

# TEXAS CIVIL RIGHTS Advisory Committee 2018 Report

Natural Resources Conservation Service



## WHAT'S INSIDE

**2** Message from the  
State Conservationist  
Salvador Salinas

**2** Comments from the CRAC Chair  
Edward J. Logan

**3-4** American Indian/Alaska Native  
Emphasis Program (AI/ANEPM)  
Melissa Sturdivant

**5** American/Pacific Islander Special  
Emphasis Program (AA/PI)  
Brenda Gibson

**5-6** Black Emphasis Program (BEP)  
Willie Holmon

**6-7** Disability Emphasis Program (DEP)  
Tony Townsend

**7** Federal Women's Program (FWP)  
Maria Hrebik

**8** Hispanic Emphasis Program (HEP)  
Raul Hinojosa

**8** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Program (HEP)  
Charles Garrett

**9** Veteran Emphasis Program (VEP)  
Glenn Greanyan Jr.



## A CIVIL RIGHTS MESSAGE FROM THE STATE CONSERVATIONIST

*Salvador Salinas, Texas*



The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a great legacy of providing practical, science-based, site-specific technical assistance to land owners and land managers to plan and apply conservation practices to address natural resource concerns on private lands.

Our conservation tradition includes delivering these services to all persons through the long-standing partnerships with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), in addition to numerous other partnerships. This conservation legacy is the result of the dedication and hard work of Texas NRCS employees across the state in getting conservation on the land.

A goal of this agency is to treat all employees and customers with dignity and respect and to ensure that all people are aware of and have an equal opportunity to receive assistance and participate in our programs.

The Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) played a critical role in Fiscal Year 2018 in this effort. Under the leadership of Ed Logan, Chair, the Committee has done an excellent job in achieving this goal. Their many accomplishments are showcased in this Activity Report.

The Committee completed Civil Rights Compliance reviews in 40 field offices and one Zone Office this fiscal year. Positive things that employees are doing in the area of civil rights are recognized through the Texas Civil Rights Awards.

Program application and participation data for financial assistance programs have been distributed to the field offices to assist in evaluating and taking actions to ensure that equitable assistance is being provided to all persons.

The Texas NRCS web site has a Civil Rights link and is updated regularly to ensure that information relative to activities of the CRAC and Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity in our agency is available to employees and others.

I appreciate the work of the CRAC and the Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPM's) this year and NRCS employees have demonstrated that Civil Rights is not just another job, rather, it is the way that we do business.

## Comments from the CRAC Chair

*Edward J. Logan*



It has been a great honor to serve on the Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee as Chairman for the past three years. Having served as both a member and Chair for several years has provided many great opportunities. This has included traveling around the great state of Texas to interact with fellow employees, while educating them about civil rights. Throughout this time period, I assisted with the implementation of our Texas NRCS 230 electronic civil rights filing system. I participated in the "Working Effectively with American Indians" training. I also participated in a National Civil Rights review in which NRCS in Texas was recognized with multiple commendable items.

I appreciate all who I have had the great pleasure of interacting with while serving on the CRAC. I am especially appreciative of Darren Richardson, ASCFO Zone 1 and State Conservationist Salvador Salinas for granting me the opportunity and flexibility to carry out the responsibilities as a member and chairman of the committee. I know that the committee will be in great hands as Pat Harris takes the reigns as Chair. I am grateful for the opportunities, experiences, accomplishments, and friendships that I have developed while serving.

Thank you!



# American Indian/Alaska Native Program SEPM

**Melissa Sturdivant**



## Outreach and Mentoring:

Provided outreach and cultural enrichment to our Texas NRCS employees as part of the American Indian Heritage Month Observance for November 2017. Three newsletters were authored with two distributed to Texas NRCS employees during the month of November.

Contests were conducted as part of this outreach to encourage employee involvement and use of the materials. Each edition highlighted information related to one of the three federally-recognized tribes in Texas. An edition of the American Indian-Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANEA)- authored cookbook was provided to employees who answered the trivia questions correctly.

Working with NRCS National Headquarters, assisted with outreach during the American Indian Science and Engineering Society's National Conference in Oklahoma. More than 3,000 American Indian/Alaska Native youth



Outreach conducted during the American Indian Science and Engineering Society Career Fair held in Oklahoma in September 2018.

attended the conference.

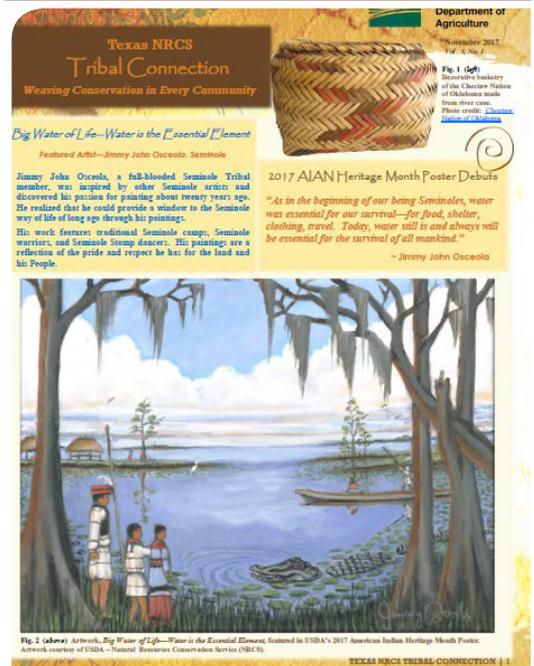
Working with the AIANEA for NRCS, served as co-chair of the AIANEA National Scholarship Program. Disseminated FY 2018 scholarship information to Tribal Liaisons and SEPMs in NRCS to advertise the opportunity for academic scholarships to high school, trade school and college students. Four academic scholarships were awarded to students in Montana, Oklahoma, Georgia and Utah in December 2017.

Assisted National AIAN SEPM with trainings and meeting, and the selection of the FY19 American Indian Heritage Month Poster.

Assisted with Civil Rights QARs for Decatur and Meridian Teams.

Worked with Assistant State Conservation for Field Operations, Laura Broyles, with the design and delivery of a diversity training conducted for employees in Zone 5.

Artwork for the Texas NRCS Tribal Connection newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 1, the first edition in FY 2018 to celebrate American Indian Heritage Month for Texas NRCS employees.

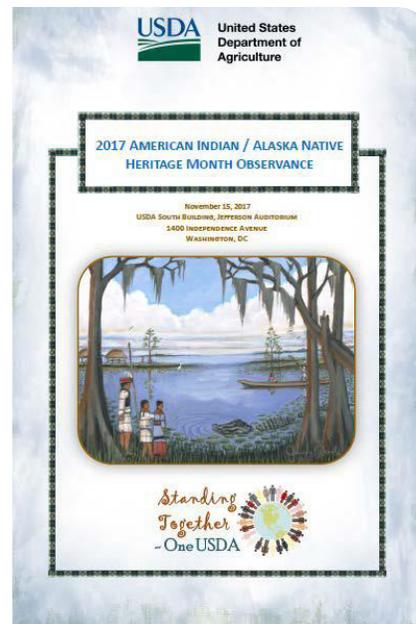


## State Tribal Liaison Activities

### **Melissa Sturdivant**

- Assisted Regional Conservationist Kevin Wickey with Tribal Liaison activities while participating in a two-day face-to-face meeting of the Central Region's Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (RTCAC) conducted in Las Vegas in December 2017 and another meeting in September 2018 conducted in Nebraska. Served as the primary representative for NRCS AIAN on the Council along with representatives from 12 American Indian Tribes from the Central U.S.
- Assisted with planning of the USDA's National Observance Activities for American Indian Heritage Month in November 2017 conducted at USDA Headquarters Whitten Building. Served as the Chair of the USDA-wide planning committee to coordinate the development of the brochure and poster for the event.
- In support of Texas tribes' involvement with the Intertribal Ag Council (IAC), worked with tribal members for their attendance at the Intertribal Ag Council meeting in December 2017. Met with tribal members while attending IAC.
- Worked with State Conservationist, principal staff, and the National Tribal Liaison Officer to evaluate the need and placement for weather stations and monitoring of climate change in partnership with Tribes.
- Attended the SAIGE National Training Program in Wisconsin in June. Coordinated a USDA-wide Forum in which multiple USDA agencies participated and discussed Farm Bill implementation with Tribes. Conducted a separate training seminar with Tribal Elder as part of the Natural Resources track.
- Continued working as part of the Cadre for NEDC's Working Effectively with American Indians training course. Served as an Instructor at three sessions conducted in Oklahoma.
- Assisted State Office and Zone personnel with program support of Tribes.

Melissa Sturdivant stands in front of the Texas Flag during her visit to the USDA Whitten Building "Patio" as part of the USDA 2018 American Indian Observance activities.



Cover art created by Melissa Sturdivant for the USDA-wide American Indian Observance event held at USDA Headquarters in November 2017.



## Asian American/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program SEPM

**Brenda Gibson**



I've been employed by NRCS for eight years and have had the privilege of serving on the Civil Rights Advisory Committee and as the SEPM for the Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) group for the past five years.

In FY18, I worked a recruitment outreach event at the West Texas A&M University Career Day in Canyon. I visited with students about NRCS disciplines and other careers in agriculture. There were more than 150 agricultural students interested in USDA employment. NRCS is involved in recruitment events in this region each year at the universities and junior colleges.

For AAPI Heritage month in May, I assisted Zone 2 staff in hosting a Lunch and Learn event as previously held in Zone 1 in FY17. The purpose of the luncheon is to highlight the different AAPI cultures and cuisines. It turned out to be a successful learning opportunity for many employees. Zone 2 personnel did a great job planning and executing the event where employees were able to learn more about the Pacific Island cultures and history of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands.

My hope is FY19 will bring increased AAPI cultural awareness and learning opportunities to reach the growing AAPI populations that NRCS proudly serves.

## Black Emphasis Program SEPM

**Willie Holmon**



This is my fifth year to serve on the committee. I am a soil conservationist and outreach specialist with 14 years of service to the agency.

I attended Stephen F. Austin State University Forestry Environmental Science and Spatial Science Career Fair on Oct. 12, 2017. More than 68 students visited the NRCS exhibit to learn about who we are, what we do, and how to apply for a USDA job through USAjobs.gov.

I attended the National Organization of Professional Black-NRCS Employees on Dec. 1-3, 2017 in Atlanta, Georgia. This was a great meeting with about 250 attendees and topics such as Using Collaboration as a Powerful Tool for Changes, Building on Your Altitude to Reflect a Positive Attitude, and Being Proactive in Your Career Development.

January 15 - I attended the Martin Luther King March in Lufkin. More than 450 personnel attended this event. The theme for this year was "The King in Me."

February 8 - I attended the Prairie View A&M University All Major Spring Career Fair. More than 125 students visited the NRCS booth to learn about the agency, Pathways Intern Program, the Recent Graduate Program, and how to apply for a job online through USAjobs.gov.

February 22 - I attended the Stephen F. Austin State University Spring Career Fair. More than 75 students visited the NRCS booth to learn about the agency, Pathways Intern Program, the Recent Graduate Program, and how to apply for a job online through USAjobs.gov.

I attended the Landowner Association of Texas' 40th Anniversary and Celebration in Houston at the Tom Bass Park on May 18-19. Approximately 78 people attended this event. NRCS had an exhibit present and I talked to landowners about NRCS programs and to students about how to apply for jobs through USAjobs.gov.

I attended a Farmer and Landowner Workshop in Grapeland at Grapeland High School on June 22-23. Seventy-five people were present for this event. NRCS had an exhibit in the agriculture building for landowners to learn about NRCS financial assistance programs, how to apply for jobs thru USAjobs.gov. On the second day of the event, everyone participated in the construction of a seasonal high tunnel built according to NRCS standards and specifications.

I attended the Texas Agri-Forestry Summit in Nacogdoches at the Convention Center on June 8. There were about 95 in attendance. I talked to the audience about NRCS financial assistance programs. NRCS also had an exhibit during the event.

I attended the Minority Landowner Magazine 12th Anniversary Conference in El Paso, June 14-16. There were about 177 minority landowners present. The theme was "Focused on the Care of the Farm and Focused on the Care of the Farmers". There were breakout sessions on



conservation planning, an update from the Policy Research Center, and grant writing essentials. NRCS had two exhibits present so landowners could gain knowledge about NRCS programs.

The challenge for me this year as the BEPM was getting Pathways Intern Students to apply for jobs online thru USAjobs.gov. But, the reward for being on the committee is that you will meet people from all over the world.

Serving on this committee will give you a chance to see how other people live and think about different subjects, topics and cultures, which is an amazing learning experience.

“The first step toward success is taken when you refuse to be a captive of the environment in which you first find yourself.”

- Mark Caine



Prairie View A&M University’s annual Fall All Majors Career Fair. Willie Holmon, center, and Corylee Thomas, right, visit with just one of many students who attended the fair.

## Disability Emphasis Program SEPM, National Civil Rights Advisory Committee to the Chief-Disability Male Representative

**Tony Townsend**



This year was my first year to serve on the Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee. I have been with NRCS for eight years starting out as a Business Management Leaders Program intern. I am an Administrative Programs Specialist at the state office handling Human Resource programs, such as the Pathways program and staffing for the state.

As the Disability SEPM, I participated in several events in FY18 including:

April 29 - Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf, Howard County Junior College, Big Spring.

- Gave three one and a half hour long presentations to a cross section of students on how to apply for jobs for federal service.
- Assisted NRCS National Veteran’s SEPM with career fair.
- Spoke with over 20 students through an interpreter.
- Interacted with SWCID administration on questions and logistics.



April 25 – FWP event, Lubbock.

- Participated in the FWP for employees across the state on relative subjects.
- Presented to 45 plus participants on the 80-day hiring process and USAJobs.

May 29 - Zone 3 Resource Team Leader and Zone staff meeting, Corpus Christi.

- Presented a discussion on persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodations.
- Conducted a real-time effective communications exercise for participants on the effective use of verbal and non-verbal techniques.

June 19-20 - Zone 4 Resource Team Leader and Zone staff meeting, Lufkin.

- Presented a discussion on persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodations.
- Conducted a real-time effective communication's exercise for participants on the effective use of verbal and non-verbal techniques.
- Gave a presentation on the NRCS 80 day hiring process with Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) and Merit Promotion Policy (MPP) categories.

June 25-26 - Zone 1 Resource Team Leader, Zone staff and district conservationists meeting, Plainview.

- Presented a discussion on persons with disabilities and reasonable accommodations.
- Conducted a real-time effective communication's exercise for participants on the effective use of verbal and non-verbal techniques.
- Gave a presentation on the NRCS 80 day hiring process with DEU and MPP categories.

The ancillary position of Disabled SEPM has given me the opportunity to meet many Texas employees at events. It is an honor to serve on this committee and represent the employees of Texas NRCS.

**"Always have a positive attitude."**

**-Anonymous**

## Federal Women's Program SEPM



*Maria Hrebik*



This is my second year as the Federal Women's Program (FWP) Manager. I have 15.5 years of service as a civil engineer on the Water Resources Assessment Team. As I reflect over this past year, I can't help but feel accomplished and proud of yet another successful year. I must add I can't take full credit for the success, as I have a dedicated committee standing behind me making things possible.

With the great support of our State Conservationist Salvador Salinas, FWP provided the Training Opportunity for the second year in a row. Six opportunities were awarded to employees for career development and training.

Also, for the second year in a row, FWP was able to provide an Employee Training Meeting in Lubbock on April 25. During this meeting approximately 50 NRCS employees attended a day of training which included presentations on how to apply for USA Jobs, financial management and planning, pollinator initiatives, the history of South Plains cotton farming, and enjoyed key note speaker Darren Richardson, Zone 1 assistant state conservationist, who presented on his overseas detail experiences. Attendees also enjoyed tours to an old gin and an agriculture museum.



## Hispanic Emphasis Program SEPM

**Raul Ray Hinojosa**



Working as a District Conservationist, I have served as the Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager (HEPM) since November 2017. I began my career as an Intern in Aledo, Illinois in 2006 and then completed my Master's degree and hired on with NRCS Oklahoma in 2010 and served as HEPM in Oklahoma for two years.

As HEPM, I attended and assisted with over 12 events that consisted of outreach to underserved communities and college/high school students. My role as HEPM has kept me busy and been rewarding by providing information to those who had little to no knowledge of our agency.

I look forward to providing outreach to the underserved communities and information to our agency employees.



Raul Hinojosa (center) at the Texas Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Conference.



Raul Hinojosa (left) conducts a mock interview.

## Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender Program SEPM

**Charles Garrett**



In my six years as a Soil Conservationist for the NRCS, I've proudly spent three of those years serving as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, & Transgender Special Emphasis Program Manager.

This fiscal year I have been able to assist and coordinate outreach efforts to various collegiate bodies of the LGBT community spreading across various parts of the state. On top of compiling training materials and information used in Equality USDA (formerly known as GLOBE), I've also been able to disseminate this information for undergraduates across the state promoting recruitment efforts for our outreach programs.



Being an ALLY representing the LGBT community constantly proves to be both a humbling and empowering experience. Leading the charge in recruiting professionals to be employed in this agency and trying to serve a customer base historically unaccepted in the government comes with rewards that I will always cherish. It also comes with some resistance. Overcoming these challenges through sharing knowledge and experience that establish lasting and real connections makes everything worth the struggles.

If you are even remotely interested in serving on the Civil Rights Advisory Committee I say, "Do it!" If you ever do receive the honor of serving on this committee attack everything with an open mind because you will be challenged. Keep in mind that without challenge there is no growth, and this committee will promote your growth as an individual and a leader.



## Veterans Emphasis Program SEPM

**Glenn Greanya**



### Introduction

- Served four years on the Committee
- Rotated off the Committee October 1, 2018
- Range Management Specialist/Decatur Field Office/5 years service

Working with the Texas Agrilife Extension and AgriAbility was a very rewarding part of my job as the VEPM. I got to meet beginning farmers and ranchers who are Veterans and some recently separated from the military. To see the enthusiasm they had for taking on the job of feeding the world was a great experience.

### Events

- March 9-10, College Station- Battle Ground to Breaking Ground- 40 in attendance
- Sherman, Bowie, Gainesville – Prep for QAR
- April 4-5, Belton - Battle Ground to Breaking Ground- 30 in attendance
- May 7-11, Conducted QAR, Zone 5
- May 8-11, Meridian QAR
- May 11-12, Battleground to Breaking Ground, Gatesville
- June 18– 22, Decatur Team QAR
- August 16, Back brief for CR item identified for Meridian Team QAR
- August 20-23, CRAC annual meeting Temple
- August 30, Stephenville - Diversity Day

During 2017 as the VEPM SEPM, I participated in three Texas A&M Agrilife Extension events known as Battle Ground to Breaking Ground Training seminars which provided beginning farmer rancher training, business plans and production ideas to start and manage small scale farms and ranches. The seminars hosted over 100 personnel that range from recently separated active duty personnel to some seasoned Veterans and their families. This program has been the grassroots organization for helping military personnel who are interested in starting a farm or ranch. Battle Ground to Breaking Ground conducts five seminars a year and registration is free for Veterans.

This is my last year on the committee and I want to say thank you to all the Committee members who have helped me through my tenure. I also want to thank all the field staff who attended Battle Ground to Breaking Ground events and who helped bridge the gap between our agency and transitioning Veterans. I also want to thank the State office staff for all the support during my time as Texas VEPM.

## Natural Resources Conservation Service



## Civil Rights Advisory Committee





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