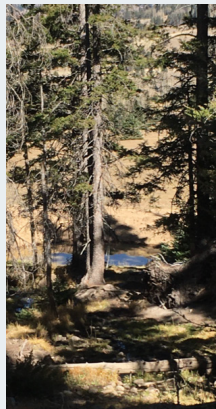


## STATE OF NEW MEXICO: UPPER RIO CHAMA RIVER WATERSHED

Adjacent to the Carson National Forest, the three-phase acquisition of the Upper Rio Chama River Watershed property, enabled by the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program (FLP), The Trust for Public Land, and the Forest Trust, took nearly a decade to complete. It now protects 11,655 acres of working forests and riparian areas. The project buffers the National Forest from the encroachment of private property development, reduces the wildland urban interface and associated wildland firefighting costs, preserves unique old growth forest, and supports a critical watershed.



As a working high mountain ranch, the property has been in the ownership of the same family for 44 years. With concerns about future management, the landowners wanted to pursue permanent protection of the property through the Forest Legacy Program. Without this, the property was at risk of fragmentation into 59 parcels of 140 acres, reducing the likelihood of active forest management.

The Upper Rio Chama River Watershed lies within the Northern Rio Grande Natural Heritage Area, designated by Congress in 2006, as well as within the federal multi-state, multi-partner Upper Rio Grande: Mi Tierra Encantada Collaborative Landscape. Situated within the viewshed of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT), protection of the property supports the CDT's management plan. The Rio Arriba County Comprehensive Plan encourages the use of conservation easements to protect critical lands, including the property, within the County's Headwaters Zoning District.

The property is also ranked in the Statewide Forest Resource Assessment as a "priority working landscape," a large, unfragmented block of land with high economic potential, which is at risk of conversion to non-forest use, and in the 2021 Forest Action Plan as a "priority watershed". The property is also enrolled in a Natural Resources Conservation Service conservation reserve program to enhance the riparian habitat.



Economic benefits of this project include both forest products and hunting access. 75% of the mixed conifer and spruce-fir forests can be commercially harvested and are under active management. According to the 2013 Chama Healthy Forest and Wood Utilization Study, the area holds considerable potential for commercial biomass utilization. The property also supports a healthy population of big-game species, including elk. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2011 the estimated economic impact of hunting in New was \$620 million. Managing the property's elk population for hunting is a boon to the local economy. The landowner alone accrues \$90,000 per year from the activity.



Potential habitat for 12 additional species of management concern is also present on this property.

In the arid southwest, the Rio Chama, which flows into the endangered Rio Grande, is a critical resource for both the traditional villages of the Tierra Amarilla Land Grant as well as New Mexico's largest city. 90% of Albuquerque's domestic water supply comes from the Rio Grande. The protection of the unfragmented, high, forested mountain project lands ensures their continued ability to act as "water factories" for the rest of the state.

Through a decade of persistence and patience, all 11,655 acres of this property are now covered by conservation easements. Protection of the Upper

Rio Chama River Watershed through the FLP ensures the public will continue to reap the benefits, from forest products to watershed protection, of this scenic property in perpetuity.

*"The Lloyd/Estrin/Hill family is deeply grateful that, through the Forest Legacy Program, we have been able to protect the precious resources of the 11,655 acre High Country Ranch."*

— Robert Estrin

Property is habitat for 48 observed species; those in need of special protection include Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Canada lynx, Mexican spotted owl, boreal toad, boreal owl, and northern goshawk.



### AT-A-GLANCE



11,655 acres of working forests and riparian areas.



Project protects 18 miles of tributary creeks, including 13 miles of Rio Chama headwaters.



Eastern edge of the property is adjacent to 18 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.



Property was at risk of fragmentation into 59 parcels of 140 acres, reducing the likelihood of active forest management.



Property has been in the ownership of the same family for 44 years.



Property supports a healthy population of big-game species, including elk.

Top L: High Country Ranch Fall late summer 2017. (Photo: Joe Carrillo); Middle L: Water catchment. (Photo: Henry Carey); Middle R: Hunters 2018. (Photo: Joe Carrillo); Middle R: Creek 2017. (Photo: Joe Carrillo)

For more information, visit  
<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/forest-legacy/>.