

## Otero Soil & Water Conservation District

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**2014-2015**

### 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.

#### **Local Funding –**

Otero County provides the operational funds for our district. Each year Otero SWCD board members petition the Otero County Commissioners for this funding. Since 2010 our budget has been reduced from \$72,419 to \$52,500. Of this \$30,000 was used for administrative support, \$7,500 for office expenses to include a fiscal year audit, and \$15,000 was allocated for the noxious plant control program. Otero County Subdivision regulations require Otero SWCD to review and comment on Terrain Management Plans of proposed subdivisions.

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 districts responsibility as the sponsor is to carry out an annual maintenance check on each of the structures. Emergency Action Plans for Graveyard Canyon Dam and Curtis Canyon Dam have been submitted to the Office of the State Engineer for approval.

#### **Legislative Funding –**

Since 2005 we have been awarded \$2,834,482.24 to complete the Hydrogeologic Study of the Sacramento Mountains through a contract with NM Tech. In 2012 they completed the Southern Sacramento Mountains Hydrogeology Study and in June of this year they completed the Northeastern Tularosa Basin Regional Hydrogeology Study. The mapping of geologic formations affecting specific sources of ground and surface water will provide a model for use in riparian enhancement projects and watersheds across New Mexico. This will also assist land managers to enhance biological diversity and water yield from the implementation of watershed restoration. Copies of these reports are available at the NM Tech website <http://geoinfo.nmt.edu/publications/openfile/home.cfml> or the Otero SWCD website: [http://oteroswcd.org/index\\_files/Page363.html](http://oteroswcd.org/index_files/Page363.html).

The Sacramento Mountains Watershed Study is complete. The final report has been printed. This study to assess the effects of the thinning of vegetation on the local hydrologic system was completed with the cooperation of Coleman Ranches. Two State Forestry Hazardous Fuels Reduction Projects have been completed. The \$515,702 allowed for 368.5 acres to be thinned within Coleman Ranch. We also received \$78,000 from the USFS Secure Rural Schools Title II program to monitor the thinning through June 2013.

## **Education & Outreach -**

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. This trailer was loaned out several times for various education events: water festivals, Earth Day, Kids Kows & More, and school presentations.

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. The current project was awarded in 2013 for \$6,250. Nine schools have utilized the funding to pay for busses to transport the students to White Sands National Monument, local water festivals and various locations in the Lincoln National Forest. The National Park Foundation has funded a new TIONM! Project - Every Kid in a Park. This \$9,000 project plans to provide fourth grade students from 11 school districts the ability to connect with outdoor recreation and environmental education experiences.

## **Farm Bill Implementation –**

NRCS – Alamogordo had another successful year getting conservation practices on the ground in Otero County. Producers in Otero County completed 48 conservation practices and the Field Office paid out over \$462,175 for the fiscal year in Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost share contract dollars. Conservation Stewardship Payments totaled \$1,398,796.

Brush Management in Acres:

Aerial – 5,930

Mechanical – 206.8

Pipelines in feet:

Livestock – 121,779

Irrigation – 1,688

Water:

Storage Tanks – 7 for 55,000 gallons

Troughs – 9 for 6,750 gallons

Solar Pumping Plants – 7

Irrigation Systems:

Sprinkler – 49 acres

Fence – 14,269 feet

## **Forest Restoration -**

Otero SWCD has executed a Joint Powers Agreement with NM Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department to complete individual work plans. Eight work plans have been approved totaling \$1,425,950.40. The following projects have been completed: Coleman Ranch, Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Project, Pine Springs Non-Federal Lands, Coleman Ranch Phase II, Timberon Block 2, and High Rolls Non-Federal Lands. The latest work plans are Karr Canyon and another Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Project. These funds provide landscape-scale areas to mitigate the spread of a catastrophic wildfire.

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.

## **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. The Bureau of Land Management recently awarded us \$22,000 to treat African rue on BLM administered lands in 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 been approved for funding from the Soil and Water Conservation Commission to complete a demonstration project in Wills Canyon. The producer is donating the labor to install 100 erosion control structures. Photos will be taken to show the amount of debris and sediment being held by the structures. A step-by-step guide will be printed and made available on the oteroswcd.org website.

In 2014, Working with South Central Mountain RC&D we submitted a request through the NM River Stewardship Program to reduce the sedimentation/siltation within the Upper Rio Peñasco Watershed by installing grade control structures, erosion control structures, head-cut stabilization structures, noxious weed management, and hardened water lanes. These activities are the first step in reversing the erosion process and initiating sediment deposition, water harvesting, nutrient retention, revegetation and bank stabilization. Another funding opportunity with the NM Environment Department to prepare a Watershed Based Plan to address the turbidity (a measure of water clarity - how much the material suspended in water decreases the passage of light through the water) problem on the Rio Penasco and Agua Chiquita is in the application process. A stretch of the Rio Penasco has been on the EPA 303(d) list since 2002 for turbidity impairment. Common sources of turbidity include soil erosion and eroding stream banks.

**WHAT'S NEW** - Earlier this year, the Otero Soil and Water Conservation District and Otero County Commissioners were contacted by several landowners regarding severe flooding from the western escarpment of the Sacramento Mountains. Residents in Orogrande, Boles Acres, Alamosa, La Luz, Tularosa and Three Rivers have experienced varying degrees of severe flooding through their properties. This flooding has created a serious threat to life and property. Funding is required for a comprehensive engineering study that assesses all the drainages across the different land statuses. A consensus among the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and State Land Office on how to address this issue and a commitment for a joint plan of action will follow.