

Taos County, local planners lauded at Montana conference

Staff Report

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Taos County and some of its citizen planners were recognized with several awards at the joint Western Planner/ Montana Association of Planners conference in Great Falls, Montana, last month.

According to a news release, Questa-based planner Ron Gardiner was recognized with the Sheldon D. Gerber Merit Award for Excellence in Environmental Planning and the Citizen Planner Award. The release said the awards were in recognition of Gardiner's long-standing efforts advocating wildfire and watershed protections in Northern New Mexico.

In addition, Taos County received the Sheldon D. Gerber Merit Award for Excellence in Environmental Planning for its Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) 2016 update. The plan builds on work completed in 2015 by the Taos Valley Watershed Coalition, representing nearly three dozen stakeholders, who all signed off on the landscape restoration strategy white paper, according to the release.

"This wildfire planning is directly linked to forest health and resiliency planning," the release said, adding that communities downstream are impacted and benefit from the forests on the mountains above.

"This is primarily a citizen-supported planning effort cast in the finest traditions embodied the intent of the Western Planner Sheldon Gerber environmental planning award," said Western Planner past-president Dan Pava.

The Gerber merit award recognizes outstanding achievements in environmental planning, which can be in the form of a project, report or the professional efforts of a planner or citizen planner.

The principle author and project coordinator for the community wildfire protection plan was Gardiner. He also prepared the original 2009 plan. The release states that Gardiner was assisted by a host of folks, but primarily organizers and activists Hannah Miller of Taos, and Toni Hippeli of Ranchos de Taos, who gave generously of their time and creativity volunteering to edit and publish the 2016 plan.

"My message is that the process of the [wildfire] plan draws the stakeholders into a coordination and collaboration that raises the likelihood of a plan being implemented," Gardiner said in the release. "This document became significantly better with the excellent editing and revision writing by [Miller and Hippeli]. It reads much better to the public."

The updated CWPP is intended to coordinate efforts by state, federal and local agencies to control and manage wildfire. The plan is meant to include significant public input in order to best meet the needs of residents. The scope of the update was expanded to draw a connection between forest health in Taos County and environmental and social impacts downstream.

For more information on the awards and Western Planner, go to westernplanner.org.



Questa-based planner Ron Gardiner

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