

Frequently Asked Questions
Farmers & Irrigators Meetings - 2026

Water Storage and El Vado

What is the current status of El Vado Dam?

El Vado Dam is not currently under construction. The Bureau of Reclamation is evaluating alternatives for addressing the dam's condition, and a preferred alternative and construction timeline have not been announced. MRGCD continues to request updates and advocate for progress, but the District does not control the federal design or construction process.

Who is responsible for El Vado Dam?

MRGCD owns the land where El Vado Dam and Reservoir are located. The Bureau of Reclamation owns the dam infrastructure and is responsible for the project and the overall management of the facility.

Does MRGCD still have a place to store native Rio Grande water?

Yes. Federal authorization and agreements allow native Rio Grande water to be stored in space associated with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority at Abiquiu Reservoir. This provides an alternative storage location while El Vado is unavailable.

If storage space is available, why can MRGCD not always store water?

Having physical storage space does not always mean MRGCD has the legal ability to retain water. New Mexico's Rio Grande Compact status and the storage restrictions contained in the Compact determine whether native Rio Grande water may be stored in a given year.

Rio Grande Compact

What is the Rio Grande Compact?

The Rio Grande Compact is an interstate agreement among Colorado, New Mexico and Texas that apportions the water of the Rio Grande amongst those three states. It establishes how Rio Grande water is accounted for and delivered among the three states. The Rio Grande Compact is federal law.

How does the Rio Grande Compact affect MRGCD's ability to store water?

The Compact includes restrictions that apply when New Mexico is carrying a Compact debit and when combined storage in Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs is less than 400,000 acre-feet. Under those conditions, native Rio Grande water generally cannot be stored for Middle Valley use, except for water associated with Prior and Paramount lands of the six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos.

What does New Mexico's Compact debit mean?

A Rio Grande Compact debit occurs when a state delivers less water than required under the Compact. The shortfall carries forward and accumulates from year to year until it is reduced through future deliveries exceeding the state's annual obligation. New Mexico is allowed to carry a Compact debit annually as long as that debit does not exceed 200,000 acre-feet.

Can the Rio Grande Compact be renegotiated?

Changing the Compact's core provisions would generally require agreement among Colorado, New Mexico and Texas, along with federal approval. The states may also pursue operating agreements that address specific issues without rewriting the entire Compact. There is not currently a formal effort to renegotiate the Compact.

Did the recent Texas v. New Mexico action change MRGCD's obligations?

The recent litigation and settlement discussions primarily concern the Lower Rio Grande. They do not change MRGCD's existing Compact obligations or directly change how irrigation water is distributed within the District.

Why can the irrigation season not simply continue after Oct. 31?

The regular MRGCD irrigation season ends Oct. 31. Beginning in November, water must move downstream toward Elephant Butte Reservoir. Continuing diversions beyond the regular season could interfere with New Mexico's Compact obligations and would require coordination with state and federal water-management agencies.

Data Centers and Shared Water Responsibility**What is MRGCD's official position on data centers?**

MRGCD does not currently have a formal Board-adopted position on data centers. The District closely evaluates proposed water-right transfers and other actions that could affect groundwater pumping, return flows and depletions to the Rio Grande.

What does MRGCD consider when reviewing a water-right transfer?

MRGCD considers whether the consumptive-use portion of the water right is properly calculated, whether return flows are protected, whether the transfer would increase depletions to the river, whether appropriate offsets are provided and whether pumping will be metered and limited to the authorized amount. MRGCD does not play a role in the review or approval of permanently transferring water rights within the Middle Rio Grande Valley. That authority rests with the Office of the State Engineer. When considering whether to protest a transfer of water rights, MRGCD considers if the transfer will harm adjacent water users, reduce return flows, or impact our core mission of promoting agriculture.

Has MRGCD opposed water-right transfers in the past?

Yes. MRGCD has protested transfers when the District believed a proposed change could increase depletions, reduce return flows or harm the surface-water system. Each application is evaluated based on its specific facts and potential impacts.

Are farmers the only water users being asked to reduce depletions?

They should not be. MRGCD supports shared responsibility among agricultural, municipal, industrial, environmental and other water users. Meaningful progress requires all sectors that withdraw water from or affect the Rio Grande system to participate in conservation and depletion reduction.

Prior and Paramount Operations and Water Delivery**What are Prior and Paramount lands?**

Prior and Paramount lands are agricultural lands of the six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos that have the most senior water rights in the region. During severe shortages, MRGCD works with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to deliver the amount of water determined to be necessary to meet the agricultural demand of those lands.

Why do some properties receive water while others do not?

The ability to deliver water depends on the property's location, river and canal levels, seepage and conveyance losses, and the amount of water required to move through the system before reaching a turnout. In severe shortages, a delivery may require more water to move through the system than can be efficiently delivered to the property. During severe shortages, including Prior and Paramount restrictions, available water may be limited to certain areas. Short-lived rain flows may also benefit some areas but may not provide enough sustained supply to reach properties farther from the point of diversion.

After Prior and Paramount obligations are met, does MRGCD serve individual water rights in priority order?

No. After Prior and Paramount obligations are met, MRGCD policy requires the remaining available water to be shared among non-Prior and Paramount lands, regardless of whether a property has a pre-1907 water right or an MRGCD irrigation right. Because pre-1907 rights are scattered throughout the District, operating the system according to individual priority dates would be impractical and could result in significant inefficiencies.

Does a farmer with an adjudicated or pre-1907 water right receive priority over someone using a leased right?

No. For routine deliveries through MRGCD's distribution system, pre-1907 water rights do not receive priority over leased rights. After Prior and Paramount obligations are met, the remaining available water is shared among non-Pueblo irrigators in accordance with MRGCD policy, regardless

of the type of water right. Prioritizing deliveries by individual priority right and date would require a formal adjudication.

What happens if rainfall increases the supply during Prior and Paramount operations?

When rainfall or runoff increases the available supply above what is needed to meet Prior and Paramount demand, MRGCD distributes the additional water to non-Pueblo irrigators where conditions and system capacity allow. Water rotations generally resume where they left off before curtailment, with deliveries continuing as long as the available supply can be sustained.

Why can water be visible in the river or a canal but not be available for irrigation elsewhere?

Water visible at one location may be committed to another purpose, may enter the river as a return flow or may be below the diversion point needed to serve a particular area. MRGCD may also route water through canals, drains, or other facilities to meet downstream delivery needs. The amount of water required to move through the system, along with seepage and other conveyance losses, affects whether water can reach its intended destination.

MRGCD manages irrigation diversions and deliveries within its system, but it does not independently manage the entire river. Federal, state, tribal and local entities have different authorities and responsibilities involving reservoirs, river flows, water rights, endangered species, flood control and Compact deliveries. As a result, water that is physically present may not be legally or operationally available for MRGCD irrigation.

Low-Flow Conveyance Channel and Constituent Advocacy

Why is the Low-Flow Conveyance Channel important?

The Low-Flow Conveyance Channel was designed and constructed to move water efficiently through the lower portion of the middle valley toward Elephant Butte Reservoir. Renewed use of the channel could reduce conveyance losses, improve water delivery and help New Mexico address its Rio Grande Compact obligations.

What action does MRGCD support for the Low-Flow Conveyance Channel?

MRGCD believes New Mexico should pursue title to or operational control of the channel so it can be maintained and operated as part of a broader strategy to balance the system, improve conveyance and reduce Compact debt.

How can farmers and community members support this effort?

Community members can contact the governor, state legislators, New Mexico's congressional delegation and other state and federal officials. MRGCD is developing materials that explain the requested action and can be used or personalized by constituents.

Bosque, River Capacity and Public Safety**How does bosque vegetation affect water use?**

All vegetation uses water through evapotranspiration. Dense invasive vegetation can increase unwanted water consumption, restrict the active river channel and contribute to wildfire risk. MRGCD's work focuses on reducing invasive growth while protecting beneficial native vegetation and habitat.

What is MRGCD doing to manage the bosque?

MRGCD is conducting vegetation-management and restoration work intended to reduce wildfire risk, remove invasive species, reduce unwanted evapotranspiration, protect infrastructure, improve public safety and support a healthier riparian system.

Why can MRGCD not simply clear all vegetation from the bosque?

The bosque is an important ecosystem and contains valuable native habitat. Vegetation work must comply with environmental requirements, protect wildlife and cultural resources, coordinate with other agencies and include a plan for long-term maintenance. The goal is targeted management, not wholesale clearing.

Is river-channel capacity a concern?

Yes. Sediment, dense vegetation and narrowed sections of the river can reduce conveyance capacity and make both high-flow and low-flow operations more difficult. River maintenance requires coordination among federal, state, Tribal and local entities because responsibility for the river, levees, drains, diversion dams and bosque is divided among several agencies.

When will sediment be removed near Isleta Diversion Dam?

Sediment removal near Isleta Diversion Dam requires engineering, environmental and federal coordination. MRGCD is reviewing the issue with the appropriate partners and will provide project information when a scope and schedule are confirmed.

What is being done about trash and unauthorized vehicle use?

MRGCD removes trash from District-owned facilities and rights of way as resources allow. Unauthorized ATVs and side-by-sides can damage riverbanks, levees and irrigation facilities and are not permitted. Illegal dumping or vehicle activity should be reported to MRGCD and the appropriate law-enforcement agency.

Can community groups organize bosque or river cleanups?

Yes, but cleanup activities should be coordinated in advance. Permission, access, safety requirements, staging locations and responsibility for disposal must be established before work begins.

Does MRGCD use goat grazing for vegetation removal?

The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) does occasionally utilize goat grazing for vegetation management and fire-fuel reduction, primarily through collaborative pilot programs and partnerships. However, the use of grazing is highly targeted rather than a widespread operational method, largely due to the strict procurement, environmental and liability requirements governing the agency.

Irrigation Operations and Communication

How can irrigators receive more timely information?

Irrigators should remain in direct contact with their ISO and monitor MRGCD's website, email notices and social media. MRGCD's online water data can also help irrigators understand where water is flowing through the river and irrigation system. MRGCD is also working to expand targeted text and email notifications so information can be sent by division, canal or irrigation area when possible.

Why are delivery times less predictable during shortages?

When supplies are sufficient, deliveries can be scheduled with more predictability. During shortages, MRGCD operates as a run-of-the-river system and uses rotations and other shortage-sharing practices to distribute limited water as equitably as possible. Rainfall, changing river levels, infrastructure problems and the needs of other irrigators can quickly change the timing of a delivery.

Who decides whether a maintenance problem will be repaired?

The ISO reports operational problems but does not make the final decision on major repairs. Issues generally begin with the division manager. Routine maintenance may be handled by division staff, while structural, design or larger engineering concerns are referred to the Engineering Department.

How do I submit a maintenance or service request?

Contact the clerk at the appropriate MRGCD field office in Albuquerque, Belen, Cochiti or Socorro. The request is entered into the District's tracking system and assigned for review and scheduling. Customers may contact the field office to ask about the status of the request.

Why might a turnout or structure be changed during a project?

Turnout and structure sizes are based on site-specific hydraulic, engineering and operational conditions. When existing structures are replaced or upgraded, MRGCD typically seeks to maintain or improve flow capacity. Turnouts are engineered to meet MRGCD's delivery standard of approximately one acre per hour, so a change in structure size does not necessarily mean reduced

capacity. Questions about a specific structure should be submitted to the appropriate field office so Engineering can explain the design decision and expected effect on delivery.

What is the purpose of the Feeder 3 Pump Station Project in Valencia County?

The project will provide another way to deliver water to Feeder 3 and the canals it serves by lifting available water from the west riverside drain system. This is intended to improve operational flexibility when it is difficult to move water far enough down the Belen Highline to reach Feeder 3. The project will not create a new water supply and can be used only when adequate drain flow is available and that water is not needed for delivery to the Socorro Division.

Programs and Other Questions

Is the Irrigation Demand Management or fallowing program still available?

The program remains active, but application periods depend on available funding and program schedules. The current application window has closed. Updated information will be posted on MRGCD's website when the next opportunity is available in November of 2027.

What technical assistance is available to farmers?

MRGCD's On-Farm Planning Program provides technical and, when funding is available, financial assistance for projects that improve irrigation infrastructure, delivery efficiency and on-farm water management.

Why does the Rio Grande often appear to carry more water during winter?

Agricultural diversions are reduced or stopped, vegetation consumes less water and more of the available flow remains in the river. Water that was stored for Prior and Paramount operations of the Six Middle Rio Grande Pueblos may also move downstream after the irrigation season.