



A Note from the Director

As the blossoms leave the trees and allergies begin to bloom, I look at our Assistance Tracker log and am impressed with the work that our WNTSC specialists are doing. That means that there is a lot of good work taking place in field offices throughout the West.

Spring is also the harbinger of change. We have several vacancies to fill at the Center and can announce two appointments. Rick Fasching, currently State Agronomist in Montana; and Giulio Ferruzzi, currently State Agronomist in Kentucky will be joining the West NTSC, reporting on June 7 and 13 respectively.

As soon as the Departmental clearance process is completed, we expect to announce the selection of the National Technology Specialist. In addition, vacancy announcements will be coming out for a soil scientist and a physical scientist on the Energy Team.

Keep an eye out for the biographies of these new employees and help us welcome them to the WNTSC.

As always, please let us know how we can better serve you.

- Bruce Newton

Core Team Highlights

Hot Training in New Mexico

Prescribed burning was the topic of a 3-day course held in March in New Mexico. Twenty employees and 4 ranchers participated in the training that involved classroom and actual burn experiences presented by **Pat Shaver**, WNTSC Rangeland Management Specialist; **Chuck Stanley**, CNTSC Rangeland Management Specialist; and **Susan O'Neill**, Air Quality Scientist with the Air Quality and Atmospheric Change National Technology Development Team, also in Portland.

The training stressed the safety, benefits, air quality issues, and planning necessary to deliver a successful burn that reduces “unwanted” vegetation and promotes the growth of “good” grasses and shrubs. After the actual burn, participants discussed the fire behavior, national and New Mexico policy, air quality issues, and fire effects, then were tested to obtain job approval authority to plan and design this conservation practice.

Shaver commended the group for including ranchers in the experience as an opportunity for both them and the NRCS employees to increase their knowledge and understanding of the practice.



*Above photo:
Starting the test fire.*



*Left photo:
The main burn.*

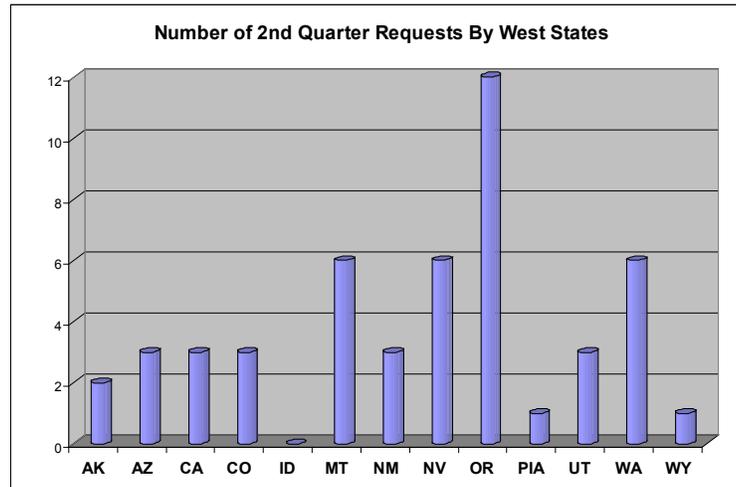
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An Analysis of WNTSC Assistance

FY09 2nd Qtr All WNTSC Requests			
Requested	In Progress	Ongoing	Completed
83	181	57	110

Note: Requests that benefit multiple States are tallied in each State's individual totals but count as only one request under the WNTSC total. (For example, a request for training for employees from 3 States would show as one request in the chart at left and one for each of the States in the graph below.)

For more information or to track a specific request, visit the Assistance Tracker web site at <http://ssiapps.sc.egov.usda.gov/RequestTracker/Default.aspx>.



Back to School for Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy!

To help our NRCS conservation professionals and other conservation partners and planners, the Air Quality and Atmospheric Change and Energy National Technology Development Teams, in cooperation with the National Leader for Climate Change and the National Employee Development Center, have developed a course that is now available through AgLearn called "Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy." The course will help you understand the terminology and basics of air quality, climate change, and energy and their connection to the planning and implementation of conservation practices to benefit the land. The course is available to all NRCS employees, partners, and technical service providers with registration in the Eauth system.

To take the course:

1. Enter AgLearn and click on "Catalog"
2. In the "Subject Area Menu," click the "Expand" icon for "AgLearn Original Courseware Structure"
3. In the "Subject Area Menu," click "Natural Resources Conservation Service"
4. In the "Items" list, launch "Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy"
5. Click on "Air Quality, Climate and Energy - Course Content"
6. Click on "Air Quality, Climate and Energy - Course Content"
7. Enjoy

Scheduled to take about 1.5 hours to complete, the Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy course will be followed by several, more detailed courses. "Why Should We Care about Air Quality?," "Why Do We Care About Energy?," "Air Quality Resource Concerns," "Energy Basics," and "Greenhouse Gases and Carbon Sequestration" are all in the final stages and will be released soon. Additional courses are in the planning stages.

For questions on the course or the subject matter, contact these specialists:

Air Quality and Atmospheric Change: Greg Johnson, greg.johnson@por.usda.gov, 503-273-2424.

Energy: Stefanie Aschmann, stefanie.aschmann@por.usda.gov, 503-273-2408.

Climate Change: Carolyn Olson, carolyn.olson@por.usda.gov, 202-720-1821.

Highlights continued

Pollinator Conservation Provides Value

With the results of “colony collapse disorder” affecting the number of honey bees available to pollinate crops, the conservation of pollinators is becoming more critical. Mace Vaughan, a biologist working with NRCS on a cooperative agreement with the Xerces Society, recently provided training to 40 Washington State NRCS conservation professionals on just that topic. Meeting with employees from the western part of the State, Vaughan focused on the fundamentals



of pollinator conservation--the importance of pollinators, their role in crop production, their habitat and conservation needs, and new opportunities for supporting pollinator conservation through 2008 Farm Bill programs.

In the West, Vaughan has also worked with Oregon, Colorado, Utah, and California NRCS offices, providing training and technical support to help incorporate pollinator conservation practices in our planning process. Discussions are underway for the development of specific pollinator activity plans for a variety of states across the country. For more information, Vaughan can be reached at 503-273-2442 or mace.vaughan@por.usda.gov. He is in the WNTSC office on Tuesday and Friday.

Partnership Provides Fish Passage

While completing the Lower Crooked River Watershed Assessment, the Crooked River Watershed Council (CRWC) in central Oregon realized there were several barriers to fish migration throughout the watershed and formed the Passage and Protection Working Group. The group located, identified, prioritized, and developed the resources (funding) and contacts to begin improving passage for fish while maintaining irrigation rights for districts along the River.

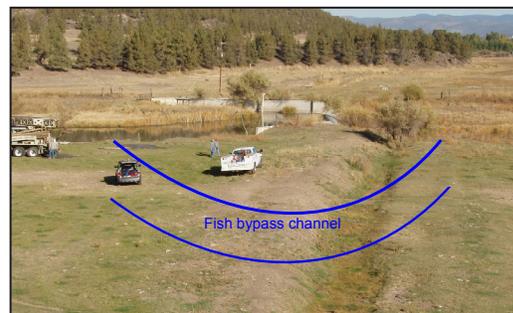
The People’s Irrigation District (PID) dam is the

oldest on the Lower Crooked River, built around 1910. It provides irrigation water to approximately 600 acres downstream. It’s location in the watershed and the fact that it was a complete barrier made it #1 on the list to kick off the project.



People’s Irrigation District Dam built in 1910.

Many organizations worked together on this project. CRWC developed the funding and obtained the permits and contracts. Portland General Electric, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service provided the funding. **Kip Yasumiishi**, Civil Engineer with the WNTSC Core Team, did the design work and provided project oversight. **Dan Moore**, Water Quality and Quantity National Technology Development Team, provided the hydraulic analysis. **Kristi Yasumiishi**, NRCS engineer in the Oregon State Office, drafted the construction drawings, and **Nicolle Kovach**, NRCS engineer in the Redmond, OR office handled the construction



View of fish bypass location

inspection. PID will oversee the operation and maintenance of the project.

Other partners on the project included Oregon Water Resource Board, White Deer Ranch, People’s Irrigation District, and Aquatic Contracting, LLC.

Everyone has been excited about the success of the project. Fish species now have over 8 miles of spawning and rearing habitat with unimpeded

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passage. Water quality has improved, channel function has improved, and the stream has the ability to support reintroduction efforts. "Wow! That will pass fish," said a representative from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The project was so successful that White Deer Ranch, with a similar diversion dam further upstream, has expressed interest in completing a similar project providing passage through a nature-like fishway approach. The Council is engaged in developing the resources to implement that project by 2012.



Completed Crooked River fish bypass

National Technology Development Team Highlights



Energy Team

With the retirement of half of our Team of two in January 2009 and the administration's emphasis on energy, the Energy Technology Development Team has been busy. The Team's has been providing technical input to National Headquarters as NRCS works to identify our energy role; in particular, assisting in developing criteria for the Comprehensive Energy Activity Plan being offered as a pilot through EQIP. We are also providing assistance to other USDA agencies--helping craft Energy Audit guidance for Rural Development, providing input to the Research Education and Extension arm of USDA on energy research needs, and providing input to the General Accounting Office for a report on the environmental impacts of biofuels development in the United States.

The Energy Team continues to develop and deliver energy training in cooperation with the Air Quality and Atmospheric Change Team, the National Climate Change Leader, and the National Employee Development Center. During the second quarter of 2009, both Teams delivered energy and air quality training to 8 states in the Southeast. We also completed the web-based "Air Quality, Climate Change and Energy Course", which is available on AgLearn.

The Team holds monthly or bi-monthly informational web meetings for the State energy contacts. The most recent web meeting featured John Vrieze, a dairy farmer from Wisconsin, who described several of his innovative energy projects. Vrieze has installed two separate methane digesters with improved efficiency features on his Baldwin and Emerald Dairies. Methane is currently scrubbed, compressed, and hauled to a natural gas pipeline. He has also completed a proposal to develop a pipeline and scrubbing facility that can supply methane gas from several different digesters in the region. Vrieze has also started a project to utilize gas from his digesters to power a tilapia aquaculture facility using aquaculture effluent in a greenhouse for use in hydroponic lettuce and basil production. The greenhouse could also supply algae and plants for fish food. He has also developed a prototype system for growing oil-rich algae that could potentially be used to produce biodiesel for the farm. Vrieze received a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit, the first in the country, to discharge reverse osmosis-treated effluent from Emerald Dairy directly into a stream.

For more information, contact Stefanie Aschmann, Team Leader, 503-273-24008 or stefanie.aschmann@por.usda.gov.

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