

New Mexico: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in New Mexico exactly as written. What's different here is the specific hazard profile and the state, local, and legal context around it. This page is the starting point; the other three pages under New Mexico go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

The 2022 Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire: a government-started disaster

In April 2022, a U.S. Forest Service controlled burn escaped its boundaries in high winds and merged with a second fire to become the largest wildfire in New Mexico's recorded history, burning 341,471 acres across San Miguel, Mora, and Taos counties before it was fully contained in August. Like Ohio's East Palestine train derailment covered on this site, this is a disaster with an identifiable human and institutional cause, not a purely natural event, and Congress ultimately allocated nearly \$4 billion to compensate victims because the government itself was responsible for the ignition. See the Risks page for the full data.

The Rio Grande Compact: a 13-year interstate water fight, just settled

New Mexico shares the Rio Grande with Texas and Colorado under a 1938 interstate compact, and Texas sued New Mexico in 2013 alleging that New Mexico's groundwater pumping was siphoning off water the compact promised to Texas. That lawsuit ran for 13 years before the U.S. Supreme Court approved a settlement in May 2026, splitting irrigation water 57-43 in New Mexico's favor while requiring New Mexico to cut its annual groundwater use by 18,200 acre-feet over the next decade. This is a live example of exactly the kind of interstate water conflict Georgia's page covers for the ACF/ACT river basins, resolved just months before this page was written. See the Risks page for the full data.

What this means for how you use the rest of this manual

The manual's Tier structure and the skill guides apply without modification. What's different in New Mexico: wildfire risk here isn't limited to naturally ignited fires, so the same defensible-space and evacuation planning this manual recommends for California and Oregon applies just as much to a fire that starts from a government-managed burn; and if your household relies on groundwater in the Rio Grande basin, the newly mandated pumping cuts are worth tracking directly rather than assuming water availability stays as it has been.

Sources

- 2022 Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire data: Wikipedia; NRCS
- Rio Grande Compact settlement, May 2026: Source NM; Office of the Governor

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New Mexico: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater harvesting: encouraged, but never a legal water right

New Mexico’s Office of the State Engineer actively encourages residential and commercial rainwater harvesting for on-site irrigation and domestic use, but the water law framework underneath it has a real limit most other states covered on this site don’t share.

Rule	New Mexico
Source water	Rooftop or other catchment
Permit required for typical residential use	No, for landscape irrigation
Permit required for large-scale collection/storage	Yes, under the prior-appropriation permitting system
Key limit	Harvested rainwater cannot be used to establish a legal water right, and may not be repurposed for uses beyond on-site irrigation/domestic use

Where to find it: the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer (ose.nm.gov) publishes rainwater harvesting guidance.

Water rights: prior appropriation since 1891

New Mexico’s water law has been built on prior appropriation since an 1891 territorial Supreme Court decision, the same “first in time, first in right” doctrine already covered for Utah, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, and Kansas.

Concept	How it works in New Mexico
Basic rule	The earliest-dated beneficial use of a given water source holds first claim during a shortage
Interstate obligations	New Mexico's Rio Grande allocation is governed by the 1938 Rio Grande Compact with Texas and Colorado, recently the subject of a 13-year Supreme Court lawsuit settled May 2026
New groundwater obligation	The 2026 settlement requires New Mexico to cut annual Rio Grande basin groundwater pumping by 18,200 acre-feet over 10 years, half within 5 years

Where to find it: the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer administers water rights and appropriation permits.

Concealed carry: shall-issue with mandatory training, not permitless

Unlike the several permitless-carry states already covered on this site, New Mexico requires a Concealed Handgun License to carry a loaded, concealed handgun in public.

Requirement	Detail
Standard	Shall-issue license required, issued by the NM Department of Public Safety
Minimum age	21
Residency	New Mexico residency required (non-resident permits limited to active-duty military and their dependents stationed in-state)
Training	15 hours mandatory, including live-fire qualification
License validity	4 years (2 years for a first-time license)

A live legal obligation, not just history

The 2026 Rio Grande settlement’s groundwater cuts are a new, binding legal obligation on New Mexico going forward, not a resolved historical dispute. Households relying on groundwater in the affected basin should watch for how the state implements the required reductions over the next decade.

Sources

- New Mexico rainwater harvesting rules and limits: NM Office of the State Engineer; Ink Stain

- New Mexico prior appropriation water law: Utton Center, UNM
- Rio Grande Compact settlement, May 2026: Source NM
- New Mexico concealed carry license requirements: Alien Gear Holsters; Giffords Law Center

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New Mexico: Local Resources

NMDHSEM: Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

DHSEM is New Mexico's central agency for mitigating hazards, preparing for emergencies, and coordinating disaster recovery statewide, including recovery coordination for the 2022 Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire.

Where to find it: dhsem.nm.gov.

NMSU Extension: Master Gardener Program

New Mexico State University's Cooperative Extension Service runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site.

- **NMSU Extension Master Gardener Program:** active since 1981, beginning in Albuquerque. County chapters teach fundamentals of horticultural and biological land management, and trained volunteers assist their local Extension office with research-based gardening information for residents.

Where to find it: mastergardeners.nmsu.edu lists chapters by county.

CERT through DHSEM's Citizen Corps

New Mexico's Community Emergency Response Team program runs through DHSEM's Citizen Corps initiative, providing residents training and tools for disaster response and community resilience.

Where to find it: dhsem.nm.gov/preparedness/cert.

Sources

- NMDHSEM structure and mission: New Mexico Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- NMSU Extension Master Gardener Program history: New Mexico State University

- New Mexico CERT program: NMDHSEM

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New Mexico: Risks & Trends

Same standard as every other page on this site: every figure below is independently sourced, and figures that vary across sources, or measure genuinely different things, are flagged as such rather than collapsed into one number that looks more precise than the underlying data actually supports.

The 2022 Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire

Metric	Figure
Cause	A U.S. Forest Service controlled burn that escaped its boundaries in high winds, April 6, 2022
Area burned	341,471 acres, San Miguel, Mora, and Taos counties
Containment date	August 21, 2022
Deaths	4
Non-fatal injuries	3
Structures destroyed/damaged	903+ destroyed (several hundred homes), 85 damaged
People evacuated	27,000+
Federal compensation allocated	~\$4 billion (Congress/President Biden)
Claims paid as of July 2024	5,633 claims totaling \$926.7 million

The government caused this one

Most wildfires covered on this site, California’s and Oregon’s included, are naturally or accidentally ignited. Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon started as a federal agency’s own controlled burn, which is why Congress took the unusual step of directly funding victim compensation rather than routing recovery through standard disaster-relief channels. It’s the same “identifiable institutional cause” pattern as Ohio’s East Palestine derailment, applied to wildfire instead of an industrial accident.

The Rio Grande Compact settlement: 13 years, resolved in 2026

Metric	Figure
Original compact	1938 Rio Grande Compact, governing water sharing among Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado
Lawsuit filed	2013, Texas v. New Mexico, alleging NM groundwater pumping violated the compact
Potential damages alleged	Up to \$1 billion
Supreme Court approval of settlement	May 2026
Irrigation water split under settlement	57% New Mexico / 43% Texas
Required NM groundwater cut	18,200 acre-feet/year reduction over 10 years, half within 5 years

A live obligation going forward, not a closed case

The settlement ends 13 years of litigation, but it starts a new decade-long compliance clock for New Mexico’s groundwater users in the Rio Grande basin. This is worth distinguishing from a purely historical event: the actual water-availability effects of the mandated cuts are still ahead, not behind.

Sources

- 2022 Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire data: Wikipedia; NRCS
- Rio Grande Compact settlement, May 2026: Source NM; Office of the Governor