



CONNECTING THE DOTS -NEWSLETTER-

July - September 2023



The Connecting the Dots quarterly newsletters is a product of the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments



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Director's Note

Investment Continues in the Four Corners

We have seen a feverous start to Fiscal Year 2024, as the Northwest NM COG team continues to lead the field in attracting investments from various State and Federal sources including Transportation Project Fund, Water Trust Board, Department of Finance & Administration (DFA) Programs, Economic Development Administration, and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

This quarter included some continued investment by the US Economic Development Administration:

1. **Milan Industrial Park** – The Village of Milan has been awarded \$2.7M for roadway infrastructure investments to help attract business to the community's industrial park. This grant requires a local match of \$684,750 that was raised with \$600,000 in DFA's Federal Matching Fund Program, and the remainder of \$84,750 from Cibola Communities Economic Development Foundation and Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments via Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association's Community Fund.
2. **San Juan College** – San Juan College has been selected to continue another three-year term as a designated University Center. The College will receive \$130,000 each year to advance the Harvest Kitchen and Food Hub.
3. **Economic Development Organizations Capacity Grant** – the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments was awarded \$621,000 for the Supercharging Diversification, Equity, and Resiliency in Northwest New Mexico. This funding along with \$155,250 in matching dollars will be aimed to re-invest in area economic development organization (EDOs) to do more with more in terms of funding and three-years of committed financial support to grow their capacity.



Evan Williams, CEcD
Executive Director

Also, the COG has been recognized for its work based on several National Awards from National Association of Development Organizations (NADO):



Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments - Prewitt / Milan Transportation Master Plan



*Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments - Water Regionalization & Water Commons
Eastern Plains Council of Governments - Mental Health Program*

Water Planning Office

Water Leadership Institute

The Regional Water Planning Organization (RWPO) partnered with the Rural Communities Assistance Corporation and its sister organization, the Rural Communities Assistance Partnership (RCAP) in organizing and facilitating summer leadership classes for small water systems in McKinley and Cibola Counties.

Five area small water systems participated in these leadership classes that were held between June and August. The last two sessions were held in August. Participants were also invited to attend and participated in the 2023 Rural Water Summit to gain more information and to take part in their graduation ceremony.

There is certainly an opportunity to continue to provide this training opportunity for small water systems in our region in the future.



Rural Water Summit

McKinley County, the COG, RWPO and RCAC worked together to organize and facilitate the third annual water summit that was held on August 31, 2023. This event attracted the largest attendance to date, with Representative Harry Garcia (District 69) delivering the welcome address. The theme of the summit was focused on regional collaboration and the agenda highlighted efforts and planning activities within the past year.

Water Trust Board

COG is currently assisting two member governments and a special district with the completion and submission of the 2024 Water Trust Board grant applications. The application cycle started with the submission of the Notice of Intent in August and the Project Applications were submitted on September 15, 2023. The WTB administrators are currently reviewing the first stage of the application process, and applicants will have an opportunity to present their respective projects at one of the regular WTB board meetings.



Special Projects Office

McKenzie Ridge Connector – Twin Springs Trail System

Trail construction on McKenzie Ridge Connector began last year, this year, and is expected to continue into next year. This connector trail connects from Sawmill trail near McGaffey Lake, onto McKenzie Ridge proper at an elevation of approximately 8656 ft. and nearing above Cottonwood Canyon. This fluctuating 23-mile trail has required approved rerouting by the US Forest Service, Cibola National Forest. Approved rerouting for sustainability, cultural, and biological concerns have interim developments with Mt. Taylor Ranger District. As a corollary, appropriate planning and management of trails is becoming increasingly important to the recreational use of the Zuni Mountains Trail systems. McKenzie's typical vegetation is an openly spaced ponderosa pine forest with pockets of oak and other brush. Lower areas with pinyon-juniper forest. The terrain is dominated by sandstone rock formations. The Continental Divide line curves through near Foster Canyon and Twin Springs.

McKenzie Ridge Connector will eventually continue into Cibola County, the Rincon, Peavine Canyon, and near Twin Springs where the future Twin Springs Trailhead will be installed. McKenzie Ridge Connector, Twin Springs Trail system, also connects through Lookout Mountain Rim, nearing Sawyer Creek, and to the future Bluewater Creek Trail system. The Twin Springs trail, in Cibola County, is an approximately 30 miles. After the completion of McKenzie Ridge Connector - Twin Springs Trail system is the other approximate 80 miles of future construction of trails left to reach the Quartz Hill Trail system near the Village of Milan and Grants. The approximate 205-mile Zuni Mountain Trail Project has gained funding from the New Mexico's Department of Transportation Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and will require additional funding from numerous sources to bring the outdoor recreation of the Zuni Mountains to full fruition.



Special Projects Office continued...

Gallup Youth Conservation Corps

To develop, expand, and improve the City of Gallup's Red Rock Trail System with McKinley County support of the expand walkability and add fitness opportunities throughout the city. The Red Rock Trail System is part of the Gallup Urban Network. This project will provide additional access and use to the park, beautify urban areas, and reinforce the "Keep New Mexico Beautiful" and "New Mexico True" Campaign. Red Rock Park was formerly a New Mexico State Park and is the only park of its kind in McKinley County with over 250,000 visitations a year. The Red Rock Trail System consisting of Pyramid Rock trail and Church Rock trail is a regional tourism asset, local quality of life asset, a recreation opportunity, and offers some of New Mexico's hiking experiences.

This project is consistent with the Gallup Growth Management Master Plan's Trails and Open Space element.

The NWNMCOG has assisted the member government, City of Gallup's Youth Conservation Corp (Gallup YCC) program with the Request for Proposal grant through the New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps Commission of the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD). This includes collaboration with McKinley County, Mt. Taylor Ranger District, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and other partners who are involved with trails and conservation efforts in the Gallup surrounding areas such as the Red Rock Park, Zuni Mountains, High Desert, Hogbacks, and the Ramah Trail System.

The Gallup YCC program builds on a track record of delivering a highly successful youth workforce program that delivers first-class and worthwhile projects for the community. Projects are aligned with advancing health and economic targets, such as trails, community garden, beautification, conservation, and built environment projects. Work plans also restore, recycle, and regenerate open space for habitat, safe play, community gardens, and recreation areas. Gallup YCC and these projects are linked together with the intentional focus of bettering our socioeconomics in terms of poverty, unemployment, obesity, diabetes, and suicide. Many of which are ranked as some of the highest

in the States and Nation. The Gallup YCC members are well respected members of the community, and many depend on their services. Gallup YCC is one of the most successful programs in building life and job skills, furthering education, empowerment, instilling pride, and conservation ethics, providing an equal employment opportunity.

In addition, the New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps funds youth-centered projects and career development. The northwest region of the City of Aztec youth has assisted in the development of Tiger Park. The City of Bloomfield youth has worked on clearing invasive species to provide visibility to the waters of the San Juan River. The Conservation Legacy – Acoma youth participated in revitalizing traditional food systems and preparing for a career in farming and food production. The Conservation Legacy – Zuni youth worked with local Zuni government and religious leaders to assist with protecting

cultural areas, constructing trails, stabilizing walls and more. Local governments, tribes, and non-profits are eligible to apply for funding.

<https://www.emnrd.nm.gov/about-ycc/>





Economic Development Office



CEDS Kickoff

With a room full of local, state, and federal officials, the 2023 COG Annual Luncheon served as the forum for the NWNMCOG to announce it will launch a region wide effort to update and generate a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

The CEDS is the economic development blueprint for the region. The CEDS was last updated in 2021 and much has happened in the region over the past three years. As the region continues to emerge from the pandemic, efforts are underway to grow and strengthen the regional economy. In addition to maintaining a document which captures monitors the economic health of the region, there are new federal requirements related to the CEDS which only helps to serve as a reinforcement for the update. New elements in the CEDS process include climate resilience, equity, workforce development, and broadband. With local and federal changes, communities are excited and ready to engage, eager to chart a new economic development path.

The CEDS process will roll out through 2024, with a targeted completion date of 2025. A community rich engagement process will be undertaken to include targeted outreach in each respective county along with coordinated tribal and pueblo outreach. The goal is to provide an all-inclusive process to generate ideas and recommendations which respond to the needs and challenges of the region. Efforts related to data research and the formation of a CEDS Committee to help drive and implement the process are underway.

With the 2025 CEDS, there is a desire to develop a digital CEDS, an online document and website where stakeholders can access information regarding the CEDS and track its implementation.

RLF Update

Marketing outreach with the Revolving Loan Fund remains in full swing. Efforts for this period included targeted outreach in the downtown areas of the region's largest metro centers including Farmington, Gallup, and Grants. For the period, the RLF conducted outreach with approximately

98 businesses in the region, which included outreach with 29 businesses in Cibola County, 33 businesses in McKinley County, and 36 businesses in San Juan County. To date, the RLF is working with three (3) businesses on five (5) potential loans with a cumulative value of \$350,000, representing well of 1/3 of the capital allocation available.

In addition, the RLF continues bi-weekly calls with the National Development Council (NDC) regarding applicant review. Further, the National Development Council has assisted in projectteering, joining several calls with applicant businesses to review proposed needs and uses of funds.

<i>Projects</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Project 1	San Juan	PWC	\$75,000
Project 1	San Juan	M&E	\$25,000
Project 2	San Juan	PWC	\$100,000
Project 3	McKinley	Debt Refinance	\$100,000
Project 3	McKinley	PWC	\$50,000
		Total	\$350,000

EDA Milan - Federal Match Grant

The Village of Milan will get \$2.7 million in federal funding for roadway infrastructure improvements to help attract businesses to the community's industrial park. The industrial park is part of a long-term plan to move Milan from a boom-and-bust economy to a robust economy. The U.S. Department of Commerce grant will be used to develop Milan's industrial park and requires \$684,750 in matching funds from the village. The investment is expected to create 54 jobs and generate \$3.2 million in private investment, according to a Department of Commerce news release. The grant was developed by the NWNMCOG in partnership with the Village of Milan and stakeholders.



Economic Development Office continued...

The industrial park land was acquired by the village in 2003 and previously was a farm. Water and wastewater utilities already are built out to the park and would have to be extended to individual sites by developers. The planned industrial park encompasses 912 acres and has several shovel-ready sites but no roads leading to it.

"Milan from its initial incorporation as a municipality was the carrot capital of the world, and the day that they found uranium, it became the uranium capital of the world," Williams said, "so they've gone through these boom-and-bust cycles, as has the region." Coal power plants and coal mining have been the latest boom-and-bust industries to upend jobs in the region. The coal-powered Escalante Power Plant in nearby Prewitt closed in 2021, leaving some Milan and Grants area residents unemployed. About 90% of the power plant workers were Cibola County

residents, and the area lost 105 jobs, Williams said, leaving some workers in the community underemployed with skillsets beyond the existing job market. "The tax base of Cibola County, through these boom-and-bust periods, you've seen periods of investment, then disinvestment," Williams said. "So, what we talk about is trying to move the economy from a boom-bust to robust, and part of that robust strategy is to diversify with logistics, light manufacturing, value added agriculture — things that fit with the assets that are in the Cibola County area."

The industrial park site already has access to Interstate 40, the BNSF Southern Transcon railroad, and the Grants-Milan airport. The new funding will add roads to the site, which could be the key to enticing new industries. The project is expected to be completed in 2025.



Milan Industrial Park



Transportation Planning Office



RTIPR Update

Out of a total of 82 PFF's (project feasibility forms) submitted, 65 were approved and authorized by DOT Districts 5 and 6 to move forward with PPF's (project prospectus forms). This includes 9 projects for Cibola County, 9 projects for McKinley County, 9 projects for City of Gallup, 11 projects for City of Grants, 7 projects for Village of Milan, 9 projects for Navajo Nation, 5 projects for Pueblo of Acoma, 2 projects for Pueblo of Laguna, and 4 projects for Ramah Navajo. COG RTPO staff have asked our nine (9) participating member governments to identify their #1 priority roadway and NM Transportation Project Fund projects, for prioritization in our forthcoming 2024 RTIPR. All other project categories will not be prioritized and simply present equal value for funding. Because Navajo Nation represents a number of communities and districts, they do not have to prioritize projects.

I-40 Planning Grants

According to Parametrix Engineering, I-40 accommodates around 10,000 freight trucks every 24 hour day, making it one of the busiest corridors in our nation. 80 to 90% of freight carriers simply travel thru our state carrying international freight to our national destinations from the California ports, or our freight being sold to other nations, to the California shipping ports. Due to the heavy traffic on I-40 our state, supported by federal sources is considering improvements to I-40 including adding lanes, safety enhancements, interchange and drainage improvements, pavement improvements, improving frontage roads, and ITS (Intelligent Transportation Systems) improvements. Our region is requesting a total of \$18,650,000 in funding for the following projects: Milan: a) I-40 / NM568 – Sawmill Road interchange, b) I-40 / Horizon Blvd. interchange phase 1A/B/C. Gallup: a) I-40 / NM118 East / West Interchanges phase 1A/B/C, b) Gallup Trade Port. McKinley County: a) I-40/NM371/NM612 Interchange Reconfiguration, b) I-40 Prewitt Industrial Park Connectivity and Rail Crossing, c) Williams Acres I-40 Noise Barrier, d) Autonomous Trucking Complex, e) Commercial Truck Testing Corridor, and f) Supply Chain Accelerator.



McKinley Transportation Master Plan

Bohannon Huston received a notice to proceed for this project dated July 24, 2023. The engineering firm is reviewing the scope of work and will commence it's first meeting with COG and McKinley stakeholders some time in October. The scope of work will include a) work plan and cost proposal, b) technical products, c) final plans and Safe Streets for All self certification. McKinley County has major roadway, bridge, freight and rail improvements needed to support economic opportunities, including alternative fuel and EV charging stations. Address county bridge issues, integrate the Gallup Transportation Master Plan, connect with the 4CITE and Prewitt/Milan Transportation Master Plan and integrate EV charging and alternative fuel stations. Create an autonomous vehicle and mobility testing center, super truck center, and potential inland port.

Transportation Planning Office continued...

The scope of work will include engaging multi-jurisdictional lands and representatives within the county; and gathering land use, environmental, population and socio-economic data for planning. Analyze current and projected traffic, freight and rail conditions for consideration around land use and transportation system impact. Consider road & rail infrastructure for inland port and anticipated growth. Engage cross-jurisdictional agreements around transportation infrastructure within different land jurisdictions. Engage a public and stakeholder engagement process including supporting agencies. This is a condensed scope of work, as the actual proposed scope of work is broader with more detail on specific actions.

Grants / Milan Transportation Safety Action Plan

Wilson & Co. received a notice to proceed for this project dated July 24, 2023. Wilson & Co. responded providing information on anticipated staffing, costs, and work tasks including: a) finalize kick off meeting, b) preliminary data collection & analysis, c) develop local transportation safety plan vision & goals, d) ID safety emphasis areas, priority corridors and potential countermeasures and needs, e) public meeting #1, f) prepare implementation plan, g) public meeting #2, and h) draft & final report.

The condensed scope of work includes a) establish a leadership team, b) develop a public engagement plan, c) review existing plans, d) collect & analyze safety data, e) use a multimodal approach, f) set measures and targets, g) prioritize countermeasures, h) prepare and implement a safety plan. Beyond this provide a plan implementation and update process; and inform community members and stakeholders on vision, design, costs and anticipated construction. Apply for SS4A and Railroad Crossing Elimination funding programs.

2024 Transportation Project Fund Awards

In FY23, the COG supported the submission of numerous applications to the NMDOT Transportation Project Fund. In August, the COG was notified of approved projects totaling \$8,014,493.51. The following are the awarded projects for COG members and affiliates:

Entity	Project	State Share	Local Share
Cibola County	CR5 - Moquino Bridge	\$1,900,000	\$100,000
Village of Milan	Stanley Avenue Bridge	\$3,000,000	Waiver
City of Gallup	E. Nizhoni Boulevard Phase IV	\$1,909,500	\$100,500
Ramah Navajo	NM53/BIA125 Intersection	\$729,993.51	\$38,420.71
Burnham Chapter	N5/NM371 Road Safety Audit	\$475,000	\$25,000
City of Bloomfield	Bergin Lane Reconstruction	\$95,000	\$5,000
San Juan County	CR350 Resurfacing	\$1,812,600	\$95,400
Total		\$9,922,093.51	\$364,320.71

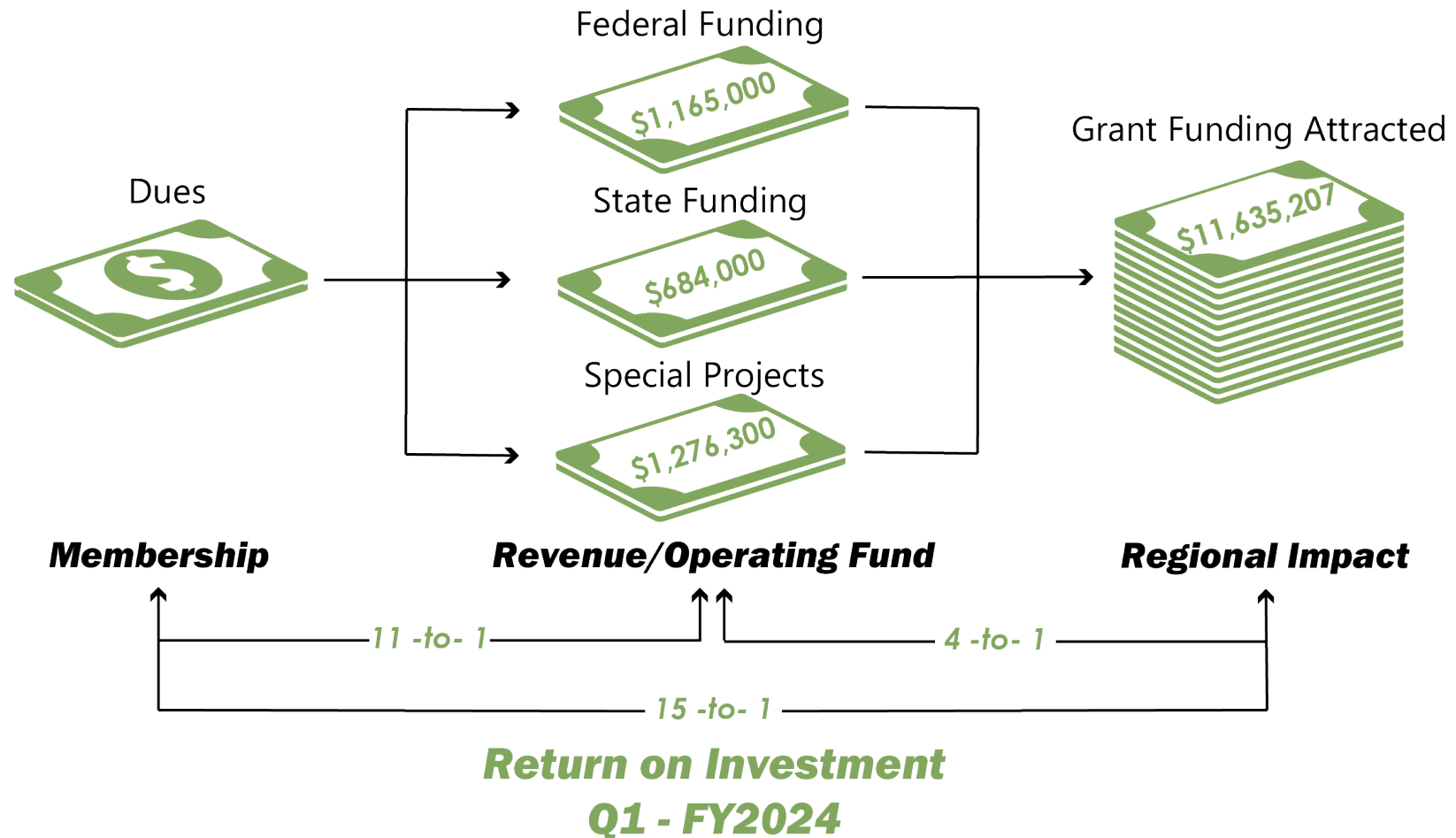


Regional Investment - COG Performance Review

Since taking over the helm as Executive Director, Mr. Williams has worked with his staff to conduct annual return on investment reports to member governments who financially contribute to the COG. These reports include highlights of accomplishments and a monetary return on investment. At the end of each quarter and the fiscal year, each member government's return on investment is incorporated into a regional recap to help the COG showcase our value to the region.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, the COG planning team huddled up to identify and set the Regional Return on Investment Goal for the year. With numerous sources available and a large list of infrastructure and planning projects already assembled by our regional communities, the COG, based on current and anticipated work, set the FY24 Return on Investment goal at \$100M. This goal represents a 25% increase from the previous year's goal of \$75M.

Below is our first quarter Return on Investment for Fiscal Year 2024:





Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments

“moving the region forward”