

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*

## **CSP Rewards Forest Landowner for Conservation Stewardship**

### **Tioga County, Wellsboro Field Office**

**July 2013**

The landowner of a 137-acre tract of mostly wooded land, and Vice President of the Tioga County Woodland Owners Association, Dale Spitzer, came in to the Wellsboro USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Field Office to tell me his story. He didn't come in looking for advice, but rather to tell me what he's accomplished on his land. Dale is a big guy who apparently has done some pretty big things, so I gave him all the time he needed. Dale showed us his Forest Stewardship Plan, and pointed out that he had already done everything that was scheduled and was seeking to update the plan with the soon retiring DCNR Service Forester, Sam Cook. Mr. Spitzer explained that when he first signed up for a Forest Stewardship Plan he assumed there would be funding to complete the planned projects. He said that due to budget cuts the funding was no longer available and that he just assumed he was "on his own" to get the work done.

NRCS had just recently announced their new "flagship" program for landowners who had shown that they were committed to being proper stewards of their land, regardless of programs, funding or flashy trends...folks who were in it for the long haul. This program, called the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address natural resource concerns by maintaining and improving existing conservation systems and undertaking some new activities. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to land stewards – the higher the performance level, the higher the payment.



The CSP ranking process includes an office-based interview and a field visit. The existing stewardship level at Mr. Spitzer's property was truly inspiring. He and his wife, Bette, had spent many years carving their 22 acres of open lands from a totally forested site. The property includes cropland, annual food plots for wildlife, produce, pasture, hayland, and bee yards. These photos show one of many vernal pools and native pollinator habitat created through CSP.



Dale completed his CSP projects ahead of schedule and beyond NRCS expectations, standards or specifications. He installed 15 bat boxes, 30 bluebird houses, 10 wood duck boxes, 5 vernal pools, native pollinator habitat and also created many standing dead snag trees for wildlife in riparian areas. And still, he wanted to do more. Since the CSP contract did not cover early successional habitat, and Dale was very interested in this type of forest management, he was able to sign up for an Environment Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract.

He also updated his Forest Stewardship Plan and identified more projects to complete. After exhausting financial assistance from NRCS, he voluntarily went out and did it without us. That is just the kind of man he is.

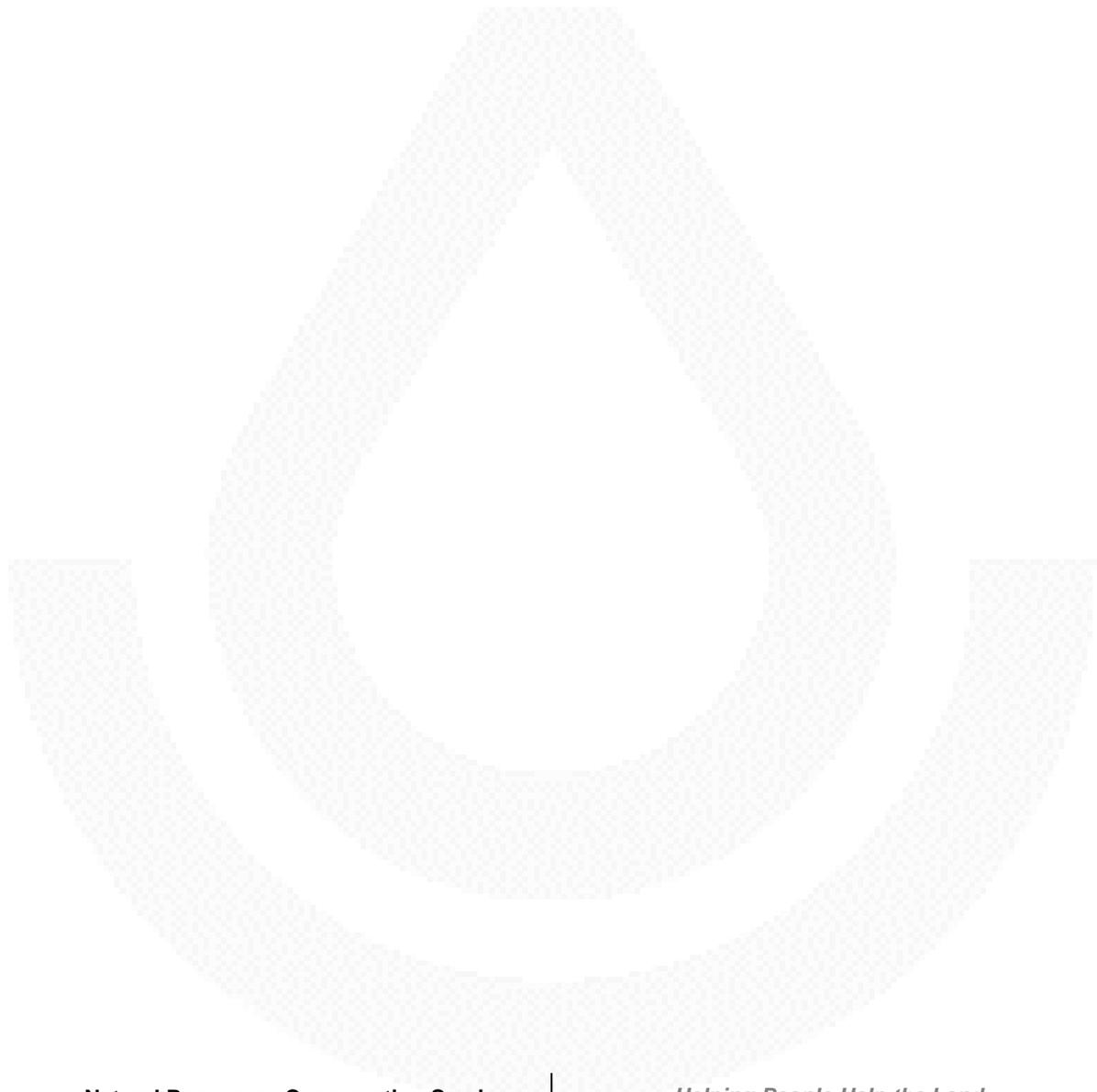
Because one of his CSP activities overlapped into the standard timber stand improvement category, Dale was excluded from funding on his Crop Tree Release ideas. But, he proceeded to do it any way, with the assistance of the new DCNR Service Forester, Steve Hoover.



These photos show the land steward, Dale Spitzer ("the big guy"), with the new Service Forester, Steve Hoover, walking amongst his early successional habitat soon after cutting

and the strong aspen regeneration occurring within one year. Dale finished his border cuts and early successional habitat development in about the time it took the ink to dry on the paperwork. Dale even threw in some warm season grass seedings at no cost. Dale is also Vice President of the Tioga County Woodland Owners Association.

Submitted By: **Ciro Lo Pinto**, District Conservationist



**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

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