

Current Developments

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From the Office of the Tennessee
State Conservationist



As we enter into the holidays, we like to reflect on the past year and give thanks for our families, a bountiful harvest, and other blessings. Yet, some may not think about the dedicated people at this time who serve in a leadership role to take care of our resources so our land can remain productive and so we can continue to enjoy a bountiful harvest and a quality environment.

In Tennessee, we have been fortunate in that we have had many leaders, both past and present, who have worked diligently in caring for our resources. There are many leaders in the state who were actively involved in the early days of conservation and even in organizing conservation districts. There are also those who have served in leadership roles both in the State Association (TACD) and the National Association (NACD) and who continue to support conservation efforts. We would like to dedicate this issue of Current Developments to these fine folks.

These leaders give freely of their time and serve unselfishly for all Tennesseans and for the quality of life that our citizens enjoy. It is appropriate during the holidays as we give thanks to also recognize these fine folks for their leadership and for helping to conserve, protect, and maintain our resources.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank each employee and volunteer and our conservation partners for their work and contributions this year, and I wish for each of you and yours...safe and happy holidays!

James Ford
State Conservationist

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GLCI Meeting Highlights

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Grazing Lands Conference Features Presentations By Successful Farmers and Ranchers!

More than 1,100 ranchers and other conservation leaders from all over the Nation gathered in Nashville on December 7-10, 2003, to focus on conserving natural resources on the nation's grazing lands at the Second National Conference on Grazing Lands.

Attendees gained invaluable knowledge on a wide variety of topics ranging from conservation easements and intensive grazing rotations to tracking livestock patterns through the use of GPS. Overall, the conference provided landowners information to help them conserve and protect natural resources on range and grasslands throughout the country, while at the same time keeping those lands productive for cattle, sheep and other grazing livestock.

"The fact that well over a thousand people traveled to Nashville for this conference is a clear indication of the increased interest in grazing lands," said Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce

Knight. "Grazing is finally being recognized as an important tool to achieve conservation objectives, rather than something that is bad for the environment.

The National Conference on Grazing Lands is sponsored through the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), a national coalition of agricultural organizations, conservation organizations and government agencies who recognize the need to keep the nation's rangelands productive, while conserving their resources for future generations.

Proceedings will be available from the conference, highlighting presentations by over 175 speakers on topics including wildlife livestock interactions, grazing and

endangered species, organic dairying, over-wintering livestock, grazing management on small acreages and much more.

Individuals interested in receiving a copy of the proceedings, or interested in learning more about GLCI can contact Monti Golla, administrator of the GLCI at 979-268-0980, or by e-mail at grazinglands@cox-internet.com.



Conservation Camp Educates Tomorrow's Leaders

Since 1994, approximately 7500 students from three East Tennessee counties have spent a day at Conservation Camp. "Conservation Camp is truly a partnership project," stated Roy Settle, RC&D Coordinator for the Appalachian RC&D. It couldn't happen without the cooperation of the Carter, Johnson, & Unicoi Soil Conservation Districts, NRCS and the myriad of other state, federal and local agencies and the support of a few true volunteers. Add to that mix, the planning, coordination and fundraising by the RC&D Council, and the presenters who actually teach the students, and you have a formula for success."

A presentation by Brad Jones, the naturalist at Johnson City's Winged Deer Park, taught them "butterflies are tough because they have to fly through high winds and predators," said Seth Kiser, a student from Happy Valley Elementary School.



Conservation Camp is a fun-filled day of learning activities for students.

This year's camp had 19 stations, featuring presentations on recycling, soil conservation and water quality. Students also learned about wildlife and waterfowl, aquatics, water quality and stream ecology, preventing forest fires and timber management.

Presenters include officials from the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U.S. Forest Service and volunteers like Roby and Mae McBride from the Washington County Ruritan Club.

Settle said the idea of the camp is to educate the next generation of "decision-makers" on the importance of conserving and protecting our natural resources. "These children will be members of the planning commission in 20 years," he said.

Buffalo/Duck River Earth Team Youth Group Receives Outstanding Youth Involvement Award

The Buffalo/Duck River RC&D Earth Team Youth Group was presented the 2003 Outstanding Youth Involvement Award at the annual RC&D meeting in Columbia.

The group, consisting of 10 to 15 members, was honored for outstanding community service to the RC&D and their community. The group has assisted with the maintenance of the Elephant Sanctuary for sick, injured and retiring elephants for the past six years. Their outreach efforts help secure local donations and create additional volunteer support for maintenance at the sanctuary.

The group assists with RC&D sponsored workshops, such as the Tennessee/Alabama Forestry Best Management Practice Workshop and tour. They participate in conservation education events at schools and help with the annual Farm/City Day program. They assist with registration, set up testing stations, and serve as photographers at the State Envirothon and the Buffalo/Duck River Regional Envirothon each year.



Pictured left or right: Jena Stilwell, Adrienne Guzy, Derek Englett and Krista Englett

Their dedication is apparent throughout their local community. For the past three years, they have conducted the 12 Days of Christmas program providing gifts to needy families. This effort involves contacting school officials for the names of families who need assistance, and raising funds to buy gifts for each individual in the family. Gifts are delivered incognito at night for 12 days leading up to Christmas. They have also helped improve housing for the elderly and families with low incomes.

"We are very proud of these young people for their outstanding service to the Buffalo/Duck River RC&D," stated Len Womack Jr., Council President. "They participate in projects that provide a significant benefit to the community."

Southeast Tennessee RC&D Award Winners

The Southeast TN RC&D Council and Area 3 TACD held their joint annual meeting on November 13, 2003 in Dayton. Guest speaker, Larry Blick (Assistant State Conservationist, and RC&D Program Manager) gave an update on RC&D activities across the state noting that two new RC&D areas are in the formation stage. Phil Cherry, TACD Liaison, gave an update on TACD activities.

The Southeast Tennessee RC&D recognized several people for their outstanding support and assistance to the RC&D. Award winners were:

10 Years of Volunteer Service – George Miller & Roy Bledsoe
20 Years of Volunteer Service – John Lee Downey
Rex Moses Distinguished Service Award – Pete Jennings
Outstanding Council Member – Joyce Green
Environmental Education Award – Shorty Beaty & Chris Gass
Distinguished Service Award – Alan Pigg USDA Forest Service, Atlanta
Outstanding Partnership Award – District 3 – TDA Division of Forestry
Volunteer of the Year – Amy Johnson
Special Recognition – Kathy Daugherty, Bill Dailey, Jerry Frady, Terry Gupton, Gary Moore, Randy Parnell, Dewitt Simerly, Fred Walker, Gloria York



Photo above: Earth Team Volunteers paint the fence at the Elephant Sanctuary in Lewis County.

Volunteers Assist at Elephant Sanctuary

Earth Team volunteers completed their 6th annual workday event at the renowned Elephant Sanctuary located in Lewis County. The sanctuary provides a home for the ever declining Asian elephant. Scott Blais, Facilities Director for the Elephant Sanctuary, provided the group updates on the sanctuary, including plans to construct an Education Center, another elephant barn, and a land expansion that will allow the sanctuary to take in African elephants.

Though the volunteers did not see elephants, Mr. Blais shared stories of the elephant's progression, noting that Tarra is hanging out with her girlfriends and Winkie is slowly learning to adjust to the dynamics of an elephant herd.

Upon arrival, one of the youth volunteers commented that he felt like he was going to Jurassic Park because of the enormously high and thick steel fencing. The group finds the work incredibly rewarding, just knowing they play a small part in giving these elephants a better life. And that is why they paint – to lend a hand and experience the satisfaction that comes from helping those in need.

Sharon Englett, Program Assistant with the Buffalo-Duck River RC&D, said “Volunteer work can be a positive experience for young people. They learn the sense of satisfaction that comes from giving. Additionally, volunteer work can be cited on college applications, resumes, and job applications.”

The Buffalo/Duck River RC&D Council provided t-shirts for the group of volunteers and treated them to dinner.

Upcoming Events

TACD Annual Convention Nashville Music City Sheraton For more information go to www.tnacd.org	February 29-March 2, 2004
NACD Annual Meeting Hilton Waikola Village, Hawaii For more information, go to www.nacdnet.org	February 2-5, 2004
State Envirothon Smithville, Tennessee For more information, contact any RC&D office	April 28-29, 2004

Father and Daughter Promote Agriculture at Career Crunch Event

Approximately 5,000 junior high school students attended the career day held by Chattanooga State Community College on November 18 and 19th. NRCS, along with other conservation partners like Scott's Farm Give-A-Hoot for Kids, Inc, setup a booth to provide information to students about careers in agriculture.

Bill Dailey, District Conservationist in Cleveland, not only had an opportunity to talk to students about careers in NRCS, he also had a chance to work side-by-side with his daughter Cathy, who is a senior in Agriculture at UT Knoxville. Cathy is an Ambassador for the College of Agriculture and provided students information about degrees available in the College of Agriculture.

Ag-in-the-Classroom in Cumberland County

The Cumberland County Soil Conservation District and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, in partnership with the Cumberland County Farm Bureau, participated in a county-wide Ag-in-the-Classroom for third graders in September.

Farm Bureau sponsors the event each year offering a variety of agriculture related tour stops including swine, food pyramid, sheep, machinery, poultry, beef, dairy, fruits and vegetables, forestry, environment, wildlife, soils, field crops, and bees.

NRCS and the Cumberland County Soil Conservation District set up a soil tunnel for the soil station. This year's theme was "Soil-We Can Not Grow Without It". Terry Lowe, District Supervisor; Lynn Carey, District Administrative Assistant; Jake Watson, Student Trainee; and Chester Bush, District Conservationist staffed the Soil Station and gave a brief presentation to the more than 500 third graders who attended the event.

This was a hands-on event for the third graders who got to feel the sand, silt, and clay soil textures. Students saw close-up the world of Edgar the Earth Worm as they crawled through the soil tunnel, which was a big hit with the students. Some of the teachers even got caught up in the excitement and crawled through the tunnel.

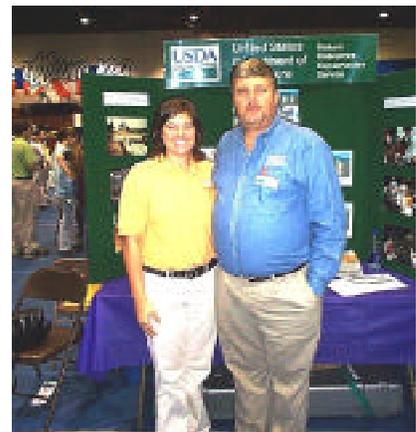


Photo above, l to r: Cathy and Bill Dailey at Career Crunch career day

Tennessee Envirothon has New Website

The Tennessee Envirothon has a new website - www.tnrkd.org
The site includes ALL study materials for Regional and State competitions in Tennessee. The materials are either printable PDF files or website links.

The site also has general information and info on Regional Events, dates and contact information. Prospective teams in counties not currently served by an RC&D can send an inquiry from the site to be assigned to a nearby event.

Shelby County Farmers Utilize EQIP

Like most farmers in Shelby County, the Sneed brothers have worked hard to comply and implement all phases of their conservation plan as required by the Farm Bill. The Sneeds have gone almost completely to no-till, using crop residue and cover crops and also to a crop rotation.

In the mid-nineties, the Sneed's noticed that the water that was coming off their farm was cleaner, but it was also causing head cuts to start forming in their fields where the excess water was going into the drainage ditches. Clean water's characteristic is to carry a silt load and this phenomenon is called hungry water by USGS. They applied for and received EQIP funds to install a grade control structure to control over 200 acres of drainage area to stop the head-cutting that was going into Royster Creek. Under this EQIP plan they also installed a field border and a grass waterway. The erosion on this rented farm has been controlled significantly with no-till, cover crops, crop residue use, and nutrient and pest management.

Because of the success on that farm, in 2003 they signed up again under EQIP for a farm on Hwy 14 and have requested two grade control structures to control head cutting that is going into Big Creek. They will sow a field border around their farm that will allow the cotton scout to get around the edge of their farms a lot easier in order to check the boll weevil traps.

Ray Sneed stated that he has been very pleased with how the structures have operated and how the program has benefitted not only the land that he owns, but also the land that he operates.

Lauderdale County Landowners Install EQIP Practices

Larry Olds, a Lauderdale County farm operator, had been watching the gully in his field get larger each year, but the size of the gully grew dramatically during the extremely wet fall in 2002. Concerned about the erosion problem, he contacted the NRCS staff at the Ripley Field Office for technical assistance and signed up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Through the EQIP, Mr. Olds installed a grade stabilization structure in accordance with the NRCS engineering design. Mr. Olds stated, "I am extremely pleased with how the installed grade stabilization structure has eliminated the gully erosion problem in my cropland field."

Arthur Bentley and the other staff of the NRCS Ripley Field Office have installed a large number of grade stabilization structures similar to the one on the Olds farm to treat erosion problems on the silty soils present in cropland fields in Lauderdale County.



Arthur Bentley, Soil Conservation Technician for the Natural Resources Conservation Service Ripley Field Office inspects the aluminum riser of a Grade Stabilization Structure being installed on Larry Olds farm in Lauderdale County.

Focus on the Field - Area 2

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Farmers Volunteer to Keep Cattle Out of Tim's Ford Lake

Water quality has been a major concern in the Tim's Ford watershed for a long time. Usually problems in a watershed make the news, but the Franklin County Soil Conservation District (SCD) has some *good* news about water quality.

Six local farmers volunteered to fence their livestock out of the lake and utilize an alternative water source. The combined efforts of J.M. Ballard, Larry Brazier, Wilburn Henderson, A.L. Shasteen, D.V. Solomon, and Allen Stephens resulted in 38,000 feet of lake property being fenced to exclude cattle.

Along with fencing, technical assistance was provided to install pipelines and water troughs on some farms. In some cases, wells and ponds were utilized or the grazing land was converted to hayland.

Wilburn Henderson said his cattle had previously had access to the lake for 60 years! When asked about the benefits of excluding the cattle from the lake, D.V. Solomon said, "It's not only going to help water quality but it's going to keep my cattle out of the undergrowth and I won't lose the occasional calf that sometimes wandered off and fell off the cliff into the lake."

The Franklin County Soil SCD administered a partnership between the Tennessee Valley Authority, Tennessee Department of Agriculture and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide assistance to



Alternative water source in Tim's Ford watershed.

these local landowners. TVA and TDA were responsible for financial assistance, while NRCS provided technical assistance.

Steve Abston and Doug Murphy-TVA, Brad Buckner-Franklin County SCD, and David Tapp and Mandy Silvey-NRCS helped plan and implement these projects.

USDA Project Helps Farmer Convert Waste into Organic Based Soil Conditioner

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade! We have all heard this phrase. But for Edmond Rollins and many other successful businessmen in our country's history, this is just a basic formula for success.

Edmond Rollins owns and operates Rollins Farms in southern Giles County, Tennessee. Rollins Farms is a very diversified family operated agri-business that consists of locally marketed cattle, honey, a breeder/layer poultry operation and R-Grow Soil Conditioner.

After construction of the poultry operation on his farm, Rollins was faced with a problem common to confined livestock facilities—too much manure!

Concern over the cost of incinerating mortality from the operation and the potential for environmental impacts from the

manure led Mr. Rollins to the local USDA Service Center. After meeting with the NRCS staff, Mr. Rollins decided to construct a compost/litter storage facility on his farm. After obtaining information about costshare programs available through the USDA that would assist in the construction of a waste management facility, he applied for assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program.

William (Rusty) Walker, NRCS conservationist met with Mr. Rollins on the farm to evaluate the waste problem. Additional resource concerns were discussed relating to nutrient management, the beef operation, grazing, soil quality, and erosion control. The final plan was approved by the NRCS and the conservation practices completed over a 5-year period by the Rollins family.

While working on the waste facility, Rollins began researching the marketability of organic soil conditioners. His hard work and determination led to the development of the R-Grow product, a composted natural material that is highly praised by home gardeners and organic based truck crop producers. Converting an overly abundant waste material into a commercial product marketed throughout the southeast wasn't easy. The cooperation of agricultural agencies like the NRCS, FSA, UT Extension and Tennessee Department of Agriculture can provide agri-businessmen like Mr. Rollins the assistance needed for success.

Does R-Grow work? Just ask local 4-Her Stephanie Walker. A quarter of a bag of R-Grow was all it took to produce her prize winning "Best of Show" pumpkin at the Giles County Fair.

Chinese Delegation Tours Conasauga River Project

The Commissioner of Soil and Water for China joined other Chinese delegates for a tour of the Conasauga River Watershed. The delegates were on a fact-finding mission to help them address water quality problems especially in the impoverished rural regions of China. The group had visited several sites across the United States prior to coming to this area.



Bill Dailey and Dr. George Smith with Chinese delegation.

Steve Rickerson, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Cherokee National Forest welcomed the group to Cleveland and gave them an overview of the Conasauga River watershed. The Conasauga River Watershed Alliance is recognized as one of the best examples of state, federal and local agencies and environmental groups working with communities and landowners to improve water quality and enhance the understanding of aquatic species biodiversity. Numerous partners and private landowners shared their story of the collaborative watershed stewardship program being implemented. The delegates had an opportunity to see and hear firsthand the principles of ecosystem restoration at work in the watershed.

The delegates toured the Cherokee National Forest where they were shown forest management practices along with best management practices installed on private land in the Conasauga River watershed. Bill Dailey, NRCS-Tennessee; Cindy Askew, NRCS-Georgia; Dr. George Smith, UT Agricultural Extension Service; and Shawn Clause, The Nature Conservancy told the delegates, with the assistance of an interpreter, about the Best Management Practices implemented in the Conasauga River Watershed. The group had an opportunity to see and learn about stream buffer practices, livestock exclusion, tree and shrub plantings, stream crossings, alternative water supplies, poultry litter and composting. "It was a rewarding experience to be involved with a group from another country, who has different political leadership, culture, and language, but still had the same interest and desire to conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources" stated Bill Dailey.

Dairy Waste Holding System in Bradley County

When Rex Calfee, Bradley County landowner, needed assistance to build a waste management system for a new dairy facility, he contacted the NRCS in Cleveland. Bill Dailey, district conservationist and Jason Miller, soil conservationist helped him get the financial and technical assistance he needed. Mr. Calfee used both the EQIP and the TDA cost share program.

After several farm visits and site reviews with soil core samples tested for permeability, a holding pond was sized and engineered by NRCS. A pond averaging 300' long and 250' feet wide with 16 feet of liquid storage was needed to meet the needs of a 600 cow operation needing 180 minimum days of storage. Several alternatives were looked at for the system but the soil core samples showed the soil needed a concrete liner to meet the specifications of water permeability on this site.

Mr. Calfee contacted the Cleveland NRCS office after receiving information on shotcrete which is shot or blown on with piston pumps and air hoses instead of pouring regular concrete. The strength of shotcrete has a greater PSI than regular concrete and would better benefit Mr. Calfee's situation. The holding pond liner is sprayed shotcrete at 4 inches thick up to the water line. Months of planning, dirt moving and construction finally came to fruition. After two weeks of spraying shotcrete into the pond, the project is finally near completion. Mr. Calfee's dairy operation meets the new CAFO regulations. The NRCS staff has spent several weeks developing his Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan which will be completed soon.

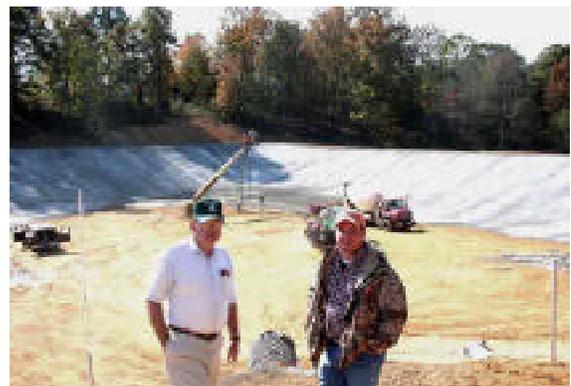
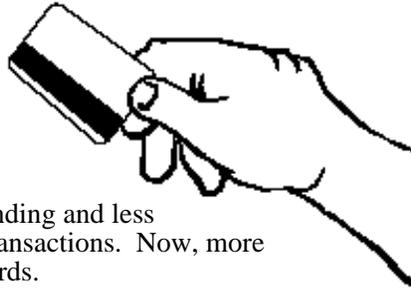


Photo above, l to r: Jack Keeling and Jason Miller oversee construction of Calfee's holding pond.

Safeguard Your Identity

Seven million Americans were victims of identity theft last year - the fastest growing financial crime. You could be the next victim.



Holidays are times of increased spending and less attention paid to unusual financial transactions. Now, more than ever, be vigilant with your records.

The following are ways to help prevent identity theft:

- Check your financial statements promptly and thoroughly.
- Obtain and verify credit reports annually - Equifax/TransUnion/Experian are the three major credit reporting agencies which will provide reports for a fee.
- Be stingy with personal information about yourself.
- Just say “NO” to telephone and mail solicitations.
- Travel light - keep unneeded personal credit cards and IDs at home when traveling.
- Find a secure place for personal information at home - keep it locked and inaccessible.
- Shred all documents with personal information - this includes computer discs.
- Consider a lock for your mailbox to discourage mail theft.
- Avoid strange or unknown ATM machines - use only those known to you and avoid deserted areas night or day.
- Be observant and sensitive to people paying attention to your use of a credit card at public telephones, cash machines, and public internet stations.

Safety Tip

Most people use cruise control to maintain a safe speed, but you should not use cruise control on wet or icy pavement, according to Marcus K. Drayton, an engineer with the automotive industry. “The reason is that the time it takes to disengage the cruise control system increases the overall reaction time needed to regain control after a vehicle has started to hydroplane.”

The purpose of cruise control is to maintain a near constant wheel spin rate. This is why using cruise control on long trips results in better gas mileage – it eliminates the subtle acceleration/deceleration cycles experienced by most drivers when using their foot.

Many people who have experienced hydroplaning feel like the car actually accelerates to a higher rate of speed when the tires lose contact with the pavement. According to Mr. Drayton, “It is highly unlikely (read impossible) that the car will accelerate when the wheels start to hydroplane. The wheels will continue to rotate at the rate dictated by the cruise control.

The only exception to this general rule applies to vehicles whose speed is metered on the non-drive axles (typically a rear wheel drive vehicle where the speedometer cable only measures the speed of the front tires). In this configuration the rear wheels may accelerate if the speed of the front wheels decrease while hydroplaning.

For those driving vehicles with traction control systems, this isn't an issue.

The main thing to remember is...do NOT use cruise control on wet or icy pavement!

NRCS Employees Receive “Friends of Conservation” Award

The Scott County Soil Conservation District recognized some long-time friends of conservation at their annual awards picnic. “Friends of Conservation” award winners were Carol Chandler, Michelle Beasley, and Larry Hasty. The awards were presented for “outstanding and dedicated work in promoting reclamation efforts in the Bear Creek watershed.” Larry Hasty, Michelle Beasley and Carol Chandler began planning in 1991 and remain active in the implementation phase.



Pictured above, l to r: Carol Chandler, Esther Abbott, Coyen Walker, Jerry Taylor, Michelle Beasley, and Johnny Acres. (Larry Hasty was not available for the photo.)

Bear Creek watershed project (PL 566) planning for acid mine remediation for abandoned coal mine sites in Scott County began in 1991. The plan was authorized by NHQ for funding in 1998. Eleven agencies and groups, including the sponsors (Scott County SCD, Town of Oneida, and Scott County Commission) have provided funding and support for ten sites that have been reclaimed which represent treatment on over half of the acres needing treatment. Reclamation in the watershed began in the mid 1990’s, but it was 2002 before aquatic life returned to Bear Creek, which had been void of aquatic life since the late 1800s when coal mines were opened in the area.

One of the prominent examples of reclamation is occurring on a 160 acre abandoned mine site, where 65 acres are being reclaimed as a recreational park with soccer, baseball and softball fields. A public day care center is also being located on the reclaimed site. An industrial park will occupy the remaining acreage. NRCS is treating the water quality on the site while the Town of Oneida is providing the funding for the recreation and other infrastructure.



Photo above, l to r: Larry Hasty, NRCS and Steve Bakaletz, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area in the Bear Creek watershed.

Today, an area that was once an eyesore is now providing recreational opportunities for the residents, as well as, providing jobs and childcare to an economically depressed area. The success of this reclamation effort can be attributed to the many individuals, groups, and agencies that have worked together toward a common goal.

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