

Colorado State Conservation Board 2008 Matching Grants Project:
Costilla Conservation District: Biological Weed Control

What natural resource problem(s) did the project address?

Costilla District, located in the southern San Luis Valley is an area where there is considerable interest in organic farming and low chemical methods of farming. It is also an area of overall low income levels and where the historical method of acequia land management stemming from Spanish land grants is still practiced. Costilla county had previously rented out goats for noxious weed control and in 2008 rather than do it all themselves, they formed a **partnership with Costilla Conservation District to provide and promote a goat service for weed control**. The district used Matching Grant funds as start-up money to purchase goats and manage the program, and the county provided fence panels and goat herders for the daily management of the goats. With the modest rental income for the goats and their eventual sale for meat at the end of the season the District can continue the program with generated revenue.

What was achieved?

- **75+ acres of noxious weeds grazed by goats** for chemical free weed control - included Colorado listed species of musk thistle, Canada thistle, Russian knapweed and bindweed.
- Grazing of brush along the **historic acequia ditches improved water flow for irrigation for low income farmers**
- Goats particularly **effective in hard-to-reach areas along ditches** with minimal erosion impact because of their light weight and small feet.
- **Local seminar with George Beck of Colorado State University** raised awareness of weeds and the potential for goat grazing as an element of weed control efforts.
- **Considerable local interest generated by the program:** 11 landowners rented goats, at least 24 others requested assistance from district on weed identification and several landowners purchased their own goats or requested to sign-up for 2009 goat rental.
- The thoroughness of the goats work was recognized by locals, who dubbed them "**Land Piranhas**"!



Eradication of weeds by goats is not the answer for every weed problem, but when properly managed they can be a useful biological control method.