CONNECTING THE DOTS NEWSLETTER

July- September 2025

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

Director's Note

Hitting the High Notes

As we start out of the gate in FY 2026, I'm proud to reflect on the momentum and meaningful progress made across our region. The Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments continues to serve as a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and resilience - connecting the dots between local needs and regional opportunities.

Annual Meeting & Luncheon

On August 20th, we hosted a couple hundred of our closest partners and contributors recognizing the COG Board and staff as well as our 2025 Regional Champions:

- GloJean Todacheene - San Juan County Champion
- Tommy Haws - McKinley County Champion
- Raymond Concho, Jr. - Cibola County Champion
- Jim Dumont - Partner Champion

Water Planning & Development

This quarter, our Water Office advanced several critical infrastructure projects through the Water Trust Board program. Multiple small systems, including Gamero WSD, Yah-ta-hey WSD, and Northwest NM Utility Authority, received technical and financial support to improve water access and management. We also continued to support regionalization efforts helping systems explore new governance models and funding pathways.

Transportation Planning & Development

Our RTPO team made significant strides in transportation including the support of $15M of projects funded this cycle in our region through the Transportation Project Fund.

Economic Development

The COG launched the Plan and Partner for Prosperity (P_3) program to support scalable, locally driven economic initiatives. We also began updating our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), engaging partners and even a Harvard graduate student to help shape the future of our region's economy. Visit the CEDS website and take our survey to plot the future direction - https://www.theprosperitycollaborative.com/

Conservation

We deepened our partnership with the McKinley Soil & Water Conservation District, co-developing a strategic framework to enhance soil health, water conservation, and agricultural resilience. We also supported the NWNM Regional Solid Waste Authority in planning for organics recycling and composting integration. Both relationships have already borne fruit and attracted over $150,000 in grant funding and investment into the region.

Outdoor Recreation

Our team submitted a federal Recreation Trails Project (RTP) application for several miles of new trail in the Zuni Mountains, connecting McKenzie Ridge to Twin Springs. This project, supported by a coalition of local and state partners, will expand recreational access and economic vitality in the region. The COG also received a Trails + grant to marshal in a regional trails plan for the bi-county area modeled and connected with San Juan County trails plan.

As always, thank you to our dedicated staff, member governments, and regional partners for your continued trust and collaboration. Together, we are building a stronger, more resilient Northwest New Mexico.

Evan Williams, CEcD
Executive Director

Water Planning & Development Office Update

Small Systems Support

The COG and standing partners (NMED, RCAC and SWEFC) continue to provide support and technical assistance to small water systems in the northwest region with compliance (e.g., financial, organizational, management, operational), regional water progra3mming activities, and developing project planning and funding strategies.

During the reporting period, the office provided coordination, technical assistance, and administrative support to multiple water and sanitation entities across McKinley and Cibola Counties. Several districts including Gamerco, Yahtahey, Allison, White Cliffs, San Rafael, and Whispering Cedars were selected for the NMFA Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to receive engineering, accounting, or legal support for project design and planning. The office also helped Ramah secure Water Trust Board funding for water system improvements and assisted Williams Acres and Catalpa in advancing their funded projects with a newly procured on-call engineer. Ongoing work included financial audit preparation, discharge permit compliance, and coordination with partners such as RCAC, NMED, SWEFC, and NMFA. In Cibola County, the office supported Bluewater Acres, Bluewater District, San Rafael, and Seboyeta in meeting compliance requirements, completing audits, and preparing to utilize capital outlay appropriations for phased infrastructure improvements. Lastly, the COG co-coordinated with RCAC, NMED and DWEFC to host an in-person asset management training in August.

Northwest New Mexico Utility Authority

- COG was recently tasked with conducting additional support for the Authority, particularly for billing, accounting and reporting to build capacity and efficiency.
- Coordinated with standing partners to assist and support with water regionalization activities through new legislation under, Senate Bill 1 – Regional Water System Resiliency.
- Participated in one board meeting on August 12, 2025.
- Starting to coordinate with the Authority Director to outline an action plan to start transitioning some of the workload to COG.

- Applied to and was awarded NMFA Technical Assistance Program (TAP) to request accounting and facilitation services.
- Participated in the request for qualifications for open positions for the Authority, with a deadline for the first week of second quarter.

Regional Water Summit

COG organized and facilitated the 5th Annual Rural Water Summit on August 27, 2025, hosted by San Juan County, was held at the McGee Park (San Juan CO Fairgrounds). The event had a great turnout from local entities, state agencies (NMED, OSE) and partner organizations (RCAC, SWEFC). The summit focus was building water resiliency at the local level.

2026 Water Trust Board

- COG continues to provide NMFA Water Trust Board application assistance to members and small water systems. This year, staff supported a variety of requested as shown below:
- City of Gallup: Completed and submitted three (3) applications for Water, Wastewater and Water Conservation or Treatment, Recycling or Reuse
- McKinley County: Completed and submitted three (3) applications for Water (2), and Wastewater.
- Ramah Water & Sanitation District: Completed and submitted one (1) application for Wastewater.
- City of Grants: Completed and submitted two (2) applications for Water and Wastewater.

Outdoor Recreation & Conservation Office Update

COG Trails Plus Grant

During the first quarter of FY 2026, the COG was awarded funding from the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division (NMORD) to create a regional Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Master Plan for McKinley and Cibola Counties and to coordinate efforts to strengthen the overall recreation economy across the region.

The Outdoor Recreation & Conservation Master Plan will guide outdoor recreation and conservation activities within McKinley and Cibola Counties by combining existing efforts, activities, programs, and plans to improve recreational access, facilitate regional economic development, and ensure preservation of our natural environment. In addition, the project supports the COG hiring a part-time Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Coordinator to assist federal, state, local and non-profit agencies implement projects outlined in the outdoor recreation & conservation master plan.

Overall, the NMORD sponsored project is aimed at moving the northwest region of New Mexico forward in terms of recreation and conservation planning, project prioritization and development, and providing a venue for community involvement and local public official engagement.

McKinley County Trails Plus Grant

n 2024 the COG assisted McKinley County with an application for a planning grant to the New Mexico Outdoor Recreation Division's Trails+ Program. McKinley County was awarded funding for the project during the third quarter of FY2025, and, as part of the project, the COG will oversee project management duties in coordination with McKinley County staff.

The planning and design project is currently underway, with the COG and McKinley County working together to evaluate the potential for large-scale expansion of recreational access and open space preservation for the benefit of current and future generations. The partners anticipate project completion during FY 2026.

Soil & Water Conservation

During the first quarter of FY2026, the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments (COG) assisted the McKinley Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD) with three separate applications to the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute's Agricultural Water Resources Grant Program to advance water conservation projects in the region.

The water conservation projects are a collaborative partnership between the McKinley Soil and Water Conservation District and local area ranchers and agricultural producers to implement water conservation activities to preserve water resources, increase agricultural viability, and provide food security for current and future generations of New Mexicans. The MSWCD was recently awarded funding for all three grant applications and will begin implementation during the second quarter of FY2026.

Solid Waste Authority Beautification Program

In 2025, the COG partnered with the Northwest New Mexico Regional Solid Waste Authority (SWA) to develop an application to the New Mexico Department of Transportation's (NM DOT) Que Linda Grant Program to establish a Regional Beautification Program that eliminates littering and protects the natural beauty of New Mexico The Regional Beautification Program will consist of four core elements: (1) creation of a full-time beautification coordinator position; (2) development a formal beautification plan; (3) collaboration with regional and statewide stakeholders; and (4) implementation of NM DOT's Que Linda beautification strategies and activities.

During the first quarter of FY 2026, the SWA was awarded funding from NM DOT to begin program implementation. This funding award from the NM DOT's Que Linda Grant program will provide critical resources to enhance regional capacity and lay the groundwork for implementation of beautification programming in coordination with the other jurisdictions within the SWA's service region.

Transportation Planning & Development Office Update

RTPO Transition

In pursuit of new opportunities, Maria Reyes, RTPO Planner & Program Manager, has departed from the Northwest Region RTPO. The position, previously held by Robert Kuipers (retired) and most recently managed by Reyes, is now vacant. During this transition, RTPO responsibilities will be overseen by Planning Director Brandon Howe while the COG works to fill the position.

As the RTPO moves into the new fiscal year, the program will focus on completing the following priorities in FFY2026:

- Hosting five in-person meetings across the region
- Developing the Regional Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR)
- Preparing the Annual Performance and Expenditures Report (APER)
- Ranking public transit applications
- Managing the intake and submission of FY2027 Transportation Project Fund applications

The COG extends its appreciation to Mrs. Reyes for her contributions and dedicated service during her tenure with the RTPO program.

RTIPR Update

As the RTPO enters the new Federal Fiscal Year, staff is continuing to develop and finalize the Regional Transportation Improvement Program Recommendations (RTIPR) - a prioritized list of transportation projects submitted by Tribal and Local Public Agencies. These projects represent some of the most critical and transformative investments in the region, all aimed at strengthening and enhancing the transportation network in northwest New Mexico.

Inclusion on the RTIPR increases opportunities for agencies to compete for and secure state and federal funding. Over the coming months, the COG will work to complete the document and present the final RTIPR to the Joint Policy and Technical Committee in December.

FY26 Transportation Project Fund Applications:

The RTPO continued its hands on support for local and tribal governments. RTPO staff assisted with the submission of 14 applications totaling $37,135,701.67 in requested TPF funding, providing technical guidance, coordination with NMDOT District Six Office and support throughout the entire process. These efforts reflect COG's ongoing dedication to improving transportation infrastructure across the region.

On August 27, 2025, the NMDOT Transportation Commission met in Albuquerque to review and approve applications for FY2026 Transportation Project Funding. The following is a recap of awards given to agencies in northwest New Mexico in both the Northwest RTPO and Farmington MPO:

District	Entity	Project Title	Total
	Farmington MPO:		
5	City of Bloomfield	East Blanco Road Reconstruction	$1,042,456.84
5	Navajo Nation	NM 371/NR 36 Intersection Improvements	$1,700,000
5	San Juan County	County Road 6480 resurfacing	$1,210,000
	NWRTPO:		
6	Cibola County	Elkins Road Improvement Phase 1	$1,000,000
6	City of Gallup	Hasler Valley Road Rehabilitation	$650,000
6	City of Gallup	West Aztec Avenue Storm Drainage Construction	$2,750,000
6	City of Grants	Davis Steet Extension & Gunderson Street Roadway Phase I & II	$5,082,744.61
6	McKinely County	Mentmore Extension	$500,000
6	McKinley County	Hasler Valley Extension	$500,000
6	Village of Milan	Stanley Ave Improvements Phase II	$1,507,321
6	Ramah Navajo	BIA Rte. 120, Candy Kitchen Road	$727,303.67
6	Navajo Nation Red Lake Chapter	Shepard Springs Blvd Reconstruction and Improvements	$2,452,000
	TOTALS:	**DOT Districts 5 & 6:**	**$19,121,826.12**

Public Notice

December 2025 – August 2026

The NORTHWEST NEW MEXICO REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION (NWRTPO) Joint Policy & Technical Committee is scheduled to meet as follows. All meetings are open and accessible to the public, as well as virtually offered using Microsoft Teams application. All information is available and updated at: https://www.nwnmcog.org/rtpo-meetings.html

The FY26 meeting schedule (December 2025 – September 2026) is as follows:

- December 10, 2025 @ East Side Fire Station #3, 3700 Church Rock St., Gallup NM 87301
- February 11, 2026 @ Village of Milan Hall, 609 U.S. Route, Milan NM 87021
- April 8, 2026 @ Public Works, 11 Rodeo Building B, Laguna NM 87026
- June 10, 2026 @ Navajo Nation Department of Transportation. #16 Coalmine Road, Mentmore, NM 87319
- August 12, 2026 @ McKinley County Conference Center, 207 W. Hill Avenue, Gallup NM 87301

NWRTPO meetings are scheduled to begin at 10:00am and end when all business is concluded.

The purpose of these meetings is to review, discuss, and act on transportation issues of importance to the region, which includes Cibola, McKinley, and San Juan Counties. Attendance is welcome from all municipal, county and tribal governments and stakeholders within the northwest region. Interested citizens are welcome to attend.

For additional information or requests for virtual participation, please contact: RTPO Program Manager at (505) 722-4327 or visit the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments located at 106 W. Aztec, Gallup, NM 87301.

Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, unless compelling reasons dictate otherwise, public meetings and hearings conducted by the NWRTPO in conjunction with the NMDOT will be held in accessible buildings and are open to the public. Given reasonable notice, interpreters and readers will be available to the hearing and visually impaired, and to those with limited English proficiency. Contact NMDOT ADA/Title VI.

Economic Development Office Update

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

The Economic Planning & Development Office continues to focus on developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is global economic development strategy for the region aimed to identify a focused moonshot that we can take together to drive economic growth. The process has been focused on a data-informed value proposition. A final draft will be delivered and available by the end of the year.

2030 Economic Development Targets:

Add $1B of economic activity

Create 10,000 new jobs

Steps and actions you can take:

1. 2021 Update: We reviewed progress from the last CEDS - In the past four years, we brought in $214 million in new investments, mo stly for infrastructure, and produced a net gain of only about $6 million in GDP and we actually had a net loss of over 2,000 jobs.

2. New Approach: We realized that our approach has fallen short and we needed a radical shift, so we have set out to take a 'Moneyball' approach.

3. Website Launched: https://www.theprosperitycollaborative.com/

4. Learning Library is available to get shareholders up to speed.

5. Prosperity Survey take this survey to tell us what our best bet to all-in is: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/prosperity2025

Planning Grant Program

Have an idea that needs a small investment to plan, prototype, seed, test, and/or scale to drive innovation and new economic sector development – apply today!

https://www.nwnmcog.org/uploads/1/2/8/7/12873976/eda-nwnmcog_capacity_grant.pdf

PLAN AND PARTNER FOR PROSPERITY (P3)

Moving from Boom-Bust to Robust

Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments

"moving the region forward"

106 West Aztec Avenue | Gallup, New Mexico 87301 | (505) 722-4327 |
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53rd COG Annual Luncheon