



# South Carolina's Current Developments

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

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From the Office of the  
State Conservationist  
*Walter W. Douglas*



Dear Conservationists,



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My time as Acting State Conservationist for Texas ends May 24. I have truly enjoyed my experience (especially the great people I met and worked with), but I am excited about returning to South Carolina. Thanks to everyone who pitched in to make sure things ran smoothly during my absence. Frank Wilcox was an outstanding Acting SC NRCS State Conservationist, and I know that he did not act alone. Thanks to the entire SC NRCS team for supporting me in my decision to pursue this opportunity. It was a valuable experience for me, and one that I will remember as a highlight of my USDA career.

I am pleased to report that our financial situation is overall very good. We still have a deficit in WRP, which needs to be resolved, but the overall outlook is positive. We are in the process of defining and prioritizing our equipment needs (including vehicles), and hope to begin ordering this equipment next month. Thanks to all of you, both in the field and state office, who worked diligently to position SC NRCS where we are today in regard to our positive program and financial status.

On another positive note, the SC NRCS Field Restructuring Plan was approved by the Regional Assistant Chief's (RAC) office and sent on to the Position Management Committee in National Headquarters (NHQ) for final review. Upon approval, we will fill the vacant District Conservationists positions and move forward with implementing the details of the plan.

Don't forget that Cultural Awareness Training Day is coming up August 23! I look forward to seeing you there!

# Conservation Success Stories



## Preserving a Way of Life in Saluda County

*Yon Family Farms Protects 100 Acres of Grassland with Permanent Easement*

*by Amy O. Maxwell, USDA-NRCS*

**Y**on Family Farms in Ridge Spring, South Carolina (Saluda County), is operated using a precise formula for farming success. The formula merges equal amounts of hard work, determination, an outstanding conservation ethic, and is balanced with a dose of fun and commitment to family. Kevin and Lydia are husband and wife of eighteen years and along with their kids Sally, Drake, and Corbin, they manage an Angus operation. Twice a year they host a bull sale, which attracts buyers from throughout the Southeast. Their website clearly states their mission to, “provide high quality, value-added cattle to satisfied customers who believe that honesty, quality, service, and value are synonymous with the name Yon Family Farms.” The Yon’s have also demonstrated a commitment to conservation through their participation in a number of Farm Bill programs. From the Conservation Security Program (CSP), to the Forestry Incentives Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and most recently the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), protection of natural resources is a priority at the Yon farm. They’ve worked closely with USDA-NRCS District Conservationist Hugh Smith to utilize financial and technical assistance to improve their operation. “The GRP easement is the icing on the cake for the Yon Farm

because it means that the 100 acres included in the easement will be forever protected from development,” explained Smith.

The Yon’s manage nearly 1,500 acres which include cropland, hay, and pastureland. Through EQIP, they fenced out streams and installed many water troughs to protect water quality, ultimately protecting the South Fork Edisto Watershed in which the farm is located. They also installed cross-fencing and practice a 2-7 day rotational grazing plan. GRP helps landowners restore and protect grassland, including pastureland, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal diversity, and grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. The Yon’s applied for funding in 2005, when GRP funding was available (South Carolina NRCS’ Congressional funding allotment for GRP has been exhausted). Smith said, “The process to apply for GRP funding was extremely

competitive, and this is Saluda’s first GRP easement.” He also explained that because the farm is close to town, the threat of conversion is what helped the application rank so high. GRP applications are ranked according to factors such as grazing management, plant composition, proximity to other protected lands, and wildlife habitat. The program offers different options, include 30-year easements, or even a restoration agreement,

but the Yon’s wanted to permanently protect this acreage. “Because we are serious about conservation, and particularly for the long-term, GRP was a good match for us,” explained Kevin. Lydia described the thought process that went into making the decision. “We sat the kids down and explained to them why we were considering the GRP easement, and then we asked them what they thought about it.” In the end, she said it was a unanimous family decision that they all felt good about. The



*Lydia and Kevin Yon manage an Angus operation in Saluda County. They entered 100 acres into a permanent Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) easement. GRP helps landowners restore and protect grassland, including pastureland, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands.*

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Yon's value the rural landscape and way of life, and GRP is one way to ensure that the scenery does not change, even as the threat of development creeps into rural areas.

Kevin Yon grew up in Anderson County, but surprisingly, not on a farm. "My grandparents owned a farm, and I spent lots of time there learning to appreciate the land." When asked to describe a good day, the Yon's don't disagree. "A good day includes plenty of grass for the cattle, and not having to haul it to them. It's a satisfying feeling to be able to turn the herd out to pasture and see them grazing on forage that you've provided for them naturally." The Yon's work tirelessly to ensure that their soil and water resources are healthy and they believe in whole-farm conservation, focusing on the big-picture when it comes to stewardship. "They have a solid understanding of the interdependence of natural resources, and their approach to conservation works," said Smith. "Farming is

**"I've been exposed to the importance of conservation my whole life, and I want to pass on that conservation ethic to the kids."**

**--Lydia Yon,**  
GRP landowner and  
daughter of a retired NRCS  
Field Engineer

not necessarily a lucrative profession—for us it was more of a lifestyle choice," explained Kevin. "One reason we moved to Saluda was because it is a great place to raise kids," said Lydia, whose father is a retired NRCS Field Engineer. "I've been exposed to the importance of conservation my whole life and I want to pass on that conservation ethic to the kids." As parents and role models, the Yon's

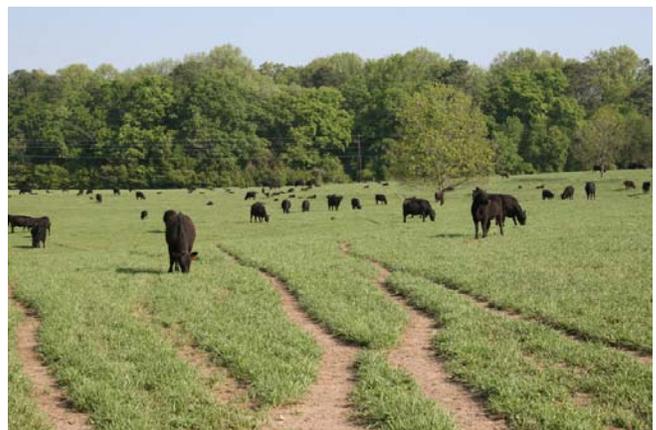
are teaching their children the importance of leadership as well. Their involvement in agricultural-based local, state, and national organizations and boards helps them stay informed and allows them to shape the future of agriculture in South Carolina. "Our relationship with fellow farmers and producers keeps us up-to-date with the latest technology, and sharing information and advice with others is helpful," says Lydia. In addition, Kevin is an associate commissioner with the Saluda Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), so it's no secret that the Yon's are in a position to be leaders

within the farming community. "To see a young family like this be involved, and so earnestly enthusiastic about making a living through agriculture, is encouraging. They embrace this way of life because they love it, and they really want to preserve and protect the environment for all the right reasons," said Smith. The Yon's are a shining example of how GRP can protect more than just grasslands, but also help sustain a way of life that families like the Yon's cherish. "Everyday on the farm is day of learning, and there is always something to look forward to each day here on the farm," says Lydia. "We keep improving, and it's satisfying to see the results of our work."

For more information about GRP or other Farm Bill Programs, visit the SC NRCS website at [www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov).



*left to right: Lydia and Kevin Yon worked with Hugh Smith, Saluda County NRCS District Conservationist, to install conservation practices on their farm. Mike Hall, NRCS GLCI Specialist from the NRCS East National Technology Support Center (ENTSC), visited the farm to survey the outstanding conservation system that has been established.*



*Twice a year, the Yon's host a bull sale, which attracts buyers from throughout the Southeast.*

**NRCS Program Protects and Enhances Marsh Wildlife Habitat**

*Amy O. Maxwell, USDA-NRCS Public Affairs Specialist*

Since its inception ten years ago, SC's *Partners Program* in the Lowcountry has provided owners of intact remnant rice field impoundments incentive and assistance to restore, improve, and maintain these important wetland systems. A number of agencies pulled together to implement and manage the program. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ducks Unlimited, Inc., SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provide technical and financial support. "This unique program targets old rice plantations where water control structures are dilapidated and in need of replacement," explained NRCS District Conservationist Debbie Mann. "Since we started this effort, over 6,000 acres of coastal managed wetlands throughout five counties were restored or enhanced."



*Rice trunks are the "valves" that control water flow into, through and out of the many former rice fields of the Lowcountry. These structures are made of wood and weigh thousands of pounds.*

To date, nearly 50 projects have been installed and/or completed, with NRCS providing \$232,500 in financial assistance. NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) contributed a large portion of the overall cost of the projects. Landowners can apply for assistance for either financial and/or technical assistance. Those requesting funding are placed on a waiting list and then ranked by members of the *Partners* committee. Approved projects are funded at fifty percent with a maximum of \$10,000. Landowners are required to provide a minimum



*Alligators and other wildlife find refuge in the marshes and tributaries of Georgetown County.*

fifty percent funding match. They are also very involved in the planning process, and they contract the work. Upon completion of the project, the work is inspected and approved, and the landowner is reimbursed. Landowners retain all rights to their land and agree to perform necessary maintenance of existing dikes and drainage ditches.

Another WHIP special project protecting coastal resources in South Carolina is the *Invasive Species Project*. This effort seeks to treat and control Phragmites on private properties in South Carolina's coastal counties. Phragmites is a perennial plant that can reach 15-feet in height and is long-lived. It grows along the shorelines of waterbodies or in deep water. An invasion by Phragmites changes the structure and function of marsh ecosystems, and decreases the quality of wetland wildlife habitat, particularly for shore birds and waterfowl. "This project meets the objectives of WHIP because phragmites is severely degrading this habitat by choking out the native species upon which the wildlife in this area depend," explained Mann.

Kenny Williams is a retired Ducks Unlimited employee, and an Associate Commissioner with the Georgetown County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), who has been involved with the Phragmites project. "This partnership is working to reduce the infestation of phragmites and create an improved ecosystem for aquatic species," he explained. "Phragmites is becoming particularly invasive along the Atlantic Coast, and first appeared here in this bay in the 70's," said Williams. "Every year we are losing valuable migratory bird habitat to the Phragmites invasion. That's why the implementation of cost-share assistance through WHIP will help us educate landowners and increase the awareness of the damage that this infestation can actually cause." The Georgetown SWCD is providing administration for the project. Through this program, landowners with Phragmites infestations are eligible for up to \$100 per acre to help offset the cost of Phragmites control. For more information, visit [www.dnr.sc.gov/water/envaff/aquatic/phragmites.html](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/water/envaff/aquatic/phragmites.html).

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During a recent tour of several of the rice trunk areas and Phragmites infestations, Bryce McCord, Kinloch Plantation manager, maneuvered a small boat through the Lowcountry marsh. Alligators, shorebirds, and a diversity of plant and animal life were abundant throughout the tidal wetlands. The operation and maintenance of the rice trunks was explained, which basically involves use of flapgates and flashboard risers to drain, mix, flood, and circulate tidewater. "This promotes establishment and growth of food and cover resources for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife," explained McCord.

By replacing old rice trunk devices to properly manage marshes and wetlands, and implementing cost-share assistance for the control of Phragmites, coastal South Carolina will continue to be a haven for unique wildlife and plant species that thrive in these fragile ecosystems. NRCS Wildlife Biologist Dick Yetter concluded, "Not only are we partnering to eradicate an invasive species (Phragmites), but the rice trunk restores wetland habitat that is an ideal nursery habitat for marine fish, and provides foraging opportunities for waterfowl."

For more information, contact Debbie Mann at (843)546-7808.



*left to right: Georgetown County NRCS District Conservationist Debbie Mann, Georgetown SWCD Associate Commissioner Kenny Williams, and Bryce McCord, Kinloch Plantation Manager, worked together through the Partners Project.*

## Marion County Family Restores Wetlands with 30-year Easement

*by Amy O. Maxwell, USDA-NRCS*

Susan Riales has fond memories of growing up on the farm in the Gresham Community of Marion County where she still lives with her family, including her 85-year old mother, Ruth Swintz. "Mother's been here since she was twenty years old," remarks Riales. "My ancestors first moved here in 1883, and this land has provided a life for many generations of our family." The wetland area on the Swintz property consists of over 311 acres. The family entered 280 acres of that area in a thirty-year Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement. "I think my family can do a lot of good in thirty years to help protect and improve these wetlands," said Riales. "This wasn't just my decision—I discussed it with the whole family." The deed reflects the fact that the WRP easement was a family decision, and includes the signatures of Susan and three family members.

Riales was previously misinformed when someone told her that the wetlands on her land were virtually worthless. "I did some research before I decided to pursue this opportunity, because honestly, I didn't really know how valuable wetland areas were in terms of environmental benefits," she confesses.

"Over the past decade or so, the general public has become more educated on the value of wetlands



*left to right: Susan Riales, her mother Ruth Swintz, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Brad Poston, and Marion County NRCS District Conservationist Rebecca Harper, review the details of the 30-year WRP easement.*

and their importance to ecosystems," said NRCS District Conservationist Rebecca Harper. "As a natural filter, wetlands play a key role in keeping our water clean."

WRP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related resource concerns on

private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. Across the nation, WRP has restored 1.8 million acres of wetlands. Under the 30-year easement option, the Swintz easement was purchased for 75 percent of what a permanent easement would pay. NRCS will also provide 75 percent of the restoration costs. Open channels on the property were plugged in an effort to restore the natural hydrology. In addition, prescribed burning is planned to improve wildlife habitat.

When the Swintz family farmed this land, they produced cotton, corn, soybeans, and tobacco. A survey of the property indicated land area consisting of woodlands and wetlands, with Rutledge soils, poor drainage, and a high water table. That's the probable cause for drainage work done in the '60's to enhance farming methods—a practice that was widely accepted and common during that time. Attitudes about wetlands and their functions took a major turn in the 80's, and from about 1987 to the present, Federal efforts to restore wetlands increased. "Programs like WRP are returning wetlands back to their original functions, which in turn improves water quality and wildlife habitat," explained Harper.

This family is dedicated to conservation, illustrated through their actions to protect wetlands, and through their practice as backyard conservationists. Susan's yard is full of lush wildlife habitat, and birds and other creatures have a lovely retreat to call home. She also plans to host her nephew's Boy Scout troop for an environmental education day. "We are stewards of the land, and while I call this home, I understand I don't really own this place. We are just taking care of it for the next generation, and I believe that conservation is our responsibility."



Open channels on the Swintz easement were plugged to restore the natural hydrology.

## Sumter County Conservation Farmer Reaps Benefits of Stewardship

Amy O. Maxwell, USDA-NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

Brogdon Family Farms is 3,000 acres of pristine farmland situated in South Carolina's Black River Watershed. The Sumter County farm, which is a shining example of the benefits of conservation, includes soybeans, wheat, corn, and brood cows. Vikki Brogdon and her son, twenty-seven year old John Michael Parimuha, manage the operation along with three hired hands. Last year, this farm family was rewarded for their outstanding commitment to conservation after they enrolled in the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Vikki participated in South Carolina's 2005 CSP sign-up after NRCS District Conservationist Louis Jackson told her about the incentive. "Vikki has always gone above and beyond to conserve soil and water resources on her farm, and CSP is a way to reward those producers that are doing the right thing," said Jackson. CSP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. CSP identifies and rewards those farmers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations. The CSP sign-up will be offered in selected watersheds across the Nation.

Selected watersheds are listed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/>.

As a fifth generation Brogdon to tend this land, she lives in the house built by her great-grandfather in the 1940's. He also built the rustic gas station and store adjacent to her home, which are reminiscent of days gone by.



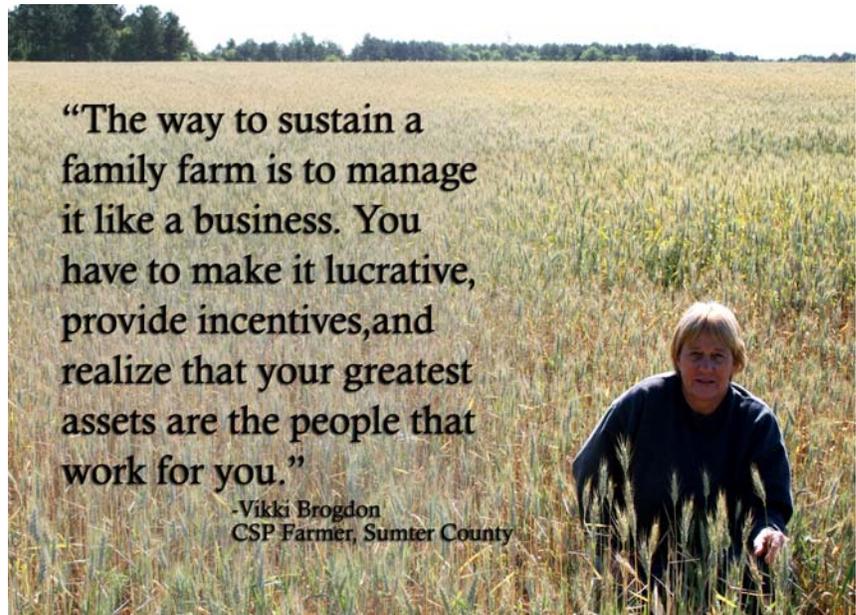
Sumter SWCD Office Manager Kimberly Arrington (left) surveys Brogdon's pasture on a clear Spring morning in May.

"The gas pump still reads that gas is 33 cents," laughs Brogdon. She speaks often of the past, reflecting about growing up on the farm, and how

her grandfather and father worked hard to make a better life for the family. “I started farming with my father in 1976, and now that I’m farming with my son, I have learned the ins-and-outs of mixing family and business,” she explained. She has it down to a science, and explains that one of the keys is to treat it like a business—even though family is involved. “The way to sustain a family farm is to manage it like a business. You have to make it

lucrative, provide incentives, and realize that your greatest assets are the *people* that work for you.” Brogdon admits there are times when she has her doubts. “Damage from winter freezes and droughts are rough, and when my crops aren’t getting enough water, sometimes I just feel helpless.” When asked how she pushes through the challenging times, she reveals a deep-seated faith in God. “He calls certain people to farming, and I’m one of them. You keep doing it because you love it, and because you want to leave this place to your family in the best condition possible. This is the concept that my family believed in, and it’s why my son and I believe in conservation farming,” she said. It is obvious she is proud of her son as well, who tried working off the farm for a time. “Because he’s a genuinely honest and hardworking person, he realized that the farm was the right place for him. He has the right work ethic for success which is important when you run your own business.”

Another factor of Brogdon’s success is her forward thinking. For instance, she adopted no-till in the 80’s before it was widely accepted. “A friend of mine let me borrow some equipment to plant directly into the stubble, and I was hooked. Not to mention the environmental benefits.” She’s also hooked on using alternative energy sources. “We use B20 (20% soybean oil) to power our equipment, and this lessens harmful emissions and allows you to use your own product to fuel your machinery.” She is hopeful about the future of farming, and keeps up with the latest technology and techniques. “Who knows what we’ll be doing in twenty years? We might be growing crops just for the stem—to produce ethanol from cellulose.” Brogdon admits



that she is a bit of a daydreamer—often looking toward the future—while her son is more in tune with the day-to-day operations of the farm. “I can’t stay in today,” she says with a grin. She sums up her management style by explaining, “If you follow other people, they might just lead you over a cliff. The way I look at it, if I fall off the end of a cliff, it’s because I was out exploring!” She believes in taking risks when necessary, and is ready to experiment if she believes soil and water resources will be protected. She’s proved her commitment to conservation through soil testing, establishing filter strips to protect water quality in the nearby Pocatigo Swamp, and recently planted Coastal Bermuda through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Sumter SWCD Office Manager Kimberly Arrington said, “Vikki’s conservation ethic is a great example for others to follow, and her dedication to protecting natural resources is deserving of the rewards that CSP offers.”

Vikki Brogdon and her son come from a long line of conservationists who believe that soil and water conservation do matter. “We are caretakers of the land for the next generation,” she says. “When I first started farming with my dad, I was overwhelmed, but over time, I developed my own way of doing business, and so far, it’s worked.” For Vikki Brogdon and her son, farming is an honest profession, a way of life, and a labor of love. As outstanding stewards of the land, they are excellent models for the CSP motto—*reward the best, and motivate the rest.*

**Oconee County's Cheohee Creek Restoration Project**

by Dave Demarest, Foothills RC&D Coordinator

A major stream restoration project in northern Oconee County, South Carolina, on the Cheohee Creek was recently completed. "While several stream restoration projects have been installed in other Upstate counties, this is the first major stream project in Oconee County," said NRCS District Conservationist Heather Stephens.

The Cheohee Valley is part of the ancestral lands of the Cherokee Indians, who were located throughout the Southeastern United States. In the 1830's the Cherokee's were displaced from North Georgia and the Carolinas because of a rapidly expanding European population. The Cherokees, many by foot, were moved westward to Oklahoma. This mass migration became known as the *Trail of Tears*.



NRCS Soil Conservationist Shawna Shrecengost assisted in establishing the riparian buffer along the Cheohee Creek.

Because of the rich heritage of the Cherokee Indians in the Cheohee Valley, NRCS Archeologist Jim Errante was called in to ensure that no artifacts would be disturbed during the stream restoration.

Restoration included installation of a riparian buffer on each side of the creek that included a variety of native trees. In addition, this riparian area was fenced out to protect it from livestock. A nearby pond was fitted with a bottom water release in an effort to stop thermal pollution of valuable trout waters. Water troughs and heavy use areas were also installed to provide livestock with reliable water sources.

"In-stream structures were used to stop stream bank erosion, and at the same time provide trout habitat," explained NRCS Field Engineer Eddie Martin. Some of the structures included j-hooks, footer rocks, kicker rocks, rock vanes, cross vanes, whole tree revetments, and the use of benches to create floodplains. "Hope-

fully, the trees that were recently planted along the stream bank will restore the area to the way it looked back when the Cherokee's lived here," said Martin.

The project was coordinated by *Partners for Trout*—a conservation partnership in the Upstate dedicated to improving the 250 miles of trout waters in South Carolina. The coalition is spearheaded by Oconee, Greenville and Pickens Soil and Water Conservation Districts, private landowners, Trout Unlimited, Foothills RC&D Council, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR).

The total cost of the project was \$105,286, which was provided by USFWS' Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Trout Unlimited, and donations from private landowners.



The Cheohee Valley is part of the ancestral lands of the Cherokee Indians.

## I Wanna Rock!

### York Soil Survey Staff Search for Bedrock

by Lance Brewington, NRCS Soil Scientist

During the week of December 18-21, 2006, the York Soil Survey Office invited Wes Tuttle of the USDA-NRCS National Soil Survey Center in Wilkesboro, NC, to visit South Carolina and use geophysical methods to assess depth to bedrock and soil characteristics in two areas of York County. One of the areas was south of Rock Hill, in the broad flats, where the Iredell soils are found. The Iredell series consists of moderately well drained, very slowly permeable soils often found on uplands throughout the Piedmont. The second area was in the northern parts of York County, in the Kings Mountain National Military Park.

Iredell soils were investigated after the discovery of a soft bedrock contact that occurred consistently around 20 to 40-inches deep. "We felt that it was also a good idea to pursue this bedrock study because in addition to the transect data that was recorded, the data from this study could reinforce the transect data by supporting what was found with an auger," explained Tuttle. The Iredell series does not allow for the bedrock contact and thus, a new series to accommodate for the bedrock was born—the **Brewback series**. The tool that Tuttle used for exploring this area is the Electromagnetic Induction (EMI) meter. This instrument allowed him to show a bedrock contact at depths of 20 to 40-inches, which reinforces data collected with an auger.

In the study at Kings Mountain National Military Park, the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) was utilized. The soil scientists agree that the GPR

is definitely a tool that works you to the core, especially if you're the one dragging it up and down the mountains! The GPR unit measures depths to restrictive layers; in this case bedrock. The GPR unit was not used in the Iredell soils due to their high clay content which produced inaccurate readings with this device. The unit weighs approximately 40 pounds, so you can imagine dragging 40 pounds with no wheels up and down mountains.

According to aerial photos, the study area is very steep compared to the surrounding area, yet it is all mapped as one soil type with the same slope breaks. The results of this study showed that the bedrock depths were less than 20 inches along the ridges and 20 to 40 inches on the side slopes. Depending on the size of the ridges, the group will either map out two separate map units (one on the ridge and one on the side slope) or map them together as a complex.

As an added treat, the group managed to

coerce Clemson University's Dr. Virgil Quisenberry to give a demonstration on use of the Amoozometer. This is a tool that measures *ksat*—basically a measurement of how fast water can move through soil. NRCS recently purchased three of these devices, so it was helpful to receive hands-on training.

The use of the Electromagnetic Induction Meter and the Ground Penetrating Radar proved to be useful tools in measuring the depths to bedrock in two distinctly different areas of York County. They also helped verify what was previously found with the auger. The data collected will be used to make a better soils map for the citizens of York County.



Caleb Gulley, Bishopville Soil Scientist, maneuvers the GPR unit while NRCS Soil Scientists Lance Brewington, Wes Tuttle (from the National Soil Survey Center), and Dennis DeFrancesco (retired) follow along.

## Ninety Six District RC&D Hosts 25th Annual Woodland Clinic

by Elyse Benson, Ninety-Six District RC&D Coordinator

In April, the Ninety Six District RC&D hosted the *25th Annual Woodland Clinic*, a forestry competition for high schools, at Baker Creek State Park in McCormick County. The competition consists of four individual events: tree measurement, compass and pacing, tree and forest pest identification, and tools and equipment. The teams finish with a lumberjack race where the kids have an opportunity to try their hand at using logging tools in a relay race.

Six counties participated with schools from Saluda, Abbeville High, Abbeville Career Center, Long Cane Academy, John de la Howe, Strom Thurmond, Dixie High, and Calhoun Falls. The Strom Thurmond High team earned top honors, with Calhoun Falls coming in second followed by Saluda High in third. The two top competitors were separated by only a single point, with Zacks Rearden (Strom Thurmond High) earning the high score, Montana Peavy (John de la Howe) in second, and Angel Henderson (Strom Thurmond High) taking the third place prize.

The Clinic is sponsored by the Ninety-Six District RC&D Council with support by contributions from local timber industry companies, county forestry associations, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The contest is set up and run by the SC Forestry Commission with assistance from local NRCS and USDA Forest Service employees, timber industry foresters and a number of retired timber workers and other volunteers.



The team from Edgefield County's Strom Thurmond High earned top honors at the 25th Annual Woodland Clinic.

## SC NRCS Helps Sponsor State FFA Agronomy Award

McBee High School FFA Team Headed to Finals

The McBee High School FFA Agronomy Team took first place honors in the State Finals held at the State Fair Grounds in Columbia on April 28, 2007. SC NRCS was proud to help sponsor the award. NRCS Soil Conservationist Bethel DuRant attended the competition and awards ceremony and presented the winning team with a plaque.

First Place team members included Kenneth Howle, Justin Hawksworth and Spencer McLeod, and their FFA advisor was Pat Earle. The team received an expense-paid trip to the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, scheduled later this year to compete in the National Agronomy Finals. Howle, the individual high-scorer, was joined by Hawksworth as the second high-scorer and McLeod as the third high-scorer.

Abbeville High School had the State Runner-Up team, while Strom Thurmond Technology Center placed third.

The Agronomy Career Development Event is co-sponsored by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in concert with the SC FFA Association.

The mission of the FFA is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.



Bethel DuRant (left), NRCS Soil Conservationist, was on hand at the awards ceremony to congratulate 1<sup>st</sup> place winners from the McBee FFA Agronomy Team. Members included Kenneth Howle, Justin Hawksworth and Spencer McLeod. Pat Earle (right) is the Agricultural Education Instructor at McBee, and coach of the award winning FFA Team.

## NRCS Employees Lend a Hand at 2007 SC Envirothon

*Winning team from Spartanburg County will travel to New York to compete in the National Canon Envirothon*

The SC Envirothon Steering Committee announced the winners of the 2007 SC Envirothon, which took place May 4, 2007. The 1<sup>st</sup> place prize was earned by Spartanburg High's Team A. Spartanburg High's Team B came in 2<sup>nd</sup>, with the Strom Thurmond High School Future Farmers of America (FFA) team coming in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Spartanburg High's Team A was also the top scorer for this year's current topic, which was alternative energy. The 1<sup>st</sup> place team will travel to Geneva, New York, this July to compete in the 2007 Canon Envirothon, which will also spotlight alternative energy.



*left to right: NRCS Soil Scientists Jackie Reed and Caleb Gulley graded examinations from the soils testing station.*

Twenty-five teams gathered at Clemson University's Sandhills Research and Education Center in Columbia, South Carolina, to illustrate their understanding of environmental knowledge in a hands-on problem solving competition. The Envirothon tests the students on topics such as soils, water resources, forestry, wildlife and current environmental issues. NRCS Soil Scientists Caleb Gulley and Jackie Reed manned the soils testing station where competitors answered questions about soil characteristics. NRCS State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas said, "NRCS is committed to encouraging and promoting environmental education, because these kids are the future employees of the SC Conservation Partnership."

South Carolina held its first Envirothon in 1997. High school teachers across the state are recognizing the value of the Envirothon as a means of strengthening the environmental awareness of young men and women, while still achieving the goals set forth by the State's curriculum standards. Comments and feedback from the participants and coaches indicate that the Envirothon experience is valuable. "The Envirothon is science in action and

emphasizes real world problems," said one team coach.

The competition involves a rotation through five different testing stations, including an oral presentation. Prior to the event, team members are provided a topic and asked to research the issues surrounding the subject matter. The day of the competition, teams have ten minutes to present their case on the topic before a panel of judges.

Students of the top three winning teams receive college scholarships (ranging from \$100-\$500), and the top three winning coaches also receive money for classroom materials.

For more information, visit [www.dnr.sc.gov/education/Envirothon](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/education/Envirothon), or call Joy Sullivan, SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), at (803) 359-3165, ext. 3.

The main sponsors of this year's event were the Richland Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund, with support from SCDNR, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the SC Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), and SC Conservation Districts and their employees.



*The 1st place Envirothon trophy.*



*The 1st place SC Envirothon prize was earned by Spartanburg High's Team A. They will travel to New York this summer to compete in the national Canon Envirothon.*

## SC NRCS Engineers Celebrate 80 Years of Service

by Sabrenna Bryant, SC NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

Many people can say they have been with a company for 20, 25, or even 30 years. But it is rare, indeed, to find a person who has been employed for **40 years** with the same agency!

This year, South Carolina NRCS is celebrating the accomplishments and career milestones of two outstanding engineers—Al McNeill and Luke Nance. These two SCS/NRCS pioneers have worked with the agency for 40+ years, contributing a total of over **80 years** worth of knowledge, experience and expertise.

McNeill started working for SCS as a student trainee during the summer of 1966, and continued every summer until he graduated from Clemson University. He briefly entered the Army after college (where he was stationed in Alaska) but returned to NRCS two years later. “I was eager to return to SCS after my military service,” he said. “The agency had always been good to me and I really felt comfortable there.”

McNeill worked in several different offices throughout the Palmetto State including Greenwood, Anderson, Chester, Florence, Charleston, Walterboro and Columbia. In addition, he has been a hydraulic engineer, civil engineer and a design engineer. He said the diversity and flexibility in positions and job locations kept his job interesting, and he has no regrets about the path he took during his career. When asked if retirement was in his

future, McNeill pondered the question before answering. “Not in the immediate future, but you never know. I’ll just take it day to day.”

Nance’s story is a little different. He started his career with the agency in 1967 as a Planning Engineer—the position he still has 40 years later. He served in the Army after graduating from Clemson (where he was stationed in Germany), completed graduate school, and then worked at a private engineering firm in Spartanburg County for two years before coming on board with SCS. “I found my

niche. When I started this job, I actually didn’t believe I would be here this long,” confessed Nance. “But what can I say—I love what I do!”

Nance’s sole duty station has been the NRCS State Office in Columbia, which worked just fine for him. “It’s been a great location for me because I am close to my

family, and in an area that I am familiar with.” He added, “One of my favorite parts of this job has been meeting the people from different agencies and communities that we work with. I believe in the partnership approach to conservation, and South Carolina has been a wonderful place to live and work.” Unlike McNeill, Nance didn’t hesitate a bit when asked about his retirement plans. “I don’t know when yet, but hope to volunteer with NRCS. I would rather be here doing what I love, than sitting at home twiddling my thumbs trying to find something to do.”

SC NRCS is proud to claim these two outstanding conservationists, and we salute their dedication to protecting the natural resources of our beautiful state.



left to right: NRCS Planning Engineer Luke Nance and Hydraulic Engineer Al McNeill are celebrating over 80 years of combined service to SCS/NRCS.

**A “sweetdeal” for South Carolina**

*by M.J. Williams, NRCS Plant Materials Specialist, Gainesville, Florida*

The Brooksville NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC), which serves Florida, the Caribbean Area, and coastal areas of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, is cooperating with Clemson University in a research trial to use native coastal grasses to control the introduced exotic invasive, beach vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*). Beach vitex is a woody shrub native to the Pacific Rim that was introduced in the 1980s by the North Carolina University Arboretum for coastal erosion control in the Southeast. By the 1990’s, it started to raise concerns on South Carolina beaches because it was spreading rapidly and posed a threat to native plants and animals. Although not yet officially classified as an invasive species, the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force was formed to coordinate interagency efforts to eradicate the plant ([www.beachvitex.org](http://www.beachvitex.org)).



*A member of the task force works to eradicate beach vitex on Sullivan’s Island in South Carolina.*

In November 2006, Dr. Chuck Gresham of Clemson University’s Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science, and a member of the task force, contacted the staff at the Brooksville NRCS PMC about using muhlygrass (also known as hairawn muhlygrass, *Muhlenbergia capillaries*) and its relative sweetgrass (also known as gulfhairawn muhlygrass, *M. filipes*) in their beach vitex eradication and coastal restoration efforts.

Sweetgrasses are native to the coastal areas of the South Atlantic and along the Gulf. They are commonly found just behind the first dune. Besides helping to restore the coastal areas of South Carolina impacted by beach vitex, sweetgrass is the foundation material for African-coiled basketry in the Southeast, particularly in the Gullah/Geechee community around Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Development in the coastal areas of the Carolinas has reduced the sweetgrass populations to the point that basket makers were going to Florida to find their sweetgrass. This coopera-

tive project between Clemson University and the Brooksville NRCS PMC will address two issues—beach vitex control and restoration of sweetgrass populations in South Carolina.

A sweetgrass accession from South Carolina and nine different muhlygrasses or sweetgrasses from Florida were increased at the Brooksville NRCS PMC for planting on the South Carolina coast in late April. On ten sites from Sullivan’s Island to Garden City, where the beach vitex has been treated with herbicide and any residual beach vitex material has been manually removed, mixtures of sweetgrass, muhlygrass, seaoats (*Uniola paniculata*) and bitter panicum (*Panicum amarum*) will be established and monitored for beach vitex seedlings, grass survival, and spread. Results from this study will allow the Carolina Beach Vitex Task Force to develop best management recommendations for beach vitex eradication. The results will also help determine which selections of sweetgrass are best adapted for coastal planting in South Carolina to development of new populations of sweetgrass for the local basket artisans to use.

SC NRCS Wildlife Biologist Dick Yetter said, “Beach vitex is highly invasive, out-competing native dune grasses and forbs. At the same time, vitex develops a complex root system as it spreads that can interfere with Leatherback and Loggerhead sea turtle nesting success. Unless controlled, the extensive root systems of this plant can inhibit the ability of female turtles to excavate a successful nest site. This could translate into a significant impact on the nesting population of Loggerhead turtles along the South Carolina coast. Beach vitex has a relatively limited distribution. If we get involved now there is a good possibility for success in stopping its impact on the primary dune habitat along the coast. NRCS needs to be involved in this project, and we are looking forward to getting more involved so that we can protect and improve our coastal areas.”



*SC NRCS Wildlife Biologist Dick Yetter says beach vitex threatens turtle nesting habitat.*

### Small Farmer Workshop Features Solar-Powered Irrigation

by Sabrenna Bryant, SC NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

A USDA Programs and Small Scale Farmer Workshop was held at Green Field Farms May 3, 2007. Green Field Farms was also the host site of the 2007 Black Cowboy and Agrarian Festival in Rembert, SC. Small rural landowners and participants in NRCS' Small Scale Farmer Program attended the workshop. The event was hosted by NRCS Small Farmer Liaison Wilfred Pace, along with Green Field Farms owners Mark and Sandra Myers.

Several speakers attended the workshop to discuss a variety of topics relating to the operation and management of small farms in South Carolina. Dr. Roy Hollingsworth, Clemson Extension Service, discussed the importance of recordkeeping and nutrient management for successful crop production. Frank Sligh, FSA Farm Loan Chief, and Larry Rogers, Farm Loan Specialist, addressed the qualifications and application process to apply for loans. Rhonda Brandt, Executive Director of Census of Agriculture, spoke about the important role small farmers play in providing information to the Census of Agriculture which will be used to help USDA develop short and long-term improvements and strategies in the farming community. David Findley, NRCS Grassland and Forestry Specialist, discussed the tools available for evaluating forage and nutrient needs of livestock plans.

SC Solar, Inc. out of Rock Hill, SC, demonstrated solar technology with a solar irrigation pump. The presentation illustrated how solar panels generate electricity to operate a submergible pump which then produces running water. Most solar pumps need about 30 volts of power to get started, and on average, pump about 25 gallons of water per minute. SC Solar, Inc. President Erik Lensch explained that the system is designed to pump the water into a holding tank that can hold up to several hundred gallons of water, depending on the farm's need. Therefore, when daylight is scarce, the farm will have several days worth of water to continue operating. "This unique technology is available to eligible small-scale farmers through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and participants could earn up to 90%

cost-share," said Pace. For more information, contact Pace at (803) 253-3314.



SC Solar, Inc. President Erik Lensch (left) and SC NRCS Small Farmer Liaison Wilfred Pace demonstrated the benefits of solar-powered pump irrigation for small farmers at a workshop in Rembert, South Carolina.

### NRCS Employee Recognized as Berkeley SWCD 2007 Outstanding Cooperator of the Year

Ann Bentley, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician in Charleston County, was recognized as the 2007 Cooperator of the Year for Berkeley County. This award recognizes an individual who demonstrates a strong conservation ethic, and historically, the District has recognized local farmers, producers, and timber and wildlife managers.

This year, the award was presented to an individual who has gone above and beyond to educate farmers about the importance of conservation. Bentley has assisted the Berkeley SWCD for over a decade. Berkeley SWCD Chairman Gary C. LeCroy said, "Ann's thumbprint is on the conservation and management of thousands of acres in Berkeley County. She has helped the landowners of Berkeley County care for our land, forests, wildlife and waters." Congratulations Ann!



Ann Bentley, Charleston NRCS Soil Conservation Technician, was honored by the Berkeley SWCD as Cooperator of the Year. She was presented with this beautiful piece of Jim Booth's artwork.

## SC NRCS Welcomes New Employees!

**Erica Westbrook is South Carolina NRCS' new State Resource Conservationist.** Erica Westbrook grew up in Moro, Arkansas, in Lee County. She graduated with a B.S. in Agriculture Economics from the University of Arkansas. She began her career with NRCS (then Soil Conservation Service, SCS) as a Soil Conservation Trainee in Forrest City, Arkansas in 1996. She has held several positions in her career including— Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, Resource Conservationist of the Watershed Planning Team, and Resource Conservationist on the Program Team. Erica lives in Columbia and is excited about her move to South Carolina and looks forward to learning more about the state. Welcome Erica!



**Ruthie Davis is the new District Conservationist in Charleston County.** She is originally from Glen Allen, Virginia, and earned a B.S. in Biology from Virginia State University. She began her conservation career as an Earth Team Volunteer with Virginia NRCS, and then signed on as an AmeriCorps Volunteer in Atlanta. During her service with AmeriCorps, she worked on outdoor educational projects and performed water quality monitoring of streams. She started with NRCS as a Soil Conservation Technician in Atlanta at a satellite plant materials center where she propagated and transplanted plants throughout the city in preparation for the 1996 Olympics. She then moved to New Jersey to serve as a Soil Conservationist, and also worked in several field offices in Virginia, and served one detail in Rhode Island and Ohio before coming to the Palmetto State this year. Welcome to South Carolina Ruthie!



**Roger Cooper is the new District Conservationist in Dillon County.** Born on a tobacco and dairy farm in far western Kentucky, he says travel other than to church and an occasional trip into town was very infrequent. Upon high school graduation, he entered Murray State University during the Fall of 1966. He admits, "My first three semesters would have been better spent working solely on the farm as I had poor study habits and learned that majoring in chemistry and math was not my calling." He then volunteered for three



years in the US Army, serving in Vietnam where he earned a Bronze Star.

Upon his return back home to Murray, Kentucky in 1971, he re-entered college to major in agriculture with emphasis in finance and marketing. In 1972, he was married, and then he went on to earn his Masters in Agriculture with a teaching certificate in Vocational Ag. For the next twenty years, he chose the profession of farmer, during which time he also had two daughters (who have graced him with two wonderful grandsons!)

After leaving the farm, he spent eleven years working at Mattel Toys in Production and Inventory Control, Plastics Molding Operations, Materials Operations, and Distribution. He then applied for a position with NRCS, and in December 2003, was hired in Henderson County, Kentucky, as a Soil Conservationist. Now, South Carolina NRCS is lucky to have Cooper on board as a District Conservationist! In his spare time, he enjoys genealogy. Welcome to South Carolina Roger!

**Mae W. Hazel is the new Administrative Assistant for Programs and Public Affairs in the State Office.** A native of Tchula, Mississippi, she recently retired from

the Army as a Sergeant Major. During the 21 years that she served her country, she held a variety of positions and served in numerous locations throughout the United States and overseas. She received numerous awards and decorations for her accomplishments and unselfish service. She has a Master of Science Degree in Adult and Continuing Education from Kansas State University. She also has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Science and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from Wayland Baptist University. She and her husband have two sons and two grandchildren. She enjoys spending time with her family, and she's looking forward to working at NRCS. Welcome Mae!



**Doug Deaderick is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Operations in the State Office.**

He was previously the Lexington NRCS District Conservationist from 1990-2007. He received his BS in Agricultural Science from Tennessee Tech University. His NRCS career began in Tennessee where he worked thirteen years as a district conservationist in two field offices. His wife Dianna is a 6th-grade English teacher. Doug is proud to announce that his daughter Beth and her husband made him a grandfather on February 10, 2007. His oldest daughter Amy will attend graduate school this fall at the *other* USC--the one in Los Angeles. Welcome Doug!



## PERSONNEL NEWS

*At time of press, this update was not available.  
The most recent personnel news will be sent out  
via email to all employees in the near future.*

### Welcome NRCS Summer 2007 Interns!



*left to right: Jefferey Epps (Orangeburg  
County), Daniel Cabaniss (York County),  
and Amy Williams (Anderson County).*

### Get Ready! It's Coming! USDA Cultural Awareness Training Day is August 23rd!

The event will take place at the  
Brookland Banquet and Conference  
Center at 1054 Sunset Boulevard, in  
West Columbia, SC.

Registration will start at 8:00 a.m. and  
the program will feature a variety of  
entertaining and educational speakers.

This event will be co-hosted by USDA Rural  
Development and NRCS. Bring an open mind  
and we'll provide the cultural diversity, excite-  
ment, fellowship, and a wonderful lunch to top  
it all off.



**Celebrating & Acknowledging  
the Value of Cultural Diversity**



# Conservation Photo Contest Winners



1st place: Sue Griggs, Chesterfield NRCS Soil Conservation Technician



Spring tranquility by Lance Brewington, NRCS Soil Scientist

## More Outstanding Photos!



Oconee County Cow, by Emory Holsonback, NRCS Soil Scientist



Flying Squirrel by Sue Griggs



WRP site by Tina Jerome, NRCS Calhoun County District Conservationist



Leapin' Lizards by Joy Sullivan, DNR Program Coordinator, Lexington



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