

Natural Resource News in South Carolina

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Contact: Amy O. Maxwell
amy.maxwell@sc.usda.gov
(803) 765-5402

South Carolina Earth Team Volunteer Wins National Award for Service

Volunteer Inspires Others to Protect Coastal South Carolina

Charleston, SC, February 7, 2007--**William “Bill” Wilkes, of Charleston, South Carolina, is truly an outstanding Earth Team volunteer.** His dedication and commitment to the Charleston County Conservation Partnership are remarkable. The South Carolina USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS, (the agency that administers the Earth Team Volunteer Program) nominated Wilkes for the 2006 National Earth Team Individual Volunteer of the Year. The SC NRCS State Office in Columbia recently received word that Wilkes was this year’s recipient. SC NRCS State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas said, “Mr. Wilkes is passionate about soil and water conservation, and is a firm believer in volunteer service. He is a great promoter of the Earth Team, and of soil and water conservation, and he definitely deserves this honor.”

Heading up the local dune restoration project on Sullivan’s Island in Charleston County for over fifteen years, his contagious spirit inspired hundreds of other volunteers to join the Earth Team and to help rebuild the dunes that protect this fragile barrier island. Coastal South Carolina, including Sullivan’s Island, sustained major damage from Hurricane Hugo in 1989, and Wilkes has worked tirelessly to help restore the natural barrier of dunes and dune plants that once protected the coastline.

A 1949 graduate of The Citadel, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps/WWII, and then served as General Manager of International Operations for Koppers Company, Inc. (Forest Products Group). He retired after nearly 40 years of service, and returned home to Charleston where he then concentrated his efforts on volunteering for the Charleston NRCS Earth Team.

Working with local and county groups and leaders, Wilkes assists in coordinating weekend workdays that combine the time and talent of hundreds of volunteers. These volunteers plant dune plants and erect sand fencing. Without the dunes and plants to protect the island’s homes and buildings from storm surge, the island would suffer from major storm damage, including flooding. The dune plants and fencing protect vulnerable and valuable dune area, in addition to protecting valuable habitat for sea turtles.

Wilkes was instrumental in getting almost all of the materials and work supplies donated. From the work gloves, to the hammers, nails, and fence post, material costs are kept to a minimum. “We are very proud that Mr. Wilkes is a part of the Earth Team in South Carolina, and NRCS hopes other private citizens will join our effort to protect the valuable natural resources here in the Palmetto State,” remarked Douglas.

The Earth Team is the volunteer arm of USDA-NRCS and has been instrumental in getting conservation on the ground since 1985. With ever-increasing workloads, and a declining workforce, volunteers are essential to carrying out the USDA mission. Since 1935, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (originally called the Soil Conservation Service) has provided leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources. To find out how you can get involved with the Earth Team, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers or call your local NRCS office.

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William Wilkes (far right), of Charleston, SC, discusses the Sullivan's Island Dune Restoration Earth Team Project with a group of visiting conservationists from around the country.

Wilkes educates a group of volunteers who are preparing to erect sand fencing on Sullivan's Island. He prepared supply bags for each volunteer containing all the items they need for a successful day of dune restoration, including bottled water.

