



Valencia
Soil & Water Conservation District
Annual Report
FY2014



Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District
2424 Highway 47, Belen, New Mexico 87002

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ANNUAL REPORT
July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014

DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Joseph Moya, Chair (seat 3)
Andrew Hautzinger, Vice-Chair (seat 2)
Abel Camarena, Treasurer (seat 1)
Charlie Sanchez Jr., Supervisor (seat 5)
Teresa Smith de Cherif, Supervisor (seat 4)
Jim Lane, Supervisor, appointed 2014 (seat 6)
Elias Barela, Associate Supervisor

VSWCD STAFF:

Madeline Miller, District Manager
Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Project Manager

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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*April 2nd 2014 Erosion Control Workshop:
In the a.m.; techniques overview session*

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, 2013- JUNE 30, 2014**

ANNUAL REPORT FY2014



The District Board

- VSWCD Board of Supervisors meetings were held on the first Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. April through September and 6:30 pm October thru March (starting January 2014) at the Whitfield Wildlife Visitor and Conservation Education Center, 2424 Highway 47 in Belen, New Mexico. During fiscal year 2014, The Board held 15 meetings including 12 Regular, and 3 Special meetings with a quorum present. Special meetings included on October 21st 2013 for presentations from other SWCDs about their experiences with mill levy funding for their Districts; Socorro, Claunch-Pinto, E. Torrance and Taos SWCDs attended and shared very helpful food for thought for the VSWCD Board in planning for mill levy funding; on March 22nd 2014 the Board held the annual Joint Boards Meeting with the Friends of Whitfield Board for planning and development concerns of the District's Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area; and on June 25th the first of two meetings scheduled for public input in the District's priority planning for the mill levy funding to start January 2015 was held at the Los Lunas Transportation Center with ~ 20 public attendees and reporter Julia Dendinger who did publish a recap of the meeting in the July 10th edition of the Valencia County News-Bulletin titled 'Public Input Sought for Mill Levy'.
- The Open Meetings Act Resolution for 2014 was approved and signed at the December 9th, 2013 Regular Meeting and included a change in the start time of meetings during the winter or non-irrigating months from October thru March to 6:30 p.m. and remained at 7 p.m. for April through September. Otherwise the meetings were held the 1st Monday of the month unless otherwise scheduled due to holidays, a lack of quorum or emergencies.
- Board Officers at start of the new year and throughout included Joseph Moya Chair, Andrew Hautzinger [offered and was accepted to serve as] Vice-Chair, and Abel Camarena continued as Treasurer. Teresa Smith de Cherif, and Charlie Sanchez Jr. continued as Supervisors seat 4 and 5 respectively. Teresa Smith de Cherif, Seat 4 and Joseph Moya, Seat 3 took their Oaths of Office at the July meeting following their re-election on May 7th 2013. Jim Lane, the newest Board Supervisor, Seat 6 was nominated and approved by the Board to serve at the August Regular Meeting of the Board on August 3rd 2013. The Soil & Water Conservation Commission approved his appointment at their January 7th, 2014 meeting and his patience paid off as he was then able to vote at the meetings. In his application, Mr. Lane commented on his desire to serve: '...Mr. Lane is interested in serving on the District Board as representative of the east and west mesa areas as well as all other areas in the District not part of the green belt farming areas proper within the District but with natural resource concerns and interests. His development of the MLPAA [Meadowlake Park

Area Association] as a 501C3 has included building community support for the ~30 acre open space park and providing positive outlets through outdoor learning workshops for the youth and general public in the area.’ The Board continues to outreach to the Pueblo members of the District, Laguna and Isleta, for representation on the Board in the 7th seat and as of yet has not been able to gain a firm commitment from an individual. Board recruitment continues to be challenging especially for representation of the agricultural and ranching communities in the areas south of Belen and west of the Rio Grande in the District.

Board and Staff trainings, activities highlights during the year:

Abel Camarena and Jim Lane, Supervisors attended the Supervisor Training at the Whitfield Center May 16, 2014, received certification for all 8 modules,

Teresa Smith de Cherif, Supervisor, attended the first half of Supervisor Training at the NMACD Annual Meeting October 2013.

Ted Hodoba, and field staff Mark Sanchez attended the Erosion Control Workshop on April 2nd to specifically address erosion management at Whitfield and have since implemented techniques with mulch obtained from District project completed in Veguita NM in March of 2014.

VSWCD staff, Ted Hodoba and Mark Sanchez attended chain saw safety training provided by the Tome-Adelino Fire Department on May 10th, 2014 for brush management practices, training was also provided to firefighters and at the Whitfield Conservation Area.

Ted Hodoba attended the ANROSP (Alliance of Natural Resource Outreach and Service Programs) Conference for administrators of master naturalist programs Nov. 4-7, 2013 on full scholarship in Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

Abel Camarena and Madeline Miller attended the NMACD sponsored Water Trust Board grant program funding workshop May 6th, 2014 at

NM Institute of Mining and Technology library in Socorro NM.

A. Hautzinger, VSWCD Vice-Chair provided public comments include April 25th, 2014, Middle Rio Grande Urban Waters Partners Meeting at the NM Natural History Museum, US Army Corps of Engineers; positive comments regarding VSWCD blending of recreation, environmental education and conservation through the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.



District Operations

- For FY14, the District was able to meet reporting requirements to the Department of Finance and Administration, and the Office of the State Auditor. For FY14, the District reported at the Tier 2 level of the Audit Rule.
- Revenues for the budget included the full NMDA Points award for the year of \$12,921, the Whitfield Wetlands Reserve Program easement investment principal and interest earnings, interest earnings from the Dan Goodman Soil & Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement Award trust, District horse training facility rental income and Wetlands Reserve Program funding for the Whitfield Habitat Improvement Project. Total operational expenditures for the year were \$169,713 including the general operational budget, the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area budget, and the Rio Abajo Conservation Area and rental property

budget from all funding sources. Grant funding for the year was provided for the riparian restoration projects through the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance, with Claunch-Pinto Soil & Water Conservation District serving as the fiscal agent and reporting on total dollar amounts for those projects.

- Funding was sought for conservation efforts during the year including a Soil & Water Quality Conservation Grant Program application to complete the erosion control project at Whitfield but it was not selected for award. Also also five proposals for bosque restoration projects in Bosque Farms, Los Lunas, Belen and for rehabilitation of the Pino Fire area south of Belen, near Veguita, New Mexico within the riparian areas along the Middle Rio Grande. were submitted to the Fiscal Agent/Project Manager, Claunch- Pinto SWCD, for the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance for funding already secured through the Water Trust Board for the group. The District made their annual cost share payment for the third year of ten to pay back the loan component part of Water Trust Board funding obtained through the GRGWA group for previous projects. All of the GRGWA proposals were approved for completion in fall of 2015.

- The District submitted two capital outlay requests to the Department of Finance and Administration during the year in September 2013 and again June 2014 when the submittal cycle changed for local public bodies. The submittal in June 2014 was for the upcoming legislative cycle in 2015 and included completion of the Whitfield Education and Visitor Building Program or Phase 2 of the project as well as a second project for improvements to the maintenance building at Whitfield.

- The District submitted their annual resolution required to the Soil & Water Conservation Commission for their intent to collect the ¼ mill levy tax for the first year in FY2014

following approval of the referendum on May 7, 2013. However in the fall of the fiscal year determined that the initial administrative process for collection could not be completed in FY2014. Thus certification by the Department of Finance and Administration would not be completed and the Counties would not be authorized to collect the tax. Rather then, in FY2014 the District set about determining how and then carried out the initial process of contacting the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department following their notice of approval by the Soil & Water Conservation Commission of the certification of results of the vote. Next, the NM Tax & Rev Department was responsible for establishing the tax in the multi-agency collection review process for the annual collection cycle. The County Assessors also needed to be contacted and the necessary information (legal description, mapping) provided for them to determine what properties would be taxed and to include the tax information for the mill levy in their submittal to the NM Tax & Rev Department by June annually. Approval of these tax valuations by NM Tax & Rev Department are then sent to the Department of Finance for certification of valuations in the subsequent year. Thus, in the early fall of FY2014, the District realized they would not start collection of the mill levy until the January of the

second fiscal year (2015) following the vote (almost two years later).

- In concert with planning for collection of the mill levy tax, the Board entered into a contract with SWCA Consultants in April of 2014 to assist with development of a mill levy funding priority plan. One of two public meetings was held for public input into the priority plan before year end. This meeting on June 25th, 2014 was held at the Los Lunas Transportation Center with a facilitator. There were 15 public attendees, most of the District Board and the local newspaper attending. The Board has discussed and planned to use the mill levy funding priorities plan for incorporation into the District Long Range Plan first developed in 1997 by the Board with NRCS assistance which will be updated in FY2015 for the next ten years.

- Contacting the Torrance County Assessor's office for collection of the mill levy tax led to a boundary disannexation for the District in 2014. The boundary along the Manzano mountains ridge put the District into Torrance County for only 11 properties. The County Assessor recommended the small tax collection would not be worth the annual administrative process required with Torrance County. East Torrance SWCD shared this boundary and worked with Valencia to carry out a public review process for the change in boundary following approval by both Boards for the change. Following approval by the Soil & Water Conservation Commission at their January meeting, the official certification by the office of the Secretary of State was completed on SWCD Day February 7th at the Capital. Cheri Lujan, with East Torrance SWCD was very proactive in ensuring these final steps were completed.

- The need to update the legal description for the District because of this small portion of the boundary brought to light other inconsistencies in the legal description which hadn't been updated since 1968. This meant the entire legal needed a careful review and revision. Ultimately, the New Mexico Department of Agriculture Program Specialist for the District, Katie Mechenbier, pursued technical support through the NMDA GIS

department to update the description as contracting out with a surveyor would be cost prohibitive. This legal description was still under revision at year end.

- The District did pay minimum dues of \$500 to NMACD in FY14. Also, the due of \$10 was paid to the New Mexico Conservation District Employees group for the District Manager, Madeline Miller.

- SWCD Day was held on February 7th, 2014 during the Legislative Session at the State Capitol in Santa Fe. Madeline Miller and Teresa Smith de Cherif did man a booth for the District showcasing Valencia projects and programs, and the capital outlay project for the Whitfield Visitor Center, phase 2 for the second building and solar power enhancements.

- In 2014 the District continued with their soils testing program. Working with the local and regional staff of the Natural Resource Conservation Service to ensure soils testing for local area producers, this was the second year of the program. Payment for soils testing was provided for a basic panel of parameters for croplands in exchange for soils data from producers for the District to review the overall health of soils and to plan for meaningful workshops for area producers in management of their soils. In this second year of the program the District general funds budget for the program was \$2000. 12 Soils tests for 10 Producers were processed for total expenditures of \$537.50 paid to labs preferred by NRCS in meeting NM soils analysis specifications. \$2000 was again budgeted for FY15.

- The District in late fall of 2013 decided to move the District office out of the USDA Service Center in Los Lunas to the Whitfield Visitor Center. The move was meant to help streamline daily operations of the District as much of District activities are carried out at the Whitfield property. The physical move was completed in early January 2014, with adding temporary office partitions for the District and Whitfield Project Manager office spaces into the open floor facility. The second building for the facility not yet built is meant to include

administrative offices and the interior space build is intended to be moved over to that building when Phase 2 is completed.



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 which hosted a SWCD Employee Training in September 2013 with approximately 25 attendees and a Supervisor Training in May 2014 with approximately 15 participants and 7 presenters attending.

On April 2nd, 2014, the District co-sponsored an 'Erosion Control Workshop' with the NM Environment Department, NM Recycling Organization and NM Recycling Coalition

Whitfield Conservation Education Center and Area. 5 NMED CEU credits for solid waste managers were provided while other land managers were welcome for this training and case studies workshop. **The workshop was meant to address how to properly apply organic materials, such as mulch and compost, to control and prevent erosion.** The workshop was led by Jim Brooks, Soilutions, experienced and recognized experts on erosion control techniques and solutions (worked with the Ciudad SWCD on erosion control project in Tijeras, east of Albuquerque).



The District used mulch generated from the restoration project in Veguita in March to emphasize using products from locally sourced riparian restoration projects. The Whitfield Conservation Area was the site showcased for application of techniques. The morning session addressed situations for applications in erosion control planning using organic materials for such needs as landfill closures, intermediate cover at landfills, road cut and roadside erosion control, landfill stabilization using mulch on inactive areas, side slope stabilization (for solid waste facilities as well as any roadways), roadside and slope management, drainage control, wildfire remediation, flooding remediation and re-channeling. Sourcing mulch locally for erosion is proving to be very cost effective as low impact

development that redirects movement of precipitation into soils and overall improvement of watershed health where applied.

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 4th year along with the 3rd 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 is 4756 of which 2955 were with the 4th program and 1801 were through the 5th grade visits. 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)



Students participating in the Birds of a Feather Explore Together Program in 2014 who entered the second annual Friends of Whitfield Essay Contest show their Certificates of Award. The 1st 2nd and 3rd place winners read the essays at the Friends Annual Meeting in April 2014 at the Whitfield Visitor Center.

The District was able to fulfill their intent to provide a soils health management event for local area producers following the first year of a soils testing program at the District. 'A Landowner's Workshop: Building Soils Through Conservation Planning' was the workshop developed with the Natural Resources Conservation Service Los Lunas Field Office for follow up for area producers who participated in the soils testing pilot program funded through the Soil & Water Conservation

Commission Grant Program in 2013. The workshop was delayed until November 20th 2013 but nonetheless built upon the outreach conducted in the first year of soils sampling. The one-day event included creating conservation plans; drought management/soil health; cover crops; pasture health; soil sampling; as well as the Valencia SWCD testing; Farm Services Agency assistance information; and a pollinator tour.

This event co-sponsored with technical staff assistance and leadership provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Area Field Office was held at their Los Lunas Plant Material Center. There were approximately 25 attendees from the local agricultural community interested in planning for their farms; the ongoing drought creating a need to re-evaluate practices and make water conserving and soil improving choices that would help with productivity (yield), disease and pests, health of crops and invasive weed management. There were breakout sessions in the afternoon of this workshop that allowed people to discuss their particular concerns and provide a basis for their individual planning process. Planning handbooks were provided to be taken home for use by participants.



The Dan Goodman Soil & Water and Environmental Improvement Awardees with their Certificates left to right: Lynn Marie A. Jarratt, and Catie Chavez both students attending the Los Lunas High School. Others in photo from left to right are Chair Joseph Moya, Supervisor Jim Lane, Miss Jarratt grandfather Raymond Jarratt, Vice-Chair Andrew Hautzinger, Supervisor Teresa Smith de Cherif, Supervisor Charlie Sanchez, and Treasurer Abel Camarena.

In the 27th year of the Dan Goodman Soil & Water Conservation and Environmental Improvement

Award, the District acknowledged two deserving District youth for their efforts in natural resources conservation. The District through the annual Dan Goodman Award finds those who are excelling and endeavors to acknowledge and showcase their experience and value for natural resource conservation which they demonstrate they will carry forward no matter their final destination. Finding this short moment with these new land stewards is inspiring for the District and important to present to the wider community that they carry an important value for the land and the resources we depend on.

Following Board approval of the Award Review Committee's recommendations at the May Regular Meeting, the Board awarded \$500 each to Catherine Chavez, a Junior, and Lynne Marie Jarratt, a Senior, both from Los Lunas High School and presented their Certificates to them. In Miss Jarratt's words: "...Science brought tangible understanding to life and its many diverse processes. For this reason, I hope to pursue a Ph.D. in biotechnology or biochemistry in order to help design and create new and more efficient ways of sustaining human society in harmony with the environment." Miss Jarratt attributes her success simply to curiosity which has prompted her to apply herself as well as the discipline of working on the family's small dairy farm.

Catie Chavez, the second of two 1st place Awardees in 2014, a Junior at LLHS is receiving the award for a second time in particular for her study

of reactive carbon in New Mexico soils on farmlands over the last five years. She has presented this study in relationship to management practices on these farmlands, winning numerous science fair awards for her study. While Catie has many other interests, it is very inspiring to see her put her tremendous drive into soils health.

Lynn Marie Ann Jarratt along with Catie Chavez also participated in the 2014 New Mexico Envirothon on the Los Lunas High School team which brought home 2nd place overall in the state competition their first year trying. Lynn Marie led the team for a perfect score on testing for the special topic, sustainable agriculture. Both have also participated in the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program through their schooling at Los Lunas High School and have brought all these applications together for their outstanding leadership in addressing the conservation needs in agriculture.

****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.*



The Los Lunas High School team for the NM Envirothon 2014.



The Belen High School team for the NM Envirothon 2014



The Los Lunas High School NME 2014 Team give their oral presentation of their solution or plan to address the special topic scenario, sustainable agriculture.

- **The New Mexico Envirothon** in April 2014 included two teams sponsored by the District with a \$400 dollar contribution to each team for expenses for the weekend of the competition. Both teams shared their experiences with the District Board at the May Regular Meeting on May 5th 2014. The Belen High School Team led by Science teacher Chelsey Cervantes and Los Lunas High School team led by Science teacher Rick Cole participated in the event. The Los Lunas H.S. team won second overall for the state competition in their first year's attempt trailing the 1st place team by only one point. The Belen team stated they placed somewhere in the middle of the pack of 15 teams competing statewide and was pleased for their 1st year effort, noting the students were all Juniors and intended to participate again in the following year. Of the individual testing stations for wildlife, forestry, aquatics, soils and the special topic sustainable agriculture for the competition, the Los Lunas H.S. Team obtained a perfect score for the special topic testing, second place in soils by one point, 1st place for wildlife, and 1st place for aquatics (Forestry score not known).

- The District actively supports **the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP)** through partnership in pursuing and providing funding for their non-proprietary data collection and reporting which they provide to all Districts and other stakeholders working in management of the river riparian areas of the Middle Rio Grande. BEMP acts as a significant coordinator of the various agencies working within the Middle Rio Grande by providing their data results and conclusions in regular updates through annual presentations and meetings to representatives of these various groups who then can network and share their knowledge

as well at these meetings for conservation issues specific to the Rio Grande corridor in New Mexico. Supervisor Teresa Smith de Cherif shared these benefits of the program with other Districts which have these monitoring sites within their boundaries at the NMACD Annual Meeting in October 2013 to request their support of the organization's efforts for recurring funding through the State Legislature. The District by year end had granted \$5000.00.

BEMP data reporting on the movement of the salt cedar beetle through the Middle Rio Grande corridor is a special interest research addition to BEMP since the introduction of the beetle into New Mexico over the last several years and may be useful to adaptive management consideration in carrying out the restoration of the riparian corridor of the Middle Rio Grande. The other regular monthly monitoring carried out by BEMP is presently showing changes in vegetation, in particular, more crown die off of Cottonwoods as the drought continues which shows a need for continued monitoring and management especially in WUI areas for fire fuels reduction and mitigation to prevent or reduce the incident of catastrophic fires in the District.

Education Note: In the 11th year of data collection, monitoring continued at the BEMP sites designated 'Marcel Reynolds Cleared and Uncleared Sites' within the Middle Rio Grande Bosque in the VSWCD's restoration project areas (The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program or 'BEMP' is coordinated by the University of New Mexico and the Bosque School with regular collection of data conducted by student and citizen volunteers along the Rio Grande sites). Belen School Students have been involved in collecting long-term data related to the overall condition of the forest ecosystem located along the river for several years already before establishment of the Marcel Reynolds sites and several have been recognized for their participation through the Dan Goodman Soil & Water and Environmental Improvement Annual Award program. Data collected includes core weather data, groundwater depth, soil surface, insect, and other arthropod activity, measures of forest production such as tree diameter growth, woody and herbaceous plant distribution and quantities for leaf and woody litter falling on the forest floor. Data collected ultimately

is put into periodic reports for review. BEMP holds annual stakeholders meeting during which a review of collected data and the ecological changes occurring on the sites especially in relationship to management of woody invasives and burned areas are reviewed. The District Manager attends these meetings regularly for adaptive management considerations in preparing for ongoing bosque restoration projects, most recently July 17th 2014.



District Special Projects



Say's Pheobe nest at Whitfield July 2014

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

Ted Hodoba continued in his 5th 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 2014. Total visitors signed into the log were 426 including a visit from the Thursday Birders (20). Service learning opportunities at Whitfield continued to contribute to management of the conservation



Red-flowered hedgehog cactus at the Whitfield Visitor Center

area in 2014; especially for invasive weed management. The 'BEST' program with the Belen School District brought 3-5 students who visited Whitfield weekly during the school year to help with basic grounds maintenance. The Menaul School from Albuquerque again brought their students (~25) to Whitfield the Friday of Easter weekend to help with projects in the conservation area.

Other special events at Whitfield included the NM Master Naturalists Association Annual Meeting where Ted Hodoba gave a presentation about the Whitfield Chapter of Master Naturalists. There was the 2nd annual Earth Day celebration at Whitfield on April 26th with students from the School of Dreams Academy again providing support for the event; this year there was a butterfly life cycle presentation and butterfly release of the Painted Lady species. This event was very well

attended at the Center; 40 were counted. In December, the District held their 4th Annual Birthday Party for the Center which included a presentation by the Director, Jennifer Owen-White, of the newly established Valle de Oro Refuge Area just north of the District (in the Ciudad SWCD district). The Friends of Whitfield held their Annual Meeting at Whitfield which included a presentation on raptors by the Hawks Aloft group; this was a well received event as many family members attended with their children who participated in the Friends annual Essay Contest; adults and children alike were very intrigued by the live birds presented. Also of note, the District co-sponsored with the Friends of Whitfield, the 4th Annual Desert Willow Festival in August 2013. This festival is a plant sale fundraising event for Whitfield with guided walks in the conservation area available during the event.



Before: May 2013 proposed excavated wetland areas – near the south end looking north



After: irrigation of wet meadows areas created shallow ponds July 2014

Whitfield Habitat Improvement Project: This project included recovery of wetland meadow

areas at the Whitfield open space area for conservation education. Creation of three shallow pond areas in June 2014 already are supporting the native vegetation of the wet meadow habitat and encouraging more use by resident and migratory wildlife found at the conservation area.

Organic Herbicide Trials at Whitfield (Ted Hodoba reporting): Continuing with the Soil & Water Conservation Grant Award of FY13 for organic herbicide trials at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, we tried three organic herbicides the summer of 2014 on three targeted invasive plants, Perennial pepperweed, Johnson grass, and Russian knapweed. The herbicides used were *Avenger* (citrus based), *WeedZap* (clove based), and *Maestro Gro's Organic Vinegar*, (20% Acidity) purchased with the original funding. The intent has been to identify these organic herbicides at WWCA that are safe for weed management while protecting various wildlife populations such as pollinator insects meant to be protected in the conservation area. Most notably, non-organic herbicides have been shown to cause injury and death to wildlife, especially amphibians.

Three plots were set up for each weed and all three herbicides were used on each one. Spraying times were not consistently timed; however, each spraying did take place in the morning between 10:00 and 10:30 AM. As a result, the following information should be considered anecdotal. The plots were sprayed three times, once each in June, July, and August. The following results are the status of the plots as of August 26, 2014 two weeks after the last spraying and with substantial summer rains that promoted abundant weed growth this year.

On Perennial Pepperweed, all three of the herbicides were very effective with *Avenger* and Horticultural Vinegar with a 100% kill rate and *WeedZap* with approximately 85% kill rate. On Russian Knapweed, all three of the herbicides were very effective with *Avenger* with a kill rate of 100%, *WeedZap* with a kill rate of 95%, and Horticultural Vinegar with a kill rate of 85%. On Johnson Grass, the most effective was *Avenger*, with a kill rate of approximately 50%, followed by Horticultural Vinegar with a kill rate of 30%, and

WeedZap with a kill rate of only 5%.

Of the three herbicides used, Avenger proved to be the most effective overall with a kill rate of 100% on Perennial Pepperweed and Russian Knapweed and 50% on Johnson Grass. The second best performing herbicide was Horticultural Vinegar with a kill rate of 100% on Perennial Pepperweed, 85% kill rate on Russian Knapweed and 30% on Johnson Grass. WeedZap was the least effective with a 95% kill rate on Russian Knapweed, 85% on Perennial Pepperweed, and only 5% on Johnson Grass.

Of the three weed species, all the herbicides were very effective at killing Perennial Pepperweed and Russian Knapweed. When it came to Johnson Grass, however, none were effective at controlling it. Only Avenger was able to cause any significant damage. Overall, it would appear that Avenger is the most effective herbicide in the group tested and is recommended for purchase and use at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

Whitfield Project Manager's Update - The Master Naturalist Chapter at Whitfield: The Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area Chapter of the New Mexico Master Naturalist Program aims to instill the pursuit of life-long learning and promote environmental stewardship. Participants are actively engaged through education and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources throughout New Mexico.

The goals of the program are:

- Build a corps of educated volunteers who assist with education, outreach, research and stewardship activities dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and public awareness/education.
- Offer a wide-range of quality classes, training, and hands-on experiences that are specific to the local environment.
- Provide quality service projects to help manage the unique natural, historical and cultural resources at Whitfield and other sites in the area.

- Cultivate a meaningful connection to nature and the pursuit of life-long and self-directed learning of the natural world.



Master Naturalist interns view a willow branch.

Master Naturalist trainees complete 55 hours of classroom training and then have one year as interns to complete their individual projects approved by the Whitfield Project Manager that support management of the Conservation Area. After completing their project, the interns then become certified Master Naturalists and complete 16 hours of volunteer time and 8 continuing education units during the next year to maintain their certification.

As of May 2014, there are nine certified Master Naturalists and three Master Naturalist interns in the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area Chapter. The Master Naturalists are currently leading a nature walk on the last Saturday of every month April through November 2014. While the certification as Master Naturalists is transferrable to other Chapters in the State, the program provides technical capacity building for the Whitfield Conservation Area through a trained and dedicated volunteer base.



Changes along a River – activity for 2014 Master Naturalist training program – led by guest speaker, Tish Morris retired from the NM Natural History Museum.

Bosque Restoration

Middle Rio Grande Riparian Corridor Bosque Restoration Projects: Approximately 50 acres of retreatment of invasives for continued return to a native 'bosque mosaic' in Belen and all along the river riparian corridor.

Los Lunas, New Mexico. Also new treatment of approximately 18 acres in Bosque Farms NM with 80 cords of invasive live and dead and down wood produced for distribution to the local community for use as firewood. These properties are within Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District jurisdiction and include attention to habitat improvement and fire fuels reduction in these wildland urban interface areas. Again, funding was provided through the Districts participation in the collaborative group, the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance. Claunch-Pinto SWCD is the fiscal agent for the GRGWA and provided the administrative and technical support for these projects also in coordination with the VSWCD and the landowner, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District.



Bosque Farms Project 2014

Private Land Non- Native Phreatophyte Management Project: private landowner assistance for removal of salt cedar on approximately 8 acres of property in Veguita New Mexico. This project was in cooperation with the Socorro Soil & Water Conservation District, with funding provided as member Districts with

the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance (GRGWA). Claunch-Pinto SWCD is the fiscal agent for GRGWA and provided the administrative and technical support for this project. Some of this two adjacent landowners' project was for conversion back to cropland and the remainder for return to native groundcover.

Rio Abajo Conservation Area (RACA)

The Rio Abajo Subcommittee (Supervisors Teresa Smith de Cherif, Andrew Hautzinger) continued with communications with co-owner of the 180+ acres property, the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, who have been interested in splitting the property according to cultural sites they had identified there. Because of ongoing changes with the Directorship of the Game & Fish Department as well as changes in their legal counsel again during the year, completion of the land split was still on hold at year end.

The northern 40 acre horse training facility owned solely by the District was still under a short term lease during the year with a management plan for the tenant to continue with necessary improvements to the property as funding allowed. At year end the District was pursuing an appraisal of the property before issuing an RFP for long term lease of the property.

**The Rio Abajo Conservation Area includes approximately 80 acres of prime Bosque along the Middle Rio Grande, a valuable link along with the WWCA (three miles north) along the Middle Rio Grande migratory corridor for migratory fowl, and 120 acres of adjoined uplands area. The cultural findings established by NMGF's archaeologist are in the uplands area.*

Report respectfully submitted by Madeline Miller, Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District





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