Rio Grande Water Fund and Water Source Protection Update

The Nature Conservancy
New Mexico

Presentation to the Water and Natural Resources Interim Committee — July 10, 2023

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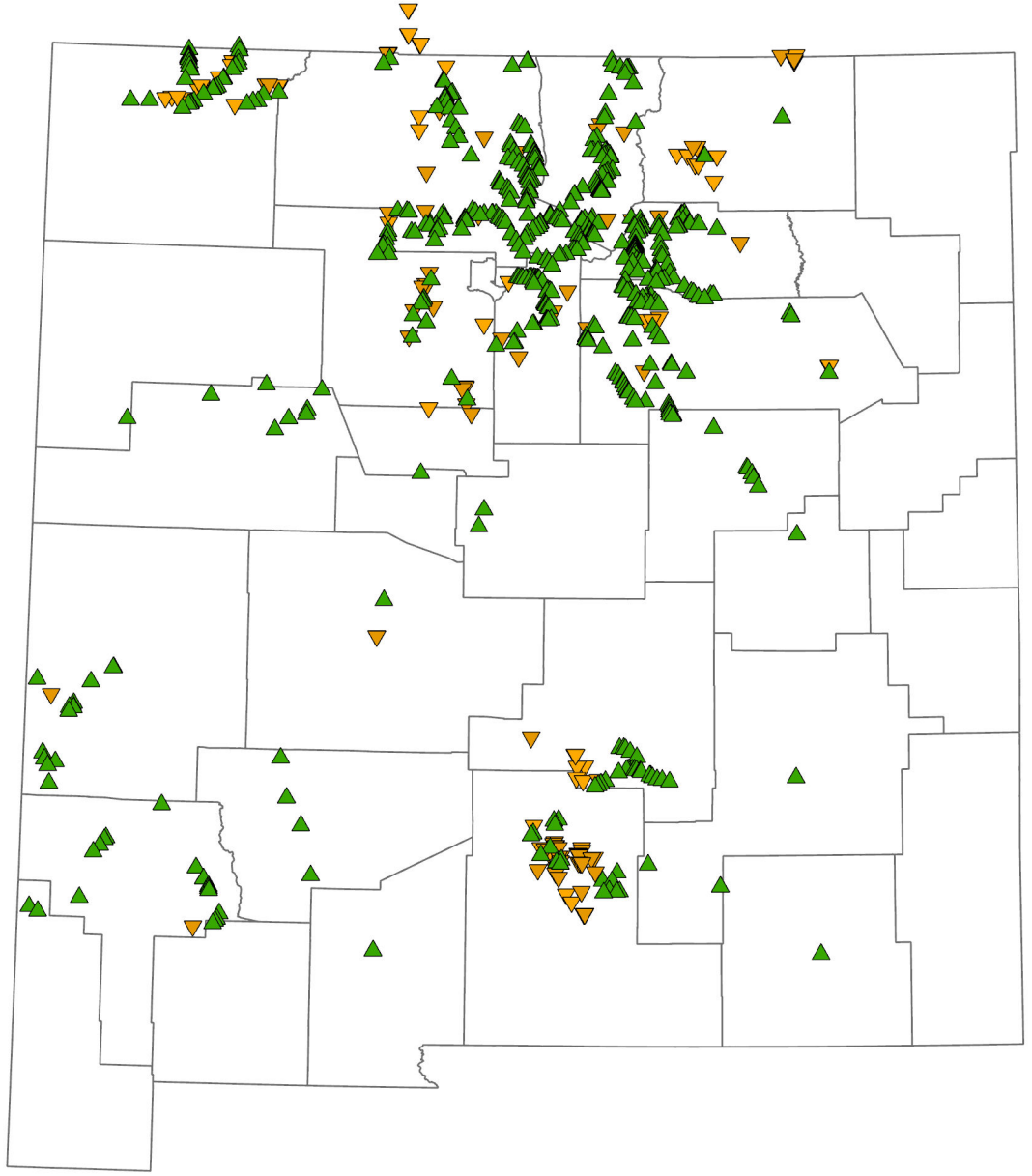
Surface Water Users

- Public Water Systems
  - Utilities
  - Mutual Domestics
- Irrigators
  - Acequias
  - Irrigation Districts



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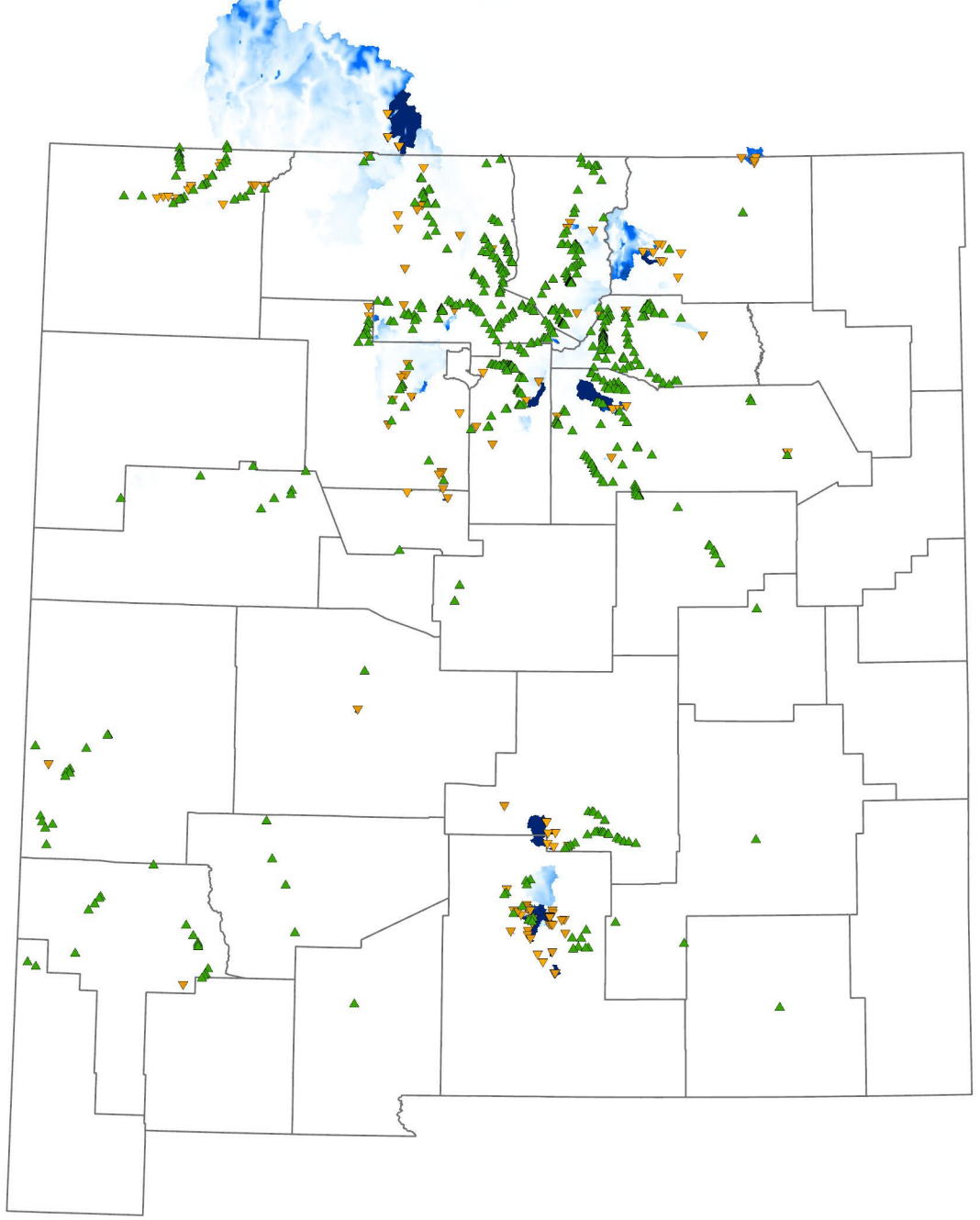
Surface Water Value

- Community Water Systems
  - “People per Drop” of Runoff
- Irrigators
  - “Irrigators per Drop” of Runoff



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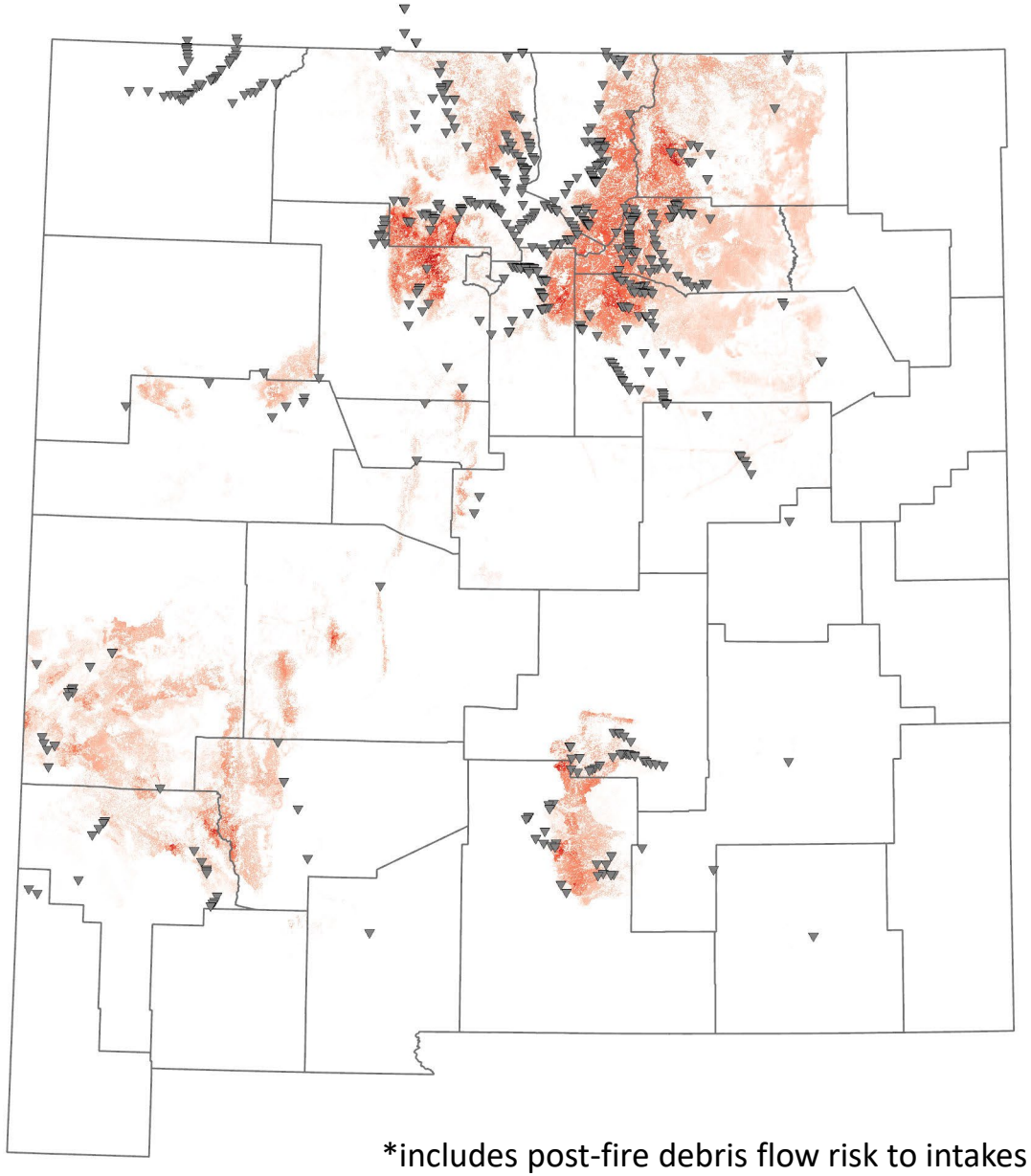
Wildfire Risk to Water

- Probability of Wildfire
- Expected Intensity of Wildfire
- Susceptibility of Watershed to Fire



*includes post-fire debris flow risk to intakes

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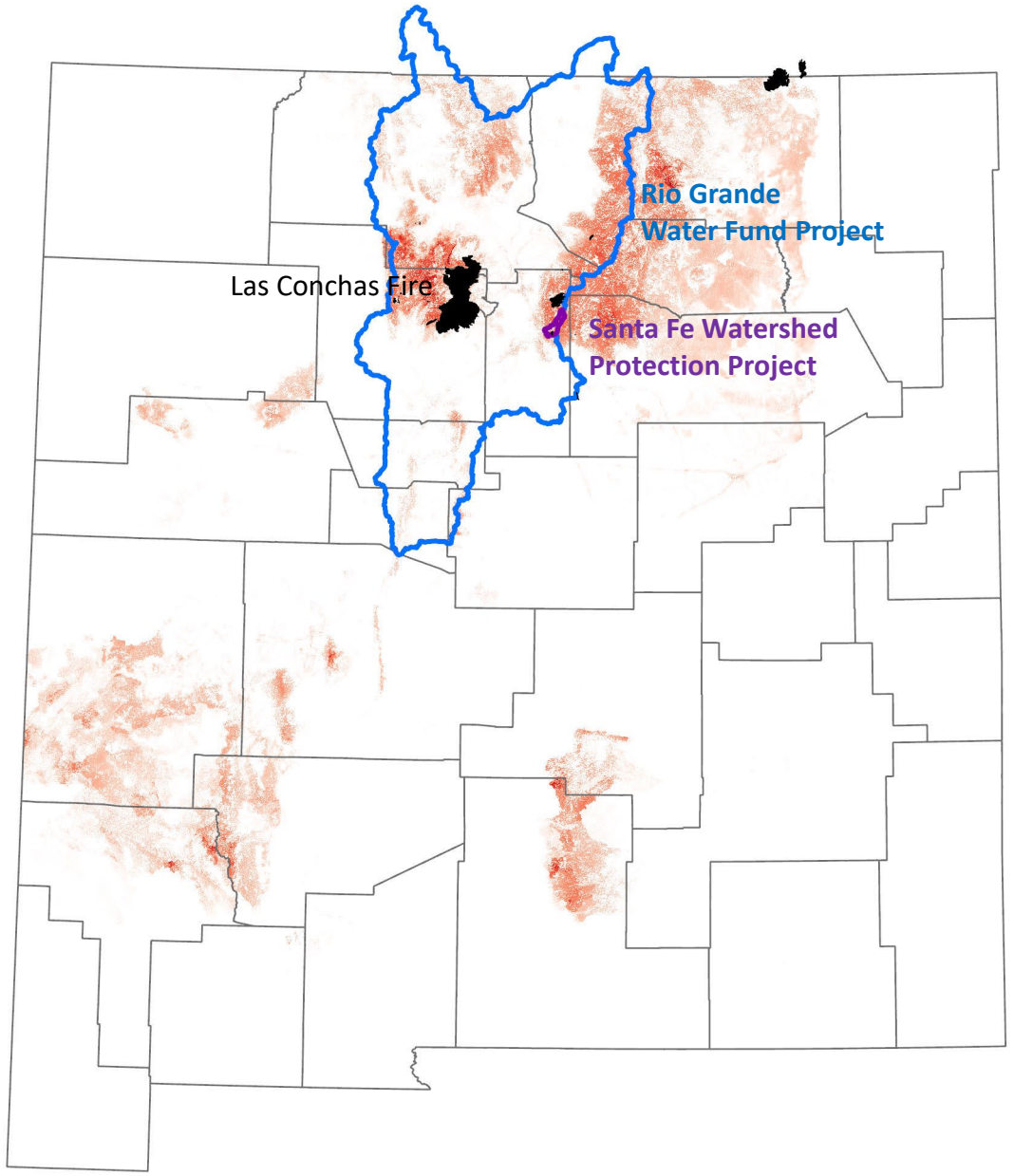
“Water Fund” Approach

- Water users caring for their watershed
- “Payment for Ecosystem Services”

- Santa Fe Watershed Protection Project
  - Dedicated funding from Water Users
- Rio Grande Water Fund
  - Motivated by the 2011 Las Conchas Fire
  - Scale the solution to the size of the problem



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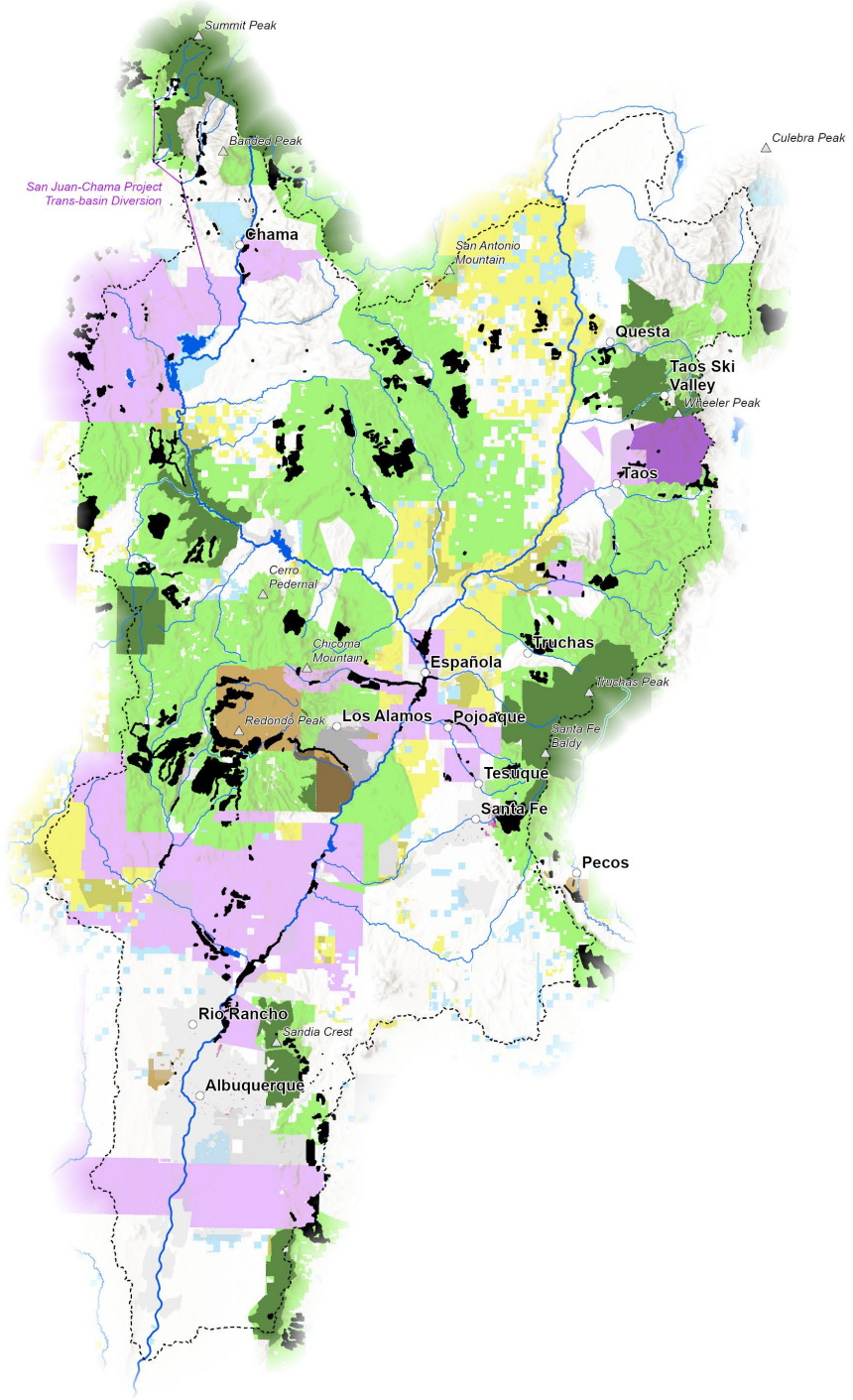
Rio Grande Water Fund

- Goal: 30,000 acres of forest restoration annually in the Project Area
- Collaboration between:
  - water users
  - water utilities & irrigation districts
  - land management agencies
  - sovereign tribal nations



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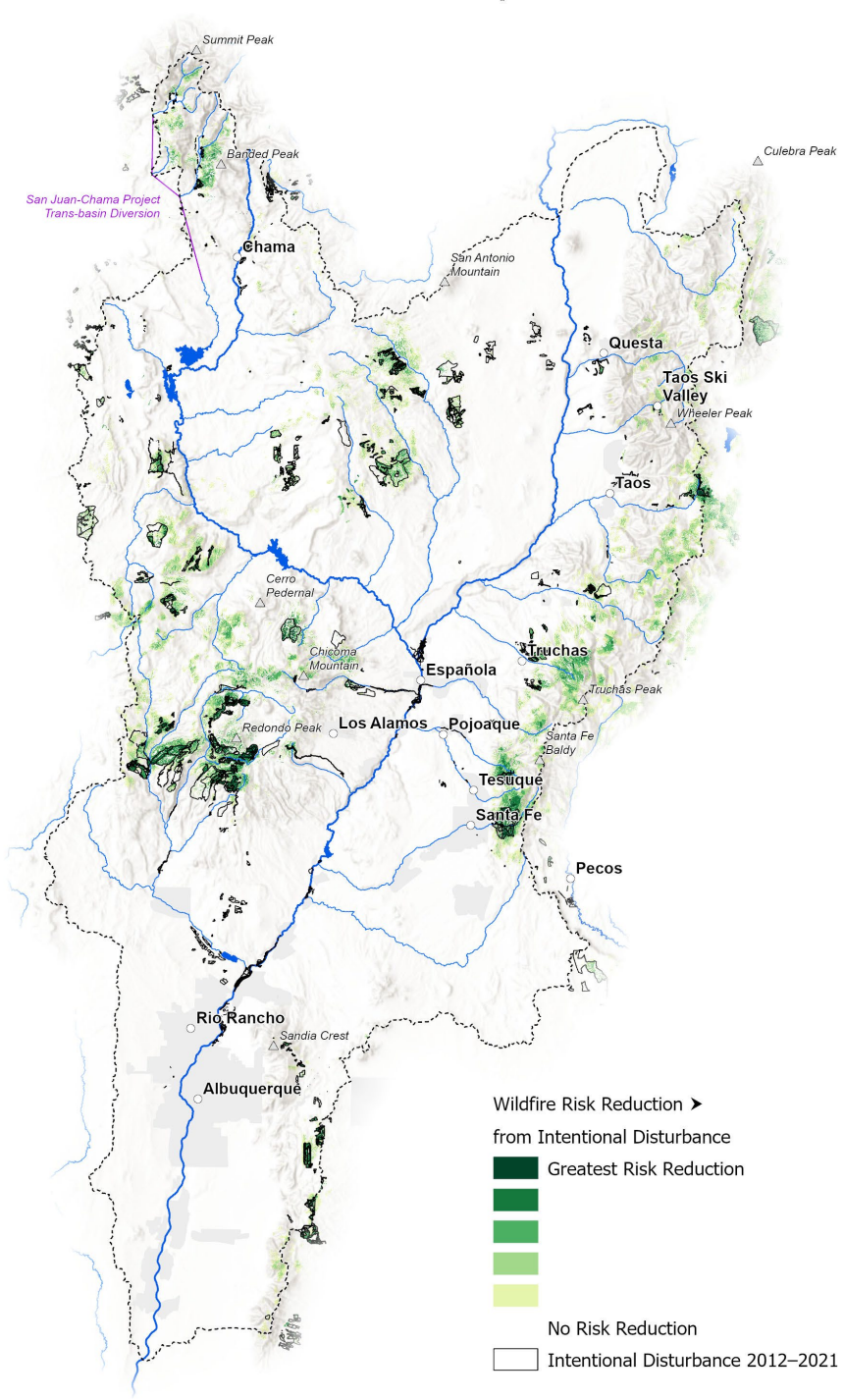
Treatment Effectiveness

- Since 2011, <u>more acres managed to reduce wildfire risk than burned by wildfire</u> in the project area.
- Risk reduction treatments have “shadows”
- Not all risk reduction treatments have the same effect
  - Most effective where risk is high.
  - Controlled burns needed for risk reduction.



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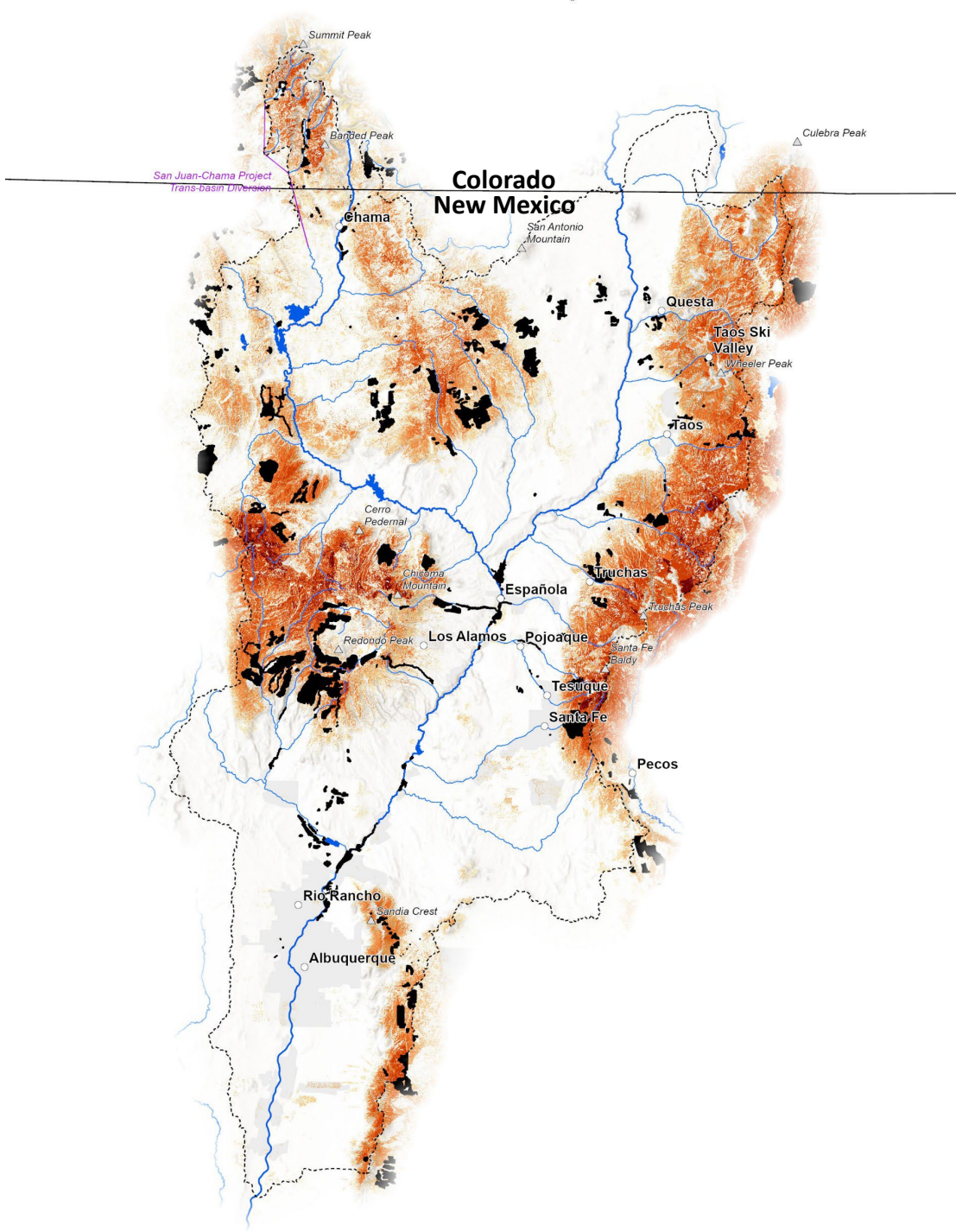
Continued Risk

- Risk to water supplies remains high.
- San-Juan Chama Project
  - Critical source for half of New Mexico
  - Exceptional risk
  - Cross-border challenge



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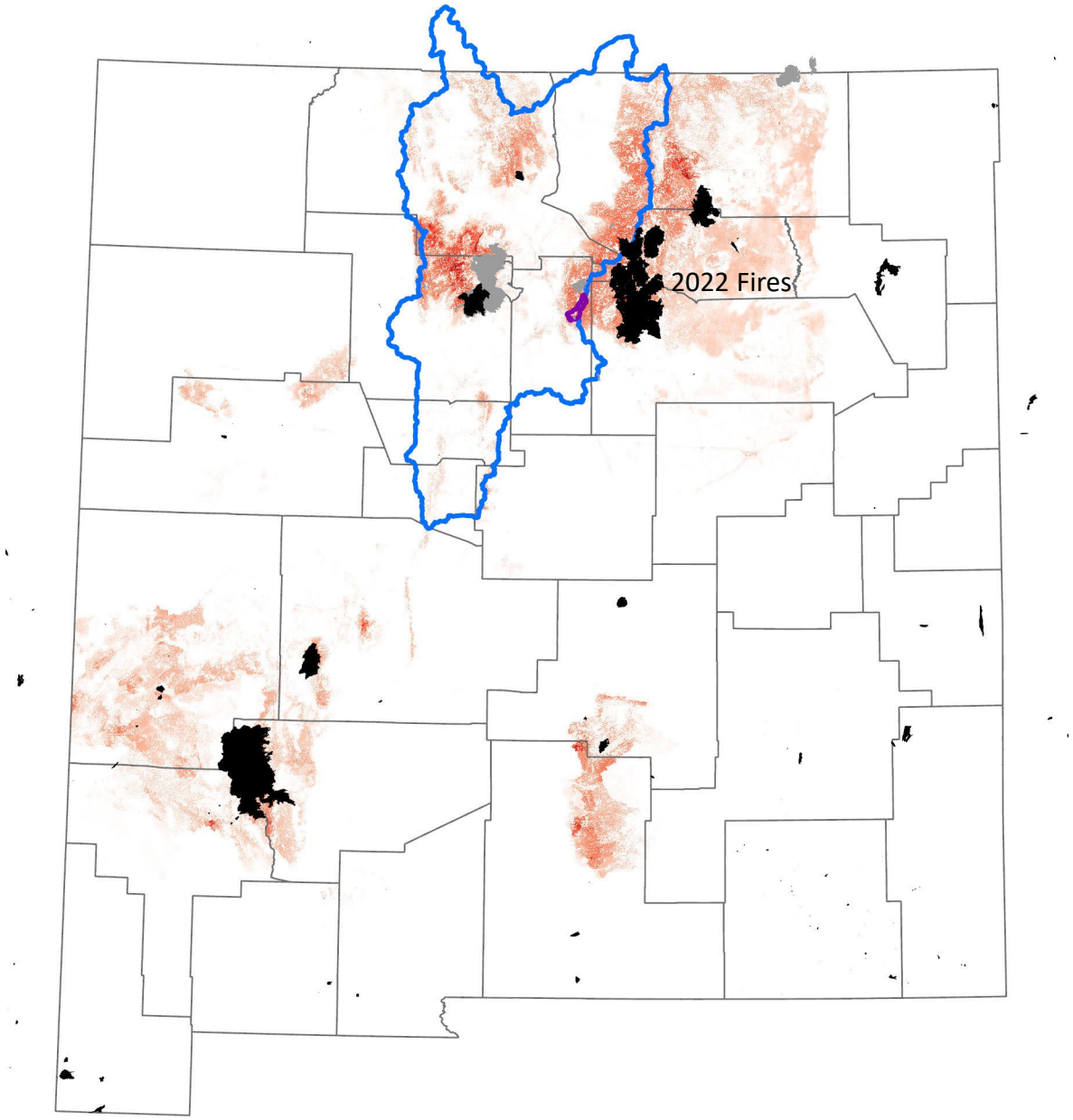
New Challenges

- Risk Mitigation Across State Lines
  - Protecting our water in Colorado
- Controlled Burning Workforce
  - When controlled burning is appropriate, ensure we have enough qualified personnel to do it safely.
- Future Forests will Look Different
  - ~2000 ft shift in elevation driven by climate change



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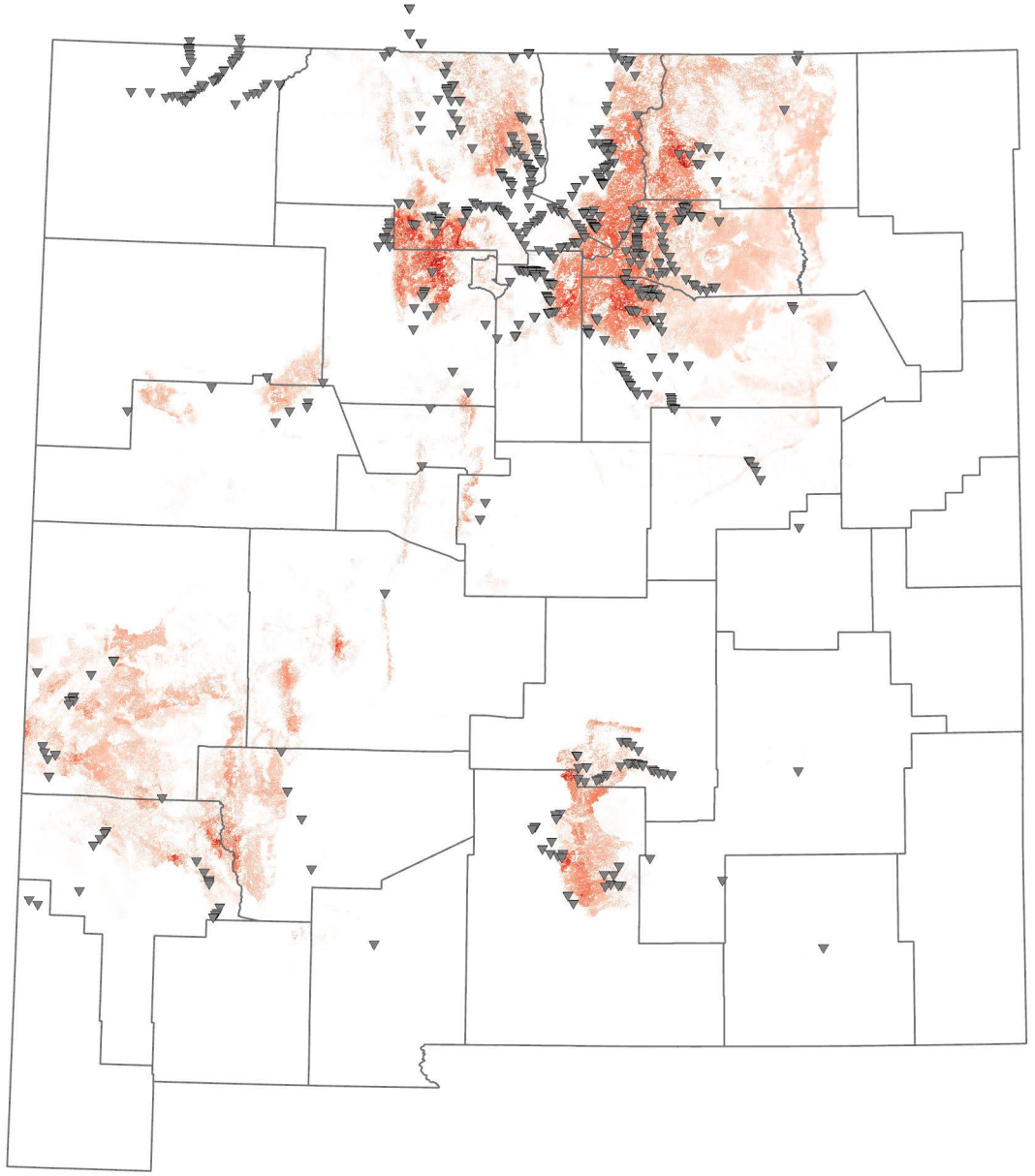
Focus and Replicate

- Pace and scale remain paramount.
- Surface water supplies at high risk statewide.
- Most of New Mexico's water comes from rain and snow that falls on our forests.
- Protecting and restoring our forests is critical for protecting our water and communities.



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