

TSV Foundation donates \$250K for Rio Grande logging economy research

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The Taos Ski Valley Foundation has donated \$250,000 to the Rio Grande Water Fund in order to find economical ways of actually using small-diameter wood coming out of Taos County's overstocked forests.

The Rio Grande Water Fund is an ambitious project led by the Nature Conservancy that aims to thin tens of thousands of acres of private and public land throughout the Rio Grande watershed over the coming decades to help make the river and its ecosystem more resilient to catastrophic wildfires.

In addition to training local firefighters in controlled burns, the recent donation is earmarked for "policies and projects to develop large-scale uses of the wood being pulled from the forests," according to Tracey Stone, media liaison with the Nature Conservancy.

"We're trying to create a market for that [small-diameter] wood," Stone said in a phone interview.

The foundation donated \$125,000 to the water fund in 2016 to conduct, among other projects, fire history research and a study of tree rings that confirms there were repeated low-intensity fires in local forests dating back to the 1300s. On average, fires burned in Taos-area forests every 11 to 43 years, according to the conservancy.

The Taos Ski Valley Foundation is the New Mexico leg of TSV owner Louis Bacon's Moore Charitable Foundation. In addition to smaller contributions, the water fund has received large donations, from \$50,000 to \$1 million, from private foundations that include the Santa Fe-based McCune Charitable Foundation and the LOR Foundation, based in Boseman, Montana.

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From left, Raul Hurtado and Ray Corral with the Carson National Forest discuss forest health up Taos Canyon with tree ring scientist Ellis Margolis, U.S. Forest Service silviculturist Gabriel Romero, Lane Johnson with the National Park Service and conservation legacy intern Rachel Bean. By understanding how fire burned in the past, land managers hope to be more effective in restoring the forest to natural conditions.

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