



Taos County Community Conservation Plan



Taos County Community Conservation Plan

August 2017

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The logo for The Trust for Public Land, featuring a green square with a gradient from light green at the top to a darker green at the bottom. The text "THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, stacked vertically within the square.

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[HTTPS://WEB.TPLGIS.ORG/TAOS_CCP/](https://web.tplgis.org/taos_ccp/)

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Preface

Acknowledgments

An enormous number of people contributed their time, energy, and passion to bringing the Taos County Community Conservation Plan to life. One hundred and sixty people participated in community meetings, and hundreds more gave their input through our survey, interviews, focus groups, and local events. Staff from Taos Land Trust, the Town of Taos, and the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program provided leadership and guidance as part of the core team for the plan. Planning staff from Taos County were active participants in community meetings. In addition, experts on local resources and recreation who were members of our technical advisory team helped shape the maps that are part of this Community Conservation Plan. (Please see Section 8 for a full list of participants.) This Community Conservation Plan was made possible through funding from the LOR Foundation, the Town of Taos, Taos County, Taos Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land.



NINA ANTHONY

The view of El Salto and the Sangre de Cristo Range at sunset

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TAOS LAND TRUST conserves open, productive, and natural lands for the benefit of the community and culture of northern New Mexico.

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to creating parks and protecting land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. Since 1972, The Trust for Public Land has helped protect more than three million acres in all 50 states. The Trust for Public Land opened the New Mexico office in 1981 and completed its first project in 1982 in the Cibola National Forest. Our dedicated local staff has worked with local communities, federal, state, and county agencies to complete a total of 64 projects, protecting over 187,000 acres. In New Mexico, The Trust for Public Land focuses on three program areas: the Upper Rio Grande Watershed, Bernalillo County Agriculture and Open Space, and the Sky Island Grasslands.



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'Life's essentials'

THE DILEMMA OF CONSERVATION IN TAOS COUNTY

COUNTY. Crestina Trujillo-Armstrong was just nine years old when her father, Carlos Trujillo, taught her to dig fence post holes that were as deep as she was tall.

Carlos was a burly, self-reliant man, with hands like bear paws and expectations that his kids would pull their weight on the family ranch. "He taught me to ride a horse. He taught me to brand cattle. And he taught me to build a fence with good, sturdy posts and good, deep holes," remembers Crestina. "Everything I learned, all of life's essentials, I learned from him."

Among the lessons Carlos taught young Crestina was an intense and abiding love for the land that had sustained their family for generations. It's a sentiment that's widely shared by other longtime residents of northern New Mexico.

Nearly 200 years ago, her great-grandfather, Antonio Maria Martinez, settled on 75 acres in the San Cristobal Valley – a narrow strip of pasture land bounded to the north and south by piñon and juniper forest, and flanked by the Sangre de Cristo range on the east and the Rio Grande Gorge to the west. The family's homestead extends across the width of the idyllic valley and is bisected by San Cristobal Creek – a critical source of water for irrigation and livestock.

For Crestina, the land and water are living, breathing things. "I have an intimacy with it," says Crestina, now in her 60s, perched on a stool in her kitchen with a cigarette dangling from her fingers. Her modest house sits in the middle of the property, and the family still does the daily chores of corralling livestock and tending to the garden.

"I can talk to this land. Ask it for advice or direction. It's made me laugh and it's made me cry," Crestina says. "It's hard to explain. You have to experience it."

It's an experience that's getting harder and harder to pass to the next generation in Taos County.

Development pressure and rising land values mean many old families are selling out or subdividing. Some are dividing these expansive family farms into 2-acre ranchettes. Others are making room for their kids and cousins who can't afford to buy land of their own.

At the same time, subsistence farming – a mainstay of the local land-based culture – is waning. County appraisers are finding that more than half the properties once used for agriculture sit fallow or have been developed, accelerating the pace at which prime green belts are being developed.

For decades, Crestina has watched as old family farms surrounding hers were cut up



Crestina Trujillo-Armstrong on her ranch just north of Taos

and sold off. “It just bugs the hell out of me,” she says. “It feels like a betrayal.”

Crestina’s entire property, which now includes about 50 acres of the original homestead, is easily worth more than \$1 million. She and her brother could have sold a few picturesque

lots and made enough money to retire comfortably.

But Crestina was determined to preserve the land and the family’s way of life. The idea of selling off even a piece of the family homestead never crossed her mind.

So when she was introduced to the concept of a conservation easement, she was intrigued. In 1999, she and her brother, Jose León Trujillo, put a conservation easement on 38 acres of the family homestead, including all of the irrigated land. The easement means the land can never be developed and can be passed to her kids intact. Then they can also enjoy that visceral connection to the dirt and the water.

But Crestina is the exception. Words like “conservation easement” are scary in a place like Taos, where people are wary of rules and regulations. There’s a real reluctance to put any restrictions on a property, especially when it’s a family’s only asset.

After the easement was dedicated, Crestina went on to serve on the Taos Land Trust board for 13 years. In that time, she says she never once convinced another old family to put an easement on their property. It was

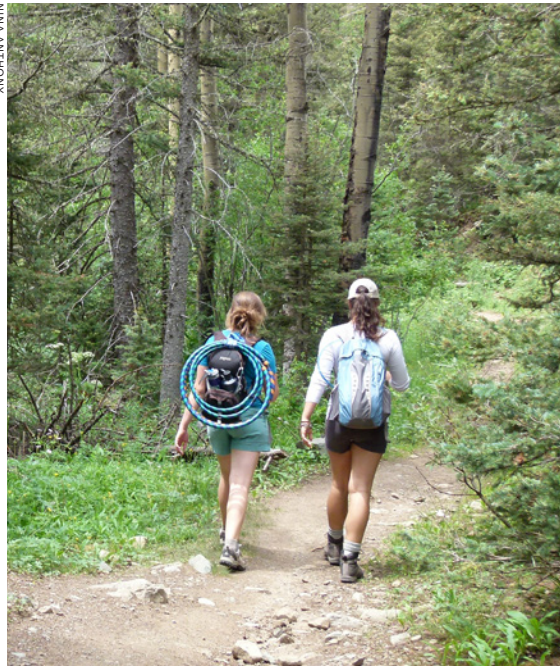
incredibly frustrating to hear people with whom she shares a love of land and water say they couldn’t preserve their property without losing money or a place for their kids to come home to.

This document – the Taos Community Conservation Plan – is about choices. It’s intended to give property owners and local leaders options when it comes to preserving landscapes and the culture to which they are so closely linked. It clearly defines the values that Crestina and so many others have in common. It shows areas of the county where those values are most prominent and offers suggestions on how to do conservation in a way that makes sense in a unique place that faces unique challenges.

As Crestina’s father used to say: “They keep making new cars, but they’re not making new land.”

Vision

Our vision is a Taos County where cultural traditions are embraced and quality of life is excellent because everyone is connected to the land and committed to sustainable stewardship of our unique natural and cultural landscapes by and for our community.



Gold Hill Trail, Taos Ski Valley

Guiding Principles

1. The Community Conservation Plan should be inclusive and should demonstrate respect for our tri-cultural traditions.
2. The planning process should foster participation from locals of all ages, from the Pueblo and Hispano communities, and from diverse interest groups.
3. We need to identify ways to conserve natural and open space resources while also protecting cultural values and local traditions.
4. Residents value traditional working lands and particularly want to protect our irrigated agricultural lands and acequias.
5. Conserved open space and access to recreation are important for connecting residents to the outdoors and for attracting tourists and jobs to Taos County.
6. We support voluntary conservation efforts.
7. We need to build support for sustainable stewardship of our unique natural and cultural landscapes by and for our community.

1. Why a community conservation plan?

“We will continue to take care of our lands, our water, our people, because without that we aren’t anything.”

– PATRICK KOPEPASSAH, TAOS PUEBLO
FIRE PROGRAM MANAGER

THE TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN is about preserving the connection between local residents and land and water that sustain us. It brings together local priorities, local stories, and local expertise with the national leadership of The Trust for Public Land’s Planning and Geographic Information System (GIS) team who led community engagement and used public input to do quality GIS mapping and modeling. Plan partners collaborated with community members to develop a shared vision, shared goals, and practical action steps for implementation. Work on the Community Conservation Plan began in the summer of 2015 and concluded in the spring of 2017.

Based on community outreach results, the top four conservation priorities for Taos County are (1) Protect water quality and quantity; (2) Protect cultural resources, including traditional agriculture; (3) Protect wildlife habitat; and (4) Provide access to recreational opportunities. This document is meant to serve as a guide for voluntary protection of properties that embody these values. The overall conservation goal map shown in Section 4 of this report identifies 49,674 acres where the

greatest number of community goals can be “stacked” and met simultaneously through conservation.

In addition to identifying and mapping these goals, the Community Conservation Plan highlights some key themes that emerged from community input. Importantly, despite major divisions in the community, there is strong consensus about the need to protect water and acequias, the need to preserve local agricultural traditions, and the need for more close-to-home access to nature.

Nearly one-quarter of Taos residents live below the poverty line, and local rates of obesity and diabetes are very high. Through their engagement in the Community Conservation Plan, Taosños expressed a strong desire for more close-to-home access to nature, which echoes recent research findings that show enormous mental, social, and physical benefits from spending time outdoors. This Community Conservation Plan provides a road map to help Taos find options for protecting its unique natural beauty and cultural traditions while cultivating tools to face its most pressing challenges.

*Please note that the Community Conservation Plan is focused on opportunities for **voluntary** conservation of private land. These strategies may include voluntary purchase of private land that could be converted to a public park; voluntary creation of conservation easements on private land that protect working lands or sensitive areas without providing public access;*

voluntary creation of conservation easements on private land that allow some public access; or voluntary creation of trail easements through private land. Please see below more information about voluntary land conservation.

Please also note that some of the strategies discussed in Section 6 (Implementing the Community Conservation Plan) may be relevant to public lands and tribal lands, but those areas have their own management plans and conservation priorities.

What Is Voluntary Land Conservation?

This Community Conservation Plan is intended to guide voluntary land conservation with landowners willing and interested in participating. The plan identifies opportunities to work with landowners to find win-win solutions that benefit landowners, protect land for future generations, and help to meet community goals. This may mean working with willing landowners to purchase land outright (in “full fee”) or acquiring conservation easements for permanent protection. If land is purchased outright for conservation, it is often held and managed by a land conservation nonprofit organization or by a public land management agency. In these cases owners can allow public access, giving the community more places to walk and play, and provide access to other public lands.

Conservation easements have many different purposes, including preserving working farms and ranches or forests, protecting wildlife

habitat, providing recreational access, or accomplishing some combination of all three. Conservation easements can help landowners continue to use working land for farming, ranching, or forestry and are tailored to the unique circumstances of each property and landowner. Through conservation easements, landowners either sell or donate some of the rights associated with a property (for example, the right to subdivide a property), but still retain ownership of the land and the ability to sell it or pass it on to heirs subject to the restrictions of the easement.

As mentioned above, when entering into a conservation easement agreement a landowner can be paid for the rights being sold (if funding is available), donate them, or arrange a combination of the two. In the case of a donation, there can be both federal and state tax benefits. Conservation easements can help ensure that valuable farmland or important wildlife habitat is never developed. Because the restrictions that are part of conservation easement agreements are permanent, landowners need to do their own due diligence to ensure that long-term benefits of protecting their land outweigh the costs of permanently restricting development.

“We are the land, and the land is us. If we do not preserve it, we risk losing our identity as a people.”

—DARIEN FERNANDEZ, TAOS TOWN COUNCILMEMBER

2. Taos County overview

“Taoseños are deeply connected to the land. Community elders have wonderful stories of parents and grandparents who grew and foraged nearly everything they needed from the mountains, forests, rivers and acequia-irrigated bottomlands of the valley. And centuries-old religious ceremonies, from the Deer Dance of the Pueblos to the procession of San Isidro, the patron saint of farmers, continue to show the relationship between people and nature.”

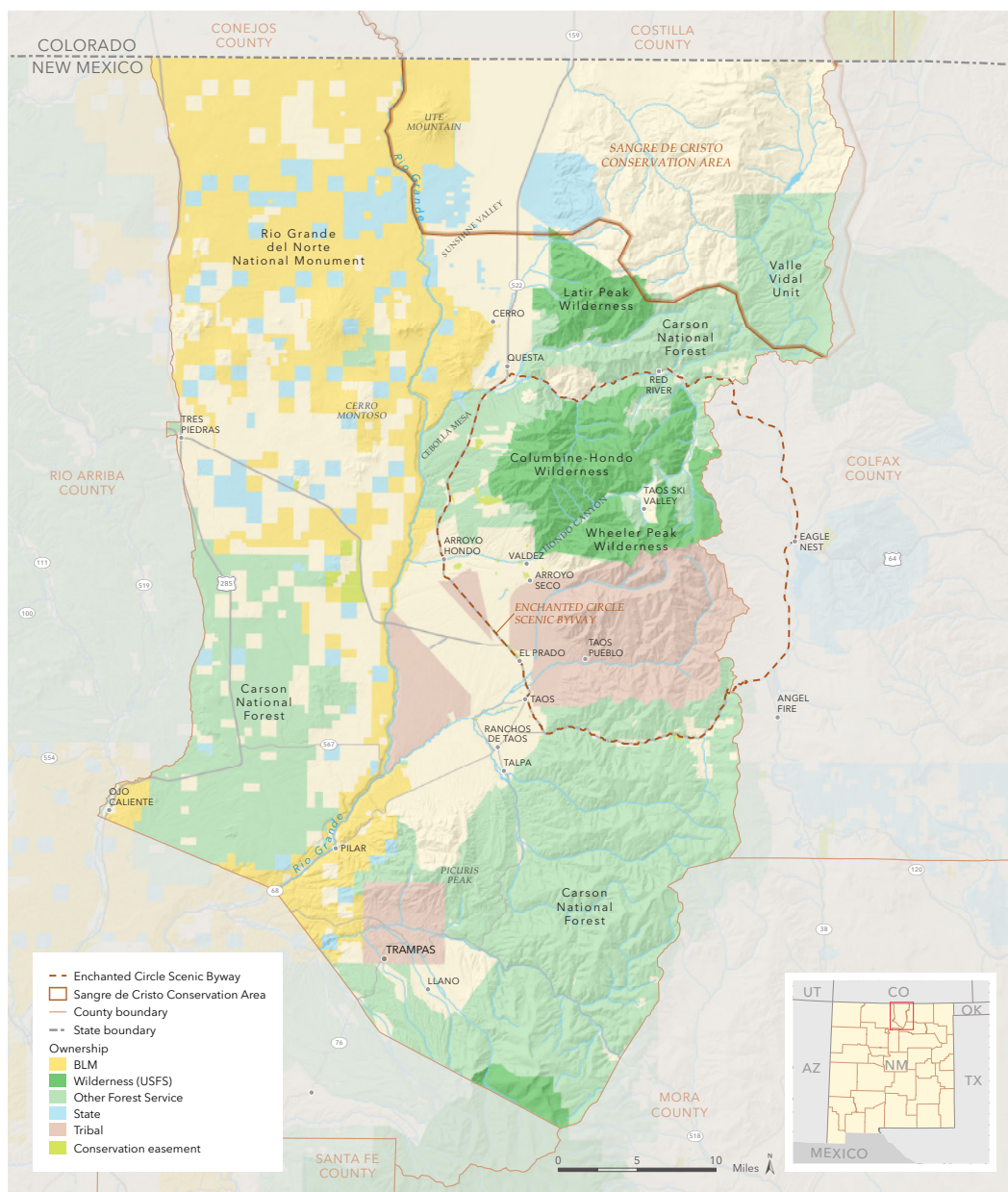
—GILLIAN JOYCE,
ADAPTED FROM FERNANDO PARK LTA REPORT

IT’S NO SECRET THAT TAOS COUNTY IS SPECTACULARLY BEAUTIFUL AND CULTURALLY RICH. The county is home to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the southernmost range of the Rocky Mountains, the Picuris Pueblo, and the Taos Pueblo. Taos County’s stunning landscapes range from mountain peaks and high desert mesas to rich farmlands that have been irrigated for hundreds of years using traditional acequia systems – beginning with Hispano

settlers who came to Taos before it was annexed by the United States. Land is central to the area’s culture and sense of community.

Despite its rich natural and cultural resources, the county faces enormous challenges. There is a long history of conflicts over land management and control of resources. Longtime residents and newcomers, Pueblo, Hispano, and Anglo community members, often do not see eye to eye on the county’s future. Tourists and second-home owners are increasingly drawn to Taos, but the economic benefits they bring are not reaching all residents, and tensions have been exacerbated by increasing land and home prices. Amid a boom in recreation tourism, Taos has very high poverty, and local obesity rates are much higher and rates of vigorous exercise are much lower than the national average. Meanwhile, the area’s legacy Hispano population is shrinking and the population is aging as many young people leave the area for opportunity elsewhere.

Still, despite conflicts and challenges, local communities agree that in the face of increasing development, important places must be protected. There is also widespread consensus that residents need more protected areas that will allow them to come together and to connect with nature.



Study area

TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN



➤ **FIGURE 1** Special thanks to the following data providers: Taos County, Town of Taos, Taos Land Trust, and Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Copyright © The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only.

Population and Housing

Taos County has an estimated population of 33,084 with an annual population growth rate of 0.4 percent (32,937 in 2010 to 33,084 in 2014). New Mexico's growth rate is 1.3 percent per year. The 2012 median age for the county is 44.4 years, which is older than the New Mexico median age (35.5 years) and the national median age (36.8 years). Over half of the population in the county (56 percent) identifies as Hispanic/Latino, and 6 percent are Native American. Just over 5,700 people live in the town of Taos, and nearly 2,000 people live on Taos Pueblo lands. According to recent estimates, there are 20,296 housing units in Taos County – very few of these are the most affordable type of apartment-style housing. Over 20 percent of the housing countywide is for seasonal or occasional use, and at any one time over one-third of housing is vacant.

Community Health

Local rates of morbid obesity and chronic diabetes in Taos County are very high. In Taos, 33.7 percent of the population is obese, which is 11 percent higher than the national average. The percentage of Taoseños who get regular vigorous exercise (50.6 percent) is 11 percent lower than the national average. Data from the Indian Health Service clinic indicate that 47 percent of Pueblo youth are overweight or obese and that 21 percent of adults have diabetes. These health problems are overlaid by persistent poverty among many local families and children, often making chronic disease more difficult to prevent and treat. Results from a 2013 analysis by Holy

Cross Hospital indicate that many factors negatively affect the health of local communities, including lack of health insurance and affordable health care options, lack of access to mental health and substance abuse treatment resources, and economic factors that contribute to inadequate diets.

Economy

Nearly a quarter of Taos County residents live below the poverty line. The median household income for Taos County is \$32,637, which is much lower than both the state and national median household incomes (\$41,587 and \$49,559, respectively). Local Native American households have a median income 21 percent below that of Anglo households and 6 percent below that of Hispanic households. Hispanic households have a median income 15 percent below that of Anglo households.

Local employment by industry has changed in the past few decades, with a shrinking number of jobs in construction and manufacturing and an increasing number of jobs in educational services, health care and social services, professional and technical services, and real estate. From 1970 to 2011, average earnings per job shrank from \$33,858 to \$32,142, a 5 percent decrease. Since 1990, the annual unemployment rate has varied from a high of 18.8 percent in 1992 to an all-time low of 4.5 percent in 2007. In January 2017, the unemployment rate for Taos County was 8.5 percent. Unemployment rates have been below 10 percent since 2000. Recently, the economy has become somewhat more

diversified, which means it is less impacted by seasonal employment and national economic downturns.

Taos County is one of the most tourism-dependent counties in New Mexico, as over 30 percent of its jobs come directly or indirectly from tourism. Visitor spending in Taos County grew 3.2 percent in 2014; that year, tourists spent money on lodging (\$49.4 million), retail (\$32.1 million), recreation (\$21.5 million), transport (\$20.6 million), and second homes (\$74.9 million).

Land Use and Ownership

Taos County covers over 1.4 million acres. Roughly half of the land in Taos County is federally owned, and only 31 percent is in private ownership (see Table 1). Pueblo lands encompass 8 percent of the county and the state owns 6 percent. Federal public lands in Taos County include Carson National Forest and Rio Grande del Norte National Monument (established in 2013). The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are the primary federal landholders in the county.

Historically, land use in Taos County has revolved around farming, ranching, mining, hunting, and timber harvesting. Land grants were made during the Spanish and Mexican periods of New Mexico's history (1598–1821 and 1821–1846, respectively). Land grants

were given as both private grants (made to individuals) and communal grants (made for establishing settlements). The land grant system was used until 1848 when New Mexico became part of the United States. However, disputes stemming from the land grant system still exist today. The movement to revive old land grants affects nearly 35 percent of the county's total property tax base, and the Hispano community is divided on how to address land grants.

**TABLE 1. LANDOWNERSHIP
IN TAOS COUNTY**

Agency	Acres	Percent
Federal Land	769,168	55%
Bureau of Land Management	250,102	18%
U.S. Forest Service	519,066	37%
State Land	78,512	6%
State Land Office	61,584	4%
State Dept. of Game and Fish	16,928	1%
Pueblo	116,909	8%
Private Land	440,698	31%
Total	1,405,287	100%

Water

“Without water, the land becomes useless.”

—MARK GALLEGOS, TAOS COUNTY COMMISSIONER

Taos County crosses six watersheds, including the Canadian Headwaters Watershed, Cimarron Watershed, Mora Watershed, Alamosa-Trinchera Watershed, Upper Rio Grande Watershed, and Rio Chama Watershed. The 2016 Regional Water Plan indicates that Taos County will face up to an 80,000-acre-foot annual shortage of water by 2030, depending on drought conditions. This would most heavily impact irrigated agriculture and commercial water uses.

Taos County lies within the Rio Grande Basin. The Rio Grande originates in Colorado and flows through Taos County north to south. Most of the Rio Grande is fed by perennial tributaries created from precipitation from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in eastern Taos County. The major water users in the county include 147 acequia associations, two pueblos, 32 mutual domestic water associations, four incorporated municipalities, and two water and sanitation districts.

Nearly 90 percent of Taos County water withdrawals come from surface water sources. However, most local drinking water comes from groundwater. As a result, acequias and wetlands are especially important for groundwater recharge. According to the 2016 Comprehensive Plan Update, the

fastest-growing component of water use in Taos County is an estimated 7,400 domestic water well users.

ACEQUIAS

Acequias are hand-dug, gravity-fed irrigation canals created to divert stream water and sustain local farms. Northern New Mexico’s acequias represent some of the oldest intact water-management infrastructure in America. Acequias divert, divide, and deliver water to crops and livestock, form borders and pathways, connect communities of irrigators, sustain biodiversity along riparian corridors, and replenish groundwater wherever they reach.



The Rio Grande River

RICH REID

Pueblo and acequia water rights and water uses in Taos County are guaranteed by treaty. In almost all stream systems, water claims exceed the natural supply of stream flow. New Mexico has a network of approximately 1,000 acequias that bring irrigation water to 12,000 farms on 160,000 acres of land. The acequias were first established when the Spanish conquistadores required settlers to locate near waterways. Traditionally, the mayor-domo, or ditch boss, oversaw the welfare of an acequia system.

The Taos Valley Acequia Association, organized in 1987, comprises the 55 community acequias. The Acequia Association works to protect the rights of the Taos Valley irrigators to access water from the Rio Grande del Rancho, Rio Chiquito, Rio Fernando, Rio Pueblo, Rio Lucero, Arroyo Seco, and Rio Hondo stream systems.

WATER QUALITY

In recent years, concerns have increased about both surface water quality and groundwater quality in Taos County. Surface water quality has been affected by nonpoint sources, including runoff from agriculture, recreation, road and highway maintenance, and resource extraction. Common contaminants detected in the Rio Grande Basin include aluminum and selenium. Despite water quality being rated “excellent” in some areas, high levels of sulfate, iron, calcium, magnesium, aluminum, nickel, and other elements have been found in upper Weimer and Canon Heights and

along the Red River in Questa. Wells near Tres Piedras exceeded Environmental Protection Agency guidelines for elevated levels of zinc, uranium, and lead. Additional groundwater quality concerns include elevated levels of fluoride, arsenic, and uranium.

Wildlife

Taos County is home to a variety of animals, including bears, elk, deer, sheep, marmots, and pika. The area also hosts a vast array of plant species, including piñon, juniper, fir, aspen, spruce, ponderosa pine, and Engelmann Spruce. Taos County is known for bird sightings, including bald eagles, golden eagles, great blue herons, red-tailed hawks, hummingbirds, and red-winged blackbirds.

Federally threatened species in this area include yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*), and Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). Endangered species in Taos County include the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and the black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*). State-listed threatened and endangered species also include Pacific marten (*Martes caurina*), meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*), white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura*), common black hawk (*Buteogallus anthracinus*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), Arctic peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*), boreal owl (*Aegolius funereus*), Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*),

white-eared hummingbird (*Hylocharis leucotis*), gray vireo (*Vireo vicinior*), Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*), and the Sangre De Cristo peaclam (*Pisidium sanguinichristi*).

Recreation

The landscapes of Taos County provide enormous recreational opportunities, including hiking, biking, river rafting, climbing, hunting and fishing, and skiing. Access to spectacular recreation is a major draw for both tourists and new residents. Statewide recreation contributes \$3.8 billion annually to New Mexico's economy, including \$2.75 billion in retail sales and \$184 million in tax revenue, supporting 47,000 jobs. Taos Ski Valley alone generates between \$13 million and \$14 million annually – an amount that is expected to increase to \$22 million annually by 2025. Recreation opportunities are found throughout the region's public lands. Within the town of Taos, the Parks Division oversees and maintains Kit Carson Park and Fred Baca Park but does not provide any formal recreation programming.

Agricultural Lands

Farmland is disappearing quickly in Taos County. According to the most recent agricultural census, acres of farmland in Taos County decreased by a dramatic 31 percent between 2007 and 2012. During this period the average size of farms decreased from 717 acres to 319 acres, and the number of farms increased

from 637 to 983. Taos County is still one of the top producers in the state for bison, honey and honeybee colonies, llamas, head cabbage, cherries, pears, garlic, and herbs. The breakdown of agricultural land use is pastureland (52.5 percent), woodland (37.7 percent), cropland (7.8 percent), and other uses (1.9 percent).

In 2014, the state required counties to reassess the properties that were being allowed to pay reduced property taxes based on their agricultural status. Since 2014, Taos County has revoked 800 agricultural classifications, resulting in huge increases in tax liability for many property owners whose agricultural production had declined for a variety of reasons. In addition, the New Mexico Water Code states that if a water right is not exercised for four consecutive years, it may be taken away. This code applies to property owners with acequia water rights.

This crackdown on agricultural land classification coincides with a severe drought in the region and increases operational costs for small-scale ranching. Revoking this tax break has added approximately \$51 million to the county's tax base. However, because many of the reclassified properties are multigenerational family farms covering relatively small acreage and owned by aging landowners who can no longer farm, increased tax burdens on reclassified land may force families to sell properties that they have owned for many years.

CASE STUDY 1

Red Clay Trail: Taos Land Trust Assists with Permanent Cultural Easement

For centuries, members of the Taos Pueblo made a pilgrimage by foot and on horseback along the Red Clay Trail to the Questa area to collect materials for ceremonial activities. In recent decades, fences, gates, and seeking permission from private landowners have made the journey more onerous.

Each year, Taos Pueblo officials notify landowners along the Red Clay Trail of the August pilgrimage and ask to pass through their lands. Though current landowners with land along the trail have happily granted their permission for this annual traditional access, future owners—especially those who are unaware of the cultural significance of the land—could deny access. To avoid future conflicts, members of the Pueblo hope to permanently secure their access through a permanent access easement agreement.

In 2009, Taos Land Trust became the first private landowner to grant Taos Pueblo a permanent “Cultural and Traditional Access Easement Agreement.” This easement, like the Land Trust’s

conservation easements, will stay in place no matter who may own the property in the future. The Traditional Access Easement covers Taos Land Trust’s 22-acre “Rio Hondo Park” along the Rim Road in Valdez.

Over the past several years, the Taos Land Trust has worked with the Taos Pueblo Warchief’s office to identify and approach private landowners along the Red Clay Trail to encourage them to enter easement agreements similar to the one the Land Trust signed in 2009. This effort began in 2010, but in 2016 the Land Trust and others traveled the Red Clay Trail to map it and determine landownership. Taos Land Trust staff joined staff from Taos Pueblo and the U.S. Forest Service to travel the Red Clay Trail and map its path through public and private lands.

The daylong trip took the group along Pueblo lands, public roads, and Forest Service property, through utility easements, and across a handful of privately held lands. Though the trail corridor may change slightly depending on annual conditions, this trip allowed the Pueblo to gather detailed information that will help the Warchief’s office approach landowners and secure permanent access.

3. Community engagement

DEVELOPMENT OF THIS COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN involved extensive community engagement throughout the nearly two-year process. The speak-outs, community meetings, community survey, focus groups, interviews, and youth-led interviews undertaken as part of the planning process are described below.

Key Themes

Some key themes arose during community engagement for the Community Conservation Plan, including the following:

- Residents expressed a nearly universal desire to protect water supplies and traditional acequia systems.
- Residents reached a strong consensus around the need for more close-to-home access to nature and safe options for walking and biking – especially for children and families.
- The priorities and the needs of longtime residents and newcomers and visitors are often different and potentially difficult to reconcile. This is at least partially a result of cultural divisions and entrenched economic inequity.
 - Longtime community members want increased access to the outdoors, but they voiced a great deal of concern about the impacts of increasing recreational use – particularly by tourists.
 - Longtime residents are also concerned about the impacts of tourism and newcomers on local culture.
- Many residents are passionate about preserving agricultural traditions and

encouraging local food production.

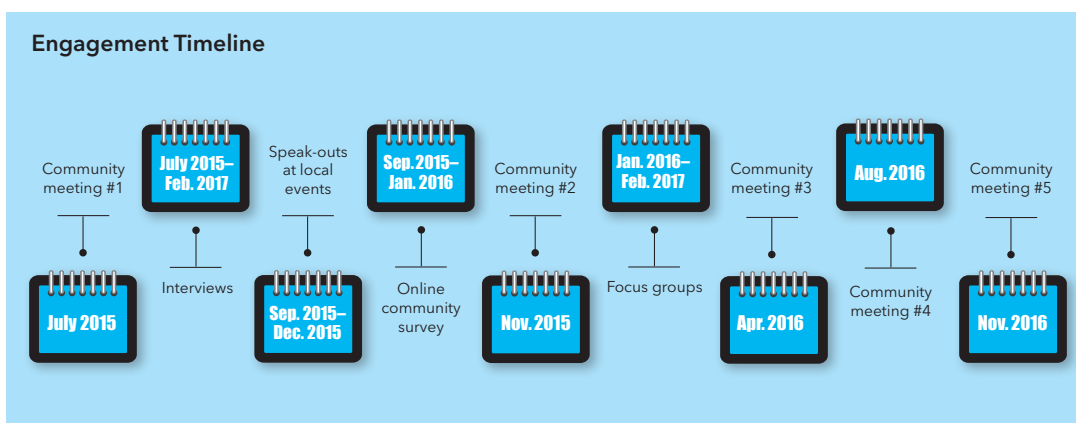
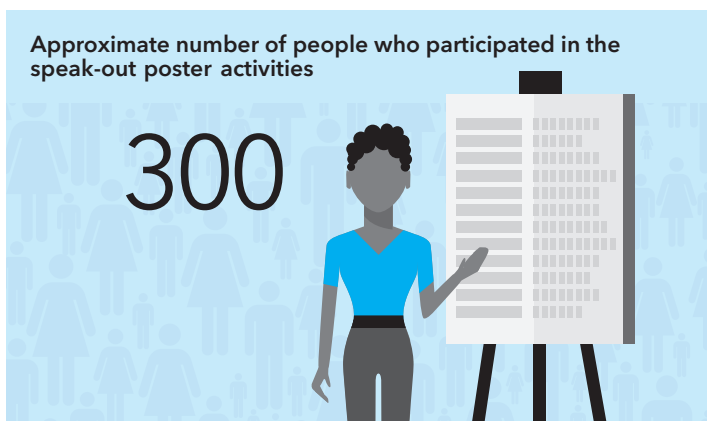
- Residents do not always share a strong sense of stewardship of local open spaces. For example, many interviewees and meeting participants talked about frequent illegal dumping in open space areas.
- Close collaboration among local governments, resource agencies, conservation and community groups, and active and engaged residents is needed.
- Local governments and local nonprofits have very limited resources. Reliable funding and local capacity-building will be especially critical for implementing the Community Conservation Plan – including for land acquisition and stewardship.

Speak-Outs

Nearly 300 people participated in speak-out poster activities in September through November of 2015. The poster activities captured community priorities for both conservation and trails. A total of 736 people were engaged through speak-outs and other outreach events at Taos Farmers Market (September and October 2015); San Geronimo Day (September 2015); and at Cid’s Market, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Taos Ancianos Lunch, Elevation Coffee, and Super Save Market (November 2015). People who were unable to participate in poster activities were given postcards with information about the online community survey.

Community Conservation Plan at a Glance

PATRICE GALLAGHER



Community Meetings

Five community meetings were held for the Taos County Community Conservation Plan. Three of these were joint meetings that also incorporated stakeholder engagement for the Enchanted Circle Trails Plan. One hundred and sixty community members, representing a wide range of organizations and interests, attended at least one of the meetings for the Community Conservation Plan. The kickoff meeting for the plan was held at the KTAOS Solar Center in July 2015. Subsequent meetings were held at the Talpa Community Center (November 2015), the Juan I. Gonzales Agricultural Center (April 2016), the Town of Taos Council Chambers (August 2016), and the Mabel Dodge Luhan House (November 2016). Participants in the community meetings helped identify the goals, vision, and guiding principles for the Community Conservation Plan. Meeting attendees also reviewed the maps created for the plan and advised on the relative weighting for the goals within the overall map (see Section 4: Mapping Conservation Values). See online Appendix 5 for the full summaries from each of the five community meetings.

Community Survey

The joint community survey for the Taos Community Conservation Plan and the Enchanted Circle Trails Plan was available online from September 2015 through January 2016. Outreach for the survey included posting survey information on the Town of Taos and Taos Land Trust websites and in a weeklong wallpaper ad in the online version of the

Taos News. The Taos Land Trust and others in the core team also reached out to the Questa Economic Development Fund, Taos Entrepreneurial Network, Taos Chamber of Commerce, University of New Mexico faculty, Taos Charter School, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, Taos Health Council, Agricultural Resolution Committee (now Alianza Agri-Cultura), and community leaders in Angel Fire. Postcards advertising the community survey were distributed at the speak-out events mentioned above. Survey information was also posted on community bulletin boards in Questa. Paper surveys (and postage paid return envelopes) were distributed at Ancianos and at Super Save Market (in addition to postcards with the survey website information). The survey URL was also included in utility bills for the Kit Carson Electric Co-op.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE SURVEY?

Six hundred and fifty-five people participated in the community survey. Most survey responses were submitted online, but six people submitted paper surveys. Please note: Over 200 survey respondents skipped demographic questions, so the percentages below refer only to the participants who answered those questions.

- Over 70 percent of respondents have lived in the Taos area for more than six years, and over 57 percent have been in the area for more than ten years.
- 55 percent of responses were from men.
- Over 40 percent of participants were 61 years old or older. Less than 10 percent of

responses were from people 35 years old or younger.

- Over 40 percent of participants have household incomes of over \$75,000 per year, and 18 percent had household incomes under \$25,000 annually.
- Only 14 percent of respondents identified themselves as Hispano/Hispanic.

HISPANO/HISPANIC VERSUS ANGLO RESPONSES

Taos County is 56 percent Hispano/Hispanic, but only 14 percent of survey participants who provided demographic data identified as Hispano/Hispanic. As a result, key survey responses have been weighted so that they accurately reflect local demographics.

There were several statistically significant differences between Hispano/Hispanic and Anglo responses. More Hispano/Hispanic participants (88 percent) ranked water as their most important regional value than did Anglo participants (75 percent). In addition, Hispano/Hispanic respondents were more concerned about agriculture and acequias and slightly less concerned about recreational access.

Recreational activities used by Anglo and Hispano/Hispanic participants also differed. Anglo participants were more likely to hike

and run on dirt paths, walk their dogs, view wildlife, and cross-country ski/snowshoe.

Hispano/Hispanic respondents were more likely to ride horses, snowmobile, canoe/kayak/raft, and hunt, fish, and forage.

Conservation Priorities

Survey participants were asked to choose their top three priorities among seven possible conservation goals: water quality/quantity, access to recreational opportunities, views, acequias, agricultural land/ranch land, cultural and historic resources, and wildlife. The selection of these suggested goals was based on input at the first community meeting in July 2015. Once Hispano responses were weighted to reflect local demographics, the overall priorities were:

1. Protect water quality and quantity;
2. Protect cultural resources, including traditional agriculture;
3. Protect wildlife habitat; and
4. Provide access to recreational opportunities.

Table 2 shows results with Hispano/Hispanic weighting already calculated. Totals are show for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices separately and totaled together. For “choice ranked total” first choice responses were weighted most heavily (given full weight); second choice responses were weighted 0.8; and third choice responses were weighted 0.6.

TABLE 2. PLEASE RANK THE TOP THREE REGIONAL VALUES THAT YOU THINK ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS IN TAOS					
Regional Value	1st	2nd	3rd	Unranked Total	Choice Ranked Total
Water Quality and Quantity	1044	160	47	1251	1200
Cultural and Historic Resources, Including Traditional Agriculture	174	600	614	1388	1022
Wildlife	57	365	268	690	510
Access to Recreational Opportunities	84	190	269	543	397
Cultural and Historic Resources	44	211	320	575	1022
Acequias	57	269	110	436	338
Agricultural Land/Ranchland	73	120	184	377	279
Views	47	67	137	251	183
Other	24	7	50	81	60
TOTAL	1,604	1,989	1,999	5,592	5,011

Two important things to note:

1. Protecting water is a very dominant priority based on this community input.
2. Because of broader community input about their importance, protection of agricultural land and acequias was folded into the “Protect cultural resources, including traditional agriculture” goal. As a result this goal became the second-highest priority below protecting water.

MOST ICONIC AND CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPES

Participants were asked to identify the area’s most iconic and culturally significant landscapes. The most frequently mentioned areas were the Rio Grande, the Gorge, and the Pueblo.

WHAT PLACES AND RESOURCES ARE MOST THREATENED?

When asked about the area’s most threatened places and resources, participants were most concerned about impacts from development and impacts on water.

RICH REID



River rafting on the Rio Grande near Pilar, New Mexico



Girl playing outside

BALANCING PROMOTING TOURISM AND PROTECTING LOCAL CULTURE

Most residents want to encourage some economic development, including increased tourism, but there is some tension between those interested in promoting economic development and those who want to protect local culture and pristine natural areas.

One survey participant noted that “tourism

is certainly a lifeblood of the region, but we must [also] retain our uniqueness, landscapes, community, and culture.” Another participant argued that “land conservation [should] protect cultural heritage by acknowledging the past, but also recognizing the needs of people on the land in the future.” Several respondents argued that Anglo residents are more interested in increasing tourism than are local Pueblo and Hispano communities.

SUPPORT FOR EXPANDING THE TRAIL SYSTEM

Residents expressed very strong support for expanding the trail system throughout the Enchanted Circle region. Eighty-six percent of survey participants said they support or strongly support expanding the trail and pathway system in the Enchanted Circle. Less than 5 percent did not support expansion. Many residents use trails and pathways daily or almost daily. The highest priority for trail investments by a large margin (for both participants overall and Hispano/Hispanic respondents in particular) was to create new trails and pathways for safety. The second priority was connected road cycling paths, and the third priority overall was maintaining/improving existing backcountry trails.

Focus Groups

Taos Land Trust led several focus groups during the planning process. Focus groups included members of a local health council, local youth, and parents from a child-care center at the University of New Mexico (UNM). The focus groups agreed on the importance of providing safer paths and trails for connectivity, commuting, and access to the outdoors and better access to healthy, locally grown food. Participants drew attention to the importance of protecting Taos's culture and history and expressed support for limiting development. Participants in the youth focus group emphasized the need for fostering a cultural relationship with the land and providing more outdoor spaces where the community can

gather and feel safe – particularly parks that provide opportunities to build skills or grow food.

Interviews

Twenty-one community leaders participated in interviews for the Community Conservation Plan. Input from interviews helped inform other community engagement efforts and provided important context throughout the planning process. Some highlights from interviews are summarized below.

- **POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE TRENDS.** Interviewees mentioned a wide variety of positive changes in the area, including the recognition and protection of the Rio Grande del Norte and renewed focus on the acequia system. Interviewees also expressed concern about the economy, the rate of agricultural land loss, and local rates of crime and substance abuse.
- **QUALITY OF LIFE.** Interviewees focused on the importance of the river, mountains, open space, and access to public lands to their quality of life. They also expressed appreciation for Taos's small-town character and rich cultural history. Several interviewees expressed the belief that the generations of families calling this place home are what make Taos special. Interviewees felt that local quality of life was threatened by development pressure, traffic, lack of education, substance abuse, and lack of respect for local culture.

- **PLACES WITH SPECIAL MEANING.** Interviewees mentioned a wide range of places with special meaning, including Kit Carson Park, Fred Baca Park, Williams Lake, Garcia Park, local waterfalls, Blue Lake, the Wild and Scenic River Frontage, the Valdez trail system, Columbine-Hondo, Carson National Forest, the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument, Taos Pueblo, Stagecoach Hot Springs, Black Rock Hot Springs, Taos Ski Valley, Couse Pasture, Mitchell Pasture, El Prado Pasture, the Ranchos church, and Llano Quemado.

Youth Interviews

In November 2015 and December 2016, local Upward Bound students conducted 14 interviews with each other and with other local young people ages 14 to 18. Upward Bound works with low-income high school students and is designed to strengthen the math and science skills of participating students to encourage them to pursue college degrees in STEM (science, technology, engineering, or math) subjects. The Taos Upward Bound program at the University of New Mexico works with 60 eligible low-income students (9th- and 10th-grade) who are potential first-generation college students. The Upward Bound students were provided training in interview techniques and then asked each other (and other peers) questions about time spent outside with their families; special memories of time spent outdoors; whether their family is engaged in local agriculture; cultural traditions related to land and water;

and priorities for protecting natural resources for future generations.

Interviewees indicated that they spend between two and 30 hours outside with their families every week. Most interviewees enjoy spending time outdoors with their families and pets, and many feel especially connected to Kit Carson and Fred Baca parks – particularly the nature trail at Fred Baca. Interviewees recounted family and cultural traditions, including harvesting piñons, cleaning acequias, and chopping firewood. A few of the stories from the youth interviews are included here:

- “The first time my sister took me hiking at Williams Lake with the dog, it was difficult, but it was honestly one of the best feelings in the world.”
- “When my family from Mexico comes over we like to take them to the hot springs and the river and make some food. I also like to spend time with them and play La Loteria while lying in the blankets.”
- “One special memory is from the time I went hiking near Red River. I liked being there because it’s a beautiful place, and nature is relaxing.”
- “I would like people to be more cautious of what they are doing. We need to take care of the water and not pollute it . . . I believe it’s important to stop littering and polluting, especially the water because that belongs to everyone – to us and to the animals.”

INTERVIEW SPOTLIGHT

Interview spotlight on open space and agriculture:

"I would advocate for community agriculture, and I feel like sustainability of community agriculture would benefit this small town. For example, one local market provides local fresh food, but it's expensive food. So I feel like if we were to have more - only saying this because we take economics - but if we had more supply the price would be better because there would be more choices than choosing just the expensive option. I think [open space and community gardens] is beneficial for people's health."

—BRANDON TRUJILLO (AGE 18)

"I like the way [a community garden] would be structured; take what you would put in. But I also really like the community garden idea because I think it would be really good to get the community together to work on the earth and make it better. Earth Day just happened and I feel like a lot of people just got together for that, and it'd be nice to see that all the time so a community garden would be a great foundation or a great start to get people together and working as a community to better the place that they live in."

—DIANA ARREOLA (AGE 18)



RICH REID

High Country Ranch

Rio Fernando Park: A Vision of Truly Community-Based Conservation

“The Fernando Park community envisions a future in which all members of the Taos community are invested and engaged in celebration and conservation of our lands and in which our lands support the vitality of our community, economy, and culture.”

—RIO FERNANDO PARK VISION STATEMENT

The planned Rio Fernando Park is at the center of Taos Land Trust’s commitment to preserving local agricultural traditions and bringing more accessible close-to-home nature to the community. The Land Trust acquired 20 acres southwest of downtown Taos along the Rio Fernando adjacent to Fred Baca Park in December 2015. The property has acres of riparian land, a long-neglected acequia, and an urban forest complete with fruit trees with towering cottonwoods that attract a diverse array of birds—including some endangered species.

In 2016, Taos Land Trust engaged a consultant to work with local leaders and residents to determine a vision for the property. Input was gathered from conservationists, agriculturalists, historians, community elders, artists and community arts advocates, elected officials, and youth. The central mission that evolved from community engagement is for the Rio Fernando Park to “provide space for the people of Taos to express, explore and grow our community’s sense of *querencia*—the rootedness of our culture in this place, this land, its history and future.”

Community members want active agriculture to be a centerpiece of the park—particularly space for demonstrating traditional local agricultural practices, including acequia irrigation and the processing of traditional foods. Restoring and revitalizing the acequia on the property would

be a key element of reintroducing agriculture. The park would also accommodate community gardening plots, which have not been widely available in the past.

Other efforts on the site would include restoration of the Rio Fernando and wetland areas. These restoration efforts would involve community volunteers and provide educational opportunities for local youth. Community members also expressed a desire for expanses of natural space in the park where families could connect to “a quiet space to be in nature in town” without needing a car. Walking paths would be designed to access natural spaces and other amenities on the property.

Other ideas for the property that will be considered during a future master planning effort include community event space; arts, culture, and history programming; an on-site residency program; and a small area for affordable housing. As it evolves, Rio Fernando Park will provide literal and figurative space for community-building; restoration and research; environmental education; art; traditional agriculture and land stewardship; and celebration of local history, culture, and identity.

As Kristina Ortez de Jones, Executive Director of Taos Land Trust, says, “We want this park to be a celebration of community. We want it to have everything. Space for solitude. Treehouses and tipis and natural play spaces where families can get together and kids can use their imaginations outdoors. An interpretive nature and prescription trail with signs designed by local young people who have a deepened understanding of local ecosystems. A thriving acequia. A community garden to help families eat healthier. Our community deserves this and we want to make it happen.”

**A poem for the Rio Fernando:
“Restore, inspire, imagine
Rebounding river ecosystem.”**

—MEG PETERSON, TEACHER/WRITER/BIRDWATCHER

4. Mapping conservation values

“To Indian people the land is a living thing. No matter who owns the land . . . it is still sacred. And that is why conserving land in the future is such a critical thing.”

—LINDA YARDLEY, TAOS PUEBLO

THE TOP CONSERVATION GOALS FOR THE COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN were determined based on community engagement results, particularly the community survey and speak-out events described above. The top four conservation goals for Taos County are (1) Protect water quality and quantity; (2) Protect cultural resources, including traditional agriculture; (3) Protect wildlife habitat; and (4) Provide access to recreational opportunities.

The GIS team from The Trust for Public Land worked with community meeting participants and a technical advisory team to create maps for each of these goals and an overall map combining the goals. Through analyzing and modeling spatial data, these regional priorities were translated into objective metrics and maps highlighting the areas where conservation would best meet community goals.

In moving from community engagement to GIS mapping and modeling phase, a technical advisory team of local experts provided strategic advice on data collection and modeling. Local experts' advice was invaluable in developing the criteria for each priority; identifying the best available data sources; and advising throughout the process to ensure that modeling assumptions were based on

defensible science and that input data and model results were accurate.

The maps created through the Community Conservation Plan process are included below. The full criteria matrix used in developing the Community Conservation Plan maps is shown in online Appendix 3.

Protect Water Quality and Quantity

“Water will tell you where it needs to go and where it can't go, be patient, listen and watch the waters flow. The shovel and a connection to the earth is all one needs.”

—MARK T. FLORES II, MAYORDOMO - ACEQUIA EN EL MEDIO/HART DITCH, CORDILLERA, RANCHOS DE TAOS

Water is a major concern for county residents. The Rio Grande is a defining feature of the local landscape. Taos is arid, and despite being relatively remote and sparsely populated, many parts of the county have experienced water quality issues as a result of runoff from agriculture, recreation, roads and highways, and resource extraction. Common contaminants detected in the Rio Grande Basin include aluminum and selenium. Despite the area's long history of agricultural water use through its traditional acequia systems, future water supplies are not guaranteed.

Figure 2 ● shows the results of the Protect water quality and quantity goal mapping. Criteria incorporated into the Protect Water map include (1) Protect riparian areas; (2) Protect and sustain soils; (3) Reduce catastrophic wildfire risk; (4) Protect acequias;

(5) Protect wetlands important for ground-water recharge; and (6) Protect headwater streams. Each of these criteria was given equal weight.

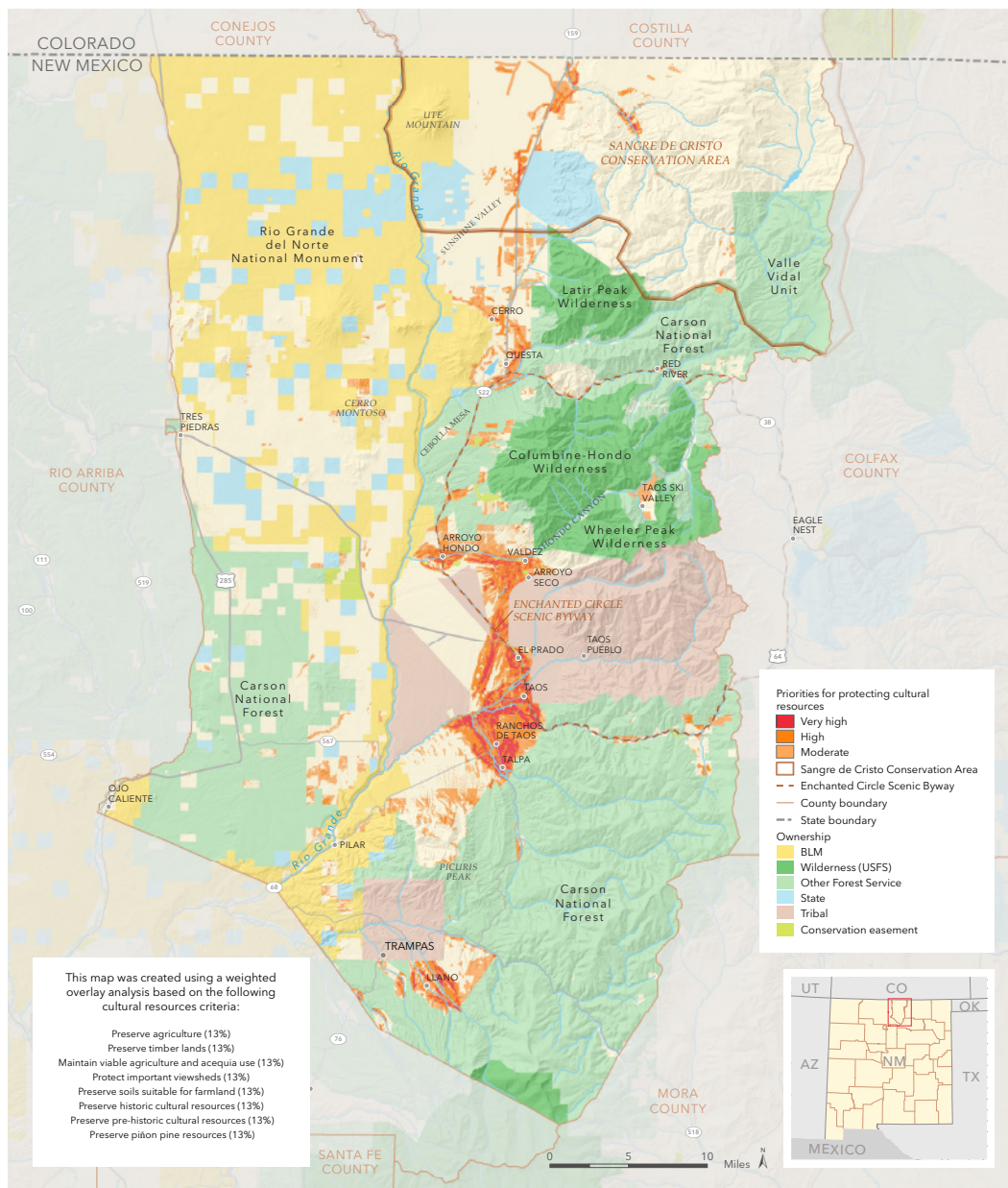
There are 3,522 acres of the highest-priority lands for water quality throughout Taos County. These lands, listed as “very high” priority in Table 3, are located along rivers and streams.

TABLE 3. WATER QUALITY PRIORITIES	
Priority	Acres
Very high	3,522.26
High	10,295.31
Moderate	109,238.75
Total	123,056.32



RICH REID

The Rio Grande River



Protect cultural resources including traditional agriculture

TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN



➔ **FIGURE 3** Special thanks to the following data providers: Taos County, Town of Taos, Taos Land Trust, and Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Copyright © The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only.

Protect Cultural Resources, Including Traditional Agriculture

Taos County has a long and rich cultural history. The Taos Pueblo has been continuously occupied for over 1,000 years. The area's agricultural history and traditional acequia systems date back hundreds of years to the region's original Spanish settlers. [Figure 3](#) shows the results of the Protect cultural resources, including traditional agriculture goal mapping. Criteria incorporated into this goal map include (1) Preserve agriculture; (2) Preserve timberlands; (3) Maintain viable agricultural sector and acequia use; (4) Protect important viewsheds; (5) Preserve soils suitable for farmland; (6) Preserve historic and cultural resources; (7) Preserve prehistoric

cultural resources; and (8) Preserve piñon pine resources. Each of these goals was given equal weight. The highest-priority lands for this goal are in flatlands near waterways and towns, particularly near Taos, Ranchos de Taos, and Talpa.

TABLE 4. PROTECT CULTURAL RESOURCES PRIORITIES

Priority	Acres
Very high	12,417.74
High	47,155.85
Moderate	152,934.25
Total	212,507.83

JOHNNY AND PAUL MACARTHUR



Foothills Traverse trail

Protect Wildlife Habitat

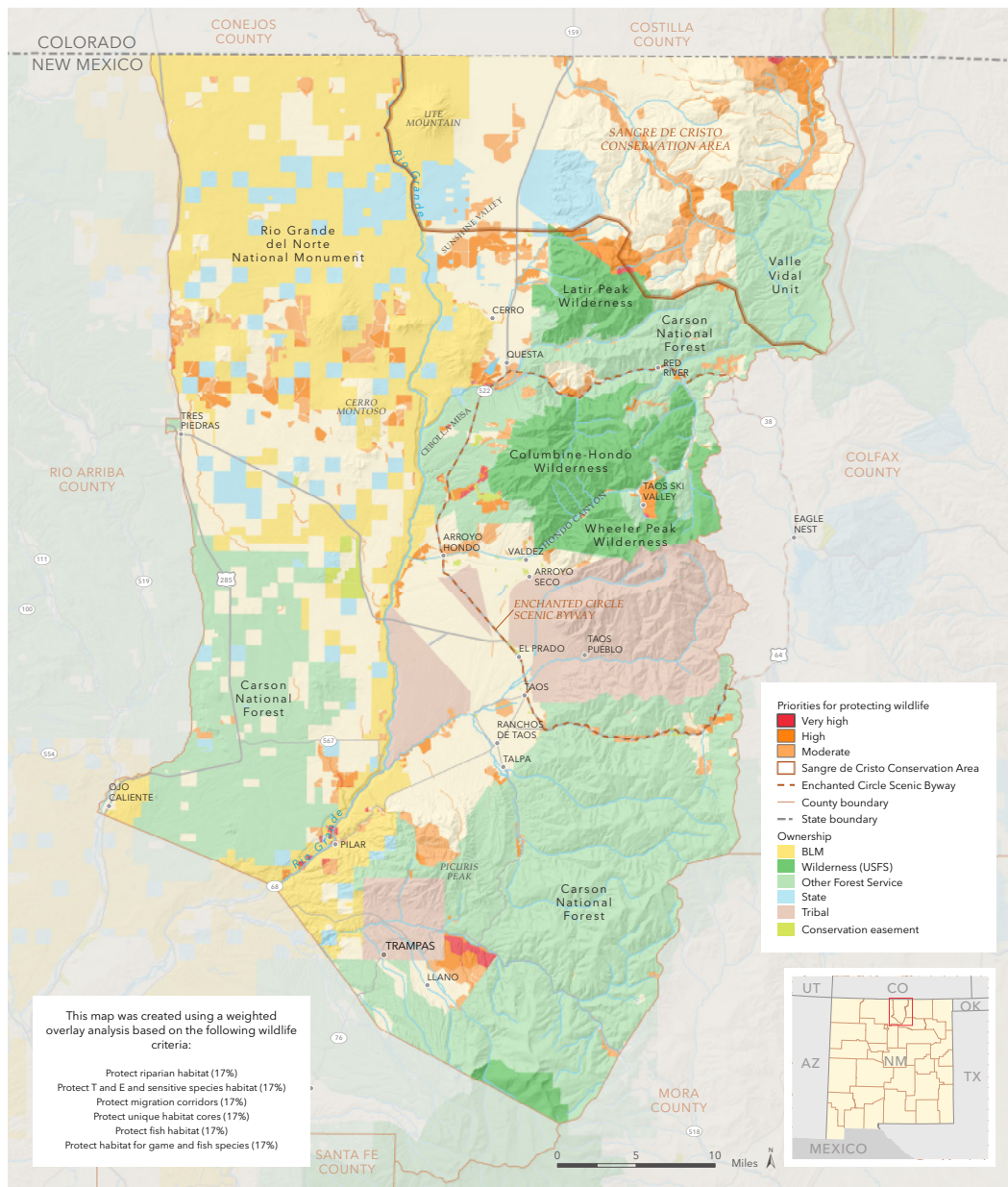
As described in Section 2, Taos County provides habitat for diverse wildlife. [Figure 4](#) shows the results of the Protect wildlife habitat goal mapping. Criteria incorporated into this goal map include (1) Protect riparian habitat; (2) Protect threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitat; (3) Protect migration corridors; (4) Protect unique habitat cores; (5) Protect fish habitat; and (6) Protect habitat for game and fish species. Each of these criteria was given equal weight. The highest-priority lands for this goal are located along waterways and in the southern tip of the county.

TABLE 5. WILDLIFE
HABITAT PRIORITIES

Priority	Acres
Very high	60,984.37
High	207,519.11
Moderate	226,439.72
Total	494,943.20



Mountain Bluebird perched on a branch



Protect wildlife

TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN



➔ **FIGURE 4** Special thanks to the following data providers: Taos County, Town of Taos, Taos Land Trust, and Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Copyright © The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only.

Provide Access to Recreational Opportunities

Community participants showed enormous enthusiasm for increasing safe opportunities to use parks and trails for outdoor recreation. The Enchanted Circle Trails Plan process, which was concurrent with the development of the Community Conservation Plan, gathered detailed input about trail and pathway priorities.

Figure 5 shows the results of the Provide access to recreational opportunities goal mapping. Criteria incorporated into this goal map include (1) Protect prominent peaks and

ridges; (2) Create a network of connected open space; (3) Encourage a variety of types of recreation with a focus on access to streams and lakes; (4) Conserve recreation opportunities identified in the Enchanted Circle Trails Plan; (5) Identify gaps in local park access; and (6) Identify gaps in access to public trailheads. The greatest weight was given to “Identify gaps in local park access” (28.5 percent) and “Identify gaps in access to public trailheads” (28.5 percent). As such, the highest-priority lands for this goal are located near towns in areas without access to parks and trailheads.

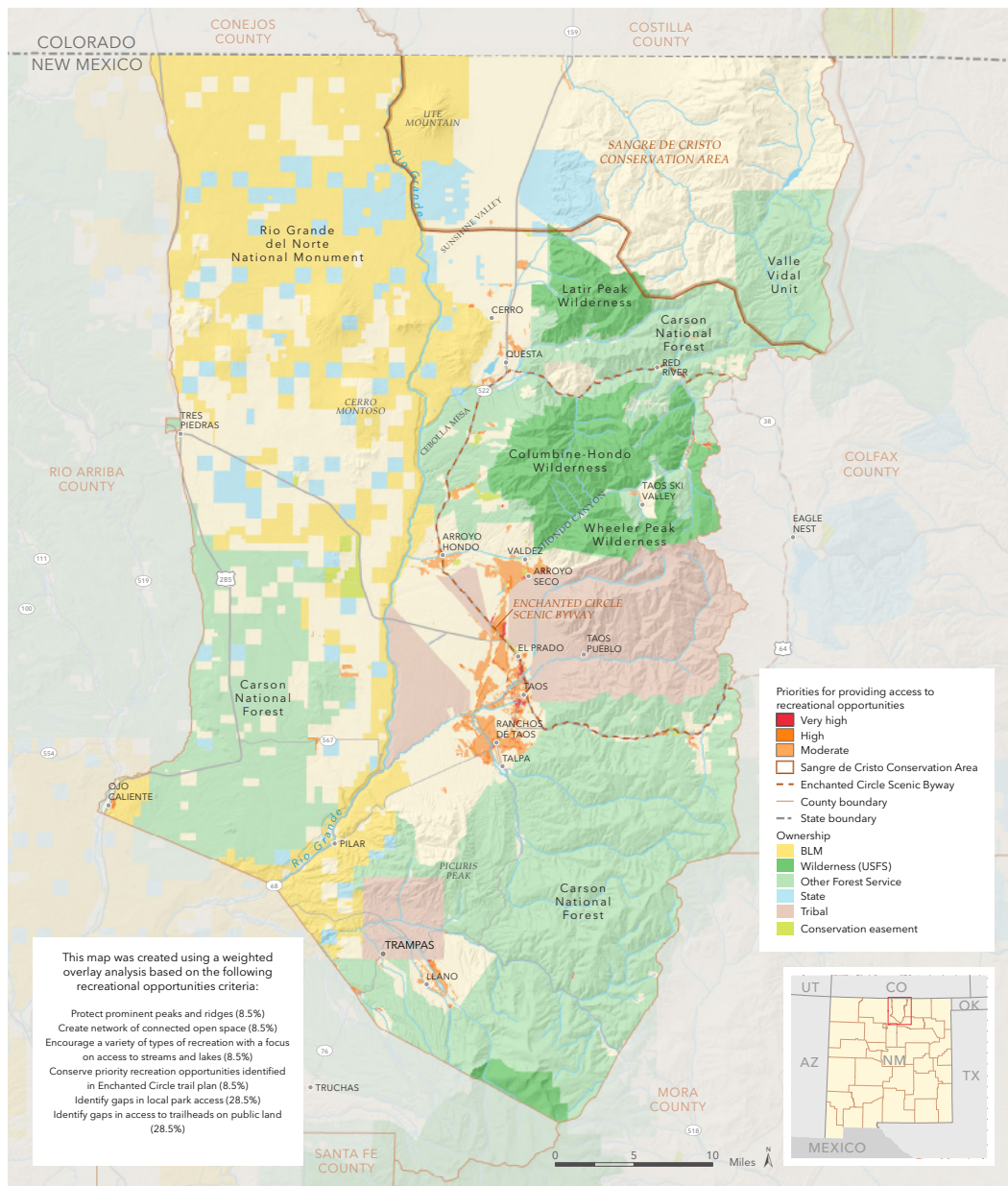


Splitboarding

JOHN MILLER

TABLE 6. ACCESS TO RECREATION PRIORITIES

Priority	Acres
Very high	1,304.81
High	4,526.72
Moderate	18,137.89
Total	23,969.42



Provide access to recreational opportunities

TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN



➔ **FIGURE 5** Special thanks to the following data providers: Taos County, Town of Taos, Taos Land Trust, and Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Copyright © The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only.

Overall Map

"In Northern New Mexico, la cultura has always been intrinsically linked to the land and water. Ancient acequias have allowed for water to flow out of the Sangre De Cristo mountains, and like blood vessels, has nourished the landscape—creating an oasis in the high desert. This culture is at risk though. Unchecked sprawl and development has fragmented the land. The culture, language, and history is slowly being lost, and without a plan for the future, it will surely disappear."

—JOHN MILLER, SENIOR PLANNER/FLOOD PLAIN MANAGER, TOWN OF TAOS

The overall map combines the results of each of the four goal maps described above; it identifies the areas where the greatest number of community goals can be "stacked" and met simultaneously through conservation of priority areas. The weighting of the goal maps within the overall map is based on the community survey results (see Section 3, Community Engagement, for more details).

- Protect water quality and quantity (38%)
- Protect cultural resources including traditional agriculture (33%)
- Protect wildlife habitat (16%)
- Provide access to recreational opportunities (13%)

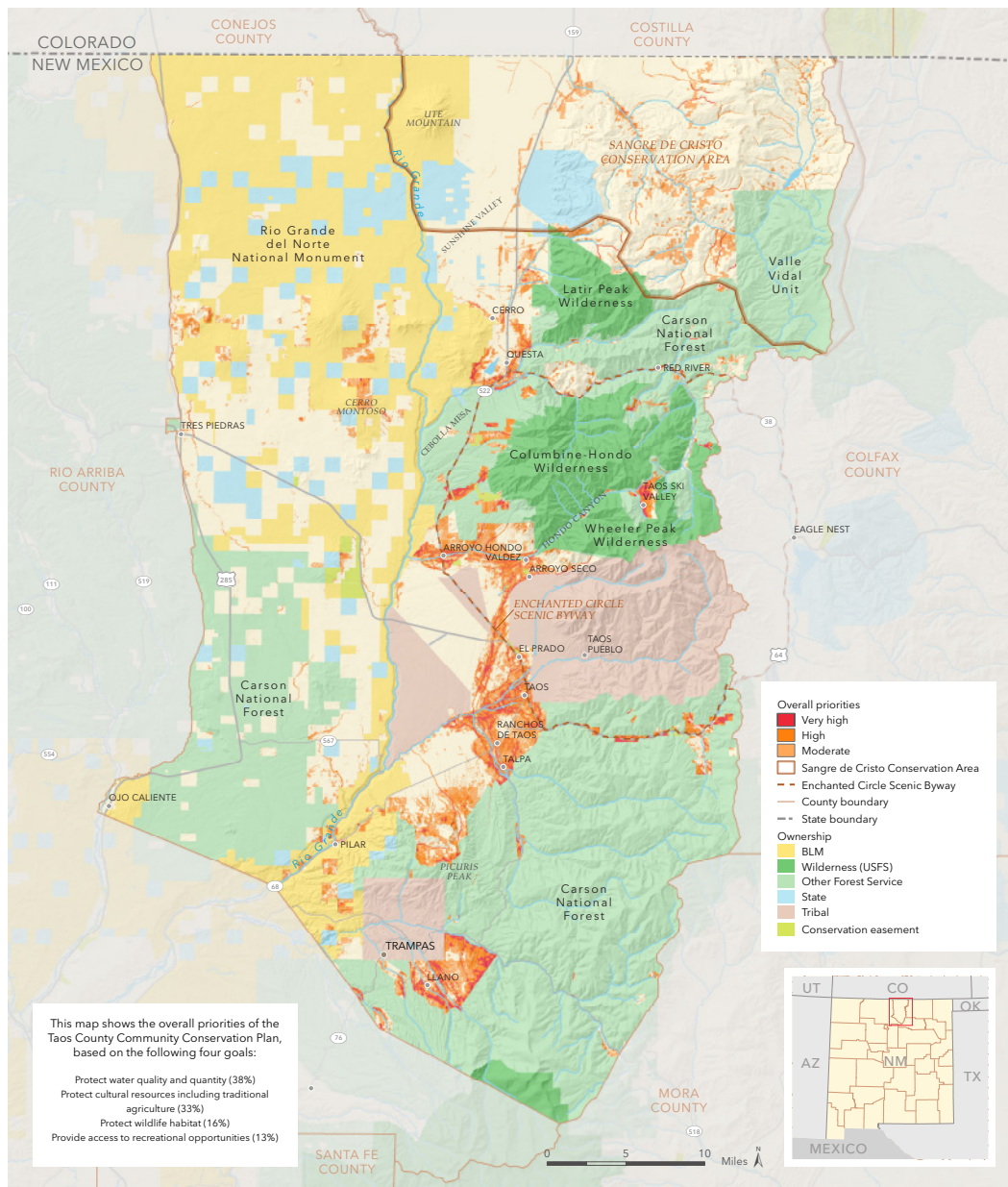
The overall map designates 54,499 acres as "very high" priority. Because of the dominance of water as a community priority and because water-related criteria such as conservation of acequias factored into the other goals as well, many of the highest-priority lands for the overall map are along key water features including critical streams, acequias, and wetlands.

TABLE 7. OVERALL COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Priority	Acres	% of County
Very high	49,673.80	3.8%
High	177,018.76	12.5%
Moderate	270,550.67	17.3%
Total	497,243.23	33.7%



Kids exploring



Overall priorities

TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN



➤ **FIGURE 6** Special thanks to the following data providers: Taos County, Town of Taos, Taos Land Trust, and Taos Soil and Water Conservation District. Copyright © The Trust for Public Land. The Trust for Public Land and The Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of The Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only.

5. Funding for community conservation

A LONG-TERM, DEDICATED SOURCE OF LOCAL REVENUE is at the heart of most successful conservation funding programs. With a reliable source of funds, local governments can meet community goals and protect a region's most valuable resources. Local governments with established funding sources are much better positioned to secure and leverage funding from the federal government and attract other local and state government or private philanthropic partners.

Over the last 30 years, nationwide advocacy efforts have coordinated effective programs and campaigns to raise both awareness of and funding for open space. Between 1988 and 2016, over 75 percent of the more than 2,600 referenda on open space conservation that appeared on ballots across the United States passed, most by a wide margin. In the November 2016 election, voters across the United States approved 70 funding measures to create more than \$6 billion for parks and conservation – an 80 percent approval rate. Earlier in 2016, voters had approved another \$3.3 billion for local parks, meaning that for all of 2016, Americans approved spending almost \$10 billion to protect land and parks in their communities.

In New Mexico, a range of public financing options have been authorized to fund parks and recreation, including the property tax, local gross receipts/sales taxes, and general obligation bonds. Because of the need to leverage many different types of funds, the Taos County Conservation Finance Report

(see online Appendix 2) describes specific local funding opportunities, state funding sources, and federal programs that may be available for land conservation in the town of Taos and Taos County. The major options for local funding sources are described below.

GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS. Bonds are the most utilized tool for parks and conservation purposes by local governments in New Mexico, accounting for 12 of 19 measures on the ballot since 1996. The Town of Taos could issue a bond for parks and open space purposes. A \$2 million bond would cost the average household about \$35 per year. Taos County could also issue a bond for open space. A \$9 million bond, for example, would cost the average household about \$34 each year. Voter approval would be required. Bonds provide several advantages over pay-as-you-go funding, including the opportunity to make significant land acquisitions in the near term before the price of land increases. However, this mechanism is not always appropriate or feasible (for example, typically bond proceeds may not be used for long-term stewardship).

PROPERTY TAX. One New Mexico jurisdiction, Bernalillo County, has dedicated a property tax to parks and open space. New Mexico statutes limit the maximum allowable mill levy for county general purposes to \$11.85 per \$1,000 of taxable value, and for municipal general purposes the limit is \$7.65 per \$1,000 of taxable value. Both the Town of Taos and Taos County have capacity to levy a tax for open space under these caps. For example, the Town

of Taos could increase the mill levy by 0.5 per \$1,000 assessed value, which would generate more than \$154,000 per year at a cost of \$37 to the average homeowner. Similarly, Taos County could increase the mill levy by 0.5 per \$1,000 assessed value, which would generate more than \$691,000 per year at a cost of \$36 to the average homeowner.

GROSS RECEIPTS/SALES TAX (GRT). The State of New Mexico has a statewide gross receipts tax and compensating tax rate of 5.125 percent. New Mexico's municipalities and counties are authorized to impose local option gross receipts taxes for select purposes.

The combined gross receipts tax rate in the town of Taos is currently 8.1875 percent. The Town of Taos has capacity to levy an additional 0.25 percent of municipal gross receipts tax in increments of either 0.125 percent or 0.25 percent, and this tax can be dedicated to parks and open space. Estimated revenue from the 1 percent municipal gross receipts tax for the 2015–2016 fiscal year was over \$3.6 million. Thus, an additional 0.125 percent could be estimated to generate more than \$458,000 each year. The Town of Taos may also levy a capital outlay gross receipts tax in increments of 0.0625 percent. Estimated revenue from the 1 percent municipal gross receipts tax for the 2015–2016 fiscal year was over \$3.6 million. Thus, a 0.0625 percent tax could be estimated to generate more than \$229,000 each year.

The combined gross receipts tax rate in the unincorporated areas of Taos County is currently 7.125 percent. The county currently

imposes the maximum level of capital outlay gross receipts tax. Taos County could amend the capital outlay gross receipts tax ordinance to dedicate a portion to parks and open space, such as 0.0625 percent. Estimated revenue from the 0.25 percent capital outlay gross receipts tax for the 2015–2016 fiscal year was over \$1.9 million. Thus, dedicating 0.0625 percent to parks and open space could be estimated to generate nearly \$493,000 each year.

LODGING TAX. Proceeds from a municipal or county lodging tax may only be used for tourist-related events, facilities, and attractions. The Town of Taos currently imposes the maximum 5 percent lodging tax. Estimated revenue for the 2015–2016 fiscal year was \$941,426. Taos could use a portion of this revenue to acquire land for parks, so long as the parks are intended for use by tourists. Taos County also imposes the maximum 5 percent lodging tax in the unincorporated areas of the county. Estimated revenue for the 2015–2016 fiscal year was \$280,350. The county could use a portion of this revenue for parkland acquisition, provided, again, that the parks are intended for use by tourists.

SPECIAL DISTRICTS. The Town of Taos and Taos County have the option of establishing a special district. Public improvement districts (PIDs) are authorized to finance various infrastructure and improvements, including streets, trails, parks, public buildings, libraries, cultural facilities, and equipment and related costs of operation and administration. Tax increment development districts

(TIDDs) may use tax increment financing to pay for nonvehicular trails, recreational facilities, pedestrian malls, and library/educational/cultural facilities. Infrastructure development zones (IDZs) may provide a variety of services, including trails and areas for pedestrian,

equestrian, bicycle, or other nonmotor vehicle use for travel, pedestrian malls, parks, recreational facilities, and open space areas for public entertainment, assembly, and recreation, including programming events for the community.



JANE BERNARD

Sunset at Taos Valley Overlook

6. Implementing the Community Conservation Plan

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS FOR THE TAOS COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN were developed and refined during community meetings in August and November 2016.

Please note: The core team for the creation of the Community Conservation Plan included

Taos Land Trust, The Trust for Public Land, the Town of Taos, and the National Park Service. The core team for implementation will be led by Taos Land Trust and the Town of Taos and will include The Trust for Public Land as needed.

TABLE 8. TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN: IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

What and How	Who	When
A. PROTECT HIGHEST-PRIORITY LOCAL LANDS AND RESOURCES		
A.1. Create maps of the high-priority areas for conservation based on best scientific data and community input Create brochure and report	The Trust for Public Land	Spring 2017
A.2. Develop Community Conservation Plan maps and web tool for strategic planning Prioritize land protection where threats are strongest	The Trust for Public Land	2017
A.3. Explore strategies for protecting land and promoting community health that do not involve purchasing land - Use plan as a starting point to work with landowners and land managers on best management practices - Use plan to discourage developers from developing priority lands - Promote low-impact development (LID) in areas where development is appropriate	Taos Land Trust Amigos Bravos Taos County Soil and Water Conservation District Town of Taos Taos County	2017, ongoing

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**TABLE 8. TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN:
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS**

What and How	Who	When
A. PROTECT HIGHEST-PRIORITY LOCAL LANDS AND RESOURCES		
A.4. Develop community-based projects in priority areas that showcase the power of community conservation • Develop Rio Fernando Park • Develop ParkRx program with community health partners to help promote access to healthy outdoor activities	Taos Land Trust	2017, ongoing
A.5. Promote policies that will help protect priority lands, including traditional working lands • Work with local and regional groups to advocate for strong local water rights for traditional agriculture and acequia systems • Advocate for agricultural designation of all farmland—including land that was recently reclassified as nonagricultural by the state • Promote additional tax incentive policies to protect traditional working farms and ranches	Taos Land Trust Alianza Agri-Cultura de Taos Taos Soil and Water Conservation District	2017, ongoing
A.6. Develop education programs to promote appreciation and stewardship of close-to-home nature • Work to connect all locals to the outdoors; focus outreach on Hispano and Pueblo communities • Develop signage about good stewardship in outdoor areas that people are already visiting • Develop an outreach program to discourage illegal dumping in open space areas • Assemble materials and train volunteers to do outreach at local schools—include training for conducting interviews with elders • Create materials to educate young people about traditional uses of local natural resources • Organize volunteer days to work on restoration projects and trash cleanup • Create education materials about conservation easements	Taos Land Trust and core team Amigos Bravos Enchanted Circle Trails Association Rivers and Birds Rocky Mountain Youth Corps Field Institute of Taos Las Cumbres Community Services ¡INSPIRE! PreK Paso Paso Network The Nature Conservancy U.S. Forest Service Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts	2017, ongoing

**TABLE 8. TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN:
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS**

What and How	Who	When
A. PROTECT HIGHEST-PRIORITY LOCAL LANDS AND RESOURCES		
A.7. Incorporate Community Conservation Plan into town and county plans • Work with elected officials to pass ordinances and a joint resolution supporting the Community Conservation Plan • Coordinate closely with Taos County Comprehensive Plan update • Create targeted materials and outreach for elected officials	Town of Taos staff and elected officials Taos County staff and elected officials	Spring/ Summer 2017
A.8. Ensure that public agencies are aware of the Community Conservation Plan and its goals • Work with federal and state agencies to help ensure that agency actions promote plan goals; review agency projects to determine potential conflicts	Taos Land Trust U.S. Forest Service Bureau of Land Management	2017, ongoing
A.9. Create a working group of local government representatives and local organizations to drive implementation of the plan	Taos Land Trust	2017, ongoing
B. DEVELOP A STRONG COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN		
B.1. Build a communications strategy and outreach plan to showcase the benefits of the Community Conservation Plan • Communications plan should include website, social media, newspaper, radio, and public open houses for diverse audiences • Information should be distributed in Spanish as well as English • Reach out to key partners such as landowners and developers with strategic communications • Work with UNM communications students to support development of communications plan	Taos Land Trust The Trust for Public Land	2017

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**TABLE 8. TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN:
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS**

What and How	Who	When
B. DEVELOP A STRONG COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR THE COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN		
B.2. Identify, engage, and train champions to drive policy and objectives of the Conservation Plan. In addition to core team, potential champions include: • Rocky Mountain Youth Corps • Local NGOs and civic groups: Amigos Bravos, River Keepers, Audubon • Hiking clubs • Chamber of Commerce • Taos County Soil and Water Conservation District • UNM	Taos Land Trust	2017
C. DEVELOP A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR USING, UPDATING, AND ADAPTING THE COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN		
C.1. Coordinate Conservation Plan updates • Create a mechanism through which the Conservation Plan and its corresponding communications strategy can be updated; ensure that updates happen annually (or more often) • Ensure that information about data sources is thorough and easily available to facilitate updates	The Trust for Public Land	2017, ongoing until 2019
C.2. Evaluate the Conservation Plan annually, including 12 months after implementation for 5-10 years • Develop metrics for measuring success: acres protected or restored, agreements implemented, partnerships developed, etc.	Taos Land Trust-led working group The Trust for Public Land	2017, then annually
C.3. Convene core team twice per year to assess progress and adapt to changes as necessary	Taos Land Trust The Trust for Public Land	Twice yearly until 2020

**TABLE 8. TAOS COUNTY COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN:
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS**

What and How	Who	When
D. IDENTIFY AND PURSUE TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES OR ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE CONSERVATION PLAN		
D.1. Use Conservation Finance report from The Trust for Public Land as a starting point for assessing funding options • Coordinate with local and federal agencies to seek grant funding	Taos Land Trust The Trust for Public Land	2017, ongoing
D.2. Identify potential incentives to assist landowners with voluntary conservation	Taos Land Trust USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Taos County Soil and Water Conservation District	2017, ongoing
D.3. Work with local groups to develop a local ballot initiative that would support conservation and trails • Convene conservation finance workshop for core team and stakeholders • Conduct additional polling to gauge support and/or possible ballot language	Taos Land Trust The Trust for Public Land	2017

7. Conclusion

IN MANY WAYS, TAOS COUNTY IS STRUGGLING — but it is also uniquely rich in spectacular natural beauty and deep-rooted cultural traditions. Although divisions are entrenched within the community, there is a great deal of consensus about the need to protect water and acequias, the desire to preserve local agricultural traditions, and the need for more close-to-home access to nature. Meeting the goals identified in this Community Conservation Plan and protecting the priority areas it highlights will take close collaboration

among local governments, public agencies, and community partners — particularly Taos Land Trust. These groups will need reliable funding and support for conservation, capacity-building, and stewardship to be successful. With help to protect its most special places — and the cultural traditions these places foster — Taos County can thrive and become, as stated in the vision statement for this plan, a place “where cultural traditions are embraced and quality of life is excellent because everyone is connected to the land.”



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Miranda Canyon view toward Taos

8. Participants

TABLE 9: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
April Winters	Taos Pueblo	Linda Yardley	Taos Pueblo
Bev Valencia	Taos Pueblo	Mark Flores	Taos School board member; Taos County Parks and Recreation
Cat Legere	Taos Sports Alliance	Mark Gallegos	Taos County Commission
Curtis Sandoval	Taos Pueblo War Chief	Miguel Santistevan	agricultural consultant
Darien Fernandez	Taos Town Council	Nick Streit	Taos Fly Shop
Gabe Romero	Taos County Commission	Patrick Kopepassah	Taos Pueblo Fire Program Manager
Jackie Martinez	Taos Pueblo	Raul Hurtado	U.S. Forest Service
Jeremy Lujan	Taos Pueblo War Chief Secretary	Richard Archuleta	Taos Pueblo Lt. War Chief
Jody Coffman	Taos Pueblo	Toby Martinez	Taos County Extension Officer
John Bailey	Bureau of Land Management	Tony Valdez	Taos County Extension Office
Lillian Torrez	Taos School District		

TABLE 10: TECHNICAL ADVISORY TEAM

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Attila Bality	National Park Service	Louis Fineberg	Town of Taos Planning
Ben Thomas	Rocky Mountain Youth Corps	John Miller	Town of Taos Planning
Bill Adkinson	Trout Unlimited	Mark Henderson	Old Spanish Trail Association
Charlie O'Leary	Santa Fe Conservation Trust	Matt Foster	independent local planner
Doug Pickett	Taos Cyclery	Rachel Conn	Amigos Bravos
Jeff Muggleston	Carson National Forest	Shannon Romeling	Amigos Bravos
Kip Price		William Brown	Sage West Consultants
Linda Fair			

TABLE 11: COMMUNITY MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Adriana Blake	Enchanted Circle Trails Association	Chris Ellis	
Adrienne Anderson	Village of Taos Ski Valley	Chris Furr	Carson National Forest
Alex Cserhat		Chris Smith	Taos Land Trust
Amy Morris	The Trust for Public Land	Chrissy Pepino	The Trust for Public Land
Andy Jones	Taos Magazine	Christopher Smith	Taos Land Trust (board member)
Andy Leonard	Upward Bound	Cindy Brown	
Angela Bates		Colette Kubichan	Snow Sports, Taos Ski Valley
Annette McClure		Craig Saum	Carson National Forest
Attila Bality	National Park Service	Dan Barrone	Taos Mayor
Barbara Dry	Red River	Dan Jones	
Barry Weinstock	BLM	Daniel Escalante	RER, Casa Taos
Ben Soderquist		Darien Fernandez	Town Councilor, Town of Taos
Ben Thomas	Rocky Mountain Youth Corps	Darren Bond	Gearing UP Bike Shop
Ben Wright	Taos Tree Board	David Lewis	ART
Beth Robinson		David Mount	cyclist
Beth Searcey		David Patton	
Bill Adkinson	Trout Unlimited	David West	
Bill Christmas		Davie Dittmar	Food Not Bombs
Bill Knief	University of New Mexico-Taos	Eddie Dry	Red River
Bill Petterson	Peterson Ventures	Edward Vigil	Taos County Planning Director
Caitlin Legere		Elisabeth Brownell	Brownell Chalet
Carl Colonius	Enchanted Circle Trails Association	Elizabeth Palacios	Taos Community Foundation
Charles Doughtry	Renewable Taos, Inc.	Eric Garner	Carson National Forest
Charlie O'Leary	Santa Fe Conservation Trust	Ernie Attencio	The Nature Conservancy

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Fred Gifford	The Trust for Public Land	John Ubelaker	SMU
Fritz Hahn	Taos Town Council	Joseph Chupek	cyclist
Gary James	Not Forgotten Outreach	JR Logan	Taos News
Gary Jones		Karina Armijo	Xynergy
Gillian Joyce	Rio Chiquito	Karlis Viceps	
Greg Hiner	The Trust for Public Land	Ken Murrell	
Hal Margolis		Kerrie Pattison	Northside M&B Alliance of TSV
Hank Friedman	Taos Sports Alliance	Kimberly Jackson	Taos Land Trust volunteer
Hannah Miller	Taos Land Trust	Kip Price	
Jack Lewis	U.S. Forest Service	Kristina Ortez de Jones	Taos Land Trust
Jake Caldwell	LOR Foundation	Lafe Harrower	Lucas Construction
Jason Corzine	The Trust for Public Land	Lara Miller	The Trust for Public Land
Jean Stevens		Laura McCarthy	The Nature Conservancy
Jean Stevens	Environmental Film Festival	Lawrence Baker	
Jeanne Green		Leilani Dean	
Jeff Muggleston	Carson National Forest	Linda Fair	
Jessica Harrower		Linda Hodapp	
Jim Dostal		Linda Yardley	Taos Pueblo, Taos Land Trust
Jim May		Lindsay Mapes	Zia Rides
Joe Riter		Lore Pease	El Centro Family Health
Joe Wells		Loren Bell	
Joe Zupan		Louis Fineberg	Taos Town Planner
Joel Serra	Aqualia	Lynn Aldrich	Taos Land Trust (board member)
John MacArthur	Taos Saddle Club	Madison Davisinger	Crossfit Taos
John Miller	Planner for Town of Taos	Mark Asmus	

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TABLE 11: COMMUNITY MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Mark Fratrack	Village of Taos Ski Valley	Paul Schilke	U.S. Forest Service
Mark Henderson	Old Spanish Trail Association	Peggy Nelson	Agricultural Resolution Team
Mark White	Taos County Community Distillery	Pete French	Taos Sports Alliance
Martha Moran	Taos Saddle Club	Peter Lamont	
Matt Foster		Peter Rich	Carson National Forest
Matthew Van Buren	Taos Land Trust	Polly Raye	Rio Fernando Neighborhood Association
Meg Peterson	Friends of OV Birders, NM Audubon	Priscilla Rokohl	
Megan Hosterman	Taos Land Trust	Rachel Singer	Crossfit Taos
Megan Lawson	Headwaters Economics	Randolph Pierce	
Melissa Naylor		Rich Montoya	
Michael Ritterhouse		Rick Bellis	Taos Town Manager
Molly McMullin	Appleseed Land Manager	Robbie Jackson	Taos Land Trust volunteer
Nancy Montoya		Robert Silver	Rio Fernando Neighborhood Association
Nathan Sanchez	Chief Planner, Taos County	Robyn McCulloch	The Confluence
Nick Still	10,000 Wags	Roger Pattison	
Nina Anthony	Taos Land Trust	Rose Bauhs	
Pam MacArthur	Taos Saddle Club	Rudy Perea	Taos County Planning
Parvati Young		Sandi Hill	
Patrick Vigil	Ojo Caliente	Sanjay Poovadan	Taos Land Trust
Paul Bryan Jones	Taos Tree Board	Shannon Parks	The Trust for Public Land

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Shannon Romeling	Amigos Bravos	Teresa Pisaño	Taos Land Trust (board member)
Sheara Cohen	The Trust for Public Land	Tim Corner	GIS Specialist, Taos County
Shelley Loveless	RF Neighborhood Association	Tim Rivera	
Sonny Robinson		Tim Rogers	Santa Fe Conservation Trust
Stephanie Schilling		Toby Martinez	Agricultural Resolution Team
Stephen Mabrey		Tom Romero	NRG NHA
Steve Kennebeck	Facilities Director, Town of Taos	Trey Finnell	cyclist
Susan Margolis		Vince Rozzi	
Susie Fiore	Field Institute of Taos	Will Clem	
Susie Soderquist		Will McMullan	
Taylor Etchemendy		William Brown	Renewable Taos, Inc.



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BACK, NINA ANTHONY

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