Protecting the Española Basin Sole Source Aquifer

Hexavalent Chromium [Cr(VI)] Plume Contamination, Drinking-Water Security, and a State–Federal Action Plan

Indian Affairs Committee Meeting • 12 November 2026

Communities for Clean Water • Espanola Basin Sole Source Aquifer designation continuing support

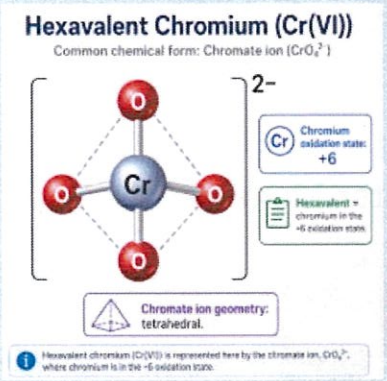
30 minute briefing

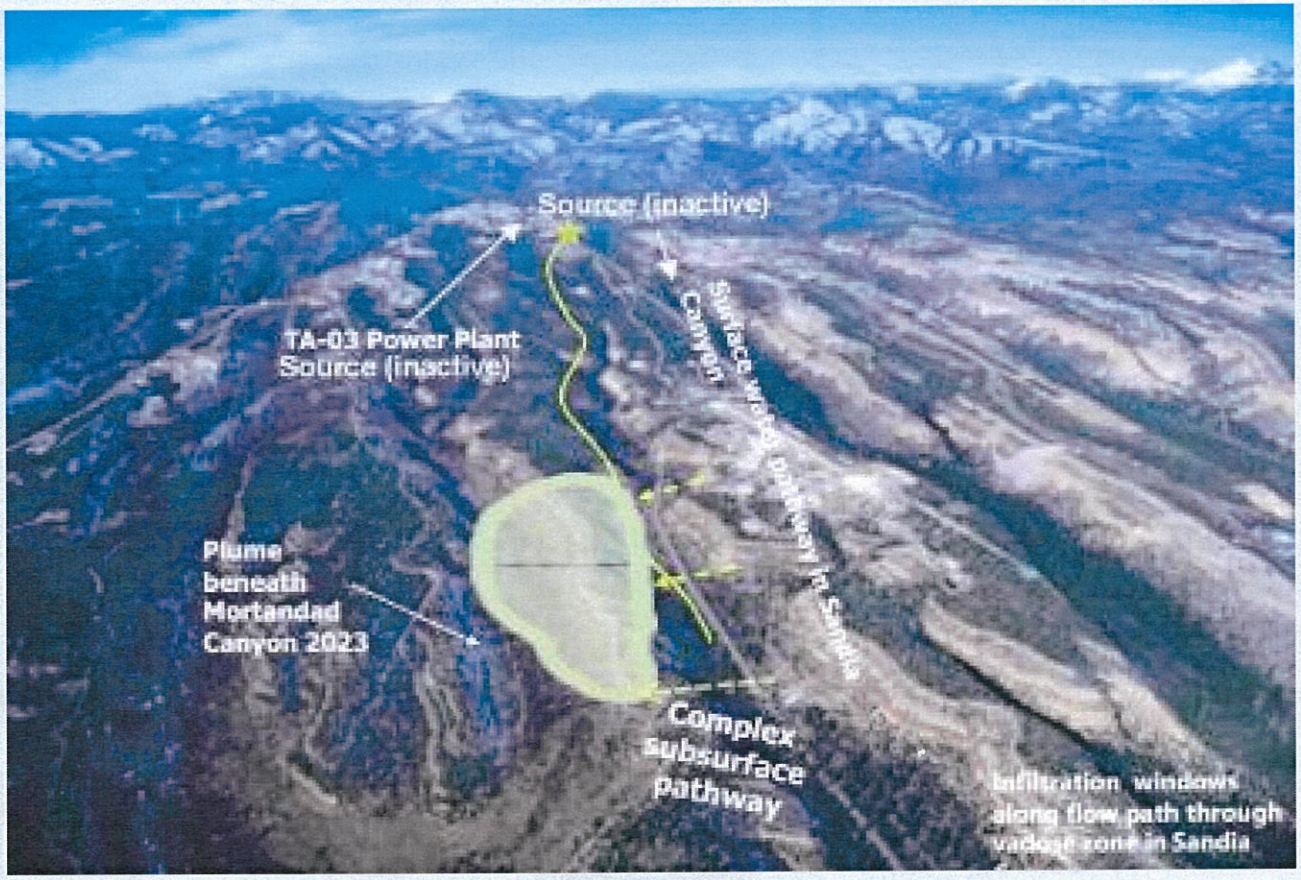
Talavi Cook
Communities for Clean Water Member
Amigos Bravos

Chenoa Scippio
Communities for Clean Water Member
Tewa Women United

Historical Use and Current Use of Hexavalent Chromium

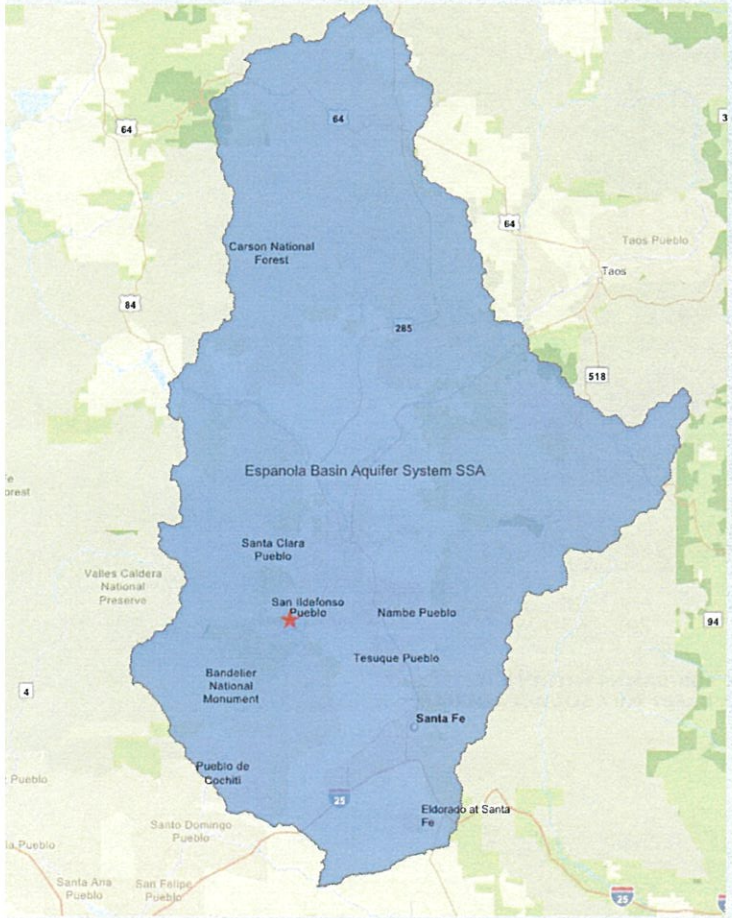
- 1956-1972:
  - Potassium dichromate used as corrosion inhibitor in cooling towers
  - Contaminated water released into Sandia Canyon
- Current:
  - Monitor
  - Extract
  - Treat





Espanola Basin Sole Source Aquifer

- Federally designated under Safe Drinking Water Act §1424(e) in 2008
- Vulnerable Hydrogeologic System
- Critical Drinking Water source
- No reasonably available alternative source



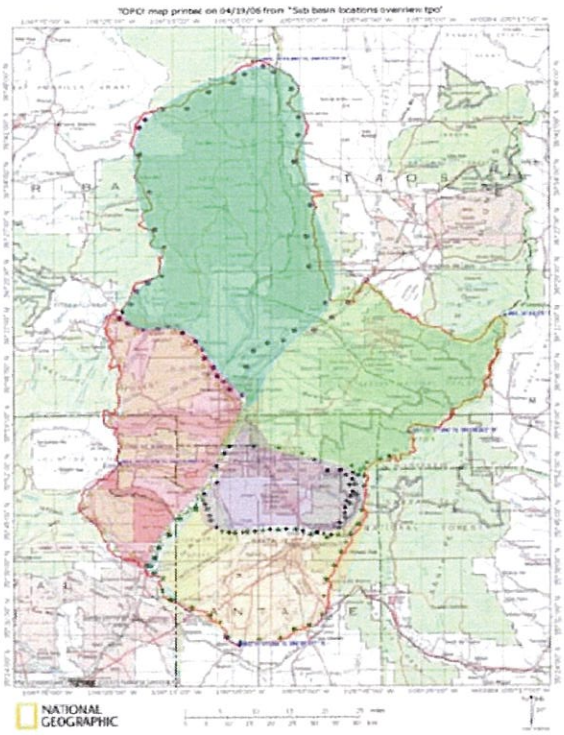


One Aquifer. An Entire Region Depends on It.

MAPPING

- THERE ARE 5 SUB BASINS WITHIN THE DESIGNATION
- COVERS OVER 3,000 SQUARE MILES OF NORTHERN NEW MEXICO
- Espanola Basin System Sole Source Aquifer System (EBSSA)

1. Lower Santa Fe River basin, **in Orange**
2. Canada Ancha/Rio Pojoaque sub-basin in **Violet**
3. Picuris /Mountains /Truchas Range sub-basin **Light Green**
4. Pajarito Plateau sub-basin in **RED**
5. Lower Rio Chama and NE tributary valleys/Abiquiu Dam to Rio Grande in **Green**



FIVE SUB-BASINS WITHIN THE ESPANOLA BASIN SOLE SOURCE AQUIFER

Source: EBSSA presentation, pp. 2–4.

Sole Source Aquifer Designation Federal Qualifications

1. Enhanced EPA Sole Source Aquifer Compliance Review

- Federal Funds
- Federal approval
- Federal permits
- NEPA-triggered federal review

2. EPA-Required Mitigation Plans

- Engineering redesign
- Groundwater monitoring
- Contingency groundwater protections
- Alternative water-supply safeguards
- Corrective action frameworks

3. Historic Federal Funding for Tribal & Municipal Mitigation

- Tribal mitigation and emergency water management
- Municipal drinking-water protection
- Replacement water-supply assistance
- Immediate remediation support
- Source-water protection planning

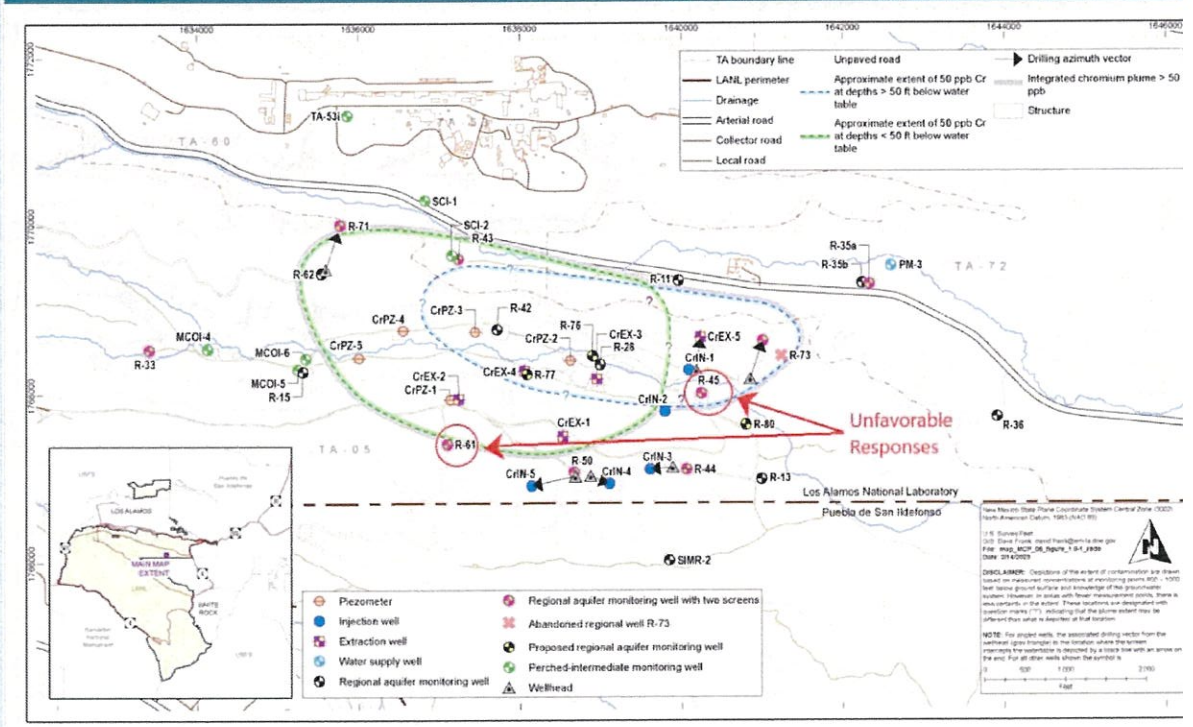
Source: Congressional briefing binder, pp. 6–8.

The Hexavalent Chromium Plume Has Reached the Regional Aquifer

November 2025: the problem moved from remediation failure to regional drinking-water protection

- NMED reported hexavalent chromium in the regional aquifer beneath Pueblo de San Ildefonso
- NMED ordered injection operations under Discharge Permit No. DP-1835 stopped
- The existing remedy and plume behavior require renewed scrutiny, independent monitoring, and transparent modeling
- The plume remains an unresolved groundwater threat

Chromium Plume Map (reminder)



Source: EBSSA briefing materials, pp. 6–7; Congressional briefing binder, pp. 1, 6–7.

ONITORING EXISTS — BUT PROTECTION GAPS REMAIN

The Gap Is Regional Drinking-Water Protection

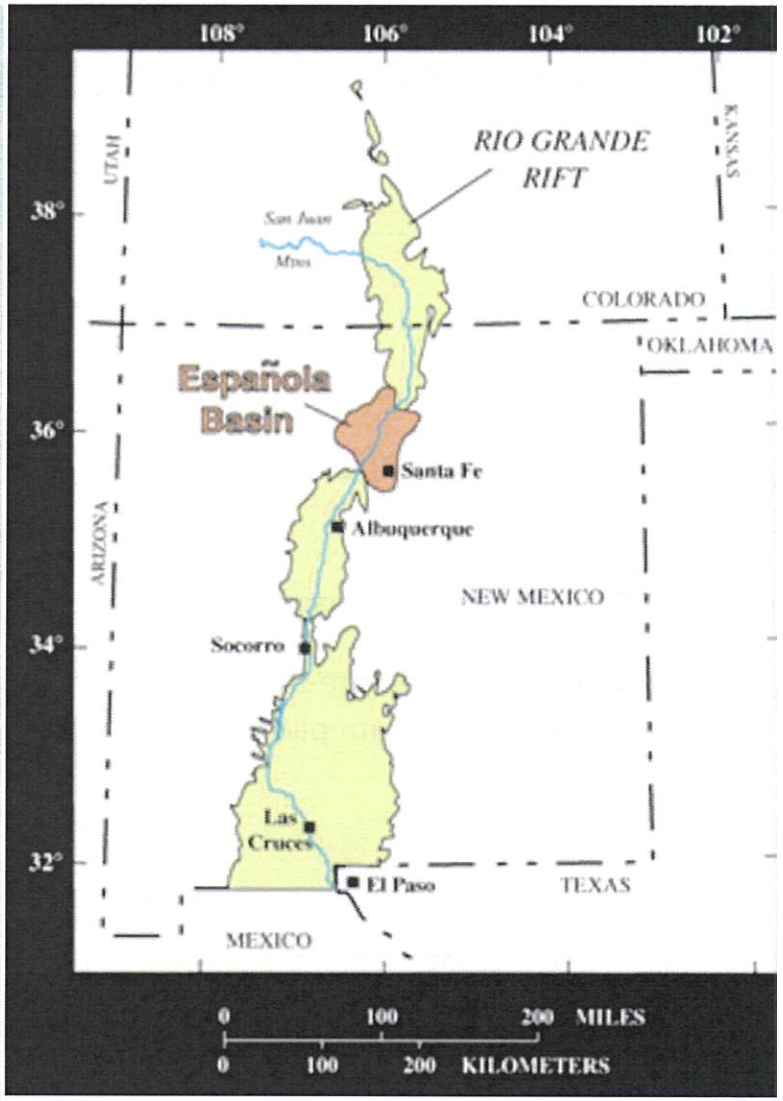
We are asking for support to identify and fund the protection gaps between DOE's cleanup network and the drinking-water systems of the broader federal designation Española Basin Sole Source Aquifer.

EPA Obligation

- Review
- Evaluate
- Enforce
- Oversee

Consequences for the Funding Cut

- Pueblo de San Ildefonso will require mitigation support without federal funding
- NMED will face technical and regulatory burdens without matched federal resources
- Municipal systems downstream lose access to emergency water supply grants
- DOE may resist expanding or modifying the remedy due to cost
- State and tribal governments will shoulder the financial burden unless Congress restores funding or litigation compels DOE to act



Index map showing the extent of the Rio Grande R and the Española Basin region of interest, New Mexico.

Three Funding Rails — Three Different Jobs

1. CLEANUP

DOE Environmental Management

Contain and remediate the hexavalent chromium plume

2. DRINKING WATER

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund • Tribal programs • State/federal infrastructure

Monitoring, treatment, redundancy, backup supply

3. Sole Source Aquifer (SSA) CAPACITY

EPA • Congressional appropriations

Restore protection and mitigation capacity for designated aquifers

"Cleanup, drinking-water infrastructure, and Sole Source Aquifer protection are three different jobs."

Source: EBSSA presentation, pp. 10–14, 19.

Protection of Drinking Water: What Infrastructure Is Needed Now?

REGIONAL EARLY-WARNING NETWORK

- Sentinel monitoring wells
- Pueblo-controlled monitoring capability
- Independent groundwater sampling
- Updated hydrogeologic and plume modeling
- Publicly accessible monitoring data

DRINKING-WATER RESILIENCE

- Redundant production wells
- Treatment capability where needed
- Emergency / backup water supply
- Regional interconnections where feasible
- Protection of recharge areas

Source: EBSSA presentation, pp. 10, 13; Congressional briefing binder, pp. 7–8.

FY2027 Federal Appropriations Request — Submitted March 9, 2026

$25 MILLION

National Sole Source Aquifer protection / mitigation request

Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

- Direct funding language: $25M for SSA mitigation/protective measures under SDWA §1424(e)

Swift Action Needed:

- Restoration of the SSA mitigation line-item in Congress
- Immediate federal oversight of DOE corrective actions
- Protection of tribal water rights and resources
- Enhanced transparency and monitoring
- Robust enforcement to prevent further plume migration

Source: EBSSA presentation, pp. 15–19, 25; Congressional briefing binder, pp. 9–10.

Proposed Joint Memorial Priorities

- **Identify where monitoring is inadequate -** Ask NMED to coordinate an assessment of monitoring gaps, protective measures, costs and responsible agencies.
- **Stronger chromium plume containment and remediation -** Urge DOE to provide a comprehensive accounting of current remediation performance, outstanding corrective actions, and measures necessary to prevent further migration.
- **Independent review of monitoring well-construction and sampling reliability -** Request evaluation of monitoring-well construction, integrity, drilling and completion methods, and the representativeness of groundwater samples, including consideration of concerns previously identified by the National Academies.
- **Fund better monitoring -** Support sentinel wells, independent sampling, evaluation of well locations and screened depths, and characterization of the plume's horizontal and vertical extent.
- **Create legislative follow-through -** Request NMED's findings and funding recommendations within six months of adoption.
- **Prepare water systems -** Support drinking-water infrastructure resilience and emergency water-supply planning.

Prepared from EBSSA community and congressional briefing materials.

Advocacy Framework

INITIAL TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT

- Pueblo nations are sovereign governments with authority over their lands, resources, and governmental participation
- Pueblo de San Ildefonso leadership to discuss the proposed memorial, establish priorities and ensure Tribal concerns and perspectives are reflected
- Desired outcome: A clearer understanding of the Pueblo's priorities and guidance on how to proceed in a manner that respects its sovereignty and protects its interests.

AGENCY COORDINATION

- Review monitoring, plume containment, remediation efforts, use USGS MODFLOW model as opposed to LANL's FEHM (Finite Element Heat and Mass) computer code model, and potential funding needs.
- Desired outcome: Record of agency actions, outstanding concerns, federal resources needed, documentation of state regulatory priorities, technical needs, and potential legislative or budget actions.

Prepared from EBSSA community and congressional briefing materials.

Advocacy Framework

LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT

- Engage potential legislative partners to initiate Legislative Council Services drafting, identify committee pathways, and finalize the proposed joint memorial ahead of the 2027 session
- Desired outcome: Identified legislative champions, pathway for legislative action, and defined group of offices willing to advance the effort

LEGISLATIVE SESSION & FOLLOW-THROUGH

- Advance the joint memorial during the 2027 session, establish agency reporting expectations, identify state and federal funding opportunities, and maintain oversight of requested actions and recommendations
- Desired outcome: Coordinated effort that advances the most feasible legislative and funding actions while preserving record of agency commitments and unresolved needs

Prepared from EBSSA community and congressional briefing materials.

What We Are Asking of the New Mexico Legislature

- **Sponsor and advance the Joint Memorial -** Request LCS drafting assistance, confirm the legislative vehicle and help identify a House partner and committee path.
- **Obtain an agency briefing and written action plan -** Ask NMED and DOE for current SIMR-3 findings, remaining monitoring gaps, cleanup performance measures and implementation status of the December 2024 independent review recommendations, with costs and deadlines.
- **Support future funding and oversight opportunities -** Assist in determining potential state and federal resources for independent monitoring, technical capacity, and long-term drinking-water protection, informed by agency findings and identified needs.
- **Establish follow-up -** Designate a staff contact and agree on dates for the drafting request, agency briefing and next meeting.

Prepared from EBSSA community and congressional briefing materials.

Thank You! Questions?

Talavi Cook, Amigos Bravos, tcook@amigosbravos.org

Chenoa Scippio, Tewa Women United, chenoa@tewawomenunited.org

Communities for Clean Water, communitiesforcleanwater@gmail.com

Resources

1-page briefing
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VBwO_pR7KfFcmTzpoHtGczfnmqZYNLtY/view?usp=sharing

1-page fact sheet
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AENbr9Kxqpe46gRzMyOGC1eh6wnD-VWE/view?usp=sharing

