

CONNECTION

The voice of the Earth Team Volunteer.

2012 Award Edition

Earth Team-- Valued Partners in Cooperative Conservation

By Dave White, NRCS Chief

Congratulations to our 2012 National Earth Team Award winners! I applaud your hard work, dedication, and your commitment to improving our nation's land, air and water. You truly are leaders in cooperative conservation.

Think about it. Earth Team volunteers choose us. They believe in us, our mission and the benefits we offer the environment. They choose to work alongside us on our conservation projects. They do this for the experience, the self-satisfaction, to help the environment and for a hundred other reasons.

Last fiscal year Earth Team volunteers collectively donated \$9,305,548 worth of assistance to us, our mission and to our

customers. Over 22,000 volunteers invested 435,653 hours of their time with us.

These are big numbers and the activity breakdown is equally impressive: Earth Team volunteers contributed 66,000 hours helping us with conservation planning and technical consultation activities, 68,000 hours in conservation implementation, 51,000 hours doing clerical work and 114,000 hours in outreach and communications activities. That's a huge help and we need more of it!

Fifty-two percent of our offices hosted Earth Team volunteers last year. That needs to be 100 percent. We need every office to participate in this program.

Earth Team had a good year in 2011. To our volunteers I say,

“Thank you! Thank you for working with us. Your help is highly valued and deeply appreciated.” To our volunteer coordinators and fellow NRCSers, I say, “Thank you for welcoming Earth Team members into our conservation family.”

The Earth Team /NRCS partnership works. It is a great example of cooperative conservation that results in environmental benefits everyone can enjoy.



Chief Dave White

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Earth Team

2012 AWARD WINNERS

Volunteer Service Award – Chief’s Cup: KANSAS

NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award: Mobile County SWCD, Alabama

RC&D/NRCS Earth Team Award: Central Prairie RC&D, Kansas

Chief’s Field Award: Holdrege NRCS Field Office, Nebraska

Individual Volunteer Award:

National/West Region Winner
East Region Winner
Central Region Winner

Timothy Rinehart, Washington
Delilah Anderson, Tennessee
Tony Reali, Minnesota

Group Volunteer Award:

National/West Region Winner
East Region Winner
Central Region Winner

Canon City HS Environmental, Colorado
Hinds County Earth Team - Mississippi
Tri-Basin Ag Water Mgmt Network –
Nebraska

NRCS Employee Earth Team Award:

National/West Region Winner
East Region Winner
Central Regional Winner

Lana Pearson, Colorado
David Hancock, Virginia
Kelly Shrable, Arkansas

Volunteer Coordinator Award:

National/Central Region Winner
East Region Winner
West Region Winner

Jan Klaus, Kansas
Ondine Rudolph, Mississippi
Julie Irinco, California

Ohio Earth Team Volunteer Takes an F5 Challenge-- Becomes National FFA Winner

By Christina Coulon, Ohio NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

Ohio has a very special Earth Team volunteer. A senior in high school, she volunteered to coordinate the Feds Feed Families Food Drive in the Wapakoneta NRCS Field Office. She picked up and donated items weekly and delivered them to a local food bank.

Field office staff set a goal of collecting 1000 lbs. of food. This young lady challenged herself to provide more pounds of fresh produce from her garden than the office total.

In mid-August both the office and the Earth Team volunteer met their goals.

This incredible Earth Team volunteer, student, FFA member, and daughter of one of our extraordinary NRCSers is Mallory McDevitt.



Mallory McDevitt in her vegetable garden and (inset) holding her national FFA award plaques.

Mallory's accomplishment is an inspiration and it inspired the membership of FFA as well. On October 21, 2011, Mallory McDevitt was selected as the National FFA Proficiency Award Winner in Vegetable Production.

Want to know more? Listen to Mallory McDevitt explain her operation in a radio interview. Use your smart phone to read this QR Code or type this URL into your web browser: <http://ocj.com/ffa/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Mallory-McDevitt.mp3>.



Smart phone QR Code

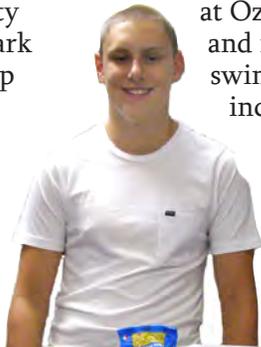
Earth Team Volunteer Helps with USDA Food Drive

Submitted by Mary Giles, Christian County USDA Service Center, Ozark, Missouri

Missouri Earth Team Volunteer Matt Hefner assisted with the USDA Feds Feed Families Food Drive at the Christian County USDA Service Center in Ozark this past summer. Matt set up collection boxes and then weighed, reported, and transported the food which was contributed by USDA Service Center employees to the "Least of These

Food Pantry" in Nixa. Matt collected 256 lbs. of food and 14 lbs. of produce. He is a junior at Ozark High School and is a competitive swimmer. His aspirations include science and/or marketing disciplines following graduation.

Matt is the son of Steve Hefner, water quality conservationist.



Family Member Serves as Earth Team Volunteer

by Brenda Ling, Wyoming State Volunteer Coordinator



NRCS Purchasing Agent Craig Bastian and his wife Shannon Bastian, an Earth Team Volunteer, measure and record the density of native cottonwood and invasive Russian Olive trees near Casper, Wyo. They were participating in a Healthy Forest Project held in mid-September which included conducting a baseline inventory of the invasive plants before removing them and replacing them with native plants. The Bastians were joined by eight others from the NRCS family.

Earth Team Volunteers Find Success in Puerto Rico

Submitted by Hilton Miro, Puerto Rico State Volunteer Coordinator

Editor's note: Each year Caribbean Basin NRCS hosts Earth Team student/volunteers. In 2011, six students worked the summer in order to complete bachelor's degree requirements from the University of Puerto Rico, Faculty of Agricultural Science. State Volunteer Coordinator Hilton Miro asked each volunteer to tell Earth Team Connection readers about their experience. Here are their stories:

Jose J. Cabrera was born in the municipality of Ponce in July 1987 and currently lives in Juana Diaz. He began his college career in 2005. His interest in agriculture and horticulture began when he started doing landscape work for private households in his neighborhood. This experience sparked an interest in studying for a bachelor's degree in agronomy with a minor in horticulture and working in the conservation field.



Jose J. Cabrera

Over the summer, he volunteered 180 hours at the Juana Diaz Field Office. He worked with agency personnel providing direct assistance to land users by designing and applying conservation practices which included contour farming, farm delineation and infiltration ditches. He also used GPS for establishing boundaries and engineering points and instruments for conducting surveys and

topographic evaluations.

Cabrera says he wants to get a job where he can develop his initiative and leadership in helping farmers improve agricultural production while protecting the environment.

Raquel Sanchez Gonzalez is a 23-year-old native of Lares, P.R. She is studying agronomy and expects to graduate in May 2012 with a bachelor's degree in agricultural sciences and a certification in agricultural education. She expects to enter graduate school and earn a master's degree in agriculture.

Sanchez Gonzalez spent six weeks as an NRCS volunteer in the San Sebastian Field Office. She said, "I am working in my summer practice with the agency to complete requirements for my bachelor degree. Also, I'm learning conservation practices that will help farmers better protect our natural resources for a better management of the farm.



Raquel Sanchez Gonzalez

"This is a great experience for me. Not only am I gaining professional experience, but I am getting a better understanding of the part I can play in conserving natural resources as I help others."

Braulio González Rodríguez from Caguas, P. R., is working toward a bachelor's degree in agronomy and soil science. He will graduate in December 2011.

He writes, "This summer was my first experience working for NRCS as a volunteer in the Caguas Field Office.

"During my time with NRCS I learned many different management practices in order to conserve natural resources. All the knowledge that I have gained from this experience will help me in my future career. When I am not working, I enjoy participating in sports and also like to spend time with my family and friends."



Braulio González Rodríguez

González Rodríguez says he enjoyed his time with NRCS and his experience has motivated him to continue his graduate studies.

Miguel Rexach-Martinez is an undergraduate student from the town of San German, P.R. He is completing a degree in agricultural sciences with a major on mechanical-agriculture technology.



Miguel Rexach

"As an Earth Team volunteer in the Mayaguez Field Office, I have seen and learned much about conservation practices and the different ways they can be applied to help the land," said Rexach. "I put into practice concepts learned in class and also in the field. Thanks to these three weeks of experience, I improved my knowledge in areas I never worked before."

Rexach says he will return to school focusing on agronomics and engineering. His goal is to join NRCS as a soil conservationist and apply *(Story continues on the next page.)*

his technical engineering knowledge helping improve agriculture and the land.

Leonardo D. Marrero Marrero was born in Bayamon, P. R. He is 21 years old and currently resides in Corozal.



Leonardo D. Marrero Marrero

He said, "I am in my fourth year of undergraduate studies in agronomy with a concentration in soil science. I will graduate in May 2012 and I plan to continue working and doing graduate studies."

"From childhood I always drew things that have to do with the environment and nature; plants and animals. I'm an Earth Team Volunteer in the NRCS field office that is in my hometown, Corozal. I've been working as a volunteer for five weeks helping the agency."

As an Earth Team volunteer, Marrero Marrero says he is applying the knowledge he acquired in college and he is also learning new and better ways to apply it to conserve the environment and help others. "I've been involved in the conservation planning process to assist farmers with their erosion control and water quality concerns. The Corozal Field Office

NRCS family taught me that we can be very efficient if we use our knowledge in helping our people and our planet Earth," he said.

Jorge L. De Jesus Rosado is majoring in technical mechanic agriculture and will graduate soon. He said, "One of the requirements to complete my bachelor's degree is to complete a summer practice. I'm doing this as an Earth Team volunteer with NRCS at the Utuado Field Office. I am working at least 30 hours a week for seven weeks as part of this summer practice. This experience will help me grow professionally and personally."

"I had been exposed to outdoor work where I learned to become familiar with many of the conservation programs and practices that NRCS



Jorge L. De Jesus Rosado

provides. I have been involved with conservation maps, reading and analyzing conservation documents as well as working with customers."

The Utuado Field Office gave De Jesus Rosado the opportunity to work with many NRCS conservation tools including the transit, tripod, Trimble, measuring wheel, rod and with computer programs like ArcGIS, AutoCAD and Toolkit.

De Jesus Rosado says he wants to graduate, get a job where he can apply his conservation skills and then pursue a master's degree.

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

The deadline for submission is February 13, 2012. Please send your stories, tidbits, photos and photo captions to: dick.tremain@ia.usda.gov.

Volunteers: An Invaluable Tool for Getting the Job Done

By Carol Donzella, Connecticut State Volunteer Coordinator

Earth Team Volunteer Bob Purcell recently worked with the Norwich Field Office staff to complete survey points for a Lebanon dairy farm project. On one of July's hottest and muggiest days, Purcell worked to gather cross-section elevations for the design of a grazing system animal walkway.

NRCS Soil Conservationist Tim Pindell, the planner for the project,

marveled that Purcell kept going even though his boots and pants got wet and muddy, and he had rubbed his legs in a patch of "seven-minute itch."

Purcell was instrumental in helping Pindell complete the design-survey, and get the client ready to begin construction. This shows that the Earth Team Volunteer Program is a great way to complete the work on time.



Bob Purcell

Michigan Volunteer Works to Gain Experience

by Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist

Thursdays are special days in the Mount Pleasant, Mich., field office. That's the day of the week Earth Team Volunteer Karen Harrington joins District Conservationist Tim LeQuier and Soil Conservation Technician Conrad Hayes in the central Michigan NRCS office. Together, with Isabella Conservation District Administrator Crystal Beutler, they work with clients addressing resource concerns on their land.

"That's the day of the week, rain or shine or snow storm, Karen is here," said LeQuier. "She does clerical work, file management, processing payments and ProTracts reports for us. She is very involved in learning the work of our agency including taking AgLearn courses and participating in on-the-job construction site training. Karen makes us more productive and allows our limited staff to spend more time in the field working directly with customers."

Harrington originally learned about NRCS and the Mount Pleasant Field Office nearly two years ago as a job applicant. She applied for a farm bill assistant position that was awarded to another person because, she was told, they had more relevant experience. Harrington asked LeQuier how she could get work experience with NRCS and he suggested she become an Earth Team



Earth Team Volunteer Karen Harrington works with District Conservationist Tim LeQuier in Mount Pleasant, Mich.

Volunteer.

"I am grateful for my Earth Team Volunteer experience. It is making me more competitive for a federal job and I'm going to keep doing this as long as I can," said Harrington.

Earth Team Volunteer Illustrates Iowa NRCS Poster

Submitted by Shelly Grimmus, Iowa State Volunteer Coordinator

Using his talents as a young graphic artist, Logan Phillips - a senior at Prairie City-Monroe High School - produced an illustration of a windbreak protecting hog confinements at the request of the Iowa NRCS Public Affairs Staff.

Phillips completed the project as an Earth Team Volunteer. He is the son of Iowa NRCS GIS Specialist Jim Phillips.

"We had a request from the field for an image showing a windbreak surrounding confinement buildings," said Jason Johnson, public affairs specialist. "We didn't have any great pictures of this on-hand, so I thought an illustration would work well in this case."

Johnson talks with Jim Phillips at lunch daily, and knew of Logan's talents from conversations. "Jim told me about some of the neat things Logan has produced, and I figured this would be pretty simple for him," said Johnson. "He did a really nice job. We have another project or two in mind for him."

Jim Phillips said he is a proud father. "Most of the drawings Logan does are different than this one," he said, "so it is pretty neat to see what he can do when asked to do something conservation-oriented."



Logan Phillips, an Iowa high school senior and Earth Team Volunteer, shows off the illustration he produced for Iowa NRCS.

District Conservationist Discovers the Value of Volunteers

By George Johnson, District Conservationist, DeLand, Florida

Editor's note: Two years ago District Conservationist George Johnson of DeLand, Fla., received an unexpected message. Here is the result:

In the fall of 2009 I received an email from a Stetson University student inquiring about internships. She had found the Volusia SWCD website while searching for "sustainable agriculture." Naturally, I assumed she was looking for a paid summer position so I answered her by giving her the information on us and that program. When I spoke with her I found she was thinking of something else, altogether.

At Stetson, students can get credit for a college course for completing 150 hours of volunteer work at a job approved by their advisor. She asked if anything like that was available. Of course, I was clueless and called my supervisor who said, "Why not? Sign her up for the Earth Team." I called her and told her I had a position available. I then called Darryl Williams, our Florida state volunteer coordinator, who sent me a whole list of Earth Team job descriptions including one for the "Hugh Hammond Bennett Earth Team Intern." Who knew there was such a thing? As it turns out I was about to get the first of three outstanding young people to fill that position.

I started by explaining to the students who we are and what we do. As much as it pained me, I introduced them to the Planning Procedures Handbook which they could look over as much as they wanted, but I wanted them to learn what we do in a more meaningful, active, productive way. That meant working with client conservation plan folders.

In the office we had many client conservation plans that needed to be copied and given to the client. I

dreaded the idea of spending countless hours photocopying, hole punching and assembling the customer's six-part copy of the plan. I gave the students a folder and a checklist and I encouraged them to take a lot of time, ask a lot of questions, read and try to understand the purpose of each piece of paper in that plan. By the time they left us, they knew the difference between an ECS-7 and the dreaded CPA-52 and actually understood the reason for each. I was able to learn from the student volunteers and made some logical changes to the office. Eventually the students got faster and more efficient and I got caught up on getting plans out to the customers. My only regret is, by the time this happens, they have to move on!

Mixed in with office work, it is very important to get them in the field as often as possible. Just riding along, meeting the farmers and walking the land is valuable for them. They can hold a survey rod, measure a fence or a pipeline and take pictures. You may even have them prepare drawings or job sheets after they catch on.

Students have to make weekly reports to their advisors so they are attentive, eager and responsible.

I have learned that other colleges and universities have similar programs and I encourage other field offices to pursue this valuable resource. I have a good relationship with the environmental science advisor and he is on the lookout for qualified future candidates. Try to contact the head of the university departments of agriculture, environmental sciences, biology, geography, or other related disciplines. Tell them you have "open positions" and prepare for a great experience.

We all know the monetary value associated with volunteer hours. This is a great way to recruit future employees and create a positive image for NRCS in the community. Seeing these young people work is a rewarding experience and you may even be able to get caught up with your work, at least for a little bit of time!



George Johnson

Volunteer Inducted into Hall of Fame

by Steve Tullar, Soil Conservationist, Monticello, Florida

A long-time Earth Team Volunteer and Florida farmer recently received national recognition from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) at their southeast regional meeting in Orange Beach, Ala. Dorothy Lewis, of Aucilla, was inducted into the NACD's Conservation Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame recognizes individuals



Dorothy Lewis

who have made significant contributions to the conservation movement.

Lewis has served as a board member of the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District since 1988. She is the district's secretary/treasurer and volunteers additional hours helping district staff serve their customers as a member of the Earth Team.

Virginia Volunteers Participate in a Unique Training Effort

Submitted by Marcie Cox, Virginia State Volunteer Coordinator

District Conservationist Tom Smith combined conservation with education by installing a new watering system in Smyth County Virginia. The client, Laughing Waters Farm, asked NRCS if it was possible to capture spring water, pipe it to a nearby cattle watering trough and let the overflow drain into an existing pond to enhance wildlife habitat. Smith saw the idea as doable. He also viewed it both as an opportunity to give the client a low cost improvement to their farm and as an opportunity to give hands-on training to NRCS and SWCD employees and NRCS interns during the system's installation.

Smith gathered a group of Earth Team Volunteers and employees June 13 and 14 to put the system in place. The project required installing a spring development, one tire trough, 550 feet of PVC pipe and 300 feet of exclusion fence around the spring to keep out cattle.

One of the people helping Smith on the installation project was Eleanor Goodrich, the landowner's daughter and an NRCS summer

intern. Smith asked Goodrich, a student at the College of William & Mary, to film the work and produce an instructional video to train new employees and contractors on these types of conservation practices. Goodrich served as videographer and editor for the training video. Jeana Waddle, administrative secretary for the Evergreen Soil and Water Conservation District, served as narrator.

One of the participants, Gifty Torkornoo, a Business Management Leadership Program (BMLP) trainee, said, "The project was a huge success. I learned a lot about this application and I gained insights into

the planning and labor involved in developing a spring fed watering system."



The Laughing Waters crew poses after completing a cattle water/wildlife enhancement project on a Virginia farm. Left to Right are: (front kneeling) Gregory Graham, Alfred Goodrich, Meg Short, (middle row) Tom Smith, Gifty Torkornoo, Antoinette Goodrich, Jeana Waddle, Eleanor Goodrich, Lance Yates, (back row) Kevin Cornett, Lucia Kossler, Emerson Kirby, Hunter Reedy, and Matt Carroll.

Earth Team Volunteer Battles Cancer by Serving Others

by Carol Vallee Crouch, Ph.D., District Conservationist, Purcell, Oklahoma

Mark Ward is an Earth Team Volunteer in the NRCS field office located in Norman, Okla. Ward is also a cancer survivor. For the last year he has been battling four cancerous brain tumors using intensive chemotherapy and radiation treatments to fight back.

After aggressive cancer treatment Ward found himself with the challenge of working daily on repetitive activities designed to assist him in improving his motor skills and short term memory. Ward decided that he wanted to do something that would not only sharpen his motor skills and improve his memory, but would

also be a benefit to others. For the last month Ward has been traveling twice a week to his local NRCS office to assemble NRCS program information packets for upcoming outreach events.

District Conservationist Carol Crouch says NRCS and the Cleveland County Conservation District staff are humbled by Ward's commitment and contribution as an Earth Team Volunteer. Crouch adds Ward's fight to recover from illness by serving others has been both inspiring and therapeutic to staff. It deserves recognition, Crouch says.



Earth Team Volunteer Mark Ward

Earth Team Assists with Annual “Walk In The Woods”

By Pam Stasa, District Manager, Kingman Service Center, Kansas

On September 29 and 30 Earth Team Volunteers and program partners assisted with presentations and served as group leaders at the Riggs Arboretum in Waterloo, Kan. They helped host the 15th annual “Walk in the Woods” for 282 5th graders and 21 teachers and adults from 10 area schools.

Seven stations were set up for the students to “walk” through. The educational stations included: Wildlife in the Woods, Stream/River Demonstration, Forest Benefits, Sawmill Demonstration, Tree Growth, and a Tour of the Arboretum. After the stations and tour were completed, the groups concluded with a litter free lunch in the woods.

The “Walk in the Woods” program is part of a national campaign, coordinated by the Society of American Foresters, designed to educate students and teachers on the benefits of forests and forest management.

The program is a cooperative project sponsored, in part, by the Kingman County NRCS and Conservation District office.



Photo by Amber Helm

Earth Team Volunteer John Riggs leads a group of elementary students in an annual “Walk in the Woods” educational event near Waterloo., Kan.

Earth Team Volunteer Steps Up to Educate Outdoor Enthusiasts

Submitted by Dimple Geisling, Tennessee State Volunteer Coordinator



Earth Team Volunteer Camille Hunter (left) and biologist Chris Hunter staff a wetlands and wildlife booth at the Land and Wildlife Expo in Nashville.

In late spring 2011, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) and NRCS were asked to begin work setting up different booths for the mid-August Land and Wildlife Expo at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel in Nashville. Billed as a “destination event” for outdoor enthusiasts and landowners that want to enhance the habitat on their properties, TWRA and NRCS planning staff soon realized they needed additional help.

Chris Hunter, a TWRA wetlands biologist, was given the task of setting up the wetlands and wildlife booth. Hunter needed help so he asked his wife, Camille, to help.

She agreed and Earth Team Volunteer Camille Hunter assisted in booth set up and talking to landowners about conservation issues.

Camille said she enjoyed talking with landowners. She is pursuing her master’s degree in education and enjoyed using her teaching skills working at the booth.

Tennessee officials say the NRCS and TWRA portion of the Land and Wildlife Expo took place without any major issues. They credit this success to effective partnerships and the work of Earth Team Volunteers like Camille.

Tennessee Office Welcomes Wounded Warriors

By Dick Tremain, Public Affairs Specialist

District Conservationist Kevin Hart of Clarksville, Tenn., welcomes to his office the help of a very unique set of Earth Team Volunteers; wounded warriors.



Earth Team Volunteer Sgt. Patrick Bower, Soil Conservationist Janet Coleman and District Conservationist Kevin Hart inspect a streambank protection jetty.

They are U.S. Army soldiers injured while serving our nation and they are using volunteer service at the Clarksville NRCS Field Office to help them recover.

Clarksville is only eight miles from Fort Campbell, Ky., a large Army base which straddles the Kentucky and Tennessee border. Fort Campbell is the home of the 101st Airborne Division, Special Forces units, a combat support hospital and sizeable medical and dental facilities.

Fort Campbell soldiers have been seeing a lot of combat. That means there are combat wounded at the fort needing treatment and time to heal.

“It is great to get volunteer help from our Army friends and help them recover enough to return to their regular military jobs,” said Hart. “The Earth Team program is perfect for many. It gives our wounded warriors an opportunity to be productive and

contribute during their recovery. We can accommodate their physical limitations and they have the flexibility to go to medical appointments when needed.

“One warrior told me that his time spent volunteering was as beneficial to his emotional healing as it was to his physical healing.”

Hart says they tailor the Earth Team jobs to the participants’ preferences and abilities. “Soldiers get to learn new skills, try out the job of a conservationist and even gain a civilian work reference,” he said. “I am very grateful for their help.”

The wounded warrior liaison at Ft. Campbell works with Hart and his staff to place recovering soldiers as Earth Team Volunteers.

Hart says the skills they gain as Earth Team Volunteers are portable and can be used anywhere in the nation. “I’m grateful for their service to our nation as soldiers and I applaud their help to us as Earth Team Volunteers,” he said, “I am very proud of the fact that when these soldiers leave us and return to active duty or civilian life, they leave with a healed body, new skills, and pride knowing they have helped us help the land.”



The Purple Heart Medal is awarded to all combat wounded.

Volunteer Gains Work Experience with Earth Team

by Kristen Lemoine, Louisiana State Volunteer Coordinator, and John Pitre, Wildlife Biologist

Senior Lance Ardoin is majoring in natural resources conservation and management at McNeese State University in Louisiana. He is also an Earth Team Volunteer who enjoys doing practical field work with NRCS in his field of study. For the second summer in a row, Ardoin has assisted NRCS staff with Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) field data collection in the hot Louisiana sun learning more about the career path he has chosen.

By serving as an Earth Team Volunteer, Ardoin says he has gained admiration for this type of field work. “I know this is where my passion lies,” he said. “This is what I want to do the rest of my life. I want to be part of Louisiana’s natural resources conservation effort!”



Earth Team Volunteer Lance Ardoin shares a laugh with State Range Conservationist Johanna Pate in a Louisiana coastal marsh this past summer. Ardoin volunteers with NRCS to work with natural resource professionals and gain field experience.

Earth Team Encourages Student Success in New Jersey

by Laura Coover, New Jersey State Volunteer Coordinator

This past summer and fall of 2011, New Jersey NRCS has been lucky enough to have quite a few dedicated college students and recent university graduates join the Earth Team.

We hosted three young women, Shalaunda Gourdine, Mildred Lopez and Heather Kutassy, through a New Jersey City University (NJCU) student internship program. Their original commitment was eight weeks, but each kept volunteering with us. They assisted four offices with fieldwork ranging from inventory and evaluation to conducting engineering surveys and grassland habitat research.

NRCS Biologist Evan Madlinger and Human Resources Manager Mayra Morales worked with the students. "They were a great group," said Madlinger. "I hope they consider working for NRCS in the future."

Morales encouraged the Earth Team Volunteers by conducting a USAJOBS.gov workshop for the volunteers. She went over the website, reviewed position

qualifications and discussed the application process. "I believe we were very successful in providing the volunteers the tools they need to pursue employment within NRCS," Morales said.

Rounding out the class were four additional college students from all over New Jersey, who volunteered in the Vineland field office, N.J. state office, and the Cape May Plant Materials Center. They were Paige McMahon, Liz O'Rourke, Amanda Hannen, and Julie Guerrara. They assisted NRCS staff in a wide variety of ways including working on field surveys, conservation planning, Geographic Information System (GIS) data layer organization, public outreach and plant research.

Intern Shalaunda Gourdine is very happy with her Earth Team Volunteer experience. She said,



Photo by Bea Sabouathone

Earth Team Volunteer Heather Kutassy makes new friends while measuring a fence.

"The amount of knowledge that I have gained through NRCS is unprecedented. I realized that working in the field and helping people are two things that I want to do. I know now NRCS lives by its motto: Helping People Help the Land."

Florida Starts a 10K Campaign—10,000 Volunteer Hours in 2012

Submitted by Darryl Williams, Florida State Volunteer Coordinator



State Conservationist Carlos Suarez (center) signs a letter to all Florida employees challenging them to improve Earth Team participation in the state. Looking on are State Volunteer Coordinator Darryl Williams, Chief Bobby Johns Bearheart, Jason Bird, Florida's Native American special emphasis program manager and Robert Johns Cedar Bear. Chief Bobby Johns Bearheart and Robert Johns Cedar Bear are both Earth Team Volunteers.

In September, State Conservationist Carlos Suarez wrote to each NRCS employee in Florida with a challenge. He asked his staff to have 100 percent Earth Team office participation and to increase the number of volunteer hours from 7,028 to 10,000 in FY 2012.

Suarez said in his letter, "I am very grateful for the help Earth Team Volunteers gave our state in 2011, but I know we can do better in 2012." He encouraged offices to conduct needs assessments and develop lists of tasks volunteers can complete. Once that's done, he says it will be much easier to recruit specific volunteers to fill those assignments.

Suarez said he will work with Darryl Williams, Florida state volunteer coordinator, and use the national volunteer tracking system to track NRCS office progress with Earth Team Volunteers to help achieve both goals.