



CITY OF SANTA FE

Memorandum

Date: July 31, 2025

To: Governing Body, Public Works and Utility Committee, Quality of Life Committee

From: Zoë Isaacson, River and Watershed Manager *ZAI*

Via: Melissa McDonald, Parks and Open Space Division Director *M Mc*
Regina Wheeler, Public Works Director *RW*
Jesse Roach, Interim Public Works and Utilities Director *JR*

RE: Solutions to Two Mile Pond

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This resolution directs the City of Santa Fe's ("City") City Manager and the Santa Fe River Commission to work with relevant City staff to analyze and, if feasible, establish the predevelopment location of the Santa Fe River as the primary watercourse from below Nichols Dam to Cerro Gordo Road. This effort would involve the engagement of a comprehensive engineering analysis of the Two Mile Pond complex and riparian corridor, and the design and establishment new infrastructure to support a free-flowing Santa Fe River. These actions would be accompanied by the commitment to collaborate and engage with identified stakeholders throughout the process. Additionally, the resolution directs that all planning, analysis, and implementation of the named actions would be guided by the principles of feasibility and long-term sustainability that would consider ecological value, water resource management, financial viability, and public safety.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS:

The City of Santa Fe has long recognized the ecological, cultural, and community value of restoring the Santa Fe River as a "living river." This vision was formally established through the adoption of the Santa Fe River Target Flow Ordinance in 2012 (Ordinance 2012-10), which created a legal and administrative framework to deliver dedicated flows from city reservoirs to support river health, habitat, and equitable access to water downstream. The ordinance represents a shift toward adaptive river management that balances human use with the restoration of ecological function.

Historically, the Santa Fe River served as a vital lifeline for the region, both ecologically and culturally. However, since 1881, its natural flow regime has been altered by a complex system of utility infrastructure, including reservoirs, pipes, culverts, and diversions, particularly in the reach between Nichols Reservoir and Cerro Gordo Road. These modifications, while originally designed for urban water supply and flood control, have impacted riparian habitat, diminished floodplain connectivity, and interrupted natural hydrologic processes.



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The City now has a unique opportunity to reevaluate water infrastructure and river management in this reach. By late 2025, a new pipe connecting Nichols Reservoir to Canyon Road Water Treatment Plant will render obsolete several key pieces of infrastructure in the river corridor, freeing the City to consider restoring the river to its approximate predevelopment course. This coincides with the broader goal of creating a resilient, self-sustaining river system that delivers ecological services while enhancing community well-being.

In response, this resolution initiates a targeted effort to evaluate, and if possible, reestablish surface flows along the approximate location of the river in 1881 from just below Nichols Reservoir to below Cerro Gordo Road and to restore the integrity of a functional riparian channel. It is expected that restoration of flows to this segment will benefit riparian habitat and improve water quality. Importantly, this effort will be undertaken without measurable diminishment of flows to downstream users, as encouraged under the Target Flow Ordinance.

To accomplish this, the City will conduct a comprehensive engineering and ecological analysis of the river corridor. This includes assessing existing infrastructure such as the remnants of the Two Mile Reservoir and the culvert system under Cerro Gordo Road, determining whether modifications or removal are necessary to facilitate natural flow, and identifying opportunities for new infrastructure that supports ecological function. The analysis will be grounded in sound hydrologic, geotechnical, and sediment transport science, and will evaluate potential habitat benefits and environmental risks. Potential benefits of re-establishing river flow in the approximate location of the pre-development river will be weighed against the costs associated with necessary infrastructure upgrades developed with this analysis.

The City is committed to a collaborative and transparent approach, working closely with stakeholders including conservation organizations, tribal entities, regulatory agencies, and the public. Engagement will include visioning sessions to help define the most appropriate long-term condition for the corridor and broad outreach to promote understanding of the Santa Fe River Target Flow Ordinance and its role in this work.

Planning and implementation will be guided by principles of sustainability, equity, feasibility, and public safety. Ultimately, this resolution marks a foundational step toward realizing the community's long-held vision: a restored, resilient Santa Fe River that supports ecological health, cultural vitality, and quality of life for future generations.

ATTACHMENTS:

Resolution

FIR

Map: Two Mile Pond Study Area