

## Editorial

# Benefits of thinning our forests are plentiful

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The threat of catastrophic wildfire is one of the major challenges facing Taos and the entire Southwest today and in the decades to come.

Devastating blazes have wreaked havoc on other parts of the state in recent years. Large swaths of forest have been reduced to barren moonscapes. The subsequent flooding and landslides have decimated watersheds.

Add the dire effects that climate change is expected to bring, and our communities are looking at an uncertain future.

That's why we're thrilled to see momentum building behind an effort that seeks to tackle the problem.

The Rio Grande Water Fund is a partnership of government agencies, utilities, businesses, nonprofits and other groups hoping to protect water quality by restoring hundreds of thousands of acres of forest across the Rio Grande Basin. To do that, it's raising awareness and money to do on-the-ground treatments meant to make our forests healthier and more resilient. Thankfully for those of us in El Norte, a big piece of Taos County has been identified as a priority project area in the first rounds of funding. Local experts and community members have identified the west slope of the Sangres — from Pot Creek to San Cristobal — as an area of forest in need of some love. It's our backyard, our playground, our water source and, for those of us with deep roots in Taos' land-based cultures, a precious legacy.

Already, money from the Rio Grande Water Fund is going to Taos Pueblo, private landowners and the Forest Service to help treatments along. We're encouraged by the fact these diverse land managers recognized the benefits of cooperation and that the fund organizers agreed it's an area worth protecting.

Reducing wildfire risk is only one benefit of this work. Thinning our forests would also improve wildlife habitat and make the woods more appealing to visitors and locals. Plus, there is the potential of revitalizing the timber industry in Taos County if we can find a use for the kind of wood that needs to be culled from the forests.

In the months ahead, we hope local, state and federal officials will see the wisdom in this model and find tangible ways to keep the effort going. That means providing funding and technical expertise. We also hope downstream water users recognize the importance of these headwaters and will be willing to pitch in — with hard cash — to help with forest treatments.

The Rio Grande Water Fund has created the model and done the legwork to get it off the ground. It's up to everyone up and down the river basin to make sure it succeeds.

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