

Current Developments

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Spring 2008



Message from the State Conservationist

Tennessee farmers have experienced many challenges over the past year. A late cold snap last spring, a long drought through the summer and fall, and then deadly tornados in February all contributed to an estimated \$500 million hit on agriculture in Tennessee, according to State Agriculture Commissioner Ken Givens.

It would be easy to be discouraged, especially with the new Farm Bill still pending approval. But as we approach spring, the renewal of plants, aquatic life, and wildlife should bring a new sense of hope. People are paying attention to what's happening in Tennessee. Last month, Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer visited Nashville and requested a briefing on what we have done—and can do—to help landowners impacted by the weather. Already, we have received word that Emergency Watershed Protection funds to help out in hard-hit Macon County have been approved, and there is reason to believe that more help is coming.

The 64th annual TACD convention last month was another bright spot in the new year. Attendance was up, and so was the level of enthusiasm. I thought the convention was positive and productive. Congressman Lincoln Davis, who delivered the keynote address, is a farmer himself as well as a former soil scientist who used to work for the Soil Conservation Service. As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, Congressman Davis knows the needs facing Tennessee farmers and landowners.

While issues such as the new Farm Bill remain unresolved, there's reason for hope that a resolution can be reached soon. Whatever happens in Washington, our responsibilities and duties here in Tennessee are unchanged. We continue our mission of helping people help the land, and we are doing so with the knowledge that our work is important because we are making a tangible difference in the lives of Tennessee landowners. I am proud of you, what you do, and how you do it. Keep up the good work!

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Upcoming Events - Mark Your Calendar

April 25, 2008 16th Annual Border Wars Golf Tournament
8:00 a.m. - ?
Dale Hollow State Resort Park
Contact: Charles Roberts 615-277-2575

May 1, 2008 TN Chapter of Soil & Water Conservation Society Meeting
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Agri-Lane Center-Murfreesboro



Dana York Honored by TTU

Tennessee native Dana York, who oversees daily operation of the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, was honored in February by Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville. Ms. York, whose title is Associate Chief of NRCS, was named 2008 Alumnus of the Year from the university's College of Agricultural and Human Sciences. She spoke to a gathering of over 100 students and fellow alumni as part of the school's John Rose Distinguished Lecture Series.

At the lecture and luncheon, Ms. York was welcomed by Agricultural and Human Sciences Dean Pat Bagley, State FFA President Chelsea Doss, and State Conservationist Kevin Brown—another Tech alumnus.

Ms. York shared her "ladder of success" with students, which included a solid educational foundation; a good attitude; a focus on problem-solving; being creative; being a good observer and listener; and surrounding yourself with talented people. Her top advice to students is to get a mentor so they can learn from the best.

Last year, Ms. York received the President's Distinguished Rank Award, the highest award given to a career federal employee for leadership. She is the highest-ranking female who has ever served in NRCS. She and AnnSue Wattenbarger were the first female District Conservationists in Tennessee.

Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer Visits USDA Offices in Nashville

The newly confirmed Secretary of Agriculture, Ed Schafer, delivered the keynote speech at a USDA Black Heritage luncheon in Nashville on February 29th.

The Secretary was in Nashville to speak at the Commodities Classic convention at the Opryland Hotel. He also requested a briefing from NRCS, the Farm Service Agency, Agricultural Extension, and Rural Development about actions taken since the deadly tornados of February 5th. NRCS State Engineer Robert Anderson reported on debris removal efforts in Macon County, where a dozen people died during the storms.

While in Nashville, the Secretary spoke to a joint gathering of employees from USDA marking Black History month. During his ten-minute speech, the former North Dakota governor thanked local employees from NRCS, FSA, and RD for all they have accomplished in Tennessee in the aftermath of the tornados.

The luncheon included entertainment from present and former NRCS employees along with recognition of present and past achievements of African American employees at USDA. The luncheon was organized and hosted by Black Emphasis Program Manager Danny Jones, who serves on the NRCS-Tennessee Civil Rights Committee.

Schafer told the group that he was happy to be selected as USDA Secretary because of the opportunity it provides him to see the work achieved by USDA employees across the nation. After his address, Secretary Schafer spent about half an hour visiting with employees and posing for pictures.



Left to right-State Engineer Robert Anderson, STC Kevin Brown, Secretary Ed Schafer, ASTC Programs John Rissler



Ground-Penetrating Radar Used by NRCS Soil Scientists to Verify Burial Sites in post-Revolutionary War Cemetery in Jefferson County

NRCS-Tennessee Resource Soil Scientist Anthony Kheil has used his knowledge of soils and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to investigate rumors of unmarked graves in an historic cemetery in Jefferson County. In December, Kheil and North Carolina Soil Scientist Wes Tuttle used GPR to determine whether the cemetery may be the site of several unmarked former slave graves. Landowner Mike Thompson told the soil scientists that he'd always been told there were slave graves just outside the perimeter of the cemetery, but he didn't know how to confirm the story without disturbing the ground.

Kheil suggested the soils investigation study utilizing GPR to see if rumored burial sites of some slaves could be verified in the post-Revolutionary War era cemetery. Taylor Cemetery is about seven miles east of Dandridge in the Baneberry community of Jefferson County. The cemetery has historical significance as the final resting place of Col. Parmenas Taylor (b. 1753, d. 1827), a soldier in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

Kheil and Tuttle determined that some graves of unknown origin were found between the marked graves within the cemetery boundary, but none was detected in the areas surrounding the cemetery where it was thought that slaves might have been buried. Survey flags were placed at potential burial sites inferred from radar records where they serve as temporary markers since no grave markers are present. Many of the older burials in the cemetery occurred before 1850.

Kheil says he was happy to help the landowner using ground-penetrating radar. "It's non-invasive. We didn't have to do any digging. As a soil scientist, I don't like to dig around cemeteries. Even if there's a fence around it, if you stick an auger in the ground, you never know what you might hit. The GPR is a great tool to let you know if there's been any ground disturbance."



Photo above: A ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey was conducted at Taylor Cemetery. GPR has often been used to help identify and locate buried artifacts and detect soil disturbance and cultural features associated with burial sites.



NRCS Associate Chief Dana York recognized and thanked Paul Fulks for his years of service to the agency on his last official day as Area 2 Area Conservationist.



Central Basin RC&D Receives Grant to Purchase Enviroscope Model

Central Basin RC&D Council has received a \$1,200 grant to purchase an Enviroscope non-point source pollution model to be utilized in educational programs within the RC&D area. Funding was made possible through a grant from the Lucius Burch Jr. Wildlife Habitat Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee.

Photo l to r: Jerry Williams – Community Foundation board member, Carol Edwards – Secretary Central Basin RC&D, Allen Persinger – Coordinator Central Basin RC&D, Ellen Lehman – President of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee



Creating a Regional Sense of Place: Four Counties Focus on Heritage Tourism

by Larry Lofton

Local leaders from Hickman, Lewis, Perry and Wayne counties are creating a unique initiative by developing regional based heritage tourism to strengthen their local economies. This effort focuses on the conservation, preservation and enhancement of the area's natural and cultural resources.

The initiative began as partnership project between local, state and federal partners including the Buffalo/Duck River RC&D Council, the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, the US Forest Service, the USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Center for Historic Preservation conducted an inventory and assessment of natural and cultural assets for each community in consultation with local organizations and agencies. Four workshops were conducted by the CHP and the council to gain public input regarding the relationship of these assets in improving heritage tourism opportunities as well as building overall economic sustainability through a regional based approach. A guide entitled "Creating a Regional sense of Place" was published for distribution to communities in the RC&D area as a capacity building tool for increased cooperation and collaboration as this initiative evolves.

Grants from the US Forest Service and the Farm Service Agency provided funding for this project. Additional in-kind services were provided by the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Buffalo/Duck River RC&D Council.

Tennessee Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) to Spring Meeting Scheduled

The Tennessee Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) will hold its Spring meeting at the Agri-Lane Center in Murfreesboro Thursday May 1, 2008. The technical portion of the meeting will focus on agricultural construction permits. Dr. James Buchanan of the University of Tennessee will be the featured speaker.

The meeting begins at 10am and will last until about 3pm.

16th Annual Border Wars Golf Tournament Kentucky vs Tennessee

The cost is \$50.00 per person which includes 18 holes with cart, lunch and prizes.

Tennessee golfers make checks payable to Charles Roberts and mail to his attention at 675 U.S. Courthouse, 801 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203. **Deadline for registering to play is April 18th.**

If you plan to stay at the lodge you should call 1-800-325-2282 ASAP to make your reservations.

For more information, contact Charles Roberts at 615-277-2575 or email at: charles.roberts@tn.usda.gov.



Being “Firewise” is Making an Impact in Tennessee

by Larry Lofton

Tennessee’s landscape is changing. In the last decade, homes and communities have merged into the state’s open/wildland space. This has been described as the wildland/urban interface. Developing areas meeting wildland areas have been and continue to be vulnerable to significant fire risks.

The Tennessee Firewise program is meeting the challenges posed by rapid development in these rural wildland areas. A significant part of this initiative is the Tennessee Firewise Communities program with the common goal being to reduce the loss of life, property, and resources to wildland fire by building and maintaining communities in a way that is compatible with our natural surroundings.

Over the past several years RC&D councils across the state have worked in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry to involve homeowners, teachers, community leaders, planners, developers, and others in adopting the Firewise approach that emphasizes community responsibility for safer home construction and design and landscaping and maintenance.

RC&D is also assisting the Tennessee Division of Forestry’s Fire Prevention and Firewise Coordinator and Firewise program personnel with hazardous fuel mitigation grants to communities including Sprucey Ridge in Mountain City and Cumberland Lakes in Monterey. Other Firewise assistance has been provided to twelve other communities through grant services provided by TDF.

RC&D thanks John Kirksey-Forest Protection Unit Leader, Jeffrey Piatt-Fire Program Specialist and Leon Konz-Fire Prevention/Firewise Coordinator for their leadership and is proud to be a partner with the Tennessee Division of Forestry in this important work.



Tennessee Division of Forestry officials hosts Firewise workshops for homeowners, teachers, community leaders, planners, developers, and others that emphasize using the Firewise approach in home struction and design and landscaping and maintenance.





FY 2007 Earth Team Annual Status Report

More than 400 volunteers gave well over 7,000 volunteer hours as part of Tennessee's Earth Team activities in fiscal year 2007. According to State Earth Team Coordinator Dimple Geesling, 405 people volunteered statewide last year. The volunteers gave of their time as individuals or as members of one of the 29 group organizations that participated in ET projects last year. The total number of ET volunteer hours worked in Tennessee was 7,136.

Appalachian RC&D's Volunteermatch is an Innovative Way to Attract Volunteers

by Dimple Geesling, State Earth Team Coordinator

Appalachian RC&D Council has set an example to recruit volunteers that I would encourage all Field Offices and other RC&D Councils to follow if possible. If you would like to have volunteers that are interested in working on specific programs or in your own area, check out the Volunteermatch.org website. The site has been around and available for quite some time, and would be worth your time to visit.

Appalachian RC&D is the first in TN to use this website to recruit volunteers and a special thanks to Kris Hinds and Roy Settle for their good work in this effort. The Appalachian RC&D Council created a free profile on www.Volunteermatch.org requesting volunteers for specific projects and programs. They received several high quality responses, and they brought onboard some new volunteers as a result. Roy says they have had other responses that did not pan out and from folks who never got back in touch after the first time, but he says the trade-off is worth it. He is very excited about the responses that have resulted in several new and productive volunteers. Congratulations, Roy and Kris, and thanks for the tip!

Rusty Walker Named Citizen of the Week

Giles County District Conservationist Rusty Walker was named "Citizen of the Week" by the *Pulaski Citizen* newspaper on February 5th. In an article headlined "Where's That Rusty Guy? I Need Help," the newspaper highlighted Rusty's service to Giles County landowners. The report said Rusty "has been instrumental in helping local farmers with Best Management Practices (BMPs) through funding such as EQIP, WHIP, and many others."

Rusty was nominated for the other honor by his coworkers, Kris Bailey and Carla Potts. Bailey told the paper that Rusty is always helping people. "It doesn't matter if it is a farmer who needs help with how to fence off a field, poultry farmer trying to dispose of waste or a student doing a research paper, Rusty is there to help."

Rusty says he was surprised but pleased with the honor. He and his wife, Myra, live in Giles County with their daughters, Stephanie and Rachel.



TDA Forum Focus on Requirements for Farmer's Selling Directly to Consumers

Tennessee's 4th Annual Farmers Market Forum will be held March 31 at the Smith County Agriculture Complex in Carthage. The event's focus is opportunities and requirements for producers who plan to sell their farm products directly to the consumer.

The event is free of charge, sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Registration for the day's program, which includes lunch, opens at 8:30 a.m. The program begins at 9 a.m. and concludes at 4:30 p.m.

Announcement for 2009 TACD Convention

Farm Credit Services of Mid-America announced that starting next year, it will sponsor the TACD Conservation Farmer of the Year award. The contest will be sponsored by Farm Credit Services of Mid-America at the county, area, district, and state levels. County winners will receive a plaque and \$250; Area winners will get a plaque and \$500; Division level winners will receive a plaque and \$750; the State winner will get a plaque and \$1000. Rules for nomination and judging entries will be released soon.



Highlights of the 64th Annual TACD Convention

Conservationists from all across Tennessee gathered in Jackson February 24-26, 2008 for the 64th annual Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts. About 50 NRCS employees were among the participants who heard the keynote address from 4th District Congressman Lincoln Davis, who is himself a former Soil Scientist.

Congressman Davis, who has a degree in agronomy and owns a beef cattle farm with his brother, spoke about the needs facing rural America and rural Tennessee, calling the Farm Bill “the best bargain for American consumers that can be provided.” Davis provided an update on the status of the 2008 Farm Bill which has yet to be approved and signed into law. He said he and other members of Congress have a duty to conserve the soil and provide needed services to farmers. Congressman Davis is the only member of the Tennessee Congressional delegation to serve on the House Agriculture Committee.



Barry Lake, TACD President, presents Keynote Speaker Congressman Lincoln Davis with a basket of Tennessee products, following his keynote address.



Congressman Lincoln Davis and Kevin Brown, State Conservationist



Barry Lake, TACD President, presents Ken Givens, Commissioner of Agriculture, with a basket of Tennessee products.



(L-R) Danny Sells, TACD Executive Director; Roy Gillis, National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Board Member; Barry Lake, TACD President; Phylis Vandevere, NACD Regional Representative; Steve Robinson, NACD President-Elect; Kevin Brown, State Conservationist.



Roy Gillis, NACD Board Member, and RuAnn Jones, outgoing President of TCDEA, enjoy the evening entertainment at the closing banquet.



64th Annual TACD Convention Award Winners

TACD recognized outstanding conservation efforts in Tennessee by presenting several

TACD Poster Contest Winners

K-1ST GRADE

1st Place--Jalen S. Smith, 1st Grade, McMinnville

2nd Place--Sydney B. Bouldin, 1st Grade, Spencer

2ND-3RD GRADE

1st Place--Auburn Lynn Payne, 3rd Grade, Morris Chapel

2nd Place--Destiny Nicole Baxter, 3rd Grade, Adamsville

4TH-6TH GRADE

1st Place--Cannon Harber Curtis, 5th Grade, Chapel Hill

2nd Place--Isaac T Barkely, 5th Grade, Telford

7th -9TH GRADE

1st Place--Trey Cash, 9th Grade, Bolivar

2nd Place--Kendra Lynette Carey, 8th Grade, Crossville

10TH-12TH GRADE

1st Place--John Erik Neal, 11th Grade, Crossville

2nd Place--Christen Elizabeth Plunk, 10th Grade, Bolivar



First grader Jalen S. Smith of McMinnville was the first place winner in the TACD Poster Contest's K-1st grade category.

Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts Award Winners Bucky Edmondson, a Land Planning Process Specialist in Watershed Operations at the Tennessee Valley Authority, announced the Conservation District of the Year award which is sponsored annually by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and TACD.

•Conservation District of the Year

—Blount County Soil Conservation District

- John P. Davis, Jr., Chairman
- Albert Coning, Vice Chairman
- Mary Gentry, Board Member
- David Fugate, Secretary/Treasurer
- Rob Walker, Board Member
- Terron Hillsman, District Conservationist of the Year
- Sandy Gregory, District Coordinator
- Erich Henry, Soil Conservationist

•District Cooperator of the Year—George Smartt, Warren County

•Tennessee Conservation District Employee Association Employee of the Year—Sara Steelman, Coffee County SCD

•Conservation Educator of the Year—Ann Cherry, Hardeman County

•Special Recognition for Outstanding Service to TACD—Jeanne Eastham, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

2007 Earth Team Award Winners

•Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator of the Year—Lorella Jennings, Fentress County

•RC&D of the Year—Appalachian RC&D Council, Roy Settle, Coordinator

•Individual Award—Raymond Cooper, Cannon County



Tenth grader Christen Elizabeth Plunk won 2nd place in the TACD Poster Contest 10th-12th grade category. She accepted her award from poster contest coordinator Donna Kitts.



Bucky Edmondson, TVA Land Planning Process Specialist, presented the Conservation District of the Year Award.