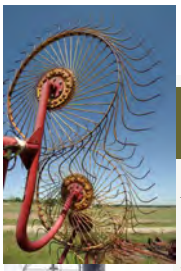
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Helping People Help The Land

JULY 2011

Activity Report



Programs

NRCS Texas finished with its initial program funding obligation in April. A second allocation has been received, and is being sent to the field for obligation. This includes additional EQIP funding for the Ogallala Aquifer, Lesser Prairie Chicken, and wildfire damages. A second allocation for WHIP was also received. This amounted to $4 million to address all WHIP resource concerns, including the Pronghorn Antelope and applications in the general pool. Overall, Texas received an additional $15.3 million.

Payment schedules are under development in preparation for program implementation for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012. Representatives from all five NRCS zones met in Temple on June 7-8 to coordinate consistent practice costs across the state. It is anticipated that these payment schedules will be ready well in advance of the beginning of the new fiscal year.

Current status of program participation in Texas:

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)

Financial assistance allocation for AWEP has been allocated to the three active projects, including the Leon River, Lake Arrowhead, and Ogallala Aquifer. To date, we have obligated 125 contracts on 34,796 acres involving $3,178,266.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Texas has completed the initial sign up and funding period for CSP. We funded 207 contracts on 498,901 acres involving $4,205,359. No ranking period dates have been set for the FY 2012 program, however, applications for the FY 2012 program are always accepted at all local NRCS field offices.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

With EQIP, we currently have 3,087 contracts funded on 1,427,851 acres obligating $57,967,890. We have a current backlog of $45 million in our county-based accounts, and an additional backlog of $12 million in the statewide resource concerns. We will be requesting additional funding from NHQ in July for the balance of the fiscal year.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

This year we funded one easement for 3,145 acres. An additional $3 million is needed to reach the second application. Funding has been requested from NHQ. Field offices are continuing to accept applications for both enrollment options.

Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP)

Two proposals were received for the $3 million available in funding. NRCS has approved one application for $2.9 million, and the other remains pending for the funding balance.

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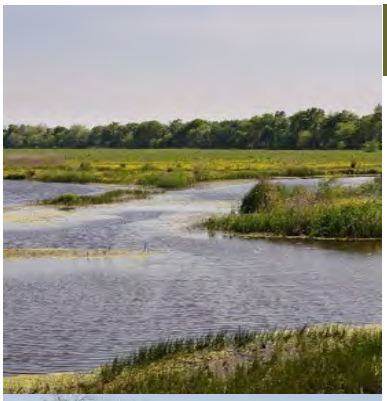


Programs–continued

Continued from page 1

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Texas has enrolled 7946 acres to date with an initial funding allocation of $13.5 million. An additional funding request has been made to address a heavy backlog of applications. However, we are yet to receive any funding as of this date. We would encourage anyone who may be interested to sign up and check the program benefits as they have changed since the last Farm Bill.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

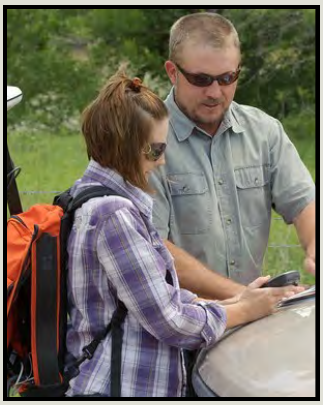
Texas has funded 110 contracts on 123,269 acres obligating $4.36 million, which was another banner year for us with this program. The special initiatives identified for the Lesser Prairie Chicken and Long Leaf Pine have been major reasons for this success. We continue to have a large backlog of regular WHIP applications that will be addressed should additional funding be received.

Human Resources

New Hires and Vacancies Update

NRCS Currently Has 26 Vacancies:

- 4 Civil Engineers
- 4 District Conservationists
- 1 Public Affairs Specialist (Outreach Coordinator)
- 1 Realty Specialist
- 4 Rangeland Management Specialist
- 1 Soil Conservationist (Wetlands Specialist)
- 2 Soil Scientists
- 1 Engineering Technicians (Civil)
- 7 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 Human Resources Assistant



Note: Due to a reduced budget for the remainder of FY 2011, a number of positions listed on previous reports will not be filled in 2011.

NRCS made the following selections in May & June 2011 resulting in accessions:

- Stephanie M. Campbell, GS-5 Soil Conservationist, Anson FO (Graduating Student Trainee)
- Aron R. Sattler, GS-11 Soil Scientist, Abilene Soil Survey Office (From NRCS – West Virginia)
- Ann M. Ross, GS-7 Agricultural Engineer, Brady FO (Conversion from Student Trainee)
- Ashley K. Newsome, GS-7 Soil Scientist, Kerrville Soil Survey Office (Conversion from Student Trainee)
- Ursala N. McCarty, GS-5 Soil Conservationist, Henderson FO (Conversion from Student Trainee)
- Chinling Chen, GS-7 Soil Conservationist, Brownwood FO (Conversion from Student Trainee)
- Brandon R. Steinberg, GS-7 Rangeland Management Specialist, Midland FO (Conversion from Student Trainee)
- Thomas O. Hunt, GS-7 Soil Conservationist, Lamesa FO (Conversion from Student Trainee)

WATERSHED PROGRAM

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

- Construction has been completed on all but one ARRA project: Calaveras Creek 6 rehabilitation (Bexar County). Final inspection of construction was completed on June 23, 2011.
- Work continues on three mitigation projects, including Elm Creek (Centex) 5A and 34 as well as Caney Creek 3A.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program

- Design for Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) is complete, and the funding for construction has been requested for FY 2012.
- Funding for rehabilitation construction of Plum Creek FRS No. 5 (Hays County) was received in February. The construction will begin as soon as the land rights are cleared.
- Design of East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County) will begin in the near future, and funding for construction has been requested for FY 2012.
- Rehab planning for Plum Creek 6 (Hays County) is complete, and the plan is going through the required review process.
- Rehab planning for Olmitos-Garcias 7 (Starr County) is under way.
- Assessments of high hazard dams: 120 assessments and reports have been completed; the remaining 54 assessments will be completed by September 30, 2011.

Watershed Operations Program

- Agreements are in place with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) for engineering design and construction inspection of dam repair projects funded by the TSSWCB dam repair program.
- Construction is 65 percent complete on recreations facilities (Phase II) at Attoyac Bayou 23A (Nacogdoches County).
- Construction will begin in July 2011 on Elm Creek (Centex) 17A (Bell County) remedial repair.
- Design work continues on Big Creek (Tri-County) 16, 17, and 19 MP (Falls County).
- Work continues on the 404 permit for Elm Creek (1250) 1A Rev. (Taylor County).

Funding for Watershed Projects in FY 2011

- Watershed Operations funding has been eliminated for FY 2011. Projects currently funded and under way with funds carried over from last fiscal year will be allowed to continue until the funds are used up. No new projects will be initiated, and no funding was requested for FY 2012.
- Watershed Rehabilitation funding is $17,964,000 nationally for FY 2011, which is a 55 percent reduction from FY 2010. However, funding is sufficient to continue planning, design, and construction on Texas projects that are currently under way.

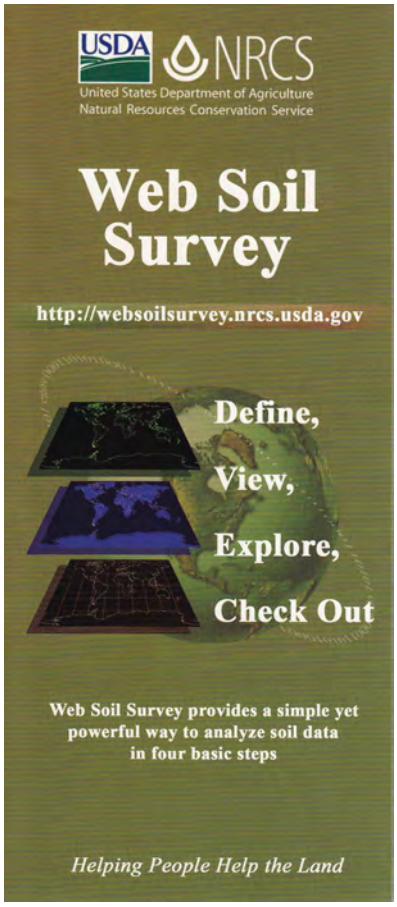
Pilot Grove FRS No. 28
Collin County, Texas

Soils

NRI High Resolution Photography Pilot Program

In cooperation with the Agricultural Research Service, NRCS conducted a pilot test using high resolution aerial photography (2-inch) to collect limited data on rangeland NRI points. Texas is one of six states that will participate in the pilot program. The objective of this test was to determine the extent that brush and grass species could be identified by air photo interpretation. The Primary Sample Units (PSUs) in this pilot is a subsample of the 2011 range study. The sites were flown on June 3 in Ector, Martin, and Midland counties. The NRI staff was on the ground collecting PSU data at the same time the flights were flown to ensure the accuracy of the time-stamped data.

A PSU site on rangeland, where brush and grasses will be identified, measured and counted.



Major Enhancements to Web Soil Survey (WSS) and the New Soil Data Viewer

A new version of the **Web Soil Survey (2.3)** is scheduled to be released on July 14, and some of the major enhancements include the ability to import Shapefile Boundary to be used to set the Area of Interest (AOI) in WSS; to export an AOI boundary in WSS for use in other applications; to bookmark an AOI in WSS so the user can return to it later; to embed AOI coordinates in an URL to open WSS and set the AOI; for quick navigation by street address for U.S. territories; for new latitude/longitude data entry options in quick navigation; and to be compatible with IE 9 and Foxfire 5 browsers. **Soil Data Viewer 6.0** is a non-NRCS release of SDV to be compatible with Windows 7 operating system and ArcGIS 10 software that is being developed. This version is scheduled for release by the end of August 2011. Once released, the install package will be posted to the webpage for external users to download. When the time comes that NRCS migrates to Windows 7 and/or ArcGIS 10, a CCE compliant version will be developed and made available to NRCS users.

Soils—continued

Texas A&M University and USDA-NRCS Staff Cooperate in Soil Pimple Mound Study in Leon County

On June 14, the excavation of a 44-meter (144 feet) continuous trench was completed for the purpose of sampling multiple pedons, and making observations along the length of the 1.2-meter (4 feet) deep trench. This study will yield very valuable data that will help soil scientists understand soil development on pimple mound landscape, and provide more accurate soil interpretations to land users. Pimple mounds are circular or elliptical mounds located on uplands, river terraces, or coastal plains. They are typically one to 4-feet higher than surrounding areas.

Soil scientists from the Bryan field office and Temple state office, along with TAMU staff participating in a pit sampling in Leon County. Measurements were taken of the depth to clayey horizon along the 44-meter (144 feet) trench at one-meter intervals.

McMullen County Soil Survey Completed

MLRA 83 Project Leader Clark Harshbarger, NRCS soil scientist in Robstown, presented the recently completed McMullen County Soil Survey to the McMullen County Soil and Water Conservation District at their annual banquet held in Tilden on June 7. During the banquet, Harshbarger presented a demonstration on the Web Soil Survey and its uses for range management. He also educated the audience on the Web Soil Survey and the most common soils in the survey area, along with an explanation of how the survey was made and its most practical uses for local landowners.

Events & Activities

NRCS Receives 2011 Business of the Year Award from Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Service (DARS) Division for Blind Services (DBS)

The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)/Division for Blind Services presented the 2011 Business of the Year Award to USDA-NRCS for promoting and recognizing outstanding businesses for their demonstrated commitment and emphasis on employing people who are blind or visually impaired. Assistant State Conservationist Tomas Dominguez attended the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Service (DARS) Division for Blind Services (DBS) award ceremony in Rio Grande City, where NRCS was presented the Business of the Year Award.

NRCS employee of 24 years, Roel Guerra, who is legally blind and hearing impaired, was also recognized for his work with the agency. Guerra, who is from Rio Grande City, was also honored for his commitment and hard work with the agency in helping landowners with conservation planning. Guerra, was presented with a proclamation from State Representative Ryan Guillen. The House of Representatives' proclamation, which was presented by Starr County Judge Eloy Vela, recognized Guerra's career as a NRCS soil conservation technician and planner that has earned him an outstanding reputation among the landowners in Starr County and his peers.

The 2011 Business of the Year Award, above, was presented to NRCS by the Harlingen Region of the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services Division for Blind Services (DARS/DBS).

(L to R) Arturo Ibarra, NRCS district conservationist in Willacy County; Roel Guerra, NRCS soil conservation technician in Rio Grande City; Tomas Dominguez, NRCS ASTC for field operations in Zone 3; and Becky Soto, employment assistance manager for the State of Texas DARS/DBS during the 2011 Business of the Year Award ceremony in Rio Grande City.

Helping People Help The Land

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES—CONTINUED

State SWCS Hosts Annual Conference in Lubbock

The 45th Annual Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) conference was held on June 16 in Lubbock for 2011. Members from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Agricultural Research Service (ARS), agricultural industry and conservation professionals, business and students attended the three-day event of programs and tours. Tours were offered at the Texas Tech University (TTU) Fiber & Biopolymer Research Institute, American Wind Power Center and the Ranching and Heritage Center, part of TTU.

In 2012, the Texas Council of SWCS is planning to meet for next year's annual conference during the national SWCS conference in Fort Worth. Part of the Society's mission serves as an advocate for conservation professionals and provides outreach and education to the public for soil and water conservation.

Jacob Shaffer, left, NRCS soil conservationist in Centerville, and Jason Eckert, right, NRCS district conservationist in Littlefield, were two of the many NRCS employees working with members of SWCS during the annual conference.

Khawir Arain, left, engineer in the textile division for TTU at the Polymer Research Institute, presented an overview of the equipment used in cotton research and development.

MT7 Ranch, NRCS Team Up for Texas State Wildlife and Recreation Management Career Development Event

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) co-hosted the Region 5 Texas State Wildlife and Recreation Management Career Development Event (CDE) held on May 10, at the MT7 Ranch in Breckinridge. The state contest was sponsored in conjunction with the Texas Wildlife Alliance for Youth (WAY). The program supports and promotes proper management and conservation of wildlife and natural resources. A total of 51 teams with 209 students competed in this year's contest.

There were seven 4-H teams with 27 participants and 48 FFA teams with 182 participants. State contest sponsors included NRCS, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, several SWCD directors and personnel from around the state, along with MT7 Ranch staff and more than 50 volunteers.

At the wildlife techniques station during the 2011 Region 5 Texas State Wildlife and Recreation Management Career Development Event on May 10, students had to identify various species and answer questions about them.

Events & Activities–continued

USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Visits Texas

USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Harris Sherman traveled to Texas to attend a Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force meeting held in Galveston. Sherman oversees the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the United States Forest Service (USFS). He is a member and USDA representative on the task force which was created by President Obama last October in response to the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

Salvador Salinas, NRCS Texas state conservationist; Kanand Brooks, NRCS assistant state conservationist; Scott Alford, NRCS soil scientist and Beverly Moseley, NRCS public affairs specialist provided an opportunity for Sherman to view wetland restoration projects by boat of Beneficial Uses Group (BUG) sites along the Houston-Galveston Navigation Channel. NRCS personnel, the Under Secretary and Julie Grogan-Brown, confidential assistant to the NRCS chief, were able to view first-hand marshes and colonial water bird and upland island habitat, which was created from dredged materials taken from the ship channel.

Alford provided the Under Secretary with in-depth information on the project's creation, partners, objectives and future plans. An Associated Press (AP) reporter and an AP photographer accompanied Sherman and Grogan-Brown on their boat. Interviews were done after the tour by Sherman and Alford. A national AP package including an article, photos and video story were released on the AP wire service about the boat tour.

(***From left to right) Scott Alford, NRCS soil conservationist in Baytown, discusses the Gorini "Demo" Marsh with USDA Under Secretary Harris Sherman, Kanand Brooks, NRCS assistant state conservationist for Zone 4, and Salvador Salinas, NRCS Texas state conservationist.***

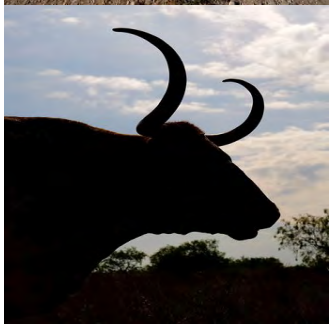
USDA Under Secretary Harris Sherman, second from left, views bird island, which is a colonial bird nesting site.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES—CONTINUED

Bi-National Ranchers Conference in Laredo

The Webb Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), NRCS, and Texas AgriLife Extension Service hosted the Bi-National Ranchers Conference on June 29-30 at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Laredo. More than 40 attendees learned the latest on animal diseases, cattle handling, and drought strategies as well as visited the NRCS and SWCD booths to learn more about the technical and financial assistance programs available through both agencies. Webb County District Conservationist Flavio Garza was interviewed by Spanish media Univision and Pro8 News, the NBC affiliate in Laredo. Zone 3 Public Affairs Specialist Melissa Blair visited with the reporter from Spanish newspaper Laredos News about NRCS to discuss the technical and financial assistance available to help landowners during the drought in Texas.

Flavio Garza, left, NRCS district conservationist in Webb County, is interviewed by Univision Laredo Reporter Marissa Lemon about the Bi-National Ranchers Conference held on June 28-29 in Laredo.



57th Annual Texas Section Society for Range Management Youth Workshop

The 57th Annual Texas Section Society for Range Management Youth Range Workshop was held on June 19-24, and welcomed 30 students from across the state. The purpose of the workshop is to recognize outstanding youth, develop leadership skills, and provide advanced training for 4-H and FFA youth interested in practical range ecology, ranch and natural resource management.

A goal of the workshop is that youth participants will return to their local communities, and serve as leaders to educate youth and other audiences about the value and management of the rangeland resource. The workshop is conducted at the Texas Tech University located in Junction, Texas.

Events & Activities—continued

USDA-NRCS and East Texas Plant Materials Center Field Day in Nacogdoches

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the East Texas Plant Materials Center (ETPMC) in Nacogdoches hosted a field day on May 24 that showcased the center's plant materials programs and technology. Upwards of 100 people attended the event which included field tours, educational sessions, and a greenhouse dedication that honored the center's original board of directors.

State conservationists from Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas were on hand to provide input into plant research to benefit conservation in their respective states, as well as take back newly developed technology to assist their private landowners.

NRCS Texas State Conservationist Salvador Salinas gave the keynote address during the opening session. Salinas commented on the valuable work being done on new plant releases, collaborative efforts with surrounding states and the active board of directors that have helped move the center's research and technology forward.

ETPMC partners include soil and water conservation districts, Pineywoods RC&D, Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Worth Whitehead, director of the ETPMC advisory board presented Angus Mims a dedication plaque which honors the original ETPMC advisory board of which Mims was a member. In appreciation of the years of leadership the original board gave to the center, the plaque will hang in the newly constructed greenhouse.

Field tours included presentations on studies underway involving indiangrass, switchgrass, cover crops, and plant ecotypes. Attendees also had an opportunity to learn about pollinator plants and wildlife food plots at the wildflower mixes stop.

(From left to right) Worth Whitehead, director of the ETPMC advisory board presents Angus Mims a dedication plaque honoring the original ETPMC advisory board of which Mims was a member. Salvador Salinas, NRCS state conservationist for Texas, took part in the presentation.

Field tours included presentations on indiangrass, switchgrass, cover crops, plant ecotypes, pollinator plants, and wildlife food plots.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES—CONTINUED

Michael Parrish Named Outstanding Forestry Conservationist for Area IV

Michael Parrish of Polk County was named the Outstanding Forestry Conservationist at the Area IV Conservation Awards Banquet held recently in Jacksonville, Texas. Parrish was nominated by the Polk-San Jacinto Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Board.

In order to be nominated, a producer or rancher must be a district cooperator who has implemented conservation work on the land and has promoted conservation, along with the SWCD's program. Parrish, who had a commercial cattle operation on the ranch, began a shift in 2004 away from cattle and toward a more intense management of the timberland and its forest habitat.

He began working closely with the Polk-San Jacinto SWCD and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist Ronald Harris, to determine which site preparation practices would be best-suited for lands once grazed by cattle. His interest was in educating himself about sustainable forestry and identifying best-management practices that would reduce pollution from non-point sources and protect wetlands, while trying to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat.

Parrish has acquired and converted more than 150 additional acres into timber. He has converted over 170 acres of pastureland since planting the first loblolly pine seedlings in February of 2007. With help from NRCS and Polk-San Jacinto SWCD personnel, Parrish's plan is to continue looking for ways to improve his timber management, and continue his timberland expansion efforts into the future - adopting effective forestry practices that are economical and environmentally sound.

(***From left to right) Jerry Nichols, TSSWCB member and chairman of the Nacogdoches County SWCD, Michael Parrish, and Ronald Harris, NRCS district conservationist in Livingston during the Area IV Conservation Awards Banquet in May.***

Outstanding District Conservationist in Area 1

At the Area 1 Conservation Awards Program, producers and landowners with outstanding stewardship were recognized, including the Outstanding Conservation Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board. This year's district honors went to Palo Duro SWCD and NRCS District Conservationist, Matt Pruner in the Canyon field office. Pruner was recognized as outstanding district conservationist in Area 1. NRCS Assistant State Conservationist Mickey Black awarded Pruner for his hard work and dedication to conservation.

Matt Bruner, left, NRCS district conservationist in the Canyon FO, receives an award from Area 1 ASTC Mickey Black, right, during the Area 1 Conservation Awards Program held in May.

25th Annual Dr. O. D. Butler Memorial Forage Day in Bryan

The 25th Annual Dr. O.D. Butler Memorial Forage Field Day was held on May 20 at Circle X Land & Cattle Company in Bryan, Texas. The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) had an educational exhibit at the event, along with others such as the Texas Forage and Grazingland Council, Grazingland Animal Nutrition Lab, and the Texas Beef Council. Educational sessions were held which included pasture and range insects, small sprayer calibration, weed product updates, feral hog management, control and agriculture transportation law and pesticide laws and regulations.

Samantha Valdez, right, NRCS district conservationist in Franklin, visits with Jim McCord, left, of Bryan who is a Brazos Area Hay Producers Association director.

Events & Activities—continued

The **Water Grows Our Economy** (USDA Blog below) campaign continues as the Texas Corn Producers leads the public outreach program. NRCS Texas is assisting the corn producers with technical assistance and information sharing in an effort to inform the general public about conserving natural resources and the economic significance of both agriculture and water. A 10-minute video is available at, www.WaterGrowsJobs.org with the slogan *Water grows our economy; let's make it last.*

NRCS and the SWCD in Canyon developed an educational program on Soil and Water Conservation at the **2011 Ag Fair in Amarillo**. Matt Pruner, NRCS district conservationist and Lori McMorrough, cartographic technician presented a program on the importance of soils and prevention of soil erosion and runoff potential to more than 1,000 elementary students in Randall County.

Strategic Watershed Action Team (SWAT) met in Lubbock to develop a working agreement to address needs for the Lesser Prairie-Chicken and its habitat. NRCS received $354,000 in technical assistance for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to be used in a five-state habitat area. The SWAT partnership includes the NRCS, Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept.(TPWD), Texas Wildlife Assc. (TWA), Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV), Pheasants Forever, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

NRCS in Zone 1 recently announced the release of the revised and reprinted edition of the **Common Rangeland Plants of the Texas Panhandle** book. The popular plant ID book has been used by agency employees, colleges, universities, producers, landowners and the general public throughout the state. Please contact Clint Rollins at (806) 468-8600 for NRCS book requests, or email Clint at clint.rollins@tx.usda.gov.

District 2 of the **Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association** (TSGRA) meeting was held on May 6 in Sterling City. Over 30 West Texas producers gathered to elect officers for the year and discuss current hot topics. NRCS offered their gratitude for the TSGRA support for the second annual rancher's workshop, and presented updates on technical and financial assistance to those that have suffered from recent wildfires.

TSSWCB Area II Awards banquet was held on May 3 in Wall, Texas, for over 200 conservationists who earned awards in their respective fields. Farmers, ranchers, absentee landowners, students and teachers were all honored for their contribution to preserving our natural resources.

NRCS state office and zone PAS staffers filmed areas that recently burned in the **Tom Green/Coke County Wildcat Fire** on May 11. Footage was used in the Voices of Agriculture series offered by the Texas Farm Bureau, and to compile an educational series for county commissioners and judges about NRCS performing prescribed burns during a burn ban.

NRCS Llano field office was part of the **34th Annual Beef and Range Field Day** held on May 31 in Llano, Texas. The classroom setting offered presentations on prescribed burning, herbicides, pest management, estate planning, parasite control, and range management practices. Local banks sponsored the noon meal and the morning and afternoon breaks were sponsored by the Hill Country Livestock Raisers Association. Over 220 were in attendance for this year's event.

NRCS zone and field staff in San Angelo attended wildfire programs hosted by the Texas AgriLife Extension office and facilitated by FSA officials on May 3-4. The meeting offered information about Farm Bill Programs to over 70 Concho Valley residents who have suffered from severe wildfires this season.

The Hunt County Fair and Livestock Show was held on June 10- 18 in Greenville. NRCS Greenville FO personnel and the Hunt County Farm Service Agency (FSA) office participated in the event. Monica Purviance, NRCS district conservationist in Greenville and Russ Garmon (FSA) were available at the Hunt County Country Living Symposium booth. Monica and Russ shared with attendees the types of services that are available for landowners from the NRCS and FSA. Approximately 250 people visited the booth.

Breckenridge FO staff gave presentations at the **Rolling Plains Bobwhite Brigade** on plant collection, Conservation and Habitat 101, and conserving water while assisting 36 students with projects from pre and post-lab assignments at the Bobwhite Brigade event in June.

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES—CONTINUED

USDA-NRCS, FSA, Texas AgriLife Extension Service (TAES), Shackelford County Range and Wildlife Management Association, and Lower Clear Fork/Brazos SWCD recently hosted the 2011 **Shackelford County Range and Wildlife Field Day**. The event was held on June 3 at Delafoss Lake with more than 70 landowners attended the event.

Bill Thompson, TAES Ag economist, presents Managing a Cow Herd in a Drougt at the Shackelford County Range and Wildlife Field Day in June.

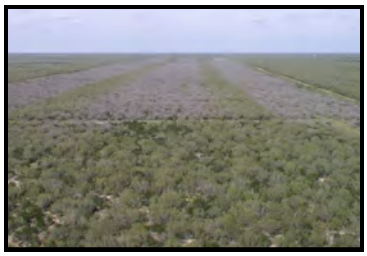
NRCS participated in the **Texas Independent Cattlemen's Association** annual convention and trade show on June 22-24 in Galveston. An estimated 100 ranchers were reached with NRCS program information. Many of the ranchers were already working with their local NRCS office and if not, they were given their NRCS office information to contact for conservation planning.

Vivian Garcia, NRCS range management specialist in Corpus Christi; and Cresencio Perez, NRCS district conservationist in San Marcos, presented **Brush Management & Native Grasses** to more than 160 landowners at the Hays County Conservation Expo on June 11 at the Wimberley Community Center in Wimberley. They also provided program information, and visited one-on-one with attendees at the NRCS booth. The event was hosted by The Hays County Conservation Partnership, which involves Texas Forest Service, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife, U.S. Fish & Game, NRCS and The Nature Conservancy.

The **Second Annual Lavaca County Range and Wildlife Workshop: *Prescribed Burning in the Post Oak Savannah and Coastal Prairies*** was held on May 7 by NRCS, Lavaca County SWCD, TPWD and Texas AgriLife Extension Service for 31 landowners who were educated on using prescribed burning as a land management tool. Landowners were able to learn post-management strategies, and they toured sites that were burned in the spring to see the results after the burn.

In honor of **National Wetlands Month in May**, NRCS and Zone 3 personnel featured the Texas Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) display, and provided accompanying conservation education materials May 4-11 at the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi for an estimated 16,000 visitors to view.

In the Frio Watershed in Zone 3, NRCS assisted the **TSSWCB with the State Brush Control Program** by providing technical and financial assistance to treat 1,778 acres. In the Nueces Watershed, the state/federal partnership provided technical and financial assistance to treat 1,810 acres.



NRCS assisted the TSSWCB with brush spraying projects in LaSalle County. Texas.

The **48th Annual Henderson County Farm & Ranch Tour** was a well-attended event. Three hundred Henderson county residents toured farming and ranching operations in eastern Henderson County. The tour emphasized the importance of farming and ranching in their community, and introduced those in the industry to new techniques and ideas. This year the stops included the G S Hilltop Ranch, a market goat operation, The Big Chicken Daylilly Farm and the Bluebird Ranch which raises Belted Galloway cattle. NRCS personnel served as tour guides on the buses and answered questions about conservation programs, farming, ranching and about NRCS as an agency.

A Belted Galloway cattle presentation at the Bluebird Ranch during the 48th Annual Henderson County Farm and Ranch Tour.

On May 5, NRCS and the Polk-San Jacinto SWCD, along with numerous agencies are invited by Texas Farm Bureau from Polk and San Jacinto Counties to give educational presentations to fourth graders from local schools for **Ag In The Classroom.** This year, Polk County had an estimated 600 students and San Jacinto County had an estimated 300 students.

NRCS Helps TAES Teach Water Conservation to Students

Texas AgriLife Extension Service (TAES) hosted an **Aquifer Field Day in Nixon** on May 5 for more than 40 third grade students in the Nixon-Smiley independent school district. NRCS Gonzales FO staff demonstrated the rain simulator, and discussed how range grass, improved grass, bare soil and asphalt effects water infiltration into the aquifer. The purpose was to

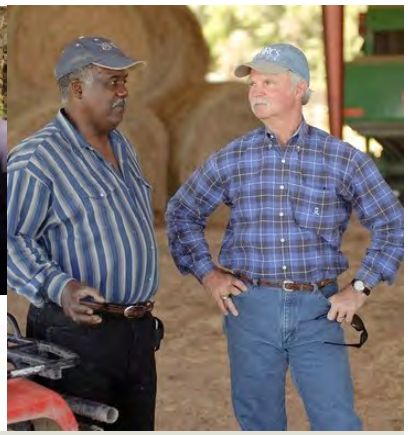
James Davis, NRCS district conservationist in Gonzales County, discusses different types of ground cover and the amount of water runoff with students during the Aquifer Field Day.

inform the students about the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer recharge zone, and the vegetative cover needed to aid it in recharging. Other stations provided insight as to how water gets into the aquifer, how we recover that water and the possible pollutants that can be leached into the aquifer. Students were then shown the structure of an aquifer and built an aquifer sundae as a treat.

INFORMATION & OUTREACH

NRCS Texas has received state, regional and national coverage from the media, including:

- Southwest Farm Press
- The Cattleman Magazine
- The Farmer Stockman
- Associated Press and national affiliates
- Texas Farm Bureau and TPWD media coverage
- Progressive Farmer
- Dozens of local media newspapers, radio and TV
- USDA Blog ran four NRCS Texas stories in June



New People's Garden Helps Red River County Residents in Local Communities

Red River County is now home to a new People's Garden. The garden is part of the national People's Garden Initiative and is a joint operation between the FSA, NRCS and the Red River County SWCD. The land for the garden was donated by Red River County SWCD, and grows peas, corn, tomatoes, okra, peppers, squash, watermelons, and cantaloupes. The produce is donated to the local food bank for distribution to Red River County families in need. The equipment and plants were donated by local Red River County individuals.

- NRCS received national coverage in June when numerous media outlets ran an **Associated Press story – "Texas Wetland Restoration Could Be Model for Gulf"** - which highlighted the recent visit of Harris Sherman, USDA under secretary for natural resources and environment, and the boat tour that NRCS staff provided to him of Beneficial Uses Group sites in the Houston-Galveston Navigation Channel.

- Beverly Moseley, NRCS public affairs specialist for Zone 3, had an article in the May 2011 issue of **The Cattleman Magazine** which featured the Similarity Index Rating System and Web Soil Survey.

- Information on NRCS programs and local work group meetings also ran in media outlets such as **Land & Livestock Post newspaper and the TSSWCB Conservation News**.

- In June, NRCS partnered with the Nueces Delta Preserve in San Patricio County to provide conservation education materials for 17 school tours. MLRA 83 Project Leader Clark Harshbarger, Zone 3 Public Affairs Specialist Melissa Blair, and Zone 3 Soil Scientist Shanna Dunn, taught more than 50 teachers about NRCS, natural resources, and how to use the Web Soil Survey in the classroom. The 5,500-acre Nueces Delta is home to the **Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Educational Program**, which instructs more than 6,000 students and 600 teachers annually.

- In June, the **Voices of Agriculture Program** featured NRCS, and the role it plays in prescribed fire. To view the program, go to the right side of the screen where you see the box titled AG VIDEO. Click the play button and drag the slider (to the right of 00:00) to 17:50 where the reporter introduces our story — http://www.txfb.org/.

- **Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth** welcomed Michael Brooks, NRCS district conservationist in Arlington, in June to speak to 76 students for TEXPREP, which is a 12-week leadership seminar. The leadership seminar encourages minority and women teens to major in mathematics, science, and engineering in college. Brooks spoke about NRCS careers and gave out educational materials about conservation and the programs our agency offers.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- NRCS has been partnering with the **Texas State Aquarium's Sea Camp** to educate more than 400 children during **June, July and August** on the importance of wetlands. Through interactive games and presentations the children in grades 1 through 4 and 8 through 9 are learning about NRCS and our role in helping landowners protect and restore wetlands, and how wetlands provide an array of benefits for wildlife, the environment and humans.
- **West Texas Beef Conference** will be held in San Angelo, Texas on **August 20**. Agriculture in the US is undergoing a change of face in 2011. Record commodity prices, rising inputs costs and an ever expanding global appetite are major sculptors. Despite the ever-changing production environment, beef is still big business in West Texas. Cattlemen are encouraged to take a look at this one-day conference constructed especially for them.
- On **August 1-3**, the 57th annual Texas A&M Beff Cattle Short Course will be held in College station.
- A ranching management clinic focusing on profitability will be held on **August 4** at the Bee County Expo Center, 214 South FM 351, in Beeville, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The **Profiling Profitable Ranchers Clinic** will be sponsored by the Texas Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), and headlined by Dave Pratt who teaches "Ranching for Profit." Successful ranchers in the region will also present information about their individual operations.
- NRCS will have an information booth at the annual **Texas Produce Convention on August 17-19** in South Padre Island.
- **2011 Annual Meeting of the Texas Section Society for Range Management** to be held in San Angelo at the McNease Convention Center on **October 12-14**.
- **Farm and Ranch Forum** will be held in Uvalde on **October 14-15**. This year's theme "Conserving Our Rural Heritage" will foster a dialog between rural landowners and urban conservationists. Key topics will include: water in the west, wildlife habitat, estate planning, rain enhancement, land fragmentation, riparian protection, rangeland management.

feds feed families

NRCS Texas and the USDA Service Centers, including the FSA and Rural Development, are off to an excellent start for the **Feds, Farmers and Friends Feed Families Food Drive** throughout the state. In June, USDA Service Centers in Texas have 249 offices registered and collected 5,522 pounds of food to help families in need. These stats are according to the USDA Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which is working out of Washington, D.C. and accumulates the overall weight totals for the food drive.

Hispanic or Women Farmers and Ranchers (HWFR) Settlement Claims Process In Texas

All NRCS Texas service centers throughout the state have been supplied with posters, claims process information, and public service announcements to be posted on their office bulletin boards and placed on counter tops for our customers. Also, HWFR webinar series announcements have been distributed to all NRCS field offices in the state to be placed on office, community and private sector bulletin boards and local businesses. **The HWFR webinars have dates in June, July and August 11.** To date, many radio, broadcast and print media have ran the announcements and several NRCS field offices have had inquiries into the HWFR Claims Process from Hispanic or women farmers and ranchers. Contact your local USDA Service Center for more information about the HWFR Claims Process, or call 1-888-508-4429 or go online at https://farmerclaims.gov.

NRCS Texas Wildfire Update

Since fire season began on Nov. 15, 2010, Texas Forest Service and local firefighters have responded to **14,480 wildfires that have burned a record-setting 3,266,480 acres.** The largest fire burned 314,444 acres in Presidio county in West Texas in April. Six of the state's largest wildfires occurred in a 19-day period during that month.

A record statewide drought combined with unseasonably strong winds have resulted in extreme fire behavior with high flame lengths and rapid fire growth in grasses, shrubs and timber. Texas Initial Attack crews and equipment are pre-positioned throughout the state to assist local fire departments with wildfire suppression actions when requested.

As of July 15, hot and dry conditions are forecasted to persist across the state into early fall, unless relief is provided by land-falling tropical storms or hurricanes. Currently, 244 of 254 Texas counties have burn bans with more than 2,200 structures, including 560 homes, having been lost due to wildfires.

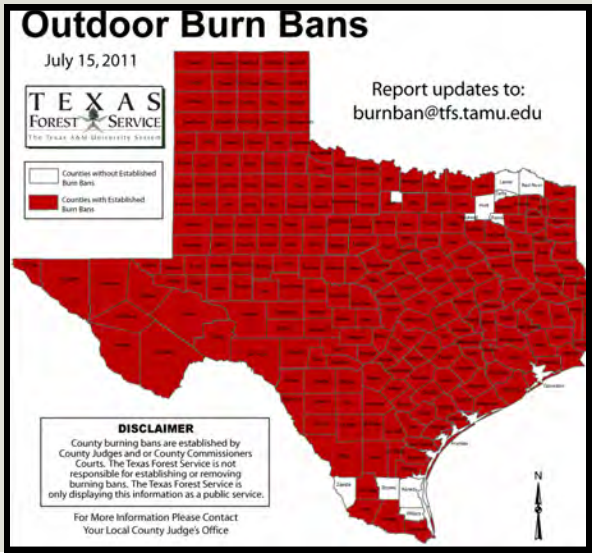
Drought and wildfires have continued to impact the High Plains and South Plains regions: By the end of June, NRCS estimated 827, 312 acres of damage from wildfires in Zone 1. Landowners and operators have lost over 14 million feet of cross fencing and prescribed grazing plans are now being recommended on 652,195 acres, including deferred grazing to rejuvenate plant health and prevent soil erosion.

Texas continues to suffer from extended drought and wildfires: Over 57 percent of the state remains classified in the "D4-exceptional" drought condition category. This is a one-in-fifty year occurrence. As of July 1, Zone 2 has lost an estimated 1.59 million acres to wildfires.

Grimes County wildfire in Zone 4 and part of the East Texas Complex fires.

Damage to Moore County in Zone 1 after wildfires.

In Texas for July to date, 244 out of 254 counties are reporting burn bans with record statewide drought this year.



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