

Santa Fe County Open Space, Trails and Parks

Annual Report

2022



SANTA FE COUNTY





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 last three years of reporting our annual work plan, Santa Fe County Open Space and Trails Program (OSTP) has made considerable strides in all aspects of our goals. From implementing plans, to identifying habitat types, to building new trails-- we have set incredibly ambitious goals and rose to meet those challenges. In 2022, OSTP is still leading by example by setting the bar high. In 2022, we are focusing on enhancing resiliency in order to respond effectively to whatever the future brings. These focus areas include providing education and stewardship opportunities to underscore what and why resource management on OSTP properties is a priority; to provide connection for visitors of OSTP properties; and to create organizational capacity through training and other internal operations.

Our most exciting part of the past year was partnering with expert organizations to complete some major resource management goals including implementing a coexistence program with beavers at two Santa Fe County open space properties; managing fire and flood risk at a popular local forest trail; and working with NM youth to improve habitat at several open spaces throughout the County.

Continuing this work into 2022 will require renewed collaboration internally with county staff and also relies on volunteers, agency experts, and county residents. We look forward to a productive and focused year, and can't wait to work with you all!



2022 Work plan and goals

This page outlines the 2022 projects and priorities for OSTP. These priorities are organized by sections consistent with the 2019 OSTP Strategic Plan. Each project has an indicator icon to show progress. Many projects have already been started, and several are upcoming. Highlighted projects are particular priorities for this year.



completed





initiated



not yet initiated

Resource Management

-  Conduct surveys on properties for bats and rare plants
-  Finalize Little Tesuque Creek Open Space Management Plan
-  Finalize Talaya Hill Open Space Management Plan
-  Finalize and Implement Pinyon Jay management plan
-  Finalize and implement a pollinator management plan
-  Investigate allocating a dedicated Resource Management project budget
-  Complete pollinator habitat enhancement at Thornton Ranch Open Space, and possibly expand to other open space properties including Los Potreros Open Space
-  Finalize and implement beaver management plan
-  Install boundary and wildlife friendly fencing at open space properties as needed
-  Complete first phase of forest enhancement project at Ortiz Mountains Open Space in coordination with Wildland Fire Crew and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps
-  Begin erosion control projects at Thornton Ranch Open Space
-  Bull frog/ invasive species management at Los Potreros Open Space
-  OSTP staff training in sustainable trail design, construction and maintenance
-  Coordinate with maintenance staff to formalize maintenance schedule
-  Update OSTP Best Practice Manual

Educational Programming and Stewardship

- Coordinate with Community Development Department and the volunteer coordinator to develop open space volunteer program
- Resurrect volunteer trail maintenance program in coordination with new volunteer coordinator
- Utilize volunteer coordinator to enhance master naturalist outreach and curriculum
- Explore Friends of Open Space program

Project Development and Implementation

- Thornton Ranch Open Space
- Arroyo Hondo Segment 2
- Santa Fe River Trail segment 2 design and acquisition
- Romero Park Phase 2
- Bennie J. Chavez Community Center Park
- Little Tesuque Creek Trail analysis
- Madrid Open Space
- Rail Trail segment 6 and 7

Planning and Program Development

- Build a database for each property in a centralized location for access by all OSTP staff
- Develop policies relating to tribal communications and concerns relating to Thornton Ranch Open Space
- Develop and implement conservation program for Open Space properties
- Lay the groundwork for a potential OSTP Interpretive Rangers program, seek opportunities for partnerships with other ranger programs
- Update open space resolutions and ordinances to reflect the current structure



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: RIO EN MEDIO OPEN SPACE

The Medio Fire started in the Santa Fe National Forest on August 17, 2020. Santa Fe County residents watched in earnest as the fire eventually burned more than 4,000 acres. This incident brought fears relating to climate change, forest fires, and environmental degradation to reality. It also provided the opportunity to respond in a meaningful and responsible way to address catastrophic flooding hazards and environmental degradation risks before they happened.

In partnership with the New Mexico Environment Department, Santa Fe National Forest and Keystone Restoration Ecology, Santa Fe County's Rio en Medio Open Space was a critical landscape for proactive river channel and floodplain stabilization in the Rio en Medio. Reducing and preventing channel incision will ensure that post-fire floods will flow across the floodplain, which will slow water and capture ash and sediment from the fire. Stream restoration techniques such as one-rock dams, J-Hook Vanes, and other Natural Channel Design methods were used, and native plants were planted in order to anchor the floodplains and prevent erosion.

PROPERTY HIGHLIGHT: LOS POTREROS OPEN SPACE

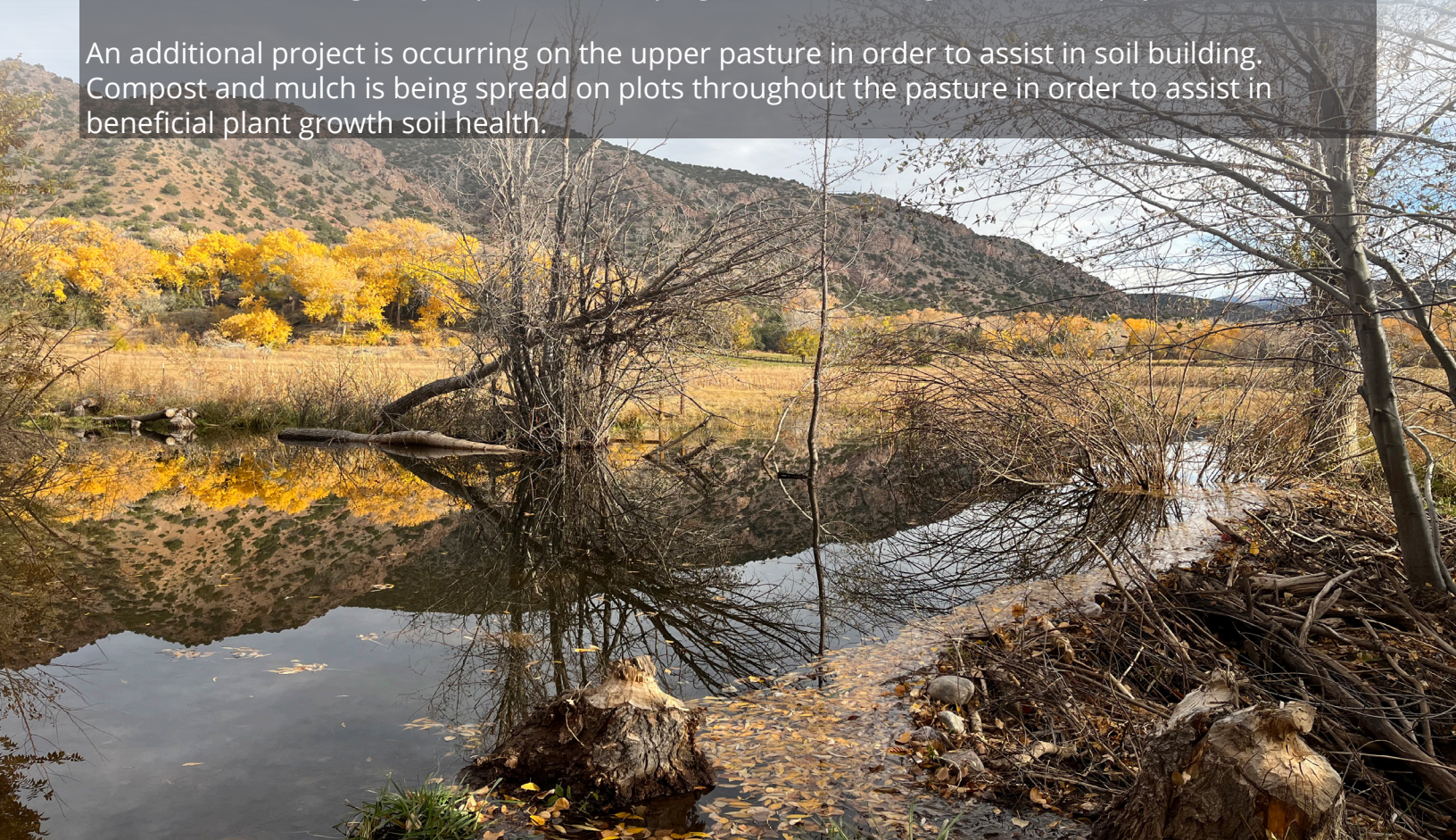
Los Potreros Open Space has been a priority property for the last few years. In 2020, we highlighted the successful pasture restoration keyline project which jump-started a number of initiatives including soil restoration, wetland restoration, pollinator habitat enhancement, and wildlife habitat enhancement.

In partnership with the New Mexico Environment Department and Ecotone Landscape Planning, Santa Fe County was successful in receiving a grant to conduct wetland restoration along the Rio Quemado. The goals for this project include installing Beaver Dam Analogs and rock structures in order to:

- Enhance the wetland environment, including wetland plants in order to enhance filtration and reduce contaminants in the Rio Quemado
- Reconnect the floodplain and raise the riverbed; and
- Keep more water in the area by enhancing the “riparian sponge” at the property

Beaver Dam Analogs are intended to simulate the conditions that beavers create by building dams, which are related to the above stated goals. While this project is still in construction at the time of writing, conditions at the property have already significantly changed because beavers have moved in and got a jump start on helping us achieve our goals for the project!

An additional project is occurring on the upper pasture in order to assist in soil building. Compost and mulch is being spread on plots throughout the pasture in order to assist in beneficial plant growth soil health.



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT: ROCKY MOUNTAIN YOUTH CORPS

Santa Fe County partnered with Rocky Mountain Youth Corps to conduct important resource management projects across several open space properties in 2021. This work is incredibly important to enhance the environment and manage our unique resources.

Two teams of young people from New Mexico assisted in invasive species management, enhancing forest health, piñon juniper research, fencing, and wetland restoration including:

- Thinned approximately 28 acres of ponderosa pine and dry mixed-conifer forest at the Ortiz Mountains Open Space in order to implement novel thinning approaches aimed at conserving wildlife habitat while also reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire. The County's novel approach to thinning is highlighted by the New Mexico Avian Conservation Partners.
- Installed approximately 100 erosion control wattles around mature piñon pine trees at the Thornton Ranch Open Space. Wattles were installed in an attempt to help trees survive drought, as well as to help them increase production of seeds (nuts) for wildlife, including the imperiled Pinyon Jay. This project was highlighted in an article published by the Santa Fe New Mexican.
- Installed new fencing at the Los Potreros Open Space to keep stray cattle off the property. Keeping cattle off the property will improve water quality and wildlife habitat and assist in achieving the wetland project goals.
- Girdled non-native, invasive tree species at the Los Potreros Open Space, including Siberian Elm, Russian Olive, and Tree of Heaven.
- Planted wildflower seeds for pollinators at the Thornton Ranch Open Space.

This was an incredibly productive partnership to enhance the County's capacity for resource management, and we look forward to another successful year of projects in 2022!



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHT: RIO GRANDE RETURN AND DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE

Beavers provide significant benefits to landscapes where they live; however, beaver management is not without challenges, especially where man-made infrastructure and beaver-made infrastructure clash. Defenders of Wildlife and Rio Grande Return have initiated a “beaver coexistence” program to assist private property owners in managing any beaver conflicts through the use of “beaver deceivers”, flow devices, or other means that encourages beavers to stay in place but still allows flow of water in waterways, prevents flooding, and enhances habitat!

Santa Fe County is excited to be a demonstration partner for this initiative. We are partnering with these two organizations to install beaver coexistence infrastructure at La Cieneguilla Open Space and at Los Potreros Open Space. Throughout 2021 and 2022, Santa Fe County and our partner organizations have made significant efforts to demonstrate best practices for beaver coexistence and the benefits of beavers in the environment.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: THORNTON RANCH OPEN SPACE

Thornton Ranch Open Space will continue to be a priority project in 2022. Through 2021, planning staff diligently coordinated with outside agencies including tribal partners in order to develop a thoughtful, sustainable and respectful trail system; as well as supporting meaningful conversations related to the importance of protection of this special place and the possibility of co-management with tribal entities of the resources on the property.



OSTP has also focused on innovative land management at Thornton Ranch Open Space as an example of resilient and adaptive opportunities in New Mexico and the Southwest. For the past two years, Thornton Ranch Open Space has been a center of experimentation to better understand methods for adapting to climate change and managing changing pinon juniper landscapes. Work has been done to seed a new generation of pinons for this ecosystem, as well as enhance the pollinator habitat and test different methods of dry land seeding.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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