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Bob Nichols, Chairman Eddie Vigil, Member

Rick Baish, Vice Chairman James Evrage, Member

Jeff Rabon, Secretary/Treasurer Colt Howland, Member

Clifton Varbel, Member

**OTERO SWCD MINUTES**

# FEBRUARY 5, 2025

**MEMBERS PRESENT MEMBERS ABSENT GUESTS**

Bob Nichols Eddie Vigil Katie Kruthaupt, NMDA

Rick Baish Sid Gordon, OCCEA

Jeff Rabon Laura Doth, SCM RC&D

Colt Howland **STAFF** Nick Smokovich, NMSF

James Evrage Vicky Milne Trystan Harpold, NMSF

Clifton Varbel Roy Nichols, Otero County

 **NRCS STAFF** Vanessa Hernandez, NRCS

 Kristi Wright Chad Novack, USFS

 Rowan Krump, USFS

**CALLED TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 am.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

The agenda was reviewed. James Evrage motioned to approve the agenda, Colt Howland seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**REVIEW OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the January meeting were reviewed, James Evrage motioned to approve the minutes, Rick Baish seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**Dam Liability** – Roy Nichols, Otero County Attorney, presented some information to the group regarding the liability the SWCD has with the three watershed dams. He suggested we look at getting an increased level of insurance through the Risk Management Division where we currently have a policy. Otero County has a meeting with the Army Corp of Engineers next week to discuss flooding in Otero County. There was discussion of an early warning system that could provide more time for downstream resident’s time to evacuate. The funds could be requested through the upcoming budget cycle.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

The monthly financial report was presented, James Evrage motioned to approve the report as presented, and pay the bills listed, Rick Baish seconded, motion passed unanimously.

**CORRESPONDEN****CE**

NM Conservation District Employee Dues Notice – Rick Baish motioned to pay the $10 dues, Colt Howland seconded, motion passed unanimously.

SWCD Day at the Legislature – Based on the expense and the short timeframe to meet with legislators, Vicky recommended we skip this year. After discussion it was agreed that we forgo this year. Rick Baish motioned to move our March meeting to its regular date of March 5th, Colt Howland seconded, motion passed unanimously.

Streamline Website Services – they have updated their platform to comply with new regulations. The new fee in April will be $1,620 annually. It was $1,080 in 2024.

**REPORTS**

NM Department of Agriculture – The NMDA report provided information on upcoming deadlines, meetings, and grant opportunities.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Kristi read the report. The EQIP application deadline was November 8th. The ranking deadline is February 28th. EQIP IRA has been put on hold. Visit AskUSDA for updates. CSP classic application deadline is February 7th with a ranking deadline of February 28th. Vanessa Hernandez attended the meeting as the new lead planner in Alamogordo. Staff have been visiting Healthy Soil Program applicants. NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting will be held on April 9th from 9am – 4pm.

Otero County Cooperative Extension – Sid provided a report. The pesticide applicator CEU workshop will be held on March 11th. The seed to supper program has 30 people. There will be a Firewise meeting in Cloudcroft of the 24th and the Otero Working Group will meet on the 27th.

South Central Mountain RC&D – Laura provided a report. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update is ready to be contracted. Timberon Phase VI is beginning implementation. The EWP in Ruidoso has 12 million dollars spent of the 53 million obligated to the project.

NM State Forestry – Trystan gave an update. The Cloudcroft NFL and the Two Goats NFL are in the legal department waiting for approvals to the work plans. The Community Wildfire Defense Grant in James Canyon needs a fiscal agent. Rick Baish motioned to approve Otero SWCD becoming the fiscal agent, James Evrage seconded, motion passed unanimously. Nick brought up the After the Wildfire publication as an addition to our website. He also mentioned looking into a Watershed Protection Plan for Curtis Canyon.

USFS – Chad Novack provided an update. He would like to assist us with getting a project developed to hold water in the watershed above Curtis Canyon Dam. There was also discussion about the Denny Hill project. The South Sacramento Restoration Project is being reviewed at the regional office. The Non-Native Invasive Plant Project EIS is at the USFWS for consultation. Chad and Rowan attended the dam rehabilitation plan public scoping meeting and offered to help with obtaining the original dam maps. Vicky will send Chad the easement information.

SWCD – The website has been updated with the dam rehabilitation planning information. The commercial applicator for the musk thistle project is still not interested in doing the spray this year. James Evrage has a contact he will get to Vicky. The winter newsletter has been completed and will be uploaded to the website.

**OLD BUSINESS**

Drone mapping – Colt is going to speak with Holloman again.

Watershed Dam Rehabilitation Planning – The meeting went well. There was one comment from the Camp at Rio about the cost for any improvements and the fact that the dams are still functional. Merceidez Fabok has responded to the comment.

## NEW BUSINESS

The landowners on the north fork of the Fresnal have asked for assistance to do additional maintenance in conjunction with work being undertaken by the City of Alamogordo. A question was raised about their status as an acequia. The group is not an official acequia. Colt suggested they contact the NM Acequia Association as they provide assistance to get bylaws prepared. There is also funding available specifically for acequias. Bob Nichols will get in contact with James Cadwallader.

The small conservation project for Jake Carner with 5 Star Ranch is still going to be used for erosion control and dirt tank upgrades.

The Dona Ana SWCD has been hosting public meetings in Chaparral to assistance producers on the Dona Ana County side. This has led to questions about what Otero SWCD can provide in assistance on the Otero County side. Vicky has answered a couple of emails and provided information about the Alamogordo Service Center.

John Tunberg spoke about the Landscape Scale Restoration Project he is working on through the NMDA funding. He has worked with NM State Forestry on the details to expand their project. He has been unsuccessful in working with Mescalero, BLM and the Tularosa Community Ditch on the Tularosa Creek application. Colt provided John with additional contact information.

James Evrage wanted to discuss the US Department of Energy National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor Project. He was at a meeting in Artesia and is very concerned about how this affects ranching in New Mexico. This corridor removes all local authority. An energy company can start with the negotiations with a landowner, if they don't like the response they can go to the local commission, if they don't like that answer they then go to the state level when they don't get what they want there they go to Federal Energy Regulatory Corridor who can and most likely will give them the power of eminent domain. This corridor is removing and tying the hands of landowners in negotiating powers and gives it all to the energy companies. If a landowner wants or needs to sell their ranch or part of their ranch, who is going to buy it with a corridor on it? There will be another meeting in Ruidoso, and he encouraged everyone to attend.

With no further business to discuss, James Evrage motioned to adjourn, Rick Baish seconded, motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:38 pm.

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Bob Nichols, Chairman Jeff Rabon, Secretary/ Treasurer