



Hilary Cooper

San Miguel County Commissioner, Colorado
Elected 2016



WHAT IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT OR IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENT AS AN ELECTED LEADER?

I came into office as a Democrat with a deep passion for and professional experience in natural resource conservation. San Miguel County continues to highly value clean air, clean water, land preservation and quiet recreation on our public lands, however I quickly discovered that as a commissioner in a very rural and conservative part of the State I needed to understand the challenges we share with our neighbors in delivering public health and human services, building and maintaining roads, addressing public safety issues, lack of funding and meeting a wide range of needs for a diverse population. Finding common ground by developing a deeper understanding of these issues and the challenges we all face as elected officials in rural areas and the working relationships and friendships that are a result of this work is something that has helped me the most in my role serving the public.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

As I entered office we had several long-term staff members in leadership positions who were on their way out. We are limited to two terms in San Miguel County and I was eager to get stuff done quickly. It was a challenge for me to slow down and instead help transition our organization and bring in new key staff members to help us be better prepared for existing challenges as well as the new ones we face with a changing climate.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE CONSIDERING RUNNING FOR OFFICE FOR THE FIRST TIME? DEVELOP EXPERIENCE BY SERVING ON TOWN/CITY, COUNTY OR SPECIAL DISTRICT BOARDS.

Once you are elected your job will consist mainly of attending meetings. Learn how to be a good meeting participant and listener in order to get stuff done while you are serving. And join Western Leaders Network!

IS THERE A CONSERVATION-RELATED POLICY, RULE OR IDEA YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IMPLEMENTED AT THE LOCAL, STATE OR NATIONAL LEVEL?

A few of us started a conversation about soil health programs and policies at the State level over a year ago. We have since grown into a broad ranging stakeholder group who now has the support from Colorado's Commissioner of Agriculture Kate Greenberg and the first budget request for a soil health focus program at the Dpt. of Agriculture. I initiated this discussion because I wanted to find funding and support for San Miguel County's Payment for Ecosystems Services (PES) Program. In 2019, we were able to get a grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to rebuild PES and we hope to launch a menu of options for landowners to implement and receive compensation for ranging from soil health practices to water conservation to wildlife habitat restoration in 2020/21. Our goal is to create a program that can be used in communities across the state to improve conservation practices, increase production for farmers and ranchers and retain our rural landscapes while enabling those who work the land to make a decent living doing the right thing.

