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West Virginia NRCS News and Views

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
August 2012

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Franklin Service Centers Participates in Tree Planting and Environmental Fair, The Pepper Patch Brings Schools and Earth Team Volunteers Together, Grant County High Tunnel Field Day, Lewisburg Women in Agriculture Day, Hardy County Producer Completes First Farmstead Energy Improvement Practice.

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[Tools to Define the Historic Extent of Red Spruce in WV](#)

Soil Scientist help government and non government organizations identify the historic range of red spruce in WV to target restoration efforts for the benefit of threatened and/or endangered species.

[Bits and Pieces](#)



150th Anniversary and Peoples Garden

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Photo award, landscape photography, composition, handling photos tips.

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Plain Language Tools: readability statistics, avoiding noun strings, active voice, link to GPO Style Manual.

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Discounts for Federal Employees, NRCS Distribution Center Updates, GovDelivery.

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Personnel Updates, Pathways Program, Open Season, Recent Requirements, Telework Frequently Asked Questions

To submit news items for the November *News and Views*, please send an e-mail message to [Carol Lagodich](#).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment.

NRCS West Virginia State Office
Suite 200
1550 Earl Core Road, Morgantown, WV 26505
304-284-7540 | fax 304-284-4839
<http://www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Kevin Wickey, West Virginia State Conservationist

NRCS field offices are located throughout West Virginia
Visit <http://www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/> for addresses and phone numbers.

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Message from Kevin Wickey

About 7 busy weeks are left in the fiscal year. The period from August through November always seems like an extra busy time with ending the current fiscal year and starting the next fiscal year. In addition, many of us are trying to take leave, get kids back to school, and finish other projects at home.

The good news is that we are finishing the year well. We have enough funds to meet our remaining needs and we have accomplished lots of conservation. While there is a lot of uncertainty, I want to remind us of why we are so busy. We do important work that Congress and the public want and value. We're not willing to let resources go to somewhere else rather than using them to address the resource concerns we have here. Voluntary, conservation on private lands is great mission to have. Thanks for making a difference here in West Virginia.

Kevin Wickey
 State Conservationist
 West Virginia

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From the Field

Franklin Service Center Participates in Tree Planting and Environmental Fair

NRCS participated in planting over 100 American chestnut and 100 Chinquapin trees at the Navy Information Operations Command (NIOC) at Sugar Grove. The trees came from the WV Clements State Tree Nursery and a volunteer group planted them in the command's riparian buffer management area. This area which borders the South Fork, South Branch of the Potomac River has been set aside as a natural filter which slows the flow of storm water run-off so sediments and pollutants are kept from entering the water way and eventually the Chesapeake Bay.

NRCS also participated in the NIOC Sugar Grove annual Safety, Health and Environmental Fair which is attended by all of the county school districts 4th graders and local home school students in the morning. The afternoon is dedicated to base personnel and their families and open to the general public.

Navy Information Operations Command, Sugar Grove is located in Pendleton County, West Virginia, in the Potomac Highlands.

For more information, contact [Doris Brackenrich](#), at 304-358-2367.

The Pepper Patch Brings Schools and Earth Team Volunteers Together



As the garden season approaches the folks at the McMechen USDA Service Center knew it was time to get started on The Pepper Patch, our local community garden. With the help of local Earth Team Volunteers – Luke Norman, Josh Shaver, Bob Lander, & Lennon Stadler as well as local staff the raised beds for The Pepper Patch were turned over and prepared for planting.



On May 17th a collaboration of NRCS, Northern Panhandle Conservation District, West Virginia Conservation Agency, and Marshall County Schools brought 4th grade students from Center McMechen Elementary School to the service center to plant the garden.

The students at Cameron High School grew the vegetable plants and donated them to the cause. Students from the John Marshall Horticulture Club were bused in to be planting specialists and teach the 4th graders how and why we plant vegetable crops. The staffers at the service center will tend the crops throughout the summer, donating the harvest to local food banks, and when the students return to the classroom in August, they will visit The Pepper Patch once again to assist with final harvests and preparing the raised beds for the winter months.

For more information, contact [Katie Fitzsimmons](#), at 304-242-0576.



Grant County High Tunnel Field Day

On May 5th, 2012, the spring gardening season was opened with a High Tunnel Field Day in Grant County. Speakers answered questions on construction and planting techniques, irrigation methods,

marketing ideas, and cost sharing opportunities. Local producers from Grant County and surrounding counties attended the event. Approximately 40-50 people stopped by throughout the day. This was a good opportunity to provide agency outreach and local producers were given the opportunity to walk through an existing structure and network among other producers and guests. Read more at <http://www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/news/success/12success/12grantEQIPhightunnel.html>

For more information, contact [Jessica Ball](#) at 304-257-4068 ext. 112.

Lewisburg Women in Agriculture Day



On Wednesday, May 9th, the Greenbrier County Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Greenbrier Valley Conservation District (GVCD) hosted their 4th Annual "Women in Agriculture" program at the Lewisburg United Methodist Church. Approximately 75 women were in attendance. There were speakers from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Greenbrier Valley Conservation District (GVCD), West Virginia University (WVU) Cooperative Extension Service, local farmers, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Katy McBride, Soil Conservationist with the Lewisburg Field Office, was one of the guest speakers and she spoke on the various Farmbill programs that NRCS has to offer. She also discussed the numerous outreach and educational programs that NRCS assists with; such as Landjudging Contest, Envirothon, and the Grassland Evaluation Contest.

Some of the other topics that were discussed by the other presenters included farm and agriculture safety, FSA loan programs, GVCD programs, women's heart health, and becoming an advocate for agriculture.



Everyone who attended was registered to win a door prize, which were donated by local individuals and businesses. They also received a free informational bag containing information about NRCS Farmbill programs, FSA loan programs, conservation programs, etc.

For more information, contact [Katy McBride](#) at 304-645-6172.

Hardy County Producer Completes First Farmstead Energy Improvement Practice



The EQIP Energy Initiative has helped many producers identify ways to address the problem of escalating fuel costs. The audit analyzes opportunities for improvement, but weighs these suggestions using a cost/benefit analysis. The Moorefield Service Center recently had a participant to complete one of his Farmstead Energy Improvement practices. Read more at <http://www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/news/success/12success/12hardyEnergy.html>

For more information, contact [Christi Hicks](#) at 304-530-2825.

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Conservation and Restoration of America's Great Outdoors: Soil Science Adds Additional Restoration Tools

Submitted by Jason Teets, NRCS, and Greg Nowacki, USFS

Red spruce historically covered 1,500,000 acres in West Virginia (Hopkins 1899). Industrial logging and subsequent burns has reduced the coverage to roughly 60,000 acres (Adams and Stephenson 1989; Pielke 1981). This dramatic decrease in the red spruce resource has spurred the Central Appalachian Spruce Restoration Initiative (CASRI) to quantify the former extent of red spruce for restoration purposes.

CASRI is a partnership of diverse interests who share the common goal of restoring the red spruce-northern hardwood ecosystem across the high elevation landscapes of Central Appalachia. CASRI includes the following partners: Appalachian Mountain Joint Venture (AMJV), Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI), Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge (CVNWR), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Mountain Institute (TMI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Trout Unlimited (TU), U.S. Forest Service Northern Research Station (NRS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Forest Service Monongahela National Forest (USFS-MOF), West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR), West Virginia Division of Forestry (WVDOF), West Virginia Highlands Conservancy (WVHC), West Virginia State Parks, and West Virginia University. The CASRI partnership began as a small working group that was formed to conserve the endangered West Virginia northern flying squirrel which depends on the red spruce-northern hardwood ecosystem. As the partnership grew, it broadened into a multi-faceted ecosystem restoration effort that seeks to address such issues as plant diversity, wildlife diversity, climate change, spruce regeneration, recreation, aesthetics, pollinator recovery, public education and interpretation, soils, private land timber restoration, and connectivity between public and privately owned habitats. The thread that connects all members of CASRI is the determination to restore the red spruce ecosystem and the diversity of plants and wildlife it supports.

Tools that can target restoration efforts include predictive occurrence models (Nowacki and Wendt 2010) and witness tree databases (Thomas-Van Gundy 2010). An additional tool may be found through soil morphology, chemistry and taxonomy. Soils may harbor tell-tale signs of past red spruce occurrence through the presence of spodic materials. In West Virginia, spodic materials are formed by organic acids produced from decomposition/leaching of coniferous and/or ericaceous plant litter strongly reacting within the soil matrix. This soil chemical condition facilitates the transfer of humus and poorly crystalline aluminum and iron from surface (A and E horizon) to lower horizons (Bh/Bhs/Bs horizons). This process is called podsolization (Lundstrom et al. 2000; Fig. 1). Spodosols are identified if the horizons made of spodic materials are well developed and the meet criteria of spodic horizon (Soil Survey Staff, 2010). If the soil does not have a spodic horizon but does contain spodic material a Spodic Dytrudept is identified. Spodosols or Spodic Dytrudepts serve as definitive markers that conifers once existed on site.

Spodosols develop within cool, humid climates beneath conifers and thick snow packs (Ciolkosz et al. 1989; Ugolini et al. 1990; Schaetzl and Isard 1996)—onditions that exist at higher (subalpine) elevations in West Virginia. Past research has verified Spodosol occurrence in West Virginia (Stanley and Ciolkosz 1981) and very small areas of Spodosols are identified in the Randolph, Tucker, Pocahontas, Pendleton, Webster, Grant and Greenbrier soil surveys. Researchers have also studied Spodosols at points southward along the Appalachian Chain (Lietzke and McGuire 1987). Soils with spodic tendencies in the southern Appalachians have been recognized as early as the 1980s, leading to proposals for spodic subgroups for Dystrichrepts and Haplumbrepts (Lietzke and McGuire 1987).

Without continuing conifer cover, the podsolization process ceases and actually reverses itself (depodsolization), causing spodic markers to disassociate over time (Barrett and Schaetzl 1998; Fig.

1). The shift in vegetation causes the breakdown of the coniferous litter layer, release of iron and manganese from B horizons, and increase of calcium from deciduous litter accrual (Lundstrom et al. 2000). This is likely what is happening over 100,000s of acres that have converted to deciduous dominance (mainly maple, beech, and cherry) in West Virginia (Fig. 2). Moreover, soil displacement (erosion) and loss of surface organic matter (O horizon) associated with past cutting and burning may have further deteriorated these “tell-tale” soil characteristics. There is added complexity because we don’t know how fast depodsolization occurs, especially considering differences in starting conditions (i.e., the initial strength of spodic horizon expression), past conifer coverage (including proximity to former-standing individual conifers; see Crampton 1982), and the amount of post-European settlement soil displacement, erosion, and organic matter loss. Although the existence of spodic horizons does not necessarily equate directly to red spruce as hemlock co-occurs as well throughout the former range of red spruce, it suggests the cool, humid, boreal climate targeted for restoration. To refine the identification of the historic range of red spruce soil scientists and ecologists need to : 1) acknowledge the existence of spodic horizon development and its conifer-linked genesis and 2) intensify efforts locating these soils before these unique soil signatures of past conifer occurrence fade away.

Soil profile observations and field discussions recently have substantiated calls for classification changes and soil map unit delineation enhancement due to the likelihood that Spodosol and Spodic Dystrudepts have a much higher occurrence on the landscape than historically predicted and delineated in WV soil surveys. Any future refinements to soil classification and map units will benefit red spruce restoration. This work lends itself well to NRCS’s Ecological Site Description (ESD) initiative, whereby, soil taxonomic units will be updated, relabeled, and possibly reconfigured to improve the formation of ecological units.

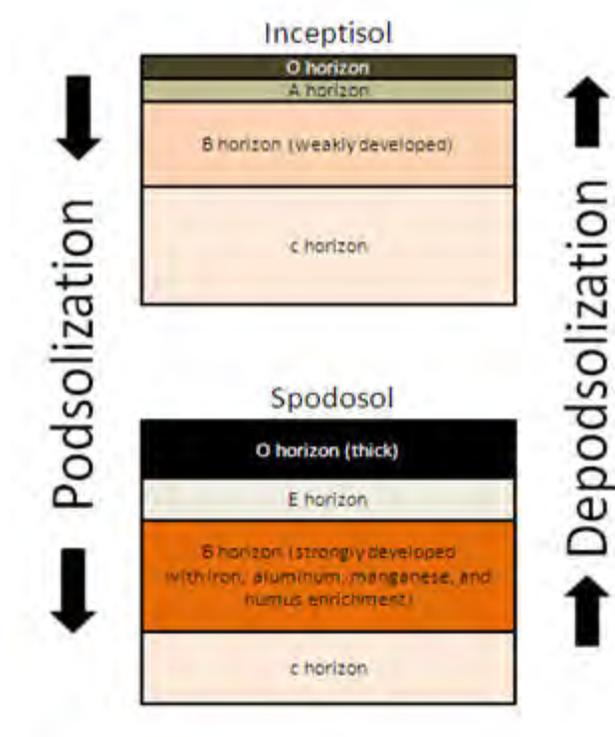


Figure 1. Schematic showing general soil property changes with podsolization and depodsolization.

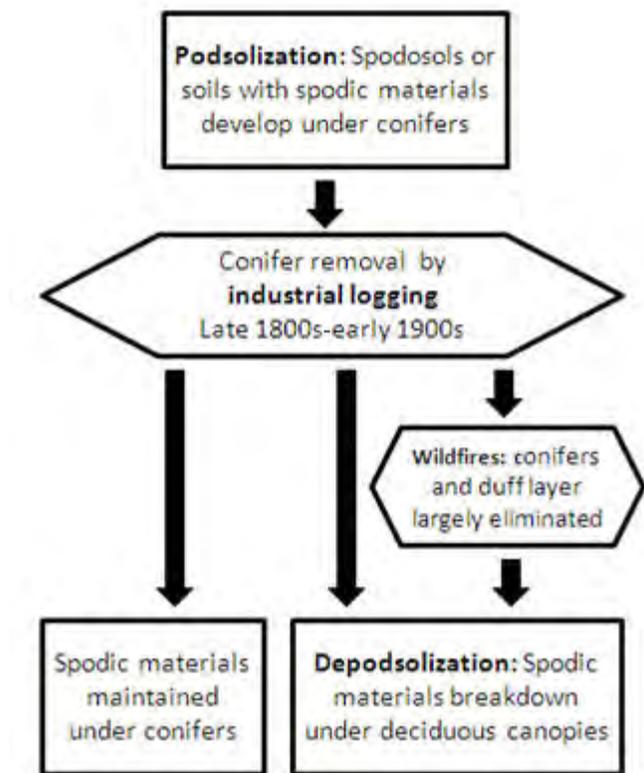


Figure 2: Schematic showing vegetation-induced changes to spodosols or soils with spodic materials.

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Bits and Pieces

150th Anniversary and Peoples Garden

On May 15, USDA commemorated its 150th Anniversary and there was no better way for the People's Garden Initiative to celebrate than to plant history. In conjunction with the Department-wide celebration, People's Gardens around the globe are growing the 'Abraham Lincoln' tomato as a living tribute to USDA's founder—Abraham Lincoln. It's an effort which reminds us that for generations, Americans have joined together to garden for a cause. "Abraham Lincoln" is a heirloom variety of tomato introduced in 1923 by the W. H. Buckbee seed company of Rockford, Illinois – named in honor of Illinois' Greatest Son.

Did you know that USDA distributed seeds from 1850 to 1924? The seed packets distributed, up to 1.1 billion at the program's height, were popular with farmers not only because seeds were free, but because government seeds were top quality.



Leanne Taylor (FSA), Kevin Wickey, Bobby Lewis (RD), Alfred Lewis (FSA), and Charlotte Elliott Friend plant the Abraham Lincoln tomatoes that will be donated to local food banks.

Barbara and Gene Broxterman built the raised bed garden box. Tim Hastings and Pat Bowen helped with the set up.

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Featured Photos

August Photo Award



This quarter's award goes to Jeremy Bennett for his exploration of video filming and editing. Ben Collier and Jeremy Bennett visited the several high tunnel in producers in the Philippi area and interviewed the landowners.

Photo Tips

11 Surefire Landscape Photography Tips

<http://digital-photography-school.com/11-surefire-tips-for-improving-your-landscape-photography>

Composition Tips—Diagonal lines, geometric shapes, Rule of Thirds, and Framing

<http://digital-photography-school.com/4-rules-of-composition-for-landscape-photography>

Handling Photos

Compiled by Colette Kessler, SD Public Affairs Specialist

The following document requires [Adobe Acrobat](#).

[MS Picture Manager](#) (17 pages, 1150 KB) options include:

- Easy to rename “bunches” of images at a time.
- Adjust the “Lightness” under “Picture” and “Brightness/Contrast”
- Color saturation under “Picture”

[Mailing Photos](#) (161 KB)

How to Email a Low Resolution Version of Digital Images

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Writing Tips

Plain Language Tools

Did you know Microsoft Word has tools to help you write more clearly?

Word:

1. Click the Microsoft Office Button
2. Click *Word Options*.
3. Click *Proofing*.
4. Under *When correcting spelling and grammar in Word*, make sure *Check grammar with spelling* is selected.
5. Select the *Show Readability Statistics* check box.

After you enable this feature, open a file that you want to check, Click *check the spelling & grammar* under the *Review tab*. When Word finishes checking the spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.

Understanding Readability Scores:

Flesch Reading Ease scores are based on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, you want the score to be between 60 and 70.

The *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* test rates text on a U.S. school grade level. For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. For most documents, aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.

Avoid Noun Strings

One way to attack a noun string is to start from the end and break them into manageable chunks. Whenever possible, turn nouns into verbs and insert prepositions and articles to make the meaning clearer and to define the relationship among elements.

Consider the following example:

Mary asked for the computer spreadsheet program advance information.

Go to the end; the last word is usually the subject of the phrase or clause. In this case, it is "information" or, even better, "advance information."

The revised version:

Mary asked for the advance information on spreadsheet program for the computer.

Use Active Voice

Active voice makes it clear who is supposed to do what. It eliminates ambiguity about responsibilities. Not: "It must be done." But, "You must do it." Passive voice, which obscures who is responsible for what, is one of the biggest criticisms of government documents. In an active sentence, the person or agency that's acting is the subject of the sentence.

In a passive sentence, the person or item that is acted upon is the subject of the sentence. Passive sentences often do not identify who is performing the action.

Passive Voice

The lake was polluted by the company.

Active Voice

The company polluted the lake.

New regulations were proposed.	We proposed new regulations.
The following information must be included in the application for it to be considered complete.	You must include the following information in your application.
Bonds will be withheld in cases of non-compliance with all permits and conditions.	We will withhold your bond if you don't comply with all permit terms and conditions.
Regulations have been proposed by the Department of Veterans Affairs.	We have proposed regulations.
The permit will be approved by the agency's State office.	Our State office must approve your permit.



The U. S. Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?granuleId=&packageId=GPO-STYLEMANUAL-2008&fromBrowse=true> is used by government employees for official document management and correspondence.

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Useful Links

Discounts for Federal Employees

You may be able to save 15% on your personal cell phone: <http://www.fedsave.com/>

NRCS Distribution Center Updates



The NRCS Distribution Center received the new 2012 Pollinator Poster *Pathways for Pollinators*. This poster depicts several Pollinators, their pathways of migration and the plants they visit on their journey. The description is in English, Spanish and French. This can be found on the ordering web site: <http://nrcspad.sc.egov.usda.gov/DistributionCenter/> using keywords "pollinator", "path", "bats", or "butterflies". The poster measures 28 x 26 inches.



The new wetlands banner stands have replaced the Wetlands floor exhibit. This set of five stands can only be reserved as a set. This exhibit and others may be reserved on the NRCS Distribution Center Share Point, under exhibits, by filling out the form at the bottom of the exhibit description and emailing christopher.radley@ia.usda.gov or by calling (515) 270-4864 ext. 101.

Social Media Tips Every Government Employee Should Know

<http://www.fedsmith.com/article/3502/social-media-tips-every-government-employee.html>

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West Virginia's Civil Rights

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Seminar held at State Office



June was Gay Pride Month. Deborah Beazley, Program Coordinator for WELLWVU, and her assistant Sarah Middleton, helped WV State Office employees understand the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community and the problems they face. After the presentation, Deb and Sarah were invited to a pizza lunch sponsored by the NRCS State Office employees association--where Gay Pride was discussed informally.

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Meet . . .

Lauren Hobbs
 Soil Conservation Technician
 Sistersville Service Center

I grew up in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania where I worked on a farm that was owned by the local Watershed Specialist and an employee of the State Game Commission. Through working on their farm I was able to learn the 'farmer's side' of conservation projects and really see how their management affected resources on the land.

After graduating from Delaware Valley College with a BS degree in Agricultural Education, I worked for NRCS as a Program Assistant in York, PA. While there, I moved into a Soil Conservation Technician position under Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative funding. As of July 16th, I am in the Sistersville Field Office. I look forward to continuing my career in West Virginia and meeting the new challenges that will be presented along the way. I'm also looking forward to meeting the other employees throughout the state.



Patricia Walters
 Term Administrative Clerk
 State Office

Hello everyone, I am very grateful to be a part of NRCS State Office in Morgantown, WV. I joined NRCS in May, 2012 as an Administrative Clerk and have met some very nice people. The state office employees have been very friendly and easy to work with for which I am very appreciative.

My work history consists of:

- a secretary position with WVU,
- four years with the US Air Force as a F-15 hydraulics systems specialist and a reprographics specialist at Langely Air Force Base, VA,
- 12 years with the US Postal Service as postmaster,
- and various accounting positions.

After the postmaster position, I took a break to raise two children currently ten (boy) and seven (girl). I have a four-year degree from WVU majoring in accounting. My hobbies consist of raising/riding horses, raising/enjoying Boxers (dogs), walking, sports cars, and having fun with my kids.

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Personnel Updates

(Submitted by Diana Bokoch as of July 17, 2012)

Name	Action	Location	Date
Adam Merritt	Promotion	Buckeye Service Center	05/06/2012
Nickolas Beaver	SCEP Soil Conservation	Mount Clare Service Center	05/07/2012
Patricia Walters	Term Administrative Clerk	State Office	05/14/2012
Christopher Heltzel	STEP Soil Science	Morgantown Service Center	05/21/2012
Carlos Cole	Retirement	Ripley Service Center	06/01/2012
Wayne Grissett	Promotion	Martinsburg Service Center	05/20/2012
Barbara Davis	Intermittent Administrative Clerk	State Office	05/29/2012
Sarah Treadway	Term Administrative Clerk	Beckley AO	06/04/2012
Justin Brackenrich	Intermittent Soil Conservation Aid	Petersburg Service Center	06/04/2012
Thomas Palmatory	Intermittent Soil Conservation Aid	State Office Soils Staff	06/04/2012
Ben Marcum	Intermittent Soil Conservation Aid	Cross Lanes Service Center	06/04/2012
William Leonetti	Intermittent Engineering Aid	State Office Engineering Staff	07/02/2012
Roseanne Kennedy	Retirement	State Office	06/30/2012
Christi Hicks	Promotion	Moorefield Service Center	07/01/2012
Lauren Hobbs	Reassignment from PA Soil Conservation Technician	Sistersville Service Center	07/15/2012

**HR Minute**

Submitted by Diana Bokoch

Pathways Program

The Pathways Program became effective July 10, 2012. We have 180 days to convert our SCEP and STEP employee's into this program. The Pathways Program include the **Internship Program**, the Recent Graduates Program, and the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. The **Internship Program** is for current students; the **Recent Graduates Program** is for people who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs (2 years from the date the graduate completed an academic course of study); and the reinvigorated **Presidential Management Fellows** (PMF) Program is for people who obtained an advanced degree (e.g., graduate or professional degree) within the preceding two years. These programs, collectively the Pathways Programs, are streamlined developmental programs tailored to promote employment opportunities for students and recent graduates in the Federal workforce.

The Internship Program replaces the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The new Internship Program provides students in high schools, colleges, trade schools and other qualifying educational institutions with paid opportunities to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while completing their education. For more information, go to: <http://www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways/>

Open Season: November 12 through December 10, 2012.

During the Open Season, employees can enroll, change, or cancel an existing health plan, dental plan and/or vision plan.

Employees can also sign up for a flexible spending account (health care and/or dependent care) under the FSAFEDS Program. Employees must reenroll in FSAFEDS each year if they want to participate; enrollments do not carry over from year to year. It should also be noted that this year, the maximum annual election for a Health Care Flexible Spending Account will change from \$5,000 to \$2,500 for the 2013 Benefit Period. The amount for Dependent Care Flexible Spending Account will remain the same, \$5,000. If you don't know how you would benefit by this program, go to this website and it explains how you will save money: <https://www.fsafeds.com/fsafeds/index.asp>

You can also get more information on all of these programs by going to: <http://www.opm.gov/insure/>

Recent Requirements

Thanks to everyone for completing IDP's in a timely manner. We are currently consolidating all training needs for next fiscal year for submission to NEDC.

Thanks also for the Telework Surveys. In case you are interested, below are the results of the Telework Survey:

West Virginia 7/13/12	Number of Employees
Already teleworking	11
Eligible and will apply for telework	37
Unable to telework due to technical issues	11
Voluntarily Opt-Out of Telework	80
Ineligible to telework due to conduct	1

Telework Frequently Asked Questions

I have been approved to telework on a regular/recurring basis. However a situation has occurred where I will be teleworking additional days on an ad hoc basis. Do I need to submit a request to telework ad hoc?

No. As long as you have been approved to telework on a regular and recurring core basis, a separate agreement is not needed to telework additional days on an ad hoc basis.

However, if it were reversed, and you were approved to telework on an ad hoc, or irregular, basis, but now wish to begin teleworking on a regular, recurring core basis, a new telework agreement request would need to be submitted.

I've been approved to telework, however, I would like to change my days. Do I need to submit a new agreement?

Yes—if changing teleworking days permanently on a regular and recurring core telework agreement, a new telework agreement is to be submitted and proper approvals obtained. Intermittent changes in a telework agreement do not require a change in the agreement.

Must dependent care be provided?

As telework is not a substitute for dependent care, employees are expected to be fully engaged in work activities for the period in which they are approved to telework. A teleworker is responsible for

ensuring appropriate arrangements for the care of dependents. For example, a parent may have a caregiver in the home to care for their infant child full time while teleworking. A teleworker is not to be providing the care of the infant or other dependents unable to fully care for themselves during a telework arrangement.

If I am teleworking from my home, does my pay or work location officially change?

Not if you are regularly reporting to your regular work location at least twice each bi-weekly pay period.

Does a teleworking employee's position description or performance plan need to be modified?

No. A basic premise of a successful telework arrangement is that the worksite of the teleworker is immaterial to the quality, quantity, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of the work performed. Consequently, performance plans, whether for teleworking or non-teleworking employees, should be results-oriented; focusing on the quantity, quality, timeliness, and comprehensiveness of work products. The criteria for evaluation and position descriptions are not modified.

Is each office expected to establish its own telework policy and procedures?

No. The NRCS Telework Policy, GM_360_429_A established policy throughout NRCS for its Telework Program, to be applied consistently. For example, no changes to the policy such as modifying the levels of approvals, not requiring documentation of disapprovals, or changes to other requirements inherent to the policy are to be made. Some offices find it helpful to prepare procedural guidance, such as providing the name of the Telework Coordinator and information on where to submit final agreements.

Are there tax benefits to my working from home?

Generally an employee who uses a portion of their home for work does not qualify for any federal income tax deductions. For specific information and interpretation of any federal, state, or local tax law implications of telework, employees should consult their tax advisors or federal and local tax authorities.

Is the supervisor required to conduct site visits to an employee's residence if it is used as the telework site?

No. Site visits are the exception rather than the rule. An employee's signature on the telework agreement form acknowledges his or her compliance with requirements for the alternate work site. If a supervisor or manager suspects problems with the telework site, he or she should contact their servicing human resources specialist for employee relations to obtain guidance.

Can telework be approved for anticipated inclement weather or for other reasons that may reduce the amount of leave an employee must use?

Yes. However an employee must have an approved telework agreement already in place (either intermittent or recurring). Supervisors and managers may approve telework for employees who request to work at home due to pending inclement weather, to minimize leave for an employee who has a medical appointment, to attend a child's school function, or for any other reason that benefits the agency and the employee.

Does NRCS reimburse an employee for expenses to cover obtaining Internet connections?

No. The employee is responsible at his or her personal expense for costs associated with obtaining an internet connection.

Is NRCS required to provide me with the equipment I need to successfully telework?

NRCS is not currently purchasing new equipment specifically for a teleworker. If the employee has what is needed, they can telework. According to IT, on the three year cycle, States should be replacing their equipment with laptops. When States connect with IT, they are requested to purchase telework friendly equipment. The CIO is also looking into piloting a CITRIX-like capability so employees may connect with their home computers.

How is security ensured while teleworking?

Employees are to maintain proper security of USDA and NRCS materials and provide the same level of support to customers, coworkers and supervisors as if they were working at the traditional office; for instance, work documents should be secured. Employees are to provide a locked file cabinet or

other secure storage unit for privacy information, are not to store PII on personal computers, and are to safeguard records per the signed telework agreement.

How does an employee dispose of nonpublic information, including sensitive PII, when teleworking from home?

Employees should use reasonable measures to dispose of paper documents, including burning, pulverizing, or shredding papers so that the information cannot be read or reconstructed. Sensitive information must be disposed of properly, just as an employee would if working in the traditional office. It must be shredded or returned to the traditional office and placed in a burn bag.

Favorite quote:



Opie, you haven't finished your milk. We can't put it back in the cow, you know.

~Aunt Bee Taylor, The Andy Griffith Show

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Conservation Education

Landjudging and Homesite Evaluation

The Greenbrier Valley Conservation District and the Southern Conservation District held a Landjudging and Homesite Evaluation Contest at the Appalachian Plant Materials Center in Alderson, WV, on Wednesday May 2, 2012.

The Homesite Contest emphasizes the importance of soils and their limitations for homesites. Shady Spring Future Farmers of America (FFA) won 1st place, Monroe 4H won 2nd place, and Summers FFA won 3rd place. Top 5 individuals were from Shady Spring and Monroe 4H.

Landjudging in West Virginia focuses on the conservation of agricultural land. Many of the same factors for judging the agricultural land apply to the evaluation for home sites. The Landjudging program teaches students about soil properties such as texture, drainage permeability, soil depth and erosion. It also shows how certain land practices such as farming on the contour, diversion ditches, and pasture management can protect and conserve the soil and water resources. Students learn about land capability classes which tells them how intensively land can be used without causing damage, how to protect it from erosion and loss of plant nutrients, and how to improve crop production. Monroe 4H won 1st, Shady Spring won 2nd, and Summers FFA won 3rd place. Top 5 individuals were from Shady Spring and Monroe 4H.

NRCS employees (Warren Haynes, Dewey Rodgers, Wanda Smith, Lee Godbey, Norris Long, Adam Merritt, Eileen Klein, Bill Harris, Rob Pate, and Katy McBride) assisted with the technical part of the contest (soil pits, scoring, etc).



Wanda Smith and Adam Merritt were pit monitors. The Pit Monitor's job is to make sure that there is no talking at any time, and to gather up the score sheets as each person is finished with their test.

For more information, contact [Katy McBride](#) at 304-645-6172.

Drinking Water: Protecting the Source

Twenty source water protection lessons for high school agriculture science students are now online and available for free download.

Drinking Water: Protecting the Source instructional materials were developed to assist teachers who seek to enhance the consciousness of their students about where their drinking water comes from, and how sources of drinking water can be protected. The teaching materials are designed to supplement existing instruction in agriculture, food, and natural resources courses. They serve as independent units of instruction on source water and as "hands-on" learning activities to enliven the educational experience for students and teachers.

The lessons are the product of a Department of Agriculture (USDA)-Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) partnership with Future Farmers of America (FFA). The lessons are available online to FFA's network of over one million high school agriculture science students and their instructors. The lessons are linked to National Science Education Standards for Grades 9-12, and contain hands-on and remedial activities, supplemental web and community resources, assessments, and community stewardship opportunities. Content covered includes the water cycle, drinking water basics, the

watershed approach, and agricultural conservation practices to protect water quality. Project Advisory Committee members included USDA (Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, National Institute of Food and Agriculture), EPA (Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water and Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds), US Geological Survey, The Groundwater Foundation, and the National Association of Conservation Districts. The University of Wisconsin's Environmental Resources Center provided significant educational content.

<https://www.ffa.org/FFAResources/ffalearn/sourcesofdrinkingwater/Pages/nosolicit.html>

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