

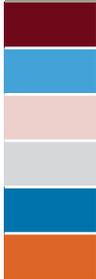
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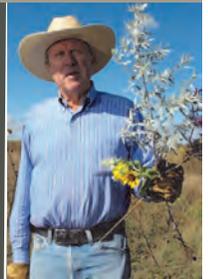
*Helping People Help the Land*



JANUARY 2012



# Activity *report*



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## Programs

Following is the breakdown of initial financial assistance allocations for Fiscal Year 2012.

<b>County Base</b>	\$32.1M
<b>State-wide Resource Concerns</b>	\$13.2M
<b>National EQIP Initiatives:</b>	
Organic	\$740K
Air Quality	\$3.3M
On-Farm Energy	Based on applications
Seasonal High Tunnel	Based on applications
Environmental Spill, Prevention, Control and Counter-measure	\$250K
Water Quality	\$2.8M
<b>National Landscape Initiatives:</b>	
Lesser Prairie Chicken	\$231K
Long Leaf Pine	\$400K
Ogallala Aquifer	\$4.0M
Gulf of Mexico	Based on applications
<b>Beginning Farmer/Rancher</b>	\$2.8M
<b>Socially Disadvantaged Farmer/Rancher</b>	\$2.8M
<b>Partnership Initiatives:</b>	
AWEP	\$5.7M
Canadian River	\$500K
Houston Toad	\$224K

# Programs (cont'd)

## Changes in Fiscal Year 2012

Compared to Fiscal Year 2011, discretionary funding is decreased by approximately 19 percent, technical assistance funding is decreased by approximately 8 percent, and Farm Bill financial assistance program funding is comparative to last year's budget.

This year, funding in our financial assistance programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), will be distributed a little differently. Approximately 22 percent is targeted for National Landscape Initiatives, National EQIP Initiatives, and Partnership Initiatives.

Last year we receive a record amount of financial assistance in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP); but, this year Texas did not receive any WHIP funding. However, wildlife habitat remains important to us so we moved the Black Capped Vireo, Long Leaf Pine, Pronghorn Antelope and Rolling Plains Quail Statewide Resource Concerns from WHIP to EQIP so they will remain funded.

On a national basis, and in line with Secretary Vilsack's review of Department operations to address budget cuts, NRCS is assessing its operations. Recommendations for improvements are being presented to the Chief for his review and consideration. Two programs, Rural Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program and the Watershed and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566), have already been cut; and, Secretary Vilsack recently announced 21 soil survey office closures in other states. As we move



forward in fiscal year 2012 and 2013, we will see additional office closures and consolidation of functions, which may impact operations in Texas. We will work through these changes and continue to address opportunities to improve efficiencies of program delivery to NRCS clientele.

Here is some information on some specific programs:

### EQIP

A statewide initial ranking cutoff deadline has been established and will be February 3, 2012. Applications for these programs received in the field offices will be evaluated and ranked for funding of FY 2012 allocations. Subsequent funding cut off periods may be necessary to fully obligate local county base and statewide resource concerns. All NRCS programs have an open sign-up period and applications are accepted throughout the year.

### WRP

NRCS has very ambitious goals for the Wetland 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.

### CSP

The first sign-up period deadline for Fiscal Year 2012 is January 13, 2012. Potential program participants are encouraged to stop by their local NRCS office and sign an application. The program enrollment acreage has been reduced from 12.7 million acres to 10 million acres this year. It is unlikely that a subsequent ranking period will be conducted after this date.

### GRP

NRCS has high expectations for program participation in the Grassland Reserve Program for FY 12. This program offers 10 and 20 year rental agreements as well as permanent easement options. 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

## American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) >>>

- Construction has been completed on all ARRA projects. Nineteen dams were repaired (final cost \$13 million) and one dam was rehabilitated (final cost \$2 million)
- Work continues on two mitigation projects (Elm Creek Centex 34; Caney Creek 3A).



View of East Fork Above Lavon FRS No. 2B after rehabilitation construction was completed. White plastic pipe is being used to irrigate the vegetation.



View of the principal spillway pipe outlet and impact basin of the East Fork Above Lavon FRS No. 2B rehabilitation project.

## Watershed Operations Program >>>

- Agreements are in place with the TSSWCB for engineering design and construction inspection of dam repair projects funded by the TSSWCB Dam Repair program.
- Construction of recreation facilities (Phase II) at Attoyac Bayou Site 23A (Nacogdoches County) is near completion.
- Design work continues on Big Creek (TriCounty) Sites 16, 17, and 19MP (Falls County).
- Work continues on the 404 permit for Elm Creek (1250) Site 1A Rev. (Taylor County).

## <<< Watershed Rehabilitation Program

- Design for Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) is complete.
- Rehabilitation construction of Plum Creek FRS No. 5 (Hays County) is underway.
- Design of East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County) is underway.
- Rehab planning for Plum Creek 6 (Hays County) is complete, and the plan has been authorized for funding by the Chief.
- Rehab planning for Olmitos-Garcias 7 (Starr County) is near completion.
- Assessments of 174 high hazard dams have been completed and reports have been provided to sponsors.

## Funding for Watershed Projects in FY 2012

- **Watershed Operations:** No funding was received for Watershed Operations for FY 2012. Plans are to close the program. Projects currently funded and underway with funds carried over from last fiscal year will be allowed to continue until the funds are used up. No new projects will be initiated.
- **Watershed Rehabilitation:** FY 2012 technical assistance (TA) funding was received for continuation of planning, design, and construction inspection on 4 ongoing projects. TA funding was not received for development of new rehabilitation plans in FY 2012. No financial assistance funding (FA – for construction) was received for FY 2012.

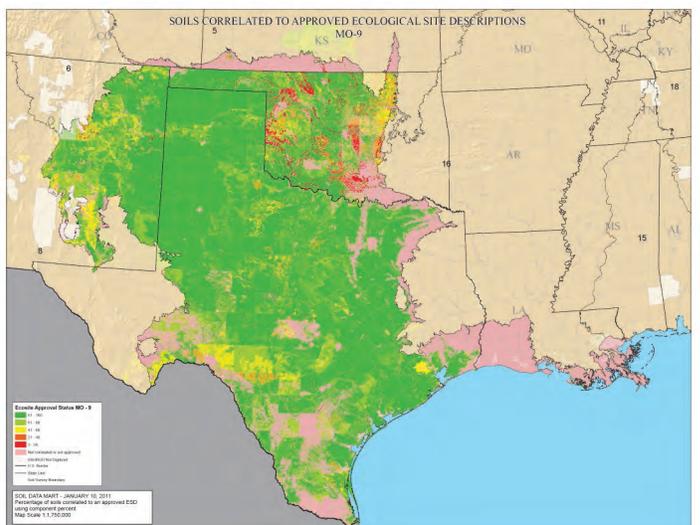
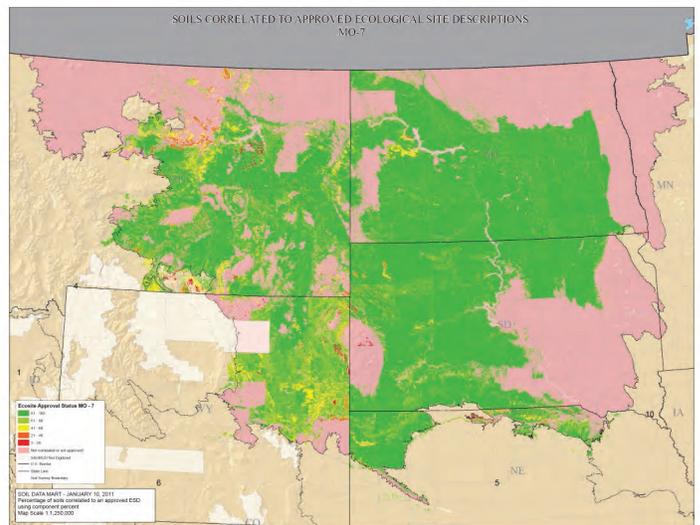
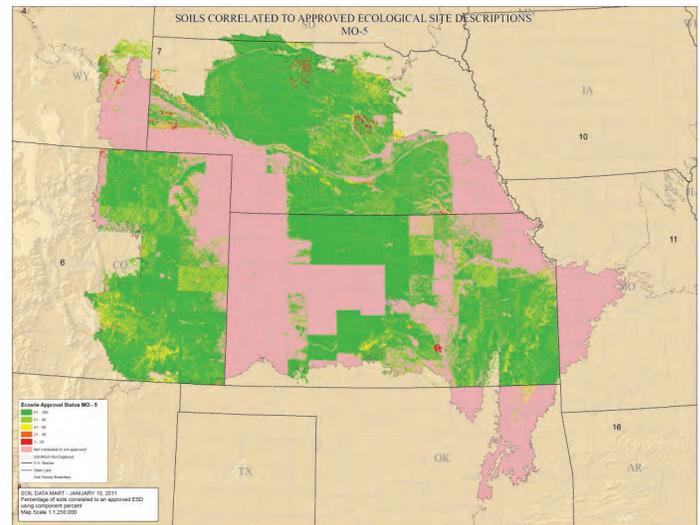
# Soils

## Ecological Site Descriptions Available for Land Managers

Many ranchers and others who manage land or want to start managing land throughout the Great Plains, have untapped resources available at their fingertips. A lot can be learned about the potential capabilities of a tract of land at a home computer. With the recent acceleration effort by NRCS with Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD's), useful information about managing land is becoming more accessible. Capping an effort begun back in the 1950's, NRCS grazing lands specialists have been collecting data, putting that with years of field experiences gained with ranchers, then developed ESD's as guidance documents. NRCS has lost and is losing a wealth of experience through retirements. A big plus to ESD's is the capture of legacy knowledge about land management for future use. All of this information is correlated to the soils as mapped in the field and is available at local field offices or through Web Soil Survey where ESD's have been completed. Nowhere else is this available.

Mark Moseley, Ecological Site Inventory Specialist, Boerne, Texas, helps specialists located in fourteen states to prepare ESD's, mainly in the Great Plains. This includes the state grazing lands specialists and five Quality Control Specialists. According to Moseley, about sixty percent of the land has a published ESD; at least to Phase I or basic completion criteria. NRCS specialists are currently working to gather data and publish the remaining acreage to Phase I. Concurrently, updates to the Phase I ESD's are being done to complete all the data elements within the ESD to the Phase II level. The ESD effort has caught the attention of several external partners which are also making significant scientific contributions to the content of ESD's.

*Ecological Sites Covered by the Texas Ecological Site Inventory Specialist:*



## Soils (cont'd)

### Gamma-Ray Sensor: A Tool for Precision Farming

*Information derived from Gamma-ray sensor for topsoil mapping; the Mole; by F.M. vanEgmond, E.H. Loonstra, J. Limburg*

For years, farmers have relied on their experience for soil and crop management and other farming related decision-making. Now, Star Wars meets Soil Science, the newest technology, a Gamma-Ray Sensor. The Gamma-Ray Sensor introduces precision agriculture on a farm. Soil Scientists, Dennis Williamson, Wayne Gabriel, Richard Gelnar, and Alan Stahnke from the State Office participated in field demonstrations of the Gamma-Ray Sensor presented by Eddie Loonstra of the Soil Company, Neetherlands, and Dr. Cristine Morgan, Haly Neely, Jason Ackerson, and Heather Watson Soil Scientists at Texas A&M University.

During the demonstration, the Passive Gamma Ray Sensor was placed on a trailer attached to a 4-wheeler and carried over the field. Each second a reading of the gamma spectrum and of the GPS position is stored on a computer. A constantly updated map shows “on-the-go” information of the variation of gamma radiation in the field. Soil samples were taken from a depth up to 12 inches, within a 1-foot radius from the sensor. At this location, a gamma spectrum was measured for 5 minutes. The locations of the samples were based on the “on-the-go” map of gamma variation in such a way that the sample location selection was reflective of the overall soil variation in the field.

The Gamma-Ray Sensor method is sensitive and is used to make high-resolution maps for precision agriculture. This new technology is used for quantitative mapping of physical and chemical soil properties such as clay content, clay type, soil carbon, and bulk density of the tillage layer. At present, there are several sensor technologies being tested that will enhance the results of traditional

soil sample techniques. This is just one of the methods and is based on measurements of (natural) gamma radiation; some naturally occurring radioactive elements are potassium, thorium, and uranium. However, variability in manmade cesium 137 can also be detected.

In agricultural applications, soil nutrient levels are influenced by management. Therefore calibration for soil nutrient maps is based on general knowledge and samples of a specific field or farm; physical soil properties and their natural gamma readings however can be compared regionally. The main focus of precision agriculture is on reducing costs, by providing soil information and high-resolution maps of physical and chemical soil properties together with yield and crop biomass maps to enhance operational decision-making in crop management.

Results from the Gamma-Ray Sensor technology can be used for creating quantitative topsoil maps in conventional units that farmers are familiar with. The results will provide quantitative interpretations of soil and mineral properties. The patterns shown on the soil maps are recognizable to farmers and confirm their perception during tillage. The quantitative aspect of the soil property maps will provide the farmer and land user with more accurate information that will aid in operational decision-making in crop management.



*The Gamma-Ray Sensor System consists of a detector*

## New Hires & Vacancies

### NRCS Currently Has 19 Vacancies:

*Note: Due to a reduced budget for Fiscal Year 2012 a number of vacant positions may not be filled in 2012.*

- 1 Conservation Agronomist
- 3 Civil Engineers
- 2 District Conservationists
- 1 Natural Resource Specialist (Program Liaison)
- 2 Rangeland Management Specialist
- 2 Soil Scientists
- 1 Wildlife Biologist
- 3 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 Soil Conservation Technician
- 1 Secretary

### NRCS made the following 10 selection in October, November, & December 2011 resulting in accessions during FY 2012:

**Cody D. Slatton** – Engineering Technician (Civil), Roby (From Federal Register)

**Price M. Money** – Soil Conservation Technician, Perryton (From Federal Register)

**Anthony J. Horton** – Soil Conservation Technician, Matador (From Federal Register)

**Jessica R. McDonald** – Soil Conservation Technician, Hereford (From Federal Register)

**Troy L. Daniel** – Soil Conservationist, Temple (From National Headquarters)

**Eddy M. Spurgin** – District Conservationist, Big Spring (Return to Duty from Military Service)

**Richard A. Williams** – State Forester, Temple (From NRCS-Arkansas)

**Lee Ann Moore** – Civil Engineer, Decatur (From NRCS Fort Worth Technical Center)

More information about open positions within the agency can be found at: [www.usajobs.opm.gov/](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/)

# Texas Producers Have Opportunity to Help Their Land and Improve Gulf of Mexico

By Melissa Blair and  
Dee Ann Littlefield

On Dec. 5, Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment Harris Sherman, along with EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson, announced USDA-NRCS commitment of \$50 million for an innovative water and wildlife conservation effort in the five Gulf Coast states — Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. This Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI) is the first step in putting the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force final strategy into motion.

The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, which NRCS serves on, was created in 2010 and is a collaborative effort of local, state, and federal government, scientists, academia and the five states, working in partnership to develop and implement strategies to improve the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

Texas NRCS held a press conference on Dec. 16 at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge to provide details of the Texas efforts to local and state media and introduce the partners. Through GOMI, Texas NRCS will provide additional technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers in the targeted watersheds over the next three years for conservation planning and implementation. These efforts will maintain

agricultural production as well as reduce erosion and runoff, which carries soil and nutrients into waterways that flow into the Gulf of Mexico.

“NRCS and our partners are committed to helping farmers and ranchers implement sustainable agricultural systems that will not only benefit the freshwater inflows to the Gulf of Mexico, but also make agricultural lands more productive, improve wildlife and fish habitats and help the communities that depend on the Gulf of Mexico for jobs,” said NRCS State Conservationist Salvador Salinas. “Our collective efforts will make a big impact locally and downstream in the Gulf of Mexico.”

The GoMI area includes three sub-watersheds of the San Antonio River and Guadalupe River that feed into the San Antonio Bay. They are Kuy Creek — Guadalupe River, the Guadalupe River — South Guadalupe River, and Hynes Bay — San Antonio Bay which include the counties of Refugio, Calhoun, Victoria and Aransas.



*NRCS State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, discusses GOMI with partners and news media at press conference at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.*

Partners include Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB); local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) of Copano Bay, Victoria and Calhoun; United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas General Land Office (GLO), Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries (CBBEP), San Antonio River Authority (SARA), and United States Geological Survey (USGS).

For FY12, \$20 million has been allocated for producers in the five states and will be funded based on applications received through a combination of NRCS programs.

NRCS is also working with the TSSWCB on a state initiative to hire two technicians to help ag producers plan a combination of core and supporting conservation practices in the upper San Antonio Bay system in the counties of Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad. This effort will be a complement to the GoMI efforts downstream.



*Drought conditions continued on the High Plains causing additional problems for producers during harvest.*

This year's **drought had multiple impacts** on producer's crops during the growing season. For some, the problem continued before and after harvesting when wildfires erupted on cropland fields. While wildfires on cotton fields are uncommon, this year a few producers were surprised when their defoliated cotton was burned before they had a chance to harvest their crops. Wildfire conditions were so extreme, some fires raced across fields that had already been harvested with bare cotton stalks. Producers were ready to put the 2011 crop year behind them much sooner than it came; hoping for much more measurable precipitation in the new year.

In November, NRCS and AgriLife Extension in **Hutchinson County hosted a Range Meeting** for area ranchers. NRCS Range Manage-

ment Specialist Clint Rollins presented a program on Brush Control During Drought. Additional topics covered during the meeting were presented by AgriLife Extension Specialists on Feed Cattle Over the Winter and Managing Wildlife During Drought In Traditional Ranching Situations. The educational program helped local ranchers earn continuing education credits.

### **New Employee Orientation Training.**

New employees in zone one attended a one-day training by zone specialists in November. Topics for the session included engineering, agronomy, soils, rangeland, wildlife biology and technology transfer.

Mickey Black, assistant state conservationist in Lubbock said, "Orientation training for new employees helps individuals get acquainted with zone specialists and provides an introduction to landuse areas and resource concerns in the High Plains and South Plains regions."

**AG Day education** was hosted by AgriLife Extension in December for Hall and Donley County elementary students. NRCS presented soil and water conservation information using a rainfall simulator to show the affects of soil erosion by water. The elementary students learned the importance of natural resources in the environment and they affect every aspect of their daily life.

**Conservation Partners Tour LPC Sites.** Representatives from NRCS, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Texas Tech University toured Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat areas in December for potential

research studies. Habitat areas chosen for research studies help to develop habitat assessment guides, management recommendations and to identify other needed research.



*Conservation plan development helps producers maintain, establish, improve and management habitat for the Lesser Prairie Chicken.*

**Drip irrigation helps one producer's corn crop survive the drought.** In 2011, NRCS and the Texas Corn Producers followed the progress of Parmer County producer David Carthel's corn crop over drip irrigation. A three part series of videos were produced to track the progress of Carthel's field on drip irrigation, while he was combating the state's record year drought. Access videos at <http://www.WaterGrowsJobs.org> or <http://www.youtube.com/watergrowsjobs>.



*L to R: Earl Berhends, NRCS district conservationist in Parmer County provided technical assistance to producer David Carthel throughout 2011.*

## **NRCS Showcases Conservation Planning at Farm and Ranch Shows in the Texas Panhandle.**

The Amarillo Farm and Ranch show and the World Championship Ranch Rodeo were held in late November and early December. Both events provided NRCS opportunities to provide education and information about conservation planning and farm bill programs to farmers, ranchers, teachers and other interested in agriculture.

NRCS exhibited technologies to showcase technical applications used by NRCS in conservation planning and contract development for producers. Farmers, ranchers and the general public had the opportunity to learn more about conservation planning tools through the use of NRCS' web soil survey and planning software. Personal maps using aerial photography were developed. The planning process offers producers the opportunity to work with NRCS and develop a personal road map of conservation planning practices on private lands.

Over 25,000 people attended the trade shows featuring farming and ranching based businesses and services in the agriculture industry.

During the Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show, Texas State Conservationist Salvador Salinas presented a yearly conservation program update at the Texas Commodity Symposium and the Amarillo Agriculture Appreciation luncheon, hosted by the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce, Texas



*NRCS State Conservationist Salvador Salinas addressed over 150 producers in the Texas Panhandle at the Eleventh Annual Texas Commodity Symposium during the 2011 Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show.*

Commodity organizations and the Southwest County of Agribusiness (SWCA) Salinas was one of seven presenters on the symposium program to offer information on current agriculture issues. Topics included updates on drought conditions, farm policy, Farm Service Agency (FSA) updates, endangered species impacts on Texas, new agriculture sales tax exemption requirements and a review of the conservation innovations grant (CIG for the High Plains and South Plains regions).



*NRCS exhibited at the World Championship Ranch Rodeo November 10-13.*



*Brittany Anderson, NRCS soil conservationist in the Pampa Resource Team assists a producer at the NRCS booth during Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show November 29—December 1.*

Over 200 producers attended the symposium at the Amarillo Civic Center on the second day of the farm and ranch show.





*Kyle Wright, NRCS District Conservationist, explains the importance of soil during the Belding Farms 22nd Annual Field Day.*

During the months of November and December, 2011 the **Hispanic Women Farmers/Ranchers Settlement** sessions continued in Zone 2. This is an effort to offer individuals information for those who believe that the United States Department of Agriculture improperly denied farm loan benefits to them between 1981 and 2000 because they are Hispanic or women, and may be eligible to apply for compensation.

On November 1st at the **Ballinger High School Career Fair**, Zone 2 PAS and local field staff visited with over 450 students. They explained what NRCS does to help in conserving our natural resources and explained potential internship possibilities.

The Trans-Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) all gathered at Belding Farms outside of Fort Stockton, Texas to welcome over 100 fifth-graders to the **22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Educational Field Day**. The agenda consisted of soils and erosion information, plant

identification, irrigation equipment and methods, pecan processing and harvesting.

Glasscock County AgriLife Extension Service welcomed nearly 60 students from Garden City Elementary and St. Ann's Catholic School of Midland to the annual **3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Farm Tour** on November 8, 2011. Demonstrations were made by the AgriLife Extension Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas Pork Producers, and local ag producers.

November 13-15, NRCS staff from El Paso, Marfa, Alpine, Zone and State offices were part of a filming project with the **Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo tribe**. Conservation practices including: conservation planning, fencing, water troughs, pipelines, wildlife water guzzlers, solar pumps and chemical individual plant treatment were highlighted during the session.

Zone 2 PAS along with NRCS staff from Alpine and Marfa aided in the filming of a **recruitment video**. The video will showcase what daily activities take place within the agency and how our jobs may be different, but all play a vital part in conserving our natural resources.

Zone 2 NRCS staff worked with the PAS to develop feature stories that will **highlight 2011 Conservation Farmers and Ranchers** within the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Conservation award winners will be recognized at the annual Spring banquet and featured in the San Angelo Standard Times Ag Edition.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), High Point Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Van Horn Elementary School class were all part of a **soil education presentation** in November. As the students wrapped up the soils chapter in their course work, teachers wanted to bring the material to life and asked for assistance from the Van Horn NRCS and SWCD.



*The Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo tribe initiated a working conservation relationship with NRCS in order to treat Creosote bush and develop wildlife water supply.*

NRCS Wildlife Biologist, Steve Nelle and Soil Scientist, Amanda Bragg worked with the **Kickapoo Tribe** in Eagle Pass to develop a Cattail Cultivation Feasibility Report. Traditional homes and ceremonial structures are made out of willow poles and covered with mats of cattail. This report is in response to their request for NRCS information and assistance.

On November 14, Kevin Isom, district conservationist, Jasper, presented soils information to the **Jasper Newton Master Gardeners** as part of an education requirement of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service's Master Gardener Program. An estimated 45 master gardeners were in attendance.

On November 16, Julie Moore, district conservationist, Athens, spoke to the **Trinity Valley Community College** agricultural industry class about NRCS, job opportunities and a day in the life of a conservationist. There were 13 students in the class.

The Bowie County Soil & Water Conservation District, FSA and NRCS held their **annual open house** on December 13. Farmers and ranchers from Bowie County and surrounding areas gathered for the luncheon to visit about past and upcoming activities in the county and agriculture community. There were over 60 people in attendance.

On December 14, Gary Barnett, district conservationist, Beaumont, participated in the **Forest Awareness Day** for Bridge City Junior High School at Village Creek State Park in Lumberton. Barnett gave six presentations to about 150 students on the importance of soil and water conservation. Bridge City Junior High School is planning on making this an annual event. The National Park Service, Village Creek Volunteer Association, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department also were in attendance.

### 36th Infantry Division Major General Returns from Iraq

**Major General Eddy M. Spurgin** became the 36th Infantry Division's commander on March 27, 2009. He took command during an important time for the 36th Infantry Division, which had over four-thousand soldiers deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq at the time. Spurgin just returned from Iraq where he commanded United States Division-South in Southern Iraq. During a recent interview with Congress, Spurgin said analysts had feared that increased Guard deployments to Iraq would imperil their ability to respond to natural disasters on the home front. But he and other commanders reported that wartime training and missions have actually enhanced the National Guard's abil-

ity to deal with challenges both at home and abroad. Major General Spurgin continues to lead the 36th Infantry Division, also known as the Texas Division. It is a modular division of the United States Army and the Texas Army National Guard. It was also activated for service in World War II on November 25, 1940, and was sent overseas in April 1943. Spurgin returned to his civilian duties as the Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist in Big Spring. He picked up where he left off, aiding agriculture producers in obtaining their conservation goals and preserving our precious natural resources.





*NRCS Under Secretary Harris Sherman in Houston at Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Restoration Task Force press conference.*

NRCS staff participated in the 3rd Annual **San Antonio International Farm and Ranch Show** on Nov. 10-12 demonstrating Web Soil Survey at their booth. Staff also provided information about the technical and financial assistance available through the NRCS and SWCDs for conservation planning. NRCS Zone 3 Agronomist, Bruce Henderson, did a session for landowners on forage management and Zone 3 Wildlife Biologist, Garry Stephens presented a session on pond management. More than 1,200 attended this year's show.

After more than 20 years in the same location the **Lavaca County NRCS and the Lavaca SWCD** moved to a new location in November. The new USDA facility at 801 W. Fairwinds, Ste. 1A, in Hallettsville provides more room for producers to work on their conservation plans with staff and also

houses the Farm Service Agency along with a conference room for meetings.

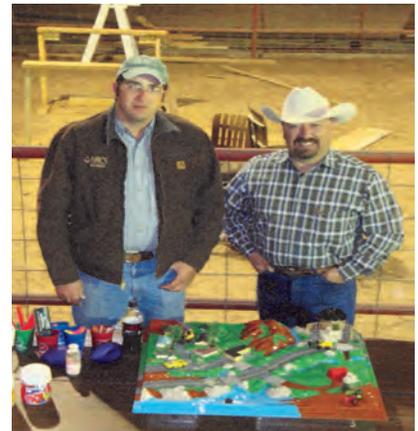
**Frio County Range Tour** sponsored by the Frio SWCD and AgriLife was held Nov 30<sup>th</sup> with a tour of the Oppenheimer Ranch. About 33 attendees viewed mesquite which had been treated with Reclaim in mid-June of 2011 which showed the benefits of brush management.

The national **USA Rice Outlook Conference** was held in Austin on Dec. 7-9. NRCS Soil Scientist/GIS Specialist, Drew Kinney spoke about the Web Soil Survey (WSS) at the New Products and Technology Showcase and then demonstrated WSS to attendees at the NRCS booth. NRCS staff answered questions and provided materials to more than 200 conference attendees.

Over 250 4th and 5th graders attended the **Ag Day in Pearsall** on December 9. NRCS staff, James Demoin, Leo Serna and Ruben Riojas, used the runoff model that the state board lends to districts to demonstrate how NRCS and SWCDs help farmers and ranchers protect water quality through conservation efforts.

More than 300 attended the **Texas Irrigation Expo** in McAllen on Dec. 9-11. NRCS staff provided information and answered questions on irrigation efficient systems and available programs. The Texas Water Advisory Council presented the 2011 Blue Legacy Awards to the top

three crop producers for their water conservation efforts. It's not surprise that all are NRCS cooperators including D & D Farms ~ Ford Family in Moore County; Gertson Farms ~ Gertson Family in Wharton County; and the Schur Farms ~ Schur Family in Hale County.



*NRCS employees James Demoin and Leo Serna visit with students about how NRCS helps farmers and ranchers.*

The **Lost Pines Recovery Team**, a partnership between Bastrop County, Texas Forest Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Agrilife Extension Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Texas Commission for Environmental Quality, Lower Colorado River Authority, Bastrop Soil & Water Conservation District, Texas State University, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provided a free educational program on Jan. 13 for landowners affected by the recent wildfires who would like to know more about landscape recovery and restoration post-fire.

### NRCS Closes Three Largest WRP Contracts Ever Wetland Restoration to help Whooping Cranes

By Melissa Blair

Wildlife and migratory birds will be receiving a helping hand from Gulf Coast producers and NRCS in the coming years as wetland restoration efforts begin on 11,887 contiguous acres in 2012. Add in the private easements and it comes up to 14,000 acres that includes Whooping crane wintering habitat and Northern aplomado falcon nesting area.

In the last few months, NRCS has closed on three Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) contracts with Calhoun County agricultural producers that will restore wetlands and keep them perpetuity while the owners retain ownership. The acres being restored are also adjacent to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, which is home to the largest Whooping Crane population.

“Conserving this important habitat by enrolling it in WRP for perpetual conservation easement will contribute significantly to whooping crane recovery and conserving habitat for many other associated wildlife species,” said State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas. “

Salinas said the wetland restoration program also kept some of the land on one ranch from being developed which will ensure native habitat will stay intact for years to come. NRCS will be helping the landowners with implementing brush removal, grazing management, prescribed burning, invasive grass and sedge removal, and other practices to obtain the desired conditions and landowner goals.



*Wetland restoration will improve the food sources for threatened and endangered species such as the Whooping Crane that frequent the area being restored. (Photo: USFWS)*

### NRCS Brings Conservation Education to CAST Annual Convention in Dallas

Combine more than 3,700 teachers and 250 exhibitors in three days, and get ready for what the Science Teachers Association of Texas (STAT) brought to the 2011 **Continuing Advancement of Science Teachers (CAST) annual convention** held at the Dallas Convention Center in Dallas on November 17-19.

The NRCS brought educational materials targeting natural resources and conservation programs for teachers from grades K-12. They also provided hundreds of informative posters about pollinators and what it takes to replace one inch of top soil. The NRCS booth had more than 1,700 educators and visitors the first day, and nearly 1,100 dropped by the next two days.

NRCS addressed several conservation topics that teachers could bring back to the classroom to educate their students at all age levels, including pollinators, backyard conservation, water resources, living within a watershed, Web Soil Survey, and NRCS conservation programs. Agriculture really hit the mark at CAST 2011 and NRCS assisted hundreds of teachers with educating their students about conservation.



*Mackenzie Moore, right, NRCS rangeland management specialist in McKinney, Texas, discusses the Hometown Clean Water Tour with a teacher visiting the NRCS booth at the CAST Show in Dallas on Nov. 17-19.*

## NRCS takes part in a national Native American agricultural symposium

Story and photos by Beverly Moseley

The Texas Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) broke new ground recently at the *Better the Future-An Indian Agriculture Symposium* hosted by the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) and the Indian Nations Conservation Alliance (INCA).

The December 2011 symposium was the first time Texas-NRCS had participated in the annual event's tradeshow, along with being invited to present during the symposium which was attended by hundreds from across the United States. In the past, representatives of Texas-NRCS have been attendees.

"I think Texas shined," said Garry Stephens, a NRCS wildlife biologist based in Corpus Christi, who attended. "As the Tribal liaison for Texas, I'm very proud of the relationships that have been developed and fostered over the years between NRCS, partners and American Indian ag producers."



**Standing from left to right are Texas NRCS State Conservationist Salvador Salinas; Kyle Williams, Tribal Council vice chairman of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas; Ronald Harris, Texas NRCS district conservationist in Livingston; Bruce Wight, NRCS national forester, Washington, D.C. and Garry Stephens, Texas NRCS Tribal liaison and wildlife biologist based in Corpus Christi.**

Kyle Williams, Tribal Council vice chairman of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas and Ronald Harris, NRCS district conservationist in Livingston, spoke about NRCS' national Longleaf Pine Landscape Initiative and



**Texas-NRCS' new American Indian tabletop display was a highlight of the recent national symposium.**

the Tribe's efforts to restore culturally significant longleaf pines on Tribal lands in the Big Thicket of East Texas.

Williams and Harris' presentation followed guest speakers USDA Agriculture Secretary Thomas Vilsack and Janie Hipp, office of the secretary, Tribal Relations.

"It was an honor that Texas-NRCS and the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas were asked to present the successful development of conservation plans that will impact today and in the future," Stephens said.

A new Native American tabletop display which featured Texas-NRCS' partnerships was a highlight of the tradeshow. A longleaf pine video on the initiative and the partnership between the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe and NRCS was shown throughout the week to attendees.

Other partners in the restoration efforts include the Polk-San Jacinto SWCD and the Texas Forest

**The Youth Drum & Dance Group: Spirit of the Buffalo Dancers & Singers, Black-foot Tribe, Browning, Mont., opened each day's General Session.**



On Nov. 1, 2011, the **Shackelford County Range and Wildlife Management Association's** annual meeting and natural resources workshop was held at the Jones Family Retreat Complex on Lake Delafosse. NRCS staff helped 35 attendees with management and conservation planning solutions for their stock ponds due to the severe drought this year.

More than 110 students from the 4th grade at the **Breckenridge South Elementary School** learned about soils, soil erosion, and how to conserve soil during a soils workshop in December 2011. Tony Baeza, NRCS soil conservationist in Breckenridge and Tom Cyprian, retired NRCS soil scientist and Earth Team volunteer, presented the students two 45-minute sessions.



*Tony Baeza, right, and Tom Cyprian, left, discuss soil erosion with more than 110 fourth grade students during a soils workshop.*

## NRCS Helps Rancher Survive Historic Drought Conditions in North-Central Texas

*By Randy Henry*

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helped many ranchers and farmers survive the historic drought in 2011 using technical and financial assistance, including successful conservation planning. Stuart Fisher, a rancher in **Ellis County, Texas**, came to NRCS before the drought began to develop a conservation plan on his 481-acre, cow-calf operation and gain technical expertise toward building a successful cattle operation.

Fisher gives credit to NRCS' technical assistance in getting his conservation plan off to a great start last spring prior to the tragic drought that hit Texas in the summer of 2011. Tom Clark, NRCS soil conservationist in Ellis County, assisted Fischer from the beginning while successfully working the conservation plan that was developed for Fisher's property.

"NRCS has helped me take a neglected piece of land, and turn it into a productive ranch," Fisher said. One of the ideas that Clark and Fisher implemented was using cover crops to help reduce soil erosion, provide supplemental forage, monitor soil moisture management, and provide weed suppression.

"To survive these severe drought conditions it is vital to work together with landowners and producers, so we will continue to work with Stuart to improve his grazing management, reapply the grass plantings, and provide technical assistance on weed control using the EQIP program," Clark said.



*With a brush pile in the background as a reminder of the burn bans that must be sustained during the severe drought Texas is experiencing, Fisher planted cover crops, including oats and hairy vetch on several hundred acres within his 481-acre ranch in Ellis County, Texas, to help prevent soil erosion, conserve soil moisture, and provide supplemental forage for his remaining cattle.*

## It's hard to see them go....

**Employee retirements** were on the rise in 2011 as many long-time NRCSers said goodbye to start a new journey in life. Many seasoned employees in Texas signed up to leave the agency by the end of the year and it wasn't any different in Zone 1.

Jon Weddle, program liaison in Lubbock, Charlie Morris, district conservationist in Spur, Mario Avila, coordinator for the former Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program were three of many em-

ployees who chose retirement in 2011.

Each of them worked on average 27 to 37 years where they helped impact change that has helped to make NRCS more successful.

They take with them the knowledge, experience and dedication to conservation that is not found in text books.

We will miss them and everyone else leaving the NRCS family that has worked to put conservation on the ground.



*L to R Charlie Morris, Jon Weddle and Mario Avila attended a retirement reception at the Lubbock Zone office in December.*

## Upcoming Events

### JANUARY

SWCD poster contests held throughout the state.

20 Jasper/Newton Forestry Landowner Seminar

24 NRCS booth at the Bell County Crop and Livestock Clinic in Belton at the Bell County Expo Center.

25 Air Quality USDA-NIFA project team and Project Industry Advisory Committee meeting.

### FEBRUARY

7 NRCS will have a booth at Texas Tech University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resource (CASNR) career expo.

7-8 NRCS booth at the 41st Mid-Tex Farm and Ranch Show in Waco at the Extraco Events Center.

7-9 NRCS exhibits at Southwest Farm and Ranch Classic in Lubbock.

23-25 NRCS booth at the 48th Texas chapter of the Texas

Wildlife Society in Fort Worth at the Radisson at Fossil Creek.

28-March 3 2012 Ranching & Wildlife Expo at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo

### MARCH

30-31 NRCS booth at the 37th Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Trade Show in Fort Worth at the Fort Worth Coliseum.

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