



Upper Chama Soil & Water Conservation District
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2023-2024 Annual Report of Accomplishments



GOVERNING BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Norman Vigil – Chairman
Paul Cordova – Vice Chairman
Horace Leyba – Secretary/Treasurer
Agapito Candelaria – Supervisor
Tirzio Lopez – Supervisor

MISSION

The Upper Chama Soil and Water Conservation District promotes stewardship of natural resources by providing leadership, education, technical and cost-sharing assistance to landowners/users with the district.

STAFF

Becky Martinez, Business Manager
Gary Mora Program Manager

BOARD MEETINGS

Regular Meetings every 2nd Tuesday of the month at 5:45 pm
Location: District Office in Tierra Amarilla, NM

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Financial & Technical Assistance Programs

- **Noxious & Invasive Weeds:** The District continued to cost-share with the Northern New Mexico Cooperative Weed Management Area program (**CWMA**). The program offers technical, financial and educational assistance in addressing the invasive weed resource concern. Equipment and cost share assistance is offered to the landowners in order to address invasive weed management.
- The District's **CWMA** program summary indicates that our Program Manager supported **10** landowners in implementing herbicide treatments to manage various invasive species including thistle, chicory, Russian knapweed, willows and mustard, across an area of **160 acres**. The District offers rental sprayers for landowners. ERASWCD engaged a Contractor to provide spraying services, specifically tasked with treating a landowner's property located within our District as part of our cooperative agreement. The District entered into a **Cooperative Agreement** with Taos SWCD, Santa Fe/Pojoaque SWCD and ERASWCD to expand the management of noxious weeds.
- **Equipment/Implement Rental Program:** The District offers equipment to landowners for a duration of three days, accompanied by a maintenance fee and a refundable fee, which is returned upon the equipment's return. This year more than **20** landowners took advantage of this service. Rental equipment includes an aerator, auger, brush hog, chemical sprayer, bearing discs, no till seed drill, three v-ditch plows, harrow, fertilizer spreader, land leveler, rototiller, and two Brillion seeders (6' & 8').
- **Conservation Acequia Projects:** The District maintained its support via the established acequia program, offering up to \$1,000 for each project. Following program guidelines, every application undergoes a review process, and funding is allocated based on assessed needs and may be submitted by either individual landowners or acequia groups managed by a board, with a requirement to provide in-kind or monetary cost-sharing contributions. The funds provided will be used for materials or technical assistance. The District extended financial support to two landowners. Acequia associations are also encouraged to apply for funding through ISC construction program and NRCS.
- The District continued to cost-share with landowners for Livestock/Wildlife Water Development Improvements, Forestry Management Practices, Brush Management and Erosion Control through the funding obtained from the **SWCC** and **RCSJ RCPP**.
- The District has been a strong supporter of the healthy soils program on the Hibner Ranch west of Cebolla leading to a **Leopold Award nomination** this year. The District also has supported individual soil health application.

Fire Prevention

- **Building Resiliency in the Upper Rio Chama Watershed Program:** The program aims to enhance resiliency within the District by prioritizing the restoration and resiliency of forest ecosystems to effectively address drought and catastrophic fire risks, with a focus on adjacency as a strategic method. The prevailing high fuel loads and drought conditions have created significant health and safety concerns for local residents and those downstream. Implementing Hazardous Fuel Reduction strategies, will mitigate flooding and erosion during severe storms, decrease wildfire intensity, and resulting in a lowering the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Additionally, the program will undertake watershed rehabilitation to yield ecological benefits for livestock, wildlife, fisheries, acequias, and erosion control by adopting a comprehensive approach to watershed management. The initiative will enhance habitats for fish and wildlife, improve water availability for both wildlife and livestock, control erosion, and support the preservation of cultural acequias.
- **Hazardous Fuels on Non-Federal Lands (NFL) Grant Program:** The District partnered with State Forestry, for the NFL Grant Program for the Cebolla/Canjilon NFL Stage IV project. NFL aims to reduce the fire threat to communities by thinning forests along non-federal and federal lands. The District will continue to apply in the future.

Grants

- **SWCC Grant:** The District took a major step forward with the SWCC Appropriation Funding of \$750,000 initiated in June 2022, under the project name *Building Resiliency in the Upper Rio Chama Watershed*. The grant is effective from October 13, 2022 to June 30, 2025. A Contract Program Manager oversees the execution of the program and an Engineer was hired to design and construct irrigation systems. Six Contractors, to date, were hired to carry out projects related to forest thinning projects, rangeland/riparian projects, and acequia/irrigation projects. Forest thinning has been effectively implemented for seven landowners, covering an area of **273 acres**, with a total expenditure of **\$232,190** in funding. Rangeland/Riparian conducted tank cleaning and installed fencing for two landowners with a total expenditure of **\$8,000** in funding. Irrigation systems and acequia infrastructure were installed for three property owners, with a total expenditure of **\$18,312**.
- **NFL Grant:** The District served as the Fiscal Agent for the Hazardous Fuels on Non-Federal Lands (NFL) Grant Program, for the Cebolla/Canjilon NFL Stage IV project. The grant was effective from October 1 to December 31, 2023. A total of over **100 acres** were masticated by three landowners with a total expenditure of **\$123,416**.
- **Outdoor Equity Grant:** The District serves as the Fiscal Agent for this grant, which is effective from February 1 to November 1, 2024. The program staff will be conducting work related to the “Future Stewards” program, which aims to teach high school students hands-on land stewardship skills and traditions through bi-monthly classes. The program covers various topics including acequia management, soil health testing, and plant identification. It will connect students with mentors and seasoned farmers, ranchers, foresters, gardeners, and other community land-tenders in Rio Arriba County. The program will also provide opportunities for outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, camping, swimming, and fishing. The initial grant amount was **\$40,000**, of which **\$11,264** has been utilized to date.
- **NMACD Grant:** This grant aims to support the **Canjilon Creek River Stewardship Project** by enhancing the accessibility of conservation technical assistance and monitoring to improve the management of natural resources within the SWCD. The grant allocates funding for 1-2 student employees to undertake projects that involve monitoring riparian zones, assessing watershed conditions, evaluating stream conditions, and examining rangeland within the Upper Chama SWCD. The grant is in effect from May 12, 2023 to June 30, 2025. The initial grant amount is **\$50,000**.
- **Healthy Soil Program:** During the District’s Board Meeting on April 9th, 2024 the Rio Nutrias Farmstead formally requested that the District serve as the Fiscal Agent for their Healthy Soil Program. Following a presentation to the Board, the Board consented to fulfill this role. The Farmstead received approval and the program is set to commence on August 1, 2024, and conclude on May 24, 2025. The initial grant amount is **\$18,828.71**.
- **WTB Grant:** The Board of Directors of the New Mexico Finance Authority (NMFA) met on May 30, 2024, to approve the final terms, structure and conditions of Water Project Funding in the amount of \$750,000 to the UCSWCD for its Watershed Restoration and Management Project. This action is a result of the WTB recommendations approved on April 23, 2024. The funding is scheduled to commence in the Fall/Winter of 2024.

Partnerships

- The partnership with **ERASWCD** continues for the Northern New Mexico **CWMA** Program. The District holds the chairmanship, while ERASWCD serves as the fiscal agent. It is the District’s desire to keep this partnership active and positive in order to address the needs of all landowners with noxious weeds. Both Noxious Weed Coordinators work together to make the program public.
- The partnership with **New Mexico State Forestry** has offered financial and technical support to private landowners utilizing NFL funds. The District and NMSF are continuously looking for opportunities to improve and sustain our watersheds.
- The District maintains its collaboration with **NRCS** through an active Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The primary support offered by the District consists of technical and financial assistance through

NRCS programs, which is administered by their personnel. Mr. David Griego, District Conservationist, and staff report at our monthly regular board meetings.

- The partnership with ERASWCD and numerous other agencies, non-profit and organizations continue to provide funding for private landowners and public land leases to implement on ground conservation practices on forest, range, and irrigated lands in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado through the Rio Chama/San Juan **RCPP**.
- The District has engaged with the Carson National Forest in the formulation of **the 10-year Forest Revision Plan**, participating as a cooperating agency in the process.
- The District remains actively involved in the **2-3-2 USDA Collaborative Group**, which encompasses Colorado and New Mexico.
- The District paid dues to **NMACD** and **NACD** during the FY 22-23.
- The District maintains its collaboration with **Chama Peak Land Alliance (CPLA)**, working together to pinpoint key areas for forest management. The partnership has established a program aimed at supplying firewood to seniors and families in need across the District, resulting in the distribution of over 70 cords for FY 22-23.

Education and Outreach

- Our Program Manager, accompanied by two Board Supervisors, participated in all monthly **CWMA** meetings during the fiscal year. The District serves as the chair for CWMA, while ERASWCD acts as the fiscal agent.
- The District is involved in the **Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D)**, a program facilitated by local volunteer councils aimed at assisting individuals in the stewardship and protection of natural resources, thereby enhancing the local economy, environment, and quality of life.
- The District took part in the **Soil and Water Conservation Day** held at the **Legislature** in January.
- Throughout the fiscal year, two Board Supervisors participated in the monthly **NMACD** meetings, with Supervisor Horace Leyba fulfilling the role of Vice-Chairman.
- The District took part in the **NMACD 77th Annual Conference** held November 6-8.
- The District made a financial contribution to the **Envirothon**.
- The District sponsored the White Face Champion and Black Face Champion Buckles for sheep at the **2024 Rio Arriba County Fair Association**.

Personnel

- The District employs a **part-time Program Manager** tasked with overseeing the Noxious Weed Program, managing small acequia projects, providing assistance on the NFL grants, and coordinating equipment rentals.
- The District employs a **part-time Business Manager** tasked with overseeing and managing the day-to-day operations, as well as managing all business transactions and office operations.
- The District hired a **Contract Program Manager** to manage the Building Resiliency in the Upper Rio Chama Watershed Program (SWCC Grant).

District Funding

The District's operating revenue is primarily derived from Mill Levy funds, which constitute 88% of the total. Additionally, rental fees contribute 1% to the operating revenue, while SWCD Point System funds make up the remaining 11%. Furthermore, the District earns administrative fees for the programs in which it acts as a fiscal agent.