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Water-guzzling plants being removed at Los Lunas bosque

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By ASSOCIATED PRESS
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LOS LUNAS, N.M. (AP) - Water-guzzling salt cedar, Russian olive and Siberian elm trees are being removed from 70 acres of the cottonwood forest known as the bosque along the Rio Grande in Los Lunas.

The main goal is to conserve water, but officials say the work also will improve water quality and wildlife habitat while reducing fire danger in the overgrown bosque.

The work, which is continuing through the beginning of bird-nesting season on April 15, is being funded by \$200,000 that was part of a settlement with Sparton Industries over groundwater contamination.

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District is managing the project for state Natural Resources Trustee Martin Heinrich, who announced the initiative Friday along with Gov. Bill Richardson.

"The Rio Grande is New Mexico's lifeblood," said Heinrich, whose office is responsible for the restoration of damaged natural resources. "This effort will protect and restore a piece of our precious river and the water that we all rely upon."