

Middle Rio Grande/Albuquerque, New Mexico

Urban Waters Project Area

2014 Work Plan



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Project Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Background

As outlined by the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the Urban Waters continued incorporation of new project locations, the Middle Rio Grande project location incorporated numerous qualities including the goal of the partner federal agencies, “seeking to help communities – especially underserved communities – as they work to access, improve the benefit from their urban waters and the surrounding land.” A fundamental piece of the federal partnership which incorporates 13 signatory agencies is leveraging existing federal programs to support projects and build partnerships with a variety of Federal, state, tribal, local and private partners that foster their increased connection, understanding, and stewardship of local waterways. The agency’s Urban Waters vision states that the combined efforts of the numerous partners and stakeholders will ‘restore urban water quality, revitalize our communities and reconnect communities to their urban waterways.’ The collaboration will provide the following:

- Align Federal government programs and investments in these communities;
- Expand partnerships;
- Build local capacity; and
- Find innovative ways to communicate the environmental and economic potential of safe and clean waters.

FWS and EPA’s approach in achieving these goals is outlined in the [Urban Waters Strategic Framework](#). For more information on the Urban Waters Movement, please visit www.epa.gov/urbanwaters. For more information on the Federal partnership, please visit www.urbanwaters.gov.

Federal Agency Partnership

- Department of Agriculture
 - U.S. Forest Service
 - Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Department of Commerce
 - Economic Development Administration
 - National Weather Service
- Department of Defense – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Interior
 - Fish and Wildlife Service

- National Park Service
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Indian Health Service
- US Geological Survey
- Department of Transportation
- US Environmental Protection Agency

State Agency Partnership

- New Mexico Environment Department
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- New Mexico Department of Transportation
- New Mexico Office of the State Engineer
- New Mexico State Land Office
- New Mexico State Forestry Division
- New Mexico State Parks Division
- New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission
- New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department

Tribes

- Pueblo of Isleta
- Pueblo of Sandia
- Pueblo of San Felipe
- Pueblo of Santa Ana
- Pueblo of Cochiti

Local Government Agency Partnership

- City of Albuquerque
- County of Bernalillo
- City of Rio Rancho
- City of Bernalillo
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Non-Governmental Organization Partnership

- Trust for Public Lands
- Mid-Region Council of Governments
- South Valley Coalition of Neighborhood Associations

Overall Goals/Objectives

The Middle Rio Grande Urban Water Project will work to protect, restore and revitalize urban water resources in the Middle Rio Grande Area and the watershed associated with the project focus areas identified by the partnership. The Partnership will use the mission, vision and principles of the National Urban Waters Federal Partnership to guide the work:

- Promote clean urban waters
- Reconnect the citizens to their waterways
- Promote water conservation
- Promote economic revitalization and prosperity through existing networks of urban water resources
- Encourage community involvement through partnerships
- Engage and hear the needs of the communities involved
- Focus on measuring results and evaluation to fuel future successes

Identified Focus Areas

Project 1: Bridge Boulevard Redevelopment Plan

Overview: Bridge Boulevard serves as the gateway to the South Valley, the historic core of Bernalillo County. As a major travel corridor that carries approximately 30,000 cars, trucks and buses per day across the Rio Grande, it is the fourth most congested corridor in the Albuquerque metropolitan area (MRCOG 2012).

Bernalillo County was awarded a \$500,000 TIGER II/Community Challenge Planning grant from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), to develop a long-range integrated redevelopment plan. The plan identifies strategies and improvements aimed to increased safety, reduce traffic congestion as traffic volumes increase, revitalize local businesses, and improve housing availability and affordability. The key principles that form the basis of this plan are:

- Provide more transportation choices
- Promote equitable, affordable housing
- Enhance economic competitiveness
- Support existing communities
- Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment
- Value communities and neighborhoods

The Bridge Boulevard Corridor Redevelopment Plan process included studying the transportation system, market conditions, and land use along the Bridge Boulevard Corridor. Using the data collected and public input, the project team developed recommendations for sustainable

transportation system improvements and zoning and identified catalytic areas for affordable housing and business development. Recommendations include:

Main Street Roadway Alternative

Several corridor design options were proposed, studied, and tested at a design workshop/charrette in May 2012 and series of roadway concepts were presented to stakeholders at public meetings, steering committee meetings, and team meetings. The option that gained the most support was a four lane roadway section with center medians and two lane roundabouts at the Isleta and Five Points intersections. The project team also performed a compatibility assessment of the preferred roadway segments and intersection options to compare various design considerations and provide a screening tool for evaluating the segment and intersection options. The assessment matrix identified that the Main Street option – with all general purpose lanes and either traffic signal or two lane roundabout intersection configuration – had greatest compatibility.

The intent of the Main Street alternatives is to make roadway improvements that reduce peak hour congestion, improve safety, and maintain a local neighborhood “feel” by:

- Working within the existing right of way
- Adding landscaped medians
- Enhancing pedestrian areas with wider sidewalks and improved lighting
- Encouraging increased transit ridership by improving transit(bus) frequency
- Improving traffic flow and reducing speeds with roundabouts and more access control

Overall Corridor Strategy

The entire Bridge corridor has a range of redevelopment opportunities. The primary strategy, detailed in the plan focuses on three catalytic sites that have the best short term potential for redevelopment. There are, however, multiple sites along Bridge Boulevard that have both short term and long term potential for new development. This includes sites along the Bridge Boulevard near or at the Goff, Old Coors, and Atrisco. The Redevelopment Plan provides all the additional materials and information necessary to better understand the concepts and ideas identified.

The Bernalillo County Commission took action on the plan on August 27, 2013. An administrative resolution was passed as well as an ordinance. This action allows Bernalillo County to move forward with the changes in zoning regulations, roadway concepts, transit strategies and pedestrian amenities.

Federal Lead(s): HUD, DOT

Partners/Stakeholders:

Year 1 Work Plan Activities Identified: Economic Development and Housing Development

Phase I: Create South Valley Main Street nonprofit and establish Board of Directors, hold community meetings for Tax Incentive Development District, meet with property owners for housing development opportunities

Phase II: Complete environmental assessment for roadway design, hire Executive Director for South Valley Main Street, establish TIDD Board, prepare Goff redevelopment plan, obtain site for senior housing project

Proposed Timeline:

Phase I: October 2013 through September 2014

Phase II: October 2014 through September 2015

Project 2: The Middle Rio Grande Conservation Initiative with primary focus on the Albuquerque metropolitan including the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge

Overview: The July 2012 report, *Middle Rio Grande Conservation Initiative (A Citizens Report: Strengthening Our Heritage in the Middle Rio Grande)* (Report) was prepared at the request of the Secretary of the Department of the Interior. It provides recommendations to advance the America's Great Outdoors initiative by enhancing conservation, recreation, and education on both private and public lands along the Middle Rio Grande (MRG) through collaborative efforts by stakeholders, agencies, and communities. The project will ultimately lead to improvements in the quality of life and economy for MRG residents and is a logical fit for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (Partnership). A central project of this Report is the first urban National Wildlife Refuge of the Southwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service); Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) which was established in September 2012 through an ongoing local/federal partnership. In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has projects in this reach of the MRG that are complementary with the Report and HUD work on Bridge Blvd is in close proximity to the future refuge allowing for opportunities to collaborate and connect.

Federal Lead(s): US Fish and Wildlife Service (Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge)

Partners/Stakeholders: Bernalillo County, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Friends of Valle de Oro NWR, Mountain View Neighborhood Association, Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority (AMAFCA), State Lands Office (SLO), Trust for Public Land (TPL)

Year 1 Work Plan Activities Identified:

Phase I: Land Acquisition and cooperative agreements – Through partnerships and federal funding, continue land acquisition for the Valle de Oro NWR to the end goal of 570 acres (currently 488 as of May 2014). Develop cooperative agreements with Bureau of Reclamation and the State Lands Office to provide access for refuge staff and visitors to adjacent property in the bosque and along the Rio Grande in order to highlight work done by ACE, BOR, AMAFCA, and SLO.

Continue working with local partners to implement findings from the MRG Conservation Initiative Citizen Report. Convene a meeting in early 2014 to update project partners on status of the project (e.g., resourcing the formation of an Advisory Council to guide outdoor recreation, environmental education and conservation along the Middle Rio Grande)

Phase II: Valle de Oro NWR refuge planning - Begin the NEPA scoping process and work to develop the Environmental Assessment (EA) for refuge habitat restoration work and visitor service facilities. Work with AMAFCA, Bernalillo County and multiple contractors to produce conceptual site plans for use in the EA.

Proposed Timeline:

Phase I:

Projected closing in December 2013 on 57 acres using State of New Mexico Capital Outlay Funding through Bernalillo County. (completed)

Continue to work with Trust for Public Land to secure additional funding needed through the Land and Water Conservation Fund – National Trails Collaborative. (in progress)

Work with AMAFCA to install a bridge connecting Valle de Oro NWR property to adjacent BOR and SLO property and to facilitate restoration work in these properties. (completed)

Complete cooperative agreements with BOR and SLO for access to adjacent properties by September 2014. (in progress)

Schedule meetings to collaborate with local partners in setting priorities re: the implementation of the MRG Conservation Initiative Citizen's Report. (in progress- workshop occurred April 2014)

Phase II:

Begin work with AMAFCA and their hired contractor October 2013 and complete conceptual site plan by June 2014

Begin NEPA scoping process December 2013

Complete EA by January 2015

Work with Ducks Unlimited to develop a conceptual design for refuge habitat

Work with Great Outdoors consultants to develop an Interpretive and Concept Plan

Project 3: The Middle Rio Grande Restoration Project

Overview: The Middle Rio Grande Restoration Project is a \$25 million project that partially fulfills COE 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 (silvery minnow) and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (flycatcher). In addition, habitat restoration benefits Neotropical songbirds and other species that migrate along the river corridor. The community will benefit with recreational features such as new trails and signs, emergency watercraft access and canoe launching points, pedestrian benches, wildlife blinds & river overlooks. This project would benefit with input from additional federal agencies that can provide both technical and resource nexuses to the overall completion of this project being implemented for use by the community at large. This project would also benefit from additional ongoing coordination with local agencies and their work.

Federal Lead(s): COE, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Partners/Stakeholders: Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, City of Albuquerque, Village of Corrales, Pueblo of Sandia

Year 1 Work Plan Activities Identified:

Phase I: Complete construction of project features

Phase II: Coordination of potential additional project features including recreational features

Proposed Timeline:

Phase I: November 2011 – April 2015

Phase II: January 2014 – April 2017

Middle Rio Grande Restoration Project – Goals:

- * **Scenario in 6 months:** A combination of activities that will include construction of high-flow channels, bank terraces and wetlands that serve as nurseries for the silvery minnow and refugia for multiple fish and wildlife species, construction of swales favorable to the restoration of stands of native Gooddings and coyote willow to the floodplain in order to establish and enhance available habitat for flycatcher and other riparian area obligates.
- * **Scenario in 1 year:** Maturing restoration features with the potential to create a more dynamic and diverse river environment favorable to native vegetation while

simultaneously discouraging the establishment and spread of salt cedar and other exotic plants. Additional recreational features and geographic ties to other projects in the region could occur due to this partnership.

Project 4: Enhanced Storm Water Management

Overview: The enhanced storm water management element will focus and coordinate efforts to test and adopt innovative approaches with the various communities along the river to better protect water quality in the Middle Rio Grande based in part on recommendations in the Nation Research Council report, Urban Storm Water Management in the United States (2008). This includes EPA's existing Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Water Phase I permit and EPA's proposed watershed-based MS4 permit (Phase I and Phase II permittees in the Middle Rio Grande area), as well as other efforts to reduce water quality impacts from stormwater in the area. The additional focus through Urban Waters will highlight the necessary support through this project by providing opportunity and flexibility for new innovative ideas for this semi-arid region. Demonstration project will provide lessons learned and possible transferability in other similar Southwestern areas.

Federal Partners Lead(s): U.S. EPA

Partners/Stakeholder: This includes all the organizations which have participated in the MRG Watershed Based permit pilot which include: City of Albuquerque, Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority (AMAFCA), New Mexico Department of Transportation; Ciudad Soil and Conservation District, New Mexico Environment Department, Pueblo of Isleta, Pueblo of Sandia, Sandia Laboratories (DOE), Mid Region Council of Governments, Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Group, NGO's, and other potential partners

Year 1: Work Plan Activities Identified:

Phase I:

- Develop an Education and Outreach Strategy to provide better education for storm water practitioners and the public about the impacts of storm water discharges on water bodies and the steps that the public can take to reduce pollutants in storm water runoff.
- Seek opportunities to encourage cooperation and partnerships.
- Finalize area wide MS4 permit (EPA).

Timeline: 6 months

Phase II:

Project 5: Isleta Pueblo Island Removal Project

Overview: The Island Removal Project (IRP) is designed and intended to:

- Remove approximately 83,000 yd³ of accumulated channel sediment
- Regrade approximately 11.6 acres vegetated islands and river bars within the project boundaries below Isleta Diversion Dam (IDD)
- Accommodate anticipated flow events
- Provide for sediment transport
- Restore a bank-to-bank view of this reach of the Rio Grande
- Provide opportunities for backwater and other habitat for the endangered Rio Grande Silvery Minnow

The IRP is designed to create a year-round base flow channel adjacent to the west bank from the apron of the IDD to approximately 1400' downstream. This channel will be 250' wide. East of this channel a terrace will be constructed the same length as the base flow channel and 250' wide. Another terrace east of this will connect with the east bank. A permanent spur dike will be placed in the channel. This dike will be keyed into the east bank downstream of the Peralta sluice gate and extend into the River approximately 300'. The purpose of this dike is to deflect high flows into the base flow channel and transport upstream sediment through the project site. (A temporary channel along the east bank with a capacity of 500 cfs will be in place during IRP construction to divert flows away from the IRP and a separate tribal project on the west bank.)

Federal Partners Lead(s): USACE, U.S. EPA, USGS

Partners/Stakeholder:

Timeline: Year One

While the Pueblo of Isleta is required and has agreed to:

- Operate and maintain the Project in good operating condition and repair at all times during the useful life of the Project (not less than twenty years)
- Implement activities on an upstream 22-acre site to support the endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher (plus many other Army Corps permit conditions),

Phase I:

The project is subject to conditions and uncertainties which will be accounted for as monitoring and site observation continue such as:

- The IRP is within a sediment-laden and dynamic river system
- Throughout the Project's life span, there will be significant events beyond the Pueblo's control such as:
 - Spring runoff
 - Upstream storm events including tributary arroyos
 - Operations of Isleta Diversion Dam
 - Extirpation of the Rio Grande silvery minnow

Project 6: North Camino/El Camino Arroyos, Avulsion One Sandia Pueblo Project

Overview: The Corrales Siphon was built around 1933 by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. It is a wooded stave-built pipe made from Douglas fir planks that are 2.5 inches thick that are held by metal bands. If it were empty, it is large enough to walk through. When it was originally built, it was several feet below the 1933 Rio Grande riverbed. As long as the Corrales Siphon remains wet and below the river, it is protected and will remain functional. It may be the oldest surviving structure of its type in the United States. The Corrales Siphon is essential to providing water to irrigators/farmers in the town of Corrales. Water from the Rio Grande River is diverted to the east side of the river at Angostura Dam into the Albuquerque Main ditch. In the northern portion of the Pueblo of Sandia Reservation, water is diverted from the Albuquerque Main into the Corrales Main (often called the Corrales Feeder on the Sandia side). The Corrales Siphon takes this water under the Rio Grande and into the Corrales Main on the west side of the river where it is distributed to the irrigation system of Corrales.

Federal Partners Lead(s): USACE, U.S. EPA

Partners/Stakeholder: Sandia Pueblo, Village of Corrales, MRGCD

Project 7: Central New Mexico Climate Change Scenario Planning Project

Overview: An Inter-Agency Transportation, Land Use, and Climate Change Initiative

Planning for rapidly growing places like Albuquerque and the central New Mexico region means addressing challenges of congestion, sprawl, energy use, vehicle emissions, and water scarcity. These challenges are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change on an already vulnerable arid climate.

A unique partnership between federal agencies and the Mid-Region Council of Governments, located in Albuquerque, NM, will help the region address these intertwined challenges through an analytical process known as scenario planning. Scenario planning allows participants to consider the impacts of growth and evaluate the costs and benefits of various development scenarios. The project will influence transportation and land use decision-making in the central New Mexico region by analyzing strategies to reduce carbon emissions and prepare for the effects of climate change. The project will be undertaken alongside the development of the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, which considers the impacts of growth on the region's infrastructure and identifies strategies to meet long-term transportation needs.

More specifically, the goals of the project are to:

- 1) *Advance climate analysis in scenario planning.*
- 2) *Impact decision-making.*
- 3) *Develop a transferrable process.*
- 4) *Build partnerships.*

For more information, please see:

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/climate_change/adaptation/ongoing_and_current_research/

Federal Partners Lead(s): USDOT FHWA, USDOT Volpe Center, FTA, EPA, USFWS, BLM, USFS, NPS, NOAA, FEMA, USACE

Partners/Stakeholder: MRCOG, MRMPO