Otero Soil & Water Conservation District
Report of Accomplishments

Mission –
The Otero Soil and Water Conservation District promotes and facilitates effective stewardship of natural resources. District activities are directed primarily toward private lands.

Assisting Local Producers with Small Conservation Projects

Local Funding –
Otero County has provided the operational funds for our district since 1975. Each year Otero SWCD board members petition the Otero County Commissioners for this funding. This funding provides administrative support, office expenses to include a fiscal year agreed upon procedures, and base funding for the noxious weed control program. These funds are used as leverage for federal funds to increase the scale of the local projects such as the noxious weed program. This year we had additional funds set aside to offer cost share to four local producers needing assistance with small conservation projects. Otero County Subdivision regulations require Otero SWCD to review and comment on Terrain Management Plans of proposed subdivisions. This year we completed one subdivision review.

Following the floods in 1941, 1951, 1954 and 1955, Otero SWCD sponsored construction of the Upper Penasco Watershed Project, which included constructing three floodwater-retarding dams. These dams were completed in 1960 and the program life of these structures is complete. Part of the district’s responsibility as the sponsor is to carry out an annual maintenance check on each of the structures.

Watershed Information –
The Sacramento Mountains are the principal source of the water which sustains communities, agriculture and industry over a significant portion of the state, including the Lower Pecos River, and the Tularosa and Salt Basins. In addition to the communities which are located in the Mountains, cities such as Alamogordo, Roswell, Artesia and Carlsbad depend on water which originates as rain and snowfall in the mountains. Understanding how the Sacramento Mountains function as a hydro-geologic unit is critical to make informed judgments concerning how the functioning of these watersheds can be optimized.
NM Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources has competed the following studies to address this issue:

2012 Southern Sacramento Mountains Hydrogeology Study
2014 Northeastern Tularosa Basin Regional Hydrogeology Study
2014 Hydrologic Investigation at White Sands National Monument
2015 Sacramento Mountains Watershed Study
2016 Brackish Water Assessment in the Eastern Tularosa Basin

These reports are available at the NM Tech website [http://geoinfo.nmt.edu/resources/water/amp/publications/home.html](http://geoinfo.nmt.edu/resources/water/amp/publications/home.html) or the Otero SWCD website: [http://oteroswcd.org/index_files/Page754.html](http://oteroswcd.org/index_files/Page754.html).

**Education & Outreach -**

Interactive Mapping – We have expanded our website oteroswcd.org to include interactive mapping of our noxious weed program and to highlight our other projects with NM Tech and EMN RD. This tool allows the public to “see” where we work.

Otero SWCD owns a NM Mobile River Study Center (Rolling River Trailer). The **Rolling River** is a five by ten foot utility trailer with a six-inch deep trailer bed that is filled with sand (actually recycled plastic granules). A meandering river or two is scooped out running from one end to the other. Small figures of cows, horses, houses, a barn, corral and a parking lot with cars and farm equipment placed on top, form a simulated village. Trees, foliage and a few rocks line the riverbank. When water is turned on at the top of the watershed, it flows through the river and can be used to demonstrate a variety of water lessons.

Since 2009, we have partnered with the US Forest Service “Take It Outside NM!” (TIONM!) Program to fund opportunities to connect school children with the natural environment. Utilizing grants from the US Forest Service, National Park Foundation and the National Environmental Education foundation $21,000 has been spent to pay for busses to transport elementary school students to White Sands National Monument, local water festivals and various locations in the Lincoln National Forest. There is $6,000 remaining to continue this project.

**Forest Restoration -**

Otero SWCD has executed a Joint Powers Agreement with NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to complete individual work plans. Ten work plans have been completed treating over 1,297.69 acres and totaling $1,740,722.67. The following projects have been completed: Coleman Ranch, five Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Projects, Pine Springs Non-Federal Lands (NFL), Coleman Ranch Phase II, Timberon Block 2, High Rolls, and Karr Canyon NFL. The latest work plans approved include for another Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Project and the Two Goats and High Roll NFL. These funds provide landscape-scale areas to mitigate the spread of a catastrophic wildfire. In 2020 we entered into a Memorandum of Agreement to complete projects through the NM State Land Office. The first project completed was located on the Circle Cross Ranch for 200 acres.
South Central Mountain RC&D plays a pivotal role in implementing these work plans. A contract for services between Otero SWCD & South Central Mountain RC&D allows for the two agencies to share the workload and the administrative fees. The RC&D has the Rural Community Forester in place to perform the necessary field work. Otero SWCD (as an entity of state government) is the fiscal agent for all projects within Otero County.

**Watershed Health -**

The Sacramento Mountain Watersheds are suffering from different levels of landscape degradation. This type of erosion is weakening the ability of the soils to store water. When the water runs rapidly through the soils they lose their structure, causing tunnel erosion. Eventually the soil collapses and gullies form. We have completed two projects funded by the Soil and Water Conservation Commission in the Sacramento Mountains. Photos were taken to show the amount of debris and sediment being held by the structures. A step-by-step guide has been printed and is available on the oteroswcd.org website.

**Noxious Weeds –**

Otero SWCD continues to manage the noxious plant control program for the county. Technical assistance is provided, and herbicides are available to control noxious plants on agricultural lands. We survey the area identifying where noxious plants exist and either cost share herbicide or arrange spraying to control these plants. Over 100 private landowners have participated in the program. Since 2007 the Bureau of Land Management has awarded us $437,000 to treat noxious plants primarily on BLM administered lands in Otero County. Otero SWCD was contracted to treat 497 acres of African rue on county right-of-way’s in conjunction with treatments on Otero County properties and BLM lands. Working with NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department we have treated private lands in the Sacramento Mountains for noxious plants such as Musk thistle. Utilizing our memorandum of agreement with the NM State Land Office we were able to treat 60 acres of African rue at the Tuli Motocross.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species by Acres</th>
<th>Sprayed</th>
<th>Monitored</th>
<th>Inventoryed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Rue - Spring 2021</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>1697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Rue - Fall 2020</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musk Thistle</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Knapweed</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta Starthistle</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>2159</td>
<td>4199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remembering Bill Mershon**

"William (Bill) Mershon, a long-time member of the Board of Supervisors of the Otero Soil and Water Conservation District, passed away on October 23, 2020, at the age of 81, in the home in which he had been born and raised on the Upper Penasco River, in Otero County, NM.

Bill attended elementary school in Mayhill, NM, and was a proud alumnus of the New Mexico Military Institute and New Mexico State University. His degree from NMSU was in Electrical
Engineering, and at the time of his retirement, he was General Manager of the Otero County Electric Cooperative.

Community service was central to Bill's life. He was a former Otero County Commissioner and former President of the Cloudcroft School Board. At the time of his death, in addition to the Conservation District board, he was serving on the boards of the First American Bank in Alamogordo, the Gerald Champion Regional Medical Center in Alamogordo, the Sacramento Mountains Historical Society, and the Otero County Fair and Rodeo. He was chairman of the Fair and Rodeo and Conservation District boards. An active cowman, Bill also was member the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association, the Otero County Cattlemen's Association, and the Lincoln National Forest Allotment Owners group.

Bill will be remembered for his loyalty and devotion to the people of Otero County, and in particular, it's young people. He will be greatly missed."

Rick