

Fiscal impact reports (FIRs) are prepared by the Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) for standing finance committees of the NM Legislature. The LFC does not assume responsibility for the accuracy of these reports if they are used for other purposes.

Current FIRs (in HTML & Adobe PDF formats) are available on the NM Legislative Website (legis.state.nm.us). Adobe PDF versions include all attachments, whereas HTML versions may not. Previously issued FIRs and attachments may be obtained from the LFC in Suite 101 of the State Capitol Building North.

FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 1/21/08

SPONSOR Rodella LAST UPDATED _____ HB 72

SHORT TITLE NMSU Vegetation Monitoring Studies SB _____

ANALYST Haug

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY08	FY09		
	\$250.0	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Higher Education Department (HED)
New Mexico State University (NMSU)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 72 appropriates \$250.0 from the general fund to the Board of Regents of New Mexico State University to assist the livestock industry with vegetation monitoring studies by the College of Agriculture and Home Economics.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$250.0 contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2009 shall revert to the general fund.

HED states that this request was submitted to the New Mexico Higher Education Department (NMHED) by NMSU, but was not included in the Department's funding recommendation for FY09.

The HED's evaluation table of FY09 Research and Public Service Projects provided to the LFC classifies this project as a "does not fit within HED priorities for Higher Education" project. Reasons for this classification decision are not provided. (LFC Report 07-20, Higher Education

Department Review of Selected Research and Public Service Projects, January 12, 2008, Table 4, p75.)

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

House Bill 72 expands the Range Improvement Task Force (RITF) funding by \$250.0 on a recurring basis. NMSU states that two monitoring specialists, one housed at Highlands University in northern New Mexico, and one at the NMSU main campus are envisioned. For NMSU to continue providing leadership, new strengths must be included in our natural resource Extension and research programs. To ensure uniform and planned implementation of management policies, these scientists, along with the existing RITF team, must provide input and assessment on policies affecting both public and private land users in the West. Educational programs will be conducted to allow permittees to be certified in rangeland monitoring. This expanded RITF focus will assist in good stewardship and the long-term health of the West's natural resources, while recognizing the multi-cultural heritage of the region and the importance of management for long-term sustainability

According to NMSU, the Range Improvement Task Force (RITF) was formed and first funded in 1978 through HB 323 in the 33rd Legislature (2nd Session). With the exception of one additional position (Riparian Ecologist) which was added to the RITF in 1996, the RITF has conducted its activities without further expansion through the state legislature. The RITF has successfully leveraged funds provided by the state legislature to match federal and private dollars and thereby increase its contribution to natural resource management and agricultural production in New Mexico. The current request is expected to generate additional leveraging opportunities as the importance of resource monitoring is becoming nationally recognized.

The RITF routinely works in all parts of New Mexico. However, several counties, based on numbers of requests for assistance, require particular attention including: Rio Arriba, Otero, Catron, Lincoln, and Taos. Collaborators on this program include many state, federal, private, professional, and non-governmental agencies and organizations including, but not limited to, Northern NM Stockmans' Association, NM State Land Office, United States Forest Service, NM State Forestry, NM Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute, New Mexico Cattlegrowers', Bureau of Land Management, and NM County Officials.

Sound science and site-specific monitoring and assessment data are critical for management decisions, which need to be dynamic and flexible in order to respond to rapidly changing resource conditions. Long-term range condition and trend data are fundamentally necessary for grazing operations and for agency personnel to make comprehensive assessments of resource conditions, livestock management strategies and wildlife numbers. Federal agency objectives, rancher livestock management objectives, and New Mexico Department of Game and Fish responsibilities may all be simultaneously addressed with solid monitoring data. Without these types of site-specific data, officials and ranchers cannot make informed decisions and carry out their responsibilities.

GH/bb