

# 2014 Environmental Quality Incentives Program Proposal

## Estancia Field Office

### **Introduction:**

The Estancia Field office is located in the town of Estancia, approximately 50 miles southeast of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Torrance County makes up the majority of the Estancia FO service area, along with a portion of eastern Bernalillo County, and the southern third of Santa Fe County. The Manzano Mountains make up the western boundary and slope eastward into the Estancia Basin. The western slope is dominated by Ponderosa Pine forest above 7000 feet elevation. Lower elevations are scattered Pinyon/Juniper woodlands. 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 aquifer that supplies water for 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. Crops such as beans, pumpkins, sweet corn, and other vegetable crops are also grown, but on a smaller scale. The majority of the area is rangeland supporting cattle and sheep operations.

### **Local Work Group:**

The 2014 Local Work Group (LWG) was held on September 18, 2013. Those present were East Torrance and Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Producers from within the districts, and Estancia NRCS Staff. The local work group reviewed the previous year's proposal along with ranking criteria and cost data. Recommendations were noted and are included in 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 partner agency attendance is greatly appreciated.

**Priority Resource Concerns:** The LWG identified the following resource concerns:

#### **A. Rangeland:**

1. Livestock Production Limitation- Inadequate Feed and Forage
2. Livestock Production Limitation- Inadequate Livestock Water
3. Degraded Plant Condition- Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health
4. Degraded Plant Condition- Excessive Plant Pest Pressure
5. Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife- Habitat Degradation

#### **B. Cropland:**

1. Excess/Insufficient Water- Inefficient use of Irrigation Water
2. Degraded Plant Condition- Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health
3. Water Quality Degradation- Pesticides Transported to Surface/Ground Waters
4. Soil Quality Degradation- Compaction
5. Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife- Habitat Degradation

#### **C. Non-Industrial Private Forest:**

1. Degraded Plant Condition- Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health
2. Degraded Plant Condition- Excessive Plant Pest Pressure
3. Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife- Habitat Degradation

### **Funding Considerations:**

The following distributions are based on the recommendations of the LWG:

- Rangeland- 55%
- Cropland- 40%
- NIPF- 5%

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. Practice cost caps were recommended as follows to insure an equitable distribution of funds for practices that have a very high cost rate.

**(314) Brush Management - \$40,000**

**(430) Irrigation Pipeline - \$20,000**

**(441) Micro-irrigation - \$40,000**

**(442) Irrigation System, Sprinkler - \$30,000**

**All other practices - \$50,000**

#### **Financial Assistance Rate Factor:**

The list of eligible practices and payment rates will be consistent with the Northwest Area Payment Schedule. The LWG accepted the 75 percent financial assistance rate factor for all structural practices in the payment schedule, as well as the 90 percent level for LRP, BFR and SD applicants.

#### **Ranking Criteria:**

The Estancia office will adopt the Northwest Area ranking questions in addition to the proposed field office questions. Points are assigned based on the resource concerns that the LWG wishes to address according to priority. The highest ranked applications will be awarded contracts until funds are exhausted. Below are the proposed Estancia Field Office questions.

#### **Grazing Lands:**

1. Does the applicant use a progressive conservation plan that was developed within the last 5 years? - **50 pts**
2. If application is funded, will this be the applicant’s first EQIP contract for this land use? - **50 pts**
3. Does the conservation treatment include the installation of practices that enhance wildlife habitat as a part of the overall agricultural operation? - **20 pts**
4. Does the conservation treatment include practices that improve water development and increase rangeland health? - **20 pts- Changed point value from 30**
5. Does the conservation treatment include practices that reduce soil erosion?- **30 pts- Changed pt. value from 40**
6. Does the conservation treatment include practices that improve grazing management and increase rangeland health? - **30 pts- Changed point value from 10**

**200 Points Max**

#### **Cropland:**

1. Will applied practices address a Water Quantity resource concern? - **50 pts -Added this question**
2. If application is funded, will this be the applicant’s first EQIP contract for this resource issue? - **25 pts – Changed point value of this question from 50**
3. Is the field slope less than 6 percent but greater than or equal to 3 percent? – **25 pts**
4. Is the field slope less than 3 percent? - **50 pts- Changed point value from 75**
5. Will a winter cover crop be planned for fall application following a low-residue crop?- **25 pts**
6. Does the conservation treatment include the installation of practices that enhance upland wildlife habitat as a part of the overall operation of the farm? - **25 pts**
7. Will applied practices address a Water Quality resource concern? – **25 pts –Added these two questions**

8. Will no-till residue management be implemented on applied land? – 20 pts

**220 Points Max**

**Forest/Non-Industrial Private Forest:**

1. Has there been a forest management plan developed by a qualified forester? - 50 pts
2. Does the applicant use a progressive conservation plan that was developed within the last 5 years? - 50 pts
3. Is this application a joint/cooperative agreement? - 50 pts
4. Is the plan part of a forest management plan that involves two adjacent properties?-50 pts
5. Is the planned conservation treatment part of a post-burn recovery effort? - 40 pts
6. Does the planned conservation treatment impact potential burn by the reduction of hazardous fuels for the prevention of wildfires? - 20 pts
7. Does the conservation treatment include practices in addition to forest stand improvement and slash treatment that enhance wildlife habitat? - 20 pts
8. Does the conservation treatment include practices in addition to forest stand improvement and slash treatment that address excessive soil erosion? - 20 pts

**200 Points Max**

**Tiebreaker:** The LWG agreed to use the computer generated “Tracking Code” that is a random number generated and assigned in Protracts as a tie breaker between applications with the same ranking scores. The highest numbered Tracking Code shall receive funding if there is a tie among two or more eligible applications.

**Watershed Initiative:** The Local Work Group would like to propose a watershed initiative for FY 2014 for the Western Estancia Watershed, HUC 13050001 that lies within the East Torrance and Edgewood SWCD’s. See attachment for details. – Last year this included the Eastern most section of the Rio Grande-Albuquerque Watershed 13020203. Took out because it does not fall within the districts.

**Small Acre Initiative:** The LWG did not request a small acre initiative for FY 2014.