

CONSERVATION Showcase

“Basin Absolutely Did Its Job”

Truth or Consequence Project Succeeds

Before EuroAmerican settlers came to Truth or Consequences, Native Americans enjoyed its hot springs. The area is steeped in the history of Spanish colonists, miners, ranchers – and floods that have roared down its many arroyos that are carved in its rugged landscape.

The topography of Truth or Consequences and neighboring Village of Williamsburg, combined with New Mexico’s propensity for cloudbursts, has created an environment that is flood prone. Local officials took the issue in hand, however, in the 1970s and approached the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service for assistance.

The result has been some nifty engineering to bring safety to these communities and prevent disruption of travel, damage to businesses and homes, and sedimentation in the communities and Rio Grande.

The first step in attacking the problem was the construction of a dam in the southwest section of the area to protect most of the Village of Williamsburg, Interstate-25, and western portions of Truth or Consequences.

The second major segment of construction was just completed in August of 2007. This effort was more complicated because the initial plan was to construct a dam to hold back arroyo flood waters. As plans moved forward, however, it became evident that soils in the area were not conducive to a dam so an alternative was sought.

The solution was to build a basin that would contain flood waters, and slowly and safely release them into the Rio Grande.

This segment of addressing the overall problem residents of Truth or Consequences faced offers protection to a large area in the north and east portions of Truth or Consequences and a portion of Williamsburg. It encompasses a basin that controls floodwaters from four of the eight arroyos the engineering is designed to address.

The value of the protection showed itself before the second segment was complete. In 2004 a cloudburst hit and spawned a flood that was close to the 100-year expectations. It brought the improvements to their capacity.

“The basin absolutely did its job,” said David Pacheco, NRCS state engineer. “The flood water went into the basin where it was let out slowly through the outlet.”

A third segment is now being pursued by the communities to fill in the middle between the two large areas that now enjoy improvements.

The projects leave the area to enjoy in safety its reputations as a health resort, artists’ haven, and jump-off point to Elephant Butte Reservoir that is a destination for boaters, wind surfers, and fishermen.

For more information about this project, contact David Pacheco at (505)761-4400 or go to www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov

