The Colorado Connection Newsletter
Summer Issue 2009
Colorado Natural Resources Conservation Service Employee Newsletter

Colorado NRCS: Living a Legacy in American Agriculture

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Highlights

by
J.B. Martin
Deputy State Conservationist

Our history of American Agriculture started from the economic cycles in the early years to our current government polices and programs. We should be proud of our efforts and accomplishments in being a part of a great legacy.

I would like to thank all employees for your continued support and understanding of our budget concerns for the state.

We strive to be effective and confident in making the correct adjustments, along with taking the right steps that will guide us in years to come.

Continue to do the great work you do and enjoy providing the assistance to the farmers and ranchers across the great state of Colorado. We are a growing nation and we, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, should be a big part of that!

As I began my 18th year with the agency, I've noticed that things have changed throughout those years.

However, one thing has remained constant… we are part of an agency that provides for the people of the land as well as the communities. Find time in your busy schedule to spend quality time in the field and enjoy it!

Speaking of change, many of you are aware that we have an almost completely new administrative staff.

In your spare time, please take a few moments to welcome these individuals to the NRCS family and make them feel at home. They are great people, just like each and every one of you. As they get settled in, the staff will provide outstanding service to you and your offices.

With that, I hope everyone will have a good rest of the summer and enjoy family and friends, as well as take some time out for yourself along the way!

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Commissioner of Agriculture Dedicates the First 50kW On-Farm Wind Turbine from the Department's ACRE Grant

by Misty George, District Manager
Baca County Conservation District

Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture John Stulp dedicated the first Entegrity 50kW wind turbine erected on a farm in Walsh, Colorado, on Friday, July 17, 2009.

Commissioner of Agriculture John Stulp dedicated the first Entegrity 50kW wind turbine erected on a farm in Walsh, Colorado.

In front of a crowd of 100 people, Commissioner Stulp congratulated H20 Farms and the Fred Hefley family for being pioneers.

The 50kW turbine will offset approximately 30 percent of the energy needs of pumping irrigation water for a center pivot sprinkler.

Farm owner Fred Hefley spoke of the many hurdles they circumnavigated to complete a project of this scope, and the many partners it took working together to make it happen.

Because this is the first turbine of its size in the state, the Hefleys were the first to attempt feasibility studies, find insurance coverage, finance from banks, and interconnect with the local utility company.

Mr. Hefley stated with the current economy, "we couldn't have picked a worse time." But with much perspiration, perseverance, and a solid network of committed partners they pulled it off.

Mr. Hefley expressed gratitude to those collaborators: Southeast Colorado Resource Conservation and Development, Baca County Conservation District, Colorado State Bank, the Colorado Department of Agriculture's "Advancing Colorado's Renewable Energy" (ACRE) grant, the International Center for Appropriate and Sustainable Technology, Southeast Colorado Power Association, Entegrity Wind Systems, Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union, Baca County Farm Bureau, and McDonald Electric.

Commissioner Stulp said the ACRE program is "designed to help rural communities in Colorado by developing agricultural energy related projects which benefit both agriculture and the environment."

H20 Farms' project will become the template for other agriculture producers to use as more farmers and ranchers step into the brave new world of small-scale wind generation for agriculture applications.

One to Grow On

He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.
~ Benjamin Franklin

Happiness is the art of learning how to get joy from your substance.
~ Jim Rohn

Look at everything as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time.
~ Betty Smith

That some achieve great success, is proof to all that others can achieve it as well.
~ Abraham Lincoln

A lot of people run full speed with incredible urgency in the wrong direction.
~ Justin Menkes

Be nice to people on your way up because you'll need them on your way down.
~ W. Migner

The difference between a mountain and a molehill is your perspective.
~ Al Neuharth

It's not what you've got, it's what you use that makes a difference.
~ Zig Ziglar

Motivation is a fire from within. If someone else tries to light that fire under you, chances are it will burn very briefly.
Stephen R. Covey

Tools for Small Acreage Landowners

by Jennifer Cook
Small Acreage Management Coordinator
NRCS/CSU Extension Partnership

CSU Extension Small Acreage Website Launched

In response to the growing need for small acreage education and assistance in Colorado, Jennifer Cook, Small Acreage Management Coordinator with NRCS and CSU Extension, and Ruth Wilson, Assistant Director of Technology at CSU Extension, developed the Small Acreage Management website.

Landowners can learn more about topics such as pasture and rangeland, fencing, soils, composting, weeds, and much more. The website also allows users to search frequently asked questions, submit a question, and browse small acreage-related events.

Contact Jennifer Cook to add your events to the list. Visit the new CSU Small Acreage Management website at http://www.colostate.edu/sam. A link to the website is listed on the Colorado NRCS homepage.

Small Acreage Landowner E-Newsletter Released

A quarterly, small acreage e-newsletter has been established by Jennifer Cook in collaboration with Adams and Boulder County Extension Small Acreage Coordinators, Jennifer Tucker, and Sharon Bokan.

The spring issue includes articles about vermiculture, leafy spurge, impacts of weeds, heirloom gardening, and much more.

View the newsletters and subscribe online at the CSU Small Acreage Management website http://www.colostate.edu/sam/index.html.

Educational Videos Pilot Project

Numerous short, three-minute, small acreage-related educational videos will be produced as part of a grant-funded educational video pilot project.

The videos will be streamed on the CSU Extension Small Acreage website http://www.ext.colostate.edu/sam.

Topics include: benefits of pasture management, how grass grows, improving grazing capacity, managing weeds, using beneficial insects, common weeds of Colorado, and small-scale solar energy.

Additionally, as part of the same project, mini-grants will be offered to teams interested in producing their own small acreage-related video (three minutes in length or less). No video production experience is necessary!

A how-to manual and a mentor will be offered to grant recipients. All NRCS, Extension, and Conservation Districts are welcome to apply. The request for proposals will come out in December.

Please contact Jennifer Cook for more information at Jennifer.cook@colostate.edu.

Third Annual Backyard Conservation Camp Highly Successful

by Denise Swanson, Haxtun Conservation District Manager

Forty area youths from fourth to eighth grades studied native range and conservation ethics and practices, built bug boxes, and learned about the history of Fort Sedgwick and the local area during a three-day conservation camp hosted by the Haxtun and Sedgwick County Conservation Districts.

Students learn how to build bug boxes.

"Rangeland Management" was the theme of this year's camp held at Watchorn Lake west of Julesburg according to Denise Swanson, Haxtun Conservation District Manager. Response from area youth was so strong that the Districts ran a bus to pick up students in Holyoke, Haxtun, and Julesburg.

Jerry Miller, District Conservation Technician for the two Districts, led the daily events based upon the Aldo Leopold Educational principle of striving for a land ethic to instill a love, respect, and an admiration for the land.

Students journal their thoughts.

Students were encouraged to observe, interpret nature, and journal their thoughts reflecting on how all things in nature are inter-connected and the affects personal actions may have on natural systems.

Josh Saunders and Julie Elliott, NRCS Multi-county Rangeland Specialists, worked with the students on identification of grasses, shrubs, forbs, and proper grazing management with fencing and water development.

Andy Steinert, NRCS Soil Scientist, showed the group different soil layers and core samples of the soil profile and let them feel the different soil textures by making mud balls of the various soil types.

Jack Wieland, Conservation Officer for the Division of Wildlife, discussed and introduced animals of the area, their impacts on the range, and how game herds are managed in periods of drought and abundance. Each camper then built a bug box to collect and study insects.

Local rancher, Jim Parker, told stories of how his grandparents moved to the area from Missouri in 1897 to homestead the land. This operation has expanded over the years and is now owned and operated by Jim and his son, J.J.

Pony Express Re-Rider, Gary Lancaster, told the history of Fort Sedgwick and how the town of Julesburg moved three times before it was established in its present location.

The group was also told of the Pony Express, and that Julesburg was Colorado's only station. The rest of the day was spent metal detecting, using GPS to mark points and tracking for a scavenger hunt, and Pioneer Olympics with old time games of hoop rolling, ring toss, and tug of war.

Additional personnel, land sites, and/or contributions from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Watchorns', Moists', Bruce Woodhams, Randy and Renee Weis, Darlene Weis, Larry Haynes, Phillips County and Frenchman Creek Pheasant Forever Chapters, and the Holyoke School Transportation, also assisted the Districts'educational event.

The hands-on field work was conducted at Watson Island located behind the Western Colorado Botanical Gardens. Los Lunas provided the willow cuttings, shrubs, and tree poles as well as a specialized auger to deep plant the riparian materials.

Dan Thompson, Wildlife Biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Grand Junction Service Center, worked with the Division of Wildlife to donate their 7230 John Deere tractor to be used for the field work.

In addition to the planting, the attendees were instructed on how to keep the newly planted materials safe from wildlife predation and harm.

The workshop was a huge success and attendees agreed it helped further their knowledge of riparian restoration and planting techniques.

Students learn about soil layers.

Stimulus Money Provides "Go Ahead" for Conservation Project

Article reprinted with permission from Susan Pieper and the Rocky Ford Daily Gazette

photo courtesy of Mary Miller, Public Affairs Specialist, Area 3

From left to right: David Miller, District Conservationist, Rocky Ford Field Office; John Knapp, Area Conservationist, LaJunta Area Office; Felipe Padilla, landowner; and Allen Green, State Conservationist, Lakewood.

The current economic situation has hit many people, not the least of which are agricultural producers who are struggling to maintain their family operations and still meet government regulations imposed on them.

For many producers, turning to the USDA NRCS (United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service) for assistance in putting into place conservation measures to add efficiency to their operations has been almost "standard procedure."

With the budget crunch, however, the money that normally went to producers virtually stopped. The release of funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 has enabled several area producers to dust off their conservation plans and get to work.

ARRA is, according to NRCS, the Obama administration's plan to "modernize the nation's infrastructure, jump start the economy, and create jobs."

The NRCS is handling some of its stimulus funding to put some funds back in the hands of the producers so they can complete their conservation projects.

Felipe Padilla, who lives in Crowley County, but has land in Lincoln, Crowley, and Otero counties, was the first southeastern Colorado producer to receive ARRA funds.

Padilla's project is part of a much larger endeavor, the Highline Breaks Watershed project that was undertaken in the 1990s.

The original intent of the project was to "improve water quality, both surface and groundwater, reduce irrigation-induced erosion to acceptable levels, and more effectively conserve and use available water supplies by improving irrigation efficiency."

Land in the Highline Breaks project, according to the original plan, is rangeland and irrigated crop land and "most of the problems that surfaced were on the irrigated land." These problems concerned "nitrates and heavy metals in the wells and irrigation drainages," among others.

Padilla's project will include improving irrigation by such methods as gated pipe, concrete ditches, sprinkler systems, or the like.

The entire Highline Breaks Watershed project will cover 89,650 acres in both Otero and Pueblo counties and will eventually "create 28 land treatment contracts with mostly family-owned farms that result in significant water quality improvement, conservation of an over-appropriated water supply, and enhancement of scarce wildlife habitat."

Through the project, which has included the partnership of West Otero/Timpas Conservation District and the Colorado State Conservation Board, water quality in both surface and groundwater should improve and irrigation-induced erosion should be reduced to acceptable levels.

It is hoped the completed Highline Breaks Watershed project will help conserve irrigation water on these 31,000 cropland acres, which ultimately will help the nearly 10,000 watershed residents.

In addition, it is hoped that erosion will be reduced by 45,000 tons per year and sediment being transported to the Arkansas River should be reduced by 19,000 tons per year.

Salt being transported to the Arkansas River through older established irrigation practices should be reduced by 31,000 tons annually and thus the selenium content would be decreased by 25 percent during that same time period.

Along the 12 miles of stream corridor it is anticipated that fish and wildlife habitat will be improved. The best thing about Padilla's individual project and the project as a whole is that nearly $1 million will be infused into the local economy through the purchase of materials and the hiring of work to install these improved irrigation methods.

The June 3rd contract signing with Padilla was historic enough to warrant the presence of the Colorado State Conservationist Allen Green who said this was just the first of several Colorado contracts to be signed.

Padilla, who had worked on his conservation plan and had had it approved several years ago, had to "shelve" it until funding was available. Thus, when the stimulus money was received, his plan was ready to go.

Fremont County Drought Workshop Held For Local Producers

By Kimberly Diller
Rangeland Management Specialist

Jeff Tranel, Economist, Colorado State University Extension (CSUE), Pueblo; Tim Steffens, Ph.D. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, Springfield, CO; and Marvin Reynolds, Director for CSUE, Pueblo.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Colorado State University Extension (CSUE) presented a range management workshop Tuesday evening, May 12th at the Fremont County Fairgrounds.

The workshop was co-sponsored by the Fremont Conservation District, the Fremont Cattlemen's Association, and the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

The workshop focused on providing science-based information to 33 private landowners and agency resource managers to address current range conditions and the ongoing drought.

Tim Steffens, Ph.D. NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist from Springfield, CO, discussed "Grazing Management During Drought" and modifying grazing in response to changing conditions.

A look at local precipitation patterns and historic rainfall in Fremont County was also highlighted. Jeff Tranel, Economist, CSUE, Pueblo provided his perspective on "What To Do with Livestock: Buy, Sell or Hold?"

Tranel discussed evaluating risks and outcomes to a producer using tools such as cow costs, production costs, and break-even prices to make decisions about buying, selling or maintaining the herd.

Tranel also discussed strategies to plan ahead when and what animals should be culled and setting long-term goals in terms of herd retention or build-up in the future.

Marvin Reynolds, Director for CSUE, Pueblo, focused his discussion on "What Makes a Healthy Drought."

Topics included noxious weed identification and management, herd health, body condition scoring, and animal nutrition.

Each participant received a resource notebook, which contained the presentations, plus pertinent science-based information on range and livestock-related topics.

Prowers County Tamarisk Project is Underway

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and many partners are putting dollars towards on-the-ground control of invasive species, specifically tamarisk, in the Holly, Colo. area.

Seven landowners, the Holly Flood District, Colorado State Land Board (CSLB), Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Tri-State Generation and Transmission (G&T) will benefit from this project.

Funding from NRCS will come from the Colorado Invasive Plant Species Program, which is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Other partners contributing funds are the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), Prowers County Commissioners, Tri-State G&T, and the CSLB.

CWCB dollars are coming from the Southeast Colorado Water Conservancy District that applied for a CWCB grant.

The Southeast Colorado Resource Conservation and Development Council and Northeast Prowers Conservation District will administer the funds for the project, which total approximately $260,000.

Interstate partners include the Kansas Water Office, Hamilton County Kansas Commissioners, and Kansas State University Extension. These groups will be duplicating Colorado's efforts across the state line in Kansas.

The project area will encompass approximately 1,500 acres along the Arkansas River and Wild Horse Creek in Colorado. Aerial spraying will be used.

Water! Water! Everywhere!!

Children's Water Festival Held Across Colorado

From Montrose!!

More than 480 fourth-grade students attended the 17th annual water festival at Baldridge Park in Montrose, CO. There were 21 stations throughout the park where the kids could visit and spend 16 minutes per station learning about water conservation, water safety, drinking water, and lots more water issues. The Shavano Conservation District hosted this event where NRCS representatives and other agencies were present to educate Montrose and Olathe classes about water.

To Grand Junction!!

- More than 2,000 fifth graders attended the 16th annual Children's Water Festival that was held at Mesa State College in Grand Junction in May.
- This two-day event, one of the largest water festivals in Colorado, included several organizations that educated students on topics such as water conservation, water safety, and many other water issues.
- Natural Resources Conservation Services representatives volunteered their expertise alongside approximately 260 other volunteers to make this event a memorable learning experience for the students.

A Fun-filled Day of Havoc Focuses Attention on Water Issues

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A flood toppled several buildings into a stream Thursday.

A screaming mob was sprayed down and scattered by a firehose.

Pollution was destroying aquatic life at a dizzying rate.

Was it just another day along Fountain Creek?

No, it was the annual Children's Water Festival at Colorado State University-Pueblo, a whole day of learning disguised as fun for about 1,800 fourth-graders throughout Pueblo County.

About those buildings. . .

Actually they were made from plastic Duplo blocks and were part of a trailer-top model sponsored by the Sangre de Cristo Resource and Development Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Children were fascinated by the effects of running water on a sandy base and learned how man-made objects in a watershed can alter or contaminate flows.

Like the Earth itself, the trailer recycles flows continuously.

"How long has the water been recycled?" asked Colin Loring of the NRCS as he described the ways water could become polluted.

A group of students from Rye Elementary School have some fun as they get sprayed with water coming out of a water gun as they take part in the Children's Water Festival.

"We're drinking water that was used by a T-rex," one bright boy quickly answered.

Outside Massari Arena, the Pueblo Fire Department supplied a firehose that attracted a large crowd throughout the day, eliciting a four-alarm fun alert.

If you wanted to get wet, but didn't, you just weren't trying hard enough. The Pueblo County High School Future Farmers of America were splashing water aplenty as they demonstrated how to use an irrigation siphon tube.

The fountains on the CSU-Pueblo grounds were freely flowing. The adults were having a hard time keeping kids from running through sprinklers or dipping toes in drainageways as students moved from one station to another across the campus.

At the Water Sentinels exhibit, students even got to pretend they were in the water. They were instructed to become "bugs" and move in a certain way (hopping, dropping or zig-zagging) across a "stream" (a lawn actually) as one student volunteered to be "pollution" (gasoline in this case). It became a game of tag with a point.

Elsewhere on campus, the kids learned about practical physics from a Mad Scientist, water basics from a Water Wizard, and boat safety from rangers at Lake Pueblo State Park. The event was co-sponsored by the Pueblo Board of Water Works, Bureau of Reclamation, Colorado State University-Pueblo, Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District, St. Charles Mesa Water District and Pueblo West Metro District.

"This has got a lot more going on than other water festivals I've been to," said Mary Miller of the NRCS. "And the weather's so beautiful for this today."

Colin Loring (center), with Natural Resources Conservation Service, uses a trailer filled with sand and plastic toys to explain the importance of watersheds to a group of students from South Park Elementary School.

Employee Spotlight

The Day in the Life of a Wildlife Biologist

Patty Knupp
NRCS/CDOW/RMBO Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
Pueblo Field Office - Pueblo, CO

"A Wildlife Biologist manages wildlife and their habitat to help sustain their populations and a healthy ecosystem."

"I provide wildlife technical assistance to 16 NRCS field offices (in the SE) and private landowners to help enhance and/or restore wildlife and their critical habitat through Farm Bill programs. I also provide program support to field offices.

I assist CDOW and the NRCS state biologist with biological assessments. I develop and sustain cooperative working relationships with numerous partners which helps leverage dollars for habitat improvement. I provide trainings and workshops for peers and landowners."

When did you begin your career with NRCS?
October 2006

How did you hear about the Agency?
I partnered with NRCS when I worked for the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as a statewide wildlife biologist, 1990-2003.

What do you enjoy the most about your job?
Getting on the land (site visits) with producers.

What is the most challenging part of your job?
Not having enough time.

In your view, how does wildlife biology benefit conservation?
Just as soils, water, air, and plants are vital resource concerns for a healthy ecosystem, wildlife is also an integral part of a healthy environment.

What is one of your favorite or most interesting projects or activities that you have been involved with since your employment with NRCS?
I am leading a very large tamarisk control project on the Apishapa River watershed. It is an interesting project as it involves at least 10 different partners as well as a dozen landowners in three counties. We have covered approximately 30 river miles. The interest continues to grow and we hope to complete the entire watershed in another year or two. This year we are releasing tamarisk beetles with the hope that they will establish and maintain the riparian corridor.

What other agencies do you work with to carry out your job responsibilities?
CDOW, TNC, CSFS, CSU, RMBO, FWS, ED, State Land Board, Conservation Districts.

What is your background in education?
I have a B.S. Wildlife Management, University of WI – Stevens Point, 1987; and a M.S. Wildlife Management, South Dakota State University, 1990.

Do you have a spouse/kids?
No.

Any pets?
Two yellow labs--Holly and Lutra and two horses-- Diamond and Dakota.

What are your interests and hobbies?
I enjoy horseback riding, gardening, hunting, angling, snow shoeing, cross country skiing (pretty much anything outdoors)!

Ride for Hope

By Mary Miller, Area Public Affairs Specialist

My getting teary-eyed because I am riding our Harley-Davidson motorcycle with David, my husband, on a nice June day sounds a bit corny. But I did when we participated in the first "Ride for Hope" that began and ended in Canon City.

The "Ride for Hope" was held in conjunction with the 9th Annual "Walk for Hope." For the past seven years, our Canon City USDA Service Center has participated in the "Walk for Hope."

They do this in honor of Krissy Barnhart. Krissy, the 11-year-old daughter of Janet (Fremont CD Manager) and Harvey Barnhart, passed away on October 23, 2002 from neuroblastoma, a type of cancer.

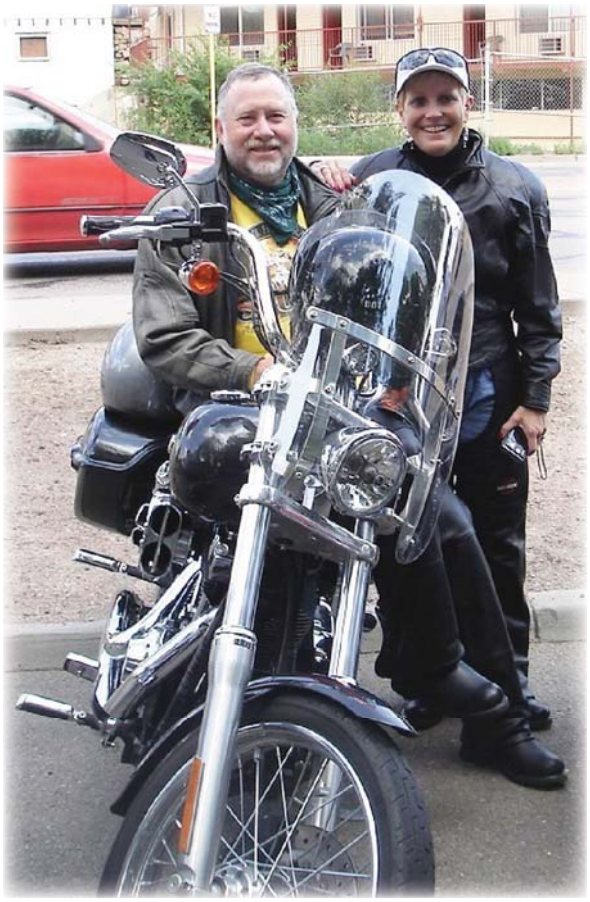
Janet and Harvey Barnhart lost their 11-year-old daughter Krissy to cancer in 2002.

Both events raised money for the Orchard of Hope Foundation, which provides financial and emotional support for Fremont County Cancer Champions and their families.

Even before the ride started, I got tears as cancer survivors took the first lap around Veterans Park in Canon City.

Each survivor wore a name tag that listed the number of days to years that he/she has survived cancer. The survivors were both young—very young—and old.

I even saw one very young boy who had a name tag that said "donor." His older brother, probably a high schooler, was also there as a survivor. These survivors walked with determination, pride, and spirit.



Dave and Mary Miller, NRCS, Area 3 participate in the "Ride for Hope," which honors cancer survivors.

As we rode, I also thought of all of David's and my family members who have passed away from cancer.

We NRCSers have always considered ourselves part of a big family. Participating in an event such as this with co-workers sure made this bond even stronger.

Leafy Spurge and Tamarisk Beetles Released Along the Cucharas and Huerfano Rivers

By Mary Miller, Area Public Affairs Specialist

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and many partners again put dollars towards on-the-ground control of invasive species in Southeastern Colorado.

Recently the Upper Huerfano Conservation District and Tony Arnhold, Walsenburg NRCS Field Office District Conservationist, worked with Dan Bean, an entomologist at the Colorado Department of Agriculture insectary near Palisade; Patty Knupp, NRCS/Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory/Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) Private Lands Wildlife Biologist; and Shelley VanLandingham, Colorado State Forest Service Assistant District Forester, in releasing leafy spurge and tamarisk beetles along the Cucharas and Huerfano Rivers.

This release is part of on-going invasive species work in Huerfano County. Last year the district, NRCS, and partners cost-shared with some producers to spray tamarisk infestations in the area. This will be done again this year.

Cost-share dollars came from the Colorado NRCS Invasive Plant Species Program, which is a voluntary program for landowners who want to improve the productivity of range, restore wildlife habitat, and restore the natural riparian plant community. Other dollars came from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, CDOW, and Colorado State University.

on the pulse State Office News

Twelve participants took the Effective Presentations course that was held in June in Alamosa.

The course was a certified NEDS course and was taught by the Public Affairs staff.

It was designed to help the participants be more professional when representing NRCS to the public, partners, and fellow employees.

The group was required to prepare and present a minimum of three speeches: introductory, persuasive, and informative.

This week-long course was a tremendous success and everyone did an excellent job with their presentation skills.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continuous sign up for the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), is well under way.

The new CSP is designed to encourage agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones onto their operations.

The continuous sign up process offers producers the opportunity to apply for enrollment into CSP at any time.

They are, however, encouraged to apply before September 30, 2009, as this is the last date applications will be considered for FY2009 funding.

All applications received after September 30, 2009 will be considered for the next allocation of CSP funding.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack recently made a visit to the State Office to show appreciation to all the USDA employees and discuss the measures that are being put forth under the new administration.

He discussed efforts that are being made through the Recovery Act and the role that we as employees play in seeing all of these new policies and programs through to fruition.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently announced that $1.2 million has been provided to Colorado for a new initiative to encourage more organic agriculture production.

Funding for the initiative is being made available as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has approved 11 of 13 proposals submitted to help control Colorado invasive plant species.

This year marks the fourth year the agency has provided financial assistance to this widespread issue.

U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Dave White recently announced that the agency will be providing nearly $58 million for water conservation and water quality improvements on agricultural working lands.

Colorado is one of the 21 states to receive funding, which includes more than $300,000 to fund a local water conservation project in partnership with the Republican River Water Conservation District.

Comings

NRCS would like the welcome the following new employees to our agency:

Debbie Farley
Voucher Examiner

Maggie Page
Budget Analyst

Also, not pictured:

- Terra Bush, *Human Resources Specialist*
- Sarah Belt, *Human Resources Specialist*
- Debbra Hawkesworth, *Contract Specialist*
- Richard Jones, *Leasing Specialist*
- Steve Jelden, *Soil Data Quality Specialist*

WELCOME! If you haven't had the opportunity to welcome our new employees, please take a moment to do so.

on the pulse Area Office News

Area One

On June 27th Liz With and John Scott participated in the Gunnison River Festival, an event-filled day with raft and kayak races at the Gunnison Whitewater Park.

They set up the River/Riparian Trailer to do demonstrations throughout the day, helping to educate people about river/riparian systems and the need for proper care and management of those systems to keep them functioning and healthy.

Recently there was an Ecological Site Description (ESD) training for Rangeland Specialists in Area 1.

ESDs, which are based on soils, illustrate a kind of land with specific physical characteristics, which differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce distinctive kinds and amounts of vegetation and in its response to management.

The training was held in Grand Junction where soils scientists and rangeland specialists also collaborated and developed a plan to complete the ESD workload in Area 1.

A Private Landowner Wildlife Habitat Workshop took place May 29th, 2009, at the Zech Ranch in Delta, Colorado.

The event was sponsored by The Colorado Division of Wildlife and was a coordinated effort with the NRCS.

The 57 participants were welcomed by ranch owner Mike Zech and got a tour of the property, which included looking at wildlife habitat and irrigation improvement projects that were part of the NRCS EQIP salinity program and hearing presentations from nine different state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations that have funding and/or technical assistance available.

Tanya Banulis, Wildlife Biologist, Delta, and Cory Kanuckel, Private Lands Biologist, Durango, gave two of the presentations.

With the floodwater receding, good weather, great food, enthusiastic hosts, and informative presentations, the workshop was a huge success.

On May 15th, Liz With and John Scott participated in the Annual 4th Grade Water Festival by conducting two stations.

Liz conducted the River/Riparian Trailer Demonstration where she had two rivers side by side and had the students help define all of the terms associated with rivers and riparian systems, and then discussed the differences in the two rivers and how they might help to fix problems in either river.

Then the students had a hands-on opportunity to fix any problems they might have observed and discussed what they did and why.

John conducted the Snow Survey Station, where he discussed the need for snow measurement, the location of snow courses, how snow courses were laid out, and then the students had an opportunity to actually measure some snow that had been brought in for the station.

The Shavano Conservation District and NRCS held a four day camp for Girl Scouts the third week in June.

The camp was organized by Cyndee Feske, Education Coordinator, Shavano CD, with assistance from Barb Cencich, Resource Conservationist, NRCS.

They taught the girls about what our natural resources are and why they are so important. Special presentations were done with the "Jug," a process that shows how ground water flows and how it can become contaminated.

The watershed model was used to teach the kids how our water flows and how we need to take precautions to keep our water clean.

Besides learning the basics of erosion and how to conserve our natural resources, they were also shown how to read topographic maps.

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The camp was geared at The Girl Scout program called "Linking Girls to the Land" and centered around earning the "Water Drop Patch."

The girls enjoyed many activities including hiking and games while learning about our natural resources. Various presenters entertained the scouts.

Steve Woodis, Wildlife Biologist, NRCS, taught the girls about bugs he caught from the Uncompahgre River, having the girls identify them.

Tanya Banulis, Wildlife Biologist, NRCS, hiked with the girls and identified tree and plants in the area. Terry Mathieson with the Division of Wildlife took the girls around Chipeta Lake while talking about animals and life styles in our area. Kirsten Melvin, SCEP, Montrose, led the girls in a game about the water cycle.

The girls also toured Morrow Point Dam, which is one of the four dams in our area that help bring water to our valley. They were shown how a dam works on the outside and inside, including how hydropower is created.

The last day of camp was spent in Ouray, where the girls learned how the hot springs operate and where that water comes from.

On April 27th, Liz With and John Scott participated in AgVenture Day sponsored by the Gunnison Valley Cattlewomen.

AgVenture Day is an opportunity for the Cattlewomen to educate students about Agriculture in the Gunnison Valley.

They bring in all of the 2nd through 5th grade students from Gunnison and Crested Butte, approximately 400 students, and spend the morning moving them through stations to learn the many aspects of agricultural production and products derived from agriculture.

Liz and John conducted a station on fencing and had some onsite fencing demonstrations in place to help educate students about the need for fences, how they are constructed, the different types of fences, livestock and wildlife needs, and fence maintenance.

On May 15, 2009, Phyllis Pineda Bovin, Biologist, Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve (GRSA) Alamosa, Colorado, along with her assistant, Josh, made a six-hour journey to Upper Colorado Environmental Plant Center (UCEPC) Meeker, Colorado.

Their goal was to assist in digging, transporting, and returning to the Park a load of Bouteloua gracilis (blue grama).

Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve has been in partnership with UCEPC for many years. During this time GRSA contracted UCEPC to grow, maintain, and increase GRSA seed source of blue grama.

The warm season plant suffered severely from winter damage, mainly frost heaving, during the first year of establishment and needed to be re-planted.

Over the next several years, milder weather helped the plants, however, after four years of very little seed production, GRSA made the decision to discontinue the seed production of the one-acre field.

UCEPC dug 700 linear feet (0.0317 acre) of blue grama plants with a plant lifter. A rigid blade on the lifter undercuts the roots of the plant at a desired depth below the soil surface.

The vibrating motion helped to loosen the soil around the root ball. GRSA and UCEPC employees helped remove excess soil from the root balls so they could easily be loaded onto the pick-up and trailer. The plants were watered and covered with burlap bags to prevent them from drying out on the journey home.

The rescued blue grama plants were transplanted at various locations throughout Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve.

Montrose and Grand Junction held its annual Children's Water Festival in each location, respectively.

The Montrose Water Festival was held at Baldridge Park and is the city's 17th annual event. More than 450 kids were in attendance. More than 2,000 fifth graders throughout the Grand Junction area attended this year's 16th annual event held at Mesa State college. (See writeup and pictures on pages 7 and 8.)

Area Two

NRCS Staff from the Byers Field Office and the Brighton Field Office talked with 48 Denver Middle School students 6th through 9th grade about farming practices applied on May Farms.

Katie Taft, Program Leader for Downtown Aurora Visual Arts, organized the field trip for Summer School Students from Denver. Katie stated that none of the students had ever been on a farm before.

Students were divided into three groups and rotated around the farm to learn about May Farms Pivot, Windbreak, Irrigation Pond, Farm Animals, and T tape.

May Farms is owned and operated by Gary and Stacie May. Gary and Stacie were on board during the activities to explain how they got started farming and what their future plans are to continue to improve the farm.

At each station, students learned about irrigation water management, pest management, nutrient management, solar energy, wind and soil erosion, shelterbelts, and wildlife.

The three group leaders were Sammie Molinaro, Byers District Conservationist; Patty Cec, Soil Conservationist Technician; and Deborah Clairmont, Soil Conservationist.

They were assisted by Tasha Chevarria, Conservation District Technician; Jennifer Cook, Small Acreage Management Coordinator for Front Range NRCS/CSU Extension; Jennifer Tucker, Small Acreage Coordinator for Adams County CSU Extension Office/ West Adams Conservation District Liaison; and Tyler Gilbert, Byers SCEP Student.

Sometimes it's easy to assume that when we put up structural practices and cost-share on them that they will be an eternal fixture in the landscape putting conservation on the ground for years to come, resulting in largely measurable effects.

Then again this Spring 2009 in Northeastern Colorado, nature has proven that it has weather that will ultimately determine not only farming practices and crop survival, but also how structurally permanent some of our practices really are.

Since mid-May, all of northeast Colorado has experienced uncommon weather resulting in tornados, hail, and thunderstorms almost nightly.

Producers north of Greeley have plowed up hailed corn and vegetables.

Producers between Wray and Holyoke have lost crops on entire circles disking out the corn and replanting beans hoping that they will make it on a short growing season.

Franktown experienced such heavy rains that sink holes formed under parking lots.

Every county office reported the ten thousands of acres damaged and destroyed for wheat and corn crops estimated to be in tens of millions of dollars in profit losses.

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Risking rain, hail and worse, muddy roads, Area 2 NRCS staff joined field, area, and state Farm Service Agency, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Pheasants Forever representatives for a 'CRP Management and Wildlife' workshop in Sterling on July 7th.

The workshop was a one-day classroom and field session on how to enhance CRP grass stands for pheasants, quail, and prairie grouse through the mid-contract management and other programs.

The workshop, which was planned and hosted jointly by the NRCS and CDOW Small Game program, used case studies from Kansas and Nebraska to illustrate the benefits that CRP management has for wildlife.

Among the practices emphasized were light disking and interseeding forbs and legumes to diversify CRP stands for both structure and composition.

The group toured two CRP stands in Washington and Phillips counties that demonstrate the high diversity, early seral conditions that benefit not only upland game birds, but the declining songbird species as well.

Thanks to astute birders, the group was able to see the at-risk grasshopper sparrow and dicksissel on the showcase CRP properties.

The workshop hosts hope to work with northeastern Colorado landowners to pilot more CRP enhancement projects for wildlife.

The Morgan Conservation District hosted a Training Livestock and Rangeland Inventory Workshop. Kathy Voth, Livestock for Landscapes, was the keynote speaker. Kathy has had a number of years of experience in working with and teaching livestock to eat weeds that they normally wouln't eat.

She talked about the nutrition and toxins found in weeds. She then provided a demonstration to the group.

Morgan Conservation District received a grant from the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative to conduct the workshop and to work with landowners on grazing animal behavior and monitoring grazing land.

Josh Saunders, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, and Tom Nadgwick, NRCS Range Specialist, showed the groups transect lines and monitoring sites.

Harvey Sprock, Area Range Management Specialist, and John Fusaro, Range Conservationist, showed the group how to estimate annual forage production.

Ben Berlinger, CACD contract advisor for GLCI and retired NRCS Area Rangeland Management Specialist, worked on production and figuring grazing animal units.

Herman Garcia, State Range Conservationist, and Dan Nosal, GLCI/NRCS Advisor, worked with the groups on ecological site descriptions.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, along with U.S. Senators Michael Bennet and Mark Udall, Congresswoman Betsy Markey, and Governor Bill Ritter were in Brush, CO, in May to meet with ranchers, farmers, and producers and listen to their concerns.

Items that were discussed included banking concerns and the effect the economy has on dairy farmers.

Secretary Vilsack addressed those concerns and further discussed exports, food safety, and the increased opportunities and assistance available to beginning farmers and ranchers.

Area Three

Lamar NRCS assisted the Division of Wildlife with their Ten Lark Session on June 1 at the Lamar DOW office.

Kyle Wait and Susan Hansen assisted with the registration process for the week-long course which provides credits for Adams State College.

Susan spoke to the teachers about the Dust Bowl and the work that NRCS does to assist farmers with their resource concerns and to educate children and the public about conservation issues and concerns in their region.

The High Plains Conservation District (CD), Prairie CD, and Hugo Field Office held a field day on June 30 on soil quality and residue management.

Mike Peterson, retired NRCS, was the presenter. Mike had two pits dug to show soil quality differences from dry land no-till farming and conventional farming systems. There were 26 in attendance.

Jonnalea Tortorelli, Spanish Peaks Purgatoire River Conservation District and Branson Trinchera Conservation District Manager, Dennis Lane, Trinidad Field Office, and Carla Wesley, Trinidad FO, presented at the Hoehne School District - Earth Day on April, 30 2009.

They presented to the entire school, kindergarten through 12th grade. The three used the river trailer to demonstrate erosion, erosion control practices, water quality, water conservation, and the water cycle.

Depending on the age group, they presented different subjects. The theme of the Hoehne Earth Day was renewable resources and alternative energy so the three also presented information on hydro-electricity. They also discussed the SCEP program to the senior class.

Rick Romano, Canon City FO, met with the Environmental Club of the Canon City High School for Earth Day.

Their planned activity was to prepare an area (that was left bare after construction and had started to fill in with grass and weeds in some very poor soil conditions) for the planting of a xeriscape garden.

Approximately 15 to 20 students and one faculty member attended the event. The young man in the photo is Nick Romano, Rick's son.

The Custer County Conservation District (CD), Silver Cliff FO, Colorado GLCI Committee, Cliffes Vet Clinic, and the Julsen Ranch sponsored a small acreage range and livestock workshop recently.

Kimberly Diller, Canon City FO, Jim Sperry, Silver Cliff FO, and Ben Berlinger, La Junta AO, were the instructors.

Topics included sustainable grazing, range nutrition, animal behavior, grazing and riparian values, and using livestock as a tool to manage vegetation.

The Custer County CD and Silver Cliff FO were also sponsors of the Custer County Weed Tour held recently.

The Springfield NRCS, Baca County Conservation District, and local Forest Service personnel celebrated Earth Day by cleaning up around our buildings.

On June 18, Baca County and Bent Conservation Districts helped sponsor a Colorado Division of Wildlife landowner workshop in northwest Baca and southeast Bent Counties.

The 39 participants toured parts of Clyde Greer's and Tom Wallace's places. Presentations were given on Private Lands Programs by Ken Morgan of CDOW; on other CDOW programs by Trent Verquer, Mike Smith and Steve Keefer; on Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory programs by Seth Gallagher; on NRCS programs by Cindy Schleining and Patty Knupp; on FSA programs by Chad Hart; and Partners for Fish & Wildlife programs by Katy Fitzgerald.

The Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, Colorado State Conservation Board, and southeastern Colorado CDs, sponsored a CRP Summit held at Lamar Community College. Approximately 120 landowners attended to hear options for their expiring CRP acres.

East Central Colorado RC & D coordinator, Kristi Gay, participated as

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a presenter for the High Plains TEN workshop held recently in the Limon area.

TEN (Teaching Environmental (Science Naturally) is a site-based, outdoor environmental science program for teachers.

The core planning team for TEN is made up of an interagency group of natural resource partners (CDOW, CSFS, NRCS, others) who collaborate with local science teachers to create a workshop that utilizes Project Learning Tree, Project Wild, and Project WET curriculum to teachers with hands on, outdoor, on-site lessons related to the nearby natural environment in their community.

The workshop theme of the High Plains 2009 TEN was 'Prairie Ecology' which included outdoor lessons on succession after wildfire, plant and animal diversity, and aquatic habitats on the prairie.

Kristi Gay, East Central RC&D, taught two activities to the Boy Scouts of America at the High Plains District Camporee in the Pikes Peak District for Earth Day.

She taught the Webelos (4th, 5th, 6th graders) to do two activity pins (mini-merit badges).

She taught the Forester activity pin to roughly 80-100 kids in the morning. Then in the afternoon, she taught the same bunch the Naturalist activity pin (trees, animals, humans, and how they interact) along with an explanation of threatened and endangered species.

The East Central Resource Conservation and Development; Double El, Agate, Kiowa, and Douglas CDs; local NRCS field offices, CSU Extension CDOW, Colorado GLCI Committee, and Douglas/Elbert Livestock Association sponsored a Livestock Grazing Behavior Basics Workshop in June.

Some of the topics included social behavior will influence food selection, preference and palatability, and variety and nutritional needs.

Vern Vinson and Pat Galvin, Teller-Park CD, and Laura Craven, Woodland Park Soils, gave Earth Day presentations to school children in Woodland Park.

Vern and Pat talked about the snow survey program using a SNOTEL model Vern built. Laura gave the Earth/Apple demonstration and played Perc through the Pores with the children.

The Fremont CD, Fremont County Weed Advisory Board, City of Canon City, RE2 School District, and Fremont County Commissioners held a weed management tour in July.

Presentations included local noxious and troublesome weeds, control methods, biological control, and herbicides. J.R. Phillips, Fremont County Weed Control Manager, was the presenter.

River clean-up on the Cucharas continued this year along with the start of a trail system.

Invasive species including Russian Olive and Tamarisk are being removed in the process to developing the trail system. This will not only improve the aesthetics of the river but will improve the actual function during flood events.

Over seventy volunteers took part in the workday, including National Park Service employees that helped Huerfano County through a grant to develop and plan a trails system throughout Huerfano County.

Volunteers learned about the importance of a healthy Riparian area. Additional work days are scheduled for this year with the next one happening in June.

Sponsors and volunteers included Huerfano Co. Social Services, Huerfano Co. 4-H, Huerfano County Employees, National Park Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service Walsenburg FO.

Rich Rhoades, Pueblo FO, and Kimberly Diller, Canon City FO, were the trip leaders for a Colorado Native Plant Society Grass ID class and field trip recently.

The field trip was held at Mountain Environmental Center, Pueblo Mountain Park in Beulah.

The morning began with a discussion of Poaceae taxonomy including an introduction to grass morphology and identification.

A field trip followed this session. Participants identified grasses in the Foothills and Montane zones.

Area Four

The Durango FO has two new employees, Laura Knapp and Robert Dobbins.

Laura is a graduated SCEP student who started in the Durango office in early June as a Soil Conservationist, her first permanent, full-time position.

Laura is a graduate of Adams State, and no, she is not related to John Knapp, at least not that she will admit anyway!

Robert is the new La Plata District Conservation Technician who started in early May and is a graduate of New Mexico State and a native of the Durango area.

Welcome to both of you!

On June 11, 2009, the NRCS Towaoc, Ignacio, and Cortez field offices attended and set up a booth at the 1st Annual Native Women in Agriculture Day at the Ute Mountain Ute Casino and Resort, Towaoc, Colorado.

This trade show was intended to empower Native Women farmers and ranchers through the dissemination of the latest technology. This event turned out to be a great success.

The trade show drew a crowd of about 125 people - mostly Native women. The Colorado NRCS Cortez office passed out different brochures, promotional items, and Native American posters, and presented a video display of common irrigation practices and photo samples of cost-share projects in SW Colorado.

This video display was meant to inform Native women of the types of practices for which they could receive federal assistance.

The people that visited the booths had many questions and concerns about their farms and ranches. The morning section of the conference consisted of several guest speakers who were ranchers and farmers who spoke about how they ran their farms or ranches.

Another guest speaker was a veterinarian who spoke about animal id's and taking care of your animals by watching what they ate as well as where they are coming from. The afternoon consisted of breakout sessions in health, farming, and ranching.

All in all this was a very informative conference that everyone should put on their list to attend next year.

The following NRCS employees attended this year's conference: Jennifer Griffin (SCEP); Rosanna Leos, Ag Engineer; Anthony Panek, Civil Engineer Technician, Cortez; Cody Regnier, Resource Conservationist, Ignacio; and Kelli McClelland, Soil Conservationist, Towaoc.

Charlene Lucero, Administrative Coordinator for Area 4, coordinated a salsa and guacamole contest to celebrate Cinco de Mayo, and a brief history of salsa was distributed to everyone.

There were a total of nine entries for this event and everyone was invited to judge the sauces.

Winners of the contest for Salsa division were: 1st Place: Cathy Dix, NRCS, Soil Conservationist; 2nd Place: Chanda Pettie, NRCS, Biologist. Winners of the Guacamole division were: 1st Place: Kevin Reeves, FSA, County Executive Director; 2nd Place: Cindy Villa, NRCS, Range Mangement Specialist. Que Viva la Salsa!!

On June 10, William Volf, Archeologist, Cortez Field Office, and Jennifer Griffin, SCEP student, Cortez Field Office, demonstrated the application of geophysical technologies in archeological settings to over 100 Colorado high school students.

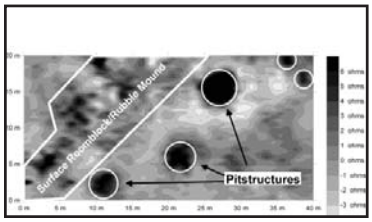
The students were taking part in the Colorado Preservation Inc.'s Youth Summit- Southwest Archeology Experience. The Colorado Youth Summit, the only program of its kind in the nation, provides students in-depth exposure to cultural resources and historic preservation issues.

Colorado First Lady Jeannie Ritter served as honorary Chairman of the Summit. Also in attendance were Ann Pritzlaff (Advisory Council on Historic Preservation) and Ed Nichols (Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer).

Archeologists are employing geophysical technologies more frequently in their investigations "to see below the surface."

The information collected provides an accurate assessment of the subsurface data potential of archeological sites in a quick and non-destructive manner.

Geophysical techniques used in the Youth Summit demonstration included an instrument that measures very subtle changes in the earth's magnetic field (FM-256 Fluxgate gradiometer) and an instrument that measures the earth's resistance to an electrical current (RM-15 Soil Resistance meter).



Collected data at the House Creek Village in Montezuma County (a Pueblo I-Pueblo II period village occupied AD 850-900) clearly indicate the presence and precise location of several subsurface cultural features (pit structures) that are not discernable by surface examination alone. continued on page 20

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Laurie Clark of the Monte Vista field office has teamed up with Mike Gibson and Heather Messick of the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) on a public education project regarding river restoration on the Rio Grande in Southern Colorado.

Together they created a display to be used at local festivals and community events. The goal of these efforts was to increase knowledge of riparian restoration projects on the Rio Grande and understanding of the benefits of riparian restoration work.

Using data that was compiled by Clark, the RGHRP created a large map showing the locations, funding sources, and status of riparian restoration projects on the Upper Rio Grande.

Additionally, Clark provided graphics and images that were used to show how a typical engineering design for a riparian restoration project translates to on-the-ground results.

The display contained aerial photos, on-site before and after photos, and a cross-section graphic from a project that was completed on the Rio Grande near South Fork Colorado in 2004.

The exhibit was displayed at the Monte Vista Crane Festival, a weekend event coinciding with the migration of the Sandhill Cranes through the San Luis Valley, in March 2009.

This event draws thousands of people annually and was an excellent opportunity for the RGHRP and NRCS to showcase their collaborative efforts to restore riparian areas on the Rio Grande.

Overall, the public outreach efforts were successful and the display will be used for future education and outreach events.

The RGHRP and the NRCS have worked together previously to secure funding for, plan, design, implement, and monitor riparian restoration projects on the Upper Rio Grande.

Volunteers repair mine damage to Kerber Creek

submitted by Center Field Office

Around 100 years ago, at the height of the mining boom, the northwestern part of the San Luis Valley was a lot more lively than it is now.

Mining towns like Bonanza and Exchequerville in the eastern San Juan Mountains did their jobs back then, but since, mine waste has found its way into nearby Kerber Creek, slowly depleting its riparian environment.

Luckily, more than a dozen groups are working together to restore the creek to its natural habitat, reducing toxic metal contamination and in the process improving the watershed's riparian and fish habitats and increasing water quantity and flow as part of the seven-figure Kerber Creek Restoration Project.

Kerber Creek flows from high in the San Juan Mountains to the flatlands of the valley below, where around 30 volunteers and Bureau of Land Management and United States Forest Service employees gathered Saturday, June 27.

They began summer work on the creek, installing over a mile of wattles, which are cylindrical erosion-control mechanisms, in preparation for the neutralization of mine tailing piles and the replacement of those tailings with stabilized soils and healthy plants along the creek.

The volunteers included 21 from Trout Unlimited, and 11 others who either own land near the creek or saw it fit to help the cause.

"What previously protected the banks, now because the plants are dead, are no longer offering that protection of the banks. By revegetating this, we'll get rid of most of the metal mobilization problem by getting the plants to grow and we'll get the stabilization we'll get the creek back up into properly-functioning condition," said BLM Natural Resources Specialist Steve Sanchez.

"Right now, the creek's almost one width wider than what it should be, which offers another problem as the water flows down from the high country way quicker than what it should."

Much of the vegetation along the banks of Kerber Creek has been impeded by the high country contamination, and due to the heavy metals prevalent in its water, Kerber Creek is currently on the state's list of impaired waters.

However, Trout Unlimited Mine Restoration Coordinator Elizabeth Russell, whose organization is heavily involved in the restoration project, said that the creek could come off that list upon successful revitalization.

"This particular creek is a priority for the state," she said, adding that the partnership amongst all of the organizations involved in the project is "fantastic."

Parties involved in the Kerber Creek Restoration Project include: the Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Western Hardrock Watershed Team, Saguache Methodist AmeriCorps, America Corps Vista, Rio Grande Division 3 Water Resources, Environmental Protection Agency, Colorado Watershed Assembly, Department of Reclamation, Mining and Safety, Office of Surface Mining, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Division of Wildlife and Trout Unlimited, along with more than 40 private landowners in the area.

Natural Resource Conservation Service District Conservationist Larry McBride at the Kerber Creek Restoration Project work site Saturday, June 27.

NRCS Earth Team

Coordinator's Corner

Earth Team Volunteers Can Ease Staffing Woes

One of the toughest problems facing NRCS, conservation districts and the conservation movement today is limited staffing.

However, the solutions may be just a step away…or down the street… or in a neighboring town. They are volunteers.

So why don't districts use them? Many aren't sure how to find volunteers, and others suffer from the misconception that it's too much trouble.

Here are some tips on finding and using volunteers and on how NRCS and districts can use the Earth Team to make the job easier.

Earth Team volunteers can work on any project that supports the overall mission of NRCS. It does not have to be an NRCS project.

It can be a district project or other conservation-related projects. Volunteers can perform any job that an NRCS employee would, from data entry to soil mapping. How can a district locate volunteers?

When searching for volunteers, there are many sources to choose from, including: high schools; scout troops; churches; social services; prisons; retirement homes; courts; family, etc.

Groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons are also good sources for volunteers. Volunteers must be at least 14 years old. However, persons 13 and 12 years old may volunteer as part of a group if they have the consent of a parent or guardian. How does a district recruit volunteers?

Just asking for help usually works. If volunteers are going to serve on the Earth Team, they must be signed up with a volunteer application form.

The following information must be obtained from each volunteer: name, address, telephone number, signature, and position applied for.

The form must also show the date the volunteer will begin work and give a brief description. Then an NRCS representative must sign and date the form.

The form is then sent to the area volunteer coordinator, who keeps it on file. What else does the district need to do?

The rest is easy. Someone needs to keep track of each volunteer's time. This can be done with an office calendar, a district time sheet or an Earth Team Calendar form. Hours volunteered can be estimated by NRCS personnel, district personnel, or by the volunteers themselves.

Volunteer recognition is also important. Letters, certificates, plaques or other non-monetary awards are appropriate.

That's all there is to it!

Read more about our Earth Team Volunteers on page 22.

ET Volunteers Participate in La Junta Trash Treasure Hunt

On Saturday, April 25th, 2009, the local Keep Colorado Beautiful Committee, under the direction of leader Beverly Babb and a group of area students, partnered up with NRCS Earth Team volunteers for the first annual "Trash Treasure Hunt."

Beverly and Earth Team volunteers demonstrated immense dedication to keeping the community clean, and organizing a fun way to get involved.

The purpose of the "Trash Treasure Hunt" was to promote trash collection, recycling, and other environmentally friendly actions.

In addition to spreading the cause, the group made tireless plans preparing for the hunt that was held the Saturday following Earth Day, during National Volunteer Week.

From 8 a.m. to 9 a.m., approximately 100 participants met at the La Junta city park to distribute free trash bags for the clean up. The participating groups were assigned an area of La Junta to collect trash from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Earth Team volunteers and La Junta A.O. 3 staff participated in their designated route along east State Highway 50 for trash collection.

Vouchers were attached to pieces of trash along the trash collection routes the night before by Beverly and the students, giving participants the opportunity to obtain redeemable prizes from local businesses after being found.

Participants were treated to a celebratory potluck lunch at the La Junta city park at 12 p.m. after the clean up.

It was a great day to have some fun helping the community out in celebration of Earth Day and National Volunteer Week!

see next page for photos!

NRCS
Earth Team Volunteers

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Trash

Earth Team volunteers on the Trash Treasure Hunt route, left to right: Donovan Ramirez and Julia Ramirez.

Treasure

Earth Team volunteers with their 32, 30-gallon bags of trash collected, left to right: Fran Pannebaker, Annie Dolley, Charlie Pannebaker, Donovan Ramirez, Julia Ramirez, and Mike Taylor.

Hunt

Earth Team volunteers gathering trash along State Highway 50 east of La Junta, CO: Fran Pannebaker, Annie Dolley and Charlie Pannebaker.

Earth Team Volunteers Lend a Hand in Tree Replantings in Ordway

photos courtesy of Al White, Hugo Field Office

Colorado Earth Team volunteers partnered with the Colorado State Forest Service and numerous other sponsors, to replant trees in the Ordway, CO vicinity on Saturday, April 25, 2009.

Crowley County and the Town of Ordway suffered a devastating wildland fire in April 2008. The consequences of the disaster have been innumerable with many families losing everything they owned.

Landowners have been rebuilding their homes and have moved on to replace trees that were badly damaged or lost due to the fire.

Volunteers met at the Crowley County fairgrounds near Ordway at 8:00 a.m., for a check-in and assignment to one of the three work crews.

After a briefing of the day's plans, reviewing planting techniques, and reviewing safety plans, crews were dispersed to their planting sites.

More than 100 volunteers from across Colorado converged in the area on that Saturday of National Volunteer Week, helping Crowley County landowners replant trees during the day-long work session. Snacks, drinks and lunches were provided for all volunteers by sponsors of the tree replacement.

Drip systems and weed barrier were installed on properties, in addition to over 300 Austrian Pine, Rocky Mtn. Juniper seedlings, Ponderosa Pine, Blue Spruce, and fruit trees (cherry, plum, apple).

Volunteers were released from the project by 4:00 p.m., with a feeling of great satisfaction that they had played a part in helping landowners begin to rebuild their lives.

Earth Team volunteers gear up to assist in replanting trees in Ordway.

Earth Team volunteers working at the Ordway fire victims tree replanting work session.

USDA/1890 Scholar Gains NRCS Experience as a Summer Intern

Victoria Turnipseed-Henderson gives a personal account of her experience with NRCS over the summer

My name is Victoria Turnipseed-Henderson and I am an USDA/1890 Scholar attending Tennessee State University.

As a part of my scholarship, I interned with the Natural Resource Conservation Service at the State Office.

Being a typical city girl from Denver, I knew very little about NRCS and about the agricultural practices done throughout Colorado. During these short six weeks, not only was I able to learn a lot about the agency and about Colorado agriculture, but I was also able to find an appreciation for the vast beauty throughout my home state.

In working at the State Office, I had the opportunity to see the administrative side of NRCS. With State Conservationist, Allen Green; Deputy State Conservationist, J.B. Martin; and Assistant State Conservationists, Tim Carney, and Frank Riggle, I was able to learn about Colorado water rights, how the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is administered, as well as the experience, innovative learning, and flexibility needed to hold a position such as theirs.

I also met with Cartographic Technician, Kristy Floyd, and learned about the geographic information systems program and how she is able to make and find various maps.

I was also lucky enough to be able to travel with the Snow Survey team, Paul Gallegos, Brian Domonkos, and Chris Pacheco, and learn about how their snow pillow is able to assess how much water will run off into the state from the snow fall as they did maintenance on the SNOTEL sites.

Most of my time centered around observing the work of Public Affairs Specialists Petra Barnes-Walker and Katherine Burse-Johnson.

Their job is crucially important because they are responsible for enhancing communication between sponsors and politicians, making information more accessible for current and future customers, inform the general public about NRCS practices, as well as making sure area and field offices receive information needed to best serve our customers.

I also had the opportunity to meet Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack as he came to the office to show appreciation to all the USDA employees and discuss future political agendas within agriculture.

Overall my experience in the state office gave me an understanding of the diversity in the different careers offered in NRCS.

During the latter part of my internship, I was able to travel to an area office in La Junta, Colorado. From there I was able to understand the immensity of land each area covers.

With Area Public Affairs Specialist Mary Miller I was able to see practices around the Rocky Ford, Pueblo, and Woodland Park offices. On this trip, I was able to see different irrigation systems for crop growing and farm lands.

We also went by the site of the Hayman Fire and discussed the conservation planning that occurred after the fire.

I was able to get some field experience with District Conservation Forester Jonas Feinstein, Metro Field Office, by learning about a fuel prevention project within the Jefferson County area. As we worked closely with a landowner, Jonas and I marked trees that would be cut down to prevent massive fire damage to the area if a fire were to break out.

As Jonas and I looked out for bears and avoided ticks, I also learned about the Ponderosa pine and Douglas fur trees and how they react to fires and some of the diseases they encounter.

In Franktown I was able to observe the district conservation, rangeland specialist, and soil conservationist positions.

With District Conservationist, Deric Clemons, and Soil Conservationist, Lana Armon, I was able to see how different conservation plans are formed, how to check the elevation of the land to find potential places of erosion, how to read and do an online soil survey, as well as how they check up with landowners to make sure their practices are being implemented effectively.

With Rangeland Specialist Dan Nosal I was able to watch as he identified different plants for a landowner to evaluate the percentage each plant inhabited their land.

Before I started my internship I did not know what to expect out of this experience. I learned a lot of different information and have a better understanding of the agency.

One thing I appreciated about NRCS was seeing how much the employees enjoy their careers despite the challenges they face every day.

I also appreciated the close relationships between employees at each office and how welcoming and helpful they were to me.

I definitely enjoyed my internship this summer and look forward to next summer, seeing more of the state and learning more about NRCS.

Painted Sky RC&D Council Working to Stimulate Local Economy

Assistance to Three Small Businesses Expected in 2009

By Paul Van Ryzin, RC&D Coordinator - Delta, CO

This is a photo of the product being developed by Fine Line Industries, Inc. Painted Sky is helping this emerging manufacturer with patenting this new irrigation equipment innovation. The product will allow a producer to control gated pipe remotely, which has the potential to save the producer on labor and energy costs.

Painted Sky Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. requested support from USDA-Rural Development in early March, 2009, to assist three emerging businesses located in Delta County, Colorado.

Funds were requested through the Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program. The RBEG program is available to units of local government, tribes, and non-profit corporations for rural projects that finance and facilitate development of small and emerging rural businesses, according to the National USDA Rural Development web site (http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/busp/rbeg.htm).

Although final contracting between Rural Development and Painted Sky is still in the works, board members and staff are currently considering a preliminary offer of $60,250 from the USDA agency.

Painted Sky expects to execute a contract for these funds in July, with assistance to be provided to area businesses shortly thereafter.

Businesses to receive assistance include Fine Line Industries, Inc., of Delta, and the Blake Family Farm and White Buffalo Farm of Paonia, Colorado.

These businesses and their partners have agreed to contribute over $80,000 in non-Federal cash and in-kind staff support to match the anticipated funds from Rural Development. The total project cost exceeds $145,000, and is expected to result in the development of three businesses and help create over ten full-time jobs.

Fine Line Industries, Inc. is an emerging manufacturer specializing in an innovative product designed to improve the efficiency of gated pipe used in surge irrigation.

The new product will allow a producer to open and close individual gates by remote control, or on a pre-programmed schedule, reducing the need for vehicle travel to the field for manual gate adjustment. Producers using the product will potentially save on fuel and labor costs while reducing carbon emissions.

Painted Sky expects to provide RBEG funds to help Fine Line Industries offset patenting and other legal expenses required to begin manufacturing the product in Delta County.

The Blake Family Farm, and White Buffalo Farm of Paonia have partnered with Painted Sky and iCAST, a nonprofit corporation based in Lakewood, Colorado, to investigate the feasibility of value-added processing of farm products.

Painted Sky is proud to assist these local small businesses, as they seek to create new jobs that will help sustain the local economy of west-central Colorado.

To accomplish this goal, Painted Sky relies on the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD), and other USDA agencies, for technical and financial support.

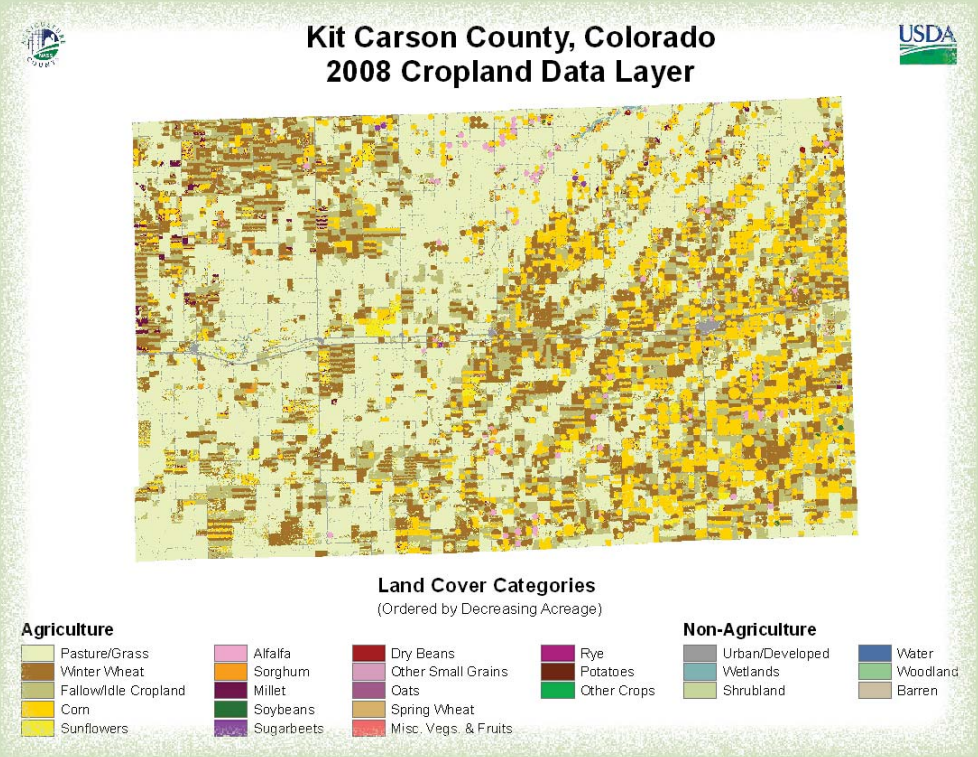
The result is an effective public-private partnership that provides essential program delivery and implementation assistance at the local level, allowing producers and other entrepreneurs involved in natural resources to achieve profitability and thrive amidst challenging economic conditions.

For more information, please contact Painted Sky board president Richard Harding at (970) 874-5735 ext. 135.

TECHNO TIPS

NASS Cropland Data Now Available As GIS Layer

by Paul Weber
Resource Conservationist (Technology)
Greeley Area Office



Example of Cropland Data Layer for Kit Carson County.

Colorado has been included in the 2008 Cropland Data Layer (CDL) produced by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

The CDL program began in earnest in 1997 with the ability to deliver geospatial content annually to customers who were interested in annual cropland cover updates.

Prior to the creation of the CDL product, estimates were provided in tabular format, with pictures/outputs depicting the results.

The CDL can be considered a "Census by Satellite," as it is a comprehensive land use classification covering an entire state, and uses ortho-rectified imagery, to accurately locate and identify field crops.

The CDL utilizes a comprehensive and robust archive of AWiFS satellite imagery from the Foreign Ag Service along with ground truth data provided by the Farm Service Agency. No farmer-reported data are revealed, nor can it be derived in the publicly releasable Cropland Data Layer product.

The CDL is a publicly available crop-specific land cover classification that focuses primarily on mapping cultivated fields and providing an update on the agriculture landscape. Coverage of non-cropland areas is provided by the USGS National Land Cover Dataset, 2001.

The CDL strives to obtain accuracies in the 90s for the major program crops. The CDL is available for free for download from the NRCS Geospatial Data Gateway.

The Area Resource Conservationists for Technology can download and install this data on FO servers upon request.