



NRCS Alabama Current Developments

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From the State Conservationist - Dr. William Puckett



Earth Team Volunteers Honored

The theme for April National Volunteer Week was "Earth Team Volunteers are the Key Foundation of Conservation." NRCS celebrated the week by thanking and honoring Earth Team (ET) Volunteers for their service to conservation. The ET is the agency's official volunteer resource.

Nationally in FY2010, nearly 30,000 people donated 641,549 hours of service to NRCS, worth \$13.4 million. NRCS State Conservationist Dr. William Puckett said that last year 3,768 Earth Team volunteers in Alabama donated 34,783 hours of service. "That's worth \$725,225 of benefit in Alabama to our customers," said Dr. Puckett. "These are impressive numbers and we are grateful for the help, but much more conservation work needs to be done." Thank you Alabama Earth Team Volunteers! (Additional ET stories on page 11.)



Garrett Stephens, Montgomery Co. ET Volunteer at an archeological dig at a farm called Riverview Plantation, a working farm that has prehistoric and historic archaeological sites including small mounds and standing structures.



Evergreen Garden Club, an ET Volunteer group, plants a tree in recognition of Arbor Week.

State Office News

Jones Holds Relay-For-Life Luncheon

NRCS retiree Deloris Jones drops by the state office fairly often for many good reasons. In April 2011, she dropped by for a good cause and something good to the employees. She sponsored her annual American Cancer Society "Relay-For-Life" luncheon. She brought her special chicken salad and pimento and cheese sandwiches. For desert, she had made her famous home-made banana pudding and other delights. Employees were invited to donate what they wanted for unlimited visits to her table of goodies. The amount collected was \$1,077. Way to go NRCSers!

This year Deloris dedicated the luncheon to co-worker Susan Dillard, IT Specialist, who lost her life to cancer on January 3, 2011. The main event, the Opelika Relay-for-Life, was May 2011 at the Southern Union State College track in Opelika, AL. A candle was lit in memory of Susan and others who have lost their lives to cancer.



NRCS Holds Forestry Training Retreat

By Tim Albritton, State Staff Forester, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Forestry related personnel attended a forestry training retreat at the Enon & Sehoj Plantations in Bullock Co. This is one of Alabama's unique forestry venues. The retreat examined current programs, guides, standards, and ways to promote forestry to the public. The retreat helped improve communications and provided an opportunity to observe unique forest management practices.

Before the technical session, everyone shared an interesting forestry experience. This created a lot of laughter and helped the attendees to get to know each other.

In addition to the sessions, the group toured some of the forest management practices at Enon & Sehoj. One of their major objectives is improving quail habitat. This is accomplished by providing adequate brood fields and

hardcover habitat that is used for feeding and protective cover.

Some other points of interest on the tour included longleaf pine restoration, prescribed burning, hardwood cover planting along feed lines, and Red Cockaded Woodpecker cluster nesting trees.

This training, held in an environment conducive to learning and in a stress-free atmosphere, created a desirable and successful experience. The planners and attendees extend their appreciation to NRCS leadership for their endorsement and to John Stivers and the folks at Enon & Sehoj Plantations for hosting the event.



John Stivers discusses the brood field management, one of 761 fields managed for quail.



Forestry retreat attendees stand in front of the Sehoj Plantation general store built in 1870.

State Office Employees Meeting

By Jillian Stephens, NRCS Communications Specialist, Auburn, AL

Knowing what to do and where to go during a crisis is essential to maintaining safety and semi-normal agency operations. In May 2011, NRCS state office employees learned more about the Continuity of Operations Plan, or COOP.

This plan has already been tested to some degree by the devastating tornado events in north Alabama, employees were briefed by Assistant State Conservationist-Operations Zona Beaty on terminology, the purpose and effectiveness of phone trees, and what to do and expect during a crisis.

After COOP training, Teresa Paglione and Charles Love, state office representatives to the Alabama NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee, presented several video scenarios from "All in the Family" and "The Office" to encourage discussion among the group about racial and class discrimination in the work place.

Later, Human Resources Officer Marty Bright-Riveria and State Administrative Officer Heather Abeyta discussed upcoming changes with the audit and, as a result, job vacancies.



After the training, the staff enjoyed a potluck lunch. The meeting and the food was a great success.

Zona Beaty talked about COOP training and the upcoming exercises.

Legislative Reception

Alabama state legislators took a few moments from their busy schedules to relax at the Annual Legislative Reception hosted by the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) in Montgomery, AL. The reception was April 2011 at the RSA Activity Center. Conservation leaders from around the state met with elected officials to discuss agricultural issues affecting rural Alabama.

This year's reception drew Governor Robert Bentley as well as numerous state representatives and senators. "This event was a chance to thank our legislators and governor for their support in the past, as well as to express our concerns for the future," said AACD President Dr. Carol Knight. "Conservation is an ongoing process, one that we cannot afford to neglect."

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on private lands and many public lands in the U.S.



(l-r) AACD 1st Vice-President Lisa Pritchett, Alabama Governor Robert Bentley, and AACD President Dr. Carol Knight.

Snells Win NRCS Small Farmer Award

In May 2011, Earl and Charisse Snell of Dale Co. were honored as the Alabama NRCS Small Farmers of the Year during the Outreach/Youth Day in Skipperville, AL. They were selected for their environmental stewardship, innovations, and community leadership.

As the Alabama NRCS 2011 Small Farmers of the Year, the Snells will represent the state in the national competition.

"The Snells are pioneers in the field," said NRCS State Conservationist Dr. William Puckett, "they were the first farmers in Dale Co. to construct a seasonal high tunnel and they have been instrumental in adopting and promoting this new technology in the area."



(l-r) Earl and Charisse Snell accept a clock with an engraved plaque from NRCS State Conservationist Dr. William Puckett honoring them as the Alabama NRCS 2011 Small Farmers of the Year.

From The Field

George Washington Carver Exhibit

By Amy Bell, Coordinator, Gulf Coast RC&D

The Museum of Mobile has been busy this spring. The George Washington Carver exhibit attracted thousands of visitors exploring the extraordinary scientist and conservationist.

Carver had a fascinating life story and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. He overcame tremendous odds to become one of America's most versatile scientists.

Gulf Coast RC&D, partnering with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), awarded the Museum of Mobile a grant to put some of Carver's methods and approaches to gardening into action.

The garden was built inside historic Ft. Conde, next to the Museum of Mobile. After the exhibit ends, the community garden will be located outside of the Ft. Conde walls. The 15th Place Homeless Shelter participants will plant, tend, and harvest the garden to provide food for the homeless shelter. Gardening provides the participants a therapeutic activity to motivate and generate confidence.

Carver was a humanitarian whose primary goal was, as he put it, "to help the farmer and fill the poor man's empty dinner pail." As the exhibit on his life ends at the Museum of Mobile, his teachings and practices will continue in the heart of downtown Mobile.



"Our Own Destiny Communal Garden" gives 4th-5th graders a hands-on experience with planting, tending, and harvesting an organic garden.

The Blount County Soil Tunnel Is Busy

By Mark Butler, Watershed Coordinator, Blount Co., AL

Blount Co. SWCD employees Polly Morris and Mark Butler set up the Soil Tunnel in the environmental section at the Blount Co. Covered Bridge Festival. The section included booths from Master Gardeners, Friends of the Locust Fork, solar ovens, and solar power to run small appliances.

Most were amazed by what they were able to see in the tunnel. The Soil Tunnel was built so people, young or old, could get an idea of what is under their feet and how everything has its purpose in the environment. Some asked questions and were answered to encourage conservation of our natural resources for future generations.

The following week, the SWCD employees took the Soil Tunnel to the Multi-Needs School Harvest Festival in Cleveland, AL. Over 70 students crawled through the Soil Tunnel's dark cavern exploring what lives under their feet.

The staff enjoyed spending time with these special students. It is hoped that they will retain something about soil and water conservation.



Students enjoyed crawling through the Soil Tunnel using a flashlight to see what is living in the Earth under their feet.

State Land Judging Contest

By April Jones, NRCS DC, Montgomery, AL



The State Land Judging contest was held in March in Montgomery Co. at the farm of Laslie Hall. The event was hosted by the Montgomery Co. SWCD/NRCS.

Pam Mason, NRCS DC, presents award to high scorer.



Clay Co. won first place.

DACs “Read Across America”

By Kathy Walker, SWCS DAC, Madison Co., AL

DACs Kathy Walker (Madison Co.) and Karen Hayes (Marshall Co.) participated in “Read Across America” in March in honor of Dr. Seuss’s Birthday. They both had a lot of fun!

Kathy has participated in this annual event for many years and enjoys it as much as the students. She is excited about getting the students involved. She made a “Cat ON the Hat.” All of the students wanted to hold or wear the hat.

Kathy read “Oh the Places You’ll Go” and Karen read “Oh The Thinks You Can Think.” The students were painted with whiskers and cute pink noses and some wore big red bow ties.

Both Kathy and Karen agree that this is great way to get involved with the local schools and to have school administrators get to know the SWCD personnel.



(l-r) Karen Hayes and Kathy Walker visit school to read to students and help school administrators become aware of SWCS/NRCS in the county.

Cullman County NRCS Distributes Hispanic Coloring Books

To help the local Hispanic population speak English, the Cullman Co. NRCS furnished Cullman First United Methodist Church’s Hispanic Ministries with coloring books.

The coloring books, entitled Tennessee Tom’s Big Adventure, are printed in English and Spanish. The books tell of the turtle’s, Tenn Tom, travels to the Tennessee River and the pollution he finds there.

NRCS DC Murray Griffin presented the church’s Director of Hispanic Ministries, Yenny Laney, with coloring books.



At the close of the story, Tenn Tom asks the readers to make a difference and not pollute our environment.

Along with helping readers learn English, the coloring books also help young readers learn about the environment and what they can do to help protect it.

Alabama Mountains, Rivers and Valleys (AMRV) RC&D developed the two coloring books to help people speaking Spanish in their transition and to encourage conservation of our natural resources.

Outreach Workshop in Geneva

By Janie B. Howell, SWCD DAC, Geneva Co., AL

More than 50 Geneva Co. farmers and landowners gathered at the Geneva Co. Farm Center in January to hear information on new and existing programs and opportunities available from NRCS, ACES, Geneva Co. SWCD, and Wiregrass RC&D. Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged, and New and Beginning Farmer opportunities were presented followed by a question and answer session. Financial assistance programs, along with loan information, was part of the agenda. Handouts were available for everyone.



(l-r) Soil Con Adam Sconyers and DC Alex Vaughan from NRCS in Geneva Co., and James Currington, Wiregrass RC&D Coordinator, explain program opportunities to meeting participants.

Congressman Bobby Bright Participates in Covington County Field Tour

By Patricia Gable, SWCD Ed Specialist, Covington Co., AL

Congressman Bobby Bright came to Covington Co. to learn how SWCD/NRCS assists county farmers and landowners. He was very interested and came in boots, prepared for a walking, hands-on tour.

The tour began at the Lurleen B. Wallace Opp Campus. NRCS DC Steve Yelverton gave an overview of financial assistance available to farmers and landowners, including the special projects that have brought funds into the county (dirt road restoration, civic facility needs, etc.) Bright then traveled with county SWCD supervisors and NRCS employees to various project sites in the county.

The group reviewed a bio-retention structure, an erosion/drainage project, a poultry farm, the NE Yellow River Watershed Site P11 repaired with Federal Stimulus Funds, a rotational grazing system on a cattle farm, and Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP), and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) sites.

Bright viewed dry stacks, a poultry farm, nutrient management systems, rotational grazing systems, and conservation tillage. He learned that EWP has provided over \$669,500 to repair 40 sites in the county within the last 5 years. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and WHIP has brought in over \$1 million in assistance to local units of government.

The tour ended with lunch at the Farm Service Center where District Supervisors and NRCS employees reviewed and discussed questions or issues regarding the agricultural needs within the county.

The day provided proof that SWCD/NRCS programs and funds really make a difference for the individual landowner, the community, the county, and our state.



NRCS DC Steve Yelverton and ASTC-FO-East Richard Collier discuss rotational grazing, pipelines, and troughs with Covington Co. farmer Joe Holmes, Congressman Bobby Bright, and Covington Co. SWCD Supervisors Wayne Reynolds, Bobby Jackson, Bill Godwin, and Mike Birge.

Organic Conservation Activity Plan Brings to Life an Organic Idea

By Travis Badger, SWCD Technician, Morgan Co., AL

Gary Slaten of Hartselle, AL, had a great organic idea, allowed NRCS to assist him, and brought his idea to life.

When Slaten decided to grow organic vegetables, he did some research. Like other farmers, he bought materials and did the work himself to build a hoop house. He then found out there were programs specially developed by NRCS that would help him build a larger and more advanced hoop house with better production of organic vegetables, and would help him pay for it.

The NRCS staff encouraged Slaten to attend organic production and marketing training. There he learned that prices of vegetables varied in different locations due to supply and demand. He found that production of organic vegetables would not only be financially beneficial to him, but would help the community by supplying an economical choice for organic vegetables. Slaten also found out other advantages of hoop houses like having better control of the growing environment and that he could grow his plants year round.

Buying the plants was the next step. He discovered that prices of organic plants are considerably more expensive than non-organic. He commented that one organic tomato plant can cost about \$3 whereas non-organic cost about 6 for \$3. Slaten decided to grow plants from seeds even though he knew it would create more challenges due to the no chemical application regulation that gives organic vegetables their unique quality.

Slaten prepared for his organic farming venture and is looking forward to the benefits it will bring to his family and the community. He thanks NRCS for their assistance in the success of his operation. NRCS is proud to have Slaten as one of their first farmers to sign up with the Organic Conservation Activity Plan under the EQIP program.

Gary Slaten built his seasonal high tunnel, hoop house, in part with funds from the NRCS EQIP Organic Initiative.



Recycling—A Way of Life

By Travis Badger, SWCD Technician, Morgan Co., AL

According to Santiago Lima of Hartselle, AL, “It’s not how much you got, but how you use it.”

Santiago grew up in Argentina in an agricultural family, but his dream was to start a farm in the USA. He immigrated in 1998, and began to look for land. In 2004, he found 25 acres in Hartselle.

His dream was coming true, but he had to make this farm productive with little money. He began to farm about 17 acres using the idea of “Waste not—Want not.” He became a recycling example for others to follow.

He recycles rain water by installing rain catchers on all structures on his farm. He used discarded advertisement and political signs as temporary patches on structures. When a wind storm blew down trees on his property, he had them sawed into lumber to put siding on his buildings. He found uses for junk lying around on the property and salvaged what he could to build other structures and equipment. Eventually he turned his small plot into a productive farm of cattle, hogs, chickens, beehives, and fruit trees.

Santiago credits NRCS for much of the new technology on his farm. He qualified for the Socially Disadvantaged program that helped him take advantage of every inch his property. He is glad for the NRCS financial assistance, and the technical advice.

Conservation has become a way of life for Santiago. He is an example of how NRCS can benefit farmers and conserve natural resources. Santiago states that his ultimate goal is to produce bio-fuel for his tractor. He agrees that if NRCS had a practice to help produce bio-fuel, he would be the first to sign up.



The stream crossing was one of the first practices that helped Santiago realize that NRCS knew what they were doing. He said he did not think it would work. After approving the project, he was amazed at how well it worked, how it improved the water quality of the stream, and how it has held up over time.



(l-r) NRCS DC Daniel Goins and SWCD DAC Katherine Patton demonstrate a cotton gin that was borrowed from the Cullman Co. SWCD. The cotton gin demonstration was a perfect fit for the theme of The Heritage Festival which began in the 1980s.

Walker County Participates In Jasper Heritage Festival

By Katherine Patton, SWCD DAC, Walker Co., AL

The Walker Co. SWCD/NRCS participated in the Jasper Heritage Festival. The organizers wanted to hold an event that had the same focus toward the community and its history as the older heritage festivals.

The event included performances by the Walker High School Drama Team portraying community figures of the past. A local educator also displayed historic photographs of Jasper and told stories about the people and places in them. These stories ranged from the settlement of the community to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s visit to the city during Congressman William Bankhead’s funeral. Organizers feel that it is imperative for communities like Jasper to safeguard their history. People need community roots on which to build their history.

The event also allowed many non-profit organizations and churches to host activities such as face painting, an inflatable slide, and arts and crafts booths. The Heritage Festival gave local organizations the chance to promote themselves within the community. It’s a golden opportunity for non-profits to share their story and mission with the general public.

The city of Jasper has a lot to be proud of and we want to recognize the wonderful area and people. It’s very important that SWCD/NRCS participates in these events and other like them so we can help inform the community about soil and water conservation and to meet customers we may not see in other situations.

DeKalb County Farmer Installs Conservation Practices

By Cecil Gant, SM-LG Watershed, Rainsville, AL

Roy Sanders lives on Lookout Mountain in DeKalb Co., AL. He is committed to improving the land with which he has been entrusted. He regards himself as a good steward of the environment, and the practices he has installed 'put his money where his mouth is.'

He established 17 acres of Bermuda grass for hay and he is re-seeding more than 23 acres of Fescue. He has strategically placed three concrete troughs in his pastures to make clean water convenient and accessible for his 50-head beef cattle herd. He has also fenced out a creek and is adding two farm ponds to keep his cattle from polluting the water and to protect them from getting foot diseases from wading in the water.

This conscientious farmer learned about conservation by observing other farmers' success. He credits Billy Twilley, a neighbor and a member of the DeKalb Co. SWCD, with being his role model and encouraging him to contact NRCS and to implement conservation practices.

"I see a connection between caring for the land—conserving it and keeping it functional, and productive—and our standard of living," Sanders said. "The low prices we pay for food results from the efficiency of our farmers, most that are environmentally friendly.

Sanders says he appreciates the help made available by the local NRCS. "Financial assistance through such programs as EQIP has allowed me to do more improvements to the land than I could have done on my own," he said.



Roy Sanders (r) is pleased with the recently installed concrete watering troughs. To reduce potential messy conditions in wet weather in and around the troughs, he installed a heavy-use area. The watering troughs enable his cows to continually have clean, fresh drinking water. Sanders tells James Huber (l) DeKalb Co. SWCD technician, the more best management practices he installs on his farm, the more he regards himself as a good steward of the land.



J.B. Turner and his hoop house.

Hoop House Installed in Madison County

By Joyce Lane, NRCS Soil Con, Madison Co., AL

J.B. Turner was an Alabama A&M University professor for 32 years. He did not realize just how hard he would have to work after retiring. He keeps-up his Registered Angus herd and raises fruits and vegetables for his customers at the local farmers market.

Turner began growing fruits and vegetables in 1980. In the beginning, his patrons picked their own; however, many did not like that option. Turner realized that he had to use another method if he was going to be successful. He needed to grow more items for market and he needed a better way to do it.

He started thinking about the advantages of a Seasonal High Tunnel, or hoop house. He contacted NRCS. After many workshops, hours of studying different designs, and phone calls and conversations with manufacturers of hoop houses, Turner built his first house in the fall of 2010.

Turner anticipates that his hoop house will allow him to start producing crops earlier and carry production later in the season than with traditional methods.

Turner said that this structure will definitely enhance his business. He planted turnip greens in the fall. He emphasized that tomatoes, peppers, and some strawberries will be the main crops grown in the hoop house during spring and summer.

He said that when extra hands are needed, Barbara, his wife, gladly pitches in so things continue to run smoothly. He reminisced about his daughter and chuckled. He said that growing up, she enjoyed all aspects of farming, but now that he has retired, is back into farming, and needed her help, Jennifer has grown up and left home. He said he sure does miss having her around.

Celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

In January 2011, the Marshall Co. SWCD, NRCS, and FSA employees gathered for a luncheon in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The main feature was a 45-minute film entitled, "Mighty Times: The Children's March" that tells the story of how young people of Birmingham, AL, under the direction of Martin Luther King, Jr., braved fire hoses and police dogs in 1963, and brought segregation to its knees. It shows that children of all ages have the power to make a difference in the world.

This documentary connected to all employees and several recalled the actual events.

Service Center employees enjoyed the film and the luncheon as they celebrated the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.



Classroom in the Park

By Nelda McKinney, SWCD DAC, Perry Co., AL

Perry Lakes Park was the site for Classroom in the Forest in Perry Co. In April, 5th graders from Uniontown, Albert Turner, Sr. Elementary Schools, and high school students from Francis Marion gathered in the Park. The Classroom in the Forest was hosted by the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC), Perry Co. SWCD, NRCS, and ACES.

At the "Flag a Tree" station, Cedric Hudson, AFC, talked about healthy forests and trees. He explained the importance of thinning and removing diseased trees. Sutton Gibbs, NRCS DC, at the Enviroscape station, explained the importance of clean water and ways to prevent water pollution. Brigetta Giles, AFC, at the "O' Deer" station, taught the students about healthy and creating healthy wildlife habitats. John Hoomes, ACES, at the Skins and Skulls station, showed students many of the skins and skulls of animals.

At the "Soil Run-off" station, David Stewart, Perry Co. Soil Con Tech, shows erosion from freshly tilled soil, mulched soil, and soil with a cover crop.



Sheep and Goat Forum

In March a forum was conducted for Goat and Sheep

producers at the Lawrence Co. Ag Center hosted by ACES, and sponsored by A+ Marketing and AMRV RC&D.



Kathy Gotcher, NRCS DC in Lawrence Co., informed producers about NRCS programs available to goat and sheep producers. Mike Roden, AMRV RC&D, discussed grants he was working on to benefit the producers. Charlie Meek, Northwest AL RC&D, announced an on-farm research project that is testing different types and amounts of feeds for sheep.

Robert Spencer, Urban Regional Extension Specialist for Goats, Sheep, and Rabbits, discussed herd health and how to avoid problem, marketing, feed/minerals for the different breeds, and pros and cons of the different breeds of animals.

Cypress Cove Farm Day

By Beth Rhea, SWCD DAC, Franklin Co., AL

Soils can be a work of art. That was what school children learned during the Cypress Cove Farm Day in Franklin Co. in May. "With children ranging from kindergarten through fourth grade we knew we had to find a way to reach them all," said Pam Skidmore, NRCS Soil Con Tech. Different soil types were incorporated into the lesson plan for the field day. Groups of students were taught about unique soils facts, general soil uses, and the uses of different soils in our everyday life. A sample of each of the soils collected was placed where the students could use them as paint to create their own works of art. The field day was a great success.



At the field day, students learned about farm living, and, that with the right soils, you can create a art masterpiece.

Farm Transferred to 2nd Generation

By Andrew Williams, Agribusiness Management Specialist, NRCS Retired

Kimberly Cosby of Perry Co. is an educator at the elementary school in Uniontown. She graduated from Francis Marion High School and holds several advanced degrees. She decided early in her career that she would stay home and help her parents manage family businesses.

One of the businesses is a cow-calf operation. When the farm was transferred to Cosby, she contacted Andrew Williams of the Winston Co. Self Help Cooperative 2501 program for technical assistance. She indicated that she wanted to continue operating the farm, but wanted to convert it to forestry production to include wildlife habitat management.

Andrew directed her to the SWCD/NRCS local office. She received financial assistance under the Alabama Agricultural Conservation Development Cost-Share Program (AACDCP). A forestry regeneration plan was developed by AFC staff. Williams provided technical assistance through the Winston Co. Self Help Cooperative 2501 program to control burn areas, remove unwanted grass and vegetation, remove unwanted seed trees, and to hand-plant 2nd generation loblolly pines.

Ms. Cosby's goal is to preserve her family heritage and pass it on to future generations to help "Save Rural America."



Kimberly Cosby planted 2nd generation loblolly pines for timber production.

Outdoor Classroom and School Habitat

The Carrollton Elementary School received a grant to install

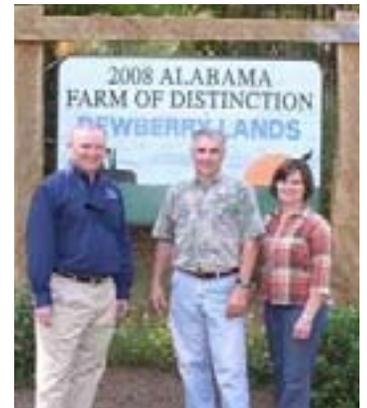


an outdoor classroom and schoolyard habitat. The project involved installing a pond, raised gardening beds, weather station, tree nursery, bird habitat, butterfly garden, gazebo, and picnic tables. The space will be used to teach students about natural resource conservation, biology, soils, weather/climate, recycling, composting, insects, aquatic habitat, forestry and agriculture. Other labor and financial donations were received from the Pickens Co. Commission, Pickens Co. Board of Education, Partners in Education (PIE) Foundation, Brown's Nursery, school teachers, and community volunteers.

Puckett Visits Clay County

By Craig B. Johnson, DC, Clay & Randolph Counties, AL

Dr. William Puckett visited Clay Co. and toured Lamar and Felicia Dewberry's farm, one of the most active forestry farms in the county. Dewberry takes conservation to heart, which is evident from his care of the farm. He said conservation is a passion for him. His farm has benefited from NRCS programs such as EQIP, CSP, etc.



(l-r) Dr. Puckett and Lamar and Felicia Dewberry

Dewberry appreciated the visit. He shared his admiration for Dr. Puckett's hands-on approach at the field level and his commitment to Alabama's landowners.

A Walk in the Forest

About 300 first-grade students recently attended a field day hosted by the Montgomery Chapter of the Society of American Foresters called "A Walk in the Forest."

Students from Redland and Wetumpka Elementary Schools learned about many animals, fish, the environment, and soils - and had fun doing it.

The students listen intently as NRCS Resource Soil Scientist Milton Tuck explained the soils ecosystem and the importance of soils.



Earth Team and Earth Day News

Earth Day in Madison County

On Earth Day 2011, Owens Cross Roads, a Pre-K-6 Blue Ribbon Lighthouse Elementary School in Madison Co., celebrated Earth Day highlighting the Outdoor Classrooms (ODC).

Faculty and students embraced a 'learn and serve project,' to learn about earth science. The classroom learning reaches beyond the school walls and embraces outdoor spaces.

Kathy Walker worked with students on special projects timed to be ready for Earth Day. A hands-on activity, Earth caterpillars, engaged the younger students. They stuffed rich soil, grass seed, and fertilizer into panty hose, kinked it, watered and fertilized it, and when the caterpillars sprout grass they appear to be fuzzy. The fourth graders worked on an outdoor amphitheater with a stage for outdoor performances. They planted crepe myrtles to provide shade for the spectators.



The ODC was completed using grants and volunteers from the school and community. It will continue to grow. Students will add a bog, a frog lodge, and a songbird and butterfly habitat.



(l) Davina Mann, ODC Coordinator, helps students release butterflies. The students studied the butterflies from cocoon stage to the butterfly release. To the student's great joy, the butterflies lit on the beautifully colored flowers that the students had raised from seed and planted in the outdoor space.

Earth Team Volunteers Dig Plantation

By Teresa Paglione, NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist, Auburn, AL

Over several weekends in February - April, Earth Team Volunteers tested two archeology sites in Montgomery Co. at Riverview Plantation, a working farm with hayfields, row crops, wetlands, and mature hardwoods. Volunteers consisted of archaeologists and students from Troy University, Auburn University, and Auburn University at Montgomery; members of the Alabama Archaeological Society; Garrett Stephens (son of Rory Stephens, NRCS Soil Con Tech in Montgomery), and George Martin, retired NRCS soil scientist.

The Riverview Plantation contains several prehistoric and historic archaeological sites as well as standing historic (19th century) structures. A portion of the farm is enrolled in the USDA-NRCS Farm and Ranchland Preservation Program (FRPP).

Lee Harrison, a professional archaeologist with Panamerican Consultants, used ground penetrating radar (GPR) and a flux gradiometer (a magnetometer), to determine if there were intact subsurface features on one known site in a hayland pasture.

At one site located in a plowed field, shovel tests indicate the site extends another 100 meters into a wooded tract. At another site, four 1 meter x 2 meter (3 ft x 6 ft) units were excavated to the bottom of the plowzone (top of undisturbed strata) and revealed possible storage pits and a thin, 2-inch (5 cm) midden consisting mostly of riverine shell and animal bone. Both sites date to about 1,000 AD and are associated with the Late Woodland period Hope Hull phase.

More field trips are planned to both sites this spring and summer as the investigations continue to define the sites' horizontal length and width and their vertical depths across the landscape.



Progress at these sites cannot be accomplished without our Earth Team Volunteers.

Earth Team Volunteers Honored

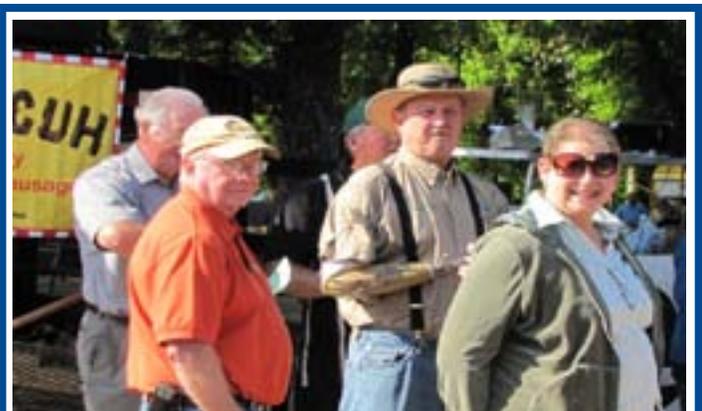
By Kathy Walker, SWCD DAC, Madison Co., AL

Earth Team Volunteers Shirley Davis, Ray Whiddon, and Inez Whiddon were presented awards by the then Acting Madison Co. NRCS DC Shawn Manning. Most recently the three volunteers spent the day at Sparkman Middle School assisting Kathy Walker with presentations for 132 seventh and eighth graders. The students learned about protection of soil and water through hands-on activities. The students were also tasked with cleaning up some waste water from various sites; learning how water treatment plants work and they even experimented with cleaning up an oil spill and learned about the role of polymers in drought situations in other countries.

The students will continue to work with their teachers to use different lesson plans furnished by the Huntsville Field Office throughout this unit of study. We appreciate our volunteers!



(l-r) Shirley Davis, Ray Whiddon, and Inez Whiddon are presented Earth Team Volunteer certificates by DC Shawn Manning for their assistance with education programs in Madison Co.



Earth Team Volunteers Bobby Boutwell (Escambia) (far left) and Danny Golson (Conecuh) (center) talk with other attendees at the Longleaf Restoration and Wildlife Field Day at Saloom Properties near Evergreen, AL.



Volunteers Assist with Water Festival

At the Mobile Co. Water Festival, Penny Smith talks with students at the Filtration Station. Penny is a Master Gardner and a Junior Master Gardeners Leader.

Shoals Earth Day Fest

By Etta Mask, SWCD DAC, Colbert Co., AL

In April 2011, the staffs of Colbert and Florence Counties SWCD/NRCS took part in the Shoals Earth Day Fest at the Florence-Lauderdale Coliseum. This free event was attended by over 500, mostly children. There were Earth-friendly displays, Magician Steve Trash, local music, and free gift to all that attended.

This was a wonderful way to reach out to children, teachers, and those who want to take care of our natural resources.



Ruby Raindrop and Sammy Soil is in the center of attention at the Shoals Earth Day Fest.

Outreach News from Alice Love

Annual Tri-State Farmer's Forum

Tri-State Farmers Forum held its annual workshop. Conservation partners assisted community-based organizations during the workshop in Dothan, AL.



(l-r front row) James Currington, Wiregrass RC&D Coordinator; Alice Love, Agricultural Outreach Liaison; Vickie Lane, Farm Service Agency Outreach Coordinator; Audrey Zeigler, Farm Management Specialist-Tuskegee University Extension; and Paul Waddy, Extension District Director. (l-r back row) Miles Robinson, Director, Alabama Small Farm and Rural Economic Development Center; and Willie Durr, Houston Co. Extension Coordinator.



Tuskegee University Farmer's Conference participants tour Seasonal High Tunnel (hoop-house) constructed through NRCS EQIP financial and technical assistance administrated by staff in Macon Co., AL.

Tuskegee University Farmers Conference

In February, Tuskegee University held its annual Farmers Conference. Alabama USDA representatives from NRCS, Rural Development (RD), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) served on informational panels.

Alabama NRCS personnel were involved in meetings at the Kellogg Center. State office staff Steve Musser, ASTC-Programs; and John Curtis, Resource Conservationist; gave presentations on programs and financial assistance available through NRCS. Teresa Paglione, NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist; give a presentation at the Agricultural Career Opportunities for Youth session.

Career Fair at Tuskegee University

Alice Love staffed an exhibit at the NRCS Career Display during the Forestry Natural Resources Career Fair in the Kellogg Conference Center in Tuskegee, AL. Interested students received information about NRCS careers.



(l-r) Dr. William Puckett, NRCS State Conservationist, visits with Earl Tarver, Alabama Council on Human Relations, during Tuskegee University Farmers Conference Field Tour.

State Soil Section Assists Carver Museum

Members of the MLRA Soil Survey (MO-15) office met with G.W. Carver Museum officials to discuss additional kiosk programs for the Carver Environmental Laboratory (CEL) located at Tuskegee University. The project is funded through a Cooperative Agreement between Tuskegee University and the Soil Survey office.

(r-l) Charles Love, State Soil Scientist/ MO-15; Walter Hill, Tuskegee University; Joe Norris, NRCS Carto Technician; and two Tuskegee University Computer Science students talk about exhibit additions.



Two touch screen kiosks in the Soils Exhibit at the CEL allow visitors to test their soils knowledge through touch screen games such as The Blackbelt Game and The Soil Profile Puzzle.

Students Prepare Marketing Plan

Alfonzo Hooks, Macon Co. producer, works with Tuskegee University students on a demo farm for a class marketing project. Students were assigned to develop a marketing promotional package.



Students interview Al Hooks (in cap) to glean information used to create a marketing promotion for his farm.

RC&D and Randolph/Clay Counties

Gene Thornton, of Sneak Crow Farm in Randolph Co., AL, is a retired Computer Specialist. He and his wife, Rose, dedicates their time promoting healthy eating through growing and marketing naturally grow vegetables. They are the primary operators of his deceased grandfather's 100 acre farm that was established in the 1950s. The farm consists of woodland, cropland, and pasture land. Meat goats are also a part of the Thornton's operation.

The Thornton's researched ways to improve their farming operation and Eddie May, Coordinator, Coosa Valley RC&D; and NRCS DC Craig Johnson were there to assist them. Through EQIP, the Thornton's are transitioning to becoming USDA Organic Certified and were the first producers to construct a Seasonal High Tunnel (hoop-house) in Randolph Co., AL.

Coosa Valley RC&D Council helped the Thornton's to install a micro-irrigation system on their farm.

The Thornton's are experimenting with, and are interested in promoting, the harvest of rain water for irrigation. They catch rain water from a shed roof top in a 1,000 gallon tank and use the water to irrigate crops in their hoop house.



(l-r) Elijah Moore (retired NRCS DC), producer Gene Thornton, and Eddie May, Coosa Valley RC&D.

NRCS Participates in Sunbelt Exposition

NRCS employees from four states participated in the Sunbelt Expo in Moultrie, GA.

Visitors examine an actual raised bed exhibit outside the tent at the Sunbelt Expo.



Youth examine a scale model raised bed display inside the tent at the Sunbelt Expo.

USDA's Help Requested for Center

Louis Maxwell, Chair of the Macon Co. Commission (l) meets with USDA representatives to discuss potential funding assistance to complete the Community Center located in the old Chisholm School in Macon Co.



Forestry Natural Resources Committee

Dr. Walter Hill welcomes members of the Forestry Natural Resources Committee to Tuskegee University. The committee members and advisors consists of current and retired USDA employees, Tuskegee University faculty and staff, and undergraduate and graduate students.



Secretary of Agriculture Visits Tuskegee

USDA Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack and Tuskegee University President Dr. Gilbert L. Rochon signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a Center of Excellence to be constructed on the campus of Tuskegee University.



(top) Vilsack
(below) Rochon



Secretary Vilsack visited with USDA Scholars on campus-Forest Service, NRCS, and 1890 Scholars.

Raised Bed School Garden

Barbara Shipman of the Cottage House is working with the Barbour Co. Middle School on a garden and beautification project. Vegetables are grown in raised beds on the grounds that are maintained by students under the supervision of Shipman. Vegetables raised in the garden are consumed at the school.



Barbara admires the work of the students and vegetables grown in raised beds at Barbour Co. Middle School.

NRCS Agency Head Visits Alabama



USDA-NRCS Chief David White give a presentation at the Federation of Southern Cooperatives Annual Conference/Workshop in Epes, AL.



Participants at the conference gained information about NRCS programs and services at a display managed by Alice Love, NRCS Ag Outreach Liaison.

Outreach Meetings

By Alice Love

More than 30 Outreach Meetings have been held across the state this year with over 15,000 brochures and fact sheets being distributed. These meetings are in conjunction with the Ala-Tom RC&D Cooperative Agreement with AL NRCS to promote outreach activities in rural communities. The program is designed to reach more underserved groups throughout the state.

Randolph/Clay Counties

Craig Johnson, DC for Randolph/Clay Counties, informed participants of USDA programs and criteria for enrollment.



Cottage House

Barbara Shipman, Executive Director of the Cottage House, hosted an Outreach Meeting to inform participants about the programs and services offered by NRCS in Alabama.

James Currington, Wiregrass RC&D facilitated the outreach meeting.



Produced raised in Shipman's raised beds was enjoyed by participants at the meeting.

Eufaula, AL



Delores Peterson, Springhill Development & Improvement Organization (SDIO) Community Liaison. SDIO hosted an outreach meeting in the Springhill Community in Eufaula, AL.

Union Springs, AL

An Outreach Meeting was held in Union Springs. Agency and partner participants at the meeting included Gwen Lewis, DC Macon/Bullock Counties; Back Porch Gardeners of Montgomery, AL; members of Southern Rural Black Women's Initiative (SRBWI), and others.

Mackie Cowart of Dynamic Women was the host for outreach meeting/workshop. Dynamic Women is a sub-part of SRBWI.



Victor Khan, Tuskegee University, gives participant's planting tips for tomato plants. He demonstrated methods to plant tomato seedling (in a horizontal position instead of vertical, to maintain healthy stem and enhance roots).



Seedlings for the demonstration were donated by Tuskegee University and Bonnie's Plant Farm.

Personnel

Accessions

Joe Cochran, Soil Consvst, Linden, AL
Alex Johnson, Soil Consvst, Alexander City, AL
James Dawsom, Soil Con Tech, Autaugaville, AL
Kenneth Parham, Soil Consvst, Carrollton, AL

Promotions

Joshua Reed, Soil Scientist, Jackson, AL
Khalia Giles, Soil Con. Tech, Tuskegee, AL
Luis Cruz-Arroya, Soil Consvst, Bay Minette, AL
James Mason, Soil Scientist, Montgomery, AL
Rita Johnson, Budget Analysis, Auburn, AL
Brandon McCray, Soil Consvst, Florence, AL
Joshua Tilley, Soil Consvst, Vernon, AL
Adam Sconyers, Soil Consvst, Auburn/Geneva, AL
William Bodiford, Soil Con Tech, Monroeville, AL
Ronald Joseph Koptis, District Consvst, Bay Minette, AL
Daniel Goins, District Consvst, Jasper, AL
Matthew Copeland, District Consvst, Fayette, AL
Rory Stephens, Soil Con Tech, Montgomery, AL
Alex Vaughan, District Consvst, Geneva, AL
Sylvia Long, Soil Scientist, Auburn, AL

Reassignments

Jerome Lanlinois, Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa, AL
Adam Sconyers, Soil Consvst, Auburn/Geneva, AL
Joshua Halpin, Soil Scientist, Auburn, AL
Robert Beaty, Easement Coordinator, Auburn, AL
Josh Elliott, District Consvst, Ozark, AL
Jason Mason, Resource Soil Scientist, Montgomery, AL

Resignations

Evelyn Bostick, D.O.D, Fort Benning, GA

Retirees

Lynn Thomas, Contracting Officer, Auburn, AL

In Sympathy

Susan Dillard

Susan Lorraine Dillard, 60, OCIO-ITS Group Manager in Auburn, AL, passed away on January 3, 2011, at Bethany House following a long battle with cancer.

Memorials may be sent to Bethany House, 1171 Gatewood Drive Building 100, Auburn, AL 36830.

Cards may be sent to her husband, Bobby Jack Dillard, 477 Persimmon Street, Auburn, AL 36830.

Pat (Elzora Perkins) O'Connell

Ms. O'Connell passed away in Prattville on January 6, 2011. She was Area Clerk in NRCS/SCS Area 3 in Tuscaloosa for many years until her retirement. She would have been 91 in April.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Lymphoma Research Foundation, American Legion Post 119, or Henry Co. Veterans Memorial Park.

Thomas Alexander Hughes, Jr.

Tom Hughes, 63, from Alabaster, AL, passed away on February 3, 2011, in Houston, TX, at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. He retired from NRCS as the Assistant State Conservationist-FO North. He was also a retired Colonel from the Army Reserve. Tom's brother, William (Bill), retired from NRCS, but continues to work in the State Office as a part-time ACES employee.

Cards can be sent to Mrs. Tom Hughes, 288 Silver Creek Pwky, Alabaster, AL 35007, or to Bill Hughes, 2285 Springwood Dr., Auburn, AL 36830.

Welcome New State Office Employees



Nancy Regan
Human Resources
Specialist



Amanda Baldano
Human Resources
Assistant

Alabama State Office Retiree



Lynn Thomas
Contracting Officer



DAC Annual Workshop

By Etta Mask, DAC SWCS, Colbert Co., AL

The AL Conservation District Employees Association held its Annual Workshop in May 2011, in Florence, AL.

Because of the tornadoes in April the ladies wanted to do something special for the victims. They held a "Stuffed Animal Drive" and collected over 110 stuffed animals to deliver to the Phil Campbell Disaster Distribution Center to help comfort needy children. Great job ladies!

Annual Poster Contest

By Patricia Gable, SWCD Ed. Specialist, Covington Co., AL

Covington Co, SWCD held its annual spring poster contest for 450, 3rd graders from seven county schools. SWCD Ed Specialist Patricia Gable did an instructional classroom lesson and provided poster board and NACD student booklets relating to the theme "Forests for People-More than You Can Imagine." A cash award and First Place ribbons were awarded in each classroom by SWCD District Supervisors and staff judges.

On April 28, first place classroom winners and their families were invited to the annual Youth Event held at Oakwood Lodge. About 80 people enjoyed a hamburger dinner, observed a program by the 3rd grade students on tree part function, and listened to a report from sponsors Pleasant Home and Straughn Envirothon Teams.

The program concluded with a presentation by Steve Yelverton, NRCS DC, who discussed the role SWCD/NRCS plays in assisting landowners and communities.

Additional cash awards and ribbons were given to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place poster contest winners. When the fun, food and fellowship ended, all the students received Realtree cookies and conservation coloring books.



Covington Co. SWCD Supervisors (l) Bill Godwin, and (r) Wayne Reynolds, award 3rd place ribbon to (l-r) Franklin Moose, 2nd place to Hunter Hudson, and 1st place to Emilio Monahan.

Lee County SWCS Holds Water Festival

By Jillian Stephens, CMO, NRCS, Auburn, AL

More than 1,900 fourth graders attended the Lee Co. Water Festival, sponsored by the Lee Co. SWCS/ NRCS, and local businesses where they learned about the water cycle, water filtration, and aquifers through hands-on activities and a science-based magic show.

Volunteers taught students ways to "make every drop count" through more sustainable practices and by decreasing water usage.

Lee County Schools 4th graders competed to have their artwork on the festival T-shirt which all participants and volunteers wore the day of the event.



Above: Students view water filtration as they pour dirty water over filter materials and it came out clean.

Below - Autumn Meredith shows winning T-shirt art.



Next Issue

Submissions for Current Developments, potential success stories, and news releases are welcomed, and appreciated anytime.

Contact Communications, Marketing, and Outreach (CMO) staff with questions or submissions by e-mail:

AL-nrcs-publicinfo@one.usda.gov



ALABAMA

Dr. William Puckett
State Conservationist

Julie Yates
Director of CMO

Fay Garner
Public Affairs Specialist

Alice Love
Agricultural Outreach Liaison

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