

Christopher Toya

My name is Christopher Toya and I am a member of the Pueblo of Jemez tribal community. As a lifetime resident of the Pueblo, I work for the Pueblo of Jemez as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO). I have been the THPO officer since 2015 when the Pueblo received recognition from the National Park Service to manage our own cultural resources. Prior to that or since 2004, I was employed by the Pueblo as the Traditional Cultural Properties Project Manager. I would like to comment on why the quality of water is important to our Pueblo way of life.

I'm sure by now you've just about heard them all. New Mexicans from all walks of life, particularly from farmers and ranchers, Native Americans who use water in all aspects of their livelihoods. We as human beings are not naive, we know the importance of water, clean water. We know that all life depend on water. Without water, there is no life. We as New Mexicans have seen the changes in weather patterns that have occurred in the past 10 years. We remember the snow pack mountains in the late winter and early spring. We remember when the Rio Grande flowed all the way down to Elephant Butte. We remember how our rivers and creeks swelled with spring runoff. Our weather patterns are changing and this past year much of New Mexico did not get much snow. We are in June and the Rio Grande is drying up and barely flowing thru Albuquerque. Hatch, the Chili Capital of the World is hurting for water, because there isn't much flowing out of Elephant Butte because Elephant Butte Reservoir is at 8 percent water capacity. Our Farmers in Jemez Pueblo are worried that the water in our river will dry up and many of them did not plant this year. There is anxiety in New Mexico. Will we have enough water for our plants in our agricultural fields? Will there be enough water for the cows, sheep and horses, not to mention the mammals, the insects, the fishes, the birds and all the trees and plants that live on the surface of our great state. Now, more than ever, we really need to look at our water quality standards and set them to par to protect whatever water we have left to sustain all life in New Mexico.

In Jemez culture, water is life and without water there is no life. Water is a crucial element with all living creatures that live on the ground, in the water and in the air. Ancestral villages were built around water resources to protect them because they understood the importance of water resources. Our main body of surface water that we want to protect is the Jemez River. The headwaters of the Jemez River start within the Valles Caldera National Preserve. The Jemez River is fed by San Antonio Creek and the East Fork River. The Jemez River, the San Antonio Creek, and the East Fork River are fed by many seasonal springs and streams, both within the Pueblo and upstream of the Pueblo. The Rio Guadalupe is a major tributary to the Jemez River and joins the Jemez River approximately one mile north of the Pueblo boundary. The Jemez River flows year-round through the Pueblo.

Water brings life to the Jemez community in all the traditional ways life is lived and understood. Here are a few examples.

As Native American people, as Pueblo People living in the community of Jemez Pueblo, water is truly sacred. All ceremony in Jemez Pueblo begin with water. Water is a very crucial resource used in the mixing of our traditional medicines that are used in our healing and blessing ceremony. Clean water is collected at natural springs located on tribal lands and on the ancestral lands managed by the United States Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Special places that the Jemez People have collected water since time immemorial. The

water needs to be clean and safe for drinking for the medicines to be consumed.

Jemez Pueblo is a farming community; a way of life taught to us by our ancestors. Our ancestors planted corn, beans and squash in the flood plains of the drainages on mesa tops, river valleys, and on the south aspect of the mountains in the ancestral homelands. Farming was practiced even in elevations as high as 8,000 feet above sea level in the Ponderosa and Conifer mixed forest in the Banco Bonito in the Valles Caldera National Preserve. Today we continue to engage in farming our agricultural fields growing crops that are used in our traditional cultural practices as well as for personal consumption. We depend on good quality water from the Jemez River to irrigate our agricultural fields. We have limited acreages of prime agricultural fields that should not be contaminated with pollutants put into the river from upstream users or inhabitants of the area.

Water sustains all life in the cultural landscape. Where there is water there is life. The Jemez River and the Vallecito Creek are abundant in wealth in the form of natural resources. They are jewels in the Southwest Desert. Jemez tribal members harvest medicinal plants, berries, birds, insects and mammals and other natural resources along the riparian areas of the Vallecito Creek and Jemez River. The main source of drinking water for the community of Jemez is the Jemez River. Water in the Jemez River is also used for cleansing, spiritual cleansing. Men and women have cleansed themselves with the water before ceremonial activities to help prepare them spiritually, mentally, and physically since time immemorial. For these particular water uses, the water must be of the utmost high quality.

On a recreational level, Jemez children love to swim in the waters of the Jemez River and the irrigation ditches in the summer time. There is nothing like the feeling of cold water all over your body on a hot summer day. It is a recreational activity we all enjoyed as children growing up on the Jemez Reservation.

In conclusion, water is a necessity in all aspects of life in Jemez Pueblo, whether it is used in ceremony, farming or recreation it is the reason why Jemez People still live in Jemez Pueblo today is because of the Jemez River.