



SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

- Conservation districts had their beginning in the 1930's because of the National concern over mounting erosion, floods and the sky blackening dust storms that swept across the country.
- In 1935, Congress enacted the Soil Conservation Act a national policy to provide a permanent program for the control and prevention of soil erosion and establish the Soil Conservation Service now known as the Natural Resource Conservation Service.
- To encourage local participation in the program, President Roosevelt sent all state governors *A Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law* with a recommendation for enactment of legislation that would allow local landowners to form soil conservation districts.
- Conservation districts are local governmental subdivisions established under state law to carry out a program for the conservation, use and development of soil, water and related resources.
- Districts are resource management agencies, coordinating and implementing resource and environmental programs at the local level in cooperation with federal and state agencies.
- Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District was organized on September 17, 1941. This is the

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2015

74 YEARS IN SERVICE

The Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors are very pleased with the District's accomplishments during the past fiscal year.

Members of the current Board of Supervisors are:

Felipe Lovato, Jr., Chairman
Jerry E. Melaragno, Sec-Treas.
LeRoy Candelaria, Member
Dan Williams, Member

William D. Caster, Vice-Chairman
John Brian Greene, Member
Richard J. Shovelin, Member

Associate Supervisors:

Frank Luna, Jr.

Larry Gomez

District Staff:

Dierdre L. Tarr, District Manager

Vernon Kohler, Field Technician

Kaisa Jones, Part-time Bookkeeper

Gabriel Ramirez, Technician

Field Staff:

John Sisneros

Mathew Chavez

Manuel Lopez

Rick Valdez

Volunteers:

Katheryn Taylor

Carla Cope

Tamra Hays

Heather Warren

During the year, the Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District was assisted by the following **Natural Resources Conservation Service Staff:**

Kenneth Lujan, Resource Conservationist

April Luna, Soil Conservationist

Brandon Bishop, District Conservationist

The Board of Supervisors meets the first Friday of every month at 8:00 a.m. The meeting is held at the Natural Resource Conservation Center, located at 1206 South Highway 55, Mountainair, N.M.

The Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District provides assistance to the landowners, small towns and villages within the District which encompasses 1,234,002 acres in parts of Torrance, Lincoln, Socorro and Valencia Counties including several small towns and villages.

The Claunch-Pinto SWCD was involved in a great number of projects this year.

1. Watershed Projects:

The District has received ten grants from the Water Trust Board for a total amount of \$6,038,200 for watershed health in the major recharge areas of the Estancia Closed Basin. These grants are for timber stand improvement, brush management, diversions, reseeding and monitoring. The District works cooperatively with the East Torrance, Edgewood and Ciudad SWCDs on this project. Public meetings were held in strategic locations in the recharge area to get information to the local landowners about the project opportunities. A CORE steering committee composed of one member from each of the districts, NM State Forestry, New Mexico Environment Department, US Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Manzano Land Grant and Chilili Land Grant meet on a regular basis. It has approved projects in the Estancia Closed Basin recharge area during this past year. The New Mexico Highlands University serves as the project coordinator for this project. The CORE Steering Committee works with

program over a 25-year time frame will assist the region, state and others in evaluating the SWCA Environmental Consultants on the monitoring portion of this project. The monitoring health of the Basin's watershed and ecosystem interaction, and assist in focusing the Watershed Health Program on areas with the greatest potential for recharge. The initial effort is focused on already known high priority recharge areas. The continuing program will enable basin entities to begin a systematic watershed renewal effort, so critical for long-term success. It will also assist in deleting data/efforts that are not productive and assist in focusing efforts in the areas where decisions and actions will make a difference. The monitoring sites are located in three areas of the Manzano Mountains in the major recharge areas to the Estancia Closed Basin. The District has completed 15 projects in the amount of \$85,465.40 on 121.8 acres this past year. The District currently has 10 contracts working on the ground for a total of 137.77 acres and \$111,046.30.



Planning a Project



Completed Project



Before Thinning Treatment



Completed Thinning Treatment

The District continues to attack noxious weeds as they are found within the District. The noxious weeds known to reside within the District boundaries are: Poison Hemlock, Russian Knapweed, and Musk Thistle.



Poison Hemlock



Russian Knapweed



Musk Thistle



The District received a Non-Federal Lands Hazardous Fuel Reduction grant through New Mexico State Forestry in the amount of \$255,000. This funding was shared between the Claunch-Pinto, Edgewood and East Torrance SWCDs. The funding was for defensible space and hazardous fuels reduction areas and public education concerning fire safety and healthy watersheds. The District completed projects in the amount of \$51,240.02 and completed 59.2 acres of hazardous fuels reduction. The District co-sponsored a contractor's training for contractors and landowners at the Torreon Community Center in May, 2015. Approximately 52 people attended the training which was conducted by NM State Forestry personnel and the District's Forest Contract Inspector. The free training consisted of tree thinning techniques, requirements for defensible space and hazardous fuels reduction and chain saw safety. The District has applied for an additional Western State Wildland Urban Interface Grant through NM State Forestry to be able to continue working with landowners throughout the District.



Lawrence Crane- NM State Forestry, training landowner and contractors on tree thinning procedures.



Fred Rossbach, the District's Forest Contract Inspector, training area contractors and landowners on tree thinning procedures.

The District has received funding for the Ojo Peak and Red Canyon Collaborative Forest Restoration Projects. The District worked collaboratively with La Merced del Manzano, NM Land Grant Council, NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, NM Forest Industry Association, Mora Research Center, La Merced del Manzano Youth, SWCA Environmental Consultants, Estrada Collaborative Resource Management, LLC, Mexicano Land, Education and Conservation Trust, Mora Research Center, Mt. Taylor Millworks, and other collaborators on these two projects. Both projects have been completed.



Ojo Peak Riparian Restoration Area

The District is the fiscal agent and project manager for the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance. The Alliance consists of 12 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, several Tribes, Federal and State agencies. The District has received \$1,650,000 in Water Trust Board funding for this project. Projects have been completed from Velarde to Bernardo. The Alliance recently approved another \$525,000 in projects to be completed in the Grants, Santa Fe, and Espanola areas. The District's field staff have sprayed re-sprouts on project areas that have been completed. The field staff has been re-spraying these areas for the last three years. We are seeing major success in controlling the salt cedar and Russian olive re-sprouts by treating them for three to five years after the project was completed.



Conducting Contractor Site Visits for the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance projects.



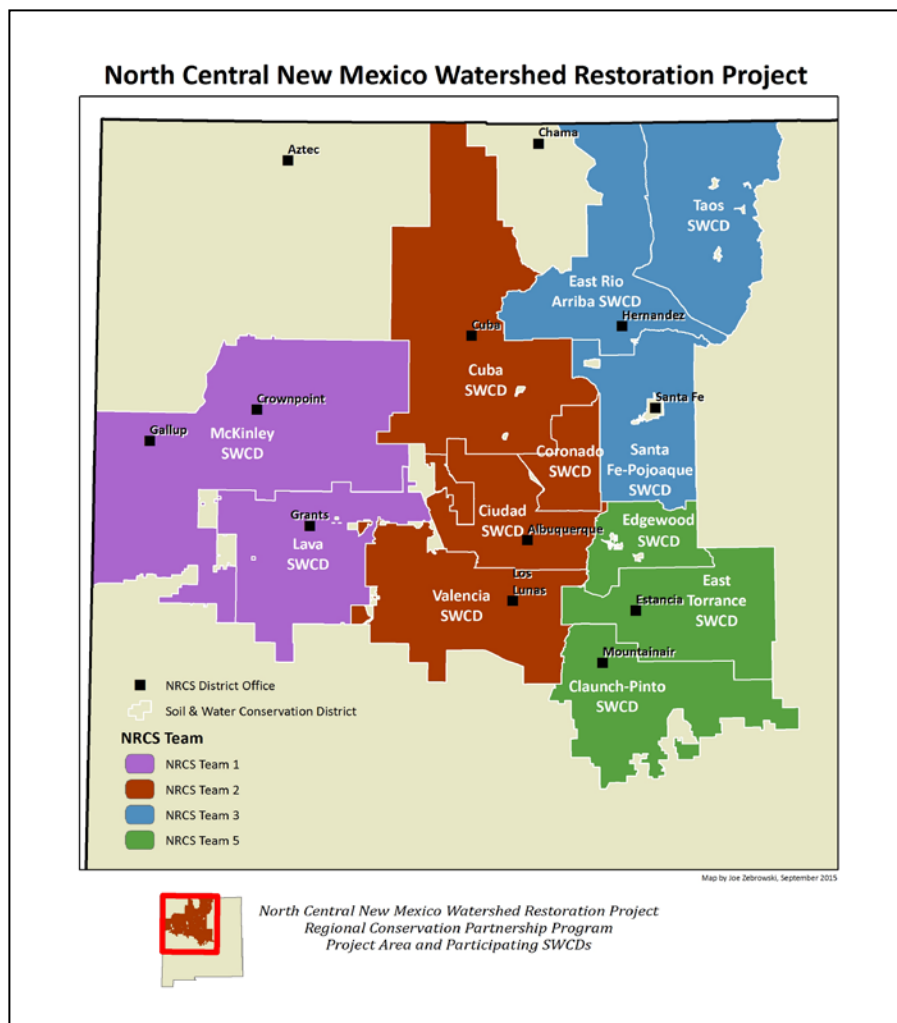
Field Staff spraying salt cedar and Russian olive re-sprouts.

The Manzanita Manzano Restoration Partnership also known as Isleta Project was created through the Pueblo of Isleta Cross-Jurisdictional Collaborative Forest Restoration Grant funded by the US Forest Service in 2009. NEPA was completed on 2,000 acres belonging to the Pueblo, 620 acres belonging to the Chilili Land Grant and 5,800 acres on the Cibola National Forest. The twenty-one collaborating partners have been working together since 2009 and as a result the Cibola National Forest and the Natural Resource Conservation Service were awarded a Joint Chief's grant for this project. Work is being completed on the project by the Pueblo of Isleta Natural Resource Department.



Masticator at work on the Joint Chief's project.

The North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project through the Natural Resource Conservation Service Regional Conservation Partnership Program is a regional project aimed at reducing wildfire risk and improving health and function of the watersheds through a watershed approach. The watershed approach provides a framework for coordinating project needs among private landowners, state and Federal agencies, Tribal governments, communities, and other interested stakeholders to emphasize and prioritize resource needs across watersheds. The project extends from Taos to Bernardo and Gallup to Santa Rosa and includes all major tributaries and sub-watersheds of the Rio Grande and Pecos River. Claunch-Pinto SWCD and its twenty-eight partners are working together to improve the Rio Grande Watershed and a portion of the western Pecos Watershed. This partnership is committed to improving watershed health and mitigating the extreme risk of wildfire. In 2015 the project received an allocation of \$2,313,359



2. Partnerships

Cooperating Agency Status – The Claunch-Pinto SWCD has entered into Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) with the Bureau of Land Management and the Cibola National Forest this past year. The purpose of MOUs are to document cooperation and to define the duties between the Federal agencies and Claunch-Pinto SWCD.

- a. **BLM – CO2 Pipeline: Responsibilities of Cooperator** – 1) Assist the BLM in the preparation of the EIS, ensuring that interests of the Claunch-Pinto are incorporated as part of the EIS; 2) Provide the BLM Project Manager with information to assist in the development of a range of reasonable alternatives and in the analysis of effects on soil and water conservation throughout the state of New Mexico; 3) Participate in communications regarding the EIS for the Lobos CO2 Pipeline Project, including, but not limited to, conference calls, meetings, and e-mails; 4) information, comments, and technical expertise to the BLM regarding those elements of the EIS, and the data and analyses supporting them.
Kinder Morgan notified the BLM on January 21, 2015, that they intend to withdraw their right-of-way application for the Lobos CO₂ Pipeline Project
- b. **Cibola National Forest – Forest Plan Revision:** 1) Serve on an interdisciplinary team; 2) Provide comments to the plan; 3) Co-convene and help design the public engagement process; 4) provide USFS with all information related to our respective comprehensive plans in respect to natural resources, economy, and cultural and traditional land uses.

The Claunch-Pinto SWCD District Manager is the Point of Contact for the Mountainair Landscape Team. All four Point of Contacts for the Cibola National Forest Landscape Teams are affiliated with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The Cibola National Forest (CNF) is revising their 1985 Forest Plan. CNF is committed to involving the public in a meaningful way to help develop a forest plan that will result in sustainable management. The deadline for comments on Phase II of the Plan Revision was September 25, 2015. Comments will be used to develop a draft proposed plan and a range of alternative plans.



Cibola National Forest Plan Re-Vision Public Meeting in Corona, NM – July, 2015.

- c. Manzano State Park: Claunch-Pinto SWCD entered into an agreement with the NM State Parks to sale wood from a thinning project on the park. The District sold 197 cords of wood. The funds from this project will be used for a joint conservation project at the park. The District's field staff also chipped all of the slash on the project area.



Manzano State Park hazardous fuels reduction project.

- d. Knights of Columbus and St. Vincent de Paul: Claunch-Pinto SWCD worked with the Knights of Columbus to make sure they could harvest wood from the Red Canyon CFRP and Manzano State Park to deliver to St. Vincent de Paul. The wood was then given to 69 families who needed to heat their homes and prepare their food. The Knights of Columbus delivered all of the wood as requested. The District also gave all of the vegetables grown in their hoop house to St. Vincent de Paul to give to the families who needed the food.



Knights of Columbus harvesting wood.

- e. Partnered with Torrance County to submit a Re-Leaf grant proposal.
- 3. We continue to maintain membership and are active in the South Central Mountain RC&D. Brian Greene is on the Executive Council of the RC&D.

We continue to maintain a position on the Estancia Basin Water Planning Committee. Brian Greene represents our District on this committee.

We were a founding member of the New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts (NMCCD). NMCCD now has twenty members. José Varela López is the President.

- 4. We promote conservation education with the District's education and information programs as follows:

- Co-Sponsored an air incinerator workshop on Brian's Greene's ranch

- Awarded a grant to conduct a water catchment and erosion control workshop.

- Awarded a grant to develop information education for a traveling workshop to take to communities to discuss and teach local land owners about the different treatments that can be used to protect the WUI from wildfire as well as improve the overall forest and watershed health.

- Awarded a grant to updated the Community Wildfire Protection Plan

- Working with SWCA Environmental Consultants, Romero Wood, LLC and Mountainair High School to talk to science students about watershed health.

- We are in the process of updating our website – claunchpinto.org.

Additional Achievements Include:

- 5. We promote Civil Rights and encourage increased participation of minorities and women cooperators.
- 6. We continue to increase awareness of local, state, and federal legislative actions and activities to influence political decisions and appropriations.
- 7. The District was very active and involved in coordinating conservation activities with the following:

- Torrance County
 - Estancia Basin Water Planning Committee
 - Abó Arroyo Watershed
 - County Commissioners - (Info/Data)
- Farm Service Agency
- Torrance County Extension Service
- Interstate Stream Commission
- New Mexico State Land Office
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Park Service
- Lincoln County Commission
- USDA-NRCS

New Mexico Cattle Growers Association
Socorro County Commission
US Senator Martin Heinrich's Congressional Office
US Senator Tom Udall's Congressional Office
State Senator Ted Barela
State Representative Matthew McQueen

The District has continued to write many letters to State Representatives, Senators, Agriculture Committees, Congressmen, and Appropriations Committees showing continued support of conservation programs.