



Shouldn't There Be Water in the Rio Grande?

There will be ecological chaos, and certainly a decline in plant and animal life.”

Lifelong biologist and ecologist Dave Parsons was interviewed about the effects of the Rio Grande being not only not *grande*, but actually having no water in it at all.

According to a 2019 article by [Rio Grande Waterkeeper](#), “Unsustainable water use and climate change are drying up this once-mighty river. The year 2000 marked the first time in its history that the Rio Grande did not reach the Gulf of Mexico. It’s not uncommon now for less than one-fifth of its historic flows to reach the sea.” This year, for the second time in 40 years, no water has reached Albuquerque for a large part of the summer.

Dave Parsons studied fisheries and wildlife biology at Iowa State University and wildlife ecology at Oregon State. He served for many years with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in many parts of the US; he also mentions a project he undertook while working for the US Army Corps of Engineers in Vicksburg, MS, where he was asked to predict the ecological effects of dredging the Mississippi River for its entire length.

Parsons describes walking up a totally dry riverbed this summer from his home near Candelaria Road to the Montaño Bridge. There were pockets of moisture, he said, containing vast numbers of dead fish, mostly carp and catfish – a brief bonanza for the animals such as raccoons that eat those fish. But those same animals will have trouble finding more fish and even finding water to drink.

Dave mentioned that he usually sees hundreds of swallows under the Montaño

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OSA Mission: OSA will enhance the experiences of all users of Albuquerque Open Space lands by providing financial support for Open Space programs; by advocating for sustainability and expansion of Open Space programs; and by encouraging increased public involvement with and use of Open Space lands.

A Bone-Dry Rio Grande Leads to Ecological Concerns



Biologist/ecologist
David Parsons

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Bridge, but saw none this summer. No water → no insects → no swallows who depend on the insects for their diet. He worries that a drop in the insect population, especially the mayflies, will decrease bird populations overall. And as small birds become scarce, their predators, the hawks like the common Coopers hawk, will also have a restricted diet.

Asked about the migratory birds such as the sandhill cranes, geese and ducks that we love to see and celebrate here, Dave said they may keep flying further south looking for water, both to drink, and also as nighttime roosting places relatively safe from coyotes and other predators.

Plants will suffer too – the already stressed and superannuated cottonwoods may succumb more quickly in such a dry climate, and invasive trees such as Russian olive, tamarisk and Siberian elms, may have competitive advantages. And the endangered silvery minnow, on which much effort and money has been spent to keep the species alive, may be dependent on water tanks at the Albuquerque BioPark, as they have been on at least one previous occasion.

“I hope this summer’s dry river is not a harbinger of things to come,” Dave Parsons concluded. “The river is the ‘life blood’ or perhaps ‘beating heart’ of the bosque ecosystem. Without the river, the health of the bosque will inevitably decline.”

As of 9/16/25, there’s a little water in the river; see page 6.



A Walk in the Wilds of the Gutierrez-Milne Open Space

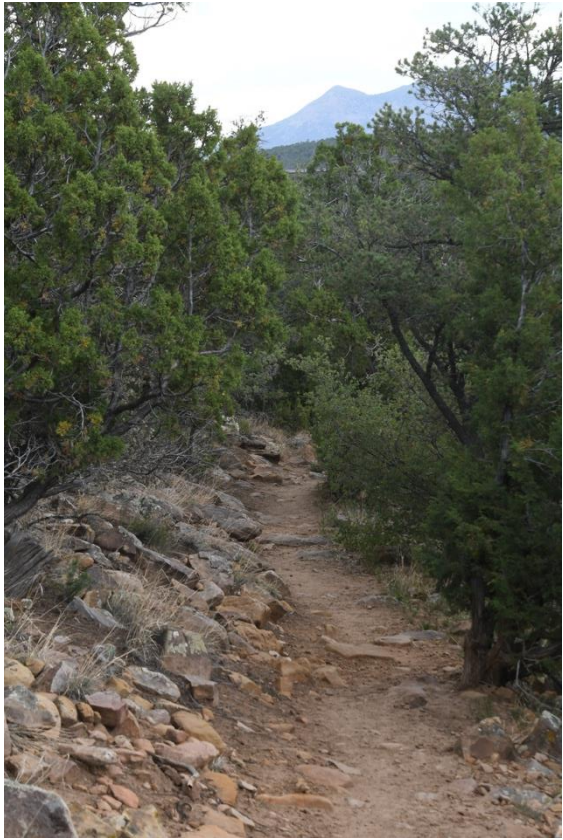
On a beautiful recent September day, OSA board member and wonderful guide Bill Pentler and I met up at the south entrance to the Gutierrez Canyon-Milne Open Space to walk among the trees and canyons and wildlife in this pristine open space property in the East Mountains. I felt again that we are so lucky to have beautiful, undeveloped land practically in our Albuquerque back yards. Bill's was the only car in the small parking lot; mine was the only bicycle chained to an adjacent tree.

There are two entries to this 720-acre open space – the one we took is located close to the Zuzax exit off I-40, a few miles east of Tijeras. The other entrance is very close to the Cedar Crest post office. The entrances are connected by a zigzaggy trail network originally built by Bill Pentler and his Open Space Division colleagues, including Jim Sattler. It's easy to make several three to six mile loops out of the network.

More to the point, it's wonderful to walk among the piñones and junipers and the occasional Ponderosa pines and bountiful wildflowers, among the rock faces, up the (usually dry) arroyos, and to hear the wildlife. Bill is remarkably good at spotting the movement of birds and small mammals; his camera has taken countless shots of these inhabitants.

Albuquerque purchased the Milne portion of the wilderness from a public-spirited seller in 2008 and named it after revered former Albuquerque Public Schools superintendent (from 1911 and 1500 students to 1956 and 38,000 kids!) John A. Milne. The Internet tells us that "Gutierrez Canyon" is "named after the Gutierrez family – a big surprise, but I could find nothing else about that obviously illustrious family.

To get to the Gutierrez-Milne Open Space's south end, exit I-40 at Zuzax, drive across the bridge to the freeway's north side, take a left on N. Zamora Rd. for 0.6 mile and then a sharp right on Gutierrez Canyon Road. 1.7 miles later, just past the entrance to Hobart Road, your sharp eyes will spot an unreadable sign across from a wide spot in the road; the well-maintained trail heads southwest from this place where you can leave your car. The west entrance is less obscure: head north on NM-14 and just south of the Cedar Crest post office, off Arroyo Seco Road is the parking area for the Milne part of the connected open spaces.



Photos by Bill Pentler



OSA board members include Steve Glass, Bill Pentler, Kent Swanson, Lance Chilton, Jeannie Allen and Colleen Shackley.





Painting by Colleen Shackley



Photos by Bill Pentler

By Richard Shackley

During a winter's walk through the Bosque, have you ever heard a heavenly trumpeting call from the skies above? Looking skyward, you may just have seen our most celebrated visitor...the sandhill crane.

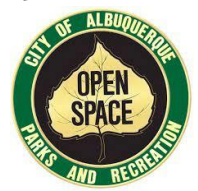
Named for their large population, over 500,000 strong, visiting Nebraska's North Platte Sandhills, these majestic birds migrate south during the winter to find warmth and food, then north in the summer to breed. The cranes travel up to 14,000 miles round trip between their breeding grounds as far away as Siberia, and their wintering grounds in New Mexico, Texas, and northern Mexico. Open Space farms such as Los Poblanos, Candelaria, and the Open Space Visitor Center provide winter feeding grounds for the sandhill cranes. Cranes are omnivores. Their diet includes tubers, seeds, grains, insects, small mammals and birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Prehistorically, the cranes found many natural meadows along the Rio Grande to feed and rest. After the river was engineered, and agricultural fields populated the river valley, the cranes found food and rest in those fields.

There are six sub-species of sandhill cranes currently recognized, and the greater sub-species and the lesser sub-species are common to the Albuquerque area. The earliest sandhill crane fossil, estimated to be 2.5 million years old, was found in Florida. Ten-million-year-old crane fossils have been found in other parts of the world making the crane possibly the oldest living bird species. Cranes mate for life, which can mean two decades or more, and stay with their mates year-round. The pair will build a three- to five-foot wide nest near or in a shallow marsh. The female will usually lay two eggs, and the pair will take turns incubating the eggs. Usually only one of the baby birds, called colts, survives. When the colt is four to five months old, the cycle starts again.

Throughout the world, different cultures' awe for the crane has been expressed through art, artifacts, mythology, and legends. Pottery designs, pictographs, and petroglyphs of cranes appear in the American Southwest beginning over 1,000 years ago and there are images of cranes pecked into the boulders at the Petroglyph National Monument here in Albuquerque. The crane is featured in many Native American rituals and tales. In the Far East, the crane symbolizes immortality, longevity, happiness, good luck, and fidelity. The crane is often pictured in Egyptian tomb paintings, and the hieroglyph for "soul" or "spirit" is said to be the crane.

Celebrations for our feathered friends occur every November at the Open Space Visitor Center (this year, on November 15), and at Bosque del Apache every December.

We are often a little sad to see our majestic sandhill cranes leave in March and April, but we can celebrate the return of our summer visitors. The powerhouse hummingbird and the soaring turkey vulture among others take the sandhill crane's place for our bird watching pleasure then to be replaced in turn some months later by our wonderful cranes..



Colleen Shackley -- Hiker, Artist, Volunteer and New OSA Board Member

New OSA board member Colleen Shackley got part of her enthusiasm about open space from a class she took some years ago led by another Colleen, Colleen Langan-McRoberts, the current director of the City's Open Space Division. Ms. Shackley took a master naturalist class given by her namesake, and she was off and running. Or, really, off and walking – walking the many wonderful trails that Albuquerque Open Space has to offer.

Colleen S. has interests in Jazzercise, in art and in hiking and what can be seen while hiking, and puts those interests to work to our benefit. She and her husband Richard, whom she met during an Open Space Copper Trailhead hike, now lead monthly nature hikes in the Bosque as well as hikes there for Oasis, the program primarily for the elderly among us. And Colleen the artist has designed some beautiful cards, sold at the Open Space Visitor Center, with all proceeds going to the Open Space Alliance. The funds raised help to support the snacks available at many Open Space events and the tools used to maintain the trails.

Also at the Open Space Visitor Center currently, she has a number of small and larger works gracing the hallway.

“After moving to Albuquerque from [Vancouver, B.C.] in 2007, I was immediately struck by the diversity and beauty of the landscapes and culture. This realization renewed my childhood interest in watercolor art. With inspiration from my artist father's art, and the incredible vistas and brilliant colors found throughout New Mexico, I've found great joy in putting color to paper. I'm constantly in awe of the multitude of subjects that artists memorialize. I'm committed to paint what I see, with the hope that others appreciate the images found in my work.”

Asked what part of Albuquerque Open Space she likes best, Colleen demurred, saying it was hard to choose among many favorite places. She did mention the developing trail system in the Tijeras Biozone as one of her favorites. “But we go all over,” she said.

We love nature and we see the need to protect it," Richard Shackley said of Open Space volunteers; Colleen added that she would like to encourage the board to help to maintain its adopted trails near the OSVC, citing the accumulation of dog “deposits” she finds there.

We are very fortunate to be able to welcome Colleen Shackley, with all of her insights, knowledge and energy, to the Open Space Alliance board.



Photo of Colleen Shackley



“There is a story that goes with that coyote, I was hiking in the 4 Hills area by myself and I felt like something or someone was watching me. I looked up at the cliffs and saw this coyote watching my every move. I had a telephoto lens on my camera, so I zoomed in and got the picture. ”

John Keliiaa, Open Space Leader and Enthusiast

John Keliiaa, Visitor Services Supervisor in the Open Space Division, has worked for OSD for the past 11 years, and seems to love everything about the job. He gets to direct and help with volunteer events such as National Trails Day and National Rivers Cleanup Day. He works with other conservation groups such as the Rocky Mountain Conservation Corps, helping to build and maintain trails in city Open Space.

John came to Albuquerque from another job he loved, with the US Forest Service in the Bridger-Teton National Forest in Wyoming. A true outdoorsman, he is pictured to the right in one of his favorite places, the Elena Gallegos Grant at the edge of the Sandia Mountains. He hikes there and in all of the Open Space properties scattered like gold nuggets around the Albuquerque area, from the forests near Juan Tomas to the Rio Grande banks running through the city.

He and his team have been working to connect the Tijeras Biozone with a trail to the Four Hills area, in another of his favorite Open Space properties. He and those who work for and with him also manage visitor access and cleanup in both the Elena Gallegos and Boca Negra Canyon properties – the latter is co-managed with the



Petroglyph National Monument in what he considers to be a model interagency relationship.

John Keliiaa believes that our Open Space is a big part of what makes Albuquerque such a fine place to live. “I’m lucky to work with such a great team in a such a great place.”



The Rio Grande at Albuquerque. Data from [US Geological Survey](#). USGS says its data can't be evaluated at less than 0.9 ft, the brown area on the graph to the left.

So there's a little water in the river as of September 16..



What's Happening in ABQ Open Space for the Rest of the Year?

There are too many wonderful events happening every three months in city and county Open Space to list in each issue of a short newsletter. So here are some highlights of coming attractions, and details are available on the [City's Open Space Division events website](#) and on [Bernalillo County's Open Space](#) webpage.

There are guided hikes in the Bosque, in the Tijeras Biozone, on the Candelaria Nature Preserve and in the foothills, introductory courses on composting, tai chi and yoga, photographing wildlife at Albuquerque libraries, yoga classes at the Open Space Visitor Center, guided hikes in various places in the morning and early evening, family nature club walks in the Elena Gallegos Grant open space and learning about volunteering. Locations include the Bosque, the fields near the Open Space Visitor center on the West Side, the Tijeras Bio-zone. Wow! For more info about these and other events, some of which require registration, call OSVC at 505-768-4950.

A few extra-special events to highlight during these three months:

Oct. 18, 10 am-12 pm at Tingley Beach.
Family Nature Club: Valuable Volunteering
Support the Rio Grande Bosque by participating in Dia del Rio, a public Open Space community service event. An Open Space educator will lead a family focused service project as part of this larger event. Learn how to use various tools such as mattocks, loppers, and spades and then utilize those skills to help the animals, plants, and the land they live on.

We want you!... to join us and/or to donate toward our work.

Please see how to support our efforts at openspacealliance.org.

And you're always welcome at our meetings.



Indigenous Peoples Day in Albuquerque



Heading to the Rio Grande for a fall cleanup



October, November, and December Events in ABQ Open Space

Continued from page 6.

October 25, 1 pm – 8 pm. Indigenous Peoples Day at OSVC. On Indigenous Peoples' Day, we honor the indigenous nations and peoples of New Mexico and throughout the country and world who continue to thrive to this day. All are welcome to join in the celebration of Indigenous Peoples' Day!



November 15, Sandhill Crane Festival. Are you a bird-watching fan, with a particular interest in sandhill cranes and geese? Don't miss our 2025 annual Crane Festival. Borrow a pair of binoculars from the front desk to help enhance your bird watching experience. Allow the many bird calls and posturing to intrigue. Participation in the Sandhill Crane migration to their winter residence is one of our most fantastic bird-watching experiences in the heart of our gorgeous city.



Dec. 13, OSVC. The Solstice Seed Mandala creation is an annual community art-making event to celebrate the coming of the winter season. We gather for the creation of a Mandala using different kinds of grains and seeds. The seeds of the mandala serve to feed migratory songbirds and the mandala remains in place for about a week. Participants contribute to the design and help to build the Mandala.

