

## Panels

### Restoration Panel

Restoration panel participants included Bill Hutchinson (NM Department of Transportation), Chris Frisbee (US Forest Service) (Joe Vinson, Department of Energy Minerals and Natural Resources), and Maceo Martinet (US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program). Harley Davis (Bureau of Land Management Roswell) emailed his responses to questions.

The demand for native seed by these agencies ranged from thousands of pounds of seed/year covering 84,000 acres (Forest Service in high fire/emergency stabilization years) to 2,400 pounds of seed covering 150 acres/year (for just one BLM field office for oil and gas reclamation projects in Roswell) to smaller projects (sometimes < few acres) working with private land owners (USFWS Partners Program). The Partners Program focuses on community development and is particularly interested in establishing pollinator habitat. Seed demand by EMNRD and NMDOT (needing seed for 15,000 miles or 500 acres/year) was somewhere in the middle. In a typical year (no major fire), the Forest Service may only purchase 250-1000/lbs. per year.

In determining what seed is appropriate for project areas most of these agencies have policies in place requiring the use of natives. For BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response), Forest Service uses native species referring to the Forest Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey plant lists, but the seed mix is typically dominated by short-lived cereal grains (e.g., 70% barley) for rapid establishment. Smaller FS projects may rely on in situ seed banks. NMDOT has conducted research and revised their standard seed mix in the last year to include only ecoregion appropriate native species. NMDOT prioritizes safety when determining plant materials (i.e., plants that do not attract grazing animals), availability, and regional appropriateness by consulting the SEINet database. MMD (*Mining Minerals Division*) generally uses a shotgun approach. Permits usually specify a minimum diversity of functional forms such as warm season grasses or cool season grasses, etc., and permits stipulate a minimum cover and diversity before an operator will get bond monies returned but they can negotiate cheaper species and substitutes when seed aren't available. AML (Abandoned Mine Land) program projects are better able to work with more comprehensive mixes. USFWS Partners Program consults the NRCS Plants Database and uses feedback from nurseries such as the Pueblo of Santa Ana and private landowners. BLM uses soil survey data.

When asked “how clean does your seed need to be”, most of the agencies indicated that they are required to use seed that is Certified Weed Free. It was unclear what tolerance levels there were chaff (assuming weed seed absent). More discussion on this topic anticipated in the future.

Bamert Seed commented that growers work hard to provide high quality seed but are concerned that when the seed is planted in restoration sites it is not receiving the same level of attention. How are agencies ensuring that restoration seedings are being done properly? NMDOT described a number of things that they are doing to ensure success: 1) Starting in June there is mandatory certification training for all 200+ inspectors and revegetation contractors based on it and the companion Seeding Certification Manual. 2) For the last 18 months we have had a full time Revegetation Specialist going to every revegetation project in the state to inspect equipment, training staff, monitor progress to make sure the work is being done right. 3) They inoculate soils with endo-mycorrhizza to restore soil health



and on non-steep slopes till 1” of compost (from green waste) into the top 4” of soil to increase the water-holding capacity. Partners Program mentioned that they are experimenting with seed balls.

### **Grower Panel**

Grower panel participants included Robby Henes (Southwest Seed Inc.), Nick Bamert (Bamert Seed Co.), Blake Curtis (Curtis & Curtis Seed), Sean Ludden (Rio Grande Community Farm), Lynda Boyer (Heritage Seedlings).

The panel was mostly large scale growers but included one small and one medium scale grower. The Rio Grande Community Farm, located in Bernalillo County, was unique in their approach that included a major emphasis on training and facilitating local farmers. While most of the large scale farmers seemed interested in participating in some form of grow-out for the SWSP, it was stressed that cultivars will continue to be an important part of their business model. In discussing shared equipment, Southwest Seed Inc. said that while they could imagine providing seed cleaning services to growers that lack this equipment, it would be difficult to lease/share other types of farm equipment. Harvesting equipment etc. is in high use at their own farm, they are concerned about equipment potentially being damaged, and transport of equipment wouldn't make sense since most growers are separated by great distances. Growers discussed the quality control measures that they use and helped to define important terms that were used throughout the day, such as “certification” and “weed free”. When asked what would you like seed buyers to know?, Blake Curtis stressed the importance of being an educated seed buyer. Buyers need to understand seed purity and many other facets of native seed development to obtain the best product while also supporting native seed farmers.