



Voices of the Region: Grounding Water Planning in Local Realities



New Mexico Water Dialogue: In Action – May 15, 2025

Facilitator: Dr. Ladona K. Clayton



Water Is Sacred

- It is life-giving — a lifeline for every living thing.
- It connects us — across generations, cultures, and landscapes.
- It humbles us — we cannot create water, only honor its limits.
- It sustains community — shaping where we live, grow, and thrive.
- It reflects creation — symbolizing renewal, cleansing, and spiritual truth.





Water Can't Wait

1. Water as the Foundation of Life and Culture

- *Water is not merely a resource; it's integral to New Mexico's cultural, spiritual, and economic fabric. As Miguel Santistevan from Taos emphasizes, "Everything we do—economically, culturally, spiritually—has a basis in water." This perspective is echoed by tribal communities like Acoma Pueblo, where water scarcity impacts health, housing, and infrastructure.*



Water Can't Wait

2. Disproportionate Impact on Rural and Indigenous Communities

- *Rural areas, including Portales, Clovis, Texico, and Cannon AFB face immediate threats due to the depletion of the Ogallala Aquifer. Residents often feel overlooked by policymakers, despite being on the front lines of the crisis. Tribal communities, such as Acoma Pueblo, highlight the compounded challenges they face, urging state leaders to engage directly with affected communities.*



Water Can't Wait

3. Inadequate Infrastructure and Bureaucratic Challenges

- *The state's current water management systems are criticized for being outdated and insufficient. There are calls for streamlined processes and increased staffing to address the crisis effectively. The campaign stresses that without significant investment and reform, the situation will deteriorate further.*



Water Can't Wait

4. Environmental Degradation and Ecosystem Threats

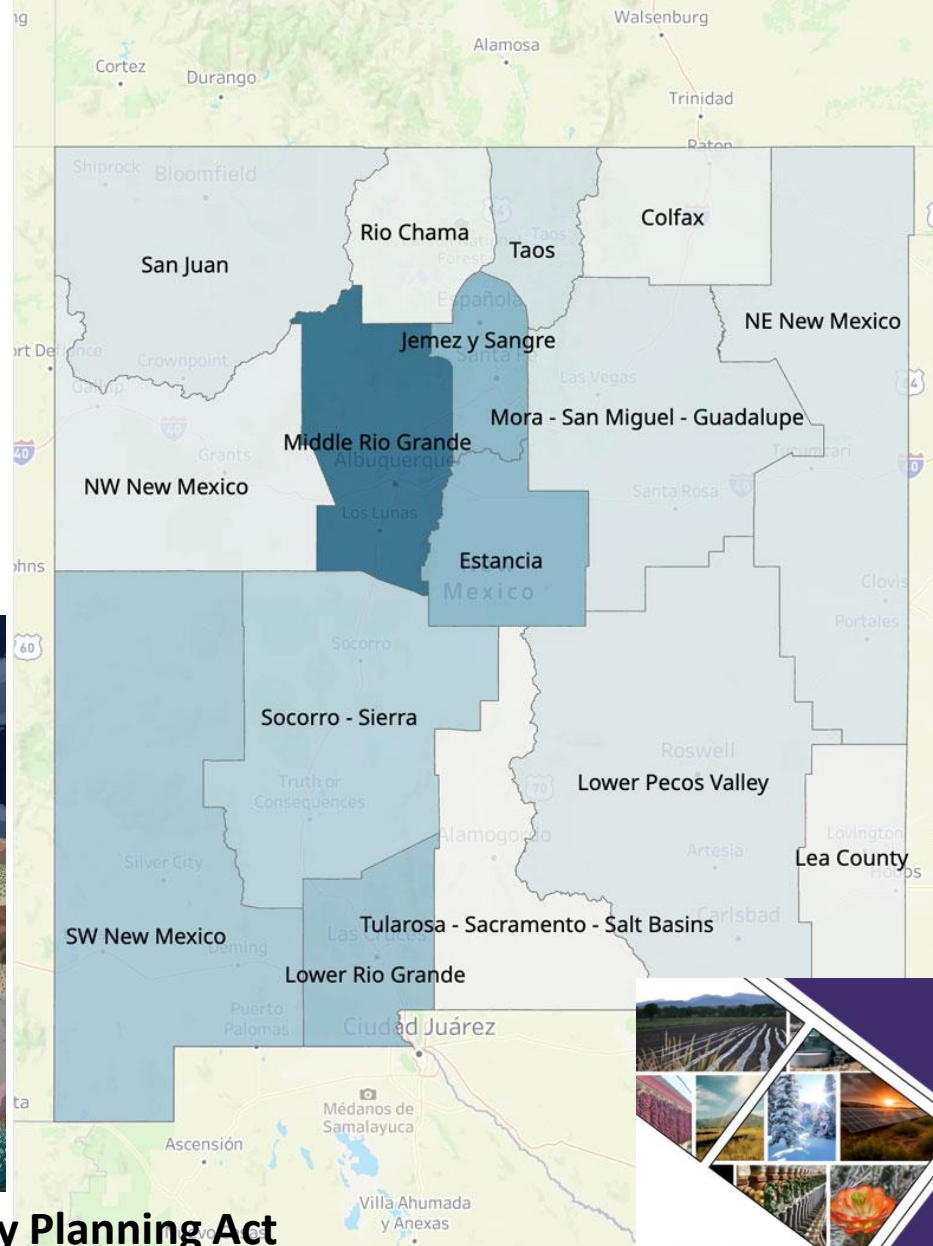
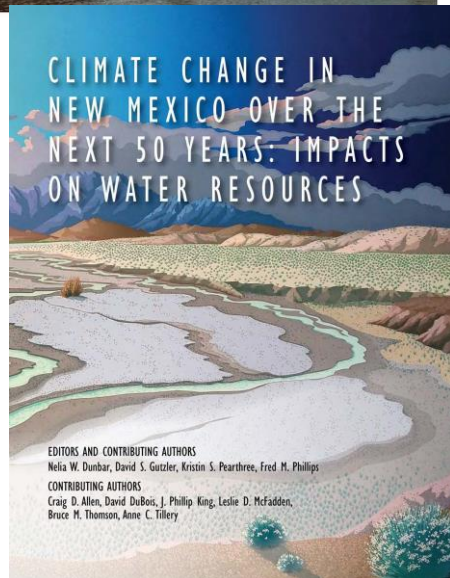
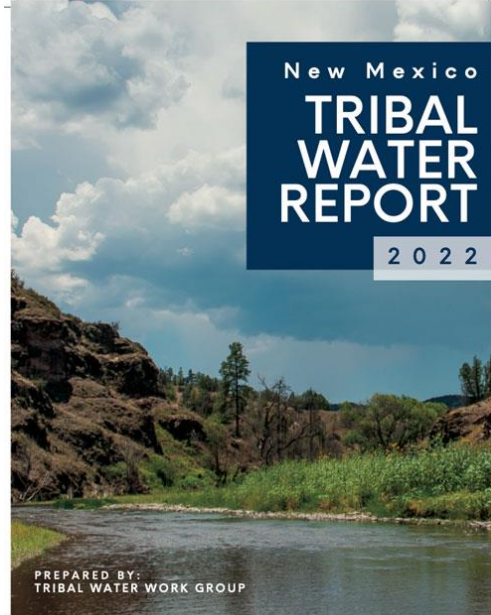
- Climate change and over-extraction have led to the drying of rivers like the Rio Grande, threatening biodiversity and the health of ecosystems. Communities such as Silver City are witnessing firsthand the loss of natural habitats and the need for immediate conservation efforts.*



Water Can't Wait

5. Urgent Call for Policy Reform and Investment

- *The campaign advocates for bold legislative actions, including the implementation of the 50-Year Water Action Plan. With record budget surpluses, there's a push for increased funding for water agencies and infrastructure projects. The message is clear: delaying action will only escalate costs and challenges.*



2023 Water Security Planning Act
2019 Water Data Act
2003 Active Water Resource Management (AWRM)
2012 Aquifer Mapping Program





Setting the Stage

- New Mexico faces a projected 25% - 35% reduction in annual water supply by 2070.
- Record-breaking drought duration: 341 consecutive weeks as of 2024
- Currently, over 47% of the state is in drought; 32.3% in severe drought (D2)
- Early Snowmelt & Declining Snowpack:
 - Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) in the Upper Rio Grande Basin is only 12% of the historical median as of May 2025.



Setting the Stage

- **Groundwater Overdraft**

- About 90% of New Mexico's rural water supply comes from groundwater—many aquifers are being pumped far faster than they are recharged.
- Some areas are seeing water table declines of 3–6 feet per year.

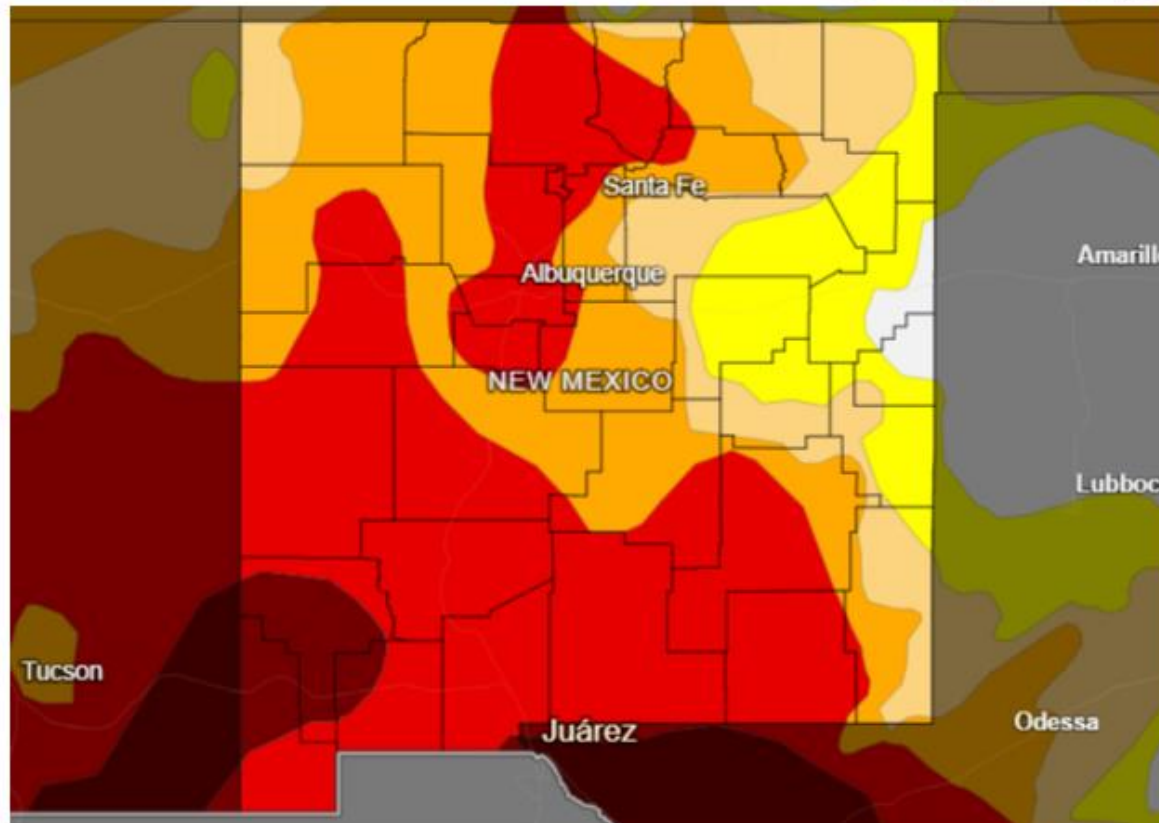
- **Reservoir Levels**

- Elephant Butte Reservoir is under 10% full (as of Spring 2025), compared to historical averages of 40–60%
- This low storage jeopardizes Rio Grande Compact compliance and downstream delivery obligations



Setting the Stage

- **Wildfire-Water Connection:**
 - 2025 fire outlook predicts above-normal fire activity through June due to low moisture from poor snowpack—threatening watersheds.
- **Climate Stressors:**
 - New Mexico has warmed by 2.7°F since 1970, leading to increased evapotranspiration and reduced snowpack retention.
 - Evaporation rates from reservoirs have increased by over 15% in recent decades.



Drought & Dryness Categories

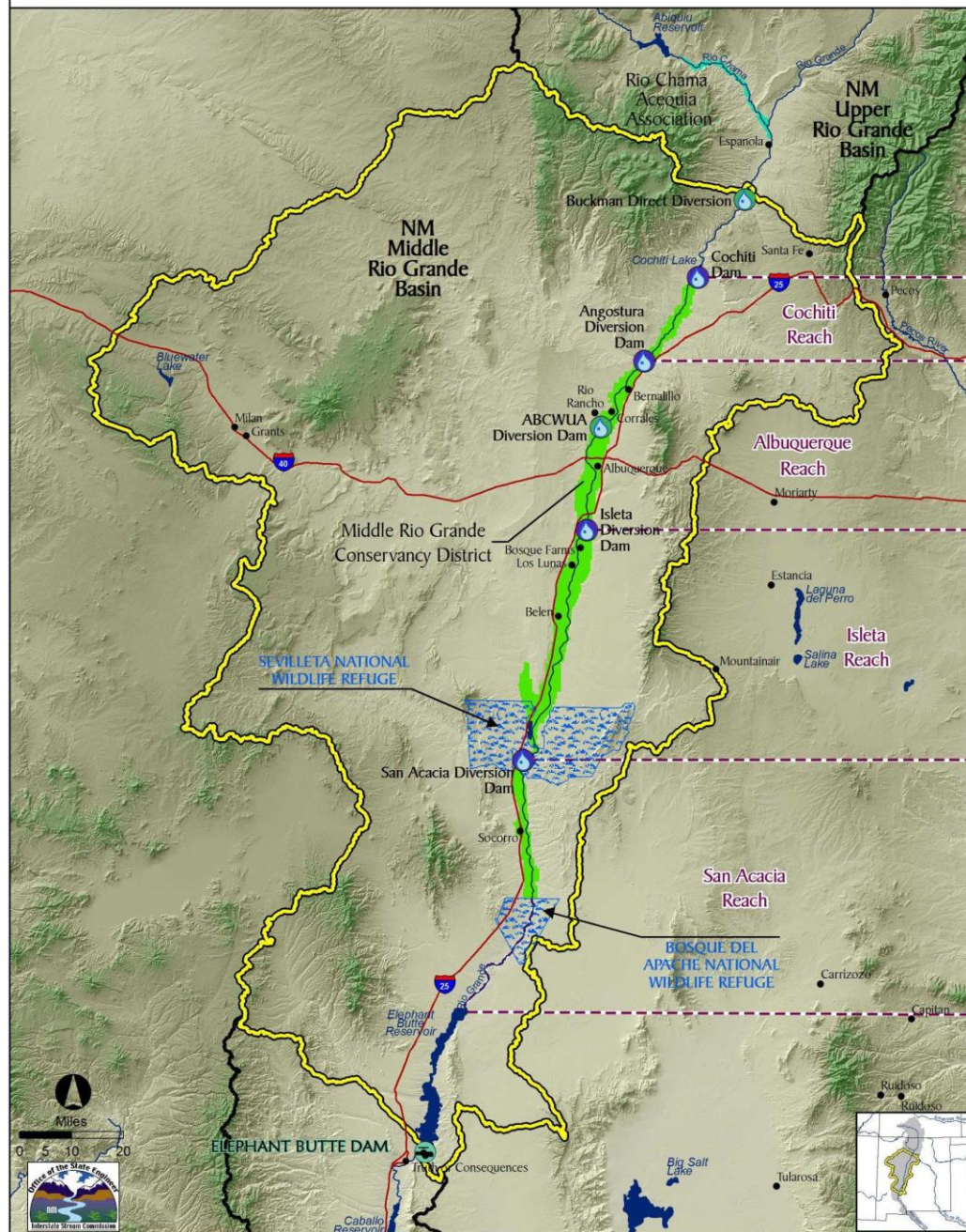
	% of NM
D0 – Abnormally Dry	10.4%
D1 – Moderate Drought	12.9%
D2 – Severe Drought	26.2%
D3 – Extreme Drought	45.1%
D4 – Exceptional Drought	4.2%
Total Area in Drought (D1–D4)	88.4%

Source(s): NDMC, NOAA, USDA

Updates Weekly: 05/06/25



New Mexico's Middle Rio Grande Basin



Current Status of the Middle Rio Grande

*The **Middle Rio Grande**, spanning from Cochiti Dam to Elephant Butte Reservoir, is experiencing significant water stress due to prolonged drought and climate change. In recent years, sections of the river have run dry, including a stretch through Albuquerque in 2022—the first occurrence in over 40 years.*

Key challenges in the region include:

- **Reduced River Flows:** The Rio Grande's flow has decreased by approximately 14,000 acre-feet per decade over the past century.
- **Low Reservoir Levels:** Elephant Butte Reservoir, a critical water storage facility, has seen storage levels drop to as low as 5.9% of capacity in recent years.
- **Increased Groundwater Reliance:** Due to reduced surface water availability, cities like Albuquerque have shifted to greater groundwater use, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.
- **Agricultural Impacts:** Agriculture, which consumes about 80% of New Mexico's freshwater, is heavily impacted by water shortages, leading to fallowed fields and economic losses.



Phase 1: Our Current Water Portfolios: Hydrologic Reality Mapping (1:30 – 2:10 PM)

Goal: Identify common threads, vulnerabilities, and knowledge gaps

- Current water **SOURCES**? (e.g., aquifer, river, reservoir, imported)
- What information is needed to quantify your current water portfolio?
- Primary water users in our region/community?
- Known **trends or concerns about water availability, access, or infrastructure** (e.g., groundwater decline, aging pipes, reliance on one source)?
- Unknown?

Follow-ups:

- ☐ What's one thing you wish neighbors or policymakers better understood about your water supply?
- ☐ Are there sources or uses you think may disappear within a generation?



Phase 2: Visioning Through Constraints (2:10 – 3:15 PM)

Goal: Spark forward-thinking dialogue rooted in community survival

Prompts:

- What would change first if your community had 25% less water?
- Which economic sectors (2-3) can thrive in a water-limited future in your area?
- What actions could help conserve or stretch our current water supply?
- Are there untapped or underutilized sources we could responsibly develop?
- What innovative practices are other regions using that could work here?
- Who else could we bring to the table to help us solve this?



Phase 2: Visioning Through Constraints (2:10 – 3:15 PM)

Goal: Spark forward-thinking dialogue rooted in community survival

- Use the strategy sheet on your table to explore examples of conservation, reuse, and agricultural adaptation. Add your own ideas too – this is just a starting point!





Phase 2: Visioning Through Constraints (2:10 – 3:15 PM)

Goal: Spark forward-thinking dialogue rooted in community survival

Prompts:

- What do 'shared values' around water mean to you?
- How will you identify these values in your region?
- How will balanced regional planning entities be developed?
- Given funding limitations, how can your regional planning be effective?



Phase 3: Regional Readiness & Collective Strength (3:30 – 4:30 PM)

Goal: Identify assets, gaps, and starting points for collaboration

Regional Readiness Checklist (10–15 minutes)

- ☐ We have a regional water plan or strategy that is currently active.
- ☐ Our community has participated in state-level or multi-county water initiatives.
- ☐ We have access to technical data about our aquifer, reservoir, or supply infrastructure.
- ☐ We have held public forums or listening sessions on water issues in the past 5 years.
- ☐ There is a known group or agency leading water efforts in our region.
- ☐ Community trust in water-related decisions is high.
- ☐ Local governments or utilities have funding allocated for water planning.



Phase 3: Regional Readiness & Collective Strength (3:30 – 4:30 PM)

Goal: Identify assets, gaps, and starting points for collaboration

Reflection Questions:

- Which items are within our control?
- Who do you see as potential community leaders for water security efforts? What qualities matter most?
- What needs state or federal support?
- What could your community realistically do in the next year?



Call to Collective Action

- ☐ The future of our region's water supply will be shaped by the choices we make in the next 5–10 years.
- ☐ No one agency or community can do this alone.
 - What we *protect today* will define what our children inherit tomorrow.
 - What we *build together* will outlast any crisis.
- ☐ Let's move from insight... to momentum... to real change.



Closing Reflections & Commitments (4:30 – 4:50 PM)

- ☐ What did you hear today that you're still thinking about?
- ☐ What's one action or conversation you're willing to take forward after today?
- ☐ Thank you for your commitment to protecting our shared future!
- ☐ Your voice matters. Your voice in action gets results!
- ☐ We must move from isolated efforts to coordinated water security.

"Water is life. And, in New Mexico, it is legacy."



Thank you!!

Contact Information:

Dr. Ladona K. Clayton

ladona.clayton@ogalwc.org

Ogallala Land & Water Conservancy

575.760.3098

"Water is life. And, in New Mexico, it is legacy."

Thank you to our sponsors!!



Eric C. Olivas

