

## Coordination Assistance Aids Navajos

In early 2007, the Hub RC&D Council was approached by the Ojo Encino Ranchers Committee on the Navajo reservation about securing financial and technical assistance to improve solid waste management in Ojo Encino and possibly other surrounding communities such as Torreon, Counselor and Pueblo Pintado.

Solid waste management is a long-standing issue in rural areas due to a lack of economy of scale caused by small populations spread out over large areas. This situation is often compounded by economic conditions.

At present, there are no nearby trash disposal facilities for approximately 2,000 Navajo tribal members living in several outlying communities in the far eastern edge of the Navajo Nation where there is mixed land ownership - the checkerboard area. With no facilities close by, residents must haul their trash many miles distance to larger communities such as Cuba and Farmington. Due to these circumstances, illegal dumping is widespread, resulting in health, aesthetic, and water quality problems. In addition, this means lost opportunities to promote recycling, provide employment in the solid waste management field, and educate residents, especially tribal youth, as to the benefits of waste management.

A project proposal was accepted by the Hub RC&D which then donated \$1,000 and offered staff time to help plan and design a trash collection facility. The Hub staff person and involved ranchers then met with James Benally, the Navajo Nation Solid Waste Management program manager, who supported the group's grassroots efforts and regional approach. This would help solid waste management be more cost-effective and better supported by area residents. Benally also recommended conducting a survey to gauge current trash disposal practices and levels of local support for improved waste management.

The Hub RC&D developed a survey and accompanying brochure with input from the Ojo Encino ranchers who then administered the survey in



Watson Castillo, local project proponent and member of Ojo Encino Ranchers Committee, discusses solid waste survey with Ojo Encino resident

the project area. Over 100 surveys were completed and responses overwhelming support improving waste management, increasing recycling activities, and defraying long-term operational costs with a user fee or other mechanisms.

A project advisory group is now being formed with representatives from the four communities to start identifying potential locations for facilities and other planning particulars. Whitehorse Lake Chapter is also interested in joining the effort and may become part of the advisory group also.

The Torreon Chapter has been awarded almost \$48,000 by the 2007 State Legislature for planning a transfer station and has drafted the project scope of work to reflect planning for the multi-Chapter project area. Hub RC&D will assist in implementation of activities with that grant.

Last but not least, the Rio Puerco Alliance was recently awarded an EPA Targeted Watershed Grant (TWG) in the vicinity of Ojo Encino. This grant is valued at almost \$1.3 million (all sources combined) and includes funding that can be used to clean-up illegal area dumps and provide education and outreach to project residents on the benefits of solid waste management. The Hub will be represented on the Targeted Watershed Grant project steering committee.