

Adelante – Capulin/Walker Flats NEPA Planning Project

In 2015 Adelante RC&D was approached by personnel in the US Forest Service Pecos/Las Vegas Ranger District and asked if the Council would be willing to undertake a project to NEPA clear approximately 5,000 acres on Forest Service land in Mora County NM. The Council was informed that there were no public lands in Mora County available for firewood collection or small diameter wood products nor could treatments occur on these heavily forested areas. Apparently previous clearances had expired and the local public had to travel to San Miguel, Colfax or Taos Counties for their wood products, particularly firewood.

Adelante agreed to the request and assembled a group of collaborators including USDA Forest Service, Western Mora SWCD, EMNRD New Mexico State Forestry, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute. This group of collaborators identified approximately 76,955 acres (12 code sub watersheds) within the larger Mora Watershed inclusive of private, state and federal lands that were evaluated with respect to acres to undergo the NEPA process and lands in proximity to those acres. The group of collaborators identified approximately 21,628 acres of Forest Service Land that would undergo a landscape assessment and then the most appropriate 5,100 acres within those 21,628 acres would undergo a NEPA assessment to authorize strategic treatments.

In 2016 Adelante applied for and was awarded a USFS Collaborative Forest Restoration Program grant in the amount of \$360,000 with a matching in-kind of \$90,000 by Adelante and its' collaborators. Several contractors were hired to conduct various NEPA analyses inclusive of Environmental Assessment (EA), Threatened and Endangered Species surveys, Heritage (archaeology) surveys, timber stand surveys and hydrology/soils (watershed) assessment. Additionally, as part of the grant requirements Adelante held six outdoor classrooms with High School Students from Mora, Wagon Mound and Robertson High Schools as well as a land owner forest management workshop.

Based on the landscape assessment, two areas of Forest Service land were selected to undergo the NEPA assessment, the Capulin area containing approximately 4,260 acres and the Walker Flats area containing approximately 830 acres.

At the time of this writing all field work and reports are completed with the exception of the wildlife section which we are waiting approval on from the District Biologist. The end of the project and the grant is scheduled for Sept. 2020. The Forest Service has already committed funding for treatment projects in the soon to be NEPA cleared areas.

Although the project had a few glitches along the way, the final objective was realized with a completed assessment of 21,628 acres on Forest Service land and the necessary environmental clearances on 5,100 acres in the Mora River Watershed. The Adelante Council is happy to have been able to assist the residents of Mora County.