Securing New Mexico's Water Future

Programmatic and Policy Solutions for Catalyzing the Use of Nature-Based Solutions

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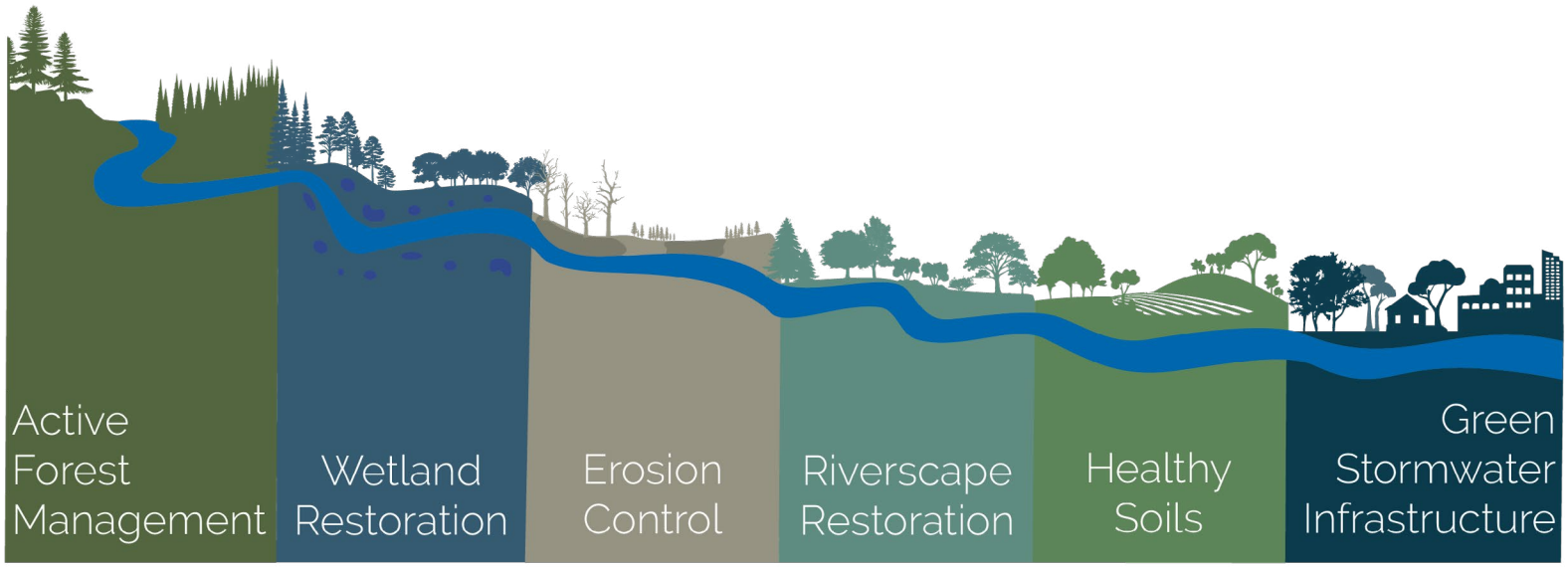
Executive Summary

New Mexico is confronting a future shaped by increasing water scarcity, prolonged drought, intensifying wildfire, extreme flooding, and rising temperatures. These climate-driven pressures threaten public safety, water security, ecosystems, and the state's natural and built infrastructure. While traditional infrastructure systems remain important, they alone cannot meet the scale or complexity of these growing challenges. Nature-Based Solutions offer a complementary approach that works with natural systems including forests, wetlands, rivers, floodplains, and healthy soils, to reduce risk, strengthen resilience, and provide long-term ecological, economic, and social benefits.

In New Mexico, Nature-Based Solutions are deeply rooted in generations of land and water stewardship. Tribes, Nations, Pueblos, acequia systems, watershed restoration, forest management, and upland erosion control practices demonstrate how communities have long worked with natural systems to sustain water supplies for human communities, agriculture, and ecosystems. Today, these approaches continue to evolve with practices such as green stormwater infrastructure, riverscape restoration, healthy soils initiatives, and wetland restoration. Together, these practices have helped reduce wildfire severity, absorb floodwaters, improve drought resilience, stabilize landscapes, and protect critical water resources.

Nature-Based Solutions also generate measurable economic value. Evidence shows these approaches support job creation, strengthen rural economies, and reduce long-term infrastructure and disaster recovery costs. By functioning as critical infrastructure, Nature-Based Solutions provide essential services such as water storage, erosion control, and flood mitigation while also delivering broader co-benefits for biodiversity, recreation, public health, and community well-being. Recognizing Nature-Based Solutions as infrastructure is essential to ensuring they are consistently considered in state planning, funding, and investment decisions.

Beaver Dam Analog in San Antonio Creek uses natural materials to slow water and reconnect the creek to its floodplain. Image credit: Reid Whittlesey, Rio Grande Return.



Nature-Based Solutions commonly used in New Mexico include a diverse set of practices that restore ecological function and strengthen resilience across landscapes. Image credit: Sarah Hurteau, SIG-NAL.

Policy Analysis and Key Findings

In 2025, Rio Grande Return and Spatial Informatics Group–Natural Assets Laboratory (SIG-NAL) evaluated over 50 programs across 14 state agencies and 4 non-state organizations to better understand how Nature-Based Solutions are reflected in state policies, programs, and planning processes. Interviews with agency leadership, program managers, technical experts, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) identified both significant opportunities and persistent barriers to broader implementation.

The analysis found that New Mexico already has many of the foundational elements needed to expand Nature-Based Solutions, including established funding programs, practitioner networks, technical expertise, and a strong culture of land and water stewardship. However, several systemic barriers limit implementation at scale. Many programs already support practices aligned with Nature-Based Solutions but do not explicitly identify or prioritize them. Fragmented planning processes, inconsistent terminology, limited staffing capacity, and siloed agency programs reduce coordination and slow broader adoption. Funding and procurement systems also make it difficult for NGOs and technical organizations, many of which hold critical expertise, to participate fully in implementation efforts.

Costilla Creek near Costilla Reservoir. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

Legislative Recommendations

The report identifies several opportunities for legislative action to better align state statutes, funding mechanisms, and infrastructure frameworks with modern resilience needs. Recommended actions include:

1. Sustain and expand funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts and state programs such as the Urban and Community Forestry Program, that implement Nature-Based Solutions.
2. Recognize Nature-Based Solutions as key strategies for disaster preparedness, wildfire resilience, flood mitigation, and drought response.
3. Formalize a statewide working group to develop a shared vocabulary and adopt a definition of Nature-Based Solutions.
4. Incorporate Nature-Based Solutions terminology and standards into statutes governing infrastructure, water, and natural resource programs.

Executive Recommendations

The report also identifies actions state agencies can take under existing authority to improve implementation and coordination across programs. Recommended actions include:

1. Update program documentation, project guidance, grant and contract solicitations (RFAs and RFPs), and evaluation criteria to explicitly incorporate Nature-Based Solutions.
2. Integrate Nature-Based Solutions into state-required planning documents during regular update cycles.
3. Update statewide building codes and development regulations to explicitly include Nature-Based Solutions approaches.

NGO Recommendations

The report also identifies NGOs as essential implementation partners because they hold much of the technical expertise needed to advance Nature-Based Solutions statewide. Recommended actions include:

1. Conduct outreach to state agencies to support the use of Nature-Based Solutions.
2. Promote awareness of Nature-Based Solutions among local governments.
3. Partner with state agencies to promote workforce development and job training.

Conclusion

New Mexico has a unique opportunity to modernize how it plans, funds, and manages infrastructure and natural resources. By integrating Nature-Based Solutions into state policy, planning, and investment frameworks, the state can better prepare for wildfire, flooding, drought, and long-term water scarcity while strengthening communities, ecosystems, and local economies. Achieving this vision will require coordinated action across the legislature, state agencies, Tribal and local governments, higher education institutions, and non-governmental partners. With sustained leadership and strategic investment, New Mexico can become a leader in advancing Nature-Based Solutions as critical infrastructure for climate resilience and long-term prosperity.

Brazos Cliffs above Tierra Amarilla. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

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Street-side stormwater harvesting structures install in Santa Fe by The RainCatcher, Inc.
Image credit: Sarah Hurteau, SIG-NAL.

Harvey Jones Bioswale, a green stormwater infrastructure feature that provides wildlife habitat and slows stormwater and treated wastewater before it enters the Rio Grande in Corrales. Image credit: Todd Lopez, Rio Grande Return.

I. Introduction

New Mexicans understand the urgent need to prepare for a future with less water. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, shifting precipitation patterns, and more frequent wildfires and floods are threatening water availability, public safety, and the state's natural and built infrastructure. At the heart of these challenges is water security—a growing concern that demands innovative, cost-effective, and sustainable strategies. Traditional infrastructure remains important, but on its own it cannot meet the scale or complexity of these challenges.

Nature-Based Solutions are increasingly recognized around the world as essential strategies to address these threats while delivering long-term ecological, economic, and social benefits. Rooted in both scientific understanding and traditional knowledge, Nature-Based Solutions use natural systems like forests, wetlands, healthy soils, and watersheds to manage water, reduce risks, support biodiversity, and strengthen community resilience. In New Mexico, these approaches are not new. Centuries-old practices like moving water through acequias and rainwater capture in Tribal communities demonstrate how communities have long harnessed natural processes to sustain agriculture and ecosystems. Today, regenerative agriculture, green stormwater infrastructure, and watershed restoration build on that legacy, offering scalable tools to adapt to a changing climate.

Since 2019, New Mexico has taken meaningful steps to prioritize water conservation and modernize how it manages its water resources. A cornerstone of this progress is the Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund, a $400 million long-term investment that represents one of the state's greatest opportunities to scale Nature-Based Solutions across agencies. Programs such as the River Stewardship Program, Healthy Soil Program, and Urban and Community Forestry Program initiatives already provide a strong foundation for implementing Nature-Based Solutions. And in 2025, legislators showed an appetite for funding innovative strategies that include Nature-Based Solutions to promote wildlife conservation. This included specific funding for beaver restoration, recognizing how building beaver dam analogs can help improve water quality, avoid major flooding and fight wildfires. Additionally, recent policy advances demonstrate continued momentum, including policies that update regional

water planning and enable local water authorities to share resources. Each of these policies creates new pathways to integrate Nature-Based Solutions into water projects.

At the same time, many funding and administrative systems remain rooted in practices that were designed primarily for traditional infrastructure—frameworks that did not anticipate today's realities of wildfire, flooding, and prolonged drought. Bridging this gap is essential to align existing investments with current conditions, implement science-backed best practices, and protect against future risks.

New Mexico already has the policy foundation and long-standing culture of land and water stewardship needed to adopt Nature-Based Solutions. The question is no longer whether these approaches work, but why they are not more widely used. To better understand this gap, we engaged personnel from over 50 programs across 14 state agencies and 4 non-state organizations to identify both barriers and opportunities for broader integration of Nature-Based Solutions. This comprehensive approach was taken with the understanding that moving forward will require coordinated action across the legislature, state agencies, and community partners. **Embracing Nature-Based Solutions is a forward-looking development strategy that can help build a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable New Mexico for generations to come.**

A log step-down structure protects and restores wetlands in the Carson National Forest by stabilizing a channel that is draining and drying out the wetlands. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

What are Nature-Based Solutions?

Nature-Based Solutions encompass a wide range of practices that are inspired by nature and use living systems to meet infrastructure needs. Natural features, such as rivers, floodplains, arroyos, wetlands, aquifers, healthy soils, and well-managed forests, do the everyday work of moving, storing, and cleaning water. **When we design and construct infrastructure using Nature-Based Solutions, we slow flood waters, refill aquifers, filter pollution from water, minimize sediment and post-fire damage, and reduce emergency and maintenance costs.**

Nature-Based Solutions are not separate from traditional engineering. These practices exist along a continuum, with some projects incorporating natural elements into engineered systems, while others rely primarily on natural ecosystems as infrastructure. Most approaches fall somewhere in between, blending built and natural solutions to create resilient systems that deliver multiple co-benefits.

In New Mexico, Nature-Based Solutions employ several approaches that are not mutually exclusive and are often used together across landscapes to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing the state. See *Appendix A* for a map of projects across the state. The following section provides a brief overview of some commonly used practices in New Mexico.

Examples of Nature-Based Practices in New Mexico

Active Forest Management reduces wildfire danger and keeps forests and watersheds healthy by thinning dense patches of trees, using prescribed burning practices, removing invasive plants, and replanting and repairing areas burned in wildfire. Management priorities include at-risk communities, watersheds with vital water supplies, and important wildlife habitat.

Before and after forest thinning in the Jemez Mountains to reduce fire behavior and protect watershed health. Image credit: Susan Harrelson, USFS.

Wetland Restoration repairs degraded or damaged areas where wetlands once existed by reconnecting groundwater with surface water, regenerating native riparian vegetation, and connecting fragmented surface flow paths to rewet soils.

At Grassy Creek, a Zuni bowl rock structure is installed to stabilize a headcut, prevent erosion, and reconnect surface and groundwater. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

Erosion Control features address incision and erosion where accelerated soil and vegetation loss dehydrate upland ecosystems and put roads and other infrastructure at risk. Treatments slow and disperse water, capture sediment, and reduce downstream flooding.

One-rock dams built by volunteers heal ongoing erosion caused by 19th century wagon ruts at Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

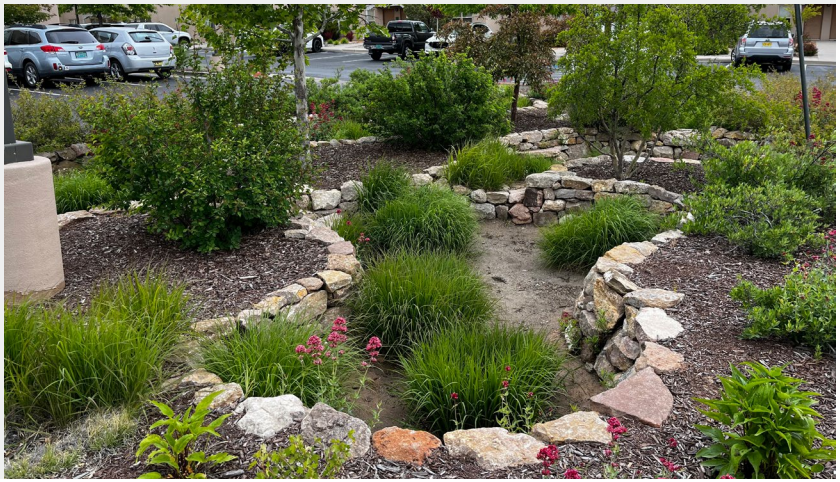
Riverscape Restoration addresses degraded or damaged river ecosystems including the river channel, connected floodplains, springs, wetlands, and the surrounding landscape using both natural and human-made features in projects to restore ecologic and hydrologic function.

San Antonio Creek in the Jemez Mountains is becoming a healthy riverscape after restoration to reconnect its floodplain. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

Healthy Soils approaches land management through practices and technology that simultaneously sustain agricultural and ranching activities such as regenerative grazing, while reducing erosion and enhancing the resilience of working lands to climate and other human and natural disturbances.

Crews spreading organic mulch and compost to reduce nonnative weeds in former farm fields at Candelaria Nature Preserve. Image credit: Esha Chiocchio.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure creates natural spaces in urban environments that soak up stormwater near where it falls through the use of streetside basins and vegetated swales to interrupt connected impervious surfaces and reduce pollution flowing to nearby rivers and streams.



Green Stormwater Infrastructure installing in Santa Fe by The RainCatcher to capture stormwater from a larger office complex. Image credit: Sarah Hurteau, SIG-NAL.

What is the Value of Nature-Based Solutions?

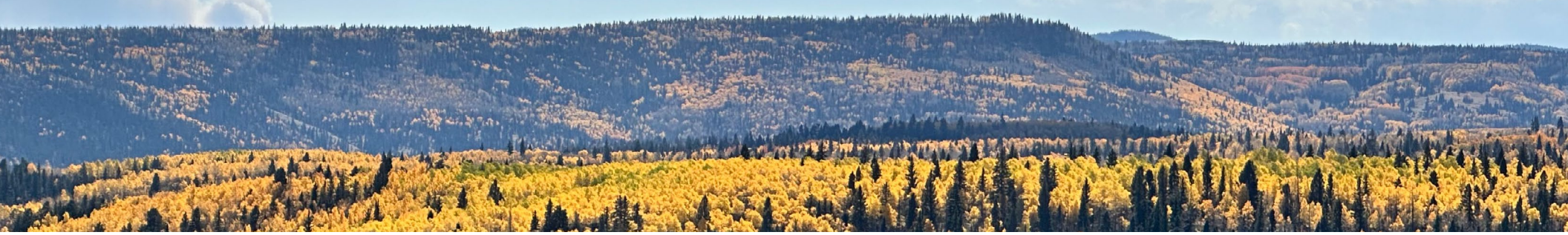
A growing body of evidence shows that Nature-Based Solutions generate substantial economic and social value by driving job creation in rural communities, supporting income growth, and reducing long-term costs associated with infrastructure and disaster recovery. A recent investigation that systematically reviewed 66 studies found that most Nature-Based Solutions produced positive outcomes for income and employment, often performing as well as or better than conventional approaches.[1] Moreover, Nature-Based Solutions deliver vital ecosystem services that can be monetized to further strengthen economic returns, including avoided costs from natural disasters such as reducing wildfire severity through forest and watershed management, slowing and absorbing floodwaters across landscapes, and improving water retention to buffer against prolonged drought. Nature-Based Solutions should be valued as a form of critical infrastructure that provides reliable, long-term performance, while generating multiple environmental, and social co-benefits.

Nature-Based Solutions are also key to sustaining New Mexico's growing outdoor recreation industry. In 2024, outdoor recreation contributed $3.6 billion to New Mexico's economy - accounting for 2.5% of the state's GDP and supporting more than 31,000 jobs. Healthy ecosystems are essential to support activities like fishing, camping, hunting and birdwatching, which are important economic drivers in rural economies.

Recognizing Nature-Based Solutions as infrastructure highlights their practical value and reinforces their role in building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economy. **In economic terms: investing in Nature-Based Solutions is a foundational component of sustaining the New Mexico economy and managing risk.**

Beaver Creek in Cruces Basin Wilderness, Carson National Forest.
Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

1 Chausson, A. et al. 2024. Harnessing nature-based solutions for economic recovery: A systematic review. PLOS Climate, DOI: 10.1371/journal.pclm.0000281.



Overlooking Beaver Creek Watershed in Carson National Forest. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

II. Policy Analysis Outreach and Research Methods

In 2025, Rio Grande Return and Spatial Informatics Group–Natural Assets Laboratory (SIG-NAL) evaluated over 50 programs across 14 state agencies (some agencies administer multiple relevant programs) and 4 non-state organizations to understand where Nature-Based Solutions are included in policies, programs, and plans (*Appendix B*). This analysis also identified opportunities to better integrate Nature-Based Solutions in ways that could increase project impacts and funding. Casting a broad net, we considered programs that provide grant funding to external entities in addition to programs responsible for internal management of state properties and resources.

Our project team developed interview questions to explore existing opportunities and challenges related to implementing Nature-Based Solutions, to identify successful project examples, and to gather referrals for other relevant interviewees and program materials. Between April and September 2025, 22 interviews were conducted with agency directors, program managers, and team leaders with direct decision-making authority and the ability to enact change within their programs. We also conducted interviews with a limited number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that interact with or provide technical assistance to state agencies.

Rio Grande Return also sent introductory letters about the policy analysis to leaders of the 23 Tribal governments and met with one Tribal representative (*Appendix C*).

To deepen the analysis, we reviewed agency websites, programs plans, enabling legislation, regulation, policy, guidance, and annual reports. While this analysis was not exhaustive, it was broad enough to identify common patterns across agencies.

This report summarizes the findings of our analysis and proposes specific recommendations to support agency and programmatic changes that would increase incorporation of Nature-Based Solutions across New Mexico.

State Agencies Interviewed

- Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Finance and Administration
- Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Wildlife
- Economic Development Department
- Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
- Environment Department
- Finance Authority
- Indian Affairs Department
- Interstate Stream Commission/Office of the State Engineer
- Office of Natural Resources Trustee
- State Land Office

Non-State Organizations Interviewed

- Forest Stewards Guild
- The Nature Conservancy
- Southwest Ecological Restoration Institute
- United States Bureau of Reclamation

Sandhill cranes foraging at Candelaria Nature Preserve Open Space in Albuquerque. Image credit: Esha Chiocchio.

III. Key Findings

The following key findings emerged through interviews, program review, and policy analysis. Together, they highlight both the progress New Mexico has made toward employing Nature-Based Solutions and the systemic barriers that continue to limit broader adoption. While many programs already demonstrate elements of a nature-based approach, gaps in alignment, capacity, and policy prevent these practices from being applied consistently or at scale. In many cases, Nature-Based Solutions are already being implemented but are not explicitly recognized, tracked, or prioritized, limiting their visibility and wide-spread use. These insights underscore the need for coordinated action, clearer guidance, and targeted investment to ensure Nature-Based Solutions can be fully integrated into state programs, planning, and funding frameworks.

New Mexico's Strong Foundation

- There is strong interest among agency personnel to collaborate and expand the use of Nature-Based Solutions.
- Established practitioner networks and technical expertise from NGOs are available to support statewide initiatives.
- Evidence shows Nature-Based Solutions deliver positive economic, environmental, and social outcomes, often performing as well as or better than conventional approaches alone.
- Other nearby states, such as Texas and Arizona, are already advancing these approaches, offering practical models and demonstrating that broader adoption in New Mexico is both feasible and achievable.
- Nature-Based Solutions reflect New Mexico's long-standing culture of land and water stewardship, building on generations of working with natural systems to sustain communities and landscapes.
- State agencies have a strong foundation of programs, funding mechanisms, and coordinating bodies that can support broader implementation of Nature-Based Solutions.

New Mexico's Opportunities to Strengthen Scale and Impact

Funding Gaps and Misalignments

- Current investment levels fall far short of statewide water system infrastructure and restoration needs.
- Existing funding is not consistently directed toward Nature-Based Solutions, which continue to receive only a small share of available resources despite established targets and demonstrated need.
- Funding is fragmented, difficult to navigate, and poorly suited to multi-phase projects with limited support for early-stage planning, resulting in gaps in project continuity and barriers to large-scale implementation.
- Existing funding structures, including loan-based programs and cost-share requirements, are often poorly aligned with the financial realities of Nature-Based Solutions projects and the organizations best positioned to implement them.
- Funding systems do not consistently prioritize Nature-Based Solutions because project selection criteria and funding guidelines often lack explicit requirements or incentives, limiting competitiveness even where these approaches are eligible.

Shared Lexicon

- Inconsistent terminology, a lack of shared definitions, and the absence of cross-agency criteria limit coordination, create confusion, and impede statewide implementation.
- Many programs implement practices aligned with Nature-Based Solutions but do not identify or track them as such, limiting their ability to evaluate outcomes and expand their use.
- Knowledge gaps among policymakers and agency staff, combined with misperceptions that these approaches are experimental, slow adoption and highlight the need for targeted education and clearer legislative support.

Volunteers building a beaver dam analog on San Antonio Creek, Santa Fe National Forest. Image credit: Kristina G. Fisher, Albuquerque Wildlife Federation

Planning Gaps

- Planning processes do not consistently prioritize Nature-Based Solutions, as key documents are not updated to reflect these approaches despite clear opportunities during routine revision cycles.
- Key planning frameworks, such as regional water plans and program-level planning documents that guide funding decisions, often do not explicitly include Nature-Based Solutions, limiting eligibility, competitiveness, and prioritization of these practices during project selection.

Process Barriers

- Procurement requirements and eligibility definitions can limit the consideration of Nature-Based Solutions during vendor selection, while contracting requirements add complexity that restricts participation by qualified nonprofits, small businesses, and technical experts.
- Article IX, Section 14 of the Constitution of New Mexico (commonly known as the "Anti-Donation Clause") does not prohibit direct contracting with NGOs as long as a contract involves an exchange for goods or services, yet it is widely perceived as a barrier for many agencies which results in NGOs often being excluded as eligible entities during the procurement process.
- Many agencies rely on external partners to implement projects, but gaps in procurement policies and eligibility rules limit access to the organizations with the most technical expertise.

Capacity and Workforce Limitations

- Workforce and capacity constraints at state agencies, including chronic underfunding, and staffing shortages, limit agencies' ability to innovate and scale implementation; key partners such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts also remain under-resourced.
- Limited availability of training, certification, and interdisciplinary expertise reduces the ability to design, implement, and maintain Nature-Based Solutions effectively across agencies and partner organizations.

Structural Barriers

- Organizational silos separate practitioners from decision-makers, creating barriers to integrating best practices into program design and funding decisions, particularly within major infrastructure agencies.
- Shifting federal guidance and administrative priorities can create uncertainty for state agencies, which in turn impacts agency implementation, limiting consistency and long-term planning for Nature-Based Solutions.

IV. Recommendations for the Legislature

1 Sustain and expand state funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts and state programs

Our analysis shows that while demand for Nature-Based Solutions continues to grow, funding remains insufficient and inconsistently aligned with program goals. Existing programs such as the River Stewardship Program and other natural resource initiatives provide a strong foundation, yet demand consistently exceeds available resources. Expanding and stabilizing funding will allow these programs, and the agencies that manage state lands and infrastructure, to more fully implement Nature-Based Solutions as core strategies for addressing wildfire, flooding, and drought.

We recommend that language be included with appropriations indicating that state funding may be distributed through grants or contracts, and that Nature-Based Solutions may be considered where appropriate for state-funded projects.

Legislative action is also needed to strengthen implementation capacity. NGOs hold much of the technical expertise required to deliver Nature-Based Solutions, yet they face barriers to receiving state funds. Expanding eligibility and supporting partnerships with nonprofits, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and other local organizations can improve the state's ability to implement projects across public and private lands.

2 Recognize Nature-Based Solutions as key strategies for reducing disaster impacts and strengthening preparedness

Nature-Based Solutions play a critical role in reducing risk and improving resilience to natural hazards. These approaches effectively mitigate post-fire flooding, erosion, and watershed degradation, and can serve as cost-effective strategies for both disaster preparedness and recovery. Legislative recognition of Nature-Based Solutions as core resilience strategies can help shift investments toward more proactive, systems-based approaches.

Restoration crew in the Hermit's Peak/ Calf Canyon burn scar, building a log mattress to stabilize a deep gully. Image credit: Reid Whittlesey, Rio Grande Return

A variety of green stormwater infrastructure techniques to reduce erosion and protect recreation infrastructure at the Tijeras Creek BioZone Open Space. Image credit: Bobby Mullin, Bernalillo County.

3 Formalize a working group to develop a shared vocabulary on Nature-Based Solutions

A foundational step to advancing Nature-Based Solutions across New Mexico is the development of a shared, practitioner-informed vocabulary, as well as the identification of statutes and regulations that need to be updated to incorporate this shared vocabulary. Through interviews, we observed inconsistent use of terminology across agencies. Similar practices are often described using different language or, in some cases, Nature-Based Solutions approaches were being implemented without being recognized as such. For example, the NMED Watershed Section and Department of Wildlife Habitat Stamp Program reference ecosystem services and other terms but don't specifically use the term Nature-Based Solutions. The lack of a standardized lexicon creates confusion and limits coordination, preventing agencies from consistently applying Nature-Based Solutions and scaling these efforts.

Within the next year, we recommend formalizing a cross-agency working group that can build consensus around shared definitions, techniques, and design standards for Nature-Based Solutions, and support consistent use of this language across state plans, programs and project solicitations. The working group should also identify the statutes and regulations governing infrastructure, water, and natural resource programs that require updates to include the developed lexicon. This effort should leverage existing communities of practice, such as the Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group, New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group, and the Arid Low Impact Development (LID) Coalition. Aligning terminology across state agencies and programs should span the full project lifecycle, including how projects are evaluated, funded, and implemented, to maintain consistency from planning through construction.

This working group should include all the agencies interviewed, not only the agencies traditionally focused on natural resources. Leadership from both the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) and General Service Department (GSD) would help ensure entities involved in infrastructure investment operate from a common understanding of Nature-Based Solutions.

4 Incorporate shared vocabulary of Nature-Based Solutions into state statutes, including ones that fund state programs

Many statutory and regulatory frameworks still emphasize traditional "brick and mortar" approaches, which do not fully account for natural systems as infrastructure. As a result, practices such as green stormwater infrastructure may face barriers to funding and implementation, even when they deliver clear public benefits.

Legislative updates can address these gaps by using shared vocabulary and clear definitions of Nature-Based Solutions practices, developed by the working group, into statutes governing infrastructure, water, and natural resource programs. This includes aligning eligibility criteria, project evaluation standards, and funding requirements where they appear in statute and adding consistent terminology where needed in statute to guide procurement and contracting practices across agencies.

Clarifying that Nature-Based Solutions are valid infrastructure approaches will allow them to be evaluated alongside conventional engineering, rather than excluded by default. This is particularly important for small or rural communities that are significantly affected by watershed issues but don't have the capacity to apply for "restoration" projects that don't seem like critical infrastructure when in fact they are.

Additionally, ensuring performance measures related to Nature-Based solutions utilize this shared vocabulary will help bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation.

Interpretive sign for public awareness and understanding at Alameda Rain Garden in Santa Fe. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

V. Recommendations for the Executive

1 Update program documentation, project guidance, grant and contract solicitations (RFAs and RFPs), and evaluation criteria to explicitly incorporate Nature-Based Solutions

Our analysis shows that while many agencies recognize the value of Nature-Based Solutions, these approaches are not yet systematically reflected in program grant and contract documentation or project solicitations (Request For Applications or Proposals), eligibility rules, or project selection criteria. Strengthening this programmatic framework will require clearer administrative direction, closer alignment with evolving science, and more consistent integration across the state's natural resource focused funding programs.

To close the gap between policy intent and implementation, agencies should update program materials to explicitly incorporate Nature-Based Solutions by clearly defining eligible practices and aligning scoring criteria with desired outcomes such as the Envision Program points table used by the Department of Transportation. Where appropriate, guidance should also require consideration of natural elements alongside engineered solutions. Because funding decisions are often tied to planning and program criteria, aligning these materials is essential to ensuring that Nature-Based Solutions are not only eligible, but competitive.

These updates should also be reflected in public-facing materials, including agency websites and guidance documents, to clearly communicate priorities and opportunities to applicants and partners. Programs that already support Nature-Based Solutions should make these criteria clear and easy to access. Aligning project selection, evaluation, grant and contract processes will support consistent application and improve the effectiveness of state investments. Consultation with the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) on grant requirements and the General Services Department (GSD) and State Purchasing Officer on procurement requirements will be important to revise eligibility and procurement requirements and expand participation by nonprofits and other organizations that currently hold much of the expertise needed to implement Nature-Based Solutions.

Additionally, our interviews and review of state programs also revealed inconsistent understanding and application of Article IX, Section 14 of the New Mexico Constitution (commonly known as the "Anti-Donation Clause") by state agencies. This finding prompted review of guidance documents issued by the State Ethics Commission. State Ethics Commission Advisory Opinion 2024-06 (Dec. 13, 2024) provides the analysis to determine if a state agency entering into a grant or contract agreement with an NGO violates the Anti-Donation Clause. In this advisory opinion, the State Ethics Commission found that a state agency did not violate the Anti-

Native vegetation along the Santa Fe River was planted using River Stewardship Program funds. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

Donation Clause by entering into an agreement with a private non-profit because the state agency received services in return for state funds or the agreement met an exception to the Anti-Donation Clause.

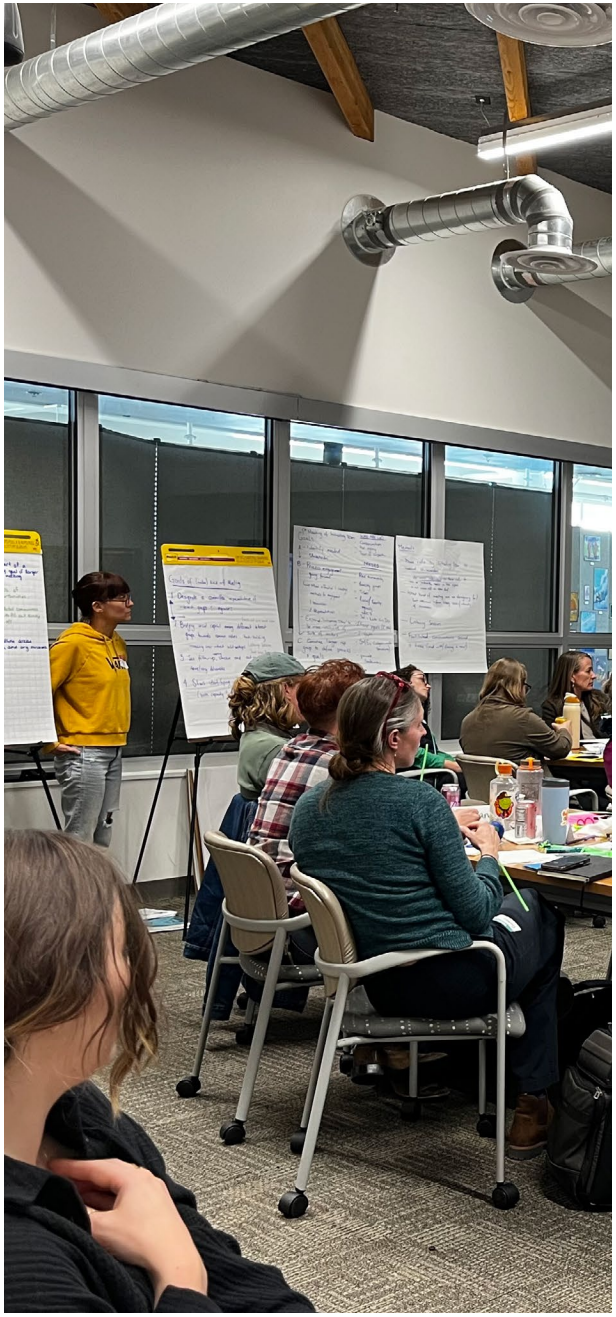
This guidance makes clear that state agencies may enter into grants and contracts with NGOs if there is an exchange of funds for a service or project of value to the government and is not a barrier to NGOs during vendor identification. As agencies update program and public-facing materials, they should clearly indicate that NGOs are eligible entities where appropriate. Agencies seeking clarification on eligibility requirements should consult DFA or GSD. Agencies requiring assistance in evaluating Anti-Donation Clause compliance should consult the State Ethics Commission.

2 Integrate Nature-Based Solutions into state-required planning documents during regular update cycles

Long-term adoption of Nature-Based Solutions depends on embedding these approaches into the state's planning frameworks. Every state agency manages planning documents that guide programs, funding, and priorities, creating a clear opportunity to integrate Nature-Based Solutions as a standard component of program strategy, design, and implementation. Agencies should use regular planning update cycles to systematically incorporate Nature-Based Solutions where they are currently missing and strengthen their role where they already exist.

Integrating Nature-Based Solutions into planning is particularly important because funding decisions often rely on these documents. For example, some programs administered through the Water Trust Board prioritize projects identified in regional water plans, making it essential to include Nature-Based Solutions early in the planning process to ensure they are considered and funded. Upcoming planning efforts provide a timely opportunity for agencies and stakeholders to identify and advance Nature-Based Solutions projects across regions.

Incorporating Nature-Based Solutions into planning also enables agencies to prioritize high-value and vulnerable ecological areas, improving long-term outcomes across programs. The New Mexico Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan provides a strong foundation for this work by directing agencies to evaluate climate risks and take action. By aligning planning, funding, and implementation through consistent standards and coordinated updates, agencies can create a clear, shared pathway for advancing Nature-Based Solutions statewide.



Natural Resource professionals facilitation training to better engage policy makers and the general public in watershed health projects. Image credit: Sarah Hurteau, SIG-NAL

3 Update statewide building, planning, and zoning regulations to directly include Nature-Based Solutions

Long-term integration of Nature-Based Solutions will require updates to statewide building, planning, and zoning regulations, and infrastructure guidance like stormwater. The New Mexico Construction Industry Division (CID) at the New Mexico Regulation and Licensing Department (RLD) holds statewide authority over most building permits, plan reviews, and inspections in New Mexico. The majority of counties do not have independent building departments to complete these tasks. As such, many communities—particularly smaller and rural municipalities—rely on these frameworks, which do not always explicitly include Nature-Based Solutions. Updating these rules will enable broader adoption and help communities across the state implement approaches that are often more appropriate, cost-effective, and better scaled to local conditions.

The intent of this recommendation is not to limit development or make housing unaffordable but to help newly constructed or retrofits of residential or commercial buildings prepare for the impacts of increased natural disaster and water scarcity. Embedding Nature-Based Solutions directly into statewide rules, administered by CID, will help ensure they are consistently considered in project design and infrastructure decisions, rather than treated as optional or secondary approaches.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure installed at an office complex by The RainCatcher in Santa Fe, to protect businesses from routine flooding due to poor and insufficient drainage design. Image credit: Sarah Hurteau, SIG-NAL.

VI. Recommendations for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

1 Conduct outreach to state agencies on Nature-Based Solutions

Our findings show that many state agencies are already implementing practices consistent with Nature-Based Solutions but do not identify them as such, while others face knowledge gaps due to inconsistent terminology and limited exposure to evolving practices. Program management is often siloed, separating technical practitioners, from leadership, and decision-makers, including those in finance and procurement roles who influence infrastructure investments within natural resource agencies.

NGOs hold much of the technical expertise in Nature-Based Solutions, and are well positioned to help bridge these gaps. In the near term, NGOs should conduct targeted outreach to the state agencies interviewed for this report and provide tailored guidance that addresses the specific barriers and opportunities identified through this analysis. This includes developing educational materials, case studies, and performance metrics that help agency leadership and program staff better understand how Nature-Based Solutions can be integrated into existing programs, guidance, and funding decisions under existing authority. By connecting technical knowledge with agency needs, NGOs can help translate policy goals into practical implementation.

Low-tech process-based restoration has improved water storage capacity and wildlife habitat in wetlands at Los Potreros Open Space, Santa Fe County. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

"Investments in innovative climate-informed infrastructure designs, new construction materials and techniques, enhancing and expanding use of nature-based solutions, as well as the distribution and diversification of infrastructure will be critical for these systems to continue to operate and ensure our communities can thrive as the climate changes."

- New Mexico Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan

2 Promote awareness of Nature-Based Solutions among local governments

Expanding the use of Nature-Based Solutions will require stronger engagement with local governments, particularly in smaller and rural communities where these approaches are less commonly included in planning and development processes. While some larger municipalities have begun incorporating practices such as green stormwater infrastructure, broader adoption remains limited statewide.

NGOs can play a critical role by working through regional entities such as Councils of Government, the Municipal League, and New Mexico Counties to provide outreach, technical assistance, and educational opportunities to interested communities. This includes supporting updates to standard terminology, sharing project examples and implementation guidance, and facilitating cross-departmental dialogues to help local governments incorporate Nature-Based Solutions into planning, ordinances, and capital projects.

Strengthening connections between municipalities, practitioner networks, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts will further support knowledge-sharing and coordination across jurisdictions. These efforts will help ensure that local governments have the tools and understanding needed to adopt Nature-Based Solutions as part of their standard approach to infrastructure and land management.

In parallel, NGOs can continue to support education and outreach efforts that build broader understanding of Nature-Based Solutions among policy makers, practitioners, and the public. Visible project examples, interpretive signage, implementation workshops, site field visits, and communications campaigns can help demonstrate the effectiveness of these approaches and build support for their continued expansion. Together, these efforts will help create the technical and institutional capacity needed to implement Nature-Based Solutions at scale and deliver lasting benefits to New Mexico's communities and landscapes.

The Jefferson Stormwater Bumpout illustrates how Green Stormwater Infrastructure can filter pollutants from runoff and grow shade urban areas. Image credit: Shelby Stimson, SIG-NAL.

3 Partner with state agencies to promote workforce development and job training

Our analysis identified a significant gap between the technical expertise required to implement Nature-Based Solutions and the capacity of state agencies and eligible contractors to deliver these projects. While NGOs often possess the necessary expertise, agencies do not always identify them as eligible entities in project solicitations, limiting their ability to fully support implementation.

Over the long term, NGOs can work with state agencies, especially the Department of Workforce Solutions and the Higher Education Department, to develop solutions that address these capacity challenges. Higher education institutions and professional societies also play an important role in developing the curriculum, certificate programs, and degree pathways needed for individuals to gain the technical expertise to work on projects using Nature-Based Solutions. This includes workforce training, certification, and interdisciplinary education programs that integrate ecological and engineering knowledge. Expanding eligibility and strengthening partnerships between agencies, NGOs, and other local organizations will help ensure that expertise is accessible and scalable across the state. Collaboration with the Municipal League, New Mexico Counties, and other regional entities can further support the technical capacity needed to design, implement, and maintain these Nature-Based Solutions effectively across diverse landscapes and communities.

Workshops are a good way to teach volunteers how to build rock media lunas that spread water. Image credit: Karen Menetrey, Rio Grande Return.

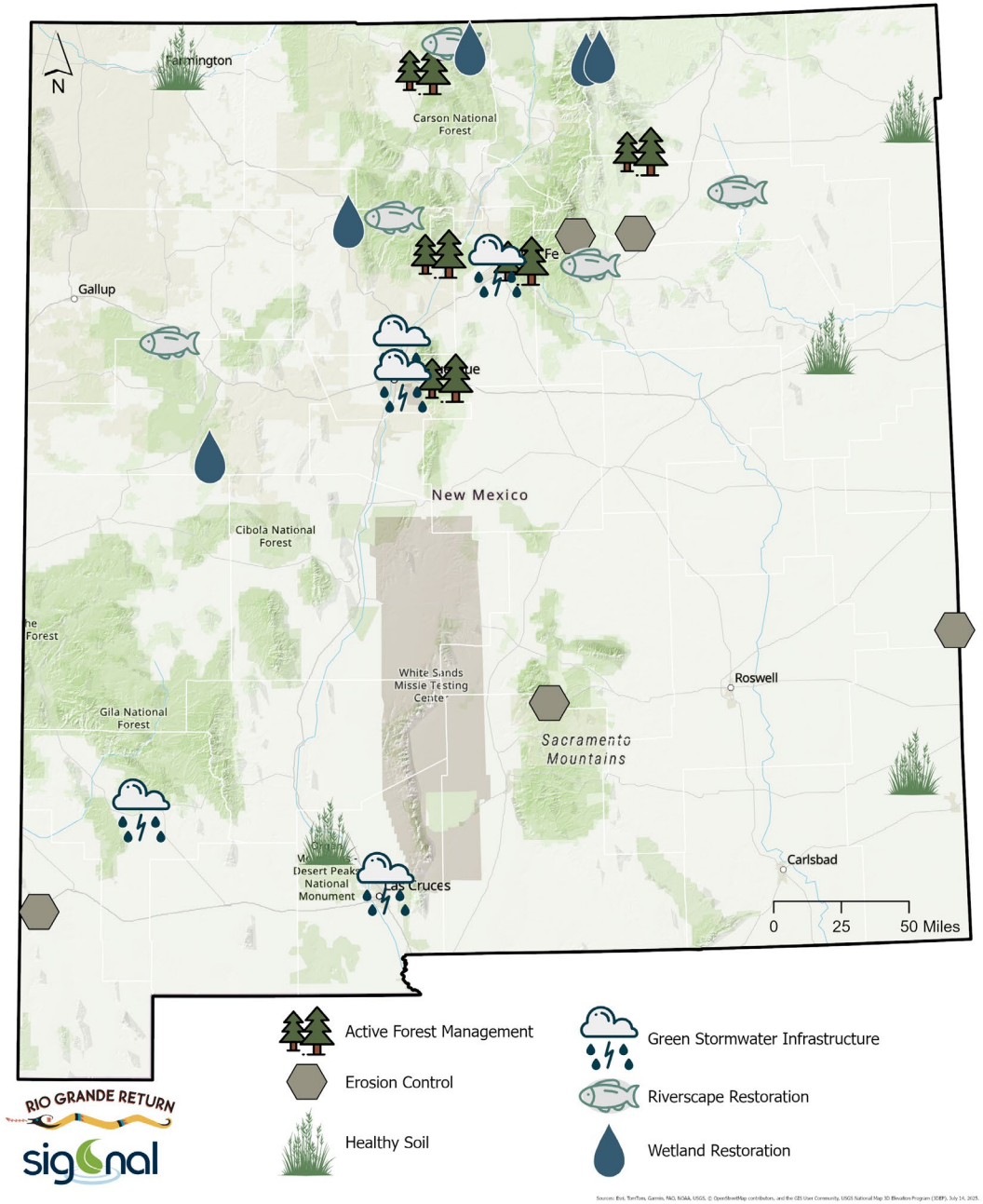
VI. Conclusion

New Mexico stands at a critical juncture in how it manages and invests in its natural systems. The state's history of innovation and stewardship provides a strong foundation for expanding the use of Nature-Based Solutions as essential infrastructure for climate resilience, water security, and community well-being. Realizing this opportunity will require coordinated action across state agencies, the legislature, and nonprofit partners to align policy, planning, funding, and implementation. Through targeted actions, such as aligning program and policy guidance, modernizing statutory and regulatory frameworks, building workforce capacity, and improving coordination across sectors, New Mexico can more fully integrate Nature-Based Solutions into the systems that shape investment and decision-making. Implementing these actions will help close the gap between science and practice while ensuring that public investments deliver lasting ecological, economic, and social benefits.

With sustained leadership, clearer executive and legislative direction, and strong partnerships, New Mexico can position itself as a national model for integrating Nature-Based Solutions into governance and development. By prioritizing a comprehensive integration of Nature-Based Solutions, New Mexico can build a future where healthy lands and waters are recognized and managed as critical infrastructure to support the state's long-term resilience and prosperity.

Beavers have reoccupied San Antonio Creek in the Jemez Mountains along a riverscape restoration project that improves habitat for beavers, fish and other wildlife. Image credit: Ulysses Yarbrough, Rio Grande Return.

Appendix A. Example Nature-Based Projects Across New Mexico



Highlighted Projects

Take a deeper dive into Nature-Based Solutions being implemented across New Mexico. The map shows examples of programs and projects in each of the six identified categories. The table below describes the Nature-Based Solutions being employed at each project. This map and list are not meant to be exhaustive, as there are many more projects than depicted here.

Active Forest Management Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Brazos Firewise Program	Rio Arriba	The Brazos Firewise Program aims to reduce fire severity in the watershed and encourage community collaboration for a healthier forest. They developed a fire mitigation program with a five-year master plan, wood chipping initiatives, educational resources, and strong local partnerships.
Ciudad SWCD East Mountains Forest Health and Wildfire Resiliency Program	Bernalillo	Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District collaborates with local partners to enhance forest health and reduce wildfire risks in the East Mountains through targeted thinning projects, including 786 acres of open space. They support community safety and engagement with neighborhood brush chipper events and free green waste disposal.
Cooks Peak Post-Fire	Colfax	The New Mexico State Land Office coordinated wildfire response/mitigation actions and conducted post-fire treatments in the Cooks Peak burn area on State Trust Land. They mapped and assessed burn severity, treated burned trust lands for post-fire hazards (erosion/drainage stabilization, hazard tree removal/piling/burning, contour felling), coordinated interagency/nonprofit organization/Tribal partnerships, and supported livestock relocation.
Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Fuels Reduction	Santa Fe	The City of Santa Fe Watershed Division has treated 6,700 acres of the Santa Fe Watershed with forest-thinning and prescribed fire to improve forest and watershed health, reduce wildfire risk, and ensure a clean and reliable water supply. Management methods include mechanical thinning, pile burning, and broadcast burning.
Southwest Jemez Mountains Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project	Sandoval	This collaboration of 40 organizations enhanced landscape resilience to wildfires and disturbances through science-based restoration, including thinning and prescribed burns and riparian restoration, which restored thousands of acres and improved water quality and wildlife habitats. The project bolstered local economies by providing jobs and trees to local industries.

Erosion Control Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Eastern Plains Playa Restoration	Roosevelt	The New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau worked with various agencies, landowners, and nonprofit organizations to improve function, habitat, and water quality in Eastern New Mexico Playas. They produced management tools to assess, maintain, and enhance playa health, and conducted an implementation demonstration project to slow and spread water and reduce erosion on a playa in Roosevelt County.
Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire Area	San Miguel	Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance is restoring burned watersheds by addressing fire-related and legacy ecological damage. Post-fire work includes building 873 restoration structures, planting 10,000 seedlings, and working on 40 properties to mitigate flooding, stabilize soils, restore vegetation, and reconnect streams to floodplains, while also providing training to local landowners on the techniques.
Lordsburg Playa Dust Mitigation Project	Hidalgo	The Lordsburg Playa project, led by New Mexico Department of Transportation with local, state, and federal partners, aims to reduce hazardous blowing dust on I-10 by limiting grazing, recontouring and imprinting with a keyline plow, and seeding 1,200 acres with drought-tolerant plants, and constructing 1,500 rock erosion-control structures.
Rio Mora National Wildlife Refuge	Mora	Albuquerque Wildlife Federation has built hundreds of rock erosion control structures such as Zuni bowls, one-rock dams and rock run-downs that improve the watershed's capacity to hold water and grow native plants.
Salt-South Fork Watershed Stabilization Program	Lincoln	New Mexico Forestry Division's post-wildfire restoration program offers free hazard tree mitigation and stabilization services on private lands, including contour felling, ground roughening, seeding, mulching, chipping and mastication, and one-rock dams. These methods help stabilize slopes, prevent erosion and reduce post-fire flooding.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Harvey Jones Bioswale	Sandoval	Harvey Jones Bioswale, a project led by The Nature Conservancy, showcases how green infrastructure can enhance water quality by filtering wastewater and stormwater before it reaches the Rio Grande. The project transformed more than 10 acres into thriving wetlands with trails, wildlife-viewing areas, 35,000 newly planted willows and 1,000 cottonwoods.
Jefferson Stormwater Bumpouts	Bernalillo	The Jefferson Green Stormwater Infrastructure Bump Outs project, initiated by Albuquerque's Green Stormwater Infrastructure Cohort (comprising nine city departments) educated city staff on best practices. The project enhanced water quality and green spaces and also provided hands-on experience to city planners, fostering better GSI implementation citywide.
Sand Hill Arroyo	Dona Aña	The Sand Hill Arroyo Green Stormwater Infrastructure project focuses on restoring the arroyo with induced meandering, bank stabilization, and water harvesting to slow stormwater, reduce erosion, and improve water quality. Residential water harvesting also helps decrease runoff from neighborhood streets. Re-planting native vegetation along a sewer line construction area addresses erosion and sediment issues.
Santa Fe Rain Gardens	Santa Fe	The City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe Watershed Association have embraced green stormwater infrastructure by building more than 20 rain gardens to manage urban stormwater. Water is captured from city streets or parking lots, and diverted into rock and soil-lined infiltration basins planted with native plants. Pollutants are filtered and water replenishes the aquifer.
Silver City Green Stormwater Infrastructure	Grant	The Town of Silver City and Silver City Mainstream have emphasized urban stormwater harvesting on private properties by building hundreds of custom-designed rain gardens. These gardens reduce the high volume flows that damage riparian habitat and contribute to erosion in San Vicente Creek.

Healthy Soils Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Crane's Landing Soil Improvement Project	Dona Aña	Doña Ana Soil and Water Conservation District sponsored keyline plowing, imprinting, seeding native cover crops and mulching on 73 acres near Rincon. The project enlivened compacted soils, incorporated existing mulch into topsoil, inhibited invasive weeds, and promoted a diverse mix of native grass species and wildflowers to support soil health, pollinators and bird diversity.
Lea County Improving Soil Quality and Health on Native Rangeland	Lea	Lea County Soil and Water Conservation District improved soil quality and health on 350 acres of native rangeland by applying compost made from horse manure and bedding, and implemented a grazing plan. The goal was to use organic matter, microbial diversity and improved cover to regenerate drought-degraded grassland.
Northeastern Soil and Water Conservation District Healthy Soil Initiative	Union	Northeastern Soil and Water Conservation District was the project sponsor for planting native grasses and other native vegetation to provide ground cover on 350 acres of cropland, rangeland and field corners around rural homes near Clayton.
Quay Ranch Orchard and Rangeland Soil Health Improvement	Quay	Quay Ranch implemented soil restoration practices that retain soil and water on 10 acres of grazing and orchard land. They improved degraded rangelands with cover cropping, mulching, reduced tillage, compost production and application, microbial inoculation, a crop/livestock system, and a managed grazing plan for chickens.
San Juan County Growing Forward Farm Healthy Soils Demonstration	San Juan	San Juan County Extension Service developed a 12-acre Healthy Soils Demonstration Area to showcase cover crops, improved tillage, composting, and biodiversity planting, transforming fallow land into an educational hub. The project aims to foster experiential learning in agriculture, youth development, and community health.

Riverscape Restoration Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Canadian River Riparian Habitat Restoration	Harding	Rio Grande Return planted 30,000 willows, 1,660 cottonwoods and other riparian shrubs on United States Forest Service and State Trust Lands in Mills Canyon and Alamita Canyon. Salt cedar had previously been removed in these canyons along the Canadian River, but it had not been replaced with native vegetation.
Bluewater Creek Riparian Restoration	Cibola	WildEarth Guardians planted 35,000 willows, 2,500 cottonwoods, and 500 riparian shrubs along Bluewater Creek to enhance stream shade, stabilize banks, and support wildlife, including coldwater fishery habitat. Protective fencing and grazing management improved water quality and transformed the area into a lush riparian forest within a few years.
Gallinas Village River and Floodplain Restoration	San Miguel	Hermit's Peak Watershed Alliance implemented the Gallinas River project to reduce downstream flooding, enhance groundwater recharge, and improve water quality by restoring the river's connection to its historic floodplain. It features a 60-foot-wide bioswale and berm system to divert and manage floodwaters, plus a detention basin that temporarily stores water, capturing sediment and debris while allowing slow release and infiltration.
Rio San Antonio Creek Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Habitat Restoration	Rio Arriba	Trout Unlimited treated 1.5 stream-miles of Rio San Antonio and Lagunitas Creek in Carson National Forest by placing trees and rocks to mimic natural processes like sediment transport and beaver dam building. Volunteers planted hundreds of willows to lower stream temperatures, improve fish habitat and enhance floodplain connection.
San Antonio Creek Beaver Habitat and Stream Restoration	Sandoval	Rio Grande Return constructed 200 Beaver Dam Analogs, Post-Assisted Log Structures, and Large Woody Debris Structures along 3.5 stream-miles of San Antonio Creek in Santa Fe National Forest. Thousands of willows were planted and protected with fencing. Beavers reoccupied the area and continue to maintain the riverscape.

Wetland Restoration Projects

Project Name	Project Location	Project Description
Cebolla Canyon Wetlands Restoration	Cibola	Albuquerque Wildlife Federation and partners have worked for two decades to restore wetlands and stream channels in Cebolla Canyon. Volunteers have hand-built hundreds of rock restoration structures such as Zuni bowls, one-rock dams and media lunas, decommissioned roads, and implemented grazing management, expanding saturated wetlands to more than 40 acres.
Midnight Meadows Wetland Restoration	Taos	Amigos Bravos has been restoring wetlands at Midnight Meadows using volunteer hand-built structures and earthmoving with machinery. In 2019, 79 rock and log structures were hand-built including Zuni bowls, one-rock dams, log mats and rock rundowns. Plug and pond structures were also built with machinery to slow and spread water.
Stewart Meadows Wetlands Waterfowl Habitat Improvement Partnership	Rio Arriba	The New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau led the effort to enhance waterfowl habitat by developing moist soil across 300 acres of formerly irrigated pasture at Stewart Meadows along Rio San Antonio. Flow splitters and shallow connected potholes were created to spread water across the floodplain.
Valles Caldera National Preserve - Sulphur Creek Wetland Restoration	Sandoval	Los Amigos de Valles Caldera led this wetlands restoration in the Valles Caldera National Preserve by constructing more than 100 earthen and rock structures to correct channel incision and raise the local water table. In addition, machine-built plug and pond structures and sod berms slowed and spread water, restoring 42 acres of wetlands.
Valle Vidal - Holman Creek Wetland Restoration	Taos	Quivira Coalition restored 40 acres of degraded headwater slope wetlands along Holman Creek in Valle Vidal using keyline design principles. They built log flow splitters, sod plugs, worm ditches, media lunas, Zuni bowls, and one-rock dams, to effectively slow, sink, and spread water across the landscape and rehydrate desiccated wetlands.

Appendix B. List of Programs Reviewed

The following programs were evaluated either through interviews, or review of program materials and websites. The authors of this report acknowledge that there are many other programs that could have been evaluated. Our review was not exhaustive, but was sufficient to identify patterns of barriers and opportunities.

Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District
- Forest Health & Wildfire Resiliency
- Agriculture & Soil Health
- Watersheds, Wetlands, & Recreation
- Urban Waters
- Education & Outreach

Department of Agriculture
- Healthy Soils Program
- Noxious Weed Program
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Soil and Water Conservation Commission

Department of Finance and Administration
- Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan
- Government Results and Opportunity Fund
- New Mexico Match Fund
- New Mexico Finance Authority
- New Mexico Water Trust Board
- Arizona Water Settlement Act Unit Fund
- Local Government Planning Fund
- Colonias Infrastructure Project Fund

Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Disaster Recovery
- Hazard Mitigation Bureau

Department of Transportation
- Dust Storm Mitigation & Safety Program
- NEPA & Environmental Compliance
- Roadside and Community Design
- Sustainability Program
- Wetland Mitigation Program

Department of Wildlife
- State Wildlife Action Plan
- Habitat Stamp Program
- Project Guidelines to Benefit Wildlife
- Share with Wildlife Program
- Pittman-Robertson Act Funds
- Wildlife Management Area Program

Economic Development Department
- Outdoor Equity Fund Grant Program
- Outdoor Recreation Division Trials+ Grant Program
- Outdoor Marketing Grant Program

Energy Minerals & Natural Resources Department

New Mexico Forestry Division
- Forest Stewardship Program
- Urban & Community Forestry Program
- Forest and Watershed Health Office

State Parks Division
- State Park Planning
- Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Environment Department
- Surface Water Quality Bureau
- River Stewardship Program
- Wetlands Program
- Clean Water Act 319h and the Wetlands Program
- Point Source Regulation Section
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
- Clean Water Act 404/401 Permitting
- Construction Programs Bureau
- Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program
- Rural Infrastructure Loan Program provides
- Drinking Water Bureau Source Water Protection Program

Finance Authority

Interstate Stream Commission/Office of the State Engineer
- Arizona Water Settlement Act/Unit Fund
- Regional Water Planning
- Acequia Program
- Rio Grande Basin Project (in collaboration with USBOR)
- Strategic Water Reserve

Indian Affairs Department

Office of Natural Resources Trustee

State Land Office

Non-State Organizations Reviewed

Forest Stewards Guild

Southwest Ecological Restoration Institute
- New Mexico Forest & Watershed Restoration Institute
- Conservation Science Center

The Nature Conservancy

United States Bureau of Reclamation

Organizational Analysis Gaps

The following agency programs are not represented in the program summaries because interviews were not conducted or up-to-date information was not readily available to ensure an accurate representation of the program.

- Tribal Sovereigns
- New Mexico Economic Development Department
  - Office of Strategy
  - Science and Technology
- New Mexico Office of the Governor - Climate Action Strategy
  - Climate Change Task Force
  - Technical Advisory Group
- New Mexico General Services Department
  - Facilities Management Division (Approximately 750 buildings owned, 380 properties leased).

Appendix C. Tribal Sovereigns

Rio Grande Return initiated outreach to all Nations, Tribes and Pueblos (Tribal governments) with lands in New Mexico by sharing introductory information about this Nature-Based Solutions analysis. One Pueblo responded, and we were grateful for the opportunity to meet and share more about the project. We recognize that engagement with Tribal governments requires a thoughtful, relationship-based approach, and that there is no one-size-fits-all method for communication or collaboration. This work takes time, trust, and dedicated capacity, both for Tribal governments and for those seeking to engage.

We are aware of a number of Nature-Based Solutions projects led by Tribal governments that demonstrate strong leadership and innovation, including work by the Mescalero Apache Tribe, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Santa Clara Pueblo, Zia Pueblo, Santa Ana Pueblo, Sandia Pueblo, Navajo Nation, and Zuni Pueblo. These projects, ranging from forestry and soil health to wetlands and riverscape restoration, highlight the deep expertise and long-standing stewardship practices within Tribal communities. Because we were not able to directly connect with representatives from these programs, we have included only limited detail out of respect for Tribal governments and data-sharing considerations.

We remain committed to listening to and learning from Tribal communities and will continue outreach and engagement, recognizing that building meaningful partnerships will require sustained effort, appropriate resources, and respect for Tribal priorities and protocols.

Appendix D. Revision Schedule of Planning Documents

The following is a list of known revisions schedules for state planning documents that should include Nature-Based Solutions.

Plan Name	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	PURPOSE	CURRENT PLAN DATE	UPDATE SCHEDULE	NEXT UP-DATE
Agency Five-Year Facilities Master Plans	Each State Agency	To create a comprehensive, data-driven framework that aligns an agency's physical real estate footprint with its long-term operational goals, statutory duties, and available taxpayer funding.	2026	Annually; all state agencies must submit by July 1	2027
Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan	Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department	To create a comprehensive, state-wide blueprint to prepare for and manage extreme climate events like droughts, wildfires, extreme heat, and heavy precipitation.	2024	As needed	2026
Community Wildfire Protection Plans	Counties, Municipalities, Watershed Groups, Homeowner Associations	To empower local communities to identify, prioritize, and mitigate their specific wildfire risks through a collaborative, data-driven strategy.	Variable (65 communities)	Every five years; annual review	Variable
County Hazard Mitigation Plans	Each New Mexico County	To establish a localized community-specific strategy that reduces long-term risks to life, property, and critical infrastructure from natural disasters.	Variable 2017-2021 (33 counties)	Every five years	Variable
50 Year Water Action Plan	Office of the Governor/ Interstate Stream Commission/ Environment Department	To secure the state's water future in response to projections of severe climate-driven water shortages.	2024	Updated as needed on dashboard	Not applicable

Plan Name	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	PURPOSE	CURRENT PLAN DATE	UPDATE SCHEDULE	NEXT UP-DATE
Forest Action Plan	Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department	To provide a comprehensive, data-driven strategy for managing, protecting, and restoring the state's forests and watersheds in the face of climate change, historic fire exclusion, and aridification.	2020	Complete rewrite every 10 years; amendments as needed	2030 (beginning 2027)
Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plans	Local governments, state agencies, and Tribal governments	To help cities, counties, state agencies and Tribal governments identify, prioritize, and secure funding for critical public projects over a five-year period.	2026	Annually	2027
Nonpoint Source Management Plan	Environment Department	To describe how the state will reduce, control, and prevent water pollution originating from diffuse, nonpoint sources to protect surface and groundwater resources.	2024	Every five years	2028/2029
Regional Water Plans	Interstate Stream Commission	To reinvigorate local water management by creating data-driven, practical strategies to handle severe climate-driven water shortages and aridification.	Variable 2016-2017 (currently 16 regions)	Every 10 years	2028/2029 (will be reduced to 9 regions)
Soil and Water Conservation District Land Use Plans	Each Soil and Water Conservation District	To establish local, community-driven strategies for the protection and sustainable management of soil, water, and natural resources, while ensuring local interests are formally considered in state and federal regulatory decisions	Variable (47 districts)	Every five years; amended as needed	Variable

Plan Name	RESPONSIBLE AGENCY	PURPOSE	CURRENT PLAN DATE	UPDATE SCHEDULE	NEXT UP-DATE
Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan	Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department	To provide guidance for the allocation of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program funding, and to serve as an actionable plan to build partnerships and guide sustainable outdoor recreation development across the state.	2021	Every five years	2026
State Park Plans	Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department	To provide direction for the management and development of the parks in the New Mexico state parks system in a manner that enhances recreational opportunities, protects park resources and provides for public input and protects the environment.	Variable (35 state parks)	Every five years	Variable
State Water Plan	Interstate Stream Commission	To coordinate regional water rights, track water management policies, and guide statutory resource distribution statewide.	2023	Every five years	2028
State of New Mexico Hazard Mitigation Plan	Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management	To identify the state's highest natural disaster risks and establish a long-term strategy to reduce the loss of life, property, and economic damage.	2023-2028 (amended 2025)	Every five years	2028
Tribal Hazard Mitigation Plans	Optional – some Pueblos, Tribes and Nations have them for FEMA eligibility	To reduce disaster risks, protect Tribal sovereignty and cultural resources, and secure federal funding through long-term strategies.	Variable	Every five years	Variable

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A series of stormwater harvesting basins fill during a large monsoon storm event (July 2026) at the Morningside community-green stormwater infrastructure project in Albuquerque . Image credit: Margaret Keller, community leader.