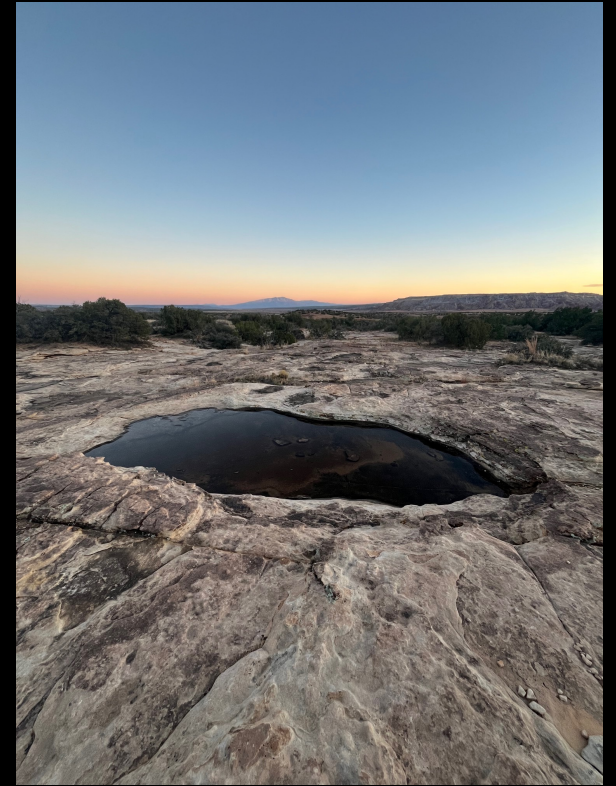


Love in a Time of Climate Change

The Intersection of Reality and
Hope for New Mexico's Rivers

Laura Paskus





1. Think of a beloved water body. 2. Grab a pen and pad.

U.S. Drought Monitor New Mexico

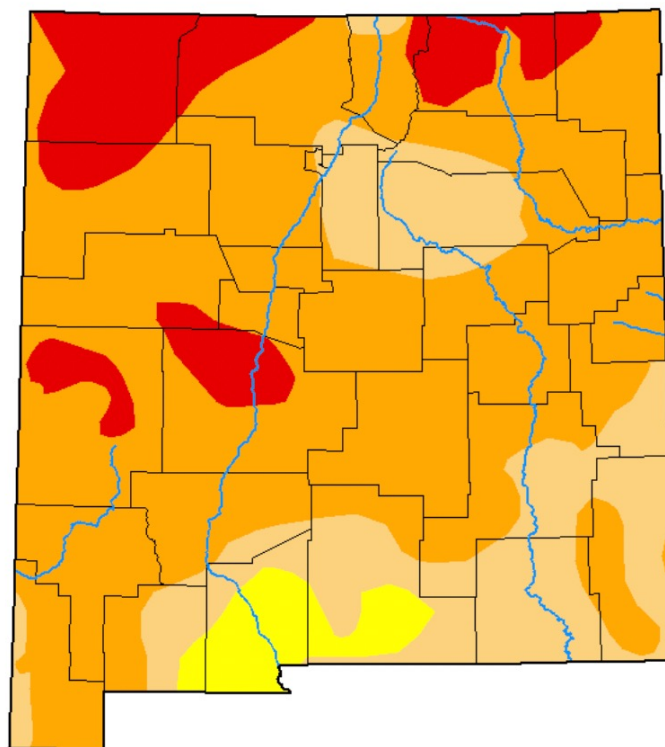
April 14, 2026

(Released Thursday, Apr. 16, 2026)

Valid 8 a.m. EDT

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	0.00	100.00	95.99	75.42	12.07	0.00
Last Week <small>04-07-2026</small>	0.00	100.00	96.01	68.01	10.48	0.00
3 Months Ago <small>01-13-2026</small>	1.02	98.98	71.70	51.36	1.99	0.00
Start of Calendar Year <small>01-06-2026</small>	0.01	99.99	71.71	51.89	2.59	0.00
Start of Water Year <small>09-30-2025</small>	19.91	80.09	68.67	47.53	14.45	2.41
One Year Ago <small>04-15-2025</small>	0.00	100.00	98.23	80.16	33.51	4.23



Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author:

Brian Fuchs
National Drought Mitigation Center



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

April 1, 2026, Water Supply Outlook Report for New Mexico

The latest [Water Supply Outlook Report](#) is now available.

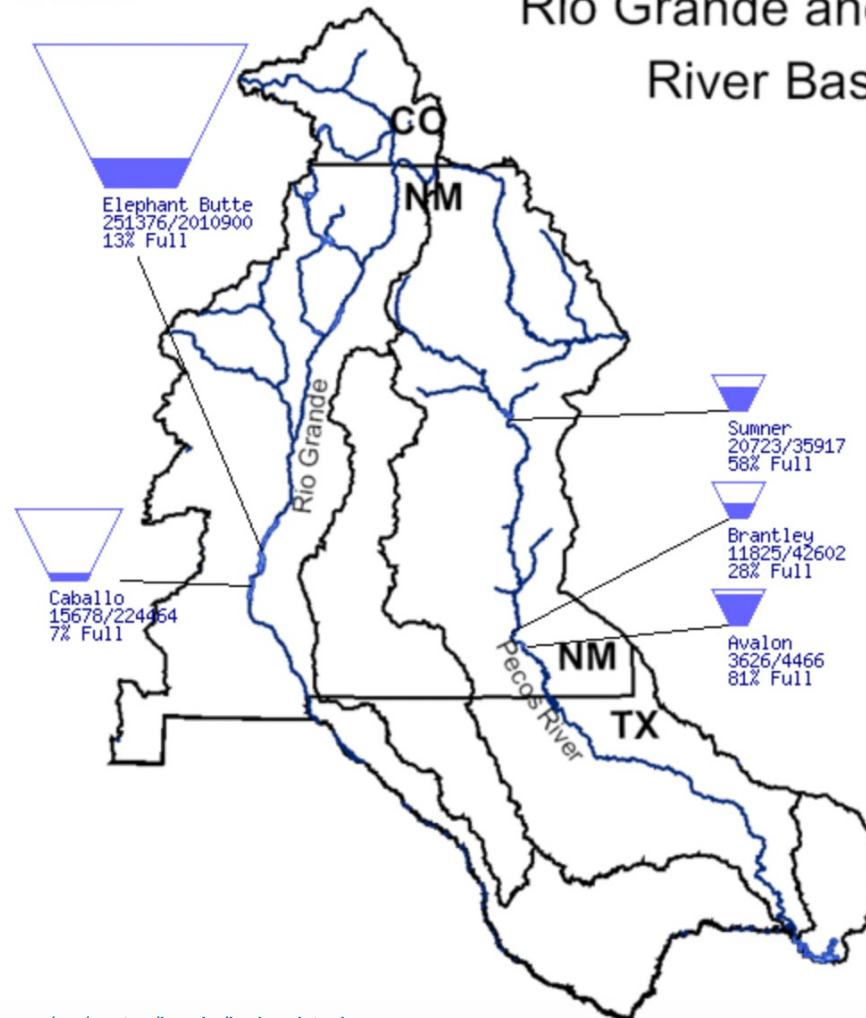
From the Summary:

“Record low snow conditions have plagued New Mexico throughout the water year. On March 31, 2026, “No Snow” conditions were observed in all but the three northernmost basins in New Mexico. The Rio Chama-Upper Rio Grande, Rio Grande Headwaters and San Juan basins reported 7, 9, and 11 percent of normal Snow Water Equivalent at the end of March. Rainfall dominated the winter due to warmer temperatures across the state. Still, overall precipitation has been less than normal, with a high of 86% reported for the San Juan basin and a low of 42% reported for the Canadian. Reservoir storage was split, with lower-than-normal depths in the southwestern basins and higher than normal storage recorded in the Upper Rio Grande, Canadian and Pecos Basins. Runoff projections across the state are significantly lower than normal, with near record or record low runoff projected for some sites. Water users are encouraged to manage resources conservatively. Technical assistance for private and tribal land managers is available from your [local NRCS Service Center](#).

- **Rick Strait**, State Soil Scientist

Data Current as of:
04/15/2026

Rio Grande and Pecos River Basins

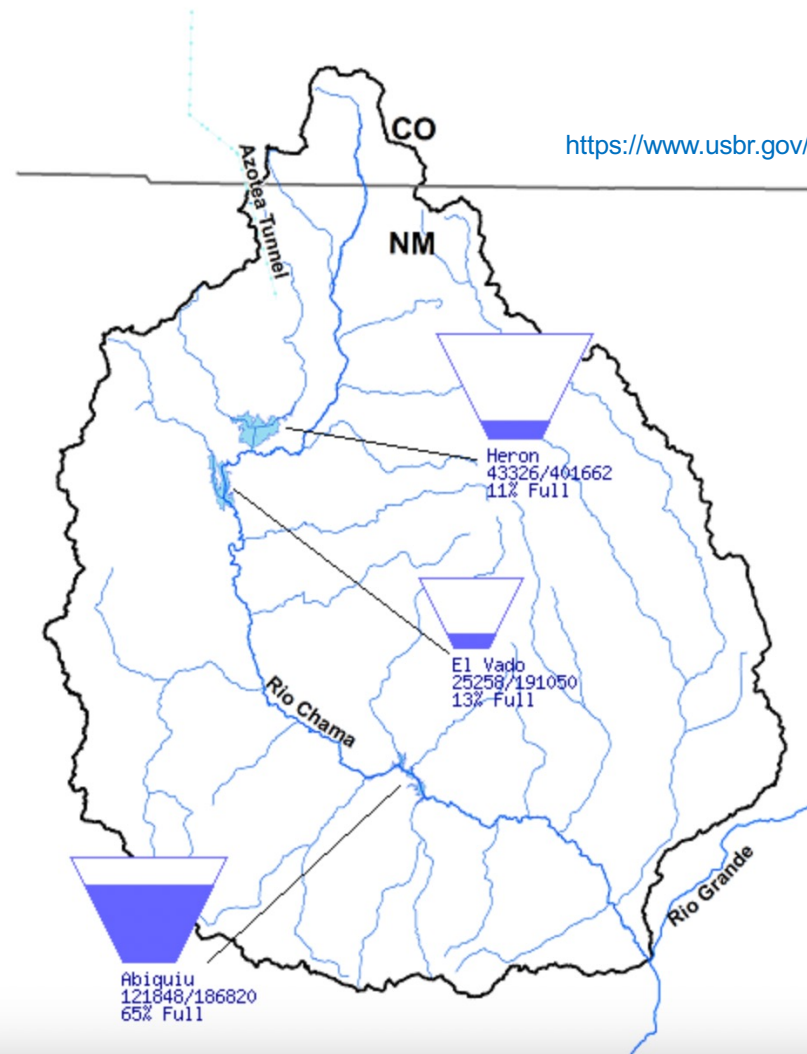


<https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/basin/index.html>

Data Current as of:
04/15/2026

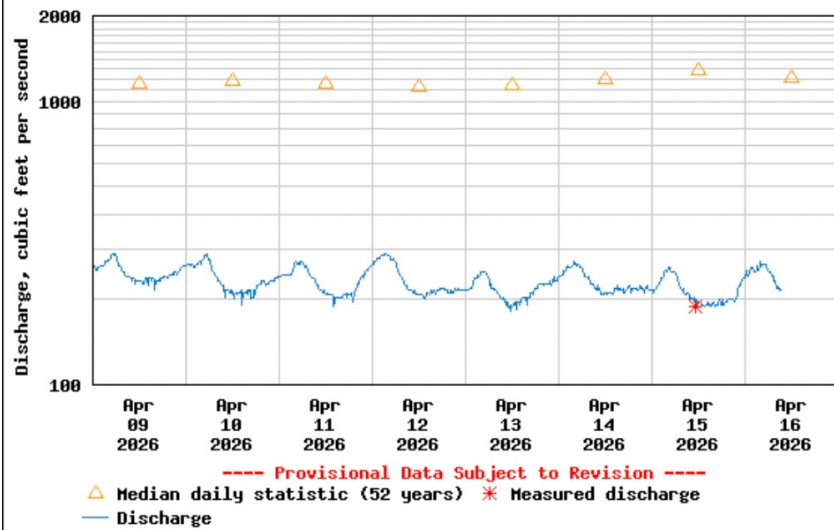
Rio Chama Basin

<https://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/basin/index.html>

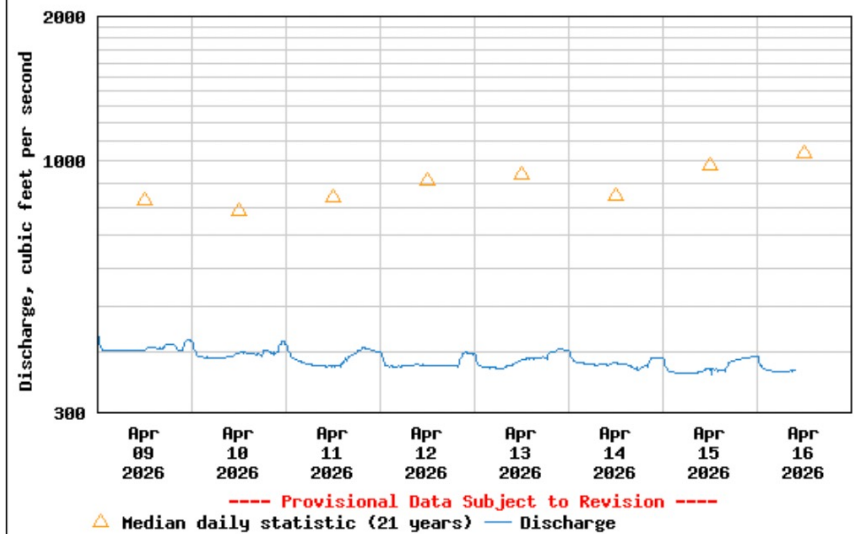


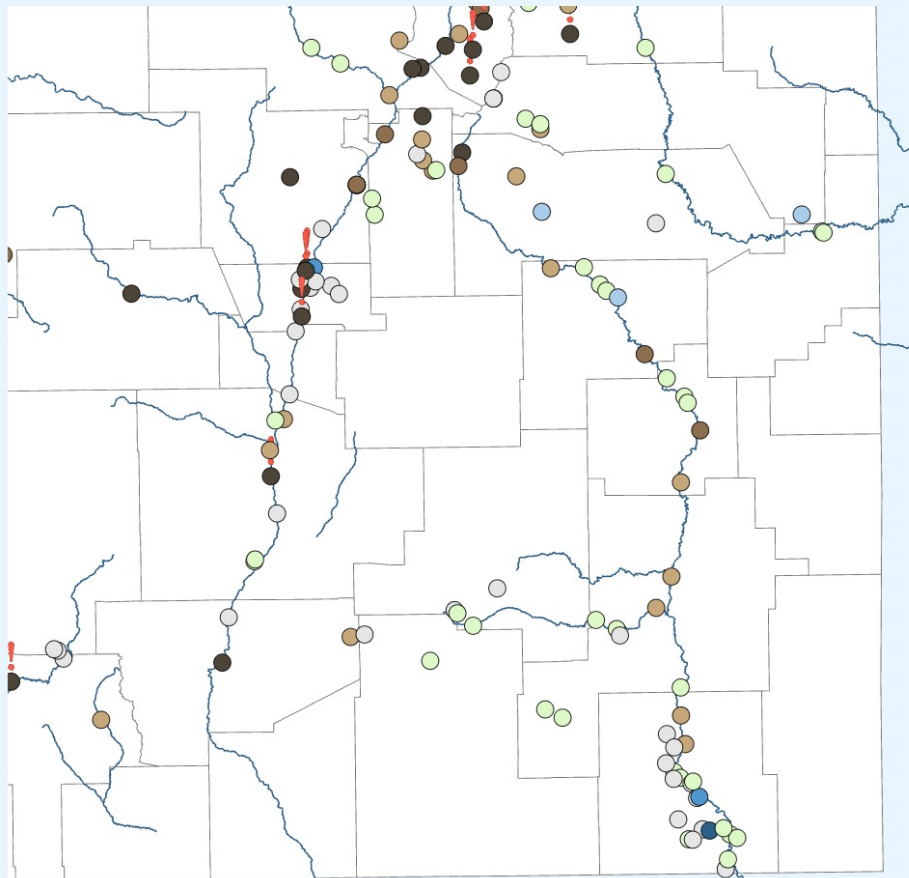


USGS 08330000 RIO GRANDE AT ALBUQUERQUE, NM



USGS 08329918 RIO GRANDE AT ALAMEDA BRIDGE AT ALAMEDA, NM





157 monitoring locations
Data collection - **Continuous**

Using filters for
Data collection duration - **The last 120 days**

Showing locations with
- Discharge, cubic feet per second

Show only locations with

- Discharge
- Gage height
- Depth to water level
- Water temperature
- Any data

<https://waterdata.usgs.gov/state/new-mexico/>

0-5
Extremely below

5-10
Much below

10-25
Below normal

25-75
Normal

75-90
Above normal

90-95
Much above

95-100
Extremely above

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Memory of a River

In another hot year, we fail the Rio Grande

BY LAURA PASKUS | LEGACY CONTENT | JULY 22, 2020 8:26 PM




[KUNM](#) 89.9 FM Live From The University Of New Mexico
 Morning Edition

[NEXT UP: 9:00 AM Left, Right & Cen](#)

The Conservation Beat

Rio Grande could join 'ghost rivers' of the Southwest



Our Land: New Mexico's Environmental Past, Present and Future


A Dry Rio Grande

Season 3 Episode 12 | 9m 1s | [CC](#)

A Dry Rio Grande and Its Impact on Endangered Fish

06/12/2020

[+](#)



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change, overuse send the Middle Rio Grande into 'dire' situation

Former state official worries another court battle over water may be looming

BY LAURA PASKUS - MARCH 20, 2026 9:19 AM | [UPDATED 2:39 PM](#)

High Country News

WATER

Southwest drought desiccates fish before farmers

Agencies let Rio Grande and Pecos rivers dry up despite minimum-flow agreements

**Southwest
drought
desiccates
fish before
farmers:**

Agencies let
Rio Grande
and Pecos
rivers dry up
despite
minimum-
flow
agreements

High Country News
July 8, 2002

Nonetheless, according to U.S. Geological Survey data posted on the Internet, flows in the middle Rio Grande south of Albuquerque – critical habitat for the minnow – regularly did not meet the Service’s 50 cubic feet per second (cfs) target flows in May and June. While farmers continued to receive their full water deliveries, recorded flows in June were consistently less than half the required minimum, and even dipped as low as 14 cfs.

When questioned, officials at both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation claimed that an out-of-whack gauge was responsible for the low numbers. Then, when a seven-mile stretch of the river dried up in early June, they pointed to the drought. But even a passing glance at New Mexico’s rivers shows that in a drought year, fish don’t get water, agreements or not.

This year, not only did the Bureau violate the minimum flow requirements, it didn’t have enough water left in the conservation pool to keep the river from drying. In June, after the river had already dried near Socorro, the City of Albuquerque leased the agency 30,000 acre-feet of water, which it plans to send downstream to the minnow. It’s a temporary fix that conservationists say won’t help the minnow in the long run.

Rio Grande could join 'ghost rivers' of the Southwest

**KUNM
October 30,
2012**

“Unless and until this river has a secure right to its own water that’s respected by the state of New Mexico, the farmers and cities, this river is going to continue to have a downward spiral,” he says.

Many western states, including Colorado, have legalized "instream water rights." These laws give rivers some rights to their own water.

Without its own water rights, Horning doesn’t see the Rio Grande in New Mexico lasting much past the middle of this century. “Look at Rio Grande in El Paso, look at the Gila River in Phoenix, the Salt River in Phoenix, the LA River in Los Angeles,” he says. “There is a long litany of southwestern rivers that have already been killed, that have become ghost rivers.”

The future of the river is uncertain. And so, too, are the futures of farmers and anyone else depending on the waters of the Rio Grande. A few things aren’t uncertain, however: climate change is here—and water managers have their work cut out for them.

Memory of a River: In another hot year, we fail the Rio Grande

Santa Fe
Reporter
July 22, 2020

Almost every year since 2002, when the Rio Grande has dried, I've reported on it.

I've ticked through all the facts: how many miles are dry, [why and how the climate is warming](#), what biologists are doing to protect rare fish as the waters heat up and evaporate or sink into the sands, and through time, what agencies and irrigators have done to deny, ignore, or nowadays, try to alleviate the drying.

Today, I'm not telling you anything new.

I'm just telling you again.

Our river has dried.

As I type this in mid-July 2020, about 50 miles of the Middle Rio Grande are dry within two stretches south of Albuquerque. Upstream, the Buckman Direct Diversion in Santa Fe warned it might soon turn off its municipal tap from the river due to low flows.

At the end of June 2020, the water utility in Albuquerque had to stop drawing water from the Rio Grande and switch to groundwater pumping. And New Mexico, Colorado and Texas agreed in July to let the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District use water meant for other downstream users to "avoid catastrophic crop losses." But that water will need to be replaced somehow, which means next year's conditions will be even more dire.


It rained last night, and even though that cool water felt miraculous on my skin, it wasn't nearly enough to revive a river and kickstart an ecosystem.

So, again. I'm not telling you anything new.

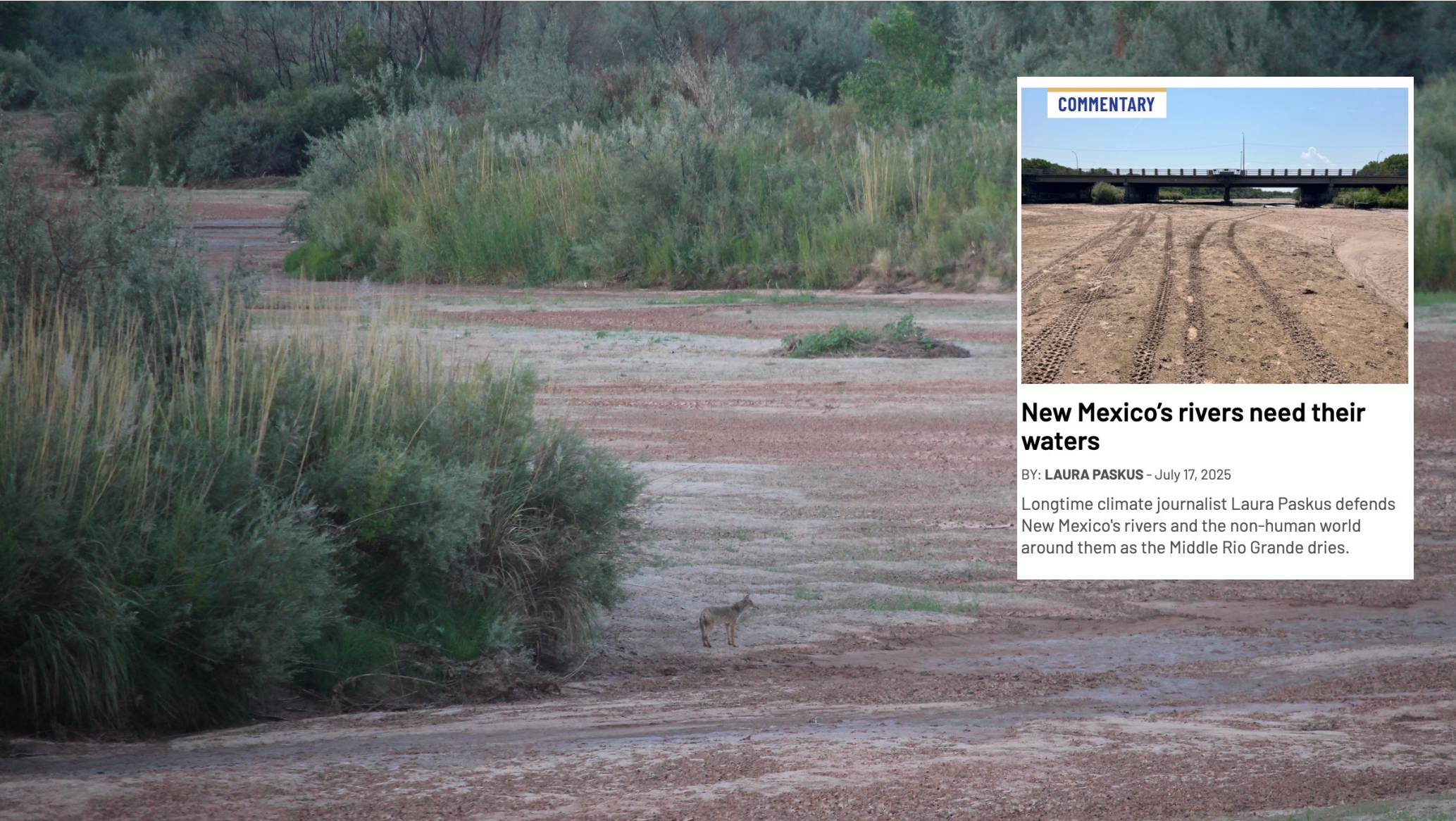
I'm just telling you again: Our river has dried.



NMPBS 2020
Video shot and edited
by Kevin Maestas



NMPBS 2022
Drone by Antony Lostetter



COMMENTARY

New Mexico's rivers need their waters

BY: LAURA PASKUS - July 17, 2025

Longtime climate journalist Laura Paskus defends New Mexico's rivers and the non-human world around them as the Middle Rio Grande dries.



Climate change, overuse send the Middle Rio Grande into 'dire' situation

BY: LAURA PASKUS - March 20, 2026

Climate change and other factors threaten the Middle Rio Grande, with some warning of a looming battle over its water.

For more than two decades, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Albuquerque Area Office leased and released water from upstream reservoirs for endangered species and to keep water flowing through Albuquerque. Supplementing the river that way "kind of masked the effects of drought, of a warmer climate," the agency's Water Operations Supervisor Carolyn Donnelly told Source NM.

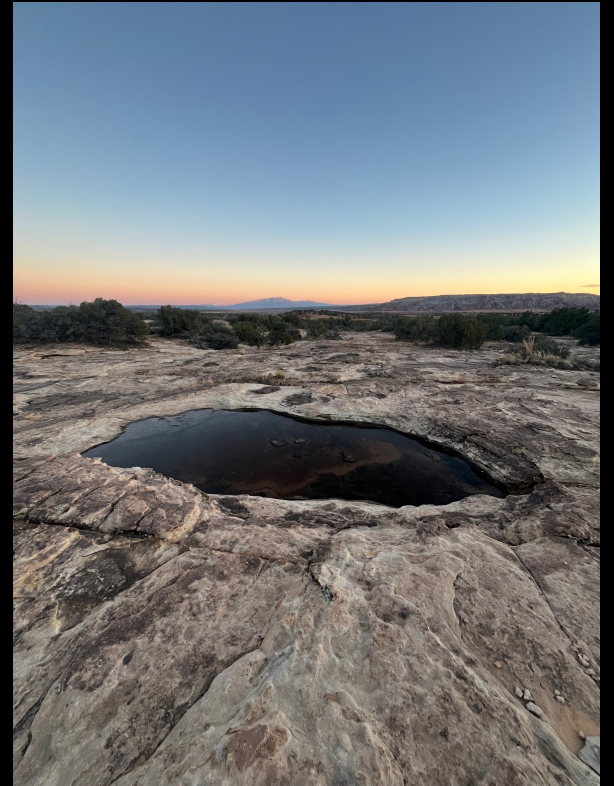
"For many years, we'd have a bad snow year but (people) still saw in Albuquerque, the river flow. So, they could think, 'It's not that bad,'" said Donnelly. "But really, it was that bad."

Now, there's no water to spare in the watershed's reservoirs. [On the Chama River](#), a tributary of the Rio Grande, Abiquiu Reservoir is 61% full; El Vado, 13% full; and Heron, 7% full. That's the lowest Heron Reservoir has been since it was filled in 1971.

The Rio Grande Basin is coming off its [warmest winter on record](#), with the mountains suffering a [major snow drought](#). But overconsumption was already putting water security on the Rio Grande at "grave risk," [according to a study released late last year](#). That study of the watershed in the U.S. and Mexico revealed that 85% of the water used in New Mexico from the Rio Grande is "fundamentally unsustainable."

Something isn't working.







Homework:

-Visit or meditate on a beloved water body. Listen to what water is telling you.

-Write letters to at least two officials (at the minimum, state rep and state senator).

-Have an intimate conversation about what NM's rivers need and deserve with at least one other friend, neighbor, family member.