

Editor's note: The following information was largely prepared by Mr. Richard Farmer, a long time advocate and confidant of local watershed issues. Staff has slightly edited this history based upon information gleaned from many sources including local newspaper articles, personal conversations and official documents. The information presented is intended to be a brief synopsis of the formation and subsequent actions of the Corrales Watershed District.

CORRALES WATERSHED DISTRICT HISTORY

There have been many incidences where, throughout recorded settlement history the Corrales Valley has been subjected to flooding. Caught between the Rio Grande and the escarpment to the west, the valley has either been flooded by the river or by the arroyos coming off the mesa. Starting in 1868 flood waters from the river took the existing church and cemetery in Los Corrales. This was followed in 1874 by "the greatest run-off on record" which caused the Rio Grande to overflow its banks, forcing most of the villagers to seek higher ground and destroying their homes. Most of Corrales was lost. Again in 1904 the river exceeded its banks, flooding the valley but sparing the far north portion of the Village.

The Los Montoyas Arroyo, located at the north end of the Village, also flooded its banks in 1904 destroying that portion of the Village that the river missed. This event deposited so much silt at the north end of the Village that it could no longer be irrigated due to its newly formed elevation. This area of the Village was primarily used for farming but due to subsequent floods from the river, which raised the water table, and flooding from the arroyo, which elevated the ground level, the combination effectively removed much farm land from cultivation. This area was subjected to periodic flooding from both the Rio Grande and the Los Montoyas over the following years, culminating in the floods of 1929 and 1941.

In 1929 the Rio Grande flooded, damaging property and creating swampland along the river, which prompted the formation of the Mid Rio Grande Conservancy District. The District constructed a series of levees and drainage ditches which alleviated much of the flooding and allowed recovery of the swampland to agriculture. However, the arroyos continued to be a problem.

In 1941 the Los Montoyas Arroyo flooded on consecutive days and another major tributary arroyo, the Lomitas Negras was formed during this event. Additional recorded flooding events occurred in October 16, 1962; August 16, 1975; August 19, 1976; April/May 1979 (Rio Grande flooding); May 1979; September 17, 1980; July 29, 1982; September 20, 1982; October 8/9, 1985; June 30, 1988; July 7/8/18, 1988; September 13, 1988 (State Declared disaster resulted in formation of SSCAFCA); July 24, 1989; July 14, 1990; July 17, 1991 (5' wall of water washed out Northern Boulevard at 11th Avenue); July 23, 1991; August 1, 1991; June 21, 1994; July 21, 1994; August 9, 1995; June 28, 1996; July 27, 1997; August 5, 1997; July 29 through August 6, 1999 (local, State and Federal Declarations of Disaster) and September 14, 2001.

While no events were found recorded between 1941 and 1962, it is documented that there continued to be flooding over these years of both the Los Montoyas and the Lomitas Negras arroyos. This caused a group of impacted citizens to form a local Watershed District under the auspices of the Federal Soil Conservation Service. Under Public Law 566, the Small Watershed Program, and sponsored by the Central Rio Grande and Sandoval County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Corrales Watershed District Board was formed in 1963. According to Edward Parham, the Corrales Watershed District was created to fulfill two projects developed by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). As of 1968, the two plans were to channel and properly drain the Black and Calabacillas arroyo on the south and west and construct a dam and holding pond at the headwaters of the Montoyas arroyo on the north.

The creation of the Watershed Board allowed them to pursue flood control solutions which required the power of eminent domain and taxation. The taxation area was defined as that area east of the Corrales Main Canal to the Rio Grande and from the siphon on the north to the shopping center now located at the south. Under Public Law 566 the District Board was responsible for obtaining rights-of-way and easements necessary for the construction of flood retarding structures and was allowed to tax up to 5 mills in their jurisdiction. The Board decided to initiate the tax at a rate of 2.5 mills for the citizens within their area which would not only pay for condemned land but also pay for the operations and maintenance, relocation of public facilities, and the necessary water rights for these structures. The CWD had no other function and no authority to concern itself with flood problems other than those directly connected to the Black, Calabacillas and the Montoyas Arroyos. It was constituted as a rural flood control district working through the SCS. It would soon become evident that the sparse number of people within the taxing jurisdiction would not be able to generate unlimited funds and that projects would have to be compromised.

The Corrales Watershed District (CWD) and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) collaborated and formed a work plan which was approved by the U.S. Congress, the SCS Administration, the State Engineer's Office and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in 1965. This original plan called for a structure west of 7-Bar Flying Service (now the Cottonwood Mall), another structure in the Los Montoyas Arroyo near the north end of the Corrales community, with a concrete diversion channel above the Main Canal. After the plan was adopted, a series of events conspired to force them to alter it.

Public Law 566 projects were funded by appropriations from the Department of Agriculture and projects had to meet two criteria:

1. It must protect agricultural lands; and
2. It must return at least a dollar's worth of benefits for every dollar spent (termed a cost benefit ratio).

Thus flood protection for agricultural land was a must since the CWD was utilizing funds from the Department of Agriculture. Flood protection for urban areas is the responsibility of the local governments or the Army Corps of Engineers.

At this time, land in Corrales Valley was going for \$2,500 to \$3,000 per acre so the CWD voted to adopt another plan which would give them flood protection and allow them to afford cheaper range land at the top of the mesa. The range land at the top of the mesa was selling at \$40 an acre. This new plan called for the construction of a very large dam 15 miles upstream on the Los Montoyas and a concrete channel to be built above the Main Canal which would divert water from the lower end of both the Los Montoyas and the Lomitas Negras north to the Rio Grande near the Corrales siphon. However, as the plans were being adopted and the design drafted the price of the mesa range land dramatically changed. Rio Rancho Estates was proving to be a successful venture and people were moving to the area causing the price of real estate to escalate to over \$6,000 an acre. Inflation was playing a major role forcing the construction cost of the proposed dam and concrete channel to increase. Simultaneously, Corrales became an attractive residential area causing land prices to rise while decreasing the amount of agricultural land due to single family unit subdivisions. All of the above conditions combined to make the cost benefit ratio unfavorable which meant that the dam and concrete lined diversion channel could not be funded under the law. These events forced the CWD to return to the original plans of having a structure in the Los Montoyas with a concrete lined channel above the main canal. Funding and the loss of agricultural land were not the only hurdles that the CWD had to overcome.

During this phase of project development by the CWD, circumstances within the region were rapidly changing. AMREP, the company developing Rio Rancho Estates, was paving streets with inverted crowns and draining the streets east to the escarpment. This led to increased runoff into the Corrales Valley. AMREP and Rio Rancho attempted to alleviate the problem by building a group of dams along the escarpment to trap the runoff and to discharge it at an "historical" rate and volume. The CWD opposed these dams because they were done without the benefit of a long range plan to account for their potential impacts. However, because the dams met the State Engineers criteria, they were approved with final acceptance to occur at a later date.

Eight dams were planned for the escarpment, but only three were constructed. One of these dams was breached by the State Engineer's Office which left only two, Dams 1 & 4. These dams were later designed to empty into the Los Montoyas but until that phase of the project was completed the discharge from the dams continued to erode property in Corrales. This discharge and accompanying erosion prompted legal action by a Village resident against AMREP which lent a sense of urgency to the design and construction of the flood retarding structures.

Meanwhile the CWD was trying to integrate all the requirements of the various state and federal agencies into a working plan. A major roadblock was encountered when the SCS decided that discharging the water and the silt into the Rio Grande from the Los Montoyas and Lomitas Negras Arroyos was in violation of Section 404 of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. After much wrangling with the SCS and the Corps of Engineers it was decided to alter the original plans to include a desilting basin at the outlet to the channel before it gets to the river. It was during this time that the Governor

appointed the first Sandoval County Flood Commissioner, Mr. Harvey Jones, with the taxing authority that would increase the monies available for flood retarding structures. Mr. Jones appointment and taxing authority were approved by the Sandoval County Commission

The main and significant difference between the Corrales Watershed District Board and the Sandoval County Flood Commissioner is that the area to be taxed under the Corrales Watershed District was limited to that area east of the Main Canal from the siphon to Alameda Boulevard. Under the Sandoval County Flood Commissioner, the area to be taxed was described as a 5 mile radius from the centerline of the Los Montoyas Arroyo for the full extent of the arroyo. This meant that for the first time residents in developing Rio Rancho were asked to bear some of the tax burden for the flood control project in the Los Montoyas. The amount that was levied by the Sandoval County Commission at the request of the Flood Commissioner was 1.5 mills. These monies were then to be allocated to the flood control project within the Los Montoyas. Finally with approved plans and the necessary monies the first phase of the project was put out to bid in September of 1987. The new concrete lined channels in the Los Montoyas and Lomitas Negras were completed in 1988 just in time for a significant run off event in July of that same year.

The Corrales Watershed District Board was responsible for recognizing the need for flood control within this area and acting upon solutions for that need. They, along with the Sandoval County Flood Commissioner, were instrumental in coordinating the various federal and state agencies and local jurisdictions in efforts to minimize damage caused by flooding. By 1995 the Corrales Watershed District Board and the Sandoval County Flood Commissioner were winding down their respective organizations and working with the newly established Southern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority which would soon take over their flood control role.

We would like to thankfully acknowledge all the people who selflessly served on the Corrales Watershed District Board. A partial list is shown below. The list is not complete and we desire to recognize all who served. If you are aware of anyone not on this list please contact SSCAFCA with this information.

Harvey C. Jones
Annette Jones
Harold Christ
Johnnie Losack
Bob Casteel
Dulcelina Curtis
George Manerre
Ernest Alary
Robert McCormick
Dub Yarbrough
Sherry Jones
Jim Henrie

Clay Henderson
Bob Reed
Oliver Scheflow

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Signed by *David Stoliker, PE* April 15, 2003