



The New Mexico Lower Rio Grande

What is happening to the river?



Our river flows only when water is needed for irrigation. The river itself has no legal right to natural flows. On average, over the last twenty years, the river has been dryer for longer periods because of drought. Under climate change, flows are projected to decrease by 25% more in the next 50 years.

Who is the water allocated to?



Ninety percent of the river flow and groundwater is used by agriculture. Seven percent is used by public water systems for drinking water. The remaining three percent is used by commercial, industrial, power, livestock and domestic well users. During the recent drought, agriculture's reliance on groundwater as a percentage of total water use has increased from 42% in 1951-2011 to 77% in 2012-2021. Combined groundwater consumption from all other users (DCMI) has increased only by 0.43% for the last ten years over the previous twenty years, while agricultural pumping increased by 84% over the same timeframe.

Why is year-round water important?



The Rio Grande is the only flow-through river in our desert region. As many as 44 native fishes, 95 amphibians and reptiles, 95 mammals, and 345 birds occur (or previously occurred) along the desert Rio Grande. At least 15 native fishes have been extirpated from all or part of their range, many during the mid-twentieth century. The river remains an important migratory flyway for birds. Many, including two federally threatened or endangered species, depend heavily on the last remaining native bosque habitat along the river. The lack of water in the river for so many months puts our native bosque habitats at risk.

- City
- Dam
- Interstate Highway
- National Monument
- Agriculture
- Waterbody

Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument



Did you know?

Beginning in the 1900s, government irrigation and flood control projects, slowly straightened and confined the river to its current shape and location. This map shows the location of the river in 1891.

Join Us!

The Lower Rio Grande's water future is in our hands. Rio Grande WAVES is advocating for a regional water plan that is holistic, equitable, informed by data, with equal and robust public participation in decision-making with the goal of securing a sustainable long-term water supply for future generations including drinking water, preservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife, recreation and enjoyment of nature and local and regional food systems. riograndewaves@gmail.com.

Anthony