

## **Taos students complete unique acequia project**

Staff report

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Earlier this year, the Taos Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) received a grant for more than \$37,000 from the New Mexico Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) to put Taos youth to work mapping and documenting the condition of acequias within the town of Taos.

Ten Taos youth participated and earned an income, transferable University of New Mexico science credits and Taos High School science credits. Taos SWCD hired three trainers — David Gilroy, Miguel Santistevan and Enrique Gonzales — to teach the students about the cultural, financial, biological and historical importance of acequias.

The students also earned their American Red Cross first aid certification and were taught how to work as a team and how to use GPS units and ArcView geographic information systems.

As they walked the acequias, they were accompanied by mayordomos, who were each interviewed. Students had many guest speakers who taught them about the identification of weed infestations, legal issues that acequias face, water table/recharge issues and more.

Late last month, the Taos SWCD held its 75th annual meeting and potluck at the Juan I. Gonzales Agricultural Center, located at 202 Chamisa Road. The guest speakers were the YCC students, who presented the outcome of the project.

About 110 community members attended, including Taos Mayor Dan Barrone, Town Manager Rick Bellis, City Councilman Fritz Hahn, County Commissioner Candyce O'Donnell and more. The YCC students later presented at a town council meeting, and another presentation was scheduled before the county commission.

“I think it is so important for Taos youth to learn about the acequias that define Taos, to understand the gravity of ignoring restoration needs and to get involved in protecting what remains. This project may become an annual endeavor for Taos SWCD – we’ll be assessing the success when this year’s program is complete,” said project organizer Tanya Duncan.



**Courtesy photo**

**Students involved in the program are pictured with staff and supervisors on the project**