

BOSQUE SCHOOL

Bosque Wildlife Adventure

From Desert to Rio Grande



Written and Illustrated By: Donny KC

Bosque Wildlife Adventure:

From Desert to Rio Grande

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BOSQUE SCHOOL
Challenging Education



Dedication:

Jerome Ginsberg (1937-2023)

Defender of and advocate for wild nature,
human rights, and environmental education.



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Written and illustrated by and all accompanying videos created by: Donny Kelley-Currens

Project Directors, Advisory Editors: Daniel Shaw, Kim Fike

Math activities created by: Kim Fike and Donny Kelley-Currens

Manuscript review by: Elaine Peabody, Kat Murphy

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Welcome to the Bosque!

Every Albuquerque morning, the sun comes up in the east over the Sandia Mountains. At the end of the day, the sun sets over the mesa in the west. The mesa and the mountains funnel their rain water to the valley between them. This water joins with other water upstream, and in the middle of the day the sun shines on this feature of our community that sustains our city: the Rio Grande.

This river is the reason Albuquerque exists! Albuquerque was built around the forest created by the river, called the bosque. This decision to preserve the wild plants and animals around the river still allows trails and places for people, but there are no roads, cars, houses, or businesses there. This decision has helped to protect the water that is shared by all life in the area.

Water is hard to come by in New Mexico, but the Rio Grande bosque has more water than anywhere else in the state! This habitat includes the river itself, the cottonwood forest, and the upland desert that surrounds it.

All the animals that live here depend on the water of the Rio Grande to survive. The water these animals live in and drink is the same that everyone in the city of Albuquerque uses. The less we waste, the more water these amazing bosque creatures will have!

Each time you turn the page, you'll get closer to the river. You'll start in upland desert habitat so dry that some animals here never drink water! You'll end beneath the surface of the Rio Grande and see the amazing fish that swim through it.

The bosque isn't just a place you can read about in a book, but a place you can visit! Take a trip to any of the Albuquerque Open Space bosque trails and try to find all the animals drawn in this book!



Upland desert habitat



Bosque forest habitat



Floodplain marsh habitat



Not Too Hot. Not Too Cold.

Different animals are active at different times during the year. Some like it hot. Some like it cool. Look at the chart below to find out when these desert animals are most active.

Animal Species (and code)	Temperature range when animal is most likely active
Roadrunner - RR	-1 to 37 °C (30 to 100 °F)
Spadefoot Toad - SP	21 to 29 °C (70 to 85 °F)
Tarantula Hawk Wasp - TH	26 to 37 °C (75 to 100 °F)
New Mexico Whiptail Lizard - NM	26 to 38 °C (75 to 105 °F)

A: Draw an 'X' in the boxes below if the animal is likely to be active.

Month	Likely temperature	RR	SP	TH	NM
January	(-2 to 28 °C)				
February	(0 to 13 °C)				
March	(3 to 18 °C)				
April	(7 to 22 °C)				
May	(12 to 27 °C)				
June	(17 to 32 °C)				
July	(20 to 33 °C)				
August	(18 to 32 °C)				
September	(15 to 28 °C)				
October	(8 to 21 °C)				
November	(2 to 14 °C)				
December	(-1 to 9 °C)				

B: Make a fraction showing how much of the year each animal is active:

Roadrunners (RR)

Spadefoot toads (SP)

Tarantula hawk wasps (TH)

New Mexico whiptail lizards (NM)

There are 12 months in a year. If an animal is active all year long = 12/12

A New Mexico Habitat

The Rio Grande flows through New Mexico. In Albuquerque, along that river's edge, there is a special upland desert habitat. There, many of New Mexico's official state animals live.

New Mexico's state bird is the **Roadrunner**. Even though it can fly, this fast bird spends most of its time running on the ground. It often eats lizards. It will even eat the state's reptile, the **New Mexico Whiptail**.

New Mexico whiptails are special. It's not just because of their pretty blue tails. It is because they are all females. They are clones of each other.

Sometimes whiptails use the New Mexico state flower, the **Yucca**, as shelter. The yucca's white flowers attract pollinators, such as moths.

New Mexico's state insect, the **Tarantula Hawk Wasp**, is also a pollinator and eats flower nectar. But it is best known for what it hunts. Adult hawk wasps catch tarantulas and feed them to their babies.

Our state amphibian is the **New Mexico Spadefoot Toad**. It comes out after heavy spring and summer rains. It lays its eggs in rain puddles. Many other animals also live in the bosque's rich habitat.

To watch a video about these New Mexico animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 

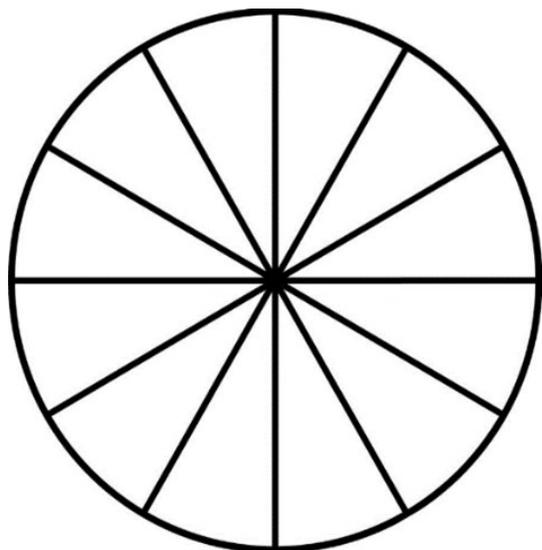


What's for Lunch?

Red-tailed hawks eat a lot of different types of animals. What they eat changes with the time of year. During the summer, one red-tailed hawk's diet was made up of...

- 3/12 Birds
- 5/12 Mammals (squirrels, mice, bats...)
- 1/12 Carrion (already dead animals)
- 1.5/12 Reptiles (lizards)
- 0.5 Amphibians (frogs, salamanders)
- 1/12 Invertebrates (grasshoppers, cicadas, beetles)

Use the pie chart below to show what the hawk ate. You will need some colored pencils or crayons. Choose six different colors. Each color will represent a different type of prey animal. Color in the pie chart below to show what fraction of the hawk's diet was made up of what prey animal.



Key—Colors Represent

- Birds
- Mammals
- Carrion
- Reptiles
- Amphibians

Birds of the Desert

Just above the bosque is dry upland habitat. People call it the bluffs. There, people can look down on the marsh and river. It is made up of shrubs and cacti. This desert habitat can be a tough place to live. There, many animals have to work hard to take care of their families.

Gambel's Quail adults often lead their tiny chicks from bush to bush to keep them safe. You might look at this bird and think it is well-dressed. The long feathers sticking up from its head can make you think of a party hat. Dressed for a party or not, it has to be careful.

Many creatures hunt baby quail. So, quail parents carefully lead their chicks between good feeding and hiding spots. Some plants, like **Four-winged Saltbush**, protect chicks from predators. There, they hide from hawks and other raptors flying above.

Red-tailed Hawks soar above the desert in search of food. They look for small animals. If they see one out in the open, they try to snatch it up.

Despite their name, not all red-tailed hawks have red tails. This hawk comes in many different colors from cream white to almost black.

To watch a video about these desert birds found in the bosque, scan this QR code.







Midnight Snack

Nighthawks have HUGE mouths! They gulp insects as they fly through the air. One nighthawk can eat 60 mosquitoes in one hour.

A: How many mosquitoes can one nighthawk eat in an 8 hour night?

B: How many mosquitoes can a nighthawk eat in 7 nights (a week)?

C: How many mosquitoes can a nighthawk eat in 30 nights (a month)?



Habitat in the Evening

Habitat is always changing. Even in one spot, there is change. To know a habitat you have to be in it at different times. Look closely and ask questions. What changes when it is cooler or hotter? Or when it rains, do animals use it differently than when it is dry? Every day, darkness replaces light. In the bosque, many animals become active at sunset.

Common Nighthawks can be seen swooping through the skies just before dark. They hold their mouths wide open and scoop up flying insects. They even have what looks like hair around their mouths to act like a net.

If you're lucky, you may see a male nighthawk display special behavior. They fly towards the ground, open up their wings, and make a loud booming sound. It attracts females, and it can also scare intruders.

In fall and winter, there are groups of birds that gather in the bosque at sunset. Massive flocks of **Red-winged Blackbirds** swirl through the air. During the day, the birds are spread out across the marsh. But at dusk, they leave the reeds of the wetland and flock to **Snags** (standing dead trees). These old trees provide an important roosting site for blackbirds. In the morning, you can find these blackbirds back in the cattails.

To watch a video about these evening animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 



Late Night Snacking

All night long, Silky Pocket Mice stuff seeds in their cheek pockets to bring back to their burrow. They carry 0.15g of seeds in their pockets during each trip. For a tiny mouse that weighs 6 grams, that's like a human carrying 18 hamburgers in their mouth!

A: Tonight the plants outside the pocket mouse's burrow have 27g of seeds on them. How many trips would it take for the mouse to move all the seeds to its burrow?

B: If it takes the mouse 2 minutes to bring a mouthful of seeds to its burrow and return to the plants, would it be able to move all the seeds to its burrow in an 8 hour night?



Night in the Desert

Sometimes it is just too hot for some animals. On a summer day, you may not see many animals here. But just wait. Because deserts come alive at night.

As night arrives, **Kangaroo Rats** come out. This rodent hops on two back feet, just like a kangaroo. It can jump more than six feet. It has other tricks, too. It does not need to drink water. It gets all it needs from the plants it eats.

The **Silky Pocket Mouse** is also active at night. It uses pockets in its cheeks to hold seeds. It then hauls the seeds back to its burrow where it safely eats them.

Small rodents must watch out for predators. **Bullsnakes** mostly hunt by day, but when it gets really hot, they hunt at night when it is cooler.

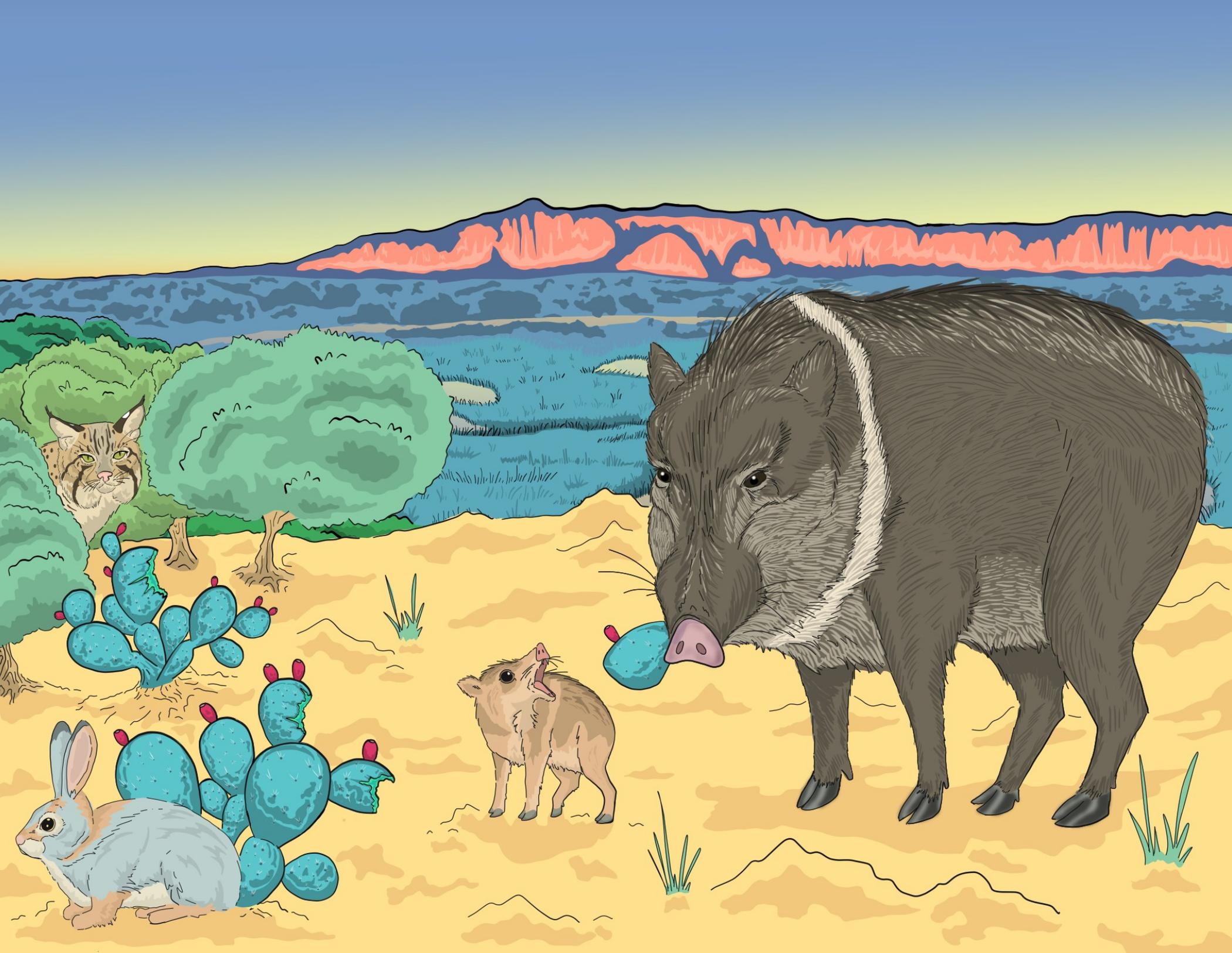
Coyotes also look for food at night. They do that for themselves, and sometimes too, for pups waiting for them at their den. You can often hear coyotes call to each other right as the night begins or ends. Just two or three calling can sound like many.

Jumping six feet all at once might keep a kangaroo rat off a bullsnake's menu. What then do you think a bullsnake would have to do to catch a kangaroo rat?

To watch a video about these nighttime animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 







Critter Counts

Different animals need different amounts of space in order to find enough food, water and shelter to survive.

- One rabbit needs about 3 acres of habitat.
- One javelina needs about 60 acres of habitat.
- One bobcat need about 150 acres of habitat.

A: How many rabbits, javelina, and bobcats can live in 1,500 acres of habitat?

Rabbits: $1,500 / 3 =$

Javelina: $1,500 / 60 =$

Bobcats: $1,500 / 150$

B: How many rabbits, javelina, and bobcats can survive in 45 acres of habitat?

Rabbits: $45/3 =$

Javelina: $45/60 =$

Bobcats $45/150 =$

Across Habitats

Many animals move across different habitat types to get what they need. The area where the bosque meets the desert is a mix of both habitats. Places where two habitats overlap are called *ecotones*. Many animals use ecotones because they have a mix of foods that they need.

Javelina are new to the bosque area. These pig-like animals eat roots and **Prickly Pear Cactus**. You might not see javelina, but look for their bite marks on those spiny plants. You can also find places where javelina have dug up and eaten roots.

Desert Cottontails blend into habitat to hide from predators. These rabbits don't dig their own holes. Instead, they use holes dug by other animals and bushes for shelter. If you get too close they'll run away. They are best watched using binoculars.

Bobcats are one of the animals on the hunt for desert cottontail. Their spotted fur makes them very hard to see. They mostly keep their distance from people. Even though they are just a little bigger than a house cat, they can hunt prey much bigger than themselves.

Bobcats, rabbits, and javelina all move through the bosque-desert ecotone.

To watch a video about these sneaky animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 



Covered from Head to Tail

These bosque animals are covered in quills, hairs, feathers or scales. These coverings help the animals to stay warm, dry, and protected from predators. How many coverings do you think each of these animals have?

Draw a line from the animal to the number of coverings on their body.

(There are more numbers to choose from than right answers.)

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Spotted Towhee: feathers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 120,000• 125• 12,300 |
| Porcupine: quills | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1,600• 850• 30,000 |
| Squirrel: hairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3,000• 17• 20,000 |
| Lizard: scales | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6,500• 3,000,000 |

Answers: Spotted Towhee (3,000 feathers), Porcupine (30,000 quills), Squirrel (3,000,000 hairs), Lizard (8,000 scales)

In the Bosque (Forest)

In many areas, the Rio Grande has a forest along its edge. It is known as the *bosque*. Tall **Cottonwood Trees** surround the wetland marsh and create shady bosque habitat.

Look up into the tree branches. There you can sometimes spot a **Porcupine**. They can spend a whole day sleeping in a tree. Porcupines are famous for their quills. They use them to defend themselves. Porcupines cannot shoot their quills, but just like hair sheds, quills fall out. If you see a porcupine in a tree, look around the ground below it. Look closely. You might find some quills dropped by a porcupine.

Rock Squirrels also live in the cottonwood, bosque forest. Unlike other squirrels, these mammals spend little time in trees. They spend most of their time on the ground and in underground holes.

Smaller animals, like **Fence Lizards** live in the forest, too. They scurry around and look for insects to eat. Their colors help them blend into tree bark.

Beneath the trees, you can often find a noisy small bird. The **Spotted Towhee** uses its huge feet to push leaves aside as it looks for seeds and insects to eat. Try to find one by listening for leaves crunching.

To watch a video about these forest animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 





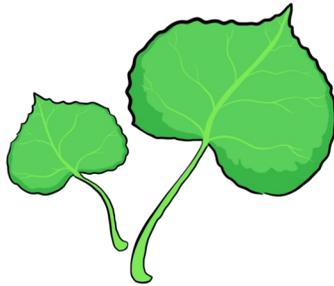


Root Race

When a cottonwood seed lands on damp soil, it's roots can grow half an inch a day! This is so the roots can catch up to the ground water as it dries up and goes deeper underground. The resting ground water depth in the bosque can be as deep as 10 feet!

A: How many days would it take for a cottonwood seedling to grow roots 10 feet deep? (*Hint: there are 12 inches in a foot)

B: A cottonwood seed lands on damp soil and starts to grow roots. If the groundwater stays at the surface for 10 days and then drops 1 inch a day after that, how many days would it take for the groundwater to become too deep for the cottonwood roots to reach?



Scientists often plant young cottonwoods 9 feet into the ground. This helps make sure they have the best chance possible at reaching the groundwater. How could you find a young cottonwood already 9 feet tall? Luckily, all you need is a large branch and a chainsaw. A huge cottonwood tree can grow from just one branch pole-planted into the ground!

Underground World

When you walk through the bosque there's a hidden world beneath your feet.

Have you ever noticed how there are very few baby **Cottonwood Trees** in the Bosque? That's because baby cottonwoods need flooding to take root and reach the ground water below. This doesn't happen much anymore because the river has been heavily changed. Many of the young cottonwood trees in Albuquerque were actually planted by people!

Botta's Pocket Gophers and **Earthworms** tunnel through the earth. When they do, it mixes air into the soil and makes it healthier for plants to grow. The gophers use their huge teeth to chew on roots and even to dig!

Plains Cicadas also feed on the roots underground. Every summer, they crawl out of the ground, up a tree, out of their shells and fly away with their new wings. The adults fill the bosque with their buzzing calls.

Too many cicadas would be bad for the trees, luckily **Cicada Killers** are there to catch them. These giant wasps don't eat the cicadas themselves, they bring them to their hungry babies underground.

In the soil, there are lots of thin white strands. These are called **Mycorrhizal Fungi**. Plants use this living web to communicate and share nutrients with each other.

To watch a video about these underground animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 



How Dry Is New Mexico?

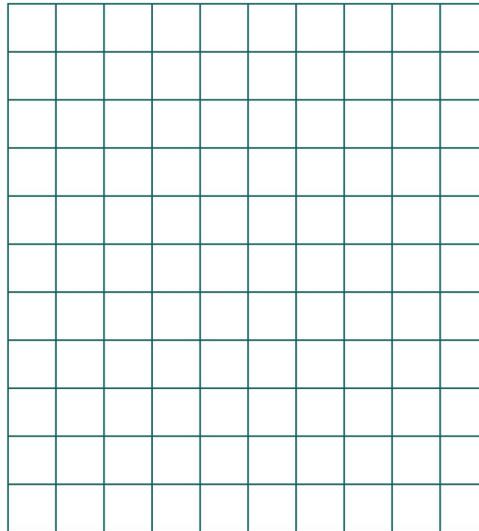
New Mexico is a dry state. Its surface is mostly dry. Lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands are rare. In fact, of all the 50 states, New Mexico has the smallest fraction of its land covered by water.

A: New Mexico is about 300,000 square kilometers. Of that area, only about 600 square kilometers are covered in water. What fraction of New Mexico is covered in water?

B: New Mexico also has many forests and several cities. There are 100,000 square kilometers of forests and 175,000 square kilometers of farmland covering the state. What fraction of New Mexico is covered in forests and farmland?

C: Here is a 10 by 10 square. If this grid was all of New Mexico's area, how much area would each box represent?

D: How many of its boxes would be covered in water, forest, and cities?
Color the number of water boxes **blue**.
Color the number of forest boxes **green**.
Color the number of farmland boxes **red**.



(Note: 300,000 square kilometers is about 116,000 square miles)

A Flooded Habitat

The bosque marsh is a mix of water and land. Both water and land are home to animals. Some animals just live in the water. Others live only on the land. And others live in both.

Beaver can be found on land and in the water. On land, they use their strong teeth to chomp down trees. In water, they build dams across streams. The dams make ponds where they can build their lodges.

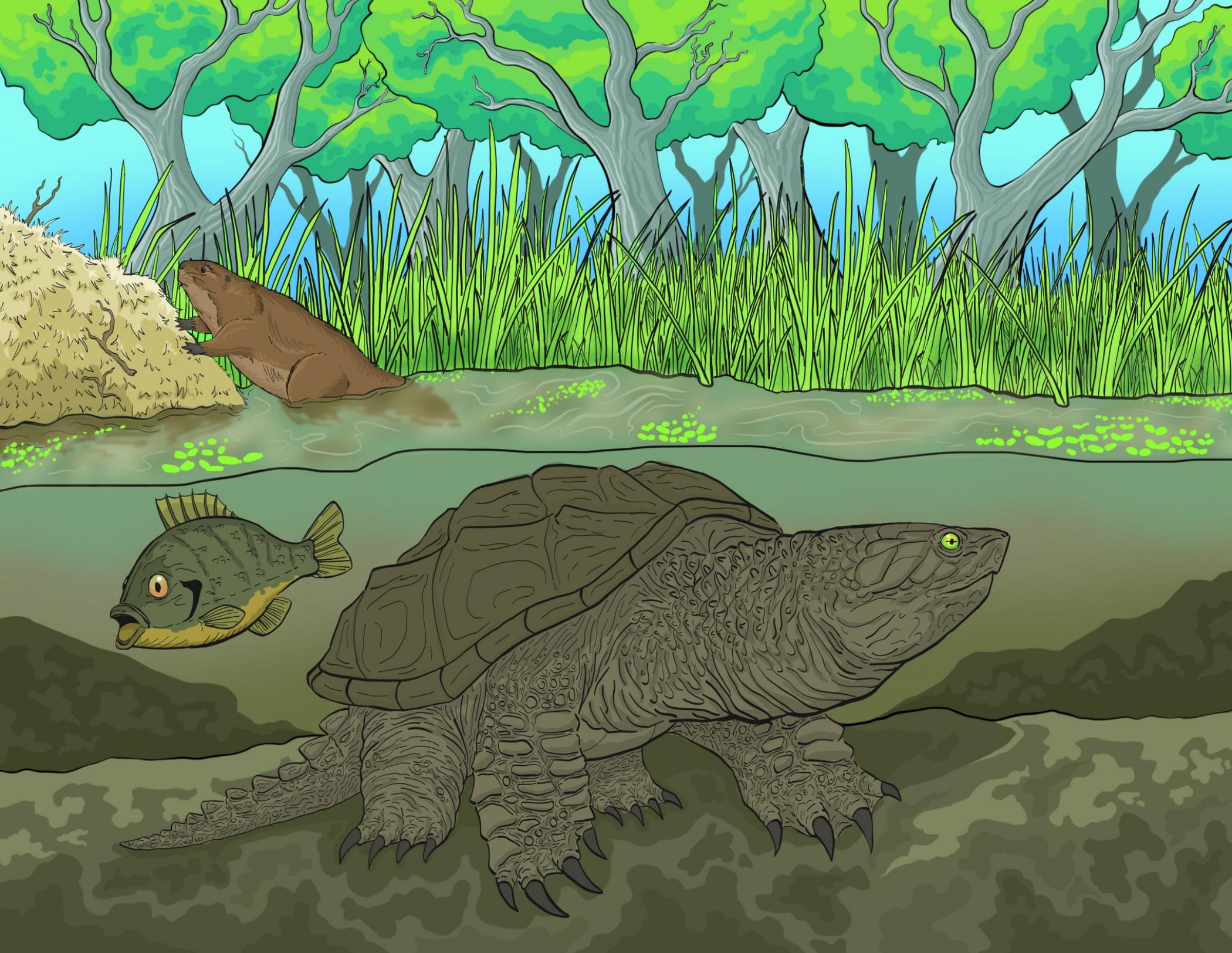
Other animals, besides beaver, also use these ponds. One is the **Bluegill**. This fish is a predator and eats smaller fish and insects. It also makes grunting sounds. Lots of underwater animals make noises.

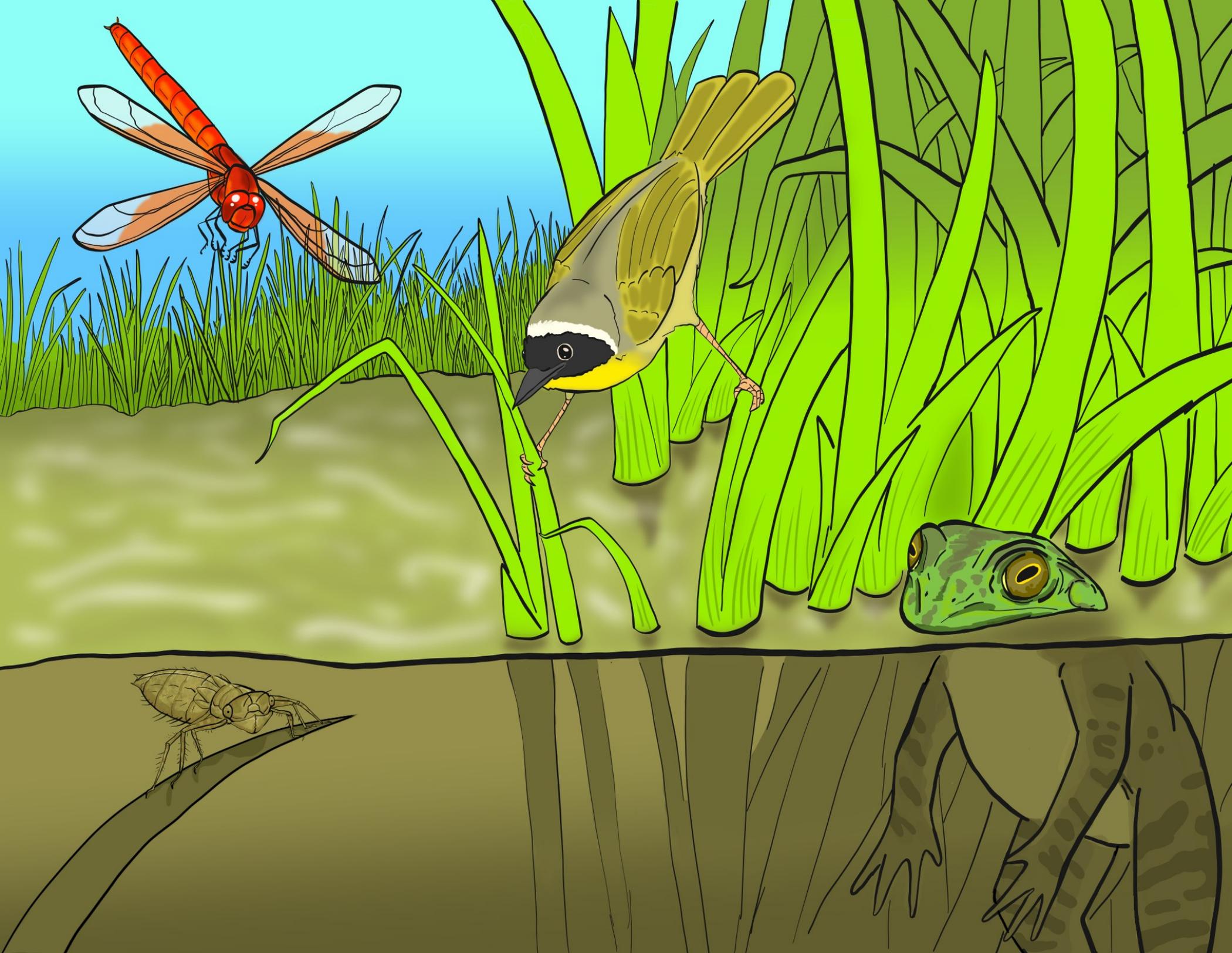
Snapping Turtles, the biggest reptile in the area, also live in beaver ponds. They rarely bask on river banks like some other types of turtles. Instead, they stay low in the water looking for prey. They are hard to see because they are often at the bottom of a pond. But look for a large brown object, barely sticking out of the water, because it might not be a log but the head of a huge turtle.

Watery habitat, like the bosque marsh, is rare in New Mexico. It is one of the reasons that the bosque is so special. How do you think people like you can protect watery habitat?

To watch a video about these aquatic animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 







Water Quality

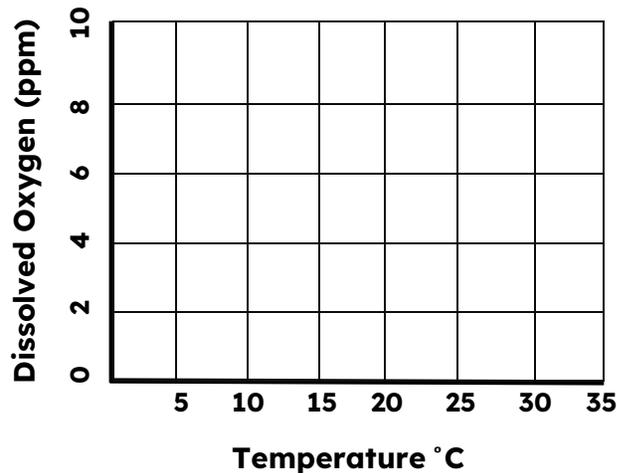
Some animals can only survive in good quality water. Other animals are fine with dirty water. The water changes when the environment around it changes.

Students collected water quality information. Here is what they found:

Water Quality Data:	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
Temperature °C	5	10	15	30
Dissolved Oxygen (ppm)	10	8	6	2

Directions:

Graph the data from the table above on the chart using a line graph (single points connected by a line).



Question:

What does the graph help to show?

(Note: A temperature that is 5°C is about 40°F and one that is 30°C is about 85°F)

Hiding in the Reeds

A marsh is a wet habitat with grasses and reeds. Marshes are rare in dry areas like New Mexico. They are getting rarer. The marsh is the highlight of the bosque ecosystem.

The bosque marsh attracts many animals. Some live there all year round. Others come just for the winter or summer. Still, others stop and rest there as they head somewhere else.

The **American Bullfrog** is named after its call. It sounds like a cow mooing. This predator will attack and eat anything that can fit in its mouth. Even birds.

The **Common Yellowthroat** migrates to the bosque each spring from Central America. This bird uses the bosque's tall reeds to nest in and hunt insects. The larger the black mask of the male, the more attractive females find it.

In summer and into fall, dragonflies are often seen in the marsh. Few are more impressive than the **Flame Skimmer**. This large, bright red dragonfly patrols the skies as an adult and crawls underwater as a nymph. It hunts and eats mosquitoes and even smaller dragonflies.

From desert to river's edge, the bosque is a critical and unique habitat.

To watch a video about these marshland animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 



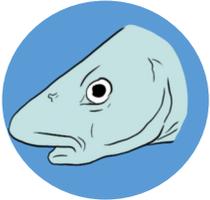
Hungry Fish

Fish can be picky eaters. They prefer to eat food in certain parts of the river. Some have mouths that point upwards. Some have mouths that point downwards. Some have mouths that are right in the middle. They like to eat the food that is in the same direction their mouth is pointing. In a river bend, there are 200 aquatic bugs these native fish love to eat:

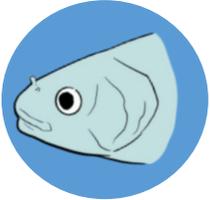
- **50** of the aquatic bugs are mosquito larvae that float near the surface.
- **110** are scuds that swim between the surface and the river bottom.
- **40** are mayfly larvae that wiggle through the mud on the bottom.

Write down what fraction of the 200 aquatic bugs...

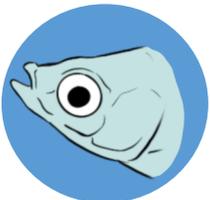
A: Longnose Dace like to eat:



B: Fathead Minnow like to eat:



C: Western Mosquitofish like to eat:



In the River

When you splash through the Rio Grande on a hot summer day, you're not the only thing enjoying the murky water. The river is home to lots of awesome native fish!

Swimming near the surface you can often find **Western Mosquitofish**. These fish give birth to live young, just like a mammal. If you watch one for long enough, you may see it take a gulp of air like one too!

Swimming together in pairs are **Fathead Minnows**. The females are plain looking, but during breeding season the male grows bumps on its head and changes to colors that look like a panda's. They are great fathers and protect their eggs until they hatch.

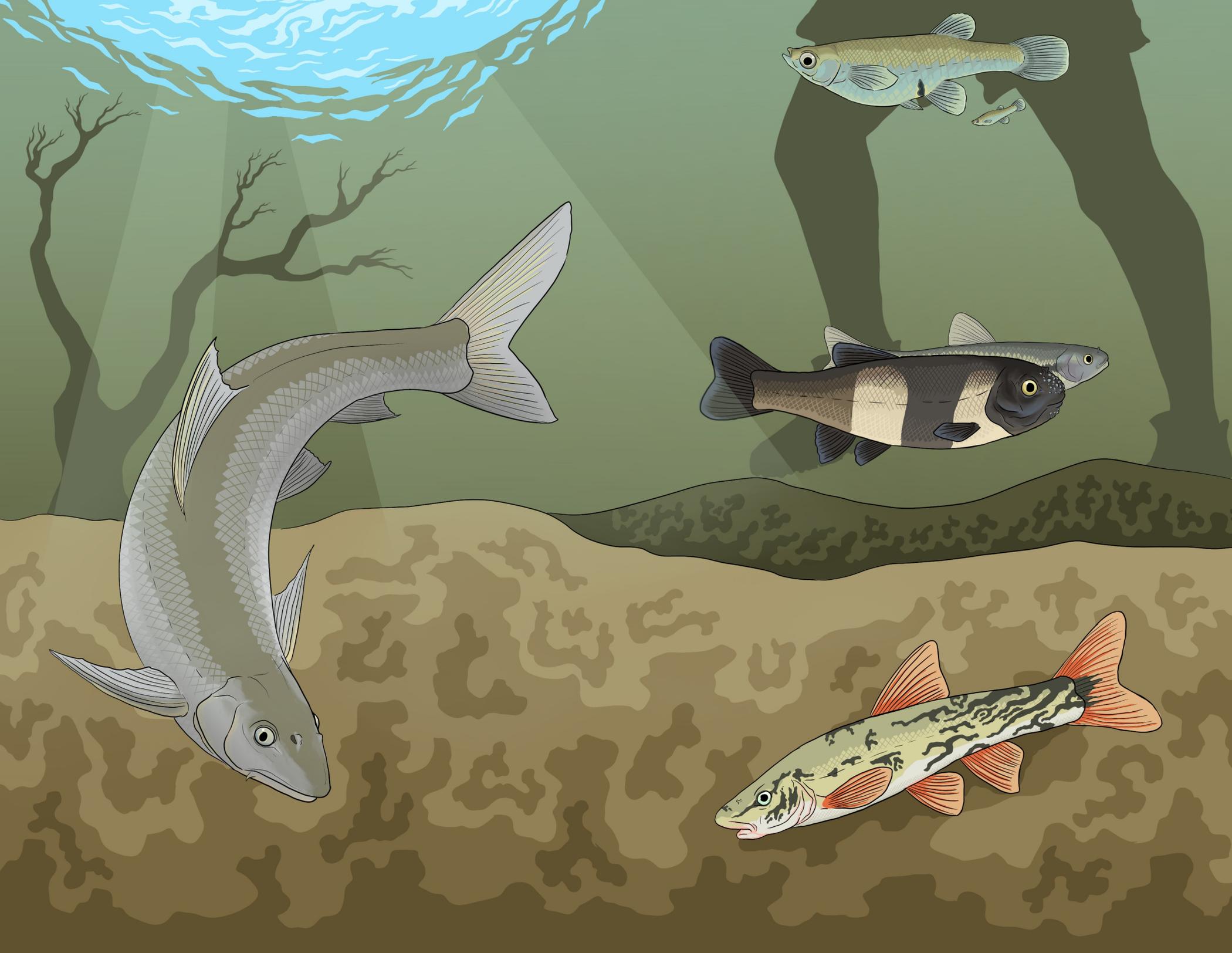
It's hard for some fish to find food in the murky water, but not the **Flathead Chub**. This silver fish has taste buds on its fins so it can find tasty a meal even when it can't see it!

The **Longnose Dace** is one of the prettiest fish here and looks for food at the bottom of the river. Its top jaw is longer than the bottom. This helps it grab food hidden in the mud.

All these fish thrive when there is more water in the river. By using less in showers or watering lawns, we can keep our native fish happy!

To watch a video about these aquatic animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 







Saving Water

One of the best ways we can help the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow is to use less water. The more water we save, the more they have to swim in! Right now the average person in Albuquerque uses 125 gallons of water a day. The city's goal is to bring that number down to 110 gallons of water a day.

A: If 565 people used 110 gallons of water instead of 125, how many gallons of water would they save a day?

B: To find out how many gallons the entire city of Albuquerque would save a day, put 3 zeros at the end of that number from question A!



A Special Fish

Swimming beneath the muddy surface of the Rio Grande is a very important fish. These are **Rio Grande Silvery Minnows**. Their scales shine like jewels as they swim in groups through the river.

There are much less of these fish now than there used to be because of dams and other changes we've made to the river. Silvery minnow are endangered, which means they might disappear forever if we don't protect their habitat.

Bald eagles fly over the bosque looking for big fish to catch with their talons. They used to be endangered just like the silvery minnow, but because people took action to save this bird, now they can be found all over the country including right here.

If **People** come together to keep the river clean, use less water, and make more minnow habitat, these fish can be a success story just like the bald eagle. This will make the river better habitat for silvery minnow and also for people who want to paddle through it and enjoy its beauty. Just like the minnow, we are a part of this ecosystem and should take care of it for all the other animals that need it too.

To watch a video about these Rio Grande animals found in the bosque, scan this QR code. 



About the Water Utility Authority Education Outreach Program



The goal of this book is to extend the learning about the 4th-grade field trip that the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority provides, and encourage conversation with classmates, teachers, and families. During the school year, we take different groups of 4th graders to walk along the river. Getting outside is a growing need for people, and becoming familiar with the bosque cultivates stewardship for our community. About one out of four students we take didn't know the Rio Grande is in our city and is part of how we get drinking water. In total, there are about 6,000 students who participate in our program from public and private schools in the community.

Remembering our community in the bosque by reading, looking at the illustrations, and watching the QR linked videos of the animals there, can help keep a connection. This book isn't just for the students on the field trip, it is for everyone who would like to keep that connection close to their hearts and minds even on days when they can't get out to our bosque.

Our outreach program, which includes the field trip for 4th-grade, has opportunities for all grades in all the area schools! For Pre-K to 2nd-grade we offer fun, informative puppet shows, for grades 1st through 3rd, and 5th through high school we offer in-class hands-on experiments, and for 5th grade up to anyone interested, we offer a tour of the reclamation plant, providing a good overview of water infrastructure that anyone who lives in a city should know about!

Education is a part of why our gallons per capita per day has decreased in our community from 252 gallons in the 1990's to 125 gallons per capita per day in 2024. What a difference learning can make! Our community has adopted a culture of sustainability so people can continue to live in this beautiful, unique setting. Learning about the river and the bosque makes a difference in sustaining both. Thank you for doing your part!

Please visit our site to see all of the education outreach opportunities that the Water Authority offers, and to sign up:

<https://www.abcwua.org/education/>



BOSQUE SCHOOL

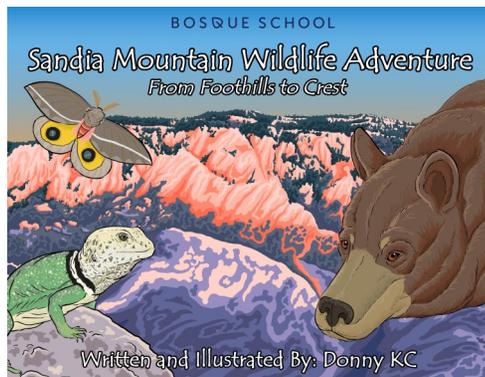
Challenging Education

Bosque School is a college-preparatory, independent school for grades 6-12 where education goes beyond the classroom and students are empowered to thrive. Learn more about Bosque School's commitment to civic engagement through environmental stewardship and academic excellence at: (505) 898-6388 www.bosqueschool.org. To learn more about Bosque School and how it may be a great fit for your child, visit bosqueschool.org/admission



Check out other activity books and field science materials from Bosque School, including Donny KC's

***Sandia Mountain Wildlife Adventure:
From Foothills to Crest***



About the author/illustrator: **Donny KC** is a Bosque School alum (class of 2018). He combines his passion for wildlife, a wry sense of humor, and his Biology and Art/Media degrees to create original content that is not always easily described but can be experienced at: www.donnykc.com



Field and Community Science

**CEBRIN Field and Community Science Program:
*Doing science that matters beyond the classroom***

In Bosque School's CEBRIN Field and Community Science program, students from K-12 public, charter, home, and other schools do science that matters beyond the classroom. Within the program, participating classes travel to the Rio Grande and its riverside forest, the *bosque*. There, they engage in actual wildlife and habitat research projects. Students do field science, gather and analyze data, and present their findings in various settings. High school students can participate in the *Fish, Floodplains, and People Program* in cooperation with the University of New Mexico's Center for Stable Isotopes.

There are no costs for participating students and classes. Bus transportation and other program expenses are paid for by community partners. For more information about or to sign up to participate, email wildlife@bosqueschool.org or call (505) 898-6388 and ask for the CEBRIN Field and Community Science office.

Take a Journey into The Bosque!

This book has everything you'll need to start learning about the amazing wildlife that live in the Rio Grande Bosque of Albuquerque!

- 11 full-color illustrations showing the different habitats and animals you can find here!
- 11 mini-wildlife documentaries featuring the animals you'll see in this book!
- 11 built-in math activities about the wildlife of the Bosque!



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