

April 30, 2024

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Dear Forest Supervisor Sanchez,

The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (Water Authority) is expressing its support for the United States Department of Agriculture, Santa Fe National Forest Service's *Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project* in the Jemez Mountains.

The Water Authority provides water and wastewater services to Albuquerque as well as portions of Bernalillo County. Surface water is an important supply source for the Water Authority and as such, the Water Authority recognizes the need for fire mitigation planning and projects upstream from its service area to ensure a reliable water supply for its customers. The *Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project* and its proximity to Abiquiu reservoir – the only upstream water storage reservoir for the Water Authority - makes it especially significant.

The Water Authority holds a contract with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to store San Juan-Chama (SJC) Project water at Abiquiu Reservoir, making it a vital storage and conveyance structure for the SJC Project. The SJC Project is a trans-basin water delivery infrastructure project that provides a lifeline of water to communities in central New Mexico. The Water Authority and other communities rely upon the SJC Project as one of its primary surface water resources. The value of the SJC surface water delivery cannot be understated, this water contributes significantly to the Water Authority's drinking water supply and is a key supply in the 100-year water management strategy, *Water 2120*.

An uncontrolled wildfire near the Abiquiu reservoir could disrupt both water quality and infrastructure, potentially impacting the delivery of SJC Project water. This event could render the SJC Project inoperable for several years, severely impacting downstream communities that rely on this water. Post-fire erosion and debris flow could also introduce an excess of sediment and debris into the water supply, potentially overwhelming the surface water treatment plant and halting operations. The loss of this vital surface water supply would require a greater dependence on groundwater to meet demand. Preserving our groundwater resources, along with watershed protection and health, are critical strategies outlined in *Water 2120*.

The Water Authority is excited to support projects that reduce the risk of fire in the landscape surrounding the Abiquiu reservoir. The *Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project* meets these goals by restoring the frequent-fire forests that were once prevalent in this area. We support the Santa Fe National Forest Service's plans to implement restoration by modifying forest stands, openings, and interspaces to enhance stand regeneration potential in a safe manner and reduce the risk of forest type loss due to natural succession and wildfire. These actions serve to promote the resilience of this natural infrastructure, which protects a vital water source for downstream users.

Thank you for your consideration of funding *Encino Vista Landscape Restoration Project*. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff about how this proposal helps build resiliency for the SJC Project and the Water Authority.

Sincerely,



Mark Kelly, P.E.  
Water Resources Division Manager, Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority  
[mkelly@abcwua.org](mailto:mkelly@abcwua.org)