



**ANNUAL
REPORT
FY 2016**



2424 Highway 47, Belen, New Mexico 87002

P.O. Box 170 Belen NM 87002

(505) 864-6460

www.valenciaswcd.org

ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Abel Camarena, Chair (seat 1)

Teresa Smith de Cherif, Vice-Chair (seat 4)

Andrew Hautzinger, Treasurer (seat 2)

P. Joseph Moya, Supervisor (seat 3)

Jeff Goebel, Supervisor (seat 5)

Jim Lane, Supervisor, appointed 2014 (seat 6)

Richard Bonine Jr., Supervisor (seat 7)

Elias Barela, Associate Supervisor

VSWCD STAFF:

Madeline Miller, District Manager

Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Project Manager

Jasmine Martinez, Administrative Assistant

Mark Sanchez, Field Crew lead

Nathanial Tannoya, Field Crew worker

Ron Goens, custodian

U.S.D.A. NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
Los Lunas Field Office

Pearl Armijo, District Conservationist

Edwin Kitzes, Soil Conservationist

Michael Jones, Soil Conservation Technician, Resource Conservationist

Sandra Martinez, Area Team Farm Bill Programs Specialist, NMACD/NRCS

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Katie Mechenbier, Soil and Water Conservation Program Specialist

Jim Wanstall, Noxious Weed Coordinator

New Mexico State University County Extension Service

Newt McCarty, County Extension Agent



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Vision Statement

To provide resource conservation for a quality environment demonstrated thru active leadership, cooperation, and partnership.

Mission Statement

To provide education, technical assistance and recognition to current and future stewards of the land in natural resources conservation.



VALENCIA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

JULY 1, 2015- JUNE 30, 2016

ANNUAL REPORT FY2016

Highlights of Regular Business

- VSWCD Board of Supervisors meetings were held on the first Monday of each month through December 2015 then changed to the 4th Monday of the month with a changed Open Meetings Act Resolution for CY2016 on December 7th, 2015. The meeting schedule continued with the 7pm start time April through September and 6:30 pm start October thru March at the Whitfield Wildlife Visitor and Conservation Education Center, 2424 Highway 47 in Belen, New Mexico. During fiscal year 2016, The Board held 16 meetings including 12 Regular, 3 Special meetings, and one closed special meeting with a quorum present. Special meetings were held on 1) July 6th the Board held a closed meeting to discuss ongoing litigation with leasee of District owned horse training facility rental property, 2) July 23rd 2015 for Board review and approval of the FY 2015 Year End Report to be submitted to the Department of Finance and Administration, 3) December 1st 2015 to meet with Kim Kostelnik, NMCCD consultant for initial planning of a Land Use Plan for the District, and 4) January 16th, 2016 to discuss concerns of the horse training facility rental property vacated January 9th, along with annual action and budget planning of the Board for the remainder of FY 2016 and FY 2017.

- The Open Meetings Act Resolution #3-2016 was approved and signed on December 7th, 2015 at the Regular Monthly Meeting of the Board. Notice of the resolution was published on December 24th in the El Defensor Chieftain and the Valencia County News-Bulletin for the District Area. Also it was posted on the Valencia Soil & Water Facebook page and is available on the District website (www.valenciaswcd.org).
- 10 Resolutions were passed in FY 2016: Resolution 1 for the FY15 Year End Report was passed on July 23rd, 2015; Resolution 2 for the Final proposed FY16 Budget to be submitted to DFA passed on July 13th 2015; Resolution 3 for adoption of the Open Meetings Act terms for public meetings in 2016 was passed on December 7th, 2015; Resolution 4 for acceptance of contribution of 43 acres from Mr. Steven Stacy just north of :Whitfield; Resolution 5 (followed Resolution #6) to submit a capital outlay request for the Whitfield Building Program Phase 2 for the second building for District administrative offices, conferencing and visitor center; Resolution #6 Budget Resolution 1 passed March 28th, 2016; Resolution #7 ¼ mill levy rate collection for the 2017 tax year passed on April 25th 2016; Resolution #8 for FY17 Preliminary Budget was passed on May 23rd, 2016; Resolution #9 for adoption of guidelines as prepared for the District Financial Assistance Program to be established; and Resolution #10 for acceptance of the NMDA boundary map and GIS shape files to allow the NM Department of Agriculture to start the process of discovery of inaccuracies in the legal description and provide a revised description.
- The District provided review of proposed subdivision, Rancho de Los Chavez April 2016 to the Valencia County Planning Department for review and comments on the terrain management plan. Ted Hodoba visited the proposed subdivision site and provided the primary report with secondary review by Board Supervisor Teresa Smith de Cherif and Madeline Miller for final preparation response which was submitted on April 4th 2016 to Valencia County Planning & Zoning's Jacobo Martinez, County Community Development Director.
- In 2016, the District continued with the soils testing program. 10 applicants requested testing assistance for a total of 16 samples tested. The

collection of data to show soil health conditions in the District still needs to be combined and will be included in the annual planning for FY2017.

- A new employee, Jasmine Martinez, administrative assistant, started with the District in 2016 to provide District administrative support and also take on the Whitfield education program scheduling and coordination with the Friends of Whitfield Educators and eventually other District conservation education programs including service learning at Whitfield. Her first day was August 17th 2015. Her support of the District outdoor classroom education programs did result in more participation of schools in FY16 enhancing a significant component of the District mission to provide conservation education. More information follows in the information and educational outreach portion of this report prepared by Ms. Martinez.
- Additionally, as part of the operational capacity building efforts of the District in FY16, the District updated the workstations for the now three member District team, and reconfigured the office space in October of 2015.
- Reorganization of Board Officers for fiscal year 2016 was conducted during the June Regular Meeting on June 1st 2015. For start of fiscal year 2016, Abel Camarena accepted the Chairmanship role from Joseph Moya, Teresa Smith de Cherif became Vice-Chair, and Andrew Hautzinger became Treasurer. Also, Jim Lane, in appointed seat 6, was reappointed and the SWCC reconfirmed his continuation for FY16 at their June 2016 meeting for the upcoming fiscal year starting July 1st.
- The District was able to fill the last vacant seat of the Board, Seat 7 of the Board following approval by the Governor of Laguna Pueblo, Virgil Siow, as confirmed in a letter to the District Chair dated October 19th 2015. Richard Bonine Jr. was appointed at the December 7th 2015 Regular Meeting to represent Laguna Pueblo on the Board. The Soil & Water Conservation Commission confirmed his appointment at their June 2016 meeting.



Mr. Bonine has nearly 30 years of professional experience in agriculture, natural resources, and range management. He is passionate about conservation and natural resources stewardship. His personal mission revolves around the idea of protecting the planet and making it more productive.

Mr. Bonine was raised on a ranch in southeastern Montana near Miles City. He graduated in 1992 from Kansas State University with a B.S. in Agronomy. In 1994, he moved to Gallup, NM. While in Gallup, Mr. Bonine served on the McKinley SWCD from 1997 through 2000 and was the chair in 1998-2000. He also served on the NRCS State Technical Committee at that time.

From 2010 to 2013, Mr. Bonine served on the Campbell County Conservation District Board in Gillette, Wyoming. From 2013-2015 he was the Conservation Manager at NAPI Farm near Farmington NM, where he was responsible for one of the largest USDA NRCS CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program) Contracts in the U.S. Overall, he has 18 years of experience associated with conservation district issues.

Currently, Mr. Bonine is the Rangeland Program Manager at the Pueblo of Laguna and oversees 7 livestock association and 368,000 acres of rangeland.

Board leadership through the Year:

Jeff Goebel in his first year with the District participated through the Mountainair District landscape team for development of the Cibola Forest Revised Plan for mountain districts of the Plan. His public comment included importance of migratory herbivores in the Southwest, predator relationship to ecosystem health and holistic management, managing soil surface, acceleration of photosynthesis in reversing climate change; loss of wilderness character in the Southwest, and he proposed a temporary change in wilderness forest thinning regulations to prevent catastrophic fire, he advised about recording of public involvement processes, listening to elders in American Indian and Hispanic populations, that most important use resources of Forest Service is to manage in a manner that optimizes absorption of water into the soil, He also commented on the current condition of the western potential wilderness designation areas being considered for the revised plan.

Jeff also was nominated and accepted the Vice-Chair position for Region 1 Representative for the NM Association of Conservation Districts.

Board Supervisor activities also accelerated through various committees during the year (the District Manager served on all Committees to facilitate the Board Supervisors efforts):

The Personnel Committee members Abel Camarena, Jim Lane, and Teresa Smith de Cherif along with the District Manager finalized the Employee Handbook in 2016. The Board approved the handbook at their August 3rd Regular Meeting. The Personnel Committee Charter was also developed and finalized by the Committee in 2016 but approval by the Board was made in July 2016.

The Financial Assistance Committee formed at the January 16th Special Meeting of the Board during the annual planning review included Jeff Goebel, Teresa Smith de Cherif, and Andrew Hautzinger as the lead, to establish a cost share pilot program for the remainder of FY16 funded by mil levy operational dollars. The approved FY16 budget included a new line item 'cost share reserve' for \$23,600 which would be available for the pilot program. The Committee met in February and provided a Committee charter and pilot program outline which the Board approved at the February 22nd meeting. The Committee formalized a set of guidelines for the program which was approved by the Board at the May 23rd Regular Meeting for the remainder of FY16 and into FY17. The preliminary and final budget approved for FY17 included \$100K mil levy funds allocated for the financial assistance program. The program was developed initially to be available to mil levy contributors only and on a first come first serve basis with review of the program guidelines and funding available to be done annually. Assistance was defined as either for 'community' or 'agriculture' based initiatives of applicants and within the conservation categories of

- 1) Rangeland and / or Cropland Assistance: Erosion-control projects erosion concern is identified, properties are at risk, and improvements enhance watershed health and reduce erosion.
- 2) Cropland Assistance: Soils testing
- 3) Riparian restoration and promotion of native habitat
- 4) Water Harvesting

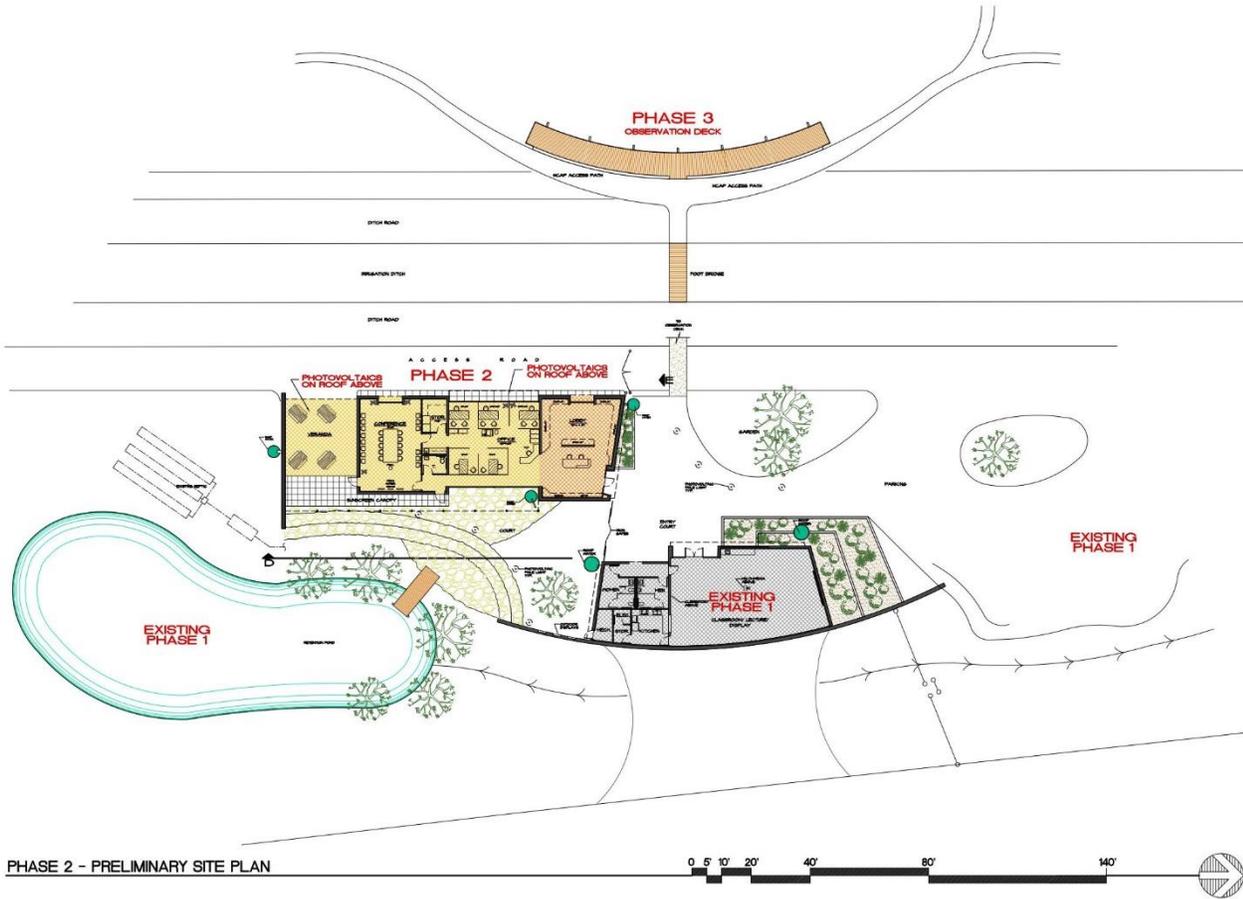
- 5) Pollinator enhancement and gardens

The Land Use Plan Committee was formed and the committee charter approved at the September 14th 2015 Regular meeting of the Board. The Committee initially was formed for completion of the Land Use Plan with consultant Kim Kostelnik facilitating and drafting the Plan. The original Committee consisted of Jeff Goebel as lead, Joseph Moya, the Whitfield Manager and the District Manager. The Board met with Kim Kostelnik on December 1st 2015 for an initial Q&A session to identify the VSWCD goals and objectives from which Kim would create a first draft. At the meeting, an initial list of resource concerns identified as within the statutory authority of the District included: Water (including acequias and water safety/ quality), Customs and culture, (including tribal considerations), Soils (including erosion control), Range, Wildlife/livestock, (including native, non-native and feral animals), Agriculture (including market development, small farm objectives, local food shed), Riparian, Wetlands, Watershed/forest management, Fire, Storm water / flooding, including dams (where they exist), Subdivision reviews, Special land designations, Utilities and renewable energy, including wind, water, and geothermal, Pollinator, organic and pesticides, Mining, gravel pit and travertine, Visual resources management, Invasive species, including native & non-native, noxious weeds, and potential habitat considerations, Threatened/endangered/sensitive species, including plants & animals listed within the District, Air quality, Outreach & Education, Climate. Other concerns were also identified as non-statutory for coordination with other agencies that have authority to address: illegal waste, trash dumping, water rights, land transfers, zoning, and economic development.

Kim Kostelnik provided first draft of the Plan back to the Board in January. Review and revision of the initial Plan has been underway by the LUP committee and has continued into FY17.

The Whitfield Oversight Committee including Abel Camarena, Andrew Hautzinger, and Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Project Manager met with architect John Kirkpatrick to modify floorplans of the 2nd building still to be constructed at Whitfield. The changes reflect the change in focus of the overall facility to include District operations. The modified design and revised budget

were again submitted in June 2016 to DFA. The 5 year plan or ICIP for the period 2018-2022 was prepared for State legislative capital outlay funding consideration during the 2017 legislative session.



PHASE 2 - PRELIMINARY SITE PLAN

PHASE 2 PRELIMINARY
MASTER SITE PLAN
FOR
WHITFIELD WILDLIFE AREA
VISITOR AND EDUCATION CENTER
5/16/16

JOHN KIRKPATRICK
ARCHITECT
P.O. BOX 1743
LOS LUNAS, NEW MEXICO



Katherine Gallegos Elementary students visit the Capitol during legislative session in 2016 to support the Environmental Education Memorial (House Joint Memorial 3 which passed just before closing of the session)

District Operations

- For FY16, the District was able to meet the quarterly and annual reporting and budgeting requirements to the Department of Finance and Administration, and the annual financial reporting to the Office of the State Auditor. For FY15, the District prepared to report at the Tier 6 level of the Audit Rule.

- Starting cash balance for the District was \$218,138. Additionally, revenues for the 2016 budget included the full NMDA Points award for the year of \$14,765 the 2nd year tax collection (2015) of the quarter mill levy of \$332,074, interest earnings from the Dan Goodman Soil & Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement Award trust, the Wetlands Reserve Program easement savings, and the grant to be used for restoration of the Rio Abajo Conservation Area. Total operational expenditures for the year were \$288,796 coming in under the approved anticipated expenditures of \$364,403 including the general operational budget, the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, and the Rio Abajo Conservation Area and rental property from all funding sources. The Year End Report for FY16 with full detail of expenditures for the year is available on the VSWCD website along with all financial reports. The FY16 Audit will be completed fall of FY17 and posted on the VSWCD website following approval by the Office of the State Auditor.

Grant funding in 2016 was provided for projects facilitating the education programs and visitation to the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area through the Friends of Whitfield, a 501© (3) established by the local community for Whitfield. As the fiscal agent for those projects highlighted in the Whitfield Project update in this report, those expenditures are not recognized in the District's financial reports.

- The District submitted their annual resolution as required to the Soil & Water Conservation Commission for their intent to collect the ¼ mill levy for the 2016 tax in the upcoming fiscal year and it was approved at the June meeting of the Soil & Water Conservation Commission.

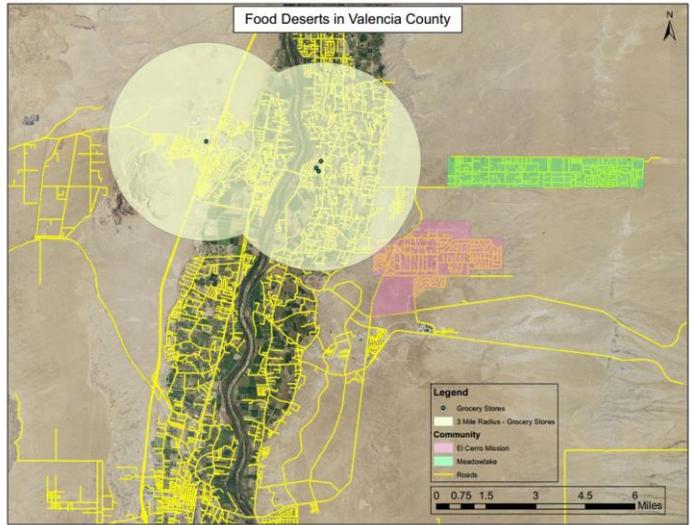
- The District made their annual cost share payment for the 6th year of ten to pay back the loan component part (\$6950 total loan) of Water Trust Board funding obtained through the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance group for completed riparian restoration projects.

- The District submitted in June of FY2015 two outstanding projects for capital outlay including for completion of the Whitfield Education and Visitor Building Program (2nd building) and improvements to the maintenance building at Whitfield. Both requests included needed energy saving components for the public facility. The maintenance building improvements capital outlay request was approved for half of the requested funding. A modified budget was then submitted to the State and the project approved with completion expected in 2017.

Maintenance Building LID Infrastructure Budget:	Original	Revised
Design	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Electrical	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00
3,000 gallon Cistern Tank	\$ 1,325.00	\$ 1,325.00
Ultraviolet Filtration System	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00

Well (140') and water pump	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 8,437.00
Septic	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Inside water storage tank	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00
Electric tankless hot water heater	\$ 425.00	\$ 425.00
Toilet	\$ 238.00	\$ 238.00
Plumbing hardware Inside and outside	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00
Bathroom other than toilet	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 1,200.00
Framing	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00
Sheeting	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00
Miscellaneous	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00
Equipment	\$ 4,375.00	\$ 4,375.00
Total	\$ 37,063.00	\$ 34,500.00

- In late May of 2016, the National Association of Conservation Districts released their Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant Initiative. The District was able to submit a proposal by the deadline of June 29th at end of FY2016. The District proposal 'The East Valencia Urban Gardens Program' was prepared in collaboration with the Valencia County Community Development Department for communities within the District which were identified as food desert areas. On July 25th, 2016, the District received initial notice and congratulation from NACD CEO Jeremy Peters that the proposal was selected for award. This award of \$44,286 will establish a multi-faceted local agriculture program for the communities of Meadow Lake, El Cerro Mission, and Monterey Park in fiscal 2017.



- Additional grants pursued but which were not funded included for a classroom size shade structure for Whitfield through the McCune Foundation, and Whitfield Project Manager Ted Hodoba also applied for a grant for a demonstration pollinator rain garden at Whitfield through the Soil & Water Quality Grant Program.
- The District paid minimum dues of \$500 to the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts in FY16 and continued membership of the New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts with annual dues of \$100. For professional development opportunities and support for District employees, the annual due of \$10 was paid to the New Mexico Conservation District Employees group for the District Manager, Madeline Miller, and Administrative Assistance Jasmine Martinez.
- The District promoted all activities and provided public information primarily through the VSWCD website and Facebook page maintained by Jasmine Martinez which greatly increased District visibility. The District website is at valenciaswcd.org. Also, Jasmine started a quarterly newsletter for the District community with a fall and spring issue published during 2016. The newsletters are distributed electronically and posted on the VSWCD website.
- The District had a booth at the Valencia County Fair in August 2015 which included raffling of pollinator landscape plants and a rain barrel to encourage rain harvesting for landscape use in residential areas of the District, and a booth with a few words at the NMSU Valencia County Forage Workshop December 1st 2015 to promote the soils testing program.



Friends of Whitfield Educator Inez Sisneros volunteering for conservation education at Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.



Students participating in the Birds of a Feather Explore Together Program in 2016 who entered the fourth annual Friends of Whitfield Essay Contest show their Certificates of Award. (Pictured left to right: Educator Robin VerEecke, 2nd place winner Heaven Walker, 3rd place winner Abby Overheim-Brown, and Educator Evelyn Brower).

Information & Educational Outreach

Conservation and environmental education outreach as key components of the District’s mission were pursued during the year. Many of the opportunities to further the mission of the District are carried out through special events, demonstration projects, special education programs and workshops at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area in Belen New Mexico. This 97 acre donated open space area includes a visitor and education center.

The Birds of a Feather Explore Together program which consists of 5 lessons per class including field trips to Whitfield as part of the school curriculum for the youth continued this year as a much desired program for local 4th grade students. This program in the 6th year along with the 5th year for the Sandia Natural History Center Program for 5th graders keeps the Friends of Whitfield volunteer Educators busy during the school year. Total school contacts for these programs this year were 6437, with 2866 in the fall and 3571 in the spring. The Friends of Whitfield also annually raise funds for bussing of students to Whitfield for participation in this program (most local public schools are not able to budget for educational opportunities outside the classroom)

Dan Goodman Soil & Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement Award

2016 was the 29th year for the Dan Goodman Soil & Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement Award. Board Supervisors Jim Lane, Andrew Hautzinger and Joseph Moya served on the selection committee and their recommendations for recipients were approved by the Board at their April Regular Meeting. In recognizing the young adults of the District Area who are excelling and and to showcase their experience and value for natural resources conservation, *this year’s* Award was presented to first place winner Belen High School senior Samantha Padilla, second place was shared by Belen High School seniors Montana Hull, Joseph Davis and Casey Canon, and third place went to Los Lunas High School senior Connor Chavez, for their efforts in agriculture and habitat restoration. Awardees received their certificates and awards at the May 23rd and June 27th, 2016 Board meetings, and their awards announced in the Valencia County News-Bulletin. The first place winner was presented with a \$500 award, second place winners each received a \$300 award, and third place was given a \$100 award. All five recipients stated their awards would go towards their college education.

****The Dan Goodman Soil and Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement Award is given yearly to high school youth grades 9-12 in recognition of their efforts in conservation and environmental improvement. The interest earnings used for the awards are from the*

trust bequeathed to the District by the late VSWCD Supervisor, Dan Goodman since 1987.

BEMP (Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program)

In 2016, with a continued Memorandum of Agreement in place between the Valencia SWCD and the BEMP, which is meant to be reviewed annually by the District Board of Supervisors, the District granted \$10,000 for sponsorship of BEMP monitoring programs in the District Area and released this funding to BEMP in May.

The BEMP sites in Valencia County were established at Valencia SWCD's request in 2003 and 2004, originally as a cooperator for the bosque restoration projects of the District funded through the U.S. Forest Service Collaborative Forest Restoration Program. The additional sites to date are the Bosque Farms, Los Lunas, Belen, and Crawford Sites. The MOA is in place for furthering the District mission and provides 10 monthly monitoring visits per year at 8 BEMP sites through BEMP's active partnership with public and charter school students for collection of the data. Partner schools to date have included Jaramillo Elementary School, Bosque Farms Elementary, Los Lunas High School, School of Dreams Academy, and Rio Grande Elementary.

BEMP has 32 monitoring sites along 300 miles of the Rio Grande, including 8 sites in Valencia County. BEMP monitors abiotic factors including depth to groundwater; water level in the ditches; precipitation; temperature; and water quality of the river, ditches, and groundwater. BEMP monitors biotic factors including litter fall of native and exotic trees; vegetation cover (includes species richness, abundance, and diversity); cottonwood monitoring (size and sex); woody debris/fuel load; surface - active arthropods; and tamarisk leaf beetle presence, abundance, and impact. BEMP tracks the impacts of restoration projects (mechanical clearing, wood chipping, mastication, bank-lowering), flooding, and fire on the biotic and abiotic variables mentioned above. The data collected, compiled into reports, and presented through various meetings including directly to the Board of Supervisors annually provide reliable data for District management decisions in the restoration of the Middle Rio Grande corridor as well as opportunity for science education of

Valencia County youth. The Report to VSWCD was presented to the Board at their April 2016 meeting and is posted on the BEMP website at <http://bemp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/BEMP-report-2015-VSWCD.pdf>.



Starting in 2013, BEMP has been monitoring behavior and movement of the salt cedar host specific beetles introduced for biocontrol of Salt cedar and all four species released are now moving through the state. From their tamarisk beetle report of 2015, BEMP observes:

“[Discussion:] Our data this year show a markedly different pattern from our monitoring in 2013 and 2014. *Diorhabda* populations seem to be shifting southward: sites in the South Valley of Albuquerque and in Belen experienced higher defoliation in 2015 than in 2014, and the number of individuals captured during sampling increased four - to nearly tenfold in these areas. Correspondingly, populations in the north appear to have dropped: Santo Domingo, which in 2013 and 2014 had the highest beetle populations and most severe defoliation, experienced mostly minimal defoliation this year and the number of individuals sampled fell by nearly 85%. Severe defoliation was observed in June and July in 2014, but was not observed until August in 2015. We observed virtually no refoliation following severe defoliation this year, compared with substantial leaf recovery at four sites in 2014. However, because severe defoliation occurred over a month later in 2015, it is possible that leaf recovery may have occurred in September, after the end of our sampling period. While the peak population

appears to be moving southward in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, we have not observed *Diorhabda* occupying any new sites to the south in our three years of monitoring. However, other surveying efforts in 2015 have documented beetles expanding their range into new areas, particularly in the area of Elephant Butte (Tamarisk Coalition 2015). It appears that this expansion was driven by beetles moving northward from Texas rather than southward through the Middle Rio Grande Valley, though these two populations will likely meet in the near future (Tracy et al. 2015). We continued to collaborate with Northern Arizona University researchers in 2015 to monitor tamarisk leaf beetle populations in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. A comprehensive summary of the combined results was reported to the US Army Corps of Engineers (Johnson et al. 2015) and presented by NAU researchers at the 2016 Tamarisk Coalition Conference in Grand Junction, Colorado. As in past years, our data were incorporated into the Tamarisk Coalition's tamarisk leaf beetle survey database. BEMP will continue monitoring tamarisk leaf beetle in 2016, expanding to all thirty-two permanent Sites as part of our long-term ecological monitoring program. We plan to conduct analysis to determine the type and extent of habitat change driven by the tamarisk leaf beetle in the Middle Rio Grande Valley, drawing on our other long-term monitoring datasets including leaf litter, vegetation transect, surface-active arthropod, and core weather data, from our thirty-one permanent sites both with and without tamarisk. BEMP sites have experienced a variety of different ecological management strategies over time and cover a wide geographic range from Santo Domingo Pueblo to Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park in Las Cruces. Therefore, our data will be useful for land managers seeking to understand the rapidly evolving ecological impacts of the tamarisk leaf beetle in the southwest, and what management strategies will be necessary and effective in the wake of these changes." The full report is available on the BEMP website at

<http://bemp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/BEMP-TLB-Monitoring-Report-2015.pdf> .



4 of the 6 students, Marisol Diaz, Nallely Carmona, Ashlee Valdez and Mariah Shama, making up the Belen High School Envirothon Team, the EcoEagles, are shown here at the Competition in Sacramento NM.

The New Mexico Envirothon in April 2016 included two teams sponsored by the District initially with a \$500 dollar contribution to each team for expenses. One team each from Belen High School and Los Lunas High School of 6 students competed in the state competition. Belen High School came in first place in the oral presentation competition; the special topic this year was invasive weeds. This year the VSWCD Board of Supervisors approved an additional contribution of \$70 to the Belen High School team so that they could attend a workshop at the University of New Mexico Main Campus in preparation for the competition.

Conner Coffey, and Lawrence Sanchez also with the Eco Eagles in Sacramento NM at the New Mexico Envirothon competition.



District Special Projects



Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

Ted Hodoba continued in his 7th year with management of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, and the Visitor and Conservation Education Center, in carrying out the mission of the District to promote land stewardship and an ethic of resources conservation to the communities of the District. The Whitfield education center and conservation area has provided the means for a variety of outreach and support for partner agencies during fiscal year 2016. Total visitors counted for the year at Whitfield were 1,842, not including school groups. A local group from Central NM Audubon, the Thursday Birders, visited Whitfield four times a year once each season. Defenders of Wildlife also brought their local members for a tour in November 2015.



The Girls on the Run find a western painted turtle at Whitfield.

Service learning opportunities at Whitfield continued to contribute to management of the conservation area in 2016:

- The 'BEST' program with the Belen School District brought 3-5 students weekly during the school year to help with basic grounds maintenance including kochia weed pulling. They were joined by 8-10 Special Education students from the Belen High School every other week.
- On April 28, a group of girls from four Belen elementary schools installed 6 perches on the mounds in the prairie dog colony at Whitfield as a community service project with the organization **Girls on the Run**. The perches that fledglings use for flight practice of this low flying species are intended to attract Burrowing Owls to Whitfield.



One of 6 perch stations being prepared by the Girls on the Run group on April 28th 2016 at Whitfield. Prior to the event, Friends educators and District Manager Madeline Miller visited with the Girls on the Run participants at their schools during their after school club time to prepare them for their visit to Whitfield.

- In May, volunteers and staff planted nearly 100 trees and shrubs that were donated to Whitfield by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Los Lunas Plant Materials Center Manager, Bernadette Cooney. Additional native shrubs from the Plant Material Center as they shut down their nursery were offered to the public for drought tolerant landscape plantings.
- March 24, students from the School of Dreams Academy in Los Lunas planted approximately 35 cacti that they grew from seed collected in the nearby foothills of the Manzano Mountains.

- Earth Day, April 22, a group of volunteers from CHI St. Joseph's Children planted \$150.00 worth of cacti that they purchased as their community volunteer project for the year.

Other special events at Whitfield included:

- the 3rd annual Earth Day celebration at Whitfield on April 23rd with students from the School of Dreams Academy again providing support for the event; this year there was a presentation on bees by Antiguas Del Norte Honey Bee Rescue Farm and the Zoo to You Van brought animals and exhibits from the Rio Grande Zoo. 40 attendees were counted.
- The 7th Annual Birthday Party for the Center was held the 2nd Saturday of December which included a presentation by the Whitfield Master Naturalists on their projects.
- April 9th 2016, The Friends of Whitfield held their Annual Meeting at Whitfield which included a presentation by Talking Talons with live snakes. The program was a well-received event as many family members attended with their children who participated in the Friends annual Essay Contest.
- District co-sponsored with the Friends of Whitfield, the 6th Annual Desert Willow Festival in August 2015. This festival is a plant sale fundraising event for Whitfield.

The Master Naturalist Certification Program interns were finalizing their projects during the year, enhancing educational programs for the communities and schools at Whitfield. Intern Liz DiCharry, District resident and Whitfield Friends member established Whitfield's participation in the Rio Grande Phenology Trail, a project of Nature's Notebook, a national organization and project spearheading citizen science based field observations and data collection of flora and fauna in natural areas across the US. Liz DiCharry gave trainings on participation with the Rio Grande Phenology Trail to the new Nature's Notebook partner, Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Members now include Bosque del Apache, Sevilleta, Whitfield, Valle de Oro, The Rio Grande Biopark, and the Santa Fe Botanical Garden. This is a citizen science project and most sites are

monitoring cottonwoods and Siberian elms as well as other plant and animal species.

Another Master Naturalist, Margette Pulis, in 2016 completed her project which documented many of the plants and animals at Whitfield and putting it into an accessible, electronic field guide. An I-pad was purchased as a field tool with this data in it that can be at Whitfield by volunteers and staff including the Whitfield Master Naturalists and the Whitfield Volunteer Educators among others when conducting tours at Whitfield.

In 2016, there were no new interns in the certification program but the Master Naturalist Advisory Committee continued with activities including field trips exploring the natural ecology of the Middle Rio Grande region. Lastly, through the Master Naturalist program at Whitfield, a citizen science field day was conducted. Called a 'bioblitz' and following the guidelines of the national Bioblitz program the Master Naturalists on May 7th at Whitfield. The group over about a 2 hour time frame explored the conservation area, recording as many flora and fauna species sited as they could. Of special note or less commonly observed, Wilson's Phalaropes and a Great Plains Skink. The group counted 60 plant species, 16 species of insects, 3 species of amphibians, 5 species of reptiles, 36 species of birds, and 3 species of mammals.



A cactus garden project was begun at the end of the last fiscal year. As part of the project, an interpretive sign about cacti of the Chihuahuan Desert was created.

The garden was dedicated with PNM representatives and Central Audubon members, funders for the materials and signage (through the Friends of Whitfield), at the annual Whitfield birthday party on December 12, 2015. Also attending was Board Vice-Chair Teresa Smith de Cherif who acknowledged former Board Supervisor Charlie Sanchez proposing the idea for the garden. Towards the end of the year, a group of Whitfield volunteers donated time and materials, solicited donations of materials, and received funding from the Friends of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation area to build a structure to keep the sign from fading and shade visitors while they are looking at it.



Both the Whitfield Conservation Area and the Rio Abajo Habitat Restoration Project noted above are within the Middle Rio Grande Bosque corridor. This past September, Whitfield Manager Ted Hodoba met State Representative Jeff Steinborn of Las Cruces who discussed with him HB 563 (amended) which was passed during the last legislative session and signed by Governor Martinez on April 2nd 2015 to establish a Rio Grande Trail Commission. The bill was amended by the House Energy Environment and Natural Resources Committee and the ‘substitute’ was approved. The substitute bill added in part to require “...the Commission to consult, regarding trail development issues within their jurisdiction, with representatives of those conservation and irrigation districts served by the Rio Grande and acequias, counties, land grants,

municipalities, and Indian nation tribes or pueblos adjoining the Rio Grande.” Ted Hodoba is currently participating in the ecotourism working group for the Rio Grande Trail Commission.

In FY16, Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Manager continued to use organic herbicides at Whitfield for management of primarily perennial pepperweed, in five areas. The Johnson grass and Russian knapweed had been mitigated significantly from two past seasons of treatments and were not treated in FY2016 but will need to be treated again. In the original trials, four different brands/types were tested and two proved particularly effective: Avenger™ (citrus oil base) and horticultural vinegar (20% acetic acid as compared to household vinegar with 5% acetic acid). These are broad spectrum herbicides; however, they appeared to be more effective on dicots than monocots (Johnson grass). Avenger herbicide was used in 2016 as most effective in particular for perennial pepperweed management. And is preferred at Whitfield as it is not harmful to aquatic wildlife.

Whitfield as a demonstration site has several water harvesting systems on the property. The visitors’ center has two large cisterns that collect rain water used in the surrounding landscape. There are two large retention basins north and south of the center that have been planted with native plants to help with water infiltration, erosion control, and to provide additional habitat for wildlife. These are essentially large versions of rain gardens, which use runoff from roofs and other structures to water native plants and provide erosion control through low impact development measures that are also cost effective and help recharge groundwater. The Whitfield Project Manager, gave a presentation on Water Harvesting on June 18, 2016 which included touring the water catchment systems at Whitfield.



Entry into the Stacy Unit from Hwy 47 in Belen, NM

The Stacy Unit: The Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area now includes the ‘Stacy Unit’ as part of the Whitfield complex. The contribution of approximately 43 acres of open unimproved land just north of Whitfield though not directly contiguous was provided by Stephen Stacy, landowner, who wanted it preserved as open space. The Board accepted the land donation in December 2015. A Phase 1 environmental assessment was conducted by Advanced Environmental Solutions in Belen, New Mexico immediately following transfer of title. There were no recognized environmental conditions with conclusion of the consultant of ‘low risk of subsurface soil contamination beneath the subject property resulting from on-site sources...’...low risk for subsurface soil & groundwater contamination beneath the subject property resulting from releases from off-site sources’. Ted Hodoba has had initial visits to the area noting the Stacey Unit has good vegetative cover with many native grasses and forbs. Also, aside from several non-native species such as Russian Olive, there are a few native shrubs and trees including Screwbean Mesquite and Four-wing Saltbush. While still in preliminary stage of considerations, the Stacy Unit presents different opportunities for habitat enhancements particularly for pollinators.

Riparian Restoration: restoring watershed health in the District

Desired Condition – The area is part of the Valencia SWCD Open Space Conservation Area and will provide an important example of bosque restoration efforts. The project will restore the native riparian habitat, enhance wildlife, and reduce soil erosion and fire hazard. Valencia SWCD may provide additional funds to remove woody material including firewood or chip piles. VSWCD may conduct tree, shrub and ground cover plantings in the future. Potential grass plantings include alkali sacaton (1 lbs./acre drill rate, \$18 per live seed) and inland salt grass (2 lbs./acre drill rate, \$34 per live seed).



GRGWA Project 15-16A: Rio Abajo - VSWCD, Draft Project Description, 6/8/15

Proposed Project: The District pursued a 12.8 acre project in the Rio Abajo Conservation Area through funding of the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance. The District was not able to move forward with the project as landowner NM Game & Fish (DGF) wanted to wait until the division of property co-owned with the District was completed but is shown here as a project that may be revisited with the project area owned by DGF.

GRGWA Project 15-16A, Rio Abajo Valencia SWCD open space property
Project Type/Size: Initial treatment of non-native phreatophytes, 12.8 acres
Sponsor: Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD),
Landowner: State (sub-division) land, Valencia SWCD, landowner

The project area may be expanded or reduced depending on location of New Mexico Game and Fish agency boundaries, project proposals and available funds.

Project Location - The project is located in Valencia County approximately 1.5 miles south of Belen, NM. The project is accessed through VSWCD property, from Horse Stables Road, a County dirt road, east off NM Hwy 304. The project area is 12.8 acres in size in the riparian zone. The project west boundary is a 20 foot buffer along the clear ditch managed by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. The approximate center of the project is located at Latitude/Longitude: N 34.61723 by W -106.74629.

Project Objective – The project is considered an initial treatment to remove non-native invasive woody trees. The project will remove and control Russian olive, salt cedar and Siberian elm species. The down and dead woody material is significant and will be treated.

Current Site Conditions – The area is primarily made up of heavy density, sapling, pole and mature tree sized Russian olive and salt cedar trees. Siberian elm may also be present. Overstory cottonwood trees make up approximately 70% of the project area. There are scattered native tree and shrub species including black willow, New Mexico olive and golden current. There is a patchy understory of native grasses.

There is an archeological site located on NMG&F lands adjoining the project area. This area will be identified and must be avoided. There is a high voltage power line that parallels the south project boundary. There was an old burn area on the project. Old fire lines meander through the middle portions of the project area and may be used as future hiking trails. There is a Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program site located at the Crawford site on the opposite side of the Rio Grande. The project boundary is not flagged. Shape files and GPS waypoints of the project boundary and protected areas will be provided.

Project Description – The project is an initial treatment to remove and treat non-native phreatophyte tree species and down, dead fuels. All treatment methods will be considered. Preference will be given to methods that avoid disturbing overstory cottonwoods and native vegetation, and will be preferred.

Alternatives will be considered for chip or mulch depth standards to protect native grasses. As an alternative, to minimize the impacted to ground cover, chips may be placed in small (minimum 10 cu ft.) to medium sized (maximum 50 cu ft.) piles along the roads and trails. Mastication may be concentrated in windrows. Alternative slash methods must avoid overstory cottonwood trees. Project treatments will also follow the GRGWA, 2015 General Riparian Prescriptions.

GRGWA Project 15-16A: Rio Abajo - VSWCD, Draft Project Description, 6/8/15

The Cibola Forest Revision Plan: Supervisor Jeff Goebel was approved by the Board to represent the District as a landscape team cooperater for initial drafting of the Cibola Forest Plan Revision at the end of FY15. To date He has provided comment on desirable social, cultural, economic and ecological conditions in addressing forest management in the revised Plan and has commented on the planning process (public participation) through his participation on the Mountainair District Landscape Team for the Plan drafting process.

Rio Abajo Conservation Area (RACA): The Rio Abajo committee for the District Board of Supervisors (Supervisors Teresa Smith de Cherif, Andrew Hautzinger) as in 2015 continued with communications

with co-owner of the 180+ acres property, the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish (DGF), who have been working towards splitting the property according to cultural sites they had identified the uplands portion of the conservation area in 2011. By year end, the DGF was completing the legal survey delineating the split of property and finishing legal descriptions before District review and approval. The completion of division of the property was approved just following close of FY16 and thus riparian restoration work is expected to begin in the area in FY17.

The adjacent 40 acre horse training facility owned by the District started to move forward in February of 2016 following departure of the leasee in January. In keeping with the Board actions of FY15 to restore the property to preserve for conservation purposes, the Property Disposal Committee including Board Supervisors Teresa Smith de Cherif, Jim Lane, and Andrew Hautzinger and the District Manager, was formed. The Committee has been overseeing interim management of the property which includes a main residence and 5 outbuildings and is chartered to prepare an overall vision for the change of use of the property under continued District ownership.



**The Rio Abajo Conservation Area includes prime Bosque along the Middle Rio Grande, a valuable link along with the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area (three miles north) within the Middle Rio Grande corridor for migratory fowl.*

☺THE END☺

This Annual Report for FY16 is respectfully submitted by the Staff of the Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District.