

## WETLANDS PROGRAM PLAN FOR NEW MEXICO

Updated 11/29/2012

Since 2003, the New Mexico Environment Department Surface Water Quality Bureau (SWQB) Wetlands Program and its partners have made substantial progress in the development of a robust program that focuses on measures that will restore and protect its wetlands. This updated Wetlands Program Plan describes the achievements made since this Plan was approved in 2010 by EPA. It also lays out a pathway to continue program development for the next five years. Through this updated 5-year Wetlands Program Plan we hope to continue progress towards a comprehensive and sustainable Wetlands Program for New Mexico.

### **PARTNERSHIP GOALS**

The principal goal which informs the work of the SWQB Wetlands Program and its many public and private partners is a desire to restore and maintain wetlands, allowing them to fully function as natural systems. This goal can be accomplished through collaborative partnerships that contribute to complete large-scale major restoration projects, and to restore numerous wetlands within a watershed an acre at a time.

A second overarching goal is to create a sustainable wetlands plan of action by developing sustainable funding sources. SWQB Wetlands Program and its partners are considering ways to achieve sustainability through potential funding, programs, and management activities such as wetlands banks, in lieu fee programs, through state-sponsored programs such as the proposed Healthy Rivers Initiative, through partnerships associated with our New Mexico Mapping Consortium and our NGO and Agency Wetlands Roundtables, by continuing to obtain matching grants through foundations, by organizing and assisting voluntary programs, and by obtaining in-kind resources and assistance through the efforts of watershed groups and their volunteers.

The priority technical goals within the next five years are to identify and maintain simple, effective and efficient methods for monitoring wetlands, and to work with our partners towards a complete inventory and baseline assessment of New Mexico's wetland resources.

### **SWQB WETLANDS PROGRAM EFFORTS**

The Mission of the SWQB Wetlands Program is to protect, restore and to increase self-sustaining and naturally functioning wetlands and riparian areas. The Wetlands Program emphasizes the role of wetlands in prevention and reduction of water quality impairments and providing habitat and life requirements for wildlife. Currently SWQB Wetlands Program development is primarily supported by EPA Wetlands Program Development Grants competitively awarded by EPA Region 6 under the CWA §104(b)(3). The State of New Mexico provides a portion of funding for Wetlands Program Staff through the Corrective Action Fund Program.

In 2003, the SWQB Wetlands Program began the development of a wetland restoration program (Wetlands Action Plan Program), which is part of a larger mission to improve and protect the state's watersheds and water quality. Through the CWA Section 319(h) Nonpoint Source Management Program, SWQB provides funding for the organization of watershed groups (federal, state and local agencies, NGO's and the public including private landowners formed to manage public watersheds) and a TMDL planning process (Watershed Based Plans) to reduce pollutants in their watersheds. The Wetlands Action Plan Program provides an opportunity and support for these established watershed groups to focus planning and resource improvement efforts on wetlands, riparian and buffer areas within their watersheds. To this end, the SWQB Wetlands Program is incorporated into the Nonpoint Source Management Plan for New Mexico.

The State has also incorporated wetlands assessment and monitoring into SWQB's Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program and wetlands assessment into the 10-year Monitoring Strategy. The SWQB Wetlands Program has focused its efforts on establishing wetlands assessment and monitoring that can be implemented with the assistance of its many partners. The assessment and monitoring goals of the SWQB Wetlands Program include:

- Continue to expand an inventory and classification of wetlands resources statewide;
- Develop and utilize assessment protocols to verify wetland condition, degradation, impacts and the causes of stress, and recovery;
- Document wetland gains and losses;
- Document results of wetland restoration projects and innovative techniques for restoration;
- Assess wetland resources to determine potential strategies for recovery of wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors;
- Use information generated by wetlands assessment to prioritize wetlands projects and protection within specific watersheds or regions.

The state's regulatory program applies to all surface waters of the State including wetlands. Specifically, these regulations are permitting under CWA §402, certification of dredge and fill under CWA §401, establishing water quality standards under CWA §303 (c) and reporting under CWA §§303(d) and 305(b).

Overall, New Mexico is making progress towards establishing a baseline for wetlands in the state to provide a picture of wetland types and condition. A rapid assessment protocol for the State's wetland resources is under development and use, which focuses on vulnerable and threatened wetland types. The protocol will be used consistently by the SWQB Wetlands Program and participating partners. Mapping and classifying wetlands in the state is progressing through partnerships and projects by SWQB Wetlands Program and others, and numerous demonstration restoration efforts using innovative techniques are in progress or in place.

New Mexico's wetlands including isolated wetlands are incorporated within the water quality standards definitions and are considered "surface waters of the State" (20.6.4.7 NMAC). The SWQB has recently successfully nominated and the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) adopted all naturally occurring wetlands within US Forest Service Wilderness Areas in New Mexico as Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW). Although wetlands have been included as previous ONRW nominations in the Valle Vidal and the Rio Santa Barbara areas, the more recent action is New Mexico's first success in applying Best Management Practices and improved anti-degradation policy to ONRW wetlands. The State continues this effort by preparing to nominate wetlands located in road-less areas adjacent to US Forest Service Wilderness Areas and in other ecologically important parts of the State. Updating and expanding a directory of Reference Standard Wetlands (best condition) to which ONRW status should apply will help aid in these efforts. The State also plans to use the data generated through assessment and monitoring to refine narrative water quality standards applicable to subclasses of wetlands.

### **WETLANDS PROGRAM PROGRESS**

Since the Wetlands Program Plan was developed in 2010, progress has been made on activities that expand the capacity of the Wetlands Program. Below is a list that highlights some of these accomplishments.

- Since 2010, the Wetlands Program has expanded its Wetlands Roundtable to include a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Roundtable that is exclusively geared towards NGO issues and needs. The NGO Wetlands Roundtable meets semiannually.

- Mapping and classification is nearly complete for the Canadian River basin and is ongoing for the Upper Rio Grande and adjacent areas. In addition to mapping, the landscape position, landform, water body type, water source classification and descriptors (LLWW) are being applied to the classes and subclasses of wetlands in order to identify functions that each wetland type provides. A Wetlands Mapping Consortium is being formed and maintained to assist in wetlands mapping throughout the State.
- The Wetlands Program has completed its first New Mexico Rapid Assessment Method (NMRAM) for Mid-Montane Riverine Wetlands Manual and Field Guide, and the SWQB Wetlands Program and its partners are taking the method to the field for data collection. A Statewide database for NMRAM data has been developed and is nearly ready for on-line access and data input.
- A Wetlands Vegetation Index of Biotic Integrity (VIBI) that will validate our NMRAM condition assessment is underway. Our 10-year Strategy for Wetlands Assessment and Monitoring is nearly complete.
- Eleven Wetlands Action Plans have been completed since the program started in 2003.
- Three Wetlands Demonstration Restoration Projects were completed since 2010 and we printed Healthy Streamside Wetlands Technical Guide in 2011.
- Review of our current Water Quality Standards to identify ways to improve and update regulations to be more applicable to wetlands and wetland subclasses is underway. Completing a review of other State's wetland regulations and participating with the Association of State Wetland Managers (ASWM) in a wetlands water quality standards project has augmented this effort.

## **OVERVIEW OF FIVE-YEAR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

To effectively develop basic program functions that form the foundation of wetlands management and protection, the following outlines core elements, actions and activities to protect and restore New Mexico's wetlands over the next five-year period.

### ***Program Development Activities for BUILDING AND MAINTAINING PARTNERSHIPS***

**Overall Objective:** The SWQB Wetlands Program relies on a substantial number of partners to implement the work on the ground. A core function of the five year plan is to continue building and maintaining partnerships to implement the Wetlands Program Plan, and to train and inform partners at all levels.

<b>Action: Continue to build and maintain partnerships</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Maintain a State Wetlands Roundtable (presently in its 6th year) composed of governmental and tribal partners to address challenges to New Mexico's wetlands resources.	x	x	x	x	x	State, federal, and tribal government partners on Roundtable	SWQB Wetlands Program
Maintain the NGO Roundtable meetings to provide training, and discuss resources for developing and maintaining initiatives, and addressing challenges to restoring and protecting New Mexico's wetlands.	x	x	x	x	X	Non- governmental partners on NGO Roundtable	SWQB Wetlands Program and NM Riparian Council
Work with Roundtables to ensure cooperation with Wetlands Program Plan goals. Develop annual actions to further the goals of this Plan.	x	x	x	x	x	Wetlands Roundtable NGO Roundtable	SWQB Wetlands Program
<b>Action: Identify and maintain simple, effective and efficient methods for monitoring wetlands through partnerships</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Identify a long-term sustainable wetlands monitoring strategy for watershed wetlands that can be maintained by local government or watershed groups		x	x	x	x	Local governments and Watershed Groups, NGO Roundtable	NGO Roundtable
Work collectively with all partners towards a long-term solution to wetlands monitoring, particularly the funding of long-term monitoring.		x	x	x	X	Agency and NGO Roundtables	NGO and Agency Roundtables

Create a wetlands monitoring strategy for determining restoration success and adaptive management that can be scalable to support both large scale and small scale projects.		x	x	x	x	Wetlands Roundtable NGO Roundtable	SWQB Wetlands Program
<b>Action: Identify opportunities to create sustainable ways to fund and accomplish wetlands restoration and protection work.</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Investigate the feasibility of creating a “short term funding source” that will promote funding of small scale restoration projects. This could make funds available to land owners who receive grants as reimbursement for expense incurred.	x	x	x	x	x	NGO Roundtable, Foundations, Banks, State Revolving Fund (SRF)	NGO Roundtable
Create Strategy to coordinate and leverage multiple funding sources. Encourage partners to work towards a large scale project with a large impact supported by numerous funding sources, such as accomplished in the Bitter Lakes area.	x	x	x	x	x	Agency Roundtable, NGO Roundtable	Agency and NGO Roundtables

**Program Development Activities for MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT Core Element**

**Overall Objective:** Develop a full and complete wetlands assessment and monitoring strategy consistent with *Elements of a State Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Program for Wetlands* (EPA, 2006) that the State can use to inform management decisions and achieve goals that protect and restore wetlands resources.

<b>Action: Continue to develop Elements of a State Water Quality Assessment and Monitoring Strategy for Wetlands beyond Elements 1 and 2</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Continue to develop monitoring design and sample sites that best serve the State’s assessment and wetland management objectives.	x	x	x	x	x	Agency Roundtable, NGO Roundtable and federal land management agencies, EPA.	SWQB MAS and Wetlands Program

Participate in National Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Work Group (NWMAWG) to stay abreast of new developments in wetland monitoring and assessment, and data analysis.	x	x	x	x	x	NWMAWG, EPA	SWQB Wetlands Program
<b>Action: Assess and monitor wetland resources by the development and use of Landscape, Rapid Assessment and Intensive Monitoring tools</b>							
<b>Activities</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Maintain a State Wetlands Mapping Consortium until New Mexico has, at a minimum, National Wetlands Inventory coverage of all wetlands resources.	x	x	x	x	x	USFWS NWI, Geospatial Advisory Committee, USFS, Roundtable Sub-Committee, Tribes	SWQB Wetlands Program (Geospatial Advisory Committee?)
Complete mapping and classification of the Canadian River drainage in the northeastern part of New Mexico, the Upper Rio Grande, the Rio Chama, and wetlands in the Jemez Mountains and surrounding areas.	x	x	x	x	x	USFWS, SLO, NMBGMR, Dept Homeland Security, ACOE, Cimarron Watershed Alliance, Village of Angel Fire, Virginia Tech, Sugarite State Park, Wind River Ranch, Cimarroncita Ranch, CS Ranch, ASWM, USFS, BLM, Pritzlaff Ranch, USFWS	SWQB Wetlands Program
Identify and complete other parts of the state that need to be mapped and classified, including USFS road-less areas adjacent to USFS Wilderness areas. Collaborate with tribes and include new areas not mapped	x	x	x	x	x	USFS, USFWS NWI, Mapping Consortium	SWQB Wetlands Program through Mapping Consortium
Continue to develop and promote the use of the New Mexico Rapid Assessment Method (NMRAM) for	x	x	x	x	x	UNM Nat. Her., ACOE, NMDOT, EPA, NMDGF, Consultants, Watershed Groups, Tribes, Others.	SWQB Wetlands Program

other riverine wetlands subclasses through training and other venues. (Conduct one training per year)							
Revise and apply NMRAM to other wetland types and to other parts of the State. Continue to collect NMRAM data following the SWQB Water Quality Assessment Rotational Schedule every other year.	x	x	x		x	SWQB Wetlands Program, UNM Nat Her., NMRAM Advisory Committee, consultants, others.	SWQB Wetlands Program
Verify and validate NMRAM methods through the use of Indicators of Ecological Integrity.	x	x		x	x	UNM Nat Her.	SWQB Wetlands Program
Update and expand database of reference standard wetlands using newly mapped wetland areas and classification as a basis for preliminary selection.		x	x	x	x	UNM Nat Her and mapping contractors	SWQB Wetlands Program
<b>Action: Track Monitoring data in a system that is accessible, updated on a timely basis, and integrated with other water quality data</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Continue development of web-based database for wetlands and begin coordination with other SWQB databases and data.	x	x	x	x	x	DoIT, UNM Nat Her.	SWQB Wetlands Program and SWQB DoIT

***Program Development Activities for WETLANDS REGULATORY PROGRAM Core Element***

**Overall Objective:** Promote the use of new and proven methods to protect and restore wetlands by regulated project proponents.

**Action: Adopt procedures and strengthen processes that protect wetlands through regulatory measures**

Activity	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Partners	Activity Lead
Maintain and improve the State's wetlands resources through development of sufficient mitigation ratios when mitigation is the only option. Include "no net loss" of function	x	x	x			ACOE	ACOE
Improve regulatory programs like the certification of Dredge and Fill under CWA Section 401 that provide mechanisms for regulation of wetlands activities. Work more closely with the Corps provide input from 404/401 public interest reviews.	x	x	x	x	x	ACOE	SWQB 401 Cert Program and SWQB Wetlands Program
Explore the feasibility, find sites and sponsors of In Lieu Fee Programs and Mitigation Banks	x	x	x	x	x	ACOE, Agency and NGO Roundtables, NMDOT	ACOE
Expand the activities and content reported for wetlands in the combined CWA §§303(d) and 305(b) report.		x	x	x		Agency Wetlands Roundtable	SWQB and SWQB Wetlands Program
Develop and improve ordinances and jurisdiction at the state or local level that protect wetlands/riparian areas/ buffer at the local level, and that ensure that vulnerable and isolated wetlands are protected from impacts.	x	x		x	x	Santa Fe County, County governments, local governments, watershed groups	SWQB Wetlands Program, NGO Roundtable
Develop a tracking process to track wetlands gains and losses from a variety of activities that either impact or restore wetlands. Work with ACOE and NRCS				x	x	ACOE, NRCS	SWQB Wetlands Program

**Program Development Activities for VOLUNTARY RESTORATION AND PROTECTION Core Element**

**Overall Objective:** Meet the wetlands goals in the watershed restoration activities established in the State’s Non-Point Source Management Plan.

<b>Action: Expand and improve Wetlands Action Plan Program</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Work with other agencies and organizations to coordinate wetlands restoration, activities and funding through development of Wetlands Action Plans. Integrate Wetland Action Plans and watershed-based plans intended to implement NPS TMDLs, and incorporate wetlands objectives in NPS pollution abatement. Incorporate potential mitigation sites into Wetlands Action Plans.	x	x	x	x	x	Watershed groups, NGO Roundtable, Agency Roundtable, SWQB Watershed Protection Section	SWQB Wetlands Program and Watershed Groups
Demonstrate innovative designs and techniques for restoring wetlands. Seek out, develop and demonstrate improved methods for protecting wetlands.	x	x	x	x	x	NGOs, Consultants, BLM, USFS, SLO, NMDGF, USFWS, NRCS, private landowners, watershed groups, local government, others.	SWQB Wetlands Program, Roundtables
<b>Action: Create strategies that build capacity on public lands in New Mexico</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Develop strategies that shape policy for land and water use on public lands to promote restoration of wetlands	x	x	x	x	x	Agencies. USFS, BLM, BOR	SWQB Wetlands Program
Promote the preservation of wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors and wetlands consistent with the Wildlife Action Plan	x	x	x	x	x	Agencies, NM DGF, Local Governments	SWQB Wetlands Program
<b>Action: Create strategies that build capacity at the local level</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Develop strategies for working with private land	x	x	x	x	x	NRCS, NGOs, Agencies,	NGO and Agency

owners and develop incentives for private landowners through watershed groups to restore, protect wetlands.						Consultants	Roundtables, Watershed Groups
Create technical materials and disseminate information to private land owners, tribes and others on incentives, methods and trainings to restore and protect wetlands.	x	x	x	x	x	NRCS, NGOs, Agencies, Consultants, Tribes, Roundtables.	SWQB Wetlands Program
Continue to refine information that provides economic justification and other value, including cultural/traditional and aesthetic for restoring wetlands.	x	x	X			Western Conservation Foundation, Earth Works Institute, ASWM, Tribes and others	SWQB Wetlands Program
Develop avenues for outreach to different groups who could be involved in wetlands as part of Watershed Forum, Quivira Coalition Conference or other venue. Conduct a Texas/New Mexico Border Wetlands workshop. Reach out to new partners, new opportunities, new venues.			x		x	SWQB Watershed Protection Section, Quivira Coalition, Roundtables, irrigation districts, others.	SWQB Wetlands Program

***Program Development Activities for WATER QUALITY STANDARDS FOR WETLANDS Core Element***

**Overall Objective:** Prepare for the future adoption of water quality standards for specific wetlands and ensure that ONRW wetlands are fully protected.

<b>Action: Develop water quality standards for wetlands</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Review wetlands data needed to support standards by other States.	x	x	x			ASWM, WQS Team, EPA	SWQB Wetlands Program
Assess results of riverine NMRAM data and other current state resources, data and information to develop draft wetlands narrative standards by subclass (mid-montane,		x	x	x		ASWM, SWQB Staff, NMDGF, EPA, others.	SWQB Wetlands Program

lower)							
Develop appropriate wetland specific designated uses for one wetland subclass (riverine).	x	x				WQS Team, EPA, NMDGF	SWQB WQS, EPA, and SWQB Wetlands Program
Draft narrative criteria that qualitatively describe the condition that must be achieved to support the designated uses. Use data from reference standard sites for the montane and lower subclass. Best attainable			x	x		EPA, SWQB Staff, others	SWQB WQS, EPA, And SWQB Wetlands Program
Draft water quality standards for wetlands for subclasses - mid-montane and lowland			x	x		WQS Team, EPA.	SWQB WQS
<b>Action: Apply anti-degradation policies to protect ONRW wetlands</b>							
<b>Activity</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Activity Lead</b>
Develop strategies to best fully protect and maintain condition and functions of ONRW wetlands	x	x	x	x	x	SWQB Staff, USFS	SWQB Wetlands Program
Review Anti-Degradation Implementation Policy to determine if additional language that protects wetlands functions, condition and hydrologic regime is appropriate.		x	x	x		SWQB Staff	SWQB Standards and Wetlands Program

## **ACRONYMS**

ACOE	Department of the Army Corps of Engineers
ASWM	Association of State Wetland Managers
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
C WA	Clean Water Act
DoIT	New Mexico Department of Information Technology
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
LLWW	Landscape position, landform, water body type, water source
MAS	Monitoring and Assessment Section
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NMAC	New Mexico Code
NMBGMR	New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NMDOT	New Mexico Department of Transportation
NMRAM	New Mexico Rapid Assessment Method
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NWI	National Wetlands Inventory
NWMAWG	National Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Work Group
ONRW	Outstanding National Resource Waters
SLO	New Mexico State Land Office
SRF	State Revolving Fund
SWQB	Surface Water Quality Bureau
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Load
UNM	University of New Mexico
US	United States
USFS	US Forest Service
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
VIBI	Vegetation Index of Biotic Integrity
WAP	Wetlands Action Plan
WPP	Wetlands Program Plan
WQCC	Water Quality Control Commission
WQS	Water Quality Standards