

Otero Soil & Water Conservation District

2018-2019 Report of Accomplishments



EcoServants Training with Kert Young

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 has provided the operational funds for our district since 1975. Each year Otero SWCD board members petition the Otero County Commissioners for this funding. Since 2012 our budget has been reduced from \$75,953 to \$47,755. 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. 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 districts responsibility as the sponsor is to carry out an annual maintenance check on each of the structures. Emergency Action Plans (EAP) for Graveyard Canyon Dam and Curtis Canyon Dam have been completed and submitted to the Office of the State Engineer. The NM Department of Agriculture hired a contractor to prepare inundation mapping for our third dam (Bear Canyon) along with the Emergency Action Plan. These documents have been completed and approved by the Office of the State Engineer.

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 completed 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> or the Otero SWCD website: 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 EMNRD. 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 1,160 acres and totaling \$1,433,700.79. The following projects have been completed: Coleman Ranch, four Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Projects, Pine Springs Non-Federal Lands, Coleman Ranch Phase II, Timberon Block 2, High Rolls, and Karr Canyon Non-Federal Lands. The latest work plan being developed is for another Otero County Wildland Urban Interface Project. These funds provide landscape-scale areas to mitigate the spread of a catastrophic wildfire. **Due to the US District Court injunction two projects in Otero County have been halted. Should an agreement not be reached soon, the projects will not resume until after Mexican Spotted Owl breeding season (March 1 – August 31).**

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 \$277,000 to treat noxious plants primarily on BLM administered lands in Otero County. On April 8, 2019 Otero County Commissioners declared a state of emergency regarding the threat of African rue to property in Otero County. They contracted with Otero SWCD to treat 697 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 1,918 acres of private lands in the Sacramento Mountains for noxious plants such as Musk thistle. In April we utilized funding from the Soil and Water Conservation Commission to improve the mapping of noxious weeds in Otero County. EcoServants were trained with the assistance of NMSU Cooperative Extension Service to recognize and gps locations of noxious weeds in the project area for the Westside Sacramento Collaborative Forest Restoration Program Project. On October 10, 2019 Otero County Commissioners approved additional funding to do a fall follow-up treatment of African Rue.

Farm Bill Implementation –

NRCS – Alamogordo had another successful year getting conservation practices on the ground in Otero County. Producers in Otero County completed 67 conservation practices and the Field Office paid out over \$868,747 for the fiscal year in Environmental Quality Incentives Program cost share contract dollars. Conservation Stewardship Payments totaled \$1,928,079.51.

Brush Management in acres:

Aerial – 3,320, Chemical IPT – 31.5, Mechanical – 1,371.3

Fence in feet – 49,205.7

Irrigation System – 14.8 acres

Micro-Irrigation Systems - 3 for 33.9 acres

Pipelines in feet:

Livestock – 121,940

Water:

Storage Tanks – 9 for 79,000 gallons, Troughs – 6 for 18,000 gallons

Solar Pumping Plants – 5, Well - 1