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Streamflows up following significant rain

By J.R. Logan

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Tributaries to the Rio Grande were brim full in Taos County Tuesday (May 19) following several days of wet, abnormally cool weather.

In one of the most extreme examples, the Rio Pueblo near Penasco was at 86 cubic feet per second (cfs) midday Monday (May 18), and up to 625 cfs (more than seven times bigger) just 24 hours later.

The median flow for that day is about 150 cfs based on 23 years of records. The record in 1994 was a booming 1,720 cfs.

In another case, the Rio Grande del Rancho measured at Talpa went from around 60 cfs to about 320 cfs in 24 hours on Tuesday (May 19).

While the river was well above normal (the mean flow based on 59 years of records is 105 cfs for May 20), the flow was well below the recorded record of 508 cfs for the same day.

While flows were brisk, none of the rivers were above flood stage, according to real-time streamflow gauges.

The sudden increase in small stream flow followed several days of cool, wet weather that brought several inches of rain to parts of Taos County. One rain gauge near Arroyo Seco recorded over 3 inches of rain between May 1 and May 20.

Jay Cederberg, supervisor hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey in Albuquerque, told *The Taos News* the increased flows were likely thanks to rain falling on snowpack in the high country. "Anytime you get rain on snow, you tend to accelerate runoff," Cederberg said, noting that quickly melting snow usually means stream flows spike, then tend to drop off just as fast. "Generally, it won't last that long," Cederberg said.

The combined volume of Taos County streams significantly augmented the Rio Grande as it flowed through the gorge. On Tuesday, the river was at just 180 cfs at a streamflow gauge near Cerro, but was up to more than 1,000 cfs by the time it reached Pilar.