



Annual Report

FY 2017



2424 Highway 47, Belen, New Mexico 87002

P.O. Box 170 Belen NM 87002

(505) 864-8914

www.valenciaswcd.org

ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017

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)

VSWCD STAFF:

Madeline Miller, District Manager

Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Project Manager

Jasmine Martinez, Administrative Assistant

Lindsey S. Hamilton, East Valencia Urban Gardens Program Coordinator

Johnny Chavez, Field Crew lead

Ronnie Gutierrez, Field Crew worker

Ron Goens, custodian

U.S.D.A. NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Los Lunas Field Office

Pearl Armijo, District Conservationist

Jasmine Wilson, Soil Conservationist

Luz Wanstall, 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, 2016- JUNE 30, 2017

ANNUAL REPORT FY2017

Highlights of Regular Business

- VSWCD Board of Supervisors meetings starting January 2017 were held at 9 am on the third Saturday of each month. The Open Meetings Act Resolution for calendar year 2017 was approved on December 19th, 2017. The notice of the resolution was published in the Valencia County News-Bulletin on February 9th 2017 and posted through the District FB page and website at www.valenciaswcd.org. Meetings continued to be held at the Whitfield Wildlife Visitor and Conservation Education Center, 2424 Highway 47 in Belen, New Mexico. During fiscal year 2017, The Board held 12 regular monthly meetings and 2 special meetings during the year with a quorum for all meetings.
 - 9 Resolutions were passed in FY 2017: Most notably, Resolution 3 'Resolution of Intent to Dispose of Surplus Personal Property'. This resolution was for establishment of a committee and initial effort to address disposition and dismantling of outbuildings on the former horse training facility owned by the District; Resolution #8 Soil Health Resolution Proposed by the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District for submittal to the NM Association of Conservation Districts for adoption.
 - *The District hosted a special event on December 10th 2016: **The Whitfield Annual Birthday Party and Conservation Celebration** inviting State and local representatives and the communities of the District with new CEO for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District Mike Hamman and Chair Christy Tafoya for the NM Governor appointed Rio Grande Trail Commission speaking at the event. The District provided information about their programs with a poster session during lunch following.*
 - In 2017, the District continued with the soils testing program and the new Financial Assistance Program for mill levy tax contributors. The Financial Assistance Program budget for 2017 was increased to 100K.
 - **For the 30th Annual Dan Goodman Soil & Water and Environmental Improvement Award, the District awarded 3 High School youth with the Award following review of 5 applications. Jared Gonzales of Belen High School was**

awarded 1st place with \$500 award, Isaiah Abeita was selected as 2nd place awardee, with a \$200 award, and Paige Hunter was selected for 3rd place, Paige with a \$100 award.

****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 District sponsored one team in 2017 from Los Lunas High School to participate in the annual **New Mexico Envirothon** and provided a \$500 dollar contribution to the team for expenses related to the final statewide competition in April 2017.
- The East Valencia Urban Gardens Program was started in 2017. On July 25th, 2016, the District received initial notice and congratulation from NACD CEO Jeremy Peters that the proposal was selected for award through there Urban Agricultural Conservation Initiative. The award of \$44,286 was approved to establish a multi-faceted local agriculture program for the communities of Meadow Lake, El Cerro Mission, and Monterey Park in fiscal 2017 recognized as food deserts in the Albuquerque Metro Area because of their limited access to healthy food in spite of their close proximity to Albuquerque. The grant provided funding to hire the Program Coordinator Lindsey S. Hamilton, and cover some program costs. The EVUGP proposal was for a five year commitment to establish the program continued community participation and ultimately ownership. The grant period initially was set for completion by June 30th 2017 but at year end the District requested an extension for the balance of funding of \$3049 to be used for additional improvements for the two community gardens established at Meadowlake and El Cerro Mission community centers. Additionally, the outreach with local private landowners in developing small farms within the area for continued into the second year

of the program with District funding through the District financial assistance program.

- The VSWCD hosted the NMACD Regional Summer Meetings for Regions 1 and 2 at the Whitfield Visitor Center in June 2017. During that that assembly, Region 1 did adopt the VSWCD Soil Health Resolution at their business meeting to be forwarded for adoption at the NMACD Annual statewide meeting in October 2017.
- Board Officers for fiscal year 2017 remained the same: Abel Camarena continued as Chair, Teresa Smith de Cherif Vice-Chair, and Andrew Hautzinger Treasurer. Jim Lane, in appointed seat 6, was reappointed and remained with the District until his resignation in May 2017; he continued as an Associate Board Supervisor following, and Richard Bonine appointed Seat 7 and representing Laguna Pueblo on the Board continued in 2017 following formal confirmation by the NM Soil & Water Commission at their June 2016 meeting. District resident Myrna Castro also became an Associate Board Supervisor with the District at their June 2017 meeting.



Board leadership through the Year:

Abel Camarena, Richard Bonine, and Jeff Goebel worked with cooperater agency USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to plan for an innovative farming conference with an emphasis on soil health. The conference is intended for half of the State along with a second offering of the conference in Clovis NM. Originally the group hoped to offer the conference to area producers in March 2017 but elected to move the event to December 6th 2017 in fiscal year 2018.

Richard Bonine explored re-establishing a coordinated weed management area for the District. Jeff Goebel, Richard, and the District Manager met initially with NMDA Weed Specialist Jim Wanstall to consider the scope of a new CWMA and a meeting with potential partner agencies was held end of June 2017. Richard reported at the next Board meeting that the District needed to wait before establishing a CWMA with the District as the lead agency; VSWCD did not yet have the capacity for the effort.

Jeff Goebel and Richard Bonine worked together to develop the Soil Health Resolution to be adopted by the VSWCD and forwarded to the NM Association of Conservation Districts for adoption. Richard Bonine wrote the resolution adopted by the Board on May 20th 2017.

Jeff Goebel began an initiative during the year for a Soil Health Stamp Program. The proposal is to develop a federal stamp program to raise funding for soil health initiatives; a semi-postal or surcharged first class stamp to help fund bottom-up initiatives for soil health in conservation districts across the country. By year end Jeff had sought sponsorship from NM Senators and had requested a support letter from the National Association of Conservation Districts that would likely act as fiscal agent for distribution of funding to the SWCDs. He also discovered that an identical initiative was started in Iowa and was already being written into legislation; Jeff hopes to contact those pursuing the Iowa initiative and join forces for the effort.

Soil Health Resolution

Proposed by the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District

VSWCD Resolution #8-2017

Whereas, Conservation Districts in New Mexico are sub-divisions of State government with responsibility for both soil and water as indicated by their organizational name;

Whereas, the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) does not have a resolution on soil health;

Whereas, soil is the fundamental building block of all life in our natural resources;

Whereas, soil health is directly correlated to the productivity of crops, rangelands, presence of erosion, and water quality;

Be it hereby resolved, that the New Mexico Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts support and encourages management practices that will increase soil health by all users of our natural resources;

Be it further resolved, that NMACD will join the National Association of Conservation Districts in implementing a Champions for Soil Health initiative to further promote soil health in the State of New Mexico by conducting soil health outreach in their communities. Forms of outreach include:

- Holding farm tours;
- Hosting field demonstrations;
- Speaking at conferences and meetings;
- Giving media interviews;
- Presenting at seminars or workshops; and
- Manning educational booths at community events.

Be it further resolved, that New Mexico Soil Health Champions will report their activities to NMACD. NMACD will utilize the research, stories, and testimonials provided by the New Mexico Soil Health Champions to promote soil health on its website, social media, publication, and presentations. By creating and engaging in this network, NMACD will be able to amplify the voices of conservation-minded producers on a statewide basis.

Resolved: in this session this 20th day of May, 2017

Signatures _____

Vote Yea or Nay _____

Abel Camarena, Chair



Yea _____

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(continue >>>)

Jeff Goebel continued in his role as the Vice-Chair for Region 1 as representative for the NM Association of Conservation Districts. Jeff attended NMACD meetings throughout the year.

Jeff Goebel continued with the Mountainair District landscape team for development of the Cibola Forest Revised Plan for mountain districts of the Plan. His public comments noted in last year's annual report are again noted here; 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 Goebel, and Richard Bonine attended Rio Puerco Management Committee meetings.

Board Supervisor Andrew Hautzinger participated in meetings by invitation, for the Valencia SWCD, and the area our District represents in the Middle Rio Grande led Rio Grande Basin Study for inclusion in the Bureau of Reclamations waterSMART Basin Study Program.

Board Supervisor Teresa Smith de Cherif worked with Lindsey Hamilton, in grant writing and represented the Board for the revisions of the Memorandum of Understanding with Valencia County for the East Valencia Urban Gardens Program.

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: there were no changes to District personnel policies in 2017. Committee members Abel Camarena, Jim Lane, and Teresa Smith de Cherif along with the District

Manager continued in 2017 to serve on the committee.

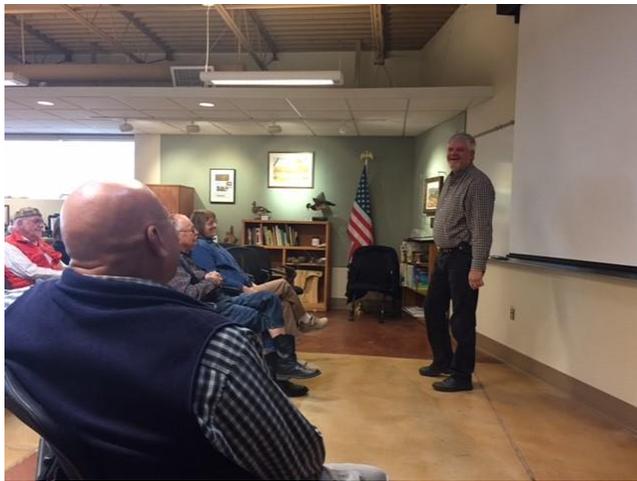
The Financial Assistance Committee formed in January of fiscal year 2016 continued in fiscal year 2017 with development of the Financial Assistance Program in 2017. Jeff Goebel, Teresa Smith de Cherif, and Andrew Hautzinger as the lead. The approved FY17 mill levy dollars budget for the program in 2017 was \$100K. The program is for District mill levy taxpayers. 8 applications were received and 6 approved by the full VSWCD Board for the year for total awards of \$32,921. By year end, two projects were completed through the program for a total of \$11,756 expended in awards. The Committee reviewed applications throughout the year and forwarded recommendations of applications to the full Board. The initial conservation initiatives of the program continued in 2017 for two main categories of applicants; community and agricultural assistance to address

- 1) Rangeland and / or Cropland Assistance: Erosion-control projects erosion concern is identified, properties are at risk, and improvements to enhance watershed health and reduce erosion.
- 2) Cropland Assistance: Soils testing and other practices
- 3) Riparian restoration and promotion of native habitat
- 4) Water Harvesting for community and agricultural applications
- 5) Pollinator habitat enhancement and gardens

The Land Use Plan Committee continued with development of the Land Use Plan. In particular, mapping for the plan to present the District geospatially as much as possible for annual action planning of resource concerns in the District. The Committee in 2017 included Jeff Goebel as lead, Richard Bonine, Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Manager and Madeline Miller, District Manager. A scope of work for contracting for the mapping of the plan as well as the initial database platform from the mapping for development of mapping capacity in house for the District was pursued. The District submitted a grant proposal for the SWCC Water Quality Grant Program in April for the mapping

project for the Land Use Plan. The proposal was not approved for funding and the costs budgeted for in the FY18 budget. Completion of the Land Use Plan continued into FY18.

The Whitfield Oversight Committee in 2017 continued with Supervisors Abel Camarena, Andrew Hautzinger, Ted Hodoba, Whitfield Project Manager, and the District Manager. Of primary concern in 2017 were addressing NM Department of Transportation requirements for the main entrance to the Whitfield Center and conservation area, capacity needs of the Whitfield education program, and review of the Friends of Whitfield role in support for the conservation area. In cooperation with the Friends of Whitfield Board, the Memorandum of Understanding with the Friends of Whitfield was revised and approved by the VSWCD Board of Supervisors at their May 20th meeting after the Friends of Whitfield approval at their meeting on April 15th.



Mike Hamman, CEO with the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District presenting at the Conservation Celebration December 10th, 2016

DISTRICT OPERATIONS

- For fiscal year 2017, 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 FY16 and FY17, the District prepared to report at the Tier 6 level of the Audit Rule.

- Starting cash balance for the District was \$285,504. Additionally, revenues for the 2017 budget included the full NMDA Points award for the year of \$13,719, the 3rd year tax collection (2016) of the quarter mill levy of \$352,279 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 \$322,821 coming in under the approved anticipated expenditures of \$517,075 For the 2017 general operational budget which includes the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex and funding for the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program, Financial Assistance Program. The East Valencia Urban Gardens Program was grant funded in 2017. The Year End Report for FY17 with detail of expenditures for the year is available on the VSWCD website along with all financial reports. The FY16 Tier 6 Agreed Upon Procedures audit as required by the State Auditor's Office for accountability was completed following approval by the the State Auditor's Office in December 2016 and is available on the District website. The FY17 Audit will be completed fall of FY18.

Grant funding in 2017 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 recognized in the Friends of Whitfield

financial reporting and not included in the District's financial budgeting and reporting.

- 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 2017 and 2018 tax collections and these were approved at their June 2016 and 2017 meetings of the Soil & Water Conservation Commission respectively.
- The District made their annual cost share payment for the 7th 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 paid minimum dues of \$500 to the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts in FY17 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 www.valenciaswcd.org. Also, Jasmine continued the quarterly newsletter for the District community in 2017. The newsletters are distributed electronically and posted on the VSWCD website and hard copies provided at special events.
- The District had a booth at the Valencia County Fair in August 2017 which included raffling of drought tolerant landscape plants and a rain barrel to encourage rain harvesting for landscape use in residential areas of the District.

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. Other information and education outreach include the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program and the special projects of VSWCD.

BEMP (Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program)

In 2017, 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 \$16,557 for sponsorship of BEMP monitoring programs in the District Area.

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 (including species richness, abundance, and diversity); cottonwood

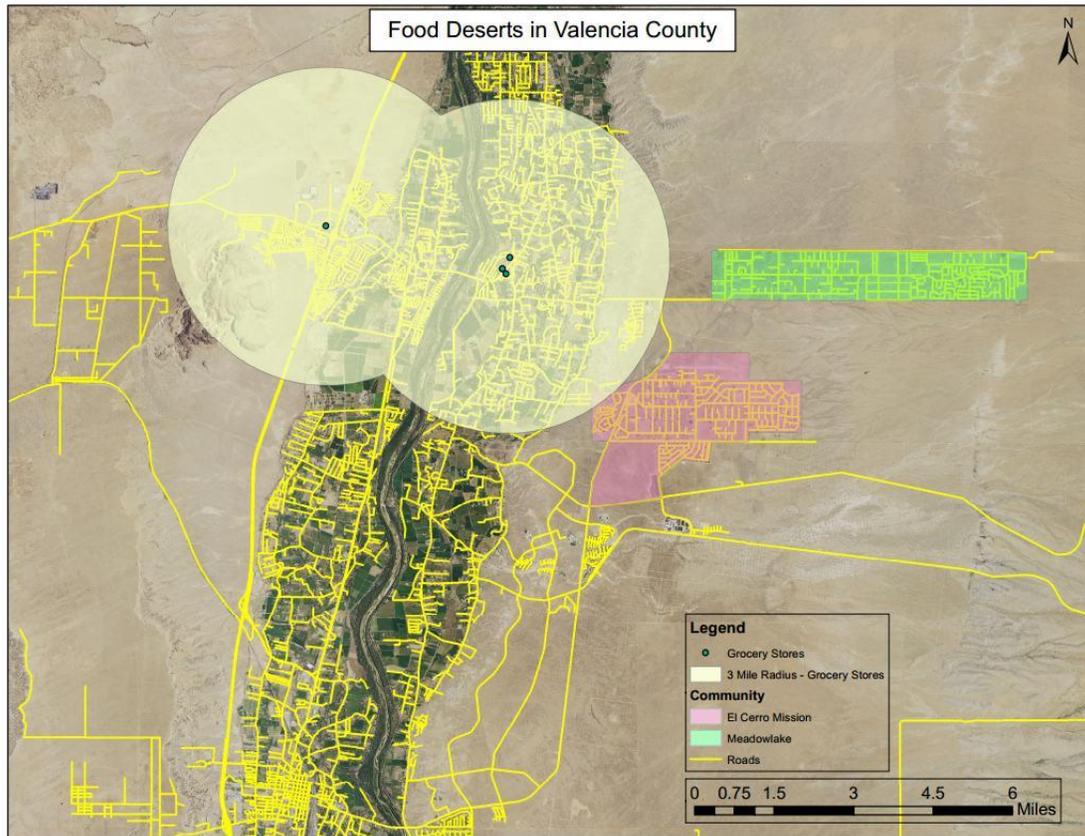
monitoring (size and sex); woody debris/fuel load; surface - active arthropods; and tamarisk leaf beetle presence, abundance, and impact. BEMP tracks the impacts of restoration projects (mechanical clearing, wood chipping, mastication, bank-lowering), flooding, and fire on the biotic and abiotic variables 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 2017 meeting and is posted on the BEMP website at



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. They presented their previous year's findings (2016) to VSWCD at their regular monthly meeting in April 2017.

DISTRICT SPECIAL PROJECTS

The East Valencia Urban Gardens Program – Start 2017



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.

The program got underway following development of a Memorandum of Agreement with Valencia County for program components being established at the Community Centers which are owned by the County. The Memorandum of Agreement between VSWCD and Valencia County was prepared and presented to the Valencia County Commission at their October regular business meeting. The Commission unanimously supported the project and Memorandum of Agreement for the two agencies to work cooperatively for establishment of the community gardens.

By year end, two community gardens have been established. Some of the EVUGP later VSWCD 2017 activities are provided here from Lindsey Hamilton's reporting to highlight the progress of the program over the first year.

Regular community work parties were established at the gardens; Meadow Lake Garden 4 hours/week and El Cerro Mission Garden 4 hours/week. There has been over 250 total volunteer hours put into the gardens by the community.

Some of Lindsey outreach for community involvement:

-El Cerro Mission Kids daycare program, every Tuesday for 2 hours to plant, water, harvest, learn about the vegetables and the water cycle. They create art projects and share with their younger classmates. The group averages about 7 each week

-Scout Reach, a Valencia County program that creates meaningful opportunities to fulfill court-appointed service hours for youth. During the entire month of June youth helped in the community gardens 8-10 hours/week. The program plans to continue working with the community gardens

-Meadow Lake Catholic Church Youth Group at the gardens during the regular work party hours. The youth have started a small section at the Meadow Lake Garden. They work 4 hours/week, 2 hours at each garden. The group ranges between 2-6 participants

Cub Scouts educational event for the local Cub Scouts chapter, included preparing and planting garden beds and learning about the different vegetables

-Home and Garden Expo – April 7th, 2017 booth and attendance at the NMSU Extension Home and Garden Expo in Valencia County had at least 50 attendees

-Meadow Lake and El Cerro Mission Native Tree Planting - April 20 and April 29 was an organized volunteer day specifically to plant native trees around the garden as a wind block and to create native habitat

-Built a fence at El Cerro Mission in May and June for some protection from vehicles led by VSWCD Maintenance Staff and a community volunteer, a 100'x80' was installed. Members of the Men's Academy (released prison inmate probationary program) volunteered to help with the labor.

Lindsey has drafted a five-year plan based on what was learned this past year.

In continuing to develop the program into fiscal year 2018, Lindsey met with NMSU Extension to plan a 6-week Basic Gardening class to be offered early 2018; met with Desert Oasis and toured the gardens to develop relationships and contacts and to learn from other examples; met with Valencia Community Gardens and Friends of Whitfield to discuss strategies for potentially developing a community based program based on their years of experience; met with NMSU Extension to discuss pest problems at the community gardens.

At year end Teresa Smith de Cherif, VSWCD Vice-Chair and Lindsey met with the Valencia County Community Development Director James Aranda to update the MOU and include language that secures the use of the land and water for the community gardens are dedicated for the long term intent of the program.

For continued funding of the program into Fiscal Year 2018, Lindsey applied for a Community Food Sovereignty grant through the Conservation Fund. The Valencia SWCD was awarded \$17,500. This is from funding from the Kellogg Foundation

- Funding breakdown:
 - \$9,000 – 2 Part-time Community Garden Managers
 - \$3,600 – 10 Youth Stipends for internships
 - \$3,000 – Equipment and Supplies

- \$1,000 – Educational Opportunities for Community Members
- \$900 – Outreach Materials

Also, The VSWCD has agreed to fund the EVUGP Coordinator position for an additional year. Lindsey is continuing to apply for funds to support this position and the program. Lindsey has applied for a State Giving Walmart Grant for funding towards the Coordinator position, the farm manager positions and internships. This grant opportunity required a 501c3 fiscal agent and VSWCD partnered with Youth Development Incorporated for this grant. The funding would also support buying equipment to expand the program for the community to produce starts in a greenhouse and market their produce. This is looking forward on the five-year plan.

The VSWCD requested an extension of the initial NACD grant period through to October 31st 2017 and while the District initially budgeted for Lindsey’s salary the intent has been that the program coordinator would continue to pursue grant funding for all program funding over the five year commitment period of the District.

Volume 2 Issue 1
Spring 2017
Newsletter



VALENCIA
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Providing resource conservation for a quality environment demonstrated through active leadership, cooperation, and partnership

Monarch Butterflies



The National Association of Conservation Districts highlighted VSWCD in their spring newsletter as one of the first recipients of their Urban Agriculture Conservation grants!





Monarch Butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) may be the only North American butterfly that have an annual round trip migration. During the summer months for reproduction purposes, Monarchs are dependent upon large milkweed (*Asclepias spp*) as a food source for the larva. Adults feed on the flowers of the milkweed as well as on other nectar producing plants such as composites. The horsetail milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) and the annual sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) are important plants for our relatively large Monarch populations at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

While it is known that Monarchs fly south to overwintering grounds in the Mexican highlands and the Pacific Coast of California to be safe from harsh continental winters, little is known about our New Mexico Monarchs and where they are going. There are few records, but we do know of two Monarchs that made it to Mexico. One unfortunately died there before it could make the journey back north. Tagging butterflies is the main method being used to track the migration.

The Monarch winter population in Mexico has been in a steady decline in the last thirty years of record keeping. Habitat losses at the over wintering sites combined with herbiciding of milkweed is a big threat and concern. Also, there are estimates that as much as 20% of the migrating population is killed on our highways on the migratory routes.

The late fall phase is called the Diapause (a period of suspended development). This last generation is larger (to make the flight) and won't breed until they return in April. They use their energy for migrating and not breeding. There is a pulse of migrating Monarchs from September 24 to October 6 in New Mexico. There are migrating butterflies and the last breeding butterflies at this time and it can be difficult to tell them apart (size). The migrating butterflies are larger, redder, and brighter. They get along better, and roost together at night beginning around 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM in trees such as cottonwoods. Males lead the migration.

The first generation dies in April after returning from Mexico and breeding. This is when their numbers are at their lowest. Their young then mature, breed and begin the cycle of repopulating the United States and lower Canada. As few as 2 generations or up to four generations of Monarchs are required to complete the full round trip.

The Natural Resource Institute in Santa Fe has been monitoring Monarchs at Whitfield for a couple of years now. In September of 2016, they tagged several Monarch butterflies with the help of Whitfield Master Naturalists, Bernalillo Master Naturalists, Friends of Whitfield, and other volunteers. They plan on doing this again in September, 2017. We will be sending out an announcement closer to the date we plan on holding this event.

You can also monitor and report Monarchs in your home or business landscape. Sites on which you can do this are "Monarchs Along the Rio Grande" on iNaturalist, Nature Digger – Monarch SOS only for iPhones and iPads right now with Android version soon, and Journey North. We are currently using Journey North at Whitfield. With your help, perhaps we can learn more about our New Mexico Monarch Butterflies.



EAST VALENCIA URBAN GARDEN PROGRAM UPDATE

EVUGP UPCOMING EVENTS:

April 20 - 3:30-5:30pm Native Tree and Shrub Planting Work Party - El Cerro Mission community center. Pizza party! All hands needed at each location to plant over 50 plants!!

April 29 - 9:30-11:30am Native Tree and Shrub Planting Work Party - Meadow Lake Community Center, with lunch party after and kite making party.

Regular work parties for all ages. We are also starting garden areas just for youth to grow and sell produce!

Meadow Lake Community Center
Thursdays and Saturdays 9:30-11:30am

El Cerro Mission Community Center
Tuesdays 11:30-2:00pm
Fridays 9:00-11:00am

Other work days and workshops starting soon, stay posted and learn more about how the program is growing at our website (www.valenciaswcd.org) or Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/East-Valencia-Urban-Gardens-Program-EVUGP-1148104485257291/>)

Board of Supervisors

Abel Camarena, *Chair*

Teresa Smith de Cherif MD, *V-Chair*

Andrew Hautingier, *Treasurer*

P. Joseph Moya, *Supervisor & Parliamentarian*

Jim Lane, *Supervisor*

Jeff Goebel, *Supervisor*

Richard Bonine Jr., *Supervisor*

Staff

Madeline Miller, *District Manager*

Ted Hodoba, *Whitfield Project Manager*

Jasmine G. Martinez, *Administrative Assistant*

Lindsey Hamilton, *Program Coordinator East Valencia Urban Garden Program*

WHITFIELD WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMPLEX

(fka Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area in 2017 was recommended and adopted by the VSWCD Board to include the Stacy Unit and Rio Abajo Conservation Areas)



Report from the Whitfield Manager – Activities at Whitfield 2017:

Ted Hodoba continued in his 8th year with management of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex, 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 2017. Total visitors counted for the year at Whitfield were 1,920, 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 three tours during the year.

Service learning opportunities at Whitfield continued to contribute to management of the conservation area in fiscal year 2017:

* 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.

* The Whitfield Master Naturalists completed a Bioblitz at the Rio Abajo Conservation Area on July 14, 2016. Master Naturalist Elisabeth Dicharry, Project Manager Madeline Millier and I went to RACA on June 29 to a preliminary reconnaissance of the area. A Bioblitz is a survey in which as many plant and animal species seen are recorded in a specific time period. At RACA we recorded 37 plant and 38 animal species (including insects). Our last Master Naturalist class of this year finished on May 17, 2017. We have five new Master Naturalist They have one year to complete a project and then they will become Certified Master Naturalists.

* On July 9, 2016, Mr. Hodoba led a group of 11 Cub Scouts, parents, and leaders on a tour of Whitfield. Afterwards, the group planted 10 native shrubs for wildlife.

* The NM Natural Resources Institute spent the day with volunteers, tagging monarch butterflies on September 13, 2016 from 9:00 am to noon. 17 volunteers including several of our Whitfield Master Naturalists, 2 people from the New Mexico Museum of Natural History, several Bernalillo County Master Naturalists, several people from Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge including the refuge manager, and other volunteers. The group tagged 18 monarchs and saw many more that they couldn't catch.

* The District co-sponsored with the Friends of Whitfield, the 7th Annual Desert Willow Festival in August 2016. This festival is a plant sale fundraising event for Whitfield.



* The District hosted a booth at the Rio Communities Health Fair on October 21, 2016. We

emphasized Whitfield as a walking destination as well as the community assistant programs available to local residents.

* On December 10, 2016 we held the seventh annual Whitfield Birthday Party. The highlight was a Conservation Celebration featuring Mike Hamman, CEO, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District speaking about Water in the Middle Rio Grande and Christie Tafoya, NM State Parks Director and Chair of the Rio Grande Trail Commission spoke about the present and future state of the trail through New Mexico.



* The Friends held their Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 1, 2017. There was a presentation by Prairie Dog Pals with live prairie dogs and a presentation by Central New Mexico Audubon Society about keeping cats indoors due to bird predation, and the presentation of essays and winners of the Essay Contest of the 4th grade program. Five decorated benches by local artists were present and people began buying raffle tickets. This was a fundraiser for the Friends of Whitfield Education Program.



* On April 27, 2017, Mary Jo McBean, Friends President, and Mr. Hodoba met with Santiago Misquez, State Biologist with NRCS about our approach to the 4+ acre wildlife crop field at Whitfield. We talked about having the soil tested and possibly changing the field over to perennials including grasses and forbs.

On May 12, we received a plan for the field from Santiago. It included a schedule with cover crop species to be planted this year and next with a conservation mix of species to be planted in 2019. The field was plowed, disked, and laser leveled in mid-June. Millet and cow peas were then planted in late June as a cover crop.

* The 4th annual Earth Day celebration at Whitfield on April 22, 2017 with students from the School of Dreams Academy again providing support for the event; There was a host of family activities including the Fill the Bill activity, a scavenger hunt called Bosque Bingo and painting ladybug rocks.



* On May 13, 2017, we had 7 birders meet at 7am to do a bird count at Whitfield as part of International Migratory Bird Day, a world-wide effort at celebrating and educating people about migratory birds. The group counted 37 species in three hours. After the count, people were invited to watch the documentary film, Green Fire, about the life of Aldo Leopold. This was followed by the drawing for the benches that were painted by the Tome artists. Over \$1,200 was raised in this effort.

As a member of the Alignment Committee, Mr. Hodoba attended a meeting of the Rio Grande Trail Commission in Santa Fe on June 14, 2017, which was the first meeting with the newly hired consultants working on the plan for the trail. The firm is Alta Planning and Design out of Portland Oregon. They have extensive experience planning trails and projects on a large scale and difficulty. They are partnered with three NM planning firms on the project, Sites SW, Wilson & Company, and Rosemary Romero Consulting.

As the NM Secretary for Indian Affairs was present the first part of the meeting was discussion on tribal response to the plan. While most have not been supportive of a trail through tribal lands, she cautioned about proceeding without taking into consideration that it may take time and cooperation to work with the tribes to gain their support. Taos Pueblo was the only pueblo to voice its support, which was noted as unusual as they are usually very conservative. Santa Ana has trails in connection with the Tamaya Resort, but they said they are keeping them for the exclusive use of registered hotel guests.

After that discussion, they presented a Power Point on the various trails of a similar nature in other states. The presentation also included slides on the various types of trails and how they may be integrated into the plan.

Last, we did a visioning session on things we would like to see the trail be in 20 years.

Christy Tafoya, NM Parks Director, mentioned Whitfield during the discussion as being an example of the things to be included in the plan. They have asked and we have said yes to holding the quarterly meeting of the RGT Commission here

at Whitfield in July, 2017. She commented that we have a wonderful facility here. John Busemeyer, Planner, NM Parks, introduced himself after the meeting and said they were excited to be meeting 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’ approximately one mile north of the Whitfield Conservation Area and the Rio Abajo Conservation Area three miles south are recognized as part of the Whitfield Conservation Area Complex; all three areas were donations to the Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District. 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.

Stacy Unit of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex: On August 22, 2016, Mr. Hodoba conducted an initial, visual survey of plant and animal species of the Stacy Unit. He observed 36 species of plants and 27 species of animals including insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

In September, 2016, we received a short report by Atilla Bality of the National Park Service on suggestions for the Stacy Unit including a trail and ditch access. This will be useful in updating the Whitfield Comprehensive Management Plan.

On May 6, 2017, the Whitfield Master Naturalists conducted a Bioblitz at the Stacy Unit. They counted 32 plant species and 51 animal species (including signs of animals such as scat) including insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.



Bio blitz participants at the Stacy Unit

The Rio Abajo Conservation Area:

In keeping with the Board actions of FY15 to restore the property to preserve for conservation purposes, the Property Disposal Committee has continued with overseeing interim management of the property which includes a main residence and

5 outbuildings. Following DFA approval of disposition of the main horse barn and mare barn as identified as asbestos free, the Committee started efforts to find other governmental agencies, not for profits and finally potentially other private parties that would remove the materials from these buildings for their use from the property at their expense.

RIPARIAN RESTORATION: RESTORING WATERSHED HEALTH IN THE DISTRICT



****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) and the Stacy Unit within the Middle Rio Grande corridor for migratory fowl.***

The VSWCD pursued riparian restoration funding through a Water Trust Board grant obtained by the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance,

of which the VSWCD is a member District. The project identified for 2017 was within the Rio Abajo Conservation Area. The project was pursued in continuing with efforts within the Middle Rio Grande river riparian corridor for restoration that reduces wildfire risk to our densely populated surrounding communities which also improves the watershed health of these areas along the river corridor. This property which was still co-owned by the NM Department of Game and Fish in 2017 was approved and contracted out with work completed in accordance with the proposal in January – February 2017. Following is the project proposal.

GRGWA Project 16-18: Rio Abajo North Riparian Treatment

Project Type/Size: Initial treatment of non-native phreatophytes, 60.0 acres;

Sponsor: Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD)

Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District Annual Report 2017

**Landowner: Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD)
Native American lands, Pueblo of Sandia**

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 60.0 acres in size in the riparian zone. The project west boundary is a 20 foot buffer along the top of the clear ditch managed by the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. The north boundary is along the railroad right-of-way. The east boundary is inside the old race track area. The approximate center of the project is located at Latitude/Longitude: N34.62419 by W -106.74523.

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 present and will be treated.

Current Site Conditions - The area is primarily made up of small patches of heavy density and scattered light density, sapling, pole and small mature tree sized Russian olive and salt cedar trees. There is a larger four acre uniform, heavy density area at the south end of the project. Siberian elm may also be present. Overstory cottonwood trees are sparse in 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.

The Tamarisk leaf beetle has affected trees in the Middle Rio Grande valley. As a result, numerous trees have dying branches making it difficult to precisely determine if the target tree is living or dead. To clarify the project, all dying or standing dead target trees will be treated as live trees. Standing and large down dead cottonwood trees will not be treated.

Some target trees are located within fence lines and may not be accessible if mechanical treatment methods are used. All fence lines must be left as found.

There is an archeological site located on NMG&F lands south of the project area. This area will be identified and must be avoided. The area is contiguous with an uplands area along the east side of the area and thus there is easy access into the project area. This combined area is intended for as access into the Middle Rio Grande bosque and thus will be managed for wildlife habitat which includes future hiking trails. 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.

All dying or standing dead target trees will be treated as live trees. Standing and large down dead cottonwood trees will not be treated.

Three to six trees located in the racetrack area may be flagged as leave trees for wildlife.

Mastication may be concentrated in windrows. Firewood and chips will be placed in piles along project roads and trails. Alternative slash methods must avoid overstory cottonwood trees.

Project treatments will also follow the GRGWA, 2016 General Riparian Prescriptions.

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. The area is also an established and helpful point of access for firefighters thus intended to be managed long term as an important fuel break area. Valencia SWCD may provide additional funds to remove woody material including firewood or chip piles. VSWCD will 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 16-18: Rio Abajo North Riparian Treatment, 60.0 acres

☺THE END☺

This Annual Report for FY17 is respectfully submitted by the Staff of the Valencia Soil & Water Conservation District.

