



Rio Fernando de Taos Revitalization *Platica*

A Community Conversation

**On November 14, 2019,
74 Taoseños came
together at the Rio
Fernando *Platica* to talk
about their connections
and concerns with the
Rio Fernando.**



**Together, they explored
what can be done to
revitalize the Rio Fernando
de Taos.**



Rio Fernando *Platica* Guiding Questions

This report presents the findings of this community conversation.

What participants love about the Rio Fernando, their concerns and proposed solutions.

What do you love about the Rio Fernando?

What are your concerns with it?

What can be done?

How to stay involve and revitalize the Rio Fernando.

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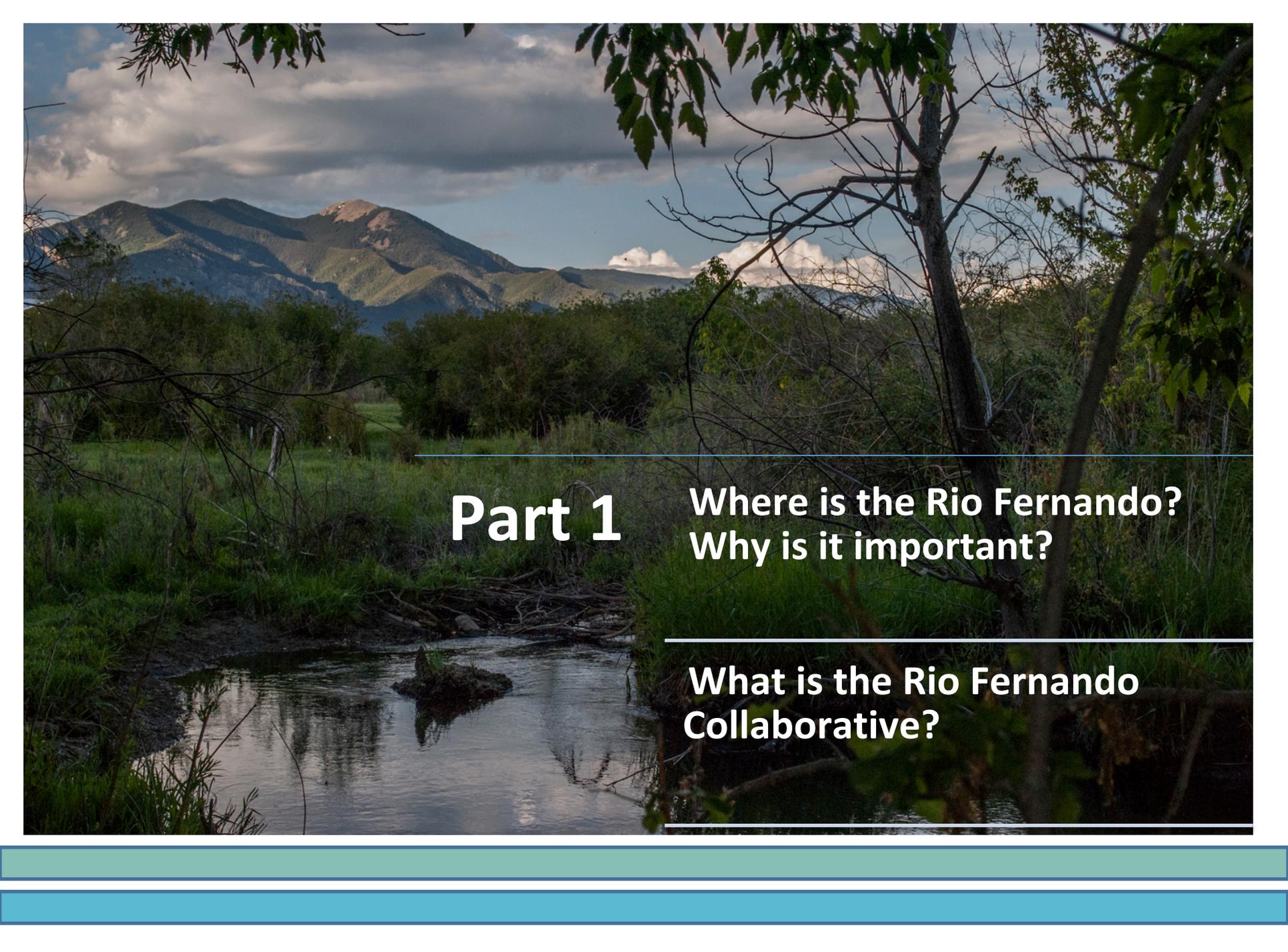
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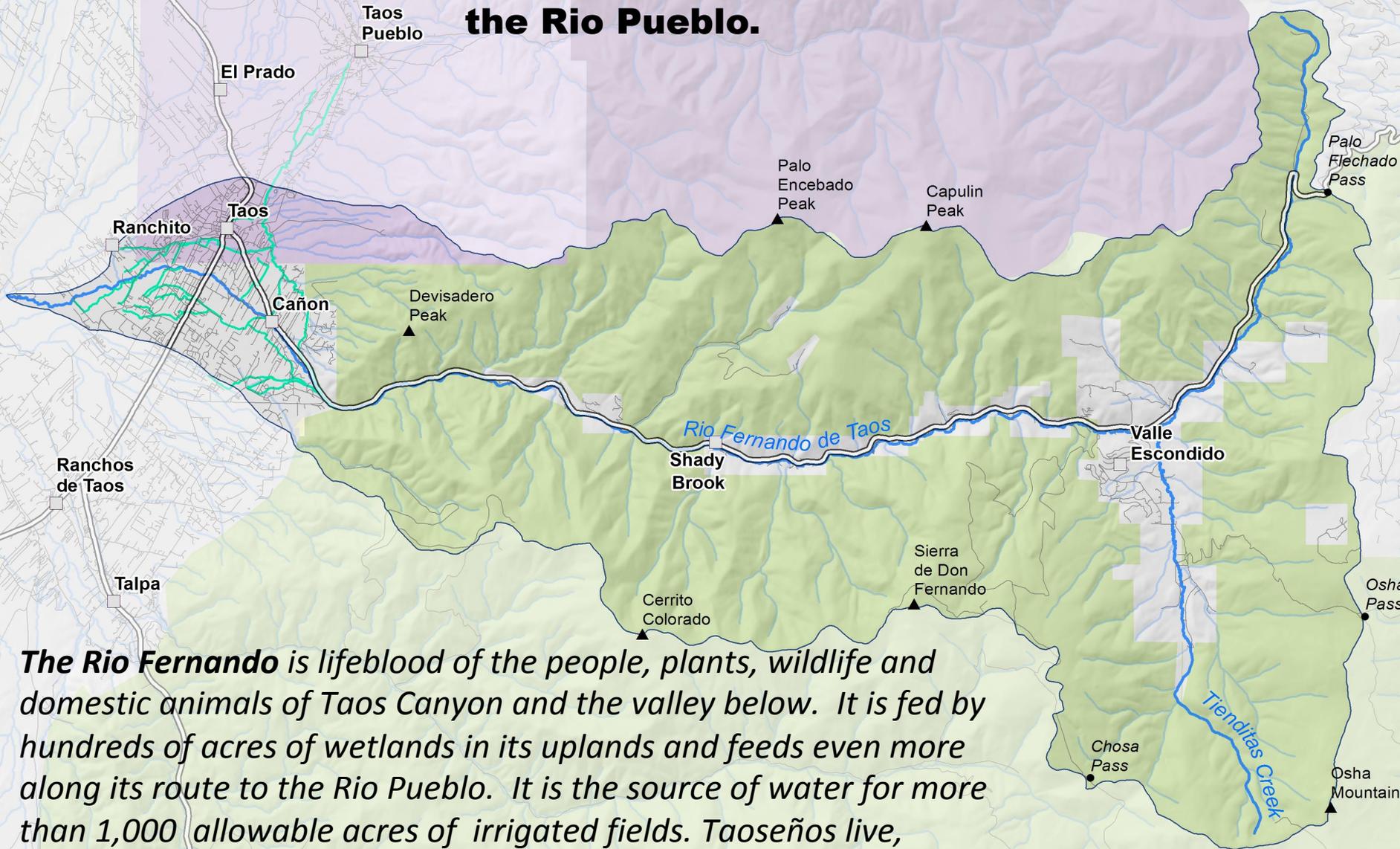


Part 1

**Where is the Rio Fernando?
Why is it important?**

**What is the Rio Fernando
Collaborative?**

The Rio Fernando River runs down Taos Canyon, through the Town of Taos and into the Rio Pueblo.



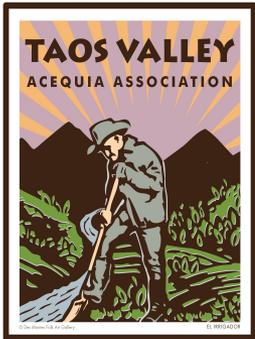
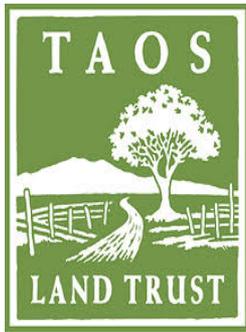
The Rio Fernando is lifeblood of the people, plants, wildlife and domestic animals of Taos Canyon and the valley below. It is fed by hundreds of acres of wetlands in its uplands and feeds even more along its route to the Rio Pueblo. It is the source of water for more than 1,000 allowable acres of irrigated fields. Taoseños live, cultivate, recreate, hunt, fish and find solace and inspiration in the Rio Fernando watershed.





The Rio Fernando de Taos Revitalization Collaborative is a collective of elected officials, agencies, groups, and individuals working to bring the Rio Fernando back to life. We improve water quality; strengthen our acequia traditions and culture; keep the river and its acequia waters flowing; better protect our communities from wildfire; and connect people to the land and the water they love.

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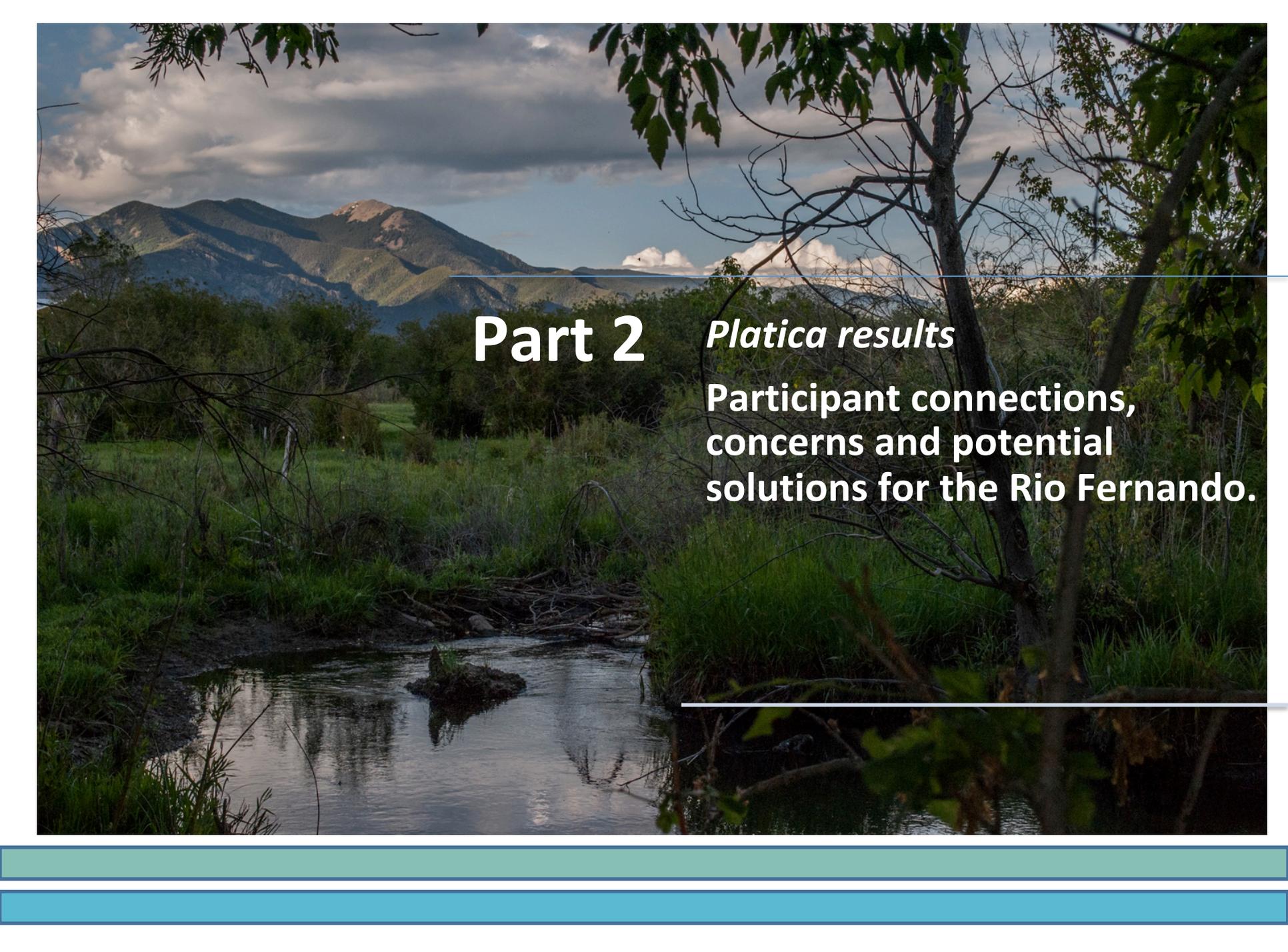


The Nature
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*The Rio Fernando
Collaborative is
Working Together
to bring
the Rio Fernando
Back to Life*

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Rio Fernando Collaborative.



Part 2

Platica results

Participant connections,
concerns and potential
solutions for the Rio Fernando.

Connections



“The Rio Fernando feeds my soul.”
- *Platica* participant

Rio Fernando *Platica* participants spoke of a range of personal connections and experiences with the river.

Many live on or near the river and love the wildlife it supports. Some families have lived in, fished and grazed Taos Canyon for generations.

Others moved to Taos for the natural environment, such as that of the Rio Fernando, and want to see it preserved.

Many *platica* participants are *parciantes* and rely on the Rio Fernando to irrigate their fields and gardens.

Participants love to walk along the river, in its parks and open spaces. Their children love to play in the parks, and their dogs in the water.

Some participants are already actively engaged in Rio Fernando revitalization – repairing wetlands and acequias, cleaning ditches, generating native grasses, controlling invasive plants - through an organization they belong to or on their own initiative.

Platica participants said they want the future Rio Fernando to be...

Healthy

Clean

Biodiverse

Flowing

“Clean, healthy, useable river with high biodiversity.”

“Safe for creatures great and small.”

“Year-round consistent quantity.”

Multi-use

Pristine

Balanced

More beavers.
Fishable.

Vital

More water

Sustainable

Organized &
Maintained

***Platica* participants envision achieving that future Rio Fernando through citizen stewardship and collaboration.**

“Where people are contributing to the health of it and doing their best.”

“The majority cares for the Rio Fernando and become its stewards.”

“There is more community collaboration.”

“A healthy ditch depends a lot on the people who live along the ditch.”



***Platica* participants identified nine issues to be addressed.**

- Water flow and quantity
- Water quality (in general)
- Water pollution, specifically E.coli contamination
- Wildlife habitat & wetland restoration
- Acequia health
- Riparian health
- Hazard fuel reduction
- Private land health
- More public spaces

After identifying the issues, participants shared with each other their concerns and questions they have about the topic, and potential solutions.

The following pages summarize the conversations held about each topic in small groups.

Water Flow & Quantity

Concerns

- Water flow and quantity is inconsistent: 50 years ago flow was twice what it is today.
- Snow is not reaching and melting into the groundwater.
- Concerned there is not enough water for wildlife.
- An abundance of deadfall in the river is restricting flow.
- Wetland expansion: meadows act as sponges.
- Too many trees are competing for water.
- Forests not allowed to burn. They used to be logged and fix themselves through fire.

Questions

- What has changed since 50 years ago?
- 50 years ago, were there as many homes? (Answer: no) How much flow and quantity is influenced by the increase in homes?
- Will there be enough water if it is retained in wet meadows?
- How much water are we using?
- How does any of the water get back to the Rio Pueblo?

Potential Solutions

- Raise awareness about the problem.
- Citizen education: have classes in community to show people how to take care of the river.
- Citizen stewardship: give citizens a portion of the forest to take care of/thin out.
- More assistance and funding to help clean the river.
- Clean ditches; keep animals out.
- Harvest water.
- More aggressive thinning on USFS land.

Water Quality

Concerns

- Polluted acequia water and is contaminating vegetables gardens.
- Septic tanks.
- Invasive weeds, such as sedge rush.
- Storm water from streets running into acequia and river.
- Port-a-potties for men's shelter.
- Ag tax re-assessment: land is being sold.

Questions

- Is the Rio Fernando a perennial or intermittent river?
- How can septic systems get tested?
- What are the parameters of the water that is sampled?
- Runoff from roads & driveways. What pollution comes from that? Gas? Salt?

Potential Solutions

- Restoration of wetlands in the upper watershed.
- Water sampling. (Taos Pueblo has sites below the Rio Fernando on the Rio Pueblo.)
- Policies: the Hahn Resolution, or Classification of Dirty Water Rule.
- Prioritize where E.coli is.
- Enforce public sewer.
- Expand sewer system for city sewer.
- Information about risks of irrigating with Rio Fernando water.
- Increase sampling. More funding for NM Environment Department.
- More enforcement of buffers, setbacks.
- Make sure river stays classified as perennial.
- More information about weeds. such as sedge rush.
- Move volunteer opportunities.

Water Pollution: E. coli

Concerns

- Pollution is an indicator of poor health in the whole watershed.
- In the past, landowners say you could fish below Divisadero.
- Could fish 9 miles up, too, but now it goes dry.
- There is a lack of fish.
- Beavers need to stay . We want to maintain that habitat.
- Wetlands are important.

Questions

- Where is the river bank incised?
- Are there other waterborne diseases? Maybe we should ask the hospital the rate of waterborne diseases?
- Are beavers protected? Is there an ordinance requiring landowners to keep beavers when they show up?

Potential Solutions

- Fence in the riparian pasture. Build more fencing.
- Advertise/check if cattle gaps can be funded by Ag grants or others funding available to landowners.
- Enforcement of USFS permits over cattle fencing/livestock.
- Enforce septic inspections. Septic tanks need to be 100ft from the river. Should be identified, mapped and repaired.
- Offer grants to replace faulty septics.
- River banks surveys. Identify where it is incised.
- Investigation into waterborne disease levels in Taos and Ranchos.

Acequia Health

Concerns

- Acequia health is river health. For a clean acequia, we need a clean river.
- There are too many trees on banks, too many fences, animal grazing on banks, old & problematic septic systems.
- Runoff from hillside pollute the river, such as salts, trash, oil from Highway 64 & Canyon East.
- There is trash in acequias, lots of dog poop, as well.
- Absentee landowners not paying their dues or cleaning their ditches.
- Folks with water rights don't understand the value of those rights
- Uninspected, old septic tanks that may be leeching into water.
- Climate change is really affecting the way we do things- we need to clean the acequias a month earlier than we used to, water dries up a month earlier.

Questions

- When are cleaning days?
- What is the trash pickup policy?
- Would we be better off to refill the aquifer with the excess water in the spring, when we can't use all the water?

Potential Solutions

- Visit the head gate for an explanation of how this all works.
- Become knowledgeable in acequia law.
- Get goats for the willow.
- Possible solution: retaining pond landscaping with constructed wetlands attached for natural filtration.
- Talk to landowners who don't use the land/rights, ask to build community gardens.

Continued on next page.

Acequia Health

Potential Solutions

- Water banking: you can share your water but not lose your rights.
- Establish a town ordinance for property owners to clean their land all the way up to the river/ acequia.
- Create a walking path / one way road of Los Pandos.
- Neighbors need to talk to each other, parciantes need to be educated.
- Beavers are good, just not too close to the head gates.
- Develop a stream commission for all the acequias to make sure sharing water in times of shortage (especially now with climate change, and new acequias being restored).

Riparian Health

Concerns

- Cattle polluting the water and destroying structure of river edge and wetlands.
- Restoration takes planning and money.
- Private owners and cattle associations believe it is their river.
- Want to be able to walk the whole river.
- The in-town region of the river doesn't have the life that other rivers do.
- Stagnant river, breeding ground for bacteria and disease. Barely moving expect in spring.
- The river is clogged with deadfall.
- Lack of working together. Not enough on the ground work.
- Near El Nogal, people make trails when it floods in the spring.
- There is a lot of trash.
- There are a lot of invasive species, now that we have started irrigating.

Potential Solutions

- Restore upper watershed forest.
- Bring back beaver. "I would love to see beavers."
- Try to make river public land.
- More community collaboration.
- Need to do water testing.
- Talk to Las Vegas watershed collaborative.
- Apply for grants/offer a community grant-writing class.
- Work to bring awareness to community.
- Bring a rancher to the meetings, and other landowners.
- Reintroduce wildlife, create corridors along river.
- Partnerships with local schools/men's shelter to help facilitate healing the river.
- Earth filters – get grants to pay people.

Wildlife Habitat: Beavers & Wetlands

Concerns

- Homes should have not been built in close proximity to wetlands and acequias.
- Construction going on at riverside property impacts wildlife habitats; especially beavers.
- Concerned about new agricultural techniques and its impact on wetland wildlife.
- Hoping to preserve the wetlands and acequias.
- Wildlife that has been negatively affected by drought, lack of protection and construction.
- “Pristine lands” are important: no people, no roads, no trash, no houses, no construction sites.
- If water sources are overused, less and less wildlife and lands are available for a sustainable place to live.
- Concerned with river water levels due to changes to the acequias.

Questions

- Have you seen wildlife moving back into the Rio Fernando Park since recent efforts?
- How are the acequias functioning now?
- Water management? Do rivers have rights to flooding on lands that surround it?

Potential Solutions

- Maintain Riparian Zones.
- More Untouched Zones with Rules for Protection
- Give the River Rights.
 - Humans have limited access in parks and so on.
 - Wildlife is permitted ALWAYS. (Preservation)
- Water Use Laws/Regulations.

Continued on next page.

Wildlife Habitat: Beavers & Wetlands

Potential Solutions

- Contiguous Wildlife Habitat Creation:
 - Pre-existing organizations coming together.
 - Government collaborations.
 - Top-down disbursement of ideas and power.
 - Grassroots sanctions.
 - Use of an umbrella organization (such as this one!).
 - Bring all walks of life together (bottom-up!).
 - Intrinsic rights of a conservation corridor (of the river).
 - Designating land as private vs. public for preservation.
 - Facilitate discussions with landowners.
- Considerate/Low impact Land Access:
 - Cannot be created on private lands.
 - Must convince people that water has intrinsic rights.
 - Designated path or patch of land along either side of the watershed that can be protected and used for public use.
 - Trash cans/recycling at entrances and exits.
 - Trails for walking running, animals, recreational activities.
 - Educating those along the river about these issues.
 - Zoning and property issues.

Hazard Fuel Reduction

Concerns

- Wildfire potential.
- Water delivery.
- Water volume.

Potential Solutions

- Understory elimination of ladder fuels.
- More grant monies for Rx.
- Model patchy clumpy desired effect.
- Do not be limited by political boundaries, such as municipalities, USFS, et al.
- Optimize stand density for landscape hydration.
- Resource Awareness on private lands, specifically check damming run-off from private forest thinning. (Swales example from WPA era/Isaac Walton League.)
- Segment the river corridor as if forest conditions. (1 – less invasive, fire tolerant species, 2 – interspaces, 3 – clumps.)

Private Land Health

Concerns

- Making changes to property/an outsider dictating changes.
- Concerns about accuracy in changes/plan of change.
- Dead wood/trees in river, choked up.
- Climate change impacts/patterns changing: water temp, insect life, adapting to changes.
- Water flow/temperature rising in river.
- Beavers are nice until they ruin structures.
- Invasive species: undesirable vegetation growth on bottom of river.
- Abandoned lands allow for invasive weeds to come in.
- Communities losing water rights, land never floods yet still need flood insurance.
- Old septic systems leaking.

Questions

- Who pays?

Potential Solutions

- Manage the timing/intensity of grazing.
- Protect the banks of the river.
- Put in vegetation on bare banks.
- Hardening off the river would keep the banks from being ruined.
- Development prevents ranchers from being able to graze in areas away from river.
- Ordinances to mitigate abandonment that allows spread of invasive species.
- Workforce to cut weeds in the right stage to prevent them from seeding.

More Public Space

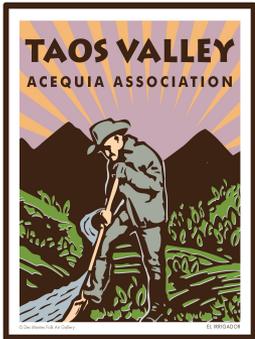
Concerns

- Need safe place to walk/run, bike ride, horseback ride, ride off-road motorized vehicles.
- Need easy and safe trailhead access for higher utilization.
- Trail system focused: no motorized and non-motorized.
- Trails designated a certain way because of pollution.
- Trail system use is improving knowledge and ownership of the river.
- Would like to use trail system along the river through town to get to destinations in town.
- Trails not gated. Work better where people work and live.
- Use trail system to connect to other trail systems.
- Staggering lack of funds.

Potential Solutions

- Collaborate with other existing planning efforts for trails in the area.
- Working on trail system throughout Enchanted Circle (2017 Enchanted Circle Plan).
- Should have Taos Main street group involved in a discussion on walkability. Would connect to goals in Strong at Heart.
- Taos Main street would be good partnership for trail in town.
- Trail could connect to Rift Valley trail and UNM campus.

AMIGOS
BRAVOS



The Rio Fernando Collaborative is grateful to everyone who attended the Platica for sharing their concerns, knowledge and ideas.

The Collaborative looks forward to working with everyone to bring the Rio Fernando Back to Life.

Please stay involved in the Revitalization of the Rio Fernando. [Sign up](#) to receive Rio Fernando Revitalization updates.

The Nature
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