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## Southwest Center for Rangeland Sustainability hits architects' drawing board

by JULIE CARTER

A concept to enhance the education capabilities of NMSU-Corona Range and Livestock Research Center is becoming a reality with the approval of \$1 million in capital outlay funding from the 2008 legislature.

The Southwest Center for Rangeland Sustainability project, a new high-tech educational complex, moved a million dollars closer to reality when 2008 Senate Bill 471, New Mexico Higher Education Investment, added to the project fund. The 2007 legislature granted NMSU \$525,000 to start the ball rolling which included the Board of Regents approving it a university priority.

Currently, the funding meter measures half of the \$3 million estimated total cost of the project. However, it is enough to give the nod to the architect Kells + Craig, Inc., of Albuquerque, to proceed with the planning process and get enough of the project built to begin functioning.

The potential impact for the Southwest Center for Rangeland Sustainability was recognized after a Research Field Day held at the Corona RLRC/Ranch in 2005. More than 200 participants took part in orientations covering the CRLRC's work with rangeland, wildlife and livestock production.

Field day guests were offered optional tours of the ranch showing brush control response, electronic identification system, hydrology research methods, use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) collars for behavior studies, and diet evaluation studies through rumen evacuation. The basics of the day allowed for ranchers



*Stirling Spencer explaining some of the options and costs offered by preliminary drawings from the architect.*



*(Top Left) Mark Petersen at the Advisory Committee meeting in Carrizozo in May, making suggestions and decisions about the new facility; (Top Right) Advisory Committee Member, Scott Shafer: Leading the charge.*

and scientists to talk to one another.

The extreme success of the event not only prompted another Triennial Research Field Day scheduled for July 18, 2008, it birthed the concept of offering year-round, stay-over, high-tech education in the field and connected to other facilities for distance education.

Management and coordination of the ranch is strengthened by the CRLRC's Advisory Committee. The committee consists of regional ranchers, land managers, program coordinators, financial lenders, media and local governmental leaders who meet twice a year to assist scientists and center staff to stay focused by promoting applied problem solving.


It was this committee that recognized the potential for having an expanded research center that would allow for NMSU to have a centrally-located educational programs site for the cooperative extension service and other agencies in the state that need a natural resources field-oriented classroom setting.

"After the center is built, we will have the capability to have a classroom setting to facilitate the use of electronic media to assist in communication of the educational material," said NMSU professor and range animal nutritionist Mark Petersen.

"I think the committee plans to go back one more time and try to get one last piece of funding to build a needed detached laboratory to support the educational center. This will help us acquire futuristic electronic remote sensors that will measure hydrology changes in relation to juniper removal, plant growth dynamics, and habitat use by beef cattle, sheep, Mule deer and pronghorn while assessing the maintenance energy requirements and activities," Petersen said. "These research sup-

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## Drawing Board

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port materials will greatly enhance the quality of our research and the experiences our students have while conducting scientific studies."

Petersen said another exciting option will be the efforts of the NMSU Water Institute and the Institute for Energy and the Environment that will start a new demonstration initiative producing domestic high quality water from well water at the center and energy for alternative sources (wind and solar). "We will be integrating land, water and energy all at one site."

Leading the charge through the Round House in both Legislative sessions were Advisory Committee members and Lincoln County ranchers Scott Shafer and Stirling Spencer. "Without them, this wouldn't have happened," said Petersen.

While plans are not yet finalized for construction, the proposed facility with current funding will include a 4-5,000 square foot main building with a meeting room/educational hall with satellite and internet capabilities, video conferencing and multiple screens. It will house a gal-



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## *These Things I Wish,*

was published by Regan Books/Harper Collins. They took the popular essay from Lee's *Dirt Roads* book and transformed it into a fabulous, fully-illustrated hardback book that would make a wonderful keepsake gift for children of all ages. *Grandparents will love it too!*

ley-style kitchen and dining area, as well as a library, restrooms and small offices.

Separate pod building(s) will supply dormitory accommodations for overnight guests, students or faculty. With the ranch remotely located away from motel accommodations, the facilities for staying over are a critical enhancement to the facility.

The Corona Range and Livestock Research Center is a 27,886-acre working ranch laboratory located just east of the village of Corona. Land within the research center is at an elevation ranging from 5,720 to 6,700 feet. New Mexico State University's Animal and Range Sciences Department operate the research center. Research programs and graduate student studies are a major part of the research center's activities.

The Corona center develops research that New Mexico ranchers usually cannot find anywhere else.

"The CRLRC is located centrally to New Mexico with many common aspects to more than 80 percent of New Mexico and the Southwest," said Shad Cox, ranch manager. "Our working ranch concept drives us to maintain profitability while investigating new concepts for increasing productivity and profitability."

The ranch is unique compared to similar research centers in other states. It is dependant upon generating income from animal sales to maintain and support the center and research. The salaries of the manager and a range technician are paid by NMSU but all other ranch expenses are covered by ranch income, uniquely making a profit while conducting research.

"The research is diverse but it is all integrated through economics," explained Petersen. "There are researchers conducting studies investigating livestock production efficiency, grazing behavior to improve distribution, wildlife management strategies to improve the trophy game population, hydrology and of course economic studies. Seventeen scientists and their students are conducting research at one site. To my knowledge there is probably no other research center with the mix of research being conducted concurrently, as is being done at CRLRC."

Final plan approval by the Board of Regents is expected this summer with construction to begin soon after.

For more information on NMSU's Corona Range and Livestock Research Center, Cox can be reached at 505/849-1015 or shadcox@nmsu.edu. □

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