

# Legislature OKs new conservation fund

By **Andy Dennison**

*The Taos News*

In the last days of the 2010 session, the state Legislature created a fund that would pay for conservation easements and restoration projects.

Gov. Bill Richardson has said he will sign the Natural Heritage Conservation Act, but no money was allocated for its funding.

If and when it gets funding, the new Natural Heritage Conservation Fund would issue grants to agencies and political subdivisions for land and water projects, including purchasing easements that shut down development.

Creation of the fund has

been a long political process for the "conservation community," said Ernie Atencio, director of the Taos Land Trust that promotes easements.

"New Mexico is one of the few states without a conservation fund," said Atencio.

The new law would help lower-income landowners, Atencio said, because more money will be available to purchase the development rights and, perhaps, save some landowners from having to sell their land outright.

The fund will not pay for purchase of land or water. The state Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Division will administer it. Grantees will compete for funds.