

Photo: Fauna Creative

RIO GRANDE WATER FUND

An innovative program to ensure water to New Mexicans for generations to come through wildfire and water source protection.

Presenter: Steve Bassett | NM Director of Conservation Programs | sbassett@tnc.org

Overview

- 1** Motivation for the RGWF
- 2** Program Vision & Context
- 3** RGWF Accomplishments in the First Decade
- 4** Evaluating Treatment Effectiveness
- 5** RGWF 2.0: Focused Impact

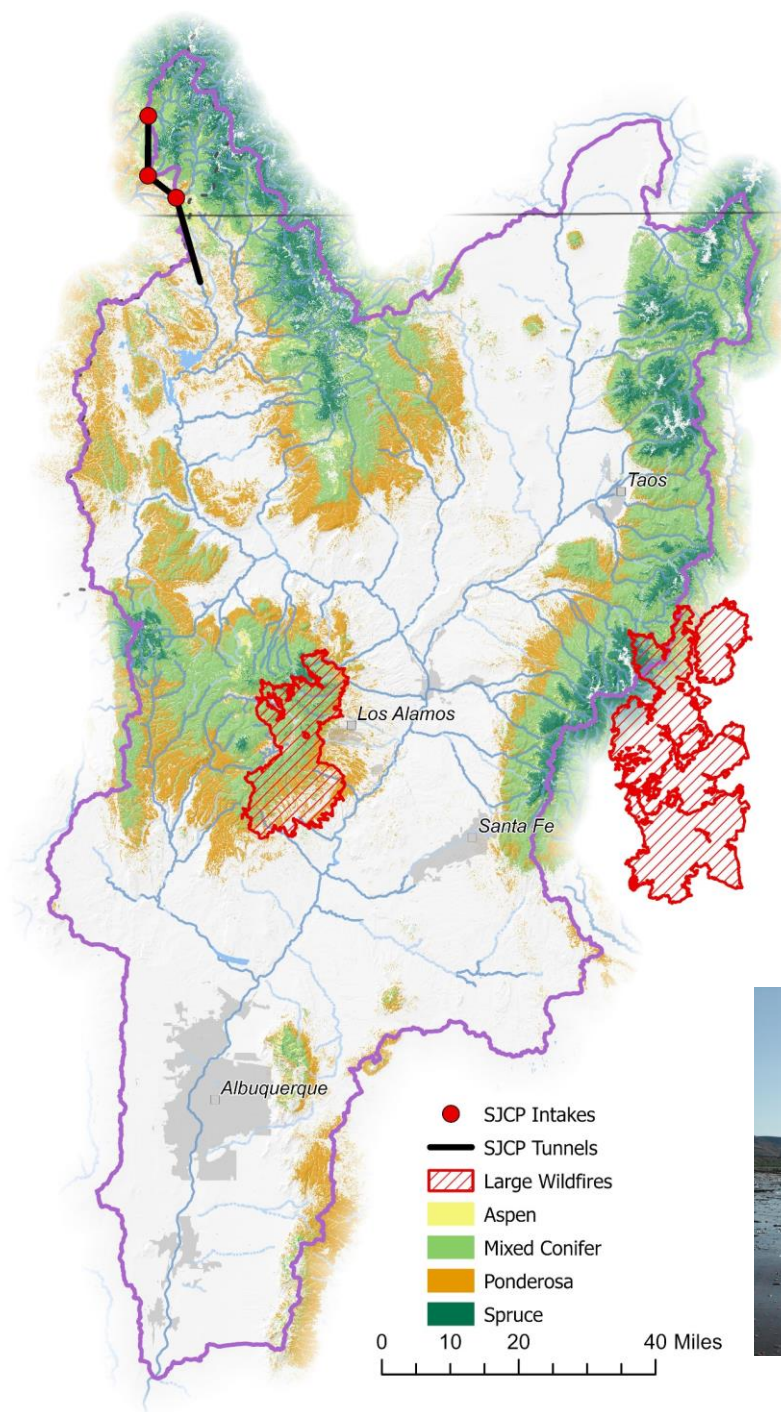
Motivation

2011 Las Conchas Fire

- Increase in fire size, severity, subsequent floods, and debris flows.
- Las Conchas Fire grew by 43,000 acres in 12 hours.
- About 45% of the 158,000-acres burned at moderate and high severity (USFS 2011).



Photos: Collin Haffey/NPS, John Fowler



RGWF Goal & Objectives

GOAL: protect the storage, delivery, and quality of water supply through landscape-scale forest restoration treatments

The objectives of the water fund are to:

- **Restore watershed functions** by improving stream and riparian area health,
- **Mitigate the downstream effects** of flooding and debris flows after wildfires,
- **Reduce forest fuels** in areas identified as high risk for wildfire and debris flow,
- Support forest products industries' use of wood by-products from **fuel reduction**,
- Maintain the **reduced wildfire hazard** in treated areas, and
- **Secure sustainable financing** from water users, government, investors and donors, and facilitate payments to upstream land managers.

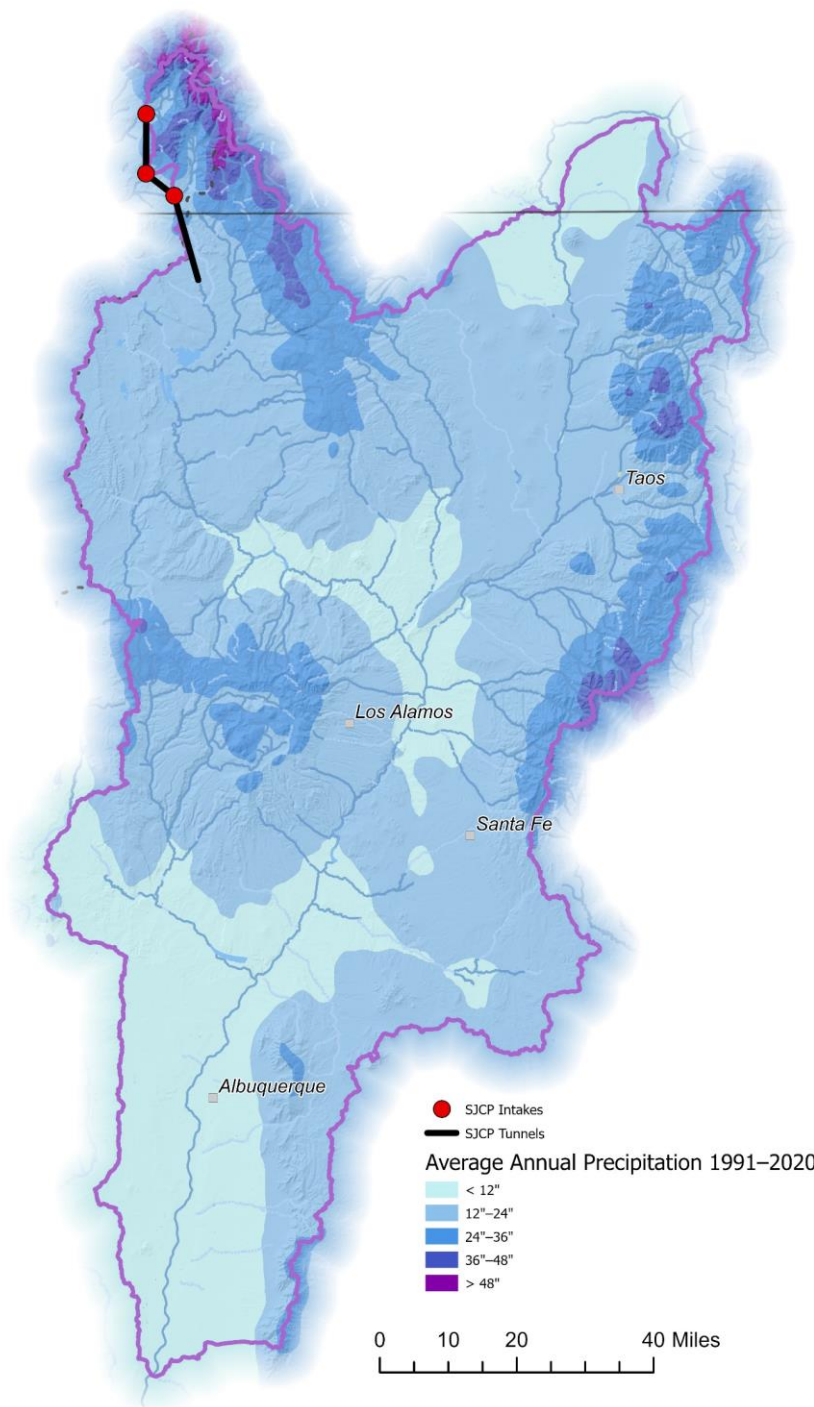


Critical Watersheds

Enabling Life and Prosperity in New Mexico

- **Water for Nature**
- **Water for People**
- **Water for Agriculture**
- **Water for Industry**

Over one million people depend on this watershed, over five-hundred thousand on the SJCP area.

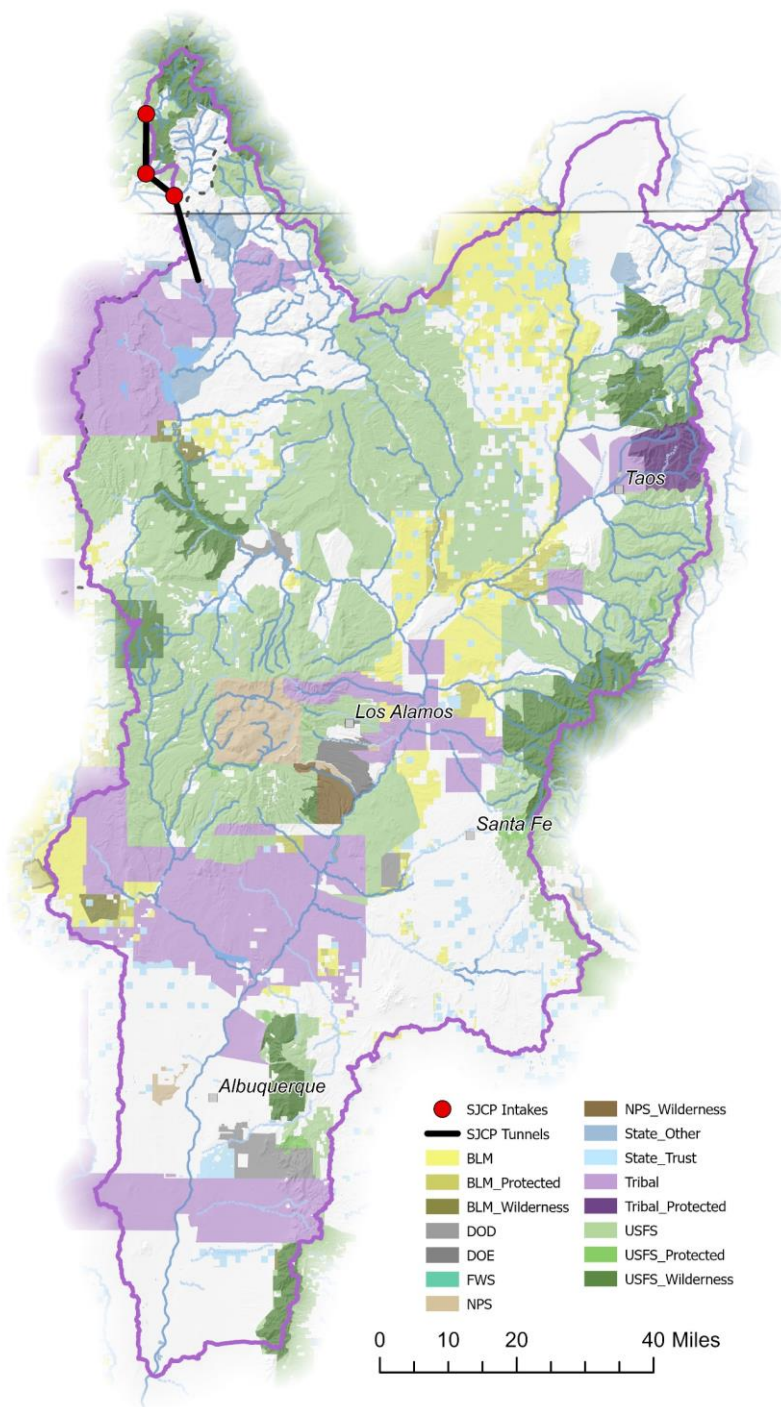


Complex Watersheds

Enabling Life and Prosperity in New Mexico

- **Large Watershed**
- **Distant Water Sources**
- **Multi-State Compacts**
- **Diverse Land Management Priorities**
- **Limited Land Management Funding**

The RGWF drives focused implementation at meaningful scales to address these watershed-wide challenges.



A Decade of Success

Together, with partnerships including our 100+ signatories, we have achieved a lot:



25
implementing
partners



105
signatories



251,000
acres of forest
restoration
activities



\$12 Million
RGWF directly
raised for
restoration



\$10 Million
In public
funding to be
deployed



50+
projects
funded



1,500+
jobs
supported



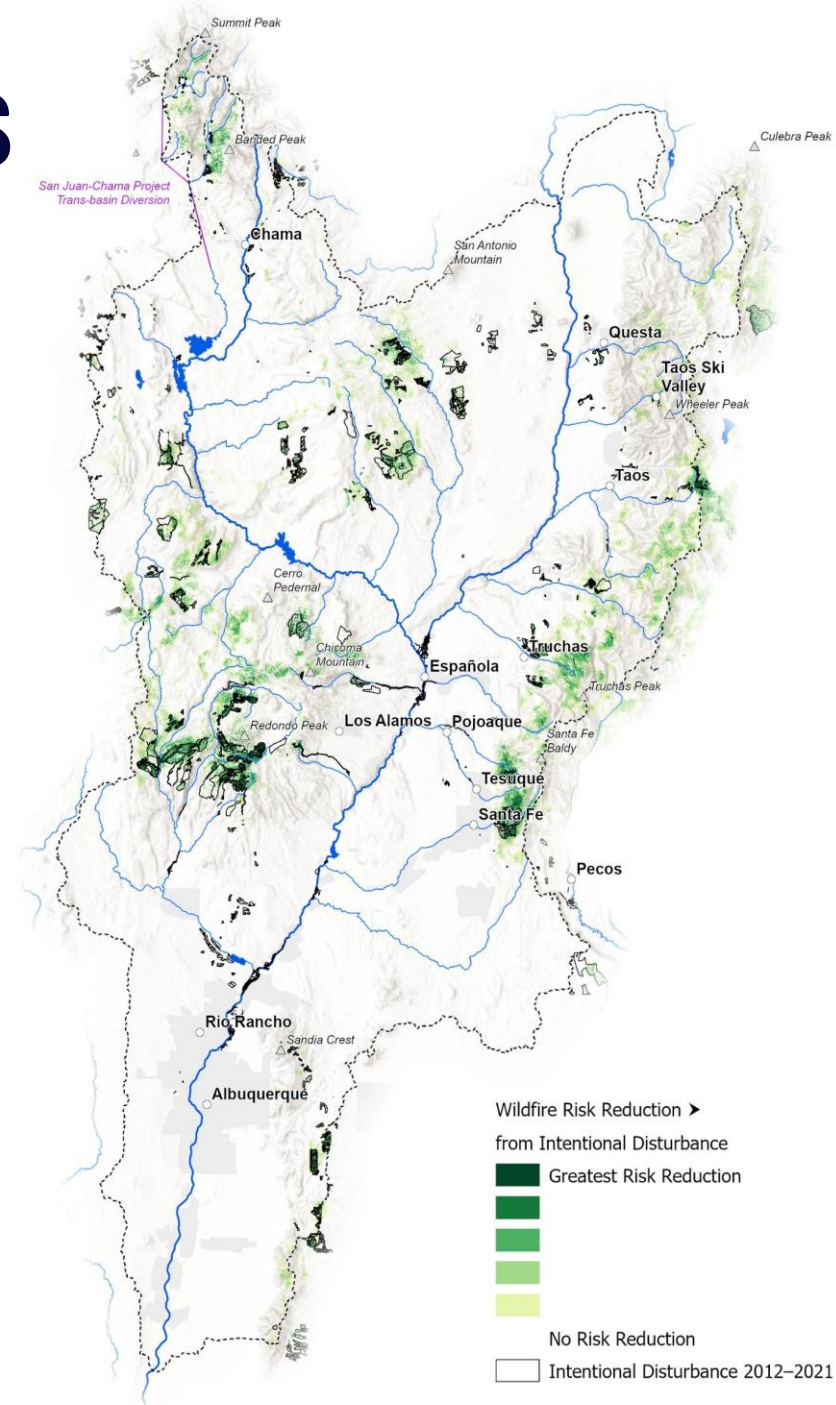
Treatment Effectiveness

We Have Reduced Wildfire Risk

Effectiveness = Change in Risk

Critical Thresholds of Treatment (Extent & Intensity)

Thin + Burn Most Effective



Treatments *After Restoration*



Forest Restoration Objectives

- Decrease Tree Density
- Restore Structural Diversity
- Restore Species Diversity
- Remove Ladder Fuels

**Fire-Resilient
not Fireproof**



Hand Thin



Mastication



**Mechanical
Harvest**



Photo credit: Dolecek Enterprises Inc., USDA Forest Service

Treatment Maintenance



Long-term Wildfire Resilience

- Controlled Burning

**Fire-Resilient
not Fireproof**



Broadcast Burn



Pile Burn

The Next Decade

RGWF Strategic Pillars

COORDINATE
COLLECTIVE
ACTION



Bring together public and private beneficiaries.

IMPLEMENT



Manage implementation of high-impact projects.

INFLUENCE



Influence policy and decision-makers.

STRATEGIC
ANALYSIS



Drive evidence-based strategic priorities.

INSPIRE
INVESTMENT



Unlock innovative and long-term investment opportunities.

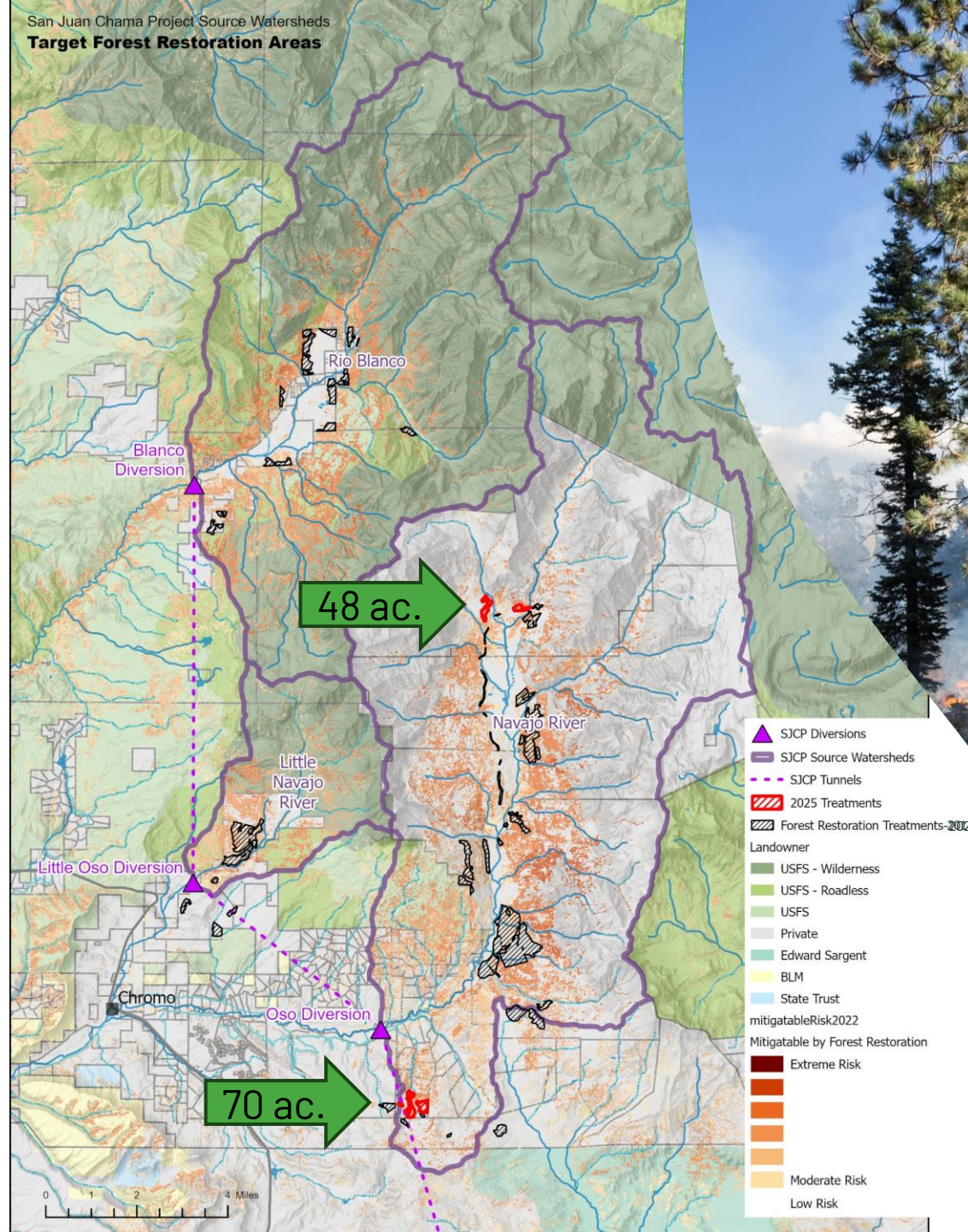
Pillar 2

Implement

Implement 15,000 acres of Forest Restoration

- Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG, \$7M)
- ABCWUA/MRGCD 2025 thinning projects →
- TNC NM fire module
- Riparian projects with CRP

Photo: Fauna Creative



SJCP Projects

Completed Projects

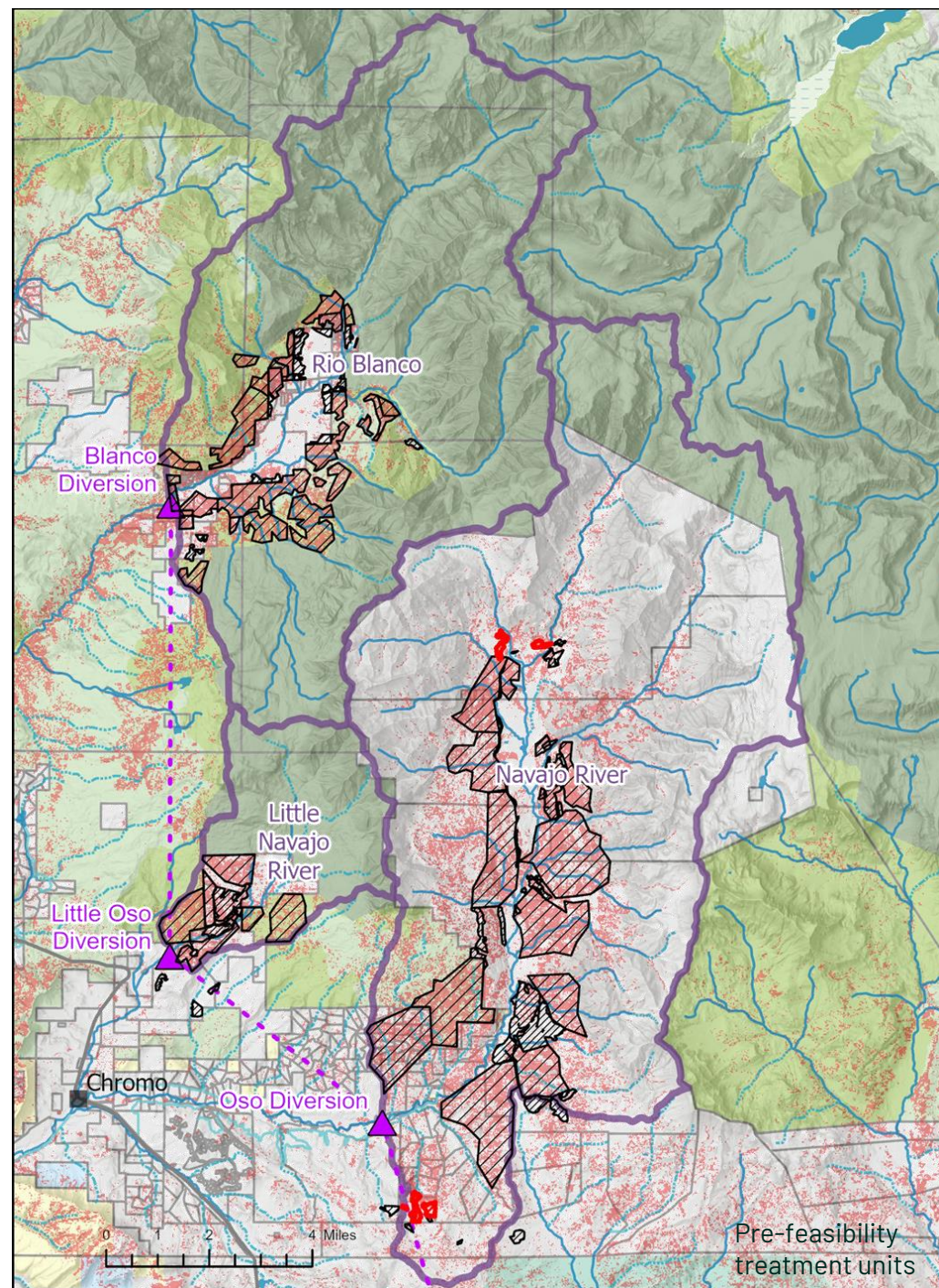
2012–2024 1,845 acres

Project Pipeline

2025–2032 ~13,000 acres
~\$50M

Annual Maintenance

2025– ~1,500 acres/year
~\$600,000/year



SJCP Projects

COORDINATE
COLLECTIVE
ACTION



IMPLEMENT



INFLUENCE



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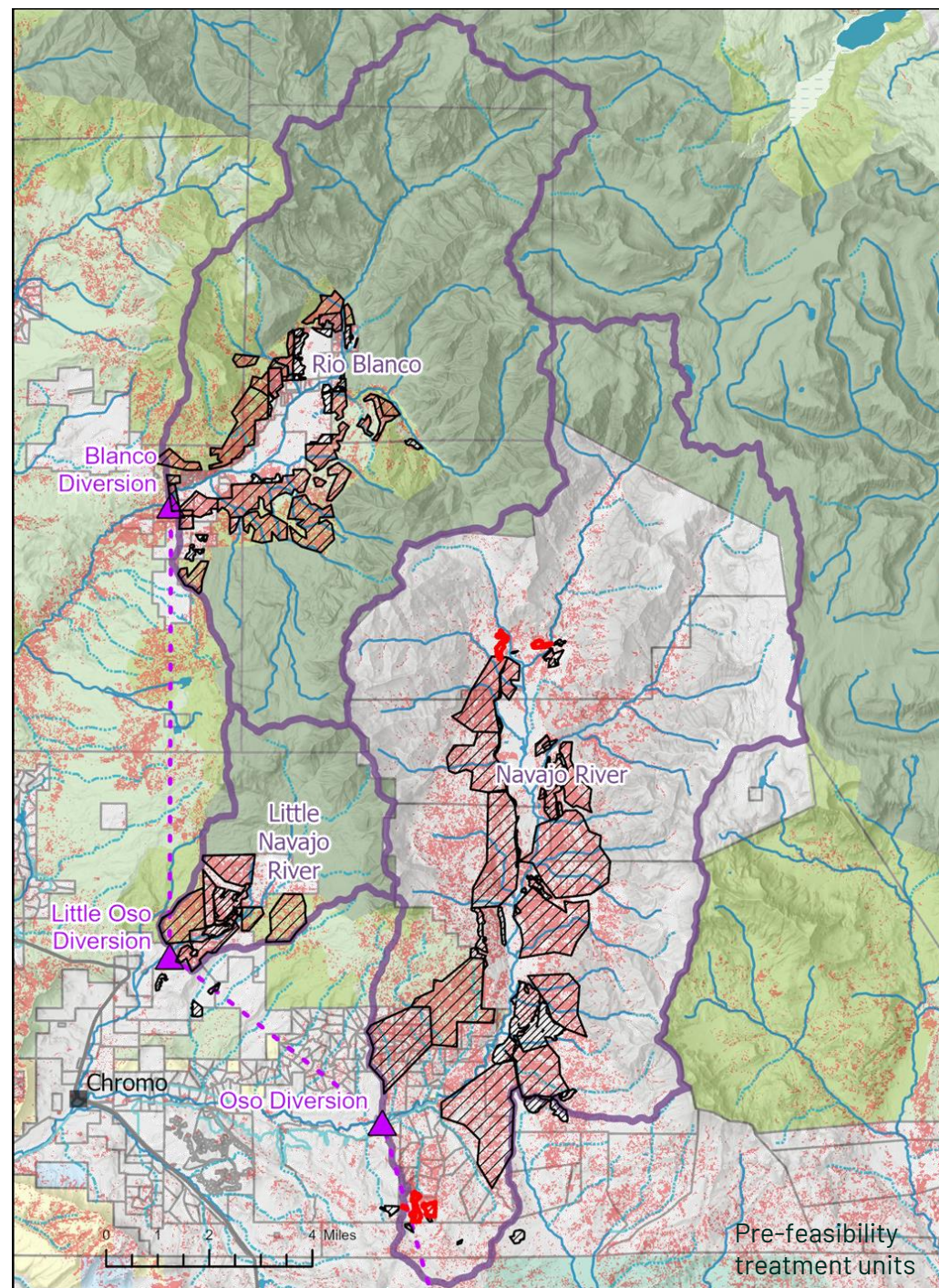
Coordinate Collective Action

Implement

Influence

Strategic Analysis

Inspire Investment



Conclusions

- RGWF has accomplished much in the first decade!
- RGWF has ambitious goals and a refined strategy for the next decade of operations.
- The challenges faced in securing our water supplies are massive, but together, we will succeed.

"Irrigation system managers can invest all they want in canal infrastructure, gate automation, and on-farm efficiency, but all of that counts for very little if you aren't investing in the source of that water. MRGCD recognizes investment in our green infrastructure upstream of our diversions is critical to furthering our mission of providing water to farmers in the Middle Rio Grande."

*~ Casey Ish,
Director of Lands and Conservation, MRGCD*

Thank You! *Questions?*

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