CONSERVATION Showcase

Solar Smarts Turn Forest Area into Prime Habitat

Solar panels that power a water well are making a portion of the Smokey Bear District in the Lincoln National Forest habitable during dry periods for wild turkey, mule deer, elk, and an occasional javelina thanks, in part, to the efforts of the South Central Mountain RC&D, their NRCS RC&D coordinator, and the U.S. Forest Service .

At the time Clark Taylor joined NRCS as the Resources Conservation and Development (RC&D) coordinator for the South Central Mountain RC&D, he was involved in a solar energy/wildlife project at his U.S. Forest Service job. After talking with the South Central Mountain RC&D Council, it became apparent the Council wanted to support the project, too.

The U.S. Forest Service had identified that the Turkey Planning Area in the Smokey Bear District was home for numerous wildlife species during times of sufficient rainfall that provided runoff into the many dirt tanks in the area. When the area suffered dry times, however, the wildlife vacated the area and moved to the north and south. This made it clear that water was a limiting factor in an area that would otherwise be prime habitat for wildlife.

Taylor did what he does best and coordinated the installation of a solar pumping system on an abandoned well that already existed in the area and could be put back into production. The result of this stand-alone solar pumping system was a well that pumps two gallons per minute or 1200 gallons per day.

"The newly available water, in addition to supporting the

many animal species in the area, is fostering every bird species you can imagine," said Taylor.

The project is proving to be so encouraging that two more phases are being planned. Because the well is at such a high elevation there is ample opportunity to move water via gravity flow to areas away from the well site. During Phase II two additional storage tanks will be installed and pipelines repaired. In Phase III more pipeline will be laid. There is also the potential for several area wildlife groups to become involved through funding or volunteer efforts.

New Mexico's resources are plentiful – and ensuring healthy wildlife habitat is among them is just one of NRCS's missions in …

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