

## SOIL AND WATER DON'T ALWAYS MAKE MUD

### *Surviving Aridification in a Dry Land*

*Lynn Montgomery, Chair, Coronado Soil and Water Conservation District*

Many Conservation Districts are obscure and not well known, even within their own districts. I would like to take this opportunity to help rectify that.

Coronado SWCD is involved in our natural resources. We like to say, “We do conservation on the ground.” We try to organize conservation projects to help farmers, ranchers, and private land holders improve their lands and water. Although we are a political subdivision of the State of New Mexico, we are apolitical. We try to educate the public, encouraging good stewardship of our water and lands. Knowing good stewardship is a very local and cultural thing so we are always striving for the “best management practices” possible to fit our needs. Board members are elected officials and are called supervisors. They are volunteers and serve gratis. The 47 New Mexico SWCDs are overseen by the NM Soil and Water Conservation Commission. To receive their full state allotment of approximately \$14,000 to run the agency, SWCDs must perform many tasks determined by a points system. We are not a regulatory agency and have no enforcement powers. We can only advise and encourage. SWCDs can ask the voters for a mill levy. The funds are used to support projects, pay staff and purchase equipment to be used by the public among other things. Coronado is not presently entertaining a mill levy initiative.

Soil and water can make mud when mixed, but many other things can potentially happen that make this combination very sophisticated. It is the fundamental process that all land-based life depends upon. Most of our food, fiber, wood, flowers and bees come from it and we ourselves are from it. It is strange we don't pay much attention to our soil and water, as every moment of our lives involves them. It begs the question of why children love mud so much. What do they know that we once did? Soil and water have many values which make it incumbent on us to be involved in them.

Water is considered sacred by all nature-based cultures. Most consider it a necessary commodity and leave it there. Concentrating on other values of water besides economic ones is often viewed as illusionary. This can create a huge imbalance in our water resource, as the urge to create markets and make money with it causes exploitation and diminishment. Within the Sandia Basin, from Edgewood, through Tijeras, Sandia Crest, La Madera, and into Eastern Placitas, we are learning the hard way how this works. Wells are going dry or are seriously impaired. This is a tragedy for a lot of people, who face property values hovering over zero. They have the choice of hauling water, which ruins pickup trucks, having it delivered, or abandoning their home. As wells go dry, well rigs set up down the road. There is no **enforced** control or restraint. It is a free-for-all to use up the remaining water as fast as possible to make as much money as possible, now. State laws and regulations do not provide a vision of running out of water, so individual well owners are on their own. Impairment is dealt with, but it is currently impossible and extremely expensive to get any justice from the courts, especially over groundwater. The state and county governments have been very laissez-faire about these situations, as though they develop naturally. There is nothing natural in any of this.

Under the Rio Grande Rift Valley there are large and deep aquifers. That doesn't mean they are inexhaustible or not under threat. Future flows of the Rio are predicted to be severely reduced,

cutting into recharge and skewing the highly overengineered system designed for past runoffs. If snow in the mountains gets scarce, the system fails. Pumping water out of these aquifers reduces river flows. Downstream users take a dim view of that and can force harsh restrictions. Fracking and pollution from Los Alamos pose serious threats.

So, whether you live up in the mountain, or down in the Valley, you have a water problem. Nothing is going to save us. Nothing is looking out for our welfare. Except us.

Coronado has received a grant to continue our watershed restoration project on the Placitas Open Space from the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. We will be starting up again in early Fall, with several workshops conducted by Jim Brooks of Soilutions. This is a hands-on project and depends on local volunteers. If you want to do something for our water, consider volunteering. More information can be found on our website, [www.coronadoswcd.org](http://www.coronadoswcd.org) or email [info@coronadoswcd.org](mailto:info@coronadoswcd.org)