

2014 Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Proposal

For the Las Vegas Field Office

Introduction: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office Staff at Las Vegas, New Mexico worked in conjunction with the local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Tierra y Montes to conduct the Local Work Group (LWG) Meeting. The LWG is made up of various local, state, and federal entities. In addition to meeting the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) requirements, the purpose of the LWG was to identify natural resources concern issues throughout Las Vegas County and help provide guidance and recommendations to NRCS. The Las Vegas Field Office is located in Northeastern New Mexico, approximately 64 miles northeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The field office services the Tierra y Montes (SWCD), which is the majority of San Miguel County. San Miguel County consists of approximately 11,145 acres of irrigated land, 7,382 acres are privately owned. There are approximately 4,180 acres of non-irrigated land, 1,555,462 acres of rangelands and 326,062 acres of forest land.

Local Work Group: The LWG meeting for the Tierra Y Montes Soil and Water Conservation Districts were held in preparation for FY 2014 program. The Tierra Y Montes SWCD meeting was held September 17, 2013, 10:30am at the Tierra Y Montes SWCD Conference room in Las Vegas. Participation was present from NRCS Area Staff, Tierra Y Montes SWCD board members/District Manager, New Mexico Acequia Association and NRCS Field Office Staff.

Priority Resource Concerns: NRCS field office staff and area office staff reviewed last year's resource concerns and agreed that they would remain the same for the upcoming year. The following resource concerns have been identified and discussed:

1. Water Quantity – The amount of water being loss due to tree canopies especially in the forest/brush types is reducing water flow in water courses. Snow pack is not reaching the ground and thus reducing run off in spring and it also affecting infiltration into the unground aquifer.
2. Water Quality – The lack of herbaceous vegetation in upland sites is affecting water quality by increasing sediment loads into streams.
3. Soil Erosion – Increased woody vegetation and lack of herbaceous vegetation is resulting in accelerated soil erosion in the form of sheet and rill erosion. Overall soil loss especially top soil loss is a big concern. Gully erosion is also a big concern.
4. Plant Condition - As it relates to both herbaceous vegetation and forest health. Increased woody species vegetation (invasive species i.e. junipers, ponderosa pines etc.) is affecting herbaceous vegetation vigor, health and overall production levels. Increased trees also increase wildfire hazard potential which is a big concern throughout the county.
5. Water Quantity – The lack of control of irrigation water from acequias/ditches from main ditch or field ditches onto irrigated cropland and or Pasture/Hayland is affecting overall herbaceous production.

6. Wind Erosion- The lack of herbaceous vegetation is affecting top soil being lost during wind events.

Funding Considerations: I have as District Conservationist decided to again leave LWG previous years funding considerations as is. I have again chosen to divide the fund allocation by resource concerns in each of the major land resource categories. Monies left over in each of the resource categories will be split equally into the remaining resource categories until funds are exhausted. Funds for the land uses will initially be allocated as follows:

Tierra Y Montes District

- Grazing Land - 34%
- Pasture & Hayland (irrigated) - 28%
- Forested Land – 33%
- Cropland (irrigated)-5%

A per practice cap of \$75,000 has been established for all other approved NRCS practices with the exceptions listed below. A per practice cap of \$30,000 has been established for brush control (314). A per practice cap on Forest Stand Improvement will be established at \$25,000 per contract for both districts. Please refer to the East Area Payment Schedule for a list of eligible practices.

The LWG district has set the cost share rate at 75% for all practices last year and upon review for FY 2014 they will remain at 75%.

The LWG did not recommend incentive payments for any practices for FY 2014.

Cost Share Rate Factor: The cost share rate for the district will be set at 75% as it was last year.

Ranking Criteria: The national ranking tool will be used for evaluating applications. Local issues will be incorporated into the ranking tool.

Tie breakers will be addressed as follows:

- Grazing Lands – Tie breaker will be awarded to the application that has a higher point total in section 3 (Local Issues).
- Irrigated Lands Croplands – Tie breaker will be awarded to the application with the higher efficiency percentage total based off Farm Irrigation Rating System (FIRS) worksheet.
- Forested Lands – Tie breaker will be awarded to the application with the higher number of trees per/acre from forest inventory worksheet.
- Hay and Pasture Lands – Tie breaker will be awarded to the application that has a higher point total in section 3 (Local Issues).

Watershed Initiative: No watershed initiative is being proposed in FY 2014.

Small Acreage Initiative: As District Conservationist and in discussion with the LWG it was determined that the Small Acreage Initiative (Acequias) be added to the 2014 proposal. The following criteria will be used to evaluate initiative:

- Eligible lands will be Irrigated Cropland and or Pasture/Hayland and will be 20 acres or less
- \$20,000 will be taken from the initial county allocation for the acequia initiative with the state office matching the \$20,000 for a total of \$40,000
- Available funds will be limited to \$10,000 per contract and any monies left in fund code can be shifted into another fund code if needed
- Tie breaker will be awarded to the application that has a higher point total in section 3 (Local Issues).