

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



July 2006

From The State Conservationist - Gary Kobylski

We recently distributed the new Strategic Plan for NRCS (2005-2010). Our mission is simple and clear: **Helping People Help the Land**. Our ultimate objective is productive lands and a healthy environment. To help us move from vision to reality, there are six goals—three foundation goals and three venture goals.

Our foundation goals cover traditional NRCS concerns:

- high quality, productive soils
- clean and abundant water
- healthy plant and animal communities.

The venture goals focus on emerging resource concerns related to current economic and demographic trends. These include:

- air quality
- adequate energy supplies
- working farms and ranch lands.

The plan also identifies three strategies we will use to address these concerns:

- cooperative conservation
- a watershed approach
- a market-based approach.

This plan is a solid blueprint that will drive us forward. I hope all of you will take time to review the document as we move forward in Alabama with our plan of work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary".

Sebastian Thomas -- Gone But Will Not Be Forgotten

We are all saddened by the death of Sebastian Thomas state office purchasing agent (former writer/editor in MLRA). He passed away suddenly on May 25, 2006, of heart failure due to a congenital heart defect. He was 37.

He was laid to rest in Seale, Alabama, on May 30. His wife, daughter, and two sons live in Smiths Station, Alabama. If you would like to send condolences, the address is:

Latricia Thomas
75 Lee Road 002
Smiths, Alabama 36877

We will all miss Sebastian's smile and helpful attitude.



From The Field

Mobile and Baldwin Counties SWCDs Work to Restore Dunes

The Mobile County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Collier Elementary School partnered to complete a beach restoration project on Dauphin Island. The SWCD received a grant from the Gulf Coast RC&D Council to purchase a greenhouse for Collier Elementary School so the students can grow sea oats to plant on the beach.

Students in Fran Moor's 2nd grade class had a field trip May 11th to help plant sea oats on Dauphin Island Public Beach with students from the island.

A second dunes restoration project took place in Baldwin County. To educate individuals about dune restoration, NRCS, in conjunction with the Baldwin County SWCD and the Bureau of Land Management, hosted an Alabama Coastal Dune Restoration Field Day and demonstration on May 24 and 25. About 50 volunteers attended.

The Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Brooksville, Florida, provided plants and technical expertise for the demonstration. According to Plant Materials Specialist Mimi Williams, "The meeting was designed to give people information so they will know what type of plants are suited for dunes or coastal properties, where the plants can be found, and how to plant them."

Technical presentations came from a variety of perspectives. Dr. Deborah Miller, University of Florida Associate Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation says, "The University of Florida has worked quite a while on dune restoration and we have been working on areas that are very similar to what we have in Alabama and Florida. It is important that people understand that plants are the key for dune restoration. Piling sand isn't the only thing that we need to do. We also need to revegetate the sand for the dune to stay in place."

Dr. John Hovanesian, President of CNPS, Inc., a private firm working in the area of dunes restoration, said, "I would like for everyone to realize how important and fragile the coastline is. It belongs to everybody in America. We have to take whatever steps, whether large or small, to preserve it."

Environmental issues have an impact on dunes restoration. Rob Tawes, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, explained the permitting process related to dune restoration. In the Gulf Shores area of Alabama, sea turtle nesting is a big issue, along with beach mice habitat. Tawes said, "When restoring the dunes, people should realize that they are not only stabilizing the area; they are improving the environment so that the animals that live in the area have a better habitat and a better chance of survival."

Several school-age youth and teachers participated in the planting demonstration on a beach site owned by the Bureau of Land Management. Sarah King, a student from Chi Alpha Academy, said, "I'm learning that the roots of planted vegetation such as sea oats, will help keep the beach from eroding." Dawn Hopper, teacher at Central Baldwin Middle School, said, "Hopefully, these students are learning to conserve, to take care of our natural resources, and to look at Baldwin County as their home. If we want the beaches of Baldwin County to be the natural setting that draws a lot of people to the area, then we have to take care of our shoreline. Volunteer work such as this improves citizenship and helps develop leadership skills."



Brooksville Plant Materials Center provided technical expertise at the Dunes Restoration Workshop/ Demonstration in Baldwin County.



An important part of the teacher workshop is a field trip to the farms. These farmers and district supervisors take time out of their busy schedule to make the tour a great experience for the teachers.

8th Annual Teacher Workshop

By Kathy Walker, DAC, Huntsville, AL

I survived the annual Huntsville Teacher Workshop once again! The June 12-16 session was a huge success. We had the best teachers again this year, and our sponsors were awesome!

Our best motivation for putting on these workshops is the response we get from the teachers. One teacher stated, "I learned more in the workshop about caring for the environment than I learned in college." Another one said, "This week has been the most fun, interesting, and educational experience I have had in a long time."

These and other positive responses are why I pour so much of myself into putting on these workshops. They are so needed and so appreciated by those who attend.

Teachers are the first step in helping students care about the environment. I am glad to do my part to help facilitate this process.



Inside the Turtle Point Environmental Science Center are touch tanks and other hands-on exhibits, a butterfly room, plant and animal specimens, and a classroom. Outside visitors can hike along the nature trail and boardwalk, visit a garden, or meditate in a garden swing.

Escambia County School System Recognized

By Detra Boutwell, DC, Brewton Field Office

The Escambia County School System was named one of "Ten Great Rural Education Environments in the South" by *Southern Business and Development* magazine, a publication devoted to providing information to companies considering expanding or relocating to the South.

The write-up says, "Exceptional environmental education is literally within arms reach thanks to the Turtle Point Environmental Science Center, where every learning experience is hands-on." Because the Center is owned by the Escambia County Board of Education, teachers and students have free access to the facilities and can work with Center staff to design customized programs that complement a class's ongoing science curriculum.

And, what part does NRCS play in all of this? The Gulf Coast RC&D Council helped get the Turtle Point Environmental Science Center off the ground.

Bankhead Lake Clean Up!

By Kellie Johnston, Black Warrior Clean Water Partnership Facilitator, Birmingham, AL

On June 3rd, 72 volunteers removed 4.4 tons of trash and debris from Bankhead Lake. Sponsors included local citizens and businesses; corporations; US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps); Alabama Power; and other county, state, and federal agencies.



Volunteers removed 4.4 tons of debris from Bankhead Lake.

Before the clean-up day, heavy trash items that could not be removed by individual volunteers, were collected. On Saturday, volunteers removed the floatable trash from around the lake.

The Samantha Co-op assisted the effort by sorting plastics, glass, tires, and metal debris for recycling.

Trash removed by type
(in pounds)

Garbage	7,560
Glass	520
Plastic	460
Aluminum	256

TOTAL: 8,796 = 4.4 Tons

MLRA Soils News

Washington County Soil Survey Lends Assistance

By Joey Koptis, Soil Scientist, Washington Co. Soil Survey

John Clement, an employee of the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), recently completed field work requirements to take his soil classifiers examination and be licensed in Alabama.

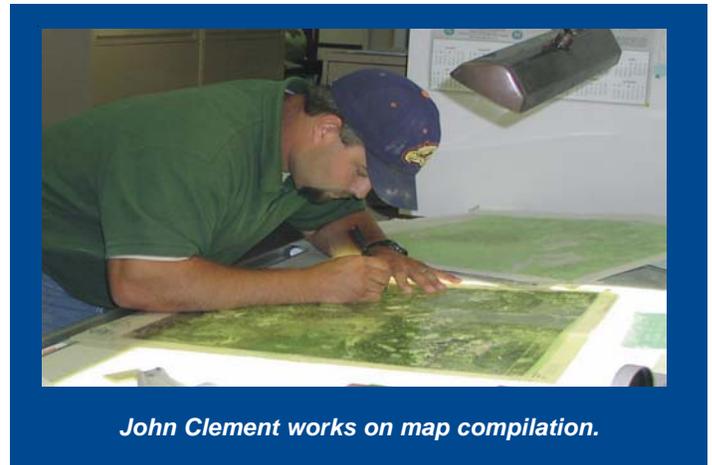
About a year ago, John was hired as an environmentalist by ADPH with the understanding that he would obtain his Professional Soil Classifiers License.

One of the requirements to take the examination is to map 5,000 acres under the supervision of a registered soil classifier. John contacted me and Sandy Page, the Soil Survey project leader in Washington County, about his needs. We gladly accepted the task of helping him. We knew that in turn, he would be helping us gather documentation for the Washington County survey. State Soil Scientist Charles Love agreed that this would be an “outstanding way of sharing knowledge and gaining experience” for John.

John signed up as an Earth Team volunteer and started in November 2005, working an average of 3 to 3.5 days per week. One of the things that made it tough for John during his time with us was that the ADPH was gearing up to adopt a new set of onsite sewage rules that had been in the making for several years. These rules took effect in March 2006, and required training courses be held throughout the state to prepare the local Health Department Environmentalists for the change. John had to assist with the soils training in these courses.

While in Washington County, John assisted with map unit documentation such as digging and describing soil pits for a field assist, running several transects on map units, and map compilation. John also used GPS locations in the field and downloaded these to ArcGIS to be integrated into the current Soil Survey GIS applications.

John will be able to use the principles and knowledge that he gained about map units and their association with landscapes throughout the state of Alabama as he goes forth with his career with the ADPH. After completing his time in Washington



John Clement works on map compilation.

County, John had mapped over 5,000 acres and performed almost 100 soil pedon descriptions. Toward the end of John’s Earth Team activities, he assisted in Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) activities by documenting locations of downed timber caused by hurricane Katrina.

Many thanks go out to John from the Washington County soil survey staff and Charles Love. John and his assistance will be missed in Washington County.

Web Soil Survey Update



Web Soil Survey

Three basic steps (define, view, explore) make the Web Soil Survey a simple yet powerful way to access and use soil data. Statistics prove that statement to be true. Charles Love says that on an average, the Web Soil Survey home page is accessed 2,350 times a day. **Helping People**

Help the Land, via the web, is a tool that proves to be very beneficial.

RC&D News

Alabama's RC&D Program Shines

The Cawaco RC&D Council has reason to stand tall. They were named the Outstanding Council of the Year for the Southeastern Association of RC&D Councils. Not only is the Council doing a great job, but their coordinator is outstanding as well. Paul Kennedy was selected as the Outstanding Coordinator of the Year 2006 for the Southeastern Association of RC&D Councils.



Paul Kennedy was selected as the Outstanding RC&D Coordinator of 2006.

Michael Fowlkes, from the Northwest Alabama RC&D Council, was selected the outstanding 2006 Program Assistant for Southeastern Association of RC&D Councils.

Let's put hands together for the good work these folks are doing!

Report of Temporary Storage of Poultry Broiler Litter Study

By Bill Prince, Environmental Engineer, Oxford, AL

Charlie Mitchell, Auburn University Department of Agronomy and Soils; Allen Torbert, USDA-Agriculture Research Service, Soil Dynamics Laboratory; and Ted Tyson, Auburn University



Research site with mini-piles of broiler litter and frames for collecting runoff.

Department of Biosystems Engineering, conducted a poultry litter study to determine the effects of litter treatment on covered and uncovered piles of poultry litter exposed to the weather in central Alabama

from December 2004 through May 2005. The objectives were to:

- Evaluate conventional and alternative methods of temporary field storage of dry poultry litter on litter quality and potential runoff and leaching.
- Demonstrate the benefits and/or problems associated with temporary winter storage.
- Encourage the transportation and proper storage and use of litter in areas where it has traditionally not been used.

The test results demonstrated that poultry litter should not be left exposed to rainfall, even for short periods of time. Rainfall is rapidly absorbed into the exposed litter resulting in degradation of the fertilizer value of the litter and potential nutrient runoff. Current NRCS guidelines for temporary litter storage seem adequate to protect both litter and surface water quality. This test is being repeated in a demonstration using larger piles more typical of what producers will experience. The results of the study will be available later.

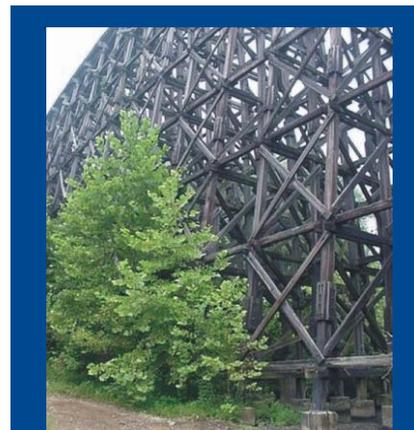
The project was supported by the Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D Council.

Hope Amidst the Rubble

By Paul Kennedy, Cawaco RC&D Coordinator, Birmingham, AL

Brookside promises to rise from the ashes. The historic rail trestle, the cornerstone of the Jefferson County rail-trail, was destroyed by arsonists. The railroad bridge, built in 1903, used to carry coal.

Despite the loss of this century-old dramatic structure, the partners in the greenway planning effort vowed to continue working to complete the hiking, biking, and nature trail. They hope to rebuild an equally impressive and appropriate structure to replace the one destroyed.



This historic railroad trestle was destroyed recently by fire.

Alabama NRCS Summer Interns

Omayra Santiago, Guntersville Field Office

By Carolyn King, Hispanic Program Manager; and Stan Franklin, DC, Guntersville Field Office

Twenty year-old Omayra Ortiz Santiago, from Lajas, Puerto Rico, is working in the Guntersville Field Office. Omayra will be a senior at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus, and plans to graduate in May 2007. Her major is mechanical technology in agriculture (agronomy). Her internship is through the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities' National Internship Program.

Omayra says, "I am very glad to be working with NRCS as a soil conservationist. I always wanted to be associated with an agency that helps farmers and protects the environment."



Omayra gets hands-on experience working with Soil Conservation Technician Bucky Howe

Esthesis O. Smith, Geneva Field Office

By James Currington, DC, Geneva Field Office

Esthesis O. Smith (known as "E") is a perky little brunette from Jacksonville, Florida. E is an only child and attends Tuskegee University. She is a Junior majoring in Environmental Science. When Esthesis goes back to school in August, she will see how what she is studying and learning can be applied to the land to help with soil and water conservation. E says, "Actually seeing how farmers live and work on the farm make the practices come to life. I have always lived in the city and have never been exposed to fields, pastures, ponds, and woods. This summer has given me invaluable knowledge and understanding of the environmental science field."



David Avery, Geneva County SWCD Soil Technician (I), and Mike Reynolds, Construction Inspector, teach E how to use the Total Station.

Christopher Joe, Eutaw Field Office

By Winford Andrews, DC, Eutaw Field Office

Christopher Joe of Greensboro, Alabama, son of Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Joe, is a senior at Alabama A&M University, majoring in agribusiness

management. Christopher is receiving exposure to NRCS policies and procedures; operations and management; assisting staff with planning, design, layout, and construction; and activities for both agronomic and engineering practices. During the past two years, Christopher has been involved with activities



Christopher gets experience working with catfish ponds.

at the Eutaw Farm Service Center. In 2004 he was a summer intern with the Farm Service Agency, and in 2005 he was a member of the NRCS Earth Team.

Whitney Boozer, Wetumpka Field Office

By Pam Mason, DC, Wetumpka Field Office

Whitney Boozer is a native of Chilton County, Alabama. She is currently enrolled as a Junior at Auburn University in agronomy and soils. One of four children, her mother is a physical education teacher at the high school and her father works for Auburn

University at the Experiment Station in Chilton County.

"Throughout my life, I have been taught about the environment and its importance. Because of this, I have a desire to assist in the protection of our land and share with others its importance."



Whitney practices using the Enviroscope.

Meetings and Conferences

National Agronomy Conference

By Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, Auburn, AL

Agricultural professionals from across the country gathered in Auburn, Alabama, for the NRCS National Agronomy Conference, May 23-25. According to Mike Hubbs, NRCS National Agronomist, the agenda was packed with presentations and field tours that provided the latest and greatest research and technology updates from Alabama and throughout the U.S.

Alabama has a rich history relating to agronomy. The agronomic practices promoted by George Washington Carver at Tuskegee University in the late 1890s and early 1900s revolutionized southern agriculture. Carver educated the farmers to alternate the soil-depleting cotton crop with soil-enriching crops such as peanuts, peas, soybeans, sweet potatoes, and pecans. The "Old Rotation" (c. 1896) at Auburn University, one of the first experiments to demonstrate and document the value of rotating cotton with other crops and including nitrogen-restoring legumes in the system, is the oldest continuous cotton experiment in the world and the third oldest field crop experiment on the same site in the U.S. It was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in 1988.



People from across the country attended the meeting.

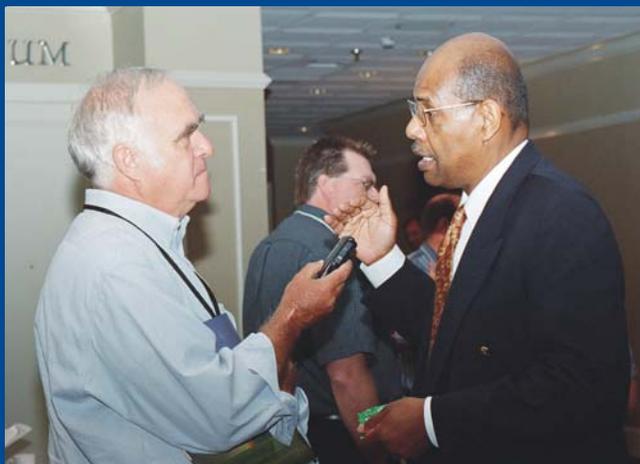
From those early research efforts, to the current research activities of Auburn University, Tuskegee University, Alabama A&M, the Soil Tillage Laboratory, and the Agricultural Research Service, Alabama had a lot to share with agronomists from across the country. Larry Clark, Deputy Chief for Technology, encouraged the participants to take the conservation management systems approach and make a difference in their respective states.

Ben Moore and Eddie Jolley coordinated the event. They would be the first to say they couldn't have done it without the help of numerous employees and partners. A meeting of this size requires a lot of teamwork, and these folks pulled it off in style!



Gary Kobylski (c), Alabama NRCS State Conservationist, welcomes Larry Clark (l), Deputy Chief for Technology, and Mike Hubbs, National Agronomist,.

Many local agencies worked together to make the meeting a success. Local media was invited to participate. Auburn-Opelika Newspaper reporter Bill White interviews Deputy Chief Clark.



The Alabama Invasive Plant Council Annual Conference

The Alabama Invasive Plant Council's 4th Annual Conference was held May 4 at the Alabama Power Water Course Building in Clanton. The meeting room

was packed with members and citizens from across Alabama who gathered to learn more about the critical problem of plant invasions in Alabama.

Dr. Doug Phillips, University of Alabama Museum of Natural History, gave the keynote address with previews of his upcoming Discovering Alabama program on invasive plants. Other experts presented timely information regarding

available cost-share assistance and incentive programs to help control invasive plant species. Current projects underway in Alabama on land-use and water-use areas were discussed. Updates on herbicide control methods for invasive plants made it possible to award 10 recertification points for



Dr. Doug Phillips spoke on his upcoming program about invasive plants.

pesticide applicators as well as 4.5 CFE credits for foresters.

Interest in the work of the Alabama Invasive Plant Council has grown tremendously since it was established in 2003. Tim Albritton, NRCS State Staff Forester, is the NRCS representative on the Council.



Tim Albritton shares information on control of invasive species with a meeting participant.

EWP Program News

Alabama has a huge EWP Workload. Mason Dollar reports that NRCS has completed the field survey phase for traditional Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) projects related to Hurricanes Dennis and Katrina. Requests from 33 sponsors were received



Dale County EWP Site

and approved for \$20 million to address damages at 215 sites. This represents a tremendous amount of work on the part of numerous NRCS employees who still had routine program responsibilities.

Geneva County is one of several counties in the state with EWP sites. Recently, the Geneva County Commission received a check for \$239,403 for EWP work. During 2005-06, Geneva County received \$1,679,880 to assist in repairs from flooding rains.



Geneva County presents EWP check to the County Commission.

Limited Resource Farmer Initiative

Micro-Irrigation/Plasticulture

By Alice Love, Farm Bill Specialist, Auburn, AL

As an outreach effort to assist Limited Resource Farmers (LRF) in the state, NRCS included micro-irrigation/plasticulture as a cost-share practice in FY06. Plasticulture, or plastic mulch and drip irrigation, is a practice that can be applied on cropland fields that are used for a variety of fruits, vegetables, and stem flower production. Over \$1 million of the NRCS state Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funds were set aside for this targeted group.

NRCS worked closely with other conservation partners to assure funding, installation assistance, design criteria, and other components were properly in place to help eligible LRF applicants to install this practice. Through this joint effort, several LRFs have installed micro-irrigation/plasticulture to meet the needs of their farming operation. This practice has proven to be ideal for this targeted group, and the demand for the practice has been tremendous.

NRCS Hydraulic Engineer Ken Aycock, who assisted many clients with micro-irrigation, has used this practice in his own 1/8 acre backyard garden (see story at right). His results have been very positive, just as it has with our external customers.

Recommending micro-irrigation/plasticulture to LRFs, and by the staff using it personally, has helped prove NRCS can walk-the-walk and talk-the-talk of conservation by helping implement proven conservation practices.



By using micro-irrigation/plasticulture, LRFs can increase their crop yields on small acreage.

Ken Aycock shows off the 18 pound cabbage (12.5 inch head) that he grew this year in his backyard garden using micro-irrigation.



Aycock Proves Micro-irrigation Works

Ken Aycock, Hydraulic Engineer with NRCS in Auburn, practices what he preaches. As Hydraulic Engineer, Ken is involved in the EQIP Limited Resource Farmer Micro-irrigation/Plasticulture project.

Ken has worked on projects like this before. In 1988, NRCS cooperated with local sponsors to develop the Chandler Mountain Watershed Project. Ken was involved with the planning and installation of this PL566 project that helped conserve soil and water on 2,050 acres of the unique 7,050 acre Chandler Mountain Plateau.

The project resulted in conversion of 1,560 acres of big gun irrigated tomatoes to micro-irrigation/plasticulture. The installed project provided a 60 percent savings in water and a 65 percent reduction in soil loss along with higher yields and quality of crop.

Ken has had a back yard garden for years, and when he saw the great results of micro-irrigation, he decided to try it in his own vegetable garden. He has used micro-irrigation in his 1/8 acre garden for 18 years, and has reaped the positive benefits.

While providing assistance on this year's special EQIP project, Ken has enjoyed designing systems, working with an interagency group to develop a strategy for installation, and answering installation questions. He also enjoys showing off his bountiful harvest!

Personnel

Accessions

Amy Bernauer, Agricultural Engineer, Bay Minette, AL

Cortez Brundage, Contract Specialist, Auburn, AL

Paul Hymer, Soil Conservation Technician, Scottsboro, AL

Annette Spivey, Soil Conservation Technician, Alexander City, AL

David Stewart, Soil Conservation Technician, Marion, AL

Promotions

Alan Hale, District Conservationist, Troy, AL

April Jones, District Conservationist, Montgomery, AL

Foy Kirkland, District Conservationist, Hartselle, AL

Kent McCray, District Conservationist,

Tuscaloosa, AL

Stephen Musser, Resource Conservationist, Montgomery, AL to ASTC-Programs, Auburn, AL

Joe Norris, Cartographic Technician, Auburn, AL

Charlie Ramsey, RC&D Coordinator/DC, Bay Minette/Mobile, AL to ASTC-FO (Central Team), Columbiana, AL (temporary location)

Reassignments

April Hill, District Conservationist, Waconia, MN to District Conservationist, Fayette, AL

Mark Rhodes, Soil Conservation Technician, Talladega, AL to Soil Conservationist, NRCS, Americus, GA

NRCS Summer Interns

Whitney Boozer, Wetumpka, AL , Auburn University

Christopher Joe, Eutaw, AL, Alabama A&M University

Esther Smith, Geneva, AL, Tuskegee University

Death

Sebastian Thomas, Purchasing Agent, Auburn, AL

Gully Stabilized in Pickens County

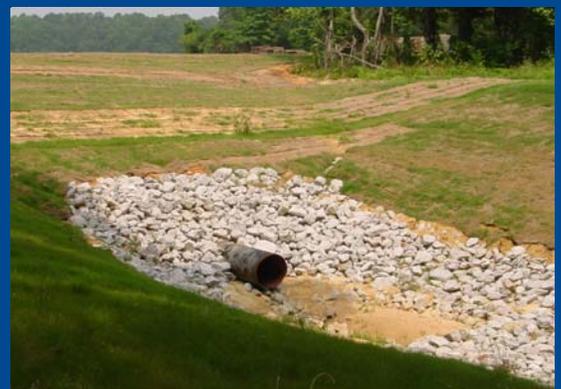
By Terry Williamson, DC, Carrollton , AL

A large Grade Stabilization Structure was constructed on Vienna Sod Farm in Pickens County. A big gully with an active headcut had moved out of a wooded area adjacent to Mr. Everett Owens sod farm and began eroding into one of his centipede sod fields. The practice has been completed and is working beautifully.



Larry McCray, Resource Engineer, inspects the 48" riser (inlet) and trash rack of the Grade Stabilization Structure.

The downstream side of the levee (outlet pipe) and the rip-rap stilling basin with a 40 linear feet rock lined channel. Note the sediment that has collected in the stilling basin below the 30" discharge pipe. The basin is working perfectly as planned by dissipating the energy from the water and allowing the sediment to drop out.



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