

SIERRA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OF JULY 1, 2024 TO JUNE 30, 2025



Repaired dirt tank; Beaverhead, NM

The Board of Supervisors of the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District continue to grow and expand their District programs and are excited that the community is recognizing the District as the leader in addressing the natural resource needs within the boundaries of the Sierra District.

The regular board meetings of the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Chandler Elkins Conference Room, Sierra Conservation Plaza, 2101 S Broadway in Truth or Consequences at 4:00 P.M.

Current Board of Supervisors include:

Willard Hall, Chairman, Palomas Community
Beau Marshall, Vice-Chairman, Engle Community
Lane Forrister, Member, T. or C. Community
Russel Woolf, Member, Engle Community
Randy Lack, Member, Winston Community
Randy Coil, Member, Monticello Community
Sharon Luna, Member, Winston Community

Personnel employed by the Sierra District are:

Jennie Bierner-Shepperd, *Business Manager, full-time*
Taylor Roberts, *Natural Resource Director, full-time*
High School/College Interns- *part-time, dependent on funding*

Sierra SWCD continued to see success in existing programs and grant funding this fiscal year. Funding was secured for Agriculture/Natural Resource Youth Education & Interns, as well as significant awards to Noxious Weeds/Restoration funding. These awards resulted in revenues consistent with last year at approximately \$1.5 million dollars. We are pleased to report that with the successful outcomes of all projects, results have opened the door for other opportunities to increase the District's capacity. Staff have secured several other funding contracts which are projected to take the budget to the current level or higher, increasing the impact of our conservation efforts. Partners include BLM, BOR, Forest Service, and NM State Forestry.

Additional technical assistance is provided to the Sierra District by staff of the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Truth or Consequences Field Office, which includes Kristi Wright, *District Conservationist*; Nicole Chavez, *Soil Conservationist*; Heather Abeita, *Rangeland Management Specialist*, Morgan Smith, Area CET. This year Sierra's relationship with the Bureau of Land Management grew as a Master Range Agreement was established. Through this agreement, Sierra SWCD has worked closely with Juan Gamon, *Supervisory Rangeland Management Specialist* and Jana Marquez, *Rangeland Management Specialist*; to complete many projects on BLM land in southern New Mexico.



Sierra SWCD Supervisors: Lane Forrister, Russell Woolf, Sharon Luna, Ronnie Woolf (former supervisor), Willard Hall, and Randy Lack.

PROGRAMS

Agricultural Cost Share Program

There was a total of 17 applicants for the FY25 District Agricultural Cost-Share program. The district awarded 11, with projects totaling \$ 127,500.00. The district paid out \$ 78,652.390 directly to producers. Projects included:

- 5 watering facilities (livestock drinkers and storage tanks)
- 4 solar pumping plants
- 25 acres of farmland land leveled
- 700 ft of irrigation pipeline
- 15,840 ft of multistrand barbed wire fence
- 0 acres of brush management (mesquite)



Alfalfa valves; Animas, NM



Livestock Watering Facility; Cuchillo, NM

Practices installed through NRCS EQIP include:

- Brush Management – 222.6 acres
- Fence – 20,044 ft
- Livestock Pipeline – 21,366 ft
- Watering Facilities – 1
- Pumping plant – 1
- Sprinkler System – 7.4 acres
- Cover Crops – 28.9 acres

Soil and Well Water Testing

The Sierra SWCD offers free soil testing and irrigation well water testing to the public. IAS Labs out of Phoenix, Arizona offers a Complete Soil Test with Soil Amendment Recommendations that tests for Nitrate, Phosphate, Potassium, Zinc, Iron, Manganese, Copper, Boron, Sulfur, Calcium, Magnesium, Sodium, Salinity, and pH. This test also includes Amendment Recommendations. The Irrigation Water Test includes: pH, Sodium, Calcium, Magnesium, Potassium, Carbonate, Bicarbonate, Chloride, Sulfate Sulfur, SAR, and recommendations for safe irrigation water. With this program, Sierra SWCD completed 5 soil tests and 1 irrigation well water test in FY24.

Residential Drip and Sprinkler Cost-Share Program

The Sierra SWCD continues their cost-share program to encourage homeowners to install a drip irrigation system on existing or newly installed windbreaks or an irrigation system for their yard. The conservation practice will be based on an average cost per foot of the irrigation system, with the District providing 60% of the average cost, not to exceed \$1,000. There were two applications for this program in FY24.

Household Water Savings Devices Cost-Share Program

This program encourages homeowners to utilize water devices in their homes that are low flow devices or utilize water more efficiently, such as low flow toilets or showerheads and even for water catchments systems. There was 1 application for a low flow (less than 1.6 gallons per use) toilet.

Conservation Outreach

Youth Sponsorship

One of the major objectives of the Sierra SWCD is conservation education. They conduct and participate in many activities that promote education in both ag natural resources. Since 1991, the Sierra District has assisted the local high school (Hot Springs High) FFA chapter and the local 4-H Chapter with education events and has also sponsored any qualifying land resource teams to the National Finals in Oklahoma City. This year the Sierra County 4H Pasture and Range Team and the Land Judging Team qualified to compete at the national level.





Hot Springs High School FFA & 4-H students.

SCAT CATS ENVIROTHON TEAM

Working with retired Hot Springs High School biology teacher, Mark Hedge, the Sierra District again sponsored a team of six students to the New Mexico Envirothon contest. The Hot Springs High School Scat Cats took first place, sweeping all categories of the competition! They will proudly represent New Mexico at the National Competition in July 2025!



Hot Spring Envirothon Team: "Scat Cats"

Conservation Education

The District worked closely with the Sierra County Cooperative Extension Office in sponsoring the annual Ag Day event at the Sierra County Sheriff's Posse Arena in Truth or Consequences. Ag Day was presented to all 2nd - 5th grade students in the local school system and had learning stations, showcasing a variety of agriculture related resources and products. This year Ag Day was held Friday April 25, 2025. Over 350 students and community members, including homeschool students, attended.



Students learning about beef production from local 4-H/FFA youth, and Rangeland Restoration using drone technology.

The District continued the popular Ag-in-the-Classroom education with students at the local elementary schools. Students from 1st to 5th grade participated in classroom activities ranging from incubating eggs to hatch chicks, to growing mushrooms and vermicomposting with worm bins. These important hands-on activities bring awareness and education about agriculture straight to the classroom learning experience.



Worm Compost Bins.



Egg to Chick program.



Mushroom grow/friendly fungus!



Soil profiles with cereal layers.

Brush Management Planning Activity: HSHS Students

This year the District received an internship grant from the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts. This allowed hiring of six high school interns, who assisted with pre-project work in preparation for an aerial creosote treatment with BLM funding. Students participated in pre-project vegetation monitoring, seed bank experiments, and mapping activities. They were also introduced to evolving drone technology and it's uses in natural resource management. This project will be on-going for FY 2026.



Students completing field work and setting up monitoring transects at the project site.





Students receiving hands-on experience during a drone demonstration courtesy of Lanford Excavation.

Community Awareness

With a mil levy in place, the Sierra SWCD is very cognizant of their accountability to the community and works very hard promoting natural resource awareness. The District set up a display booth at the local county fair and information is provided to all the cooperators of the Sierra District. The staff work to update the District Facebook page and local media to bring awareness about local programs offered through the office, and updates to important projects being implemented.

Copies of the Annual Report and Annual Plan of Work were distributed to conservation partners and local legislators. The Sierra SWCD also has their own web site (www.sierrasoil.org) to help keep local constituents up to date on District projects.

District staff make an on-going effort to openly communicate with the local government and other entities regarding the Sierra SWCD programs and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in general. Staff hosted a Conservation Summit, in which highlights of important work to eradicate salt cedar was presented. The presentation was well attended by agency representatives, partners, and community members.

Fiscal Administration

The Board and staff takes their fiscal responsibility very seriously and works diligently to ensure that financial procedures are followed closely. Budgets and financial reports are submitted on a timely basis to the Department of Finance & Administration. The Sierra SWCD adheres to the Office of the State Auditor Agreed upon Procedures Tier System for financial reporting. The existing mil levy rate authorization is submitted to the New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission and the local County Treasurers for review and compliance. Professional Services Contracts were completed for necessary technical and fiscal assistance. We are happy to report the District received a full audit this past year and there were no significant findings reported.

District Act Compliance

The District follows the Open Meetings Act and completes an Open Meetings Resolution annually. The Sierra SWCD participates in any pertinent County Planning and Zoning meetings, Sierra County Commission, T or C City Council, and Elephant Butte City Council meetings monthly. District Supervisors and staff attended trainings provided at the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) annual conference as well as other professional development classes. The Sierra District also attends the Farm Bill local work group with the T or C Field Office of the NRCS.

Current Issues

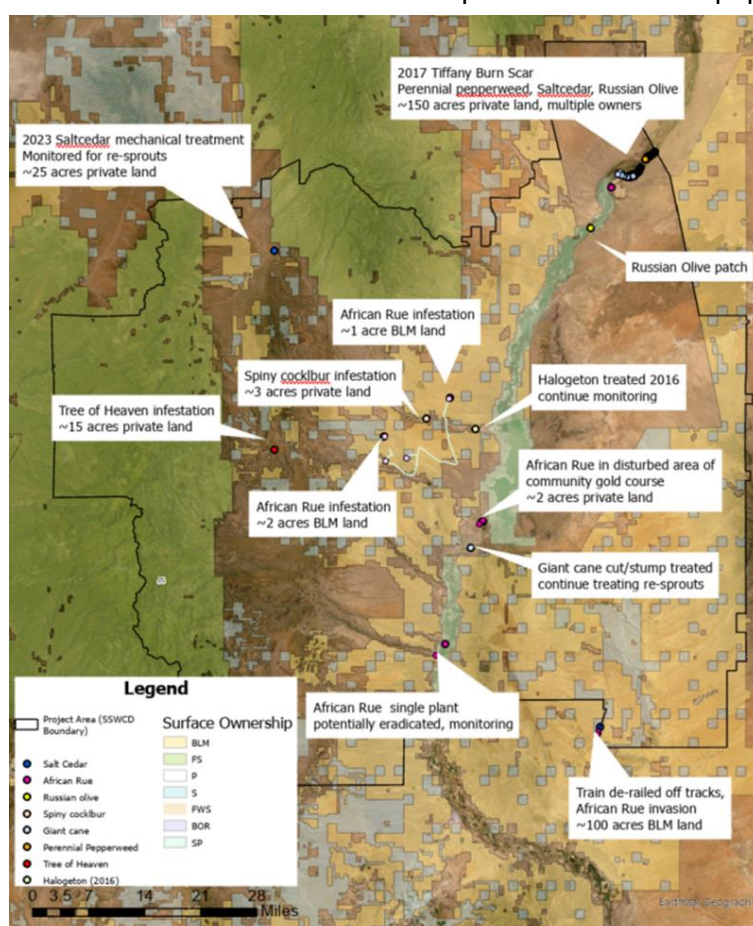
The Sierra SWCD, during regular meetings, annually reviews their Memorandums of Understanding with the USDI- Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces Field Office, the T or C Field Office of the NRCS, USDA-Forest Service, Gila National Forest and the USDA-Forest Service, Cibola National Forest.

Official comments are provided as necessary, and staff travel to Santa Fe during the Legislative Session to advocate for ag producers and policy affecting our local natural resources. Sierra SWCD continues as a cooperating agency with the Cibola National Forest to participate in revisions to their National Forest Plan and actively participates in planning and public meetings. The District has stayed up to date and active in the development of the Gila National Forest Plan and most recently, recovery plans for the 2022 Black Fire.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Sierra SWCD Noxious Weeds Program

The District continues to inventory, map and treat identified noxious plants in the Sierra District. Partnerships and grant funding through the Bureau of Land Management, NM State Forestry Energy Minerals and Natural Resource Department, and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture have provided needed herbicides and equipment to Sierra SWCD, as well as the ability to hire contractors for professional services to aid in the treatment of noxious weeds. Current plants on the inventory include: African Rue, Salt Cedar, Perennial Pepperweed, Tree of Heaven, Giant Cane and Russian Olive. The Sierra District has worked very hard with the community, providing technical and on-site assistance for education and removal of noxious weeds. Outreach efforts included on-site treatments throughout the district as well as advertisement of various “WANTED: Dead Not Alive” posters in the local paper.

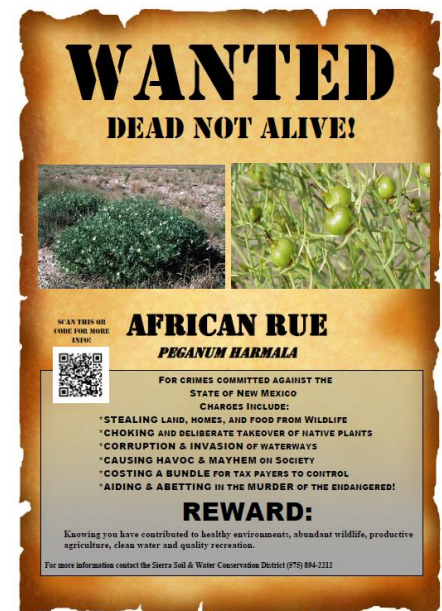


Map of noxious weeds in Sierra SWCD boundary.

In the ongoing battle against invasive species, treatment has been applied to over 480 acres of weeds. In the private sector, we have been working hard to assist in the control of several invasive species such as African Rue in the lowland areas and Bull Thistle in some of the mountainous grazing areas.

EMNRD: Invasive Plants Program

Sierra SWCD received \$30,000 in grant funding from NM State Energy Minerals and Natural Resource Department (EMNRD) through their Invasive Plants Program. With this funding, Sierra SWCD was able to expand their existing Noxious Weeds Program and hire a specialized contractor to treat noxious weed infestations across the district. "WANTED: Dead Not Alive" posters were published in the local newspaper and social media outlets describing the various noxious weeds that can be found in the area, and listed contact information for Sierra SWCD to be able to confirm and treat infestations. The Natural Resource Director collected applications, confirmed identification of noxious weed, and coordinated with contractor to spray at optimal time for successful herbicide application. With this funding, SSWCD has treated over 30 acres of private and state lands infested with noxious weeds, and monitored over 50 acres.



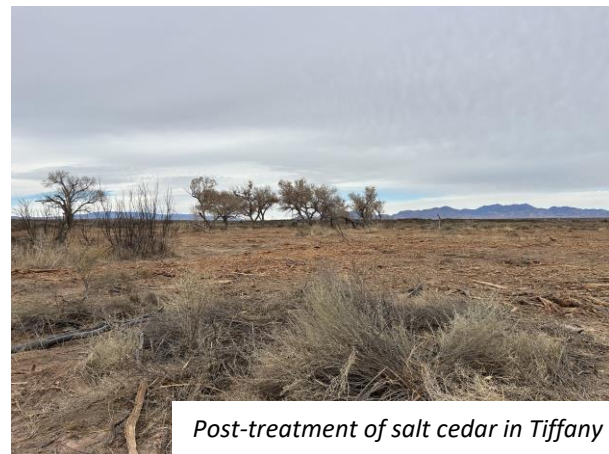
WANTED Poster published in local paper.

NMDA: Sierra SWCD Noxious Weeds Program

The Invasive Plants Program grant required a 1:1 non-federal match. NMDA gladly partnered with us to provide \$30,000 to match that provided by the IPP grant through EMNRD. Main weeds treated are African Rue, Tree of Heaven, and Salt Cedar. With this grant, SSWCD has treated over 75 acres of federal lands (BLM and BOR) and monitored over 100 acres.

Tiffany Fire Rehabilitation:

In June of 2017, the Tiffany Fire was ignited by a lightning strike near San Marical, NM. The fire burned 9,200 acres of primarily Tamarisk dominate vegetation. The Sierra SWCD continued to partner with 9 other entities to restore the burned area to the historic, productive state on projects started last year.



Post-treatment of salt cedar in Tiffany Basin.

Water Trust Board Funding: Tiffany Fire Rehabilitation Phase 2

New Mexico State Forestry Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department funneled \$750,000 of Water Trust Board funding through Sierra SWCD. Sierra SWCD was able to facilitate the partnership between EMNRD, WTB, and Bureau of Reclamation to treat over 650 acres of BOR land dominated by salt cedar within the Tiffany Fire burn scar. Extra care was taken to ensure that treatment



areas were not inhabited by sensitive wildlife species prior to mechanical treatment. All saltcedars within each polygon were either extracted and mulched, or cut down with chainsaws and treated with herbicide.

NM State Forestry EMNRD: Tiffany Fire Rehab Phase 2

Sierra SWCD received \$50,000 worth of funding from New Mexico State Forestry Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) to complete re-treatment of 50 acres of salt cedar on private lands within the Tiffany Fire Burn Scar. Sierra SWCD hired a private contractor to extract salt cedars with an excavator, then mulch and spread slash material.

NMDA Noxious Weeds: Tiffany Basin Retreatment/Aerial Drone Application

Sierra SWCD received grant funding from NMDA's Noxious Weeds Program to re-treat a project area that was previously mechanically treated in 2024. The 115 acre plot had many saltcedar resprouts that required a foliar herbicide application to fully eradicate. An very successful on-the-ground application was used to treat saltcedar. The remaining funds were used to re-treat a patch of pepperweed plants in a 50 acre using a drone to aerially apply the herbicide. Sierra SWCD hosted an education and outreach event where agency personell, landowners, and the general public were invited to to come out to see the drone application. There were over 30 people in attendance, representing multiple agencies.



Drone demonstration on Armendaris Ranch, NM

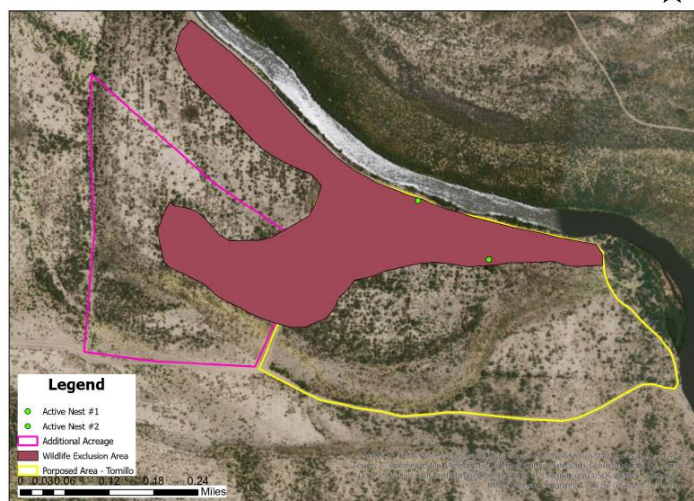
Water Telemetry

To increase awareness and understanding of new technologies, the Bureau of Land Management gave Sierra SWCD 11 water telemetry devices to distribute to BLM permittees in the Sierra district. These devices are able to communicate via satellite to the landowner's phone the water levels in a water storage tank. This new technology saves time and water by detecting leaks quickly and alerting the rancher in real-time. BLM plans to award more grant funding to distribute more of these water sensors.



Example of water sensor.

<https://am.gallagher.com/en-AU/Products/Water-Tank-Monitoring>



Map of project area, including wildlife exclusion area.

Caballo Reservoir Salt Cedar Treatment

Utilizing funds provided by Bureau of Land Management Noxious and Invasive Weeds grant, Sierra SWCD extracted and mulched 100 acres of salt cedar near the Caballo Reservoir. Given the close proximity to the river, Sierra SWCD had to work closely with Bureau of Reclamation to ensure no migratory nesting birds were affected by mechanical treatment. Wildlife buffer areas were established and avoided by all machines.

Conservation Summit

In August 2024, Sierra SWCD hosted a “Conservation Summit” with a “Call to Action: Salt Cedar Control” highlighting various salt cedar control methods and projects completed with Sierra SWCD’s many partners. The day started with presentations by Sierra SWCD’s Natural Resource Director, NMSU Range Improvement Task Force Wildlife Biologist, NM State Forestry EMRND, and a local contractor. In the afternoon, attendees went to a site visit to see an active project site where an excavator was extracting standing salt cedar and a large mulcher was mulching and spreading slash material.

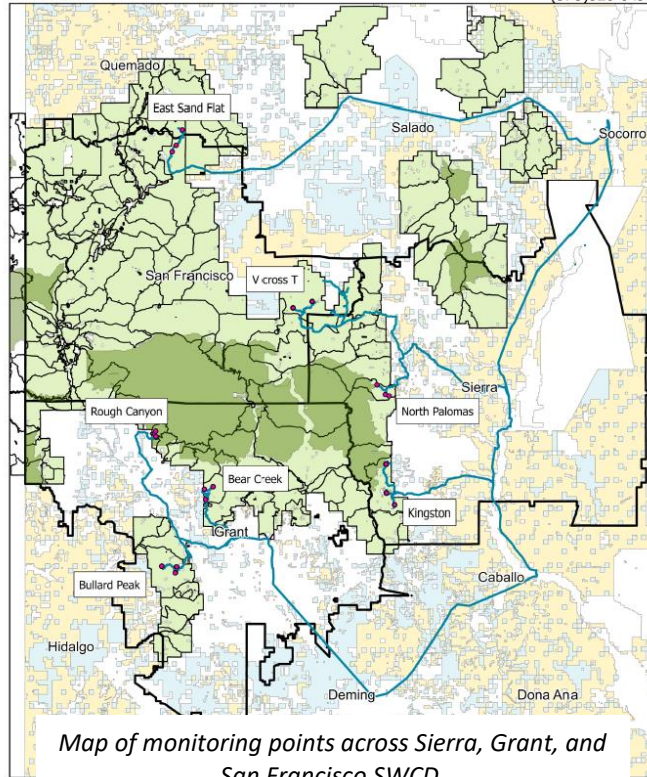


Conservation Summit, hosted at the Albert Lyons Event Center in T or C. Mulcher demonstration at Caballo Reservoir Lands.

be completed horseback. NMSU's RITF helped identify the most effective method of data collection called the Rapid Assessment Method. Monitoring data will be compiled and collected over the next 3 years to provide permittees with accurate vegetation data to keep in their own records.

**Sierra, Grant, San Francisco SWCD
RAM Monitoring
Fall 2023**

Data Collector: Taylor Sanchez
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THE SIERRA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IS VERY PROUD OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE PAST FISCAL YEAR AND HOPES TO CONTINUE MOVING FORWARD.