

Alexander gets Restore New Mexico award

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RENO, Nev. — Dennis Alexander, State Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in New Mexico, was presented the Restore New Mexico Award today in recognition of the agency's participation and financial support of landscape-scale restoration efforts across the state.

Jesse Juen, Associate State Director for the BLM in New Mexico, presented the award at the annual meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts in Reno, Nev. on behalf of all New Mexico partners involved in the program.

The NRCS has provided over \$4 million in Environmental Quality Incentives Program grants to over 100 landowners with federal grazing allotments to restore degraded rangelands in New Mexico. The BLM, landowners and other partners have been able to match or exceed these funds, greatly enlarging the size and scope of the restoration projects.

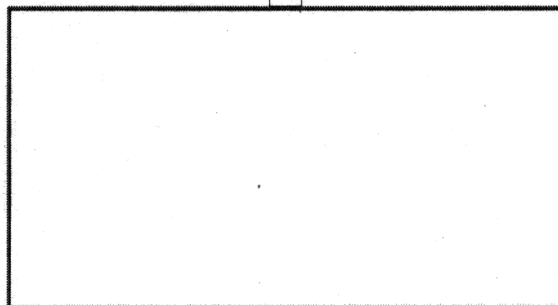
"The NRCS has been a major foundation for this effort," said Juen. Restore New Mexico partners have restored 500,000 acres of degraded landscapes in New

Mexico over the past three years, and with their continued support we look forward to restoring another 250,000 acres this year."

What started out as a concept to restore and enhance landscapes three years ago has blossomed into Restore New Mexico, Juen added, an effort

involving the BLM, NRCS, other agencies, ranchers and other landowners, conservation organizations and the energy industry.

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Habitat fragmentation, erosion and the spread of invasive plants have resulted from decades of human impacts and natural ecological processes.

Because fire has largely been excluded from the landscape, there's been a dramatic shift over the past 150 years from desert grasslands with scattered shrubs to vegetative communities extensively dominated by invasive shrubs this has occurred on more than 6 million acres in New Mexico. The result has been reduced grass and herbaceous cover and a significant increase in the amount of bare ground, severely reducing their biological productivity, while increasing their susceptibility to erosion and reducing the quantity and quality of groundwater.

Restore New Mexico efforts are focusing on

landscapes dominated by mesquite, creosote, juniper and other invasive species to restore native vegetation, which also benefits watersheds and wildlife habitat. The goal of brush treatments is to reduce their incidence in rangelands to historic levels in many areas, the percentage of brush in a landscape has increased from 10 to 90 percent or more over the past 150 years.

Restore New Mexico partners include ranchers and other landowners, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, New Mexico State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, several Soil and Water Conservation Districts, New Mexico State University, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.