

**Saturday, October 7, 2023 at 2 pm**  
**Kit Carson Electric Coop boardroom, 118 Cruz Alta**

## **Río Grande del Norte National Monument: How the Land Has Shaped the People of Taos County**

A landscape of extreme beauty and daunting harshness, President Barack Obama called it when he proclaimed the creation of the **Río Grande del Norte National Monument** in 2013. Anchored by the Taos Valley Overlook in the south and Ute Mountain in the north, the monument includes rugged, wide-open landscapes covered by loom-ing volcanic cones and carved by deep, craggy canyons with rushing rivers. Sweeping plateaus, native grasslands, essential wildlife habitats, and prehistoric footprints add to the beauty and significance of Río Grande del Norte.

It's vast. At 242,555 acres of public land, the monument covers 15 percent of Taos County and a smaller portion of Río Arriba County, land that is now forever protected from development. Evidence of human existence, such as petroglyphs, dwellings, and artifacts, dates back to 10,000 years ago. Homesteaders tried without much success through the 1930s to eke out an existence, just as settlers in much of the rest of the country have striven to subdue the land to their own purposes. In Taos County, however, it's been the land that shapes the people.

Monument manager Eric Valencia is passionate about Río Grande del Norte's importance to our area's economy and recreation, to the monument's visitors, and to the pursuit of conservation. A skilled guide and interpreter, he plans to engage us on October 7th in a dialogue about the monument and the historic interplay of land and people in Taos County.



**Eric Valencia** became the Río Grande del Norte Monument's first full-time manager in June 2022. He was born and raised in Pecos and earned a B.A. degree in history and an M.A. in public affairs, both from New Mexico Highlands University. Before coming to Taos he spent six years as chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services at the National Park Service's Fort Laramie National Historic Site in Laramie, Wyoming. Prior to that, he was a Park Ranger from 2004-2015 at the NPS's Pecos National Historic Park.

Advocacy groups instrumental in the creation of the monument are delighted to have a native Norteño as its manager. Valencia enjoys hiking with his two dogs and has said he's excited to get back to living a traditional lifestyle in northern New Mexico.



North entry at Cerro / Wild Rivers Visitor Center.  
Photo: Michael Wilson