

Paso del Norte Watershed Council

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A CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATED WATERSHED PLAN FOR THE PASO DEL NORTE REGION

NEED STATEMENT: Over the last century, human use and development of the land and water resources within the Rio Grande Project watershed downstream of Elephant Butte Dam, New Mexico—217 river miles to Fort Quitman, Texas—have altered the historic condition of the natural environment. Changes to the watershed include altered flows, channelization of the river, loss of river-floodplain connectivity, prevention of sediment and biological input to the river from intermittent tributaries, and the removal of historic vegetative communities in the upland and floodplain upon which fish and wildlife depend. These alterations influence the natural functioning of the ecosystem that sustains the biological diversity and health of the watershed. Opportunities for collaborative efforts to enhance watershed conditions are growing in response to drought and the need to better manage our natural resources for the benefit of agriculture, communities and nature.

The Paso del Norte Watershed Council was established to address the health of the tri-state and bi-national region's watershed. The Council is an alliance of private citizens, non-governmental organizations, representatives of federal and state agencies, water utilities, municipal governments, and universities dedicated to providing an integrated vision for watershed management. Council members provide interdisciplinary expertise in many aspects of watershed and resource management and represent the diverse interests of the area.

PROJECT PURPOSE: The purpose of the project is to

- Develop an inventory of watershed resources
- Identify opportunities for integrated watershed management to better meet the needs of agriculture, communities, and nature
- Develop a science-based and peer-reviewed comprehensive watershed enhancement plan to benefit the Rio Grande ecosystem and the interests of all watershed stakeholders

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The plan would be developed with public participation and would (1) summarize historic and existing biotic and abiotic information on the Rio Grande Project watershed, (2) identify data gaps, (3) analyze the multiple functions of the watershed including the ability to support plant, fish, and wildlife communities, (4) identify opportunities to integrate water management for multiple uses, (5) investigate, and develop recommendations for watershed planning and management to achieve a healthier watershed and (6) where opportunities and partnerships present themselves, implement one or more pilot projects to demonstrate watershed enhancement practices.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Paso del Norte Watershed Council requests that the New Mexico and Texas congressional delegations support this initiative by increasing appropriations to the [agency name] to provide to the Council funding of \$8,000,000 over a 5-year period to develop a plan to achieve a healthier Rio Grande Project watershed. The monies would be administered by the Paso del Norte Watershed Council consisting of the following member groups: City of Las Cruces, New Mexico State University, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Water Resources Research Institute (New Mexico), Environmental Defense, World Wildlife Fund, Southwest Environmental Center, City of El Paso, University of Texas at El Paso, Texas A&M Agricultural Research and Extension Center, International Boundary and Water Commission (U. S. and Mexico), U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Bliss Army Base, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Forestales, Agrícolas y Pecuarias (INIFAP), the Institución de Investigación y Planeación (IMIP), and others throughout the Rio Grande basin.

