

August 17th, 2023 Regular Board Meeting

VSWCD Staff Report for the Board:

- **Board Meeting Agenda (below)**
- **District Director Monthly Report (Andrew Hautzinger)**
- **Business Manager Report (Megan McCready)**
- **Education Manager Monthly Report (Laura McCann)**
- **Conservation Program Manager Report (Johnny Chavez)**
- **YCC Field Crew #2: Juztine Diaz (Crew Leader), Fran Keryte, Nate Kaib, Mikaila Chavez and Dulce Bautista**

Final Agenda 17AUG2023: *VSWCD Regular Board Monthly Meeting:

CALL TO ORDER 4 P.M. (set for every 3rd Thursday of the month)

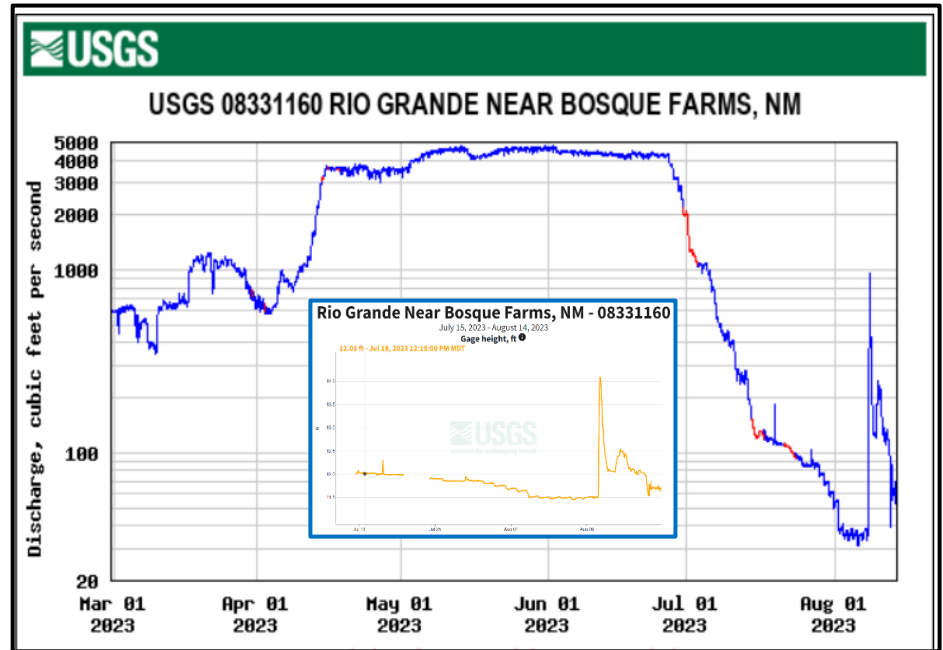
- *Verify quorum, conduct pledge of allegiance and agenda review with changes & approval*
- *Approval of 7/20/2023 Regular Board Meeting Minutes*
- *Public Comments (e.g., posted letters and emails from public-input@valenciaswcd.org)*
- *District Staff Monthly Report*
- *Special Guest: Debbie Lee & Catherine Murphy (MRG Endangered Species Collaborative)—2023 Climate Futures Workshop, Sept. 2023 Field Tour and VSWCD applying for MRGESCP membership*
- *Special Guest: Todd Caplan (Isleta Reach Stewardship Association)—FY24 IRSA Updates*
- *Updates/Partner Reports /Correspondence/Other: NMDA Monthly Report (Katie Mechenbier), NRCS Monthly Rpt. (Nick Goodman/April Luna), MRGCD Monthly Report, Friends of Whitfield Monthly Rpt. (Pres. Linda Frazer) and Correspondence/Announcements (e.g., TBD).*
- *District Inventory & Asset Appreciation*
- *Update on VSWCD's Infrastructure Capital Improvement Plan (ICIP)*
- *Budget & Accounting: (Treasurer Draszkievicz and Business Manager McCready): Month of July 2023 expenditures review & approval, Whitfield HVAC Update (system on its last legs....), Maintenance Storage Shed (<\$5k proposed purchase) and Grant/Related Updates: (1) AmeriCorps VISTA (approved!), (2) CASC-SC grant (advanced to full proposal due 9/6/23). In the works/pending: (3) Peregrine Accelerator Final Presentation (9/7/23), (4) VC-ARPA, (5) local farmer donation.*
- *Salazar International Symposium: Oct.10-12 (Denver)*
- *Supervisor Round Robin*
- *Executive Session Open Meetings Act (NMSA 1978, Section 10-15-1(H)(7)) for a discussion subject to the attorney-client privilege pertaining to threatened or pending litigation*
- *Contract for legal services*

Expected 7 PM ADJOURNMENT

*Any item listed on the published meeting agenda can be acted upon by the Board.

District Director's Report to the VSWCD Board of Supervisors' August 17th, 2023 Regular Monthly Meeting

Director Updates & Activities: On 7/21/23 (the day after the July board meeting) Andrew and family departed the Great State of NM for a week of R & R in the cooler climes of Colorado, spending time up in the North Park region (aka Moose Viewing Capital of the World). While (sadly) no moose were seen (ask about granddaughter's fox sighting though!) we had a great trip enjoying time outdoors spent with family. And upon my return, after several months of sustained high flows in the Rio Grande, the local stretches of the floodplain here in Valencia County finally seemed to have succumbed to the paltry June and July rains, with the river level dipping down quickly as the adjacent floodplains finally released their stored water held since back in April (as shown nicely in the last ½ year hydrograph of El Rio). Promosingly, the inset graph shows the 8/9/23 morning rain the river received--**Think MONSOONS!**--as these waters may be most of what our local farmers have access to in the coming final weeks of the 2023 irrigation season (per MRGCD board meeting disucssion 8/14/23).



Monthly Visitation: The Whitfield Complex has enjoyed visits from over 137 people during the last month. In highlight, we enjoyed over 28 visitors on July 17 for the NMACD Region 1 annual meeting, and on August 9 over 16 attendees came to our Peregrine Accelerator / VSWCD Restoration People & Places Workshop, while five USDA-NRCS visitors for an annual national audit of the Whitfield Wetland Reserve Project in the PM of the 9th.

Priority Updates & Activity Recaps: (since last board meeting)

- Saturday, August 29, 2023: Isleta Environmental Fair. A super-well attend with over 50 booths and vendors—really impressive event. VSWCD stood up a table (thanks Pam, Duana, Abel and crew!), next door to a NM Health Soils Workgroup table that was staffed by VSWCD's own Board Supervisor Priscilla Abeita and local regenerative farmer partner Kirsten Cuevas. In big bonus, Andrew got invited by Governor Max Zuni for a cup of coffee, which should be fun.
- 8/1/23: Peregrine Accelerator Webinar: Communication and Story telling (a great panel of media-savvy folk e.g., Laura Paskus) offering insights like great stories have strong characters: is our protagonist the Bosque? Excellent reflections on how conservation goals are achieve with effective communication plans.



- **8/2/23: Another PA-hosted webinar:** Valencia Team 1:1 Time with **For Impact's** Mike Brown. After Priscilla and Johnny's rave reviews, we took PA up on chance to have a one on one talk with Mike. He laid out a great **ALTITUDE FRAMEWORK** to help us align our planning approach to the different elevational (altitudinal?) levels called for in all projects at different points. Here's some of the brainstormed examples from that session:

30,000' The WHY (VISION) PURPOSE

- INCREASE LAND & WATER SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE
- Effective Climate- & Fire-Adapted Restoration / Bosque Management THAT IS SOCIALLY RELEVANT

14,000' The WHAT (STRATEGY) PRIORITIES

- DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS (that are SOCIALLY RELEVANT)
- CONSERVATION TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

3' The HOW (EXECUTION) PLAN

- 2 WEEK CLASS CUSTOMIZED TO MEET LOCAL YOUTH TRAINING NEEDS (chain saw, CPR, soil/plants)
- WORK w/ LOCAL FIRE DEPARTMENT on ANNUAL FUEL BREAK MAINTENANCE PLAN
- APPLY PLANT MATRIX WORK to IMPROVE AVAILABLE LOCAL NURSERY STOCK of NATIVES

- ❖ **August 8-9, 2023 MINI-WORKSHOP:** VSWCD stood up a focused workshop on Wednesday August 9th at the Whitfield Visitor's Center, with a related tour of the complex and the Big Hole Fire scar the day prior. We had over 15 participants in the workshop, which was focused on taking the next steps in our planning process to restore, rebuild and manage these special grounds in a way that supports bosque management more generally. This session was facilitated by two mentors provided by the Peregrine Accelerator program: Sharon Hausam (Climate Researcher) and Jonathan Bruno (30 years of wildfire experience up in Colorado), whose investment into bettering VSWCD's work is greatly appreciated.
- ❖ The session was remarkable in its creative exchange of ideas and possible next steps to be considered by the partnership team working with VSWCD. Besides attendance by a good showing our VSWCD Board Supervisors, the workshop was also greatly aided by participation from a nice handful of highly valued partners, including MRGCD's Yasmeen Najmi, Casey Ish and Tyler Otero (new Belen Division Manager). MRGESCP's Debbie Lee and folk from NRCS (Athena Cholas, Nick Goodman and Jason Mondragon-Martin) also made important contributions. We had excellent input from Eugene Pickett, who represented the Latino Farmers and Ranchers International, from Rob Barr (Valencia County Wildland Fire Captain) and from Kim Eichhorst and Dr. Ara Winter (from the Bosque Environmental Monitoring Program) offering key insights through decades of BEMP acquired knowledge. A workshop summary report is in the works.
- ❖ The workshop was designed to help address VSWCD's near-term recovery planning efforts, while also preparing for the 9/7/23 Peregrine Accelerator Program Final Presentation (which will be part of the PA program's process as it winnows down to one or two teams out of a cadre of nine will be in the running for a +\$100k project implementation grant being offered). Lots of good progress on determining the

optimal path(s) ahead for the VSWCD and our served communities!


- **Grant updates:** As noted last month, VSWCD's AmeriCorps Vista proposal (submitted in May) has been approved, with the operative MOA now processed. Our VISTA Project budget start date is 8/14/23, with the expected reporting date of the two VISTA members as early as 10/23/23 (each "member" is funded for 365 days, with possible extensions). Lots of preparation works awaits (e.g., the need to finalize the two position descriptions, and development of our recruitment strategies stand out, as does the need for VSWCD to potentially need to secure housing for the VISTA members).
- In a final piece of exciting news, on the day of my return from the Colorado climes, the 30 degree climb in the day's hi (75 deg°F in Walden CO to 105 in Los Lunas) was countenanced with the Great News that our "statement of interest" with the USGS's South Central Climate Adaptation Science Center (CASC) re: the development of a **Plant Matrix** manual has been advanced to the full proposal stage. Super cool: Our team (led by USGS Ecologist Pat Shafroth) has until end of this month to get the full proposal finalized. Here's a draft *Plain Language Summary* to let you good folk know where the effort is headed. **Project title: A Scientist-Practitioner-Citizen-Management collaborative to develop a Fire- and Climate- Adapted Revegetation Manual for Riparian Ecosystems of the Rio Grande Basin.**

"Changes to climate, land and water management, and vegetation have dramatically increased the frequency and severity of wildfire events throughout the western U.S., constituting an immediate threat to the riparian ecosystems of the Middle Rio Grande. Underlying this threat is a highly flammable and dense riparian understory (Webb et al. 2019), lack of flood events capable of removing understory fuels, and a rapidly changing climate that is fostering a hotter, drier future (Garfin et al. 2013, Garfin et al., 2014). The danger and immediacy of this threat is underscored by recent wildfire events that have severely burned parts of the MRG (e.g., the Big Hole Wildfire of April 2022).

MRG managers, practitioners and citizens are seeking applied, practical guidance to address three key needs: (i) how to respond effectively after a wildfire has severely burned a river's bottomland plant community; (ii) how to identify a diversity of native bottomland plant species that are better adapted to future climate conditions; and (iii) how to develop and implement strategies that will reduce the severity and impacts of future wildfire occurrences to native bottomland ecosystems. In response, we propose to develop a Fire- and Climate-Adapted Revegetation Manual for Riparian Ecosystems of the Rio Grande Basin that will provide guidance on each of these three needs. Each section will provide expert, widely supported practical guidance that will be specific to the MRG but will also be applicable to other parts of the Rio Grande Basin and Southwest.

Our team has brought together a diverse review committee of MRG land and water agencies, communities, Pueblos, consultants and NGOs who constitute manual end users and who will be collaboratively involved throughout the project to make certain the manual best meets their needs. We have explicitly established collaborative input from MRG Pueblo communities on all aspects of developing the manual, with emphasis on identifying and describing plants important to their cultural heritage, as deemed appropriate to tribal members." DRAFT

With that, I'll sign off here on this director's report, hoping everyone is enjoying these last days of summer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Hasting".

VSWCD District Director

Business Manager's Monthly Report August 17th, 2023: Submitted by Megan McCready

Hello dearest board members,

I hope you all have found joy in this last month, and that you all remain in good spirits and in good health. This month has been a roller coast of both work and emotions for me.

Last month ended with a bang; we got all our end of year reporting done, submitted, and to no surprise it was all done on time. The amount of pride I feel to be able to say and do things is indescribable. Our books are solid and continue to flow with no error. What a way to keep Division of Finance Authority (DFA) happy with us!

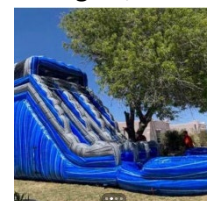
August began with a joyful celebration, my birthday on August 1st. It was a great day! My peers surprised me with the most amazing succulent, it makes me smile and feel so blessed every time I look at it. My parents bought me a new pair of shoes (how the gifts we ask for change as we get older), they also supplied one of my favorite things to eat, and my older brother was man of the hour to make it happen. Fondue cheese, and a charcuterie board with some wine. My second choice was fried chicken. My family blessed me with the love my heart needed, and the most amazing meal my belly needed.

I had an opportunity to further engage my skills with some items and the specifics are not as important as the implementation that will take place as a result. I am working on a purchasing policy that will ultimately guide that all purchasing goes through the business manager no matter how big or small the purchase is (with occasional exceptions / in emergencies). This is both for tracking purposes, and consistency. I am going to do my best to put this proposed policy in front of you all during the September monthly meeting.

I was able to participate in a webinar held by the UNM workforce connection center. The focus of this webinar was QuickBooks. The webinar went over the very most basics, and how to kick start a QuickBooks account all the way though how to use QB to generate invoices so there is no third step. This will make some of the processes much easier, especially when it is time to receive the funds from those invoices. Now that I am mastering my role, I am ready to master the tools I use to do my job. All exciting stuff.

We had a Peregrine workshop here at WWCA on the 9th that went very well. I was happy with the role I got to play. I got to keep everyone with snacks, drinks, and the set up. All the things I am very good at, and I was happy I could take on that task so that Andrew would have one less thing to worry about. I honestly think I just enjoy being a team player and taking weight off my peers when I can.

I also celebrated 2 of the 5 children's birthdays. The oldest on the 16th of August turned 17. All he asked for was one more forest outing with his family. The youngest on the 12th of August, however, his birthday is on the 11th. On the 11th he asked to take cupcakes to school to share with his friends, and he picked whatever he wanted for dinner. We then had a great party for him on the 12th. I am not sure if his Spider Man pinata or the water slide jumper was his favorite part.



Andrew and I also spent a little time cleaning up his desk. I am going to respect his process. A little bit as he is ready and able, and my job will be to support and help as he sees appropriate. I do not wish for him to feel like I am being aggressive or pushy. However, we made some progress and I think he is (mostly :-)) happy with the result.

The healthy soil program started effective August 1st and we have been able to get all the site visits done. Already! Johnny and the YCC got to go with Cliff twice, and then the torch was passed to Johnny. I am so excited for this process; both for VSWCD and Johnny. We are saving money and Johnny gets to broaden his horizons. It might be very strange, but this warms my heart and makes me feel overjoyed.

There have been some updates to our Financial Assistance Programs. With the support of the Director, and the Chair I pushed the deadline up from June 30th to June 15th. In doing so, all projects and payments will happen in the same fiscal year and will be much easier for me to track what is happening and when. I am grateful I was able to make this change.

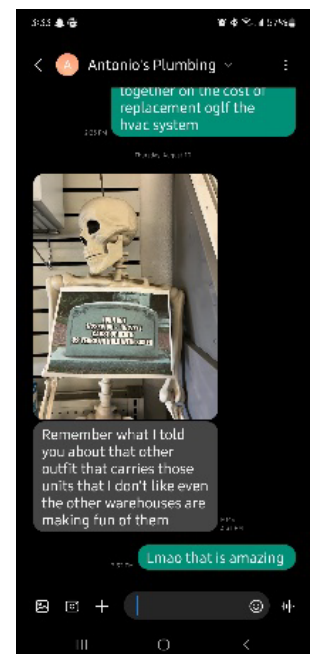
The future holds great things for me as well. School starts on the 22nd and I have many mixed feelings about it, but I always do it right before we start and then I am happy to go through it. This semester I will only be taking three classes as there have been some astronomical changes in my personal life and that is all I can manage right now. However, slow, and steady wins the race and I will not give up on myself, my dream, or what I can be for the district.

The last thing that comes to mind to share with you all is our HVAC system. We have Antonio's Plumbing heating and cooling out here on more than one occasion and the news never gets any better. There is shorts in the wiring somewhere between the thermostat and the unit itself; the unit is not working now more than it is. With Winter Coming I have been working on getting quotes for replacement and that has been wild. I have Hessinger's Plumbing coming out Tuesday the 15th , Duke City plumbing heating and cooling coming Wednesday the 16th and Antonio is still waiting to hear from suppliers as of today the 10th. The photo is one he sent me as I was writing the report. I hope it makes you laugh like it did me.

Until next month to you all. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Megan

PS--If any of you have any questions or concerns, please send me an email (meganmccready@valenciaswcd.org)



Environmental Education Program Manager Report

Report to VSWCD Board of Supervisors August 17, 2023

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Well, the 2023-24 school year is already underway! While teachers typically do not schedule field trips for the first month of school, that hasn't stopped me from reaching out to them about our classroom science lessons and field trips to Whitfield. Also, after taking my annual vacation, I am ready for our next event in September and for our summer monsoons to drop more precipitation on the Rio Grande Valley...

Classroom Programs & Field Trips

As mentioned above, I was busy last month spreading the word to local elementary schools about our 4th and 5th grade programs. I visited every public elementary school in Los Lunas and Belen, and St. Mary's School in Belen. At each site, I gave flyers for our programs (see the end of this report) for their teachers. Additionally, I asked for the email addresses of the secretary and the 4th and 5th grade teachers at each school. This way teachers can contact me to schedule programs, AND I can follow up with teachers at the end of this month to see if they are ready to sign up for a FREE field trip and classroom science lessons. School started August 1st, and I already have 4 schools, a 4-H club, and a homeschool group scheduled for programs/field trips!

The Whitfield Nature Journals are here and ready to be assembled! I practiced with the new coiling machine, and I am happy to report it is easy to use. With help from volunteers, we should have plenty of them created in no time! If you would like to be shown how to use the machine and help put together journals, I would love help on Wednesdays in August from 1:30-4:30pm. Feel free to stop in August 23 and/or August 30. If those dates/times don't fit your schedule, please just email me: EducationManager@valenciaswcd.org and let me know when you are available to help. I would like to supervise this process first, then volunteers with experience can come in when available to do assembly.

As a reminder, next week I will be hosting a training/refresher class for those who wish to become field trip volunteers! **We will meet Saturday August 19 from 9am-1pm at Whitfield.** If you know of anyone who would like to be trained to volunteer to guide field trips, please have them contact me by email. *The flyer is at the end of this report. More volunteers are always welcome, since this gives people a chance to volunteer when they are able, without being asked to come every week!

Update on Signage from P&M Signs

I am happy to report the Upland Trail sign designed by Master Naturalist, Julie Mehrl, and created by P&M Signs was installed by Johnny and the current YCC Crew last month! It is at the front of the trail near the front entrance gate at Whitfield. I hope you have time to check it out and walk along the trail. Be advised, this trail does get impassable when we have heavy rains. (After all, it is a detention basin)! When this happens, we will close the trail temporarily for safety reasons. *Special note: I would like to give a shout out to Volunteer, Dana Gebel, for all his hard work clearing the weeds off that trail last year!



Master Naturalist, Julie Mehrl, next to the Upland Trail sign she helped create!

Master Naturalist Program

All Master Naturalist Intern projects are in process. There is nothing new to report at this time. I will update you on these projects in the Fall.

REMINDER

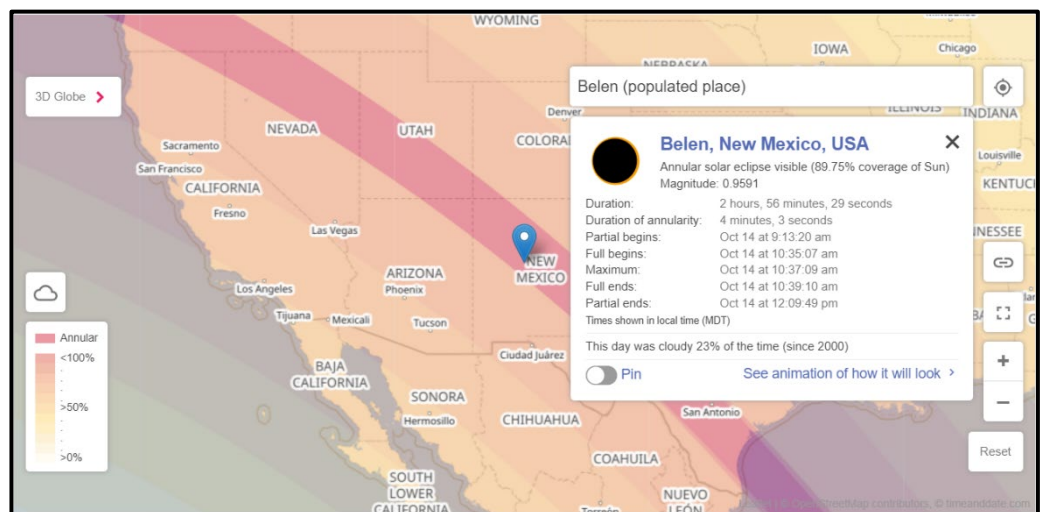
Master Naturalist Class 2024: The Master Naturalist Committee met and decided to hold the next class at a different time of year due to wind, length of day, and season. It will be August 15-October 17, 2024. Our celebration of completed coursework and 2023 Master Naturalists presentations will be on October 19, 2024. Johnny and I will be setting up an online location for course materials on our website. More on this as it develops...

Events

Our **Desert Willow & Pollinator Festival** on Saturday September 16 is now advertised... We will have Desert Willow trees and other native plants for sale. CPM Chavez will lead a Pollinator Walk 10-11am and will also be tagging Monarchs. We will have three pollinator presentations: 11-12, 12:30-1:30, and 2:00-3:00. See flyer at the end of this report for more details! **This week, we added a soil health activity for this event! We will be working with Patrick DeSimio from the Seeding Regenerative Agriculture Project to plant chufa seed in Moist Soil Unit #1. CPM Chavez will be working with NRCS on the details for this planting. Additionally, Mr. DeSimio has offered \$500 in food vouchers for food from the Tome Todo food truck at this event. He will be distributing these vouchers at the planting activity and at his information table that day!

The date of **Whitfield Under the Stars** will be Saturday November 11. This event will be a star party 5:30-8:30pm. I have now scheduled Jim Greenhouse, Space Science Director for the NM Museum of Natural History & Science (NMMNHS), to give a night sky presentation for this event! I am still working on getting local Astronomy Societies/Clubs to bring telescopes. More details on this event will be in next month's report...

Annular Solar Eclipse: As of the time of this meeting, I will have met with an eclipse task force from NMMNHS to find out about being a public viewing site for the solar eclipse happening on Saturday October 14! I should have more information by the time I am giving my report



If you have any questions about this report, please let me know! As always, it is an honor to serve my community as the Environmental Education Program Manager at VSWCD!

-Laura

Join us for a

Field Trip Guide Training

At Whitfield WCA

Saturday, Aug. 19th
9 AM - 1 PM

Bring a sack lunch for a picnic in the conservation area!

If you love nature and working with kids, you are a perfect fit!



Scan the code for more information



2023

Desert Willow & Pollinator Festival

Saturday September 16
10:00am-3:00pm

10am-11am:
Pollinator Walk & Monarch Tagging!

TALKS in the VISITOR CENTER

11am-Noon:
Birds & Bats!

12:30-1:30:
Bringing Bees to Your Backyard!

2:00-3:00:
Monarchs & Moths!

Scan with your phone!



***Desert Willow seedlings for sale!**
***Local Vendors!**
***Food Truck!**
***Family Fun!**

2424 Highway 47
Belen, NM, 87002
(505) 864-8914

Whitfield
Wildlife Conservation Area



4th Grade Outdoor Science Program!

FREE program includes:

- * Two 1-hour classroom lessons!
- * Field Trip to Whitfield WCA!
- * Nature Journaling!
- * Lunch on the trail!
- * Focus on our Bosque Ecosystem!
- * FREE buses for local schools provided by:



VSWCD/Whitfield WCA Field Trip Interest form



Friends of Whitfield



5TH GRADE ECOLOGY FIELD PROGRAM AT WHITFIELD!

FREE PROGRAM INCLUDES:

- Classroom Lesson prior to Field Trip
- Ecosystems Introduction
- Bosque Plants & Animals
- Hike & Science Activities
- Nature Observation & Journaling
- Lunch during the hike
- Funding for Buses

Tuesdays & Thursdays
January-February 2024

CONTACT VSWCD TODAY TO REGISTER:

(505) 864-8914
www.ValenciaSWCD.org
EducationManager@valenciaswcd.org



SCAN WITH YOUR PHONE!



SANDIA MOUNTAIN
New Mexico Museum of Natural History and Science



Conservation Program Manager Report

Prepared by Johnny Chavez, johnnychavez@valenicaswcd.org

VSWCD BOS Monthly Meeting –8/17/2023

District-Wide Programs

Youth Conservation Corps

The Corps members are doing a great job at keeping the trails and access road clear. They have been working on tackling weeds like Kosha. They have been helping our neighbors with prairie dog problems. We are trying to get the prairie dogs away from the fence line with non-invasive ticktacks. The group has learned a lot of prairie dogs and how they live.

The YCC crew has also attended the Ag day at the experimental station in Los Lunas. They enjoyed their time and learned a lot from the event. The YCC crew is also continuing their online gardening class through NMSU.

EVUGP

The Gardens got more mulch recently as they were requesting for better soil coverage. Vegetables are growing but are being eaten by bugs. Chavez has been working with garden managers and will be showing them how to use non-toxic oils to do so.

Peregrine Accelerator

We are getting close to the end of the program. Staff and Chavez have learned a lot from the who session. Chavez will try to work on getting his thoughts together and put in to a word document on the whole program and how it has influenced him.

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area Complex

Whitfield

Chavez is still excited about how much has grown back. The community dynamics of the different living organisms is complex and interesting. Chavez has been working with the crew on making sure we are taking care of invasive species.

The demo field is still growing with many different species. There is a lot of competition from what we planted but Chavez is still happy with the results. It may not have been exactly what we wanted but it still serves as habitat for wildlife.



Stacy Unit

YCC crew and Chavez has been working hard at Stacy Unit to make sure the fire lines are staying cut. Chavez is working on a map for the unit to make management and decision making easier—this is tied to collaboration with local fire department personnel as we update the fire response plans for the properties (we are working closely with Rob Bar, Wildland Fire Captain and Rio Communities Fire Chief Andrew Tabet).

RACA

RACA is still on a hold till the new contract comes through. Some revegetation of non-native vegetation could be seen and will be tackled in the fall when we can hit the roots before the plants go dormant. We are set to meet with the new EMNRD Forester, Marissa Goodwin, on Friday 8/18/23 (she is Clay Benton's replacement). This will allow us to get the next phase of work for the full complex scheduled, including the current project area at the RACA cottonwood grove.



Healthy Soil Program:

The healthy soil program has been going great. Chavez has taken the YCC crew out to different fields to evaluate the soils and understand how the landowner is using their land. Cliff Sanches taught the YCC crew and Chavez a lot about soils and agriculture that day. The District has changed to Ward labs which will have more of an organic view but also have the physical characteristics of analysis that is needed.

Education

Chavez will start his next class on the 21st. This class is titled: Landscape Ecology.



Snippet of map of STACY UNIT taken from series of soil maps CPM Chavez is preparing