Management Committee, the BLM and potential partners conducted a field review of the Cebolla Canyon Closed Basin to discuss Wetlands Action Plan and demonstration restoration potential.



***Cebolla Closed Basin near Cebolla Springs- Field Review***

- The Silver City Wetlands Action Plan is completed in March 2008.
- The WPC presents the Wetlands Program to EPA Region 6 in Dallas, Tx.
- Julie Walker presents the Wetlands Program and Forest Service wetlands projects at the USFS/SWQB Annual Meeting in March in Albuquerque, NM.
- In April 2008, the Wetlands Program submits 5 proposals for CWA Section 104(b)(3) funding including for the Mora, Silver City, and Cebolla Watersheds, and Playas of Curry County.
- WPC attends the ASWM State/Tribal/Federal Coordination Workshop and the Society of Wetlands Scientists Conference May 26-30, 2008, held in Washington DC.
- The Cebolla Closed Basin Wetlands Action Plan concept and potential projects are presented at the Rio Puerco Management Committee meeting in Albuquerque on August 6, 2008.
- The Wetlands Program goes through reorganization due to staff shortages and a hiring freeze. In September, the WPC conducts a day-long training for five 319 Project Officers to fill in for staff shortages in the Wetlands Program and these Project Officers take over some of the project duties for wetlands projects. Wetlands Action Plan development was delayed due to staff shortages.
- The Cebolla and Silver City Watershed and Playas of Curry County Wetlands Projects were selected for funding through Region 6 CWA Section 104(b)(3) Wetlands Program Development. Presentations were made to the Rio Puerco Management Committee and Silver City partners to initiate these projects. The Cebolla Closed Basin Wetlands Action Plan will be completed during the course of that project.



- Another request was made to the legislature to approve funding for the Wetlands Program in early 2009. However because of statewide budget constraints, the economy and hiring freeze, the request was not funded in 2009.
- The Wetlands Program was selected by EPA Region 6 to participate in a National Pilot study and the Wetlands Program will complete a Wetlands Action Plan for the Galisteo Watershed for that project. The proposal for the Galisteo Wetlands Action Plan was completed as part of this project.
- In February 2009, a field review of Las Huertas Creek Watershed wetlands was conducted and the Wetlands Action Plan Program presented by the WPC to the Watershed Coordinator and the Watershed Group. Later, the development of a Wetlands Action Plan for Las Huertas Creek was dropped because some landowners were not willing to place easements on proposed restoration sites and one developer was concerned that his rights to ground water (which could dewater wetlands) would be an issue.
- WPC attends and presents at the ASWM State/Tribal/Federal Coordination Workshop in Shepherdstown, West Virginia March 16-19, 2009. The presentation "Integrating Wetlands Program Development with TMDLs and CWA Section 319" was directly tied to the goals of this project.
- The Wetlands Action Plans for Playas of Curry County and Playas of Lea County were completed in the fall of 2009.
- Jim Dick, SW Regional Wetlands Coordinator for the USFWS completes mapping all wetlands on US Forest Service wilderness lands in New Mexico for inclusion in the nomination for Outstanding National Resource Waters summer 2009.



***ONRW Wetlands in the San Pedro Parks Wilderness***

- Several documents for the ONRW designation are created or revised to include 5,000 acres of wetlands in the designation in the fall of 2009.

- A new chapter in the SWQB Water Quality Management Plan and the Continuing Planning Process was developed for the SWQB Wetlands Program.
- Julia Barnes, Facilitator, is hired to help coordinate strategic planning for the Wetlands Program to help integrate and assimilate wetlands into other SWQB water quality programs. This is in response to a directive from David Evans, Director of the Wetlands Division to use the Core Elements Framework for building Wetlands Programs.
- The WPC prepared testimony as well as posters of ONRW nominated wetlands for the ONRW Hearing. A TRO and preliminary injunction attempted to stop the hearing on September 8, 2010, but the TRO was quashed.



**Serpent Lake, 2007.**

***ONRW Wetlands in the Pecos Wilderness***

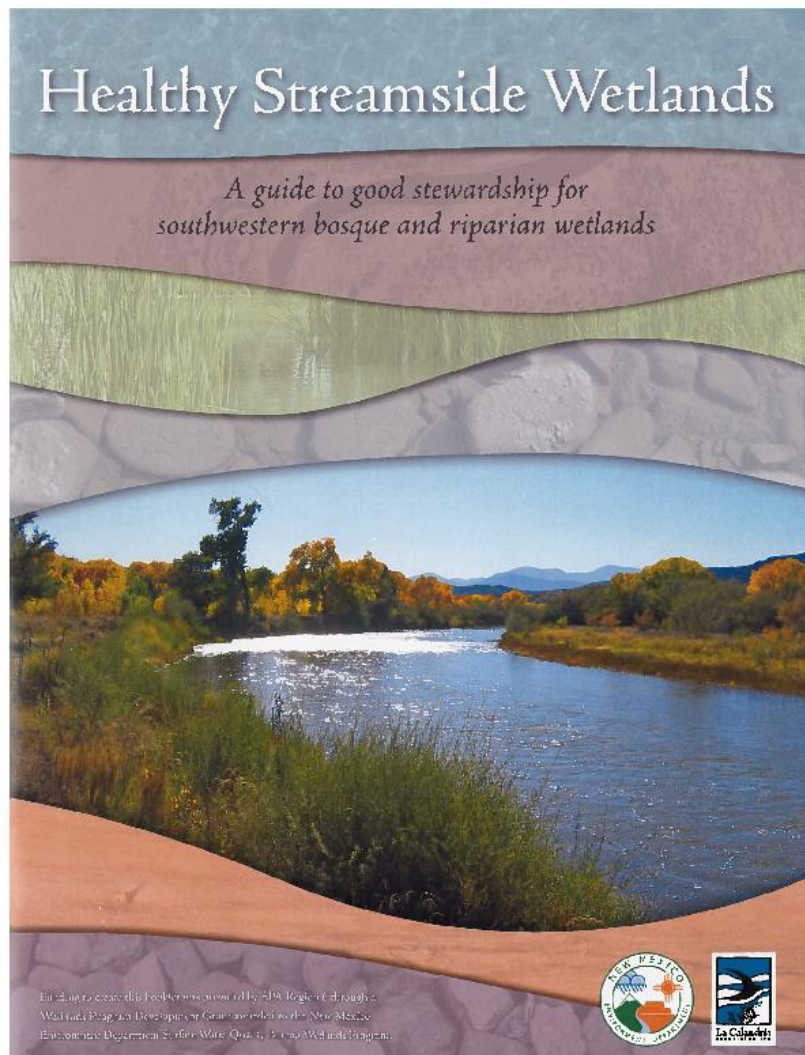
- The hearing for ONRW took place from September 14-17, 2010 and October 12-15, 2010. ON December 1, 2010, the Water Quality Control Commission voted in favor of the ONRW designation which in the end included 4,930 acres of 1,405 wetland areas in 12 USFS Wilderness areas throughout New Mexico.
- A final draft of the Wetlands Program Plan for New Mexico was submitted to EPS for approval on January 31, 2011. The WPP was approved by EPA on
- The WPC presented "Nomination of Headwater Wetlands as Outstanding National Resource Waters" at the ASWM State and Tribal Coordination meeting March 21-25, 2011 in Shepherdstown, WV.
- The first New Mexico NGO Wetlands Roundtable was conducted on May 2, 2011. The WPC and Facilitator helped design and organize this Roundtable in partnership with the New Mexico Riparian Council. The NGO Wetlands Roundtable is still maintained today and conducted meetings 2 times a year.
- The WPC begins work on Wetlands Water Quality Standards and submits a proposal to continue Wetlands Program development to EPA Region 6 WPDG called "Wetlands Action Plan Phase 3." The New Mexico Wetlands Program is

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selected by ASWM as a pilot state for wetlands water quality standards development.

- The final Wetlands Action Plan under this grant for the lower Rio Grande is submitted to EPA in July 2011.
- The Wetlands Program staff is increased by 1.5 positions with the inclusion of Karen Menetrey ½ time on the Wetlands Team and the hiring of Michelle Barnes full time for the Wetlands Team in the fall of 2011. Both positions are partly funded through State Corrective Action Funds. Supplies were purchased for them out of the remaining supplies funds for this grant.
- 500 copies of "Healthy Streamside Wetlands, A Guide to Good Stewardship for Southwestern Bosque and Riparian Wetlands," were printed from remaining supply funds for this project. The document was created by SWQB and contractors through another grant and was previously only available on the SWQB website.





***ONRW Middle Fork of the Gila wetlands – Gila Wilderness***

### **List of Major Deliverables**

Wetlands sections included in:

- SWQB QAPP
- 2006-2008 CWA Sections 303(d)/305(b) Integrated Report,
- draft 2006 10-year Monitoring and Assessment Strategy for New Mexico in the Future Direction Sections
- SWQB Water Quality Management Plan

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- Continuing Planning Process (CPP)
- ONRW wetlands included in WQ Standards

WPC power point presentations from ASWM meetings, Roundtables and watershed outreach

Meeting agendas and sign-in sheets for CO/NM Border Meeting, Roundtables and watershed group outreach

Curry County Wetlands Action Plan

Wetlands Action Plan for Lea County

Silver City Wetlands Action Plan

Lower Rio Grande Wetlands Action Plan

ONRW Documents and maps

Wetlands Program Plan 2011

Healthy Streamside Wetlands Hard Copy

Semi-Annual and Final Reports, Match reporting

Wetlands posters and outreach brochures

## Lessons Learned

*What made the project successful?*

This project is successful for producing a number of products and outcomes beyond the original expectations when the project was first conceived.

- 1) **Task One** was to develop a Wetlands Section for the Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) and take steps toward a State Wetlands Protection Act. Under this task, a Section in the WQMP, an update to the SWQB QAPP, inclusion of a Section on the Wetlands Program in the 2006-2008 CWA Sections 303(d)/305(b) integrated report, and incorporation into the draft 2006 version of the 10-year Monitoring and Assessment Strategy for NM in Future Directions were also accomplished. The Wetland Program maintains files of other State's Wetlands Protection Acts to move forward when the Wetlands Program has enough scientific data, background and technical staff to support the Act and when a favorable political climate is present.
- 2) In addition, under **Task One**, nearly 5,000 acres of wetlands were mapped and designated Outstanding National Resource Waters and are now protected with the highest level of protection under New Mexico's Water Quality Standards. The regulations require the USFS to specifically approve any activity that could result in temporary and short term degradation of water quality, and limits such degradation to the shortest possible time, not to exceed 6 months, and use of BMPs. Degradation may not result in lower water quality and activities must include actions to protect existing uses of the ONRW. Essentially, ONRW designation would require the USFS to carefully scrutinize any project at or near an ONRW that could degrade water quality and water quality would be protected at the highest level. This is the first time applicable standards are directed specifically towards wetlands water quality protection.
- 3) Also under **Task One** the Wetlands Program began a survey of our existing Water Quality Standards to determine how we can strengthen the applicability to wetlands resources. New Mexico was selected to participate in a pilot study through the ASWM to review and prepare potential revisions that apply to wetlands. The Wetlands Program and Standards Section also participated in the monthly ASWM conference calls about Wetlands Water Quality Standards in preparation for reviewing our own standards.

- 4) Under **Task One**, the SWQB Wetlands Program Strategic Planning initiative led to the development of Region 6's first approved Wetlands Program Plan. Early in the life of this project (2006-2007), the Wetlands Program Coordinator was fortunate to participate as a member of the EPA National Wetlands Program Strategic Planning Committee that developed the revisions to the Wetlands Program Core Elements. This in turn led to looking at how our program could apply the new Core Elements as our Strategic Plan which in turn then set the stage for completing a Wetlands Program Plan to guide program development in each of the four core areas over the next five years. The Wetlands Program Plan was presented to other agency and non-agency partners so that they could provide input through the New Mexico Wetlands Agency Roundtable and the New Mexico Wetlands NGO Roundtable.
- 5) Under **Task Two**, the original workplan called for 10 meetings to present the Wetlands Action Plan program to at least four watershed groups and at local environmental and water related events and/or to local leaders and agencies. As part of this project 24 presentations were made to local watershed groups including the San Juan/Animas, Las Huertas, Rio Puerco, Gila, Comanche and Mora Watersheds, to Santa Fe County, at various local environmental events and to environmental leaders, and at the 2008 legislative Session.
- 6) In addition, under **Task Two**, a 2.5 day meeting was organized to bring the Wetlands Action Plan concept to watersheds that cross the New Mexico/Colorado Border and was called the "Wetlands Partnerships Across Co/NM Border Meeting." Part of this meeting was organized to bring partners within these cross border watersheds including the San Juan, Conejos and Rio Grande to the table to strategize wetlands protection and restoration needs.
- 7) Under **Task Three**, a "Playa Lakes Assemblies" were developed for Roosevelt, Curry and Lea Counties, but were called Prairie Partnerships and their goals were expanded to cover uplands and wildlife as well as wetland restoration and preservation. Meetings were convened in for each of the Prairie Partnerships and Wetland Action Plans were developed for Curry County and Lea County Playas as deliverable for this project. A Project to restore wetlands in Curry County was funded and resumed the Playas Assembly meetings under that grant.
- 8) **Task Four** provided technical assistance to watershed groups to develop Wetlands Action Plans. Under this Task, two additional Wetlands Action Plans for Silver City and for Lower Rio Grande were completed. In addition, several Wetlands Action Plans were planned as part of larger projects including Cebolla Closed Basin, Santa Fe County, and Comanche Creek. These projects were developed as part of this task. In addition, the planning for wetlands in these watersheds resulted in State funded matching awards for wetlands restoration under the River Ecosystem Restoration Initiative (~\$800,000 in restoration funding). The total wetland acreage that will be restored by these projects and their matching RERI projects when these projects are completed will be more than 180 acres. A Mora Watershed Wetlands Action Plan was proposed but not funded. The Mora and San Juan/Animas Watershed groups will be revisited in the future.
- 9) **Task Five** was to provide SWQB staff opportunities to attend EPA sponsored conferences and trainings. Under this task, the Wetlands Program Coordinator attended several workshops including ASWM State/Tribal/Federal Coordination workshops in which the WPC made presentations about the Wetlands Action Plan Program in 2009 and ONRW Wetlands in 2011. The WPC also made a presentation about the program to EPA Region 6 in Dallas in

2008. The WPC also served on the EPA National Wetlands Program Strategic Planning Committee and the EPA National Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Work Group. The WPC attended the Wildlife Action Plan Coordination Workshop by the Environmental Law Institute in 2007. Some of these activities were partially paid for under this grant and under other funding sources.

10) Under **Task 6** nine semi-annual reports and this Final Report were completed.

*What made the project not so successful?*

The project progressed slower than expected. In 2008, the Wetlands Program lost key staff and due to a hiring freeze and staff shortage. This project was put on hold until reassignments could be made. In the meantime, project progress was slowed due to fewer SWQB staff involved. However, additional progress was made when opportunities such as ONRW and the Wetlands Program Plan were able to be accomplished as part of this project during the longer timeframe. Another opportunity was to use the watershed planning initiatives and technical assistance provided by this project to allow watershed groups to apply for and awarded RERI funds.

*What would you do differently in terms of effectiveness?*

Participants in the "Wetland Partnerships Across the Co/NM Border" meeting were eager to plan a follow-up meeting in future years. This would have solidified the partnerships and relationships fostered at that meeting. At that time the NM Wetlands Program was hoping Colorado would host and plan the next meeting. In future, the NM Wetlands Program would love to host this meeting again.

### **Technical Transfer**

*What information can you pass along to other agencies, cooperators or local landowners in other watersheds about this project?*

The Wetlands Action Plan process invigorates watershed groups to do more work in the watershed. Many groups are already interested and participating in watershed restoration. The focus on the wetlands portion of the watershed as part of the planning process was an invaluable part of this project, in terms of stakeholder buy-in, future planning, seeking new funding opportunities, and creating a forum about wetland activities and opportunities.

The Wetlands Action Plan process also helped recognize the need for more mapping, inventory and condition data about wetlands within a watershed, and that this information is deficient in every watershed in the entire state. The Wetlands Action Plan process identifies these needs and ways to plan for and obtain these data.

### **EPA Feedback Loop**

*What would you suggest that EPA do differently to improve the process in regard to 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 work through these Project Tasks.

## **Future Activity Recommendations**

- Efforts should continue to improve the applicability of existing water quality standards to wetlands.
- Efforts should also continue for identify wetlands that should be designated ONRW wetlands.
- The Wetlands Action Plan Program should be presented to more watershed groups
- Outreach to eastern New Mexico should continue since surface water resources are so rare and need additional attention, protection and restoration. Isolated waters such as playas should be more robustly protected by the State, and the Wetlands Program should continue to pursue ways to monitor and restore playas.