

Candelaria Nature Preserve

2023 Annual Report

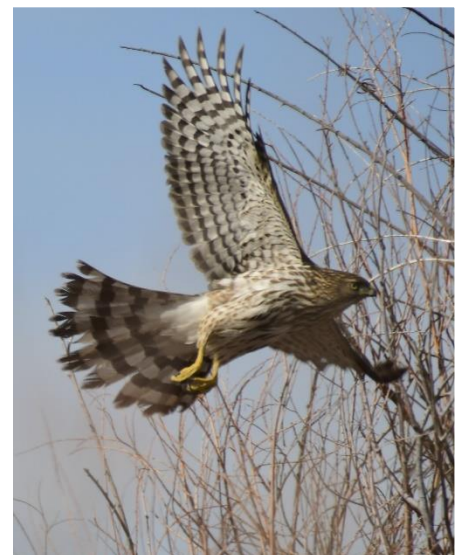
January 2024

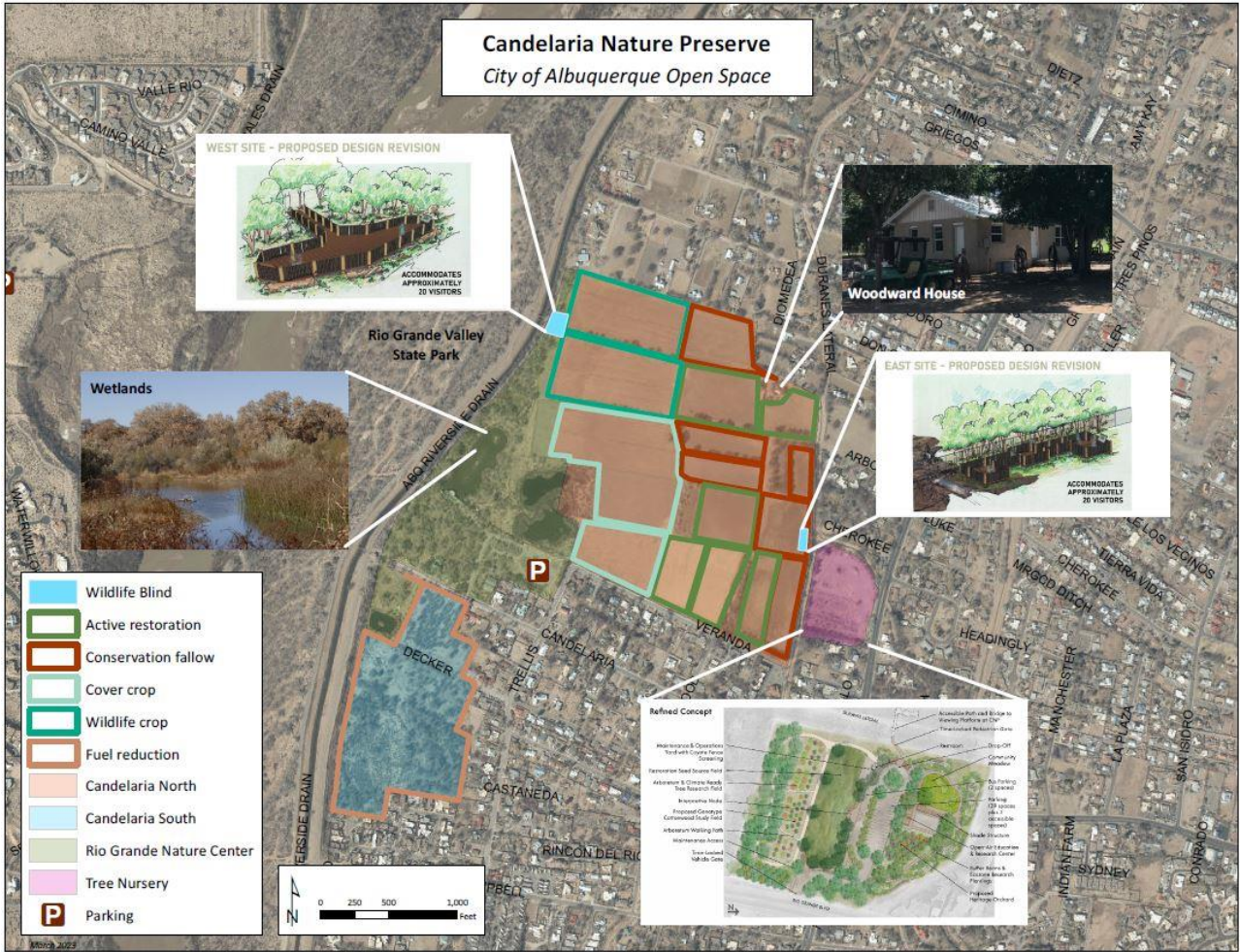


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OVERVIEW

The City of Albuquerque purchased Candelaria Nature Preserve (CNP) in 1977. CNP became part of the City of Albuquerque's inventory of lands designated as Major Public Open Space. The Parks and Recreation Department/Open Space Division (OSD) manages this property in partnership with New Mexico State Parks. In 2021, following a three-year community-driven planning process, OSD completed a Resource Management Plan (RMP) that was formally adopted by the City Council. The RMP outlines a bold new vision to restore the traditional farmed fields to a mosaic of native habitat that supports a diversity of wildlife. The adaptive management plan will be a 20-year endeavor. The CNP is ideally situated in the middle of Albuquerque, where the research and successful restoration efforts can help inform other projects on private and public lands throughout the Rio Grande Valley. The CNP is programmatically connected to similar areas, such as Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, Whitefield Wildlife Conservation Area, and Bernardo Wildlife Area. This is especially important in the time of climatic changes and other related pressures to our natural areas. The implications of this project are significant, far-reaching, and community-supported.





Partners of the Candelaria Nature Preserve



- Ciudad Soils and Water Conservation District
- Rio Grande Return
- Friends of Candelaria Nature Preserve
- Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps
- Valle de Oro Urban National Wildlife Refuge
- Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area
- Rio Grande Nature Center State Park



MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The City of Albuquerque has made great strides in implementing the vision outlined in the Resource Management Plan. The RMP focuses on three major areas, including restoration of the farm fields to support a mosaic of habitat, monitoring to inform an adaptive management approach, and supporting outdoor low-impact recreation and education opportunities tied to the goals of the CNP. The Parks and Recreation Department/Open Space Division made the following major accomplishments in 2023:



Figure 1 Mayor Keller officiating ribbon cutting for Wildlife Viewing Areas.

- The Resource Management Plan was officially reviewed and approved by Dr. Robert Stokes, Bureau Chief and Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Liaison with the New Mexico State Parks Department. It was deemed the City is in full compliance with LWCF.
- The City completed construction on Wildlife Viewing Areas to the east and west of the Candelaria North Tract, which are now open to the public.
- The City consultant PLAND Collaborative completed 100% construction plans for the Tree Nursery Tract.
- OSD continued to contract with Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) and Rio Grande Returns to oversee restoration efforts. Active restoration has been initiated on seven new acres for a total of 19 acres that have been restored since 2021. CIUDAD secured a \$57,000 grant from the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Healthy Soils Program that funded work from 2022-2023. Additionally, CIUDAD submitted a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant for \$788,000 (that includes a 1:1 match from the city) to support restoration.
- OSD is managing 43 acres under a “wildlife farming” approach.
- Public access continues through monthly guided tours, student experiences, and volunteers (600 volunteers contributed a total of 1,882 hours).
- The City and partners lead a comprehensive tour for the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative.
- Through the support of State Senator Bill O’Neill, State Representative Javier Martinez, and State Representative Eleanor Chavez, the City recived \$310,000 in state capital outlay funds during the 2023 session of the New Mexico Legislature. State Senator Bill O/Neill and State Senator Katy Duhigg allocated an additional \$300,000 in state capital outlay funds in the 2024. Session. Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham approved these capital outlay appropriations.
- Friends of Candelaria Nature Preserve (FCNP) formed and now has 105 members, an increase of 30 people, who contributed 850 hours of volunteer time. FCNP is working with the City to develop an interpretive plan that will further enhance visitors’ experience and understanding of the CNP. They also designed and helped write interpretive signs featured at the wildlife viewing areas.



Wildlife Habitat Restoration

Open Space Division staff are working alongside CSWCD and Rio Grande Return on this major restoration undertaking. In 2023, active restoration was initiated on seven acres, where more than 700 native perennials and seeds have been planted in fields and hedgerows. Previously started restoration continues on another 12 acres, including maintenance of propagation cells, expanded planting of a wet soil habitat, soil health interventions. Nursery plants are also being grown for future efforts. Conservation fallow has been implemented on 21 acres to mitigate weed pressure. Wildlife farming is being managed on 43 acres where no-till drill methods are employed, and the use of diverse native seed mixes is being propagated. An integrated management approach is being incorporated to mitigate weed pressure, including utilizing cover crops, fallowing fields, grazing goats, and mulching. Annual crop plans can be found on the CNP website.



Ecological Monitoring Methods

Ecological models are being utilized to better anticipate better and plan restoration outcomes. CSWCD is using a *Society for Ecological Restoration Recovery Wheel* to track progress over time, which is an internationally accepted method for restoration projects. Additional monitoring practices include seed bank analysis, soil testing, photo points, aerial imaging, and vegetation transects. Friends of the Rio Grande Nature Center volunteers conduct weekly bird surveys of the North Tract fields and wetlands. Tracking species diversity and number in each field

will help assess wildlife usage as vegetation is established. Community science is also underway with programs like e-Bird, bird banding, iNaturalist, and Nature's Notebook.

Outdoor Recreation, Public Access and Education Efforts

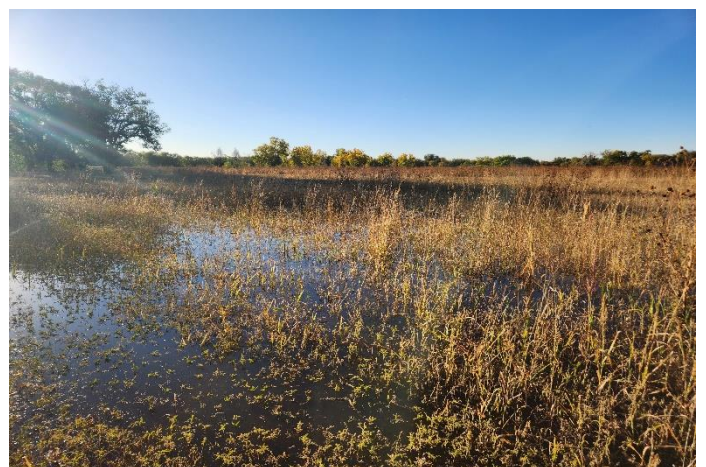
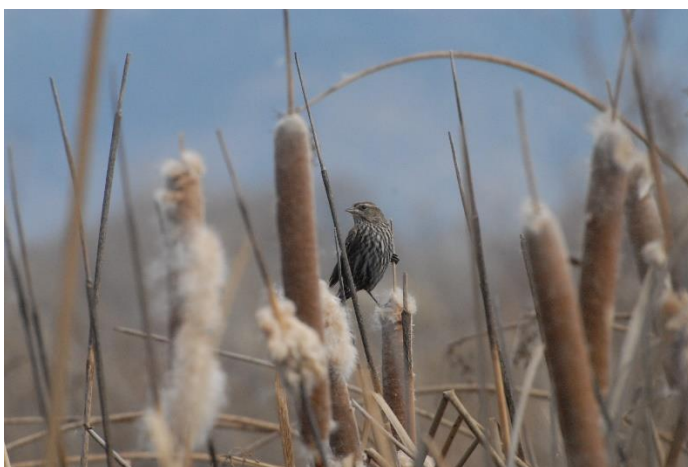
Per the RMP, public access is carefully managed to protect wildlife and integrate with restoration management. Access is mainly supported through wildlife viewing areas and guided tours. A community-driven process to design

wildlife viewing areas resulted in the East and West Wildlife Viewing Platforms being completed and opened to the public in October 2023. Access from two public trails offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy seated birding and wildlife observations at their leisure. Monthly guided tours are held for the general public (120 participants in 2023). Ongoing education work days take place with local groups, including RiverXchange fifth grade classes, Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions, Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, Holy Ghost Catholic School, Rocky Mountain Youth Corps and volunteers with the FCNP. Over 600 volunteers contributed a total of 1,822 hours. The Friends of CNP are leading the development of an interpretive plan with partner supports including Open Space Division, that will further enhance visitor experience and understanding of the CNP.



Candelaria Nature Preserve Investments

Year	Amount	Balance	Description
Capital Improvement Funds (State Capital Outlay Grants)			
2019	\$300,000	\$0	Wetland design and improvements, design of wildlife viewing areas. Construct west wildlife blind
2019	\$110,000	\$0	Construct west wildlife blind
2020	\$275,000	\$0	Tree Nursery Tract and Duranes bridge planning, construct east wildlife blind
2021	\$550,000	\$180,000	Construct east and west wildlife blind, TNT parking & site planning
2022	\$250,000	\$250,000	TNT site plan construction & irrigation improvements
2023	\$310,000	\$310,000	TNT site plan & Duranes Lateral bridge construction plans
2024	\$300,000	\$300,000	TNT site plan construction
Total	\$2,095,000 allocated	\$1,040,000 available	
City Funds (General Fund 3 Fiscal Years)			
FY20	\$108,000		Technician, supplies and equipment budget
FY21	\$341,000		Added a biologist position, supplies and equipment budget
FY23	\$341,000		Staff = \$145,000; supplies and equipment = \$196,000
FY24	\$341,000		
Total	\$1,131,000		The current annual operating budget is \$341,000



Looking Ahead

The City and partners are moving full steam ahead and will be working on the following in 2024:

- Begin phased implementation of the TNT site plan, starting with the irrigation ditch relocation and construction and parking area.
- Identify funding and partnership opportunities to secure additional capital funds for irrigation upgrades, Tree Nursery site implementation, plant propagation facility, and South Tract improvements.
- Continue and expand restoration on Candelaria North Tract.
- Complete the interpretive signage plan.
- Complete the Integrative Pest Management plan.
- Continue ecological monitoring and community science projects.

CAPITAL FUNDING NEEDS 2023-2024	
Tree Nursery Tract- site plan implementation	\$700,000
Duranés Bridge Construction	\$130,000
Irrigation upgrades, ditch improvements, and water rights allocation	\$400,000
Candelaria South Tract-wildlife platform & viewing area	\$400,000
Total	\$1,630,000



www.cabq.gov/candelaria-nature-preserve

