



26th

RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION MEETING



NEW MEXICO
OUTDOOR RECREATION DIVISION



Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department



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Commission Meeting Agenda

September 18, 2026

MEETING INFORMATION

Friday, September 18, 9 am – 12 pm in the City of Socorro Council Chambers

111 School of Mines Rd, Socorro, NM 87801

MICROSOFT TEAMS CONFERENCE OPTION

Link to join the meeting online: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/277285717250866?p=Bj1wKujJBvjFI0jZH>

Meeting ID: 277 285 717 250 866

Passcode: cX3Jr6xo

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:

During the meeting, please mute yourself unless you would like to speak. This will minimize background noise.

AGENDA

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

3. Approval of Agenda

4. Approval of Minutes from the 25th RGTC meeting

- Attachment A

5. Public Comment

6. New Business

- Updates from the Chair
 - i. Voting Procedure Change
- Subcommittee Reports
 - i. Tribal and Legislative Subcommittee
 - 1. RGT website Tribal Acknowledgment language (Attachment B)
 - 2. Legislative Efforts
 - ii. Alignment Subcommittee
 - 1. Field Verification Procurement SOW - Santa Fe to Rinconada (Attachment C)
 - a. Pointe Strategies Introduction (Attachment D)
 - 2. Trail Segment Designation – Action Item
 - a. NM-333 Bike Route: Albuquerque (Tramway) to Tijeras (Attachments E,F)

- b. NM-14 Multi-Use Trail: Tijeras (I-40) to San Antonito (roundabout)

- (Attachments G,H,I,J)

i. NPO Subcommittee

- 1. Fundraising for the Future Contract Closeout

- (Attachments K,L,M,N)

- 2. Rio Grande Trail Association Presentation

- (Attachment O)

○ Miscellaneous

- Rio Grande Trail FY2026 Report (Attachment P)

7. Announcement of Next Meeting

- Fri, July 16, 2027

8. Public Comment

9. Adjournment



Attachment A: Meeting Minutes – 25th RGTC Meeting (April 10, 2026)



25th Río Grande Trail Commission Meeting – Minutes

Friday, April 10, 2026 // 9 AM – 12 PM

**Doña Ana County Government Center BOCC Chambers
845 N Motel Blvd, Las Cruces, NM 88007**

Commissioners Present, In-Person:

- Shanna Sasser – Deputy Cabinet Secretary, TD
- Shannon Glendenning – Traffic Safety Division Director, DOT
- Michael Chacón – Tribal Environmental Justice Specialist, IAD
- Toby Velasquez – SPD Division Director, SPD
- Ben Bajema – Policy Director, EMNRD (Chair)
- Dan Carter – Continental Divide Trail, Trail Mgmt.
- Tucker Davidson – Audubon Society, Bird Eco
- Steve Harris – Rio Grande Restoration, River Eco
- Myron Temchin – Temchin Environmental Planning, Public 2

Commissioners Present, Online:

- Karina Armijo – Outdoor Recreation Division Director, EDD

Commissioners Absent:

- Howard Gross – HG Conservation Solutions, Public 1

1. Call to Order

Chair Bajema called the meeting to order.

2. Roll Call

All Commissioners introduced themselves.

3. Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Velasquez made a motion to approve the agenda.

Commissioner Davidson seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

4. Approval of Minutes from the 24th Rio Grande Trail Commission meeting

Commissioner Velasquez made a motion to approve the minutes from the 24th Rio Grande Trail Commission Meeting.

Commissioner Glendenning seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

6. New Business

a. Updates From the Chair (Chair Bajema)

b. Subcommittee Reports

i. Tribal Subcommittee (Commissioner Chacón)

Commissioner Chacón: The Department of Indian Affairs has filled the Tribal Consultation Act specialist position. The person filling this role has Tribal Historic Preservation and cultural resource preservation experience. He will be helpful in our efforts to locate and avoid traditional cultural properties on proposed segments of the trail. Welcome aboard Garrett Briggs.

1. Discussion: Combining Tribal and Legislative subcommittees

Summary:

- The Tribal and Legislative Subcommittees have been combined as capacity issues were bogging down the Tribal Subcommittee as a standalone entity.

- Hopefully, this combination will help improve meeting frequency, consistency, and progress on both the policy and tribal fronts.

2. Review: New language for the Río Grande Trail website

Summary:

- The Río Grande Trail website currently lacks acknowledgment of the Pueblos in the Río Grande Trail planning process.
- Adding language to the site will help with our outreach efforts as it will give Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos a sense of recognition.
- All stakeholders will benefit from language on the website about Tribal primacy along many stretches of the river.

ii. Alignment Subcommittee (Commissioner Carter)

1. New Trail Segment Considerations

- a. Santa Fe Taos Connection, Update
 - i. Survey Results & Next Steps

Summary:

- For the past few months, Pland Collaborative, the Alignment Subcommittee, and the Río Grande Trail Commission as a whole have been studying possibilities for a Río Grande Trail alignment connecting Santa Fe County to Taos County. The 2018 Río Grande Trail Master Plan did not identify an alignment connecting Santa Fe and Taos, underscoring the challenges of linking those two communities.
- Before the previous Commission meeting, Pland identified 3 possible alignment options with the help of key land managers, stakeholders, and the Alignment Subcommittee. These alignments were put out into a public survey to solicit feedback.
- The Santa Fe to Taos survey showed that most respondents were from Northern New Mexico, while the next largest group of respondents were from Central New Mexico. Respondents primarily cited Hiking, Biking, and Backpacking, with a minority saying Horseback Riding, when asked how they would use the Río Grande Trail. Most respondents preferred the Western Alignment because it is closest to the Río Grande and offers the most unique and novel experience among the three proposed options.
- In a recent stakeholder conversation, Nambé Pueblo expressed opposition to the southernmost “Wilderness Alternative” of the preferred “Western” Santa Fe to Taos alignment that traverses the low Sangre de Cristo Wilderness from Santa Fe to Rio

Chiquito. Instead, the Pueblo suggested an exciting alternative: using US-84 and the High Road to Taos to Chimayo and staying on the NMDOT right-of-way through this section. Despite the hazardous nature of this route, hundreds of people walk along this section of highway each year as they complete their pilgrimage to Chimayo on Good Friday. The benefit of pursuing this alignment of the Río Grande Trail is that all trail facilities built along this section would benefit RGT users and yearly pilgrims alike. This section is also part of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, lending further history to travel within this corridor.

- In another recent stakeholder meeting Picuris Pueblo expressed support for the northernmost “Wilderness Alternative” of the preferred Santa Fe to Taos alignment which largely utilizes BLM and USFS lands and arcs around Pilar from Dixon to the Taos Junction Bridge. One section of this alternative alignment comes extremely close to Picuris Pueblo lands. Picuris leadership conveyed interest in routing the RGT through the Pueblo to link it to existing economic development centers in the area. USFS and BLM land managers expressed some concern about this alignment, however, stating that it routes through remote and sparsely traveled areas. In response to this concern another alternative, the “Pilar Passage” was devised. This alternative follows NM-68 from Rinconada to Pilar, then NM-570 from there to the Taos Junction Bridge.
- The refined Santa Fe to Taos alignments, including the Chimayo Pilgrimage Alternative, Pilar Passage Alternative, and both Wilderness Alternatives will need additional work, truthing, and public and stakeholder engagement. These are draft alignments and are not designated as Río Grande Trail. The Commission will decide whether to adopt them as “Proposed”.

Commissioner Chacón: In our engagement efforts, have we heard back from Tesuque Pueblo regarding routing through their lands along US-84? Out of deference to that sovereign nation, it would be good to have their approval.

Dan Majewski: We have reached out but have not yet gotten any response.

Commissioner Chacón: I will see if I can find someone to talk to at the Pueblo.

Commissioner Harris: Was any consideration given to using the Chili Line Trail on the west side of the river?

Dan Majewski: Yes, there has been extensive discussion about utilizing the Chili Line, but there are several challenges with using it: The southern portion of it goes through the Tribal land of multiple Nations, and the northern parts of the alignment run into private lands as well. In the long term, as more conversations with these stakeholders take place, it could be a possibility, but we cannot pursue it currently. Our immediate focus is to identify a

viable route that could be designated in the near to medium term. Once that is established, we can pursue improvements to that route.

Commissioner Harris: Are you aware of any alienation of land from the right of way? In other words, has that been privatized, or is it a contiguous piece?

Carl Colonius: My understanding is that the [Chili Line] easement has been broken, and that it is not a contiguous historic easement at this point. That alignment has been in discussion for a long time, as it is not an easy segment to negotiate.

Commissioner Harris: Geographically, though, the Chili Line does tie into the West Rim Trail System.

Carl Colonius: Yes, it is ideal as far as user experience is concerned, but it does not check the boxes it needs to when it comes to accessibility, easement, or access.

Commissioner Harris: Are the public land-owning agencies supportive or in opposition to that alignment?

Carl Colonius: There are some user groups, primarily friends of Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument and the fishing community, that are really interested in alignment possibilities through the Racecourse section, whether it is the Chili Line, or on the east side of the river above the high-water line, but below the highway.

Commissioner Harris: I would have safety concerns about routing the trail along the road in the Racecourse area.

Carl Colonius: It could help optimize safety in that area by providing better access to the river where there is heavy user concentration with rafting and fishing. Pull-offs and the parking along the Río Grande from Velarde to Pilar are relatively constrained, so having non-motorized access could heighten extractions and safety.

Commissioner Glendenning: Walking along a state highway is not a great experience, but in the meantime, as a viable option for throughput, these alignments are fantastic.

Commissioner Carter: I would like to highlight that the Río Grande trail can serve as a foundation and springboard for many communities to develop additional trail amenities nearby. Using the RGT to improve amenities and quality of life for people participating in the pilgrimage is a prime example of how our trail efforts can provide support and resources to people beyond just the long-distance hiking community. The Río Grande Trail can be much more than just a long-distance experience; it can be an economic driver and a means of connecting communities. I also agree with Commissioner Chacón that it would be good to hear from Tesuque Pueblo before moving forward with these alignments in earnest.

Commissioner Velasquez: I think this alignment adds a lot in terms of gateway community possibilities. With this alignment, there are many opportunities for economic stimulus, as well as to include and embed historic, traditional, and cultural interests through that stimulus and through education. There are very few ways some of these small northern towns can generate income, and one of them is through outdoor recreation. I think this alignment greatly benefits the RGT as a whole and the experience it provides.

Chair Bajema: I grew up off of Highway 503 and I remember often seeing the walkers on their way to Chimayo as I drove to school in the mornings. I drove that route last Friday and was reminded of the dangerous conditions that exist along that road for people partaking in the pilgrimage. There really is very little shoulder, and these people are walking next to extremely fast traffic. If the Río Grande Trail can be a way to improve those conditions, that would be a massive benefit to the people of New Mexico. I also acknowledge the concerns of the Commission about wanting to hear from Tesuque Pueblo about this alignment. Upon reflecting on previous Tribal meetings, specifically one I had with San Felipe Pueblo that I had around this time last year, I recall that they said, “we want to see what you are proposing”: Coming to the Tribes with a thought-out proposal is the best way to engage them in a dialogue.

Commissioner Carter: Is the Commission making a formal vote on this alignment, or are we deciding to make a formal agreement to move forward with further investigation of this route?

Chair Bajema: It is a formal agreement to move forward with further investigation of the route.

Commissioner Carter made a motion to adopt all Santa Fe to Taos alignments as “Proposed”, to be refined as trail and engagement efforts progress.

Commissioner Velasquez seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

2. Trail Segment Designation

a. Sunland Park Trail

Summary:

- This segment that is being proposed for Designation exists in the City of Sunland Park and runs alongside the Río Grande for 1.33 miles from Racetrack Dr to the west.
- This Designation Application was endorsed by the mayor and all the councilors of the City of Sunland Park by means of a signed resolution. They have all expressed enthusiasm and excitement about the RGT and see it as a great economic development opportunity.
- In its current condition, with its trees, grass, picnic tables, and paved path, the site is a community amenity. The City of Sunland Park recently received a Trails+ grant to continue expanding and improving this trail.

Commissioner Chacón: The City of Sunland Park is an environmental justice community, so I appreciate all efforts to add to its recreation economy. This effort will help uplift them.

Mario Juarez-Infante (City Manager – Sunland Park): The City of Sunland Park is intentionally developing itself as a multimodal municipality. We have 10 miles of trail that we're developing on McNutt Rd that runs parallel to the RGT, with a segment already in place today, and another segment coming soon. We also have 10 miles of additional trail coming in with the border highway. All our policies for new subdivisions or “public improvement districts” are also required to develop their own internal, multi-purpose trails and connect to our primary trails.

Commissioner Velasquez made a motion to approve the Designation of the Sunland Park River Trail segment DA-18-B.

Commissioner Harris seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

b. Río Grande Riverpark Trail; El Paso, TX

Summary:

- This is the first designation application for a segment of the Río Grande Trail that is outside of New Mexico.

- This segment of trail starts at the New Mexico/Texas border at Country Club Rd, just north of Sunland Park, and follows the Río Grande north through Texas until it reaches another New Mexico/Texas border to the north, just south of Washington St. It is a paved multi-use trail and fits all the criteria of a Río Grande Trail segment.
- The City of Sunland Park is already planning to connect its river trail to this segment with a phased trail-building approach that will expand the trail northward from the Sunland Park River Trail that was just designated.
- The Rio Grande Riverpark Trail is within the city of El Paso and is managed by the City of El Paso Parks and Recreation Division, which has spoken in strong support of this designation application.

Commissioner Carter: It is worth noting that this segment is part of the greater Paso del Norte Trail, a long trail through El Paso County that would provide connectivity from the RGT to communities farther downriver in Texas. As this is the first designation application for a segment of trail outside New Mexico, there should be a discussion about how we approach this.

Commissioner Glendenning: Does the Commission Designate trail outside of New Mexico? How is trail maintenance affected?

Dan Majewski: In this case, this is an existing trail that is maintained by the City of El Paso Parks and Recreation Division, so maintenance is not a concern.

Commissioner Carter: In this area, political borders are often blurred, especially when it comes to the functionality of the area and how we operate as individuals. I'm curious if representatives from local MPOs are here and might be able to offer any insight.

Andrew Wray (Executive Director – Mesilla Valley MPO): I cannot speak to this alignment, but broadly speaking, there should be documented concurrence. In this case, the concurrence should come from Texas.

Dan Majewski: We have requested letters of support from the City of El Paso Parks and Recreation Department and the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, but have not yet received a response.

Jana Renner (Senior Program Officer – Paso del Norte Health Foundation): I have spoken with the MPO in Texas, and they are meeting next week to discuss the letter of support you've provided.

Commissioner Carter made a motion to table the discussion for Designation of the Rio Grande Riverpark Trail segment DA-17-B pending letters of support.

Commissioner Armijo seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

c. Bosque/Tijeras Canyon Connection

Summary:

- Since this alignment was last brought to the Commission, the City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Director has recommended that the portion of the alignment closest to the river (through Downtown Albuquerque) be realigned to Mountain Rd. Mountain Rd. is designated as a bike boulevard by the City of Albuquerque. With this change, the city supports this alignment.

Commissioner Carter: This segment of trail has a lot of benefit as both a short-term spur and as a long-term portion of the greater alignment, as it connects the Bosque Trail to the largest metropolitan area in New Mexico.

3. Other Trail Segment Updates, Doña Ana County

a. IBWC Levee Roads

Summary:

- The International Boundary Waters Commission is responsible for most of the levee roads throughout Doña Ana County, along which much of the Río Grande Trail is Proposed.
- These levee roads are already signed for use by hikers, bikers, and equestrians, the target user groups for the RGT. We are not proposing any different use for these levee roads or any physical infrastructure changes, only the ability to designate these alignments as the Río Grande Trail.
- There was a productive meeting with IBWC conducted last month, where they voiced their support. Pland has put together a license application, which once approved, can be amended in the future in the case that we want to add signage, infrastructure improvements, or make any other changes.
- EMNRD will be the applicant for this license. If this application is approved, we would be able to Designate the majority of all proposed Río Grande Trail in Doña Ana County.

Commissioner Carter: The IBWC told us that they do not foresee any issues with this application, and that it would be reviewed and likely approved by our September Commission meeting.

Commissioner Carter a motion to move forward with the IBWC project application.

Commissioner Chacón seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

b. Southern Gateway (Dinotracks)

Summary:

- The 2018 Río Grande Trail Masterplan identified the southern terminus of the trail as the busy intersection of Doniphan Dr. and Racetrack Dr. in Sunland Park, around which it is difficult to walk. This made for an unpleasant and underwhelming southern terminus for the trail.
- We are proposing several realignment alternatives to this, both short and long term, which connect the newly designated Sunland Park River Trail to a new terminus: The Insights El Paso Dinotracks site.
- Dinotracks has received Trails+ grant funding for infrastructure improvements and is planning to construct more amenities as well as a campground.
- The short-term proposal utilizes NM-273 (McNutt Rd) to connect to Cristo Rey Rd. to access the Dinotracks site. The long-term alignments propose trail along the south bank of the Río Grande, then connecting to McNutt Rd. at the Rio Grande bridge, or cutting through Mender Park towards Cristo Rey Rd.
- McNutt does have an existing sidewalk/multi-use trail, so it would be possible to designate it in the short term, but today we are just asking the Commission to approve this realignment.
- Realignment also better connects the RGT to the Paso del Norte Trail network

Kimberly Calkins (Insights Science Discovery): Dinotracks offers tours, a beautiful amphitheater that is under construction, and many other amenities that have been funded through Trails+ grants. We intend to continue to apply for grant money to continue to shape Dinotracks into an informational community center. Dinotracks is located on Mount Cristo

Rey, which is also a pilgrimage destination, last weekend it saw 30,000 visitors. We provide STEAM education to the entire greater El Paso area, we want to be a hub for outdoor recreation.

Commissioner Carter a motion to approve the Realignment of the Southern Gateway (Dinotracks) segment DA-18-C.

Commissioner Sasser seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote:

Commissioner Sasser – YES; Commissioner Glendenning – YES; Commissioner Chacón – YES; Commissioner Velasquez – YES; Chair Bajema – YES; Commissioner Carter – YES; Commissioner Davidson – YES; Commissioner Harris – YES; Commissioner Temchin – YES; Commissioner Armijo – YES

With unanimous consent, this motion is approved.

c. Village of Hatch Campground

Summary:

- The Village of Hatch applied for a Trails+ grant last year to construct a campground at the Hatch Valley Park. They have been awarded this grant and are in the pre-construction phase. These developments are expected to be complete by this coming Fall.
- The Village of Hatch sits alongside the Río Grande and is close to and adjacent to proposed IBWC levee road trails. Hatch will serve as a great gateway community and offer many amenities for users of the Río Grande Trail.

d. Paso del Norte Trail: Implementation Plans

Summary:

- The Paso del Norte Trail directly connects the Sunland Park River Trail to Texas on either side. Many sections of this trail system are funded or already complete, and funding is being pursued for the remaining portions.
- The Paso del Norte Health Foundation is dedicated to completing this trail and is willing to support the Río Grande Trail and sections of the trail within New Mexico.
- It is important for the Commission to continue having these kinds of conversations with partners in the pursuit of connectivity.

iii. Legislative Subcommittee (Commissioner Davidson)

1. Legislative Session Update

Summary:

- The Río Grande Trail has received a smaller budget for this upcoming year, so we are working with fewer funds.
- We were reauthorized for the budget we had left over from this past year, so we are able to continue to contract with Pland Collaborative.

Commissioner Velasquez: The Commission needs to start preparing for the upcoming interim legislative sessions ahead of the 60-day session with the new administration. Maintaining the momentum the Commission has built recently is incredibly important. While recurring funding is important, we need to focus on building relationships with the new administration and positioning the commission for continued success.

Chair Bajema: The Commission has never had recurring funding from the legislature and has always been funded by special appropriation on an annual basis. Recurring funding, and potentially an ask for dedicated staff time at EMNRD, would help the Commission immensely as it tries to maintain and build momentum on this project. A long time ago, there was a trail-related FTE at EMNRD; something like that may be worth pursuing again.

Commissioner Carter: There has been a lot of support for the RGT in the last year. We have received a lot of letters of support and gotten a lot of trail Designated. Thinking of the maintenance needs for that Designated trail is going to be really important going forward.

iv. Non-Profit Subcommittee (Chair Bajema)

1. Non-profit subcontractor progress report (Fundraising for the Future)

Summary:

- Fundraising for the Future is a consulting firm that has been working for nearly a decade with a focus on grant writing, funding strategies, and establishing nonprofits. The FFTF team is experienced in fundraising, trail development, and community engagement.
- The Río Grande Trail Association nonprofit is being created with the intention of providing long-term stability and community support for the trail beyond political cycles. The organization will help with fundraising, stakeholder coordination, and on-the-ground management, while preserving the trail's institutional knowledge over time.
- The nonprofit is currently being established, with bylaws in development, initial board members in place, and ongoing efforts to expand the board, engage the public, and plan future strategy and funding.

- An online survey has been put out to the public to begin the public engagement process, as well as aid in the initial search for board members. Open public meetings and one-on-one stakeholder meetings are being conducted as part of this outreach.
- Next steps include the filing of Articles of Incorporation and the IRS Form 1023, seating the full board of directors, amending articles and bylaws based on the board's direction, and presenting the final report to the Río Grande Trail Commission at the June 18th meeting.

Commissioner Velasquez: State parks can share this messaging and the survey with their newsletter and with their reservation system contractor.

Commissioner Temchin: It seems to me that the organization we are building to run this new nonprofit may stall without some startup funding.

Chair Bajema: The Commission has some money that we could potentially put out for an RFP; the Economic Development Department could do the same. But my understanding is that during the startup period, we will rely on volunteer work.

Commissioner Temchin: I question whether the startup board members are grant writers, project managers, educators who engage with the public, and whether they have the equipment and tools they need. With only three people on board to start, it will likely take a while for the nonprofit to see cash flow.

Carl Colonius: The Outdoor Recreation Division is hoping to provide some resources for the nonprofit, following procurement rules, of course. The board of directors should expect to provide some pro-bono services to the nonprofit.

2. Program Management Plan: Draft Review

Summary:

- The annual Program Management Plan aims to show the legislature that we are spending government funding wisely by detailing the scope, schedule, deliverables, and budget for each of the four main subcommittees.

c. Miscellaneous

Dan Majewski: The Río Grande Trail website now has a link to our signage plan, so anyone who wants more information on it can visit the site.

7. Announcement of Next Meeting

a. Fri, September 18, 2026 – Socorro

8. Public Comment

George Pearson (Chair of the Mesilla Valley NPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Advisory Committee): It would be nice if the Commission Meeting Agenda and Packet were added to the Río Grande Trail Website. I also believe there should be a no-turn-away policy for bikers and hikers in State Parks.

Jeff Steinborn (New Mexico State Senator, District 36): I think it's a very visionary thing to create that long term mechanism as other long distance trails have friends groups, and it can really be a sustainability mechanism, not as a replacement necessarily, for the commission, because I think that's kind of a backstop for New Mexicans that we have a legal mandate and law to build this trail and to oversee it. I think it would be smart to transition some of the recurring funding that we secure at the legislature to the nonprofit because they have a big mission and if we wanted to be successful they need to have the tools to hire a good staff person and to know that they're going to have longevity and then get their legs underneath them. It needs to be clear to those involved in the nonprofit that they have a front-line role in helping plan this trail, they need to take ownership over the mission of building out this trail and doing the work to figuring it out. I'm pledging to work with you on this and play a larger role, is legislation this coming session to fix the trail liability issue for the conservancy districts once and for all and look at other changes needed to the trail act including board composition etc. And then also considering the issue of moving the commission over to the Economic Development Department.

9. Adjournment

Attachment B: RGT Website Tribal Acknowledgment Language



FINAL DRAFT

Proposed Website Language: Tribal Acknowledgment, Sovereignty, and Future Commitments

Acknowledgment of Past Shortcomings

The Río Grande Trail Commission was established under the Río Grande Trail Commission Act. The Río Grande Trail Commission recognizes that the original Río Grande Trail Commission Act was passed and signed into law without sufficient engagement or participation from Pueblos, Nations, and Tribes who have called the Río Grande home since time immemorial. Early planning assumptions envisioned the trail following the Río Grande River corridor through areas that include sovereign Tribal lands. However, Pueblos along the Río Grande have primacy within their sovereign lands. These assumptions did not reflect the government-to-government relationships, cultural responsibilities, or legal protections that guide how the State of New Mexico must work, and seeks to partner, with Tribal governments.

Respect for Tribal Sovereignty

The Commission affirms that the Río Grande Trail will not cross sovereign Tribal land boundaries without full tribal approval. The Commission is committed to ensuring that Tribal governments retain full control over activities on their sovereign lands.

Commitment to Responsible Stewardship and Equitable Access to the RGT

First and foremost, the RGTC will honor and respect tradition, cultural, and historical values of all Tribal communities with ties to the Río Grande as well as all applicable Tribal laws and guiding principles. In addition to following Tribal laws and values, all new trail planning, development, and environmental review will comply fully with applicable federal and state laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and all cultural resource protection requirements. The Commission is committed to ensuring that culturally significant sites, traditional cultural properties, and sensitive environmental areas are respected, protected, and preserved, be they within, or outside of, current political boundaries.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that the Río Grande Trail benefits all communities along the Río Grande by supporting equitable access, community health, and outdoor engagement. Trails serve as connectors, linking people to landscapes, cultural heritage, one another, and provide meaningful opportunities to experience nature and wellness.

Strengthening Government-to-Government Collaboration

The Río Grande Trail Commission is committed to building a future planning process that authentically includes Tribal leadership, cultural knowledge, and priorities. This includes

early and transparent communication with Pueblos, Nations, and Tribes when planning activities may intersect with areas of cultural, historical, or environmental significance. The Commission acknowledges that respectful engagement is essential to creating a trail that honors the river's cultural importance and reflects the values of all communities along the Río Grande.

A Shared Vision Moving Forward

The Río Grande Trail is envisioned as a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional effort; this includes Tribal representation on the Commission and in the development in the Río Grande Trail. Recognizing past shortcomings is an important step toward building a more respectful, inclusive, and responsible planning process. The Commission is committed to ensuring that future work reflects the sovereignty, history, diversity, and stewardship of the Tribal Nations whose lands and cultures shape the Río Grande corridor, and to fostering a trail vision that strengthens connections and shared benefits for all communities along the river.

Attachment C: Field Verification Procurement Scope of Work



1. Scope of Work.

The Contractor shall perform the following work:

Conduct light-to-moderate field verification of the Santa Fe Ski Basin-Rinconada alignment of the Rio Grande Trail (RGT). The Contractor shall provide on-the-ground assessment, GPS-verified data, feasibility findings, and decision-ready mapping products to support Rio Grande Trail Commission ("Commission") designation decisions.

3.1 Task 1 - Project Initiation and Alignment Review

The Contractor shall:

- Review the proposed Ski Basin-Rinconada alignment, available mapping resources, land-ownership data, and existing trail/roadway information.
- Establish standardized GPS, GIS, photo documentation, and field-note protocols.
- Prepare data collection templates, GIS schema, and metadata structure compatible with EMNRD's ArcGIS environment.
- Identify land-manager sub-segments (USFS, BLM, State Trust, County, private) to be used consistently across all deliverables.
- Participate in a virtual project kickoff meeting with the Commission.

Deliverable 1:

- Data collection protocol package (GPS settings, photo naming conventions, field note template, GIS schema)
- Finalized land-manager sub-segment map for Commission approval
- Due 7 weeks after contract execution.

3.2 Task 2 - Field Verification and Data Collection

The Contractor shall conduct a single-pass, end-to-end on-foot traverse of the proposed alignment. If a section is unsafe or inaccessible, the Contractor may bypass it and document the reason.

Field verification shall document:

- GPS-verified route tracks
- Major terrain constraints

- Key access points and road interfaces
- Safety concerns (steep slopes, unstable footing, water crossings)
- Environmental constraints (riparian areas, erosion-prone soils, sensitive vegetation)
- Opportunities for reroutes where the proposed alignment is not feasible
- Recommended primary and secondary user groups for each sub-segment (hikers, bikers, equestrians)

Data collection shall include:

- GPX tracks for all traversed segments
- Geotagged photos of constraints and notable features
- Raw, chronological field notes organized by land-manager jurisdiction
- Preliminary recommendations for alignment adjustments

Deliverable 2:

- Complete raw field data package (GPX tracks, geotagged photos, raw field notes)
- Due 12 weeks after contract execution.

3.3 Task 3 - GIS Data Package

The Contractor shall deliver all spatial data in a file geodatabase containing separate feature classes for:

1. Constraints
2. Recommended reroutes
3. Access points
4. Hazards
5. GPX-derived alignment

Geotagged photos must be linked to GIS datasets via attribute table or attachment relationship. All GIS deliverables must include complete metadata describing data sources, coordinate system, and field definitions.

Deliverable 3:

- File geodatabase with all required feature classes, photo linkages, and metadata
- Due 16 weeks after contract execution

3.4 Task 4 - Feasibility Summary (10-15 pages)

The Contractor shall prepare a 10-15 page feasibility summary organized by land-manager sub-segment. For each sub-segment, the summary shall include:

- A brief narrative overview of the sub-segment, summarizing terrain character, environmental conditions, vegetation communities, landscape setting, access context, and any notable features or observations encountered during the field traverse.
- Major constraints and recommended mitigations
- Recommended alignment adjustments or reroutes (narrative; sketch-style illustrations allowed)
- Assessment of suitability for FY27 refinement
- Recommended primary and secondary user groups

- Recommendation on whether the Commission should adopt the segment into the RGT alignment, with justification

Deliverable 4:

- Feasibility Summary (10--15 pages), Word format
- Due 19 weeks after contract execution

3.5 Task 5 - Annotated Alignment Map

The Contractor shall prepare an annotated alignment map showing:

- GPX track overlaid on base map
- Key constraints and recommended adjustments
- Land-manager sub-segment boundaries

The map shall be delivered as:

- A PDF suitable for Commission review
- GIS layers compatible with EMNRD's ArcGIS datasets and aligned with the current ROT schema

Deliverable 5:

- Annotated Alignment Map (PDF and GIS layers)
- Due 23 weeks after contract execution.

4. Project Timeline

All final deliverables are due no later than February 1, 2026.

2. Compensation.

A. The Agency shall pay to the Contractor in full payment for services satisfactorily performed at the rates established in Attachment A of this Agreement, such compensation not to exceed (\$29,395.00), excluding gross receipts tax. The New Mexico gross receipts tax levied on the amounts payable under this Agreement totaling (\$2,406.72) shall be paid by the Agency to the Contractor. **The total amount payable to the Contractor under this Agreement, including gross receipts tax and expenses, shall not exceed (\$31,801.72). This amount is a maximum and not a guarantee that the work assigned to be performed by Contractor under this Agreement shall equal the amount stated herein. The parties do not intend for the Contractor to continue to provide services without compensation when the total compensation amount is reached. Contractor is responsible for notifying the Agency when the services provided under this Agreement reach the total compensation amount. In no event will the Contractor be paid for services provided in excess of the total compensation amount without this Agreement being amended in writing prior to those services in excess of the total compensation amount being provided.**

Attachment D: Pointe Strategies Introduction



**Ground Truthing the Santa Fe–Taos Alignment
Rio Grande Trail Commission
September 18, 2026**



**POINTE
STRATEGIES**

26th Rio Grande Trail Commission Meeting Packet 1-27



**POINTE
STRATEGIES**

We create sustainable trail systems that connect people to nature
and each other

As a small, highly responsive team, we are committed to being a
collaborative partner and delivering valuable, practical, and buildable
solutions.

OUR SERVICES



TRAIL PLANNING +
DESIGN



TRAIL CONSTRUCTION +
MAINTENANCE



COMMUNITY + STAKEHOLDER
ENGAGEMENT



BIKE PARKS + SKILLS TRAILS



CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT



SIGN + MAP DESIGN



CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS



POST WILDFIRE RECREATION

26th Rio Grande Trail Commission Meeting Packet 28

**Annie
McFarland**

Outdoor Recreation Planner

Specialty Areas

- Project Management & Coordination
- Human Dimensions

**Joe
Tehan**

Trail Design & Construction

Specialty Areas

- GIS & Map Development
- Trail Design
- Feasibility Recommendations
- Permitting & Regulations
- Hands on experience building trail across the Mountain West



The Three Dimensions of Trail Sustainability

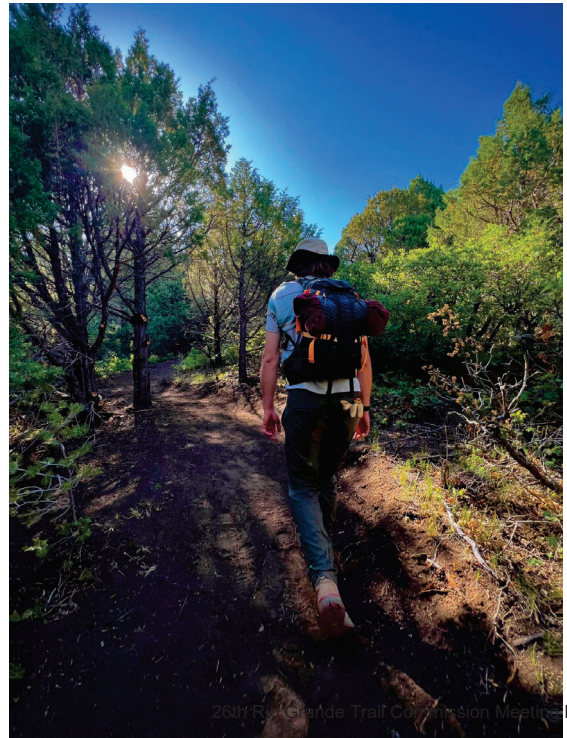


Trail Durability: Physical trail characteristics, such as grade, cross slope, and outslope, that minimize erosion and impacts to surrounding resources



Visitor Experience: Seamless integration of intangible elements (good view points, logical trail connections, safety, signs, managing conflict, etc.) that make a trail system fun and easier to manage

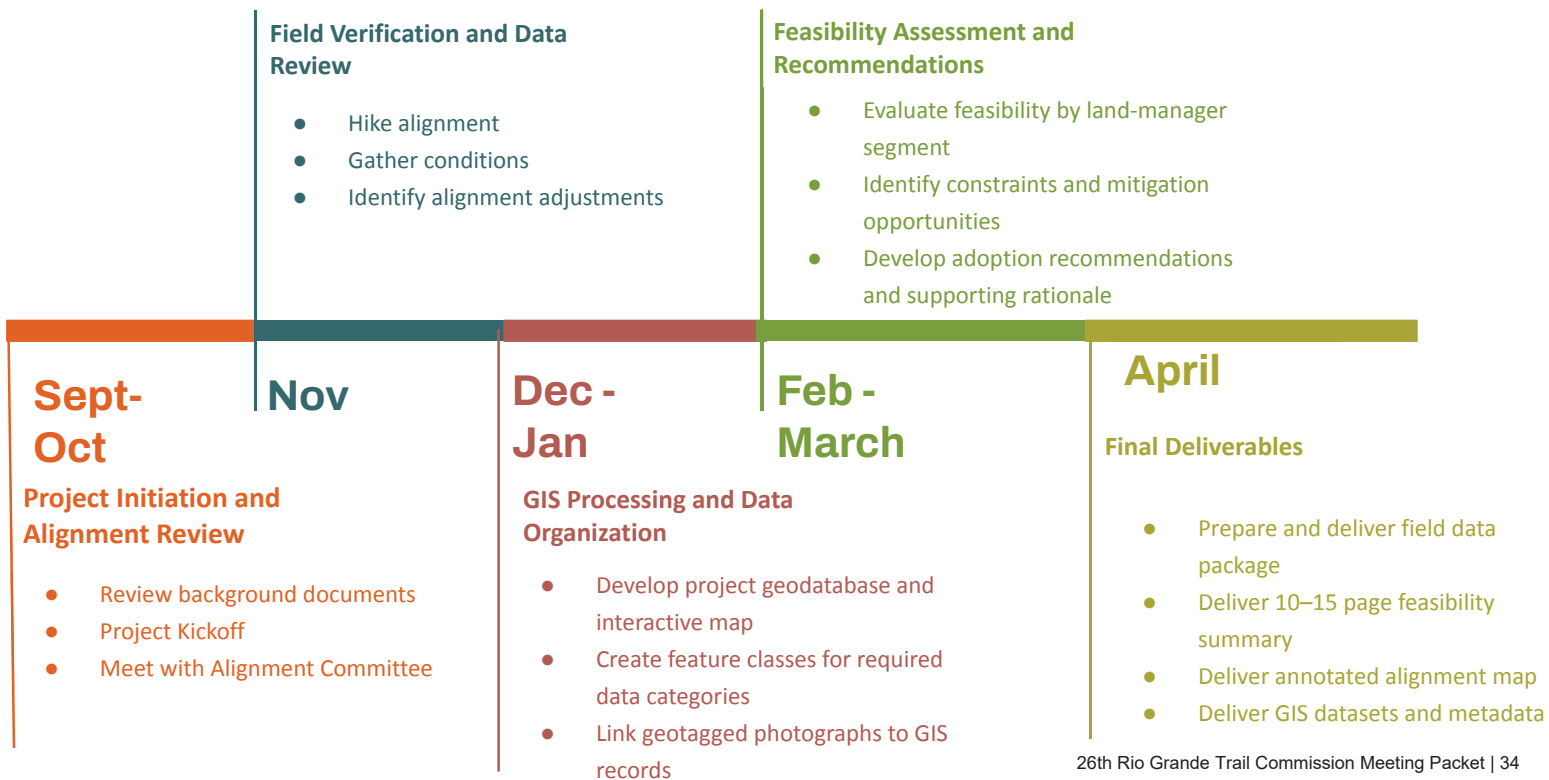
- Road crossings
- Connections to amenities
- Use of Arroyo bottoms
- Good Views
- Signage



Economic Feasibility: Balancing the upfront construction costs with future staff availability and financial resources allocated to on-going maintenance



Project Timeline



QUESTIONS



**POINTE
STRATEGIES**

26th Pointe d'Inde Trail Commission Meeting Packet 1-55

Attachment E: NM-333 Bike Route Designation Application





TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
Albuquerque to Tijeras

Date of Submittal: 08/10/2026
Submittal to: RGT Commission

Approval Date (RGT Commission):

Applicant Information

Name/Title: David D. Quintana, Acting Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT)

Email: Submit inquiries to Shannon Glendenning at Shannon.Glendenning@dot.nm.gov

☒ Land Owner / ☐ Land Manager (Check which applies) / ☐ Other

If additional applicants:

Name/Title:

Email:

☒ Land Owner / ☐ Land Manager (Check which applies) / ☐ Other

Access

Public Access:

☒ Yes / ☐ No / ☐ With permit

User Groups (if not open to all the below groups, note alternate accommodation for those groups in the "Connectivity" section of the application):

☐ Hikers / ☒ Bikers / ☐ Equestrians

Surfacing:

☒ Paved / ☐ Unpaved / ☐ Blue (water)

Universal Design/ADA Accessible:

☐ Yes / ☒ No / ☐ Partial

Difficulty:

☐ Easy (mostly flat & smooth) / ☒ Moderate (some elevation change) /

☐ Difficult (significant elevation change)

Traffic Flow: Located along a high-traffic, high-activity corridor. Bike lane located within the shoulder of the Highway.



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
Albuquerque to Tijeras

Barriers: Limited separation between vehicular traffic and cyclists on the shoulder. Additionally, the current infrastructure only supports bicycle users.

Signage: The corridor includes some wayfinding signage that provides directional guidance.

Features: The segment is a direct link between Albuquerque and Tijeras. Scenic views of the Sandia and Manzano Mountains enhance the corridor and create a visually appealing experience for users.

Designation Type

☐ Proposed/ ☒ Full Designation of through trail / ☐ Full Designation of spur trail (Check which applies)

(Note: Proposed Designation is for proposed future trail segments; Full Designation is for existing/constructed trail segments.)

RGT Segment for Designation (for future identification purposes)

County	Jurisdiction	Segments	Existing Facility	Existing Facility Name	Miles	Application Type
Bernalillo	Tijeras and unincorporated county (Carnuel)	BN-05-F	Wide shoulders	NM 333/Old Route 66	7.60	Designation
				Total	7.60	

Location/Description of Current Alignment

Please describe the boundaries, extent, and relative location of the trail segment and how it relates to the Rio Grande Trail Corridor.

This segment of the Rio Grande Trail provides direct connectivity between Albuquerque and Tijeras via an existing bike corridor along Highway 333/Old Route 66. It follows the Tijeras Creek Cultural Corridor and uses a designated shoulder for bicycle travel between the two communities. Classified as a Tier 1 corridor by the New Mexico Department of Transportation, it is considered a high-use, high-priority route for future improvements per the New Mexico Prioritized Statewide Bicycle Network Plan. While



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
Albuquerque to Tijeras

the segment does not formally accommodate hiking or equestrian use, the opposite side of the corridor is informally used for these activities.

This is categorized as a Tier 1 facility in the [NMDOT Bike Plan Priority Network](#). Tier 1 routes are high priority for bikeways that provide critical intra-community and statewide connections between New Mexico's communities and for cross-state travel. Page 49 of the [NMDOT Bike Plan](#) notes that NM 333 is one of the many state highways that overlap with the proposed alignment of the Rio Grande Trail.

The 2023 average daily traffic (ADT) count data for this road segment mostly averaged between 5,000-6,000 vehicles per day. On the western end, where this segment becomes more urban, counts were as high as 14,403, and the eastern end, in Tijeras, had counts as high as 12,379.

RGT Vision

How does this segment support the vision of the Rio Grande Trail?

Connecting communities to the Rio Grande is a core goal of the Rio Grande Trail system. Establishing a link from Tijeras to Albuquerque will connect East Mountain communities to the river and expand route options for the community. This access aligns with the trail's mission of enabling more people to reach the river by bike.

Ownership

Is the segment in public ownership, or are necessary easements or agreements in place? If not, describe the plan for obtaining and/or managing trail right-of-way.

NMDOT and the Village of Tijeras share jurisdiction over this trail segment. Coordinated efforts will be needed to formalize its designation and safeguard sensitive properties near Tijeras Creek as the segment experiences higher levels of use.

Public Support

Please indicate whether there has been any public outreach and whether there are any groups, organizations, or individuals that have demonstrated support for this trail segment.

Public support for this segment can be seen through the existing high usage of the bike shoulder for through traffic. The current corridor serves as an important connector between the two spaces for bikers and sees a steady concentration of use throughout the year. NMDOT designation of the corridor



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
Albuquerque to Tijeras

as Tier 1 reinforces the high use that this segment sees as well as its importance to the broader statewide trail network.

Connectivity

Describe how this trail segment would provide continuity and/or connectivity within the overall Rio Grande Trail system.

Designating this segment would establish a key connection between the City of Albuquerque and the Village of Tijeras, a spur community that currently lacks direct trail access to the Rio Grande. This designation would create a designated route for cyclists to reach Albuquerque's extensive trail network, providing direct access to the Rio Grande and the broader RGT system.

Accessibility

What level of access/accessibility is anticipated for the general public and different user groups?

Public accessibility is limited because the segment runs along a highway shoulder and is designated only for bicycle use. Restricted user groups and the absence of a separated bike lane or separated path also limits the types of bicyclists that will feel comfortable riding the segment. Some signage is present, offering adequate wayfinding for travelers.

Impact Studies

Have environmental impact studies and/or cultural surveys been conducted to understand the potential impacts of trail designation? How may the impacts support existing efforts, community visions, or regional planning? (Required for full designation, optional for proposed designation)

The site runs through the Tijeras Cultural Corridor, a protected area along the Tijeras Watershed notable for its local history and diverse landscapes. Preserving this space is a priority for both the City of Albuquerque Open Space, which manages the corridor, and the community, which values its cultural significance. Bernalillo County and the Village of Tijeras are also involved in this initiative to protect and highlight the ecological and cultural value of this historic waterway. The Tijeras Creek Cultural Corridor Plan provides safeguards for the area as development continues, facilitating projects such as the Tijeras Bio-Zone Education Center while protecting the corridor. Designation of this route as RGT will support the existing efforts to protect and increase recreational access to this corridor.



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
Albuquerque to Tijeras

Capacity to Maintain

How will the trail segment be maintained, and by whom?

NMDOT will continue to maintain this segment.

Public Safety

Indicate how public safety will be addressed.

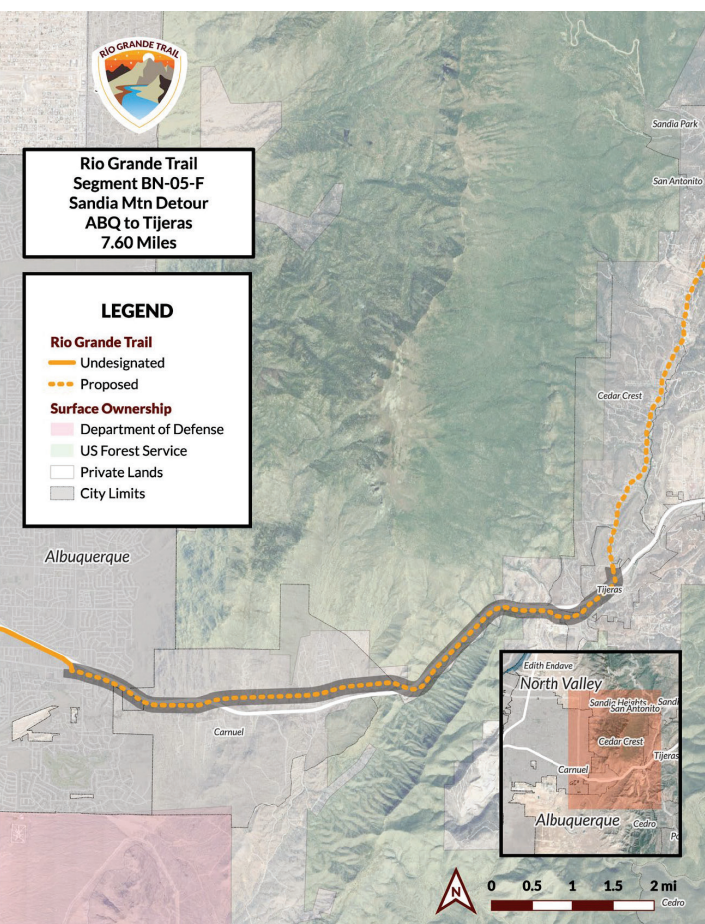
The Bernalillo County Sheriff is responsible for this jurisdiction. Designation of this corridor can support efforts to prioritize this area for future NMDOT upgrades during reconstruction or major rehabilitation projects in alignment with their 2018 Bike Plan.

1. Additional Documentation

Please provide any supporting documentation that would help the Commission evaluate your request as a separate attachment. This could include maps of the proposed route for designation, letters of support, resolutions from the respective municipality or county, existing planning studies, easement documentation, pictures of the trail, etc.

Attachment F: NM-333 Bike Route Map





TRAIL DESIGNATION



NM-333 Bike Route: Albuquerque to Tijeras



- Total Mileage: 7.60 miles.
- Ownership: New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT).
- Jurisdiction: Tijeras & unincorporated Bernalillo County.
- User Groups: Bicycle riders (cyclists).
- Utilizes the wide shoulders of Old Route 66 (NM-333), a popular cycling route.
- **Alignment is categorized as a Tier 1 facility on the NMDOT Bike Plan Priority Network.**
- The NMDOT Bike Plan notes that NM-333 is one of the many State highways that overlap the proposed Río Grande Trail alignment.
- Trail-based stakeholders in the East Mountains have voiced support for designation.
- **Opportunity: Leverage the Route 66 Centennial.**

Attachment G: NM-14 Multi-Use Trail Designation Application





TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION PROCESS & APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonito

Date of Submittal: 01/16/2026
Submittal to: RGT Commission

Approval Date (RGT Commission):

Applicant Information

Name/Title: David D. Quintana, Acting Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT)

Email: Submit inquiries to Shannon Glendenning at Shannon.Glendenning@dot.nm.gov

☒ Land Owner / ☐ Land Manager (Check which applies) / ☐ Other

If additional applicants:

Name/Title:

Email:

☐ Land Owner / ☐ Land Manager (Check which applies) / ☐ Other

Access

Public Access:

☒ Yes / ☐ No / ☐ With permit

User Groups (if not open to all the below groups, note alternate accommodation for those groups in the "Connectivity" section of the application):

☒ Hikers / ☒ Bikers / ☒ Equestrians

Surfacing:

☒ Paved / ☐ Unpaved / ☐ Blue (water)

Universal Design/ADA Accessible:

☐ Yes / ☐ No / ☒ Partial

Difficulty:

☐ Easy (mostly flat & smooth) / ☒ Moderate (some elevation change) /

☐ Difficult (significant elevation change)

Traffic Flow: Light traffic on Shared Use Path, Moderate to Heavy traffic on NM-14



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION PROCESS & APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonito

Barriers: This section is currently isolated and not connected to other trails on either end. The southern start of the trail is challenging to access due to its proximity to Interstate 40.

Signage: There is some existing signage to indicate bicycle and pedestrian activity on the path.

Features: Paved Shared Use Pathway through scenic terrain on the east side of the Sandia Mountains

Designation Type

☐ Proposed/ ☒ Full Designation of through trail / ☐ Full Designation of spur trail (Check which applies)

(Note: Proposed Designation is for proposed future trail segments; Full Designation is for existing/constructed trail segments.)

RGT Segment for Designation (for future identification purposes)

County	Jurisdiction	Segments	Existing Facility	Existing Facility Name	Miles	Application Type
Bernalillo	Tijeras & unincorporated county (Cedar Crest, San Antonio)	SF-03-G	Shared Use Path	NM-14 Multiuse Trail	5.74	Full Designation
				Total	5.74	

Location/Description

Please describe the boundaries, extent, and relative location of the trail segment and how it relates to the Rio Grande Trail Corridor.

The NM-14 Shared Use Path, part of the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway, runs along the East side of NM-14 from a few yards north of its intersection with I-40 in Tijeras to its intersection with the Sandia Crest Road/536 and Frost Road/306 in San Antonio.

This segment of the Rio Grande Trail Alignment is part of the larger through-route connection between



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION PROCESS & APPLICATION

RGT Segments: NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonito

Central and Northern New Mexico. Due to opposition to the trail running along the river through tribal jurisdictions, the greater NM-14 corridor has been identified as an important link from the Rio Grande in Albuquerque to trail systems heading North to Santa Fe and south to Valencia County.

This is categorized as a Tier 1 facility on the [NMDOT Bike Plan Priority Network](#). Tier 1 routes are high priority for bikeways that provide critical intra-community and statewide connections between New Mexico's communities and for cross-state travel. Page 49 of the [NMDOT Bike Plan](#) notes that NM 14 is one of the many state highways that overlap with the proposed alignment of the Rio Grande Trail.

The 2023 average daily traffic (ADT) count data for this road segment mostly averaged between 8,000-14,000 vehicles per day. Traffic volumes are generally higher on the southern end, closer to Interstate 40, and generally decline as one goes further north towards San Antonito.

RGT Vision

How does this segment support the vision of the Rio Grande Trail?

Designating this segment will establish a key link between Tijeras and San Antonito, potential gateway communities that offer an important route around the Sandias to reconnect with the Rio Grande. This alignment continues a vital pathway that will ultimately enhance connectivity to the bosque, supporting the trail's mission to remain aligned with the river.

Ownership

Is the segment in public ownership, or are necessary easements or agreements in place? If not, describe the plan for obtaining and/or managing the trail right-of-way.

This segment of the trail is owned by the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT).

Public Support

Please indicate whether there has been any public outreach and whether there are any groups, organizations, or individuals that have demonstrated support for this trail segment.

There have been numerous conversations with trail-based stakeholders in the East Mountains, including Friends of the Sandia Mountains, the East Mountain Regional Trails Council, and the Turquoise Trail Regional Alliance. All have shared unanimous support for the designation of this trail.



TRAIL SEGMENT DESIGNATION PROCESS & APPLICATION

RGT Segments:
NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonito

Connectivity

Describe how this trail segment would provide continuity and/or connectivity within the overall Rio Grande Trail system.

This trail segment is part of an effort to route the Rio Grande Trail further from Sandia Pueblo and areas of cultural sensitivity nearby. As a longer segment of trail (5.74 mi), it also plays a crucial role in providing connectivity between Albuquerque to the West, Santa Fe to the North, and Valencia County to the South.

Impact Studies

Have environmental impact studies and/or cultural surveys been conducted to understand the potential impacts of trail designation? How may the impacts support existing efforts, community visions, or regional planning? (Required for full designation, optional for proposed designation)

This is an existing trail along an existing highway. Therefore, this facility has already received numerous studies and environmental reviews.

Capacity to Maintain

How will the trail segment be maintained, and by whom?

NMDOT will continue to maintain this segment.

Public Safety

Indicate how public safety will be addressed.

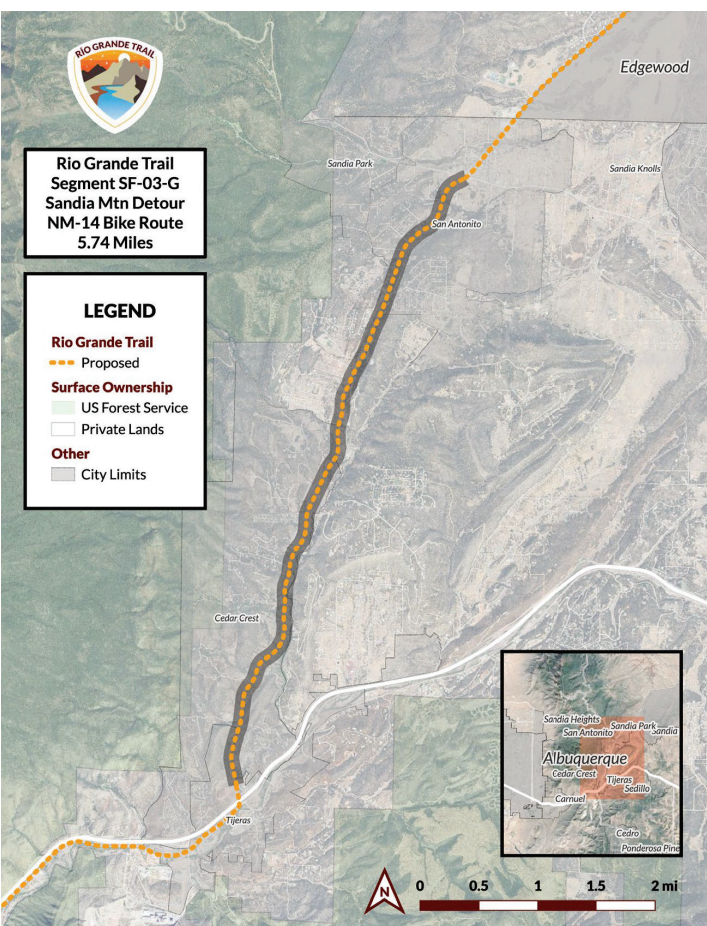
The Shared Use Path will rely on local law enforcement from the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Department.

Additional Documentation

Please provide any supporting documentation that would help the Commission evaluate your request as a separate attachment. This could include maps of the proposed route for designation, letters of support, resolutions from the respective municipality or county, existing planning studies, easement documentation, pictures of the trail, etc.

Attachment H: NM-14 Multi-Use Trail Map





TRAIL DESIGNATION



NM-14 Multi-Use Trail: Tijeras to San Antonito

- Total Mileage: 5.74 miles.
- Ownership: New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT).
- Jurisdiction: Tijeras & unincorporated Bernalillo County (Cedar Crest, San Antonito).
- User Groups: Hikers, Bikers, and Equestrians.
- Utilizes existing Shared Use Pathway along NM-14.
- **Alignment is categorized as a Tier 1 facility on the NMDOT Bike Plan Priority Network.**
- The NMDOT Bike Plan notes that NM-14 is one of the many State highways that overlap the proposed Río Grande Trail alignment.
- Trail-based stakeholders in the East Mountains have voiced support for Designation.

Attachment I: NMDOT Letter of Support





August 27, 2026

Dear Rio Grande Trail Commission,

On behalf of the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), I am pleased to submit this letter of support for two Rio Grande Trail (RGT) designation applications: the Albuquerque to Tijeras segment along NM 333/Old Route 66, and the NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonio segment. Both segments are existing, publicly accessible facilities that NMDOT owns, manages, and maintains in partnership with local jurisdictions.

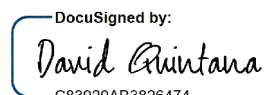
The development and maintenance of these facilities are consistent with the New Mexico Prioritized Bicycle Network Plan classification and would formalize a route already carrying significant bicycle traffic while extending connections to the Rio Grande from the East Mountain communities.

During Rio Grande Trail Commission meetings and related planning meetings, support for this alignment of the Rio Grande Trail came from trail users and advocates including the East Mountain Regional Trails Council, Friends of the Sandia Mountains, and the Turquoise Trail Regional Alliance.

Designation of both segments advance NMDOT's core mission. They expand safe, multimodal travel options along two of our high-priority bicycle corridors; they strengthen the economic vitality of East Mountain gateway communities; and they support environmental stewardship by providing active transportation options and connecting people to natural and cultural resources.

NMDOT is committed to continuing to maintain both segments and to working with the Commission, Bernalillo County, the Village of Tijeras, and our regional trail partners as these connections mature. NMDOT remains fully supportive of designating both segments as part of the Rio Grande Trail and looks forward to advancing this work together.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

 C83920AB3826474...
 David D. Quintana, P.E.
 Acting Cabinet Secretary

Michelle Lujan Grisham
 Governor

David D. Quintana, P.E.
 Acting Cabinet Secretary

Commissioners

John McElroy
 Commissioner
 District 1

Debra P. Hicks
 Commissioner
 District 2

Hilma E. Chynoweth
 Commissioner, Vice Chairman
 District 3

Walter G. Adams
 Commissioner, Chairman
 District 4

Thomas C. Taylor
 Commissioner
 District 5

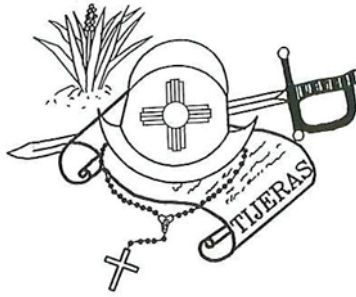
Anthony K. Tanner
 Commissioner
 District 6

Attachment J: Village of Tijeras Letter of Support



VILLAGE OF TIJERAS, NEW MEXICO

Post Office Box 9
12 Camino Municipal
Tijeras, NM 87059
Phone: (505) 281-1220
Fax: (505) 281-0948
Email: clerk@tijerasnm.gov



Jake Bruton, Mayor

Council:
Matt Armenta
Ernest Barnes
Yvette Garcia
Jonathan Ortiz

September 16, 2026

Rio Grande Trail Commission
New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
Santa Fe, New Mexico

RE: Support for Dedication of the Tijeras Segment of the Rio Grande Trail

Dear Members of the Rio Grande Trail Commission:

On behalf of the Village of Tijeras, I am pleased to support the proposed dedication of the trail segment along NM 14 from Tijeras to San Antonito as part of the Rio Grande Trail. As Village Clerk/Manager, I recognize the value this connection would bring to our residents, local businesses, and the greater East Mountain community.

Tijeras serves as a gateway to the East Mountains, and this designation would strengthen our community's connection to New Mexico's broader trail network. The proposed segment offers an opportunity to expand outdoor recreation, improve regional trail connectivity, and encourage residents and visitors to experience the natural beauty of our area.

The Village also recognizes the importance of thoughtful trail planning that respects neighboring communities and culturally sensitive lands. Collaboration among local communities, agencies, and trail organizations is essential to establishing a route that serves the public while respecting the places that make New Mexico unique.

For Tijeras, the benefits extend beyond recreation. Bringing trail users into our community creates opportunities for local businesses and encourages visitors. This connection would complement our ongoing efforts to improve pedestrian access and make the Village a welcoming destination for residents and visitors alike.

The Village of Tijeras supports inclusion of this segment in the Rio Grande Trail and respectfully encourages the Commission to approve its dedication. Thank you for your continued work to expand trail access and connect communities throughout New Mexico.

Sincerely,

Audrey Caufield
Village Clerk/Manager
Village of Tijeras

“WITH PRIDE IN OUR PAST, AND FAITH IN OUR FUTURE”

Attachment K: RGTA Public Engagement Report





Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) Nonprofit Formation

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Land Acknowledgment

Public lands in the United States hold the creation stories, burial grounds, and ceremonial sites of Indigenous peoples who were killed or forcibly removed during territorial expansion. The original peoples of New Mexico – Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache – since time immemorial, have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to the broader community statewide. We honor the land itself and those who remain stewards of this land throughout the generations and also acknowledge our committed relationship to Indigenous peoples. We gratefully recognize our history.



Introduction

Executive Summary

This report details the findings and strategic recommendations resulting from a two-week, nine-county stakeholder engagement tour conducted across the Río Grande river corridor, New Mexico. The primary objective was to facilitate the transition of the Río Grande Trail from a state-managed concept to a community-led nonprofit organization, the Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA). This process aligns with the operational standards of premier long-distance trail organizations, such as the Colorado Trail Foundation, Continental Divide Trail Coalition, and the Arizona Trail Association, which rely on localized stewardship, public-private partnerships, and clear regional identities tied to history, genealogy, and culture (EG food, agriculture, heritage) to ensure long-term sustainability.

The engagement successfully identified localized mandates that will define the association's management of the 500-mile corridor. These findings establish a three-tiered regional strategy: Alignment and Sovereignty, Riparian Conservation, and Heritage Narrative and Equity. This document serves as the technical basis for the RGTA's governance structure and its initial multi-year strategic roadmap.

x'

Background

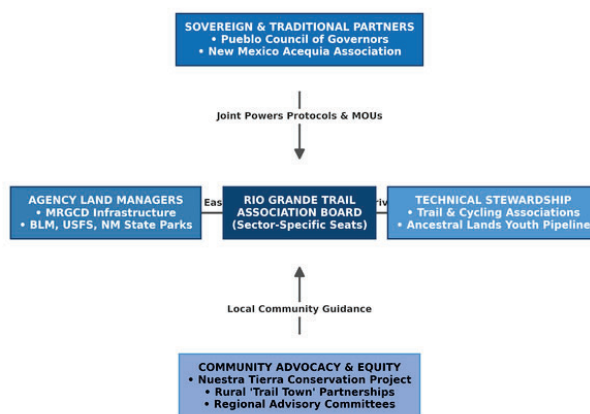
The Río Grande Trail is envisioned as New Mexico's cross-state recreational trail for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Grounded in the 2018 Rio Grande Trail Master Plan, the initiative aims to create a 500+ mile, non-motorized, multi-use corridor connecting diverse landscapes, communities, and cultural resources across the state. The trail's alignment is being planned and refined by Pland Collaborative, a consultant working under the direction of the Outdoor Recreation Division of the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD). Currently, 90 miles of trail have been developed.

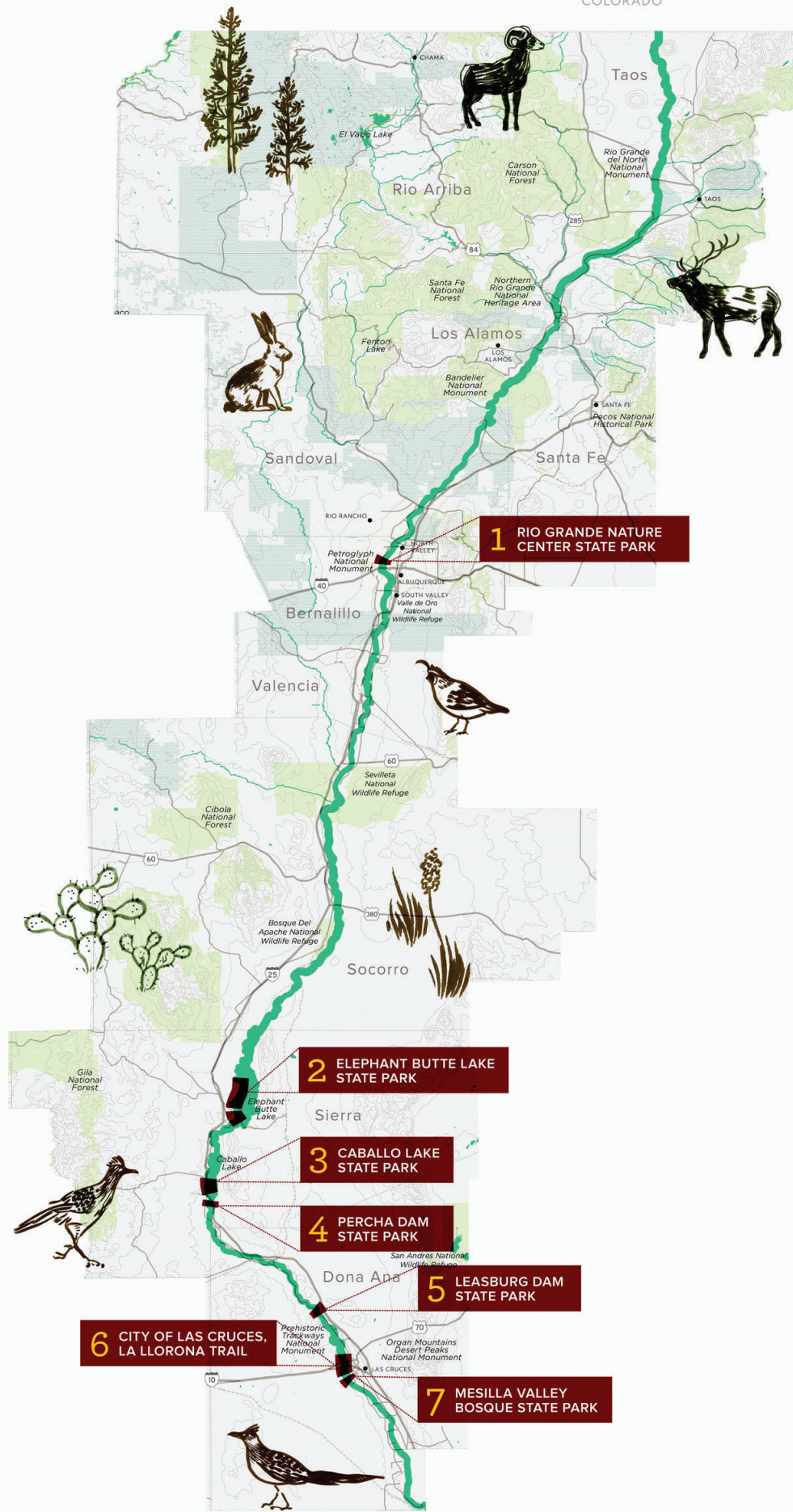
The State of New Mexico, under the direction of the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), is facilitating the formation of the Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA), a community-led nonprofit organization (NPO) that will serve as a long-term partner for the Río Grande Trail. A nonprofit partner can provide focused leadership, fundraising capacity, community engagement, advocacy, and long-term stewardship to help advance the Rio Grande Trail across jurisdictions and through changing political and funding cycles.

During the first half of 2026, EMNRD hired a consultant to facilitate the establishment of the RGTA including engaging stakeholders, facilitating the formation of the NPO, seating a full board of directors, and conducting a strategic planning process. The consultant worked under the guidance of the Rio Grande Trail Commission's (RGTC) NPO Subcommittee. The RGTA board of directors helped complete the strategic planning process and refine the Association's mission, governance structure, and priorities with input from communities and stakeholders along the Río Grande Trail corridor.

The public engagement process was designed to recruit board members and gather stakeholder input to help guide the RGTA's early direction, focus, programs, and leadership structure.

RIO GRANDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION (RGTA) ORGANIZATIONAL STAKEHOLDER MATRIX





Route and Usage



Single Track Trail



Soft Surface Road



Paved Road

1. Public Engagement Plan

The engagement process was designed to provide multiple avenues for participation, including in-person and virtual meetings, tribal engagement, and an online survey.

Fundraising for the Future and Dillon Osleger (Consultants) prepared for and conducted stakeholder engagement for the Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) from March - April 2026. Overall, the engagement process included interactive public group workshops, individual stakeholder meetings, and a survey to inform the organization's mission, bylaws, and strategic direction.

1. Communications Plan

Under the direction of the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) NPO Subcommittee, the Consultants conducted outreach to interested and relevant parties. The NPO Subcommittee provided contact information for relevant stakeholders. That information was assembled under a parallel and ongoing process to determine the alignment of the Rio Grande Trail (<https://riograndetrailnm.org/>).

The Consultant developed a schedule and held in-person public meetings in each county that the Rio Grande River passes through including Dona Ana, Sierra, Socorro, Valencia, Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos. The meetings were announced through public notices in newspapers and the Rio Grande Trail newsletter distributed by Pland Collaborative. In addition to public meetings, individual meetings were conducted with targeted stakeholders such as agencies, bike shop owners, outfitters, and community leaders to obtain technical expertise, local knowledge, and perspectives from groups directly connected to trail use, recreation, tourism, and corridor development. Additionally, the Consultant created a flyer (Appendix A) with the meeting schedule and project survey link and distributed the flyer to targeted populations (bicycle shops, sporting goods stores, etc.) and community locations.



III. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Under the direction of the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) NPO Subcommittee, the Consultants reached out to interested communities and partners. The NPO Subcommittee provided the contact information for these stakeholders, which was gathered during the ongoing process to map out the final route of the Río Grande Trail.

The Consultant set up a schedule and held in-person public meetings in every single county that the Río Grande flows through: Doña Ana, Sierra, Socorro, Valencia, Bernalillo, Sandoval, Santa Fe, Rio Arriba, and Taos. These meetings were announced through public notices in local newspapers and in the Río Grande Trail newsletter sent out by Pland Collaborative.

Along with the public forums, individual meetings were held with specific groups—including public land agencies, bike shop owners, outdoor outfitters, and community leaders—to get their technical advice, local knowledge, and perspectives. These are the groups directly tied to trail use, outdoor recreation, tourism, and local development. To help spread the word, the Consultant created an informational flyer with the meeting schedule and a link to the project survey, distributing it to busy community spots and local shops.

While this approach succeeded in getting the word out and bringing diverse groups to the table, a look back at the process shows clear successes as well as a few blind spots. These lessons will help the Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) build a better communication strategy for the future.

1. WHAT WORKED WELL

- **Going Directly to Communities:** Holding in-person meetings in all nine counties, rather than just sticking to big cities, was crucial. Showing up face-to-face proved to residents that the project valued their input and wasn't just being pushed down from a distant state office.
- **Talking Directly to Local Experts:** Interviewing outdoor business owners, bike shops, and local land managers one-on-one brought in excellent, practical details. These groups knew exactly which trail connections were ready, how people currently use the river corridor, and what local towns need to welcome visitors.
- **Using Existing Networks:** Tapping into Pland Collaborative's email list and state agency contacts gave the team an immediate way to reach thousands of people who already care about outdoor recreation and conservation in New Mexico.

2. WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE DIFFERENTLY

- **Reliance on Internet and Newspapers:** Depending mostly on digital newsletters and standard newspaper notices left out some rural communities, older residents, and traditional land-grant families who either have unreliable internet or do not read mainstream print notices. In the future, outreach needs to include older, simpler methods: direct mailers, local radio announcements, and physical flyers hung up at local businesses, community acequia offices or water association buildings.
- **Being Reactive on Farming Concerns:** Sending out a general flyer left a lot of unanswered questions about land use. This allowed worries about private property rights, trespassing, and farm liability to pop up unexpectedly during public meetings. It would have been much more effective to share a clear "Good Neighbor" policy at the very start of the project, openly reassuring farmers and ranchers that their traditional land and water rights would be fully protected.

3. HOW FUTURE COMMUNICATION WILL WORK

To move from a temporary, consultant-led tour into a permanent conversation run by the community, the RGTA will use a step-by-step communication pipeline. This ensures that local feedback actually shapes the board's decisions moving forward.

1. Public Meeting Presentation

For the public meetings, the Consultants developed a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix B) to soliciting input as to how to best form and operate a RGT NPO:

- **Part I: Context & Vision (30 mins)** – Understanding the Master Plan and why we need an Association.
- **Part II: Interactive Workshop (40 mins)** – Collaborative discussion of the Mission and Values.
- **Part III: Governance Design (20 mins)** – Discussing the Board structure and Regional Representation.
- **Part IV: Community Dialogue & Q&A (30 mins)** – Open floor for local concerns and specific county feedback.

Overall, the presentation frames the Río Grande Trail Association as a collaborative, community-driven effort to create a lasting recreational, environmental, and economic asset for New Mexico. It introduces the vision, purpose, and formation process of the RGTA; cues discussion about the organization's mission, leadership, and long-term stewardship role; and emphasizes that the Association will serve as a stable, community-centered partner to coordinate trail planning, stewardship, fundraising, and stakeholder engagement across jurisdictions. By acting as a central hub, the organization is envisioned to help ensure continuity beyond political cycles, support local economies, maintain long-term relationships with communities, landowners, and agencies, and provide opportunities for public questions and discussion regarding the future development of the Río Grande Trail in New Mexico.

Key principles guiding the effort include ecological stewardship, cultural and historic integrity, voluntary participation, and respect for agricultural and tribal interests. The presentation also emphasizes the importance of public and stakeholder input in shaping the RGTA's mission, governance structure, and regional representation, with proposed governance models designed to encourage inclusive corridor-wide participation and expertise across sectors such as conservation, agriculture, tribal affairs, recreation, and local business.

1. Public Meeting Schedule & Attendance

Rio Arriba - March 23 - Española Public Library

Taos - March 24 - Taos Public Library

Santa Fe - March 25 - Santa Fe Public Library

Sandoval - March 27 - Martha Liebert Public Library (Bernalillo)

Bernalillo - March 27 - Albuquerque Special Collections Library

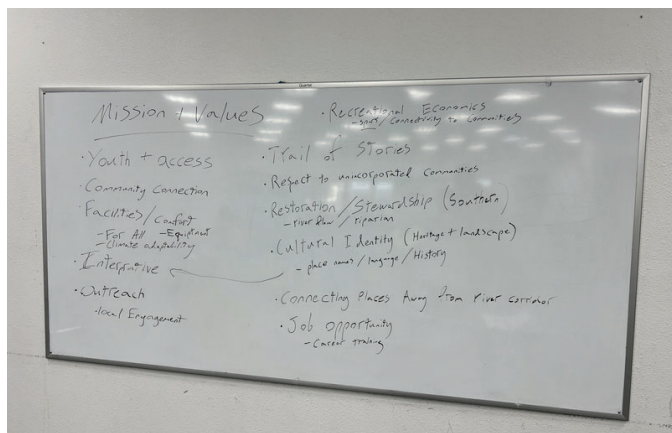
Valencia - March 30 - Los Lunas Public Library

Socorro - March 30 - Socorro Public Library

Sierra - March 31 - Truth or Consequences Public Library

Doña Ana - April 1 - Thomas Branigan Memorial Library (Las Cruces)

Virtual - April 30 - Via Zoom Online



IV. Public Meeting Results

1. Regional Strategic Mandates

1. Northern Segment: Protocols for trail alignment and technical coordination & sovereign and acequia association engagement

The northern section, spanning Taos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe Counties, is characterized by complex land-ownership patterns, including traditional land grants and sovereign tribal territories as well as federally managed lands such as the Bureau of Land Management. The mandate for this region is the securement of a corridor that honors these boundaries while closing critical gaps in the existing trail network.

- **Tribal Nations Consultation and Alignment:** Initial contact was established via formal correspondence with the Council of Governors (Pueblo). Following successful models like the Arizona Trail Association's work with tribal nations, the RGTA's immediate priority is to transition these introductions into funded, face-to-face consultations. The core focus is to ensure the trail is co-created with sovereign partners from the very beginning, deeply respecting tribal sovereignty, boundary integrity, and traditional lands.
- **Acequia Association Integration and Protections:** Separate formal outreach was initiated with the New Mexico Acequia Association to address the specific intersection of the trail corridor with historic, community-managed irrigation systems. The priority for this track is to secure explicit protections for traditional agricultural practices and the historical water rights of acequia communities, ensuring trail management never interferes with vital local water delivery or ditch maintenance.
- **Technical Coordination:** Engagements with the Enchanted Circle Trails Association and Santa Fe Bike highlighted the need for data-driven alignment (specifically leveraging user data or data sources that would help create a supported alignment that is less impactful to resources / raises opposition). The RGTA should act as a technical hub, utilizing GIS mapping to ensure that proposed routes do not impede agricultural infrastructure or violate the integrity of private land grants.

2. Middle Segment: Conservation and Ecological Integrity

The central corridor spanning Sandoval, Bernalillo, and Valencia Counties represents the most populated segment of the trail and the most ecologically sensitive, as it traverses the vital riparian Bosque of the Rio Grande. An additional mandate for this region is the securement of a corridor that honors these boundaries while closing critical gaps in the existing trail network.

- **Riparian Stewardship:** Engagement with the Middle Río Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) emphasized the trail's role in managed access. By providing designated paths, the RGTA can prevent the unmanaged degradation of riverbanks and sensitive habitats.
- **Resource Protection and Monitoring:** Following the stewardship models of the Colorado Trail, the RGTA should develop citizen science programs. These initiatives could empower local volunteers to monitor ecological health and climate impacts along the river, ensuring that recreation remains secondary to the long-term health of the watershed.

3. Southern Segment: The Trail of Stories and Equity

The southern reach, spanning Socorro, Sierra, and Doña Ana Counties, is the narrative heart of the trail. The focus here is on leveraging the landscape's deep history to drive economic vitality and social equity.

- **The Narrative Framework:** This segment (and both northern segments) should center on the Trail of Stories concept, utilizing historical maps from 1600 through the present to highlight ancient routes of travel. This includes the Indigenous paths connecting Casas Grandes in the South to Chaco Canyon in the northwest part of New Mexico, providing a deep historical context that connects modern travelers to the heritage of the region.
- **Conservation Equity:** Partnerships with Nuestra Tierra will ensure the trail serves as a tool for equity. In this context, "equity" means actively fixing the historical gap in outdoor recreation infrastructure for underserved populations. In practice, the RGTA will focus its planning on creating physical ease of access points—such as dirt-path trailheads, neighborhood connectors, and clear signage—specifically positioned within rural, unincorporated towns and traditional land-grant communities. Rather than designing the trail solely as a destination for traveling tourists, this strategy guarantees that the families living immediately alongside the corridor have safe, free, and direct recreational access to the river right from their doorsteps.
- **Economic Vitality:** In collaboration with Bikepacking Roots (Monumental Loop) and local business owners, the RGTA will promote trail town programs. These programs are designed to leverage regional heritage to support local hospitality and service economies in unincorporated areas, ensuring that the trail provides a tangible return to the communities that host it.

B. Governance and Institutional Architecture

To ensure technical mapping, legal, and cultural competency, the RGTA Board of Directors should be seated based on specific sectoral expertise. This structure is essential for an organization tasked with managing a cross-state corridor and navigating complex multi-agency agreements as mistakes in the planning phase can lead to delays, partner impasse, and lowered public trust.

Potential Designated or Desired Board Seats:

- **Indigenous Representation:** A permanent, designated seat for a representative approved by the Council of Governors to ensure continuous alignment with tribal visions and respect for sovereign lands.
- **Education (Dual Focus):** One seat dedicated to K-12 youth inclusion and one for collegiate-level environmental, ensuring the trail serves as a permanent outdoor classroom with curricula that could be taken state wide.
- **Economics/ business:** A seat for an individual with destination stewardship (Destination marketing) or economic development experience to ensure the trail is developed in a way that supports local gateway economy needs.
- **Wildlife & Conservation:** A technical expert focused on riparian habitat protection, migratory corridors, and climate resilience (ensuring the trail delineation is sustainably located with regards to erosion).
- **Water Infrastructure:** A seat for individuals with expertise in water rights/management, critical for the Rio Grande's complex hydrology.
- **State-level legislative expertise:** A seat for an individual with expertise in state-level legislative policy
- **Public Health & Accessibility:** A practitioner focused on ADA compliance and ensuring the trail serves as a resource for community wellness and the disabled community.

C. Interactive Themes and Public Priorities

The following themes emerged from the nine-county public meetings and the preliminary synthesis of public survey responses as primary pillars informing the RGTA mission and organizational development:

- **Youth Inclusion:** Creating vocational pipelines through partnerships such as the Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps to involve youth in paid stewardship and restoration projects.
- **Cultural Identity:** Celebrating heritage and landscapes through a “singular flowing narrative” that connects the history of New Mexico's people to its unique geography.
- **Access Equity:** Ensuring the trail is both physically and culturally accessible to local residents, particularly in underserved rural areas.
- **Landscape Literacy:** Developing interpretive messaging that helps users understand the life stages of the river and the historical transit routes that have shaped the state.



V. Tribal Engagement

This section will summarize outcomes of ongoing tribal engagement processes currently underway.

VI. On-line Survey

To document and supplement input provided during public meetings and stakeholder discussions, the Consultant created a Google Form survey with web and QR links (see Appendix C). The survey was reviewed by the NPO Subcommittee before finalizing. The link to the survey was distributed through the NPO Subcommittee via emails and websites and through the Consultant via the flyer created for the public meetings, during the public and stakeholder meetings, and after the public and stakeholder meetings. Most of the questions offered respondents multiple choice answers to allow for higher completion rates due to less effort, easier quantitative analysis, and standardized, comparable data.

Key Takeaways

A. Synthesis of Stakeholder Survey Responses

To ensure that the development of the Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) directly addresses the values, priorities, and needs of New Mexican communities, an extensive virtual public and stakeholder questionnaire was distributed throughout the spring of 2026. This section provides a comprehensive strategic analysis of the feedback received, capturing a unified public desire for low-impact recreation, deep historical awareness, and structural frameworks that explicitly safeguard traditional land and water uses.

1. PARTICIPANT METRICS AND REGIONAL DIVERSITY

The digital questionnaire captured a dataset from 120 total public participants across New Mexico and adjacent border communities, providing a broad geographic cross-section of input. By tracking targeted trail sectors of interest, distinct regional diversity and stakeholder clusters were identified:

- Southern Corridor (Socorro – Elephant Butte – Las Cruces – Texas Border): Composing a substantial 36.7% of total feedback (44 responses), stakeholders in this section expressed high interest in early trail connectivity, multi-use guidelines, and rural economic vitality near communities like Las Cruces, Lordsburg, MainStreet Truth or Consequences, and Sunland Park.
- Albuquerque / Middle Rio Grande Corridor: Representing 21.7% of participants (26 responses), this urban-riparian demographic focused heavily on managed public access, volunteer trail stewardship, and minimizing user conflicts within the highly active Bosque trail system.
- Northern Corridor & Santa Fe Region: Combining for 24.2% of responses (13 responses for the Far North from the Colorado border to Española; 16 responses for the Santa Fe region), northern participants heavily emphasized cultural landscape protections, Tribal consultation protocols, and technical alignment coordination near Taos, Madrid, and Cerrillos.
- Statewide Lens: The remaining 17.5% of respondents (21 responses) identified their connection as spanning the entire 500-mile statewide trail, offering systemic organizational perspectives on multi-agency coordination and legislative funding strategies.

2. EMERGENCE OF MISSION PILLARS

Stakeholders were asked to identify the elements most vital to the founding mission of the RGTA. The results strongly validate a dual mandate of physical connectivity and profound landscape stewardship:

- Continuous Trail Completion: A significant majority of respondents view "completing the Río Grande Trail as a continuous route" as the highest architectural priority.
- Long-Term Physical Care: Public sentiment emphasizes that creating a new trail is secondary to "maintaining the physical trail over time" and "supporting long-term stewardship".
- Cultural Interpretation: Respondents heavily favor an operational mission that actively honors and interprets the unique cultural, historical, and geological heritage of the Río Grande corridor.

3. TWO-YEAR IMMEDIATE OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

When prompted to establish the top operational directives for the RGTA's first two years of formal nonprofit existence, public consensus fell squarely on building organizational capacity and localized trust:

- **Volunteer Mobilization:** The highest-ranking administrative priority is "coordinating volunteer trail maintenance and stewardship". Public feedback notes that early, positive volunteer inclusion builds a durable grassroots base.
- **Capital Sourcing:** Concurrently, stakeholders prioritized "fundraising for trail infrastructure and amenities" to secure a solid fiscal foundation away from pure reliance on fluctuating state allocations.
- **Economic Activation:** For the southern corridor, respondents highlighted "marketing and promotion supporting local economic development," advocating for immediate "low-hanging fruit" trail connectivity to jumpstart rural hospitality economies.

4. SAFEGUARDING TRADITIONAL LAND USES AND ACEQUIAS

A primary focus of the stakeholder questionnaire centered on how the RGTA can seamlessly integrate with existing agricultural systems and community boundaries without causing friction.

- **Agricultural Respect:** Respondents expressed an overarching concern that the trail must be planned and managed in explicit ways that respect agricultural lands, historical water rights, and sovereign Tribal communities.
- **The "Good Neighbor" Mandate:** The public heavily supports the immediate development and dissemination of a formal "Good Neighbor" code of conduct for trail users. This code is envisioned as a mechanism to mitigate trespassing, combat "not-in-my-backyard" (NIMBY) anxieties, and explicitly outline user responsibilities near active farms and ranching territories.
- **Ecosystem Protections:** In environmentally fragile reaches, stakeholders emphasized that planning must happen "upfront to care for the ecology of systems," ensuring alignments do not cause erosion, damage watershed health, or fragment sensitive wildlife corridors.

5. GOVERNANCE MODELS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The feedback regarding the organizational architecture of the RGTA board and advisory framework provided distinct structural direction for the upcoming seating of the board:

- **The Hybrid Governance Mandate:** The public overwhelmingly rejected general or politically appointed board models in favor of a hybrid approach combining regional and stakeholder representation.
- **Tribal and Water Leadership:** Stakeholders view the formal inclusion of Acequia leadership perspectives and the establishment of a dedicated Tribal Liaison or advisory role as mandatory, non-negotiable governance steps. Public input underscores that tribal leadership must be active in "this stage and all stages going forward" to ensure mutual benefit.
- **Localized Feeder Committees:** To keep communities aligned, respondents strongly support the creation of county or regional advisory committees that feed direct public feedback upward to the executive board.

6. ADVISORY INPUT AND CRITICAL SUB-THEMES

Several highly specific strategic concerns were introduced by the public via qualitative feedback windows, which the RGTA must address during its impending strategic planning phase:

- **Equitable and Adaptive Access:** Multiple respondents raised concerns regarding multi-use rules, strongly advocating for the inclusion of adaptive bicycles and a transparent re-evaluation of e-bike restrictions. Commenters noted that if the trail restricts access to those with limited health or physical capabilities, it will fail to serve enough New Mexicans to maintain long-term public relevance.
- **Permitting and Commercial Readiness:** Long-time bicycle tourism professionals advised the RGTA to formulate a streamlined, reasonable permitting process for commercial outfitters early in the process. They urged the association not to "reinvent the wheel" and to look at successful frameworks utilized by the Katy Trail State Park in Missouri and county trail networks in Colorado.
- **Strategic Re-evaluation:** Public sector transportation and tourism partners noted that where the trail cannot physically follow the Rio Grande due to private property constraints, the RGTA must publish clear, collaborative principles to guide alternative upland alignments in tandem with local county land managers.

VII. Conclusion and Next Steps: The Road to Stewardship

The success of this two-week engagement tour confirms a broad public mandate for the Río Grande Trail Association. The transition from a state-led project to a community-governed entity requires a phased approach to leadership, planning, and fiscal sustainability. The following priorities will guide the RGTA through the remainder of 2026:

1. **Primary Indigenous Engagement** - The Association recognizes that initial outreach to the Council of Governors (Pueblo) and the New Mexico Acequia Association marks the beginning of a long-term relationship. The immediate next step is to facilitate formal, funded consultations to ensure an Indigenous-led vision is the bedrock of the trail's alignment and interpretive messaging. This process ensures that sovereignty is respected before any physical or digital assets are finalized.
2. **Synthesis of Public Input** - Data from the nine-county tour and the ongoing public survey will be finalized to provide a comprehensive view of New Mexican priorities. These survey responses will serve as the evidentiary basis for the Association's first three-year strategic plan, ensuring that the nonprofit's goals are directly tethered to the needs of the communities it serves.
3. **Seating of the Board and Governance** - The recruitment and seating of the Board of Directors will occur based on the specialized professional criteria outlined in Section III. Once seated, the board will undergo formal orientation to establish legal and fiduciary protocols, including the finalization of the Articles of Incorporation and IRS Form 1023 to secure 501(c)(3) status.
4. **Strategic Planning and Sustainable Funding** - With a seated board and synthesized public data, the RGTA will commence a formal strategic planning process. This phase will define the Association's operational milestones, from trail maintenance standards to Trail Town pilot programs. Parallel to this, the Association will launch a diversified funding strategy, targeting private philanthropic grants, federal recreation funds, and state-level partnerships to ensure the long-term financial health of the 500-mile corridor.
5. **Trail Stewardship and Friends Groups** - Strategic plan to be shared broadly with local trail stewardship or related NGOs in the state in order to foster partnerships and proactive planning / momentum for trail designation, community engagement, and stewardship (maintenance) activity.







Appendix



1. Which of the following best describes your relationship to the Río Grande Trail? (Select up to two)

- Trail user / recreationist
- Resident near the Rio Grande Trail corridor
- Local government representative
- State government representative
- Federal agency or land manager
- Tribal government or Tribal organization
- Acequia association or traditional land / water governance group
- Conservation or outdoor recreation organization
- Business, tourism, or economic development organization
- Landowner, rancher, or agricultural producer
- Interested member of the public
- Other:

2. Which section of the Río Grande Trail are you most interested in or connected to? (Select one)

- Northern New Mexico (Colorado border – Taos – Española)
- Santa Fe Region
- Albuquerque / Middle Rio Grande
- Southern New Mexico (Socorro – Elephant Butte – Las Cruces – Texas border)
- Statewide / entire trail
- Not sure

3. Which elements would you like to see reflected in the mission of the Río Grande Trail Association? (Select up to five)

- Maintaining the physical trail over time
- Completing the Rio Grande Trail as a continuous route
- Supporting long-term stewardship and care of the trail
- Expanding public access to the Rio Grande Trail
- Supporting outdoor recreation opportunities
- Improving physical and community connections along the trail
- Serving as a community-led organization
- Bringing together diverse perspectives and communities
- Coordinating across jurisdictions, agencies, and partners
- Supporting conservation of natural resources
- Respecting agricultural lands and acequia systems
- Respecting Tribal communities and cultural landscapes
- Supporting environmental education
- Honoring and interpreting cultural and historical heritage
- Increasing public awareness of the Rio Grande and surrounding landscapes
- Supporting local communities along the trail corridor
- Supporting local economies and tourism

4. Are there any additional elements you would like to see included in the mission of the Río Grande Trail Association? (Open-ended)

5. In its first two years, which of the following should be the Río Grande Trail Association's top priorities? (Select up to two)

- Coordinating volunteer trail maintenance and stewardship
- Fundraising for trail infrastructure and amenities
- Educational signage about history, ecology, and water rights
- Marketing and promotion supporting local economic development
- Ensuring the trail is planned and managed in ways that respect agricultural lands, acequia systems, and Tribal communities
- Other:

- Which approaches would help ensure the trail respects local communities and traditional land uses? (Select up to two)
- Recognizing Right-to-Farm and Acequia traditions in the Río Grande Trail Association's guiding principles
- Including Acequia leadership perspectives in governance or advisory groups
- Establishing a Tribal liaison or advisory role
- Developing a "Good Neighbor" code of conduct for trail users
- Other:
- What structure would best help the Río Grande Trail Association work collaboratively with communities and local governments along the trail? (Select one)
- Regional representation on the Board (north, central, south)
- Stakeholder representation (agriculture, Tribal communities, conservation, economic development)
- County or regional advisory committees that provide input to the Board
- A hybrid approach combining regional and stakeholder representation
- Other:
- How might you be interested in supporting the Río Grande Trail Association as it gets started? (Select all that apply)
- Serving on the Board of Directors
- Serving on a statewide advisory board
- Serving on a regional advisory group
- Volunteering for stewardship or outreach
- Providing professional expertise
- Helping connect potential donors or partners
- Making a financial contribution
- Staying informed about the project
- Not sure yet
- What experience or expertise could you contribute to the Río Grande Trail Association? (Select all that apply)
- Nonprofit governance or board service
- Fundraising or philanthropy
- Finance, accounting, or business management
- Legal expertise
- Tribal leadership or cultural knowledge
- Agriculture, acequia governance, or water management
- Land management or conservation
- Outdoor recreation or trail planning
- Tourism or economic development
- Community organizing or public outreach
- Education or interpretation
- Communications, media, or marketing
- Grant writing or nonprofit administration
- I do not have professional expertise but would like to support the effort
- Other:
- If you are interested in serving on the Board, an advisory group, or helping the organization in other ways, please provide your contact information. (Optional)
- Email (Optional)
- Organization (Optional)
- City / Community (Optional)
- Do you know of businesses, foundations, or funding sources the Association should contact regarding potential partnerships? (Open-ended)
- Is there anything else you would like to share about the formation of the Río Grande Trail Association? (Open-ended)

Event Flier



Attachment L: Strategic Plan



Río Grande Trail Association

Strategic Plan 2026–2030

A Five-Year Roadmap for Corridor Alignment, Coordinated Funding, and Partnerships

Prepared by:

Fundraising for the Future

In collaboration with:

Dillon Osleger

Under contract with:

The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
to support the formation of the Río Grande Trail Association

June 2026

RÍO GRANDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

New Mexico • <https://riograndetrailnm.org/>

Adoption

Río Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan (2026–2030)

This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Directors of the Río Grande Trail Association on _____, 2026. It establishes the Association's strategic direction for the period 2026–2030 and provides the framework for governance, organizational development, annual planning, partnership coordination, fundraising, performance evaluation, and the Association's support of planning, stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail.

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I. Executive Summary

Purpose of the Río Grande Trail Association

The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization established to support the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the 500-mile Río Grande Trail. Working alongside the Río Grande Trail Commission, public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities, the RGTA helps build the organizational capacity, financial resources, partnerships, volunteer support, and public engagement needed to advance the trail over time.

The Río Grande Trail represents a monumental investment in outdoor recreation, conservation, rural economic development, cultural heritage, public health, transportation connectivity, tourism, and quality of life for New Mexico.

The RGTA does not exercise regulatory or land management authority. Instead, it complements the work of governmental agencies and partner organizations by providing fundraising, coordination, community engagement, stewardship, education, communications, and other organizational support that advances shared trail objectives.

Relationship to the Statewide Río Grande Trail Initiative

The Río Grande Trail is a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional initiative involving federal, state, Tribal, regional, and local governments; land managers; nonprofit organizations; businesses; and community partners. Trail designation, land access, environmental review, construction, management, and formal government-to-government consultation remain the responsibility of the appropriate governmental entities and sovereign governments.

Within this framework, the RGTA serves as the nonprofit partner that helps coordinate partnerships, mobilize resources, strengthen public support, and maintain long-term organizational momentum across jurisdictions and changing administrations. By connecting public agencies, private philanthropy, volunteers, and communities, the Association helps translate statewide priorities into locally supported initiatives that advance the long-term vision of the Río Grande Trail.

Strategic Direction

Over the next five years, the RGTA will focus on seven strategic priorities:

1. Community Engagement & Partnerships
2. Funding & Organizational Sustainability

3. Trail Completion & Connectivity
4. Stewardship, Volunteers & Maintenance
5. Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity
6. Communications & Public Awareness
7. Governance & Organizational Development

Implementation will occur through a regional approach that recognizes the unique cultural, environmental, and community characteristics of northern, central, and southern New Mexico. Organizational growth will be intentional and financially responsible, transitioning from a volunteer-led startup organization to one supported by professional staff and specialized technical expertise as funding and organizational capacity allow.

Long-Term Vision and Desired Outcomes

Through implementation of this Strategic Plan, the RGTA seeks to achieve the following long-term outcomes:

- **A Connected Corridor (Segment Identification & Acceptance):** The systematic identification and official acceptance of trail segments by the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC), establishing a verified and approved 500-mile corridor blueprint. While the physical development of a fully safe, navigable, and clearly marked trail outside of vehicular lanes will require significant infrastructure funding and span many years, this NPO-driven alignment baseline legally and geographically validates the route.
- **Trusted Relationships:** Establish respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, landowners, and communities while supporting collaborative trail planning and implementation.
- **A Culture of Stewardship:** Foster a statewide network of volunteers, community organizations, youth conservation programs, and stewardship partners committed to the long-term care and sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.
- **Economic and Community Benefits:** Support gateway communities and rural economies by promoting responsible recreation, heritage tourism, conservation, public health, education, cultural appreciation, and community connectivity while protecting natural resources, working landscapes, and cultural heritage.

Success will be measured not only by progress toward a connected trail corridor, but also by the strength of partnerships, community trust, organizational sustainability, stewardship, and the long-term public benefits created for New Mexico.

II. Organizational Foundation

A. Mission Statement

Mission: The Río Grande Trail Association supports the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Río Grande Trail for the benefit of New Mexico's communities, landscapes, and cultures.

Purpose: The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the planning, development, stewardship, and long-term success of the Río Grande Trail. Through fundraising, partnerships, public engagement, stewardship, education, and organizational capacity building, the RGTA works alongside public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities to help create a continuous trail corridor that provides recreational, educational, environmental, cultural, and economic benefits throughout New Mexico.

Commitment: The RGTA is committed to advancing the Río Grande Trail through collaborative partnerships, responsible stewardship, public education, and meaningful community engagement. The Association seeks to build respectful, lasting relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while working collaboratively with acequia associations, land grants, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, residents, and other community partners to help ensure the trail reflects and benefits the diverse communities it serves.

B. Vision

The Río Grande Trail will be a continuous 500-mile trail corridor that celebrates New Mexico's diverse landscapes, cultures, and history while promoting recreation, stewardship, education, and community connections. Through collaboration among public agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities, the trail will enhance access to outdoor recreation, support conservation, strengthen local economies, and contribute to the quality of life for residents and visitors throughout New Mexico.

C. Organizational Role and Boundaries

The Río Grande Trail Association (RGTA) is a statewide nonprofit organization established to increase the organizational capacity, financial resources, public understanding, community participation, and long-term stewardship needed to advance the Río Grande Trail. The Association complements the work of the Río Grande Trail Commission, state agencies, Tribal Nations, Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners by providing fundraising, coordination, public engagement, stewardship, education, communications, and other organizational support.

For purposes of this Strategic Plan, “partner organizations” refers to nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, businesses, community organizations, volunteers, and other non-governmental entities that collaborate with the Association. References to governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, land managers, and local governments are identified separately where relevant.

What RGTA Does

The RGTA supports the Río Grande Trail by:

- Convening and coordinating partners and supporting collaboration across jurisdictions.
- Raising public, private, and philanthropic funding.
- Assisting with grant development and resource coordination.
- Supporting public engagement, education, and community-informed planning.
- Organizing authorized volunteer stewardship and maintenance activities.
- Developing educational materials, communications, and trail identity resources.
- Advocating through lawful, nonpartisan activities for investment in the Río Grande Trail.
- Providing administrative, technical, and project support when requested by partner organizations.

Organizational Boundaries

The RGTA does not independently:

- Designate trail routes or authorize public access.
- Exercise regulatory or land management authority over public, private, Tribal, or sovereign lands.
- Acquire trail access without the express authorization of the appropriate landowner or managing entity.
- Approve environmental reviews, construction projects, trail closures, or land management decisions.
- Deploy volunteers or conduct activities on lands without appropriate authorization.
- Conduct formal government-to-government consultation with Tribal Nations or Pueblos.

- Represent the views of Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, landowners, communities, or governmental entities without their authorization.
- Replace or assume the statutory responsibilities of the Río Grande Trail Commission, state agencies, local governments, sovereign governments, land managers, or other partner organizations.

Relationship with Government Partners

The RGTA works collaboratively with the Río Grande Trail Commission, the Outdoor Recreation Division, State Parks Division, federal agencies, Tribal Nations, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, and community partners. Through regular communication, collaboration, and formal agreements where appropriate, the Association helps build organizational capacity, public support, financial resources, and long-term momentum for the Río Grande Trail while respecting the authorities and responsibilities of each partner.

D. Planning Assumptions

Successful implementation of this Strategic Plan is based on several assumptions that support the successful development and long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail Association. These assumptions should be reviewed annually as part of the Board's strategic planning and annual work planning process and revised as organizational conditions evolve.

The Strategic Plan assumes:

- Continued collaboration with the Río Grande Trail Commission, Outdoor Recreation Division, State Parks Division, Tribal Nations, Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and other partner organizations.
- Continued progress toward implementation of the Río Grande Trail through coordination among governmental agencies, land managers, communities, and partner organizations.
- Continued availability of public, philanthropic, corporate, and individual funding necessary to support organizational priorities and sustainable growth.
- Successful establishment and continued development of the RGTA's Board of Directors, governance systems, financial controls, policies, and organizational capacity.
- Continued community engagement and relationship-building with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, local governments, landowners, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and residents.
- That trail designation, land management, environmental review, regulatory authority, and formal government-to-government consultation remain the responsibility of the appropriate governmental entities, sovereign governments, and land managers.

- The Association's role is to complement these responsibilities by providing organizational capacity, fundraising, stewardship, education, communications, advocacy, partnership development, and community engagement.
- Organizational growth, staffing, and program expansion will occur as financial capacity allows and will be paced to maintain the long-term sustainability of the organization.

E. Guiding Principles

- **Community-Centered Planning:** Support community-centered planning by considering local quality of life, safety, cultural values, and economic opportunities while balancing regional recreation and tourism objectives.
- **Respect for Tribal and Traditional Historic Communities:** The RGTA recognizes the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and respects the historic rights, responsibilities, and traditions of acequia associations and land grants. The Association will support the state's formal, government-to-government tribal consultation tracks and engage through the processes and protocols identified by each sovereign government or organization while supporting respectful, long-term relationships built on trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding.
- **Stewardship and Sustainability:** The RGTA will encourage planning and stewardship practices that minimize environmental impacts, protect wildlife habitat, and support sustainable long-term maintenance through collaborative partnerships, volunteer engagement, and responsible resource management.
- **Collaboration and Partnership:** The Río Grande Trail depends on strong partnerships, shared leadership, coordinated resources, and collaborative agreements among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and local communities.
- **Education and Interpretation:** The Río Grande Trail serves as a living classroom that fosters appreciation for New Mexico's geological, ecological, cultural, and historical landscapes through thoughtful interpretation, education, and storytelling.
- **Access and Connectivity:** The RGTA supports equitable access to outdoor recreation by encouraging safe, welcoming, and accessible connections to the Río Grande Trail for communities throughout New Mexico, including rural, unincorporated, and underserved areas.
- **Economic and Community Benefit:** The RGTA supports responsible recreation and trail-related economic opportunities that strengthen local businesses, contribute to rural economies, enhance quality of life, and help protect the character, cultural heritage, and long-term vitality of New Mexico's communities.

III. Strategic Priorities

A. Priority 1 — Community Engagement & Partnerships

Goal: Build respectful, collaborative, and lasting partnerships that support planning, development, stewardship, and long-term success of the Río Grande Trail.

- **Build and Maintain Strategic Partnerships:** Develop and strengthen relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and landowners to advance shared trail objectives.
- **Support Community-Informed Planning:** Facilitate community engagement activities that encourage local participation, gather input, identify opportunities, and build support for trail planning and implementation while respecting local priorities and decision-making processes.
- **Promote Regional Collaboration:** Support regional coordination among communities and partner organizations to address local opportunities, challenges, and implementation priorities throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- **Encourage Volunteer and Community Participation:** Create opportunities for residents, organizations, and businesses to participate in stewardship, planning, fundraising, advocacy, and other activities that strengthen long-term community ownership of the trail.
- **Support Collaborative Problem Solving:** Foster open communication, mutual respect, and collaborative approaches that help address concerns, build trust, and strengthen long-term partnerships.

B. Priority 2 — Funding & Organizational Sustainability

Goal: Build a resilient and diversified funding base that provides long-term organizational stability while supporting trail development, stewardship, education, and community engagement initiatives throughout the corridor.

- **Develop Long-Term Fundraising Strategy:** Create a comprehensive fundraising framework that combines public grants, philanthropic investments, corporate sponsorships, memberships, and individual giving. Establish annual fundraising targets aligned with organizational growth and trail implementation priorities.
- **Coordinate Public Funding and Legislative Support:** Develop an annual legislative and public funding strategy that identifies priorities, funding opportunities, and advocacy activities. Legislative engagement may be undertaken directly by the Board or in

collaboration with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations, as appropriate.

- **Support Economic Impact and Return-on-Investment Analysis:** Develop and communicate information demonstrating the economic, recreational, environmental, cultural, and public health benefits of the Río Grande Trail. Support development of economic impact analyses, visitor use information, volunteer value, community benefits, and other performance measures that strengthen grant applications, legislative funding requests, and public investment decisions.
- **Pursue Grants, Sponsorships, Donations, and Partnerships:** Actively identify and pursue grants from federal and state programs, foundations, outdoor recreation partners, conservation organizations, and private donors. Develop sponsorships and strategic partnerships that leverage both financial and in-kind support to advance organizational and trail-related priorities.
- **Build Donor and Membership Programs:** Establish membership and donor programs that create recurring revenue while fostering a statewide community of trail supporters. Develop stewardship-focused giving opportunities that connect contributors directly to trail projects and regional initiatives.
- **Support Funding Coordination for Statewide Trail Priorities:** Work collaboratively with public agencies, local governments, and implementation partners to identify funding needs, coordinate grant pursuits, and align philanthropic investments with statewide trail priorities and community-driven projects.

C. Priority 3 — Trail Completion & Connectivity

Goal: Support the planning, designation, connectivity, and long-term implementation of a continuous Río Grande Trail through collaboration, technical assistance, community engagement, and coordinated partnerships.

Under this Strategic Plan, trail connectivity and completion are viewed as two complementary phases that involve different organizational roles and responsibilities:

- **Phase 1 – Planning, Evaluation, and Designation:** Support collaborative planning, route evaluation, mapping, public engagement, partnership development, and other activities that assist governmental agencies, the Río Grande Trail Commission, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations in identifying opportunities to improve trail connectivity and advance trail designation.
- **Phase 2 – Implementation and Construction:** Support implementation through fundraising, volunteer engagement, stewardship, communications, partnership coordination, and other activities that complement the work of governmental agencies, land managers, and partner organizations as trail projects advance, consistent with available funding, applicable approvals, and organizational capacity.

The RGTA implements this priority through the following tasks:

- **Support Trail Planning and Connectivity:** Work collaboratively with the Río Grande Trail Commission, EMNRD, federal agencies, Tribal Nations, local governments, and partner organizations to provide GIS alignment baselines, route evaluation, and coordination that improves legal segment designations.
- **Facilitate Strategic Trail Priorities:** Support the identification of priority trail segments, connectivity opportunities, implementation challenges, and funding needs in collaboration with governmental agencies and partner organizations. Assist in coordinating resources and partnerships that help advance statewide trail priorities over time.
- **Support Community-Informed Trail Development:** Encourage community participation throughout trail planning and implementation by facilitating public engagement, sharing information, identifying local opportunities and concerns, and supporting collaborative solutions that reflect community values while respecting property rights, cultural resources, and the responsibilities of governmental agencies and sovereign governments.
- **Promote Consistency Across the Trail Corridor:** Support the development of consistent trail identity, wayfinding, mapping, visitor information, and implementation guidance that enhance the user experience while recognizing the unique character, cultural heritage, and environmental conditions of communities throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.

- **Strengthen Technical and Organizational Capacity:** Support collaborative planning, mapping, grant development, data management, project coordination, and resource sharing that help governmental agencies and partner organizations advance trail planning, stewardship, and implementation priorities throughout New Mexico.
- **Measure Progress Toward Trail Completion:** Monitor progress toward trail connectivity, designation, planning, implementation, and partnership development through the Association's Performance Measurement Framework. Use performance information to inform organizational priorities, strengthen funding proposals, and support coordinated implementation efforts.

D. Priority 4 — Stewardship & Volunteer Engagement

Goal: Foster a statewide culture of stewardship by engaging volunteers, strengthening community partnerships, supporting responsible trail care, and promoting the long-term sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.

- **Develop Volunteer Stewardship Programs:** Establish and expand volunteer opportunities that encourage long-term community involvement in caring for the Río Grande Trail. Programs may include Adopt-a-Segment initiatives, youth conservation and service-learning projects, volunteer trail crews, community stewardship events, and regional volunteer leadership opportunities.
- **Support Authorized Trail Stewardship:** Coordinate authorized stewardship, maintenance, restoration, cleanup, monitoring, and resource protection activities in partnership with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, land managers, local governments, and other partner organizations. All stewardship activities will be conducted with the appropriate permissions and in accordance with applicable land management policies and agreements.
- **Build Community Stewardship:** Encourage residents, businesses, schools, civic organizations, and community groups to take an active role in protecting and enhancing the Río Grande Trail. Support recurring stewardship events, local leadership, and volunteer participation that foster long-term community ownership and care of the trail.
- **Strengthen Stewardship Partnerships:** Collaborate with governmental agencies, conservation organizations, educational institutions, outdoor recreation organizations, businesses, and community partners to expand volunteer capacity, leverage technical expertise, coordinate stewardship initiatives, and maximize the impact of available resources.
- **Promote Responsible Trail Use:** Support responsible recreation by encouraging respect for natural resources, cultural heritage, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, private property, acequia systems, working agricultural lands, wildlife, and neighboring communities through volunteer engagement and educational initiatives consistent with the Association's Communications and Public Awareness Strategy.
- **Recognize Stewardship Contributions:** Celebrate volunteer service, stewardship accomplishments, and community leadership through the Association's communications, public awareness, and recognition programs to encourage continued participation and strengthen a culture of stewardship throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- **Measure Stewardship Success:** Evaluate stewardship efforts through volunteer participation, stewardship events, partner engagement, trail care activities, resource improvements, and other performance measures identified in the Performance Measurement Framework. Use these results to continuously improve stewardship programs and strengthen long-term organizational capacity.

E. Priority 5 — Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity

Goal: Develop a recognizable and respectful trail identity that promotes understanding of the Río Grande Trail while celebrating New Mexico's diverse landscapes, cultures, history, and communities.

- **Develop a Unified Trail Identity:** Support the development and consistent use of branding and visual identity materials that strengthen public recognition of the Río Grande Trail while reflecting the unique character of New Mexico and its communities.
- **Promote Interpretation and Education:** Collaborate with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, educational institutions, historians, cultural organizations, and partner organizations to develop interpretive and educational resources that increase public understanding of the trail's natural, cultural, historical, recreational, and environmental significance.
- **Support Place-Based Learning:** Encourage educational opportunities that use the Río Grande Trail as an outdoor classroom for environmental stewardship, conservation, cultural heritage, recreation, public health, and community history while supporting educational programming for residents, schools, youth organizations, and visitors.
- **Promote Consistent Visitor Information:** Support the development of maps, interpretive materials, educational resources, and wayfinding guidance that improve visitor understanding, encourage responsible recreation, and strengthen the overall trail experience in coordination with governmental agencies and partner organizations.
- **Celebrate Community Identity:** Promote the stories, traditions, landscapes, cultures, and communities that define the Río Grande Trail while ensuring interpretation reflects multiple perspectives and is developed in collaboration with the appropriate governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historians, cultural organizations, and local communities.

F. Priority 6 — Communications & Public Awareness

Goal: Increase public awareness, strengthen community engagement, and build broad public support for the Río Grande Trail through coordinated communications, education, transparency, and storytelling.

- **Develop a Coordinated Communications Program:** Implement a comprehensive communications strategy that supports the Association’s Mission through consistent branding, digital communications, media relations, publications, photography, storytelling, and public information resources.
- **Strengthen Public Awareness:** Promote statewide understanding of the Río Grande Trail by communicating its recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, economic, and public health benefits while highlighting opportunities for public participation, stewardship, and volunteer involvement.
- **Support Community Engagement:** Provide timely, transparent, and accessible information that encourages meaningful public participation in trail planning, stewardship activities, organizational initiatives, and community partnerships consistent with the Association’s community engagement goals.
- **Promote Responsible Recreation:** Develop educational campaigns and visitor information that encourage safe and responsible trail use, including Leave No Trace principles, “Good Neighbor” guidance, agricultural awareness, cultural respect, outdoor safety, and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- **Tell the Story of the Río Grande Trail:** Share stories that celebrate the landscapes, communities, cultures, volunteers, and partnerships that contribute to the Río Grande Trail while recognizing the contributions of Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and local communities.
- **Maintain Organizational Transparency:** Provide regular updates regarding organizational activities, Board actions, Strategic Plan implementation, funding, partnerships, stewardship accomplishments, and organizational performance through annual reports, newsletters, digital communications, public meetings, and other appropriate communication channels.

G. Priority 7 — Governance & Organizational Development

Goal: Establish a strong, representative, and sustainable governance structure that provides effective leadership, accountability, financial stewardship, and organizational capacity to support the long-term planning, development, stewardship, and sustainability of the Río Grande Trail.

Governance Philosophy

The Río Grande Trail Association is committed to governance practices that promote transparency, accountability, collaboration, ethical leadership, and responsible stewardship of organizational resources. The Board of Directors will govern in a manner consistent with the Association's Mission, strategic priorities, fiduciary responsibilities, and long-term sustainability while fostering an organizational culture built on trust, respect, inclusiveness, and informed decision-making.

The Board will:

- Conduct its work in a transparent, ethical, and accountable manner.
- Foster collaboration among Board members, partner organizations, volunteers, and the communities served by the Association.
- Exercise sound fiscal stewardship and prudent oversight of organizational resources.
- Make decisions informed by available data, community input, partner collaboration, organizational priorities, and applicable legal and fiduciary responsibilities.
- Regularly evaluate organizational performance and progress toward strategic goals.
- Review the Strategic Plan annually and adjust organizational priorities in response to changing conditions, opportunities, funding availability, and community needs.

The Strategic Plan will serve as the Board's primary long-range planning document and will be implemented through annual work plans, budgets, and performance measures that support continuous organizational improvement.

Governance Outcomes

Effective governance provides the leadership, accountability, strategic direction, financial stewardship, and organizational continuity necessary to advance the Río Grande Trail and sustain the Association over the long term. Through responsible governance, the Board will ensure the RGTA remains mission-focused, financially resilient, and accountable to its partners, supporters, and the communities it serves.

Board members are expected to actively support the Association through strategic leadership, fiduciary oversight, fundraising, community engagement, ambassadorial leadership, and participation in Board and committee activities.

Board Leadership

- **Build and Sustain Representative Board Leadership:** Recruit, develop, and retain a diverse Board of Directors that reflects the geographic, cultural, professional, and commu-

nity interests represented along the Río Grande Trail corridor. Seek expertise in outdoor recreation, conservation, fundraising, finance, law, communications, public administration, Tribal relations, and community development while maintaining representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico.

- **Develop Leadership Capacity and Continuity:** Establish effective officer leadership, committee leadership, Board recruitment, onboarding, continuing education, leadership succession, and Board evaluation practices that support sound governance, institutional knowledge, and long-term organizational effectiveness.

Organizational Governance

- **Establish Governance Systems:** Develop governance policies, committee charters, advisory groups, working groups, and organizational procedures that clearly define roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and communication pathways through the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) framework and other governance tools. These systems will support effective leadership, collaboration, accountability, and implementation of the Strategic Plan.
- **Build Organizational Capacity and Resilience:** Develop the organizational systems, administrative infrastructure, technology, financial management practices, and human resources necessary to support long-term organizational effectiveness. Determine staffing priorities and engage employees, contractors, consultants, and volunteers as organizational needs and financial capacity evolve while maintaining financial sustainability and mission focus.

Financial Stewardship, Compliance & Risk Management

- **Exercise Financial Stewardship:** Fulfill the Board's fiduciary responsibilities through responsible financial oversight, sound budgeting, diversified resource development, internal controls, and long-term financial planning that supports organizational sustainability.
- **Maintain Compliance and Organizational Integrity:** Regularly review and update policies related to nonprofit compliance, ethics, conflicts of interest, records management, reporting requirements, transparency, and accountability to maintain public trust and organizational integrity.
- **Manage Organizational Risk:** Identify, evaluate, and proactively manage operational, financial, legal, reputational, partnership, and organizational risks through regular policy review, strategic planning, and Board oversight.

Organizational Performance & Continuous Improvement

- **Monitor Organizational Performance:** Regularly review progress toward the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, financial objectives, governance effectiveness, and organizational performance measures. Use evaluation results to strengthen decision-making, improve organizational effectiveness, and guide future planning.

IV. Organizational Growth & Implementation Roadmap

A. Organizational Growth Strategy

Organizational growth will occur deliberately and in proportion to available financial resources, organizational capacity, and implementation priorities. Growth decisions will be guided by organizational readiness, financial sustainability, partner needs, and the Association's ability to deliver high-quality programs and services.

To scale the Association responsibly from its current state to a mature, stable nonprofit, the Board will execute a three-phase growth strategy keyed to funding benchmarks:

Phase A – Organizational Startup (2026–2027)

Purpose: Establish the organizational foundation needed to begin implementing the Strategic Plan.

Primary Focus:

- Establish governance and administrative systems.
- Adopt organizational policies and annual work plans.
- Build partnerships and organizational visibility.
- Launch initial fundraising and communications.
- Develop the organization's operational capacity.

Key Milestone: The organization has established governance systems, secured initial funding, and is prepared to expand its capacity through professional support.

Phase B – Organizational Growth (2027–2029)

Purpose: Expand the organization's capacity to support statewide implementation.

Primary Focus:

- Strengthen fundraising and communications.
- Expand partnerships and volunteer programs.
- Utilize professional contractors and consultants as needed.
- Evaluate staffing needs as organizational capacity and funding allow.
- Support implementation of strategic priorities.

Key Milestone: The organization has established stable funding, expanded partnerships, and sufficient operational capacity to support long-term growth.

Phase C – Organizational Maturity (2030 and Beyond)

Purpose: Sustain a mature statewide nonprofit organization supporting the Río Grande Trail.

Primary Focus:

- Maintain professional organizational capacity.
- Strengthen governance and financial sustainability.
- Coordinate statewide stewardship and partnerships.
- Support long-term implementation of the Río Grande Trail.
- Continuously evaluate and improve organizational performance.

B. Implementation Timeline

The Board of Directors will adopt and annually update a rolling three-year implementation plan to guide the execution of this Strategic Plan. The implementation plan will establish annual priorities, organizational milestones, and key initiatives that advance the Strategic Plan through annual work plans, budgets, fundraising objectives, partnership initiatives, and organizational capacity-building activities.

Implementation will build upon the governance documents, GIS resources, partner relationships, volunteer networks, funding resources, and other organizational assets developed during the Association's formation. These resources provide the foundation for organizational growth, fundraising, partnership development, and statewide trail implementation.

Year 0.5 (2026) Establish the Organization

Focus: Build the governance, administrative, and financial foundation needed to launch the Association.

Key Milestones:

- Establish the Board of Directors, elect officers, adopt the Strategic Plan, and approve the initial governance structure.
- Develop the 2027 Annual Work Plan, Board calendar, committee structure, and organizational priorities.

- Establish financial management, banking, accounting, insurance, technology, donor management, and other core administrative systems.
- Determine staffing priorities and engage professional services as needed to support organizational development.
- Launch initial fundraising efforts, pursue public funding opportunities, and begin grant development.
- Establish working relationships with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations supporting trail planning and implementation.

Year 1 (2027) Build Organizational Capacity

Focus: Implement the Strategic Plan while strengthening organizational systems, partnerships, fundraising, and public engagement.

Key Milestones:

- Implement the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.
- Continue building organizational capacity consistent with Priority 7 by strengthening Board leadership, governance systems, committees, advisory groups, and operational infrastructure.
- Strengthen fundraising, communications, membership, and grant development efforts.
- Expand partnerships that support trail planning, stewardship, education, and community engagement.
- Launch volunteer and stewardship programs while establishing organizational performance reporting.

Year 2 (2028) Expand Programs and Partnerships

Focus: Increase statewide capacity, deepen partnerships, and expand program delivery.

Key Milestones:

- Continue implementing Strategic Priorities 1–7 through the Annual Work Plan.
- Continue expanding organizational capacity consistent with Priority 7 through regional leadership, staffing, technical expertise, and organizational systems as funding and organizational needs evolve.
- Strengthen fundraising through grants, sponsorships, memberships, donor cultivation, and collaborative funding initiatives.

- Expand volunteer stewardship, youth engagement, education, communications, and community outreach.
- Support priority trail planning, stewardship, and implementation projects in partnership with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Years 3–4 (2029–2030) Sustain and Institutionalize

Focus: Position the RGTA as the long-term nonprofit partner supporting the Río Grande Trail.

Key Milestones:

- Maintain a diversified funding portfolio, financial reserves, and sustainable organizational systems.
- Continue implementing Priority 7 by strengthening Board leadership, governance, organizational resilience, succession planning, and performance evaluation.
- Maintain long-term partnerships with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners.
- Continue supporting trail planning, stewardship, education, public engagement, and implementation throughout the Río Grande Trail corridor.
- Evaluate progress, update the Strategic Plan, and strengthen the Association's long-term organizational capacity and statewide leadership.

C. Annual Work Planning

The RGTA will translate the Strategic Plan into an Annual Work Plan that identifies specific objectives, implementation activities, responsible parties, timelines, performance measures, and annual budget priorities. The Board of Directors will review and approve the Annual Work Plan each year, generally in conjunction with the annual budget, to ensure organizational efforts remain aligned with strategic priorities, emerging opportunities, funding availability, and statewide trail implementation needs.

D. Board Work Plan

The following calendar provides an illustrative annual governance cycle for the Board of Directors. It is intended to guide recurring governance, strategic planning, partnership coordination, fundraising, budgeting, legislative engagement, and organizational oversight activities. The Board may modify the timing of these activities as organizational needs evolve.

The Board will use governance policies, committee charters, annual work plans, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) framework to clarify organizational roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, and coordination among the Board of Directors, committees, staff, contractors, volunteers, the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and other partner organizations.

Monthly Recurring Commitments

Coordinate regularly with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations to:

- Review action items from previous Board meetings.
- Align organizational and implementation priorities.
- Share progress, opportunities, and emerging issues.
- Coordinate funding, stewardship, and partnership initiatives.
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and areas of collaboration using the RACI framework and other governance tools.
- Identify opportunities to advance trail planning, stewardship, education, public engagement, and implementation.

Each Board meeting should include:

- Financial report and budget review.
- Resource development update (grants, public funding, sponsorships, memberships, and donor development).
- Partnership, implementation, and organizational capacity update.
- Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan progress review.
- Organizational status and implementation update provided by the Executive Director, staff, contractors, or a Board officer, as applicable.

Annual Governance Cycle Tasks

- **January:** Confirm annual Board goals, committee priorities, and monitor legislative activity.
- **February:** Monitor legislative priorities and public funding opportunities.
- **March:** Begin Board recruitment and succession planning; prepare for IRS Form 990 filing.

- **April:** Review organizational compliance requirements and approve IRS Form 990.
- **May:** Complete the annual Board self-assessment and governance review; conduct staff performance evaluation(s) (if applicable).
- **June:** Conduct the annual strategic planning session; review Strategic Plan progress and performance measures; confirm organizational priorities, legislative priorities, and organizational capacity needs.
- **July:** Coordinate with the Río Grande Trail Commission and partner organizations to prepare legislative requests, funding strategies, and supporting materials.
- **August:** Engage legislators, state agencies, and partners to advance legislative priorities and public funding opportunities.
- **September:** Continue legislative coordination and begin development of the following year's Annual Work Plan, budget, and organizational priorities.
- **October:** Finalize the draft Annual Work Plan and proposed operating budget; review partnership agreements and coordination priorities.
- **November:** Approve legislative priorities, the Annual Work Plan, and annual budget; elect officers and appoint committees for the coming year.
- **December:** Review annual accomplishments and organizational performance; prepare the Annual Report and finalize implementation plans for the upcoming year.

E. Regional Implementation Approach

Recognizing the geographic, cultural, ecological, and organizational diversity of the Río Grande Trail, the RGTA will implement this Strategic Plan through regionally tailored approaches that reflect local priorities, opportunities, partnerships, and implementation needs. While the Association will pursue a unified statewide vision, successful implementation will depend upon building relationships and supporting locally appropriate solutions throughout the trail corridor.

Northern Region – Traditional Partnerships, Cultural Landscapes, and Historic Communities (Taos, Río Arriba, Santa Fe)

The northern region includes the greatest concentration of Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historic acequia communities, land grants, and culturally significant landscapes along the Río Grande corridor.

Successful implementation will emphasize relationship-building, trust, and long-term collaboration while respecting tribal sovereignty, traditional agricultural communities, cultural resources, and locally identified priorities. The RGTA will support community engagement, partnership development, stewardship, interpretation, and trail planning efforts that reflect the unique cultural heritage and governance structures of northern New Mexico.

The RGTA's engagement approach recognizes the distinct roles, responsibilities, and relationships associated with Tribal Nations and Pueblos and with Acequia Associations and Land Grants:

- **Tribal Nations and Pueblos:** The RGTA does not conduct or initiate government-to-government consultation, which remains the responsibility of the appropriate governmental agencies. When requested and appropriate, the Association may support relationship-building, public education, partnership development, and other collaborative activities that complement agency-led engagement. The Association respects Tribal sovereignty and cultural resources and recognizes that governmental agencies and land managers may implement temporary trail management measures, including trail closures where appropriate, to protect culturally sensitive areas and ceremonial activities.
- **Acequia Associations and Land Grants:** Engagement with Acequia Associations and Land Grants emphasizes relationship-building, collaboration, and voluntary partnership agreements, as appropriate, to help protect acequia infrastructure, water delivery systems, private property rights, agricultural operations, and continued maintenance access while advancing shared trail objectives.

Central Region – Urban Connectivity, Public Access, and Community Engagement (Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, Socorro)

The central region serves as the population center of New Mexico and provides significant opportunities to expand public access, connect existing trail systems, and increase public awareness of the Río Grande Trail.

Implementation will focus on strengthening partnerships with local governments, public agencies, community organizations, educational institutions, and recreation partners to improve connectivity, promote active transportation and outdoor recreation, support stewardship and volunteerism, and engage diverse urban and suburban communities in the long-term success of the trail.

Southern Region – Rural Communities, Conservation, and Economic Opportunity (Sierra, Doña Ana)

The southern region encompasses extensive rural landscapes, working agricultural lands, public lands, and internationally significant wildlife habitat.

Trail development will require strong collaboration with land managers, agricultural communities, conservation organizations, local governments, and regional partners to balance recreation, resource protection, and private property interests.

Implementation will emphasize stewardship, conservation, community-based tourism, rural economic development, and expanded recreational opportunities while recognizing the unique environmental, cultural, and logistical challenges of southern New Mexico.

Conservation equity will be prioritized by partnering with groups like Nuestra Tierra to build direct, walkable river trail access for unincorporated communities and colonias, providing a direct recreational and transportation utility to multigenerational families living alongside the corridor.

V. Funding & Financial Strategy

The RGTA will pursue a diversified funding strategy that combines public funding, philanthropic support, corporate partnerships, memberships, sponsorships, individual giving, events, and other earned and in-kind revenue opportunities. As the organization grows, its funding strategy will evolve to support statewide trail planning, stewardship, education, community engagement, and long-term organizational sustainability.

A. Revenue Sources

1. **Public Grants and Appropriations:** Pursue federal, state, regional, and local grants, legislative appropriations, and other public funding opportunities that support trail planning, development, stewardship, conservation, recreation, education, and community engagement. Initial efforts will emphasize New Mexico-based funding opportunities while expanding to larger state and federal programs as organizational capacity grows.
2. **Philanthropic and Individual Giving:** Cultivate relationships with foundations, family philanthropies, major donors, and individual supporters whose interests align with outdoor recreation, conservation, cultural heritage, public access, youth engagement, community development, and rural economic vitality.
3. **Corporate Partnerships, Sponsorships, and Memberships:** Develop sponsorships, memberships, and strategic partnerships with businesses, tourism partners, financial institutions, utilities, and outdoor recreation organizations that support healthy communities and trail-related initiatives while creating recurring revenue and long-term public investment in the Río Grande Trail.
4. **Events, Campaigns, and In-Kind Support:** Conduct fundraising events, stewardship initiatives, educational campaigns, and volunteer programs that increase public engagement while generating financial and in-kind support through donated services, materials, equipment, technical assistance, and volunteer labor.

B. Funding Strategy by Organizational Phase

- **Phase A – Board-Led Resource Development:** Establish the organization's fundraising systems, annual fundraising strategy, case for support, donor management processes, and funding calendar while pursuing startup funding through memberships, donations, sponsorships, community foundations, grants, local businesses, and legislative relationship-building.
- **Phase B – Foundation and Grant Expansion:** Expand fundraising through larger foundation grants, statewide sponsorships, public funding opportunities, and major donor cultivation while strengthening grant writing, communications, and resource development capacity through professional support as needed.

- **Phase C – Long-Term Implementation Funding:** Support large-scale trail planning, development, stewardship, restoration, education, and community initiatives through coordinated state and federal funding, multi-partner grant proposals, philanthropic investments, and collaborative funding strategies with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

C. Financial Sustainability

The RGTA will maintain a diversified, multi-year funding portfolio to reduce reliance on any single revenue source and strengthen long-term organizational resilience. The Board of Directors will annually review fundraising priorities, funding prospects, and application schedules to ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan, organizational capacity, partnership opportunities, and project readiness.

As the organization matures, the RGTA will establish financial reserves, sound financial management practices, internal controls, and organizational systems that support responsible stewardship of resources, compliance with nonprofit standards, and long-term organizational sustainability. The Association may engage qualified financial, accounting, auditing, or other professional services as needed to support effective financial management and organizational growth.

VI. Communications & Public Engagement Strategy

The Río Grande Trail Association will implement a coordinated communications and public engagement strategy that strengthens public awareness, builds community support, promotes responsible recreation, and advances implementation of the Strategic Plan. Communications will foster transparency, encourage meaningful public participation, strengthen relationships with governmental agencies and partner organizations, and celebrate the people, landscapes, cultures, and communities that define the Río Grande Trail.

- **Branding and Messaging:** Develop and maintain a consistent visual identity and messaging framework that reflects the Association's Mission, values, and strategic priorities while promoting recognition of the Río Grande Trail throughout New Mexico. Communications will emphasize stewardship, collaboration, respect for cultural and natural resources, community partnerships, and the long-term public benefits of the trail.
- **Digital Communications:** Maintain an accessible and informative website and digital communications program that provides current information regarding trail planning, organizational activities, volunteer opportunities, stewardship initiatives, public meetings, funding opportunities, educational resources, and organizational performance. Digital resources should support transparency, public engagement, and informed participation.
- **Education and Public Information:** Develop educational resources that increase public understanding of the Río Grande Trail, responsible recreation, stewardship practices, outdoor safety, cultural heritage, and environmental conservation. Educational materials may include Good Neighbor Guides, Leave No Trace information, visitor resources, interpretive content, maps, and other materials that encourage responsible trail use and respect for neighboring communities, working landscapes, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, acequia systems, and cultural resources.
- **Storytelling and Interpretation:** Promote the stories, history, cultures, landscapes, and communities that shape the Río Grande Trail through photography, publications, digital media, interpretive materials, and collaborative storytelling initiatives. Whenever appropriate, interpretation will be developed in collaboration with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, historians, cultural organizations, local communities, governmental agencies, and other partner organizations to ensure information is accurate, respectful, and representative of multiple perspectives.
- **Public Awareness and Outreach:** Increase statewide awareness of the Río Grande Trail through coordinated media relations, public presentations, community events, newsletters, publications, social media, and other outreach activities that communicate the recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, economic, and public health benefits of the trail. Outdoor efforts will encourage volunteer participation, stewardship, fundraising, and community engagement while strengthening long-term public support for the Association's Mission.

- **Stakeholder Communications:** Maintain regular communication with the Río Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, partner organizations, landowners, and community stakeholders throughout planning and implementation activities. Communications will emphasize transparency, collaboration, early coordination, and timely sharing of information that supports effective decision-making and long-term partnerships.
- **Organizational Transparency:** Provide regular updates regarding Strategic Plan implementation, Annual Work Plan accomplishments, financial stewardship, organizational performance, partnership initiatives, and Board actions through annual reports, newsletters, public meetings, digital communications, and other appropriate communication channels. The Association will communicate openly about organizational progress, opportunities, and challenges to strengthen public trust and accountability.

VII. Organizational Success Measures

The Board of Directors will monitor progress toward the Strategic Plan through a balanced set of organizational performance measures. Detailed annual performance indicators and targets will be established through the Annual Work Plan and reviewed by the Board each year.

The Board will monitor progress in the following areas:

1. **Trail Progress:** Progress toward planning, designation, stewardship, connectivity, and implementation of the Río Grande Trail.
2. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Strength and diversity of partnerships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos, governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, community organizations, and volunteers.
3. **Stewardship and Volunteer Engagement:** Growth of volunteer participation, stewardship activities, Adopt-a-Segment programs, youth engagement, and community involvement.
4. **Communications and Public Engagement:** Public awareness, stakeholder engagement, educational outreach, digital communications, website and social media engagement, media coverage, and public participation.
5. **Organizational Development and Governance:** Board development, committee effectiveness, policy implementation, organizational compliance, risk management, and governance effectiveness.
6. **Financial Sustainability:** Revenue growth, funding diversification, grants, memberships, donations, sponsorships, financial reserves, and organizational capacity.

7. Community and Economic Benefits: Progress in demonstrating and communicating the trail's economic, recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, and public health benefits to communities throughout New Mexico.

VIII. Supporting Documents

Implementation of this Strategic Plan is supported by governance documents, organizational resources, and implementation tools developed during formation of the Río Grande Trail Association. These supporting documents provide the framework for governance, partnership development, fundraising, performance evaluation, organizational administration, and implementation of the Strategic Plan. Supporting documents may be updated periodically without requiring amendment of this Strategic Plan.

Supporting documents include:

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Governance Report
- Public Engagement Report
- Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)
- Funding Prospect List
- Performance Measurement Framework
- Board recruitment, orientation, and governance materials
- Partner contact directory
- Volunteer and stakeholder database
- GIS resources, maps, and planning materials
- Organizational policies, administrative procedures, and financial management resources
- Other governance documents, organizational records, and implementation resources developed and assembled during formation of the Association

These documents collectively provide the inaugural Board of Directors with the information and tools needed to establish the Association, support effective governance, strengthen partnerships, pursue funding opportunities, monitor organizational performance, and implement the Strategic Plan.

IX. Appendix: Performance Measurement Framework

This appendix identifies illustrative performance indicators that may be used by the Board of Directors to monitor progress toward the Strategic Plan. Specific annual performance targets and reporting measures will be established through the Annual Work Plan and may be revised over time as the organization grows and organizational priorities evolve.

Trail Connectivity and Designation Progress

- **Miles Designated:** Number of trail miles formally approved and added to the statewide system each year.
- **Gap Reduction:** Percentage reduction in critical unmapped or inaccessible corridor bottlenecks.
- **Signage Installed:** Total number of continuous miles successfully brought up to unified wayfinding and safety standards.

Partnership Development

- **Relationship Development:** Number of collaborative partnerships, memoranda of understanding (where appropriate), invitations to participate, joint projects, educational initiatives, or other mutually supported activities developed with Tribal Nations, Pueblos, acequia associations, land grants, and other governmental and community partners.
- **Collaborative Agreements and Joint Initiatives:** Number of active collaborative agreements, memoranda of understanding, and joint initiatives supporting trail planning, stewardship, education, fundraising, and implementation.
- **Cross-Sector Coalitions:** Number of local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and local governments actively participating in regional advisory panels.

Economic and Community Benefits

Measure and communicate, as information becomes available:

- Visitor spending associated with trail communities.
- Volunteer labor value.
- Local business participation.
- Tourism partnerships.

- Public and private investment leveraged.
- Community participation.
- Economic benefits to gateway communities.

Volunteer and Stewardship Participation

- **Stewardship Hours:** Total hours logged annually by volunteer trail crews and segment adopters.
- **Certified Leaders:** Number of community volunteers successfully completing the trail leader safety and maintenance certification.
- **Youth Engagement:** Number of local youth and conservation corps members employed in vocational trail maintenance projects.

Communications and Outreach Metrics

- **Public Awareness and Engagement:** Measure public awareness of the Río Grande Trail through stakeholder engagement, educational outreach, digital communications, website and social media engagement, media coverage, public meeting participation, and other opportunities for community involvement.
- **Communications Reach:** Measure the reach and effectiveness of digital communications, website usage, social media engagement, newsletters, media coverage, and other public information efforts.
- **Community Outreach and Feedback:** Track public meetings, presentations, stakeholder engagement activities, community inquiries, public comments, and other feedback received and addressed through the Association's outreach and engagement efforts.
- **Educational Resource Distribution:** Track the development and distribution of educational resources, including Good Neighbor Guides, interpretive materials, maps, visitor information, and other public education materials that promote responsible recreation and stewardship.

Organizational Growth and Governance Benchmarks

- **Regional Balance:** Achieve diverse geographic representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico across the Board of Directors, advisory groups, and regional committees.

- **Board Development:** Track Board member participation in orientation, governance training, continuing education, and annual Board self-assessments to strengthen leadership capacity and governance effectiveness.
- **Leadership Continuity:** Maintain succession plans for Board officers, committee leadership, and key organizational roles to support long-term organizational resilience.
- **Governance and Policy Development:** Develop, regularly review, and adopt governance, financial, risk management, records management, ethics, conflict of interest, volunteer management, temporary trail closure, and agricultural protection policies that support effective nonprofit operations.

Organizational Sustainability and Capacity Metrics

- **Annual Revenue Raised:** Total annual revenue generated through grants, donations, sponsorships, memberships, events, and other fundraising activities.
- **Active Membership Growth:** Number of active members participating in and supporting the organization each year.
- **Recurring Donor Retention:** Number and percentage of donors providing ongoing annual or recurring financial support.
- **Grant Development Activity:** Number of grant applications submitted annually and the percentage of applications successfully funded.
- **Funding Diversification:** Percentage of revenue derived from multiple funding categories, including grants, donations, sponsorships, memberships, events, and service-based revenue.
- **Financial Resilience:** Maintenance of operating reserves and unrestricted funds sufficient to support organizational stability and long-term sustainability.
- **Organizational Capacity:** Growth in organizational capacity through staff positions, contractor support, and specialized technical expertise as needed to implement strategic priorities.

Attachment M: Governance Report



Río Grande Trail Association

Governance Report

Prepared by:

Fundraising for the Future

In collaboration with:

Dillon Osleger

Under contract with:

The New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)
to support the formation of the Río Grande Trail Association

June 2026

RÍO GRANDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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Executive Summary

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) Governance Report documents the governance framework developed to establish the Rio Grande Trail Association as the independent nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. Prepared under contract with the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), the report summarizes the public engagement process, organizational framework, governance recommendations, Board development strategy, funding readiness, and organizational launch priorities developed during formation of the Association.

The Governance Report is intended to complement—not replace—the Association's Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and other supporting governance documents. Rather than repeating those materials, this report explains how they work together to establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective organizational leadership, sound financial stewardship, strategic planning, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

Together, these documents provide the inaugural Board of Directors with the legal, organizational, and strategic foundation needed to launch the Association, establish effective governance practices, build organizational capacity, and support the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail.

I. Introduction

The Rio Grande Trail is a long-term statewide initiative to establish a continuous recreational trail following the Rio Grande through New Mexico. Advancing this vision requires collaboration among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community partners. Because no single organization has the authority or capacity to complete every aspect of the trail, long-term implementation depends on coordinated leadership, sustained partnerships, and broad public support.

Recognizing this need, the New Mexico Legislature established the Rio Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) to provide statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the trail. The Commission works with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), the Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD), the State

Parks Division (SPD), governmental agencies, and regional partners to support planning and implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

A. Creation of the Rio Grande Trail Association

To complement these public efforts, EMNRD contracted with Fundraising for the Future to facilitate public engagement, evaluate nonprofit organizational models, develop governance recommendations, recruit an inaugural Board of Directors, prepare organizational governing documents, and support establishment of the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA).

The RGTA was formed as an independent New Mexico nonprofit corporation to serve as the primary nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

The Association does not exercise regulatory authority or land management responsibilities. Those responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and land managers. Instead, the RGTA complements these organizations by building partnerships, mobilizing financial and volunteer resources, supporting stewardship and public engagement, increasing public awareness, and strengthening the organizational capacity needed to advance shared trail objectives.

B. Relationship with the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

EMNRD serves as the lead state agency responsible for administration of the Rio Grande Trail initiative and provides staff support to the Rio Grande Trail Commission through the Outdoor Recreation Division and State Parks Division. Through this contract, EMNRD initiated formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association to establish an independent nonprofit organization capable of providing long-term organizational support for the statewide trail initiative.

As an independent nonprofit corporation, the RGTA will collaborate with EMNRD on matters of mutual interest while maintaining its own Board of Directors, governance structure, funding strategy, and organizational priorities.

C. Relationship with the Rio Grande Trail Commission

The Rio Grande Trail Commission provides statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the Rio Grande Trail. The RGTA serves as the Commission's primary nonprofit partner by supporting implementation through fundraising, partnership development, stewardship, communications, education, volunteer engagement, and organizational capacity.

The Association does not replace or direct the Commission's responsibilities, nor does the Commission govern the Association. Rather, the two organizations are intended to maintain a collaborative working relationship that leverages the strengths of each organization while respecting their distinct roles and responsibilities. Coordination will be supported through regular communication, annual planning, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI).

D. Purpose of this Governance Report

This Governance Report documents the governance framework developed to establish the Rio Grande Trail Association and provides guidance for the Association's initial governance and organizational development. The report summarizes the public engagement process, organizational framework, governance structure, Board development, funding readiness, and organizational launch priorities developed during formation of the Association.

The report is intended to be read in conjunction with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and other supporting governance documents. Together, these documents establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective organizational leadership, strategic planning, financial stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

II. Public Engagement Summary

Public engagement was a foundational component of establishing the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA). Through public meetings, stakeholder outreach, questionnaires, interviews, and regional engagement, the project gathered input from governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, outdoor recreation organizations, conservation groups, philanthropic organizations, community leaders, and members of the public throughout

New Mexico. This engagement informed development of the Association's Mission, governance framework, Board development strategy, and Strategic Plan.

A. Public Engagement Process

The public engagement program was designed to ensure the proposed governance framework reflected the diverse interests, communities, and organizations connected to the Rio Grande Trail. Engagement activities included:

- Public meetings to introduce the proposed nonprofit organization, gather community feedback, and identify organizational priorities.
- Stakeholder meetings with governmental agencies, land managers, nonprofit organizations, outdoor recreation organizations, conservation groups, philanthropic organizations, and other implementation partners.
- Statewide questionnaires and individual interviews regarding organizational priorities, governance, partnership opportunities, and public participation.
- Regional outreach throughout northern, central, and southern New Mexico to ensure broad geographic representation and consideration of regional perspectives.

Consistent with the project scope of work, stakeholder engagement included organizations representing outdoor recreation, trail stewardship, conservation, outdoor equity, governmental agencies, special districts, philanthropic organizations, Rio Grande Trail Commissioners, and other stakeholders whose perspectives could inform formation of the Association.

B. Tribal Engagement

Recognizing the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and their unique relationship to the Rio Grande corridor, the project included a dedicated Tribal engagement component separate from general public outreach. Consistent with the project scope, outreach was coordinated with the Rio Grande Trail Commission Tribal Engagement Subcommittee to request meetings with federally recognized Tribal Nations and Pueblos identified by the Contract Manager.

The governance framework and Strategic Plan recognize the importance of building respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while acknowledging that government-to-government consultation responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies.

C. Major Findings

Public engagement demonstrated broad support for establishing an independent nonprofit organization to support the long-term planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. Several consistent themes emerged:

- Strong support for an independent nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations while respecting their distinct authorities and responsibilities.
- Recognition that successful implementation of the Rio Grande Trail will require long-term partnerships, diversified funding, sustained community engagement, and coordinated leadership.
- Broad support for protecting the cultural, historical, agricultural, environmental, and recreational resources of the Rio Grande corridor through responsible stewardship and public education.
- Strong interest in regional implementation approaches that recognize the unique needs and opportunities of northern, central, and southern New Mexico while advancing a shared statewide vision.
- Recognition that the Association should be governed by a diverse Board of Directors reflecting the geographic, cultural, professional, and community interests represented along the Rio Grande Trail corridor.

D. Influence on Organizational Development

Public engagement directly shaped the organizational framework developed for the Rio Grande Trail Association.

Mission and Organizational Purpose

Public input confirmed the importance of creating an organization that complements the work of governmental agencies and land managers through partnership development, stewardship, fundraising, education, public engagement, and organizational support.

Governance Framework

Stakeholders emphasized transparency, accountability, collaboration, broad representation, and clearly defined organizational roles. These priorities informed development of the Association's governance philosophy, organizational boundaries, Board responsibilities, committee structure, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI).

Board Development

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of a geographically and professionally diverse Board of Directors. Recruitment recommendations therefore focused on regional representation, broad professional expertise, leadership development, succession planning, and long-term organizational sustainability.

Strategic Planning

Community priorities directly informed development of the Strategic Plan and its seven Strategic Priorities, establishing a long-term framework for partnership development, stewardship, communications, funding, organizational capacity, and implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

E. Relationship to the Public Engagement Report

This chapter summarizes the public engagement process and its influence on the formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association. Detailed information regarding public meetings, stakeholder outreach, Tribal engagement, questionnaires, interviews, participation, survey results, and supporting documentation is provided in the Rio Grande Trail Association Public Engagement Report, which should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report. Figure 2.1 illustrates how stakeholder input informed development of the Association's Mission, governance framework, Board development strategy, and Strategic Plan.

Figure 2.1 – Public Engagement Process and Organizational Development



III. Organizational Framework

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) was established to serve as the independent nonprofit partner supporting the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail. The organizational framework described in this chapter defines the Association's Mission, organizational role, guiding principles, and relationships with the governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, and partner organizations that collectively advance the Rio Grande Trail throughout New Mexico.

Developed through public engagement, organizational research, and strategic planning, this framework provides the foundation for effective governance, partnership development, organizational growth, and long-term implementation of the Association's Strategic Plan.

The complete organizational framework—including the Mission, Vision, Purpose, Commitment, Strategic Priorities, implementation strategy, and Performance Measurement Framework—is contained in the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan, which should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report.

Mission, Vision, Purpose, and Commitment

The Association's Mission, Vision, Purpose, and Commitment establish the foundation for all organizational activities and guide governance, planning, fundraising, partnerships, and program development.

- **Mission:** The Rio Grande Trail Association supports the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail by building partnerships, engaging communities, mobilizing resources, and advancing a shared vision for a continuous statewide trail that benefits present and future generations.
- **Vision:** The Rio Grande Trail will become a continuous statewide trail that connects New Mexico's communities, landscapes, cultures, and history while supporting outdoor recreation, conservation, education, public health, heritage tourism, economic vitality, and quality of life.
- **Purpose:** The Rio Grande Trail Association exists to provide the nonprofit leadership, organizational capacity, fundraising, volunteer coordination, stewardship, education, communications, and partnership development needed to support the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

- **Commitment:** The Association is committed to advancing the Rio Grande Trail through collaboration, responsible stewardship, public education, and meaningful community engagement. The RGTA seeks to build respectful, long-term relationships with Tribal Nations and Pueblos while working collaboratively with governmental agencies, acequia associations, land grants, land managers, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and communities to help ensure the trail reflects and benefits the diverse people and landscapes it serves.

A. Organizational Role

The Rio Grande Trail Association serves as the primary nonprofit partner supporting implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. While governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and land managers retain responsibility for policy, regulation, land management, permitting, construction, and operations within their respective jurisdictions, the Association provides the organizational continuity, community engagement, and resource development needed to help advance shared trail objectives.

The Association fulfills this role by:

- Building partnerships among governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community organizations.
- Mobilizing financial resources, volunteers, stewardship initiatives, education, communications, and public engagement that support the Rio Grande Trail.
- Supporting planning, stewardship, implementation, and organizational capacity through collaboration with governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Organizational Boundaries

The Rio Grande Trail Association complements—but does not replace—the responsibilities of governmental agencies and land managers. The Association does not exercise regulatory authority, own or manage trail lands, issue permits, or direct governmental decision-making.

Instead, the Association focuses on functions that are most effectively performed by an independent nonprofit organization, including partnership development, fundraising, volunteer engagement, stewardship, education, communications, advocacy, and organizational support. Maintaining these clear organizational boundaries strengthens

collaboration while respecting the legal authorities, responsibilities, and decision-making processes of implementation partners.

B. Organizational Relationships

Successful implementation of the Rio Grande Trail depends upon collaboration among organizations with distinct authorities, responsibilities, and areas of expertise. The Association's role is to strengthen these relationships by providing coordination, organizational capacity, and community support that complements the work of governmental agencies and partner organizations.

Governmental Agencies

The Association will collaborate with federal, state, regional, and local governmental agencies responsible for recreation, conservation, transportation, land management, public safety, and other functions related to the Rio Grande Trail. The Association supports these agencies through partnership development, fundraising, volunteer coordination, stewardship, education, communications, and community engagement.

Rio Grande Trail Commission

The Rio Grande Trail Commission provides statewide leadership and recommendations for advancing the Rio Grande Trail. The Association serves as the Commission's primary nonprofit partner by supporting implementation through organizational capacity, fundraising, stewardship, education, communications, volunteer engagement, and partnership development. Coordination between the Commission and the Association will occur through regular communication, annual planning, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), which clarifies organizational roles and areas of collaboration.

Tribal Nations and Pueblos

The Association recognizes the sovereign status of Tribal Nations and Pueblos and is committed to building respectful, long-term relationships founded on collaboration, mutual respect, and recognition of Tribal sovereignty. Government-to-government consultation responsibilities remain with the appropriate governmental agencies. The Association may support communication, partnership development, education, and collaborative initiatives when invited and appropriate, while respecting the priorities, protocols, and decision-making authority of each sovereign government.

Partner Organizations

The Association will work collaboratively with nonprofit organizations, conservation organizations, outdoor recreation groups, educational institutions, businesses, philanthropic organizations, community organizations, and other implementation

partners whose missions align with advancing the Rio Grande Trail. These partnerships expand organizational capacity, leverage expertise and resources, and strengthen public support for the trail throughout New Mexico.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan

This chapter summarizes the organizational framework established for the Rio Grande Trail Association. The Strategic Plan provides the Association's complete Mission, Vision, Purpose, Commitment, Strategic Priorities, implementation strategy, regional implementation framework, governance philosophy, funding strategy, and Performance Measurement Framework.

Together, the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Public Engagement Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Funding Prospect List, and this Governance Report establish an integrated governance framework that supports effective leadership, responsible stewardship, organizational accountability, and the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

IV. Governance Framework

The governance framework of the Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) establishes the leadership structure, decision-making processes, and accountability systems that guide the Association in fulfilling its Mission. Developed in conjunction with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and Strategic Plan, the governance framework promotes effective organizational leadership, sound financial stewardship, transparent decision-making, and long-term organizational sustainability.

The Articles of Incorporation establish the Association as a New Mexico nonprofit corporation, while the Bylaws define the legal authority, governance structure, and operating procedures of the organization. This chapter summarizes the governance framework established through those documents and explains how governance supports implementation of the Strategic Plan.

A. Governance Philosophy

The Rio Grande Trail Association is committed to governance practices that promote transparency, accountability, ethical leadership, collaboration, and responsible stewardship of organizational resources. The Board of Directors will exercise its fiduciary responsibilities in a manner that advances the Association's Mission, Strategic

Plan, and long-term organizational sustainability while fostering a culture of trust, respect, and informed decision-making.

The Board is committed to:

- **Transparent and accountable governance** by conducting its work ethically, exercising sound fiscal stewardship, and responsibly managing the Association's financial and organizational resources.
- **Collaborative leadership** by working constructively with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, partner organizations, volunteers, and the communities served by the Association.
- **Informed decision-making** by considering the Strategic Plan, organizational performance, community input, partnership opportunities, and available information when establishing priorities and making organizational decisions.
- **Continuous improvement** by monitoring organizational performance, reviewing governance practices, and evaluating the Strategic Plan annually to ensure the Association remains responsive to changing conditions, opportunities, and community needs.

B. Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is the governing body of the Rio Grande Trail Association and is responsible for providing strategic leadership, establishing organizational policy, exercising fiduciary oversight, and ensuring that the Association fulfills its Mission in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws.

The Board establishes the Association's long-term direction by:

- Adopting and periodically updating the Strategic Plan.
- Approving the Annual Work Plan and annual operating budget.
- Monitoring organizational performance and financial health.
- Supporting organizational sustainability through sound governance and resource stewardship.
- Providing oversight of the Association's leadership, programs, and partnerships.

C. Organizational Leadership Structure

Officers

The Association's officers provide leadership for the Board of Directors and support the effective administration of Board business in accordance with the Bylaws. Officers

facilitate Board governance, support organizational oversight, maintain official records, oversee financial reporting, and carry out other responsibilities assigned by the Board.

Committees

The Board may establish standing committees, ad hoc committees, and subject matter working groups to assist in carrying out its governance responsibilities and advancing implementation of the Strategic Plan. Committees provide recommendations to the Board, assist with planning and organizational oversight, and engage volunteers and subject matter experts in support of the Association's work.

Advisory Board and Regional Advisory Groups

The governance framework encourages broad participation through advisory bodies that provide technical expertise, regional perspectives, and community input. Advisory Board members and regional advisory groups support the Association by offering specialized knowledge, strengthening regional relationships, and expanding opportunities for stakeholder engagement throughout northern, central, and southern New Mexico.

These advisory bodies serve in an advisory capacity and do not exercise governance authority unless specifically authorized by the Board.

D. Decision-Making and Organizational Coordination

The Board of Directors is responsible for organizational decision-making and exercises its authority in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and adopted governance policies. Decisions should be guided by the Association's Mission, Strategic Plan, fiduciary responsibilities, organizational priorities, and available information.

To support effective collaboration, the Association will use governance policies, committee charters, Annual Work Plans, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) to clarify organizational roles, decision-making authority, communication pathways, and coordination among the Board of Directors, committees, staff, contractors, volunteers, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, and partner organizations.

E. Financial Stewardship

The Board of Directors is responsible for safeguarding the Association's financial resources and ensuring sound financial management. Responsibilities include approving annual budgets, monitoring financial performance, overseeing financial

reporting, supporting diversified resource development, and ensuring compliance with applicable legal and nonprofit financial requirements.

As organizational capacity grows, the Board may engage qualified accounting, bookkeeping, auditing, legal, and financial professionals to support these responsibilities while retaining overall fiduciary oversight.

F. Ethical Governance

The Association is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct and public accountability. Members of the Board of Directors, officers, committee members, and others acting on behalf of the Association are expected to conduct organizational business in the best interests of the Association and to disclose actual or potential conflicts of interest in accordance with the Bylaws and organizational policies.

The Board will periodically review governance practices and adopt additional policies, as appropriate, to support ethical leadership, organizational integrity, and public trust.

G. Organizational Accountability

Accountability is achieved through regular governance review, financial oversight, strategic planning, and performance evaluation. The Board will monitor organizational performance through:

- Annual organizational planning and budgeting.
- Regular financial reporting.
- Implementation of the Performance Measurement Framework.
- Annual review of the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.
- Compliance with applicable legal, financial, and reporting requirements.
- Periodic review of governance policies and organizational practices.

These practices support continuous organizational improvement and help ensure that the Association remains responsive to its Mission, partners, and the communities it serves.

H. Relationship to the Governing Documents

The governance framework described in this chapter is implemented through the Association's governing documents. The Articles of Incorporation establish the legal

corporation, the Bylaws define the governance structure and organizational procedures, the Strategic Plan establishes long-term direction and priorities, and the Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) clarifies organizational roles and coordination with implementation partners.

Together, these documents provide the governance framework that enables the Board of Directors to lead the Association effectively while supporting long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

V. Board Development

A strong and representative Board of Directors is essential to the long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail Association. As part of the Association's formation, the project included development of a Board recruitment strategy, identification of prospective Board members, establishment of governance recommendations, and creation of organizational documents to support the Board's transition from formation to active governance.

The Board development process was designed to establish an initial governing body capable of providing strategic leadership, fiduciary oversight, and long-term organizational stewardship while reflecting the geographic, cultural, and professional diversity of the Rio Grande Trail corridor.

A. Board Composition

The Bylaws establish the composition, authority, terms of office, and governance responsibilities of the Board of Directors. Recruitment efforts sought to establish a Board with diverse geographic representation and a broad range of professional experience to support the Association's Mission and long-term organizational sustainability.

Board recruitment sought individuals with experience in areas such as:

- Outdoor recreation and trail development
- Conservation and natural resource management
- Nonprofit leadership and governance
- Fundraising and philanthropy
- Finance and accounting
- Communications and public engagement
- Public administration and government relations

- Tribal relations and cultural resources
- Community and economic development
- Legal, business, and organizational leadership

As the Association grows, future recruitment should continue to strengthen the diversity of perspectives, experience, and regional representation needed to support statewide implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

B. Board Recruitment and Selection

The Board recruitment process was designed to identify individuals with demonstrated leadership, professional expertise, and a commitment to advancing the Mission of the Rio Grande Trail Association. Recruitment emphasized collaboration, geographic representation, and the diverse skills needed to support the Association's long-term governance and organizational sustainability.

The Association's initial founding Board consisted of three individuals—one representing each of New Mexico's northern, central, and southern regions—who were recommended by members of the Rio Grande Trail Commission's Nonprofit Organization Subcommittee to guide formation of the Association.

Additional prospective Board members were identified through the public engagement process, stakeholder outreach, professional networks, and recommendations from organizations and individuals involved in development of the Rio Grande Trail. Following evaluation of prospective candidates, 12 invitation letters were extended to individuals throughout New Mexico with the goal of establishing a geographically representative Board with broad professional expertise.

Six invitees, together with the three founding Board members, participated in the Association's four strategic planning meetings, providing input on the organization's Mission, governance framework, and Strategic Plan. Of the six invited participants, five accepted appointments to serve on the inaugural Board of Directors, while one elected to remain involved in an advisory capacity. The remaining invitees either declined or did not respond to the invitation.

The Board candidate list, recruitment materials, and invitation process developed during the organizational formation process provide a foundation for future Board recruitment as vacancies occur and organizational needs evolve. Future recruitment should continue to strengthen geographic representation, professional diversity, and the leadership capacity needed to support implementation of the Strategic Plan.

C. Organizational Leadership Development

The Association's long-term effectiveness depends upon continuing investment in Board leadership and governance capacity. Beyond recruiting qualified Board members, the Association should provide ongoing orientation, governance education, and leadership development that supports informed decision-making and responsible stewardship of organizational resources.

Board development activities should include:

- Orientation for new Board members.
- Ongoing governance and fiduciary training.
- Review of organizational governance documents.
- Strategic planning participation.
- Committee leadership development.
- Succession planning for officers and committee leadership.
- Periodic Board self-assessment and governance evaluation.

These practices support continuity, strengthen organizational knowledge, and prepare future leaders as the Association grows.

D. Regional Representation

Because the Rio Grande Trail extends through diverse landscapes and communities across New Mexico, effective governance depends on broad geographic representation and meaningful engagement throughout the trail corridor.

The Association's governance framework encourages representation from northern, central, and southern New Mexico while recognizing the importance of diverse cultural, professional, and community perspectives. As future Board vacancies occur, recruitment efforts should continue to strengthen regional representation and organizational capacity consistent with the Strategic Plan.

The inaugural Board of Directors consists of eight members representing the geographic diversity of the Rio Grande Trail corridor, including one representative from a Tribal Nation, three members from northern New Mexico, one member from central New Mexico, and three members from southern New Mexico. As the Association evolves, future recruitment should continue to strengthen geographic representation while expanding the Board's professional expertise, cultural perspectives, and leadership capacity.

E. Board Expertise

The inaugural Board of Directors brings together a broad range of professional expertise and community perspectives that support the Association's Mission and long-term organizational sustainability. Collectively, Board members provide experience in Tribal leadership and cultural knowledge; outdoor recreation, trail planning, and trail infrastructure design; land management and conservation; tourism and economic development; nonprofit governance and Board service; fundraising, philanthropy, grant writing, and nonprofit administration; finance, accounting, and business management; communications, marketing, and public outreach; community engagement; Geographic Information Systems (GIS); legal services; and education and interpretation.

This combination of expertise provides the Association with a strong foundation for governance, strategic planning, partnership development, fundraising, stewardship, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

F. Board Transition and Organizational Readiness

The work completed during formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association provides the inaugural Board with a comprehensive governance framework and supporting organizational documents necessary to begin governing the Association immediately.

The Board's initial responsibilities are to adopt these governance documents, establish annual organizational priorities, implement the Strategic Plan, oversee financial management, strengthen partnerships, and guide the Association through its first years of operation.

G. Relationship to the Strategic Plan and Bylaws

The Strategic Plan establishes the Association's long-term governance objectives, leadership development priorities, and organizational capacity goals, while the Bylaws define the legal authority, composition, responsibilities, and procedures of the Board of Directors.

This chapter summarizes the Board development process undertaken during formation of the Association and provides recommendations for continued Board development and organizational leadership as the Association evolves.

VI. Funding Readiness

The long-term success of the RGTA depends upon a diversified funding strategy that supports organizational operations while advancing implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. During formation of the Association, a comprehensive funding prospecting effort identified public, philanthropic, corporate, and community funding opportunities aligned with the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

A. Funding Strategy

The RGTA will pursue a diversified resource development strategy that combines public funding, private philanthropy, corporate partnerships, memberships, sponsorships, individual giving, and community fundraising. This approach recognizes that implementation of a statewide trail initiative will require multiple complementary revenue sources that support both organizational sustainability and trail-related projects.

Funding priorities will evolve as the Association grows from a Board-led startup organization to a professionally staffed nonprofit capable of supporting statewide trail implementation, stewardship, education, communications, and partnership development. Early fundraising efforts will emphasize organizational capacity, relationship development, and startup funding while establishing the systems necessary to pursue larger public and philanthropic investments over time.

The Association's comprehensive funding strategy is described in the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan.

B. Funding Prospect Development

A comprehensive Funding Prospect List was developed during the organizational formation process to identify funding opportunities aligned with the Association's Mission, organizational capacity, and anticipated program areas. Each opportunity was evaluated for organizational fit, eligibility, competitiveness, funding potential, timing, and strategic value. The Funding Prospect List is intended to serve as a living resource that will be reviewed and updated regularly as organizational priorities and funding opportunities evolve.

C. Public Funding

Public funding will play an important role in supporting both organizational development and long-term trail implementation. The prospecting effort identified numerous federal, state, and local funding opportunities that align with the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

Priority public funding opportunities include state legislative appropriations, outdoor recreation and trail infrastructure grants, tourism and destination development programs, environmental stewardship initiatives, and federal technical assistance programs. Several opportunities encourage collaborative proposals involving governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and regional partners, reinforcing the importance of strong partnerships throughout implementation.

As organizational capacity grows, the Association will work with governmental agencies and partner organizations, as appropriate, to pursue funding opportunities that support trail planning, stewardship, education, public access, conservation, interpretation, and community engagement.

D. Foundation Funding

The prospecting effort identified numerous private and community foundations whose funding priorities closely align with the Association's work. These organizations support initiatives related to outdoor recreation, conservation, environmental stewardship, rural community development, cultural preservation, organizational capacity building, education, public access, and healthy communities.

Foundation funding will be particularly important during the Association's early years by providing organizational capacity funding, strategic planning support, community engagement resources, stewardship programming, and pilot project funding. As the Association establishes a successful funding history and demonstrates organizational capacity, larger foundation partnerships may support multi-year initiatives and regional implementation projects.

E. Corporate Partnerships and Sponsorships

Corporate partnerships provide opportunities to expand both financial support and community engagement. The funding prospect list identifies corporations and corporate giving programs with demonstrated interests in outdoor recreation, trail stewardship, conservation, tourism, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities.

The Association will seek sponsorships and collaborative partnerships that support volunteer stewardship activities, educational programs, trail amenities, community

events, public awareness initiatives, and statewide outreach. Corporate partnerships may also provide in-kind contributions, professional services, equipment, volunteer participation, and other resources that strengthen organizational capacity.

F. Memberships and Individual Giving

A statewide membership and individual giving program will provide recurring unrestricted revenue while strengthening public ownership and long-term support for the Rio Grande Trail. Membership opportunities will allow individuals, families, businesses, and organizations to participate directly in advancing the Association's Mission through annual memberships, recurring donations, volunteer participation, and community stewardship activities.

Individual giving, major donor cultivation, planned giving, and annual fundraising campaigns will complement grant funding by providing flexible financial resources that support organizational operations and strategic priorities.

G. Annual Fundraising Planning

The Board of Directors will oversee development of an annual fundraising strategy that aligns resource development activities with the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan. The annual fundraising process will include:

- Review and update of the Funding Prospect List.
- Identification of annual fundraising priorities and revenue goals.
- Development of an annual grants calendar.
- Coordination of public funding and legislative opportunities.
- Board participation in donor cultivation and relationship development.
- Evaluation of funding performance and resource development outcomes.

This annual planning process will enable the Association to respond to emerging opportunities while maintaining a balanced and diversified funding portfolio.

H. Relationship to the Strategic Plan

Funding is an enabling strategy that supports implementation of every Strategic Priority. The Strategic Plan, Funding Prospect List, Annual Work Plan, and annual fundraising calendar collectively provide the framework for coordinating resource development with organizational priorities, project readiness, partnership opportunities, and available organizational capacity.

I. Relationship to the Funding Prospect List

This chapter summarizes the Association's overall funding readiness and resource development strategy. Detailed information regarding prospective funders, application priorities, eligibility requirements, recommended funding levels, application timelines, and funding strategies is provided in the Rio Grande Trail Association Funding Prospect List, which serves as a working resource for the Board of Directors and future staff in implementing the Association's annual fundraising program.

As part of the organizational formation process, 71 potential public and private funding opportunities were identified to support organizational capacity, trail planning, stewardship, education, community engagement, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail. The prospect list is intended to be a living resource that will be reviewed and updated annually as organizational priorities, funding opportunities, and project readiness evolve.

Examples of funding opportunities identified include:

- **Public Funding & Technical Assistance:** State appropriations, Trails+, Destination Forward, River Stewardship Program, National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program
- **Private Foundations:** McCune Foundation, LOR Foundation, Taos Community Foundation, Catena Foundation, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- **Corporate Giving:** New Belgium Brewing, onX, PNM Foundation
- **National Trail & Recreation Organizations:** Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA)
- **Membership & Individual Giving:** Annual membership program, individual donors, major gifts, recurring giving
- **Community & Regional Partnerships:** Community fundraising events, sponsorships, volunteer stewardship, and in-kind contributions

VII. Organizational Launch Priorities

The Organizational Launch Priorities provide the inaugural Board with the immediate governance, administrative, financial, and organizational actions needed to transition the Association from formation to implementation.

A. Governance and Organizational Leadership

The Board's first responsibility is to establish the governance framework that will guide the Association's operations. Initial governance activities include organizing the Board, electing officers, establishing committees, adopting governance practices, and confirming organizational priorities.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt the Strategic Plan as the Association's primary long-range planning document.
- Elect officers in accordance with the Bylaws.
- Establish Board committees and appoint committee members and committee leadership.
- Approve the Annual Work Plan and Board calendar.
- Review the Governance Report, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), and other foundational governance documents.
- Establish regular Board meeting schedules and governance procedures.

B. Organizational Administration

The Association must establish the administrative systems necessary to support nonprofit operations and maintain compliance with applicable legal and financial requirements.

Priority actions include:

- Complete required organizational filings with the State of New Mexico and other applicable regulatory agencies.
- Establish organizational banking relationships and financial accounts.
- Implement accounting, financial management, and internal control systems.
- Obtain appropriate organizational insurance coverage.
- Establish records management, document retention, and administrative procedures.
- Develop technology, communications, donor management, and other organizational systems necessary to support operations.

C. Financial Management and Resource Development

Establishing sustainable funding is essential to the Association's long-term success. During its first year, the Board should focus on building the organizational capacity necessary to support future fundraising while initiating resource development activities consistent with the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt an annual fundraising strategy and resource development goals.
- Review and prioritize the Funding Prospect List.
- Develop an annual grants calendar and funding schedule.
- Pursue startup funding, memberships, sponsorships, donations, and initial grant opportunities.
- Develop relationships with public agencies, foundations, corporate partners, and individual donors.
- Coordinate legislative and public funding opportunities, as appropriate.

D. Partnerships and Organizational Development

The Association's success depends upon maintaining strong working relationships with governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, volunteers, and community partners.

During its first year, the Board should focus on strengthening organizational relationships while establishing the Association as the primary nonprofit partner supporting the Rio Grande Trail.

Priority actions include:

- Establish regular coordination with the Rio Grande Trail Commission.
- Strengthen relationships with governmental agencies and partner organizations.
- Support development of regional partnerships and volunteer networks.
- Continue Board recruitment and succession planning as organizational needs evolve.
- Determine staffing priorities and engage employees, contractors, consultants, or volunteers as organizational capacity and financial resources allow.

E. Strategic Implementation

The Strategic Plan establishes the Association's long-term direction; however, successful implementation depends upon translating those priorities into annual organizational objectives and measurable actions.

The Board should establish an annual planning process that aligns organizational priorities, funding activities, committee work, and performance evaluation with the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Adopt the Annual Work Plan.
- Establish organizational performance measures and annual reporting procedures.
- Monitor implementation of Strategic Priorities.
- Review progress toward organizational goals throughout the year.
- Review and update the Strategic Plan annually based on organizational performance, funding opportunities, community input, and emerging priorities.

F. Legislative and Public Funding Coordination

The Association will play an important role in supporting public investment in the Rio Grande Trail by identifying funding opportunities, developing relationships with legislators and governmental agencies, and coordinating public funding strategies.

During its first year, the Board should establish an annual legislative and public funding strategy that supports the Association's Mission and Strategic Priorities.

Priority actions include:

- Identify legislative and public funding priorities.
- Coordinate funding strategies with the Rio Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, and partner organizations, as appropriate.
- Support development of funding requests, legislative materials, and public funding initiatives.
- Review legislative priorities annually as part of the Association's planning process.

G. Performance Measurement & Continuous Improvement

The Board is responsible for monitoring organizational performance and ensuring the Association continues to operate effectively and in furtherance of its Mission.

Performance evaluation should be integrated into the Association's annual planning cycle through regular review of organizational accomplishments, financial performance, fundraising outcomes, partnership development, and implementation of the Strategic Plan.

Priority actions include:

- Implement the Performance Measurement Framework.

- Monitor progress toward Strategic Plan goals.
- Prepare and publish an Annual Report.
- Conduct annual Board self-assessments and governance reviews.
- Review organizational priorities and adjust Annual Work Plans as conditions and opportunities evolve.

H. Relationship to the Strategic Plan

This chapter summarizes the initial organizational priorities that will guide the Rio Grande Trail Association during its transition from formation to active implementation. The detailed implementation schedule, organizational milestones, and long-term priorities are contained in the Implementation Timeline and Board Work Plan of the Rio Grande Trail Association Strategic Plan.

Together, the Governance Report, Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Funding Prospect List, Board Calendar, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) provide the governance and organizational framework needed to support the successful launch and long-term sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

VIII. Governance Documents

The Rio Grande Trail Association (RGTA) governance framework consists of a coordinated set of legal, governance, planning, and management documents developed during the Association's formation. Each document serves a distinct purpose while collectively establishing the legal authority, organizational structure, strategic direction, governance practices, implementation framework, and accountability systems necessary to support the Association's Mission and long-term sustainability.

Rather than functioning as independent documents, these resources are intended to operate as an integrated governance system that provides the Board of Directors with the tools needed to govern the Association, establish organizational priorities, monitor performance, and support implementation of the Strategic Plan.

A. Governance Framework Documents

The following governance documents collectively establish the organizational foundation of the Rio Grande Trail Association.

- **Articles of Incorporation:** Establishes the Rio Grande Trail Association as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of New Mexico and defines its legal existence and charitable purpose.
- **Bylaws:** Establishes the Association's governance structure by defining the authority of the Board of Directors, officers, committees, fiduciary responsibilities, and organizational procedures.
- **Strategic Plan:** Establishes the Association's Mission, Vision, Strategic Priorities, implementation framework, funding strategy, governance philosophy, and long-term organizational direction.
- **Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI):** Outlines organizational roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority, communication pathways, and coordination among the Association and its implementation partners.
- **Annual Work Plan:** Translates the Strategic Plan into annual priorities, projects, responsibilities, and implementation activities.
- **Board Calendar:** Establishes the annual governance cycle and recurring Board responsibilities, including strategic planning, budgeting, fundraising oversight, governance activities, and organizational reporting.
- **Performance Measurement Framework:** Outlines ways to monitor organizational performance, evaluate implementation of the Strategic Plan, and support continuous organizational improvement through measurable outcomes.

B. Integrated Governance System

Together, these documents provide a comprehensive governance framework that enables the Board of Directors to govern the Association effectively while maintaining alignment between long-term strategic priorities and day-to-day organizational operations.

The governance framework functions as a continuous planning and accountability cycle:

- The **Articles of Incorporation** establish the Association's legal authority.
- The **Bylaws** define how the Association is governed.
- The **Strategic Plan** establishes long-term organizational direction.
- The **Annual Work Plan** translates strategic priorities into annual implementation activities.
- The **Board Calendar** organizes recurring governance responsibilities throughout the year.
- The **Performance Measurement Framework** monitors progress and informs organizational decision-making.

- The **Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)** supports coordination by clarifying organizational roles and responsibilities among the Association and its implementation partners.

Together, these documents support effective governance, financial stewardship, strategic planning, organizational accountability, and long-term implementation of the Rio Grande Trail.

C. Maintaining the Governance Framework

The governance framework is intended to evolve as the Association grows. The Board of Directors should periodically review each governance document to ensure it remains consistent with the Association's Mission, organizational priorities, legal requirements, and evolving organizational capacity.

While the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws establish the Association's legal and governance foundation, the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Board Calendar, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), and Performance Measurement Framework should be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect organizational growth, implementation progress, and emerging opportunities.

Collectively, these documents provide the governance infrastructure necessary to support responsible organizational leadership, effective decision-making, and the long-term sustainability of both the Rio Grande Trail Association and the Rio Grande Trail.

IX. Conclusion

The Rio Grande Trail Association has been established with the governance framework, organizational structure, strategic direction, and foundational resources necessary to begin operations as the nonprofit partner supporting the Rio Grande Trail. The Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Strategic Plan, Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI), Public Engagement Report, Funding Prospect List, Board Calendar, Annual Work Plan, and Performance Measurement Framework collectively provide the legal, organizational, and strategic foundation for the Association's long-term success.

As the Association grows, the Board of Directors should continue refining these governance tools through annual planning, regular evaluation, and ongoing collaboration with the Rio Grande Trail Commission, governmental agencies, Tribal Nations and Pueblos, local governments, land managers, nonprofit organizations,

businesses, volunteers, and community partners. Together, these documents provide a flexible governance framework capable of supporting the long-term planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail.

Recommendations

Based on the work completed during formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association, the following actions are recommended for the inaugural Board of Directors:

1. Adopt the governance documents that establish the Association's legal, strategic, and organizational framework.
2. Review and update the Strategic Plan, Annual Work Plan, Board Calendar, Performance Measurement Framework, and Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI) through the Association's annual planning process.
3. Continue strengthening Board leadership, organizational capacity, and long-term sustainability through ongoing governance education, succession planning, and resource development.

X. Supporting Governance Documents

The following documents were prepared as part of formation of the Rio Grande Trail Association and should be read in conjunction with this Governance Report:

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Strategic Plan
- Public Engagement Report
- Board Qualifications
- Board Recruitment Materials (if applicable)
- Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)
- Board Calendar
- Funding Prospect List

***Attachment N: Fundraising for the Future Presentation to RGTC
(July 6, 2026)***



Rio Grande Trail Association

EMNRD Contract Deliverables

Governance Framework & Strategic Plan

Presentation to the Rio Grande Trail Commission



Purpose of Today's Presentation

- Present completed EMNRD contract deliverables
- Introduce the Rio Grande Trail Association
- Review Governance Report and Strategic Plan
- Discuss next steps toward organizational launch
- Begin Commission review and comment period

Following today's presentation, Commissioners will receive the draft Governance Report and Strategic Plan for review and comment prior to Board adoption.

Completed Contract Phases

B

			
Initiate & Plan Background materials reviewed and work plan launched.	Engage Public Conducted 9-county listening tour, digital surveys, and stakeholder sessions.	Form NPO & Seat Board Established mission & purpose, seating process, and facilitated Board meetings.	Strategic Plan & Governance Report Developed Governance Report and 2026–2030 Strategic Plan.

Completed EMNRD Contract Deliverables

B

- ✓ Public Engagement Report
- ✓ Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws & NPO Filings
- ✓ Board Recruitment, Form NPO & Seat Board
- ✓ Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI)
- ✓ Funding Prospect List
- ✓ Partner Contact Directory
- ✓ Volunteer & Stakeholder Database
- ✓ Governance Report & Strategic Plan
- ✓ Performance Measurement Framework
- ✓ Supporting Governance Documents & Resources

E

SL

Inaugural Board of Directors

The inaugural Board was intentionally assembled to provide statewide geographic representation and professional expertise to guide the Rio Grande Trail Association.

Geographic Representation

- Northern New Mexico (3)
- Central New Mexico (1)
- Southern New Mexico (3)
- Tribal Nation Representative (1)

Collective Expertise

- Nonprofit leadership & governance
- Outdoor recreation & trail development
- Conservation & land management
- Fundraising & philanthropy
- Finance & business management
- Communications & public engagement
- Tribal leadership & cultural resources
- Tourism & economic development
- GIS, education & interpretation

Board: Loren Bell (President), Deborah Torres (Vice President), Katrina Arndt (Secretary), Scott Kaiser (Treasurer), Richard Virtue, Brooks Fitzsimmons, Matt Mason, Kimberly Calkins

Public Engagement Summary

120+

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

- **Multi-County Representation:** Direct feedback from Dona Ana (36.7o/o), Middle Rio Grande (21.7%), and Northern/Santa Fe communities (24.2°/o).
- **Communication Lessons Learned:** Future outreach must de-emphasize pure digital channels to better include rural, offline communities and historical land-grant families.
- **Agricultural Protections:** General public notices left a messaging gap regarding property rights, underscoring the need for proactive "Good Neighbor" codes.

Key themes informing the Strategic Plan: statewide partnerships, stewardship, funding, storytelling, and regional representation.

Statewide Perspective

D



Northern Zone

Taos, Rio Arriba, Santa Fe

Complex land matrices. Focus: Sovereign Pueblo agreements, private land grants, and rugged trail design.



Central Zone

Sandoval, Bernalillo,

Valencia Populated riparian Bosque. Focus: Linking existing urban paths, erosion control, and commuter integration.



Southern Zone

Socorro, Sierra, Dona Ana

Desert corridors. Focus: Conservation equity, ease-of-access points, and economic tourism for colonias.

Governance Report Overview

B

The Governance Report provides the Board with the organizational framework to launch and govern the Association by addressing:

Topic	Purpose
• Organizational Framework	• Defines mission, role, and partner relationships
• Governance Framework	• Establishes leadership, decision-making, and accountability
• Board Development	• Builds statewide leadership capacity
• Funding Readiness	• Prepares for public and private fundraising
• Organizational Launch	• Identifies first-year priorities
• Governance Documents	• Integrates bylaws, strategic plan, RACI, performance measures, and related tools

Rio Grande Trail Association

RGTA supports trail planning and implementation through partnerships, fundraising, community engagement, and organizational capacity, while governmental agencies retain authority for planning decisions, permitting, land management, and construction.

What RGTA Does

- Fundraising
- Partnerships
- Support trail planning and implementation
- Stewardship
- Volunteer coordination
- Communications
- Education
- Capacity building

What RGTA Does Not Do

- Regulate land use
- Approve or direct trail alignments
- Exercise permitting or land management authority
- Replace government agencies
- Conduct government-to-government consultation
- Construct or own public trail infrastructure

Rio Grande Trail Association

D

Role of the Association

- Support & guide trail planning and implementation
- Build partnerships and community engagement
- Pursue public and private funding
- Support stewardship, volunteers, education, and communications
- Build organizational capacity

Role of Government Partners

Government agencies continue to lead:

- Planning decisions and trail alignment approvals
- Land management
- Environmental review and permitting
- Trail designation
- Construction and maintenance of public infrastructure

Strategic Plan Framework

The 2026–2030 Strategic Plan is organized around seven strategic priorities that guide the Association's governance, partnerships, fundraising, communications, stewardship, and support for implementation of the Río Grande Trail.

1. Community Engagement & Partnerships
2. Funding & Organizational Sustainability
3. Trail Completion & Connectivity
4. Stewardship & Volunteer Engagement
5. Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity
6. Communications & Public Awareness
7. Governance & Organizational Development

These priorities are implemented through annual work plans, budgets, and performance measures, with organizational growth occurring in phases as funding and capacity allow.

Strategic Plan Implementation Roadmap



Strategic Implementation Timeline (2026–2030)

B

Year 0.5 (2026): Establish the Organization

Goal: Build the governance, administrative, and financial foundation

- Board & governance
- Annual Work Plan
- Initial fundraising
- Partner coordination
- Organizational Launch
 - Banking, accounting, website transition, insurance, and operational startup

Strategic Implementation Timeline (2026–2030)

B

Year 1 (2027): Build Organizational Capacity

Goal: Implement the Strategic Plan and strengthen organizational systems.

- Governance & committees
- Fundraising & membership
- Partnerships
- Volunteer programs
- Performance reporting

Strategic Implementation Timeline (2026–2030)

B

Year 2 (2028): Expand Programs & Partnerships

Goal: Increase statewide capacity and program delivery.

- Regional leadership
- Organizational growth
- Diversified funding
- Education & outreach
- Priority trail initiatives

Strategic Implementation Timeline (2026–2030)

B

Years 3–4 (2029–2030): Sustain & Institutionalize

Goal: Establish the RGTA as the long-term nonprofit partner.

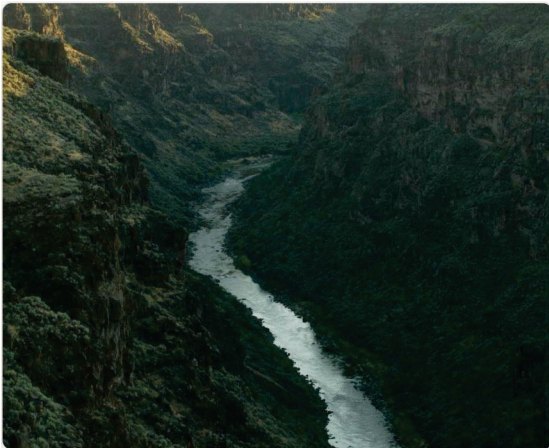
- Financial sustainability
- Board succession
- Long-term partnerships
- Statewide leadership
- Strategic Plan update

Contract Complete

B

- Public engagement completed
- Governance framework completed
- Strategic Plan completed
- Inaugural Board seated
- Organization prepared for Board adoption and organizational launch

Next Steps



-
- Distribute draft Governance Report and Strategic Plan for Commission review
 - Commission review and comment period (July 6–9)
 - Incorporate Commission comments (July 10–13)
 - Present final documents to the Board for adoption
 - Conduct organizational launch activities
 - Begin phased implementation of the Strategic Plan

Questions & Commission Discussion, Public Comment

Attachment O: Rio Grande Trail Association Presentation





Hello!

Introducing the Rio Grande
Trail Association

RGTA Board Introduction



Loren Bell(President)
*Enchanted Circle Trails
(Taos)*



Deborah Torres(Vice
President) - *Passport to
Indian Country (Santa Fe)*



Katrina Arndt
(Secretary) - *Planner /
Dekker (ABQ)*

Brooks
Fitzsimmons

Matt
Mason

Richard
Virtue

Scott
Kaiser

RGTA Board Framework

- Inaugural Board established with 8 members
- Representation included 1 Tribal Nation representative
- 3 members from northern New Mexico
- 1 member from central New Mexico
- 3 members from southern New Mexico
- Board expertise spans outdoor recreation, trail planning, conservation, nonprofit governance, fundraising, finance, communications, community engagement, Geographic Information Systems, legal services, education, tourism, and economic development

RGTA Overview

- **Organization Type** Established as a public benefit nonprofit corporation under the New Mexico Nonprofit Corporation Act to support the planning, development, stewardship, and promotion of the Rio Grande Trail
- **Core Purpose** Serves as the dedicated nonprofit partner helping build organizational capacity, financial resources, volunteer engagement, and public support across jurisdictions
- **Key Partnerships** Operates alongside the Rio Grande Trail Commission (RGTC), state agencies like the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) and Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD), Tribal Nations, and local communities

Mission & LongTerm Vision

- **Mission Statement** The Rio Grande Trail Association supports the planning, development, stewardship, promotion, and long sustainability of the Rio Grande Trail for the benefit of New Mexico's communities, landscapes, and cultures
- **LongTerm Vision** Envisions a continuous 500-mile trail corridor celebrating New Mexico's diverse heritage, protecting river ecology, enhancing outdoor recreation access, and strengthening local economies
- **Key Statewide Outcomes** Focuses on establishing an officially accepted corridor blueprint, building trusted relationships, fostering volunteer stewardship, and delivering economic benefits to gateway communities

RGTA Role

What RGTA Does:

- Convenes partners and supports cross-jurisdictional collaboration
- Raises private, philanthropic, and public grant funding
- Organizes authorized volunteer stewardship and trail maintenance initiatives
- Develops educational materials, public communications, and consistent trail identity resources

What RGTA Does NOT Do:

- Does not exercise regulatory or land management authority over public, private, or sovereign lands
- Does not independently designate trail routes or authorize public land access
- Does not conduct formal government-to-government tribal consultation (which remains with appropriate governmental entities)
- Does not replace statutory responsibilities of the Rio Grande Trail Commission, state agencies, or sovereign governments

Strategic Priorities & Growth Roadmap

Seven Strategic Priorities:

- Community Engagement & Partnerships
- Funding & Organizational Sustainability
- Trail Completion & Connectivity
- Stewardship & Volunteer Engagement
- Interpretation, Education & Trail Identity
- Communications & Public Awareness
- Governance & Organizational Development

Phased Implementation Roadmap:

- Phase A (Startup 2025-2027): Establish board governance, bank accounts, internal controls, and initial grant pursuits
- Phase B (Growth 2027-2029): Expand partnerships, volunteer stewardship programs and contract specialized technical expertise
- Phase C (Maturity 2030+): Maintain long-term statewide stewardship, diversified funding portfolios, and professional capacity

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- Phase C (Maturity 2030+): Maintain long-term statewide stewardship, diversified funding portfolios, and professional capacity

Nearterm Goals

Fundraising Committee

- Members: Katrina Arndt, Loren Bell
- Responsibilities: Tracking RFPs, pursuing grant opportunities, and developing the overall fundraising strategy

Administration & Governance Committee

- Members: Scott Kaiser, Brooks Fitzsimmons
- Responsibilities: Establishing the bank account, coordinating the website transfer, drafting the Executive Director job description and salary range, and refining organizational goals and metrics

Legislative & Public Relations Committee

- Members: Deborah Torres, Richard Virtue
- Responsibilities: Managing legislative outreach, developing PR messaging, and coordinating legislative meetings with key leaders

Tribal & Community Engagement Committee

- Members: Matt Mason, Deborah Torres
- Responsibilities: Strengthening relationships with Tribal Nations and Land Grant communities, conducting outreach, and fostering grassroots engagement

Attachment P: Rio Grande Trail FY2026 Report





Río Grande Trail

FY2026 REPORT

JUNE 2026



Proposed Rio Grande Trail river crossing at the John Dunn Bridge near Taos, NM

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OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Fiscal Year (FY)26 (July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026) was a productive year for the Rio Grande Trail (RGT). Over 10 miles of existing trail were designated. Progress towards the designation of 100+ miles continued through numerous meetings with land managers, tribes and pueblos, local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and community organizations. In addition to the three Rio Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) meetings that were held in FY26, there were other significant ongoing efforts to engage the public.



Community Gravel Bike Ride event prior to the April 10, 2026 RGT Commission Meeting, Las Cruces, NM

The primary goal of our work on the RGT is to designate RGT segments. The 2018 RGT Master Plan identified alignments and described segments in relation to their readiness for designation. **These are important distinctions when evaluating each segment to understand the relative ease or difficulty of designation. Throughout the report, we describe and categorize trail segments as follows:**

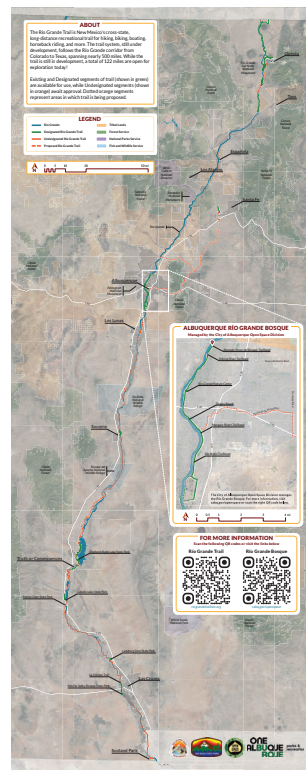
- > **Designated:** Existing trails or infrastructure that have been designated as the RGT.
- > **Undesignated:** Existing trails or infrastructure that could be utilized as the trail that have not been designated as the RGT.
- > **Proposed:** This term refers to trail segments that do not exist. Some of these trail segments have begun the planning process, while others are still conceptual.

The following sections outline the key tasks and actions undertaken by the Pland Team to advance the vision of the RGT.

Link to the Rio Grande Trail Map:



[Click here to access the Rio Grande Trail Interactive Map](#)



Map Area Panel Sign depicting the full extents of the RGT, designed for the City of Albuquerque (CABQ)

DESIGNATED TRAIL

Designated trail is existing infrastructure that is currently a part of the RGT. The following total accounts for all Designated trail, including segments Designated in prior years:

Designated = 130.53 miles

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL

Undesignated trail segments are a priority for designation. Undesignated trails are existing trails or infrastructure that are already being used for recreation or as trails. Each segment requires different levels of stakeholder engagement. Tables in the County Summaries section on page 18 provide more information about each trail segment, location, and engagement details.

Undesignated = 31.13 miles

PROPOSED TRAIL

The remaining trail mileage is at the planning level or includes gaps where no alignment is identified. Those trail segments may require new trail construction and additional resources. Ground-truthing may lead to recommendations to realign certain segments. In southern New Mexico, a significant percentage of trail mileage is proposed on existing flood control infrastructure: levees or levee roads. Some of these alignments could be designated with support from the local flood control authority, and the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), with whom we initiated engagement over the past year. In northern New Mexico, the Master Plan left significant gaps where no trail alignment was proposed, notably between Santa Fe and Taos County. For this area specifically, our team held multiple meetings with stakeholders to discuss the Santa Fe-Taos connections, which are further elaborated under the Santa Fe to Taos Connection section on page 14. More information about notable sections of proposed trail segments that have begun the planning process can be found in the County Summaries on page 18 of this report.

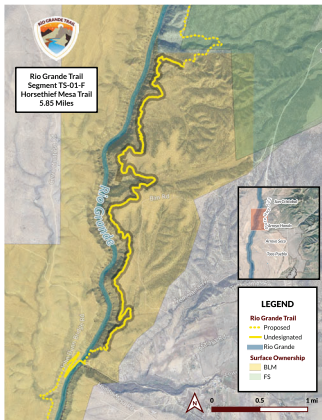
Proposed = 365.88 miles



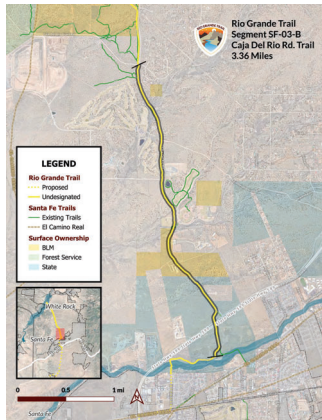
OVERVIEW

TRAIL SEGMENTS DESIGNATED IN FY26

By the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC)

HORSETHIEF MESA TRAIL - 5.85 MILES

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office provided a letter of support for this segment. The RGTC approved it at the September 19, 2025 meeting.

CAMINO REAL: SANTA FE RIVER TO CAMINO DE REY RD - 3.36 MILES

This portion of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail (NHT) provides a paved multi-use trail connection between the Caja del Rio and the Santa Fe River Trail. The City of Santa Fe provided a letter of support for this alignment, and Santa Fe County passed a resolution backing the trail's designation. The RGTC approved this alignment for designation at their September 19, 2025 meeting.

SUNLAND PARK RIVER TRAIL - 1.33 MILES

After receiving enthusiastic support and a letter of support from the City of Sunland Park, the RGTC approved this section of the existing paved trail at its April 10, 2026 meeting. Sunland Park intends to continue expanding this trail northward to connect it with the Río Grande Riverpark Trail in El Paso.

The total number of miles designated during FY26 was 10.54



View of the Rio Grande Gorge from the Horsethief Mesa Trail Near Taos, NM

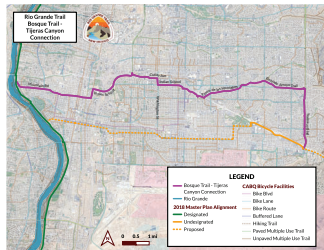


View of Mount Cristo Rey from the Sunland Park River Trail, Sunland Park, NM

TRAIL SEGMENTS REALIGNED IN FY26

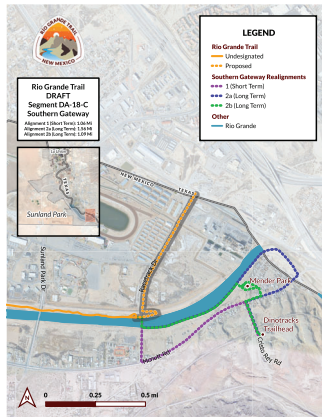
By the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC)

BOSQUE TRAIL-TIJERAS CANYON CONNECTION: 15.05 MILES



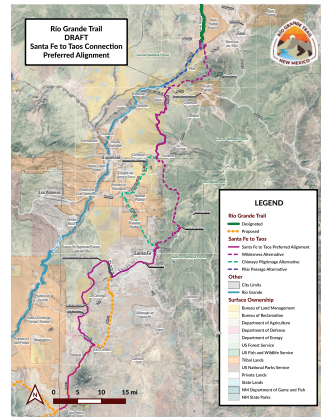
This segment of trail through the City of Albuquerque connects the Bosque Trail to Tijeras Canyon. The realignment application for this section of trail was brought before the Río Grande Trail Commission at the April 10th, 2026 meeting, where it was approved unanimously. Previously, the alignment utilized on-street facilities such as Zuni Rd, Lead Ave, and Coal Ave, as well as the I-40 multi-use trail to navigate the city east/west, from the Bosque to the Sandia Mountains. The realignment proposed a more pleasant, accessible, and safer user experience by shifting the trail north and aligning it with existing trails, such as those along Paseo de las Montañas, Embudo Arroyo, and Tramway. While multi-use trails were not available, the realignment utilized prominent, established bike routes such as Indian School Rd, Edith Blvd, and Mountain Rd.

SOUTHERN GATEWAY (DINOTRACKS): 1.06-1.56 MILES



This section of RGT was realigned at the April 10th, 2026 commission meeting. Before this, the southern terminus of the Río Grande Trail was at the busy intersection of two roads in an industrialized part of Sunland Park. The realignment proposed three routes, each of which connect the Sunland Park River Trail to DinoTracks, a scenic site at the base of Mount Cristo Rey. The "short-term" option proposes a direct path to DinoTracks along the sidewalk of NM-237 while the "long-term" options propose routes which follow the Río Grande, then cut back towards DinoTracks, limiting the amount of time spent walking along busy roads. With support from a recent Trails* Grant, Insights El Paso, the owner of DinoTracks, completed a new restroom, outdoor classroom, signage, and other site improvements, with plans to add a campground in the future.

SANTA FE TO TAOS CONNECTION: 184.87 MILES



A primary focus in FY26 was the alignment and realignment effort for the section of trail between the south Santa Fe County line and the southern end of the West Rim Trail in Taos County. The map above displays the alignments officially proposed and adopted for consideration by the Río Grande Trail Commission at its April 10th, 2026 meeting.

See [page 14](#) for more information about the Santa Fe to Taos Connection.



DinoTracks site visit prior to the April 10, 2026 RGTC meeting



Site visit to La Bajada near the Caja del Rio Plateau, NM

RÍO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION



The RGTC seated for their January 15, 2026 Meeting at the Vincent E. Griego Chambers, Albuquerque

MEETING PRODUCTION

In FY25, the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) was re-established and met twice. This fiscal year, the RGTC continued their work with three meetings.

Our team continued to support the RGTC meetings with administrative tasks, the development of materials, and the preparation of trail segments for designation. This included audio/visual checks with the meeting venue, procurement of meeting refreshments, coordination with guest speakers, and any other meeting logistics as required. Meeting packets and agendas, as well as large maps and other graphics, were also developed for each meeting in coordination with the commission. We promoted the meetings through our newsletter, project website, and strategic, targeted outreach in the communities where the meetings took place. Our team also worked with stakeholders to garner support, led the RGTC subcommittee meetings, and provided information sharing and training sessions on the RGT project. In coordination with the RGTC meeting, we also organized community gatherings and site tours the day before the meetings.

MEETING OVERVIEWS

SEPTEMBER 18-19, 2025: TAOS

September 18: Horsethief Mesa Site Visit and Community Happy Hour

- > On the Thursday before the commission meeting, 15 community members and commissioners joined a site tour of Horsethief Mesa and the John Dunn Bridge. As a result of conversations on this site tour, Horsethief Mesa was approved for designation at the meeting the following morning. Visiting the John Dunn Bridge site allowed community members to view and discuss the planned connection between Horsethief Mesa and the John Dunn Bridge.
- > After the site tour, attendees and community members were invited to continue conversations at Midtown Market, a restaurant in Arroyo Seco.

September 19: Río Grande Trail Commission Meeting

- > Meeting highlights included:
 - Review of Tribal subcommittee meetings with multiple tribes
 - Designation of Horsethief Mesa Trail
 - Designation of Camino Real: Santa Fe River to Camino de Rey Road
 - Approval of designation & realignment application forms and a standard letter of support template
 - Proposal to amend the State Trails Act

JANUARY 15-16, 2026: ALBUQUERQUE

January 15: Rail Trail Site Visit and Community Happy Hour

- > On the Thursday before the commission meeting, 13 attendees joined a site tour of an under-construction segment of the Albuquerque Rail Trail adjacent to the Alvarado Transportation Center. This site tour highlighted the newest and most advanced urban trail project in New Mexico. It also provided opportunities to discuss multimodal connections to the RGT corridor. Additionally, this trail segment was being considered as part of a connection between the Bosque Trail and the RGT through route via NM 14.
- > After the site tour, attendees walked to Sidetrack Brewing to continue the conversation and deepen community connections.

January 16: Río Grande Trail Commission Meeting

- > Meeting highlights included:
 - RGT budget updates
 - Review of proposed options for the Santa Fe Taos Connection
 - Updates on the non-profit contractor selection
 - Discussion of trail segments for designation in Bernalillo County
 - Approval of a redesigned RGT logo

APRIL 9-10, 2026: DOÑA ANA COUNTY/LAS CRUCES

April 9: Southern Gateway Site Visits and Community Gravel Bike Ride

- > On Thursday, April 9, 18 community members and commissioners joined a site tour of DinoTracks, a fossil-filled prehistoric landscape owned by an El Paso-based non-profit partner. Following this site tour, the commission approved this location as the new southern trailhead for the trail at the meeting the following morning. After this site tour, attendees visited the Sunland Park River Trail. The following morning, the commission approved the trail for designation.
- > In the evening, the commission collaborated with local outdoor recreation advocates on a community bike ride along designated sections of the Río Grande Trail in Las Cruces. Attended by an estimated 100 cyclists, this ride was an opportunity to connect with the community and highlight the RGT. The ride was followed by conversations at Spotted Dog Brewery, the start and end point of the ride.

April 10: Río Grande Trail Commission Meeting

- > Meeting highlights included:
 - Combining the tribal and legislative subcommittees
 - Approval of proposed Santa Fe Taos connection route for further refinement
 - Designation of Sunland Park Trail
 - Approval of RGT southern trailhead realignment to the DinoTracks site
 - Presentation from non-profit subcontractor

SUBCOMMITTEES

TRIBAL

Summary of FY26 subcommittee work:

This fiscal year, the Tribal Subcommittee continued the important work of building and rebuilding relationships with tribes and pueblos. The focus continued to be on tribal entities in proximity to the river and the proposed trail segments, but the outreach included all tribes and pueblos. We were able to have key meetings with the Nambé Pueblo and Picuris Pueblo related to the Santa Fe Taos Connection.

The fiscal year ended with the combining of the Tribal and Legislative Subcommittees. The hope is that by combining these subcommittees, limited capacity can be used more efficiently.

Meetings with specific tribes and pueblos:

- > San Felipe Pueblo (7/14/2025)
- > Nambé Pueblo (3/19/2026)
- > Picuris Pueblo (4/1/2026)

Subcommittee Meetings:

- > 2025: July 14; July 28; August 25; September 22
- > 2026: March 3; March 17; March 31

Special meetings with key stakeholders:

- > October 1, 2025: Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps (ALCC)
- > March 18, 2026: Tribal Focus Group, New Mexico Indian Affairs Department (IAD)

ALIGNMENT

Summary of FY26 subcommittee work:

The Alignment Subcommittee, by far the most active of the subcommittees, continued to grow and evolve over FY26. More community members were invited to the subcommittee. Relationships were strengthened, and trust among members grew, allowing for more impactful discussion and greater support for trail designation and future strategy. This subcommittee was a critical part of the Santa Fe Taos discussion. The work this year included:

- > Santa Fe to Taos Initiative
- > Albuquerque Realignment (Bosque to Tijeras Canyon Connection)
- > Albuquerque to Tijeras Designation
- > NM-14 Tijeras to San Antonio Designation
- > Sunland Park River Trail Designation
- > Rio Grande Riverpark Trail Designation
- > DinoTracks Realignment

Looking ahead, this subcommittee could continue to support the efforts of trail designation. Key next steps for the alignment subcommittee include:

- > Resolving the Bernalillo County/Valencia County Connection, the final significant statewide gap in the proposed trail alignment;
- > Identifying the next round of segments to designate, with a focus on Sierra County/State Parks + natural candidates from the Santa Fe Taos Connection, including the Santa Fe River Trail, deeper conversations with Caja del Rio stakeholders, and coordination with Santa Fe County on La Bajada Ranch;
- > Continued designation coordination with IBWC and MRGCD, with an opportunity to involve MRGCD at the upcoming Socorro meeting;
- > Conducting a deeper audit of the list of trail segments found at the end of the report and agreeing on priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. This ideally would coordinate with meeting locations for the upcoming fiscal year as well.

Subcommittee Meetings:

- > August 18; September 15; October 6; October 27; November 10; December 8; December 15; January 5; February 2; February 18; March 2; March 16; March 30; April 27; June 8; June 22

Special meetings with key stakeholders:

- > February 23: DinoTracks Meeting, Insights El Paso
- > March 11: Paso del Norte Trail Meeting, Paso del Norte Foundation
- > March 20: Dinotracks Meeting, Insights El Paso
- > March 25: Santa Fe to Taos Stakeholder Meeting, various stakeholders
- > April 2: Santa Fe to Taos, Pilar Meeting, various stakeholders

LEGISLATIVE

Summary of FY26 subcommittee work:

- > Coordination with IBWC
- > Coordination with MRGCD

Subcommittee Meetings:

- > March 3; March 17; March 31; April 14; April 28; May 12; May 26; June 9; June 23

Special meetings with key stakeholders:

- > March 2: IBWC Pre-Meeting, Doña Ana County
- > March 5: IBWC Meeting, USIBWC

NON-PROFIT

Summary of FY26 subcommittee work:

- > Creation of the Non-Profit RFP
- > Selection of Non-Profit Contractor, Fundraising for the Future
- > Continued coordination with and support of the Non-Profit Contractor

Subcommittee Meetings:

- > December 9; December 23; January 6; January 20; February 3; February 17; February 24; March 3; March 10; March 17; March 24; March 31; April 7; April 14; April 21; April 28; May 5; May 12; May 19; May 26; June 2; June 9; June 16; June 23; June 30

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

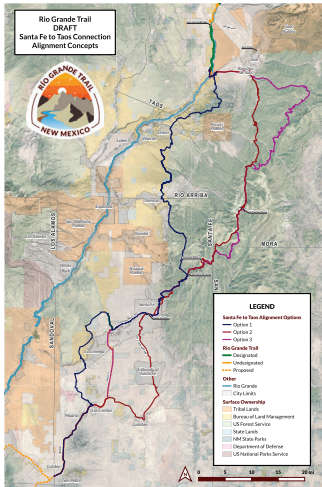
INTRODUCTION

In FY26, stakeholder engagement became more strategic and targeted. With the commission meetings restarting, our work aligned more closely with the commission. Additional tabling was done at the state legislative session.

At each commission meeting, Pland provided printed maps associated with the event location, SWAG such as stickers, mugs, seed packages, candy, and sign-in sheets to connect community members to the RGT newsletter and website. Pland continued to manage promotion of the RGT through merchandise and a project-specific website.



Engagement materials at the 23rd RGTC Meeting, Taos



SANTA FE TO TAOS CONNECTION

Our primary engagement effort this fiscal year focused on the Santa Fe Taos Connection. In the 2018 Master Plan, no alignment was identified between these two important communities. We conducted a thorough evaluation, with the scope encompassing both counties. In collaboration with the Alignment Subcommittee and other key stakeholders, three proposed alignments were identified. We developed narrative guides for each of these three options. A survey was conducted to gather public input on these three alignments. Additionally, a key stakeholder group was developed to discuss the three different options. After 5 months of collecting input, a strong consensus on a single alignment emerged. That alignment was brought to the commission, and at their April 10, 2026 meeting, the commission voted to adopt this proposed alignment for further consideration.

Map of the initial (3) proposed Santa Fe to Taos Connection alignment options

LOGO

To better align with National Trail System standards and position the Río Grande Trail for future designation as a National Scenic Trail, a new RGT logo was developed in FY26 and approved at the January 16, 2026 RGTC meeting. The updated design retains the recognizable elements of the existing logo while flipping the Reuleaux triangle-shaped frame so that its point faces upward, consistent with national trail signage conventions. Additional refinements included adding "New Mexico" at the base of the frame, a black border to improve legibility, and changing the internal accent color from yellow to dark red.



Old (left) and new (right) Río Grande Trail Logos

ONLINE PRESENCE

NEWSLETTER

To keep up with the increased pace of Río Grande Trail efforts, the once quarterly newsletter has become a monthly publication since November 2025. As of April 2026, the newsletter has 526 subscribers and an above-average open rate of 55% for the fiscal year. Newsletters contain trail segment highlights, information about RGTC meetings, events, and commissioners, updates on RGT progress, surveys, links to partner organizations, and more.

WEBSITE

Since its launch in 2024, the Río Grande Trail Website has undergone many changes. The site is regularly updated to reflect current information, and new content is continually added in response to ongoing planning efforts and stakeholder input. Notable additions to the website from FY26 include updates to the Río Grande Trail Interactive Map, the inclusion of the Río Grande Trail's 2026 Signage Guidelines Packet as a downloadable PDF. The website also hosts a "Santa Fe to Taos" information page, with the interactive Santa Fe to Taos Map, and more information about the Santa Fe to Taos alignment effort. Visit the website at: riograndetrailnm.org

INTERACTIVE MAPS

Our team continues to maintain an interactive map that highlights where RGT alignments are located and whether they are designated, undesignated, or proposed. Pland continues to manage and update the trail alignments and other layers featured on the map as discussions progress and discoveries are made. This map remains a useful tool for tracking progress and facilitating communication with stakeholders. It is accessible via the website and through the RGT newsletter. A new interactive map was created in 2025 to aid stakeholder engagement efforts for the Santa Fe to Taos alignment initiative. This map displayed current alignment possibilities as our team was working on them and was updated in accordance with new information and ideas from RGTC Alignment subcommittee meetings and Santa Fe to Taos stakeholder engagement events. Visit the interactive map at: <https://arcgis.com/maps/150v42>

INTERNAL MEETINGS



Santa Fe to Taos Meeting; site visit to the mountains above the Rio Grande Gorge Visitor Center, Pilar NM

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INTERNAL MEETINGS

INTRODUCTION

Over FY26, our team had over 30 meetings with land managers across federal, state, county, tribal, and local governments. Pland also met with community organizations and nonprofits. Constant engagement and communication are essential for the RGT's development. The project relies heavily on relationship building- hiking, biking, and horseback riding towards a shared future, together.

CHECK-INS

In FY26, our team met with the Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) over 20 times. After the commission was re-established, check-ins also included the Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD). These meetings were utilized to provide progress reports, develop commission meeting agendas, discuss priorities, and solicit input on trail-related deliverables.

COUNTY SUMMARIES

TAOS COUNTY

62.8 miles are Designated in Taos County, comprised of Rio Grande del Norte Trails, the La Junta Trail, Cebolla Mesa, Horsethief Mesa, and the West Rim Trails.

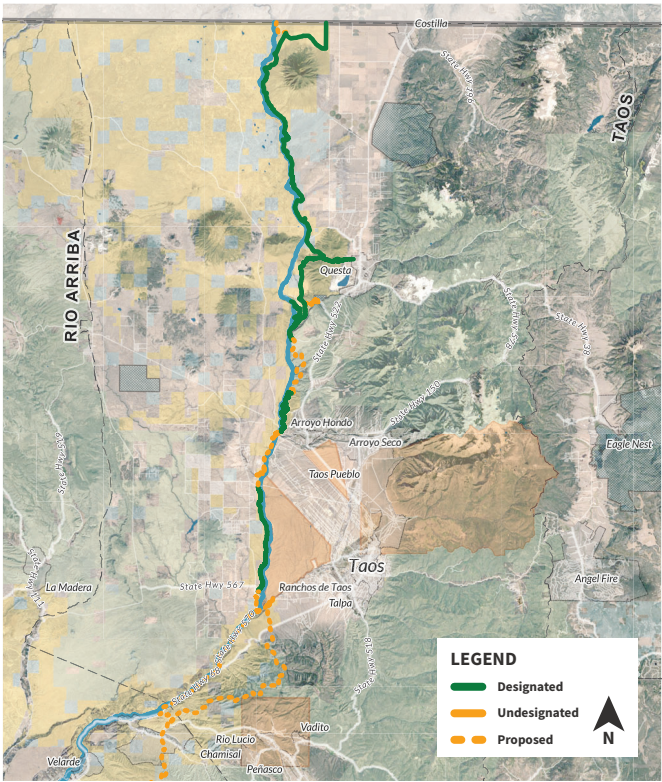
0.8 miles are Undesignated in Taos County, comprised of the John Dunn Bridge.

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
John Dunn Bridge (TS-02-A)	0.83	A bridge over the Rio Grande on BLM land, just west of Arroyo Hondo. This would connect the existing Horsethief Mesa Trail in the northeast to the proposed Bridge to Bridge trail in the southwest.

56.8 miles are Proposed in Taos County, with different segments in varying levels of development.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Costilla Creek (TS-01)	1.77	Parallel alternative trail connection to the Colorado border. Connects the trail back to the Rio Grande River.
Pescado Trail (TS-01-B)	2.41	Proposed spur trail.
Garrapata Canyon – Cebolla/Horsethief Connection (TS-01-E)	7.5	In partnership with the USFS, a route has been identified to connect Cebolla Mesa to Horsethief Mesa. Initial linework has been identified. Opportunities include numerous existing roads and paths. Challenges include significant grade changes throughout the route and multiple canyons.
John Dunn Escape/Horsethief Connector (TS-01-G)	0.45	Connector route between John Dunn Bridge and Horsethief Mesa. Steep terrain. No trail currently exists but a route has been scouted.
Bridge-to-Bridge (TS-02-B)	6.02	Trail connecting John Dunn Bridge to Rio Grande Gorge Bridge.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: West Rim Trail to John Dunn Bridge	2.26	Connector route between the West Rim Trail and John Dunn Bridge.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Northern Wilderness Alternative	22.56	Mix of proposed and existing trail. Endorsed by the RGTC at the 4/10/26 meeting. Utilizes USFS and BLM land, including a section of the recent Taos Klaur BLM acquisition. Connects the southern end of the Orilla Verde Recreation area and the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument to Dixon.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Pilar Passage	13.85	Alternative route for the Santa Fe Taos Connection. Stays closer to the river and avoids remote wilderness areas.

FIGURE 1. TAOS COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

RIO ARRIBA COUNTY

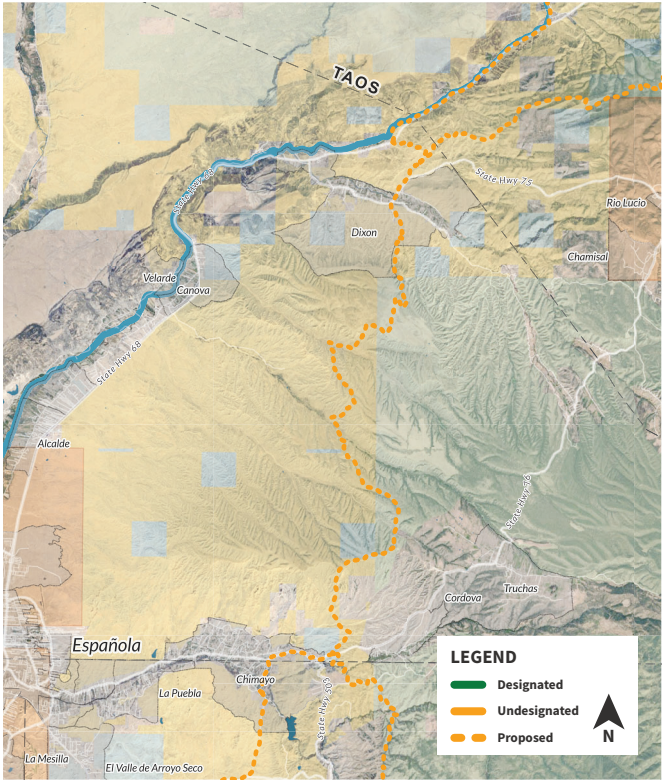
22.0 miles are Proposed in Rio Arriba County, comprised of the Santa Fe to Taos Connection: Chimayo to Dixon section.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Chimayo to Dixon	22.04	Connection between Chimayo and Dixon. Primarily BLM and USFS. Requires additional ground truthing. Primarily utilizes existing two-track and arroyos.



Site visit to the Horsethief Mesa Trail near Taos, NM

FIGURE 2. RIO ARRIBA COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

SANTA FE COUNTY

3.4 miles are Designated in Santa Fe County, comprised of the Caja del Rio Connection.

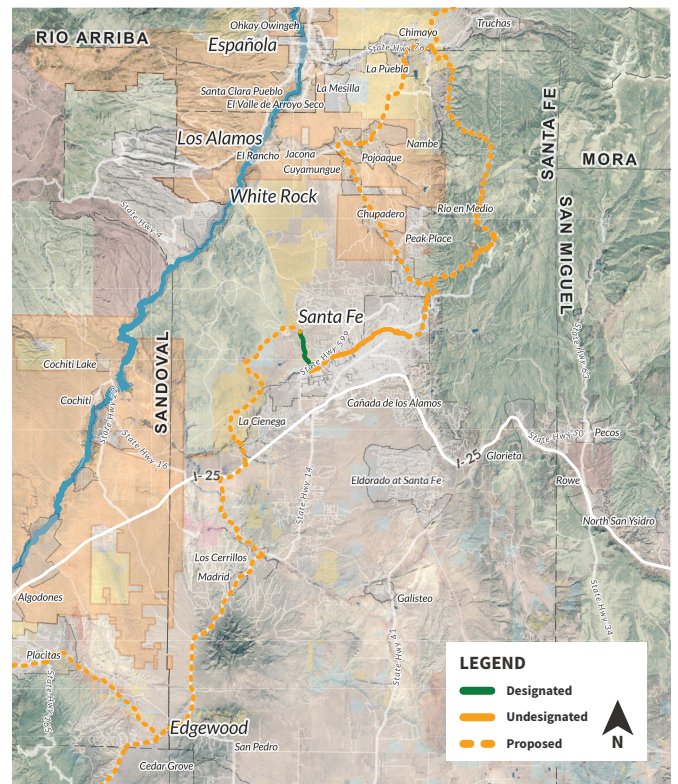
9.2 miles are Undesignated in Santa Fe County, comprised of the Santa Fe River Trail.

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Santa Fe River Trail	9.15	The alignment utilizes the entire Santa Fe River Trail through Santa Fe. This is an existing urban multi-use trail that is mostly complete. There is a short gap on the southwest end of the corridor.

111.5 miles are Proposed in Santa Fe County, with different segments in varying levels of development.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Southern Wilderness Alternative	30.73	Connection between Chimayo and City of Santa Fe. Opposed by Nambe Pueblo. Primarily utilizes wilderness, which prohibits bicycles. Primarily utilizes existing trails.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Chimayo Pilgrimage Alternative	27.94	Alternative route for the Santa Fe Taos Connection. Suggested by Nambe Pueblo. Utilizes NMDOT/highway right of way. Passes through Tesuque and Nambe Pueblos. Utilized by hundreds of pilgrims annually on Good Friday, before Easter.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Dale Ball Trails	8.27	From the National Forest, the alignment enters Santa Fe via the Dale Ball Trail network. After using a few short sections of local streets, the alignment connects to the Santa Fe River Trail.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Caja del Rio	14.5	Connection through the Caja del Rio on USFS and BLM land.
Santa Fe Taos Connection: Caja del Rio to I-25	1.8	From the Caja, the connection travels through the Santa Fe County-owned La Bajada Ranch to I-25. There is also a short possible connection through Tres Rios Ranch, which, as of 5/14/2026, is listed for sale. A conservation trust is attempting to purchase it.
Santa Fe to Taos Connection: I-25 Frontage Rd	2.76	At I-25, the alignment crosses the highway via Canada de Santa Fe, an existing lightly used bridge that connects two ranches. From there, the trail proceeds southwest along the interstate until it reaches NM 57/ Waldo Canyon Rd.
SF-T Connection: Waldo Canyon Rd.	8.17	The alignment follows NM 57/Waldo Canyon Rd, which is mostly unpaved, southeast through Los Cerrillos until it reaches NM 14.
SF-T Connection: Pilar Passage	13.85	Alternative route for the Santa Fe Taos Connection. Stays closer to the river and avoids remote wilderness areas.

FIGURE 3. SANTA FE COUNTY



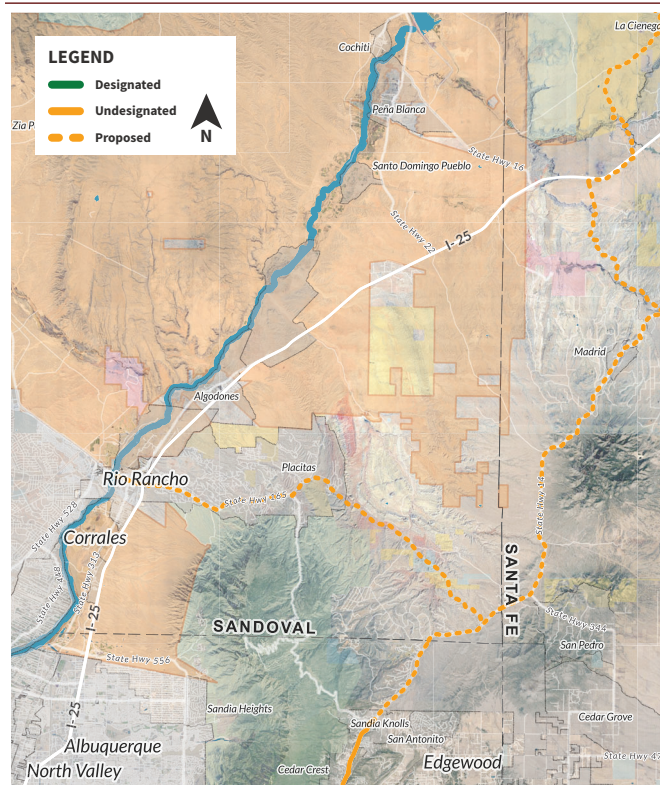
24.5 miles are Proposed in Sandoval County, comprised of the Santa Fe to Taos Connection: Santa Fe County Line to Bernalillo County Line, and the Placitas Gas Line Easement and Placitas Cutoff which connect the proposed trail along NM-14, through Placitas, to Bernalillo.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
NM 14: Santa Fe County Line to Bernalillo County Line (SF-03-F)	3.85	Proposed trail along state highway corridor right of way.
Placitas Gas Line Easement (SV-08-A)	12.18	Connection between NM 14 and Placitas. Conversations between local trail advocates, the City of Albuquerque Open Space, the NM State Land Office, and the BLM have recently begun to identify a way to connect adjacent parcels with a trail. It's a parallel alternative to this gas line easement, which is not feasible.
Placitas Cutoff, NM 165/550 (SV-08-B)	8.48	Connection between Placitas and the river.



View of the Sandia Mountains near Albuquerque, NM

FIGURE 4. SANDOVAL COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

BERNALILLO COUNTY

25.1 miles are Designated in Bernalillo County, comprised of the Bosque Trail system. This trail network includes the Chris Chavez Trail, the West Riverside Trail, the Paseo del Bosque Trail, the Rio Grande Nature Center, and Valle de Oro Trail.

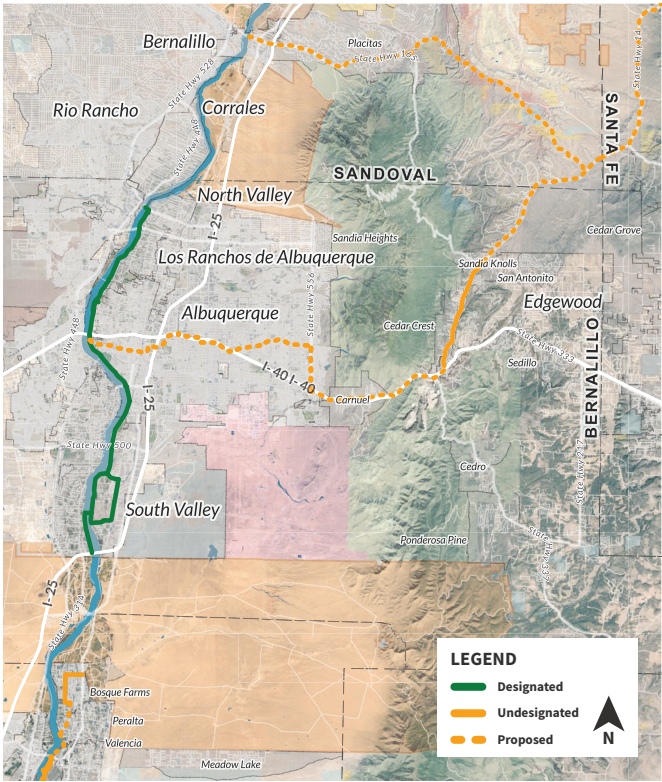
28.4 miles are Undesignated in Bernalillo County, comprised of the NM-14 Multi-Use Trail, NM-333/Old Route 66, and The Bosque Trail to Tijeras Canyon Connection through the city of Albuquerque.

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
NM 14 Multi-Use Trail (BN-03-G)	5.74	Existing paved trail between San Antonito and just north of I-40. Designation support from NMDOT has been requested.
NM 333/ Old Route 66 (BN-05-F)	7.57	Old Route 66 bicycle corridor through Tijeras Canyon. Designation support from NMDOT has been requested.
Bosque Trail Tijeras Canyon Connection (BN-05-A)	15.05	East-west connection through Albuquerque to connect the Bosque Trail to the NM 14 through route. A revised version of a concept from the 2018 master plan. Utilizes primarily existing urban multi-use trails, with on-street bicycle facilities filling the gaps. Designation support from CABQ has been requested.

4.5 miles are Proposed in Bernalillo County, comprised of NM-14: Sandoval County Line to NM-536/Frost

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
NM 14: Sandoval County Line to NM 536/Frost Rd. (BN-03-F)	4.53	Proposed trail along state highway corridor right of way.

FIGURE 5. BERNALILLO COUNTY



VALENCIA COUNTY

5.0 miles are Undesignated in Valencia County, comprised of the North Bosque Loop Trail and the Los Lunas River Park Trails.

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
North Bosque Loop Trail (VL-02-A)	2.51	Paved trail in Bosque Farms near the southern edge of the Pueblo of Isleta.
Los Lunas River Park Trails (VL-03-A)	2.45	Hard-packed trails in Los Lunas Bosque.

23.8 miles are Proposed in Valencia County, comprised of the Otero Drain/Valencia East Levee and MRGCD Levee Roads from Los Lunas to the Socorro County Line.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Otero Drain/ Valencia East Levee (VL-02-B)	3.04	Unpaved informal trails along the flood protection/drainage network. Would require a liability conversation with MRGCD.
MRGCD Levee Roads: Los Lunas to Socorro County Line (VL-03-B, VL-04, VL-05)	20.74	Unpaved informal trails along the flood protection/drainage network. Would require a liability conversation with MRGCD.

FIGURE 6. VALENCIA COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

SOCORRO COUNTY

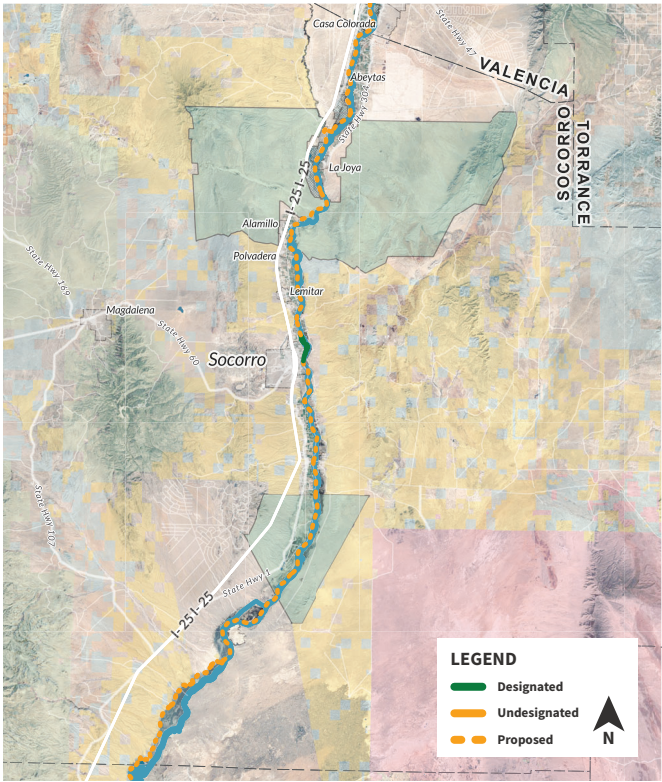
4.4 miles are Designated in Socorro County, comprised of the Socorro Valley Bosque Trail.
91.1 miles are Proposed in Socorro County, comprised of MRGCD Levee Roads from the Valencia County Line to the city of Socorro, and from Socorro to the Sierra County Line.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
MRGCD Levee Roads: Valencia County Line to Socorro (SC-01, SC-02, SC-03, SC-04, SC-05, SC-06-A, SC-06-B, SC-07-A)	36.44	Unpaved informal trails along the flood protection/drainage network. Would require a liability conversation with MRGCD. Includes portions through the Sevilleita National Wildlife Refuge.
MRGCD Levee Roads: Socorro to Sierra County Line (SC-07-C, SC-08, SC-09-A, SC-09-B, SC-10-A, SC-10-B, SC-10-C, SC-11-A, SC-11-B, SC-11-C, SC-11-D, SC-11-E, SC-11-F, SC-11-G)	54.68	Unpaved informal trails along the flood protection/drainage network. Would require a liability conversation with MRGCD. Includes portions through the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge.



Site visit to the Whitfield Conservation Area near Belen, NM

FIGURE 7. SOCORRO COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

SIERRA COUNTY

24.4 miles are Designated in Sierra County, comprised of the West Lakeshore Trail, the Rock Canyon to Lakeshore Spur trail, part of the City of Elephant Butte Trail, Luchini Trail, Lakeshore Road, Turtleback Trail, and a small section of trail through the Percha Dam Campground.

10.0 miles are Undesignated in Sierra County, comprised of the north section of the Elephant Butte West Side Trail, a section of the City of Elephant Butte Trail, the Williamsburg Connector, the Caballo Equestrian Alternative route, and the Percha Dam South Spur trail.

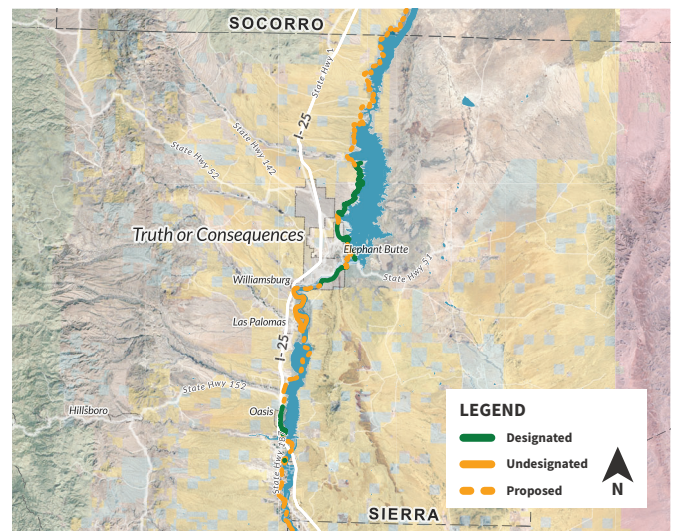
UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Elephant Butte SP West Side Trail (Central) (SR-03-D, E)	0.96	Trail along west shore of Elephant Butte.
City of Elephant Butte Trail (SR-03-F)	0.37	Undesignated portion of the City of Elephant Butte Trail. Connects the West Side Trail to the City of Elephant Butte Trail.
Williamsburg Connector (SR-06-A)	5.81	Trail through State Park-managed land north of Caballo Lake.
Caballo Equestrian Alt (SR-06-B)	2.92	Alternate equestrian loop near the river.
Percha Dam South Spur (SR-12-F)	0.27	A short unpaved spur trail which follows the river south from the Percha Dam State Park campgrounds.

49.3 miles are Proposed in Sierra County, comprised of two sections of the Elephant Butte West Side Trail, the BOR Access Road, Caballo Equestrian Trail, Riverside Park Connector, Riverside Campground trail, the Percha Dam Connector, Percha Dam Canal, Garfield Canal, and IBWC Levee Roads from the Garfield Canal to the Doña Ana County Line.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Elephant Butte West Side Trail (North) (SR-01-A, SR-01-B, SR-01-C, SR-01-D, SR-02-A, SR-02-B, SR-02-C, SR-02-D, SR-02-E, SR-02-F, SR-02-G)	21.98	Remote trail through Elephant Butte State Park from the Sierra County Line south along the river/lake.
Elephant Butte SP West Side Trail (South) (SR-04-B, SR-05-A)	4.05	Unpaved trail along the shoulder of NM-195 which branches off at the Lakeshore Road spur and continues south to connect to the Turtleback Trail.
BOR Access Road / Lower Bench (SR-05-C, D)	2.64	Southeastern continuation of the Turtleback Trail network to Williamsburg.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Elephant Butte West Side Trail (North) (SR-01-A, SR-01-B, SR-01-C, SR-01-D, SR-02-A, SR-02-B, SR-02-C, SR-02-D, SR-02-E, SR-02-F, SR-02-G)	21.98	Remote trail through Elephant Butte State Park from the Sierra County Line south along the river/lake.
Elephant Butte SP West Side Trail (South) (SR-04-B, SR-05-A)	4.05	Unpaved trail along the shoulder of NM-195 which branches off at the Lakeshore Road spur and continues south to connect to the Turtleback Trail.
BOR Access Road / Lower Bench (SR-05-C, D)	2.64	Southeastern continuation of the Turtleback Trail network to Williamsburg.

FIGURE 8. SIERRA COUNTY



COUNTY SUMMARIES

DOÑA ANA COUNTY & TEXAS

10.47 miles are Designated in Doña Ana County, comprised of Leasburg Dam State Park, the La Llorona Trail, Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park, and the Sunland Park River Trail.

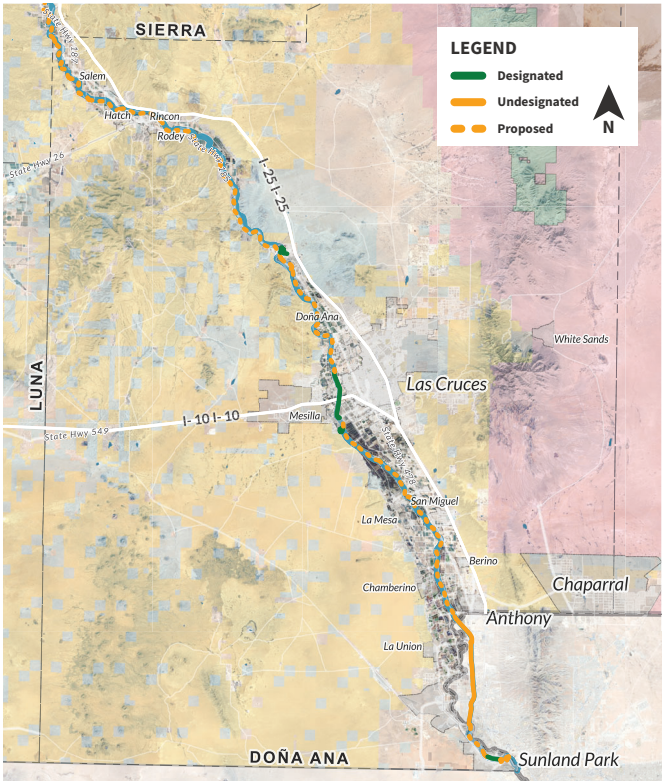
10.6 miles are Undesignated in Texas, comprised of the Rio Grande Riverpark Trail.

UNDESIGNATED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
Río Grande Riverpark Trail (DA-17-B)	10.61	Existing paved trail managed by TXDOT.

82.5 miles are Proposed in Doña Ana County, comprised of multiple sections of IBWC Levee Roads and the proposed Southern Gateway/Dinotracks routes.

PROPOSED TRAIL SEGMENT	LENGTH (MILES)	DESCRIPTION
IBWC Levee Roads: Doña Ana County Line to La Llorona Trail (DA-01-A, DA-01-B, DA-01-C, DA-01-D, DA-01-E, DA-01-F, DA-02, DA-03, DA-04-A, DA-04-B, DA-04-C, DA-05-A, DA-06-A, DA-06-B, DA-06-C, DA-07-A, DA-07-B)	50.12	Proposed trail along USIBWC levee roads.
IBWC Levee Roads: La Llorona Trail to Río Grande Riverpark Trail (DA-10-A, DA-10-C, DA-11, DA-12, DA-13, DA-14, DA-15, DA-16, DA-17)	24.19	Proposed trail along USIBWC levee roads.
IBWC Levee Roads: Río Grande Riverpark Trail to Sunland Park River Trail (DA-17-C, DA-18-A)	4.29	Proposed trail along USIBWC levee roads.
Southern Gateway/DinoTracks (DA-18-D)	3.85	Proposed route and alternative routes leading to the southern terminus of the trail. Realignment to connect this site with existing trail in Sunland Park was approved at the 4/10/2026 RGTC meeting.

FIGURE 9. DOÑA ANA COUNTY



NEXT STEPS



Inside the Alvarado Transportation Center: Rail Trail site visit prior to the 24th RGTC meeting

NEXT STEPS

Over the past four years, Pland Collaborative has been the de facto face of the RGT. In recent years, the RGTC has resumed meetings, creating a public-facing space for community members to engage with the trail. Now, a non-profit organization is being developed to create a stronger foundation for the trail. As FY26 closes, there are some critical next steps that should be taken to ensure the longevity of this important project:

SHORT TERM

1. **Prioritize support for the non-profit:** A strong non-profit entity is critical to the short and long-term success of the Rio Grande Trail. **Without continued support, the non-profit is at risk of failing.** Commission members, community members, agency staff, and other trail advocates should focus limited energy and resources on supporting the non-profit. **The non-profit will need to quickly develop a strategic plan and secure funding.**
2. **Keep the momentum:** without contractual support, the subcommittees and stakeholder conversations risk falling apart. Additionally, at the end of Calendar Year 2026, a new state governor will be in office. This will likely lead to a significant turnover at the commission. **It's essential that the momentum of the previous year not be lost.** The non-profit is the best candidate to fill this emerging power vacuum.
3. **Increase visibility:** Over the past year, there has been an increase in media coverage and media interest in the trail. Work with existing allies to creatively identify opportunities to increase visibility of the trail. **The greatest risk faced by the trail project is that it may lose public and community support if engagement efforts cease to be made.**

LONG TERM

1. **Resolve policy barriers:** There are ongoing barriers to the designation of many miles of trail, specifically regarding liability and special districts.
2. **Deepen connections** with allies and opponents: When the public is informed about the trail, there is often strong support expressed. However, due to the lack of consistent support, there is not a cohesive group of allies. The non-profit and other staff must **invest in building a stronger foundation of support.** Additionally, opponents to the trail have not received consistent engagement and information about trail development. This is especially true for tribal entities. It is critical to continue investing in these relationships to ensure long-term success.
3. **Focus on a continuous statewide route:** Creating and sustaining a long-distance trail requires a multi-faceted effort. However, the critical goal is the continuous statewide route. Identify the route which is most **attainable on the shortest timeline.** There will be time for refinement in the future. However, getting a continuous, connected route is the key to building long-term success and support.

TRAIL SEGMENT PRIORITIES:

Over the past year and a half, Pland has worked closely with the reconvened Rio Grande Trail Commission to quickly designate trail segments. At this point, much of the "low-hanging fruit" has been identified and designated. Moving forward, each additional segment will be increasingly difficult to designate due to various obstacles. On the other hand, if certain policy conflicts are resolved, many miles could be quickly designated in partnership with just a couple of different agencies. The following pages display perceived priorities by county, with additional background provided.

TAOS COUNTY

1. **Horse Thief Connector:** As the crow flies, only half a mile separates the top of Horse Thief Mesa from John Dunn Bridge. While the terrain is steep, a potential route has been identified. Work with BLM and other key stakeholders to begin further analysis of that connection and determine how this may impact existing parking/access challenges at John Dunn Bridge.
2. **Bridge to Bridge:** While this connection between the Gorge Bridge and the John Dunn Bridge was identified long ago, little progress has been made in recent years. Connect with the BLM and other stakeholders to identify a next step.
3. **Select a Priority Route, Dixon to West Rim:** In the Santa Fe Connection conversation, two different options emerged to connect the West Rim Trail to Dixon: a remote wilderness route and a riverside route. Reconvene with stakeholders from the April 2, 2026 meeting (BLM, USFS, NPS, Picuris Pueblo, NM ORD, Friends of the Rio Grande/other community groups), and have a deeper conversation about each of these options. Select one of the two to actively pursue.

RIO ARRIBA COUNTY

1. **Deeper Investigation of the Chimayo Dixon Connection:** In the Santa Fe Taos Connection, a route was identified connecting Chimayo to Dixon. However, this proposed trail requires further investigation. Ground-truth this section and convene BLM, the NM State Land Office, and community groups in the area to better understand this land and the route.

SANTA FE COUNTY

1. **Santa Fe River Trail:** The Santa Fe Taos Connection identified an existing multi-use trail along the Santa Fe River through the City of Santa Fe. This is a natural candidate for designation. A single gap remains along this corridor. Designation could help to build more support for filling this final gap. Work closely with the City of Santa Fe and Bike Santa Fe/other regional outdoor recreation advocacy groups to build support for designation.
2. **La Bajada Ranch:** Santa Fe County is in the process of master planning its recent acquisition of La Bajada Ranch. They advocated for the inclusion of the Rio Grande Trail on that property. Follow up with Santa Fe County Open Space and work through the details of trail designation on that property.
3. **Alignment refinement, Caja del Rio:** The 2018 Master Plan included the Caja del Rio as a part of the through route, and a portion of that was included for the Santa Fe to Taos Connection. Now that this connection has been reaffirmed, a deeper investigation of the route through the Caja should be completed. Additional engagement should also be done with the many community organizations and advocates working to increase protections in the Caja.

NEXT STEPS

BERNALILLO COUNTY

1. **Bernalillo Valencia County Connection:** Now that a Santa Fe Taos Connection has been identified, a similar effort needs to be made to identify the connection between Bernalillo and Valencia Counties. This is the final gap in the proposed contiguous route. The Grand Enchantment Trail, despite declining an offer to collaborate, would be a starting point for identifying a viable through route.
2. **NM-14, Northern Trail Expansion:** Now that the roundabout at Frost Rd. and NM 14 has been completed, conversations about expanding the multi-use trail northward should be restarted.

SOCORRO COUNTY

1. **Local/county adoption of MRGCD Levee Roads:** Building on the model developed with Socorro, identify other communities in Socorro County who might be able to adopt sections of levee road trail through their communities. Since these communities are all unincorporated, the county would be the adoptive agency and would need to lead these conversations.

SIERRA COUNTY

1. **Elephant Butte Lake State Park Trails:** While significant stretches of trail have been designated through Elephant Butte, there are other existing trail segments that have not yet been designated. Restate conversations with State Parks and identify barriers to designation.
2. **Caballo Lake State Park Trails:** Same as Elephant Butte. This could be the same conversation with the same stakeholders.
3. **Truth or Consequences (TorC) Connections:** There are currently gaps between Elephant Butte and TorC. Additionally, there is recently designated trail on the opposite side of the river from TorC. Connect with the active outdoor recreation community and local government allies in TorC and restart those conversations.

DOÑA ANA COUNTY

1. **Levee trail designation with United States International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC):** Continue working with IBWC on an MOU or MOA allowing for the use of their levees as RGT. This critical opportunity has made significant progress in recent years. Additional effort will be required to finalize an agreement.
2. **DinoTracks Sunland Park Connection:** At the April 10, 2026 commission meeting, a realignment of the trail was approved. This realignment established that the southern trailhead of the RGT would be the DinoTracks site. As a result of this decision, reconvene stakeholders (Sunland Park, Doña Ana County, Paseo del Norte Foundation, DinoTracks/Insight El Paso) and identify which of the three alternatives for connecting Sunland Park to DinoTracks is the most viable.
3. **Washington Street Anthony Connection:** Between Sunland Park and Anthony, the state of Texas has jurisdiction of the river. Along the river in this area, there is an existing multi-use trail maintained by El Paso Parks and Recreation. The trail was developed with support from the Paso del Norte Foundation. On the north end, this trail terminates at the New Mexico border. This terminus is less than one mile from the nearest road, Washington Street. Work with key stakeholders (Anthony, TX, Anthony, NM, Doña Ana County, El Paso Parks and Recreation, Paseo del Norte Foundation) to identify a trail connection to the nearest road, Washington Street. This could open conversations about how to continue the trail even further north into New Mexico.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This important work was made possible through an Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) contract. ORD is a division within the State of New Mexico's Economic Development Department.

Additional work with the Río Grande Trail Commission (RGTC) was made possible through a contract with the State of New Mexico's Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), the department which hosts the RGTC.

Pland Collaborative supported the Río Grande Trail project and the Río Grande Trail Commission throughout FY26 under contracts with ORD and EMNRD. Public engagement materials, Río Grande Trail Commission meeting materials, and the content of this report were prepared by the Pland Collaborative team.

We also thank the many public sector staff, advocates, community members, and others who have spent time and resources contributing to the success of this project. Long distance trails require patience and commitment. The Río Grande Trail is on a successful trajectory due to the passion of its supporters.

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