NRCS VolunteerVoice
"The voice of the Earth Team"
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Summer 2006

High School Students "Cutting Class"

Oregon State Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

Every Wednesday af121oonl bginnwing n Januaerylan workwing throughsprwingo

mile riparian stretch of the Powder River. It's not just Smith's students who are involved in the project. Special education students have been out along the river broadcasting grass seed.

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Note from Michele

The Earth Team staff has been busy as ever to provide you with the latest updates as we continue to review current Earth Team materials. The following items have been recently updated and are available to you through the Earth Team web page under "Resources":

- Volunteer Coordinator Guide,
- Volunteer Supervisor Handbook, and
- Volunteer Orientation Guide

The following items will be available to you later this summer through the LANDCARE Web Page at http://landcare.sc.egov.usda.gov

Revised Earth Team Poster

Volunteer Supervisor Packet (available for NRCS Employees only) to include:

- Volunteer Supervisor Handbook
- Information on Volunteer.Gov/Gov
- Volunteer Orientation Guide
- General Manual Part 428
- Resources (web page, exhibits, newsletter, etc.)
- Volunteer Database Instructions

Volunteer Coordinator Binder (available for NRCS Volunteer Coordinators only) to include:

- Volunteer Coordinator Guide
- Volunteer Supervisor Handbook
- Volunteer Orientation Guide
- Earth Team E-list instructions
- State Volunteer Coordinator Directory
- General Manual Part 428
- Information on Volunteer.Gov/Gov
- Volunteer Database Instructions
- Resources (web page, exhibits, newsletter, etc.)

If you haven't checked out the NRCS exhibits currently available, you may want to visit http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/exhibits/ . We have recently made an Earth Team and Walk A Mile Banner Stand available!

An updated version of the Earth Team brochure is currently going through the approval process at NHQ and we will let you know when it becomes available.

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Smith College Picker Engineering Program Students

Join the Massachusetts Earth Team

By Carol Kusnierz
Massachusetts Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

Four Smith College engineering students, who served as group volunteers for the Massachusetts Earth Team from September 2005 to May 2006, worked with NRCS staff and partners to restore access to the spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous fish on the Town River in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Andrea Fiumefreddo, Diana Hubbard, Shawna King, and Cora Olson, participants in the Picker Engineering Program Design Clinic, designed a fishway for the War Memorial Park Dam after considering fishway options, fish passage requirements, and site considerations.

In collaboration with NRCS, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the team prepared a final design for the fishway and presented it to NRCS and the dam owner. The final design and specifications will be used by NRCS, the town, and project sponsors for obtaining funding, permits, and as a construction package for implementation.

From left: Andrea Fiumefreddo, Diana Hubbard, Shawna King, and Cora Olson

According to Andrea, Diana, Shawna and Cora, the 720 volunteer hours that they logged over the six month period were well spent. They helped NRCS and its partners in the project and gained valuable real life experience. The volunteer's researched fishways, planned and developed alternatives for the site, then prepared a design, construction specifications, and a cost estimate for the project. They provided NRCS with weekly progress reports, which also provided an opportunity to request assistance and ask questions about the project.

Over the course of the project, NRCS engineering and resources staffs, and the partner agencies provided reference material and technical guidance to the student. They also assisted the students as they surveyed the project site, met every two to three weeks for progress updates, and corresponded by email, answering questions regarding planning and design for the fishway.

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Student Volunteer

Helps Field Office Accomplish Goals

Kudos goes out to Clement Cummins, a volunteer in the Crow Agency, Montana, field office from October 2005 to April 2006. Clement was participating in an internship through Little Big Horn College's Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) project which is funded by the National Science Foundation. Clement put in more than 200 hours helping with conservation activities throughout the Big Horn County, Montana. His duties included recording range inventory information gathered from the previous summer, working on ArcMap projects for EQIP applicants, and assisting with surveying. Originally from Lodge Grass, Montana, Clement will be enrolled in the agriculture education program at Montana State University-Bozeman in the fall of 2006.

Clement Cummins accepts a Certifcate of Appreciation for his work at the Crow Agency tribal feld offce.

List Your Volunteer Opportunities at:

www.volunteer.gov/gov

Email

for more information

Cutting Class

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These three Baker High School classes are Earth Team volunteers. Doni Clair, former manager of Baker County's Soil and Water Conservation Districts, said that with students volunteering so much of their time and labor, the willow portion of the project will cost only about $15,000 and result in at least 20,000 potential willow trees being planted along the river this year. "Without the help of these student volunteers," Clair said, "the project would have cost $30,000." As a result of these savings, the SWCD will be making a donation to the school's forestry program.

So students on their weekly forays cut roughly six-foot sections of willow "whips," bundled them, then placed them in the back of a pickup truck. The bundles were then transported to a snow bank where they were buried, where they would stay dormant until planting time the end of April.

Volunteer service by the three high school classes is being performed on the Powder River pipeline project in Baker County, Oregon. The $3 million enhancement project, now two years old, includes fencing to exclude cattle as well as pumping water to livestock troughs located on private ground along the Powder River.

"Cutting the whips isn't so hard," said Eli Eggers, one of the student volunteers with the forestry class. "We get breaks every now and then," he says with a smile. "This is the most fun class I have." His Forest Team Coach, Jeff Collier, said he looked forward to planting the whips. "Willows are easy to grow," he said, "but you have to keep the cows away from them."

With fencing in place and a conservation plan in tact, the volunteer students began the planting process in late April using a combination of hand and water-jet planting. In a matter of four days, the students, teacher, SWCD staff, and NRCS staff planted over 20,000 whips that the class had spent the winter cutting and caring for. In that time, the volunteers transformed the two-mile stretch of river from a sparsely vegetated void to what they hope will be a riparian forest of coyote willow, red osier dogwood, and booth's willow.

Travis Bloomer, District Conservationist, for the Baker Service Center, Baker City, Oregon, designed and was in charge of the willow-planting/grass-seeding project. "The project has established a link between students and possible courses of study," Bloomer said. "I've had a lot of them ask me what courses to take in college to get into this line of work," he said. "It's great to have them out there, and I know the landowners think that it's a great thing, too."

Oklahoma State Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

Natural Resource Day in Sequoyah County

The Sequoyah County Conservation District and Sallisaw NRCS Office in Oklahoma held their annual Natural Resource Day on Wednesday, April 26, 2006 at Brushy Lake. There were approximately 145 fifth grade students, teachers, and parents from Roland, Brushy, and Central Schools. The students attended nine different conservation stations learning about: wildlife, recycling, water quality, fisheries, mine safety, reptiles, soils, engineering, and forestry. For more information on the volunteer effort in Sequoyah County, please contact Audra Fenton at 918.775.6577, or for email at: Audra.Fenton@ok.usda.gov.

Abandoned Mine Land Gets Reforested

On March 7, 2006, 13 students from the Sallisaw, Oklahoma, FFA Chapter, and their advisor, along with the Oklahoma Department of Forestry, assisted the Sequoyah County Conservation District and Sallisaw NRCS Office in planting 4,000 trees on an Abandoned Mine Land Project. The Project was located four miles southwest of Sallisaw in the eastern part of Oklahoma in Sequoyah County in planting Zone 2. The trees were planted as a permanent cover to prevent erosion and to provide habitat for wildlife. This is an excellent example of what volunteers really do for the agency. Audra Fenton, District Conservationist, was the lead NRCS employee for this project. If you would like more information on this project, please contact Ms. Fenton at 918.775.6577 for email at:
: Audra.Fenton@ok.usda.gov.

Student Intern Lands Funds for Envirothon and Camp Wooten

Washington State Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

Asotin County Conservation District Envirothon Program and Camp Wooten Environmental Learning Center will offer enhanced learning programs and new equipment this season, thanks to a successful grant prepared by Dayton High School senior, Cole Blessinger. The grant award comes in the amount of $1,500.00. Camp Wooten is an educational facility for 6th graders.

Blessinger is a student intern serving as an Earth Team volunteer at the Blue Mountain Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council office in Dayton, Washington. The local nonprofit organization supports natural resource based and economic development activities in Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield and Asotin counties. The RC&D was notified about the grant by area project leaders of the Palouse-Snake River Chapter of the Inland Empire section, Society of American Foresters. The professional society approved the grant request.

Dayton High School is completing a three-year grant secured from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to connect communities with local high schools. Student internships are one part of a program designed to deliver learning opportunities that link students with local businesses and nonprofit organizations. Envirothon is a problem solving, natural resources competition for high schools students. The Asotin County Conservation District has sponsored regional Envirothon competitions for more than eight years serving more than 400 students. The goal has been to bring this competition to other high schools in the area like Dayton, Pomeroy and Waitsburg to broaden competition.

Camp Wooten in Columbia County is an Environmental Learning Center managed by Washington State Parks. Every spring and fall, local rural school districts offer four days of environmental education, outdoor skills and fun for up to 200 area 6th graders. For many, this is the first time they have attended camp. Blessinger spoke modestly of his grant-writing success, “I’m ready to write another grant!”

Community Service Program
Recruitment for Earth Team Volunteers

National LANDCARE/Earth Team Coordinator

The National Earth Team Office in Des Moines, Iowa has received over 13 volunteer referrals totaling more than 500 hours from the Polk County Courthouse 5th Judicial Court Community Service System since October 2005. Each of the referrals is signed up as an Earth Team Volunteer and all of their hours are reported under the National Earth Team Office in the Volunteer Database.

Alan Benge and Venessa Alvarado serve as Volunteer Coordinators for the National Earth Team Office. Venessa communicates with Polk County Staff, receives community service time sheets, coordinates dates and times the volunteer will be working, assigns tasks, supervises volunteer progress and tracks volunteer hours. Alan also assists in supervising volunteers, assigns duties and prepares tasks that need to be accomplished.

Alan Benge & Venessa Alvarado

Volunteers perform various office and warehouse duties, to include: making copies, labeling and burning CD's, collating packets, taking inventory of office supplies and Earth Team items, packaging forms to help make filling orders easier, data entry, sweeping the warehouse docks, moving boxes of publications to different shelves in the warehouse, and labeling files and packets. These are just a few duties that volunteers assist our office with on a weekly basis.

Some of the volunteers started out as community service volunteers but have returned on their own just to donate more of their time to this worthy cause. This recruitment method has proven to be very effective for our office. We thank Polk County for all of the referrals they have sent and continue to send us. You may want to consider contacting your local courthouse to see if your office can participate in a Community Service Program.

"Walk a Mile in My Boots"

California Area 4 Earth Team Coordinator

Blythe Field Office District Conservationist Steve Hill spent a week and a half with Wayne Stroshein, watching him irrigate his fields, asking questions, and taking measurements. Steve's mission was to learn what distinguishes a 'good' field from a 'bad' one.

Steve is new to the area, and unfamiliar with the predominant border-check flood irrigation practice. A local saying is: "get it on and get it off," meaning the irrigator needs to get sufficient water across the field to supply crop needs, without drowning the crops or flooding the neighbors. Border-check irrigating is a delicate art, and is either facilitated or hampered by field and ditch characteristics.

With Wayne's help Steve now has a better understanding of how irrigation ditch and field gate capacity, along with field texture, slope and length affect irrigation performance. "I learned more about irrigation management in a week and a half working with Wayne than I did in a year and a half in the office. There is no substitute for the learning that comes from being out on the land with an experienced farmer. This experience will help my office design better irrigation systems in the future." Steve said.

NRCS Partners with Girl Scouts!

NRCS Earth Team State Volunteer Coordinator

Lewis County District Conservationist and Earth Team Volunteer, Jacquelyn Drake recently represented NRCS at the Girls Enjoying Math and Science (GEMS) Program held in Lexington. The annual event held in March by the Girl Scouts Wilderness Road Council (GSWRC), hosted more than 200 Girl Scouts from fifty-five counties in Kentucky, one county in Ohio and one county in Tennessee, who ranged in age from eleven to seventeen. The purpose of the event is to help girls develop a greater interest in the fields of math and science.

Jacquelyn's workshop focused on soil particle size and it's relation to soil conservation. The girls acted out a soil and water skit, investigated soil textures, and discovered how little soil is available for food production. The workshop also provided the girls information regarding careers with NRCS, and how they too could become an Earth Team Volunteer. Additionally, every girl attending the Soils workshop received a "Natural Resources Gift Bag" courtesy of the Lewis County Conservation District.

"Being able to participate in the program was a wonderful experience for both me and the Girl Scouts," stated Jacquelyn after the event. "I don't mind volunteering a Saturday when it gives me the opportunity to increase conservation awareness in the leaders of tomorrow."

Photo by: Cami Stevens, Membership Specialist GSWRC

Jacquelyn, center, works with the girls scouts in getting their hands dirty to feel soil texture.

When it Comes to Saving Space

Nebraska Earth team Volunteer Coordinator

The Chadron field office enlisted the help of six volunteers to help the office clean up and get organized. These volunteers were recruited through the local RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). Most of the volunteers had worked with NRCS before.

The volunteers assisted with tossing outdated manuals and cleaning up the office bookshelves, which included dismantling more than 30 manuals. When the job was completed 14 hours, later the Chadron field office had 13 feet of freed-up bookshelf space. The paper from the outdated manuals was recycled and picked up by the Chadron Clean Committee – another local volunteer organization.

While the manuals were being dismantled and recycled, one of the volunteers staffed the telephones. The Chadron field office is currently without a secretary, so this was especially helpful, according to District Conservationist Robin Folk.

"I've used RSVP volunteers before to answer the phones while our staff is in the field or at meetings. Since we're currently without a secretary volunteers have really filled a need," Folk said.

Volunteers helped the Chadron field office get organized by dismantling and recycling over 30 outdated manuals. Notice the large pile of binders behind them.

Earth Day in Lafayette County, Wisconsin

Wisconsin State Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator

Since 1988, every fifth grade student in Lafayette County, Wisconsin, has been able to celebrate Earth Day at an outdoor educational experience organized by NRCS District Conservationist, Dan Cotter.Approximately 4500 students have participated in the event. The cumulative impact is significant since the total county population is 16,100 people. The topics covered have varied through the years depending upon the expertise available from local volunteers and conservation professionals. Mountaineering, forestry, wildlife, water quality, soils, soil conservation, gun safety, fisheries, local history, archery, outdoor safety, ethics, archaeology, wood utilization, prairie plants, wetlands, wild population dynamics, groundwater concerns, fishing and more have been presented with hands on learning stations.

Voluntary effort from local people interested in conservation coupled with support from county, state and federal experts are the key to this successful program. Presentations for the 2006 Earth Day event were helped by 44 local volunteers. State Conservationist Patricia Leavenworth presented District Conservationist Dan Cotter with a plaque recognizing his efforts to engage volunteers in this Earth Day activity.

Cotter has received many letters over the years and these responses from participants have been most rewarding.

Students watch a log splitting demonstration.

The new per hour volunteer value for FY2006 is $18.06.

A big THANK YOU to all of the Earth Team Volunteers who donate their time and talents to NRCS in 2006!

Smith College

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"The students were professional and represented the Smith College Picker Engineering Program well," said Carl Gustafson, NRCS State Conservation Engineer. "They worked diligently on the project throughout the year and did an excellent job on the final presentation at the May engineering design clinic. We enjoyed working with the students on the fishway project. It was a learning experience for everyone involved."

In 2000, Smith College began the nation's first engineering program at a women's college. The goal of the Smith College Picker Engineering Program Design Clinic is to provide students with an opportunity to tackle real-world engineering projects with actual industry and government clients. Students are required to solve engineering design problems and produce a final product. Students work in teams of three or four under the guidance of a faculty adviser and one or more technical liaisons from the sponsoring organization. The completed projects benefit both the students and the sponsoring organizations.

From left: Andrea Fiumefreddo, student; Dennis Verdi, NRCS; Diana Hubbard, student; Cora Olson, student; Susannah Howe, Ph.D., Clinic Director; Shawna King, student; Carl Gustafson, NRCS: Jeff Anliker, NRCS.

Articles and photographs for publication should be e-mailed, via your State Volunteer Coordinator, to michele eginoire@ia.usda.gov. If you prefer, copy can be mailed or faxed to NRCS Attn: Michele Eginoire, 5140 Park Avenue, Suite C, Des Moines, IA. 50321, fax number (515) 289-4561.

Please remember to include photographs to illustrate the article. JPEG images are preferred. Slides and prints are accepted. If you are using a digital camera, remember to set the camera to the highest quality resolution. Submittal deadlines for 2006 editions of the VolunteerVoice are listed below.

Please remember to submit stories as Word files and photos as separate files in JPEG or TIFF format. Photos embedded in word documents or submitted as web pages present printing problems as they are not of high enough resolution to reproduce.

• Fall 2006--Distribution October 2006. Deadline to submit: 9/15/06

• Winter 2006--Distribution December 2006. Deadline to submit: 11/15/06

• Spring 2007--Distribution March 2007. Deadline to submit: 2/15/07

For information about the Earth Team and the VolunteerVoice, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov, call 1-888-LANDCARE, or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

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