

COMMISSIONERS
Steve Glass, Region I
Ross Garcia, Jr., Region II
Vacant, Region III
Boe Lopez, Region IV
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Cyle Sharp, At-Large

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New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) Meeting
Via Teleconference
January 15, 2026
9:00 am
Minutes

All Items for Discussion and Possible Action

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: All commissioners were present-see roll call.
2. Approval of Agenda: Commissioner Glass moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.
3. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (10/20/2025): Patricia Depner (NMDA) asked the Commission for a modification of the previous meeting minutes, correcting the date from October 28, 2025 to October 20, 2025. Commissioner Glass moved to approve the previous meeting minutes as modified. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

New Business

4. Public Comment (*2 minutes per person*): Teresa Smith de Cherif (Valencia SWCD chair): Introduced Blaine Sanchez for supervisor position 6 on the Valencia SWCD board. Mr. Sanchez comes highly recommended. Commissioner Glass asked if there were additional public comments, Ms. Depner verified that no additional public comments were submitted.
5. SWCD Supervisor Appointments:
 - Valencia: Blane M. Sanchez (6)Commissioner Sharp moved to approve the SWCD Supervisor Appointment. Commissioner Lopez seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

6. Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Mil Levy Referendum Resolution:

- Dona Ana \$0.25

Jennifer Kleitz (Dona Ana SWCD) presented the mill levy referendum resolution.

Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the SWCD mill levy referendum resolution.

Commissioner Sharp seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

Old Business

NMDA \$9 Million 3-Year Plan for SWCDs: Capacity-Building Funding Opportunity Update: Max Henkels (NMDA) provided an update on FY26 Point System and capacity-building funding. The initial Point System distribution of just under \$1.5 million has been completed. For capacity building, 27 districts have approved plans, representing approximately 60 percent of districts and \$4.2 million (56 percent) of the \$7.5 million allocation. Capacity funds are being used primarily for staffing and retention, employee benefits, interns, audits, training, conference participation, procurement, ICIP support, education and outreach, and equipment, technology, and software needs. The submission deadline is July 15, 2026 after which remaining funds will be evaluated for redistribution or a second funding round. Overall implementation is progressing steadily, with ongoing technical assistance provided to districts. Commissioner Sharp expressed appreciation for the report and noted the success in obligating funding. He emphasized a particular focus on audits, citing experience with other quasi-local government entities where funding was delayed due to audits not being current. They inquired whether NMDA requires districts to be up to date on their audits before allocating funds. Mr. Henkels noted that audit requirements vary by funding source. Under the Public Fund Accountability Act, compliance is required for capital outlay and special appropriations, with funds only allocated if districts are progressing toward audit compliance. For the \$160,000 capacity plan, the agency acts as a fiscal agent, reimbursing only for approved expenses, so audits are not required. Point system distributions are normal appropriations and not subject to

the Act, while other grants require detailed invoicing to ensure fiscal oversight.

Commissioner Sharp also commended the Department of Agriculture for implementing these procedures and incorporating commissioner input, likely to be well-received by the legislature. Mr. Henkels reported support is available through both the Auditor's Office and NMDA funding to assist districts in achieving compliance. Overall, substantial progress has been made toward audit compliance this year.

8. Land of Enchantment Legacy Funding Update: Mr. Henkels provided an update on FY26 and FY27 grant funding. Due to higher-than-expected Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund revenues, a competitive FY26 fall noxious weed grant cycle was conducted, awarding approximately \$580,000 to 11 projects, with most awards going to Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Demand exceeded available funds. For FY27, projected funding is approximately \$4.3 million. Spring grant offers will include the District Opportunity Grant and the Noxious Weed Management Grant. The capacity-building category in the District Opportunity Grant will be discontinued for SWCDs but retained for watershed districts.
9. Healthy Soil Program Update: Katie Crayton (NMDA) presented a power point update on the Healthy Soil Program and NMDA's role in administering the program under the Healthy Soil Act with Commission guidance-see attached PowerPoint. The FY27 application cycle opens January 16, 2026 and closes March 20, 2026 at noon, with online-only submissions. Webinars will be held January 27, 2026. Individual applicants must complete NRCS conservation planning by February 20, 2026. Commissioners were invited to support outreach, participate as reviewers, and provide recommendations for program improvement.

Reports/Verbal Highlights (5 min. each; written reports required 72 hours in advance)

10. Commissioner Glass (Region I): Coronado and Ciudad are collaborating to recruit Rio Grande-affiliated SWCDs for the USGS Upper Rio Grande Basin study; progress is underway despite minor delays. Valencia SWCD was recognized again as the best outdoor nature park and recreation area for the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

Ongoing mil levy and assessor issues were highlighted in both Valencia and Ciudad SWCDs, emphasizing the importance for all SWCDs to maintain regular communication with their assessor and treasurer to prevent errors. Commissioner Garcia (Region II): no new updates to be presented at this time. Commissioner Lopez (Region IV): No comment was made. Chair Vigil (Region VI): no new updates to be presented at this time. Commissioner Sharp (At Large): No comment was made.

11. Governor's Office: None
12. New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA): Mr. Henkels reported the Mesa SWCD mill levy referendum has passed since the last meeting. Also, the Archaeology Field Training program, administered by the State Office of Archaeological Studies, has delivered three of four sessions, with five staff members from four SWCDs participating in the upcoming session. Participants will gain hands-on experience through subsequent projects. The program is seeking continued funding for a second year and beyond, with appropriations currently included in both the LFC and executive budgets. Commissioner Glass requested an update from Debbie Hughes (NMACD) about the Archaeology Field Training program status in the current Legislative as a bill. Ms. Hughes reported there will not be a bill, the funding is being put directly into House Bill 2.
13. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Xavier Montoya (NRCS) reported conservation programs staffing challenges remain, with 52 positions lost last year and an additional five expected to depart soon, though efforts to fill vacancies will continue. The January 15, 2026 sign-up deadline for all programs has passed, including the new nationwide regenerative agriculture pilot, which allocates 25% of EQIP and CSP funds for whole-farm or whole-ranch planning and requires soil health testing. NRCS acknowledged the outstanding support of local SWCDs, particularly in sponsoring 11 active Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) sites, with progress expected on closing four sites in the coming months. Commissioner Glass emphasized his encouragement to the strong partnership between NRCS and the conservation districts, which reflects our founding purpose and is clearly demonstrated through the EWP program.
14. Forest Service: none

15. Farm Service Agency: none
16. New Mexico Environment Department (NMED): none
17. Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC): Chair Vigil stated he received numerous comments regarding the Water Quality Control Commission and note that significant activity is ongoing. He didn't receive a packet for the December meeting for reasons unknown, and the January meeting has since been canceled. He will continue to remain engaged with the Commission.
18. New Mexico Mining Commission: none
19. National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD): none
20. New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD): Jennifer Hopper reported NMACD is currently focused on strengthening training for district supervisors and staff through NRCS and PACT grant funding. Over the past year, feedback gathered from 46 district meetings identified three primary training needs: conservation planning, supervisor roles and responsibilities, and district authorities. In response, they developed a governance and compliance training that helps supervisors understand key state statutes, compliance requirements, and potential risks. The goal is to ensure supervisors are informed, confident in their authority, and equipped to prevent issues that could impact individual districts or the system as a whole. This training is supported by comprehensive reference materials and is part of a broader, collaborative effort with NMDA, NRCS, and the Soil and Water Conservation Commission to establish ongoing, standardized training for districts. (see PowerPoint slides in the package). Commissioner Garcia appreciated Ms. Hopper's commitment to visiting all the districts and commended the strong training system being developed. Ms. Hughes reported a bill has been drafted to amend the Watershed District Act to correct a technical issue from last year. The revised language clarifies that when a watershed district is a subdistrict, the conservation district will retain authority to levy mill taxes while continuing to appoint the watershed board. This session also includes key funding priorities, including approximately \$5 million proposed for the Water Conservation Program, continued support for the matching fund to leverage federal dollars, investments in forest and watershed health, and

an estimated \$40 million for the River Storage Program. Additional items include a cleanup amendment to the Legacy Fund and consideration of a composting bill.

21. New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts (NMCCD): none
22. NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES): none
23. New Mexico Conservation District Employees (NMCDE): none
24. Next meeting: TBD
25. Meeting adjourned at 10:23 am.