

# Current Developments

December 2005

## From the office of the State Conservationist

**A**s the calendar year comes to an end, the new fiscal year is already in full swing. I want to take this time to extend a sincere thank you to all NRCS-Tennessee employees for your hard work this past year. We faced several challenges, from EQIP Migration, to significant staff changes and learning new business tools. But in all cases, you rose to the occasion, and I am proud of your achievements.

We did a lot of sprinting last year. This year, instead of being sprinters, I want us to think of ourselves as marathon runners. We have to be ready if we want to run steady. This year, to turn a phrase, we will Plan our Work and Work our Plan.

What do I mean by that? We need to be strategic about our approach to work. We want to consolidate the gains we have made in conservation in Tennessee. To achieve excellence, we must make good decisions early on, utilize Cooperative Conservation whenever possible, and ensure that each NRCS-Tennessee employee is working to his or her greatest potential.

We accomplished great things in 2005. We invested \$13.8 Million in conservation throughout the state of Tennessee, and we achieved our agency goals. In 2005, we successfully completed our first year in the Conservation Security Program, and already we can see CSP growing dramatically in 2006. And we also put the Web Soil Survey online, making that tool much more accessible and relevant to the public.

Thank you for helping NRCS-Tennessee to achieve these successes. By continuing to plan and implement our work together, we will all have another productive and Happy New Year!

James Ford  
State Conservationist

## Upcoming Events

**American Farm Bureau Federation**      **January 8-11, 2006**  
**87th Annual Convention**  
**Opryland Hotel**  
**Nashville, Tennessee**

**62nd Annual TACD Meeting**      **February 26-28, 2006**  
**Park Vista Resort Hotel**  
**Gatlinburg, TN**



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## NRCS State Office Employees Association's

The NRCS State Office Employees Association purchased nearly \$300 dollars of winter clothes and delivered approximately 25 boxes of purchased and donated items to the Nashville Rescue Mission on December 7. The employee association also plans to help four families, selected from a Christmas Angel Tree, with food this holiday season.

The employee association is active all year with events such as:

Spring Food Drive-Thanks to the generous donations of the State Office employees, eleven boxes of much needed food were collected for Second Harvest Food Bank.

NRCS Anniversary Puzzle-Richard Bryan, Susan Hopkins and Grace Lutz correctly completed the NRCS 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Puzzle, which was developed by Executive Committee member Sandy Stewart. Mr. Ford randomly selected Susan's puzzle from the three eligible entries, making her the winner of a \$10 Blockbuster gift card, popcorn, and candy.

Mother's Day Basket- Member donations provided two lovely baskets for Mother's Day. Annie Timberlake (Cheryl Mitchell's Mom) and Tommy Hunt were the lucky winners. The winning tickets were randomly picked by Carolyn King from FSA.

Special thanks to SOEA Officers for 2005:  
 Phil Cherry-President  
 Sandy Stewart-Vice President  
 Cheryl Mitchell-Secretary  
 Febe Ortiz-Executive Board Member  
 Beatriz Villa-Executive Board Member  
 Paul Bluhm-Executive Board Member



Photo top-SOEA members at Christmas luncheon. Bottom, l to r, Phil Cherry delivers good to Second Harvest; Cheryl Mitchell & Tommy Hunt with Mother's Day Basket; and Susan Hopkins receives Blockbuster gift card from Sandy Stewart.



## Twas the Night before Christmas....2005

The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,  
 I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.  
 My wife was asleep, her head on my chest  
 My daughter beside me, angelic in rest.

Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,  
 Transforming the yard to a winter delight.  
 The sparkling lights in the tree I believe,  
 Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.

My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,  
 Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep.  
 In perfect contentment, or so it would seem,  
 So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,  
 But I opened my eyes when it tickled my ear.  
 Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know,  
 Then the sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.

My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,  
 And I crept to the door just to see who was near.  
 Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,  
 A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.

A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old,  
 Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.  
 Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,  
 Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

"What are you doing?" I asked without fear,  
 "Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!  
 Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,  
 You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!"

For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,  
 Away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts..  
 To the window that danced with a warm fire's light,  
 Then he sighed and he said "It's really all right."

"I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night.  
 It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,  
 That separates you from the darkest of times.  
 No one had to ask or beg or implore me.

I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before me.  
 My Gramps died at 'Pearl on a day in December."  
 Then he sighed, "That's a Christmas 'Gram always remembers.  
 My dad stood his watch in the jungles of 'Nam',  
 And now it is my turn and so, here I am."

"I've not seen my own son in more than a while,  
 But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile."  
 Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,  
 The red, white, and blue...an American flag.

"I can live through the cold and the being alone,  
 Away from my family, my house and my home.  
 I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,  
 I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat.

I can carry the weight of killing another,  
 Or lay down my life with my sister and brother..  
 Who stand at the front against any and all,  
 To ensure for all time that this flag will not fall."

"So go back inside," he said, "harbor no fright,  
 Your family is waiting and I'll be all right."  
 "But isn't there something I can do, at the least,  
 Give you money," I asked, "or prepare you a feast?"

"It seems all too little for all that you've done,  
 For being away from your wife and your son."  
 Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,  
 "Just tell us you love us, and never forget,  
 To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone,  
 To stand your own watch, no matter how long."

"For when we come home, either standing or dead,  
 To know you remember we fought and we bled,  
 Is payment enough, and with that we will trust,  
 That we mattered to you as you mattered to us!"

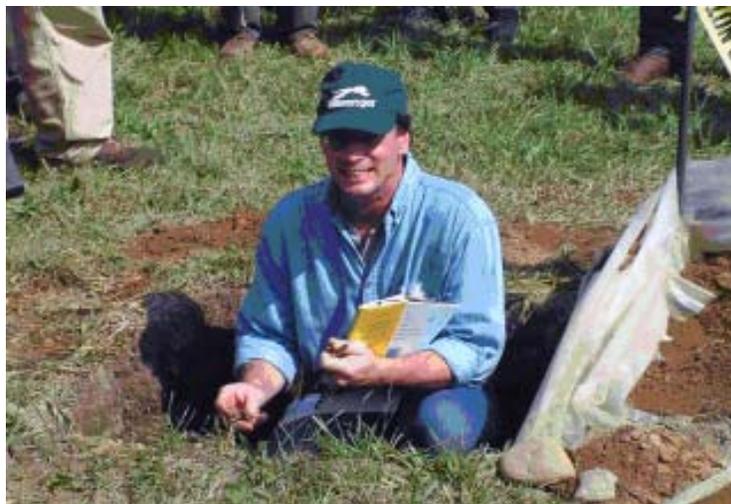


25th Annual Central States Forest Soils Workshop

About a hundred soil scientists and specialists along with forestry workers and geologists from several states gathered for the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Central States Forest Soils Workshop hosted by NRCS and the Soil Scientist Association of Tennessee (SSAT).

The mid-October workshop was held in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. NRCS has been conducting a soil survey in the park since 1998. The workshop allowed participants to examine soils that occur in high elevations (up to 6,650) and frigid zones.

NRCS employees Dave McMillen, Anthony Khiel, Dillon Gray, and State Soil Scientist Doug Slabaugh were among the many NRCS-TN employees responsible for the workshop's success. Good job, guys!



NRCS-Tennessee State Soil Scientist Doug Slabaugh at the Central States Forest Soils Workshop.



Front row: Dave McMillen, Soil Scientist; David Moore, Soil Scientist; Gabe Krantz, Soil Scientist; Debbie Brasfield, Soil Survey Project Leader; Dillon Gray, Soil Scientist  
 Second Row: Anthony Khiel, Soil Survey Project Leader; Nathan Hartgrove, Soil Survey Project Leader; Melissa Oliver, Soil Scientist; David Hargis, Soil Scientist; Clarence Conner, Resource Soil Scientist; Jennifer Yaeger, Soil Survey Project Leader; Carlie McCowan, Soil Survey Project Leader; Jerry Prater, Resource Soil Scientist; Doug Slabaugh, State Soil Scientist.



Retired UT Professor Dr. Max Springer and Soil Scientist Dave McMillen



Photo at left: Soil Survey Project Leader Anthony Khiel leads a field lecture at the Central States Forest Soils Workshop in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park

Photo, bottom right: Soil Scientist Dillon Gray displays a soil sample from the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.



## NRCS Represented at SAMAB

The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual SAMAB (Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere) Conference was held November 1 – 3 in Cherokee, NC. "Southern Appalachian Landscapes: Preserving Our Heritage", was the conference theme. Note the theme written in Cherokee at the right.

The conference highlight was a field trip to Kituwah, the Mother Town and cultural center of the Cherokee for over 12,000 years. A perpetual "sacred" fire burned within a hearth located in the center of the town. Cherokee people would travel hundreds of miles to get the sacred fire from the hearth and bring it back to their communities. Presently part of Kituwah is being used for river cane and butternut tree research and restoration. Kituwah is located adjacent to US Hwy 19 between Bryson City and Cherokee, NC.

The Water Resources Staff attended the conference. Charles Roberts is the NRCS representative on the SAMAB Executive Committee, and Jenny Adkins is the Chairperson of the Resource Committee. Carol Chandler presented a paper on the "Rebirth of Bear Creek: Effects of acid mine drainage remediation".



Southern Appalachian  
Landscapes: Preserving Our  
Heritage

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SAMAB Conference, November 1-3, 2005



*Charles Roberts and Jenny Adkins on the field tour at the SAMAB conference.*

## USDA Releases \$12 Million for Voluntary Conservation Programs in TN

On December 12, 2005, State Conservationist James W. Ford announced the release of \$12,058,766 for three voluntary conservation programs in Tennessee. The funds are being released early to ensure farmers and landowners in Tennessee have more time to make sound decisions regarding their conservation practices. "We want to give producers time to develop effective conservation plans. The Tennessee sign-up deadline is January 17, 2006. We want to help farmers meet that deadline so they can improve their land while also making it more productive." The Tennessee funds are part of the national release of nearly \$2.7 billion for voluntary conservation programs on working lands announced by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns last week. A total of more than \$2.3 billion will be distributed to the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the Pacific Basin.

With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, Tennessee farmers and other landowners will continue to address resource concerns on agricultural working lands,

promote environmental quality, address challenges in water quality and quantity, protect prime farmland and grazing lands and protect valuable wetlands ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

Key voluntary conservation programs and allocations for Tennessee include:

•**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): \$10,020,289.** EQIP assists farmers and ranchers to improve soil, air and water quality and other related resources on private working lands.

•**Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP): \$1,852,173.** WRP helps landowners restore, enhance and protect wetlands through permanent easements, 30-year easements and restoration cost-share agreements. The program maximizes wildlife habitat and wetland functions and values.

•**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP): \$186,304.** WHIP offers technical and financial assistance through long-term agreements to create, restore and enhance wildlife habitat for

upland wildlife, wetland wildlife, threatened, endangered or at-risk species and fisheries and other types of wildlife.

The Tennessee sign-up deadline to be eligible for FY 2006 funds is January 17, 2006 for EQIP, WRP, and WHIP.

Funds for the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP) will be allocated to Tennessee at a later date.

Additional information about conservation programs administered by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is available at <http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov> under Programs. Landowners who want specific information regarding program participation should contact their local USDA Service Center or NRCS office located at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the telephone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

## Safety - ICE (In Case of Emergency)

An ongoing nationwide campaign is encouraging people to enter an emergency contact number into their cell phone's memory under the heading ICE so that paramedics or police will know exactly who to contact in an emergency situation.

Take a few minutes to program the phone number of a designated relative, next of kin, friend or co-worker in your cell phone so rescue workers can quickly contact that person if necessary. Simply select a new contact in your phone book, enter the word ICE and the phone number of the person you wish to be contacted. You can enter more than one contact by specifying after the word ICE who they are. For example ICE wife Mary, ICE son Bill, or ICE work.

This is easy, free, and could save lives. At the very least, your family or friends will be aware of an emergency situation.

## Add your Cell Phone to Do Not Call List

Just a reminder....In January, cell phone numbers are being released to telemarketing companies and you will start to receive sales calls. YOU WILL BE CHARGED FOR THESE CALLS...telemarketers will eat up your free minutes and end up costing you money.

To prevent this, call the following number from your cell phone: 888/382-1222. It is the National DO NOT CALL list. It will only take a minute of your time. It blocks your number for five (5) years. You can also register online at: <https://www.donotcall.gov/default.aspx>



Photo above, l to r: Donald Moony Contractor, Charlie Davis Landowner, and Dwaine Johnston NRCS.

## Humphreys County Landowners Reduces Erosion along the Buffalo River

Troy Davis, a landowner in southern Humphreys County near Hurricane Mills, participated in a federal cost share program to protect his bottom land from a severe bank erosion problem along the Buffalo River. Each year the river would wash away several feet of some of the best agriculture land in the county. Much of the river bank erosion has now been solved with the partnership of the Humphreys County Soil Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and cost share from the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). The project included the installation of approximately 1,200 tons of rock armoring, 900 tons of rock jetties and the planting of a riparian forest buffer along the river. Installation of these conservation practices resulted in an estimated 1,000 tons of soil saved every year.

Mr. Davis has completed numerous other conservation practices such as pasture and hay land management, conservation tillage, heavy use area protection, native warm season grass establishment, pond construction and wildlife plantings.



Troy Davis, Humphrey County landowner, has installed conservation practices that have resulted in an estimated 1,000 tons of soil saved annually.



## "Sweet Charlie" Implements EQIP

Charlie Davis, a local farmer and landowner in the Fort Pillow community, recently begin the implementation of a Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Mr. Davis applied for the EQIP program back in 2004 and due to a lack of funds the original contract was disapproved, however, sometimes persistence pays off and Mr. Davis reapplied again in 2005 and his contract was approved.

Most of the local people know Mr. Davis as "Sweet Charlie". Mr. Davis is retired from the U.S. Corp of Engineers and has a cattle farm and raises produce.

The EQIP program is designed to help landowners and or farmers establish erosion control practices on there farm, and provide cost share assistance. Practices such as terraces, diversion, grade control structures, and cropland conversion are eligible for cost share assistance.

Lauderdale County has had one of the most active EQIP programs in the state with approximately 300 contracts being developed since the program begin. The EQIP program requires that a contract be developed with the landowner ranging from 5 to 10 years and it is require that the landowner carry out all practices as stipulated in the contract.

## A New Frontier: USDA Program Bringing Land Management Technology to the Field

Pick up a copy of almost any agribusiness related magazine today and you will probably find an article about the "new" USDA programs available through your local Farm Service Center. Even though many of these programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), have been in place since 1996, they have continually been modified each year to improve their effectiveness. The Natural Resources Conservation Service has worked with Local Work Groups annually to seek information on the most critical natural resource concerns that our farmers are faced with on their land. Those resource concerns are then addressed through a ranking sheet which prioritizes conservation practices that are most effective in solving the problems.

In Giles County, Tennessee, the primary resource concern identified by this process has been Grazing Lands Health and Surface Water Quality. To many USDA clients and staff, this was old news. Cattlemen had been applying "pasture" practices for many years. One of the most requested practices had been pasture renovation. "What we began to realize across the state was that the same people asking for assistance in reseeding eroding pasture fields were coming back on a 5 year rotation," according to Gregg Brann, NRCS Agronomist. This was the key to many of the changes incorporated into EQIP. NRCS now has moved to a systems based approach. In other words, "fix the cause of a problem instead of wasting funds treating symptoms."

There has been a tremendous amount of research conducted by universities, cattlemen, and state and federal agencies that have shown the economic and environmental benefits of this approach. NRCS has developed technical guidance for a new practice called Prescribed Grazing. Does it work? Ask those who have tried it. "It's the best change we have made in our farming operation," according to Mary Haehl of Beechwood Farms in Pulaski, TN. In 1996 the Haehl family began implementing some of the basic concepts of this system by developing a nutrient, pest and grazing management plan (Water Quality Incentives Program) with the local Soil Conservation District. This plan basically



*Dimple Geesling and son, Brandon*

focused on managing for the needs of the forage by following current soil tests and regulating the grazing to allow the pastures an opportunity to recover. Based on soil tests, the Haehls reduced fertilizer applications to a "minimum" yield level and shifted operating costs to address low soil pH. In 1997, Mrs. Haehl reported significant improvements in forage quality with basically no change in operating costs. Additional fencing was installed to protect streams and woodland areas and also to split fields into manageable grazing paddocks.

Tommy Burns, a second generation cattleman in Giles County, has also seen the benefits of a systems approach. "We are seeing more weight gain and better body condition scores than any time in the past," Mr. Burns recently reported. "This is the second year after implementing his Prescribed Grazing EQIP plan. Our biggest change has been to focus more on the plant needs by applying lime based on the soil test and placing more emphasis on resting pastures".

Other clients, like Orlando Lima who owns a farm south of Pulaski and is just starting an EQIP plan, has already seen improvements. "We have kept records for the past year on cattle rotations, moving the heard to a new field every two weeks," said Mr. Lima. "The grass is short now due to no rainfall in over 5 weeks, but we feel we are better off than we would have been without the grazing system. While we have started feeding some hay, we still have fields we can rotate to."

## The EARTH TEAM in Tennessee

Tennessee's Earth Team has been busy this year. Under the direction of Tennessee Earth Team Coordinator Dimple Geesling, more than 600 volunteers participated in Earth Team activities in 2005. Volunteers put in nearly 14,000 hours of work throughout the state.

Dimple was an area volunteer coordinator in Middle Tennessee for 11 years before being appointed State Earth Team Coordinator earlier this year by State Conservationist James Ford.

Tennessee's Earth Team Area Coordinators are Debbie Blankenship and Faye Floyd in West Tennessee; Heather Conner and Cory Hodge in Middle Tennessee; and Lorella Jennings and Terron Hillsman in East Tennessee. Dimple will be scheduling a workshop for the area coordinators in the near future to discuss ideas and work on a statewide plan for 2006.

Congratulations, Dimple, and keep up the good work! Dimple is pictured here with her son, Brandon, back at Camp Lejeune, NC after Brandon returned from a tour of duty in Iraq with the US Marine Corp.

## FY-05 Accomplishments in TN

*by Susan Hopkins*

Listed below are *just some of the highlights* of the work we did in Tennessee last fiscal year. To accomplish this much, it took everybody – NRCS and our partners, technical and administrative specialists in our state, area, and field offices – working together as a team. Congratulations to everyone on a job well done! Here's what we accomplished:

- 3,500 new conservation plans written on 349,000 acres
- Reconciled 2500 EQIP contracts transferred to NRCS from FSA
- 680,000 acres of soil surveys updated or newly mapped
- 948 new EQIP contracts totaling over \$10,000,000
- 103 CNMPs written
- 1,917,000 tons of soil saved from erosion
- 123 new RC&D projects completed
- 40 individual EWP projects started and/or completed at a cost of over \$10,000,000

## 2005 TN RC&D Annual Meeting

by Allen Persinger

The Central Basin Resource Conservation & Development Council hosted the 2005 Annual Tennessee RC&D meeting August 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> with approximately 130 people attending the meeting at Lane Agri-Park in Murfreesboro. Meeting participants were treated to a variety of educational sessions, good food and musical entertainment.

The first day of the meeting provided participants with two forum options. These break out sessions dealt with sustainability and growth of RC&D councils in one session and project opportunities in the other session. Following the breakout sessions, a forum discussion was held to formulate strategies to improve council stability and increase public awareness of RC&D activities and capabilities.

Attendee's were treated to a banquet and musical entertainment by 2nd Nature, a bluegrass band made up of employees from TWRA. As part of the banquet, outstanding employees, projects, partners & councils were recognized and presented awards. This year's award recipients were:

- Outstanding Council – Chickasaw-Shiloh**
- Outstanding Coordinator – Chris Moyers**
- Outstanding Office Assistant – Debbie Blankenship**
- Outstanding Project – Camp Discovery Shade Project**
- Outstanding Council Member – Audrey Burton**
- Outstanding Youth Involvement – Cumberland County High School**
- Outstanding Partner – Lewis Kearney**

The following day representatives from some RC&D partner agencies and organizations addressed the meeting. These included James Ford - NRCS State Conservationist, Barry Lake - TACD Vice President, and Jim Fyke - Commissioner TDEC.

Bill Williams, President of the Smoky Mountain RC&D Council, was elected President of the state RC&D Council. The 2006 annual meeting will be hosted by Cumberland Mountain RC&D.



*Chris Moyers, Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Coordinator received the Outstanding Coordinator Award. Debbie Blankenship, Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Office Assistant was the recipient on the Outstanding Office Assistant award.*



*RC&D Council President Charlene Shelton welcomed everyone to the 2005 Annual RC&D Meeting in Murfreesboro.*



*James Ford speaking at the 2005 Annual RC&D meeting.*



*Lewis Kearney, a longtime friend and supporter of RC&D, was presented the Outstanding Partner Award for his long term commitment and assistance to the Tennessee RC&D Councils. Lewis was also presented a Career Achievement Award by the Appalachian RC&D Council at their annual meeting.*

## Hull-York Lakeland RC&D Receives Award



Photo above, l to r : Jan Lee HYL President; Lynn Carey, HYL Vice-President; Tom Pointer, HYL Secretary/Treasurer; Dolores Angelini, HYL Past President; Dimple Geesling, NRCS Office Assistant; and Jeff Sanders, NRCS Coordinator.

Hull-York Lakeland RC&D received two awards at the annual Tennessee RC&D Meeting held in Murfreesboro August 4-5, 2005. The first award was for Outstanding Project for the Shade Shelter project at Camp Discovery in Jackson County. This shelter is being used in the outdoor pool area to protect camp residents from overexposure to the sun.

Camp Discovery is a summer recreational camp that hosts an average of 700 children and adults with physical and mental disabilities, and is located on the shore of Cordell Hull Lake. Partners in this project included the Tennessee Jaycees, Hull-York Lakeland RC&D, USDA Rural Development, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The second award went to the Cumberland County High School Environmental Club for Outstanding Youth Involvement. Instituted by Ecology teacher Annell Fields, the enthusiastic group participated in events such as: the Obed River Park bird, water-fowl and squirrel habitat boxes project; assisted the Cumberland County Tree Board with development of a bird and butterfly garden; numerous field trips; recycling projects including eyeglasses recycling; household hazardous waste collection; adopt a highway program; Daddy's Creek and Lake Tansi water's edge litter cleanup; the Envirothon; and many other worthwhile projects.

The Environmental Club won an award for youth involvement and Ms. Fields will travel to Orlando, Florida to receive the award at the Southeast Regional RC&D meeting.

## "Operation Pack the Bus" Welcomed in Tennessee

NRCS-TN and the Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D welcomed "Operation Pack the Bus" as it traveled through West Tennessee December 5. The project is an effort of the Interstate RC&D Council in northwestern Illinois and eastern Iowa to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. Volunteers loaded a bus formerly used as a bookmobile full of school supplies, materials, and monetary donations onto a flatbed truck and drove it to coastal Mississippi, where it was presented to the Mississippi Coastal Plains RC&D.

On the way, they spent the night in Memphis where Shelby County District Conservationist presented the traveling caravan with gift certificates to Cracker Barrel donated by the Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council. Those traveling with the caravan included Illinois' State Conservationist William J. Gradle, and Charles Curry, who conceived the idea for "Operation Pack the Bus".



District Conservationist Andy Neal of Shelby County presents a certificate of appreciation on behalf of the Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council to Volunteer Charles Curry, Interstate RC&D Council member who came up with the idea for Operation Pack the Bus.

The hurricane season of 2005 was the busiest hurricane season ever recorded. Hurricane Katrina was one of the most devastating storms in history, taking hundreds of lives across the Gulf Coast and forcing the largest relocation in American history. It also impacted people far beyond those living in its path. Tennessee NRCS employees were also impacted by the hurricanes...some watched their friends and families lose everything and several reached out to help. Following are some of those stories.

## McQuade Journey's Home in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina

Paul McQuade, District Conservationist, grew up in New Orleans and still has family and close friends in the city. When he saw and heard of the devastation from Hurricane Katrina, he felt powerless to help. Paul said, "It was so hard to watch TV, it made me want to jump in my truck and go help. But I was told you can't get in."

As soon as the city opened up, he made some calls and within a day, he had six friends from Memphis, Knoxville, and Georgia who said, "I've got a truck, a chainsaw, and gas. Let's go."

They spent most of their time cutting broken and uprooted trees. The biggest was a huge Pecan that had snapped off about 30 feet up and had a dangerous limb hanging. They hooked up cables and a come-a-long and pulled the limb while it was being cut to prevent it kicking back.



They also helped carry out flood damaged furniture and knocked out moldy walls. "I can't describe how heartbreaking it was to see all the ruined antiques and family photos, knowing there are thousands of homes

just like these. It was sad to see the damage, but it was good to do something hands-on to help," stated Paul. "We all got as much as we gave."

As Paul headed home, unsettled by the devastation he had seen, he stopped for gas in Mississippi. There, he encountered a displaced welder from the Bayous south of New Orleans. The gentleman asked for food and change and said he'd spent 6 days in the water. His pregnant wife had miscarried and she died as a result. In all, he had lost 2 cars, a truck, his home, his wife, and his unborn child. He said that he had found a job welding and was waiting for his first paycheck while he and his 4 year old daughter were living in a local motel. They cried together, they hugged, and Paul gave him a bag of food and some money before driving off. "During my trip, I saw the tragic destruction of personal property and the painful desolation of a place I call home, but the human toll is much harder to measure."

Paul and his friends now feel better knowing they made a difference and they feel connected to the people of the Gulf area. They also have lots of new friends and places to stay during Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest. "I hope to go back very soon," says Paul.



*Photo above: Paul McQuade and friends take a break from their recovery efforts for a photo in New Orleans.*



*The group spent much of their time cutting broken and uprooted trees, but also carried out flood damaged furniture and knocked out moldy walls.*



## Katrina – Up Close and Personal

by Sandy Stewart

I consider the Mississippi gulf coast my second home because that is where my parents and two sisters have lived for 30 years. For me, Hurricane Katrina's impact was up close and personal. Not only did this storm destroy a region I was fond of visiting, it turned my family's life upside down. They all lost their home, cars, furniture, treasured possessions and a loved family dog. For my parents, who are in their 70's, years of hard work were obliterated in eight hours. Possessions that were a part of our family history were scattered, broken, twisted around trees, mangled and buried deep in piles of rubble. But their sad story is one of thousands along Mississippi's eleven coastal communities that were wiped out overnight by this monster storm.

I was finally able to see my family four anxious weeks after Katrina made landfall. Since they all lived close to the beaches I had an exclusive opportunity to see in person the worst of Katrina's wrath. To get to the epicenter of destruction you have to cross the railroad tracks that run parallel to the coast. But the tracks are guarded by miles of razor wire and armed military checkpoints. Only residents with ID, relief workers, and clean up and utility crews are allowed to cross over. As we crossed the tracks the landscape went from bad to unbelievable. I truly felt like I was stepping into a war zone. TV images and photos simply cannot convey the scale of this disaster.

Gulfport neighborhoods were littered with overturned freight cars, mangled trailers, fishing boats, and other debris from its shipping port. A shipping container of frozen chicken and pork bellies landed in one neighborhood causing a literal stink. Those containers were still there during my visit and the smell of rotting chicken, dead fish, combined with muck, mud and fetid pools of standing water, created an unbearable stench wherever you went. Incredibly, a massive casino barge was ripped from its moorings, tossed across the beach, and deposited on the middle of highway 90. It was later blown up by dynamite. Gulfport's quaint marina was shredded by the storm. Several dolphins were found in the gulf and rescued. But most of its inhabitants suffered the fate of one sea lion that was found dead on top of rubble – more than 5 miles from the marina. Amazing how far things were tossed. My sister's home was near the marina – it was leveled. She was not able to salvage anything.

West of Gulfport is Long Beach where my other sister lived. On the way there I felt lost. There were no familiar landmarks. Gone were the beautiful antebellum homes that gave the coast its southern charm. Even the ones that withstood Camille were not able to bear up under Katrina's ferocity. It was surreal. The vacant lots, the silence, and the crippled live oak trees stripped of leaves made it seem like a ghost town. Since there were no homes, no cars traveling US 90, no businesses to illuminate the night, it was a very eerie place to be. One irony - the 72-foot tugboat, SS Camille, washed ashore by the storm that changed its name, remains unmoved from the place it landed in 1969. A little more weathered, but unmoved. Yet all around it, including the gift shop built alongside the boat, everything was wiped out. Another affect of the storm is the tremendous amount of stuff tangled in the trees - clothing, curtains, plastic, all sort of materials. I wonder...how will Mississippi clear 26 miles of littered trees short of chopping them all down?

In Long Beach maneuvering through the neighborhoods was difficult. A 4-5 foot wall of debris, trash, furniture, appliances, bedding lined the narrow streets. My sister's home was damaged by the tidal surge, but not leveled. Everything she owned was still ruined either by water damage or by fuzzy green and black mold. Her house had to be gutted. This monumental task could not have been done without the help of **Robert Anderson, NRCS State Engineer**. Robert had recently gone to Long Beach with his church to help in relief work. Upon hearing about my family, he passed the need onto his church and they sent a team to lend a hand. In one day these hard-working men were able to gut her house down to the studs. When I was there I saw firsthand the great impact the churches, the Red Cross, and the Salvation Army are having on the area. Church groups were everywhere chainsawing, roofing, feeding, distributing clothes and supplies. I took my mother to one distribution center near her property to get some bottled water and cleaning supplies. As we entered the huge tent, they gave us a lawn & leaf size bag to put our goods in. We were amazed at the selection and quantity of stuff available – food, medicines, clothing, cleaning supplies, baby



Sandy's mom, Saipin Larimer, looks at the empty slab in Pass Christian, MS where Mrs. Larimer's house used to sit.

items. My family has been so touched by the outpouring of help and donations.

The worse part of my trip was going to my parent's property in Pass Christian. Pass Christian took the full force of the hurricane's strength. Nearly all 2500 homes in this quaint harbor town were leveled by a 23 ft tidal surge. Only 15 houses were spared. My parent's house was not one of them. Their entire neighborhood had vanished in the storm. A brand new home, just completed and worth over a million dollars, never saw its new owners move in-it was leveled. Not one brick remained standing. Another unlucky homeowner had just signed settlement papers two days before the storm to buy a house that's no longer there. Immediately after the storm my two sisters combed through my parent's property to try and salvage anything they could. The destruction was so complete that after weeks of rummaging, they were only able to find a handful of items worth keeping. We couldn't stay long because of the bad smell coming from a neighbor's pool. It was filled with mucky green water, a fallen tree, items caught in its limbs, and the family's van which was also oozing fuel into the water. I didn't want to leave but I didn't want to stay. I longed to go "home," but it was gone forever. As I stood on their vacant concrete slab, I thought how strangely peaceful and quiet it was there. All around me was sadness and destruction, yet in front of me was the beautiful, calm Mississippi gulf coast.

Katrina has come and gone, the news has moved on, but many people are still in need. Some are still living in tents. Many want to rebuild but cannot because insurance companies are stating that damages were done by water not wind, therefore folks like my parents have a very uncertain future. Please continue to remember Katrina victims in your giving and in your prayers. They will need both for a long time to come.

## Incident Management Teams Respond to Hurricanes

Jeanne Eastham is the lead Incident Information Officer for the Southern Area Incident Command Blue Team, one of 17 Type 1 interagency incident management teams in the nation. Jeanne has been on the team for approximately five years and is the first NRCS employee to serve on an Incident Management Team. NRCS is reimbursed for her time and travel through an MOU with the USDA Forest Service. She has responded to forest fires in the southeast and the western states, to the Columbia Shuttle Recovery and to hurricanes in 2004 and 2005.

This year, Jeanne's team was called out for Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, and Rita. On hurricane assignments, Jeanne works with FEMA information officers on press releases, conducts VIP tours, manages internal information for the team, meets with all media sources and arranges or conducts tours for them. Jeanne is the first point of contact on these assignments for all VIP visitors, media, agency heads, and political leaders. The hours are long, but as Jeanne says, "the job is very gratifying in terms of helping those less fortunate than me."

The Southern Area Blue Team was assigned to Hurricane Katrina support at the Naval Air Station Meridian in Mississippi from August 29 to September 16, 2005. NAS Meridian, cooperating with FEMA, hosted a federal Operational Staging Area (OSA) to support Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts. The Meridian OSA was the staging area for distribution of relief supplies to hurricane victims state-wide in Mississippi. "Our team was in place before the hurricane hit, rode out the hurricane in the military barracks, and began shipping supplies as soon as it was safe," said Jeanne. Supplies shipped were primarily water, ice, MREs (meals ready-to-eat), cots, blankets, and generators. The geographic scale of this operation was unprecedented. The Meridian OSA surpassed 1,000 truck shipments in the first six days of operation, and shipped approximately 3,000 trucks with relief supplies during the assignment. "Not only are we shipping and receiving emergency supplies 24 hours a day, but since we are usually staged on a military installation, we have to work closely with the military to not impact their operation," said Jeanne. "Parking trucks on the tarmac of an active military base requires a lot of coordination and teamwork between the team, FEMA and the military."

Following Hurricane Rita, the Blue Team was deployed to Texas. The team managed an Operational Staging Area receiving and shipping emergency supplies at the Astrodome in Houston. The team also supported (housed, provided shower units, and fed) 500 emergency workers.

Incident Management Teams (IMTs) manage the incident, whether it is a forest fire, hurricane, 9-11 homeland security disaster, or an avian flu outbreak. "We are expected to be ready to deploy within two hours of receiving a call out and travel with sleeping bags, tents, laptop computers and other necessary supplies," said Jeanne. IMTs are self-sufficient. The logistics unit can set up a base camp and the team can be operational within 24 hours. Often the team is setup in a remote location. "We are literally a small city", said Jeanne. "Our logistics unit orders the caterer, shower unit, and tents for us to operate from. Our communication section will tap into power and phone lines if they are available, or we may operate off of generators, King radios and cell phones. We have to be flexible."

"My role as the lead incident information officer is to manage the information function of the incident, which includes developing a communication strategy, ordering information officers to staff the unit, establishing and maintaining contact with the host agency public affairs representative, monitoring cost, participating in Command and General Staff and planning meetings, preparing for and hosting visits from dignitaries/VIPs and the media, and maintaining contacts with elected officials and other key contacts," stated Jeanne.

There are two national interagency incident management teams in the southeast. All 17 teams are on a national rotation for assignment. The Blue Team is represented by federal and state land management agencies in the 13 southern states and team members are from the USDA Forest Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the US Park Service, and various state forestry agencies.

All federal and state agency employees are suppose to receive training in the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is so efficient that the Coast Guard and the New York City Fire Department are using ICS. Also, APHIS and other USDA agencies have trained or are in the process of training their employees in ICS. Jeanne served on the instructor cadre for the first USDA Incident Command System Command and General Staff training held in Arizona in the fall of 2004.



*Trucks on the tarmac at the Naval Air Station Meridian, an active military base.*



*Jeanne Eastham is interviewed by the local ABC affiliate at NAS Meridian on the Hurricane Katrina incident.*

## Hurricane Relief Volunteers

Tennessee NRCS employees **Allen Persinger** (Central Basin RC&D Coordinator), **Paul Bluhm** (State Office Civil Engineer) and **Ralph Smith** (Chattanooga TST Ag Engineer) served on a 30 day voluntary detail to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with their Debris Removal Mission in Jefferson Parrish Louisiana. Jefferson Parrish was divided into three primary work zones of the East Bank, West Bank and Grand Isle. Ralph Smith worked on the East Bank which is the North section of Jefferson Parrish between Lake Ponchartrain and the Mississippi River with the towns of Kenner and Metarie. Allen Persinger worked on the West Bank which is across the river from the East Bank and covered the towns of Westwego, Marrero, Harvey & Laffite. Paul Bluhm worked in Grand Isle which is the southern tip of Jefferson Parrish which meets the Gulf of Mexico.



Allen, Paul & Ralph all worked as Quality Assurance representatives for the USACE. They were responsible for the supervision of work crews as they removed demolition & vegetation debris from the communities. They were responsible for ensuring all safety gear was being used properly and that equipment was being operated in a safe manner along with watching for potential safety hazards for local residents that could result from the debris removal operation. In addition they ensured items such as tires which were being taken to a special disposal site or refrigeration units which were being taken to a certified refrigerant disposal contractor to remove the refrigerant gas and compressor oil prior to being crushed or shredded for recycling instead of getting mixed in with the demolition and vegetation debris. When not in the field, they worked at dump sites performing load inspections for incoming trucks and issuing load tickets to the drivers from which the contractors were paid.



"With the exception of Thanksgiving Day, the three worked 7 days a week and 11 to 12 hours per day which took a little getting used to compared to a 5 day work week back home," said Allen Persinger. Allen went on to say that it was a unique and rewarding experience that he would consider doing again in the future if the need arose.



## Campbell County Landowner Installs Wildlife Habitat Improvements

William and Ann Lowe have wild turkey, whitetail deer, bobwhite quail, grouse, fox squirrel, blue herons and elk in the wildlife habitat area they created on their East Tennessee farm. The elk, which were released at a nearby Tennessee Wildlife Management Area in the winter of 2000-2001, have migrated to the Lowe farm. The Lowes are proud of the fact they have elk on the farm and enjoy watching the elk when they come off the mountain to graze in the valley below.

Mr. and Mrs. Lowe moved back to the family farm between Caryville and Jellico in Elk Valley in 2002 after living in Seattle, Washington for 21 years. Mr. Lowe had known for some time that he wanted to have a farm that attracted a wide variety of wildlife. The Lowes now own over 200 acres including Bill's grandparent's farm. In addition to acreage set aside for wildlife habitat, the Lowes have three horses and maintain approximately thirty acres of cool season grasses and legume pasture.

The farm had a wide variety of terrain and vegetative cover including mature hardwood timber, cool season hay fields, and creek bottoms with row crops nearby, but it needed some improvements to the habitat especially small game cover, water availability, and food sources.

Mr. and Mrs. Lowe contacted the USDA-NRCS Service Center in Clinton and Mike Shoffner, previous District Conservationist and Robin Mayberry, Area 3 Wildlife Biologist met with them on the farm. They determined what practices would positively affect wildlife habitat and discussed the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as possible avenues to obtain cost-share funding. Early in 2005, the Lowes were approved for both WHIP and CRP funding. Mr. Lowe also submitted an application for Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) funding for a pond and was also approved for this funding.

Mr. Lowe completed the pond in April of 2005 and planted fourteen acres of Switchgrass and Kobe Lespedeza field borders utilizing the continuous signup CRP (CP33) in May of 2005. This fall Mr. Lowe is planning to install a one acre hedgerow with Sawtooth Oak, Persimmon, and Dogwood species, three one acre forest opening food plots with clover mixes, a tree and shrub field border with oaks species, and a one acre perennial food plot with clovers and chicory. With the installation of the water source and the warm season grass and legume buffers and the planned practices this fall, the farm will be wildlife friendly and should protect our rare species from habitat loss. The Lowe's hope these conservation practices will keep the elk there for a very long time and sustain other game species as well.



*Bill Lowe is shown standing in his Warm Season Grass and Legume Field Border on his farm in Campbell County.*



*Elk grazing in the valley.*

## Overton County Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Day Camp

The Overton County SCD coordinated the 2005 Overton County Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Day Camp which is designed for the 275 4th graders of Overton County.

This day camp involved 162 earth team volunteers and 2,048 volunteer hours for Overton County as well as a wide range of local people and businesses involved. Volunteers were from Farm Bureau, Overton County Co-op, 911, Overton County Fire Department, Overton County Board of Education, TN Technology Center, all county banks, U.T. Extension, NRCS, Upper Cumberland Electric membership corporation, FSA, Overton County Sheriff's Department, and Progressive Farmer just to name a few.



*4th graders of Overton County at the Progressive Farmer Farm Safety Day Camp.*

## NRCS – Tennessee Awards for Fiscal Year 2005

### Outstanding Performance Award

Eugene Andrews	Bronnie Hartman
David Barker	Kristina Hinds
Matthew Brown	Ray Holyfield
Trent Cash	Harold Jones
Heather Conner	Larry Lofton
William Dailey	Grace Lutz
Charles Davis	David McMillen
W. Dwight Dickson	Ronald Owen
Phillip Dixon	Tony Sexton
E. Faye Floyd	Ralph Smith
Paul Fulks	William Walker
Naomi Hamilton-Johnson	James Woodall

### Performance Award

Robert Anderson	Richard Livingston
Arthur Bentley	Curtis McDaniel
Debra Blankenship	John Morrow
Paul Bluhm	Chris Moyers
Phillip Brasfield	Will Nesby
Mark Carroll	Ronald Perkins
Jennifer Chastain	J. Todd Reynolds
Richard Cooke	Paula Schroth
Meredith Crosby	Wiley Scott
Charles Frost	Vic Simpson
Susan Hopkins	Denise Watkins
Terry Horne	Joseph Zimmerman
Gary Johnson	
Brandi Lamb	

### Special Act/Service Award

Gregg Brann	Katherine Sells
Gary Handley	Sandy Stewart
Michael Hart	David Tatum
Larry Hasty	Annsue Wattenbarger
Kristina Hinds	Mike Zeman
Herb Paugh	

### Special Act/Service Award - Group

Mark Carroll	Louis Grissom
Wayne Coates	Tommy Hunt
James Denton	Cheryl Mitchell
Phillip Dixon	Linda Reames
Jerry Frady	

### Spot Award

Jenny Adkins	Hugh Jackson
James Brown	Lorella Jennings
Richard Bryan	Steve Koonce
Chester Bush	Patty Lane
Carol Chandler	Lynda Lemay
Jennifer Chastain	Terrill Mayberry
Matthew Denton	David Merinar
Carolyn Dillard	Alton Miller
Mitzi Dunham	John Mimms
B. Jeanne Eastham	Lori Pittman
Charlotte Epps	Johnny Sandefur
Natalie Freeman	Elaine Smith
James Gilliam	Barbara Swindell
Dillon Gray	Beatriz Villa

### Spot Award - Group

Linda Bierley	Michael McElroy
Wayne Coates	Carl Tinker
Jerry Frady	Kenneth Williams
James Gilliam	

### Time Off Award

Mildred Fields	Paul McQuade
Grace Lutz	LaSonya Moore

### TimeOff Award Group

William Abbott	Andrew Faulkner
Nearlene Bass	Cory Hodge
Jeff Bowie	Gary Johnston
Gary Blackwood	Harold Jones
Phillip Brown	Curtis McDaniel
Chester Bush	Gary Moore
Richard Cooke	James Needham
William Dailey	Randy Parnell
W. Dwight Dickson	Charles Parrish
Phillip Dixon	Wray Pulliam
Mark Dorsett	J. Todd Reynolds
Craig Ellis	William Walker
David Hargis	Henry Webb
Nathan Hartgrove	
Kristina Hinds	

**TSP Percentage Limits Limited** The percentage limits on employee contributions to TSP will be lifted in January 2006. However, your TSP contributions in 2006 cannot exceed the Elected Deferral Limit of \$15,000. TSP no longer has open seasons; employees are able to make changes at any time. You may begin to contribute a higher dollar or percentage amount for TSP in pay period 25. Changes to the amount of your TSP contribution may be submitted to the Human Resources Office using the TSP-1 form or may be done through the Employee Personal Page (EPP). Contributions will be effective no later than the first full pay period after the receipt of the election form or change input to EPP.

It is important for employees to realize that contributing a higher amount to TSP could adversely affect your other bi-weekly deductions. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure that the amount deducted for TSP does not do this. The TSP website <http://www.tsp.gov> is a good source of additional information. Or if you have any questions, please contact Charlotte Epps, Human Resources Assistant, at 615/277-2542 or Sharon Young, Human Resources Assistant, at 615/277-2548.