ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

OF ENVIRONEMTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM FOR

PUEBLO OF JEMEZ TRIBAL TRUST LANDS GPA

2002

INTRODUCTION

This environmental assessment (EA) is being prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and implementing regulations at 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508. The EA will assist NRCS in determining whether the proposed action will have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment and therefore requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:

There is a need in the Jemez Pueblo Geographic Priority Area (GPA) to improve irrigation water utilization and efficiency , reduce soil erosion on rangeland and cropland, and to increase range productivity and balance forage utilization. The purpose of meeting these needs is to improve the water quality in the watershed, improve the health of the range ecosystems by increasing biodiversity and reducing exotic plant populations.

Background:

The Pueblo of Jemez consists of three separate yet distinct geographical land parcels. Jemez Pueblo Tribal Trust Lands are situated at the southern flanks of the Jemez Mountains and the Western edge of the Nacimiento Mountains. Pueblo lands consist of farm land, pinyon and juniper uplands, mixed conifer forests, grass and herbaceous ranges, and perennial and intermittent waterways with riparian buffers. Prominent features include irrigated lands adjacent to the Jemez River and in close proximity to the village of Jemez Pueblo. The village of Jemez Pueblo is home to nearly 3,000 Jemez Pueblo members. The Tribal Lands consist of 89,000 total acres and the number of producers is 199. The land use consists of 2,100 acres irrigated cropland, 6,500 acres grazing land and 21,900 acres of mountain mixed conifer. Acres **requiring treatment** include 500 acres cultivated cropland, 160 acres pastureland, 65,000 acres rangeland and 1,000 acres riparian area.

Farming, hunting, fishing, grazing, fuel wood, timber and recreation are some of the important resources within the Pueblo's lands. The primary concerns include soil erosion, inefficient use of irrigation water, reduction in biodiversity, reduction in food and forage for livestock and wildlife, invasion of exotic plants, and poor livestock control.

The Jemez River is by far the most important economical and cultural water resource of the Pueblo. The river provides the Pueblos with the water resources for both the production of small family and communal farms and the recharge of the alluvium that provides the Pueblos with its source of drinking water. Degradation of natural conditions has led to reduction of biodiversity due to the invasion of exotic and noxious plants, increased runoff leading to soil erosion and decreased groundwater recharge, reduced soil fertility, unhealthy single species mono-cultures and brush invasion.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1. No Action

Alternative 2. Use NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) authorities to assist land owners in the Pueblo of Jemez Tribal Trust Land GPA to apply prescribed grazing practices such as, fences, livestock pipelines, grazing systems, livestock wells and pumping plants, spring development, ponds, troughs and tanks; brush management methods such as, chemical or mechanical treatment; streambank stabilization practices such as, grade stabilization structures and pole plantings; irrigation water management practices such as land leveling, irrigation pipeline, structures for water control and field borders and pest and nutrient management practice such as fertilization management.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT STUDIED IN DETAIL

No other alternatives were discussed at public meetings.

SCOPING OF ISSUES FOR UNIQUE AND PROTECTED RESOURCES IN THE AREA:

NRCS conducted a review of the area to identify unique and protected resources and other special issues of concern. Members of the public had an opportunity to provide comments and identify concerns during a meeting on October 15, 2001 of a special local workgroup responsible for recommending proposed EQIP actions. No controversy about the need for action or the actions themselves was raised during this meeting, and no resources or issues of concern were identified during the meetings or by NRCS or other Federal, State and Tribal agencies but those discussed in the EA.

Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern: A record search of the Sandoval County list of Threatened and Endangered Species, lists several species, but NRCS has determined that none of these will be affected by any alternative or action considered in this EA.

The Mexican spotted owl has potential habitat in the GPA, however, no treatment is being considered in these areas. The areas being considered for treatment are the lower upland sites that support low growing (<8') one-seeded juniper trees and other low growing shrub like woody plants. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has performed a complete pedestrian survey in accordance to survey protocol (et al Sogge, 2001) of the Southwestern willow flycatcher in the riparian bosques of the Jemez Tribal Trust Lands. Although potential habitat exists for southwestern willow flycatcher, the results of the survey indicate no presence of this species. A search of the website nmnhp.unm.edu/bisobresults.php of the New Mexico Game and Fish Department reveals there are no Threatened or species of concern in the Jemez Pueblo Tribal Trusts Lands.

Cultural Resources and Historic Properties: NRCS completed a search of cultural resource records and determined there are 824 recorded sites within the Jemez Pueblo Tribal Trust Lands. Before landowner is ready to implement any practice and before survey and design begins, a thorough research check of the literature of the specific construction area will be conducted. An onsite pedestrian inspection of the area will be completed as well to make every effort possible to avoid these areas.

Wetlands: The Pueblo manages approximately 10 surface acres of manmade freshwater lakes located in two distinct locations. These lakes are both deeper than 6 feet and are not considered wetlands. Several small flow (<2gpm) mountain springs exist throughout the GPA. Before survey and design work begins, a wetland determination will be completed followed by minimal effect determination if applicable.

IMPACTS AND EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative 1. No Action

Landowners, with the assistance of other agencies will continue to apply conservation measures at the current rate without NRCS assistance. On farm irrigation systems efficiencies will continue to be low with excessive amounts of water used to grow crops. The loss of soil integrity, an increase in soil erosion and reduction of soil nutrients will continue. Grazing lands and riparian areas will continue to degrade and support unhealthy ecosystems under present management operations. Exotic and invasive plant encroachment will continue thus encouraging further reduction in biodiversity and increasing monoculture species communities. Continuous grazing and uncontrolled livestock numbers will continue to reduce food and forage for livestock and wildlife.

Alternative 2.

There are 66,000 acres of grazing land and riparian areas that can benefit from the application of prescribed grazing, brush management and grade stabilization.

Prescribed grazing is the controlled harvest of vegetation with grazing of browsing animals. The purpose is to manage with the intent to improve or maintain the health and vigor of selected plant(s), provide or maintain food, cover and shelter for animals of concern, improve or maintain animal health and productivity, and to attain grazing and management efficiency to promote economic stability.

NRCS expects to treat this acreage by installing 15 miles of fence (4 wire, barbed). This practice consists of driving steel posts into the ground at selected intervals (20-30’) and hanging 4 strands of barbed wire to the posts. If a fence is constructed in brushy terrain, it is common to have a tractor blade a lane that transverses the fence line in order to physically construct the fence. This will be done only on soils and terrain that is not prone to erode.

Once the fence is installed, 5 miles livestock pipeline and necessary storage tanks and watering facilities will be installed to provide water for livestock and wildlife. This method will involve excavating a 30” deep trench to receive a 1-2” diameter poly-vinyl chloride (PVC) or polyethylene (PE) pipe that will act as a carrier of water from a stored point to a selected watering site. Excavation for the pipe will require not more than 10’ wide disturbed area along the pipe by vehicular and heavy equipment activity. The pipeline routing is determined by terrain and soil conditions and is normally routed via the easiest most convenient route. Disturbance is short-term. Water facilities will be installed at different intervals along the pipeline and at the end of the pipeline. These permanent troughs or storage tanks are constructed of steel with concrete bases or are of fiberglass or prefabricated metal. Troughs made of steel with concrete bases are constructed by excavating the base in the soil, welding or bolting the ends of the steel

sheets together in a circle, then embedding four inches of steel in concrete. Fiberglass and prefabricated metal tanks are molded in a factory, then brought to the site for installation. Where the tank is to be set, an area the circumference of the tank is excavated to a depth of 6-8 inches. The tank is then set in the excavated area and backfill is placed around the tank on all sides in order to anchor the tank. The only areas disturbed are immediately around the troughs when they are being constructed. All disturbances are very temporary.

There are 5 existing livestock wells that are unserviceable because they lack the proper pumps to extract water from the well. New pumping plants for extracting water out of wells will be installed at these locations utilizing the most modern technology in solar and electric generated pumps. If solar pumps are installed, solar panels will be installed on 4” diameter pipe stand elevating the panels 12 feet in the air. If electric pumps are used, portable generators will be used to supply the necessary power. Disturbance as a result of these treatments will be none to minimal as roads and wells already exist.

Three new wells will be drilled and equipped with the same pumps and watering facilities as mentioned above. New wells will be machine dug to approximately 500 feet deep with a 6” steel casing incased in the 8” original hole. During construction, an area of approximately 30’ in circumference is disturbed while the well drilling rig is set in place. Some other light disturbance may occur because of other traffic in the area from support vehicles.

Three natural springs will be developed. This method will involve excavating an area in the spring large enough to install a 2’ by 3’ collection box made of corrugated metal pipe (CMP) or concrete. A pipeline is attached to the collection box to act as the water carrier for a specified distance to a watering facility. Pipelines and drinking troughs will be installed in the same manner as mentioned before.

Earthen dams or ponds are constructed for a number of reasons. Two of the most common reasons would be for erosion control and or to provide livestock water. Typically they are constructed by earth moving equipment of large rubber tire tractors or track machines (bulldozers). Surface disturbance and complete removal of soil 6-12 feet deep by widths and lengths of not more than 200 by 200 feet will result if this practice is installed. They can vary in size from a few hundred yards in size (500 cubic yards) to over 5000 cubic yards. The area disturbed is hoped to be inundated with water after the first good rain and will benefit livestock and wildlife and well as serve the purpose of controlling erosion. All areas disturbed will have gone through the cultural and historic clearance process and T&E surveys.

Brush management is the removal, reduction or manipulation of non-herbaceous plants. This practice will be applied mechanically or chemically to restore the natural or desired plant community and reduce competition for space, moisture, and sunlight between desired and unwanted plants. Mechanical control will entail removing individual species by axing, chainsaw or dozing. Chemical removal entails the application of a herbicide to individual herbaceous species or through aerial application. Roughly 5,000 acres of sagebrush will be treated either using chemical or mechanical methods. When using chemical, the herbicide Spike 20P will be applied according to the product label. No disturbance will occur as a result of this application. When treating mechanically, sage will be scalped, which is a practice that is carried out only when the soil is frozen. A bulldozer or maintainer blade is used to scrape the individual plants and as the blade is pushed on top of the soil surface the plant breaks off with minimal soil disturbance. This procedure is done in 50-75’ swaths in both directions creating a windrow that

is laid on the contour. The method to be used for mechanical treatment of juniper is axing and chainsaw. This method will involve completely cutting individual plant and disposing the slash in small gullies or laying it on the ground to a maximum 12” height. The only ground disturbance will be very temporary as a result of support vehicle travel.

Bank stabilization is used to stabilize the grade and control erosion in natural or artificial channels, to prevent the formation or advance of gullies and to enhance environmental quality and reduce pollution hazards.

Grade stabilization structures are used to control the grade and head cutting in natural or artificial channels. One form of grade stabilization will be rock and brush dams. These structures are placed in small gullies and are a continuous stacking of rock over brush to a maximum 4’ high. Log dams are another form of grade stabilization that will be implemented. These structures are also placed in small gullies and are a continuous stacking of logs one on top of the other to a maximum 4’ high. Net wire diversions are grade stabilization structures installed to control sheet and rill erosion. These structures are placed across broad valley and swales to collect sediment, reduce the velocity of flow, and increase water permeability and infiltration. Net wire diversions consists of 2’ steel posts driven into the ground at 10’ maximum intervals and woven wire, maximum 15” in height strapped to the posts. These structures are often referred to as miniature fences and are designed and surveyed on a set grade. Since these structures will be placed in already disturbed or erosive areas, the construction of the practices will have no more impact than what is already occurring naturally. Willow and Pole planting are used to improve biodiversity in riparian zones as well as to provide a woody blanket to aid in soil and streambank protection. The Coyote Willow is native to the GPA and will be the species used. This method involves taking dormant cuttings from existing stands and transplanting them into predrilled holes in the area being improved or introduced to woody plants. The cuttings can range from 1-2” in diameter and the 2-3” diameter holes probed into the ground have to be deep enough to reach the water table. Poles will be dormant cuttings from native Cottonwood or Blackwillow species in the GPA. This method is similar to willow plantings however the diameter of the poles and holes is larger but does not exceed 12”. Very little to no disturbance occurs when this practice is installed.

There are 660 acres of cropland and pastureland in the GPA that will benefit from the application of Irrigation Water Management practices. Irrigation Water Management is determining and controlling the rate, amount, and timing of irrigation water in a planned and efficient manner. The practices planned will promote effective use of available irrigation water supply by managing and controlling the moisture environment of crops, controlling undesirable water loss and minimize soil erosion and loss of plant nutrients.

NRCS plans to treat this acreage by land leveling or smoothing 250 acres. Land leveling or smoothing is reshaping the surface of land to be irrigated to a planned grade. This method is accomplished by scraping high spots in the field and placing the material from the high spots into the low spots on the same field to adjust the grade.

Once the land is leveled, either a concrete-lined ditch or irrigation pipeline would be installed depending on the slope of the land after it is leveled. The purpose of installing a pipeline or concrete-lined ditch is to reduce water loss by seepage. Irrigation pipeline minimizes water loss from both seepage and evaporation. A concrete ditch eliminates water loss from seepage. Under this alternative, NRCS would install irrigation pipeline or install a concrete-lined ditch.

If pipeline is installed, a minimum 30” deep trench will be excavated on a grade to receive the pipeline and a water control structure will be built to control the stage, discharge, distribution, delivery or direction of flow of water. Water control structures will be built on site and will be of concrete or CMP. If a concrete-lined ditch is installed, a berm, which is a raised pad made from earth, will be built according to NRCS specifications. The berm will be built to a height necessary for water to flow from the ditch to the field. The berm will then be shaped and prepared for the concrete to be poured. The material used to build the berm will be obtained during land leveling activities on the site. Plans are to install 20,000 feet of pipeline and 5280 feet concrete-lined ditch.

Once the pipeline or concrete ditch is installed, field borders will be installed. Field border are small earth berms placed in the field at 50-100 feet intervals, depending on the slope and amount of irrigation water flowing into the field. These borders will allow the water to flow uniformly down a given field and will aid the landowner in timing of the application of water.

Nutrient management is managing the amount, form, placement and timing of application of plant nutrients. Pest Management is managing agricultural pest infestation (including weeds, and diseases) to reduce adverse effects on plant growth, crop production, and environmental resources. Nutrient and pest management would involve teaching farmers to follow NRCS nutrient and pest management standards so fertilizers and pesticides would be applied in accordance with crop needs and field conditions. Application would be adjusted as soil quality and field conditions change.

DISCUSSION OF IMPACTS AND EFFECTS OF ALTERNATIVE NO 2 ON CROPLAND

If alternative 2 were implemented, there would be impacts to soil quality and erosion, water quantity, air quality, crop production, fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, quality of life and economics. As indicated above, steps would be taken on a site-specific basis to ensure no cultural resources or historic or traditional properties are adversely affected.
If pipeline or concrete ditches are installed, the local working group estimates that there will be a cumulative loss of 2 acres of wetland by all sources. Most of these are temporary wetlands that are not wet year-round. These wetlands are very small, grow only annual vegetation, and are very low value to wildlife.

Land leveling or smoothing on average moves 300 cubic yards per acre. Based on its experience in the area, and the amount of EQIP funding available, NRCS estimates the implementation of this alternative will result in about 250 acres of land leveling, or a total of 75,000 cubic yards of soil and fill being moved under EQIP.

Land leveling or smoothing will provide uniform grades of slope on the field so that irrigation water will flow properly to allow infiltration into the soil at an optimum rate. This movement of soil will rearrange the textures and cause bacterial explosions temporarily and later depletions in bacteria and organic matter. Designed grades will allow enough excess soil to be used for ditch berms if concrete ditches are planned. Construction dust and noise from heavy equipment will cause temporary air degradation.

In those areas, land leveling and construction activities would impact soil and air quality on a short-term basis. Air quality would only be affected by the dust generated during the construction period and would clear when construction ended.

Concrete lined ditches will save water, which may be lost through seepage. A pad made from earth (berm) is laid out according to designed grade and location. The berm is built up to a height adequate to provide flow head from the ditch to the field. The berm is prepared for the concrete to be poured. The impacts from this activity are primarily from construction dust and noise from heavy equipment. If existing ditches to be replaced by concrete lining are older than fifty years, they will be treated as historic sites and consultations with SHPO will be necessary.

Irrigation pipelines stop seepage of water, reduce evaporation and allow for ease of management. A trench will be excavated on a grade to receive the pipeline. Soil disturbance in the trench area and construction dust and noise are temporary. Pipelines would also reduce the need to divert water from the river for irrigation.

Nutrient and pest management techniques would improve water quality. Application of fertilizers, based on crop needs and soil condition according to NRCS standards and specifications would reduce the amount of nitrates in the groundwater by an estimated 10%. Management of the application of pesticides, according to the label, would reduce soil contamination and exposure of birds and fish. Pesticides would always be applied according to their label, thus keeping effects of those pesticides within levels determined by the Environmental Protection Agency to be acceptable.

Irrigation water management (IWM) techniques used together with land leveling and irrigation pipelines or concrete-lined ditches would primarily impact water quantity and water quality. Installation of irrigation pipes and concrete ditches would eliminate water seepage. Artificial wetlands caused by leaking ditches will be reduced or eliminated by pipelines and concrete ditches. The land would be evenly sloped, so a uniform amount of water would flow evenly across the entire field. Because the field would not be over irrigated, pesticides and nutrients in or on the soil would stay on the farm and less would travel through the soil in to groundwater. This would result in improvements to both ground water and surface water quality. Nitrates would be reduced from 10.0 PPM in groundwater to 9.0 PPM in the treated area. The computer model known as Nitrate Leaching and Economic Analysis Package (NLEAP) verifies this reduction. Many variables are analyzed to predict the effect on nitrate leaching into the groundwater. Crop production should be optimum with nutrient management and IWM. Fertilizer is saved and less leaching into the groundwater occurs.

When over irrigation is eliminated, erosion and deposition will be reduced by this alternative. Local experience reveals efficiency of water application can be increased from 25% to 65% over 250 acres. Soil tilth, infiltration and compaction will be improved through the combination of practices in this alternative. Wind erosion, sheet and rill, concentrated flows, gully erosion, streambank erosion, and mass movement of soil will not be a problem on irrigated lands.

In addition, since less water would be needed for irrigation, less water could be diverted from the river, and more water would potentially be available for other uses. NRCS does not have the authority to allocate water. Water saved through installed and properly managed practices, while available for other uses, may not necessarily be used.

Table 1. Cumulative Effects

	Treatment with NRCS EQIP Assistance Alone	Treatment with NRCS EQIP and other Agency Assistance (Cumulative)
Fences	2 miles	15 miles
Pipelines	1 mile	5 miles
Troughs and Tanks	3 each	10 each
Spring Development	0	3 each
Ponds	2 each	5 each
Wells and Pumping Plants	3 each	8 each
Prescribed Grazing	0 acres	65,000 acres
Brush Control	100 acres	5000 acres
Grade Stabilization Structures	30 each	50 each
Willow and Pole Planting	10 acres	50 acres
Land Leveling	100 acres	250 acres
Irrigation Pipeline	1000 feet	20,000 feet
Concrete Ditch Lining	0	5380 feet

Land uses will not change as a result of implementing this alternative. Cash flow may increase for individuals, but investment requirements will increase with improvements. This system should reduce labor requirements. Management knowledge and ability to manage these systems will need to increase. Risk of investment loss is moderate. Profitability may remain static. Overall, client and community well being will be improved because more water has become available and grazing and riparian areas will become more productive.

TABLE 2. Comparison of Alternatives – Effect on Needs (See Need for Proposed Action on page one. Irrigation water effeciency, soil erosion on rangeland and cropland, range productivity and health, balance forage utilization, water quality, range biodiversity, exotic plants. How will each alternative affect these needs and purposes? Quanitify as much as possible with facts.

	Alternative 1	**Alternative 2**
Water	Continue at Present Level Quality & Quantity	Increase irrigation system efficiency by 30%
Wildlife	Remain at Present Level	Potential to Benefit through Better Habitat
Threatened & Endangered	Remain at Present Level	Potential to Benefit through Better Habitat
Safety Issues	Ungulates Roaming Unrestricted and Trampling Riparian Areas	Traffic Safety & Decrease of Fecal Coliform by fencing
Socieo Economics	Production at Present Level for Crops and Livestock	Meet objective of increased production by 25%
Soils	Continued Erosion of Soil at 12 to 46 tons/acre/year	Decrease soil erosion to tolerable levels
Ecosystems	Remain at Present Levels	Meet Riparian Habitat improvement goal
Plant Diversity	Continue encroachment of Exotic plants and Noxious weeds	Increase Plant diversity and Reduce Exotics plants and Noxious weeds

No prime farmland is involved in this GPA. Unique farmland will be maintained and improved to sustain continued use.

PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED:

Cuba Soil and Water Conservation District Board and attendees at June 1, 2001 meeting.

Local work group and attendees of April 18, 2001, May 15, 2001, May 22, 2001 and May 29, 2001 meeting. Copies of minutes are available at the Jemez Pueblo Department of Natural Resource Protection office.

Jemez Pueblo Tribal Council at June 4, 2001 meeting

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REFERENCES:

NRCS Field Office Technical Guide Section III, Quality Criteria

NRCS Field Office Technical Guide Section IV, Standards and Specifications

A Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Natural History Summary and Survey Protocol (Sogge et al. 1997, revision 2000).

Shafer, M. J., et.al. 1991 Nitrate Leaching and Economic Analysis Package. Agriculture Research Service, Ft Collins, CO.

Finding of No Significant Impact
For the Implementation of EQIP
in the Pueblo of Jemez Tribal Trust Lands GPA

Introduction

The Pueblo of Jemez Tribal Trust Lands GPA is a federally assisted action under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), with assistance from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). An environmental assessment was undertaken in connection with the development of this proposed action. This assessment was conducted in consultation with Local, State and Federal agencies. Data developed during the assessment are available, upon request, from:

U. S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
PO Box 250
Cuba, New Mexico 87013

The Environmental Assessment (EA) is attached for reference.

Determination of Significance

Table 1. Determination of Significance of Proposed Action.
If all these items are significant, then you have to do an EIS. Explain why these items are not significant. See handout from training session – EA Significance Determination.

CONTEXT (What is the impact from alt 2?)	INTENSITY (How much impact?)	REASONS FOR NON-SIGNIFICANCE
Prescribed grazing reduces Soil erosion on rangeland.	Erosion reduced 25% on treated areas.	Example: Actual soil saved will occur on only 2%? of project area.
Grazing Land management will increase productivity on rangeland.	Improvements will occur over 10 to 20 years.	Only 2% of project area will show improvement.
Wildlife habitat	Continue habitat degradation	Improve wildlife habitat
Human Safety Fecal coliform in drinking water???	Fecal coliform permanent reduction	Reduction of fecal coliform does not meet drinking water standard.
Socio-economics Alt 2 will improve s-e for low income farmers.	22 farmers will benefit.	Income will increase only 2% .

Other considerations related to context and intensity are discussed as follows: Farm and ranches are similar in the valley and are not unique compared to other irrigated farms in the state. No issues or concerns have been expressed at any public meetings, so there is no controversy.. Results of actions are known that from past experience in the area, thus uncertainty and risk is low. Precedent for future action will be very limited because nearly all farmers interested in this

proposal are going to participate in the first round. The preferred alternative will be done without overlap with other agencies, individuals or entities so that cumulative impacts are very low. There will be no impact to National Register of Historic Places or cultural resources..??? Endangered species will not be affected by this program. No national, state, local or tribal laws will be violated by this action.

Finding of No Significance Impact:

This finding is based on the evidence presented in the environmental assessment of impacts and alternatives for this geographic priority area. Based on the assessment and the reasons given in table 1, I find that the alternatives analyzed in the EA will have no significant impact on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

ROSENDO TREVINO State Conservationist	February 8, 2002 Date