



2010

NRCS New Mexico Activities Report



United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Quick Facts



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Voluntary Private Lands Conservation Assistance in New Mexico

With the mission of “Helping People Help the Land,” the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) delivers voluntary programs, products and services that help local people protect and improve natural resources on non-federal lands.

Our locally based NRCS staffs work directly with farmers, ranchers and others to provide technical and financial conservation assistance suited to each client’s specific needs. We provide technical information and guidance, plan conservation systems and practices, and offer financial assistance for conservation activities through the programs of the 2008 Farm Bill.

These voluntary programs help local people improve land stewardship on working cropland and rangeland, conserve water supplies, enhance wildlife habitat, preserve high-quality farmland, protect native plants and animals, and improve stream conditions. NRCS programs also provide upstream flood prevention, emergency watershed protection, urban conservation, and assistance for local community projects designed to improve social, economic and environmental conditions. As a result of our voluntary technical and financial assistance, land managers and communities take a comprehensive approach to the use and protection of natural resources in rural, urban and developing areas.

More information about the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in New Mexico is available at: www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov.

New Mexico NRCS Fiscal Year 2010 Accomplishments

- ✓ 5,479,000 acres of conservation planning completed
- ✓ 183,000 acres of cropland conservation applied
- ✓ 3,943,000 acres of conservation applied to improve water quality
- ✓ 70,000 acres of irrigation improvements
- ✓ 5,104,000 acres of grazing land and forest land conservation
- ✓ 2,933,000 acres of conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat
- ✓ Nearly \$30 million in financial assistance to New Mexico producers and landowners

2010 Farm Bill & Other Program Funding

The conservation provisions in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) are providing conservation opportunities for farmers, ranchers, private landowners and communities for years to come. The 2008 Farm Bill builds on the conservation gains made through the 1985, 1996 and 2002 Farm Bills. It simplifies existing programs and creates new programs to address high priority environmental goals.

A summary of Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 funding provided through some important Farm Bill programs in New Mexico is shown below.

FY 10 Financial Assistance Expenditures by Program by Congressional District				
Congressional District*	1	2	3	Total
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	A voluntary program that provides technical, educational, and financial assistance to eligible farmers and ranchers to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on working agricultural lands.			
	\$1,040,013	\$8,411,905	\$9,326,156	\$18,778,064
Programs funded through EQIP:				
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)	A partnership program to leverage EQIP assistance against the funding, staff or other resources of project partners to conserve ground and surface water or improve water quality on agricultural lands.			
	\$0	\$96,831	\$0	\$96,831
Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)	A partnership program to leverage funding through EQIP, WHIP and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) against the resources of project partners to address a high-priority natural resource concern.			
		\$1,212,490	\$117,768	\$1,330,258
Conservation Stewardship Program (2008 Farm Bill)	A voluntary stewardship program of the 2008 Farm Bill that promotes ongoing conservation on agricultural lands. No new contracts are being written, and NRCS is making payments to fulfill existing contracts.			
	\$79,062	\$3,203,042	\$5,544,419	\$8,727,323
Farm & Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)	A voluntary program that helps landowners keep their productive land in agriculture through conservation easements limiting conversion of property to non-agricultural uses.			
		\$600,000		\$600,000
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)	A voluntary program to help landowners restore and protect sensitive wetlands.			
	\$120,345	\$799,773	\$113,072	\$920,118
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	A voluntary program to help farmers and ranchers protect their grazing land from conversion to other uses.			
	892,265	385,280	1,383,158	2,660,703
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	A voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitat that support wildlife populations of national, state, tribal, and local significance.			
	\$127,175	\$325,550	\$152,092	\$736,439



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Conservation Technical Assistance

NRCS provides data, information and technical expertise that helps people collect and analyze information to identify natural resource problems and opportunities, clarify their objectives, and formulate and evaluate alternatives. *Conservation plans* reflect a customer's decisions about the management of natural resources for a specific area, which may be a farm or ranch operating unit, a group of units, a community, or a landscape feature such as a watershed. *Technical consultations and planning assistance* provide professional advice that helps customers make decisions about natural resource management.

In 2010, NRCS New Mexico worked with private landowners and producers to plan conservation strategies on nearly 3.7 million acres.

Sustainable Workshops a Proven Success in New Mexico

1st, 2nd and 3rd Congressional Districts

In 2010, the NRCS Soil health Team conducted ten Producer Sustainable Workshops throughout New Mexico; Workshops were held at Deming (2x), Espanola, Las Vegas, El Paso (with Texas Agrilife Center and Texas NRCS), Taos, Las Cruces (2x), Tome, Albuquerque and Aztec.

Attendance to these workshops averaged between 45 to 75 local producers, including SWCD, Extension and agriculture consultants. An actual case study with a local producer was the emphasis of the trainings. This included how to evaluate and interpret irrigation water, soil and plant tissue analyses for implementing an integrated cropping system.

The main emphasis of these trainings were on achieving natural resources sustainability and optimum crop productivity, based on the principles of building healthy soils. Various hands-on soils demonstrations were used to illustrate productive and healthy soils such as: infiltration, salinity, pH, residue management, water-stable aggregates, soil respiration, etc.

Another component of these trainings that we have begun to implement, is field cover crop trials on pecans and vegetable crops for improving soil fertility, structure, carbon sequestration and improved water conservation. You can find our basic soil health technical assistance that we are using for our workshops at: <http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/handbooks/iwm/nmiwm.html>.





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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)



EQIP is a voluntary program that helps producers install measures to protect the soil, water, air, and other resources while ensuring sustainable production on farms, ranches and working forest lands.

Through EQIP, NRCS provides funding and technical expertise to help farmers and ranchers and others to address natural resource concerns on their land in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. It promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals and supports activities such as: *manure management practices, pest management treatments, efficient irrigation upgrades, forest stewardship plans and management practices, erosion control and buffers, range and pasture planting, fencing and stockwater, and a number of other practices.*



NRCS New Mexico Launches “Local Food Initiative”

1st, 2nd & 3rd Congressional District

In support of USDA’s key Initiative “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food,” the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) in New Mexico has introduced a new state initiative called the Local Food Initiative.

The NRCS uses Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds to help New Mexico agricultural producers implement practices aimed at conserving our natural resources.

USDA’s “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative supports local farmers, strengthens rural communities, promotes healthy eating, and protects natural resources. The New Mexico Local Food Initiative will assist producers who grow food to be sold at local farmers market.

EQIP funding is providing opportunities for local growers to participate in USDA “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food”



Eligible practices include seasonal high tunnels (hoop houses), irrigation system improvements, and land management practices.



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Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP helps landowners improve and protect wildlife habitat on private and tribal lands. Program priorities for fiscal year 2010 were to:

- Promote restoration of declining or important native habitats;
- Protect, restore, develop or enhance habitat for at-risk species;
- Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats; and
- Protect, restore or enhance declining or important aquatic habitats.

FY 2010 was a record-setting year for the program, with the most WHIP funding ever provided to improve habitat in New Mexico. New Mexico. These projects have improved habitat on private land for elk, turkey, bear, grouse, bighorn sheep, endangered willow flycatchers and other species. These projects have emphasized the development of water supplies for wildlife, establishment of permanent flood plains, and fencing cattle out of creeks and ponds.



WHIP Focuses Resources on Canadian River

3rd Congressional District

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) New Mexico offered a second funding opportunity in FY 2010 to New Mexico tribal governments, farmers and ranchers through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

NRCS is working with ongoing wildlife projects, such as the Canadian River restoration efforts. By merging local programs with WHIP funds NRCS was able to extend the treatment area.

WHIP offers opportunities to landowners to improve and protect wildlife habitat on private, State Trust and Tribal lands. Anyone interested in entering into a financial assistance agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop wildlife habitat may file an application at any time. The NRCS works with the landowner to develop a wildlife habitat development plan.

Projects in New Mexico have improved habitat for elk, turkey, bear, shorebirds, Lesser Prairie Chicken, desert bighorn sheep, and other species including the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatchers. The projects have emphasized the development of water supplies for wildlife, establishment of permanent flood plains, and fencing cattle out of creeks and ponds.

Nearly \$1 million in FY 2010 WHIP funding helped landowners protect and improve conditions for wildlife in New Mexico.



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Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)



The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) encourages land stewards to improve their conservation performance by installing and adopting additional activities, and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities on agricultural land and nonindustrial private forest land.



Newly authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill, CSP is available for agricultural landowners across the nation and replaces the former Conservation Security Program.



New Mexico Producers Fare Well in First Statewide Signup

The FY 2010 CSP in New Mexico showed a great deal of interest in the program and submitted applications for more acres than almost any other state in the nation.

NRCS entered into 169 CSP contracts to help producers improve and enhance conservation activities across the state. Because of the high level of interest here, NRCS exceeded the initial New Mexico signup allocation of 500,000 acres and enrolled more than 650,000 acres of rangeland, cropland and forest lands into the program.

New Mexico producers account for a large amount of the 2010 CSP acres enrolled in the nation. Their program participation will increase the conservation funding brought to local communities.

The first sign-up for FY 2011 ended Jan. 21, 2011. NRCS New Mexico received more than 250 applications. NRCS anticipates enrolling all its sign-up 495,000 allocation acres.

Program payments will be based on individual contract details and will help producers install additional conservation measures while benefitting local economies.

Partnership Programs



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NRCS partners with private landowners, state and local governments, tribes, pueblos, American Indian nations, agricultural groups, non-profits and others to focus conservation assistance on local projects. Groups that address natural resource issues in New Mexico may be able to partner with NRCS to leverage dollars and expertise through the following programs:

- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)
- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Small Watershed Program
- NRCS Assistance for Acequia Associations

These programs allow NRCS to work with partners to address high-priority concerns, improve conditions on a landscape scale, and/or develop innovative approaches.

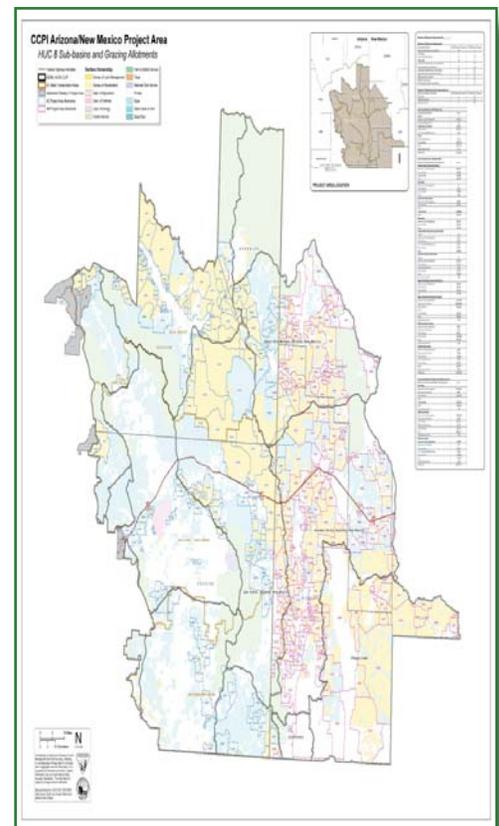
In FY 2010, NRCS funded nearly \$97,000 in AWEP conservation contracts in New Mexico.

NRCS Funds the \$7.5 million “Restore New Mexico” CCPI Borderlands Initiative in FY 2010

2nd Congressional District

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative program (CCPI) proposal by the Black Range RC&D, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts and Arizona Association of Natural Resource Conservation Districts for the AZ-NM Borderlands Conservation Initiative (BCI) CCPI was funded in FY 2010. This is part of the “Restore New Mexico” landscape initiative, an initiative whose roots date back to FY 2005.

State, federal and local agencies from both states teamed to design this bi-state five-year proposal rangeland improvement project to address brush control, erosion control, water quality and wildlife habitat in the 8 million-acre project area involving three SWCD’s in New Mexico and three NRCD’s in Arizona. AZ-NM BCI was awarded \$7.5 million in NRCS CCPI program. The Bureau of Land Management in both states matched the funds. When combined with the in-kind contributions of the State Land Offices and Conservation Districts in Southwest NM and southeast AZ the total \$16.5 million for a 5-year period. The goal is to keep the group functional beyond the life of this specific CCPI project so that future proposals can be developed to benefit the bi-state area. CCPI EQIP contracts for \$500,000 in NM and \$300,000 in AZ were signed in FY2010 for nine rangeland improvement projects.





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Easement & Long-Term Restoration Programs



The voluntary easement programs administered by NRCS offer landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance natural resources on their property and ensure long-term conservation benefits.

- **Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP):** helps entities with easement programs work with farmers and ranchers to protect working agricultural land from conversion to non-agricultural uses.
- **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP):** helps farmers and ranchers protect their working grazing land from conversion to other uses through easements or restoration agreements.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP):** helps landowners restore or protect wetland areas through easements or restoration agreements.

These programs often leverage NRCS with against the resources of partner entities with corresponding goals to protect farm and ranch lands, preserve grasslands, or enhance wetlands.

Wetland Reserve Program More than Easements

2nd Congressional District

In FY 2010, NM entered into its first “cost share restoration” agreements under the authority of WRP. The first will help restore 27 acres of wetland along the Burro Cienega, south of Silver City New Mexico. (A cienega is a Spanish term for a spring, or intermittently flooded canyon with minimal slope.)The second will facilitate Santo Domingo Pueblo efforts to improve a large wetland complex on tribal lands.

WRP enables NRCS to work with private landowners and tribes to restore and protect wetlands, which are in turn protected for a minimum of 10 years.

Wetlands at both of these sites have experienced hundreds of years of human impacts, which current managers are interested in mitigating. However, neither program participant was in a position to make 30 year or permanent commitments.

One of the flexibilities of WRP is that even if a party chooses to complete restoration via a restoration cost share agreement, longer term options remain open to them. And in the meantime, applicants have the opportunity to work with NRCS experts on restoration activities.

With NRCS easement and restoration assistance, partners can leverage their programs, services with those of NRCS to improve conservation outcomes in New Mexico.



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American Reinvestment & Recovery Act Projects

The authority for rehabilitation of aging watershed dams is included in section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL 83-566). More than 11,000 dams in 47 states that were constructed under the four watershed programs (PL-534, PL-566, Pilot, or Resource Conservation and Development) were eligible for ARRA help.

Many of these dams are nearing the end of their 50-year design life. Rehabilitation of these dams is needed to address critical public health and safety issues in these communities. Priority for funding of projects was based on a priority ranking system that considers the condition of the dam and number of people at risk if the dam should fail.



Two American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Projects 2nd and 3rd Congressional Districts

Prop Canyon Dam was built in 1960 in the village of Bluewater, New Mexico by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Lava Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Bluewater Toltec Irrigation District.

The earthen structure has protected crops, residents and infrastructure from serious flooding for 50 years. Nearly three decades of drought, constant western winds and New Mexico's arid climate had taken their toll. Engineers from Lava SWCD discovered cracks in the dam and asked NRCS to develop a repair plan.

After NRCS conducted the review and developed a repair plan, the project stalled without funding. Then the ARRA provided \$1.2 million to implement the plan. Prop Canyon Dam protects agricultural lands and 30 homes by slowly releasing floodwater into the Rio San Jose.

"This repair project reflects a commitment that NRCS will be there for the next 50 years of the life of this dam," said NRCS New Mexico State Conservationist Dennis Alexander. The Prop Canyon Dam reparation project is one of two flood control structures. The Santa Cruz #4 reparation was the second ARRA project.



ARRA Funding for 2 Projects

FY 2010 ARRA Financial Aid	\$1,500,000
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Prop Canyon #1 and Santa Cruz #4 dam sites
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Los Lunas Plant Materials Center



The purpose of the Plant Material Centers (LLPMC) program is to develop native plant solutions to help solve natural resource problems. Beneficial uses for which plant material may be developed include biomass production, carbon sequestration, erosion reduction, riparian restoration, and other special conservation treatment needs.

Scientists at the Los Lunas Plant Materials Center research plants that show promise for meeting identified conservation needs and test their performance. After species are proven, they are released to the private sector for commercial production.

Developing Plant Solutions to Natural Resource Challenges

Hydrogel Seeding Study

The LLPMC is testing “Soil Moist” (a starch polymer) in a seeding study to determine if this polymer treatment will benefit seedling establishment. These compounds hold 40 to 800 times their own weight in water. With precise placement of the polymer in the seed furrow, surface moisture retention may be enhanced enough to allow seedling establishment during the arid periods between rainfall events. The PMC is evaluating the polymer in a 60-plant replicated study in Estancia, NM. The compound was applied at a rate of 10 pounds per acre and exhibited no significant effect on seedling survival in 2009. In 2010 field observations showed the seedlings responding favorably in both growth and establishment to the hydrogel.

Pollinator Plant Evaluation

Decline of honey bee and wild pollinator (i.e. native bee) populations are evident in the U.S. This decline could have effects on agricultural crops and native plant communities. The PMC has installed a planting of 42 herbaceous perennial species, 23 annual and biennial species, and 30 woody shrub species.

This is a collaborative study with Dr. Tess Grasswitz at NMSU. Evaluations are examining plant survival, plant vigor, and duration of flowering. This study is replicated at the high school in Reserve, NM. Pollinator activity is observed and recorded as is activity by predatory wasps, beetles, parasitic flies and butterflies. Additional species will be planted in 2011. Two added plantings will be installed in 2011.

The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center develops, tests and transfers native plant solutions to solve conservation problems.



NRCS Soil Survey Program



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NRCS provides soil surveys of the privately owned lands of the nation. Soil surveys provide an orderly, on-the-ground, scientific inventory of soil resources that includes maps showing the locations and extent of soils, data about the physical and chemical properties of those soils, and information derived from that data about potential uses and problems on each kind of soil. This is done in sufficient detail to meet many needs for farmers, agricultural technicians, community planners, engineers, and scientists in planning for specific land areas.



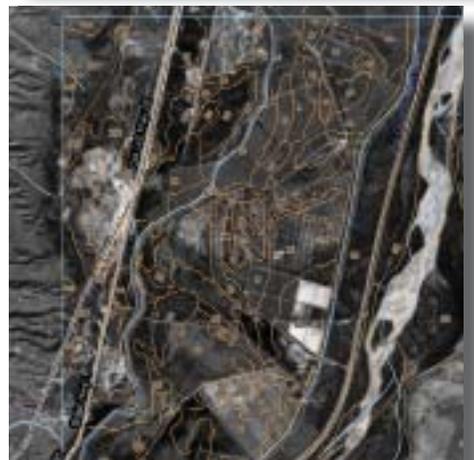
ESDs: Road Map to Successful Conservation Planning

A major NRCS reorganization within the NRCS impacts Ecological Site Descriptions. Responsibility moved from Technical Services to the Soil Survey division. NRCS Agricultural Research Service, Bureau of Land Management and US Forest Service met in 2010 to determine the best way to continue the development of ESDs.

Looking across any landscape from a high vantage point, it is easy to see that some areas of the terrain vary in vegetation, geology and soil types. NRCS classifies different areas into units called Ecological Sites. Land inventory, analysis, and the resulting management decisions require the accurate knowledge of these ecological sites and their interrelationships to one another on the landscape. This information is crucial to a successful conservation plan.

Sections of the ESD are categorized into Animal Community, Plant Preference by Animal Kind, Hydrologic Interpretations, Recreation Uses, Wood Products, and other products such as forage inventory for grazing management. There have been 322 ESDs created that cover the vast majority of private, state, and federal lands in NM.

ESDs are used as basic information about use and management of a particular site's vegetation. Increasingly they are used for research and restoration activities for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, both plant and animal.



Soil Survey information and tools help NRCS and other agencies and individuals sustain the long-term productivity of cropland, forests, range, and other lands across New Mexico.



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Snow Survey & Water Supply Forecasting



The winter snowpack contributes 50 to 75 percent of the flow in our streams and rivers with melting snow. The Snow Survey Program provides winter snowpack and stream flow forecasts for water users in New Mexico, including reservoir managers, irrigation groups, tribes and pueblos, and municipalities. In addition, NRCS participates in drought forecasting and mitigation in cooperation with other state and federal agencies.



Snow surveyors from NRCS conduct monthly readings of snowpack depth and density at 56 locations throughout mountainous areas of the state. Included in these sites are 22 SNOTEL (snow telemetry) automated stations which report both climate and snowpack conditions.

Snow Survey Activities

In 2010, NRCS developed and released five Water Supply Outlook Reports with snowpack summaries and streamflow forecasts for New Mexico. These reports are developed and released at the beginning of the month from January to May each year. The reports include data and forecasts on the snowpack, reservoir storage, and anticipated water supply (stream flows) based upon the depth, density, water content, and aerial extent of the winter snowpack.

This past year, plans have been implemented to expand the New Mexico SNOTEL network with three new sites installed in the Rio Grande Watershed. Upgrades to 12 existing SNOTEL sites, and conversion of one additional manual snow course site with the latest SNOTEL technology are planned for 2011.

In addition to providing high-elevation snow and climate information, NRCS also operates a network of automated Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) sites located in lower elevation areas across the nation. This system provides data on soil temperature and soil moisture content at several depths, air temperature, relative humidity, solar radiation, wind, precipitation, barometric pressure, and more. Currently, there are seven SCAN sites in New Mexico.

The SNOTEL system can report numerous climate and snowpack conditions including precipitation, temperature, depth of snow, humidity, and wind speed.





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Resource Conservation & Development

The NRCS Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program is designed to help local groups and communities foster the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources. RC&D supports improved economic activity and seeks to enhance the environment and standard of living within RC&D Areas. RC&D Areas are locally sponsored areas designated by the Secretary of Agriculture for RC&D technical and financial assistance program funds. There are eight federally authorized RC&D Areas in New Mexico.

Current program objectives focus on improving quality of life through natural resources conservation and community development leading to sustainable communities, prudent development, and management and conservation of natural resources.



Ecological Restoration of the Rio De Los Pinos 3rd Congressional District

The Northern Rio Grande RC&D along with Adelante RC&D partnered in providing the San Miguel Ecological Group, (an organized group of private land owners along the Rio de Los Pinos) assistance in ecologically restoring approximately 5 miles of river ecosystem on contiguous private lands.



The San Miguel Group set goals and objectives for the project and assisted with some grant writing. Both RC&D Councils provided assistance with planning grant administration, permit applications, bidding for and administering service provider contracts as well as networking with the NM Plant Materials Center, NRCS and New Mexico Environment Department.

Support at the ground level came from the 12 land owners working with each other and both RC&D councils in planning and achieving their collective goals.

2010 New Mexico RC&D Contributions

Congressional District	RC&D Funds (from NRCS)	Leveraged Funds
1	\$ 61,614	\$ 125,000
2	\$ 523,714	\$ 5,370,300
3	\$ 300,488	\$ 2,149,900
NM Total	\$ 985,815	\$ 7,645,200

For every \$1 NRCS invests in the New Mexico RC&D program, partners and other entities contribute \$8.30 for local natural resource and community improvements.



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