

## My Turn

### Protecting watersheds takes a community

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Watersheds are the lifeblood of our planet. They carry nutrients and oxygen from their headwaters to their outflows. Every aspect of our society and ecosystem depends on water as every organ in our bodies depends on the nutrients supplied by our blood.

We depend on water for staying hydrated, cooking, cleaning and bathing. Yet just as some may contaminate their bodies with drugs or alcohol, we have allowed our waters to be contaminated as well.

We have allowed industries to pollute our waters with chemicals without repercussions. We have allowed cattle to defecate in the streams causing E.coli and other water-born illnesses (not to mention the damage they cause to riverbanks and stream beds).

We have removed vegetation from river banks, which causes the water temperature to increase, thereby decreasing the concentration of dissolved oxygen. Without dissolved oxygen, fish and other aquatic species can not survive let alone thrive and reproduce.

Plant roots hold the soil in place; therefore, the removal of vegetation has also caused erosion along the river banks. The overpumping of aquifers for agriculture is causing the ground beneath our feet to dry up and erode away, and the improper disposal of cleaning chemicals and detergents gets into the water supply.

We must remember that despite the picturesque mountains and beautiful sunsets, we live in a desert, and the water we receive is a precious commodity to be preserved.

As drug addicts and alcoholics can go to rehab, we need to detox our waters. However, as they did not become polluted overnight, they will not be cleaned up overnight. It is going to take a lot of work and determination. It may be disheartening at some points, but it can be done.

No one person can do it alone. It will take the entire community.

It will take people willing to get their hands dirty volunteering in river restoration projects. It will take people willing to use less water for agriculture or on their lawns, or perhaps collecting rain water to water their lawns and gardens on dry days. It will require people to be more cautious of the chemicals they dump down the drain.

Just as we all should be cautious of what we put into our own bodies, everyone should be careful of what goes into the water we all drink.

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**Randy Suazo during a 2017 internship with the BLM Taos field office assisting with a beaver dam survey on the Santa Fe River.  
Courtesy photo**

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