

January 2010 Activity Report

Natural Resources Conservation Service

(NRCS)

Helping People Help the Land.

Programs

NRCS Texas received the following initial allocations by program for FY 10:

- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) – \$0 – Allocations should be forth coming in 30 days.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – 1.7 million acres
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) – \$61.6 million down from \$64 million in 2009.
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) – \$2.55 million compared to \$2.2 million in 2009.
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) – \$4.66 million same as 2009.
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) – \$873,000 down from \$4 million in 2009.
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) – \$9.4 million significant increase over 2009.

These figures are initial allocations. As funding is obligated and funds exhausted, additional funding will be requested with the hope of receiving more.

AWEP/CCPI

NRCS is going to be soliciting requests for proposals for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) later this winter.

The proposals will be similar to last year's format – that they will be announced in the Federal Register and have a 30-day solicitation period.



HFRP

The Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) proposal NRCS put together with a team of outside partners was not chosen for funding in FY10. There were only four areas selected nationally this year. This is an easement program for industrial as well as non-industrial forest landowners and stewards.



WRP

NRCS has very ambitious goals for the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) this year, as well as for the balance of the Farm Bill tenure. The acceptance of wetlands into the program has been streamlined and the easement payments have been revised to better reflect the value of the land. NRCS is encouraging anyone who may be interested to sign up and check the program benefits as they have changed since the last Farm Bill.

CSP

NRCS field office staffs are diligently field verifying 852 Conservation Stewardship Program applications on more than 1.8 million acres received from August 10 through September 30. Texas had over 3 million acres in applications including 608,000 acres of cropland, 74,000 acres of non-industrial forest land, 137,000 acres of pasture, and 2.24 million acres of range. These figures nearly doubled what was expected and exceeded the 1.6 million acres allocated to Texas. Those applications not accepted for the FY09 program will be considered for the FY 10 program scheduled for ranking later this year.



LWG Meetings

NRCS and local soil and water conservation districts in Texas are currently scheduling public local work group meetings for January and February. As meetings are planning, they are posted on the Texas NRCS Website at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov.

Watershed Program

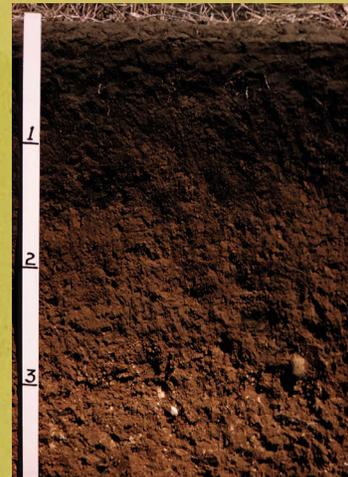
American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)

- NRCS has requested ARRA funding for 10 additional projects (8 remedial repairs) in Grayson, Wise, Cooke, Navarro, and Ellis counties.
 - \$7 million financial assistance
 - \$1.5 million technical assistance
- All ARRA projects currently under construction have been delayed by wet weather
- Watershed Rehabilitation
 - 2010 funding allocations to Texas included funds for development of rehab plans for Plum Creek Sites 1 and 6 (Hays County), and Olmitos-Garcias Creeks Site 7 (Starr County). Rehab planning is underway on Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) and East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County).



Soil Survey

- Mapped 1.3 million acres, both initial and update acres, in the first quarter of FY10.
- To improve soil interpretations, NRCS soil scientists pit sampled 44 soil series for complete soil characterization analysis by soil labs at Texas A&M and Texas Tech universities.
- Published the Young County and Edwards and Real counties soil surveys.
- Completed the 2009 National Resources Inventory range study. Data from the study will be available after compilation and analysis.



Events and Activities

October 22-23, 2009

Collaborated with Texas Tech University on conducting the Southern Regional Collegiate Soil Judging Contest. Six university teams from Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas competed. Texas A&M University won the competition.

November 14-16, 2009

At the Working Ranch Rodeo Association (WRCA) National Finals Ranch Rodeo in Amarillo, NRCS set up the 2008 Farm Bill exhibit, representing Farm Bill programs and conservation planning opportunities. More than 20,000 people attended the show.

December 2 - 4, 2009

Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show. NRCS exhibited the new cropland display for 2009 and showcased agency technology for conservation planning and program contracting. The event hosted an estimated 30,000 people from a four- to six-state area and is currently the largest indoor farm show in Texas.



December 8, 2009

Landowner workshop held in Jacksboro to address energy company activities and their affects on conservation practices and floodwater retarding dams. The program included presentations the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and NRCS.

Information and Outreach

October 20, 2009

Gave Web Soil Survey presentation/demonstration to more than 150 individuals at the Texas Environmental and Health Association conference in Austin.

November 17, 2009

Leadership Lubbock Program, presented through the Chamber of Commerce of Lubbock, requested a soil and water conservation program for business leaders of the community. NRCS was invited to present an educational program using the rainfall simulator for soil/water erosion. Select agricultural educators from the 'Ag in the Bag' program were asked to develop a presentation for higher learning.

November 17 -18, 2009

Water Well Screening Program for Landowners. The Upper Colorado SWCD, Big Country RC&D, Scurry and Borden Agri-Life Extension Offices and the Snyder NRCS Field Office organized and planned the program. Water samples from the wells were screened for bacteria, salts and nitrates with a detailed report provided to each landowner with facts sheets for corrective measures if needed. Landowners were also provided with additional information on where to get a more detailed water analysis.

December 9, 2009

CRP Mtg. "After CRP" Options for Expired CRP Lands. NRCS and local SWCD planned and organized an additional CRP meeting in Cochran County. A total of 29 landowners attended the meeting to learn about the options available to them to continue to manage expired CRP lands.

January 2010

An article in the January issue of Texas Monthly featured three private landowners who are finding creative ways to conserve their natural resources and maintain their way of life. It mentions the Dahlstrom Ranch in Hays County. The owners are currently working through the process of placing their ranch in a conservation easement with NRCS and other entities.

A video developed by NRCS Texas and first shown at the All-Employee meeting in San Antonio in December will be available by March 1 on CD. Email requests can be sent to tx-nrcs-publicaffairs@tx.usda.gov.

Field Accomplishments

An initial meeting for the Houston Toad Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) was held January 6, 2010, at McKinney Roughs in Cedar Creek for all of the partners involved. The meeting was also to prepare for two upcoming meetings: Jan. 14 "Providing Technical Guidance in Houston Toad Habitat" for resource professionals working with the Houston toad efforts; and the Jan. 15 "Land Stewardship Assistance in Houston Toad Habitat" for landowners to showcase the various programs that provide assistance for land management practices that would benefit the Houston toad. Select delivery team members (at least one member from each of the conservation agencies/groups in attendance at the Jan. 6 meeting) will meet on February 24th at 1:00 p.m. at the River Systems Institute in San Marcos to make this a "team" approach to achieve conservation success for the Houston toad.

FY10 New Hires and Vacancies



NRCS currently has 24 vacancies:

- 9 Soil Scientists
- 8 District Conservationists
- 1 RC&D Coordinator
- 1 Technology Transfer Specialist
- 1 Civil Engineer
- 1 Office Assistant
- 1 Engineering Technician
- 1 Assistant State Engineer
- 1 Soil Conservationist

NRCS has filled the following vacancies since October 1, 2009:

- 3 Agricultural Engineers
- 1 District Conservationist
- 1 Civil Engineer
- 1 Office Automation Clerk
- 1 Soil Scientist
- 1 Soil Conservationist
- 1 Soil Conservation Technician

Calendar of Upcoming Events

January 26 - 27, 2010

SWCD Director and Employee Program Development Workshop Training in Temple, Texas.

January 28 and 29, 2010

National Cattlemen's Beef Association meeting in San Antonio. Mark Quinn, Stoney Point AgriCorp, Melissa, Texas, was the Region IV recipient of the Environmental Stewardship Award. *The 2009 National Winner will be selected from one of the seven regional winners and announced at the 2010 NCBA Convention in San Antonio.*

January 31 – February 3, 2010

2010 NACD Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

February 3, 2010

Texas Alliance for Water Conservation (TAWC) - Five years of project results will be presented during this year's field tour and luncheon in Muncy. NRCS will provide an exhibit displaying conservation tillage practices and present a program on current farm bill programs.



February 4-5, 2010

Soil Survey and Land Resources Workshop in College Station.

February 8 -8, 2010

Ag Summit – Lost Pines, Bastrop, Texas

February 9 -11, 2010

Southwest Farm and Ranch Classic, Lubbock. NRCS will participate in the 2010 farm and ranch show exhibiting the 2008 farm bill program display at the Lubbock Civic Center.



February 18-21, 2010

National Wild Turkey Federation Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Soil scientists from Texas will demonstrate use of the Web Soil Survey.

February 26-27, 2010

A “Sustaining the Hill Country Seminar” will be held in Fredericksburg, Texas. Three NRCS employees will give presentations and provide educational outreach material.

March 14 -17, 2010

Bluebonnet RC&D, the Texas state RC&D Association, and the Southwest RC&D Association will host the 2010 Southwest RC&D Training Conference in Fort Worth.

March 18 - 20, 2010

Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association annual convention in Fort Worth.

March 29, 2010

Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors (TAWS) spring meeting in Fredericksburg.

March 30 - 31, 2010

National Watershed Coalition OTM Workshop in Fredericksburg.

April 27, 2010

NRCS will celebrate its 75th anniversary. More information about anniversary activities will be forthcoming from the NRCS national office.

October 14-16, 2010

San Antonio International Farm and Ranch Show, Freeman Coliseum, San Antonio. NRCS is a member of the advisory committee.

September, 2010

Last Acre Ceremony to commemorate the completion of the once-over of the soil survey in Texas is in the early planning stages.



*People's Garden – L-R;
Michelle Walden, FSA;
Rodney Schoppa , FSA;
Jason Eckert, NRCS;
Helen Saldana, SWCD
Secretary; Kerry
Weinheimer, NRCS;
Jennifer Wilson, FSA; Kyle
Lindgren, NRCS; Jennifer
Fowler, FSA.*