

# **March 2010 Activity Report**

## **Natural Resources Conservation Service**

### **(NRCS)**

**Helping People Help the Land.**

## **Programs**

Program payment schedules and ranking tools have been developed for all 2008 Farm Bill programs for FY 10. Field offices are determining application eligibility and ranking applications. The demand for EQIP, in particular, is once again expected to outpace available funding. Initial cut off dates for funding contracts are due in the near future and all funding is expected to be obligated by May 1.

### **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program**

NRCS Texas has not received a financial assistance allocation for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP). We have informed NRCS National Headquarters of the agreed upon funding for each project and are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to tell the field to begin funding contracts.

### **Conservation Stewardship Program**

As of March 1, 2010, we have a total of 490 general agriculture signed contracts and 147 non industrial forest land signed contracts. This amounts to 12,288,800 acres for a total of just over \$9 million. This is just over 400,000 acres less than we were allocated for the initial sign-up. Plans are pending for a second sign-up to be held later this year. The program allows for an additional 12.7 million acres to be enrolled this year. More information on this program should be available in the coming weeks.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

Currently, there are 6,092 applications logged into our program database for EQIP for this fiscal year. All program funding has been disbursed to the field of obligating contracts. Beginning April 1, we will begin monitoring funding obligations with the expectation that all funding will be obligated by May 1.



### **Grassland Reserve Program**

Last week, we obligated all GRP funding of \$4,660,000. As with most of our programs, we have more demand than funding and an additional \$9 million has been requested. Other states have requested additional funding as well. It is doubtful that we will get all that we asked for, but reasonable to believe we should receive some supplemental funding.

### **Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program**

Early last month, NRCS, the Hill County Conservancy and the City of Austin combined financial resources to protect the Dahlstrom Ranch near Buda, Texas, which is in danger of being encroached upon by urban development. NRCS implemented the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program to partner with these other entities. NRCS put \$4.3 million in the easement acquisition. A final review of the property took place on January 29 and the closing was officially completed in early February.

## **Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative**

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative released its funding for the two projects in Texas in late February. One project located in Lee and Bastrop counties is designed to improve habitat for the endangered species and species of concern, the Houston toad. Funding for this project in FY 10 will be \$250,000. The second project is for eradicating Salt Cedar from the Canadian River from Lake Meredith to the Oklahoma state line. This project is funded for FY 10 at \$500,000.

## **Requests for Proposals**

NRCS has three programs that are funded through requests for proposals. These programs include the Conservation Innovation Grant, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program. These requests for proposals will be announced through the Federal Register and will be open for a period of 30 days. At this time, it is undetermined when these opportunities will be published; however, we expect all three of them to be announced in the very near future.

## **Healthy Forest Reserve Program**

A team within NRCS and outside partners developed a proposal for funding through the Healthy Forest Reserve Program. We were notified in January that the Texas proposal was not selected for funding. However, this isn't the end of the line for this conservation effort as it is expected to be submitted for funding under other Farm Bill program opportunities.

## **Wetlands Reserve Program**

NRCS has very ambitious goals for the Wetlands Reserve Program this year, as well as for the balance of the Farm Bill tenure. The acceptance of wetlands into the program has been streamlined and the easement payments have been revised to better reflect the value of the land. We would encourage anyone who may be interested to sign-up and check the program benefits as they have changed since the last Farm Bill.



## **Watershed Program**

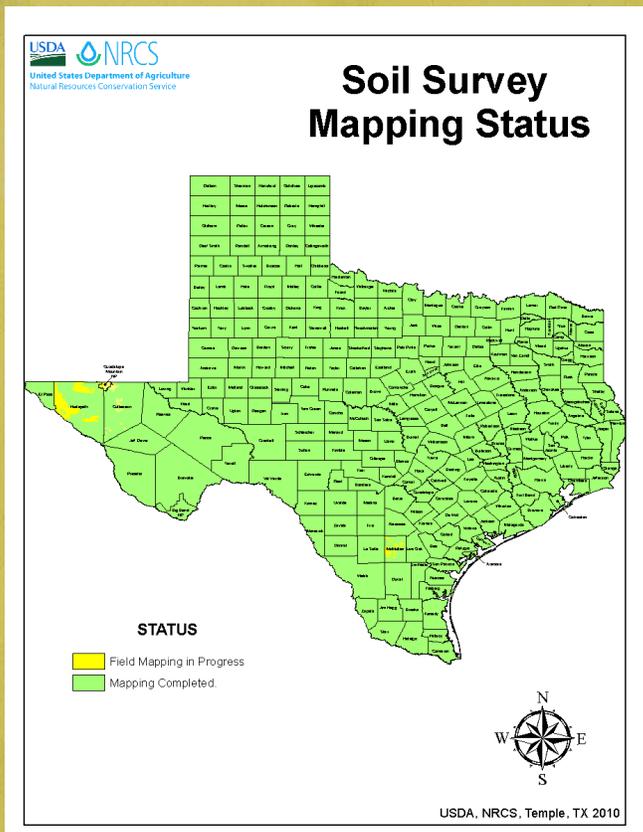
- All ARRA funds expire on September 30, 2010. Any construction contracts not completed by September 30, 2010, will have to be terminated because there is no funding available for fiscal year 2011. Therefore, we are planning to terminate the following projects and return \$10.8 million to the NRCS national headquarters:

- Trinity-Chambers 111/112 Repair
- Trinity-Little Elm and Laterals 19 Repair
- Upper Brushy 29 Repair
- Plum 5 Rehab
- Calaveras 6 Rehab
- The remaining ARRA federal construction contracts are being accelerated in order to complete them by September 30, 2010. Currently it appears that allocated ARRA funds to Texas will be adequate to cover the increased cost of acceleration.
- All ARRA projects currently under construction have been delayed by wet weather; continued wet weather delays could result in some projects not being completed by the deadline and additional project terminations.

#### Watershed Rehabilitation

- Rehab planning is underway on East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County) and Olmitos-Garcias 7 (Starr County). These projects will be completed and receive authorization by September 30, 2010.
- The rehab plan for Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) has been completed and submitted to the National Water Management Center for 30 day review.
- Rehab planning will begin on Plum Creek Sites 1 & 6 (Hays County) in mid-summer.

### Soil Survey



- Completed mapping of 1.9 million acres in the first half of FY10. A “Last Acre” ceremony to commemorate the completion of the “once-over” of the soil survey in Texas is planned for September.

- Conducted 5 soil survey details to complete the “once-over” soil survey for Texas. Forty-three soil scientists participated in the details.
  - 2 details to Guadalupe Mountains National Park (GUMO)
  - 1 detail to Hudspeth and Culberson counties
  - 1 detail to Presidio County
  - 1 detail to Big Bend National Park
- Published San Augustine and Sabine counties soil survey on Web Soil Survey. This survey is also available in paper copy and on CDs.
- Provided technical soil services support to over 800



*At 8,000 feet elevation, soil scientists analyze the newly identified Mescalara soil, where Douglas Fir and Pinyon Pine trees grow in the Guadalupe Mountains National Park in Culberson County.*

- organizations, groups, and other land users.
- Presented 4 SWCDs with recently published soil surveys of Edwards and Real, Marion and Cass, Robertson, and Tyler counties. A commemorative leather-bound soil survey was presented to each SWCD for their outstanding assistance with the completion of the soil survey.
- Co-hosted the annual “Soil Survey and Land Resources Workshop in College Station,” February 4-5, 2010. Over 75 individuals attended the two-day conference and presented soil research results.
- Conducted Web Soil Survey presentation/demonstration at the National Wild Turkey Federation Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, February 18-21, 2010. Over 80 individuals attended the technical committee meeting to learn how WSS can be used in managing habitat for turkey. The presentation included the review of a newly developed soil interpretation that identifies the capabilities and limitations of the soils for use and management of wild turkey habitats in east Texas.



*Presentation of the Marion and Cass Counties initial soil survey to the Marion-Cass SWCD.*

## Events and Activities

### January 16, 2010

NRCS co-sponsored and participated in a Plant I.D. contest at the Fort Worth Stock Show, working with Earth Team volunteers, Texas A&M University personnel, and SWCD directors.

### January 27-29, 2010

Demonstrated Web Soil Survey at the NRCS booth at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association annual conference in San Antonio. Conference and trade show had an estimated 5,600 in attendance.



*Kent Ferguson, left, NRCS state rangeland management specialist, demonstrates web soil survey to Cowboy Poet and Humorist Baxter Black, right, at the NCBA annual meeting.*

### February 2, 2010

NRCS participated in the Blackland Income Growth Meeting and Farm Show, where approximately 2,000 attendees visited the booth.

### February 3, 2010

Soil Survey and Land Resource Workshop – College Station. An NRCS soil scientist presented a poster at the workshop titled “Detection and Evaluation of Reduction in Playa Soils.” The target audience at the workshop was university faculty and students, consultants in the mining and environmental industries and state agency personnel (Railroad Commission and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)).

### February 3, 2010

Texas Alliance for Water Conservation (TAWC) - NRCS presented an overview of farm bill programs and statewide accomplishments at the 2010 TAWC landowner meeting in Muncy. Approximately 150 people attended the event. Other presenters included representatives from Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Smart Crop Technology, High Plains Underground Water District, and Texas Tech University Ag Economics Dept. A Texas commodity leader panel discussion was moderated by Tom Sell with Southwest Council. Darren Hudson, TTU Professor and Larry Combest, Chair for Agricultural Competitiveness were the keynote speakers.



*Mickey Black, NRCS assistant state conservationist for field operations, Lubbock, speaks at the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation meeting in Muncy on February 3, 2010, at the Floyd County Unity Center.*

### February 3, 2010

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory Committee – Amarillo. The Interagency Task Force on Economic Growth and Endangered Species (established by Senate Bill 2534) formed the Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory Committee to provide input to the Task Force on information to help prevent the listing of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken on the Endangered Species List and minimize harm to economic sectors if listing does occur, and assist in outreach and education efforts on potential listing decision and methods to minimize the impact of listing. Representatives of both the soil and water conservation districts and NRCS were present at the meeting. There was a

discussion about open government training requirements and an overview of lesser prairie-chicken habitat, range and status. A timeline for the work of the advisory committee was developed along with the selection of a presiding officer to conduct future meetings.

#### **February 4, 2010**

Playa Education Day – Tulia. NRCS worked in conjunction with Playa Lake Joint Venture (PLJV) to present a program about playa wetland areas and their ecological services, while teaching participants about the link between playas and recharge of the Ogallala Aquifer. The program offers information about federal programs for playa conservation, as well as resources for grazing management techniques that can improve playa habitat.

#### **February 4-21, 2010**

More than 40 NRCS staff and volunteers worked the NRCS booth at the San Antonio Livestock Show and Rodeo and reached an estimated 125,000 people who came through the Texas Experience building. The booth featured an interactive kiosk which provided attendees with information on programs, office address/phone number, videos and a kid's educational program. More than 500 bags with conservation education materials were provided to teachers, student teachers, boy scout/girl troops, and home school parents. We estimate from those who worked, NRCS staff and volunteers visited one-on-one with more than 1,000 folks who inquired about working with us on their land, potential new employees and interns, volunteer opportunities, Web Soil Survey demonstrations, and helping educate urban and rural audiences on how the conservation work we do with landowners impacts all Texans with productive soil, clean air and water, healthy plants and animals.



*Sammy Soil Saver makes an appearance at the NRCS exhibit at the San Antonio Livestock Show.*

#### **February 9-11, 2010**

Southwest Farm and Ranch Classic – Lubbock. NRCS participated in the 2010 farm and ranch show exhibiting the 2008 farm bill program display at the Lubbock Civic Center. Approximately 3,000 toured the event at the Lubbock Civic Center. The Farm Show Power Breakfast was held on February 11. Keynote speaker was Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples. He discussed the current state of agriculture in Texas and its worldwide impact through our products. Over 200 people attended the event.

#### **February 10, 2010**

South Plains AG Conference and Trade Show – Brownfield. NRCS representatives presented programs about 'Options for Expiring CRP Land' and 'Saltcedar Beetles used for Biological Control Agents.' Additional speakers included representatives from Texas AgriLife Extension, Texas Peanut Producers, Plains Cotton Growers, Texas Grain Sorghum Producers, Texas Dept. of Ag and South Plains Underground Water District. NRCS and the Terry County SWCD helped sponsor the event.

**February 27, 2010**

NRCS booth at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Nature Day Celebration at Sea Center Texas reached an estimated 700 attendees.

**February 26-27, 2010**

NRCS was a sponsor of the Texas Wildlife Association's Farm and Ranch Forum: Sustaining the Hill Country Workshop. More than 135 were in attendance.

**March 3-4, 2010**

Lesser prairie-chicken LPC Interagency Meetings. Interagency meetings in the Texas High Plains region will assist landowners with future decisions for building and maintaining habitat for the LPC. Representatives from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Farm Service Agency (FSA) and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will meet in Morton and Pampa to discuss the defined critical habitat areas and landowner opportunities for developing resource management plans.

**March 5, 2010**

Fayette County NRCS and SWCD co-sponsored Conservation Easement Workshop with LCRA on in La Grange. Provided information on conservation easement programs offered through NRCS. Approximately 75 were in attendance.

**March 5-6, 2010**

NRCS participated in the Holistic Management International Texas 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Conference: Wealth of Wildlife in New Braunfels.

**March 8, 2010**

Groundbreaking ceremony for a People's Garden in Carthage. The coordinator of the USDA People's Garden initiative attended the event on behalf of Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

**March 13, 2010**

1<sup>st</sup> Annual Ranchers Workshop in Big Lake.

**March 11-14, 2010**

43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Exotic Wildlife Association Meeting in Kerrville.

**March 18, 2010**

Ballinger Producer Ag Day.

**Information and Outreach**

- Abilene Farm and Ranch Show, NRCS participated in an educational seminar that was attended by 150+ local producers.
- Crockett County CCSD and local district conservationist discussed plans for outdoor classroom. School district has \$25,000 they want to spend on project and are using NRCS to help with design and plans.



*Hansford County Feedlot managers met with NRCS personnel and agricultural writer Alan Newport to develop an EQIP success story. Hansford County Feeders have worked with the NRCS to apply multiple conservation practices through EQIP.*

- Robert Fears, a freelance writer, is writing a story for the May 2010 issue of “The Cattleman” magazine that will discuss the value of a conservation plan, steps in its development, and how it should be used. The article will also include an interview and photos with a rancher who has worked with NRCS to install several conservation practices and is working with NRCS to accomplish his land management goals through conservation planning. Robert Fear’s article on NRCS’ work using conservation practices to fight Fever Tick was published in the January issue of “The Cattleman” and is also featured on the NRCS Web site.
- The Texas Water Development Board is hosting a meeting on March 8 to discuss outreach efforts and partnership opportunities with other state agencies. NRCS will be participating to explore new outreach opportunities.
- NRCS will be participating in the Texas AgrAbility Project Advisory Committee Meeting via teleconference the week of March 15 to discuss how we can partner on outreach to the estimated 35,000 farmers and ranchers with special needs in Texas. Texas AgrAbility’s ACE program is a funded project of the USDA. Texas AgrAbility’s focus is on connecting, assisting and empowering agricultural producers, their family members and employees with disabilities and chronic health conditions to stay engaged in production agriculture.
- NRCS gave a presentation on the EQIP Organic Initiative to the members of the Texas Sustainable Ag group during its annual meeting in Edinburg February 5-6. Approximately 100 people attended.
- Lamb County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board of directors approves book cover designed by Texas NRCS. Texas SWCD districts will have the opportunity to order book covers through May. This year, the Lamb County SWCD anticipates 28,000 book covers will be ordered and distributed statewide.

**check it out!**  
**DID YOU KNOW?**



The white-tailed deer is a warm-blooded mammal found all across Texas. Deer eat twigs, leaves, grasses, ferns, lowly plants, fruits and nuts. They like to live on the edges of woods and brushy places. A deer has tan fur with white on its throat, on its belly and under its tail. When it runs, it raises its tail like a little white flag.



Snakes are skilled predators. How would you catch prey without arms or legs? Venomous snakes have poisons to inject in their prey. The venom keeps small prey still so the snake can grab it with its mouth and swallow it whole. This is a helpful adaptation for snakes. Snakes help the balance of nature by eating prey that reproduces frequently, everything from earthworms to rabbits. Snakes also eat eggs. Snakes are especially important in the control of mice and rats.



The Attwater's prairie chicken is a small, brown bird about 5.7 inches long, with short, rounded, dark tail. Males have large orange air sacs on the sides of their necks. During mating season, males make a "booming" sound, amplified by inflating the air sacs on their necks, that can be heard 1/2 mile away. Attwater's prairie chickens live on coastal prairie grasslands with tall grasses such as little bluestem, Indian grass, and switchgrass. The birds like a variety of tall and short grasses in their habitat. Attwater's prairie chickens live about 2-3 years in the wild.

These prairie chickens are found only on the coastal prairies of Texas. Prairie chickens are endangered because the tallgrass prairie has been plowed for farmland and covered by cities. Habitat has also been lost because of heavy grazing by cattle, although some cattle ranches maintain good grassland habitat suitable for prairie chickens. Wildlife are courtesy of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. NRCS/2008

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'cause there's nothing mild about the

**WILD**



courtesy of  
Lamb County Soil and Water Conservation District

working with  
USDA NRCS  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## Field Accomplishments

- Brazos Bottom Irrigation Project: An AWEF project in Burleson, Robertson, and Brazos counties will improve irrigation efficiency with practices of pivot systems, underground pipelines, and land leveling.
- The Lamar SWCD is working with the four watershed groups to complete Operation and Maintenance on a total of 30 Watershed Structures in Lamar County with State Board funds.



*The Lamar SWCD is working to complete O&M on 30 watershed structures in Lamar County.*

## FY10 New Hires and Vacancies

### **NRCS currently has 28 Vacancies:**

- 6 Soil Scientists – Job Opportunity Announcement (JOA) posted to USAJOBS
- 3 Soil Scientists
- 1 Technology Transfer Specialist – Selection Pending
- 2 Civil Engineers
- 1 Assistant State Conservation Engineer
- 4 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 Engineering Technician
- 1 Office Assistant
- 1 Natural Resource Manager
- 5 District Conservationists – Selections Pending
- 1 District Conservationist – JOA posted to USAJOBS
- 2 District Conservationists

### **NRCS filled the following 14 positions since January 1, 2010:**

- 1 Rangeland Management Specialist
- 12 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 RC&D Coordinator

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

### **March 14-17, 2010**

Southwest Regional RC&D meeting in Fort Worth.

### **March 19-21, 2010**

Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Convention in Fort Worth

### **March 25, 2010**

San Angelo Area Awards Banquet

**March 25, 2010**

Honey Creek Tour with State Legislators

**March 25, 2010**

Sustainable Agriculture Conference for farm and home hosted by Alamo RC&D on in Jourdanton.

**March 27, 2010**

Images for Conservation Landowner and Photography Workshop in Laredo. Will feature NRCS booth and presentation on funds and assistance available for wildlife management.

**March 30-31, 2010**

National Watershed Coalition and Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors meeting in Fredericksburg

**April 8-9, 2010**

Texas Wildlife Association Trans-Pecos Prescribed Fire Symposium

**April 14, 2010**

21<sup>st</sup> Annual South Plains Ogallala Conference – Lubbock, The Next Dust Bowl....75 Years After Black Sunday

**April 17, 2010**

Earth Fest – Amarillo, Wildcat Bluff Nature Center

**April 18-20, 2010**

Texas Grain and Feed Association annual conference in Fort Worth

**April 26-30, 2010**

Biodiversity without Boundaries – NatureServe Conservation Conference held in conjunction with the Southeast Natural Heritage Conference, Austin

**April 28-30, 2010**

Texas Land Trust Council annual meeting in Austin

**April 30-May 2, 2010**

Woodland and Wildlife Expo in Conroe

**May 28-30, 2010**

Ducks Unlimited National Convention in Grapevine

**June 25-26, 2010**

Texas Wildlife Association annual conference in San Antonio