



*ANNUAL REPORT-**FINAL***
FISCAL YEAR 2023



What a difference a year makes! Photos of the oldest surviving cottonwood tree that burned during the 4-11-2022 Big Hole Fire

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VSWCD ANNUAL FY22 REPORT

July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023

DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS: On July 1, 2022

- **Abel Camarena, Chair (Seat 1)**
- **Teresa Smith de Cherif, Vice-Chair (Seat 4)**
- **P. Joseph Moya, Treasurer (Seat 3)**
- **Richard Bonine Jr., Supervisor, Laguna Appointed (Seat 7)**
- **Gail Goodman, Supervisor (Seat 5)**
- **Duana Draszkwicz, Supervisor (Seat 2)**
- **Priscilla Abeita, Supervisor, Isleta Appointed (Seat 6)**
(Pamela Cordova sworn in February 13, 2023 to fill Seat 3)

Valencia Soil & Water Conservation Service Staff:

- ◆ *Andrew Hautzinger, District Director*
- ◆ *Megan McCreedy, Business Manager*
- ◆ *Johnny Chavez, Conservation Manager*
- ◆ *Laura McCann, Education Manager*

U.S.D.A. NRCS SERVICE LOS LUNAS AREA FIELD OFFICE:

- *Nick Goodman: Team 2 District Conservationist*
- *April Luna: Soil Conservationist*
- *Athena Cholas, NRCS / Wetland Reserve Program POC*
- *Jason Mondragon-Martin, Area Conservationist, North Area*

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE:

- **Katie Mechenbier, Program Specialist**
- **Katie Getz, NMDA Healthy Soil Program**
- **Patricia Depner, Prog. Coord. NMDA-Ag. Programs and Resources, and SWCC Executive Assistant**

NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY COUNTY EXTENSION SERVICE

- **Lynda Garvin, County Extension Agent**
- **Jon Boren, NMSU Associate Dean & Director, Cooperative Extension Service**

MIDDLE RIO GRANDE CONSERVANCY DISTRICT

- **Stephanie Russo-Baca: Board Chair & Valencia County Rep.**
- **Jason Casuga, CEO**
- **Eric Zamora, MRGCD COO**
- **Yasmeen Najmi, Lead Planner**
- **Casey Ish, Conservation Program Manager**
- **Gabriella Coughlin, Agroecologist**



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APPENDIX C --FY22-23 BEMP Final Report to VSWCD

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Linked to here: <https://valenciaswcd->

[my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERyIV59Kk6pGjgegilgOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB](https://valenciaswcd-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERyIV59Kk6pGjgegilgOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB)

APPENDIX E – VSWCD and USDA- SW Climate Hub Co-Hosts: A WORKSHOP TO DEVELOP A CLIMATE ADAPTED REVEGETATION DESIGN FOR THE WHITFIOMPLEX LANDS ALONG THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE (April 6-7, 2023 at WWCA). Restoring Whitfield Workshop Summary report found here:

<https://valenciaswcd.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/WHITFIELDOPS/Ec4fFLAb8qNElpIZVHuDvUYByHqUhilZH4zRRx-XQzzOhQ?e=wVIU4QVALENCIA>

Valencia SWCD's

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

II) VSWCD FY23 OVERVIEW: July 1st, 2022 – June 30th, 2023

2022's Big Hole Fire: While FY23 is more likely remembered as a year of recovery and contemplation, for some time into the future, FY22 will near certain be remembered for the historic Big Hole Fire, which burned through the bosque outside of Belen, NM on April 11, 2022. Not only did this human-caused fire burn over 75% of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area and the Stacy Unit, but it also burned almost 900 acres of land, making it the biggest bosque fire in the history of the Middle Rio Grande.

In FY23, we've been heartened to see much of the burned areas recover, both summer of 2022 and again this summer. This is especially true with the grasses and forbs, less so for the woody species. Nonetheless, while we lost all but a few of a class of ancient trees numbering about a dozen, the front cover shows the best example of an old survivor, while the oft discussed and photo'd lost Owl Tree tells a different story.



After the April 11th, 2022 fire was clear that not only had the fire been catastrophically destructive, killing many of the preserve's oldest native trees, but also set the stage for a once-in-a-lifetime conservation opportunity. The year since has seen the District's Board, staff, and community members who treasure Whitfield engaged in plotting a path forward that makes the right connections. Connecting the scientific guidance of restoration to the local communities' social priorities. Beyond asking (the needs to be answered) question on how can we effectively restore these 105 acres of public land that burned in a resilient fashion that is more likely than not going to stand the test of time (and not waste tax-payer dollars)? How can we incorporate into our science-based restoration decisions and actions such that they are socially meaningful with potential for adding to the betterment of things? These questions resonate with the board and staff, as we strive to be of effective service.

Over the last year we've continued to generate resources to support restoration work. Unfortunately, while Director Hautzinger has participated in more than 30 FEMA disaster Zoom sessions, nothing firm has been landed yet (noting that the Big Hole Fire was covered as part of the Disaster Declaration made by President Biden last April—DR-4652 covered not only the Big Hole but also Calf Canyon and Hermit's Peak fires—noting that no previous fire in Valencia County has received federal disaster declaration, so the good fight continues!).

Even in the absence of landing the hoped for large federal grant to fuel our restoration and outreach aspirations, we had good pieces of building-capacity news in FY23 to be sure. Early in the year we were informed that we had been selected to join the Peregrine Accelerator program. VSWCD joined 9 other small organizations on a six month program



to build capacity, improve securing resources, design successful projects and grow staff. Conservation Program Manager Johnny Chavez and our youngest Board



Supervisor Priscilla Abeita are the core members of our team going through intense learning modules (including one face to face session at the famous Ghost Ranch) to build better project design, content and presentation. VSWCD received an award of \$10,000 to be in this program, covering our salary

needs for participation. Excited to see where we find ourselves in September of 2023, when the program ends and one or two of the teams will be selected for a +\$100,000 conservation award to further the best projects. VSWCD will tie some facet of its Big Hole Fire restoration work into the final proposal to the Peregrine group.

Another piece of good news has received in April 2023, when the District was informed of a grant through the Lavender Village. Vice-Chair Teresa de Cherif worked with Linda Zaragoza on this grant that brought \$5,000 to the district to establish 3 raised bed Lavender gardens.

Vice Chair Smith de Cherif worked more of her magic, as in May of 2023 we were informed that the District application she spearheaded to the Albuquerque Community Foundation was approved, providing \$50,000 to improve the water delivery (and fire suppression) infrastructure in place at the District's Stacy Unit. This could be a great match to a larger federal grant.

In quick overview of the (fiscal) year just passed, the District has worked with many partners on the following initiatives:

- Continuation of the East Valencia Urban Gardens Program, a collaboration between Youth Development Inc., Valencia County Public Works and VSWCD. Two community gardens celebrate their 8th year of existence this year, powered by members of the community who have found employment and a community area of value through the EVUGP.

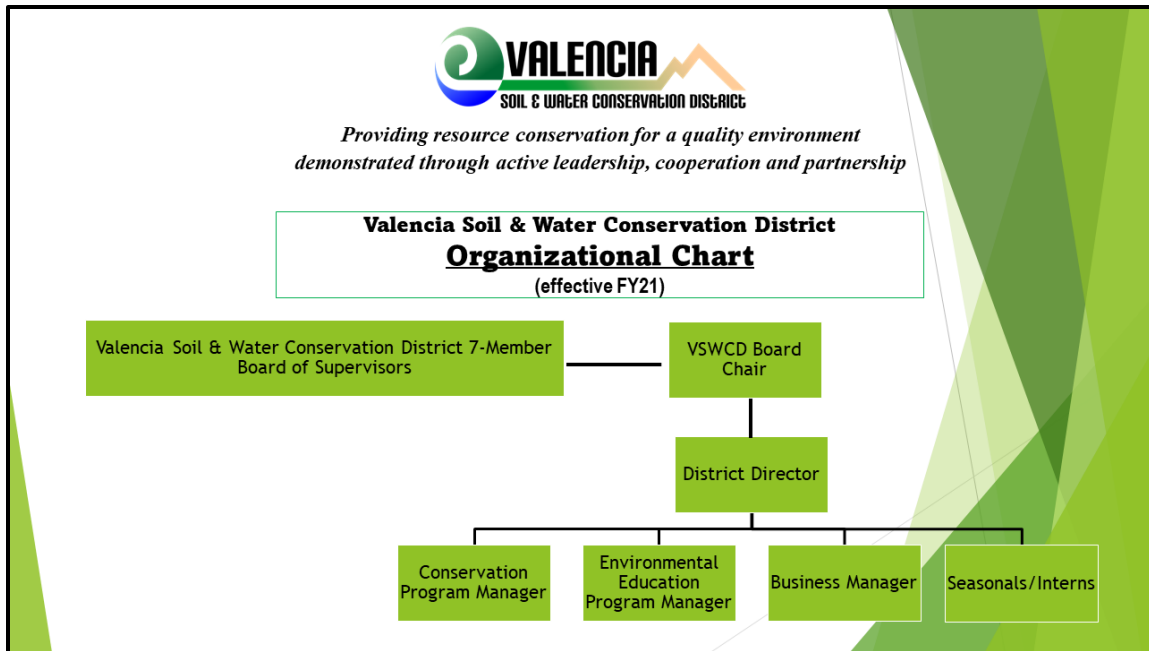


- VSWCD continues to focus on establishing a restoration plan that applies emerging tenets from climate-science that has recently emerged (e.g., concept of “assisted migration”, where we’ll find plants and seeds 100-200 miles south of Whitfield to plant at Whitfield, so the plantings might be more resilient per being pre-adapted to the hotter and drier weather expected to be coming Belen’s way).
- Develop a climate-adapted plant pallet, namely a list of native plants that could be actively considered for riparian restoration planting purposes.
- Develop a sustainable monitoring plan to inform restoration efforts, and measure the success of the District’s land management practices. VSWCD took a big step forward in that regard during the first week of July (2022), when the Rio Abajo Conservation Area saw the establishment of a *Long-term Sentinel Monitoring Plan*. This was based on a “Big River Protocol” developed by USGS, USNPS and universities, that looks at hydrologic and vegetative trends to inform management and habitat conditions.
- Working in partnership with NM State Forestry (EMNRD), VSWCD has received a Notice to Proceed for a 50-acre bosque thinning project in October of 2022, removing the dense largely non-native understory below the RACA cottonwood grove.
- A future phase is being investigated to further the improvement of bosque management in the district. Specifically, VSWCD hopes to go from our 50 acres of riparian area being protected (through thinning and establishment of fuel breaks) to expand to 500 acres of adjacent mixed riparian habitat owned by MRGCD and within the Rio Abajo reach of the MRG: Let’s go 50 to 500!

District Changes in FY23: As is often the case, the last year brought a few organizational changes at the District during fiscal year 2023.

The District’s hiring process developed a robust hiring cert list, from which came our new Environmental Education Program Manager, Laura McCann. Laura started her SWCD career on August 1, 2022 (see Page 53 for Laura’s introduction to the community).

As shown in the current org chart, VSWCD has four permanent positions: District Director (Andrew Hautzinger), Conservation Program Manager (Johnny Chavez), Environmental Education Program Manager (Laura McCann) and Business Manager (Megan McCready). VSWCD has also hired seasonal and brought on interns over the year.



III) VSWCD---OPERATIONS AND BUDGETING: FY22

During fiscal year 2023, the District met the quarterly and annual reporting and budgeting requirements of the NM State Department of Finance and Administration, and the annual financial reporting to the Office of the State Auditor. For FY23, the District is prepared to report at the Tier 6 level of the Audit Rule.

- Throughout FY23, operations and all VSWCD activities were conducted by a brand new business manager, and we are happy to have a new sheriff in town. The Board has provided guidance to management and the staff regarding the criticality of compliance. In FY23, the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area grounds had more individuals in attendance than any year prior.
- Also, in FY23, all Board meeting were conducted in a hybrid fashion, with some limited instances of a board meeting attendees being at the Whitfield Office but continuing to offer participation offsite.
- The Open Meetings Act Resolution for calendar year 2023 was passed at the 12/08/2022 Regular Meeting of the Board. The Board's Resolution # 2023-6 passed that meetings would now be held the 3rd Thursday of the month, from 4 PM to 7 P M (the board had met previously the 4th Tuesday of the month starting at 4 pm). The Board held 12 regular and 4 special meetings during the FY23 cycle.
- 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 2022 and 2023 tax collections and these were approved by the Soil & Water Conservation Commission in June of 2023.
- Starting cash balance July 1st, 2022 of FY23 for the District was \$247,565.57, with an estimated end of year balance of \$157,077.72 (see Resolution # 2023-1). Additionally, revenues for the 2023 budget included the full NMDA Points award for the year of \$17,250.47 and collection of the quarter mill levy, estimated at \$427,911.91.

- The 2023 general operational budget provided for District programs and services including the landowner conservation reimbursement programs; maintenance of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex, the District office and visitor center; environmental educational program delivery and outreach; funding for the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program; the Rio Abajo Conservation Area restoration funding; and the East Valencia Urban Community Gardens Program.
- The FY22 Tier 6 Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) audit as required by the State Auditor's Office for accountability was completed March 17, 2023 with a permitted extension. The AUP was conducted by Baldwin Accounting & Consulting, LLC and approved by the State Auditor's Office. There were 6 findings. The District management response to the findings were reviewed with the auditor Mr. Baldwin at the May 18, 2023 VSWCD Board Meeting. The FY23 Audit/AUP will be on time and, will be with significantly less findings conducted by CPA Lee Baldwin.
- The District paid minimum dues of \$500 to the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts and also continued their membership with the National Association of Conservation Districts at the minimum level of \$775.
- The District granted \$15,000 for sponsorship of Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program monitoring programs (BEMP) in the District Area in FY2022-2023 in support of the youth stewardship opportunities and staff of the BEMP. The Program additionally
- On 1/19/2023 the District submitted three capital outlay funding requests for the FY23 NM Legislative cycle, including a reiterated request for support of Phase 2 of the building program for the Whitfield Visitor Center and District administration (\$585,000 was awarded via LCS Project ID 2300). A second request was made to improve the RACA unit's access road to allow access in times of emergencies (\$75,000 via Project ID 2204), while a third (new) request was put forth (ID 2828) for a 30 by 40 foot storage structure at WWCA (estimated cost of \$60,000). The \$585k was sponsored by Representative Tanya Mirabel-Moya, and the other two requests were not supported.
- VSWCD's has a FY22 Capital Outlay project to demolish the asbestos-laden main residence at the RACA unit (\$150,000 via Project ID 2262). Among other supporters in the delegation, Sen. Joshua Sanchez supported this request, and \$125,000 was awarded to the District to take this important step in getting RACA ready for public enjoyment. Work has not begun yet on this project.
- Second Building Update: In FY21 the District contracted John Kirkpatrick's architectural firm to develop final engineering drawings for the administrative office building. These drawings were 100% completed in June of 2021, with full invoicing (\$29,000 of capital outlay funds) done by July of 2021. A bid process was begun in the month of May (2022), but the process was suspended from Board concerns re: rapidly climbing construction costs.
- In July of 2022 the District re-initiated another RFP process, with the bid window closing on August 18, 2022. Two complete bids were received, and under the advice of Architect Kirkpatrick, the low bidder Anissa Construction, Inc. received the Board's endorsement at the 8/26/22 Special Board Meeting. The Phase 2 construction bid was awarded for \$840,000 for a construction project to build the Whitfield Education Center Administrative Building (aka Phase 2). The change in construction costs was due to many factors (e.g., the pandemic's disruptions on delivery of goods) and required a revision of total costs of the project. In August 2021 costs were estimated by architect of record (John Kirkpatrick) to be ~\$650K, while two years previously the general estimate was below \$500,000.



- As of June 30, 2023 VSWCD is caught up on its audits and has spent out the remaining funds from a 2019 capital outlay for the second building (that was set to expire at the end of FY23). The dirt work (earth pad) has been done to compaction specifications, and the Whitfield Visitor Center water line has been rerouted. We are excited that this process is moving forward.
- On December 20, 2022 the district Board passed resolution 5 for the district to participate in the Public Employees Retirement Act also known as PERA. This process had made a positive incentive for the staff and made the district that much more of an employer of choice.
- In FY23, all Board meeting were conducted in a hybrid fashion, with some limited instances of a board meeting attendees being at the Whitfield Office but with most participation still being offsite (our new normal we expect).
- On 1/13/2022 the District submitted three capital outlay funding requests for the FY22 NM Legislative cycle, including a reiterated request for support of Phase 2 of the building program for the Whitfield Visitor Center and District administration (\$540,050 was requested via LCS Project ID 2300). A second request was made to improve the RACA unit's access road to allow access in times of emergencies (\$75,000 via Project ID 2204): neither of these capital outlay requests were advanced, although Rep. Gail Armstrong tried to secure funding for the second building.
 - VSWCD's third FY22 request was made to demolish the asbestos-laden main residence at the RACA unit (\$150,000 via Project ID 2262). Among other supporters in the delegation, Sen. Joshua Sanchez supported this request, and \$125,000 was awarded to the District to take this important step in getting RACA ready for public enjoyment.

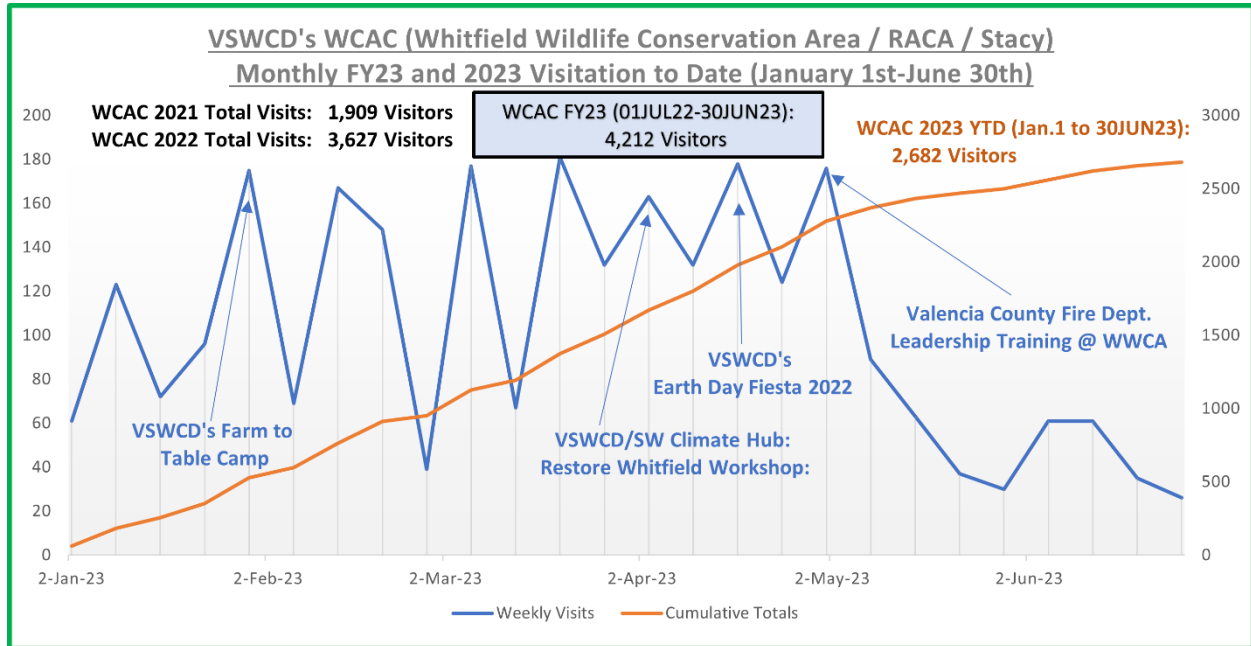
To highlight the District staff's FY23 accomplishments, **Business Manager Megan McCready** was most proud of these five activities:

The things I am most proud of from the last year.

- All financial reporting requirements were done on time, and with no error.
- Implemented a new filing system as well as the organization of the building and files.
- Implemented a new inventory system.
- Improved my ability to take meeting minutes.
- Received multiple awards and certificates (Notary, CPO, and DFA) all while going to school full time. I have been able to juggle a brand new job, school, and my home and for that I am most proud of myself.

- IT evolution: Largely powered by the knowledge and ingenuity of Johnny Chavez, FY23 was the second full year of VSWCD running its own IT program without a contract with a consulting firm (in FY21, VSWCD severed its contract with ABBA, Inc., an ABQ-based IT firm). We have migrated to a cloud based file storage system, again led by Johnny's knowledge. We have also tried hard to improve the office's general internet capacity, but the search remains elusive. After several years of unsatisfactory internet service from Century Link, in February 2023 we shifted to a local firm Rio Cities Internet—so far so good.

- Whitfield Complex Visitation in FY23: For FY23, the Whitfield Complex saw 4,212 visitors, while since the start of the calendar year, the complex has recorded about 2,497 visitors, with some 183 visitors in the last month. We are super excited for the school year’s arrival and the return of our favorite Whitfield visitor (aka short legged humans 😊).



IV) Board leadership updates through the year:

- In FY23, the District lost its longtime friend, leader and comrade Joseph Paul Moya, who rode his tractor for the last time October 3, 2022. Supervisor D u a n a D r a s z k i e w i c z was appointed as Treasurer on November 25, 2022. On February 16, Pamela Cordova was approved to fill Seat 3 until the November 7, 2023 Regular Local Election.
- Board Officers: Abel Camarena continued as Chair (Seat-1), as did Teresa Smith de Cherif (Seat-4) for Vice-Chair. Gail Goodman also continued to serve (Seat-5). Similarly, FY23 was another year of contribution from Priscilla Abeita (appointed Seat-6) representing Isleta Pueblo and Richard Bonine (appointed Seat-7) representing Laguna Pueblo.
- 2023 Regular Local Election: VSWD has informed the respective county clerks in the five counties the district resides that the slate for the 11/7/2023 ballot will include seats 1, 2, 3 (interim) and 5 (August 29, 2023 is the date for individuals to declare their candidacy).



Long-term Board Member Joseph Moya and his girlfriend Peggy Gutjahr



V) Board Committee Activities in FY2023

Board members continued through Committees to address District programming: The Mil Levy Committee, Land Use Plan Committee, Financial Assistance Committee, Whitfield Committee, Education Committee, East Valencia Urban Gardens Program Committee and Personnel Committee were active during the year:

Whitfield Committee: Abel Camarena, Teresa Smith de Cherif and Pam Cordova served on the Whitfield Committee with Andrew Hautzinger and Johnny Chavez. Committee support included continued implementation of top-tier responses to the April-2022 fire, associated plans of action and further implementation of the Whitfield Comprehensive Management Plan (June-2020). Various proposals and projects were reviewed throughout the year, making great headway at the Rio Abajo Conservation Area (e.g., Stand Up Plan following forest thinning and a long term monitoring program). WWCA work was done to update the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program planning documents, an effort led by NRCS' Athena Cholla (Johnny Chavez on point for VSWCD). Whitfield and Stacy Unit had fire smart maintenance / brush removal.

Education Committee: Gail Goodman replaced Joseph Moya as chair of the education Committee (which is also supported by the Education Manager (lead) and District Director). This committee provided key support to the Education Manager in many respects. And was a key point of coordination between the VSWCD and the Friends of Whitfield, our core partner organization with a strong focus on EE (environmental education).

East Valencia Urban Gardens Program Committee: Supervisors Teresa Smith de Cherif, Duana Draszkievicz and Priscilla Abeita served on the East Valencia Urban Gardens Program to work with the Conservation Program Manager & District Director and other staff in bringing recommendations to the Board about the future of the program after the seventh year of singular District leadership. A grant from NM CYFD is hoped to be awarded to YDI in July of 2023 do the remainder of this season and the next. This committee has been key in supporting the staff's efforts to in turn support the gardens, the garden managers and the garden assistants. This has entailed working closely with YDI, who agreed to administer the grant if VSWCD would continue managing the day-to-day aspects of the gardens.

The Financial Assistance Committee was active in FY23, administering over \$40,000 in awarded conservation projects while making concurrent improvements in the program itself for the coming year. This committee is Chaired by Dusana Draszkievicz (relacing Joseph Moya) and includes the Director.

The Personnel Committee including Abel Camarena, Teresa Smith de Cherif and Director Hautzinger worked hard throughout the year was addressing staff reorganization needs, changing staff roles and job descriptions. The committee brought recommendations to the full Board that proposed reorganization in the new year that would allow the District to achieve their goal of annual revenues equaling annual expenditures. This was the key committee during a time of transition and fundamental organizational changes. FY23 saw the hiring of new Environmental Educator (Laura McCann), and oversaw the establishment of the VSWCD's use of the Youth Conservation Corps program (started in October 2022).

Land Use Plan: Richard Bonine continued chairing this committee in FY23, and will convene an early FY24 meeting to chart a course to take the rough draft product currently in hand towards final form. The LUP Committee currently consists of Richard (Chair), Gail Goodman, Duana Draszkievicz and Hautzinger.

Executive Committee: On March 16, 2023 the VSWCD Board of Supervisors Established this new committee is comprised of the Board Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and District Director.

VI) Whitfield Conservation Area Complex:

Of special note, on April 21 and 22, 2023 Whitfield hosted our biggest annual event: **Earth Day Fiesta. This 2023 event** brought 166 visitors to Whitfield, helping to celebrate the Earth Mother in lots of fun and educational ways.




AGRICULTURE APPRECIATION DAY
SATURDAY MARCH 25
 10am-5pm | Free Entry!
 At Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area
 2424 Hwy. 47, Belen, NM, 87002
 LOCAL VENDORS | FACE PAINTING | FOOD TRUCK

On Saturday March 25 2023, VSWCD held its first Agriculture Appreciation Day, a wonderful day of learning about farming, healthy soils, gardening and using animals in context of regenerative farming.

Meanwhile, at Whitfield Main, the work in FY23 was varied, often involving water-infrastructure upkeep and time spent irrigating. This year was expected to be another exceptionally dry one, given the very droughty start to the year, so many were somewhat relieved by wetter than typical monsoon rains come mid-summer (early June was second wettest monsoon on record).

Other Whitfield Complex notes include:
 Habitat Council

- Council of 20+- to advise and support WCAC, Valle de Oro, Candelaria Farms – monthly meetings and tours
- Hosted a tour for the Council at Whitfield Main Unit

NRCS Wetland Reserve Unit

- Updated outdated reporting by co-leading tour of the Main Unit
- Completed documentation to complete a CUA with NRCS for Moist Soils Unit

- These actions have led to availability of funding for projects in the Main Unit, proposing a plan to remove non-native trees/shrubs and plant a greater diversity of native trees to enrich the existing habitat.

Moist Soils Units

- Partnering with others (e.g., Rio Grande Returns) to remove hundreds of cottonwoods (no roots though) to clear the moist soils units. Completed CUA paperwork with NRCS to manage the site.



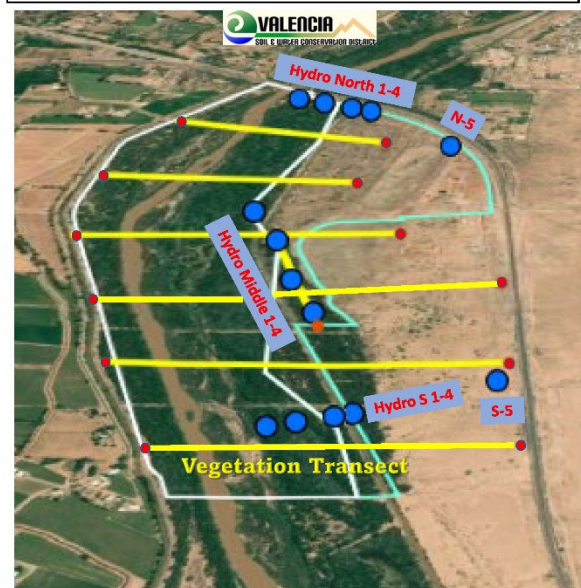
Crop Field

- Staff restarted management by getting on site a no-till seeded with cover crops in spring of 2023 with cover crop mixture. Dry spring and early summer reduced waterings.

RACA

- Began to develop an outreach plan for future restoration of RACA (contracted for RACA Stand-Up Initial Management Plan—final done 6/30/23).
- Develop RACA monitoring program

The Rio Abajo Conservation Area:
A Schematic of Proposed Monitoring Approach (veg and hydro transects as of 25JUN2022)



5-year Management Plan

- Identified framework for a 5-year management plan
- Created irrigation plan
- Began invasive species management plan

Grants/Fundraising

- Completed NMDA Grant ~\$12,000
- Completed Permaculture Grant ~ \$18,000
- Continue to manage NACD grant award - \$50,000 award to EVUGP
- Co-led applying for Conoco-Spirit grant in Aug 2020 - rejected
- Completed paperwork and meetings to seek funding with NRCS – creating proposal to be funded for next 3 years of work for WCAC management

District Staff continued to work on a variety of tasks associated with the Whitfield Complex. In staff highlight, **Conservation Program Manager Johnny Chavez** was most proud of these five activities in FY23:

- Improving professional knowledge and skills
- Being there to help staff with their situations (IT, wildlife questions, safety, etc.)
- Partner improvement
- Better Project Management
- Improved management and effectiveness of the NM Youth Conservation Corps (as we now have on complex YCC Cohort #2, with an award for YCC Cohort #3 to start work in 20-24)
- Continued work with local fire department with events (Whitfield Training Fire, Forensics fire, burn pile training).

VII) District Education Program Activities for FY 2023

FY 2023 was full of exciting educational offerings for our District’s K-12 students and adult Master Naturalist candidates! School programs for elementary students were particularly successful. Programs for elementary school students focused on conservation of our water, soil, and wildlife throughout the District. Our curricula focused on using national Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) to coordinate our science lessons to each grade level. EEPM gave lessons and conducted field trips for 29 different groups of students from 21 different schools in our District. Over 1,200 students were reached with these programs! In January-February 2023, programs for 5th graders were coordinated with the Sandia Mountain Natural History Center who helped guide field trips at WWCA. EEPM McCann trained nine volunteer educators to be field trip guides March-May 2023. This increased the number of students able to be served in our communities. Please see the table below for details on these school programs. Field trips were also conducted for non-school groups such as the Central New Mexico Audubon Thursday Birders and Adelante Adventures for disabled adults.

In addition to school programs, EEPM McCann helped organize and manage the educational portion of our Master Naturalist program for adults in our District. The Master Naturalist class of Spring 2023 saw eight candidates finish coursework. They are now Master Naturalist Interns who will be working on conservation projects here at WCAC and nearby property in our District. These adults will be contributing to our District not only by being more knowledgeable stewards of our natural resources, but also by completing projects for our District! These projects are being overseen by Conservation Program Manager (CPM) Chavez and EEPM McCann.

Last, but not least, EEPM McCann was responsible for spearheading the organization of several public educational events in FY 2023: Fall Festival & Whitfield Under the Stars, Agricultural Appreciation Day, and our Earth Day Fiesta.

School Programs from August 2022-June 2023

<u>School and Grade Level(s)</u>	<u>Month / Number of Students</u>
Homeschool Group (ages 6-11)	August 2022 / 15
Peralta Elementary (Kindergarten)	October 2022 / 37
Los Lunas MS Native Students (7 th & 8 th)	October 2022 / 25
Valencia MS Native Students (7 th & 8 th)	October 2022 / 27
Belen Family School (Elementary)	October 2022 / 30
School of Dreams Academy-SODA (4 th)	November 2022 / 43



Belen Family School (Upper Elementary)	November 2022 / 27
Tome Elementary after school club (4 th -6 th)	December 2022 / 15
Los Lunas Digital Academy (K-6 th)	January 2023 / 58
Isleta Elementary (4 th -6 th)	January 2023 / 40
Tome Elementary (5 th)	January 2023 / 61
Isleta Elementary (2 nd -3 rd)	February 2023 / 17
Katherine Gallegos Elementary (5 th)	February 2023 / 87
La Merced Elementary (5 th)	February 2023 / 38
Gifted Students: Bosque Farms, Peralta, & Desert View Elementary Schools (K-6)	February, March, April, & May 2023 / 17
Bosque Farms Elementary (5 th)	February 2023 / 77
Sundance Elementary (4 th)	March 2023 / 88
Isleta Elementary (K-1)	March 2023 / 34
Bosque Farms Elementary (4 th)	March 2023 / 65
Tome Elementary (4 th)	March 2023 / 42
Gil Sanchez Elementary (4 th)	March & April 2023 / 41
UNMVC- Upward Bound Program (High School Students)	April 2023 / 20
Central Elementary (4 th)	April 2023 / 75
Valencia Elementary (4 th)	April 2023 / 44
La Merced Elementary (5 th)	April 2023 / 15
Bosque Farms Elementary (2 nd)	April 2023 / 60
Ann Parish Elementary (3 rd)	April & May 2023 / 62
UNMVC- Upward Bound Summer Program (High School Students)	June 2023 / 30
Los Lunas Elementary Summer School (K-6)	June 2023 / 22

School Program Reflections:

Bringing science-based Conservation Education to school students across the district is a core part of EEPM McCann’s duties here at VSWCD. The main audience for programs this year was 4th and 5th grade students; however, curricula are available for students K-12 when requested. By focusing in on two grade levels, there is more opportunity for all students in the district to connect with conservation and our Whitfield Conservation Area Complex. Students can look forward to the special experience they will have in their 4th and 5th grade years. This plants the seed for future visits to our conservation areas for events or for regular family outings. The more students come to love our programs, the more likely they will become future stewards of our precious natural resources. Reaching over 1,200 students in her first year on the job is quite an accomplishment for EEPM McCann.

Master Naturalist Program 2023 Reflections:

The Master Naturalist Program concluded on May 13th. All eight students received their certification as Master Naturalist Interns and were approved to start conservation projects they had selected. The students all expressed their gratitude and enthusiasm for the Master Naturalist class. Each student will be meeting with EEPM McCann or CPM Chavez at least once every quarter to review progress on their projects. EEPM McCann sent out an evaluation form for the class to get feedback for next year. Due to feedback and a meeting with the Master Naturalist Committee, the 2024 class will be ten weeks long instead of eight. Also, the class will be held at a new time of year: August 15-October 17, 2024. I will be working



with CPM Chavez to create an space on our website for Master Naturalist course materials, which will be accessible using a password.

Public Event Reflections:

All public events for FY 2023 were well attended and we received positive feedback from the public who attended, the vendors, and our partners and presenters. This outreach to citizens in our District is an intrinsic part of our mission to support current and future stewards of the land in our District. Maintaining positive relationships and serving our communities is a highlight of what we do at VSWCD. We will continue to organize events that share education about a variety of natural resource conservation topics. We are unique among SWCDs in New Mexico in that we manage 207 acres of conservation area among three properties to utilize in our efforts to lead the way in conservation efforts.

District Staff continued to work on a variety of tasks associated with the Whitfield Complex. In staff highlight, **Environmental Education Program Manager Laura McCann** was most proud of these five activities in FY23:

- Meeting new partners and networking with old partners to put together fun public events at Whitfield WCA: Fall Festival & Whitfield Under the Stars, Agriculture Appreciation Day (new 😊), and Earth Day Fiesta.
- Organizing and scheduling school groups for newly created science lessons in the classroom and field trips to WWCA.
- Training volunteer field trip guides to help with school groups at WWCA. I also created route cards for all of us to use with accurate and interesting information on a variety of conservation topics and Whitfield History.
- Coordinating with last year’s Master Naturalist class interns to complete their conservation projects at WWCA. I am especially proud of the Whitfield Nature Journal Victoria and I created and the Upland Trail Sign!
- Taking over the Master Naturalist Program for 2023 by bringing together the MN Committee, planning and conducting classes, learning as a student myself, and creating a new logo and binder for class.

VIII) Financial Assistance Program FY22–Awards Year End June 30th 2022

The Valencia SWCD Financial Assistance Program for FY23 came to a close June 30th 2023. Changes to the program in FY23 were minimal, as many changes were made in FY21, including providing a list of common land practices related to the priorities of the program for soil health management, water quantity and quality conservation, pollinator habitat restoration; preservation, support of wildlife habitat where possible and protection of soils with vegetative cover and more for preservation of the natural resources of the District. Ranking of practices were re-aligned in high, medium and low priority categories aligned the conservation value of the practice to the rate of reimbursement of assistance to applicants – 75%, 50%, and 25% respectively.

Applications were due for the (competitive) Standard Conservation Projects by September 30th, 2022. The original District program budget for the year was \$40K mil levy dollars.

The Financial Assistance Committee of the Board of Supervisors annually review applications. Following is the recommendation put to the full Board for action at their 10-25-2022 regular monthly meeting:

COMMITTEE MEMO to the BOARD:

Date: October 25, 2022

To: VSWCD Board of Supervisors



From: VSWCD Financial Assistance Committee

Re: Financial Assistance Committee's Review of 9 FY23 Standard Conservation Project Applications to VSWCD's Competitive FA Program and resulting recommendation to board to fund top 7 proposals.

This memorandum provides recommendations to the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD/District) Board of Supervisors from the Board's Financial Assistance Committee for nine Fiscal Year 2023 proposals received from qualifying applicants to the VSWCD's Financial Assistance Program's competitive Standard Conservation Project process. As detailed below, it is recommended that the District award the top 7 applications for a combined award amount of \$30,334.

The VSWCD Financial Assistance Program was established by the District in February 2016 to partner with our community members to support the preservation soil and water resources in a manner that is strategic, innovative and cost-effective, and shows proper due diligence of public funds. It is our goal to promote innovative conservation practices which can be effectively used across all of the many different landscapes found within the Middle Rio Grande Valley floodplain, uplands, and mesas.

Qualifying applications are those coming from community members who paid into the District's ¼ mil levy and who provided their application between July 1, 2022 and September 30, 2022. In FY21 the District's Financial Assistance Program was redesigned, now consisting of two primary funding components: 1) \$30,000 for reimbursing Standard Conservation Projects ("SCP", the primary subject of this memo), and 2) \$10,000 for Stand-Alone Practices, which are pre-approved / first come first serve simple practices that are reimbursed at 75% level to support use of: high-efficiency toilets, rain-barrels, water-harvesting tanks, Bio-compost kit, hoop houses, and small-scale native plantings which encourage native biodiversity.

The committee thinks it is important for the Board (and the public) to appreciate the full scope of the District's efforts to provide financial support to community members in furtherance of conservation goals. As noted above, the District now offers multiple vehicles to support citizen-powered conservation within the District, ranging from reimbursement programs to diverse technical support services provided to the community. Beyond the Standard Conservation Project and Stand-Alone Conservation Practice described above, we also offer free soil samples to any individual within the District (we have processed several dozen soil tests in the last year).

The District staff places high priority on providing these programs to the community. It is estimated that the District Director spends approximately 15% of his time on directly-related activities, while it is estimated that the Conservation Program Manager position spends as much as 20% of its time in support of work related to financial assistance related activities, including being the District lead on all things soils. In addition, the District's has worked with a technical service provider (a retired NRCS conservationist) on a contractual basis, which has greatly improved the professionalism of our program. To date, we have expended about \$4,000 for this contractual technical support.

Beyond providing background information directly above, this memo relates to the 9 standard conservation projects (SCP) applications received in FY23. These SCP applications were evaluated by the Financial Assistance Committee and the District staff through applicant interviews and site inspections, with a detailed Site Conservation Plan typically developed by the District for each proposal. All the site plans were ranked according to a ranking system developed by the committee and based on a District-modified version of the USDA-NRCS scoring system for evaluation of conservation projects. This system entails a prioritization process that provides three different levels of reimbursement to the applicant, based on the conservation practice(s) importance, innovation and positive impact (high=75% reimbursement level, medium=50% and low=25%).

For FY23, out of the 9 applications, it is the recommendation of the Financial Assistance Committee that the Board support funding 7 of the projects for a total of **\$30,334** (based on the available \$30,000 in funding). Meanwhile, we recommend informing the lowest ranking applicant that her project exceeds available funds. This information is provided in **Table 1: VSWCD Financial Assistance Committee Recommend Funding Levels for FY2023 Standard Conservation Project Applications.**

<u>Project Description and Conservation Benefits: (in ranked order, highest to lowest)</u>	VSWCD Ranking Score	Recommended Project Award Reimbursable Amount
Roseanna McGinn: Post Big Hole Fire Restoration, pollinator and tree plantings and pond rehab (7.78 acres).	62	\$2,775
Chris & Harold Specter: Multi-component: water and soil conservation, crops and pollinator enhancement (9.5 acres).	55	\$8,846
Laura McCann: Pollinator and tree plantings and pond rehab (1/8 acre).	55	\$1,275
Pete Rodriquez: Multi-component: water and soil conservation, crops and pollinator enhancement (10 acres)	51	\$8,000
Pam & Rick Craddock: Well rehab and pollinator habitat improvements (25.5 ac)	50	\$5,225
Brandon Galarza: Multi-component: water and soil conservation, crops and pollinator enhancement (1.5 acres).	50	\$2,963
Rob Raucci & Joanne Burns: Pollinators and manure mulch project (0.05 ac)	45	\$1,250
Cyndy McCrossen: 2nd year field improves, water conserve. w/ pollinators (2 ac) (unfunded)	45	\$4,000
Brandon Wilcox: Establishment of a Bee Apiary and pollinator garden (2 ac) (unfunded)	35	\$2,020
Total for 9 Standard Conservation Project Applications for FY23 funding:		\$ 41,354
Total AWARD for 7 Standard Conservation Project Applications Recommended for FY23 funding:		<u>\$30,334</u>

IX) East Valencia Urban Gardens Program – 8th Year.

The EVUGP gardens thrived in their 8th year, even in the face of funding and personnel challenges. Great to see Olga Cervantes stay on our team for another year of supporting the gardens, now as the Garden Manager at the Meadow Lake Community Garden. Also very nice to have Gabriella Padilla continue with us for her 2nd year as the Garden Manager for the El Cerro Mission garden. While we had challenges filling our slots for Garden Interns, we are very appreciative for the over 10 local youth who interned at the gardens in 2023. Our fingers



and toes are crossed for a solid 9th year next summer for these amazing community asset that are the two EVUGP community gardens. El Cerro Mission Garden Expansion---Ongoing -Expanded the garden to approximately 3 times its previous size, funded by NACD and Permaculture grants.



- Designed expansion to include permaculture principles with small fruit orchard, native wind break, desert food forest, Kids Area, additional private garden beds, etc.
- Coordinate expansion – Buy supplies and coordinate labor to complete efforts
- Completed fence construction built by Valencia County Public works.
- Completed 10 raised garden beds - interns
- Completing water delivery to new area - interns
- Completed native tree wind block, fruit orchard and starting food forest - interns that worked through the winter.
- Planted 50+ perennial trees/shrubs/cacti, for habitat or wind or are edible

Meadow Lake Garden Expansion

- Created a food forest with deep swales/OM sponges to absorb water runoff.
- Planted 30+ native and edible trees/shrubs/cacti around the outside of the garden for habitat, food and wind protection.



Internship Program

- Coordinate, mentor 15 youth in 2020
- Coordinate and train Garden Managers (GM) to lead 13 youth 2021
- Organized 1 market day to sell food (not in 2022)

Donation Program

- Coordinated program to grow 2,500+ lbs of produce that was primarily donated to 30+ families in East Valencia County
- Created a donation program with 4 separate East Valencia partners.

Volunteer in the Garden –(post 2020-2021 due to Covid restrictions)

- We had approximately 15 volunteer hours so far for 2022
- GMs have 1 day a week designated at the garden for volunteers, this is an area we'd like to improve upon (CPM Chavez making weekly educational handouts).



Classes/workshops/events

- *All of these regular programs were canceled due to Covid (2020-2021).*

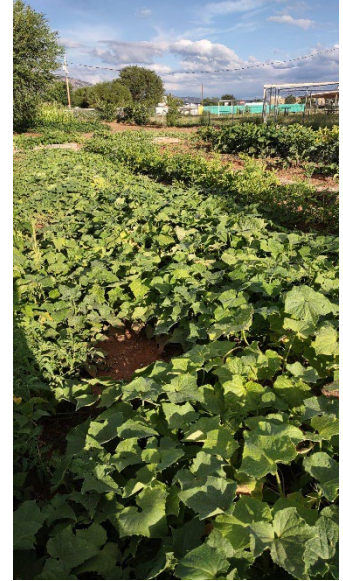
- Normal year – 6-week Seed to Supper series in Spring, Spring kick-off event in gardens, 2-3 hands-on workshops at the gardens, Harvest festival/community harvest dinner.

Covid programs

- Distribution of 300+ packets of veggies seeds through Little Libraries
- Creation of curriculum to take home and start a small home garden or container garden and distributed to schools throughout the State.

District Supervision

- Two part-time Garden Keepers and up to 10 Garden Assistants
- Funding to Date from Outside Grants and Partnership Commitments Towards EVUGP Program (Excludes Donations):



Item	Implementation Year	Summary of Projects	Grant Amount
Conservation Fund	2017 – 2018	10 Youth Intern Stipends, 2 Garden Keeper positions, supplies	\$17,500
Permaculture Grant	2019	2 Garden Keeper positions, 5 Intern stipends, supplies for fruit trees, hoop house and hoop house supplies	\$18,059
Youth Development Inc.	2019	10 Youth Internship stipends	\$3,600
NMDA Healthy Soils	2020	Bioreactor study and soil champion training, primary for soil test, reimbursement to participants for time	\$12,430
NACD Grant	2020	EVUGP Coordinator Salary, 2 Garden Keeper positions, materials for garden expansion fencing, plants and supplies and a EVUGP computer	\$50,000
Youth Development Inc.	2020	12 Youth Internship stipends	\$6,240
Youth Development Inc.	2020	2 Youth Leader stipends	\$1,920
NMCYFD Next Generation Grant	2021	(partial award) \$33,000 grant to YDI for FY22 Garden funding.	\$20,000
USDA-NIFA GRANT13357518	2022-2025	(denied) Nat'l Institute of Food and Agriculture proposal (4 years \$344k total with \$163k match)	---
Rep. Stansbury Community Funded Project Grant	2022-2023	(denied) Community Grant for Urban Conservation.	---
Valencia County C-19 Hardship Grants	2023	NTE \$20k Community Grant for Conservation.	(pending)
Total Funds			\$129,749

X) District Special Projects, Programs & Partnerships

- **BEMP MOA 2020, and 2022-2023 Proposed Work:** The District maintained their working Memorandum of Agreement with the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP) for activities and deliverables. For the Board for planning with adaptive management of riparian areas in the District (the Bosque) and environmental education opportunities for District youth. The year included a grant of \$15,000 to BEMP.
- **Soil Health Champions:** There continues to be a concerted effort in New Mexico especially thru the Healthy Soils Working Group to identify soil health champions and encourage them to participate in the NACD program to help develop a network of champions who can share their experiences in soil health management across New Mexico. Over the past several years the local cadre of Valencia County based Soil Health Champion has grown to over 25, one of the highest concentrations of champs in the state. VSWCD helped organize a February 20, 2022 Healthy Soils Event at the EVUGP Gardens, with this YouTube video capturing the event: [Magical Mulching Event 22FEB22 Community Event - YouTube](#).
- **Isleta Reach Stewardship Alliance (IRSA)** – Throughout FY23, Paul Tashjian with Audubon New Mexico has been leading up a stakeholder-driven coordination effort within the Isleta Reach area of the Middle Rio Grande, funded through the US Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART program. This effort involves forming a restoration group for the Isleta Reach of the Rio Grande from the South Boundary of Isleta Pueblo to San Acacia NM. During the last year, the group has been meeting about every 3 months with Tashjian facilitating development of a conceptual restoration plan for the reach, including both riverine and farmland habitat. The group developed and distributed a survey to residents in the reach about the Rio Grande. In FY23 Tashjian and his partner, Todd Caplan (Geosystems Analysis, Inc) produced a strong product to ISC based on a uniquely solid appreciation of the hydrologic and other physical considerations associated with often biologically based restoration objectives seen (but infrequently achieved) on the MRG. VSWCD has a dozen reasons and entry points to be supportive of the work IRSA is leading.
- **The Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance (GRGWA)** – The Regional Conservation Priorities Program funding and Water Trust Board funding available to the District as a member District of the group was available during the year for planning riparian restoration projects in the District. However, there were no active projects during the year. The D. Director attend quarterly meetings and is working with Johnny Chavez to coordinate with NM Forestry, MRGCD and Valencia County contacts to prioritize & plan for projects GRGWA could support within the District.
- **MRGCD** – The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District and the SWCD community continue to be closely linked. In FY22, MRGCD was immensely helpful to the District through making repeated repairs to the La Costancia Ditch. They are looking to work with soil and water conservation districts, and have several ongoing initiatives with Valencia, Ciudad and Coronado SWCDs. Andrew worked with Casey Ish on a grant with NRCS, and is working with many at MRGCD on a bosque improvement project (a la Lets go 50 to 500).
- **Youth Development Inc.** has continued to be a vital partner of the District, working on common priorities based on aligned organizational missions. YDI has played a leadership role in providing administrative and fiscal support for youth interns and garden keepers for the East Valencia community gardens of the Meadow Lake and El Cerro Mission

communities of the District. The Memorandum of Agreement between YDI Inc. and the District was updated in FY20, and a new grant from NM CYFD Next Gen would provide funds for the two community gardens in FY22.

- **Friends of Whitfield 501©3** – is a not-for-profit core supporter of the Whitfield Conservation Area Complex comprised primarily of District community members. Their support was various and far-reaching in FY23 (and in years prior). The Friends of Whitfield have helped mission achievement in many ways. They help guide field tours, they help set up for events, they help find and apply for grants, and the hold fundraisers to help Whitfield’s educational programming. During the month of April 2023, the Friends hosted a wonderfully successful Silent Auction, generating over \$4,000 in proceeds from items donated by dozen local businesses



*****END OF FY23 ANNUAL REPORT—Main Body*****

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX A – VSWCD FY23 Action Plan

APPENDIX B – Historic 11APR22 Big Hole Fire

APPENDIX C --FY22-23 BEMP Final Report to VSWCD

APPENDIX D – VSWCD Monthly Staff Reports to Board

Linked to here: [https://valenciaswcd-](https://valenciaswcd-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/person/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERvIV59Kk6pGjgegiIgOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB)

[my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/person/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERvIV59Kk6pGjgegiIgOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB](https://valenciaswcd-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/person/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERvIV59Kk6pGjgegiIgOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB)

APPENDIX E – VSWCD and USDA- SW Climate Hub Co-Hosts: A WORKSHOP TO DEVELOP A CLIMATE ADAPTED REVEGETATION DESIGN FOR THE WHITFIELD COMPLEX LANDS ALONG THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE (April 6-7, 2023 at WWCA). Summary report found here:

<https://valenciaswcd.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/WHITFIELDOPS/Ec4fFLAb8qNElpIZVHuDvUYByHqUhilZH4zRRx-XQzzOhQ?e=wVIU4Q>



APPENDIX A --FY23 Action Plan (as required by NMDA for SWCD points)

VALENCIA Soil & Water Conservation District

FY23 Action Plan

Critical Natural Resource Issues:

1. Watershed Health
2. Soil Health
3. Water Conservation
4. Aquifer Protection
5. Specter of Catastrophic Fires
6. Noxious/Invasive Weeds
7. Urban Growth/Conservation

Critical Geographic Areas:

- Watershed Health = Middle Rio Grande sub-basin + Rio Puerco tributary & our Rangelands across the District (e.g., west of Hwy.6, Laguna country)
- Water Conservation = Middle Rio Grande
- Healthy Soil Promotion = District wide
- Aquifer Protection = Middle Rio Grande
- Specter of Catastrophic Fires = Destructive fires an issues throughout district, but especially in the floodplain bosques and upper alpine areas.
- Noxious/Invasive Weeds = District wide
- Urban Growth = Central portion of the district (e.g., Village of Los Lunas)
- All serviced by Environmental Education = District wide

Critical Operations Areas of Activity (“operational buckets”):



Operational Buckets



Board Working Committee Assignment Roster: (per 1-16-2021 mtg. minutes, revised)

Board Committees:	Chair:	Other Members (Supervisors & staff):
Education	Joseph Moya	Gail Goodman, EEPM, DD
EV Urban Gardens Prog.	Teresa Smith de Cherif	Priscilla Abeita, Duana Draszkievicz, CPM, DD, EEPM
Financial Assistance	Duana Draszkievicz	Joseph Moya, DD
Land Use Plan	Richard Bonine	Gail Goodman, Duana Draszkievicz, DD
Mil Levy	Abel Camarena	Teresa Smith de Cherif, DD
Personnel	Abel Camarena	Teresa Smith de Cherif, DD
Whitfield Complex	Abel Camarena	Sue Small, Teresa Smith de Cherif, DD, CPM

Statements of Intent (desired outcomes) for the District’s priority issues:

- 1) By February 2023, Valencia SWCD will have finalized the Master Plan for the Whitfield Wetland Reserve, identifying restoration actions associated with the April 11, 2022 Big Hole Fire that burned over 75% of WWCA and Stacy units.
- 2) By December 2022, Valencia SWCD will have completed the first phase of a thinning and monitoring project at RACA Unit 50-acre grove of native trees.
- 3) By March 2025, Valencia SWCD will have led a partnership consortium to improve bosque conditions in a 500-acre stretch of the Rio Abajo reach.
- 4) By December 2022, Valencia SWCD will have generated a revamped set of business practices to further professionalize and optimize the management of our financial affairs.
- 5) By June of 2025 the Valencia SWCD will have provided financial assistance to benefit conservation on over 500-acres of land within the district
- 6) By June of 2025 the Valencia SWCD will have conducted over 400 Soil Tests for benefit to local landowners management of their soil resource.
- 7) By June of 2025 the Valencia SWCD will work with partners to help them reduce their irrigation water use by 10% through information, education, voluntary metering, and improved irrigation efficiency.
- 8) By June 2023 the Valencia SWCD and its Whitfield Conservation Area Complex will have had over 40,000 local student visits to our outdoor classrooms (since 2016).
- 9) By June of 2023 the Valencia SWCD will establish a monitoring program to measure water



- quality and quantity and other critical bio-metrics..
- 10) By June of 2024 the Valencia SWCD will have a Master Plan established for each of its three management units (WWCA, RACA and the Stacy Unit).
 - 11) By June 2025 the Valencia SWCD will work with cooperators to eliminate 1,000 acres of Salt Cedar, Siberian Elm and Russian Olive along the MRG.
 - 12) By June of 2026 the Valencia SWCD will work with partners to see the East Valencia Urban Gardens Program enter its 10th year of community gardening.
 - 13) By June of 2024 the Valencia SWCD will establish a partnership with the Valencia County Planning and Zoning Commission to implement a conservation plan consistent with district and county goals.
 - 14) By June of 2023 the Valencia SWCD will have established a partnership with both the Laguna Pueblo and the Isleta Pueblo to implement a conservation plan consistent with the goals of the two tribal nations and the district.
 - 15) By September of 2022 the Valencia SWCD will have acquired a loan to build the VSWCD Whitfield Education Center Administrative Building.

Priority Actions for the next 12 months: Fiscal Year 2023 (7/1/22-to-6/30/23)

ACTION	*WHO	DATE	DATE COMP	BUDGET (in hand)
Support Education Program’s capacity by filling EEPM Vacancy (open as of 5-27-22)	AH, PC & EE Committees	July 2022	Filled 8-1-22	\$55,000
Support Education Program’s capacity by keeping EE Assistant Intern position funded	EEPM, AH	August 2022	Done	\$15,000
Support expansion of Educ. Prog.’s capacity with agreements w/ local school districts	EEPM, AH	May 2023	In works	N/A
Protect and enhance the lands of the Whitfield Complex: Revise Fire Management Plan	JC, AH	Dec 2022	Oct.2023	\$20,000
Protect and enhance the lands of the Whitfield Complex: YCC Field Crew Forest Thinning	JC, AH	Aug.’22 to March 2023	Done	\$53,000 (secured)
Protect and enhance the lands of the Whitfield Complex: YCC Field Crew Trail Building	JC, AH	Aug.’22 to March 2023	Done	\$10,000
Build/Revive partnerships with USFS, BLM, State Land Office, State Forestry, NMGF and establish MOUs as needed (annual focus: fire)	All	June 2023	Partial	---
Pursue recovery funds for the Whitfield Complex Post Big Hole Fire/RACA thinning	WCAC Committee	June 2023	Ongoing	TBD
Support FY23 Financial Assistance & Healthy Soil awardees conservation projects	FA Committee & AH, OM	June 2023	Done	---
Finalize VSWCD’s Land Use Plan	LUP Comm.	June 2023	Ongoing	---
Continue to support EVUGP community garden, social & environmental justice project	EVUGP Committee	June 2023	Ongoing	\$40k/year
Implement Phase I of RACA 50-to-500 Thinning Project with EMNRD and MRGCD	WCAC Committee	July 1 2022	½ done	\$125k (secured)



Support planning for FY24 Phase II 50 to 500 acres bosque management partnership effort	WCAC Committee	June 2024	Ongoing	TBD
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District Staffing Needs:

- I. 1 Full time District Director (Andrew Hautzinger, current DD)**
- 1 Part time Business Manager (Megan Owen as of 5/31/2022)
- 1 Full time Conservation Program Manager (Johnny Chavez, current CPM)
- 1 Full time Environmental Education Program Manager (Laura McCann as of 8/1/22)
- 1 Part time Field Crew Technician (vacant)
- 1 Part time Education Assistant Intern/Technician (vacant)

Annual Budget Needs (FY23 Preliminary—approved by board 5/24/22):

- Salaries & Benefits: \$230,000
- Equipment: \$15,000
- Office Supplies: \$2,000
- Programs & Cost Share: \$70,000 (Financial Assist./Cost Share at \$40,000)
- Utilities: \$8000
- Contracting: \$40,000
- Total Annual Budget (Planned): \$400,000

Key individuals, groups, or agencies to reach for program success:

PARTNERS (name)

Acequia Association	NM Envirothon Pete Vigil	Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (Cecelia R.)
Audubon of Central NM	NM Federal Delegation	State Engineers Office
Belen School District	NM Hay Growers Assoc.	State Legislators
City of ABQ Open Space	NM Healthy Soil Working Group (Isabelle Jenniches)	SWCD: NMACD
City of Belen	NM Local Delegation	SWCD: Ciudad SWCD
City of Rio Communities	NMDA (Katie M. liaison)	SWCD: Coronado SWCD
EENM (Eileen E.)	NM-EMNRD-Forestry	SWCD: NMCDE
Friends of Whitfield	NMFWRI / Highlands	SWCD: Socorro SWCD
GRGWA (Dee Tarr)	NMGF Commission	SWCD: Taos SWCD
Habitat Council (MRG)	NMGF: Bernardo WMA	Tome Historical Society
Hawks Aloft	NMSU Agricultural Science Center	Town of Peralta
Isleta Reach Stewardship Association (P. Tashjian)	NMSU BILLING	U.S. Army Corps
Los Lunas School District	NMSU Experiment & Research Farm	U.S. EPA
4 Daughters Land & Cattle (Mike Mechenbier)	NMSU Valencia County Cooperative Ext. Service	USDA Farm Service Agency
MRGCD	Pueblo of Isleta	USDA-NRCS—Los Lunas Field Office Team2
NACD (Soil Health Champions (Beth Mason))	Pueblo of Laguna	USDOI-USBR
NM Cattle Growers Assoc.		USDOI-USFWS



USFWS: Bosque del Apache NWR
USFWS: Sevilleta NWR
USFWS: Valle de Oro
Valencia Community Action Network
Valencia County Commissioners
VC Community Expo

• Covers 4H and FFA
Valencia County Ext. Master Gardeners:
Valencia County Fair Board: Danny Goodson
Valencia County Farm and Livestock Bureau
Val. County Fire Dept.

Valencia County Manager (Danny Monette)
Valencia News Bulletin
Valencia Water Watchers
Village of Bosque Farms
Village of Los Lunas
Youth Development Incorporated (YDI)

APPENDIX - B: Historic April 11, 2022 Big Hole Fire (75% of WWCA & Stacy)

Poem shared by a 2nd grade student who visited Whitfield:

It is Windy
No Clouds
It is 10:41 am.
Apr 7, 2022

Trees, water and logs
Seeds, rocks and dirt

Weeds, a pole and a mantis
Flying insects and nice people

Grass, turtles and a porcupine

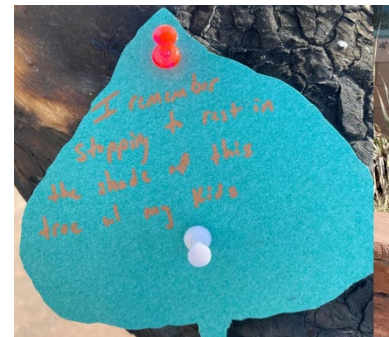
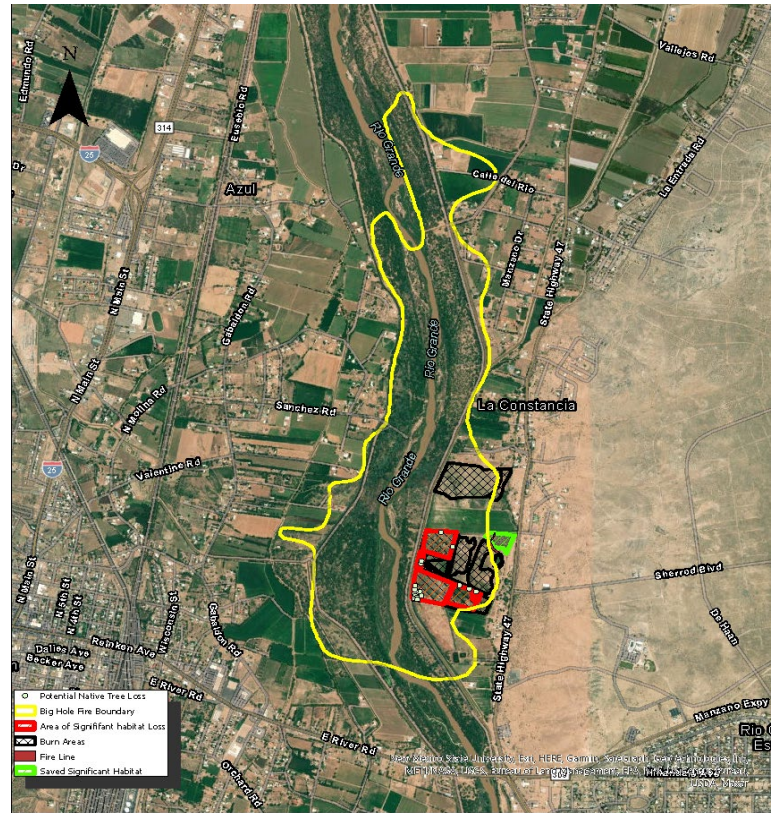
School busses, backpacks
Cars, homes and birds.

Our planet, sticks and first aid kits.
Ladybugs, sticks, and rocks.

I think the trees are cool and I find
the water cool.
I love the very old Cottonwood tree!

That was April 7th and I had so
much fun with my teacher and my
class.
Today... April 11th so much wind
and now so much fire.

Prayers for Whitfield



Transporting charred Owl Tree limb (see next page)



The plume from the Big Hole Fire before it hit Whitfield



Fire Department starts to use Whitfield as a staging area

Big Hole Fire devastates conservation area

Cause of blaze still under investigation; county-wide burn ban enacted

By Julia M. Dendinger VCNB April 21, 2022

News-Bulletin Assistant Editor

Nearly two decades of restoration and protection of a local wildlife conservation area has gone up in smoke as a bosque fire tore through Valencia County last week.

When the Big Hole Fire started shortly after 1 p.m., Monday, April 11, Andrew Hautzinger was struck by an uncanny sense of the familiar.

"The feeling was exactly, 'We've been here before,'" said Hautzinger, the district director for the Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District. As he and district staff stood in front of the visitor and education center at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, east of the Rio Grande, the towering pillar of smoke brought back memories of three years ago.

"I saw the 2019 Ironworks Fire presented exactly again. This column of smoke stood up a mile or two away," he said. "I felt we were relatively safe then. That's the downside to seeing the cup half full - sometimes I'm surprised."

Remembering the path of the Ironworks Fire, which also started west of the river, jumped east and swept north, just missing Whitfield, Hautzinger headed to the west side of the river to see what was happening. He was quickly turned back from the ditch Bank road by fire personnel and as he returned to Whitfield, the heavy winds pushed the fire across the river and headed for the conservation area.

"From the time it got me to get from there back to (Whitfield) it jumped the river," he said. "It pretty much headed straight north but then it took just a bit of a curve to the east over the San Juan Drain and into Whitfield."

With human safety first and foremost in his mind, Hautzinger sent two staff members home while he and Johnny Chavez, the district's conservation program manager, remained on site.

"Johnny and I have a fire background; we were quickly in contact with fire officials. They suggested using Whitfield as a staging area and, I, of course said yes. We are a community asset in all regards."

They closed the ref-uge and opened the gates, and for four days hosted a steady presence of fire personnel from federal and state to local crews.

When the flames were at their worst, Hautzinger said he heard one firefighter comment they don't fight fires, they fight to protect structures.

"On day three, he said they can't fight fire in the bosque under these conditions," Hautzinger said.

An assessment of the 97 acres that is Whitfield shows 75 to 80 percent of the area was burned, and an early assessment indicates upwards of 90 percent of the large native trees won't survive, Hautzinger said.

Saying he believes the bosque is now largely unmanaged, the director said the ability to fight fires on the scale they are happening now "forces us to only look at protecting structures. We have to make horrible sacrifices of places like Whitfield while protecting our neighbor's houses. The time has well since passed that we need to have a solution at the scale of the problem.

"We, on the government side, need to find way to go from 5 to 50 to 500 acres in our treatments ... like effective fuel breaks, strategic thinning. I also think treatments that are thoughtful of regenerative farming, looking to re-implement farming techniques our ancestors used to great benefit.

"I really believe with a collaborative framework, we should be able to find a way to get animals back in the bosque, using managed, rotational grazing to reduce intense buildup of fuels. There has to be a creative way of getting animals back in for vegetation clearance that is compatible with the environmental and endangered species needs."

While the thought that fire is cleansing and beneficial, that doesn't hold true for ecosystems like those in the bosque and Whitfield.

Those riparian systems are not fire-evolved systems, Hautzinger said, but rather flood adapted.

"Fires, here in our bosque, most typically are found to encourage, to increase nonnative, invasive species. That's the hard depressing piece of it," he said.

For the fire to have a positive ecological response in an area like Whitfield, there needs to be carefully planned management, Hautzinger said.

"There are areas so badly burned the native grasses are dead," he said. "We can oversee those areas and help them in the right direction.

"I think the biggest silver lining is the education opportunity that recognizes our bosque management has to improve. Our ability to fight fire more effectively has to improve. All partners have to play together because it's bigger than any one of us. I think, ideally, my organization is situated to be a bridge for these different conversations."

The recovery at Whitfield will need to be managed along a continuum, he said, with careful, long-term plans laid out to nurture the remaining system. Hautzinger said staff will continue monitoring to determine which trees are truly dead and begin watering areas most likely to benefit.

"In the midst of that, we will be looking for support from our government partners to do a formal fire assessment and restoration design. Anyone in government that has money, or big grants," he said with a grim chuckle. "I think it could easily be in the millions to replant. We have a fully committed staff and a board that is supporting doing our planning right, even if it takes nine, 12 months.

"We really want to have the best of science deployed here so we are making the best choices, that the plants we put in are climate and fire adapted. Perhaps most importantly, we want to play role as being a demonstration area for community on how to go through an assessment of damage and into the restoration phase."

The district's annual Earth Day Science Fiesta is still going to be held this weekend, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Friday and Saturday, April 22 and 23, at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, 2424 N.M. 47.

Hautzinger said they will use the opportunity to incorporate fire education into the activities.

"I imagine for the next several years, the western half of Whitfield will be closed off because of dead trees and safety issues there," he said. "I ask my fellow lovers of Whitfield to be patient as we find a path to reopen and regrow."

As of Tuesday morning, Valencia County Fire Chief Matt Propp said the Big Hole was at 85 percent contained. The fire was downgraded from a type 4 to a type 5 incident that same morning, he said, and the total area burned held at 890 acres. One home was destroyed and 18 outbuildings were damaged.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation, Propp said.

"We still have some state (fire) resources on scene and probably will through the end of the week. They are looking for hot spots, patrolling the fire area to make sure no trees are a threat to the public or branches to bring down," Propp said. "We hope to call this LOO percent contained by the end of the week. Each day, containment has been going up 3 or 4 percent. This fire had so many different areas it's a matter of getting to each individual area to make sure the containment lines are holding. We want to get to all the areas before we say it's contained."

With the burn area spread over hundreds of acres, Propp said the public is going to be the fire services' best resource for tracking flare-ups.

"If someone happens to see a tree with an active fire, they should call it in and we'll get a crew out there," the chief said. "The things we worry about with trees like that is the fire can spread and the fire can make a tree unstable and suddenly fall. We want to mitigate that. If people see something like that, please call it in."

Now that the situation has calmed, Propp said he hopes the public has a better understanding of just how resource intensive large-scale fires can be.

"We are competing with fires around the state," he said. "That should reinforce why we enacted a burn ban."

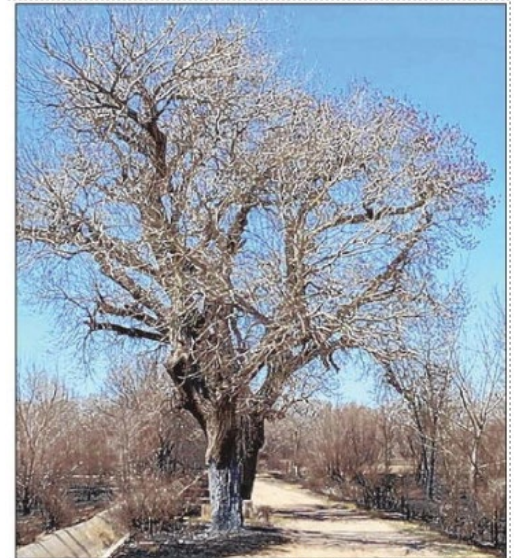


Photo courtesy of Andrew Hautzinger

As the ashes of the Big Hole Fire cool, areas like this outdoor classroom at the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area are no more. The conservation area was hit hard by the fire, losing 75 to 80 percent of its 97 acres to the blaze.



Clara Ganda | News-Bulletin photo
New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, far right, was at the Rio Communities Fire Station Friday morning, speaking to local officials about the Big Hole Fire, fire protection and more. Pictured, from left, are Rio Communities Mayor Joshua Ramseil, Valencia County Commissioner Joseph Bizzell, Belen Mayor Robert Noblin, and New Mexico Sens. Joshua Sanchez and Gregory Baca.



Big Hole Rising (from WWCA)
(noon, 11APR22)

Conservation Program Manager Report

Prepared by Johnny Chavez, johnnychavez@valenciaswcd.org

Big Hole Fire Report – 4/26/2022

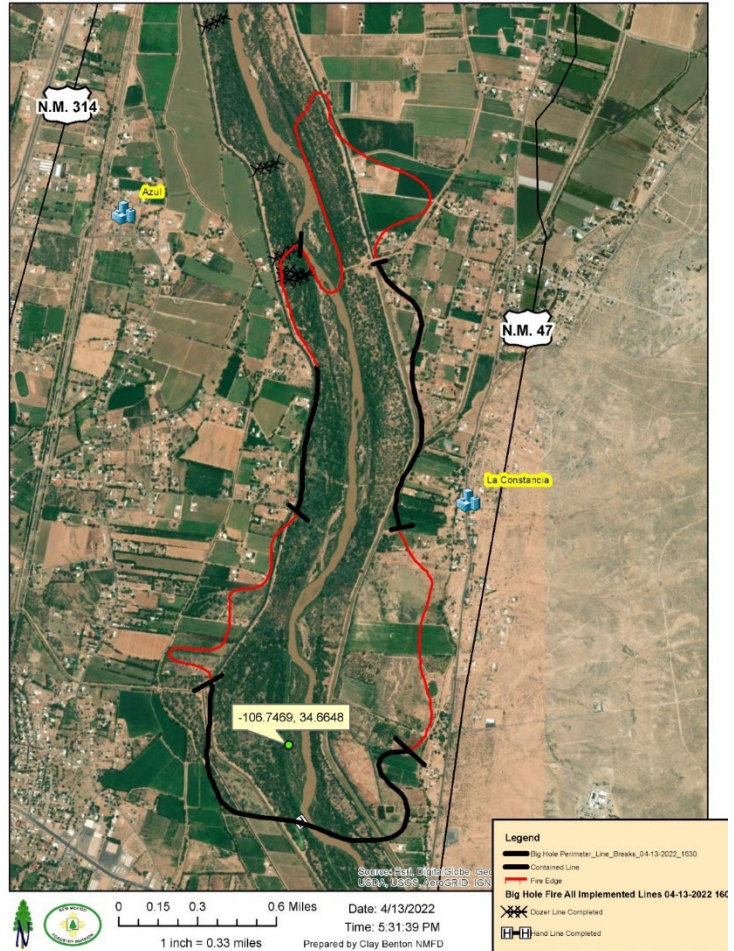
At about lunchtime on Monday, April the 11th, a bosque fire started on the West side of the river. This was about 300 yards west of Whitfield. Johnny Chavez (Conservation Program Manager) was off that day but was able to see the smoke from his home. Chavez called Andrew Hautzinger (District Director) and then headed to Whitfield. As Chavez turned into Whitfield, the smoke in the bosque was dense and the fire was burning on both sides of the river. Chavez got on his PPE (Chavez has had Wildland Fire Training) and talked with the District Director on what can be done and what to watch out for.

For the next couple of hours, Chavez drove around the conservation area watching out for embers landing in or around the conservation area. The head of the bosque fire continued to head north, with small hotspots and flare ups remaining. The wind was not consistent, as it was turning different directions throughout the day. Around 15:00, the winds turned south and reignited fuels next to Whitfield then turned East. The fire jumped the clear ditch and the drainage ditch within 20 minutes and it was on the boarder of the West side of Whitfield.

At this point, there was nothing Chavez could do so he headed back up to the Visitor Center and made sure no one entered the conservation area besides emergency personnel. At about 16:30, Fire Department showed up with a Brush truck, type 5 and a tanker. The fire department used the parking lot to deploy a *water pumpkin* which was used a couple of times by the Socorro Sheriff's Police Department to drop water. The District Director also stayed and watched as the flames came closer. The Director talked to many stakeholders and partners and continued to take photos and video.

At this time, the fire was about half way into the conservation. The lateral concrete ditch held the fire back for about 10 minutes, but with the unpredictable winds, this would not have held. The Moya's used their tractor to create a fuel break just North-East of the pond. This most likely saved the North East forest.

Note: A future fire plan with a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) with different neighbors around the District Property will come in handy because this will help both parties understand what can be done in an event like this. A better plan will help conduct a more effective fuel break.



The Fire Department at the time did not have the personnel to help fight most of the fire at Whitfield. They did go down into the conservation a couple of times to lay down some hard and wet lines. Neighbors on the East side of Whitfield, close to the maintenance building, told us that a small fire was heading towards their homes. This was inside Moist Soil Unit #1. One Brush truck and Chavez when down behind the maintenance building and started working that line. A couple of neighbors came down to help make a line to disrupt the fuels.

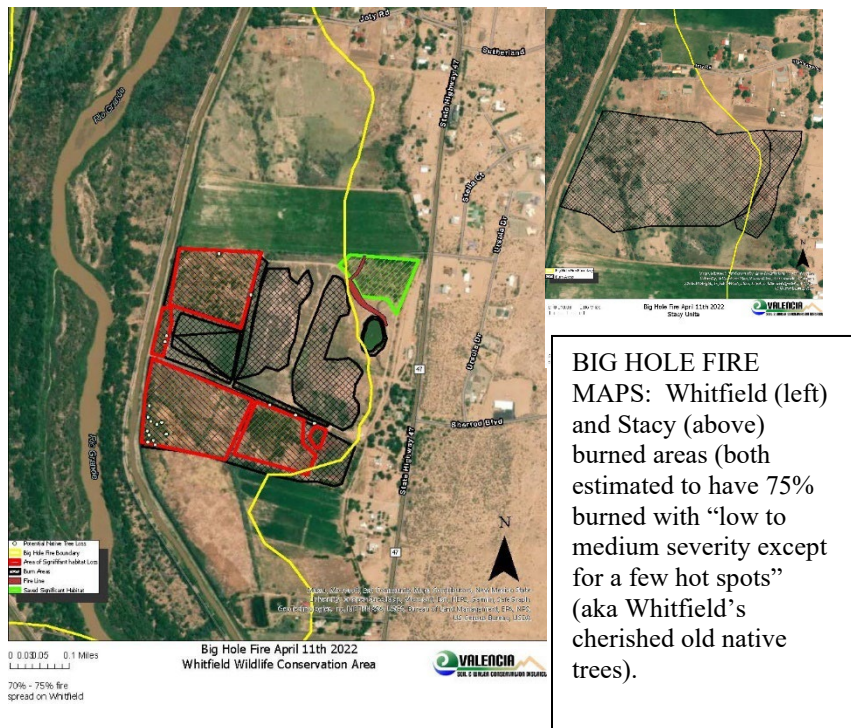
As the fire started to run out of light fuels to burn, Chavez started to drive around and see the damage and put out any hotspots as possible. Chavez continued to do this till around 20:00. The District Director and Chavez decided to leave the gates open so emergency personnel could enter the conservation as needed.

As the next day came around, District Staff were at Whitfield for a post-fire meeting. During the

meeting, Fire personnel came to Whitfield and wanted to use the area as a staging area for type 1 helicopter. Chavez helped find a location to put down two large pumpkins and helped set them up. This location was just at the entrance of the conservation area where little damage could be done to the area. Rest of the staff went home to do remote work.

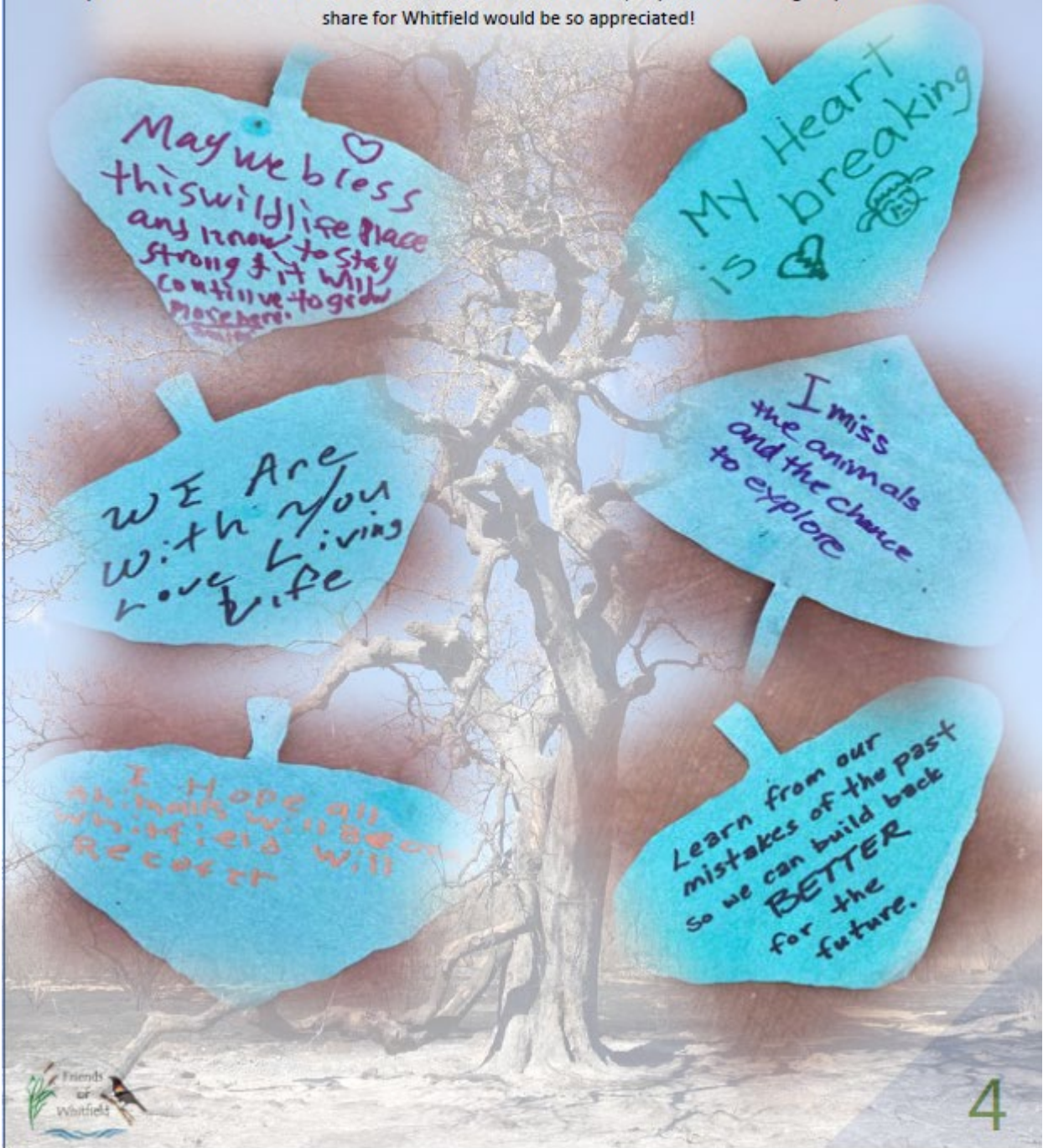
As winds were too high, air support was grounded for the entire day, so fire personnel stayed on standby. At the end of the day, The type 1 helicopter was able to come in Wednesday and was able to stay for one fuel cycle before heading north for another fire. Fire personnel stayed at Whitfield till Saturday when the fire was starting to become more contained.

Above are maps of the Big Hole fire and fire damage on Whitfield and Stacy Unit. Whitfield and Stacy Unit fire maps are early print and will be modified to show the correct fire damage in the next couple of weeks.



Memories and Prayers for Whitfield

During the Earth Day Science Fiesta, some of Whitfield's many supporters shared their reactions to the Big Hole fire by writing on paper "cottonwood leaves" that were then pinned to a charred limb from Whitfield's iconic Grandfather Cottonwood/Owl Tree – the site of many field trip visits throughout the years. Cottonwood leaves are still available at the Visitors Center, any stories or thoughts you want to share for Whitfield would be so appreciated!



Source: Friends of Whitfield Spring 2022 Newsletter (Natalie Duncan, EE Intern)

APPENDIX C –FY22 BEMP Final Report to VSWCD – BEMP Study

(2019 VSWCD note included for informational purposes)

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, Infinity High School of Belen, School of Dreams Academy of Los Lunas, and Rio Grande Elementary of Belen.

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, and 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. A Report to VSWCD was presented to the Board at their April 2019 meeting and is posted on the BEMP website at www.bemp.org.

Valencia Soil and Water Conservation District Semi-Annual Report prepared by the Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program

July 29, 2022

PROJECT DELIVERABLES

1.1.1 Field work, data analyses, and public speaking /presentations by Valencia County students.

From July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022, BEMP staff continued to collect data and monitor sites. Data collections included the monthly monitoring of depth to groundwater, water level in the nearby ditch or drain, precipitation, and litterfall (leaves, reproductive parts, and wood) of the dominant tree species. Surface-active arthropods were monitored at specified sites three times along with vegetation cover in late summer. Tamarisk leaf beetle monitoring was conducted at specific sites in the summer months. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and pressures on teachers as we returned to in-person classes, student involvement was minimal. BEMP again reached out to teachers to gage their interest and willingness to participate with BEMP on some level while following the remote learning for in-class lessons and safety procedures for in-field lessons. The majority of teachers stated a desire to be involved with BEMP at a later date, but this school year still had minimal involvement from schools. BEMP continued to provide education activity booklets and online curriculum to teachers for use in classrooms to maintain outdoor, hands-on science activities. Although teachers received booklets, we do not have numbers on use or participation. These booklets were sent to teachers from Belen High School, Del Rio Academy, Rio Grande Elementary, School of Dreams Academy, and The International School. BEMP's social media had over 15,800 "reaches" in 2021, and many more views. Due to a shift in software, downloads of BEMP materials are now harder to track. Teachers from Valencia County schools reached out to BEMP's Education Manager at the end of the school year to state that they were interested in resuming field and classroom participation in the 2022-23 school year.

Outreach Numbers for Valencia County 2020-21 School Year Participation in BEMP

School/Association	Students	Adults	Activity
The International School at Mesa del Sol	28	5	Monthly Monitoring and class activities
UNM students	0	47	Monthly Monitoring
Master Naturalists & volunteers	6	25	Monthly
Monitoring Master Naturalist class		10	Volunteer training
Environmental Justice Day (2 days)	100	50	Community Event
Total # participants	134	137	

1.1.2 Valencia County student participation at events.

This year, there were students from The International School at Mesa del Sol (TIS) who presented at the Crawford Symposium. TIS has students from Bernalillo and Valencia Counties.

1.1.3 Delivery of the BEMP Annual Report

The Bosque Ecosystem Monitoring Program (BEMP) mailed out the BEMP 2020 Annual Report on June 11, 2022. This provides a comprehensive overview of the work done during the period up through December 31, 2021. The key sections of that report for VSWCD include:

Pg. 5 – COVID-19 restrictions and protocols

Pgs. 8-9 – Importance of long-term data and community outreach and citizen science

Pgs. 10-60 – Data (groundwater, precipitation, litterfall, vegetation cover, arthropods, temperature, tamarisk leaf beetle) and analyses from BEMP sites

Pgs. 60-61 – Outreach (including social media outreach)

1.1.4 BEMP data and educational resources

BEMP resources provided on an open access data repository (GitHub):

<https://github.com/BEMPscience>. BEMP data are available on the bemp_data link and educational activities (in English and Spanish) are available on the bemp_education link.

BEMP data and education activities are also available on BEMP’s website, www.bemp.org.

Core data sets were updated April, 2021. Water chemistry and quality datasets (including historic data) were uploaded April, 2021.

II.

2 ADDITIONAL ANALYSES

2.1 Monthly monitoring data

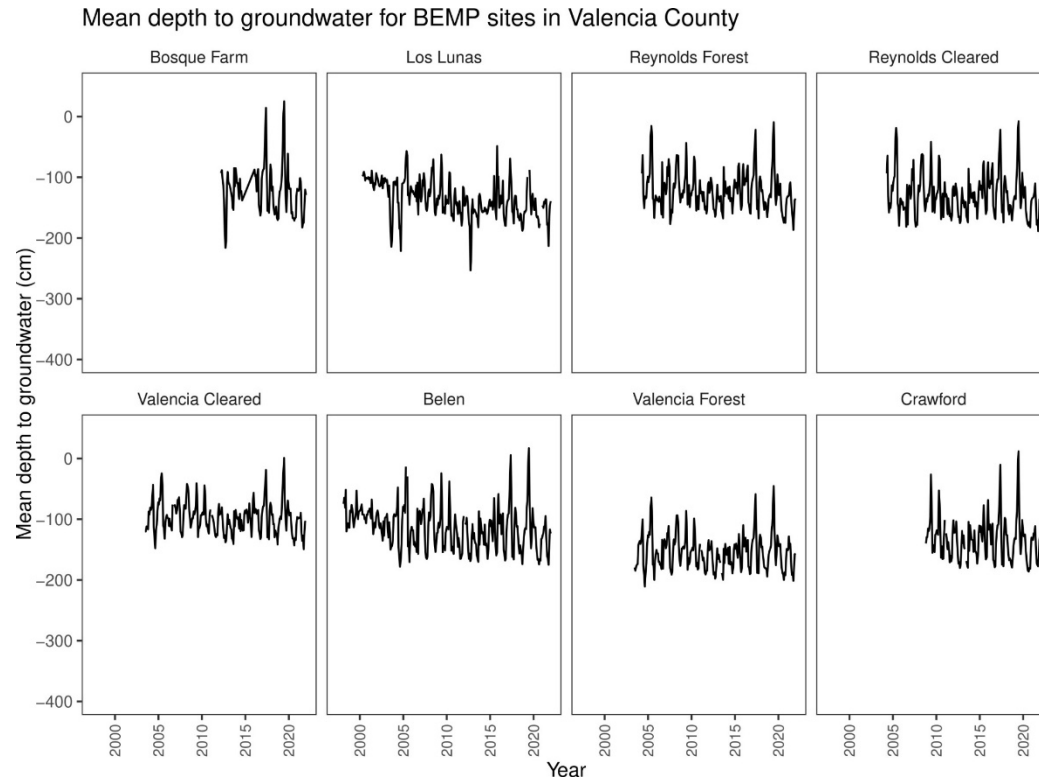


Figure 1. Groundwater trends at Valencia BEMP sites as compared to river flow; these show different perspectives from the graphs in the BEMP Annual Report.

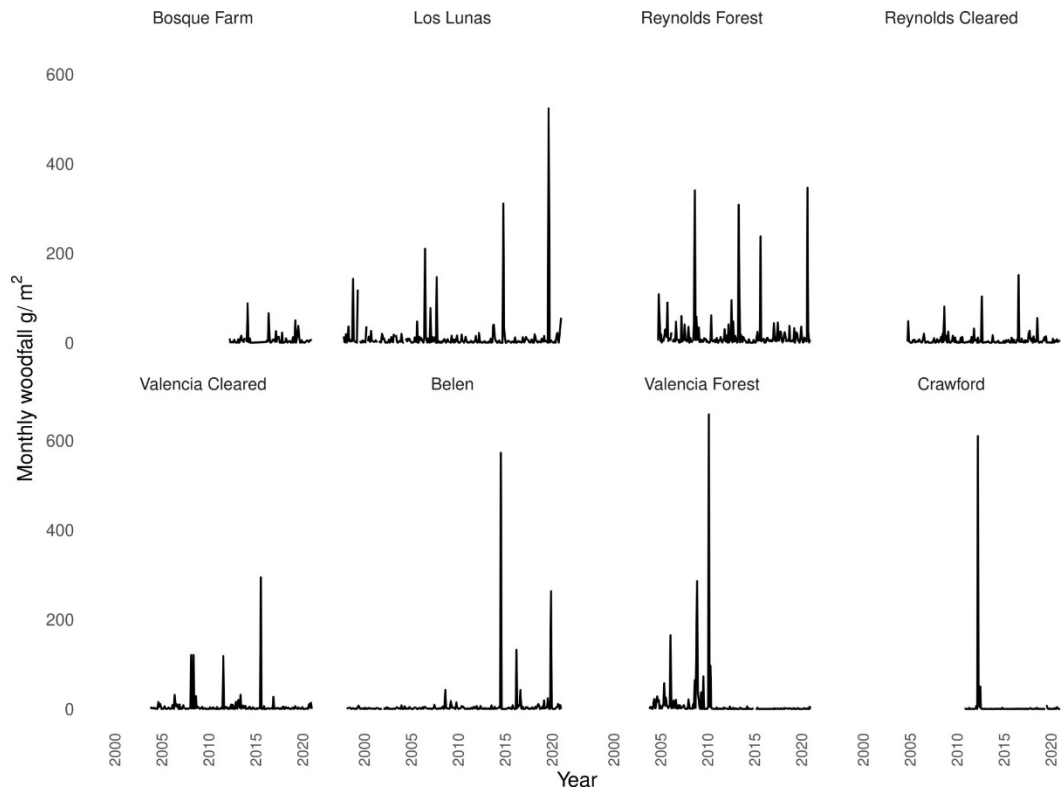


Figure 2. As the cottonwood gallery continues to senesce and undergo stress due to climate related changes woodfall increases over time.

2.2 Tamarisk Leaf Beetle

The riparian (bosque) vegetation composition shifted throughout the years due to anthropogenic manipulation of both the floodplain and the river; stands of coyote willow were notably reduced in many areas. This was the preferred nesting habitat for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) (SWFL, see Figure 3). The bird has since adapted to using saltcedar for nesting purposes. An unforeseen consequence of releasing the TLB was a decline in the hatching success of the endangered SWFL. The TLB's peak saltcedar defoliation occurs in conjunction with SWFL egg laying and chicks hatching. This defoliation exposes the eggs and chicks to predation and increased temperatures.

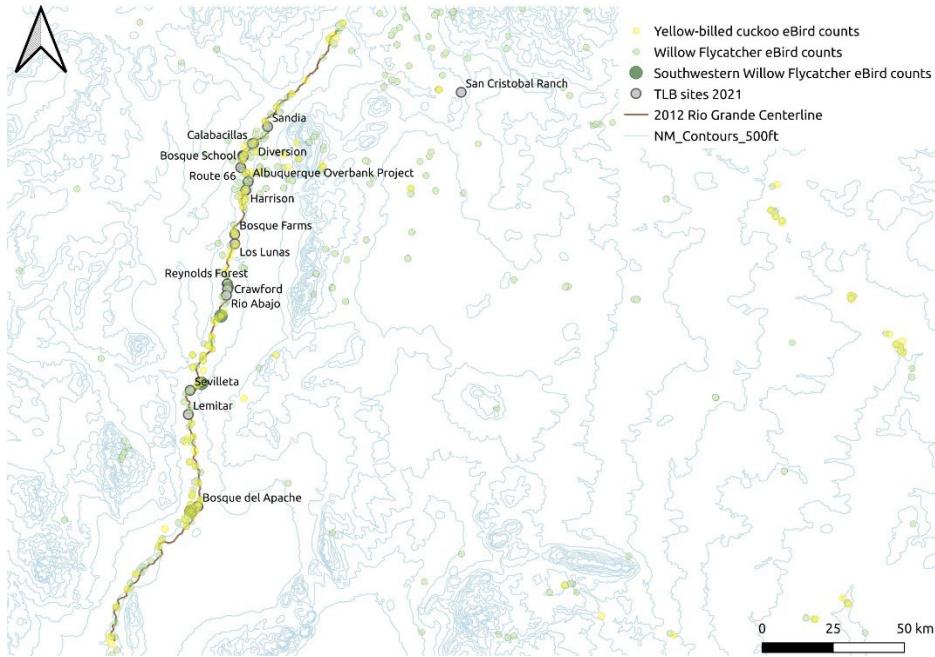


Figure 3. Defoliation of shrubs that are used as habitat by endangered bird species and other birds is still a concern with the tamarisk leaf beetle. BEMP TLB sites are shown with ebird data.

In Valencia County, across the five sites sampled monthly, May had a single TLB captured. In June abundance increased at the Valencia Clear site with 10 TLBs counted out of 14 total for the month in this range. Abundances peaked in July with 373 total TLBs counted for that month with a majority 331, at Valencia Clear. Numbers tapered but remained relatively high in August with 278 TLBs counted, a majority, 151, at Valencia Clear. Figure Figure 4 shows the adult TLB abundance patterns which is a subset of the total TLB collected.

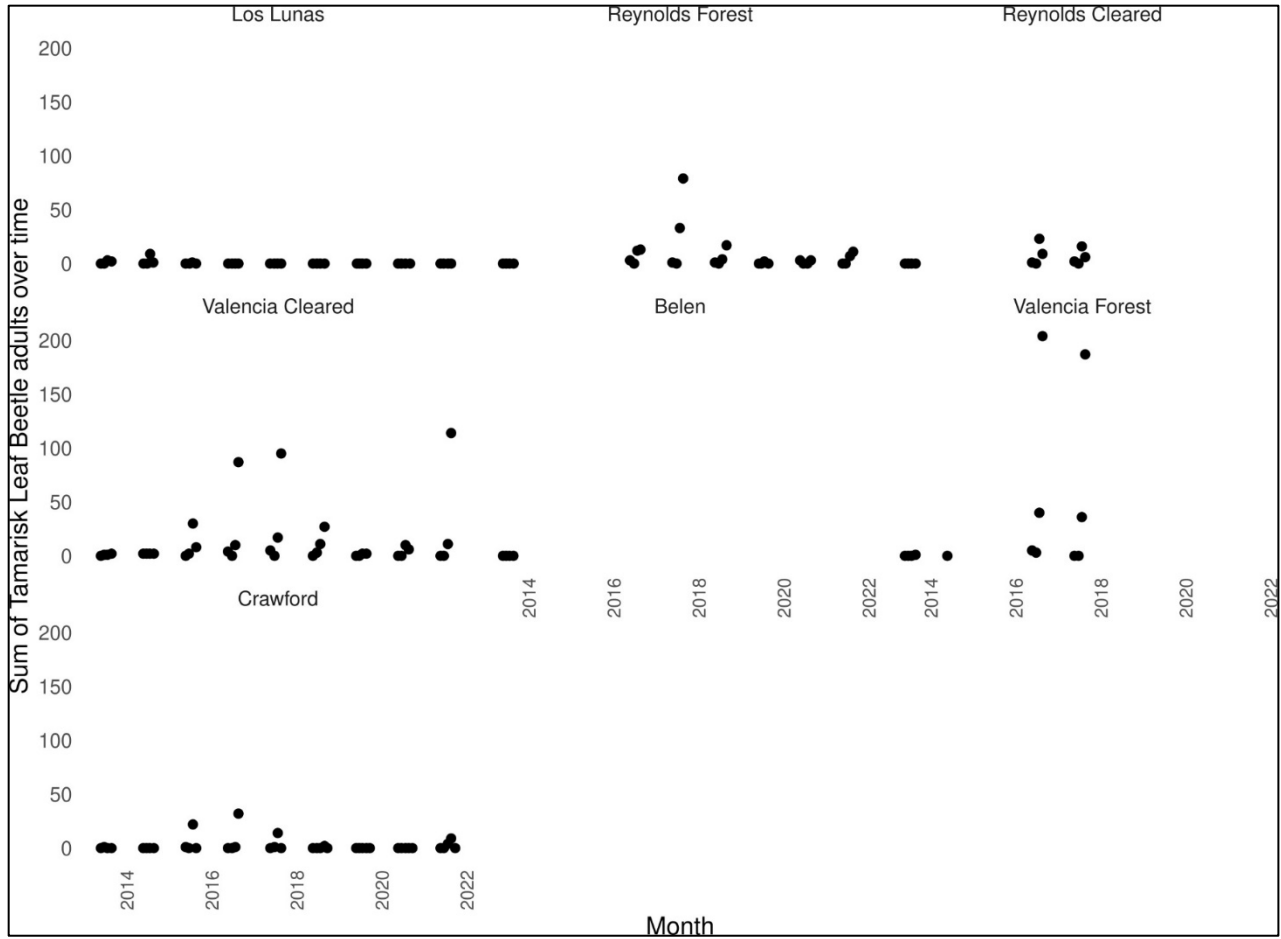


Figure 4. During the 2021 TLB season we saw far fewer adults than previous years. This follows a boom-bust pattern BEMP has observed in the TLB data over time.

TLB numbers were highly variable in 2021, total defoliation levels ranged from 0 to 100% at the sites in Valencia County (Figure 5). Defoliation due to the tamarisk leafhopper, which results in yellow foliage, ranged from 0 to 20%, while defoliation due to the TLB, which results in brown/dead foliage, was 0 to 100%. The high defoliation levels at some sites underline the importance of the full range of monitoring, as the beetle populations were likely missed on the specific sampling date, but the evidence of beetle damage was still observable.

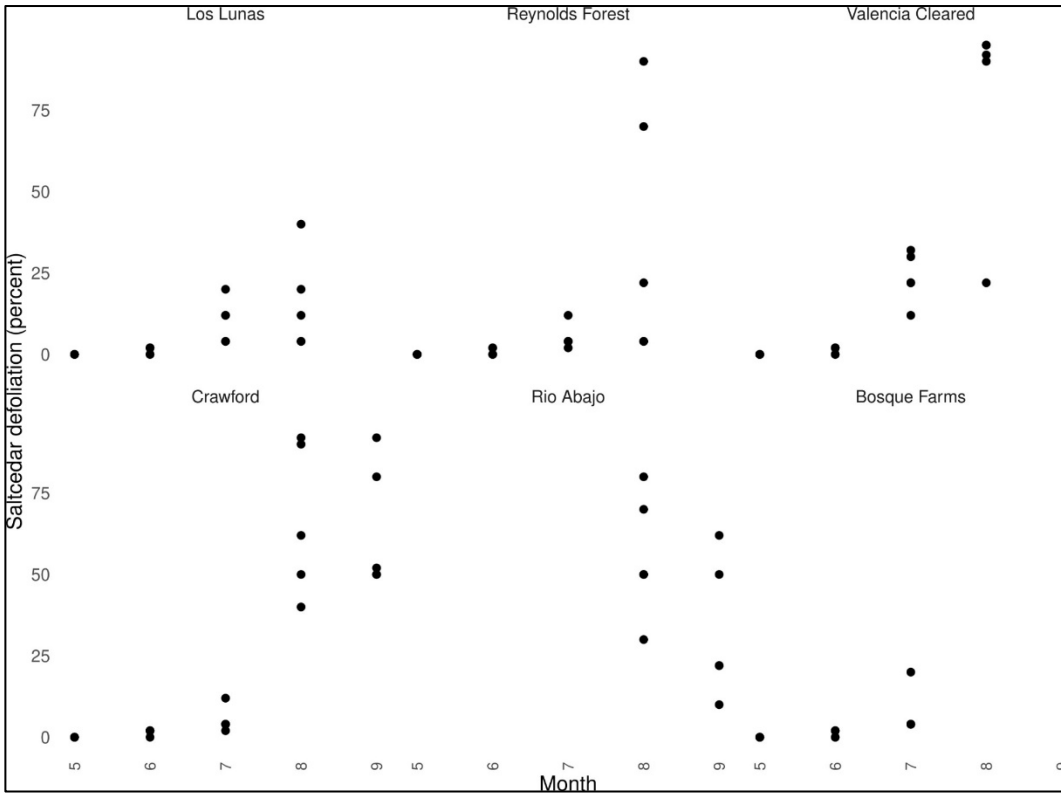


Figure 5. Saltcedar defoliation over the 2021 collection year. Defoliation of trees can lead to an increase in fine fuel load

ADDITIONAL WORK CARRIED OUT IN VALENCIA COUNTY

Milkweed geographic information system collaboration.

BEMP, in collaboration with the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area, digitized and georeferenced a historic milkweed survey. The original survey was conducted by Rick Madden in 2014. This survey looked at the distribution of horsetail milkweed (*Asclepias subverticillata*) at Whitfield. Horsetail milkweed is an important plant for bees. BEMP provided the georeferenced map (see Figure 6) and GIS layer to Whitfield.

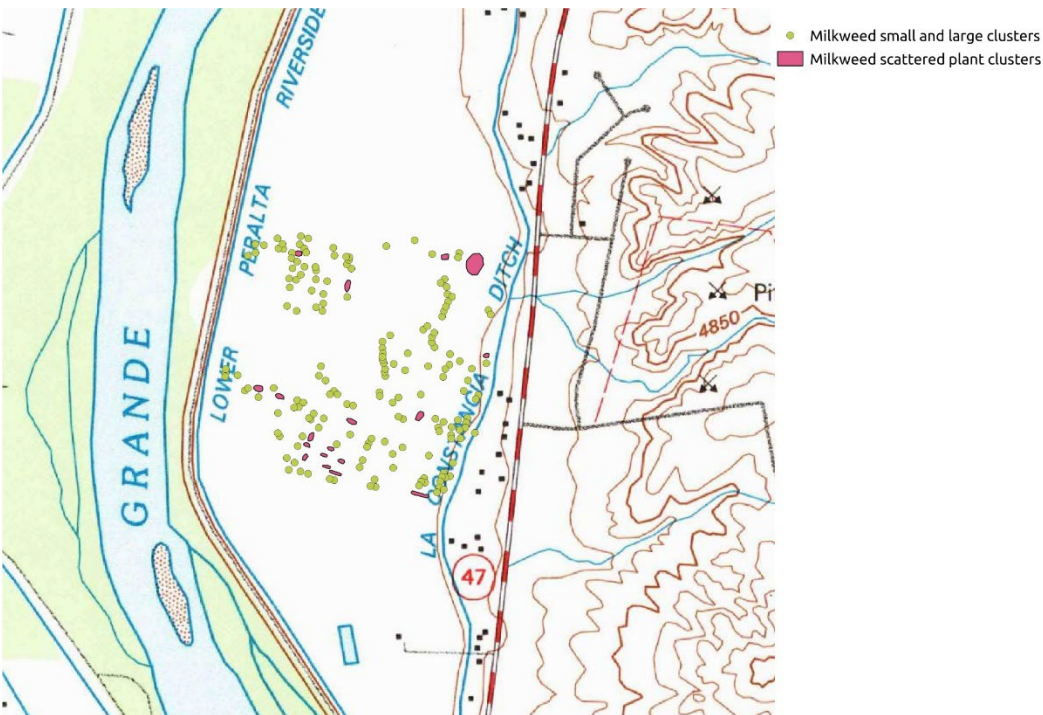


Figure 6. Digitized and georeference 2014 milkweed survey at Whitefield. This shows the pattern of the horsetail milkweed distribution on site.

Arroyos, acequias, ditches, and drains GIS work

BEMP's data manager reached out to the GIS Specialist at Valencia County to ask about assembling GIS layers that contain culturally relevant, historic and current acequias, ditches, and drains. BEMP maintains and shares a similar database for Bernalillo County. This project is in the initial stages of gathering old and current maps to then georeference these features into GIS layers. This is important because former and current water features often harbor areas that can be more easily rewilded or offer a chance to mix agriculture practices with re-wilding. Having a GIS layer like this also allows water quality data to be easily mapped to better understand how the quality of water impacts our Rio communities.

III. 3

3 SUMMARY

3.1 BEMP staff have continued to collect data that are requested and used by various agencies, while including volunteers and students. Valencia County BEMP sites typically have high native vegetation cover and restoration project success. Much of this is due to the high groundwater levels at these sites (Figure 1). Increases in woody litter are leading to higher fuel loads (Figure 2). BEMP staff were invited to tour Whitfield following the Big Hole Fire. Monitoring of conditions before and after fires, along with tracking management strategies, will be a key component for addressing post-burn sites in the future and at other bosque and conservation areas. BEMP has been developing and testing rapid assessment protocols to be able to monitor more sites, separate from our long-term sites, in order to support resource managers in addressing various concerns (e.g., post-burn management, islands and bars, impacts of drought and river drying). Flooding at sites in Valencia County in 2017 and 2019 resulted in a shift towards more native-dominated arthropods (e.g., carabids and riparian field crickets). Mature cottonwoods continue to decline, but younger cottonwoods at restoration sites are maturing nicely.

3.2 BEMP education and outreach have been greatly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, reducing in-person outreach and our ability to get students outside but increasing our online presence and resource accessibility. BEMP continues to support teachers and outdoor science education. BEMP continued to focus on making our efforts to be equitable and inclusive. BEMP continues to improve existing curriculum and increase science activities and data collection that have meaning beyond the classroom.

References

eBird. 2021. eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org>. (Accessed: Date [November 24th, 2021]).

APPENDIX-D: Valencia SWCD FY2023 Monthly Staff Reports

Please use this link to Access the monthly reports produced by District Staff for each Regular Board Meetings in Fiscal Year 2023: https://valenciaswcd-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/person/andrewhautzinger_valenciaswcd_org/ERyIV59Kk6pGjgegiGOfpUB9TIUd-7iUBX1jzeLwRfGvg?e=U3SGRB



March 16th, 2023 Regular Board Meeting VSWCD Staff Report for the Board: List of Contents

- Board Meeting Action Items (below, per agenda)
- 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: Lexi De Graaf, Fran Kernte, Nate Kaib and Brayden Galarza

March 16th, 2023 VSWCD Board Meeting Overview and *Expected Action Items:

- (in order of appearance on agenda)
- Verify quorum, conduct pledge of allegiance review meeting agenda with changes & approval
 - Past Board Meeting Minutes Approval: 2/13/2023 Regular Monthly Meeting minutes
 - VSWCD District Staff Monthly Report: Covering priority issues and highlights of the month, many captions included.
 - Update: City of Rio Communities Planning & Zoning Commission Meeting and OMA. Zone change report.
 - Partner Reports (NMDA and NRCS) and Correspondence, including:
 - NMDA SWCD Report (Katie Mechenbier—SWCD Liaison);
 - NRCS Monthly Report (Nick Goodman—District Conservationist);
 - MRGCD Monthly Report (Board chair Russo-Baca or Agronomist Gabriella Coughlin);
 - Friends of Whitfield Monthly Report (Linda Frazer—FWWCA President);
 - Correspondence (e.g., Invenery North Track Project (Bonnie).
 - Board Committee Assignments: Review
 - SunShare / TrigoSol Community Solar Garden in Rio Communities: Introductions (Troy McGee)
 - Whitfield Committee Updates: Stacy Unit clearance, RACA Thinning Project, April 6-7 Restore Workshop (co-hosting with SW Climate Hub)
 - Budget & Accounting: (led by Treasurer Draszkievicz and Business Manager McCready)
 - Month of Feb. 2023 expenditures review & approval;
 - Grant Updates (NRCS, FEMA/DOI, NHTF's Waterways 4 Wildlife, Lavender, APRA and Capital Outlay updates (\$585k for 2nd Building!);
 - AUDIT/AUP Updates (FY21 & FY22) [POSTPONED TO APRIL];
 - District Operational Needs List (and a request for an industrial wood chipper).
 - Adjournment (expected before 7 PM)

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

Master Naturalist Class 2023. This year we have 9 students in our Master Naturalist Class! As of this meeting, we have had 5 classes and one field trip, to San Lorenzo Canyon at Serrillita NWR. The students are doing great, and I am impressed with their knowledge already. Lifelong learning about nature is one of my passions, so it is a pleasure to work with adults who share that passion...

I am still finalizing advertising for the City Nature Challenge April 28-May 1. Master Naturalists and current students will be helping out with this "bioblitz" type of program...

Events:
Agricultural Appreciation Day was a wonderful success! We had 160 visitors at this 3/25/23 event and positive reports from attendees and participants appreciate community shout out.

Our Earth year: Friday Saturday
The native plant vendor and organic soil and trade African coffee and Tome Tofdo food activities and talks. Information tables for who have kid activities and crafts! We will be the visitor center will be by Wild Spirit W presentation by Laura. Paraiso Coffee R

Education Committee Meeting
The VSWCD Education Committee met at conservation camp. So far, we are considering and July 10-14. The camp focus will be wildlife. There was discussion of focusing if you have any questions about this report, community as the Environmental Educator.

VSWCD District Staff Report

District Director's Report to the VSWCD Board of Supervisors' May 18th, 2023 Regular Monthly Meeting

Monthly Overview & Highlights:
Luna May 6 river bridge, with early suspicions being connected somehow to the partial collapse of the Rio Grande (aqua)—but not extreme by most measures (see graphs). As we hope the bridge is fixed quickly, it does underscore the high flows over the last several weeks. MRGCD expects flow level could go above what they are now (Rio Grande @ Bosque Farms = 5,000 cfs on 5/15/23).

Discharge, cubic feet per second
Most recent instantaneous value: 5000 05-15-2023 16:45 MDT

USGS gage records, last five months to the right, and last five years below.

Monthly Visitation: 608 Visitors (4/17/23-thru-5/14/23) Since the last board meeting on 20APR2023 we've seen our 567 last visitors at the Whitfield Conservation Area Complex. As summer time beckons Whitfield Main has seen Education's biggest annual event (over 30 school partners within the district (see Whitfield to celebrate the Earth Mother, our many communities (see beyond) and enjoy scrumptious grub from Tomé Tofdo food truck and delicious fresh coffee from Paraiso Roasters.

Otherwise, the last month has seen many visitors coming by to enjoy the birds (Verdin), walk the trails, perhaps picking up some of our free mulch or taking advantage of our soil testing or bird migration.

Our Tuesday Talks series finished up, with an informative 5/9/23 talk on Community...

Thanks to our Master Naturalist partner Beth Coban

Through our Healthy Soils Grant, we had funding for a second soil testing kit. I reached out to Quivira Coalition for the supplies to create another kit. Instead of charging us for one, the kind lady named Amy gifted us our second soil testing kit. The only catch was one of us had to drive up to Santa Fe to get it. So, I offered on a day after class since I was already in Albuquerque, because Amy gifted us this kit, we still had funds to purchase another one. Now we have three soil sampling kits, and none of them cost the district a penny. Go team!

Of course, our daily business operations continue as regular. No missed payments of any kind. Payroll is all going great; I even got the garden managers added to payroll as approved at a previous board meeting. The only change to report in the daily operations is the hope for a second trash can or full-size dumpster. With the increase in visitors our regular size trash bin just is not enough for us anymore.

I almost forgot, we also had our YCC audit this month. This process entailed the auditors to come and look at grounds, as well as checking the employee files for completeness and having all appropriate documentation. I am happy to report we passed this audit with only a fraction of error. One of the forms we had to use was out of date but complete correctly, because of the completeness they did not give us a finding.

The last things I would like to share with you all are the personal things I have been up to. This school semester has come to an end, and I have passed all my classes with two B+ and an A-. I strive for A's, so the B+ made me a bit but I still passed and ultimately that is what counts most. I also had two separate honors rights this month. The first my induction to the National Society of Leadership and Success. I cried and so did my husband and parents.

The second honors right was at the Valencia Campus. On this night I was awarded a student spotlight award business professor. I was also awarded for making the dean's list and continuing my involvement with Phi Theta Honor Society. This too was a big night, but I chose to do this night on my own with no husband, children, or I hope you all have enjoyed your month as much as I have. Thank you for taking the time to read the you have any questions or comments, I would appreciate hearing them. Always,

Megan L. McCready, Business Manager, CFO

VSWCD District Staff Report to the Board for the monthly Regular Board Meeting

Black-necked Stilt in the riparian at VSWCA

Pearl Crescent Butterfly at VSWCA

Erick's Whin catching a moth at the Visitor Center

Education: Reunited with my pet (renew)

VSWCD District Staff Report to the Board for the monthly Regular Board Meeting

Whitfield Conservation Area Complex: RICHFIELD 2023
The water table has been high at Whitfield and several rains have helped and health area looking good at substrate, we hope for a productive resource results this summer.

Whitfield Monitoring
Chavez has been working with the projects the next are going to be done by Chavez and approved by NRCS. A lot of good monitoring will be happening this year.

AGRICULTURAL APPRECIATION DAY
The demo field is going well during the cover crop planting as well during the and VSWCD board with Chavez, Cuba, and Consuelo Zavala (see later staff report for specific details). Chavez has been talking partners and watching the growth of the vegetation in the field. Lots of native grasses and other herbaceous growth has occurred.

REGIONS GC Data System (VSI) monitoring software Chavez is working with the visit @ VSWCA in the coming weeks.

RACA (Rio Abasco Conservation Area)
RACA this cycle still waiting for groundwater monitoring but rank down taking over the monthly hope down (depth to groundwater) from Director monitoring.

Notes: More information will be provided at the next board meeting.

Chavez has started his conservation Ecology Class and is excited as it will help him in his current position with the District.

VSWCD District Staff Report to the Board for the monthly Regular Board Meeting

APPENDIX -E: Valencia SWCD and USDA-SW Climate Hub Co-hosts for: RESTORING WHITFIELD: A WORKSHOP TO DEVELOP A CLIMATE ADAPTED REVEGETATION DESIGN FOR THE WHITFIELD COMPLEX LANDS ALONG THE MIDDLE RIO GRANDE

Following the historic Big Hole Fire of 4-11-22, VSWCD and the USDA SW Climate Hub co-hosted this 1.5 day session of 38 subject-matter experts to discuss and devise strategies for resilient post-fire restoration that provides actionable climate and fire management science to the 105 acres that of VSWCD land that burned in the fire. See attached Workshop Summary (finalized 6/30/23):

<https://valenciaswcd.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/WHITFIELDOPS/Ec4fFLAb8qNElpIZVHuDvUYByHqUhilZH4zRRx-XQzzOhQ?e=wVIU4Q>

A. Workshop Objective

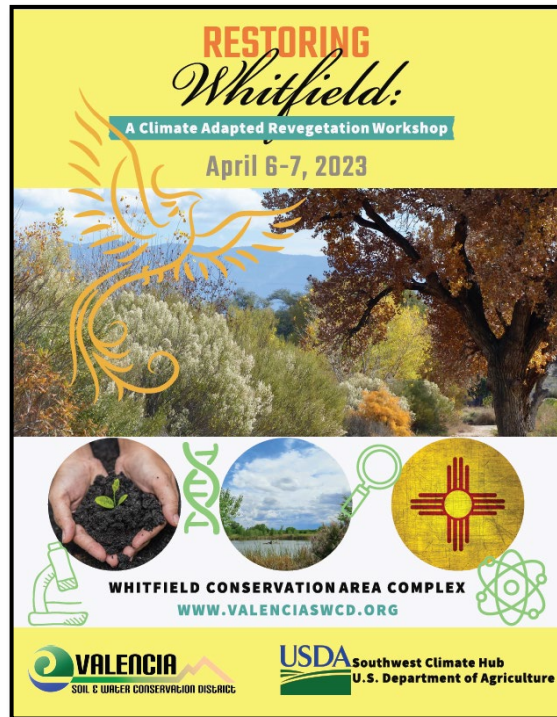
The central objective of *Restoring Whitfield: Workshop to Develop a Climate Adapted Revegetation Design for the Whitfield Complex lands along the Middle Rio Grande* (Restoring Whitfield) was to elicit broad response on the development of a climate and fire adapted revegetation response on Whitfield Complex lands following the Big Hole Fire of April 2022. Specifically, the workshop centered on gathering input from workshop participants on the following key post-fire considerations:

- 1) The revegetation design at Stacy and/or WWCA in response to fire impacts, including input on whether revegetation (or any other on-the-ground management response) should include in the first place.
- 2) A climate-adapted plant list that would constitute the backbone of the revegetation response.
- 3) Strategies for reducing impacts of future wildfire events (e.g., constructing fuel breaks, conducting thinning operations of dense understory vegetation).

B. Central Questions

Reflecting the above post-fire considerations, the following questions were put forward to workshop participants:

- What considerations are central to developing a long-term viable, climate adapted the revegetation design?
- What viable strategies could be incorporated into the revegetation design to reduce the severity of wildfires?
- What key information gaps are a priority to address to inform our response to both climate change and wildfire?



Group discussion over a meal: Strong opinions born of resource concern in a time of change.



Group Photo: Workshop Day 2

(4-7-23 drone Photo courtesy of Angela Ollison)