

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

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## **New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) Meeting**

**October 20, 2025**

**1:30 pm**

**Sheraton Albuquerque Uptown**

**2600 Louisiana Blvd NE**

**Albuquerque, NM 87110**

**Minutes**

All Items for Discussion and Possible Action

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: Commissioner Lopez was absent; all other commissioners were present-see roll call.
2. Approval of Agenda: Commissioner Glass moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Sharp seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.
3. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (06/19/2025): Commissioner Sharp moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

### **New Business**

4. Public Comment (*2 minutes per person*): A member of the public asked when will the vacant positions on the Commission be filled, as they have not had representation of Region 3 for quite some time. Some supervisors have submitted applications for the Region 3 and 5 without response. Chair Vigil agreed but no news regarding these vacant positions has been announced.
5. San Francisco SWCD: 5-member board request: Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the 5-member board request for San Francisco SWCD. Commissioner Sharp seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.
6. Border SWCD: Boundary Modification Request: Commissioner Glass asked if Border

SWCD has contacted the town of Elida's governing body or town council. An action on behalf of that governing body should be taken and a record submitted to the Commission, as SWCDs do not have the authority to annex towns without the town's participation. Deena Kinman (Border SWCD) reported they are currently in the process of collecting signatures from Elida residents to add their town to the district's boundaries, to then present to the Commission. Border SWCD hopes to work with their county clerk's office to see if a district can have a boundary modification on an election ballot. Ms. Kinman clarified this agenda item is only providing an update on the request, as the boundary modification process is more complicated than expected and may be on next year's November election ballot. Commissioner Glass moved to table Border SWCD's Boundary Modification Request. Commissioner Sharp seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

7. Water Quality & Conservation (WQ&C) FY27 Grant Application Form: Katie Mechenbier (NMDA) reported there were no changes to the FY27 grant application. Ms. Mechenbier requested if the commission had any proposed changes to the application. The commissioners did not have any changes for this fiscal year. The FY27 RFPs will become available to Soil and Water Conservation Districts in February 2026. This grant does not have a limit to the amount of funding which can be applied for, the intended goal is to spread the \$100,000 in available funds across as many districts as possible. Districts can contact their NMDA specialists for any assistance with the grant application.

### **Old Business**

8. NMDA \$9 Million 3-Year Plan for SWCDs: Point System and Capacity-Building Funding Opportunity Update: Max Henkels (NMDA) reported on the \$9 million special legislative appropriation for the SWCDs from fiscal year 2026 through 2028. In the previous SWCC meeting, NMDA allocated some of these funds towards the point system for districts to use for operational funding and to create a \$160,000 non-competitive grant each district can apply for to increase and support their organizational capacity. Districts

that earned full points from the fiscal year 2025-point system distribution received approximately \$11,000 in additional funds, totaling an estimated \$30,000 per district. 15 capacity-building proposals have been submitted and approved by NMDA, some proposals needed clarifications or proposed budget adjustments that have been resolved through a collaborative effort between the NMDA specialists and districts. As a few awardees have already begun invoicing expenses, current applicants are taking additional time to evaluate their options and needs or are planning a collaboration with other districts. Mr. Henkels expects more applications through the July 15, 2026 deadline, especially awarded districts with budgets for less than the full \$160,000 that can re-apply for the remaining amount. The submitted applications have planned to use funds for staffing positions like support staff or noxious weed coordinators, new staff-related costs such as phones or employee insurance, training, travel, contractor services such as auditing/accounting for districts now at a higher income level, constituent outreach marketing, and office space. Chair Vigil expressed contentment as an estimated \$2.2 million out of the budgeted \$7.5 million for the capacity-building funding opportunity has already been allocated, as well as with the update provided by Mr. Henkels and NMDA staff. Commissioner Garcia requested additional information on any awarded districts requesting up-front funding compared to reimbursement. Mr. Henkels stated none of the current applicants have requested funding up front to cover costs then later providing back-up documentation. Commissioner Glass asked for clarification as to whether these funds were allocated or spent. Mr. Henkels confirmed the funds were allocated, as most of these districts were approved in the last month and have budgeted their expenses over the next 2.5 years.

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

9. Commissioner Glass reported the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) is in the process of executing the Upper Rio Grande Basin Study which would compare availability and need for water resources for the next 30-40 years and adaptation strategies. They have requested SWCDs share their input for his study, of which Ciudad and Coronado SWCDs

have consulted with USBR. Six other SWCDs in the Rio Grande Valley area of regions 1 and 2 will be contacted to participate and provide their perspective on this study. The NMACD region 1 chair will draft a letter to these six districts, requesting they join the special subcommittee within the government sector study.

Commissioner Garcia reported on the flooding occurring in his region over the last quarter. As of three years ago, they have been working with NRCS and using EWP funding to deal with flooding issues.

Commissioner Sharp announced former SWCC Commissioner Clint Harden passed away Sunday night. Clint Harden of Central Curry brought compassion and his inquisitive nature to the SWCC and will be sorely missed. Commissioner Sharp also reported supporting the New Mexico Department of Emergency Management for their assistance with the acequia restoration and working with EWP. During the shutdown, EWP has been instrumental in recovery as well as federal partner, FEMA. This is a long-term resource for acequias and local entities to use for restoration efforts. When working with county or city officials, Commissioner Sharp remarked they don't understand their local SWCDs are uniquely situated to get public funds on private lands, as watershed restorations are mostly on private lands. A program is currently in development that would use NRCS/EWP funds, FEMA and other entities to work on private lands, but would allow cities and counties to access funds as well as work with SWCDs to address debris that has washed up on private property. The anti-donation clause prevents county, state, or local government from addressing this debris. Commissioner Sharp encourages these entities to get acquainted with NRCS and their local SWCD partners, as well as getting to know their county's emergency manager to find common ground and work in local communities to help victims of disasters.

Chair Vigil reported Upper Hondo, Chaves, and Otero SWCD are also working on flooding issues in burn scar areas. The monthly minutes received from different SWCDs in Region 6 are appreciated.

10. Governor's Office: none

11. New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA): Max Henkels (NMDA) reported on the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the Healthy Soil Program (HSP). There are 20 different Soil and Water Conservation Districts participating in this year's program as an eligible entity with their own project, a sponsor for an individual applicant project, or both. NMDA is collaborating with NMACD on providing NRCS conservation planning training to district staff. Due to federal funding cuts and general uncertainty, NMDA is working with the state office to set up training for SWCD staff to receive level 1 conservation planning certification, possibly even an NRCS training level through the NRCS portal. Unfortunately, there is currently no progress on this training due to the current government shutdown. There is a training scheduled for mid-January in Moriarty, of which 28 different district staff have signed up for. NMDA will be providing travel and per diem costs for participants. NMDA is also working on alternative options for the NRCS conservation planning requirements in the upcoming FY27 HSP individual applicant grants, as the federal shutdown poses potential delays in getting a conservation plan in time for the FY27 grant application period opening on January 16, 2026. Any commissioner interested in assisting with the HSP application reviewing process should contact NMDA. Mr. Henkels provided an update on the District Opportunity Grant, part of the Land of Enchantment fund, awarded an estimated \$1.3 million to 15 different SWCDs in FY26. This program offers 4 different categories for funding: Landscape-Scale Restoration for large scale projects up to \$250,000, Conservation Planning/Land Use Planning, Education and Outreach, and Capacity-Building which will be paused for a few years due to better available resources. The FY27 grant will open in February 2026, and SWCDs will be contacted with more information. The Noxious Weed Management Program has also received a lot of district participation. Due to additional Forest Service funding and remaining LOE funding, districts are encouraged to apply for a second fall FY26 grant cycle which will be open until November 12, 2025. The FY27 grant cycle for this program will also start in late February. Mr. Henkels also provided an update on the new Archaeological Field Training Program, thanking Representative Rebecca Dow and Debbie Hughes for their efforts in this \$300,000 statewide program. This appropriation

allows NMDA to work in consultation with the NM Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS). This program focuses on professional training to perform archaeological surveys and complete conservation projects around the state. Traditional archaeological field schools are academic based, but this new field training program allows more accessibility with Field Technician and Supervisor tracks. The Field Technician option is an entry-level track to provide basic knowledge and skills on a field crew managed by experts. The Supervisor track provides training and marketable skills for those with intermediate knowledge and previous field experience. There has been an unexpectedly high demand for this program. Over 170 applications were submitted in just a few weeks, although only 32 students were enrolled due to the limited funding. NMDA is still collecting information on those who are interested in this pilot program, with the hope that DCA can receive a recurring appropriation and allow more SWCD staff to gain experience in this field.

12. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): none
13. Forest Service: none
14. Farm Service Agency: none
15. New Mexico Environment Department (NMED): none
16. Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC): Chair Vigil reported the WQCC passed the Water Reuse Rules in August, which was closely followed by another group requesting a new set of hearings. The commission granted the request, and a hearing officer was appointed to schedule a meeting for May or June to hold the next round of 2-week hearings. These new hearings will take place for in the Hobbs area for one week and Santa Fe for the remaining week.
17. New Mexico Mining Commission: none
18. National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD): Josh Smith (NACD) announced the annual meeting will be held in San Antonio, Texas on February 15-19, 2026.
19. New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD): Debbie Hughes (NMACD) announced Soil and Water Conservation District Day will take place on February 16, 2026. NMACD are still managing the TSP program with Troy and Linda

Hood. Last year, NRCS allocated an additional \$1.2 million in extra funding to the TSP contract. These funds were used to hire additional employees for help with farming programs, an estimated 30 former NRCS employees that were laid off earlier this year.

20. New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts (NMCCD): none
21. NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES): none
22. New Mexico Conservation District Employees (NMCDE): Jennifer Kleitz (NMCDE) reported few meetings have taken place since a new board was established in Santa Fe. A mentorship program is being established, which would pair new SWCD employees with experienced district employees in their area or region. The mentors would assist new employees in learning their district's processes as well as identifying partners and resources.
23. Next meeting: Commissioner Sharp acknowledged the Commission previously agreed to meet more often if not quarterly, which would place the next SWCC meeting during the legislative session. Chair Vigil commented the Commission will review dates with Max Henkels to schedule the next meeting for January in Santa Fe.
24. Commissioner Sharp moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote. Meeting adjourned at 2:28 pm.