

New Mexico State Forestry Forest and Watershed Health Office



FY2009 Annual Report



**New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
Forestry Division
Forest and Watershed Health Office**

**Annual Report
FY2009**



Introduction

The following report describes the activities and accomplishments of New Mexico State Forestry's Forest and Watershed Health Office (FWHO) during the FY2009 fiscal year. The Forestry Division established the Office in 2006 to facilitate implementation of the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Plan. FWHO coordinates with other entities working toward a common goal of improved forest and watershed health, including enhanced wildlife habitat, reduced susceptibility to pathogens and wildfire, improved water quality and reduced wildfire risk to communities.

New Mexico's Forest and Watershed Health Plan provides a framework for meeting ecological, socio-cultural and economic objectives through a collaborative, landscape-scale approach. It recommends actions for transforming the way ecological restoration is accomplished in New Mexico by strengthening on-the-ground efforts, eliminating unnecessary barriers and, in the end, realizing much greater impact for the dollars invested.

The Plan breaks out recommended actions into three categories:

- I. support for local on-the-ground efforts;
- II. state-level strategic planning and coordination; and
- III. state-level management and administration.

The Forest and Watershed Health Plan can be viewed in its entirety at:

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/FD/FWHPlan/FWHPlanMain.htm>.

The FWHO works collectively with Forestry's state and district offices, the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute and other partners to accomplish the goals of the Plan. Partners include federal, tribal, state and local natural resource agencies, private landowners and land managers, forest product and restoration businesses, non-governmental organizations, and community groups.

FY2009 Work Plan

FWHO's Coordinating Group serves as an advisory body that provides direction on implementation of the action items contained in the Forest and Watershed Health Plan. A Strategic Planning Subcommittee guides and reviews FWHO's annual plan of work, which is then approved by the State Forester. Each year's work plan is built upon the accomplishments of the past year and may incorporate new initiatives brought forth by State Forestry or the Coordinating Group. The FY2009 Work Plan is published on State Forestry's website at http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/FD/forestandwatershedhealthoffice_annualreports.htm.

Projects and Accomplishments

The majority of action items undertaken in FY2009 addressed the following recommendations from the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Plan:

- I.A - Support Local Collaborative Projects
- I.E - Create Comprehensive Information Clearinghouse
- I.G & I.F - Develop Ecological Restoration and Monitoring Practices
- II.F - Mitigate Administrative Barriers
- II.I - Educate Current and Future Generations
- II.F - Mitigate Administrative Barriers
- III.A - Establish State Leadership Authority
- III.B - Establish Representative Advisory Group.

Some of the FWHO's activities addressed more than one of the prioritized recommendations. Some addressed other recommendations from the Plan as well. The accomplishments described below are listed under the most directly applicable category of action.

I. Actions in support of local on-the-ground efforts

Landscape-scale restoration requires local and regional collaborative groups to consider where their project lies within its watershed and the needs of that larger landscape. More and more funders stipulate that project proposals demonstrate the proponent's grasp on the big picture, and require collaboration between various stakeholder groups within the same region. The FWHO conducts activities that directly support local collaborative efforts.

The FWHO provides information and services to enhance the capacity of stakeholder groups engaged in restoration, and technical support for developing comprehensive plans to deal with problems on an ecosystem or landscape scale. It also coordinates with other entities that may be able to provide additional support.



- *The 2008 New Mexico Watershed Forum provided networking and practical information for stakeholder groups working on watershed issues. Over 300 participants attended the plenary session and two busloads toured projects in the field. Presentations and field trips centered around the theme of restoring watersheds from mountaintop to river bottom. The forum was co-hosted by five state agencies and funded in part by an EPA grant through NMED with additional financial support from State Forestry,*

FWRI, and Bureau of Reclamation. Members of the planning committee are seeking funds for a second gathering. More information, including proceedings of the Watershed Forum, can be viewed at <http://www.watershedforum.org/>.

A series of three follow-up meetings were held in spring and summer 2009 in response to feedback from forum participants and to maintain the momentum of the forum. The first two meetings focused on funding and other mechanisms that support and that hinder watershed groups' efforts, and considered the pros and cons of forming a statewide alliance of watershed groups. The third meeting summarized the first two and set the stage for planning a 2010 Watershed Forum with an expanded planning committee. Preliminary findings were presented to the Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group at its May 2009 meeting.

- **Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)** - Over the past two years, the FWHO managed 19 grants to produce county-wide CWPPs. With thirty New Mexico counties now having an approved CWPP in place, the FWHO is helping county and community CWPP administrators find funding and technical support to turn their plans into action. To this end, the FWHO organized a workshop to help communities obtain funds for on-the-ground projects. Our Wildland-Urban Interface Specialist is developing a Living With Wildfire public education program in concert with multiple parties from Northern New Mexico and developing a WUI Assessment program for communities.
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- **Direct Technical Assistance** - FWHO staff, working closely with our District Offices and often with other agencies' field staff, provided technical assistance to community groups and non-governmental organizations. In FY09, assistance included implementing WUI cost-share programs in Cuba with the Cuba SWCD, assisting the Cimarron Watershed Alliance with baseline monitoring for the Ponil Creek 319 project, designing project proposals with the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance, and working with a variety of watershed groups to identify funding and other resources to implement and evaluate on-the-ground projects and outreach/education activities. With all FWHO efforts, capacity-building is integrated into these activities.

II. State-level strategic planning and coordination – The FWHO initiates and coordinates state-level actions that will result in changes that allow restoration work to be done more easily, more effectively, and more efficiently. Those actions include developing tools, resources and partnerships, and finding ways to address needed policy challenges. Many of these actions are done through specialized task teams established by the multi-entity Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group.

- **The Government Impediments Task Team** was formed to critically evaluate and mitigate institutional impediments to getting work done on the ground in a way that restores watershed health while protecting all natural and cultural resources. It addresses both project-specific bottlenecks and broad institutional barriers to conducting restoration activities in New Mexico. Small working groups tackle problems brought before the Coordinating Group and identified by its members as high priority.

For example, project managers in agencies, communities, and NGOs asked for clear, concise information about the NEPA processes their federal partners must follow. A Task Team subcommittee organized a training for this purpose in October 2008. Discussions about ways to chart a more efficient path through the environmental review process are continuing at the Coordinating Group level. The ultimate goal is enabling inter-jurisdictional projects to move from conception to completion in a more effective manner and a shorter period of time.

- **The Public Outreach and Education Task Team** helped design a wide-ranging outreach and education program. FWHO obtained a grant for the Know Your Watershed Campaign, designed to promote better understanding of watershed health and elicit support for conservation and restoration efforts. Current projects include:



- ▶ Collaborating with NMDOT and the Santa Fe Watershed Association to install watershed highway signs that mark major watershed boundaries around the state
- ▶ Assisting the State Forestry Capitan District with an exhibit on Southeastern NM watersheds at Smokey Bear Historical Park
- ▶ Building a traveling watershed display for public events.

- **Youth Education** - Teaching our up-and-coming citizens is one of the most effective ways to change the future. FWHO staff are leaders in New Mexico Envirothon, a hands-on environmental problem-solving competition for high school-aged students in the US and Canada. Participating teams complete training and testing in forestry, soils and land use, aquatic ecology, wildlife, and current environmental issues. FWHO also assists FFA chapters with training teachers and students in forestry, and participate in regional water fairs.



- **NMSF-NRCS Partnership** - Forestry is forging a strong partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in New Mexico. The Division and NRCS have a Cooperative Agreement to enhance delivery of high-quality technical assistance and cost-share funds to private forest landowners in the state. Through this program, the agencies are working together to update the standards and specifications for forestry practices installed through Farm Bill programs. That is being followed up with cross-trainings on both the technical and administrative aspects of those programs. The partnership has led to a greater emphasis on conservation of forested lands at the local and state levels. Due to its success, the agencies are extending and expanding the arrangement.
- **State Agency Partnerships** – While the Division has always partnered with other state agencies on specific projects, FWHO’s focus on inter-jurisdictional cooperation has fostered new ties and strengthened existing partnerships. This past year those included cross-training on the Game and Fish Department’s Comprehensive Wildlife and Conservation Strategy, assisting NMED’s Outstanding National Resource Waters Workgroup, participation in the NM Drought Task Force, serving on grant review panels, and involvement in state level efforts to streamline contracting for cultural resource services.

- **Comprehensive Information Clearinghouse** - FWHO and the NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute are collaborating on building a clearinghouse for forest and watershed health topics in the Southwest. A web-based portal, the “virtual” heart of the clearinghouse, features a library, newsfeeds, calendar of events, and shared group workspace. The portal is accessible while being developed live at <http://www.allaboutwatersheds.org/>



- **Interagency representation** - FWHO staff serve as EMNRD forestry liaisons to commissions and interagency committees that deal with ecosystem restoration policy and special initiatives, and that review grant programs and proposals. In FY2009, staff participated on the Drought Task Force, State Technical Committee, FWRI Advisory Council, Western Forestry Consortium, and Outstanding National Resource Waters Working Group; presented to the Governor’s Water Cabinet, and provided support to the NM Fire Planning Task Force.

III. State-level management and administration

The authors of the Forest and Watershed Health Plan recommended establishing a “state leadership authority” with personnel devoted to the task of facilitating implementation of the Plan. The Forest and Watershed Health Office, based in Albuquerque, was organized to fulfill that charge.

The Plan also calls for a representative advisory group to advise and provide direction on the Plan’s implementation, and to ensure coordination of and outreach to stakeholders. The Forest and Watershed health Coordinating Group fulfills those functions. In addition, the FWHO keeps regular contact and coordinates many of its activities with the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, one of three such institutes formed to ensure that the best available science is used to implement effective restoration-based forest treatments in the Southwest.

- **Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group** - FWHO hosts quarterly meetings of its multi-entity Coordinating Group. Members identify issues in need of attention and propose solutions. The group then establishes task teams that tackle specific problems or produce desired products. These Task Teams may function as standing committees for ongoing efforts or may be ad-hoc working groups, existing only until a particular job is done. The Coordinating Group’s membership includes representatives from seventeen agencies and organizations.
- **Forest and Watershed Health Office** - FWHO builds internal capacity within its own office and through coordination with other Forestry units and sister agencies through trainings, grants, and resource sharing.



Forest and Watershed Health Coordinating Group Representation

Bureau of Indian Affairs
Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Reclamation
Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department, Forestry Division
Natural Resources Conservation Service
New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts
New Mexico Department of Agriculture
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
New Mexico Environment Department
New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute
New Mexico State University
Public Sector
State Land Office
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Forest Service