



# NEWS RELEASE

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### **BLM Director Kathleen Clarke Launches Cooperative Conservation Initiative in New Mexico - Desert Bighorn Sheep to Benefit in Peloncillos -**

Las Cruces – BLM Director Kathleen Clarke has awarded over \$546,000 in federal grants to partners working with BLM to improve wildlife habitat throughout New Mexico. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish Department is a partner in three of eight projects with BLM, including a project to benefit desert bighorn sheep west of Las Cruces.

“I’m delighted to visit this beautiful State to distribute grants that help wildlife, especially for such a magnificent animal as the desert bighorn sheep,” Clarke said.

The Las Cruces Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish will construct two water catchments in the Peloncillo Mountains this year, thanks to a Cooperative Conservation Initiative (CCI) grant to provide additional water for one of the last remaining herds of indigenous desert bighorn sheep in New Mexico.

“BLM has participated in efforts to improve desert bighorn habitat for many years,” said Ed Roberson, manager of the BLM’s Las Cruces Field Office, “and we’re extremely grateful for the financial support of future efforts from the Cooperative Conservation Initiative.”

The major funding partner for previous projects has been the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, through its Habitat Stamp Program. Members of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, local sportsmen groups and individuals have volunteered labor in this effort.

President Bush proposed cooperative conservation challenge cost-share grants last year as a tool for federal land managers to use in creating or enhancing cooperative conservation projects. Last week, Interior Secretary Gale Norton announced \$873,000 in challenge cost-share grants to support 10 conservation projects in New Mexico, eight of which involve the BLM.



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The grants are part of \$21 million in challenge cost-share grants under the CCI to complete 377 conservation projects nationwide in conjunction with states, local communities, businesses, landowners, and other partners. The projects involve more than 1,100 partners in 43 states and will conserve, restore or enhance more than 565,000 acres. Overall funding for the projects totals more than \$52 million including the matching contributions of partners.

The Las Cruces Field Office currently maintains 20 rainwater catchment units in desert bighorn sheep ranges of the New Mexico Bootheel region. The units have been installed over the years since the late 1960s, some by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish and some by the Bureau of Land Management. Since 1996, the Las Cruces Field Office has been aggressively replacing non-functioning or inadequate water units in desert bighorn habitat.

The availability of CCI funds ensures the continuation of this effort. In 2004 two water units in the Peloncillo Mountains are being replaced. The funds are being used to purchase materials and pay for helicopter flight time needed to transport the materials into the rugged terrain. Each unit will consist of a 12- by 24-foot catchment apron and two 1,800-gallon storage tanks.

The project will result in water being available to desert bighorn sheep where natural sources are no longer available. Populations of desert bighorn rarely use free water, but in drought periods water becomes a limiting factor. Water units that leak or are of insufficient capacity do not provide for sheep when availability of free water is critical. Desert bighorn are left lacking water when they need it and do not have the option of moving to other areas.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: See attached fact sheet and map for details on other BLM-CCI projects in New Mexico.

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