

Colorado Natural Resources Conservation Service Employee Newsletter



# Successes, Challenges, and Opportunities in “Helping People Help the Land”

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## Highlights

by  
Phyllis Ann Philipps  
State Conservationist

It is hard to believe that I have been your State Conservationist for more than six months and I am happy to share that it has been one of the best and most rewarding six months in my career. You are a very large part of that.

In my visits around the state, I have been so impressed with the projects that I have seen and the successes you have shared. Colorado is a diverse state with many exciting opportunities. With that said, I also recognize the challenges we face.

I understand and can appreciate your efforts to keep up with the ever expanding to do lists and the continuing and increasing deadlines while still maintaining your technical excellence and quality customer service. Be proud of the work that you are doing.

As budget will allow, I am looking forward to continuing my field visits. For me, sharing in your accomplishments and seeing the tangible results of your labors realized in natural resource benefits is very gratifying.

Thank you for making this a smooth and pleasurable experience thus far. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide leadership in this great State and I am hoping there will be many more opportunities to

meet up and interact in the years ahead. Know that my door is always open and that if you have concerns or problems feel free to visit with me about them. I value and appreciate your constructive feedback, your thoughts, and ideas.

Please remember to take time for your selves, to recreate, rejuvenate, and laugh.

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# USDA Celebrates 150 Years

A message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack



In 2012, USDA will commemorate and celebrate the 150th anniversary of our founding in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act of Congress establishing the United States Department of Agriculture.

Two and one-half years later, in what would be his final annual message to the Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department." At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about 2 percent today. But through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a host of issues, USDA still fulfills Lincoln's vision - touching the lives of every American, every day.

As we commemorate 150 years of accomplishments, USDA is learning

from past experiences and looking to the future. In the years to come, we must help address the changing needs of agriculture and rural America. We must continue to help provide a safe, ample food supply for our nation and the world.

To meet those goals, we are working to make USDA a more modern and effective service provider and to deliver the best possible results for all of the American people.

Over the course of the year, I hope that Americans will acknowledge and join in our commemoration of 150 years of USDA.

It is a great time to learn about our contributions to the strength and health of this nation, and to see how we can continue to partner with Americans working to provide a better life for their families.



**May 15, 2012**  
**Commemorative Kick-off and**  
**A Day of Celebration**

## One to Grow On



**"Don't blend in. Stand out."**  
 ~ Unknown

**"Act the way you'd like to be and soon you'll be the way you act."**  
 ~ Dr. George Crane

**"Never, never, never give up."**  
 ~ Winston Churchill

**"Fear is an illusion. If you use that energy for self-confidence - you will be amazed at the results."**  
 ~ Unknown

**"The human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it."**  
 ~ George C. Scott

**"Not being able to do everything is no excuse for not doing everything you can."**  
 ~ Ashleigh Brilliant

**"If you cannot find happiness along the road, you will not find it at the end of the road."**  
 ~ Unknown

**"Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around."**  
 ~ Unknown

**"The time is always right to do what is right."**  
 ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

**"If we all did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves."**  
 ~ Thomas Edison

# NRCS Provides Assistance to Ute Mountain Ute Farm & Ranch Enterprise

By Allen Maez, NRCS Tribal Liaison to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Area 4



Not all assistance provided by NRCS is program-based.

For the last two years, NRCS has been helping Ute Mountain Ute Farm & Ranch Enterprise to submit corn yield information to the National Corn Growers Association for their annual yield contest.

The contest requires that the yield data is collected, recorded, and documented on official entry forms by Agricultural Experts. These experts are drawn from local State or Federal Agricultural Agencies.

This year, Allen Maez, NRCS Liaison to the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; Debbie Clairmont, Soil Conservationist; and Sam Lyons, Dolores Conservation District Technician were asked to help.

The data collected is from fields planted to corn varieties that the landowner thinks is going to produce competitively with other corn growers throughout the nation. The yield data is from a sample in a given field that represents that field. The size of the sample is one acre.

The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe grows its corn under irrigation and using ridge-tillage operations. They compete in that category.

This year, the yield entry came to 316 bushels of corn per acre, and won 3rd in the nation. Ute Mountain Ute Farm & Ranch Enterprise has been a high-yield producer for many years. The yield not only recognizes Ute Mountain Ute Farm and Ranch as a

high-yield corn grower but also as a Tribal leader in corn production.

Paul Evans, the Farm & Ranch Director, says the competition is always fun for him as he meets and talks with other corn growers. He also says though that the competition is good for his staff.

*"It gives them a feeling of pride," he says, "for the hard work they put in over the season. Being picked as 3rd in the nation for their category also provides a trip to Orlando, Florida to receive the recognition and the trophy. Representatives from the Farm & Ranch and also the Ute Mountain Ute Leadership attend the awards presentation. The Tribal Leaders enjoy the recognition they get on the national level, it means a lot to them,"* Paul said.

Ute Mountain Ute Farm & Ranch is outside the "Corn Belt" and it shows what can be done with good management in the Southwest. *"This is the result of some good management but also because of some assistance from USDA-NRCS given through its programs and on-the-ground relationships,"* Paul said.

Corn Seed Suppliers are very interest-



Corn Yield Field Crew.



Corn Yield Harvester.



Sam Lyons and Allen Maez.

ed in the results of the contest entry.

The yield lets them know what seed/variety will be of interest to producers for future seasons.

# CPP Assists with Combating Pinyon-Juniper in Garden Park Area

By Katherine Burse-Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office and the Canon City Field Office

**N**estled along the Arkansas River valley in south-central Colorado sits Fremont County, a place where approximately 47,000 people reside.

Within Fremont County is the town of Canon City, which is known for its prison systems and popular tourist destinations. It is also the place where, just seven miles north of the city in the Fourmile Creek watershed, dense stands of Pinyon-Juniper were wreaking havoc on public and private lands in the Garden Park area.

To combat this concern, Dr. Curtis Sorenson, four other local landowners, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) partnered up with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). Using funding from CDOW's Habitat Protection Program, NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the landowners themselves, the group was able to mechanically treat approximately 400 acres of Pinyon-Juniper that had crept into meadows and overtaken wildlife habitat and native grasses.

*"We found that this project had high implications for grassland improvement, reduction in soil erosion, mitigation of fire hazard potential, and wildlife and domestic stock grazing benefits,"* said Dr. Sorenson.

After that phase of the project was completed, Dr. Sorenson sought sponsorship from the Fremont Conservation District (FCD) and NRCS to continue treatment on an additional 1,200 acres of public and private lands, which will further increase the overall forest health of the watershed.

*"Locally-led conservation is a key aspect to assisting our community. So when Curt Sorenson approached the FCD in March 2011 with his project proposal and explained how other he and other landowners were collaborating on addressing those resource concerns, the FCD board gave him their full support. That's when the project really started to gain momentum,"* said Rick Romano, District Conservationist at the Canon City NRCS Field Office.

Beginning in April 2011, NRCS staff mapped and catalogued all 54 properties in the affected area and worked to contact each landowner with information on the project.

*continued on page 5*



Garden Park Project Area before thinning.



A hydroaxe was used to treat more than 1,200 acres of public and private lands.



Pictured here is a fraction of the crew that made the NRCS CPP Garden Area project possible.

*CPP, continued from page 4*

Within two months, NRCS had locked in participation from owners of over 70 percent of the targeted area.

With the sponsorship of the FCD, technical assistance from NRCS, CSFS, BLM, and CDOW, and funding from the NRCS Colorado Partnership Program (CPP), Dr. Sorenson and 36 fellow landowners joined together to improve the overall health of the forest, to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, to reduce soil erosion, and to improve habitat for multiple wildlife species.

*“Through the support of multiple local partners, the thinning of the pinyon-juniper throughout the project area was a great opportunity to leverage funds and technical support to impact a significantly large section of big and small game habitat,”* said Bob Carochi, District Wildlife Manager, CDOW.

NRCS provided \$250,000 to fund the project through CPP, a program whereby partners with approved projects will enter into multi-year agreements with the NRCS to help enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural lands and nonindustrial private forest lands.

*“We used hydro-axe and manual chainsaw treatments to thin and clear dense stands of pinyon pine and one-seed juniper to create a mosaic of stand structures,”* said John Grieve, District Forester, CSFS. *“Our objectives were to*

*improve wildlife habitat, mitigate wildfire hazards, and improve the health and vigor of the woodlands.”*

This area has seen a decline in the condition of the pinyon pines, which was brought on in part by the density of the stands and the current drought conditions. As a result the area has seen an invasion by the Ips beetle and twig beetle, which in the last year alone has caused the death of a significant percentage of the pinyon pines in the area.

Based on the overall health of each tree, age class, and tree species, the hydro-axe equipment was used to selectively thin trees, which helped to open up the forest landscape. This in turn increased herbaceous and woody forage quantity and quality for deer, elk, and wild turkey.

*“I’m just thrilled and could not be happier with the entire process,”* said Dr. Sorenson. *“None of this could have been achieved without the assistance of NRCS and other agency partners.”*

Since the completion of the project in December 2011, NRCS and FCD continue to work with the project participants using demonstration workshops and forest health updates to encourage upkeep of the treated area. NRCS has also established forty monitoring sites which will be used to assess increases in grass species composition, regeneration of woody species, and invasions of weed species.

# No-Till and Cover Crops Part II

*by Julie Elliott  
Holyoke Field Office, Area 2*



Farmers from Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska gathered in the Phillips County Event Center in Holyoke, CO, to learn about no-till and cover crops.

More than 130 people attended “No-Till and Cover Crops Part II” on Thursday, February 16.

Speakers included Nebraska grower Kirk Laux, Extension Specialist and grower Mark Watson, Extension Engineer Paul Jasa, and Dallas Johannson, NRCS.

The presenters shared their knowledge and personal experience of how no-till and cover crops positively impact soil structure, water-holding capacity, water infiltration and crop yields. The day-long workshop was hosted by the Haxtun and Yuma County Conservation Districts.

# Have You Seen This Bird?



## Southwestern Willow Flycatcher

- Small, sparrow-sized bird
- Stands about 5.75 inches in total length
- Weighs about 0.4 ounces
- Has a greenish-brown back, a white throat, and an olive breast with two white-wing bars
- Can be identified through a distinct "fitz-bew" song
- Neotropical migrant songbird that winters in southern Mexico, Central America, and northern South America and breeds in North America
- Arrives here early May to early June; heads south from late August-September
- Has been on the endangered species list since 1995



# WANTED

# NRCSer Wins Prestigious Wildlife Management Award



(Photo and writeup submitted by Noe Marymor, Private Lands Wildlife Biologist, Area 2)

**Patty Knupp**, Soil Conservationist in Canon City, received the Colorado Wildlife Society's 2012 Jim Olterman Award for Achievement in Wildlife Management. This is one of the most prestigious awards given by Colorado's professional organization of wildlife biologists and was bestowed on Patty due to the lasting impact of her invasive species removal and riparian restoration efforts in the Arkansas Basin. Patty's nomination for the award came from a wide range of staff at the NRCS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. ***Congratulations*** to Patty and thanks for all of your hard work!

## “Drought or No Drought – That is the Question!”

by Carol Kuisle-Franta

District Manager, Custer County Conservation District, Area 3

How can we help our producers plan ahead and make the most of their growing season this year?

The Custer and the Fremont Conservation Districts, in conjunction with their respective NRCS offices and CSU Extension offices, conducted a workshop on Thursday, March 15th, aimed to help producers gather information that will help them in their planning/decision making.

The workshop was held from at the Fremont County Rodeo Grounds 4-H Building. Four speakers provided at-

tendees with insight into the weather, snowpack, marketing outlook, and economics of drought.

The line-up of speakers included a drought forecast from Brian Bledsoe, Chief Meteorologist KKTV, followed by Mage Skordahl, Hydrologist, NRCS, who provided an update on the current snowpack report/outlook.

Dr. Stephen Koontz and Jeffrey Tranel discussed the “Economics of Drought: Tools & Decision Making Aids.”

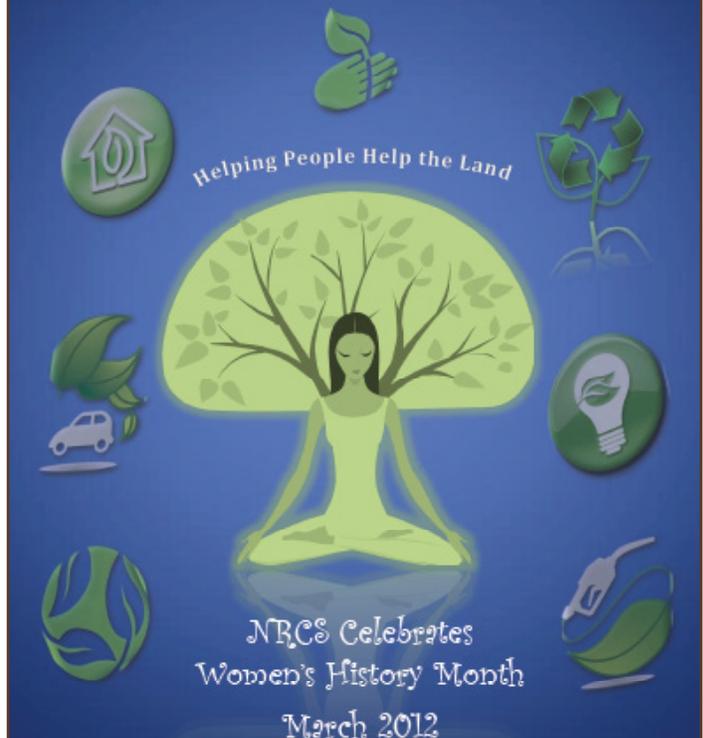
**2012 Theme:****Women's Education -  
Women's Empowerment**

Although women now outnumber men in American colleges nationwide, the reversal of the gender gap is a very recent phenomenon.

The fight to learn was a valiant struggle waged by many tenacious women—across years and across cultures—in our country. After the American Revolution, the notion of education as a safeguard for democracy created opportunities for girls to gain a basic education—based largely on the premise that, as mothers, they would nurture not only the bodies but also the minds of (male) citizens and leaders. The concept that educating women meant educating mothers endured in America for many years, at all levels of education.

Pioneers of secondary education for young women faced arguments from physicians and other “experts” who claimed either that females were incapable of intellectual development equal to men, or that they would be harmed by striving for it. Women’s supposed intellectual and moral weakness was also used to argue against coeducation, which would surely be an assault on purity and femininity. Emma Willard, in her 1819 Plan for Improving Female Education, noted with derision the focus of women’s “education” on fostering the display of youth and beauty, and asserted that women are “the companions, not the satellites of men”—“primary existences” whose education must prepare them to be full partners in life’s journey.

While Harvard, the first college chartered in America, was founded in 1636, it would be almost two centuries before the founding of the first college to admit women—Oberlin, which was chartered in 1833. And even as “coeducation” grew, women’s courses of study were often different from men’s, and women’s role models were few, as most faculty members were male. Harvard itself opened its “Annex” (Radcliffe) for women in 1879 rather than admit women to the men’s college—and single-sex education remained the elite norm in the U.S. until the early 1970s. As coeducation took hold in the Ivy League, the number of women’s colleges decreased steadily; those that remain still answer the need of young women to find their voices,

**MARCH is Women's  
History Month****WOMEN'S EDUCATION  
WOMEN'S  
EMPOWERMENT**

and today’s women’s colleges enroll a far more diverse cross-section of the country than did the original Seven Sisters.

The equal opportunity to learn, taken for granted by most young women today, owes much to Title IX of the Education Codes of the Higher Education Act Amendments. This legislation, passed in 1972 and enacted in 1977, prohibited gender discrimination by federally funded institutions. It has become the primary tool for women's fuller participation in all aspects of education from scholarships, to facilities, to classes formerly closed to women. Indeed, it transformed the educational landscape of the United States within the span of a generation.

Source: [National Women's History Project](#)



# Employee Spotlight

## Veteran's Who Make A Difference: Randy Randall

by Petra Barnes Walker, State Public Information Officer



*"Serving my country has been one of the most rewarding and honorable things I have done in my life. It brings me a great source of pride as well as humility and humanity."*

Randy Randall has many accomplishments for which he can be proud, from being a dedicated husband, father, and grandfather to rising in the ranks of his profession from a student trainee biologist to his current position as the Assistant State Conservationist for Operations in Colorado. But one of his most noteworthy and certainly most admirable achievements has to be his active duty status in our Armed Forces. Randy is currently a Major in the U.S. Army and has committed 25 years of his life to serving his country.

Randall began his service in 1987 to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded to the enlisted and has served and/or been stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany; Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Fort Sam Houston, Texas; and Fort Riley, Kansas as well as Afghanistan as recently as 2008. Having met his educational aspirations long ago, Randall continues his service at 47 years of age.

*"Serving my country has been one of the most rewarding and honorable things I have done in my life,"* Randall states. *"It brings me a great source of pride as well as humility and humanity."*

Randall is currently a Major in the US Army Reserves and serves one weekend a month at Fitzsimmons. As a Major for the 143rd Medical Detachment, he commands 60 troops and has the responsibility of ensuring their readiness because if deployed they are often on the front lines providing medical attention.



While In Afghanistan, Randall served on an Embedded Training Team (ETT), providing combat and medical training to the the Afghan National Army (ANA)4/1 Kandak, the equivalent to a U.S. Army Brigade. The Afghanistan Embedded Transition Teams are tasked with the mission of mentoring members of the Afghanistan security Forces - usually the Afghan National Army.

The ETTs mentor the ANA in leadership, staff, and support functions; planning, assessing, supporting, and execution of operations; and training doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures.

*"Joining the Army was a great way to experience other cultures and appreciate the things we have in the U.S. I've seen a lot in my 25 years of service, some good some bad,"* Randall finally states. *"I've also learned a lot and if there is one lesson I could pass along it would be not to sweat the small stuff. Life is extremely fragile and most things people fret over just aren't that serious."*

# Conservation Education: FCD Presents “Prizes for Puzzles” Program

by Katherine Burse-Johnson, State Public Affairs Specialist and  
Melanie Scavarda, Outreach Technician, Canon City Field Office, Area 3

The Fremont Conservation District (FCD) has devised a unique way to teach local community kids about the district and about conservation.

The “Prizes for Puzzles” program is a monthly contest for students in grades 1-8. Each month, students submit a completed entry form and designated conservation puzzle to the FCD office. For their efforts, every entrant receives a donated gift certificate for things like bowling and ice cream, and at the end of each month FCD randomly selects two grand prize winners for the big ticket items.

Monthly grand prizes include items purchased by the FCD and local sponsors. Prizes include gift cards, game sets, book sets, video players, bicycles, and music players.

*“This program is meant to target several outreach areas that we felt we could improve upon. The*



Fremont Conservation District's “Prizes for Puzzles” Program

*kids are being introduced to conservation terms and ideas while also getting used to talking with us about projects and volunteer opportunities,”* said Melanie Scavarda, Outreach Technician, FCD, Canon City, CO.

*“For the parents, a lot them are unaware of what we can offer landowners in our community as far as technical and financial assistance, so this is about getting them comfortable with us as well. As a district, we benefit greatly from an event like this because it allows us to build new relationships in our community and it gets our name out to the main-stream population in a fun and proactive way.”*

“Prizes for Puzzles” kicked off in January 2012 and continues to be a big hit in the community. The first winners for the program were 3rd grader Madison Boone-Wallis and 2nd grader Haley Suter. FCD staff made a big splash when they surprised Madison during school and presented her with balloons, popcorn, and a hot pink Mp5 media player.

This program will continue throughout the year. If you would like more information on “Prizes for Puzzles,” you can visit the FCD website at [www.fremontcd.org](http://www.fremontcd.org) or contact Melanie Scavarda at 719-275-4465, ext. 109.



Madison Boone-Wallis, a 3rd-grader and one of the first winners of the Fremont Conservation District's “Prizes for Puzzles,” poses with her family. She received an Mp5 player for her conservation knowledge.

*Congratulations  
Madison Boone-Wallis*

## Earth Team Volunteers: The Volunteer Workforce of the Natural Resources Conservation Service

The Earth Team provides volunteer leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources.

The Earth Team is the volunteer workforce of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Earth Team volunteers are an integral part of the conservation partnership and each member takes pride in the fact that they maintain and improve our natural resources and environment on private lands.

When you sign on as an Earth Team volunteer, you are on your way to becoming a caretaker of natural resources in your community. You may find yourself helping farmers, ranchers, and other landowners prevent wind and water erosion, conserving and cleaning up water, enhancing wildlife habitat, reducing flooding, or helping citizens of all ages learn about the environment and conservation through exciting educational activities.

The Earth Team offers outstanding and exciting opportunities for people who need professional work experience or academic credit. Who knows? After serving on the Earth Team, you may decide to pursue a career in conservation.

The Earth Team needs a variety of people with a variety of skills and talents. As an Earth Team volunteer, you can join professional conservationists as they work directly with local farmers and ranchers in putting conservation practices on the land. You also may play an important



Julesburg High School senior Ashley Campbell, an NRCS Earth Team Volunteer, assists with identifying grass species in a Conservation Reserve Program Field.



Earth Team Volunteer Ashley Campbell assists District Conservationist Daniel Palic with laying out terraces.

part in improving wildlife habitat or taking inventories of natural resources.

If you are interested in conservation education, you can work with elementary and high school students, and college and university students, too. Through camps, classes, tours, and exhibits, you can introduce them to the wonders of nature and get them in closer touch with natural resources.

Interested in other kinds of community outreach? As an Earth Team volunteer, you may organize and develop conservation tours and exhibits for professional societies, civic groups, and people of all ages. You can get folks involved in improving water quality and erosion control projects. You can write newspaper and magazine articles or speak to community groups. You can also use your talents for computer data entry and programming, typing, filing, and customer service.

To become an Earth Team volunteer, you must be 14 years of age or older and interested in conserving natural resources. You can work part time or full time, evenings or weekends, outdoors or in a local NRCS office.

It's easy to sign up. Contact the NRCS office at the Julesburg Service Center (970)474-2518 for more details. You can also call 1-888-LANDCARE (526-3227) and leave your name, address, and phone number. Your information will be passed on to an office near you.

Join the Earth Team today! Your community's natural resources need you.

## Hoop House Project

by Jim Sperry, District Conservationist  
Silver Cliff Field Office, Area 3

The Cliff's Community Garden High Tunnel Project was a collaborative effort with the NRCS, Sustainable Ways--a local nonprofit which oversees the garden, and Custer 2020--a local nonprofit which owns the land where the high tunnel is located.

The high tunnel, also known as a hoop house, is designated as a demonstration for local folks in Custer County to see how food can be grown in a high tunnel in our climate. Frigid temperatures and strong winds are the harshest elements that residents face when trying to grow food in Custer County. The high tunnel has provided a good growing environment amidst these elements.

It has withstood the wind (with a few repairs to the vent system and a few upgrades to the structure – i.e., a wooden frame and an actual door put into place) and has virtually been frost-free for the plants growing during the colder seasons, excluding late December through February when the nighttime temperatures get too cold without additional heating sources.

This project has been a big asset to the community for demonstrating how a high tunnel works and its capabilities in our harsh environment. It will also provide a public place to grow food and help distribute healthy, natural foods in our community.



Colorado Leadership Development Program Members (left to right): Mike Collins, Program Manager; Boyd Byelich; John Lestina; Sarah Hanlon; Charlene Lucero; and John Knapp, Sponsor.

## Colorado's Leadership Development Program

**O**n February 29 and March 1, 2012, members of the Colorado Leadership Development Program (LDP) met at the State Office to complete their scheduled Capitol visit.

The half day session on the February 29 included meetings with Phyllis Ann Philipps, NRCS State Conservationist; Cindy Lair, Program Administrator, CSCB; Brett Moore, Contract Lobbyist for CACD; and Tim Macklin, NRCS Western Governors Liaison.

On March 1, the group was the guest of Representative Jerry Sonnenberg and was seated on the floor of the House for the morning legislative session.

The group also sat in on one

House committee meeting and one Senate/House joint committee meeting during the morning.

The Leadership Development Program is a unique development activity to enhance the potential of NRCS employees to become managers.

The goal of the LDP is to challenge employees to undertake leadership development; expose employees to all levels of management, aiding them in future career decisions; and to enhance participants' leadership and management skills to effectively compete for positions of greater responsibility in order to assist the Agency in carrying out its mission. The LDP is typically offered every two years.

# Bee a Conservationist

By Kelsey Ridennoure, Soil Conservationist  
Walsenburg Field Office, Area 3

John and Janet Fink are nestled in a little oasis along the Huerfano River, eight miles North of Walsenburg just west of Interstate 25.

Since purchasing their property in 2003, the Finks have found that improving and maintaining the land has proved to be very challenging as well as rewarding.

When John and Janet first moved to their new property, the river bottom was overgrown with Russian Olives and Tamarisk. The two of them explored various ways to develop their farm and beekeeping seemed to fit in well with the surrounding irrigated alfalfa fields as well as the thick stand of Russian Olives in the river bottom.

Janet quickly expanded her bee operation to what it is today. She manages 10 colonies of Italian/Carniolan cross bees. Each colony has around 7,000 bees in midwinter to 70,000 in the summer. Each colony consists of one Queen, several hundred Drones, and thousands of workers. Twenty to thirty pounds of honey is collected per hive. Wax, pollen, and propolis are also harvested.

In 2011, anxious to take an additional



Christine Taliga, State Plant Materials Specialist, NRCS, and Janet Fink plant pollinator plots.

step in conserving and improving their property, the Finks worked with the Walsenburg Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office as well as the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO) with assistance from Patty Knupp, Area 3 Wildlife Biologist, to remove the Russian Olives and Tamarisk trees from the river bottom.

This project was funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The tree removal proved to be successful; however, Janet and her bees were faced with a tough challenge. The Russian Olive blossoms provide a bountiful source of nectar. Once this source was removed, Janet needed to replace it with a bee-friendly pollinator habitat.

John and Janet teamed up with the NRCS Plant Materials Center to plant a pollinator plot on their property. The Finks are one of 19 landowners that entered into a project under NRCS Colorado Partnership Program's Huerfano River Watershed Invasive Weed Project covering two counties and involving six partners including CO Parks and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, RMBO, CO State Land Board, two conservation districts, and NRCS. Seed for the planting was provided by four different plant material sites in the West as well as Applewood Seed Company.

Site preparation included two



John and Janet Fink.

applications of Roundup and two disking operations. Following this, weed barrier was laid. Extra precautions were taken to secure the weed barrier in hopes of preventing damage during frequently occurring high winds. Seeding took place in late January. Fifteen forb species were planted along with six tree and shrub species. Evaluation of progress will be conducted annually the by Finks and NRCS.

John's and Janet's commitment to this project is evident. They have been instrumental in the planning process and hands-on in the implementation of the project. This has been a very successful partnership that will complement their beekeeping enterprise.

Overall goals for the project will identify the species that will grow in this climate and altitude for future plantings along the Front Range. It will be exciting to see the progress of the site in years to come.

# NRCS Participates in Telework Week

## March 5-9, 2012

NRCS employees participated in National Telework Week, a second-annual initiative encouraging government agencies, businesses, and individuals to pledge to telework during the week of March 5 through March 9.

The goal of Telework Week 2012 was to highlight the many benefits of telework, which includes enhancing workplace efficiency, improving the environment, ensuring safety, and improving one's quality of life.

On a national level, this year, more than 69,000 employees pledged to telework. Collectively, these pledges saved \$5.5 million and removed 3,358 tons of pollutants from the air during Telework Week. If all pledges teleworked for a year, they would collectively save \$275 million.

NRCS employees in Colorado were asked about their experiences with teleworking during Telework Week and this is what they had to say:

### Jodi Hastings Resource Conservationist

*"I teleworked one day during telework week and my experience was great! I accomplished quite a few tasks that involved number crunching and I had fewer distractions and was able to stay on task. What I enjoyed the most about teleworking is not having to drive and I think having this opportunity is very valuable for the agency. Teleworking is an activity that is becoming more and more popular and will be necessary to maintain a quality workforce. If management continues to support teleworking, I am there!"*

### Ted Lucero Resource Conservationist

*"My telework experience was good. I'd like to continue doing it at least once a week or pay period. I teleworked one day and I enjoyed not having to fight traffic, the amount of gas I saved, and not having to dress up. Not being disturbed also helped alot. Teleworking is very important and useful. Because of the many benefits, I am very likely to telework in the future."*



### Mage Skordahl Assistant Snow Survey Supervisor

*"I teleworked once during Telework week and thought it was a good experience because of the lack of commute and quieter setting. I would like to telework on a weekly basis but I would need improved equipment."*

### Gene Backhaus State Resource Conservationist

*"I teleworked one day and found that it allowed me to focus in on tasks better and I was able to accomplish more in a short amount of time. The only challenge for me was the inability to communicate directly with staff about specific issues that may arise and need immediate responses. At the same time, teleworking was quiet with little to no disturbances. I am highly likely to do it again in the future."*



### Boyd Byelich District Conservationist, Longmont

*Teleworking was convenient, easier to stay on task, saved on commuting costs and time spent driving, and allowed for fewer distractions and interruptions. I think it is very important. I will do it again in the future if permitted."*

### Jonas Feinstein State Forester

*"I currently telework two to three days per week and it has been a life saver. Without question, I'm more productive at home because there are far less distractions from my office or the field office. Teleworking can have a measurable impact on team cohesion and collaboration. The flexibility is bar none. My daily commute into the office would be about one and one half hours, but teleworking saves me three hours of time spent commuting each day. For long-term sustainability and satisfaction, teleworking is important and I plan to stick with it!"*



# Milk Creek Cutthroat Trout Habitat Enhancement

By Steven Yochum, Brandon Miller, Brian Hodge, Bob Timberman, and Tiffany Harvey, Area 1

Between its headwaters on the White River National Forest and its confluence with the Yampa River downstream of Craig, Milk Creek flows through a series of private ranches, with Milk Creek Ranch being the first private property downstream of the National Forest boundary. This ranch envelops 3.5 miles of the stream.

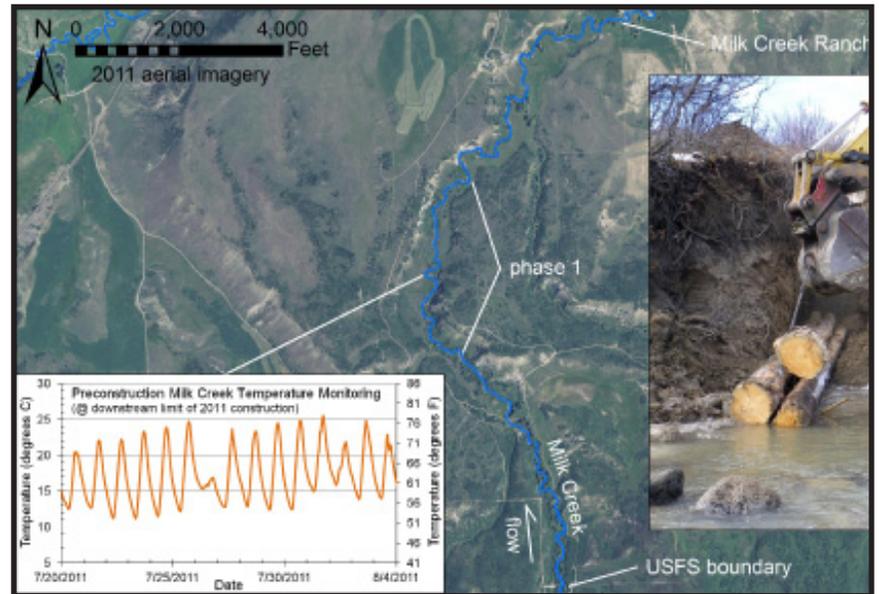
In the summer of 2009, a Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory private lands wildlife biologist and NRCS range conservationist partnered with staff from Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Habitat Partnership Program to improve wildlife habitat on Milk Creek Ranch. While working on this project NRCS staff learned that an aquatic biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife had recently discovered a pure strain of Colorado River cutthroat trout (CRCT) in Milk Creek, on the Forest.

This subspecies of cutthroat trout is considered a species of special concern by the State of Colorado and a sensitive species by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service. As with all subspecies of native cutthroat trout, CRCT is also a regional resource conservation priority for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Genetic analysis indicates that the Milk Creek population of CRCT is at least 99% genetically pure, which qualifies it as a Core Conservation Population.

Additionally, Milk Creek is one of only three streams in the Yampa River Basin where CRCT co-occur, or occur in close proximity to, bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker, roundtail chub, and other native fishes (e.g., mountain sucker, mottled sculpin).

Today, CRCT occupy only 16% of their historic range and bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker, and roundtail chub (commonly known as the "three species") occupy only 45, 50, and 55% of their historic range, respectively.

Upon learning of this discovery on the adjacent reach of Milk Creek, the owner of Milk Creek Ranch became very interested in taking measures to conserve this rare find and wished to learn what steps he could take to improve the



fishery on his property.

A multi-organizational team was assembled to address this interest, with representatives having expertise in biology, hydrology, and stream restoration. Today, this effort includes the NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, River Fixer LLC, Trout Unlimited, and the White River Conservation District. The project partners identified summer temperature as the primary limiting factor to production of cutthroat trout in Milk Creek.

As a coldwater species, CRCT are dependent upon the availability of cool water. On Milk Creek Ranch, summer stream temperatures often exceed optima for CRCT, and at times, approach the point at which sub-lethal effects (e.g., reductions in long-term growth and survival) may be realized. The elevated temperatures observed are, in part, a function of historical land use practices, which left the channel generally wide, shallow, and lacking sufficient riparian vegetation.

The general goal of the Milk Creek project is to increase abundance and distribution of CRCT on Milk Creek Ranch. Because temperature is the primary limiting factor to cutthroat production, a necessary first step towards satisfying this objective is to moderate the thermal regime during summer months.

An ultimate goal of the restoration is to create a robust and pure population that can serve as a brood source for reintroductions of CRCT into areas of the Yampa where the species has been extirpated. To meet these objectives in the desired timeframe, a restoration strategy was de-

*continued on page 16*

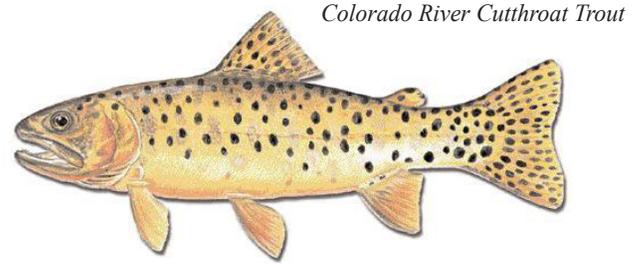
*Cutthroat Trout, continued from page 15*

veloped to improve habitat diversity for all age classes of CRCT, decrease the channel width-to-depth ratio, increase pool depth and frequency, increase cover and terrestrial food input to the stream through revegetation of channel banks, and reestablish a riparian canopy.

A stream restoration design was developed for a mile-long portion of the stream to accomplish these riparian modifications, through the use of in channel structures (log vanes, toe wood), pool excavation, vegetative plantings, and management. The pools, which are important refugia from peak summertime temperatures and winter ice, are designed to be maintained by scour forced by the log vanes.

In the autumn of 2011, 2,700 feet of the mile long Phase 1 were constructed. Construction of the second half of Phase 1 is planned for September of 2012, with a second mile (Phase 2) to be designed in 2012 for construction in 2013. Construction on the Milk Creek Ranch is projected to be completed in 2014 or 2015. Monitoring of the physical form, temperatures, and CRCT population response will be performed to apply the process of adaptive management.

Through this process, the project team will learn from previously constructed portions of the project to develop an understanding of the system response and gain the knowledge to modify later phases, to achieve the greatest benefit to CRCT. Additionally, this method allows



*Colorado River Cutthroat Trout*

the project to be used as a learning opportunity for other, similar projects.

Funding for the project is coming from the NRCS (WHIP, EQIP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, Milk Creek Ranch, and the White River Conservation District.

With funding for the project coming from federal, state and local programs, as well as from a non-governmental organization and the private ranch, and the specialists involved having diverse professional skills, the Milk Creek habitat enhancement project reflects the power that a multi-organizational and interdisciplinary project can have to satisfy complex problems.

As long as ongoing monitoring indicates improvement over time and sufficient funding is available for the restoration, the partners will remain focused on this important project to help recover a species of special concern.

## Lessons in AutoCAD

*Howard Clyma, Agricultural Engineer  
Pueblo Field Office, Area 3*

In January and February, Area 3 held seven AutoCAD training sessions led by Brady McElroy, Irrigation Water Management Engineer, and Howard Clyma, Agricultural Engineer.

The goal of six of these sessions was to teach soil conservationist and technicians to learn how to draw simple structures. The first to session taught basic drawing and editing skills.



**Soil Conservationists and technicians learn AutoCAD.**

The second two were practice drawing sessions and students were given two example drawings to attempt in AutoCAD and could ask

questions when they had problems. The last two sessions taught a few editing tips, how to set up the drawings on layouts (paper) at a given scale, and then how to dimension and print the drawings.

At the end of the training, each student had drawn at least one structure, setup a layout, and dimensioned parts of the drawing. Students were given both books and handouts on how to learn more in AutoCAD and encouraged to try drawing structures for field office designs.

Brady and Howard offered continued OJT by offering support through phone calls, Net Meetings, and requested field office visits. Six employees completed the training.

One session was offered for soil conservationist and district conservations to teach them how to find and download standard drawings. Training was also given on how to use free Autodesk software to add comments to standard drawings and review comments to designs by technicians and engineers.

# Colorado NRCS hosts Business Management Leadership Program Trainee

by Katherine Burse-Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist, State Office

**M**et NaJeema Randall. A native of Pensacola, Florida, NaJeema came to work for Colorado NRCS in February under the Business Management Leadership Program as a Procurement Specialist trainee.

Out of the 9,000 applicants who applied to the BMLP, NaJeema was one of only 100 trainees selected into the two-year internship program, which was designed to train future administrative staff in the areas of Financial Management, Acquisitions, Human Resources, and Administrative Support functions.

*"My aunt Brenda told me about the job announcement and I immediately started gathering all the documents required for me to apply,"* recalls NaJeema.

With only one week to apply to the program, NaJeema submitted her application and, to her surprise, got the position. She began the program in April 2011 and saw the program as a great opportunity for her to cross-train and receive on-the-job training while traveling and working in various NRCS offices.

She began her journey at one of three home base training centers in Greensboro, North Carolina. There she received six weeks of classroom training to prepare her for field office experience.

Her first field rotation was to the Milton Field Office in Milton, Florida where she spent three months shadowing the soil conservationist, district conservationist, and soil scientist to gain field office experience. After that she returned back to the classroom to learn about acquisitions, which prepared her for her next rotation to Auburn, Alabama to spend another three months doing contracting (acquisitions).



NaJeema Randall, Business Management Leadership Program Intern

Before coming to Colorado, she had an additional two weeks classroom experience in financial management. She spent approximately five weeks working in financial management.

*"I really like financial management,"* said NaJeema. *"Honestly, I've really enjoyed all of my experiences so far."*

NaJeema admits that certain aspects of the program has its challenges, such as the constant travels back and forth but, if given the chance to do

it all again, she said she would not hesitate.

*"I feel very fortunate to be a part of this program,"* she said. *"Many applied but only a few were chosen. I've never been a part of anything like this before and I feel like this is so much more than a job; it's like a family."*

When asked about her aspirations after she has completed the program, NaJeema said that she is looking forward to settling into a permanent NRCS office and getting to work.

She still has one more rotation to complete in Athens, Georgia where she will be placed in Human Resources for approximately five weeks. From there she will return to her hometown where she will continue her work at a nearby field office for the remainder of the program, which she expects to complete in April 2013.

NaJeema holds a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Business Management from Troy University. She is an only child and she has an adorable Pug named Bubbles.

# State Snowpack Makes Gains in February

by Mage Skordahl, Acting Snow Supervisor, State Office

February's weather brought welcome increases to snowpack percentages across Colorado, according to March 1 snowpack surveys conducted by the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The statewide snowpack increased to 81 percent of average, up 9 percentage points from the 72 percent of average recorded on February 1.

Despite these gains, this year's snowpack continues to lag well behind last year's, with the March 1 readings only 71 percent of last year's totals on this same date, according to Phyllis Ann Philipps, State Conservationist with the NRCS.

This year's La Nina pattern has been dramatically different than the previous La Nina pattern. At this time last year many basins in Colorado had broken records that had been in place since the 1930s; this year, average would be a welcome benchmark. February's snowfall seemed to be a turning point for the Yampa, White, and North Platte and combined San Juan, Animas, Dolores, and San Miguel basins.

The combined Yampa and White basins snowpacks increased 14 percentage points, reporting at 74 percent of average on March 1. The North Platte basin was at 80 percent of average on March 1, compared to just 69 percent of average on February 1.

In the southwest corner of the state, the combined San Juan, Animas, Dolores, and San Miguel basins snowpacks were at 86 percent of average on March 1, a 13 point

improvement over last month. The Arkansas, Upper Rio Grande, and Colorado basins benefited the least from the February storm systems but their snowpack percentages still improved. Across the state all major river basins received near or above average snowfall for the month of February.

As of March 1, the state's water supply forecasts closely mirrored the state's snowpack percentages. All major basins in Colorado are expected to have below average runoff conditions this spring and summer. The South Platte basin has the highest snowpack percentage in the state and boasts some of the highest streamflow forecasts.

Fortunately for most water users, reservoir storage is above or near average across most of the state. This available stored water should help alleviate any late-summer shortages.

The **table below** shows Colorado's snowpack and reservoir storage as of March 1, 2012.

For additional information about Colorado's water supply conditions, please visit: <http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/snow/>.

BASIN	% AVERAGE SNOWPACK	% LAST YR'S SNOWPACK	% AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE	% LAST YR'S RESERVOIR STORAGE
Gunnison	79	65	112	100
Colorado	75	59	116	101
South Platte	89	73	105	106
North Platte	80	61	---	---
Yampa/White	74	60	124	129
Arkansas	86	80	98	99
Rio Grande	83	94	69	84
San Juan, Animas Dolores	86	87	104	102
STATEWIDE	81	71	107	102

## Prowers Conservation District Holds 69th Annual Meeting

by Carla Warman  
Prowers Conservation District, Area 3

The Prowers Conservation District held their 69th Annual Meeting on February 29, 2012 at the Cow Palace Empire room. There were about 90 landowners/producers and others in attendance.

The Lamar Troop 218 Boy Scouts posted the Colors and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Henry Schnabel gave the invocation, then after a brief introduction of board members, NRCS employees, FSA employees, County Commissioners and the candidates for the upcoming Commissioner Election everyone enjoyed a BBQ buffet with brisket, pulled pork, and chicken.

Also attending the Annual Meeting were Christina Thiebaut-Mark Udall's office, Doris Morgan-Cory Gardner's office and Dwight Gardner-Michael Bennett's office. The district introduced the 2011 Poster Contest winners from Lamar, Alta Vista and Wiley schools.

The 2011 scholarship winner, Taylor Wilson, was not able to be present (he was in a biology class) but a letter was read to the audience thanking the district for the scholarship and what his plans are for the future.

Ben Berlinger presented Donna Hoffman Lord with a plaque honoring her for the 2011 Conservationist of The Year. Her family was present when she received the award and was totally surprised.

Dr. James Pritchett, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, was the guest speaker. He did a PowerPoint presentation on agriculture water policy and water economics.

James encouraged agriculture to take the lead and be proactive; citing that it will take 700,000 acres of irrigated cropland to support the front range. He said when his group surveyed city-dwellers, no one at an individual level wanted to take water from the farmers.

The District would like to thank everyone for their support and for coming to the Annual Meeting. Hope to see everyone again next year.

# Sage Grouse Initiative: Seeking Land Protection Partnerships in Colorado

by Wayne Jipsen

Area Conservationist, Area 1



The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory (RMBO), in coordination with the NRCS, brought together the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and many land trust organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, Yampa Valley Land Trust, Colorado Open Lands, Colorado Cattlemen Agricultural Land Trust, and the Legacy Land Trust to find ways to bring Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) funding for land protection to Colorado through Cooperative Agreements.

Demand for land protection opportunities in Colorado, especially in core range sage-grouse country, is exceedingly higher than the CPW or land trust organizations' ability to fund them. The SGI provides a unique opportunity highlighted by Wyoming's ability to allocate \$40.2 million in fiscal year 2011 through the Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). Colorado doesn't have the vast core range Wyoming does, although with the demand already in place informing eligible entities such as CPW and land trusts will open the door to many potential opportunities.

This effort increased partner awareness for the NRCS/CPW/RMBO/Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation positions in western Colorado, identified their potential role in land protection partnerships, and left the group with tangible land protection collaborations among partners. These partnerships will continue grow and provide ways to further leverage dollars across the landscape to protect vital habitats for sage-grouse.

## NRCS Human Resources' Mission to Recruit SCEP Students

Kent Amott, Human Resources Specialist, NRCS Colorado, was present at a career fair for the College of Agricultural Sciences on February 15 on the Colorado State University Campus.

The primary focus for NRCS was to recruit for the NRCS Student Career Experience Program (SCEP).

A current SCEP student, Samuel Streeter, stopped by the booth and spent about an hour talking with students and sharing his experiences and observations. Overall, about

50 students stopped by the booth to ask questions, drop off resumes, and get more information on the program.

Their educational backgrounds included Watershed Science, Biology, Natural Resources Management, Engineering, and Wildlife Management. Most of the discussion was geared toward helping the students understand the coursework that would be required to qualify for our positions. It was a positive experience and definitely helped improve our relationship with the College and spread our name and mission among the students.

# 3rd Annual From Our Lands to Your Hands Event

Article and photos by Sylvia Hickenlooper  
Soil Conservationist, Longmont Field Office, Area 2

They say it takes a village to raise a child and I believe the same holds true for educating our youth today about agricultural literacy. It takes the dedication of a superb planning committee, the knowledge and passion of the presenters and volunteers from the community and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) St. Vrain Chapter, generous contributions from the sponsors, and willing students who look forward to attending From Our Lands to ensure a recipe for success.

This year 545 students from seven local schools filled the Exhibit Building on February 2, 2012 on the Boulder County Fairgrounds to attend the From Our Lands to Your Hands Expo for the third annual event. The event is organized by the Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts, as well as the NRCS Longmont office, and Boulder County Farm Service Agency.

36 different presenters were on hand to teach the students the immense importance of agriculture and conservation in their daily lives through hand-on activities. FFA and Boulder County Naturalist volunteers led the students through the presentations. Bus transportation is provided for the attending schools through the use of these sponsorships.

When the day is over and the tables have been put away, the floors swept, feet tired from walking, and voices weak from talking all day, it is getting the opportunity to see the faces of the excited students who truly make this event a triumph.

Here are just a few samples of what kids had to say about attending From Our Lands:

*"It was fun! One of my favorite stations was the water one."*

*"I learned that everything and every person is a part of agriculture."*

*"That our food, clothes, and sport equipment all come from agriculture."*

*"I loved going. I liked how we were learning and having fun at the same time."*

*"I would not change anything about this field trip. It was the best field trip I have ever been on."*

And good advice to depart on:

*"You really can't just walk up to any cow and start milking it"*



## Thank You Presenters!!

Labor Farms  
 Boulder County Beekeepers  
 Zeb Dennis horseshoeing  
 Western Sugarbeet Growers  
 Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment  
 Anderson Farm  
 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Snow Survey  
 Colorado Egg Producers  
 Colorado State Forest Service  
 Kathy and Jennifer Litzengerger  
 Farm Service Agency  
 NRCS Soils  
 Red Wagon Organic Farm  
 Colorado Department of Agriculture  
 Colorado Department of Wildlife  
 Boulder County Ag Heritage Center  
 Cal-wood Education Center  
 St. Vrain Progressive Farmers  
 Colorado State University (CSU) Extension-Adams County  
 Colorado Corn Growers  
 Hand Weavers Guild  
 Vista Junior Gardners  
 Isabelle Farm  
 NRCS Range  
 CSU School of Agriculture Sciences  
 CSU Extension Boulder County  
 Colorado Cattlewomen  
 Colorado Beef Council  
 Boulder County Parks and Open Space Ag Division  
 Longmont Dairy  
 Weld County Weed District  
 Boulder County 4-H  
 Rademacher Farms  
 Van Thuyne Farms  
 Chad Musich

## Thank You Donors!!

Boulder County Commissioners  
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 American Pride Co-Op  
 Bill and Jean Turner  
 Pawnee Buttes Seed  
 Ag Professionals  
 Quality Irrigation  
 Turner Realty, Labor Farms  
 Longs Peak Equipment

# Jefferson CD Promotes Urban Agriculture Through Volunteerism and Education



Jefferson Conservation District's Kaitlin Fischer and Brian Devine (kneeling) pose with Barbara Moore, Executive Director of Harvest Mountain, after a rewarding day of pulling tomato plants and t-posts.

by Kaitlin Fischer and Brian Devine, Americorps/JCD

Thanks to the help of Jefferson Conservation District employees and five community volunteers, 4,000 square feet of urban farmland was prepared for spring planting this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (Jan. 16).

Jefferson Conservation District (JCD) staff Brian Devine, Joseph Hansen, and Kaitlin Fischer volunteered at the Wadsworth Blvd, Lakewood site to remove t-posts, wires, and tomato and basil plants to clear the planting rows for the spring, and moved tomato and basil silage to the farm's compost pile for use in the upcoming season.

The Conservation District informally spoke with the property owner offering technical assistance and discussed potential NRCS funding sources that could be used to improve the group's operation.

AmeriCorps OSM/VISTA and JCD employee Kaitlin Fischer reached out to a local non-profit, Harvest Mountain Farm Gardens, and organized the event after recognizing the farm's need for community volunteers due to staff limitations. This work was essential to the farm's mission of connecting Lakewood residents with local, organically-grown foods and educating local students about sustainable agriculture, because the farm relies on community volunteers to complete labor-intensive farm tasks. Harvest Mountain's volunteers also gain a working knowledge of urban agriculture from spending their time on the land.

The Jefferson Conservation District's partnership will continue to bear fruit—and veggies!—as the two work together to recruit students and finalize content for an after-school gardening course they will offer to 7th and

8th graders this April at Harvest Mountain's Lakewood greenhouse. This class will be based on the Junior Master Gardener (JMG) curriculum, a national program administered through extension services that certifies participants as "Junior Master Gardeners (JMG)," using hands-on learning about gardening, nutrition, and service to the community.

Fischer, who is spearheading this initiative on behalf of the Conservation District, hopes that a successful program this spring will encourage local public schools to utilize the curriculum in their classes in the fall.

At that time, retired teachers whom Jefferson CD actively sought out will have finished aligning the JMG curricula to Colorado's science academic standards. This will make it much easier for teachers to fulfill necessary academic requirements while also helping to develop an appreciation for agriculture and the environment in their students.

In addition, JCD staff adopted an activity from JMG's Health and Nutrition from the Garden handbook at Boulder Valley and Longmont Conservation Districts' 3rd Annual "From Our Lands to Your Hands" Expo held on Feb. 2nd.

Entitled "Rough and Tough Foods," Devine and Fischer used the activity to teach 150 4th grade students from Weld and Boulder counties about dietary fiber. They introduced the concept of texture by having students feel two mystery objects (sandpaper and plastic) and then describe what they felt. Next they discussed the benefits of incorporating foods with different types of fiber into one's diet.

The most fun—and messy—part was letting the kids finger paint with four blended food mixtures (broccoli and water, sugar and water, banana and water, bran cereal and water) and then having them deduce which foods have the most and least fiber according to how they look and feel.



Jefferson Conservation District staff hold out a bucket and sandpaper to demonstrate different textures to 4th grade students as part of a lesson on dietary fiber.

# High School Youth Benefit from Rangeland Management Forum in Spokane, Washington

The Colorado Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) was well represented at the 2012 High School Youth Forum (HSYF) held in Spokane, Washington on January 29 to February 2, 2012. The HSYF is an integral part of the SRM annual meeting. This year there were 26 delegates representing 13 of the SRM Sections.

During the Forum, high school youth from all parts of the western United States and Canada are invited to participate and interact among the various professionals and college students attending the meeting. Each of SRM's 21 Sections is allowed to send up to three youth delegates to this program that provides a high quality learning experience.

This year, the Colorado Section sponsored three delegates to Spokane. Nakayla Lestina of Dove Creek, David Everhart of Boone, and Cheyanne Foeppel of Fountain were selected to participate in the Forum. All three delegates were chosen based on their exceptional participation at the Colorado Association of Conservation District's (CACD) Camp Rocky, Colorado's premier natural resource summer camp for high school youth.

The goals of the HSYF are to recognize youth for outstanding accomplishments in rangeland activities and to provide young people the opportunity to discuss rangelands, learn about career options, and meet with leaders in the field of range management. One requirement of the HSYF is that each delegate must present an illustrated talk on some aspect of rangeland conservation or management.

David's presentation was titled "Drought Management." During his presentation he discussed how drought is defined and measured, as well as the varying effects drought has on our rangelands and the families who make their livelihoods from their rangelands.

David's personal experience regarding the current drought on his family's farm/ranch in northeast



Cheyenne, David, and Nakayla were CO high school delegates who were sponsored by CSSRM to attend the Youth Forum in Spokane, WA in January.

Pueblo County was the motivation for his choice of the topic of drought. As a result, David's paper presentation was awarded **SECOND PLACE** out of the 24 presentations made during the Forum!

Nakayla presented her talk on pollinators. It was titled "The Importance of Native Pollinators and Their Habitats." Nakayla discussed the different varieties of pollinators and the important role they play in our society. She highlighted the habitats that support pollinators and the need to enhance these habitats through proper management.

Nakayla concluded that on rangelands, pollinators benefit people by enhancing aesthetics that improve recreational experiences and that through these activities people get to enjoy the beautiful native forbs that these pollinators help produce. Pollinators also help to conserve rangeland plant communities by making them diverse, healthy and productive.

*continued on page 23*

*High School Youth, continued from page 22*

Cheyenne's presentation was about the advantages of grass-fed beef. Her title was "Grain-Finished Beef vs. Grass-Finished Beef: the Truth Revealed." During her presentation Cheyenne contrasted the differences between conventional feedlot-finished beef that have been fed a grain-based diet versus grass-finished beef production.

She discussed the health advantages and the environmental benefits of grass-finished beef including reduced feed grains needed, leading to reduced soil erosion, less energy inputs and improved manage-

ment of rangeland and pastureland. Cheyenne cited Colorado rancher Steve Oswald and his successful grass-finished enterprise.

The Colorado Section SRM and CACD congratulate David, Nakayla, and Cheyenne for their outstanding achievements in rangeland management and wish them the best of luck as they further pursue their ambitions in the field of natural resource management. Contact Ben Berlinger (719-384-5408) for more information about the SRM High School Youth Forum and Camp Rocky.

## Kiowa Conservation District Recognizes Pine Valley Ranch as Conservationist of the Year

by Deric Clemons, District Conservationist  
Franktown Field Office, Area 3

The Kiowa Conservation District recognized Pine Valley Ranch as the 2011 Conservationist of the Year for their outstanding efforts in land stewardship of our natural resources at the district's annual meeting on January 25, 2012.

Pine Valley Ranch is located east of Kiowa in Elbert County and consists of 1,375 acres of native rangeland and forest land. The native plants consist of: Big bluestem, blue grama, prairie sandreed, winter fat, fourwing saltbush and ponderosa pine. The winter fat and fourwing saltbush are desirable shrubs and are not seen very often. They are very palatable, offer good winter-feed, high in protein, and high in wildlife value.

Pine Valley Ranch is owned and operated by Florence Pritchard with the assistance of Florence's nephew Roger Trout. Florence was born on the ranch in 1921.

Florence and her husband Buck Pritchard were married in 1939 and leased 320 acres next to the ranch and bought eight cows and two horses to begin ranching.

They moved to the ranch in 1952 where they lived until Buck's passing 17 years ago. Florence still lives on the ranch today.

Pine Valley Ranch has installed 9,942 feet of fence to implement a rotational grazing system for the 120 head of cattle currently on the ranch. They have installed three livestock watering sites throughout the property. These



watering systems consist of the installation of one well, two solar pumping systems and three livestock tanks.

They also have one 440 gallon tire tank, and two rubber tread wall tanks which hold 9,200 and 11,000 gallons of water each.

They have implemented pest management for sawfly larvae on the 250 acres of forested land consisting of ponderosa pines for the past several years.

Florence's motto is a little song that says: *"Smile and be happy, sing and be gay, let's hope God's plan will give us another wonderful day"*

At age 90, Florence's key to longevity is being active and keeping busy.

## West Greeley Conservation District presents.... *Conservationists of 2011*



### Small Acreage Conservationist of the Year

### *Dale & Marsha Trowbridge*

The Small Acreage Conservationist of the Year 2011 by West Greeley Conservation District are Dale and Marsha Trowbridge.

Marsha is a lifelong resident of the Eaton area. Her grandfather settled in the area in the 1930s and established a farm. The farm remains in the family today. Dale was raised in Pennsylvania on a dairy. His family moved to Colorado and settled on a dairy east of Eaton.

Dale attended Colorado State University and received his bachelors in Agriculture Industries Management. He then went to Montana State University to pursue a degree in Animal Breeding and Genetics however Dale and Marsha were called back to Colorado to tend the family farm.

The Trowbridges have managed the Grove family farm since 1984 where they have raised sugar beets, pinto beans, wheat, corn, barley, alfalfa and even raised beef cattle. Last year the 180 acre family farm was put into CRP.

The family farm was not financially conducive to raising a family, so in 1994 Dale went to work for the Cache la Poudre Ditch Company in Lucerne. Dale

was recently promoted to General Manager of the #2 Ditch and is kept very busy with his work at the ditch company. In 2009, they purchased 20 acres from the family farm for their own little piece of heaven to build a house.

Due to their long history on the land, the Trowbridges were well aware of the sandy soils and the blowing wind. They recognize how important it is to maintain ground cover.

Last year, they purchased 350 seedling trees through the District seedling tree program. But they also wanted more immediate wind protection, so they also planted 120 8-10 foot trees.

In addition to windbreak protection, the Trowbridges were also interested in providing wildlife habitat. In addition to the ubiquitous rabbit, they have deer and even pheasant on their property.

The Trowbridges have a deep understanding of conservation values and wish to manage the land properly. They raised their three children on the family farm and value the hard work and dedication the land has taught them and their children.

## West Greeley Conservation District presents.... *Conservationists of 2011*



### Farmer Conservationist of the Year

### *Mertens Diversified Ag LLC*

**M**ertens Diversified Ag LLC members include Cole, his wife, Erika, and their four-month-old daughter, Carlee.

Erika manages the office, while Cole does most of the field work and takes care of the machinery. Some machinery and labor is shared with Mertens Brothers Inc.

Cole Mertens attended Colorado State University for a few semesters; however, he decided that he would rather farm than go to school. He started farming on his own in 2007, when he rented 700 acres of cropland to raise winter wheat and millet near New Raymer. He comes from a farm family of conservation pioneers. His dad, Jim, and his uncle, Paul, started no-till farming about 25 years ago.

Erika grew up near Roggen, CO where her parents operate a feedlot. She attended Colorado Christian University and graduated in 2009 with a Bachelors Degree in Education. She went on to pursue her career by teaching sixth-grade Language Arts before having Carlee. She is actively involved with the Mertens Diversified Ag, LLC operation and helps make everything happen.

Mertens Diversified Ag LLC entered into an Air Quality Initiative Environmental Quality Incentives

Program contract with the NRCS in 2011.

Cole and Erika receive incentives for conservation practices that reduce fuel consumption and soil erosion, increase carbon sequestration, and improve soil moisture and soil quality. Fertilizer and pesticide inputs are carefully managed to protect air and water quality while increasing profitability.

The farming operation has expanded to 2,600 acres with crop rotations that include winter wheat, corn, millet, and fallow. Cole's goal is to incorporate cover crops in the rotation, increase crop diversity, and reduce the need for fallow with no-till practices and improved soil quality.

Cole currently produces a brand of white wheat used to make whole wheat bread that looks like white bread. It is also used for sprinkles on McDonald's hamburger buns.

Mertens Diversified Ag LLC supplements its farming income with 200 head of yearling cattle on rangeland near Peetz, Colorado.

As the farming population ages, it is important to have young farmers like Cole and Erika Mertens taking over food production with sustainable practices.

## West Greeley Conservation District presents.... *Conservationists of 2011*



### Rancher Conservationist of the Year

*Steve and Gigi  
O'Hare*

Steve and Gigi O'Hare's ranch consists of 1,600 acres located north of New Raymer. The O'Hare family homesteaded the area in 1913. Steve, Gigi, and their sons Tyler and Booker have been operating their ranch since 1978.

The ranch originally had just three pastures but with assistance from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the O'Hares installed a water well, 7,200 feet of stock water pipeline, and two 1,150 gallon tire tanks.

The water distribution system has allowed them to create 12 pastures, which makes their high intensity/short duration grazing system possible.

A baseline forage inventory was used to determine

carrying capacity of the ranch when the grazing system began. Now, Steve monitors plant condition, forage availability, and livestock condition to judge grazing duration in each pasture and he keeps an eye on which pastures may be grazed more than once in a growing season while improving range health. The ranch supports 100 cow-calf pairs for six months, May through October.

Steve and Gigi's goal is to continue to improve the ranch by installing additional conservation practices such as windbreaks, playa and wetland exclusion for wildlife benefit, and an integrated pest management to control larkspur. They also promote a sustainable rangeland environment that they are proud to showcase.

## Collaboration Continues Along the Upper Rio Grande

*Written by the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project*

A partnership that began in 2001 between the NRCS and Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) continues to thrive as the two organizations work to monitor completed efforts and develop new projects. The RGHRP, a non-profit organization in the San Luis Valley of Colorado, was formed in 2001 to implement the recommendations of the 2001 Study.

The Study was prompted by concerned local farmers, ranchers, irrigators, agency personnel, and environmentalists who recognized the Rio Grande had deteriorated. It analyzed causes of degradation and developed recommendations to improve water quality, riparian habitat, streambank stability, wetland and floodplain function, and condition of in-stream structures.

The RGHRP and NRCS have partnered on three of the Projects that have resulted in the improvement of approximately four miles of Rio Grande riverbank. These



Laurie Clark, Phase 2 Project Engineer from the NRCS Monte Vista Field Office, performs monitoring of a Phase project site.

projects were funded through EQIP and with grants obtained by the RGHRP through the Colorado Non-Point Source Program (EPA 319 monies), the Colorado Water Conservation Board's Water Supply Reserve Account, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), and the Colorado Partnership Program (CPP).

In addition to

partnering on streambank stabilization and riparian restoration projects, the RGHRP and NRCS are spearheading an ambitious project to address issues with streambanks, diversion and headgate structures, and a wetland in an area known as the Sevenmile Plaza. Identified by the 2001 Study as a critical project, the "Plaza Project" will greatly improve the riparian and wetland habitat, streambank stability, diversion efficiency, and recreation potential of these in reach of the river.

The RGHRP and NRCS are specifically examining the results of the Rio Grande Riparian Stabilization Project – Phase 2 (Phase 2), completed in 2004. Phase 2 was funded through EQIP, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's Colorado Habitat Improvement Program, landowners, and a \$250,000 grant from the Colorado Non-Point Source Program. Phase 2 involved 17 private landowners on approximately 8,300 feet of streambanks in Rio Grande County. The RGHRP and NRCS completed annual monitoring of the Project sites until 2010.

Now, working with the Colorado Measurable Results Program (MRP), the groups are transitioning to long-term monitoring, which will occur every three to five years. The information gathered from these efforts is invaluable as it identifies successes and lessons learned to apply to future projects.

Heather Dutton, Coordinator of the RGHRP, commented, "We are very fortunate to have such a dynamic working relationship with the NRCS personnel in our local field office, area office, and the Colorado State office. From project development and implementation to monitoring and reporting, the NRCS is an exceptional organization to work with. It is this partnership that allows us to realize our shared goal to improve and conserve our region's natural resources."

For more information about the RGHRP or the NRCS/RGHRP Projects, contact, Mike Collins at (719) 589-6432 or visit [riograndeheadwaters.org](http://riograndeheadwaters.org)

# AREA 4 AWARDS CEREMONY



Employees in Area 4

Mike Collins and Phyllis Ann Philipps handed out numerous awards for Area 4, two Earth Team Awards and several lengths of service awards from 5 years to 40 years (guess who that was?).

Cathy Dix and Mike Collins talked on the Leadership Book Tribes and how this fits into NRCS.

A good time was had by all, at least, *WE* think so.



Richard Sparks and Mike Collins

*Congratulations  
Area 4!*

## CCTA ANNUAL NO-TILL CONFERENCE



by Ed Kilpatrick, Soil Conservationist  
Springfield Field Office, Area 3

The Colorado NRCS Soil Health Team was invited to present at this year's CCTA Annual No-Till Conference. Storm Casper, Tim Steffens, and Ed Kilpatrick, all from the Springfield Field Office, were dispatched to Burlington, CO this past January 31 and February 1, 2012, to give two different presentations on Soil Health and two separate demonstrations of the NRCS's new Rainfall simulator.

**Soil Health I**, presented by Tim Steffens, is designed to encourage the thought processes regarding the soil, the systems within it, as well as possibilities to increase the utilization of those ecological systems.

**Soil Health II**, presented by Storm Casper, gives

practical answers to the questions raised in the first presentation and also provides further discussion of the tools available for the producer to increase the soil health of his/her soils.

The Rainfall Simulator, demonstrated by Ed Kilpatrick, shows the value of soil health and residue in the infiltration of water into the soil as well as in the reduction of soil erosion.

Reports from the organizers of the event indicate that the information was well received and that much thought on these processes had been stimulated.

## USDA's **New** Non-Discrimination Statement

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD)."

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



# Junior Master Gardener®

growing good kids<sup>SM</sup>



Do you know where your food comes from?  
Have you ever grown vegetables?

## The Junior Master Gardener Certificate

**Program** inspires learning through outdoor activities, creative expression and open exploration. Dozens of hands-on math, science and language-based activities encourage leadership development, individual responsibility, community involvement, and the development of critical thinking skills.



Harvest Mountain Farm Gardens is accepting 12 committed and passionate 7 & 8 graders to participate in our 2012 Junior Master Gardener Program Certificate Course.



**When:** Every Wednesday for 8 -10 weeks starting April 4th, 2012

**Where:** Harvest Mountain Farm Gardens  
1875 Wadsworth Blvd. Lakewood, CO 80214

Tuition is \$35 and scholarships are available

Please contact Kaitlin Fischer (720) 544-2869

[kait.fisch@gmail.com](mailto:kait.fisch@gmail.com) if interested

# You CAN be a member of AIANEA

*Celebrate our rich culture which includes tribal governments, food, native traditions, natural resources, education and family connecting with the Natural Resources Conservation Service employees, Diversity of Tribes and Tribal Elders from 100s of different tribes across the United States.*

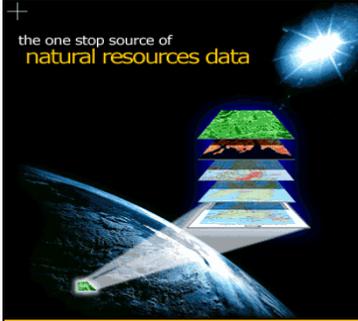


- **Who can join AIANEA?** **Anyone**
- **Do you have to be American Indian or Alaska Native heritage to join this employee association?** **Anyone can join!**
- **What are the benefits of becoming a member?**
  - \* Network with NRCS employees throughout the United States
  - \* Learn about diversity of American Indian Cultures and Traditions
  - \* Mentor or become a Trail Blazer (*protégé*) in the *Bi-Cultural Mentoring Program*
  - \* Educational Opportunities
  - \* Support Tribal Youth Activities/ education
  - \* Promote excellent government to government relations between Tribal Nations and NRCS
  - \* Encourage and support efforts in Conservation activities with the Farm Bill, Indigenous Stewardship Practices relating to Tribal Governments and NRCS
  - \* Leadership/Detail Opportunities
  - \* We offer several committees to make a difference; Visioning Committee, Leadership, Growth and Mentorship Committee, Youth Committee, Elder Committee, and many more...

**How to join:** American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association  
<http://www.aianea.com/index.html>

You can also visit us on **Facebook**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/American-Indian-Alaska-Native-Employees-Association/160121254007738?sk=wall>



the one stop source of  
natural resources data

# TECHNO TIPS

## Are You a NRCS Pirate?

by Andy Piszkin

Member, Colorado NRCS Technology Support Team  
Soil Conservation Technician, Fort Collins Field Office



**(Disclaimer: this is not about pirating software or any other illegal activity!)**

- In your everyday work, are you covertly using some one else's good idea or "trick" learned from another field office, state, or agency?
- Have you ever created your own template to serve a client's need just a little bit better?

It's OK; these are good traits to have when you work for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a nationwide organization. I believe every one of us should think a little bit like pirates and explore the application of tools and techniques either self-developed or already proven and used by other NRCS resources.

How many of you have ever come across a handy-dandy spreadsheet or check list and thought "Wow, that's a pretty smart way to do XYZ; I think I'll start doing the same on my projects"?

I know an NRCSer who worked in another state during the time when their animal waste management program hit the proverbial fan. Leadership went to battle stations; a comprehensive set of standard assessment protocols, design criteria, and engineering drawings were developed that could handle the bulk of all producer needs while consuming minimal execution effort from their soil cons, engineers, and techs. They had put in the collaborative effort to build a really good wheel for themselves.

Granted, the same exact 'wheel' would not fit the precise needs of another state; however, with some comparative analysis and a similar focus of resources, the fundamentals of the original program could be tailored to roll just as smoothly with a much reduced learning curve. To me, that would be a worthy pursuit. Sure, this may be a simplification of friendly pirating of another state's good NRCS idea, but any means of minimizing rework within this agency should be regarded as a beneficial act.

Back in 2009, I was using a common spreadsheet for calculating storage for an irrigation regulating reservoir – better know to us techs as a pivot pond. The spreadsheet did

help me what-if pond dimensions and volumes, but was a bit short on other practical aspects. With so many considerations floating in my head, my curiosity and I set out to enhance the existing spreadsheet. The outcome came to be a one-page template with add-ons I thought would be advantageous to any field tech faced with the task of designing and staking out storage pond options – what client wants only one choice?

I submitted the spreadsheet to the state engineer for vetting, approval, and consideration for statewide distribution. Ray Marine, Assistant State Conservation Engineer, and I worked together on enhancing the formulas and key features. The spreadsheet can be found on the NRCS SharePoint Directory for Colorado under the Engineering tab, Irrigation Tools documents. It makes me feel good to hear from others that it is a helpful tool.

So, how about you? Are you excited to let out your inner NRCS Pirate? If so, we'd like you to share your treasured spreadsheets, tricks-of-the-trade check lists, or your short-cuts (that don't short cut quality). How do you work smarter?

Back when I was working on my one-page pond design spreadsheet, I did not know about the Colorado NRCS Technology Support Team. One purpose of the Team is to solicit useful tools and technical treasures from our co-workers and help get those reviewed, evaluated, and hopefully shared throughout the state for others to consider.

There are two ways to either request a technical solution (i.e., I need a work-smarter tool) or to offer up a solution (i.e., I have a work-smarter tool). First, go to the Colorado NRCS Share Point Technology Team website [<https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/west/co/tech/Technology%20Team/Forms/AllItems.aspx>] and submit a Colorado Technology Form or Application Request. The form can also be used to share your ideas and pirate treasures. If you prefer a less formal way, just contact any of the tech team members; we're listed on the site.

So again, I ask: **"Are you a NRCS Pirate?"**