

# ALBUQUERQUE BERNALILLO COUNTY WATER UTILITY AUTHORITY

## SWRP Outfall Restoration Project

NEAA26 OPERATIONS & ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE



National Environmental  
Achievement  
AWARDS



### Reconnecting River, Habitat, and Community

- **Major climate-adaptive investment:** An \$8.6 million restoration project completed in 2025 improves the Southside Water Reclamation Plant wastewater outfall, which delivers ~55 million gallons of clean water to the Rio Grande each day.
- **Habitat restoration at scale:** Restored 11 acres by removing invasive vegetation and planting ~33,000 native, riparian plants to revive bosque habitat for fish, wildlife, and vegetation.
- **Protection of endangered species:** Reconnected the river to its floodplain and created shallow spawning areas benefiting the endangered Rio Grande Silvery Minnow while restoring critical habitat for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and Yellow-Billed Cuckoo.
- **Community and recreation benefits:** Added new trails for hiking, fishing, and biking in a historically disadvantaged area, delivering ecological and community benefits just three months post-construction.
- **Long-term stewardship commitment:** Builds on nearly 20 years of commitment to the Rio Grande, reinforcing the Water Authority's role as an active steward of the river ecosystem.



## Reconnecting River, Habitat, and Community: The SWRP Outfall Restoration Project

Nearly twenty years ago, when it started using water drawn from the Rio Grande as a major part of its drinking water supply, the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (Water Authority) committed to be an active and responsible steward of the river's ecosystem. As part of that commitment, the Water Authority in 2025 completed work on an \$8.6 million environmental restoration project aimed at improving the outfall site where clean water from the utility's reclamation process flows into the river. The outfall, which channels some 55 million gallons into the Rio Grande every day, is an increasingly important source of water for fish, wildlife and vegetation as natural river flows diminish due to aridification. Over many decades, habitats adjacent to the outfall deteriorated as the surrounding forested area, or *bosque*, became choked with invasive, non-native vegetation. Affected wildlife species included the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and the threatened Yellow-Billed Cuckoo. Meanwhile, breeding areas for fish—particularly the endangered Rio Grande Silvery Minnow—were lost or damaged due to flood-control efforts that had disconnected the river from its floodplain, eliminating the shallow riverside pools necessary for spawning. The restoration initiative, officially designated the Southside Water Reclamation Plant Outfall Project, addressed these issues across an 11-acre span. Non-native vegetation was replaced by some 33,000 new native plants; terraced embankments were constructed in place of steep drop-offs to allow creation of fish spawning areas; and a new trail system installed to allow recreational access for hikers, anglers and bicyclists in a historically disadvantaged area of the community. The Project represents climate-adaptive project design what was achieved with stakeholder collaboration. The project is only three months post-construction and is already showing results for species and community members alike.