

Isaiah Meza



Career Goals:

Following his graduate degree, Isaiah intends to work on the conservation of watersheds and the restoration of ecological systems in the American West. Specifically, he aims to build upon his interdisciplinary experiences with watershed restoration, principles of ecology, science-policy interface, and wetland management to support environmental protection. Through applied research and government (or tribal) work experiences, he aspires to refine his skills in resilience-based ecosystem stewardship, science communication, and stakeholder advocacy. As an underrepresented, first-generation student, he is determined to leverage his multidisciplinary and collaborative outlook to become a groundbreaker and leader in conservation.

Biography:

Isaiah grew up in the New Mexican High Desert where he cultivated a deep physical and spiritual connection to our public lands. These experiences shaped his devotion to western landscapes, and as a high school student, inspired him to volunteer as an environmental educator at his local Bio park. Becoming a resource for young learners to gain a knowledge and appreciation of the biodiversity of the Middle Rio Grande Valley, and the invaluable ecological services that it provides, solidified his aspirations to seek and practice environmental stewardship.

To pursue his career in conservation, Isaiah attended the University of New Mexico (UNM) for his undergraduate studies where he earned a B.S. in Environmental Science. As an assistant in his department's analytical geochemistry and biomedical laboratories, Isaiah developed a technical understanding of the structure of research at an R1 institution and various contamination issues surrounding abandoned mining operations. During his undergraduate studies, he also worked as a peer learning facilitator offering a source of mentorship and feedback for introductory students of environmental science. With support from the McNair Program and the Alliance for Minority Participation, he led research in his community at Valle de Oro, the first Urban National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in the Southwest. Working with the NWR team on environmental and economic justice, and refuge partners such as Los Jardines Institute, he gained an essential perspective on the importance of inclusion and diversity in conducting research and managing public lands. As such, Isaiah took a lead role in organizing and assembling data and participants for this ongoing collaborative project, thus supporting the overarching rehabilitative and community outreach goals of the refuge.

These academic and professional conservation experiences have motivated Isaiah to continue developing his interdisciplinary understandings of environmental issues and conservation through the M.S. Environmental Science and Policy program at NAU. His current research focuses on investigating the ecological resilience and restoration of springs, a type of groundwater-dependent ecosystem, on the Colorado Plateau.