Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan

Prepared by:

QUIVIRA COALITION
education, innovation, restoration—one acre at a time

JUSTIFICATION AND CREDITS

This Wetlands Action Plan was prepared in partnership with the New Mexico Environment Department's Surface Water Quality Bureau Wetlands Program, with additional support from the stakeholders of Santa Rosa.

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full Name
EMNRD	Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentive Program
ESA	Endangered Species Act
GSWCD	Guadalupe Soil and Water Conservation District
NM	New Mexico
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NMED	New Mexico Environment Department
NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
NMRPTC	New Mexico Rare Plant Technical Council
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service
SGCN	Species of Greatest Conservation Need
SRWAPSC	Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan Steering Committee
SWQB	Surface Water Quality Bureau
T&E	Threatened and Endangered
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
WAP	Wetlands Action Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND NEED

PURPOSE

The Santa Rosa wetlands are unique in the arid Southwest where water resources are sparse and critical for the needs of the environment and people. The wetlands are so extraordinary that they meet most criteria for designation as "wetlands of international importance".

> The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty whose mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world". As of October 2010, 160 nations have joined the Convention as Contracting Parties, and more than 1900 wetlands around the world, covering over 186 million hectares, have been designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 2010).

Robert Sivinski (wetland expert) explored a Ramsar designation and determined that the Santa Rosa Wetlands meet 7 of 9 criteria for Ramsar designation. Only one of the nine criteria is necessary which further highlights the remarkable nature of Santa Rosa wetlands. The possibility of having the Santa Rosa wetlands included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance discussion was initiated by New Mexico Energy, Mineral and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) and the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Surface Water Quality Bureau (SWQB) Wetlands Program. Robert Sivinski's complete Ramsar assessment is included in Appendix A.

Appendix B contains a ciénega-specific curriculum developed specifically for the community of Santa Rosa. In a city where the surroundings are so special and unique, the importance of educating community youth about their own environmental wealth is an essential component of any plan to address preserving and restoring area wetlands. Community engagement on this topic has been established and a continuation would include implementation of the curriculum. This will require a broader level of community education and engagement to establish value in educating the community youth on the rarity of the regional natural resources.

In addition to initial identification as wetlands of international importance and the ciénega curriculum, Santa Rosa wetlands have been showcased in a documentary film by Christina Selby, Saving Beauty (https://www.savingbeautyfilm.com) that has been widely viewed on

multiple platforms and in screening events (Figure 1). As described on the film's website, "The Saving Beauty film and project raises awareness about rare plants, their unique habitats, and the other endangered species that share their home." These wetlands host some spectacular species such as the endangered Pecos sunflower. An annual Sunflower Festival to celebrate the presence of this plant species in the area wetlands will be celebrated in September each year starting in 2021.

Figure 1. Saving Beauty film by Christina Selby

Also created by Christina Selby is an online story map. A story map is a media platform supported by ArcGIS (mapping software) which uses maps as part of a digital storytelling narrative. Story maps can beautifully communicate complex conservation stories with imagery and maps. The story map contains detailed information and a wealth of images that tell the story of Santa Rosa history and wetland uses and changes over time. Las Ciénegas: The American Southwest's Most Endangered Ecosystem is available for free at the following link. https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ab9b1d934dd94a3b8f4052a2f6059baa

The purpose of this Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan is to bring together members of the Santa Rosa community to begin articulating and documenting a comprehensive approach to

preserving and restoring their notable wetland resources. The WAP includes background information and prioritizes wetlands in the project area where activities should be designed and implemented when funds become available.

NEED

The City of Santa Rosa is built in a large geologic depression of sinkholes and springs that is six miles in diameter (Sweeting 1972). Much of the built infrastructure in the City of Santa Rosa is built upon former wetlands. Development in the Santa Rosa area as well as heavy land use in the last century has led to drainage of some large ciénegas and wetlands, and down-cutting of the large river channels. The damming of the Pecos River just north of Santa Rosa has changed natural water distribution. Wetlands and ciénegas have been channelized to provide water for agricultural irrigation. Past and current drainage move water away from former wetlands to maintain private homes and municipal buildings. These actions have impacted both surface and subsurface flow of water. Grazing management has also impacted wetland vegetation and sensitive species such as the Pecos sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*), Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii)* and Great Plains lady's tresses orchid (*Spiranthes magnicamporum*). Additionally, dense stands of highly volatile non-native Tamarisk (Tamarix spp.) and Russian olive *(Elaeagnus angustifolia)* trees in area wetlands are impairing hydrology and degrading habitat for plant and animal species. Invasive herbaceous species are also of concern.

The information in this plan is based upon historical records, available data, stakeholder interviews, and information provided in the Ciénega Wetland Action Plan by Robert Sivinski. Significant assistance has been provided by Daniela Roth with New Mexico Energy, Mineral, and Natural Resources Department-Forestry Division (EMNRD). A Wetland Action Plan also identifies data gaps in order to inform future planning activities.

Currently, many different entities have interests in the wetlands of Santa Rosa. The stakeholder group consists of the City of Santa Rosa, private land owners, agency personnel, an educator, nonprofits, and recreationists. The Steering Committee currently consists of individuals representing the groups shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Steering Committee Members

Partner	Contact Person(s)	Partner Role
Surface Water Quality Bureau Wetlands Program, New Mexico Environment Department	Maryann McGraw JT Jones	Project funding through grant awards, technical assistance
Quivira Coalition	Mollie Walton Morika Hensley	Project management for the Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan
Botany Program Coordinator EMNRD – Forestry Division	Daniela Roth	New Mexico State Botanist and Pecos Sunflower expert
Institute for Applied Ecology - Southwest	Melanie Gisler Ashlee Wolf	Education and Outreach
Santa Rosa Stakeholder	Estela Thompson	Santa Rosa stakeholder, rancher and educator
Impact Outdoors	Matthew Monjaras	Educator and waterfowl enthusiast
Santa Rosa Stakeholder	Lisa Brassell	Santa Rosa stakeholder
Santa Rosa Stakeholder	Polly Robinson	Santa Rosa stakeholder, rancher
Santa Rosa Stakeholder	Alan Fuchs	Santa Rosa stakeholder, rancher
RCS Southwest	Robert Sivinski	Botanist and ciénegas expert
Creator of Saving Beauty Film and Pecos Sunflower story map	Christina Selby	Botanist and filmmaker

In working with the stakeholders of Santa Rosa, it became apparent that the greatest need regarding area wetlands was education of all stakeholders to the exceptional wetland resources that surround them. The ciénega curriculum has been developed to educate local youth about the unique wetlands with the hope that this education begins early and helps to instill pride and help develop a stewardship ethos in the area. The future preservation of Santa Rosa's natural resources is directly correlated to the educational process which will enhance local community engagement. Through a better understanding of the natural resource's economic value and impact, local engagement will increase causing further preservation of this unique treasure.

OBJECTIVES

The Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan Steering Committee (SRWAPSC) has identified the following objectives:

1. Create a Santa Rosa Wetland Alliance composed of community members from diverse backgrounds who have an interest in wetland stewardship. The group should be composed of city representatives, technical advisors, local land owners/managers, sportsman, nature enthusiasts, and local educators in order to implement projects identified in the Santa Rosa Wetland Action Plan.
2. Improve wetland and riparian habitats in priority wetland sites.
3. Improve soil water storage in ciénegas by addressing water diversions/drainage features through area wetlands.
4. Research wetland function, endangered species population trend monitoring and impacts of management practices to inform Best Management Practices.
5. Inventory and document sensitive resource locations for management and conservation priority.
6. Conserve and protect habitats for sensitive species through acquisition, tax incentives, conservation easements, or other forms of permanent protection.
7. Serve as a demonstration site showcasing multiple-use management practices that are effective in protecting, restoring, and maintaining wetlands.
8. Educate youth and local residents about the unique ecosystem where they live.
9. Promote wetland health in order to become an ecotourism destination.

INTRODUCTION

Due to the legacy use of wetlands and riparian areas in the project area and the resultant degradation of these ecosystems, management efforts are necessary to improve ecological conditions. Since 2005, restoration efforts in the project area have been undertaken to reclaim the ciénegas from an overgrowth of Russian olive and to a lesser extent Tamarisk. The New Mexico EMNRD-Forestry Division have been active in these projects as well as surveying for and managing the Pecos sunflower, Great Plains lady-tresses orchid, and Wright's marsh thistle which are currently listed as endangered species for the state of New Mexico (Roth 2020a&b).

PROJECT AREA DESCRIPTION

The Santa Rosa WAP Project area is Guadalupe County surrounding the town of Santa Rosa in the Pecos Headwaters (United States Geological Survey (USGS) Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 13060003 (Figure 2) in Eastern New Mexico.

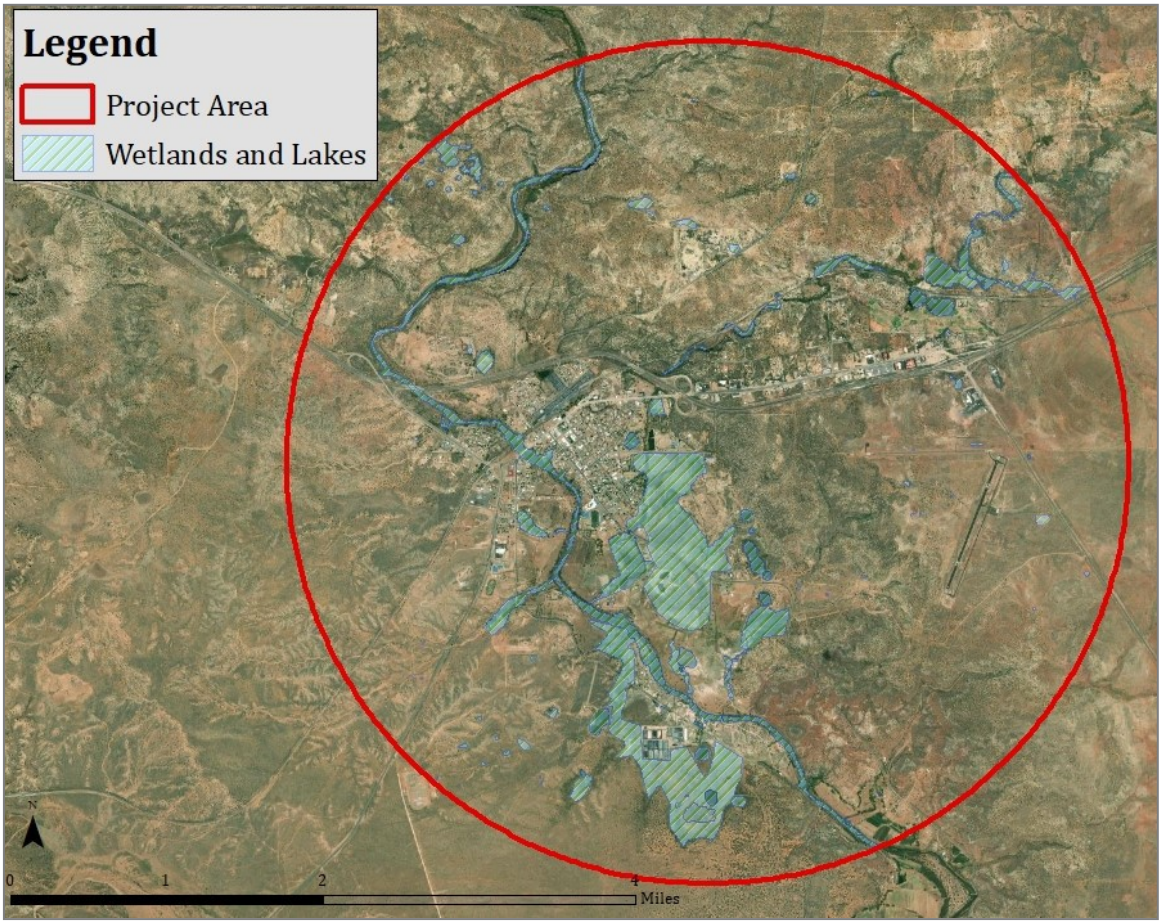


Figure 2. Location of Santa Rosa Wetland Action Plan Project Area, Pecos Headwaters, Guadalupe County, New Mexico (upper figure) and aerial view of the project area with wetlands highlighted (lower figure)

LAND USE

HISTORIC

Although a permanent settlement was not established at Santa Rosa until American colonization in the late 1800s, humans have moved over the landscape for millennia. The earliest evidence of human presence is from the Clovis Period. Santa Rosa remains within the homelands of the Apache, Comanche, and Kiowa people (Wester 2004). The Spanish first passed through the area in the 1580s and noted the abundance of bison, but did not stay due to the alkaline soil and water. The Southern Pacific and Rock Island rail lines came to Santa Rosa in the early 1900s, creating a regional hub. The economy of the area revolved around the railroad, livestock, and agriculture. Large numbers of cattle, horses, donkeys, and sheep contributed new grazing pressure. Agricultural crops were irrigated by water from the Pecos River. Diversions and ditches were constructed to drain wetlands for grazing, cropland, and urban and exurban development. The alkalinity of the groundwater made it unsuitable for irrigation and domestic use which preserved many of the wetlands in the area (Goetz 1948).

PRESENT

The City of Santa Rosa promotes itself as a tourism destination along historic Route 66. The existence of the sinkhole lakes and the September bloom of the Pecos Sunflower also draw visitors to the area. While ciénegas in the project area still suffer from a number of stressors, there is much attention on preserving the unique wetlands in order to draw ecotourism dollars. Land ownership in the area is primarily private, but ownership of protected ciénegas is primarily City of Santa Rosa and EMNRD-Forestry Division (Table 2 and Figure 3).

Table 2. Land ownership in the project area

Land Ownership	**Acres in Project Area**	**Percentage of Area**
Bureau of Land Management	82	0.56%
Private	13,689	93.90%
State of New Mexico (Includes Blue Hole Ciénega Nature Preserve)	737	5.06%
NM Department of Game and Fish	70	0.48%
Totals	**14,578**	

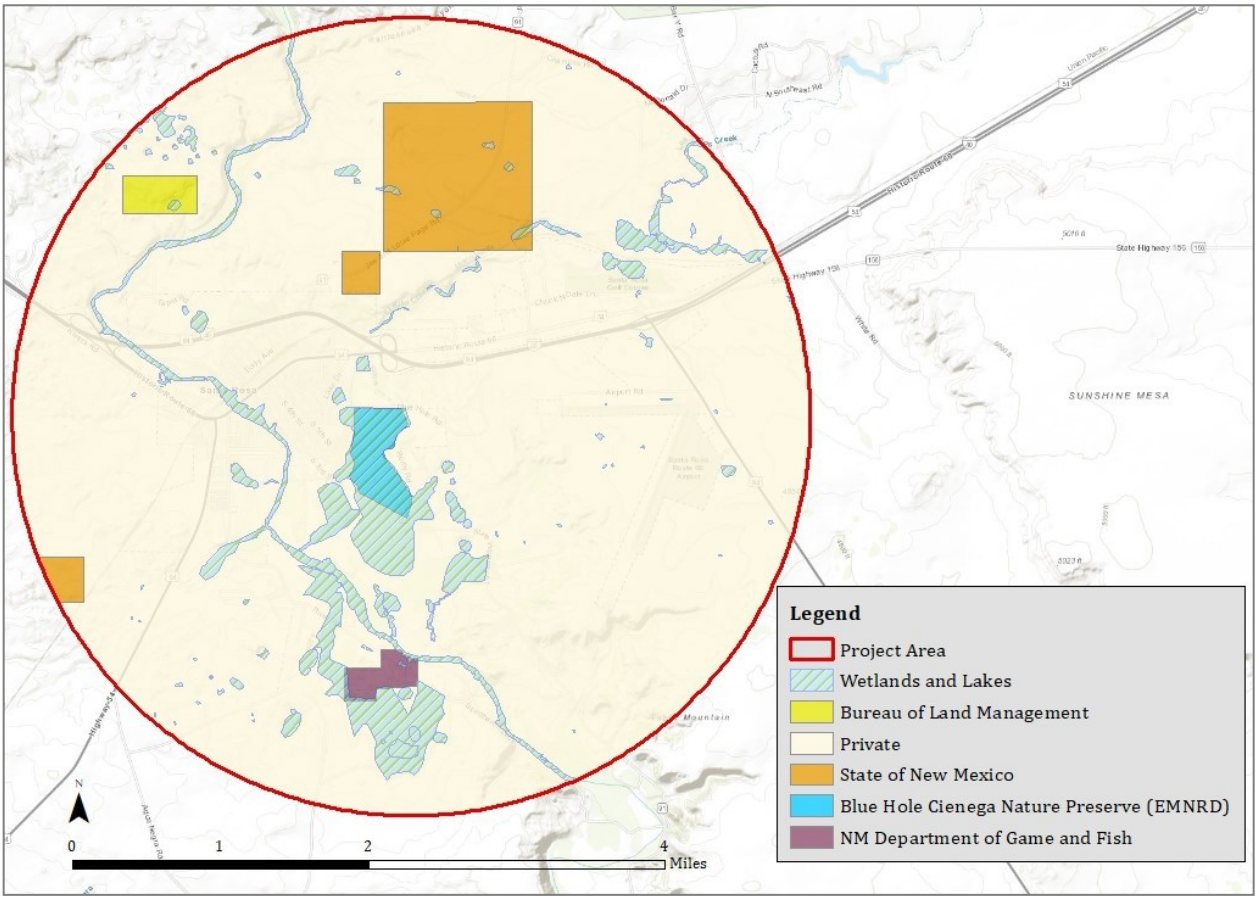


Figure 3. Land ownership in the Santa Rosa Wetland Action Plan Project Area

Current wetland stressors include recreation, poorly managed grazing, encroachment by invasive species (Figure 4), and property development. For an excellent time lapse sequence, see Chapter 2 in the "Las Ciénegas: The American Southwest's Most Endangered Ecosystem" story map by Christina Selby showing current development in Santa Rosa ciénegas (Selby 2020). Las Ciénegas: (arcgis.com)


Figure 4. Russian olive are evident in the foreground of a Santa Rosa ciénega with dried Pecos Sunflowers (reddish plant) in the mid-ground of the photograph.

EMNRD-Forestry Division created the 116 acre Blue Hole Ciénega Nature Preserve in 2005. The preserve was funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT). The nature preserve was created to protect the Pecos Sunflower, Wright's Marsh Thistle, and Great Plains Lady-tresses which are listed as endangered species by the State of New Mexico. The Pecos Sunflower is also listed as threatened by the Federal Endangered Species Act (https://nmrareplants.unm.edu). Active management in the preserve includes removal and re-sprouts treatment of Russian olive and Tamarisk and occasional prescribed burning (Figure 5) has improved habitat conditions for the Pecos Sunflower (Figure 6). This has also occurred on most other ciénegas in Santa Rosa since 2014, for the same purpose. Tourism in the area may provide incentives for protecting Santa Rosa's unique ecosystems (Figure 7).

While the Blue Hole Ciénega is protected, many of the privately-owned ciénegas are in variable condition depending upon management practices. The City of Santa Rosa has protected the 15 acre Milagro Ciénega through fencing and a 25 year conservation easement. Redhawk Preserve is a 275 acre privately owned ciénega protected through a perpetual NRCS Conservation Easement. Most ciénegas in Santa Rosa have seen active removal of invasive species since 2014, with the help of the Guadalupe Soil & Water Conservation District, the USFWS, the NRCS, and the EMNRD-Forestry Division. Stakeholder involvement and investment in local ciénegas is crucial. During the Wetland Action Plan process, education of the local citizenry and youth was identified as one of the most crucial tasks for the future of Santa Rosa wetlands.

Figure 5. Blue Hole Ciénega Nature Preserve in 2005, March 2017, and October 2017 showing Russian olive encroachment into the ciénega in 2005 to recovery post prescribed burn in 2017 (photos from Google Earth).

Figure 6. Pecos Sunflower in the Blue Hole Ciénega Nature Preserve (photograph by Robert Sivinski)


Figure 7. Kids enjoying the Blue Hole (Photograph by Karen Menetrey)

Landscape Characteristics

Geology

In the center of the watershed where the City of Santa Rosa is located, the dominant geologic composition is alluvium (Qa), loose sediments deposited by from erosion by water (Figure 8). In the southeast portion of the watershed, the Artesia Group (Pat) forms broad south-southeast trending outcrops and includes the following formations: Tansill, Yates, Seven Rivers, Queen and Grayburg Formations. The Artesia Group may be overlain by areas of the Moenkopi Formation. The Artesia Group is interpreted as a sequence of shelf rocks of the Capitan reef with much variation in the type of rocks based on deposition environment (Lucas and Hunt 1989).

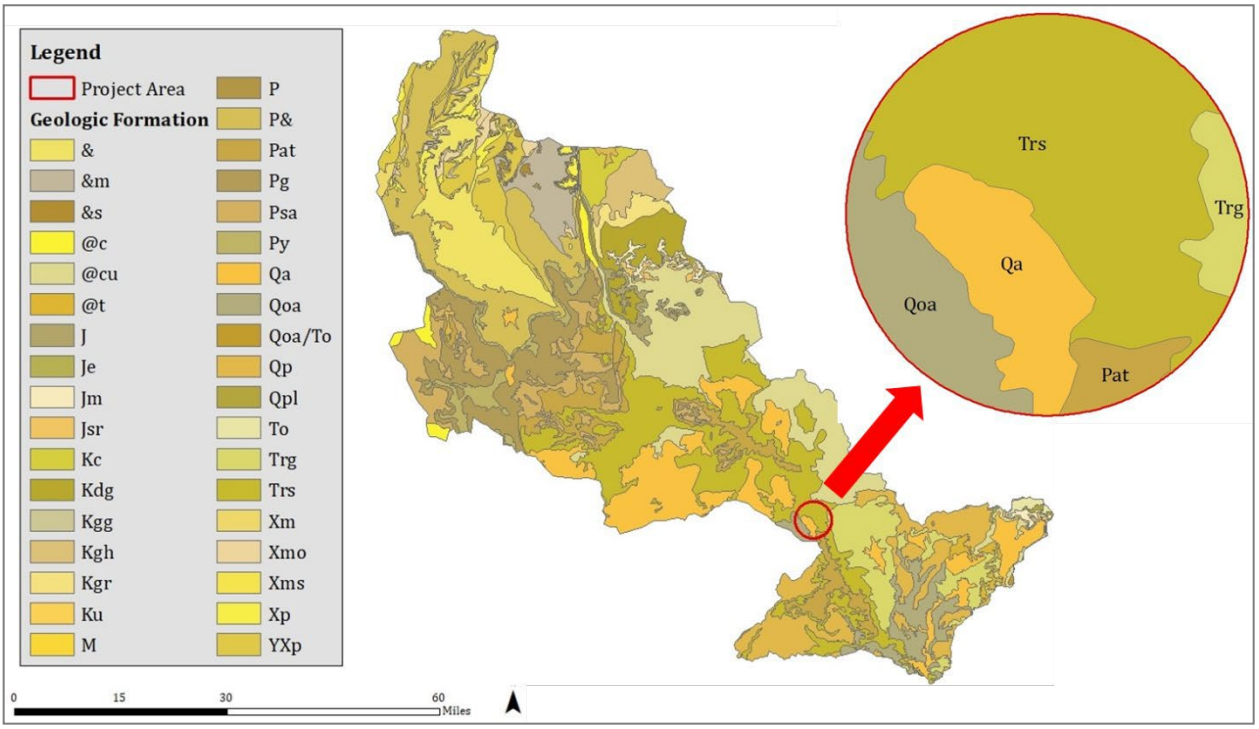


Figure 8. Geology of the Pecos Headwaters Watershed (HUC 8 - 13060001) and the project area for the WAP

See https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/publications/maps/geologic/state/home.cfml#download for the legend key to the geologic map. The southwest portion of the project area is composed of older alluvial deposits (Qoa) of upland plains and foothills areas, and calcic soils and wind deposited sediments of the High Plains region. The majority of the project area is covered by the Santa Rosa Formation (Trs) which includes Moenkopi Formation at its base in most areas. The Santa Rosa Formation is mostly sandstone and mudstone with interbedded conglomerate. The formation is beneath the Anton Chico Formation and is overlain by the Garita Creek Formation (Lucas and Hunt 1987, Lucas and Hunt 1989). The Garita Creek Formation (Trg) is comprised of mostly gray red to red or mottled gray green mudstone with about 25% fine-grained laminar sandstone. It lies above the Santa Rosa Formation and below the Trujillo Formation (Lucas and Hunt 1989).

The City of Santa Rosa is called the “City of Natural Lakes”. The lakes are the result of sinkholes that developed as a result of dissolution of underlying geologic layers (Sweeting 1972). Several artesian springs provide water for lakes and also as a source of water for the area ciénegas. Santa Rosa is in a large geologic depression about six miles in diameter and 400 feet deep (Kelley, 1972). Many residents of Santa Rosa expressed a concern that the town was sinking. The city is sinking, but on a geologic time scale not likely to have an impact on the people living in Santa Rosa. The karst topography of the area is common in the entire Pecos River Valley

(Figure 9). Karst topography is characterized by caves, sinkholes and underground streams (Figure 10) from dissolution of rocks such as limestone, dolomite and gypsum which are water soluble (Jackson 1997). Figure 11 shows Hidden Lake, one of the many sinkhole lakes in the project area. It is an almost perfectly round sinkhole flanked by steep cliffs of the Santa Rosa Formation.

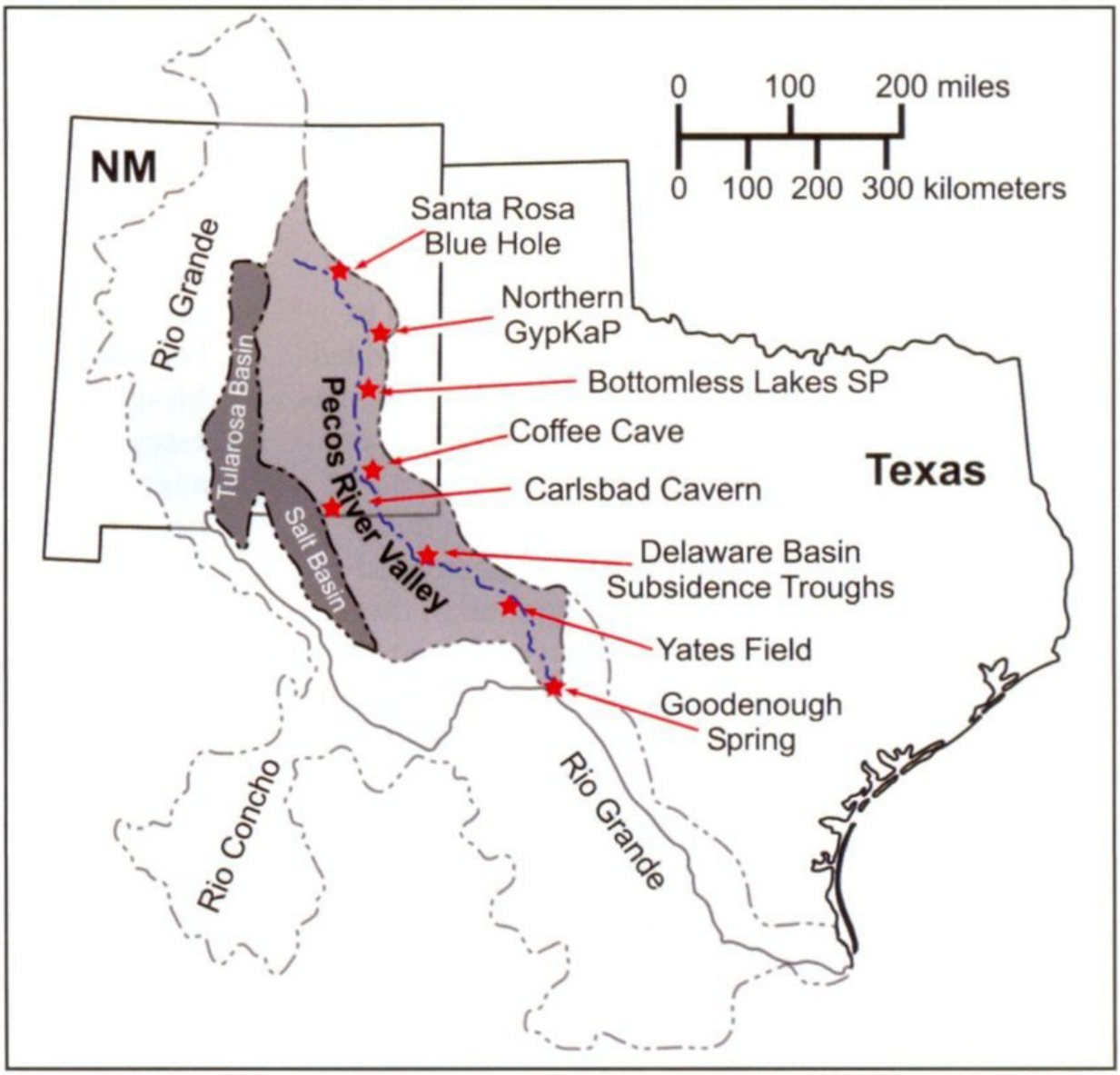


Figure 9. The Pecos River Valley is an area of karst topography with multiple cave systems (graphic from Stanford et al 2009 (adapted from Thomas, 1972)).

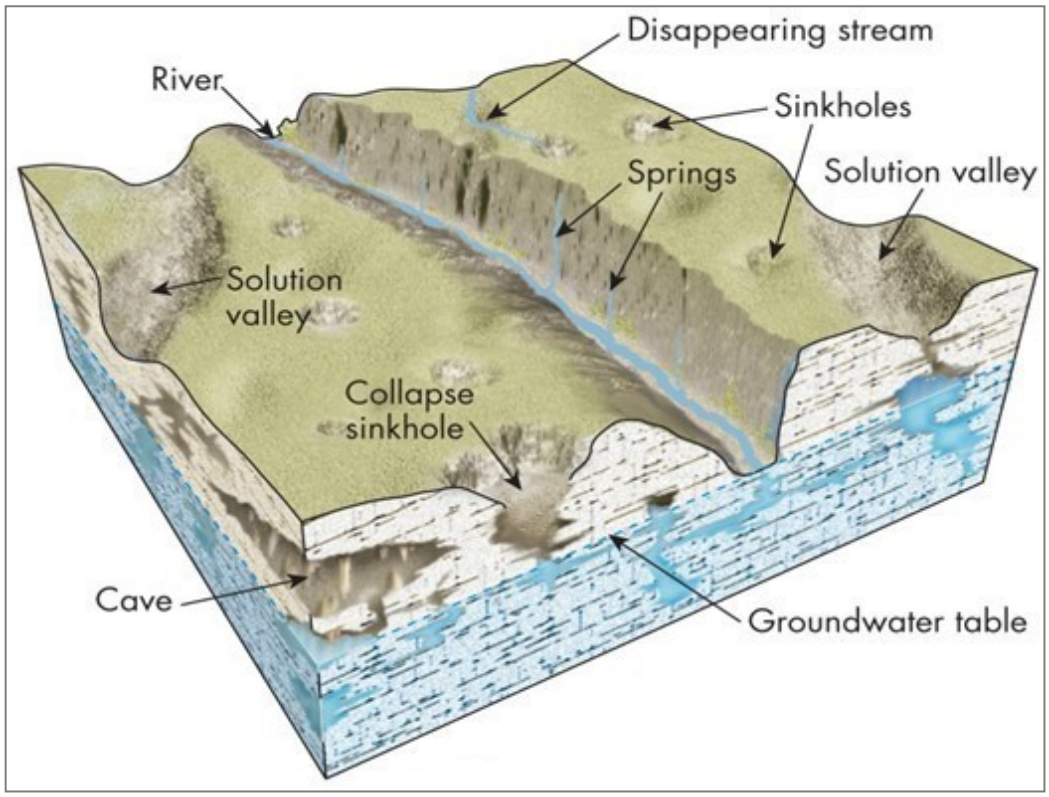


Figure 10. The karst landform diagram is from Prentice Hall 2008.


Figure 11. The photograph of Hidden Lake shows cliffs from the Santa Rosa Formation surrounding a circular sinkhole lake.

In a presentation, *The Unique Hydrology and Management Challenges in Karst Wetlands,* to the New Mexico Wetlands Roundtable in April 2021, George Veni from the National Cave and Karst Institute stated that one of the most significant dangers to karst wetlands is groundwater depletion. In New Mexico, much of the groundwater has not been extensively mapped and therefore the full impacts of drilling are unknown. Groundwater pollution poses a similar threat, as there are not standardized guidelines about the distance and depth of pollution that can impact karst wetlands. Karst hydrogeology is incredibly complex and wetland protection needs to incorporate both surface and subsurface risks.

Hydrogeology and Surface Hydrology

The karst topography and resulting natural springs make Santa Rosa an area of abundant water in an otherwise semi-arid environment (Figure 12).

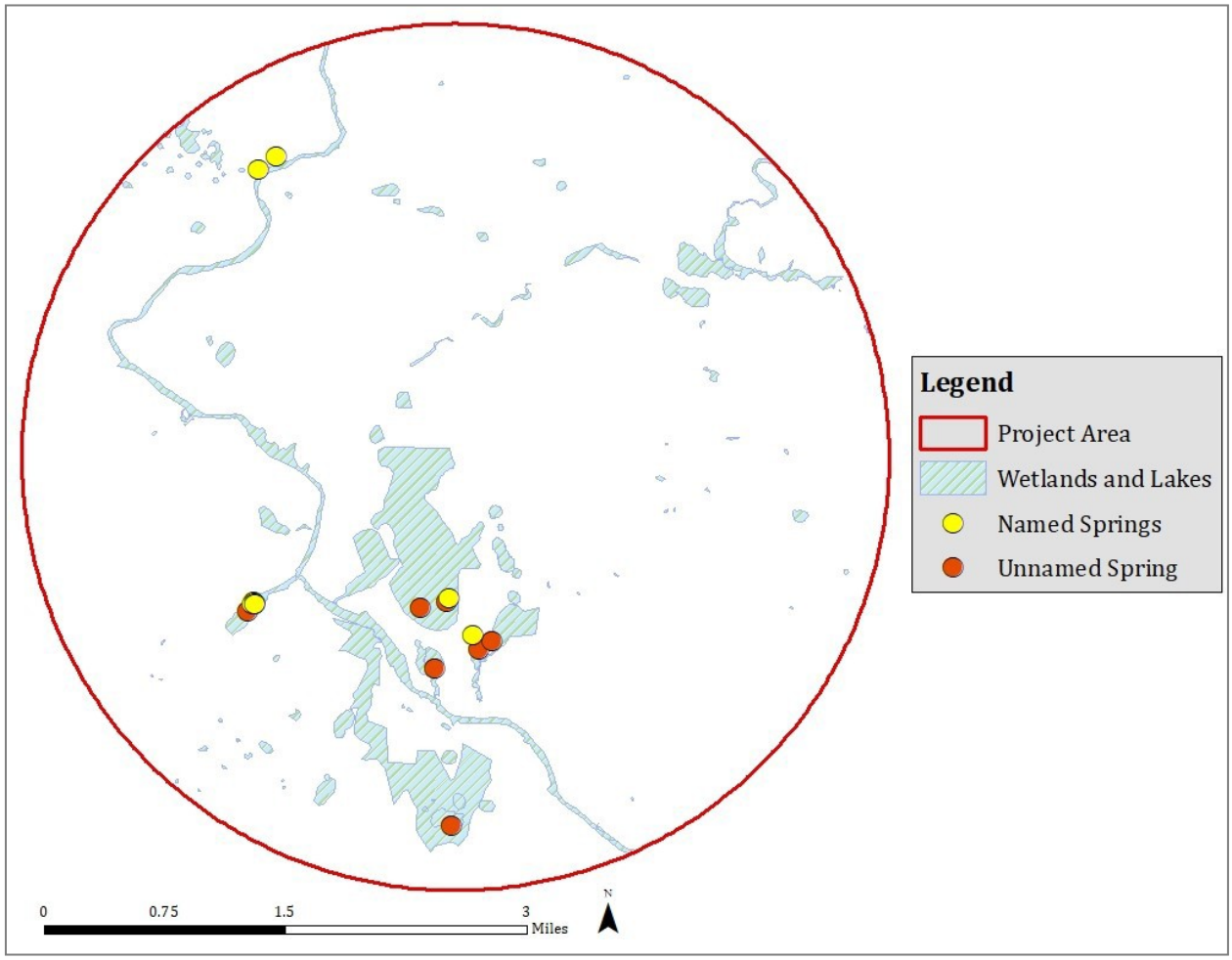


Figure 12. Surface water in the Santa Rosa Wetland Action Plan project area

WATER QUALITY

Surface water quality in the watershed is under monitored due to limitations of budget and personnel. Water quality impairments in the project area are listed in Table 1.

Table 3. Water quality impairments in the Santa Rosa project area as of 2021 (NMED 2021)

Impaired Creek	**Impairment**
Pecos River (Santa Rosa reservoir to Sumner Reservoir)	Nutrients
El Rito (Pecos River to headwaters)	Ammonia, Total E coli
Tres Lagunas (Northeast)	pH

Ground water in the area is mostly alkaline. This has been a benefit to area wetlands as the groundwater is not suitable for municipal uses. Variation in chemical quality is related to the subsurface geology. The groundwater is recharged by precipitation and underground rivers kept flowing by channels through permeable geologic layer (LeJeune 2018). Lowering of the ground water table was measured in LeJeune's 2018 study and warrants further study.

SOILS

Soils in the project area (Figure 12) are dominantly Lacoca-Rock outrock complex (16) at 21.2%. The Lacoca series soils are derived from red bed sandstones and are formed on slopes covered with alluvium, colluvium, and eolian materials (NRCS 2006). La Lande-Chispa complex (30) at 14.2% is also derived from red bed sandstone. It mostly occurs on hillslopes fans and terraces. The Regnier-Lacoca-Rock outcrop complex (32) at 11.9% and the Lacoca-San Jon-Rock outcrop (28) at 11.4% are the third and fourth most common in the project area (Table 1). These soil types are highlighted in light gray. The soil type that covers most of the area covered by ciénegas in the project area is Bluhol loam (116) at 6.1% and is highlighted in light green in Table 1. Bluhol loams are deep and poorly drained and derived mainly from gypsiferous source. Gypsum soils are often found in karst terrain as gypsum is soluble by water. For additional soil descriptions, a complete Custom Soil Resource Report for the project area may be generated by the National Cooperative Soil Survey (USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey).

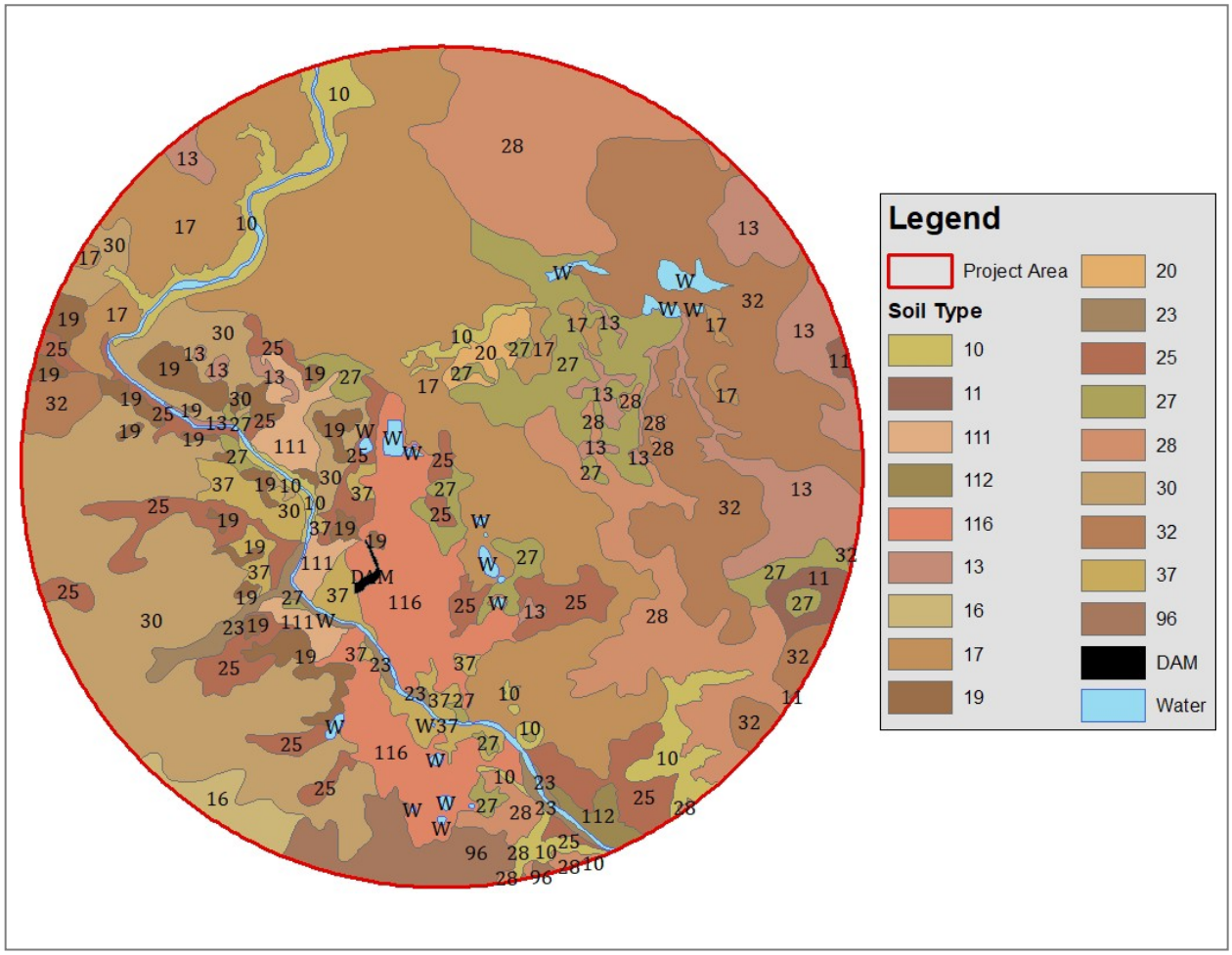


Figure 13. Soil types in the Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan Project Area

The Bluhol loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes (116 soil type), correlates to the extent of ciénegas surrounding Santa Rosa (Figures 7 and 8).

Table 4. Soil series in the Santa Rosa Wetlands Plan Area

Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Acres in Project Area	Percent of Area
10	Regnier-Rock outcrop-Lacoca complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes	587.1	4.00%
11	Tucumcari-Hassell clay loams, 0 to 5 percent slopes	99.7	0.70%
13	Tucumcari-Redona association, 0 to 5 percent slopes	779	5.30%
16	Redona-Berwolf fine sandy loams, 1 to 5 percent slopes	138.8	1.00%
17	Lacoca-Rock outcrop complex, 10 to 25 percent slopes	3,096.40	21.20%
19	Gallen very gravelly sandy loam, 5 to 30 percent slopes	405.1	2.80%

Map Unit Symbol	Map Unit Name	Acres in Project Area	Percent of Area
20	Walkon-Newkirk-San Jon fine sandy loams, 1 to 7 percent slopes	77.2	0.50%
23	Minneosa very fine sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	137.2	0.90%
25	Ima-La Lande fine sandy loams, 2 to 10 percent slopes	887	6.10%
27	San Jon-Lacoca-Rock outcrop complex, 1 to 10 percent slopes	862.3	5.90%
28	Lacoca-San Jon-Rock outcrop complex, 5 to 20 percent slopes	1,662.70	11.40%
30	La Lande-Chispa complex, 3 to 15 percent slopes	2,070.80	14.20%
32	Regnier-Lacoca-Rock outcrop complex, 3 to 25 percent slopes	1,740.60	11.90%
37	Hollomex-Reeves complex, 1 to 10 percent slopes	336.2	2.30%
96	Mido loamy fine sand, 1 to 10 percent slopes	308.7	2.10%
111	La Lande loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	218.5	1.50%
112	Ima sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	67.1	0.50%
116	Bluhol loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	884.9	6.10%
DAM	Dams	9.6	0.10%
W	Water	219.6	1.50%
Total		**14,588**	**100%**

Ecoregions

The Wetlands Action Plan project area is within the Southwestern Tablelands Ecoregion, Conchas/Pecos Plains sub region (Figure 14). The land is characterized by grasslands, tablelands, piedmonts, and river valleys. Most streams are ephemeral with some intermittent streams. Perennial streams are often dry in places due to the region's permeable (karst) geology (EPA 2006). The region receives on average 13-16 inches of precipitation annually (EPA 2006). The vegetation community is dependent upon both the soils and the combined amount of surface and groundwater available at a particular site. The area is mostly shortgrass prairie with scattered mid-grass prairie plant communities. There are areas of scattered juniper shrubland as well with scattered sinkhole lakes (Figure 15).

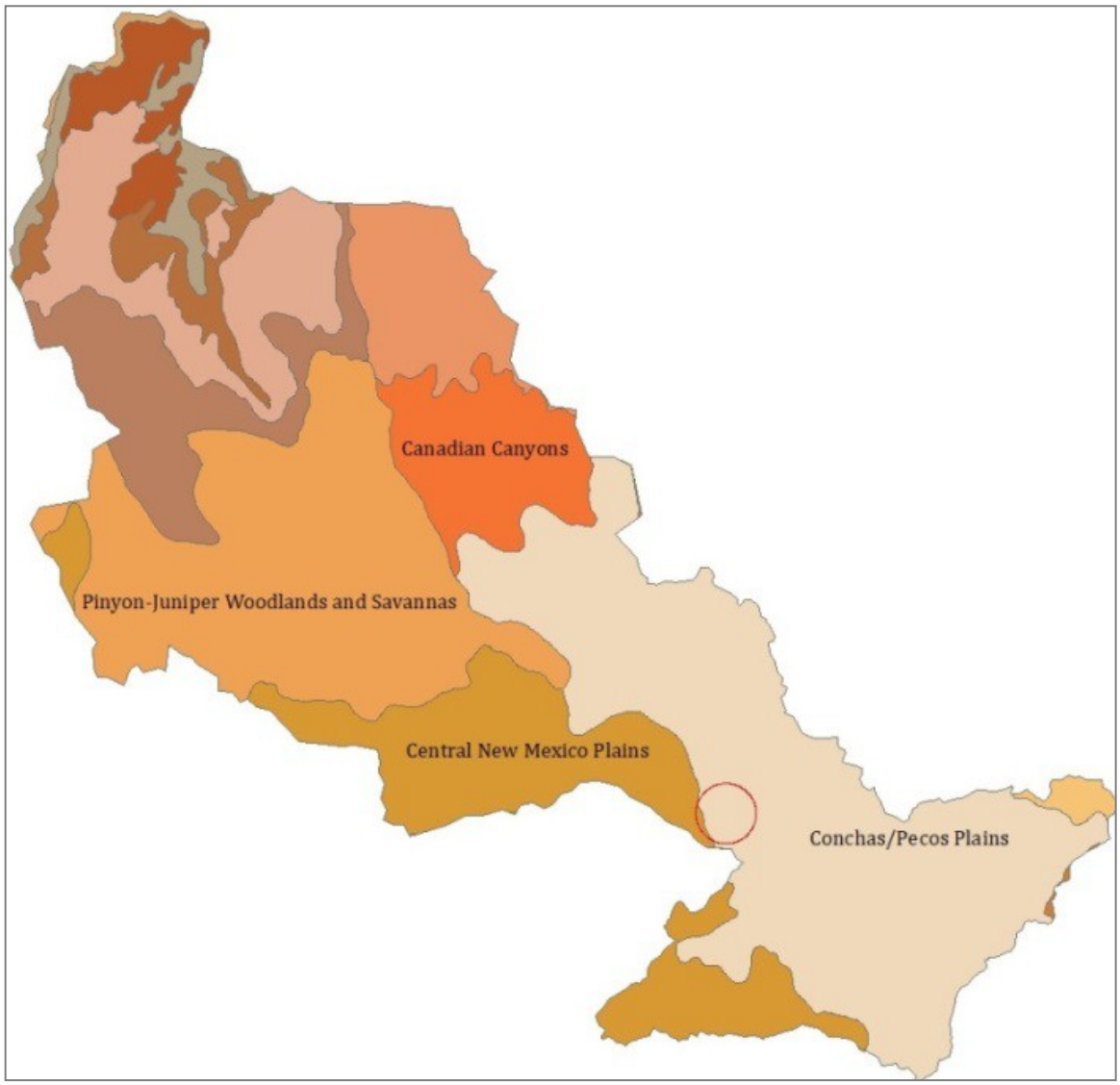


Figure 14. Level 4 Sub-ecoregions within the Great Plains Ecoregion (EPA 2011)


Figure 15. Perch Lake surrounded by ciénegas and juniper shrublands

BIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF SANTA ROSA WETLANDS

Wetlands are keystone ecosystems in arid environments and comprise only approximately 0.3% of the surface area of the arid Southwest (Cowardin et al. 1979). Arid-land springs and associated ciénegas are a special class of these inland wetlands and are well-known for their biological diversity and productivity in otherwise dry environments (Hendrickson and Minckley 1985). They therefore also serve as important ecological oases that provide resiliency in arid environments during times of drought and variable climate changes.

It is the relative permanence of the spring features that make many arid-land spring ciénega habitats biologically distinct from other types of wetland communities (Sivinski 2018). Arid-land spring ciénegas are typically isolated above arroyo or river channels where they are protected from floods and erosion that frequently modify riparian marshes and floodplains. Ciénega spring flows are typically associated with relatively stable geologic aquifers, such as those in the Karst strata and sinks of the Santa Rosa Basin. These regional aquifers are less susceptible to variable flooding and drying than are alluvial seeps in drainages or playa basins, which are precipitation dependent wetlands. Spring wetlands that can be stable for millennia are islands of suitable habitat that, over time, will accumulate greater diversity of wetland plants and animals than the more temporary alluvial seeps and riparian wetlands in the same region (Stanislawczyk et al. 2018). These geologically stable springs are also refuges for species that may have been more widespread and common during wetter periods of the Quaternary. Several vertebrate and invertebrate animals still utilize arid-land springs and ciénegas as core habitats in their overall distributions and some species are entirely confined to only one or a few arid-land springs and their associated ciénegas.

ARID-LAND SPRING CIÉNEGA VEGETATION

Arid-land spring ciénega vegetation in the Santa Rosa artesian basin is highly productive and dense in comparison to the surrounding relatively arid landscape. A list of plants in the Santa Rosa wetlands was prepared by Sivinski and Bleakly (2004) and documented 90 species (71 native and 19 non-native). Some plant associations are similar to those of spring wetlands in the Roswell artesian basin and Chihuahuan Desert spring ciénegas of Trans-Pecos Texas and north-central Mexico. These are typically alkaline springs, often from gypseous strata, with inland saltgrass (*Distichlis spicata*), scratchgrass (*Muhlenbergia aperifolia*), and Baltic rush (*Juncus balticus*) on seasonally saturated and sub-irrigated soils; alkali sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*) on the drier ciénega margins; and bulrushes (*Schoenoplectus* spp.), southern cattail (*Typha domingensis*) and beaked spikerush (*Eleocharis rostellata*) emergent from continuously wet soils. Several desert wetland plants reach their northern-most Pecos River distribution in

Santa Rosa including Pecos sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*), California sawgrass (*Cladium californicum*), clasping yellowtops (*Flaveria chlorifolia*), clapdaisy (*Pseudoclappia arenaria*) and southwestern sea lavender (*Limonium limbatum*).

The most noteworthy plant association in the Santa Rosa ciénegas is the large areas (many acres) of grassland analogous to the tallgrass prairie of the central Great Plains. This is one of the very few places in the State of New Mexico with relative large grassland patches densely covered with iconic tallgrass prairie of Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) and tall dropseed (*Sporobolus compositus.*

Wildlife Habitat

The springs, spring brooks, sinkhole lakes, ciénegas and riparian woodlands of the Santa Rosa wetlands provide habitat for a variety of vertebrate and invertebrate animals. Wide-ranging species such as birds and large mammals may utilize these wetlands as only part of their year-round habitat while many small, less mobile species spend their entire lives in wetland habitats (Figure 16). Large mammals occasionally seen in the wetlands by Santa Rosa residents include white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), grey fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) and bobcat (*Lynx rufus*). Bats and small terrestrial mammals have not have not been adequately assessed, but a few such as the western harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys megalotis*), hispid cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*) and least shrew (*Cryptotis parvus*) have been observed in the ciénegas (Sivinski pers. obs., Bulger and Stuart 2021).

Figure 16. Coyote in ciénega habitat (left) and Killdeer at Power Dam (right) (Photographs by Robert Sivinski)

Avifauna in the Santa Rosa wetlands is diverse and there are abundant observations available on eBird checklists (https://eBird.org). Blue Hole Ciénega has a total of 122 bird species observed from 73 observer checklists. The adjacent Power Dam Park gets a lot more visits by the birding public (193 checklists) and has 181 species observed. The greater diversity there may also reflect more habitat diversity with the open-water pond and marsh at the dam and surrounding riparian woodland. Most of these birds are seasonal migrants, but several nest in this area and some are permanent residents (Figure 17).

Figure 17. Waterfowl using Santa Rosa habitat (Photograph by Robert Sivinski)

Aquatic and semiaquatic vertebrate animals include several fish species documented in the spring run creek called El Rito del Agua Negra Chiquito (El Rito) and other spring brooks and sinkhole lakes. Native fish include green sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*), bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*), longnose dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae*), red shiner (*Cyprinella lutrensis*), Rio Grande chub (*Gila pandora*), fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*), flathead chub (*Platygobio gracilis*), speckled chub (*Macrhybopsis aestivalis*), white sucker (*Catostomus commersonii*), western mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*), plains killifish (*Fundulus zebrinus*), rainwater killifish (*Lucania parva*) and roundnose minnow (*Dionda* cf. *episcopa*) (Koster 1952, Sivinski pers. obs.). Additional non-native sport fish such as largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), and yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*) have been introduced to all the sinkhole lakes. Amphibians and turtles are uncommon in the Santa Rosa wetlands, but have not been adequately surveyed. Thus far, only the plains leopard frog (*Lithobates blairi*), eastern snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentine*) and common slider (*Trachemys scripta*) have been observed in Santa Rosa (James Stuart, NMDG&F, pers. comm., Daniela Roth, EMNRD, Forestry Division, pers. comm.).

Wetland invertebrates such as mollusks (snails), crustaceans and annelids are found throughout the Santa Rosa wetlands, but are very poorly studied and rarely identified to species (Figure 18). Aquatic insects are also abundant, but only the Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) have received any attention from biologists. Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge is in a similar artesian basin of springs and sinkhole ponds on the Pecos River about 100 miles south of Santa Rosa. That refuge is famous for its impressive diversity of dragonfly species and conducts an annual dragonfly festival that is well attended by the public and amateur naturalists. Dragonfly

diversity in Santa Rosa is also impressive and probably only second to Bitter Lake, but has less public access and not yet been discovered by dragonfly enthusiasts (Figure 17).

Figure 18. Physid snail (left) (Photograph by Christina Selby), Western Pondhawk (right) (Photograph by Robert Sivinski)

Special Status Species

Artesian basins with karst topography of sinkhole lakes and springs have unique habitats that are permanent features supporting populations of plants and animals that are regionally rare or locally endemic. The Santa Rosa artesian basin has at least two locally endemic species that apparently occur nowhere else in the world and were discovered in just the last decade. Additional endemic species (especially aquatic invertebrates) may yet be discovered in the Santa Rosa wetlands when biologists are allowed to access and study these unique habitats.

Table 5. Threatened, endangered or sensitive species in the Santa Rosa wetlands (SGCN = Species of Greatest Conservation Need)

Scientific Name	Common Name	Status
ANIMALS		
Centronyx bairdii	Baird's Sparrow	State of NM: Threatened, SGCN
Cryptotis parvus	Least shrew	State of NM: Threatened, SGCN
Chordeiles minor	Common nighthawk	State of NM: SGCN
Danaus plexippus	Monarch butterfly	Federal: Candidate
Empidonax traillii extimus	Southwestern willow flycatcher	Federal: Endangered; State of NM: Endangered, SGCN
Haliaeetus leucocephalus	Bald eagle	State of NM: Threatened, SGCN
Gila pandora	Rio Grande chub	State of NM: SGCN
Lanius ludovicianus	Loggerhead shrike	State of NM: SGCN
Lithobates blairi	Plains leopard frog	State of NM: SGCN
Scientific Name	**Common Name**	**Status**
ANIMALS		
Melanerpes erythrocephalus caurinus	Red-headed woodpecker	State of NM: SGCN
Phalacrocorax brasilianus	Neotropic cormorant	State of NM: Threatened, SGCN
Podiceps nigricollis californicus	Eared grebe	State of NM: SGCN
Sphyrapicus thyroideus nataliae	Williamson's sapsucker	State of NM: SGCN
PLANTS		
Cirsium wrightii	Wright's marsh thistle	Federal: Proposed Threatened (with Santa Rosa Critical Habitat); State of NM: Endangered
Helianthus paradoxus	Pecos sunflower	Federal: Threatened (with Santa Rosa Critical Habitat); State of NM: Endangered
Spiranthes magnicamporum	Great Plains lady's tresses orchid	State of NM: Endangered
ENDEMIC SPECIES		
Dionda sp. nov.	Santa Rosa roundnose minnow	Genetic study by Schönhuth et al (2012) found a new minnow species in Santa Rosa spring brooks, but not yet formally named or assessed for threatened or endangered status.

Gammarus percalacustris	Santa Rosa amphipod	Described from a single spring on City of Santa Rosa land by Walters et al. (2020), but not yet assessed for threatened or endangered status.

The Santa Rosa amphipod (*Gammarus percalacustris*) is a tiny crustacean recently discovered in the unnamed spring below the fairgrounds southwest of Perch Lake (Walters et al. 2020). The entire global distribution of the Santa Rosa amphipod may be this single unnamed spring, which originates on land owned by the City of Santa Rosa (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Santa Rosa amphipod (*Gammarus percalacustris*) (left) (photograph by Christina Selby) and Santa Rosa roundnose minnow (*Dionda* sp. nov.) (right) (photograph by Tom Kennedy)

This was originally a mound spring that spilled over the sides of a low hill of carbonate and sulfate spring deposits, but has been captured and redirected into an excavated acequia that irrigates adjacent private land. The spring flow used to reach the spring brook channel below Perch Lake, but now rarely reaches that small tributary to the Pecos River.

The Santa Rosa population of roundnose minnow has been studied in the Power Dam impoundment and creek (El Rito) above Power Dam (Farrington 2015) (Figure 18). It is also known to occur in the spring brooks below Perch Lake and Blue Hole (Sivinski pers. obs.) and may be in other Santa Rosa spring brooks that have not been sampled. It had been called *Dionda episcopa*, which is the widespread species of roundnose minnow, until a genetic study of the entire genus discovered the Santa Rosa population to be a separate distinct species endemic to the spring brooks of the Santa Rosa artesian basin (Schönhuth et al. 2012). The principle authors of this study intend to name this new species, but have been delayed in publishing the formal description.

Some widespread species are threatened with extinction or extirpation because they are confined to arid-land spring habitats, which are rare wetland biological communities in an otherwise arid environment. The Santa Rosa artesian basin provides habitat for three spring ciénega plants that are listed as endangered species by the State of New Mexico, two of which also have federal status (Table 5).

The Pecos sunflower (*Helianthus paradoxus*) is locally well known for large patches of yellow flowers splashed across the green ciénegas of Santa Rosa every September. This sunflower is listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act and occurs at a few other arid-land spring ciénegas in Trans-Pecos Texas and the middle Rio Grande. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Critical Habitat designations included the Santa Rosa populations in Santa Rosa, which has been a great help in securing federal funding for habitat restoration activities. In addition, Santa Rosa is one of four Recovery Regions for the sunflower, as described in the Recovery Plan. Blue Hole Ciénega is the Core Conservation Area for the Santa Rosa Recovery Region. Milagro Ciénega is the secondary population needed for recovery. A certain number of sunflowers have to be maintained and documented over a 10-year period in these areas before the plant can be recovered. The sunflower may also be a boon to the area in terms of ecotourism. This plant is really the focal species for most restoration and conservation efforts of ciénegas in Santa Rosa. The first annual Pecos Sunflower Festival is scheduled for fall 2021 (Figure 20).

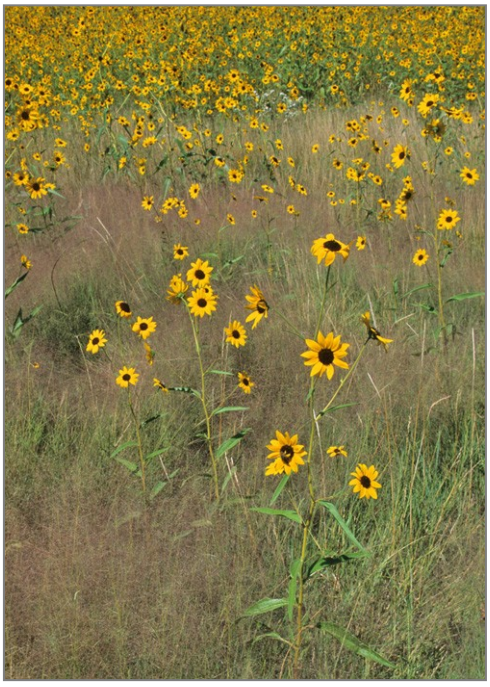


Figure 20. Blooming Pecos Sunflowers (left) (photograph by Robert Sivinski), Flyer for the Pecos Sunflower Festival (right)

Less well known, but even more endangered, is Wright's marsh thistle (*Cirsium wrightii*). It occurs at only a few arid-land spring ciénegas in New Mexico, Texas and Chihuahua. The Arizona population of Wright's marsh thistle is now extinct. The Santa Rosa artesian basin and the Bitter Lake ciénegas near Roswell have the largest remaining populations of this rare wetland thistle. USFWS proposed in 2020 to list Wright's marsh thistle as a threatened species with some Santa Rosa ciénegas designated as Critical Habitat (50 CFR 17, 61460-61498). This should afford some protection for ciénegas in the Santa Rosa area. Areas designated as Critical Habitat should be designated as priority focus areas for restoration and conservation actions. The Great Plains lady's tresses is an orchid species native to North America found primarily in the Great Plains. Isolated populations exist in New Mexico (NatureServe, 2020). The species is found in wetlands and also drier prairie sites. The orchid blooms in late fall and has a spiral of white flowers. Controlling woody species invasion into its habitat is critical. Prescribed fire is often recommended for maintaining conditions the species needs to persist.

Animal species with federal status in the Santa Rosa wetlands include the Southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii* ssp. *extimus*). This endangered bird is a rare spring migrant and only occasionally seen in Santa Rosa. It is not known to nest in the Pecos River valley so no Critical Habitat was designated in the Pecos drainage. Another migrant with federal status is the Monarch butterfly, which became a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act in 2020 (50 CFR 17, 78775-78778). This epic butterfly migration is threatened by drought and agricultural impacts on larval host plants (milkweeds) and the nectar producing wildflower that fuel the trip to a winter refuge in Mexico. Santa Rosa wetlands do not have a lot of milkweeds, but do have an abundance of nectar producing plants. Monarch butterflies are especially attracted to flowers on the endangered Wright's marsh thistle during their autumn migration (Figure 21).

Figure 21. Monarch butterflies on Wright's March Thistle (photograph by Robert Sivinski)

Several animal species in the Santa Rosa wetland habitat are designated as 'threatened' or 'species of greatest conservation need (SGCN)' by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (Table 5). Most of these are seasonal migrant birds which have not been locally studied by biologists or the bird watching public. Additional research is needed to determine their frequency of use and if any actually nest in the Santa Rosa wetlands. Three species of concern, however, are residents of the Santa Rosa wetland. The plains leopard frog (*Lithobates blairi*) appears to be uncommon, but has not been looked for in all the spring brooks and ciénegas. The Rio Grande chub (*Gila pandora*) was collected in the creek called El Rito in 1952 (Koster 1952), but its current status in Santa Rosa has not been assessed and may no longer be extant. The least shrew (*Cryptotis parvus*) is a NM Threatened species that was recently documented as extant in the ciénega habitat at Rock Lake Fish Hatchery (Bulger and Suart 2021). It likely occurs in all the Santa Rosa ciénegas and, if found to be common, will assist in attaining some criteria of the NMDGF Recovery Plan for this species.

Noxious Weeds

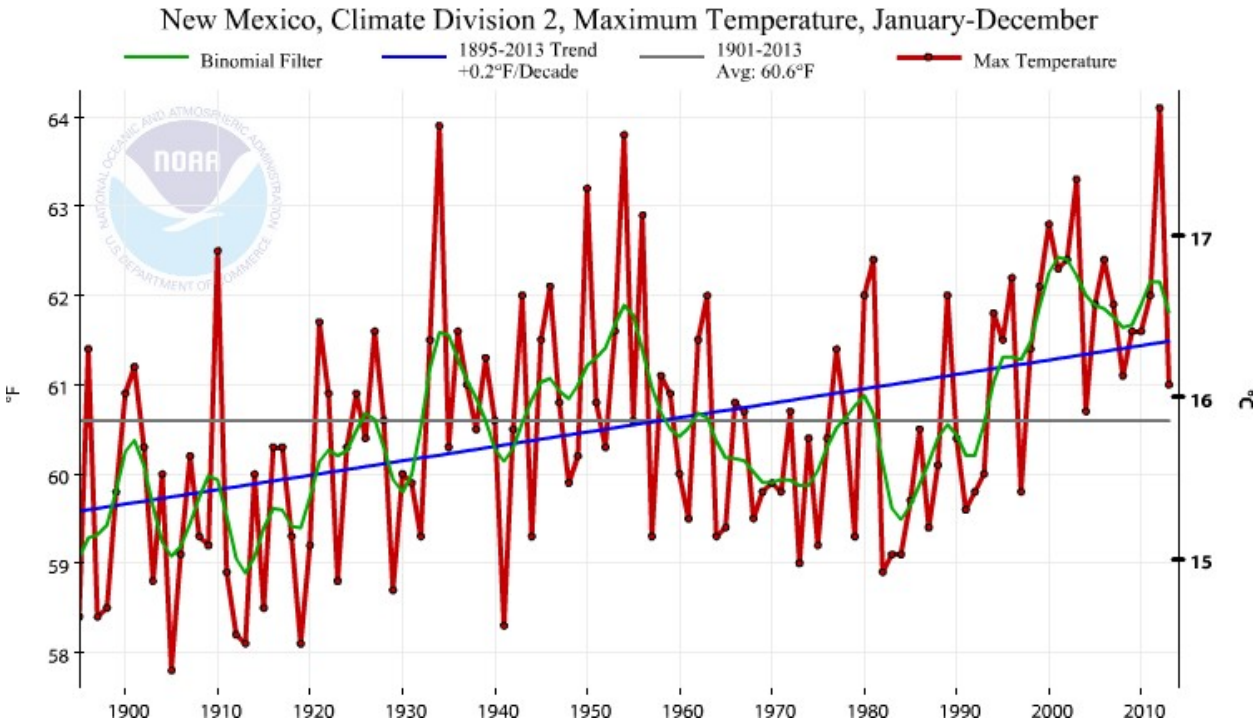
Noxious weed species in the project area include Giant reed (*Arundo donax*), Ravennagrass (*Saccharum ravennae),* Russian olive *(Elaeagnus angustifolia),* and Tamarisk *(Tamarix* spp) (NMDA 2020). Management measures will need to include control of these invasive species to protect wetland integrity in the project area (Figure 22). Controlling invasive and noxious species will ensure that native and T&E species will not be outcompeted in their native habitat. Russian olive has been successfully controlled using prescribed fire and follow-up treatment with herbicide. Chemical weed treatments require hiring a consultant with a pesticide operator's license who will be aware of the latest treatment options.

Figure 22. *Arundo donax* in the upper left of the photograph

More information on control of specific noxious weed species in New Mexico may be found at the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Noxious Weed Information website (https://www.nmda.nmsu.edu/nmda-homepage/divisions/apr/noxious-weed-information/). Troublesome Weeds of New Mexico is another great resource with for controlling undesirable species (Ashigh et al 2010).

CLIMATE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Current understanding of the local effects of global warming include a significant increase in the severity and duration of drought, the severity and intensity of precipitation events, increased stream water temperatures, and earlier snowpack runoff, all of which will increase stress on riparian and wetland systems and put them at risk (Garfin et al 2013, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2014, and Potter et al. 1998). Rising temperatures are documented for the area (Figure 23) (NOAA, 2021).



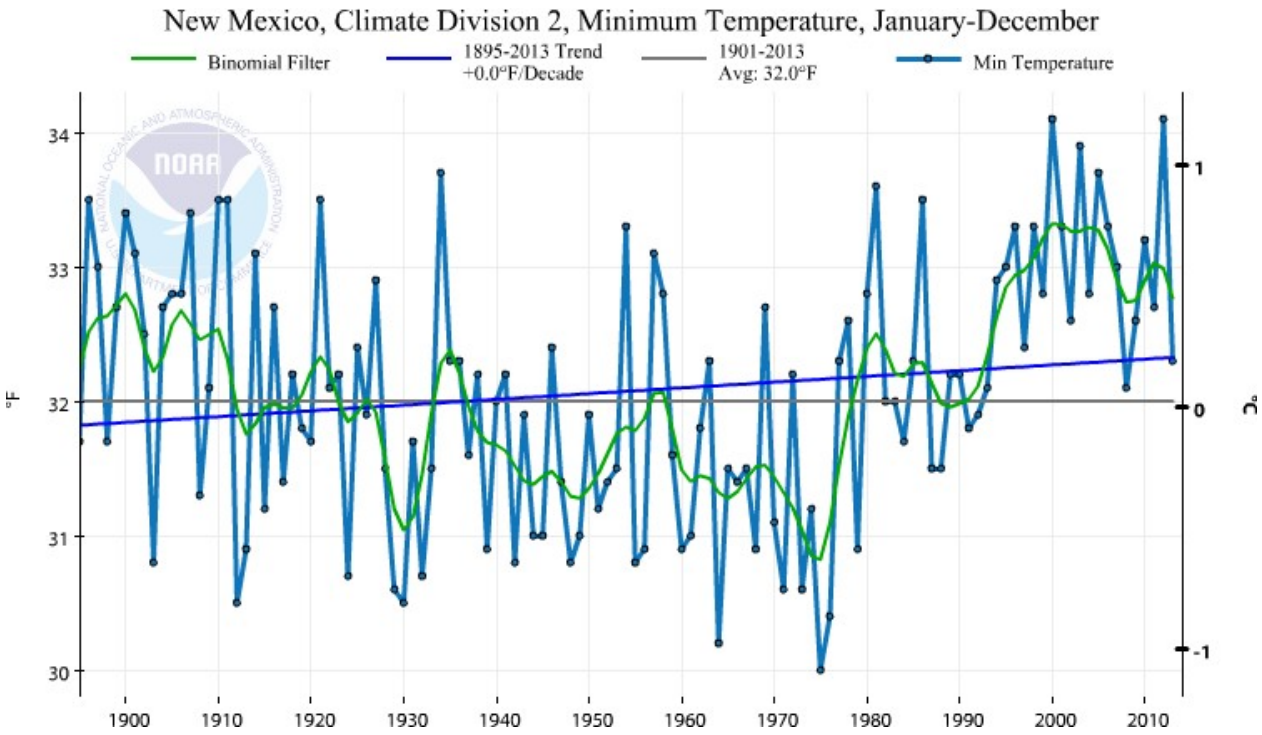


Figure 23. The trend from 1900 to 2010 is rising temperatures.

The combination and rising temperatures and lower precipitation affects both surface and ground water quantity in the project area (Figure 24).

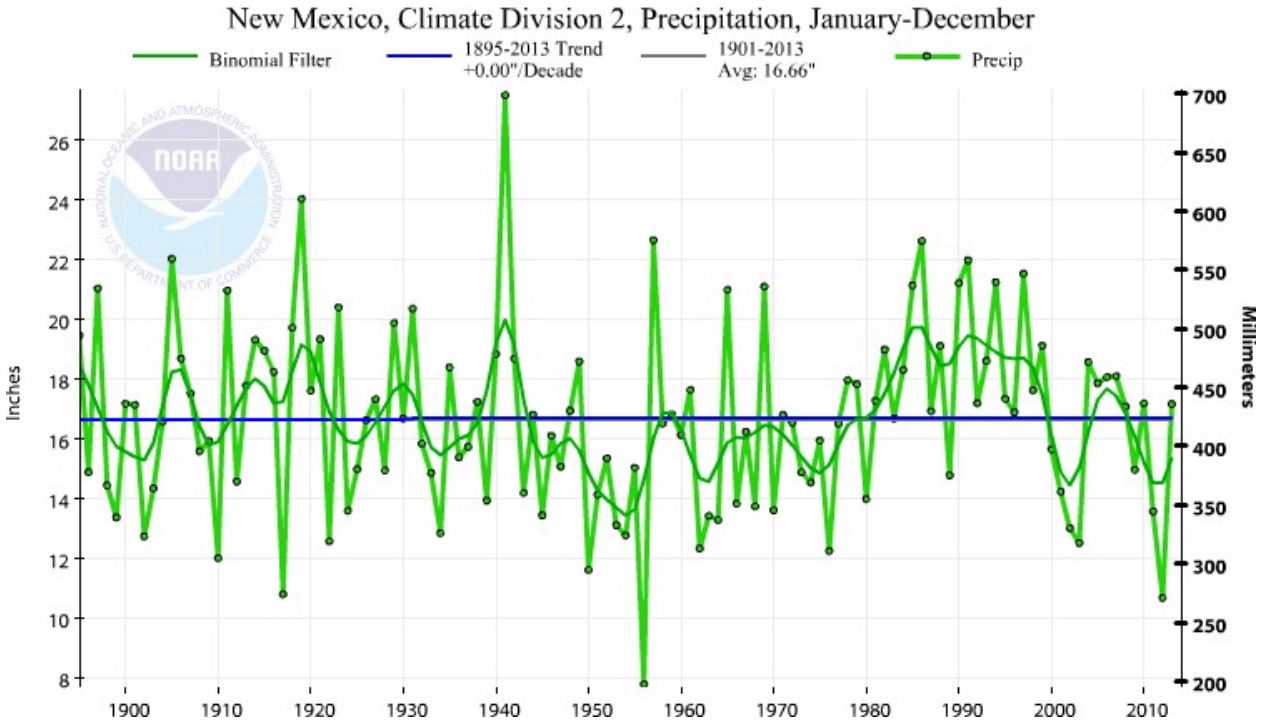


Figure 24. The last decade has shown mostly lower than average precipitation rates in New Mexico (NOAA, 2021).

With higher temperatures and less water, wetlands are under abiotic stress as well as stress from competition from other plant species competing for the scarce resources. As wetlands dry up, the decomposition rates of organic-rich soils increase, which can lead to the system becoming a carbon source rather than a carbon sink. This wetland system provides valuable climate resiliency that impacts the local watershed. The implications of wetland restoration and preservation can go beyond the local watershed scale by buffering downstream systems.

WETLANDS ACTION PLAN

DATA GAPS

Filling in data gaps will help stakeholders to better refine actions and education. The following data gaps have been identified.

1. Land ownership data for wetland areas is not readily accessible for the purposes of mapping and contacting people who own these unique wetlands.
2. Surface water quality in the watershed is under-monitored due to limitations of budget and personnel.
3. Groundwater quantity and quality data is also under-monitored due to limitations of budget and personnel.
4. Biologists should be invited to explore and document the biotic diversity (especially invertebrate animals) of the Santa Rosa wetlands.
    - Research is needed into wetland function, endangered species population trend monitoring, and impacts of current management practices.
    - Inventory and document sensitive resource locations for management and conservation priority
5. Quantifying the amount of recreation income received by the City of Santa Rosa could inform stakeholders about current profit levels in order to be able to develop plans to leverage these funds to increase wetland health, promote educational activities, and potentially increase future ecotourism dollars.

IMPLEMENTATION

Practices that have already occurred or are ongoing include activities to protect Santa Rosa wetlands, such as monitoring of rare and endangered plants, grazing management, prescribed fires, removal of Russian olives, and conservation easements throughout the Santa Rosa

wetlands (past and ongoing), shows the interest and participation of the local community and land managers to actively manage their wetlands.

Projects and implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as prescribed grazing and invasive species control could be implemented as project funds become available. Protecting intact wetlands from development is the most important action that could be taken in the project area. Other identified actions that would help sustain and restore Santa Rosa wetlands in the project area are contained in Table 6.

Table 6. Identified Actions

Action	Potential Result
Restoring Dispersed Surface Flow	Reversing the channelization that drain ciénegas at the spring source could potentially have an important effect on restoring the surface overflow that sustains the ciénega. Filling in diversion ditches could have beneficial effects in the water balance of the system with water stored within the wetland soils rather than being diverted to non-wetland areas.
Grazing Management	Proper grazing management will help to ensure that wetland species are not over-utilized by herbivores. It can also be prescribed for duration and timing to protect the Pecos sunflower populations. More research is need to determine the specific timing and duration of grazing that will benefit the Pecos sunflower during different parts of its life cycle.
Prescribed Fire	Prescribed fire helps to control invasive Russian olive and other shrub species. It also can remove a build-up of thatch which impedes seedling germination and growth. Prescribed fire is a primary tool for enhancing Pecos sunflower habitat.
Erosion Control	Incisions (nick points, headcuts and incised channels) in the wetlands should be stabilized. (Zeedyk et al 2014)
Invasive Species Control	Controlling invasive and noxious species will ensure that native and T&E species will not be outcompeted in their native habitat. There are many resources with information about the control of invasive species including NMDA and the techniques used by EMNRD of prescribed burning followed by chemical treatment of root sprouts for Russian olive.
Tres Lagunas Restoration	Tres Lagunas is an important area for waterfowl. It is an area that has become neglected and overused by the public. Research into increasing the amount of water allocated to these wetlands is in the beginning stages (Figure 25).
Power Dam Lake	Power Dam Lake is nearly full of sediments and needs attention. Reconfiguring the shape of this lake should increase both wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities (Figure 25).
Albert Campos Ciénega	This ciénega is designated Critical Habitat for the Pecos Sunflowers and should be a priority for restoration and conservation actions (Figure 25).

Fill Data Gaps	Filling in data gaps such as groundwater levels and recreation income achieved by the city will help stakeholders to better refine actions and education. Biologists should be invited to explore and document the biotic diversity (especially invertebrate animals) of the Santa Rosa wetlands.
Research	Identify and document locations of sensitive resources. Research and monitor sensitive resources to inform best management practices, including rare and endangered species.
Ciénega conservation priority list	Protect ciénegas by purchasing lands on the priority list to protect sensitive species or work with land owners to protect these areas with the help of tax incentives or conservation easements, or other means of permanent protection. There are many private land conservation agencies in New Mexico who can help establish conservation easements.

FUNDING SOURCES

The stakeholders for the Santa Rosa area will continue to seek grant funds for education and outreach funding as well as implementation funding for wetland and riparian restoration projects. Table 6 is a summary of potential funding sources.

Table 7. Potential Funding Sources

Source	Agency	Grant
Federal	Environmental Protection Agency	5 Star Restoration Challenge Grant Program
		Environmental Education Grants
	Natural Resource Conservation Service	Environmental Quality Incentive Program (private lands cost-matching)
		Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
		Wetland Reserve Program
	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	North American Wetland Conservation Act
		Partners Program
State	New Mexico Environment Department, Surface Water Quality Bureau	River Stewardship Program Wetlands Program 319 Clean Water Act Grants
	NM Game and Fish Department	Potential matching monies for other grants Share with Wildlife
	NM Community Foundation	NM River Conservation & Restoration Fund
	EMNRD - Forestry Division	Forest and Watershed Restoration Act (FAWRA) Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Grant Program Wildland Urban Interface Grant

		Community Forestry Assistance
	Guadalupe Soil and Water Conservation District	Coordinates assistance from all available sources – public and private, local, state and federal – in an effort to develop locally driven solutions to natural resource concerns
	New Mexico Finance Authority	Water Project Fund (Water Trust Board)
	NM Youth Conservation Corps	YCC Commission Projects
	NM Outdoor Recreation Division	Outdoor Equity Fund Special Projects and Outdoor Infrastructure Fund
Private	Orvis Conservation Grant Program	
	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	
	Trout Unlimited	
	Native Plant Society of New Mexico	Carter Conservation Fund, Science Teacher Award
	Wildlife Conservation Society	
	Mitigation Funds	
	Land Conservation Easement Organizations	
	Private Donors	
	Volunteer Labor	

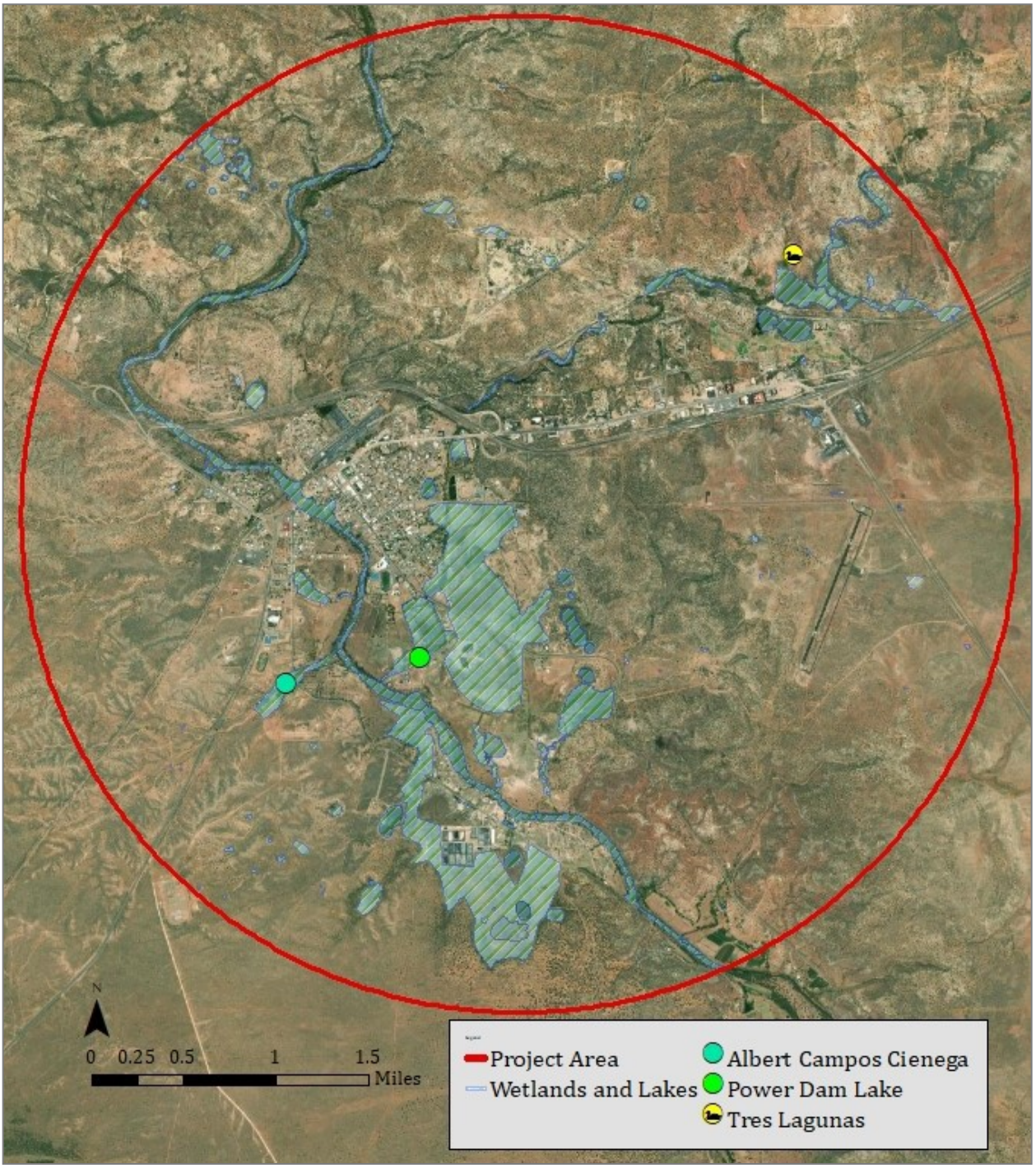


Figure 25. Three project areas identified by the Santa Rosa Steering Committee

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

There are substantial and ongoing efforts to raise awareness in the area about the unique ciénega ecosystems that surround the City of Santa Rosa. Table 8 lists current and future education and outreach actions as identified by members of the Steering Committee.

Table 8. Education and outreach activities for raising awareness about Santa Rosa wetlands

Education and Outreach	
Ciénega Curriculum	The Ciénega curriculum will introduce specific content in the Santa Rosa school system that engages Santa Rosa youth about the unique wetland ecosystems in their backyard. Citizen Science should be encouraged.
Santa Rosa as a Birding Destination	Promoting Santa Rosa as a birding destination could help raise funding and awareness.
Santa Rosa as a Dragonfly Enthusiast Destination	Promoting Santa Rosa as a destination for seeing rare dragonflies could help raise funding and awareness.
Santa Rosa Annual Sunflower Festival	The festival will increase the civic pride in the Santa Rosa community surrounding the Pecos Sunflower and its unique habitat. It will also help the community by increasing recreation and tourism dollars.
Ciénega Boardwalk	The boardwalk will increase awareness and showcase ciénega ecosystems with educational signage.
Ramsar Designation	Designation will bring national and international attention to the importance of this unique area of wetlands and ciénegas.
Establishment of a Santa Rosa Wetland Alliance	Steering Committee Members expressed a desire to establish a nonprofit watershed group to steward the wetlands in the project area going forward.

Ciénega Curriculum

A ciénega-specific curriculum was developed by the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE), Estela Thompson of the Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools, and Quivira staff (Figure 26). The Institute for Applied Ecology is a nonprofit conservation organization which creates, restores and manages habitats for native plants and wildlife throughout the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest and beyond through research applied to conservation challenges and enhancing the restoration and conservation of native species and habitats. Additionally, IAE offers opportunities and curricula for K-12 students, teachers, and a diversity of community members to engage in ecological education and on-the-ground stewardship. IAE was a perfect partner in helping to create an excellent educational resource for the community of Santa Rosa. The chapter is currently stand alone for use in Santa Rosa schools this fall, but will eventually be incorporated into IAE's existing From Ponderosa to Prickly Pear: Exploring the Native Plants of New Mexico curriculum for the state.

Figure 26. Cover page of the Ciénega Curriculum developed during the Wetlands Action Planning Process

Santa Rosa Annual Sunflower Festival

The establishment of an annual festival will establish the area as an ecotourism destination and will call attention to the Pecos Sunflower and its host ecosystem. Highlighting the benefits of healthy watersheds and the impact on human health, the festival captures the attention of youth and the community members in the surrounding area to support the protection of these desirable plants. Through education and engagement, which instill pride in these local treasures, the community will encourage wetland stewardship as a way of life.

Ciénega Boardwalk

A boardwalk through ciénega habitat has been proposed for years through the Blue Hole Ciénega Nature Preserve. Developing a culture supportive of this unique wetland system requires educational signage as a significant and accessible component of the boardwalk. The signs would help educate residents and tourists about the unique plant and animal species which depend upon the unique hydrological features of Santa Rosa wetlands. Completion of a boardwalk would help the community in its stewardship efforts by creating greater exposure in the community to the local ciénega systems. It would also serve as an important draw for ecotourism development and thus opportunity for lasting economic impacts. This endeavor requires the support of local government engagement and maintenance. Specific consideration on behalf of these developments by the City of Santa Rosa would include budgeting for trail maintenance and clean-up, as an example. A wide range of volunteer groups could be an essential resource for building and maintaining a boardwalk and should be considered when developing ecotourism models for the area.

One potential funding source for the boardwalk could be the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Outdoor Equity Fund. Additional funding that might be considered for this project are 319 Clean Water Act Grants. The boardwalk would need to be a component of the grant that would protect wetland hydrology within the three impaired areas listed in Table 3.

Santa Rosa Wetland Alliance

Four members of the existing Steering Committee have expressed interest in establishing a nonprofit Santa Rosa Wetland Alliance. This local alliance would use the Santa Rosa Wetlands Action Plan to build on efforts identified in this planning document.

Summary

All restoration priorities as outlined in this WAP are the result of collaborative work with Steering Committee members and other stakeholders invested in wetland health in Santa Rosa. As the community continues to work toward a healthier wetland and riparian landscape in the

project area, restoration priorities will be revisited and refined based on research finding. Wetland protection and restoration work is contingent upon stakeholder involvement in the processes and successful grant writing or other fundraising activities. Opportunities to enact changes outlined in this document to advance the protection and celebration of Santa Rosa's natural wetland resources are necessary in order for further progress to take place. The following actions are as follows.

1. Paramount to the success of implementing the Wetlands Action Plan is the education and outreach component. The following tools for increasing community awareness around ciénegas have been identified or created.
    a. The new Ciénega Curriculum will help to educate Santa Rosa youth about the remarkable nature of Santa Rosa wetlands and help create a community stewardship ethos.
    b. Continuing to promote and host the Sunflower Festival will raise awareness about the uniqueness of the ecosystem and its biological inhabitants.
    c. Seeking funding for and eventually building an educational boardwalk could educate locals and tourists about the unique ciénega ecosystems of Santa Rosa, drawing ecotourism to the community.
    d. Pursuing Ramsar designation for area wetlands will potentially help with raising awareness and also be a funding draw to address identified action items from Table 6.
    e. Creation of a Santa Rosa Wetland Alliance will be critical to the success of any endeavors to protect and enhance Santa Rosa wetlands.

2. Address data gaps and conduct research that will help to inform the wetland protection and restoration practices.

3. Undertake identified actions from Table 6 with funding resources from Table 7.

The wetlands surrounding the City of Santa Rosa are extraordinary and deserving of extraordinary efforts on the part of the community. By undertaking a combination of these identified actions, the wetlands of Santa Rosa will be protected and cherished resources with a secure ecological future.

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APPENDIX A: RAMSAR DESIGNATION

9 Criteria for a "Wetlands of International Importance" Designation

1	*Representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate ecoregion.*	• Santa Rosa is a unique artesian basin of arid-land springs and seeps, spring brooks, ciénegas and sinkhole lakes in an otherwise semiarid region of Great Plains Shortgrass Prairie. • The ciénegas (wet meadows) support a rare example of Great Plains Tallgrass Prairie in the State of New Mexico.
2	*Supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.*	• Some Santa Rosa ciénegas are designated Critical Habitat for the federally threatened Pecos sunflower. Wright's marsh thistle is also proposed federally threatened with Critical Habitat proposed in the Santa Rosa wetlands. • The Santa Rosa amphipod is endemic to one spring in the Santa Rosa wetlands and three of the spring brooks are the only known habitats of the Santa Rosa roundnose minnow. Both of these endemic species are highly vulnerable because of their limited wetland habitats. • Arid-land spring ciénegas are endangered climax communities that are rapidly vanishing from the American southwest. The Roswell Artesian Wetlands (160 km south of Santa Rosa) and Cuatro Ciénegas Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna in Coahuila, Mexico are also artesian basins of arid-land springs that are already Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance and share some similarities with the Santa Rosa Wetlands.
3	*Supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.*	• Several plant species such as Wright's marsh thistle, Pecos sunflower, clasping yellowtops, clapdasiy, cardinal flower, etc. occur only in arid-land spring habitats. • Wetland invertebrates also add to the overall diversity of this semiarid region. Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies) are especially diverse and in the Santa Rosa wetlands.
4	*Supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides*	• Artesian springs are reliable water sources for wetland plants and animals during all seasons and during years of drought.

	refuge during adverse conditions.	• Constant flow and temperature of spring brooks that flow into the Pecos River provide refuge and spawning habitat for fish that are impacted by fluctuations in flow or temperature in the river channel.
5	*Regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.*	Not Applicable (insufficient data)
6	*Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.*	Not Applicable (insufficient data)
7	*Supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and contributes to global biological diversity.*	• At least thirteen native fish species, including the endemic Santa Rosa roundnose minnow, occur in the spring books and sinkhole lakes of the Santa Rosa wetlands.
8	*Important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.*	• Most of the thirteen species of native fish in the Santa Rosa wetlands spawn and live their entire lives in the spring brooks and sinkhole lakes.
9	*Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal.*	• 100% of the habitat and population for the Santa Rosa amphipod is in one arid-land spring in the Santa Rosa Basin. • 100% of the Santa Rosa roundnose minnow individuals occur in the spring brooks of the Santa Rosa wetlands. • The least shrew occurs in the Santa Rosa ciénegas. The New Mexico population of this shrew appears to be dependent on wet meadow habitats.

The Ramsar designation will be pursued for the Santa Rosa Wetlands for the purpose of advancing public recognition of just how unique the area wetlands are in this arid ecosystem.

APPENDIX B: CIÉNEGA CURRICULUM

Blue Hole Cienega

A curriculum for desert wetlands and the unique plants that live there

For Grades 6-8

Institute for Applied Ecology

Blue Hole Cienega

A curriculum for desert wetlands and the unique plants that live there

• For grades 6-8 •

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Grant to the Quivira Coalition from the New Mexico Environmental Department Wetland Program

Organization of the Curriculum

Lessons progress from setting the ecological stage into more advanced topics related to the ecology and conservation of native plants in Blue Hole Cienega; the curriculum is designed to be a complete unit of study. We also understand that many teachers are unable to commit to the entire unit of study, so lessons can also be used individually. All lessons start with a Teacher Page; check there for the Teachers Hints section to find any essential skills or background needed from earlier lessons. Study topics, background information, and associated sections are included with each of the lessons for study.

Student pages are written for self-guided studies. What better way for them to practice their literacy skills than to read, interpret, and follow written directions. As the teacher, you will need to be familiar with the background information and reflection activities found on the student pages. Of course as the teacher, you maintain the control to use this student directed learning feature as it works best in your classroom.

All lesson worksheets provided will follow the Student Pages. Lessons suggest ways to integrate student studies into service-learning and community projects.

Making the Most of this Curriculum

1. Create a student field journal at the beginning of the study. Encourage students to use them throughout the course of study. Allow time for students to observe, explore, and document their discoveries in field journals each time you take them outdoors. Over time their journal will become a handy reference for them to check back to when they are in the field. Journals, kept over time, can also serve to mark phenology - or changes in the timing of natural phenomena. In addition, the journal can be used throughout the curriculum as an assessment tool and portfolio.

2. Plan ahead to take advantage of outdoor, hands-on learning opportunities. Many of the activities lessons are outdoors-based. While many of these hands-on outdoor activities can be done in the schoolyard or an empty lot, we believe it is a hugely beneficial experience for students to discover and explore a natural area. When areas such as these are contrasted with human dominated environments, such as schoolyards, students can more easily understand human impacts. Some schools are lucky enough to be within walking distance of a wetland or other natural area, but many may need to take a field trip to incorporate this type of experience. If this is the case, plan ahead for lessons that would best be done at Blue Hole Cienega or other natural areas. Buses may need to be ordered, schedules arranged, permission slips signed, and permission may need to be requested from whomever owns or manages the natural area you plan to visit. We recommend always being in touch with the manager of the natural area before visiting, as they may be able to provide valuable information or even meet your class there to provide a tour and answer questions.

3. Make community connections. The best sources of knowledge about your specific area comes from those who live and work there. Reach out to local or regional groups including: conservation organizations; government land management agencies; watershed districts; soil and water conservation districts; the New Mexico Native Plant Society, land trusts; city, county, or national parks departments; colleges and university extension services. Contacts from these groups can provide a variety of assistance to your class, from recommending resources to helping to guide a native plant garden or restoration project. It is invaluable to have a go-to contact to answer questions and provide guidance as you teach about native plants.

Blue Hole Cienega

A curriculum for desert wetlands and the unique plants that live there

• For grades 6-8 •

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About this curriculum

In 2016, the Institute for Applied Ecology published From Ponderosa to Prickly Pear- Exploring the Native Plants of New Mexico, the first comprehensive native plant curriculum for New Mexico. This Blue Hole Cienega curriculum follows the same principles and formatting. When Ponderosa to Prickly Pear is revised in the future, the Blue Hole Cienega will be featured as a new section, Section 8: Wetlands. The Quivira Coalition is working with stakeholders of the Santa Rosa Community and the New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau Wetlands Program to guide wetland stewardship in Santa Rosa. As part of this effort, it became clear that educating Santa Rosa youth about the unique ecosystem surrounding them is one of the most important components for future stewardship of area wetlands. The curriculum developed by IAE in collaboration with Estela Thompson of the Santa Rosa school system will become part of the Wetland Action Plan funded by the NMED SWQB Wetlands Program.

About the Institute for Applied Ecology

Founded in 1999, the Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) is a nonprofit organization with offices in Corvallis, Oregon and Santa Fe, New Mexico. Our mission is to conserve native species and habitats through restoration, research and education. Our vision is a world where all people and wildlands are healthy and interact positively, biological diversity flourishes, and environmental challenges are met with a social commitment to solving problems with scientific principles. Our ecological education programs provide place-based education and service learning opportunities for K-12 students, teachers, and students of all ages.

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Quivira Coalition & the New Mexico Environmental Department Wetland Program

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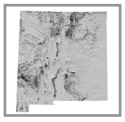
Appendices



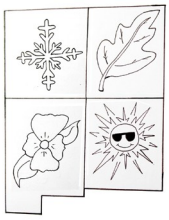
Teacher Page

Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

Time Estimate

40-60 minutes for classroom activity; 2-3 hours for Take it to the Cienega! field trip; 2-3 hours for a tour of the water treatment plant.

Best Season



Spring
Winter
Fall

Grade level
6-8

"For many of us, water simply flows from a faucet, and we think little about it beyond the point of contact. We have lost a sense of respect for the wild river, the complex workings of a wetland, and for the intricate web of life that water supports." Sandra Postel

Overview

This unit sets the stage for future chapters in the curriculum by providing the ecological context and emphasizing the importance of wetlands and water for life. It highlights a rare type of wetland habitat that occurs in Santa Rosa, the cienega. It further illustrates water quality and cleanliness and all of the ways in which wetlands can be polluted or degraded. Students learn why wetlands are so critical and what functions they provide.

Preparation

- Acquire materials for model demonstration.
- Students can work in groups to build several models in the classroom, or you can assemble a single model for all students to view.

Learning Targets

1. Define/describe a wetland and a cienega
2. List 3 or more important functions of wetlands
3. Understand ways in which water quality can be affected

Teacher Hints

1 Up to 4 students in a group can play off of a game board printed on 8.5x11" paper. Alternatively, if one large game board is made (3x4 feet), 15 or more students can play off of just one game board. Consider laminating the board for reuse.

2 Select one student per group to be Rain Keeper. The Rain Keeper is responsible for the water bottle and mists the air (and other players that agree to this) every time somebody lands on the rain square on the game board. Ideally the students selected for this role would be more likely to respect the wishes of those declining a mist and would not be tempted to spray at times other than when playing the game.

3 Should you decide to do the field trip cienega activity, you will want to visit the site ahead of time to find a few places to sample water and order a water test kit in advance (many options available online for $25 or less).

4 The story map about Blue Hole Cienega can be browsed ahead of the lesson: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ab9b1d934dd94a3b8f4052a2f6059baa

S Student Project

Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

What will you learn?

- What is a wetland and a cienega
- Important wetland functions
- How water quality can be affected by humans and natural processes

Vocabulary

- *ecosystem*
- *biotic*
- *abiotic*
- *keystone*
- *ecosystem*
- *ecosystem*
- *services*
- *cienega*
- *habitat*
- *arid*
- *groundwater*
- *hydrology*

Materials Needed

- Wetland Board Game printed out (see board at the end of Unit 1)
- one die
- player pieces (one per student- they can be found objects)
- red, yellow, blue, and green food coloring (4 colors per group)
- clear plastic cups, large (one per student)
- water jug filled with water (enough for ~ 2 cups per student)
- large bin or sink for pouring out water
- spray bottle filled with water (one per group)
- ¼ cup measuring cups
- 1 tablespoon (one per group)
- soil (about one cup per group)

"For many of us, water simply flows from a faucet, and we think little about it beyond the point of contact. We have lost a sense of respect for the wild river, the complex workings of a wetland, and for the intricate web of life that water supports." Sandra Postel

Overview

This unit kicks off the Blue Hole Cienega Curriculum by introducing you to the wonderful world of wetlands, the ecological stage on which all of the plants, people, and other players perform. You will meet the players in upcoming chapters. In this chapter you will learn about the importance and complexity of wetlands and will be introduced to a special type of wetland found in arid landscapes and in Santa Rosa, cienegas (pronounced: see-eh-nuh-guh). You will learn why wetlands are so critical and what functions they provide. Your activities will focus on water quality and cleanliness and all of the ways in which wetlands can be polluted or degraded.

Background

Think about the surroundings in which you live. Is it lush with a lot of trees and shade? Is it more desert-like and dry with only a few plants, or is it dry but with some wet areas? If you live in or near Santa Rosa, New Mexico, you are probably familiar with the Blue Hole Cienega. Blue Hole, and its associated wetland, creates an island of lush habitat in the middle of a mostly dry region. As you will see in upcoming chapters, how much water is present and its quality affects not only the plant and animal life present but also how lands are managed.

A **wetland** is a distinct ecosystem defined by the presence of water in the soil or at the surface, either permanently (such as swamps), or seasonally (such as wet meadows that are saturated by winter or spring rains but dry up in the summer). The presence of water affects soil chemistry and texture. Both soil and water affect the types of plant and animal communities that can live there. The main factor that makes wetlands unique is that they have plants that are adapted to the **hydric** soils. Hydric soil is formed when water saturates, floods, or ponds the soil long enough that it becomes **anaerobic**, which means having low levels of oxygen.

Background Continued

Wetlands are considered **keystone ecosystems** because, even when they are small, they are critical for the health and biodiversity of the larger landscape where they are located. Wetlands are especially important for ecosystem services, or benefits to humans provided by the natural environment. These ecosystem services include keeping water clean, preventing large-scale floods, and recharging groundwater resources. Wetlands clean water by removing pollutants through trapping sediment that then absorbs nutrients and chemicals (such as pesticides).. Wetlands also reduce the effects of flooding. As water from a stream or runoff enters a wetland, the water spreads out and flows through trees, root mats and other vegetation. The plants help to slow the water down which allows suspended material like soil particles carried by the water to settle on the surface of the wetland. Wetlands are like natural sponges, storing either flood waters that overflow riverbanks or surface water that collects in depressions. The combined benefits of storing and slowing down water reduces flooding and erosion.

Wetlands are also considered the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems, providing homes to a wide range of plant and animal life including amphibians, reptiles, birds and even mammals adapted to aquatic environments. In addition to serving as a food source, the dense vegetation found in most wetlands provides places for wildlife such as muskrat and beaver to build homes and to hide from predators. Upland wildlife like raccoons, coyotes, deer, elk and bears often visit wetlands to find food, water and shelter. Wetlands also provide important nesting habitat for migratory birds, such as sandhill cranes, ducks, herons, and cormorants. Migrating birds also rely on wetlands as rest stops on their long journeys.

A **cienega** is a unique wetland ecosystem characterized by a wet meadow with saturated soils in an otherwise **arid** land or desert environment. The water and soil are generally **alkaline** because of increased evaporation that takes place in shallow wetlands in dry environments. Alkalinity refers to its pH level being higher than seven on a scale of 0-14. When this happens, you can sometimes see a salty white crust on the soil.The plants that grow in these environments must be able to tolerate alkaline, salty soils.

Wetlands are rare in the Southwest, but cienegas are even more rare. Only a handful remain in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Northern Mexico. Unfortunately, cienega habitats continue to become even more rare as a result of increasing development and extended droughts that stress plants, lower the water table, and prevent crucial recharging of surface springs. The Blue Hole Cienega Nature Preserve in Santa Rosa, New Mexico provides an opportunity to conserve a high quality wetland and the rare and unique plant and animal species that depend on this habitat, including Pecos sunflower, Wright's marsh thistle, and Great Plains lady's tresses orchids, roundnose minnow, and a recently discovered fairy shrimp. Not only is it one of the largest cienegas in the world, but as you will discover in future lessons, it receives a lot of positive attention from conservationists and the local community which further promotes its protection. While participating in the activities in this and future lessons, think about your role in conserving this special natural wonder and be proud that it exists in your own backyard!

Student Project

Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

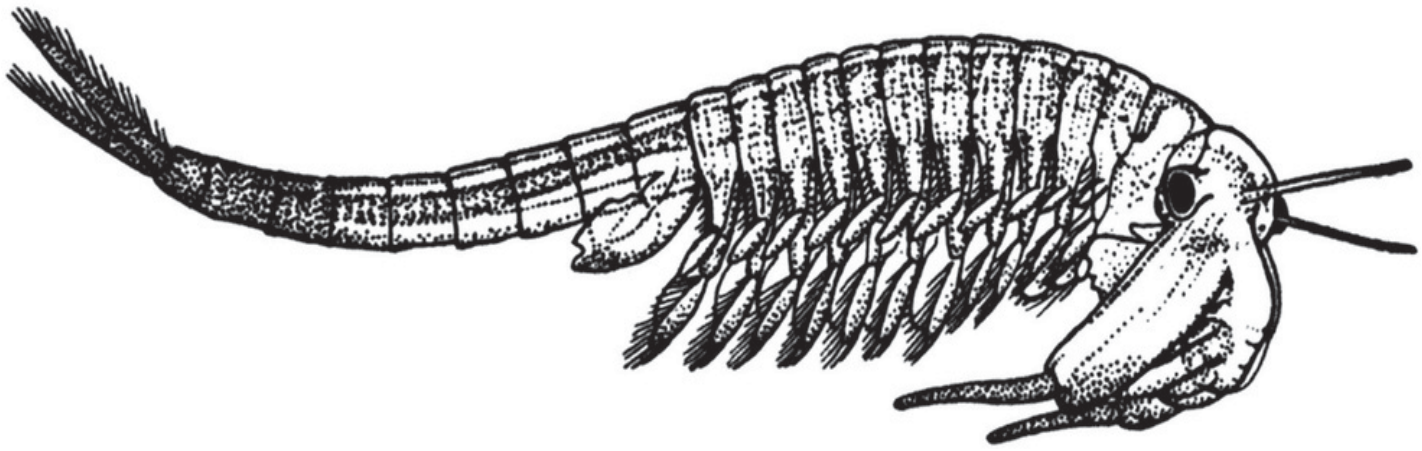
Student Directions

1. Get set up
   a. Lay out the Just Add Water game board
   b. Each student gets a clear plastic cup and fills it with ½ cup of water to start. This cup of water represents *your personal wetland*
   c. Gather dice, food coloring (brown, green, blue), water jug or bucket (filled), plastic bin, spray bottle (filled with water), dirt, measuring cups, tablespoon scoop
   d. Select your game piece

2. Your teacher or group will assign one person the job of Rain Keeper. The role of the Rain Keeper is to take care of the spray bottle and provide a mist (representing rain) each time anybody lands on the *rain square*. The rain keeper must first ask all players if anyone does not want to receive mist.

3. To play the game
   a. Players take turns rolling the dice and moving along the game board according to the number rolled
   b. When you land on a board square, read it for instructions about what will happen in your personal wetland (the plastic cup)
   Adding food coloring: Yellow or red drops usually occur if your water becomes polluted; blue drops usually occur if your water is purified; green drops signify an algal bloom or an imbalance in the wetland ecosystem.
   Adding water: Adding water is an opportunity to purify and refresh your wetland. Use the ¼ measuring cup to add water to your wetland.
   Removing water: Removing water signifies a drop in the water table. Use ¼ measuring cup to remove water into the disposal bin or on the ground if you are outside.
   Adding soil: Soil represents sedimentation resulting from erosion. Use the tablespoon to scoop dirt into your wetland if instructed to do so.
   Misting: Be prepared for a gentle misting representing rain when somebody lands on the rain square! It is OK to ask the rain keeper to mist your cup instead of you or to keep the mist away.
   c. At the end of the game, compare your wetland with others by holding the cup against a white piece of paper. Clean is clear or blue and dirty is brown or green. **The cleanest wetland with the most water wins!** If it is unclear, you can take a vote or agree to a tie.

Were most wetlands clean or contaminated? If your wetland got polluted at any time, did any purification squares remove the pollutant completely?



Student Project

Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

Take it to the Cienega!

Take a field trip to the cienega, and test water quality at several locations. For this activity, your teacher will bring a water quality test kit, and students will bring their field notebooks and take notes about their general impressions at each of the sites - observing water color, depth, disturbance, erosion etc. When you are out there, be sure to also observe any salty white crusting on the soil surface and discuss what this means. One test kit per class should be enough. The teacher will provide instruction and supervision while students take turns conducting the tests at each site. Class discusses any differences they observe from one location to the next and see if it makes sense based on the notes that they have taken. If your class is feeling really ambitious and wanting to explore water quality further, you could also tour the Santa Rosa Water Treatment Plant.

Reflection

How does it feel to live near such a unique and valuable natural feature - Blue Hole Cienega? Does this give you a sense of pride or awe? How do you think Santa Rosa would be different if the wetland was polluted or gone? How can you contribute to the protection of this resource?

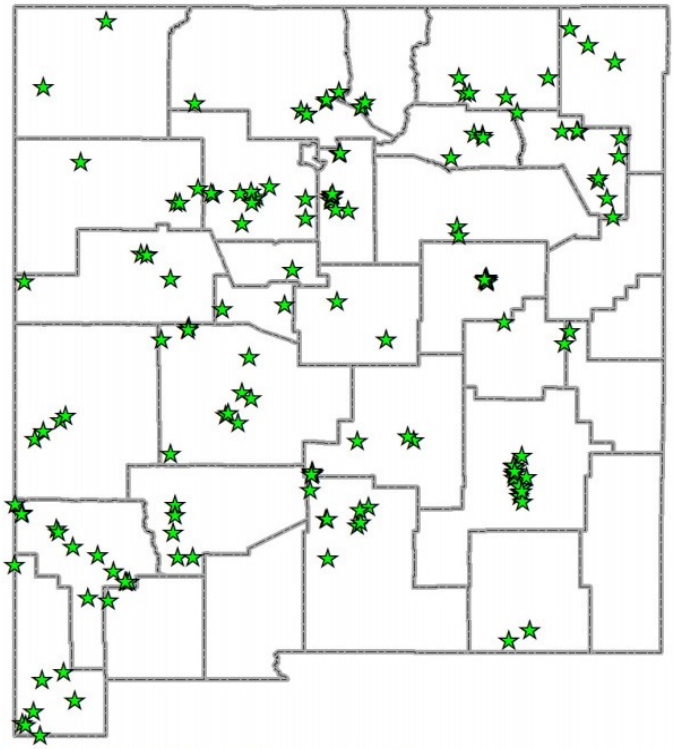


Figure 1. Distribution of arid-land spring ciénegas across New Mexico.

Resources

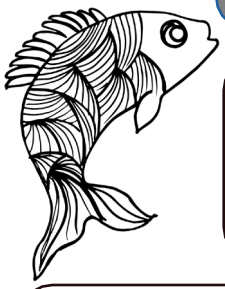
- Story map: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ab9b1d934dd94a3b8f4052a2f6059baa
- Blue Hole Cienega Nature Preserve, Santa Rosa, New Mexico; Groundwater Monitoring Project Final Report FY 2016-2017
- http://www.lockyphoto.com/wetlandskeystoneecosystem/

Student Project

Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

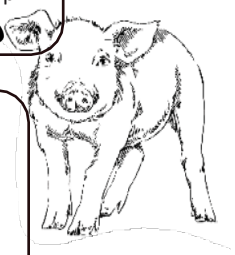
JUST ADD WATER BOARD GAME

START



Spring water is diverted from wetland to make a recreational fish pond. Remove ¼ cup water.

Santa Rosa initiates a water conservation measure and teenagers start taking shorter showers. Add ¼ cup water.



Overgrazing creates erosion and sedimentation. Add 1 TBS dirt.

State Forestry removes water-hogging Russian Olive trees. Add ¼ cup water.

An invasive weevil eats all of the Pecos sunflower seeds and the loss of sunflowers hurts tourism and the economy. Lose 1 turn.

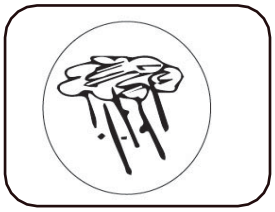
Monsoons deliver significant rain. Add ¼ cup water + 1 drop blue.

Neighbors drain standing water due to a mosquito outbreak. Remove ¼ cup water.

Factory uses the special alkaline water from your cienega for high tech cooling tanks. Remove ¼ cup water.

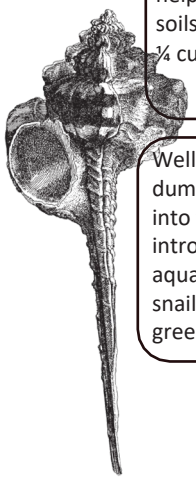
A dam is removed upstream by River Stewards increasing water flow. Add ¼ cup water.

Wetland cleanup by city volunteers removes pet waste. Pet waste bags provided on site give an incentive for dog owners to clean up after their animals. Add ¼ cup fresh water.



Unseasonably hot weather and low precipitation result in algal bloom. Add 1 drop green.

Drift from aerial herbicide spray contaminates your wetland. Add 1 drop yellow.

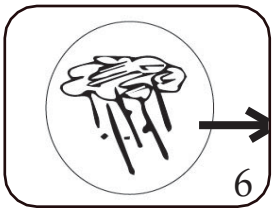


Regenerative grazing helps improve health of soils and ecology. Add ¼ cup water.

YCC crew builds one-rock dams improving hydrology and reducing erosion. Add your ¼ cup water.

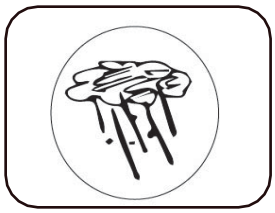
Well-meaning fish owner dumps their aquarium into your wetland introducing invasive aquatic plants, fish, and snails. Add 1 drop green.

Oil drilling miles away contaminates groundwater feeding your wetland. Add 1 drop yellow + 1 drop red.



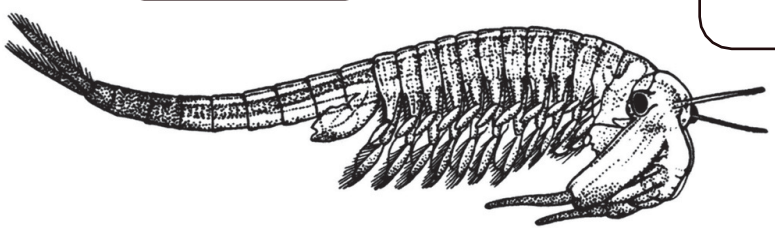
A new road is constructed changing the hydrology of your wetland. Remove ¼ cup water.

Your grandfather gives you his old tractor and you are able to remove fill dumped in your wetland by a previous landowner. Add ¼ cup water.



A parking lot is built on top of your wetland. Pour all water from your cup.

A local chef adds bullfrog legs to the menu, hunting this invasive species in your wetland. Add 1 drop blue.



A local school teacher puts on a Sunflower Festival raising awareness about the importance of the Santa Rosa cienega. Add ¼ cup water.

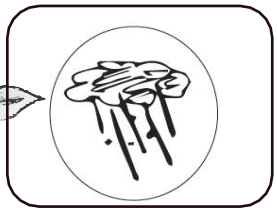
Mountain bikers hit the trails hard upstream causing erosion. Add 1 TBS dirt.

During a drought year, more water is used to keep gardens alive. Remove ¼ cup water.

A conservation organization does a large scale wetland restoration project in Santa Rosa. Add ¼ cup water.

Dog owners leave poop on wetland trails. Add 1 drop red.

A dike or dam restricting water flow is removed. Add ¼ cup water

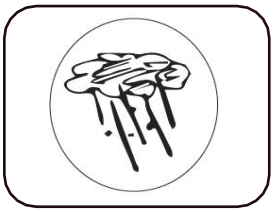


Local students monitor water quality and are able to detect early contamination. Add ¼ cup water.

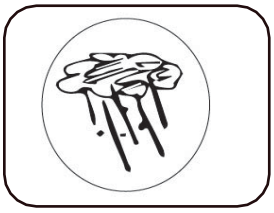
Heavy sudden rain causes erosion and fast moving water. Remove ¼ cup water.

A litter bug dumps garbage with constantly leaky oil cans, contaminating water in your wetland. Add 1 drop red.

Your cousin writes an award winning poem which inspires pride in Santa Rosa and wetland stewardship. Add ¼ cup water.



Biocontrol beetle lays waste to invasive salt cedar. Add ¼ cup water.



END

Nutria fur is suddenly valued and farmed in Santa Rosa, but invasive nutria escape into your wetland. Add 1 drop green.

Big rain event floods homes and the city installs dikes to protect homes. Remove ¼ cup water.

A Land Trust purchases several neighboring wetland properties to protect for many years to come. Add ¼ cup water.

Several local wetlands are included in a large vegetation management study, improving knowledge of best practices. Add ¼ cup water.

A local farmer attends an organic workshop and reduces pesticide use on his crops. Add ¼ cup fresh water.

A construction worker misreads a map and accidentally dumps fill in your wetland. Remove ¼ cup water.

T Teacher Page

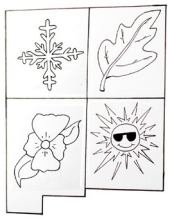
A Sinking Feeling:
Karst Limestone and the formation of Blue Hole

"The earth is a book in which we read not only its history, but the history of the living things it has borne." Isaac Asimov

Time Estimate

60 minutes; additional time is required for Take it to the Cienega!

Best Season



Spring
Winter
Fall

Grade level
6-8

Overview

This lesson uses a model demonstration to explore how geologic features on and below the earth's surface form the topography and resulting ecosystems we see today. Students will build a model of karst limestone terrain using sugar cubes and modeling clay to learn how the sinkholes and springs around Santa Rosa, NM were formed.

Learning Targets

1. List the properties of karst limestone and how they lead to the formation of sinkholes and caves.
2. Describe the process that formed the Blue Hole

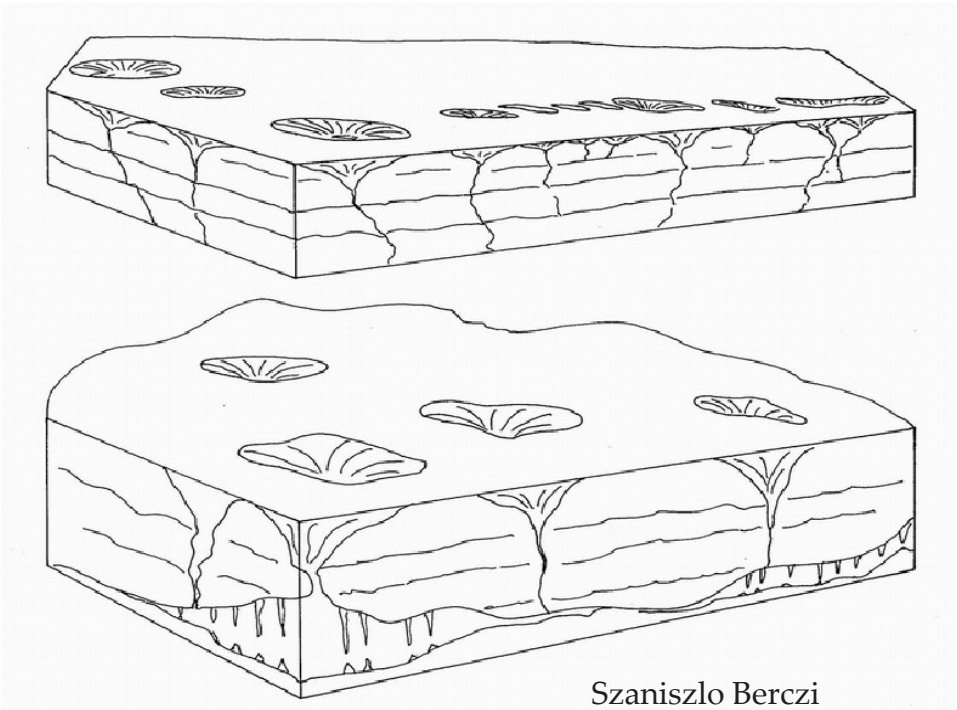
Preparation

- Acquire materials for model demonstration.
- Students can work in groups to build several models in the classroom, or you can assemble a single model for all students to view.

Teacher Hints

1 Students can work in groups to build several models in the classroom, or you can assemble a single model for all students to view.

2 Discuss examples of sinkholes and lakes in the Santa Rosa area.



Szaniszlo Berczi
Eötvös Loránd University

Student Project

A Sinking Feeling:
Karst Limestone and the formation of Blue Hole

"The earth is a book in which we read not only its history, but the history of the living things it has borne." Isaac Asimov

What will you learn?

- Increase understanding of geology and how it shapes the physical and biological world
- Visualize how the Blue Hole Cienega and other Santa Rosa wetlands were formed
- Understand the properties of karst limestone

Overview

You will explore how geologic features on and below the earth's surface form the topography and resulting ecosystems we see today. You will build a model of karst limestone terrain using sugar cubes and modeling clay to learn how the sinkholes and springs around Santa Rosa, NM were formed.

Vocabulary

- *geology*
- *topography*
- *limestone*
- *karst*
- *karst limestone*
- *sinkholes*

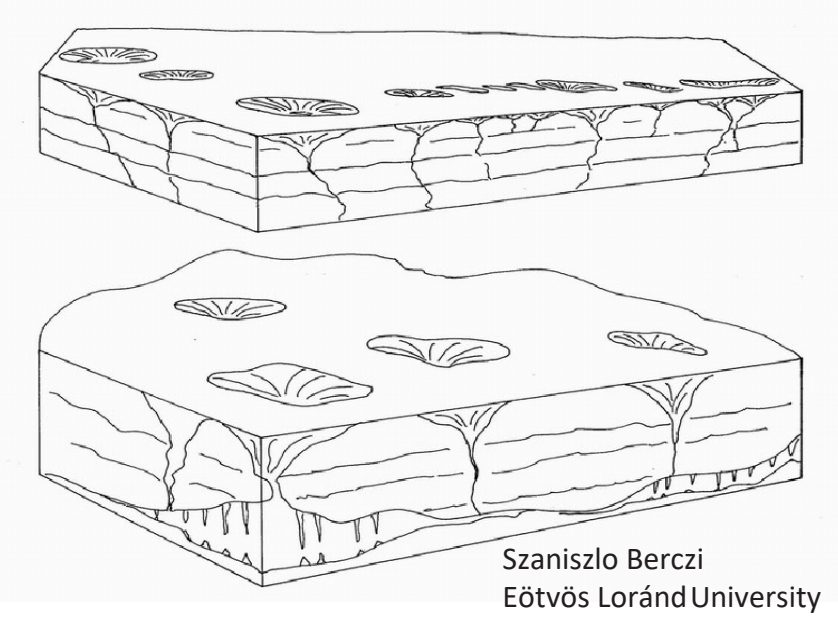
Materials Needed

- Box of sugar cubes
- Modeling clay (green or brown)
- Clear glass container with high sides
- Water
- Toothpick or pencil
- Rolling pin

Background

The landscape of Santa Rosa is defined by its **karst limestone** terrain. All of the lakes, wetlands, and underground features not visible to us are a result of this unique geology. Understanding geology and how the **topography** (physical shapes and features of the area) was formed gives us a better understanding of biology and why plants grow where they do.

Limestone is composed mainly of calcium carbonate left behind by organic matter from seashells and plants that once lived in ancient oceans that covered the region. **Karst** is a type of geologic feature made up of limestone that dissolves in water and forms sinkholes and caves. Blue Hole and the other lakes in Santa Rosa are sinkholes that filled with water after the karst dissolved and collapsed. Water continuously flows out of Blue Hole from deep underground caves and rises to the surface to feed the wetlands known as the Blue Hole Ciénega.



Szaniszlo Berczi
Eötvös Loránd University

Student Project

A Sinking Feeling:
Karst Limestone and the formation of Blue Hole

Student Directions

Make a sinkhole!
In this activity, sugar cubes are used to represent karst limestone, covered with clay, representing the earth's surface. Holes are poked through the clay and water pours over the clay to show how water seeps into the ground.

1. Arrange the sugar cubes in the bottom of the glass container, loosely stacked 3-4 cubes high and 3-4 cubes deep to make a "hill".
2. Cover the outside of the cubes with modeling clay. The cubes should be completely covered except for one part at the bottom, which will be the cave mouth or spring. Decorate the outside with additional clay or other materials to represent grass, rocks, flowers, etc.
3. Use the toothpick or sharp pencil to poke 2-3 holes (the size of a pencil eraser) in the top of your clay hill –These will be the holes that allow water to seep into the hill.
4. Slowly pour water over the top of your formation. It should filter down through the holes and start to dissolve the sugar before flowing out of the opening at the bottom, creating a sinkhole and spring!

Take it to the Cienega!

Take a field trip to Blue Hole Ciénega after discussing karst limestone and see the sinkhole for yourselves!

Reflection

How do you think the formation of Blue Hole impacted the surroundings and the kinds of plants that grow in the area today?

Resources

- This lesson was adapted from Education Possible: https://educationpossible.com/geography-activities-make-sugar-karst-cave-sinkhole/#_a5y_p=4771528
- Caves and Karst in New Mexico: https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/publications/periodicals/earthmatters/3/n1/em_v3_n1.pdf
- National Geographic: Karst: https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/karst/

T Teacher Page

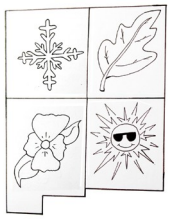
Plants in their Places:
Plant Adaptations in Deserts and Wetlands

"Look closely at nature. Every species is a masterpiece, exquisitely adapted to the particular environment in which it has survived." - E. O. Wilson

Time Estimate

60 minutes; additional time is required for Take it to the Cienega!

Best Season



Spring
Winter
Fall
Grade Level
6-8

Overview

This lesson explores how environmental conditions shape the physical traits of plants. Students will read, research, discuss, observe, and speculate about the traits of plants and how these traits may help a plant survive in different environments. They will look at live plants or specimens that have been previously collected from the field or schoolyard to make observations and relate plant traits to potential environmental adaptations.

Preparation

1. Locate suitable outdoor sites for plant observations or collect plant specimens by digging them up (root and all) and bringing them into the classroom.
2. Conduct the plant observations during class or assign them for outside of class time. Without giving students any additional background information, have them complete the plant adaptation observation worksheet. Copy only the activity directions for students to guide their observation session.

Learning Targets

1. Explain how plant traits relate to environmental adaptations
2. Make detailed observations and use them to make inferences

Assessments

- Explain how plant traits relate to environmental adaptations
- Make detailed observations and use them to make inferences

Teacher Hints

1 Introduce the plant observations with a class discussion: Ask students to brainstorm: What environmental conditions do plants face in deserts? What do they face in wetlands? What kind of traits might a plant need to survive in a desert? What about in a wetland?

2 Try to find a location with a variety of plants that have different adaptations or collect a variety of plant specimens for classroom observations. Print pictures of cacti or plants with unique adaptations that you may not be able to find.

Teacher Page

Plants in their Places:
Plant Adaptations in Deserts and Wetlands

"Look closely at nature. Every species is a masterpiece, exquisitely adapted to the particular environment in which it has survived." - E. O. Wilson

Materials Needed

- Copy of observation directions

What will you learn?

- Hone observation skills; record data and discuss findings
- Understand different types of plant traits and environmental adaptations
- Increase understanding of interactions between plants and their abiotic environments

Vocabulary

- *adaptation*
- *abiotic factors*
- *biotic factors*
- *taproot*
- *competition*
- *seed dispersal*
- *herbivory*
- *endangered species*

Overview

In this lesson, you will explore how plants are adapted to their environment. You will read, research, discuss, observe, and speculate about the physical traits of plants and how they help plants survive in different environments.

Background

Plants have evolved to thrive in a variety of environments across the globe. From snowy mountaintops to hot and dry deserts, plants can be found proliferating under extreme conditions. A plant's ability to survive and reproduce in any environment is related to its **adaptations**. **Adaptations** are special features that allow a plant to live in a particular place or environment. Because they can't get up and move around, plants must have **adaptations** to both the **abiotic** and **biotic factors** in their environment. **Abiotic factors** are the nonliving parts of the environment that can influence plant adaptations-- these include things like soil, temperature, and precipitation. **Biotic factors** are the living elements within a habitat or environment that influence plant adaptations, such as pollinators, herbivores, and surrounding plants that are competing for resources.

Plants in deserts have adaptations that allow them to acquire and conserve water. For example, some desert plants have **taproots**, long, straight roots that can access water stored in deep underground soil layers. Additionally, because plants lose water out of their leaves, many desert plants have small leaves with minimal surface area to prevent water loss. Some desert plants even have waxy layers or hairs on the outside of their leaves to help hold in water and/or shade the leaf surface from the hot sun. Many plant adaptations in deserts are driven by abiotic factors of heat and aridity (low rainfall or precipitation and high evaporation).

Plants in wetlands like the Blue Hole Cienega have very different adaptations from desert plants. Because they don't have to worry about water, they often have larger leaves that allow them to take in more sunlight to produce sugars and grow tall. However, when water is abundant, biotic factors such as **competition** from other plants for space and sunlight can shape adaptations in wetland plants. Karst environments may also drive plant adaptation because of the higher pH of the surrounding soil.

Teacher Page

Plants in their Places:
Plant Adaptations in Deserts and Wetlands

Background Continued

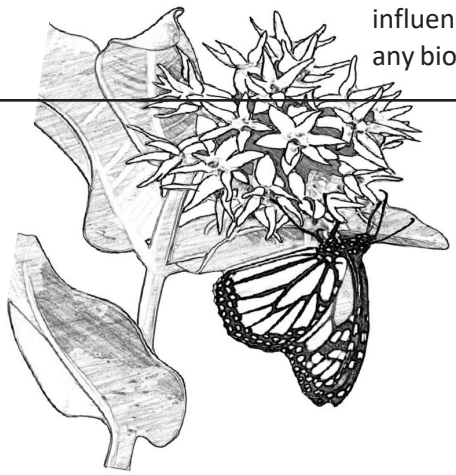
Plants also have general adaptations across environments that help them survive and reproduce. Flower colors and shapes are often adapted to attract specific pollinators. For example, flowers that are red and tubular typically attract hummingbirds. Large white flowers are often pollinated by moths that can easily see the white flower in the night. Plants can also have specific adaptations for **seed dispersal**, or methods that allow their seeds to be transported to new locations. Seed dispersal adaptations can include fluffy attachments that help a seed be carried in the wind, or spiky seed parts that help the seed stick to animal fur or even your socks! Other general adaptations include physical and chemical defenses like thorns or poisonous compounds that protect plants from **herbivory** (getting eaten by animals like mammals or insects). For example, the Wright's marsh thistle *(Cirsium wrightii)* that lives in Blue Hole Cienega has spiny attachments to it's flower head and leaves that help prevent things from eating it!

Some plants have adaptations that are restricted to very specific environments. For example, the Pecos sunflower *(Helianthus paradoxus)* found at the Blue Hole Cienega in Santa Rosa, New Mexico only grows in arid land cienegas with alkaline soils that are wet year-round. These special requirements, and the fact that cienegas are rare, mean that the Pecos sunflower is a rare and endangered species. **Endangered species** are species that are at risk of extinction because of a sudden rapid decrease in its population or a loss of its critical habitat. Endangered species, including the Pecos sunflower, are protected by federal laws to ensure they are able to survive and recover. You will learn more about endangered species conservation in Unit 4 of this curriculum.

Directions

Observering plant adaptations

1. Choose a plant or group of plants to observe for plant adaptations.
2. Make notes about the physical characteristics of the plant or plants you are looking at. Include details about their roots, height, leaf size, leaf texture, flower color, number of flowers, seeds, and anything else you notice about the plant. You can even draw pictures of what you see and label them.
3. For each characteristic you observe, write down how you think it could help the plant survive in its environment. If it is a desert plant, how does it acquire and conserve water? If it is a wetland plant, how does it compete for sunlight and space? What kind of pollinators does the flower attract? How do the seeds get dispersed into new locations?
4. If you are observing the plant in its natural habitat, list some biotic and abiotic factors that may be influencing the plant's adaptations. Did you observe any biotic or abiotic factors influencing the plant?

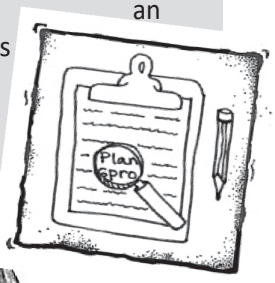


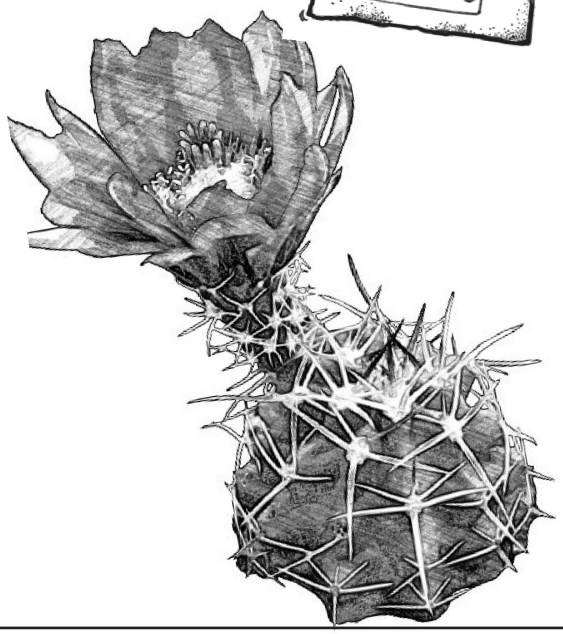
Teacher Page

Plants in their Places:
Plant Adaptations in Deserts and Wetlands

Take it to the Cienega!

This lesson and activity can take place in the Blue Hole Cienega or outside at the schoolyard. If you go to the Cienega, do not dig up any plants since they could be an endangered species like the Pecos sunflower or Wright's marsh thistle.





Reflection

Humans can change both biotic and abiotic factors that plants are adapted to, causing plants to have to re-adapt or die off. What are some ways that plants react to human-caused changes in the environment? How can understanding plant adaptations help humans avoid negative impacts to plants and their environment?

Resources

- Appendix I - table of plant adaptations
- New Mexico Rare Plants: Helianthus paradoxus (Pecos sunflower): https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/95
- New Mexico Rare Plants: Cirsium wrightii (Wright's marsh thistle): https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/52
- Pollinator Syndromes: US Forest Service: https://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/What_is_Pollination/syndromes.shtml
- How do desert plants adapt to their environment? https://sciencing.com/climate-landlocked-gets-little-precipitation-21799.html
- Wetland Adaptations: New York Botanical Garden: https://www.nybg.org/garden/wetland-trail/wetland-adaptations/

Observation Worksheet:

1. Describe and/or draw the following parts of your plant and how they might be an adaptation to the environment:

Roots (length, structure)-

Stem (height, structure, texture)-

Leaves (size, texture, hairs, number of leaves, etc.)-

Flowers (color, number, size)-

Seeds (number, size, structure)-

2. What are some abiotic factors this plant might be adapted to?

3. What are some biotic factors this plant might be adapted to?

4. How might this plant defend itself from being eaten?

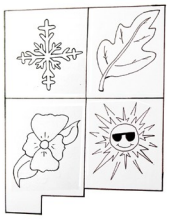
5. Where do you think this plant grows? Why?

Teacher Page — The Rare Ones: Conservation of Biodiversity

Time Estimate

60 minutes; additional time is required for Take it to the Cienega!

Best Season



Fall

Grade level 6-8

"We all have a responsibility to protect endangered species, both for their sake and for the sake of our own future generations." Loretta Lynch

Overview

This lesson explores the biology and characteristics of two endangered plant species. Students will create educational materials to share what they learn in order to support conservation of these species.

Learning Targets

1. Explain what endangered species are and why we should care about them
2. Name two endangered plant species that live at the Blue Hole Cienega
3. Share information about local endangered plant species with their peers and community

Preparation

- Watching the film Saving Beauty (link) will help provide context for the endangered species that grow in Santa Rosa
- Gather materials for students to make brochures and flyers (paper, pencils, markers, crayons, etc.) and, if you decide to do Activity 2, poster board(s) and a table for the booth.
- Print copies of the informational handouts for each species.
- Coordinate with Sunflower Festival event planners for your class and school to have a booth at the event.
- Coordinate with elementary school teachers to potentially create and carry out an educational activity with younger students.

Teacher Hints

1. Depending on classroom facilities, students can make their brochures or flyers using paper and colored pencils, crayons, and markers or using computer software.
2. Activity 1 could be assigned as homework or completed in class. This activity could be adapted to include designing a billboard, comic strip, or other materials related to the endangered species in Santa Rosa.
3. If students have access to computers and the internet in class, they can use both the handouts that accompany the lesson and independent internet research.
4. Students can host a booth at the annual Sunflower Festival (Activity 2) on behalf of their class and school. They can display their materials, such as brochures/flyers and educational products created from other lessons (such as the Karst limestone model from Unit 6).
5. In Activity 3, students will create an activity for younger students (K-2nd grade) to teach them about the endangered plants in Santa Rosa. For example, they could make paper plate sunflowers and/or thistles with a kindergarten class. This activity could also be included at the Sunflower Festival booth.

Student Project

The Rare Ones: Conservation of Biodiversity

What will you learn?

- Increased awareness of the endangered species that live among us
- Ability to share information to educate others on the biology and importance of endangered species

"We all have a responsibility to protect endangered species, both for their sake and for the sake of our own future generations." Loretta Lynch

Overview

Did you know that there are endangered species in your community? The Pecos sunflower and Wright's marsh thistle only grow in a few places in the Southwest, including the Blue Hole Cienega. In this lesson, you will learn about these plants and how to protect them through educating your peers and community members.

Vocabulary

- *Threatened and endangered Species*
- *Threats*
- *Conservation*

Materials Needed

Activity 1

- Paper
- Writing/coloring utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons)
- And/or access to computer software like Microsoft Powerpoint

Activity 2 (optional)

- Poster board
- Writing/coloring utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons)
- And/or access to computer software like Microsoft Powerpoint

Activity 3 (optional)

- Paper plate sunflower and thistle materials listed in links under Resources

Background

Federal and state laws protect species that are designated as endangered or threatened. **Threatened and endangered species** are species that are at risk of extinction because of sudden rapid decreases in their population and/or a loss of their critical habitat. If the federal government calls a species **endangered**, it means that species is on the brink of extinction. If a species is listed as **threatened**, it is likely to be at the brink of extinction, but doing better than if it were called endangered. The main federal law that protects these species is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA provides strict rules for protecting species and guidelines to actively help them recover so they are no longer at risk of going extinct. Additionally, the State of New Mexico has a list of species that are designated as threatened or endangered. Two plants that live in the Blue Hole Cienega are listed as endangered by the State of New Mexico, and are either currently or proposed to be listed as threatened under the ESA.

Wright's marsh thistle (Cirsium wrightii) is found in only 8 places in New Mexico, including the Blue Hole Cienega, where it grows in wet soil near springs or streams. Its flower color ranges from white to pink. It is covered in spikey attachments on the leaves and flower heads. It is listed as endangered by the state, and proposed to be listed as threatened under the federal ESA.

Student Project

The Rare Ones: Conservation of Biodiversity

Background Continued

Pecos sunflower (Helianthus paradoxus) may look like other common sunflowers that you may notice growing along roadsides throughout New Mexico, but it has narrower leaves, fewer hairs, and smaller flower heads. It lives in arid land wetlands, also called cienegas, where the soil is always wet and has a high pH (alkaline). It can be found in both New Mexico and Texas. It is listed as endangered by the state and threatened under the federal ESA.

You can learn more about both of these species from the handouts your teacher gave you.

Threats to endangered species are stressful conditions or disturbing events that can reduce the health of individual plants or populations. Threats can include natural factors like insect predation or fires, as well as human-caused disturbances like building roads or using too much water. Both of the endangered plant species in Santa Rosa are threatened by climate change which, on average, is causing warmer temperatures and drier weather (less snow and rain). A warmer and drier climate means there is less water available to support not only human needs, but also the wetland habitats where these plants grow. Humans directly impact water availability in wetlands by using water for agriculture and supplying growing cities and towns.

Invasive species can also negatively impact these endangered plants. For example, in the Blue Hole Cienega, Russian olive (Elaeagnus angustifolia) and tamarisk (Tamarix spp.) are growing in the cienega and competing with the Pecos sunflower and Wright's marsh thistle for water, nutrients, and space.

Conservation is the protection of things found in nature. Endangered species conservation includes researching the species to understand what they need to survive, protecting their habitats, and monitoring populations to make sure they are healthy and not decreasing.

Botanists, land managers, and the people of Santa Rosa are working to conserve the Pecos sunflower and Wright's marsh thistle by removing invasive species, protecting the Cienega from threats, and educating the community. One of the most important parts of endangered species conservation is educating people about the species and what threatens them. In 2021, the community of Santa Rosa hosted the first annual Santa Rosa Sunflower Festival to celebrate the wetlands and the endangered Pecos sunflower. As you learn about endangered species, especially the ones that live in your surroundings, you can share what you learn with your family, friends, and community. When people learn about the beautiful living things that share their community, they can feel empowered to protect these species and their habitats!

Student Project

The Rare Ones: Conservation of Biodiversity

Student Directions

Activity 1: Make an educational brochure or flyer about Pecos sunflower or Wright's marsh thistle

1. Using information from the handouts for each species, make an informational item like a poster, brochure, or flyer to teach people about one of the endangered plant species in Santa Rosa.
2. Be sure to include pictures of what the plant looks like and where it grows.
3. Include the following information in your own words and using visuals:
   a. Describe the plant (height, flower color, leaf shape, etc.)
   b. Where does it grow?
   c. What are its threats?
   d. How can people help protect it?

Activity 2: Design a booth for the sunflower festival while representing your school.

1. Using information from the handouts for each species, create a poster for your booth

Activity 3: Design a lesson to teach kindergartners through second graders about the sunflower and thistle. Since one of the most important parts of learning is sharing what you learn with others, this is a special opportunity to do so.

Take it to the Cienega!

Go to the wetlands when both species are in bloom and learn to identify them in their natural habitat!

Reflection

Should we protect endangered species? What do you think you can do to help protect the endangered species that live in your area?

Resources

- Movie- Saving Beauty: https://www.savingbeautyfilm.com/
- Daniela Roth Introducing Blue Hole Cienega: https://vimeo.com/user104669649
- New Mexico Rare Plants: Helianthus paradoxus (Pecos sunflower): https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/95
- New Mexico Rare Plants: Cirsium wrightii (Wright's marsh thistle): https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/52
- Paper plate sunflower craft: https://www.theresourcefulmama.com/paper-plate-sunflower-craft/
- Paper plate thistle craft: https://www.activityvillage.co.uk/paper-plate-thistle

Pecos Sunflower *(Helianthus paradoxus)*

Description:

Height: 1-2m tall (3-6 feet)

Flowers: August-October; a composite head of brown tubular disk flowers in the center and yellow petal-like ray flowers

Leaves: Wider at the base and narrowing at the tip (lanceolate) with rough, sandpaper-like texture and 3 prominent veins.

Habitat

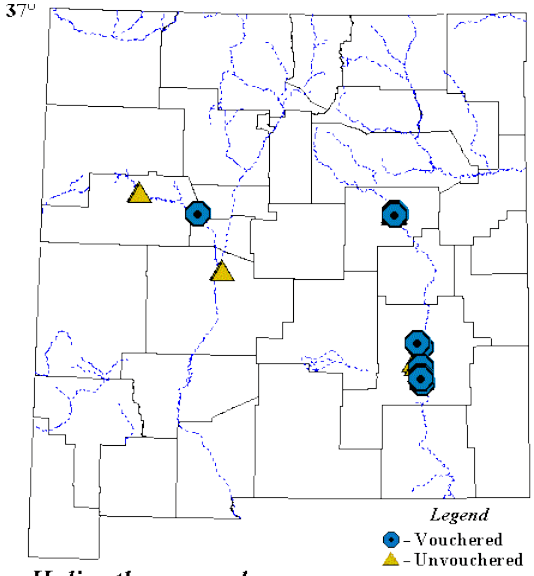
Pecos sunflower grows in wet soils of desert wetlands and is found only in a few locations in New Mexico and Texas (see .

Threats

Decreased water availability, invasive species, disturbance of fragile wetland habitats, and climate change all threaten this species.

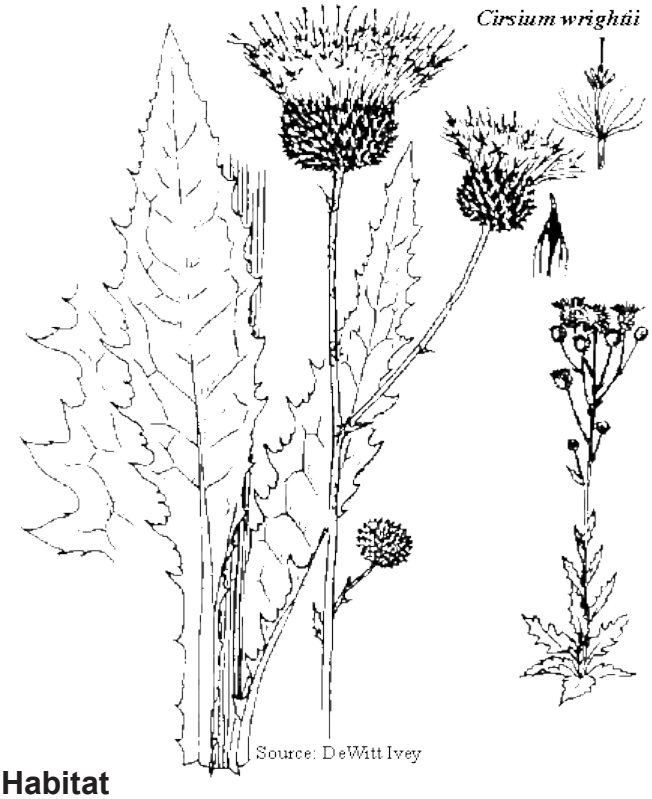
Conservation

Avoid damaging wetlands, reduce water usage, work with researchers to study its biology and population health. Collect, store, and grow seeds for long term conservation.



Left: a photo of Pecos sunflower growing in a desert wetland habitat. Right: a map showing the distribution of Pecos sunflower in New Mexico from https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/95

Wright's Marsh Thistle *(Cirsium wrightii)*



Description:

Height: 1-2.5 m tall (3-8 feet)

Flowers: August-October; a composite head of white to pink disk flowers held in a receptacle with spiny attachments.

Leaves: basal rosette of thick leaves with short black spines and stem leaves similar and get smaller in size towards the top of the stem.

Habitat

Wright's marsh thistle grows in wet soils near springs, seeps and streams. It is known from only in a few locations in New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico (see map of New Mexico distribution below).

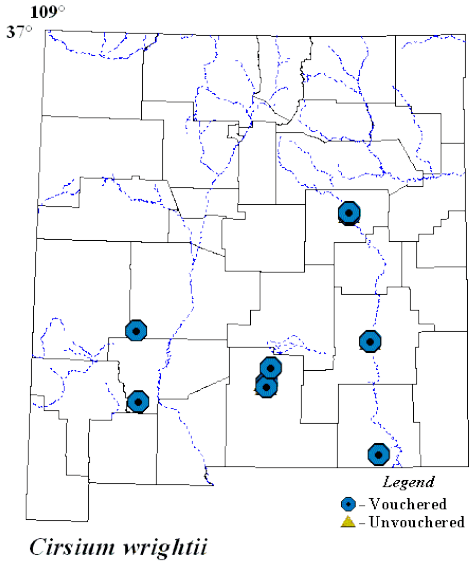
Threats

Decreased water availability, invasive species, disturbance of fragile wetland habitats, and climate change all threaten this species. Insects called weevils also eat the flowers and seeds and can negatively impact the Wright's marsh thistle.

Conservation

Avoid damaging wetlands, reduce water usage, work with researchers to study its biology and population health. Collect, store, and grow seeds for long term conservation.

Photo: Isabel Szyjnski 2011



Left: a photo of Wright's marsh thistle growing in a desert wetland habitat. Right: a map showing the distribution of Wright's marsh thistle in New Mexico from https://nmrareplants.unm.edu/node/52

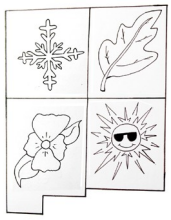
Teacher Page

Data Talks: Measuring Plant Populations

Time Estimate

30-45 minute introduction, 60-90 minute field session; an additional session or two would be needed for Take it to the Cienega!

Best Season



Spring
Summer

Grade level
6-8

"An experiment is a question which science poses to Nature, and a measurement is the recording of Nature's answer." - Max Planck

Overview

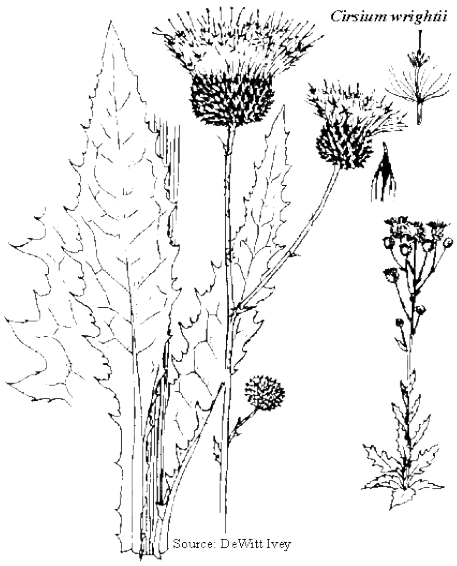
It is important for scientists and land managers to measure various characteristics of plant communities. These measurements allow us to evaluate ecosystem health and document changes occurring over time or in response to management actions. It is not practical or possible to count each plant out there, so we use different methods of sampling portions of a larger population or plant community to collect information

Learning Targets

1. Students will understand why monitoring is important and be able to describe two methods of sampling plant populations
2. Students will be able to discuss the pros and cons of taking a census versus a sampling method

Preparation

- Identify a study area; it could be the school yard, adjacent to the school property or if you have time, at the Blue Hole Cienega.
- Locate an ideal place to run the transect and get familiar with a number of plants in your study area.
- Pick one focus plant species for each group. Focal plant species should be common enough to be encountered in most of the plots.
- Prepare 10 hula hoops for estimating percent cover by using string to divide the hula hoops into 4 sections (25% cover)
- Label the hula hoops with tape or flagging for each plot 1-10, indicating where it is located along the transect (ie. Plot 1 @ 3 meters, Plot 2 @ 6 meters)



Teacher Hints

1. If you can not purchase a 30 meter tape, the 10 hula hoop plots could be placed randomly in your study area or you can measure a 30m rope and mark every 3m with flagging tape.

2. This lesson can be adjusted to make it more challenging or less challenging. For instance, each group could study a common plant species as well as a less common plant. To simplify, students could have fun throwing hula hoops to random plot locations.

Student Project

Data Talks: Measuring Plant Populations

"An experiment is a question which science poses to Nature, and a measurement is the recording of Nature's answer." - Max Planck

What will you learn?

- Why and how plant populations are monitored
- Strengths and weaknesses of using different methods of sampling vegetation
- Data analysis skills

Overview

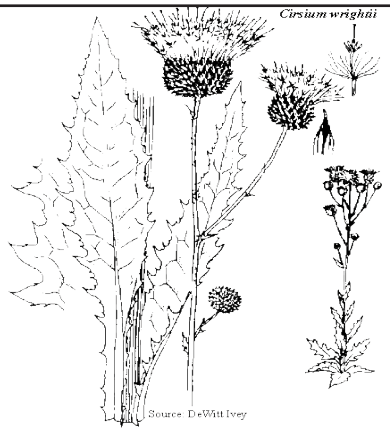
It is important for scientists and land managers to measure what is happening in a plant community to evaluate ecosystem health and document changes occurring over time, or in response to management actions. It is not practical or possible to count each plant out there, so they use different methods of sampling portions of a larger population or plant community to collect information that is representative of the whole. This lesson will introduce you to several methods of sampling populations and the different types of data that can be collected.

Vocabulary

- *monitoring*
- *census*
- *cover*
- *transect*
- *plot*

Materials Needed

- 30 meter measuring tape
- hula hoops
- tape or flagging
- sturdy string
- clipboards/data sheets/pencils
- 2 oversized nails
- field guides
- graph paper



Background

Ecosystem managers and scientists sample plant populations for many reasons, including **monitoring** or "keeping tabs" on a population of rare plants, comparing the results of habitat treatments in an experiment, or determining the impact of an activity or event (e.g., building a new road, wildfire, or grazing) on a plant population. There are many aspects of the plant populations to consider, such as plant height or number of leaves or how many individuals are present.

Some common types of data collection to meet different objectives are listed below.

Presence/absence: Is the species of interest present or not? This is the fastest and easiest type of data to collect. However, it only lets the researcher know if the species is present or absent.

Population estimates: This method estimates the size of the population without actually counting every plant. During sampling, a representative portion of the population is counted and then this data is extrapolated to estimate the size of the entire population. For this method to be legitimate, the part of the population that is counted (the sample) must be selected carefully, in an unbiased manner and must also be representative of the rest of the population as a whole.

Data Talks: Measuring Plant Populations

Background Continued

Percent cover: This is a measure of the amount of the ground covered by the plant from a bird's eye view. This is a very useful measure for comparing the abundance of different species. One drawback of measuring cover is that it can vary drastically for an individual plant over the course of the growing season and can be difficult to measure accurately because it is based on visual estimation. This measure is commonly used to study plant communities, showing which species is most abundant and indicating which plants are using resources.

Census (complete population counts): To complete a census, first decide on the area within which all plants will be counted. No statistical analysis is required and therefore any changes in counts from year to year are real. However, this method can be extremely time consuming, costly and, and often impossible. This is the preferred method when possible.

Sampling Layouts: There are different sampling methods and layouts that researchers use to collect data. Here are some examples of common layouts for sampling:

- **Transects** can be long, narrow strips or wide belts that traverse the landscape. The area within the boundary of the transect is sampled and transects are placed randomly or in intervals across the area to be sampled. Target species within the transect can be counted or percent cover of any or all species present can be assessed.

- **Plots** are square, round, or rectangular areas within the sampled area in which data is collected. The size of plots can vary with sampling method, though one meter square plots are common.

- **Photo points:** A picture is worth a thousand words! With this method, the photographer takes photos in the four directions (north, east, south and west) from a set of permanently marked points within the area of study. The photo points should give a good visual assessment of the entire area. Photo points can then be revisited over time, the photos re-taken, and compared to the initial (baseline) photos to evaluate change over time.

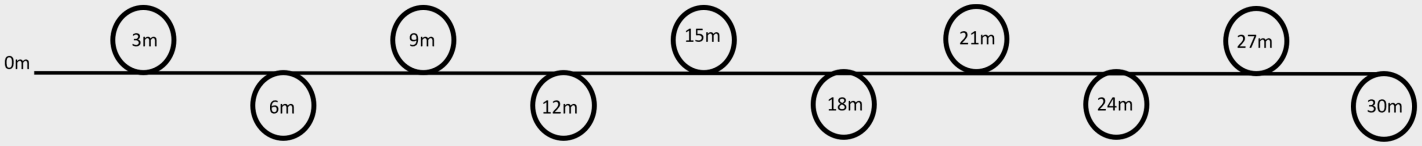
Once you have collected your data, the next step is data analysis. Until you do this you just have a bunch of numbers on a piece of paper. Data analysis involves quantitatively summarizing your data to paint a picture of what is happening with the plant community you measured. For example, you may want to know the average cover or average number of individuals across the area you measured. If you repeat these measurements year after year, you can monitor how a population is growing or shrinking over time.

Student Project

Data Talks: Measuring Plant Populations

Student Directions

1. Divide students into groups of 3-4.
2. Your teacher will tell you what plant you will be measuring. This is your group's "focal plant species". Make sure you can recognize younger and older or flowering and non-flowering individuals. This monitoring exercise will answer the question of how common your chosen plant species is within your survey site.
3. Set up a 30 meter long transect in your study area. Typically plant ecologists randomly locate transects or plots, but for this activity, your teacher will help you set up the transect to make sure you intersect plants you are studying.
4. Once your transect is established, place the hula hoops every 3 meters, alternating sides, starting at the 5 meter mark along the transect line.
5. At each sample point (3 m, 6 m, etc.) place the apex of the hula hoop ring.
6. Record three types of data for the focal plant species on the handout. :
   a. Presence/absence- Is the species present in the plot (yes or no)?
   b. Percent cover- visually estimate how much of the plot the species is taking up (% out of 100% cover).
   c. Count the number of individuals
7. Data analysis- Calculate the frequency (% of plots in which your species is found) at which each species was present in your sample of ten plots. Calculate the average percent cover for each species. Average your count data for each species. Do the same techniques yield similar or different results?
8. Discuss your results as a class. Which type of data most accurately represents the population of plants you are studying? Compare the efficiency of data collection (how long it took) against the usefulness of the information you collected. Which methods were best for the plants you studied? How could you change your methods to collect more accurate data? How might you change the data you collect if you had a different research question?



Take it to the Cienega!

Activity could be done at the Blue Hole Cienega. Students should be mindful of trampling vegetation.

Resources

- Measuring and Monitoring Plant Populations- http://msuinvasiveplants.org/documents/archives_cism/BLM_Measuring_and_monitoring.pdf

Reflection

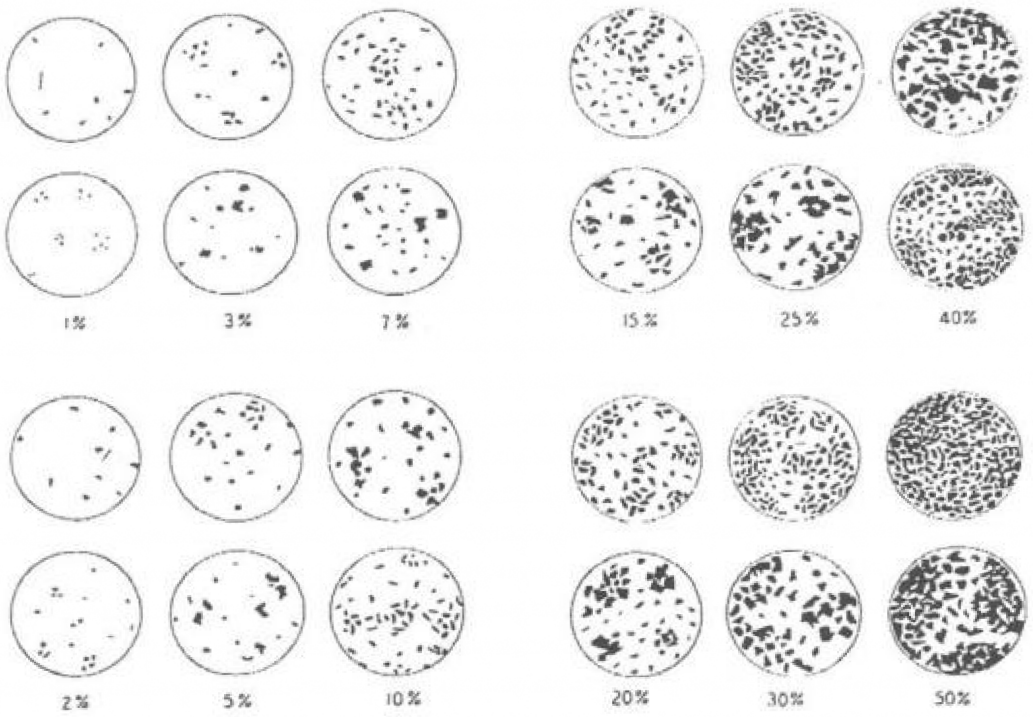
What did you learn about measuring plant populations? Why do you think there are so many different methods used? Does the sampling method influence your interpretation of the data? Will you have greater confidence in some methods of data collection than others?

Tips for Estimating Percent Cover

Estimating percent cover takes practice. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Work with your team to calibrate your estimations. Have everybody come up with an estimate in their minds. Then share your estimates and compare how different they are across the team. If needed, explain why each of you estimated what you did and reach a consensus on what makes the most sense.
- Narrow down your range. Start by asking yourself, "Is it more than half or less than half? If it's less than half, is it more than a quarter or less than a quarter?"
- Visualize moving everything to one side so that it is all clumped together to help estimate how much space it is taking up.
- The back of a closed fist is about 1% of a 1x1 meter plot.
- Use the chart below to help estimate:

COMPARISON CHARTS FOR VISUAL ESTIMATION OF FOLIAGE COVER 1/



1/ Developed by Richard D. Terry and George V. Chilingar. Published by the Society of Economic Paleontologist and Mineralogist in its Journal of Sedimentary Petrology 25 (3): 229-234, September 1955.

Datasheet

Record data from each hula hoop plot in the table below.

Focal plant species description and/or name *(ex. small hairy plant with yellow daisy flowers):*

_____

_____

Plot #	Plot Info	Present (Y/N)	Cover %	Count
1	3m			
2	6m			
3	9m			
4	12m			
5	15m			
6	18m			
7	21m			
8	24m			
9	27m			
10	30m			

Data Analysis

1. Calculate the frequency your focal plant species was detected:
   a. Number of plots the focal plant was present in _____
   b. Multiply the number of plots the focal plant was present in by 10 =_____%
2. Calculate average cover:
   a. Sum of 'Cover %' column = _____
   b. Sum of Cover % column divided by 10 =_____
3. Calculate average count:
   a. Sum of 'Count' column =_____
   b. Sum of 'Count' column divided by 10 = _____

T Teacher Page

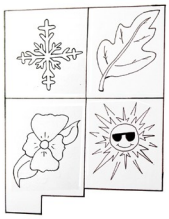
Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."– Jane Goodall

Time Estimate

60 minutes; additional time is required for Take it to the Cienega!

Best Season



Spring
Fall

Grade level
6-8

Overview

In this lesson, students will learn about concepts of restoration and ecology and apply what they learn to assess the schoolyard, create a plan for a restoration project, and potentially carry out a mini-restoration demonstration project. Students will make observations, identify problems, and visualize solutions to restore the schoolyard or Blue Hole Cienega. They may also conduct a real restoration project in a small area of the schoolyard where they can put their ideas into action by sowing native seeds or planting potted plants.

Learning Targets

1. Explain restoration and why it is necessary.
2. Observe damaged areas that are in need of restoration.
3. Create a restoration vision with clear goals (e.g. more wildflowers, less bare ground).

Preparation

- Print copies of handouts and schoolyard maps.
- Obtain permission to plant seeds or container plants for a mini-restoration project in the schoolyard.
- Acquire seeds and/or container plants. See resources for vendor ideas.

Teacher Hints

1 Have students share their before and after map drawings in small groups or with the whole class to prompt discussion

2 Make a list with photos of what plant species they may run into in the schoolyard that they can use in their restoration assessment; you can use various free plant identification apps to help create the list.

S Student Project

Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration

What will you learn?

- Learn about ecological restoration
- Assess areas at your school or at the Cienega that are in need of restoration and plan what you would like to improve

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."– Jane Goodall

Overview

We, as humans, are capable of causing significant damage to the ecosystems we rely on for our health, enjoyment, and economic resources. The practice of ecological restoration is an opportunity to restore or fix some of the damage we cause and improve our environment for both ourselves and the plants and animals in our communities. In this lesson, you will learn about restoration, identify areas that could be restored, and make a restoration plan.

Vocabulary

- *ecological*
- *restoration*
- *biodiversity*
- *invasive*
- *species*
- *prescribed fire*
- *erosion*

Materials Needed

- markers (Activity 1)
- print out of school map (Activity 1)
- seeds (Activity 2)
- plants (Activity 2)
- shovel (Activity 2)
- rakes (Activity 2)

Background

Humans rely on healthy and functioning ecosystems for clean water, clean air, pollination of food crops, and for recreational and spiritual enjoyment. When an ecosystem becomes damaged, by natural events like fire or human activities like building roads, people can take action and help recover what was lost or changed. **Ecological restoration** is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. For example, after a wildfire burns in the forest, land managers may practice ecological restoration by planting trees and seeds of native wildflowers and grasses. By planting seeds, land managers are working to restore **biodiversity** (the variety of different species living in a particular habitat or ecosystem) and stabilize the ground after plants that were there before have been destroyed by fire.

Restoration can have many different goals including:

- increase biodiversity
- improve flower resources for pollinators
- reduce invasive species
- recover rare or endangered species
- prevent loss of soil from wind and water erosion
- improve water quality

Student Project

Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration

Background Continued

In Blue Hole Cienega, invasive species such as Russian olive *(Elaeagnus angustifolia)* and tamarisk *(Tamarisk sp.)* are growing in the wetlands and competing with **native species**. **Invasive species** are species that are introduced from other parts of the world and are causing ecological or economic harm in their new environment. Invasive species are one of the biggest threats to biodiversity and conservation of native species.

In Santa Rosa, **prescribed fire** is used in the Cienega to help control invasive species. Prescribed fire is planned and controlled use of fire for ecosystem management. Land managers in Santa Rosa use prescribed fire in the Cienega in order to reduce the amount of Russian olive and tamarisk. The fire does not hurt native plants, which are able to resprout or reseed during the next growing season. Other methods for controlling invasive species include digging them up, targeted use of chemicals called herbicides, and introducing the species' natural predators.

Areas with large amounts of bare ground where plants are unable to grow on their own are often a focus of restoration efforts. Bare ground can be caused from wildfires that kill vegetation, livestock eating or trampling plants, off-road vehicles driving over plants and compacting the soil, and abandoned agricultural fields where soil health has been reduced and plants can no longer grow. When there are large areas of bare ground, there are no plants to act as a sponge to keep water from quickly running off and causing **erosion**. Erosion happens when particles of soil are carried off by water or wind, eventually, leading to deep channels or loss of plant-supporting soil. All of these different disturbances may require different methods to re-establish plants and prevent erosion. Sometimes, large machinery is required to make depressions in the soil where water can sink in. Other times, simple structures made of rocks can help capture water that would otherwise run off. Planting native plants can also help, since their roots and above ground growth can help retain water on the land.

Student Project

Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration

Student Directions: School Yard Restoration

Activity 1: Restoration Plan - What would a restored schoolyard look like?

1. Use the Restoration Planning handout to assess what could be done to restore the schoolyard into a healthy ecosystem.
2. Use the first map to draw where there are areas that are in need of restoration. These can be areas with weedy plants, bare ground, or erosion issues.
3. Use the second map to draw what you would want the area to look like after restoration (i.e. would there be more wildflowers, water features, wildlife, butterflies?). You can be creative and aim for the stars with your ideas!

Activity 2: Planting

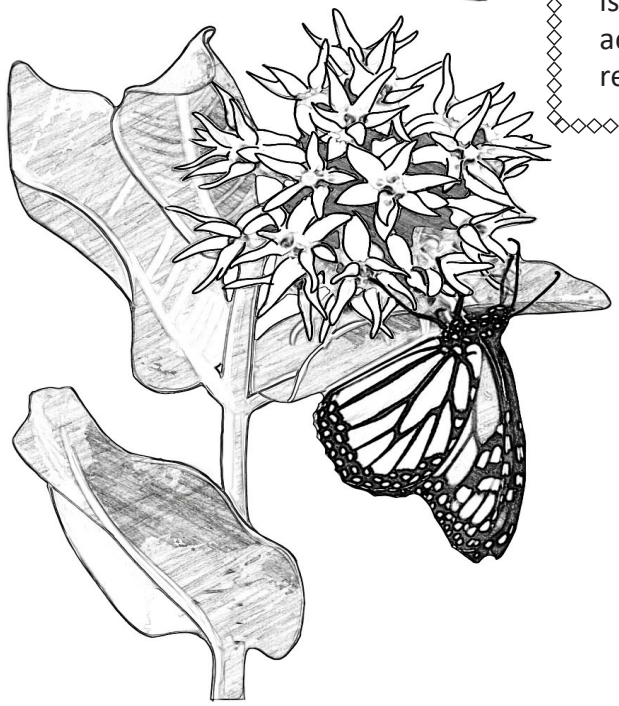
1. Pick a planting location. Reflecting on your restoration design, is there a place on the school grounds where you can plant seeds or container plants from a native plant nursery? Things to consider:
   a. Does the planting location you selected have access to water?
   b. Start small so that you are able to take care of this area.
   c. Avoid areas that might disturb existing native plants.
2. Pick your plant species for restoring a section of the school yard. Using your restoration plan, decide which species you want to plant in this location. You can gather the seeds from plants at the school yard or even at the wetland if you get permission.
3. Decide when is the best time to plant. During the school year, spring temperatures may be more mild and give plants more time to establish than fall plantings. You can sow seeds in the fall that can wait to germinate until spring, but potted plants may not survive the winter.
4. Prepare the ground. If the area you picked for planting has some weeds, pull them out before you plant. If the ground is hard, roughing up the ground with hoes and rakes will make it easier for the roots to grow and seeds to germinate.
5. Plant! If sowing seeds, sprinkle them over the surface of the soil and cover them very lightly with soil. If planting, dig holes a little deeper than the pot and at least an inch wider than the pot. Be careful not to squish the roots.
6. Water. If you are planting container plants from a native plant nursery, water them right after they are planted. Check on the plants every week for 6 weeks, and water them as needed. After 4 weeks, students can take turns checking plants once per month and watering as needed until they are established.
7. Protect. Put up a sign or pin flags around your planting area so nobody accidentally tramples your plants.

Student Project

Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration

Take it to the Cienega!

Activity 1 can be completed in the Cienega using a similar aerial image of the area where the class will be visiting.



Reflection

Why do you think restoration is important for wildlife? Why do you think restoration is important for the economy? Why do you think restoration is important for human health? What actions can we take to prevent the need for restoration up front?

Resources

- Society for Ecological Restoration: https://www.ser.org/
- Native Seed Source: https://plantsofthesouthwest.com/
- Erosion control field guide: http://www.watershedartisans.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Erosion-Control-Field-Guide.pdf

Activity 1: Restoration Planting

Answer the following questions to help assess the schoolyard and plan a restoration project.

What kinds of plants do you see? Make a list, or describe the different types of plants present in the area.

Is there high biodiversity (i.e. a variety of different kinds of plants)? Could there be more?

Are there any invasive species or weeds? Make a list or describe plants that may be invasive.

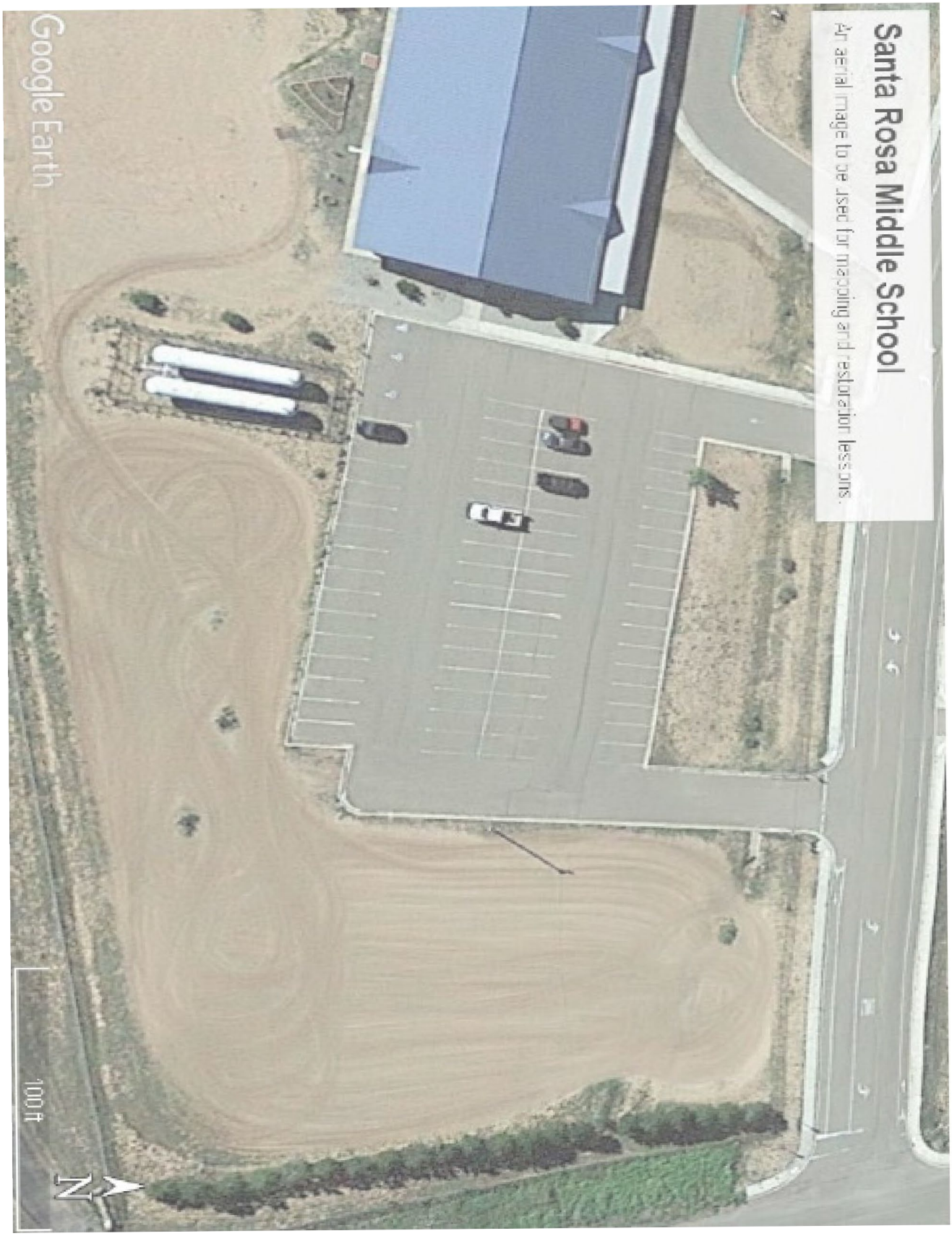
Are there places where water is causing damage or erosion? What about places where water could be slowed and captured with rocks or plants? This would look like bare ground or places where channels are forming.

Are there places with a lot of bare ground?

What would you do to improve this area?

Use the maps on the next 2 pages to draw 1) areas that are in need of restoration on the first map and 2) what you want the schoolyard to look like on the second map.

Use this map to show areas that are in need of restoration.



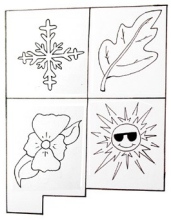
Use this map to draw what the area will look like after restoration

Teacher Page

Saving Beauty or Bottom Line?
Finding Common Ground for Plants and People

Time Estimate
1-2 hours

Best Season



Spring
Winter
Fall
Winter

Grade level
6-8

"Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in." Alan Alda

Overview

In this lesson, students will play a role-playing game based on issues relevant to the Blue Hole Cienega management and protection. Students will develop roles, form opinions that reflect their position, and defend their position during the game. The goal is for students to gain knowledge of the issues, cultivate empathy for stakeholders with differing perspectives on a controversial issue, and prepare them for stewardship decisions.

Learning Targets

1. Students participate in role-playing discussion in a positive and productive way.
2. Students state their opinion on a controversial environmental subject and give one or more reasons based in fact to back up their opinion.
3. Students demonstrate empathy by listening to differing viewpoints and demonstrate respectful disagreement.

Preparation

- Determine a specific decision that needs to be made. This gives the conversation a clear goal.
- Identify specific roles for each student or group of students. Give them time to think about and research the viewpoints and concerns of the demographic that they are representing.
- Provide background information or time for research so that students can back up their ideas and arguments.

Teacher Hints

1. This role playing exercise is a discussion with an emphasis on listening (not a debate with a winner). Students will get the most out of this exercise if they have clear objectives and support in staying focused in discussions.
2. Students are instructed to listen to other viewpoints, weigh all sides of the issue, form an opinion, and work creatively to find common ground.
3. Establish clear guidelines of acceptable behavior in role-playing games. Controversial issues can and often do lead to strong feelings and arguments; it is important that no one feels intimidated. Learning is enhanced by constructive feedback from the teacher and peers and freedom to explore alternate roles.
4. For larger groups, assign multiple copies of roles or create additional roles of your own. For smaller groups leave out some roles, but be sure to balance both sides of the issue. Students reluctant to participate in oral projects could pair up as teams.

Student Project

Saving Beauty or Bottom Line?
Finding Common Ground for Plants and People

What will you learn?

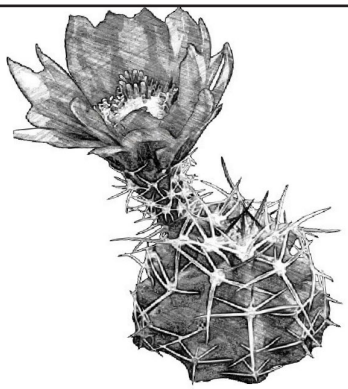
- Examine values and beliefs in controversial environmental issues
- Explore diverse opinions in a safe environment through role-playing
- Gain insight into problem solving skills, using defined steps to analyze the process
- Exercise the process of being an informed citizen and making personal stewardship decisions
- Learn ways to become involved in local issues

Vocabulary

- *stakeholder*
- *stewardship*

Materials Needed

- scenario description



"Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in." Alan Alda

Overview

In this lesson you will consider how important natural resources in Santa Rosa will potentially be managed in the future to improve the economy. Can your class find a compromise that brings more jobs and makes Santa Rosa a destination for tourists but also prioritizes resource protection? Tourism is healthy, but too many people enjoying the area can damage natural resources like clean water, biodiversity, and scenery. Finding a healthy balance is the goal.

Background

Have you noticed a tension in your community over environmental problems such as limited water resources, decreasing air quality, or climate change? Maybe you know someone that is concerned that the Endangered Species Act will give the government control of how he or she manages his or her property. Are you aware that Santa Rosa has a rare cienega that is threatened by a growing number of impacts? There may be conflict over the management of this native ecosystem because each **stakeholder** (person or group with different interests and concerns) has different ideas on how the resource should be managed. How do these issues become conflicts? Conflicts can arise when the livelihood, or ability to make a living, of people feels threatened by the conservation of natural resources and vice versa.

There are no right or wrong answers to the issues in this activity. The main purpose of this role-playing game is to provide an opportunity to explore viewpoints on controversial environmental issues in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Begin by considering what environmental **stewardship** means. Stewardship is generally defined as responsible caretaking, or management of the environment for future generations. Under this definition of stewardship we are all responsible for natural resource management. With each decision we make, we can consider all kinds of future impacts, including economic, social, cultural, and environmental. It is said that native peoples took into consideration the impact of all decisions on the next seven generations. How do we form our opinions when making stewardship decisions?

Student Project

Saving Beauty or Bottom Line?
Finding Common Ground for Plants and People

Background Continued

Often we fall back on our **values**- an individual's standard of right and wrong. Factors such as economics, education, politics, spiritual beliefs, and culture all go into forming our values. As you can imagine, this complex stew of values can make reaching an agreement on environmental issues difficult, and often requires diplomacy and compromise between all the parties involved. Even though people have different opinions, most people generally want to do what they feel is the "right" thing. Role playing is a chance to practice listening to the viewpoints of others on controversial subjects.

Student Directions

1. Context: This activity is designed to help you evaluate your own feelings and form your own viewpoint while listening to and weighing the differing viewpoints of others. Be sure to weigh all the information before forming your own opinion.
   a. You will gain the most by participating fully, but relax and view the role-playing as a learning experience.
   b. Ask questions as needed to clarify your understanding, but respect the opinions of others.
   c. Notice the friction that can arise over environmental concerns in different segments of society. How will you resolve these issues?
2. Student roles:
   a. Work in groups of 6.
   b. Each person is assigned a character from the list in the scenario. First, complete the "Role Development" sheet individually. Take time to develop your character's background and values, using both your imagination and research. The viewpoints and concerns you will discuss should reflect your character and not your personal viewpoint.
   c. Staying in character, have a discussion with your group about the future of the Blue Hole Cienega and what you want to see happen there. Play your role as accurately as possible; realize that it may not mirror your own viewpoint, but do your best to empathize (walk in your character's shoes).
3. Sharing with the class:
   a. Each group will share what decision they made and what compromises they made to reach a decision.

Class Discussion

Is there any part of this conflict that both sides of the issue can agree on?
What values do both sides share?
How might people's values influence their viewpoint?
How do you recognize bias?
How would you weigh information to determine bias?
Do you recognize how your values have influenced your decisions?
What have you learned through participating in this meeting?
Do you think it has improved your listening skills, why or why not?
Values and prior knowledge will shape your first impressions; did any of the presentations cause you to change your first impression?
How successful do you think a solution will be if it requires people to change or compromise their values?
Look at the issue; what do you think would happen if no decision is made?
Do you see any parallels between this local issue and larger global issues?

Student Project

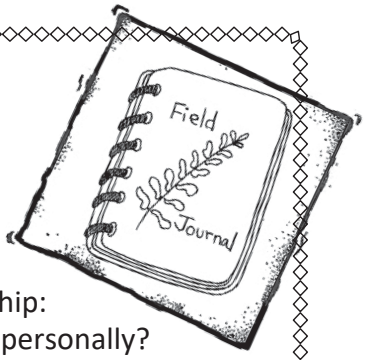
Saving Beauty or Bottom Line?

Finding Common Ground for Plants and People

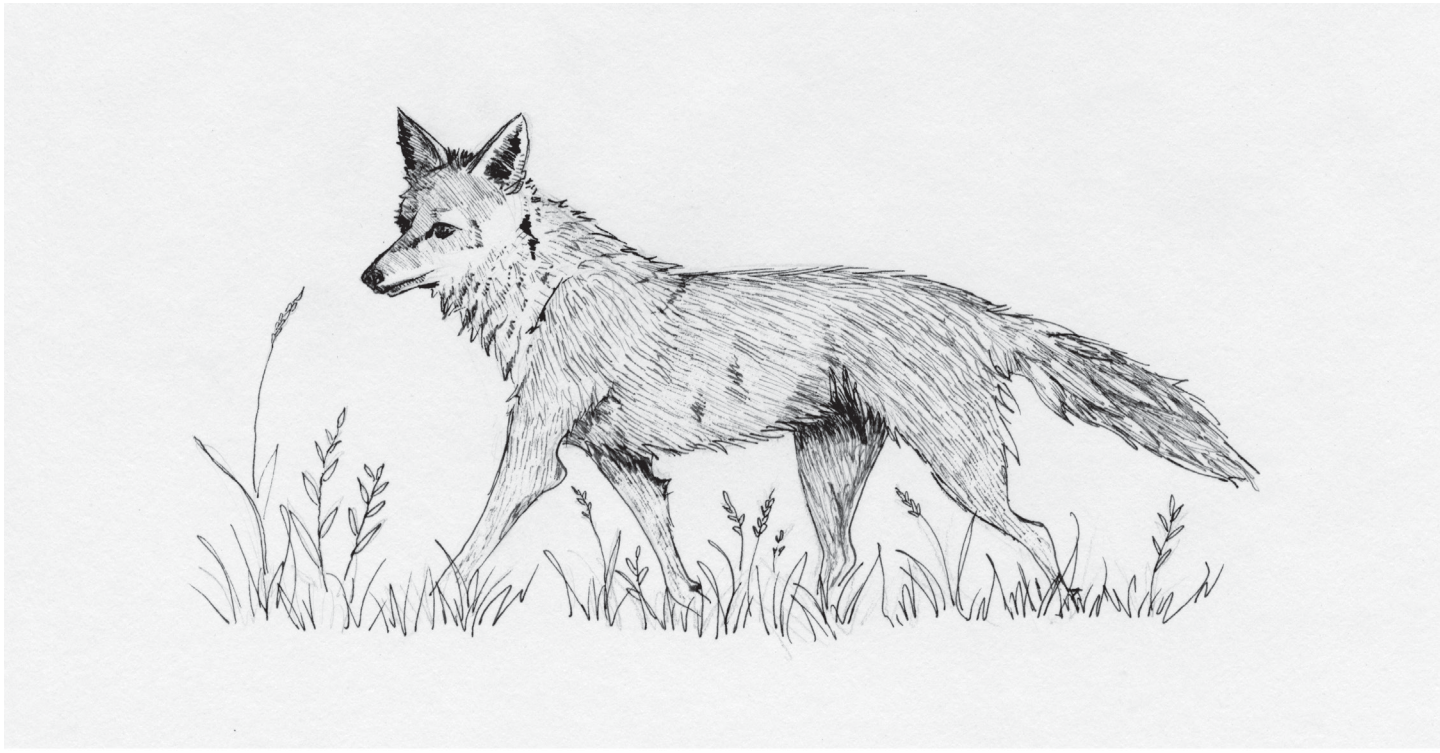
Take it to the Cienega!

Take a tour of the different places the Cienega touches from Blue Hole dive site and recreation area to the wet meadows with rare plants and stream outlets and sinkholes. Note impacts to these places and also discuss how these places seem to support humans.

Reflection



How do you feel when you see a rare field of sunflowers in your hometown? Reflect on the definition of stewardship: what does it mean to you personally? Do you feel that you have a responsibility as a citizen to help make decisions on land management issues? How can an individual's actions make a difference to their community, to the world? Do you think the role-playing activity will change the way that you make decisions in the future? Explain your reasoning.



Resources

- Materials from the previous units

Saving Beauty vs. Saving Bottom line - Role Play Scenario

Scenario: Thirty years in the future a taskforce is formed to create a plan for the Blue Hole Complex. Does the plan support development, conservation, or compromise and how?

Conservation History:

In the 1990's, the discovery of the endangered Pecos sunflower living in the Blue Hole Cienaga brought attention to this special ecosystem. Ten years later, the state botanist helped establish the116-acre Blue Hole Nature Preserve to protect the sunflower. The state prioritized habitat enhancement and monitoring for this species, and the town of Santa Rosa planned improvements that increased the protection of natural resources. The Mayor of Santa Rosa saw Pecos sunflower as an opportunity to draw tourists into town, and he agreed to build a boardwalk (to help people visit the wetland without harming the plants) and install interpretive signs (so people could learn more about the wetland resources). A local educator started the tradition of hosting a festival to celebrate the sunflower bloom every September.

Fictitious Future:

Fast forward thirty years from now!

Mayor Coffers is concerned about many jobless citizens- even some of his closest friends have lost their jobs. He does not understand the environmental value of protecting Blue Hole Cienega and thinks the Pecos sunflowers are weeds. He is attracting new developers with a vision of filling the cienega and turning the Blue Hole water park into a premier amusement park. Tourists and local youth would be excited to visit an expanded and improved premier amusement park.

The New Mexico education board is stressing lab science over natural resources. Teacher Sally Science has a degree in microbiology and does not have any training in ecology. Sally does not have time to add any ecology lessons or put any energy into festivals for rare plants or go on field trips.

The future state botanist is trying to maintain the Blue Hole Nature Preserve and is opposed to any development that will adversely impact the cienega and sunflower.

Local ranchers and the Quivira Coalition understand the fragility and importance to the wetland resources and will stand up for rangeland health.

The local community enjoys walking the boardwalk with family and friends, especially in September when sunflowers are blooming.

The Community:

Everyone in this community is connected in one way or another to this issue and decisions will have a ripple effect throughout the town of Santa Rosa. Decisions regarding the management of the Blue Hole Cienega and the surrounding wetlands will have an effect on the economy. Increased tourism and development can boost the economy. Local businesses will benefit and more jobs will be created.

The Decision:

Are there scenarios for both improving the economy and preserving the natural resources of the Blue Hole Cienega thirty years from now? What sort of compromises can be made among your group?

Characters:

- Mayor of Santa Rosa, Kevin/Kasey Coffers
- Teacher, Sam Science
- Amusement Park Developer, Morgan Moore
- New Mexico State Botanist, Daisy/Danny Diaz
- Rancher, Cindy/Caesar Sanchez
- Restaurant Owner, Paula/Paul Padilla

Taking it Further

Now that you are aware of how important and limited water resources are, what might you be able to do to conserve water?

Role Development Sheet

Your Name _____

Name of your character:	Occupation:

Briefly describe your fictional self (work, hobbies, home, family, values).	How does the issue affect your fictional life (economics, politics, ethics, etc.)? Does it conflict with any of your values?
Do you support or oppose the issue (in character)?	Give reasons to support your position (in character).

Role Development Sheet

Your Name _____

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NEW MEXICO STEM READY SCIENCE STANDARDS

STANDARDS	Description	UNITS 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
MS-LS 1-4	Use argument based on empirical evidence and sciientific reasoning to support an explanation for how characteristic animal behaviors and specialized plant structures affect the probability of successful reproduction of animals and plants, respectively			x				
MS-LS1-5	Construct a scientific explanation based on evidence for how environmental and genetic factors influence the grov\11:h of organisms			x	x			
MS-LS2-1	Analyze and· nterpret data to provide evidence for the effecis of resource availability on organisms and populations of organisms in an ecosystem	x		x	x	x		x
MS-LS2-.2	Construct an explanation that predicts patterns of interactions among organisms across multiple ecosystems			x	x	x		
MS-LS 2-3	Develop a model to describe the cycling of matter and flow ·of energy among living and non- living parts of an ecosystem	x						
MS-LS2-4	Construct an argument supported by ernpiriical evidence that changes to physical or biological components of an ecosystem affect populations	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
MS-LS2-5	Evaluate competing design solutions for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystems services						x	x
MS-ESS2-4	Develop a model to describe the cycling of water through the Earth's systems driiven by energy from the sun and he force of gravity	x	x					
MS-ESS 3-1	Construct a scientifii,c explanation based on evidence for how he uneven distributions of Earth's mineral, energy, and groundwater resources are the result of past and current geosciience processes		x					
MS-ES S3-3	Apply scientific prindiples to design a method for monitoring and minim l'zing a human impact on the enviironment						x	x

MS-ESS3-4	Construct an argument supported by evidence for how increases in human population and per-capita consumption of natural resources impact Earth's systems		x	x			x	x
MS-ESS3-5	Ask questions to clarify evidence of the factors that have caused the rise in global temperatures over the past century							x
MS-ETS1-1	Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem with sufficient precision to ensure a successful solution, taking into account relevant scientific principles and potential impacts on people and the natural environment that may limit possible solutions						x	x
MS-ETS1-4	Develop a model to generate data for iterative testing and modification of a proposed object, tool, or process such that an optimal design can be achieved					x	x	x
1-SS-1 NM	Obtain information about how men and women of all ethnic and social backgrounds in New Mexico have worked together to advance science and technology				x	x	x	x
5-SS-1 NM	Communicate information gathered from books, reliable media, or outside sources, that describes how a variety of scientists and engineers across New Mexico have improved existing technologies, developed new ones, or improved society through applications of science						x	
MS-ESS3-3 NM	Describe the advantages and disadvantages associated with technologies related to local industries and energy production		x		x		x	x
HS-LS2-7 NM	Using a local issue in your solution design, describe and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of human activities that support the local population such as reclamation projects, building dams, and habitat restoration	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
HS-SS-2 NM	Construct an argument using claims, scientific evidence, and reasoning that helps decision makers with a New Mexico challenge or opportunity as it relates to science				x		x	x

GLOSSARY

abiotic: the nonliving elements of an ecosystem. Example: rocks, water

abiotic factors: see 'abiotic'

adaptation: a process over multiple generations in which an organism changes to better fit the habitat

Example: Natural selection would favor the deeper-rooted plants during climate shifts that cause drought conditions

arid: land or climate that receives limited precipitation (rain or snow)

biodiversity: every living organism within a single ecosystem or habitat, including numbers and diversity of species

biotic: living elements of an ecosystem. Example: soil bacteria, plants, predators

biotic factors: see 'biotic'

census: a complete population count

cienega: alkaline, freshwater, spongy, wet meadows with shallow-gradient, permanently saturated soils in otherwise arid landscapes that often occupied nearly the entire widths of valley bottoms. They are usually associated with seeps or springs, found in canyon headwaters or along margins of streams.
competition: Occurs due to limited resources, which prevents equal access and supply, as organisms compete for survival. Competition can occur between organisms of the same species or between members of different species.

conservation: the preservation and protection of natural resources through sustainable practices to prevent loss of habitats and biodiversity

cover: the area that plants take up when viewed from a bird's-eye perspective

ecological restoration (restoration): the process of repairing sites in nature whose biological communities and ecosystems have been degraded or destroyed

ecosystem services: the benefits humans obtain from ecosystems. Examples: food and water, flood and disease control, nutrient cycling

ecosystem: an interacting system of biotic and abiotic elements linked together through nutrient cycles and energy flows

endangered Species: organisms whose number have reduced drastically and if not conserved could become extinct

erosion: the process by which the surface of the earth is worn away by the action of water, glaciers, winds, waves, etc.

geology: the study of the earth's physical structure and substance, history, and the processes that act on it
groundwater: water held underground in the soil or in pores and crevices in rock.

habitat: The area or natural environment in which an organism or population normally lives

herbivory: the consumption of plant material by animals

hydrology: the study of water, and especially its movement in relation to land

invasive species: an introduced organism that becomes overpopulated and negatively alters its new environment. Although there may be beneficial aspects, invasive species adversely affect the invaded habitats, causing ecological, environmental, and/or economic damage.

GLOSSARY cont...

karst: A landscape produced by the natural processes of solution and leaching of soluble rocks, generally carbonate rocks, in which the ensuing topography is mainly characterized by sinkholes, sinking streams, underground drainage networks, and caves.

karst limestone: a soft rock that dissolves in water

keystone ecosystem: an ecosystem that has a greater influence on the surrounding landscape than other ecosystems relative to their size (i.e. they can be small but have a large influence on biodiversity and function)

limestone: a hard sedimentary rock, composed mainly of calcium carbonate or dolomite

monitoring: the act of observing and assessing the state and ongoing changes in ecosystems

plot: a sample area

prescribed fire: a form of land management in which fire is intentionally applied to vegetation

seed dispersal: the spread of seeds away from the parent plant. Facilitated by abiotic vectors such as wind and biotic vectors such as birds.

sinkholes: a depression in the ground that has no natural external surface drainage. Most common in karst terrain, where the types of rock below the land surface can naturally be dissolved by groundwater circulating through them

stakeholder: beneficiaries, persons of interest

stewardship: the responsible use and management of the natural world and its resources

taproot: main root of a primary root system, growing vertically downward

threats: an infectious disease with the potential to spread and cause an outbreak.

topography: the arrangement of physical features on the earth's surface (i.e. mountains, hills, canyons, etc.)

transect: a line across a habitat or part of a habitat. It can be as simple as a string or rope placed in a line on the ground. The number of organisms of each species along a transect can be observed and recorded at regular intervals.

APENDIX I: Plant Adaptations

Challenge	Adaptation	How It Works	Example
Limited			
	Hairs	Hairs slow down the movement of air over the surface of leaves and stems to minimize water loss by evaporation. Light-colored hairs can also reflect solar radiation.	Sagebrush, desert ironwood
	Water Storage	Some plants store large amounts of water within their stems and leaves for use during dry periods. Waxy coatings and thorns help protect these water stores.	Cacti, aloe
	Reduced Leaves	Decreasing or eliminating leaf surface area minimizes water loss by evaporation.	Conifers, cacti
	Specialized Root Systems	Deep root systems allow plants to reach low water tables. Alternatively, extensive, shallow root systems maximize absorption of light precipitation by capturing water that doesn't infiltrate deeply into soil layers.	Mesquite, saguaro cacti
High Moisture or Aquatic Conditions			
	Hollow or spongy stems	Air spaces in stems transport oxygen to waterlogged plant roots.	Cattail
	Flexible stems	Plants growing in the water column can bend in currents without breaking.	Water lily
	Prolonged seed viability	Seeds can wait to germinate for many years until they come in contact with soil and air.	Bulrush, cattail
	Floating leaves	Buoyant leaves allow plants rooted in standing water to reach sunlight and air. Stomata are located on the upper surface of the leaf for gas exchange.	Water lily
	Lenticels	Specialized pores allow plants to absorb nutrients, water, and necessary gasses from the water.	Willows
	Modified root systems	Modified and adventitious roots can extend above the waterlogged soil or water line to allow contact with oxygen. This also provides support in soft soil.	Mangroves
	Rot Prevention	Anti-fungal or anti-bacterial chemicals can help prevent rotting.	Cedar, larch
Hot Conditions			
	Hairs	Hairs can insulate a plant against heat. Light-colored hairs can also reflect solar radiation.	Brittlebush
	Leaves used as shade	The arrangement of leaves, spines and persistent dead leaves on the plant can provide umbrella-like shade.	Joshua tree
	Altered daily rhythms	Flowers may open only at night to attract nocturnal pollinators that avoid daytime heat.	Evening primroses
Cold Conditions			
	Evergreen needles	Small, low-growing plants, sometimes called "dwarf," are more protected from cold air, and require less water and nutrients.	Arctic willow
	Deciduous leaves	Thick, woolly hairs help insulate plants against cold air and wind.	Lousewort

Limited Nutrients			
	Symbiotic relationships	Soil bacteria including Rhizobia and Frankia form nodules on the roots of certain plants and fix nitrogen into a usable form. Some fungi can help plants increase their absorption of water and nutrients. Under some soil conditions, certain nutrients can only be taken up by plants with the help of these fungi.	Legumes, alders
	Carnivory	In nutrient-poor soils, some plants obtain nutrients by trapping and digesting insects and other arthropods.	Pitcher plant
Limited Light			
	Vines	Vining plants use larger plants as ladders to reach light without putting energy into producing large supporting trunks and branches.	Muscadine
	Broad leaves	Increased leaf area maximizes the photosynthetic capacity in light-limited conditions, but result in increased water loss as well.	Oaks, maples
	Specialized life cycle	Some understory plants in deciduous forests develop and mature early in spring in order to utilize light before they are shaded out by the growth of leaves on larger trees.	Spring beauty, trillium
	Height	Trees can grow very slowly under low-light conditions, eventually reaching incredible heights in order to reach sunlight at the canopy of a forest. A very strong trunk and root system are required to support such height, which can only be obtained through plentiful water and nutrients.	Oaks, cedars, maples, hemlocks
Herbivory			
	Armaments	Different types of armaments work against different types of herbivores. Large thorns and spines deter larger animals like deer, while hairs can be effective at deterring insects.	Cacti, roses
	Toxins	A wide variety of toxins, both mild and potent, keep herbivores from eating certain plants. Effects can range from bitter tastes to skin irritation to fatal poisonings.	Poison ivy, water hemlock
	Protected crown	Buds and stored carbohydrates located in the crown at the base of a plant are protected and allow for quick and low-cost recovery if the top of the plant is grazed.	Grasses
	Mast-fruiting	This is a phenomenon where individuals of a certain species will produce very few seeds for several years, followed by a year of high seed production. It is thought that this helps keep the population of seed predators low so they don't devastate the seed bank each year.	White oak

APENDIX II:
Supplemental Lessons from the "From Ponderosa to Prickly Pear" New Mexico Native Plant Curriculum

Each Unit in this curriculum can be supplemented with additional lessons from the "From Ponderosa to Prickly Pear:Exploring the Native Plants of New Mexico". These lessons can be used as a reference for teachers, or as supplementary lessons for the Units in the Blue Hole Cienega Curriculum.

Unit 1 Just Add Water: The Wonderful World of Wetlands

- The Place I Call Home (page 80)
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Can't Live Without 'Em (page 230)

Unit 2: A Sinking Feeling: Karst Geology and the Formation of Blue Hole

- No applicable lessons.

Unit 3: Plants in their Places: Plant Adaptations in Deserts and Wetlands

- Plant Adaptations:Create-A-Plant (page 60)
- Plant Wars: A Tale of Offense and Defense (page 118)
- What's Going Down Underground? (page 102)

Unit 4: The Rare Ones: Conservation of Biodiversity

- Saving Botanical Treasures (page 237)

Unit 5: Data Talks: Measuring Plant Populations

- Ecosystem Comparisons (page 87)
- Phenology: Tracking the Seasons in Your World (page 211)
- Measuring and Monitoring Plant Populations (page 173)

Unit 6: Let's Restore! Ecological Restoration- Planning and Planting

- Nurture a Native Garden (page 142)
- Designing a Habitat Restoration Plan (page 257)

Unit 7: Saving Beauty or the Bottom Line? Finding Common Ground for Plants and People

- Nobody Right, Nobody Wrong (page 245)