

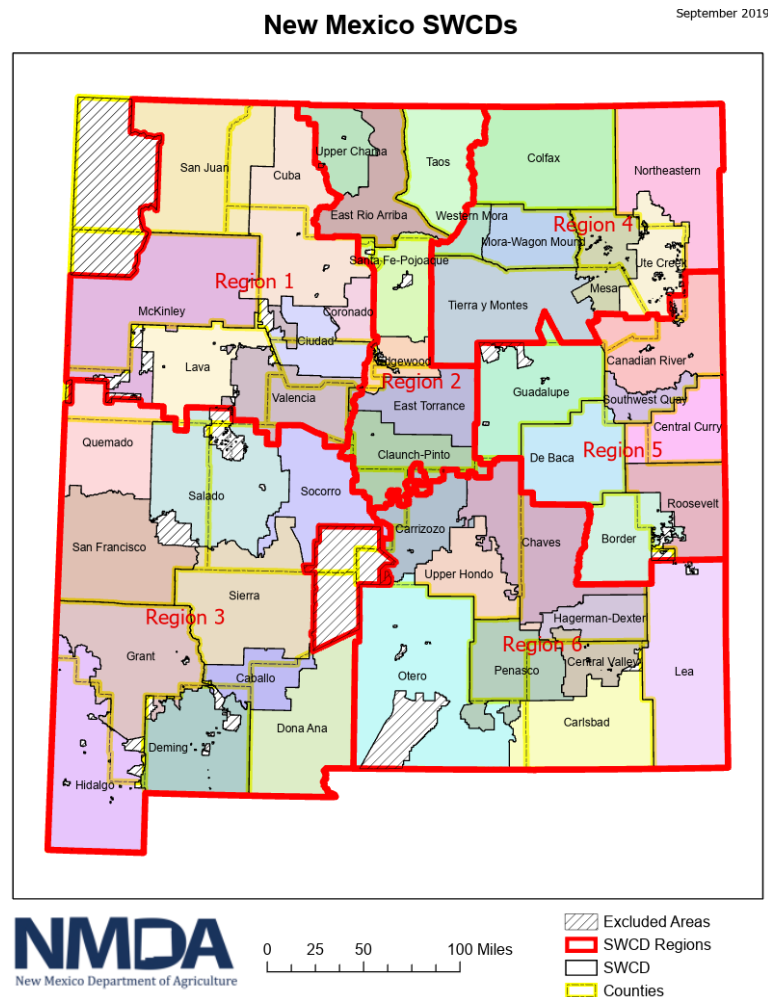
May 13th, 2025

## Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Prepared By: Austin Davidson, LFC Analyst

### Operations and Governance

- Soil and Water Conservation Districts have multiple operations. They conserve and develop the state's natural resources, aiding constituents with flood control, wildlife maintenance, and habitat stability.
- Housed within the New Mexico Department of Agriculture (NMDA), SWCD's are independent subdivisions of state government. They are governed by a board of supervisors who are elected or appointed.
- There are 47 SWCDs across the state, which cover nearly all of the state.
- NMDA receives a recurring appropriation of \$819.41 annually through its agency budget. Divided equally between the SWCDs, this equals \$17,434.26 per district. In FY25, NMDA received an additional special appropriation of \$3.5 million to carry out its statutory responsibilities for operations and programs.
- NMDA also receives Land of Enchantment Legacy Fund allocations to be distributed to SWCDs. They received \$2.8 million in FY25 and \$3.4 million in FY26.
- NMDA allocates operational funding to SWCDs using a point system formula that weighs several factors, including compliance with statutory obligations, development of conservation project proposals, and level of community engagement. The SWCC approves the point system on an annual basis.
- Some SWCDs have mill levies and other funding sources, while others are heavily reliant on the point system distribution to cover basic operational costs.



May 13th, 2025

## Wildfires In New Mexico

Prepared By: Austin Davidson, LFC Analyst

---

### Wildfire Outlook

- Wildfires will be an ever-present part of the state's future, and the state's risk of wildfires will only increase as snowpacks decline, average precipitation drops, and average temperatures rise. New Mexico already has a high risk of wildfire—higher than 82 percent of states in the United States. Wildfire risk is based on likelihood, intensity, exposure, and susceptibility.
- New Mexico is in the 86th percentile for risk to homes. In New Mexico, 46 percent of homes and buildings are located in direct exposure areas, meaning they are adjacent to flammable vegetation and indirect sources, such as embers and home-to-home ignition. The remaining homes are in areas with minimum exposure (or not likely to be subjected to wildfire) or in indirect exposure (close to indirect sources).
- The state's main responder to wildfires, the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's State Forestry Division, received \$30 million during the 2025 legislative session for wildfire mitigation and thinning, and received a \$1.2 million recurring increase for hot shot crew operation costs and right sizing.
- Additionally, multiple wildfire and disaster related bills were passed by the Legislature, specifically SB31, SB33, HB178, and HB553.
  - SB31-Zero Interest Natural Disaster Loans- The bill establishes the natural disaster revolving fund to provide zero-interest loans to political subdivisions of the state and electric cooperatives that have been approved for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) public assistance funding following a federally declared natural disaster. The bill directs the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) to administer the loan program in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM) and requires loan recipients to enter into reimbursement contracts to repay the state once FEMA funds are received
  - SB33-the Wildfire Prepared Act- The bill amends sections of the Forest Conservation Act, creates a section called the Wildfire Prepared Act, adds to and defines members of the Fire Planning Task Force, updates the duties of the Fire Planning Task Force, creates the wildfire prepared fund (WPF), and creates the Wildfire Prepared Program within the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD). The bill allows EMNRD greater flexibility in working with communities, individuals and qualifying political subdivisions to better protect them from wildfires. Additionally, the task force and the fund will enable and spearhead the work.

- 
- HB178-Forest and Watershed Buffer Projects- The bill adds and amends language within the Forest and Watershed Restoration Act. The bill also proposes to add projects that create or maintain buffers zones in and around wildland and urban areas to the list of eligible projects for funding from the forest land protection revolving fund. What the adding and amending does is enable State Forestry to add buffer zones to the list of eligible projects for Forest Land Protection Revolving Fund funding, which it previously was not. In many ways, this is paired with Senate Bill 33, the Wildfire Prepared Act, further enhancing Forestry’s ability to work with qualified entities to create buffer zones and treat areas to prevent wildfires.
  - HB553-Timber Grading Bill- The bill creates the Timber Grading Act, empowering the Forestry Division of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) to create and administer a certification program for the grading of structural timbers used in construction. The bill creates a structural timber grading certification program that will provide sawmill owners and operators with training to administer production following procedures based on American Lumber Standard Committee best practices.