SIERRA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OF JULY 1, 2025 TO JUNE 30, 2026

Sierra SWCD Supervisors: Willard Hall, Russell Woolf, Sharon Luna, Lane Forristerl, Randy Coil and Randy Lack.

The Board of Supervisors of the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District continue to grow and expand their District programs and are excited that the community is recognizing the District as the leader in addressing the natural resource needs within the boundaries of the Sierra District.

The regular board meetings of the Sierra Soil and Water Conservation District are held on the second Wednesday of each month at the Chandler Elkins Conference Room, Sierra Conservation Plaza, 2101 S Broadway in Truth or Consequences at 4:00 P.M.

Current Board of Supervisors include:

Willard Hall, Chairman, Palomas Community
Beau Marshall, Vice-Chairman, Engle Community
Lane Forrister, Member, T. or C. Community
Russel Woolf, Member, Engle Community
Randy Lack, Member, Winston Community
Randy Coil, Member, Monticello Community
Sharon Luna, Member, Winston Community

Personnel employed by the Sierra District are:

Jennie Bierner-Shepperd, *Business Manager, full-time*
Taylor Roberts*, Natural Resource Director, full-time*
High School/College Interns- *part-time, dependent on funding*

Sierra SWCD continued to see success in existing programs and grant funding this fiscal year. Funding was secured for a variety of projects including fire recovery and hazardous fuel reduction, as well as significant awards to noxious weeds/restoration funding. These awards resulted in revenues consistent with last year at approximately $1.5 million dollars. We are pleased to report that with the successful outcomes of all projects, results have opened the door for other opportunities to increase the District's capacity. Staff have secured several other funding contracts which are projected to take the budget to the current level or higher, increasing the impact of our conservation efforts. Partners include NMDA, BLM, BOR, Forest Service, and NM State Forestry. In addition, private funding was received from the Foundation for America's Public Lands and the Armendaris Ranch.

Additional technical assistance is provided to the Sierra District by staff of the USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Truth or Consequences Field Office, which includes Kristi Wright, *District Conservationist*; Nicole Chavez, *Soil Conservationist*; Morgan Smith, Area CET. This year Sierra's relationship with the Forest Service grew as a Challenge Cost Share Agreement was established. Through this agreement, Sierra SWCD has worked closely with staff on the Black Range Ranger District, targeting Black Fire recovery projects.

PROGRAMS

Agricultural Cost Share Program

There was a total of 15 applicants for the FY25 District Agricultural Cost-Share program. The district awarded 12, with projects totaling $ 165,207.87. The district cost-shared $ 77,363.67 directly to producers. Projects included:

- 7 watering facilities (livestock drinkers and storage tanks)
- 1 Livestock Well Drill
- 7 Solar Pumping Plants
- 7,965 ft Livestock Pipeline
- 1 Solid Set Sprinkler System
- 2,300 ft of Irrigation Pipeline
- 15,840 ft of Multistrand Barbed-wire Fence
- 2 Dirt Tank Repairs
- 35 acres of Brush Management (mesquite)

Alfalfa valves; Las Palomas, NM

Solar Pump, Livestock Watering Facility; Beaverhead, NM

Practices installed through NRCS EQIP include:

- Brush Management – 222.6 acres
- Fence – 20,044 ft
- Livestock Pipeline – 21,366 ft
- Watering Facilities – 1
- Pumping plant – 1
- Sprinkler System – 7.4 acres
- Cover Crops – 28.9 acres

Soil and Well Water Testing

The Sierra SWCD offers free soil testing and irrigation well water testing to the public. American Agricultural Laboratory, Inc out of McCook, Nebraska offers a Complete Soil Test with Soil Amendment Recommendations that tests for Nitrate, Phosphate, Potassium, Zinc, Iron, Manganese, Copper, Boron, Sulfur, Calcium, Magnesium, Sodium, Salinity, and pH. This test also includes Amendment Recommendations. The Irrigation Water Test includes: pH, Sodium, Calcium, Magnesium, Potassium, Carbonate, Bicarbonate, Chloride, Sulfate Sulfur, SAR, and recommendations for safe irrigation water. With this program, Sierra SWCD completed 7 soil tests and 1 irrigation well water test in FY26.

Residential Drip and Sprinkler Cost-Share Program

The Sierra SWCD continues their cost-share program to encourage homeowners to install a drip or sprinkler irrigation systems for their yard. The conservation practice will be based on cost docket price per foot of $1.95/linear foot of the irrigation system, not to exceed $1,000. There were 5 completed projects for this program in FY26.

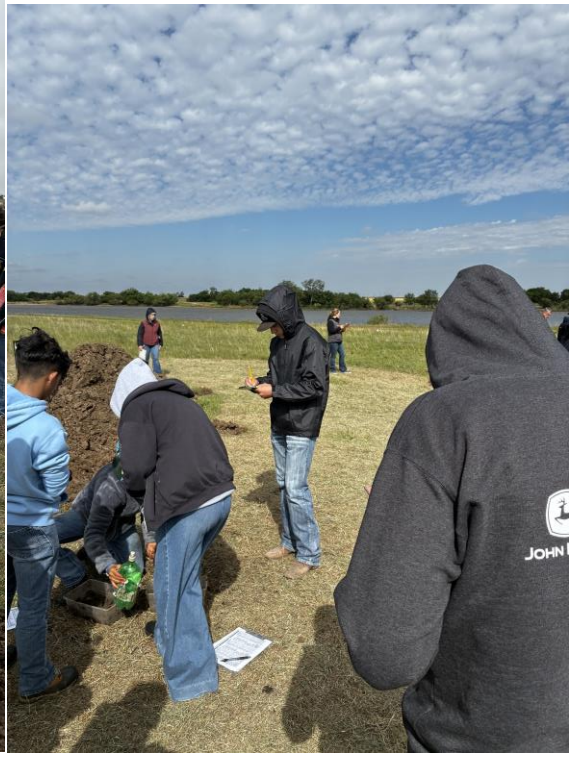
Household Water Savings Devices Cost-Share Program

This program encourages homeowners to utilize water devices in their homes that are low flow devices or utilize water more efficiently, such as low flow toilets or showerheads and even for water catchments systems. There was 1 application for an instant hot water heater.

Conservation Outreach

Youth Sponsorship

One of the major objectives of the Sierra SWCD is conservation education. They conduct and participate in many activities that promote education in both ag natural resources. Since 1991, the Sierra District has assisted the local high school (Hot Springs High) FFA chapter and the local 4-H Chapter with education events and has also sponsored any qualifying land resource teams to the National Finals in Oklahoma City. This year the Sierra County 4H Pasture and Range Team and the Homesite Team qualified to compete at the national level. Evan Aguirre finished second in the nation in the Homesite contest!



Hot Springs High School FFA & 4-H students.

Evan Aguirre, Reserve National Champion-Homesite Evaluation contest!

Conservation Education

The District worked closely with the Sierra County Cooperative Extension Office in sponsoring the annual Ag Day event at the Sierra County Sheriff's Posse Arena in Truth or Consequences. Ag Day was presented to all 2nd - 5th grade students in the local school system and had learning stations, showcasing a variety of agriculture related resources and products. This year Ag Day was held Thursday May 14, 2026. Over 400 students and community members, including homeschool students, attended.

AG in the Classroom

The District continued its partnership with NMSU Sierra County Cooperative Extension, by implementing the popular Ag-in-the-Classroom education with students at the local elementary schools. Students from Kindergarten to 5th grade participated in classroom activities ranging from incubating eggs to hatch chicks, to growing mushrooms and vermicomposting with worm bins. These important hands-on activities bring awareness and education about agriculture straight to the classroom learning experience.

Egg to chick

Egg to Chick

Soil profiles with cereal layers.

Mushroom grow/friendly fungus!

Drone Applicability Activity: HSHS Students & Sierra SWCD Interns

Last year, local students were introduced to evlolving drone technology and it's uses in natural resource management. This project began last fiscal year with students assisting with pre-project monitoring for an aerial creosote treatment in cooperation with BLM. Unfortunately, due to mulitiple factors, the original project had to be shifted to another site, however students continued their study with volunteers from a local contractor.

Students completing field work and setting up monitoring transects at the project site last year.

Students receiving hands-on experience during a drone demonstration courtesy of Lanford Excavation.
Drone calibration with BLM staff and contractor prior to Selado Springs project.

Elaina Mays, a senior intern with our office, took her research to competition at the NM State Fair and qualified to compete at the National Society for Range Management Conference in Monterey, CA. New Mexico was well represented with the 2nd and 3rd place winners! Sierra SWCD was a sponsor for the trip and Taylor Roberts provided coaching and mentorship throughout the process.

National Range Management Competition!

Community Awareness

With a mill levy in place, the Sierra SWCD is very cognizant of their accountability to the community and works very hard promoting natural resource awareness. The District set up a display booth at the local county fair and information is provided to all the cooperators of the Sierra District. The staff work to update the District Facebook page and local media to bring awareness about local programs offered through the office, and updates to important projects being implemented.

Copies of the Annual Report and Annual Plan of Work were distributed to conservation partners and local legislators. The Sierra SWCD also has their own web site (www.sierrasoil.org) to help keep local constituents up to date on District projects.

District staff make an on-going effort to openly communicate with the local government and other entities regarding the Sierra SWCD programs and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in general. Staff hosted a Conservation District Employees training that was open to all Districts in the state. The goal of this effort was to educate new staff and equip them with knowledge and contacts necessary to successfully apply and implement funding available. The presentation was well attended by District staff and board members from across the state.

Fiscal Administration

The Board and staff takes their fiscal responsibility very seriously and works diligently to ensure that financial procedures are followed closely. Budgets and financial reports are submitted on a timely basis to the Department of Finance & Administration. The Sierra SWCD adheres to the Office of the State Auditor Agreed upon Procedures Tier System for financial reporting. The existing mil levy rate authorization is submitted to the New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Commission and the local County Treasurers for review and compliance. Professional Services Contracts were completed for necessary technical and fiscal assistance. We are happy to report the District received a full audit this past year and there were no significant findings reported.

District Act Compliance

The District follows the Open Meetings Act and completes an Open Meetings Resolution annually. The Sierra SWCD participates in any pertinent County Planning and Zoning meetings, Sierra County Commission, T or C City Council, and Elephant Butte City Council meetings monthly. District Supervisors and staff attended trainings provided at the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) annual conference as well as other professional development classes. The Sierra District also attends the Farm Bill local work group with the T or C Field Office of the NRCS.

Current Issues

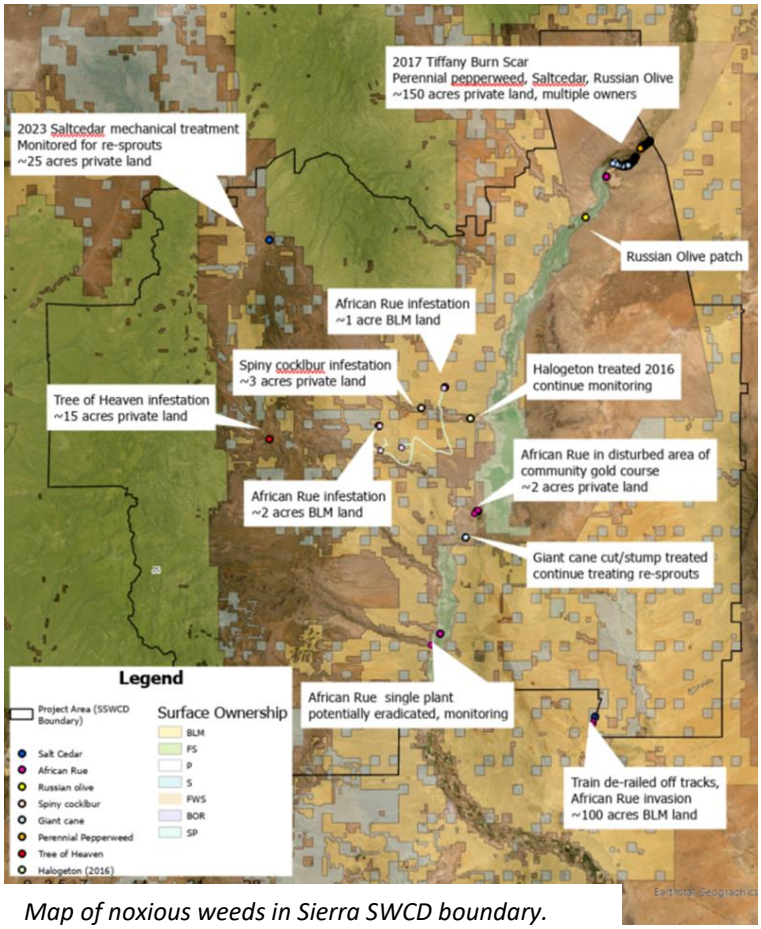
The Sierra SWCD, during regular meetings, annually reviews their Memorandums of Understanding with the USDI- Bureau of Land Management, Las Cruces Field Office, the T or C Field Office of the NRCS, USDA-Forest Service, Gila National Forest and the USDA-Forest Service, Cibola National Forest.

Official comments are provided as necessary, and staff travel to Santa Fe during the Legislative Session to advocate for ag producers and policy affecting our local natural resources.
Sierra SWCD continues as a cooperating agency with the Cibola National Forest to participate in revisions to their National Forest Plan and actively participates in planning and public meetings. The District has stayed up to date and active in the development of the Gila National Forest Plan and most recently, recovery plans for the 2022 Black Fire.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Sierra SWCD Noxious Weeds Program

The District continues to inventory, map and treat identified noxious plants in the Sierra District. Partnerships and grant funding through the Bureau of Land Management, NM State Forestry Energy Minerals and Natural Resource Department, and the New Mexico Department of Agriculture have provided needed herbicides and equipment to Sierra SWCD, as well as the ability to hire contractors for professional services to aid in the treatment of noxious weeds. Current plants on the inventory include: African Rue, Salt Cedar, Perennial Pepperweed, Tree of Heaven, Giant Cane and Russian Olive. The Sierra District has worked very hard with the community, providing technical and on-site assistance for education and removal of noxious weeds. Outreach efforts included on-site treatments throughout the district as well as advertisement of various “WANTED: Dead Not Alive” posters in the local paper.



Map of noxious weeds in Sierra SWCD boundary.

In the ongoing battle against invasive species, treatment has been applied to over 480 acres of weeds. In the private sector, we have been working hard to assist in the control of several invasive species such as African Rue in the lowland areas and Bull Thistle in some of the mountainous grazing areas.

EMNRD: Invasive Plants Program

Sierra SWCD received $30,000 in grant funding from NM State Energy Minerals and Natural Resource Department (EMNRD) through their Invasive Plants Program. With this funding, Sierra SWCD was able to expand their existing Noxious Weeds Program and hire a specialized contractor to treat noxious weed infestations across the district. “WANTED: Dead Not Alive” posters were published in the local newpaper and social media outlets describing the various noxious weeds that can be found in the area, and listed contact information for Sierra SWCD to be able to confirm and treat infestations. The Natural Resource Director collected applications, confirmed identification of noxious weed, and coordinated with contgractor to spray at optimal time for successful herbicide application. With this funding, SSWCD has treated over 30 acres of private and state lands infested with noxious weeds, and monitored over 50 acres.

WANTED Poster published in local paper.

NMDA: Sierra SWCD Noxious Weeds Program

The Invasive Plants Program grant required a 1:1 non-federal match. NMDA gladly partnered with us to provide $30,000 to match that provided by the IPP grant through EMNRD. Main weeds treated are African Rue, Tree of Heaven, and Salt Cedar. With this grant, SSWCD has trated over 75 acres of federal lands (BLM and BOR) and monitoried over 100 acres.

Buearu of Land Management – Master Range Agreement:

Sierra SWCD was awarded a Master Range Agreement from the Bureau of Land Management to complete various projects that align with BLM priorities. Projects completed this year include:

Cookes Peak Thinning Phase 1

290 acres near Cookes Peak in Deming, NM was thinned by Rocky Mountain Ecology as a Wildfire Risk Reduction initiative. Target species were stump cut or limbed and piled for burning. This project served as Phase 1 of a larger project that will serve as a fire break protecting native, desirable Ariozona Cypress trees.

Selado Spring Ranch Aerial Creosote Treatment

Using a Hylio brand spray drone, 578 acres of native rangelands suffering from invasive creosote encroachment were treated aerially with tebuthiuron at a conservative rate with the overall goal of returning the rangeland back to it's historical plant community.

Monticello Bay Salt Cedar Removal Project

Sierra SWCD partnered with the Bureau of Reclamation to treat 38 acres of dense monotypic salt cedar in Monticello Bay near Elephant Butte. This area is used heavily by the public to access the lake, and is also home to many sensitive wildlife speices. Coordination with various parnters including biologists was essential to complete this project.

Excavated (left) then masticated (right) salt cedar.

Foundation for America's Public Lands – Virtual Fencing, Hidalgo NM

We parterned with the Bureau of Land Management to obtain funding from the Foundation for America's Public Lands to complete a Precision Ranching project in Hidalgo county for the Massey Ranch. This grant purchased and deployed 400 cattle collars across the Massey Ranch. Through this collarborative project, Sierra SWCD was awarded the **2025 Rangeland Innovations Award** at the Public Lands Council Meeting in Flagstaff, AZ.

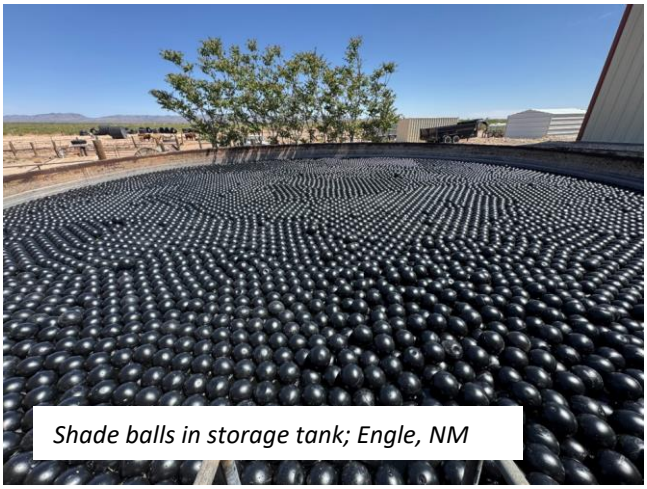
Pictured above-Massey Family, Taylor Roberts, Willard Hall, Juan Gamon – PLC Meeting 2025

NM WRRI: Ag Water Resilience Program

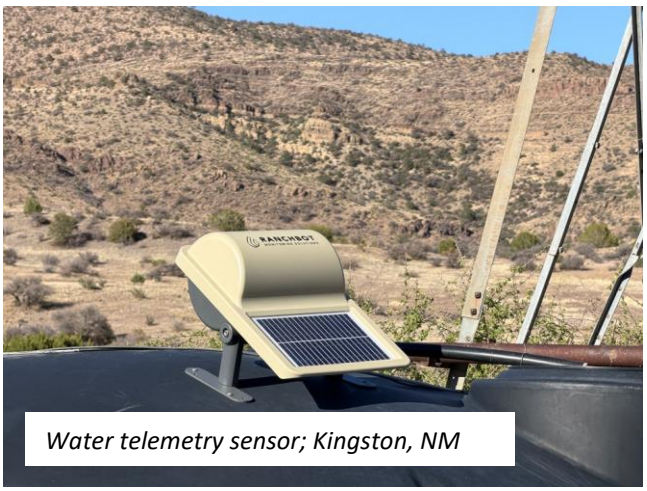
This year, Sierra SWCD applied and was awarded 4 grants from NMSU's Water Resources Research Institute, Agricultural Water Resilience Program. Through this funding, Sierra partnered with 4 different landowners within the district to complete various water projects on their agricultural operations. Projects include:

- Redrilling 5 livestock wells
- Installing over 70,000ft livestock pipeline
- Installing shade balls in large open-top storage tanks
- Replacing open-top storage tanks with closed storage tanks
- Replacing tire trough or steel drinkers
- Installing water telemetry sensors, rain guages, and pump controllers
- Aerially spraying pre-emergent herbicide on farm fields with a drone
- Installing sprinkler irrigation system

Livestock well drilling rig; Hillsboro, NM



Shade balls in storage tank; Engle, NM



Water telemetry sensor; Kingston, NM

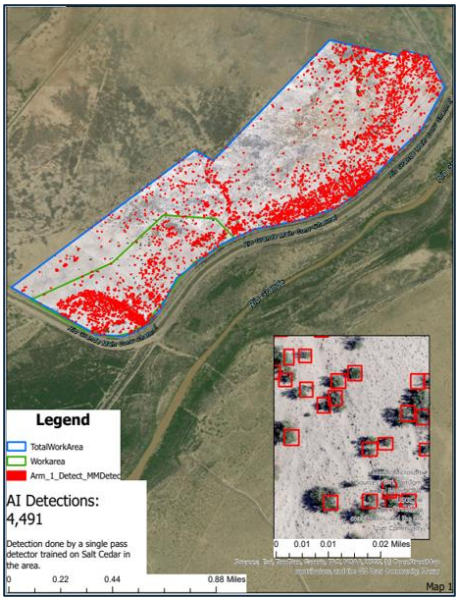
Water telemetry sensor and closed storage tank; Hillsboro, NM

Healthy Soils Program

Sierra SWCD served as the project sponsor for Gina Vanlandingham out of Animas Creek. She was awarded a Healthy Soils Program grant from NMDA. With this funding, they were able to integrate bale grazing, intense rotational grazing, electric fencing, and poultry grazing as part of her healthy soil initiative.

NMDA Tiffany Fire Rehabilitation Phase 2

NMDA awarded Sierra SWCD $100,000 to complete a salt cedar removal project within the 2017 Tiffany Fire burn scar. This year, Sierra mechanically exvacated and mulched 125 acres of salt cedar on private lands owned by NM Ranch Properties. The selected contractor, Lanford Excavation LLC, utilied their mapping drone to use Atifical Inteligence to fly and map all salt cedar plants in the treatment area. This helped Sierra SWCD determin the acres with the highest density to prioritize for treatment.



Highway 59 Thinning

This year, the Sierra District secured a District Opportunities Grant to thin and masticate overgrown vegetation along the highway 59 corridor between Winston and Poverty Creek. This area had become dangerous for both vehicle and wildlife traffic due to the encroachment of brush and trees along the road. In addition, the dense fuel load created a potential fire hazard. Over 60 acres of brush was treated with this funding and the District just learned they were awarded a second grant to implement phase II in FY 2027.

Before:

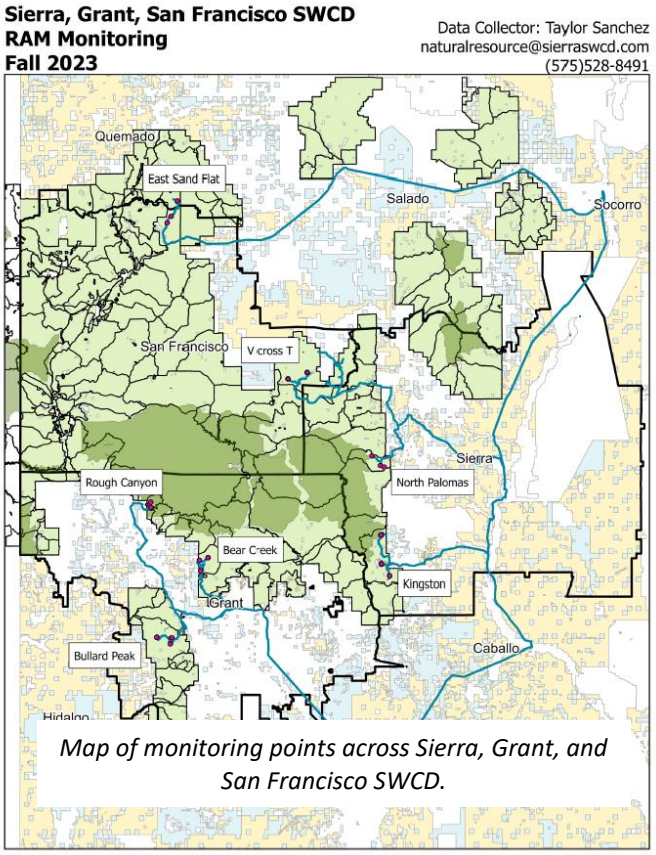
After:

Armendaris Ranch Agreement

Each year, Sierra SWCD enters into a cooperative agreement with NM Ranch Properties (Turner Enterprises) on the Armendaris Ranch. Activies include: noxious and invasive weed treatment, mapping, monitoring, and restoration project maintenance. Through this agreement, multiple grants have been applied on private land in the Tiffany Basin.

Rangeland Monitoring on US Forest Service Allotments

In partnership with Grants SWCD and San Francisco SWCD, Sierra SWCD has completed the third and final year of rangeland monitoring across 8 different FS allotments. Sierra SWCD completed monitoring across the 3 allotments in Sierra's district. Through a private contractor, Grant and San Franscisco SWCD have also completed monitoring across 5 FS allotments. Two of the eight participating grazing allotments are in designated wilderness areas, requiring all monitoring to be completed horseback. NMSU's RITF helped identify the most effective method of data collection called the Rapid Assessment Method. Monitoring data was compiled over these 3 years to provide permitees with accurate vegetation data to keep in their own records.



Map of monitoring points across Sierra, Grant, and San Francisco SWCD.

THE SIERRA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IS VERY PROUD OF THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE PAST FISCAL YEAR AND HOPES TO CONTINUE MOVING FORWARD.