



## Gov signs drought bill, approves TSV bond sale

By J.R. Logan

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A bill to give farmers and ranchers a tax break in times of drought, and another to spur development in Taos Ski Valley were both signed by Gov. Susana Martinez April 8.

The first bill, Senate Bill 112, would allow ag producers across the state to continue receiving a break on their property taxes during periods of prolonged drought. Under the new law, county assessors would be able to continue classifying land as agricultural, even if its not in production, as long as the U.S. Department of Agricultural has declared at least moderate drought in any part of the county.

The law does require that basic ag infrastructure like irrigation ditches and fences be maintained, even if no crops are being produced or livestock grazed.

Former county assessor Darlene Vigil — who instigated a meticulous review of land classified as agricultural before her term ended last year — has said the law offered some clarity, but she said the Taos County Assessor's Office was already considering drought conditions when reviewing the status of ag properties.

In addition to the ag bill, Gov. Martinez also signed a House Bill 441, which would make it possible for Taos Ski Valley, Inc. to recoup part of its investment in public infrastructure.

The corporation is planning \$350 million in on- and off-mountain improvements over the next decade, but it says the existing infrastructure can't handle the growth. To build, the company needs to improve basic utilities, roads and other infrastructure. The bill signed last week would authorize a new board that would use increased tax revenue generated by the construction to pay back the developer for investments made that serve the general public.

Gordon Briner, CEO of Taos Ski Valley, Inc., told *The Taos News* the approval means work at the resort will happen faster, putting people to work sooner and improving the region's economy by attracting more visitors.

"It absolutely speeds up our timeline," Briner said.