**FY 2023**

**Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal**

**For USDA- NRCS-NM Team 1 (Includes USDA-NRCS Grants, Crownpoint, Gallup, and Aztec Field Offices)**

**Introduction:**

Team 1 is comprised of 4 field offices in the northwest quadrant of New Mexico. These offices include the Aztec, Crownpoint, Gallup, and Grants Field Offices. The Aztec Field Office is located in the northwest corner of New Mexico and services the San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District. It includes areas with river valleys with irrigated cropland and large tracts of native rangeland. Major Rivers include the San Juan River, Animas River, and La Plata River, all of which provide water to irrigated fields. Ownership consists of private, federal (BLM, USFS), state, and Tribal (Navajo), lands.

The Crownpoint Field Office is located in McKinley County and services the McKinley Soil and Water Conservation District. It includes areas that are mainly rangeland. Ownership of lands serviced by this offices is mainly Tribal lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs-Eastern Agency and several private land units under the jurisdiction of the Navajo Nation Department of Natural Resources. It also includes some state and federal (BLM) land units.

The Gallup Field office is also located in McKinley County, along Interstate 40 and services the McKinley Soil and Water Conservation District. Land units include rangeland, forest land, and irrigated cropland in the communities of Ramah, NM and Zuni, NM. Ownership consists of private, federal (BLM, USFS), state, and Tribal (Navajo, Zuni), lands.

The Grants Field Office is located in Cibola County, along Interstate 40 and services the Lava Soil and Water Conservation District. Land units include rangeland, forest land, irrigated cropland in the communities of Bluewater, Grants-Milan, Cebolleta, Cubero, and Acoma Reservation. Ownership consists of private (includes Cebolleta and Cubero Land Grants), federal (BLM, USFS), state, and Tribal (Navajo, Acoma), lands.

**Local Work Group:**

Virtual Meeting was held by the Local Work Group for Aztec (San Juan SWCD), Gallup (McKinley SWCD), and Grants (Lava SWCD) on September 21, 2022. Various representatives from several agencies, entities, and individuals attended the meetings. They included representatives from the BLM, Navajo Nation, Eastern Agency BIA, Acoma Pueblo, irrigation groups, Rio San Jose Flood Control Districts, livestock groups/associations, USFS, State Agencies, NRCS, and others. (input was provided by some that could not attend)

Meeting was chaired by the San Juan Soil and Water Conservation District and included review of the SWCD’s Long Range Plan, Mission Statement, service area covered by the SWCD and the land uses in their area. A power point presentation was provided to those attending to remind the group on the function and makeup of Local Work Group Groups and their members. Local Working Groups were informed on changes for Farm Bill Programs for FY-2023. Other agenda items included an overview of the 2022 Farm Bill Programs and FY-2023 recommendations for EQIP and CSP programs, cost caps, Fund Distribution information, local fund accounts, Historically Underserved payment rates, screening and ranking criteria, tie breakers, eligible practices, priority resource concerns, funding percentages, review and discussion of state and national initiatives, and timelines and evaluation periods. Plus, information on ACEP and CIG.

The CPPE Matrix was reviewed at the Local Work Group meetings and consensus was reached to follow the same, 2022 resource concerns for the ranking questions for 2023.

**Conservation Needs Assessment**:

The conservation needs assessment from the 3 Soil and Water Conservation Districts was based on input from the District Supervisors, who are from different parts of their district, in conjunction with the use of their Short Term and Long-range Plans. These resource concern assessments are reviewed on an annual basis by the SWCD’s.

**GIS Date prepared by the district for the use of Program Funding:**

The SWCDs would like to use any GIS data available from the NRCS for all programs, including EQIP, CSP, and ACEP.

**Program Outreach:**

It was noted by the Local Work Groups that underserved populations were being adequately served within these SWCDs and NRCS service areas, and continuation of all the current NRCS, SWCD, and other partners efforts on outreach. (HU participants comprised the majority of obligated contracts)

**Payment Schedules:** The Local Work Group recommended to follow the practices, scenarios, enhancements, and bundles that were followed in 2022, no changes.

**CSP**:

The Local Work Groups had no recommendations for funding local pools for specific watersheds or geographic areas. Their recommendations were to follow the FY-2022 rankings and points and the top priority resource concerns for rangeland, cropland, and forestland for EQIP.

**CIG:**

No known projects or demonstrations for prioritization.

**ACEP:**

No known local areas under threat of development or private land that would need expansion of benefits from land already protected.

**EQIP Funding Recommendations**

**Priority Resource Concerns:**

Priority resource concerns for Team 1, as identified by the local work groups and carried over from the FY-2022 program, included:

Irrigated Cropland/Pastureland Resource Concern and weighted priorities:

* See Attached National Ranking Template

Grazing Lands (Rangeland) Resource Concern and weighted priorities:

* See Attached National Ranking Template

Forest/Woodland Resource Concern and weighted priorities:

* See Attached National Ranking Template

**Team Sub Accounts and Funding Allocations:**

Funding percentages for the priority resource concerns between the land uses varied across the 3 groups, depending on acreages within their groups. 40% of the funding will be allocated to the Irrigated Cropland/Pastureland Resource concern, 50% will be allocated to the Grazing Lands Resource Concern, and 10% will be allocated to the Forest/Woodland Resource Concern.

A $75,000 cost cap, per practice, will be implemented for FY-2023 contracts, for Tribal and Non-Tribal Contracts.

**Payment Percentage Rates:**

The members in attendance at the meetings recommended to continue with the 75% rate for Non-Historically Underserved applicants and the 90% rate for Historically Underserved applicants, for the 2023 program.

**Screening Criteria:**

No Screening tools will be utilized for the FY-2023 program.

For breaking ties, the Efficiency Scores in CART, will be used.

**Ranking Questions:**

The local questions from the 2023 program will have some changes in both content and/or points for the Team 1 funds.

**CART Assessments**:

The LWG does not recommend any additional resource concern categories to be required for CSP. The LWG did recommend that the same RC categories be evaluated for CSP be evaluated for all EQIP applications to maintain consistency in ranking.

In addition, the Local Work Groups were in consensus to continue the WaterSmart Initiatives and Water Management Entities programs.