

In January 2011, the Secretary of the Interior visited our fine state and hosted a public meeting to discuss the future of the Middle Rio Grande. By the meeting's end, the Secretary created a citizen's committee to prepare a vision document that would chart a path forward to advance the countless opportunities for conservation, educational and recreational activities along the Middle Rio Grande.

The newly formed Committee was charged to work with leadership and staff from the Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Reclamation of Reclamation to design a framework through which local citizens, government agencies and concerned organizations worked together to create a new model for conservation and recreation efforts along the river.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Region took this challenge seriously, and we have worked in collaboration with the Bureau of Reclamation over the last six months to develop a partnership-based framework for the Middle Rio Grande (MRG) that includes all the stakeholders, and supports the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative.

We took the lead in working with the Committee members and initiated a process involving members of the public and technical experts to ensure we included historical and current expertise and ideas, as well as a vision for the future. The Service was there at each Committee and public meeting, and attended more than a dozen meetings of the three subcommittees on conservation, education, and recreation.

In addition to our public outreach efforts, we sought out key local government and environmental interest group partners. Mayor Berry of Albuquerque enthusiastically joined the effort, as did the Mayor of the Village of Corrales, the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance, and New Mexico Audubon. The Service and Reclamation also coordinated directly with the six Rio Grande pueblos to seek their perspectives and advice.

It is truly impressive to see the power of community, as expressed with the high level of public involvement in the process that produced this initial report on the Middle Rio Grande Conservation Initiative. The report truly reflects President Obama's America's Great Outdoors

initiative, and embodies a locally driven, landscape-level conservation effort that leverages strong existing and new partnerships.

One idea that continually emerged throughout this report is the vital need to complete the purchase of the Price's Dairy property and officially establish the Middle Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge. As the Southwest's first urban Refuge, this unique natural resources jewel will do much to further conservation, education and recreation activities in the river corridor.

I want to thank the members of the Middle Rio Grande Conservation Initiative Committee:

Kelly Gossett, from the New Mexico Outdoors Coalition

Amalia Kenward, from the New Mexico Archaeological Council

Derrick Lente, Board Chairman of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

Matt Schmader, Superintendent of the City of Albuquerque Open Space Division

Oscar Simpson, from the New Mexico Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and

Charles Walter, Executive Director of the New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science

I also want to thank my colleague and our good partner, Larry Walkoviak, BOR's Upper Colorado Regional Director. I would also like to express my appreciation to our contractor, Dave Simon, for his excellent work in conceptualizing and writing the document you will receive today.

Most of all, I am especially grateful to my outstanding staff – Andrew Hautzinger, Janet Bair and Michelle Shaughnessy and many others – who spent many hours making this report a reality.

I also conveyed my thanks to the Secretary for his leadership and vision that lit the spark for this initiative. Wednesday, July 11, 2011, marks the date of delivery of a report that will move us all forward as we work to manage and protect this special river system forward.