

101 South Main Street
 Temple, Texas 76501

Contact us at 254-742-9800
www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov

Helping People Help the Land



MARCH 2011



Activity *report*

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Programs

The initial ranking deadline for all financially assisted programs was January 28th. Since that time, the state and field offices have been diligently ranking applications and determining eligibility for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and their associated initiatives. All totaled, NRCS will have obligated over \$65M by the end of March. Requests to NRCS National Headquarters for additional funds have been submitted and acknowledged.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)

Funding for all three current Texas AWEP funded areas has been obligated. This includes Leon River (\$112,893), TWDB High Plains Aquifer (\$2,571,465) and Lake Arrowhead (\$112,893). Additional AWEP funding has also been requested.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Field offices are currently evaluating and ranking applications for the 2011-1 CSP sign-up period. This will continue until March 9th, and then field verification will begin. Contracts will be written once the applications have been field verified and the enhancements and practices are confirmed with participants. At this time, Texas has over 300 applications with acre amounts yet to be determined.

Programs—Continued

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

EQIP Statewide Resource Concerns funding pools are nearly exhausted. There is some slippage that will need to be gathered and placed in priority areas of need. The goal is to have all funding fully obligated across Texas by March 4th.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative released its funding for the two projects in Texas in late February. One project located in Lee and Bastrop Counties is designed to improve habitat for the endangered species and species of concern, the Houston toad. Funding for this project in FY 11 will be \$250,000. The second project is for eradicating Salt Cedar from the Canadian River from Lake Meredith to the Oklahoma state line. This project is funded for FY 11 at \$500,000.



New Hires, Known Losses & Vacancies Update

NRCS Currently Has 21 Vacancies:

- 4 Civil Engineers
- 1 RC&D Coordinator
- 1 Realty Specialist
- 3 Soil Conservationists
- 3 Soil Scientists
- 3 Engineering Technicians (Civil)
- 1 Physical Science Technician
- 3 Soil Conservation Technicians
- 1 Human Resources Assistant
- 1 Secretary

NRCS made the following 6 selections in January & February 2011 resulting in accessions:

- Mary Webb-Marek, GS-12 Forester, Bryan Zone Office (From USDA – Forest Service)
- Ruben Riojas, Jr., GS-7 Soil Conservationist, Pearsall F.O. (Conversion from Student Trainee Program)
- Alexandra Verrillo, GS-7 Soil Conservationist, Comanche F.O. (Conversion from Student Trainee Program)

- Cordelia Redman, GS-7 Soil Conservationist, Wheeler F.O. (Conversion from Student Trainee Program)
- Ron Marek, GS-5 Soil Conservation Technician, Caldwell F.O. (Appointment from Federal Register)
- Benjamin Davis, GS-5 Soil Conservation Technician, Victoria F.O. (Appointment from Federal Register)

NRCS has 47 known losses to date during FY 2011



Watershed Program

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) >>>

- \$19.7 million of ARRA funds obligated for repair, rehabilitation, and mitigation of dams in Texas
- ARRA projects in Texas provide \$2.2 million in annual benefits
- Construction has been completed on all but 1 ARRA project: Calaveras Creek 6 rehabilitation (Bexar County)
- Work continues on 3 mitigation projects (Elm Creek Centex 5A and 34; Caney Creek 3A).

Watershed Operations Program >>>

- Agreements are in place with the TSSWCB for engineering design and construction inspection of dam repair projects funded by the TSSWCB Dam Repair program.
- Construction is underway on recreations facilities (Phase II) at Attoyac Bayou Site 23A (Nacogdoches County)
- Work is underway to obtain the 404 permit for construction of Elm Creek (1250) Site 1A Rev. in Taylor County

<<<Watershed Rehabilitation Program

- Construction has been completed for rehabilitation of East Fork Above Lavon Site 1A.
- Mountain Creek 10 (Ellis County) rehab plan has been authorized by the NRCS Chief for funding; funding for construction in 2011 has been requested.
- Funding for rehabilitation construction of Plum Creek FRS No. 5 (Hays County) was received in February. Construction will begin as soon as land rights are cleared.
- East Fork above Lavon 2A (Collin County) has been authorized by the NRCS Chief for funding.
- Rehab planning for Plum Creek 6 (Hays County) is underway.
- Rehab planning for Olmitos-Garcias 7 (Starr County) will begin in the near future.
- Assessments of high hazard dams: 34 assessments and reports have been completed; the remaining 140 assessments will be completed by September 30, 2011.



Calaveras 6 Rehabilitation: Preparing to install new principal spillway pipe by boring through the dam.



Calaveras 6 Rehabilitation: Preparing to install new principal spillway pipe by boring through the dam.

Funding for Watershed Projects in FY 2011

- Initial allocations have been received for on-going projects
- Funding for new projects unknown at this time (continuing resolution)

Celebrating a Historic Milestone on Texas Soils

Promoting Soil Survey

Soil Scientist and land managers from Texas and surrounding states assembled in College Station to attend the 48th annual Soil Survey and Land Resources Conference, February 3rd and 4th, hosted by NRCS, Texas AgriLife Research and Extension, and Texas A&M University. The conference is conducted annually to exchange ideas and discuss on-going soil survey and land resource activities, soil research findings, new research initiatives and needs, new soil interpretations available, educational/informational efforts, and other topics that serve to further the development, use, and understanding of soil survey information. Participants included NRCS personnel, staff from Universities, consultants, contractors, mining officials, railroad commission staff members, consultants, students from Texas Universities, and representatives from other federal and state agencies. Chance Robinson, NRCS SCEP employee/TAMU student, presented a paper on the *Distribution and Interpretation of Pimple Mounds utilizing LiDAR technology*. Chance Robinson was the first place winner of the student presentation awards.

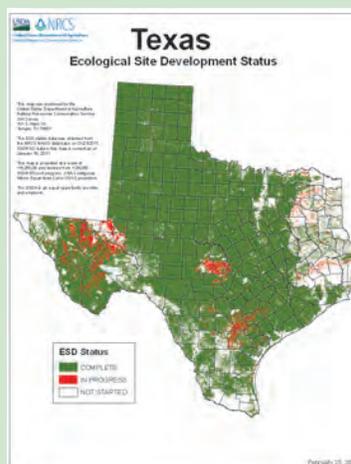


(left to right) Dr. Cristine Morgan, Professor, TAMU, Texas AgriLife Research and Chance Robinson, TAMU, NRCS SCEP employee.

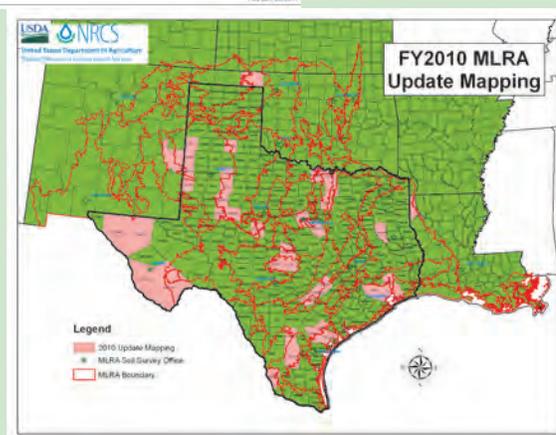
Ecological Site Descriptions Initiative

New initiative, Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD's), previously called Range Sites, are comprehensive interpretations of the soils and vegetation that grows on the land. The ESD's describe different plant communities and general guidelines on how to manage for them. With an ESD, the landowner can then select the plant community that carries them toward a landscape goal that fits their objective. These interpretations are available through Web Soil Survey. Currently, two-thirds of

Texas is covered encompassing 310 ESD's- about 260 remain.



In the future, ESD's will be written for forestland and pastureland. Staffing for this initiative consists of a regional coordinator and two field positions located in Robstown and in Nacogdoches.



Ecological Site Inventory Soil Survey Mapping

A total of 770,752 acres were mapped in the 1st quarter of FY2011. Update mapping is currently on-going in 15 counties in Texas.

Future Outreach

Soil Survey staff will have a soils display and Web Soil Survey demonstration at the 2011 Southwest Dairy Day, Stephenville, May 5th, 2011.

The city of Madisonville has been working with NRCS and TSSWCD for more than 30 years on **site #1 at Lake Madisonville** in Madison County. Work has included maintaining sight slopes to prevent erosion, establishing a buffer to prevent wave action (pictured below), along with keeping the integrity of the drop inlet structure. Cost-share dollars were obtained from TSSWCD.



Site #1 at Madisonville.

The Eldorado NRCS staff went to the **Eldorado Elementary School** on January 5th to discuss and educate students in the art of conservation. Soil erosion was the main subject covered with the 40+ 8th grade students. This helped to prep the students as they took part in the Eldorado-Divide Soil and Water Conservation District's poster and essay competition.

On January 8th the Alamo RC&D sponsored a **used electronics collection and tire disposal** in Floresville, Texas that was the first in a three part series. 329 households participated. An impressive 2,535 pounds of household waste were collected, along with 2,169 pounds of hazard-

ous paint, 40 lead acid batteries, 173 gallons of used oil, 50 used oil filters, 48 gallons of used antifreeze, 3,915 used tires and 24,000 pounds of electronic waste.

USDA-NRCS/Winter Garden SWCD set up an **information booth** on January 6-7, 2011 at the **Zavala Livestock Show**. Attendees were provided information the services offered by the Winter Garden SWCD and the NRCS.

Texas AgriLife Extension hosted an **issue identification meeting** on January 10th. Local NRCS staff provided program material. Approximately 20 attendees, comprised of individuals seen as leaders in the community, participated in this meeting. Various topics from agriculture to home economics were discussed to determine what issues could be addressed by public education and outreach programs provided by Texas AgriLife Extension. Chase Garcia (District Conservationist) represented the NRCS at meeting.

During a **planting of 775 tree seedlings** on 5.5 acres at the Elm Creek Watershed Site 5A in January 2011, participants from the American Youth Council assisted with the planting of several species, including Live Oak, Burr Oak, Pecan, Red Mulberry, Green



Photo Credit: Michael Turner, USDA-NRCS

Ash, and Eastern Red Bud in Milam County, Texas. A total of 3,475 tree seedlings on 14.5 acres were planted within Elm Creek Watershed sites 5A and 34A with assistance from Dale Mengers, general manager of the Elm Creek Watershed Authority, NRCS personnel from the Cameron, Georgetown, Marlin, and Belton Service Centers, and many volunteers.

On January 11-13 the **Sam Houston RC&D** helped coordinate the **Resource Team** along with the Eagle Lake Chamber of Commerce. The RC&D contacted and put together the four team members from the outside organizations that served as the Resource Team, participated in the listening sessions to record the responses, and are responsible for compiling the information, putting together the summary report, and will help coordinate the follow-up efforts of the citizens of Eagle Lake in the various projects that they have identified. The Eagle Lake Chamber and City put together the tour, schedule for the three days, advertised the event, and hosted the resource team by providing lodging, meals, and facilities for the listening sessions and town hall meeting. The continued follow-up and efforts to take action of what was identified during the three day visit will be the key to the success of the project.

The **Post Oak Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)** council began the year with a well-attended meeting in Hearne on January 12, 2011. Along with board members, attendees also included elected officials, community members and NRCS employees.



NRCS Presents at Growing Green Conference

Growing Green is no longer a fad, as rural communities, farmers and ranchers across Texas are looking to save and make money with energy resources. The NRCS along with local, county, city and federal agencies and private companies, partnered with the Texas Engineering Extension Service's (TEEX) Knowledge Engineering Division, on the first **Growing Green conference** held in Aransas Pass on February 24-25. NRCS focused on "Renewable Energy: From the Farm to the City," on how the agency is working with farmers, ranchers and rural communities on renewable energy and in protecting the natural resources. As part of Texas NRCS efforts to meet Chief Dave White's challenge of remaining focused on steps to advance clean energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions while growing our economy, NRCS will be presenting at two more "Growing Green" conferences: San Marcos June 16-17, and Lubbock October 5-6.

The Alamo RC&D held a **Grant Writing Workshop** in San Antonio on January 13 and 14th that was attended by 10 individuals from various groups and agencies.

NRCS exhibited at the **High Plains Irrigation Conference** at the Amarillo Convention Center on January 13. NRCS was also a partner in hosting the event.

Zone One employees Si Causey, Jonathan Parr and Manuel DeLeon were asked to develop a new contest category to submit to the state **Wildlife Alliance for Youth committee** for review. The additional category would be used in place of the 'compass and pacing' event for all student contests beginning in 2012.

NRCS participated in the **Texas Farm and Ranch Wildlife Expo** in Abilene on January 22. The two day event offered a variety of educational seminars. The Big Country Range Management

Seminar was made up of four NRCS speakers and one from GLCI. Chemical/Mechanical Brush Mgmt., Prescribed Burning, Wildlife, Selective Effective Brush Management. Methods all made the list of agenda items. 140 attendees enjoyed the program sponsored by Dow AgroSciences.

On January 24, NRCS Soil Scientist for Zone One **presented a program to TTU University** – Landscape Architecture Class, a master planning class, about soil quality, soil health and considering soil factors.

The **Permian Basin Cotton Conference** was held on January 24 at the Martin County Community Center in Stanton, Texas with program updates provided by local NRCS. Approximately 90 people comprised of farmers and ranchers from around the Permian Basin attended the conference. Various topics from nematode control to legislative updates were covered and CEUs were available. Chase Garcia (District



District Conservationist, J.M. Villarreal, and Winter Garden SWCD employee, Johnny Joe Cordova, dressed up in white lab coats, and used Sammy Soil and doctor tools to illustrate to students how NRCS/SWCD employees are like Soil Doctors to help landowners heal the land.

Southwest Farm & Ranch Classic

NRCS participated in the **Seventh Annual Southwest Farm and Ranch Classic** trade show in Lubbock on February 8-10. NRCS exhibited a display titled 'Growing Confidence in Conservation Tillage.' Brandt Underwood, agronomist for Zone One presented a program as part of informational sessions organized. His main topics included the 2011 conservation initiatives, specific to organics, the Agriculture Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), wildlife habitat improvement project under the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI).



Conservationist) presented an overview of current NRCS program availability and eligibility requirements to the attendees. Chase Garcia (District Conservationist) and Clair Harrison (SCT) set-up and operated an informational booth, fielded questions on conservation issues, and distributed literature pertaining to current NRCS conservation programs.

The Caldwell County team visited with almost 400 students at the **Lockhart High School Career Day** on February 1 about internship and career opportunities with NRCS.

NRCS was again part of the **South Texas Irrigation Symposium** that welcomed 60 producers to Southwest Junior College in Uvalde, Texas on February 2. A presentation was given NRCS District Conservationist, Mark Ramirez about Farm Bill programs available on cropland.

More than 60 attendees braved the ice and bitter cold on February 3 to attend the **Brush Country Prescribed Burn Program** at the Escobar Ranch in Falls Church, Virginia. Although they were not able to conduct a burn the attendees learned the effects of fire on rangeland, equipment and safety for prescribed burns, preparing burn plans and received updates on the fire weather season, drought and the Texas Prescribed Burn Board.

The Mills Service Center had a successful booth at the **Mills County Stock Show** where approximately 250 students, parents and teachers attended and discussed EQIP, WHIP and GRP among other conservation programs.

NRCS had a booth at the **Blackland Income Growth and Mid-Tex Farm and Ranch Show** in Waco, Texas, on February 8-9 with several hundred attendees.

Chisholm Trail RC&D exhibited NRCS and RC&D information to more than 500 attendees at several shows, including the **Cattleman's Round-Up in Bowie, Texas, Tri-County Farmer/Rancher Symposium in Gainesville, Texas, and Clay County Ag Day.**



This exhibit booth was prepared by the Chisholm Trail RC&D during the Tri-County Farmer and Rancher Symposium in Gainesville, Texas, where more than 200 attendees received information about NRCS and RC&D programs. Photo: by Stacey Stark, RC&D Coordinator, Bowie, Texas.

Events & Activities, cont'd



On February 10, NRCS helped host the **Brownfield Tradeshow and South Plains Ag Conference** and exhibited a display at the trade show.

NRCS participated in the **West Texas A&M Career Fair** at WTAMU in Canyon on February 10 and shared employment information with students interested in working for the NRCS.

More than 200 farmers and ranchers attended the **Four States Ag Exposition** in Texarkana on February 10. The Bowie County SWCD and NRCS participated in this multi-state expo. NRCS had an informational booth set up where employees were able to educate farmers and ranchers on the technical assistance, Farm Bill programs and services that NRCS can provide, along with SWCD information.

On February 15, NRCS Zone 2 PAS and the Alpine Field Office participated in the **Sul Ross Recruitment Fair** on the Sul Ross campus. Over 20 businesses, agencies and organizations offered employment information to over 130 students, teachers and staff.

Kaufman County (Forney Service Center) **Ag Producers Meeting** had speakers from NRCS talking with producers in the Cedar Creek Watershed, including Kevin Derzapf, Weatherford Field Office; Zach Kinsey, Kaufman-Van Zandt SWCD; Glenn Lubke, Forney Field Office; and Ken Mayben and Andy Spencer, Weatherford Zone Office. Topics included Pasture and Range BMPs, Funding of BMPs, Water Quality Management Plans for the Cedar Creek Watershed, and Evaluating Rangeland Stream and Riparian Health.

Dennis Brezina, Zone 4 resource soil scientist, gave a presentation to the **Polk County Agri-Life Extension and Texas Parks & Wildlife Master Naturalist** program on February 15. Brezina's program covered topics such as soils, geology and ecological regions of Texas.

Zone 4 Public Affairs Specialist Beverly Moseley (below) was an invited guest speaker for a Texas A&M University animal science class in February. Moseley spoke about **agricultural communications and career opportunities** in NRCS. Upwards of 60 juniors and seniors made up this semester's roster of students.



On February 15, '**Water Grows Our Economy**' Campaign began with televised public service announcements, a 10 minute video and a new website, www.WaterGrowsJobs.org, with the slogan "Water grows our economy; let's make it last." Directed by the Texas Corn Producers, NRCS provided the technical assistance for the production, including information on the latest water-efficient irrigation systems for center pivot irrigation drop nozzles and subsurface drip irrigation.



On February 17, the Bowie County SWCD, NRCS and other community members attended the Texas AgriLife Extension **Service Issues Forum** to discuss future educational programs that the Bowie County Extension Service will be hosting

Provided NRCS and GLCI educational outreach materials for the GLCI/NRCS booth at the **annual Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society meeting** on February 17-19 in San Antonio.

NRCS Helps Judge Projects at Regional Science and Engineering Fair

On February 18 Lubbock hosted the 2011 Regional Science and Engineering Fair at the United Spirit Arena where the Golden Spread Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) in the High Plains and South Plains region provided special awards to students for projects related to soil and water conservation.

USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) representatives from the local area in zone one judged 5th through 8th grade projects for the Golden Spread Chapter's special awards. NRCS judges were Manuel DeLeon, wildlife biologist for the High Plains, Damon Hertel, civil engineer in Lynn County and Seth Sowder, soil scientist in Lubbock.

This year the first place award was presented to Charles Lascano, a 7th grade student from Christ the King Academy in Lubbock. His project was entitled "An Easy Way for Farmers to Save Water" that involved different residue covering the soil to reduce evaporation loss.

The second place award went to Blayden Myers in the 5th grade at Lubbock Cooper West Elementary in Lubbock. Blayden's project was entitled "Chronicles of Erosion", a project where he determined sand as the most erosive soil.

Finally, the third place winner was Tanner Best, a 6th grade student from Lubbock Cooper Middle School with a project entitled "Cottons Final Plan Height as Affected by Variable Rates and Timings of PGRs for Five Varieties." Tanner's project involved the evaluation of plant growth regulators on cotton plants utilizing micro subsurface drip irrigation, an efficient irrigation system that helps to reduce water use.

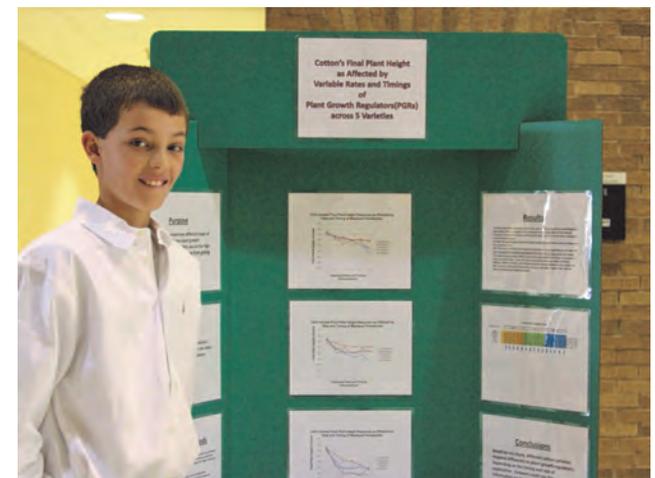
Anyone interested in finding out more about the Texas Council of Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society should visit the website at <http://www.tx-swcs.org/>.



Charles Lascano, and his first place entry, "An Easy Way for Farmers to Save Water."



5th Grader Blayden Myers received 2nd place in the contest for his "Chronicles of Erosion" entry."



Tanner Best won 2nd place with with a project entitled "Cottons Final Plan Height as Affected by Variable Rates and Timings of PGRs for Five Varieties."

Events & Activities, cont'd

Phillip Wright, NRCS/GLCI, gave a presentation to 10 members of the **Scientific Evaluation Team for the city of San Antonio** on February 18. Wright, a member of the team, covered soils and range management effects on infiltration and runoff.

NRCS Resource Team Leader Mark Hall presented an NRCS program update **Sandyland Agricultural Conference** in Gaines County in Seminole on February 22.

Greg Sokora, NRCS Zone One Area Engineer, presented a program on center pivot sprinkler irrigation efficiencies at the **Senniger Irrigation Workshop** held February 23 in Amarillo.

On February 23, Zone 2 staff spoke to 45 **Angelo State University** seniors about the NRCS and the careers available with the agency. Students learned who NRCS is and what we do for farmers and ranchers along with our partnerships with local, state and national agencies and organizations.

NRCS participated in the **Texas Tech University – College of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources' (CASNR) career expo** on the TTU campus on February 23. We shared employment information with agricultural students interested in seeking a job with the NRCS.

Randy Underwood, NRCS District Conservationist in Lubbock, visits with Texas Tech students about NRCS career opportunities.



Rick Florence, area specialist for USDA-Rural Development is presented a certificate of appreciation from Kanand Brooks (left) Zone 4 NRCS Assistant State Conservationist and Wade Ross (right) with Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers.

The **Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers community based organization** continued to reach out to Texas producers during a February meeting in Bryan. This organization has been tasked with coordinating outreach efforts and training, along with providing technical assistance to socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant program administered through the USDA-Office of Advocacy and Outreach. State partnering entities include the Texas Soil and Water Conservation District Board. Wade Ross, of Bryan, has taken a lead role in producing meetings across East Texas that create awareness among attendees about the programs available through the USDA and other partnering entities. About 20 farmers attended the evening meeting at Neal Community Center where Rick Florence, an area specialist for USDA-Rural Development, was the guest speaker.



More than 70 students from Weatherford to Houston participated in the NRCS and Bedias Creek SWCD **land judging contest** held in Madisonville on February 24.

NRCS in Zone 1 has conducted multiple **prescribed burn trainings** in January and February. More training sessions are scheduled throughout the remainder of the fiscal year. Photo below was taken at a training exercise in Stonewall County.



A **Production Agriculture Planning Workshop** was presented by the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation (TAWC) in Muncy on February 24. The program overview was presented by TAWC Chairman Glenn Schur. A number of presentations followed with topics about 'What You can Expect From Commodity Prices for the Coming Year' to 'Optimal Irrigation: Growing More With Less.' Two Keynote speakers, Larry Combest, former U.S. Representative and Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, presented a brief outlook on agriculture and how it relates to our national debt, and Jim Conkright, manager for the High Plains Soil and Water Conservation District #1 in Lubbock, provided information on the progress being made concerning the de-



sired future conditions (DFCs) for underground water in the Groundwater Management Areas in their district. NRCS serves as a partner in this project with Texas Tech University, Texas AgriLife Extension and Research, High Plains Underground Water District #1 and the Agricultural Research Service.



Former US Representative Larry Combest speaking at the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation.

On February 25 the Hill Country RC&D held part one of three in a series of **workshops that targets new absentee/resident landowners**. Thirty Hill Country residents gathered to learn about government programs, water testing, land value, transmission line easements and landowner liability. The next workshop will be held on March 25, 2011.

A **benefit team roping** was held February 26, 2011 at Rancho La Fe – Crown V Arena, Crystal City for the Winter Garden SWCD. Approximately 500 persons attended and 209 teams participated for 10 Buckles and cash prizes. Teams with their families and friends from as far as Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Laredo, Camp Wood, Carrizo Springs, Cotulla, and Uvalde and many from the Dimmit and Zavala counties attended.

NRCS in the Media

NRCS on TV:

On January 18-20, **Fox 34 television in Lubbock** featured interviews with Brandt Underwood, NRCS Zone One agronomist, talking about the NRCS Organic Initiative, and Kerry Weinheimer, Resource Team Leader in Lynn County talking about the AWEF Initiative. The interviews can be viewed online at <http://www.myfoxlubbock.com/> and then click on the Ag Day Lubbock tab.

Our video project, “Water Grows our Economy – Lets Make it Last” with Texas Corn Producers was released last Tuesday as public service announcements on **Lubbock and Amarillo television stations**. The campaign includes televised public service announcements, a 10 minute video and a new website, www.WaterGrowsJobs.org, with the slogan “Water grows our economy; let’s make it last.” Between the PSAs and the web coverage, several hundred thousand people have seen this information to date.

NRCS in Major Magazines:

The “**Fire and Ice**” feature story on page 10 of the February 2011 issue of *The Cattleman Magazine* was a great tribute to NRCS’ technical assistance. This article is pretty neat in that it was written from a landowner’s perspective – Jill & Doug Dunkel in Archer County. Their ranch was nearly 100% burned in an April 2010 wildfire. The

article is a great personal testimony on how NRCS personnel helped provide them with technical assistance to help them rebound beautifully (thanks in part to some well-timed rains).



NRCS PAS Beverly Moseley had a feature story in the February 2011 issue of *Rice Farming Magazine*, a full-color national magazine with a circulation of 8,700. The article features China, Texas rice farmer Cecil Slack and his family’s organic rice business.



The spring issue of *TTU’s Agriculturalist* magazine included a great, well-written article on a sensitive issue

– Carbon Credits and Cap and Trade. 6666 Manager Joe Leathers stating that just because he is involved in carbon credit trading, doesn’t mean he agrees with the principles of cap-and-trade. Guthrie DC Steve Drennan did a good job clarifying NRCS’ role in all of this. NRCS PAS Quenna Terry helped Joanna coordinate the interviews.

NRCS PAS Jamie Tankersley had a story in the March issue of *The Cattleman* magazine about NRCS efforts in the recovery of Pronghorn populations in west Texas.



NRCS Texas press releases showed up in hundreds of print and online publications in January and February. For a complete list of releases, visit the Texas NRCS website at: www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/

The **Concho Valley RC&D** received a **Circle of Diamonds** certificate, making them a Tier 1 member on February 22, 2011.

On March 11, 2011 **Robert Gober**, civil engineer technician in the Brady field office will have worked for the agency for 50 years. He has the current **longest running tenure as a federal employee with NRCS Texas**. December 4, 1966 was his first day on the job in the Brady office. He worked in Seminole and Crowell before taking what has become a permanent residence in McCulloch County.

NRCS cooperator, C.W. "Bill" Hellen received the **Texas Chapter Wildlife Society's Land Stewardship Award** at their annual meeting on Feb. 18 in San Antonio. Bill has been instrumental in the development, application, and promotion of sound wildlife management principles as the managing partner of the C.W. Hellen Family Ranches in Jim Hogg County, just outside of Hebbbronville.



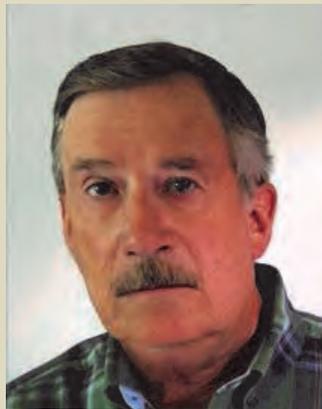
Bill Hellen at his ranch in Hebbbronville.

The Shackelford Service Center was awarded **advanced local posters and essay winners** for Region 5 competition this month.

Three NRCS Texas Employees Receive International Awards

The NRCS in Texas was well honored at the Society for Range Management's (SRM) 64th Annual International Meeting held in Billings, Montana, February 5 - 11, 2011.

Bruce S. Healy, district conservationist in the Alice field office, received the **Fellow Award**. The Fellow Award recognizes SRM members for their service and contributions to the Society. He has been an active member of three SRM sections, South Dakota, Florida and Texas, playing a vital role in each; as well as the parent society.



J. R. Bell, Amarillo, Texas, received the **Outstanding Achievement Award for Stewardship**. The Outstanding Achievement Award is presented by the Society for Range Management for outstanding achievement to members and other qualified individuals and groups working with rangelands. Bell was employed by the NRCS from 1971 to 2000. From 1986 to 2000 he served as the Zone 1 Rangeland Management Specialist for 52 counties of the Texas Panhandle.

Jeff Goodwin, State Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) Coordinator, received the **Outstanding Young Range Professional Award**. The Outstanding Young Range Professional Award recognizes SRM members who exhibit superior performance and leadership potential in any range-related area. Jeff provides rangeland management training to NRCS field office personnel, technical assistance to landowners, and provided leadership for the state of Texas through the GLCI.



Goodwin and Navarro County Agrilife Extension Agent Derek Scasta developed a poster for rancher Gary Price which **won the Excellence in Rangeland Management poster competition**.

International Outreach Efforts

San Angelo Zone and Field Office staff worked with National Guard Commander Joe Huro on collecting range and crop conservation information for his troop's upcoming deployment to Ghazni, one of the thirty provinces of Afghanistan. The troop will aid in assisting local residents in the agriculture sector. They aim to help Afghan farmers improve their agriculture industry with methods that the NRCS has been using for the past 76 years

According to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, the Obama administration has identified agriculture as the top reconstruction priority for the U.S. government in Afghanistan. NRCS is supporting this mission.



Upcoming Events

March 24 — NRCS will have a booth at the Matagorda County Beef Producers event expected to draw more than 200 producers.

March 26 & 28, 2011 — Land Judging Contests — Quanah, Clarendon, and Childress

April 1- 2, 2011 — NRCS will participate in the 2011 Texas Farm & Range Forum. This year's theme is "Conserving our Rural Heritage."

April 1-3, 2011 — TSCRA annual meeting, San Antonio, NRCS will have a booth.

April 6 & 9, 2011 — Land Judging Contests in Wellington and Lubbock.

April 16, 2011 — Kendall County Conservation Expo will be held at the Boerne Convention Center and Community Center from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information please visit www.texasconservation.org

April 20, 2011 — Earth Day Expo: Planet Pursuit in Victoria will feature NRCS' "Earth's Treasures" where more than 1,000 3rd-5th grade students, from Victoria County and surrounding counties, will be guided to the NRCS booth using clues and questions based on our booth's hands-on ac

tivity that will educate on the five natural resources "treasures" that NRCS works to protect soil, water, air, plants and animals.

May 1-3, 2011 — NRCS will be participating in the annual Texas RC&D Association conference in Corpus Christi. The De-Go-La Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council will host the Annual Texas Association of RC&D Areas Conference at the Omni Bayfront Towers Hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas. The Texas Association represents the entire state of Texas, which includes over twenty-two RC&D areas.

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