Bright, sunny, windy days: this spring, all of New Mexico is in drought, most of it severe, extreme, or exceptional drought.

Yet we know that this state of being is not exceptional anymore. Around two decades ago, the Southwest entered a megadrought, the second worst in the last 1,200 years. Precipitation has not actually declined all that much, but our region has experienced substantial warming as a result of climate change, meaning that snow melts faster, evaporation increases, the soil dries out, and vegetation needs more water to sustain itself. Simply put, a hotter climate means less water in our part of the world.

Humans, ever adaptable, are working to maximize our use of the water that remains. In Santa Fe, the City is pushing a proposal to stop releasing treated wastewater back into the lower Santa Fe River. Instead, the City plans to put the water in a pipe and transport it back to the Rio Grande for return flow credits, which will allow Santa Fe to take more water out of the Rio. Ultimately, the City envisions reusing the water directly, creating a closed loop where nearly every drop of water that comes in is captured for use by humans, and then returned to the City water system for further use.

The problem is that humans are not the only creatures who need water to live. Right now, the lower Santa Fe River is lush with life, wetlands supporting a diversity of birds, insects, fish, mammals, amphibians. Across New Mexico, at least 80 percent of all animals depend on riparian areas for part or all of their life cycles. Putting the water in a pipe will dry up that ecosystem, and the species supported by the wetland will vanish. Water flowing down rivers is not being wasted; it is sustaining the systems that support all life on earth.

Humans, too, have a deep need for rivers, and not just as a source of water in their pipes. In 2012, with strong public support, Santa Fe enacted the Living River ordinance to put some water back into the middle stretch of the river that runs through town. Under this law, about one-fifth of the water captured in the City’s upstream reservoirs is released into the river, rather than being diverted into our faucets. When that water shimmers down through the heart of Santa Fe, it not only nurtures birds, wildlife, willows, and cottonwoods; is an irresistible magnet for children, families, and people out walking their dogs.

As water scarcity becomes permanent, it is imperative that we find ways to live that allow us to share the water with our rivers, and all the plants and animals they support. The lower Santa Fe River deserves to live just as much as the upper stretches, and so too does the Rio Grande, the Gila, the Pecos. If the survival of humanity comes at the cost of killing our living rivers, what is that future even worth?
MAY 14-16, 2021 SERVICE PROJECT: Ft. Union Ranch

LOCATION: Ft. Union Ranch near Watrous, NM

THE PROJECT: This month AWF is teaming up with our friends at the Hermit’s Peak Watershed Alliance to restore Higgins Canyon on Fort Union Ranch. Our restoration activities are part of a larger, landscape-scale conservation effort that includes the nearby Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge. During this project, volunteers will hand-build rock restoration structures designed by Bill Zeedyk to help hold water on the landscape and improve the habitat for riparian plants and the wildlife they support.

SCHEDULE: Friday, May 14 – Sunday, May 16
Volunteers do not need to be present for the entire weekend to participate. You are welcome to join us just for the work day Saturday, or camp for just one of the two nights.

GEAR: Bring your own face mask or bandana, as well as everything you need for a weekend of camping and restoration work, including work gloves, hat, long sleeves, long pants, sturdy boots, and sunscreen. We recommend bringing a change of shoes, and waterproof boots or boots you don’t mind getting wet. Rain gear, layers, warm clothes for the evenings and plenty of water are essential.

FOOD: AWF will provide breakfast burritos on Saturday morning and bison or veggie burgers on Saturday evening. Please bring lots of water and your own food for Friday dinner, Saturday and Sunday lunches, any sides you want for Saturday dinner, and Sunday breakfast.

TO SIGN UP: Contact Scial at rioscial@gmail.com or 505-480-2906. Directions and further details will be sent to you once you sign up.

Click here to review AWF’s COVID-19 safety protocols.

2021 SERVICE PROJECTS CALENDAR

April 23-25.................Rio Mora Wildlife Refuge
May 14-16.................Ft. Union Ranch
June 4-6.....................Valles Caldera
June 25-27.................Polvadera Creek, Jemez Mountains
July 16-18....................Valle Vidal
August 13-15.............Midnight Meadows near Questa, NM
September 10-12.........Limestone Canyon, San Mateo Mtns
September 24-26.........Rio en Medio, near Santa Fe, NM
October 23.................Day project at Cedro Creek

AWF BOARD 2021

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AWF’s first restoration project of 2021 was limited in size but not in enthusiasm! The volunteers at Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge split into two groups. Three volunteers worked on repairing old structures on the western end of the refuge and cataloguing next steps for further work on those structures. The majority of our crew helped designate, prune, and edit a new two-mile trail the refuge is installing near Loma Parda canyon. This will be the first trail open to the public on the refuge. AWF volunteers assisted with rockwork in erosion-prone areas of the trail, helped plan the most intuitive route around obstacles, and marked the route with cairns that can be easily scattered once use renders the trail more visible.

Though we did our best to give the resident bison herd lots of room by switching campsites last minute, they followed us across the refuge and we gladly shared space with the small herd Saturday night, watching youngsters bounce around in the waxing moonlight. —Paul Ross, Project Leader
UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Trail Work in the Gila
MAY 1; MAY 8-13; MAY 30-JUNE 5
NEW MEXICO WILD
New Mexico Wild and Heart of the Gila are collaborating on several trail work opportunities in the Gila National Forest. For more info: https://www.nmwild.org/events/

Erosion Control Watch Party
WEDNESDAY, MAY 12 & WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 5:30-7:00 p.m., online
QUIVIRA COALITION
This free online series focuses on erosion control: why we do it, where we do it, and how we do it! For the May 12 watch party, Quivira will show a series of short films and Aaron Kauffman from Southwest Urban Hydrology will explain why and where we build erosion control structures, and how to build one rock dams, media lunas, and rock rundown. For the next two weeks, Quivira will send out activities that help you consider erosion where you live and practice building erosion control structures. We’ll come back together on May 26 with Aaron who will answer all your questions. To register: https://quiviracoalition.org/events/erosion-control-watch-party/2021-05-12/

2021 Virtual Crawford Symposium
THURSDAY, MAY 13, 1:00 p.m., online
BOSQUE ECOSYSTEM MONITORING PROGRAM (BEMP)
This year’s Crawford Symposium will be hosted virtually! Tune into BEMP’S YouTube channel to watch live as we join together to honor the multiple voices and perspectives of BEMP students, partners, and community this year. BEMP’s YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZFY31NlhtZFTd0ixAaEMSw

El Rito Grande: Conserving a Once-Mighty River
THURSDAY, MAY 13, 6:00 p.m., online
AUDUBON NEW MEXICO
Join Audubon Southwest’s Director of Freshwater Conservation, Paul Tashjian, as he walks us through how the Rio Grande functioned in its native state, how it was altered for societal needs, and how ecosystem function remarkably still remains today. We’ll learn how a future “Rito Grande” might remain alive in the face of climate change and increased water shortages, and what we can do to help preserve this essential river of life. For more info and to register: https://act.audubon.org/a/webinar-ritogrande

Rio Chama Citizen Science Bug Collection
APRIL-OCTOBER, NEW MEXICO WILD
Be a citizen scientist and help improve water quality on the Rio Chama! Help New Mexico Wild collect bug data on the Rio Chama. Learning which bugs are present helps us determine the condition of the water. To learn more about this project or to sign up, email rhett@nmwild.org. For more info: https://www.nmwild.org/event/rio-chama-citizen-science-bug-collection/

Send your event information to: abqwildlifefederation@gmail.com!
JOIN US!
Become a Member of the Albuquerque Wildlife Federation

The Albuquerque Wildlife Federation is an all-volunteer organization founded by Aldo Leopold and dedicated to protecting and restoring New Mexico’s wildlife and habitat resources.

Our work is only possible thanks to the generous support of our members.

If you like the work we do, we hope you will help keep this legacy going by becoming a member or renewing your membership.

AWF MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Albuquerque Wildlife Federation | P.O. Box 20225 | Albuquerque, NM 87154

☐ Yes, I’d like to join AWF! ☐ This is a gift membership from:________________________________________________________

ame(s): __________________________________________________________________________________________

address: __________________________________________________________________________________________

city, state, zip: ______________________________________________________________________________________

phone: _____________________________________________ email: _________________________________________

☐ Student __________ $10
☐ Individual ________ $25
☐ Family ___________ $35
☐ Sustaining _________ $50-99
☐ Patron _____________ $100
☐ Lifetime _____________ $500 (one-time payment)

Dues: $_________
Extra Contribution: $_________

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $_________