

NEW LIFE FOR THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE

THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

ABOUT THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The Middle Rio Grande is one of eleven newly selected locations for the nation's Urban Waters Federal Partnership. This partnership will reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways by improving coordination among federal agencies and collaborating with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental and social benefits. Specifically, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership will:

- Break down federal program silos to promote more efficient and effective use of federal resources through better coordination and targeting of federal investments.
- Recognize and build on local efforts and leadership, by engaging and serving community partners.
- Work with local officials and effective community-based organizations to leverage area resources and stimulate local economies to create local jobs.
- Learn from early and visible victories to fuel long-term action.

Led by these federal agencies and coordinated by the White House Domestic Policy Council and White House Council on Environmental Quality, the Urban Waters Federal Partnership closely aligns with and advances the work of the White House's place-based efforts, including the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, to revitalize communities, create jobs and improve the quality of life in cities and towns across the nation. The Urban Waters Federal Partnership also advances the work of the America's Great Outdoors Initiative (<http://americasgreatoutdoors.gov/>).

For more information, visit www.urbanwaters.gov

ABOUT THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE PARTNERSHIP

The two federal agencies that will co-chair this project are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. There are a number of federal agencies that are engaged in

projects with the local officials and community members such as Housing and Urban Development, Department of Transportation, United States Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bureau of Land Management. The project is looking forward to providing additional nexus to other federal agencies that can support these efforts in a more robust means from the National Federal Partnership in providing linkages where applicable.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW

In an effort to improve water quality, make public access safe, and restore the watershed's ecosystem, the Partnership is currently engaged in a number of federal and/or local projects:

Middle Rio Grande Conservation Initiative

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead federal partner for the first urban National Wildlife Refuge—Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge—which was established in September 2012 through an ongoing local/federal partnership. The project will ultimately lead to improvements in the quality of life and economy for Middle Rio Grande residents. A *Citizens Report: Strengthening Our Heritage in the Middle Rio Grande* was prepared and presented to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, which provides recommendations to advance the America's Great Outdoors Initiative by enhancing conservation, recreation, and education on both private and public lands along the Rio Grande through collaborative efforts by stakeholders, agencies and communities. The refuge is in its early stages of reconnecting the community to the Rio Grande.

Bridge Boulevard Corridor Redevelopment Plan

Bernalillo County in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, has begun a process to create a redevelopment plan for the Bridge Boulevard corridor from Coors Boulevard to the Barelás Bridge. The Bridge Boulevard Corridor Redevelopment Plan will identify appropriate improvements and areas for development to transform Bridge Boulevard into a mixed-use,



ABOUT THE COMMUNITY AND THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE

Preservation of the Rio Grande holds cultural and historical significance to the people who continue to use it today as it was used in prior generations. The river runs from its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains near Creede, Colorado and flows into the Gulf of Mexico. It is over 1,900 river miles long and has continued to meet the needs of the surrounding communities. Even in times of drought and overuse, these communities have used innovative means of preserving the river for daily use. The Middle Rio Grande project coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to seek the America's Great Outdoors designation through the acquisition of the first phase of the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. The community will continue to support the pursuit of the remaining parcels.

pedestrian and transit-friendly corridor that honors and maintains the unique history and character of the community. The plan includes the following objectives: reduce traffic congestion, increase safety, revitalize neighborhood businesses, improve housing availability and affordability and manage environmental impacts.

Middle Rio Grande Restoration Project

This project will restore 916 acres of native bosque (riparian cottonwood forest) along a 26-mile stretch of the Rio Grande between Isleta Pueblo and the northern border of Sandia Pueblo. This project partially fulfills the United States Army Corps of Engineers' requirements on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2003 Biological Opinion to create and restore habitat within this reach of the river for the listed Rio Grande Silvery Minnow and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. The project will also provide habitat restoration benefits as well as provide major recreation features, including new trails and signs, emergency watercraft access and canoe launching points, parking improvements, pedestrian benches, wildlife blinds and river overlooks.

WHAT'S NEXT

Water Quality Improvements

The Middle Rio Grande Watershed Stormwater Permit (MS4) Pilot project was proposed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, coordinating with stakeholder groups through numerous public meetings with all communities and permittees north and south of the City of Albuquerque along the Rio Grande. The discussions engage State/local/Tribes and interested stakeholder groups in the preparation of a watershed-based permit for this stretch along the river. The pilot will allow partnering communities to be creative and innovative in developing approaches that will be tested in meeting the requirements of the drafted watershed-based permit. The goal is for the watershed permit to better protect the water quality in the Middle Rio Grande.

Public Participation and Stakeholder Involvement

The Bridge Boulevard Corridor Redevelopment Plan is in the process of beginning public participation and recently convened a number of committee meetings. Once the Planning Commission approves the plan, additional meetings may resume for implementation activities. The sub-committees will focus on specific topics such as transportation, housing, economic development and environmental issues. The public will be invited to participate and those interested will be required to commit to allocated time dependent on their role in the focus groups, public/committee meetings, and a charrette that will be scheduled.

Water Quality Data Collection

The Middle Rio Grande valley was chosen as one of three pilot Watershed-Based Permit (WBP) projects nationwide because of existing water quality impairment in the Rio Grande and the opportunity to work on the challenges of permitting unique to arid and semi-arid parts of the country. The pilot project was aimed at developing a permit for MS4s in the area that would be more effective at addressing watershed issues while accommodating opportunities for cooperative programs that would hopefully be less expensive to implement. As a result of these activities, EPA Region 6 Water Quality Protection Division is proposing this month, May 2013, for public comment the issuance of a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) general permit for storm water discharges from municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) located in the Middle Rio Grande Watershed in the State of New Mexico. The goal of the watershed permit is to improve the protection and water quality in the Middle Rio Grande.

THE URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

The partnership includes: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army (Army Corps of Engineers), U.S. Department of Commerce (Economic Development Administration and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), Corporation for National and Community Service, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior and U.S. Department of Transportation

For more information on the Middle Rio Grande Urban Waters Federal Partnership, please contact the lead agency representatives:

Adele Cardenas
U.S. EPA
(214) 665-7210
cardenas.adele@epa.gov

Joaquin Baca
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, DOI
(505) 248-6621
joaquin_baca@fws.gov