



# URBAN CONSERVATION IN NEW MEXICO

## Cities and Nature Thriving Together

As the climate continues to change, urban populations are facing increasing challenges and growing demands on our natural resources. To create a future where both people and nature can thrive, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in New Mexico's Urban Conservation Program has worked since 2016 to bring nature-based solutions to Albuquerque that promote health, clean water and climate resilience in New Mexico's most populous urban area. Fundamental to our approach is understanding what nature can do for cities—and what cities can do for nature.

# NATURE'S SOLUTIONS

Our Urban Conservation Program seeks to bring nature back into the greater Albuquerque area to help solve some of the city's most pressing challenges. Our priorities include protecting and conserving our drinking water, reducing heat impacts, investing in our urban tree canopy and building strong and diverse partnerships to make a positive change for people and nature.







## Water for the Future

To ensure that Albuquerque's residents have access to clean, safe water—now and in the future—the Urban Conservation Program is working to clean the stormwater that flows into the Rio Grande and protect water quality at its source.

**Stormwater as an Asset.** Nearly half of Albuquerque is covered by asphalt and concrete, which prevents rainfall from seeping into the ground. Instead, stormwater runoff carries pollutants directly into the Rio Grande. By harnessing the power of nature to filter and clean stormwater using green stormwater infrastructure like rain gardens, bioswales and enhanced tree canopies, we can keep pollution from reaching

the Rio Grande while adding much-needed irrigation to street trees and other natural spaces. In 2019, the Arid LID (Low Impact Development) Coalition, for which TNC currently serves as chair, continued its efforts to serve as a hub for new and existing research, demonstration projects and educational outreach. In our first major event, we successfully hosted a two-day training workshop for 65 professionals focused on overcoming barriers to adopting green stormwater infrastructure practices that are adapted to New Mexico's arid climate. Investments like these help our community share technical resources, fill knowledge gaps and promote healthy spaces that can keep our city sustainable.



## Cooling Our Communities

Albuquerque has less than ten percent tree canopy and is losing trees at an alarming rate due to old age. Healthy trees can improve air and water quality, filtering up to a third of fine particle pollutants within 300 yards. They're also one of our best defenses against urban heat, providing cooling shade that reduces temperatures and cuts down on energy use. A healthy tree canopy also supports biodiversity and offers health benefits like reducing stress, encouraging recreation and lowering rates of heart disease, stroke and asthma.

**Policy Shift.** Recently, the City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Department asked the Conservancy to convene a group of tree experts to make recommendations for improving the city's urban forest management. After much deliberation, it was clear that a major shift in strategy was needed. Our recommendations were presented to Albuquerque's mayor,

who in turn established a citywide goal to plant 100,000 trees in 10 years—one for every child in the city. The mayor also launched an Urban Forest Initiative, which will support several new, full-time positions to add expertise around city-wide tree stewardship.

**Tree Planting.** The Conservancy is doing its part to make progress toward that 100,000-tree goal. Over a series of community engagement events, we planted or gave away more than 700 trees. With the help of our partners, we also developed a planting list of recommended tree species that will thrive in Albuquerque's future climate conditions. Finally, we developed a series of videos and animations as part of our tree awareness campaign to engage the public and highlight our partnerships and shared, on-the-ground efforts. View them at [nature.org/abq](http://nature.org/abq).



## Collaborative Conservation

The success of our on-the-ground efforts in Albuquerque hinges on close collaboration with our partners and the communities within which we work, from beginning to end. We're building diverse, inclusive partnerships that focus on engaging the community in hands-on conservation activities, creating jobs and training the next generation of environmental stewards.

**Diverse Partnerships.** Diversity is important at all levels of conservation, and finding new ways to partner often leads to unexpected benefits. The Conservancy recently collaborated with the Xerces Society to co-host a workshop on native pollinators. More than 30 participants learned how to identify native bees and other beneficial insects, create habitat for these critters and understand their important role in a healthy, diverse urban ecosystem. The timing was perfect, as we also helped another partner, Friends of Valle de Oro, launch their Backyard Refuge program. Backyard Refuge

focuses on creating wildlife habitat in your own space, whether you have an acre of land or a few small containers on your patio.

**Equity in Conservation.** In 2019, we led efforts to construct a half-acre pop-up park in the heart of Albuquerque's International District, one of the most densely populated communities in Albuquerque with high opportunity for enhancing community resources. The park includes vibrant, mural-covered containers that house medicinal plants, herbs and trees, and was the result of a community-driven process that included more than 18 months of deep listening. With the help of our valued partners and a team of neighborhood organizers and community leaders, we transformed a vacant lot dominated by trash and dirt into a beautiful green space and showed one of the most diverse communities in the city that they are worth investing in. Our story, covered by PBS New Mexico In Focus, was voted as one of the top ten stories of 2019.

"Since nature exists in many forms and is not something for just a few to enjoy, Avalon was drawn to the Urban Conservation Program's tree planting project. It introduces nature at scale, with the promise to transform and improve quality of life for Albuquerque's South Valley residents for generations to come. "

-Julia Peters, JD, Avalon Trust



"The arrival of TNC's Albuquerque Urban Conservation program was a life-saving defibrillator on the heart of the Middle Rio Grande Valley natural resource community. TNC collaborated with 20+ stove-piped government and non-profit organizations to identify and execute a unifying strategy with precision, developing capacity and leveraging funding. For the first time, I feel like we all have the same heart rhythm."

-Jennifer Dann, Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager, NM State Forestry

## 2019 at-a-glance



Employed **40 young adults** (aged 17-25) in conservation projects



Recorded more than **1,084 hours** of volunteer time **planting trees** and restoring natural spaces

**6,000 gallons** of rainwater storage added by installing rain barrels at schools, community gardens and other public spaces with our partner, General Mills



Distributed/planted **700 trees** to support the city's 100,000-tree planting goal



Engaged **1,122 volunteers** and residents in conservation, education and outreach events

Thanks to our partners and communities for helping to build a more resilient, healthy Albuquerque!

For more information visit [nature.org/abq](https://nature.org/abq)

To support The Nature Conservancy's Urban Conservation Program, please contact **Jackie Hall** at **505-946-2021** or [Jacquelyn\\_hall@tnc.org](mailto:Jacquelyn_hall@tnc.org).

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