

2017

Helping People Help the Land

Annual Report

NRCS New Mexico



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To NRCS New Mexico Partners, Producers, and Public

NRCS New Mexico accomplishments support Secretary Sonny Perdue’s priority to conduct the people’s business efficiently, effectively, and with integrity while focusing on customer service, and to “Do Right and Feed Everyone.”



J. Xavier Montoya
State Conservationist

NRCS New Mexico’s Mission Defines Who We Are

NRCS New Mexico is committed to “helping people help the land”. For more than 80 years, our mission has been to provide assistance to farmers and landowners that helps with their conservation efforts. We want New Mexico’s producers to have productive lands that foster a healthy environment.

NRCS New Mexico’s Program Opportunities

The type of program assistance that NRCS New Mexico provides is both broad and specific. NRCS New Mexico’s program assistance is designed to address the natural resource concerns that impact American agriculture.. Significant changes came with the passing of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (aka, “2014 Farm Bill.”)

What Resource Technology Can Do

From the birth of NRCS its mission has always been rooted in sound science. The decisions made, the practices implemented and the conservation technical assistance offered are based on research, technological advances, and empirical study. NRCS New Mexico helps producers achieve their long-term goals while also providing assistance with their more immediate agricultural production needs.

Partnerships

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

Thanks to all of our partners who continuously work to create a better New Mexico.

NRCS New Mexico is honored to serve as stewards of the Land of Enchantment and privileged to have earned your trust and confidence as we continue Helping People Help the Land!

2017 Leadership Team

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Management & Strategy

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

The NRCS New Mexico Management & Strategy Team is committed to doing its part in accomplishing USDA's goals and objectives related to operationally working to implement conservation efforts at the ground level.

While the Team continued to experience significant staffing shortages in FY2017, we approached this formidable challenge by working together cohesively. This resulted in the successful delivery of high quality and timely support services to our customers, both internal and external.

NRCS New Mexico continued the evolution of its administrative operational processes in accordance with the national Administrative Transformation initiative. This initiative requires numerous changes in administrative processes, which were met and/or exceeded. In addition, NRCS New Mexico successfully implemented the State Business Plan, State Quality Assurance Plan, State Resource Assessment, and Workload Analysis.

NRCS New Mexico awarded several Federal contracts, amended existing agreements, and conferred new partnership agreements. We strive continuously to improve our operations. As part of this effort, we conducted internal quality assurance reviews to determine what worked well, as well as any areas that require improvements. The results were shared with NRCS New Mexico leadership and disseminated as deemed appropriate to the relevant teams across New Mexico.

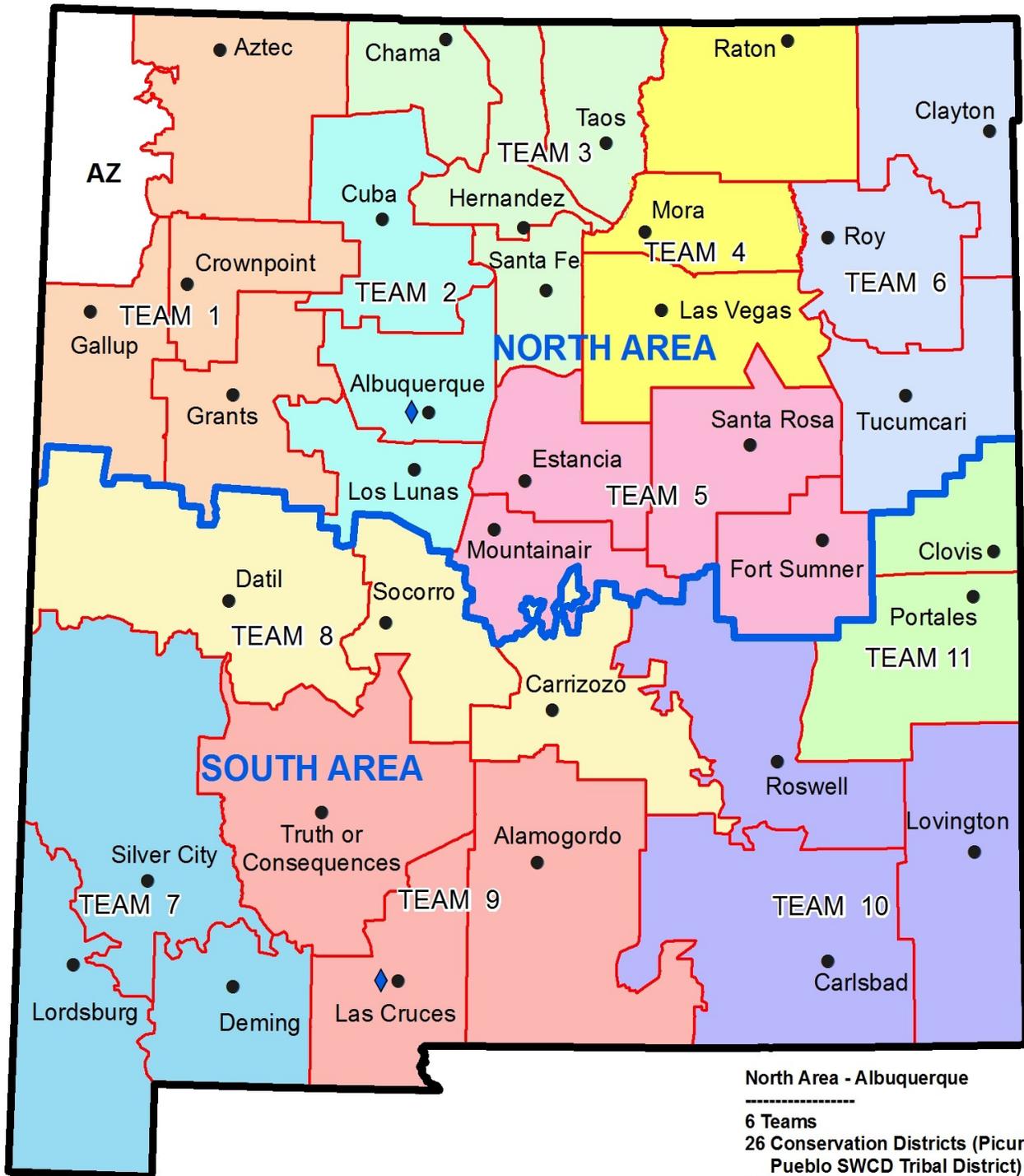
2017 was also the year in which NRCS New Mexico, as the lead agency, successfully completed the National Engagement Project, which began in 2012 and involved the relocation of the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development from GSA-leased space to U.S. Forest Service-controlled space in Albuquerque. The National Engagement Project was designed to reduce the USDA office space footprint and realize cost savings to the American taxpayer. Indeed, we reduced our combined square footage by over 10,000 square feet and realized nearly \$2,000,000 in cost savings. If you were not able to attend the open house on November 3, 2017, we invite you to stop by and tour the new Albuquerque Field Office, North Area Office, and New Mexico State Office. We think you'll like what you see!

We are very proud of the work achieved under Management & Strategy. We truly operate as a team and are committed to getting the job done and helping to put conservation on the ground. The Management & Strategy Team stands ready to assist wherever needed and looks forward to the many challenges that lie ahead as we continue to face staffing shortfalls and agency realignment.

Simon Sinek's words say it best: "The challenge of the unknown future is so much more exciting than the stories of the accomplished past."

Our Team thanks you for your continued support.

NRCS - New Mexico Administrative Areas



North Area - Albuquerque

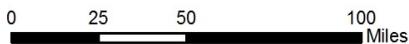
 6 Teams
 26 Conservation Districts (Picuris
 Pueblo SWCD Tribal District)
 23 Nations, Tribes, and Pueblos

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 NRCS Programs

Kristin Graham Chavez, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

NRCS New Mexico was extremely busy in FY2017, its many programs operating in full swing.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was a continued success with over \$25 million in obligated funding 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 local, state, and national initiatives.

- **Local initiatives include:** Grazed Rangeland, Irrigated Cropland, Forestland, Watersheds, Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Conservation Activity Plans, and Animal Feeding Operations.
- **State initiatives include:** Energy, Organic, Seasonal High Tunnel, Acequias, and Tribal Lands.
- **National initiatives include:** Resiliency to Climate Change, National Water Quality, Ogallala Aquifer, Strike Force, Working Land for Wildlife Lessor Prairie Chicken, Acequias, Joint Chiefs, and Water Smart.

Top Eight EQIP Practices -- FY2017

Practice	Extent	Projects	Financial Assistance
Brush Management (acres)	45,900	249	\$3,200,027
Sprinkler System (acres)	2,995	53	\$2,675,218
Irrigation Pipeline (feet)	129,976	104	\$1,768,254
Watering Facility	323 No.	323	\$1,493,365
Fence (feet)	798,384	144	\$1,390,033
Livestock Pipeline (feet)	939,333	176	\$1,256,882
Conservation Crop Rotation (acres)	2,995	30	\$1,200,033
Forest Stand Improvement (acres)	794	100	\$1,046,020

Programs

Regional Conservationist Partnership Program (RCPP) in New Mexico include:

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project: The Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project encourages ranchers and landowners operating within the Prairie Grasslands Region of New Mexico to utilize the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Each participating rancher, in collaboration with Federal and state land managing agencies, will develop a resource management plan. The leveraged EQIP funds facilitate restoration efforts outlined in the plan, like treating invasive plant species. Partners within the CRWRP have been addressing resource concerns on ranches with mixed ownership lands for 11 years. This project was initiated when eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts encompassing the entire Canadian River Watershed began collaborating through a Joint Powers Agreement to restore the watershed of the Canadian River and its tributaries.

New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative: The New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative is designed to bring Environmental Quality Incentives Program and partner funds together for New Mexico's ranchers whose operations include Federal lands. Each rancher, state and Federal agency with lands included in the ranch operation will develop a coordinated resource management plan or CRMP. The CRMP will include range and forest soil health restoration strategies, such as forest thinning, to combat the increase in wildland fires. New Mexico experienced over 1.5 million acres in wildfires from 2009 to 2014. Restoration efforts through this initiative are critical to fund treatments on over 20 million acres of brush-invaded rangeland and 10 million acres of overstocked forest lands.

Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region: Completed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1976, the San Juan-Rio Chama Diversion is a series of diversion structures and tunnels that together carry runoff 26 miles across the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. This diversion, along with the Rio Chama, provides approximately one third of New Mexico's water supply for irrigators, agriculture, industry, communities, and fish and wildlife. The Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region Project, managed by East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District and twenty partners, complements recent diversion structures with additional forest health and watershed treatments to increase the resiliency of the landscape to withstand stressors such as drought, wildfire, and climate change in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Between 2017 and 2021, partners in the San Juan-Rio Chama region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico will complete 1,000 – 1,500 acres of watershed resiliency treatments per year utilizing \$6.4 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds, Conservation Stewardship Program funds, and the Agricultural Easement Program funds.

Programs

North Central NM Watershed Restoration Project: This is a regional watershed project aimed at reducing wildfire risk while at the same time improving soils, hydrology, vegetation, and enhancing social/economic needs. The watershed approach provides a framework for coordinating project needs among private land-owners, state and Federal agencies, tribes, communities, and other interested stakeholders. The project extends from Taos (North) to Bernardo (South) and Gallup (West) to Santa Rosa (East), including all major tributaries and sub-watersheds of the Rio Grande and Pecos River in that region. This project will expand on previous work with established partners to improve the natural resources of this critically important region. Forest restoration practices have been shown to reduce high-severity wildfire and to improve watershed health, water quality, and water quantity. Poor historic management of forest watersheds and riparian zones along with current and forecast climate change are creating a dire situation for the condition and availability of New Mexico's forest, rangeland, and water resources.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands: New Mexico has a rich history of community acequias supporting agriculture. Approximately 800 acequias and community ditch associations serve many farmers or "parciantes" who make all, or part of their livelihood from farming and ranching. Farms served by acequias range in size from less than 1 acre to over 500 acres. The majority of farmers depending on acequias are minorities in underserved communities. Acequias are located in 12 of the most impoverished counties in New Mexico. In New Mexico we say "agua es la vida" (water is life). This project will help sustain this critical social and spiritual connection as a matter of social and environmental justice. The objective of this initiative is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness, and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes.

Programs

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is another program positively affecting ranchers and farmers in New Mexico. In 2017 a national reinvention of the program resulted in a new process to evaluate the natural resources of an operation and new requirements for approving payments for conservation activities. The new process requires more involvement from NRCS New Mexico with conservation planning and certification of activities. The process results in increased transparency in how payments are earned and consistency with the NRCS New Mexico technical standards and specifications for conservation practices. In order to meet the higher level of involvement required by CSP, state office technical staff conducted training on Rangeland Health Assessments, Pasture Condition Score and Cropland Soil Health evaluations. State and area staff also focused on providing training to NRCS New Mexico staff and partners on Prescribed Grazing. Even though the 2017 reinvention resulted in a drop in the number of contracts funded, NRCS New Mexico is now in a better position to provide contract participants with technical assistance, and contract participants will have better instructions on how to implement contracted activities.

In FY2017, NRCS New Mexico funded 25 new contracts compared to 95 contracts in 2016. The total acres contracted is 353,570 for new enrollments. Of these 25 contracts, 10 contract participants registered as socially disadvantaged producers and include four tribal organizations. The 10 new contracts to socially disadvantaged producers cover 71% of the contracted acreage and 75% of the contracted dollars.

NRCS New Mexico also funded 57 renewal contracts on 702,044 acres. The renewal contracts include 20 with participants registered as socially disadvantaged, including two tribal organizations. The 20 renewal contracts to socially disadvantaged producers cover 42% of the renewal contracted acreage and 35% of the renewal contracted dollars. For both new and renewal contracts three participants registered as Beginning Farmer/Rancher. These three new contracts with Beginning Farmers/Ranchers cover 1% of the contracted acres and 2% of the contracted dollars. The three renewal contracts with Beginning Farmers/Ranchers cover 4% of the contracted acres and contracted dollars.

The total amount of funds obligated on new and renewal contracts for 2017 is \$2,147,499. The total payments made in 2017 for 625 contracts obligated from 2013-2016 was almost \$18 million.

Programs

Congressional District Programs Tally

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Congressional District	Contracts Obligated	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	16	91,290	\$1,038,174
2	144	845,889	\$12,277,945
3	175	243,852	\$9,718,089
Total	335	1,181,032	\$23,034,209

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Congressional District	Contracts	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	3	63,200	\$174,707
2	51	761,559	\$3,046,852
3	28	230,853	\$1,399,895
Total	82	1,055,614	\$4,621,454

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Congressional District	Contracts	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount
1	1	28,190	\$172,188
2	2	12,751	\$192,721
3	2	1,730	\$149,620
Total	5	42,672	\$514,529

Partnerships

Alicia Rodriguez, Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships

NRCS New Mexico's achievements in delivering conservation services and programs are largely attributed to our strong working relationships with many key partners, such as the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, New Mexico Coalition of Conservation Districts, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, local, state and Federal government, acequia associations, elected and appointed officials, and of course, farmers, ranchers, and others who manage privately owned lands.

NRCS New Mexico worked diligently in planning, coordinating, and participating in numerous successful stakeholder events to promote NRCS's motto, *Helping People Help the Land*. Specifically, NRCS New Mexico promoted productive working lands and healthy water, while sustaining and enhancing the future for agriculture producers.



NRCS with NM Partners at a forest thinning project located in Taos, NM.

As a result of these efforts the NRCS New Mexico brand continues to grow stronger. Consequently, NRCS New Mexico's relationships with New Mexico's stakeholders—including those in agriculture, conservation, community organizations, and other USDA mission areas—have also been strengthened. This has promoted the NRCS mission to protect, restore, and enhance the lands and waters upon which people and the environment depend.

Together the work NRCS New Mexico performed has resulted in the enhancement, expansion and depth of our conservation reach throughout New Mexico. This was accomplished by working more closely with individual farmers, ranchers, landowners, local conservation districts, state, and Federal government agencies, tribes, Earth Team volunteers, and many other people and groups that care about the quality of America's natural resources.

NRCS New Mexico leveraged relationships with USDA agencies; other Federal agencies; and state, tribal, local and private partners to coordinate community relations programs. It also developed and implemented outreach activities designed to inform and involve all USDA stakeholders.

Engineering

Charles Braden, Acting State Conservation Engineer

NRCS New Mexico plans, designs, and inspects complex earthen dams, reservoirs, and related infrastructure under widely varying conditions. It is essential that these structures be constructed with uniform criteria to ensure consistent performance. Consideration must be given to the damage that might occur to existing and future developments should the dam suddenly release large quantities of water downstream due to a failure, or landslide into the reservoir. The stability of the spillway materials, the physical characteristics of the site and the valley downstream, and the relationship of the site to industrial and residential areas, including controls of future development, all have a bearing on the amount of potential damage in the event of a failure.

NRCS New Mexico staff continuously performs inspections of NRCS constructed watershed structures and related critical infrastructure. The aging condition of the structures are monitored and preparation of Emergency Action Plans are drafted to protect downstream facilities and the public.

As part of this effort, NRCS New Mexico staff participated in Emergency Action Plan Table Top exercises with sponsors that were funded by the New Mexico Department of Agriculture. Table Top exercises are critical to understanding and coordinating Emergency Action plans.

A total of six Emergency Action Plans were compiled and have been approved by the Office of the New Mexico State Engineer, Dam Safety Bureau. Ten additional Emergency Action Plans were submitted and are pending approval. The Santa Cruz River Watershed Site One Dam rehabilitation planning is ongoing.



Photo is an example of an NRCS constructed earthen dam constructed by NRCS

Resource Technology Services

Steve Kadas, State Resource Conservationist

NRCS New Mexico's Resource Technology Services Team is proud to have worked on numerous exciting and challenging projects in FY2017 to advance the mission of USDA.

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, NRCS has led the way in some of the most innovative and scientifically-based agricultural practices.

The Resource Technology Services (RTS) oversees the NRCS New Mexico ecological sciences (i.e., Agronomy, Range, Wildlife Biology, Forestry, Archeology and Business Tools). We ensure that our employees are prepared to offer the best technical assistance and guidance to our customers and partners so they can be good land stewards, conserve natural resources, while getting the most from their agricultural lands. We ensure the NRCS New Mexico team has access to the latest scientific tools, technology, and training. Below are examples of our accomplishments for FY2017.

Wildlife Biology and Environmental Conservation

Fish and Wildlife Conservation is a priority for America and NRCS. Both humans and wildlife are dependent on the land, and as stewards of the land, both land users and NRCS are challenged with addressing the needs of the land. NRCS' mission of *Helping People Help the Land* gives direction to our conservation planning and programs. Partnerships with private landowners, tribal, local, state, and Federal agencies play important roles. Broad partnerships which focus on a strategic conservation approach further insure that we can achieve true conservation for the benefit of generations to come.

NRCS New Mexico, through a partnership with the Pheasants Forever wildlife organization, hired a local biologist in Portales, to address issues regarding working agriculture lands and Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat needs. The partner position works with clients and staff to improve Prairie Chicken habitat with prescribed grazing practices, thus the saying, "What's good for the herd is good for the bird".

Resource Technology Services



Lesser prairie-chicken nesting habitat with tall, dense vegetation. Good conservation planning and prescribed grazing insures good habitat cover and cattle feed. (Photos courtesy of David Haukos and NRCS)

Agronomy and Soil Health

NRCS New Mexico, in conjunction with Curry County and Valencia County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), hosted two Innovative Farming Conferences. The conferences were attended by 175 people with topics that focused on cutting-edge soil health principles, and techniques that provide both conservation and production benefits. As a result of the success of these conferences, three more SWCDs requested NRCS New Mexico help with their own conferences.

Resource Technology Services

Range Management and Grazing Land Conservation

Great efforts went into updating and streamlining inventory methods and advancing NRCS New Mexico planner skills. The greatest impact will be improved management plans for ranchers and improved grass and soil resources while moving grass land to higher production and nutrition. These changes also improve application of NRCS New Mexico financial assistance programs like EQIP and CSP.

Prescribed Burning Improves Grazing Land: NRCS New Mexico successfully conducted an 1100 acre prescribed burn near Duran, NM in April 2017. Fire is an effective tool to battle invasive trees and its effectiveness surpasses mechanical and chemical treatments alone. The burn included a collaboration of partners; the McIntosh and Duran local Volunteer Fire Departments, East Torrance Soil and Water Conservation District, Western Refinery Oil Company, and NM Association of Conservation Districts.



Resource Technology Services

Conservation Planning and Water Quality Conservation

During the summer of 2017, two important trainings—the Conservation Planning Basics and Nutrient Management—were held, respectively in Las Cruces and Roswell. The trainings were attended by both NRCS New Mexico employees and partners. The Nutrient Management training focused on water quality and soil health through good management of dairy/feedlot manure. It also covered EPA regulations and legislation on Confined Animal Feeding Operations or dairies. Participants gained valuable skills on the complex process of managing nutrients for farm production and improving water quality. Dan also oversees the Farm Bill Highly Erodible Land and Wetland conservation activities.

Outreach and Education on Soil Health and Water Conservation: Conservation education for schools, colleges, tribes, and organizations is a priority. Our rainfall simulator can be seen around New Mexico demonstrating the benefits of healthy soil. Audiences are amazed when they see how soil health increases water on farms and ranches to improve crop and grass production, while keeping water clean.

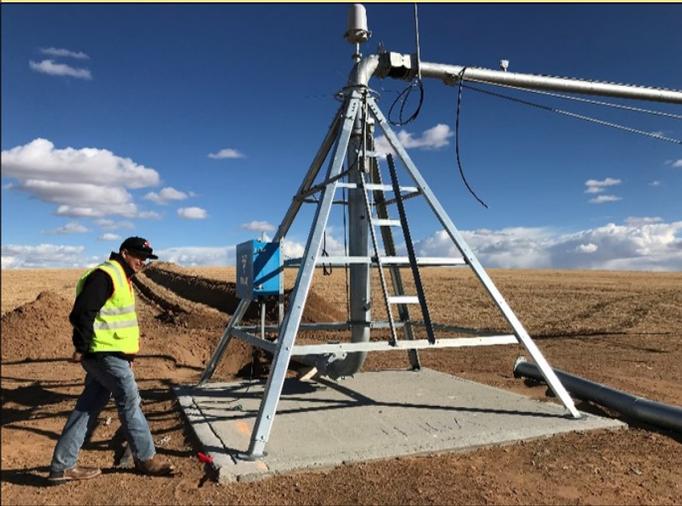


North Area

Thomas Marshall, North Area Conservationist

North Water Area - Aztec

The Water Smart Initiative funded under the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and administered by NRCS New Mexico EQIP Cost Share Program in the Aztec Field Office (FO) has been able to assist the Navajo Nation’s Tribal Enterprise, Navajo Agriculture Products Industry (NAPI) with the technical and financial assistance needed to improve the delivery and efficiency of center pivots on the operations. The NAPI operation has recognized the need to upgrade some pivots. Annual maintenance before and during the irrigation season has been continuous for the pivots. NRCS New Mexico in the Aztec FO with the assistance of NAPI and NRCS New Mexico North Area Office personnel were able to identify the systems that needed improvement. The BOR Water Smart Initiative funds were used to assist the NAPI operation with two EQIP contracts for a total dollar amount of \$1,505,518.00 for improvement on 1,855.5 acres of irrigated cropland. The financial assistance will make a significant difference in water saving over the course of the irrigation season and improve the operation’s crop production, but most importantly conserve important water resources. NAPI has accepted an advance payment that is available to historically underserved (HU) participants for Phase I of the Water Smart Initiative and plans to have these practices complete in time of 2018 irrigation season. Phase II of the project will be a priority once the cropping season for 2018 is complete and will be ready for the 2019 growing season.



Photos of Water Smart Project

Program	Contracts Obligated	Contracted Acres	Obligation Amount	Payment Amount
EQIP	219	581,685	\$11,204,999	\$1,937,274
CStP	47	642,459	3,056,749	1,377,682

South Area

Blake Glover, South Area Conservationist



A hay field in southern NM that is highly productive due to NRCS's conservation assistance

2017 South Area Program Activity

	Contracts	Acres	Obligation Amount	Payment Amount
EQIP	120	601,472	\$12,189,624	\$2,024,110
CStP	33	398,955.80	\$1,564,705	\$753,698

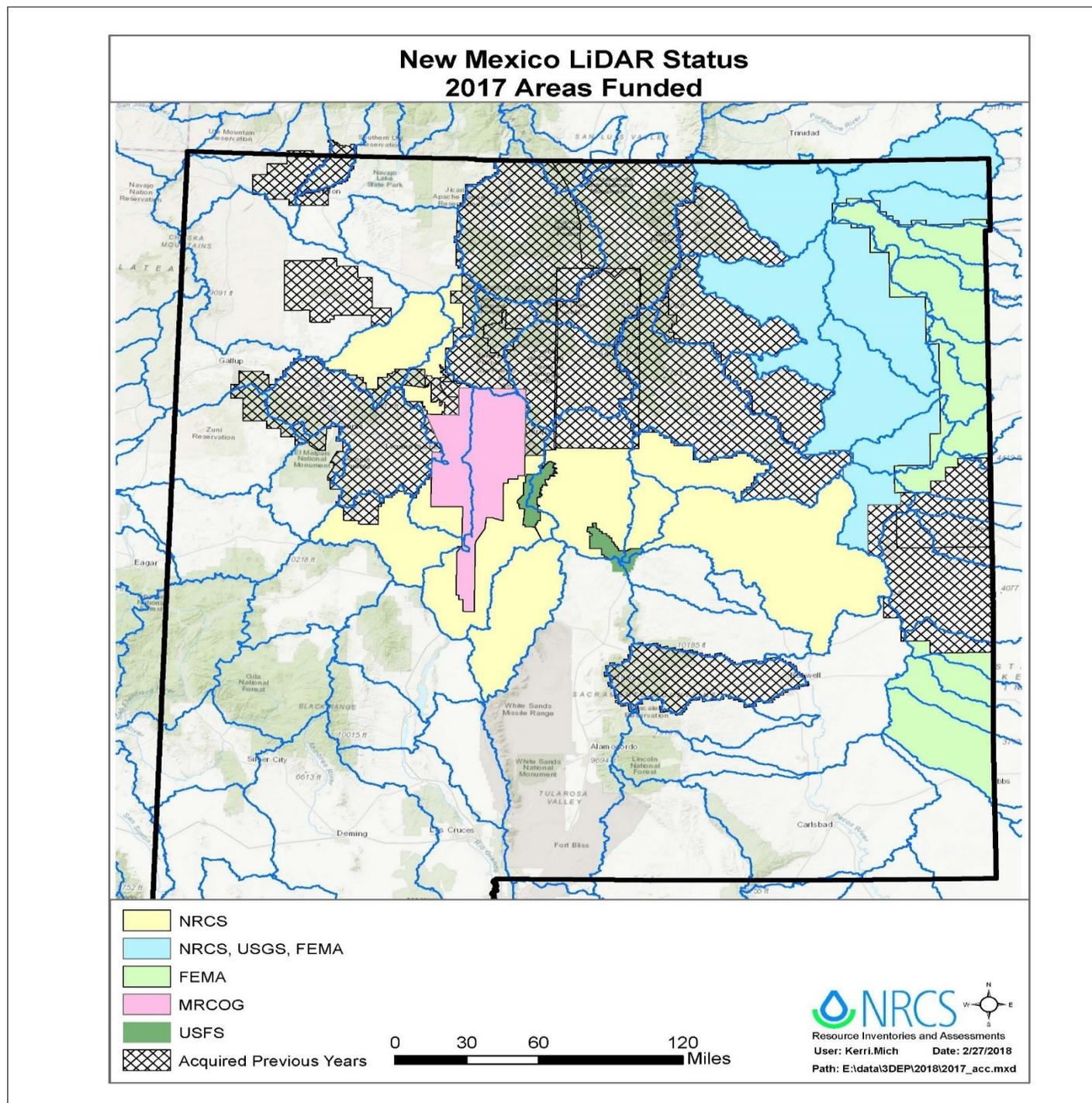
FY2017 was a productive year for the South Area. Although the South Area had 18 staff vacancies in FY17, employees took on the challenge of providing quality conservation assistance to agricultural producers across the South Area and, with its conservation partners, accomplished a significant portion of its scope of work. We continue to build and foster partnerships with BLM, Forest Service, State Land Department, Extension Services, NM Game and Fish, and NM Association of Conservation Districts. Collectively and collaboratively, we help meet the needs of the land and the producers of southern New Mexico.

In addition, we took on a special project that also resulted in a significant impact. The Heritage Farm – agreement with NMSU—provides technical assistance to the university in the construction of a demonstration farm site that will depict the landscape, habitat, and commodity crops throughout New Mexico.

Resource Inventories & Assessments

Rick Strait, State Soil Scientist

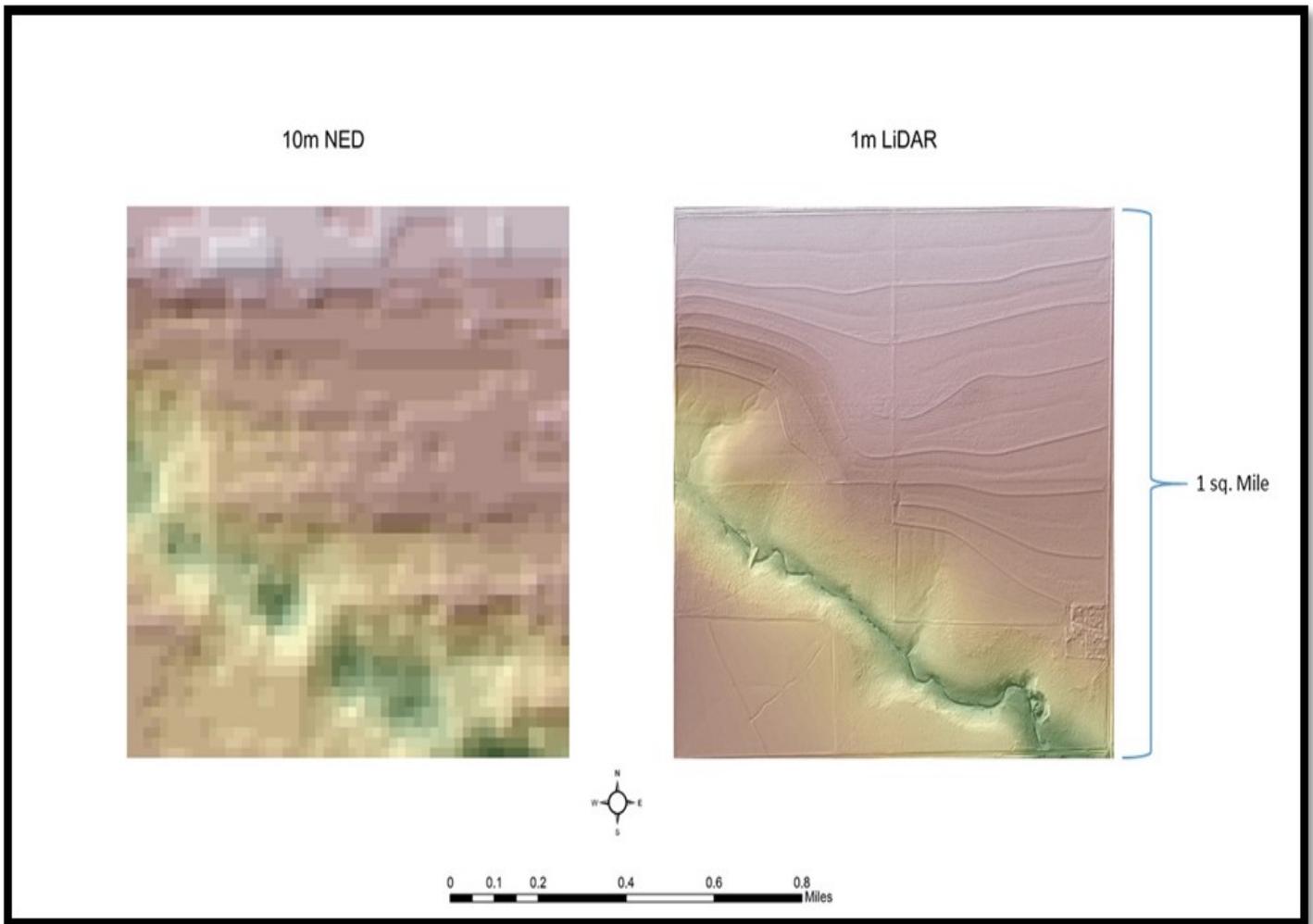
As part of an ongoing partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), United States Geological Survey, United States Forest Service, and the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments, NRCS New Mexico contributed \$4,500,000 to acquire high resolution Light Imaging Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) elevation data in critical areas of the state. This is the third year that NRCS New Mexico had led the state in contributions to LiDAR Image Acquisitions.



Resource Inventories & Assessments

This data provides a critical tool to improve conservation planning, resource conservation, and watershed management. NRCS New Mexico has been using lower resolution National Elevation Dataset (NED) for some years.

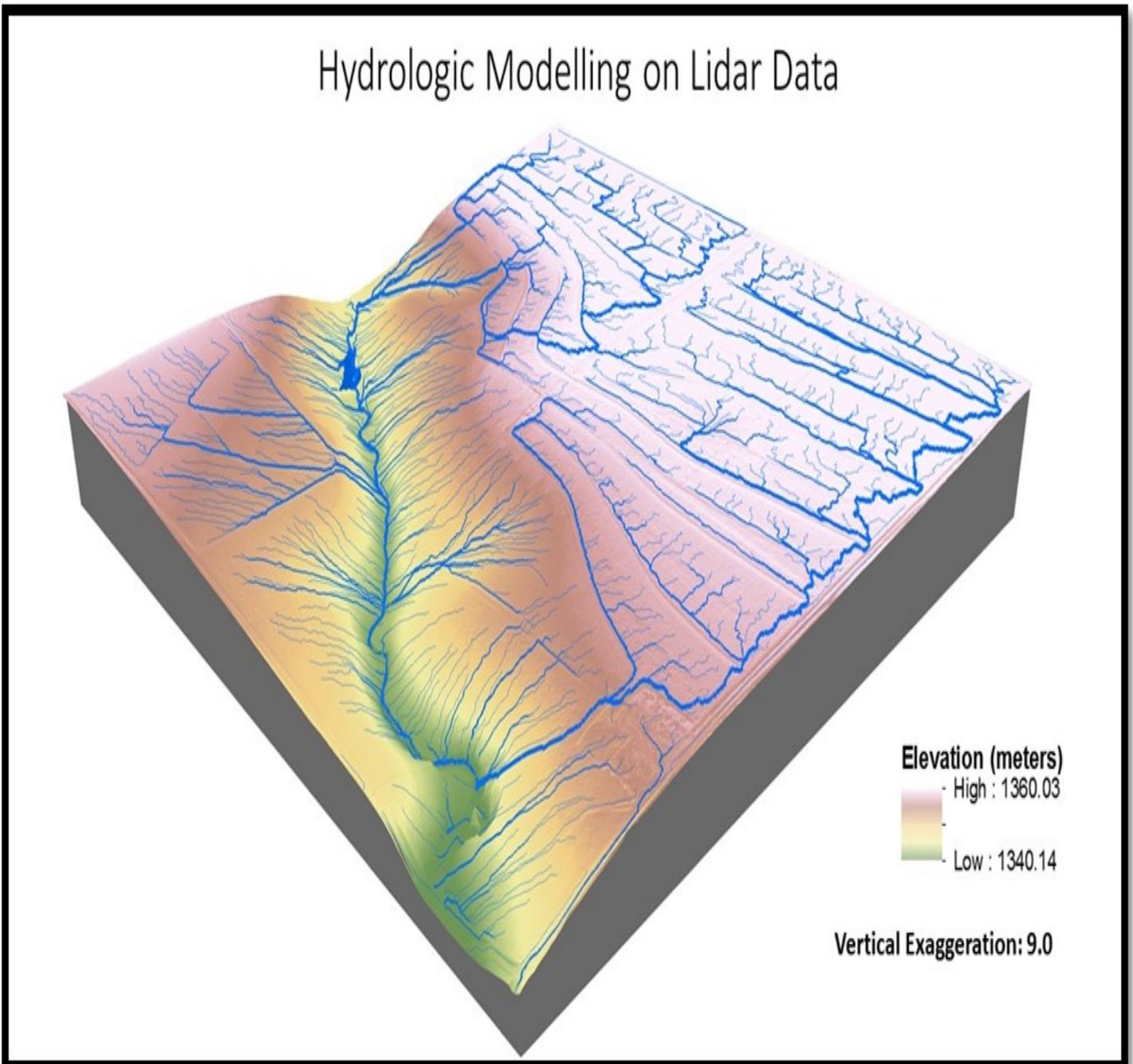
The new LIDAR data provides higher resolution for more detailed conservation planning as illustrated in the image below.



The New Mexico Resource Staff, with assistance from Earth Team Volunteers, is currently investigating different methodologies for developing value-added products for Conservation Planning using LIDAR data.

Resource Inventories & Assessments

The image below was created using hydrologic modelling algorithms and LIDAR. This three-dimensional representation illustrates water flow over micro-terraces on CRP land in Eastern New Mexico. Products such as this assist conservation planners as they evaluate resource concerns. These products can reduce field survey time while increasing planning accuracy.



NRCS Service Centers

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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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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
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Conservation Planning



Conserving New Mexico

Helping People Help the Land

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