

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

*Soil and Water Conservation Commission*  
*MSC APR*  
*P. O. Box 30005*  
*Las Cruces NM 88003-8005*  
*Telephone (575) 646-2642*  
*SWCC@nmda.nmsu.edu*



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**New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) Meeting**  
**Via Teleconference**  
**June 19, 2025**  
**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 (01/28/2025): Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the minutes. Commissioner Glass seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.
4. Open Meetings Resolution: Commissioner Glass moved to approve the open meetings resolution. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

**New Business**

5. Public Comment (*2 minutes per person*)
  - Rebecca Touchin (Valencia SWCD supervisor applicant for position 7):  
Introduced herself to the commission as from the Pueblo Laguna. Ms. Touchin works across the state helping Native American and Hispanic farmers as part of a technical farm team with the Center of Southwest Culture. Chair Vigil asked Ms. Touchin if Valencia SWCD has a vacant supervisor position. Commissioner Glass responded that Valencia SWCD currently has 2 vacant positions. Commissioner Glass commended Ms. Touchin and Mr. Rodney Jones for their interest in serving on the Valencia SWCD board, as tribal entity representation is

critical due to a large portion of the district's boundaries overlaps with tribal boundaries.

- Howard Hutchinson (San Francisco SWCD) commented on the point system and administrative grants, hoping the commission would maintain distribution of the point system without further dividing the funding. As San Francisco SWCD recently hired a new administrator, and with audits as well other project developments, the district needs as much funds as possible. Mr. Hutchinson was unsure if the commission would allow comments under that agenda item. Chair Vigil confirmed comments would be allowed later in the meeting for the \$9 million proposal agenda item.
- Jennifer Pierce (Chaves SWCD) thanked the commission for the point system funding her district previously received and is interested in how the point distribution will be executed this year. Chaves SWCD will use these funds for capacity building, working with other districts, and continuing partnerships. Chair Vigil announced the commission will accept further public comments and questions regarding the point system after the proposal is presented for that agenda item.

6. SWCD Supervisor Appointments:

- Caballo: Ron Garay (6), Harvey Morrow (7)
- Carlsbad: Fred Beard (6), Henry Vasquez (7)
- Carrizozo: Lee Sultemeier (6), Bryan Hightower (7)
- Central Curry: Rachel Armstrong (6), K.C. Schooley (7)
- Central Tri-County: Juan Sanchez (6), Mark Anaya (7)
- Central Valley: Jason Patton (6), Lance Conklin (7)
- Chaves: John Sisk (6), Cody Munson (7)
- Ciudad: Gabriella Coughlin (6), Sarah Hurteau (7)
- Claunch-Pinto: Larry Gomez (6), Roy Glenn Gibson (7)
- Colfax: Andy Yates (6), Cathy Sauble (7)

- Doña Ana: Joshua Smith (6), Joshua Sanchez (7)
- Deming: Jamie Viramontes (6), Russell Johnson (7)
- Grant: Johnny Reed (6), Niel McDonald (7)
- Guadalupe: Earl J. Sena (6), Mary S. Baca (7)
- Hidalgo: Levi Klump (6), Walt Anderson (7)
- Lava: Anthony Martinez (6), Mark Salazar (7)
- Otero: Richard O. Baish (6), James Evrage (7)
- Penasco: Camille Graham-Figueroa (6), Bernard Cleve (7)
- Roosevelt: Sharon Davis (6), Dylan Marks (7)
- San Juan: Cash Carruth (6), Gentry Sterling (7)
- Santa Fe-Pojoaque: John Kadlecek (6), Shann Stringer (7)
- Sierra: Randy Coil (6), Willard Hall (7)
- Southwest Quay; Preston Downey (6), Kandy Hutchens (7)
- Taos: Greg Miller (6), Mary Lane Leslie (7)
- Upper Hondo: Beth Mendiola (6), David Cox (7)
- Valencia: Michael Rodney Jones (6), Rebecca Touchin (7)

Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the SWCD Supervisor Appointments.

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

7. Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Mill Levy Resolutions:

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|----------------------|--------|
| • Caballo            | \$1.00 |
| • Carlsbad           | \$0.70 |
| • Carrizozo          | \$1.00 |
| • Central Tri-County | \$1.00 |
| • Central Valley     | \$0.50 |
| • Chaves             | \$1.00 |
| • Ciudad             | \$0.25 |

• Claunch-Pinto	\$1.00
• Cuba	\$1.00
• East Rio Arriba	\$1.00
• East Torrance	\$1.00
• Guadalupe	\$1.00
• Hagerman-Dexter	\$1.00
• Lava	\$1.00
• Mora-Wagon Mound	\$1.00
• Penasco	\$1.00
• Sierra	\$1.00
• Socorro	\$1.00
• Taos	\$1.00
• Tierra y Montes	\$1.00
• Upper Chama	\$1.00
• Upper Hondo	\$0.75
• Ute Creek	\$1.00
• Valencia	\$0.25
• Western Mora	\$1.00

Commissioner Glass moved to approve the SWCD Mill Levy Resolutions. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

8. Mill Levy Referendum - Santa Fe-Pojoaque SWCD: Commissioner Garcia moved to approve the Mill Levy Referendum for Santa Fe-Pojoaque SWCD. Commissioner Sharp seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.
  
9. Water Quality and Conservation FY26 Grant Recommendations/Funding: Katie Mechenbier (NMDA) reported the WQC subcommittee met on May 22, 2025 and submitted their recommendations to the commission-see attached recommendations. The full FY26 funding amount of \$114,130.00 was able to be distributed to the projects

selected for full and partial funding. Commissioner Glass moved to approve the Water Quality and Conservation FY26 Grant Recommendations/Funding. Commissioner Garcia seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote.

10. NMDA \$9 Million 3-Year Proposal for SWCDs:

- Point System
- SWCC Advice on Capacity-Building Grant

Max Henkels (NMDA) is seeking advice from the commission and public input for this appropriation to forward to NMDA leadership for a final decision. Mr. Henkels presented the proposal for the \$9 million NMDA received through legislative appropriation, to be distributed to the SWCDs from FY26 through FY28. The \$9 million would be split between increasing the annual district operation funding/point system distribution and a simple grant program for district capacity building. This would allow for better district accessibility and accountability to the legislature on how these funds are spent. The point system formula would not change for FY26 and will increase the base funding by approximately \$10,000 per district to assist with basic SWCD expenses, including audit compliance. The proposed non-competitive grant program would provide districts with funding to implement local conservation through capacity support with a simple budget, timeline, and justification for their requested funding amount. Currently, if districts were to maximize their point values, the total annual point system base funding amount for each of the 47 districts would be \$17,434.25. The \$9 million split between the three fiscal years, would increase the annual point system base funding amount by \$10,496.45 to \$27,930.70 and leave a maximum of \$160,000 available for each district over three years through the capacity building program. An open application period would be held for the grant program and the contract period would be from August 1, 2025 through January 31, 2028. At the closing contract period date, any unspent district funds from the grant program would be allocated in that year's point system distribution to ensure any remaining funds to not revert back to the state. The grant program applications would be internally reviewed and approved by NMDA staff, working with the districts on their

applications to ensure they receive funding and it can be spent correctly. Awardees will receive a Memorandum of Agreement and purchase order number, submitting invoices with proper documentation for reimbursement and quarterly reports. These steps would provide fiscal accountability to the legislature for this one-time state appropriation. This proposal for the \$9 million funds would follow the legislative intent to support SWCD staffing and capacity.

Commissioner Garcia asked if districts be expected to apply for the \$160,000 capacity building funds just once or annually. Mr. Henkels clarified the open application period allows districts to apply at any time in the next three fiscal years for the entire \$160,000 or submit applications for portions of the \$160,000 during these three fiscal years.

Commissioner Garcia stated early notification would best for districts that cannot spend their awarded \$160,000 as those funds can be reallocated to assist districts before the end of the contract period. Commissioner Glass requested clarification on the proposed point system base funding amount in terms of district operational funding. Mr. Henkels stated the point system base funding amount of \$17,434.25 for each of the 47 districts goes to the commission through NMDA's annual budget. The proposal allows for a portion of the NMDA appropriation, an estimated \$10,496.45, to be added to the base funding for each of the 47 districts. Depending if districts maximize all of their points, the FY26-28 base funding would be an average of just under \$28,000 per year.

There were numerous questions and concerns from SWCD representatives regarding the type of suitable expenses on a hypothetical application, smaller districts not being able to front the cost for additional employees or administrative costs, the disadvantage of capacity-building reimbursement as opposed to the point system funds distributed directly to districts, the difficulty in reporting the point system and capacity-building grant funds on the annual budgets to DFA, a suggestion to reconfigure the FY26 proposed amounts placing more funds toward point system distribution, and alternative ways for reporting.

Additional information regarding the proposed capacity-building grant was provided by Mr. Henkels and Patricia Depner (NMDA). The frequency of invoices for reimbursement

will be on an as-needed basis requested by the district. Each district will be receiving \$28,000 through the point system and other resources. If a district needs additional funds for administrative expenses, NMDA can discuss the issue with the district. It is up to the applicant to select any amount of funding up to \$160,000 at any time during the FY26-28 period. A signed annual contract would not be sufficient for a district to request reimbursement in order to pay a contractor the entire agreed amount. As all of NMDA grant programs are state funded and on a reimbursement basis, the district can invoice NMDA for spent point system funds to pay a contractor and then be reimbursed with capacity grant funds.

Debbie Hughes (NMACD) clarified all districts will receive \$27,930 through point system this year. If they apply and receive the \$160,000 in the 3 years, the district's annual DFA budget would need to show an annual income of approximately \$81,230 for those 3 years. These funds were applied and were approved by NMDA, and will be reimbursed within about a month as soon as the invoice is submitted to NMDA. A district can rearrange their budget, using a mix of the point system and capacity-building funds to pay staff and fund projects. Other grants such as the Healthy Soil Program and Noxious Weed Management fund projects, but the NMDA proposed grant funds increase capacity and cover admin costs with the intent to continue larger conservation projects. Last year, several districts placed their point distribution funds into savings accounts. As district audits go to DFA and the LFC committee, they are aware of how much funds are sitting in savings. The goal is for districts use these funds to show capacity has grown by hiring contractors and staff, placing more funding toward conservation projects, and hopefully use the capacity funds by the second year to show legislators recurring funding is needed. Mr. Henkels stated the commission's advice, public input, challenges to cost reimbursement, DFA budgeting concerns, and possible alternatives for this proposal will be forwarded to Secretary Witte for final decision. Commissioner Sharp made a motion for Chair Vigil to appoint a small subcommittee of 3 or more commissioners to meet with Secretary Witte to discuss possible options. Ms. Depner responded at most 2 commissioners could be included on subcommittee in order to avoid a rolling quorum.

Commissioner Sharp amended his motion for Chair Vigil to appoint a small subcommittee of 2 commissioners to meet with Secretary Witte to discuss possible options for the NMDA proposal. Commissioner Glass seconded and the motion passed by all commissioners present-see roll call vote. Chair Vigil committed himself and Commissioner Sharp to meet with Secretary Witte for the NMDA proposal issues.

### **Old Business**

11. Healthy Soil Program Update: Katie Crayton and Bruce Dean presented an update for the commission. The Healthy Soil Act directs the NMDA to administer the Healthy Soil Program (HSP) with support and advice from the SWCC, and how those program funds can be spent. The NMDA website has an HSP interactive map of the state, showing the Eligible Entity and Individual Applicant projects. This year, 98 applications were submitted for the FY26 HSP grant cycle. 57 grants were awarded, 14 of which were Eligible Entities and 43 Individual Applicants. The project timeline for FY26 was increased from 10 months to nearly 15 months, starting in mid-July 2025 to September 2026. NRCS conservation planning is required for Individual Applicants to ensure application and program integrity. With the challenges NRCS and other federal agencies experienced this past year, the HSP team will post FY27 documents and host a webinar in early fall 2025 to provide future Individual Applicants with time to understand and meet requirements. The HSP team are also working with key partners to ensure there are plenty of NRCS and NRCS-certified conservation planners to meet demand. NMDA and NMSU Extension co-hosted the first New Mexico Soil Health and Soil Carbon Conference last July in Albuquerque. Based on the success and attendees of last year's event, the hope is to hold more conferences in the future biennially. The two co-leads can promote and attend field days, conferences, legislative events, webinars, and other events to promote the Healthy Soil Program. Key partners such as NRCS, NMACD, and the New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group, help the HSP reach a wider audience. Soil health news, events, resources, and HSP updates are featured in the weekly HSP e-newsletter. The e-newsletter subscription form can be found on the HSP homepage on



NMDA's website. There are currently 3 ongoing HSP-funded soil health research projects at NMSU Agricultural Science Centers in Clovis and Las Cruces. Any critical soil health-related questions the public has that the HSP can ask their research partners can be submitted to [hsp@nmda.nmsu.edu](mailto:hsp@nmda.nmsu.edu). Commissioner Glass commended the Healthy Soil Program on their current and prior work and looks forward to review applications in the FY27 cycle.

12. Santa Fe-Pojoaque: Obtaining Legal Assistance from District Attorney: Chair Vigil spoke to Attorney General regarding legal counsel representation to be provided by their office. At one point, there were various legal representatives assigned to the SWCC. Chair Vigil requested Mr. Henkels draft another letter from the commission to the Attorney General's office, requesting to know who is the current appointed representative.

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

13. Commissioners: Commissioner Glass, reported some confusion from the County Assessor's office regarding the mill levy submitted last year by Ciudad SWCD. The district was notified no mill levy revenues will be collected on their behalf until January 2026. Although all of the required documentation was submitted, Ciudad will be deprived of a mill levy for 2 years, as the County Assessors in both Bernalillo and Santa Fe counties failed to act timely on the submitted referendum. Ciudad SWCD had contacted the Bernalillo County Assessor in November and received a schedule for the implementation of the mill levy. Although the mill levy first payment was set to be in December 2025, the Bernalillo County Assessor has given administrative reasons as to why the mill levy cannot be incorporated this year. The New Mexico Department of Finance has sided with the County Assessor on this matter. Commissioner Glass cautions any district attempting a mill levy.  
  
Commissioner Garcia reported a well-attended Region 2 meeting yesterday. East Rio Arriba is on target to complete a grant from the SWCC \$3 million appropriation. They had partnered with Upper Chama SWCD for a weed program in the past few years, with

this grant they also partnered with Santa Fe-Pojoaque and Taos SWCDs. The grant was a success and has brought awareness to noxious weed management issues.

Chair Vigil reported last Wednesday's Region 6 meeting as very informative, thanking Rebecca Dow and Debbie Hughes (NMACD) for hosting.

Commissioner Sharp reported receiving a confirmation from Secretary Witte to meet with the SWCC subcommittee next week. Commissioner Sharp also commended Upper Hondo, Carrizozo, Tierra y Montes, Western Mora, and other SWCDs for participating in the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program supported by NRCS. With the devastating wildfires and flooding in the state, these districts have assisted the affected citizens in those regions. Commissioner Sharp will meet with the chief of NRCS on Monday to testify on the results and effectiveness of the EWP program.

14. Governor's Office: none.
15. New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA): Max Henkels recently replaced Julie Maitland as the Agricultural Program and Resources Division Director. Mr. Henkels reported the 2022 projects under the \$3 million legislative appropriation to the SWCC were concluding. The unspent balance from these 3-year projects is an estimated \$1 million, which will revert back to the state on June 30, 2025. There are no extensions for this grant, the hope is for awarded districts to spend down this balance and submit invoices before the end of the month. The Land of Enchantment (LOE) legacy funding has completed its first year. In FY25, NMDA received \$2.8 million in disbursement from state and federal funding. 97 grants were awarded from the District Opportunities, Noxious Weed Management, and Healthy Soil Program grants. These funds also helped launch 2 new grant programs and hiring a Noxious Weed Coordinator, Dylan Burruss. A FY25 report will be published for legislators, outlining the accomplishments and funding impact, detailing how this funding was used and locations of the funded projects. After receiving a \$3.4 million LOE legacy disbursement for FY26, NMDA is in the process of sending award notifications and Memorandum of Agreements for projects to start in July. Over \$3 million is passing through districts from NMDA funding, of which about \$2.8 million was awarded to 45 district-led projects across 3 programs and

\$350,000 awarded to 42 individuals with district sponsors in the Healthy Soil Program. The Agricultural Workforce Development program is currently accepting applications from Agricultural businesses and producers for FY26 through March 31, 2026 or until all funds are allocated. NMDA is consulting with the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs with the legislative intent to start an archeological field school, building a trained workforce with archeological clearance to help increase conservation in the state. Mr. Henkels highlighted the New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute, which received a legislative \$5 million one-time appropriation for the Agricultural Water Resilience Program. Mr. Henkels encourages SWCDs to apply as these funds can be used for water conservation projects.

16. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): Xavier Montoya reported participating in most of the region meetings. NRCS is currently in the midst of obligating all regular funds across the state, any new IRA funds were rescinded and were not able to be obligated. The hope is for these rescinded funds will be reallocated to the new farm bill or farm bill extension. Any contracts that were signed with IRA dollars are still in effect, as well as the NMDA/NMACD agreement in place for technical and administrative services. There are 15 active EWP events in state, Mr. Montoya thanked the SWCDs as they are key sponsors for these events. NRCS had 4 offices with General Services Administration (GSA) leases listed to be closed in state, but the lease terminations for these offices will be rescinded. Mr. Montoya is pending official notification in the form of a letter regarding the rescinded lease terminations for these offices and requested the public notify him with any information regarding this situation. Due to the deferred resignation program, NRCS lost 52 New Mexico employees in just the past few months. They are hoping to increasing some of their staff when the hiring freeze is possibly lifted on July 15, 2025 or extended. This year marks the 90<sup>th</sup> annual celebration of NRCS, which began during the Dust Bowl and has some of oldest conservation districts in nation. Mr. Montoya expressed his thanks and appreciation of the growing partnerships with districts and others in past 90 years.

17. Forest Service: none
18. Farm Service Agency: none
19. New Mexico Environment Department (NMED): none
20. Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC): Chair Vigil reported the WQCC met in April and May for the water reuse program. The rules have been developed, finalized, and formally adopted by WQCC.
21. New Mexico Mining Commission: none
22. National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD): none
23. New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD): Debbie Hughes reported the 79<sup>th</sup> annual NMACD meeting will take place in Albuquerque on October 19-22, 2025 at the Uptown Sheridan. Jennifer Hopper has met with some districts to identify their training needs, especially elected official training. There is also a possible conservation planning training in the works as NRCS lost 52 employees in New Mexico. Xavier Montoya will seek to hold certified conservation planning training, inviting technical service providers and district employees to attend. Due to the fire in the Silver City area, the next region meeting may not be held next week. The recently passed watershed bill may not work as initially intended without potential amendments in the next legislative session. The constitution does not presently allow appointed board members to levy a mill, which affects an estimated 7 watershed districts with current mill levies. Secretary Witte recommended not enacting the bill this year, allowing the watershed districts to hold elections and collect their mill.
24. New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts (NMCCD): none
25. NMSU College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES): none
26. New Mexico Conservation District Employees (NMCDE): Jennifer Kleitz (Doña Ana SWCD) reported there was a new board was elected in Santa Fe. Ms. Kleitz serves as president, Gerald Romero (Tierra y Montes SWCD) as vice-president, Brenda Smythe (Central Tri-County SWCD) as treasurer, and Fernando Najera (Carrizozo SWCD) as secretary. In their recent meeting in April, they are re-establishing the NMCDE website, improving member communications, exploring a partnership with NMACD for district

staff training, scheduling the next full member meeting, and anticipate reporting more detailed updates in the next SWCC meeting.

27. Next meeting: Chair Vigil announced a special SWCC meeting will need to be held very soon, as a late mill levy referendum request was received from Mesa SWCD. Chair Vigil selected June 30, 2025 at 9:00am to hold the SWCC special meeting. Commissioner Glass announced he may be unavailable that day. Commissioners Sharp, Garcia, and Lopez confirmed their availability.
28. Meeting adjourned at 11:29am.