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Protecting the Pecos River Watershed and New Mexico Communities - Grant

Grant Name	Protecting the Pecos River Watershed and New Mexico Communities - Grant	Today's Date	12/15/2023
Staff Size	321	Organization Name	Trout Unlimited, Inc.
Total Membership	350,000	Annual Operating Budget	\$111,626,735.00
BIPOC-led	No	Operating Budget Year	
C-Suite Staff		Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Notes			

Project Information

Project/Campaign Name	Protecting the Pecos River Watershed and New Mexico Communities	Project Address	
Project Location (State or Territory)	NM	Amount Requested from Alliance	\$50,000.00

Proposal Questions

1. Purpose/History Of Organization	Trout Unlimited's (TU's) mission is to bring together diverse interests to care for and recover rivers and streams so that our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Our vision is for communities across America to engage in the work of repairing and renewing our rivers, streams and other water bodies on which we all depend. TU was founded in 1959 in Grayling, Michigan on the banks of the Au Sable River by a group of anglers who successfully sought to change the state's reliance on hatchery production of trout into a program that focused on protecting and restoring fish habitat. Today, TU is the nation's largest grassroots coldwater conservation organization working to achieve our mission on a local, state and national level through dedicated staff and an extensive volunteer network of over 150,000 volunteers organized in 420 local chapters.	7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes	Outcomes we seek to achieve over the next year include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Elevate voices from traditional Hispanic and Indigenous frontline communities with a connection to the watershed. · Broaden the support network by bringing new voices to the table, with an emphasis on underserved communities and youth. This includes exploring opportunities to provide direct funding to partners where financial resources are a barrier to participation. · Profile voices from the outdoor recreation business community in support of clean water and public lands in the region. · Prevent exploratory drilling of the Jones Hill mineral deposits and expansion of new mining claims within the Pecos River watershed through a two-year segregation order initiated at the onset of the mineral withdrawal. · Provide capacity for federal agencies through TU's National Partnership Agreement with the Forest Service and advocate for Inflation Reduction Act funding.
2. Final Success	TU will be successful when we secure federal protections for the headwaters of New Mexico's Pecos River through an administrative mineral withdraw for approximately 166,000 acres of public lands administered by the Santa Fe	8. Evaluate Your Progress	We will evaluate progress by the following milestones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Conduct three events in 2024 that connect new stakeholders to the Pecos River through field visits and outdoor recreation pursuits like hiking and fly-

National Forest, ensuring future generations have access to clean water, wilderness quality lands, and recreational opportunities in one of the state's premier outdoor destinations.

fishing.

- Author and place five earned media pieces – LTEs and guest columns – in statewide and regional publications, including voices from the outdoor recreation community.
- Conduct radio interviews highlighting the importance of the campaign, including reaching Spanish-speaking audiences.
- Organize weekly and monthly meetings for coalition partners, including meetings with USFS and BLM leadership.
- Completion of required BLM cadastral survey and legal description for the administrative mineral withdrawal's Federal Register notice.
- Initiation of two-year segregation order and NEPA process upon the publication of the Federal Register notice for the administrative mineral withdrawal.
- Lead public comment on draft NEPA documents for the coalition and local communities.

3. Location Details

The Pecos River drains from the southernmost portion of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, which has shaped its landscapes and people who depend on it since time immemorial. The river is a haven for native fish and wildlife, the lifeblood of a local agricultural economy still dependent on centuries old and hand-dug irrigation systems, and a centerpiece of the region's outdoor recreation economy.

It's here that the southernmost extent of the Rocky Mountains gives way to high-desert environs characterized by mesas and plains. It's a region still largely undeveloped and holds tremendous promise as both a corridor and refugia for species adjusting to a changing climate. The upper Pecos watershed supports a diverse array of native wildlife, including peregrine falcons, Mexican spotted owls, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, northern leopard frogs, and a unique population of Rio Grande cutthroat trout. The area is also home to a rich and diverse plant community, noted by the presence of Holy Ghost ipomopsis, a flowering member of the phlox family that grows only in a handful of locations along Pecos River tributaries.

The watershed also holds tremendous mineral wealth and is currently the target of a multi-national exploratory mining company intent on developing the watershed's mineral resources, including millions of tons of gold, silver, zinc, copper, and lead. This type of mining is responsible for the legacy of acid mine drainage pollution that has impacted communities across the West for over 100 years.

9. TCA Funding Plan

TCA funds will support staff resources and campaign management, including engaging decision-makers, organizing community meetings and events, producing earned media content, and supporting local partners. We will pass \$5,000 to local partners in the year ahead whose lack of financial support may be a barrier to participating in these efforts, such as the Flower Hill Institute, Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO), and the Semilla Project.

In doing so, we continue to broaden and diversify the network of support for this campaign, bringing new voices to the table, including youth, and underserved communities. This could include events that bring people to the Pecos watershed through outdoor activities like hiking and fly-fishing. In 2022, for example, TU volunteers partnered with the National Park Service on a fishing event for Tribal leaders and their families along the Pecos River, and we hope to pursue similar opportunities this year.

Beyond the immediate threat of mining to the watershed, climate change has exacerbated the challenges of drought and wildfire and threatened the reliability of surface water downstream and the region's outdoor recreation appeal. In 2022, the Hermit's Peak-Calf Canyon wildfire—the largest in New Mexico's history—burned large portions of the Santa Fe National Forest (SFNF) but largely spared the Pecos watershed. However, fire severity in neighboring watersheds highlights the threat of catastrophic wildfire and the effects to water supplies, and wildlife.

The upper watershed is a hub for New Mexico's outdoor-based tourism and recreation economy, including the recently established Pecos Canyon State Park. The Pecos River is New Mexico's second most-popular trout fishery, and the surrounding area is a premier destination for non-motorized recreation and a gateway to the 223,000-acres Pecos Wilderness, the state's most visited wilderness area.

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our goal is to mobilize a broad and diverse support network, from local communities to Congressional offices, to achieve a 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal for the Pecos River headwaters region, initiated by the Biden administration in 2024, which would go into effect by January 2025. Since learning of the mining threat in the spring of 2019, TU has worked alongside community partners to mobilize opposition to Comexico LLC's mining interests, elevate local voices, and galvanize support for protecting the watershed around shared goals of protecting ecological and cultural resources.

Over four years of coalition-building and community engagement have positioned this campaign as one of the most broadly supported mineral withdrawal proposals in the nation and put the watershed on the radar of top officials with the Biden administration. Highlights include:

- securing resolutions and letters of support by the Village of Pecos, San Miguel, and Santa Fe Counties;
- securing statements of support from all three state legislators representing the region (including New Mexico's Senate Majority Leader), New Mexico Governor Lujan Grisham, all five members of New Mexico's Congressional delegation, and the Pueblos of Jemez and Tesuque; and
- obtaining an endorsement from the Santa Fe New Mexican editorial board.

In the year ahead, our efforts are laser focused on influencing federal leaders in Washington DC, and leveraging the broad and diverse community of supporters we've helped bring together

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

For 60+ years, TU has engaged millions of people and diverse partners to fulfill our mission to care for and recover rivers and streams. TU's growing equity practice draws from our decade-old Diversity and Inclusion Workgroup. Together, staff, trustees, and volunteers continue to create shared language, grow our understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion, diversify staff, and develop learning resources and policies.

Our New Mexico team strives to strengthen ecological and economic resilience in rural New Mexico, a predominantly BIPOC inhabited area afflicted by generational poverty, by accomplishing projects in collaboration with communities. Our local staff have built strong relationships with a variety of stakeholders including Hispanic ranchers, outdoor businesses, land management agencies and community members critical to the success of our work.

in recent years to get this proposal over the finish line. This entails working with Congressional offices to pressure agency leaders to act, directly engaging decision-makers at local, state, and federal levels, and continuing to grow our network of supporters, including those historically underrepresented in federal decision-making.

Specifically, we will focus on the following objectives:

Organize grassroots advocacy that is inclusive of traditional communities and local leadership through the Stop Terrero Mine (STM) Coalition. TU leads the Pecos protection efforts in partnership with members of the STM coalition, a group of regional water advocates, tribal leaders, land grant heirs, environmentalists, recreationists, and local government officials who are committed to the long-term protection of the river and its headwater streams. Through the coalition, we elevate community voices through letters of support, coordinate petitions addressed to key decision makers, and hold public meetings for community members to engage with elected officials and agency leaders.

Coordinate with Congressional offices and national conservation organizations to advocate for federal protections with senior Biden administration officials. Top officials in Washington DC will make a formal decision to move forward with administrative protections for the Pecos watershed. With support from TU's government affairs team in DC and working closely with Congressional offices, we will continue to apply pressure and engage leaders in the Biden administration to prioritize the Pecos watershed for federal protections. This includes using our position as a national organization to highlight local support and spotlight on-the-ground leaders who are representatives of the diverse communities where we work. If we are successful, the Santa Fe National Forest will initiate NEPA to start the administrative process.

Partner with the Santa Fe National Forest to assist with completion of an environment assessment and other National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements essential to completing a mineral withdrawal. In October of 2023, the SFNF invited TU to assist with completion of an environment assessment using our National Partnership Agreement with the United States Forest Service (USFS). TU will work with USFS leaders to explore how we can assist and add capacity to the NEPA and other administrative process,

including supporting NEPA requirements through a third party contracting scenario. TU will also advocate for Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for local offices to further support capacity.

5. Key Decision Makers

The Biden administration is the final decision maker, including Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, USFS Chief Randy Moore, BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning, and officials with the White House Council for Environmental Quality.

11. Confidential Items N/A

Support from local public land managers is critical to garnering an endorsement from national leaders. Securing support from SFNF Supervisor Shaun Sanchez, Regional Forester Michiko Martin, and New Mexico BLM Director Melanie Barnes is imperative.

In recent years, TU and our partners have built support from the ground-up to secure hard-to-come-by endorsements from local USFS leaders. TU has worked with USFS Region 3 and the SFNF to address capacity concerns for the administrative mineral withdrawal process by negotiating a potential agreement for TU to support the NEPA process. TU continues to advocate for IRA funding for local USFS and BLM offices to hire staff and contractors necessary to lead the administrative mineral withdrawal process.

We also work with members of New Mexico's Congressional delegation to collaboratively pursue a suite of protections for the watershed. Recently, we supported the reintroduction of the Pecos Watershed Protection Act to permanently protect the headwaters of the Pecos River from mining impacts and expand the Pecos Wilderness to include roadless areas recently targeted for mineral exploration. Passage of the legislation complements efforts to secure a 20-year mineral withdrawal through the Administration.

The outdoor recreation community is also a key stakeholder. The Pecos provides enormous value to San Miguel County, and cities like Santa Fe and Albuquerque, whose tourism-related industries are served by the outdoor-oriented population. According to the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, over 158,000 anglers fished the Pecos River during the 2020-2021 fishing season, and approximately \$87 million was spent on recreation in San Miguel County in 2020.

6. Elevate Voices

A center of Native American culture for thousands of years, the region houses archeological and historic resources, and is used for traditional practices by

descendants of those who settled here, including the Tesuque and Jemez-Pecos Pueblos of New Mexico and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. For hundreds of years, the greater Pecos River Valley has been home to traditional Hispanic communities where acequia-based agriculture, dependent on clean water originating in the Pecos River headwaters, has thrived.

Today, most of the headwater region threatened by mining lies within rural San Miguel County, with a population of 27,000 people across nearly 5,000 square miles. 78 percent of residents identify as Hispanic, median household income is less than \$45,000, and less than one-quarter of adults have a college degree. In these communities “agua es vida” is a way of life and locals are united in their opposition to new mining exploitation.

Protecting the Pecos River from future mining has diverse and broad appeal, and at the heart of the campaign are social and environmental justice issues for Hispanic and Indigenous New Mexicans who have been historically underrepresented in federal policy decisions impacting public lands. These communities have been disproportionately harmed by legacy mining pollution. The Pecos administrative mineral withdrawal is a key opportunity for the Biden administration to support traditional New Mexican communities who depend on clean water for their livelihoods.

Through our leadership role in the Stop Terrero Mine Coalition, TU local staff serve as a bridge between local leaders and communities and elected decision-makers by organizing public meetings, authoring letters of support, speaking with Congressional offices, and leveraging relationships on Capitol Hill, we work to elevate local voices and draw attention to a largely rural and underserved region of the state.

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