

## **A Naturalistic Approach to Watershed Restoration and Water Resources Development**

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Santa Clara Creek consists of a 23-mile, west-to-east trending stream that flows from the Jemez mountains, down into the Rio Grande in northern New Mexico. Since 1998, three devastating wildfires have impacted the 32,000-acre Santa Clara Creek Watershed, which serves as a primary source of water, cultural identity, and spiritual sanctuary to the Santa Clara Native American Tribe. The most devastating of these events was the 2011 Las Conchas Fire which burned 60% of the watershed and resulted in widespread flooding and devastating debris flows which resulted in 100% fish kill within the watershed. Santa Clara Pueblo has since coordinated a collaborative effort to mitigate fire and flood damages by leveraging federal, state, and non-governmental resources. Starting at the watershed boundary, the Tribe implemented a 'top-down approach' to treating the watershed after it became apparent that mitigating erosion at the source was needed before restoration efforts could be sustained along the creek. After 12-years and over 5,000 hand-built erosion structures, creek restoration efforts have commenced since 2018. This presentation will review these restoration efforts by highlighting best practices, fish passage, water security, and how the Tribe is developing a 'naturalistic approach for water resources development' with the goal of restoring native Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and long-term climate resilience to this watershed.

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