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New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) Meeting

October 28, 2024

1:00 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 Sharp was absent. Commissioner Lopez joined via Zoom; all other 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 (8/1/2024): Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Glass seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

New Business

4. Public Comment (*2 minutes per person*):
 - Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR) National Program - Cooperation with NMACD to implement program in New Mexico: Caroline Wade (Executive Director for the national STAR program) introduced the programs as a non-profit organization working with state and local farmers to implement the STAR framework. STAR is an evaluation tool for farmers and ranchers to assess conservation on a field-scale, provide conservation guidance, as well as a direct connection from producers to a variety of technical and financial resources. The organization also facilitates a connection to a variety of

programs that include cost-share, incentive, landowner, and lender. A structure that allows affiliate entity within the state to work with individual conservation districts to help provide support and training, and align people on messaging around conservation and consistency across how that is shared and implemented. The national STAR team are here this week with a forum in which the New Mexico STAR affiliate will be signing an agreement with the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) tomorrow. STAR is very focused on local engagement and uses input on terms of guidance and development to determine how STAR actually implements in the state.

- Champe Green (Santa Fe-Pojoaque SWCD) requested a follow-up with the previous request presented to the commission at the June 18, 2024 meeting. The legal assistance inquiry with the New Mexico Attorney General’s office based on the SWCD Act 73-20-41.e, “supervisors may call upon the district attorney of the judicial district within which all or part of the district lands may be situated for legal services required by the district”. Santa-Fe Pojoaque had pursued assistance with the first judicial district and the Attorney General’s office in which they were told no assistance was available. As the commission had opened an inquiry, Mr. Green asked if there had been any progress with this issue. Chair Vigil reported meeting with Attorney General’s office in August, to explain the legal assistance issues from Santa Fe-Pojoaque SWCD and the status of the lawsuit in Dona Ana. Since they have not contacted the commission after the August meeting and this inquiry concerns all 47 districts, Chair Vigil will revisit the Attorney General’s office in 2 weeks then report back.

5. SWCD Supervisor Appointments:

- Caballo: Ronald Garay (6)
- McKinley: Kathy Landers (5), Richard S. “Bud” Lopez (6)

Commissioner Glass moved to approve the SWCD supervisor appointments.

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

6. McKinley SWCD: 5-member board request: Commissioner Glass asked if a representative from McKinley was present to provide more information on this request for the purpose of discussion. No representative was in attendance. Patricia Depner (NMDA) reported to the commission that due to difficulty staffing a full 7-member board, McKinley SWCD are requesting to change to a 5-member board. Commissioner Garcia moved to approve McKinley SWCD 5-member board request. Commissioner Glass seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

7. SWCD Boundary Modifications – Landowners moving to other SWCDs: Katie Mechenbier (NMDA) reported NMDA has been receiving feedback from producers who are trying to move from districts with lower or no mil levies that cannot support many programs, and move to one with a higher mil levy in order to receive more funding. A landowner can technically move districts by obtaining permission and following proper protocol. This type of situation might be occurring more frequently in the future due to landowners attempting to access larger funding from a different district. Commissioner Glass asked if there is currently a request to change districts or is this just information being presented to the commission? Ms. Mechenbier confirmed this subject was just information. Commissioner Glass asked if a landowner can make the move purely through a decision from the commission or does the affected district have to act as well? Ms. Mechenbier responded it would have to be a decision from the commission. Commissioner Glass questioned if the commission would have to assign that landowner to another district, which may not be ideal for the original district's board to lose a contributor to another SWCD. Ms. Mechenbier replied the Soil and Water Conservation District Act allows it, only if the landowners ask permission from the receiving district they want to move to. Once the receiving district brings the issue to the attention of the commission, and it is approved, the losing district would have the opportunity to protest. This situation has not occurred yet, it is only the feedback received from producers. A member of the public asked if the producer moves to a different SWCD, does it have to be an adjoining district? Ms. Mechenbier replied that remains unclear, the current feedback is only potentially moving to an adjoining district.

8. Noxious Weed Management Grant: Ms. Depner provided an update on this new pilot program, in which 12 projects from across the state were awarded a total of just under \$700,000.
9. Water Quality & Conservation (WQ&C) FY26 Grant Application Request for Proposals (RFP): Ms. Depner reported there were no changes to the FY26 grant application. She requested if the commission had any proposed changes to the application. The commissioners did not have any changes for this fiscal year. The FY26 RFPs will become available on February 1st, 2025.

Old Business

10. \$3 Million SWCC Legislative Appropriation Status Reports: Ms. Depner presented the commission with the latest status report for the 15 awardees from the 2022 \$3 million SWCC appropriation, which included the awardee's amount spent and the last project summary report received.

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

11. Commissioner Glass reported Ciudad SWCD will be attempting mil levy referendum on the November 5th ballot, as well as a few concerning resignations from Valencia SWCD in recent weeks. Commissioner Glass will be contacting one of their board members to obtain more information on the situation. Commissioner Garcia reported East Rio Arriba, Upper Chama, Taos, and Santa Fe-Pojoaque SWCDs have been partnering on a noxious weed program under the SWCC appropriation. There has been good progress, which includes soil health workshops and a noxious weed website in development from Taos SWCD. Commissioner Lopez reported Colfax SWCD have been taking their fumigator and no-till drill to the county fair for outreach, as well as working on capital outlay requests. Chair Vigil reported there is a new NMACD board member for region 6, Colt Howland.
12. Governor's Office: none

13. New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA): Julie Maitland (NMDA), stated Secretary Witte will be attending tomorrow's conference to report. Chair Vigil announced representatives that are scheduled on the NMACD agenda to report during tomorrow's conference, may choose to report tomorrow instead of reporting on both days.
14. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Xavier Montoya (NRCS) will wait until tomorrow to report.
15. Forest Service: none
16. Farm Service Agency: none
17. New Mexico Environment Department (NMED): none
18. Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC): Chair Vigil reported the WQCC had a public hearing that lasted almost 3 weeks. The large volume of paperwork included testimonies and 150 public comments on the new water reuse rules. He perceives they will not deliberate on this until early next year, possibly after the legislative session.
19. New Mexico Mining Commission: none
20. National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD): Chair Vigil introduced Gary Blair (NACD President Elect) who announced he will also report tomorrow. Rachel Theler (Southwest Region NACD Representative) announced the region-specific newsletter and 5 free marketing & outreach webinars are available on the NACD website.
21. New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD): Josh Smith (NMACD President) thanked everyone for attending the 78th annual conference and will report tomorrow.
22. New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts (NMCCD): none
23. NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES): none
24. New Mexico Conservation District Employees (NMCDE): none
25. Next meeting: TBD

26. Adjourn: Commissioner Glass moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote. Meeting adjourned at 1:51 pm.