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CONSERVATION PROGRESS REPORT

United States Department of Agriculture
 NRCS Natural Resources
Conservation Service

State Conservationist's Message



2009 was another banner year for private lands conservation. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continues to be on the forefront every-day working with Texas private landowners to help them conserve and restore our natural resources on Texas' private working lands.

In fact, last year alone, we worked with private landowners to apply conservation practices on more than 16 million acres in Texas. Through these conservation efforts, Texas farmers and ranchers are implementing sustainable crop production methods and improving their grazing land resources.

We are also working to revitalize rural communities by expanding economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers and investing in infrastructure that will stimulate rural economies, create jobs, and build a foundation for success in the 21st century economy.

We are investing in water quality and water quantity. NRCS worked with landowners to improve water quality on 8.3 million acres and install more efficient irrigation systems on 312,000 acres.

We're also working to implement the President's Recovery Act. In 2009, NRCS Texas received \$16 million to rehabilitate two aging flood prevention dams and repair an additional 20 dams. This funding will ensure these dams continue to provide flood protection, improve the environment, and at the same time stimulate local economies.

NRCS Texas worked with landowners to implement a new Farm Bill in 2009. We invested more than \$85 million through five conservation programs. Texas landowners matched our investment, bringing the total conservation investment in Texas to more than \$170 million. The new farm bill makes more resources available to more landowners than ever before-- we have worked hard to extend the benefits of the new farm bill to everyone, addressing a wide array of resource concerns.

Working with private landowners, NRCS will continue to make strides in conservation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald W. Gohmert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DONALD W. GOHMERT

IMPROVING LIVES, COMMUNITIES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT
through conservation



United States Department of Agriculture
 **NRCS** Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Helping People Help the Land

www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov



Our Passion

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with the people of Texas to improve and protect their soil, water and other natural resources. For decades, private landowners have voluntarily worked with NRCS specialists to prevent erosion, improve water quality and promote sustainable agriculture.

NRCS employs soil conservationists, rangeland management specialists, soil scientists, agronomists, biologists, engineers, geologists, and foresters. These environmental experts help landowners develop conservation plans, create and restore wetlands, and restore and manage other natural ecosystems.

Created in the 1930s in response to the Dust Bowl, the agency initially focused on preventing soil erosion on America's farmland. Over the years Americans have become more aware of the issues surrounding natural resources. In response, NRCS has broadened its technical services in order to provide science-based solutions to address America's ever-changing environmental concerns. While farmers and ranchers remain the primary customers of NRCS, the agency also provides technical assistance to city planners, watershed groups, state and local governments, and civic organizations.

NRCS partners with many organizations to get conservation on the ground. From the beginning, NRCS worked through local soil and water conservation districts to resolve local conservation problems. That partnership continues today. Soil and water conservation districts are also an important part of the State Technical Advisory Committee that provides recommendations to NRCS on how to best implement conservation programs.

Conservation is the work of many. It takes collaboration from many partners to set and achieve conservation goals. Together, we leverage expertise and financial resources to protect our natural resources. Together, we are helping people help the land.





Keeping Ag Land Productive

Rich natural resources, abundant land, and economic opportunities have made Texas an attractive place to live. As a result, the state's population is growing faster than much of the country, bringing land use challenges along with it.

According to accumulated data from County Appraisal Districts, more than 2.1 million acres of farms, ranches and forestlands were converted to other uses from 1997 to 2007. More than 40 percent of this land conversion was related to population growth in the state's 25 highest growth counties. The need to maintain and improve our state's remaining productive agricultural lands is crucial.

Soil Survey

NRCS keeps cropland productive by helping landowners maintain healthy soils through proper management that includes crop rotations, reduced tillage, and matching land use with soil types. Soil surveys provide the basic information needed to manage soils sustainably. Soil surveys show where certain soils are located and help landowners determine the best use of the soils. The NRCS team of soil scientists produces soil surveys for every county. Soil surveys are now available online at <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>. In 2009, NRCS mapped or updated mapping on 3.8 million acres.

Organic Initiative

NRCS offered a special initiative in through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to provide financial assistance for growers transitioning to organic farming or who are already certified for organic agriculture.

	Number of Contracts Funded		45
	Number of Acres Funded		7,200
	Total Dollars Funded		\$1.6 million

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

Through a program called the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), NRCS also helps guarantee that some of the state's most productive farm ground will continue to produce crops for future generations. This is done through the purchase of conservation easements that stipulate the land may not be used for anything but agricultural production.

	Number of Contracts Funded		2
	Number of Acres Funded		637
	Total Dollars Funded		\$2.2 million

Conservation on the Ground

NRCS Texas worked with private landowners to improve soil quality on 1.1 million acres of cropland.



Conserving Texas' Largest Resource – Rangeland

With more than 92 million acres of rangeland in Texas, it is the state's largest resource base. Rangelands not only provide food and fiber to sustain us, they also purify water by filtering sediments before it reaches a waterway or water body, it filters water that goes into groundwater, and provides wildlife habitat. Overuse, invasion of non-native species, and conversion to other uses all threaten the state's rangeland acres.

Plant Materials Program

NRCS' Plant Materials Program is a valuable resource in developing native plants that can help solve natural resource problems, primarily on grazing lands. Scientists at the Plant Materials Centers seek out plants that show promise for meeting an identified conservation need and test their performance. After species are proven, they are released to the private sector for commercial production. The work at the three centers in Texas is carried out cooperatively with state and federal agencies, commercial businesses, and seed and nursery associations. In 2009, Texas plant materials centers released three plant species.

Zapata Germplasm Rio Grande Clammyweed was released for use in upland wildlife habitat plantings, range seeding mixes and critical area plantings. The seed is eaten by game birds such as Bobwhite quail, scaled quail, mourning dove, white-wing dove and Rio Grande wild turkey. Zapata Germplasm clammyweed is a nectar plant for many species of butterflies and provides habitat to many other species.

STN-496 Germplasm Redseed Plantain was released for use in upland wildlife habitat plantings and range seeding mixes. Redseed plantain seed is known to be consumed by game birds such as a s Bobwhite quail and mourning dove. The foliage is eaten by Bobwhite quail, Rio Grande wild turkey, white-tailed deer and cattle.

STN-561 Germplasm Hookers Plantain was released for cool season upland wildlife plantings and range seeding mixes. Hookers plantain seed is consumed by game birds such as Bobwhite quail and mourning dove. The foliage is eaten by Bobwhite quail, Rio Grande wild turkey, white-tailed deer and cattle.



Clammyweed



Redseed



Hookers Plantain



Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Financial assistance through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is used to address many resource concerns in Texas. Congress mandated that 60 percent of the program's funding be directed to livestock related issues. Therefore, EQIP funds are used in large part to improve grazing land resources.

	Number of Contracts Funded		3,070
	Number of Acres Funded		1.6 million
	Total Dollars Funded		\$64 million

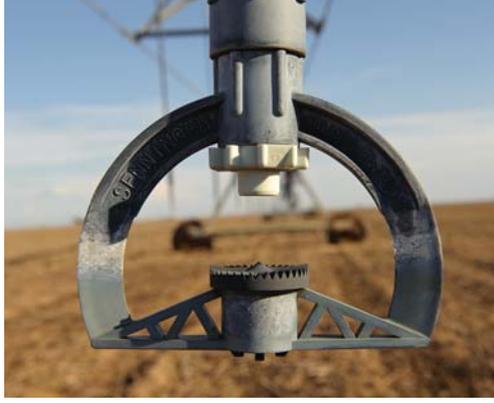
Grassland Reserve Program

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. Landowners can enroll land under a permanent easement or a rental contract for 10, 15, or 20 years.

	Number of Contracts Funded		14
	Number of Acres Funded		14,000
	Total Dollars Funded		\$3.8 million

Conservation on the Ground

NRCS worked with private landowners to protect and improve 8.6 million acres of grazing and forest land in 2009.



Investing in Water – Quality and Quantity

NRCS works with private landowners to assist in the quality and quantity of water on private lands. By working with landowners to install conservation practices, reduced erosion and runoff improves water quality. Water quantity is improved by making the most efficient use of water through advanced technology for improved irrigation systems. NRCS also plans animal waste management systems to ensure waste does not enter waterways or other water bodies.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

New in 2009, the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a voluntary conservation initiative that provides financial and technical assistance to promote ground and surface water conservation and improve water quality by helping farmers and ranchers implement agricultural water enhancement activities. NRCS entered into agreements with five partner groups to offer funding to agricultural producers in designated project areas.

Ogallala Aquifer, Texas Water Development Board
178 contracts, 37,000 acres, \$7.2 million

Leon River, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
1 contract, 77 acres, \$20,000

Brazos Bottom Irrigation Water Management, Post Oak RC&D
34 contracts, 10,000 acres, \$2.5 million

Lake Arrowhead, Chisholm Trail RC&D
4 contracts, 2,100 acres, \$92,000

Water Conservation on University Lands, University of Texas
20 contracts, 159,000 acres, \$1.2 million

To qualify for help through AWEP, producers must also be eligible for NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) since AWEP is a special initiative within EQIP.

	Number of Contracts Funded	237
	Number of Acres Funded	208,761
	Total Dollars Funded	\$11 million

Conservation on the Ground

NRCS worked with landowners to plan and install conservation practices to improve water quality on 8.3 million acres. NRCS wrote 145 animal waste management plans and landowners installed another 185. NRCS worked with landowners to plan and install more efficient irrigation systems on 312,000 acres.



Enjoying the Great Outdoors

With an increase in population throughout Texas, more people are turning to the great outdoors for personal relaxation and family fun. From hunting to bird watching, conservation on private lands makes the biggest contribution to the health and well being of these resources.

NRCS works with thousands of private landowners each year to help them reconstruct wetlands, build dams to create small private lakes and ponds, restore native prairies, and plant trees. These all provide crucial habitat for wildlife throughout the state.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Landowners have received financial assistance through NRCS' Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to improve or create habitat types.

	Number of Contracts Funded		105
	Number of Acres Funded		79,000
	Total Dollars Funded		\$4 million

Conservation on the Ground

NRCS Texas worked with private landowners to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality on 5.2 million acres. In addition, NRCS worked with private landowners to create, restore, or enhance 7,200 acres of wetlands in the state.

Protecting Roads, Bridges and Homes

Emergency Watershed Protection

One of the first agencies to respond during flooding emergencies is NRCS. We routinely assist local communities after floods and other natural disasters. One of the most effective tools to help counties and towns during a crisis is the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program. Through this program, NRCS is able to immediately minimize damage to roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. This assistance is often provided directly following a disaster, reducing future damages.

In 2009, NRCS continued its work in mending damage created by Hurricanes Ike and Dolly, along with the flooding that took place in 2007.

EVENT	EWP \$	LOCATION	PROJECTS
Hurricane Ike	\$6.6 million	Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, Harris, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, and Newton counties	23 projects to remove debris from streams, drains, and irrigation canals to prevent future flooding.
Hurricane Dolly	\$6.5 million	Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties	11 projects to stabilize drainage and irrigation canals and remove debris.
Spring 2007 Flooding	\$3.2 million	Callahan, Eastland, Ellis, Hill, McLennan, Navarro, and Wilson counties	9 projects to stabilize streambanks from further erosion, protect roads, and remove debris from stream channels.
Summer 2007 Flooding	\$4.6 million	Burnet, Collin, Cooke, Coryell, Eastland, Edwards, Ellis, Fannin, Gillespie, Gonzales, Kendall, Lampasas, Llano, Medina, Refugio, and Wise counties	22 projects to stabilize streambanks from further erosion, protect roads, and remove debris from stream channels. Medina, Refugio, and Wise counties

Many more of NRCS' efforts result in preventing and reducing flooding. This includes building grade stabilization structures, restoring wetland systems along rivers, and installing conservation practices and other structures across the state.

Watershed Program

NRCS has a watershed program through which the agency has assisted watershed sponsors in construction of nearly 2,000 dams in 145 watershed projects across Texas. In addition, watershed sponsors have installed land treatment practices, channel improvements, and dikes for watershed protection.

Many of the dams that protect roads and bridges from flooding and other infrastructure from erosion are nearing or have exceeded their 50-year life expectancy. There are hundreds of watershed structures that are 30 years old or older. NRCS has authority to assist communities with the rehabilitation of these aging dams. In 2009, NRCS began work on the rehabilitation of two dams – Plum Creek 5 in Hays County and Calaveras Creek 6 in Bexar County – \$4.8 million funded through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, commonly called the Recovery Act. In addition, NRCS received \$21.5 million through the Recovery Act to repair slope slides on 20 dams and perform mitigation projects on another four dams.



**EMERGENCY
RECOVERY TEAM**



Job Creation and Economic Development

Each year, NRCS enhances local economies with millions of dollars through contracts for the construction of conservation practices, watershed structures, and other activities. This impact is in some of the smallest and most economically needy communities.

Resource Conservation and Development

In addition to the funds NRCS distributes for conservation financial assistance and structure construction, NRCS' Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) coordinators work with local industries and businesses helping them create jobs, expand business opportunities, and improve local tax revenue. In 2009, RC&Ds helped create or retain 57 businesses in rural communities.

RC&Ds also assist local groups with unique natural resource concerns, benefiting land and water resources on more than 17,000 acres in 2009.



HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND