

2016

Helping People Help the Land

Annual Report

NRCS New Mexico



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NRCS New Mexico

6200 Jefferson St. N.E., Suite 305

Albuquerque, NM 87109

(505) 761-4402



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To Our Partners, Producers and Public

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 New Mexico producers to have productive lands that are in harmony with a healthy environment.



J. Xavier Montoya
State Conservationist

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 helping agricultural producers achieve their long-term goals while also providing assistance with their more immediate ag production needs.

Our Program Opportunities

The type of program assistance that NRCS provides is both broad and specific. We aim to address the natural resource concerns that impact American agriculture through our various programs. Significant changes came with the passing of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (aka, “Farm Bill.”)

Outreach: Looking Ahead

We continue to do our best to ensure that we reach out to all of our agricultural producers. Our current outreach initiatives are strong and we continue to be open to new approaches that reach every producer. We continued to update our print products and worked to expand our social media presence in FY 2016. This is part of our effort to reach out to more people needing our help and expertise.

Partnerships

NRCS collaborates with key stakeholders and facilitates effective communication within the agricultural community to ensure we best serve all of our constituents. We will continue to work with new and different partners to continue building the strongest team possible.

As such, we added an Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships position to our Leadership Team. Our presence, visibility and guidance will be even greater now as a result. My thanks to all of our partners who continuously work to create a better New Mexico.

We are honored to serve as stewards of the Land of Enchantment and are privileged to have earned your trust and confidence as we continue Helping People Help the Land!

2016 Leadership Team

Rosabeth Garcia-Sais
Assistant State Conservationist for
Management & Strategy



Tel (505) 761-4411
rosabeth.garciasais@nm.usda.gov

Kris Graham Chavez
Assistant State Conservationist for
Programs



Tel (505) 761-4404
kristin.grahamchavez@nm.usda.gov

Alicia Rodriguez
Assistant State Conservationist for
Partnerships



Tel (505) 761-4421
alicia.rodriguez@nm.usda.gov

Brian Schwebke
State Conservation Engineer



Tel (505) 761-4490
brian.schwebke@nm.usda.gov

Blake Glover
South Area Conservationist



Tel (575) 522-8775
blake.glover@nm.usda.gov

Thomas Marshall
North Area Conservationist



Tel (505) 761-4445
thomas.marshall@nm.usda.gov

Steve Kadas
State Resource Conservationist



Tel (505) 761-4422
steve.kadas@nm.usda.gov

Rick Strait
State Soil Scientist



Tel (505) 761-4433
richard.strait@nm.usda.gov

Rey T. Adame
State Public Affairs Officer



Tel (505) 761-4406
rey.adame@nm.usda.gov

Management & Strategy

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

It is a well known fact that preparing for and adapting to change is a reality and a necessity. For NRCS, that adaptation was a national reorganization effort called Administrative Transformation. Admin Transformation is now entering its second year. This is where the real world meets the virtual one. Admin Transformation created a set of virtual teams to help make our Budget & Financial Management, Procurement & Property, and Human Resources more effective and consistent nationwide.

Part of that process called for all states to prepare for most of their in-house Administrative Support staff to get reassigned to national teams. The staff of 10 at the New Mexico State Office was reduced to four as part of the local support. The others were formally assigned to virtual teams. Take into consideration the adjustments we made in our new roles, I'd say we did well in supporting our employees, customers, partners and general public. But there is still plenty of room for improvement and we will continue to adjust the processes until we get it right.

Although processes changed in fiscal year 2016, New Mexico met our conservation goals and successfully implemented the State Business Plan, State Outreach Plan and awarded several partnership agreements. We continuously strive to improve our operations, and successfully conducted two internal quality assurance reviews (one in each Area). By reviewing our internal operations, we are able to identify areas that need to be improved as well as share what is working with the other teams statewide.

In addition to the internal reviews, our state operations were reviewed nationally through a Quality Assurance Compliance Review as well as a Civil Rights Compliance Review. We were recognized for the great work our employees do on a daily basis to serve our customers, partners and public, ensuring we provided a fair

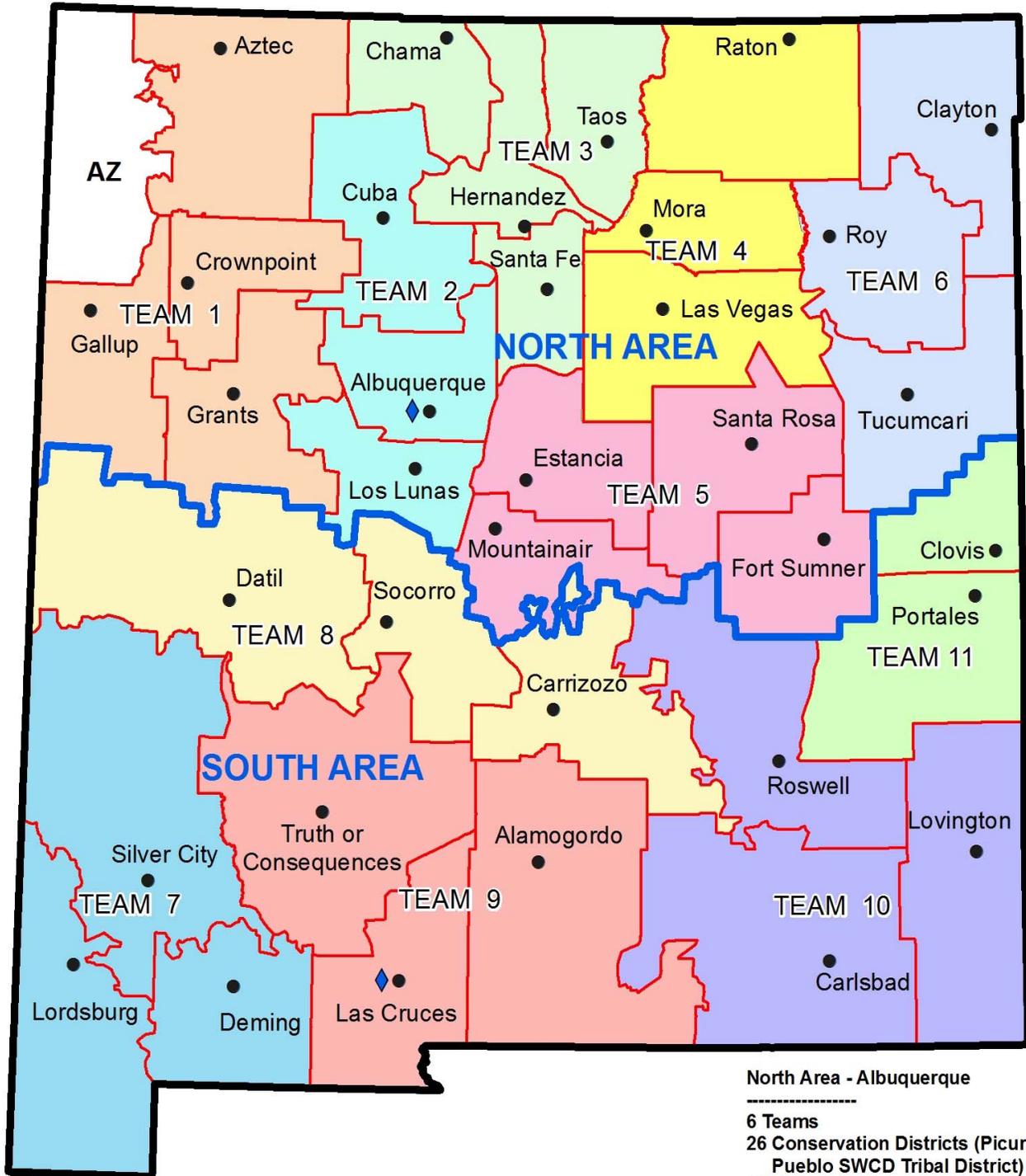
and equitable opportunity for anyone who needed our assistance.

New Mexico is known as one of the best NRCS operations in the country, and I am proud to lead the Management & Strategy team.

We are committed to listening to our employees and partners for ideas and input on how to 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



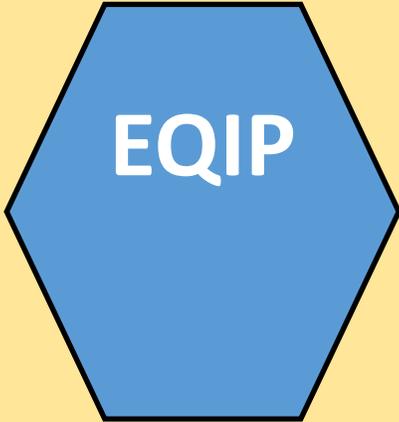
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Opportunity Through Our NRCS Programs

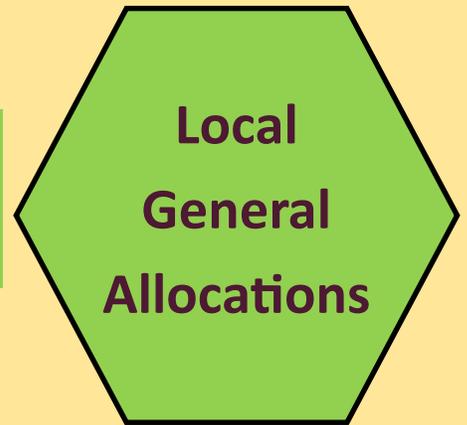
Kristin Graham Chavez, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

New Mexico NRCS was extremely busy in FY 2016 with numerous programs in full swing.



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) proved to be a success with over \$27 million obligated to assist agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices that improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related natural resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. This was achieved through both local state and national initiative.

Includes Grazed Rangeland, Irrigated Cropland, Forestland, Watersheds, Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Conservation Activity Plans, and Animal Feeding Operations.



Includes Energy, Organic, Seasonal High Tunnel, Acequias, and Tribal Lands.

Includes Resiliency to Climate Change, National Water Quality, Ogallala Aquifer, Strike Force, Working Land For Wildlife Lesser Prairie Chicken, Acequias, Joint Chiefs, Water Smart.



Programs

2016 Regional Conservationist Partnership Program include 2 previously funded projects that will be worked on in the fall and winter.

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. Claunch-Pinto SWCD and its partners have identified forest restoration treatments on private, public, state and Tribal lands that are located within the upland ponderosa pine, pinon, juniper, and in the lower elevation riparian watersheds.



Results of Brush Management efforts as part of the North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Irrigated Lands (NMAR)

Lead partner: New Mexico Acequia Association, Interstate Stream Commission, 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 New Mexico Acequia Revitalization 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.

Programs

2016 Regional Conservationist Partnership Program progress includes:

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

Lead partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

67 Applications and 25 Contracts allocated a total of \$3,3 million in Financial Assistance.

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project (CRWRP)

Lead Partner: Canadian River Riparian Restoration Project

66 Applications and 27 Contracts allocated a total of \$1,6 million in Financial Assistance.

North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project

Lead partner: Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

16 Applications and 16 Contracts allocated a total of \$1,638,485 million in Financial Assistance.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Irrigated Lands (NMAR)

Lead partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

22 Applications and 6 Acequia completed for a total of \$291,647 in Financial Assistance.

Top Eight Practices Across New Mexico

Practice	Enrolled Acres	Extent	Number	Financial Assistance
Brush Management	1,943,106	87,840 Acres	236	\$4,872,264
Conservation Crop Rotation	12,180	8,826 Acres	74	\$3,612,344
Irrigation Pipeline	9,489	125,547 Feet	96	\$2,200,026
Sprinkler System	18,283	2,737 Acres	39	\$2,072,956
Fence	1,405,516	1,104,826 Feet	163	\$2,205,698
Livestock Pipeline	2,458,608	1,010,411 Feet	171	\$1,598,707
Watering Facility	6,055,640	379 No	355	\$1,542,448
Forest Stand Improvement	35,678	1,103 Acres	109	\$1,396,088

Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Congressional District	Contracts Obligated	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	39	96,078	\$1,816,172
2	186	1,289,341	\$14,515,022
3	208	234,304	\$11,284,690
Total	433	1,618,724	\$27,615,885

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Congressional District	Contracts	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	17	162,025	\$930,320
2	90	720,912	\$5,319,432
3	45	258,791	\$1,552,934
Total	152	1,141,728	\$7,802,686

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Congressional District	Contracts	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	2	55,399	\$156,941
3	14	50,063	\$1,167,265
Total	16	105,463	\$1,324,206

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

In 2016 New Mexico closed on a FRPP conservation easement with the New Mexico Land Conservancy (NMLC) that covers 1,510 rangeland acres. Also with NMLC, an agreement for a new ACEP easement was signed for a rangeland easement on over 5,200 acres.

Partnerships Promote Progress

Alicia Rodriguez, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships

I remember the “*Hands across America*” benefit event and publicity campaign in 1986 where approximately 6.5 million people for 15 minutes held hands in a human chain along a path across the continental United States. The \$34 million of benefit proceeds raised were donated to local charities to fight hunger and homelessness and help those in poverty. This example illustrates that when people band together for a cause great things happen.



NRCS New Mexico realizes the power of Partnerships. As a result, an *Assistant State Conserva-*

tionist for Partnerships position was established as part of our Leadership Team. This new position will help place focus on strengthening and maintaining existing partnerships and seeking new ones. Since our beginning, NRCS can attribute much of our success to what our partners have done in helping us reach our goals.

As the USDA and in particular, NRCS New Mexico take on more panoramic natural resource conservation initiatives, the need for additional strategic partners becomes more relevant and significant. Individually, our organizations and entities can accomplish many things. However, like strands of straw, alone they can easily break. Tie them together they become a formidable tool that gets things done!

My role will be to maintain and enhance current partnerships. I will assess if there are there things that need to be done to improve our partnerships and, develop a work plan accordingly. I will meet with New Mexico’s Tribal Councils and their governance leadership to introduce myself and establish long-term working relationships.

NRCS New Mexico will be expanding partnership opportunities with organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. We will continue to partner with colleges and universities and explore the idea of entering into mutually beneficial agreements.

Today’s successes are a result of what NRCS started years ago. Future success is largely contingent on new partnership initiatives that we establish now. We will build a coalition with agencies that need individuals in agricultural and natural resources-related fields such as agronomy, range science, soil science, forestry, ecology, botany, biology, civil and agricultural engineering.

I look forward to this new and important role for NRCS New Mexico. Like “*Hands Across America*” we intend to reach out to our current and future partners to take those ideas and dreams and extend them to the reality of building a better life and world for everyone.

Engineering

Brian Schwebke, State Conservation Engineer

Emergency Watershed Protection

Dog Head Fire

The Dog Head Fire near Chilili, N.M., started June 14, 2016 and burned approximately 17,912 acres, including 24 single residences and four minor structures. Through the Emergency Watershed Protection program (EWP) the NRCS, in conjunction with the Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the East Torrance SWCD, was able to assist with recovery efforts aimed at the relief of the threat to life and property after the fire. The main threat was increased and more rapid runoff due to the removal of protective vegetation on the burned watershed. In order to help offset this runoff a multi-practice approach was developed and implementation started. The practices included:

- Contour log felling - a method that uses the burned trees anchored on the contour of the slope to slow the runoff and increase the opportunity for infiltration.
- Mastication combined with seeding – mastication processes burned trees into small chunks and chips that provide a protective cover over the bed of reseeded areas providing the opportunity for revegetation.
- Rock and brush structures – grade stabilization structures designed to reduce sediment flows within washes and arroyos and slow the velocity of the water.
- Sediment traps – earthen tanks dug into the bottom of washes and arroyos to trap sediment and debris from runoff of burned watersheds.
- Diversions – earthen embankments designed to convey the runoff away from critical areas to safe outlets.
- Seeding burn scar areas

Resource Technology Services

Steve Kadas, State Resource Conservationist

For more than 80 years, NRCS has been recognized as the leader of federal government agencies in soil health and agricultural-related sciences and technology. Since the 1930s, we have led the way in some of the most innovative and scientifically based agricultural practices.

The Resource Technology Services (RTS) oversees the NRCS ecological sciences (i.e., Agronomy, Range, Wildlife Biology, Forestry, Archeology and Business Tools). We need to ensure that our employees are prepared to offer their best advice and guidance to our customers and partners so they can get the most from their agricultural lands.

It is the main mission of the RTS staff to give our employees the most current, applicable, credible and scientifically- and technically-based training and tools possible.

Resource Technology Services

In FY 2016, RTS conducted more than two trainings a month across the state on topics such as Rangeland Management, Conservation Planning, and How to Properly Recognize and Record Archeological and Historical Sites.

We added a second archeologist to our team. This addition enhanced our working relationship with the State Historical Preservation Office and helped to improve our Cultural clearance times for a myriad of NRCS projects.

At the end of FY 2016, the RTS staff became whole again as we filled the vacant State Wildlife Biologist and vacant State Agronomist positions.

Agronomy and Crops

In a region where water is scarce it has been hard to convince many producers to initiate a management practice such as cover crops. There is often pumping costs associated with or there is simply no water in the acequia before or after the growing season to try and establish a cover crop on irrigated land. In dryland situations they have to save every inch of moisture received for the cash crop.

New Mexico NRCS is trying to help answer some of the questions and concerns associated with cover crops. NRCS initiated several case studies statewide to evaluate growth parameters of cover crops, their impacts on soil moisture use and most importantly their impacts on the cash crop to follow.

Producers and NRCS employees in Clayton, Portales, Los Lunas and Deming are currently working on projects to try and determine some potential species and mixes that can be used in farming systems around the state.

Additionally, state agronomist Kevin Branum has been training NRCS field staff in New Mexico on how to properly plan for the use of cover crops to achieve the producer's objectives.

Cover crops, similar to the one in the photo, are grown to gain multiple benefits such as increase production, improve soil health and capture extra moisture. Planted in June after wheat harvest, it used existing soil moisture and subsequent rains that otherwise would have been lost to evaporation; to make an extra crop of livestock forage while improving the soil's ability to retain extra water. Next year's wheat crop was planted directly into the forage residue in September and is already growing. This cover crop is a mix of sorghum, millet, buckwheat and sunflower.



Resource Technology Services—Rangeland

Cultural Resources

Molly Murphy was added to the RTS staff in January 2016, after earning her Master's degree in Anthropology (with archeology emphasis) from New Mexico State University (NMSU). The RTS Cultural Resource staff completed National Historic Preservation Act compliance work on 217 NRCS contracts reflecting 14,139 acres surveyed for cultural resources. The surveys identified and documented 198 cultural resources consisting of archeological sites (prehistoric and historic) and historic acequias. The cultural resources staff also provided two week-long cultural resources awareness training to NRCS field office staff.

Rangeland Management

Training in grazing management, range inventory, and rangeland health assessments were priorities in FY 2016. Sixty employees received hands-on training to ensure confidence in providing New Mexico ranchers with the best technical assistance on their operations. New Mexico's agricultural land is comprised of 96% rangeland. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialists provide a vital role in providing sound conservation technical assistance on rangeland.



Curtis Talbot, a rangeland management specialist with the NRCS National Soil Survey Division, discusses the Land Resource Unit (LRU) key to NRCS employees at the Rangeland Management Course in Silver City. Talbot, along with the MRLA staff in Las Cruces helped prepare this portion of the training.

Conservation Planning

The RTS staff devotes many hours to maintain conservation planning expertise for all field office employees. During the 2016 Conservation Planning Course in Fort Sumner, new NRCS employees worked through the first six steps of the conservation planning process and developed multiple alternatives for both a farm with irrigated cropland and a ranch with rangelands, with varied ecological site conditions. The new employees gained valuable experience in conservation planning from the experienced employees who served as course instructors.

Fort Sumner rancher Jorge Ramirez shows grazing concerns to students during the NRCS Conservation Planning Course. The training uses actual real-life situations in the planning process. These field exercises demonstrate the rancher and farmer objectives which is key to addressing natural resource concern.





NAPI Water Smart Initiative

Workers conduct maintenance on a center pivot at the Navajo Agriculture Productions Industry (NAPI) farming operation.

North Area

Thomas Marshall, North Area Conservationist

EQIP funding helps Navajo Nation to upgrade irrigation systems

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) Water Smart Initiative will benefit the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI) farming operations by using NRCS EQIP and BOR funding to upgrade and replace 11 center pivots at NAPI. The aging center pivots average 34 years of operation and are in dire need of repair or replacement. The NRCS Conservation Practice “442– Sprinkler System” has a practice lifespan of 15 years. NAPI needs to replace 24 center pivots but funding limitations allow EQIP to only pay for 11 of them. The NRCS Conservation Plan will benefit 1,353 acres through the Water Smart Initiative. This will increase the efficiency rate by 25%. NAPI will save \$60,000 annually in operating costs for just those 11 center pivots that will be replaced in FY 2016-2018.

Acequia Improvements

San Ysidro Community Ditch Project

This project is located approximately three miles north of the community of San Ysidro, N.M., on the Jemez River about one mile from the Jemez Pueblo, on N.M. Highway 4. The project rehabilitated an existing irrigation ditch lining and construction of a new 36-inch diameter polyethylene pipeline. Excessive sediment that built up along the irrigation ditch from the existing diversion dam entering into the irrigation system restricted the flow and required considerable effort to maintain during and after irrigation. A seven-foot diameter concrete manhole structure designed to remove sediment was not cost effective. It was replaced by a 36-inch diameter corrugated pipe to discharge its flow into the Jemez River. This saved time and money as well as improving irrigation and water quality.

Acequia Del Barranco De Jacona

The Acequia Del Barranco De Jacona has received water from the Pojoaque River since 1846. This acequia serves 103 acres and 79 members. This project included an infiltration system and 1,400 linear feet of installed pipeline. The project was completed in the Spring of 2016.

South Area

Blake Glover, South Area Conservationist



2016 South Area Program Activity

	Contracts	Acres	Obligation Amount	Payment Amount
EQIP	151	953,260	\$15,540,385	\$2,072,015
CStP	76	617,243	\$2,326,782	\$2,211,966

Fiscal Year 2016 was a busy and productive year for the South Area. At the end of FY 2015 and the start of FY 2016 staff were able to complete obligations of \$5 million in Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). These contracts are on private and federal lands that gives NRCS the opportunity to address re-sources concerns. The great work that is accomplished in the South Area could not be done without our conservation partners. We continue to build and foster partnerships with BLM, Forest Service, State Land Department, Extension Service, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts and local conservation districts to meet the needs of the land and the producers of Southern New Mexico.

Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative

Year	Number of Practices	Acres	Obligated Amount	Payment Amount
2010	25	12,571	\$211,271	\$211,271
2011	147	164,594	\$1,277,068	\$1,277,068
2012	106	78,150.10	\$1,054,415	\$984,854
2013	46	110,125.70	\$1,106,876	\$899,585
2014	42	39,647.42	\$856,310.37	\$520,444
2015	61	60871.45	\$1,021,325	\$211,087
2016	60	34,596.50	\$1,056,989	\$8,568.38
Total	487	500,556	\$6,584,254.37	\$4,104,309.00

Resource Inventories & Assessments

Rick Strait, State Soil Scientist

Soils

Understanding Watershed Dynamics

In partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State University, and the World Wildlife Fund, New Mexico NRCS launched a project to evaluate the impacts of rangeland management practices on water quality within the Rio Puerco Watershed. The watershed has been impacted by historical overgrazing and is a major contributor of sediments to the Rio Grande, the major water source for most of New Mexico. The goals of the project are to document that brush control and grazing management can improve Rangeland Health and Water Quality and benefit agricultural and urban water users downstream.



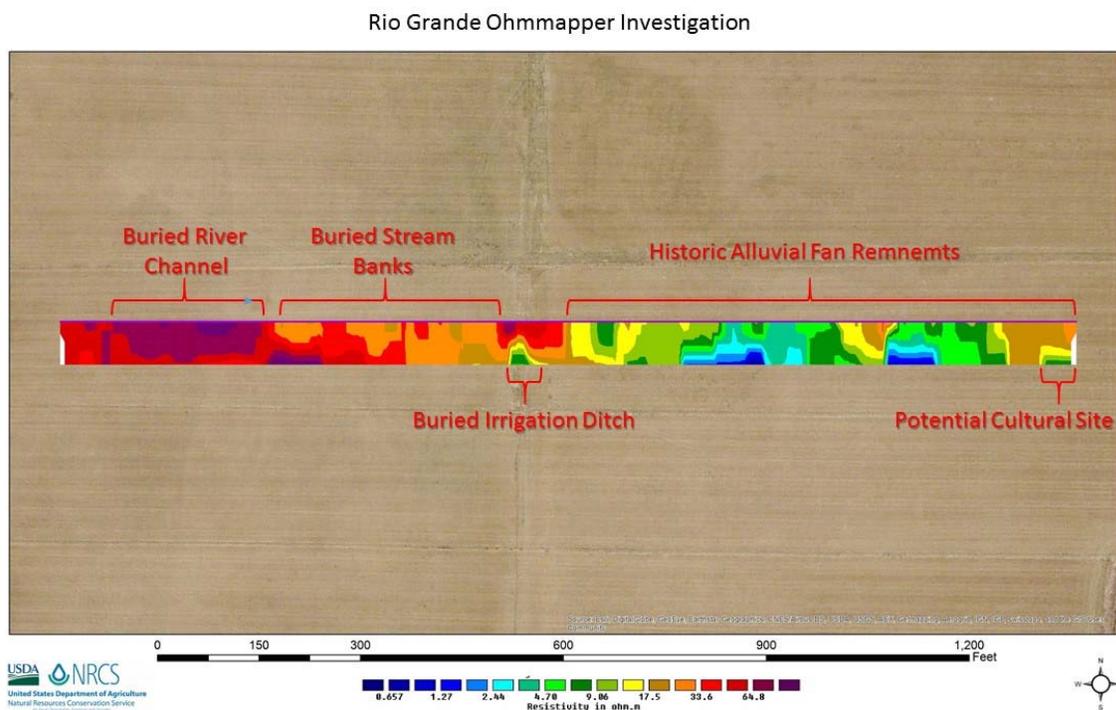
This is a gully in a Rio Puerco pasture. NRCS and its partners will evaluate how brush management, prescribed grazing, and erosion control improve water quality in this area.

Resource Inventories & Assessments

Modelling Water Tables along the Rio Grande

The New Mexico Soils Staff, with assistance from the Regional Geologist, entered the second year of working with the “Nex+Gen Academy,” an Albuquerque High School, to develop a model of water table dynamics on farmlands along the Middle Rio Grande floodplain. Water tables on the floodplain have been impacted by nearly a century of flood control along the river. A better understanding of how underground features influence water table behavior will allow NRCS to assist private and tribal land managers to improve irrigation water management, thus improving the water supply for both agricultural and urban water users.

In 2016, NRCS and Nex+Gen evaluated faster, more accurate assessments of the floodplain. Traditional soil sampling techniques and historic aerial photography (1935 to present) were used to validate modern Ohmmapper technology. The Ohmmapper is an instrument array that uses resistivity to identify changes in the underground landscape. Results from the instrument digitally display a slice of the earth up to 30 feet deep.



Geographic Information Systems

LIDAR Data Acquisition

As part of an ongoing partnership with other Federal and State Agencies, NM NRCS contributed \$600,000 to acquire high resolution Light Imaging Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) elevation data in critical areas of the state. This is the second year that NRCS had led the state in contributions to LIDAR Image Acquisitions. This data will be a critical tool to improve conservation planning, resource conservation, and watershed management within the state.

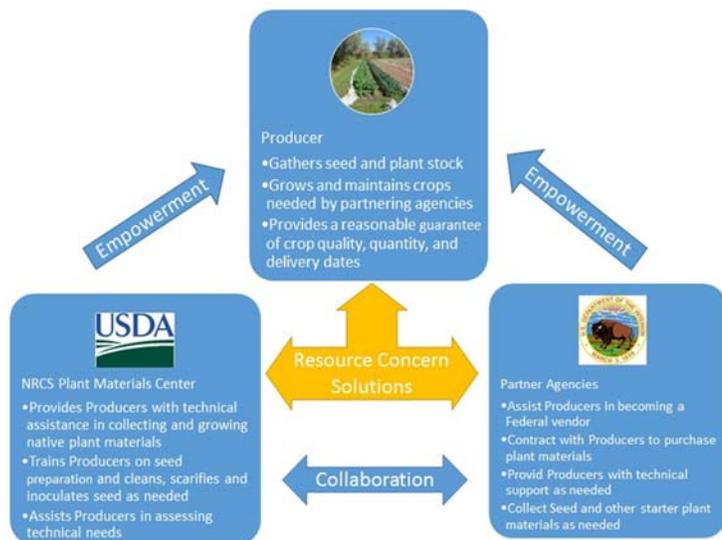
Resource Inventories & Assessments

Plant Materials

Empowering Traditionally Underserved Producers

During FY16, New Mexico NRCS began working with other federal partners (USFS, BLM, USFWS) to assist traditionally underserved producers in growing native plant materials for use on restoration projects on federal and private lands. The project aims to help producers grow plants for conservation use close to their farms, thus ensuring that native plants are truly 'locally grown'. For small acreage farmers, these are value added products that should allow them to diversify their operations and increase their sustainability. Approximately half of New Mexico farmers are traditionally underserved and farm less than 50 acres. This project aims to increase small farm profitability while increasing the availability of plant materials for riparian restoration, pollinator habit, and erosion control.

PMC/Partner/Producer Business Model



Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting

As part of a cooperative project between NRCS and NPS, the Snow Survey Program installed a new SNOTEL site on the rim of the Valles Caldera National Preserve. This unique partnership will provide valuable water supply information to both the Rio Grande water users and wetland managers within the preserve.



The newly constructed La Garita Hill SNOTEL site.

NRCS Service Centers

NRCS Office	(Current as of Feb. 17, 2017)
Alamogordo	(575) 437-3100
Albuquerque	(505) 761-5447
Aztec	(505) 334-3090
Carlsbad	(575) 887-3506
Carrizozo	(575) 648-2941
Chama	(575) 756-2581
Clayton	(575) 374-9461
Clovis	(575) 762-4769
Crownpoint	(505) 786-7094
Cuba	(575) 289-3278
Datil	(575) 772-5722
Deming	(575) 546-9692
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Conservation Planning



Conserving New Mexico

Helping People Help the Land

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