



CERRO NEGRO FOREST COUNCIL

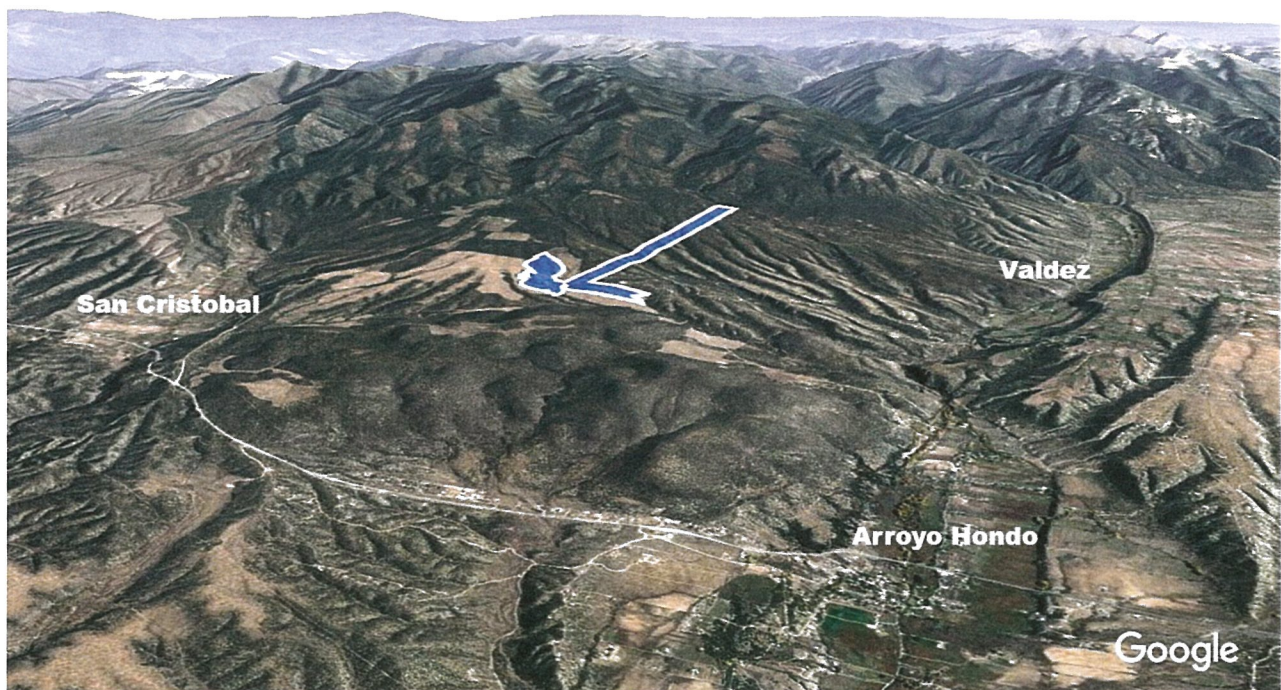
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Forest *Mayordomo* CFRP Project: At a Glance

- Work on the ground started April 2019
- After three cutting season, 150 *leñeros* had been allocated at least one block and were actively working.
- Almost all participating *leñeros* live in Valdez, San Cristobal, or nearby communities.
- As of June 30, 2022, more than 200 acres had been completed, with another 50 acres underway.
- Actual thinning costs are between \$600 and \$700 per acre, including administrative expenses.



Project Area (highlighted in blue):



THE FOREST *MAYORDOMO* MODEL FOR ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL HEALTH IN NEW MEXICO

Traditional communities in northern New Mexico are using an innovative model to promote healthy watersheds, improve forest health and boost the rural workforce by empowering local residents to thin forests near their villages. Millions of acres of forest in New Mexico are dangerously overgrown, resulting in more and more catastrophic fires that destroy watersheds and decimate communities. The scale of the problem is immense. But a new approach to community forestry on the Carson National Forest near Taos is proving to be a useful restoration tool, with the potential to expand across the state.



The “forest *mayordomo*” model relies on the labor of local adult woodcutters, known as *leñeros*, who already gather firewood and other forest materials and who have, for centuries, depended on these resources as a way of life. The *leñeros* are recruited and organized under the supervision of a local forest council which has hired a *mayordomo* (foreman) to oversee the day-to-day thinning work. The *mayordomo* concept has been adopted from the acequia system, which has deep roots in these communities and is a well-understood and well-respected form of self-governance. *Leñeros* are allotted one-acre blocks in areas that have been prioritized for thinning work. Trees that are to remain (based on a professional prescription) are marked with paint by the *mayordomo*. *Leñeros* take all other trees at their leisure, and keep all harvested material for personal use and/or sale. *Leñeros* are also reimbursed on a per-acre basis (\$300 per acre) to cover reasonable expenses for equipment wear and supplies.

The Cerro Negro Forest Council is currently working on Forest Service lands adjacent to the communities of San Cristobal and Valdez. Since early 2019, more than 150 *leñeros* on this project have completed over 200 acres of thinning, with another 50 acres underway. An estimated 1,200 cords of wood have been harvested so far. The total cost to perform the work comes out to less than \$700 an acre — far less than the standard contractor rate. The Las Trampas Land Grant, Santa Barbara Land Grant and Taos Pueblo are also adopting the forest *mayordomo* model to do similar projects in Taos County.

As part of the project, a crew of local high school and college students has been collecting data about forest conditions as part of a career pipeline partnership with UNM-Taos and Highlands University. Since the program began, at least four high school crew members have enrolled in undergraduate programs in the natural resources field.

Federal land managers, congressional representatives, local elected officials and New Mexico State Forestry have all endorsed the forest *mayordomo* model as a way to address ecological challenges while building a culturally relevant restoration economy.

For more information, visit www.cerronegroforestcouncil.org