New Mexico
Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
FY 2010 Program Guidance

Local Work Groups

Every Field Office will have a Local Work Group established and hold, at a minimum, one official Local Work Group meeting in preparing for the EQIP & WHIP programs. The Local Work Group will be convened by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and will establish its own working procedures, including:

- Organization
- Decision-making procedure
- Meeting dates, including timely notification of members.
- Recording and distributing Local Work Group considerations, actions and decisions
- Others as deemed necessary

Some Districts may wish to join with other neighboring Districts and have one common local work group.

Membership on the Local Work Group, as a result of a change in the 2008 Farm Bill language, is now open to all individuals; federal, state, local agencies, and tribal governments; special units of government and non-government organizations (NGOs). **District Conservationists are to ensure that the following agencies are provided an invitation to the Local Work Group meetings:**

Federal Agencies (as appropriate)
- US Forest Service - Local Districts
- Bureau of Land Management - Area Managers
- Farm Service Agency - County Executive Directors
- Farm Service Agency County Committees - Chairman
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- US Fish and Wildlife Service

State Agencies
- Department of Agriculture - Field Representative
- New Mexico Department of Environment - Division Representative
- New Mexico Game and Fish - Regional Representative
- New Mexico State Engineer - Local representative
- State Land Office - Local Representative
- Irrigation Districts

Local Agencies
- County Extension Service - Extension Agent
- County Government - Commissioner or County Manager
- SWCD Managers

Tribal Governments
- Tribes with land in the Field Office area - Governor/President or other designated representative.

Designated Conservationists are also responsible for ensuring that there is adequate public notice of the LWG meeting(s).

Fund Distribution

Each Field Office that serves one or more Districts will be assigned a pool of funds based on the percent of range land, irrigated land, dry cropland and woodland and animal feeding operations in the District(s). AFP funds will be allocated to the Area based on field office data. Only one pool of funds will be made per Field Office and will be made to the Designated Conservationist with the lead responsibility for assisting the

District(s). The District Conservationist with lead responsibility will coordinate with any other field office that serves the same District(s).
A spreadsheet listing the private, state and tribal acres by agricultural land use, SWCDs and County, was provided to each Designated Conservationist in FY 2003, and has been reviewed annually. The same acreages will be used for FY 2010.

At this time it appears there will be statewide funding pool for Private-Federal Cooperative Grazing Lands, involving USFS administered lands. However, as noted above, this could change. There will also be a state reserve for the Small Acreage and Watershed Initiatives.

Payment Schedules
Payment schedules will be maintained on a statewide basis. Practice average costs and cost share rate factors will be uniform on a NRCS statewide basis. The lead Designated Conservationist for the county must ensure that input is obtained from all District Conservationists, who have service areas in the county. Designated Conservationists are to obtain input from Local Work Groups. Payment schedules will be maintained in eFOTG I, and can be accessed through the state website. Practice cost data shall be provided to Seth Fiedler on a quarterly basis.

Eligible Practices, Cost Share Rates, Incentive Payments and Practice Caps

Practices listed on the NM website under eFOTG IV are eligible. The Local Work Group should review these practices and make recommendations on which practices should be cost shared in the Field Office area. See guidance in the EQIP Manual. Practice 533 (Pumping Plants) can be used in association with irrigated crop, but only where the applicant is willing to convert from surface to sprinkler or drip systems.

In NM the cost share rate factor for most of the practices will be set at **75%**. Local Work Groups should review and recommend the cost share rate factor for all practices to be included in the local program. (At this time C/S rates are expected to be **75% for EQIP** and WHIP) Please remember that while practice cost-share rates are used as one factor to develop the payment rates, we should try to avoid using them in discussions with our clients. Our focus is the payment schedule rates.

Local Work Groups have the flexibility to recommend payments for management practices. Payments can only be made to encourage practices that are not commonly accepted in the area. In order to maintain some limits on the amount of financial assistance obligated to certain practices LWGs/DCs may recommend cost caps.

Historically Underserved Producers
A cost share rate factor of **90%** will be used for all successful applicants who self-certify they meet the BFR, LRFR or SD criteria.

Coordination across Field Office and State Lines
It is important that the EQIP programs developed at the local level are coordinated across Field Office and State Lines. While the programs do not have to be identical, there should be much similarity when addressing the same resource concerns. To ensure this coordination, District Conservationists must contact by phone or other method, the District Conservationist in adjoining Field Offices in New Mexico and in adjoining states. The purpose is to discuss the implementation of EQIP, including: cost-share rate factors, eligible practices, ranking criteria, etc.

Evaluation Periods for EQIP and WHIP Applications
A statewide end of evaluation period has been set for January 29, *2009*. Because of the need for consistency and coordinating public service announcements across the state we must use a single evaluation period date. Multiple dates would be confusing to our clients. Additional evaluation periods, if necessary, must be approved by the STC.

Ranking Criteria
Local issue questions need to be developed for each approved land use in your F.O. If you are comfortable with the local issues developed for FY 2009 and do not want to make any changes for FY 2010 please indicate that in your proposal. Adjustments may be needed to accommodate changes forthcoming from NHQ. If revisions are desired they need to be submitted with your proposal. Area Conservationists may want to consider an area-wide set of local issues for any of the land use categories. AFO ranking criteria will be established by Areas incorporating local concerns.

Ranking criteria questions/issues must be submitted as word (.doc) documents

Proposed EQIP Program
Each District Conservationist must submit to the State Conservationist an EQIP proposal on behalf of the Local Work Group for the area to be served. This proposal will be reviewed, and must be approved, by the State Conservationist before the program can begin. **The FY 2010 EQIP proposal is due to the State Conservationist by November 20, *2009*.**

Information, ranking criteria, payment schedule, etc. for the Field Office program, once approved, will be published on the state web site for access by the public. We also need to be consistent in the information provided for each F.O. Using the template (attachment **#4**) when preparing your proposal is required. *Proposals submitted in a different format will be returned!*

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)
This component of EQIP was very successful in FY 2009. Five AWEP proposals from New Mexico were selected by NHQ for funding. The program objectives are to treat water quality and water quantity resource concerns. SWCDs, RC&D Councils and Tribal governments are encouraged to consider submitting a proposal. A national RFP will be used and we will keep you informed. AWEP funds do not come out of the states EQIP allocation, they are additional funds.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
The CCPI is another component of EQIP (and WHIP) which was successfully utilized in New Mexico in FY 2009. Unlike AWEP, CCPI can be used to treat all NRCS approved resource concerns. The funds come from the state's EQIP allocation. However, if a proposal is multi-state in nature additional funds may come from NHQ. Again, SWCDs, RC&D Councils and Tribal governments are encouraged to consider submitting a CCPI proposal. A national RFP will be used and we will keep you informed.

Local Watershed Initiative
A pool of funds will be available to provide additional FA fund assistance to LWGs/DCs who propose, and are selected for, a local watershed initiative. If your LWG recommends submitting a proposal please complete attachment **#3** and submit as part of your overall EQIP F.O. proposal.

All watershed initiatives will use the CCPI template beginning this fiscal year in addition to the information requested in attachment #3.

Small Acreage Initiative
A pool of funds will be available to provide additional FA fund assistance to LWGs/DCS who propose, and are selected for, a small acreage initiative. If your LWG recommends submitting a proposal please complete attachment **#3** and submit as part of your overall EQIP F.O. proposal.

Timelines: F.O. need to complete each activity in the schedule of activities/deadlines by the date indicated. If a problem/issue arises that may prevent meeting a deadline, Area Conservationists need to be notified as far in advance as possible to discuss alternatives. Attachment **#1** of this bulletin provides the list of activities/deadlines for FY 2010.