

Ciudad SWCD Takes Healthy Watershed Mission to Heart

To ensure healthy watersheds in New Mexico it takes public landowners, private landowners, Natural Resources Conservation Service, soil and water conservation districts, State Forestry, private non-profits, and a whole of cadre individuals and organizations to make it happen. And, the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is taking this mission to heart in the east mountain communities of Bernalillo county with healthy forest funding provided by the U.S. Forest Service and administered by the New Mexico State Forestry.

To reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve forest and watershed health, the Ciudad SWCD has underway a fuels reduction and forest health project at the Sandia Mountain Natural History Center owned by the Albuquerque Public Schools.

“This is more than just a land treatment project,” said Sue Hansen, Ciudad project manager. “The project itself will be another learning opportunity to teach children and adults about proper forest care while helping to protect adjacent public and private lands.”

But, really, what are the characteristics of this or any healthy forest? Part of that answer is found by looking at the conditions that make a forest unhealthy.

New Mexico State Forestry defines unhealthy forests as those with overly dense fuels, including invasive species and noxious weeds. This unhealthy condition is exacerbated by drought, which results in conditions susceptible to wildfire and insect infestation, compromised watersheds, and decreased biodiversity.

Some view diversity as the biggest key to forest health. A multitude of different kinds of plants, animals, and microorganisms, as well as natural processes such as fire maintain a healthy forest



ecosystem. Careful management and harvesting also sustain a healthy forest ecosystem.

Ciudad’s project to improve forest health at the Natural History Center will include treatment of approximately 70 - 80 acres of the Center’s total 128 acres. The treatment will create defensible space around classrooms, a museum, and other structures on the property – and the seven miles of interpretive education trails. Remaining areas, including the Center’s western and northern boundaries with the Cibola National Forest, will be treated to reduce heavy fuel loads while also enhancing future fuels reduction projects planned by the Sandia Ranger District.

At the same time that Ciudad is carrying out this project, it is encouraging the public to contact the agency about its cost-share program for the creation of defensible space on private land.

For more information about this and Ciudad’s other programs contact Sue Hansen at (505)761-5446.