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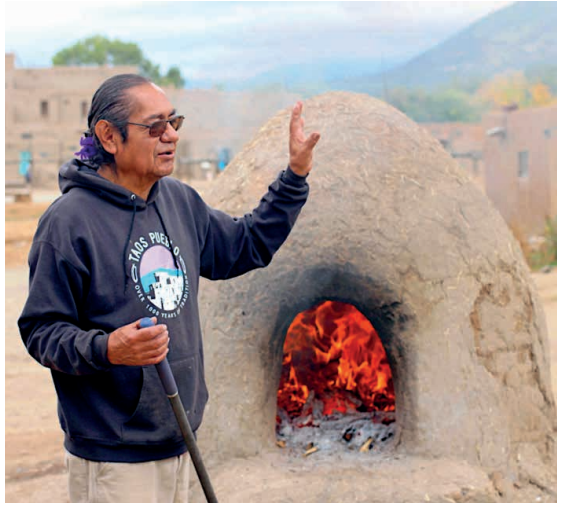
NMELC'S TOP-5 ISSUES TO LOOK FOR IN 2026

GREEN FIRE TIMES

News & Views from the Resilient Southwest



LIVING COMMUNITIES, ENDURING TRADITIONS

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COVER: TAOS PUEBLO BONFIRE AT SUNSET; YUCCA CLIMATE PROTEST IN SANTA FE; MORA, N.M. COMMUNITY MEETING DURING HERMIT'S PEAK FIRE; DAWN BUTTERFLY CAFÉ; BREAKING GROUND FOR HOUSING AT TAOS PUEBLO; RÍO GRANDE SKY FIESTA AT LOS LUCEROS; ONE OF 400 USDA SCHOOL LUNCHES PRODUCED BY AIRE IN TAOS USING LOCAL PRODUCTS; GERONIMO ROMERO EXPLAINS HORNO BAKING AT TAOS PUEBLO.

PHOTOS COURTESY: DAWN BUTTERFLY CAFÉ (TAOS PUEBLO), YUCCA/NMELC, CHARLES G. CURTIN, TIRA HOWARD/NMDCA, MICAH ROSEBERRY (AIRE), N.M. INDIAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT, NORTHERN RÍO GRANDE NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA

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Support Independent, Community-driven Journalism

Green Fire Times provides a platform for community-based voices—useful information for residents, businesspeople, students and visitors—anyone interested in the history and spirit of New Mexico and the Southwest. GFT's articles and storytelling document the interrelationship of community, culture, the environment and the regional economy, uniting people from all backgrounds to create innovative and sustainable solutions.

Some people write off GFT as just an "environmental publication." If you are a regular reader, you know that the environment is but one thread of a unique tapestry that highlights time-honored regional traditions of sustainability, while promoting culturally based economic development. You will also find articles on education, renewable energy, Indigenous solutions, growing a regional food system, and a lot more. You will find thought-provoking ideas, as well as passionate opinions. The wealth of article submissions we receive demonstrates the need for the unique platform that GFT provides.

Green Fire Times is owned by the nonprofit Southwest Learning Centers, Inc. (Est. 1973). Because of the ever-increasing financial challenges of maintaining a quality print/online magazine, it is uncertain how much longer GFT can survive. It is important for GFT to maintain the free print copies—still widely distributed from Albuquerque to Taos, including to some rural areas—because many people from rural and tribal communities contribute ideas, articles and images and really enjoy being able to share a hard copy. The print copies also provide exposure to people who wouldn't otherwise find GFT.

In order for GFT to build on its accomplishments and stay alive, we really need to upgrade our operations. We have reached out to potential funders and foundations, as well as advertisers. Mostly, we receive small donations from devoted readers. We have been operating on a shoestring for a long time—and it's not sustainable. As you're aware, this is an especially critical time for independent, nonprofit, community-centered journalism. If GFT matters to you and you value the work we do, a tax-deductible contribution or placing an ad in an upcoming issue would make a meaningful difference in helping us continue to publish and serve our community. A donation may be made through this QR code or via PayPal on WWW.GREENFIRETIMES.COM. Or, send a check to Southwest Learning Centers (with a notation "for GFT") to P.O. Box 8627, Santa Fe, N.M. 87504-8627. Thank you.

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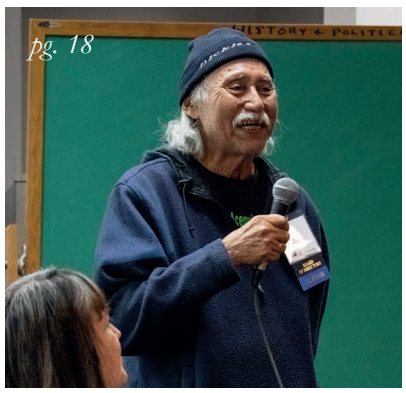

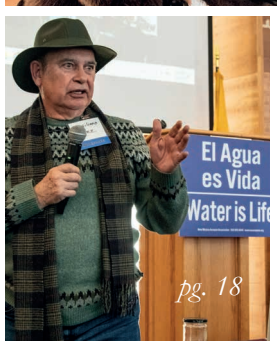

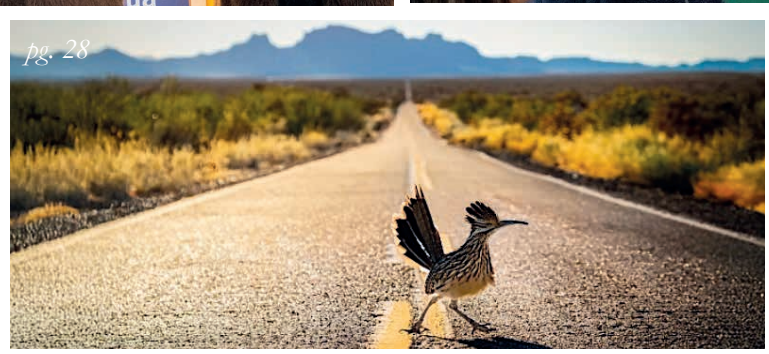

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AFTER THE SMOKE CLEARED: HOW MORA FORGED ITS OWN PATH TO RECOVERY

BY **ELLIOTT BOCHSTEIN**

On April 23, 2022, smoke rose over the Sangre de Cristo range as two federally prescribed burns merged in high winds, igniting the largest wildfire in New Mexico's history. By August, the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon Fire had scorched 341,471 acres—a burn scar larger than the city of Los Angeles.

Anita LaRan, a fifth-generation Mora resident and longtime leader of the grassroots nonprofit Collaborative Visions, was in a hotel room when her phone buzzed with evacuation orders. "I thought it couldn't happen here," she said. "I was wrong."

The fire was only the first blow. That summer's monsoon season brought torrents of mud and ash into a watershed stripped of vegetation. Mora's centuries-old acequias—communal irrigation channels—overflowed or clogged with debris, choking off the valley's lifeblood. "All our farmland, our forest, our grazing land—burned," LaRan said. "The flooding just destroyed what was left of our land."

At the height of the disaster, 15,500 households received evacuation orders, including the entire town. More than 900 structures were lost, 450 of them homes. In Mora County—population 4,500, median household income about $40,000—the disaster imperiled a way of life rooted in land and family. "People lost homes with hundreds of years of history," LaRan explained. "All the memories these places represent; a lot of people lost that and will never replace it. When outsiders say, 'Just build another house,' they're missing the point. That's devastating in a culture like ours."

In the aftermath, Mora turned to Rural Community Assistance Corporation, a nonprofit that had worked in the region for more than 30 years. This trust was built on a long history of collaboration; years before the fire, LaRan had served 12 years on RCAC's board, helping bring nearly $40 million in technical assistance to the valley's water systems.

"Small rural communities lack organizational capacity," she noted. "So, Collaborative Visions partners with groups that have the technical expertise to make us stronger."

When community leaders reached out, RCAC's Building Rural Economies program, which had worked with LaRan's group since 2015, responded by repurposing an existing U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant to get resources flowing.

Top: Aerial view of Mora with homes, fields and surrounding mountains
Above: Volunteers fill sandbags to reduce post-fire flooding. Photos: Wildcraft Media

RCAC's new Community Resilience and Disaster Planning program joined the effort, coordinating RCAC's diverse departments to tackle Mora's complex challenges in a cohesive manner. Led by former Federal Emergency Management Agency official Alan Nazzaro, CRDP provided the overarching disaster strategy and technical framework while BRE maintained its on-the-ground partnerships. "Our question was, 'How do we coordinate?'" Nazzaro explained. "How do we organize the community and coordinate among different departments within RCAC to get the most impact for the community? And that's exactly what we did."

A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY-LED RECOVERY

RCAC's fundamental ethos is to "advise, not decide." Rather than imposing a top-down plan, the recovery strategy aligned with the federal government's framework for disaster response, breaking the task of rebuilding into manageable categories like housing, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources, health and social services, and economic recovery. The process began with intensive community workshops facilitated by RCAC staff, using the established Recharge Our Community's Economy (ROCE) curriculum with disaster recovery training slides interspersed, which guided residents through a process of identifying local assets and setting priorities.

"We came in trying to bring everybody together—not just the community but stakeholders, education, local government," said Elizabeth Bernal, an RCAC consultant on the BRE team. "We do this to find out how to address not only what the fire has taken away from them, but how they can move forward to become a safer place."

Together with RCAC, residents crafted a placemaking vision statement to anchor their recovery efforts: "Protect and develop Mora County's water, land, people and culture by promoting and investing in future economic and community growth while improving the quality of life for generations to come so that people who love here can live here!"

Guided by this vision, the community formed three resident-led committees focused on housing, infrastructure and economic development. The initial workshops that formed these committees drew an average of 30 to 50 citizens, who invested over 900 personal hours in the effort. As these groups began their work, RCAC provided the technical backstop, helping to align the community's priorities with the federal disaster response framework to ensure the final, unified strategy would be both authentic to Mora and legible to federal funders.

Community members discuss and write during a workshop. Photo: Wildcraft Media

To empower these committees, RCAC provided each with $7,500 in seed money from a USDA Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge grant, allowing them to begin their own planning initiatives. CRDP's continued work with the committees was supported by a Partners for Rural Transformation grant through Fahe.

"You can't build homes if there's no water system," said Bernal. "And you can't keep people if there's no local economy. It's all interdependent."

PLAZA NUEVA: REINFORCING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Among the recovery's most ambitious ideas is Plaza Nueva, a new town center envisioned by the Economic Development Committee. The concept draws inspiration from Mora's original 1835 Mora Land Grant plaza, destroyed by U.S. troops during the 1847 Taos Revolt. The plaza had served as the community's heart, a central gathering place near waterways where residents met, celebrated and conducted business. CRDP's meticulous archival analysis and mapping of those 19th-century land grant records pinpointed the plaza's historic footprint.

This community held on through disaster; but without water, people leave. That's how places like this unravel.

Community surveys revealed overwhelming support for the project, with 82 percent of residents saying they would use the plaza regularly. The favored design features traditional pueblo-style architecture with adobe and stucco façades, covered walkways and shared courtyards. Plans include workforce housing, senior living units, artisan workshops and spaces for public gatherings. A functioning acequia would run through the plaza, serving as a living demonstration of the valley's historic water-sharing traditions.

"It would be a place where people could gather to eat together, to celebrate, to mark important community moments," LaRan said. "It's about creating something meaningful to our community for generations to come." A $149,000 planning grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is now translating this vision into architectural blueprints through ongoing charettes—intensive planning workshops that keep community input at the forefront.

Concept sketch of Plaza Nueva. Photo: Wildcraft Media

INFRASTRUCTURE: FROM CRISIS TO COORDINATION

While Plaza Nueva captured imaginations, the Infrastructure Committee grappled with more immediate survival needs. The county's 15 Mutual Domestic Water Consumer associations—small, community-run utilities—were already struggling with aging systems and scarce resources before the disaster pushed them to the brink.

Protecting water systems is central to recovery. Photo: Wildcraft Media

"We address not only what the fire has taken away from them, but how they can move forward to become a safer place."
– Elizabeth Bernal

The fire's impact reached deep into the earth itself. In Chacon, intense heat sealed the community's original spring, forcing water to emerge at a new location and requiring construction of an entirely new spring box. In Buena Vista, excessive pumping during firefighting efforts overtaxed wells beyond capacity, leaving residents dependent on hauled water.

Ramon Lucero, RCAC's regional field manager from the Environmental team, witnessed the community's transformation firsthand. "At first, everyone was angry—and understandably so," he recalled. "But then people started clicking. Once the committees formed, people knew where they were needed, and you could feel the energy shift."

Anita LaRan with a water-level gauge used to monitor Mora's supply. Photo: Wildcraft Media

Much of this energy crystallized around a long-discussed idea: the Mora County Water Alliance. LaRan had advocated for this coalition for years, watching volunteer board members leave without replacements. "I thought it would really be good to step up the process of forming this alliance, so that we could have staff in place," she explained. The committee also identified 26 critical water-related projects, which CRDP helped organize into a FEMA-compatible matrix detailing each project's scope, cost estimates and funding potential. Their efforts bore fruit when the newly formalized Water Alliance secured a $145,000 state grant to hire its first professional staff. "We're finally moving from volunteer boards to real staffing," Lucero said. "That's building real capacity, not just patching holes."

Among the recovery's most ambitious ideas is Plaza Nueva, a new town center.

The committee's work also outlined proposals for long-term resilience, including proposals for a Mora Watershed Alliance for environmental restoration, plans to deepen wells to combat falling water tables, and designs for a central potable water station for future emergencies. They also planned for emergency equipment access and a "resource harvesting" hub to train local grant writers. In addition, they addressed hidden threats such as unregulated handmade septic systems that posed growing environmental risks.

THE HOUSING MAZE: A CRISIS OF SHELTER AND PAPERWORK

With 450 to 500 homes lost, much of the county's population was suddenly displaced into a region where housing was already scarce. Many families who had lived on their land for generations lacked the formal titles FEMA and insurance companies required—documents they were expected to procure while living in temporary shelters.

Burn scar, flood risk: the landscape that pushed utilities to the brink. Photo: Wildcraft Media

The existing support systems proved woefully inadequate, with only 18 Section 8 vouchers allocated annually to the entire county. Using their seed funding, the Housing Committee's first action was commissioning a preliminary needs assessment to create a data-driven picture of the shortage.

A functioning acequia would run through the plaza, serving as a living demonstration of the valley's historic water-sharing traditions.

CRDP facilitated workshops and connected the committee with housing specialists and partners like El Camino Real Housing Authority, helping residents explore solutions like a Community Land Trust model to create permanently affordable homes. The committee also examined zoning requirements, recommending changes to mitigate future disaster risks while allowing diverse housing options such as accessory dwelling units.

A LONG ROAD AHEAD

Three years after the fire, with substantial federal compensation still slow to arrive, Mora refuses to wait. The committees' work has now evolved from crisis response to foundational planning. That resilience continues to be tested, as the community faced further destructive flooding unleashed by rains washing over the fire's burn scar in the summer of 2025.

As Celeste Gauna, CRDP program coordinator, wrote: "The work to rebuild the community will continue for years, but the people of Mora County will thrive, showing the world that they are strong, proud survivors."

Yet progress remains fragile. Lucero voices a fear that haunts many: "What's at risk?" he asks. "The social fabric. This community held on through disaster; but without water, people leave. That's how places like this unravel."

For other communities facing similar threats, LaRan offers hard-won advice: "Don't wait till it happens. Prepare your water systems. Prepare the things that are most important in your community. Utilize the technical expertise that's out there—especially in small rural communities—because we can't do it by ourselves." ■

Elliott Bochstein is staff writer with the Rural Community Assistance Corporation.
HTTPS://WWW.RCAC.ORG

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Photos: Wildcraft Media. Learn more about Collaborative Visions at VISIONESCOLLABORATIVAS.ORG *and RCAC's Community Resilience & Disaster Planning at* RCAC.ORG/HOUSING/COMMUNITY-RESILIENCE-AND-DISASTER-PLANNING.

THE MORA WATER CRISIS

In yet another blow to people who have lived through fire and flood, in November 2025, the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) advised private well owners in and around the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon Fire burn area in Mora County to avoid using their water for things such as drinking, cooking, washing dishes, brushing teeth, or as drinking water for pets due to elevated levels of 11 metals discovered in the area's groundwater. Three (antimony, arsenic and uranium) tested at levels above EPA drinking water standards. One metal, manganese, tested above an EPA lifetime health advisory.

The DOH advised that residents can continue to use the water for household uses–including bathing and washing clothes, "as current levels do not affect normal skin contact," but to use bottled water for drinking.

At higher concentrations or with long-term exposure, heavy metals can damage the kidneys, skin, cardiovascular system and nervous system. Arsenic and manganese can affect brain development and lead to long-term health effects. The NMDOH has created a fact sheet on health factors and water safety, which is available on its website, or by calling 1-833-796-8773.

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) recommended that all private well owners in the community get their water tested at a certified lab, and also recommended the installation of whole-house reverse osmosis systems. Boiling the water does not make it safe and can increase metal contamination.

How did the heavy metals get there? Antimony in 93 percent of the wells leads to a hypothesis of fire retardant as the source. Surprisingly little research exists on the chemical content of fire retardant products that have been used to douse watersheds and communities. Some have suggested that the cause may be the igniting of fire rather than the fire-fighting. U.S. Forest Service workers ignite prescribed burns with potassium permanganate, a neurotoxin that turns into manganese dioxide, which can leach into waterways.

Charting a Pathway Toward Long-term Fire Recovery

Why Our Institutions Are Failing, and What to Do About It

BY **CHARLES G. CURTIN**

Nearly four years have passed since the catastrophic Hermit's Peak–Calf Canyon wildfires, but for the people who live in the region, the wounds are still fresh. Sure, a few roads and bridges have been patched or replaced, some burned trees harvested, and significant payments have gone out to individuals and contractors. But the reality is hard to ignore: Fire threats still loom, floods keep coming, and the land and its people are struggling more than ever—despite billions poured into recovery. The sense of frustration and despair is palpable.

Citizens in Mora debate the role of federal agencies in fire mitigation and recovery.

What's happening in the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon burn area isn't just a local tragedy—it's a wake-up call because most of the forests in New Mexico and across the West are predicted to burn in coming decades. This story reveals not only the struggles of people and landscapes caught in the aftermath but also exposes just how unprepared our institutions are to meet the challenges of a radically changing world.

The answer to the riddle of why we've not made more progress in post-fire recovery is that existing institutions and the systems they embody aren't working because they're not designed to work in the face of rapid, repeated and dramatic change. Here are a few examples of intersecting factors leading to poor outcomes.

FEDERAL RESPONSE—A SYSTEM OUT OF SYNC

The FEMA recovery process tasked with disaster recovery isn't designed for long-term recovery. The process lacks the core elements needed to adapt to a changing world, including accountability, long-term design-based thinking and a focus on collective rather than individual benefit. Congressional rules ensure failure by stipulating that replaced infrastructure, such as bridges and culverts, cannot (except in exceptional circumstances) improve on pre-existing infrastructure, so even though a valley post-fire may have many times the run-off it did previously, mandating the same size bridge or culvert results in repeated

replacements rather than right-sizing for the current situation. There is little to no effective oversight to make sure the funding spent results in better outcomes.

FEMA's insurance-style recovery scheme exacerbates existing inequalities by giving large landowners and contractors millions while the rest get comparatively little or nothing. This institutionalized inequity tears at the fabric of communities, compensating landowners while providing no incentive to apply the money to landscape or community recovery. The rational response to such a system is to cash out and leave... which is often what is happening and what has occurred in many rural communities across the West post-fire.

At the same time, inflated federal wages undermine local employers' ability to find reliable, long-term workers, putting additional pressure on already-struggling local economies. While some local contractors have earned substantial incomes, most of the money never percolates down to the local community because, for the most part, large national contractors that feed off the FEMA system don't hire locally and bring in most of their own resources.

In short, we're got a political quick fix to a problem that demands long-term, thoughtful solutions. Our institutions are stuck in the past, treating disasters as rare accidents—when, in this era of climate upheaval, wildfires, floods and intense storms are nearly as inevitable as death and taxes. Based on these shortcomings and many others, the process results in outcomes that unravel communities and push both people and nature into decline.

PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE —MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Though FEMA's response has been disappointing, local philanthropic and economic development responses are at times equally problematic.

Flood Impacts - Massive floods continue unabated and will likely persist for several more years, while fire is a relatively short-term event. The flooding and water contamination are the gift that keeps giving.

Carbon and biomass markets are too often just another form of resource extraction.

Here again, there is little attention to long-term solutions. Yes, short-term assistance, along with other near-term emergency aid, are essential for helping people get through a crisis. Yet, years later, there have been few coherent attempts to get to the heart of the problem: how to finance long-term, ecologically and socially responsible recovery. It's like continually applying Band-Aids and OxyContin to someone with a chronic heart condition. Yes, we're doing stuff, but mostly it's a surface-level response to systemic challenges. There is little or no long-term strategy because there are few incentives and many barriers to long-term thinking.

In my own work, we've meticulously documented place-based solutions to fire-recovery challenges through extensive community engagement and research, all grounded in insights from numerous nationally recognized experts. I've even penned a book that has been vetted by leading figures in conservation and societal change. Yet, despite ample evidence supporting an alternative, more holistic path forward, it seems that the more information we gather, the less support we receive. The lack of support for long-term solutions isn't personal, nor due to insufficient documentation. It's systemic: The grant guidelines and review process for agencies, foundations and economic development organizations, for the most part, don't prioritize systemic solutions to systemic problems. In the words of conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold, "We have the sad spectacle of one obsolete idea chasing another around a closing circle, while opportunity goes begging." And there are opportunities if we recognize the challenge's dimensions and evolve responses to match the scale and scope of the situation.

TOWARD LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

Most support is an incremental approach to a transformational problem—base hits when we need home runs. Consider pro baseball. Less than 13 percent of hits result in home runs, and those who hit the long balls strike out more than those who seek base hits. In Babe Ruth's legendary 1927 season, he hit 60 balls out of the park in 540 at-bats, averaging a home run every nine at-bats while striking out every six at-bats. So, he lost more than he won. Yet it was the home runs, not the strikeouts or base hits, that made the difference! Current strategies of simple, incremental solutions to overwhelming social and environmental change in prioritizing base hits over home runs are like bringing a knife to a gunfight. The scope and scale of the challenges outmatch current strategies. One must swing for the fences or be assured of facing resounding defeat, which means learning to embrace risk and uncertainty.

Biochar plant - Biochar (a charcoal-like substance that can be used for water retention in soils and myriad other uses) technology, as in this plant in production in Arizona, is approaching reliability, as are the associated markets, but there's still a lot of trial and error involved in the process.

And too often, an honest expression of uncertainty is mistaken for weakness or lack of expertise, when in truth, it's the only reasonable response to the tangled crises we face. Real solutions demand flexibility, experimentation and the courage to try new approaches. We need to strip issues down to their core principles, ask tough

At all scales, there are ways to enhance rather than extract from local communities.

Fire threats still loom, floods keep coming, and the land and its people are struggling more than ever.

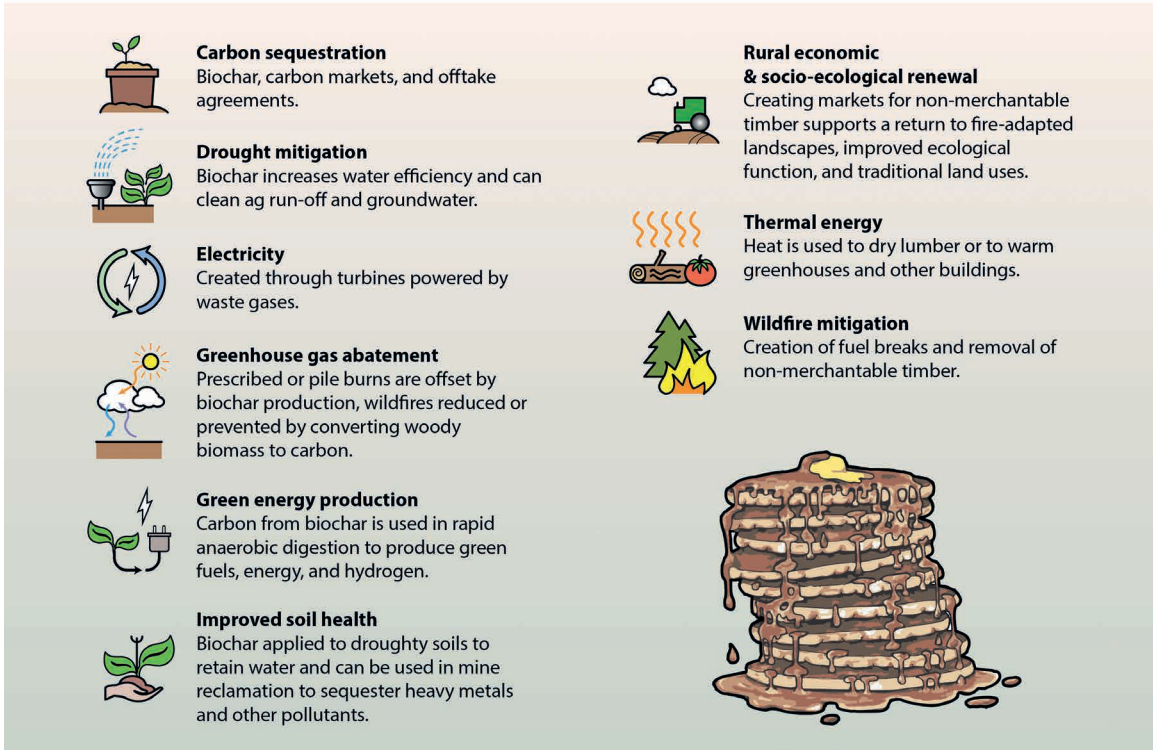
questions, and be ready to learn as we go. In short, in the face of massive socio-ecological change and uncertainty, we need to move from narrow problem framing to embracing a series of overarching principles. If we were to devise a few principles to guide a path toward adaptation and recovery, what might they look like? Here are a few suggestions.

PROCESSES NEED TO BE SELF-SUSTAINING, ADAPTIVE AND REGENERATIVE

For approaches to work over the long haul, they need to align rather than run counter to social, ecological and economic forces. Yet as noted, most public and private sector strategies are maladapted to addressing messy, multifaceted challenges. As in Hermit's Peak–Calf Canyon fire responses, they're also just too slow and clunky to respond at the pace of solutions that need to be delivered, and they're too prone to being co-opted by existing political or institutional forces. Agencies and foundations can contribute most effectively by providing start-up funds to support the less monetizable parts of the process, which are community engagement and prototyping and testing alternative strategies. But once a viable approach is devised, the speed of action needed to enact innovation and the need for long-term sustainable incomes requires private investment, supported by alternative valuation methods that incentivize social and ecological renewal.

AVOID SIMPLIFICATION FOR THE SAKE OF COMMODIFICATION

In recent years, a range of verified compensation schemes has emerged to provide investors with returns on environmental benefits. The most widely known of these are carbon credits, in which projects that provide additional benefits over baselines can sell credits to investors. This provides an invaluable income stream for conservation actions. However, the commodification of a public good such as climate change mitigation or ecosystem services too often results in the simplification of a complex, interconnected system in which carbon or other benefits are the most monetizable but often least valuable part. For example, the value of fire prevention or mitigation is typically many times the value of biomass or carbon extracted from a landscape—but you need to design for regenerative outcomes to optimize overall societal benefits.



Stacking benefits like stacking pancakes—Biochar and carbon markets are just one of a diversity of potential income streams, which like a stack of pancakes, provide multiple valuation streams; the most valuable are often the least readily monetizable.

REDUCE LEAKAGE BY MONETIZING ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION

Leakage is a term in carbon and other markets for reducing impacts in one place only for them to "leak" elsewhere. So, one needs to be attentive to the whole system. For example, an approach that acquires carbon from burned trees but uses damaging logging practices that undermine overall ecological function may create a negative outcome from a potentially positive process. Remote monitoring technologies and understandings of environmental function, as well as ecosystem service markets, have reached a point where we can incentivize landowners to restore and sustain their lands by monetizing the maintenance of ecological function, and public landholders can also use these techniques. This includes creating mosaics of fire-adapted habitats that enhance rather than damage environmental function.

For example, grazing can reduce fine fuels to retard wildfire spread while enhancing nutrient cycling and vegetation patch dynamics to enhance biodiversity. Studies in Europe suggest one horse can generate over 10,000 Euros in annual fire suppression benefits if managed in a sustainable way. New tech, such as

Our institutions are unprepared to meet the challenges of a radically changing world.

fenceless livestock management, enhances landowners' ability to do this. But we need vibrant rural communities to sustain this strategy, and this approach strengthens rural communities by boosting landowner incomes and creating well-paying rural jobs. Such approaches aren't unfounded speculation—we're piloting this strategy right now in the burn scar areas of Mora and San Miguel counties and will have preliminary results in early 2026.

INTEGRATED DESIGN FOR THE LONG HAUL.

Too often, policies and philanthropy operate as if the present is eternal, when there is overwhelming evidence that the world is changing radically. For example, in many places, due to a warming and drying climate, burned or logged areas no longer naturally regenerate into forests. So simply removing burned trees is not a solution, because they are replaced by other biomass,

Landscape and Oak Colonization - Image of the upper Gallinas Valley with Hermit's Peak and the location of wildfire ignition points in the background. In the foreground is a recently burned hill slope with oaks coming in; the barren hills in the background (also covered with oaks) are likely old fire scars. Once oaks colonize, they are hard to remove. Small stands can be beneficial, but the thousands of acres coming in following recent fires represent a wholesale landscape conversion that threatens local ecology and culture. Yet oak impacts and the need for regional restoration are rarely considered in recovery plans.

Most of the forests in New Mexico and across the West are predicted to burn in coming decades.

typically with less commercial or ecological value and often equally or more fire-prone (such as dense stands of shrub oaks). Replanting trees can help, but it also creates more fuel and returns conditions to those that led to the wildfires in the first place, unless one designs and implements a fire-adapted landscape stewardship strategy to complement tree replanting and other ecological recovery actions. This requires integrated attention to the overarching social, ecological and economic facets of recovery design.

CLOSE THE LOOP, RENEW NEW MEXICO FIRST

Carbon and biomass markets are too often just another form of resource extraction, where natural resources taken from areas of low value in disadvantaged communities are refined and exported to areas of higher value, often with out-of-state investors getting the lion's share of the benefits. But it does not need to be that way. At all scales, there are ways to enhance

Diffuse Strategies - Regenerative strategies need to be measurable, replicable and marketable, with a range of benefits ranging from soil health to water quality improvements and adaptive grazing strategies.

rather than extract from local communities, and as already noted, the social and ecological returns in a well-designed system can be many times those to investors. Investors still receive a reasonable and competitive economic return. Many of these I have already alluded to, including payments for ecosystem services to landowners, restoring historic fire-adapted landscapes and rural lifeways, and enhanced water flows which support farming, acequia systems and other forms of agricultural land use.

The preceding discussion is just one example of the value of reconceiving solutions to move from incrementalization to integration using a principled approach. The crucial point is that new outcomes require new thinking that, from first principles, considers the overall decision space in which we operate, seeks to avoid the pathologies of the existing system and generates new vision, ideas and outcomes. In the words of architect, social activist and polymath Buckminster Fuller, "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." ■

Ecologist and conservationist Dr. Charles G. Curtin has worked for three decades in New Mexico and across the globe on collaborative conservation programs and large-scale research projects. His recent work has focused on regenerative conservation design and the process of using carbon and other alternative markets to sustain communities and the ecosystems they rely on. CHARLESCURTIN.COM

BOOK PROFILE

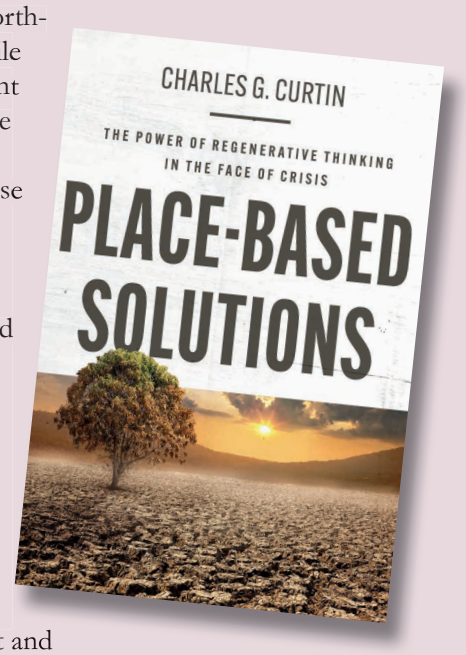
PLACE-BASED SOLUTIONS:
THE POWER OF REGENERATIVE THINKING IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

BY **CHARLES CURTIN**

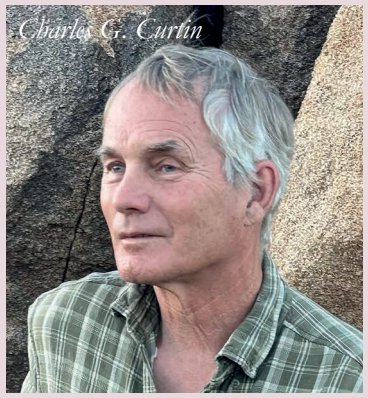
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS (JANUARY, 2026)

In 2019, Charles Curtin left a three-decade career in international conservation science and landscape ecology. Despite having led or contributed to some of the most significant collaborative projects around the world and co-founding programs and teaching at institutions like MIT, he no longer believed that conventional approaches were adequate or relevant in the face of increasing socio-ecological change.

To gain a fresh perspective on how to attain more conscientious and socially relevant environmental action, he moved to the remote mountain town of Mora, located high in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico. There, he sought to reconcile conservation efforts with immersion in ancient Hispanic-Indigenous cultures. This experience led to a reconception of conservation and social action principles that emphasized the use of biochar and a carbon and ecosystem-services economy. The goal was to develop a model for reviving disadvantaged rural communities facing massive wildfires, flooding and the related impacts of climate change.



This book chronicles Curtin's three-decade journey in place-based action across vast landscapes and seascapes, supported by a deep dive into the supporting literature. The insights gained along the way illustrate how to harmonize the needs of communities, economies and ecosystems for mutual benefit and show how, by rethinking social action, we can craft economically and ecologically viable solutions to societal challenges. Jonathan Cobb, who has edited for eminent ecologists and conservationists ranging from Paul Erlich to David Western, has described this as one the most important books of its time.



The book can be acquired from local book sellers in Santa Fe and Taos, from Amazon, or directly from the publisher (https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/53924/place-based-solutions).

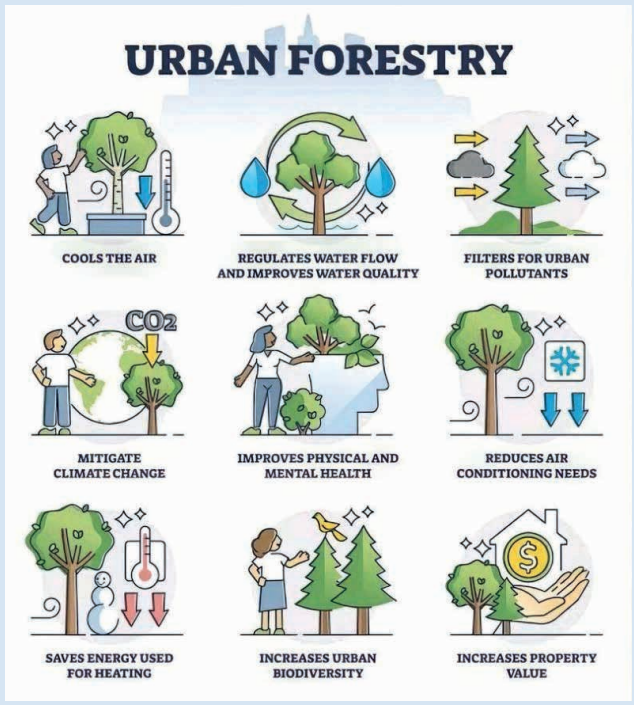
LAS VEGAS, NM CONSIDERING URBAN FORESTRY PLAN

Areas of Las Vegas, New Mexico have repeatedly been affected by flooding, a result of water rushing over the Hermit's Peak - Calf Canyon burn scar, which caused debris flows and contaminated the city's reservoirs. Some residents have put sandbags in front of their homes.

Community meetings have been held in recent months to discuss a new urban forestry plan that would get flooding under control using green infrastructure. A Southwest urban forestry design group, Seeds of Wisdom (HTTPS://SOWSFE.COM), which has done work for the city and county of Santa Fe and collaborated with the New Mexico Forestry Division, has presented a draft "climate appropriate" proposal to the Las Vegas City Council. Approximately $190,000 in federal funds secured by the Forestry Division have been allocated toward development of a plan, Seeds of Wisdom principal designer Athena Beshur told the *Santa Fe New Mexican*.

Flooding in downtown Las Vegas, New Mexico

Unlike "gray infrastructure," like sidewalks and buildings, green urban infrastructure includes trees, stormwater collection and rain gardens, and grows over time, Beshur said. Proposed projects in Las Vegas may also include creating fire-defensible spaces, soil stabilization, and designing parks and trails to irrigate "green corridors."



New, more climate-adaptable trees are already being planted in the city to restore tree canopy and replace the invasive dominant monoculture of Siberian elms, which are vulnerable to disease and have been dying off. Las Vegas has experienced decades of drought since the 1980s. Water restrictions have been enacted. The city is expected to become more like Albuquerque in the summer—hotter and drier.

NM COMMUNITIES GET $26 MILLION TO REDUCE WILDFIRE RISK

Funds advance wildfire mitigation on private and tribal land

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced in September that four New Mexico communities would receive $26 million in federal grants to guard against catastrophic wildfires. Community Wildfire Defense Grants help local communities plan for and reduce wildfire risks. Areas identified as having high or very high wildfire hazard potential receive priority for funding, especially if they recently experienced a severe wildfire disaster.

"This critical funding helps communities meet their wildfire mitigation objectives," said former New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Secretary Melanie Kenderdine. "These awards will help the communities be proactive," said State Forester Laura McCarthy. New Mexico Forestry Division staff worked with applicants to submit the proposals. The Forestry Division also is administering funds that come from the USDA Forest Service.
The four grant awardees and their projects are:

- **Cimarron Watershed Alliance, Inc.** received $10 million for the Colfax Wildfire Risk Reduction Project. This will implement wildfire risk reduction measures including fuels reduction, evacuation route clearing, focused forest thinning, and defensible space work on private land in and around communities in southwest Colfax County.

- **Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District** received $7.2 million for the East Mountains Community Wildfire Protection Project. This project will implement fuels reduction initiatives in and around wildland urban interface and high-risk communities. The intent is to protect the East Mountain area of Bernalillo County from high-intensity fires and improve community and forest resiliency.

The Flying Horse fuel break project undertaken by Cimarron Watershed Alliance. Photo by Rick Smith, CWA

- **Taos Soil and Water Conservation District** received $5.8 million to conduct 2,000 acres of defensible space and hazardous fuels treatments in wildland urban-interface communities. The work will be coordinated with other planned and ongoing wildfire risk reduction projects by local, state, federal and tribal partners.

- **Pueblo of Cochiti** received $3.3 million for what it labeled its Fire Reduction through Fuel Management and Capacity Building Project.

GROWING THE REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM ONE SCHOOL MEAL AT A TIME

Taos Regional Farm and Ranch Food Security Collaborative Update

BY **MICAH ROSEBERRY**

A project designed to connect and strengthen regional food systems across northern New Mexico and the San Luís Valley of southern Colorado is continuing efforts to establish sustainable food security for the region. This collaborative effort, which received $1.4 million in state funding through the Governor's Food, Farm and Hunger Initiative in 2022, represents a coordinated approach to addressing food sovereignty, farmer resilience and community health.

The award was part of a $24 million statewide appropriation supported by state agencies and farm and ranch NGOs, working together in a coordinated legislative advocacy effort spearheaded by the New Mexico Food and Agricultural Policy Council. While the initial $1.4 million was spent entirely on purchasing equipment for a local slaughterhouse project, many essential elements of the collaborative's vision remain in active development—and momentum is building.

A.I.R.E.: 10 Years of Building Food Security

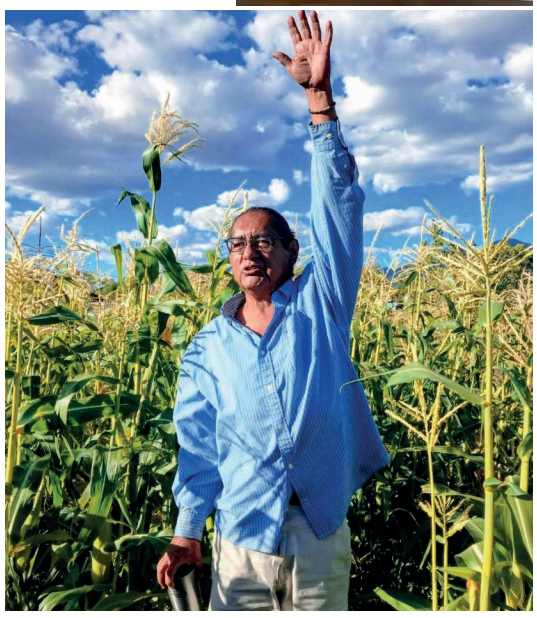
The nonprofit A.I.R.E. (Agriculture Implementation Research & Education), a key member of the collaborative, has leveraged resources and managed partnerships to increase food security in Taos County for over a decade. The organization aggregates local production of fruits, vegetables and grains from 10 local farms through the Taos Community Farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program, providing weekly shares to more than 60 local families.

Perhaps most significantly, A.I.R.E. provides 800 local and organic USDA farm-to-school meals daily—160,000 annually—with preparation assisted by high school culinary interns at Amigos Locale, A.I.R.E.'s commissary kitchen. Across Taos County, A.I.R.E. maintains five school gardens, six greenhouse structures and educational programs reaching 3,800 students each year.

New Infrastructure Expands Regional Reach

A.I.R.E. has acquired a 16-foot refrigerated truck through a grant from Río Grande Colonias, and plans to expand regional aggregation by 50 percent by providing transportation and delivery of local produce, grains and meat from northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. This expansion addresses a critical infrastructure gap—many small and mid-size producers grow exceptional food but lack the capacity to transport it to larger markets while maintaining food safety and freshness.

Shifting local dependence for year-round fresh produce—including carrots, onions, beets, potatoes, apples and fresh greens—from California to northern New Mexico and the San Luís Valley will not only effectively cut the carbon



Photos (L-R): AIRE Halloween harvest; Pancakes made with local blue corn and flour from Big Wheel Farm; Making tamales at Amigos Locale commissary kitchen; Geronimo Romero with blue corn growing at Los Luceros; Romero and Vista Grande High School interns making tamales; Micah Roseberry spoke at the 10th annual National Farm to Cafeteria Conference about using local food in USDA school meal programs and providing hands-on opportunities in growing and cooking culturally relevant foods; Local rancher John Painter of Montoso Bison Co. delivers frozen meat; Amigos Locale Market features potatoes and red onions from Río Lucero Farm, carrots from Cultivo Farm, garlic from Cerro Vista Farm, apples from Freshies Farm, eggs from Yoder Farms, and sprouts from Kaizen Greens Farm; Interns weigh carrots; Local producers receive a larger profit share at the new Amigos Locale farm store.

Above: Mr. Gilroy's 8th grade Taos Middle School science class preparing beds and planting winter greens. Salad mix, radishes, turnips, spinach and kale will be harvested in February. Community donations support school programming; Arroyos del Norte students make salsa for harvest festival with tomatoes, chile, jalapeno, onions and cilantro grown in their high-tunnel greenhouse.

footprint of thousands of pounds of fresh produce; it will support a regional food system that strengthens the local economy.

To support local ranchers, A.I.R.E. has also secured grant resources to purchase a freezer trailer, enabling ranchers to transport local beef, lamb and bison from processing facilities to local markets more efficiently.

When state grant funding was reduced, private donors stepped forward. Community contributions funded a new hoop-house greenhouse at Taos Middle School, ensuring students are able to continue learning agriculture year-round while growing fresh vegetables that appear in their own school lunches. These same donations also funded critical repairs to a walk-in cooler at Taos Pueblo Day School and provided carrots and apples to supplement school lunch programs.

The Taos Middle School greenhouse represents more than infrastructure—it is an investment in food sovereignty for the next generation, connecting students from kindergarten through high school to hands-on learning about where food comes from and how to grow it sustainably.

Building Food Sovereignty Through Education

A.I.R.E. has received funding from the Keeler Foundation to launch bi-weekly, after-school, farm-to-school nutrition, garden and cooking classes at Enos García and Ranchos elementary schools. The program includes scratch-cooked dinners served during after-school care, with families and students sharing monthly meals together that showcase recipes made by students using ingredients from school gardens and greenhouses.

Vista Grande High School students interning at Amigos Locale through the CTE (Career and Technical Education) program will assist with mentoring younger students and preparing dinner meals. This pilot program could expand to produce 1,000 meals daily, serving as a model for state-funded CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program) after-school dinner meals delivered to sites throughout the county.

Developing a regional food system that strengthens the local economy

Currently, only 50 percent of New Mexico schools are able to provide scratch-cooked meals made from locally sourced products.

The commissary production model has proven its value beyond regular meal service—it can also be rapidly deployed for emergency food response, such as meals that were needed during the Calf Canyon fire.

Training the Next Generation of Food System Leaders

To support increased production and aggregation at scale, A.I.R.E. is partnering with leading food safety organizations. Pueblo farmer Geronimo Romero, sixth-generation rancher Robert Martínez and 10 Vista Grande student interns are earning food safety certificates from the Food and Drug Administration. This program includes a collaboration with Cornell University, in partnership with the FDA and USDA, hosted through New Mexico State University. This training provides the expertise needed to aggregate and prepare food to meet state standards.

A.I.R.E. provides 800 local and organic USDA farm-to-school meals daily—160,000 annually—prepared by high school culinary interns.

Addressing a critical workforce gap, UNM Taos is interested in expanding its Culinary Arts program to build a workforce of cooks who can prepare scratch-cooked meals for school cafeterias. Currently, despite the intent of the governor's healthy universal school meal program, only 50 percent of New Mexico schools are able to provide scratch-cooked meals made from locally sourced products; the remainder rely on shelf-stable, ultra-processed food sourced from outside the state.

Honoring Traditional Agriculture

Plans for spring 2026 include establishing a local tortilleria to process local wheat grown at Big Wheel Farm in Costilla and local blue corn grown by Taos Pueblo farmers. Geronimo Romero, a Taos Pueblo traditional baker and farmer, currently trains interns to bake bread, make tortillas and prepare tamales with blue corn. The tortilleria will produce flour and blue corn tortillas for the school lunch program and the local community, connecting traditional agricultural practices with contemporary food security needs.

A Vision for Regional Resilience

Building food security and production in northern New Mexico through collaboration is more than an agricultural project—it is a step toward supporting food sovereignty for our children, increasing resilience for farmers and ranchers, and strengthening northern New Mexico communities for generations to come.

The Taos Regional Farm and Ranch Food Security Collaborative demonstrates that when communities invest in local food infrastructure—refrigerated trucks, refrigerated storage, commissary kitchens, school greenhouses, processing facilities and workforce training—the benefits multiply across the entire system. Students learn to grow food and prepare meals. Farmers gain reliable markets. Families access fresh, regional produce. Carbon emissions drop. Communities become healthier. Food dollars stay local. And the next generation builds the skills needed to sustain these systems into the future.

As this collaborative work continues to unfold, one thing becomes clear: Food security is not built through single programs or isolated grants. It is built through sustained, coordinated investment in the complete food system—from seed to soil, from farm to school, from kitchen to table. Northern New Mexico is proving it can be done.■

For more information about A.I.R.E. and the Taos Regional Farm and Ranch Food Security Collaborative, or to contribute to A.I.R.E., email MICAH@AIRETAOS.ORG *or visit* GROWINGCOMMUNITYNOW.ORG .

Micah Roseberry has been farming in New Mexico since 1988. She is currently the director of A.I.R.E. and owner of Farmhouse Café and Bakery in Taos, N.M.

FARE KITCHEN & CAFÉ: SANTA FE YOUTHWORKS CULINARY PROGRAM

When it opens in mid-2026, FARE Kitchen & Café on Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe will be a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen, job training center and café. And, it will become a dynamic community hub where young people gain hands-on experience in the culinary arts, hospitality and food service industries. Participants will also be able to develop essential life and leadership skills that open doors to employment and personal growth.

At the same time, the FARE Kitchen will serve as the heart of YouthWorks' community food programs, preparing thousands of nutritious meals every week for community members in need across Santa Fe and parts of northern New Mexico. To learn more about naming partnership opportunities for the project, contact EMILIE@SERAFINACOMPANY.COM. To make a donation, visit HTTPS://SUPPORT.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/CAMPAIGN/738552/DONATE

Left: Food truck outreach brings meals to community celebrations; FARE Kitchen & Café architectural rendering; Above: disconnected youth in Santa Fe receive paid training in culinary arts and job placements

2026 NM FOOD & FARMS DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

Celebrating Food, Farming, Land Stewardship & Hunger Initiatives Across New Mexico

The 2026 New Mexico Food & Farms Day and Awards Ceremony will take place Jan. 30, from 10–11 a.m. in the Rotunda of the New Mexico State Capitol. Now in its 14th year, Food & Farms Day honors individuals, farms, ranches, organizations and programs that are building a thriving, equitable and resilient local food and farming economy. The event highlights the intersection of health, sustainable food systems, land stewardship, economic vitality and informed policy-making.

"Food & Farms Day emphasizes that every New Mexican deserves access to fresh, healthy, nutritious food grown close to home," said Pam Roy, executive director of Farm to Table and coordinator for the New Mexico Food & Agriculture Policy Council. "It is our chance to honor the growers, organizations and community leaders who nourish New Mexico and push forward innovative, culturally rooted, and resilient food system solutions. Their work strengthens our communities, our economy and our future."

Helga Garza of Agri-Cultura Co-operative Network introduces awardees at 2025 New Mexico Food & Farms Day © Seth Roffman

THE GREAT GARLIC REVIVAL: A NEW ERA FOR AG, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN RÍO ARRÍBA

BY **JOSELUÍS "AGUA Y TIERRA" ORTÍZ Y MUNÍZ**

Sostenga Garlic Festival, 2009 © Seth Roffman

On Nov. 6, 2025, the fields at Northern New Mexico College's Sostenga Center for Sustainable Food, Agriculture and Environment in Española stirred with life in a way they had not in nearly a decade. More than 200 people from across the region—elders, youth, farmers, teachers, artists, families, gardeners, acequia stewards, land grant and pueblo leaders, and curious neighbors from as far as Albuquerque and the San Luís Valley—gathered for what quickly became a landmark community celebration: the Great Garlic Revival.

Both a planting day and a cultural gathering, the event marked a major step toward the return of the region's beloved Garlic Festival, scheduled for summer 2026. But for those who attended, it was much more than preparation for a future festival. It was a cultural homecoming and a spiritual renewal, grounded in agriculture, memory and land-based identity. "It was medicine," one attendee told me as she brushed soil from her hands. "I came to plant garlic, but it felt like I was planting something in myself, too. Something much greater than I imagined."

Sostenga aims to reestablish agriculture; not only as a profession, but as a cultural pathway of life.

The day unfolded in layers—prayers by a Khapo Owingue elder and his grandson, a seed blessing with songs by a Capitan of La Mesa de la Virgen de la Luz danza Azteca Conchero Chichimeca; bison posole, chicos and tamales from Mayahuels Catering; music by Ana Malinalli Gutiérrez-Sisneroz (Doctora X) and Dabi "La Soledad" García; storytelling by local, world renowned farmer, Don Bustos; a grounding by Sostenga founder, Santa Fe County Commissioner Camilla Bustamante; a garlic talk by local farmer Roxanne Louise Sánchez; a traditional healing pop-up space by Pilar Trujillo of Viva Vida Botanicals; and lots and lots of laughter.

The aroma of copal incense and fresh ground *atole,* from blue corn grown on-site, drifted through the crisp air, mixing with chords of traditional northern New Mexico music, Tewa drums and the hum of conversation. Children explored the center's Bosque Trail and intergenerational spaces, elders shared stories of fields and families long past, and neighbors who had never met planted side-by-side, discovering shared ancestry, purpose and hope.

The garlic beds stretched across the acequia-fed fields—bright, neatly laid rows representing the rebirth of a tradition once held at the college each year. Originally launched in 2008, the Garlic Festival had become one of the most recognizable agricultural and cultural events in the region until its pause in 2017. Now, with garlic back in the ground, the festival's return feels not only tangible but inevitable. More importantly, Sostenga—the place where the festival was born—is coming alive again.

A NEW VISION FOR A NEW GENERATION

The Sostenga Center's revival is grounded in a bold and timely mission: to train and support the next generation of land-based farmers and professionals in northern New Mexico. That mission includes orchardists, gardeners, acequia and land grant leaders, permaculture and biodynamic specialists, soil scientists, regenerative agriculture practitioners, skilled trades people, traditional Indigenous and acequia stewards and others committed to sustaining the region's ecological, cultural and agricultural future.

We are planting identity, memory and belonging.

Photos, page 16, right side: The Great Garlic Revival, Nov. 2025. Third photo from top: Camilla Bustamante speaks; This page, top: Nursing consultant Ana Malinali X Gutiérrez Sisernos and Deputy Secretary of New Mexico Higher Education Patricia Trujillo; event participants; "Dr. X" plants garlic. Photo © Seth Roffman. Other photos courtesy the Sostenga Center

NMCC President Dr. Hector Balderas has positioned Sostenga as a core pillar in the college's long-term regional strategy.

Sostenga is not simply producing technical expertise. It is committed to grounding agricultural learning in ancestral wisdom, cultural identity and traditional land and acequia stewardship. Through workshops, ceremonies, internships, academic instruction, community events and hands-on fieldwork, Sostenga aims to reestablish agriculture—not only as a profession, but as a cultural pathway of life that honors Indigenous and land-grant communal values.

We are not just planting crops; we are planting identity, memory and belonging. We are preparing our communities' youth, families and elders to step into our shared inheritances as land stewards, leaders and caretakers—not only of the land, but of each other. The Great Garlic Revival embodied that vision. That intergenerational exchange is at the core of Sostenga's revived purpose.

A STORY OF CLOSURE—AND REBIRTH

The Sostenga Center's path to this moment has been long and marked by both loss and persistence. The center, once a thriving incubator of agricultural education and hands-on learning, shut down in 2017 due to extended resource challenges and administrative changes. Partners packed up and abandoned the center, buildings sat unused, fields fell dormant, and community access to the space was largely lost.

Its closure came as a major cultural and educational setback. For many in northern New Mexico—particularly land-based families, farmers and youth seeking agricultural pathways. Sostenga had represented possibility, growth and belonging, and now they were left to find support in more distant places such as at Santa Fe Community College, Albuquerque—or they were left unsupported.

In 2019, I joined forces with the GreenRoots Institute and its director, my mentor, Don Bustos. We imagined bringing volunteers, elders and partners back to the fields, and the college back to the discussion table. Together, we began the painstaking work of reviving the program by hand—field by field, tree by tree, shovel by shovel, and meeting by meeting.

In 2023, Don and I organized meetings to gain support from state Sen. Leo Jaramillo and his colleagues. He managed to provide critical funding that helped move the project forward. That allowed us to reestablish internship opportunities, repair infrastructure, restore irrigation, remove invasive plants, and prepare agricultural acreage for education.

Today, the revival effort has entered its most promising phase under the leadership of Northern New Mexico College President Dr. Hector Balderas. A native of rural New Mexico himself, Balderas has aligned the college's priorities with community-based land and agricultural initiatives, positioning Sostenga as a core pillar in NNMC's long-term regional strategy. Under his administration, the program is expanding its partnerships, curriculum and facilities—and preparing to serve larger numbers of students and families.

ROOTED IN CULTURE AND LAND

Over the past 16 years I have served New Mexico by providing cultural education, agricultural implementation, cultural healing, land grant and acequia leadership development, historical literacy, youth mentorship and community-based, grassroots organizing. As a *Genízaro* farmer, father, educator and cultural worker with deep ties to the Embudo, Last Trampas, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz watershed region, I have dedicated my life to advancing food sovereignty, land-based education, revitalizing agricultural integrity and soil health, restorative justice, restoration of cultural memory and building Genízaro consciousness. I traveled to Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress, seeking support for New Mexico farmers, acequias, our traditions, and for farmer-based peer-to-peer technical support in agencies such as the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

My work with Sostenga is more than a professional commitment—it is the work of my heart. It is a calling to restore land-based identity, revive northern New Mexican culture and open pathways for everyday people—especially youth, families and elders—to learn, grow, lead and belong. At its core, this work is about healing: healing the historic fracture between our First Nations Pueblo relatives and the Genízaro, Indo-Hispano and acequia communities; healing the cultural and political wounds created by systems that erased our shared history of land stewardship, mutual protection, collaboration and kinship. The truth beneath that erasure has never disappeared: we are related. Our New Mexican story is not a Spanish story—it is a deeply Indigenous story, woven from thousands of years of continuity with this land. North-

At its core, this work is about healing: healing the historic fracture between our First Nations Pueblo relatives and the Genízaro, Indo-Hispano and acequia communities.

ern New Mexicans are Indigenous to this place, too. It is time to honor that truth openly, to celebrate it and build a future rooted in it.

LOOKING FORWARD: THE RETURN OF THE GARLIC FESTIVAL

The land teaches us how to come back to ourselves. The garlic we planted in November will feed us in 2026. But what we planted in each other will feed us long into the future.

In the summer of 2025, I led the organizing effort for the Great Garlic Revival—an ambitious collaboration with the Rodale Institute, Viva Vida Botanicals, The Greenroots Institute, Muy Chingon Creations and Northern New Mexico College. The event surpassed every expectation—both in turnout and in the depth of community impact. Many of the Garlic Revival's participants enthusiastically expressed willingness to stay involved, return for future planting days, volunteer at events, join planning teams, and to participate through student and youth activities.

The Garlic Revival also marked the official restart of the Garlic Festival planning cycle: an effort that will build toward the Great Garlic Harvest Festival, a full-scale cultural and agricultural celebration at NNMC in summer 2026. The multi-day event will feature food vendors, a farmer's market, art exhibits, live music, workshops, seed exchanges, cultural performances, and robust educational programming.

GARLIC IN THE GROUND, HOPE IN THE AIR

As the sun slipped behind the great Jémez mountains, and families made their way back to their cars, the fields glowed softly. People hugged tightly and promised to return when the first green shoots pierce the soil in spring. Through the winter, the garlic will settle in beneath the frost, sending roots into the cold earth. By midsummer, full heads will form. And by 2026, those cloves will become part of a harvest that feeds families, supports local markets, and anchors the rebirth of a beloved festival.

For Sostenga, the Great Garlic Revival it was the planting of purpose—an affirmation that land, people and college are bound together in a shared story that is still unfolding. It was a nod to what once was—and a declaration of what will be. A future nourished by soil, pueblos, land grants, acequias, history and community. A future rooted in land- and water-based culture. A future of a united northern New Mexico—standing in relationship rather than division. A future rising, row by row, seed by seed, from the land itself. ■

Joseluís M. Ortíz y Muníz is vice-president of the Santa Cruz de la Canada Land Grant, an acequia mayordomo and director of the Sostenga Center for Sustainable Food, Agriculture and Environment at Northern New Mexico College. HTTPS://NNMC.EDU/ABOUT/SOSTENGA-FARM.HTML

Agua y Justicia Declaration 2025

From the New Mexico Acequia Association Congreso

WE BELIEVE THAT WATER IS LIFE, ÁGUA ES VIDA. *La tierra es sagrada y el água es bendita. Se proteje, se respeta, y se defiende.* Water is a divine gift that makes all life possible and we believe it is our responsibility to protect the interconnected waters of watersheds, rivers, acequias and aquifers. We have a right to live in a respectful relationship to the land and water in a way that sustains us and also provides for future generations.

We are caretakers of the land and water, and we center this responsibility as acequia leaders. For generations, we have worked the land, cleaned out our acequias and shared water in our communities. This is a sacred responsibility and vocation.

We have a right to keep water in our communities, and we have a right to local, collective decisions about how to govern our water. We should live in peace with the knowledge that our water rights will not be severed from our communities and that our water will be clean and free of pollution. Water is a human right, and it is a common resource to be governed with justice and equity.

We have a right to have healthy bodies, nourished with locally grown, culturally meaningful foods, grown with clean water from our forests and watersheds. Acequias are the foundation for food sovereignty in our communities.

We have a right to live with happiness, joy and meaning by ensuring that we support our elders, families and youth with mutual respect and mutual aid and caring for future generations.

We deserve investment in our communities, just as all public and common infrastructure is availed of support, our acequias and community ditches need resources to build our collective future.

OUR MISSION is to protect water and acequias, grow food for our communities and honor our cultural heritage. In our vision, acequias flow with clean water, and people work together to grow food. We grow a movement to prevent the commodification and contamination of our water.

We declare our resistance to the commodification of water, which is a systemic threat to acequias by separating water from the land, fragmenting water rights away from agriculture, and unraveling the fabric of communities. Treating water as a commodity elevates the dollar value over communities and gives privilege to individuals or entities with greater economic wealth.

We declare our opposition to the contamination of water, which is a form of dispossession and a violation of the basic human right to clean water. Acequia communities are vulnerable to mining waste, discharge of fracking wastewater, radioactive discharge and venting, heavy-metal poisoning in post-fire landscapes and other forms of pollution. Failure of governments to regulate industries that create toxic and radioactive waste threatens our well-being and survival.

We declare our right to resources to build a socially just and resilient future in our communities in which our watersheds and infrastructure are restored to recover from and to be more resilient to climate disruptions. We are committed to our traditional role of investing our own local resources but also deserve an equitable share of public resources.

WE DECLARE OUR THIRST FOR JUSTICE. Acequias are facing vast inequities in the struggle to fight the commodification and contamination of our water. As rural, traditional and limited-resource communities, we devote energy, time and resources, always working to protect our heritage and legacy.

We resolve to build a stronger grassroots base with the intent of building power to affect political decisions that affect our water rights, water quality and availability of resources.

We resolve to uplift the core values of love, respect and equity as part of the solution to the economic, climate and political crisis in our communities that results in an unjust concentration of wealth.

We resolve to work the land, clean our acequias, plant our fields and work together as communities to continue to live as land-based communities with our hearts full of *querencia.*

CONGRESO DE LAS ACEQUIAS

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5-6, 2025

New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM

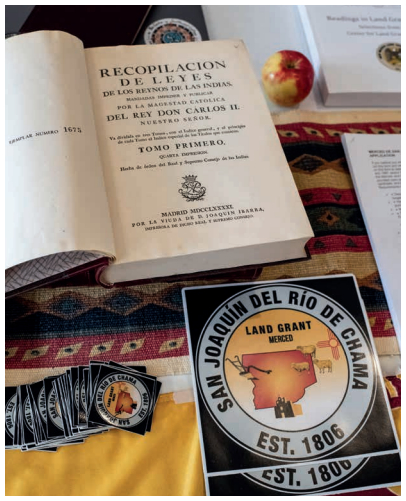
Our annual gathering is a time to gather with fellow acequia leaders and supporters to reconnect, share updates on issues relating to water and agriculture in New Mexico, and to learn how to be more involved in the movement to protect our acequias and way of life.

REGISTRATION AND MORE INFO HERE

If you plan to join us, please register ***today!***
Questions? Ask Rudy at rudy@lasacequias.org

WWW.LASACEQUIAS.ORG/CONGRESO/

New Mexico Acequia Association



Photos © Seth Roffman

HERITAGE TOURISM

The Heritage Kitchen at Los Luceros

A Living Cultural Campus Takes Shape

BY **MONIKA NEULAND**

The Northern Río Grande National Heritage Area (NRGNHA) has a long history of supporting cultural and economic vitality in northern New Mexico. That work continues with the launch of a new commercial kitchen at Los Luceros Historic Site designed to serve as a community space for food education, heritage-based gatherings and small-scale economic activity connected to regional agriculture.

Opening the Heritage Kitchen at Los Luceros, near Alcalde, is part of an effort to position the State Historic Site as an active cultural and educational setting. The property includes orchards, acequia-irrigated fields, adobe buildings dating to the 1700s, and program areas tied to long-standing community foodways in the Española Valley.

"Our role is to connect people in the valley—growers, cooks, artists and families—through shared activities rooted in this landscape," said Eric Vasquez, NRGBHA's executive director. "The Heritage Kitchen allows us to use traditional practices in present-day ways."

The kitchen's first full activation occurred in October during the Río Grande Sky Fiesta, an intimate hot-air balloon event in its second year. Attendance exceeded 2,000 visitors and included an evening reception, pre-dawn hospitality service, and youth-focused activity stations led by partner organizations.

"Los Luceros is becoming a living cultural campus, not just a historic site," said state Sen. Leo Jaramillo. "Through the Heritage Kitchen and Sky Fiesta, we're seeing how legislative support can help activate historic spaces in ways that celebrate northern New Mexico's foodways, arts and traditions, while supporting local families and small businesses."

Food for the reception reflected regional sourcing. Tomatoes used for sauces came from farms in La Mesilla, grown in soil enriched with vermicompost produced by Samuel Peter McCarthy, known locally as "Do It with Worms." McCarthy's garlic, peppers and onions were used throughout food preparation. Wine from El Alamo Winery in Alcalde, operated by the Martínez family, was served, including a Los Luceros-labeled red tied directly to the site.

NRGNHA will continue instructional offerings in food preservation, heritage grain history and value-added product development.

Bread was provided by Poppy Ridge Bakery of Vallecitos, which uses stone-ground heritage wheat grown in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, baked in wood-fired ovens. Pizza production took place using a newly built adobe *horno* attached to the Heritage Kitchen. Community member Dani Bustos fired the oven after completing a horno-building workshop taught by Pancho Ochoa. That class highlighted the continuity of Pueblo and Hispano food traditions still practiced throughout the region.

Top: Heritage-inspired cuisine; Samuel Peter McCarthy makes pizza; Daniel Zillmann (NM Dept. of Cultural Affairs); Monika Neuland (NRGNHA); Jessie Greenspan (NM Dept. of Cultural Affairs); and state Rep. Andrea Romero; "Queen of the Night" tomato salad with La Mesilla heirloom tomatoes; whole-wheat blackberry hazelnut cake; Dried fruit garland with apples from Los Luceros and Española Valley botanicals; wheelbarrow of Red Chesnok garlic; Families enjoy the fiesta (photos by Tira Howard); NRGNHA Board President Darlene Vigil, Exec. Dir. Eric Vasquez, Rep. Andrea Romero and volunteer Dani Bustos

Celebrating northern NM's foodways, arts and traditions, while supporting local families and small businesses.

Menu preparation featured multiple regional contributors. Chef-educator Mary-Dawn Wright prepared dishes based on traditional valley recipes. Chef Melodie Milhoan, owner of Café Sierra Negra in Abiquiú, developed plant-forward offerings using seasonal produce. I prepared tapenades and sauces using heirloom, biodiverse vegetables grown locally within 20 miles of Los Luceros. Apple butter and fruit preserves were produced by volunteers using orchard apples and locally sourced apricots and berries.

Before sunrise the next morning, the kitchen served visitors waiting for the balloon launch. Service was led by Dora Terrazas, who has worked in senior-meal initiatives at local community centers and seasonal food programs. She coordinated preparation, equipment setup and volunteer support, assisted by Gabriela Silva, director of education at NRGNHA. Coffee, green chile stew and freshly baked biscochitos in the shape of balloons were served to balloon crews, families and visitors.

Afternoon programming included participation from nonprofit partners:
- Moving Arts Española provided arts-based youth engagement activities.
- Celebrate Planet Earth staffed cookie-painting and educational storytelling stations.
- Pajarito Environmental Education Center led a pollinator education table.
- Los Viejitos lowrider organizers coordinated decorated vehicles and family photo sessions.

Multigenerational families moved among stations before the evening balloon programming.

The kitchen is available for classes and community events, as well as for local producers who need access to a licensed commercial kitchen.

NRGNHA staff plan to continue instructional offerings in food preservation, heritage grain history and value-added product development. These trainings reinforce skills relevant to small-scale entrepreneurship, menu development and compliant food handling.

Agricultural learning, conducted in partnership with local experts and organizations, will continue to be a key component. The site's orchards, acequia system, composting efforts and seasonal harvesting cycles provide practical instruction on soil improvement, seed-saving, drought-tolerant crops and orchard maintenance.

As the programming expands, the Heritage Kitchen is positioned to serve residents of the Española Valley and surrounding communities as a shared resource that strengthens regional identity, supports cultural continuity and creates economic opportunities rooted in local agricultural traditions. The kitchen is available for classes and community events, as well as for local producers who need access to a licensed commercial kitchen. In addition to the traditional adobe horno, unique features include modern equipment, such as a commercial freeze-dryer. ■

Monika Neuland, a community foodways practitioner and interdisciplinary artist, serves as director of Development & Programs for the Northern Río Grande National Heritage Area.
HTTPS://RIOGRANDENHA.ORG

THE DAWN BUTTERFLY CAFÉ: A RECIPE FOR HEALING IN TAOS PUEBLO

One family is building a restaurant and gallery that honors their ancestors and loved ones with every dish.

BY **ELLIOTT BOCHSTEIN**

The shipping containers sit on family land belonging to Carpio J. Bernal Jr., ("CJ"), outside Taos Pueblo. They are meant to become a restaurant—130 seats, a full kitchen, a year-round operation. But for now, they wait, steel rectangles set against the backdrop of Taos Mountain, hinting at a vision still in the making.

Meanwhile, inside the pueblo, Bernal lugs portable batteries into a small adobe building every morning. The pueblo is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that forgoes modern utilities to maintain its traditional architecture. Yet, since November 2022, visitors have been able to enjoy a modern amenity: the first espresso served within the historic community.

"I don't call myself a chef," Bernal said. "I just have a big interest in food and how it affects us as people." To understand Bernal's vision, order his signature porridge, the "Red, White and Blue." The name is intentionally loaded and comes with certain expectations: Fourth of July picnics, maybe a toothpick flag planted in the bowl. What arrives is a striking bowl of Hopi blue and white corn, bisected down the middle. One side is bright and sweet, with wild blueberries and a drizzle of local chokecherry honey. The other offers a savory, aromatic counterpoint: a fine dusting of juniper ash, created by roasting cedar and juniper branches over an open flame.

The result is a quiet, edible land acknowledgment, made with ingredients that have populated the high desert for millennia. "It has all the colors of the American flag in it," he explains. "But it represents the decolonizing of food."

The Dawn Butterfly Café and Bistro fills a shop that's been in the Bernal family for more than 35 years. What started as $8,000 in seed money has grown into something far more ambitious: part café, part cultural reclamation project—and part memorial.

A SISTER'S STORY BECOMES A COMMUNITY'S

The café's genesis began in July 2020. At the height of the pandemic, Bernal was in Canada with his mother's family. Bernal's father, Carpio Sr., is a former war chief from Taos Pueblo; his mother, Rose, is a member of the Skwah First Nation in British Columbia. Both nations' borders—along with the U.S.-Canada border—were closed to all but essential travel. Bernal never expected to be gone so long.

Part café, part cultural reclamation project—and part memorial

Then, as the world was shutting down, his family called from New Mexico. Coral, his older sister, had passed away. Coral was 33. She was a writer and poet whose words reached across New Mexico, a mentor to young women and a passionate voice for her community.

When Bernal tried to return home for her memorial service, he ran into a bureaucratic ordeal, requiring permissions from Canadian and U.S. governments, as well as both tribal nations, just to cross three sets of closed borders. "I was in Canada for several months," Bernal recalls. "I had to get official documents to be able to go home, and the reason why was because of her passing. They overrode the usual restrictions."

The goal: strengthen economic sovereignty in the pueblo and build something tangible from the trauma of loss

Top: CJ Bernal. Photo: Dawn Butterfly Café
Below: A promotional collage for Dawn Butterfly Café: charcuterie meats, cheeses, dried fruits, pickles—and the café's butterfly logo

Finally back in Taos Pueblo, the family's journey through grief began when they reviewed Coral's lifelong medical records from the Indian Health Service. Those documents uncovered the extent of what she had quietly endured—sexual assaults, domestic violence, depression and substance abuse—all of which remained inadequately addressed by healthcare providers who failed to see how those traumas were interconnected. "We didn't really know what she had gone through in her life until we looked at all those records," Bernal said, his voice breaking. "We always saw the best parts of her."

Determined to prevent others from facing similar circumstances, the Bernals became the first family in Taos Pueblo to publicly address the widespread neglect Native victims face, holding press conferences to spotlight jurisdictional confusion and serious gaps in care between mental health, physical health and community support services. They highlighted how untreated trauma, combined with insufficient support, can leave vulnerable individuals at greater risk of harm. For over a year, they pushed for Coral's case to be reviewed in federal court, advocating fiercely for reforms aimed at better communication, accountability and healing within healthcare and law enforcement institutions.

"We held a press event and we advocated for health reform and sexual assault and domestic violence victims," Bernal says. But when they tried to get Coral's case into federal court, they faced what Bernal describes as an unwillingness from authorities to address the families' ongoing concerns and unanswered questions.

But channeling grief into advocacy came at a crushing emotional price. The family had to ask themselves: *Where do we want to put our energy?* "We started thinking about an art center in her memory," Bernal said. "But art centers need money. Everything takes money somehow. And then the idea of the café came in."

During a catering event at the Millicent Rogers Museum, Bernal prepared a dish using solely Indigenous ingredients. Afterward, a Pueblo elder approached him in tears. "She just gave me a big hug and said, 'CJ, your food reminded me of my childhood. That's all we used to eat back then—our Native food.'"

That moment crystallized what Bernal was learning: by cooking with the pre-colonial foods of his ancestors, he felt his body recognize what his mind had forgotten. "These are ingredients that our bodies as Native people are naturally adapted to," he explained. For generations, these foods sustained the continent's Indigenous peoples before processed flour and refined sugars transformed Native diets,

"These are ingredients that our bodies as Native people are naturally adapted to."– CJ Bernal

Indigenous gastronomy is an evolving cultural force, not a relic of the past.

contributing to epidemic rates of diabetes and heart disease. "When I started to really cook with these local ingredients, I felt like my body had been craving this food."

His experiments push beyond nostalgia, testing the boundaries between ancestral traditions and contemporary culinary artistry. By serving dishes like the Three Sisters bowl—corn, squash and beans inside roasted squash with local goat cheese and wild plum reduction—or slow-roasted bison with red and green chile over Indigenous grains, Bernal proves Indigenous gastronomy is an evolving cultural force, not a relic of the past.

Such innovative cooking quickly put the adobe café on the map, earning features in *Forbes* and *Edible New Mexico*. However, practical realities soon created a bottleneck. The pueblo's new $25 visitor entrance fee strained revenue, while the café's functional constraints—reliance on batteries along with mandatory winter closures—made one thing clear: the vision had outgrown its small adobe shell.

His experiments test the boundaries between ancestral traditions and contemporary culinary artistry.

A VISION TAKES SHAPE

The next phase will be a new, 1,300-square-foot, two-story restaurant just outside the pueblo, constructed entirely from shipping containers, complete with full electricity and running water—the first full-service restaurant of its kind in the area. "We're on the main road going to Taos Pueblo. So, we're really in the perfect location," Bernal said. "We'll have a lot of traffic going by every day."

Bernal's path to funding began years earlier with business courses from New Mexico Community Capital, a nonprofit lender focused on underserved communities. He learned branding, marketing and how to pitch a concept. When he was ready to expand beyond the café, he reached out to NMCC again, asking about funding possibilities.

NMCC connected him to the Rooted Relative Fund, Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and Roanhorse Consulting, LLC's new lending program that takes a different approach than traditional banks. Instead of focusing solely on credit scores and collateral, the fund works through Community Lending Catalysts like NMCC—trusted local organizations that understand the unique challenges Native entrepreneurs face, valuing relationships and community impact alongside the bottom line.

As the fund's first applicant, Bernal spent months working with NMCC advisors on business plans and financial projections. It was an education in navigating systems that weren't designed with Indigenous businesses in mind. "I've been learning so much in this process about the underlying problems we face as Native people living in this country, trying to start businesses," he said.

By the time RRF approved the loan in January 2025, he had almost forgotten about the application. The Zoom meeting where he received the news was emotional—representatives from NMCC and RRF all on the call to celebrate this milestone. "Both programs were very kind and open to all of this, and I honestly didn't think any of it would go through," he said. "We kinda kept plugging away at it…and here we are."

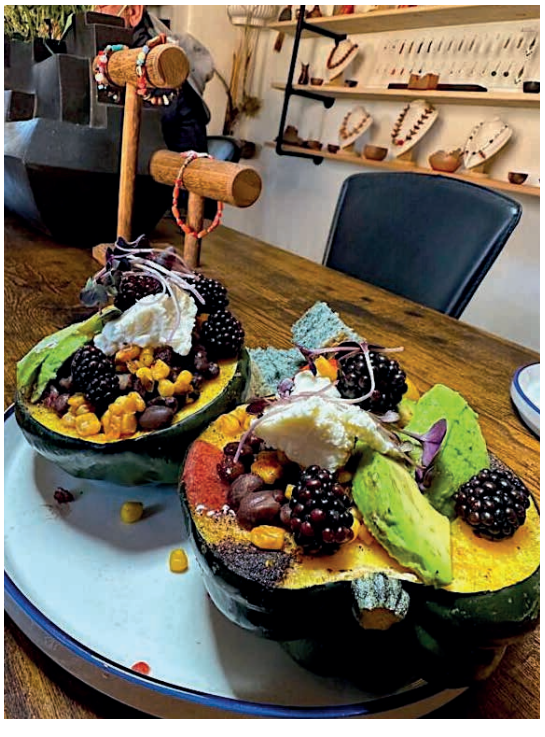
As soon as the loan came through, the project began creating jobs in the pueblo. Bernal hired nine tribal members—six laborers and three skilled workers—and put his own family at the heart of the operation: His father is on construction. His brother, Kwantlen, coordinates the crews. And his mother draws on her experience as a domestic violence advocate to guide the project's deeper mission. "We're really doing this as a family," he said. "I'm the sole owner of all of this, but I don't feel like it."

Every dollar of profit has been reinvested into the vision. And though the opening timeline has shifted, the goal is to open the restaurant and eventually build the Coral Dawn and Paul J. Bernal Center for Arts and Literature, a self-funded space for advocacy, healing and community.

A SISTER'S LEGACY

Media attention tends to focus on the food or the novelty of shipping container architecture.









Top: Rose Bernal; examples of Dawn Butterfly Café's cuisine include roasted squash layered with heirloom beans, fresh blackberries, avocado, micro-greens and local goat cheese, served with blue corn bread. Photos courtesy Dawn Butterfly Café

However, a documentary crew is chronicling the family's journey. While he hopes it will inspire people, Bernal is quick to ground the story in its larger purpose. "My sister wanted to help her community," he said.

The attention makes him uncomfortable. "I'm not even a person who really likes to be photographed," he confesses. However, he accepts it as necessary for the overarching goal: to strengthen economic sovereignty in the pueblo and build something tangible from the trauma of their loss.

That vision is taking shape in the new restaurant, which opened in the fall with on-site gardens and greenhouses in a true farm-to-table model. The goal, Bernal says, is to make his food both available and affordable for the community. It's not haute cuisine for tourists, though they're welcome. Nor is it purely nostalgia for elders. He thinks of it as medicine.

Tomorrow might find Bernal at the construction site, where summer monsoons turned the earth to mud. Or perhaps he'll be at the adobe café, folding back the bright turquoise shutters from the window to serve whoever visits.

Coral Dawn Bernal's mantra was "Art is Healing." Her family has taken that belief and made it tangible, serving a kind of poetry in every beverage and bowl, while building a home for the words and passion she left behind.

To learn more about the Dawn Butterfly Café's mission and menu, visit: HTTPS://WWW.DAWNBUTTERFLY.COM .
To learn about how NMCC supports Indigenous entrepreneurs through mentorship, training and capital, visit: HTTPS://WWW.NMCCAP.ORG . *To learn about how RCAC and Roanhorse Consulting are helping Native-led businesses thrive through culturally grounded lending, visit:* HTTPS://WWW.RCAC.ORG/INDIGENOUS-COMMUNITIES/ROOTED-RELATIVE-FUND/ . ■

Elliott Bochstein is staff writer for the Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC).
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NM NATIVE WORKFORCE PARTNERS RECEIVES JOB CREATION GRANT

Native Workforce Partners (NWP) has been selected to receive funding via the Families and Workers Fund to expand career pathways in sustainable industries. Supported by the LANL Foundation and sponsored by New Mexico Community Trust (NMCT), NWP is dedicated to creating opportunities for Native Americans in the workforce. The two-year, $550,000 Powering Climate & Infrastructure Careers Initiative grant will help NWP hire its first full-time staff, expand workforce training and technical assistance, and support tribal nations in preparing for climate and infrastructure careers.

"These programs offer more than employment and training services; they provide a pathway to financial stability and long-term success for our participants. We are excited to continue expanding these opportunities and elevating the potential within our Native communities," said NWP Co-chair Rosemary Reano.

As a collective of 15 tribal workforce programs, NWP will coordinate training and build pathways into sustainable jobs. The LANL Foundation is administering grant funds this year as NWP transitions to independent operations in partnership with NMCT by 2027. One of the first regional tribal workforce collaboratives in the country, NWP serves 14 tribal workforce programs in New Mexico and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in Texas.

The Powering Climate & Infrastructure Careers Initiative has invested more than $33 million nationwide to expand career pathways for workers living on low incomes in clean energy, construction, broadband, transportation, water management and other climate and infrastructure sectors. In 2024, it awarded 32 grants as part of the Powering Climate & Infrastructure Careers Challenge, an open call for grant funding that received more than 460 applicants from across the nation.

NA'TEHSIEME HOUSING PROJECT AT TAOS PUEBLO

The First Such Project at the Pueblo in 37 Years

In response to a critical need for sustainable, affordable and culturally-supportive housing, last July, Taos Pueblo and the Taos Pueblo Housing Authority held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Na'Tehsieme Housing Project. Governor Edwin Concha opened the event with a traditional prayer. Joseph Romero, Gilbert Suazo Sr. and other tribal council members sang an opening song that had been composed for the commemoration of the federal government's return of Blue Lake to the pueblo.

Attendees heard presentations on home design, functionality and financing options. Locally produced, high-performance lavacrete and local timber will be used. Lavacrete is a high strength, low weight material made of concrete and volcanic elements. The event marked the beginning of a major step forward for the community. The project is the first of its kind at the pueblo in 37 years. The event concluded with a closing prayer by War Chief Robert Evan Trujillo and a shared community meal.

Some of the homes are slated to be rental units, while other units may be sold to tribal members. Project funding partners include the New Mexico Governor's Office, the New Mexico Indian Affairs Department (NMIAD), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Minnesota Housing Partnership. Thanks to state Capital Outlay funding, infrastructure is now underway for 31 new homes—with 19 more to follow as funding allows.

Photos: New Mexico Indian Affairs Department

PUEBLO TOURISM: LIVING COMMUNITIES, ENDURING TRADITIONS

BY **DEBORAH TORRES**

In Pueblo communities, time does not move in a straight line. It circles. It returns. It remembers. The past is not something left behind; it walks with us. It lives in the language spoken between grandparents and grandchildren, in the rhythm of footsteps during ceremony, in the way bread is made, fires are tended and prayers are offered quietly before dawn. Pueblo life is not a reenactment of history—it is continuity in motion.

To understand Pueblo tourism, one must first understand Pueblo life. And to understand Pueblo life, one must release the idea that culture exists for display.

LIFE IN PUEBLO COMMUNITIES: MORE THAN WHAT IS SEEN

Across New Mexico, Pueblo communities awaken early. Mornings begin long before visitors arrive. Fires are built. Water is carried. Food is prepared. Elders are checked on. Children are guided into the day. The work of Pueblo life is steady, purposeful and often unseen.

These daily acts—so ordinary on the surface—are expressions of responsibility. Pueblo life is organized around relationships: to land, to water, to one-another, to ancestors, and to generations yet unborn. Everything is connected, and nothing is accidental.

Fields are not simply planted; they are cared for. Songs are not simply sung; they are remembered. Dances are not performances; they are prayers in motion. Language is not merely spoken; it is carried.

This is the foundation of Pueblo culture: responsibility over convenience, community over individualism, and continuity over spectacle.

Mural at Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, Albuquerque, N.M.
Photo © Seth Roffman

CEREMONY AS LIVING PRACTICE

Ceremony is often what draws visitors to Pueblo communities, but ceremony is only one visible expression of a much larger system of belief and responsibility. What is seen during a public dance or feast day is the surface of something deeply rooted. Ceremonies are acts of balance—between people and the natural world, between the physical and the spiritual, between past and future. They are not staged events; they are necessary acts of prayer, renewal and survival.

Preparation for ceremony begins long before visitors arrive. Clothing is carefully maintained. Songs are practiced and corrected. Elders guide and instruct. Younger generations learn by watching, listening and participating long before they are ever seen in public. What visitors may witness for a few hours represents months, sometimes years, of preparation—and generations of knowledge passed down without written record.

FEAST DAYS: SACRED, NOT SPECTACLE

Feast days are often misunderstood. To outsiders, they may appear celebratory, even festive. To Pueblo communities, they are sacred days layered with responsibility, devotion and memory.

Feast days honor patron saints while continuing Indigenous spiritual tradition that long predates colonization. They represent adaptation without erasure—a blending of faith systems that allowed Pueblo people to survive immense pressure to abandon who they were.

On feast days, Pueblo communities gather, not for entertainment, but for prayer, gratitude and renewal. The sharing of food, when it occurs, is an act of generosity—not an obligation. Visitors who attend feast days are witnessing something deeply personal. They are being allowed into a moment that belongs first and foremost to the community.

That is why etiquette matters. Why silence matters. Why humility matters.

A HISTORY THAT SHAPES THE PRESENT

Pueblo communities carry history in ways that are not always visible to visitors. For generations, Pueblo people were photographed, studied, displayed and written about without consent or understanding. Our ceremonies were documented when they should not have been. Our sacred spaces were entered without permission. Our cultures were treated as artifacts rather than living systems.

This history matters because it informs how Pueblo communities approach tourism today.

When visitors arrive, they do not enter a neutral space. They enter communities shaped by resilience and survival—communities that have learned, sometimes painfully, the cost of being misunderstood.

That is why Pueblo people set boundaries. Why photography is restricted. Why some questions go unanswered. Why some spaces are closed. Boundaries are not barriers; they are protections.

RECLAIMING THE NARRATIVE

For much of history, Pueblo stories were told about us rather than by us. Narratives were shaped by outsiders—anthropologists, historians, photographers—who often misunderstood what they were seeing.

Today, Pueblo communities are reclaiming their voices.

Native-led tourism is part of that reclamation. It allows Pueblo people to decide what is shared, and when it is shared. It centers sovereignty and consent. It prioritizes community benefit over visitor convenience.

Through Passport to Pueblo Country, this approach has been foundational. The goal has never been access for access's sake. The goal has been relationship.

Sometimes that means saying no. Sometimes it means slowing down. Often, it means teaching visitors that not everything needs to be photographed, explained or taken home.

THE WORK BEHIND THE EXPERIENCE

Visitors may see a guided walk, a pottery demonstration, a shared meal. What they do not see is the planning, consultation and care that goes into each experience. They may not see the conversations with elders about what can be shared. The decisions about timing, language and setting. The agreements made to ensure artists are compensated fairly and knowledge is respected. They may not see the responsibility felt by Pueblo guides who carry not only

Deer Dance, Ohkay Owingeh. © Seth Roffman

information, but the weight of representation.

Sharing culture is not easy work. It requires trust. It requires accountability. It requires saying no when necessary—and trusting that the right visitors will understand.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GUEST

In Pueblo culture, guests are treated with generosity—but generosity is met with expectation. Guests are expected to observe, to listen and to behave with humility. Being a guest means understanding that:

Pueblo dancer at arts & crafts show, Ohkay Owingeh
© Seth Roffman

• You are not entitled to an explanation.
• You may not understand everything you see.
• Presence itself is a privilege.

This mindset is essential for visitors. Tourism becomes harmful when it is driven by entitlement. It becomes meaningful when it is guided by gratitude.

THE ROLE OF THE VISITOR ECONOMY

Tourism, when aligned with Pueblo values, can support artisan livelihoods, create economic pathways for youth, and allow families to remain connected to their communities while participating in the modern economy.

But tourism must be intentional.

Economic benefit must flow back to Pueblo people—not just businesses that profit from proximity to Pueblo culture. Experiences must be designed with consent. Representation must be accurate and respectful.

Buffalo dancers on Feast Day, San Ildefonso Pueblo, N.M., 1991. Photo: Nancy Hunter Warren

When Pueblo people lead tourism efforts, they can ensure that growth does not come at the expense of culture.

TEACHING BEFORE INVITING

One of the most important aspects of responsible Pueblo tourism is education before arrival. Visitors who understand protocols, boundaries and context arrive differently. They move more slowly. They ask fewer intrusive questions. They observe more deeply. Education changes behavior. It transforms tourism from consumption into relationship. This is why "before you visit," guidance matters. It prepares visitors, not just logistically, but emotionally and ethically.

SEEING THE UNSEEN

Visitors often leave Pueblo communities changed—not because of what they saw, but because of what they felt.

A quiet moment during a dance. A shared meal eaten without conversation. A realization that not everything needs to be documented. These moments linger because they ask something of the visitor. They ask for reflection.

Pueblo tourism, at its best, does not entertain. It invites introspection.

THE FUTURE OF PUEBLO TOURISM

As New Mexico prepares for increased visitation in the coming years—driven by national and international attention—the way Pueblo tourism is approached will matter deeply.

The question is not how many visitors arrive. The question is how they arrive. Will they come informed? Will they respect boundaries? Will they understand that Pueblo communities are not attractions but homes?

The future of Pueblo tourism depends on visitors who are willing to arrive prepared, patient and grateful.

WALKING GENTLY FORWARD

Pueblo communities are still here. Still praying. Still farming. Still speaking their languages. Still teaching their children. Still carrying responsibilities passed down through generations.

Tourism does not define Pueblo Life—but it can support it, when done right. When visitors walk gently, listen closely and leave with respect rather than souvenirs, tourism becomes something meaningful. It becomes a bridge rather than a burden.

When you visit a pueblo, remember this:

You are stepping into someone else's living story.

Visit in humility with respect.

May your time there honor the community and the generations who continue to care for it. ■

Deborah Torres is a Native-led tourism professional and co-founder with her husband, Elmer Torres of Passport to Pueblo Country, dedicated to authentic, community-centered Pueblo tourism in New Mexico. 505-301-3956, WWW.PASSPORTTOPUEBLOCOUNTRY.COM

IPCC RECEIVES AMERICAN INDIGENOUS TOURISM ASSOCIATION AWARD

For more than 27 years, the American Indigenous Tourism Association (WWW.AMERICANINDIGENOUSTOURISM.ORG), a national nonprofit, has worked to address inequities in the tourism system and serve as the national voice for U.S. Indigenous peoples engaged in cultural tourism. AITA also provides technical assistance, training and capacity-building to Native nations, communities and Indigenous-owned enterprises engaged in tourism, hospitality and recreation. AITA says that the industry has an $11.6 billion annual economic impact on the U.S. economy.

The AITA 2025 Excellence in Indigenous Tourism Awards, announced at the 27th Annual American Indigenous Tourism Conference in October 2025, "recognized individuals and organizations that exemplify the highest standards of Indigenous hospitality, cultural preservation and innovation in the travel and tourism industry," said Sherry L. Rupert (Paiute/Washoe), CEO of the AITA. "Each honoree epitomizes the diverse contributions that are shaping the future of Indigenous tourism and creating unforgettable experiences for travelers."

The awardee for Best Cultural Heritage Experience was the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque. The IPCC is dedicated to preserving and showcasing authentic Pueblo traditions. More than just a museum, the center offers an immersive experience. Visitors can watch traditional dances, see artists at work and explore exhibitions co-curated with Pueblo leaders. The center's Pueblo Kitchen has authentic cuisine, and unique, handcrafted works can be found in the IPCC's store.

BOOK PROFILE BY SHELLI ROTTSCHAFER

CAMPFIRE STORIES:
SANTA FE & TAOS — TALES & TRAVEL COMPANION
EDITED BY ILYSSA AND DAVE KYU
MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS (SEATTLE), 2025
HTTPS://WWW.CAMPFIRESTORIESBOOK.COM/SANTA-FE-TAOS

Editors Ilyssa and Dave Kyu's latest "*Campfire Stories: Santa Fe & Taos—Tales & Travel Companion,"* introduces their reader to the Land of Enchantment by storytelling. The anthology collects perspectives from authors who call Santa Fe and Taos home. Each illustrates what life can be like in our "Tierra Encantada." The final portion includes traveling suggestions, tourist etiquette, and how to access some of New Mexico's amazing vistas and learn from its many cultural sites.

This book sets us within the arid high desert and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, where Santa Fe averages 7,200 feet above sea level and Taos's Wheeler Peak rises to 13,167 feet. The foothills are covered in juniper and piñón, whereas aspens and pine grow at elevation. All of which glow pink at sunset. This region supports an abundance of wildlife. Bighorn sheep, coyote and elk roam chamisa-covered mesas, while hummingbirds and greater sandhill cranes fly over wetland vegas in their migrations.

National Medal of Arts recipient N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) opens the collection with an epilogue from *The Man Made of Words*:

> "To encounter the sacred is to be alive at the deepest center of human existence. Sacred places are the truest definitions of the Earth; they stand for the Earth immediately and forever; they are its flags and shields. If you would know the Earth for what it really is, learn it through its sacred places."

Former Santa Fe poet laureate Valerie Lynne Martínez lifts up an invocation to the land she calls home in her verse, "And They Called It Horizon."

"But there was a time, long ago,
before names…
Haleeh, principio, the beginning.

[A] seed [became] this planet we call Mother Earth.

> And the warp was the white light of morning;
> and the weft was the red light of evening;
> and the fringes were sky-water falling;
> and the borders the dewy rainbows of afternoons."

The Chicano novelist known for the quintessential *nuevomexicano* read *Bless Me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya, encourages our web of extended communities to come together to restore the Earth. He connects the past, present and future in "Cornerstones."

> "Mother Earth… your mountains rise as building blocks, joining beloved earth to sky. Rivers and wind rush, wearing away clay and sand. This is as it should be."

Sunset, Taos Mountain. Photo by Daniel Combs

Acclaimed poet and screenwriter Jimmy Santiago Baca speaks of lifeways tied to el Río Grande, its tributaries and the acequia culture that irrigates the "three sisters"—corn, beans and squash—as well as other crops. In "Spring" he writes of when the mayordomo first opens the *llave*, and water gushes down the canal, flowing again after debris has been cleaned out by community members.

"All things pull and strain.
From each unfolding lilac leaf….
spring finally arrives,
glistening the dead-slag of winter
in all creatures,
as they emit that special light
they do."

Closing the storytelling is Natalie Goldberg's poem, "Remember This Place." In gratitude, she invites her reader to accompany her on a journey. "If I took you to New Mexico... ['you' will learn to], "be thankful in this dry land," just like she has.

Camp Stories: Santa Fe & Taos—Tales and Travel Companion is published through Mountaineers Books, a well-known publisher of guidebooks that help the savvy adventurer "get out there." Their series highlights National Parks as well as regions throughout the United States such as the Adirondacks, The Redwood Coast, The San Juan Islands, and now, our "Tierra Encantada."

Río Grande Vista Verde Trail, Pilar, N.M. Photos by Daniel Combs

THE NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER'S TOP-5 ISSUES TO LOOK FOR IN 2026

BY **NMELC STAFF**

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center is honored once again to be invited by Green Fire Times to share our list of what we consider to be the Top Environmental Justice Issues for the coming year. As 2026 is upon us, we reflect on the major shifts impacting the environment this past year and our predictions for what will be the most significant trends to look for. This year we decided to focus on what we consider the top five issues instead of our usual 10, to give readers more detailed information on each. Thanks for reading!

1. The Fevered Expansion of A.I./Data Centers Gambles with our Health and Environment

Hyperscale data centers are rapidly popping up across the nation, typically targeting and locating in already overburdened communities. These data centers place an immense strain on local water and power supplies; hike local residents' and businesses' utility bills; and heavily pollute the air, land and water communities depend upon to live and survive. In exchange, these data centers promise hundreds to thousands of jobs to local residents, which in many cases don't materialize. Here in New Mexico, Project Jupiter, a proposed hyperscale data center, intends to rely upon the very same public water supply that local residents depend upon for drinking water and it is sited in a region where the water rarely flows and the wells run dry. And yet, this project purportedly promises a "bright and sustainable future" for the communities of Santa Teresa, Sunland Park and all of New Mexico—seemingly weaving the same tale of deceit and exploitation that many overburdened communities know all too well.

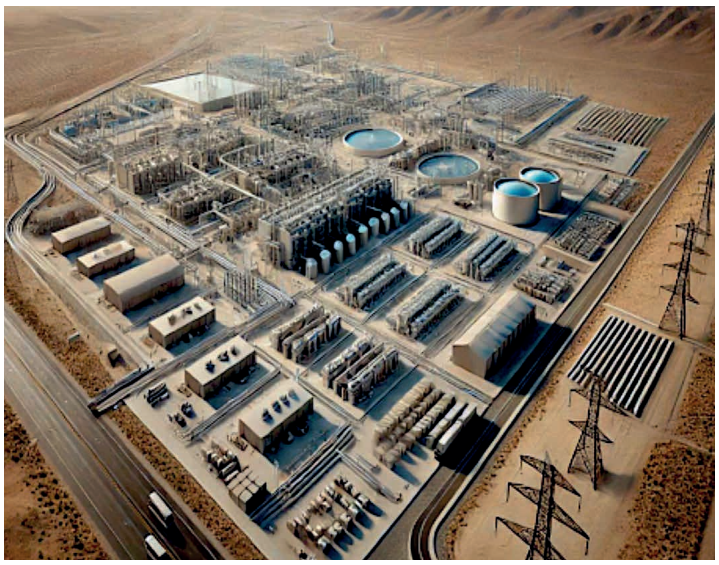
Sunland Park and Santa Teresa residents protesting against state funding for the Project Jupiter data center at Legislative Finance Committee hearing, Aug. 19, 2025
Photo by Kacey Hovden

Data centers are large warehouses filled with thousands of computers and equipment, operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to fuel Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), cloud platforms and surveillance systems. These facilities do not operate independently, instead necessitating the buildout of several extractive and polluting operations such as natural-gas power plants and pipelines, to power the data centers themselves. The results: a massive and resource-intensive development that drains public water and power supplies; pollutes the surrounding land, air and water; emits significant noise and light pollution, and drives both residents and local businesses away from the communities they call home.

Local and state governments nationwide, however, are swiftly greenlighting data center projects in frontline and fenceline communities, with both pressure and support from a federal administration beholden to billionaires and corporations. Data center projects are shrouded in secrecy and advanced by wealth and power. Local leaders sign non-disclosure agreements and claim "trade secrets" every step of the way, all to line the pockets of corporations and keep communities in the dark.

This data center expansion is the right arm to the larger power grab at play in our nation and yet another explicit and intentional act of violence against already marginalized and vulnerable communities. Project Jupiter is no different, with local and state leaders unilaterally choosing to gamble with New Mexicans' water, health, lives and futures in exchange for a "promised" profit from corporations whose loyalties will forever lie solely with their businesses, their shareholders and their narrow, short-term interests.

Despite the onslaught of A.I. and data centers, communities around the country are pushing back hard and winning. According to Data Center Watch's latest report, from March 2025 to June 2025 alone, community resistance has blocked $98 billion worth of data center projects from moving forward. In 2026, as federal regulations will likely continue to weaken, and investors begin to second-guess whether the A.I. boom is here to stay, we know the community-led resistance to data centers will grow—in strength, resources, research and people. In New Mexico, we strive to do the same. Although the mass imposition of data centers and A.I. comes on the crest of "groundbreaking" developments, this is not a new story or a new fight. It is a familiar tale, and one we are fighting



Rendering of Project Jupiter
Illustration by BorderPlex Digital

to shift alongside communities, in the defense of clean air, water, land, health and future generations.

2. Duck & Cover Won't Be Enough: The Accelerating Socialization of the Nuclear Industry Including Uranium

Many of us remember or have heard of the days during the Cold War when school children were instructed to get under their desks and cover their heads—the famous "duck-and-cover" drills—to protect themselves in the event of a nuclear attack. Many believed if they ducked and covered, they'd be able to walk away from nuclear Armageddon. Now, the duck-and-cover drills are seen as a more naive time in America, the punchline to a joke, or a cynical ploy by the military/industrial complex to instill a false sense of security about the horrors that the quest for power and profits created.

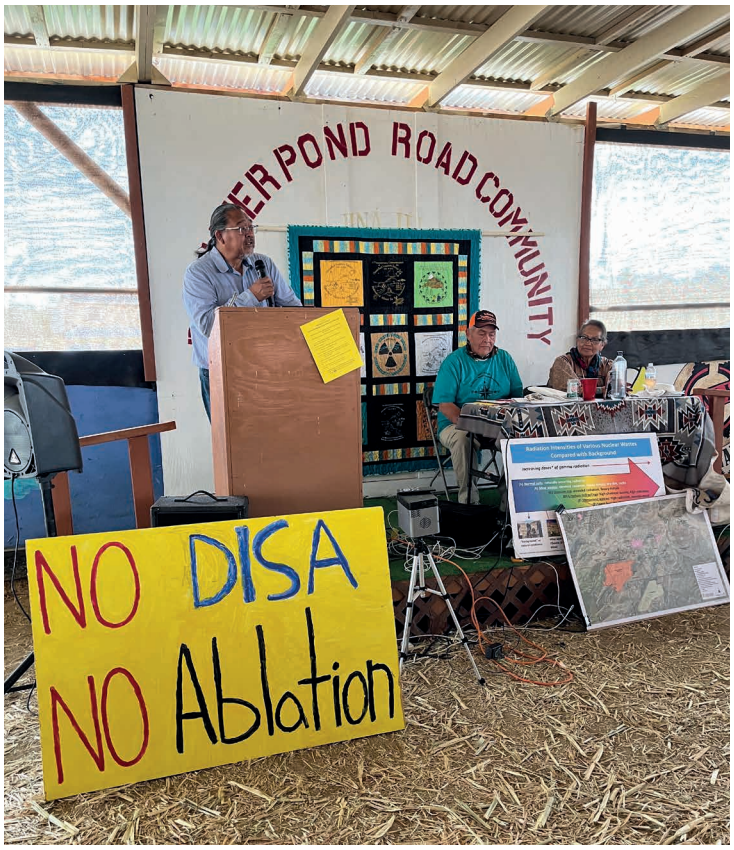
Southern N.M. residents spoke at a press conference on Sept. 19, 2025 after the Doña Ana County Commission approved $165 billion in IRBs for the hyperscale data center. Photo by Kacey Hovden

A protest was held near the Velvet-Wood mine after it was fast-tracked—meaning minimal environmental review—by the Trump regime. Photo by Andrew Christiansen/Moab Times

Homestake Barrick uranium mill tailings near Milan, N.M. The EPA SuperFund site covers more than 200 acres and weighs approximately 22 million tons. Photo: The Center for Land Use Interpretation

The current federal regime is embarking on a new age of duck-and-cover style propaganda. The propaganda isn't designed to allay fears of nuclear war (although that spectre still haunts us, probably more now than in any time since the Cold War), but to soothe the American public into accepting nuclear power as the panacea to climate change, cheap electricity and "energy dominance." The pivot toward nuclear power also includes increasing uranium production, while simultaneously stripping away environmental and public health protections.

The nuclear industry is by far the most socialized industry in the world. That's why it really only *thrives* in countries such as China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, where governments commit to showering billions of dollars yearly on propping up reactor construction, fuel production and uranium extraction. Not coincidentally, these countries are also firmly authoritarian. The shift toward nuclear power in the U.S., then, tracks our shift toward an authoritarian federal regime.



The Red Water Pond Road community expressed opposition to DISA ablation technology at an annual commemoration near Churchrock, N.M. Photo by Susan Schuurman

As part of the shift to prop up the domestic nuclear and uranium extraction industries, the Trump administration took dramatic steps in 2025, which will continue to play out in 2026. In Executive Order 14300, the administration purports to reform the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The NRC has ostensibly been the national watchdog for civilian uses of atomic material since the 1970s. In reality, it was almost instantly captured by the industries it was meant to regulate and has been a booster for all things nuclear ever since. E.O. 14300 further weakens an already timid regulator to the point of complete impotence. The E.O. directs the NRC to adopt radical new regulations by November 2026 that will, at a minimum, drastically reduce licensing timelines for reactors and other NRC regulated projects. The NRC will be required to make a decision on new license applications within 18 months of receiving them and within 12 months if the license application is a renewal. *Eighteen months is a laughable timeframe to evaluate some of the most complex and dangerous engineering projects on earth.*

Restructuring the NRC will affect New Mexico directly, even though there are no nuclear power plants in the state. Turbo-charging reactor production and licensing will create a market for uranium, of which New Mexico has plenty. Uranium extraction will very likely ramp up in the state, putting New Mexico, and particularly Native communities, at risk from radiation and heavy metal exposure. Further, the NRC's loving embrace of the uranium extraction industry will only become more passionate, meaning *New Mexico communities will have to rely more heavily on state, local and tribal governments to ensure that public health and shared resources like groundwater are protected.*

More directly, the administration's executive orders unleashing "energy dominance" and declaring a "national energy emergency" will allow the uranium extraction industry to cut corners during environmental reviews and permitting. They will also significantly restrict the public's ability to review and challenge these projects.

We're already beginning to see the results of federal nuclear and mining policies in New Mexico. The current administration has fast-tracked five uranium extraction projects in New Mexico, including the Laramide/NuFuels Crownpoint Uranium Project that NMELC clients Eastern Navajo Diné Against Uranium Mining have been resisting since 1994 and the Grants Precision in situ leach mining project near Mount Taylor. Further, this last fall, the NRC for the first time issued a single *nationwide* license, with no serious environmental review, for DISA Technologies to use high-pressure slurry ablation (HPSA) to "remediate" uranium mine waste. However, ablation is an experimental technology that has never been used at commercial scale, and the only existing data indicate its utility for remediation that protects public health is limited at best. Nevertheless, HPSA allows for extraction and concentration of uranium from mine waste, making it a potential profit-making enterprise. Unsurprisingly, one of the first places DISA proposes to use its experimental technology is on the Navajo Nation in northwestern New Mexico, honoring a long tradition of the nuclear industry and the federal government experimenting on Native populations.

3. It Takes a Village: How the Federal Government Coordinated to Eviscerate Environmental and Public Health Protections

Aerial photo of YUCCA street mural protest on the first day of the N.M. Legislative Session in Santa Fe, Jan. 2025. Photo from Youth United for Climate Crisis Action

2025 represented a rare occurrence in politics: when all three branches of government aligned on an issue that is critical to the American people. Unfortunately, the topic that all three branches agreed upon was that the protections for our land, air, water and public health should be scrapped in favor of allowing polluters to run roughshod over communities and ecosystems.

The staunchly ideological U.S. Supreme Court continued its methodical rollback of environmental laws the majority believes get in the way of corporate profits. In *City and County of San Francisco, California v. Environmental Protection Agency*, a 5-4 majority of the court significantly limited the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ability to regulate pollution discharges into water bodies. Although as explained further below, the current EPA is happy to limit its own authority, the *San Francisco v. EPA* decision will have far-reaching consequences and will hamstring future administrations more concerned with protecting the public from pollution.

In a *unanimous* decision, the court in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County* decimated decades of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) case law by determining that NEPA only requires a *short statement* of environmental consequences for polluting projects that the federal government regulates. For the current regime, the *Seven County* decision is catnip, that is, irresistible. Future environmental impact statements are unlikely to have any meaningful analyses of environmental harm, cumulative impacts or environmental justice. As a result, neither the federal government nor the public and the most affected communities will have the information necessary to make sound decisions about whether a given project will protect public health and the environment.

Congress also did its part to put us all at higher risk from pollution. In the 2025 reconciliation bill (more commonly known by the contradictory title "One Big Beautiful Bill Act"), Congress rolled back substantial Inflation Recovery Act funding for environmental and public health projects, such as incentives for electric cars, home solar panels and other clean energy projects. It also slashed the budgets for agencies created to regulate polluters and pollution.

Unsurprisingly, the most aggressive and authoritarian efforts to unleash American polluters comes from the executive branch. In a prolonged episode of what we would describe as manic, the administration issued

Churchrock resident Larry King showed Inter-American Commission on Human Rights commissioners his land, which continues to have high readings of radiation decades after a United Nuclear Corporation mill stopped operation. Uranium mining on his property is expected to start up again in 2026. Photo by Susan Schuurman

a flurry of executive orders which, while failing to overturn enacted legislation, gave executive agencies the excuse they needed to significantly roll back environmental and public health protections. From E.O.s as substantial as Executive Order 14154, "Unleashing American Energy" to those as ridiculous as E.O. 14264 "Maintaining Acceptable Pressure in Showerheads" the regime has ripped away any veneer of protecting public safety and the environment from corporate greed.

"Unleashing American Energy," for example, really does nothing of the sort. Instead of leveraging the U.S. government's resources to "unleash" inexpensive and climate-friendly renewable energy, the E.O. instead dismantles all executive programs related to climate change and renewable energy and instead retrenches into subsidizing fossil fuel extraction. More troubling, the E.O. directs executive agencies to abbreviate environmental reviews in the name of "efficient" permitting. The Department of the Interior enthusiastically carried out this directive over the summer by completing an environmental "review," including public comment, of the Velvet-Wood conventional uranium mine in Utah in just two weeks. While polluters may celebrate this as a victory for efficient permitting, the reality is that modern mines are huge, complex and dirty industrial operations. Not even the largest team of dedicated staffers could complete a thorough, meaningful environmental review in two weeks, much less a skeleton crew under the direction of an oil baron. Finally, the E.O. rescinds nearly all the Biden administration E.O.s directing federal agencies to protect the environment and public health from climate change, toxic chemicals, radiation and other environmental threats.

Further, Executive Order 14156 declares a national "energy emergency," and directs federal agencies to remove regulatory "barriers" to efforts to extract energy minerals, including uranium. The E.O. does not remove regulatory "barriers" to wind and solar development.

These alarming trends are certain to continue in 2026. The Supreme Court has several cases on its docket that promise to create an opportunity for further weakening of federal law. The reactionary court majority's liberal use of the "shadow docket"—which bypasses usual court procedures like briefing and oral argument and results in short, unsigned decisions that often contain no rationale—could also mean significant deregulation with little fanfare.

Congress is also already gearing up for massive polluter protections in 2026. The Mining Regulatory Clarity Act, for example, has already been passed in the House of Representatives and intends to give away public lands for mining companies to use as waste dumps. Despite elections upcoming in the fall of 2026, Congress is almost sure to introduce a spate of legislation eroding environmental and public health protections before then.

The Executive Branch will also continue to wipe away modern environmental and public health gains. The Heritage Foundation, which is responsible for the Project 2025 blueprint the administration adopted to advance its reactionary and authoritarian policies, released a policy vision for 2026. This "vision" includes further increasing subsidies for fossil fuels and eliminating support for renewable energy. It also includes plans to deregulate electricity markets and reduce environmental and public health protections for oil, gas and nuclear infrastructure.

New Mexico communities will not be insulated from the decisions made in Washington. From fast-tracked uranium mines to operations at the national labs, federal environmental reviews will be meager and public participation in them limited. Oil and gas production on federal land will increase, with little to no oversight. Not only will state resources be spread thin because of the need to fill federal regulatory gaps; state and local regulatory agencies will likely have to contend with federal agencies actively obstructing their work. Federal incentives to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gasses will disappear, making healthy air quality in places like Bernalillo and Doña Ana counties all the more unlikely.

Collective resistance is the only way to counter these efforts that aim to return us to the days of the Cuyahoga River burning and dioxin coursing through every ecosystem and human body. The New Mexico Environmental Law Center will continue to stand with New Mexico communities to protect our land, air, water and health from the federal government's policies and regulations that cause harm and degradation.

4. The Importance of the Rule of Law to Resist Authoritarianism and Fascism

Over the past 11 months of the Trump administration, we have seen countless examples of how many federal courts have delayed or prevented lawless power grabs by the Executive Branch, while members of Congress have succumbed to fear or enthusiastically embraced authoritarianism. Trump has gutted the Inspector Generals' ability to act as a check on authoritarianism. The rule of law—the principle that no one is above the law and *all* should be held accountable—is under threat in ways we haven't seen in generations. It was disappointing to witness the Supreme Court grant Trump presidential immunity from prosecution for conduct committed as "official acts."

Our democracy, flawed though it may be, is hanging on by a thread. In the coming year, courts must continue to courageously issue rulings that adhere to the law and the Constitution, and to restrain the executive branch when it violates current law. Our society must insist that law matters, that rules apply, that the law cannot be tossed out on the whim of a narcissistic administration that finds it inconvenient to their goals. International rules, such as prohibiting killing people in international waters in the absence of a war that Congress has declared. Rules like sharing evidence of a crime before issuing a sentence. Rules like due process for people detained and being suspected of the civil infraction of overstaying a visa. Laws like those found in the Bill of Rights, including the First Amendment, which guarantees our rights to Freedom of Speech, which are violated when people are arrested for social media posts or attending political protests. Rules like applying for National Historic Preservation permits before bulldozing the historic East Wing of the White House.

In New Mexico, NMELC relies on the rule of law as a critical tool in the toolbox wielded by frontline impacted community members to push back against powerful corporate entities who place greed above community needs. In one example, NMELC filed a lawsuit against the Doña Ana County Commission for approving $165 billion in Industrial Revenue Bonds based on incomplete information submitted by BorderPlex Digital about the massive Project Jupiter data center. Recently the New Mexico Environment Department declared Project Jupiter's air permit applications for two microgrids as incomplete, causing further delays to the project and a reminder that rules matter in a democracy.

We must strengthen core institutions, enforce checks and balances, prosecute corruption and not let lawless behavior at the highest levels become normalized. Popular resistance must continue to uphold that no one is above the law. We must protect judges that issue decisions based on law and not let the Department of Justice be weaponized for personal vendettas. Every time we speak up against illegal behaviors and actions by this administration, it supports the concept and principle of the rule of law. Every time we are silent when another democratic norm is eroded, we weaken it. We must find the courage to resist this erosion. The power resides in the ballot box and it will be exercised.

5. Growing Resistance to Authoritarianism and Fascism

As the current federal administration (what many have referred to as a 'Regime') continues its daily onslaught against democratic norms, throwing its radical Project 2025 policies against the wall and seeing what it can get away with, the resistance to authoritarianism and fascism also grows each day. Resistance to tyranny is crucial to not only salvaging environmental protections—guardrails on polluters' contaminating our air, land and water—but also protecting our health and wellbeing. Our rights to public participation, including commenting on government proposals, review of environmental regulation, and our ability to elect candidates that will uphold the law and honor their oaths to uphold the Constitution upon which our system is built, are all under threat and need to be defended.

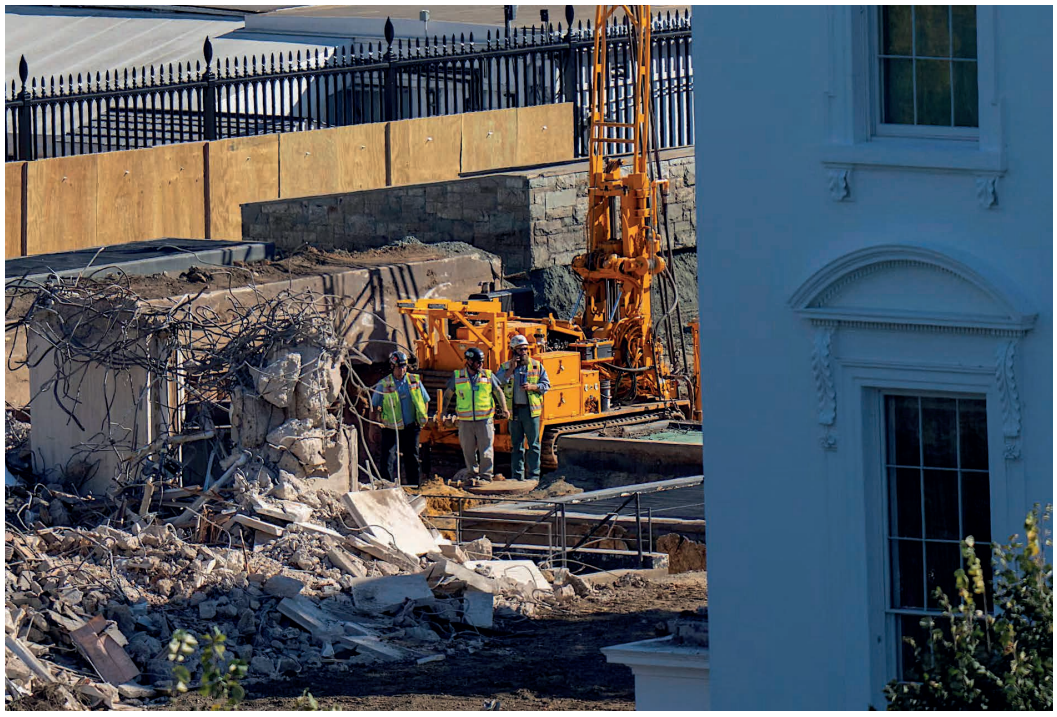
Now more than ever, we must form networks of mutual aid, solidarity and support to organize and fight back against lawless encroachment of civil rights and environmental protections. Our resistance must be intersectional; we need to rise above divisions that may have siloed us in the past. Immigration rights groups joining hands with unions, environmentalists and faith-based organizers—as they already are—to form broad-based social, economic and environmental justice coalitions will continue to grow our strength and our ability to take united direct action together.

It is likely that the current administration will try to interfere in the mid-term elections in 2026. Likewise, Trump might seek a third term in 2028, even though the Constitution forbids him from doing so. Community defense is required. We must go outside our comfort zone and utilize our networks to resist fascism in both large and small ways which, when numbered in their millions, add up to form a block on the rise of fascism. Capitulation is unacceptable. Authoritarianism and fascism can only succeed if there is cooperation from the bureaucracy and the public.

Resistance can take many forms. Lawyers who swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution (and that's every lawyer in the U.S.) must step forward to protect the rights and liberties that many of us take for granted. We must show up at our elected officials' offices and demand adherence to laws. We recognize the social justice movement's commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action as important tools in this fight for equity. Here in New Mexico, there are multiple ways to organize for collective action, and we encourage people to become more involved in local climate/environmental actions and trainings.

We must not succumb to fear—that is what nourishes tyrants—we must take courage from each other and rise up to face the challenge of this unprecedented moment and not allow racist, xenophobic, white supremacist and transphobic policies and ideologies to erode our rights. ■

We'd love to hear from readers what you think about our list, and what issues are on your list. Let us know by emailing us at NMELC@NMELC.ORG .



The East Wing of the White House was demolished without going through the usual National Historic Preservation permitting process. Photo by Andrew Leyden/Reuters

THE NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

Contributing to more just and healthy communities

Established in 1987, the New Mexico Environmental Law Center is the oldest, and only public, nonprofit law center in the state focused on environmental justice. In addition to legal services, the NMELC also provides policy development, advocacy and public education.

NMELC Staff

To protect air, land and water, the NMELC offers free and low-cost legal services to frontline, low-income and communities of color that are the most harmed by environmental degradation and would otherwise not have access.

NMELC ensures that clients and communities participate in decision-making processes. In order to effect systemic change and to dismantle discriminatory and racist policies, the center's priorities and approaches are client-directed. The center's staff works collaboratively with clients to navigate legal processes and to support grassroots changemakers in holding polluting industries and government accountable.

As a nonprofit, the NMELC relies on donations to provide legal services across New Mexico. You can donate online at NMELC.ORG/DONATIONS and follow the center's work on Instagram, Facebook and Linkedin. To follow the center's work, sign up for twice-a-month eblasts at HTTPS://NMELC.ORG/SIGN-UP/ .

PROJECT JUPITER

Could Out-Pollute ABQ, Las Cruces Combined

In September 2025, Project Jupiter, an AI and energy-generation and storage project in southern New Mexico, began construction near Santa Teresa and Sunland Park. Its campus of four data centers, larger than 1,000 football fields, will be used by Oracle and OpenAI. The project promises to bring more than 750 permanent jobs and significant economic investment to the area. Doña Ana County commissioners voted to give the project a historic $165 billion in industrial revenue bonds. A lawsuit filed by the New Mexico Environmental Law Center in Third Judicial District Court on behalf of area residents, alleges the commissioners approved the bonds without sufficient information and that the project threatens the community's already decreasing water supply.

Project Jupiter must obtain a water permit from the New Mexico State Engineer at the very moment New Mexico has signed an interstate and federal litigation settlement to reduce groundwater pumping in Doña Ana County by 18,200 acre-feet per year. In November, Texas-based BorderPlex Digital affiliate Acoma LLC submitted air- quality permit applications for a pair of microgrid facilities at the site that would produce about 2.8 gigawatts of electricity through natural gas (Permian Basin fracked methane) turbines, raising alarms about carbon emissions and ozone pollution. More than double the greenhouse gas pollution of the recently retired San Juan coal plant would be emitted. Doña Ana County already has unhealthy smog. The plants' estimated emissions include close to 500 tons of nitrogen oxides every year and 200 tons of volatile organic compounds—both considered ozone precursors. Additionally, the combined projected emissions of sulfur dioxide would be 54.85 tons per year. Such particulate matter and toxic pollutants can damage people's lungs, hearts and brains.

Acoma LLC hopes to split Project Jupiter's power plant into two separate facilities, which would sidestep pollution controls. Colin Cox, a senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity's Climate Law Institute, said, "They are analyzing them in isolation and claiming that they're not going to cause any air- quality problems," he said. "If you put them together, it's a different story." A New Mexico Environment Department spokesman said that both facilities emissions will be counted as background sources for each other when modeling air impacts. A state law pertaining to microgrids, enacted last year, includes a temporary exemption from renewable energy requirements for self-sourcing power facilities like those proposed for Project Jupiter.

The Environment Department's Air Quality Bureau requested more information, including details on air-dispersion modeling calculations and a plan to control nitrogen oxides. The applications were posted on the department's online portal with a 30-day public comment period.

The interest in attracting data centers to New Mexico amid the AI boom has raised questions about whether the projects, which require tremendous amounts of power at all hours of the day, could negate gains in reducing carbon emissions under New Mexico's Energy Transition Act. On Dec. 23, 2025 as part of a "portfolio-based" approach, Acoma LLC unveiled "Project Green" (PROJECTGREENNM.COM), to scale up power generated from sources such as solar, wind and geothermal. The developer is seeking market information from renewable energy infrastructure developers, to be followed by a formal request for proposals.

A comparable data center is steadily advancing in El Paso, Texas. The Meta facility will be powered by El Paso Electric, partially with renewable energy, and supplied water by the El Paso Water Utility. In a letter facilitated by Food & Water Watch, sent to Congress on Dec. 8, 2025, more than 200 national, state and local organizations from across the country called for a moratorium on the approval and construction of new data centers, citing "massive and unsustainable consumption of energy and water resources, and skyrocketing utility costs for families and small businesses." A single data center can consume the equivalent electricity of 50,000 homes. According to an analysis by FFW, energy demand from data centers in the U.S. is expected to increase up to threefold between 2023 and 2028.

OP-ED: JACK LOEFFLER

THE ETHICS OF RESISTANCE

"A patriot must always be ready to defend his country against the government." So said Ed Abbey. This holds true, especially now as an autocratic narcissist has somehow become the president of this nation and is intent on the continued pillaging of our wildlands to support endless growth at great expense to the biotic community of our planet Earth. Our hardcore conservationist forebears—Aldo Leopold, Dave Brower, Martin Litton, Ed Abbey, Dave Foreman—to name but a few—would not hesitate to rise to the occasion, nor should we.

Sunset Over Indian Country

For the last months, I've been working on preparation of an exhibit scheduled to open in a gallery in Santa Fe. The exhibition is titled *Ethical Resistance*, and delves into the necessity for defending what remains of our wildlands against corporate-driven oligarchic governance and legislation that violates Nature's principles. Our nation is nearly as deeply divided as it was shortly before the Civil War, a war that was begot in large measure by differences in skin-tone of fellow humans.

In 1849, the great American philosopher, Henry David Thoreau wrote his famous essay titled *Civil Disobedience*. I include the first paragraph:

Environmental and social activism are fast becoming illegal.

'I heartily accept the motto, 'That government is best which governs least'; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe—"That government is best which governs not at all'; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure."

Bison

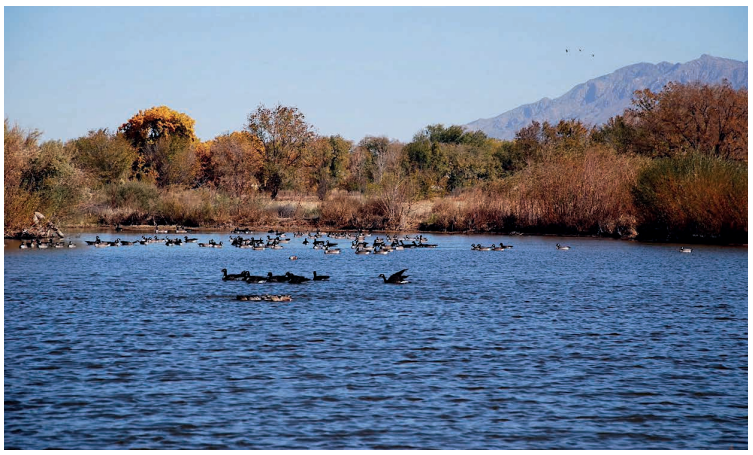
The entirety of this essay is available online and is at least as worthy of a deep read as it was when it was originally written by one of America's greatest thinkers. It is absolutely applicable at this time in the United States of America, when social and environmental

consciousness is greatly jeopardized by erroneous governance—"the work of a comparatively few individuals using the standing government as their tool…"

Forty-nine years before Thoreau wrote this great essay, the human population of our planet Earth reached one billion. America was then in the early throes of 'Manifest Destiny,' our country's version of the Holocaust, as we murdered or otherwise displaced Native Indigenous peoples in order to wrest their homelands from them as our "God-given right." Now, our culture is murdering biotic communities in order to extract every last available resource in the name of growth. Again, I cite Ed Abbey: "Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell." To which Dave Foreman brilliantly responded, "I sometimes tell people that I think the Earth evolved some of us—if you look at the human race not as the consciousness of the Earth, but as the cancer of the Earth—that we're a disease ecologically, and that maybe Nature has evolved some of us as anti-bodies."

Ed and Dave remain pillars of the conservation/environmental movement. Both were men of great courage, and neither of them ever relinquished their principles. I personally know this to be true.

It took just over 200 years for the human population of our planet Earth to grow from one billion to eight billion. In 1968, when the population ranged between three and four billion, a brilliant human ecologist, Garrett Hardin, wrote his masterful essay, *The Tragedy of the Commons*. In this essay, Hardin used as an example a community of residents in the English countryside of a couple of centuries past who claimed common pastureland for their cattle, sheep and other critters. As time wore on, it became apparent that as more animals were let loose into the common pastureland, the land itself suffered from over-grazing and other problems associated with too many animals in too little space. The continuing desolation of shared habitat became common knowledge among the neighbors, yet they continued to add ever more animals, and finally the common pastureland was so seriously compromised that it could no longer support the animal population. In a recorded conversation, Dr. Hardin concluded, "…the one clear thing is that the commons cannot possibly work when the population grows too great." The tragedy was that the local population realized in advance that if they added more animals, the commons would fail, *yet they did it anyway*.



Wildlife Refuge Near Albuquerque

I read this essay in 1970, and it has become an important cornerstone in my own brand of environmentalism, namely, the population of the human species has grown too great to be supported by the commons that is our planet Earth. We erroneously comport ourselves as if we were Nature's reason to be. Wrong! Nature is its own reason to be.

We create governing bodies to fulfill presumed human needs. This is a tremendous flaw born of erroneous cultural attitudes shaped over the millennia by religions, human hierarchical propensities (pharaohs, priests, politicians, etc.), basically those who seek power for its own sake… "the most depraved, criminally violently insane—generals and dictators," in the words of brother Abbey.

Since the end of World War II, our cultural perspective—our commons of human consciousness—has been subsumed by the corporate dictum of planned consumerism. There are now four generations of Americans who live within this corporate bias. And now, that bias is itself being re-shaped by artificial intelligence, the digital realm claiming ever more of our collective attention. Thanks to attendant techno-philia, our very humanity is slipping away to be replaced by what?—the digital dreams of a coterie of billionaires and their minions who are shoring up their personal guarantee of survival at the expense of the general population, itself grown so great that disaster is now inevitable? This is the technocratic dictatorship that Ed Abbey regarded as our worst nightmare.

I vigorously do not approve of that sort of collective dream.

We are presently engaging in a tragedy of the commons, but on a planet-wide scale.

Over the last seven decades of my nearly 90 years on our planet Earth, I've tended to the perspectives of a particularly diverse swath of fellow humans and other fauna—and even flora into whose purview I've strayed. At one point, I lingered long in a hypothesis presented by Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana, who forwarded the notion that life and cognition are two aspects of the same phenomenon, even at the cellular level. I interpret this to mean that

You Are Here

cognition is essential for any organism to remain alive, be it mosquito, dandelion, or even a single cell in my big toe. I also consider that the tome of science largely supports the notion that about 3.8 billion years ago, here on our young planet Earth, a living cell popped into being, perhaps near a hydrothermal vent in an early liquid porridge, a cell that reproduced and thus became the last universal common ancestor (LUCA) of all life that has proliferated through almost every conceivable evolutionary process through time to date. What a thought!

Now, our culture is murdering biotic communities in order to extract every last available resource in the name of growth.

A tiny cognitive speck of life that spawned us all. The maple tree, the western tanager, the mushroom, are my distant cousins, as is every other organism that has passed through life on our planet Earth, including the current president of the United States, though it pains me deeply to admit that. All life intermingles within a living system borne by the flow of Nature across the face of planet Earth through time. How rich is our biotic community! How paltry is our human perspective that has failed to thwart our collective appetite for more and more and more. Yet human consciousness is an extraordinary byproduct of evolution of life on this tiny blue dot adrift in space.

Are we as a species about to squander what remains of our resources contained within a biotic community that is already jeopardized by

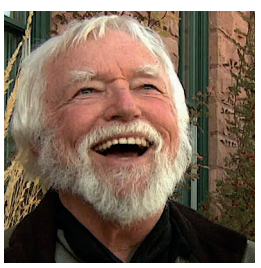
"Maybe Nature has evolved some of us as anti-bodies."
– Dave Forman

the false dream of presumed human needs? Are we as a biological species allowing our collective consciousness to be subsumed by a digital steering committee directed by artificial intelligence? Or by a cohort of billionaires whose wealth they presume entitles them to control the fate of our species and many others? Indeed, this is the ultimate ignominy. We are petrifying our consciousness by committing an unforgivable crime against our planet Earth, the only home in the Universe that is rightfully ours, the only planet on which our cellular structure may dance to the song of life as we know it. We are presently engaging in a tragedy of the commons, but on a planet-wide scale.

There yet remains a cadre of us who have invested our lives in hard-core environmentalism, be it of the Earth First! variety; the traditional environmental organizational variety; preservation of wildlands variety; radical environmentalism based on individual imagination; preservation of Indigenous Mindedness as a source for re-wilding human consciousness; or all the above, and more—far more. We have a collective inkling of what must be done in a time when environmental and social activism are fast becoming illegal according to the absolutely erroneous perspective of the so-called governing powers that be.

Our activism is based on ethics and intuition of what is appropriate and what is not. We are a fellowship, a Gaian fellowship to which it is a high honor to belong. We are individuals with imagination, who are stout-hearted, who know that we must react as individuals or in groups to defend our planet Earth from others of our species who would ever perpetrate the final tragedy of the commons.

We are practitioners of the ethics of resistance. As old Uncle Walt vigorously advised: *Resist Much—Obey Little.* ■



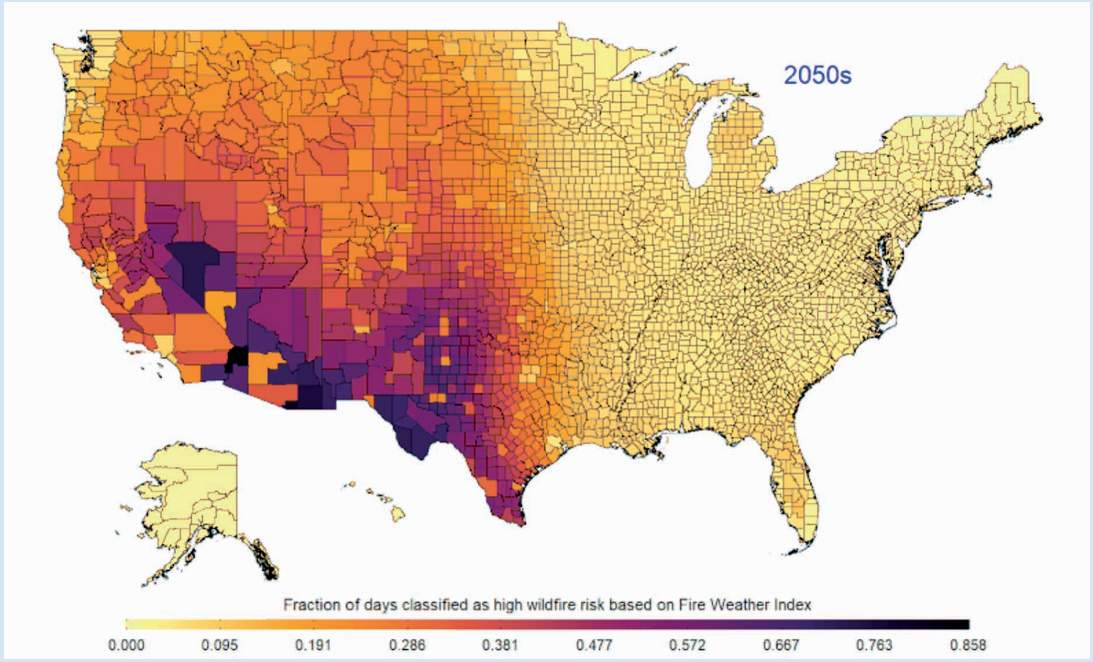
Jack Loeffler is an aural historian, environmentalist, writer, radio producer and sound-collage artist. He is the author or editor of many books, including Headed into the Wind: A Memoir; Thinking Like a Watershed: Voices from the West; Survival Along the Continental Divide: An Anthology of Interviews; and Adventures with Ed: A Portrait of Abbey. *You can hear a podcast interview with him at:* HTTPS://REWILDING.ORG/EPISODE-63-JACK-LOEFFLER-ON-REWILDING-HUMAN-CONSCIOUSNESS-AND-TALES-FROM-AN-EXTRAORDINARY-LIFE/

Photos by Jack Loeffler

CLIMATE

DYNAMIC HEAT MAP

Dynamic heat maps generated from the S&P Global Sustainable1 Municipal Climate Physical Risk dataset show how the distribution and intensity of climate hazards may evolve throughout the U.S., and which regions face the greatest potential for damages now and in the future. Across Rocky Mountain and southern Midwest states, as well as California and the Southwest, high-likelihood wildfire conditions are already substantial and are projected to rise. The greatest increases over the next 30 years are expected to occur among central U.S. states.



EPA TERMINATING $20 BILLION IN CLIMATE GRANTS

Includes $1.5 billion for tribal clean-energy projects

In September 2025, a federal appeal court dealt a blow to tribal clean-energy initiatives, ruling that the EPA can proceed with terminating $20 billion in climate grants that included approximately $1.5 billion earmarked for Native American communities. In a 2-1 decision, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a lower court injunction, finding that grant recipients must pursue their claims in the specialized Court of Federal Claims, which can only award monetary damages, not the injunctive relief sought by the organizations.

EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin terminated the grants in March of last year, citing concerns about oversight and potential conflicts of interest in the award process, though the agency failed to provide evidence of fraud when grantees sued. In a sharp dissent, Judge Nina Pillard, an Obama appointee, argued the majority reached "the wrong conclusion at every step" and accused the Trump administration of "spurious" investigations into the grants.

The terminated funding was part of the $27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund established by the Inflation Reduction Act. Of that total, $20 billion was used to create what are known as "green banks"—nonprofit financing institutions that use public money to attract private investment for clean energy projects. The green bank funding supported two programs: the National Clean Investment Fund and Clean Communities Investment Accelerator, which committed $1.5 billion specifically for tribal communities.

Climate United Fund, one of the largest green bank recipients with $6.97 billion, had pledged $620 million for tribal projects and already committed $63 million in pre-construction financing for solar installations in partnership with tribal governments in Eastern Oregon and Idaho, according to court documents. The organization also launched a $30 million technical assistance program that approved 22 awards to tribes and Native-serving organizations across 18 states. In August 2025, terminated the separate Solar for All program, Zeldin eliminated more than $500 million in tribal solar funding that supported communities nationwide.

Climate United CEO Beth Bafford said that organization would continue fighting the September decision. "We stand firm on the merits of our case: EPA unlawfully froze and terminated funds that were legally obligated and disbursed," she said in a statement. If litigation ultimately proceeds in the Court of Federal Claims, it could take more than a year to reach resolution.

LAWMAKERS HEAR OF THE RISING PRICE OF A WARMING NEW MEXICO

Clear Horizons New Mexico Coalition Advocates for Climate Action

In November 2025, at a Water and Natural Resources Interim Committee hearing in Santa Fe, New Mexico lawmakers were shown data indicating how hotter temperatures are impacting families and communities across the state. Scientists, economists and policy advocates told them that New Mexico is already paying a steep price for this—from higher insurance premiums and shrinking water supplies to mounting costs of rebuilding after fires and floods.

"In just the last year, New Mexico has had to spend more than $256 million through executive orders alone to respond to climate-driven disasters," said Adrian Avila, the New Mexico Senate Majority Office's principal fiscal analyst. "The frequency of disasters is increasing—and our emergency spending reflects that reality." State data show that climate-related losses could reach one-third of New Mexico's annual budget by 2040.

"New Mexico has spent nearly a decade in severe to exceptional drought. That kind of long-term stress supercharges wildfires, dries out soils and turns routine rainfall into catastrophic flooding," Ali Rye, secretary of Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department, told the committee. "Before 2022, New Mexico hadn't had a federally declared disaster since 2012. But in the last three years alone, we've had four—a dramatic shift that shows how severe and widespread these events have become."

Senate President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart outlined her proposal—the Clear Horizons Act—which would codify New Mexico's 2050 climate pollution emissions goals and establish a framework for long-term investment in clean energy and community preparedness. "New Mexico families are already feeling the rising costs of wildfires, flooding and extreme weather—in utility costs and everyday expenses," Stewart said. "The Clear Horizons Act puts the governor's executive order into statute and gives our agencies the tools and certainty they need to guide industry and safeguard family budgets."

The act is intended to work in tandem with the Community Benefit Fund, which invests directly in community-led projects that create jobs and strengthen local resilience—from wildfire recovery in Mora County to renewable energy storage in Eddy County and water infrastructure in Curry County. "This legislation gives New Mexico a real plan, one that brings state agencies, local governments and communities onto the same page so we can finally tackle greenhouse gas emissions and build a safer future for our families," said Rep. Tara Lujan, House District 48. Thirty-five climate, equity, social justice and conservation organizations and businesses across the state have formed the Clear Horizons New Mexico Coalition to advocate for climate action, including the Clear Horizons Act.

ADMINISTRATION FINALIZES DELAY OF EPA OIL AND GAS METHANE POLLUTION RULE

On Nov. 26, 2025, the Environmental Protection Agency delayed Clean Air Act protections that would have curbed methane and other toxic pollution generated by the oil and gas industry. The methane standards—finalized in December 2023 after years of scientific review, public input and sustained advocacy—were considered a major victory for climate and public health watchdogs. For the first time, EPA required pollution controls on existing oil and gas equipment, while strengthening safeguards for new sources. Those protections were designed to cut dangerous emissions at reasonable cost, level the playing field with stronger state rules, and deliver cleaner air for millions of families.

Instead, according to Sierra Club Río Grande Chapter Director Camilla Feibelman, EPA's delay will expose communities to 1.3 million additional tons of methane, a climate-impacting gas 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over 20 years. Feibelman said that the rule will allow 350,000 extra tons of smog- and soot-forming pollution and 13,000 additional tons of air toxins—including benzene and formaldehyde, known carcinogens linked to leukemia, respiratory illness and adverse birth outcomes. Feibelman says that the EPA has offered no legitimate scientific or legal justification for postponing the protections, and that the agency sidestepped required federal rulemaking procedures by issuing the delay as an "interim final rule," bypassing public participation. The Sierra Club and partner organizations that challenged the EPA's earlier interim delay in federal court will continue to pursue legal action to overturn the final rule and restore safeguards.

SWAMP COOLERS' ABILITY TO BEAT THE HEAT IS EVAPORATING

FROM INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS

Evaporative coolers are a popular and climate-friendly cooling option in arid regions, but temperatures in New Mexico are rising beyond what the home appliances can manage. Evaporative coolers, also known as swamp coolers, use the power of evaporation to cool indoor air. The units, which often sit on top of homes and office buildings, use a fan to pass outdoor air over a wet pad. As the water evaporates, it pulls heat from the air, cooling it before it is pumped into the home.

"The average temperatures in Albuquerque have gone up considerably," said James McAfee, a plumber who works on swamp coolers and has lived in the metro area for 35 years. "Swamp coolers tend to like temperatures of 90 degrees and below. Once you start getting up to 95, the temperatures start to be too much for the evaporation to happen at a slow enough pace."

Aside from heat and humidity, swamp coolers have another weakness: The outdoor air they pull into homes carries pollutants like wildfire smoke, which is becoming increasingly common in a drought-stricken and easily ignitable Southwest.

As an alternative to abandoning swamp coolers, Neil Kolwey, building electrification specialist for the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project in Boulder, Colorado suggests keeping them as the primary cooling systems for homes—at least on the second floor—and supplementing them with refrigerated air or heat pump systems on hotter days. He also recommends that people with swamp coolers ensure their homes are properly sealed and insulated, which should help with efficiency. "It's also important to properly size and regularly maintain swamp coolers in order to get the most out of them," he said.

Nature's Swamp Coolers

As Southwestern cities become hotter, local governments are also seeking ways to cool neighborhoods, which could help take the load off of struggling swamp coolers. Adding tree canopy can help not only by providing shade, but with its own evaporative cooling of the outside air. Through evapotranspiration, a process in which trees release water vapor into the air, the leafy canopy cools the surrounding environment.

Albuquerque discovered up to a 17-degree difference from one neighborhood to the next based on how much tree canopy they had.

Albuquerque collaborated with NASA in 2021 to map its tree canopy, and then compared temperatures across the city on the hottest days of the year. According to Ann Simon, City of Albuquerque sustainability officer, they discovered up to a 17-degree difference from one neighborhood to the next based on how much tree canopy they had.

Green stormwater infrastructure can lower temperatures with evaporative cooling.

Let's Plant Albuquerque is a city-led initiative that aims to plant 100,000 new trees in the city by 2030—so far, they've reached a little over 25 percent of this goal, according to the website. The city is prioritizing plantings in areas with diminished tree canopy. It's also encouraging citizens to take a tree-planting pledge where they commit to planting a tree in their yard or in the community, and now requires all new development to meet tree-planting quotas. A similar initiative in Tucson aims to plant a million trees by 2030, and the nonprofit Eco El Paso also hopes to plant that many.

Albuquerque's effort to incorporate more green stormwater infrastructure, a practice that uses natural systems and practices that mimic natural water cycles to reduce flooding, can also lower temperatures with evaporative cooling. For instance, permeable pavements, which allow rainwater to seep through a porous surface, can help cool the pavement when the moisture evaporates. The city also aims to use such infrastructure to naturally irrigate trees, according to Simon, helping them fulfill their cooling mission.

Permeable pavement, which allows rainwater to seep through a porous surface, can help cool the pavement.

But anything that can reduce the outdoor heat in the city can help indoor temperatures remain in the range in which swamp coolers are more effective. Albuquerque is investigating solutions like cool roofs and pavements, which use materials that help reflect sunlight and absorb less heat. In Phoenix, the Cool Pavement Program, which uses a water-based treatment painted on top of regular asphalt pavement, lowered temperatures in treated areas by 10.5 to 12 degrees during the afternoon compared to untreated asphalt. "We're still testing [cool roofs and cool pavements], but we passed a sustainability resolution last year with nine-to-zero council support," said Simon. "It urges the city to pilot these kinds of programs, so we will be rolling those out for sure."

Simon encouraged people to think about heat in the long term and help manage rising temperatures by cutting their carbon output, whether it be by reducing their food waste, taking the bus or making their next car electric. "No matter what's happening in Washington, D.C., we can still take climate action," she said. "These ways that we can help our own communities will really matter, if not immediately, then for the next generation."

NEW MEXICO'S WATER USAGE

In New Mexico, over the years, water usage has shifted dramatically toward urban consumption, energy production and large-scale agriculture. Over-reliance on groundwater extraction has led to the depletion of many of the state's aquifers. In some areas, water tables have dropped so significantly that wells have run dry, leaving communities and farms without a reliable water source. Small family farms in particular have suffered as decreased water supply lowers yields, causing some farmers to lose agricultural status on their tax filings and costing already struggling families their traditional livelihoods.

The Legislature has funded hundreds of water projects across New Mexico and made it easier to get funding through the New Mexico Finance Authority's Water Project Fund. The state also addressed scarcity by funding the treatment of brackish, previous unusable water from deep aquifers. This has the potential to increase water availability to farmers as well as manufacturing industries.

Then there is the issue of overconsumption. Current state law does little to discourage illegal water diversions. Industries pay nominal fines for overuse. Watering of non-native ornamental grass on land other than schools, parks and athletic fields consumes a significant amount of limited water resources.

NEW MEXICO ANNOUNCES $26 MILLION FOR BRACKISH WATER PROJECTS

The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and Office of the State Engineer (OSE) have announced more than $25.9 million in grant funding to advance the exploration, production and treatment of brackish water projects across the state—an investment intended to develop new clean and reliable water sources as climate change intensifies.

New Mexico is estimated to have up to 1.3 trillion gallons of brackish water stored underground.

The announcement marks the first step in awarding $40 million appropriated by the Legislature in 2025 for the newly created Strategic Water Supply Program. The state expects to award an additional $13 million in contracts in the coming months. The grants support implementation of Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's 50-Year Water Action Plan.

A technical review committee led by the NMED and the OSE selected seven applicants to receive a total of $25,928,632. The grants align with local, state, or tribal economic development goals and comply with water quality and other permitting requirements. The awards include one construction project, one design pilot project, one environmental documentation or demonstration project, two feasibility studies and two research and development projects. In total, 13 grant applications requesting more than $94 million were submitted for consideration, along with $40 million in private sector contract proposals. The governor's fiscal year 2027 executive budget request will include additional funding to support future brackish water projects.

Why Brackish Water?

Brackish water is naturally salty groundwater found in underground reservoirs across New Mexico. While it cannot be used directly for drinking or for many agricultural crops without treatment, brackish water treatment units are able to create an alternative water source that can be safely used for a range of purposes such as manufacturing, cooling, dust control and cement-making.

New Mexico is estimated to have up to 1.3 trillion gallons of brackish water statewide. If New Mexico continues with business as usual, scientists project the state will have a water shortfall of over 244 billion gallons in 50 years. Developing brackish water is one essential step toward ensuring long-term water security. Other efforts underway include water infrastructure improvements, aquifer mapping and enhanced watershed protection.

2025 Grantees

- **Alamo Navajo School Board ($1.83M): Socorro County—**Construction of a small-scale brackish water treatment plant to improve public health, water security and community self-sufficiency.
- **City of Anthony ($1.41M): Doña Ana County—**Environmental analysis and testing for a brackish groundwater pilot, producing scalable recommendations and a permitting roadmap for statewide use.
- **Village of Cuba ($11.7M): Sandoval County—**Design of a first-of-its-kind zero-waste desalination facility estimated to produce 518,000 gallons of potable water per day while generating jobs and revenue.
- **University of New Mexico ($400K): Bernalillo County—**Statewide evaluation of economic and environmental tradeoffs associated with brackish water management.
- **Pueblo of Laguna ($6.0M): Sandoval County—**Tribal-led feasibility study to characterize brackish water resources and support long-term water resilience.
- **New Mexico Institute of Mining & Technology ($1.58M): Socorro County—**Advanced membrane research to recover over 98 percent high-purity water while reducing brine waste and supporting clean-energy supply chains.
- **Arrowhead Center at New Mexico State University ($3.0M): Doña Ana County—**Establishment of a Brine Valorization Accelerator Hub to convert waste brines into valuable products and build a statewide water-technology ecosystem.

To see the full list of grant recipients, visit HTTPS://WWW.ENV.NM.GOV/STRATEGIC-WATER-SUPPLY/STRATEGIC-WATER-SUPPLY-GRANT/ .

RÍO GRANDE WATER AGREEMENT

After more than a decade of litigation over the Río Grande, on Sept. 30, attorneys for Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and the federal government presented a U.S. Court of Appeals senior judge, the senior master in *Texas v. New Mexico and Colorado*, a proposed settlement of four different agreements. Representatives for New Mexico described the proposal as a fair resolution, despite objections from the City of Las Cruces, the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Authority and agricultural groups that think that it would leave New Mexico with most of the responsibility to protect groundwater supplies. Those parties filed amicus curiae briefs in October.

In 1938, the three states signed the Río Grande Compact, which appropriated water deliveries. In the decades since, surface water flows have changed and groundwater pumping has increased. In 2008, irrigation districts and the federal government negotiated an operating agreement for the Río Grande Project, which Congress authorized in 1905, apportioning 57 percent of surface waters to New Mexico and 43 percent to Texas. The project's infrastructure included Caballo and Elephant Butte dams.

New Mexico sued over the agreement in 2011, claiming that Texas was getting more than its share. Two years later, Texas sued New Mexico, alleging violations of the Río Grande Compact. In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a proposed settlement the two states had worked out. In August 2025, the states announced that they had reached a revised settlement, pending the court's approval. New Mexico agreed to reduce depletions of groundwater and draft a water management plan. The depletion reductions would require New Mexico to scale back groundwater pumping in the Lower Río Grande by 5 to 7 percent and buy water rights that could cost about $150 million. Water debts would be forgiven, and neither state would have to pay penalties or damages. The final ruling from the court is expected this year.

Richter, B.D., Abdelmohsen, K., Dhakal, S. et al. Overconsumption gravely threatens water security in the binational Rio Grande-basin. Discov Water 5, 104 (2025). HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.1007/S43832-025-00301-2

In addition to being a water delivery system, the middle and lower Río Grande are a living, vital ecosystem. Last summer, 18 miles of the river that goes through Albuquerque went dry, and in early October, Elephant Butte reservoir was at 3.8 percent.

SANTA TERESA AQUIFER RESILIENCE PROGRAM

Doña Ana County will be applying for up to $25 million from New Mexico's Strategic Water Supply program for a proposed desalination plant in the Santa Teresa Industrial Park. The funding was established by the state Legislature and is administered by the state Environment Department.

The county also plans to support the project with $15 million matching funds from Project Jupiter gross receipts tax rebates. Project Jupiter is a planned complex of four data centers, a power generation facility and business offices being developed by Borderplex Digital Assets and Stack Infrastructure in an industrial area near the southern border. That project is being funded in part through $165 billion in industrial revenue bonds and other tax incentives. The data center's primary client is OpenAI.

The total cost of the plant, which would be built to supply a reliable drinking-water source for the Santa Teresa area and support the corridor's economic development, is projected to be $75 million. It would use reverse osmosis to remove salts and other solids, producing four million gallons per day. Construction would begin in 2028 or 2029.

The county's commissioners also authorized a $10 million application to support research into brackish water sources from the Mesilla Basin and Mount Riley aquifers "to determine the commercial viability of brackish water withdrawal and treatment to meet the needs of the County."

A vast supply of mostly brackish water has been located within the Mesilla Basin, which crosses beneath the U.S.–Mexico border. A feasibility study listed electric vehicle and solar panel manufacturing, data center cooling and cement and concrete manufacturing as potential users of the treated water. Leftover brine might be injected deep into the Earth and remaining solids disposed of in a landfill.

ENERGY

SANTA FE COUNTY COMMISSION VOTES TO EXPLORE COUNTY-OWNED ELECTRIC UTILITY

Santa Fe's County Commission has voted to look into creating a county-owned electric utility system to replace the current service, provided by Public Service Company of New Mexico. The study would explore options for consideration, which could emphasize expediting the transition to renewables and lowering electric costs. "We need to do this in the interest of resilience," said Commissioner Camila Bustamante.

PNM is a privately owned monopoly, whose rates and services are regulated by the Public Regulation Commission. Part of the impetus for this initiative appears to be the effort by PNM to obtain PRC approval for its proposed sale to a massive private equity firm seeking to become "the world's largest provider of data centers," Blackstone, in an $11.5 billion deal. Unlike privately owned utilities, municipal utilities do not build profits for investors into their rates.

Santa Fe County operates 28 solar facilities generating more than 3 million kilowatt-hours annually, and manages a water utility that serves more than 4,000 customers. The county also has partnerships in additional solar projects and energy training initiatives, including a microgrid partnership at Santa Fe Community College.

FUSION ENERGY COMPANY TO BE LOCATED IN ALBUQUERQUE

Pacific Fusion, a California-based company, has chosen Albuquerque's Mesa del Sol, a large, mixed-use, master-planned community as the place to build its first fusion-power research and manufacturing facility. Groundbreaking on the 225,000-square-foot campus will begin next year, and operations are to commence in 2027. Pacific Fusion has already begun hiring staff.

The facility will house a demonstration system, designed to achieve "net facility gain"—more fusion energy than all the energy stored in the system—by 2030, at 10-fold lower cost than the National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. The company's website says, "These developments keep us on track to deliver the first commercial fusion system in the U.S. by the mid-2030s and then move quickly to scaled deployment of affordable fusion energy." If Pacific Fusion achieves its goals, it could revolutionize energy generation.

Fusion is considered clean energy because it produces no greenhouse gas emissions and uses abundant fuel sources. Unlike nuclear fission, it produces no high-level radioactive waste that requires long-term storage.

The Albuquerque City Council approved a $776 million industrial revenue bond, which provides the company with tax exemptions on property and gross receipts for up to 30 years in exchange for commitments to create jobs and capital investment. Eight million dollars in state Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) funding was also approved.

Pacific Fusion will invest $1 billion and create around 200 long-term jobs in addition to construction jobs. An economic impact report says this will contribute $1.7 billion in economic impact to the area over the next decade, including $57.15 million in direct impact. In *Albuquerque Business First,* Pacific Fusion's co-founder and COO Carrie von Muench said that incentives, working with state and local government, and the state's commitment to clean energy were all components that led to the decision, as well as the research that has been done at Sandia National Laboratories. The article also quotes Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, who said, "This is the platform for [carbon-free] energy that the world is waiting for… This is where it will happen."

Design concept rendering for Pacific Fusion's campus in Albuquerque, N.M. (image courtesy Pacific Fusion)

National Ambient Energy for Building Research Symposium

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiú, New Mexico

BY **DAN ANTONIONI**

Symposium participants toured innovative building sites including an Earthship in Taos.

In September 2025, Ghost Ranch hosted the *National Ambient Energy for Building Research Symposium* (NAEBERS). Ambient energy is otherwise known as "Passive Solar" energy. The symposium brought together solar professionals from around the world, with many coming from New Mexico and around the Southwest.

Before the advent of photovoltaics, which converts sunshine into electricity (and which dominates the solar energy market today), there were practical building designs and human settlements that allowed for passive heating in the winter and natural cooling in the summer. No moving parts, pumps, plumbing, or electricity required—just a good design that allows a building to heat with sunshine and cool with shade and cool nighttime air. With buildings consuming roughly 40 percent of global energy supplies, ambient buildings can dramatically lower the carbon footprint of the built environment and provide comfortable temperatures to live in. As such, ambient designs offer practical solutions for energy efficiency and combatting climate change.

4,000 year-old Persian wind chimneys (badgirs) are still functioning as natural cooling ventilation systems.

AMBIENT ENERGY

Like all mammals and most lifeforms, human beings are thermal creatures. We are biologically evolved to migrate to warmer and cooler climates, put on sweaters, and design buildings that provide comfort. Ambient temperatures vary widely on planet Earth, and building designs offer practical ways to adapt to a wide variety of climates. From freezing temperatures to the humid tropics, we are always on the move to be comfortable.

New Mexico saw a renaissance in passive solar designs in the late 1960s and '70s, with experimental buildings, solar adobe homes and an assortment of geometric and unusual dome-shaped

prototype homes and small living spaces. Pre-colonial settlements at Chaco Canyon and Mesa Verde utilized passive-heating principles and created stunning human settlements. Achieving ambient warmth with sunshine was central to their designs.

Today there are many examples of passive-solar buildings throughout the world, including many in New Mexico. Earthships are one of the more recognized styles.

The '70s were a time of tremendous building and energy innovation, and New Mexico was a cultural hub of solar creativity. At the time, going "back to the land" and learning to live off-grid with solar as a primary energy source was an opportunity to "think outside the box" (both figuratively and literally) and allow for a fusion of ecology, engineering and grassroots building. Interesting unusual buildings were experimented with, such as geodesic domes, so much so that solar pioneer Steve Baer eventually invented the "zome," which is a hybrid paradigm design incorporating dome shapes and polyhedra geometry.

The oil embargo in 1973 further prompted interest in energy sources other than fossil fuels, and what better way to achieve energy independence than harnessing the sun. Jimmy Carter installed solar thermal panels on the White House roof, and "energy independence" and "conservation" became household phrases. Hence the modern passive solar age was born.

Many homes today incorporate practical efficiency features through insulation, tight building envelopes, green appliances and photovoltaics. However, most do not integrate solar gains and thermal mass to minimize heating and cooling loads. So what happened to these ambient energy principles and the research that continually strives to improve them?

THE NATIONAL AMBIENT ENERGY FOR BUILDING RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

The conference brought together experts in the field of passive solar design to discuss current research and to pay tribute to the many solar pioneers who contributed to the movement. Steve Baer and Peter Van Dresser were honored with stories, examples of their work and fond memories. Both were prolific designers, writers and builders of many things solar in New Mexico and were mentors to many of the symposium's presenters.

Ghost Ranch was a fitting place for this conference, as Baer and Van Dresser organized the first passive-solar workshop there in 1972, called *Life Support Technics Conference*. Ghost Ranch is also home to four passive-solar prototype buildings known collectively as the Sundwellings Demonstration Center that were designed and developed by Van Dresser and a team of early solar pioneers, including architect Mark Chalom, who offered a pre-conference tour of the buildings.

With the advent of photovoltaic solar, the passive-solar movement faded from public view, but research and design didn't stop. While the conference highlighted the heyday of passive solar in New Mexico, it also delivered a large body of current scientific research and demonstrated that research is robust and will continue well into the future. There were close to 50 presentations and a dozen posters and displays.

Ambient strategies offer a sensible way forward for the built environment.

HISTORY

Several presentations focused on the research and developments of the passive-solar movement in New Mexico, with examples of solar research conducted at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL). (And there were references to the current political climate that has withdrawn funding for solar research and renamed the NREL the "National Laboratory of the Rockies.") Illustrations of 4,000 year-old Persian wind chimneys *(badgirs)* that are still functioning as natural cooling ventilation systems highlighted the significance of ambient strategies throughout history. From space-age illustrations showing how photons travel to Earth and can be captured in building designs, to back-to-the-land structures that served as practical solar-heated dwellings, presenters demonstrated that ambient energy research and designs have made a significant impact on the built environment.

Of all the New Mexico solar pioneers, Steve Baer was, by far, the most frequently referenced. A brilliant designer, prolific writer and practical innovator, Baer exemplified the experimental movement that spanned high-tech engineering to creative geometric-shaped "zome" designs, creative re-use of materials, and eventually the development of his company, Zomeworks. Some of Baer's notable books include *Sunspots*, *Dome Cookbook*, and *Zome Primer*. Equally significant were references to Peter Van Dresser, who played a pivotal role in developing solar designs in New Mexico. He authored two groundbreaking books on solar: *Passive Solar House Basics* and *Homegrown Sundwellings*. The early passive solar movement was so extensive that presentations were challenged to squeeze so much amazing information into 15-minute sessions.

Current Research

Current research is extensive and covers a wide range of ambient-energy applications. Materials research, housing developments and manufactured homes were just some of the topics covered. Graduate students from several prominent universities presented on topics ranging from windows, mobile homes, phase-change materials, and traditional topics ranging from the use of thermal mass to creative ventilation strategies. Heating, cooling, net-zero buildings, strategies for affordable housing, building science, and sociological and behavioral research were also covered. An overview of Pliny Fisk's pioneering Center for Maximum Building Potential showed the history and current research the center is conducting.

Banana trees grow inside a Taos Earthship; Earthship visionary Michael Reynolds (center) explains how the home was built.

There were ample displays of engineering formulas, technical jargon and insights into many of the ways that photons can be channeled into energy-efficiency designs.

Steve Baer's son, José Baer, presented an innovative approach to greenhouse freeze protection utilizing thermal principles which demonstrate a practical thermodynamic ambient application. Images of greenhouses were abundant and highlighted many of the symposium's visuals.

The conference also provided illustrations of several examples of "night-sky cooling." Cooling is an equally important component of ambient research and design.

ONE-OFFS

Ambient energy applications go well beyond just solar heating and nighttime cooling. The conference heard presentations on homesteading, growing food in aquaponic greenhouses, and energy-efficient mobile homes. All of these have relevance to the ambient-energy movement.

A separate conference room was set up for poster boards, academic information, colleges, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Conference organizer Keith Sharp made a compelling argument that ambient-en-

Ambient buildings can dramatically lower the carbon footprint of the built environment and provide comfortable temperatures to live in.

Dan Antonioli's projects have included founding an ecovillage in Northern California and a net-zero-energy retrofit of a historic property in upstate New York. He is currently designing and building a net-zero-water home prototype in Santa Fe that integrates permaculture. GOING-GREEN.CO

Above: Attendees discuss presentations and visit a passive-solar home in northern New Mexico.

ergy buildings require little or no energy from the grid for heating and cooling, which will continue to be largely fossil-fuel driven, even with the shift towards electrification. Most or all of the energy we need for heating a building can be harnessed from the sun, and for cooling by shade and the night sky. Ambient strategies take a huge weight off the grid, as thermal loads consume a large fraction of energy requirements.

While the conference covered a dazzling array of engineering, chemistry, physics and flashy geometry, ambient principles are simple, efficient, and they work. They are time-tested. Ambient strategies thus offer a sensible way forward for the built environment. And, a robust ambient research movement can endure a hostile political climate against solar, much in the same way solar endured the Reagan years.

Resources
For information about the symposium and links to solar resources, visit: HTTPS://ENGINEERING.LOUISVILLE.EDU/NAEBRS/ ■

ENERGY DEPARTMENT RESCINDS "NATIONAL DEFINITION" OF ZERO EMISSIONS BUILDINGS

On Dec. 3, 2025, the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Critical Minerals and Energy Innovation rescinded its "national definition" of a zero emissions building. The DOE justified this action by asserting that it would "lower costs and promote freedom of choice in the buildings sector by relieving developers, investors and building owners of indirect pressure to account for federal guidelines that never had the force or effect of law."

"The interaction of America's 130 million buildings with our energy system should not be further complicated by arbitrary and imprecise federal guidance," said Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Lou Herkman. "The Department will no longer make use of this definition and recommends that state and local government agencies and standard-setting bodies do the same."

Originally published by DOE in 2024, the definition established discretionary standards for energy efficiency, on-site emissions from energy use, and consumption from "clean" energy sources. These were not regulatory standards, and compliance was purely voluntary. References to the rescinded definition have been removed from DOE's website and informational resources. DOE will no longer provide technical assistance related to the definition.

NEW GUIDE SHOWCASES LEED AS CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

In September 2024, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the leading authority on green building and the global developer of the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) green building program, released a guide on how green rating systems can accelerate sustainable finance by increasing confidence in performance outcomes while lowering transaction costs. The guide aims to help green building practitioners understand the different financing options for their projects and how to make them bankable.

Green Building & Sustainable Finance: Accessing Capital to Accelerate Market Transformation covers key concepts and strategies for investing in green buildings and how tools such as LEED and PERFORM, USGBC's verification program, can align expectations and achievements for owners, investors, lenders, tenants and regulators. The guide shows how finance can be a catalyst for green building, and how green building can be a solution for sustainable finance options. Sarah Zaleski, USGBC's chief products officer said, "When capital is directed toward green building, it becomes both a catalyst for innovation and a system of accountability, demonstrating that what's good for people and the planet is also good for investors."

Greater access to capital is critical to financing large-scale projects and accelerating decarbonization efforts in the built environment, which is responsible for nearly 40 percent of all carbon emissions.

Remembering Malcolm Ebright

Presented at Malcolm Ebright's August 2025 Memorial in Santa Fe

BY **ROBIN COLLIER**

I am Robin Collier, manager of KCEI, Cultural Energy's public radio station, 90.1 FM Taos/Red River. I worked with Malcolm Ebright for 25 years, building and maintaining the website for the Center for Land Grant Studies, and helped him maintain his computer for his research. My family has known Malcolm since before 1970, because his wife, Chama Ruíz, was a student of my father, John Collier Jr., at San Francisco State University.

What I want to do today is to explain why Malcolm was so successful in his research on Spanish and Native American land grants. From his first work for the State of New Mexico on the Land Title Study, he put no distance between himself and the people he was studying and their history.

In his blue jeans, he came to Tierra Amarilla and immersed himself in the struggle for land grant rights. He immediately was a collaborator, always listening, making the community participants in his research. In every book he wrote, he first dug into journals, dug through attics and letters, maps, baptism, censuses, and then followed up everything in the state archives and reels of micro film. He translated from Spanish longhand, putting together pages of notes, creating a narrative history. Then he would go back and ask more questions. He would be on the ground, finding traces of old acequias, Indian pueblos, old cornfields and adobe ruins, until history began to fit together.

He commissioned me to do a huge database of New Mexico genealogies and of all the land grants, so everything could be cross-referenced and connected. He would set up teams of collaborators, such as Richard Salazar, Rick Hendricks, Richard Hughes, myself, Denise Damico, Norman Martínez, Kay Matthews, Mark Schiller, Anselmo Arellano, Moises Morales, David Benavides, Clark S. Knowlton, Robert Torrez, Julian Josue Vigil and others. He would regularly meet at the New Mexico State Archive and research and consult with his collaborators.

As his work expanded to the Genízaros of Abiquiú and Ojo Caliente, and the New Mexico pueblos, his collaborators drew in Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Sandia, Cochiti, Jemez, Isleta, Pojoaque, Nambe, Taos, Picuris and Ysleta del Sur. All of these involved many people from each pueblo, going back and forth as research deepened.

Extremely important were his two secretaries, Carisa Williams Joseph and Meg Magee, who both kept track of all his notes on his Mac computer, and all the scans of maps, documents and hundreds of photographs. Their knowledge and organization of materials was essential for the success of each book.

Robin Collier

Every book is extensively footnoted so that it is a guide of how you can explore the history more. Because of his in-depth involvement with so many people, each book became very readable with so many personal stories to liven the history. This constant collaboration is what made Malcolm Ebright one of the most important historians of New Mexico. ■

Editor's Note: The Nov.–Dec. 2025 Green Fire Times featured a tribute to Malcolm Ebright.

EDUPRISING CONFERENCE FEB. 26–27 IN ALBUQUERQUE

The sixth annual EdUprising Conference will take place on Feb. 26 and 27 at the Marriott Pyramid North in Albuquerque. Future Focused Education hosts the conference to provide a place for New Mexico educators, students and community members to collectively re-imagine what's possible for education in New Mexico. From classroom to job sites to the legislative floor, the intention is to build stronger, more equitable and prosperous communities.

Last year, 550 attendees (including 70 students) attended 55 sessions. This year, conference participants will engage in authentic, personalized learning about youth mental health, funding paid internships, delivering education without barriers, and meaningful community partnerships that build strong communities and re-engage students. Panels and workshops will focus on school impact and innovation through proven, successful approaches such as graduation profiles, capstones, social-emotional practices, community partnerships and work-based learning.

According to FFE Executive Director Kim Lanoy-Sandoval, ED.D., "EdUprising brings us together at a time when education feels uncertain, with ever-changing challenges. Yet, it highlights the positive momentum we've built together—proof that when communities unite to ensure that New Mexico's youth have the support and real-world pathways they need to thrive, progress is possible." FFE is seeking sponsors to share their business and services with leaders in education, youth and higher education students, as well as New Mexico legislators, lawmakers and policy creators. For more information, visit HTTPS://FUTUREFOCUSEDEDUCATION.ORG/EDUPRISING/

ASU SCHOOL OF CONSERVATION FUTURES LAUNCHED

Embracing Wisdom and Innovation

Rob Walton, a 20-year supporter of Arizona State University, has invested $115 million for the creation of ASU's School of Conservation Futures. The school will be a bold reimagining of conservation science education. Nancy Gonzales, ASU executive vice president and university provost said, "ASU is honored to be the steward of this gift. Through the faculty and staff, we will leverage this investment to rapidly scale solutions and innovations that benefit our shared global future."

"We're really thinking about how we build the conservation workforce of the future," said Miki Kittilson, the college's dean. Kittilson, who is also a professor, said, "The next generation of conservation leaders will need different types of skills and knowledge. Students in the new school will tackle the most urgent and complex challenges from a holistic perspective, seeing the ways systems work and turning innovative ideas into action." Melissa K. Nelson, Ph.D., professor in ASU's School of Sustainability said, "This school promises to transform our understanding of the human-nature relationship by co-creating a new approach to conservation education in part by highlighting Indigenous peoples' long-term environmental knowledge and practices—both with local tribal nations and global Indigenous communities."

The school's programs include project-based work and immersive experiences that will bridge science, policy, economics, and prepare graduates to make a major positive difference in the world of conservation and sustainability. "We need clean air, clean water, and food that is healthy," said Walton. "We need advocates for observing this world, for biological diversity; we need to train professional leaders that will be in communities around the world."

NMHU DESIGNATED RESEARCH COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY

The American Council on Education has designated New Mexico Highlands University as a Research College and University (R3), recognizing NMHU's growing research activity and expanding portfolio of doctoral programs. This marks Highlands' first classification as a research institution and places it among only four public universities in New Mexico with formal research status.

"This classification affirms Highlands' success in developing research programs that solve real-world challenges facing New Mexico," said President Neil Woolf. "Our faculty are deeply connected to northern New Mexico. This recognition underscores our commitment to academic excellence, student success and regional impact."

Dr. Dann Brown, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs said, "Highlands' designation highlights the opportunities available to students through undergraduate and graduate research. Working with a faculty mentor builds critical thinking, communication skills and confidence—abilities that translate directly into professional success."

The milestone comes as Highlands prepares to launch its first Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in spring 2026, with additional doctoral programs—the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and Doctor of Social Work (DSW)—in development, programs that strengthen the university's mission of access and applied learning.

For more information about research and sponsored programs at NMHU, contact Dr. Ian Williamson at IWILLIAMSON@NMHU.EDU or 505.454.3311.

WHAT'S GOING ON

ALBUQUERQUE / Online

THROUGH FEB. 8
VOCES DEL PUEBLO
NHCC Visual Art Museum, 1701 4th St. SW
"Artists of the Levantamiento Chicano in New Mexico." Six artists (Ignacio Jaramillo, Juanita J. Lavadie, Francisco LeFebre, Noel Márquez, Roberta Márquez, Adelita Medina) showcase the roots of the Chicano movement. Discussions, musical performances. NHCCNM.ORG/EXHIBITIONS

FEB. 26–27
6TH ANNUAL EDUPRISING CONFERENCE
Marriott Pyramid North
Future Focused Education hosts educators, students and community members to ensure NM's youth have the support and real-world pathways they need to thrive. The conference is seeking sponsors. Registration deadline: 2/18 ($300). On-site for a higher fee. Exhibitor deadline: 1/16. HTTPS://LNKD.IN/GPEZPYWD

APRIL 9
ELECTRIFY NEW MEXICO 2026
Sid Cutter Pavilion, Balloon Fiesta Park
Flagship gathering for renewable energy innovators. Discussions on NM's evolving energy landscape. Panels on policy and practice. Spotlights on successful partnerships. Connections with the workforce of the future. Business booths. Renewable Energy Industries Assoc. of NM. Registration: HTTPS://REIA-NM.ORG

THROUGH JUNE 7
"WHAT WE BRING TO THE TABLE"
National Hispanic Cultural Center
Group show to mark NHCC's 25th anniversary featuring work by 18 NHCC staffers, including curators, designers, coordinators, campus safety and security, custodial teams and business department. 505-246-2261, NHCCNM.ORG

SEPT. 17–19
38TH ANNUAL GREAT MINDS IN STEM CONFERENCE
Albuquerque Convention Center
GMIS inspires and supports students and professionals–especially from underserved communities–to build a diverse and inclusive STEM workforce. Hosted by the Hispano Chamber of Commerce. Info: 323-791-9295

TUES.–SUN. 9 AM–5 PM
"ONLY IN ALBUQUERQUE"
Albuquerque Museum, 2000 Mountain Rd. NW
Permanent exhibit told through four galleries: Spirited, Courageous, Resourceful and Innovative. Hundreds of the city's beloved artifacts are featured. $3–$6., Free Sun., 9 am–1 pm. CABQ.GOV/ARTSCULTURE/ALBUQUERQUE-MUSEUM

TUES.–SUN. 9 AM–4 PM
INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER
2401 12th St. NW
"Gateway to the 19 Pueblos of N.M." Museum galleries, exhibits and restaurant. Cultural dance program Sat., Sun. 11 am, 2 pm. $12/$10/children under 5 free. 505-843-7270, INDIANPUEBLO.ORG

TUES.–SAT. 10 AM–4 ON
MAXWELL MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY
500 University Blvd. NE
"People of the Southwest" permanent exhibition celebrates the cultural history of the SW, especially the close relationship people have had with the land. Free admission. 505-277-4405, HTTPS://MAXWELLMUSEUM.UNM.EDU

RESILIENT FUTURES INITIATIVE
Dangerous heat, pollution and natural disasters affect all New Mexicans, especially frontline communities. This initiative, facilitated by the City of ABQ's (CABQ) Sustainability Office, is an effort to future-proof communities in Central NM. RESILIENTFUTURESNM.ORG

SANTA FE / Online

JAN. 30
FOOD & FARMS DAY AND AWARDS CEREMONY
NM State Capitol
Highlighting the intersection of health, sustainable food systems, land stewardship, economic vitality and informed policy-making. 10–11 am: awards honors individuals, farms, ranches, organizations and programs building a thriving, equitable and resilient local food and farming economy. PAM@FARMTOTABLENM.ORG

JAN. 31, 11 AM VIP; 12 PM GENERAL ADMISSION
30TH ANNUAL SOUPER BOWL
SF Community Convention Center, 201 W. Marcy
Good soup for a purpose. Food Depot fundraiser. Includes dessert, beverages and bread. "Best soup in Santa Fe" awarded at the end. $125/$35. $30/$20 children. HTTPS://GIVE.THEFOODDEPOT.ORG/

FEB. 2
ACEQUIA DAY AND TREATY OF GUADALUPE HIDALGO DAY
NM State Capitol

FEB. 4, 1 PM
RÍO GRANDE WEAVING TALK
New Mexico History Museum
Illustrated talk by award-winning seventh-generation Chimayo weaver Irvin Trujillo and moderated conversation with the audience. $15 general public; $10 students. Presented by Friends of History. Moderated conversation with the audience follows.

FEB. 6
AMERICAN INDIAN DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE
NM State Capitol

FEB. 22, 4–7 PM
MOVING ARTS FUNDRAISER
Unit B by Chocolate Maven, 821 W. San Mateo Rd.
Moving Arts is building community and cultivating leaders through arts & culture. Dinner, live auction, performance. MOVINGARTSESPANOLA.ORG

THROUGH FEBRUARY
"TRUTH. MEMORY. JOY. RESISTANCE"
The Community Gallery, Marcy Street
Black Expressions in New Mexico. Exhibition exploring the diverse experiences and creative voices of Black artists across the state. ARTSANDCULTURE@SANTAFENM.GOV

MARCH 16–17
BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL WORLD TOUR
The Lensic Performing Arts Center
Breathtaking adventures, heart-pounding action sports, stunning wildlife and environmental films and culturally diverse stories. Tickets on sale Jan. 30. $20 one night/$38 both nights.

MAY 15–17
SANTA FE INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL
SF Community Convention Center
World-renowned authors, thinkers and passionate readers celebrate the power of story. SFINTERNATIONALLITFEST.ORG

THROUGH SEPTEMBER
MAKOWA: THE WORLDS ABOVE US
Museum of Indian Arts & Cultures
Exhibition exploring Indigenous relationships with the sky and how stories and sciences speak to one another. WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG

SUNDAYS
RAILYARD ARTISAN MARKET
SF Farmers' Market Pavilion
Gifts, souvenirs and mementos from local artisans and creative small businesses. SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM

MON.–FRI.
POEH CULTURAL CENTER AND MUSEUM
78 Cities of Gold Rd., Pueblo of Pojoaque
Di Wae Powa: They Came Back: Historical Pueblo pottery. The Why, group show of Native artists. Nah Poeh Meng: core installation highlighting Pueblo artists and history. $7–$10. 505-455-5041

MON.–SAT., 8 AM–4 PM
RANDALL DAVEY AUDUBON CENTER & SANCTUARY
1800 Upper Canyon Rd.
Free guided walks to see birds, Sat., 8:30–10 am. RSVP for Randall Davey House tours. 505-983-4609, RANDALLDAVEY.AUDUBON.ORG

TUES., SAT., 8 AM–1 PM

SANTA FE FARMERS' MARKET
Market Pavilion, 1607 Paseo de Peralta
Farmers and producers from northern NM. 505-983-4098, SANTAFEFARMERSMARKET.COM

WEDS–SAT., 10 AM–6 PM; FRI.–SAT., 10 AM–6:30 PM

SANTA FE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM
Interactive exhibits, play areas, weekly programs. Masks required for ages 2 and older. $10/$8/$7/$3/one & under free. 505-989-8359, SANTAFECHILDRENSMUSEUM.ORG

WEDS–SUN.

EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS
334 Los Pinos Rd., La Ciénega
Living History Museum dedicated to the heritage and culture of 18th- and 19th-century New Mexico. 505-471-2261, GOLONDRINAS.ORG

SAT., 9–4, SUN., 10–4

EL MERCADO DE EL MUSEO
El Museo Cultural de Santa Fe
Many vendors. Art, jewelry, herbal remedies, textiles, beads, tapestries, books, furniture and more.

EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS
La Ciénega, N.M.
Living history museum. GOLONDRINAS.ORG

IAIA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY NATIVE ARTS
108 Cathedral Place
Closed Tuesdays. $5–$10; under 16, Native and Indigenous peoples free. 888-922-4242, IAIA.EDU/MOCNA

MILAGRO SCHOOL OF HERBAL MEDICINE
Classes and training intensives with experienced herbalists can be a life-changing healing experience. Botany, medicine-making, plant-spirits. 505-820-6321, INFO@MILAGROHERBS.COM

MUSEUM OF INDIAN ARTS & CULTURE
710 Camino Lejo (Museum Hill)
Maatakuyma: Essential Elements: Art, Environment and Indigenous Futures, Makowa: The Worlds Above Us; Here, Now and Always. $7–$12. 10 am–5 pm. Closed Mondays. 505-476-1269, WWW.INDIANARTSANDCULTURE.ORG

MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FOLK ART
706 Cam. Lejo, Museum Hill
"Protection: Adaptation and Resistance." More than 45 artists explore themes of climate crisis, struggles for social justice, strengthening communities through ancestral knowledge and imagining a thriving future. $3–$12. NM residents free, first Sunday of the month.

NATIVE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE
SF Business Incubator, 3900 Paseo del Sol
Monthly gatherings for Native American entrepreneurs, artists and business owners to connect, share resources and build pathways to success. Presented by UNM Rainforest Innovations and the City of SF Economic Development Dept.

NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM
113 Lincoln Ave.
The Lamy Branch of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad model train; Palace Seen and Unseen: A Convergence of History and Archaeology, photos and artifacts; Telling NM: Stories from Then and Now. Closed Mondays. 505-476-5200, NMHISTORYMUSEUM.ORG

NUEVO MEXICANO HERITAGE ARTS MUSEUM
750 Camino Lejo, Museum Hill
Closed in January for installation of a new exhibition. 505-982-2226, HTTPS://NMHERITAGEARTS.ORG

SANTA FE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY
Seeking land, donated or for sale, to build affordable housing. Low-income homeowners help build homes and make mortgage payments to the nonprofit HFH. Property owners can qualify for 50% Affordable Housing tax credit through the NM Mortgage Finance Authority. 505-986-5880, ext. 109

STATE MUSEUMS
Museum of International Folk Art (10 am–5 pm), Museum of Indian Arts and Culture (10 am–4 pm), N.M. History Museum (10 am–4:30 pm), N.M. Museum of Art (Tues.–Sun., 10 am–4 pm). NEWMEXICOCULTURE.ORG/VISIT

WHEELWRIGHT MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN
704 Cam. Lejo, Museum Hill
Closed Jan. 12–Feb. 6. 10 am–4 pm Tues.–Sat. $10.

YOUTHBUILD / YOUTHWORKS!
Paid training for Youth 16–24. Construction, Culinary, GED. 505-989-1855, WWW.SANTAFEYOUTHWORKS.ORG/SANTA-FE-YOUTHBUILD/

TAOS / Online

THROUGH MAY 2026

PUEBLO FOODWAYS
Harwood Museum, 238 Ledoux St.
Collective practices within Taos Pueblo foodways, from seed to ceremony. A glimpse into diverse activities and relationships that define food culture and sovereignty. HTTPS://HARWOODMUSEUM.ORG

LA HACIENDA DE LOS MARTÍNEZ
708 Hacienda Way
Northern NM-style Spanish colonial "great house" built in 1804 by Severino Martínez. Open daily. HTTPS://TAOS.ORG/PLACES/LA-HACIENDA-DE-LOS-MARTINEZ/

MILLICENT ROGERS MUSEUM
1504 Millicent Rogers Rd.
Tuah-Tah/Taos Pueblo: Home, highlighting the pueblo's culture and artistic achievements. Open daily. HTTPS://WWW.MILLICENTROGERS.ORG/

HERE & THERE / Online

JAN. 20, 6–7:30 PM

URANIUM MINE CLEANUP PLAN PUBLIC HEARING
Grants, NM and Online
Representatives of the NM Environment Department and State Land Office will discuss current site activities and the selected cleanup for the abandoned Schmitt Decline Mine. McKinley County Commission Chambers. 700 E. Roosevelt Ave. MELISSA.WHITE@ENV.NM.GOV

FEB. 23–24

FOOD WASTE SUMMIT
Rancho Mirage, CA
Tackling food waste for a sustainable future. Engage with experts, share ideas and network with peers. Early bird tickets through Oct. 31. INFO@FOODWASTESUMMIT.COM, WWW.FOODWASTESUMMIT.COM

FEB. 25–26

NATIONAL NATIVE SEED CONFERENCE
Virtual event focused on building and sustaining the native seed community while strengthening the supply chain. Featured speaker is scientist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer. Presented by the Institute for Applied Ecology. CONFERENCE@APPLIEDECO.ORG. $160–$215. Registration: APPLIEDECO.ORG/NNSC26

MARCH–APRIL

NATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY LABORATORY INDUSTRY GROWTH FORUM
IGF@NREL.GOV, HTTPS://LNKD.IN/GJCI6IUX

THURS–SUN, 10 AM–4 PM

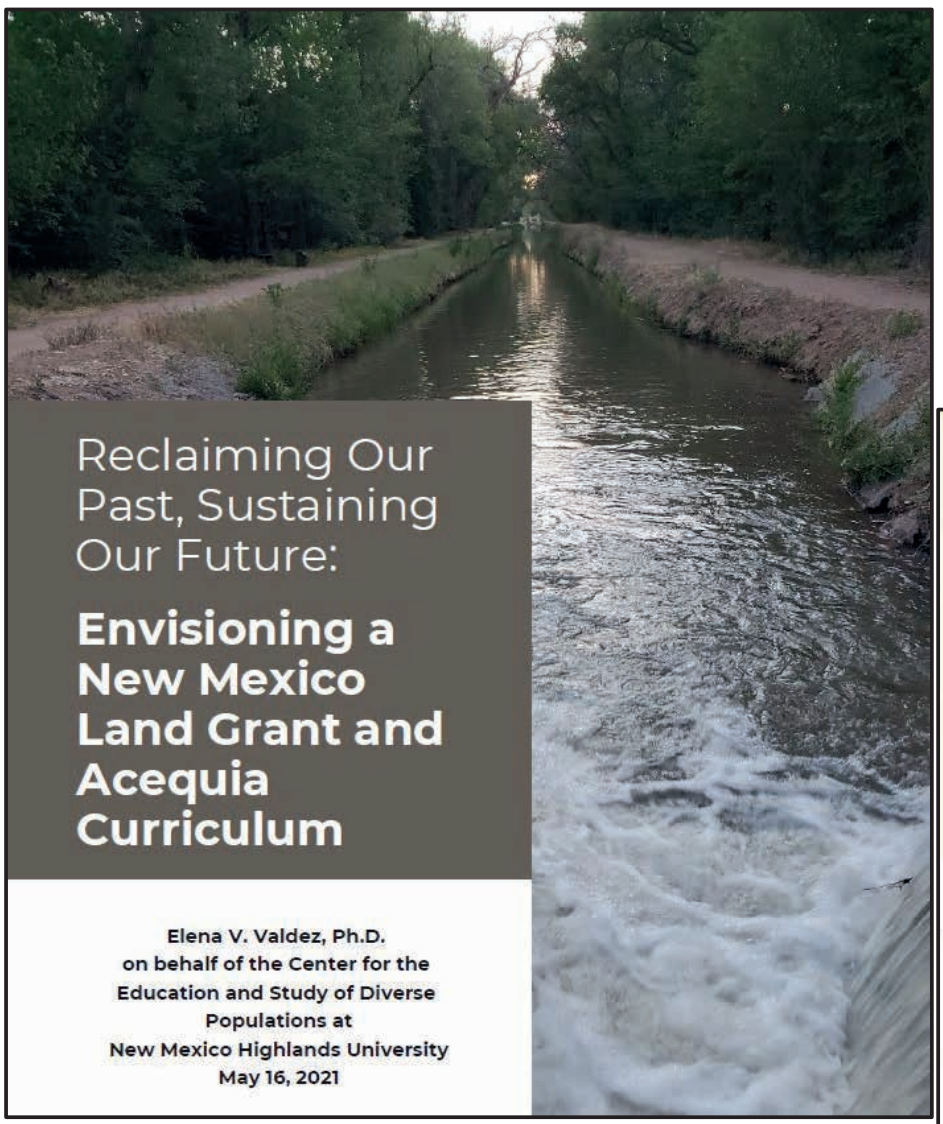
BOSQUE REDONDO MEMORIAL
Fort Sumner Historic Site, Fort Sumner, N.M.
Exhibit, 30 years in the making, tells the story of 'The Long Walk' and the Bosque Redondo. $7, children 16 and younger, free. NM residents with ID free first Sun. each month. NMHISTORICSITES.ORG/BOSQUE-REDONDO

EARTH KNACK SURVIVAL AND OUTDOOR LIVING SKILLS
Crestone, Colo. and elsewhere
Fiber arts, blacksmithing, hide tanning, Rocky Mtn. Survival, Edible, medicinal plants, internships and more. HTTPS://WWW.EARTHKNACK.COM

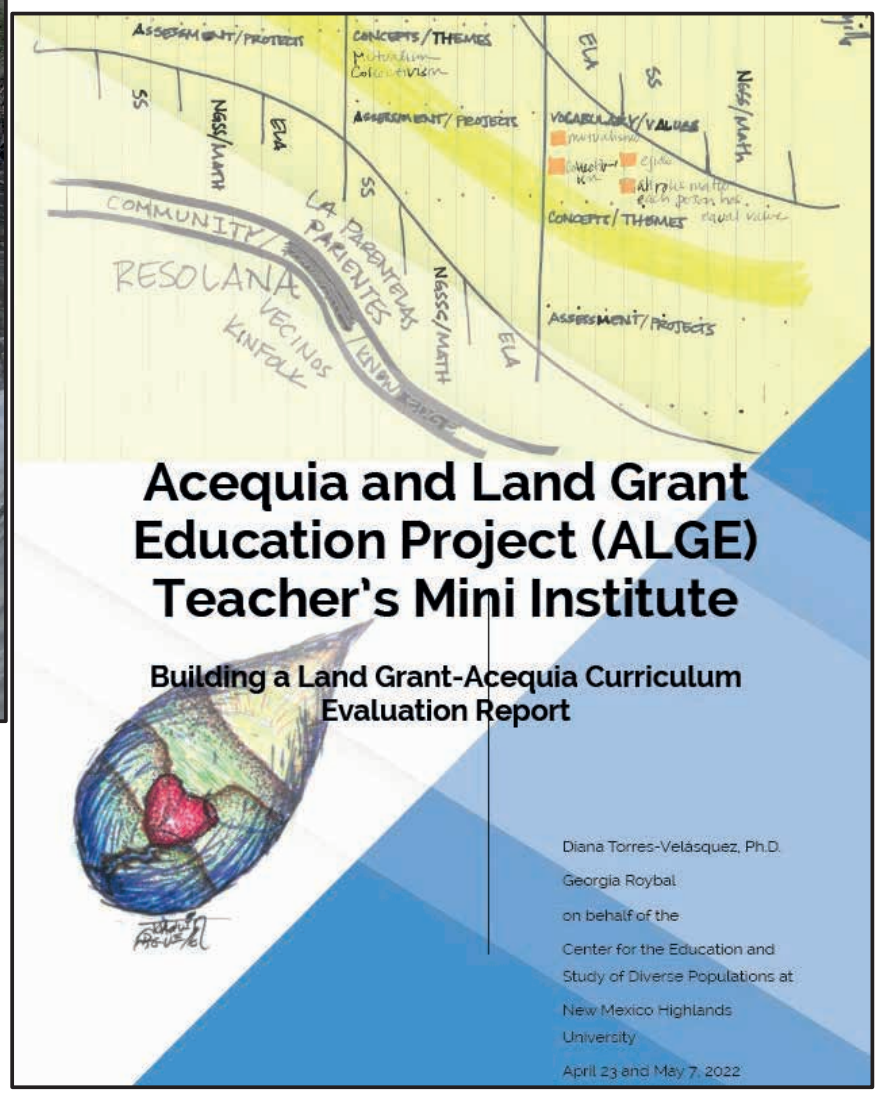
GALLUP NEW DEAL ART VIRTUAL MUSEUM
GALLUPNEWDEALART.ORG
The culmination of a 9-year project provides images of the works as well as scholarly information. Hand-carved wood furniture, Spanish-Colonial-style tinwork, prints, murals, western American paintings, Native art.

CESDP | Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations

Acequia and Land Grant Education (ALGE) Project



BEN LUJAN LEADERSHIP & PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE



https://cesdp.nmhu.edu/

Phone: 505-891-6904