



The **Paso del Norte Watershed Council** (Council), established in 2000, has been awarded a watershed restoration grant to develop a Watershed Based Plan to protect and improve water quality in the lower Rio Grande from Percha Dam (below Caballo Reservoir) downstream to the American Dam (near the New Mexico, Texas, and international border). Levels of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) were found in this reach of the river that exceeded state water quality standards. Funding has been provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) under the authority of the Clean Water Act Section 319(h) Nonpoint Source grant program.

What is a Watershed Based Plan?

A Watershed Based Plan (Plan) is a general blueprint for a comprehensive, watershed-wide restoration program. It provides a non-regulatory, stakeholder driven, voluntary approach to improve water quality within a designated watershed. Guidance for the Plan is provided in the “Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters”. Its strength is based on collaboration, open communication, and establishment of a watershed community by integrating local residents, agencies, and other stakeholders in the process.

What is this grant doing to address *E. coli* bacteria in the river?

The watershed restoration grant will fund a water quality sampling program, a bacterial source tracking study, subsequent data analyses, and a community outreach and education program. Water quality data will be collected from the river, drains and arroyos for two years. Data analyses will identify the cause of elevated *E. coli* levels and indicate where the bacteria might be coming from. It will also help distinguish among human and animal sources. These analyses will assist with the development of recommended management solutions for bacterial remediation in the river. Outreach and education will provide regional stakeholders with practical watershed practices to reduce the causes of *E. coli*.

Project Area

Paso del Norte 319(h) Watershed Restoration Project Area

Landcover

- Water
- Developed
- Forested
- Shrub/Scrub
- Grassland
- Planted/Cultivated
- Wetland
- City of Las Cruces
- River Sample Sites

What is a watershed?

A watershed, also called a drainage basin, is a geographic area that contributes surface water and groundwater to a specific stream. A watershed acts like a funnel by collecting water within an area and routing it into a waterway. All land is part of some watershed. So, wherever you go, you are in a watershed.

What is *E. coli* and why should I be concerned?

E. coli is a bacterium that originates in the gut of warm-blooded animals and is sometimes associated with feces from animals. Feces can be transported by runoff from the watershed into the Rio Grande. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless, but some can cause intestinal illnesses in humans and animals. The presence of *E. coli* is often associated with other pathogenic (disease-causing) organisms that can cause harm to humans.

How can I reduce *E. coli* input to the Rio Grande?

- Clean up pet waste
- Have your septic system inspected
- Control soil erosion on your property
- Manage livestock waste
- Plant vegetation near waterways

Other practices can be found at:

www.water.epa.gov/polwaste/nps/whattodo.cfm and
and www.cpub.gov/npdes/stormwater.

How can the public help?

We ask for your assistance as we develop a plan for a healthy watershed in southern New Mexico. A combination of local advisory committees, public meetings, questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups can help in determining a rational approach that includes local perspectives and priorities on water quality and restoration. With your participation we will address nonpoint source pollution and watershed health in our community. Information about public events will be made available on the Council's website (www.pdnwc.org).

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What is Nonpoint Source Pollution?

Nonpoint source pollution results from pollutants being carried to a waterway by storm water runoff, atmospheric deposition, drainage, or underground seepage from many different sources.

Types of pollutants include chemicals, metals, sediment, salts, nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) and bacteria from pet waste, wildlife, faulty septic systems, or livestock, and agricultural runoff of excess fertilizers or pesticides.

Rainfall or snowmelt moves through the landscape picking up pollutants, eventually depositing them in waterways.

Nonpoint source pollution has been found to be the leading cause of water quality degradation in the United States.

Under the Clean Water Act 319(h) grant program, funds are made available to state and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and citizen watershed groups to address nonpoint source pollution.



Rio Grande at Leasburg Dam

The purpose of the Paso del Norte Watershed Council is to investigate, develop, and recommend projects and activities for watershed planning and management and to explore how water-related resources can best be balanced to benefit the Rio Grande ecosystem and the interests of all watershed stakeholders.