

Rescue the Rio Chama Weekend Recreational Water Releases  
(Information provided by Rio Grande Restoration)

The Rio Chama was designated a Wild and Scenic River in 1988. The BLM officials in Taos negotiated an agreement with the City of Albuquerque and federal and state water managers to secure a program of weekend recreational boating releases during July and August each year. Although this was a “handshake agreement” the program operated reliably for over 11 years, during which time many boaters, including AWC members, were able to enjoy boating flows of 900-1000 cfs on Summer weekends.

Unfortunately, over the past four years, as a result of drought, personnel changes and development of the new Albuquerque Drinking Water Project, the recreational release program has become increasingly unreliable and is in danger of falling through the cracks. On at least three weekends during the recent years, even the minimum flows for boating were not provided. Several boaters were actually left with less than 60 cfs while part way through the Rio Chama 20-mile wilderness section of the river. They were left to hike out of the canyon.

Recently Mark Sundin, BLM-Taos, and Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration, have engaged City of Albuquerque officials seeking their cooperation in securing reliable, regular recreational releases (and minimum flows) in 2005 and beyond. There are two things Albuquerque could do to breathe new life into the program. One is to agree to hold irrigation water temporarily in Abiquiu Reservoir. The other is to agree to release its own San Juan – Chama project water from Heron Reservoir during the summer, rather than in March or April as they did the past three years.

This simple act of changing when they release their water would have a significant effect on the Rio Chama boating season.

The City has not been particularly receptive to taking either of these actions. It is not apparent that the officials understand the number of whitewater recreationists from Albuquerque who enjoy the Rio Chama’s beauty.

**Please Help Save Summer Boating on the Rio Chama with your letter!**

**Who to write:**

Mayor Martin Chavez, Water Resources Manager, John Stmp  
City Councilors  
One Civic Plaza, NM Alb NM 87102

**Key Points to Make:**

**The Chama is a rare and beautiful resource.** The Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River is one of the few recreational rivers available to New Mexicans.

**That you personally enjoy the river.** Recreational opportunities on the Rio Chama are important to Albuquerque residents like “me”, family and neighbors. They enhance the quality of life.

**The City needs to do more to make river flows more reliable.** This is only a timing problem. We are only requesting a change in WHEN the City releases its water.

**It is quite possible to manage the river to accommodate recreation.** The Chama's system makes it relatively easy to release extra water from upstream reservoirs and capture it back in the city's storage pool, downstream at Abiquiu.

**The city's cooperation is essential:** By agreeing to cooperate with the BLM, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and others, the city can ensure "my" ability to enjoy the river for years to come.

Editor's Note: There is a sample letter on the website if you don't have time to draft something unique. The timelines for this are important, we need your input by Mid-January. Although we would encourage all of the State's boaters to write, it is critical for Albuquerque boaters to communicate their elected Mayor that they expect the city's cooperation in this matter. Of the 300 paddlers in the AWC roster – approximately 145 live in the metro area of Albuquerque.