



May 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 June 1.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

Financial assistance allocation for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) has been received. Projects that were approved last fiscal year will be funded as follows: Leon River - \$125,000; Lake Arrowhead - \$100,000; and Ogallala - \$4,002,208.

Conservation Stewardship Program

As of May 6, 2010, we have a total of 2,041 applications and 696 signed contracts for 1,404,531 acres. There will be a sign-up period May 10 through June 10 for fiscal year 2010.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Currently, there are 7,450 applications logged into our program database for EQIP for this fiscal year. Contracts have been signed on 2,920 applications for 1,259,840 acres. All program funding has been disbursed to the field for obligating contracts. Monitoring of funding obligations has begun with the expectation that all funding will be obligated by June 1.

A special Agricultural Energy Conservation and Efficiency Initiative was recently announced by NRCS. Through EQIP, funding is available for on-farm energy audits. Texas will target the poultry and dairy operations for this initiative. Participants will choose a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to conduct agricultural energy management plan.

Grassland Reserve Program

An additional \$14 million in GRP funding has been requested to approve 16 more easements and 53 more rental contracts. Field offices are continuing to accept applications for both enrollment options.

Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program

Two proposals were received for the \$2.5 million available in funding. NRCS is evaluating these and determining the eligibility of both for approval.



Ben Godfrey, left, organic farmer and owner of Sand Creek Farm, shows Todnechia Mitchell, right, NRCS district conservationist in Milam County, a Purple Majesty potato that is one of many varieties of potatoes grown on the farm. Godfrey offers several organically grown vegetables to the public.

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. Currently there are no applications.

The second project is for eradicating Salt Cedar from the Canadian River from Lake Meredith to the Oklahoma state line. Currently, three contracts have been approved for 402 acres. This project is funded for FY 10 at \$500,000.

Requests for Proposals

NRCS has four programs that are funded through requests for proposals. These programs include the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) and the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). These requests for proposals have been through the Federal Register. Proposals are due for AWEP on May 17, CCPI on May 27, WREP on May 24 and the full application for CIG on June 4.

Wetlands Reserve Program

NRCS is making progress toward the goals for the Wetlands Reserve Program. A total of 34 applications have been received for a total of 27,826 acres. NRCS has enrolled 3,794 acres to date with initial funding allocations. An additional \$14.4 million has been requested to approve another 11,181 acres. 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.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Currently, we have 149 applications and 26 have been signed into contracts for 44,950 acres. Additional funding has been requested to approve more applications.

Watershed Program

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)

- Construction underway on 19 projects, but progress is slow because of wet weather
- All 19 projects have been accelerated to finish by September 30, 2010
- Contracting of two projects (Little Elm 19 repair and Plum 5 rehab) has been delayed because of land rights problems.
- Contracting of Calaveras 6 rehab should begin in late June Watershed Rehabilitation
- Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) rehab plan is complete and submitted for review



Jim Rogers, NRCS wildlife biologist, spoke recently at a Wetlands Reserve Program workshop held recently in Centerville. Attendees came from Leon and Walker counties.

- Planning underway on East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County) and Olmitos-Garcias 7 (Starr County)
- Planning for Plum Creek Sites 1 and 6 (Hays County) will begin around August

Soil Survey

- Conducted 9 additional soil survey details to complete the “once-over” soil survey for Texas. 45 Soil Scientists participated in the details.
 - 1 detail to Guadalupe Mountains National Park (GUMO)
 - 2 details to Hudspeth and Culberson Counties
 - 2 details to Presidio County
 - 2 details to Big Bend National Park
 - 2 details to McMullin County
- Assisted over 200 organizations, groups, and other land users, providing technical support and solving natural resource issues and concerns.



Two details in Presidio County will help complete the “once-over” soil survey for Texas.

Events and Activities

March 3-4, 2010

Lesser prairie-chicken LPC Interagency Meetings - Interagency meetings were held in Pampa and Morton to discuss the future of the LPC. Opportunities for landowners for developing resource management plans and the defined critical habitat areas were the main topics for building and maintaining a future for the species. Representatives from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) attended the meetings.

March 11, 2010

Chisholm Trail RC&D hosted a private tour of natural treatment systems in Clay County for Sen. Craig Este’s office, TCEQ and the Governor’s office in an effort to get the state to consider an alternative treatment for home site sewage of class IV soils.

March 17-19, 2010

Participated in Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association annual conference in Fort Worth.



The Web Soil Survey drew large crowds throughout the two-day TSCRA tradeshow. Attendees were able to work one-on-one with NRCS staff using computers to learn how to access data such as interactive soil maps, soil properties and qualities, along with assessing suitability and limitation of land uses.

March 21-26, 2010

Collaborated with Texas Tech University on conducting the 50th American Society of Agronomy National Collegiate Soil Judging Contest. Twenty-one university teams from around the United States competed. Virginia Tech University won the competition.

March 29-April 1, 2010

Sponsored the “Voices of Agriculture” speech contest held during the Harrison County Farm City Week activities.

March 30-31, 2010

National Watershed Coalition O&M workshop held in Fredericksburg.

March 31, 2010

The Georgetown NRCS Resource Team assisted the Elm Creek Watershed Authority with AmeriCorps to plant approximately 800 trees on Elm Creek dam No. 5.

March and April, 2010

Held regional and state Woodland Clinics for hundreds of east Texas FFAers and 4Hers

April 6, 2010

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory committee meeting in Pampa - NRCS representative from Zone 1 attended the meeting.

April 6, 2010

Career fair worked by NRCS staff in Alpine and Zone PAS at Sul Ross University. Over 200 students, faculty and guest visited the NRCS booth to obtain employment information.

April 6-8, 2010

NRCS New Mexico Area Sustainable Agriculture Team presented training on how to develop comprehensive cropping systems concentrating on soil health with goals of improving soil quality. Some of the topics discussed were nutrient cycling, soil assessment techniques, reduced tillage systems, utilization of cover crops, and irrigation. Two NRCS employees from the Zone 1 technical staff attended the training.

April 8, 2010

Perryton Farm Show in Perryton - NRCS participated and exhibited a center pivot sprinkler irrigation display and provided related handouts.

April 9, 2010

Hill Country RC&D sponsored the Farm Safety Day in Llano, Texas. NRCS had two educational stations at the event which was attended by over 135 students.

April 13, 2010

Wildlife Alliance for Youth (WAY) – Area 1 contest in Caprock Canyon was planned and organized with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS and Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.



April 13, 2010

Region 5 Wildlife Contest was held in Meridian, Texas, with a record-setting 189 students on 49 teams at the Rocosa Ridge Ranch. The region will send 17 teams to the state wildlife finals on May 11, 2010. The state contest in 4-H was won by Kerr County and the FFA contest was won by Rusk County.

April 13, 2010

Wildlife for Youth contest held at Angelo State University. Hosted by the Tom Green SWCD and the NRCS the event was attended by 100+ high school students who judged in both range and wildlife categories.

April 14, 2010

21st Annual South Plains Ogallala Conference – Lubbock - The Next Dust Bowl....75 Years after Black Sunday - NRCS presented a historical presentation of the agency and served on a panel discussion.

April 17, 2010

Earth Fest at Amarillo Wildcat Bluff Nature Center - NRCS celebrated the agency's 75th anniversary participating in the 2010 Amarillo Earth Fest celebration providing education on the importance of conserving natural resources. The celebration



was an opportunity for the public to see what steps major businesses in the area are taking to protect the environment and ensure sustainable resources for future generations.

April 19, 2010

Smartfield-- Smartcrop Workshop - NRCS field office employees and technical specialists attended a training session with Smartfield representatives to learn about the new Smartcrop irrigation monitoring systems, now available on the payment schedule for EQIP. The systems are designed to assist producers in irrigation scheduling with the goal of improved efficiencies and reduced underground water use.

April 20 - 21, 2010

Lone Star Solar Summit was held in Sweetwater Texas. NRCS had a booth present for solar powered industry officials.

April 23, 2010

Earth Fest 2010 at Fort Hood was attended with 1,000 4th and 5th graders from surrounding ISDs meeting with NRCS for information about conservation and water issues.



April 23, 2010

Potential Playa Lake Recharge project - NRCS technical specialists and assistant state conservationist in Lubbock met with representatives from the Texas Water Development Board, Underground Water Districts in the area to discuss a possible Playa Wetland recharge project.

April 23, 2010

Spring Expo held in Mason Texas and hosted by the Hill Country RC&D. Over 45 participants learned about developments to organic farming and gardening.

April 26, 2010

NRCS staff, West Texas A&M University, Texas Cattle Feeders, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and AgriLife Extension Service discussed a demonstration grant for manure and composting treatment.

April 27, 2010

Celebrated NRCS's 75th Anniversary with an open house at the state office and various other events across the state. More than 150 people visited throughout the day.

April 29, 2010

Approximately 60 people attended a Stockmanship Clinic held in Bandera by the Alamo RC&D, NRCS and local SWCDs. Event covered a variety of topics including: Trichomoniasis, nutrition, pesticides, and behavioral principles in livestock and management practices.

May 1-2, 2010

NRCS assisted with Texas Woodland and Wildlife contest in Conroe, where nearly 5,000 participated.

May 4-5, 2010

Conservation exhibit at the National Mitigation and Ecosystem Banking Conference in Austin.

May 4-6, 2010

Two Texas soil scientists participated as judges in the Soil Land and Range Judging Contest in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Participants of this national finals contest are 4-H and FFA students. In the Range Judging Contest, the Jacksboro, Texas, chapter won the FFA team competition, and Braydan Besselaar of that team won the FFA individual award.

May 6, 2010

GLCI, along with Big Country RC&D, held a rangeland workshop on the historic Spade Ranch located in Mitchell County.

May 6, 2010

Approximately 15 people attended an NRCS-sponsored night workshop for landowners interested in WRP in New Boston.



A proclamation from Texas Governor Perry was just one of the many ways NRCS was recognized on its 75th anniversary.

May 10, 2010

Agricultural Communicators in the High Plains Meeting in Lubbock - Meetings scheduled two times each year, the purpose is to acquaint those of us trying to tell agriculture's story - whether that is from a commodity organization, government or other standpoint. These meetings allow us to "put a face with a name" and get to know each other, what we all have to offer and how we can help each other.

May 10, 2010

Lubbock Chamber Ag Committee Mtg. - NRCS was asked to provide input in the development of an extensive agricultural website for the High Plains and South Plains regions.

May 13, 2010

Phosphorus Reduction Systems Tour in Liberal, Kansas - Representatives from Texas Cattle Feeders (TCFA) and NRCS will meet with the Kansas Livestock Association and Kansas State University representatives to tour and discuss a feed yard wastewater phosphorus removal project in place at Supreme Cattle Feeders near Liberal. The practice has been approved by the NRCS through Kansas for the payment schedule under EQIP.

Information and Outreach

- Conducted Web Soil Survey presentation/demonstration at the 18th Annual Texas On-Site Wastewater Treatment Research Council (TOWTRC) Conference in Mesquite, Texas, March 8-10, 2010. More than 2,500 individuals attended the 2-day conference. During the conference, soil scientists manned a booth and were able to demonstrate Web Soil Survey as well as provide handouts on other available NRCS programs. About 60 individuals participated in the formal Web Soil Survey training, and well over 150 individuals attended the formal presentation of Web Soil Survey.
- NRCS in Texas will have a 4-minute feature as a regular part of the Texas Farm Bureau's Voices of Agriculture show on RFD-TV. Texas Farm Bureau is featured the second Wednesday, every other month – February, April, June, August, October and December. The first segment, featuring the Birdwell-Clark ranch in Clay County, aired on April 14, 2010. It repeated on April 15 and April 17. Other features will air on June 9, August 18, October 13, and December 15.



NRCS soil scientists conducted web soil survey demonstrations at the Texas On-Site Wastewater Treatment Research Council conference.

Field Accomplishments

- Worked with the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) to complete the 2010 phase of the Creekside Project, which is partnership to plan and apply conservation practices in the riparian areas of the Colorado River

- Assisted the Galveston District of the Corps of Engineers by servicing on the Federal Review Team for all projects involving wetland mitigation
- Trained NRCS conservation planners on the new environmental evaluation process

FY10 New Hires and Vacancies

NRCS currently has 28 vacancies:

- 4 Soil Scientists
- 2 Civil Engineers
- 1 Assistant State Conservation Engineer
- 8 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 Engineering Technician
- 1 Office Assistant
- 9 District Conservationists
- 1 RC&D Coordinator
- 1 Secretary

NRCS has made the following selections since March 2010:

- 3 Rangeland Management Specialists
- 6 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 5 Soil Scientists
- 8 Soil Conservationists
- 1 Audio Visual Specialist
- 1 Biological Science Technician
- 1 Engineering Technician (Civil)



An NRCS exhibit at the Capital recognized the 75th anniversary of NRCS. April 27 was declared "Conservation Day."

Calendar of Upcoming Events

May 17, 2010

House Agriculture Committee Farm Bill Hearing in Lubbock, Texas Tech Museum, Texas Tech University – Purpose is to review U.S. agriculture policy in advance of the 2012 Farm Bill.

May 18, 2010

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Advisory Committee in Hereford. 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. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will present the wind turbine guidelines. NRCS representative will present information on available programs to assist in the management of the LPC habitat.

May 18, 2010

Hill Country Association of SWCD's spring tour and meeting to be held in Llano, Texas.

May 28-30, 2010

Ducks Unlimited National Convention in Grapevine

June 1, 2010

Llano Beef Field Day held in Llano, Texas. Annual event attended by 235+ producers and residents.

June 8 and 9, 2010

James E. "Bud" Smith Plant Materials Center Field Day – Knox City

June 9-11, 2010

Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas Annual Conference in College Station

June 25-26, 2010

Texas Wildlife Association annual conference in San Antonio

June 28 – July 4, 2010

Nuffield Group Tour – Panhandle and South Plains regions - Australian scholars will be visiting the region to look at various agricultural industry and operations. NRCS will host the tour in the Amarillo and Lubbock area from June 28 thru July 1.

July 13-16, 2010

Texas FFA Convention in Corpus Christi

August 2-4, 2010

Beef Cattle Short Course in College Station



Myron Merz, left, NRCS district conservationist in Palo Pinto County, Texas, accepts the 75th Anniversary NRCS proclamation from Palo Pinto County Judge Mike A. Smiddy, center, with Austin Shero, right, NRCS soil conservationist in Palo Pinto County.