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# State Board Activity Report January 2016

## BUDGET

- Currently operating under a Continuing Resolution until January 21, 2016.
- Anticipate approximately a \$2.1M reduction in discretionary funding and approximately a \$4.0M increase in mandatory (Farm Bill) Financial Assistance funding and approximately \$5.2M mandatory (Farm Bill) Technical Assistance funding.
- Anticipate final allocation by end of January 2016.

## FARM BILL

- Program guidance is being finalized and will be released after budget allocations are final for implementation of FY 2016 programs.
- Will have a State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting, January 20-21, 2016; during which will hear from STAC members regarding recommendations for the 2016 program year.

## STAFFING

Our current FTE is 626 employees and our current vacancies total 67 and are as follows:

- 1 ASTC (FO) GS-14 – Weatherford**
- 2 Office Assistants GS-6/7**
- 4 Program Support Specialists GS-5/6/7**
- 11 Soil Conservationists GS-09**
- 6 Rangeland Management Specialists GS-09**
- 8 District Conservationists GS-11**
- 3 SCTs GS-5/6/7**
- 1 Conservation Agronomist GS-12**
- 1 CET GS-8/9**
- 4 AG/Civil Engineers GS-11**
- 1 RTL GS-12**
- 1 Soil Scientist GS-13**
- 1 Soil Scientist GS-12**
- 1 Management Analyst GS-11**
- 1 Management Analyst GS-12**

## NEW HIRES & RETIREMENTS

We will be hiring 15 new Pathway Interns and 20 recent graduates in the coming months.

21 retirements in 2015



## - ANNOUNCEMENT -

### JOHNSTON'S FRANKENIA REMOVED FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

*Number of plants exceeds 4 million  
in Texas and Northeast Mexico*

*Courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that the Johnston's frankenia will be removed from the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants. Once thought to number less than 1,000 plants, the best available information now indicates that there are over 4 million plants in at least 68 locations throughout southwest Texas and northeast Mexico. Johnston's frankenia was listed on August 7, 1984, as endangered. The Service is also announcing the availability of the Post-Delisting Monitoring Plan for Johnston's frankenia. The post-delisting monitoring plan was developed in cooperation with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, The Nature Conservancy, and Texas Department of Transportation.

The Johnston's frankenia is a plant endemic to south Texas in Webb, Zapata, and Starr counties and an adjacent area in northeastern Mexico. It is a low-growing, perennial shrub that occurs in a clumped distribution on specialized habitats of hypersaline (very salty) soils. The range of the Johnston's frankenia in Texas is currently estimated to encompass 2,031 square miles (5,260 square kilometers). Currently, there are 68 reported populations in the United States and four in Mexico, with an estimated total number of individual plants exceeding 4 million.



## EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM (EWPP)



Spending bill signed by the POTUS on December 18, 2015, includes an appropriation for the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP). NRCS anticipates receiving all the funds requested in the near future. Letters will be sent out in January to the EWPP sponsors informing them of the funding and advising them to begin the process of acquiring land rights and permits.

Texas NRCS received 26 requests for EWPP assistance following the floods, storms and tornadoes from May, October and December 2015. To date, 55 Damage Survey Reports (DSRs) have been completed for a total recovery cost of \$9,157,618. Of that, 38 DSRs were completed on watershed flood retarding structures totaling \$6,485,083. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016 - HR 2029, also known as the Omnibus

## GULF OF MEXICO INITIATIVE (GOMI)



Guadalupe River, and the Hynes Bay – San Antonio Bay watersheds have been installed. These watersheds are in Refugio, Calhoun, Victoria and Aransas counties.

- NRCS and partners worked with agricultural landowners to enroll a total of 1,546.16 acres in seven easements in Calhoun, Refugio and Victoria counties. Funding was provided through the Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WREP), which will keep this agricultural land protected from development, and leverage resources to carry out high-priority wetland protection and improve wildlife habitat.
- Technical and financial assistance has helped producers apply sustainable agricultural and wildlife habitat management systems that are maintaining and/or improving agricultural productivity; reducing nutrient runoff sediment transport, thus helping freshwater inflows.

NRCS in Texas currently has a proposal under consideration through Gulf Restoration Reserve Program funds focused on water quality in the San Antonio River watershed that empties into San Antonio Bay/Guadalupe Estuary on the Texas Coast. This region is a specific winter home for the endangered Whooping Crane.

## MONARCH



In June 2014, a Presidential memorandum was signed creating a Federal Strategy to promote the health of honey bees and other pollinators. USDA was tasked to develop a strategy for Monarch conservation on private lands.

- USDA-NRCS is developing a strategy to educate landowners as well as staff members on establishing and managing monarch habitat. There are two goals in mind for habitat management: 1) protect natural habitat that remains 2) promote habitat projects that include a diversity of flowering native plants for nectar and milkweed to host monarch eggs.

Continued...

## TEXAS FARMER RECOGNIZED FOR TOP-NOTCH CONSERVATION EFFORTS

A Texas farmer recently received national recognition for his conservation efforts at the 2015 Outreach and Ag Education Expo hosted by the National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees (NOPBNRCSE) in Atlanta, Georgia. McLennan County resident Rickie Roddy was named the third place winner for the Lloyd Wright Small Farmer of the Year award.

Rickie grew up on two acres his parents owned near Waco, Texas, but that didn't stop him from raising cattle. He bought his first cow when he was 13 years old. By the time he was 19, he had grown his herd to 13 head of cattle. He and his wife Tiffhanie married and bought 13 acres of land, slowly adding neighboring acreage as it became available. Today, he owns more than 300 acres where he runs his herd of 40 cows. He leases an additional 780 acres of land where he raises cattle, Sudan and coastal hay, corn, milo and oats.

He has been working with NRCS and McLennan County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) since the 1991. He has developed a conservation plan on his owned and leased land to serve as a roadmap toward accomplishing his goals. With the funding assistance from NRCS through the USDA Strike Force Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity, Rickie has been able to fulfill many of his conservation plans for his land including brush control, Bermuda grass sprigging, new fences for pasture rotation and cover crops for soil health improvement.

The Lloyd Wright Small Farmer Award is named after the organization's founder, Virginia native and 37-year USDA Employee Lloyd Wright. The award is given to producers who share a passion for improving awareness and development in the field of agriculture.



...Monarch Continued.

- In Texas, NRCS worked hand-in-hand with conservation partners to develop a strategy to address monarch habitat on a landscape basis. Steps are underway to establish specific goals and objectives, set conservation target areas, outline key habitat conservation practices, determine roles and responsibilities of conservation partners and delivery methods.
- Texas Partners include USFWS, TPWD, SSWCB, Texas Comptroller's Office, Texas Grazing Lands Coalition, USGS, Texas A&M University – Institute for Renewable Resources.
- The monarch butterfly population is also in danger because they cannot survive without milkweed. Monarch caterpillars eat the plants and butterflies lay their eggs in the milkweed.

## COLLABORATING IN THE TRINITY RIVER WATERSHED

### *Building Sustainability through Public/Private Partnerships*



The Trinity River Watershed supplies approximately half of Texans with their water. In 2015, through strategic partnerships as part of the USDA NRCS National Water Quality Initiative, over 2.4 billion gallons of water were collectively restored to the Trinity River Watershed.

MillerCoors, NRCS and Tarrant Regional Water District recently presented "Trinity River Watershed Collaborative," a full-day

program that focused on the success of this partnership and building long-term solutions for the Trinity River Watershed and the people of Texas.

Hosted by MillerCoors and Earth Day Texas at the Trinity River Authority of Texas, this summit convened a multi-disciplinary group of participants, including beverage, energy and manufacturing companies, public policy officials, government organizations, academia, agriculture and nonprofit groups, to work together to protect our vital water resources.

Since 2012, NRCS has funded 117 contracts for over 100 producers on almost 30,000 acres for a total of \$6.9 million through the NWQI program. An additional half million in funding has been added to the effort from beverage industry giants, MillerCoors and Tarrant Regional Water District (TRWD) that supplies water for over 1.5 million residents of Fort Worth.

## CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CRP



The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is now 30 years old. Administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA), this conservation program is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the nation. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has led the planning and technical assistance efforts in grass establishment for CRP since the program began in 1985.

Worthy of celebrating a stewardship milestone for the next generation, USDA agencies, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the National Wildlife Turkey Federation (NWTf) in Texas kicked off the 2015 Amarillo Farm and Ranch show with a tribute honoring the CRP program and recognition of CRP participants in the Lone Star State.

The event was held at the Amarillo Civic Center in December where a few of USDA's leadership attended. Brad Pfaff, acting deputy administrator for farm programs with FSA from Washington D.C., Judith Canales, state executive director for Texas with FSA and Salvador Salinas, state conservationist for Texas with NRCS presented during the program.

## NATIONAL GRAZING CONFERENCE RESOUNDING SUCCESS

“Deep in the Heart of Grazing Lands” was the theme that carried upwards of 700 participants through the 6th National Conference on Grazing Lands held recently in Dallas. NRCS in Texas helped host the event, alongside the National Grazing Lands Coalition and numerous partners and GLC affiliates. Two years of planning went into this event.

The conference featured experts in fields such as forage management, range and pasture management, range science and animal behavior, just to name a few. The

conference’s unique format featured grazing information and expert speakers, along with the “cowboy expert” across four “tracks” – Western, Midwestern, Eastern and Dairy.

Texas Day was another highlight of the national conference. Topics ranged from global beef sustainability to pasture management strategies to minimize nutrient losses in surface and ground water. Throughout the event, an allied industry tradeshow was also held.



## TEXAS COMMODITY SYMPOSIUM WELCOMES NRCS CONSERVATION UPDATE

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Salvador Salinas, presented an overview of the agency’s annual conservation efforts made on Texas’ private lands during the 2015 Texas Commodity Symposium at the 2015 Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show.

Salinas credited farmers, ranchers and other partners for natural resources conservation implementation across the state. He explained how Farm Bill programs are the producer’s programs. During the symposium, state commodity leadership served on a panel discussion covering agricultural issues. They answered some tough questions concerning the challenges farmers and

ranchers have faced in the past year. In contrast, the group collectively shared an optimistic view for future opportunities in U.S. markets and abroad.

Keynote speaker Julie Borlaug, granddaughter of Dr. Norman Borlaug, spoke on behalf of the Norman Borlaug Institute based in College Station. She portrayed her late Pulitzer Prize winning grandfather as a normal, everyday kind of person, and explained how he gained perseverance, competitiveness and discipline to achieve a lifetime of accomplishments feeding the world.

The commodity symposium was one of several events taking place during the annual Amarillo Farm and Ranch Show.



NRCS exhibited in the Heritage room again in 2015, providing current information on conservation planning, Farm Bill programs and technical assistance opportunities through local field offices and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) in USDA service centers.

## MEETINGS STATE CONSERVATIONIST IS SCHEDULED TO ATTEND

**Texas NRCS Leadership Meeting - Austin, TX, January 19 – 22, 2016**

**State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting - Austin, TX, January 20 – 21, 2016**

**National Cattlemen’s Beef Association - San Diego, CA, January 26-30, 2016**

**National Association of Conservation Districts Reno, NV, January 31 - February 3, 2016**

**National Society for Range Management Conference - Corpus Christi, TX, January 29 - February 5, 2016**

**Texas NRCS Communications Team Workshop Temple, TX, February 8 - 12, 2016**

**Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) – Brownsville, TX, February 9 - 12, 2016**

**Texas Wildlife Society Meeting - San Antonio, TX, February 17 – 20, 2016**

**Minority Landowner Magazine 10th Anniversary Conference - San Antonio, TX, February 18 – 20, 2016**

**National Grazing Land Coalition Steering Committee Meeting - Washington, DC, February 21 – 24, 2016**

**Texas Land Conservation Conference - Austin, TX, March 2 – 5, 2016**

**MillerCoors Meeting with Chief Weller - Washington, DC, March 7-9, 2016**

**National Association of Conservation Districts Legislative Fly-In - Washington, DC, March 13 – 16, 2016**

**Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Meeting - Fort Worth, TX, April 7 – 10, 2016**

**National Employee Development Center Board of Directors Meeting - Fort Worth, TX, April 13 – 15, 2016**

**MAFO Conference - Austin, TX, April 24 – 27, 2016**

**2016 National Mitigation & Ecosystem Banking Conference - Fort Worth, TX, May 9 – 13, 2016**

**Private Lands Advisory Council Meeting/ Texas Lone Star Stewards Awards Banquet - May 18 – 20, 2016**