

Santa Fe County Open Space, Trails and Parks

Annual Report

2024



SANTA FE COUNTY
**OPEN SPACE
TRAILS AND PARKS**





Vision

Santa Fe County's Open Space, Trails and Parks Program sustainably manages and conserves a vibrant network of cultural, historical, recreational and natural community resources that inspire a deep sense of regional identity and stewardship among current and future generations.

Mission

Santa Fe County provides innovative leadership in local land management and conservation that enhances the quality of life for County residents, provides access to public lands for unique outdoor experiences, advances community stewardship through partnerships and effectively leverages community investments in the Open Space, Trails and Parks Program. Management of County open spaces and trail networks provides sustainable and resilient ecosystems with landscape-wide benefits for human, plant and wildlife communities.

Over the past year, Santa Fe County has made steady progress to advance the mission of the Open Space, Trails and Parks program. Highlights in 2024 included acquiring two new open space properties, breaking ground on the next segment of the Santa Fe River Greenway Trail, hiring the County's first open space ranger, hosting 5 youth crews to conduct resource management and trail work, organizing 25 volunteer workdays, and receiving a \$500,000 Trails+ grant from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division to construct the next segment of the Santa Fe Rail Trail.

We are grateful to voters, who approved a \$16,125,000 general obligation bond to improve open spaces, trails and parks within Santa Fe County. And we extend our gratitude to the many partners, volunteers and community members who continue to provide guidance and helping hands so that Open Space, Trails and Parks program can better serve diverse communities and enhance the quality of life in Santa Fe County.

2024 Accomplishments

Below are the accomplishments of the Open Space, Trails and Parks program in 2024, grouped by sections consistent with the Open Space, Trails and Parks Strategic Management Plan.

Resource Management

- Staff conducted monitoring of rare, threatened and endangered species, including the Pinyon jay, Santa Fe cholla, cyanic milkvetch and grama grass cactus.
- Santa Fe County entered into a partnership with Defenders of Wildlife to enhance human-beaver coexistence at Los Potreros Open Space by assisting in monitoring and managing beaver activity as well as promoting the open space as a positive example for beaver management that can be replicated elsewhere in the Southwest.



Beaver pond at Los Potreros Open Space

- Youth crews with the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps conducted resource management work at Los Potreros Open Space, including removing 158 cubic feet of invasive plant species, removing 1,563 feet of legacy fencing, and replacing 950 feet of barbed wire fencing with wildlife-friendly fencing to enhance the ease of movement of wildlife between the open space and neighboring public land.
- Staff continued the first phase of the forest management project at the Ortiz Mountains Preserve in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps and Defenders of Wildlife. Youth crews thinned 10 acres of overgrown ponderosa pine forest using an experimental thinning prescription that is designed to reduce the potential for catastrophic fire while improving wildlife habitat.
- A Rocky Mountain Youth Corps crew at Little Tesuque Creek Open Space conducted trail maintenance work on 370 ft of trail and installed 31 hand-built erosion control structures along the trail and in several side drainages, including rock rundowns, one rock dams, Zuni bowls, media lunas, wicker weirs and brush mattresses. These serve to mitigate erosion on the hillsides and improve the trail and riparian corridor.

2024 Accomplishments

- Santa Fe County partnered with the Santa Fe Conservation Trust to maintain County-owned portions of the Dale Ball Trail system.
- Staff received training in sustainable trail building and maintenance.
- Santa Fe County continued partnering with the New Mexico Wildlife Center's wildlife rehabilitation and release program to conduct releases of native wildlife on appropriate County open space properties.
- Maintenance staff completed an average of 128 work orders per month to maintain trails, parks and open space properties.

Educational Programming and Stewardship

- Santa Fe County launched the Open Space Ranger program with the hiring of the County's first Open Space Interpretive Ranger. In 2024, the ranger gave several community presentations about the wildlife that calls open spaces home, and is actively collaborating with other area ranger programs.
- Staff facilitated the 14-week 2024 Northern New Mexico Master Naturalist training course with a cohort of 13 participants in partnership with the Randall Davey Audubon Center & Sanctuary and the Santa Fe Botanical Garden.



Volunteer workday at Arroyo Hondo Open Space to remove invasive plant species

- Staff trained 8 Master Naturalist volunteers to be open space property stewards at 3 open space properties. Property stewards report on plant and wildlife species found on the property, beaver activity, and monitor for issues like erosion, needed fencing repairs, trespassing, unsanctioned trails and illegal dumping.
- Volunteers contributed 360 hours and 25 workdays to steward the County's open spaces. Work included planting native species, removing invasive plant species, assisting with wetland restoration, closing social trails and cleaning litter.

2024 Accomplishments

- Staff created recreational maps of Arroyo Hondo Open Space, El Camino Real Trail and the Santa Fe Rail Trail. These maps are on the County's website and will be published in brochures and on signs.
- Staff completed the design of four new interpretive exhibit panels for Arroyo Hondo Open Space.
- Staff continued partnering with NM Historic Preservation Division's SiteWatch program to monitor historic, cultural and archaeological resources within Santa Fe County to diminish the rate of vandalism, disturbance and destruction of these resources and sites.

Project Development and Implementation

- The County acquired two new open spaces, and expansion of San Pedro Open Space, which doubles its size from 160 to 320 acres; and "10 Little Hills," two acres near Cerrillos Hills State Park that feature a trail easement to access the park via the Elkins Canyon Trail.
- Staff continued partnering with Madrid community members and the Abandoned Mine Land Program to implement the Madrid Stormwater and Erosion Control Project, located in part on County open space land.



Elkins Canyon Trail through 10 Little Hills

- Staff completed the trail reroute and improvement plan at Little Tesuque Creek Open Space. The purpose of this project is to elevate the trail above the floodplain to protect and restore the riparian corridor through the open space.
- Staff completed the floodplain restoration plan for Rio en Medio Open Space in collaboration with community members and stakeholder agencies.
- Staff completed the Rio Quemado restoration project at Los Potrerillos Open Space funded by the New Mexico Environment Department. The arrival of beavers resulted in ecological benefits that exceed the original goals of the project.
- Staff completed improvements to Avenida De Compadres Trail, including resurfacing the trail and installing culverts.

2024 Accomplishments

- Staff completed the construction of Nine Mile and Avenida Eldorado trailheads, creating additional access points to the Rail Trail.
- Staff completed the construction of the staircase and ADA access for the Oscar Huber Memorial Ballpark in Madrid.
- Staff completed the relocation of the Spur Trail trailhead as part of the NE/SE Connector road project.
- Staff began the construction of the Santa Fe River Greenway Trail from Siler Road to San Ysidro Crossing.
- Staff removed the development rights from a portion of the Santa Fe River Greenway through the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.



Santa Fe River Greenway Trail groundbreaking

Planning and Program Development

- Staff continued collaborating with the NM Outdoor Recreation Division to plan for the alignment of the Rio Grande Trail through Santa Fe County.
- Staff continued Thornton Ranch Open Space co-stewardship meetings with tribal and agency partners. Meetings in 2024 focused on tribal access to open spaces to conduct traditional gathering and ceremonial practices, and tangible actions for the protection of cultural resources.
- COLTPAC considered the potential acquisition of Bobcat Crossing Ranch for addition to the Open Space, Trails and Parks program and voted to recommend the acquisition to the Board of County Commissioners.
- Staff amended the Open Space, Trails and Parks Official Map in the Sustainable Land Development Code to include a new trail route called the “Turquoise Trail Extension” from Rancho Viejo Boulevard to the NM 599 Rail Runner train station. Inclusion on the map opens up funding opportunities for the construction of the trail.

2024 Accomplishments

Grant and Bond Funding

The Open Space, Trails and Parks program received \$16,743,040 in funding from grants and bonds in 2024. Below is the list of grant awards and bond funding received.

- \$100,000 capital outlay grant received from the State of New Mexico to acquire land, easements and right of ways for and to plan, design and construct the Santa Fe River Greenway Trail from Caja del Oro Grant Road to Cottonwood Drive.
- \$500,000 Trails+ grant awarded by NM Economic Development Department's Outdoor Recreation Division to construct the Santa Fe Rail Trail from Spur Ranch Road to US 285 and a new trailhead at US 285.
- \$18,040 Recycling and Illegal Dumping (RAID) grant awarded by NM Environment Department's Solid Waste Bureau to clean up a legacy illegal tire dumping site in the Santa Fe River Greenway near San Isidro Park.
- \$16,125,000 approved by voters in the 2024 General Obligation Bond question to acquire, design, construct, improve, equip and restore open spaces, trails and parks within Santa Fe County. This is anticipated to fund the next phases of the Santa Fe River Greenway Trail, Santa Fe Rail Trail and Romero Park, and restore the floodplain within Rio en Medio Open Space.



TRAIL HIGHLIGHT: SANTA FE RIVER GREENWAY TRAIL

The Santa Fe River Greenway Trail is a backbone, regional trail that serves County and City residents alike. The project was conceptualized in the 1980s and began in earnest in the 1990s. It is a complex, multi-agency project with two primary goals: (1) create a continuous multi-use trail along the length of the Santa Fe River, and (2) restore the ecological health of the river.

For years, the Santa Fe River was used as a dumping ground for household waste, commercial waste and even gravel mining. 1998 to 2003 saw the first implementation of restoration along five miles of the Santa Fe River. The City and County have since spent decades restoring the river corridor for the benefit of people, wildlife and water.

The trail revives the river's traditional use as a transportation corridor. When fully constructed, the trail will run from the southside of Santa Fe to downtown Santa Fe, with a direct connection to the El Camino Real Trail and nearby connections to the Rail Trail and Acequia Trail. The trail promotes outdoor recreation and alternative transportation and increases safe passage to schools and facilities.

Santa Fe County is currently constructing the next segment of the trail, from Siler Road to San Ysidro Crossing. This section is expected to be completed in 2026.



The Santa Fe River Greenway Trail at San Isidro Park in 2007 (left) and 2022 (right), showing the extent of revegetation over the past 15 years. Notice the utility pole and Tetilla Peak in the backgrounds of both photos.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: RANGER PROGRAM

In 2024, Santa Fe County hired its first open space interpretive ranger. An interpretive ranger educates visitors about the natural and cultural resources of an area, and helps visitors understand, appreciate and develop a sense of stewardship for its resources. The County's ranger has been busy meeting with community members and trail users to help shape interpretive materials and programs for the County's open spaces and trails.

Over the past year, the ranger gave several community talks about the wildlife that inhabits County open spaces; created recreational maps for Arroyo Hondo Open Space, El Camino Real Trail and the Santa Fe Rail Trail; connected with other area ranger programs including the City of Santa Fe and Boulder County to learn about their ranger programs and explore opportunities for partnership; worked to advance the protection of natural and cultural resources on County open space properties; and began patrolling the County's trails on the weekends.

County trails, parks and open spaces are intended for the enjoyment of the outdoors and access to nature, enhancement of public health and well-being, and the stewardship of land and biodiversity. Please remember to recreate responsibly to ensure these natural areas remain beautiful and enjoyable for future generations; please pack out all trash, pick up pet waste, keep dogs on a leash, and stay on designated trails.

Exciting plans are underway for next year, including new interpretive exhibits at Arroyo Hondo Open Space about the history, geology, flora and fauna of the open space; a new brochure about the County's open spaces, trails and parks; and volunteer opportunities to assist with the stewardship of County open spaces.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners

Camilla Bustamante – District 3, Chair

Justin S. Greene – District 1

Lisa Cacari Stone – District 2

Adam Fulton Johnson – District 4

Hank Hughes – District 5

County Leadership

Gregory S. Shaffer, County Manager

Leandro Cordova, Deputy County Manager

Alexandra Ladd, Growth Management Department Director

Lisaida Archuleta, Deputy Growth Management Department Director

Gary Brett Clavio, Planning Manager

Brian Snyder, Public Works Department Director

PJ Montaño, Facilities & Projects Division Director

Ryan Ward, Roads, Fleet, Solid Waste & Traffic Division Director

County Open Lands, Trails and Parks Advisory Committee (COLTPAC)

Christopher Mann, District 2, Chair

Steven Forde, At-Large, Vice Chair

Daniel Alvarado, District 1

Jill St. Thomas, District 3

Paige Grant, District 4

Amelia Adair, District 5

Bryan Bird, At-Large

Dan Potter, At-Large

Genna Waldvogel, At-Large

County Open Space, Trails and Parks Team

Adeline Murthy, Open Space & Trails Planning Team Leader and COLTPAC Staff Liaison

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Rose Masters, Open Space Interpretive Ranger

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Cedric Griego, Maintenance Technician

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Joshua Lopez, Maintenance Technician

Everette Lovato, Maintenance Technician

Christopher Martinez, Maintenance Technician

Christopher Padilla, Maintenance Technician