

2015

Helping People Help the Land

Annual Report

NRCS New Mexico



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NRCS New Mexico

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To Our Partners, Producers and Public



J. Xavier Montoya
State Conservationist

Our Mission Defines Who We Are

NRCS is an agency committed to “helping people help the land.” Since our inception more than 80 years ago, our mission has been to provide assistance to farmers and landowners that helps them with their conservation efforts. We want them to have productive lands that are in harmony with a healthy environment.

Our Program Opportunities

The type of program assistance that NRCS provides is both broad and specific. All that we offer through our various programs begins with the idea that we aim to address the natural resource concerns that impact American agriculture.

What Resource Technology Can Do

From the birth of our agency our mission has always been rooted in sound science. The decisions we make, the practices we implement and the Conservation Technical Assistance we offer are based on research, technological advances and empirical study. We look at the long-term sustainability of the agricultural producer and respond to short-term opportunities.

Outreach: Looking Ahead

We must continue to do our best to ensure that we reach out to all of our agricultural producers. I believe our outreach initiatives are strong, but we must be open to new approaches that reach every producer.

Partnerships

While each of us in the agricultural community can do a lot singularly, teaming up with our partners helps all of us reach more of those who need the help the most. My thanks to all of our partners who continuously work to create a better New Mexico.

We thank you for the opportunity to serve you, the people of New Mexico, in your efforts to feed this state and around the world!

2015 Leadership Team

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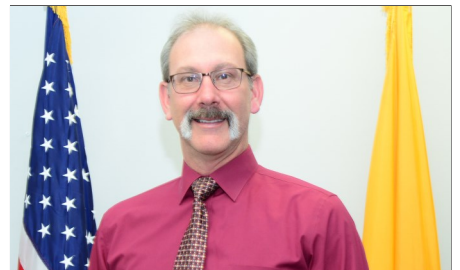
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Management & Strategy

Rosabeth Garcia-Sais, Assistant State Conservationist for Management & Strategy

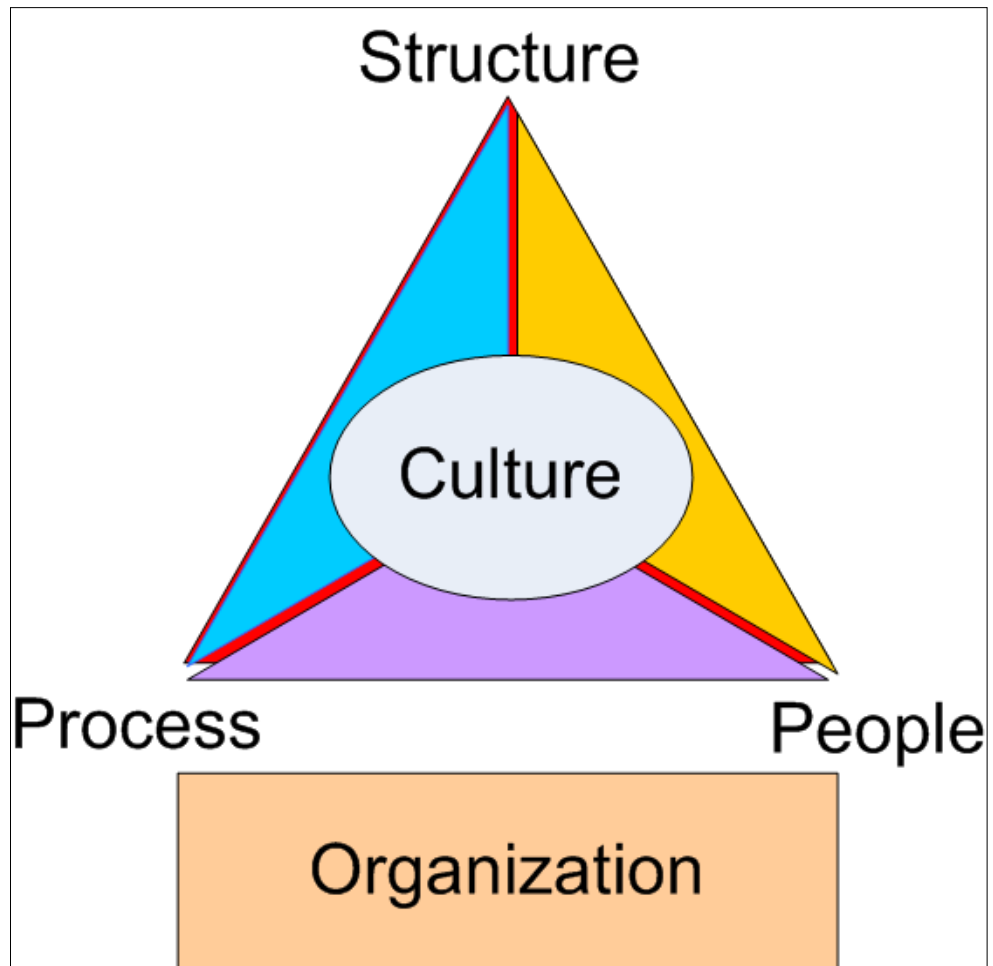
Since the 1990s, NRCS has seen our role change as the Farm Bill programs expanded opportunity to America's agricultural community. Simultaneously, our NRCS business and administrative structure did not keep pace with this expansion, making it more challenging for us to best support our mission.

Now we're looking ahead and building a better business and administrative structure for the future. Administrative Transformation will create a new set of virtual teams to help make our Budget & Financial Management, Procurement & Property, and Human Resources more effective and consistent. New Mexico, like all the other states, saw most of the Administrative Support staff get reassigned to national teams. The staff of 10 in the State Office was reduced to four as part of the local support. The others were formally assigned to national virtual teams.

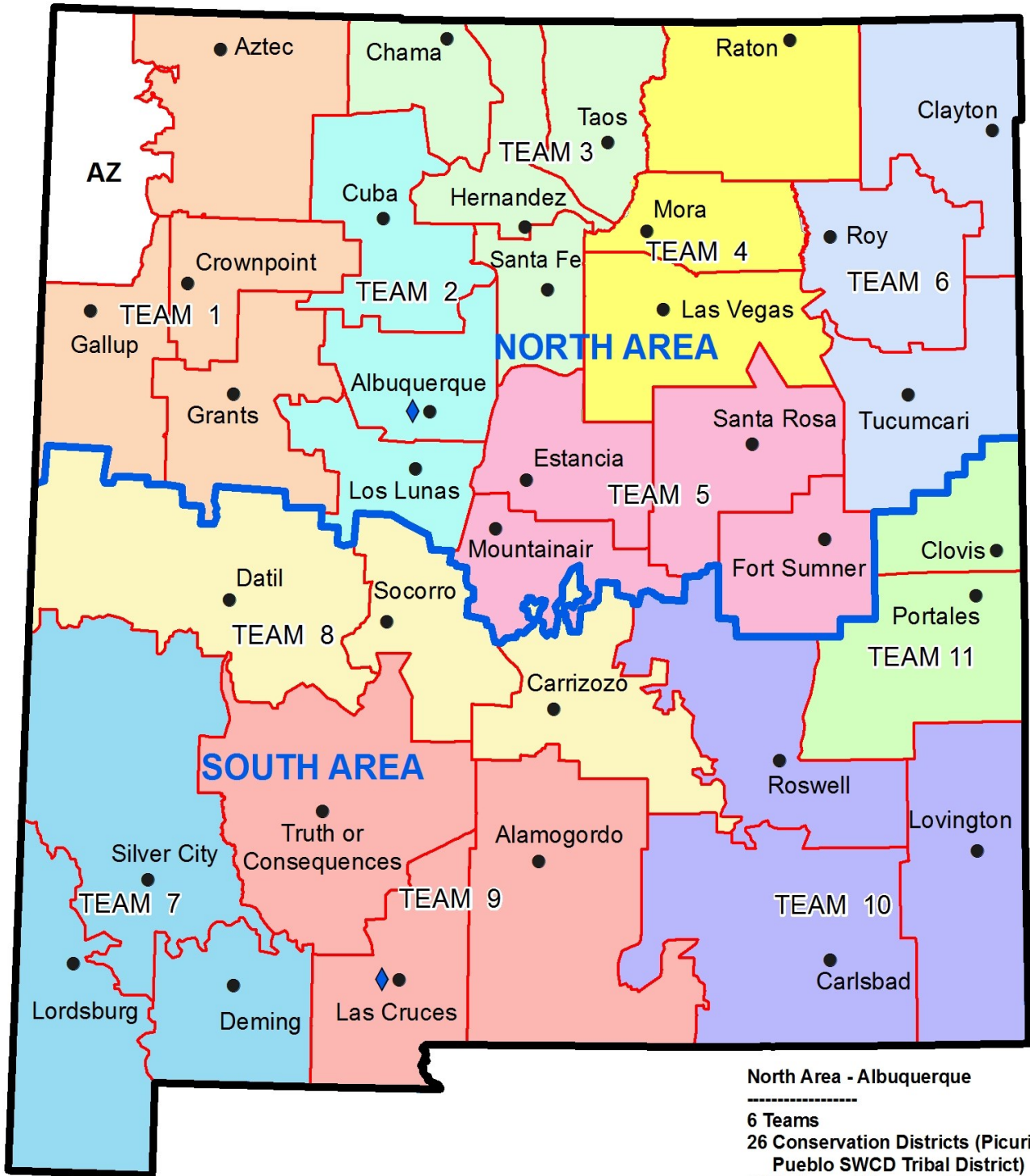
A new structure called Management & Strategy (M&S) now provides the on-the-ground support for each state. In addition to this transition from a national scope, NRCS New Mexico saw the need to get more of our employees into the field to provide direct support to our customers. As such, a team was comprised of State, Area and Field Office employees, and partner organizations to see how to develop a practical and effective plan.

After nearly a year of research, consultation and feedback from employees, the team made its recommendation. The 34 field office structure was reshaped into 11 Teams with one District Conservationist heading up each team. This freed up approximately 20 percent of our employees to provide Conservation Technical Assistance and Program support directly to our customers. The New Mexico of the Future was implemented in January 2014.

The changes didn't stop with the implementation. We strive to be the best in NRCS. We will continue to listen to our employees and partners for their ideas and input on how we can better serve our customers.



NRCS - New Mexico Administrative Areas



North Area - Albuquerque

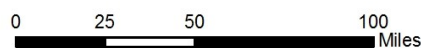
-
- 6 Teams
- 26 Conservation Districts (Picuris Pueblo SWCD Tribal District)
- 23 Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos

South Area - Las Cruces

-
- 5 Teams
- 22 Conservation Districts
- 2 Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos



Resource Inventories and Assessments
KKM, 2/25/16
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Opportunity Through Our Programs

Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill

Kris Graham Chavez, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

The 2014 Food Security Act (more commonly known as the 2014 Farm Bill) made some significant changes. We think these changes are for the better.

The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated 26 Programs into 16. It gives the NRCS more flexibility and latitude in helping our agricultural producers achieve their goals of maximizing ag production while preserving, protecting and building a sustainable natural resource environment for generations to come.

The current Farm Bill now includes a Special Emphasis component for military veterans pursuing their dreams of being a farmer or rancher. We have already started developing a working relationship with entities who will support our efforts to assist these veterans interested in being a part of the agricultural community of New Mexico. Being an ag producer is not an easy life and military veterans know the value of teamwork, hard work, staying the course and reaching their objectives. They will fit in just fine!

The 2014 Farm Bill change that may have the biggest impact is the creation of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). We will discuss the RCPP in more detail later in this report.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds used to help improve an irrigation system on a farm north of Springer, New Mexico.



NRCS Approves Four RCPP Projects in New Mexico ...



Debbie Hughes, Executive Director, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD), in a public meeting discusses the various projects that were submitted for the RCPP funding consideration.

New Mexico Restoration Initiative for Rangeland, Forestland, and Wildlife on Ranches with Federal Lands

Lead partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts: In response to drought conditions and extreme wildfires impacting more than 1.5 million acres from 2009 to 2013, New Mexico has developed a Restore New Mexico plan that includes treating brush- invaded range lands and dense forest land, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat degradation. As part of this effort, ranchers in 15 conservation districts collaborated on Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMPs).

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project (CRWRP) Lead Partner: Canadian River Riparian Restoration

Project: Working across private, federal, and state lands, the partners in this area of New Mexico will focus on treating invasive plant species while maintaining energy production, maintaining cultural traditions, and supporting operation sustainability. A CRMP will be developed collaboratively by the rancher, Federal, and state land management agencies to ensure that all areas of the watershed will be able to benefit from treatment of brush invasion, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat degradation.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Irrigated Lands (NMAR) Lead partner: New Mexico Acequia

Association, Interstate Stream Commission, and New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts: The objective of the proposal is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes in primarily highly minority/underserved communities. The NMAR Initiative will use Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program contracts with farmers and ranchers operating irrigated lands served by an acequia system. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities.

North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project Lead partner: Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water

Conservation District (SWCD): Poor historic management of forest and riparian watersheds and climate change are creating a dire situation. Wildlife, fish, acequias, rural economies, tourism and outdoor recreation are all at risk from the associated impacts of watershed wildfires. Without a large scale watershed solution, wildfire will threaten more communities within the Wildland Urban Interface.

Alternative Funding Arrangement a Powerful Partnership Tool

The 2014 Farm Bill introduced significant changes in how the Department of Agriculture administers assistance to the nation's agricultural producers. One of the most prominent changes of the 2014 Farm Bill was the creation of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

A small three-part section called **Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA)** authorized, as part of the RCPP:

A) the USDA Secretary may enter into Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA) with a multi-state water resource agency or authority if the Secretary determines that the goals/objectives will be met by the AFA. *(In NRCS New Mexico, the authority is the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) along with the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts.);* **(B) CONDITIONS** - As a condition of receipt of funding under subparagraph (A), the multi-state authority (NMISC), in partnership with NMACD, shall agree –(1) to submit an annual independent audit to the Secretary that describes the use of funds under this paragraph; (2) to provide any data necessary for the Secretary to issue a report on the use of funds under this agreement; and (3) Not to use any of the funds provided pursuant to subparagraph (A) for administration or provide for administrative costs through contracts with another entity; and **(C) LIMITATION** – The USDA Secretary may enter into at least 10 but not more than 20 alternative funding arrangements under this paragraph.

New Mexico completes First RCPP Project using AFA in USA!

Xavier Montoya, State Conservationist for NRCS New Mexico (left) listens to Mark Rose (center left), NRCS Director of Financial Assistance Programs manager, talk about the successful partnership and teamwork that led to the completion of the Las Joyas Acequia improvement project near Nambé, New Mexico. Las Joyas is the first RCPP project in the United States that used the Alternative Funding Arrangement for project funding. Also attending the event were Kenneth Salazar, former president of the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD); and current NMACD President Jim Berlier (far right).



Outreach

Rey T. Adame, State Outreach Coordinator and State Public Affairs Specialist

A successful outreach campaign and strategy is key to ensuring that our customers, partners, and the public are aware of all of the opportunities and services that NRCS New Mexico provides.

Printed materials, banners, audio and video recordings — any tool that helps to spread our message that our employees and agency stand ready to serve. We can assist producers in creating a tailor made Conservation Plan; explain in more detail our existing programs; or help them apply for one of our programs.

But it all begins with outreach. We can customize our information products to be language-specific. We consider culture and tradition when introducing new technologies and scientific practices. We must first build trust with our customers before building projects. We work closely with our sister agencies in the USDA such as Farm Services Agency, Rural Development and Risk Management Agency. While we all have different missions, there is overlap in our work that can benefit our customers.

We provide workshops, trainings, demonstrations, and attend Native American-hosted events, conferences and other venues. We share information with our customers as quickly as possible. For example, when news and information is released from the national or state office, that information is relayed to as many customers as possible via email, press releases to print, broadcast and internet media, and Pueblo, Acequia, soil and water conservation district newsletters and meetings.

Top Seven Practices Across New Mexico

Practice	Enrolled Acres	Extent	Number	Financial Assistance
Brush Management	3,013,253.71	197,509 Acres	295	\$6,774,141.25
Livestock Pipeline	3,104,581.3	135,2990 Feet	218	\$2,300,046.08
Fence	1,900,167.21	119,4712 Feet	151	\$2,106,531.08
Forest Stand Improvement	155,618.58	1,683 Acres	76	\$1,853,130.34
Sprinkler System	2,967.1	1,760 Acre	34	\$1,796,137.25
Conservation Crop Rotation	8,139.15	6,866 Acres	66	\$1,737,536.15
Irrigation Pipeline	4,905.75	102,908 Feet	104	\$1,466,928.83

StrikeForce—New Mexico

2015 NRCS New Mexico Farm Bill Program Investments:

A Snapshot of Historically Underserved (HU), Socially Disadvantaged (SD) Farmers and Ranchers
and All Contract Investments in New Mexico

Descriptions		CSP ¹	EQIP	RCPP-EQIP (excluding Acequia)
Contracts with HU Participants	Contracts	62	141	13
	Obligations	\$13,816,000	\$6,638,000	\$891,000
All Contracts (including non-HU)	Contracts	233	407	54
	Obligations	\$58,016,000	\$22,908,000	\$4,953,000

¹ Estimated CSP obligations are for the full 5-year contract term.

	Contracts	Obligations	Acres
Total HU Assistance	216	\$21,345,000	941,000
All Contracts	694	\$85,877,000	4,184,000

StrikeForce is part of the Administration's commitment to address persistent poverty across America. USDA identifies census tracts with over 20 percent poverty (according to American Community Survey data) to identify sub-county pockets of poverty. As areas of persistent poverty are identified, USDA staff work with state, local and community officials to increase awareness of USDA programs and help build program participation through intensive community outreach and technical assistance.

Launched in 2010, more than 1,500 StrikeForce partnerships have already helped USDA support nearly 190,000 projects and invest \$23.5 billion in high-poverty areas in rural America. Across the nation, 970 counties, parishes, boroughs, areas are recognized as StrikeForce areas.

New Mexico was recognized as a StrikeForce state in 2012. In this state, 30 of our 33 counties are considered StrikeForce eligible. Our New Mexico StrikeForce partners agree that we need to place this special emphasis to assist our farmers and ranchers across the state.

As StrikeForce partners, we share information and event opportunities to present a multi-agency presence at as many venues as possible. We use a unified approach, carry one banner, provide printed information to our current and potential customers on what programs each agency can offer, and have USDA employees on hand to work one-on-one with those needing our help. The New Mexico StrikeForce team is expanding its outreach to include focusing on the military veterans who want to become farmers and ranchers.



Engineering

Brian Schwebke, State Conservation Engineer

Staffing was a challenge for engineering in 2015. The State Geologist position was vacated and filled by an acting geologist for approximately six months. When this position was permanently filled by the current State Environmental Engineer another vacancy was created. The State Design Engineer position also became vacant.

For FY 15 NM NRCS decided to not continue with the traditional reimbursable agreement with ISC to plan, design or perform construction inspection on acequia projects. NRCS will continue to dedicate resources to the planning and design of group irrigation projects on the order of 1 project per NRCS team per year (11 designs/year).

Use of Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

During the 2011 Las Conchas Fire, 156,000 acres, accounting for approximately 50 percent of the watershed above Santa Clara Pueblo, were severely burned. Much of the soil became hydrophobic from the intense fires leading to increased runoff during rainfall events, intensifying by up to 10 times greater than natural conditions.

Flooding from rains less than a month after the fire were a result of a one-quarter inch rainfall on the watershed. The flooding, along with the associated sediment deposition, have greatly reduced the capacity of the channel and increased the likelihood of damage to infrastructure downstream.

The NRCS was able to join in an overall larger effort to restore the capacity of the channel, improve the watershed and protect the lives downstream by assisting with funding and technical assistance through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program.

Even though a significant amount of time has passed since the initial event, much work remains to relieve the imminent hazard that still exists.

Through the 2015 Santa Clara EWP \$41,600 project the NRCS was able to remove 2,715 cubic yards of sediment and debris immediately above a water crossing that served as an access point into the canyon. Ensuring that this access point did not plug and/or breach was a major priority to the pueblo.



Resource Technological Services

Steve Kadas, State Resource Conservationist

The Resource Technology Services (RTS) oversees the NRCS ecological sciences (i.e., Agronomy, Range, Wildlife Biology, Forestry, Archeology and Business Tools). Significant positive changes were made while facing a number of on-going challenges. The following examples highlight our challenges and success in RTS:

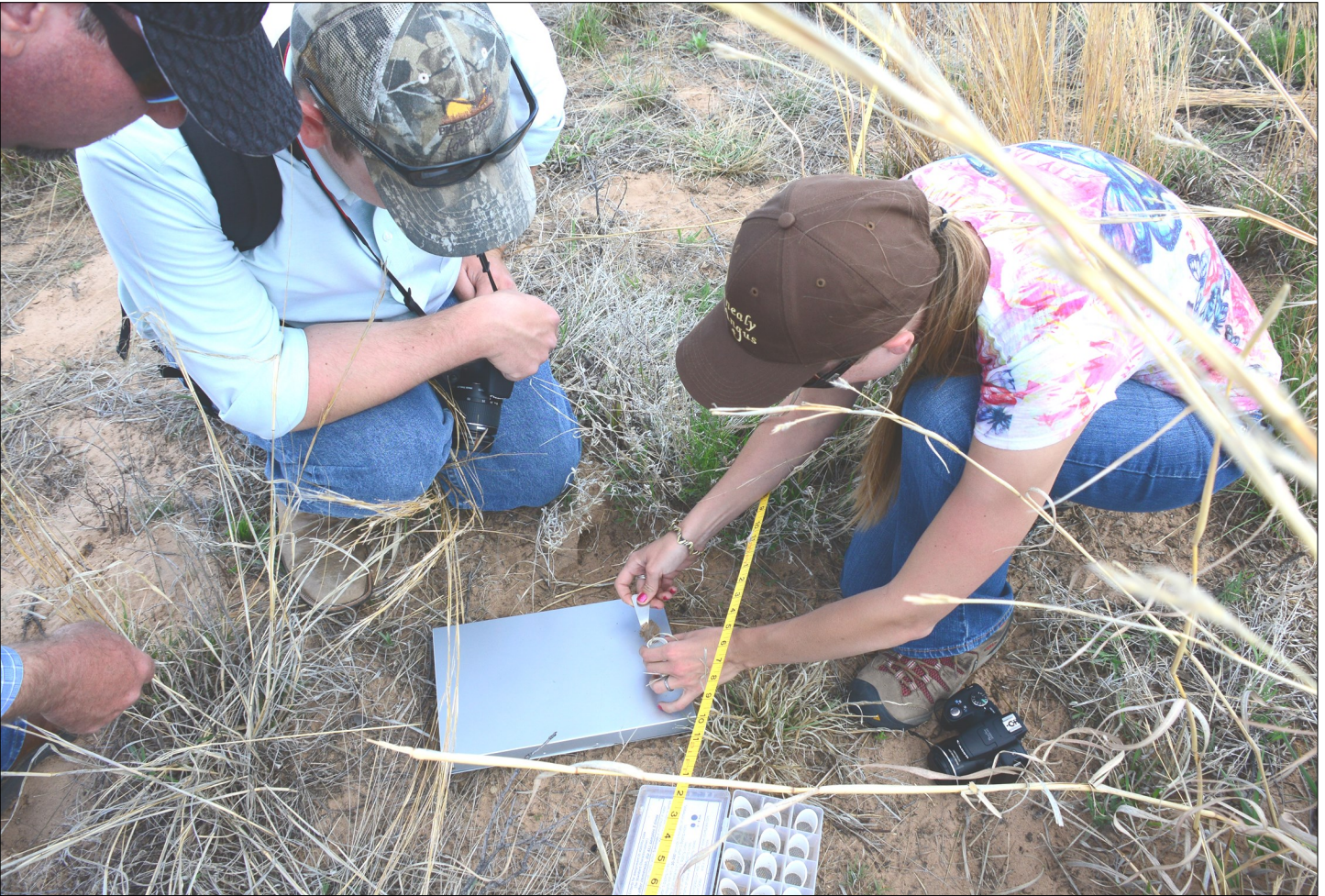


Brenda Simpson, State Rangeland Management specialist for NRCS New Mexico, demonstrates to an audience in Farmington, N.M., how the rainfall simulator behind her illustrates how precipitation passes through various types of soils and vegetation. Simpson is part of the Resources Technological Services staff who provide hands-on Conservation Technical Assistance and training to New Mexico's NRCS staff and private agricultural land owners. Ranchers saw that healthy soil really does mean more grass for livestock and wildlife while controlling erosion and improving water quality.

Soil health continues to be an important NRCS initiative. Among the top benefits of a healthy range or cropland soil are higher production and drought tolerance. The challenge was getting the word out, but this year that changed. One of the best ways to demonstrate the concept of soil health is with our new rainfall simulator demonstration. Soil health is an important national initiative that the New Mexico RTS has been working on in the past two years. Across New Mexico there are difficult challenges with maintaining and improving soil health on both cropland and rangeland.

The rainfall simulator has enabled us to illustrate the importance of healthy soil and water management and its impacts on infiltration, water holding capacity, importance of cover and soil erosion. Numerous presentations were made to promote rangeland soil health to partners and producers.

Resource Technological Services—Rangeland



NRCS Portales staff and SWAT biologists are seen here running Similarity Index (range transects) in the Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat areas of eastern New Mexico.

Partnership

Inventory and Evaluation trainings tie things together and collaborate between NRCS, producers, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, New Mexico Department of Game & Fish, and other partners in treating large, landscape level area's. These trainings will enhance our capability to properly evaluate wildlife habitat needs.

Conservation Planning

Improving the quality of conservation planning is a major goal and focus area of the RTS. In addition to maintaining state conservation planning policies, the RTS Staff has devoted many hours in preparing and presenting training to both new and seasoned NRCS employees.

During the 2015 Conservation Planning Courses in Deming our new and seasoned employees were asked to develop conservation treatment alternatives for both a high-end pecan farm and a small diversified ranch. The newer NRCS employees were able to gain valuable experience in conservation planning as were the more experienced employees who also served as course instructors.

Resource Technological Services

Conservation Client Gateway (CCG)

The CCG may be the biggest singular tool to help America's farmers and ranchers. CCG allows for producers to conduct their business with NRCS online, saving time and a trip to the field office.

Toolkit

'Toolkit' is an NRCS conservation planning computer program designed to manage clients' plans and contracts.



Toolkit 7 was released in February 2014, with Toolkit 8 following a few months later. Our state toolkit team trained NRCS New Mexico field staff and Farm Bill Specialists on Conservation Planning and NRCS Programs. This training enabled our employees and Farm Bill Specialists to provide better assistance to our customers.

Archeology

NRCS and the New Mexico State Historical Preservation Office have collaborated on a draft Archeology Programmatic Agreement for NRCS conservation activities. The agreement recognizes the role NRCS plays in conservation work and the need to preserve historic properties and sites.



Cultural clearances are a substantial workload for NRCS. There is a backlog of pending clearances that is preventing some conservation work. Both agencies have been creative in streamlining procedures to reduce the backlog.



Federal Partnership Reduces Wildfire Threats through Local Partnerships

USDA NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service announced a federal investment of over \$40 million for restoration of forests near growing communities to reduce wildfire threats, protect water supplies, improve wildlife habitat and support rural economies.

North Area

Thomas Marshall, North Area Conservationist

Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership enters its third Year

This is the third year of the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership between the NRCS and U.S. Forest Service to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems where public and private lands meet. USDA works with other public land management agencies and thousands of private landowners through a range of programs and partnerships to decrease the threat of wildfire, restore forest habitat and increase economic and other opportunities for the families and businesses that make their homes near woodlands.

This partnership is bringing funds to New Mexico through the Isleta Collaborative Landscape Restoration Project. The scheduled \$1.5 million to continue their forest restoration efforts in FY 2016 brings the total to more than \$2.86 million for the previous two years. The Joint Chiefs' project is one of the many efforts to help New Mexico's agricultural producers achieve their goals.

Acequias and Land Grants

In addition to the Joint Chiefs' project, we work closely with the New Mexico Acequia Association and local soil and water conservation districts in improving the utility and efficiency of New Mexico's acequias.

Another example of our continued outreach and customer support is our collaborative work with the numerous Land Grants in the state. Our intent and goal is for the Land Grant owners to develop a structure and process to be more competitive for our Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) opportunities.



South Area

Kenneth Alcon, Acting South Area Conservationist

New Mexico CTA and EQIP install one of the largest digester projects in the nation

We are proud of the consistent, professional service we provide our agricultural customers in southern New Mexico. We successfully provided scientific and technical information to our farmers and ranchers, developed and maintained our relationships with our partners, provided and trained our employees to better serve both customers and partners, and implemented major natural resource conservation practices. We conducted a Conservation Planning Course for employees and partner organizations, developed and signed a Cooperative Agreement with the Gila National Forest and the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), and teamed with the Otero SWCD and Cloudcroft FFA chapter to identify and install erosion control measures in the Cloudcroft Village.

The installation of an Anaerobic Methane Digester which serves seven dairy farms and approximately 35,000 head of dairy cows began in May 2015. The NRCS Roswell Field Office staff contributed Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) as well as Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Financial Assistance to this project.

Once it is completed, it will serve as one of the largest — if not the largest — project in the United States installed using NRCS assistance. The digester will effectively address resource concerns involving ground and surface water. We will continue to be there for customers, partners and the public.

Resource Inventories & Assessments



Snow survey specialists prepare to determine how much precipitation has fallen at a snowtel site since the previous reading.

Rick Strait, State Soil Scientist

Snow Survey

Snow provides 50-75 percent of New Mexico's water supply. Having accurate snow data is critical. This data is used by municipalities, tribes, and agricultural producers. The NRCS New Mexico gathers this data through a network of automated and manually measured sites. Data from these sites are used to produce monthly water supply forecasts during the snow season. Approximately 1,500 of these reports are provided to the public. These reports are posted on the NRCS New Mexico website and the National Water and Climate Center website.

Web Soil Survey



Nearly 100% of New Mexico's private lands have been mapped and are posted to Web Soil Survey. Web Soil Survey is the most popular USDA web portal, with over half a million reports accessed nationally each month. See for yourself at: <http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>.

NRCS Civil Rights Program and Diversity in New Mexico



NRCS New Mexico has a vibrant and dynamic Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC). They collaborated with our employees and as a committee created Diversity Day — a day to celebrate all that makes up the world in which we live.

In the past, Diversity Day in New Mexico was always celebrated only in the NRCS New Mexico State Office.

After hosting the successful event in Albuquerque in 2012 the CRAC decided that Diversity Day needed to be accessible to as many of our employees as possible. They determined that three events needed to be hosted in strategic locations around the state. In FY 2015, Diversity Day events were held in Las Vegas, Roswell and Albuquerque.

The Las Vegas event included touring the Armand Hammer United World College of the American West. The World College enrolls approximately 230 students representing 70-80 countries at any time. The tour included a visit to the farm that is managed by the students.



The Roswell event provided participants with some information and history about the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell and Blackdom, N.M., the all-Black frontier town that began in 1903 with the establishment of the Blackdom Townsite Company and dissolved around 1930 during the Great Depression.

In Albuquerque, the CRAC hosted the 'Diversity Day Film Festival,' showing "Salinas Project," "Two Spirits," "Choua Tao: Female Hmong Veteran Reflects on Secret War," and "Veterans History Project."

Diversity in our workforce provides us with new ideas and approaches that can help us be more aware of the needs and interests of our customers and the public.

Armand Hammer United World College of the American West

NRCS New Mexico Service Centers

(Current as of March 8, 2016)

NRCS Field Office:	Phone Number:
Alamogordo	(575) 437-3100
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Clayton	(575) 374-9461
Clovis	(575) 762-4769
Crownpoint	(505) 786-7094
Cuba	(575) 289-3278
Datil	(575) 772-5722
Deming	(575) 546-9692
Estancia	(505) 384-2272
Fort Sumner	(575) 355-2448
Gallup	(505) 722-4357
Grants	(505) 287-4045
Hernandez	(505) 753-3508
Las Cruces	(575) 522-8775
Las Vegas	(505) 425-3594
Lordsburg	(575) 542-9141
Los Lunas	(505) 865-4643
Lovington	(575) 396-5857
Mora	(575) 387-2424
Mountainair	(505) 847-2941
Portales	(575) 356-6629
Raton	(575) 445-9571
Roswell	(575) 622-8746
Roy	(575) 485-2294
Santa Fe	(505) 471-0410
Santa Rosa	(575) 472-5401
Silver City	(575) 388-1569
Socorro	(575) 835-1710
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Tucumcari	(575) 461-3801
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CONSERVATION



CONSERVATION PLANNING

Conserving New Mexico's Resources

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