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State awards ecotourism contract to EcoNewMexico

New Mexico Business Weekly

The **New Mexico Tourism Department** has awarded a contract to administer the state's new ecotourism program to **EcoNewMexico LLC** of Santa Fe.

Gov. Bill Richardson approved a special \$250,000 appropriation to fund the initiative for fiscal year 2010.

The \$242,500 contract runs through June 30, 2010. It may be extended for up to three additional one-year periods at the discretion of the Tourism Department, based on funding availability and other factors.

EcoNewMexico's proposal was one of 11 received by the state through a request for proposals. The company will plan, coordinate, implement and administer the ecotourism program.

The work will include taking an inventory of ecotourism assets throughout the state and educating communities on ecotourism, including teaching marketing skills related to that sector. EcoNewMexico will work with state agencies and other public and private entities.

Michael Cerletti, secretary of the Tourism Department, said eco-tourists spend more money, visit longer and are seeking "authentic, hands-on experiences."

Jennifer Hobson, deputy secretary of the Tourism Department, said EcoNewMexico will help the department create new partnerships that will lead to new economic opportunities in communities around the state.

EcoNewMexico is owned by Chip and Sandy Cunningham. They also own **Uncharted Outposts**, which manages a portfolio of tourism destinations and other eco- and community-driven projects around the world.

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