

## Join Us for the Torreon Wash Volunteer Weekend, Sept. 26-27

Come join us for a joyful weekend at Torreon Wash, part of the Rio Puerco watershed, in the Checkerboard area of Navajo Lands:

- Watershed cleanup and restoration work with Ojo Encino Chapter members
- Camping available Friday and Saturday nights at the Navajo Ojo Encino Chapter
- Rooms available at the Frontier Motel in Cuba
- Dinner Saturday night with Ojo Encino Chapter members
- Talk with a BLM archaeologist or geologist
- Enjoy beautiful buttes and mesas, clear fall weather, and help repair an important watershed

### Conditions at Torreon Wash

Excessive erosion at Torreon Wash is caused by predominately sandy loam soils, unpaved roads acting as conduits for runoff during heavy rains, and overgrazing by feral and wild horses. Further, stream channel modification has led to straightening, bank collapse, and accelerated upland and tributary head-cutting, thus altering the natural river's hydrology and contributing to erosion and sedimentation. Army Corps of Engineers' studies indicate the Arroyo Chico watershed has the highest watershed soil erosion rate in the country.

### Our Volunteering

We will be cleaning up trash sites, and laying down rock to promote vegetation growth. During the summer, roads were regraded, closed, or reengineered to reduce erosion. Some of those roads led to trash sites, and their usage accelerates erosion. Our work will remove trash, improve the sites, and start the regeneration process.

Three neighboring Chapters have commissioned a solid waste management study by an international firm, which has worked with indigenous tribes. A new system of regular trash removal is expected once that analysis is completed, rather than hauling trash many miles away. Our work, along with similar local schoolchildren's work, prepares the community for centralized trash removal and reduced erosion.

### Schedule

Drive up Friday, September 25, or very early Saturday, September 26. Directions, maps, and orientation materials will be provided once you've signed up.

#### Saturday, September 26

- 9:00 a.m.: Meet for orientation, T-shirts, and carpooling to sites
- Work through the day with lunch and snack breaks
- Dinner at with Ojo Encino Chapter members

#### Sunday, September 27

- Optional early morning talk/ hike with BLM archaeologist or geologist
- 9:00 a.m.: Meet to carpool to sites
- 1:00 p.m.: Closing ceremony, pictures, and campground cleanup

### Sign Up

Contact Margaret Gray (505/983-2703 or 505/204-8074, [margaret.gray@sierraclub.org](mailto:margaret.gray@sierraclub.org)) to sign up or to receive more information. Reservations are required.

—Margaret Gray



A rain gauge near erosion-control rock work done by students in the Summer Youth Program. (Photo courtesy of Steve Fischer)

## What Are the Rio Puerco Watershed and the Rio Puerco Management Committee?

The Rio Puerco headwaters are in the San Pedro Mountains north of Cuba, NM. Starting on the northwest side of the Valles Caldera's mountains, the river runs generally south. In the main exception to her route, south of the Caldera, the Rio Puerco takes a short westerly break north of the San Mateo Mountains, turning in front of them and west of Mesa Prieta, then south, meandering roughly parallel to the Rio Grande some 20 miles to the west, eventually emptying into the Rio Grande south of Belen at Bernardo.

Torreon Wash in the Arroyo Chico drainage basin is a subset of the larger Rio Puerco watershed. At 4.5 million acres, the Rio Puerco watershed is New Mexico's largest tributary basin to the Rio Grande river system. While contributing only a minor portion of the water flowing into the Rio Grande, it has been documented as the primary contributor of silt and sedimentation to the river, degrading downstream reservoirs and water conditions in New Mexico, Texas, and Mexico.

Traditional villages once dotted the Rio Puerco's banks and extensive farm fields tapped its waters. Today, in many places the river flows far beneath the historic floodplain, a victim of incision through highly erodible soils, channelization, entrenchment, historically poor land management, and a complex mix of land ownership.

In 1996 the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club became a partner of the Rio Puerco Management Committee, a congressionally mandated collaboration of federal, tribal, state, nonprofit, and private participants. The Committee's mission was to develop and implement land management practices that reduce erosion, increase native vegetation, and improve riparian habitat while supporting the rural, agrarian characteristics of the Rio Puerco drainage basin. Thirteen years later the work continues.

For a map of the watershed and more information about the Rio Puerco Management Committee, visit <http://riopuerco.org>.

—Margaret Gray

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For more info, call GCC at 575.538.8078. Complete schedule and on-line registration at [www.gilaconservation.org](http://www.gilaconservation.org)