

CONSERVATION Showcase

Awkward Buzz Word Yields Answers

CARLSBAD, NM-Collaborative conservation may be a new and somewhat awkward buzz word in New Mexico conservation circles, but to Stacy Mills of the JC & Frances Mills Family Ptr. LTC of Carlsbad it means finally being able to access the benefits of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in a way that makes sense for his operation.

Like most ranchers in the Carlsbad area, Mills runs an operation that has the West's famous checkerboard pattern where up to 80 percent of the land is federally owned – in this case by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). What Mills needed was a program that allowed him to address his land units as a whole, regardless of what parcel was under what ownership. He found the answer in NRCS New Mexico's collaborative conservation project that brought federal agencies and his private holdings together for unified conservation improvements.

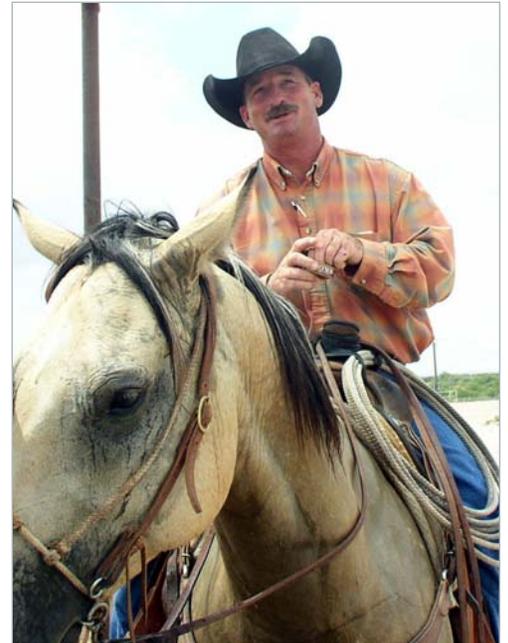
Under the FY2006 EQIP collaborative conservation effort, Mills was able to do brush management that was impacting the land's productivity and crowding out natural grasses. Managing the brush was important not only to Mills' cattle, but the large, indigenous deer population and local lesser prairie chickens. Early indications are that the collaborative

brush management has an 80 percent effectiveness rate, and the Mills' ranch can look forward to enhanced resources and resource management that respects the integrity of natural land units.

Jimmy Richardson, from Richardson Cattle Company in Carlsbad, by comparison has used NRCS programs before. The collaborative conservation effort gave him, however, an opportunity to address his brush management needs in a much more coordinated, sound resource management way. Because of the collaborative option he was able to do brush management, improve water storage, and install a pipeline to a different pasture area. This will help in livestock distribution, and enhance habitat for wildlife.

The Carlsbad Soil & Water Conservation District and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts are taking collaborative conservation yet another step further in the Carlsbad area. Uniting with BLM and landowners, they are rehabilitating abandoned oil field patches so they may be returned to production in concert with the surrounding land units. The soils are being cleaned and sites fenced so recovery can transpire.

The conservation districts and association, and federal agencies, are joining together to assist working ranches like the Mills' and



Stacy Mills new to NRCS programs

Richardson's because it is these ranchers who are a mainstay locally and to the state. Richardson is important to the economy of Carlsbad where he sells his beef to a local meat market. Mills is involved with his county's future, and works with his kids in rodeo where they are active competitors.

Collaborative conservation may be a new buzz word to Mills and Richardson, but it means using EQIP on federal lands to benefit private landowners and bring conservation in a more efficient and effective way to natural land units in the American West.