AFTER WILDFIRE

A GUIDE FOR NEW MEXICO COMMUNITIES

U.S. ARMY

US Army Corps of Engineers ®
Albuquerque District

NEW MEXICO FORESTRY DIVISION

SILVER JACKETS
MANY PARTNERS - ONE TEAM

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About

Wildfire can upend lives and communities in an instant, leaving behind not only burned landscapes but also urgent hazards such as post-fire flooding that requires quick and informed action. The After Wildfire Guide is a resource created to support New Mexico communities, homeowners, landowners, and local governments navigate the critical period following a wildfire. We recognize that recovery can feel overwhelming, and this guide is designed to help you take clear, informed steps in the days, weeks, and months after a fire. This guide brings together practical safety information, emergency contacts, assistance programs, land recovery treatments, and community coordination tools to support both individuals and local leaders. While no guide can address every situation, this guide provides a solid starting point to help you understand what to expect and where to turn for help. Whether you are returning home, seeking recovery assistance, or organizing a community response, the After Wildfire Guide provides clear steps and reliable resources to help you stay safe and begin recovery with confidence. This guide will be reviewed and updated by its contributing partners periodically.

Immediate Safety

Safety Resources

SAFETY IS A PRIORITY:

Following a destructive wildfire structural damage, instability, hazardous trees, and flash flooding are just some of the dangers that people face. Planning ahead can help survivors navigate hazards.

If you are in danger, call 911 or your local emergency number.

Nixle Emergency Alerts: Provides real-time safety notifications from local law enforcement and emergency management agencies; https://www.nixle.com.

Emergency Alerts and Warning Systems

Staying informed after a wildfire is essential. The National Weather Service (NWS) issues real-time alerts for hazardous weather, including Flood Watches, Flood Warnings, and Flash Flood Warnings. Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), NOAA Weather Radio, and the Emergency Alert System (EAS) provide immediate notifications on weather conditions. Residents can sign up for local emergency alert systems offered by their county or municipality to receive these notifications. Signing up for community alert programs such as Nixle, a free location-based service, can also help ensure you receive timely evacuation or safety updates.

Wildfire and Flood Information Tools

Several trusted platforms offer up-to-date information following wildfire. InciWeb and NMFireInfo.com provide fire status updates and official announcements. FEMA's Flood Map Service Center and FloodSmart.gov also offer accessible tools for understanding flood conditions in your area. Residents should also monitor guidance from their local emergency management or county officials for current flood risk information.

Emergency Shelter, Supplies, and Basic Needs

During an evacuation, organizations such as the American Red Cross can help with immediate shelter, food, and emergency supplies. However, it is recommended that every person maintain a GO bag with at least 72 hours of supplies, including items for pets. Local support networks, including community centers, churches, faith-based groups, mutual aid services, and 2-1-1 referral services, may also provide short-term assistance. These resources help ensure you have access to basic needs while waiting for official clearance to re-enter your property. More information on how and when these resources are available can be found below in the Individuals and Families section.

IMMEDIATE SAFETY, HELPFUL LINKS

- **New Mexico Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (DHSEM):** For real-time statewide emergency updates, alerts, and guidance on disasters and recovery resources in New Mexico; https://www.dhsem.nm.gov.
- **U.S. EPA AirNow Interactive Map:** View real-time air quality conditions, wildfire smoke levels, and health guidance for your location; https://www.airnow.gov/.
- **Watch Duty Wildfire App:** A real-time wildfire tracking app that provides verified updates, evacuation information, and situational awareness during active fires; https://www.watchduty.org.
- **Private Well Resources New Mexico Department & New Mexico Health:** If you have a private well, access guidance on maintaining water quality, testing, and post-disaster actions at the New Mexico private well resource page; https://www.env.nm.gov/drinking_water/private-wells-2/.
- **National Weather Service:** Sign up to receive real-time weather alerts; https://www.weather.gov/alerts**.**

Health and Environmental Safety Guidance

Wildfire impacts can affect water quality, soil, and the air you breathe. The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and the Drinking Water Bureau provide essential information on water contamination, private well safety, and environmental hazards that may persist after a fire. The New Mexico Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer guidance on smoke exposure, air quality, and health risks associated with post-fire environments. These resources help you make informed decisions about returning home safely. When returning to a new burned area, ash may contain contaminants that can be inhaled; use a N95 mask when navigating these areas as a precaution.

The NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

- **Call or Text:** 1-833-796-8773
- **Website:** https://www.nmhealth.org/.

Apps and Digital Safety Tools

Several mobile apps offer quick access to emergency information. The FEMA App provides real-time alerts, checklists, and disaster guidance while the American Red Cross First Aid and wildfire apps offer step-by-step safety information and hazard updates. These tools can help you stay informed and respond safely during emergencies, even if communication systems are disrupted.

FEMA MOBILE PRODUCTS

- https://www.fema.gov/about/news-multimedia/mobile-products.

Post-Fire Hazards

Wildfire-impacted areas can remain hazardous long after the flames are out. Be alert for:

- **Flash flooding and debris flows** – even light rain can trigger dangerous runoff on burn scars.
- **Unstable trees and branches ("widow makers")** – trees and trunks can fall over without warning.
- **Hidden ground hazards** – ash pits, burned-out root systems, and unstable soil are hidden dangers as you walk about.
- **Damaged structures** – weakened roofs, walls, decks, and foundations may collapse.
- **Compromised utilities** – downed power lines, damaged propane tanks, leaking gas lines are hazards to watch out for.
- **Contaminated water sources** – ash and debris can affect wells, cisterns, and surface water.

SAFETY NOTE:

Avoid entering burned areas until officials say it is safe.

Before Returning Home

Re-Entry Safety

Residents should not return home until local officials declare the area safe to enter. Burned areas may still contain hazards such as damaged structures, downed power lines, unstable trees, contaminated water systems, and lingering smoke or ash. When entering a fire-damaged building, wear protective gear such as gloves, sturdy shoes, and an N95 or similar respirator to reduce exposure to soot and ash. Avoid disturbing ash or debris without proper protection, and do not drink or use tap water until authorities confirm the water system is safe. Before beginning cleanup or repairs, document all damage with photographs or video and contact your insurance provider for guidance.

> **AMERICAN RED CROSS:**
>
> For more information on guidance for checking your home condition after a fire, visit https://redcross.org and search "Checking Your Home After A Fire."

Individuals and Families

What Help is Available After a Wildfire?

Wildfire recovery resources can vary significantly depending on the severity of the event and whether it results in a federal disaster declaration. This declaration determines which federal and state programs become available, and some forms of assistance may not be accessible without it.

To help you understand what assistance may apply to your situation, this guide uses a simple labeling system throughout the following recovery and support sections:

- ✓ **Available After Any Wildfire** Resources that do *not* require a federal disaster declaration.
- ★ **Available Only with a Presidential Disaster Declaration** Programs that activate only when the President approves a federal disaster declaration for your county or Tribe, Nation, or Pueblo.

If you are unsure whether your area has a federal declaration, contact your county emergency manager or visit the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (NMDHSEM) website. The sections below walk you through the support available during the first hours, days, and weeks after a wildfire.

Basic Needs During Early Recovery

These services are designed to support individuals and families through the difficult period immediately following wildfire, when reliable shelter, food, and essential supplies are most important. Reaching out early to local partners ensures that you receive the help needed to stay safe, maintain stability, and begin the recovery process with support.

Local Support and Supplies ✓

New Mexico's 2-1-1 hotline and online network connects families with essential services in their area, including food pantries, clothing depots, emergency financial assistance, and transportation support. Many communities also organize supply hubs or donation centers after a wildfire, where individuals can receive clothing, toiletries, meals, and cleanup supplies at no cost. These local resources can bridge the gap while larger aid programs are activated.

Emergency Shelter ✓

After a wildfire, your home may be unsafe to enter or uninhabitable for days or weeks. The American Red Cross is often the first to open emergency shelters, offering temporary housing, hot meals, hygiene supplies, and help replacing essential items such as medications, eyewear, or medical equipment. When shelters are not available, the Red Cross may work with community centers, churches, or local agencies to establish short-term lodging or distribute necessities. If you do not have access to your home after a wildfire or flooding, contact New Mexico 2-1-1 or your local American Red Cross chapter to find the nearest available emergency shelter and local assistance resources.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY LINKS:

- **InciWeb:** Incident Information Systems provides current incident information, evacuation notices and maps for fires across New Mexico and the U.S.; https://inciweb.wildfire.gov.
- **American Red Cross- New Mexico Chapter:** Responds to disasters across New Mexico year-round and assists with immediate emergency needs such as temporary food and shelter; https://www.redcross.org/local/az-nm/about-us.

Temporary Lodging Options

If evacuation orders, smoke impacts, or structural damage prevent you from returning home, hotel stays may serve as temporary lodging. Depending on the situation, the Red Cross or other aid partners may offer hotel vouchers when shelter space is limited. Households with infants, elderly family members, or specialized medical needs can receive additional help locating baby formula, medical devices, oxygen refill stations, or other critical supplies through county health departments and community partners. While all wildfires are not designated as a national disaster, it is a good idea to save receipts for expenses incurred during evacuations, in case governmental assistance and reimbursable programs become available.

Food Assistance

Families experiencing income loss, displacement, or food shortages after a wildfire may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In some situations, emergency allotments may help replace food lost due to power outages or evacuation. Information about eligibility and application assistance is available through the YesNM benefits portal. Local nonprofit and faith-based organizations may also provide meal programs, vouchers, or essential pantry items until longer-term assistance becomes available.

CENTRALIZED FOOD RESOURCES:

- **Yes New Mexico:** One-stop shop for health and human services programs, including food and nutrition**;** https://yes.nm.gov/.

Caring for Pets & Livestock

Pet Safety Post Wildfire

Pets are vulnerable to the same hazards people face after a wildfire, including hot ash, unstable debris, and smoke inhalation. Check them for burns, singed fur, blistered paws, or signs of respiratory distress. If your pet shows coughing, drooling, limping, or unusual behavior, contact a veterinarian immediately. Avoid letting pets drink from puddles or standing water, which may contain ash or contaminants.

RESOURCES FOR PETS AND LIVESTOCK:

- **American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA):** Offers resources on pet first aid and disaster preparedness; https://www.avma.org/.
- **Animal Protection New Mexico (APNM):** Provides disaster relief support for livestock and resources for pets; https://apnm.org.
- **Animal Humane New Mexico:** Provides emergency shelter options, temporary housing, and animal care assistance; https://animalhumanenm.org.
- **New Mexico Livestock Board (NMLB):** Find help locating, securing, or reporting injured livestock after a natural disaster; https://www.nmlbonline.com/.
- **New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA):** For post-disaster resources like emergency feed and animal health advisories; https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/#gsc.tab=0.
- **USDA Farm Service Agency-New Mexico State Office:** Provides access to disaster assistance programs that support recovery from wildfire-related livestock losses, grazing impacts, and fence damage; https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/new-mexico.

Livestock Hazards and Injury Assessment

Livestock may face injuries and environmental hazards long after flames are out. Inspect animals for burns, swelling, lameness, wheezing, or signs of smoke stress. Survey pastures and pens for weakened fence posts, downed power lines, ash pits, or unstable soil where roots have burned underground. Remove animals from steep slopes or drainage prone areas to ensure safety post-fire.

State Support for Livestock Owners

The New Mexico Livestock Board (NMLB) helps locate, identify, and secure livestock that escape during a wildfire, working closely with law enforcement and agricultural partners during emergencies. The New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA) can provide information on feed resources, animal health concerns, and other support for producers managing herd impacts after a fire or flood. Additionally, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers federal disaster assistance programs to help producers with financial recovery from livestock and infrastructure losses. Together, these agencies serve as key contacts for livestock owners needing on-the-ground assistance, recovery resources, and financial support.

Protecting Animals from Post-Fire Floods

After a wildfire, sudden storms can create hazardous flash floods and debris flows that threaten both people and animals. Move livestock away from waterways, canyons, and low-lying areas, and avoid placing animals where escape routes may be cut off by rising water. Ensure gates, fencing, and access roads allow for rapid movement of animals to higher ground if flooding occurs. Keeping animals in safer, elevated areas during monsoon season can prevent injury and loss.

Displaced Animals

Ensuring your pet or horse is microchipped with up-to-date contact information is the most effective way to guarantee a swift reunion after an emergency. The New Mexico Livestock Board (NMLB) accepts microchips as a permanent and reliable alternative to traditional brands for equine identification. If you find a lost pet, take it to a vet or shelter to be scanned. If an animal is not chipped, you can help by posting on social media, using neighborhood forums, or creating "found pet" flyers, steps that are crucial when local shelters are at capacity. Owners should check lists of found animals at shelters and vet clinics and seek veterinary care early for any recovered animal to treat fire-related injuries.

Trauma & Emotional Support (includes Helping Children Cope)

Emotional Effects of Wildfire Recovery

Wildfires can leave lasting emotional impacts, and it is normal to experience shock, grief, anxiety, irritability, or trouble sleeping in the days and weeks that follow. These reactions often come in waves as you return home, adjust to losses, or navigate recovery decisions. Understanding that these feelings are a natural part of trauma response can help you regain a sense of steadiness. Reaching out to trusted friends, community support networks, or mental health professionals can reduce stress and improve well-being during this time.

Support for Individuals and Families

Professional and community resources are available if you or a family member needs additional support. The Disaster Distress Helpline, the New Mexico Crisis and Access Line, and the Agora Crisis Center offer confidential, 24/7 emotional support for anyone affected by disaster-related stress. These services can help you manage overwhelming feelings, find mental health care, and connect with local resources. Speaking with trained counselors early, before stress escalates, can make recovery feel more manageable.

CRISIS AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT RESOURCES:

- **Disaster Distress Helpline (SAMHSA):** 24/7 crisis counseling and emotional support for people experiencing disaster-related distress**.**
  Call or Text: 1-800-985-5990
  Website: https://www.samhsa.gov.
- **New Mexico Crisis and Access Line (NMCAL):** Free, confidential mental health support and connections to services in New Mexico.
  Call: 1-855-662-7474
  Website: https://nmcrisisline.com.
- **Agora Crisis Center:** 24/7 confidential support experiencing emotional crisis**.**
  Call: 505-277-3013
  Website: https://agoracares.org.

Support for Children

Children often react to disasters differently than adults. They may become emotional, dependent, quiet, irritable, or fearful, especially when routines are disrupted or when in a stressful environment. Encourage children to share what they are feeling and answer their questions honestly in age-appropriate ways. Re-establishing daily routines, offering reassurance, and creating opportunities for play and normal activities can help them regain a sense of safety. If a child continues to struggle, pediatricians, school counselors, and mental health professionals can provide additional guidance and support. Families may also find FEMA's *Helping Children Cope with Disaster* resource helpful for understanding common reactions and age specific ways to support children through recovery.

FEMA Accessible: Helping Children Cope After Disaster YouTube Video

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=di6j1XxKC8c.

FEMA's *Helping Children Cope with Disaster*:

- https://www.ready.gov/kids/helping-children-cope.

Programs & Services (includes Finance, Renters, Legal)

Financial Assistance Options

Families affected by wildfire may qualify for short-term or long-term financial support depending on the severity of damage and the type of emergency declarations issued. The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers low-interest disaster loans not only to businesses but also to homeowners and renters for repairing or replacing damaged property. These loans can cover losses that insurance does not fully address, including personal belongings, vehicles, and home repairs. Some communities may also connect residents with local nonprofits, relief funds, or charitable programs that provide immediate financial help for unmet needs.

Support for Renters

Renters impacted by wildfire may receive assistance even if they did not own the damaged property.

- ★ SBA disaster loans can help renters replace belongings or cover relocation expenses.
- ✓ Local aid organizations may provide temporary housing support depending on availability.

Renters should prepare for wildfire by familiarizing themselves with insurance policies and recovery resources that would be pertinent to post-fire recovery. This includes requesting documentation from landlords regarding the condition of the property, expected cleanup timelines, and any necessary safety inspections. Maintaining records of temporary living expenses and lost personal items can help with insurance clams or other reimbursement programs that may become available.

FLOOD RISK AND INSURANCE RESOURCES:

- **National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP):** Learn about flood insurance coverage and policy options; https://www.floodsmart.gov.
- **FEMA Flood Map Service Center:** Search your address to determine whether your property is in a FEMA-designated flood zone; https://msc.fema.gov/portal/home.
- **Legal Services Corporation-Disaster Legal Assistance:** Information on legal resources related to housing, insurance disputes, and disaster recovery; https://www.lsc.gov/disaster.
- **New Mexico Property Insurance Program, FAIR Plan:** the state's insurance of last resort for residential and commercial property; https://www.nmpropertyinsurance.com/.

Insurance and Coverage Guidance ✓

Insurance plays a significant role in wildfire recovery, and coverage varies depending on the policy. Homeowners and renters should contact their insurance provider as soon as possible to begin the claims process, document losses, and understand deadlines for filing.

Wildfire damage is typically covered under standard homeowners' policies, **but flood damage caused by post-fire storms is not. Flood coverage requires a separate policy**. Keeping receipts for cleanup, repairs, lodging, and replacement items can support both insurance claims and potential reimbursement through state or federal assistance programs if activated.

Residents may wish to review their flood risk and consider purchasing flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) or a private insurer. Tools are available to help determine whether a property is in a FEMA-designated flood zone and to learn more about flood insurance options.

Documenting Your Home and Insurance Needs

Documenting your home and preparing insurance information ahead of time can significantly ease the recovery process. Take photos of your home's interior and exterior, maintain an updated inventory, and store important documents in waterproof, off-site locations and as digital copies in, offline accessible spaces like "the cloud". Review your homeowner's insurance policy to understand what is and is not covered; remember that flood damage may not be included in standard policies. Checking FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) can help you understand your flood risk and plan accordingly.

HOME INSURANCE PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES:

- **New Mexico Office of Superintendent of Insurance:** Provides consumer assistance with insurance coverage questions, claims concerns, and insurer availability in New Mexico; https://www.osi.state.nm.us.

RECOVERY SUPPORT AND LEGAL RESOURCES:

- **FEMA Disaster Assistance:** Provides information on housing assistance, temporary lodging, and other support after a federally declared disaster; https://www.disasterassistance.gov.
- **New Mexico Legal Aid:** Free legal help for renters and homeowners with landlord-tenant issues, insurance disputes, benefits, and disaster related fraud; https://newmexicolegalaid.org.
- **New Mexico 2-1-1:** Connects individuals and families to local financial assistance, housing support, legal services, and recovery programs statewide; https://www.211nm.org.

Legal and Consumer Protection Resources

After a wildfire, individuals may encounter legal questions related to property access, tenant-landlord responsibilities, insurance disputes, or contractor agreements. Local legal aid organizations can help residents understand their rights, particularly with issues such as rent obligations, habitability concerns, or recovery-related fraud. Information about disaster-related legal assistance is available through the Legal Services Corporation Disaster Legal Assistance website, which connects individuals with legal help and resources.

Finding Updated Program Information

Available assistance can vary depending on jurisdiction, declarations, and phase of recovery. Local emergency managers, county services, 2-1-1 operators, and state agencies often provide updates on new or expanded programs as conditions evolve. Staying connected with these sources can help families identify financial support, rental assistance, legal guidance, and household recovery programs that may not be available immediately after the fire but become accessible in the weeks that follow.

Misinformation & Scams

After a wildfire, be cautious of misinformation and individuals offering services that seem urgent or unusually cheap. Only work with licensed, insured contractors and take time to verify references, business cards, and credentials. Avoid high-pressure sales tactics, unsolicited visits, large upfront payments, or contractors who cannot provide a local address or prior work history. If you have insurance, contact your provider before agreeing to repairs so you understand what is covered. Seek multiple bids, insist on a written contract, and remove valuables before allowing anyone into your home. Report suspicious offers and use trusted local sources to confirm information. Scams often increase after disasters, and careful screening can protect you from financial loss and unsafe work.

Be especially careful with information circulating on social media or informal news sources. Rumors can spread quickly during disasters and may cause unnecessary panic or confusion. Always confirm evacuation notices, road closures, and safety updates through official county, state, or tribal emergency channels.

Preparedness: Planning for Future Wildfires

Family Safety and Evacuation Plan

Developing a family safety plan is essential. Identify local hazards such as nearby burn scars that may increase flash flooding risk, map out evacuation routes, choose a meeting location, and establish an out-of-state emergency contact. Make sure everyone in your household knows to call 911 if you are in danger and are familiar with evacuation plans. Include pets and livestock in every part of your planning. Practicing your plan regularly helps ensure everyone can act quickly under stress. Identify a predetermined community meeting location, such as a fire station or community center, where residents can gather if communication systems fail.

For households seeking a structured planning tool, the Ready, Set, Go! Program provides checklists and customizable Wildfire Action Plan template that can help guide discussions and documentation.

WILDFIRE ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE:

- **Ready, Set, Go! Personal Wildfire Action Plan:**

  https://www.santafecountynm.gov/media/files/SantaFeRSGGuide2017.pdf.

Emergency Supply Kits

A basic emergency supply kit supports both rapid evacuation and short-term sheltering. **In waterproof containers**, store **enough** water, food, medications, and personal items for several days, along with flashlights, a NOAA weather radio, chargers, cash and essential documents. Keep pet supplies and **medications** readily accessible as well. Preparing these items ahead of time reduces anxiety and saves valuable time during an emergency.

Structural and Utility

Wildfires can damage buildings, utilities, and nearby infrastructure, creating hazards that may not be immediately visible. Before re-entering, check for structural instability such as leaning walls, weakened roofs, unstable decks, or compromised foundations. Do not restore power, propane, natural gas, or water service until systems have been inspected and officials indicate it is safe. Be alert for downed power lines, damaged utility poles, unstable trees, and compromised septic or fuel systems.

Maintain situational awareness, especially if your property is near gullies, creeks, arroyos, or drainage ditches. Burn scars are prone to flash flooding, debris flows, and erosion. Roads, particularly unpaved access roads, and infrastructure in low-lying areas may be unstable or washed out after heavy rainfall. These wash outs are often recurring for many years after a wildfire.

SANDBAG TECHNIQUES:

- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Guide:**

  https://www.nww.usace.army.mil/Portals/28/docs/Missions/Flood%20Assistance/20180205_FloodFighting_HowToUseSandbags.pdf.

Home Safety Preparation

Before wildfire or monsoon season begins, take steps to reduce risks on your property as annual or regular maintenance. Test sump pumps and battery backups, install water alarms, and keep gutters and downspouts clear. Anchor fuel tanks and elevate appliances, electrical components, and valuables above anticipated flood levels. Move hazardous materials (such as paints, solvents, glues, fuels, propane cylinders, and cleaning chemicals) to safer locations and learn proper sandbagging techniques in advance to reduce flood risk, **see p. 41 for a sandbagging guide**.

Home Hardening and Defensible Space

Reducing wildfire risk begins with strengthening your home and maintaining defensible space. The Institute for Business & Home Safety (IBHS) developed the Wildfire Prepared Home program to provide science-based guidance on reducing structural ignition risk. The program includes recommendations for ember-resistant construction, vegetation management, and creating defensible space around structures.

WILDFIRE PREPARED HOME QUICK LINKS:

- **Wildfire Prepared Home Program:**

  https://wildfireprepared.org/.

Community Coordinator

Mobilizing Your Community

Community Coordinator Role

Wildfires that affect entire neighborhoods or communities often require a coordinated recovery effort. A Community Coordinator may be a local official, tribal representative, neighborhood leader, or volunteer who serves as a central point of contact during early recovery.

This role helps organize information, connect residents with agencies and recovery resources, and reduce confusion during a stressful and rapidly changing time. Community Coordinators may work with emergency managers, county officials, natural resource specialists, and nonprofit partners to identify immediate needs and support both individual households and the broader community.

Communities can strengthen their ability to prepare for and recover from wildfire by participating in national wildfire preparedness programs such as NFPA Firewise USA® and Fire Adapted Communities.

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES:

- **NFPA Firewise USA®** A national program that helps communities organize around wildfire risk and take action to reduce hazards around homes and neighborhoods; https://www.nfpa.org/firewise.

- **Fire Adapted Communities** Provides tools and guidance to help communities prepare for wildfire, reduce risk, and improve long-term resilience; https://fireadapted.org.

Community Needs and Resources

Early recovery begins with understanding what your community needs most and what resources are already available. Assess vulnerable populations, post-fire flooding risk, and areas where assistance will be required quickly. Identify residents with skills that support community recovery, such as grant writing, communications, organizing volunteers, or technical evaluation of post-wildfire erosion or infrastructure impacts. Coordinators can also connect with state and federal partners, such as the Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams, the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (NMDHSEM), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and local emergency management offices to determine available assistance and share local observations. Understanding how federal BAER teams operate and who manages post-fire responses on nearby federal lands can help.

UNDERSTANDING BAER TEAMS:

Federal Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams focus primarily on assessing and addressing post-fire risks on federal lands. While they may analyze conditions on adjacent non-federal lands to identify threats to life, safety, and downstream values, their authority to implement treatments is generally limited to federal lands. BAER teams often coordinate with state, Tribal, and local partners to share information and support cross-boundary planning. Community coordinators can help by maintaining communication with the local Forest Service or Department of the Interior office (such as BIA, FWS, or BLM) that manages post-fire response and by sharing local observations or concerns that may affect nearby communities.

Effective Communication

Accurate, timely communication is essential for keeping residents informed and preventing confusion or misinformation. Establish reliable methods for sharing updates, such as community meetings, radio messages, message boards, social media, text notifications, or phone trees. Consider the cultural and language needs of your community to ensure all residents receive critical information. Transparency about decision-making, resource allocation, and safety concerns build trust and helps residents feel supported during recovery.

Community Participation and Recovery

Communities recover most effectively when residents understand how to contribute. Coordinators can organize volunteer opportunities, connect neighbors with support networks, and track volunteer hours that may qualify for reimbursement under certain federal programs. Encouraging local involvement strengthens community resilience and helps distribute the workload during a challenging time. As recovery progresses, communities may also benefit from forming long-term working groups to address preparedness, mitigation, and lessons learned, ensuring future wildfire and flooding risks are managed with greater confidence and coordination.

Funding & Financial Support

★ What Is a Presidential Disaster Declaration?

NAVIGATING DISASTER ASSITANCE:

- **Disaster Case Management Hotline:** The New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management may provide disaster case management support to help residents understand available recovery resources and assistance programs. **Phone:** (505) 670-4662.

A presidential declared disaster is a formal designation that allows federal agencies, including FEMA and the U.S. Small Business Administration, to provide additional assistance to states, tribes, and local governments. This declaration is not automatic after a wildfire; it requires documentation of impacts and a formal request from the state. If approved, a declaration can unlock programs such as FEMA Public Assistance, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and community disaster recovery funding. Communities should stay informed through New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (NMDHSEM) and county emergency management to understand which declarations apply to their area and what programs are applicable.

Understanding Community Funding Needs

After a wildfire, communities must quickly identify their most urgent funding needs, especially those related to post-fire flooding and infrastructure safety. Funding timelines can be tight, so it is important to understand what local, state, or federal resources are immediately available, and which require formal disaster declarations before becoming accessible. Coordinators should connect early with the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (NMDHSEM) and county emergency managers to determine eligibility for assistance programs and to prioritize projects that protect residents, infrastructure, cultural assets, and vulnerable areas.

★ Damage Documentation and Requirements

PROTECTION OF IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS:

Important documents may be required to verify ownership, identity, or insurance when applying for disaster assistance. Because these records can be destroyed in a wildfire, consider protecting them in advance.

- Store documents in a fire-resistant safe or bank safety deposit box.
- Scan or photograph records and keep digital backups.
- Place copies in your evacuation go-bag.

If ownership or property records are lost, contact your county assessor's office to request replacement copies.

Thorough and timely documentation is essential for accessing most recovery funds and assistance programs. Take photos and videos of damaged areas from multiple angles, including roads, culverts, bridges, drainage systems, and public facilities with written descriptions. Keep all receipts, invoices, and records of emergency actions. If federal or state funding is used, communities must follow procurement standards and permit requirements to remain eligible for reimbursement. Ensuring compliance with these rules from the start prevents delays and protects limited funding resources and can help streamline processes.

Volunteer and In-Kind Support

Volunteer labor and donated materials can play a significant role in recovery and may count as match for certain grants or federal assistance programs. To ensure credit, communities must track volunteer hours, tasks performed, equipment used, and donated supplies with clear documentation. This information supports grant applications and reimbursement requests and helps demonstrate the community's commitment to recovery efforts. Establishing a system early for recording volunteer and in-kind contributions strengthens both immediate response and long-term funding opportunities.

Available Funding Sources

Funding may come from a combination of local, state, and federal programs, each with its own rules and timelines. Some resources are available after **any** wildfire (✓), while others activate only when a **presidential disaster declaration** is approved (★).

★ FEMA Public Assistance supports debris removal, emergency protective measures, and repairs to public infrastructure.

★ Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) supports long-term risk-reduction projects.

✓ State programs and local funds can support immediate recovery, and mitigation needs regardless of federal status, though availability may vary by incident.

★ NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) can assist with postfire flooding and erosion threats. To request EWP, an eligible sponsor, such as a city, county, or conservation district, must submit a formal written request to the local USDA Service Center within **60 days of the disaster**. Projects must address imminent threats to life and property, and sponsors should be prepared to meet cost share and documentation requirements.

QUICK LINKS FOR COMMUNITIES:

- **Presidential Declared Disaster Determination:** Some recovery programs require a Presidential Disaster Declaration to be activated. Use FEMA's disaster database to check if your wildfire or related event has been officially declared; https://www.fema.gov/disaster/current.
- **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Emergency Relief Program:** Provides funding to help repair or reconstruct federal-aid highways and roads that have suffered serious damage because of wildfires and flooding; https://highways.dot.gov/.
- **New Mexico Forestry Division (EMNRD):** The New Mexico Forestry Division may provide resources to communities following a wildfire including post-fire flooding risk, watershed stabilization, and recovery planning; https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/.

Coordinators should review program requirements carefully, track expenses **from the start,** and understand how receiving funds from one program affects eligibility. Sometimes, local foundations are best placed to create donations hubs and disbursed funds quickly because they are nimbler and more flexible in their granting process. Contact your local community foundation for details.

Post-Fire Flooding

Risk Awareness

Post-Fire Flood Awareness

Flooding becomes a major hazard immediately after a wildfire. Burned soil repels water, causing run-off to move faster and carry mud, rocks, and debris downslope. This phenomenon, called hydrophobicity, will lessen over time, but there will be excess water and sediment moving across the landscapes for many years, and in some cases, over a decade. Flash flooding can occur with little warning and residents in burn scars should treat every rainfall event as a potential flood and stay alert to changing conditions.

Debris Flow Hazards

Debris flows, fast-moving mixtures of water, mud, rocks, and burned material, pose extreme danger within and downstream from burn scar areas. Even small storms can trigger debris flows without visible surface water. Residents should avoid canyons, steep drainages, and low-lying roads during storms and leave the area immediately if conditions deteriorate.

Flood Risk Evaluation

A home's location greatly influences its flood risk after a wildfire. Properties within or downstream of burn scars, along arroyos, or near steep slopes face higher risk. Reviewing local flood maps, paying attention to drainage pathways, and consulting county emergency management staff can help determine whether a property falls within a high-risk flood zone.

WEATHER ALERT SYSTEMS:

Monitoring weather forecasts is essential in post-fire areas. Sign up for city, county, and state alert services.

- Check notification settings to ensure you will receive alerts.
- NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards is a nationwide radio network that broadcasts continuous weather information.
- Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) is FEMA's national system for local alerting; https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system.

Preparedness: Before Flood Event

Flood Insurance Options

Flood insurance is a key tool for protecting homes after wildfire. Most policies require a 30-day waiting period before coverage begins, so contacting an insurance agent early is important. In some wildfire-related situations, waiting periods may be waived. Because post-fire flood hazards can last many years, maintaining flood insurance is often a long-term necessity.

Household Planning

Families living near burn scars should create a household plan that includes evacuation routes, designated meeting points, and backup communication methods. Some emergencies may require sheltering in place, so planning for both evacuation and sheltering scenarios helps households respond quickly under stressful conditions.

Emergency Supply Readiness

Preparing emergency supplies ahead of the rainy season reduces the need for rushed decisions during a storm. Tools for clearing small debris from drains or gutters may also be helpful if conditions remain safe. Supplies may include flashlights, batteries, nonperishable food, drinking water, medications, protective clothing, and waterproof storage for essential documents.

AMERICAN RED CROSS:

WHAT DO YOU NEED IN A SURVIVAL KIT?

- https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/survival-kit-supplies.html?srsltid=AfmBOoq5ik2SPSzkrJzOvtlpKgUioUwKaQuhXf0YSQB8W26r7az87786.

Home Safety Measures

Simple actions around the home can reduce exposure to post-fire flooding. Clearing debris from gutters and drainage routes helps direct water away from structures. Moving valuables, tools, or equipment to higher ground provides added protection. These steps are especially important for homes downslope from burn scars or near arroyos and steep terrain.

Animal Safety Planning

Pets and livestock require specific preparation before flood events. Households should identify evacuation areas, keep carriers or trailers accessible, and store food and water for several days. Livestock owners should ensure animals can be moved quickly from low-lying pastures to higher ground when storms are expected, i.e. practice loading and unloading animals on a regular basis to increase comfort for both animals and handlers during stressful times.

Recreation and Travel Caution

Both residents and visitors should exercise caution when traveling or recreating near burn scars. Flash flooding can occur even when weather appears calm. Avoid drainages, canyons, low-water crossings, and downstream areas during monsoon season or whenever storms are predicted upstream.

During Flood Event

TURN AROUND, DON'T DROWN!

- Never enter moving water.
- 6 inches of water can knock an adult down.
- 1-2 feet of water can sweep away a vehicle.
- Avoid driving across roads as they may be washed out beneath the moving water.

Immediate Danger Response

If you are in danger, call 911 or your local emergency number right away. Flash floods can develop suddenly, often with little or no visible warning, especially in and below burn scar areas. If heavy rain begins or a flash flood warning is issued, move immediately to higher ground. Never wait for rising water before acting.

Hazard Awareness in Flood Zones

Storm channels, arroyos, canyons, and low-lying areas can fill with fast-moving water in minutes. These locations are extremely dangerous during post-fire storms because burned landscapes shed water rapidly. Flash floods can occur even when rainfall is happening miles away, so avoid all drainage pathways during storms or warnings.

Avoid Moving Water

Even small amounts of moving water can be life-threatening. Six inches of fast-moving water can knock an adult off their feet, and only one to two feet of water can sweep a vehicle away. If you encounter moving water, do not attempt to walk or drive through it. Always assume it is too deep to navigate as it is almost impossible to gauge the depth of gushing turbid water. Turn around, find higher ground, and never risk crossing floodwater. Maintain emergency supplies including a window breaking device and seatbelt cutter in case of the need for rapid escape.

Vehicle Safety Measures

If water rises around your vehicle, abandon it and move to higher ground if it is safe to do so. Cars and trucks can be swept away quickly, especially when debris is carried in the water. Never attempt to drive through flooded roads, as the depth and speed of the water, and the condition of the roadway beneath, are often impossible to judge. After a fire, flash flooding and excess runoff means all culverts under roads are now too small for the volume of water that the culverts were originally built for pre-fire. Be careful because former routes that were once safe may now be dangerous.

Home Safety Actions

If water begins entering your home and you cannot evacuate safely, move to the highest level of the structure such as an upper floor, attic, or roof. Turn off utilities at the main switch or valve only if you can do so without standing in water. Disconnect electrical appliances and avoid contact with electrical equipment until professionals confirm the area is safe.

After Flood Event

Return Guidance

Do not return home until authorities confirm that it is safe. Follow all official instructions carefully, as post-fire flood areas can remain unsafe even after water recedes.

Home Re-Entry Safety

Once you are cleared to return, enter your home with extreme caution. Avoid turning on lights or electrical equipment until utility providers confirm it is safe to do so. If you smell gas, leave immediately, turn off the main valve if possible, and contact the gas company or fire department. Reenter during daylight hours whenever possible to reduce the need for electrical lighting and keep children and pets away from damaged areas until hazards are addressed.

Electrical and Gas Hazards

Water intrusion can create serious electrical risks. Never touch electrical appliances, outlets, or circuit panels while standing in water. Have electrical systems inspected by a qualified professional before use. Flooding may also damage propane or natural gas systems, so shut off valves only if it can be done safely and avoid creating sparks or flames inside the home.

Health Precautions

Floodwater often contains mud, ash, sewage, chemicals, and debris from burn scars, creating significant health hazards. Additionally, burned homes and infrastructure can introduce toxic and harmful contaminants into the environment. Avoid ingesting or exposing open wounds to floodwater and keep children and pets away from contaminated areas. Wash hands thoroughly after contact with floodwater. A tetanus shot may be needed if an injury is exposed to flood water or if it has been more than five years since your last vaccination. Mosquito populations may also increase after flooding; use repellents and reduce standing water to lower the risk of mosquito-borne illnesses such as West Nile Virus.

Water and Mold Safety

Private wells may be contaminated after floods. Test well water before drinking or cooking with it and avoid using electrical well equipment until it is inspected by a professional to prevent electric shock. Mold growth can begin within 24-48 hours of water exposure. Vulnerable individuals, such as those with asthma or weakened immune systems, should avoid mold-affected areas. Follow EPA guidelines for safe mold removal, ensure adequate ventilation, and avoid dry sweeping, which can spread spores.

ADDITIONAL FLOOD RESOURCES:

- **EPA Mold Cleanup Guidance:** https://www.epa.gov/mold.
- **FEMA Flood Insurance Information:** https://www.fema.gov/flood-insurance.
- **CDC Floodwater Health & Safety:** https://www.cdc.gov/floods/about/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods.
- **NOAA Flood Safety Education:** https://www.weather.gov/safety/flood.
- **New Mexico Environment Department Drinking Water Safety:** https://www.env.nm.gov/drinking_water.

Food Safety Measures

Floodwater contamination can make food unsafe to eat. Discard any food that encountered floodwater or was stored in non-waterproof containers. Throw out raw or processed meat, dairy products, eggs, dried foods, and anything showing signs of spoilage. Discard cans with swelling, rust, dents, or leaks. Commercially canned foods that remain sealed and undamaged may be cleaned and sanitized with a bleach solution before use. If power was out for an extended period during a flooding event or a wildfire, you may need to also discard unrefrigerated items and defrosted items from freezers. When in doubt, throw it out.

Cleanup Awareness

Post-flood cleanup requires caution, as debris, damaged structures, and unstable soil can create ongoing hazards. Wear protective clothing, gloves, and sturdy footwear. **Document all damage with photos and videos before beginning cleanup, especially if you plan to apply for assistance** ★. Use caution when removing debris from around burn scars, as slopes and channels may remain unstable for weeks or months.

Avoid airborne asbestos and lead dust. Buildings constructed before 1970 are more likely to contain asbestos. Airborne asbestos can cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings. Pipe or other insulation, ceiling tiles, exterior siding, roof shingles and spray-on soundproofing are just some of the materials found in older buildings that may contain asbestos. Lead is a highly toxic metal which produces a range of adverse health effects, particularly in young children. Many homes built before 1978 may contain lead-based paint. Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in elevated concentrations of lead dust in the air.

If you know or suspect that your home contains asbestos or lead-based paint and any of these materials have been damaged or will otherwise be disturbed during cleanup, **seek the assistance of public health authorities and try to obtain help from specially trained contractors, if available.**

Landscape Recovery & Treatments

After a wildfire, New Mexico's landscapes face heightened risks from flooding, debris flows, erosion, and invasive species. These hazards can persist for decades—in some areas, elevated flood and erosion risks may remain for 25 years or more. Each ecosystem, forests, grasslands, and deserts, recovers differently, and no single treatment fits every situation. The following sections outline common post-fire recovery approaches and provide resources to help landowners stabilize soil, support vegetation recovery, and reduce hazards to homes, infrastructure, and watersheds. Because conditions vary widely and recovery is a long-term process, landowners should work with local experts, conservation districts, tribal partners, or agency specialists to select treatments appropriate for their site.

RECOVERY RESOURCES QUICK LINKS:

- **Quivia Coalition:** Watershed Restoration Field Guide; https://quiviracoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Watershed-Restoration-Field-Guide-FINAL_web.pdf.
- **Coalitions & Collaboratives Post Fire Resources:** Valuable post-fire recovery and restoration information; https://co-co.org/post-fire-toolbox/.
- **USDA Emergency Forest Restoration Program:** Assists owners of non-industrial private forests restore forest health; https://www.fsa.usda.gov/resources/disaster-assistance-program/emergency-forest-restoration.
- **New Mexico Forestry Division (EMNRD) Post-Fire Treatments:** Primer on different treatments and review of their effectiveness; https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/Post-Fire-Treatments-A-Primer-for-New-Mexico-Communities.pdf .

Before You Begin: Choosing the Right Treatments

Not every burned area needs treatment. Some treatments can cause harm if used in the wrong place—for example, blocking drainages, introducing weeds, or creating erosion problems. Treatments should be matched to:

- Slope steepness
- Soil type and burn severity
- Rainfall patterns
- Available materials
- Safety considerations

For example, low-severity fires often produce positive ecological benefits and may not require intervention. When in doubt, consult a local specialist before installing structures or altering channels and diverting water flows.

Soil Stabilization

Techniques such as mulching, contour log placement, straw wattles, and lop-and-scatter light slash help reduce runoff and protect bare soils from erosion. These methods are most effective on moderate slopes or where burn severity is high. Certified weed-free materials should always be used to prevent introducing invasive species. **Avoid:** plastic sheeting, uncertified straw, hay bales in drainages, or materials that block natural flow paths.

Contour Log Structures

Contour felling and similar log-based treatments slow runoff, capture sediment, and break slope length. These techniques work best where abundant burned woody material is available, and slopes fall within moderate ranges (i.e. <60%). Log placement must follow the natural contour of the land and logs should have full ground contact to be effective. Logs must be installed on true contour and constructed using best practices, including leveling, staggering logs in a brick-lay pattern, and securing them to prevent downslope movement. Because improper installation can increase erosion or create new hazards, this work is highly technical and should be completed by trained professionals familiar with post-fire hydrology and slope stability.

Drainage and Channel Protection

Small channels may require stabilization after a fire to prevent erosion, blockage, or downstream flooding. Rock structures, debris racks, and check dam features can slow water and intercept sediment. Nature based erosion control structures use natural materials that are found onsite.

Free online guides are available:

- An Introduction to Erosion Control

  https://quiviracoalition.org/product/erosion-control/.

- Erosion Control Field Guide

  https://quiviracoalition.org/product/erosion-control-field-guide/.

Debris racks and similar structures require frequent monitoring and maintenance—often for many years after a wildfire. Post-fire runoff can carry large volumes of sediment, woody debris, and rocks, and these materials can quickly clog structures if they are not cleared regularly or reinforced.
Culverts in post-fire landscapes are often undersized for the increased flows and debris loads that occur after a burn. In many cases, replacing a culvert with a low-water crossing or other open-channel design provides a safer and more resilient alternative. These options reduce the risk of blockage, overtopping, and road failure during intense post-fire storms.

Important note: Because drainage work can influence downstream properties and may require permits, landowners should consult local experts before modifying channels or installing structures.

Native Vegetation Recovery

Many burned areas recover naturally, but replanting may be necessary where seed sources were destroyed or where erosion risks remain high. Use locally adapted species and appropriate planting densities based on moisture availability and elevation. For both short-term soil stability and longer-term recovery, consider weed-free, seed mixes that are a combination of annuals and perennials for both grasses and wildflowers. Focus on species that have deep roots that can help the soil recover its water absorption capabilities. Be very careful about non-sterile non-native species in your seed mixes.

Landowners should request seed test results before purchasing any seed to ensure no noxious or invasive species are present. The New Mexico noxious weed list provides guidance on species to avoid and helps ensure that post-fire seeding supports healthy, resilient vegetation recovery.

Invasive Species Control

Burned areas are highly susceptible to noxious or invasive weeds. Early detection and removal helps native vegetation re-establish and prevents highly flammable invasive grasses from creating future wildfire hazards. Coordinate with county weed programs or Soil and Water Conservation Districts to identify and manage invasive species.

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE:

- **Noxious Weed Dashboard:** https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/apr/noxious-weeds.html#gsc.tab=0.

Heavy equipment operators and contractors working on hazard tree removal or contour felling should clean machinery, tools, and footwear before entering the site to avoid spreading invasive seeds. Landowners can also unintentionally transport weeds – boots should be brushed or washed before walking on bare soil, and vehicle undercarriages and tire treads should be cleaned before re-entering the property.

SAFETY NOTE:

Cutting or moving burned trees can be hazardous – seeking professional assistance from a certified arborist is advised.

Hazard Tree Management

Burned trees can fall without warning during wind or rain events. Prioritize removing hazard trees that pose immediate risks to people or infrastructure. Large snags (i.e. >15in Diameter at Breast Height), or large standing dead trees, can support wildlife habitat. Consider keeping your largest snags about one per acre when removing standing dead trees.

Monitoring

Recovery is gradual. Recovery treatments such as contour log or rock structures should be checked after storm events and adjusted or repaired if they shift, wash out, or fail.

Monitoring should continue for multiple years, especially during monsoon seasons, as post-fire conditions evolve over time. Land restoration efforts may need to be repaired after a rainstorm, so monitoring how your efforts fared over time can ensure continued progress towards recovery. Monitoring could include a written description or photo points tracking changes over time. When establishing photo points, consider reference features so photos can easily be lined up to take similar repeat photos. Documenting progress over time can be surprisingly effective in retaining a commitment towards land recovery and healing.

Landowners are encouraged to seek technical assistance from government agencies and nonprofit organizations, such as the New Mexico Forestry Division, NRCS, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and nonprofits like American Forests, which can provide guidance on treatment effectiveness, long-term monitoring, and site-specific recovery needs**.** Remember, recovery may be possible but may follow an inconvenient timescale that is slower placed. Efforts should focus on influencing the trajectory of recovery of a specific ecosystem and allowing a landscape the time and space it needs to heal, with some support along the way.

Forest Recovery

Forested areas may experience severe soil heating, hydrophobic conditions, heavy runoff, and bark beetle stress after wildfire. Slopes above 20 percent are particularly prone to erosion and debris flow. Treatments such as contour felling and installation of log erosion barriers, mulching, slash redistribution, and channel protection can help stabilize burned terrain. Hazard trees and bark beetle outbreaks may persist for several years, requiring monitoring. To reduce bark beetle infestation, it is especially important to follow seasonal guidelines and only cut green and living trees during the winter dormant season.

Something to consider, not all forests will return to looking as they did before a wildfire, and some forests may transition into oak shrubland. These types of forests provide significant ecological benefits to forested landscapes following a wildfire, including providing protective cover for other species of tree seedlings to re-grow. Recovery of the original tree species will depend on burn severity, seed source and conditions for seedling survival (i.e. slope, soil temperature, etc.).

Reforestation in New Mexico is a long-term process. In many high-severity burned areas, natural tree regeneration may be slow or absent, and full forest recovery can take generations. However, it is generally recommended to wait 3–5 years before planting seedlings. This waiting period allows soils to stabilize, water-repellant ground cover to break down, different species of vegetation to establish, and post-fire erosion patterns to settle.

Where natural regeneration is limited after several years, active reforestation may be appropriate. Seedling survival improves when planting is timed with favorable moisture conditions and when follow-up care—such as protection from browsing and competition—is provided. Local forestry specialists can help determine whether a site is ready for planting, which species are most likely to succeed, and help you establish a plan to help maximize seedling survival.

Forest Resources

Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department Forestry Division:

New Mexico specific guidance and resources for post-wildfire forest recovery, including erosion control practices, vegetation stabilization, and forest health management.

- Watershed Stabilization & Hazard Tree Mitigation Practice Specifications are post-fire practices the Forestry Division will select to mitigate hazardous conditions;

  https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/Practice-Specifications-Handout_NMFD_SSF.pdf.

New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute:

- Landowner guides on land restoration practices, including Contour Log Felling to Stabilize Hillslopes, Bark Beetle Management, Bark Beetle Field Guide for New Mexico Forests, and other free downloadable resources can be found here:

  https://nmfwri.org/stewardship/wildfire-resiliency/.

Bosque Recovery

Bosque areas along rivers and streams are especially vulnerable after wildfire because vegetation, soils, and shallow groundwater systems are closely connected. Fire can reduce native cottonwood and willow cover, destabilize streambanks, and increase erosion during post-fire runoff events. Disturbed riparian areas are also highly susceptible to invasion by non-native species such as salt cedar and Russian olive, which can outcompete native vegetation, alter habitat conditions, increase water use from shallow groundwater, and contribute to future wildfire risk by creating dense fuel conditions.

Recovery in bosque areas often focuses on controlling invasive species, supporting native vegetation re-establishment, and protecting streambanks and adjacent floodplain soils. Selective removal of invasive deep-rooted plants, monitoring for re-sprouting, and planting native riparian species may be appropriate where natural regeneration is limited. Because bosque systems depend on river processes and seasonal moisture patterns, landowners should coordinate with Soil and Water Conservation Districts or natural resource professionals to identify treatments that support long-term watershed health and reduce future fire risk.

Bosque Resources

New Mexico Wetlands Program:

- Supports wetland restoration and protection as an integral part of watershed health;

  https://www.env.nm.gov/surface-water-quality/wetlands/.

USDA New Mexico Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):

- A Guide for Planning Riparian Treatments in New Mexico, providing both planning and design assistance in restoring riparian areas;

  https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/plantmaterials/nmpmcpg7685.pdf.

Grassland Recovery

Grasslands often recover more quickly than forests after wildfire, but the first year remains critical for stabilizing soil and preventing the spread of invasive grasses. Many native grass species in New Mexico are adapted to periodic fire, yet high severity burns, drought conditions, or repeated disturbance can slow natural regrowth. Post-fire storms may still trigger erosion on exposed slopes or in drainages, especially where ground cover was fully consumed. Effective grassland recovery focuses on maintaining native grass communities, monitoring for invasive species like cheatgrass or red brome, and protecting vulnerable areas from concentrated runoff. Supplemental seeding may be appropriate in areas lacking native seed sources, provided locally adapted, weed-free mixes are used. Ongoing monitoring during monsoon seasons helps landowners identify problem areas early and support long-term landscape resilience.

Grassland Resources

Management for Recovery of Rangeland After Wildfire:

- This resource is from South Dakota State University but still offers helpful insight on grassland recovery after a fire;

  https://extension.sdstate.edu/management-recovery-rangeland-after-wildfire.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):

- Provides seeding recommendations, erosion control options, and post-fire rangeland management guidelines for New Mexico ecological sites;

  https://www.nrcs.usda.gov.

Southwestern Environmental Information Network:

- Provides regional plant occurrence data to support selection of locally appropriate native species for grassland recovery after wildfire;

  https://www.swbiodiversity.org.

Southwest Seed Partnership:

- An established network for native seeds that are locally sourced and commercially available;

  https://southwestseedpartnership.org/.

Desert Recovery

Desert landscapes often recover slowly after wildfire because vegetation grows sparsely, and soils may be fragile. Invasive grasses such as buffelgrass or cheatgrass can spread rapidly after disturbance, increasing future fire risk. Erosion may be localized but can still threaten nearby roads, drainage, and low-lying communities. Stabilization often focuses on minimizing disturbance, controlling invasive species, and protecting small drainages from sediment movement.

Desert Resources

Southwest Fire Science Consortium:

- Provides research-based information on fire behavior, fire effects, and recovery processes in desert and arid environments;

  https://www.swfireconsortium.org/.

Sonoran Fuel Breaks:

- Presents Arizona-based research on fire and fuel breaks in the Sonoran Desert, with concepts and lessons that may be transferrable to similar desert landscapes in New Mexico;

  https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/2fc8b981ae5b4a2b8ca49f43bf89fb80.

Programs, Services & Resources

Many agencies and organizations support community recovery after wildfire, offering technical guidance, financial assistance, and resources to reduce post-fire flooding risks. The availability of these programs depends on the type and scale of the disaster, and certain resources only activate after specific declarations. Community Coordinators should maintain communication with county emergency managers, state agencies, and federal partners to understand which programs are available and how to access them.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEMA provides Public Assistance, Hazard Mitigation funding, and technical support to communities after major disasters. Assistance depends on the type of declaration issued.
Website: https://www.fema.gov.
Phone: 1-800-621-FEMA (3362)

FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grant

FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grant helps state, tribal, and local agencies cover emergency wildfire suppression costs when fires threaten populated areas.
Website: https://www.fema.gov/assistance/public/fire-management-assistance.
Phone: 1-800-621-FEMA (3362)

The Federal Highway Administration-Emergency Relief Program

The Federal Highway Administration-Emergency Relief Program assists communities in repairing roads, bridges, and transportation infrastructure damaged by wildfire or post-fire floods.
Website: https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/programadmin/erelief.cfm.
Phone: (202) 366-9494

Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service - Emergency Watershed Protection Program assists communities in reducing threats from post-fire flooding, erosion, and debris flows by funding stabilization and watershed protection projects.

Website: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/watershed-programs.
New Mexico NRCS Website: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/nm.
Phone: (505) 761-4400

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provides technical expertise on flood risk management, engineering support, and Clean Water Act permitting for community recovery projects.
Website: https://www.spa.usace.army.mil.
Albuquerque District: (505) 342-3100

U.S. Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response

The Burned Area Emergency Response teams assess burn severity on federal lands and recommend emergency stabilization treatments to reduce erosion and flooding risks.
Website: https://www.fs.usda.gov/naturalresources/watershed/burnedareas.shtml.
Southwestern Regional Office: (505) 842-3292

U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency provides loans and financial assistance for farmers and ranchers after disasters.
Website: https://www.fsa.usda.gov/.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development administers Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery funding when authorized after major disasters. These funds support long-term community recovery.
Website: https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/cdbg-dr.
Phone: (202) 708-1112

U.S. Small Business Administration

The Small Business Administration provides low-interest disaster loans to businesses, nonprofits, and eligible local governments for rebuilding public infrastructure and facilities.
Website: https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/disaster-assistance.
Phone: 1-800-659-2955

STATE OF NEW MEXICO AGENCIES

Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources Department - Forestry Division

The Forestry Division helps communities with wildfire recovery, hazardous tree assessments, and post-fire rehabilitation planning.
Website: https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd.
Phone: (505) 476-3325

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture supports agricultural communities by providing resources for livestock feed, fencing, and soil recovery, and by coordinating with federal partners.
Website: https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/#gsc.tab=0.
Phone: (575) 646-3007

The New Mexico Environment Department

The New Mexico Environment Department assists communities with drinking water, wastewater systems, and environmental health concerns following wildfire and flooding.
Website: https://www.env.nm.gov.
General Phone: (505) 827-2855
Drinking Water Bureau: (505) 476-8620

The New Mexico Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management

The New Mexico Department of Homeland Security & Emergency Management coordinates statewide disaster response, damage assessments, and access to federal and state assistance.
Website: https://www.nmdhsem.org.
Phone: (505) 476-9600

The New Mexico Livestock Board

The New Mexico Livestock Board assists with livestock recovery, identification, and health concerns after fire, and supports coordination for displaced animals.
Website: https://www.nmlbonline.com.
Phone: (505) 841-6161

The New Mexico Department of Transportation

The New Mexico Department of Transportation helps assess and repair transportation routes affected by wildfire or post-fire flooding and debris flows.
Website: https://www.dot.nm.gov.
Phone: (505)-795-1401

LOCAL & REGIONAL PARTNERS

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide technical assistance for erosion control, watershed stabilization, and post-fire land treatments.
Directory: https://www.nmacd.org.
Phone: (505) 832-1111

New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service

Extension agents offer community education on land management, soil recovery, watershed health, and fire impacts.
Website: https://extension.nmsu.edu.
Phone: (575) 646-3015

VOLUNTARY & NONPROFIT PARTNERS

American Red Cross

The Red Cross supports communities with sheltering, emergency supplies, and recovery coordination during and after disasters.
Website: https://www.redcross.org/local/az-nm/about-us/locations/new-mexico.html?srsltid=AfmBOoreoyAyqZIKhKnKEiSRg9h-hcaMnghbI5mgk_Q2P9LjJvzdw14q.
Phone: 1-800-RED-CROSS (733-2767)

New Mexico Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

NMVOAD connects communities with volunteer organizations offering debris removal, relief services, and coordinated recovery support.
Website: https://www.nmvoad.org.
Email Contact: info@nmvoad.org.

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army may provide emergency relief services, supplies, and support for community recovery efforts depending on local capacity.
Website: https://www.salvationarmyusa.org.
Phone: 1-800-SAL-ARMY (725-2769)

Team Rubicon

Team Rubicon deploys trained volunteers to assist with debris removal, hazard mitigation, and community stabilization efforts.
Website: https://teamrubiconusa.org.
Phone: (310) 640-8787

Sandbag Construction – The use of sandbags is a simple, but effective way to prevent or reduce flood water damage. Properly filled and placed sandbags can act as a barrier to divert moving water around, instead of through, buildings. Sandbag construction does not guarantee a water-tight seal, but is satisfactory for use in most situations. Sandbags are also used successfully to prevent overtopping of streams with levees, and for training current flows to specific areas.

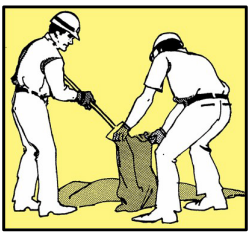
Untied sandbags are recommended for most situations. Tied sandbags should be used only for special situations when pre-filling and stockpiling may be required, or for specific purposes such as filling holes, holding objects in position, or to form barriers backed by supportive planks. Tied sandbags are generally easier to handle and stockpile. However, sandbag filling operations can generally be best accomplished at or near the placement site, and tying of the bags might be a waste of valuable time and effort. If the bags are to be pre-filled at a distant location, due consideration must be given to transportation vehicles and placement site access.

Commercial plastic sandbags, made from polypropylene, are available from most bag suppliers and hardware stores. These will store for a long time with minimum care, and are not biodegradable. Thus, they have to be disposed of after use, or will remain around for a long time. Another option is untreated burlap sacks, often available at feed or hardware stores. Empty bags are biodegradable, and can be stockpiled for several years, if properly stored. Filled burlap bags of earth material will deteriorate quickly. In either case, rodent control is strongly recommended during storage.

Do not use garbage bags, as they are too slick to stack. Avoid the use of feed or seed sacks, as they are too large to handle when filled even half full. If they must be used, keep the weight of filled bags down to what can be handled by one or two people (no more than 60 pounds). Where possible, use bags about 14-18" wide, and 30-36" deep.

A heavy bodied or sandy soil is most desirable for filling sandbags, but any usable material at or near the site has definite advantages. Coarse sand could leak out through the weave in the bag. To prevent this, double bag the material. Gravelly or rocky soils are generally poor choices because of their permeability.

Sandbag barriers are best built by a group of people working as a team. Insure that the individuals have the physical capability to carry or drag a sandbag weighing approximately 30-50 pounds (depending on dampness and type of sand). They should wear work clothing and gloves.

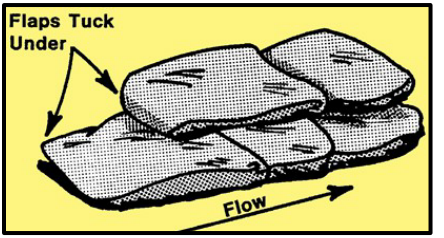


How to Fill a Sandbag – Filling sandbags is usually a two-person operation. The use of safety goggles and gloves is recommended. One member of the team places the empty bag between or slightly in front of widespread feet with arms extended. The throat of the bag is folded to form a collar, and held with the hands in a position that will enable the other team member to empty a rounded shovel full of material into the open end. The person holding the sack stands with knees slightly flexed, and head and face as far away from the shovel as possible.

The shoveler carefully releases the rounded shovel full of soil into the throat of the bag. Haste in this operation can result in undue spillage and added work. Bags should be filled between one-third (1/3) to one-half (1/2) of their capacity. This keeps the bag from getting too heavy, and permits the bags to be stacked with a good seal.

For large scale operations, filling sandbags can be expedited by using bag-holding racks, funnels, or power loading equipment. The special equipment required is not always available during an emergency, but can be fabricated using available materials, and should be identified in local flood response plans.

Sandbag Placement – Remove any debris from the area where the bags are to be placed.

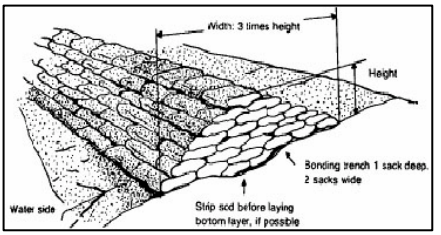


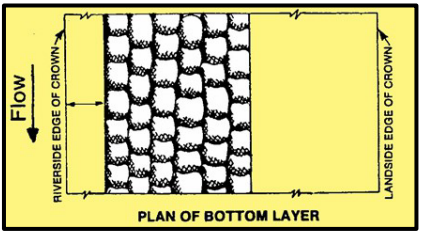
Fold the open end of the unfilled portion of the bag to form a triangle. If tied bags are used, flatten or flare the tied end.

Place the partially filled bags lengthwise and parallel to the direction of flow, with the open end facing against the water flow. Tuck the flaps under, keeping the unfilled portion under the weight of the sack.

Place succeeding bags on top, offsetting by one-half (1/2) filled length of the previous bag, and stamp into place to eliminate voids, and form a tight seal.

Stagger the joint connections when multiple layers are necessary. For unsupported layers over three (3) courses high, use the pyramid placement method (below).





Pyramid Placement Method – The pyramid placement is used to increase the height of sandbag protection. Place the sandbags to form a pyramid by alternating header courses (bags placed crosswise) and stretcher courses (bags placed lengthwise). Stamp each bag in place, overlap sacks, maintain staggered joint placement, and tuck in any loose ends.

Estimating materials – Use the above table, and assume 40 pounds of sand per bag. A 3 foot levee, 500 feet long, requires (500/100) × 4500 = 22,500 bags. From that, (40 * 22,500) ÷ 2000 = 450 tons of sand. The weight of sand per bag will vary locally.

Number of Bags / 100 linear feet of sandbag levee					
Levee Height	# Bags	Levee Height	# Bags	Levee Height	# Bags
1 foot	800	3 feet	4,500	5 feet	9,750
2 feet	2,100	4 feet	7,800	6 feet	11,700

Ringing boils – A boil is a condition where water is flowing through or under an earth structure (such as a levee) that is retaining water. Free flowing water wants to move to lower elevations. If a levee is stopping floodwaters, the water may be able to find weak points to enter. This action is called "piping". If the water finds a large enough path, the flow will become visible, and is a serious threat to the integrity of the levee. Most boils occur in sand, silt, or some combination.

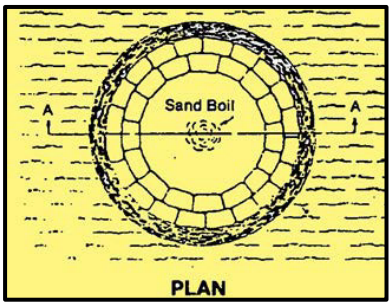
A boil is found on the landward side of the levee, or in the ground past the levee toe (the exact distance varies with local conditions). Possible boil sites can be identified by free standing or flowing water (other than culverts, pumps, etc). A boil can be found only by close inspection. A prime indicator is water bubbling (or "boiling"), much like a natural spring.

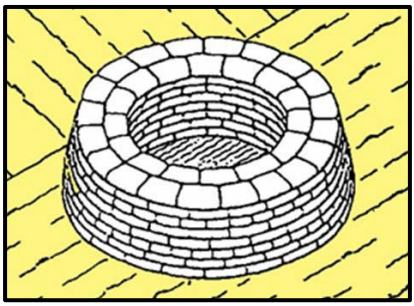
Another is obvious water movement in what appears to be standing water. Carefully examine the water for movement. Boils will have an obvious exit (such as a rodent hole), but the water may be cloudy from siltation, or the hole very small. If there is any movement in the water, carefully approach the site, disturbing the water as little as possible. Let the water settle, and look at the suspected site. If you see the hole, examine it carefully. If the water flow is clear, there are no problems as yet. If there is no distinct hole, the water flow is not a threat. Monitor the site regularly for changes, and take no other actions.

A dirty water flow indicates that the soil is being eroded by the water, and that could mean failure of the levee. A boil ring is the best solution. The idea is to reduce the water flow until the water is flowing clear, but not to stop the water flow. This acts as a relief valve for the water pressure; the water continues to flow, but is not eroding the material. If the water flow is stopped, the pressure will remain, and another boil will form. Ring the boil with sandbags, with the first bags back 1-2 feet from the boil. More, if the soil is unstable.

Build the first layer in a circle, 2-4 bags across, and then build up, bringing each layer in. If possible, keep the interior face straight. Build the ring wall with the means for water to flow out, leaving a gap in the wall, or using pipes. Adjust the flows until the water slows, and becomes clear.

Monitor the ring wall constantly. Raise or lower the height of the wall as necessary, maintaining a slow, clear flow. The height should be only enough to slow flow such that no more material is displaced, and the water runs clear.





Notes:
Do not sack a boil which does not put out material. The entire base should be cleared of debris and scarified. Tie into the levee if the boil is near a toe. Use loose earth between all of the sacks. All joints must be staggered. Be sure to clear the sand discharge. Never attempt to completely stop the flow through a boil.

Corps of Engineers Sandbag Policy – Non-federal governments are responsible for maintaining a supply of sandbags adequate to cover anticipated immediate needs. At the discretion of the District Commander, a portion of the District's stockpile may be loaned to meet a specific local flood emergency. The Walla Walla District maintains a limited sandbag stockpile to augment local jurisdictions during actual flood emergencies, but can access a national contract for additional supplies. We will issue only to agencies or governments, through the designated emergency manager. Individual citizens requesting sandbags will be directed to their local government.

Unused stocks must be returned to Walla Walla District as soon as the emergency is over, unless otherwise released to the supported jurisdiction. Consumed stocks must be replaced in kind, or paid for by the local interests, unless the District Commander directs otherwise This applies only to those jurisdictions within the Walla Walla District's area of operation, the Snake River basin.

For Further Information – Refer to the Walla Walla District Flood Fight Handbook: Preparing For a Flood, available for download at the link below. Contact the District Readiness Office, as noted below, for a copy.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

WALLA WALLA DISTRICT READINESS OFFICE

201 North Third Avenue; Walla Walla, WA 99362-1876 509-527-7146 business hours

1-509-380-4538 emergencies (include 1-509- when calling)

cenww-eoc@usace.army.mil ¤ www.nww.usace.army.mil/Missions/Flood-Assistance/

November 2018

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Supply Readiness Checklist

ITEM	YES	NO
Flashlight		
Battery		
Non-Perishable Food		
Drinking Water		
Medications		
Protective Clothing		
Waterproof Storage		

After Wildfire: A Guide for New Mexico Communities is an interagency response to fire affected communities' requests for a one-stop-shop for information to help them respond to wildfires. In recent years, New Mexico has experienced multiple catastrophic wildfires, many followed by intense flooding. In the wake of these events, communities had to navigate a complex system of state and federal response authorities. This guide was created to help communities organize and respond to wildfire and subsequent flooding. This booklet contains safety information, flood information, state and federal agency resources and contacts for assistance, ways to mobilize your community, and financial and funding tips for communities and families. It is intended to provide useful guidance through a difficult time, and to start you and your community on the road to recovery. If you are reading this before a wildfire occurs, use it to help you plan ahead.