

New Mexicans share their stories as Land Witnesses

Written by Staff Reports

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The impact of the changing climate on lives and livelihoods on Youtube

ALBUQUERQUE — The Land Witness Project was conceived from a desire to learn about the ways the changing climate is affecting New Mexico's lands and people now and in the future. It seeks to deepen scientific understanding with stories that clarify what is at stake for us as individuals and communities.

The purpose of the project is to illuminate neglected personal accounts of rural New Mexicans facing challenges and how they are responding with positive individual and community actions.

"It is our hope the stories will stimulate meaningful conversations and reimagine how we live and work, free from blame or shame, and provide resources and opportunities for all New Mexicans to protect our home," Delese Dellios, project director of the Land Witness Project, said.

The project is a collection of land witnesses sharing their stories from Mesilla Park to Española, Jemez Springs to Hatch, Albuquerque's South Valley to Mosquero. The stories are about families and traditions, doubt and worry, land and water, and love and commitment.

The stories and videos feature farmers, ranchers, conservationists, scientists, outdoor-recreation professionals & business owners, land managers and environmental justice advocates. They express a living relationship to the land that seeks to protect and restore it. They all love this land deeply, and are keen observers of our diverse ecosystems.

"The seeds are strong like the people. They've gone through colonization alongside us. They've gone through droughts before. Unlike western cultures, which view seeds as property and patents to be fought over in a legal system, seeds are Indigenous relations to the land in accordance with natural law and spiritual and cultural beliefs. They are key to adapting to climate change," Beata Tsosie-Peña, Environmental Health and Justice program coordinator at Tewa Women United, said. She is also the manager of the Española Healing Foods Oasis demonstration garden project.

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Each person has special ties to their particular region, and each is a steadfast defender, protector, leader, and educator on behalf of the land. The focus areas include:

- Water
- Temperature
- Snowfall
- Fire

“There used to be major fires here every 10-20 years along the Bosque. But in the last three years, we had three major fires in or near the Refuge,” Kevin Cobble, former manager of the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, said.

Numerous scientific reports indicate New Mexico is one of the most climate change vulnerable states in the U.S. and the most water vulnerable state in the U.S. but graphs, charts and predictions, though essential, form only a partial understanding.

The stories underscore the impacts on agriculture and local food systems, individual, community and ecosystem health, economic well-being and environmental racism suffered by low-income and Indigenous communities.

“Food is a gift and we can’t take it for granted. [The Earth] is a living creature, not just dirt that we stand on. We are dependent on her for everything and if we don’t have the gratitude and appreciation for that, we are all doomed,” Lorenzo Candelaria, a farmer for Cornelio Candelaria Organics in Albuquerque’s South Valley, said.

“It is a pleasure and a privilege for me to contribute to this project. Meeting New Mexicans of diverse backgrounds who are observing the effects of increasing heat and diminishing water in

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their everyday work, and who are taking specific, practical steps to both slow the change and rebuild in a better way is inspiring,” Nancy Singham, writer for the Land Witness Project, said. “It is an honor to learn from these leaders who are seeking solutions based on fairness and community, on tradition as well as technology.”

Find the stories at: <https://bit.ly/34nKhDz>