



Socorro Soil & Water Conservation District
103 Francisco de Avondo, Socorro, NM 87801
August 15, 2022, 5:00 PM

Present: Eddy Harris, Chris Lopez, Lencho Vega, Jimmy Sanchez, Vernon Leseberg, Will Kolbenschlag, Nyleen Troxel Stowe, Katie Mechenbier, Jason Casuga (MRGCD), Eric Zamora (MRGCD), Julian Avalos (MRGCD), Adrian Tafoya (NRCS), Rafael Sierra Castro (NRCS), Dusty Glidewell (NRCS), Carlos Lopez, Denise Sanchez and Della Vega.

The **meeting** was called to order at 12:09 pm by Chairman Eddy Harris.

The **agenda** passed on a motion by Chris Lopez and second by James Sanchez.

The **July 6, 2022 minutes** passed on a motion by Chris Lopez and second by James Sanchez.

Items:

Adrian Tafoya-NRCS South Area Conservationist: Adrian Tafoya introduced the NRCS staff that was in attendance with him. He wanted to discuss the Memo of Agreement with the Socorro SWCD Board. Last month the Socorro SWCD sent a letter to the Chief of the NRCS stating the dissolution of the Memo of Agreement effective September 7, 2022-the sixty-day requirement listed in the agreement for dissolution. Adrian stated that Rafael Sierra-Castro had been promoted to a position in the State Office. They have been advertising for a new district conservationist in Socorro. They intend to fill this position by the end of September. Adrian then discussed the importance of the local work group meetings to develop the local resource concerns and why board members needed to attend this meeting. Chris Lopez asked why Adrian Tafoya did not come back to a board meeting like he stated he would at the meeting when the Memo of Agreement was signed. Adrian said he would have to receive an invitation to attend a meeting. Chris Lopez also asked why the contractor could not get a copy of the design and could not ask NRCS any questions about the project. He also stated that NRCS policies were ensuring that no one could work with NRCS. Denise Sanchez asked Adrian why it takes so long to pay producers with EQIP contracts once the project is complete. James Sanchez asked why NRCS staff are insisting that his 24-inch turnout is a 30-inch turnout and the area engineer stated on paper that he has a 12-foot bottom ditch. James Sanchez stated that NRCS staff are basically calling him a liar and that they have a complete disconnect with the producers. Denise Sanchez asked what Adrian intended to do to fix this situation. Adrian stated that they are simply understaffed, and they are trying to hire staff. Jason Casuga, CEO of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) told Adrian that he has a staff of licensed professional engineers. He then asked Adrian if his engineers were licensed. Adrian responded that they have one licensed engineer in the NRCS State Office and that NRCS employees all work under their license. He is going to recommend to the MRGCD Board that they adopt the policy that the MRGCD engineers need to see these designs and make sure that the projects are being designed based on the surface water elevation of that ditch and not just a randomly guessed high water line. MRGCD has all of these elevations. He also stated that the MRGCD will have more knowledge of that particular farm tract, including historical data as well as landowner information. Jason stated that the NRCS needs to stop making assumptions regarding the MRGCD ditch system. Socorro Division is very efficient, and he would like Socorro to stay this efficient. Katie Mechenbier asked Jason Casuga if this would affect



landowners/contracts in Valencia and Bernallilo counties. Jason stated that they would make this a District wide policy if adopted by the MRGCD Board. He made the request to Adrian that they begin giving the EQIP contract awardees a form to fill out that would give project designs and all pertinent information to not only the landowner, but the contractor, MRGCD, and the SWCDs in the Rio Grande Valley. He also asked Adrian to find a functional way for the NRCS to start communicating with the MRGCD. Jason also stated that until this situation is corrected, he will not recommend to any irrigator that they sign an EQIP contract with the NRCS. Denise Sanchez asked if people on water bank are getting EQIP contracts. Adrian stated that they do not ask about water rights. This is not part of the Farm Bill and does not matter to the NRCS when funding projects. Jason Casuga stated that this absolutely must change. This is the second year without a water bank and due to drought conditions, this is expected to be the norm for many years. Will Kolbenschlag asked Adrian why landowners are asked to sign contracts before designs are completed, and how the NRCS determines the cost of the projects without doing designs. Adrian did not answer this question despite it being asked four times. Kolbenschlag also asked why the NRCS refuses to share any personal information about EQIP contracts, including the name of the landowner, when the Socorro SWCD board used to vote on these and sign them. Adrian said this was due to the Farm Bill and that they cannot change it. Rafael Sierra Castro then stated that the Socorro SWCD should make changes to the Memo of Agreement and submit it to him and he would send it to the Grants and Agreements Section of the NRCS for approval.

Financial:

Treasurer's Report and Voucher Payments: See attachments. This was approved as presented on a motion by Chris Lopez and second by James Sanchez.

FY 2022 4th Quarter Report: The Department of Finance and Administration approved the 4th quarter/End of Year Budget report. See attachment.

NMDA Agreement for SWCC Grant for New Printer/Plotter: Staff submitted a grant for \$3,025 to purchase a new printer and a new plotter. This has been selected and funded by the Soil & Water Conservation Commission. This grant funding agreement was approved on a motion by Chris Lopez and second by Lencho Vega. See attachment.

NMDA Agreement for Salt Cedar Funding: The Socorro SWCD is receiving funding in the amount of \$31,780 for Salt cedar control and restoration along the Rio Grande in Socorro County. This funding agreement was approved on a motion by Chris Lopez and second by James Sanchez. See attachment.

Sawtooth Salt Cedar Treatment Contract: This was sent out prior to meeting for review. Staff contacted companies on the State of New Mexico Price Agreement #20-00000-22-00039. The first contractor chosen was Ferranti Natural Resources, LLC. They requested a change in finish date to October 25. Mr. Ferranti the owner, had hip replacement surgery a few weeks ago and will not be back to work until mid to late September. Staff discussed this with Jeff Fassett, Socorro Bureau of Land Management. This contractor lives near the project. Jeff was agreeable to having a local contractor and a later date to complete the acreage. Staff also added language into the contract regarding the termination of contract if freezing temperatures are reached overnight. This contract was approved on a motion by James Sanchez and second by Chris Lopez.



Request For Bid New Office Building: Two sealed bids were received—LGE Construction and WestCon Commercial Industries Ltd.Co. LGE submitted a bid for an office that would be 1500 square feet for \$292,378.55 with a 8.5 in x 11 in basic floor plan. This comes out to \$194.92/square foot cost. WestCon Commercial Industries Ltd. Co. submitted a bid for \$290,000 plus gross receipts tax for an office that is 2400 square feet. This comes out to \$128.54 per square foot. They also submitted full architectural plans for a building they completed in 2019 of this size. Plans included site plan, office codes, foundation plan, plumbing-water, plumbing-sewer and vent, mechanical compliance, HVAC plan, elevation plan as well as the floor plan. They stated that they have these plans in AutoCad and will be able to make changes to the plan that we would like. On a motion by Chris Lopez and second by James Sanchez, WestCon Commercial Industries Ltd. Co. was selected as the contractor.

New Employee Hire: Daniela Rivera was interviewed on August 4, 2022 by several of the board members. On a motion by Chris Lopez and second by Lencho Vega. The board discussed salary. On a motion by Chris Lopez and second by Lencho Vega, the board will offer Ms. Rivera \$32,000 as a starting salary with regular employee benefits. Roll call vote followed with all five voting in the affirmative.

Cost Share:

Agricultural: Aa application for agricultural cost share was received from Dawn Waver for livestock pipeline. This was approved on a motion by James Sanchez and second by Chris Lopez.

NMDA Report: Katie Mechenbier went over the NMDA report and the upcoming deadlines.

Adjourn: Meeting concluded at 2:45 pm.

Chairman

Date