

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



January 2007

From The State Conservationist - *Gary Kobylski*

I've heard it said that there are two great moments in life—the first is WHEN you were born—and the second is when you realize WHY you were born.

For the most part, as members of the NRCS family, we have figured out at least a portion of the “why.” We all share a passion for the good earth and have a desire to help others do the right things to conserve and use wisely our natural resources. As we begin another calendar year, it's a good time to take stock of what we are doing and why. The work of NRCS is a mission that we

believe in and one that we are proud to be a part of.

We offer best wishes to ten recent retirees. We thank them for their contributions to the work of the agency, and we wish them all the best as they enjoy some well deserved time with family and friends.

For all of us, I extend best wishes for a happy, healthy, and productive New Year.

Randall East Receives 2006 Jerry L. Johnson Award

Randall East, Resource Engineer in Grove Hill, Alabama, was recently honored as the 2006 recipient of the Jerry L. Johnson Award for excellence in public service through family, employment, profession, and community. East was selected for his contributions to community through volunteer work and church activities, as well as exemplifying the highest standards of work ethics as an NRCS employee. He received a stipend of \$1,000 to be donated in his honor. He also received a one-of-a-kind wood carving as a token of appreciation.

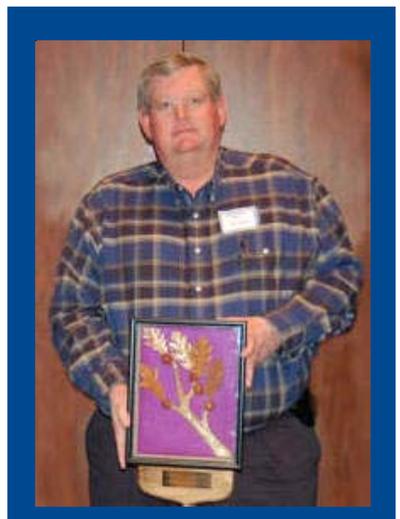
“His commitment to the mission of NRCS is outstanding,” says John Richburg, ASTC-FO West. “NRCS and I could not have handled the increased

workload associated with hurricanes Ivan and Katrina had it not been for Randall.”

Randall East is the type of involved, dedicated NRCS employee that represents the intent and legacy of The Jerry Johnson Award.

For more information, about the award, visit the Alabama NRCS website:

www.al.nrcs.usda.gov.



Making a Difference

Alabama Farmer Wins National Small Farmer Award

Mr. Jacob Waddy, a Perry County producer, placed second in the national Lloyd Wright Black Small Farmer Awards for 2006. The award was presented at the 14th Annual Conference of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) held in Indianapolis, IN, in December 2006. Special thanks go to Andrew Williams, Alice Love, and Sutton Gibbs for providing technical assistance to Mr. Waddy to enable him to achieve this level of farming operation.

The nomination process required a five-minute video. The video showcased Mr. Waddy's farming operation featuring his goat herd and vegetable crops grown with plasticulture and drip irrigation. A major component in being selected for the honor was his commitment to sustaining the land, ingenuity in farming operations, and dedication to making a difference in his community.



l-r: Gary Kobylski, Alabama NRCS State Conservationist; Jacob Waddy with his farming partner Virginia Fikes; and Gerald Willis, Special Assistant to the Chief.

Landowner Helps Endangered Species

by James Currington, District Conservationist, Geneva, AL

Everette Stewart, a Geneva County farmer and landowner, made a critical decision that significantly reduces damage to the nests of an endangered species, the Gulf Sturgeon. The Gulf Sturgeon, a salt and fresh water fish, migrates up the Choctawhatchee

Elimination of eroded stream banks will be among the benefits of establishing a riparian forest buffer on the farm of Everett Stewart in Geneva County, AL.



River to spawn each year. Heavy sediments can smother the eggs and significantly reduce the spawn. There are numerous sites of caving banks and erosion along the river that need stabilization. Mr. Stewart agreed to restore almost a mile of riparian area along the Choctawhatchee River to its original forested condition as a riparian zone on his land. The riparian forest buffer and streambank stabilization will reduce hundreds of tons of sediment from entering the river and smothering nests of the sturgeon and other aquatic species.

A riparian forest buffer is an area of trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to a body of water. Hardwood trees were the native species along the river bottomland before humans disturbed the areas. These hardwoods provide food and cover for wildlife, stabilize the soil, and filter sediments as floods sweep across the flood plain. Water oaks, white oaks, hickory, and many other species are well suited for bottomland soils. The soils are moist, and, in some places, wet; hardwoods do not mind wet feet.

The streambank stabilization practices include burying logs and establishing willows, birch, and other shrub and tree species that tolerate very wet conditions and swift currents. These bio-engineering practices are just as effective as rock rip-rap, but minimize impact on aquatic and terrestrial animal species that nest and transcend the river's bank. The river banks are currently being undermined, which results in sloughing of huge chunks of soil that becomes sediment downstream. The stabilization will significantly reduce this erosion and the resulting

sediment. The riparian forest buffer will tie into the streambank stabilization and stabilize the adjacent land.

Mr. Stewart says, "I want to pass on the land in better condition than I received it, which is what every landowner ought to do." A cattle producer, Mr. Stewart also depended on the river and a small tributary to water his livestock. He plans to drill a well and install several water troughs in his pastured area, and then fence the livestock out of the riparian area. This will reduce the amount of nutrients and pathogens found in livestock waste from entering the streams and river.

Mr. Stewart will receive cost-share funding from the Farm Service Agency for the riparian forest buffer and additional assistance from the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alabama Department of Conservation—Freshwater Fisheries and Wildlife Division for the streambank stabilization. NRCS and the Wiregrass Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) will provide planning and technical assistance. This project is an example of federal and state agencies working together to benefit the landowner and the endangered species.

Richard Collier, Coordinator of the Wiregrass RC&D, says, "This partnership will eventually treat about 15 similar sites along the Choctawhatchee River which will significantly improve the habitat for the Gulf Sturgeon."

Bio-Retention Project in Opp

Ed Meadows, President of Lurleen B Wallace (LBW) Community College, was concerned about the water quality in the lake at LBW Community College - MacArthur Campus in Opp. Storm water was entering



Completed Project of LBW Community College in Opp.

the lake from a large parking lot, damaging the water quality in the lake. Covington County NRCS District Conservationist Steve Yelverton made a field visit to the site and suggested that a bio-retention project be installed. This structure will filter runoff water through topsoil, plants, sand, and gravel to remove pollutants before it enters the pond. The site will be used as a demonstration for other water quality improvement projects.

This project was designed by NRCS Resource Engineer Randy Martin. NRCS Soil Conservation Technicians Leon Wages and Butch Kelley provided technical assistance during construction. The Covington County Commission generously supplied the equipment and labor to install the project. Funds were provided by the Covington County Soil and Water Conservation District, Wiregrass RC&D, Choctawhatchee Pea and Yellow Rivers Watershed Management Authority, and LBW Community College.



Representatives from the Covington County Commission; Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Yellow Rivers Management Watershed Management Authority; LBW Community College; and the Covington County SWCS/NRCS.

Meetings and Workshops



Macon/Bullock Counties NRCS District Conservationist Gwen Lewis (r) introduced PAW guest speaker Bruce Knight, USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Program.

64th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers Conference in Tuskegee

Gwen Lewis, NRCS District Conservationist of Macon and Bullock Counties, presided over a session at Tuskegee University's 64th Annual Professional Agricultural Workers (PAW) Conference. Held December 3-5 at the University's Kellogg Conference Center, the conference brings together agricultural professionals from across the country. This year the conference celebrated the centennial of the appointment of Thomas Monroe Campbell as the nation's first extension agent in 1906.

Lewis introduced Tuskegee University President Dr. Benjamin F. Payton, who welcomed keynote speaker, USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Bruce Knight.

Knight, who is a prior Chief of the NRCS, spoke about sharing information, animal identification, and future job opportunities for college graduates.

Knight told the group that power lies with distributing information, and USDA must make farmers feel welcome. He emphasized that USDA must make sure information about programs is disseminated, saying "Simply putting information on the web is not enough."

He said USDA has been tasked with putting in place a voluntary animal identification system. The

system has three phases: 1) premise registration, 2) individual animal identification, and 3) trace out and trace back.

In closing, Knight spoke of future employment opportunities within USDA. He projected that 40-50 percent of employees within many federal agencies will retire within the next five years, leaving the door "wide open" for students at Tuskegee University and other 1890 universities to apply for jobs.

Stream Assessment Workshop

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

A two-day stream assessment workshop was held December 11-12, to provide information to assist in assessing stream conditions. With the information provided, participants may develop a plan of action for the protection and restoration of stream segments. This information may be used to assist communities in addressing issues such as water quality, water quantity, flooding, storm water management, and habitat.

Twenty-one natural resource professionals, state and local government representatives, and industry professionals attended. Subjects covered included: Channel and Riparian Condition, Aquatic Insect Assessment, Local Funding Mechanisms, and Low Impact Development. The workshop was featured on



Workshop participants learned principles that help them with local stream assessments.

the front page of the *Jasper Daily Mountain Eagle*, December 13, 2006. Sponsors Included:
Cawaco RC&D Council, Inc.
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
North Carolina State University
City of Jasper
Walker County Commission
USDA/NRCS
Black Warrior and Cahaba Rivers Clean Water Partnership

Alabama Agriculture Energy Conference

In addition to food and fiber, the conservation effort has an added focus—fuel. The third annual Alabama Agriculture Energy Conference, a one-day event focusing on energy efficiency, and renewable energy technologies and techniques for agriculture, took place on November 29 in Auburn. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) in cooperation with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the Alabama Farmers Federation, and the Alabama Poultry and Egg Association hosted the conference which attracted an assortment of participants. Dr. Ed Richardson, President of Auburn University, said that “home-grown” energy has many benefits for Alabama. In addition to reducing the amount of fuel imports, renewable energy has the potential to pump added revenues into rural areas.

Several NRCS employees attended the conference, and the Alabama Mountains, Rivers, and Valleys (AMRV) RC&D Council had a poster exhibit focusing on the process of converting used cooking oil into an alternative fuel for heating poultry houses.



Blake Garner, RC&D Projects Manager (l) and Mike Roden, MRV RC&D Coordinator, displayed a poster at the Energy Conference promoting the use of cooking oil to heat poultry houses.

Renewable energy such as solar, wind, and biofuels can play a key role in creating a clean, reliable energy future. The benefits are many and varied, including a cleaner environment. Equally important, renewable energy technologies contribute significantly to local economies, creating jobs and keeping energy dollars in the local economy. To help focus on alternative energy in the farming operation, the AMRV RC&D Council hosted a conference on Energy Conservation Opportunities on the Farm on January 17-18 in Huntsville, Alabama. The conference is sponsored by the National Association of RC&D Councils; the AMRV RC&D Council; and ADECA.

Displaying Good Conservation

We are proud of the work we do in Alabama and now we have a way to show it. Most of you are aware of the plea to field offices to send in pictures of good conservation that has been installed or is being installed in your county. In the State Office conference room we have installed frames to display a photo from each county. We expect to rotate them quarterly. Keep the good conservation photos coming.



NRCS Surveying Equipment Donated to Museum

by Sue Daniel, Secretary, Engineering Section, Auburn, AL

One man's trash is another man's treasure. Such is the case with an antiquated piece of engineering equipment—a pantograph. The pantograph was used to copy and enlarge or reduce engineering plans or sections of maps. Before the pantograph, engineers used the proportional rule or dividers to copy plans. In its day, this 'new' equipment saved a lot of time and was deemed more accurate; however, it took up a lot of space—about six feet by six feet. The pantograph gave way to today's technology—the computer.

NRCS owned a pantograph which sat in a wooden box on a shelf in engineering section at the state office for some time until I asked what it was and how it was used. Mac Nelson, recently retired State Design Engineer, took it down and showed it to me. The pantograph was purchased from the Leitz Company in California, but the equipment was manufactured in Germany. Equipment of this nature was extremely precise, and the company had them manufactured only when they received an order. The wooden box used to house the equipment was handmade with dove tailing on the corners and beveled molding around the inside edge to keep the box from sliding when closed.

I realized the historical value of the equipment and knew it needed to be preserved. I contacted the Smithsonian Institute, but they declined the donation because they already have two. State Conservation Engineer Perry Oakes recommended contacting the Surveyors Historical Society (SHS). I got a contact name, address, and e-mail address of the Society from the Internet. I received a letter from Mr. Roger Woodfill, L.S., SHS Administrator, stating the Society would accept the donation. Mr. Milton Denny, SHS member from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, was designated to come to the state office and accept the donation. Mr. Denny said, "It is always important to preserve the past. It is rare to find a pantograph so complete and in such good condition. Only a few people are left who know how to use the equipment. Preserving it will be a great testimony about how different processing data was before the invention of the computer."

The SHS will display the pantograph in the surveyor's museum in Springfield, Illinois, within two blocks of Abraham Lincoln's home. Since Lincoln was a surveyor, the pantograph has been preserved in an appropriate place.



Sue Daniel, Secretary, Engineering Section; and Mac Nelson (r), recently retired State Design Engineer; turn the pantograph over to Milton Denny, a representative of the Surveyors Historical Society.

Alabama Conservation Innovation Grant

by Alice Love, Farm Bill Specialist, Auburn, AL

Alabama NRCS is requesting applications from eligible government, non-government organizations, or individuals for 2007 State Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG). Funds for this effort will be set aside from a percentage of the state Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds with a minimum of 10 percent set-aside for applications from beginning and limited resource farmers and ranchers, Indian tribes, or community-based organizations comprised of or representing these entities. Alabama NRCS will be accepting applications in the local field offices during January and February 2007 addressing two categories: Natural Resource Concerns and Technology. Application deadline is March 1, 2007.

The purpose of the CIG program is to stimulate interest in and promote adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies while leveraging the Federal investment in environmental enhancement and protection, in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG does not fund research projects. CIG funds projects target innovative on-the-ground conservation.

From the Field

Point A/Gantt Lake Projects Completed

The Covington County Watershed Assessment Report of FY1999 listed several sites where sediment was entering the Point A and Gantt Lakes from dirt roads at extremely high rates per year.

The Covington County Watershed Advisory Committee ranked Point A/Gantt Watershed top priority for the county. A Plan of Action was written to significantly reduce the amount of sediment entering Point A and Gantt Lakes by installing best management practices (BMP) at critically eroding areas adjacent to the lakes and to demonstrate the effectiveness of properly applied BMP's.

In October 2001, the FY2001 Clean Water Section 319 (h) Cooperative Agreement between Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the Covington County SWCD was signed.

Five sites were monitored by Geological Survey of Alabama to determine the erosion rates on these critically eroding areas. The following sites were completed: Broden Road, C.W. Green Road, Holiday Hill, Point A Isle Road, and Steam Plant Road.

Since construction has been completed, the Geological Survey will monitor the five sites to document the amount of erosion that enter the lakes. This monitoring should show the benefits of installing BMPs along roads and, hopefully, lead the way to more funding for dirt road stabilization.

The Covington County SWCD, along with the Covington County Commission, formed a committee with state leaders to look for ways to stabilize more dirt roads and hopefully obtain funds for the projects.

The District is very appreciative for the work that was done by the Covington County Commission and the other sponsors. Many landowners living on these roads paid for materials to complete paving on part of the roads not included in this agreement. The Geological Survey is still working on data from these sites and will present this report in spring 2007. A tour of these sites will be planned by the District board.

Auburn University Qualifies for National Soil Judging Contest

Auburn University finished second (out of 12) at the Southeastern Regional Soil Judging Contest hosted by Western Kentucky University. The top five finishing order was: University of Kentucky (2,100 pts), Auburn (2,097 pts), Virginia Tech (2,064 pts), Clemson (2,061 pts), and West Virginia (2,046 pts). Top Auburn individuals included Mike Gunn (2nd overall out of 81) and Amy Weaver (9th). Auburn qualifies for the National Contest hosted by Utah State in April 2007.



(Center) Bill Godwin, District Supervisor presents the final payment of \$11,872.57 to the members of the Covington County Commission.

In Sympathy

Eleanor Jean Chaffin (68), wife of retired ASTC Jimmy Chaffin, passed away on December 25 in her home after a battle with cancer. Condolences can be sent to Jimmy at: 650 Jennifer Drive, Auburn, AL 36830.

Personnel

Promotions

Zachry Adams, Soil Conservationist, Cullman, AL
Amy Bell, from District Conservationist, Monroeville, AL to Gulf Coast Resource Conservation & Development Coordinator, Bay Minette, AL
Marshall Colburn, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL
Sutton Gibbs, District Conservationist, Greensboro, AL
Bucky Howe, Soil Conservation Technician, Guntersville, AL
Craig Johnson, from Soil Conservationist, Centre, AL to Soil Conservationist, Carrollton, AL
Scotty Noles, Soil Conservation Technician, Wedowee, AL
Annette Spivey, Soil Conservation Technician, Alexander City, AL
David Stewart, Soil Conservation Technician, Marion, AL.
Alex Vaughan, Soil Conservationist, Dothan, AL.
Walker Williams, from District Conservationist, Evergreen, AL to Resource Conservationist, Troy, AL

Reassignment

Zona Beaty from Resource Conservationist, Resource Conservation Staff, Auburn, AL to Resource Conservationist, Program Services Staff, Auburn, AL.

Alice Love from Soil Conservationist, Resource Conservation Staff, Auburn, AL to Soil Conservationist, Program Services Staff, Auburn, AL.
Teresa Paglione from Archeologist, Resource Conservation Staff, Auburn, AL to Archeologist, Program Services Staff, Auburn, AL.
Kim Pridgen from Secretary (OA), Resource Conservation Staff to Secretary (OA), Programs Services Staff, Auburn, AL.
Andrew Williams from Outreach Coordinator, Resource Conservation Staff, Auburn, AL to Outreach Coordinator, Programs Service Staff, Auburn, AL.
Phillip Slater from Soil Conservationist, Andalusia, AL to Soil Conservationist, Talladega, AL.
Andrew Wright from Soil Conservationist, Bonifay, FL to District Conservationist, Jackson, AL.

Reassignment/Conversion

Michael Gunn, from Soil Conservation Technician (Career Enhancement Program), Montgomery, AL to Soil Conservationist, Rainsville, AL

Resignation

Paul Hymer, Soil Conservation Technician, Scottsboro, AL

Alabama Retirees

Ten people have retired from NRCS in Alabama in the past few months:

Mason Dollar, Resource/Program Manager, Auburn, AL
Dan Evans, Supply Clerk, Auburn, AL
Billy Frost, District Conservationist, Moulton, AL
Stan Franklin, District Conservationist, Guntersville, AL
Ed Holley, District Conservationist, Clayton, AL
George Martin, Soil Scientist, MLRA, Auburn, AL
Mac Nelson, Civil Engineer, Auburn, AL
Johnny Trayvick, Project Leader, MLRA, Auburn, AL
Danny Williams, District Conservationist, Huntsville, AL
Randal Wilson, District Conservationist, Anniston, AL

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