

Current Developments



USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

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April 2003

From the
Office of the Tennessee
State Conservationist



Spring has arrived in Tennessee, and we as NRCS Employees and Tennesseans have much to celebrate...

We can celebrate our beautiful State and our abundant natural resources that sustain life for everyone —and especially during Earth Week and on Earth Day...

We can celebrate our Earth Team Volunteers who contribute not only their time, but also their expertise, ideas, and enthusiasm. National Volunteer Week has been designated this year on April 27-May 3. Please be sure to recognize and do something special for your volunteers.

We can celebrate our Agency and its employees. In Tennessee, NRCS will soon be recognizing Certified Conservation Planners across the State. Our employees, already widely known for their professionalism and expertise “went the extra mile” to receive additional training to become certified...

Upcoming Events

- April 27-May 3, 2003 - National Volunteer Week
- April 30-May 1, 2003 - State Envirothon, Cedars of Lebanon State Park, Lebanon, TN
- May 5-9, 2003 - Give A Hoot For Kids Week, Ooltewah, TN (near Chattanooga)
- May 9, 2003 - Public Service Recognition Day
- May 2003 - National Wetlands Month
- May 30-June 1, 2003 - Ducks Unlimited Great Outdoors Festival, Memphis, TN

Although this is a very exciting time and a time to celebrate, it is also a time that is very stressful and trying for some of our employees. External forces over which we have no control, such as competitive sourcing, potential field office closures, and budget uncertainties are management issues with which we are currently dealing. It is in times like this that we need to remain confident in our own expertise and abilities. Continue to do the best job you can possibly do, and try not to be concerned too much with these issues. Realize, too, that the management team in Tennessee and others are dealing with these issues in a thorough and caring manner.

I would like to personally thank each of you for your hard work and extra efforts. Let's continue to carry out our jobs with professionalism and commitment as we assist Tennessee landowners and other customers.

JAMES W. FORD
State Conservationist



Front row sitting - (l to r) Dr. Jack Britt and NRCS Chief Bruce Knight. Back row standing (l to r) Dr. Gary Cunningham, Associate Administrator, CSREES; James Ford, NRCS State Conservationist, Tennessee; Dr. Charles Norman, dean, UT Agricultural Extension Service; and Dr. Robert Burns, designated technical leader, UT Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning Certification Program.

NRCS Signs Technical Service Provider Agreement with The University of Tennessee...At a ceremony held on April 9, 2003 in Washington D.C, NRCS Chief Bruce Knight signed a TSP memorandum of understanding with The University of Tennessee. Those present from UT included: Dr. Jack Britt, vice president, University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture; Dr. Charles Norman, dean, University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service; Dr. Gary Cunningham, Associate Administrator, CSREES; and Dr. Robert T. Burns, designated technical leader, University of Tennessee's Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) Certification Program.

Also, attending were Congressman Jim Duncan, from the Second Congressional District in Tennessee; representatives of Senators Bill Frist and Lamar Alexander, and others. Tennessee NRCS State Conservationist James W. Ford served as Master of Ceremonies for the event.

The three-year agreement allows the UT Agricultural Extension Service to recommend certified nutrient management specialists in manure and wastewater handling and storage, nutrient management and land treatment practices as USDA-NRCS technical service providers. These providers must perform work that meets USDA-NRCS standards and specifications for effective nutrient management.

Southeast Region Conservation Partnership Hall of Fame

Established...“Over the past 70 years people have made many contributions to conservation in the Southeast Region. Some have spent a lifetime in conservation and have made major contributions. These individuals should be recognized for their contributions.” says Charles Adams, NRCS Southeast Regional Conservationist.

The Conservation Hall of Fame recognizes and honors conservation partnership employees, retirees, and other individuals in the Southeast Region who have devoted much of their life and have made major contributions to conservation at the state, region or national level.

The deadline for nominations is May 9. Nomination packets are available from the following:

- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Resource Conservation and Development Councils, and
- State Soil and Water Conservation Commissions

The first induction ceremony is being planned for June 30, 2003, in Point Clear, Alabama during the Southeast Regional NACD (National Association of Conservation Districts) Meeting.

NRCS Soil Scientists Discover New Soils in the Smokies...Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Scientists from Tennessee and North Carolina are currently surveying all soils in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and have discovered types of soil not previously known to science!

The project's goal is to generate detailed, digital maps of the soils in the park as they relate to various landscapes. Teams of soil scientists working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and based in Sevierville and Waynesville, N.C., have been working on the survey for four years and expect to be finished by 2007. The soil survey is at about the halfway point, having mapped 260,000 acres in the park.

In addition to the soil survey, there are other scientists surveying all life forms in the park, officially called an All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI).

And just as the ATBI already has uncovered dozens of species new to science, the soil survey so far has identified 21 soil types, some of which probably occur in the park and nowhere else.

“Each soil has had its own history. Like a river, a mountain, a forest, or any natural thing, its present condition is due to the influences of many things and events of the past.” --from The Soils That Support Us by Charles E. Kellogg (1902-1980) soil scientist, leader, and administrator.

“This is the most comprehensive soil survey we’ve done,” says Anthony Kheil, NRCS Soil Scientist, Sevierville, Tennessee, “Nowhere do you get the range of soils you find in the Park, and that comes from the combination of elevation, geology and climate you only get in the Smokies.”

For additional information, read full story that appeared in the Knoxville News-Sentinel...

http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/gs_news/article/0,1406,KNS_392_1869364,00.html

USDA Secretary Veneman Announces CRP Signup

Dates...Speaking on Earth Day 2003 from a farm in Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman said, “The CRP general sign-up will be held from May 5 through May 30. Producers can sign up at local USDA service centers across the nation. The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to maintain CRP enrollment up to 39.2 million acres. Aside from the general sign-up, CRP’s continuous sign-up program will be ongoing.

USDA has reserved two million acres for the continuous sign-up program, which represents the most environmentally desirable and sensitive land. USDA is making a special effort to help enhance wildlife habitats and air quality by setting aside 500,000 acres for bottomland hardwood tree planting. Continuous sign-up for hardwood planting will start after the general sign-up.

Current participants with contracts expiring this fall, about 1.5 million, can make new contract offers. Contracts awarded under this sign-up will become effective either at the beginning of the next fiscal year, Oct. 1, 2003, or the following year, Oct. 1, 2004, whichever the producer chooses. One other general sign-up will be offered through 2007.”

For additional information visit the following website:”<http://www.usda.gov/news/releases/2003/04/0132.htm>.



Join us in Nashville for the Second National Grazing Lands Conference December 7-10, 2003.

For additional information, visit the GLCI website at: www.glci.org/



Arts Trail Mini-Grants Merge Local Arts and Nature Based Recreation
The Appalachian RC&D Council is offering Mini-Grant funding for Arts groups again in 2003. In 2002 8 projects were funded in the region, ranging from

Classical Music to Reggae to Bluegrass as well as nature crafts, fine art and pioneer cooking and tradecraft. Projects funded for 2003 include wildlife viewing and painting, sheep poetry, art shows, family art classes, story telling, music and much more. A special "Take a Walk on the Arts Trail" logo was commissioned and used on posters, websites, news articles, and 15,000 rack cards to publicize all events.

The Arts Trail Mini-Grant program is designed to enhance public knowledge, understanding and appreciation by providing access to the arts in a natural setting, while promoting tourism. Both arts and tourism are among America's fastest growing industries. The mini-grants offered under this program require the grant recipient to host their event in an outdoor venue that is primarily green space and trees, such as a Greenways, Trails, Local or State Parks or National Forest. The events considered for these mini-grants include Visual Arts, Performance Arts, Classes or Workshops and Heritage Arts. Grants are offered to organizations in Carter, Cocke, Greene, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington Counties in Northeast Tennessee. The Johnson City Area Arts Council provides technical assistance to ensure artistic content and quality to the effort. The USDA-Forest Service in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts along with the Harris Fund for Washington County—East Tennessee Foundation, provides funding for this effort.

Tennessee's Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council Hosts Roadbank Maintenance Workshop...The Chickasaw-Shiloh RC&D Council area recently hosted a Roadbank Maintenance workshop. Working in cooperation with the Tennessee Valley Authority, Hardin County Road Department and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, sixty-five erosion control specialists were presented with an alternative means to erosion control. The seminar focused on spot treating problem areas while leaving existing vegetation intact. Traditional means of treatment required the entire site to be graded before treatment could begin. By leaving existing vegetation and only spot treating problem areas, success rates are greatly enhanced.

Gearing Up Emergency Services in Clinch-Powell RC&D Area...
Clinch-Powell Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and Enterprise Community joined together to improve the capabilities of Volunteer Fire Departments (VFD's) across the five-county RC&D area. In direct response to needs expressed in a broad-based public participation process, the RC&D and EC developed a strategy for how to best help the numerous VFD's in the region with very limited dollars. After much research and discussion with firefighters, a strategy was developed to offer a challenge cost-share program with VFD's for the purchase of full sets of Bunker (Turn Out) Gear. VFD's have volunteer firefighters willing to serve but have no safety gear to equip the firefighters. On average, there are fewer than three sets of approved Bunker Gear per department.

Offering a challenge cost-share program to departments allowed use of bulk purchasing to obtain a discount price per set of gear that would not have been possible for departments purchasing on an individual basis. Each department received a per set cost of \$1,200 for only \$400 after the bulk discount and EC cost share.

RC&D also provided direct assistance to 25 VFD's in accessing FEMA grant funds. In FY 2001 we wrote 20 grants on behalf of VFD's in the region. In 2002, we provided hands on training to aid VFD's write their own grants as required on-line. This direct assistance produced 10 grants to 9 VFD's in the region including 1
(Continued on Page 6)

NRCS Busy Assisting Landowners in West Tennessee...

Lauderdale County, Tennessee -- Tennessee NRCS Employees Richard Cooke, Paul McQuade and Dwaine Johnston met with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians on Tribal Land to discuss services offered by USDA NRCS. Details of programs and services available were presented to the group. Information was also provided concerning employment through the STAR Program, the Volunteer Program, and the Student Trainee Program.

Weakley County, Tennessee -- In 2002, NRCS contacted minority landowner Hoover Nunley informing him that a cost-share program was available. Nunley decided to participate in the State Agricultural Resources Cost-Share Program in the spring of 2002. A grade control structure was constructed that benefited 13 acres on his farm. This structure also eliminated sheet erosion in a neighbor's field. In addition, this grade control structure has a permanent pool for livestock watering.

Mark Carroll, NRCS District Conservationist, discussed the possibilities available to Nunley during the planning interview and while walking over the farm with him. Carroll discussed the availability of cost share that the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) had to offer. Nunley decided to convert two crop fields to pastureland in the fall of 2003 with the cost share available through the program.

The cropland conversion of 16.1 acres will result in approximately 189 tons of soil saved. Nunley will have 29.1 acres of land benefited by the end of 2003. These benefited acres do not count his neighbor's bottomland crop field that is also being protected.

Hardeman County, Tennessee -- Vernon Henderson recently constructed a livestock pond on his farm near Middleton, Tennessee in Hardeman County as a part of his Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract.

Mr. Henderson had wanted to do rotational grazing, but had only one pond for his livestock. Through EQIP, Mr. Henderson was able to cross fence his farm and add another pond so that he can begin intensive, rotational grazing. The cost sharing on the fencing and pond made it possible for him to do something he had wanted to do for a long time, but was not able to do on his own.

Fayette County, Tennessee -- Billy Montague, of Fayette County, Tennessee is both a cotton farmer and avid rabbit hunter. He decided to combine his two passions, by planting filter strips on his home farm. Mr. Montague signed a contract for Conservation Reserve Program filter strips along two main drainage ditches. A mixture of five native warm season grasses were established in early April of this year. He received an incentive payment from the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency for planting this mixture. Mr. Montague says that besides noticing more rabbits in the area, the development of wildlife habitat, improvement of water quality, and his annual income rental payments, that this program fit his farming operation perfectly.

Gearing Up (continued)...

of only 200 fire truck grants in the country. Total FEMA grant awards to date in the area is \$424,767.

Because of the increased focus on emergency services in the region, the newly formed United Way in Grainger County designated emergency services as one of their areas of giving. Because VFD's did not have 501C3 status, RC&D serves as the pass-thru agency for those departments. These first year funds have already resulted in \$10,300 in badly needed new operating funds for VFD's.

At the request of VFD's, RC&D is now working on an effort to determine the feasibility of group insurance, equipment swaps, bulk purchasing, region-wide training, etc. The increased dialogue among the departments as a result of RC&D efforts is encouraging. The increased cooperation across county boundaries is exciting.

This has been a highly gratifying project. While we began our work in this project pre-9/11, the value has certainly been elevated post-9/11. More than 200 firefighters now have safety gear thanks to our efforts. It is the least we could do for those volunteers who put their lives on the line for the public's safety.

The total project value is \$591,163. Benefits include:
25 Volunteer Fire Departments trained in FEMA grant writing,
9 Volunteer Fire Departments receive FEMA grants,
17 Volunteer Fire Departments receive EC grants
200+ new sets of Bunker Gear purchased
1 new pumper truck
6 Volunteer Departments receive United Way donations for operating funds.



NRCS Assists Native American Landowner... Greg Taylor, NRCS District Conservationist, Centerville, TN recently assisted Ms. Venus Tyler with information about building a pond on her property for fish and wildlife benefits. She works hard to conserve and protect the resources on her land. Tyler is a Native American who has recorded music and makes jewelry and pottery. She is proud of her ancestry and gladly makes presentations to various groups and students in Lewis, Perry and Hickman Counties.

Stones River National Battlefield Interagency Agreement To Increase Native Plants... Recently, Larry Robeson, NRCS District Conservationist and Cory Hodge, Soil Conservationist of the NRCS Field Office in Murfreesboro met with Terri Hogan, Ecologist with the National Park Service along with John Vandevender, Manager, Warren Haynes, Technician, and Dan Pinkham, Technician from the Alderson Plant Material Center in West Virginia. The meeting was held at the Stones River National Battlefield to start up a five-year interagency agreement between the National Park Service and the Alderson Plant Material Center. Over the next five years the (PMC) staff will collect, evaluate, grow, and increase native plant materials to revegetate disturbed areas on the Battlefield.

Neal Brothers of Wilson County Landowners use Common Sense Conservation Approach... The Neal Brothers of Wilson County have been farming all their lives. The operation includes an extensive cow/calf operation and tobacco. The Neal's are practical producers.

Perry Neal stated, "We run as many animals as we can, but we rest our grass to get the most production from both our grass and cattle." Five years ago the Neal's began a project with NRCS to improve the profitability of their operation using low input common sense techniques.

A "Pasture Walk" was held recently at the Neal Farm to give other landowners an opportunity to see these techniques and hear discussions on rotational grazing, alternative water systems and other practices. The event was hosted by the Neal Family, along with NRCS, Wilson County SCD, and others.. Over 100 people attended the event.

Jackson County Landowner Wins Progressive Farmer Wildlife Habitat Contest! Jackson County Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) contract participant Edward Clark was chosen as 1 of 4 winners in the Progressive Farmer Magazine wildlife habitat contest. The magazine flew Mr. Clark to Fort Worth, Texas for the awards ceremony and presented him with a \$1300 Benilla Shotgun. Progressive farmer magazine came to Jackson County and took pictures of his WHIP practices, as well as his other practices. He gave them details of his WHIP contract and the WHIP Program and related to them the technical assistance he received from Phillip Dixon, NRCS District Conservationist.

NRCS/Soil Conservation District Assists With Senior Day on the Trail for Cheatham County Citizens... Cheatham County Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil Conservation District recently joined the Cheatham County Friends of the Trail group to sponsor Senior Day on the Trail. The participants enjoyed a hayride and picnic at the native garden and comfort station, Approximately 75 senior citizens attended.

The University School of Nashville Receives Assistance with Wetland for Wastewater Treatment... Cheatham County's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil Conservation District personnel partnered with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation recently to assist The University School of Nashville. The cooperative effort was to select and plant wetland plants for a wetland that has been established at the school for wastewater treatment.



Firewise Controlled Burn Held at Yuchi Wildlife Management Area...

Southeast Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council and the Rhea County Soil Conservation District recently sponsored a Firewise Prescribed Burning Workshop with an actual controlled burn demonstration. The workshop was held March 4, 2003 at the Yuchi Wildlife Management Area in Rhea County. The event was made possible by a Firewise grant administered through the Southeast Tennessee RC&D Council. Approximately 70 persons attended the workshop that included speakers from the Tennessee Division of Forestry, Rhea County Soil Conservation District, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Southeast Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development Council, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service.

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) Provides Assistance to

Landowners With Tornado Damage... Numerous Cumberland County farms were intensively damaged from a tornado that swept through the county on November 10, 2002. There were a total of four (4) fatalities from the deadly storm. Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency personnel toured the damaged areas and surveyed the damages. They submitted a request to FSA for Emergency Conservation Program funds to assist landowners with debris removal and fence replacement. Cumberland County was approved for a total of \$129,000 in ECP funding to assist landowners repair damages.

Status of ECP cleanup work at the present time is as follows: A total of 70 applications have been received. NRCS personnel have made site visits and completed cost estimates for the landowners. There were 58 applications approved for funding. Landowners are currently working to remove debris from farmland and replace fencing.

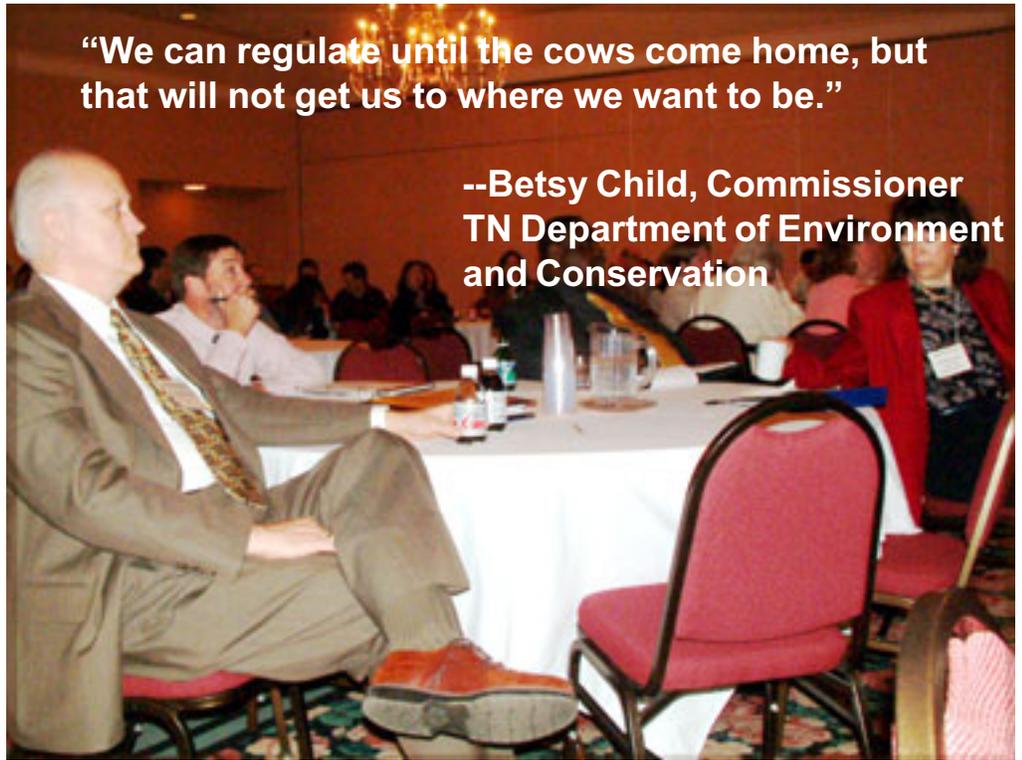


NRCS Assists City of Morristown To Form "Tree Board"

The Morristown NRCS Field Office has been working with the City of Morristown to help form a "Tree Board" to improve the use, care, and maintenance of the trees located in city. Through this effort, people with a wide variety of expertise have come together to develop plans for the effort. So far, several projects have been accomplished including planting trees along the stream banks in Fred Miller Park, the development of a greenway trail to connect two city parks, the approval of a grant to finance an arboretum, and the development of a pamphlet describing the 25 types of trees recommended for planting in the area. Also, the Smoky Mountain Resource Conservation and Development Council working in partnership with NRCS has purchased a tree cooler to store seedlings for projects. All of these things are helping improve the quality of life in the Morristown area.

“Working Together for Measurable Water Quality Results” was the theme of the Second Annual Tennessee Watershed Roundtable held March 27-28, 2003, in Nashville, Tennessee. State Conservationist James Ford served on a “Leadership Panel” along with the heads of other state and Federal agencies. Assistant State Conservationist Donald Dotson served on an “Assistance Panel” and discussed the 2002 Farm Bill.

Watershed success stories were presented in three concurrent sessions entitled Land Trusts and Local Watershed Initiatives, Farmland Protection and the Farm Bill, and Impaired Waters Recovery. Breakout sessions were held to discuss Tennessee watersheds where success and restoration can occur and to begin a dialogue and cooperative strategies and actions to restore Tennessee watersheds.



“We can regulate until the cows come home, but that will not get us to where we want to be.”

--Betsy Child, Commissioner TN Department of Environment and Conservation



Leadership Panel - (left to right) Betsy Child, Commissioner, TN Dept. of Environment and Conservation; Terry Oliver, Deputy Commissioner, TN Department of Agriculture; James Ford, State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Christine Olsenius, Executive Director, Southeast Watershed Forum; Ed Cole, Chief, Environment/Planning, Tennessee Department of Transportation; Louis Buck, State Executive Director, Farm Service Agency; and Doug Goddard, Exec. Dir., TN Co. Commissioners Assn.



Todd Reed, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, is shown sharing successful activities in the Bullrun Creek Restoration Project.



Charles Roberts, Assistant State Conservationist, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, is shown serving as Moderator.



(At the Podium) John McClurkan, Administrator, Water Resources, Tennessee Department of Agriculture and Chairperson of Tennessee Watershed Roundtable Planning Committee.

The Tennessee NRCS Civil Rights Committee Advisory Meeting was held on February 18-19, 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. Those present on Day One included: Gloria York, Mark Roberts, Kandace Dye, Christy Luna, Mike Hart, James Brown, Jr., Carol Chandler, Paul McQuade, Langston Wood, Terron Hillsman, and Susan Hopkins. Those present on Day Two were: Gloria York, Mark Roberts, Kandace Dye, Christy Luna, James Brown, Jr., Carol Chandler, Paul McQuade, Langson Wood, Terron Hillsman, Dwight Bell, Susan Hopkins, James Ford, and Will Nesby

Highlights of the meeting and actions agreed upon are as follows:

1. Monitor the Mentoring Program this year. CR Committee will request evaluation reports from mentors & mentees about the program and draft a summary report that highlights the success of the program based on evaluations. Contact mentors/mentees by July 1, and give them a deadline to submit evaluations back to committee by August 1. Mike Hart volunteered to perform this task for the committee.
2. Committee discussed the importance of follow-up on employee responses to Mr. Ford's recent survey. Committee will ask Mr. Ford to make certain employees are informed regarding the survey results and corrective actions to be taken.
3. Post highlights of CR meetings &

Chairman's Comments to NRCS-TN website, and include in Current Developments publication. Kandace Dye volunteered to perform this task for committee.

4. Committee discussed the possibility of writing a report of the issues raised and resolutions reached regarding employee concerns addressed by Committee during CR meeting. Send copy of report to all employees.

5. At the request of the State Conservationist, CR Committee will develop a Management Development Program for the state. Include Job Shadowing in the program. Subcommittee was formed: Terron Hillsman, Gloria York, James Brown, Jr. and Christy Luna. Subcommittee will develop criteria and selection process for project. Committee will report on project at the May CR meeting

6. CR Committee by-laws were reviewed by all members and advisors.

7. Draft APO for FY-2003 was reviewed and revised.

8. Diversity video was reviewed for the first time. Committee agreed that the video did not have to be limited to fifteen minutes as originally suggested; it is more important to ensure that it included a good variety of customers, employees, and partnerships.

9. Committee discussed employees' concerns regarding freedom of speech to speak out about the budget, management decisions, and other subjects.

10. Committee discussed low employee morale caused by increasing concern for job security, management policies, budget talks, and new concepts such as outsourcing and technical service providers.

11. Committee has concerns about lack of visibility of CR committee in the state and how few employees contact committee members regarding their issues and/or concerns. CR committee needs to do a better job of tracking and monitoring employee comments, and following up with Mr. Ford to seek possible resolution to issues.

Tennessee Farm Numbers Decline...

According to the Tennessee Agricultural Statistics Service, the number of farms for 2002 was 90,000, a decrease of 1,000 from the previous year. A farm is defined as "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the year."

NRCS District Conservationist James Brown Selected 2003 Public Service Recognition Week Employee of the Year!

Public Service Recognition Week (May 5-11, 2003), celebrated the first Monday through Sunday in May since 1985, is a time set aside each year to honor the men and women who serve America as federal, state and local government employees. Throughout the nation and around the world, public employees use the week to educate citizens about the many ways in which government serves the people and how government services make life better for all of us. The theme for the 2003 PSRW celebration is "Celebrating Government Workers Nationwide."

In Tennessee, participating agencies select one employee who sets an example of an outstanding public servant. In the Middle Tennessee area District Conservationist James G. Brown, Jr., Springfield Field Office, was selected for the "2003 Public Service Recognition Week Employee of the Year." Following are highlights of his accomplishments:

During James' years of federal service his awards and accomplishments have included:

Four Exceptional Performance Awards, two Superior Performance Awards, two Outstanding Awards, 1989 NRCS Employee of Month and he served as the first Black Emphasis Program Manager in Tennessee. Other accomplishments have included: Civil Rights Counselor for NRCS Tennessee, completion of the NRCS Tennessee Managerial Development Program, Certificate of Commendation from the Middle Tennessee Executive Association 1989 and 1995, Certificate of Achievement 1999 from Tennessee State University's Department of Agriculture as an Outstanding Alumnus, a member of International and National Who's Who in Executive and Professionals, and he currently serves on the NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee in Tennessee.

Community service work has included: former chairman of the Robertson County United Way Board of Directors, former chairman of the Robertson County YMCA, and 2001 Robertson County YMCA Volunteer of the Year Award. He graduated and serves on the Robertson County Leadership Committee and currently serves as secretary of the Robertson County Scholarship and Community Foundation. He serves as vice president of I Care, Inc. of Robertson County, and is vice chairman of the Robertson County Senior Center Board of Directors. He serves as a Mason, Deacon at First Missionary Baptist Church in Springfield. He and his wife, Jurine, have two children, Trinika, Anthony, and one grandson, Desmond.

Multiple Sclerosis and Lupus Information Available...Langston Wood, Disability Program Manager, has information about multiple sclerosis (MS) and Lupus that may be helpful to some employees and their families. The MS information packets contain a list of publications from the National MS Society, and information about how the disease affects the body, drugs used to treat the disease, and work place accommodations for people with MS. The information on Lupus is a Quiz and Answer Sheet. Anyone interested in getting a copy of any of this information should contact Langston by e-mail at langston.wood@tn.usda.gov.

Coming Soon - Flexible Spending Accounts For Health Care...Later this fiscal year OPM is expected to announce the availability of "flexible spending accounts" (FSA) through which employees can use pre-tax allotments to pay for certain health care expenses that are not reimbursed by any other source and not claimed on the participant's income tax return. The maximum amount an employee may set aside is yet to be determined, but will probably be in the range of \$2000 - \$3000 per year. The employer will deduct these contributions from the employee's pay throughout the year and deposit them into the employee's FSA account. The employee can then draw upon the FSA account for reimbursement as he incurs eligible expenses. As more information becomes available, we will share it with you.

Compensatory Time (in lieu of paid overtime)...Employees who have elected (or been directed) to earn compensatory time in lieu of paid overtime should keep track of the time earned and *use it before you lose it!* Comp time must be used no later than the year following the year in which it was earned, and comp time should be used before annual leave.

Henderson County Wins Earth Team of the Year!

Henderson County Soil Conservation District was the TACD/NRCS Earth Team Award winner for FY02. The award was presented by State Conservationist James Ford and TACD President Roy Gillis at the Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting on February 25 in Johnson City, Tennessee.

The Annual Farm Fest is an example of a successful Earth Team activity in Henderson County. The Henderson County SCD supervisors, NRCS employees, District Secretary Rita Smith, and Earth Team volunteers devote many hours in carrying out the annual event. Approximately 500 children attend Farm Fest that is held each year in May. Demonstrations on erosion control, water quality, Backyard Conservation, and many other activities help to teach children about the importance of agriculture and conservation.

Without the dedication of the Henderson County Earth Team, activities and events such as this would not be possible. The Earth Team includes NRCS employees, District Employees and District Supervisors, and Earth Team Volunteers. This event and others including Tree Day, help to teach many people in the community about the importance of conservation of our natural resources.



In the photo above, Rita Smith, District Secretary, Henderson County Soil Conservation District, is shown accepting the TACD/NRCS Earth Team of the Year award for the Henderson County Earth Team. The award is presented annually at the TACD Convention to the Earth Team who contributes significantly to the natural resources program in the county.

What Volunteers Can Do...

Earth Team Volunteers perform a wide array of jobs to help carry out natural resource goals and objectives. Following are just a few activities on which Earth Team volunteers can provide assistance:

- Assist with implementation of conservation practices,
- Make natural resource inventories.
- Assist with conservation tours and exhibits,
- Take photographs,
- Write articles and success stories,
- Speak to community groups,

- Produce artwork and publications.
- Assist with office support services including computer data entry, typing, filing, computer programming, and conservation information, and many other activities. They also contribute enthusiasm and ideas and help get projects started.

If you need assistance in recruiting volunteers, contact your Area Volunteer Coordinator, or State Volunteer Coordinator Jane Counts.

**National Volunteer Week
April 27 - May 3, 2003**



Camden, TN 6th Graders Celebrate Earth Day!



“The President has said many times that if you are an owner of the land, every day is Earth Day.” --Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman

Students at Camden Junior High School in Benton County celebrated Earth Day last week by planting two White Dogwood trees. Mrs. Kee’s sixth grade class “got their hands dirty” when they helped set two dogwood trees in the school’s recess area, just outside their classroom window. The Benton County Soil Conservation District sponsored the tree planting. James Woodall and Curt McDaniel, NRCS conservationists in Benton County, provided assistance in setting the trees. “They were really excited about being involved and helping plant the dogwoods,” commented Curt McDaniel, Soil Conservationist, on the eagerness of the students to participate. Mrs. Kee’s class has reported that the trees “are growing good and getting tall.”

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