

CHAMA PEAK  
· LAND ALLIANCE ·



# 2021 CPLA ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT



Photograph by: In Light Of Nature

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# MISSION

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The Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA) is a diverse group of conservation-minded landowners committed to practicing and promoting responsible land, water and wildlife stewardship in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico for the benefit of our diverse cultural heritage and for generations to come.

# VISION

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We envision the watersheds of the San Juan and Rio Chama as an interconnected system that thrives on cooperative management between private landowners, states, tribes and federal agencies. It is a “wild and working” watershed where agricultural operations are in harmony with wildlife, clean water, and resilient forests. And it is a watershed where the local rural economy is strong and provides a positive feedback loop into the community and land that supports it.

# WAYS TO SUPPORT

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Visit [www.chamapeak.org](http://www.chamapeak.org) to sign up for our monthly newsletter and discover other ways to be involved with our mission.

# FOREST + WATERSHED HEALTH

## Watershed-based Partnerships

*with support from TNC - US Forest Service R3 capacity grant*

Water is the lifeblood of the Southwest, but with unnaturally dense forest landscapes and warming climate trends, many watersheds in this region are at a risk for catastrophic wildfire. **Watersheds in the CPLA region supply approx. 75% of Albuquerque's drinking water, 50% of Santa Fe's drinking water, many tribes and pueblos, rural communities, acequia systems and agricultural producers.** A huge priority of CPLA is to protect the quantity and quality of water flowing from these watersheds. CPLA serves as the fiscal sponsor for the San Juan Chama Watershed Partnership, and we also participate in the San Juan Headwaters Partnership and the 2-3-2 Cohesive Strategy Partnership. These partnerships all attract a diverse group of stakeholders and land managers, and are valuable for getting folks together to develop strategies towards common goals of watershed protection, habitat conservation, rural economic growth, and restoring forest health. A US Forest Service initiative known as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, recently ranked the Rio Chama project area first in the nation due to the importance of these watersheds and risk of severe wildfire, and is on track to bring in \$40 million over 10 years to restore USFS lands in the Rio Chama region.



*CPLA worked with watershed partnerships to host a forestry field day for over 50 people in the San Juan-Chama project source watersheds in August.*

## Rio Grande Water Fund

*with support from TNC – ABCWUA and MRGCD grant*

We are continuing a \$1 million investment from downstream water users to protect watersheds from catastrophic wildfire. **In 2021 we treated 142 acres in the San Juan-Chama Project Source Watersheds** in collaboration with TNC and the Rio Grande Water Fund. We are finishing up a five year RGWF contract and are exploring available funding options so that our forestry work can continue in these critical watersheds.



Log Skidder removing firewood



*Chama Peak Land Alliance Executive Director Caleb Stotts showing the removal of rotten cored aspen to feed local firewood markets while mitigating down woody fuel loading*

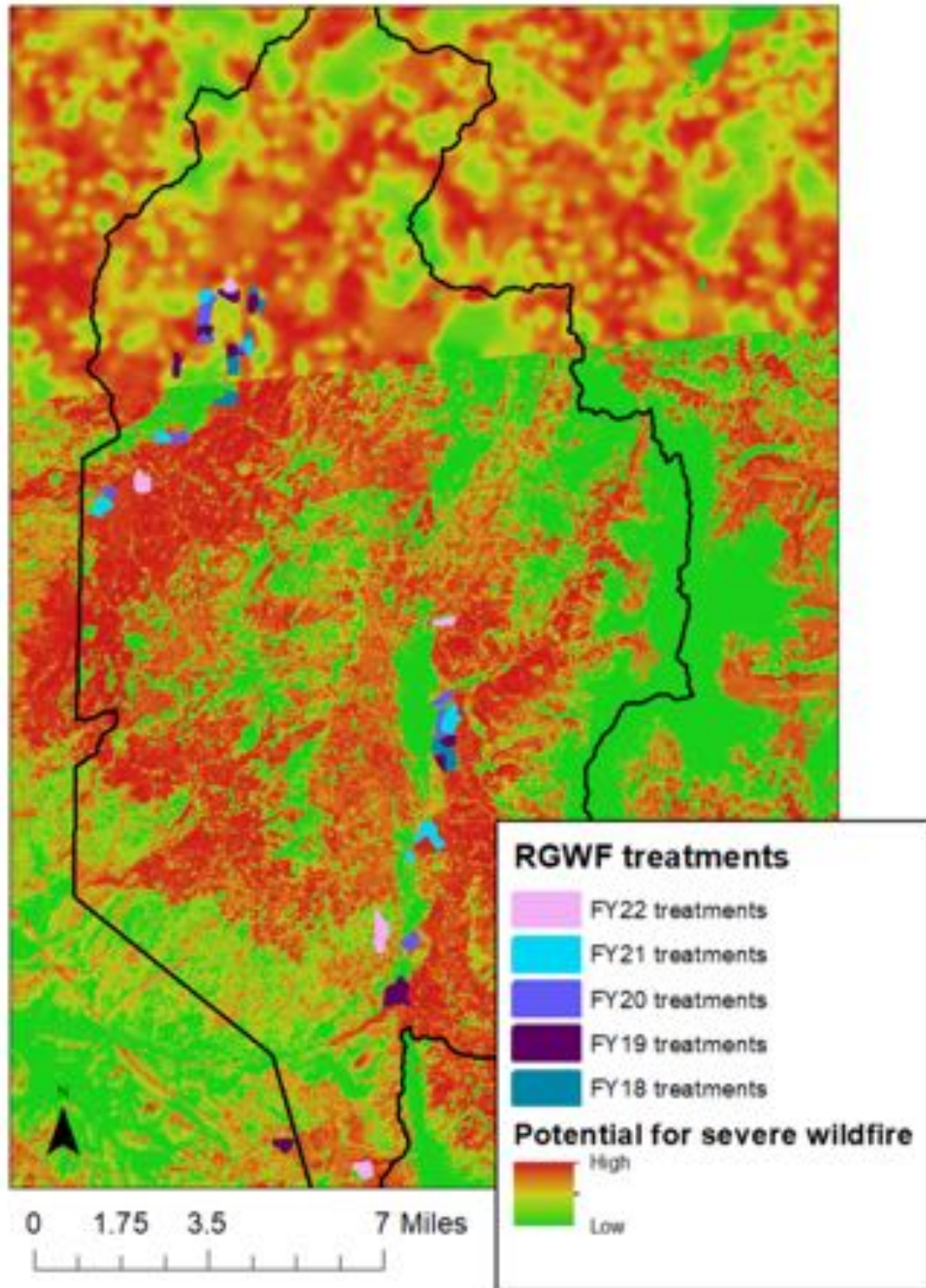


**Pre-Thinning**



**Post-Thinning**

## RGWF treatments in the SJCP source watersheds



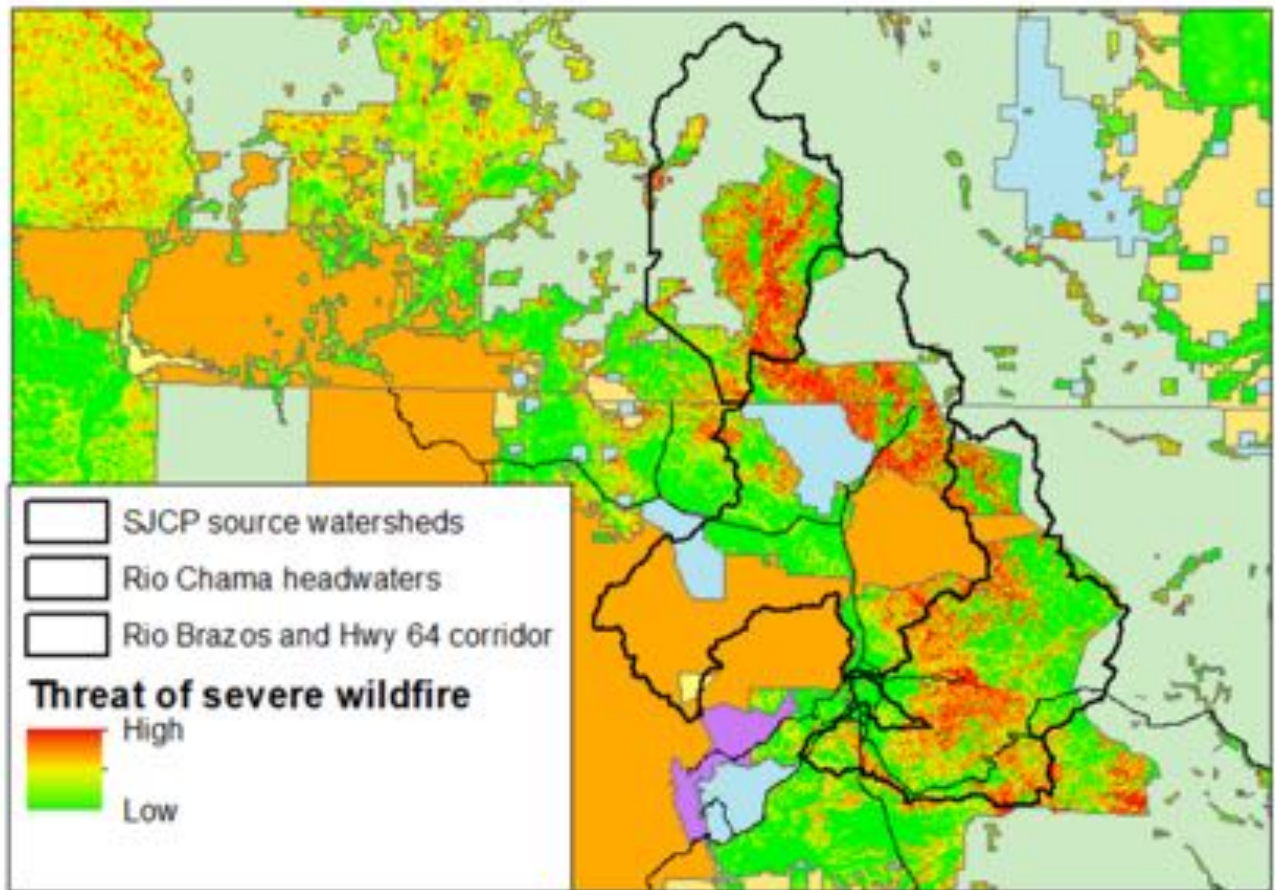
*CPLA, RGWF, and landowners in the Navajo and Blanco Basins have teamed up to treat hundreds of acres over the last few years. Much more work is needed to help protect the critically important San Juan Chama Project source watersheds and Rio Chama headwaters.*

## Landscape Planning for Forest Restoration

### ***with support from Network for Landscape Conservation - Catalyst Fund***

In collaboration with the San Juan Chama Watershed Partnership, we worked towards the following goals in 2021: Update geographic priority areas, implement an active landowner outreach strategy in priority geographic areas, and build a catalogue of on-the-ground potential restoration projects to target for future funding. **Coordinating with 14 ranches, we laid out 3,500 acres of priority forest treatments that we are currently seeking funding for.**

### Threat of severe wildfire on private lands in the Chama region



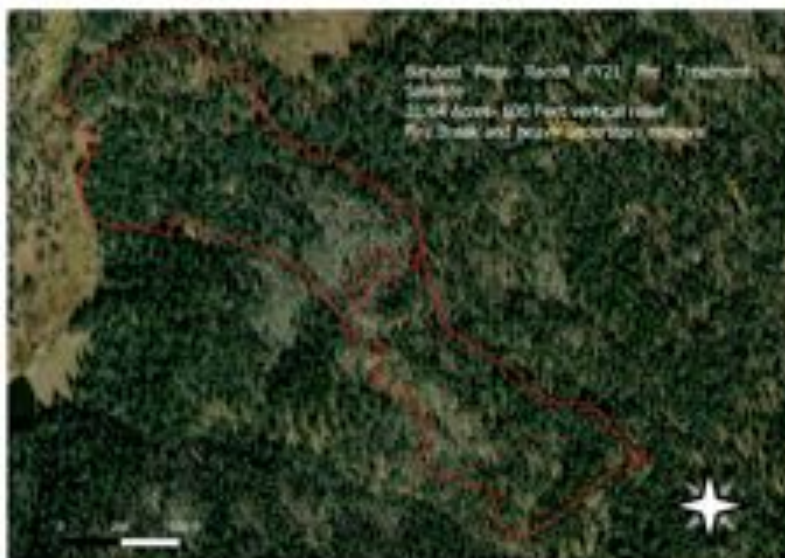
*Thousands of acres of private lands are at risk of severe wildfire in the Rio Chama headwaters, Rio Brazos, and San Juan Chama Project source watersheds. In 2021 we worked with partners to help identify Focal Areas that can help partners plan and coordinate restoration efforts in specific watershed areas.*

**Working with planning partners, we identified a dozen specific watershed-based Focal Areas in the SJCWP region.** We are currently working to develop a Forest Planning Atlas for Focal Areas in the San Juan Chama region. Using new map products from NM Forest Action Plan, we are working to compile maps that planning partners can use to plan forest treatments.

## Drone Monitoring of Forest Treatments *with support from TNC drone monitoring grant*

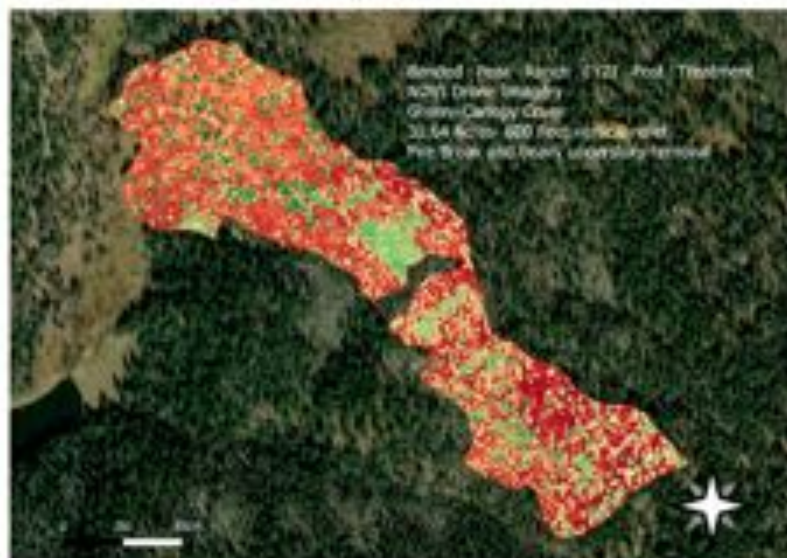
In 2021 we partnered with TNC and landowners to use drones to monitor ecological forestry treatments. Using state of the art technology, we assessed the impact of our treatments on forest structure, including metrics for canopy cover and trees per acre. This monitoring work will help our adaptive management program to make sure we are achieving desired outcomes. **We completed two reports documenting how we are using these new tools in our forestry operations.** We look forward to using new qualitative and quantitative methodologies to monitor future treatments as we strive to protect critical watersheds from severe wildfire.

**Before treatment**  
(satellite imagery shown)



Est. 1260 trees per acre  
Canopy Cover = approx. 95%

**After treatment**  
drone-based canopy classification shown)



177 trees per acre  
Canopy Cover=41%  
Openings = 59%



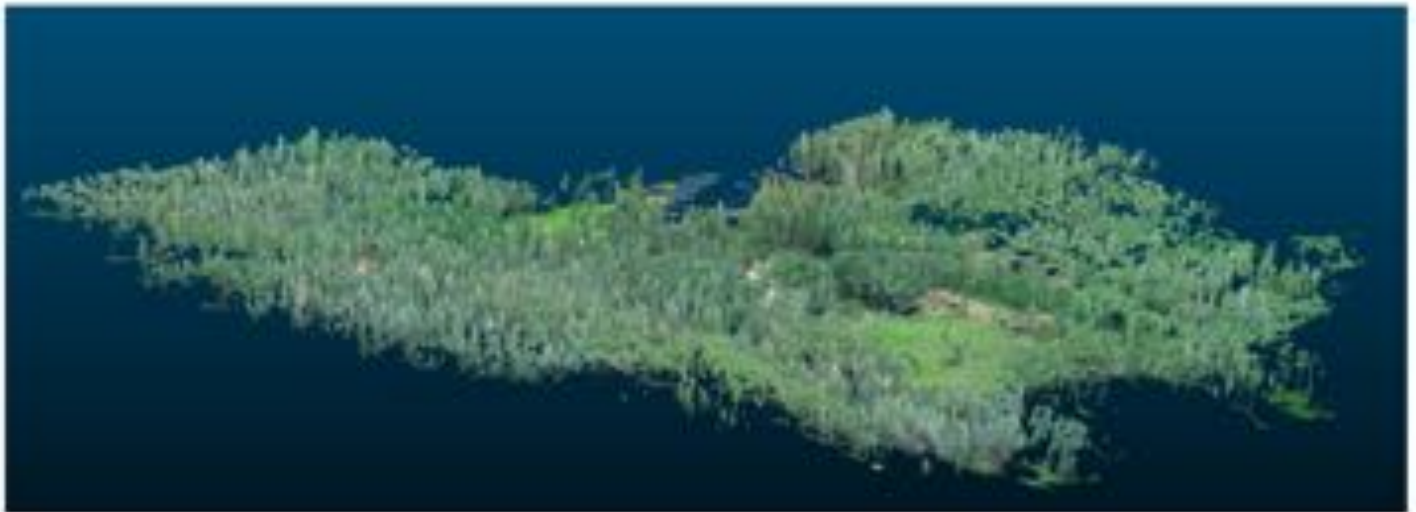




# UAV Monitoring of Changes in Forest Structure Caused by Forest Restoration and Prescribed Fire Treatments

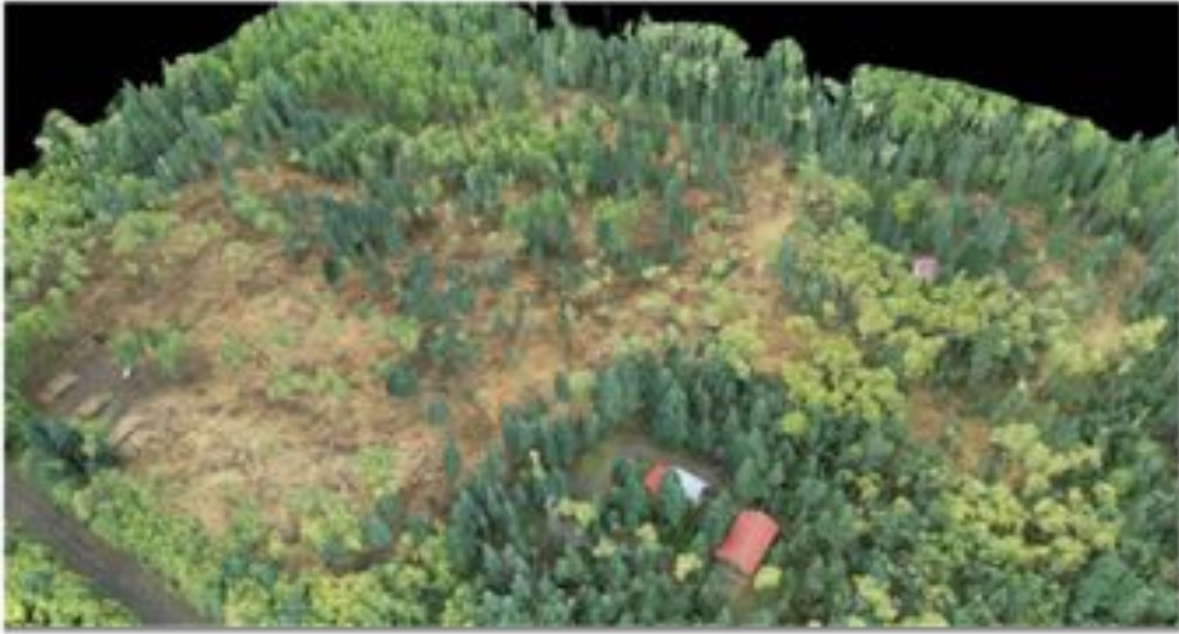
Edward MacKerrow, [Santa Fe Science, LLC](#)  
Nick Dolecek, [Dolecek Enterprises, Inc.](#)  
Caleb Stotts, [Chama Peak Land Alliance](#)

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*Point-cloud model of Thunderbird Ranch, Blanco Basin, Colorado during tree-thinning treatments.  
Photogrammetric reconstruction based on 1,000 UAV RGB images collected on July 28, 2021.*

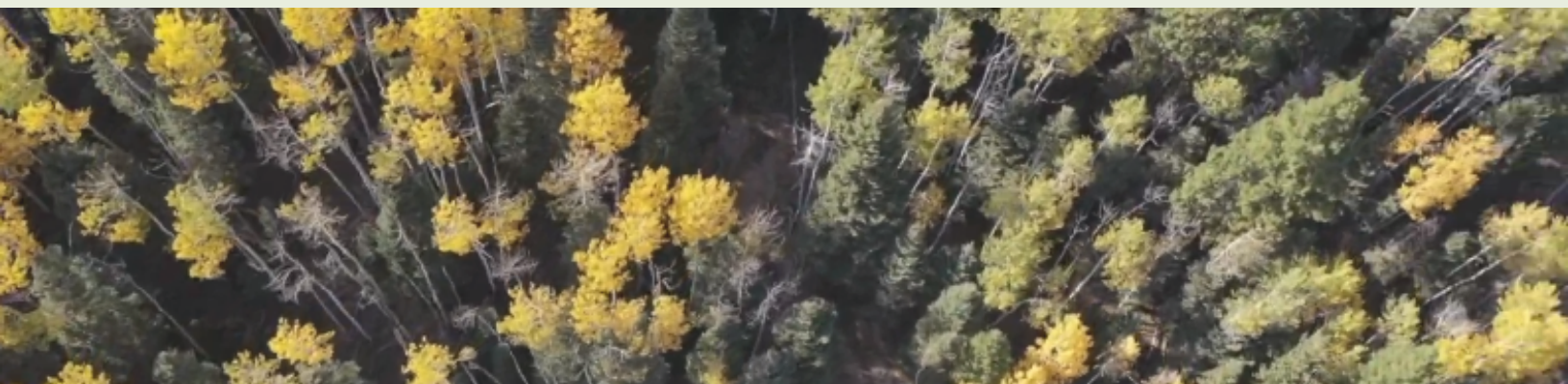
## Small Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Monitoring Protocol for Operational Forestry



Chama Peak Land Alliance

*By: Caleb Stotts and Nicholas Dolecek*

*We completed a report that outlines drone monitoring protocol for use in pre-treatment, mid-treatment, and post-treatment forestry operations. Working with Dolecek Enterprises, Inc. we developed methods to help layout projects, assess active operations, and provide visuals of forest treatments outcomes.*





# WILDLIFE + FISHERIES

## **Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout Phase 2: Project Implementation Guide on private lands**

*with support from New Mexico Habitat Conservation Initiative grant*

Building off of the Return of the Native: Rio Grande cutthroat and private lands stewardship report, Phase 2 will focus on creating 'shovel-ready' projects in specific areas where RGCT conservation strategies may be most impactful. **We are currently working with landowners to develop Project Implementation Guides** designed to be a springboard to apply for implementation funding.



## **Riparian Restoration Project on the Rio Chamita**

*with support from USFWS Partners Program grant*

Working with landowners and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, **we are implementing a habitat improvement project to improve stream/riparian habitat and ecological function in the Rio Chamita.** This work includes cross-boundary planning with the Edward Sergeants Wildlife Management Area.

# EDUCATION + ECONOMY

## **CPLA Scholarship Program**

### ***with support from 262 Ranch***

The Alliance offers scholarships to graduating high school seniors at Escalante and Pagosa Springs High Schools to support advanced studies at any university or technical college. Our scholarship winners for 2021 are:

**Escalante High School:** Matias Lujan, Zachary Gurule, Isiah Maestas, and Dante Salazar

**Pagosa High School:** Kylie Keuning, Layla McRae, Madeline Metzger

Visit the Education and Economy webpage at [chamapeak.org](http://chamapeak.org) to learn more about these awesome graduates.

## **2021 Rio Chama Congreso**

### ***with support from Network for Landscape Conservation - Catalyst Fund***

Every year, partners in the San Juan Chama Watershed Partnership convene folks from across the Rio Chama Watershed to present and discuss pertinent watershed issues. The sixth annual Congreso theme was "Our United Watershed". **We are delighted to announce that the Rio Chama Congreso was a success** and we are gearing up for 2022 Rio Chama Congreso's theme "The Future of Snow and Water in a Changing Climate."

## **Firewood for Seniors**

In 2021 we partnered with Women Owning Woodlands (WOW), La Merced De Los Pueblos De Tierra Amarilla, Upper Chama Soil and Water Conservation District, the Chama Senior Center, and many community members and volunteers to process firewood for senior citizens in the Chama Valley. **Through the combined efforts and hard work of many folks, we served approx.56 individuals with firewood in 2021.**



*Sarah DeMay of WOW cutting firewood.*



**VISTA (Volunteer In Service To America) Position**

The continued work with the AmeriCorps VISTA program provided CPLA, US Bureau of Reclamation, and SJCWP with a lot of great community outreach work. In 2021, we were excited to work with Hannah Whittaker, who is a native of Canjillon. Thanks Hannah for your volunteer service!! Here are some highlights from Hannah's time with SJCWP and CPLA:

**Plant Association Course-** Extensive silvicultural training in the field

**Startup of a snowboarding/Ski program for the Chama Valley Schools-** Ski/snowboarding lessons for school age children.

**Soils Presentation for Junior Conservation Writing Workshop-** Science based youth outreach in the community.

**Firewood for the Elderly WOW (women owning woodlands) Group-** WOW Distribution of cut, blocked, and split firewood to elderly and/or impoverished families.

**Watershed Protection + Forest Management-** Gaining and sharing knowledge of the ever-pressing issue of protecting watersheds and prevention of catastrophic wildfires.



**Fire Camp Training-** Fire camp in class and hands on training to become a certified firefighter Type 2



**Forestry Management Plan-** Working with a local forester to create a forestry management plan.



*Hannah + Governor Michelle Lujan Graiham*

**San Juan Chama Watershed Partnership Start Up-** Writing bylaws, articles of incorporation, and getting together all the necessary requirements for a nonprofit corporation in New Mexico.





***The Fish and the Flame Film  
with support from New Mexico Habitat  
Conservation Initiative***

We partnered with internationally recognized Day's Edge Productions to make a short video highlighting the good stewardship work of land managers in the region and the importance of private lands conservation. This message is conveyed through the story of the critically imperiled San Juan cutthroat trout, which was thought to be extinct and was only recently rediscovered. CPLA board chairman Tim Haarmann stars in the film.

**The Fish and the Flame video is off to a strong start on the environmental film festival circuit, receiving laurels from 8 different film festivals so far.**

Visit our website at [www.chamapeak.org](http://www.chamapeak.org) to find a link to view the film, it is available for viewing on Youtube.



# CLIMATE + WATER

## **Riparian Restoration**

The CPLA region is home to incredibly important riparian ecosystems that provide crucial habitat for diverse species and supply water for downstream users. We are working with numerous partners to promote riparian restoration in the region, with our primary goals being: protect quantity and quality of water, slow down the movement of water where appropriate, raise the water table of riparian and wetland systems, and create stream habitat complexity. **We are working with partners to promote the use of stream and riparian restoration techniques** outlined in the Utah State University's Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration of Riverscapes Design Manual.

# PUBLIC POLICY FOR CONSERVATION

## Ensuring a Voice for Private Lands Conservation

Many landowners are working to safeguard biodiversity, wildlife habitat, clean water, and landscape resiliency for public benefit. CPLA works in synergy with land stewards and likeminded conservation organizations to create synergy on policy issues that increase opportunities and incentives for land stewards to manage for conservation goals.

**EPLUS CLAIMS VS FACTS**

**MYTH:** It's not fair that landowners receive over 13,000 elk authorizations  
**FACT:** 50% of elk habitat is located on private land. It is reasonable that roughly half of elk authorizations are for private land given that roughly half of the habitat is located on private land. Elk consume an estimated \$25 million per year in forage on private land, and landowners invest billions of dollars into the working lands that sustain them. EPLUS offsets only a small portion of costs incurred by private landowners in providing vital habitat, cover, and water resources to elk and all of New Mexico's wildlife.



**MYTH:** ALL elk authorizations should be Ranch Only  
**FACT:** 80% of private land elk authorizations are considered Ranch Only. That means they can only be utilized on the deeded acreage associated with the authorization. Roughly 20% of authorizations are considered Unit Wide. If a landowner wishes their authorizations to have Unit Wide availability, they must agree to open the private land associated with the authorization to ALL public land elk hunters. New Mexico's Unit Wide authorizations provide public hunters with an additional half million huntable acres.

**MYTH:** There are no reasons a landowner should receive Unit Wide tags  
**FACT:** There are several legitimate reasons for Unit Wide authorizations. First, they enable better access for all hunters in the case of ranches located in units with extensive "checker boarding." Second, they support parcels that provide critical winter habitat, calving grounds and vital water resources, but may not be positioned to charge trespass fees due to size or location.

**MYTH:** Transferable hunting permits are contrary to the North American Model  
**FACT:** Also, a false statement. But don't just take our word for it; here and an excerpt from a recent study conducted by the Property and Environment Research Center: "Transferable hunting permits fit neatly into the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation from a regulatory, public management, and common-practice perspective. From a regulatory perspective, state agencies authorize and manage landowner permits just as they do all hunting permits. Whether awarded to a landowner or any other hunter, each hunting permit, commonly called a "tag," authorizes the holder to harvest one animal of a specific game species according to rules set by the state agency, which include when and where the permit is valid, what weapons can be used, and other regulations specific to the animal, such as sex or antler restrictions. Landowners, like all hunters, must also own an up-to-date license to hunt purchased from their state to receive permits, regardless of whether they intend to use or sell the permits."

**MYTH:** Allowing landowners to sell elk authorizations on the open market is a privatization of a public resource  
**FACT:** Elk authorizations are not a guaranteed harvest of an elk. Authorizations are simply the opportunity to participate in a fair chase elk hunt on private property. The state's wildlife is considered a public resource. When a landowner sells their elk authorizations, they are merely selling access to their private property; they are not selling the public resource.



**MYTH:** New Mexico resident hunters are priced out of the private tag market  
**FACT:** On average, 30-40% of EPLUS tags go to New Mexico resident hunters each year. This includes tags for primary, secondary, and special management zones. EPLUS authorizations are equal opportunity. That means they can be given or sold to a resident or non-resident hunter. Thousands of New Mexico resident hunters utilize landowner elk authorizations every year. Many EPLUS authorizations are donated by landowners to young sportsmen, veterans, charitable causes, family members, or neighbors in need, generating positive relationships and supporting communities and hunting traditions throughout the state.

**MYTH:** NM should move to a trespass fee system  
**FACT:** The EPLUS system is mutually beneficial to all stakeholders (landowners, hunters, & the state wildlife management agency). A straight trespass fee system discriminates against smaller landowners. In addition, many landowners have chosen to invest in land in New Mexico and to incur the cost of keeping it intact in order to be able to hunt. Eliminating EPLUS would disincentivize private investment in conserving New Mexico's most important remaining wildlife habitat.

The EPLUS system was established 40 years ago to assist the NMDGF in compensating private landowners for wildlife damages. The idea was to create a system where the open market would reward and incentivize private land wildlife conservation without reducing the overall agency budget. The system has evolved over decades into the very efficient program that exists today. EPLUS has substantially reduced the NMDGF need to reimburse landowners for wildlife depredation/damages and has grown into a program that recognizes the important benefits that private lands make to healthy elk populations.

Without EPLUS it is assumed that for a short period of time more elk permits will be distributed through the public land draw. However, this will increase the number of hunters on public land, push more elk onto private land, and reduce overall hunter satisfaction, leading to potential future reductions in public tags, greater difficulties in managing elk populations, and higher conflicts between sportsmen and landowners. More significantly, it will contribute to the sale and fragmentation of more land and accelerated loss of habitat and wildlife. EPLUS is a win-win. Repealing EPLUS will be a lose-lose with very significant ramifications for all stakeholders.

**MYTH:** New Mexico is the only state that allows landowners to sell authorizations  
**FACT:** Landowner hunting permits are a common tool used to achieve state wildlife conservation objectives in the Western US. There are 13 states that offer landowner authorizations and seven of those states offer transferable (i.e. sellable) authorizations (CA, CO, OR, NV, NM WA, & UT).

**MYTH:** EPLUS only benefits wealthy landowners  
**FACT:** EPLUS compensates landowners of all sizes who are investing in conservation of elk species and habitat, ensuring that the elk populations are healthy for generations to come and that small ranches and farms can promote sustainable landscapes and still meet their bottom line.

**We are working in a coalition of partners to defend the EPLUS program.** In 2021 we helped collect EPLUS stakeholder testimonials, compile EPLUS Myths vs. Facts, and host a community meeting for folks to learn about the effort to save EPLUS and share their voices.

# THE NEED TO SAVE EPLUS



WESTERN ALLIANCE



FOR A FRACTIONAL INCREASE IN THE ODDS OF DRAWING A TROPHY ELK TAG, CERTAIN SPORTSMEN'S GROUPS ARE TRYING TO DISMANTLE THE EPLUS PROGRAM. WHAT WOULD BE THE IMPACT OF DISMANTLING EPLUS? HERE ARE JUST A FEW TESTIMONIES FROM STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAM...

- "If I didn't have permits to sell I would have to sell my cattle due to three years of drought. We need these permits!"
- "My eldest son harvested his first elk this year because of an EPLUS tag. He is determined to continue this sport for as long as he can."
- "My wife and I are retired and live on a fixed income. The EPLUS tag allows us to harvest an elk to put meat in our freezer for the year."
- "Three years ago I donated my mature bull tag to a veteran. He and his dad were able to hunt together and got a real nice bull the morning of the first day of the season."



- "As a rancher, we depend on EPLUS to put food on our table and promote elk herds on our private and surrounding forest land."
- "The program allows me to dedicate my land to wildlife habitat. [EPLUS is] the best program to provide habitat for elk."

- "On average, elk eat 3% of their body weight per day, so 50 elk, weighing on average 800 lbs, consume 12,000 lb of forage per day or 36,000 lbs of forage per month. 36,000 lbs of forage is enough to sustain 33 head of cattle in the same period of time. In the absence of elk, we could increase the number of cattle on our property. Instead, we lease additional pasture. Elk periodically knock down fences while moving across property lines. Broken fences lead to unaccounted cattle, and ultimately lost income. We are not making a profit from the EPLUS program, it provides part of the budget for operating expenses and is crucial for the family ranching operation."
- "I think the EPLUS program has done a good job at helping manage the elk population in unit 4. I do not want my property to be overrun by elk."
- "I have a small parcel that qualifies for the EPLUS program. Each year I get a permit. I donate the permit to disabled veterans so they can hunt."

• "I think our New Mexico herd is too large. Elk eat the best grass in my pastures every year. It is hard for landowners to get or increase the number of EPLUS tags they get to use. I know that if the EPLUS program goes away, landowners' only solution to the elk problem would be to kill elk. I hope it never comes to that solution."

• "The EPLUS program enables me, as a landowner (through the sale of tags) to be compensated for the damages to my property by elk. The hunters that purchase my tags contribute to our local economy."

• "We basically raise the elk, feed them and water them. It's nice to get some compensation for the damage that they do."

• "I run a small ranch containing 200 acres on the state road 112 south of Tierra Amarilla, a crossing for elk and deer which ruins my fences but I only get one elk permit. It is not enough to keep with all maintenance and all grass lost due to elk and deer."



• "Every year from early spring to the late fall elk graze our fields, usually from dusk to dawn. Some years the loss from grazing is significant. In 2019 we suffered a loss of just under 300 bales to our annual hay harvest, cost to us \$3000. When we receive mature bull tag we are able to recover some of the cost by selling our tag to local outfitters or when we get a cow tag we put meat in the freezer."

• "My husband is retired and we rely heavily on this food to get us through the year on fixed incomes. We have also helped other families by donating the tag so other families are able to hunt and put food on their tables."

• "The EPLUS program is one of the best options for locals to hunt their home districts and the landowners do a great job of keeping the land in great condition for the elk populations. I strongly believe EPLUS is great the way it is."

• "The benefit of our EPLUS tags are very important to our family. With the rising cost of meat in today's market the venison we are able to harvest is an extremely valuable resource that gets us through tough times."

• "Landowners feed, water, salt, and maintain fences that house the "state's" elk. We are unable to run livestock to capacity with these elk. If they do away with the EPLUS system, what will the state do to compensate for the damages?"

One particular issue that we focused on in New Mexico in 2021 is EPLUS. There is an ongoing effort to eliminate the EPLUS program, which essentially provides elk tags to landowners in exchange for providing about 50% of the state's elk habitat. The elimination of EPLUS would be damaging for the local economy, would disincentivize conservation efforts on private lands, take away hunting opportunities for local folks, and take away an important tool for compensating landowners for elk depredation.

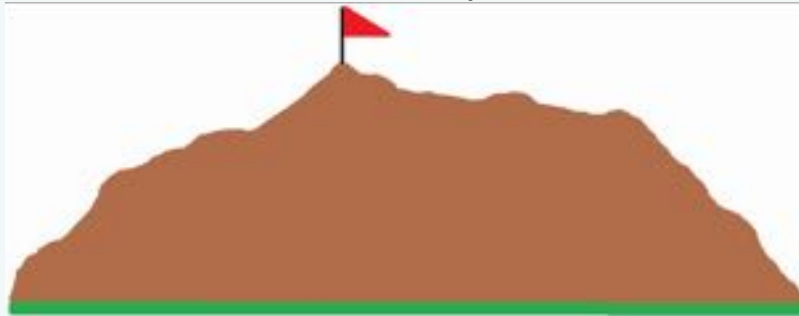


We held a community meeting and have been working to advocate for saving EPLUS.



# 2022 CPLA FUNDRAISING

**GOAL: \$150,000**



Through discretionary donations of membership fees, corporate sponsorships, and major support from partners, our goal in 2022 is to raise \$150,000 to support Our Team, and to maintain a strong organization. Become a high-impact donor to support the mission of conservation and help us get to the top of Chama Peak!

## **Suggested amounts for high-impact donations:**

	\$5,000
	\$10,000
	\$25,000
	\$50,000

\*Our 2022 discretionary fundraising goals for were set to help ensure that our organization has the administrative capacity in order to carry out our ambitious 2022 workplan and to maintain a strong organization. Discretionary donations to CPLA are tax deductible and provide crucial support to our team of professional staff and independent contractors.

Learn more about Our Team at <https://chamapeak.org/our-team> and please contact Executive Director Caleb Stotts at [caleb@chamapeak.org](mailto:caleb@chamapeak.org) with any questions.

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