



Overview of the District's 2021 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

VSWCD MISSION is to provide education, technical assistance, and recognition to current and future stewards of the land in natural resources conservation.

VSWCD VISION: To provide resource conservation for a quality environment demonstrated thru active leadership, cooperation, and partnerships.

VSWCD Programs, Properties & Activities Include:

Environmental Education and outreach; Whitfield Conservation Area Complex (including the Whitfield, Stacey and Rio Abajo units); Wildlife habitat improvement; Gardening programs; Hazardous fuel reduction; Soils Testing (free!) & Soil Health championing; Water harvesting; Environmental monitoring; Weed management and the Financial Assistance Program.



The VSWCD Financial Assistance Program was established in February 2016 to support the public in the preservation of soil and water, and the natural landscapes that protect and enhance the quality and resilience of these critical community resources. **Starting in July 2020, the Financial Assistance program offers two reimbursement programs, including:**

- 1) **Standard Conservation Project Program:** This is a competitive program that provides funds for projects that are typically multifaceted and in need of at least moderately detailed planning for project success (e.g., site conservation plans/engineering designs). This program is administered through the **Standard Conservation Project Application.**
 - Standard Conservation Project Applications are accepted between July 1, 2020 and September 30th, 2020, with project award notifications expected no later than the end of the year.
- 2) **Stand-Alone Conservation Practices Program.** The VSWCD utilizes public funds to reimburse taxpayers for **completing pre-approved activities** that have natural resource conservation merit. These projects are typically simple and do not generally require much planning. Examples include: High efficiency toilets, rain barrels/water harvesting tanks, Bioreactor kits, hoop houses, native plantings.
 - Starting July 1st, 2020, this annual program is administered on a **first-come / first serve approval basis,** using the **Stand-Alone Conservation Practice Application.**

There are two primary requirements: 1) Applicants must provide proof of mil levy tax assessment and current payment, 2) these public funds are used to complete practices that have natural resource conservation merit.

Goals and Principles: The VSWCD Financial Assistance Program promotes conservation practices which can be used across different landscapes, including rural, urban, wildlife urban interface (WUI), rangeland, and agricultural lands located within the Middle Rio Grande Valley's floodplain, uplands, and mesas. Maintaining agricultural lands and open space and incorporating residential and urban areas into conservation initiatives (e.g., urban agriculture). Thereby improving the total environment and quality of life for all the VSWCD benefitted service area and achieving cost-effectiveness and proper due-diligence of tax-payer dollars.

Natural Resource Priorities to include soil, water, air, plants, wildlife, human and energy natural resources. Also included is open space, supporting the agricultural sector, and conservation education.

Ranking System and Use of USDA-NRCS Payment Schedule: The District uses a ranking system to inform program award decisions. We gain guidance from the USDA-NRCS Payment Schedule to determine reasonable reimbursement payment rates, although the District has final discretion on payout amounts.

Funding level percentages will vary according to the conservation practice(s) importance, innovation, and impact to positively affect the greatest area. The VSWCD Board reserves the right to allow exceptions as warranted by unique circumstances. For 2021, the District has established three reimbursement rates, High (75%), Medium (50%) and Low (25%), as detailed below:

High Priority Practices will receive 75% cost-share funding not to exceed \$5000 for any one practice. Examples include: Pollinator Plant establishment using perennial shrubs, forbs, and grasses. Wildlife habitat improvement thru perennial tree, shrub, forb and grass plantings, wildlife water facilities, Bat, and bird houses, fencing off critical habitat or other sensitive areas, practices to improve habitat for beneficial insects, endangered species, wetlands establishment and management. Riparian area establishment and management. Noxious weed management. Hazardous fuel reduction. Hi-Flow turnouts. Water Quality and Quantity to include well capping. Conservation of irrigation water thru laser land leveling, concrete ditch lining, installation of irrigation pipelines, establishment of drip irrigation systems, water harvesting. Critical area treatment practices. Erosion control practices. Certifying and transitioning to Organic Farming. Innovation in conservation is highly encouraged, and innovative practices will be judged on a case-by-case basis. The Program promotes: solar power systems, No-Till and direct seeding, as well as Rangeland and riparian areas management, Native Grass Seeding, range seeding and simple water control structures. Strategic monitoring is supported, as are any practices that support soil health -- we are especially interested in partners who will pursue becoming a Soil Health Champion (!).

Medium Priority Practices will receive 50% cost-share funding not to exceed \$5000 for any one practice. Examples include: Windbreaks, hedgerows, and routine tree and shrub establishment. A Standard flat rate Cost is established at \$450 per acre for ripping/leveling/seeding to alfalfa or pasture. Legally Permitted Irrigation wells and pumping plants tied to other conservation practices. Retaining walls not tied to critical area treatment. Ponds. Cover crops and vegetative cover between crop rows and mulching. Non-organic practices. Interior (Cross-fencing) Fences tied to a conservation system; Note that pipe fences will likely not be funded at their stated (high) cost and the NRCS Payment Schedule for Woven wire will be used. Land clearing.



Low Priority Practices will receive 25% cost-share funding not to exceed \$5000 for any one practice. Examples include the following: Routine farming practices, and routine commonly used seeding of crops such as alfalfa stands, pasture, orchard, and vineyards. Other heavy tillage type soil disruption. Irrigation storage tanks. Replacement of already established practices such as old concrete lined ditches, pipelines, and drip irrigation systems. Exterior Fences, (those not tied to a conservation system may not be cost-shared at all). Plastic cover on crop beds. Composting. Irrigation wells and pumping plants not tied to other conservation practices, (may not be cost-shared at all). Diversion dams and diversions.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS: (*)

Based on the complexity of each proposal, more or less planning will be required. For example, a landowner could purchase a rain barrel through our program and not be required to produce a Site Conservation Plan nor design drawings for the project, as long as this person could demonstrate that the rain barrel was properly installed and serving the intended conservation function, reimbursement could occur. However, in the instance of a proposal that is complicated and multi-faceted, or that presents a need for more baseline site assessment, the District may require more supporting documents/drawings to insure project approval and success.



Site Conservation Plan: A Site Conservation Plan (SCP) is typically required to demonstrate a well-thought-out process for laying out conservation practices in order to achieve the greatest impact on the resources and in a cost-effective manner. The SCP will also outline which practices may be 2nd-year or 'carry-over' due to high workloads, timing, lack of water, practical crop rotations, or other mitigating circumstance as allowed by the VSWCD. The Applicant must obtain any required Permits before installing those practices. The Applicant must secure written permission from an adjoining landowner if the practice is to be partially or wholly constructed on their land. The District can help with all steps.

Exceptions to developing a Site Conservation Plan (SCP): There are multiple practices that do not require a SCP, however, even more conservation can be achieved if supported by a thoughtful SCP, and in those cases where the VSWCD allows for unique circumstances and considerations.

Soil Testing: Soil testing is available and 100% paid for by VSWCD. Refer to **Soil Testing Application** for this practice. NOTE: All forms can be found on the VSWCD website (www.valenciaswcd.org).

Engineering practices: some practices will require an engineering design and or drawings. Examples: complicated drip irrigation systems, solar wells and pumping plants, and especially when associated with erosion control efforts such as retaining walls, etc. The applicant can obtain these from the supply companies, agencies, private engineers, etc. For instance, well drilling, the capacity of the well must be logged by the drilling company and provided to the applicant so that the proper type and size of pump can be determined, this also applies to solar installations. The applicant must follow NM State Law and supply a full copy of the engineering to the VSWCD prior to any funding obligations. A design and a set of drawings will be absolutely required in those cases where the work to be performed is complex and must be designed by a Professional Engineer for project success and legal compliance.

OTHER IMPORTANT PLANNING INFORMATION

Noxious Weed Control: Any noxious weed control where funding support is requested, and herbicides are involved must be coordinated with the NMDA Noxious Weed Coordinator and have an approved written plan before starting work. This plan will contain the location of the noxious weeds, type of weeds, how they will be controlled and when this can take place, what chemicals will be used and estimates of how much; and must have before and after treatment documented photos.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction (removal of dead and down trees and shrubs which increase risk of catastrophic fires): In certain instances, this type of work must be coordinated with NM State Forestry and have a complete written plan developed before starting work. This plan will contain the location of the hazardous fuels, type of fuels to be controlled, how they will be controlled and best times to conduct this work. And must have before and after treatment documented photos. Again, the LUP process will flesh out what information is needed for project success.

The 10 most used conservation practices from 2017 to 2020 are: land leveling, pollinator plantings, alfalfa (organic) seeding, crop seeding, soil testing, pipelines, drip systems, native grass seedings, composting/mulching, and erosion control practices.

Conservation Education: In the District's ongoing commitment to advance conservation education, we will look for opportunities to report upon and highlight Financial Assistance projects that have strong educational dividends for the community.

Public Outreach Descriptions: The VSWCD Website includes photos, descriptions of the Individual and Community Financial Assistance Programs and their pertinent Application Forms. Various Success Stories of past conservation practices installations and outcomes are present for obtaining good information. Links to more sources of information are available. End of Year District reports will be listed.



(*) ITEMS NOT TO BE CONSIDERED: Work items that will cause degradation or regression of ecological conditions; cost-sharing of portable items that could be resold or disappear altogether; work items that are impractical/overly complicated or costly.