

This article is modified from the original: <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/AboutUs/student.html>

Aqua es vida. Water is Life

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Students helping with grassland restoration project in Taos County, NM. Photo credit: Emily Olson.



Dr. Benjamin Tuggle with Training Program students in Rio Grande bosque. Photo credit: USFWS.

Maceo Martinet, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Biologist, recently was co-instructor for the Aqua es Vida Water Conservation Leadership Training Program (Training Program) based out of Albuquerque's own Rio Grande High School, Querencia Institute. The Querencia Institute is a non-profit collective of educators, activists, and professionals dedicated to improving the learning experiences of our young people across New Mexico. The Training Program, on-going for the past 2 years, contains both in-class and hands-on work for students, and focuses on water conservation and environmental leadership, knowledge of wildlife and their habitat, and conservation techniques for improving the southwest landscape.

The Division of Ecological Services fills a critical role in community-based projects such as the Aqua es Vida Water Conservation Leadership Training Program due to increased focus on mandated testing that limits teacher and school staff time for outdoor hands-on learning activities. Ecological Services through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program can provide local students with practical opportunities along with unique

learning experiences geared towards environmental education, environmental leadership, and environmental stewardship.

Says Martinet, of the Program, “The most important aspect of this program was that the youth were able to experience different places, people, and ideas related to water conservation, wildlife habitat, and other environmental issues. Experiences like this help challenge students to build their self-confidence, little by little, in who they are and what they are capable of achieving for our local community.” This past summer, the 5 students from Rio Grande High School received a certificate from the Querencia Institute and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program recognizing their 157 hours of work aimed at local conservation efforts, including:

- Planting 348 native pollinator plants, 100 riparian plants, and dispersing 50 lbs of native grass seed in Northern NM
- Establishing pollinator habitat at 2 urban, organic farms and 1 urban community garden in Albuquerque, NM; and 1 rural community garden/community library in Embudo, NM
- Constructed two rainwater harvesting systems, one for wildlife in the East Mountains, ABQ, NM and one for a community garden in Albuquerque, NM.

“The Aqua es Vida Youth Training project positions the FWS, through the Division Ecological Services with the distinct opportunity to provide and support staff to engage with our local community and its youth, to learn not only about our environmental issues and how to help but also learn about themselves and their own capabilities to champion for the Southwest Region’s imperiled resources.” - Dr. Benjamin N. Tuggle