

## Message from the State Conservationist

*By James Tillman, State Conservationist*

The last few months have been a very busy, exciting, and positive time for us. We've experienced many personnel changes that include retirements, promotions, and the relocation of familiar faces across the state this summer. Sidney Lanier was promoted to assistant state conservationist for Area 4 in Waycross where he replaces David Ferrell. Steve Lawrence was promoted to the state soil scientist position in Athens where he replaces Edward Ealy.

We've also welcomed two new members to our state leadership team in Athens: Aquanda Jones, assistant state conservationist



*Continued on Page 2*

## AG Day 2012

Governor Nathan Deal and Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black held the annual National Agriculture Week Kick-off at the Georgia Freight Depot in Atlanta March 13. This year's theme was "Celebrating Agriculture in Georgia." During the kick-off the governor announced the district winners of the 2012 Environmental Stewardship Award. This year's winners are:

District I winner is James P. Burton Farm. Burton Farm is a family farm that has been in operation for more than 100 years by the Burton family. Burton Farm consists of over 550 acres of hay, timber, and cattle farm operations in LaFayette, Mr. James Burton is very involved in several organizations including Walker County Young

### FOCUS ON THE FIELD



**Governor Nathan Deal**

*Continued on Page 4*

**3**

**Forestry Field Day**

**5**

**PMC**

**7**

**NRCS Receives Golden Shovel Award**

**8**

**RUSLE2 Update**

*continued from page 1*

for programs and Tansel Hudson, assistant state conservationist for operations. Jones replaces Jimmy Bramblett and comes from Iowa where she worked for our agency and Hudson replaces Dorothy Harris and comes to us via Maryland where he worked for our agency also.

Even though changes come with challenges, I am confident that we will take charge and forge ahead to ensure that we continue to meet our customers' needs. This has been proven through the continued commitment of our staff to put conservation on the ground. You have done a phenomenal job in program delivery.

This year we have obligated 2,053 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts covering 140,141.98 acres totaling \$26.6 million in financial assistance. This has been a record year for the StrikeForce, High Tunnel, Agriculture Water

Enhancement Program and Organic Initiatives. You also made noteworthy accomplishments with the National Water Quality, the Pigweed and the Longleaf Pine Initiatives—all components of Georgia's EQIP accomplishments.

With the new additions to our team, we are even better equipped to continue our mission to help people help the land and to also increase our impact across the state. On that same note, it is imperative that we continue to keep outreach efforts in the forefront of our day-to-day tasks.

One aspect of this effort involves the development and implementation of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI), which was started as a pilot in 2009. The purpose of CDSI is to implement a more effective, efficient and sustainable business model for delivering conservation assistance.

As we begin to implement key parts of the initiative, I anticipate

a future where field staffs can spend as much as 75 percent of their "conservation assistance" time in the field with customers delivering the service our customers need. Financial assistance processes will be standardized and streamlined allowing for shorter periods between program application and funding.

To facilitate the smooth transition to these new systems, a CDSI Readiness Team has identified a number of tasks and activities that need to be completed prior to implementation. The staff recently started a cleanup of our National Conservation Planning Database. Cleanup of this database is only the beginning to an exciting time of transition to a more efficient way for the Natural Resources Conservation Service to accomplish its mission of "Helping People Help the Land".

Thank you NRCS Georgia for working hard to make sure that we continue helping people help the land.

*Articles for the next Conservation Connection are due by November 5.*

*Please e-mail them to ron.morton@ga.usda.gov. For photos please use the Sharepoint site under <https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga>*

# Outreach

## Forestry Field Day

By Chris Groskreutz, Outreach Coordinator, NRCS Greensboro

The 28th Annual Pine Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District Forestry Field Day was held in March of this year, at Marion County High School. This event, which serves as a regional practice event for the Georgia Future Farmers of America (FFA) Forestry State Competition, has been hosted by the high school since 1985 (then



Students conducting timber estimations.

while the high school students compete in the Senior Division.”

Regardless of level of competition, the overall division titles went back on the same bus as both the Junior and Senior Division were won by the Bleckley County FFA team.



Students cruising timber.

known as Tri-Counties High School) and supported by yearly corporate sponsorship and volunteers. This year’s event drew more than 200 students from all over eastern and middle Georgia.

Luke Crosson, Region 5 representative for the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission said, “This was the first year that we had Junior and Senior Divisions. The school advisors came to the District and asked for a chance to get the younger kids involved earlier on so now the middle school students compete in the newly formed Junior Division,

pass, and sawtimber estimation, among others, also includes a chance for more hands on conclave events such as pole felling, cross cut sawing and turkey calling, among others.

The competition which is made up of individual technical events such as den-drology, land measurement com-

pass, and sawtimber estimation, among others, also includes a chance for more hands on conclave events such as pole felling, cross cut sawing and turkey calling, among others.

The longtime District Chairman Sam Rigdon, congratulated all the students during the awards ceremony for their participation as well as their hard work preparing for the event. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service’s State Conservationist James Tillman later commended the leadership of the District, the FFA Advisors and other partners as they help prepare these students for their future studies and careers in natural resource management.

The compe-



The winners of this year’s event -Bleckley County FFA.

*Continued from Page 1*

Farmers, Tristate Cattlemen's Association and the local high school Future Farmers of America Chapter. He utilizes many environmental stewardship practices on his farm, including reuse of old materials in construction of new structures and to prevent runoff and soil erosion.

**James Burton (right) accepts District I award from Governor Nathan Deal and Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black.**



### District II Winner



**Governor Deal (left) and Commissioner Black pose with District II winner, Dr. Carl Jordan and his granddaughter.**

The winner for District II is Spring Valley EcoFarms, a family farm that has been in operation for 18 years in Athens. They have 100 acres of corn, millet, timber, beef cattle, horses, swine, poultry and a seasonal array of fruits and vegetables. Beginning in 1864, the farm was operated as a cotton plantation. Dr. Cad Jordan purchased the farm in 1993 and began planting mixed species forest plantations. In 1998, he began research on winter cover crops and tillage conservation for small scale organic farms. In 2002 he began teaching classes in organic farming and giving educational tours to local civic groups and school children. Vegetable crops, fruits and berries are the main crops. Animal components were added that provided manure for compost as well as meat and egg production. His daughter and wife manage finances and publicity, and a granddaughter feeds the poultry. The missions of Spring Valley EcoFarms are research, education and outreach. Every year more than 1,000 University of Georgia students visit the farm as a field exercise.

*continued on page 6*

## USDA 150 Year Factoid

The Hatch Act of 1887 established experiment stations in each of the states, laying the foundation for dramatic advances in all agri-

cultural science over the subsequent decades

In 1900, the average size farm was 146 acres, three times smaller than the average of 487 acres in 1997.

Since 1944, USDA has built thousands of small dams on

upstream watersheds to control floods and supply water in rural areas across the country.

The USDA Bureau of Biological Survey, established in 1905, was one of the first federal agencies committed to wildlife conservation.

# plant materials

By Mike Owsley, PMC Manager, Americus, Jim Lathem, Area 2 Resource Soil Scientist, Athens

In July of 2010, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released Circular No. 6, Part 527, Appendix to the National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM).

This appendix provided guidance to states that NRCS would utilize Part IV-Methods of the 1987 Corps of Engineers (COE) Wetland Manual and the approved COR Regional Supplements - but only after consideration of specific "Farm Service Agency (FSA) Variances" included in the FSA Procedures.

The "FSA variances" were included to assure that all NRCS wetland identification decisions meet unique definitions provided by the law and by USDA regulation.

As part of the requirements to retain state job approval authority for wetland determinations, NRCS employees must receive wetland determination update training for these methods and variances. Jim Lathem provided this update training to several NRCS employees from Area's 2 and 3, April 11-13, in Dawson. He was assisted by Mike Owsley and Sherry Carlson resource soil scientist, Tifton.

Participants were Ray Jones, Karen Reese, Melissa Golden, Darrell Clayton, Jackie Busby, Del Braziel, Alan Woodward, Daniel Baker, Tom Bell, Calvin Essex, Vontice Jackson, Steve Cleland, and David Rudisail.



**Jim Lathem and Students in Classroom**

Instruction was provided in the classroom and at several nearby wetland field locations. Topics included methods and indicators to determine a wetland. Emphasis was placed on independent deter-



**Cypress-blackgum wetland**



**Vegetation site determination**

mination of wetland hydrology, hydric soils, and wetland plants.

Many documents along with a CD containing comprehensive materials (laws, regulations, policies, plant list, plant guide, etc.)



**(Fetterbush - *Lyonia lucida* (in photo above) and Climbing Hydrangea - *Decumaria barbara* (in photo below) were two of the wetland plants identified during the field determinations)**



were distributed to the class for reference.

The course also covered NRCS wetland responsibilities, wetland compliance policy and procedures, wetland labels, appeal procedures and interagency cooperation. Many specific examples of wetland determinations in several counties were discussed.

### District III Winner

District III winner is Waller Farm. Glenn Waller and his wife, Rabun, have operated Waller Farm for 45 years in Harrison. The farm consists of nearly 900 acres of cotton, corn, hay, peanuts soybean, wheat and beef cattle. Waller utilizes parallel terraces with drain tile, strip till and cover crops, over seeding and crop rotation to best use his farm's most precious resources: soil and water. He has also modified diesel pumps to electric for irrigation, improved dams and ponds and planted multiple species of trees to provide wildlife with additional food sources. Among his many agriculture associations and activities, he is heavily involved in the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation (including 1971 Conservationist Districts Supervisors of the Year), Georgia Farm Bureau and the Georgia/Florida Soybean Association.



**Governor Deal (left) and Commissioner Black pose with District III winner, Glenn and Rabun Waller.**

### District IV Winner



**Governor Deal (left) and Commissioner Black pose with District IV winner, Adam and Jane Graft.**

Leatherbrook Holsteins, LLC is the winner of District IV. Adam and Jane Graft, along with their children Lee Reese and Emmie, have owned Leatherbrook Holsteins in Americus for 8 years. They have 1,300 acres of corn, rye grass and sorghum for silage for their 1,800 dairy cattle. Adam graduated with a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine degree from the University of Georgia in 2000, and after being in private practice for four years started a small dairy farm. Jane grew up on a family dairy farm in South Carolina. Leatherbrook Holsteins places a high priority on conserving and recycling their precious natural resources. Feed, water and manure management are the three highest impact areas. Cows and heifers consume a total mixed ration using waste

byproducts from other industries - including citrus pulp, peanut hulls and skins, brewers' grain, whole cottonseed and distillers' grain. Water is recycled many times to wash out bams and then is applied to the dairy farm crops. Manure generated is applied to the land that produces feed for the dairy as well. Adam is a member of the Georgia Milk Producers, Georgia Farm Bureau, and Georgia Veterinary Medical Association.



*John M. Englert, NRCS Coordinator for the USDA People's Garden Initiative  
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, D.C.*

The USDA People's Garden Initiative celebrated 3 years of growing with an award ceremony held on February 17, 2012. NRCS was recognized for its many contributions towards this initiative.

Most notable was the Golden Shovel award received by NRCS

for having the most People's Gardens of any USDA agency. This is a direct reflection of all of your efforts and the efforts of our NRCS field staff to make this initiative a success. Wayne Bogovich and John Englert, NRCS

Coordinator for the USDA People's Garden Initiative, presented the Golden Shovel award to Chief Dave White a week following the ceremony and the shovel is now hanging in the reception area of the Office of the Chief for everyone to see.

Iowa received the Golden Garden Gnome award for the state with the most People's Gardens. NRCS leads USDA agencies in the number of gardens in Iowa, so NRCS Acting Associate Chief



Homer Wilkes accepted the award on behalf of the agency. The USDA People's Garden coordinators are arranging for shipment of the garden gnome to Iowa.

## Stephens Federal Building Hold 2nd Annual Clean-up

USDA employees at the Stephen Federal Building in Athens, held their 2nd annual People Garden clean-up April 20, in celebration of Earth Day.

Around 13 employees volunteered their time to pulled weeds, trimmed flowers and shrubs, picked up trash from the garden area and fixing signs that fell during the winter. Some even planted some famous Lincoln tomatoes.



## District V Winner

The winner of District V and the State winner is Hopkins Farm. Chris Hopkins, his wife Marilynn, and their son Banks, have owned Hopkins Farm for 7 years in Lyons. They farm cotton, peanuts, corn, wheat, timber, watermelons, rye and pecans. Hopkins has a Master's degree in plant protection and pest management from the University of Georgia. Although both have full-time occupations off of the farm, they started from scratch beginning with 50 acres of rented land and has grown to 600 acres of leased and owned land. With each new land acquisition, they look at what can feasibly be done to improve the tracts' overall productivity and to protect the natural resources. They have renovated and installed terrace and grass waterway, utilized conservation tillage and have also removed highly erodible land from production. He has implemented irrigation water management in conjunction with converting irrigation systems from high to low pressure. Hopkins is a member of the Farm Bureau, Young Farmers and Georgia Cotton Commission.



Governor Deal (left) and Commissioner Black pose with District V and State winner, Chris and Manlynn Hopkins.

## Technical Support

### Soil Loss Prediction Software Update

*J.M. Dangler, Agronomist, Athens*

The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation, Version 2 (RUSLE2) software managers have made several important changes since the latest version of the software was released.

The operations and management associated with crops and the common "moses" database should be replaced in our field

offices as a result of these improvements. Also, the soils information in 14 Georgia counties have been updated.

We can expect several other changes in the near future. For example, all of the operations in each crop management have been reviewed throughout the country.

The software managers are reviewing these changes for consistency. Also, there will be significant changes in the capacity to predict soil loss in grazing land. Finally, we should expect some changes in the soils databases in the next year or two that may be applicable to many of Georgia's counties.

## The History of Conservation through Quotes

"Since the achievement of our independence he is the greatest patriot who stops the most gullies."  
--- Patrick Henry, Remarks before the Virginia Assembly, 1777.

"To skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed."  
--- Theodore Roosevelt, Message to Congress, December 3, 1907.

# EARTH TEAM

cards; you name it, she takes care of it.

She feels that what she does is part of a bigger effort that will have an impact on others.

“It’s just a small part but every little bit helps when it comes to conservation. I would like to think that what I’m doing will help my 8-year-old granddaughter and future generations.”

Because of her dedication and commitment as an Earth Team volunteer, Morton was recognized by Georgia’s Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator, Janice Lester.

She said, “Maria has been a great asset to us here at the state office. She is very dependable and gets the job done. She has put in over 100 volunteer hours this fiscal year.”

Morton said she will continue working to make sure her job gets done. She plans to continue volunteering with the Earth Team and doing whatever she can in the future to share NRCS’s message about the importance of conservation.

**Identify your greatest fear, and walk directly at it. – Eleanor Roosevelt.**



The State Public Affairs Specialist, Luther Jones, (left) and the State Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator, Janice Lester, (right) pose with Earth Team Volunteer, Maria Morton holding her new garment bag.

## Volunteer Recognized

*By Amelia Hines, Assistant Public Affairs Specialist, Athens*

Maria Morton has always been interested in conservation. So, it only seemed natural for her to volunteer as an Earth Team volunteer when her husband Ron got a job as an assistant public affairs specialist with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

That was four years ago and Maria says she still loves every minute she spends as a volunteer with the NRCS in Athens.

During Maria’s time as a volunteer, she has learned to do a little bit of everything. From making buttons, folding brochures, assembling packets, pamphlets, and soil

“The most rewarding part is just being able to get out the message of conservation with pamphlets, buttons, and items,” said Morton.

Making buttons and designing different themes is part of Morton’s contribution to the agency’s goal of sharing its mission, goals, and vision with the public.

Her favorites are the ‘soaring for conservation’ and ‘vote for conservation’ buttons. In addition to that, she works to gear some buttons specifically to an audience that will be targeted at certain events.

Although the job can be stressful during high-demand seasons, Morton says she still enjoys her time as an Earth Team volunteer.

# Photography Contest!

*"A Snapshot of Conservation Across Georgia"*

**Who:** The Public Affairs Advisory Council is sponsoring a photography contest for all Georgia NRCS employees, Partners and Earth Team Volunteers!

**Why:** To build a high quality conservation photo file for Georgia NRCS and showcase conservation!

**When:** Photographs must be taken within the year, in Georgia.

**Theme:** Conservation in Georgia!

Photos should reflect some aspect of natural resources conservation, i.e. Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Humans: (SWAPA plus H)

**Judging:** The photos will be judged by the Public Affairs Advisory Council at its next meeting!

**Prizes:** 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes will be awarded statewide and best in each Area. Prizes are non-monetary gifts. In addition, photos will be used in our newsletter, on our web site, in PowerPoint presentations and future publications.

**How to Enter:** An entry form with the rules is located on our Sharepoint site at <https://nrsc.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga/default.aspx> in Microsoft Word form under the Shared Documents. Please submit the form and the photo electronically. One photo per form. You may submit more than one photo.

Have Fun!

