

NRCS Alabama

# Current Developments



April 2007

## From The State Conservationist - Gary Kobylski

It's been an interesting and challenging year for NRCS. Up until just a few weeks ago, we have been operating under a continuing resolution. Funds have been tight. No doubt you have heard rumors that change will be necessary to perform our work and we must wisely use both our financial and human resources. Just a few weeks ago, we began working with the conservation partnership to determine how we should respond to these challenges. We want to become more proactive than reactive. We want to have a plan in place that will help us make good decisions as we face the challenges of the future. Some of you will be involved in these task force groups who will be making recommendations, and I appreciate your help.

NRCS has been known as a technical agency, and we are. That's what we do best—provide technical assistance to landowners. More will be required of us in years to come than technical ability alone. A willingness to change and to adapt will be needed as well.

Alabama NRCS has the reputation of facing the challenge and doing what's necessary to get the job done. I appreciate all that each of you do to help us get conservation on the ground and to assist the landowners of our state. As we have in the past, we will continue to do those things necessary to move our conservation efforts forward.

*Gary*

## Black History Month Observed

By Herbert Ross, BEPM, Auburn, AL

During the month of February, the Alabama NRCS state office observed Black History Month. The theme for this year's celebration was "Slavery to Freedom: African in the Americas." A pictorial gallery and other reading material about Black history highlighting some of the achievements and contributions of African Americans were on display in an office hallway.

On February 22, we attempted to raise awareness by making the observance more relevant  
(con't)



Herbert Ross, BEPM (l) presented Pastor Lacornia M. Harris (c) with a plaque for time and effort to help celebrate Black history with the employees and guests in the state office. Gary Kobylsky, STC (r).

and meaningful during a meeting in the state office.

Gary Kobylski, State Conservationist, welcomed everyone and shared valuable information regarding Black history. Thanks to Gary for time spent researching information and sharing it with everyone.

The keynote speaker was Pastor Lacornia M. Harris from Demopolis, Alabama. Pastor Harris took the audience back in time with a story and gradually brought them back to the present. As Pastor Harris started to speak, he pulled two stones from his pocket and a calm came over the room; all attention was focused on the stones. He used the stones as a reminder of how we came over. He referred to the Children of Israel, who were destined for the Land of Promise. Before they crossed over to the promise land, they were told to reach down and pick up a stone to always remind them of how they got over. The speaker was well received by everyone.

The celebration followed with the group singing James W. Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing." We all regained a full appreciation of the History that was never taught, but impacts us all in a direct or indirect way.

The celebration ended with everyone enjoying lunch that was provided.

## Go Red For Women...on National Wear Red Day

*By Linda McGraw, Federal Women's Program Manager, Tuscaloosa, AL*

Go Red For Women is a nationwide movement to empower women to love – and save – their hearts through lifestyle choices and actions. By joining together with hundreds of other companies and organizations across America on National Wear Red Day, we helped support the American Heart Association's ongoing research and education about women and heart disease.

I sent an email to all NRCS employees announcing that Friday, February 2, 2007, was National Wear Red Day for Women and encouraged employees to wear their favorite red clothing or accessories and show some heart for heart disease prevention on that day. Here are some photos of those who participated.



*I-r: Randy Hale, Sheila Ennis, Wyman Hamm, and Phillip Barbaree of Troy.*



*Front I-r: Larry McCray, Milton Tuck, and Mike Cornett. Back: Linda McGraw, Steve Rohrer, and Wendy Brown in Tuscaloosa.*



*State Office personnel participated in National Wear Red Day: (I-r) Betty C. Walker, Paul Swenson, Fay Garner, Zona Beaty, Evelyn Bostick, Deloris Jones, Sue Daniel, Perry Oakes, Julie Best, Rick Zellmer, Gary Kobylski, Sarah Walker, and Julie Yates.*

*At a Beef Management Meeting hosted by Extension in Montgomery every first Friday. (I-r) Dr. Walt Prevatt, AU Professor and guest speaker; Merry Buford, Soil Con; L.T. Hataway, producer; Larry Montgomery, producer; April Jones, District Con; Julianne Hataway, District Supervisor; David McCurdy, County Executive Director; Pat Latham, producer; and Jan Hall, producer.*



## From The Field

### Conservation Tillage Workshops Held In Dothan and Decatur

*By Ben Moore, Resource Conservationist, Luverne, AL*

Conservation tillage workshops were held in Dothan at Landmark Park on January 25<sup>th</sup> and in Decatur at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Visitor Center on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Over 135 farmers, researchers, and agricultural agency personnel attended the workshops. Attendees heard presentations from farmers about their experiences with conservation tillage systems. The farmers were more than willing to share with others about their convictions and lessons learned about conservation tillage farming. Billy Lee of Lawrence County said, "I have a peace of mind knowing that I'm farming in a way that enables the farm to sustain itself." He also said that a lot of the risk in farming is taken out because conservation tillage systems conserve and maintain more moisture. Jimmy Brooks of Monroe County says he has improved his soil organic matter, saved time, labor, and fuel. He says he has no plans to ever go back to a conventional tillage system. Auburn University and ARS scientists presented the latest research about the management of cover crops, weeds, fertility, nematodes, and compaction. Randy Raper of the USDA-ARS said that conservation tillage systems must be managed as a long-term, multi-year system to achieve all the maximum benefits. Bob Goodman, Auburn University economist, presented on the economics of conservation tillage systems and how conservation tillage can save on many input costs, but varies greatly from farm to farm. A field demonstration and equipment display was part of the Dothan workshop. Attendees were able to examine new equipment and see some equipment in operation. Thomas Kirkland of Dale County demonstrated some of his conservation tillage equipment. Farmers were very complimentary of the workshops and asked if we could have more in the future. The partners and sponsors for these workshops were: Alabama Mountains Rivers & Valleys RC&D, Northwest RC&D, Wiregrass RC&D, USDA-ARS, USDA-NRCS, Auburn University, Alabama SWCS, ACES, SWCDs, ADECA,

Landmark Park, Tennessee Basin Clean Water Partnership, Dale County Farmer's Federation, Wiregrass International Inc, SunSouth LLC, Northside New Holland and Kirkland Farm.

### High Residue Cover Crop Conservation Tillage Field Day

*By Joyce Nicholas, District Conservationist, Monroe County*

What a great way to spend one of those perfect spring days, halfway between Frisco City and Uriah, down on the farm with plenty of good friends and neighbors who have a common interest- conservation tillage. That is just what several NRCS employees and the ACES staff members from Auburn and the surrounding counties did on April 5, 2007. Attendance was great! There were over 55 farmers and about 35 professionals at the Jimmy Brooks Farm to enjoy the day's activities.

The weather had been a bit stormy during the early morning hours and we worried about attendance being a bit diminished. Imagine our delight at the number of people who came to gather information about conservation tillage and how NRCS can help apply it on the farm.

Those on the agenda giving updates, program information, and/or demonstrations included: Richard Petcher, ACES Regional Extension



*This tool rolls and crimps green cover crops to prepare for conservation tillage planting.*

Specialist; Steve Yelverton, District Conservationist, Covington County; Randy Raper and Andy Price, USDA Soil Dynamics Lab; Kirk Iversen was also on board—and by the way, thanks to Kirk for bringing and displaying the Alabama SWCD Chapter display. Chemical reps on hand included Rod Higdon with \*Monsanto and David Whitehead with \*Valent. Other Auburn University participants included Dennis Delaney and Edzart van Santen, Agronomists; and John Fulton Biosystems Engineering.

Last, but certainly not least, were our excellent hosts for the day's activities, our own farmers Eddie Nall and Jimmy Brooks who, according to one specialist, *"have seen the light"* in regard to high residue and conservation tillage. Farmers from Mobile, Baldwin, Conecuh, Escambia, Washington, and Clarke Counties were there to observe some of the lessons learned by Jimmy and Eddie. Even though the rain prohibited the demonstration of the field equipment, the roller that crimped or rolled the cover crop was observed, as was other equipment that is required for a successful endeavor with this type of planting practice. Tim Mulleck, a Baldwin County farmer, was also on hand to share his method of broadcasting wheat seeds before he digs his peanut crop. Tim has had excellent results on germination of the cover crop for the last two years.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the partners and sponsors that made the day a success: Monroe County SWCD, Alabama SWCS, \*Monsanto and \*Valent Chemical companies, NRCS, Auburn University, and ACES.

I want to thank those who worked behind the scene to make the day so successful, especially Richard Petcher and the Monroe County Extension Office Staff under the leadership of Willie Williams. Most of all, my gratitude to the Monroe County field office staff: Reuben Hyde, Soil Conservation Technician and District Administrative Coordinator Robin Thames, who handled one of the most important details of any successful field day—our delicious lunch, which included bar-b-que sandwiches, chips, soft drinks, and my famous baked beans. Several of those attending wanted to kiss the cook, but Reuben said he'd give them a black eye if they tried to hug or kiss him! It was a great day. Hard work and doing what you love -- that's life!

\* Trade names are used solely to provide specific information. Mention of a trade name does not constitute a guarantee of the product by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does it imply endorsement by the USDA or NRCS over comparable products that are not named.

## Local Landowners Choose Conservation Programs Over Development

*By Sam Sandlin, Flint River Watershed Coordinator, Madison County SWCD*

Charlsie Woody, along with her daughter and son-in-law, Phyllis and Hank Holland, recently did a big favor for Peavey Creek in Hampton Cove - the family committed over 70 acres along the creek to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Hampton Cove area in Madison County is an ever-growing section of the county. With the commitment of this family, several cotton fields in the heart of Hampton Cove that have huge development potential, have been converted to hardwood trees, pine trees, and permanent grasses.

Their goal was to ensure that a large part of their family farm remained in a natural state, safe from development. The extra benefit for the local stream and environment is that tree and grass buffers improve water quality by reducing the amount of sediment and pollutants entering the creek.

The riparian buffers will provide other enhancements. They will improve aquatic habitat by cooling water temperature, providing food and shelter for both aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, improving air quality, decreasing soil erosion, and reducing flood damage by slowing the velocity of water as it travels across the land to the streams.

Mrs. Woody and the Hollands worked in partnership with NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Madison County SWCD. CRP is designed to rest agricultural land for a period of time by converting it to trees or permanent vegetation. Contracts are typically for fifteen years, and a small annual rental rate per acre is awarded to the landowners. The Madison County SWCD, in partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority, offers a similar program with its Flint River Buffer Initiative. Here, a one-time incentive payment is awarded to landowners that offer



**Hank and Phyllis Holland examine one of their newly planted pine seedlings.**

## Alabama Receives National Awards

Alabama walks away with more national awards! Dakota Coleman, a student at Evergreen Elementary School, Evergreen, Alabama, representing Conecuh County SWCD, won first place in the national kindergarden-1st grade poster category. Dakota's poster was displayed at the 61<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts meeting in Los Angeles, California, on February 4-6, 2007.

Alabama was also among the Quota Award winners. Alabama was recognized as one of the top 10 membership contributing states and as one of the states with 100 percent district participation. Congratulations, and keep up the good work! On-line information is available at:

<http://2007.nacdnet.org/awards/>



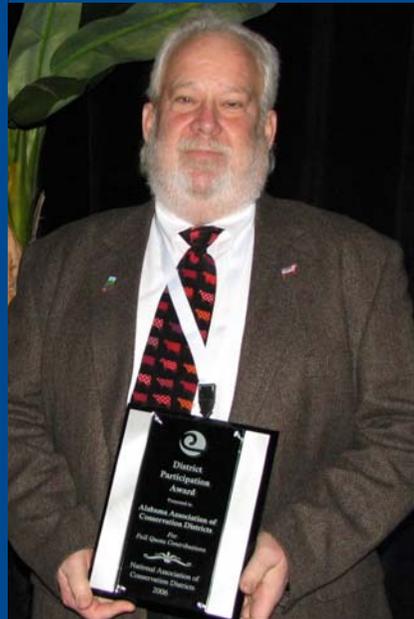
*As Peavey Creek leaves the farm, it flows south through the residential areas of Hampton Cove. There was no buffer to filter non-point source pollutants like excess fertilizers, herbicides, and chemicals that enter the surface water as it runs off the landscape. Recent tree plantings will provide a buffer for a section of the creek.*

to establish new hardwood buffers along waterways within the larger Flint River drainage.

The farm originally was land-granted to the family in 1819 from President James Monroe. The Hollands still have the deed, and their children, Lee, Sheree, Brett, and Samantha, will be the seventh generation to be a part of its interesting history. For over the last century, it has been farmed in cotton, corn, or soybeans.

Now, with subdivisions literally across the street, development seemed like the next phase for the farm. Developers have already shown interest. Mrs. Woody and the Hollands had different ideas, however. After reviewing the rules for the conservation programs, Hank replied, "We'll do whatever you want us to do, but we won't sell it."

Although the trees are only about a foot tall now, they will grow, other vegetation will fill in around them, a canopy will form, the topsoil will be held in place, and pollutants will start being filtered out. Fish and other stream critters can be seen swimming in Peavey Creek, although the southern end is now more like a ditch than a stream. Who knows for sure if they would have survived in the long-term at the rate Hampton Cove continues to grow. However, as these buffers continue to develop, these creatures should have a place to call home in Peavey Creek for years to come. Wouldn't it be cool to travel fifteen years into the future to see what it will look like and to see how special this farm will be?



*Craig Sizemore, President, Alabama Association of Conservation Districts, accepts Quota and Membership Contribution awards for Alabama.*



*Dakota Coleman from Conecuh County won first place in the national kindergarden-first grade poster contest.*

# Program News - Outreach in Action

By Alice Love, Soil Conservationist, and Andrew Williams, Outreach Liaison, NRCS, Auburn, AL

## Conservation Partnership

It's a pleasure to see local community-based organizations thrive in the arena of adopting and implementing the new technologies of conservation. The River-Road Cooperative in Houston County has been working closely with the outreach/program staff and ALA-TOM RC&D over the years. Based on this partnership, the River-Road Cooperative and other local community-based organizations has a Cooperative Agreement with ALA-TOM RC&D to assist in enhancing the awareness of NRCS conservation programs throughout their farming communities. This project has increased the participation of limited resource/small scale farmers in NRCS programs throughout the state.

Alabama NRCS adopted new conservation practices such as woodland grazing for small ruminants, micro-irrigation, and pastured poultry into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The purpose of this action was to offer conservation practices

that were more adaptable to limited resource/small scale farmers.

The River-Road Cooperative assisted NRCS in informing producers within their working area of this new program in EQIP. They not only advertised the technology, but they implemented micro-irrigation on acreage farmed by its members and non-members.

This conservation practice is in such high demand that members of the Cooperative noticed another barrier in their farming community - the lack of equipment to install the practice. The Cooperative sought funds and purchased a planter for use on micro-irrigation sites throughout the community.

Based on these advancements in their farming community,



*Thomas Turner, a member of the River-Road Cooperative, is proud of the new planter. He works closely with the partnership to keep farmers informed.*



*Alvin Melton (r) is a Limited Resource/Small Scale Farmer who uses micro-irrigation/plasticulture to increase his small farm production. Our own Shane King is demonstrating the planter.*



*This field has been planted using techniques developed for successful micro-irrigation/plasticulture.*



*Ken Aycock, Agricultural Engineer, says a well, fertilizer injector, filter, and pressure regulator are necessary components for a micro-irrigation system.*

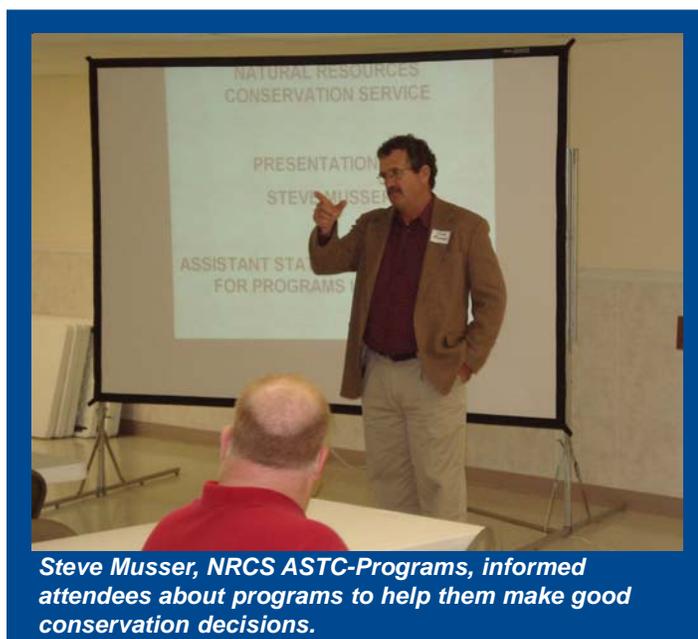
the Cooperative has planted an 8.5 acre site of seedless watermelons using micro-irrigation. Hopefully, this will develop a market which will enable all farming operations in this community to flourish.

NRCS outreach/program services has proven to enhance the strengths of this community-based organization. Other partners instrumental in this project are the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, Greene County SWCD, Alabama Sustainable Agriculture Network, Wiregrass RC&D, and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries. This is a strong visual of the effectiveness of conservation partnerships and outreach services.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Tri-State Farmer's Forum

Alabama NRCS program staff participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Tri-State Farmers' Forum held in Dothan, Alabama, in January 2007. This event is an outreach effort conducted by conservation partners through local community based organizations, private industries, and government agencies. Conservation partner's work together to enhance producer's knowledge of conservation techniques, funding assistance, marketing approaches, and other areas as it relates to today's agriculture industry.

Steve Musser, NRCS ASTC-Programs, gave a presentation informing about 53 customers, ranging from Limited/Small Scaled Resource Farmers to business representatives, about programs offered through NRCS. He highlighted programs such as WHIP, CSP, and EQIP (regular and Limited/Small Scaled Resource Farmer, Beginning Farmer Programs). Critical information was presented such as sign-up dates advertised through local news media, program policies, and ranking systems.



*Steve Musser, NRCS ASTC-Programs, informed attendees about programs to help them make good conservation decisions.*

The audience was informed of alternative ways to preserve agriculture lands through easement programs such as WRP, GRP and FRPP.

Steve was available to address individual concerns on a one-on-one basis during this event.

After this presentation, attendee's displayed a greater knowledge base about programs offered by NRCS.



*Eugene Hall (l), the recipient of the 2007 Merit Farmer Award, talks with Andrew Williams, NRCS Outreach Liaison. Mr. Hall is a Technical Service Provider (TSP) who helps producers install micro-irrigation systems.*

### NRCS Participates in Tuskegee University's 115<sup>th</sup> Farmers Conference

Alabama program staff participated in Tuskegee University's 115<sup>th</sup> Farmers Conference on February 22-23, 2007, as part of the outreach effort to producers throughout the state. The history of this conference dates back to 1892.

This year's conference focused on the problems and solutions for small-scaled farmers, landowners, and their families and communities in managing change in agriculture. There were about 300 national agricultural stewards of the land in attendance.

Steve Musser, ASTC-Programs, participated in this year's conference on behalf of NRCS. He embraced the topic of small farmer opportunities and USDA. Steve highlighted NRCS programs designed to target underserved customers. He focused on the goal of the agency to ensure that all programs and services are accessible to all customers. Interpretation of the existing Farm Bill was discussed and its effects on conservation programs. The successes of the 2005 Small Scale/Limited Resource Farmer Initiative were outlined. It was explained to the audience how NRCS targets its outreach efforts towards listening to their concerns. NRCS has backed up these efforts by setting aside EQIP funds for this targeted group. It has led to

their adopting more conservation practices such as micro-irrigation, woodland grazing, and pastured poultry. Steve also emphasized the agency commitment to this effort by informing the audience of how we partner with others to achieve this goal.

This partnership effort was recognized through the recipient of the 2007 Merit Farmer, Mr. Eugene Hall and family. Mr. Hall serves as a Technical Service Provider (TSP) assisting producers to install micro-irrigation systems. Mr. Hall's assistance is funded through a conservation partnership agreement.

An agency display, staffed by me, advertised the Alabama NRCS program successes. I spoke with producers and other vendors and gave them information and brochures based on their interest.

### State FY 2007 Conservation Innovative Grant

The Alabama NRCS state office technical and program staff met with representatives from Tuskegee University to discuss FY 2007 Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Criteria. During this meeting the objective of the program was discussed along with the application process. Tuskegee representatives expressed interest in submitting a proposal for potential funding. NRCS staff informed them of the goal of the program which is to demonstrate innovative conservation techniques on the ground in hopes that these techniques will be adopted by other producers.

The closing date for all state CIG proposals was March 1, 2007. Announcements of accepted proposals will be made in June 2007.



*Representatives from Tuskegee University met with NRCS state office staff in Auburn to discuss the criteria for the FY 2007 Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG).*

## Historic Preservation Programs

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

I sometimes hear comments about these “new laws” NRCS has to comply with. I thought this would be a good opportunity to provide some information about the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

The 40th anniversary of the passage of the NHPA was celebrated in 2006! Now more than 40 years old, NHPA predates the National Environmental Act and the Clean Water Act, and most other laws and regulations that NRCS activities must follow.

The NHPA was created due to public outcry regarding the use of federal funds that resulted in the destruction of individual historic sites, neighborhoods, downtowns, and archaeological sites. U.S. Congress passed the NHPA in 1966, stating for the first time that historic preservation is public policy.

The earliest law regarding cultural resources is the Antiquities Act of 1906, followed by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, and then the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NRCS compliance via the CPA-52 forms). In 1979, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act was passed. The newest law regarding cultural resources is the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) passed in 1990. Of course, all of these laws have been amended almost yearly by Congress, and new ones have been passed; but still, the substance of all of these laws remains the same—federal funds cannot be used without properly considering the effects to our national heritage, whether it is a small archeological flake scatter, an historic farmstead, or a Native American Traditional Cultural Property (TCP).

The NHPA put in place the foundation of Alabama's historic preservation programs, including the National Register of Historic Places and the review process known as Section 106 of the NHPA, which requires that all federally funded or licensed projects be reviewed for their impact on above-ground (i.e., structures or rural landscapes) and archaeological resources. The act charged states with protecting their historic resources and required them to establish State Historic Preservation Offices with officers to oversee preservation activities. In Alabama, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), also known as the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), works to fulfill the requirements of the NHPA, including the Section 106 review process. Since NRCS is a federal agency, we must adhere to Section 106 of the NHPA. We must also adhere to Section 110 of NHPA for all Plant Material Centers -- but that is another story!

## First Acre Ceremony

By Julie Best, Public Affairs Specialist, Auburn, AL

The Lamar County SWCD hosted a First Acre Ceremony on April 18, 2007. Local landowners, county officials, and business people were in attendance to show their support. State Conservationist Gary Kobylski says, "The project we are undertaking is not the first soil survey of Lamar County. A soil survey of the county was published in 1916. That publication is out of date and has long been out of print. The new survey will be a state of the art product, a digital product that can be used in a Geographic Information System."

Lamar County Probate Judge and Chairman of the County Commission was on hand to celebrate the occasion. He said, "Lamar County officials are pleased to cooperate with Natural Resources Conservation Service and the local Soil and Water Conservation District to provide soil data for our landowners. The updated soil data is information that we have needed for many years. It would have been so useful to us in our water reservoir project. The soil data will be information that will help us as we work toward county economic development."

The survey of the 387,370 acres in the county is expected to cost about \$1.3 million dollars; the projected completion date is late 2010.

*A gold augur was given to members of the Lamar County Conservation Partnership to mark the First Acre celebration.*



**Lamar County conservation partners join with members of the Lamar County Commission to celebrate the beginning of updated soils data for the county.**

## Personnel News

### Promotions

Merry Buford, Soil Conservationist, Montgomery, AL to District Conservationist, Oneonta, AL  
Kathy Gotcher, District Conservationist, Tuscumbia, AL to District Conservationist, Moulton, AL  
Anthony Hudson, District Conservationist, Jasper, AL to District Conservationist, Huntsville, AL  
Amber Johnson, Soil Conservationist, Hamilton AL to Soil Conservationist, Vestavia Hills, AL  
Shawn Manning, District Conservationist, Linden, AL to District Conservationist, Guntersville, AL  
Joyce Nicholas, District Conservationist, Monroeville, AL

### Reassignment

Amy Bernauer, Agricultural Engineer, Bay Minette, AL to Agricultural Engineer, Tuscaloosa, AL  
Jody Burdette, District Conservationist, Oneonta, AL to District Conservationist, Anniston, AL  
Zamir Libohova, Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa, AL to Soil Scientist (Intermittent), Indianapolis, IN  
Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservationist, Mobile, AL to District Conservationist, Monroeville, AL  
Angela Warden, Soil Scientist, Tuscaloosa, AL to Soil Scientist, Grove Hill, AL  
Shannon Weaver, Assistant State Conservationist (FO) - East Team, Auburn, AL to Assistant State Conservationist for Natural Resources, Auburn, AL

### Resignation

Travis Burns, Civil Engineer Technician, Auburn, AL  
Jennifer Wells, Soil Conservationist, Geneva, AL

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