
CHAMA PEAK LAND ALLIANCE



2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

www.chamapeak.org / chamapeak@chamapeak.org

photograph by In Light of Nature

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 01** Mission + Vision
- 02** A Note From the Director
- 03** Forest + Watershed Health
- 05** Wildlife + Fisheries
- 07** Education + Economy
- 13** Climate + Water
- 16** Sustainable Agriculture
- 16** Public Policy for Conservation





MISSION

The Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA) is a diverse group of conservation-minded landowners committed to practicing and promoting responsible land, water and wildlife stewardship in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico for the benefit of our diverse cultural heritage and for generations to come.

VISION

We envision the watersheds of the San Juan and Rio Chama as an interconnected system that thrives on cooperative management between private landowners, states, tribes and federal agencies. It is a “wild and working” watershed where agricultural operations are in harmony with wildlife, clean water, and resilient forests. And it is a watershed where the local rural economy is strong and provides a positive feedback loop into the community and land that supports it.

WAYS TO SUPPORT

Visit www.chamapeak.org to sign up for our monthly newsletter and discover other ways to be involved with our mission.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings!

Thank you for checking out our Chama Peak Land Alliance 2023 Year in Review. With lots of partnerships and projects going on, we wanted to share some highlights from 2023.

Our biggest news is that we are being awarded two large federal grants. These grants are for hazard fuels reduction and ecological forestry to help protect crucial watersheds. Make sure and stay tuned with our monthly newsletters to learn more about these grants while we are gearing up for lots of forestry work with landowners in summer of 2024.

While addressing the risk of severe wildfire is ever pressing, we have been managing several other grants and working on many other important conservation issues with CPLA members. 2023 was truly an inspiring year to work with so many people doing great things.

You may or may not be aware, but private landowners and managers in the region are doing amazing things for the benefit of land, water, and wildlife. These efforts are incredibly important but rarely are these efforts recognized for public benefit. A recent study by Colorado State University (Seidl et al. 2023) found that public benefits of carbon sequestration, food and grazing, habitat biodiversity, water quality, and soil erosion control amount to serious public benefit. The study estimated that the state's Conservation Easement Tax Credit Program amounted to a "total cumulative public benefit of conservation easement credits between \$35 and \$57 billion, or about \$20 thousand per acre conserved".

Big thanks to folks working hard day after day for the benefit of conservation values, keeping our landscapes and wildlife populations intact and contributing so much to local economies and communities.

We hope you check out our 2023 Year in Review and we look forward to seeing you in 2024!

Sincerely,
Caleb Stotts
Executive Director
Chama Peak Land Alliance



FOREST AND WATERSHED HEALTH

2 Grants for Forestry Work - USFWS and EWRP

Major news in 2023 - CPLA was awarded two new major grant programs! In August, the US Fish and Wildlife Service awarded CPLA \$1 million for ecological forestry and fuels reduction work in the watersheds that supply Heron and El Vado Reservoirs. These funds are designed to protect crucial watersheds and help reduce the risk of severe wildfire on adjacent federal lands. All of the treatments lined up for this program needed to be directly adjacent to federal lands, and we laid out several hundred acres of treatment this fall. We are currently working to complete the environmental review process and things are looking good for completing this work load in summer/fall of 2024.

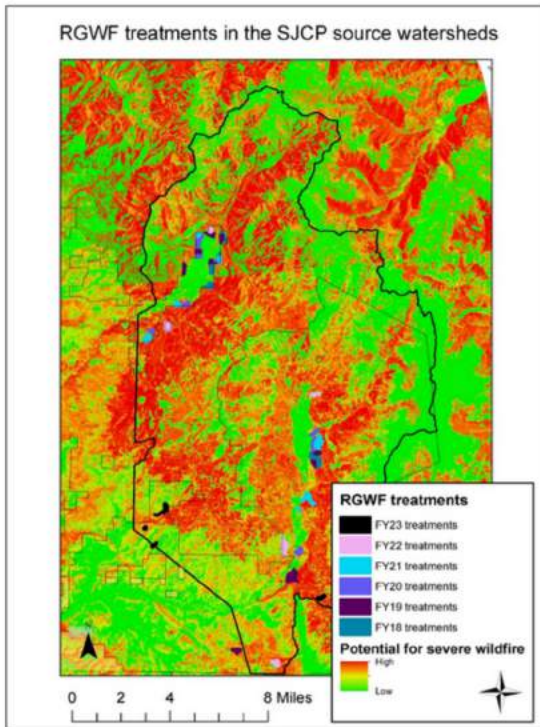
In November this year, the US Bureau of Reclamation announced that CPLA is among the few organizations nationwide that will receive \$3 million through the Environmental Water Resources Program (EWRP). Similar to the USFWS grant, the EWRP grant is designed to protect crucial watersheds in the Chama region by reducing the risk of severe wildfire through fuels reduction and ecological forestry.



Applying ecologically-based forestry practices is the most proactive approach to helping reduce the risk of severe wildfire in this era of climate change and megafires.

The Nature Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund

CPLA continued a multi-year work plan to implement forestry projects in the San Juan-Chama Project (SJCP) diversion source watersheds. These crucial watersheds supply approximately 75% of Albuquerque's domestic water supply and 50% of Santa Fe's. In 2023, combined with landowner funded matching, we treated 83 acres with a truncated budget. In the last several years we have treated over 1,000 acres in partnership with The Nature Conservancy's Rio Grande Water Fund. The Water Fund works with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Authority and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy - District to funnel dollars to crucial watershed protection efforts.



Map shows RGWF treatments in the San Juan Chama Project source watersheds over the last few years. Many more acres need treated to help safeguard the watersheds supplying 75% of Albuquerque's and 50% of Santa Fe's drinking water.

Watershed Partnerships

Several watershed partnerships operate in the Chama region, including the San Juan-Chama Watershed Partnership, the San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership, and the 2-3-2 Cohesive Strategy Partnership. CPLA is an active participant in all of these partnerships, which share a common goal of reducing risk of severe wildfire, protecting crucial watersheds, and coordinating across jurisdictional boundaries.

In 2023, some of our highlights included:

1. Fiscal sponsor for the 8th annual Rio Chama Congreso held at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu.
2. Helping to host a 3-day meeting and field tour with downstream water users in the San Juan Chama Project source watersheds.
3. Helping to host a 3-day workshop with the Western Aspen Alliance.
4. Helping to put together a 2-3-2 Partnership meeting and field tour in Chama.



2-3-2 Partnership and San Juan-Chama Contractors Association field tour in August.



CPLA partnered with several organizations to host an annual Colorado Aspen Ecology and Management Workshop.

WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

In addition to the 2-3-2 meetings, we also participated in the 2-3-2 Monitoring subcommittee. This included assisting in placing monitoring tools in the Rio Chama on Sargent Wildlife Management Area, and collaboration with others across the watershed for watershed health evaluation.

According to Cody Dems, Forest Stewards Guild and 2-3-2 Partnership, "The 2-3-2 is implementing landscape scale monitoring to understand the effects of forest and watershed treatments. Monitoring data provides information about whether or not the treatments are promoting resilient systems in the desired manner, as determined by the 2-3-2 Partnership and its collaborating land stewards."



Riparian beaver dam analog structures in Rio Arriba County. By slowing the water down with structures that emulate beaver dams, habitat is created and the water table is raised up.



2-3-2 subcommittee on a site in Sargent WMA.

RGCT project implementation guides

funded by New Mexico Habitat Conservation Initiative

Within 120 miles of the project area there are ample production capabilities to handle this entire projects timber in one year. For this project we modeled a three year baseline harvest of all project lands as a conservative measure based on quality operators in the region.

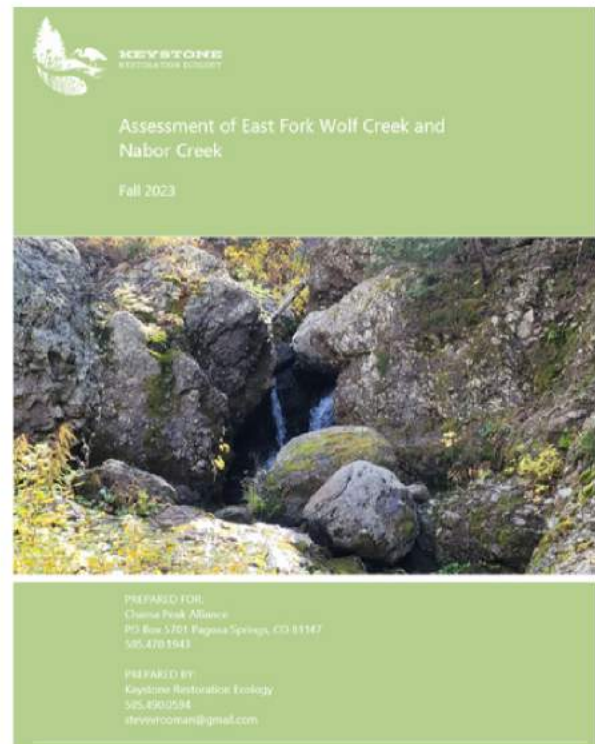
Building off our 2018 assessment for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout restoration opportunities, we wanted hone in on a couple of the best RGCT conservation opportunities in the region. CPLA partnered with Keystone Restoration Ecology Inc. to investigate sources of instability and the potential to restore stream habitat in two small tributaries to the Rio Chama, Nabor Creek and East Fork Wolf Creek.

A large focus of the work was using LIDAR elevation data and historic aerial photos to identify ecological and human caused changes that have affected stream function and habitat. Issues like forest overgrowth, lack of fire, road building and livestock trailing can all have effects on the watershed and cause deleterious changes to watershed form and function.

LIDAR data is taken by satellite or plane and shows elevation data at a fine scale, even under tree cover, which can identify erosion such as gullying and head-cutting, as well as locations where roads or trails captured the stream channel. These stream capture locations shorten and steepen the channel, causing it to cut deeply into the landscape and lower the water table. These locations can also be seen on historic aerial photos from 1935 taken by Charles Lindbergh and photos from the 50s, 60s and 70s.

This initial review was followed up by a ground based assessment and design process to create a restoration design using native materials such as boulders, logs, and native wetland sod. The goal of the restoration designs is to create a natural, meandering channel which provides deep cool water for fish, storage of water on the landscape and enhanced wetlands and forage on the landscape. Projects designed using the natural channel design method carry floodwaters easily and need little or no maintenance after flood events.

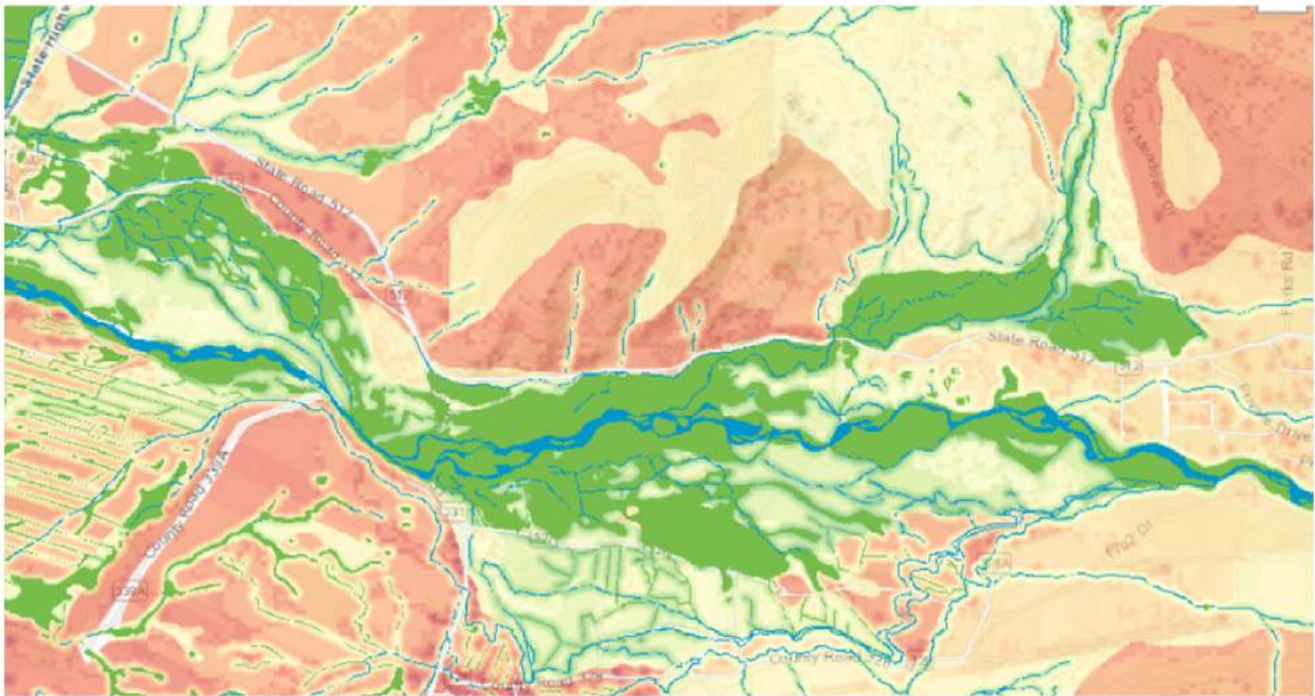
These projects are now one step closer to implementation and CPLA is actively searching for funding opportunities.



Spatial Analysis of Wetland Restoration Opportunities

funded by Carroll Petrie Foundation

Working with Earth Analytic, Inc. we developed a multicriteria raster suitability model focused on the identification and prioritization of riparian zones, streams, and wetlands within the CPLA study area with moderate to high potential for economically feasible restoration and long-term sustainability. A web application was developed that can easily make maps with this information and other relevant information. Ultimately, this will help CPLA and partners identify wetland and riparian restoration projects and help prioritize certain projects in certain areas.



CPLA's new spatial analysis tool helps us identify areas that may be suitable for potential wetland and riparian restoration projects

EDUCATION AND ECONOMY

Scholarship Program

CPLA partnered with Rancho Lobo in 2023 to present the annual opportunity for local high school students to apply for a scholarship to assist with post-high school education tuition and expenses. The goal of the scholarship program is to provide financial assistance to graduating high school students with higher education plans. Students may be pursuing any field of study, but preference points were given to those with a demonstrated interest in land, water, or wildlife conservation and/or with plans to pursue educational or career path in conservation and/or natural resource management.

"The essays this year were just really good, and they left us all feeling really hopeful about the next generation" says Caleb Stotts, Chama Peak Land Alliance Executive Director, from press release.



CPLA Director, Robert Ferrell, announcing scholarship recipients at Escalante High School

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT KEIGAN HUGHES

"As I was growing up, most of my spare time was spent exploring and learning about different outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, hunting, and hiking. This instilled in me a love for the outdoors and a will to protect it." Keigan plans to pursue a degree in science, majoring in parks and recreation management with a minor in criminology.



Pagosa Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT BAYLER FAULKNER

"Growing up on a ranch has provided me with a unique childhood and a special perspective into how the world works. Advancing towards adulthood, I learned early on how to care for the animals on the ranch, this is including the land they live on! Bayler plans to attend his Junior College and complete his college rodeo as well as pursue a degree in criminal justice.



Escalante Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT BRYCELYN MARTINEZ

"I am fortunate enough to have grown up in areas where I can experience all four seasons. I appreciate the outdoors and relish the time I am able to inhale the fresh air of fall while horseback riding. I also know the importance of water in our community." Brycelyn plans to become an optometrist.



Escalante Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT KATELYN HINDS

"Katelyn Hinds, "Have many thoughts and ideas that come in the time. I hope my uncles take my every opinion and give their opinion. I know that's hard but to not have the water we need most times to grow the crops in the fields for what they believe in our success." Katelyn plans to pursue a nursing degree and return to her community.



Escalante Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT TOMAS ATENCIO

"In a young child, I remember spending a lot of time outside watching my uncles work in water in the land and observing our path that runs by the house. My uncles were great men, they and my dad always had fun talking about the water and how to clean it up and how to clean it up and how to clean it up. The water is so important and the water is so important and the water is so important. Tomas plans to pursue a degree in water work/management.



Escalante Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT JONATHAN NASRALLA

"I learned from the springs and a responsible and sustainable source of energy, providing much of the fuel for businesses, homes, schools, and government buildings. When businesses utilize clean energy resources, this has a very positive effect on our climate, with massive environmental impact." Jonathan plans to pursue a degree in business.



Pagosa Class of 2023

CONGRATULATIONS TO CPLA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT KARISSA FOSTER

"I have been lucky to grow up in such a beautiful place with so many opportunities to learn and explore outside. From the age of nine I have been very active in the local Audubon society. With my group(s) and others in the group I have been on many field excursions and documented our findings to the Audubon website." Karissa plans to major in communications.



Pagosa Class of 2023

Radio Show and Podcast

The Farm & Ranch Show, a weekly radio show airs locally on 96.1 FM radio and livestream via chamaradio.com and features guests and market updates.

In 2023, we began working with Brittany Ference to turn recorded shows with guests into podcasts and have those available for podcast listeners. Check out recent episodes on your preferred source for podcasts!



Farm + Ranch Show with Sage Faulkner

Chama Peak Land Alliance

Chama Peak Land Alliance's Program Director hosts the weekly Farm + Ranch Show on Chama's Radio Station, The Eagle.

Listen to the latest episodes of **Chama Peak Land Alliance's Farm + Ranch Show Podcast** with CPLA's Program Director, Sage Faulkner as your host!



Joysree Aubrey, local farmer and guest on the Farm & Ranch Show



Carlos Salazar, local rancher and guest on the Farm & Ranch Show.

Outreach



Ag-Fest table, Ms. New Mexico Agriculture, Erica, visits with Sage at the CPLA booth.



Sage participated in a roundtable discussion on the IRA and challenges facing NM producers with USDA Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (pictured) Senators Lujan and Heinrich.



Rio Arriba County fair visit with Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez



Banner up at Sage's trailer during Chama Days. CPLA cards, water and watermelon were provided, along with meeting folks who want to learn more about CPLA.



Bayler and Sage Faulkner, Representative Susan Hererra, Caleb Stotts



Caleb talks about private lands forest management in a field of resprouting aspen during a workshop in August

Firewood For Seniors

Volunteers Warming Things up in Northern NM (from an article in Rio Chama Reporter, January 2024)

By Sage Faulkner

Program Manager, Chama Peak Land Alliance



Local volunteers helping load wood at a Firewood for Seniors, 2023

Firewood for Seniors is a collaborative effort between Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA), Foundation for a Better Tomorrow, and the Upper Chama Soil and Water Conservation District (UCSWCD). It has been in operation locally for several years, bringing firewood to the elderly and disabled in the heart of the Rio Chama region.

Rio Arriba county has a poverty rate that is almost double the national average, according to U.S. Census Bureau information. In this part of northern New Mexico, roughly one person in five is considered to be at or below the poverty level, and the elderly and disabled are even more economically challenged. Because of the increasing costs of supplying logs for the program, only 75 families could be served this season—a drop in the bucket when compared with the need.

Each year it is the volunteers who provide the warm glow for this project. Local community members Dan Rioux, Mike Weinberg, and Luis Martinez have stepped up and delivered wood in homebound situations. Dan and Mike are both veterans themselves, and Dan is disabled. A former diver in the Navy, he says he wants to help people who can't help themselves. "Being disabled myself, I know how hard it is when you are not able to do something because of your disability. I have learned that even though I am disabled, I can and will continue to help others in need."



Local contractor, Chris Tafoya bucking wood for 2023 Firewood for Seniors



Dan cut, loaded and split wood for twenty community members in 2023. He and Mike delivered wood for seniors who didn't have the ability to get enough wood for themselves; Luis delivered several loads of wood to homebound elderly and helped load wood when needed.

This year's program was partially funded by the Foundation for a Better Tomorrow, and efforts are underway to increase availability and broaden the number of people the program serves. The UCSWCD facility on US 84/64 served as the drop off and pickup location for the firewood.

According to CPLA Executive Director, Caleb Stotts, "These partnerships and the volunteers really bring this project together. CPLA is really excited to focus on the importance of healthy forests and to bring that effort back to our communities through the Firewood for Seniors program. The program didn't have enough wood for everyone who needed it this year," says Caleb, "but we hope it will grow for 2024. As we move forward, we hope to continue working with our partners and offering this service to the community."



Volunteers Dan Rioux and Mike Weinberg deliver wood to homebound individuals. Cant thank these guys enough for their hard work and dedication!

FIREWOOD FOR SENIORS 2024 SUPPORT

65 INDIVIDUALS PICKED UP WOOD

25 HOME BOUND DELIVERIES

30 CORD OF WOOD AT UCSWCD

CLIMATE AND WATER

Rio Chama Congreso

The long road to recovery and resiliency...

Brace ourselves for the future, catastrophic wildfires are more frequent and more widespread as climate change continues

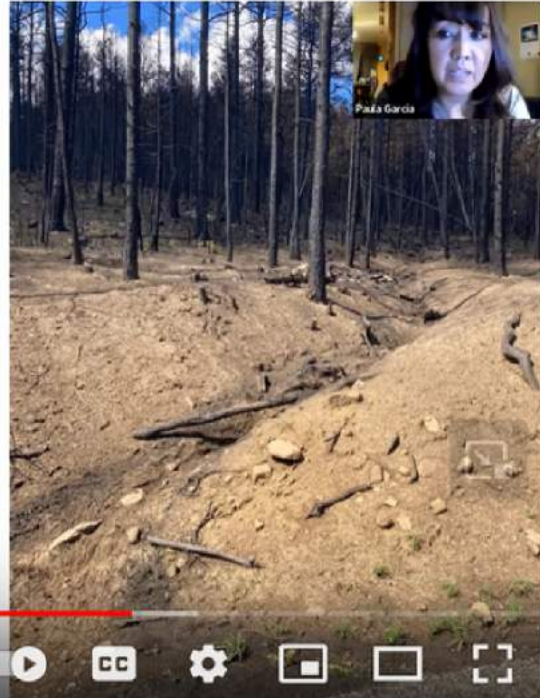
Create better mechanisms for landscape-scale restoration before and after wildfires.

Massive investments are needed on public lands and private lands. Current programs are too siloed.

USDA programs are not suited to short- or medium-term needs and they leave gaps: NRCS EWP, FSA ECP, and FSA EFRP but they may be better suited to long-term work.

Landscape scale restoration and reforestation will require a massive investment from the federal government.

Communities need to move beyond navigating and apply for existing federal programs.



NM Acequia Association Executive Director shared a humbling presentation about the impacts to watersheds and communities after the Hermit's Peak Fire.

What is at stake for the Rio Chama region in this era of megafires? As we have seen in nearby watersheds, one of the big answers is water. In February we helped host the 8th annual Rio Chama Congreso, focusing on this year's theme of "Water After Wildfire". On the 24th we will be offering Field Trip options and on the 25th we will be hosting our Main Event at Ghost Ranch. We were honored and humbled to hear from Paula Garcia with stories about the impacts to water resources after the Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon Fire. You can view her presentation on the following Youtube link or by searching San Juan Chama Watershed Partnership 2023 Rio Chama Congreso
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6AVUbiGTuc>



Members of the San Juan-Chama Watershed Partnership at the Rio Chama Congreso showing gratitude to NMFD Forester Mary Stuever. Mary changed jobs in 2023 but we will be seeing her around still!

Peregrine Fund

In early 2023, CPLA applied for and was chosen along with eight other teams to participate in the Peregrine Accelerator for Conservation for Impact. The teams were selected from a pool of 28 applicants to participate in the inaugural 6-month accelerator program to further develop their proposal ideas. These proposals represent a range of community-led efforts across the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River basin and were assessed by expert evaluators based on key criteria. Monthly educational zoom meetings and workshops were held, along with an in-person meeting in March. Along with networking opportunities, the program was rich in educational opportunities to focus on conservational impact.

The proposal submitted was “Uplands Restoration Pilot Projects For Working Lands In The Rio Chama Watershed” and the six months during the program were spent learning about restoration needs, healthy riparian areas and focused on the Canjilon Creek and a large project being done with NMSU-WRRI and NMSU Cooperative Extension Services – Rio Arriba.

A competitive final proposal presentation was held in early September and CPLA's project received funding. Three proposals were funded, with CPLA receiving the highest funding award of \$75,000. Keystone Ecological Restoration is the primary contractor and has reviewed the area and identified the key restoration project parameters. The project will start work in 2024, with a workshop and educational materials developed as the project starts.



CPLA was awarded with two grants from CSU Salazar Center's Peregrine Accelerator for Conservation Impact and received the program's highest funding award for project implementation.



Sage Faulkner, CPLA, round-table discussion during the in-person meeting for Peregrine Accelerator in March, 2023

Restoration in Canjilon Creek

Canjilon Creek is one of the focus areas for the NMED River Stewardship Grant that several collaborators (UCSWCD, NMSU CES, NMSU WRRI, Keystone Ecologic Restoration and others) are working on. The project is a watershed-based approach to address the challenges of climate change and drought on water quality and stream health. "We also recognize that because community members that manage the landscape in agriculture feel the cumulative downstream effects, they have the incentive to address the root of the problem..."



Meeting in Canjilon with stakeholders, producers and landowners to evaluate creek needs.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Fruit Growers Workshop

In Spring of 2023, through funding with the Partnership for Better Tomorrow, we hosted a portion of the northern NM fruit growers workshop. The topic was no-till practices for orchardists and fruit growers. As producers continue to face drought impact, this workshop focused on ways to mitigate impacts of drought and add soil health practices.

OWL BOX WORKSHOP

FREE WORKSHOP FOR CPLA MEMBERS:
PUT TOGETHER AN OWL BOX TO TAKE HOME AND LEARN ABOUT ALL THE BENEFITS



INTERESTED IN GOPHER CONTROL?

Participants will leave with a ready to install barn owl box.

Please register by April 21

Limited to first 10 that sign up!

sage@chamapeak.com

505-490-2822

April 25, 2023
at Upper Chama SWCD shop,
17305 US Highway 64-84
Tierra Amarilla, NM 87575

9:00am to 12:00 pm (weather permitting, we may offer an installation afterwards for participants)

Workshop is for CPLA members (membership is free at www.chamapeak.org) featuring Ed MacKerrow, in Light of Nature Photography, to learn about the benefits of putting up owl boxes on your property.



2023 Annual Fruit Grower Workshop

Time/Date: March 3, 2023
9:00-3:00

Fee: \$20 per person Pre-Registration is Required
Location: Rio Arriba county Extension Office
State Road 554 House #122-A
Abiquiu, NM 87510



Program

9:00-9:30: Registration
9:30-10:15: Fruit production updates: cultivar selection, fruit thinning, high tunnels, fruit in high elevation etc. (Shengrui Yao, NMSU Alcalde Center)
10:15-11:00: Integrated pest management in orchards (Miranda Kersten, IPM Program Manager, NMSU Los Lunas Center)
11:00-11:15: Coffee Break
/11:15-12:00: No till management in orchards (End-O-Fite Enterprises LLC/JAL Farms)
12:00-1:00 Lunch
1:00-1:45: Conserving Beneficial Insects in Orchards and Vineyards (Miranda Kersten, IPM Program Manager, NMSU Los Lunas Center)
1:45-2:20: Panel discussion: reading tree labels, rootstock selection, orchard management, Q & A session. (Danny Farrar, David Lucero, Tim Seaman etc.)
2:20-3:00: Wild life control/management (gopher, squirrel etc.). (Tom Dominguez and Don

Owl Workshop

Thanks to Ed MacKerrow, In Light of Nature Photography, Upper Chama SWCD, and The Foundation for a Better Tomorrow, the Owl Box Workshop was well attended by participants interested in learning about the important role that owls have in a healthy ecosystem. Additionally, ten owl boxes have been placed throughout the CPLA region! The hope is by placing owl boxes and raising awareness in owls, an increase in the owl population may show over the next few years.

PUBLIC POLICY FOR CONSERVATION

EPLUS

With a very small but vocal group of trophy hunters is interested in dismantling the EPLUS program, CPLA has actively worked to educate folks on the important role private lands play in elk habitat.



Check out the Youtube link below or do a Youtube search for "EPLUS works for Rural New Mexico"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUmHzFjq1Kk>

In New Mexico, about 50% of the total elk habitat is on private lands. New Mexico's EPLUS (Elk Private Land Use System) is a state program that was designed to help reimburse landowners for elk damages to private property and to promote habitat improvements and conservation on private lands. In addition to these functions, EPLUS provides incredibly important economic stimulus to low-income rural communities and culturally important hunting and freezer-filling opportunities for rural New Mexico families. While EPLUS doesn't adequately compensate for the sometimes extreme elk depredation that some landowners face, expansion of the EPLUS program is one option to help provide relief from elk depredation and incentivize wildlife and landscape conservation.



*Director Sloan and Jose B. Archuleta, Sage Faulkner
Meetings with concerned landowners about elk impacts in the Abiquiu area with Director Sloan, Senator Jaramillo, Representative Herrera. CPLA was honored to be included in the discussion.*

While many of the calls to reform EPLUS originate from urban offices in Albuquerque and Santa Fe, we felt the need to show how EPLUS benefits rural communities in New Mexico. We worked with a filmmaker to produce a short film called "EPLUS works for rural New Mexico". This film is available to view on the CPLA Youtube channel. EPLUS is crucial for providing hunting opportunities for rural residents and it helps keep many businesses afloat in the Chama region. While repealing EPLUS policies could result in marginally higher odds for people to draw trophy bull tags in the public tag draw, we should not sacrifice a public policy tool that so many rural New Mexican communities rely on.



www.chamapeak.org
chamapeak@chamapeak.org

Report Designed By:

*Song Dog
Media*



photograph by In Light of Nature

www.songdogmedia.com