



MRGCD Bosque Stewardship FAQs

WHY IS MRGCD DOING WORK IN THE BOSQUE?

The Middle Rio Grande bosque is a managed riparian ecosystem that requires active stewardship. Historically, floods, shifting river channels, and natural disturbances helped maintain a diverse and healthy landscape. Today, dams, levees, and water management systems have greatly reduced those natural processes.

Stewardship projects help reduce wildfire risk, improve habitat diversity, support water sustainability, protect infrastructure, and ensure the bosque remains healthy and accessible for future generations.

WHY ARE TREES BEING REMOVED?

Not all trees are being removed.

MRGCD projects focus on removing invasive species such as salt cedar and Russian olive, which consume large amounts of water and can crowd out native plants.

In some areas, thinning is also necessary to reduce wildfire risk, improve ecosystem health, and create space for a more diverse mix of native vegetation, including cottonwoods, willows, grasses, and shrubs.

The goal is not fewer trees; it is a healthier and more resilient bosque.

ISN'T THE BOSQUE SUPPOSED TO BE LEFT ALONE?

The bosque people enjoy today is not a completely natural system.

Historically, the Rio Grande regularly flooded, shifted course, and created open areas, wetlands, meadows, and new cottonwood forests. Those natural disturbances shaped the landscape.

Because the river is no longer free-flowing, due to dams and flood-control infrastructure, active stewardship is meant to bring back more controlled disturbance and maintain ecosystem health.

Doing nothing is also a management decision and in today's environment, it often leads to increased wildfire risk, invasive species expansion, and declining habitat quality.

ARE YOU DESTROYING WILDLIFE HABITAT?

No. Wildlife habitat is a primary consideration in all stewardship projects.

MRGCD coordinates with state and federal wildlife agencies and follows required environmental regulations. Projects include measures such as bird surveys, species monitoring, seasonal restrictions, and post-treatment monitoring.

While some areas may look different immediately after treatment, long-term goals include creating a more diverse mix of climate resilient habitat types that support a variety of wildlife species as river conditions change over time.

Our long-term goal is to preserve and create more riparian specific habitats to support our Endangered species such as willow stands for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Cottonwood canopy for the Yellow Billed Cuckoo, both of which will support our local and migratory species through high-quality vegetation and corridors.

WILL WILDLIFE DISAPPEAR AFTER A PROJECT?

Wildlife may temporarily move away from active work areas, just as they would after a natural disturbance such as flooding or fire.

Research shows that many species return as vegetation recovers. In many cases, habitat diversity improves over time as native grasses, shrubs, and trees reestablished and a wider variety of food and shelter resources become available.

Monitoring helps ensure habitat conditions recover as expected or trigger active restoration activities such as grazing, seeding, and planting.

WHY DO YOU USE HERBICIDES?

Herbicides are one of several tools used to control invasive species and help restore the health of the bosque. Simply cutting invasive trees such as saltcedar and Russian olive is often not enough, as these species readily resprout from the stump or root system, requiring repeated cutting and increasing long-term maintenance costs.

To prevent regrowth, MRGCD uses a targeted cut-stump treatment. After an invasive tree is cut, a small amount of herbicide is applied directly to the freshly cut stump, where it is absorbed into the root system. This targeted approach is highly effective while using significantly less herbicide than broadcast spraying.

Applications are performed by licensed professionals, carefully targeted only to invasive species, and timed to account for weather conditions such as wind, temperature, and the potential for rain.

Using herbicides responsibly helps reduce invasive regrowth, supports the return of native vegetation, minimizes repeated disturbance to the bosque, and improves the long-term success of restoration efforts.

WHY ARE HEAVY MACHINES BEING USED?

Some projects require specialized equipment to safely and efficiently remove invasive vegetation, reduce hazardous fuels, or improve access.

The use of equipment is carefully planned to minimize impacts while accomplishing work that would otherwise take significantly longer and cost substantially more. Mechanical removal also leads to lower resprout rates, reducing the need for herbicide application.

Not all stewardship activities involve heavy equipment. Depending on site conditions, treatments may also include hand crews, mowing, prescribed grazing, or other lower-impact approaches.

WHY DOES THE AREA LOOK WORSE AFTER WORK IS COMPLETED?

Stewardship projects can look dramatic immediately after treatment, especially in areas with a high density of invasive species.

The short-term appearance of disturbed ground, cut invasive vegetation, or equipment tracks can be surprising. However, these projects are designed with long-term outcomes in mind.

Many restoration efforts initially look less attractive before native vegetation recovers and new habitat develops. The true results are often best measured months or years after treatment rather than days after completion.

HOW DOES BOSQUE STEWARDSHIP HELP WITH WILDFIRE RISK?

Dense stands of invasive vegetation and accumulated ground fuels can contribute to large, fast-moving wildfires.

Stewardship projects reduce fuel loads, create defensible space, improve access for firefighters, and help prevent catastrophic fires that can destroy habitat, threaten nearby communities, and close public access for extended periods.

A healthier bosque is generally a more fire-resilient bosque.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT WATER?

Water is one of the most important challenges facing New Mexico.

The bosque is the largest water user in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Some invasive species consume significant amounts of water while providing fewer ecosystem benefits than native vegetation.

Stewardship projects help support a more balanced water budget while improving overall ecosystem function and long-term sustainability.

DOES REMOVING INVASIVE SPECIES SAVE WATER?

Removing invasive species alone is not a silver bullet, but it is an important part of a broader water management strategy.

Dense stands of invasive plants can consume substantial amounts of water and often outcompete native vegetation. Replacing them with more appropriate native plant communities can help improve ecological function and support more sustainable water use over time.

WHAT WILL THE BOSQUE LOOK LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

The bosque will continue to change, just as it always has.

Future stewardship efforts aim to create a more diverse landscape that includes native cottonwood groves, wetlands, meadows, grasslands, shrubs (remove), and open spaces.

Rather than a continuous wall of vegetation, the bosque of the future will be made of a mosaic of habitat types that better support wildlife, improve resilience, and reduce wildfire risk.

ARE THESE PROJECTS PERMANENT?

Stewardship is an ongoing commitment.

Just as roads, parks, and irrigation systems require maintenance, the bosque requires continued care and monitoring. Most projects will require follow-up treatments and adaptive management over time.

The goal is long-term stewardship, not one-time intervention.

WHO DECIDES WHAT WORK GETS DONE?

Projects are developed using scientific data, field observations, regulatory requirements, and input from resource agencies and partners.

MRGCD works with local, state, and federal agencies to follow environmental laws and regulations before conducting stewardship activities.

HOW CAN THE PUBLIC GET INVOLVED?

Community involvement is an important part of bosque stewardship.

Residents can:

- Attend public meetings and project tours
- Participate in volunteer stewardship events
- Follow project updates online
- Share questions and feedback
- Help spread accurate information about ongoing work

The bosque belongs to all of us, and its long-term health depends on community partnership.

I LOVE THE BOSQUE THE WAY IT IS TODAY. WHY DOES IT NEED TO CHANGE?

Many people have a deep personal connection to today's bosque. It's a place for walking, birdwatching, family outings, quiet reflection and enjoying nature. We value those experiences too.

The challenge is that the bosque has never been a static landscape. Throughout history, it has continually changed in response to flooding, fire, shifting river flow and seasonal cycles. Today, those natural processes have been significantly altered, while hotter, drier conditions and the spread of invasive species are placing increasing stress on the ecosystem.

Our goal isn't to erase what people love about the bosque but to help ensure those experiences remain possible for future generations. Thoughtful stewardship helps create a healthier, more resilient bosque that can better withstand wildfire, support native plants and wildlife, conserve water and continue providing the recreational and natural values our community cherishes.

IF THE RIVERBED IS DRY, IS IT OK TO WALK, RECREATE OR DRIVE THROUGH IT?

No. Even when the Rio Grande riverbed appears dry, it remains an active and sensitive ecosystem. MRGCD and local authorities urge the public to stay out of dry riverbed areas to protect wildlife habitat, including areas used by endangered species such as the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

Walking, biking or driving through the riverbed can compact soil, damage vegetation, disturb wildlife and contribute to erosion. Conditions can also change quickly if water is released upstream or enters the river following rainfall.

At times, authorized agency staff, biologists or contractors may need to enter the riverbed to conduct habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, emergency response or other official work. This access is planned, coordinated and limited to necessary activities.



Bosque Stewardship Program Myth vs. Facts

MYTH: "MRGCD IS CLEAR-CUTTING THE BOSQUE."

Fact: Stewardship projects target invasive species, hazardous fuels, and unhealthy vegetation conditions in order to protect native trees. The goal is improved ecosystem health, not widespread tree removal.

MYTH: "THE BOSQUE SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE."

Fact: The modern bosque is a highly managed system. Active stewardship helps replace natural processes that no longer occur at historical scales.

MYTH: "WILDLIFE IS BEING DESTROYED."

Fact: Projects are planned with wildlife protection measures and monitoring requirements designed to protect species and habitat.

MYTH: "THIS IS JUST ABOUT CUTTING TREES."

Fact: Bosque stewardship addresses wildfire risk, habitat health, water sustainability, public safety, invasive species management, and long-term ecosystem resilience.