

The River is the Foundation

Photo: Rio Grande
Taos Box, 2021

The ecological, human, and economic
consequences of a low-flow Rio Grande

Cisco Guevara & NMROA
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NEW MEXICO HAS PROMOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OUTDOORS

But the river industry depends on the landscapes
and waters that make recreation possible.

Resilience should not be confused with sustainability

Outfitters have proven they can adapt. Guides have shown they can navigate challenging low-water conditions. Businesses have absorbed shorter seasons, smaller boats, fewer passengers, canceled trips, and the loss of entire river sections.

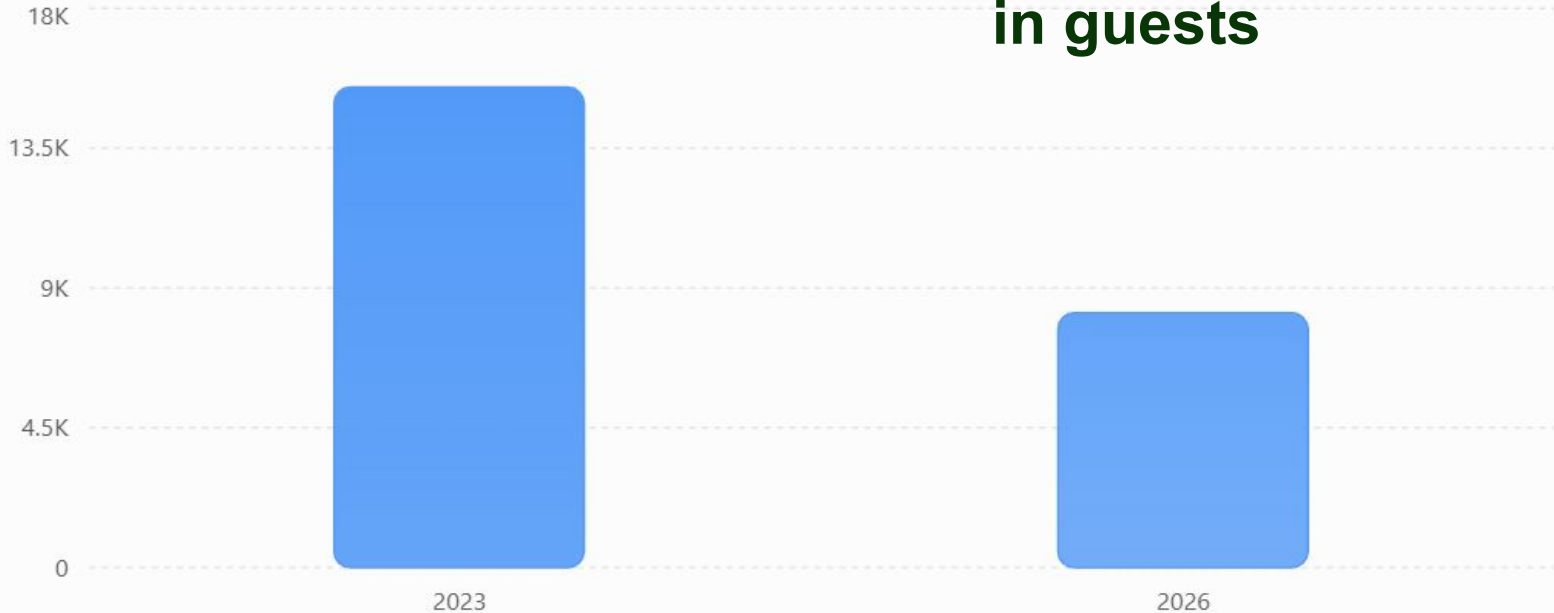
There is a limit to how far a community can adapt before a river-based economy becomes economically impossible. We have arrived.



Healthy Rivers Create Capacity. Low Water Takes It Away.

Guest volume: high-water vs. low-water year

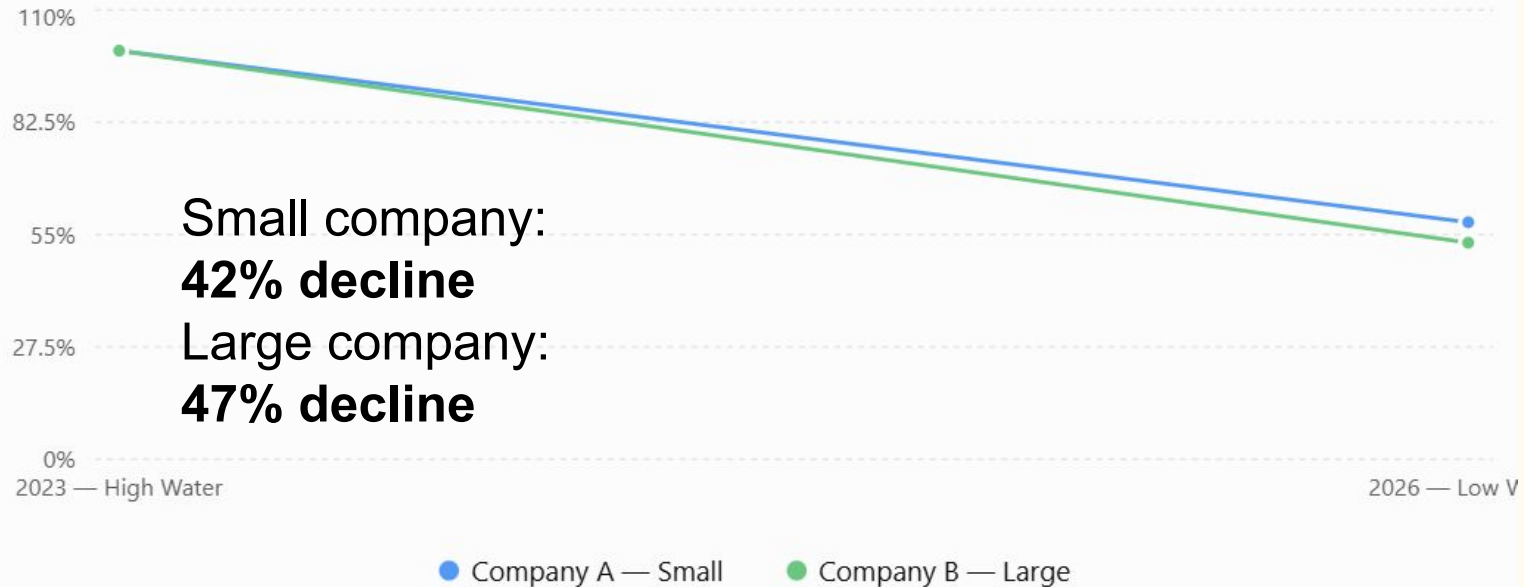
Comparison of guests served in 2023 and 2026.



The scale is different but the impact is the same.

Guest volume retained: high water vs. low water

Each company is indexed to 100% in the high-water year to compare the proportional impact of low water.



Company A retained 58% of high-water volume; Company B retained 53%.

Rio Grande | March 17, 2026 | Souse Hole | 603 CFS



Rio Grande | July, 2026 | Souse Hole | 137 CFS

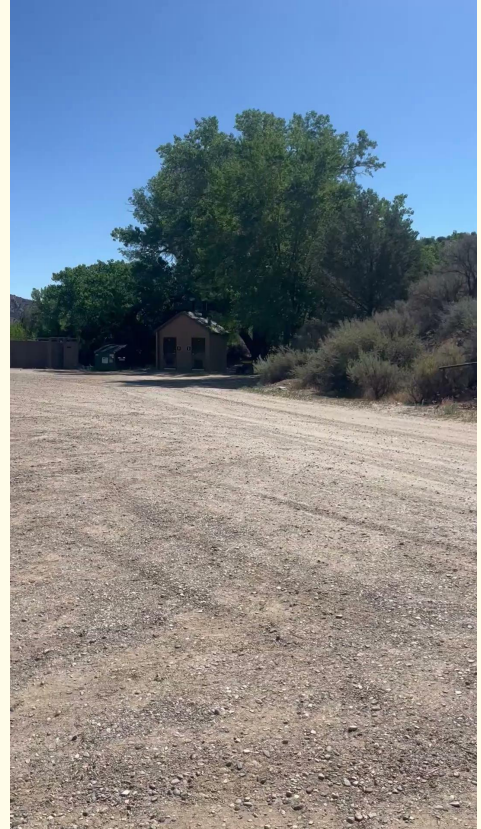


The Crisis is No Longer Abstract

With low water flows like we see now, these numbers will continue to drop. Guests, guides, and outfitters are experiencing it firsthand.

Their experience travels across their communities and to the public. When guests come rafting at this low water they can see firsthand what a water crisis looks like.

Rio Grande | Quartzite | Sunday | July 2026

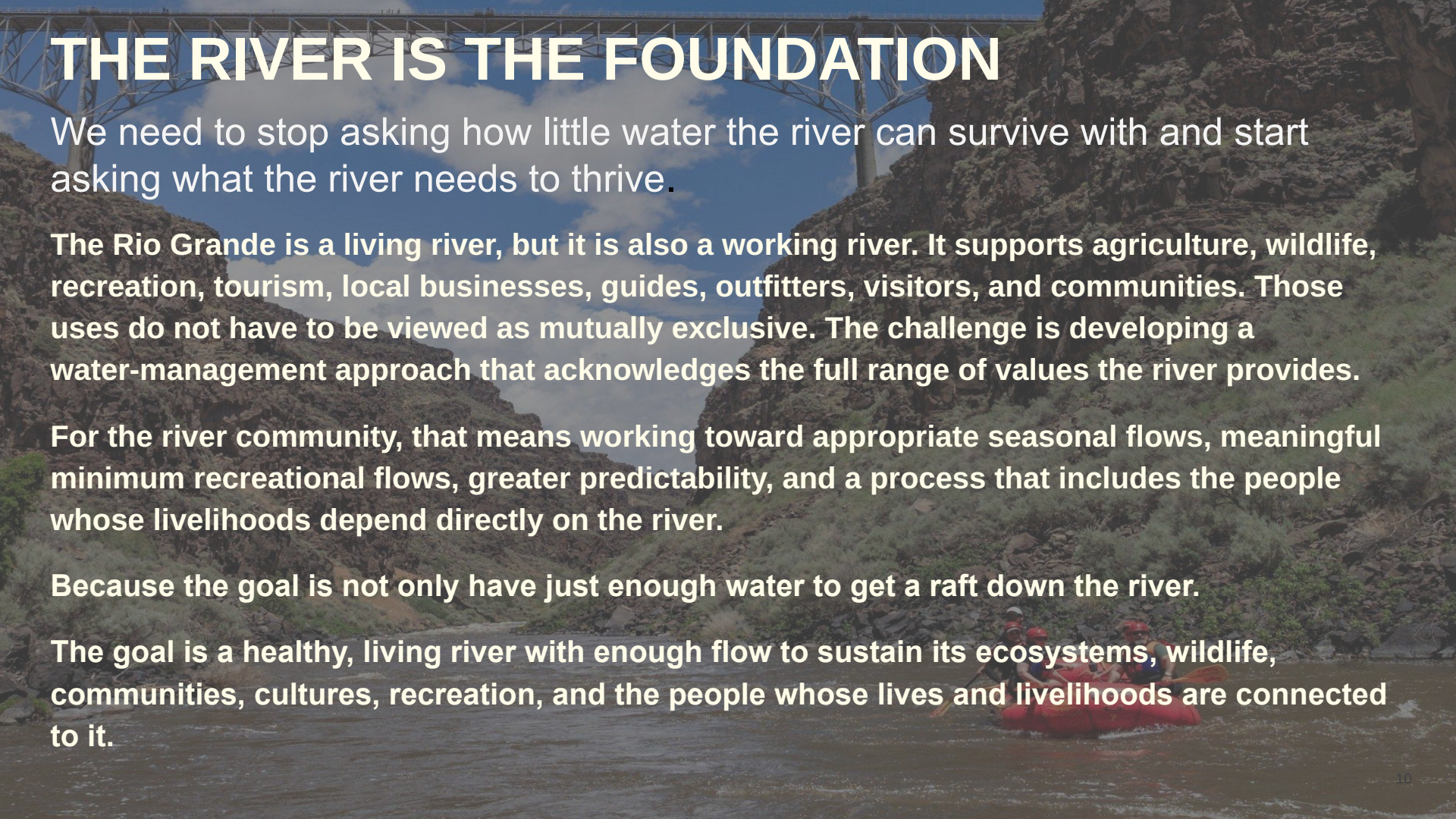


What Would A Thriving River Look Like?

- Water sufficient to sustain ecological function
- Seasonal flows that support wildlife and habitat
- Water that sustains the land and communities connected to it
- Flows that allow meaningful recreational access
- Predictability that allows communities and businesses to plan
- Recognition of recreation as one legitimate beneficial use among many
- A management approach based on when water is available, how much is available, and what the river needs throughout the season



THE RIVER IS THE FOUNDATION



We need to stop asking how little water the river can survive with and start asking what the river needs to thrive.

The Rio Grande is a living river, but it is also a working river. It supports agriculture, wildlife, recreation, tourism, local businesses, guides, outfitters, visitors, and communities. Those uses do not have to be viewed as mutually exclusive. The challenge is developing a water-management approach that acknowledges the full range of values the river provides.

For the river community, that means working toward appropriate seasonal flows, meaningful minimum recreational flows, greater predictability, and a process that includes the people whose livelihoods depend directly on the river.

Because the goal is not only have just enough water to get a raft down the river.

The goal is a healthy, living river with enough flow to sustain its ecosystems, wildlife, communities, cultures, recreation, and the people whose lives and livelihoods are connected to it.

END

For more information on New Mexico River Outfitters, our greater contributions and our Association please visit:

[NMROA.org](https://nmroa.org)

Remaining slides have further video evidence of low flow conditions.



Rio Grande | Big Rocks Rapid | 2026 | 137 CFS



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