



Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program

Est. 2000

Executive Committee (EC) Meeting Summary

July 31, 2025, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM MST

Location: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Albuquerque District Office, MPR Conference Room
4101 Jefferson Plaza NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, USA

Attendance

Matt Miller, Hira Walker, Stephanie Jentsch, Danielle Galloway – USACE
Kim Eichhorst, Matt Leister – BEMP
Kyle Harwood – Buckman Direct Diversion
Jenny Davis – FWS
Jennifer Faler, Lynette Giesen, Shannon Nelson – BOR
Chandler Farnworth – DOI Solicitor's Office
Debbie Lee – UNM
Mark Kelly, Francesca Shirley – ABCWUA
Doug McKenna, Nathan Schroeder– Pueblo of Santa Ana
Sharon Wirth – NMISC
Bill Grantham – NM Dept of Justice
Teresa Smith de Cherif – Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District
Paul Tashjian, Tucker Davidson – Audubon Southwest
Virginia (Ginny) Seamster– NMDGF
Michael (Scial) Scialdone – Pueblo of Sandia
Colleen McRoberts – City of Albuquerque, Open Space Division

Decisions:

- ✓ Approval of the July 31, 2025 EC meeting agenda
- ✓ Approval of immediate considerations of revisions to By-Laws
- ✓ Approval of forming By-Laws Ad Hoc Group
- ✓ Next EC meeting: August/September 2025 (email to be sent to choose date)

Announcements:

- ❖ Mark Kelly stepped down as Non-federal Co-chair in June 2025. Debbie Lee with UNM is now the Non-federal Co-chair
- ❖ Santa Ana Pueblo Environmental Fair is August 23 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. There were over 400 visitors last year. Contact Doug if you would like to have a table. There are 35 signed up now and would like to get to 50.
- ❖ UNM ARID has new director (Ann Kinsinger) starting September 2025. She was previously with USGS. Would like to loop her into the Collaborative Program.

Welcome, Introductions, Agenda Review

The Non-Federal Co-Chair, Debbie Lee, University of New Mexico (UNM), opened the meeting, led introductions, and reviewed the July 31, 2025 meeting agenda.

- ✓ **Decision:** Approval of the July 31, 2025 EC meeting agenda

Signatory Funding and Project Updates

BOR

- Reclamation program management contract with UNM was cancelled; most other contracts are anticipated to continue.
- ET Toolbox now called Middle Rio Grande Water Management Toolbox and can be found here: <https://www.usbr.gov/uc/albug/water/ETtoolboxV2/home.html>

USACE

- LTC Matt Miller reports that personnel is an issue for federal agencies, 15-16 percent reduction since January at the district – due to early retirement, DRPs and general attrition. Down from 360 to 300 personnel. About a 16% reduction in personnel but workload is unchanged.
- FY26 funding for the collaborative program: staff and some funding through FY26. Hira and Ryan's (oversight) positions and some resource providers/engineers are funded through FY26. No funding for FY25 was received per Hira. They are using carry over funding from FY22-24 and are being careful to extend and stretch funding.
- BEMP funding is a priority as they are only receiving 1/4 of what they normally get and their funding ends July 2026.
- Program Portal funding ends in April 2026.

Pueblo of Santa Ana

- Tribal specific federal grants are beginning to open up. There are positive indications that Tribal funding is a priority however it is hard to see beyond 3 years.
- Odonata surveys discussed. Nathan has been doing weekly surveys for 5 years to produce a small dataset.
 - **Action Item: The group expressed interest in a future presentation on this topic.**
 - **Action Item: Nathan and Ginny Seamster will have a follow-up conversation on these survey data.**

Southwest Audubon

- They are continuing to lease hundreds of acre feet of water with funding that goes through 2035. This is in coordination with FWS. They can store water to improved availability.
- Bird surveys at 6 outfalls for 5 years (Tucker's work). Looking at riparian obligate birds and the select habitat they use. Habitat characterization work using a drone.
- Basin Study work that is funded year by year through foundation support in 6 reaches is ongoing.

ABCWUA

- Continuing spring egg monitoring, working with FWS.
- Continuing to fund city's Aquatic Conservation Facility (ACF) for broodstock which is written into their BO.
- Southside Water Reclamation Plant (SWRP) Outfall restoration site – construction was fully grant funded. Monitoring includes groundwater and vegetation transects.
 - **Action item: Schedule a Collaborative Program field trip to the SWRP outfall restoration site.**

BEMP

- Kim reports FY26 funding has across-the-board been reduced. Collecting less data at some sites (17 of 25 are currently funded).

- **Action Item: Let Kim know of any sites and/or datasets that are important to your agency's work.**

NMISC

- Sharon Wirth says funding is stable or growing (especially for large conveyance projects with MRGCD and BOR). Also funding for the Strategic Water Reserve for the State to purchase water rights. This benefits both species and compact compliance.
- Planning for sediment management on the Rio Chama.
- Efforts to build a database and data repository is important. This has been brought into focus with the recent loss of 'brain trust' with so many people leaving/turning over.

NMDGF

- Statewide Riparian Conservation Opportunity Area (RCOA) mapping with rankings to separate areas to conserve from those where restoration may be needed to enhance habitat quality. The scale goes from A to D, with A = conserve, and D= has some high-quality habitat to quality as a RCOA but restoration would make it better. Emphasis is on a basin wide or statewide level to help prioritize riparian habitat projects. New 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan has been submitted to USFWS for review (they are just starting review and the submitted document is on NMDGF's website: [State Wildlife Action Plan - NMDGF](#)).
- State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) core team for review and revision is being expanded as we shift to a focus on conversations focused on SWAP implementation. One goal of these conversations is to identify places for collaboration and shared funding. Not capping the group size for these implementation-focused meetings; emphasis is on sharing information on work being done regarding Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the state.
 - **Action Item: Reach out to Ginny if interested in joining/participating.**
 - **Action Item: The group expressed interest in a SWAP presentation for the Collaborative Program. Debbie will coordinate with Ginny on this.**
- Two motus Stations installed in March (at Bernardo Wildlife Management Area) and June 2025 (at the Albuquerque Regional Office). This is a non-invasive remote monitoring approach that requires tagged birds to come within a certain distance. Small tags are detected passively. Installing 50 stations is the mark/goal. These 2 stations are live or coming online. Trying to be strategic with the distribution of 50 stations.
 - **Action Item: The EC asked if there is a location map. Ginny will ask. . (Follow-up - Installed stations can be viewed here: <https://motus.org/dashboard/#> . NMDGF still identifying some of the locations, so map of all 50 not yet available).**

UNM

- RGSM Genetics Monitoring and Assessment project is continuing with Megan Osborne as the PI.
- A grant from Thornburg Foundation was just received for the ***Future Scenarios Planning Workshop for Drought and River Drying in the Middle Rio Grande*** which will be held in the Fall of 2025
 - **Action Item: Let Debbie know of others who should be invited to the workshop.**

Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District (joining remotely from Alaska)

- Will provide some funds for Drought and River Drying workshop
- Theresa has been made aware of New Mexico Water Trust Board funding opportunities to support the Collaborative program. The Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District could serve as a fiscal agent to support work for this Collaborative.
- Theresa is serving on new Valencia County Arroya Flood Control District; will be running next year. Opportunities to collaborate and seek funding sources.

City of Albuquerque, Open Space Division

- City council approved Open Space Division getting 3 new positions dedicated to bosque management. Capacity has been a bottleneck. Two of the 3 are brand new positions (being developed) and the other is a Forester position (existing)
- Should be receiving GeoSystems Analysis, Inc. (GSA) report for long term habitat action plan.
- Additional thinning needed and planting natives. An additional 200 acres needs work. Developing a new prescription with State Forestry (hazardous fuels mitigation project).
- Working with many partners (MRGCD, USACE, BOR, local fire departments) to remove jetty jacks. These present a safety issue especially at night (due to unseen wires). Jetty jack removal efforts discussed by EC. This needs to be coordinated. Some jetty jacks are still serving a purpose (for example at RM 163 Project site).
- There have been several small fires that have NOT gotten out of control due to effective response.
- A new Bosque Stewards Program has started. Increased community engagement and volunteers working on trail maintenance, herbaceous weed removal.

Pueblo of Sandia

- State Forestry funded 3 more years of goats coming to the Pueblo for fuels reduction (clearing the leaf litter, invasive weeds and debris since there is no longer flooding). This program has been a great success.
- BOR-funded projects: Biochar project planned for this fall with inoculation and planting in the spring and Hazardous fuels reduction project next to the RM 199 Project.
- Kim mentioned a 3-D printing technology at UNM with mycorrhizal fungi based on the structure of the soil you want it to go into (includes inoculum), and it stays in place.
 - **Action Item: Kim will connect Scial with the UNM researcher doing this work.**
- Ginny with NMDGF asks if the biochar work will be monitored. Schiel says yes, this is planned. He notes soil amendment seems to be the key to success based on his experience. Dead and downed cottonwoods will be more of an issue going forward.
- Debbie L. mentions UNM has been looking at how to support the Wood for Life movement, to get downed wood to the places that need it. MRGCD has a tub grinder to make mulch. Theresa notes mulch is a high value commodity that can serve multiple purposes.
- Debbie highlights a recently awarded NSF grant which includes investigating potential economic development revenue streams for communities to benefit from forests and watershed management, such as fuels reduction removal. The intent is to support local businesses (start-up). Could develop into a local cottage industry around dead and downed wood (business opportunity).
- Theresa adds that the Valencia Soil and Water District is also exploring uses of downed cottonwoods. They have a biochar kiln that can be moved (it comes apart) so others can use. Happy to share and collaborate.
 - **Action item: A field trip was suggested by the City of Albuquerque representative to see the kiln. Theresa indicated they own the kiln which came from a State grant.**
 - **Action item: A future Collaborative Program meeting to discuss downed trees.**

Buckman Direct Diversion

- Rick Carpenter has retired. There have been no other staffing changes.
- Brad Prada, the new facilities manager, will be coming to a future EC meeting.

MRGESCP By-Laws

- Suggested revisions for today's meeting are to revise the appointment of the Federal Co-Chair to match language associated with the Non-Federal Co-Chair as there are no statutes requiring Secretarial appointment of Federal co-chair.
- Motion to approve a change to the By-Laws as edited from Audubon Southwest – no objections, motion passes.

- **Action Item: Lynette will work with Chandler to make sure revisions are incorporated and posted to the Program Portal.**
- Additional revisions will be necessary.
 - **Action Item: Formation of the By-Laws Ad-Hoc Group made up of Chandler Farnworth, Bill Grantham, Trevor Stevens, Kyle Harwood and Lynette Giesen. Sharon Wirth will also see if Chris Shaw can join.**
 - **Action item: Debbie Lee will update the charge for the By-Law Ad-Hoc Group for review at the next EC meeting.**
 - **Action item: Schedule next EC meeting for August/September to discuss Program direction/options and By-Laws.**

Habitat Restoration Coordination Field Trip

- Debbie discusses Habitat Restoration Ad Hoc Group field trips. Every other meeting is intended to be a field trip. Perhaps all meetings should be field trips? A few ideas for next trip shared: Rhodes Property, Buckman Direct Diversion HR sites, SWRP, Harvey Jones Outfall. Others? The following ideas were offered:
 - Biochar kiln at Valencia – Theresa is happy to host. Could also have meeting there.
 - Isleta Reach suitable habitat and outfalls work
- **Action Item: Hira, Paul, and Tucker to plan the next HR Field trip which will be a tour of several outfalls plan this in the next month or two. After the next EC meeting (which will likely be in early Sept).**

Public Comment and Announcements

- Weekly Announcements: Please send emails with events, announcements, etc. to Debbie Lee
- Birds in the Albuquerque Reach include flycatchers; less cuckoos (but they are also present). Must assume it is occupied. Cutting trees counts as take.
 - **Action Item: USFWS will send out an email about this**
- Group agrees that guidelines related to Russian olive and bird use would be helpful.
 - **Action Item: A small group (Jenny Davis, Hira Walker, Tucker Davidson, Colleen McRoberts, and Francesca Shirley) will work on this.**
- Lynette suggested that each Signatory to take notes at the EC meetings.
 - **Action Item: Tucker Davidson, Audubon Southwest, will take notes at the next EC meeting.**
- With budget shortfalls, there are several projects that need funding.
 - **Action Item: Fiscal Funding Committee to identify budget shortfalls for projects**
- The Buckman Direct Diversion representative expresses a need to clarify the 3 options from the December 2024 workshop summary. Short option descriptions may lead to different understandings.
 - **Action Item: Debbie, Lynette will develop more detailed descriptions of each option.**
 - Lynette noted that the options have morphed since the December meeting. More of an information sharing focus now. Nothing has been voted on.
- Mailing list is broken (formatting issue).
 - **Action Item: Please email Lynette and Debbie with who you want on the mailing list.**
 - **Action Item: Portal needs to be updated with current EC members.**