



**1413 SECOND STREET
SUITE 3
SANTA FE, NEW
MEXICO
87505
505-820-1696**

Our Vision

- Returning the Santa Fe River to a living river.
- Restoring the heart to our community

Inside This Issue

Director's Corner	2
River Trail	2
Summer Intern	3
Environmental Flow	3
Member and Adopt Recognition	4
San Ysidro River Park	5
Watershed Signs	6
Santa Fe River Fund	6
Collaborative Forest Grant	7

Watershed Notes

2

Summer/Fall 2007

Santa Fe River Festival



Drawing a Living River

The river was flowing and so was the fun as more than 200 people came to celebrate the river at the first annual Santa Fe River Festival at Frenchy's Field on June 2nd, sponsored by the Santa Fe Watershed Association, Santa Fe County and the City of Santa Fe. The Santa Fe River has traditionally been the heart of the community and, though often neglected and abused in the past years, the festival was a way to reconnect with and create greater awareness of this rich resource.

It was a full day of activities starting with a river clean-up in the morning with a free lunch for all volunteers. At booths throughout the park, you could learn about water quality with the Earth Works Institute, play a trout game with rangers from Santa Fe National Forest, pump water through an aquifer at New Mexico Environment Department's table, create and stop erosion with the County's Open Space and Trails Program, and find out more about owls and raptors from the Wildlife Center.

Some of the other events included the exploration of a watershed with the State Land Office's Rolling River, a large working model with rivers that flood and dry up, and making ladybugs with the Santa Fe Green Party. The City's Water Conservation Division tested our water knowledge with a Water Jeopardy game and Trout Unlimited enlightened us about water insects. For plant lovers, the Forest Guardians had many native plants on display and there were native wildflower seed balls to make and distribute on a river hike with the folks from River Source.

The Festival also marked the kick-off of two exciting river projects: the Santa Fe River Fund, which will collect donations to purchase or lease water rights to put flow in the Santa Fe River, and the



Fun in a Flowing Santa Fe River

Thank You River Festival 2007 Supporters

Presenters: New Mexico Environment Department, Surface Water Quality Bureau; New Mexico State Land Office; City of Santa Fe Water Conservation Division; City of Santa Fe Parks, Trails and Watershed Division; Santa Fe County Open Space and Trails Program; Forest Guardians; U.S. Forest Service, Jemez Ranger District; Earth Works Institute; The Wildlife Center; River Source; Green Party of Santa Fe; Trout Unlimited, New Mexico Council

Volunteers: Instruments of Joy A Cappella Group; Mariachi Diferencia; River Commissioners: Danielle Montes, Rachel Friedman, and Tobe Bott-Lyons.

Contributors: Whole Food Markets, Albertsons Food Centers. Trader Joe's; Pepsi Bottling Group.

And a Special Thanks to Eliza Frank, Bart Kaltenbach, Tom Noble, Francois-Marie Patorni, and Elizabeth Hightower.

Director's Corner

What a difference six months can make! Today our city leaders are considering a 1000 acre foot allocation of water for the river. Meanwhile, the Santa Fe River Fund is now active, aimed at securing water rights for the river. And most importantly, restoring flow to the river has become a topic of community-wide discussion. The future of our river is looking brighter.

Back in April, our Santa Fe River was declared the most endangered river in America for 2007. We were featured in NPR's *All Things Considered*, and, though we didn't quite make it to the night-time talk shows, we received a healthy dose of embarrassing publicity about our river's plight.

We need that publicity from the outside, to counter our sense of fatalism about our dead river. Outsiders who ask why the Santa Fe River is endangered are surprised to hear that the entire flow of water is impounded in our upstream reservoirs, leaving the river a dry ditch. That explanation invariably prompts another, Why: "Why is all the water impounded? Why not leave some water for the river to flow just a little?"

Today I can happily report to the outside world that the prognosis for our endangered river is improving. Reports of our river's death have been exaggerated. Now let's ensure that our current predictions of our river's revival do not also prove to be exaggerated!



David Groenfeldt
SFWA Executive Director

"Thousands have lived without love, not one without water." W.H Auden

Santa Fe River Trail and Restoration

The Santa Fe River Trail Corridor Project is moving forward. The Corridor Project, which will go from Camino Alire to NM State Highway 599, includes a multi-purpose trail and river restoration. A collaborative project supported by both the City and County of Santa Fe, the scope of the project will be to produce construction-ready design documents for three miles of trail, river restoration designs for Camino Alire to San Ysidro Park, and a schematic master plan for the whole reach.

The trail will be one of three primary urban trail spines with the Rail Trail and Arroyo Chamisa Trail that will serve the Santa Fe area. It will provide open space corridors, trails for walking and biking, and a series of parks, as well as a way for bicycle commuters to get to and from downtown safely.

River restoration is an integral part of the project. The channel and banks in many sections of the river are in poor condition. Erosion has caused steep banks with few plants and the river bed has many failed grade control structures. The goal is to re-meander the river where possible (this was successfully done at San Ysidro Park, see article on page 5) and to use bioengineering techniques such as boulder drop structures and cross vanes to slow the water down and limit erosion. These approaches will also help to increase aquifer recharge and support plants and trees.

The project is underway with surveys, reviews of previous studies of the river, and public input. Six public meetings have been held in neighborhoods along the river. A Community Support Group with member from each of the neighborhoods along the corridor will be meeting once a month to receive updates on the project and give feedback to the design team. A large public meeting will be held in the Fall with the first draft design open for comment.

For more information, meeting schedules, and maps, please visit the website at www.swpm.biz and click on the Santa Fe River Corridor Trail Project icon.

Alexandra Kleyman, Summer Intern

Growing up in Minnesota, I gained an appreciation for nature and water resources through my camping and canoeing experiences. After graduating with a BS in Biology and working for two years in the medical field, I realized that I wanted to work on a macro rather than cellular level. So I decided to pursue a Masters degree in Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning with a certificate in Water Systems, Science, and Society at Tufts University.

Searching for internship, I lucked out when I came across the Watershed Association. For my research, I interviewed many people in Santa Fe (urban designers, planners, city employees and non-profit organizers) to get a feel for their thoughts on a living river and how it could be achieved in Santa Fe. The second part of my work consisted of collecting case studies of river restoration and environmental flow policies from the western U.S. The hope is that Santa Fe and The Watershed Association will be able to gain some insight from these examples and apply some of the underlying principles to reviving the Santa Fe River.

I learned an immense amount this summer. The opportunity to speak with and learn from people doing vital conservation work was invaluable. I also feel very lucky to have experienced a new city, learn about a different culture and part of the country, and meet new people. I'm excited to finish my degree and continue working on urban planning and resource management issues.



Rio Ruidoso.

Frank Mangano

Environmental Flow

By Alexandra Kleyman

So they can protect water in their rivers in Australia, well that's not New Mexico! What makes us so sure that we can accomplish the same thing here in Santa Fe? Well, for one thing, it's already happening here. Indeed, there is an inspiring cases of river restoration from right here in New Mexico and in Colorado that we should pay attention to.

In 1996 the Village of Ruidoso saw their treasured river run dry causing concerned citizens to form the Rio Ruidoso River Association. With dedicated leadership and community support, the organization completed a biological assessment determining the water needs of their river. Richard Wisner, Executive Director of the association, said that the hard work finally paid off seven years ago when village officials agreed to change the management of their reservoir in order to keep the Ruidoso flowing at a certain level. It was and

continues to be a lot of work to ensure that their river is protected, but in the end, the entire community (not to mention the river!) benefits from maintaining water flows, economically imperative fish populations, and an important source of recreation and community enjoyment.

Another important model comes from further north. Starting in the 1980s, the City of Boulder made a commitment to dedicate a portion of the city's raw water to flow in the river. Kim Elkins, from the city's Water Resources Department, emphasized the role that public support played in allowing the city to protect water in their river. This support along with the in-stream water rights acquired by the city in 1993 resulted in the active protection of Boulder Creek. The city has an agreement with the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) allowing Boulder to call for more water in North Boulder and Boulder Creeks in the case that streamflow drops below predetermined levels. Through this agreement with the CWCB, the city administers and monitors the creek and its tributaries by keeping daily flow records. When the flows drop below the legal limit, the city contacts the state for release of more flow.

While it may seem a daunting proposition to get water flowing along the now dry banks running through Santa Fe, it is vital to realize that similar work is being accomplished all around us. There may not be one single cure, it will take a multi-pronged approach coupled with creativity, collaboration, and perseverance, but the point is that it can be done. The prize to focus on is the enhanced quality of life that every Santa Fean will have when this important natural resource is restored to the community.

For more information on the cases cited above see:

Rio Ruidoso River Association - <http://www.ruidosoriver.com/>

City of Boulder Instream Flow Program -

www.boulder.colorado.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2765&Itemid=1245

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San Ysidro Park Is Growing!

This spring the Watershed Association and Santa Fe County Open Space and Trails Division held three planting days as part of the on-going restoration of the river at San Ysidro Park. . Undaunted by snow, students from the College of Santa Fe and UNM worked at getting willows in between the boulders. Cottonwoods were planted by local students and youths from the Santa Fe Mountain Center as part of Earth Care's youth leadership program. Our final day was a great success with over 40 community members helping out with the planting of 500 willows to help stabilize the banks. With all the rain this summer, the plants are doing great. A big THANKS to everyone who helped.



Watershed Awareness Campaign

It's bad enough that many people don't know where the boundary of our watershed is, but when locals and not just tourists don't know even where the Santa Fe River is, well, no wonder we have a dead river! Public awareness of where the river is, and where is our watershed, is vital to our larger goal of reviving the health of our river and watershed. Soon, very soon, you will start seeing signs similar to this one, wherever major roads cross the river, or major arroyos, or where our roads cross the boundary of the watershed.

The signs are intended to make us think about the natural surroundings that we often take for granted or don't even see. They highlight the concept of a watershed and that all land is part of a watershed. The watershed signs not only provide useful geographic information but also promote a sense of identity among local residents, reminding us that we all share the watershed that we live in. And the signs also will spark public interest in the historical, cultural, and environmental significance of our local waterways.

While the signs look simple enough, a great deal of effort has gone into the program. The Santa Fe Watershed Association is collaborating on the project with Earthworks Institute, the Santa Fe Conservation Trust, the City and County of Santa Fe, and the New Mexico Environment Department's Surface Water Quality Bureau and Department of Transportation. Not only will our Santa Fe River, arroyos, and watershed be labeled, but so will many other rivers and arroyos throughout the state.

As our community becomes more aware of the interconnected but normally dry river and arroyo system, we hope to see more support for restoration projects and trails, to see more concern about trash and chemical pollution, and to inspire a reconnection to the land and the water that supports it.



Santa Fe River Fund

The City of Santa Fe has launched a Santa Fe River Fund to raise money to purchase dedicated water rights for the river. Think of it as a legal defense fund for the Santa Fe River. It seems strange to outsiders, and should also seem strange to us, that a river would have no legal protection to its own water. Some states and many countries, have passed laws mandating a minimum flow of water in their rivers, but New Mexico has no such provisions. With no legal protections for itself, the river can survive as a river only if we deliberately give back some of the water we have become accustomed to taking.

The Santa Fe River Fund offers a way of doing this. When we pay our water bill, in addition to paying for the water we have used that month, we have the option of also paying into the fund to ensure that someday the river will also have some water to use. Starting with the July bill, there is an option to check a box to make a monthly or one-time donation to the Fund. The City will match private contributions dollar for dollar, so your money is effectively doubled.

The more important reason for contributing to the Santa Fe River Fund is not to "buy" a living river, but to express support for restoring flow, through the positive act of giving money. The money we contribute really will purchase water rights for the river, little by little, and that little bit of water really will help. But more importantly, our contributions convey a message, that restoring flow to our river is a community priority.

The water we can obtain through purchasing new water rights for the river, will be added to the water we can obtain from better management of our stormwater, wastewater, and reservoir water. We need to work on all fronts to restore water to our river, including the legal front.

If you are a water customer within the City system, please contribute to the River Fund. Call the Water Division at 955-4333 and tell them you want to sign up. For more information, visit the City of Santa Fe's website at www.santafenm.gov and click on Santa Fe River under Hot Topics or Watershed Association website at www.santafewatershed.org.

Colaborative Forest Restoration Program

The Santa Fe Watershed Association has been awarded a one-year grant through the US Forest Service Collaborative Forest Restoration Program to develop a comprehensive management plan for the upper portion of our watershed. As the name implies, this will be a collaborative project with the City Water Division, the City Fire Department, The Nature Conservancy, and the US Forest Service Espanola Ranger District.

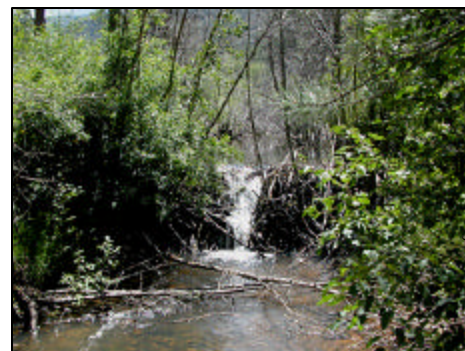
The project is the logical next step following completion of forest thinning in the non-wilderness portion of the upper watershed. That project is still incomplete, awaiting the burning of slash piles left over from the thinning in some 3,000 acres. These piles need to be burned as weather conditions permit. But even as we keep our attention on the urgency of finishing that work, we also need to start planning for the future of our entire watershed, including the wilderness portion. All of it, the entire 17,384 acres of beautiful forest, contributes to the wellbeing of all of us living downstream, as the source of water for Santa Fe's two reservoirs.

The CFRP-funded project will produce four thematic sub-plans, together comprising the first comprehensive management plan for our municipal watershed: (1) a forest management plan to make sure the forest stays healthy, including a program of periodic burns to keep the fuel load down; (2) a water management plan, including monitoring water quality, erosion, and silt loads in the reservoirs (3) a public awareness and outreach plan including educational programs and more public access into the watershed to enjoy its beauty and understand where our water comes from, and (4) a financial management plan to make sure there will be money available to keep our watershed managed properly.

Along with the dry science of forest and watershed management, the new plans will also address some controversial issues for us to consider in our future watershed. One sensitive issue is the "no trespassing" policy which the City and Forest Services adopted in 1932 to keep people out of the watershed. Most municipal watersheds are open to public use such as hiking and even mountain biking. Our watershed has been consistently closed for ever-changing concerns about water quality, fire danger, and now terrorism. Our new plan will revisit the current policy of closure against the many benefits of greater public access: awareness of how the watershed works and where the water comes from, as well as the aesthetic enjoyment of this beautiful forest.

Another controversy the plan will address is money. Who should pay for the improved management practices which our plan will undoubtedly propose? The US Forest Service continues to have a mandate to manage our watershed, along with the rest of the Santa Fe National Forest, but with drastically declining budgets, they probably will not have the capacity to manage our watershed as carefully as we would like. Our municipal watershed is of unique and irreplaceable importance to the growing community of Santa Fe, and we need to consider how to finance the right kind of management practices. If the Forest Service can't pay for it, the community has an interest to somehow make up the difference. In the language of watershed management, this is called, "payments for ecosystem services" or PES.

The management plan that we will be working on during the next year is another expression of how critical our watershed is to our continued existence. Wise management of our watershed is not optional; it is absolutely required. The challenge is to figure out what "wise management" means on a practical day-to-day level, as well as over the long-term.



Cynthia Gutierrez

Beaver Pond on Upper Santa Fe River

"So-this-is-a-River". "THE River," corrected the Rat. "And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!" "By it and with it and on it and in it," said the Rat. "It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing. Lord! the times we've had together..."

Kenneth Grahme, *The Wind in the Willows*



1413 Second Street
Suite 3
Santa Fe
New Mexico
87505
505-820-1696
info@santafewatershed.org

We're on the Web at
www.santafewatershed.org

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Bringing the Santa Fe River back to life —restoring the heart to our community.

Join Us

If you would like to help us bring back the river, please become a member. Membership entitles you to:

- Discounted or free hikes, work-shops, events
- Newsletter with email updates on general progress of organization
- SFWA Bumper Sticker

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Santa Fe River Downtown, September 1957