

VolunteerVoice

“The Voice of the Earth Team”

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Fourth Quarter 2009

Earth Team Volunteers in the Garden

Submitted by: Mary Giles, Volunteer Coordinator, Missouri

Digging in the dirt...planting a seed...discovering the wonders of nature! Ladybugs, leaves, sunshine, and trees took root and grew at the second annual “Young Sprouts in the Garden” event in Springfield, Missouri. The USDA-NRCS South Missouri Water Quality Project partnered with several community organizations to bring this educational opportunity to the children of the area. Youngsters with parents or grandparents in tow came from Springfield and the surrounding communities to enjoy a fun-filled day. Activities included making crafts and learning about kid-related gardening, nature, and the environment.

Earth Team volunteers Christa Kauble, Mary Jo Tannehill, and Brandy

Christa leading story time in the garden

Morgan assisted Mary Giles, Earth Team Coordinator, with activities provided by the South Missouri Water Quality Project. Christa and Mary Jo, author and illustrator of a book recently published by Missouri NRCS, distributed copies of “The Little Acorn” and led a story time. They conducted face and hand painting activities with the children, while Mary and Brandy provided educational materials to the adults. Christa and Mary Jo also signed books throughout the day.

Christa wrote “The Little Acorn” in the fall of 2007 as a student of Ozarks Technical Community College in Springfield. She became an Earth Team volunteer and participated in the USDA-NRCS Early Childhood Education Program through the South Missouri Water Quality Project in Ozark. She wrote the story through the program partnership to introduce conservation concepts to young children.

Sharon Small, Missouri NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, selected “The Little Acorn” for publication in 2008. A call-to-artists was announced and Mary Jo, Laclede County SWCD Manager, submitted artwork and was selected as illustrator for the book. Mary Jo is a firm believer in the importance of education in protecting our natural resources, so using her talents as an Earth Team volunteer to illustrate “The Little Acorn” was a natural fit.

Mary Jo painting hands and faces

L-R: Christa and Mary Jo, receiving awards for their work in writing and illustrating “The Little Acorn”

“The Little Acorn” was published in the fall of 2008 and has received two notable distinctions. It was placed in the federal depository libraries across the nation, and an announcement was made in May 2009, that it was selected to be included on the list of “2008 Notable Government Documents in Library Journal.”

The “Young Sprouts in the Garden” event was the perfect setting to introduce “The Little Acorn” to the children in the Springfield community. Approximately 600 children attended the day-long event.

For more information about the Earth Team Early Childhood Education Program or “The Little Acorn,” please contact Mary Giles at 417-581-2719 x 5 or mary.giles@mo.usda.gov.

Volunteers in Colorado Participate in “Trash Treasure Hunt”

Submitted by: Colleen McCleary, State Volunteer Coordinator, Colorado

Recently, the Keep Colorado Beautiful Committee, under the direction of leader Beverly Babb and a group of La Junta, Colorado, high school students, partnered up with NRCS Earth Team volunteers for the first annual "Trash Treasure Hunt." Beverly and Earth Team volunteers demonstrated immense dedication to keeping the community clean, and organizing a fun way to get involved.

The purpose of the "Trash Treasure Hunt" was to promote trash collection, recycling, and other environmentally friendly actions. In addition to spreading the cause, the group made tireless plans preparing for the hunt. Approximately 100 participants met at the La Junta City Park to distribute free trash bags for the clean up and the participating groups were assigned an area of La Junta to collect trash.

L-R: Donovan Ramirez and Julia Ramirez

Earth Team volunteers and La Junta Area Office staff participated on their designated route along east State Highway 50 for trash collection. Vouchers were

32, 30-gallon bags of trash collected. L-R: Fran Pannebaker, Annie Dolley, Charlie Pannebaker, Donovan Ramirez, Julia Ramirez, and Mike Taylor.

attached to pieces of trash along the trash collection routes the night before by Beverly and the students, giving participants the opportunity to obtain redeemable prizes from local businesses after being found.

It was a great day to have some fun helping the community!

New Mexico Volunteer Receives National Award

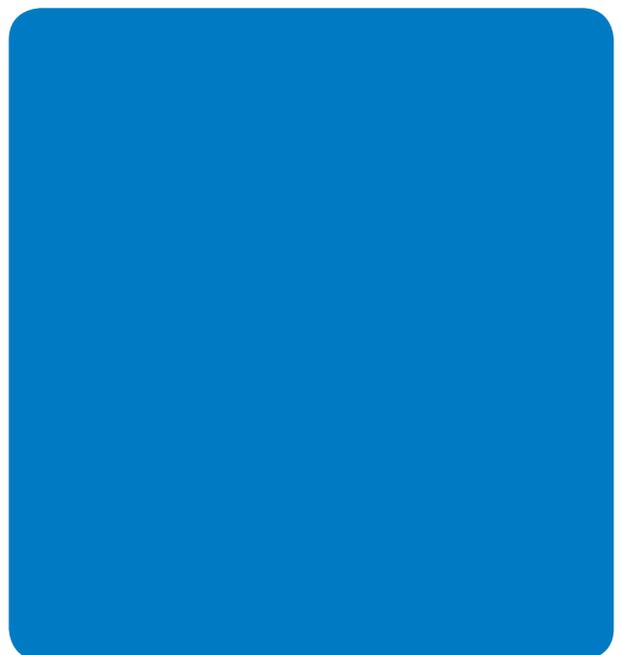
Submitted by: Rita Yarbrough, State Volunteer Coordinator, New Mexico

April Weitlauf, winner of the 2008 National Earth Team Individual Volunteer Award, was recognized at the National Association of RC&D's Conference in Albuquerque, NM, for her contributions as an Earth Team volunteer to the Black Range RC&D Council.

“April has been such an integral ingredient of the Black Range RC&D that most people identify her with the agency,” said Dennis Alexander, State Conservationist. “Her Earth Team volunteer work for the Black Range RC&D has been invaluable.”

April is a project manager for major, multi-year RC&D projects, she assists with the operation of the Black Range RC&D office, and aids the entire area council. She manages her time between being the owner/operator of a management consulting service, fulfilling the role of a mother, and working as an Earth Team volunteer for the RC&D.

“Our volunteers are vital to our conservation team, and April has done an outstanding job,” said Alexander. “She is an asset to our team and to New Mexico.”



April Weitlauf

High School and College Volunteers Join Forces

Submitted by: Sarah Szachnieski, State Volunteer Coordinator, Missouri

Missouri State University (MSU) students joined forces this spring with high school students enrolled in the Missouri A+ program to teach fundamental natural resource concepts to young children in a small rural town in southwest Missouri. The high school and college students were all enrolled as Earth Team volunteers through the South Missouri Water Quality Project (SMWQ) in Ozark.

“Cool!” “Awesome!” are just some of the comments heard in the second grade classroom in Hurley, MO, as MSU student Whitney Kramer led the children in a hands-on experiment depicting evaporation during the water cycle.

A room was darkened in an adjacent building as Lindsey Hoskins, another MSU student, divided the children in her kindergarten classroom into groups and asked each group to shine the light from their flashlights through bottles of clean and dirty water and discuss what they saw and where they might find that type of water.

Planning...

L-R: Josey Payne and Whitney Kramer planning a lesson about evaporation

Just down the hall Kim Brewer, also a MSU student, helped excited four and five year old children with their coats as they lined up to

go in search of living things while visiting the nearby creek. While they were having fun, they were introduced to an important concept: ALL LIVING THINGS NEED WATER TO LIVE.

The SMWQ Project, located in Ozark, MO, created the Earth Team Early Childhood Education Program four years ago and has had an ongoing partnership with students in Dr. Denise Cunningham’s, “Methods of Teaching Science and Math” class at MSU. Each semester students are involved in developing and teaching lessons related to water and present them in primarily urban practicum classrooms within the watershed. All MSU students receive academic credit for their participation in addition to serving as Earth Team volunteers.

However, this semester these three MSU students jumped at the opportunity to be involved in a pilot project which placed them in practicum classrooms in a rural school and teamed them with Missouri A+ high school students. Lindsey, Kim, and Whitney developed lessons that introduced a water concept, and also developed four supporting activities that the high school students led in follow-up sessions.

Hurley High School Principal Lisa May and Elementary Principal Josh Phillips were excited that Hurley Public School was invited to be a partner in this Earth Team volunteer joint endeavor. Josh Phillips said this about the program, “I have been impressed with the multiple facets of this program. We are not only developing the skills of future teachers, but are teaching state required content in a stimulating manner. Our high school students have learned a great deal from the college students and in turn have produced high quality lessons themselves. The result has been classrooms full of eager young children learning in a highly engaging and hands-on way.”

and...Learning!

Excited 4 and 5 year old children exploring a creek near the school

Kim Brewer explaining that living things need water

The opportunity to participate in the pilot project also appealed to high school students Anna Wolfe, Billie Carsten, Josey Payne, Macey Thompson, and Kelsey Frossard because the service hours involved in the program contributed toward the mentoring

requirements of the Missouri A+ program. In addition, their Earth Team service was documented allowing them to cite it on future college applications as community service.

To date, the Earth Team Early Childhood Program has reached over 5,500 children in 19 communities in the Upper White River Watershed. This adaptation of the program supports the SMWQ Project’s overall outreach strategy to extend the Early Childhood Program into the rural areas of the watershed.

Teaching...

Lindsey Hoskins teaching a lesson about pollution

Dorothy Chambers Assists with Projects in Kansas

Submitted by: *Mary Shaffer, State Public Affairs Specialist, Kansas*

Dorothy Chambers is an Earth Team volunteer for the Wilson County Conservation District and Fredonia Field Office in Fredonia, Kansas.

“She is a tremendous asset to the office. She serves with a smile and a great attitude,” says Gina Thompson, Wilson County Conservation District manager. “I like to volunteer when I can,” says Dorothy.

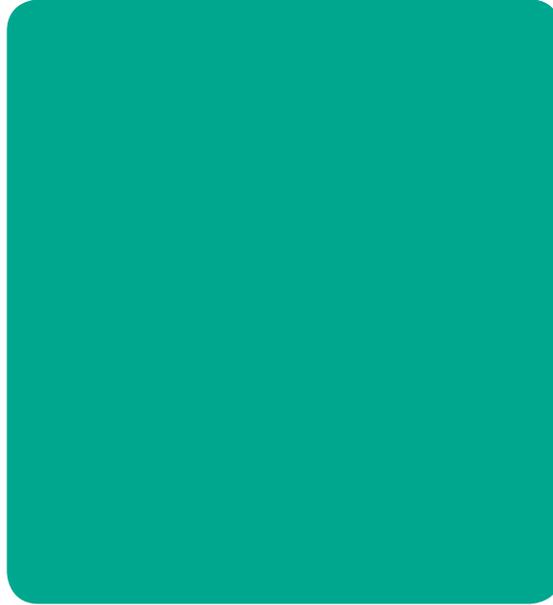
She enjoys assisting with newsletters and other clerical duties as the need arises. Dorothy also volunteers with the hospital auxiliary and her church.

“Sometimes we have a project that Dorothy can do where she lives and not at the

office,” said Jeff Schmidt, District Conservationist. “For those out-of-the-office projects, it’s not

uncommon for Dorothy to enlist the help of other volunteers as they gather in a common area,” said Schmidt, “and work on a project together.”

Dorothy was raised on a farm, and as most farm-raised children, learned to pitch in and help with the farm work at an early age. Though Dorothy now lives in town, being an Earth Team volunteer helps Dorothy feel connected to the land as she did when she was a farm kid. Today, she understands and appreciates the land, conservation and natural resources.



Dorothy Chambers

RECOGNITION IDEAS

By: *Lori Valadez, State Public Affairs Specialist, Texas*

Chuck Damron has been a volunteer in Texas for 17 years – helping out in administrative services. NRCS Staff recently celebrated Chuck’s 83rd birthday with him.

Chuck Damron

By: *Colleen McCleary, State Volunteer Coordinator, Colorado*

The La Junta, Colorado, Area Office held a "Potluck Lunch" in honor of their Earth Team volunteers and office.

Volunteers and staff prepare for lunch, L-R: Ben Berlinger, Carolyn Miller, Lane Simmons, Shyla Valencia, Mike Taylor, and Lorenz Sutherland

Remember:

Venessa is looking for articles for the next issue of the VolunteerVoice! Please limit articles to a maximum of 3/4 of a page and send jpg photos as a separate file. E-mail your articles and photos to: venessa.homewood@ia.usda.gov

Deadline for article submission for the next issue is November 15, 2009.

Colorado Volunteers Replace Trees Destroyed by Wildfires

Submitted by: Colleen McCleary, State Volunteer Coordinator, Colorado

Colorado Earth Team volunteers recently partnered with the Colorado State Forest Service and numerous other sponsors, to replant trees in the Ordway, Colorado, vicinity. Crowley County and the Town of Ordway suffered a devastating wildland fire in April 2008. The consequences of the disaster have been innumerable with many families losing everything they owned. Landowners have been

Volunteer Coordinator Al White, assisting other volunteers with Ordway fire victims tree replanting

rebuilding their homes and have moved on to replace trees that were badly damaged or lost due to the fire.

Volunteers met at the Crowley County fairgrounds near Ordway for a check-in and assignment to one of the three work crews. After a briefing of the day's plans, reviewing planting techniques, and reviewing safety plans, crews were

Volunteers replanting trees

dispersed to their planting sites.

Altogether, over 100 volunteers from across Colorado converged in the area on the Saturday of National Volunteer Week, helping Crowley County landowners replant trees during the day-long work session. Snacks, drinks and lunches were provided for all volunteers by sponsors of the tree replacement.

Drip systems and weed barriers were installed on properties, in addition to over 300 Austrian Pine, Rocky Mountain Juniper seedlings, Ponderosa Pine, Blue Spruce, and fruit trees (cherry, plum, apple).

Volunteers concluded the day with a feeling of great satisfaction that they had played a part in helping landowners begin to rebuild their lives.

2009 National Earth Team/Public Affairs Training Conference

The 2009 National Training Conference was held in St. Louis, MO, September 14-18. Volunteer Coordinators attended different sessions ranging from Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities, Working with Management, to Social Media. All training session presentations will be posted to the Earth Team SharePoint. If you are a coordinator who would like access to the Earth Team SharePoint, please contact your State Volunteer Coordinator.
