Hugh Hammond Bennett (right), first Chief of the Soil Conservation Service.

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NRCS New Mexico Hosts CSP Listening Session

Part of Nationwide Effort to Hear from Producers

NRCS New Mexico held a listening session February 19 in Albuquerque to gather comments on the proposed Conservation Security Program (CSP) rules that have been published in the Federal Register.

This session was part of a number of sessions that were being held nationwide in an effort to solicit input from the public regarding how CSP should be run. As of the end of February, NRCS Headquarters had received over 10,000 comments which is the largest number received by USDA-NRCS on initiation of a new program. This strong public involvement reflects the high interest the public has in the program.

CSP is a voluntary conservation program to support ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural lands by providing payments to producers who maintain and enhance the condition of natural resources. CSP will identify and reward those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation.

Issues Can Continue to be Addressed by 2002 Farm Bill

Rosendo Trevino III
State Conservationist

Many events in New Mexico are converging on NRCS and producers in the state. NRCS is again beginning its cycle of letting Farm Bill assistance to New Mexico producers. We are still in the dregs of drought, but hope this devastating natural phenomena will soon lift. Meanwhile, the New Mexico state legislature has helped NRCS by putting 27 new employees in place to help implement the Farm Bill and in doing so the New Mexico legislature is aiding our state's producers.

One challenge that we now are facing is Congress's concern that the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is being funded with more dollars but is resulting in fewer and larger contracts. The cost-share rate proposal that New Mexico has developed allows for some local flexibility in Working Groups to identify high priority practices and results in less than seven percent of the practices being cost-shared at greater than a 50 percent rate.

The State Technical Committee has set two top priority issues in the midst of our ongoing drought: watershed health and water conservation. These priorities are reflected in the requests received from the Local Working Groups for higher cost-share rates on practices that address these key issues in the state.

Reduced cost-share rates will help spread the funds available over more producers, and a higher percentage of applicants will be funded. Most of the practices selected for a maximum of 50 percent cost-share are practices that a large majority of the field offices have already set at 50 percent. Reducing the overall cost-share rate within the state will possibly allow for increased funding from the national level.

I feel strongly NRCS New Mexico will help as many producers as possible to use efficiently our limited range and water resources, and want to thank all those who are doing good work implementing the Farm Bill and helping our producers.

Natural Resources Reporter
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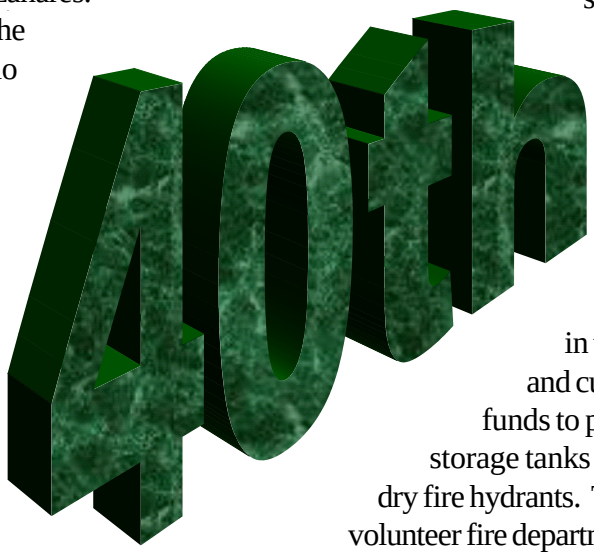
New Mexico's First RC&D Celebrates 40th Anniversary

The Northern Rio Grande Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council marked its 40th anniversary February 12. It is one of the first ten RC&D councils to be formed in the United States. The act authorizing the creation of RC&Ds was established September 27, 1962, and the Northern Rio Grande RC&D held its first meeting February 12, 1964. The first Council chairperson was Herbert Quintana, and committee members were Joe Ferran, Phillip Trujillo, and W.A. Williams. Sponsorship dues in 1964 were ten dollars.

At its inception, the Northern Rio Grande RC&D Council was busy sponsoring PL-566 watershed dam projects, securing loans for the famous Rancho de Chimayo Restaurant, and obtaining funding and technical assistance for the local apple growers in the Espanola Valley.

The Council's first coordinator, Phil Lovato from the Soil Conservation Service, placed the RC&D on the map, and went on to serve three terms as major of Taos, New Mexico after he retired. Over the years Council chairpersons that have served include Pablo Roybal, Arturo Jaramillo, Ken Denson, Gustavo Fernandez, Agapito Candelaria, Nancy Rodriguiz, Ben Maestas, and Ted Martinez. Coordinators that have supported the Council include Buck Brinneman, Larkin Salazar, Gene Greene, Richard Ramsey, Mike Neubeiser, Leon Martinez, Clarence Montoya, and David Manzanares.



Today the Northern Rio Grande RC&D conducts outreach and capacity building in the area's rural communities. Partnering with the U.S. Forest Service, 50 percent of the coordinator's salary is provided by the USFS.

The hard work of the Council, coordinator, and all its partners enabled the Council to recently fund sixteen grants from its own resources. The Council was instrumental in the rehabilitation work done after the Cerro Grande Fire in Los Alamos, New Mexico with the assistance of more than 17,000 volunteer hours. The agency also secured funds to do a landscape project called "Touch the Sky" in Los Alamos after the rehabilitation was completed, and was responsible for securing a $1.8 million grant from the USFS to re-build fences, bridges, culverts, and other structures that were destroyed by wildfires in the year 2000 in New Mexico and Arizona.

The Council has installed 95 dry fire hydrants in three counties, and currently is seeking funds to purchase water storage tanks to work with the dry fire hydrants. This will provide volunteer fire departments with much needed water to fight fires, and improve the safety of its residents while decreasing home insurance rates.

After 40 years, the Northern Rio Grande Resource can reflect on a long history of accomplishments while continuing as an outstanding RC&D Council.

For more information contact David Manzanares, Northern Rio Grande RC&D coordinator, (505)753-6412.

Salt Cedar Experience:

Harry Hopson at Arroyo de la Cejita

The Arroyo de la Cejita ran water until the drought of the 1950s, and from then on it has been intermittent depending on the weather. In 2003, the driest year on the ranch since 1956, Harry and Lindit Hopson, the ranch owners, were surprised to see water flowing once again in the creek bed. What made the difference? NRCS's preliminary investigation shows removal of the salt cedar was the reason for the recovery of the creek.

The Hopson ranch is located on the Arroyo de la Cejita (which means eyebrow in Spanish) a tributary of Ute Creek near Roy, New Mexico. In the early 1900s and up until about 1938 the water from Arroyo de la Cejita was diverted to irrigate approximately 15 acres adjacent to the creek. The area historically had a high water table.

Aparcio C. de Baca owned the ranch at the time, however, the ranch was sold in 1944 to E.V. "Jack" and Linda Lambert in 1944.

The creek in Arroyo de la Cejita continued to have water in it, until the drought of the 1950s. From then on it was intermittent depending on the weather.

The present owners, the Hopsons, do not remember when the salt cedars appeared, but they do remember the salt cedars on the Arroyo de la Cejita in the sixties when they picnicked and played in the area with their children.

From the period of 1966 to the present, the salt cedar infestation changed from small scattered trees, no bigger than three inches in diameter, to thick impenetrable thickets of mature trees 24 – 36 inches in diameter.

In 2001, the Hopsons approached Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist, Mike Delano, about the problem. Delano worked with them in securing a Continuous Conservation Reserve (CRP) contract. Under the CRP contract, the riparian area was fenced to exclude livestock. With the help of the Ute Creek Soil and Water Conservation District, 66 acres of salt cedar were treated. Large individual cottonwood trees and groves were avoided during treatment, and in the summer of 2003 Joe Culbertson, who owns the ranch immediately to the north of the Hopson's Triangle Ranch, also participated in the salt cedar control program.

As stated earlier, the Hopsons were surprised to see water flowing once again in the creek bed in 2003, and this was has been increasing since the summer of 2003 until the present.

NRCS completed a preliminary field study of the site in early January to determine whether there could be other reasons why the Arroyo de la Cejita had started to flow again. They made casual observations of the Arroyo de la Cejita and the water it contained; and reviewed the surface geology, soils, upstream land management, and evidence of any new drilling or mineral exploration. They looked for as many sources they could think of to account for the increase in stream flow, and did not find any outside sources of water entering the arroyo. Their preliminary conclusion was that the most significant action that had occurred in the area was the treatment of the salt

Recovery of Arroyo de la Cejita

cedar, and the water now not being taken up by the salt cedar was the probable cause of the flow.

Most salt cedars are shrubs or small trees growing to 12 - 15 feet in height and forming dense thickets. Salt cedars are fire-adapted species and have long tap roots that allow them to intercept deep water tables and interfere with natural aquatic systems. Salt cedars disrupt the structure and stability of native communities and degrade native wildlife habitat by out competing and replacing native plant species, monopolizing limited sources of moisture, and increasing the frequency, intensity, and effect of fires and floods. Although salt cedar provides some shelter, the foliage and flowers of salt cedar provide little food value for native wildlife species that depend on nutrient-rich native plant resources.

The Arroyo de la Cejita appears to be a remarkable example of recovery from infestation by this devastating plant, and the hope that good conservation can bring.

"To my knowledge the Arroyo de la Cejita did not normally flow throughout the year," Harry Hopson said. "I have never seen it flow throughout the year."

Arroya de la Cejita running water again after CRP conservation practices installed and salt cedar treated

Hopis Tap Plant Material Center

Willows and Cottonwoods Featured for Riparian Restoration

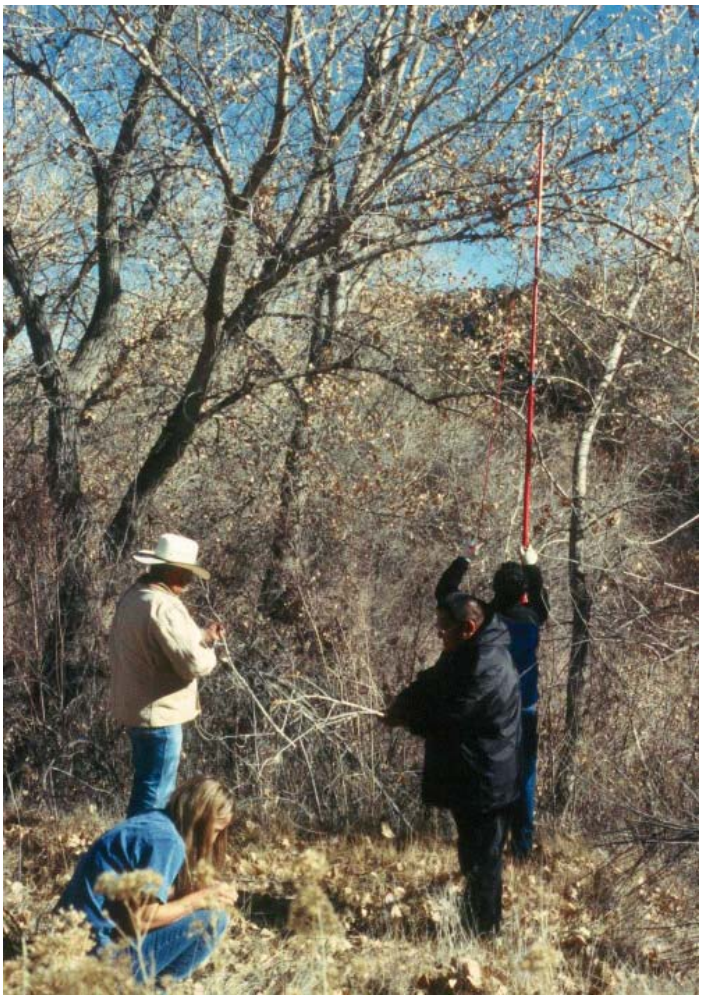
When venturing through the Hopi Reservation in northern Arizona with its vast grass and desert scrublands and mesa-top villages, you don't immediately think about the presence of riparian oases in this arid region. However, on the Reservation there are a number of areas with remnant riparian plant communities in Keams Canyon, Bluebird Spring, Blue Canyon, Deer Spring, and Polacca Wash.

Many of these riparian areas have been degraded by the invasion of exotic species such as salt cedar and by excessive grazing pressure. The Los Lunas Plant Materials Center has been engaged through an interagency agreement with the USDA Forest Service Southern Region to propagate plant materials and develop riparian revegetation techniques for the restoration of riparian areas on Hopi Tribal Lands.

The Hopis have begun an intensive effort to fence riparian areas and to eradicate invasive species in preparation for reintroducing native riparian plants.

In working with the USFS and Tribe the Plant Material Center's goal is propagate willow and cottonwood species from cuttings and seed collected from extant populations at a number of sites on the Reservation.

During January and April 2003, US Forest Service and Hopi Office of Range Management personnel collected cuttings. For cottonwoods, male and female plants were identified in the field by micro-examination of flower buds allowing cuttings of both sexes to be collected from several riparian sites on the Reservation. The species being propagated from cuttings include Fremont cottonwood , lanceleaf cottonwood, Goodding's willow , coyote willow, yellow willow, shining willow, and a possible peachleaf hybrid willow. The PMC has rooted these reproductive cuttings to force flowering and pollination as quickly as possible to provide a seed source in the event that collection of seed from native stands is not possible. The first 50 transplants were picked up by Max Taylor of the Hopi's Office of Range Management in January 2004 for outplanting this spring.



Pruning poles on the Hopi Reservation

A few remnant plants of quaking aspen can still be found at remote higher elevation sites on the Hopi Reservation. Reintroduction of aspen is being initiated using aspen grown from seed collected by the Navajo Forestry Nursery. These seedlings will be used with a new propagation technique (i.e., multiple stacked flats) developed in Canada to rapidly produce numerous root cuttings for production of aspen transplants. In addition, the Hopi Tribe has asked the PMC to propagate several culturally significant species including desert princesplume, New Mexico olive, skunkbush sumac, cattail and a wild rose possibly Arizona rose.

Northwest Area Civil Engineering Tech Fruitful

Frank Casaus Reflects on Irrigation Projects

Because of Frank Casaus's work, residents of the Santa Clara Pueblo have irrigation on a 400 – 500 acre site where they can practice traditional farming, growing corn and raising crops on personal gardens and small farms. At the Santa Clara Pueblo Casaus, the civil engineering technician for NRCS in the northwest quadrant of the New Mexico, undertook the necessary planning, surveying, and design that put back into production land that had been unused for several years because the old irrigation system had deteriorated.

A similar project that demonstrates Casaus's handiwork is 800 – 900 acres of permanent pastures and alfalfa that have been put back into production near Ramah. The project serves some 50 – 60 farmers in the area.

Both those involved in the Santa Clara and Ramah projects have expressed exceptional satisfaction with the outcomes to which Casaus has contributed.

Among his many engineering endeavors, Casaus works with many acequias in the northwestern part of the state. In such situations he is working with culturally significant irrigation structures, and frequently doubling their efficiency for the New Mexican farmers involved.

Casaus is called on to assess a variety of problems and develop solutions.

"No two jobs are alike," Casaus said.

An example of his work is the flood prevention structures he designed following the Taos fire this past summer. The purpose of this Emergency Watershed Protection project is to prevent the Taos Pueblo from flooding after they had been denuded by the fires.

"The success of this work will show up this spring, when we get the spring rains," Casaus said.

He has worked on previous fire rehabilitation projects that have been successful as demonstrated at the Penasco burn site near Mayhill, and a home that was saved because of his design work following the Lake fire.

Casaus serves 11 NRCS field offices in the northwestern quadrant of the state, providing the field staffs the engineering services they require to serve New Mexico farmers and ranchers. The major workload Casaus carries is the planning, design, and installation assurance of irrigation systems. This is a basic need for New Mexico agriculture, where irrigation is so important. His technological contributions to the agency not only include his engineering, but his efforts to bring new equipment and technology to the NRCS field offices. He participates in training staff in the use of such technology as CPA and total stations.

> *No two jobs are alike.*
>
> Frank Casaus

In addition to his engineering and technical contributions, Casaus makes social contributions through his work on the state's NRCS civil rights committee.

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