

For Immediate Release  
June 5, 2020

## **Firefighters Perform Rescues of Visitors to the Rio Grande**

RIO RANCHO, N.M.--The recent rise in temperatures, combined with the desire to escape the confines of home, has brought many people in the Albuquerque metro area to the Rio Grande River to find solace in the cooling waters and the ability to spend some time outdoors. Although the water flow in the river has yet to reach the peak run-off flows, the Rio Grande still poses a significant danger to boaters, rafters, and swimmers. Firefighters from Rio Rancho Fire and Rescue (RRFR) and Corrales Fire Department (CFD) have recently been dispatched to several incidents involving people who became stranded or injured while floating in the river. Many of these incidents involve the use of floatation devices that are meant for use in a swimming pool, not in the flows of a river. Without the ability to steer the craft to avoid downed trees or other debris in the water, these people end up hung up on trees or caught in hidden debris under the water.

Fire personnel from both agencies have witnessed many people using the river not only with inappropriate floatation devices, but also without wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) or life jacket. The use of life jackets is required by the state and, due to the dangers that are present on the river, rafters and others are taking a significant risk of injury or death when they choose not to use a life jacket.

When rescuers arrive at these incidents, they are often faced with adults and frightened children hanging on to branches of downed trees, or stuck on a sandbar, unable to cross the moving water. Firefighters must deploy boats and kayaks to shuttle them to safety on shore. In extreme situations, fire personnel may swim to victims, which creates a danger for these first responders.

“People underestimate the power of water,” said Paul Bearce, Fire Chief RRFR. “Even moderate flow rates can knock down an adult and hold them under the water,” he added.

In order to stay safe while recreating in the waters of the Rio Grande, RRFR and CFD both recommend that anyone who chooses to float the river do so in a craft designed for use in moving water. This can be a kayak, canoe, raft, or shallow-bottom boat. The use of oars or paddles will help the boater steer to avoid the dangers that are present all along the river. The use of PFDs is required for everyone in the boat. Swimming in the Rio Grande is highly discouraged. The presence of sunken debris poses a risk of injuries and being caught and dragged under the water by the current. Both departments have responded to injured boaters this year, and performed body-recoveries of people in years past.

It is important to note that there are river-mile marker signs along the Rio Grande’s west bank, from the 550 bridge, south through Albuquerque. Knowing your location on the river if you need to call for assistance greatly helps responders locate you.

CFD Chief Anthony Martinez said, “My crews have had to assist seven people to safety so far this season, all of whom were using pool floatation devices. You can still end up needing to be rescued when using the appropriate craft and PFDs; however, both of these greatly help lessen danger to you while on the river.”

The Rio Grande and the Bosque are amazing outdoor resources for our communities and they should be enjoyed; however, it is critical to understand the risks of floating the river unprepared and under-equipped. The men and women of RRF and CFD want everyone to have a happy and safe summer.

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Corrales Fire Department  
Tanya R Lattin  
505-702-4182  
[Tlattin@corrales-nm.org](mailto:Tlattin@corrales-nm.org)

Rio Rancho Fire Rescue  
Lt. Jessica Duron-Martinez  
505-515-6429  
[jduron-martinez@rrnm.gov](mailto:jduron-martinez@rrnm.gov)





