

# 2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal

## For the Alamogordo Field Office

### Introduction

The Alamogordo Field Office provides financial and technical assistance to Otero County and a small portion of Lincoln County in South Central New Mexico. Assistance is provided cooperatively with the Otero Soil & Water Conservation District.

The total service area consists of 4,248,320 acres. Federal lands make up the majority of the area with 67.4 percent of the land administered by the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Department of Defense and the National Park Service. In addition to the Federal lands, 10.8 percent of the total acreage includes the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation. State lands make up 10.6 percent and Private lands make up the remaining 11.2 percent.

The District includes most of the Sacramento Mountains, the Tularosa Basin, and south to Otero Mesa and Crow Flats. Several rivers along with 23 Acequias and/or Community ditches are the primary contributors for irrigation water in the mountain valleys and the community of Tularosa. The remaining areas are irrigated with wells. Alfalfa, pecans, pistachios, fruit trees and vegetable crops occur throughout the District. Rangelands, primarily used for livestock grazing, make up the majority of the agriculture setting within the District.

### Local Work Group (LWG)

The Local Work Group convened on September 4, 2013 at 1:30 PM in the conference room at the Alamogordo Service Center. Thirty six letters and emails of invitation were sent to local Federal, Tribal, State, County and Individuals cooperatively working with the Alamogordo Field Office and Otero Soil & Water Conservation District. The following Representatives attended the meeting:

- Rick Baish – Otero SWCD
- Lynn Muncy – FSA
- Innis Lewis – Rancher
- Tommie Herrell – Otero County Commissioner
- Tom Dominguez – Otero County Extension Agent
- Ryan McBee – NMDGF
- Adam Wright – NMDGF
- Vicky Milne – Otero SWCD
- Mary Sanchez – NRCS
- John Hartung – NRCS

### Priority Resource Concerns

The Local Work Group recommends the following list of priority resource concerns for land uses within the District:

#### Water Quantity

- Cropland-Inefficient Water Use on Irrigated Land
  - Rangeland-Inefficient Water Use on Non-irrigated Land & Rangeland Hydrologic Cycle
- Water Quality
- Cropland- Harmful Levels of Pesticides in Surface & Ground Waters
  - Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Surface & Ground Waters
- Energy
- Applies to all land uses and resource concerns.
- Plant Condition
- Rangeland- Noxious, Invasive Plants & Productivity, Health and Vigor
- Soil Condition
- Cropland- Organic Matter Depletion
  - Rangeland- Rangeland Site Stability
- Soil Erosion
- Cropland – Irrigation-induced

### **Funding Considerations**

The Local Work Group recommends the following funding allocation, by land use, to address priority resource concerns:

- 60 percent on grazing land
- 30 percent on cropland
- 10 percent on forested land

The Local Work Group supports moving funds between land uses, as deemed necessary, to fund additional contracts.

The Group reviewed the criteria for Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, and Limited Resource Farmers/Ranchers and the provisions for voluntary participation, incentive offers, and the focus on equity within programs and services. The additional practice cost-share rate factors were also presented and acknowledged.

Continuation of the \$100,000.00 practice cost cap for all eligible practices planned in a contract was recommended as well as the Mescalero Apache Tribe would continue to be exempt from a practice cost cap.

The Local Work Group reviewed the available land management practices and payment rates. The recommendation is not to provide funding incentives for land management practices for FY2014.

### **Cost Share Rate Factor**

The Local Work Group reviewed and recommends the use of all eligible practices for NM. Consensus supports the NRCS Regional and Statewide use of the payment schedule for eligible practice average costs and cost share rate factors as determined by the State Conservationist.

### **Ranking Criteria**

The Local Work Group supports the use of Area wide ranking criteria worksheets for each land use, with the understanding that applicants are ranked within the County and not

statewide; unless mandated by the program. The ranking criteria worksheets for the County are recommended as follows:

- Grazing Lands
- Irrigated Cropland
- Tribal Lands
- Forested Land
- CCPI

### **Watershed Initiative**

The Local Work Group recommended a continuation of the initiative for the Salt Basin Watershed. This initiative addresses resource concerns on grazing lands within the Salt Flats area of the County. The Group supports using \$50,000.00 of their allocation to target the resource concerns within this watershed.

Discussion also supported the continuation of the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) with NMACD and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for lands administered by the BLM in Otero County. A discussion regarding funding allocations for past years presented a recommendation for funding levels for 2014 to be at or above the base \$100,000 funding received in FY 2013.

### **State Small Acreage Initiative**

The Local Work Group does not recommend a small acreage initiative for Otero County. The Group recognizes that 'smaller' farmers in the area have had contracts funded and resources concerns addressed without additional allocations needed.