

Rio Grande Ecosystems: Proceedings Introduction

Deborah M. Finch
Jeffrey C. Whitney

These proceedings are an outcome of a symposium and workshop of the same title held June 2-5, 1998, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Hosted by the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Bosque Improvement Group, in collaboration with partners from a variety of public and private sectors, the symposium was designed to report on current research, development, and educational activities in the Middle Rio Grande Basin. Participants shared information and developed ideas for sustaining and conserving Middle Rio Grande Basin ecosystems, especially those from Cochiti Dam to Elephant Butte Reservoir.

In 1994, the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Albuquerque developed and implemented a 5-year research program to evaluate ecological conditions of Middle Rio Grande Basin ecosystems. This Forest Service Research program addressed four problem areas: (1) ecology and restoration of upland basin ecosystems, (2) watershed analysis and stream quality, (3) riparian habitats and species, and (4) human history and culture. More than 25 cooperating organizations have been participating in this program, either by conducting research through contracts and agreements, by matching funds and sponsoring new research, or by cooperating through various land use agreements. Simultaneously, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service developed a program of research, monitoring, management, and education focusing on improving ecological conditions and communications along the Middle Rio Grande. This program, implemented through the Bosque Improvement Group, was also initiated as a 5-year effort. Combined, both programs have sponsored over \$1 million per year of Rio Grande Basin activities from 1994 to 1998. This includes cost-share and matching dollars contributed by collaborating organizations such as Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, Army Corps of Engineers, State of New Mexico, City of Albuquerque, National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, University of New Mexico, and several other universities, private institutions, environmental organizations, and public agencies.

Specially designated funds allocated to these two programs have been used to develop partnerships, conduct research, and expand knowledge for managing the Rio

Grande and its associated natural resources and ecosystems. After prioritizing, sponsoring, and conducting projects for the past 5 years, we have convened this symposium to report relevant results, describe progress, and document outcomes of joint ventures. The research results, technology, and partnerships described in these proceedings attest to the many achievements and products these programs have helped to generate in the Basin. Viewed by some as the "river of life," the Rio Grande's past, present, and future are captured in this volume. Success stories are worth telling and worth reading about.

We invited experts to contribute oral presentations, posters, and papers that addressed five Basin themes. Theme One's session was designed to identify methods and opportunities to enhance communication and collaboration among researchers, managers, cultural groups, and communities. Historical overviews from different cultural perspectives were presented that helped to lay the groundwork and direction for communication about current environmental conditions, conflicts, and options. Theme Two participants explored ideas and approaches for conserving water and riparian resources in relation to human needs and population growth. Theme Three focussed on how watershed processes form linkages and influence management of upland and river resources. Theme Four participants identified methods and strategies for restoring and monitoring basin ecosystems and discussed project successes and failures. Theme Five was a report on the status of endangered and sensitive species, biological diversity, and opportunities for restoring and managing habitats to recover species. The written papers that resulted from the symposium are grouped along similar lines.

An evening poster session and social was held at the Albuquerque Aquarium. Symposium participants, accompanied by friends and family members, viewed scientific posters, chatted with presenters, toured exhibits of sea life, and exchanged ideas and information with strolling colleagues. Poster papers were assigned to theme categories using an ad-hoc basis.

Management and understanding of the Middle Rio Grande Basin's natural resources and ecosystems require communication and cooperation of partners across cultural, land-owner, and organizational boundaries. To produce a shared understanding of the current state and desired future state of the Middle Rio Grande Basin and to outline the steps needed to move toward the desired future, a facilitated workshop was held the last day of the conference. The workshop was designed to enable participants to plan some joint actions for improving environmental conditions in the Rio Grande watershed and river corridor and at the same time learn a new way to increase their success rate in

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Deborah M. Finch is with the Ecology Diversity, and Sustainability of Soil, Plant, Animal, and Human Resources of the Rio Grande Basin Research Work Unit, USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Albuquerque, NM. Jeffrey C. Whitney is with New Mexico Ecological Services Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2105 Osuna Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87113.

achieving goals when working together. Participants were first asked to find areas of “common ground” regarding their desired future of the Rio Grande Basin. Then they were asked to examine their views of the current status of the Basin so as to be able to determine what the appropriate actions would be. During these exercises we saw a positive release of “structural tension,” a phenomenon defined by Workshop Facilitator, Dr. Barbara Coe of Daystar Associates, as energy that generates action toward the goal. The written results of this workshop are reported in the concluding section of this proceedings. Additional outcomes included: (1) increased understanding of the similarities and differences in participants’ desires for the future of the Rio Grande, (2) increased understanding of the current state of

the Rio Grande Basin, (3) preliminary action plans for elements of the desired future, and (4) increased knowledge of a new way to achieve goals collaboratively.

In conclusion, the technical coordinators of the symposium and proceedings wish to acknowledge all the partners who have contributed to the research, restoration, technology development, educational outreach, and special activities designed to better human and ecosystem conditions in the Basin. A comprehensive list of those organizations that helped to make this symposium successful is included in the beginning of the proceedings. We hope this volume captures at least some of the excitement, ideas, and productivity generated by Basin projects over the past 5 years.