



# Natural Heritage Conservation Act 2025 Annual Report

Prepared by the Energy, Minerals and  
Natural Resources Department

December 2025



## Executive Summary

The Natural Heritage Conservation Act (NHCA) was signed into law on March 19, 2010 “to protect the state’s natural heritage, customs and culture by funding conservation and agricultural easements and by funding land restoration to protect the land and water available for forests and watersheds, natural areas, wildlife and wildlife habitat, agricultural production on working farms and ranches, outdoor recreation and trails and land and habitat restoration and management.” The Act directs the Forestry Division to administer, implement, and report on the projects and charges the Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC) to evaluate and recommend projects to EMNRD. Funding to support the NHCA program comes from the Land of Enchantment Legacy (LOE) Fund, the state’s first funding source for land and water conservation, agriculture and outdoor recreation. The LOE Fund dollars is a catalyst for land conservation efforts to leave a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy stunning landscapes that make New Mexico so special.

This report summarizes the progress that has been over the past year. The report includes an update on eight new projects selected for funding in November 2025 (Fiscal Year 2026) and provides updates on previously awarded projects.

## Accomplishment Summary

- 10 projects are underway where all conservation easement projects are co-held by EMNRD and in partnership with land trusts and federal agencies.
- EMNRD Forestry Division conducted a rulemaking process to amend the Natural Heritage Conservation Act. The rule amendment was published in August 2025 and increases the payment percentage for transaction costs, making conservation easements more accessible for land-rich, cash-poor landowners.
- \$4,617,180 in NHCA funds allocated to projects on 6,568 acres are leveraging over \$3.2M with other private and federal sources.

# Natural Lands Protection Committee and Public Engagement

A list of current Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC) members is provided in Appendix A. The NLPC activities in calendar year 2025 are described below. Meeting minutes are provided in Appendix B.

- **January 6, 2025** - The NLPC met to receive presentations for three new NHCA conservation projects proposed for Fiscal Year 2025 funding. The Committee asked questions about the projects, compiled project scores and made recommendations for grant funding to the Forestry Division. The NLPC also received updates with ongoing projects and the NHCA rule amendment.
- **April 1, 2025** - The NLPC met to review two Land Conservation Incentive Act (LCIA) Assessment applications and make recommendations to proceed with Certification of Eligibility application for tax credits to the Forestry Division. Both projects were recommended. Additionally, NLPC was informed that the NHCA rule amendment is progressing with cooperation from the land trusts.
- **July 28, 2025** - The NLPC met to review five LCIA Assessment applications and make recommendations to proceed with the application phase for tax credits to the Forestry Division. All projects were recommended. The NLPC was also informed that the NHCA rule amendment hearing will take place on July 30, 2025.
- **November 20, 2025** - The NLPC met to discuss eight NHCA applications for Fiscal Year 2025 and Fiscal Year 2026 funding that were previously reviewed and scored by the NLPC. All projects were recommended for funding. Additionally, the NLPC also reviewed two LCIA Assessment applications, which were both recommended to proceed with the next application phase.



*The Natural Lands Protection Committee and land trust partners gathered during a meeting to review and recommend NHCA and LCIA applications for conservation funding and tax credits, November 2025. © Carmelita Austin*

## Natural Heritage Conservation Act Rule Change

The Forestry Division hosted a public hearing of the NHCA rule amendment on July 30, 2025. Notices of rulemaking and public hearing began June 20, 2025, including mailing to the leadership of tribes, nations and pueblos. The Forestry Division received two written comments and four oral comments at the public hearing. Most notable amendments included:

- 1) amend definition of in-kind;
- 2) amend the evaluation criteria to include the degree to which transaction costs are reasonable and justified and the degree to which water quality and quantity protect, restore, and manage watershed to maintain healthy waterflows, including the protection of transferable water rights;
- 3) revise to increase the percentage of the amount awarded for transaction costs from three to thirty percent; and
- 4) remove the requirement that transaction cost awards not exceed ten percent of the grant or \$45,000.

Several land trusts expressed full support and appreciated the change to modernize the rule to help leverage state funding to aid land trusts' work with land rich cash poor landowners who own much of the high conservation value property in the state. Sandia Pueblo also expressed full support for the amendment, particularly to keep cultural resource locations confidential. The NHCA Rule 19.1.3 NMAC was published in the New Mexico Register as provided by the State Rules Act and made effective on August 26, 2025.



# Submission Guidelines

Beginning Fiscal Year 2025:

- NLPC proposals are accepted year-round;
- project submissions are reviewed for recommendation by the Forestry Division to the NLPC; and
- submissions are accepted through the Forestry Division's Submittable Grant Portal (<https://emnrd-sfd.submittable.com/submit>).

## New Projects Recommended for Funding

The Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC) recommended eight new projects for funding on November 20, 2025. As NHCA is the only dedicated funding source for conservation and agricultural easements in the state, NHCA funding appeals to landowners who would not otherwise be able to finance easements to protect their lands and valued natural resources. See Appendix C for project maps.

- **Ghost Ranch (\$921,450)**

The Ghost Ranch project proposes to protect 4,225 acres of scenic open space, agriculture, source water, natural habitat and historical and cultural values on one of the most iconic landscapes in northern New Mexico. Situated between two national forests and containing 14 miles of water frontage along Abiquiu Lake and the Rio Chama River, it holds strategic importance for habitat connectivity and preservation of New Mexico's natural heritage. This project enshrines cultural histories of the Presbyterian Church, Georgia O'Keefe, Spanish land grants, and the Pueblo peoples.

- **Buck Ridge Ranch (\$650,000)**

The Buck Ridge Ranch project encompasses approximately 1,407 acres on Bartlett Mesa in northeastern New Mexico. It anchors a strategic landscape within a growing network of public and protected lands including Sugarite Canyon State Park and the Bartlett Mesa Wildlife Management Area. The project is designed to protect clean water, conserve vital wildlife habitats and scenic open space, and create meaningful opportunities for outdoor recreation. More importantly, the conservation easement will contribute to the City of Raton's drinking water system and is well-positioned to influence future conservation efforts on neighboring lands.

- **Marvin Meadows (\$103,000)**

This project proposes to protect land and water, natural areas, wildlife and its habitat, and agricultural production on 43 acres. Due to its proximity to the Rio Grande River, it may be some of the oldest irrigated farmland in Socorro County with records indicating it has been cultivated since the late 1800's. This project is directly adjacent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with designated critical habitat for the Rio Grande silvery minnow, southwestern willow flycatcher, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo. The project area contains unique and ecologically significant land and water that benefits people and wildlife in New Mexico and beyond.

- **Montoya-Gila River (\$218,156)**

Situated in Grant County, the 130-acre project occupies a critical position along the mainstem Gila River. The project directly borders the Bureau of Land Management public lands and the New Mexico Game and Fish Red Rock Wildlife Area and expands a contiguous block of conserved habitat along the river corridor. The

conservation easement will safeguard riparian habitat, conserve valuable upland landscapes, protect a Mimbres archaeological site, and enhance the ecological resilience of the Gila River, the last free-flowing river in the state.

- **Kyle & Michelle Duggins (\$963,000)**

Protecting farmland with water rights in Socorro County is especially urgent as county farmlands are at risk of being sold and permanently severed from the land. The 121-acre farm is one of the larger farms in the area and proposes to protect land and water, natural areas, wildlife and its habitat, and agricultural production. As part of the historic Sevilleta Land Grant, this project is part of a contiguous greenbelt of flood-irrigated farm fields and riparian habitat that stretches from Cochiti Lake to the delta of Elephant Butte Reservoir. This project is also directly adjacent to the USFWS with designated critical habitat for the Rio Grande silvery minnow, southwestern willow flycatcher, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo.

- **Glen Duggins (\$694,000)**

The Glen Duggins' Cinco Estrella project is a 78-acre irrigated farm in Socorro County and sits adjacent to the Kyle and Michelle Duggins' project and experiences increasing challenges of protecting agriculture and water rights as developers seek to purchase water rights and transfer them to other communities. Once water rights are severed from farmland, it is extremely unlikely the land will ever return to agriculture fields. The project proposes to protect land and water, natural areas, wildlife and its habitat, and agricultural production. Protecting the project area will provide connectivity of nearby 1,150-acre Indian Hills Farm, 230,000-acre Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and 57,000-acre Bosque del Apache NWR.

- **Walnut Creek (\$151,532)**

The Walnut Creek conservation easement proposes to protect 146 acres between the Pinos Altos Range and Silver City Range in Grant County, including wildlife habitat along the Walnut Creek, which is a tributary of the Gila River – New Mexico's last free-flowing river. As a national forest in-holding, the project will secure a conservation easement that will maintain land and water, natural areas, wildlife and its habitat, outdoor recreation, and sound land management. The riparian-upland provides suitable habitat for 50 Species of Greatest Conservation Need, 5 state-listed threatened and 3 endangered species, as well as 2 federally-listed threatened and 1 endangered species.

- **Synergia Ranch (\$247,145)**

The proposed 111.4-acre conservation easement will safeguard watersheds, conserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, and maintain agricultural/open-space and scenic values near the urban edge of Santa Fe where fragmentation pressure is high. Permanent limits on land conversion, subdivision, and impervious development will reduce future parcelization and road density that otherwise fragments habitats, accelerate runoff, and elevate sediment loads. The project complements an interconnected complex of more than 43,000 acres of state and federal protected lands, including Cerrillos Hills State Park, the Bureau of Land Management, and State Trust lands and maintains diverse habitat for 32 Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 3 state-listed threatened and 2 state-listed endangered species.

## Projects Under Development

The following projects have been recommended by the NLPC and are currently under development. Dollar figures indicated account for both expended funds and funds currently budgeted to projects, including non-NHCA dollars. Both conservation easements are to be co-held with the Forestry Division.

- **Rancho Las Lagunas (\$595,000)**

This project focuses on a 100-acre agricultural conservation easement that borders the Pojoaque and Name Pueblos in Santa Fe County. The easement provides farmland protection with surface water rights. The farm consists of irrigated farms and produces alfalfa hay and beef cattle. Conservation values to be protected include agriculture, scenic open space, and wildlife habitat. The state funding is matched with Natural Resources Conservation Services federal funds.

- **Franklin-Coggins (\$73,897)**

This project is located within a forest stewardship priority area for communities, water and biodiversity and the Forest Legacy High Priority Area<sup>1</sup>. Located in Mora County, this project exhibits forest, agriculture, water wildlife and scenic open space conservation values. The project area contains tributaries and springs that feed into Coyote Creek, a critical water source for wildlife.



*Scenic open space in Santa Fe County, September 2025. © Carmelita Austin*

---

<sup>1</sup> Forest stewardship and Forest Legacy High Priority areas are identified in the state 2020 Forest Action Plan. The plan included a science-based assessment, strategy development, and stakeholder engagement. The assessment ranked high priority rank on shared stewardship priorities for communities, water, and biodiversity.



## Delayed or Deferred Projects

Occasionally projects are deferred due to unexpected landowner issues. Funding has been redirected from the following projects. In future years these projects may still receive NHCA funding.

- Rancho Las Lagunas Agricultural Easement – (originally \$595,000 in FY25, a conflict of interest caused project to be re-submitted in November 2024).
- Bear Canyon Conservation Easement – (originally \$56,278 in FY25, landowner experienced unexpected hardships and respectfully declined state funds).
- Kyle and Michelle Duggins Agricultural Easement – (originally \$45,000 in FY25, reapplied FY26 funding and awarded).
- Glen Duggins Agricultural Easement – (originally \$36,500 in FY25, reapplied FY26 funding and awarded).



*Scenic landscape in Socorro County © Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust*



## NHCA Projects Summary

Project name	NLPC Recommendation Date	Acres	Due Diligence costs	Easement Acquisition costs	Match	Status	NHCA funds expended	Leveraged funds
Franklin-Coggins	9/4/2024	198.7	\$11,297	\$62,600	\$177,466	Ongoing	-	-
Bear Canyon	9/4/2024	-	-	-	-	Delayed/Deferred	-	-
Rancho Las Lagunas	1/6/2025	100	\$25,000	\$570,000	\$243,500	Ongoing	\$9,304.12	\$757,500
Ghost Ranch	11/20/2025	4225	\$121,450	\$800,000	\$1,605,000	Pending	-	\$800,000
Buck Ridge Ranch	11/20/2025	1408	-	\$650,000	\$432,559	Pending	-	-
Marvin Meadows	11/20/2025	49.3	\$103,000	-	\$362,500	Pending	-	-
Montoya-Gila River	11/20/2025	130.3	\$93,156	\$125,000	\$125,000	Pending	-	-
Kyle Duggins	11/20/2025	121	\$113,000	\$850,000	\$166,400	Pending	-	\$1,016,400
Glen Duggins	11/20/2025	78	\$53,000	\$641,000	\$74,200	Pending	-	\$655,200
Walnut Creek	11/20/2025	146.1	\$24,086	\$71,244	\$23,748	Pending	-	-
Synergia Ranch	11/20/2025	111.4	\$63,797	\$183,348	\$61,116	Pending	-	-
<b>Total:</b>		<b>6568</b>	<b>\$607,786</b>	<b>\$3,953,192</b>	<b>\$3,271,489</b>		<b>\$9,304.12</b>	<b>\$3,229,100</b>

Total NHCA budget (all years): **\$3,429,450**

Unexpended NHCA budget (as of 11/24/25): **\$4,617,180**



*Abiquiu Lake, NM, June 2025. © Carmelita Austin*

Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department  
1220 South Saint Francis Drive  
Santa Fe, NM 87505

## APPENDIX A: NATURAL LANDS PROTECTION COMMITTEE

### Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department Forestry Division

Melanie A. Kenderdine, Secretary Designate  
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Dept.  
1220 S. Saint Francis Dr. Santa Fe, NM 87505  
Designee: Laura McCarthy  
505-490-2954  
[laura.mccarthy@emnrd.nm.gov](mailto:laura.mccarthy@emnrd.nm.gov)

### State Land Office

Stephanie Garcia Richard, Commissioner NM State  
Land Office  
310 Old Santa Fe Trail Santa Fe, NM 87501  
Designee: Camilla Romero  
505-827-5851  
[cromero@slo.state.nm.us](mailto:cromero@slo.state.nm.us)

### New Mexico Department of Game & Fish

Michael Sloan, Director  
1 Wildlife Way  
P.O. Box 25112  
Santa Fe, NM 87507  
505-476-8118  
[michael.sloane@dgf.nm.gov](mailto:michael.sloane@dgf.nm.gov)

### NM Department of Agricultural

Jeff Wittee, Director/Secretary  
MSC 3189, Box 30005  
Las Cruces, NM 88003  
Designee: Max Henkels  
575-646-2642  
[mhenkels@nmda.nmsu.edu](mailto:mhenkels@nmda.nmsu.edu)

### Appointed Public Member

Vicente Fernandez  
Email: [vincentefernandez@gmail.com](mailto:vincentefernandez@gmail.com)

### Appointed Public Member

Kimberly Barmann  
Email: [kimberlyknell@yahoo.com](mailto:kimberlyknell@yahoo.com)

### Appointed Public Member

Dr. Ladona K. Clayton  
Email: [ladona.clayton@ogalwc.org](mailto:ladona.clayton@ogalwc.org)



# APPENDIX B: 2025 MEETING MINUTES

## Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC)

### Final Meeting Minutes

January 6, 2025

#### 1. Call to Order

The NLPC meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. MST on January 6, 2025. NLPC members and presenters attended in-person, and the public attended via Teams. The meeting was chaired by Laura McCarthy, State Forester/Director of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), Forestry Division.

- **NLPC Members and Designees Present in-person:**

Laura McCarthy, State Forester/Director, NLPC Chair  
Camilla Romero, NM State Land Office, Designee  
Michael Sloane, NM Department of Fish and Game, Director  
Vincente Fernandez, Public Member  
Dr. Ladona Clayton, Public Member

- **NLPC Members Absent:**

Julie Maitland, NM Department of Agriculture, Designee  
Kimberly Barmann, Public Member

- **Others present in-person or via Teams:**

Carmen Austin, EMNRD, Forestry Division  
Gabe Wade, EMNRD, Office of General Counsel  
Chelsea Fox, EMNRD, Office of General Counsel  
Jonathan Hayden, NM Land Conservancy  
Claire Catlett, NM Land Conservancy  
Raena Kamakahi, NM Land Conservancy  
Chantell Bustillos, NM Land Conservancy  
Cecilia Rosacker, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Amy Erikson, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Ariel Patashnik, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Melissa Houser, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Melanie Solis Alvarez, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Kyle Duggins, Landowner

#### 2. Welcome/Roll Call/Opening Comments

State Forester and NLPC Chair, Laura McCarthy welcomed NLPC members and attendees, initiated a roll call, and moved onto addressing business matters.

### **3. NLPC Business**

#### **a. Approval of Agenda**

Vincente Fernandez moved to approve the agenda; Camilla Romero second; none were opposed. The agenda for January 6, 2025, was unanimously approved.

#### **b. Approval of Minutes from the meeting held on November 13, 2024**

LaDonna Clayton moved to approve the minutes; Camilla Romero second; none were opposed. The minutes from November 13, 2024, were unanimously adopted.

### **4. Natural Heritage Conservation Act project updates**

Laura McCarthy discussed the withdrawal of New Mexico Land Conservancy's Bear Canyon project and Santa Fe Conservation Trust's Rancho Las Lagunas project. Laura suggested the process to withdraw NHCA projects will require written notification to NLPC.

### **5. Review 2024 Applications for the Natural Heritage Conservation Act (NHCA) funds**

- a. Rancho Las Lagunas Agricultural Easement (RLLAE) – EMNRD, Forestry Division and Santa Fe Conservation Trust (SFCT), Land Protection Project Manager, Ariel Patashnik. Ariel identified the proposal as not new to NLPC, but noted the only change is EMNRD as the eligible qualified entity.

NLPC's review and comments conformed with criteria 19.1.3.12 NMAC. The proposal received 35 out of 44 points.

- b. Kyle and Michelle Duggins Agricultural Easement (KMDAE)– EMNRD, Forestry Division and Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT), Cecilia Rosacker, Executive Director, and Amy Erickson, Conservation Specialist. (RGALT presented both project proposals since they are adjacent properties and have the same conservation values and characteristics.)

NLPC's review and comments conformed with criteria 19.1.3.12 NMAC. The proposal received 40 out of 44 points.

- c. Glen Duggins' Cinco Estrella Farm Agricultural Easement (CEFAE)– EMNRD, Forestry Division and Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT)

NLPC's review and comments conformed with criteria 19.1.3.12 NMAC. The proposal received 39 out of 44 points.

Laura confirmed with Carmen Austin that there is adequate NHCA funding to award all three NHCA applications.

Michael Sloane noted NLPC should have adopted an Open Meetings Resolution. Later, Carmen confirmed the 2024 Open Meetings Resolution was signed April 3, 2024, and Assistant General Counsel, Chelsea Fox confirmed the Open Meetings Resolution needs updating annually within a rolling 12-month period and does not tie to calendar year nor fiscal year. Carmen will add the Open Meetings Resolution for 2025 to the April 1, 2025, meeting agenda.

## **6. NHCA Rule Amendment Update**

Laura announced EMNRD is hosting a proposed rule amendment meeting in the Secretary's Conference Room beginning at 2:00 p.m.

## **7. Public Comment**

None.

## **8. Other business**

Next meetings to discuss LCIA proposals are:

- Tuesday, April 1, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.
- Monday, July 28, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.

## **9. Adjourn**

Vincente Fernandez moved to adjourn the meeting and Ladona Clayton seconded the motion. The committee voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 11:46 a.m. MST.

Minutes prepared by Carmen Austin on: 1/15/25

Minutes reviewed by Laura McCarthy on: 1/27/25

Minutes reviewed by Chelsea Fox on: 1/29/25

---

### **Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC) Meeting**

#### **Minutes**

**Monday, April 1, 2025, at 10:30 AM**

**1220 St. Francis Dr., Santa Fe, NM 87505**

## **1. Call to Order**

**10:30 am**

A meeting of the NLPC was called to order at 10:30 a.m. No participants attended via Teams or phone.

### **a. NLPC Members and Designees Present:**

Melissa McLamb, EMNRD, Forestry Division, NLPC Chair Designee  
Camilla Romero, NM State Land Office, Designee  
Michael Sloane, NM Department of Game & Fish  
Max Henkels, NM Department of Agriculture  
Vicente Fernandez, Public Member  
Ladona Clayton, Ph.D., Public Member

### **b. NLPC Members Absent:**

Kimberly Barmann, Public Member



**c. Others Present:**

Carmen Austin, EMNRD, Forestry Division  
Chelsea Fox, EMNRD, Office of General Counsel  
Jonathan Hayden, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Claire Catlett, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Traci Burnsed, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Raena Kamakahi, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Ariel Patashnik, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Cecilia Rosacker, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Amy Erickson, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust

**2. Review and Approve Agenda (Action Item)**

Michael Sloane made a motion to approve the agenda; Ladona Clayton seconded the motion. The agenda was unanimously approved with no abstentions.

**3. Adopt Open Meetings Resolution for CY 2025 (Action Item)**

Michael Sloane suggested including in the resolution how the public can access the meeting virtually. Ms. McLamb mentioned that a virtual link is always provided with the public meeting notice and agenda, and is posted on the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources website. After discussion, Mr. Sloane suggested the committee consider an amendment to the resolution at a future meeting. Ladona Clayton made a motion to adopt the Open Meetings Act Resolution for CY25, as drafted. Camilla Romero seconded the motion. None opposed. The resolution was unanimously adopted.

**4. Review and Adopt Meeting Minutes of January 6, 2025 (Action Item)**

Ladona Clayton moved to adopt the minutes; Vicente Fernandez seconded. None opposed. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

**5. Review and February 2025 LCIA Assessment Applications (Action Item)**

**a. Ute Lake Ranch Amendment III Conservation Easement less-than-fee donation to the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC)**

Traci Burnsed of New Mexico Land Conservancy provided an overview of the easement. Camilla Romero moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Ladona Clayton seconded. None opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

**b. Kozoll-Davis Ranch Conservation Easement less-than-fee donation to the New Mexico Land Conservancy**

Raena Kamakahi of New Mexico Land Conservancy provided an overview of the easement. Vicente Fernandez suggested NMLC confirm with NM State Engineer's Office (OSE) a "validated statement" confirming ownership and details related to water rights. Ladona Clayton inquired about a domestic well at 3 acre-feet instead of 1.29 acre-feet, which is the usual standard applied by the OSE in the appropriation of water rights for domestic use. NMLC will ask the landowners how they acquired the 3 acre-feet for the domestic well. Ladona Clayton moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Vicente Fernandez seconded; none were opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

## **6. Natural Heritage Conservation Act (NHCA) Project Updates**

Carmen Austin informed attendees project agreements with land trusts are progressing and Forestry Division aims to have agreements completed soon.

Jonathan Hayden, Ariel Patashnik, and Cecilia Rosacker provided updates with the Franklin-Coggins project, Rancho Las Lagunas project, Kyle Davis project, and the Glen Duggins project, respectively. Ariel announced the Rancho Las Lagunas project will receive NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement (ACEP) funding. Cecilia announced that one Duggins' project will not be funded by NRCS ACEP, as anticipated and this will impact the NHCA project.

### **NHCA Rule Amendment Update**

Melissa McLamb informed attendees that Forestry Division is proceeding with a rule amendment and intending to host stakeholder outreach between April and May.

Michael Sloane questioned if the NLPC is required to review the rule amendment before it's posted with state register. Carmen Austin offered to follow up with EMNRD general counsel.

Cecilia Rosacker informed attendees of challenges to securing full project funding with misaligned timelines between NRCS ACEP and NHCA processes and suggested that NRCS and NHCA staff meet to determine if improvements can be made.

Melissa McLamb thanked the land trusts for cooperating with the Forestry Division and providing feedback as staff learn what's required to run the NHCA program effectively.

## **7. Public Comment**

Cecilia Rosacker announced the Farm Service Agency will be closing offices in northern NM.

Announcement: NRCS Technical Review Committee meeting scheduled for April 9, 2025, in person, webinar, teleconference in Albuquerque. Contact Kenneth Branch at 505-761-4454 or [Kenneth.branch@usda.gov](mailto:Kenneth.branch@usda.gov)

## **8. Other Business**

Next NLPC meeting is scheduled Monday, July 28, 2025, at 10:30 AM.

## **9. Adjournment**

Vicente Fernandez moved to adjourn the meeting; Michael Sloane seconded. NLPC Chair, Melissa McLamb adjourned the meeting at 11:30 AM.

Minutes prepared by Carmen Austin on: 4/9/2025

Minutes reviewed by Melissa McLamb on: 4/9/2025

Minutes reviewed by Chelsea Fox on: 4/10/2025

**Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC)**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday, July 28, 2025, at 10:30 AM**  
**1220 S. St. Francis Dr., Santa Fe, NM 87505**

**1. Call to Order**

**10:30 am**

A meeting of the NLPC was called to order at 10:30 a.m.

**a. NLPC Members and Designees Present:**

Laura McCarthy, EMNRD, Forestry Division, NLPC Chair Designee  
Camilla Romero, NM State Land Office, Designee  
Michael Sloane, NM Department of Game & Fish  
Max Henkels, NM Department of Agriculture, Designee  
Vicente Fernandez, Public Member  
Ladona Clayton, Ph.D., Public Member  
Kim Barmann, Public Member

**b. Others Present:**

Carmen Austin, EMNRD, Forestry Division  
Jonathan Hayden, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Traci Burnsed, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Ariel Patashnik, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Melissa Houser, Santa Fe Conservation Trust  
Cecilia Rosacker, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Amy Erickson, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Quintina Martine, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Michelle Duggins, Landowner  
Susan Jones, Landowner

**2. Review and Approve Agenda (Action Item)**

Ladona Clayton made a motion to approve the agenda; Camilla Romero seconded the motion. The agenda was unanimously approved with no abstentions.

**3. Review and Adopt Meeting Minutes of January 6, 2025 (Action Item)**

Vincente Fernandez moved to adopt the minutes; Camilla Romero seconded. None opposed. The minutes were unanimously adopted.

**4. Review and February 2025 LCIA Assessment Applications (Action Item)**

**a. Brazfield-Chupadero Aroyo Ranch Conservation Easement less-than-fee donation to the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC)**



Traci Burnsed of New Mexico Land Conservancy provided an overview of the easement. Laura McCarthy invited a discussion, and Ms. Burnsed addressed questions. Discussion included NMLC's selection of the parcels considered for LCIA projects. Michael Sloane moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Kimberly Barmann seconded. None opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

**b. Susan Jones Conservation Easement less-than-fee donation to the Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust**

Landowner Susan Jones opened to describing the property and expressed her desire to keep conservation values protected in perpetuity. Amy Erickson of Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust provided an overview of the easement. Camilla Romero moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Ladona Clayton seconded; none were opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

**c. Dettling Conservation Easement to the Santa Fe Conservation Trust**

Ariel Patashnik of Santa Fe Conservation Trust provided an overview of the easement. Ms. Patashnik invited a discussion and provided additional context regarding the building envelope, stewardship management plan, and water rights. Ladona Clayton moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Camilla Romero seconded. The motion passed with Michael Sloane not recommending. The application will move forward.

**d. Pecos Canyon Conservation Easement to Sant Fe Conservation Trust**

Ariel Patashnik of Santa Fe Conservation Trust provided an overview of the easement. Ms. Patashnik provided additional context regarding the Pecos River Open Space. Kimberly Barmann moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Camilla Romero seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**e. Treehouse Road Conservation Easement to Santa Fe Conservation Trust**

Ariel Patashnik of Santa Fe Conservation Trust provided an overview of the easement. Ms. Patashnik provided additional context regarding adding grazing as long as conservation values remain protected. Ladona Clayton moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Camilla Romero seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**5. Natural Heritage Conservation Act (NHCA) Project and Rule Amendment Updates**

Laura McCarthy informed attendees that the Public Notice has been advertised and the hearing will take place on June 30, 2025. Attendance to the hearing is available virtually.

Carmen Austin informed attendees that project agreements with land trusts remain in progress.

**6. Public Comment**

About water rights, Vicente Fernandez suggested the language "with permission from the Acequia Commission" be included in the easements since acequias are located on some the proposed easements. Acequias are not currently included. Laura McCarthy highlighted a water criterion is added to the proposed rule amendment to address water rights. Laura invited Mr. Fernandez to attend the rule hearing to offer oral comments.

## **7. Other Business**

Max Henkels asked about Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trusts' (RGALT) letters and when the NLPC will discuss the request for additional NHCA funding for the two Duggins' projects. Laura McCarthy described the discussion with Office of General Counsel, federal funding release of September 30th, and the potential for RGALT to reapply for NHCA funding.

Next NLPC meeting is scheduled Monday, November 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM.

## **8. Adjournment**

Camilla Romero moved to adjourn the meeting; LaDonna Clayton seconded. NLPC Chair, Laura McCarthy adjourned the meeting at 11:52 AM.

Minutes prepared by Carmen Austin on: 8/1/2025

Minutes reviewed by Laura McCarthy on: 8/4/2025

---

### **Natural Lands Protection Committee (NLPC) DRAFT**

#### **Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, November 20, 2025, at 10:00 AM**

**1220 St. Francis Dr., Santa Fe, NM 87505**

#### **1. Call to Order**

**10:04 am**

A meeting of the NLPC was called to order at 10:04 a.m.

##### **a. NLPC Members and Designees Present**

Laura McCarthy, EMNRD, Forestry Division, NLPC Chair Designee  
Camilla Romero, NM State Land Office, Designee  
Michael Sloane, NM Department of Game & Fish  
Max Henkels, NM Department of Agriculture, Designee  
Vicente Fernandez, Public Member  
Ladona Clayton, Ph.D., Public Member  
Kim Barmann, Public Member

##### **b. Others Present**

Jonathan Hayden, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Raena Kamakahi, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Claire Catlett, New Mexico Land Conservancy  
Travis Clarke, New Mexico Land Conservancy\*  
Ariel Patashnik, Santa Fe Conservation Trust

Cecilia Rosacker, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Amy Erickson, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust  
Quintina Martine, Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust\*  
Kyle Duggins, Landowner\*  
Christine Chevis, EMNRD, Attorney\*  
Carmen Austin, EMNRD, Forestry Division

\*denotes virtual attendance

## **2. Approve Agenda (Action Item)**

Camilla Romero made a motion to approve the meeting agenda; Vincente Fernandez seconded the motion. The agenda was unanimously approved with no abstentions.

## **3. Approve Meeting Minutes of July 28, 2025 (Action Item)**

Ladona Clayton moved to approve the minutes from the July 28, 2025, meeting; Kim Barmann seconded. None opposed. The minutes were approved with no abstentions.

## **4. Status of previously approved Natural Heritage Conservation Act (NHCA) Projects (Informational)**

Carmen Austin informed attendees the Rancho Las Lagunas and Franklin-Coggins conservation projects are progressing well and timeline completion is on track.

## **5. Review and Recommendation of the September 2025 NHCA Applications (Action Item)**

Laura McCarthy informed attendees eight NHCA applications were received and because of this the NLPC scored the applications ahead of the meeting and EMNRD compiled the scores. Ms. McCarthy presented the scores and rankings to the NLPC. Combined scoring and ranking are identified below:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Ghost Ranch	328	1
Buck Ridge Ranch	325	2
Marvin Meadows	301	3
Montoya-Gila River	288	4
Kyle Duggins	283	5
Glen Duggins	281	6
Walnut Creek	265	7
Synergia Ranch	250	8

The NLPC were given the opportunity to discuss the score and the ranking of the eight applications. Comments, questions, and responses included the following:

- Is there sufficient funding to fund all projects? Yes, because even if some of the FY25 funds revert,

they go back to the Land of Enchantment (LOE) Legacy Fund and are re-distributed in a future year.

- Is it this committee's job to recommend to the secretary the ranking and the department to figure out the funding? Yes, the authorizing legislation has a clear answer that the committee recommends the ranking, and the department manages the funds.
- The LOE Legacy Fund authorizes a two-year funding timeframe which does not align with current Department of Finance Administration project management procedures. Two years is not adequate time to get land conservation work through the application, due diligence and acquisition process.
- After discussing whether the NLPC wants to consider accepting all eight projects for funding or wants to focus on a top tier of applications and drop others at the bottom of the ranking, the committee voted to proceed with the ranking of the projects since it reflects the final scores from the NLPC.
- Should NHCA funding go to due diligence steps for projects that have pending match from a federal agency? In the case of the Duggins projects, if funding from NRCS falls through, then at least they have completed the due diligence and can proceed with locating other funding for easement acquisition. Eventually a pathway to land acquisition will be found. This is worthy and we should invest in due diligence.
- Water rights are invaluable, as is keeping water rights where they belong with the land and protecting them. Property is sold and the water rights are being pulled out of the very area the water is intended to serve. We are threatened by water scarcity and water rights and what they mean to the landowner.

Laura McCarthy made a motion to accept all eight applications in ranked order as identified above; Ladona Clayton seconded. None were opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **6. Review and Recommendation of the October 2025 Assessment Applications for the Land Conservation Incentive Act Tax Credit (Action Item)**

##### **a. Caja Vista**

Raena Kamakahi provided an overview of the proposed easement. Kim Barmann moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Camilla Romero seconded; none were opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

##### **b. Dettling, Phase 2**

Ariel Patashnik provided an overview of the proposed easement. Camilla Romero moved to recommend approval of the assessment application; Vicente Fernandez seconded; none were opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **7. Public Comment**

Cecilia Rosacker informed attendees that Natural Resource Conservation Service criteria ranking will be coming soon.

Ariel Patashnik provided conservation deed update to the Rancho Las Lagunas project. Ariel requested a letter of award for the land acquisition for approved projects since landowners desire some assurance that the NHCA funding is committed for the awarded amount by the NLPC and a timeline for the next round of NHCA applications. Laura McCarthy addressed these questions.

Jonathan Hayden reminded land trusts that they can move forward with due diligence before the FY25 funds expire on June 30, 2026.

#### **8. Other Business**

Claire Catlett inquired about awards for the Request for Proposals to Conduct Due Diligence Tasks. Carmen Austin responded that Carol Bada, Forest Legacy Program Coordinator, is drafting the agreements.

#### **9. Next Meeting**

Next NLPC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 1, 2026, at 10:00 AM Mountain Time.

#### **10. Adjournment**

Camilla Romero moved to adjourn the meeting; Max Henkels seconded. The NLPC meeting adjourned at 11:18 AM.

Minutes prepared by Carmen Austin on: 11/24/2025

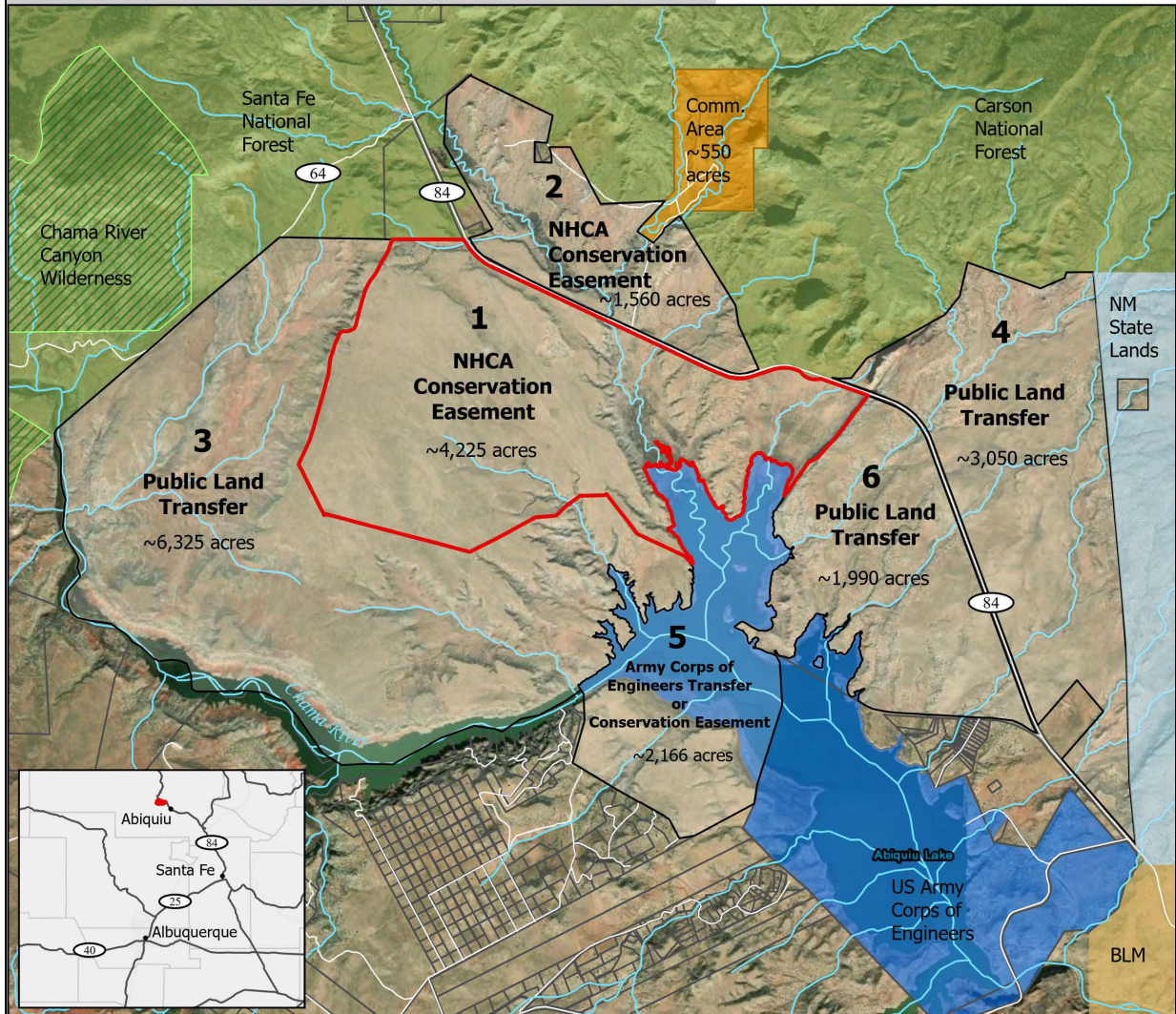
Minutes reviewed by Laura McCarthy on: 11/24/2025

Minutes approved by Christine Chevis on: 11/25/2025



## APPENDIX C: PROJECT AREA MAPS

### Ghost Ranch - Rio Arriba County Aerial Map of Conservation Areas



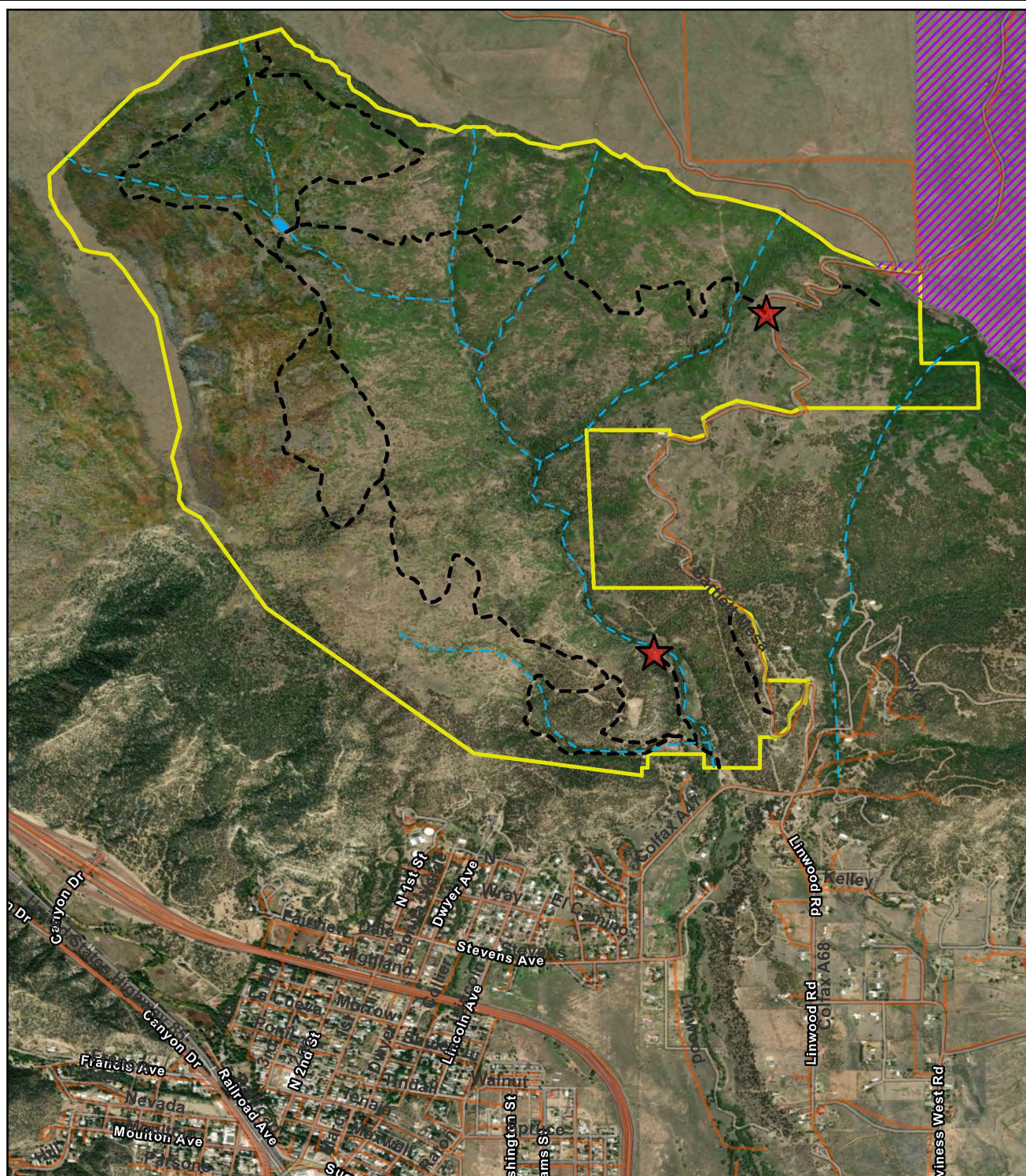
Ghost Ranch Conservation Areas

- 1 NHCA Conservation Easement (Phase 1) ~4,225 acres
- 2 NHCA Conservation Easement (Phase 2) ~1,560 acres
- 3 Public Lands Transfer ~6,325 acres
- 4 Public Lands Transfer ~3,050 acres
- 5 Army Corps of Engineers Transfer or Conservation Easement ~2,166 acres
- 6 Public Lands Transfer ~1,990 acres

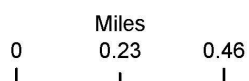
- Ghost Ranch Commercial Area Excluded (~550 acres)
- Forest Service
- Forest Service Wilderness Area
- NM State Lands
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- Bureau of Land Management

Spatial Reference  
 PCS: NAD 1983 StatePlane New Mexico  
 Central FIPS 3001 Feet  
 GCS: GCS North American 1983  
 Projection: Transverse Mercator  
 Map units: Meter  
 Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA, Rio Arriba  
 County Assessor Parcels



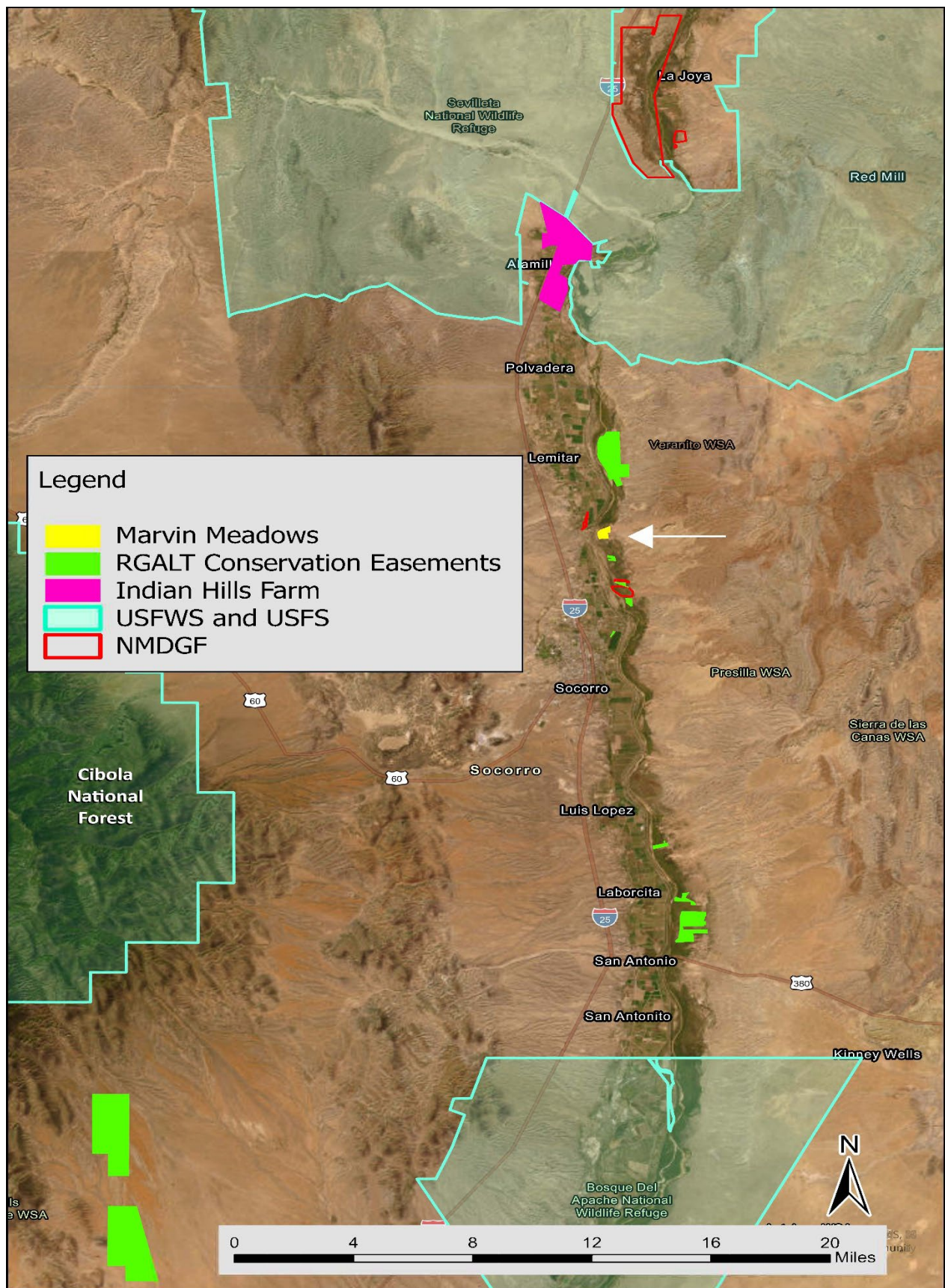


# Buck Ridge Ranch

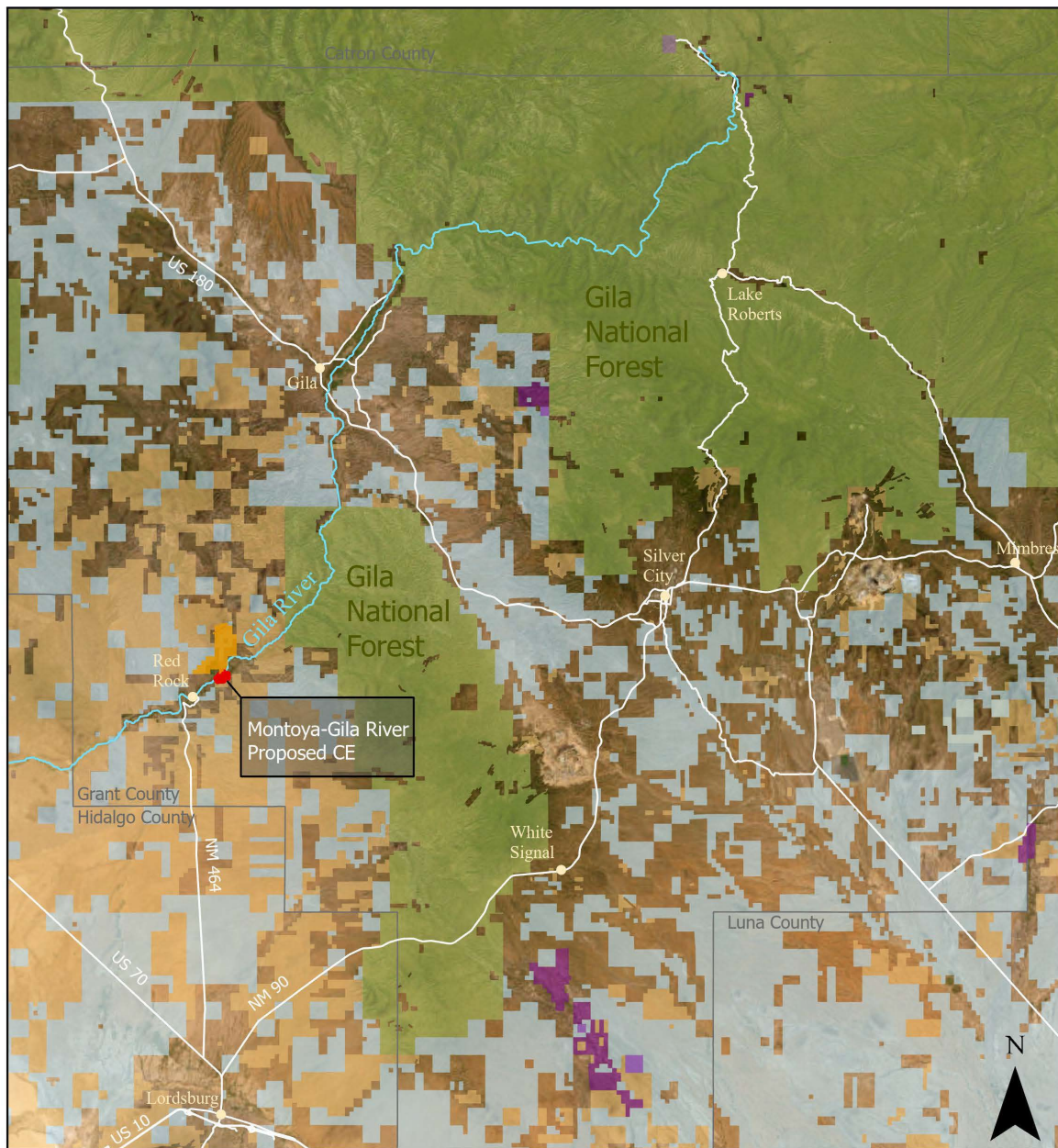


-  Buck Ridge Ranch  
 Roads  
 Ranch Roads  
 Streams  
 Bartlett Mesa WMA  
 Proposed Building Envelopes









# Map 1: Montoya-Gila River Property Regional Map

Grant County, NM

- Proposed Conservation Easement
- NM Dept. of Game and Fish
- Red Rock Wildlife Area
- National Forest
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- NM State Trust Lands
- Existing NMLC Conservation Easement Properties

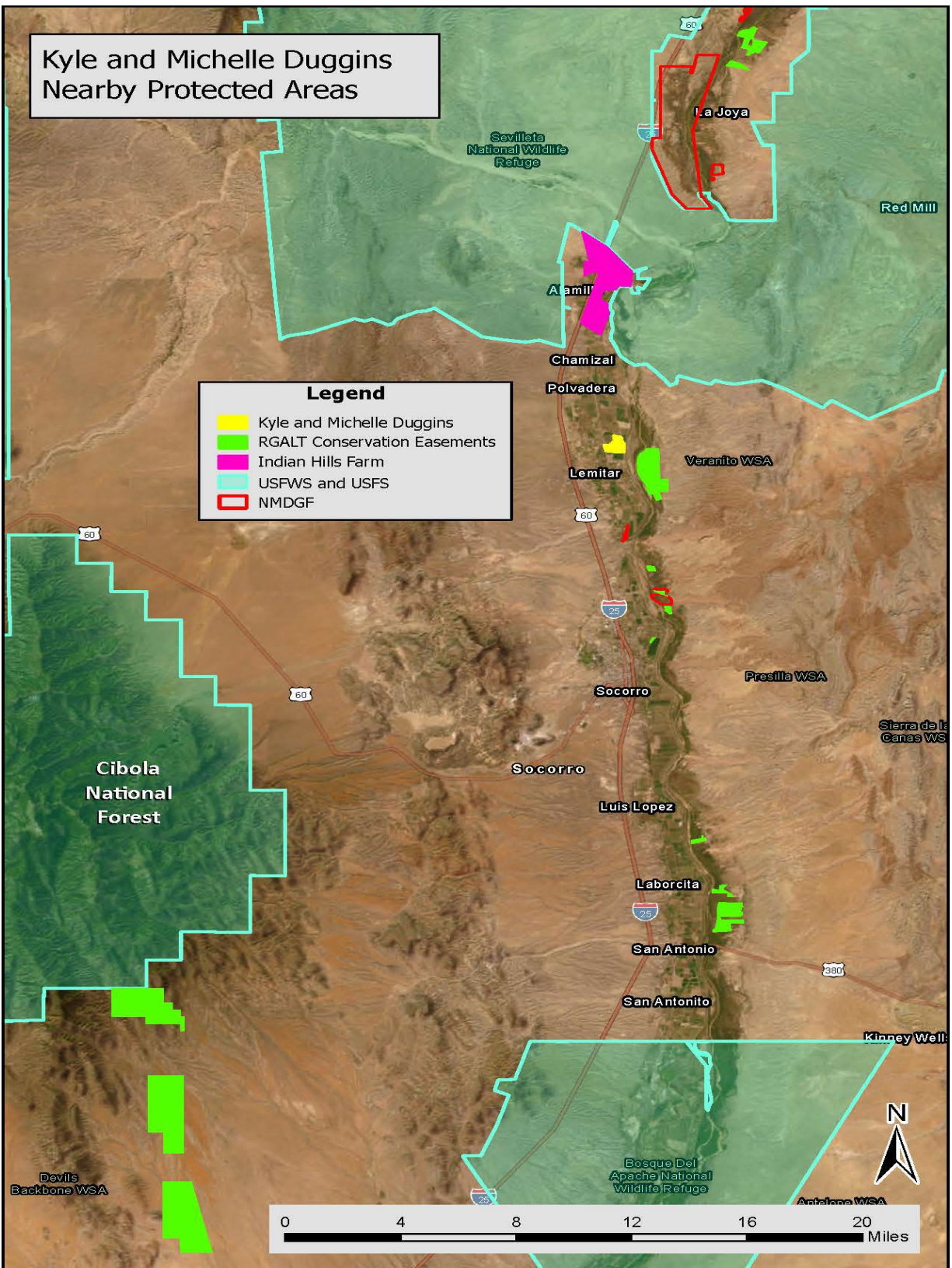
0 3 6 12 18 24 Miles

Spatial Reference  
Name: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
PCS: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
GCS: GCS WGS 1984  
Datum: WGS 1984  
Projection: Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
Map Units: Meter

**NEW MEXICO**  
**LAND CONSERVANCY**

Conserving Land. Preserving Heritage.



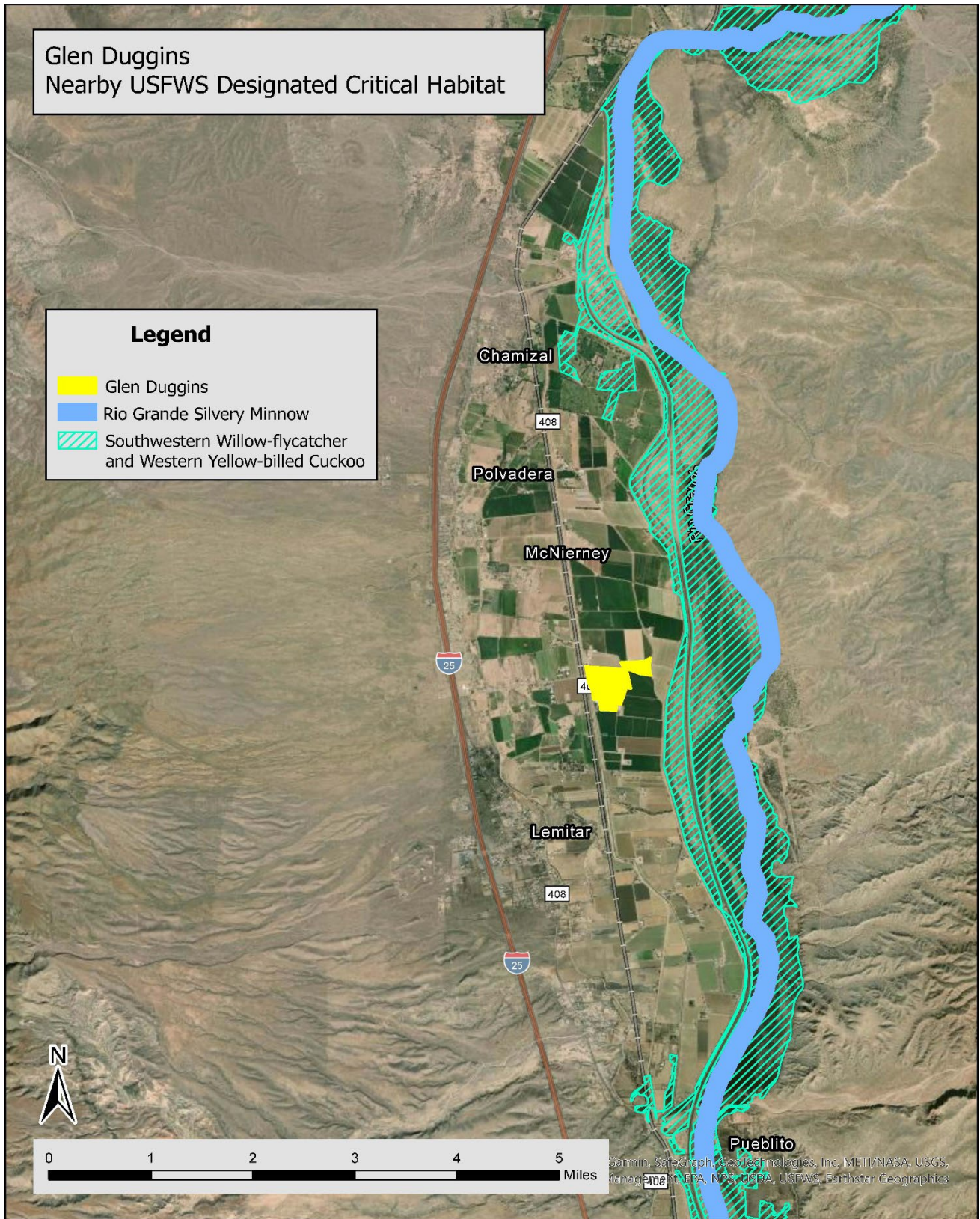
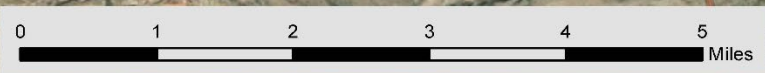




Glen Duggins  
Nearby USFWS Designated Critical Habitat

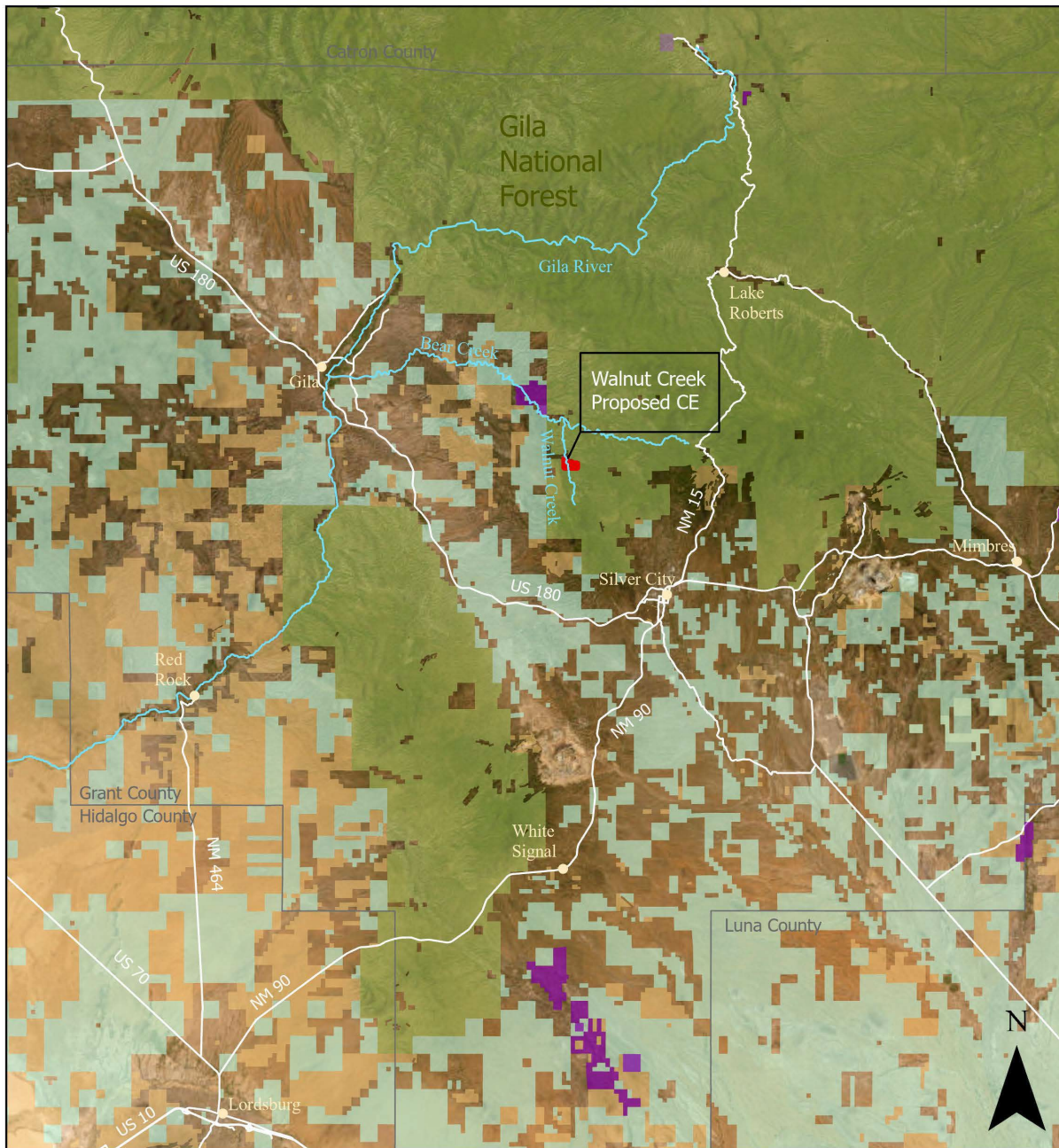
**Legend**

-  Glen Duggins
-  Rio Grande Silvery Minnow
-  Southwestern Willow-flycatcher and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo



Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS,  
Management, EPA, NPS, USRA, USFWS, Earthstar Geographics





# Map 1: Walnut Creek Property Regional Map

Grant County, NM

- Proposed Conservation Easement
- National Forest
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- NM State Trust Lands
- Existing NMLC Conservation Easement Properties

0 3 6 12 18 24 Miles

Spatial Reference  
Name: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
PCS: WGS 1984 Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
GCS: GCS WGS 1984  
Datum: WGS 1984  
Projection: Mercator Auxiliary Sphere  
Map Units: Meter

**NEW MEXICO**  
**LAND CONSERVANCY**

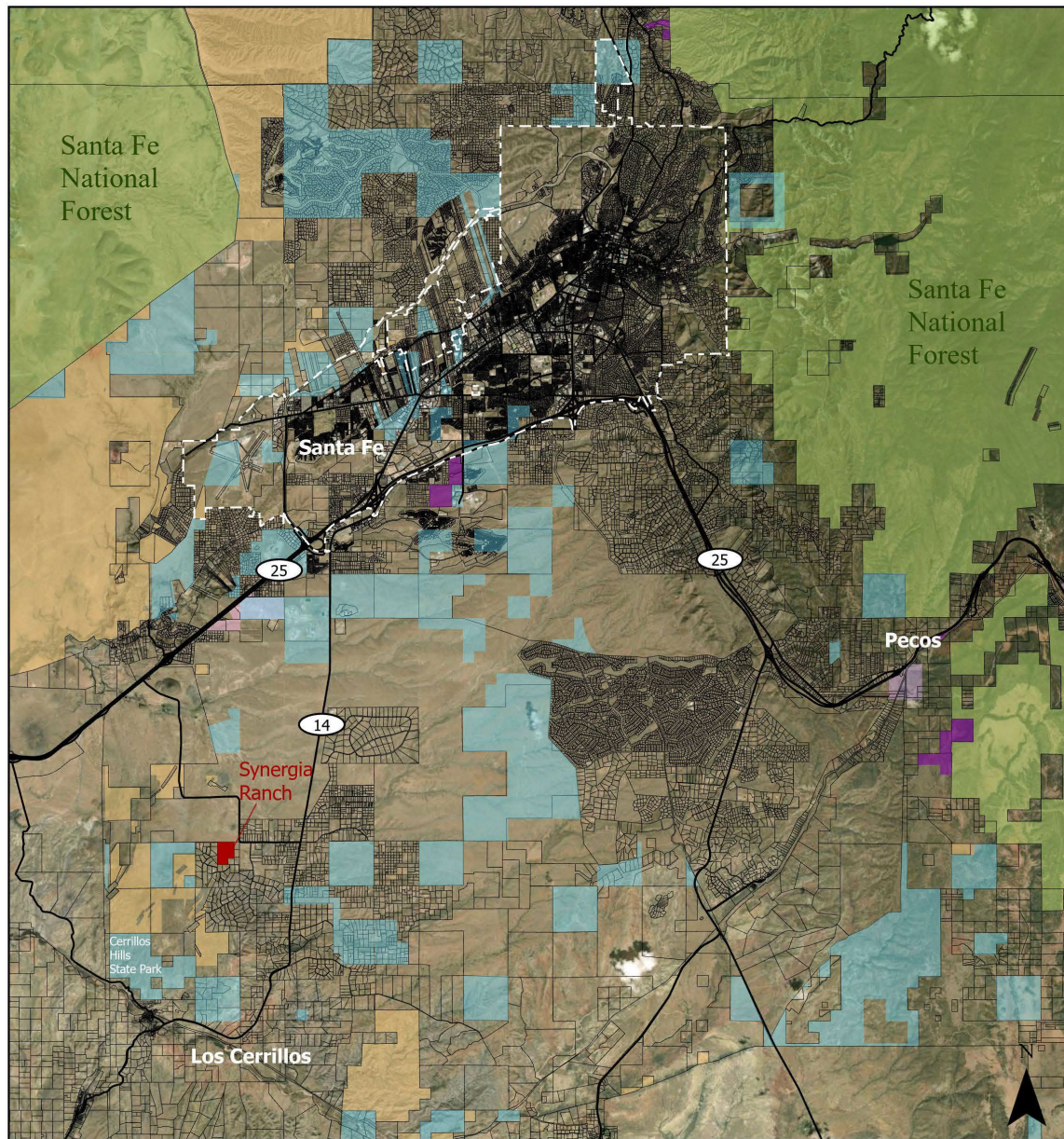
Conserving Land. Preserving Heritage.



# Synergia Ranch Conservation Easement Regional Map

NEW MEXICO  
LAND CONSERVANCY

Conserving Land. Preserving Heritage.



- Potential Conservation Easement Boundary (~111,408 acres)
- NM State Lands
- Bureau of Land Management
- Forest Service
- NMLC Conservation Easements
- National Park Service

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles

Spatial Reference  
Name: NAD 1983 StatePlane New Mexico Central FIPS 3002 Feet  
PCS: NAD 1983 StatePlane New Mexico Central FIPS 3002 Feet  
GCS: GCS North American 1983  
Datum: North American 1983  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Map Units: Foot US