

Protecting Our Water



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Valencia Water Watchers
September, 2025

Valencia Water Watchers

We advocate for clean, safe water for Valencia County residents, and for sustainable, equitable access to water for generations to come.

We promote awareness and educate our community about water issues.

We have been organizing around local water concerns since Jan. 2020.



Rio Grande, Albuquerque, July 2025



New Mexico is facing a **LONG-TERM WATER CRISIS**

- **ONCE AGAIN**, the Rio Grande ran dry in Belen & Albuquerque
- **Year after year**, irrigation water has been limited and interrupted.
- As surface water runs dry, farmers are pumping groundwater **to survive**.
- **Extremely low snowpack** = very little spring runoff.
- **Crucial ecosystems** are drying – birds, fish, and wildlife are dying.



Aquifer Depletion is Real

- **Aquifer Levels Are Declining**
 - Being drained faster than they can recharge
 - Unsustainable surface water & groundwater use
 - Groundwater depletion lowers the water table
 - Corporations that pump our water for profit further deplete groundwater.
- **Rio Grande Compact (CO, NM, TX, & Mexico)**
 - We have legal obligations to deliver water downstream
 - We could face a Rio Grande Compact violation as early as 2026 (Extremely costly litigation!)

Residents said NO to Niagara.

Again and Again.

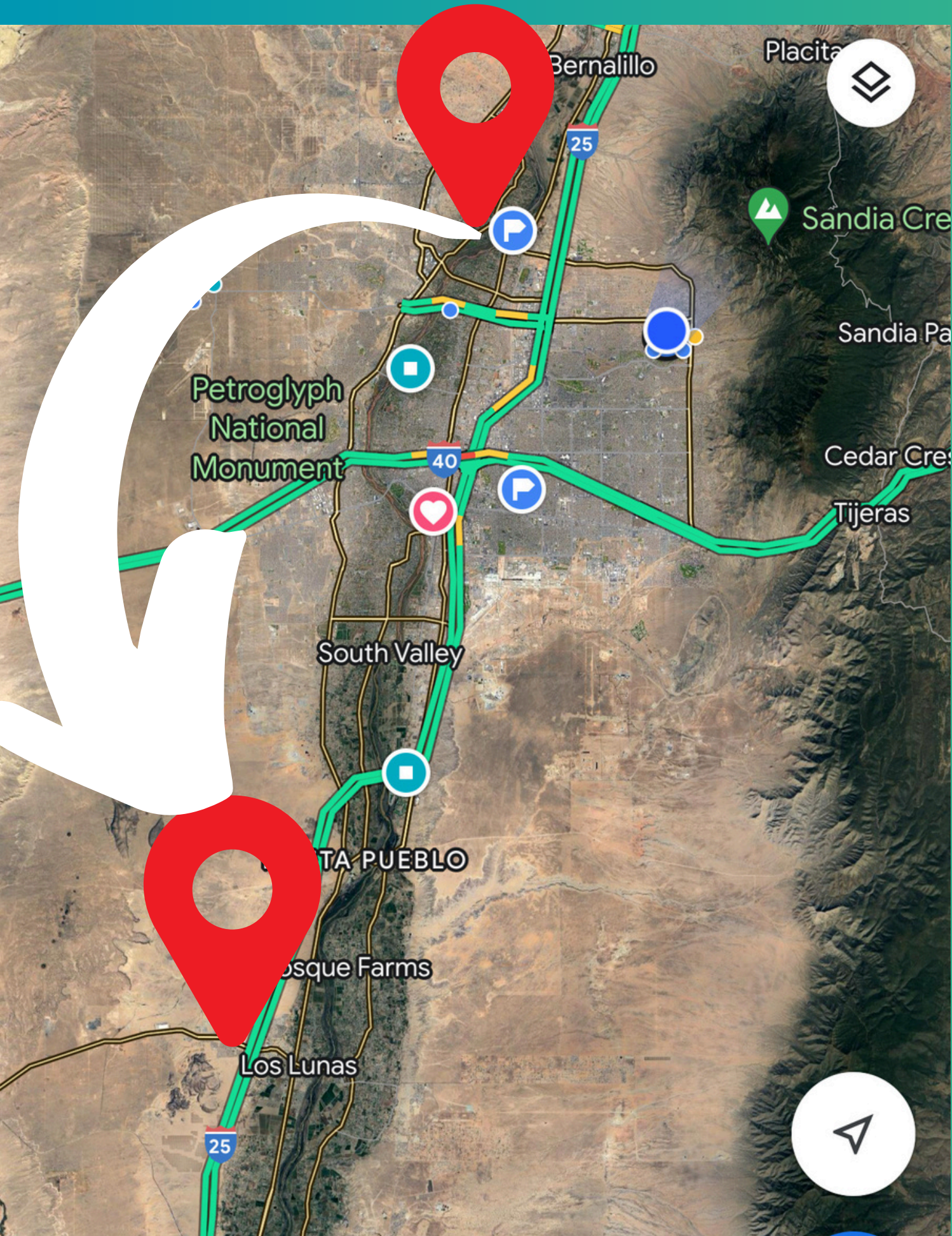


**HUNDREDS
of people
spoke out**



3 Village Councilors said YES.

Paper Water in Albuquerque = Real Depletion in Los Lunas



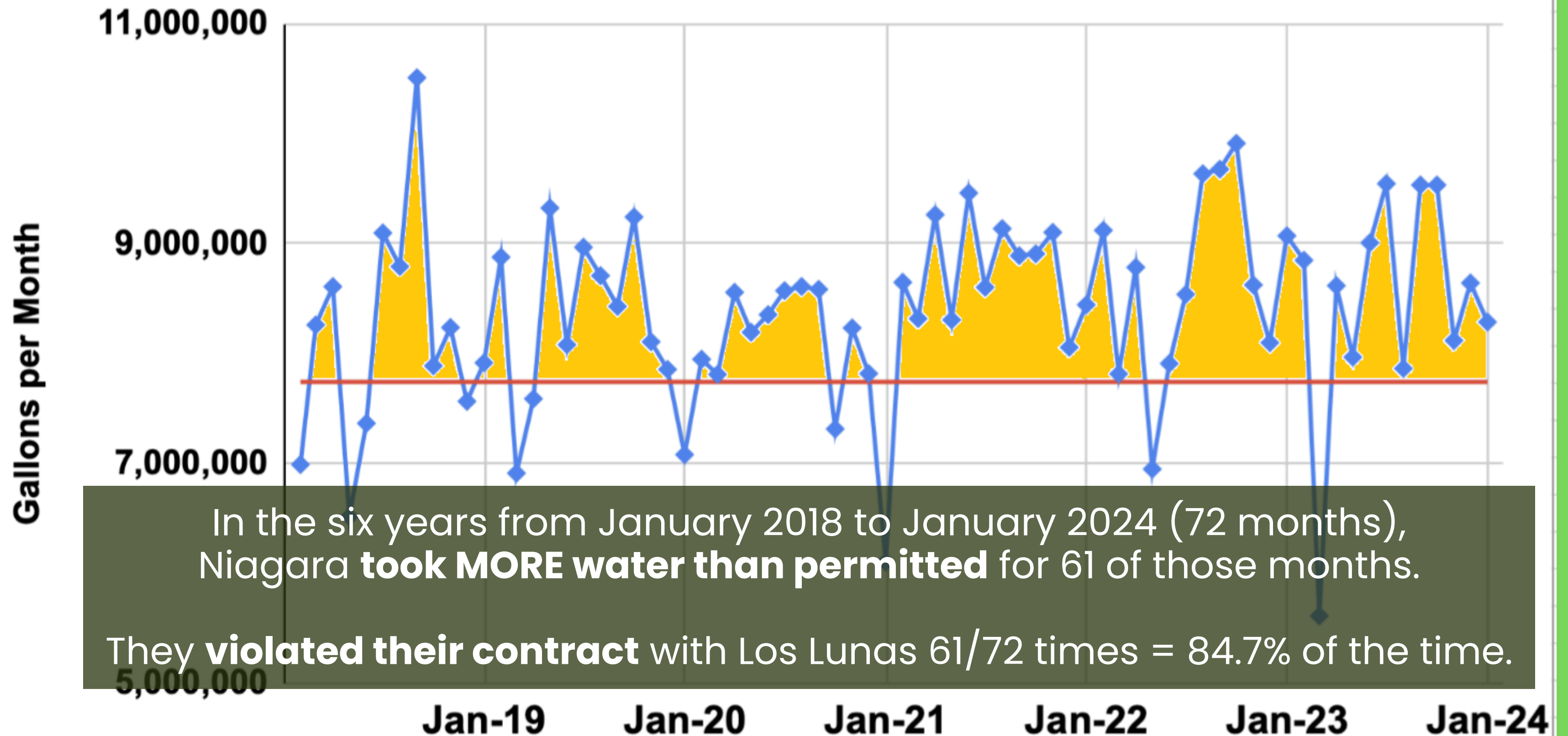
Niagara LEASES 'paper water' from PNM in ABQ

But... they PUMP 'wet water' from the Rio Grande Basin aquifer using Los Lunas wells

And... Niagara *consistently* takes more water than permitted.

Niagara Monthly Pumping

◆ Actual Use — Allowable Use





Niagara is NOT a good neighbor and is NOT a good steward of our water.

VWW & others submitted formal protest letters to OSE objecting to Niagara's water grab

Protest Letters Argued:

- **Contrary to Public Welfare & Conservation**
- **Rio Grande Compact Compliance Risk**
- **Groundwater pumping increases aquifer depletion**

Robust Formal Protest

- **More than 50 Individual Protest Letters from water rights holders & residents of Valencia County**
- **Pueblo of Isleta**
- **Councilors from the Town of Peralta**
- **Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District**
- **Over 500 VWW members joined the Valencia Water Watchers' Protest**



Our Asks for Legislators

Modernize & Fund

Office of the State Engineer &
Interstate Stream Commission

Form & Fund Regional Water Councils

(including MANY community stakeholders)
to make DATA-DRIVEN decisions about water use.

Fully Fund Aquifer Mapping & Water Data Initiative

Much work remains unfunded:

The 2025 Budget recommended \$29 million

But funding was cut to \$7.5 million



Invest in Long-Term Water Planning & Management

Modernize & Fund

Office of the State Engineer & Interstate Stream Commission

Legislators need to **invest** in:

- Staffing
- Technical Systems
- Infrastructure

Aging dams, canals, and pipelines are deteriorating. Leads to water loss & increased vulnerability to drought & floods.



2025 lawmakers **DID NOT PASS** legislation to authorize the State Engineer to enforce against illegal water use. **WHY?**

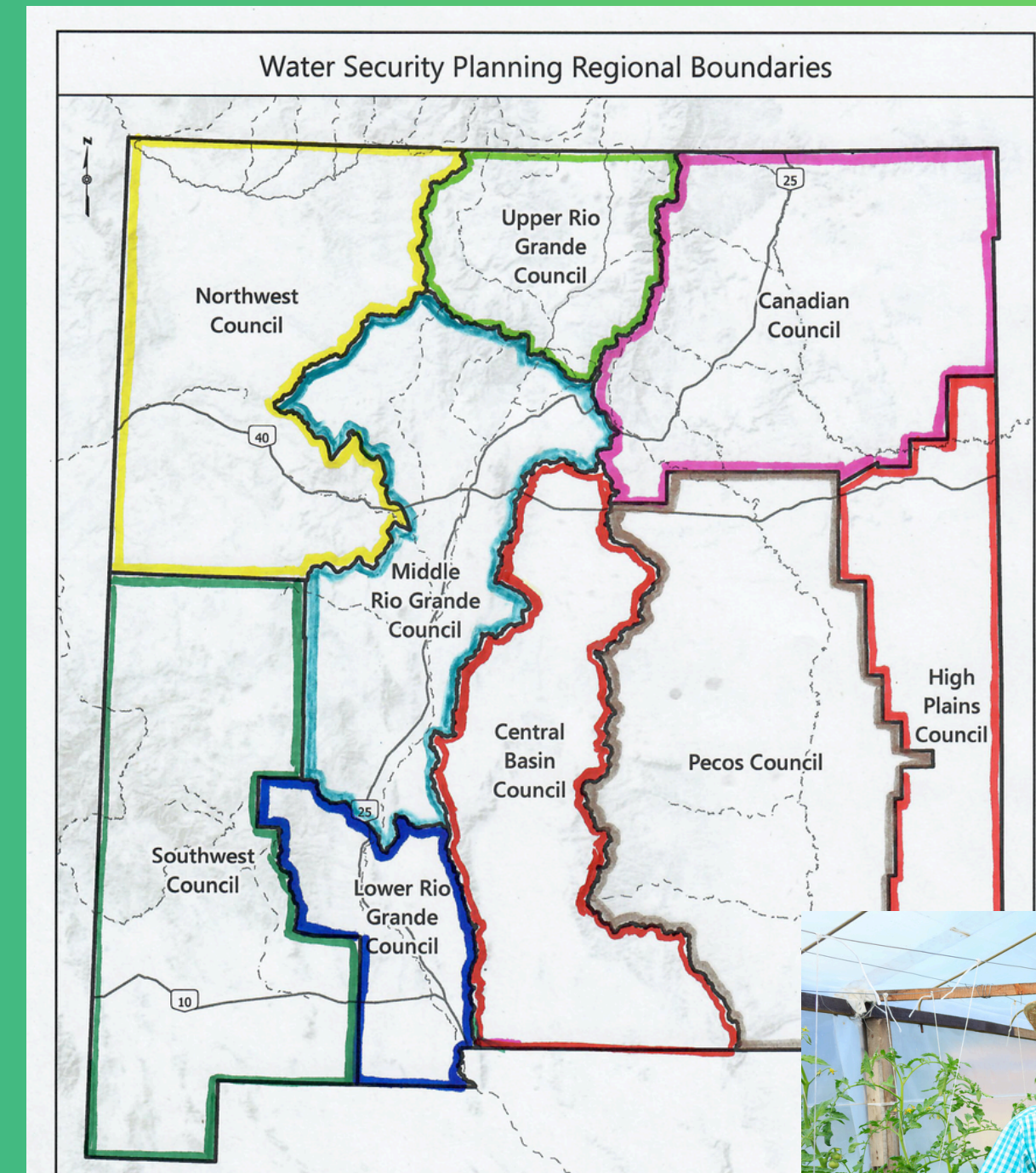
2025 legislature **REJECTED** the Governor's proposed \$500,000 increase for State Engineer compact compliance staff. **WHY?**

Fund Implementation of Regional Water Councils

- Promote long-term **sustainability**
- **Balance** supply and demand
- **Balance** competing interests
- Build community water **resilience**

Each **Regional Water Council** must include a majority of stakeholders from communities in that region.

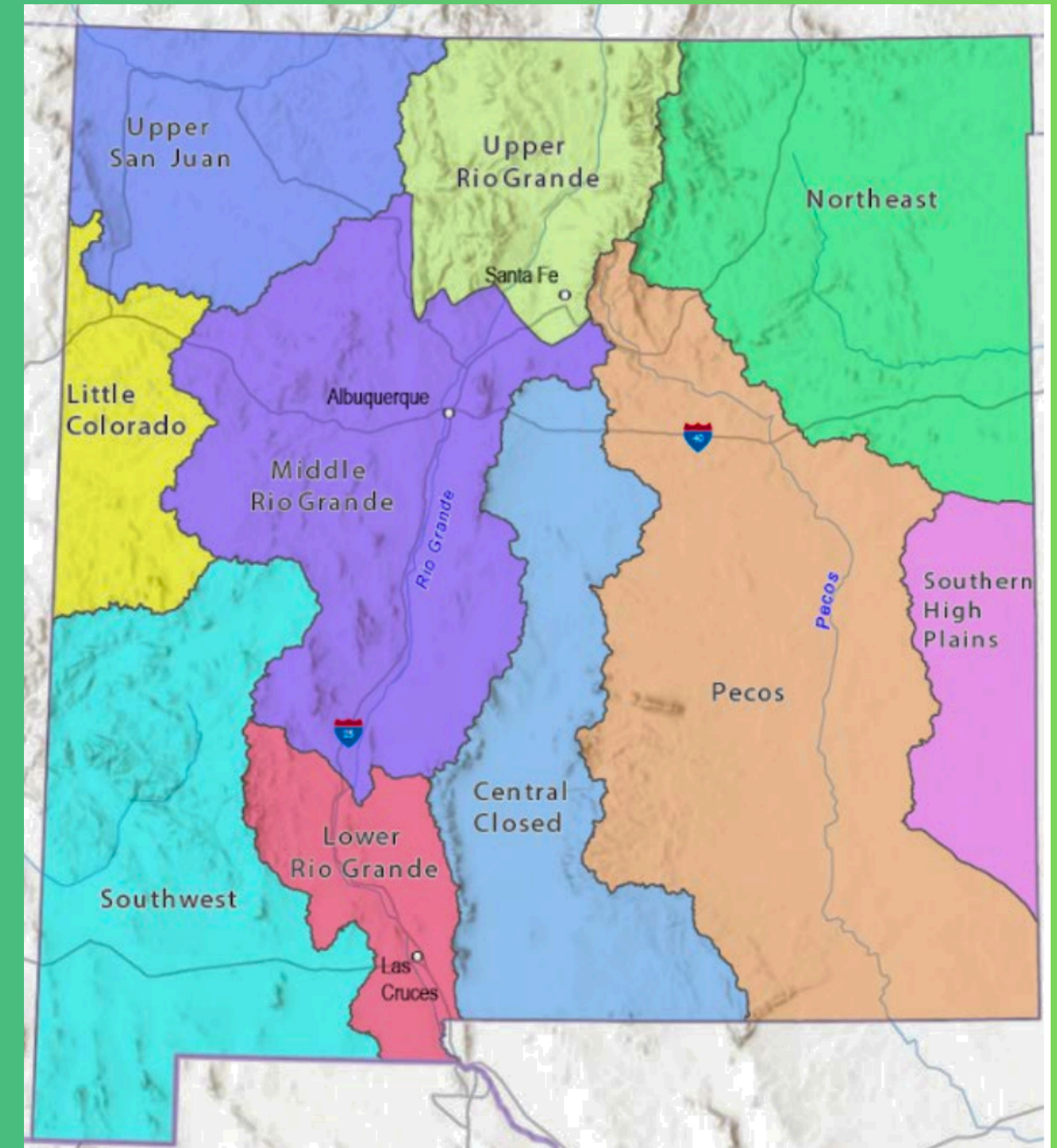
These decisions must be **data-driven** & must be made **by and for the people**.



The Water Security Act of 2023 must be implemented as intended.

Fund Aquifer Mapping & Water Data Initiative

- Conduct regional short & long-term **hydrogeology studies**
- **Measure:** Available groundwater & Aquifer recharge rate
- Monitoring 600 wells is **insufficient**
 - Need to measure **more frequently**
 - Need to monitor **more wells** to fill gaps
- Map water **quantity & quality** (3D Maps)
- Make **data** accessible & usable, as outlined in **2019 Water Data Act**



Data Driven Decisions for our Future



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