



# Taos Soil & Water Conservation District

## FYE24 Report of Accomplishments

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Taos SWCD forest monitoring intern Mikhail Parison working on the Cerro Negro collaborative project near Taos Canyon. The Soil Conservation District is committed to youth conservation and mentorship.

## Mission

To serve the citizens and landowners of Taos County by promoting the wise use of land, water and natural resources and to provide technical, financial and educational assistance in order to meet the conservation needs of local communities.

*Taos SWCD Board of Supervisors and Staff operate all conservation programs under the principles of transparency, integrity and accountability. Taos Soil & Water Conservation District respectfully submits this summary report for review and comment.*

## Program Summary

### Acequia Program

- Taos SWCD completed **13** individual acequia projects during the past year. These projects benefitted **55** total landowners and **134** acres.
- **7** acequia group projects were constructed benefitting **1,502** landowners and **3,380** irrigated acres.
- The Taos SWCD program is estimated to leverage an additional **\$1.1 million** from State sources to assist acequias in Taos County.
- Taos SWCD also provided engineering support to **2** acequia associations. This technical assistance benefitted **72** landowners and **100** acres in Taos County.
- Taos SWCD continues to support acequia capacity and governance through collaborations with Taos Valley Acequia Association, New Mexico Acequia Association, and New Mexico Acequia Commission.



Diversion dam benefiting the Acequia En Finado de Francisco Martinez and the Acequia Madre del Rio Grande.

## Water Quality Program

- Taos SWCD and NMSU Water Resources Research Institute continued monitoring acequia water quality in the Rio Hondo watershed. The governor and the state of NM have allocated **\$500,000** for this project which will be completed by June 2025.
- The district continued to work with the NM Office of the State Engineer to monitor ground water levels in the Sunshine Valley.
- Taos SWCD continues to cost-share well water analysis at **50%**.

## Land Use & Technical review

Taos Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was created to prioritize and provide guidance in addressing local conservation issues. The SWCD encourages public participation in conservation activities as set forth in the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law (1937). Each year an annual plan of work is approved and is intended to ensure federal, state and local government consistency with Taos SWCD priorities. Taos Soil & Water Conservation District advocates for responsible and sustainable land use practices and assists the local community, governmental entities, and developers with minimizing the impact of urban development on the surrounding environment.

## Collaborative Conservation Projects

- The Forest Mayordomo Project: The District, in partnership with the Cerro Negro Forest Council, The Carson National Forest and Taos County continued to hire youth conservation crews to monitor and collect data on **300** acres as part of the Collaborative Forest Restoration Project (CFRP).
- Taos SWCD cost-shares irrigation tarp and sandbags. These programs benefited **102** landowners and **4,690** acres within Taos County.



Taos SWCD continues to partner with the Town of Taos and the Northern Rio Grande Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) to assess and monitor the Las Cruces arroyo flood control dam.





### **Animal Damage Program**

- Taos SWCD has continued to partner with USDA Wildlife Services to fund a full-time wildlife specialist to assist landowners with animal damage issues.
- Verified financial losses from wildlife damage to trees, crops, livestock, pasture, rangelands, recreational facilities and irrigation ditches was approximately **\$2,000,000** in 2023-24.
- Over **2,000** acres of land are affected (Federal, State and deeded) by animal damage problems within Taos County.
- Taos SWCD provided cost-share assistance to **52** local cooperators which benefitted **1,135** private acres.

### **Forest Health Program**

- Taos SWCD completed **27** Forest Health Program projects assisting **27** landowners and benefiting **73** woodland acres.
- The district continued to participate in the Taos County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
- Taos SWCD partnered with Taos County to utilize **\$250,000** in Green Corridor funding to assist Rio Hondo watershed residents with forest thinning projects.

### **Education & Outreach**

- Taos SWCD District sponsored **5** teams (Taos High School and Peñasco High School) from Taos County to compete in both the Northern New Mexico Regional Envirothon and NM Envirothon competitions. This was the **17<sup>th</sup>** year that the district has assisted Taos County youth in participating in the world's largest environmental stewardship education program.

- Taos SWCD staff provided outreach education and materials to public schools in Taos, Questa and Peñasco. Many classrooms were serviced with **268** students benefiting from the program.
- The district promoted the 2024 NACD Soil Stewardship week by promoting a conservation poster contest. This year’s theme was “May the Forest Be with You Always”.
- Taos SWCD attended Soil & Water Conservation District Day at the NM Legislature (January 31, 2024).
- Taos SWCD staff attended and promoted the District at the Dia de las Acequias del Norte event in Questa NM on September 9, 2023
- As part of the District commitment to youth conservation, Taos SWCD staff served as judges at science fairs in February 2024.
- Taos SWCD hosted a Rangeland restoration tour at the Wolf Springs Ranch west of the Rio Grande Gorge in June of 2024.



Long time Taos SWCD board member Anthony Benson talks about grasses and rangeland restoration during the Wolf Springs Ranch tour

## Soil Health

- Taos SWCD implemented its fourth NMDA soil health grant in the fall of 2023. The grant consisted of winter cover cropping and serviced **68** Taos County landowners and benefited **220** acres.
- Taos SWCD staff conducted over **100** soil health site visits with Taos County cooperators.

- Taos SWCD staff hosted soil health educational events in October, December, February 2023 and May 2024.

### **Noxious & Invasive Species Program**

- The District continued to sponsor the Taos County CWMA as well as the 5<sup>th</sup> annual noxious and invasive species lecture and tour. 92 field participants were provided education and information by noxious weed experts (Dr. Richard Lee from the Bureau of Land Management and Dr. Leslie Beck from NM State University).

### **Stream Restoration**

- Taos SWCD was allocated **\$800,000** as part of the NM Environment Department's River Stewardship grant program. The grant will restore eroded stream banks and remove outdated gabion baskets in the community of Vadito in southern Taos County. In FYE24, the District worked with NMED and contract engineers to design and bid the project out. The projects are expected to begin during summer/fall 2024.

### **Range Improvements**

- Taos SWCD completed a water development project as part of the Rangeland Improvement program near Tres Piedras. The project benefits grazing permittees and approximately **10,500** allotment acres.

### **Local Funding**

- The Taos SWCD mill levy accounts for approximately **83%** of District operating revenues.
- FY 2022-23 budgeted expenditures total approximately **\$1.4** million dollars.

### **State Funding**

- Taos SWCD received approximately **\$238,893** from State sources.
- State funds account for approximately **15.5%** of the District operating revenues.



*Established by State of New Mexico enactment of the Federal Soil and Water Conservation District Law in 1941*

***“Taos SWCD - Assuring our future through conservation”***