

Building New Mexico's Forestry Workforce Pathways

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Land based work is local work

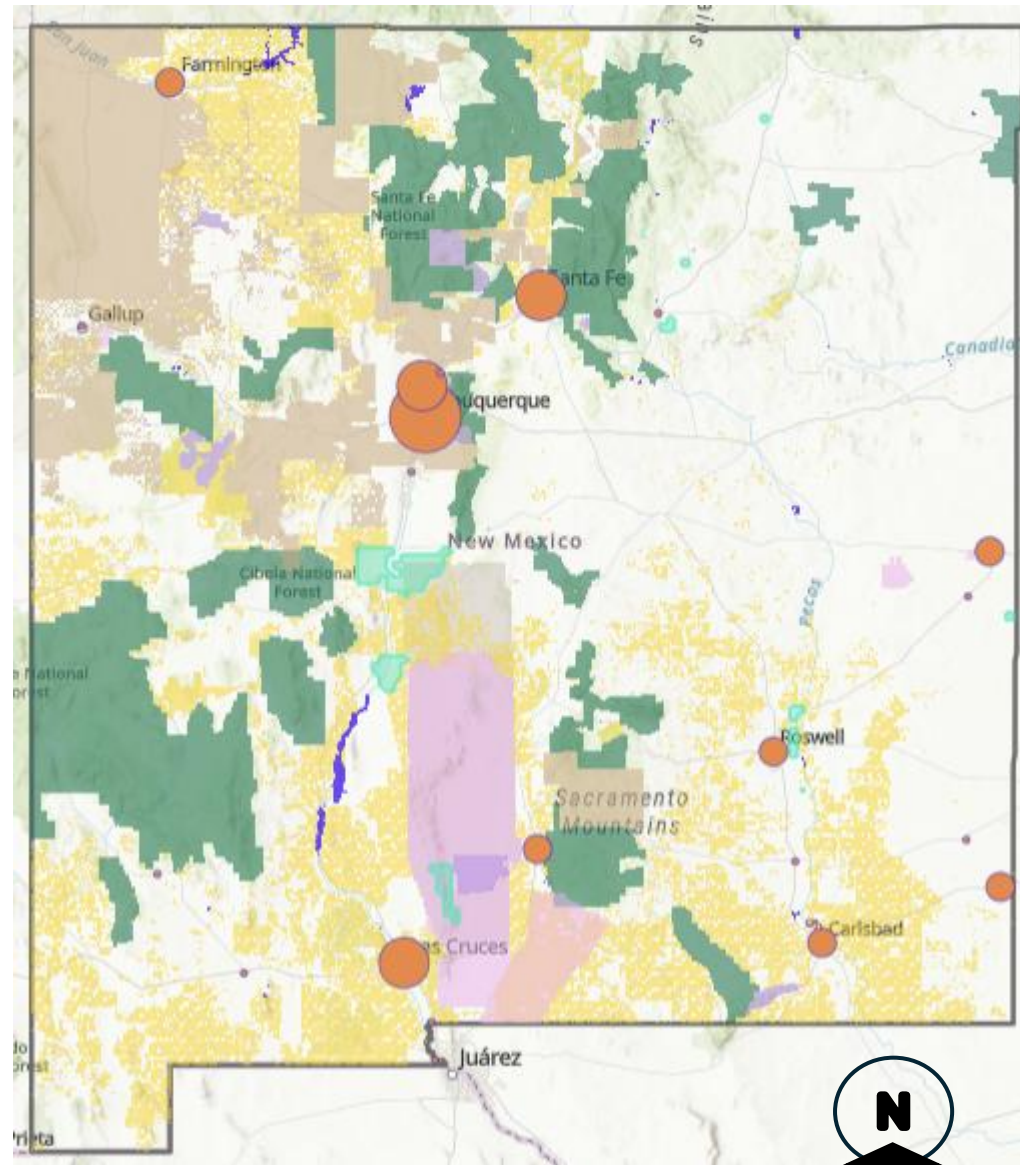
Geographically, NM is large

- Land area is ~ 77,630,720 acres
- ~ 35% of land is publicly held
- ~19% is State Trust land
- ~11% Tribal land
- Water represents less than 1% of the total area

NM population is relatively small.

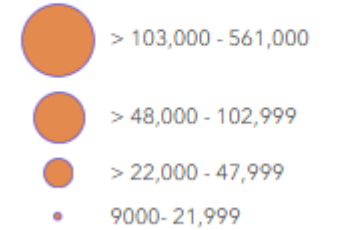
- ~18 people/mi²
- 2.1 million residents. Most of the population resides in the north/north-central part of the state

New Mexico is characterized by small, rural communities whose people and cultures are deeply connected to the land

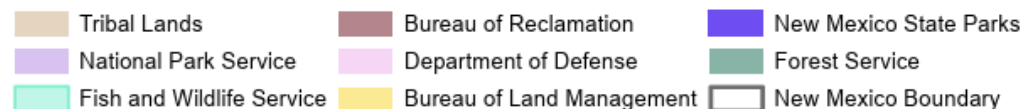


New Mexico Cities by Population

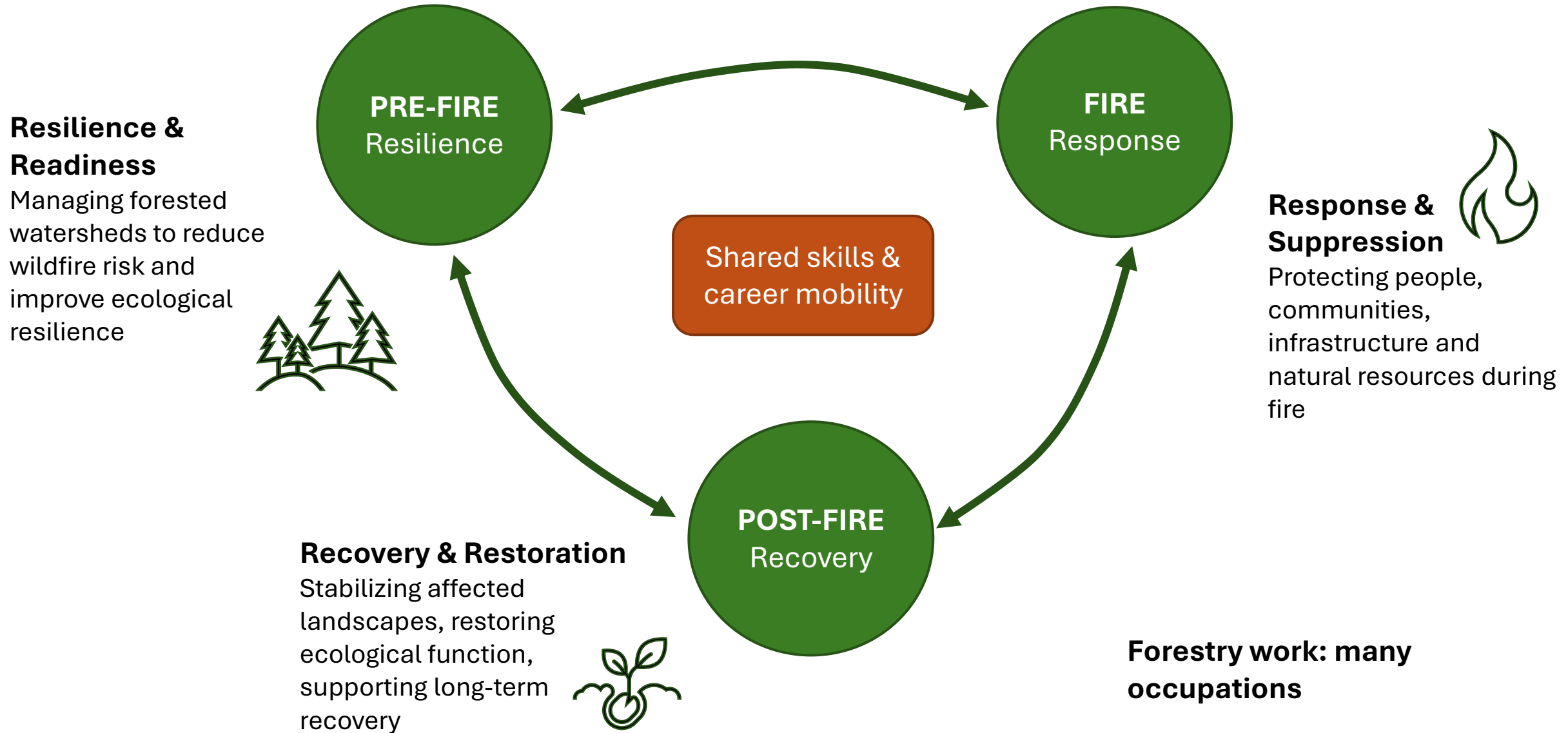
Population 2018



Towns with populations of 8,999 people or less are not shown



Forestry and fire are a connected workforce

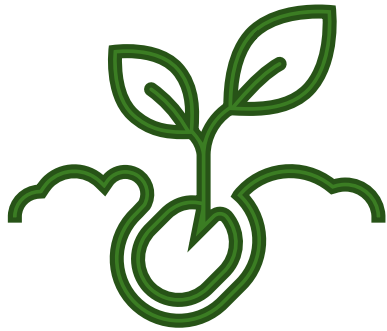




Major Activities	Example Occupations
Forest inventory and monitoring	<i>Forestry technicians, forestry workers, foresters, GIS technicians, research scientists</i>
Forest treatments (e.g. thinning, fuels reduction, prescribed burns)	<i>Forestry equipment operators, sawyers, burn bosses, fire/field crews</i>
Watershed and ecological restoration	<i>Restoration technologists, field biologists, hydrologists, conservation scientists</i>
Forest products utilization (e.g. small diameter products, emerging industries)	<i>Entrepreneurs/contractors, wood product technicians, biomass processing workers</i>
Community wildfire mitigation	<i>Wildfire mitigation specialists, community navigators</i>
Planning, mapping	<i>GIS analysts, natural resource specialists, recreation and forest planners</i>

Major Activities	Example Occupations
Wildfire detection and assessment	<i>Fire lookouts, remote sensing and GIS specialists</i>
Initial attack and suppression (ground)	<i>Wildland firefighters, hand crews, engine crews/crew bosses</i>
Heavy equipment operations	<i>Dozer and equipment operations, water trucks</i>
Aviation Support	<i>Air crews, aviation operations, Smokejumpers</i>
Incident management and logistics	<i>Incident commanders (IC's), logistics specialists</i>
Fire behavior and weather	<i>Fire behavior analysts, meteorologists</i>
Public safety and emergency coordination	<i>Emergency management specialists (agency and community), dispatch</i>



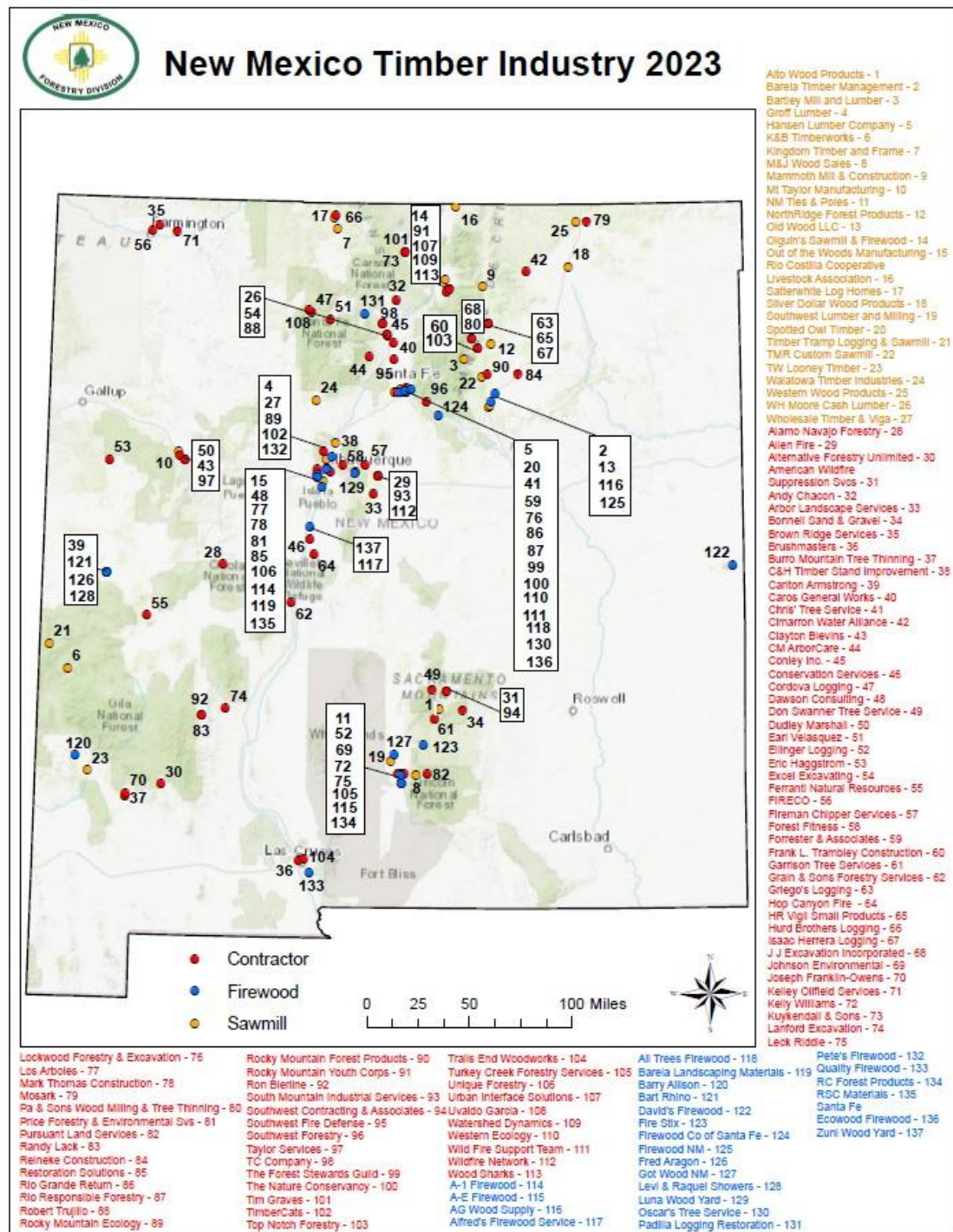


Major Activities	Example occupations
Burn severity, damage assessment	<i>GIS specialists/remote sensing, soil scientists, hydrologists</i>
Watershed stabilization; flood mitigation	<i>Field restoration crews, erosion control technicians</i>
Debris and hazard tree removal	<i>Hand crews, arborists, sawyers, equipment operators</i>
Stream/watershed restoration	<i>Hydrologists, restoration technicians</i>
Revegetation and reforestation	<i>Nursery workers, forestry technicians; geneticists and researchers</i>
Infrastructure	<i>Civil engineering techs, equipment operators</i>
Long-term ecological monitoring	<i>Ecologists, biological technicians, GIS analysts</i>

Supporting industries



- **Wood products manufacturing** – small diameter wood utilization, biochar
- **Contracting** - equipment maintenance, transportation, technical and business services, environmental consulting
- **Support services** – plant nurseries, engineering





McKenna Park, Gila National Forest

Pathways

- Connect exposure, experience and learning to a **quality job** – and to the next job
- improve income, expand skills, career opportunities and financial circumstances over time (a.k.a. economic mobility)
- Pathways $\neq$ degrees or stacks of certificates (though both are components)

Transferrable skills and advancement

Career Stage	Examples	Potential Preparation
Exploration (K-12) and exposure (paid and unpaid)	Paid summer camps, career technical education (experiential education), corps programming, informal and formal environmental education	Outdoor engagement , career exposure, job shadowing, fire camp crews (<18yo), community engagement; art and inquiry-based science
Entry (16 and older) (training + work)	Conservation corps programs, forestry technician apprenticeship; informal and formal education; internships, job shadowing	Wilderness first aid, basic equipment identification and use, field safety, communication standards; research engagement
Skilled worker (skilled employment)	Forestry technicians, prescribed fire field crew, conservation corps crew lead	Industry certifications, work experience, education and research
Advanced technician (higher wages + options)	Fuels specialist, restoration, range, and GIS technicians	Specialized training; post-secondary education
Professional	Forester, hydrologist, wildlife biologist, fire management; post secondary educator	Relevant degrees & professional experience
Leadership	Crew supervisor, Incident Commander, burn boss, post-secondary administrator	Leadership, experience, education, incident qualifications, project and risk management

Note: some occupations require specific education or advanced degrees, additional agency qualifications and years of experience

Quality Jobs

The Five Dimensions of Quality Jobs:



Source: *Jobs for the Future* <https://www.jff.org/quality-jobs/>

Dimension	Definition	Thresholds for Achievement
Financial Well-being	<i>Fair pay, stable employment, benefits that meet basic needs</i>	<i>Earning a “living wage”; access to paid time off; job security</i>
Workplace Culture and Safety	<i>Safe, respectful environment free from discrimination and harassment</i>	<i>Feeling physically safe at work; not experiencing serious work-related injuries; feeling respected and supported; not subject to discrimination or harassment/bullying</i>
Growth and Development Opportunities	<i>Clear path to build skills, gain experience and advance in a career</i>	<i>Opportunities for career advancement; opportunities for work-related training, mentorship or education every year; job allows workers to learn new things</i>
Agency and Voice	<i>Influence over decisions that shape the job, such as pay, work conditions and technology</i>	<i>Workers influence compensation, pay and benefits, working conditions (safety and ability to take breaks), ability to use new software, technology and AI tools</i>
Work Structure and Autonomy	<i>Stable, predictable schedule, manageable workload, meaningful control over when and how work gets done</i>	<i>Workers know their schedules; work hours don’t fluctuate >25%/month; choice in how to do work; time to complete tasks and not work at unsustainable pace</i>

Economic Reality

- A **living wage** is what one full-time worker must earn on an hourly basis to help cover the cost of their family's minimum basic needs where they live without depending on public or private assistance
- Rural costs change the meaning of a living wage



Annual total cost of living for a single person without children in Grant County, New Mexico

- Housing (1-bedroom; \$14,400) + Food (\$4,171) + (Utilities, healthcare, mobile, internet, other basics (\$16,077)+ Transportation (\$13,650) = **\$48,298 before taxes**
- **Annual taxes = \$9,075.19** ($\$48,298 \times 0.1879$) = **(\$928.81 week)**
- Required living-wage income: **\$57,373.19**
- *Not included in the calculation: Car payment, student loan debt, retirement contributions, vehicle replacement, emergency savings, required equipment or PPE not covered by employer, training (e.g. tuition, certifications)*

Location	Average Weekly Wage (Private, <i>Forestry</i>)	Average Weekly Wage (Federal Government, <i>Forestry</i>)	Average Weekly Wage (State Government, <i>Forestry</i>)	Average Weekly Wage (Local Government, <i>all industries</i>)
New Mexico	\$1,212 (N = 58)	\$1,909 (N = 104)	\$1,661 (N = 44)	\$997 (N = 12)
Bernalillo County	\$1,596 (N = 5)	\$1,939 (N =9)	\$1,517 (N = 3)	\$1,1311 (N = 235)
Cibola County	Suppressed (N = 1)	\$1,909 (N =4)	Not reported	Not reported
Dona Ana County	Suppressed (N =2)	\$1,940 (N =5)	\$1,439 (N =3)	Not reported
Grant County	Not Reported	\$2,000 (N =3)	\$1,611 (N = 2)	Not reported
San Miguel County	Suppressed (N = 5)	\$1,877 (N = 3)	\$1,120 (N = 2)	Not reported
Santa Fe County	\$1,013 (N = 8)	\$2,133 (N = 4)	\$1,738 (N = 6)	Not reported
Socorro County	Suppressed (N = 1)	\$1,765 (N = 5)	\$1,971 (N = 4)	\$634 (N =1)
Taos County	Suppressed (N = 3)	\$1,908 (N = 5)	\$1,090 (N = 1)	Not reported

2025 Forestry and Conservation Wages. *Average weekly Forestry –related salaries by county in private, federal, state, and local government sectors, 2025. N= number of reporting establishments. Suppressed data result from a small number of establishments and are withheld for confidentiality. Not reported = no record. (NAICS 113, 115310, 924120)*

New Mexico

- Much of the forestry work is publicly funded; private economic demand does not always exist
- **Median salary** for entry level Forest and Conservation Technicians: \$25.48/hr.; \$53,000 annually (median)
- **Education requirements:** 35% high school/GED, 35% Associates or other 2-year degree, 14% Bachelors degree
- Jobs are more stressful and hazardous than other jobs but are less impacted by AI (Marx and Sick, 2026)
- Traditional ecological knowledge and practices are widely recognized as important in land and forest management disciplines.

Job access is more than a job opening. **Rural barriers** are real

TRAVEL

Workers must travel long distances to get to work; vehicle dependent; limited public transportation in rural areas; gas is very expensive

HOUSING

Scare and expensive
*1-bedroom: N=692 statewide
(Oct. 2026)
Average cost \$1,200 month*

Universal Childcare

<https://www.nmececd.org/universal/>

SEASONAL WORK

Uncertainty in earnings, limited to no health insurance benefits, few opportunities

LIMITED ADVANCEMENT

Workers need to move away to move up; “Brain Drain”

Opportunity Scholarship

<https://hed.nm.gov/free-college-for-new-mexico>



Interconnected career pathways contribute to landscape resilience, healthy communities, and rural economic development.

- How do we build pathways that engage the next generation, allow people to develop transferrable skills, move laterally between pre-fire, fire, and post-fire employment, and provide economic mobility to sustainable, quality jobs in New Mexico?
- How do we make a forestry job a quality job?
- What does success look like?

Sources

- **Quality Jobs.** Jobs for the Future <https://www.jff.org/quality-jobs/>
- **Living Wage Calculator**, Grant County NM. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/35017>
- **Fair Market Housing** rates, 2026. Housing and Urban Development https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026_code/2026summary_sa.odn
- **Preparing Students for Green Jobs in Northwestern Montana, Recommendations for Educational Institutions in the Region and Across the US**, 2026. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/preparing-students-green-jobs-northwestern-montana>
- **Zillow Rent Market Trends**, 2026, New Mexico. <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/>
- **NM Wages:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=2&st=35&year=2026&qtr=1&own=5&ind=10&supp=0
- **NM Statewide Strategic Plan**, 2023. <https://edd.newmexico.gov/about-us/state-plan/>
- **NM Science & Technology Roadmap**, 2025. <https://www.edd.newmexico.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/New-Mexico-ST-Roadmap-Final.pdf>
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THANKS!