

Candelaria Nature Preserve

2022 Annual Report

March 2023

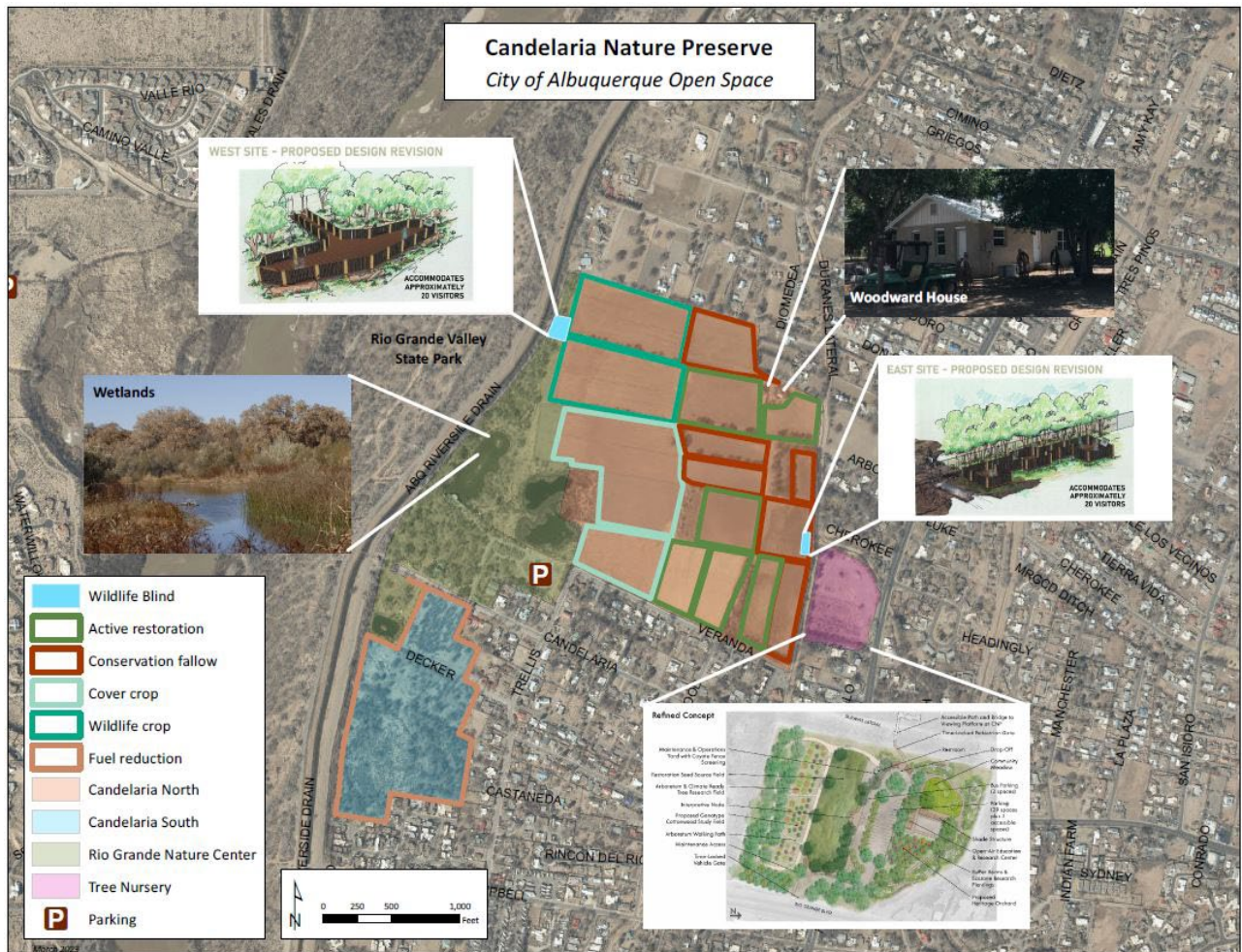


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OVERVIEW

Candelaria Nature Preserve (CNP) was purchased in 1977 and is part of the City of Albuquerque's inventory of lands designated as Major Public Open Space. This property is managed by the Albuquerque Open Space Division in partnership with New Mexico State Parks. In 2021, following a three-year community-driven planning process, City Council adopted a Resource Management Plan (RMP). 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



MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The City of Albuquerque has made great strides to implement 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 following major accomplishments have been met since the adoption of RMP:



- City Council approved the Resource Management Plan in September 2021.
- The Environmental Planning Commission approved the Tree Nursery Tract (TNT) site plan in August 2022.
- The City entered into contract with Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) to oversee restoration efforts. Active restoration has been initiated on 14 acres.
- Wildlife farming is being managed on 43 acres.
- Public access has expanded through monthly guided tours, student experiences, and volunteers (500 volunteers contributed a total of 2,587 hours).
- The City established a Habitat Council comprised of professional representatives from the CNP, Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area and Bernardo Wildlife Area. The group meets quarterly to share best management practices and compare successes and challenges.
- Through the support of State Senator Bill O'Neill, State Representative Debbie Armstrong, Gov. Michelle Lujan-Grisham and others, the City secured \$1,485,000 in state capital outlay grants. The State funds have supported the following projects:
 - Aquatic Consultants designed a 20-acre Ephemeral and Damp Soil Habitat area.
 - MRWM Landscape Architects completed the design of two wildlife viewing areas that will be constructed in 2023.
 - MRWM Landscape Architects completed a site plan for the Tree Nursery Tract (TNT).
- The City allocated reoccurring general funds for a fulltime technician, biologist, and operating funds for a total of \$790,000 over the past three years.
- Friends of Candelaria Nature Preserve (FCNP) formed and now has 75 members. FCNP are supporting monthly tours and working with the City to develop an interpretive plan that will further enhance visitor's experience and understanding of the CNP.

WEST SITE - PROPOSED DESIGN REVISION



EAST SITE - PROPOSED DESIGN REVISION



Wildlife Habitat Restoration

Open Space Division staff are working alongside CSWCD and Rio Grande Return on this major restoration undertaking. Active restoration has been initiated on 14 acres where more than 800 native perennials and seeds have been planted in fields and hedgerows. Propagation cells have been established with mulch sponges to support new plantings. Nursery plants are also being grown for future efforts. Wildlife farming is being managed on 43 acres where no till drill methods are employed and the use of diverse native seed mixes are being cultivated. 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 at the CNP website for more information.



Ecological Monitoring Methods

Ecological models are being utilized to better anticipate and plan restoration outcomes. CSWCD is using a *Society for Ecological Restoration Recovery Wheel* to track progress overtime, 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. 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 restricted and is mainly supported through wildlife viewing areas and guided tours. A community-driven process to design the wildlife viewing areas was completed in 2022, along with a site plan for the Tree Nursery Tract that will offer public parking, a variety of access opportunities and educational programs. Monthly guided tours are held for the general public (180 participants in 2022). 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 and volunteers with the FCNP. Over 500 volunteers contributed a total of 2,587 hours. The Friends of CNP are also developing an interpretive plan that will further enhances visitor experience and understanding of the CNP



Candelaria Nature Preserve Investments

Year	Amount	Balance	Description
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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	\$25,000	Equipment and Tree Nursery Tract planning
2021	\$550,000	\$550,000 projected to spend in 2023	Construct east wildlife blind, TNT parking & site plan
2022	\$250,000	\$250,000 projected to spend in 2023	TNT site plan construction
Total	\$1,485,000		

City Funds (General Fund 3 Fiscal Year)

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
Total	\$790,000	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 2023:

- Construction of the west and east wildlife blinds.
- Complete construction plans and begin phased implementation of the TNT site plan.
- 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 survey of the Candelaria South 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	\$750,000
Bridge across Duranes Lateral	\$150,000
Irrigation upgrades, ditch improvements, and water rights allocation	\$500,000
Candelaria South Tract-wildlife platform & viewing area	\$400,000
Total	\$1,800,000



www.cabq.gov/candelaria-nature-preserve

