

**New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee
Groundwater Restoration Plan for the
Middle Rio Grande Region
Sparton Technology Settlement Funds**

Pursuant to the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 9601-9675), the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee (NMONRT) has prepared a Restoration Plan, subject to public comment, for the utilization of monetary awards for damages to the natural resources of the State of New Mexico. The Restoration Plan details the utilization of a portion of the funds recovered from the Sparton Technology Inc. settlement to compensate the public for the lost use of injured ground water. The Consent Decree that resolves the City of Albuquerque et al., v. Sparton Technology, Inc. and apportions funds to the Office of Natural Resources Trustee was signed on March 3, 2000.

CERCLA provides that the governor of each state is to designate responsible officials as Trustees for natural resources under the jurisdiction of state government. Accordingly, the Governor of New Mexico designated the Natural Resources Trustee as trustee for resources under the jurisdiction of the State of New Mexico. In addition, CERCLA requires development of a plan to use funds for the restoration, rehabilitation or replacement or acquisition of injured resources.

Sparton Technology Site

The Sparton Technology site is located at 9621 Coors Road NW in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sparton Technology is currently performing corrective action at the site to address the ground water plume that has been contaminated with solvents. There are no drinking water wells impacted by the contaminant plume and an off-site ground water recovery system has been successful in preventing any further expansion of the plume. Documentation concerning the remedial cleanup efforts is located in the repository at the Taylor Ranch Branch Library. Questions regarding the cleanup effort can be directed to the New Mexico Environment Department, Ground Water Quality Bureau, 4131 Montgomery, Albuquerque, NM 87109, 505/841-9458.

Summary

The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) will implement a Bosque restoration project that will include the territory between Avenida Cesar Chavez and Rio Bravo Boulevards, and between Campbell and Montano Roads in Bernalillo County. This effort will result in water conservation through the eradication of phreatophytes and other non-native plant species in the Rio Grande Bosque, fuel reduction to lessen the danger of wildfires, revegetation activities, and regular monitoring of Bosque conditions.

The MRCOG is well positioned to help the Office of the Natural Resources Trustee achieve its goals for improving the Rio Grande Watershed. In the process of developing the Middle Rio Grande water plan on behalf of the Interstate Stream Commission, MRCOG has collected a great

deal of data on the status of the Rio Grande watershed and water conservation efforts in the region.

As a regional governmental organization, MRCOG exists to address issues that cross-jurisdictional boundaries and build partnerships among local governments to solve common problems. Through MRCOG's existing structure, we have the capacity to engage all entities with jurisdiction over the Rio Grande watershed to coordinate conservation efforts and develop a long-range plan for new projects.

Presently, there are several local organizations engaged in Rio Grande Bosque restoration. However, available funding is estimated to cover less than half of the acreage that needs restoration.

Current costs estimates show that an investment of \$800,000 could potentially fund the restoration of 300 to 800 additional acres of Bosque habitat, depending on the type and density of vegetation, proximity to population centers, and techniques used. Estimates for consumptive water use by an acre of salt cedar vary from 3 acre feet/year to 6 acre feet/year, depending on plant maturity and water table depth. Eradicating 500 acres of salt cedar could potentially save between 1,500 and 3,000 acre feet of water annually.

MRCOG requests \$800,000 from the Office of the Natural Resources Trustee to carry out this project.

Project Goal:

The goal of this proposal is the restoration and protection of the Rio Grande watershed through the management of Office of the Natural Resources Trustee funding for new Bosque restoration efforts.

Our primary goal will be the development and implementation of a long-term bosque restoration plan for project areas covering at least 500 acres.

Methods:

This proposal requests \$800,000 from the Office of the Natural Resources Trustee to plan and implement new Bosque restoration activities. Such activities can include clearing of non-native plant species, revegetation, and regular monitoring and maintenance of Bosque conditions and needs. The Office of the Natural Resources Trustee resources will be used for new projects that are not currently funded by other entities. It will not be used to supplant funding for Bosque projects already underway. MRCOG will contract for restoration services. A MRCOG employee will manage the contract with Office of the Natural Resources Trustee oversight and provide on-site supervision of restoration work being done by contractors.

The cost of phreatophyte removal and revegetation with native species varies significantly depending on the density of non-native vegetation and proximity to population centers. Removal costs range from \$150 per acre for broadcast herbicide application in uninhabited

areas to \$2,700 per acre for labor-intensive mechanical extraction where native plant species and/or wildlife habitat must be preserved.

Budget:

The cost of implementing the project will amount to \$800,000.

Measurements:

The success of some watershed restoration efforts can be directly measured as in the case of water conservation achieved through the eradication of non-native plant species. The direct water conservation benefits of eliminating those species from the Bosque have been clearly established.

It is widely accepted that a single mature salt cedar plant can consume up to 200 gallons of water under ideal conditions. Estimates for consumptive water use by an acre of salt cedar range from about 3 acre feet to 6 acre feet per year, depending on growth state and water table depth.

The success of this proposal can be measured by the land area that has successfully been cleared and restored through those efforts and associated acre feet of water conserved.

Benefits:

Current drought conditions have highlighted the need to preserve and protect our limited water resources. The Rio Grande Watershed represents the primary source of water coming into this region, and Bosque restoration efforts have been shown to have a significant impact on the quality and availability of water. A healthy Bosque consumes less water, has lower wildfire risk, a robust wildlife population, and offers a beautiful, natural environment for recreation activities for the residents of this region.

The implementation of Bosque restoration will provide both short- and long-term benefits for the communities in the Rio Grande Watershed. The restoration activities contained in this proposal have the potential to reduce water consumption, thereby increasing the availability of groundwater and water in a river that is currently over appropriated. The water saved through such measures could be used to extend the life of the region's aquifers, help New Mexico meet its compact obligations to Texas and/or satisfy the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.

Organizational Qualifications

The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) of New Mexico is a voluntary association of local governments and special units of government within State Planning and Development District No. 3, which is comprised of Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia counties. Most of our member governments are located within the Middle Rio Grande Watershed.

MRCOG currently administers a variety of programs. MRCOG is a state-designated Regional Water Planning Agency, and is Federally designated as an Economic Development District. MRCOG is the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area for transportation systems planning, and serves as the Regional Planning Organization (RPO) for non-metropolitan transportation planning.