

FORESTRY NOTES



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National Association of
Conservation Districts

Grant SWCD and partners helping to restore New Mexico forestlands



As a single-person, part-time office, the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has its work cut out when it comes to implementing on-the-ground projects, so the SWCD is partnering with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to undertake forest restoration in New Mexico.

The timing couldn't be better, as New Mexico's Gila National Forest, which is located in part, in Grant County and near the Grant SWCD headquarters in Silver City, has been focusing on restoration efforts to reduce high fuel loads, especially near communities and neighborhoods adjacent to the forest.

"We don't have funding where we can hire a forester or a technician, so it's really important we partner with these outside agencies to help us conduct these projects," Grant SWCD Project Manager Rebecca Benavidez said.

"The fires can spread quickly and rapidly, so any time we can do fuels reduction projects it helps the watershed and helps prevent catastrophic fires," she said. "We struggle to find funding, so these grants are really im-

portant to us."

Grant SWCD was awarded a \$315,000 Collaborative Forest Restoration Program (CFRP) grant from the USFS, which also required a 25 percent or \$80,000 non-federal match. The grant aims to build collaboration and provide treatment to 237 acres of ponderosa pine and pinyon-juniper on the wilderness district of Gila National Forest in southwest New Mexico.

The project takes place in Gattón's Park's wildland-urban interface along the edge of a residential area. Objectives include reducing fire risk, harvesting and utilizing small-diameter wood, restoring forest structure and improving wildlife habitat. Now in its second year, 116 acres have been treated to date, Benavidez said.

"I'm thrilled with what we've been able to accomplish," USFS Gila National Forest Partnership Coordinator Julia Faith Rivera said. "We're getting quality work done on the ground and building stronger relationships, not just for this project but for future collaboration efforts, as well."

TNC initially applied for and received a CFRP grant for planning the project. In 2018, the Grant SWCD was awarded the implemen-

tation grant. TNC assisted with completion of the archeological and environmental analysis in the first CFRP grant and currently continues the project monitoring component in the second CFRP.

"The other piece is just trying to facilitate collaboration around implementation on public and private land restoration," TNC Gila Program Manager Martha Cooper said. "It's been entirely positive. Certainly the folks who have come out to see the project have been really interested and encouraged by what it looks like."

"The tree density has been reduced by nearly a half, and we're seeing a lot more small openings and breaks in the canopy," she said. "The Forest Service has been happy to get the support from the Grant SWCD and having the work on the ground, and the contractors have done a great job."

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SWCD Learning Circles assist female forest landowners



Indiana's LaPorte County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is partnering with Women4theLand to focus on female landowner needs through periodic Women's Conservation Learning Circles.

"The American Farmland Trust did some research that found when women find themselves in a position where they've inherited property or have lost their husbands, they are more likely to hang on to the property and manage it in a more consistent way with their values when they have direct access to resources," SWCD Ed-

ucation Coordinator Nicole Messacar said.

"We have a lot of forests and a lot of female landowners, so we wanted to have a stronger connection with them," she said. "This has been very successful, and we will be doing it again."

The first gathering took place in June at Cummings Lodge in LaPorte and included about 20 female landowners, as well as representatives from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the County Surveyor's Office and other local resource professionals.

Morning discussions examined how female landowners can connect with local resource professionals. After lunch, there was a guided hike that included invasive species identification and forest management practices. The hike also included information on efforts to promote healthy soil and water quality and information on financial assistance programs.

"They're all concerned about maintaining the quality of their forest," Messacar said. "Everyone had a different reason for participating – one landowner was a birder, another

was concerned about invasive species – but forest health was at the top."

The smaller group size allowed the women to interact with one another, share stories and suggestions, and provide the SWCD with suggestions on topics for additional workshops.

Messacar found that key takeaways included learning which agencies were available to help and in which areas of their land management process. It's something she plans to build upon for future workshops.

"It really did engage them. I don't want to lose that," she said. "They had a lot of great questions."

Already, landowners have contacted the conservation district to schedule a time for a forester or conservationist to visit their property, and in some cases, to provide ideas for land management. Messacar noted that the local NRCS district conservationist also experienced an increase in inquiries.

Messacar will soon decide on potential topics for future meetings.

"This approach is different for me in that the women are saying, 'Yes, tell me more,' so we're letting it play out in order for us to learn what our women need, so we can meet them there," she said.

ON THE WEB



Conservation districts eligible for 2020 Smokey Bear Awards

In the world of wildfire prevention, there is no greater honor than to receive a Smokey Bear Award. These special awards are reserved for people or organizations that provide sustained, outstanding service. All nominations for 2020 Smokey Bear Awards must adhere to the criteria and be submitted to the online form by December 15, 2019.

To view criteria and apply, visit>>
<https://www.stateforesters.org/2019/08/12/nominations-period-for-2020-smokey-bear-awards-opens>



FORESTRY BRIEFS

SWCD organizes workshop to discuss woodland management resources

Darke Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is offering a forestry workshop on Oct. 5 at Chenoweth Trails. There will be experts on site to discuss woodland management resources, timber stand improvement, timber harvesting, logging and wood utilization and woodland wildlife management. Registration is \$10 and includes educational materials, refreshments and lunch.

District program helps restore forestland following wildfire

Butte County Resource Conservation District will pay 75% of the costs of restoring forestland to those who lost forestland in the Camp Fire.

Anyone with more than a few acres of burned forest is eligible to get financial help removing dead brush, replanting trees, protecting seedlings, and erosion control under the USDA's Emergency Forest Restoration Program. Baby Ponderosa Pines, Douglas firs, and oaks will be available as early as March 2020. Landowners can choose their own contractors; funds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

District remakes student program to cater to adults

Vermilion County Conservation District is offering "Outdoor School for Adults" this September. The four-day program will follow one that has been provided to school students for 46 years. Highlights will include tours of several Illinois nature preserves; forest habitat exploration including the popular "critter crawl"; wetland habitats with a tour; and prairie plant identification and exploration. The fee for all four days is \$100, or \$75 if registered by the early bird deadline. All participants will receive a copy of the Outdoor School workbook and a naturalist gift pack.

Forestry Notes Q&A

Vicki Christiansen, Chief
U.S. Forest Service



U.S. Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen leads a workforce of more than 25,000 employees who steward 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands; supports the world's largest forestry research organization; and works with states, tribes and others to sustain all forests, so they can benefit all citizens today, and in the future.

Chief Christiansen joined the Forest Service in 2010 as the Deputy Director of Fire and Aviation Management. Prior to serving as chief, she worked as Deputy Chief for State and Private Forestry, overseeing Forest Service activities in managing wildland fire, and working with our partners to sustain the health and productivity of non-federal forest lands. Prior to joining the Forest Service, she served as the Arizona State Forester and director of the Arizona Division of Forestry, where she was responsible for the protection of 22 million acres of state and private lands in Arizona. She had previously served as the Washington State Forester, the culmination of a 26-year career with the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Chief Christiansen recently sat down with NACD to discuss a number of topics.

The National Association of State Foresters recently organized a roundtable for Shared Stewardship. What are the keys to making Shared Stewardship a success?

First and foremost, it's building on some really good collaboration work that the whole round of partners has been working on for over a decade. We have some really great play space collaboratives with conservation districts, NRCS, Department of Interior, Forest Service, state forestry agencies, state fish and wildlife agencies—you name it. There's a mix of folks along with NGO and play space citizenry that are valuing the multiple benefits that come from healthy, productive, working landscapes. That's a critical foundation. Meanwhile, we have threats to our natural resources that are accelerating. Wildfire gets

most of the headline space and that certainly is a major threat, but there are many others – invasives, insects and disease, water quality – and so what we've always done isn't necessarily going to get us to where we need to be.

What's different about Shared Stewardship is to really acknowledge this scale issue. One of our scientists calls it a 'scale mismatch.' Just from the Forest Service, the lands we manage, 80 million of the 193 million acres are at least at moderate to significant risk of catastrophic fire, insects and disease. Eighty million acres need treatment, and just working harder and thinking that every acre is all equal in the amount of risk it's going to reduce isn't getting us where we need to be. Shared Stewardship is about looking at the scale and working more intentionally. I think everyone would say – clean water, good wildlife habitat, good economic opportunities from our natural resources, health and safety of communities – all of those things are important. Well, if we consider them all the highest priority in equal doses across the whole U.S., we still are not prioritizing.

Shared Stewardship is a call to action and it's an invitation. There is not a lot of structure around it. It's to say the conservation challenges and opportunities of our time are bigger than any one organization, than any one government entity – local, state, tribal, federal – and we need to think about the way we convene, and the way we make choices and tradeoffs about the priorities.

You're familiar with conservation districts. If you were speaking directly to our 3,000 districts, how would you advise them that they fit into Shared Stewardship?

The state conservation commissions have a strong voice to reach out to their state forestry organization, their natural resource directors for the governor's office, and say 'We have a role.' Conservation districts are the heart of the conservation done in that community. In my experience, particularly in Washington



Vicki Christiansen

State, we had conservation districts that really focused on being the catalyst around Firewise communities because they were a part of that community. As the state department of natural resources, we just helped boost those conservation districts because they were in the areas where the wildland urban interface was significant. That's an example of where we prioritized what we wanted to make happen, and we shared our investment.

I would strongly encourage conservation districts, at the level they can, to coalesce their efforts at a state scale and reach out to their state agency partners and say, 'We'd love to be a part of how we define what Shared Stewardship is like and what the prioritization is for our state.'



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The two contractors for the project have not been involved in forest restoration previously, Rivera said, so helping them and being able to have flexibility through the CFRP grant enables cost savings and more connections throughout the community.

With Forest Service guidance, the contractors have been able to remove timber to an area where it can be chipped, and residential landowners have come and taken the mulch for their own use, saving hauling costs and benefiting the nearby community. In some areas, contractors have created piles with the smaller logs and slash and local fire districts have come in and performed prescribed burns to reduce the load.

"That's one of the most important aspects of the Forest Service CFRP Program in New Mexico," Rivera said. "We're able to take into account everyone's needs and desires, and building trust and relationships among the

partners, from the proposal development to achieving the desired end results that improve forest health."

"Landowners adjacent to the project area have come into the Wilderness Ranger Station to tell us how great the area looks, how pleased they are with the results. Several locals have visited with the contractors at the project site, and have been really impressed with their commitment to doing what's right for the landscape. Having really great partners is just a win-win for everyone."

The Grant SWCD hopes this project will lead to other projects and stronger partnerships in the future.

"It's always beneficial when agencies can work together for a common purpose," Benavidez said. "Grant SWCD values these collaborative partnerships and is always receptive to working with others in conservation efforts. We are accomplishing a great deal in our area."

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CALENDAR

September 23-26 – NASF Annual Meeting, Asheville, N.C.

Visit <https://www.stateforesters.org>

October 30-November 3 – SAF National Convention, Louisville, Ky.

Visit <https://www.eforester.org/safconvention>

November 20-21 – Partners in Community Forestry Conference, Cleveland, Ohio. Visit

Visit <https://www.arborday.org/programs/pcf/>

February 8-12, 2020 – NACD Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, Nev.

Visit <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/annual-meeting>

February 12-16, 2020 – NWTF Annual Convention & Sport Show, Nashville, Tenn.

Visit <http://www.nwtf.org/convention>