

# FY 2011 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal For the Estancia Field Office

## **Introduction:**

The Estancia Field office (FO) is located in the town of Estancia, approximately 50 miles southeast of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Torrance County makes up the majority of Estancia FO service area, along with a portion of eastern Bernalillo County, and the southern third of Santa Fe County. The Manzano Mountains border the west boundary and slope east into the Estancia Basin. To the north is South Mountain, to the south is Chupadera Mesa, and to the east are gently rolling uplands. The basin contains a significant but limited underground water supply; furnishing flood, sprinkler, and small-scale drip irrigation. The majority of crops grown in this area are alfalfa hay, corn silage, oats, and some winter wheat for winter grazing. Other crops such as beans, pumpkins, sweet corn, and other vegetable crops are also grown, but on a smaller scale. Along with agriculture there has been an expanding suburban (2 to 40 acre size) type development in the NW corner of the service area that continues to expand. The remaining land base is not suitable for cultivation and is used mainly as grazed range and timberland.

## **Local Work Group:**

The official 2011 Local Work Group (LWG) meeting was held on September 16, 2010. Those present were East Torrance and Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Mountainair NRCS, M State Land Office, BLM, State Forestry and individual landowners. The previous year's proposal was reviewed along with ranking criteria, cost document, and cost share rates. Recommendations were noted and will be included for this year's proposal.

The area represented is comprised of southern Santa Fe County, eastern Bernalillo County, and the majority of Torrance County. Membership is mainly made up of the local conservation districts, FSA County committee members, FSA CED, and local NRCS personnel. Federal and state government partnering agencies are invited and welcome to participate.

## **Priority Resource Concerns:**

The resource concerns were reviewed and it was decided that they will remain the same. The LWG prioritized the resource concerns as follows:

1. Rangeland Health
  - Plant Condition – Productivity, Health & Vigor
  - Plant Condition - Noxious & Invasive Plants
2. Cropland Health
  - Water Quantity – Inefficient Water use on irrigated crop/hayland
  - Water Quality – Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Groundwater
  - Plant Condition – Productivity, Health & Vigor
3. Forest Management - Plant Condition – Productivity, Health & Vigor -Fuels Reduction

## **Funding Considerations:**

Following the recommendations of the LWG to distribute funds based on resource concerns:

- 55 % - Rangeland
- 40 % - Irrigated Cropland
- 5 % - Non-industrial Private Forestland

These percentages are established as a “general rule” and not hard lines. Funds will be moved between these priorities based on number of applications in each category and the integrity of applications addressing the resource concerns. The ranking criteria will establish order of funding and degree of environmental benefits. Currently the percentage breakup is working effectively and is funding equitably to landowners and addressing key resource concerns. A **\$50,000** financial assistance cap has been established for each practice with the exception of **1) drip micro irrigation (441)** which would have a financial assistance **cap of \$90,000** and **2) brush management (314)** which will be **capped at \$40,000**. Setting a cap will insure the best distribution of funds to a variety of producers and resource concerns and allowing a higher financial assistance cap for micro irrigation will encourage producers to adopt this technology on larger scales due to the high cost per acre.

## **Cost Share Rate Factor:**

The list of eligible practices and payment rates will be consistent with the Northwest Area Payment Schedule. The LWG recommended all practices be calculated at a 75% cost share rate for FY 2011, with the exception of cost share rates for those applicants who self-certify they meet the Limited Resource Farmers or Beginning Farmer (BF)/Beginning Rancher (BR) criteria will receive 90% cost share on all conservation practices.

Please refer to the FY 2011 EQIP cost list for final practice payment rates.

## **Ranking Criteria:**

Existing ranking criteria worksheets for irrigated cropland and grazing lands were reviewed and discussed. It was decided that the priority resource concerns identified for each land use were adequately addressed by the existing ranking sheets. Adjustments to combine light and medium brush management were made, with 50 pts available and heavy brush management as 25 points available.

Please refer to the ranking criteria links for specific information.

## **Watershed Initiative:**

The LWG recommended not to propose a watershed initiative in 2011.

## **Small Acreage Initiative:**

The LWG did not recommend a small acreage initiative.

