

Natural Resources Conservation Service

CONSERVATION footprints

A quarterly publication by, for, and about NRCS-WA employees.

Designing Fences to Last

Submitted by Patrice Beckwith, Resource Conservationist

This spring, Kevin Guinn, State Range Management Specialist, led four informative workshop on the function of fencing elements and the minimum materials and maximum spacing as set out in our Fencing practice standard 387. Kevin led participants in discussing considerations for design; planning, material and construction considerations. Last but not least, certification requirements were defined.

We all know that in our line of work the best trainings are those that are held outside and are hands-on. In addition, those done collaboratively with partnering agencies can include the added benefit of technology exchange.

On April 9th, the fencing workshop that was held in Nespelem included all three components where members of two



Kevin Guinn, instructs staff on dimensions and components necessary to certify a PS 387 Fence.

fencing crews from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation were in attendance. With so many people with real-life, applied experience present, a lot of technical and practical information was being shared.

In areas where the terrain is remote and steep and where the landscape is rocky,

meeting specs is sometimes impossible. Tribal employees shared with us their creative efforts to build and maintain a strong, functional fence line. The fencing crew displayed the implement they developed to replace the traditional H-brace assembly. The components are fabricated in the shop by cutting and

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A Message from Roylene



As many of you know, summer is my favorite time of the year. It's also one of NRCS' busiest seasons, especially this year, with the Voluntary

Natural Resources Conservation Plan sign up. We had an excellent turnout – over 100 applicants from throughout the state. Leadership and the VNRCP committee are currently working on guidance for contacting selected applicants as well as planning requirements for staff, with a deadline of the end of June.

Farm Bill obligation and contracting season is well underway and will also be completed by the end of June for FY15 programs. I want to thank area staff for working so diligently on this state priority!

We are now really getting close to standing up our Administrative Local Support Staff. The business service specialist has been selected and the remaining two positions are currently being rated for selections. I am hopeful that during the last quarter of our fiscal year we'll have all positions selected and local support staff stood up. Thanks for your patience on this very significant development that affects our operations.

A few other items of note:

- In July, NRCS-WA has two national appraisals, the Quality Assurances Appraisal from July 6-10 and Civil Rights Review from July 27-31.

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Fencing, continued



Colville Tribe's fencing crew display their fabricated, in-line H-brace assembly.

welding the heavy T-posts to shape. The materials have to be small enough and light enough to transport by ATV or to be hand carried up steep slopes. Heavy rocks on site are used to weigh down and stabilize the assembly. After discussion and review it was determined that the methods being used by the Tribe is an acceptable NRCS alternative under difficult terrain conditions.

This type of training opportunity supports NRCS staff when certifying and approving installed practices that use unconventional yet sound methods. In addition, NRCS can in turn share their knowledge with other cooperators looking for solutions to treat resource concerns on their rough terrain units.

Bi-State Sage Grouse No Longer Endangered

Submitted by Kevin Guinn, Range Management Specialist

On April 21, 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service decided that the Bi-State sage-grouse no longer needs protection under the Endangered Species Act. The Bi-State population straddles the California-Nevada state line. Through the Sage Grouse Initiative, NRCS has supported proactive conservation efforts and sustainable ranching. The efforts of ranchers, state and federal agencies, conservation groups and universities are responsible for this decision.

It is important to note that the decision for the Bi-State population has no direct bearing on the

Washington population of sage grouse. At the end of September the Department of Interior must decide whether to list the greater sage-grouse population across 11 Western states, including Washington, as threatened or endangered.

Also, in Douglas County more than 60 farmers and ranchers have requested a conservation plan through the Voluntary Natural Resources Conservation Plan initiative. Implemented conservation plans which meet the requirements of the Sage Grouse Conference Report may allow farmers and ranchers to achieve regulatory predictability. Predictability is a key feature of SGI.

Nez Perce Tribe Earth Day Celebration

Submitted by Pamela Pavek, Agronomist



The Nez Perce Head Start Class in their butterfly costumes. Credit: Johna Boulafentis, Nez Perce Tribe.

There is a valley in north Idaho that once was visited by an abundance of butterflies, and was named *Lapwai* by the Nez Perce people. The word translates to “land of the butterflies,” in reference to the Nez Perce word *lap-lap*, the sound of flapping butterfly wings. The town of Lapwai in this valley is now the seat of governance for the Nez Perce Tribe. It was here the Tribe hosted an Earth Day Event in April, where they celebrated butterflies and bees. The day began with an opening prayer by a circle of elders, and a butterfly song by the Head Start class. Representatives from the Nez Perce Tribe Wildlife Division, the NRCS Pullman Plant Materials Center, WSU Extension, and Idaho Fish and Game gave scientific presentations, and there was a round table discussion with speakers and elders. Following the presentations, there was an Earth Day Fair, with booths from various organizations and information about gardening, butterfly and bee habitat,



Students learning: Tim Hatten, Lead Scientist and CEO of Invertebrate Ecology, Inc., teaching students how to identify bee species. Credit: Johna Boulafentis, Nez Perce Tribe

NRCS programs (hosted by Kara Carter-Chase) and citizen science opportunities. The focus of the day was on declining butterfly and bee populations, and what individuals could do to improve habitat. The Tribe provided live seedlings of plants to all participants to plant at home. The NRCS Pullman Plant Materials Center was honored by the opportunity to participate in this special event.

Goodbye and Good Luck to the following employees:

Kara Carter-Chase, Soil Conservationist in the Pomeroy Field Office, transferred to NRCS/Idaho effective 4/5/15.
Nick Vira, District Conservationist in the Chehalis Field Office, accepted a new position with NRCS Minnesota effective 4/28/15.

Vanessa Knox, Program Support Assistant in the Olympia Area Office, temporary appointment expired effective 5/2/15.

Tony Sunseri, District Conservationist in the Mount Vernon Field Office, accepted a new position with NRCS Idaho effective 7/12/15.

Welcome to the following employees:

David Rose, hired as District Conservationist in the Chehalis Field Office, effective 4/5/15.

Susan Hoey Lees, hired as Soil Conservation Technician in Montesano Field Office effective 4/5/15.

Gabriela Fajardo, hired as Soil Conservation Technician in Walla Walla Field Office effective 4/5/15.

Ryan Sinclair, hired as Biological Science Aid in Plant Material Center effective 5/10/15.

Parker Dolezal, hired as Biological Science Aid in Plant Material Center effective 5/17/15.

Welcome to the following employees:

Mary Collier, hired as Pathways Student in Mt. Vernon Field Office effective 6/14/15.

Mariah Aguiar, hired as Pathways Student in Ephrata Field Office effective 6/14/15.

Alec Simpson, hired as Pathways Student in Spokane Field Office effective 6/14/15.

Congratulations on your promotion!

Carolyn Edenbo, Soil Conservationist, promoted in the Pasco Field Office effective 3/8/15.

Sandy Crusch, promoted to Financial Specialist for Washington DC Financial Team, effective 4/5/15.

Chris Wright, Soil Conservationist, promoted in the Chehalis Field Office effective 5/17/15.

Bobby Burken, Soil Conservationist, promoted in the Spokane Field Office effective 5/17/15.

Georgia Sormun, Secretary, promoted in the Spokane State Office effective 5/31/15.

Isaac Bickford, Soil Conservationist, promoted in the Prosser Field Office effective 5/31/15, will also be reassigned to the Okanogan Field Office effective 6/14/15.

USDA Kicks Off Summer Food Drive

Submitted by Jennifer Van Eps, Public Affairs

The USDA is kicking off the Feds Feed Families Food Drive to help feed school age children and others in need during the summer months. For some children, the only meal they get is the one provided by their school lunch program. During the summer months, these children sometimes don't know where their next meal is coming from. A heavy burden is placed on the local food banks to supply more food during the summer months. The Feds Feed Families Food Drive is an opportunity for federal employees to help. NRCS, FSA and RD are encouraging local offices to hold events that promote food donations such as ice cream socials, chili cook-offs, etc.



Service centers are encouraged to:

- Arrange for a food bank or charitable organization to receive food donations. Attached is a recommended list of contacts.
- Collect food donations at your local USDA service center. Attached is a list of recommended items.
- Hold special events to generate food donations (example: ice cream social).
- Participate in a community garden or local gleaning efforts.
- Record the amount of donations per service center by pound to the following contacts:
 - Kile Conciencie, FSA (if FSA is in the Service center)
 - Linda Willand, NRCS (if FSA is not present)
 - Phil Eggman, RD (Where RD is the only agency present)

This year, we are offering a two-tiered competition among the service centers. The service center who donates the most pounds per person overall wins the competition. Additionally, a drawing will be conducted to determine this year's co-winner to give all offices a better chance at winning. For every ten pounds per person (on average) donated, a service center will receive a ticket to be placed in a drawing. For example: If a field office has five employees, and together they donate 200 pounds for the month of June, the field office averaged 40 pounds per person. So the field office would earn four tickets. At the end of the contest, a ticket will be drawn for the winner.

The contest will run from June 22 to August 30, 2015. The state directors from NRCS, FSA and RD will recognize the winning service centers. Details about the prizes are yet to be determined.

For questions regarding Feds Feed Families, please contact the corresponding agency personnel:

- Kile Conciencie, FSA
- Linda Willand, NRCS
- Phil Eggman, RD

Don Hanson Wins National Award

Submitted by Peter Bautista, Assistant State Conservationist for Operations



Civil Rights Advisory Committee Advisor, Peter Bautista, and Don Hanson, Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager get silly at an office party honoring his award.

Don Hanson, Spokane State Office Design Engineer, was awarded the prestigious NRCS Chief Individual 2014 Award. Don was recognized for his outstanding achievements as the NRCS-WA Civil Rights Advisory Committee Chairman for FY2014.

During his chairmanship, Don successfully led the development of significant state-level reports, namely the State Barrier Report and Small Farms Initiative Report. In addition, Don has served for the past four years as the state Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager, whereby he was instrumental in the development of the State Hispanic Initiative Plan and its implementation over the past three years.

Congratulations Don Hanson for your very significant contributions and leadership to the state in the area of civil rights. This national award is very well deserved for your hard work and commitment to the agency's mission and civil rights.

Fragrance and Chemical Courtesy

Submitted by Eileen Jackson, Human Resources Officer

NRCS Washington encourages all employees to be considerate and sensitive to the needs of others when it comes to using chemicals, fragrances, and other scented products.

Some people cite health issues surrounding their intolerance to fragrances, and in many cases reactions to

fragrances and chemicals can be extreme and profoundly affect those with sensitivities. In closed office environments these people experience difficulty breathing when others in the same or surrounding space present strong perfume or cologne scents, or when other scented chemicals or products are introduced into their environment.

Employees are encouraged to moderate the use of perfume, cologne, after-shave, scented hand lotions and sanitizers, air fresheners, cleaning products with chemicals or any other personal product that produces a scent and which may irritate another employee with environmental sensitivities. Please be mindful of your co-workers' environmental sensitivities, and use common sense when using products that may affect the environment indoors.



Items of Interest:

Several members of the WA Administrative Staff are currently detailed to National Service Delivery Teams as part of the NRCS Administrative Transformation effort:

Kathleen Dickerson, 25 percent detail to the new National Staffing/Hiring Team.

Amy Smith, 100 percent detail to the new National Contracting Team.

Nancy Burnett, 100 percent detail to the new National Accounts Receivable Team.

Na Yang, 75 percent detail to the new National Accounts Payable Team.

Debbie Williams, 100 percent detail to the new National Grants and Agreements Team.

Billy Burr, 100 percent detail to the new National Accounts Team.



A Message from Roylene, continued

- Our state budget allocation requests are due by July 11 and we are currently working at developing our budget using the local working group input for programs that was collected this spring. This allocation request is different than previous years because this will be the first time we'll have a three-year budget (FY16-18).

Lastly, something I always try to remind staff of at this time, please take time off to be with family during these busy summer months. Enjoy the weather and spend some time away from the office. This year has been a very busy one, so it's a good reason to use annual leave for relaxing and recharging.

Enjoy your summer,



Submitted by Amy Hendershot,
District Conservationist

Pictured above is a prairie near Scatter Creek that was restored using Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (FY13) dollars. There were approximately 20 different native forb and grass species sown. This is a reminder of all the wonderful work the staff do on a day-to-day basis with private landowners.

Debbie Williams Rescues Beaver

Submitted by Jennifer Van Eps,
Public Affairs

Debbie Williams doesn't consider herself to be a hero. But for one unfortunate beaver, that's just what she became.

It was a day like any other for Debbie with emails, phone calls, and meetings. One meeting in particular, with the area archaeologist, struck her as odd because he hadn't shown up. When he finally did, David Munsell told her that his government vehicle had been torn apart – by a beaver!

"I thought he was joking! How many times do you hear about a beaver in the third story of the parking structure?" mused Debbie.

Still skeptical, Debbie and co-worker Na Yang went to the parking garage to investigate. Sure enough, there was a beaver right where Dave said it was. There were bloody footprints and puddles of vehicle fluid on the cement – signs that the beaver was hurt and may have ingested poison.

Witnesses had already tried contacting Animal Control and Fish and Wildlife, and were upset that they hadn't gotten a response.

"The little guy obviously needed help, so I went over to the General Store to find something to capture the beaver in. They didn't have any wire crates, so I got a live trap, leather gloves, and a net," said Debbie.

Debbie convinced Na and another witness to help her, and after a bit of chasing and corraling, they managed to coax the beaver into the live trap. Debbie called a few veterinarians to find out who she could take a beaver to for medical attention; she ended up taking it to the Ponti Animal Hospital in Otis Orchards.



Above: Williams reenacts the rescue.

Below: The beaver Williams was able to rescue and get rehabilitated.

They'd never treated a full-grown beaver before, but agreed to give it a try.

At Ponti, the beaver was given food and water and kept under observation. They tried to handle it as little as possible in order to keep it from being stressed. Ponti knew of a WDFW project in Colville National Forest in which beavers are being reintroduced to wetlands areas, as the animals play an instrumental role in keeping these ecosystems stable. WDFW agreed to release the beaver back into the wild within the project area once it was healthy.

"Life is full of opportunities to make the world a little better... I like to think that I ended up in the parking structure that day because that beaver needed somebody to get it out of a bad situation, and I was glad to be able to help. It is gratifying to have been a part of giving this story a happy ending!"

Administrative Transformation is in full swing!

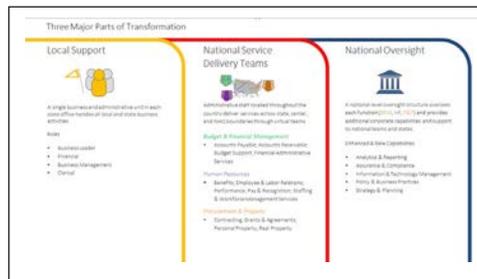
Submitted by Eileen Jackson, Human Resources Officer

As most of you are aware, NRCS is in the process of changing the way we do administrative business, and the process being used to effect those changes is called Administrative Transformation.

All employees, not just those in administrative positions, will be affected by this effort, and very soon you will be going to national staff and national team for assistance with benefits, personnel processing, travel, paycheck problems, grants and agreements, and more. So what is Administrative Transformation, and why are we doing it?

In 2012 Secretary Vilsack launched the Blueprint for Stronger Service, directing USDA agencies to take steps to cut costs and modernize operations. One initiative under the Blueprint is the transformation of USDA's business and administrative operations. Since the 90s, NRCS has seen its business expand and diversify due to a rise in Farm Bill programs, but the business and administrative structure hasn't really kept pace. Administrative Transformation was put into place to help NRCS build a better business and administrative structure for the future that would allow us to move from maintaining over 50 separate administrative units (i.e. separate admin staff in each state) to a single national structure for each business area with teams that will focus on specific services to assist customers nationwide.

Transformation will create a new set of virtual teams to help make our Budget & Financial Management, Procurement & Property, and Human Resources operations more effective and consistent. As part of the transformation effort a new Local Business Unit is being put in place in each state to provide on-the-ground support and to do



the administrative duties that can't be provided by the national teams. According to the Blueprint SharePoint site, the Blueprint for Stronger Service initiative has already resulted in over \$1.4 billion saved to date. The savings so far have come from things like workforce reductions, closed offices and laboratories, telework, mass contracting, and changes in our computer processes and equipment. The savings are expected to be higher once transformation is in place. Some of the new administrative teams such as the new fleet management team are already seeing significant cost savings and efficiencies, and those savings get passed down to NRCS and the states, so this effort will benefit us all and help put more money into conservation activities.

Administrative transformation is well under way, with most current Washington State administrative employees already serving on details to the new national teams and all WA State administrative employees expected to be permanently placed on the new national teams by October 1, 2015. WA State has already done a lot of planning and put interim processes in place to help us navigate the changes that will be coming, and will be posting and/or distributing information as things change. Step one, though, is for all employees to understand Administrative Transformation. If you have not already taken the time to learn about transformation and how things

will work once transformation is complete, we encourage you to do so. Navigating the changes coming your way will be easier if you understand the goals, objectives, and new processes the agency will be using going forward. Complete information about the Transformation process is available in the Administrative Transformation subfolder on the [NRCS Community page on USDA Connect](#). We also encourage you to view the recorded webinar on Administrative Transformation that HR developed and presented on June 4th to get state-specific information. That webinar can be accessed [here](#).

Don't wait until you need help with your travel, contracts, or HR activities to learn the new processes. Taking time to become informed now may save you stress and delays later!

Have Your Own Conservation Success Story?

Our successes do not end when we implement a conservation plan. An important aspect of conservation success includes "showing-and-telling" the work we've accomplished. "Highlights in Conservation" is a quick submission process which will help facilitate capturing our accomplishments, like those above. View and download the [submission form](#).

[View past Conservation Footprints publications.](#)