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## **New Mexico EPSCoR Awarded \$17.5 Million in Grants for Three Projects**

*Funding to aid New Mexico's higher education research institutions including UNM*

Three grants, totaling more than \$17.5 million, were recently awarded to New Mexico Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NM EPSCoR) through the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation.

The grants range from \$150,000 to \$750,000 per year for three years each, respectively, from the Department of Energy, to a \$15 million five-year grant from the National Science Foundation for Research Infrastructure Improvement to establish New Mexico as a national laboratory for climate change research and a model for science-based education and public outreach.

"The \$15 million award is significant because New Mexico was one of four states recommended for full funding," said Dr. Bill Michener, director, New Mexico EPSCoR and University of New Mexico research professor of biology. "It is a very key area for addressing state needs with respect to understanding climate change and water resources in the state as well as the implications for society in general."

The research team that has been assembled includes young scientists from New Mexico Tech, UNM, New Mexico State University, and New Mexico Highlands University, as well as Sandia and Los Alamos National Labs.

"It is truly a multifaceted award that not only benefits science but the whole spectrum of education in the state," said Michener. "The project has broad impact by making the science relevant to the diverse population of New Mexico through an extensive outreach program involving seminars across the state, science cafes in rural communities, and a climate change exhibit that will be visited by 250,000 people annually at the New Mexico Museum of Natural History.

The Research Infrastructure Improvement award will support a five-year effort to improve research infrastructure, cyber infrastructure and human infrastructure in the state of New Mexico. These investments will stimulate transformative research on climate change and its impact on water resources, the economy and society. The RII grant also targets interrelated research and development opportunities of direct, immediate, and passionate concern to New Mexicans.

The project also aims to create the computational and informational infrastructure that will facilitate delivery of scientific data and information to researchers, policy makers and the community at large. New Mexico EPSCoR will also integrate an education and outreach component that creates education opportunities for K-12 students, undergraduate students and the public.

DOE EPSCoR funds will aid research in federal-state partnerships that will improve the capability of the designated jurisdiction to conduct sustainable and nationally competitive energy-related research. The implementation grant, \$750,000 per year for three years with a maximum period of six years, is led by a multiinstitutional team including Plamen Atanassov, professor of Chemical and Nuclear Engineering at UNM. The team includes researchers from UNM, NMSU, NMT, ENMU, Sandia National Lab and LANL.



“Dr. Atanassov’s award is a very significant achievement for New Mexico because it’s the first time our state has ever won a Department of Energy EPSCoR implementation award,” said Michener. “This one in particular is exciting because it involves four state universities and both labs. It’s focused on alternative energy, which is one of the key components in the state’s science and technology plan.”

“One of the exciting things for New Mexico within this award is the fact that the faculty member from Eastern New Mexico University, Juchao Yan, was a post-doctorate for Dr. Atanassov at UNM. A bright and rising star, Dr. Wan is now a faculty member at ENMU. We were fortunate to keep him in the state of New Mexico.”

UNM Biology Professors Marcy Litvak and Robert Sinsabaugh, in collaboration with Los Alamos National Labs and the United States Department of the Interior, received a three-year EPSCoR-State/National Laboratory Partnership Grant for \$150,000 per year.

Titled, “Linking ecosystem scale vegetation change shifts in carbon and water cycling: the consequences of widespread piñon mortality in the Southwest,” Litvak’s research builds on research funded in a previous EPSCoR grant and complements her work on climate change, also in a previous NSF EPSCoR award.

“This award is significant because it’s tied in to the state science and technology plan, which is focused on our state’s needs. Climate change and its impact on forest, including Piñon mortality in New Mexico, is a concern in the state, regionally and also nationally. Additionally, that grant is exciting because Marcy Litvak is another rising star and a feather in the cap of our pool of emerging young scientists in the state.”

New Mexico has had only one previous award, Dr. Vakhtang Putkaradze, currently a faculty member at Colorado State with an appointment in the UNM Mechanical Engineering Department and Mechanical Engineering Associate Professor Peter Vorobieff. The award was in collaboration with Sandia National Lab.

The mission of New Mexico Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NM EPSCoR) program is to gather resources and expertise from academic institutions, our national labs, private industry, and state and federal sources to benefit education, the environment, and the New Mexico economy.