

COLUMBINE HONDO AND WATER

Wilderness Areas are a major contributor to our nation's clean and abundant water supplies.

- Though national forests cover only 8 percent of the land area in the contiguous 48 states, these lands are typically located at the headwaters, especially in New Mexico and the West in general, and are the source of a substantial portion of the nation's water supply.
- The Columbine Hondo Wilderness Study Area contains headwaters of two major Rio Grande tributaries, the Red River and the Rio Hondo
- In the 11 western contiguous states, 50% of the water supply originates on national forests and grasslands
- Many large metropolitan areas, such as Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces receive a significant share of their drinking water from the Rio Grande which has many tributaries and headwaters areas in designated wilderness as well as Columbine Hondo Wilderness Study Area.

Wilderness contributes to New Mexico's water supply in many ways

- Human activities, such as road construction, timber harvests and grazing, have the potential to degrade water quality primarily through sedimentation. Mining often affects water chemistry, as well as the physical and biological components.
- Designated wilderness areas, according to the Wilderness Act of 1964, are "protected and managed so as to preserve [their] natural conditions". As such, ground disturbing activities are typically excluded "except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area."
- Wilderness areas often contain large, relatively intact watersheds that help to mitigate the effects of climate change on water by providing large areas for aquifer recharge and undisturbed vegetation offering shade to reduce increases to water temperature.

References

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