

## NM water release aims to help silvery minnow

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN, Associated Press  
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*Low flows in the Rio Grande expose sand bars in Albuquerque, N.M. on Tuesday May 6, 2014. Federal and state water managers are releasing more water this week as part of an effort to mimic spring runoff to get the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow to spawn. (AP Photo/Susan Montoya Bryan)*

This year is expected to be no different. The flow coming into the most northern reservoir on the Rio Grande is expected to be only 28 percent of normal, according to the Bureau of Reclamation.

Thomas Archdeacon, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the plan is geared toward the worst-case scenario this year. The top priority is to collect the eggs that result from the spawning and get them to the hatcheries for rearing.

If any of the fish survive the river through the fall, biologists and conservationists say that will be a bonus.

An exchange among several Native American pueblos and Albuquerque's water utility authority helped make the release of water possible.

Officials say the river's flow at the upper end of the minnow's range — just south of Cochiti Reservoir — is expected to double this week. In all, 18,000 acre-feet of water will be used to boost flows.

Jen Pelz, director of WildEarth Guardian's wild rivers program, said the release is encouraging but likely won't be enough to create the overbank flows that the minnows need to rear their young. Drying of the river later in the year is another concern, she said.

"While it's helpful for the hatcheries, the goal is to have self-sustaining populations in the river," she said. "If you can't keep the river wet, especially in key reaches, then that's going to be a problem for the fish. You can't have one and not the other."

Federal water managers have said they hope to keep the river wet and connected through the Middle Rio Grande Valley at least through June 15.