

# **2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program Proposal**

## **For the USDA-NRCS Grants-Crownpoint Field Office**

### **Introduction:**

The Grants Field Office (FO) is located in the city of Grants in Cibola County in the northwest quadrant of New Mexico. The field office services the Lava Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) which includes portions of Cibola, Catron, Sandoval, and McKinley Counties. Also included in Cibola County are the Cebolleta Land Grant, Cubero Land Grant, Acoma Pueblo, and management units of Navajo Tribal Lands. Over 1.2 million acres of Private, State, and Tribal Lands are serviced out of the Grants FO. Approximately 661,000 acres are within the Lava SWCD and 559,582 acres are in McKinley County. Federal lands, including BLM, and Forest Service, also make up a good portion of the lands serviced by the Field Office. These lands are important because many producers utilize allotments in these land statuses. Most of the area supports agricultural uses, with a majority of the land being rangeland and used for livestock grazing. Irrigation and dryland cropland occur in small fields in valleys next to streams throughout the field office service area. Some land units are serviced by irrigation wells. Pasture and Hayland acreages make up the greatest portion. Forests play a minor role in the local economy but are becoming more significant, mainly from the production of lumber and firewood. The Grants Field Office also services Navajo Nation Lands out of the Crownpoint Field Office in McKinley County, making the field office staff participants of the McKinley Local Work Group.

### **Local Work Group:**

The Local Work Group is very diverse and made up of representatives from the Lava SWCD, NRCS, Pueblo of Acoma, Navajo Eastern Agency, US Forest Service, FSA, County Committees, Southern Pueblos Agency, NM State Forestry, BLM, NMDA, County Extension Service, EID, NM State Land Office, local City and County Governments, Rio San Jose Flood Control District, 9 irrigation groups, NM State Engineers Office, USFWS, 2 Land Grants, NM Dept. of Game and Fish, and USDA Predator Control Services. Areas that are represented include the Cebolleta Land Grant, Cubero Land Grant, Pueblo of Acoma, portions of the Navajo Nation, as well as those Federal, State, and Private lands within the Grants Field Office service area. Outreach meetings with stakeholders are held throughout the year with the Tribes, Land Grants, and local producers. One meeting was held by the Local Work Group to review resource concerns, establish priorities, application periods and deadlines, review cost lists, ranking sheets, cost-share rates, fund distribution, eligible practices, coordination across field office boundaries, watershed and small acreage initiatives, and national, state, and local issues and policies. 11 representatives from the groups or agencies attended and provided input at the Local Work Group Meeting. 2 other provided input by phone call or in writing because they could not attend the meeting. The Lava SWCD chaired the meeting. Review of the Lava SWCD's Long Range Plan, Mission Statement and resource concerns from past Local Work Group meetings and stakeholders meetings took place at the 2014 program meeting. Resource concerns were reviewed and discussed. The top priority addressed is still Grazing Lands (Rangeland) with Irrigated Croplands (inclusive

of irrigated cropland, pasture, hayland, and orchards), being second and Forest-Woodland, being third. Other concerns discussed included wildlife (to be addressed by the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, WHIP or EQIP), natural resources education, beginning farmers and ranchers, limited resource farmers and ranchers, and erosion control, all of which are concerns for the all the land uses.

**Priority Resource Concerns:**

Consensus was reached by the Local Work Group to keep Grazing Lands (Rangeland) as the number one priority, with erosion, water quality and quantity, plant productivity, forage quality, and inadequate stock water as the main concerns. Irrigated Croplands as the second with water quantity and quality, plant condition, mainly productivity, and sheet and rill erosion, as the main concerns. Forest-Woodland is the third priority, with water quantity and quality, plant health and vigor, wildfire hazard, and wildlife population's imbalance, as the main concerns. It was agreed by the members that these three categories will capture most of the resource concerns within the SWCD and field office service area and will apply to both Tribal and Non-Tribal lands.

**Funding Considerations:**

70% of the funding will be allocated to the Grazing Lands resource concern, 15% will be allocated to the Irrigated Cropland resource concern, and the remaining 15% will be allocated to the Forest resource concern for both Tribal and Non-Tribal funds. The local work group would like to continue the 2013 cost cap of \$30,000 for all practices except 614-watering facilities which will be \$40,000. The consensus was to continue to go with these caps since funding is becoming more limited every year.

**Cost Share Rate Factor:**

The LWG members in attendance recommended to continue with the 75% rate for Non-Historically Underserved applicants and the 90% rate for Historically Underserved applicants, for the 2014 program. Cost-share will be addressed as payment rates to participants.

**Ranking Criteria:**

It was recommended by the Local Work Group to use the ranking questions presented from the 2013 programs and resource concerns as approved by the Area and State Offices. Two screening tools developed for the NW Area and used in 2013 were presented and agreed upon by the Local Work Group. A tiebreaker from 2013 was also discussed. Ties will be broken by using a Tracking Code assigned to the producer by the Protracts computer program at the time the applicant is entered into the system. Consensus by the group was to go with the higher number as the tiebreaker. There are no recommended changes for the Screening Tools, Tie Breaker, and Ranking Questions for Grazing Lands, Irrigated Lands, and Forest Lands for 2014 programs.

**Watershed Initiative:**

The Lava SWCD is still working with adjoining counties, agencies, Tribes, and SWCD's on developing a watershed plan for the Rio San Jose Watershed and utilize 319 grants as

funding sources. The Local Work Group decided not to pursue this initiative for the 2014 program.

**Small Acreage Initiative:**

During past EQIP program years, including 2013, both small and large acreage applicants with one or multiple resource concerns, were funded. Ranking and funding has not been an issue during these past programs. With this in mind, the Local Work Group opted not to go with the Small Acreage Initiative for the 2014 program.