



HELPING PEOPLE  
HELP THE LAND

2011

# NRCS New Mexico Annual Report



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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](http://www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov).

### New Mexico NRCS Fiscal Year 2011 Planning/Application

- ✓ 4,219,000 acres Conservation Planning Completed
- ✓ 196,700 acres Cropland Conservation Applied
- ✓ 3,592,400 acres Conservation Applied to Improve Water Quality
- ✓ 60,900 acres of Irrigation Improvement Applied
- ✓ 4,240,000 acres of Grazing Land Conservation Applied
- ✓ 3,143,000 acres Conservation Applied to Improve Fish and Wildlife Habitat
- ✓ 43,900 acres Forest Land Conservation Applied

# 2011 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) 2011 funding provided through some important Farm Bill programs in New Mexico is shown below.

<b>FY 11 Financial Assistance Expenditures by Program by Congressional District</b>				
<b>Congressional District*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)</b>	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.			
	<b>\$565,904</b>	<b>\$10,449,544</b>	<b>\$10,631,755</b>	<b>\$21,647,203</b>
<b>Programs funded through EQIP:</b>				
<b>Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)</b>	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.			
	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$27,918</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$27,918</b>
<b>Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)</b>	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.			
	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$2,391,010</b>	<b>\$201,364</b>	<b>\$2,592,374</b>
<b>Conservation Stewardship Program (2008 Farm Bill)</b>	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.			
	<b>\$174,705</b>	<b>\$2,705,649</b>	<b>\$2,433,204</b>	<b>\$5,313,558</b>
<b>Farm &amp; Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)</b>	A voluntary program that helps landowners keep their productive land in agriculture through conservation easements limiting conversion of property to non-agricultural uses.			
		<b>\$791,000</b>		<b>\$600,000</b>
<b>Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)</b>	A voluntary program to help landowners restore and protect sensitive wetlands.			
	<b>\$120,345</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>	<b>\$113,072</b>	<b>\$920,118</b>
<b>Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)</b>	A voluntary program to help farmers and ranchers protect their grazing land from conversion to other uses.			
	<b>\$128,566</b>	<b>\$1,524,254</b>	<b>\$252,972</b>	<b>\$1,905,792</b>
<b>Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)</b>	A voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitat that support wildlife populations of national, state, tribal, and local significance.			
	<b>\$36,367</b>	<b>\$243,070</b>	<b>\$472,801</b>	<b>\$752,238</b>

# Conservation Technical Assistance



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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.

## Conservation Concepts Fit Like Hand in Glove

Watershed conservation, forest management, cooperative conservation, and inclusion of the historically underserved are all concepts that fit like a hand in a glove in the Tierra Y Montes Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in northern New Mexico. Adoption of numerous conservation practices by the owner of the Alexander Milliken Ranch is a case in point.

When Milliken purchased the ranch near Las Vegas, New Mexico, much of the forest was clogged with overgrowth, and the spread had just two wells that only pumped one gallon per minute. The ranch totally encompassed the Agua Zarca Watershed which is a tributary of the Gallinas River, and the Gallinas provided much of the water supply for the Las Vegas community.

Ranch manager Kenny Alderete, turned to the Tierra & Montes SWCD to help with forest stand improvement thinning. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) aided as water resources were developed, pipeline laid, cross fencing installed, and prescribed grazing management practices adopted. Milliken wanted to establish a cattle operation, prevent catastrophic fire, enhance wildlife habitat, and develop water resources. Forest thinning and establishing six wells that pumped hundreds of gallons of water per minute helped wildlife such as elk, turkey, deer, mountain lion, and bobcat habitat flourish.

The Milliken Ranch conservation work is only one such project in the Las Vegas area. The Adelante Resource Conservation & Development Council, based in Las Vegas, developed a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grant application to further water quality enhancement aspects of large scale work. Adelante partnered with the U.S. Forest Service, NRCS, Tierra Y Montes SWCD, New Mexico State Forestry, and private landowners in the Gallinas and Tecolote Watershed to achieve this goal.





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# Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

*Drip irrigation in the area can reduce water use 30 to 50 percent.*



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.*

## Group Partners Bring AWEPP Solution to Local Growers

For years, irrigators in the Deming, New Mexico area have been looking for ways to keep their farms productive. This was challenging as their water wells went down and irrigation, fuels, fertilizer and well maintenance costs went up. These farms are located in the Mimbres Basin, a closed system where producers rely only on groundwater.

With new partnership program opportunities made available by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), local groups are helping to deliver conservation funding and technical assistance to save water with an improved irrigation system on these farms.

In 2009, the Black Range Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and the Deming Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) submitted a request to direct federal resources to help local growers address these issues.

NRCS partnered with the Black Range RC&D and the Deming SWCD to jointly deliver conservation assistance to producers in a defined area of agricultural land through the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEPP).

NRCS agreed to provide \$24 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for irrigation system improvements on as many as 59 fields and 20 contracts over a four-year period.



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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 2011 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 2011 was a record-setting year for the program, with the most WHIP funding ever provided to improve habitat in 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 2011 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, 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.



*More than \$750,000 in  
 FY 2011 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 2011 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 101 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 495,000 acres and enrolled more than 905,792 acres of rangeland, cropland and forest lands into the program.

*New Mexico producers account for a large amount of the 2011 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 280 applications.

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 2011, NRCS funded nearly \$2.6 million in CCPI conservation contracts in New Mexico*

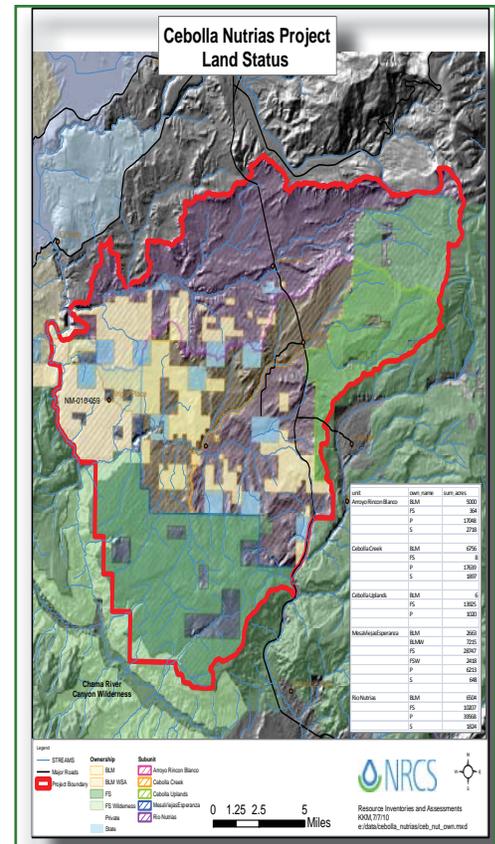
## Cebolla - Nutrias Project Benefits Through Partnerships

Private landowners, local, state, federal and non-profit organizations joined in the initiative to resolve some of the natural resource concerns in the Cebolla-Nutrias area of northern New Mexico. Cebolla- Nutrias Project coordinators Gerald Chacon and Max Martinez outlined the three primary concerns – (1) maintain the integrity of the watershed; (2) forest health; and (3) the economics of the community (rural practices to maintain agricultural integrity).

The partners participating in the 220,000-acre Cebolla-Nutrias Project include Cebolla Livestock Association, U.S. Forest Service (Canjilon Ranger District), New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, NRCS, Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Land Office, New Mexico Extension Service, and the Upper Chama Soil and Water Conservation District.

Here is a summary of what the Cebolla-Nutrias Project has accomplished or is planning:

- Applied for 319 grant
- Applying for EQIP on Mesa De Las Viejas for water development
- Corridor protection of roadway out of Canjilon through USFS
- Forest thinning – Fire protection on private land adjacent to Canjilon Corridor
- US – 84 Corridor project with USFS in planning phase (800 acres southeast of Cebolla)
- Watershed Initiative in UCSWCD EQIP proposal for 2012





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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.

## Red Hawk WRP provides Wetland Protection Into the Future

### 2nd Congressional District

In FY 2011, NRCS New Mexico closed a 274.9-acre Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement encompassing two of the state’s extremely rare “Blue Holes” -- two small surface lakes, and wetlands surrounding each. The area is adjacent to the State of New Mexico’s Blue Hole fish hatchery and provides long term protection for the wetland. This is a diverse and unique property offering a variety of wildlife benefits, the federally-listed Pecos Sunflower, the Wright’s Marsh Thistle, and the Hatchery’s water supply.

This easement, called the “Red Hawk WRP,” is a perpetual easement, and will provide wetland protection and development control into the foreseeable future and beyond. WRP includes a variety of enrollment options, including permanent easements, 30-year contracts and 10-year restoration-only contracts. All WRP easements, including this one, include a restoration component. Restoration efforts for this project are currently underway, and once completed will further enhance the wetland and wildlife benefits of the property.

Part of the same geologic wetlands complex owned by the New Mexico Sate Forestry Division, Santa Rosa’s “Blue Hole,” the Red Hawk WRP’s are larger, the various public holdings in this area offer diverse and compounding benefits, with varying degrees of access control and various public benefits.

These include the developed recreational diving benefits of the City of Santa Rosa owned Blue Hole and the more remote and limited development of the Red Hawk WRP easement.

*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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# Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) was established by Congress to respond to emergencies created by disasters. It is designed to relieve imminent hazards to life and property caused by fires, floods, windstorms and other natural occurrences. The purpose of EWP is to help groups of people with a common problem. It is generally not used as an individual assistance program. All projects must be sponsored by a government entity, such as a city, county, conservation district or Tribe. The work must reduce future threats to life and property, be economically and environmentally defensible, and sound from an engineering standpoint. NRCS pays up to 75% of the cost with the Sponsors contributing at least 25%.

## More than 30 Wildfires burn nearly 1 million acres in New Mexico, including Private, State and Tribal lands

Two of the most notable wildfires were the Raton Track Fire and the Las Conchas Fire. The Las Conchas Fire alone consumed 156,000 acres – the largest single fire in New Mexico history. The Track Fire burned three Watersheds north of Raton, including the Lake Maloya Watershed area. Lake Maloya supplies drinking water to 9,000 residents in the Raton area.

Lake Maloya was deemed an “exigency” – denoting that it was urgent and compelling to act and protect the water supply. The city of Raton and County of Colfax quickly contacted the Raton Field Office to jointly begin fulfilling the EWP agreement. NRCS swiftly assembled an EWP Assessment Team to survey the conditions and to plan the critical treatments needed. All treatments were successfully installed.

### Critical Area Land Treatments Installed:

Aerially Applied Seeding	6,872 Acres	\$309,240
Contour Tree Felling/ and Waddles	171 Acres	\$95,907
Mulching	307 Acres	\$50,000
Sediment Basin Dams	7 Total (3 by Sponsors)	\$84,000
<b>Totals:</b>		<b>\$539,147</b>



*Lake Maloya smoulders after fire*



*Sediment dam full of ash, debris*



*Contour felling trees helps make reseeding process a success*



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# Los Lunas Plant Materials Center



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



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

### “Windbreaker” big sacaton cultivar release in October 2011

In the fall of 2011, the LLPMC and the New Mexico State University Los Lunas Agricultural Center released the “Windbreaker” big sacaton cultivar. This native, warm-season, perennial bunchgrass is adapted to southwestern United States and their semi-arid temperate environments. The original source of “Windbreaker” big sacaton was selected from 37 accessions collected by NRCS field office staff in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The Windbreaker will provide:

- Wind erosion control
- Forage for livestock and wildlife
- Cover for livestock and wildlife
- Hay mulch for critical area seeding
- Ornamental in low water use plantings

### 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 were installed in 2011.

# 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 2011 to determine the best way to continue the development of ESDs.

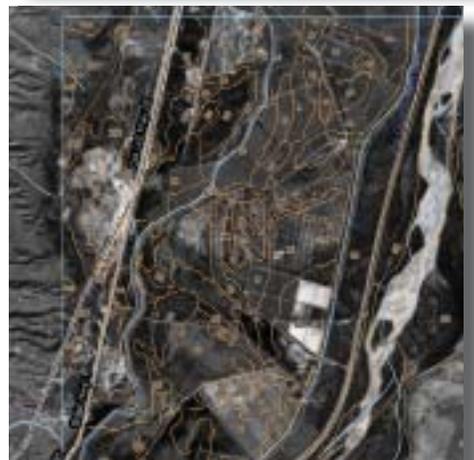
Looking across any landscape from a high vantage point, it is easy to see that some areas of the terrain vary in vegetation, geology and soil types. NRCS classifies different areas into units called Ecological Sites.

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 25 SNOTEL (snow telemetry) automated stations which report both climate and snowpack conditions.

## Snow Survey Activities

In 2011, 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.

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

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 2012.



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.