

## Della Moen — Illinois' Featured Earth Team Volunteer

**Volunteer Job Title:** Writer

**Location:** Freeport, Illinois

**Date:** May 5, 2008



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**EARTH TEAM  
VOLUNTEER  
WRITES  
NEWSPAPER  
COLUMN**

**“So What Can We Do?”**

### Meet Della Moen

Della Moen has been an Earth Team Volunteer for more than 15 years in the Natural Resources Conservation Service field office in Freeport, Illinois. Among her many tasks, the most notable is writing her newspaper column “So What Can We Do” through the Stephenson County Soil and Water Conservation District. For nearly ten years, Della has produced these articles weekly, covering a limitless variety of natural resources issues. A retired elementary school teacher, she uses her skills as an educator and writer to great effect. Each week Della prepares a new article which is published in several local papers. The focus is to help readers understand more about soil and water conservation. Della has a unique ability to take very complex topics and write them in such a way that is very readable and understandable to the average person.

But the real magnitude of her work comes from the fact that her articles are also distributed across the state of Illinois. Each week she writes her column, which then gets e-mailed to every Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employee in Illinois. That means she reaches more than 500 employees and nearly 100 SWCD's. She encourages others to use her articles as they see fit in their daily work. Her articles are then published in local papers across the state and in local SWCD newsletters. Her efforts, therefore, touch literally thousands of people in Illinois. Due to her knack for writing in a way that is easy to understand, all of these people have a better understanding of conservation and how it impacts our daily lives.

Nearly everyone would agree that one of our biggest challenges is to communicate the need for conservation. If we can somehow instill the importance of conservation in our customers' daily lives, then the job of putting conservation on the ground becomes easier. Della's efforts do just that. Her ability to take complicated technical topics and turn them into something accessible to the average reader is simply amazing. For example, in a recent article she discusses the importance of soils as they impact land use planning. She goes on to talk about how soils vary from one location to another, and that USDA/NRCS has a soil survey which shows the different soils within any given area. This information was timely for our local office because we had just completed an update to our soil survey. The article was distributed across the state and, while its timeliness applied particularly to our local office, I am sure that readers

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all across the state learned about the importance of their own soil surveys. In addition she talked about the internet program “Web Soil Survey. In the article she sends people to the internet site to learn more about the soils in their locations. The power of this kind of publicity is impossible to measure.

Della faces two primary challenges in the writing of her articles. First and foremost is the fact that she is not a technical person. This is both an asset and a liability. In order for an article to demonstrate competence, she must gain a thorough understanding of her topic. She spends many hours researching each topic and gaining knowledge about it. (She estimates that she spends eight to ten hours of research and writing per article.) This allows her to bring a high level of technical accuracy to her articles. Her not being a technical person helps her to avoid getting caught up in minutia which would bore the average reader.

Her second challenge is to find topics to write about. It is very important to Della not merely to fill the need for the week, but to write an article that is timely and of interest to her readers. She searches constantly for topics to write about each week. So far she has succeeded for nearly ten years and nearly 500 columns.

Della’s work has gone a long way towards nurturing and building partnerships. Whenever the public gains a better understand of conservation and the work we do, it helps us do our job a little better. Just one example is an article she wrote about a year ago concerning the Yellow Creek Watershed planning committee. As a result of her article and their own efforts, this committee continues to improve water quality in the watershed.