

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



April 2006

From The State Conservationist - *Gary Kobylski*

From the reports I've been getting, the field staff has been very busy. Counties are working hard, and several have already obligated all of their Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds. The sign-up for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) ended March 31. We had a good sign-up. The field staffs in CSP counties have performed an exceptional job in assisting producers who are interested in the program.

We just announced the availability of Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) funds to help producers clean up downed timber as a result of Hurricanes Dennis and Katrina. This is the first time that the language in the funding bill has

allowed direct assistance to landowners through the EQIP program. These activities represent new opportunities for producers in Alabama.

You have heard that 2006 is going to be a year of "consolidating the gains." What does that mean? Very simply, it means completing the work we've begun. We're putting emphasis on completing those contacts that have already been signed. Along with our partnership, we will focus on addressing the backlog of Farm Bill practices needing to be implemented.

Again, let me say, I appreciate your hard work.

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

And the Winner Is—Covington County

The Covington County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Education Program won one of the 2006 BEEP (Best Environmental Education Program) awards given by the Environmental Education Association of Alabama (EAAA). EAAA is a non-profit group comprised of classroom teachers and other educators; personnel from local, state, and federal agencies; business and industry representatives; and others that were involved, or interested in, teaching about the environment and Alabama's natural resources.

Deb Hughes, Covington County SWCD Education Specialist, developed a diversified environmental education program with the emphasis on wildlife, local ecosystems, and soil and water. These free classroom environmental enrichment programs provide minds-on, hands-on science, social studies, and language arts activities for students in grades K-5. Each program meets the 2006 Alabama course of study requirements.

Congratulations to Deb for coordinating an outstanding conservation education program in Covington County!



Deb Hughes helps students test water samples from local rivers and ponds.

RC&D News

EWP Workshop In the Wiregrass

By Richard Collier, Wiregrass RC&D Coordinator, Ozark, AL

To help local communities with Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) applications, the Wiregrass Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, in cooperation with NRCS and local SWCD personnel, held a one-day EWP workshop in Troy, Alabama, in March. The workshop provided basic information on what qualifies for the program, how assistance is requested, limitations of the programs, and the expectations of each partner. Over 80 individuals from local units of government, contracting firms, and NRCS participated. Sixteen counties were represented.

EWP helps safeguard people and property following natural disasters like tropical storms, hurricanes, floods, fires, and droughts. EWP is a tremendous asset to local entities, but the guidelines call for rapid response in these emergency situations.

EWP was active in Alabama in 2005. As a result of several natural disasters, Alabama received \$19.2 million to assist with damages caused by hurricanes. These funds will be used to provide assistance for the traditional EWP work. In addition, added language extends the guidelines to give the State Conservationist authority to enter into agreements with individual landowners to provide cost-share assistance to reduce debris and to install fuel breaks.

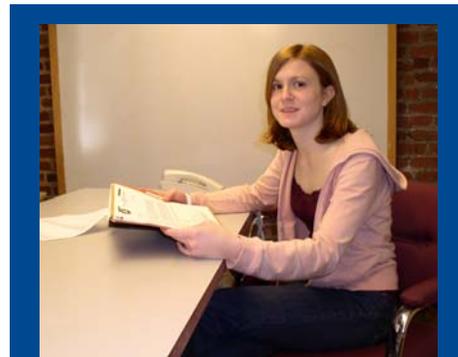
Participants came away from the EWP workshop with a wealth of information, hard copies of the presentation materials, and a CD with forms, guidelines, and contacts needed to request EWP funds.



r-l: NRCS engineer Mac Nelson talks with workshop participants Fred Powell, Engineer with Wilcox County; and Allen Nix, City of Atmore.

Enthusiasm is Catching!

The Cawaco RC&D Council has capitalized upon the expertise and energy of students in their local area. **Samantha Masdon**, a sophomore at Birmingham Southern, majoring in political science, has brought new enthusiasm to the Cawaco RC&D Council office. Cawaco became acquainted with Samantha when she interned with the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission. Samantha gained valuable experience, and these offices benefited from her knowledge and willingness to help.



From research to filing, Samantha is a willing worker and definitely an asset to the Cawaco RC&D Council.

During this time, Samantha took a real interest in the activities of the Cawaco RC&D Council. She says, “In my career, I plan to do some sort of lobbying. Originally, I was interested in educational reform. I had never considered environmental issues. Since working for Cawaco RC&D, I have really gotten interested in the environment. The activities of the Cawaco RC&D Council are so diverse—it’s not just going out and cleaning up areas—they do so much to preserve Birmingham. That helps not only the environmental community but also the business community.”

The Cawaco RC&D Council hired her to work a few hours a week. Samantha says, “The staff at Cawaco RC&D is a wonderful team to work with. They have been very appreciative and supportive of the contributions I make, and I have learned so much from them.”

Paul Kennedy asked me to help with their public relations activities. The Council wants to show that Cawaco RC&D is a diverse group that reaches out to all sorts of people, not just environmental groups. One of their most important contacts is with their

congressional members. I have observed that they are friends--they joke around and have a good time--but they also get down to business. Cawaco RC&D has a great working relationship with their congressional representatives. That is so important, especially for a non-profit organization.”

Paul Kennedy says, “It is great to have Samantha on board. We plan to draw upon her expertise. Hopefully, she will learn from us, and we certainly will benefit from her assistance.”

Septic Vouchers and a Cleaner Flint River

By Mike Roden, Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D Coordinator, Decatur, AL

The Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys RC&D Council is coordinating a septic tank educational training effort in Madison County on the Mountain Fork Tributary of Flint River. This stream has identified pollutants that likely come from failing septic tanks. Homeowners who attend a training session receive a voucher worth up to \$150 to go toward their cost to have their septic tank pumped out. According to **Vicky Mitchell**, Tennessee River Basin Facilitator, “Septic-tank cleanings can run \$350 or more in rural Madison County, so the \$150 voucher will cover only

Pumping out septic tanks can be expensive. The AL MRV RC&D Council is giving homeowners an incentive to have septic tanks emptied.



part of the cost. The voucher serves only as an incentive to take action. If we can repair some septic tanks that are outdated, it would be a win-win situation for everybody and bring attention to the problem.”

The program is funded by a \$10,000 grant from Legacy Inc., which uses proceeds from the sale of Alabama’s “Protect Our Environment” car tags to boost environmental education in the state. Other partners include the Madison County SWCD, the Madison County Commission, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Health Department, the Flint River Conservation Association, and NRCS.



Greater Peace Missionary Baptist Church Nature Trail

With two grants from the Coosa Valley RC&D Council, Arthur Maurice Fort, Jr. (c) received his Eagle Scout Award by designing and directing the layout of a nature trail at the Greater Peace Missionary Baptist Church in Opelika, AL. Arthur discusses the project that includes an 800 foot long self-directed trail and a 40 foot bridge with members of the church congregation.

The Tuskegee Main Street Project

received a grant from the Mid-South RC&D Council that will be matched by the National Parks Conservation Association to



sponsor the Junior Rangers Program in Tuskegee. This program provides students an opportunity to learn environmental concepts through real life experiences and structured educational opportunities. It also helps build public support for national parks. The program helps students acquire new skills and abilities that build their confidence and self-esteem. Students, on their own time, will be able to visit the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site where the legacy of Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, and others has been preserved. Gwen Lewis (I), NRCS District Conservationist, Tuskegee; & Shirley Baxter, Tuskegee Main Street Project.

Farm Bill Program News

Fresh Vegetables for Pickens County

Plans are under way to assist limited resource producers in installing plastic mulch and drip irrigation systems to grow vegetables using Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds.

To be competitive in today's market, vegetable growers must continually strive for high quality, superior yields, and extended production cycles that include spring and autumn crops. Plasticulture with drip irrigation is a management tool that enables producers to realize greater returns per unit of land. Statewide, 38 EQIP contracts were awarded to install plasticulture systems for limited resource producers.

Pickens County producers **Bennie Carpenter** and his partners, **Willie Crowell** and **Willie L. Tweddie**, have secured EQIP contracts to install two acres each of plasticulture. They have been growing vegetables for years, but plasticulture is new to them. They did not have an irrigation system and had been watering their plants by hand. An irrigation system will make more efficient use of the water.

Bennie Carpenter leases the land, and his partners sub-lease plots from him. NRCS Farm Bill Specialist **Alice Love** and Outreach Liaison **Andrew Williams** are working with them as their systems are installed. A well will be installed and NRCS Hydraulic Engineer **Ken Aycock** is designing a drip irrigation system to supply six acres.



District Conservationist Terry Williamson (c) reviews the conservation plan with producers (l-r) Bennie Carpenter, Willie Crowell, and Willie L. Tweddie.

Andrew says, "We're working to get the installation procedure in place. Our plan calls for the Greene County SWCD to hire a technical service provider (TSP) with experience in working with plastic mulch and drip irrigation systems. The Federation of Southern Cooperatives (Federation) has the equipment. To make supplies more accessible, the AlaTom RC&D Council will purchase the supplies in bulk and store them at the Federation in Epes, Alabama. The TSP will determine how much is needed to complete each system. Producers will have the option to purchase the supplies through AlaTom RC&D Council or from a private vendor. If supplies are purchased through the RC&D Council, the TSP will bring the supplies and the equipment, and install the system."

Carpenter and his partners know what they want to do—to have plenty of fresh vegetables and watermelons by the 4th of July. "That's when lots of people are at home. Everyone loves fresh vegetables," says Carpenter.

Pickens County NRCS District Conservationist **Terry Williamson** says, "With the plastic mulch and drip irrigation system, producers can plant earlier. The well-designed drip irrigation system will lose practically no water to runoff or evaporation. Irrigation scheduling can be precisely managed to meet crop demands."



Ken Aycock, NRCS Hydraulic Engineer, goes over the irrigation plan with the producers.

Gully Control Structure Project Complete

by Gayle Johnson, Media Specialist, Poarch Creek Indians Community Relations, Atmore, AL

The Poarch Creek Indian Tribe owns a piece of highly erodible land off Highway 21 near Atmore, Alabama. This section of land is managed by Perdido River Farms, a Tribal enterprise.

Not long ago, a jagged gully was eating up a large portion of the property. With technical assistance from NRCS Resource Engineer **Randall East** and Tribal Liaison **David Elliott**, a design and layout of a gully control structure was completed to control the severe erosion.

Using the NRCS design, the management of Perdido River Farms contracted with Homer Coleman, Tribal member and local contractor, to implement the plan.

The gully control structure has been installed and the area has been reshaped and vegetated. According to David, the completed project has saved 1,200 tons of soil from being washed away during heavy rain storms. This practice will enhance the

natural resources of the land owned by the Tribe, and will help preserve it for future generations.



Tribal Chairman Fred L. McGhee (l) discuss the gully control structure with the Escambia County Tribal SWCD supervisor Kent McGhee (r) and David Elliott. The structure will enhance, improve, and protect this natural resource of the Tribe.

Alternative Water Supply Funded by EQIP

by Danny Williams, District Conservationist, Madison County, AL

On **Charlie Britton's** farm in Madison County, cattle had long been watering in Hester Creek, which was the only water source on the farm. NRCS staff talked with the landowner about improving water quality in Hester Creek and developed a conservation plan. An EQIP contract was prepared to assist with the



The exclusion fence will keep cattle out of Hester Creek and protect the riparian buffer.

A spring development and water trough were installed on Charlie Britton's farm to provide clean, fresh water for his cattle.



cost of excluding the cattle from the creek. A spring that was used for household water years ago was developed and water was piped into a concrete trough for the cattle. This spring development project was used as a training exercise for NRCS employees in the surrounding counties. This project was one of the first of its kind in Madison County.

Earth Team Volunteer News

Earth Team Volunteers Assist NRCS Cultural Resources Specialist

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

During the month of March, 23 Earth Team volunteers contributed 312 hours on a farm in west Montgomery County. The volunteers are members of Auburn's East Alabama Chapter of the Alabama Archaeological Society (which meets at the State Office once a month), employees of the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), members of Montgomery's Girl Scout Troop 208, professional archaeologists, and our own Montgomery Soil Conservationist, Merry Buford.

Volunteers cleared vines, brush, and overhanging tree branches from the immediate environs of four slave cabins; surface collected artifacts from three prehistoric archaeological sites; and mapped the cabins as well as the archaeological sites with a Total Station, courtesy of the AHC. (A total station, an optical instrument used in modern surveying, is a combination of an electronic theodolite (transit), an electronic distance measuring device, and specialized software running on an external computer.)

Earth Team Volunteers from Girl Scout Troup 208 in Montgomery remove vines from the slave quarters under the supervision of Shawnee, the resident horse.



More work on the same farm is planned in the coming months (mapping and surface collecting in plowed fields) because next year the operator is planning to go "no-till." So far, the volunteers and I have identified a small mound, twelve archeological sites, a historic road, four slave cabins, a smokehouse, an overseer's house, and a barn. Most of the prehistoric, or pre-Contact sites, are about one thousand years old, but at least one includes a ten thousand year-old projectile point called a Big Sandy found by Merry. The historic structures all date to the 1820-1830s.



Earth Team Volunteers from Auburn's East Alabama Chapter of the Alabama Archaeological Society, sorted and displayed surface artifacts collected from three prehistoric archaeological sites.



Over 20 Earth Team Volunteers take a break at the back of the overseer's house during the first spring cleanup at the old farm.



A ten thousand year-old projectile point called a Big Sandy was found by Merry Buford.



Alabama's Earth Team Has Another Great Year

During FY2005, 3,543 Earth Team volunteers provided 90,000 hours of service to promote conservation on private lands in Alabama. We led the Nation, as well as the East Region, in both categories. The North Team led Alabama in both volunteers and hours of service. Based on the \$16.05 hourly rate established by nationally recognized volunteer organizations, the total value of volunteer time to Alabama NRCS was about \$1.5 million.

In FY2005, nationwide, more than 34,432 Earth Team volunteers donated 938,631 hours of their time to conservation practices.

Cawaco RC&D Council won the 2005 National RC&D/NRCS award. Alabama's Earth Team has won national Earth Team awards ten times in 13 years (1991-95, 1997, 1999, 2000, and 2003). In FY1991 Alabama's Earth Team won the highest recognition presented --The National Volunteer Service Award-Chief's Cup.

Volunteers help landowners with conservation practices and projects that help stop erosion, improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and reduce flooding. They also help people of all ages learn about conservation through hands-on educational activities. We are proud of The Alabama Earth Team Volunteers that help us and conservation districts carry out conservation missions.



Cawaco RC&D won the National RC&D/NRCS Award. Paul Kennedy (c), Cawaco RC&D Coordinator; and Hillary Aten (l), Five Mile Creek Coordinator, accepts the award from Sharon Ruggi, President, National Association of RC&D Councils.

2005 Alabama Earth Team Award Winners

- Individual – Michelle Gullatte/Lee County
- Group – Perry Garden Club/ Lee County
- RC&D/NRCS Award – Cawaco RC&D (also won the national award)
- NACD/NRCS Award – Jefferson County SWCD
- Chief's Field Award – Vestavia Hills Field Office

Lauderdale County Gets Help From Volunteers

by Renea Dyer, District Conservationist, Florence Field Office, AL

Kristen Johnsey and **Olivia Miller**, Earth Team Volunteers from University of North Alabama, proved to be invaluable helping with the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in the Florence field office. Their help allowed the field office personnel to keep up with the CSP workload. Even before the first meeting, the volunteers were labeling, stamping, and mailing almost 2,000 letters to the landowners in Lauderdale County. During producer interviews, Kristen and Olivia gathered aerial photos of the farms of each CSP applicant. As geography students at UNA, they used their knowledge of geographic information systems (GIS) to digitize all the aerial photos.



Olivia can attest to the fact that getting 2,000 letters in the mail is time consuming!



Kristen's GIS skills were a great asset in getting the CSP program off the ground in Lauderdale County.

“Follow Your Heart”- A Farewell to Darin Moseley

by Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS, Auburn, AL

“I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help you,” that’s what **Darin Moseley** said for 15 years. Now he has a new job—parenting a house-full of girls.

Darin was a Soil Conservation Technician in Elmore County. He provided technical assistance to agriculture producers to help them install best management conservation practices on their land. It’s a career that he thoroughly enjoyed. Darin says, “I like people and working with people, whether they are agriculture producers, agency folks, or county or city officials,. That is what I have enjoyed about this job.”

In February 2006, Darin resigned his position with NRCS. If there are so many advantages to the job, and he enjoyed it so much, why did he resign?

“For several years, my wife, **Lisa**, and I have known that at some point we would probably be in some type of full-time ministry,” says Darin. About two years ago, he went on a mission trip to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where he met a woman from Texas who lived and worked on a girl’s ranch. That meeting planted the seed, and the seed grew.

“I began talking with Lisa about this type of work, and she was terrified. So was I, to a certain extent,” says Darin. “Lisa worked for the Elmore County Board of Education, a state job, and I worked for the U.S. Government. We would be giving up two secure

positions for the unknown.” But the tug of the heart continued.

“Over the past two years, we have been through many life altering events,” says Darin. In December 2004, the Moseley’s adopted little **Abigail**, a baby girl from Guatemala. “Since Abigail’s adoption, we have thought about other children that may not have opportunities if someone doesn’t help,” says Darin. In the summer of 2005, the Moseley’s began seriously looking into opportunities to serve in a full-time ministry that would benefit children. That search led them to Big Oak Girls’ Ranch.

Big Oak Girls’ Ranch is located on 325 acres about six miles from Springville, Alabama, on U.S. Highway 11. The Girls’ Ranch has six residential homes, a transitional apartment home, gymnasium, equine center, and swimming pool.

The children live in as normal a family setting as possible, with as many as eight children living with house parents in a comfortable two-story brick home. The house parents give their lives in full-time Christian service to provide the consistent love, discipline, and direction that the children need.

After visiting the facility to learn first-hand how it functioned, the Moseley’s accepted the position of house parents of one of the homes, the Thompson House. **John David Phillips**, Director of Big Oaks Girls’ Ranch, says, “Each family works together, plays together, and attends a local church as a family unit each week. We know children listen with their eyes, and our spiritual emphasis is on witnessing by example in all we say and do at Big Oak Girls’ Ranch.”

Lisa says, “Within our 5,500 square foot home is our two-bedroom and a bath living quarters. At the other end of the house are four bedrooms for the girls in our home. Our responsibility will be to care for the children that God sends to us. As house parents, we will not only help meet the the girls’ physical needs, but we will also love and encourage them as if they were our own. Our desire is that each day with us will prepare them to go into the world as adults knowing that they are loved, and, that they too have a purpose to fulfill in life. We are excited about the new turn our journey is taking.”

Darin says, “We know it’s not going to be the easiest thing we have ever done. In fact, it’s probably



Darin Moseley, his wife, Lisa, and daughter, Abigail, pulled up stakes in Wetumpka and moved to Springville for a new life challenge, house parents at the Big Oak Girls’ Ranch.

going to be the hardest thing that we ever thought we could do. But at the same time, we can make it hard, or we can make it a little bit easier, just by our attitude. If we allow ourselves to blend and become a part of these girls' lives, perhaps we can lead them to become a part of ours. We hope to have a positive influence on their lives."

Darin grew up in Hartford, Alabama. His parents taught him and his brother how to work, and how to work hard. "I owe a lot to my parents for the raising they gave me," says Darin. It's a good thing he didn't mind hard work. Not only did he work with Elmore County producers when employed with NRCS, his area of responsibility also included Coosa and Tallapoosa Counties.

According to Darin, "I owe thanks to **J.O. Norris** for giving me that first opportunity to work for NRCS. I started out as a WAE (when actually employed) in Geneva County in the summer of 1990. When the WAE funds ran out, I went to work for a local veterinary clinic. One day I received a call from J.O. asking if I would be interested in a position in Wetumpka, Alabama. I said, 'Sure, but where is Wetumpka!'"

Darin says, "Wetumpka has been very good to me. It's where I met my wife, Lisa, who was the District Clerk for the Elmore County SWCD (1986-1992). We both appreciate the support of the now deceased Elmore County District Conservationist

(DC) **Bobby J. Moody**. He was instrumental in hiring both of us."

"Working for NRCS has provided many advantages," says Darin. "I could never have had a better job. With NRCS, I've had the opportunity to advance in my career. There are many jobs where you don't have that opportunity. With NRCS; you can continue to gain knowledge, experience, and education, and have the opportunities for advancement. The salary and benefits package are great as well."

Pam Mason, DC with NRCS in Elmore County, says, "Darin has been a real asset to our office. We appreciate the contributions that he has made over the past 15 years to promote the NRCS mission of "Helping People Help the Land." As he begins his new career, the NRCS family wishes him all the best."

Darin is no longer saying, "I'm from the Government, and I'm here to help you." His attitude and goal, however, are much the same. His focus now is equipping young girls with real world skills so they will have the necessary tools to succeed in life.

For more information about Big Oak Ranch, visit their website at <http://www.bigoak.org/>.



Shelby County Hosts State Land Judging Contest



District Conservationist Thomas McDaniel (l) and Agronomist Ben Moore confer on guidelines for the pastureland site as a student judges the soil and fills out his form.

The Alabama State Land Judging contest took place March 13 in Shelby County. NRCS District Conservationist Thomas McDaniel and the Shelby County SWCD did an excellent job of setting up the contest site. Twelve teams participated—four teams from each of the three regions in the state.

Winners in the 2006 contest were: 1st – Horseshoe Bend High School; 2nd – Charles Henderson High School; 3rd – Douglas High School; and 4th – Falkville High School. The FFA Association contributes \$2,500 for the 1st place team to go to the National contest in May in Oklahoma City.

Troy Newton, State FFA Coordinator, said, "The teams were well prepared. There are so many ways for the teams to tap into the expertise available to them at the local level. The State Soil and Water Conservation Districts sponsor the contest at the state level. We appreciate the work involved in preparing these students for the contest and the continued support of the sponsors.

Going Red For Women...on National Wear Red Day

by Fay Garner, Public Affairs Assistant, NRCS, Auburn, AL

Go Red For Women is a nationwide movement to empower women to love – and save – their hearts through lifestyle choices and actions. Hundreds of companies and organizations across America take part in “National Wear Red Day,” to help the American Heart Association support ongoing research and education about women and heart disease.

Linda McGraw, Federal Women’s Program Manager, asked NRCS employees in Alabama to participate in National Wear Red Day for Women. She sent an email to all employees encouraging them to wear their favorite red clothes or accessories on February 3 and show some heart for heart disease prevention.

Linda thanks all NRCS employees who participated in National Wear Red Day.

Personnel and visitors in the Mobile Field Office (r) and the State Office (below) wore red to show their support for The American Heart Association.



Personnel News

Promotions

- Winford Andrews, District Conservationist, Eutaw, AL
- Autry Burns, Soil Conservation Technician, Rainsville, AL
- Doug Gresham, District Conservationist, Selma, AL
- Don Nelson, Soil Conservationist, Jackson, AL
- Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservationist, Mobile, AL
- Mark Rhodes, Soil Conservation Technician, Talladega, AL
- Kent St John, Soil Conservation Technician, Gadsden, AL

Reassignments

- Shane King, Agricultural Engineer, Project Office, Oxford, AL to Project Office, Ozark, AL.

Resignations

- Deana Mann, Soil Conservationist, Scottsboro, AL
- Darin Moseley, Soil Conservation Technician, Wetumpka, AL
- Chris Rice, Soil Conservation Technician, Scottsboro, AL

In Sympathy

Retiree **Genevieve Rymal** of Auburn passed away on March 23 in her home.

Retiree **David Waller** (62) passed away at his home and was laid to rest March 14 in Opelika, AL. David retired from the NRCS state office in December 2004 with over 30 years of service.

SCS/NRCS retiree Charles (Jesse) Bush’s son, **Ronald David Bush** (42) of Dahlongega, GA, passed away on March 26 after a sudden illness. The home address for Jesse and Glenda is:

502 Overlook Drive
Opelika, Alabama 36801

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