

# Current Developments

675 U. S. Courthouse  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
615/277-2531  
www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov

Fall 2008



## Message from the State Conservationist

The new fiscal year brings an important change in the structure of NRCS in Tennessee. As I told you during the October 1<sup>st</sup> teleconference, we are moving from three areas to four areas as of October 26, 2008.

In the past year, we have applied over 47,000 practices on the ground—that averages 500 practices per county. We have developed stronger and more effective partnerships and a cleaner environment. Nearly two dozen new partnership agreements have added 22 technicians and District employees.

As you can see, we have been very successful in implementing conservation practices. But by creating a fourth area in the state, we can be even more successful. Adding another area will

- eliminate the practice of DC's supervising DC's
- shorten trips between field offices and area offices
- encourage more face to face meetings
- strengthen communication up and down the chain of command
- increase career opportunities
- allow Area Conservationists to take a stronger role in the field and further develop relationships with Districts and RC&D Councils

With Farm Bill programs being as complex as they are, we need to ensure that we make the technical experience available to work effectively on all our contracts.

I realize that uncertainty surrounding the upcoming budget might impact our ability to fill some positions over the coming year. However, I am committed to making all line positions (Area Conservationists and District Conservationists) a top priority. Once the new area is in place, we will still have a leaner structure than we want, so my longer-term goal is to work toward putting more staff on the field level.

With new performance plans being written in October, now is the time to begin the new structure. Thank you for your assistance during this organizational adjustment. I appreciate your hard work and commitment to our mission of Helping People Help the Land.

Kevin Brown

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

**Agricultural Field Day at Tennessee State University Agricultural Research & Extension Demonstration Farm**  
For more information, contact:  
**Christopher Robbins @ 615-466-6460**

**October 17, 2008**



### EWP Provides More than \$2 Million in FY 2008

**N**RCS provided more than \$2 Million to help Tennesseans recover from a series of deadly storms in fiscal year 2008. Prior year flooding and high winds from 2008 tornadoes damaged county roadsides, blocked creeks and streams, and resulted in significant soil erosion in 11 middle Tennessee counties. NRCS gave more than \$1.8 Million in financial assistance to the affected counties while spending \$300,000 to provide technical assistance.

The counties included Macon, Giles, Maury, Wayne, Cheatham, Marshall, Humphreys, Sumner, Trousdale, Hickman, and Lewis. Funding from the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program allowed local communities to stabilize eroded roadsides and streambanks. It also helped remove debris that blocked streams and utility crossings to avoid significant damages from future stream flows.

The work accomplished with the money stabilized more than 150 sections of roadside and about a dozen bridges and culverts in fiscal year 2008. It restored road and bridge access to rural communities and prevented environmental damage from a petroleum pipeline impacted by the storms. The work resulted in \$3.3 Million worth of economic benefits and protected property.

In all, workers stabilized more than 13,000 feet of streambank, and protected almost three miles of road, making them safe for drivers and pedestrians. Removal of debris from streams prevented future runoff that would have further destroyed or eroded the streambanks at downed tree locations, caused flooding to homes and property and damaged roads and utilities.



### Driving Safety

High gas prices have caused a noticeable change in traffic over the last several months. More and more people are opting out of using their cars and are instead going to work on motorcycles. That has resulted in a significant increase in motorcycle traffic throughout the state. How does that impact the driving experience for the rest of us?

NRCS employees in Tennessee drive a total of 207 vehicles that are NRCS-owned or GSA-licensed. Recently, the Tennessee Traffic Safety Resource Service published some tips on safely sharing the road with motorcycles:

Because of their small size, motorcycles are easily hidden in a car's blind spots, so take an extra moment to look for motorcycles, whether you're changing lanes or turning at intersections.

It's sometimes difficult to judge a motorcycle's speed, when checking traffic to turn into an intersection or into (or out of) a driveway, assume that a motorcycle is closer than it looks.

Motorcyclists often slow by downshifting or merely rolling off the throttle, thus not activating the brake light. All more following distance, and assume that a motorcyclist may slow down at intersections without visual warning.

Many turn signals on motorcycles are not self-canceling, thus some riders (especially beginners) sometimes forget to turn them off after a turn of lane change.

Stopping distance for motorcycles is nearly the same as for cars, but slippery pavement makes stopping quickly difficult. Allow more following distance behind a motorcycle because it can't always stop "on a dime."

For additional information on motorcycle safety, visit <http://www.forcardrivers.com/>

*Photo at left: This photo from Macon County shows a small portion of the damage inflicted by the February tornadoes.*



## Coffee County 4-H Wildlife Judging Team - National Champions

by Sara Steelman, Coffee County SCD

The Coffee County 4-H Wildlife Judging Team won 1st place at the 2008 National 4-H Wildlife Judging Contest held July 23-27 at Oklahoma State University. Team members were Nathan Slone, Andrew Russell, Andy Brown and Deborah Anderson. The team was coached by Sara Steelman - Coffee County Soil Conservation District Technician as well as Jeremy Mills and Jonathan Mills - members of the 2006 State Champion 4-H Wildlife Judging team from Coffee County.

In addition to being the Champion overall team, the Coffee County team also won the award for the 1st place Wildlife Management Plan. This plan was written as a team effort and included items such as management objectives, species to be managed, practices to be implemented for the species and evaluation efforts for the plan. Each team member received a Walkie Talkie radio set for writing the winning Wildlife Management Plan. Each team member also received a GPS unit and check for \$250 for winning the overall competition.

The team was accompanied on the trip to Stillwater, Oklahoma by team coach Sara Steelman, and Stephen Harris, University of Tennessee Extension Agent. Team members also received training prior to the contest from NRCS biologist Chris Wolkonowski.

The team would like to thank everyone who helped them reach and win this national competition. A special thanks goes to the Southern Middle Tennessee Quail Unlimited Chapter #696 for their generous sponsorship to help pay expenses for the trip. Appreciation is also extended to the Coffee County Soil Conservation District and the Coffee County 4-H Club for their support of the team in this contest.



Photo above: The Coffee County 4-H Wildlife Judging Team national champs! (Kneeling: left, Sara Steelman, Coffee City SCD/Coach and team member Deborah Anderson. Standing: left Stephen Harris, Extension Agent/Coach; and team members Andrew Russell, Andy Brown and Nathan Sloan. Not pictured: Jeremy Mills & Jonathan Mills, Coaches.)

## Betty Brown named Shelby County Employee of the Quarter



Administrative Assistant Betty Brown of the Memphis Field Service Center has been named Shelby County Employee of the Quarter for her outstanding work in the second quarter of the fiscal year. Shelby County Mayor A.C. Wharton presented the award at a luncheon with the mayor in August. Last year, Betty was recognized as the 2007 Agribusiness Person of the year by the Memphis Ag Club.



Photo above: NRCS Area Biologist Chris Wolkonowski provided training on native warm season grasses and wildlife management practices to help prepare the team for the national contest in Oklahoma.



## Conservation Resources Outreach Program

by Lydia Smith (Rutherford County District Technician)

The Rutherford County Soil Conservation District has created a new program to assist in conservation outreach and agricultural education. The Conservation Resources Outreach Program, also known as "CROP," has been designed to promote agricultural awareness through technical and financial assistance. The program has a hands-on approach in assisting groups and educating them about the importance of agriculture, conservation, and self-sufficiency. There has been great interest shown in this program from an array of educators and individuals throughout the community.

Mrs. Delann Hickman's fourth grade class at Stewarts Creek Elementary was the first group to participate in "CROP". Her goal was to give her students the opportunity and experience of growing a vegetable garden that consisted of vegetables that were pre- and post- Christopher Columbus era. Many areas of the students' curriculum have been incorporated into the garden including reading, science, math, and social studies. Mrs. Hickman plans to grow cool-season crops in the fall months. She will later team up with other classes when the project becomes fully developed.

Mrs. Patty Short's first grade class at Rock Springs Elementary was the second participant in "CROP". Mrs. Short had many of the same goals as Mrs. Hickman. She and her class chose vegetables that would show variations in growth such as prostrate plants like watermelons and beans in comparison to upright plants like tomatoes and corn. She is incorporating outdoor learning into her curriculum and providing hands-on learning to the students. Both teachers have provided a non-traditional method of teaching to their students. This program has allowed the students to put their studies and knowledge to practical use.

The Conservation Resource Outreach Program "CROP" is off to a great start providing conservation methods and educational opportunities to the public. The Rutherford County Soil Conservation District hopes to continue and expand the program to benefit others. If you have any questions or interest in the program contact the Rutherford County Soil Conservation District at (615) 893-9295 ext. 101.



Photos above & below: CROP projects in Rutherford County promote agricultural awareness while students learn through the hands-on approach.



## Tennessee Earth Team Report for FY08

by Dimple Geesling, TN Earth Team Coordinator

FY 08 Volunteer Update:

- Number of Volunteers: 481
- Number of Hours: 8281
- Number of Offices in State using volunteers: 38

A special thanks to Debbie Blankenship, Lori Pittman & Todd Reed for helping with this report.

Reminder: Earth Team Awards are due in by Oct. 20th. Please send your nominations to Earth Team Coordinator Dimple Geesling.

You can access the new Earth Team volunteer application form with the following link and searching for OF 301a:

[www.gsa.gov/forms](http://www.gsa.gov/forms)



## Mid-South Fair FFA/ Agribusiness Soil Judging Contest

The Mid-South Fair FFA/Agribusiness Soil Judging Contest was held at Agricenter International in Memphis on **Monday, September 22, 2008**. The contest was conducted by Andy Neal, District Conservationist with Troy Taylor, Soil Conservationist, and Betty Brown, Soil Conservation District assisting. Don Tyler and Charlie Davis were the judges with scorekeepers being Ozell Wright and Phil Coleman.

There were three (3) states competing:  
Clarksburg FFA– Tennessee  
Jackson County High School – Arkansas  
East Prairie FFA - Missouri

The winning team was Tennessee, Clarksburg FFA Chapter. Taking the high scorer individual award was Rebecca Stokes from Tennessee. Second Place went to Arkansas. Third Place went to Missouri.

The winning teams were recognized at the Mid-South Fair Agribusiness Luncheon held at the Holiday Inn Select Hotel that same day.

## Fentress County Envirothon Team



Photo above: Front row, L to R - Kyley Dickson, Tammara Garrett, Kayla Samber, Kelly Ramey (coach)  
Back row, L to R - Josh Clapp, Trayce Lee

**T**he Envirothon Team from York Agricultural Institute in Fentress County represented Tennessee at the national Canon Envirothon in Flagstaff, Arizona.



Photos above: The Mid-South Fair FFA/Agribusiness Soil Judging Contest was held at Agricenter International on September 22, 2008. Andy Neal, Troy Taylor and Betty Brown assisted with the event.



## Appalachian RC&D Awarded Outstanding RC&D Council in the State & the Southeast

**T**he Appalachian RC&D Council was named winner of the Outstanding RC&D Council in Tennessee at the TN RC&D Annual Meeting at Fall Creek Falls State Park in August. But the awards did not stop there. In September, the Appalachian RC&D was awarded Outstanding RC&D Council for the southeastern United States. Congratulations to RC&D Coordinator Roy Settle and the entire Appalachian RC&D Council and its partners! The southeastern states RC&D meeting also named the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency as the region's Outstanding Supporting Organization.



### Appalachian RC&D Council Receives \$10,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian RC&D Council has received a \$10,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. Congressman David Davis made the announcement in July. The grant provides funding to develop a map and signage program for the "Follow the Quilt Trail" in an effort to attract more visitors and increase agri-tourism.

"I am pleased to see that the Appalachian Regional Commission is investing in Northeast Tennessee," said Representative Davis. "Tourism is the second largest industry in Tennessee and it is important to promote attractions like the Quilt Trail."

The Quilt Trail features 70 hand painted murals of traditional quilt patterns on barns, museum and gallery walls, and other visible places. The trail winds through Carter, Greene, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington Counties in Northeast Tennessee.

### Robert Thompson Receives the 2008 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Excellence in Agriculture or Forestry

McMinn County farmer Robert Thompson has been chosen to receive the 2008 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Excellence in Agriculture or Forestry. Mr. Thompson utilized EQIP, TDA, and TVA funds to implement practices that protect and improve his resources.



Photo above (l to r) TDA Deputy Commissioner Paul Sloan, Robert Thompson, and Office of Environmental Assistance Director Lori Munkeboe

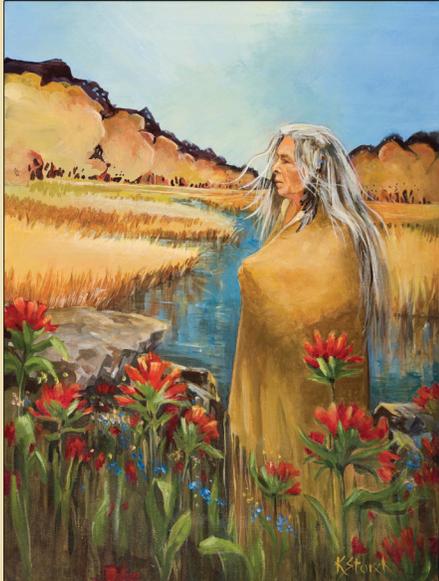
### November is Native American Heritage Month

November is Native American Heritage month, and in honor of Native Americans, NRCS has released the 2008 American Indian Heritage Month Poster. The poster is entitled "Touch the Earth" by Oklahoma artist Kathy Sturch, who is a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Sturch says the painting recalls the passion the Choctaw people have for creation and their kinship with the earth.

"The Choctaw people passionately love the earth. The ancient ones walked barefoot, sat and lay on the ground because it was good to touch the earth. The old Choctaw believed the Great Spirit created the earth and all the creatures that drink from her bounties and listen to her whispers. The Choctaw's passion and kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water continues today. The earth nourishes and provides for man. Man must care for the earth and do it no harm. If the earth dies, man dies," Sturch said about the story behind the artwork.

The painting was unveiled at the National Association of Conservation Districts conference in August. Copies of the poster are made available to each Area Office in Tennessee.

## American Indian Heritage Month



*Touch the Earth*  
Conservation...Our Passion...Our Heritage

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NRCS is an equal opportunity provider and employer.  
Helping People Help the Land

NOVEMBER 2008





## NRCS Welcomes Charity Justice

**N**RCS in Tennessee welcomes Charity Justice, the new secretary for the Programs Staff in the State Office. Charity grew up on a farm, and she comes to the agency knowing a great deal about NRCS. Charity spent her school years as a member of FFA and 4-H. In the 10th grade, she qualified for a youth loan through FSA which allowed her to buy five cows. Charity, her brother, and her dad operate a hydroponic greenhouse where they have grown tomatoes, green beans, lettuce, and tobacco.

Charity learned about a job opening at NRCS through the internet. "NRCS is right up my alley, so I applied," she says. When she's not working at NRCS or the family's hydroponic greenhouse, Charity cares for her 13-month old son, Bryson. "Keeping up with Bryson doesn't leave me a lot of spare time for anything else!" she says.

## Lori Pittman Receives Team Award for Work on Hurricane Ike

**N**RI Specialist Lori Pittman from the Area 2 office in Murfreesboro has received a prestigious team award for her work with an Interagency Incident Management Team responding to Hurricane Ike in Texas.

Incident Management Teams (hosted by USDA Forest Service) serve at the call of the President to respond to wildland fires, hurricanes, avian flu outbreaks, floods, and other disasters. Lori is a GIS Specialist (GISS) on her team, and fellow NRI Specialist Kevin Davis of the Lewisburg Field Office is an alternate GISS on the same team. (Public Affairs Specialist Jeanne Eastham serves on the Southern Area Blue Team. Jeanne is a longtime Incident Management responder, having achieved the highest certification possible as a Public Information Officer. In fact, she is the only person in all of NRCS who has managed to reach that certification.)

Though relatively new to Incident Management, Lori is already earning recognition for her work. At the end of the response to Hurricane Ike, Lori was honored with the "Bodacious Award" which is given to the team member who contributes most to the accomplishment of the mission. Lori's fellow 40 team members honored her for working long hours producing assessment reports to FEMA and updates to the mayor and city council of Galveston.

Team members are nominated by their peers; then the Command and General Staff review the nominees and decide on a winner. Incident Commander Tony Wilder says the award is meant to provide instant recognition for being a valuable team player. "Lori has grown professionally as a team player," he said. "She did an outstanding job providing the maps that FEMA requested and did the most of any team member in supporting the Operations Section and Planning Section in accomplishment of the team mission."

Lori also won a team Coin Award halfway through the assignment. The Coin Award, similar to an NRCS spot award, immediately recognizes the accomplishments of team members. The team also has a "Bless Your Heart Award" for the person(s) who "messes up", i.e., missing Command & General Staff meetings, locking their keys in the car, etc. The Bless Your Heart Award is done in fun to build team camaraderie and to show that everyone makes a mistake. Nevertheless, that is one award that Lori has not won!



Photo above (l to r): Tony Wilder, Incident Commander, present Lori Pittman with a team Coin Award.



Photo above: Lori Pittman improvises to complete GIS work on the Hurricane Ike assignment.



## RC&D Councils and FSA Host Outreach Workshops

by Larry Lofton, RC&D Coordinator

More than 150 people participated in three outreach workshops in August for women, minorities, limited resource farmers, and those with disabilities who are actively engaged in agriculture. The workshops were sponsored by the Tennessee RC&D Councils and the Farm Service Agency.

Entitled “Your Farm--Keeping It Profitable, Keeping It in the Family,” the workshops focused on programs and assistance that can provide both economic and conservation based opportunities to farmers who have faced historically difficult challenges. The free workshops included lunches provided on-site.

RC&D Coordinator Larry Lofton said the workshops were a success. “It created a great deal of goodwill, cooperation and collaboration between federal and state agencies and non-profit organizations,” Lofton said. “RC&D is known for building strong partnerships so I think we will be creating some form of ‘Outreach Team’ as a working group to look at new strategies that will create opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers.”

Workshop presenters included representatives from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD), The Center for Historic Preservation, The Land Trust for Tennessee, the Tennessee AgriAbility Project, the University of Tennessee Extension Service, The Center for Profitable Agriculture, the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.



Photos above and below: More than 150 people participated in the three outreach workshops.



Photo above: Jim Nance, Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA), shared with the group the programs and assistance available through TDA.

## Milan No-Till Field Day

Farmers and landowners from more than a dozen states converged in Tennessee in July for the 25th Annual Milan No-Till Field Day. Blake A. Brown, the director of Milan’s Research and Education Center, says 33,322 visitors from 66 Tennessee counties, 16 states, and one international country attended.

Of the attendees, 681 identified themselves as farmers, and they reported farming nearly 600,000 acres with no-till and just over 200,000 acres with conventional tillage practices. Brown says the attendees represented a good cross section from the state. “The farmers who registered represented 23-percent of the total acreage in Tennessee of the five major row crops,” Brown reports. Those major row crops are corn, cotton, soybeans, wheat, and sorghum.

The next Milan No-Till Field Day is scheduled for Thursday, July 22, 2010, so start planning now!



Photo above (l to r): District Conservationist Carter Andrews, Soil Conservationist Tamara Sneed, District Conservationist Mike Shoffner, District Conservationist Phillip Dixon