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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 02/06/12

SPONSOR Griego, P. LAST UPDATED _____ HB _____

SHORT TITLE NM Highlands Watershed Restoration SB 251

ANALYST Hartzler-Toon

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
FY12	FY13		
	\$100.0	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

Duplicates Appropriation in the General Appropriation Act, Section 4, J Higher Education, New Mexico Highlands University

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU)

Higher Education Department (HED)

Energy, Minerals, Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 251 appropriates \$100 thousand from the general fund to NMHU to provide outreach services and technical assistance for watershed restoration on forest and landscape levels not available elsewhere in the state. The New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute (NMFWR) at NMHU will administer the appropriation.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$100 thousand contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2013 shall revert to the general fund.

The NMFWR has been annually reviewed by the HED as one of NMHU's special projects. The program has received an annual appropriation from the general fund since fiscal year 2007, and received \$209.3 thousand for fiscal year 2012. The program requested an increase of \$100

thousand, or 50 percent, in general fund support for fiscal year 2013, though the HED did not support this increase. The Executive and Legislative Finance Committee recommended flat funding for fiscal year 2013.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Southwest Forest Health and Wildfire Prevention Act (P.L. 108-317) established a program of applied research and service via three university-based restoration institutes. As summarized in the program's 2010 report, like the Colorado and Arizona institutes, the NMFWRI's primary purpose is "to develop, translate, and provide the best available science to land managers, practitioners, and stakeholders designing and implementing forest restoration and hazardous fuel reduction treatments." The New Mexico institute accomplishes this purpose by working with state agencies, tribal and pueblo governments, local governments, and other community leaders to develop and implement science-based approaches to reduce the risk of severe wildfires and improve the health of forest lands and watersheds throughout the state. The 2010 report concluded that, based on performance in the first 5 years, the institutes should continue to receive federal and other funding because these state institutes have a distinct purpose, unlike other agencies or organizations, to coordinate and perform forest restoration efforts.

The NMFWRI has worked to assist and staff the Estancia Basin Project, the Greater Rio Grande Watershed Alliance, and the Gallinas Partnership. With additional resources, the NMFWRI seeks to expand its collaborative efforts and develop restoration-based economies, helping communities implement and manage hazardous fuels reduction and other watershed and forest health activities. Since the 2011 wildfire season was particularly harmful, affecting nearly 1 million acres, and drought conditions persist, local communities are placing a greater emphasis on protecting and managing lands and watersheds and demanding more of the services the NMFWRI provides.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

The NMFWRI reports measures and targets as part of the HED's annual review of special projects. Targets that could better be met, with additional funding, include drafting a restoration handbook for general use, expanding to new demonstration areas (one in the Sacramento Mountains has been identified), and additional monitoring of restoration treatments that have been implemented.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

The NMFWRI will continue to receive funding as a special project affiliated with the NMHU.

THT/amm