

Community-based Conservation: Making a Community's Vision of a Refuge a Reality

Ariel Elliott¹, Cameron Weber², Jacob White³

¹Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge, Albuquerque, NM, USA

²Rio Grande Return, Santa Fe, NM, USA

³Rio Grande Return, Santa Fe, NM, USA

We have all heard that engaging the communities we serve leads to greater buy in, increased support and overall greater success in our conservation efforts, but how does that work in the real world? How do you engage community members when all the decisions are already made? How do you build trust with communities to start with? How do you keep community members engaged throughout the lifespan of a project?

In this presentation, Cameron Weber, Habitat Conservation Director and Jacob White, Habitat Field Technician and Community Justice & Resilience Specialist, of Rio Grande Return, and Ariel Elliott, former Wildlife Biologist and current Deputy Refuge Manager will share the story of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and its mission to be built “by the community, for the community”. After completing community-based site planning for the refuge, staff and partners have the difficult task of bringing the shared vision to life. Learn how the refuge continues to engage community members and how those relationships have shaped the refuge's programs, partnerships, and workforce.

Ariel Elliott is the Deputy Refuge Manager at Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge and works to provide support for all programs, staff, partners, visitors, and community members as the day-to-day supervisor of the refuge. Formerly, Ariel was the Wildlife Biologist for Valle de Oro NWR, working together with others to create a mosaic of natural Middle Rio Grande Valley habitats back onto the refuge. Ariel has a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science, concentration in wildlife and fisheries management, and a minor in Forestry from the University of Tennessee – Knoxville.

Cameron Weber serves as Habitat Conservation Program Director for Rio Grande Return, a non-profit devoted to the unique waters, wetlands, and wildlife of the Southwest. Cameron's projects are primarily focused on rewilding agricultural landscapes and ecological systems dependent on human participation. Cameron holds a master's of Community and Regional Planning from the University of New Mexico and has worked for over 15 years on community-oriented nature care, native plant materials development, and conservation planning.

Contact Information: Ariel Elliott, Rio Grande Return, 1704B Llano St #347, Santa Fe, NM, 87505, USA, Phone: 505-901-1700, Email: ariel_elliott@fws.gov

Contact Information: Cameron Weber, Habitat Conservation Director, Rio Grande Return, 1704B Llano St #347, Santa Fe, NM, 87505, USA Phone: 505-901-1700, Email: cameron@riograndereturn.org