



South Carolina's Current Developments

Home of the first soil conservation district plan...February 4, 1938

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service

January/February 2005

So far, NRCS in South Carolina has enjoyed a busy and productive year. We have many exciting programs and events coming up in the near future, but that also means we have a heavy workload. As the Conservation Partnership proved in 2004, I know that we will have many successes again this year.

It was a pleasure to see many of you this January in Charleston at the Annual Conservation Partnership Conference. I hope you met NRCS' special guests, Chief Bruce Knight and Regional Assistant Chief for the East Dick Coombe. They were very impressed with the conference program and the open dialogue that occurred during the sessions. The conference was a great way to share with them how the Conservation Partnership successfully works together to protect South Carolina's natural resources.

South Carolina's three eligible Conservation Security Program (CSP) watersheds are hosting public information workshops for landowners and others who want to learn more about the program. The workshops can help interested applicants determine their eligibility.

NRCS is also hosting public input meetings for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). These meetings will ensure that EQIP continues to address the most important resource needs. I encourage district commissioners, board members, and other conservationists to attend these meetings (*March 1st in Orangeburg; March 3rd in Florence; and March 8th in Clarendon*) and help shape the future of conservation programs.

We recently received good news regarding EQIP in South Carolina. We were one of seventeen states in the nation to receive additional EQIP funds for our high level of performance in implementing the program during 2004. I am excited we were rewarded for our conservation efforts and that South Carolina's farmers will benefit.

Thanks for your dedication to protecting and improving the state's natural resources. Your hard work does pay off.

From the Office of the State Conservationist

Walter W. Douglas



In this issue....

Highlights from the SC Conservation Partnership meeting.....pgs. 2-3

NRCS Celebrates 70 Years!pg. 5

Conservation Security Program Workshopspg. 7

SC Earth Team Updatepg. 8

South Carolina-- 1st in GRP.....pg.10

Conservation Photo Contest Winners....pg. 12

Notes from the Field.....

Highlights from the South Carolina Conservation Partnership Conference

The 2005 South Carolina Conservation Partnership Conference, *Blueprint for Success*, took place January 3rd-6th at the Charleston Place Hotel.

The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) kicked off the week with a symposium highlighting the Conservation Partnership. SC SWCS President-Elect Louis Jackson presided. District Conservationist Debbie Mann and State Conservationist Walt Douglas represented NRCS on the panel of speakers.

The conference also included NRCS special guests Chief Bruce Knight and Regional Assistant Chief for the East Richard Coombe. Clemson University's *Your Day* radio show conducted interviews with several speakers, including Chief Knight.

Other topics and issues discussed throughout the week included water rights issues, the Conservation Bank, working with legislators, and NRCS' Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP).

On Wednesday, an awards ceremony was conducted to recognize leaders of South Carolina's Conservation Partnership. The Conservation District Partnership Awards were presented to NRCS employees Dennis Bauknight (Greenville) and Rebecca Harper (Marion).

The conference concluded with a Leadership Breakfast.

NRCS Award Winners



left: NRCS State Conservationist Walt Douglas and Regional Assistant Chief Richard Coombe recognized Greenville NRCS District Conservationist Dennis Bauknight. right: Marion NRCS District Conservationist Rebecca Harper was also recognized by Douglas and Coombe.



Inspirational Humorist Glen Ward entertained the audience during the awards ceremony and luncheon.



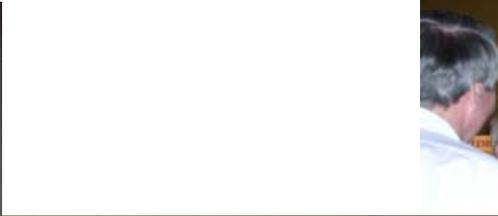
NRCS State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas shared his thoughts about the Conservation Partnership.



Clemson University's *Your Day* radio show taping. left to right: Show host Donna London, NRCS Chief Bruce Knight, NACD CEO Krysta Harden, SCDNR-Conservation Districts Group Leader Von Snelgrove.

Joint Conference 2005

Blueprint for Success



Heading South: Orangeburg Conservationist Installs Duck Pond to Attract Wildlife

by Sabrenna Bennett, Public Affairs Assistant

Nestled in his cozy log cabin one mile from the road in the Cattle Creek Community of Orangeburg County, Edward Buckley enjoys the peaceful sights and sounds of his duck pond. "I have always wanted a farm with a duck pond, and installing this pond was a great way to provide for wildlife, as well as enhance the recreational value of my property," stated Buckley.

Buckley, an attorney who resides in Mt. Pleasant, remembers the soothing tranquility of the duck ponds he visited on the farms of family and friends as a young boy growing up in Charleston. It was these fond memories that persuaded him to convert ten of his 195 acres into a duck pond, receiving financial assistance through the NRCS Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), as well as technical assistance from NRCS Soil Conservationist Charles Holland.

After Buckley installed the duck impoundment, his first step was to plant 150 pounds of rice on four of the ten acres, leaving the remaining portion in native vegetation. The rice used in the duck pond is a type of waterfowl forage that is frost resistant and has a long stiff stem. This is ideal for the ducks, because they tend to lean upon the stems when searching for rice.

After planting the rice, Buckley used a well to flood the impoundment. The water not only provides a natural habitat for the ducks, but also serves as protection from predators.

His pond has proven to be a safe haven for waterfowl, attracting as many as one hundred Wood Ducks a day. The clear and open view of the pond also alerts the ducks to any predators that may be stalking about.

Buckley's love of nature and wildlife extends beyond just installing a duck pond. In addition to CRP,

he also participates in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Through WHIP, Buckley installed conservation practices to enhance the wildlife habitat on his property. Some of the conservation practices include field borders, firebreaks, and prescribed burning. He also plans to attract doves by planting a 10-acre dove field consisting of sunflowers and corn.

"When I first saw the field at the back of Edward's farm, I knew it would make a great site for a duck pond," stated Holland. "With Cattle Creek close by, the pond greatly enhances the wildlife habitat."

The ducks have responded to Buckley's pond by heading south in flocks, and it's not surprising that he plans to maintain the duck pond in the future. He is living proof that the love of wildlife, nature and conservation runs deep.



This duck impoundment in Orangeburg County is planted with 150 pounds of frost-resistant waterfowl forage.



Landowner Edward Buckley (left) discusses his duck pond with NRCS Soil Conservationist Charles Holland.

"I have always wanted a farm with a duck pond, and installing this pond was a great way to provide for wildlife, as well as enhance the recreational value of my property."

-Landowner Edward Buckley

African-American History Month



by Dorothea Martinez, SC Black Emphasis Program Manager (BEPM) and Trinette Vereen, Williamsburg County District Conservationist

Fulton Farms

"True Champions of the Environment"

At a time when the number of African-American farmers is at an all time low, Fulton Farms in Williamsburg County has a great deal to feel good about.

As the recipients of the 2003 Conservation Farm Award by the Williamsburg SWCD, their recipe for success in the farming industry includes annual soil testing, staying committed to soil and water conservation, and staying abreast of new technologies in the industry.

Fulton Farms is managed by James, Jackson and Marvin Fulton. Marvin is the operations manager and his father, James, and brother, Jackson, are partners in the operation. Their farming operation is in the Cades Community and includes the planting and rotation of tobacco, corn and soybeans on more than 1,200 acres.

The Fultons' success in the farming industry can be attributed to their dedication to soil testing once a year to help improve soil and water quality, and the planting of trees (without cost share assistance) to help conserve soil. They have also implemented new technologies to improve their farming operation by attending classes on the proper use of herbicide and insecticide, which, in turn, helps protect the environment.

As fourth generation farmers, Marvin and Jackson believe in the sustainability of the land for future generations. Being raised on the land with simple yet profound values, their faithfulness to family and land is obvious, as they are well respected as farmers and businessmen. Through their leadership in the community and their inherent love of the land, they not only set a good example for African-American farmers, but for all farmers throughout South Carolina.



left to right: Marvin, James, and Jackson Fulton of Williamsburg were presented with a "Conservationist Farm Award."

NRCS Celebrates 70 Years of Service



The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)--successor to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS)--

was made an official agency on April 27, 1935. During the days of the Dust Bowl in the 1920's and early 30's, soil erosion was declared a menace to national welfare and SCS was formed to attack the problem. At the forefront of this movement was Hugh Hammond Bennett, soil erosion expert and the first chief of NRCS, who spent several years studying soil erosion and its effects.

Bennett, known as "The Father of Soil Conservation," came to believe that soil erosion was taking such a toll on farmland that, if left unchecked, it would impair the nation's ability to produce food. This was a catalyst that encouraged Bennett to take action through demonstrations, lectures and articles, proving that conservation management practices were necessary and beneficial. His determination and persuasion eventually led to the passing of the Soil Conservation Act of 1935.

Today, NRCS holds fast to the vision of Bennett and continues to support conservation efforts through programs and outreach. As the 70th anniversary of our organization approaches, field offices are encouraged to plan events or other promotional outreach to celebrate NRCS' birthday on April 27th.

The theme is "A Partner in Conservation Since 1935," and national informational materials have been developed to assist with the celebration, including a four-minute video with the same name as the theme, a button with the theme and the agency's logo, and a gold-colored lapel pin with the raindrop in color. More information and materials will be forthcoming as soon as they are received in the state office.

NRCS is proud of its heritage and looks forward to carrying out the conservation legacy that was started 70 years ago.

For more information, contact Amy Maxwell, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, at (803) 765-5402.

NRCS and National Guard Develop Erosion Control Plans

USDA-NRCS and the South Carolina Army National Guard (SCARNG) Environmental Section recently joined forces to fight erosion. NRCS was asked to develop site specific erosion control plans for the McCrady Training Center on Ft. Jackson. NRCS Urban Conservationist and coordinator of the inventory Jim Wilson said, "The plan is intended to serve as a basis for future funding priorities and not just construction plans.

SCARNG employed a USC graduate to model and inventory erosion sites during the summer of 2004. From October to December 2004, NRCS utilized this inventory to complete site specific erosion control plans for fifty of the erosion sites, with conservation plans developed in January 2005.

NRCS personnel completing the field work included Monica Franklin, St. Matthews NRCS soil conservationist, and Robbie Newman, Camden NRCS soil conservation technician. Additional technical assistance was provided by Eric Fleming, NRCS design engineer, Gene Hardee, NRCS state conservation agronomist, George Sullivan, NRCS GIS specialist, and Ricky Walker, civil engineering technician.

For each site, there is a photograph, a summary narrative of the site, a plan view showing the locations of recommended conservation practices, a conservation plan showing specific practices, quantities, and costs, and a cost estimate. There is also a summary spreadsheet with conservation practices, cost, and a priority ranking listed by site. Priority was assigned with regard to proximity to Red Cockaded Woodpecker habitat and wetlands.

The cost information used to develop site specific construction cost estimates was developed from past NRCS construction contracts on both Ft. Jackson and the McCrady Training Center. These figures closely reflect the amounts actually paid to contractors to perform similar work.



NRCS developed site specific erosion control plans for Fort Jackson's McCrady Training Center.

8th Annual SC Native Plant Symposium Planned for April

The River in the City: Plant, Animal, and Human Interactions in the Midlands of South Carolina is this year's theme for the 8th annual Native Plant Symposium sponsored by the SC Native Plant Society (SCNPS). The event will take place April 22-24, 2005, at Riverbanks Zoo and Botanical Garden, in Columbia. This symposium will focus on the importance of native plants to the diversity of the Midlands' landscape, its historical development, and conservation.

Speakers, workshops, and field trips will address the biology of native plant species, natural areas, and the vegetation of the Midlands. Invited local and national experts will cover a wide range of environmental topics on citizenship and ecosystem management, the history and role of fire in South Carolina forests and grasslands, and the importance of pollination biology in plant conservation.

Workshops will offer participants hands-on experience with the identification and effects of exotic plants, the uses of native plant materials in traditional arts, crafts, propagation and gardening. Field trips will highlight significant natural areas in or near Columbia's major river drainages.

For additional details and registration materials visit www.scnps.org/symposium.html.



Foothills Farmland Protection Task Force

by Gerry Cohn, Southeast Director of American Farmland Trust

When Oconee County District Conservationist Heather Stephens heard about the new Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) in the 2002 Farm Bill, she knew that there would be interested farmers in her county. Although she only had a month to submit applications, she generated 22 proposals from local farmers, requesting \$12 million to help protect their grasslands. After she heard that South Carolina had been allocated 300,000 dollars for this program statewide, she realized that her efforts had to stretch beyond outreach to local farmers. As she began talking with colleagues in her region of the state, she learned that there was widespread interest in Farm Bill conservation programs and that a concerted effort was needed to secure adequate funding to fill that demand.

This was the beginning of the Foothills Farmland Protection Task Force (FPTF), a collaboration of area Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS, Foothills RC&D, Upstate Forever land trust, South Carolina Farm Bureau and local farmers. These partners meet periodically to discuss with local farmers, citizens, and political leaders outreach opportunities, conservation opportunities through state and federal programs, and increased communication with state and federal elected officials to make them aware of the strong demand for conservation funding amongst area landowners.

In addition to the interest in the GRP, task force members have found many landowners interested in selling an agricultural conservation easement through the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). They have emphasized the importance of preserving viable farming communities, rather than just individual farms.

Stephens is awaiting the results of an application to the FRPP and the Conservation Bank for seven landowners to protect over 1,100 acres in the Tokeena Crossroads area. "If we can ensure that a significant block of land will always be available and affordable for agriculture, this gives a young farmer a fair shot at making it," she said. "We want to do whatever we can to give that next generation some hope."

Conservation Security Program (CSP) Public Meetings Announced**Georgetown County**

February 24th from 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. at Indiantown Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall (in Hemingway, SC), in conjunction with Florence and Williamsburg Counties.

Feb 25th from 8:00 a.m.- 10:00 a.m. at the Georgetown NRCS office conference room, 1837 N. Fraser Street.

March 3rd from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon at Pleasant Hill Community Center.

Contact Debbie Mann at (843) 546-7808, ext. 129 for more information

Lee County

February 23rd at 12:00 noon at the South Carolina Cotton Museum.

February 24th at 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion Hut in Lynchburg.

Contact Lori Bataller at (803) 484-5388, ext. 113 for more information

Sumter County (2 workshops have already been held)

February 23rd at 6:00 p.m. at the Compass Restaurant (on U.S. HWY 378 and I-95, exit 135, near Turbeville), in conjunction with Florence County.

Contact Louis Jackson at (803) 905-7650, ext. 111 for more information

Florence County

February 22nd at 2:00 p.m. at the South Lynches Fire Station in Coward, SC, on Highway 52.

February 24th at 8:30 a.m. at the Florence USDA Service Center Conference Room, 215 Third Loop Road.

Contact Lynette Savereno at (843) 669-9686, ext. 114 for more information

Clarendon County

March 2nd at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. at the Central Carolina Technical College, F.E. Dubose Campus in Manning.

Contact Roy Todd at (803) 435-2612 for more information



South Carolina Earth Team Update



Who had the MOST Earth Team hours???

January 2005:
Beaufort SWCD-123 hrs.

December 2004:
Beaufort SWCD-112 hrs.

November 2004:
Hampton-111 hrs.

October 2004:
Edgefield-909 hrs.

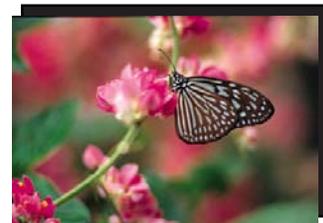


Earth Day is a nationwide celebration held on April 22nd that promotes "environmental goodwill" throughout communities and emphasizes the importance of protecting our natural resources.

NRCS would like to encourage the Conservation Partnership and Earth Team volunteers to become a part of this celebration through community outreach efforts in their counties.

Volunteers can assist the Conservation Partnership with a variety of tasks to prepare for Earth Day, such as--

- ☒ Coordinating events and brainstorming
- ☒ Preparing flyers and press releases
- ☒ Typing and mailing letters
- ☒ Making and/or setting up displays or exhibits
- ☒ Handing out conservation materials at Earth Day events





NRCS Heroes



an email from Horry County District Conservationist Alex Johnson, who is currently serving in Afghanistan.

We just got another 8-10 inches of snow which is a nuisance for travel, but a blessing indeed for the farmers. They are coming off of a 7 year drought, and the only moisture they get during the year is the snow.

I work in two provinces that are usually peaceful, but, it is indeed a challenge to work with the Army and the farmers in these areas. Some 80% of the people are in the farming business--much like the US in the late 1800's. The farmers here really have the same problems as the ones in Horry County after a drought. There is no cash for operating expenses because of prior year failures, but here, there is also no banking enterprise to make a loan. Their biggest re-



Alex Johnson, Horry County District Conservationist is in Afghanistan serving his country.

quest is for an advance of seed and fertilizer (but primarily seed because they often don't use fertilizer). We could use a good Farm Credit person over here to help them establish a system. They are also interested in some crop diversity with new fruit trees and grapes where none exist. Afghanistan has the best almonds and raisins I have ever had. Their soils seem to be very fertile in general.

On missions to the "far side"(other districts--like counties), we deliver shoes, coats, blankets, food, and medicine to the poor in the villages. Work closely with the Governor and other leaders in a wide variety of ways. Provide materials to schools – which close in the winter.

Put in drinking water wells. Set up medical clinics. Now that an ag person is on staff, we are talking to farmers about their needs and desires as we give out the supplies. We cannot do much here until the snow melts, then we have only



a few weeks to get any planting done. The best time for dam construction will be in the dry season, but we will be gone and hopefully someone else will be here to continue with what has been started. It is a challenge. Pray for a whole lot of wisdom and wit for me and the other decision makers involved. We need it. It is easy to get fragmented with so many needs.

I am fortunate to have good soldiers, a commander who believes in agriculture, good interpreters, support from friends at home, a warm sleeping bag at night and food to eat (usually pretty good). We all can learn from this. Hope your week goes well. Take care.

Alex

Grazing Lands Specialist Mike Hall is also on active military duty and serving his country at this time.



Thanks to these NRCSers for their service to our country!

National Park Service Director Visits Cowpens Battlefield in Cherokee

Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service, recently visited Cowpens National Battlefield (CNB) in Cherokee County. Dennis DeFrancesco, NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, and Amy Bridges, Cherokee NRCS District Conservationist, along with Beth Bradley and Jane Waters of the Cherokee SWCD, had the opportunity to meet and visit with her.

Mainella visited the CNB to learn firsthand about the partnership between CNB and the Palmetto Conservation Foundation (PCF). She hailed the partnership as a shining example for other parks. Years without a controlled burn led to natural growth of underbrush and non-native species. CNB and PCF have been working on reducing the risk of forest fires as well as restoring the landscape back to its original state as it would have appeared during the battle in 1781.

PCF battlefield restoration planner Oliver Buckles contacted the Cherokee NRCS for assistance in soil interpretations and native grasses information. Bridges, DeFrancesco, NRCS Grazing Lands Specialist Mike Hall, and NRCS Cultural Resources Specialist Jim Errante assisted in the preliminary restoration plans.

Buckles and DeFrancesco were featured in a recent airing of "Battlefield Detectives" on the *History Channel*. They discussed their role in the restoration project. This episode, which first aired in December, will be rebroadcast on Saturday, February 26th, at 11:00 a.m.



left to right: Dennis DeFrancesco, Greenville NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service, and Amy Bridges, Cherokee NRCS District Conservationist.

NRCS Chief to Dedicate Nation's First Grassland Easement in Sumter, SC

South Carolina NRCS State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas announced the first conservation easement completed in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). The easement is located on 83 acres of grassland in Sumter County.

"South Carolina's grasslands provide significant economic and ecological benefits and play a key role in environmental quality," said Douglas. "This program helps conserve grasslands and helps maintain viable ranching and farming operations. This easement provides permanent protection for the property's ranching operation from conversion to non-grassland uses."

NRCS worked with Rowland Alston, the South Carolina landowner, to develop a grassland resources conservation plan that will maintain the viability of a perennial stand of



mixed grasses through common grazing practices such as rotational grazing and cross fencing. Also, habitat for bobwhite quail will be protected from haying and mowing during the primary nesting season.

On March 16, 2005, at 11:00 a.m., NRCS Chief Bruce Knight will preside over a press conference at Alston's GRP site. South Carolina legislators, USDA officials, and Sumter County officials have been invited to attend the event. Prior to the press conference, Chief Knight will tape a segment for "Making It Grow," a nationally syndicated television show hosted by Alston.

GRP, a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore and enhance grasslands on their property, is administered by NRCS, the Farm Service Agency and the Forest Service. The program emphasizes protection for grasslands that are under threat of conversion to cropland or other uses.

P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife Youth Grants Awarded

South Carolina's P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife (Protecting Our Wildlife at Every Right-of-Way) Youth Grant Program announces the selection of four grant recipients in its inaugural year. The program was initiated in 2004 to fund youth programs which promote, enhance, or assist with environmental education. The P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife steering committee reviewed the applications and awarded grants in the amounts of \$1,000, \$500, and \$250.

The 1st place \$1,000 grant was awarded to the Blue Heron Learning Center in Ridgeland (Jasper County) South Carolina. This 10-acre outdoor classroom is located just off I-95 at exit 21 and provides a peaceful and educational haven accessible to thousands of people, including interstate travelers. The area includes a trail lined with educational kiosks as well as an outdoor classroom and a 4,000 square foot Nature Center, complete with classrooms and hands-on displays. The grant will be used to replace some of the hands-on materials such as animal furs, lab equipment, and collection dishes.

The 2nd place \$500 grant was awarded to the Joe Adair Outdoor Education Center in Laurens County. Opened in 1996, this outdoor learning center boasts an authentic 1800's log cabin, man-made waterfall and bird sanctuary, hiking trails, a Native American village, butterfly garden, a handicapped accessible garden, and a state-of-the-art education building. Since its opening, the center has hosted over 40,000 visitors. The grant money will be used to purchase plants to enhance wildlife habitat at the center.

The 3rd place \$250 grant was a tie between the Ninety Six District Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Woodland Clinic, and the South Carolina Envirothon. Both groups will be awarded \$250.

The RC&D Woodland Clinic is an annual event hosted in McCormick County. The program

has been in existence for 24 years and targets high school students. Each year, nearly one hundred students come together to test their knowledge of tree and pest identification, as well as forestry tools and equipment and tree measurement. The grant funds will be used to replace many of the tools used in the competition, and to pay for prizes for the winning teams.

The SC Envirothon is a yearly competition for high school students that encourages and enhances understanding of the natural environment. The event is sponsored by the SC Association of Conservation Districts (SCACD) in partnership with a number of state and federal agencies.

The day-long event is a hands-on environmental problem-solving competition in which student groups compete for recognition and scholarships. The grant funds will be used to prepare the winning team and their coach to travel to the national Envirothon competition to represent the Palmetto State.



P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife is a statewide partnership effort administered by the SC Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and funded by Duke Power, Progress Energy, Santee-Cooper, South Carolina Electric and Gas, and the Electric Cooperatives of SC, Inc. The program offers landowners technical and financial assistance to create and maintain wildlife habitat beneath electrical transmission lines.

The P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife Youth Grant Program plans to award grants each year with funds generated from the year-old P.O.W.E.R. for Wildlife Seed Program to entities that encourage natural resources education for children.

For more information, contact Lowcountry RC&D Coordinator Steve Edwards at (843) 549-5596.

Conservation Photo Contest Winners



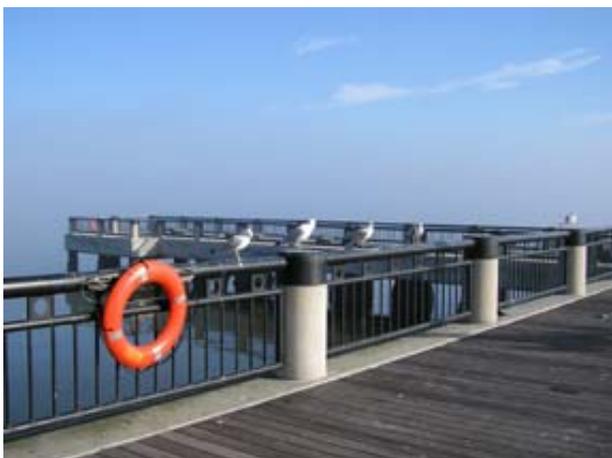
First Place: Scott Glenn, Chester Field Engineer, Twin Falls in Pickens County.



Second Place: Dwayne Mangum, Charleston District Conservationist, Oaks at Santee Gun Club.



Third Place: Ben Stuckey, State Soil Scientist, Moonlight.



Honorable Mention: Dwayne Mangum, Charleston District Conservationist, Waterfront Park.

Submit your best photos to
sabrenna.bennett@sc.usda.gov

South Carolina's 21st Annual Premier Hunting, Fishing, and Outdoors Show!

March 18, 19 & 20, 2005

Come prowl the booths and events at the 2005 Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic, South Carolina's largest and wildest hunting, fishing and outdoors show ever! Experience South Carolina's diverse natural resources, wildlife and fish.

Browse booth after booth stocked with the latest and greatest hunting, fishing and outdoor sports equipment and clothing, unusual foods and unique gifts. Reach out and touch live critters, from snakes and amphibians to marine life, in several hands-on exhibits. Attend special seminars to learn about wildlife and natural resources, hunting, fishing and related outdoor equipment. Children's amusements abound. Let the kids try catch-and-release fishing in a free fishing SC Reel Kids catch-n-release pond or try their hand at shooting at the virtual ranges on the "Take One-Make One" trailer.

It's gonna be an incredibly wild opportunity for an early spring fling the entire family will enjoy. It's a tradition as wild as the outdoors...a tradition you don't want to miss! More detailed information about the event will be publicized by South Carolina Wildlife magazine, WIS-TV, and WCOS-FM during February and March.

For more information, call 803-734-4008.



USDA-NRCS Seeks Comments on Environmental Quality Incentives Program

NRCS is seeking comments from South Carolina landowners and organizations on its conservation cost share program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Walter W. Douglas, South Carolina NRCS State Conservationist, is launching a comment period to allow public input on EQIP's four national priorities.

"NRCS periodically reviews and updates the EQIP priorities, with input from the public, to ensure the program continues to address the most important resource needs as well as any emerging resource issues," said Douglas.

NRCS invites the public and stakeholders to provide input at these sessions. Feedback from agricultural organizations, environmental groups, commodity organizations, agencies, individuals and others is encouraged.

Three public input sessions will be held with each beginning at 6:00 p.m.

-March 1st: Orangeburg-Calhoun Technical College, Room 118 (Building C), US 601 and I-26.

-March 3rd: Florence County Public Library, 509 South Dargan Street.

-March 8th: Clarendon County, F.E. DuBose Career Center Auditorium, US 521.

In addition to public input sessions, the Federal Register and the NRCS national website, www.nrcs.usda.gov, can be used to submit written comments. The culmination of the public input sessions will be a national public listening session scheduled for the spring of 2005.

All comments received will be recorded and forwarded for national review and consideration in developing the 2006 EQIP and beyond.

Comments can be emailed to bethel.durant@sc.usda.gov or sent by U.S. mail to USDA-NRCS, 1835 Assembly Street, Room 950, Columbia, SC, 29201, attn: Bethel DuRant.

All comments must be received no later than March 14, 2005.

Personnel News

New Hires

Bobby McQueen, GS-05, Career Intern, Civil Engineer Technician in the State Office, was hired effective October 17, 2004.

Edward Mitchell, GS-05, Career Intern, Soil Conservation Technician in Walterboro, was hired effective December 4, 2004.

Promotions

Erica Goza, Soil Conservationist in Walhalla, was promoted to GS-09 effective October 3, 2004.

Marie Reynolds, Information Technology Specialist in the Lexington Office, was promoted to a GS -12, Supervisory Information Technology Specialist position in Greensboro, North Carolina, effective November 14, 2005.

Resignation

Kimberly Brinkley, Student Soil Conservationist, in Barnwell, resigned effective December 22, 2004.

Retirement

Neil Richardson, District Conservationist in Manning, retired effective January 3, 2005.

Reassignment

Petra Sumter, Administrative Assistant in the State Office, was transferred to an Administrative Assistant position in Honolulu, Hawaii, effective October 20, 2004.

Patricia Turner, Administrative Assistant in the State Office, was transferred to a Financial Assistant position in the State Office, effective January 23, 2005.



**Organization of
Professional
Employees-
United States
Department of
Agriculture
(OPEDA)**

**OPEDA will have a meeting on February
28th, at 11:30 a.m.**

NOTE: We have a new location! We will now meet at Piccadilly Cafeteria, at Dutch Square, Bush River Road.

**Our speaker will be Mike Quinn with IRS.
He'll speak to us about tax laws/changes,
and give advice on preparing tax returns.**

We hope you'll join us!
<http://www.usda.gov/opeda/>