

# CONSERVATION Showcase

## Big Problems Get Big Solutions

Take miles of New Mexico mesquite and counter them with a watershed initiative, and you have the Lovington Field Office working at its best.

In 2007 NRCS New Mexico challenged its field offices to devote funding on a landscape or watershed scale, and it would match dollar-for-dollar monies that were set aside for such purposes. The Lovington Field Office along with the Portales Field Office, and its locally-led work groups, accepted the challenge and set aside some \$95,000 to manage brush in the Lost Draw area. This \$95,000 was matched by the NRCS New Mexico State Office.

It was a good bet because the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), under its Restore New Mexico program, was treating miles of invasive species that were encroaching on valued rangeland. By teaming up with BLM, ranchers could gain the treatment of federal BLM lands they leased with BLM funding and similar care of their private lands with cost-sharing from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that are administered by NRCS. In doing so, because large watershed-wide areas were being treated, the actual cost of the operation was significantly less than if each rancher tried to undertake pieces of the project on their own.

“We concentrated on one area,” said Philip Carter, Lovington district conservationist. “We are going to rotate throughout the county. That way, everyone will at some point become a priority.”



Mesquite on the left dying after treatment

In 2008, another watershed initiative project was launched. This time the Landreth-Monument Draw was targeted. This project resulted in some 120,000 acres being treated for brush in Eddy, Chaves, Roosevelt, and Lea counties. In addition livestock watering and other rangeland improvements were installed.

The 2008 project was such a success, the Lovington Field Office is putting in for similar treatment on a portion of the 1,000,000 acres in the Landreth-Monument Draw in Fiscal Year 2009. Again, its target will be the mesquite that is choking rangeland grasses that not only are fodder for livestock but contribute to watershed health by capture precious rainfall and lead to more diverse ecosystems. Such ecosystems also better support the wildlife of eastern and southern New Mexico.

The EQIP watershed initiative is proving itself as a valued conservation tool. And, it is to the credit of the Lovington local work group and field office, who had the vision to realize this tool's potential.