

**SOUTH CENTRAL MOUNTAIN
RESOURCE CONSERVATION
AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.**

NEW MEXICO

AREA PLAN

Prepared by the South Central Mountain RC&D Council

Assisted by Cooperating Local, State and Federal Agencies

Prepared Under Authority of the Agriculture and Food
Act of 1981, Public Law 97-98, 16 U.S.C. 3451-3461
as amended by Public Law 101-6254, section 1452, as amended by Public
Law 107-171

For the five year Period

01 October, 2008 -- 01 October 2013

(2009 REVISION)

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Introduction

This is the long-range plan for the South Central Mountain Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, Inc. It was developed by soliciting public input through a survey of citizens in the Lincoln and Otero county area served by the South Central Mountain RC&D. In addition to the survey results, local Council members were provided guidance on the development of this plan. The counties served by this Area Plan include Lincoln and Otero counties in south central New Mexico.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a strategic direction for the organization. The organization is stronger than ever before, yet more efforts are needed to ensure a strong sustainable organization that serves the communities in our area.

Congress passed the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, which authorized Resource Conservation and Development areas. The purpose of the act was to expand opportunities for conservation districts, local units of governments, and individuals to improve their communities in multi-county areas. This included assistance in enhancing the economic, environmental and social well being of the RC&D areas. Currently, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the Federal RC&D Program. This serves as an agreement among NRCS and the South Central Mountain Resource Conservation and Development Council Inc (Council).

Organization Overview

SOUTH CENTRAL MOUNTAIN RC&D VISION

The vision statement for the organization, as revised in 2009 is: A council that is financially stable and is comprised of motivated volunteers who provide leadership to the Council and their communities to enhance the quality of life for current and future generations through the development of human, natural and economic resources.

SOUTH CENTRAL MOUNTAIN RC&D MISSION

The mission statement for the organization, as revised in 2009 is: A non-profit organization that utilizes the resourcefulness and skills of its members to improve the natural resources, educational opportunities and socio-economics of our citizens and communities.

Background and Structure of the Council

In February, 1968, Howard Harkey reported to the RC&D Steering Committee the following: “During the past five months, the South Central Mountain RC&D District has come into existence. What was just an idea in the minds of the supervisors of the three Soil and Water Conservation Districts (Carrizozo, Otero and Upper Hondo) is now a reality.”

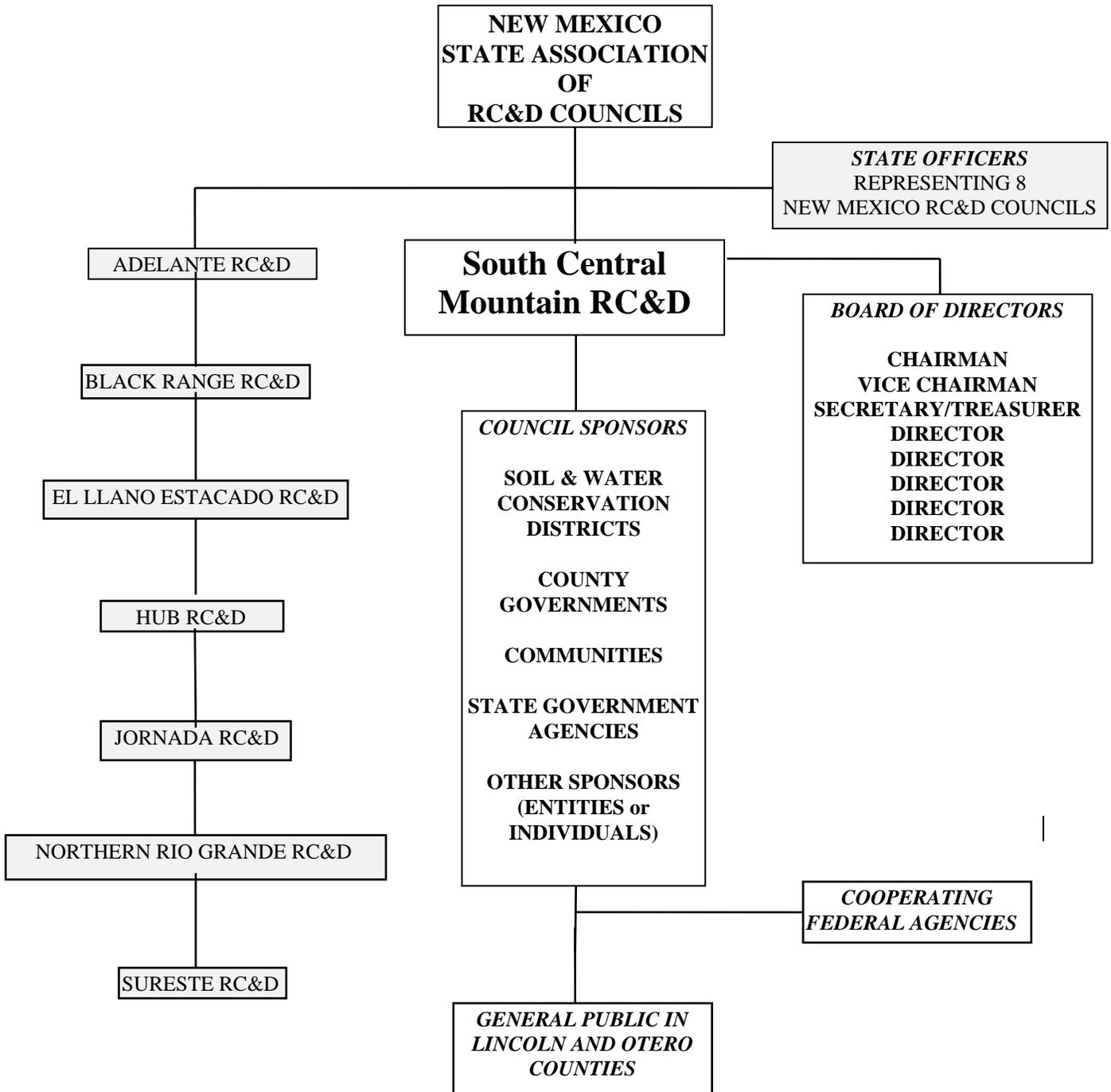
The South Central Mountain RC&D was formed on September 21, 1967 and officially authorized on January 8, 1976. The office was established in Carrizozo, New Mexico and a “Project Conservationist”, Howard (Harve) Abercrombie, was assigned in June, 1970. Sue Ann Stearns was hired to work as “clerk” on a very limited basis in December, 1970.

The South Central Mountain RC&D Council has received recognition by the State of New Mexico as a nonprofit corporation and has been granted federal tax exempt status (501(c)(3)) by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). A 501(c)(3) status represents official designation from the IRS that South Central Mountain operates for charitable and educational purposes. South Central Mountain can receive, hold, distribute and solicit funds for project purposes. Under the 501(c)(3) designation, any monies donated to South Central Mountain are tax deductible.

The South Central Mountain RC&D is led by a local eight member, all volunteer Board of Directors which represents sponsors consisting of soil and water conservation districts (SWCD's), towns, counties, other units of government, business leaders and individuals. They team up with other agencies and groups to adopt a project proposal, procure funding for it, and carry it through to completion to solve local problems and satisfy local needs as a team effort through partnerships. The area covered by the South Central Mountain RC&D today is as it was in the late 1960's, including Lincoln and Otero Counties. Sponsoring organizations pay nominal annual dues for membership and voting privileges. Project proposal initiation must be presented by a sponsoring organization, which then presents it at a regular scheduled Council meeting. In this way, the South Central Mountain RC&D addresses local needs by uniting local community developers, various units of government, and grassroots organizations to collaborate on projects to attain sustainability and wise use of our local water, land, community and environmental resources.

Election of the Board of Directors officers occurs every two years, on even numbered years. The Board of Directors meets every month to conduct business and evaluate progress. The full council meets three (3) times a year including the Annual Meeting.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Overview of the Area

The South Central Mountain RC&D Area is located in the south-central part of New Mexico, and includes Lincoln County and Otero County. The combined acreage of both counties is 7.3 million acres.

The Area is characterized by a central chain of mountains extending to the New Mexico – Texas state line on the south; the Tularosa Basin to the west and Hondo, Bonito and Ruidoso Rivers Basins to the east. The area includes the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation, and portions of the US Forest Service-Lincoln National Forest and White Sands Missile Range.

The landscape varies from rugged canyons and high mountain meadows to gently sloping alluvial fans, irrigated valleys and southern desert grasslands. Elevations range from approximately 3,200 feet above sea level to over 12,000 feet near Sierra Blanca Peak. Probably no other area in New Mexico has such a wide variation in soils, vegetation and climate in such close proximity to each other as does this RC&D.

Approximately three-fourths of the Area drains into the Pecos River Basin while the western one-fourth drains into the Tularosa Basin, which is a closed basin. The Sacramento, Jicarilla and Capitan Mountains occupy the forest landscape while the majority of the remaining area is semi-desert rangeland and irrigated valleys. The principal rivers are the Tularosa, Hondo, Bonito, Ruidoso, Penasco and Sacramento.

The climate of the area is varied due to elevation differences but generally quite desirable. The weather is a major factor in the recent surge of population growth, attracting an increasing number of retirees and tourists. The relative humidity is low, sunshine is abundant and winters are generally moderate. The snow pack formed over the Sacramento Mountains provides the major water supply for irrigation, recreation and municipal purposes. Precipitation varies with elevation, ranging from approximately 9 inches to 28 inches per year. Over 50% of the annual precipitation occurs during July, August and September.

The two major population centers are Alamogordo (county seat of Otero County) in the Tularosa Basin of Otero County and Ruidoso – Ruidoso Downs in Lincoln County. Alamogordo is a major retail center and its economy is dependent on the military presence of Holloman Air Force Base and White Sands Missile Range. Cloudcroft, Ruidoso, Capitan and Lincoln are situated in or near the mountains and depend on tourism, recreation, hunting and winter sports for their economic base. Other communities in the area include Corona, Carrizozo (which is the county seat of Lincoln County) and Tularosa. The remaining area is rural consisting of large cattle ranching enterprises.

Demographics

The total population within the South Central Mountain RC&D Area in 2000 was 81,709. Lincoln County had a population of 19,411 and Otero County had a population of 62,298.

The RC&D Area has only one community with a population in excess of 10,000, which is Alamogordo with a population of 35,582. Two communities had populations above 2,500, including Ruidoso with a population of 7,698 and Tularosa with a population of 2,864. Three communities had populations between 1,000 and 2,500, including Ruidoso Downs with a population of 1,824, Capitan having 1,443 residents and Carrizozo with a

population of 1,036. Two communities had populations of less than 1,000, including Cloudcroft and Corona.

The largest ethnic group in the South Central Mountain RC&D area is Hispanic. Based on 2000 census figures, 30.6 percent of the population is Hispanic. Otero County has the highest Hispanic population at 32.2 percent and Lincoln County has 25.6 percent.

Natural Resources

A summary of the regions' Land Use is as follows: (NRI 1997 data)

County By Acres	Total Acreage	Federal Land	Non-Federal Lands	Cropland
Lincoln	3,110,300	1,103,500	1,704,937	6,300
Otero	4,248,300	2,688,600	1,559,694	19,300

County By Acres	Pastureland	Rangeland	Forestland	Urban/Build-Up
Lincoln	2,500	1,901,300	75,200	3,800
Otero	400	942,900	406,700	19,800

Agriculture

The major land uses within the South Central Mountain RC&D Area are livestock grazing, crop production and forest products.

Livestock grazing is the primary land use as approximately 45 percent of the area is either rangeland or graze able woodland. Food and fiber production, accomplished through the grazing of domestic livestock, is the most universally viable use of native rangeland. Good grazing management is essential to maintain or improve the resource, control erosion, improve habitat for wildlife, maintain natural beauty and promote healthy watershed practices. Encroaching brush species are a problem in many areas and are a major management challenge.

Traditional farming is carried on in the Tularosa area and alfalfa is the major crop. Pecans and pistachios are also important cash crops. Farming in the mountain valleys of the Hondo, Bonito and Penasco areas is diminishing and is giving way to horse farms, subdivisions and home sites. Continued improvement to surface irrigation systems and the potential for installation of subsurface micro-irrigation systems is needed within the area to improve irrigation water application efficiency. Technical assistance to assist farmers in learning the proper amount of water to apply in relation to crop growth and moisture content of soil is needed. There is a need for technology transfer of all irrigation methods, especially subsurface drip systems and systems using open ditches for water delivery and application to level fields.

Forest Products – One major sawmill is operated by the Mescalero Apache Tribe. The mill is located at Mescalero, New Mexico. Another mill is located in Alamogordo but is presently closed. Several smaller mills still operate, at least on a part-time basis, in the Sacramento Mountains. A combined timber harvest of approximately 14 million board feet is taken from the forested areas.

Resource Needs and Opportunities

The South Central Mountain RC&D Area is known for its natural beauty, historical significance and tourism. However, several problems exist that need to be addressed. These natural resource concerns and problems include:

Land Conservation – The forests in the area are choked with thick stands of small diameter timber of little economic value. This condition leads to the constant threat of wildfire, reduced water quantity and poor overall watershed health.

Water Management –The watersheds, and the upper reaches of the Sacramento Mountains in particular, are in poor functional condition as a result of overstocked native vegetation. Within the Tularosa Basin, fresh water supplies are very limited. Old septic systems are causing pollution of groundwater alongside of the river systems, in particular the Rio Hondo and its tributaries and Tularosa Creek. Irrigation systems are inadequate and extremely inefficient.

Land Management – The propensity for private landowners to subdivide acreage is unprecedented during the past ten years. Small returns on livestock investments, as well as continued drought, have created this recent upsurge in development of grazing lands.

Public Participation Activities

A survey was conducted using an Area Plan Questionnaire to gather public input into the issues, ideas and/or projects that the South Central Mountain RC&D Council should be focusing on. The survey results indicate the following areas of natural resource conservation concerns were rated highest by the participants:

Water Management – Promote watershed restoration;

Land Conservation - Promote thinning within Wildland Urban Interface;

Land Management - Protect habitat for fish and wildlife;

Community Development – Promote forest product business development.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal 1. Provide annual opportunities for private and public land managers to reduce the hazards of catastrophic wildfire and improve forest ecosystems in Lincoln and Otero counties over the five year period. (Statutory Element: Land Conservation and Water Management)

Objective 1:

Improve one community's wildfire protection and one watershed's condition in the Hondo Basin, Rio Penasco, Sacramento, and Tularosa drainage areas each year through partnerships and fuels management with sponsors, cooperating agencies, private landowners and businesses.

Strategy 1:

Complete a minimum of 100 acres of fuels reduction each year within the Wildland Urban Interface areas, as grant funding permits, to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire in communities and surrounding areas. The Community Wildfire Protection Plans in Lincoln and Otero Counties will be basis of priorities.

Strategy 2:

Complete a minimum of 100 acres of brush/forest thinning each year within Lincoln and Otero Counties, as grant funding permits, to: increase forest and watershed health; promote proper ecosystem function; and to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Strategy 3:

Provide technical assistance on a quarterly basis to the Lincoln County Planning Committee, as requested, for Subdivision Development as it relates to erosion, soil conservation, and water conservation.

Goal 2. Assist five water associations in Lincoln and Otero counties to improve the sustainable management of the water resources in the Hondo Basin and the Lower Sacramento Mountains by 2013. (Statutory Element: Water Management)

Objective 1:

Maintain a continuous partnership with the Conservation Districts, Pecos Valley Water Users Association and Upper Hondo Water Users Association to promote the wise use of surface and ground water.

Strategy 1:

Provide surface and ground water data through mapping, measurement, and data collection for the update of the Tularosa/Salt Basin Regional Water Plan and the Lower Pecos Regional Water Plan by the year 2010.

Strategy 2:

Assist three acequias per year in the Hondo Basin to develop bylaws, plans of action, and timeframes to obtain grant funding to accomplish upgrades of acequia infrastructure for a total of fifteen acequias assisted through 2013.

Strategy 3:

Assist in securing expertise for survey, design, and implementation of one acequia infrastructure upgrade projects through NRCS assistance or by contracting professional services each year.

Strategy 4:

Facilitate public awareness of the Sacramento Mountain Hydrogeology Study in the Lincoln County area with New Mexico Bureau of Geology, Otero Soil and Water Conservation District and United States Geological Survey by conducting one awareness event per year.

Goal 3: Develop and promote annual public awareness, education, and local business development projects that relate to natural resources, renewable energy and conservation within Lincoln and Otero counties by 2013. (Statutory Element: Community Development)

Objective 1:

Conduct annual informational seminars to instruct and inform contractors on forest related businesses and job opportunities.

Strategy 1:

Develop two new business opportunities or business expansions through collaboration with Small Business Development Centers involving renewable thermal or electric energy by 2013.

Strategy 2:

Assist US Forest Service, Mescalero Apache Tribe, NM State Forestry and the Village of Ruidoso Forestry Department to conduct a forest products seminar or contractor capability / capacity enhancement seminar every other year.

Objective 2:

Develop or enhance three collaborative partnerships with agencies or entities that create initiatives or demonstration projects related to renewable energy by 2013.

Strategy 1:

Complete three initiatives or projects by 2013 that demonstrates renewable energy utilizing solar, wind, or biomass for electric or thermal power generation.

Objective 3:

Develop or enhance three collaborative partnerships with agencies or entities that create initiatives or demonstration projects related to ecological best management practices or recreational activities by 2013.

Strategy 1:

Complete one project per year that creates or enhances the public's understanding of natural resources through recreation and interpretive learning.

Strategy 2:

Complete two projects that create or enhance the public's understanding of natural resources through educational or historical awareness activities by 2013.

Strategy 3:

Complete one project per year that creates or enhances the public's understanding of natural resources through ecosystem restoration or best management practices.

Objective 4:

Participate in three annual public awareness and educational events related to natural resources conservation and /or renewable energy.

Strategy 1:

Develop, organize and staff an informational booth at the Mountain Living Home and Garden Show in March of each year in Ruidoso, NM.

Strategy 2:

Maintain a booth at the Otero County Fair and the Lincoln County Fair in August of each year to distribute information.

Strategy 3:

Participate in one additional USDA or other public awareness event relating to natural resources each year.

South Central Mountain Sponsors and Partners

There are currently 29 sponsoring organizations on the South Central Mountain RC&D Council that direct activities within the South Central Mountain Area. Other regional and state agencies participate as well as several federal agencies.

Soil & Water Conservation Districts:

Carrizozo SWCD
Chaves SWCD
Claunch Pinto SWCD
Otero SWCD
Upper Hondo SWCD

County Governments:

Lincoln County
Otero County

Communities:

City of Alamogordo
City of Ruidoso Downs
Village of Capitan
Village of Carrizozo
Village of Cloudcroft
Village of Corona
Village of Ruidoso
Village of Tularosa

State Government:

NM Department of Agriculture
NM EMNRD- Forestry Division
NM Environmental Department
NM Highway and Transportation Department
NM Office of the State Engineer
NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
Lincoln State Monument

Other Sponsors:

Carrizozo Woman's Club
Friends of Smokey
Rails to Trails Association
Timberon Development Council
Cloudcroft Future Farmers of America
Billy the Kid Byways
Small Business Development Center - Roswell

Cooperating Federal Agencies:

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDA-Forest Service
USDI-Bureau of Land Management
Holloman Air Force Base

Policies

The Area Plan and the Plan of Work will guide all activities of the South Central Mountain RC&D Council and staff. Revisions to the Area Plan and Plan of Work will be made as necessary in order to meet the needs within the South Central Mountain Area. The Council will partner with any other entity to facilitate the implementation of the Area Plan and the Plan of work.

The South Central Mountain RC&D Council will charge a ten percent (10%) administrative fee for any and all grant monies that are acquired through the use of its non-profit IRS 501.(c)(3) status. The Council may take into consideration the size of the grant and the purpose of the grant and make adjustments to the fee accordingly. These moneys will be placed in the “grant administration fee” account and may be used to supplement the general operating fund and used for day to day operations as well as to create community grant funds for small projects as determined by Council. Eligibility for the use of the Council’s 501.(c)(3) status shall be limited to projects that are sponsored by any one of South Central Mountain’s RC&D Council members.

Outreach

The South Central Mountain RC&D Area will promote outreach that will ensure that percentages of the general population (ethnicity and gender) are reflected in Council membership. Council members will at least annually inform and stress to the entity that they represent the importance of female and minority representation on the South Central Mountain RC&D’s Council.

Agreements

“The South Central Mountain RC&D Council’s program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (P. L. 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A & B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial (or technical) assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.”

The South Central Mountain RC&D Council Inc. agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with Federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for procurement, suspension, and disbarment.

The South Central Mountain RC&D Council agrees that in accordance with its tax-exempt status, no member of the South Central Mountain RC&D Council may benefit from the South Central Mountain Council.

South Central Mountain RC&D Council, Inc., New Mexico

By: _____ Date: _____
Chairman

Attest: _____
Secretary

This action authorized at an official meeting of the South Central Mountain RC&D Council, Inc. on 10/29/2009.

U. S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service

Reviewed by: _____
Area Conservationist

Date: _____

The State Conservationist hereby acknowledges the attached Area Plan of the South Central Mountain RC&D Council, Inc. as meeting the requirements under Public Law 97-98 to receive assistance from USDA.

Acknowledged By: _____ Date: _____
State Conservationist

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communications of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at (202)720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C., 20250-9410, or call (202)720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

SUMMARY

The Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 provided the start of the USDA Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. Changes to the program occurred with the passage of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981. This act was Public Law 97-98 16 USC, 3451 – 3461 as amended by Public Law 101-624, Section 1452. Public Law 104-127, the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, Section 383 reauthorized the program through 2002. Public Law 107-171, Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Sections 1528-1537 permanently authorized the program.

RC&D is a unique program that is led by local volunteer councils who help people care for and protect their natural resources in a way that improves the local economy, environment and living standards. The program provides a way for people to work together in partnership to plan and carry out activities that will make their communities a better place in which to live. Guiding principles of the South Central Mountain RC&D are to create a general awareness of and appreciation for the issues facing rural and urban New Mexico; achieve harmony with diverse cultures, opinions and competing views to display the value of working together to solve problems; secure a stable financial source

of funding to support statewide projects and local councils; and to develop state and local leadership to set and carry out RC&D goals and objectives for our Council.

The South Central Mountain RC&D Council operates a grassroots, non-profit charitable organization with IRS 501(c)(3) designation in order to receive grant income through private, corporate and/or local foundations and organizations. It is led by a local eight member, all volunteer Board of Directors who represent sponsors consisting of soil and water conservation districts, towns, counties, businesses, individuals and community development and civic entities. They team up with other agencies and groups to adopt a project proposal, procure funding, and carry through to completion to solve local problems and satisfy local needs through collaborative efforts.

The area covered by the South Central Mountain RC&D is Lincoln and Otero Counties. Sponsoring organizations pay nominal annual dues for membership and voting privileges. Project proposal initiation must be presented by a sponsoring organization, who then presents it at a regularly scheduled Council meeting. In this way, the South Central Mountain RC&D addresses local needs by uniting local community developers, various units of government and grassroots organizations to collaborate on projects to attain sustainability and wise use of our local water, land, community and environmental resources.

Twenty nine sponsoring organizations make up the South Central Mountain RC&D Council. Current areas of concern include natural resource management, land conversion and rural economic development. What can the South Central Mountain RC&D Council do, you ask? The Council can direct individuals to conservation agencies to solve water quality and quantity concerns, erosion problems and forest and watershed health concerns. The Council can seek funding to provide for community facilities and tourist attractions and promote various industries. The key to the success of the South Central Mountain RC&D Council is the teamwork and creative ideas of people from a variety of backgrounds and professions. How can you participate in the South Central Mountain RC&D? Participation is voluntary. Anyone who has a concern for the natural resources found in Lincoln and Otero Counties, community development, economic improvement, or other local issues of concern can contact our office for assistance.

This plan will serve the South Central Mountain RC&D Council, Inc. for a five year period. It serves as a working agreement between the South Central Mountain RC&D Council and the Secretary of Agriculture for program delivery. The efforts of other USDA agencies will be solicited and used to complete this plan. Numerous state agencies are official sponsors for the South Central Mountain RC&D Council, Inc. and will have substantial roles in the application of the plan. The South Central Mountain RC&D Council members will use the National Resource Conservation and Development Manual for program authority and guidance.