

Message from the State Conservationist

By *James E. Tillman, Sr. State Conservationist*

It's always a pleasure to use this newsletter as another opportunity to openly communicate with you about all the exciting things that are taking place within NRCS. Again, this year I have had the opportunity to travel throughout the state of Georgia, from one end to the other. And there is not a day that goes by that I am not reminded of the great work that each of you do. Whether you work in the Decatur, Camden, Burke, Hart, or Walker field offices, I want you to know that your diligent efforts everyday does not go unnoticed. Your actions each day are so important to NRCS both locally and on the national level. I constantly get



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District Conservationist Honored

FOCUS ON THE FIELD

District Conservationist Lewis Fokes was honored at the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors annual meeting in Atlanta. He was given the Superior Professional Support to Conservation Districts Award for his work with the Pine Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District.

Fokes provides technical support on conservation projects undertaken by the Pine Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District, which includes Chattahoochee, Harris, Marion, Muscogee and Talbot counties. Over the past 34 years he has had many achievements with watershed programs in and around his district, as well as working closely with the City of Columbus.

He has participated in the design and completion of two pond program contracts and played an active role in the development of the Manual for Better Back Roads Project. He has also



Photo by Chris Groskreutz, Acting State Public Affairs Specialist, Athens.

Lewis Fokes holding his Superior Professional Support to Conservation Districts Award at the GACDS Awards Dinner in February.

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telephone calls or cards from farmers who just want to thank NRCS for the work each of you do each day.

They highlight that extra follow-up telephone call that you made to them or just the fact that you took the time to be sure you met their expectations. It is you that have reminded me that NRCS is not just a name it's the people, it's YOU!

I recall in the Fall 2011 Issue of the Conservation Connection, I briefly made a comment on how NRCS was taking the necessary steps nationally and redesigning its business processes, and tools to reduce the administrative burden on our field, administrative and technical staff as a means to reduce workload pressures. Well now I am excited to say that this process is well underway and the completion of this process is well within view. Earlier this year, Acting Chief, Jason Weller, laid the ground work for this critical effort by laying out three key elements of this plan. They were:

- Stabilize current administrative operations. Identify and implement stop-gap solutions for states and Centers that need support to carry out their administrative activities.
- Standardize how administrative activities are done across NRCS. Establish a single, consistent set of standards to guide the work and a common set of tools to support the work.
- Structure, staff and deliver administrative services in a new way. Create nationwide teams to deliver services by business process (for example, Fleet Management Services). These teams will be current administrative staff in state offices, Centers, and NHQ who will

work together virtually to deliver services to customers.

NRCS has already established an Associate Chief for Operations position. "This position recognizes the importance of administrative functions in supporting our mission and provides a single-point of accountability over all our business operations," said Weller. It is clear to me that NRCS is well on its way to addressing this important issue that will truly strengthen NRCS' administrative functions and at the end of the day get more conservation on the ground and relieve many of the workload pressures by getting more staff out in the field.

NRCS is always looking to improve the products and services it provides, as a result NRCS is looking at improving the delivery of its Public Affairs services, by initially implementing a Public Affairs Pilot Program in three regions of the nation on the sharing of Public Affairs staff and services across state lines on similar projects and tasks.

This effort could quickly reduce many duplicative efforts by states as well as create needed consistency across state lines and within the Agency. Keep your eyes open for future updates.

In recent months we have seen a change in our web site to a more modern looking active web site. We now use a notification system called GovDelivery where the media and public can sign up for the topic of their choice. Additionally, we now use social media items such as USDA Connect, Twitter and YouTube. Wow!

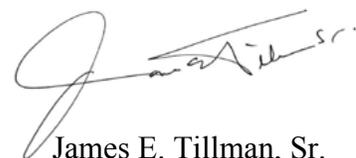
I remember when the field office got its first computer and

now we have Twitter. I encourage all of you to stay engaged and continue to take advantage of all the new technology that the agency has available to help move conservation forward.

We have had more farm bill participation this year than ever before. We received over 5,800 applications this year in our Environmental Quality Incentive Program alone. I remember a few years ago we were getting around 2,800 applications and I was amazed with that.

Well now we are well on our way to obligate more than 60 million dollars in farm bill funds alone this year. This is tremendous! I say thanks to all of you and especially to all the Conservation Technicians all cross Georgia that have played a key role in helping to stabilize NRCS local relationships with its customers in all 159 counties. You have helped to keep this agency strong and have been critical to our field office Teams.

While the constant wheel of change will keep on rolling, one thing that will not change is our commitment to get conservation on the ground. Whether it's through an initiative like Working Lands for Wildlife or StrikeForce, these new efforts all complement our traditional programs and historic mission of "Helping People Help the Land." I appreciate everyone's ability to adapt and respond positively to these challenges. Keep up the good work and "Thank You"!



James E. Tillman, Sr.
Georgia State Conservationist

Meeting Held to Encourage Economic Growth and Opportunity

Georgia's StrikeForce Team held an informational meeting May 23, at Fort Valley State University to inform the public of what has been accomplished in Georgia since the StrikeForce Initiative began. Information included number of outreach events, total USDA obligations, and economic contributions that resulted from these efforts. They also announced what each agency was focusing on under future StrikeForce efforts.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack launched the StrikeForce Initiative in 2010 to increase investment in priority, poverty-stricken rural communities through technical assistance and other resources.

USDA's top leadership in Georgia pledges to champion StrikeForce efforts through targeted partnerships with local and state governments and community organizations on projects that promote economic development, job creation and food security.

About 31 various agencies, elected official's offices, Community Based Organizations (CBO), and private firms were represented. Over 85 individuals attended overall. The meeting also featured a discussion from the leadership panel that included a question and answer session followed by a presentation from the National Appeals Division (NAD).

"The success of new efforts like the StrikeForce Initiative is dependent on reliable information. NASS's mission as a USDA partner is the source for this



Photo by Ron Morton, Assistant State Public Affairs Specialist, Athens.

The panelists are from left to right, Southern Regional Director Doug Kleweno, National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS); Assistant Vice President for Land Grant Affairs (Interim) and Extension Administrator Dr. Mark Latimore, Fort Valley State University; State Director Quinton Robinson, USDA-Rural Development (RD); Southeast Regional Administrator Don Arnette, USDA-Food and Nutrition Service (FNS); Executive Director Jerome Tucker, Southeast Ag Coalition (Community Based Organization (CBO) partner); Public Affairs and Outreach Coordinator Neal Leonard, USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA); Executive Director, Naomi Davis, Digging Roots Educational Farm, a CBO partner); Assistant State Conservationist for Programs Aquanda Jones, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

reliable and timely rural and agricultural data," said Douglas Kleweno, Southern Regional Director, USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service.

"The Food and Nutrition Service will continue to support StrikeForce goals of improving access to, and awareness of, nutrition assistance programs – such as the Summer Food Service Program, the National School Breakfast Program, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefit redemptions at farmers markets -- for eligible recipients and participating farmers markets by working with Georgia state agencies and our Georgia StrikeForce partners," said Donald Arnette, Southeast Regional Administrator, Food and Nutrition

Service.

"The Natural Resources Conservation Service is committed to expanded outreach, technical and financial services to farmers and ranchers all around Georgia. We are especially encouraged to see an increase of 263 percent in the total number of applications in our most requested program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in the StrikeForce region. The Georgia StrikeForce team has worked very hard over the last couple years to identify better ways to inform the public about USDA programs as well as how USDA staff can better assist our customers in qualifying and applying for USDA assistance. As the Chairman of the Food and Agricultural Council that oversees

Revitalization of Beautiful Northwest Georgia

By Melissa Mooneyham, Earth Team Volunteer, Dalton

The largest and most costly single-system tornado outbreak ever recorded, killing a total of 348 people across the United States, came barreling through Northwest Georgia on April 27, 2011. The storm was predicted to be one of the nation's most fierce tornado outbreaks with recorded winds of 175 miles per hour in Catoosa County. In an article written by

“This kind of moderate risk [forecast] doesn't show up that much for us three days in advance like this” said Derek Eisentrout, hydrometeorologist technician for the National Weather Service in Morristown, Tennessee. The day after the storm, residents of Catoosa, Dade, and Walker County, along with many other counties across the south, woke up to devastation and destruction beyond belief.

On Friday April 29, 2011, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack made the announcement that USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has \$6 million in Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program aid available for disaster recovery projects in ten states affected by the tornado outbreaks and floods.

Immediately after the April storms, NRCS employees from the Lafayette and Dalton field offices assessed the damage. Preparations were made to survey and record the widespread damage in their respective counties.

GPS points, pictures, and notes were taken in order to prepare proper documentation for the Damage Survey Reports (DSR) that would follow - meanwhile, five local units of government, submitted letters of



South Chickamauga Creek near the City of Ringgold - Before



South Chickamauga Creek near the City of Ringgold - After



Holcomb Road site near the City of Ringgold - Before



Holcomb Road site near the City of Ringgold - After

staff-writer Pam Sohn for the Chattanooga Times Free Press on April 26, 2011 Pam writes, “Greg Carbin, warning meteorologist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said there's never been a “high risk” forecast that came three days out.

request for assistance to the NRCS.

Local sponsors included Catoosa County, City of Ringgold, City of Rossville, Walker and Dade County.

Responsibilities of the local sponsors included securing easements on potential worksites, securing necessary local, state, and federal permits, furnishing local cost share, and completing installation of work through local workers or contractors.

A total of 55 sites were investigated after the storm of which 37 were determined to be eligible.

After the DSR's were complete, a cost estimate along with a cost benefit analysis was generated for each of the eligible sites. If the eligible site resulted in a net benefit, it was included in the request for funds to be addressed.



Rock Creek in Walker County - Before

On Tuesday June 21st Catoosa County hosted an EWP information exchange to discuss damage site cleanup and review the responsibilities of the sponsors and contractors. Local sponsors, contractors, and various city,

county, and federal officials attended the meeting.

Request for comments were sent to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the activities proposed in the cleanup process.

Upon approval of funds, known damage sites were provided to contractors for bidding purposes. Several of the sponsors would use local employees and equipment to accomplish the work.



Rock Creek in Walker County - After

Preserving stream bank integrity, ensuring the safety of threatened and endangered species, and protecting infrastructure were on the forefront of the minds of NRCS employees and all of those involved in the cleanup efforts.

	Catoosa County	Dade County	Walker County	City of Rossville	City of Ringgold
Clearing and Obstruction(LF)	2,912	2,653	2,782	550	9,777
Seeding/Sprigging/Mulching(AC)	6.2	1.8	2	0.1	9
Clearing and Grubbing(AC)	4.8	0	0.2	0	13
Infrastructure Protected	\$232,942	\$462,800	\$232,869	\$240,000	\$767,131
EWP Cost Share	\$103,511	\$35,780	\$62,027	\$11,898	\$223,087
Net Benefit	\$129,431	\$427,020	\$170,842	\$228,102	\$544,044

Chief McCormick Receives NRCS Award

By Debbie Henry, Soil Conservation Technician, Colquitt

Chief Marian McCormick, Principal Chief of the Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe, was recently presented with a certificate of appreciation by State Conservationist James E. Tillman, Sr. McCormick was awarded a certificate of appreciation for serving as Georgia's Elder Representative on the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Southeast American Indian Workgroup. Tillman thanked McCormick for her



James E. Tillman Sr., presents Chief Marian McCormick of the Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe in Georgia with the award.

Outreach

Coast Fest

Coast Fest 2012 was held Oct. 6, 2012 at the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Regional Headquarters in Brunswick, near the beautiful Sidney Lanier Bridge. It was a successful day that drew over 8,000 visitors to the festival.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has participated in this event for the past ten years. District Supervisors from the Satilla and Coastal Districts volunteered their time at the NRCS booth to speak with visitors and hand out conservation educational materials.

Volunteers from the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission also were present. One hundred multi-media packets were handed out to teachers, so students will learn about soil, water and other natural resources in



Photo by Barry Deas, Conservation Assistant, Waycross.

Glynn County District Supervisor Ann Keen (left) and her granddaughter Ashley Mikell (right), environmental health inspector for Glynn County, who has participated in 4H for years, handing out educational materials at the NRCS booth.

their classrooms and posters were a popular request also. Amid the hourly canon blasts were Native American dance demonstrations, a bald eagle, various snakes, a pollinator exhibit of an entire hive of bees and live examples of

invasive species found in our waterways.

Participants not only included government agencies and universities, but elementary school age musicians and the Girl Scouts of America were contributors to the success of the day.

Articles for the next Conservation

Connection are due by August 21.

*Please e-mail them to
ron.morton@ga.usda.gov.*

*For photos please use the
SharePoint site under*

*[https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga/Photo%20Contest/Forms/
AllItems.aspx](https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga/Photo%20Contest/Forms/AllItems.aspx)*

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the StrikeForce Initiative in Georgia, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist, James Tillman is excited to see that we are continuing to eliminate barriers in these persistent poverty regions,” said USDA- NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, Aquanda Jones.

USDA- Rural Development (RD) State Director Quinton Robinson stated that “Building blocks for sustainable economic growth can be achieved through Rural Development’s Community Programs, Business, Cooperative Programs, and Housing Programs. Some current priority areas this year for RD are renewable energy and bio-refinery projects, rural tourism, food hubs, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. These areas and RD’s programs can go a long way in alleviating unemployment and poverty.”

Some of the recent successes in the StrikeForce region include:

* USDA is helping Second

Harvest Food Bank of South Georgia expand its mission to gather and share quality food and nurture partnerships that will end hunger through the use of a new regional distribution center.

* StrikeForce is helping farmers and ranchers conserve natural resources on their land through technical and financial assistance. Poultry farmer Adam Nguyen now has a better way to store and manage poultry litter on his operation in Arlington (Baker County), Georgia. Fellow farmer, Howard James, now has a better way of irrigating his muscadine vineyards after obtaining assistance to install a drip-irrigation system on his Byromville (Dooly County) farm.

* In Rayle (Wilkes County), StrikeForce has restored four households with running water after the area’s previous year’s drought caused wells to run dry.

* USDA is also collaborating with Fort Valley State University to develop a cooperative business structure in the Georgia goat industry. Georgia-based Gotcha

Goat was able to develop their business through the school’s Meat Technology Center and their product is now on the shelves of grocery stores around Atlanta.

USDA-Farm Service Agency’s (FSA) Acting State Director David Laster added “Reaching out in an intentional and collaborative way, USDA and its partnering community based organizations have impacted Georgia’s 60 StrikeForce counties in a very positive way. The StrikeForce Initiative has significantly raised the awareness and availability of resources in these communities and has improved the quality of life for many of its citizens.”

Participants in the StrikeForce Initiative include the USDA’s NRCS, RD, FSA, and FNS as well as other USDA agencies, state and local governments, and community based organizations.

Anyone wishing to learn more about USDA programs and initiatives like StrikeForce can visit <http://www.usda.gov/strikeforce> or stop by their local USDA service center.



Photo by Ron Morton, Assistant State Public Affairs Specialist, Athens

Employees from Nature Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development and Farm Service Agency watch a video on StrikeForce. This video was developed by National with the help of Georgia Public Affairs.

Technical Support

Brassicas as Forage?

By Philip Brown, Grassland Conservationist

Twenty-one producers and NRCS personnel turned out for pasture walk in Wilkes County Dec. 4, 2012. The pasture walk was sponsored by the Wilkes County Young Farmers Chapter and NRCS, and was held at Moore Cattle Company. The subject involved using hybrid forage brassicas for grazing.

'Pasja' Hybrid Brassicas, a cross between turnips and Chinese Cabbage, along with 'Soil Buster' Daikon Radish were planted Sept. 17, 2012. Moore Cattle Company

began grazing the brassicas 60 days after planting.

Brassicas have the ability to quickly produce high quality forage in 45 to 60 days. Plantings in Madison County this fall reached 3,200 lbs. dry matter per acre in just 45 days. While the planting



'Pasja' Hybrid Brassicas Nov. 9, 2012 at Moore Cattle Company in Wilkes County.



'Soil Buster' Daikon Radish with Annual Ryegrass Dec. 4, 2012 at Moore Cattle Company in Wilkes County.

in Wilkes County reached 2,000 lbs. dry matter per acre in 60 days. Crude protein typically ranges 15-25 percent and total digestible nutrients are typically between 70-80 percent.

Given this high quality, brassicas are best used in a limit grazing system where

cattle are turned in for only a few hours each day, and the brassicas supplement lower quality hay or stockpiled forage. They are a good fit for replacement heifers or fall calving cows that producers are trying to get bred back.

The brassicas will recover after grazing. The target residual height is two inches. The plants will continue growth until there are two-to-three consecutive nights of temperatures in the mid 20's.

Various daikon radish varieties have become popular as winter cover crops in recent years. The large radish can alleviate compaction issues, and is a very good scavenger of nutrients.

A Day at the Office

By Michael Sampson, State Forester, Athens

It was just another day at the office for GA State Forester Michael Sampson. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Natural Resource Conservation Service were evaluating Gopher Tortoise habitat on Moody Forest in Appling County when they came upon an endangered Indigo Snake. Gopher Tortoise burrows provides homes and shelter for a large variety of different species. John Jensen

Photos by Dirk Stevenson, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Biologist

Right is the Gopher Tortoise burrow, this endangered Indigo Snake exited either sun bathing or just simply looking for food.



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continuous dedication, support and contributions to the success of the workgroup's efforts to help Tribes and American Indian landowners "Help the Land".

As a facilitator, guide and teacher of Tribal cultures to US Department of Agricultural (USDA) agencies and their employees, she has helped ensure a strong relationship is being established, maintained and enhanced as we work to get USDA programs and activities delivered to Indian Country. Her participation in Local, State, Regional and National meetings has provided a voice for the Tribes and American Indian Landowners addressing Tribal issues with USDA programs is commendable and needed.

It is because of her voice that we have heard, listened and implemented changes within USDA to remove barriers that have limited participation in USDA programs and hopefully made USDA more accessible to Tribes and American Indian landowners.

The Southeast American Indian Workgroup was created in 1996 to ensure the USDA program delivery is provided to all American Indians in nine southeast states. In 2013 the workgroup expanded to include 12 southeast states and the new Workgroup Champion for 2013 is Georgia's State Conservationist, James E. Tillman Sr. Georgia's representatives on the workgroup include; Debbie Henry, Tribal Liaison, Robyn Ledford, AIAN-SEPM and Jack Lewis, AIANEA Southeast Representative. Chief McCormick has served as the Georgia Elder Representative on the Southeast American Indian Workgroup since its inception.

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Georgia DNR herpetologist, noticed slid marks just outside the burrow and noticed this large male Indigo Snake over five feet in length. After the photo's was taken this snake was released safely back into its natural environment.

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worked with the Pine Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District on Forestry Field Days and the Marion County Environmental Trails and Native Tree Arboretum.



Photo by Dirk Stevenson, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Biologist
Michael Sampson holding the endangered Indigo Snake.

Photography Contest!

"A Snapshot of Conservation Across Georgia"

Who: The Public Affairs Advisory Council is sponsoring a photography contest for all Georgia NRCS employees, Partners and Earth Team Volunteers!

Why: To build a high quality conservation photo file for Georgia NRCS and showcase conservation!

When: Photographs must be taken within the year, in Georgia.

Theme: Conservation in Georgia!

Photos should reflect some aspect of natural resources conservation, i.e. Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Humans: (SWAPA plus H)

Judging: The photos will be judged by the Public Affairs Advisory Council at its next meeting!

Prizes: 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes will be awarded statewide and best in each Area. Prizes are non-monetary gifts. In addition, photos will be used in our newsletter, on our web site, in PowerPoint presentations and future publications.

How to Enter: An entry form with the rules is located on our SharePoint site at <https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/east/ga/default.aspx> in Microsoft Word form under the Shared Documents/260 Public Affairs or contact chris.groskreutz@ga.usda.gov. Please submit the form and the photo electronically - One photo per form. You may submit more than one photo.

Have Fun!