

Field Notes: AgriPolicy Brief

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SIGNS POINT TO DRY 2026 SUMMER

The US Drought Monitor in late April showed that all of New Mexico was experiencing some level of drought with the vast majority of land experiencing a D2 or "Severe Drought." When compared to the week prior, the Drought Monitor shows that more land is classifying in the D3 or "Extreme Drought." While conditions are better when compared to the same time last year, continuous years of dry conditions are setting up New Mexico, and the West at large, for a historically dry and water-scarce year.

2026 has been the earliest snow melt on record according to the US Bureau of Reclamation. The Bureau explains that the peak melt of the record low snow pack has already happened and will result in very dry conditions through the planting season and into May. However the National Weather Service is seeing indications that through the monsoon season the Southwest is expected to receive above-average precipitation.

Presently, water capacity in New Mexico watersheds is at around 15% and will result in little water available to supplement rainfall.

While water managers feel confident that their teams are ready to respond to these historic conditions, the situation could intensify if the anticipated rainfall does not happen as predicted.

The Elephant Butte Reservoir could fall below 2% capacity following last year's drop to just 3%.

The Rio Grande River Water Commission met on April 17th to outline management plans for the upcoming season. Together they determined the allocation of water each state will receive to mitigate impacts of the historically low water levels.

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Rio Grande River near Anthony, NM
April 2026 - Photo Credit Pam Roy

SIGNS POINT TO DRY 2026 SUMMER CONTINUED...

To learn more and stay abreast of these critical issues here are several resources and upcoming learning opportunities:

The [Rocky Mountain Farmers Union](#) invites you to join a virtual session on water use and the future of agriculture in New Mexico. This year in particular, a hot dry winter will present real challenges to agricultural operations. Understanding the realities of larger trends in water use and availability will help farmers adapt and identify ways they can shape discussions about the possible solutions to ensure we have water for food production livelihoods, and ecological function.

Water in the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin: Current Conditions & Future Outlook

Tuesday, May 12

6:00–7:30 PM (MT)

[Virtual \(Zoom\)](#) - You will need to register for this event!

This session will feature Enrique Prunes of the [World Wildlife Fund](#), who will present research co-authored with Brian Richter with [Sustainable Waters](#) on water sustainability in the greater Rio Grande/Rio Bravo basin.

The session will include a brief presentation followed by Q&A and a listening session to hear directly from farmers and ranchers.

50-Year Water Action Plan – New Mexico Environment Department

The Interstate Stream Commission has broad powers to investigate, protect, conserve, and develop New Mexico's waters including both interstate and intrastate stream systems. Find out more here and ways to participate: [New Mexico Office of the State Engineer/Interstate Stream Commission](#).

New Mexico's Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) meets monthly and is addressing critical state issues such as clean water, produced water, mining issues and more. Find more information: [Water Quality Control Commission](#).

The New Mexico Legislature's Water and Natural Resources Interim Committee will resume their meetings starting in late May. This is an important committee and their agendas are full of the most important water issues for the state. Keep an eye out for their schedule that will be posted late May. Here's the link to the Committee and their 2025 report [Interim Committee – New Mexico Legislature](#).

The Water Resources Research Institute at NM State University funds research conducted by faculty and students from universities across the state to address water problems critical to New Mexico and the Southwest. The institute also participates in joint efforts to solve water-related problems along the U.S./Mexico border. [About Us | New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute](#)



NEW MEXICO CALLS FOR A FULL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ON URANIUM DRILLING PROJECT AND ADVOCATES TO PROTECT CHAMA WATERSHED

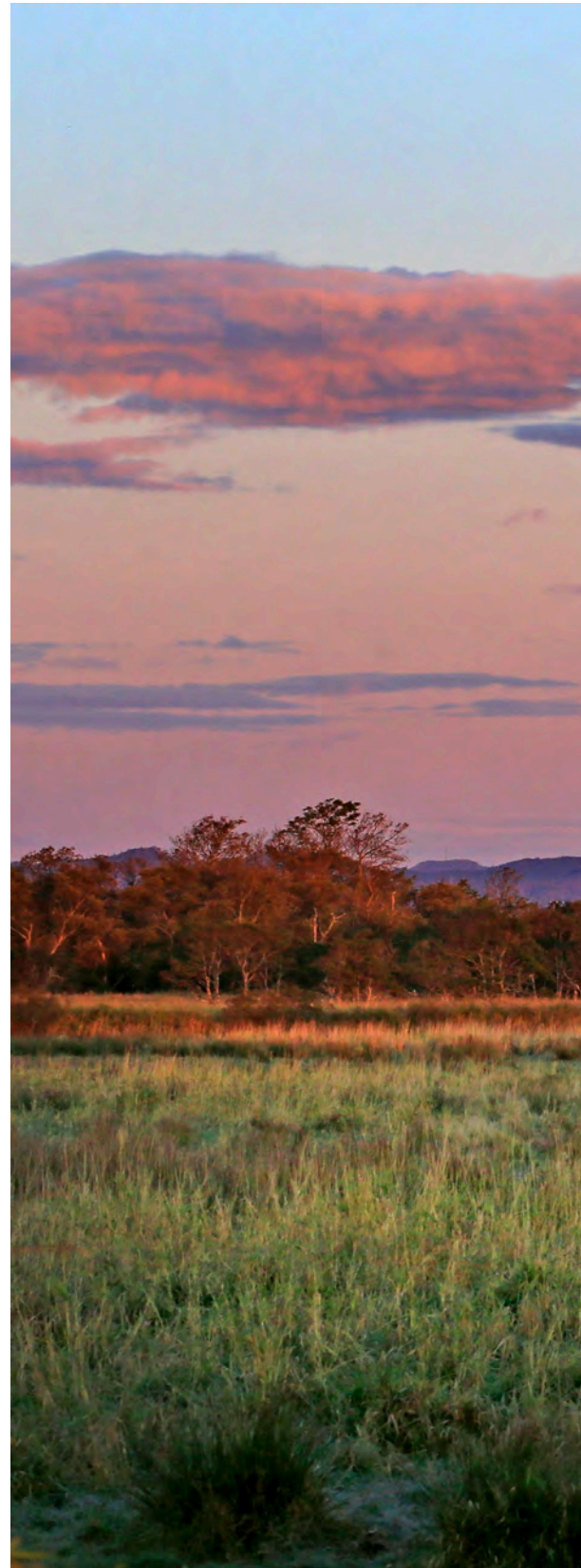
According to [Source New Mexico](#), a company has issued a notice of intent to conduct exploratory drilling for uranium in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico. Carson National Forest officials have outlined that the Forest Service will be responsible for determining the level of environmental review needed for such a project to be conducted. This review will need to be complete before any action is taken by the company.

Residents of Rio Arriba County have long dealt with health side effects from drilling projects in the region and local officials are sounding the alarm, noting that people need to “wake up” to the impact that drilling will have on their communities and future generations.

In response to notice of intent, U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.), U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), and U.S. Representative Teresa Leger Fernández (D-N.M.), [wrote a letter](#) to Carson National Forest Supervisor James Duran expressing strong opposition to a proposal to conduct uranium drilling within the Carson National Forest. The New Mexico delegation urged the Forest Service to require a full Environmental Impact Statement and requested that the Forest Service suspend its review pending congressional action to protect the Chama watershed from mineral development.

“We are very grateful for Sen. Luján’s leadership in the quest to safeguard our natural resources. Water, in particular, is critical to agriculture. Without safe, uncontaminated irrigation water, we risk polluting our croplands, rangelands, and the food they produce. Uranium mining in critical watersheds like the Chama constitute risks to food production and to food producers. With the Gold King Mine as recent history, we in New Mexico know that we cannot risk new contamination to our water and consequently our food systems. As such, we oppose allowing permitted exploratory drilling for uranium in the Chama basin.”

– **Cathy Day, Executive Director, and
Pam Roy, Policy Director, Farm to Table**





USDA FOREST SERVICE REORGANIZATION

On March 31, 2026, USDA announced its plan to relocate the employees of the US Forest Service. In the announcement, the Department outlined that the headquarters will move from the Yates Building on the National Mall in Washington, DC to Salt Lake City, Utah. The Administration outlined that this move is intended to move Forest Service leadership closer to the people and forests it serves. The new organizational plan includes 15 state directors who will oversee Forest Service operations in one or more states. This structure will replace the regional model previously used by the Service.

During a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee hearing on April 22, 2026, US Senator Martin Heinrich questioned Secretary Rollins on the planned reorganization. Senator Heinrich asked about the cost of the reorganization and the Secretary responded that she did not have the numbers available to her but would follow up. Senator Heinrich also outlined that when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was moved to Colorado that 87% of the workforce chose not to relocate.

BLM is not the only agency that has been relocated and seen a drastic decrease in the number of staff. In 2019, the first Trump Administration relocated the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to Kansas City, Missouri. According to a GAO report, the move resulted in a dramatic decline in productivity for both agencies, including missed reporting deadlines and significant delays in processing grants. The reason was clear: the loss of experienced staff. Within two years, the agencies' workforces were almost entirely new, losing decades of critical expertise.

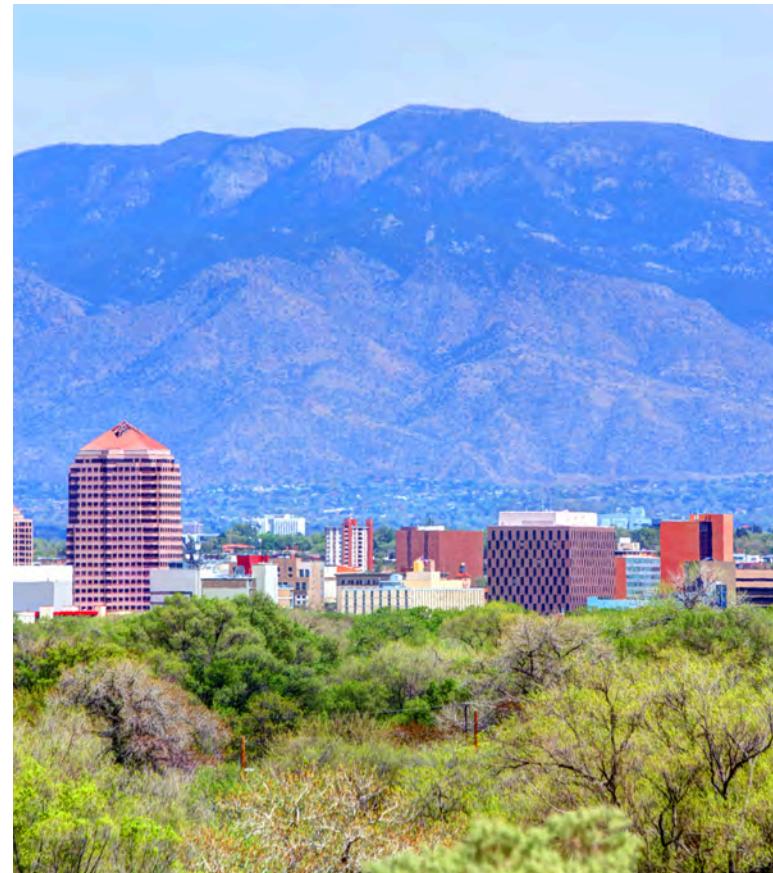
As the West heads into a summer season with little snow pack, it is reasonable to be concerned about the ability of the Forest Service to respond to wildfires in a timely fashion and with adequate resources in the midst of a massive reorganization.

NEW MEXICO HACKATHON FOCUSES ON AGRICULTURE

The City of Albuquerque and NM Tech Talks partnered to host the second annual Desert Dev Lab Hackathon. A “hackathon” is a competitive event where tech experts and developers work, under a time constraint, to solve problems. This year’s event worked to find solutions to challenges in New Mexico food and agriculture. The event drew 70 “hackers” making up 27 different teams.

The winners created projects including an AI meal planning solution, water-saving crop recommendations, and a food sharing platform to reduce food waste.

More information about the event can be found [here](#).



HERMIT'S PEAK/CALF CANYON CLAIMS OFFICE ACCOUNTABILITY

In a meeting with the leadership of the new Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims office, US Representative Leger Fernández and US Senator Luján advocated for speedy processing of claims. The lawmakers learned that the new office has paid \$3.44 billion in claims and will be sharing regular reports with Congress and the public detailing how claims will be processed without further delay.

The lawmakers ended a [press release](#) saying: "We are hopeful that the new leadership will move this process forward faster and with the respect that our communities deserve. We will continue our advocacy until New Mexicans who lost everything get the relief they deserve."



HOW TO FIND YOUR POLLING LOCATION

As summer rolls in, don't forget to mark your calendars for New Mexico's primary election on June 2, 2026, and general election on November 3, 2026. You can find your polling place on the [New Mexico Secretary of State's Website](#).

FUEL COSTS SPIKE

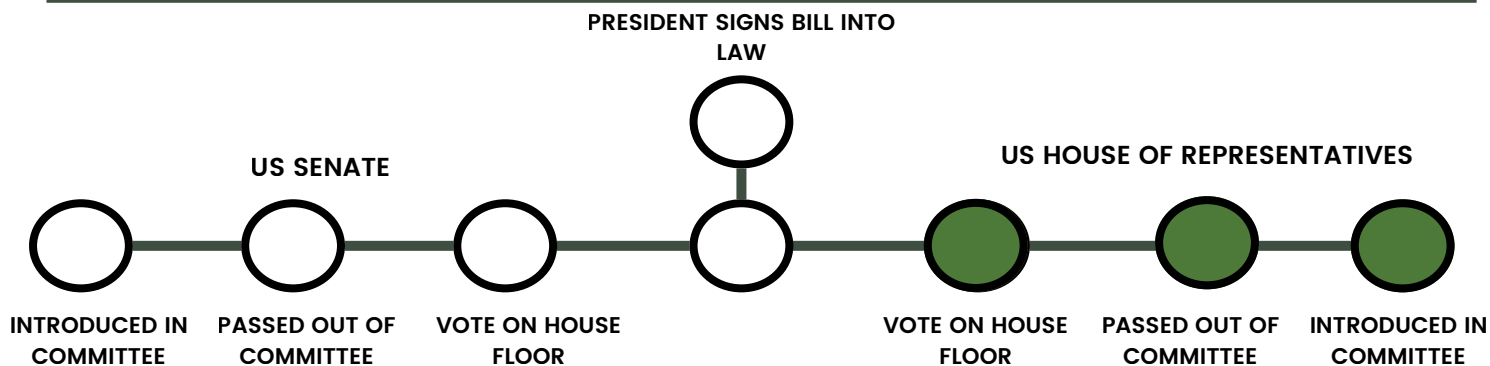
Farmers and ranchers have been struggling over the last few years to make ends meet with record yields, low crop prices, and skyrocketing input costs. After the initial round of tariffs issued by the Trump administration, input costs continued to climb for American farmers and ranchers and last year's growing season put many [banks on shaky ground to issue operating loans for the 2026 crop year](#). Over the last year and a half, little has been done to improve the farm economy. The current war in Iran has further exacerbated input costs by increasing the cost of fuel.

The [Strait of Hormuz](#) is a channel of water between Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Currently, Iran has more or less blocked passage through the strait which results in increased, and climbing, oil prices. Since February 28th, U.S. gas prices have risen more than a dollar for regular grade and diesel has surged by nearly two dollars. While average fuel costs vary, [New Mexico State University](#) estimates that conventional agricultural systems use 5 gallons of fuel per acre. Just one year ago, a farmer managing a 640-acre section would have faced an estimated fuel bill of \$10,496 for their 2025 crop (based on [AAA's 2025 March diesel average](#) for New Mexico of \$3.28 per gallon and a 5-gallon-per-acre average). Today, with diesel hitting \$5.24 a gallon, that same farmer faces a bill of \$16,768.

As these pressures are applied to farmers, food prices will continue to rise as a result of the increased cost of fuel. As food travels from the farm gate to the grocery store transportation costs will rise.

According to a [report from USDA](#), food prices are expected to climb again in 2026. As these price increases begin to show up in the market place, [experts](#) are saying that fresh foods will likely be the first to rise. Fresh fruits, vegetable, and meats travel on refrigerated trucks which burn more fuel than normal freight transportation. Eventually, grocery store items will all see an increase as the cost to get a produce to the store continues to climb.

FARM BILL TRACKER



The House Committee on Agriculture passed the Farm Bill out of committee in early March. While the debate lasted several days, very few amendments were accepted at that stage. Following the committee vote, the House Committee on Rules requested amendments in anticipation of a full House floor vote. This week, the House of Representatives voted and the measure passed with a vote of 224-200.

Before the bill heads to the Senate, the House of Representatives will need to vote on a separate measure to determine if the U.S. will allow year-round sales of E-15 - gasoline with 15% ethanol. This issue has been particularly contentious. Generally speaking, Midwestern lawmakers have been supportive of E-15 sales, hoping their constituents will have additional domestic markets for their corn crops. Conversely, environmentally focused lawmakers are concerned about the impact this type of fuel will have on carbon emissions and greenhouse gases, and oil state lawmakers have historically disapproved of the year-round sales. The vote on this measure will take place after the congressional recess in mid-May.

This marks the furthest a Farm Bill has made it in the legislative process since 2018, but the road to becoming law is still long and marred with obstacles. [Politico](#) outlines that in the Senate, Chairman John Boozman may need to remove the more contentious portions of the bill to meet the 60-vote threshold. Senate Agriculture Committee Majority has indicated that the Senate will use the House version as a starting point and plans to unveil its own bill in the coming weeks.

