



**Conservation Voters New Mexico
Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District
Board of Directors Candidate Questionnaire
2009 Election Cycle**

Candidate Name **Cecilia Rosacker McCord** **Socorro Division, Position 6**

Issue Questions:

1. Should MRGCD-owned ditch banks be open to public use?

Yes No

I agree that the ditches should be open to the public, but with some restrictions. All terrain vehicles and motor cross type vehicles driven aggressively (and for that matter, any motorized vehicle driven aggressively) can be detrimental to the ditch system as well as a nuisance to people living along those ditches, and in some cases should be prohibited when not being used for agricultural purposes.

2. Should the Conservancy District allow farmers to forbear from using water in exchange for compensation in water-short years?

Yes No

Individual farmer forbearance should be allowed only if there is sufficient measurement and accounting of water available to ensure that the forbearance occurs, and that the forborne water is directed toward its intended purpose.

3. Do you believe that urban ratepayers receive benefits from the District? How would you increase the benefits that they receive?

Yes No

Yes, first and foremost they receive the benefit of the MRGCD flood and drainage control system allowing urban development to exist in the valley. Urban dwellers also benefit from the recreation opportunities in and along the irrigation and drainage systems. Ditches are used for recreation by joggers, bicyclists, walkers, birdwatchers, hunters, and fishermen, etc...

In urban areas where residents would like to enhance these recreational opportunities, communities can work collaboratively with the MRGCD to improve recreation, keeping in mind the priority of the MRGCD is irrigation, flood control, and drainage.

4. Should farmers be allowed to continue irrigating after they have sold their water rights?

Yes No

Farmers should be allowed to continue to irrigate with water bank or lease back water, however in drought years it should be curtailed or administered in priority. Also, I feel the State Engineer's Office should determine if the MRGCD water bank is valid or not.

I believe it is more beneficial to the public and wildlife if those who sell their water rights continue to irrigate in years or periods of sufficient water supplies (in periods of short supplies, the water bank should be viewed as a junior right and curtailed), keeping the farmland productive as well as maintaining open space for the community and wildlife corridors. The alternative to continued irrigation is that the land is fallowed and invasive species may move in, often consuming as much or more water than a crop and creating a weed problem for other neighboring agricultural producers or creating a tax burden for NM taxpayers when the state implements eradication of invasive species such as salt cedar. Another alternative is the land gets subdivided and domestic wells are installed or higher density subdivisions occur, both of which means water consumption continues on that land. Higher density subdivisions will most likely get water from a community well system which requires the water system to acquire a water right, however, both types of subdivisions have a negative impact on wildlife corridors and open space in the community. In counties such as Socorro, where no county zoning exists, it can cause a whole chain of negative impacts on the valley and community. Often times in these low income rural communities infrastructure lags behind or doesn't exist, and these developments suffer from lack of fire and police protection, road maintenance, trash removal, sewage systems, all of which leave the door open for an increase in crime and negative environmental impacts.

5. Should Conservancy District elections be held at the same time as General Elections?

Yes No

NOT SURE. I think it would be hard to manage since only a fraction of the voters are qualified MRGCD electors, however it might increase voter turn out.

6. How would you increase participation in Conservancy District elections?

I have been amazed to find out how many constituents are unaware of the election and the candidates, and many don't know they are eligible to vote.

I think the District should be more proactive in getting information out to the constituents about the election. This could be accomplished by mailing out a newsletter a month prior to the election to all the qualified electors notifying them of the upcoming election. The newsletter should include information on candidates (including a short biographical sketch on and positions of each of the candidates), early and absentee voting information, who is eligible to vote and polling locations.

MRGCD should also issue a press release to the local papers including all of the above information excluding the candidate bios.

Allowing early voting in the local MRGCD Division offices or at multiple polling locations in the particular divisions would be another way to increase voter participation.

Absentee voter ballot request forms are difficult to obtain and are rationed out ten-at-a time to candidates and constituents . (By the second day of the availability of the request forms, Socorro Division had NONE left in the County. Only 10 forms were sent to Socorro County Clerks' office and according to the MRGCD Socorro Division office maybe 50 were sent to them.) The absentee request forms currently used need to be notarized, so there is no reason the forms shouldn't be easily available and handed out in large quantities to candidates and voters.

Getting the forms notarized can be burdensome for many of the outlying rural voters as notaries are hard to come by in rural parts of the county.

7. Should ratepayer monies be used to oppose environmental protections?

Yes No

8. Should the Conservancy District reduce the amount of ratepayer money that it spends on attorney's fees?

Yes No

If yes, how?

The current board has reduced the amount the District spends on attorney fees and has requested more accountability from the current attorney. I think this was a wise move and should be something that is continued. Board oversight of the attorneys fees is very important in making sure ratepayer's money is efficiently spent.

Another option to reducing attorney fees is to hire an in-house attorney that works solely for the District. Not only may this be more cost effective, but it would avoid conflicts of interest or the perception of conflicts of interest.

9. Should previously retired employees of the district be allowed to collect retirement pay as well as a salary?

Yes No

While this practice is not illegal, it definitely can be perceived as unethical and can be costly to ratepayers.

Background and Campaign-Related Questions:

1. Describe your current occupation and other employment experience relevant to the Board of Directors of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District. What other relevant positions have you held, if any?

- **Fifteen years experience irrigating in Socorro Division MRGCD gives me a knowledge and understanding of issues relevant to farmers.**
- **10 years on NM Farmer’s Market Association Board and 6 years on NM Food and Ag Policy Council gives me prior board experience.**
- **Co-founder (1998) and currently Executive Director (2005) of Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (RGALT) . In the role as Executive Director I have gained experience in working for a board driven organization.**
- **I have 10+ years organic farming and have owned and operated my own business, growing and marketing produce to farmer’s markets, stores, and restaurants.**
- **I also worked for the NM Bureau of Mines for 5 years as a chemist. In this occupation I was responsible for analyzing water chemistries and gained a knowledge of monitoring water quality, which is an issue of concern for the MRGCD constituents.**

2. What experience do you have with conservation issues? What, if any, specific environmental accomplishments are you most proud of?

- **Co-founder of Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust (1998), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving farmland, open space, wildlife habitat, and traditional communities in central NM**
- **Executive Director of Rio Grande Agricultural Land Trust, 2005 – present**
- **I have worked with over a dozen landowners to preserve forever, hundreds of acres of Rio Grande farmland and river habitat since 2005**
- **Worked with Governor’s office and NM Dept of Agriculture Secretary to develop \$1,000,000 appropriation to match federal funds for preserving New Mexico farmland**

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Thanks very much for your time and effort.