

3. Description of the Planning Region

This section provides a general overview of the Middle Rio Grande Water Planning Region. Detailed information, including maps illustrating the land use and general features of the region, was provided in the 2004 RWP; that information is briefly summarized and updated as appropriate here. Additional detail on the climate, water resources, and demographics of the region is provided in Sections 5 and 6.

3.1 General Description of the Planning Region

The Middle Rio Grande Water Planning Region, located in central New Mexico, encompasses Valencia County, most of Bernalillo and Sandoval counties, and a small part of Torrance County. The region is bounded on the north by the San Juan and Rio Chama planning regions (Rio Arriba and the northern part of Sandoval counties), on the west by the San Juan and Northwest planning regions (McKinley and Cibola counties), on the south by the Socorro-Sierra planning region (Socorro County), and on the east by the Jemez y Sangre and Estancia planning regions (Torrance, Santa Fe, and Los Alamos counties) (Figure 3-1).

The total area of the planning region is approximately 5,472 square miles, distributed among the four counties as follows:

- Sandoval County: 3,284 square miles
- Bernalillo County: 1,054 square miles
- Valencia County: 1,068 square miles
- Torrance County: 66 square miles

The terrain of the planning region is relatively flat, lying in the valley along the Rio Grande between the Sandia and Manzano Mountains to the east and the Jemez Mountains to the west. There are 12 Native American tribes in the region, listed below, and a variety of federally owned land. The largest urban area in New Mexico, the Albuquerque metropolitan area, is located in the Middle Rio Grande region.

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|---------------------------|-----------------|
| □ Cochiti | □ San Felipe |
| □ Isleta | □ Sandia |
| □ Jemez | □ Santa Ana |
| □ Jicarilla Apache Nation | □ Santa Clara |
| □ Laguna | □ Santo Domingo |
| □ Navajo Nation | □ Zia |

3.2 Climate

The climate of the planning region is semiarid and variable, with higher temperatures and lower

precipitation in the valleys than in the mountains. Long-term average annual temperatures in the region are around 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Average annual precipitation varies from 8 to 12 inches along the Rio Grande Valley to more than 30 inches at the highest elevations.

3.3 Major Surface Water and Groundwater Sources

The Rio Grande is the principal surface water source in the Middle Rio Grande region; other sources include two tributaries to the Rio Grande, the Rio Jemez and Rio Puerco, and water from the San Juan-Chama Project. The Rio Grande is shared with five other water planning regions: Taos, Rio Chama, Jemez y Sangre, Socorro-Sierra, and Lower Rio Grande. In addition, the planning region's share of the river is governed by the Rio Grande Compact between Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, which NMISC administers on behalf of New Mexico.

The Middle Rio Grande water planning region falls entirely within the middle portion of the Rio Grande Underground Water Basin (UWB), commonly referred to as the Middle Rio Grande UWB. (A declared UWB is an area of the state proclaimed by the State Engineer to be underlain by a groundwater source having reasonably ascertainable boundaries. By such proclamation the State Engineer assumes jurisdiction over the appropriation and use of groundwater from the source.) The Middle Rio Grande UWB is shared primarily with the Socorro-Sierra water planning region; geographically the Northwest New Mexico and Estancia Basin regions also overlie the Middle Rio Grande UWB, but these regions are hydrologically separate from the Middle Rio Grande region. The entire planning regions falls within the Middle Rio Grande UWB with the exception of a small portion on the eastern boundary of the region that falls within the Sandia Basin UWB. A map showing the UWBs in the region is provided in Section 4.7.2.

Additional information on administrative basins and surface and groundwater resources of the region is included in Section 4 and Sections 5.2 and 5.3, respectively.

3.4 Demographics, Economic Overview, and Land Use

The Middle Rio Grande region consists primarily of the entirety of Valencia County and most of Bernalillo and Sandoval Counties. The 2013 population of Bernalillo County was 674,221, while there were 136,575 people residing in Sandoval County and 76,284 in Valencia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a).

As shown in Table 3-1, all three counties experienced a high rate of population growth from 2000 to 2010; however, since 2010, growth has slowed in Bernalillo and Sandoval counties and declined slightly in Valencia County. The boundaries of the Middle Rio Grande roughly coincide with the Albuquerque Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which also includes a small part of Tarrant County.

The largest employment categories in the region are education/healthcare, professional services, retail trade, and tourism-related services (arts, entertainment, recreation, hospitality, and food

services). Manufacturing and construction are also important. Agriculture is the largest water user in Sandoval and Valencia Counties, while public water supply is the largest water user in Bernalillo County.

Current statistics on the economy and land use in each county were compiled from the U.S. Census Bureau and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions and are summarized in Table 3-1. Additional detail on demographics, economics, and land use within the region is provided in Section 6.