



# THE RIO GRANDE TRAIL



# THE RIO GRANDE TRAIL (VISION)

The Rio Grande Trail (RGT) is New Mexico's cross-state, recreational trail for hiking, biking, and horseback riding along the Rio Grande. Trail users explore, learn about, and connect with a tapestry of diverse natural habitats, rich history, striking landscapes, and vibrant communities. The trail contributes to cultural and environmental awareness, healthy lifestyles, spiritual growth, and economic prosperity for New Mexico and its visitors.



# THE RIO GRANDE TRAIL (History)

2004 – Planning for Rio Grande Trail commences

2005 – EMNRD entered into agreement with Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) to develop/ implement a Rio Grande Trail plan for Bernalillo to Belen

2007 – Rio Grande Trail Coordinating Committee was created and drafted Charter.

2007 to 2009 – Regional stakeholder meetings were held to garner local support for the trail and plan for pilot projects

2008 - Trail Alignment Study from Belen to Sunland Park completed

2009 – BLM, Taos Field Office strongly supported installing Rio Grande Trail signs along existing trail in Northern NM on BLM lands (NM-CO border to Pilar)



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Established 2015)

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HOUSE BILL 563

52ND LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - FIRST SESSION, 2015

INTRODUCED BY

Jeff Steinborn

AN ACT

RELATING TO PARKS; CREATING THE RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION TO  
RECOMMEND POLICIES TO ESTABLISH A RIO GRANDE TRAIL; CREATING  
THE RIO GRANDE TRAIL FUND; MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

SECTION 1. [NEW MATERIAL] RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION  
CREATED--MEMBERSHIP--FUND CREATED--ENERGY, MINERALS AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.--

A. The "Rio Grande trail commission" is created to  
establish the Rio Grande trail to run the length of the state  
from Colorado to Texas. The commission shall define and  
recommend viable path routes of the Rio Grande Trail, mitigate  
challenges related to its establishment and define and  
recommend other features, facilities and enhancements needed on  
the trail. The commission shall also make recommendations to

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# RIO GRANDE TRAIL ( Master Plan)

## Plan completed in December 2018 includes:

- Vision and planning framework
- Timelines
- Context
- Alignments
- Partnerships
- Maintenance and management
- Trail Users
- Steps Forward
- Alignment Maps

# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION ACT (9-5C-1 NMSA 1978)

- Created a commission, which is directed to define and recommend viable path routes of the RGT, mitigate challenges to its establishment, define and recommend features, facilities, and enhancements needed on the trail, make recommendations to the legislature, and report annually to the governor and the appropriate interim committees.
- The Commission is administratively attached to EMNRD. The Commission does not have the authority necessary to construct, establish, or maintain trail segments.



# STATE TRAILS SYSTEMS ACT (STSA) 16-3-1 thru 16-3-9 NMSA 1978

- The STSA aims to provide public access to, and the enjoyment of, the New Mexico outdoors to conserve, develop, and use the natural resources of the state for purposes of health and recreation.
- The EMNRD Secretary may plan and designate a trail after prescribing the uses and limits of the trail, holding a public hearing after proper notice, and adopting any evidential findings based on the hearing.
- Critically, formal designation of trails through the STSA process gives liability protection to the owners of land who provide rights-of-way or easements for trail use.





# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Process of Designation)

- While the RGTCA does not explicitly state that implementation and management of the RGT is given to the EMNRD Secretary (nor does it explicitly cite the STSA as the vehicle to implement the RGT), that silence is properly interpreted as requiring the RGTCA and STSA to be read to operate together. In other words, the RGTCA provides the vehicle to identify segments and the STSA provides a vehicle to operationalize those segments.
- To do this, the Commission would present the Secretary with its plans for the development of the RGT (or specific sub-segments). The Secretary would then designate the RGT segments as part of the state trails system under the STSA by prescribing the uses and limits of the RGT (or segments), holding a public hearing after proper notice, and adopting any evidential findings based on the hearing. Given the length of the trail, we recommend that the RGTCA submit subsegments because hearings must be held in the affected county/area.





# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Route Designation)

- The Commission completed its initial task of proposing the RGT's general route. The current designation runs the entire length of the state and overlays existing trails where possible (e.g., Bosque Trail in Albuquerque, La Llorona Trail in Las Cruces, trails at six State Parks).
- For significant mileage, the RGT crosses landscapes managed by various landowners and does not follow existing trails (in other words, in such areas new trails would have to be constructed).
- The tribes have been universally opposed to establishment of the RGT and the pueblos along the Rio Grande have been particularly clear that they would not welcome or allow such a trail to be established within their sovereign territories. This opposition led the Commission to reroute the trail east of the Sandia Mountains; however, even with that adjustment the tribes remain opposed.

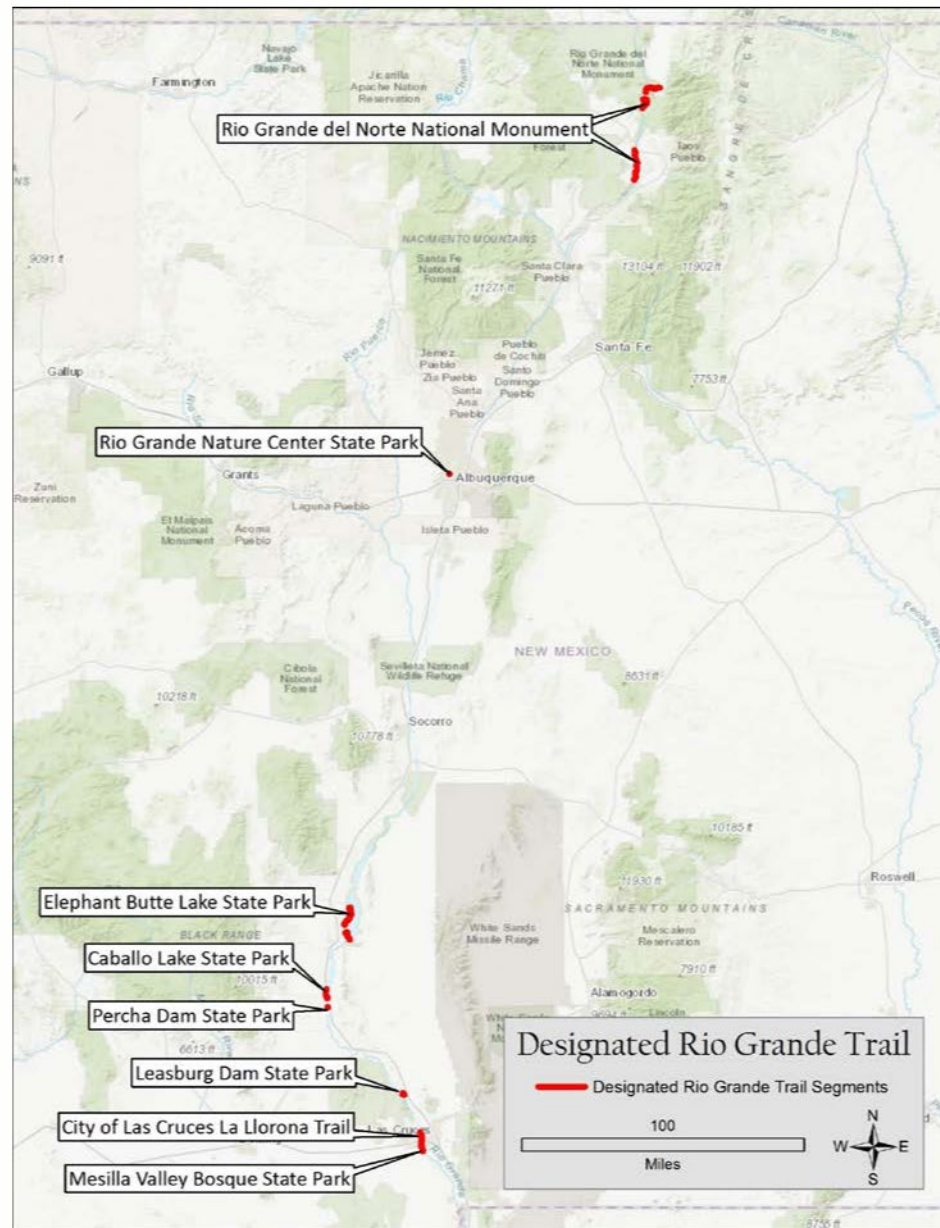


# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Miles Designated)

- The Rio Grande Trail Master Plan framework prioritizes trails that already exist within the Rio Grande corridor as part of the Rio Grande Trail alignment. Through the action of the Rio Grande Trail Commission, 88.55 miles of existing trail across New Mexico are already designated. If all existing trail segments along the alignment were to be formally designated, the Rio Grande Trail would be 39% complete.



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL (Designations)



Location	Miles
Rio Grande Nature Center	0.28
Leasburg Dam	2.66
City of Las Cruces	4.69
Mesilla Valley Bosque	1.62
Percha Dam	0.07
Elephant Butte Lake	15.69
Caballo Lake	4.91
Rio Grande del Norte	58.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>88.55</b>



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Work Groups)

- The Commission established six work groups to support ongoing efforts to develop the Rio Grande Trail. These volunteer coalitions include members from across the state contributing time and talent towards specific aspects of the trail planning and development process.
- Work group discussions provided key insights that informed Rio Grande Trail recommendations. The work groups focused on the following six categories: 1) Interagency Coordination; 2) Communications; 3) Resources; 4) Alignment; 5) User Groups; and 6) Design and Management.



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Funding)

- Commission/EMNRD: Annually House Bill 2 has provided a \$75,000 general fund appropriation to EMNRD-State Parks Division in contract dollars to support the Rio Grande Trail Commission. This year the funding wasn't explicitly marked for RGT activities, but EMNRD continues to use \$75,000 annually toward RGT.
- State Parks has used this funding to support a professional services contractor who assisted with coordination of Commission activities, including stakeholder coordination, meeting logistics, compliance with Open Meetings Act, developing communication tools, GIS geodatabases, and mapping. The funds cannot be used for staffing.
- Economic Development Department (EDD): \$100,000 annual recurring appropriation to EDD's Outdoor Recreation Division (ORD) for Rio Grande Trail development.



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Ongoing Work)

- ORD contracted with Pland Collaborative, a landscape architecture and planning firm based in Albuquerque, to work with stakeholders on refining RGT alignments proposed in the RGT Master Plan (2018), support communities in identification and nomination of segments as part of the RGT, and building consensus on items like ancestral land designation, signage, and creative control. This work allows segments to be brought to the Commission for formal consideration. The feedback from stakeholders has been very positive about this effort.



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL COMMISSION (Management)

- State government does not currently have an entity with the necessary legislative authority, budget, or staff to formally manage the physical trail (e.g., funds for its construction, provide ongoing maintenance, or basic law enforcement services) except in those areas where the RGT overlaps an existing trail and such resources are already available there (e.g., inside a State Park).
- Once authority is given to an appropriate state entity, we anticipate that the RGT will operate similarly to the Continental Divide Trail (CDT), which has a more rustic and informal feel; however, unlike the CDT, the RGT will require agreements with more landowners as it will cross more land types (95% of the CDT is federal).
- The possibility of the establishment of a not-for-profit entity to manage the ongoing needs of the RGT is possible, again similar to the Continental Divide Trail as supported by the Continental Divide Trail Coalition.





# RIO GRANDE TRAIL (Next Steps)

- ORD will again contract with Pland Collaborative in FY24 to continue community outreach to generate activity around the voluntary identification, designation, and development of sections of the RGT.
- Pland Collaborative will present these proposed segments to the RGTC on a quarterly basis. The RGTC will then present these segments to the Secretary of EMNRD for designation under the STSA.
- Both the RGTC and STSA require public meetings. The Commission's next meeting is planned for August 2023 where process for designation and potential trail designations are expected to be on the agenda.



# RIO GRANDE TRAIL (Next Steps)

- EMNRD is updating the list of Commissioners to ensure that all seats are filled, and Commissioners are committed to attending meetings and engaging fully and is making recommendations to the Governor's Office for filling vacancies.
- EMNRD is creating an outdoor recreation specialist position so that we can more efficiently and directly staff the Commission.
- EMNRD will seek an FY25 recurring appropriation to support the RGT Commission efforts to define viable segments, mitigate challenges and establish more miles of trail. The funds will support one FTE, professional services contracts, and provide per diem to the non-governmental RGT Commissioners.





QUESTIONS?

