

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

April 2003



R.L. "Gus"
Hughbanks

It looks a little like spring out there. The grass is beginning to green up and days are getting longer and warmer. Trees are budding. Farmers are getting in their fields. Trees are being planted. Yep. Looks like spring.

As usual, NRCS folks are anxious to get to the field. There is a pile of work to be done - important work. And we are the right folks for the job. Working with our partners, especially the districts, we are going to put a lot of good conservation on the ground. I commend you for your enthusiasm and efforts.

There are also a few distractions: competitive sourcing, office closures, Technical Service Providers (TSP), EQIP applications and Local Work Groups. The list goes on. In fact, I've never seen so many issues of such importance all in play at the same time. It is quite a juggling act to keep everything going.

We will work our way through these issues. I believe we can compete with anyone for the work that we do. The breadth of the work is really amazing when you dig into it. I think we will fare well in the competitive sourcing process.

There aren't many new details on the office closure issue. The team developing the office identification process is still working through the issues. Not surprisingly, the process is very difficult. Given the complexity of operations and the variety of need, the development of a single set of nationwide criteria will be hard. It appears likely, however, that the states will have significant input in the final selections.

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The picture on TSPs gets a little clearer each week. It is a very complicated process and we are charged with having it ready to go in a very short time. We will be successful because of the dedication and commitment of our people. When we get all the wrinkles ironed out, the TSP system will provide us with a powerful force to speed the application of conservation on the ground. We just need to get through the growth pains of getting started.

By the time you read this note, you have probably already been working with your Local Work Group to see if changes in the EQIP process are appropriate. I am convinced that the process as designed would have worked well if the application rates had been consistent with our prior experience. But who could have predicted a sign-up of \$85 million? \$85 million!

With such a large volume, the process used didn't always provide for the array of scores anticipated. So we need to ask if some changes are necessary for this year.

The EQIP sign-up was nearly twelve times our usual- Wow! That speaks well for the conservation ethic of the people of Washington. I think it also speaks well for the Local Work Groups and their outreach to local communities. Unfortunately, we won't be able to fund most of these applications this year. But they will be in the mix next year and the year after that.

So, yeah, there are a lot of distractions this spring. But it is spring. We've been waiting all winter for this. Let's continue to focus on our primary job. Quality conservation application through solid planning.

Attention Retirees!!

We would like to hear how things have been since your retirement. Please send your letters to Georgia Sormun at the following address.

USDA - NRCS
316 W. Boone Ave., Ste 450
Spokane, WA 99201-2348

If you would like to receive your copy of Current Developments by email, please respond to the following address
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SUPPORT FOR OUR TROOPS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR LOVED ONES

I am sure everyone, no matter what your politics are, has been affected and distracted by the war and news that we receive around the clock. But, for those who have loved ones serving in the military and especially those that are deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, have a lot more on their minds. Sometimes it's difficult to concentrate about anything else. That is why I am writing this article. I know how hard it is for some. Therefore, your support and prayers for those brave men and women and their families left at home, is so very important. Below is a list of some of the many that are serving their country and us.

One of own NRCS family, **Gale Mayer**, has just been deployed as part of the 21 member advance group for the 396th Combat Support Hospital. She will be somewhere in "the desert" in support of this campaign. She did not know where that would be. Hopefully, she will keep us posted.

Monica Hoover's sister, Marianne Burr, has been deployed to Germany with an Air Force Medical Evacuation Unit. She is greatly missed by her family, especially by her two children Daniel and Aimee.

Harold Crose's son-in-law, Steve Judd is serving with the 101st Airborne Division somewhere in Iraq. He is a Satellite Communications Specialist. Steve serves in the reserve but was called to active duty two months ago.

Nancy Rau's son, Technical Sargent Tracy Rau, is in the Air Force and is based at

Mountain Home AFB. Tracy is a Crew Chief and works on F-15 E's for the 391st "Bold Tigers" Fighter Squadron. Tracy is not currently deployed but has been deployed to Kuwait twice in support of this current campaign. Tracy has three children.

Scott Pattee's son, Jason Pattee, is a truck driver with the 3rd LAR Marine Battallion, stationed at 29 Palms, CA. His unit was deployed in January and he joined them in February. His unit supplies the troops with food, fuel, ammunition and most everything they need to keep rolling. At last word he was somewhere around the Bagdad International Airport. Scott believes they are supporting the 3rd Marine Infantry Division. Scott reports that they move so quickly that he hasn't received any mail as of yet. He hopes to be back in the States by July.

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My (**Kathy Randazzo**) son-in-law, Air Force Lieutenant Richard Gockley is a Navigator on the B-1B based at Ellsworth, AFB, South Dakota. He is on standby to leave at any time. He will be stationed at an undisclosed air base in the Middle East. This will be Rich's first deployment and he is ready to serve his country. Rich and my daughter Jennifer have two children, Allison 2 1/2 and Ryan 9 months.

I also have a relative by marriage serving in the U S Marine Corps. He is William Willis and he is with the 15th MEU and is in Iraq.

Dianne Guidry's husband, Air Force Chief Master Sargent, Jim Guidry, was deployed to the Middle East on March 7, 2003. He is serving as Command Chief for the 487th Air Expeditionary Wing.

Dennis Robinson's family has two very close friends who just happen to be uncle and nephew serving in the Gulf. Ryan Lyonnais is in the Navy and is serving on an aircraft carrier, his uncle Rick Lyonnais is

with the Army Reserve and is at an undisclosed area "somewhere in the desert." Dennis has known these two men and their families for 16 years. That pretty much makes them family.

Larry Cooke's son-in-law, Nick Swanson, joined the Air National Guard in February 2001. Nick is married to Larry's daughter, Sarah. After Nick graduated from basic training in San Antonio, TX, he immediately began a 10-week Security Forces Training. After completing that training, he was put on active duty at Fairchild AFB with the 92nd Air Refueling Wing. He was later deployed to the United Arab Emirates for four months. He has returned to duty at Fairchild AFB and will be receiving more training in the near future.

There are many ways in which we can support our troops. **Lisa Naylor's** Cub Scout Troop, made up of six, seven and eight years olds, are meeting this week to put together a care package for **Greg Schlenz's** nephew who is serving in Iraq.

I would like to thank all those who contributed stories for this article and I would like to write an update to this story and publish it in the next Current Developments. So, if you have any updates on the people featured in this article, let me know about it. If anyone else would like to contribute other stories that did not get to me for this issue, please send them in. Although our focus right now is on Iraq, let us not forget about our military personnel who are serving in other places like Afghanistan and those who are here protecting our nation. I for one am very proud of all of them. They will be in my prayers and I hope in all of your prayers too.

Kathy Randazzo, Secretary
Spokane State Office



EARTH TEAM

By Betty Schmitt, State Earth Team Coordinator

Earth Day is April 22 and I hope many are planning activities that include Earth Team workers. We would like to recognize activities and volunteers that day - let me know if you have a volunteer project planned. Recognition is key in having volunteers return and also encourages others to volunteer.

Last year the number of volunteers and hours they worked increased considerably in the State. In 2001, 836 volunteers worked 10,037 hours and in 2002, 1,225 volunteers worked 14,832 hours. Our goal is to have at least one volunteer in all offices. To help us reach that goal and provide assistance to the field, three Area Coordinators have been appointed. Cheryl Jacobson will serve the East Area, Amy Rodman will serve the Central Area and Erica Fifer will serve the West Area.

Cheryl, Amy and Erica will be meeting with Georgia Sormun, Assistant State Earth Team Coordinator and me to identify where we want to go with the program. We will be sharing more information in the future.

If you have questions or want more information on the Earth Team program give Cheryl, Amy, Erica, Georgia or me a call.

Personnel Actions

Congratulations to the following employees:

Kelly Sprute has been promoted to the Spokane Public Affairs Specialist as a GS-1035-7, effective 2/23/03. Congratulations!

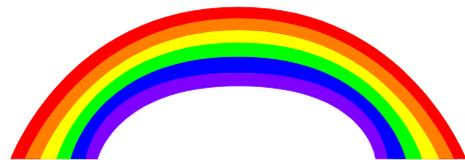
Chandra Neils has been promoted to the Spokane Soil Scientist position as a GS-470-9, effective 3/9/03. Congratulations!

The following people have been reassigned

Marty Chaney has been reassigned as the West Area Cultural Resource Specialist, effective 2/9/03.

Mark Amara has been reassigned as the Central Area Cultural Resource Specialist, effective 2/9/03.

Toby Rodgers has been reassigned to the Mount Vernon Soil Survey Office as the Soil Scientist, effective 3/23/03.



If you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain



Snow Survey Media Demonstration

By Kelly Sprute, Public Affairs Specialist

On March 25th the Natural Resources Conservation Service held a snow survey demonstration on Mt. Spokane for the media. Reporters met us at the cross-country ski lodge and Scott Pattee and Ron Abramovich, Snow Survey and Water Forecasting Specialists, showed how they determine the water content in the snow pack.

Snow surveys involve taking many core samples to determine the average water content in that area. They measure the snow depth by pushing a metal tube down through the snow pack to the ground and extracting the core. The core sample is weighed to calculate the water content.



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Reporters from Channel 2, along with Steve Jackson from KPBX public radio interviewed Scott. He answered questions about the current condition of the snow pack and the effects of this year's below average readings. The news stories aired that evening. The event was a success for NRCS.

KXLY Channel 4 and KREM with Steve Jackson from

2003 SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SPOKANE - July 27-30, 2003

Plans are shaping up and being finalized for the 2003 Annual SWCS Conference. What a great opportunity for all of us in Washington, Oregon and Idaho to have a national conservation conference available in the Pacific Northwest.

The conference provides many training opportunities and continuing education credits from professional organizations - several workshops are being offered. Conservation tours will focus on resource issues in the Columbia Basin. There will be many posters on various conservation topics related to air, water and watershed issues. A key benefit of the conference is the networking opportunities with specialists from across the country.

Are you planning on attending? Have you thought about helping the Inland Empire Chapter by volunteering during the conference or before? The Local Arrangement Committee has been working for more than two years on planning, but help is still needed to make this a successful conference. If you are interested in volunteering, contact one of the Co-Chairs - Larry Cooke at (509) 323-2964 or Dennis Roe at (509) 335-3491.

To find out more about the conference and to register, go to the SWCS National web site at www.swcs.org



Living Snow Fence Planting

By Kelly Sprute, Public Affairs Specialist

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and four other cooperative partners came together to plant a living snow fence 14 miles north of Davenport off Highway 25 on April 1st. The living snow fence is a windbreak of trees, which causes a tornado like effect that alters wind speed and direction, allowing the snow to settle out. These fences are an effective method of reducing the impact of blowing and drifting snow. Small segments of roads exposed to these snow conditions can cause miles of roadway to close.



The Washington State Department of Transportation identified this site as having a snowdrift problem. Bill Reinbold, a farmer and innovator in conservation methods, believes in the benefits of the living snow fence. He provided land for planting, equipment for site preparation and actively participated during the project.

The living snow fence is over 800 feet long planted with two twin rows of Rocky Mountain juniper trees. The trees will grow through a fabric mulch material that will control weeds and keep extra moisture in the ground. Bunch grass was planted between the rows to prevent the spread of weeds. The fence should be fully effective in 5 to 7 years.

The living snow fence is a cooperative effort with the USDA National Agroforestry Center and Natural Resources Conservation Service; Lincoln County Conservation District; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; and the Washington State Department of Transportation. This project took over a year to plan and coordinate and became a success through the hard work of everyone involved.



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