



# GET A GRIP

The Newsletter of the Gila Resources Information Project

PROMOTING  
HEALTHY  
COMMUNITIES  
BY PROTECTING  
OUR ENVIRONMENT  
SINCE 1998

WINTER 2024-2025

## *Achieving Tree Equity in Our Communities*

# GRIP PARTNERS WITH WNMU TO CREATE SWNM COMMUNITY FORESTRY NETWORK



The SWNM Community Forestry Network provided trees for the Bayard Union Hall rainwater harvesting project spearheaded by SWNMACT. Eric Brown of SWNMACT helped plant trees in July 2024.

By Allyson Siwik, Executive Director

Venture down to Big Ditch Park on a hot summer day and experience firsthand one of the biggest benefits of trees. The native cottonwoods and box elders and other trees that grow within the riparian corridor provide shade and cooling for the park and the San Vicente Trail system, creating a lovely respite from the heat. In addition to mitigating urban heat, trees deliver other benefits like beautification, physical health and well being, improved air and water quality, wildlife habitat, stormwater collection, and increased property values.

Recognizing that many disadvantaged communities in the U.S. don't have sufficient tree canopy cover to realize these benefits, the Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) dedicated \$1.5 billion to urban and community forestry projects across the nation to achieve equal access to the benefits of trees, known as "tree equity".

Western New Mexico University (WNMU) and GRIP received a 5-year grant through this US Forest Service-funded program to expand the tree canopy in disadvantaged communities in southwest New Mexico.

The Rural Southwest New Mexico Integrated Urban Forestry Project aims to plant trees and provide technical support to community partners to ensure that our trees are cared for like the valuable resources

we know them to be. We are working in Silver City, Santa Clara, Hurley, Bayard, Deming and Lordsburg to grow each community's tree canopy by providing planning, logistics, and planting and tree care assistance to improve the health of our urban trees.

As part of the project, WNMU is developing a certificate program aimed at providing green jobs training and continuing education for basic tree workers, addressing workforce needs and economic development in the growing industry of tree care within New Mexico and beyond. Building upon its Tree Campus USA designation, WNMU is creating an arboretum and teaching garden to provide hands-on training for students and for community members wanting to care for trees in their own yards.

For the community-based portion of the project called the Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network (SWNMCFN), GRIP and Integrated Biological Solutions (IBIS) are working within each community to provide planning and planting of 1,000 trees. We are compiling relevant data needed to create a road map for where stewardship is needed for existing trees and where to plant the shade for future generations. We serve as the technical support for each community to develop a unique plan that is just right for them.

We have also established a network to provide ongoing support to partner (Continued on page 2)

## Letter from the Executive Director



As we were putting the finishing touches on this issue of GetAGRIP, we were thrown for a loop by the new administration's federal funding freeze that could put in jeopardy our USDA-funded Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network project and slow down other projects with a federal

nexus. Judges temporarily stopped the freeze, but the future of the project is uncertain as the White House reviews more than 2600 federal funding programs and eliminates critical environmental programs it doesn't like, such as progress on climate change and environmental justice.

Legal experts agree that it's illegal to clawback funds

approved by Congress and for which there are already government contracts in place. Until this plays out in the courts, we and our partners continue to move ahead with tree planting and tree care projects in Silver City, the Mining District, Deming and Lordsburg that will build a healthy tree canopy for our communities.

Meanwhile, the administration has opened up public lands to drilling and mining and is attacking the Environmental Protection Agency responsible for implementing our nation's bedrock environmental laws that protect public health and the environment. Needless to say, now is not the time for backsliding on environmental progress as we face mounting disasters due to climate change.

It can be overwhelming to figure out what to do as an authoritarian takes over the White House and we feel helpless to stop the destruction of our government, laws, and democracy. (Continued on page 2)



## *Grant County AIR-WISE:* GRIP AND UNM DEPLOY PARTICULATE AIR MONITORING NETWORK FOR REAL-TIME DATA ACCESS

Imagine being able to track the air you breathe in real time, right in your own neighborhood. With advancements in low-cost sensor technology, the Grant County AIR-WISE community air quality monitoring network is providing critical, real-time data to empower residents to protect their health, tackle air pollution, and advocate for cleaner air.

Through a partnership between GRIP, the University of New Mexico NM INSPIRES Center, and Roger Tree of Gila Tech, LLC, the project has deployed 8 PurpleAir sensors around Grant County with 10 more in the pipeline. Monitors are located in the Cliff-Gila Valley, Mimbres Valley, Grant County Airport, downtown Silver City, Hanover, Bayard and Pinos Altos.

The climate crisis has brought about long-term drought that has harmful consequences for our air quality – from more frequent and severe wildfires that produce fine particles, referred to as particulate matter 2.5 microns or less in diameter or PM2.5, and from fugitive dust composed of particles 10 microns or less in diameter or PM10. In southwest New Mexico, our air quality is also affected by long-range transport from urban areas like Phoenix and El Paso-Juarez, vehicle emissions, and local sources like wood stove smoke and mining.

Given their small size, these particles can be inhaled deeply into the lungs causing a range of respiratory and cardiovascular effects, including exacerbation of asthma, increased risk of respiratory infections, and premature death in individuals with heart or lung disease.

That's why real-time air monitoring data is a critical public health tool in rural areas such as ours where federal and state air quality monitoring does not exist.

Residents can access local particulate air quality data collected from the Grant Co. AIR-WISE monitoring network at the project website at [air-wise.org](http://air-wise.org). Air quality concentrations are color coded to provide health risk messages that residents can use to make personal decisions regarding daily activities to protect their personal health.

Although we are in the process of analyzing the data we've collected so far, our network has measured PM2.5 from wood stove smoke in downtown Silver City, as well as particles from the haboob (dust storm) that passed through southwest New Mexico in June 2024.

Community outreach and education is a major component of the air monitoring initiative. GRIP hosted three Aldo Leopold Charter School interns in spring 2024 to help with deployment of the sensors, development of outreach tools, and education of community members at Gila Earth Day.

The Grant County AIR-WISE project is not just an investment in data—it's an investment in people, public health, and a cleaner, brighter tomorrow.

Grant County AIR-WISE is online at [air-wise.org](http://air-wise.org).



**GILA RESOURCES  
INFORMATION PROJECT**  
Promoting Healthy Communities by  
Protecting Our Environment Since 1998

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## SWNM Community Forestry Network

(Continued from page 1)

communities. The group provides guidance every step of the way to overcome the barriers to tree care that are specific to small, rural communities. Based on the needs that are identified by partner communities, we are helping them with grant writing, planting logistics, shared educational materials, graphic resources, or whatever else is needed to steward community forests.

GRIP has hired Mariah Runnels as our Tree Stewardship Coordinator to manage SWNMCFN tree planting and tree care projects. (Find out more about Mariah on page 2.) We've also hired Denise Smith as the Community Forestry Liaison for the Mining District, while we're providing grants to Lordsburg and Silver City for staff to serve in the liaison position for those communities.

More than 380 people across southwest New Mexico provided input to their community's forestry plan. We are in the process of compiling these survey results and using them to inform the development of forestry plans to be completed in summer 2025.

To date, the project has planted 32 trees in public spaces in each of the 6 partner communities, as well as given away 216 tree seedlings and 22 native wildflower seed packets at community outreach events. Over 80 kids helped plant trees as part of the project. Aldo Leopold Charter School planted trees in Silver City, Hurley and Santa Clara, while we partnered with SWNM Arts Culture and Tourism to plant trees and install irrigation at the Bayard Union Hall. Kids from the NM Wildlife Federation's Vamos a Pescar event helped plant trees at Trees Lake in Deming.

In 2025, we expect to provide tree care (pruning, removal of dead trees) to each community through Southwest Tree Solutions. We'll also plant 30 - 40 trees in public spaces in each community, and Stream Dynamics will build green stormwater infrastructure to harvest stormwater from streets for supplemental irrigation as needed. Additionally, plans are in the works to partner with Tree New Mexico, also an IRA grant recipient, to organize residential tree planting through its Tree Stewards program.

To find out more and stay on top of urban forestry projects in your community, visit our project website at [swnmforestry.org](http://swnmforestry.org) where you can find community survey results, sign up for our email list, find out about volunteer opportunities, and join the Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network.

## Letter from the Executive Director

(Continued from page 1)

But we've shown that through collective action, we can stop harmful projects. We proved it with the Gila River diversion and the Holloman Air Force Base proposal. We also demonstrated that it's possible to get protective reclamation plans in place for Grant Co. mines through grassroots organizing. Citizen engagement was key to getting permits that require a half billion dollars in reclamation - 5 times more than what Phelps Dodge proposed.

The organization Choose Democracy advises: "Get as grounded as you can. Find your next step. Do it." Here are some suggestions:

1) Speak truth to power! Attend public hearings and make public comments on environmental and natural resource decisions at the local, state, and federal levels. Exercise your right to participate in public decision making processes. Check out our newsletter on current opportunities;

2) Write our elected officials in Washington and tell them to fight like hell against the administration's anti-environment and anti-people agenda;

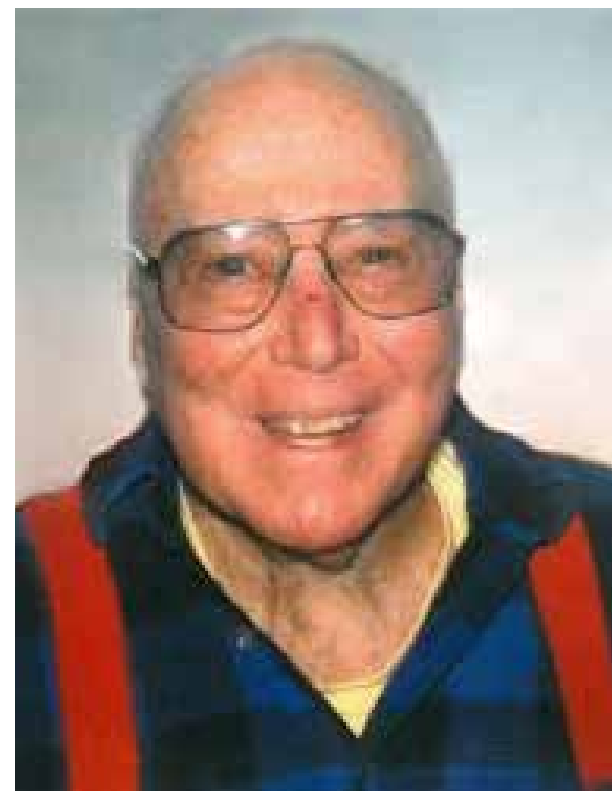
3) Donate to GRIP and other organizations so that we can keep up the fight on all fronts.

We need you. We need everyone to do something. The moment is now.

Thank you for stepping up.

Allyson Siwik  
Executive Director

## Thank You to GRIP Board Member David Rose



Our deepest gratitude to retiring board member David Rose for his many years of service to GRIP. David has dedicated his life to protecting our environment, democracy, and many, many other causes. He has made a difference not only to GRIP, but also to the several hundreds of organizations he supports every year. One of David's favorite mottos is "every ecosystem needs a protector." His passion for protecting the environment has been instrumental in our success and inspiring others to support our mission. Thank you, David, for your contributions and lasting impact on our organization and the planet!

## Welcome to New GRIP Staff



### Alesia Hallmark

Silver City Watershed Keepers/Pick It Up-Toss No Mas Coordinator

Alesia grew up in the forests of eastern Oklahoma.

Her curiosity about the natural world led her to B.S. degrees in Botany and Zoology from Oklahoma State University and a Ph.D. in Aridland Ecology from the University of New Mexico. As a researcher with the Sevilleta Long-Term Ecological Research program, Alesia studied the relationship between long-term patterns of climate, plant growth, and animal population dynamics across the Southwestern U.S. As the coordinator of the Silver City Watershed Keepers and Pick It Up-Toss No Mas programs, Alesia hopes to protect natural spaces and waterways of the greater Gila bioregion and encourage people to connect with their local ecosystems.



### Mariah Runnels

Tree Stewardship Coordinator

Growing up in Silver City, Mariah spent much of her free time immersed

in the stunning Gila wilderness. This formative experience profoundly shaped her academic path, leading her to study Landscape Architecture and deepening her passion for the natural world. With this background, Mariah aspires to contribute positively to the preservation of our natural resources and enhance the well-being of our community.

Mariah is coordinating tree planting and tree care projects for the Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network and Big Ditch Revitalization Project.

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## Thank you to our funders!

NM Environment Department	Just Woke Up Fund
NM Clean and Beautiful	Lineberry Foundation
Town of Silver City	National Forest Foundation
USDA Forest Service	

Legislative Update:

# Bills Introduced to Restore Water Quality Protections and Safeguard Drinking Water



Photo: Stock image

The 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Sackett v. EPA* significantly weakened federal protections under the Clean Water Act, leaving many of New Mexico's waterways without the safeguards our communities once relied on. As a result, an estimated 95% of New Mexico's rivers and streams and 88% of the state's wetlands are at risk of pollution. These water bodies, including the Mimbres and Gila Rivers and their tributaries, serve critical functions like maintaining a clean water supply for communities and healthy habitat for wildlife.

Compounding this issue, New Mexico lacks a state permitting program to regulate pollution discharges

into these now-unprotected waters. Additionally, New Mexico is one of only three states without U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) authority to administer the federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

New Mexico's state elected officials, regulatory agencies and environmental advocates all agree that we must increase state protections for our rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands. During the last three legislative sessions, lawmakers allocated funds to develop a state permitting program, but it's critical that we now pass two state bills that together will establish the legal foundations for long-term protections of the state's waters.

Sponsored by Senator Peter Wirth and Representative Kristina Ortez, Senate Bill 22 would allow New Mexico to create its own state surface water quality permitting program for waters that are no longer federally protected.

The sponsors also introduced Senate Bill 21 to give New Mexico the authority to take over permitting for waters that are still federally protected under the Clean Water Act, as 47 other states have done.

With the majority of New Mexico's waters no longer protected from pollution and degradation along with declining water supplies due to climate change, it is of paramount importance that we quickly safeguard all of our water resources. Water can't wait!

Your support online or in person at committee hearings and by contacting legislators will be needed to get this legislation passed.

Join GRIP's email list at [gilaresources.info](http://gilaresources.info) and stay tuned for email updates on how you can get involved.

## Earth Day 2025: Changing How We Celebrate, Deepening How We Act



This Earth Day, we're doing things differently. In 2025, we're reimagining how we celebrate our planet—focusing on deeper impact and collective action. The Continental Divide Trail Coalition will be hosting CDT Trail Days in Gough Park on Saturday, April 19. However, GRIP will be organizing separate Earth Day stewardship activities to protect biodiversity, safeguard our watersheds, and empower our community

Join us on April 19 for an Earth Day cleanup with Pick It Up-Toss No Mas, plant trees to shade and cool our towns with the Southwest New Mexico Community Forestry Network, and inventory our local flora and fauna as part of the City Nature Challenge April 25 - 28 to help us better understand biodiversity in our own backyard.

Mark your calendars for Earth Day and stay tuned online at [gilaresources.info](http://gilaresources.info) for more details about how you can give back to the planet this Earth Day.

## Businesses, Conservation Groups Slam Air Force Combat Training Proposal



Photo: Sgt Jorge Intriago

In a powerful show of opposition to the recent Air Force proposal to expand military combat training above the Gila Wilderness and other areas, thirty-nine organizations in New Mexico and Arizona submitted comments to the Air Force today expressing their serious concerns with its proposal to authorize low-elevation fighter jet maneuvers as low as 100 feet above ground level (AGL) and supersonic flights as low as 5,000 feet AGL in southern Arizona and southwest New Mexico.

More than 6,100 individuals and over 115 businesses in New Mexico and Arizona also submitted comments in opposition to the Air Force proposal.

"The Air Force's proposal will cause extreme noise and sonic booms above rural communities and tribal and public lands, including some of the Southwest's most fragile sky-island ecosystems, and beloved wilderness areas and national monuments. The Air Force has not justified why it can't continue to conduct this high-risk training at the Barry M. Goldwater Range," said Allyson Siwik, executive director of Gila Resources Information Project and partner in Peaceful Gila Skies.

Organizations told the Air Force that expanding military combat training over rural communities and tribal and public lands is not acceptable. The Air Force should restrict its lower elevation and supersonic flights, and other combat training, such as dropping chaff and flares, to the Barry M. Goldwater Range where it's already happening. The Air Force must not shift the burden of risk to rural and tribal communities in southern AZ and SWNM.

The Air Force is expected to release its final EIS this spring with a final decision by summer. Stay tuned at [peacefulgilaskies.com](http://peacefulgilaskies.com) or on Facebook @PeacefulGilaSkies.

## Judge Upholds Feral Cattle Removal to Protect Gila Wilderness

A federal judge has upheld the U.S. Forest Service's plan to remove feral cattle from the Gila Wilderness, dismissing objections from the livestock industry. The Gila, America's first designated wilderness and a vital ecological area, has suffered severe damage due to these unowned, unbranded, and unauthorized cattle. Public support for their removal has been strong, with more than 5,000 comments backing the plan, including the use of lethal measures.

The feral cattle have caused significant ecological

harm, including overgrazing native vegetation, trampling stream banks, and polluting critical water sources. These activities put at risk endangered and threatened species such as the Mexican spotted owl and Chiricahua leopard frog. Roundup efforts and years of monitoring confirm that the cattle are not tied to any ranching operations or active grazing allotments and reproduce independently.

The court's decision supports the Forest Service's legal authority to manage and protect federal lands.

## The Future of the Gila discussed at the 19th Gila River Festival

The 19th Gila River Festival celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Gila Wilderness and its role in protecting America's first Wilderness River as well as looked to the Gila's future. Exploring themes of long-term protection, climate resilience, cultural exchange, and stewardship, the event envisioned the Gila River's next hundred years and beyond.

Dr. Wendsler Nosie delivered an inspiring keynote address about the San Carlos Apache Tribe's tireless

effort to prevent the desecration of Oak Flat, an Apache sacred site in what is now southeastern Arizona, from a massive underground mine. He urged all of us to band together against the economic forces that are taking away our land and destroying our environment.

In addition to a variety of field trips, music and art, a panel of community leaders discussed the future of the Gila River.

If you missed the keynote or panel discussion, video recordings of the events are available at [www.gilariverfestival.org](http://www.gilariverfestival.org)

### Gila River Festival Video Recordings Available

www.gilariverfestival.org

**DR. WENDSLER NOSIE SR**  
2024 Keynote Presentation

**COMMUNITY VOICES**  
Blueprints for the Future of the Gila River

# OSE Determines Freeport's Emma Pit will Impair Adjacent Domestic Wells



In 2021, Freeport-McMoRan filed an application for the Emma Expansion Project, a 337-acre project on the southeast side of the Tyrone Mine, just west of Highway 90. The plan? Mine out a 600-foot-deep open pit that will extend 200 feet below the water table, requiring constant dewatering.

Once operations end, the pit will fill, creating a toxic lake that exceeds state water quality standards — a long-term threat to wildlife. To manage this, Freeport proposes to remove 116 acre-feet of water annually, pumping it to the adjacent Tyrone Mine for process water or treatment at closure. That means pumping and treating polluted water forever.

Concerned about the impacts on domestic wells and local springs, GRIP, alongside nearby well owners, formally protested Freeport's water rights application in 2022. Our technical assessment showed that dewatering would impair domestic wells — a finding confirmed by the State Engineer's Hydrology Bureau in 2023. State experts also backed our concerns about potential impacts on a nearby spring. Based on these findings, the OSE Water Rights Bureau recommended denying the application.

In 2024, Freeport made an attempt to salvage their project, amending their application and claiming they

Photo: Julie Dermansky for EarthWorks

would use just a third of the water initially proposed. But the OSE Hydrology Bureau isn't convinced — their review still shows domestic wells will be affected.

This is promising news, but it's not over yet. We need to present our case at a formal OSE hearing to secure a final decision. The hearing is scheduled for April 1- 4, 2025, in Santa Fe.

## Water Rights Decision Looms Over Copper Flat Mine Reopening

*Public Comments Due February 24 to the Mining and Minerals Division*

## Freeport Proposes More Exploration at Tyrone Mine



Photo: James St. John

Freeport-McMoRan has applied for two copper exploration permits at its Tyrone Mine: the Emma Exploration Project and the Tyrone Peak Exploration Project. The state Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) held a joint public hearing for both applications on February 10, with public comments open until February 24.

The Emma Exploration Project will impact 60 acres, including roads and drill pads, as Freeport explores for copper at the proposed Emma Open Pit. After exceeding the 5-acre limit on its previous minimal impact permit, the company was fined \$25,000 and required to apply for a regular permit.

GRIP is concerned about Freeport's lack of transparency regarding potential impacts on nearby residents. Rather than providing the details on how it will take proactive steps to prevent impacts to neighbors, the company simply directs affected individuals to a grievance line—an inadequate response to community concerns.

Additionally, the Department of Game and Fish has

recommended basic wildlife protections, like fencing mud pits and capping drill pipes to prevent animals from getting trapped. Freeport has dismissed these requests in its response to agency comments.

The Tyrone Peak Exploration Project covers a massive 900-acre area, with 40 acres slated for disturbance in the initial phase. GRIP is alarmed by significant road construction that appears to have been completed without a permit, seemingly to dodge reclamation and financial assurance requirements. Google Earth imagery reveals extensive roadwork across the area between 2022 and 2024 — all before the permit application was filed in July 2024.

It's critical that regulators hold Freeport accountable by including exploration permit conditions that safeguard residents, wildlife, and the land. Make your voice heard by submitting public comments before the February 24 deadline. For more information on how you can participate, visit [www.gilaresources.info/wp/responsible-mining/](http://www.gilaresources.info/wp/responsible-mining/)



Photo credit: GRIP

New Mexico Copper Corporation (NMCC) is seeking to reopen the long-shuttered Copper Flat Mine near Hillsboro. The mine briefly operated under Quintana Minerals in 1982 but has remained idle ever since. The company faces a major hurdle: it doesn't have enough water rights to operate and properly close the mine.

NMCC applied to the Office of the State Engineer (OSE) to lease and transfer water rights from Santa Teresa, near El Paso, to the mine site. This move sparked strong opposition. Represented by the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, GRIP, the Percha Animas Watershed Association, Hillsboro Pitchfork Ranch, and the Sierra Club formally protested the transfer, along with Turner Ranch Properties and many others. We are concerned that the mine's operation would reduce flows in Percha and Las Animas creeks and the Rio Grande, threatening domestic water supplies, wildlife habitat, and recreation.

An OSE hearing took place in August 2023, with final briefs filed in early 2024. All eyes are on the state engineer as stakeholders await a decision that will have significant consequences for local ecosystems and water resources.

# 30 Years Later: Toxic Cleanup at Chino Mine Still Incomplete



Photo: Julie Dermansky for Earthworks

It's been 30 years since the New Mexico Environment Department and Freeport-McMoRan's predecessor, Phelps Dodge, signed the Chino Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) to clean up toxic contamination at the Chino Mine. Meant to be a state-managed alternative to a federal Superfund designation, this cleanup was supposed to take just ten years. Instead, it has dragged on for three decades — and the work is far from done.

Modern copper mining and processing at Chino began in 1910, long before environmental protections existed. Toxic metals from operations were released and deposited out across the land near the former Hurley

smelter, endangering local residents. Contaminated water flowed down Hanover and Whitewater creeks, rendering the riparian corridor lifeless. Copper levels in the water were so high that informal recovery operations sprang up along the creek to collect metal and sell it back to the company.

While progress has been made — including cleaning up residential soils in Hurley in 2007, removing toxic stream sediment from Whitewater Creek in 2019, and addressing discharges from historic mine sites — the pace has been excruciatingly slow. This decades-long delay is unacceptable.

Dedicated community members on the AOC's Community Work Group, including GRIP board members, have invested countless hours holding Freeport accountable.

We strongly urge the New Mexico Environment Department and Freeport to accelerate this process and finally finish the job. The people and environment of the Mining District have waited long enough — this cleanup must be completed without further delay.

NMED PHONE NUMBER TO REPORT  
A SPILL/ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE

**866-428-6535**

Report an Environmental Issue or Incident  
to the NM Environment Department

You can report an environmental concern or possible violation of a license, permit, or rule directly to NMED online at [www.env.nm.gov](http://www.env.nm.gov) >>> General >>> Report an environmental issue or incident, or call 866-428-6535. Please provide as much information as you can.

- What is the problem?
- Where is the problem located?
- When did the problem occur?
- How long has the problem been going on?
- What kind of materials or substances are involved?
- How much?
- Who is involved or caused the incident?
- Have any actions been taken already?

## Lithium Exploration on Lordsburg Playa Stalled



Photo: Patrick Alexander via Wikimedia Commons

Two proposed lithium exploration projects for the Lordsburg Playa — the Alkali Flats Lithium Brine Exploration and the Lordsburg Playa Lithium in Brine Exploration — are on pause for now.

Canadian-based Lancaster Resources has yet to provide the required financial assurance to the state, delaying permits and the start of exploration at Alkali Flats. Meanwhile, the state's Mining and Minerals Division (MMD) granted operator Frank Bain a six-month extension to post financial assurance for the Lordsburg Playa Lithium in Brine project. Bain attributes the nearly 5-year delay to a sharp downturn in lithium prices, which plummeted 90% over the past 18 months, stalling exploration investments across the industry.

Concerns about the environmental impacts from these projects remain front and center. MMD has already granted a public hearing for Phase 2 of the Lancaster Resources Project as exploration activities could disrupt the fragile Lordsburg Playa ecosystem and worsen air quality along Interstate 10, where dust and visibility are already serious issues, causing deadly pile ups on the highway. Given the ecological importance of the playa, careful management is essential to protect both the land and public health.

## BLM Faulted for Failing to Address Toxic Waste at Proposed Mine



Photo: Mark Bixby.

A coalition of environmental organizations recently won a legal victory against the development of a dolomite mine in the Florida Mountains near Deming. The Federal District Court for the District of New Mexico ruled that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by failing to fully assess potential water quality impacts from the mine's processing mill.

The lawsuit, filed by Friends of the Floridas, New Mexico Wilderness Alliance, WildEarth Guardians, Gila Resources Information Project, and Amigos Bravos, highlighted BLM's inadequate environmental review. Although the court didn't rule in the groups' favor on all issues, it agreed that the agency neglected to address pollution risks from magnesium sludge — 2,300 tons of toxic waste generated annually by dolomite processing. The court noted foreseeable threats to surface and groundwater, including increased chloride, nitride, and possibly toxic beryllium levels.

Local opposition has been strong due to the project's

environmental risks and industrial scale. The mine would involve blasting, extensive drilling, new roads, and industrial infrastructure near sensitive ecological and recreation areas. Operations would last 30 years, with up to 92 truck trips per day cutting through public and residential areas. Potential impacts include groundwater contamination, wildlife habitat disruption, and the degradation of the scenic Florida Mountains.

The mining company, American Magnesium, has already violated its state exploration permit by illegally cutting roads and expanding drilling areas. The State of New Mexico fined the company \$30,000 and required it to triple its reclamation bond.

Ongoing regulatory oversight will be crucial to holding the company accountable and protecting the region's land, water, and wildlife. The coalition remains committed to watchdogging the project and ensuring compliance with environmental protections.

# Battling Invasives to Save San Vicente Creek's Biodiversity

By Scott Zager, GRIP GIS Specialist/Plant Ecologist

Found within the arid landscapes of the American Southwest, gallery forests are vital ecosystems, providing biodiverse habitats along rivers, streams, and wetlands. One such hidden gem is the riparian corridor of San Vicente Creek, flowing just below downtown Silver City. This area harbors several towering cottonwoods, wildlife, and diverse plant species. However, the ecological health of this gallery forest has been under siege for decades by invasive species and disrupted natural stream function. Recognizing the urgent need for restoration, the Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP) partnered with the NM Environment Department, Town of Silver City, private landowners, and other partners to restore this critical area and inspire local stewardship.

The San Vicente Creek gallery forest supports over 150 plant species and approximately 200 bird species, along with 24 additional animal species. The perennial reach of the creek serves as a natural fishery for native minnows. Field classes from Western New Mexico University use the area for educational purposes, while high school students contribute to monitoring and restoration efforts. Tourists and locals visit daily, watching birds and enjoying the trail and the lush riparian forest.

However, non-native invasive plants such as Ailanthus (tree of heaven), Siberian elm, and Russian olive pose significant threats to the gallery forest. Ailanthus is particularly invasive, forming dense monocultures that outcompete native vegetation and inhibit other plant growth. Impaired stream function caused by damaging floods further prevents native tree reproduction, resulting in very few young cottonwoods growing beneath the canopy - a big problem for the long-term health of the riparian corridor.

GRIP secured two rounds of funding from the New Mexico Environment Department River Stewardship Program to combat these threats. GRIP's team of contractors - Southwest Tree Solutions, Stream Dynamics, and Gila WoodNet - eradicated non-native, invasive species by cutting trees and saplings and treating stumps with herbicide.



Photo: Allyson Siwik

The result of this work has been a substantial improvement in ecological quality.

Over 340 tons of non-native trees and slash were removed from the project area. Tree of Heaven trees were completely eliminated in the canopy, subcanopy and sapling layers while Siberian Elm trees in the canopy/subcanopy were substantially decreased on average by 64%. Some trees of Siberian elm were left in the canopy because they provide bird nesting habitat. However, all standing trees of Tree of Heaven were completely removed wherever it was found. The goal of the tree work was to open up the canopy so that native trees and shrubs would gain dominance in the riparian forest over the non-native species.

Stream Dynamics and Aldo Leopold Youth Conservation Corps students stabilized streambanks and restored wildlife habitat by planting more than 1200 willows and cottonwoods along San Vicente and Pinos Altos creeks.

Stream Dynamics built three grade control structures on San Vicente Creek that have reconnected the incised channel with the floodplain to restore natural stream function. These structures help spread water across the floodplain, recharging

groundwater and depositing nutrient-rich sediment for seed germination and plant growth.

Over the course of the 3-year project, Aldo Leopold Charter School Youth Conservation Corps and Silver City Watershed Keepers volunteers have dedicated hundreds of hours to planting native trees and shrubs and watering. Additionally, SWNMACT spearheaded planting and irrigation at the Waterworks site on Silva Creek.

While GRIP and its partners' efforts have significantly improved the gallery forest's ecological health, invasive species remain a persistent challenge. Long-term success will require sustained funding, community engagement, and professional management.

The restoration of San Vicente Creek is not only an investment in the future, but also a testament to the power of collaborative conservation. By protecting this riparian corridor, we ensure that future generations can continue to learn from, enjoy, and be inspired by the natural beauty and biodiversity of San Vicente Creek.

## Protecting Endangered Species at Dorsey Spring and Bear Creek



Photo: Allyson Siwik

The ecologically important Dorsey Spring and Bear Creek, a tributary of the Gila River, provide critical habitat for endangered species like the loach minnow and Chiricahua leopard frog. Bear Creek has been proposed as Critical Habitat for the loach minnow, while small populations of the Chiricahua leopard frog persist nearby. Restoration efforts aim to enhance these populations, as some in the area remain free from the deadly Chytrid fungus. Water withdrawals and grazing have turned once-permanent streams into dewatered channels, destroyed riparian vegetation, and degraded water quality, contributing to the decline of these species. The loach minnow has already been lost from 80-90% of its historical range.

In partnership with the NM Environment Department River Stewardship Program and the Gila National Forest, GRIP will restore 0.7 miles of Bear

Creek and 43.1 acres of riparian and upland habitat by constructing a cattle enclosure to protect this vital ecosystem. The enclosure will be built with durable fencing and cattle guards to protect habitat, improve water quality, and support endangered species. The project builds on existing conservation efforts to reconnect fragmented populations, promoting their resilience to environmental changes.

Once the enclosure is in place, GRIP and volunteers will plant willows and cottonwoods to stabilize stream banks and enhance wildlife habitat. This cost-effective, long-term solution will protect native species, restore vegetation, and improve watershed health.

Follow the project's progress at [gilaresources.info](http://gilaresources.info) or on Facebook @gilaresources.

**HELP RESTORE OUR STREAMS!**

**Volunteer with GRIP**

We're looking for volunteers to help with projects that improve water quality, stabilize streambanks, and create healthy habitats for fish and wildlife.

**What You'll Do**

Plant and water native vegetation  
Monitor water quality and habitat conditions

**Why Volunteer?**

Gain hands-on conservation experience  
Enjoy the outdoors and meet like-minded people  
Help protect endangered species and improve watershed health



To sign up, send an email to [grip@gilaresources.info](mailto:grip@gilaresources.info)

# Silver City Watershed Keepers Updates

By Alesia Hallmark, Silver City Watershed Keepers Coordinator

## Safeguarding Our Streams: Monitoring Water Quality in San Vicente and Pinos Altos Creeks

GRIP's Silver City Watershed Keepers is dedicated to safeguarding the health of our urban streams. Through consistent water quality monitoring and collaboration with town leaders, we strive to keep San Vicente and Pinos Altos Creeks safe for our community and the ecosystems they support.

This year, we conducted seasonal surveys at five sites within San Vicente and Pinos Altos Creeks, including a recently added monitoring location at the Silver City disc golf course, situated at the reclaimed Hearst Mill along Pinos Altos Creek. This new site, located upstream of the San Vicente sites, features cooler temperatures, clearer water, and lower dissolved oxygen levels, offering valuable insights into the natural progression of our waterways—from mountain springs and snowmelt, through Silver City, and into the Mimbres Basin Aquifer south of town.

For most of the year, water quality in our creeks met state surface water quality criteria. However, in July 2024, we observed elevated bacteria concentrations (total coliform and E. coli) at four of the five monitoring sites. The Town Utilities Department confirmed that no sanitary sewer overflows had occurred, pointing to potential sources such as wildlife and pet waste, leaking septic systems, or a possible sewer line issue.

Looking ahead, we are excited to continue partnering with community members and local students for water quality monitoring events. In addition, we will continue our efforts to establish native tree plantings along the riparian corridor, fostering a healthier and more resilient ecosystem.

Visit [silvercitywatershedkeepers.org](http://silvercitywatershedkeepers.org) for more information.

## Inspiring the Next Generation through Environmental Education



Photos: Silver City Watershed Keepers, National Center for Frontier Communities/Frontier Food Hub

In 2024, we had the immense joy of connecting nearly 300 students with the wonders of their environment. Thanks to the generous financial support from the New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund, the Lineberry Foundation, and the Alex Olsen and Martyn Pearson Memorial Donor Advised Fund at the Grant County Community Foundation, we successfully hosted three week-long Nature Discovery Summer Camps for 4th–6th graders from Silver City and the Mining District.

Students spent 30 hours immersed in the outdoors, exploring the unique ecosystems of the Gila bioregion. They learned about native trees, birds, and insects, studied stream biology while splashing in the Mimbres River, and discovered the importance of Wilderness areas alongside Forest Service staff on the Little Cherry Creek Trail. Indigenous elders joined us at the Gila River to teach students how to honor our local culture and history. To enhance the experience, we hired youth interns to lead small groups and teach lessons, providing them with valuable outdoor leadership opportunities.

In addition to the camps, we partnered with the Frontier Food Hub for their Journey Through the Food System events, bringing interactive activities to Hurley, San Lorenzo, Bayard, and Central elementary schools. More than 240 3rd–5th graders participated in hands-on lessons about how water moves through and is used in our watershed.

Looking ahead, we're excited to announce that the Nature Discovery Camp 2025 will return with expanded programming! Camps will take place in Silver City and Bayard this June. Stay tuned for updates—we can't wait to provide more adventures for our community's young environmental stewards.



Photo: Pick It Up-Toss No Mas

## Tackling Trash: 2024 Highlights from the Pick It Up - Toss No Mas Program

In 2024, our community came together once again to tackle litter and keep our town clean and beautiful. Through Pick It Up -Toss No Mas cleanup events, partnerships, and volunteer efforts, we made a significant impact on our parks, roads, and waterways, while raising awareness about the ongoing challenge of improper waste disposal.

We hosted ten cleanup events and supplied cleanup materials to partner groups and businesses. Our volunteers gave 648 hours of their time and cleaned 9,344 pounds of litter and debris from our parks, roads, and waterways. These annual sums are bittersweet. They show the hard work and dedication of volunteers and also illustrate how much trash is being improperly disposed of in our town. It will take continued efforts to stem the tide and change our culture around littering.

In 2025, we are dedicated to continuing our anti-littering campaign. We will continue to host cleanup events. Our first will be on February 15th. We will be recruiting more businesses to take our Business Pledge and individuals to Adopt-a-Road or Adopt-A-Stream. We will also be producing short information videos about proper waste disposal and continuing to use social media, radio, and print media to spread awareness.

## Congratulations to Loren Poole, Volunteer of the Year 2024!



Photo left to right - Former Pick It Up-Toss No Mas coordinator, Emily Cox; Loren Poole, GRIP Executive Director Allyson Siwik

Loren has dedicated countless hours to litter cleanup with Pick It Up-Toss No Mas and San Vicente Creek restoration projects. We appreciate his commitment to our community and environment. Thank you, Loren, for your outstanding contribution!



**YOUR GENEROSITY LEAVES A  
LASTING LEGACY**

Join the  
**GRIP for the Future  
Society**

Find out more at  
[www.gilaresources.info](http://www.gilaresources.info) or  
call Allyson at 575.538.8078



**City Nature  
Challenge**  
Silver City  
April 25-28, 2025



- Ⓞ Contribute to a global citizen science initiative
- Ⓞ Document biodiversity in your community
- Ⓞ Learn how to identify new species

## Taking part is easy!



Download the **iNaturalist app** to  
your smartphone or tablet.  
Every observation submitted  
during the event will count  
toward our goal!



Find wildlife



Take a photo



Share!

Join us for daily guided hikes with local  
naturalists or make observations on your own!

For more information, visit  
[silvercitywatershedkeepers.org](http://silvercitywatershedkeepers.org)




**BE A FORCE FOR NATURE.**  
Renew your membership today.

[www.gilaresources.info](http://www.gilaresources.info)

Gila River by Dennis O'Keefe

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### 57th Legislative Session (60 Days)

January 21 – March 22, 2025

More info: [nmlegis.gov](http://nmlegis.gov)

### Public Hearing:

#### Emma & Tyrone Peak Exploration

February 10, 2025 | 5 PM

Grant County Veterans Business &  
Conference Center

More info: [gilaresources.info](http://gilaresources.info)

### Pick It Up – Toss No Mas Cleanups

Third Saturday of the Month | 9 AM – Noon

Grant Co. Community Foundation Parking Lot

Upcoming Dates:

Feb 15 · Mar 15 · Apr 19 · May 17 · Jun 21 · Jul 19

Aug 16 · Sep 20 · Oct 18 · Nov 15

More info: [silvercitytossnomas.org](http://silvercitytossnomas.org)

### Earth Day 2025 Cleanup & Tree Planting

Saturday, April 19

More info: [gilaresources.info](http://gilaresources.info)

### Continental Divide Trail Days

Gough Park | Saturday, April 19

More info: [cdtcoalition.org/trail-days](http://cdtcoalition.org/trail-days)

### City Nature Challenge – Silver City

April 25–28

Sign up: [silvercitywatershedkeepers.org](http://silvercitywatershedkeepers.org)

### City Nature Challenge – Silver City

April 25–28

Sign up at: [silvercitywatershedkeepers.org](http://silvercitywatershedkeepers.org)

### Nature Discovery Summer Camp

For 4th–6th Graders

Silver City & Bayard | June 2025

More info & registration coming soon:

[silvercitywatershedkeepers.org](http://silvercitywatershedkeepers.org)



**Gila Resources Information Project**

305A North Cooper St.  
Silver City, NM 88061

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