

CONNECTION

The voice of the Earth Team volunteer.

Earth Team Helps Move the East Region Forward

By Leonard Jordan, Regional Conservationist (East)



Leonard Jordan

At NRCS, our mission and passion is conservation. We have done a lot to improve America's environment, but there is no doubt in anyone's mind that we have a lot more work to do.

Thousands of dedicated Earth Team volunteers share our conservation mission. They have a passion for our work and they are helping us improve the environment. They enjoy the same sense of accomplishment we get that comes with working on a conservation project and seeing it help the land.

Earth Team volunteers are an important partner; some would argue a critical partner.

Read the stories in this newsletter. See what Earth Team volunteers are doing to help us. Look at what volunteers like Kathy Peters, Jose Cabral, Sandy Evans, Joe Buckley and Jonathan Bowlin are doing to help us in the East Region. See what the Tennessee Boy Scout Troop 55 and the Obion County Central High School Forestry Class are doing as group volunteers to help us. Their stories of volunteerism and accomplishment are featured in this newsletter. They are all inspiring. They are helping us as an Agency and they are

all helping us as individual employees put conservation on the ground.

To our East Region Earth Team volunteers I say thank you! Your dedication to conservation and the assistance you provide us and the land is greatly appreciated by me and your entire NRCS family.

To our NRCS employees I say "thank you" for welcoming Earth Team volunteers into your offices and making them feel welcome and productive.

We have much work ahead. There are initiatives, sign-ups, and special projects to complete in addition to regular work assignments. There is no shortage of conservation tasks that need to be done in the East Region.

District conservationists, look for jobs volunteers can do. Conduct a needs assessment and then recruit members to join our Earth Team. We can use the help of Earth Team volunteers to speed the delivery of conservation practices and programs to private landowners, tribes and producers. Together we can all continue to improve America's environment to benefit all the people of our great Nation.

Harvest Time

By Michele Eginore, National Volunteer Coordinator

Fall is coming. The leaves are starting to change in many parts of the country and farmers are starting their harvest. Autumn is either here or it's near.

The questions on everyone's lips in rural America seem to be, "What kind of crop will we have?" "What will the reward be for a year of hard work?"

The harvest will tell. The harvest always tells. We simply look at the grain in the bin, cattle on the hoof and grapes in the crush and then we know with certainty.

Fall is "harvest time" for Earth Team, too. We need to know what kind of support our volunteers were able to give to our NRCS field staff



Michele Eginore

in FY 2011. This is the time of year I ask state volunteer coordinators to get their state's hours recorded in the Volunteer Tracking System.

All hours must to be recorded by October 15. The resulting information helps tell the story of Earth Team's success and clearly demonstrates its value to our Agency.

October is normally the month nominations for the 2012 National Earth Team Awards are due. Because our office is moving and our phone numbers and address are changing, we are extending our normal October 31 deadline to November 4. (See page 10 for more information on the move.) Each state may submit one nomination per award category and nominations must be in to the National Earth Team Office no later than the close of business November 4, 2011.

I urge you to take advantage of this award program. Nominate outstanding individuals, groups, states, field offices, districts and RC&Ds. Use the award nomination as a way to recognize extraordinary achievement and demonstrate the importance of Earth Team to your local and state leadership. Use the volunteers' compelling stories to show what Earth Team volunteers are doing in your state and demonstrate how they are helping NRCS staff stretch scarce resources to benefit both our customers and the environment.

Fall is always a busy time of year. It is "harvest time" for Earth Team, too. Please get your hours recorded and your nominations in.

Once that's done, we can all answer the question: "What kind of crop did Earth Team have in FY2011?"



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NRCS Volunteers Expand Biologist's Ability to Monitor Threatened Gunnison Sage-Grouse

by Deborah Clairmont, Colorado Area 4 Volunteer Coordinator

Earth Team volunteers with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) surveyed approximately 300 hundred acres of remote Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and private lands north of Villa Grove, Colo., this spring looking for Gunnison sage-grouse a ground-dwelling bird considered a keystone species in this

habitat. The participants walked into roost areas accessible only by foot and braved cold temperatures to look for evidence of the Gunnison sage-grouse as part of an effort to improve the bird's habitat and survivability.

The NRCS volunteers' sage-grouse work is important. There has been a significant decline in the birds' population over the

decades prompting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consider protecting the bird under the Endangered Species Act. NRCS has tried to reverse the bird's declining numbers by implementing a Sage Grouse Initiative; a program offering technical and financial assistance to landowners in western states to improve sage-grouse habitat.

"During the year there is not enough time for me to do all the bird monitoring that needs to be done. So getting Earth Team volunteers to help is really important to a successful count and our conservation efforts," said NRCS Wildlife Biologist Ruth Lewis. "Our Earth Team volunteers are very interested in saving the sage-grouse. They want the population to grow and their efforts to assist me and other NRCS employees under difficult field conditions prove their commitment to conservation."

Sage-grouse are ground-dwelling birds, native to the American West. They are found at elevations ranging from 4,000 to over 9,000 feet and are highly dependent on sagebrush for cover and food.

The Colorado area surveyed by Earth Team volunteers is at 7,500 feet in a high elevation desert valley. It is surrounded by 14,000 foot peaks and receives only seven inches of moisture per year.



NRCS Earth Team volunteers and a Colorado state biologist enjoy lunch in the field during a bird count of the Gunnison sage-grouse in a remote section of high

desert. Left to right are Robert Bright, Michelle Collins, Stephanie Steinhoff (state biologist), Jenny Nehring and Elinor Laurie.

The NRCS Earth Team Connection is looking for articles for our next issue.

The deadline for submission is November 13, 2011. Please send your stories, tidbits, photos and photo captions to:
dick.tremain@ia.usda.gov.

Earth Team Experience Helps Returning Soldier

By Brenda Ling, Wyoming State Volunteer Coordinator

Returning veteran Randy Gibson didn't know what to expect when the Department of Veterans Affairs introduced him to NRCS. He had just come back from an 18-month deployment which included spending a year in Iraq. In the war zone, Gibson did convoy security work. He sustained shoulder injuries from daily use of a 50-caliber rifle and entered a Veterans Affairs rehabilitation program upon his return. As part of the VA program, he became an Earth Team volunteer doing three months of work in Wyoming NRCS field offices.

"I didn't know a whole lot about it (NRCS) other than they worked with farmers and ranchers and it was a government agency that did conservation work," he said. "I liked the fact a lot of outdoor work was involved."

He worked closely with

District Conservationist John Richards in both the Lovell and Powell field offices. "Randy has been a great help. He assisted with office cleanup, conservation practices, project certifications, range transects and more. He is an eager worker and willing to tackle any task handed to him," said Richards. "It is hard to believe three months has passed. We enjoyed having him as a member of our team."

Gibson plans to attend Northwest College in Powell this fall. He said he enjoyed his Earth Team work so much this past summer that he hopes to continue his relationship with NRCS in the future.

"I would most definitely recommend this experience to veterans," Gibson said. "It provided a good transition to civilian life and I learned a lot."



Earth Team Volunteer Randy Gibson uses a wheel to measure a pipeline.

RC&D Earth Team Volunteer Recognized

Submitted by Shanna Huckins, Montana State Volunteer Coordinator

Former Resource Conservation & Development Coordinator Sue Sutherland had one last bit of RC&D business to finish. She needed to formally recognize Earth Team volunteer Chris Malgren for her exceptional volunteer service at Northwest Regional RC&D in Montana. So, Sutherland set up an event to recognize Malgren for her volunteer accomplishments. She gathered friends and coworkers and they all formally thanked Malgren for her long service to conservation and to economic development.

Malgren is the chair of Northwest Regional RC&D in Libby, Mont. She signed on with the Earth Team in December 2008 to help provide leadership and promote NRCS,

conservation, communities, and partnerships within Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders counties.

"Chris is the cream of the crop because she is dedicated to the program, she has invested the time to truly understand the intricacies, and she has been selfless in terms of meeting the community needs and putting the needs of the council first," said Sutherland.

Sutherland thanked Malgren for her commitment to the Earth Team with a keepsake Leatherman tool and a certificate of appreciation.

Malgren says she plans to continue her Earth Team volunteer work by helping at the Ronan NRCS field office.



Sue Sutherland, right, former RC&D coordinator for the Northwest Regional RC&D in Montana, presents Earth Team member Chris Malgren a certificate of appreciation for her volunteer service.

Earth Team Volunteer Takes Home Valuable Soils Experience

by LaShawn Guion, NHQ Volunteer Coordinator

Jose Cabral, from the island country of Timor-Leste in southeast Asia, worked as an Earth Team volunteer from May 23 to June 24, 2011 at NRCS National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The recent University of Hawaii graduate assisted the Soil Survey Division with updates to the soil taxonomic classifications for a number of soil maps including the Cimanuk watershed in West Java, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste.

He was also able to use the Geographic Information System (GIS) to manage soil data sets and generate soil maps for use by soil scientists.

Cabral holds a degree in natural resources and management. He says his five weeks of work as an Earth Team volunteer has helped give him many ideas about what he

can do for his country. “With the experience that I’ve gained from being in the Earth Team, I can be one of those who share their conservation knowledge with others and help them better manage their natural resources. At the Soils Division I gained more knowledge on how to use GIS to access soil information and I learned how to produce soil maps that can be used for agricultural purposes.”

He added, “I can now better help the people of my country, East-Timor!”



Earth Team Volunteer Jose Cabral (left) receives a token of appreciation from NHQ Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator LaShawn Guion. Cabral was recently honored for his volunteer service in the NRCS Soil Survey Division in Washington, D.C.



Jose Cabral, center, wearing a ball cap, gathers with NHQ Soils Division coworkers at a luncheon honoring his service as an Earth Team volunteer. The native of Timor-Leste spent five weeks

working in Washington, D.C. before returning home with new soils skills learned while serving with Earth Team. Joining Cabral are (left to right) Emmabelle Kenyon, Thomas Riensch, Mike

Bzdil, Paul Reich, Paul Benedict, Marita McCree, Doug Holy, Cabral, Carolyn Olson, Lashawn Guion and Adrienne Bovell. Soils Division Director Mike Golden is not shown.

Earth Team Volunteers in Action

Mississippi--Helping F5



Otis Gates (left), a food pantry director, and Earth Team Volunteer Joe Buckley collect for the Feds, Farmers, and Friends Feed Families (F5) food drive at a local farmers' market in Pass Christian. Earth Team volunteers like Buckley are helping federal employees across the nation meet the national challenge of gathering 2 million pounds of food to help families in need this summer.

Georgia--The Peoples Garden



Earth Team Volunteer Kathy Peters (left) shows participants how to propagate plants from cuttings at a Peoples' Garden lunch and learn event at the Native People's Garden at the Stephens Federal Building in Athens, Ga. The Athens garden is the only one in Georgia. Vegetables from the garden will be donated to food banks and shelters.

NRCS Distribution Center is Your Poster Headquarters!



Put conservation color on your walls! NRCS Distribution Center has 18 posters you can order free of charge. Call 1-888-526-3227, ext. 101 or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/distributioncenter/ and help decorate America!

Louisiana Field Office Partners to Improve the Lives of Earth Team Volunteers

By Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist

Earth Team volunteers routinely work on large vegetation projects for the New Orleans NRCS field office in southeastern Louisiana. Each year they plant miles of vegetation for shoreline protection, install sand fencing for beach dune habitats and restore areas impacted by saltwater intrusion, hurricanes and other environmental damage.



Michael Trusclair

District Conservationist Michael Trusclair is very grateful for the help Earth Team volunteers give his office. In return, Trusclair and his staff use the Earth Team program to improve the lives of their young volunteers and steer them toward careers with NRCS.

For the past 12 summers, Crescent Soil and Water Conservation

District, southern Louisiana NRCS offices, along with the Golden Meadow Plant Materials Center (PMC) have teamed up with the Louisiana chapter of The National Organization for Professional Black NRCS Employees to assist the Southern University College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences to put on a youth program called the Beginning Agricultural Youth Opportunities Unlimited or BAYOU. Forty to sixty minority high school students spend two days learning about careers in agriculture and the natural sciences. The students are signed up as Earth Team volunteers. PMC staff help them explore various plant species and discover the important role plants play in ecosystems. The student Earth Team volunteers get career counseling and then get hands-on conservation work experience by planting different species in environmentally sensitive areas along Louisiana's coastline.

"The BAYOU program helps student volunteers make the critical connection between the outside world and themselves. They see that school, studying and hard work can make the earth around them better. They experience how their actions can improve both the environment and their own lives," Trusclair says.



Earth Team Volunteer Alishia Bridgewater plants grass for shoreline stabilization.

Trusclair is proud of the fact 85 percent of the seniors in this year's program graduated from their high schools and all the graduates have committed to go on to college to study agriculture.

"This program works," Trusclair said. "Five BAYOU alumni proved it by joining us for this year's training. Each of these five young people are now Louisiana NRCS interns launching their careers with our agency. The interns tell me they want to continue doing what they learned in BAYOU and work with landowners and others on improving our environment."

Trusclair is a very strong Earth Team supporter. He urges NRCS employees at all levels to embrace Earth Team. "Keep your office needs assessment up-to-date. Find jobs volunteers can do and go recruit them. Go to schools, distributive education teachers, environmental clubs, 4-H, scouts and FFA to find Earth Team volunteers. Sign them up and get them helping you with your conservation work," he said.



Earth Team volunteers, members of the Louisiana BAYOU program, plant bitter panicum and seashore paspalum on a beach near New Orleans. The plants will help

prevent dune erosion and provide wildlife habitat. Each year Earth Team volunteers plant between six and nine miles of beach saving grasses along the gulf coast.

Volunteers Team Up to Improve Wildlife Habitat in Tennessee

Submitted by Leon Tillman, Tennessee Area Volunteer Coordinator



Tennessee State Flag

Tennessee Boy Scouts from Troop 55 in Union City recently planted 400 trees and shrubs for NRCS as part of an Earth Team project to improve the habitat for bobwhite quail. Participating are (left to right) Soil

Conservationist Hannah Davis, Brett Gore, Karl Ullrich Jr., Kark Ullrich Sr., Robert Ullrich, Jacob Triplett, Hunter Corley, Sea Riley, Emmanuel Morgan, John Cain, JD Cain and Soil Conservationist Leon Tillman.

“Since becoming a district conservationist in Obion County we have utilized the Earth Team volunteer program to benefit both the volunteers and the land with conservation for wildlife. These volunteers have taken a burden off the local staff, allowing us to work on other conservation projects.” District Conservationist Matthew Denton



Matthew Denton



Earth Team Volunteers from the Obion County, Tenn., Central High School Forestry Class gather after planting 850 trees and shrubs to enhance bobwhite quail habitat. Back Row (left to right) Cortney Johnson, Josh Hutchens, Tyler Woods, Brandon

Stephenson, Blake Dawson, John Harris, BJ Laird, Ashton Eddlemon. Front row (left to right) Kirsten Snider, Kelsey Barnes, Brian Crowell, Dylan Cranford, Robert Evans, Drew Gammons, Hadeline Blurton and Trevor Clouse .

Earth Team Volunteer Digs His Work

Submitted by Kathy Respess, Mississippi State Volunteer Coordinator

Earth Team Volunteer Sandy Evans has logged many hours assisting the Metcalfe, Miss., soil survey staff with a wide variety of projects which include identifying benchmark soils, making soil/carbon measurements and working on archeological investigations. Evans' supervisor is his wife, Soil Scientist Rachel Stout Evans. When schedules permit, she invites Sandy to help her soil survey team work on special projects.

"Sandy is a valued team member because of all the different types of work he does at the office. He brings us a fresh, practical perspective that helps the Metcalfe soils staff to do the best job possible for our clients," said Stout



Sandy Evans

Evans. "Sandy operates the backhoe for large soil pit investigations, hand digs other soil pits, samples the soil pits for specific laboratory measurements, and he is learning how to describe soil profiles."

Stout Evans says Sandy is also a mechanic and a carpenter, which she finds handy on a soil survey with so much equipment that has to be maintained. "He built the portable soil profile display boxes that are used for soils presentations and training. He is a very valuable asset to the Metcalfe Soil Survey Staff," she said.

Earth Team Volunteer Sandy Evans was recently recognized for his contributions to NRCS Mississippi. He was named Area 4 Volunteer of the Year and he is now competing to be his state's nominee in the NRCS National Earth Team Volunteer of the Year Award for 2012 competition.



Earth Team Volunteer Sandy Evans works in a soil pit alongside NRCS Soil Scientist Rachel Stout Evans. When schedules permit, Sandy Evans assists with soils work in the delta and loess hills regions of Mississippi.

Can't Plant? Then Earth Team Volunteers Clean!

by Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist

There was a problem this past spring. The East Remote Sensing Lab (ERSL) staff and their Earth Team volunteers found they could not plant another large community garden near their office in Greensboro, N.C. So, instead of planting a garden, Nathan West staff decided to do some stream cleaning.



"You don't have to go far to make a difference," said Cartographic Technician Nathan West. "I saw the debris in the stream near the office and decided if I couldn't plant this spring I wanted to clean up the stream. Others agreed and this spring we set up a stream cleaning schedule."

Over the years, the nearby stream had been turned into a dumping ground. Earth Team members mobilized and 10 to 20 volunteers worked for three days pulling debris and waste from the water. West says they removed 400-500 gallons of trash from the stream including 4 tires, and 3 shopping carts.

Vera Thomas, centers and labs volunteer coordinator, is very happy with their effort. She said, "Earth Team volunteers turned that stream from shabby to shiny in just a short time. They set a very good example of environmental stewardship and I'm proud of them for their hard work."

Now that the stream is clean, West hopes Earth Team volunteers will be able to plant another community garden near the office next year.



Working as an Earth Team volunteer, Cartographic Technician Johnathan Bowlin pulls trash from a stream near his office in Greensboro, N.C.

Teleworking Volunteer

By Julie MacSwain, Minnesota State
Volunteer Coordinator

Early this year, Elizabeth Standaert, a senior at the University of Minnesota-Mankato, was wondering what she might be doing for the summer of 2011. A chance conversation helped answer Elizabeth's question.

It was May. Her father, Frank Standaert, a dairy nutritionist at a large, well-known dairy cooperative, was having lunch with my husband Rob MacSwain. The two were discussing their children's plans for summer jobs. They talked about what each was studying in college and what they were interested in doing. Rob said to Beth Standaert Frank, "Have your daughter, Beth, contact my wife to see if there might be a way that she could volunteer for NRCS over the summer."



Beth made the call. In June, the Spanish major with a minor in teaching English as a second language became an Earth Team volunteer for Minnesota NRCS. She started helping me by completing research reports, assisting with minority outreach, and editing stories and reports for the public affairs staff.

Beth does all of this by telework.

I like this arrangement very much. I am the state public affairs specialist for Minnesota and I have the extra work. My two-person section is now more productive and effective thanks to Beth.

The Earth Team Program gives my communication team the opportunity to take advantage of this volunteer's special skill sets. Beth likes it because she is learning new skills and gaining valuable work experience. Our leadership likes this arrangement because there are tangible results pointing to more conservation going on the ground. Finally, Frank and Rob like this arrangement, too. My husband says I'm a bit calmer now and Frank reports the Earth Team work is helping his daughter transition from school into the real work-a-day world.

Earth Team offers everyone a win-win!

National Earth Team and NRCS Distribution Center **are moving.**

During our move to new facilities, NRCS Distribution Center will suspend distribution and exhibit shipping services from October 12 to 28. Earth Team and Distribution Center staff will be available by email, phone and BlackBerry.



Our **new** address and phone starting
October 25: **4407 121st St., Urbandale,
Iowa 50323--515-270-4864**
1-888-526-3227 moves with us.

Earth Team Volunteers Dig the Farm and Find History

By Teresa Paglione, NRCS Cultural Resource Specialist, Auburn, Alabama

Over several weekends this spring and summer, Earth Team volunteers consisting of archaeologists and students from Troy University, Auburn University, Auburn University at Montgomery; and members of the Alabama Archaeological Society, tested two sites in Montgomery County for historical artifacts. They conducted their research at a working farm with hayfields, row crops, wetlands, and mature hardwoods.

The plantation contains several prehistoric and historic archaeological sites as well as standing historic (19th century) structures. A portion of the farm is enrolled as a conservation easement in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program.

Lee Harrison, a professional archaeologist, used ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and other tools to look for disturbances in the soil. The results are promising for finding hearths, storage pits and house postholes.

At another site located in a plowed field, shovel tests suggest there is an archeologically significant site extending 100 meters from a field into a wooded tract. In the plowed field, four 3 by 6-foot excavations



An Earth Team volunteer holds a piece of pottery recovered during the dig.



Troy and Auburn University Earth Team volunteers excavate and screen one of eight 1x2 meter units on a 1,000 year old site in Alabama.

revealed evidence of human activity 1,000 years ago.

More field trips are planned as the investigations continue. That means we will be excavating more sites to better understand farming practices dating back to the Hope Hull phase of central Alabama which dates from A.D. 700-900.

Progress in the field cannot be accomplished without our Earth Team Volunteers. Thank you for your help.

Earth Team Volunteer Animates the Web

Earth Team Volunteer Glen Carpenter and Visual Information Specialist Devie Perry work on a computer animated video for the NRCS website at National Headquarters. Carpenter, a University of Maryland student, spent part of his summer working on web animation projects with Public Affairs Division staff in Washington, D.C. This included working with Devie Perry on a video highlighting the work NRCS and private landowners did to protect migrating birds after the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico

