

TAOS

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



FYE25 ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

What is a Soil & Water Conservation District?

Soil & Water Conservation Districts are local governmental subdivisions established under State law to carry out a program for the conservation, use and development of soil, water and related resources. Districts are resource management agencies, coordinating and implementing resource and environmental programs at the local level, in cooperation with federal and state agencies.

Conservation districts had their beginning in the 1930's when Congress, in response to national concerns over mounting erosion, floods and the sky-blackening dust storms that swept across the country, enacted the Soil Conservation Act of 1935. The act stated for the first time a national policy to provide a permanent program for the control and prevention of soil erosion, and directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish the Soil Conservation Service to implement this policy. The conservation district concept was developed to enlist the cooperation of landowners and occupiers in carrying out the programs authorized by the act.

To encourage local participation in the program, President Roosevelt sent all state governors - *A Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law*, with a recommendation for enactment of legislation along its lines. On March 3, 1937, Arkansas became the first state to adopt a law modeled on the Standard Act. On August 4, 1937, the first conservation district, the Brown Creek Soil Conservation District, was established in North Carolina. Interestingly enough, the Brown Creek District included the birthplace of Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service - commonly referred to as the father of soil conservation. By 1938, twenty-seven states had followed suit, and by the late 1940s, all fifty states had adopted similar legislation. District laws were adopted in the 1960s by Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and in the 1980s by the District of Columbia, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Soil & water conservation districts are primarily focused on long-term natural resource management and conservation rather than providing immediate emergency services. While they may play a role in the aftermath of a natural disaster, like a wildfire, by assisting with recovery and implementing preventative measures for future events, their core mission is broader. They conserve and develop natural resources in partnership with private landowners, provide for flood control, preserve wildlife, and protect the tax base.

History of Taos SWCD

It was on September 23, 1941 that the Certificate of Organization of the Eastern Taos Soil & Water Conservation District was issued by the Secretary of State, Mrs. Jessie M. Gonzales. The District is a governmental subdivision of the state of New Mexico organized under State law (Chapter 73, Article 20). Only lands east of the Rio Grande in Taos County were included in the District at that time. Petitions for inclusion into the District resulted in additions in October 1943 and again in November 1945. They enlarged the District to include all lands west of the Rio Grande in Taos County except 1840 acres in and around Ojo Caliente.

Among the first leaders organizing the District were Mardequeo Martinez of Taos; Max Fernandez of Penasco; J.F. Borrego of Vadito; Marcelino Martinez of Questa; and G.B. Gallegos of Cerro.

Although priorities change yearly, the focus remains primarily to take available technical, financial and educational resources and coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local landowner with regard to conservation of soil, water and natural resources.

Meet Taos SWCD



Pictured left to right: Greg Miller, Stephen Trujillo, Maureen Johnson, Mary Lane Leslie, George Long, Sam DesGeorges and Andy Martinez

Board

Maureen Johnson, Chairman (Elected, Position 2)
Stephen Trujillo, Vice-Chairman (Elected, Position 5)
George Long, Secretary/Treasurer (Elected, Position 3)
Sam DesGeorges, Supervisor (Elected, Position 1)
Andy Martinez, Supervisor (Elected, Position 4)
Greg Miller, Supervisor (Appointed, Position 6)
Mary Lane Leslie, Supervisor (Appointed, Position 7)

Staff

Peter Vigil, District Manager
Tanya Duncan, CPO, Assistant District Manager
Grace Powell, Forester/Forest Health Program Specialist
Manuel Gutierrez, Acequia Program Specialist
Tyler Zander, Soil Health Program and Noxious Weed Program Specialist
Elisa Hardy, Watershed Program Specialist
W. Bruce Trujillo, AutoCAD Design Technician
Veronice Cortez, Administrative Assistant
Mikhial Parison, Program Associate
Angeles Ribeiro, Program Associate

About Taos SWCD

Taos Soil and Water Conservation District is located in northern New Mexico in a high mesa valley next to the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range. The District encompasses all of Taos County and covers nearly one and one-half million acres divided as follows: privately owned, 700,658 acres: state 93,000 acres: national forest, 393,841 acres: public domain, 192,428 acres: and 62,073 acres of Tribal Lands. Of the privately owned lands about 42,000 acres are irrigated, with the balance of the acreage classified as grazing and timber lands. There are at present about 422 farm and ranch operating units in the District. Of the 310,284 acres currently in farm or ranch use, it is estimated that two-thirds of these units contain less than 20 acres. These small family farms have come into existence as a result of local customs. It has been customary for the head of the family to divide all of the land owned equally among the heirs. Such a custom, practiced for generations, has resulted in the present day narrow-strip land ownership pattern.

Taos SWCD is located at 220 Chamisa Road, Taos, NM. Office hours are 8:00am to 4:30pm, Monday through Friday. The District is closed for all federal holidays and occasionally for inclement weather. Landowners are welcome to stop by or call the office to discuss their natural resource conservation needs.

Vision

Taos SWCD's Vision is to be the conservation authority for Taos County by providing outstanding programs and services leading to the use of all natural resources in a well thought out, sustainable way.

Mission

Taos SWCD serves the citizens and landowners of Taos County by promoting the wise use of land, water and natural resources. In order to accomplish this mission, the District gathers available technical, financial and educational resources and focuses or coordinates them so that they meet the needs of the local populace. Taos SWCD is committed to a productive and sustainable environment for present and future generations.

Taos SWCD Board of Supervisors



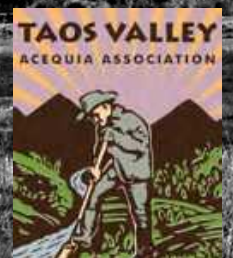
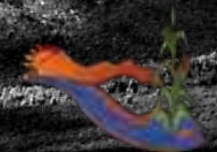
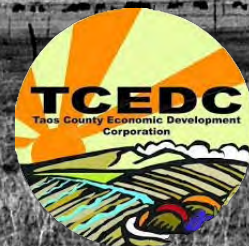
New Member!

Greg Miller brings over 43 years of experience from the Forest Service, specializing in watershed resource management and community-focused environmental initiatives in Taos County. Residing in Taos, New Mexico, he is dedicated to forest health and sustainability.



New Member!

Sam DesGeorges is a dedicated conservationist with a background in Wildlife Management and a former Field Manager for the Bureau of Land Management. He passionately advocates for environmental initiatives and sustainable land use in Taos County.



OUR PARTNERS!

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Service Agency

US Forest Service

Bureau of Land Management

STATE, LOCAL & NGOs

New Mexico Department of Agriculture

New Mexico State Forestry

Taos County

Town of Taos

Northern New Mexico RC&D

National Association of Conservation Districts

New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

Rocky Mountain Youth Corps

New Mexico Acequia Association

Taos Valley Acequia Association

Taos County Economic Development Corp

Northern NM Cooperative Weed Management Area

Taos County Cooperative Weed Management Area

Taos SWCD's Forest Health Program aims to improve ecosystem health and support resilient communities through strategic thinning and fuels reduction. In FYE25, the Program expanded its reach across Taos County, completing 30 projects, securing new funding, and deepening community engagement.

Project Implementation

- Taos SWCD completed eight individual forest health projects through our regular cost-share program, 13 projects with funding from Legacy Fund Landscape Scale Restoration funds and 15 more projects were funded via a collaboration with Taos County aimed at improving the watershed along the Rio Hondo. Total funds allocated to Forest Health projects in FYE25 was \$240,893.49.
- In addition to completed projects, 20 new projects have been approved with funding allocated, representing an additional \$181,950 in new projects.
- We have completed a diverse range of projects, including 9 in El Rito/Latir, 19 in the Rio Hondo area, 4 in Taos Canyon, 2 in Lama, and 2 in San Cristobal. Across Taos County, TSWCD completed over 87 acres of thinning project work.

Public Outreach & Education

The program conducted outreach at 8 public events, engaging residents and educating the community about the importance of forest health and wildfire resilience. We have also coordinated and filmed three Forest Health educational videos in collaboration with True Kids 1 Media (check them out on our YouTube Channel!).

Grant Funding & Development

- We have secured \$150,000 in funding from the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD), as well as a \$112,125 District Opportunity Grant from New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA).
- We have submitted additional applications for the Non-Federal Lands Grant (NFL) to support treatments on private lands within Taos County, and the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) to expand defensible space work and cross-boundary forest restoration.

Forest Health Program



The program remains focused on expanding capacity to meet growing demand, increasing community resilience to wildfire, and supporting forest restoration efforts throughout the county. With new funding opportunities under review and a strong pipeline of approved projects, 2025 promises to be another productive year for the Taos SWCD Forest Health Program

Taos County is HUGE! You can almost fit two states of Rhode Island into our beautiful County. Of all that land, less than 6% is irrigated farmland. That is our local food security and Taos SWCD prioritizes the conservation of these historic structures so that our communities will always have access to land suitable for local food production.

Taos SWCD's Acequia Program is for local acequia associations and irrigators who want to ensure that only high quality and efficient structures are installed, helping them to focus on restoring their land and maintaining productivity. Approved projects receive design packets individually produced based on each projects specific goals and circumstances. Many of our projects also receive cost-share funding to help with fabrication and installation!

Project Implementation

- **Acres Impacted:** A total of 964.3 acres were impacted by our FYE25 completed projects. 16 of which were individual acequia projects and four were acequia group projects.
- **Landowners Served:** The projects successfully engaged and served 298 landowners, fostering a strong partnership and commitment to sustainable land management.
- **Total Funded Amount:** The total funded amount for these projects was \$69,184.52.
- **Special projects:** This year, Taos SWCD worked with a local landowner to alter his design so that we could construct it using ADA specifications for improved accessibility.

Public Outreach & Education

Projects completed during this period have contributed significantly to improving irrigation, soil health, enhancing the producers' crops, along with supporting the local community. For example, the Los Lovato's project impacted a large area of 271 acres and benefited 125 landowners, demonstrating the potential for significant impact through large-scale initiatives.

Acequia Program



The completion of these projects shows the collaborative efforts of Taos SWCD and our cooperators. From the acres impacted, landowners served, the improvement in the land, we are pleased to continue these efforts to continue building this program's success and continue to expand our goals of this program.

Soil Health Program

Taos SWCD's Soil Health Program helps landowners improve their land through soil testing and cover cropping. Formerly fallow fields that only grew weeds (or nothing!) can be planted with a multispecies mix of cold-hardy and drought-resistant annual and perennial crops suitable to Taos County. This improves water infiltration, increases organic matter, and provides forage for livestock.

Project Implementation

Taos SWCD received a grant from NMDA's Healthy Soils Program for the fiscal year 2024/25 to help landowners plant cover crops to reduce soil erosion and improve soil health. Out of 105 applications, 87 participants successfully seeded over 275 acres in the fall with seeds inoculated with beneficial bacteria and fungi.

Taos SWCD analyzed 85 soil samples and provided rapid assessments of soil health—focusing on stability, compaction, and erosion potential before and after plant growth. Many participants, who had previously used annual cover crops, were able to use perennial seeds for the first time to restore degraded soils affected by weed growth.

Public Outreach & Education

In 2024, Taos SWCD, with NMSU Extension and Alianza de Agricultura, organized events to enhance soil health and land management. Workshops on soil health for orchards and bale grazing drew around 70 participants who learned about soil principles and cover crops.

In November, a seminar on the NMDA Healthy Soils Program Grant led to five successful applications, securing about \$80,000 in funding.

In May 2025, a regenerative ranching workshop featuring rancher Fernando Falomir attracted about 50 livestock managers from New Mexico and Colorado, shifting the program's focus to effective plant community management through livestock.



First-year program participants plant a diverse annual mix of cover crops intended to germinate quickly with sufficient moisture and then grow at rapid rates to outcompete other undesirable weedy species present in the soil seed bank. Breaking this weed cycle makes seeding slower-germinating perennials with higher nutrient and soil health demands more successful in the following year. This timeline imitates nature's succession model where plant communities evolve and become more complex over time.

Taos Soil and Water Conservation District advocates for an integrated pest management strategy with regard to noxious and invasive weed infestations. The District continues to research and fund alternative methods of weed management while continuing to provide vegetative expertise to private landowners.

Project Implementation

In FY24/25, 28 landowners sought assistance from Taos SWCD for invasive species management, focusing on the removal of Russian olives among other noxious species. Over the past year, approximately 35 site visits were conducted with support from the Rio Arriba CWMA, resulting in the treatment of 78 acres of invasive plants through the use of shared resources and funding.

To address the Russian Olive invasion on irrigated agricultural land, Taos SWCD and Claunch Pinto SWCD emphasized treatments for 68 acres on 16 properties, with plans scheduled for 2025. In June 2025, the Taos SWCD secured additional funding from NMDA for initial removal and follow-up treatments to address regrowth. They also received a grant from the New Mexico State Forestry to hire a GIS contractor to map and analyze the spread of Russian Olive using high-resolution aerial imagery.

Public Outreach & Education

In FYE25, Taos SWCD and the Taos County Cooperative Weed Management Area hosted two successful Noxious Weed Lecture & Tour events, with approx. 70 participants each. The first featured experts Dr. Leslie Beck from NMSU and Dr. Richard Lee from the BLM. Dr. Beck returned with Jim Wanstall for the second one to discuss the 14 most troublesome invasive species in Taos County. Each event featured morning classroom sessions followed by afternoon bus tours to see various noxious weed infestations.

Taos SWCD, in partnership with East Rio Arriba SWCD, Upper Chama SWCD and Santa Fe/Pojoaque SWCD, continues utilize interns who research characteristics and management practices of noxious weeds to develop a statewide noxious weed website. Grant funding for this project was generously provided by UNM-Taos, ERASWCD, NMDA, NM ENMRD/ State Forestry and NMACD. Check it out now at www.nmweeds.org.

Noxious and Invasive Species Program



Taos SWCD remains a key player involved with the Taos County CWMA and collaborates with NMDA, NMSU Extension, Carson National Forest, Taos County, the Town of Taos, Native Plant Society of NM (Taos Chapter), Taos Valley Acequia Association, Taos Land Trust, the NM Department of Transportation and other interested parties to address invasive species across jurisdictional lines in Taos County. Aside from hosting weed tours, Taos SWCD also conferred with Town and County officials about how to best address post-construction revegetation, as well as potentially funding a new Weed Coordinator position to better serve Taos County landowners.

Animal Damage Program

TSWCD helps landowners combat animal infestations like prairie dogs through our animal damage program. The district provides consultation services in cooperation with NMDA, as well as technological tools to help mitigate threats to our county's agriculture.

Project Implementation

In FY 24/25 102 people in Taos county benefited from pest materials and education provided at our office. This program helped protect 11,398.58 acres of land, saving the people of Taos county \$486,537 in damage to pasture, crops, fruit trees, gardens, municipal areas, and airports.

Public Outreach & Education

Our animal specialist conducted several site visits to help identify animals responsible for damage to crops, buildings, and private properties. In addition to this, we also engaged in outreach efforts for schools and private groups across the county. These outreach programs aimed to educate children about the natural environment and the local wildlife, fostering a greater understanding of humane and effective pest control.



Very little of the private land in Taos County is irrigated and suitable for local food production. Prairie dogs can be extremely difficult for local landowners to manage. They compete with livestock for forage, reduce plant production on grazing lands, and can damage irrigated pastures. The mounds they create can lead to damage to farm equipment, cattle, and horses.

Taos SWCD partners with USDA-APHIS to ensure that Animal Damage experts are available for free consultation most Thursdays (11:00 AM to 1:00 PM) during Spring and Summer months at the Taos SWCD office. This service is extended to local farmers, ranchers, homeowners and municipalities.

Stream Restoration Program

Since 2000, Taos SWCD has been a leader in promoting sustainable and innovative techniques for stream restoration. Our approach focuses on natural channel design, which not only fosters a healthier ecosystem but also preserves the river's natural beauty, enhances surrounding habitats, and proves to be more cost-effective than traditional methods. The cost of implementing high-quality stream restoration projects has skyrocketed in recent years, making it so that funding is primarily grant based.

Project Implementation

In FYE 25, Taos SWCD was the recipient of a New Mexico Environment Department River Stewardship Grant.

After required permitting and cultural resource studies, Taos SWCD worked with four landowners along the Rio Pueblo in Vadito, NM to improve temperature impairments by removing existing gabion basket structures and providing vegetative cover through cottonwood plantings. We also helped the landowners to reduce sediment loads by restoring eroded streambanks with post vanes and willow plantings. Finally, we installed boulder cross vanes to improve stream function and maintain optimal streambed grade.



Site 3 prior to restoration work



Notice:

Due to the rising cost of stream restoration projects, this program is on hold, pending further review and future projects will likely be grant based.

Range Improvement Program

Taos Soil & Water Conservation District's Range Improvement Program offers technical and cost-share assistance for natural resource projects that enhance non-irrigated rangeland within Taos County. It primarily supports landowners actively grazing livestock on parcels of at least 40 acres with an intact boundary fence.

Examples of restoration work supported are internal fencing for rotational grazing, native dryland pasture seeding, water catchment and overgrown brush management.

Occasionally, the program may assist with projects on public land if they benefit adjacent private land. Eligible landowners must wait a year after receiving cost-share assistance before applying again.

Project Implementation

In FYE25, the District completed three rangeland improvement projects that collectively enhanced 680 acres of agricultural rangeland.

These initiatives included the installation of 2,640 feet of internal cattle fencing, designed to better manage livestock movement and protect grazing areas.

Additionally, 40 acres of sagebrush were mowed to encourage the growth of desirable range grasses.

Taos Soil & Water Conservation District played a significant role in these efforts by ensuring that practices either meet or exceed current specifications. The District also helped with cost-sharing by contributing a total of \$13,500 to ensure the successful completion of these projects.



Applications for the Range Improvement Program are accepted year-round during regular business hours, with two batching periods: July 1 to December 31 (Batching Period 1) and January 1 to June 30 (Batching Period 2). After each period, completed applications are reviewed for completeness and eligibility over the following six months. Site visits by District staff are required for eligible applications, during which the applicant must be present. If contact attempts are unsuccessful, the application may be deemed non-responsive. The District will consider funding applications based on the reviews conducted after each batching period.

Group Acequia Projects

Seven group acequia projects were completed by TSWCD in coordination with the New Mexico Acequia Commission (NMAC) and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NM ISC). These projects have helped provide water to 1,474 individuals and a collective 3,462 acres of land.



Newly constructed diversion dam at Lovato's Ditch, the oldest recorded ditch in the Taos Valley.

We also assisted with four ACDIF applications impacting 253 individuals and 1,877 acres, and are currently designing another four projects which will help 639 people and provide water to another 4,449 acres of land.

In addition, there are four other projects currently under construction in Taos county in collaboration with the same entities. These projects directly affect 343 people and 2,310 acres of irrigated land.



Diversion dam at the Citizens Middle Ditch in Questa, N.M.

In the FY 24/25, our group acequia projects helped 2,709 landowners and supported 12,098 acres of irrigated land!