



## Middle Rio Grande Location Generates Environmental, Economic, and Social Benefits in the Watershed

The Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) in Albuquerque, NM involves multiple federal, state, and local partners working together to improve waterways in the Middle Rio Grande. The Partnership is co-chaired by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Other federal partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Transportation (DOT), the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Defense. Additionally, Tribal, State, and local officials, as well as community stakeholders and nonprofits, are working to reconnect urban communities with their waterways — while extending environmental, economic, and social benefits.

**ABOVE:** Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge is located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and it is the first Urban National Wildlife Refuge in the Southwest.

### Project Highlights:

The Middle Rio Grande UWFP location is:

- Developing the first urban National Wildlife Refuge in the Southwest: the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge
- Advancing community development through the Bridge Boulevard Corridor, a project supported by HUD and DOT, which is in close proximity to the future refuge
- Leveraging local, state, and federal resources to support the sustainability of the Middle Rio Grande
- Working on clean-up efforts and ecosystem restoration
- Promoting citizen science and environmental education
- Encouraging community involvement

### Introduction

The Rio Grande is over 1,900 miles long, running from its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains near Creede, CO and flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. The Middle Rio Grande holds cultural and historical significance to nearby residents, who continue to use it as prior generations have. The watershed is sandwiched between two tribes: the Isleta Pueblo to the south of Albuquerque and the Sandia Pueblo to the north, with additional tribes north of the area. There are a number of underserved neighborhoods within the location area, where residents face high levels of unemployment and poverty.

The Middle Rio Grande faces numerous challenges in balancing competing needs within a limited water supply and other resource constraints. Long-term drought is affecting natural and human communities living along the river.



**ABOVE:** University of New Mexico students perform water sampling through the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program.

## Creating an Urban Wildlife Refuge

The partnership is supporting the growth and development of the first urban National Wildlife Refuge in the Southwest Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): the Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge. The area was originally a dairy farm, but groups sought to restore its natural habitat by purchasing about 50 acres of the land at a time. The current refuge spans 570 acres. This initiative has involved diverse stakeholders from the county, state, and federal level, as well as the nonprofit “Friends of Valle de Oro” which has supported the acquisition of the land.

The Urban Wildlife Refuge will have a positive economic impact on the region. According to an *analysis* published by the USFWS, national wildlife refuges added \$2.4 billion to the economy and supported more than 35,000 jobs in Fiscal Year 2011. In addition, the project hopes that local residents will also develop a stronger connection with the Middle Rio Grande watershed.

## Middle Rio Grande Restoration Project

Efforts to restore the ecosystem include restoring native vegetation and enhancing hydrologic function by removing unnecessary jetty jacks, removing select invasive vegetation and planting native vegetation, and establishing shrub thickets and native tree canopy. Further, restoration includes

transportation improvement plans, which will add trails within and leading to the refuge.

## Promoting Redevelopment of the Bridge Boulevard Corridor

The partnership supports implementation of the sustainability improvements that were adopted in the Bridge Boulevard Redevelopment Plan, a planning initiative funded by HUD and DOT. The corridor runs from Coors Boulevard to the Barelás Bridge, a distance of roughly three miles. Plans are to transform Bridge Boulevard into a mixed-use, pedestrian, and transit-friendly corridor that honors and maintains the unique history and character of the community. The redevelopment of this corridor will increase safety, reduce traffic congestion, revitalize neighborhood businesses, improve housing affordability, and manage environmental impacts.

## Citizen Science Projects - Urban Waters Small Grants

This citizen science project is supported by the Urban Waters Small Grants, and is being implemented by four organizations, including Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, Earthforce, Amigos Bravos, and Talking Talons Youth Leadership.

### Measuring Success

At the Middle Rio Grande location, success will be measured by evaluating several environmental, social, and economic activities, including the following:

- Implementing new Urban Wildlife Refuge restoration projects
- Completing new Bridge Boulevard Corridor redevelopment projects
- Teaching citizens about water quality and ecosystem health
- Working collaboratively to demonstrate innovative and creative ways to incorporate green infrastructure in redevelopment and development opportunities
- Improving access to and maintaining the integrity of the historical and cultural aspects of the Middle Rio Grande
- Creating new jobs