



FY25 VFA SUCCESS STORY



Cochiti Volunteer Fire Department

The Cochiti Fire Department (CFD) is a primarily volunteer municipal fire department, located in northeastern Sandoval County. Comprised of three fire stations and 30 volunteer firefighters and EMTs. Cochiti Fire Department services a distinct landscape, and unique communities.

A response area spanning 181 square miles, provides a diverse landscape and unique challenges, from high plains grazing lands, and piñon juniper, to the Rio Grande River valley bosque, into the higher elevations of ponderosa pine

and mixed conifer. The Cochiti Fire Department coordinates and responds to seven different jurisdictional landowners including, tribal lands, a BLM managed national monument and an Army Corps of Engineers Lake recreational area.

The VFA grant has been instrumental in creating a successful system by increasing out capacity within our region. This grant has helped the Cochiti Fire Department's Bearhead Fire Crew by providing much needed personal protective equipment, shelters, weather monitoring equipment, equipment handles, and fire hose. This equipment has helped us build capability by allowing us to provide for safety, not only to our firefighters, but to our communities and landscapes that we protect. The increasing effectiveness that this equipment has given the Cochiti Fire Department has also helped our surrounding communities and partners by allowing us to lend a helping hand in an emergency.



Cochiti Lake Fire Volunteer Department's Bearhead Hand Crew Module on a recent preseason training hike.

The objectives of the 2012 Sandoval County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) are:

- To educate residents regarding wildfire risk and shared responsibility.
- To reduce fuel loading around our homes, infrastructure, communities, and forests.
- To decrease structural ignitability of our homes, business, and buildings.
- To manage forested areas to promote forest health and foster resilience.

New Mexico Forestry Division VFA Wildland Coordinator Success Story

Sandoval County – Cochiti Pueblo – Cochiti Lake Volunteer Fire Department

The Cochiti Fire Department was the recipient of the VFA Wildland Coordinator Grant, and it was implemented in 2023. Firefighter Captain Dominick Ortiz was assigned to the position of CFD Wildland Coordinator. Prior to the creation of this position Captain Ortiz was the lead wildland firefighter and fire operations captain. Captain Ortiz is a qualified Engine Boss, Heavy Equipment Boss, and Intermediate Faller. The CFD Wildland Coordinators focus has been to reduce wildland fire risk within the community, advance firefighter education, and the promotion of multi-agency coordination and cooperation. Wildland Coordinator Ortiz is uniquely qualified for his position given his many years of experience and strong ties to both the local community and our regional partners.

In 2023, the Cochiti Wildfire Risk Reduction plan was implemented. The intent of this plan was to educate the public on safe practices during seasonal agricultural burns, provide firefighter training, and promote multi-agency cooperation. This program was deemed successful resulting in over 200 acres of agricultural fields safely and successfully treated for the growing season. In addition, 20+ firefighters and farmers received hands on training in a controlled environment. The success of this plan lays with the implementation of the CFD Wildland Coordinator. Cochiti firefighters participated in approximately 1500 hours of collective training in the 2023 season. This training was held not just in our stations but at different locations throughout the state.



Cochiti VFD Bearhead Hand Crew assisting on an agricultural burn on Cochiti Pueblo.



Cochiti VFD firefighters facilitating an After Action review (AAR) after assisting on Cochiti Pueblo's ag burn.

Wildland Coordinator Ortiz, organized training for 25 new wildland firefighters from across our region. Through cooperation with individuals from Sandoval County and Town of Bernalillo, came the creation of a standard annual wildland firefighter refresher. This was delivered to career firefighters and volunteer firefighters throughout each department, providing continuity of training and cooperation across multiple jurisdictions. These efforts were continued and valued during all operations.

Wildland coordinator Ortiz has also coordinated Cochiti Fire Department resource responses to 15 different RMP requests and multiple mutual aid requests.