

The **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program** was used to fund 14 projects. New Mexico currently has 134 contracts in place for improving wildlife habitat on private lands. About \$1.1 million are committed to these projects.

As part of EQIP, New Mexico NRCS received \$1.1 million under the **Ground and Surface Water Conservation** project to reduce the use of the declining Ogallala Aquifer water levels. The funding was made available to farmers who chose to convert irrigated land to permanent grasses, irrigated cropland to dry cropland, and reduced actual pumping on wells be either making hardware changes or converted from high water use to lower water use crops.

This past year two new buzzwords, **TSPs and contribution agreements**, marked a new, significant effort to put conservation on the ground under the 2002 Farm Bill. TSPs are technical service providers - or private individuals who are certified by NRCS to provide technical services under the Farm Bill. Clearly, the increase in the size of financial assistance available to producers has greatly increased the workload for NRCS staff. TSPs are a way to gear up to handle this additional workload and deliver services to producers. Contribution agreements in contrast utilizes \$412,600 in NRCS funding to match \$1.2 million in state monies through the State Soil and Water Commission to implement the Farm Bill. The contribution agreement puts personnel in the field offices to handle applications for producers enabling NRCS to devote more time to field work.

The **soil survey** section of NRCS New Mexico was equally busy with work that furthers conservation. This summer the section completed the soil survey report that includes text and maps for the McGregor Range on Fort Bliss and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. This data is vital in planning restoration and recovery of land, and for grazing and forest management. The soil survey for McKinley County is in the process of being digitized, and the digital soil maps for Shiprock have been completed.

Within the past few years, 75 percent of the soil database in New Mexico has been updated. A group of agencies, including NRCS, are working to establish a **geospatial soil data warehouse** that will be accessible to the public to use in planning for erosion rehabilitation, range production, land carrying capacities, and other conservation efforts.

This was a benchmark year for the completion of New Mexico's portion of a **National Resource Inventory**. The endeavor quantifies range conditions in New Mexico and provides this information to producers. Because this was the first year of the program, in future years it will be possible to better understand trends in conditions on rangeland in the state because of the historical perspective.

Not to be left behind, the engineering section of NRCS New Mexico was involved with the **Small Watershed Program** and supporting the design work needed to install flood control structures that will protect lives and property. The majority of the third phase of a flood retention basin at Truth or Consequences has been completed. NRCS New Mexico completed 35 assessments for rehabilitation of dams on request from sponsors such as the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Finally, the NRCS Plant Materials Center filled a vital role in providing tree, shrub, and other material for rehabilitation of riparian areas bared by wildfires or the eradication of salt cedar and Russian olive. In Albuquerque, the Center is providing expertise and plant materials for the restoration of bosque sites. This work was completed in addition to its normal advancement of the science of propagation native plants for conservation purposes.

Through the many events and accomplishments of the year, NRCS New Mexico has advanced the cause of conservation on private land in the state. NRCS continues to be proud to be a partner with these private landowners for bringing good stewardship to the land, and ensuring healthy communities.

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The Past Year's Accomplishments by NRCS New Mexico

2003



My personal thanks goes out to all New Mexicans for the many wise decisions that were made this past year in face of the drought that continues to stress our environment and challenge private landowners.

It is the private landowner that NRCS is designed to serve, and our

strong working relationships with such individuals is key to any successes for which we may take credit.



Rosendo Treviño
State Conservationist

I want to thank our many NRCS employees and the New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Districts for their dedication this past year. NRCS employees rose to the challenge of the greatly increased workload that the expanded 2002 Farm Bill placed on them. It is easy

for me to do my job when I can work with such committed and well-grounded individuals as NRCS New Mexico and the New Mexico Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) made ground-breaking strides this past year, and we at NRCS are looking forward to working with them through **contribution agreements** that will allow **NMACD** employees assist districts in implementing the 2002 Farm Bill.

Through its many programs and basic services, NRCS New Mexico brought conservation to the ground on more than 1.9 million acres of New Mexico's private lands in FY2003. This is a huge achievement that reaches to the far corners of this great state, and one for which we all can be proud.

As always, answers to your questions about our services and programs are as close to you as your nearest USDA Service Center. Our staff stands ready to assist you in all ways possible with your conservation issues.

Healthy rangeland helps New Mexico's economy, and an FY2003 rangeland improvement project in the Fort Sumner area promises more water and better forage for livestock and wildlife. Major brush treatment was completed in July on 11,657 acres of rangeland in De Baca County. The \$770,000 project was co-sponsored by the De Baca Soil and Water Conservation District and United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The De Baca Soil and Water Conservation District, chaired by Mark McCollum, secured up to \$385,000 in funding from the State Water Trust Board to match \$250,250 from NRCS through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and \$134,750 from area ranchers to treat land that was infested with mesquite.

By removing the mesquite, watersheds adjacent to the Pecos River will benefit from more available water. After treatment, the competition for water by this invasive woody plant decreased, enabling the soil moisture to increase and produce more desirable forage. More available soil moisture meant more vegetation production.

Aerial application of herbicides to 11,657 acres of mesquite began on the project area July 5 and was completed July 15. Another 1,375 acres were mechanically removed by grubbing the mesquite. To be successful, the mesquite needed to be in the right growth stage, soil temperatures needed to be right, and they needed to make sure there was not any insect damage before treatment. Signs of success were already showing within days of the application.

At a time when New Mexico is crying for water, the treatment of areas covered with invasive brush is essential. Land cleared of mesquite and juniper means less competition for limited rainfall that replenishes springs and waterways. The resulting healthier grasslands will in turn help communities to prosper.



NRCS prepared for treatment of mesquite by checking soil temperatures and completing extensive field work

NRCS Advances Private Lands Conservation

Meager snowpacks in the winter of FY2003 warned of water shortages faced by farmers, ranchers, municipalities, and others during summer months. The *Albuquerque Journal* read "Snowmelt Forecast Is Dismal" in its January 8, 2003 issue, and subsequent predictions did not offer better news.

NRCS New Mexico's **snow survey** crew played a vital role in gathering data and assisting in the development of runoff forecasts. Their alerts help producers make cropping and other agricultural decisions. Notably, chile farmers in New Mexico planted many fewer acres this year because of water shortage predictions.

Because of the drought, a horrific fire season was anticipated. However, the fire season was kind to New Mexico running below the 11-year average for total number of fires and number of acres burned. NRCS New Mexico did respond to four fires with its **Emergency Watershed Protection** program. Particularly noteworthy was its support of rapidly-installed emergency protection measures around a home in the Sacramento Mountains. Days after the area was burned, thunderstorms dumped rains that resulted in serious flooding. The rehabilitation held, saving the home and outbuildings.

NRCS New Mexico welcomed the spring with **range monitoring** workshops that were offered in several locations and continued on into the fall. The workshops were a joint effort with other organizations and designed to help ranchers make daily judgment calls on where and when to pasture, how to treat invasive weeds, and whether to buy or sell. There was a tremendous response to these well-attended gatherings by ranchers seeking to hone their range management skills in drought conditions.

A closely related NRCS project was the updating of **ecological site descriptions** done in cooperation with the Bureau of Land Management, Agricultural Research Service Jornada Experimental Range, and others. This new system of site descriptions helps to determine what kinds of practices are needed to improve range, forestland, and riparian areas.

Meanwhile the standards and guidelines NRCS uses to measure success in preserving soil, water, air, plants, and animals was put on the Internet. Casually known as the **Field Office Tech Guide**, the placement of eFOTG on the web is part of NRCS's effort to make the information it uses more accessible to the general public.

Summer saw NRCS's 2002 Farm Bill, soil survey, and engineering efforts kick into high gear.

NRCS New Mexico administered significantly more financial assistance available through **Environmental Quality Incentives Program** (EQIP) compared to FY2002. Over \$13 million was available for much more conservation on the ground. Competition was keen, however, as the agency received over 2,100 application and made 416 awards. In conjunction with more funding, NRCS New Mexico made new efforts to incorporate more local decision making in establishing local conservation priorities and ranking awards.

In other 2002 Farm Bill achievements, NRCS New Mexico granted \$1.3 million to two easement projects under the **Farm and Ranchland Protection Program** and distributed \$1.35 million under the **Grasslands Reserve Program**. The Grasslands Reserve Program received significant attention with 115 applications for funding, for a total of more than \$40 million in requests.

Technical Assistance

Financial Assistance

Snow Surveys

Range Monitoring Workshops

Emergency Watershed Protection

Ecological Site Descriptions

eFOTG

Technical Service Providers

Contribution Agreements

Soil Survey

Geospatial Soil Data Warehouse

National Resource Inventory

Small Watershed Program

Plant Materials

Our appreciation goes to our employees, partners, and the public who have advanced conservation goals in New Mexico during this past year. A special thank you goes to the state of New Mexico who has pursued groundbreaking conservation efforts to ensure all New Mexicans enjoy a quality environment in which to work and live.

