

Marathon County Success from the Field

NRCS to the Rescue After Fire and Flood

Background

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff have diverse backgrounds and experiences to offer when working with farmers and forest landowners across the country to meet conservation needs. This month, we spotlight Charles Schwartz, an NRCS Soil Conservation Technician working out of the Wausau USDA Service Center. He is an experienced Technician that has worked on terraces in southern Minnesota, drop structures in Pierce County, Wisconsin, and manure storage facilities in central Wisconsin. The work detail he completed recently in Durango, Colorado, for NRCS, was a new experience in applying NRCS technical assistance to flood prone areas, to expand his skills further.

Program Successes

Charles' duties included practice planning, surveying and design review for the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). The Hermosa Creek watershed had experienced a wildfire, along with a catastrophic rainfall event that flooded homes in the area. The fire, named 416 fire, caused much damage on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land. Much of the USFS land area where the fire scar is located has no replanting plans. The area is still vulnerable to flood events, so the NRCS, through the EWP program, assisted landowners in protecting their homes. LaPlata County was the partnering agency with NRCS on the project.

“This detail gave me an opportunity to work with engineers and technicians in a different state to put conservation on the ground. The detail also broadened my perspective of NRCS, working on different landscapes,” Charles said of his experience.

The customers that Charles worked with were not traditional farmers, but homeowners whose structures were threatened by runoff from the mountains.

NRCS provided technical assistance in the development of concrete barriers, sandbag barriers and hydrologic analysis, offering a degree of protection to the homeowners. Trash racks used to catch debris off the mountain and surveying for debris removal in the Hermosa creek were also part of the job.



Charles Schwartz assists a landowner with options.



Fire scar near Durango, Colorado.

“Using the NRCS Engineering Field Handbook Section 2 for 64% slopes pushed my comfort level.” Charles said.

Charles would consider another work detail in the future to explore different programs and practices. He's always looking to broaden his horizons and may consider volunteering for NRCS Snow Survey responsibilities in the future. Charles looks forward to using some of what he learned back in Wisconsin.

