

Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition

Sarah Kotchian

In June 1994, one hundred people gathered for the first Uniting the Basin Conference in El Paso to discuss the state of their basin and to explore ways to improve its sustainability for future generations. One of the recommendations of that conference was the formation of an international non-governmental coalition of groups throughout the Basin to share information and ideas and facilitate local efforts to improve the river and the quality of life along it for all members of the ecosystem. In 1995, a steering committee met to begin to make that recommendation a reality. The non-profit Coalition now has a 15-member board of directors from throughout the basin, and partners and friends representing a wide variety of grassroots environmental and business groups.

The response to Coalition initiatives has been tremendous, indicating the need and support for a Basin-wide network. Within the first three years, the Coalition has raised money for and donated computers and financial resources to river groups throughout the Basin, providing internet access and communication linkages between groups and sub-Basin areas facing similar issues. The Coalition also functions as an information clearinghouse, providing a web page (www.utep.edu/rioweb/) and BasinNet listserve, and publishing a newsletter called "La Corriente". It has founded the enormously successful Dia Del Rio, a celebration and restoration of the river on the third Saturday of October each year by communities all up and down the river. The Dia Del Rio celebration in turn inspired the Gathering of Waters project initiated by artist Basia Irland, an initiative which collects river water in a vessel and has been transferring it community to community, uniting upstream and downstream partners. The Coalition has sponsored

fundraising trainings in both Mexico and the U.S., to strengthen the capacity of local groups to be effective in river protection. And it co-sponsored the first River Stewardship conference with the New Mexico Conferences of Churches and the U.S. Catholic Bishops this past spring to empower local communities of faith to become more active on river sustainability issues. In September, 1998, the Coalition is hosting the Uniting the Basin Congress in El Paso, Texas. The Coalition has two staff members, Bess Metcalf, the Executive Director, and Gabriela Vale, the Mexican Outreach Coordinator for supporting Mexican grassroots river groups.

The Coalition is dedicated to the sustainability of the ecology, economy, and cultures of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin through international cooperation and communication, education and public awareness, and positive action. It has adopted principles that include strengthening grassroots groups of citizen throughout the river basin, empowerment of local communities to determine their own issues and find their own solutions, a commitment to representing the social, cultural, geographic, and ethnic diversity of the Basin, and dedication to dialogue, consensus-building, and the democratic process.

For more information on the Coalition, contact:
Bess Metcalf, Executive Director,
Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition
c/o C.E.R.M., P.O. Box 645, Burges Hall Room 315,
El Paso, TX 79908
(915) 747-5720
email: bmetcalf@utep.edu

In: Finch, Deborah M.; Whitney, Jeffrey C.; Kelly, Jeffrey F.; Loftin, Samuel R. 1999. Rio Grande ecosystems: linking land, water, and people. Toward a sustainable future for the Middle Rio Grande Basin. 1998 June 2-5; Albuquerque, NM. Proc. RMRS-P-7. Ogden, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Sarah Kotchian is the Co-Chair, Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin Coalition.