

# Current Developments

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Summer 2007



## Message from the State Conservationist

It is a hot summer in Tennessee, and while farmers here have been wrestling with dry conditions, much of the heat in the nation's capital is being generated by debate over the Farm Bill. Both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees have their own versions of the bill, and each chamber must pass its legislation so a compromise version can be hammered out in conference committee. Secretary Mike Johanns released his Farm Bill proposal back in April with an emphasis on adding more money to the Conservation Title and simplifying conservation programs overall.

I am hopeful that the Secretary's priorities will remain in the final version approved by Congress, but we still don't know a timetable for completing the Farm Bill. There is some hope based on discussions at the national leadership meeting earlier this month in Washington. Deputy Secretary for Agriculture Chuck Conner and others indicated that the administration expects a Farm Bill to be approved before the end of this fiscal year. I will keep you informed as I learn more.

In the meantime, we all need to keep performing our duties and going about our jobs with the same excellence and dedication that make NRCS employees among the best in the federal government. Farm Bill politics traditionally involve a lot of rumors and hearsay, but until the bill is passed out of conference committee, approved again by both chambers, and signed by the president, just remember that anything we hear is only speculation.

I hope your summer is a good and productive one and that you are able to enjoy some of the great natural resources Tennessee has to offer. I've been enjoying getting out to the field offices and meeting each of you individually, and I will be spending the next several weeks doing more of the same. Another thing I'm particularly looking forward to is the state RC&D annual meeting in Jonesborough August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. Tennessee's Resource Conservation and Development councils are an integral part of the state's success in conserving our natural resources, and I am happy to support them as they, too, help people help the land.

Kevin Brown  
State Conservationist

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## TN Chapter SWCS 2007 Scholarship Awarded to Ashton A. Smith

The TN Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) Chapter's 2007 Scholarship has been awarded to Ashton A. Smith of Crossville. The \$300 scholarship, which is administered by the Chapter, was established as an incentive to encourage young people to attend college and major in a natural resources curriculum.

Ashton is the daughter of Richard and Lisa Smith of Crossville. She was very active in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) while attending Cumberland County High School, serving as Secretary and Chapter President. She was also active in the Pep Club, DECA, Church Youth Group, and Fellow Christian Students.

She grew up working on the family's beef cattle farm where Best Management Practices (BMPs) were incorporated into their farming operation to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion. She has assisted with feeding and vaccinating cattle, building fences, and harvesting hay. In addition to that, Ashton participated in public speaking and livestock judging, either winning or placing very high in those competitive events. Another outstanding accomplishment for Ashton was receiving the American Farmer Degree which required a lot of hard work and dedication.



Ashton Smith receives the 2007 TN SWCS Chapter Scholarship from SWCS member Chester Bush.

Ashton is an active member of the Fredonia Baptist Church where she organizes fundraisers for local and overseas missions. She also provides transportation for younger children so they can attend various church functions. In addition, Ashton donates her time in helping the Good Samaritans, Cumberland County Fair Board, and Cumberland County Fire Department.

Ashton will be majoring in Agriculture Education at Tennessee Technological University this fall, having completed two years of study at Roane State Community College. Her career goal is to be a Vocational Agriculture teacher.

### Upcoming Events

**Tennessee State University 4th Annual Small Farms Expo** For more info, contact: Ms. Hilda Gooch at 615-963-5530, email: [agooch@tnstate.edu](mailto:agooch@tnstate.edu), or Ms. Bridgette Bush at 615-963-1842, email: [bbush@tnstate.edu](mailto:bbush@tnstate.edu)

August 2, 2007  
7:30 - 3:30

TSU Demonstration and Agricultural Research and Extension Demonstration Farm, Ashland City

**Tennessee RC&D Council Annual Meeting** "The Economics of Sustainable Tourism"  
To register, go to: [www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov) or [www.TNRCD.org](http://www.TNRCD.org). For more information, contact the Appalachian RC&D at 423-753-4441, ext 4. or your local RC&D office.

August 2-3, 2007  
Registration begins at 10:00 a.m.  
Lunch Session - 11:00 am

The International Storytelling Center in Historic Jonesborough

**TN-NRCS All Employees Meeting**

November 7-8, 2007

Fall Creek Falls State Park



## RC&D Council Awards Excellence

The Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council has been busy since the beginning of 2007 giving out awards. On February 23, 2007, the council co-hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conservation Nation Science Fair and Recycled Art Contest. This year's theme was "Water – Keeping It Clean." The event, which was held at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, consists of a judged science poster/essay contest and a judged recycled art contest and is open to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in West Tennessee. During the judging the students participated in a hands-on science lab led by Freed-Hardeman Science Department personnel. Plaques were awarded to the top five winners in the science poster category and the art contest. The top three winners in each category also received cash prizes of \$200, \$150, and \$100. Over 75 students participated and there were several outstanding entries – making judging a very difficult process. The judges were from several departments at the University and the local media. The students, teachers, and parents present not only learned about the importance of keeping the world's water supply clean, but they had a lot of fun doing so.

On March 12, 2007, the Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council, along with the West Tennessee Leadership Development Corporation, Tennessee Farm Bureau, Tennessee Farmers Cooperatives, and UT Agricultural Extension Service, awarded 11 graduation plaques to the 2007 Class of AgStar. The graduation banquet, held in Jackson, was a fitting end to another successful year for the AgStar Leadership Program. This is the sixth class to graduate from this leadership program that creates an awareness of the vital need for agricultural leaders and developing their leadership, communication and policy skills to advance the agriculture and forestry industries and improve the quality of life. The course consists of four one-day classes, a two-day trip to Nashville to visit with the State Legislature, and the graduation banquet. Class members range from farmers and ag-related business professionals to state and federal agency personnel. To date, 63 class members have completed this important program. The Council and the other sponsors will offer the AgStar Leadership Program again in 2008.



Photo above: Judges are impressed by Conservation Nation Poster/Essay contestant from Jackson Christian School in Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Area.



Photo above: Clock made from recycled coke cans was one of the 65 entries in the Conservation Nation Recycled Art Contest.



Photo above: AgStar Leadership Program graduating Class of 2007. Class members represented Chester, Crockett, Fayette, Hardeman, Henderson, Henry, Lake, Lauderdale, and Madison Counties in West Tennessee.



### All-Employees Meeting Scheduled

NRCS in Tennessee is planning an all-employees meeting on November 7-8, 2007 at scenic Fall Creek Falls State Park in Pikeville, Tennessee. This will be the first two-day all-employees meeting held by the agency in several years. State Conservationist Kevin Brown has asked Gary Mast, the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, to be the special guest and speaker. The meeting will happen over two half-days to allow employees from all over the state to travel to and from the meeting. Events also will include additional speakers, plenty of food, and a statewide awards ceremony. Mark your calendars and watch your email for more details!

### The Conservation Journey - 64th Annual TACD Convention

Planning is underway for the 64th Annual TACD Convention scheduled for February 24-26, 2008 at the Jackson Doubletree Hotel. The theme for the convention is *The Conservation Journey*. NRCS is looking forward to having increased participation in the 2008 TACD convention.

### NRCS Regional Assistant Chief Dick Coombe Makes Site Visit to Middle Tennessee

NRCS Regional Assistant Chief Dick Coombe made a site visit to middle Tennessee in May where he toured more than half a dozen farms in Davidson, Cheatham, and Montgomery counties accompanied by State Conservationist Kevin Brown and Area Conservationist Paul Fulks. Mr. Coombe was also the featured speaker at the Five Rivers RC&D Council's 35th anniversary celebration in Robertson County. The Regional Assistant Chief later toured the Dairy Experiment Station in Marshall County before winding up his brief visit to the state.

AC Paul Fulks says he enjoyed spending time with the RAC. "I really appreciated the emphasis that Dick has on the field and conservation on the ground. During the tour when we reached a farm Dick got in the vehicle with the DC and spent as much face time as possible getting their perspective. When Dick was on the farm he talked to the farmers and asked their opinions. He is sincerely concerned with our customers and our employees."



Photo above, l to r: Jim Root (Veterinarian and cattle producer); Area Conservationist Paul Fulks; Regional Assistant Chief Dick Coombe; State Conservationist Kevin Brown; District Conservationist Carolyn Dillard (Cheatham/Davidson Counties). Photo below: The group views a stream crossing. Photo at bottom left: Regional Assistant Chief Coombe showed off his riding abilities on a Tennessee walking horse in Lewisburg during his visit to middle Tennessee.





## Naomi Hamilton-Johnson Is Retiring After 37 years of Service

After 37 years of service with the agency, Naomi Hamilton-Johnson is retiring effective August 3, 2007. Naomi has been working as the State Conservationist's Administrative Assistant since July 1997, but she began her career in May 1970 as a part-time employee with the Soil Conservation Service working as a Clerk in the Personnel Section. Over the years, she has worked as a Clerk-Typist and Secretary in every state office section, but most of her career was spent working for the State Soil Scientist.

About her tenure, she says, "I've seen many people come and go, including five State Conservationists, three State Administrative Officers, five State Soil Scientists, and too many others to list."



Naomi was born 90 miles northeast of Nashville in the small community of Free Hill near the town of Celina in Clay County, Tennessee. She came to Nashville in 1969 to attend Falls Business College, where she received her degree in Secretarial Science.

Outside the state office Naomi is best known as the pleasant and soothing voice you have heard over the past decade any time you have tried to reach the State Conservationist by phone. Naomi is well known and respected also for her unofficial collateral duties which include—but are not limited to—sharing her strong opinions, advice and counseling with others.

Naomi is married to George Johnson and together they have six children and 16 grandchildren (with a new arrival expected any day now!) She looks forward to spending more time doing volunteer work with various non-profit organizations. For the past two years, she has donated her time and energy to the Victory Over Crime Program, which assists elderly crime victims. She also anticipates spending more quality time with her grandchildren and doing a little shopping!

We're going to miss you, Naomi !



## Native Warm Season Grass Mix Benefits Wildlife

by Dwaine Johnston

Mike Hansbrough, USDA NRCS Wildlife Biologist from West Tennessee and Dwaine Johnston from the USDA NRCS Ripley Field Office have been jointly working with landowners from Lauderdale County to plan and apply the Native Warm Season Grass mixture on cropland fields under the Conservation Reserve Program.

Cropland conversion to native warm season grasses will have a positive impact on wildlife habitat while improving water quality and reducing soil erosions on these cropland fields. Hansbrough noted that landowners who choose native warm season grass mixtures are providing additional food and shelter for a large variety of wildlife species including quail and turkey.

Johnston commended the Lauderdale County Farm Service Agency staff for their cooperative efforts under the Conservation Reserve Program to assist local landowners in planning and implementing soil and water conservation programs in Lauderdale County that will help protect the natural resource base. Johnston pointed out that Lauderdale County Soil Conservation District has worked cooperatively with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to obtain a no-till drill with the capability of establishing native warm season grasses on lands in Lauderdale County. Johnston said that this is an excellent example of how local, state, and federal agencies working cooperatively with local landowners can make a positive impact on the environment for today and for future generations.

*Photo at left: Mike Hansbrough, NRCS Wildlife Biologist from West Tennessee (left) and Derry Newman, landowner from the Mary's Chapel community in Lauderdale County in West Tennessee examine a cropland field in preparation for the seeding of the Native Warm Season Grass mixture.*



## Rhea County SCD Gives Back

by Audrey Burton

The Rhea County Soil Conservation District has had great success over the last few years and is always looking for ways to give back to the community. At its February 2007 meeting, board members decided to start a scholarship to help one local student to continue their education at any post secondary school. A scholarship entry form was developed and delivered to all secondary schools county wide.

The Rhea County Soil Conservation District awarded Miss Amanda Turner with its first scholarship. Miss Turner graduated in May from Rhea County High School where she excelled both academically as well as in her extracurricular activities. Rhea County Board member Eric Smith recognized Miss Turner by presenting her with a plaque and scholarship recognition letter at the annual Rhea County High School honors program. She will enter Austin Peay University this fall and plans to pursue a degree in nursing. Amanda will be the first person in her family to graduate from high school and attend college.



Photo above: Amanda Turner was the recipient of a plaque and scholarship from the Rhea County SCD. Board member Eric Smith made the presentation at the Rhea County High School honors program.

## Increase in Cost Share Dollars Marks Third Season for TAEP

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture is accepting applications for the third season of the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program cost share assistance for hay storage, farm diversification and cattle improvement.

“With the passage of Governor Bredesen’s budget and a \$21 million increase in funding for the Ag Enhancement program, the Tennessee General Assembly recognized that the investments we’re making in Tennessee farms are working,” said state Agriculture Commissioner Ken Givens. “The increase in funding will help us to meet the producer demand that we’re experiencing in all of our cost share areas.”

Farmers have until Oct. 1 to apply for 35 percent, up to \$3,500 in cost share assistance through the *Hay Storage Facility* cost share program for the construction of a new hay storage facility or an addition to an existing structure. To be eligible, farmers must be a Tennessee resident and operate a farm or agribusiness located in the state with at least 10 head of cattle or 50 acres of hay production.

Farmers interested in diversifying their farming operation and investing new or emerging areas of agriculture like grape growing, organics or agritourism can apply for cost share assistance through Aug. 31.

The goal of the Tennessee *Agricultural Growth* program is to build farm income by helping farmers expand or improve their operations through production of diversified agricultural products. Diversified agricultural products include agritourism, aquaculture, bees, fruits and vegetables, horticulture, goats and sheep, organics, value-added products, grapes and others as approved by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

Tennessee farmers can apply for reimbursement at a 35 percent cost share up to \$10,000 for farm infrastructure, specialty equipment purchases and marketing activities. New for this year, farmers can apply for 50 percent cost share up to \$15,000 for investments in

priority areas. Priority areas include agritourism, goats and sheep, organics and grapes of certain varieties.

The department will accept applications beginning Aug. 1 for the *Cattle Improvement Initiative* to help producers purchase cattle handling equipment or to improve herd genetics through bull purchases and leases or artificial insemination.

New for this year, the cost share allowance for the purchase of livestock handling equipment has been increased to \$3,500, and certified Master Beef Producers can qualify for 50 percent cost share.

Requirements for the Cattle Improvement Initiative are otherwise the same as those required for the last fiscal year. Tennessee beef and dairy farmers can apply for reimbursement of 35 percent, up to \$850, for the cost of a bull purchase or lease, or for artificial insemination to improve cattle genetics. Certified Master Beef Producers can receive up to \$1,000 maximum cost share for genetics. The department will also reimburse producers up to an additional \$175 for the cost of a herd evaluation by an approved evaluator.

Cattle farmers can also apply for a 35 percent reimbursement up to the new maximum of \$3,500 for the costs of such cattle handling facilities as headgates, holding chutes and other approved equipment used for managing cattle. Dairy producers have the opportunity to receive cost share on items such as vacuum pumps, commercial hot water heaters, and headlock stanchions.

Producers with livestock must also register their premises with the National Animal Identification System. Livestock premises can be registered at most Farm Service Agency, UT Extension, Farm Bureau or Co-op locations, or online at [www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/tpis](http://www.tennessee.gov/agriculture/tpis).

For more information about and applications for TAEP cost share programs, visit online at [www.picktnproducts.org](http://www.picktnproducts.org), or call the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Market Development Division at (615) 837-5160.



## Governor Bredeesen On Hand for Release of Greenway and Trail Plan

Governor Phil Bredeesen was on hand to mark the release of a new plan to connect the people and communities of northeast Tennessee with the greenways and trails of Appalachia. The Southern Appalachian Greenways Alliance (SAGA) announced the plan in Kingsport in April. SAGA is a nonprofit organization of community leaders and volunteers whose mission is to advocate, develop and sustain a creative and comprehensive system of trails and greenways in eight Northeast Tennessee counties and three Southwest Virginia counties. Appalachian RC&D Coordinator Roy Settle says the multistate effort really sets the course in working toward regional connectivity. The plan includes dozens of action items, including developing trail infrastructure, instituting stream zone protection ordinances, creating conservation corridors, and establishing local "Safe Routes to Schools" programs in local communities to teach traffic safety and promote walking and biking activities. Settle says the next step is for a bi-state commission to work with communities on implementing the plan.



Photo above (l to r): Representative Nathan Vaughn, RC&D Coordinator Roy Settle, Kingsport Mayor Dennis Phillips, Governor Bredeesen, Lt. Governor Ron Ramsey, and Allison Bullock - National Park Service Rivers Trails & Conservation Assistance Program.

**NRCS in Tennessee has been making a positive difference by conserving Tennessee's natural resources for many years, and that is our number one job, but the good works of our employees aren't limited to conservation. Do you have a story or anecdote about how one of your coworkers is making a difference for the better? Send it to Perry Stevens or Jeanne Eastham and it may appear in the next issue of Current Developments.**

## NRCS Employees....Helping People

by Richard Cooke

On Friday, June 22, I received a phone call about 4 pm from a family friend that moved from the Alamo area to the Friendsville area in East Tennessee about 4 years ago. She and her husband have 5 children; after a couple of years, the dad skipped town leaving her and the children alone and he was not paying any child support. She was working 3 different part-time jobs trying to make ends meet and everything was going ok until her car broke down and she could not get to work. She called me out of desperation; she just didn't know what to do.

Around 6 pm I went by the office and talked to Dwaine Johnston, my Soil Conservationist, and asked him if he could think of anyone we knew in the Friendsville area. Dwaine got out the NRCS phone book and began going over names. One of the names that came up was Fred Walker who is a District Conservationist. I have known Fred for several years since he worked as a soil conservationist in Dyersburg for a time.

I called Fred that evening and told him the story of the young lady who was a family friend in desperate need and I ask him if he would be willing to go check on her and find out about her car. I knew Fred was a real good shade tree mechanic because he and I had worked on his old Chevy truck together a few years ago. Fred liked old trucks. The next day Fred went to see her and called me back saying she

needed a new radiator, and most likely some other parts as well. Of course when she called me earlier she was already overdrawn at the bank and did not have enough money to repair her car. So now what?

The church I attend "Cypress United Methodist Church" has a special fund to help people in need, so I contacted the chairman of the "MAW CARES PROGRAM" at the church and anyone else I could think of that might help. We raised \$750 dollars to help with the car repairs. I have a brother in-law who also lives about 30 miles from Friendsville and my wife told him if he would take her the \$750 dollars that we would send him a check to cover the expense. So the following Monday the lady met up with my brother-in-law to get the money we had raised. Fred went back and repaired her car and got her back on the road.

This single mom with five children who had been abandoned by her husband, faced with a broken-down car and not enough to make ends meet, really needed help. This situation makes me realize that I have been truly blessed. It's great to know that we have great NRCS friends that will extend a hand to help someone else's friends. My thanks to Fred Walker, District Conservationist. I am glad to call Fred "My Friend".



## Four New Private Lands Biologists in NRCS Offices Thanks to a Cooperative Agreement with TWRA

Thanks to a new cooperative agreement with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, we are happy to welcome four new Private Lands Biologists into NRCS offices across the state. Under the agreement, NRCS provides office space, a computer and guidance on a daily basis, but the four biologists are supervised and employed by TWRA.

NRCS has signed on for a one-year agreement and there is great hope that additional funding will allow the cooperative agreement to become permanent and expand to include even more Private Lands Biologists. Our neighboring states, Kentucky and Missouri, have similar agreements. Kentucky's plan has been in effect for five years, and the Tennessee agreement is based off that model. There is a precedent for the program to grow. For example, Missouri started out with a handful of Private Lands Biologists working with NRCS offices, but now that state has one in every county!

### Wally Akins, TWRA Private Lands Biologist - Knoxville Area Office

**W**ally Akins is a native of Monroe County in eastern Tennessee. He received a B.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville in 1991 and a M.S. in Wildlife Management from West Virginia University in 1994. From 1996-1999 Wally worked for TWRA as Wildlife Officer in Hancock and Meigs Counties. In 1999 he became Area Manager of Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge, where he worked until his most recent appointment with NRCS.

Farming practices on the refuge and surrounding wildlife management areas included grain farming primarily of corn, wheat, soybeans, millet, grain sorghum, and native warm season grasses. He has additional background in timber management and wildlife census and survey techniques. Wally's work focus will be Farm Bill programs and technical assistance for Area 3. He is working out of the Knoxville Area Office.

During his spare time Wally enjoys hunting, fishing, and camping when time permits. He also conducts a small hay and beef cattle operation in Meigs County, Tn.



### Clint Borum, TWRA Private Lands Biologist - Murfreesboro Area Office

**C**lint Borum comes by his interest in agriculture and wildlife resources honestly—his dad is a wildlife officer for TWRA, and Clint—along with his brother, dad, and grandfather—manages a 200-acre farm in middle Tennessee where he owns about 60 head of cattle. Clint is the new Private Lands Biologist working from the Murfreesboro Area Office. Clint received his B.S. in Wildlife Biology from UT-Martin where he was a member of the Wildlife Society. While he was getting his degree, Clint interned at a west Tennessee fish hatchery doing information and education work. That led to a permanent position conducting stream surveys which eventually resulted in Clint being in charge of conducting stream surveys in three large areas of west Tennessee.

He then moved to Nashville to take a position managing the TWRA's Landowner Incentive Program. He says his new position now allows him to help administer the same programs that he helped coordinate with NRCS previously. Clint says with so much of the state's land being privately owned, the job that he and the other Private Lands Biologists are doing is especially needed. "This will help landowners learn what's out there. 90-95% of Tennessee has little to no guidance as far as wildlife management goes. You can really make a difference with that land."



needed. "This will help landowners learn what's out there. 90-95% of Tennessee has little to no guidance as far as wildlife management goes. You can really make a difference with that land."

When he's not working or farming, Clint likes to hunt and fish, but he spends most of his free time with his three year old son, Gauge Riley. A new addition to the family—a baby girl—will make her arrival in late September.



### Aubrey Deck, TWRA Private Lands Biologist, Jackson Area Office

Aubrey Deck is originally from Knox County, but now he lives in west Tennessee where he works from the Jackson Area office. Aubrey received his B.S. in Wildlife and Fishery Science from the University of Tennessee and his M.S. in Wildlife and Fishery Science from Texas A&M. Previously, he did an internship in the Great Smoky Mountains trapping feral hogs and black bears as part of the National Park Service's damage control efforts. After school, he worked fulltime with USDA Wildlife Services. Later, he was an Extension Wildlife Specialist at the U-T Extension Service.



Aubrey is certified as an Associate Wildlife Biologist and says he is enjoying his new job. "This is like a dream job for me. Working with landowners every day to help them understand and help them facilitate putting more wildlife on the ground is my dream. I grew up on a dairy farm so I understand the mentality of a farmer as well as that of a wildlife specialist. I think education is the key to bridging that gap."

Aubrey is the proud parent of a six year old daughter, Kailynn, who went deer hunting with her dad for the first time last year. He says they didn't bag a buck, but Kailynn learned Stage One, which is learning to walk quietly in the woods. So what is Stage Two going to be? "Learning to be quiet in the deer stand," Aubrey says.

### Chris Hunter, TWRA Private Lands Biologist, Jackson Area Office



Chris Hunter grew up in Dyer County in West Tennessee. He graduated from UT-Martin in 1999 with a degree in Natural Resources Management and received his Masters in Biology from Murray State University in 2004. Chris is working out of the Brownsville Field Office and his work focus is wetlands and continuous practice contracts.

Chris is a former park ranger with the Tennessee State Parks who was hired by the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency as a non-game biologist to work on the Congressionally-mandated State Wildlife Action Plan. Because of his work, he was a co-recipient of the 2005 Wildlife Biologist of the Year Award.

Chris says the work he is able to do with NRCS is satisfying because it makes a difference. "It's about putting habitat on the ground to promote landowners' needs. Anytime you can change a cornfield to a native warm season grass field, that's beneficial from my standpoint."

Chris has been married for two years and has a 10-month old son.

### Raymond Cooper, Cannon County Farmer, receives 2007 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Excellence in Agriculture

The 2007 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Excellence in Agriculture has been awarded to Cannon County Farmer Raymond Cooper and to the Cannon County Soil Conservation District. Mr. Cooper and District Conservationist Pamela Hoskins accepted the honor in June at a ceremony held at Ellington Agricultural Center in Nashville.

Mr. Cooper recently worked with the Cannon County SCD and NRCS to host a farm tour. Attendees had an opportunity to see first hand his innovative approach to his farm operation, especially his cattle operation.

He has reduced his hay feeding to the bare minimum, averaging 250 lbs/per year/per head by adjusting stocking rates and rotational grazing. Rotational grazing keeps cattle out of the woods and streams and allows nutrients to be recycled to the pasture. He also maintains a legume balance that allows pastures to produce their own nitrogen and reduce the need for additional fertilizer on his pastureland.



Pictured (from l to r): Deputy Governor Stuart Brunson; Raymond Cooper; District Conservationist Pamela Hoskins; Deputy Commissioner Paul Sloan.



## Wheelin' Sportsmen Event

The Third Annual Wheelin' Sportsmen Event wheeled onto two Campbell County farms this year. Over 1500 acres on these farms are devoted to wildlife habitat, especially elk, and are enrolled in the NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Robin Mayberry, NRCS Wildlife Biologist, worked closely with the farms' owners to optimize wildlife habitat and with the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and other sponsors to insure that this year's Wheelin' participants had a memorable outdoor experience

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) sponsors the nationwide Wheelin' Sportsmen event that allows wheelchair-users or otherwise mobility-limited people the opportunity to experience hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities that they might not otherwise participate in. In Wheelin' Sportsmen events, mobility-limited people are paired with volunteers who assist them in outdoor recreation at no cost to the participant with disabilities.

Toby Steele, President of the Knoxville NWTF Chapter known as the Rocky Top Long Beards, stated "This is our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Wheelin' Sportsmen event. We have approximately 125 folks sharing the outdoors and fellowship. This event is about more than just hunting. It is sportsmanship, safety – safety is our #1 priority, and an opportunity to establish new relationships."

Terry Lewis and Ron Cunningham own the Campbell County farms who hosted this year's event. "I have established 37 different food plots to date," stated Terry Lewis. "Robin Mayberry, NRCS Wildlife Biologist, looked at my property, discussed my goals with me, and gave me some additional insight and ideas that helped me develop a plan. Then he introduced me to Matthew Denton, NRCS District Conservationist in Campbell County. Matthew has been on the farm several times and helped me get enrolled in WHIP. With his assistance, I have planned some stream bank restoration and a curtain wall of trees and planted warm season grasses and annual and perennial plots to increase habitat for wildlife. During this process, Matthew helped me look at each area as it applied to habitat and as a result, I have several areas with improved habitat. Both Matthew and Robin were very helpful."

"This Wheelin' Sportsmen event is about more than harvesting a turkey," Lewis further stated. "It is about fellowship, safety, conservation, camaraderie and enjoying the great outdoors. Harvesting a turkey is great, but it isn't at the top of anyone's list."

Ron Cunningham, who owns 1600 acres adjacent to Lewis, said "Today is all about sharing and giving other's an opportunity. When I purchased this land it was strip pit land that had the timber cut. The first year I owned it I saw one deer. I'm now in my 8<sup>th</sup> year in the WHIP program and I have an abundance of wildlife including turkey, deer, rabbits, grouse, and some quail. I have installed food plots, ponds, and I'm working with the timber. These days I spend most of my time in land management because that's what I enjoy."

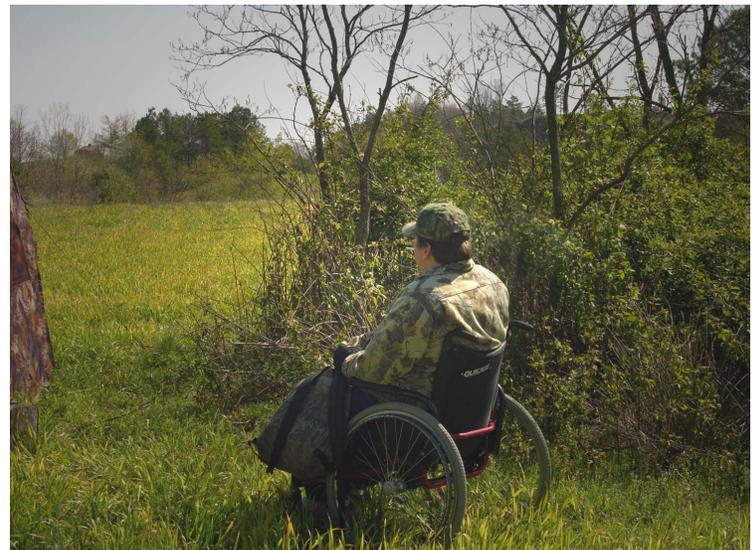
Dana Bowman, a retired Sergeant First Class with the US Army, was the guest speaker for the event. Bowman was a Special Forces Soldier and a member of the U.S. Army's Golden Knights who lost his legs in a midair collision during the team's annual training in 1994. Today he is a motivational speaker emphasizing "It's not the Disability – It's the Ability." For more information, go to [www.danabowman.com](http://www.danabowman.com).



Photo above: The 3rd Annual Wheelin' Sportsmen event was held on two Campbell County farms that have more than 1500 acres devoted to wildlife habitat and are enrolled in WHIP.



Photo above: In upper East Tennessee, food plots are especially important due to the fact that typically cropped acres are less than other parts of the state and climatic conditions like this year's drought could adversely affect mast production. Photo below: Charlie Vogel, one of the many participants in this year's event, reflects back over the day's hunt before heading back to camp.





## Coffee County Team State Envirothon Winner

After winning the statewide Tennessee Envirothon competition in May, five Southern Middle Tennessee RC&D youth will be traveling to the North American Canon Envirothon competition, being held in Geneva, New York, during the week of July 29.

Jeremy Mills, Daniel Sherrouse, Jordan Kelly, Jonathan Mills and Andrew Russell, all Coffee County 4-H members, will participate in North America's largest high school environmental education competition along with teams from 44 states and 8 Canadian provinces. Participating teams complete training and testing in five natural resource categories: soils and land use, aquatic ecology, forestry, wildlife and current environmental issues. This year's theme is alternative and renewable energy. Teams compete for recognition and scholarships while demonstrating their knowledge of environmental science and natural resource management through exercises that showcase their training, problem-solving and presentation skills.

The Coffee County team ranked first out of 11 other teams representing the various RC&D Councils across the state. The Southern Middle Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development Council through NRCS sponsored the team from Coffee County. Team adviser Sara Steelman is a Conservation Technician with the Coffee County Soil Conservation District. She says becoming the state winners of the Tennessee Envirothon competition was a great honor for the students. "The Envirothon competition is a hands-on environmental problem-solving competition for high school-aged students in the United States and Canada. It is very challenging and our young people rose to that challenge." Ms. Steelman and Coffee County Agriculture Extension Agent Steve Harris will be accompanying the team to the North American contest.

The Southern Middle TN RC&D consists of Bedford, Coffee, Franklin, Giles, Lincoln, Lawrence, Marshall, Maury and Moore Counties. The RC&D is actively pursuing community development projects such as the Quilt Trail, First Wheels and Envirothon. For more information regarding the Southern Middle TN RC&D and its programs, please contact your local SCD/NRCS office.



*Pictured (l to r) Jonathan Mills; Andrew Russell; Daniel Sherrouse; Bill Mayo, 1st Vice President TN RC&D Council; Jordan Kelly; Bill Williams, President, TN RC&D Council; Jeremy Mills; Sara Steelman (team adviser); Alan Persinger (RC&D Coordinator)*

## Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts Employees Association (TCDEA) Workshop



The Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts Employees Association (TCDEA) held its Spring Workshop in May at Fall Creek Falls State Park. East Tennessee Wildlife Biologist Robin Mayberry and Bledsoe County District Conservationist Randy Parnell helped with a Native Warm Season Grass (NWSG) demonstration.

The group also visited the farm of retired NRCS engineer Jim Bickford to view different stages of NWSG growth. TCDEA Area III Coordinator Renita Beaty says, "We couldn't have put on such an awesome workshop without these outstanding USDA/NRCS employees!"



## Claiborne County Landowner Gives Back to the Community

Dr. Carroll Rose, a well known surgeon in Claiborne County, and his wife Janice own a 700 acre farm that they manage for wildlife habitat. The Roses have an avid interest in the history of the area and believe in giving back to the community. They have restored cabins and built cantilever barns on their property to give their farm the look of an old Appalachian farmstead. They hold an annual festival at their farm the second weekend in October that is open to the public with horse and buggy rides, molasses making using grain sorghum from their farm, an apple-butter stir-off, sour-kraut and hominy making and more.

Dr. Rose worked with NRCS and the Claiborne County Soil Conservation District to develop wildlife habitat on his farm through farm planning and technical assistance. He utilized the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to install practices for wildlife habitat.

He is especially interested in bringing quail back to the farm and has converted over 200 acres of fescue/clover fields to Native Warm Season Grass including Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, Switch grass, and Indian grass. He is currently working with the Tennessee Division of Forestry to install or establish woodland openings and edge feathering.



Photo above: Dr. Rose was recognized as the Claiborne County Soil Conservation Educator of the year. Photos below show one of the restored Appalachian cabins with the cantilever barn in the background and the wagons used for the horse and buggy rides.



### Helping People Help the Land Display Now Available

A new display, **Helping People Help the Land**, is now available. Each area office will receive two copies - one for table top displays and one for floor displays.

A copy of each will also be available in the State Office. If you have display needs, please contact the Public Affairs Staff to reserve a display.

Plan ahead....It's county fair time in Tennessee so reserve your display early!

The graphic includes the following text and images:

- NRCS** logo in the top left corner.
- Headline: **The Natural Resources Conservation Service Helping People Help the Land**
- A central map of Tennessee with various scenes of nature and agriculture overlaid on it.
- Five service areas with corresponding images:
  - Conservation Planning**: Image of a field with a cow.
  - Technical Assistance**: Image of a field with a cow.
  - Partnerships**: Image of a field with a cow.
  - Community Assistance**: Image of a field with a cow.
  - Resource Protection**: Image of a field with a cow.
- Bottom right text: *For more information, go to: [www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov)*