

FOCUS

Florida NRCS Outreach and Conservation Updates



U. S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Helping People Help the Land



*Photo Contest 1st Place winner - Brian McGraw, District Conservationist in Blountstown
See page 13 for Photo Contest details.*

Fall/Winter 2012

A Note

From Your State Conservationist

Carlos Suarez



Dear Florida NRCS Family,

It is spring again and I hope you all take the time to enjoy the beautiful scenery that the season brings to our great sunshine state. In this note I would like to spend a few minutes updating you on some new and exciting initiatives going on in FY 2012.

As you know, our agency has embarked on several important national landscape initiatives. Two of these new initiatives are in our state: the Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI) and Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW). These initiatives address very important resources such as water quantity, wild-life habitat and wetland restoration; which you know are vital to Florida. I'm very impressed with the interest we have received from our farmers and ranchers in the GoMI watersheds and I expect similar interest with the WLFW initiative. This is a testament to our outreach efforts, in conjunction with our partners.

We also have two efficiency initiatives currently underway. Some of you may have heard about the Florida Conservation Delivery Task Force. This task force is composed of eight employees, mainly from the field level, whose responsibility is to develop recommendations to enhance the delivery of conservation assistance at the field level. This task force is similar to other actions being carrying out across the nation in response to Chief White's 90% Initiative. The Chief has tasked each state conservationist to implement recommendations at the state level, so each state will be different in their approach. Florida's task force is looking at ways we can maximize our technical expertise and tools to continue delivering sound conservation technical assistance. They are working diligently to provide me with their recommendations within the next few weeks and I look forward to sharing their progress with you in the very near future.

On many occasions you have heard me talking about the value and importance I put on conservation planning. With this in mind, I have tasked a team of 6 district conservationists under the leadership of Greg Hendricks and Walter Albarran to look at ways we can enhance our conservation planning efforts in support of delivering sound, program neutral, technical assistance to the customers we serve.

I'm very excited about these two efficiency efforts and look forward to the recommendations from each of the teams on implementation.

I would like to end by saying how proud I am of each and every one of you. Your work and professionalism doesn't go unnoticed. I receive many compliments from our partners on the excellent job you all do to protect the natural resources of our sunshine state.

Thanks for all you do!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carlos Suarez'.



Comings

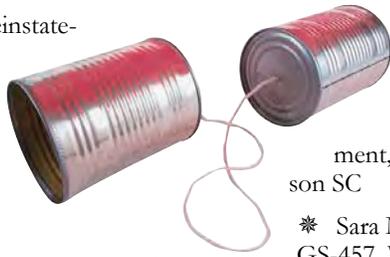
- * Andytra (Dytra) Lewis, Transfer from HHS, Secretary, GS-318-9
- * Walter Albarran, ASTC(FO) Area 3, GS-457-13
- * Susan Carr, Reinstatement, Ecological Site Inventory Specialist, GS-471-11, Tavares

Goings

- * Angela Allen, Retirement-Early Out, Contract Officer
- * Eric Harper, Reassignment to NRCS-CA, Bartow SC
- * Pam DeVore, Reassignment to NRCS-AR, ECS-SO
- * Jillian Etrass, Resignation, Marianna SC
- * Christopher Davis, Reassignment to NRCS IN, MLRA Leader
- * Zakia Williams, Resignation/Transfer to US Fish & Wildlife Service
- * Judith Howard, Resignation (relocating to TX)

Employee News

September - December 2011



Changes

- * Amy Moore, Reassignment, Soil Con, GS-457-7, Bronson SC
- * Sara May, Reassignment, Soil Con, GS-457, Wauchula SC
- * Leroy Crockett, Reassignment, SS, GS-470-11, Quincy MLRA
- * Greg Garvey, Reassignment SRIC, GS-401-12, Homestead SC
- * Doug Ulmer, Reassignment, Soil Con, GS-457-09, Live Oak SC
- * Chad George, Promotion, State Range Mgmt Spec, GS-454-12, ECS-SO
- * Nga Watts, Promotion, ASTC (Operations), GS-801-13, SO
- * Carlos Javier Torres, Promotion and Reassignment, Ag Eng, GS-890-9, La-Belle SC



My Hawaiian Detail

By Page Jordan, Budget Analyst

Aloha (hello in Hawaiian). It is nice to be back in the great state of Florida and working with familiar faces again. I spent mid-October to mid-November on a detail assignment working as the Acting Budget Officer in Hawaii. Actually, it is known as the Pacific Island Area (PIA). They serve the State of Hawaii, Territory of American Samoa, Territory of Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of Marshall Islands. It was a very long trip—about 12 hours in the air both ways—but the experience made it all worth it. Not only did I get to experience serving in another capacity that will help my career in the long run but I also had the opportunity to see another culture and lifestyle. I met and worked with some great people and was able to share things with them as well as learn about how they operate. My main goals were achieved by ensuring that their FY 12 operating budget was off the ground and running, supplying them with budgeting tools/guidance and assisting with daily financial issues.

I couldn't have been successful if it wasn't for the excellent support that I was given by the NRCS-PIA family while I was there. They always made me feel at home and were very receptive to me from day one. This experience has allowed me to grow professionally and I highly encourage people to expand their horizons and take on the challenge of details/assignments that may be available to them in the future. Mahalo (thanks in Hawaiian) to all of the NRCS-Florida staff (you know who you are) who supported me and made it possible for me to be gone for a month.

Thanks for your time and prayers

By Brandee Williams, Area Range Con

My story starts off sketchy, but ends well. In July 2010, I was diagnosed with the lung disease Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis, known as IPF. Not understanding the language or the repercussions of the diagnosis, I didn't know what to believe. One thing I would urge people not to do is random internet research. It did more to scare me than make me feel better. I was put on steroids for about 2 months and this helped the chronic cough I couldn't seem to shake, however, after the steroids wore off my health began to decline rapidly. In October, I was put on oxygen and told that I needed a lung biopsy by three separate doctors.

During the biopsy my lung was perforated, I found out later that lung biopsies often do more harm than good. I was in the hospital for 3 weeks and my doctors couldn't figure

out what to do. I was effectively a tragic loss waiting to happen. My mom and dad, amongst several others, had been praying for me diligently to receive a healing, when I was transferred to Tampa General Hospital. I was put to sleep and placed on the waiting list for a new lung. Within one week I was approved for a lung transplant, which I'm told, is almost unheard of. I was within 24 hours of being told I was too sick to be on the list and moving to the back of the line. I finally received my miracle on December 5th, 2010.



During all of this I know several of my NRCS family prayed for me and donated their leave to make sure I was taken care of. I can't tell you how thankful I am to still be here and how appreciative of the many, many hours of leave that have been given to me. I just want to acknowledge my NRCS family and all they have done for me. While "thank you" seems to be so little, that is all I have. So, thank you, thank you, thank you, and many times more. I am indebted to you all.

Outreach and Civil Rights

Táinos Contribute to Puerto Rican Culture

By Martin Figueroa, with assistance from Sherlynette Perez-Castro and Milton Cortes

My name is Martin Figueroa and I am from the Island of Puerto Rico. Our Hispanic identity and heritage come from a combination of 3 different cultures and civilizations: Taíno, African, and Spanish. As part of our recent celebration of American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month, I wrote this small article about the Taíno Indians that once lived in the Caribbean Islands.

On November 19, 1493, during his second voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus landed on the island of Puerto Rico. At the time of Columbus' arrival, the island was inhabited by a group of well established Arawak Indians known as the Taíno. The Taíno society was centered on a hierarchical political system and relied on organized agricultural techniques, hunting, and fishing for subsistence.

Historians and scientists believe that by the 18th century, Taíno society had been devastated by introduced diseases such as smallpox. In addition, other factors such as intermarriages, forced assimilation into the plantation economy imposed by Spain upon its Caribbean colonies, and the subsequent importation of African slave workers contributed to the demise of the Taíno population. Cultural Centers around Puerto Rico and heritage organizations, such as the Jatibonicu Taíno Tribal Nation of Borikén Puerto Rico (1970), the Taíno Nation of the Antilles (1993),

the United Confederation of Taíno People (1998), and El Pueblo Guatu Ma-Cu A Borikén Puerto Rico (2000), have been established to foster and preserve Taíno culture.



Since November 1969, an annual indigenous Taíno festival known as Festival Nacional Indígena de Jayuya (left) has taken place in Puerto Rico on the anniversary of the first sighting of Puerto Rico by Columbus. This folkloric festival is celebrated in the municipality of Jayuya, named after the Taíno tribal leader, Hayuya. The event includes

indigenous dances and rituals performed by the Jayuya youths, a ceremonial Taíno ball game resembling modern day soccer, and a village (yukayeque) of thatched-roof huts that enables visitors to see how the pre-Columbian natives lived. During the festival visitors enjoy lectures in Taíno language and customs, tours to caves containing Indian drawings, and local Taíno influenced food. Other activities include live Puerto Rican music, artisan handcrafts, and an indigenous ceremonial attire beauty queen contest.

The Taínos may have disappeared, but their contributions to Puerto Rican culture are vibrantly present (below). Many words in the Puerto Rican language (Spanish) and English language including *tobacco*, *canoe*, *hurricane*, and

hammock are Taíno in origin. While the original intact Taíno society has disappeared it is not extinct; it is preserved in the lives and hearts of those who practice and believe in the Taíno culture.



Celebrating Earth Team Volunteers in Action

This year's National Volunteer Week is April 15-21. Each year we take a week to honor our Earth Team volunteers and thank them for their service to NRCS. This year's theme is "Celebrating Earth Team Volunteers in Action."

During volunteer week and throughout the year, we should let each volunteer know we appreciate them and the actions they take to advance conservation in Florida. For some ideas on how to thank your volunteers go to the Florida SharePoint/Shared Documents/Volunteer folder and you will find "75 Low Cost Ways to Reward Performances."

2012 Stewardship Week is April 29 to May 6

This year's theme is "Soil to Spoon".



Stewardship Week helps to remind us all of the power

each person has to conserve natural resources and improve the world. When everyone works together with their local conservation district, that power continuously grows. We have seen these good deeds multiply across the nation's network of conservation districts and the results are spectacular!

Ribbon Cutting on Perdido Tribe Environmental and Cultural Center

By Jason Bird, American Indian/Alaskan Native SEPM

I arrived early on Friday, November 4th, at the Perdido Bay tribe's Environmental and Cultural Center. I was met by 1st Vice Chair Robert Johns Cedar Bear who took me around and showed me the great work that was accomplished by an array of people, districts, agencies, friends, and of course by the tribe. Robert explained that they dug out a ditch for surface runoff that feeds the pond. As we walked we came up to a newly created mound. Robert told me that Muskogee Creek Indians traditionally built mounds as a as a regional landmark, or burial area. As we crossed the pond he explained that the pond was part of a NRCS Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative project. It is also a part of a "cleaning" system to help purify the water before it goes back into the Jones Swamp Preserve. Robert said all kinds of birds have settled in since it was built. They plan on building a greenhouse later and incorporating more native plants into the swamp. As we walked and talked I learned a great deal about the Perdido Bay Tribe and how hard they work to make their dreams come true. We went inside "Native Paths", a heritage museum and environmental education center that Robert explained will be a focal point for education about the environment and their heritage. All the art work was either given to the tribe or was done by tribal members.

Later, I was greeted by a smiling Chief (Micco) Bearheart, and more family and tribal members. Micco Bearheart told me that he was from a southeastern tribe called Muskogee Creek Nation, and that because of the Indian Removal of

1830, most Muskogee Creek were moved to Oklahoma but some stayed behind in Florida and parts of the southeast. One of Perdido Bay Tribe's missions is to locate and reunite with the tribe, any Muskogee Creek who stayed behind. Micco told me that through that era of repression and heartache, many are still hesitant to call themselves Creek Indians. Micco Bearheart's passion is to teach young people about the Indian nation and how they lived parallel with Earth and nurtured it. That passion is plain to see in the Environmental and Cultural Center.

As ribbon cutting event began, the tribe gave thanks to those who helped with the dream of the heritage center and transforming the Jones Swamp Preserve. Many people spoke about how they came to know Micco Bearheart and how he accomplished so much and touched their lives.

Mrs. Edna Dixon got up to read Micco Bearheart's genealogy, but before she could, Micco Bearheart, with his great sense of humor, apologized just in case there happen to be a Horse thief in there. Then Micco Bearheart got up to say a few words and to thank all who came to help, and to all who will help in the future.

"It's awesome to see so many come together for the purpose of education and conservation and to see the dreams of many come true," said Bearheart. "This isn't just for the tribe, it's for everyone."



Delegates from Escambia County with Micco Bearheart, second from left, during the ribbon cutting ceremony.



Micco Bearheart with (left to right) Darryl Williams, Bearheart, Carlos Suarez, Jason Bird, and Robert Johns, signing the Earth Team newsletter. Both Micco Bearheart and his son are Earth team volunteers.

Recruitment Update

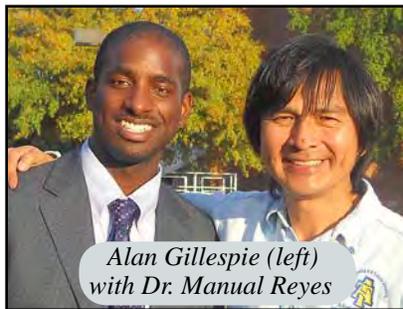
NORTH CAROLINA A&T STATE UNIVERSITY

By Jesse Wilson, State Conservation Engineer

In October 2011, Frank Ellis, Alan Gillespie, and I made a recruiting visit to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NCA&TSU) in Greensboro, North Carolina. We were there to interview students for soil conservationist and engineering internship positions with Florida NRCS. NCA&TSU was established in 1891. Today, it is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as a doctoral-granting research university.

It was a pleasure meeting and interviewing several talented students who were highly interested in the natural resources career field. Several of the engineering students we interviewed have received scholarships from NRCS. In 2006, Alan Gillespie, Area 4 Agricultural Engineer, was a student at NCA&TSU with a NRCS scholarship. NRCS offered Alan an internship for the summer of 2006 and when he graduated in 2007 he accepted a full time position...and the rest is history.

One of the highlights of the



trip was the opportunity to meet the students during a ceremony recognizing student accomplishments. Dr. Manuel Reyes, Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Design, requested Alan speak to the Bioprocess Engineering and Natural Resources Engineering students. Alan discussed his educational experience and how the NRCS scholarship not only afforded him the opportunity to attend college, but planted the "seed" of conservation. He encouraged the students to take an internship and if possible to work a summer with NRCS.

Recruiting potential NRCS employees is something we all can do to help to find the top candidates for the next generation of NRCS conservationists. Recruiting can be as simple as visiting local high schools and providing students with information about NRCS.

FIU | FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

By Kay Nickel, DC

Recruiting team members (left to right) Rosa Reyes, Kay Nickel and Karyn Ruiz-Toro meet with Florida International University Professors Dr.



Jayachandran and Dr. Kateel G. Shetty. Two students from FIU were selected as potential SCEP employees for 2012.

FLORIDA SOUTHERN COLLEGE on the move!

By Ed Sheehan, District Conservationist

Florida Southern College (FSC) in Lakeland held a Career, Internship and Graduate School Expo for their students on November 9th. FSC holds the event to help their students meet potential employers as well as provide the students with

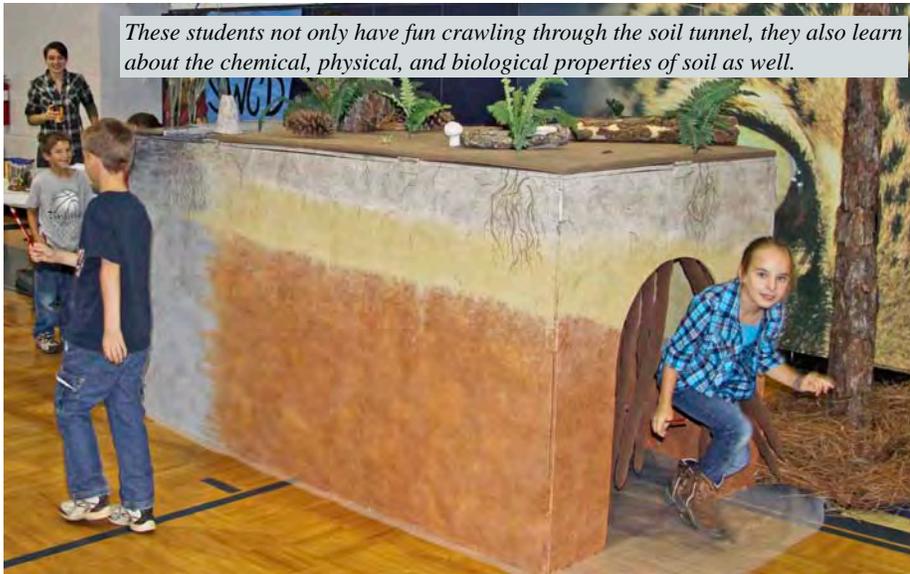


a chance to find out about potential internship possibilities with those employers. Paula Allen, soil conservationist at the Baldwin field office (FO) and Ed Sheehan, district conservationist at the Bartow FO, represented the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at the event.

Paula is a graduate of FSC. Ed has been a guest lecturer several times at FSC for the citrus management course that the school offers. During these courses he has discussed the various environmental issues that affect citrus production and the different programs and resources available to the students who hope to find careers in the citrus industry.

At the expo Paula and Ed handed out literature on summer internships, careers and the work that NRCS performs. FSC has degree programs in citrus production, horticulture, landscape management and others that would allow students to qualify for careers with NRCS. The NRCS booth featured a NRCS banner, the new NRCS table skirt and other recruiting goodies provided by human resources in the state office. All of these added to the appealing and professional look of the booth.

A Creative Method for Promoting Soil Education



By Candice Tritt, Blackwater SWCD

This fiscal year, a new educational display by the Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District debuted at area schools. Known as a soil tunnel, it was built by district staff with funds provided by Three Rivers RC&D Council, Incorporated. The tunnel's design was conceived by employee Candice Tritt. After reviewing a variety of other tunnel styles, she formulated a unique design tailored to Santa Rosa County.

The construction phase involved building a four by eight foot rectangular plywood box, held together with heavy duty hinges for quick assembling and disassembling. The entire box was then painted in colors that reflect an actual

local soil type, known as Lucy, and its soil profile. The top of the box was designed to fit eight, two by two foot foam board panels, painted dark brown to represent the topsoil. The interior walls also had animal burrows and call outs with microscopic views of mycorrhizal fungi, soil protozoa, and soil bacteria painted on them.

In addition to promoting soils and soil formation, Candice wanted the soil tunnel to also reflect the role soils play in their ecosystem and in the web of life. This was accomplished by focusing on the local longleaf pine ecosystem; simulating flora and fauna from this particular environment. Paper maché, artificial, and real life props such as a

cut-over longleaf pine stump, longleaf pine straw and cones, ferns, a black racer snake, and several kinds of insects were added to the top. Roots, worms, a mole, and a gopher tortoise were placed within the tunnel to represent the life forms typically found underground in these ecosystems. One corner of the tunnel also mimics a lowland wet area with saturated gray soils, the beginnings of a pond and a crayfish in its preferred habitat.

Since its completion, the soil tunnel has been set up and used at a couple of school career days. District staff first give a fifteen minute talk on the science of soils, hoping to generate some curiosity. Afterwards, the students crawl through the tunnel and get the unique opportunity to explore the complex world beneath their feet. This interactive, visually stimulating, program was a big hit with the kids. The soil tunnel seems to help students retain more by attaching the scientific facts to their associated imagery.



Candice Tritt attaches a paper maché crayfish to an interior wall of the soil tunnel.

Public Law 111–274 - Also Known as the “Plain Writing Act of 2010”

This law requires agencies to use plain language and writing in every document that the agency issues or substantially revises. All NRCS employees should be aware of this when writing letters or producing documents. Here are some tips to consider:

- **Shorten your sentences:** Studies show readers have great difficulty reading at their normal speed beyond 65 characters in a line.
- **Don't use all caps:** It's very difficult to read sentences in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS because it's unnatural and the normal visual cues are missing. Consider these other methods to highlight important information: boxing the information, changing type size or font, or using italics.
- **Use descriptive headers:** Use headers that specifically describe the sections of your documents. Your reader absorbs information more quickly and easily, and understands its relationship to other information.
- **Break up dense copy:** Use shorter paragraphs and headers when possible.
- **Use white space:** Some blank space (white space) in a document increases readability.

Agency Officials Conduct Business in Florida

USDA Under Secretary Sherman Makes GoMI Announcement in Florida

By Gail Hendricks, PAS



Top left - Suwannee announcement. Bottom left, Suwannee partner roundtable. Above, Carlos Torres, DC in Highlands County (right) explaining about sawgrass's spiny, serrated leaf blades at WRP site.

USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Harris Sherman, was in Florida in December to make the Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI) funding announcement. Florida has two watersheds related to GoMI. One in the Escambia River watershed that we share with Alabama and the other in the Middle Suwannee River watershed area. He held a press conference in Tampa to make the announcement.

While here he also conducted a roundtable discussion with conservation partners (bottom picture) and took a tour of the Fisheating Creek WRP project in Highlands County.

Ann Mills Attends Coral Reef Task Force Meeting



By Gail Hendricks, PAS

USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, Ann Mills (right above), represented USDA at the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting in October. The USCRTF meeting, held in Ft. Lauderdale, is a joint effort by leaders of 12 Federal agencies, seven U.S. States, Territories, Commonwealths, and three Freely Associated States to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems.

Florida NRCS did our part to help by creating and staffing a display on

NRCS' efforts to reduce land based sources of pollution, including sediments and nutrients.

One of the highlights of Ann Mills' trip to Florida was a tour of agricultural concerns in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) in Palm Beach County conducted by Florida NRCS employees. Along with other members of the task force, Mills was shown a South Florida Water Management stormwater treatment area, had a discussion with a local farmer, a tour of the University of Florida Everglades Research and Education area in Belle Glade and a presentation on the use of barn owls in eliminating rodents in the fields by Dr. Richard Raid.



Ann Mills views sugarcane plants.



Tour group and NRCS employees (left) in front of a subsidence measurement pole at UF research station. In 1924, the top of the white pole was set even with the soil surface. Over 6 feet of soil has been lost to subsidence since that time.

High Tunnels Spell Early Success for Producer

By George Johnson, DC

One of the Volusia County, Florida participants in the High Tunnel Initiative through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is already having a positive reaction after just a few months with this new technology. Their high tunnel was completed in March 2011, but no real success was expected until the winter. No one expected any benefit from this "hot house" during the summer months.

The owner is a beginning farmer who, with her husband, owns 10 acres and are trying to build a business they can rely on for a solid future. In the beginning stages, they were actively farming a little over two acres; growing a variety of vegetables that were sold at roadside stands, farmer's markets and to friends and acquaintances. Most of the crops were irrigated by overhead sprinklers. The owners were interested in the concept of a high tunnel, expecting the growing season could be lengthened during the fall and winter.

Despite the investment costs, the EQIP program provided enough incentive for her to take the chance. The owner, her husband and several neighbors worked hard to put the house up (photo below). Micro-irrigation and weed cloth was installed.

There is no power ventilation



and it was extremely hot inside so they wondered what, if any, crops could be grown at the end of March and through the summer. Several were tried and, as expected, they didn't do well...but some did. The Basil they planted not only grew, it flourished. The lettuce, cucumbers and squash also did well.

The irrigation system can be run for 15 minutes per cycle. The fertilizer and pesticide inputs have been minimal.

They got a good price for their product and it sold as fast as they could pick it. Fall planting began and they are really looking forward to what this and future harvests will bring. We expect the best is yet to come.

Seminole Tribe Steps Up Conservation Efforts

By Jorge Rodriguez, LaBelle SWCD

For many years NRCS has been assisting the Big Cypress and Brighton Seminole Indian Reservations with conservation measures to maintain and/or enhance the tribal lands located in Hendry and Glades counties. The cooperation between NRCS and the Seminoles has been increasing every year. As more staff has been assigned specific duties to assist both reservations, we have gained a better understanding of the goals and concerns that the Tribe has for their land.

Recently there has been a shift in the governmental structure and staffing of the Reservation. As we interact with the current administration, we are encountering board and council members that are asking what they can do to increase the ecological integrity of their agricultural lands. Rather than waiting for us to emphasize the importance of conservation practices, they have been proactive in bringing up crucial topics such as efficiency of water delivery, elimina-

tion of invasive exotics, and ways to increase wildlife habitat.

One example of the dedication to better management practices that we have seen has come from the Natural Resources Director, Alex Johns, who oversees both reservations. Mr. Johns told us that he was going to conduct updated soil testing of tribal lands in the near future. The purpose of this testing is to ensure that the nutrient content of pasture forage is adequate for cattle and to investigate the level of fertilizer content of the soils. The end goal of this plan is to generate range management plans for individuals so that landowners can efficiently maintain pastures and improve forage quality.

Another member of the new administration that has been eager to put conservation on the ground is Joe Frank, a member of the Board of Directors. Mr. Frank has said that his top priority is to tackle invasive exotics on tribal land. He would like to make this a tribe-wide concern, making sure that individual landowners can come together in a more concerted effort to reduce Tropical Soda Apple and Brazilian Pepper on both reservations. Mr. Frank has also expressed interest in improving forage quality, as well as improving management of the Tribe's cattle industry overall.

One result that we have already seen in our efforts has been an increase in communication between members of different committees. Regular meetings are being set up between NRCS staff, the Cattle Office, and Board staff. This open forum allows for new concerns to be voiced to everyone involved. The LaBelle field office has also gained a staff member to assist with Seminole conservation efforts; our new agricultural engineer will dedicate half of his time to working on Tribal planning.

These coordinated efforts will ensure that Tribal lands will receive the proper planning and implementation in order to increase productivity, efficiency, and sustainability.





NRCS Assists Regional Envirothon SW Florida Gulf Coast

By Kendal Hicks, DC, and Sherlynette Pérez-Castro, Soil Scientist

On December 9, 2011, Kendal Hicks and James Nikolich, from the Fort Myers Service Center; and Martin Figueroa, Sherlynette Pérez-Castro and Howard Yamataki (left to right in photo, above right) from the MLRA Soil Survey Office 15-8, assisted with the annual Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Regional Envirothon. The Fort Myers staff has assisted with the regional event for over 14 consecutive years. NRCS has been a part of the SW Florida Gulf Coast Envirothon since before 1998.

This is a one day environmental competition offered to area high school students. It provides a hands-on approach to solving issues related to forestry, soils, aquatics, wildlife, and current issues. Five-person teams competed in five written tests using knowledge previously obtained through classroom instruction. The textbook knowledge is then applied through the natural environment found in the Caloosahatchee Regional Park (CRP), in Lee County. The event drew over 100 students from Charlotte, Collier, Highlands, and Lee Counties for a day filled with enthusiasm, competition, fun, prizes and sponsorships for the winning teams. A delicious grilled lunch was provided by Vulcan Materials. The regional event would not be possible without the cooperation of multiple local government agencies, conservation organizations, private businesses

and landowners. The partners provided financial support and staff volunteer assistance.



In the station most closely associated with NRCS—the Soils Station, students examined a soil pit to evaluate horizons and soil textures. They also utilized the Munsell color charts, completed texture analysis and referenced Soil Surveys. Also, for visual effects, Martin Figueroa exhibited a typical field vehicle with all the tools and accessories frequently used by soil scientists (photo above).

A colorful table top display was established to provide information about Earth Team volunteers and NRCS careers. The NRCS name and logo was emblazoned on various small gift items, pens, brochures and NRCS folders that were provided to the students and their teachers. The regional Envirothon has proven to be an effective outreach tool. Several former students have indicated they took natural resources college courses and ultimately they chose careers based, in part, upon their positive experience at the Envirothon. Approximately 65% of the Envirothon participants were female. Overall, roughly 20-25% of the students were of the socially disadvantaged status.

Grazing Lands Stewardship Award to Greenville Ranch

By Brandee Williams, Area Range Conservationist

The Florida Grazing Lands Coalition (FGLC) and the Florida Section of the Society for Range Management (SRM) presented Deep Roots Meat, LLC, with the third annual Grazing Lands Stewardship Award on October 20, 2011. This award recognizes contributions to the ranching community in the areas of grazing and wildlife management.



The joint meeting covered topics such as grass production, sustainability, wildlife habitat management and the various operations on the ranch. This 3800+ ranch is a grass-fed beef operation that uses an all forage label for beef production. This label carries with it a strict adherence to not using supplements such as soy pellets. Deep Roots Meat also has all natural range fed chickens. These chickens are not only used as part of the nutrient cycle on the ranch, but also produce another source of revenue.

Professionals from all areas of range management were escorted through the ranch by Troy Platt, Manager and Owner. Troy gave a presentation detailing his operation and awards previously given to the ranch. Deep Roots Meat, LLC, is a diverse operation that has been recognized for their environmental conservation and ingenuity including, The County Alliance for Responsible Stewardship (CARES) Award for Outstanding Environmental Stewardship. Troy also traveled to the Fourth National Conference on Grazing Lands in Reno, Nevada, in December 2009 to give a presentation.

If you would like to nominate a ranch for the Grazing Lands Stewardship Award, please contact Brandee Williams at (941) 729-6804, or Brandee.Williams@fl.usda.gov.

Plant Materials Center News

New Pollinator Info and Updated Pollinator Tool!

By Mimi Williams, Plant Materials Specialist

At least 10 conservation practice standards in the Florida Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) mention pollinators as a purpose or consideration. Until recently there was little information on planting pollinator habitat that was Florida specific.

As part of the nationally funded Operation Pollinator project, University of Florida Entomologists, with the assistance of the Brooksville PMC, are trying to identify which native herbaceous plants are the most important plants for native pollinators in Florida. Started in 2010, so far this project has identified 9 species of annuals and perennials that are particularly attractive to native bees. These include Goldenmane Tickseed or Dyeflower (*Coreopsis basilis*), Lanceleaf Tickseed (*C. lanceolata*), Partridge Pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*), Blanketflower (*Gaillardia pulchella*), Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Dotted Horsemint (*Monarda punctata*), Leavenworth's Tickseed (*C. leavenworthii*), Ironweed (*Vernonia* spp.), and Narrowleaf Sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*). Additional good news is that seed of Florida ecotypes of all these species are available commercially.

Additionally, the Brooksville Plant Materials Center has developed two fact sheets specifically for Florida NRCS staff dealing with pollinators (FOTG, Sect. II, Plant Materials). Plant Materials Fact Sheet No. 3. – *Planting Native Species for Flower Rich Habitat* <http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/FL/FLPMFS3.pdf> deals

with the “how to” aspects of pollinator habitat planting. Plant Materials Fact Sheet No. 4 – *Developing Planting Mixtures for Pollinator Habitats* <http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/references/public/FL/FLPMFS4.pdf> and the accompanying pollinator mixture calculator deal with designing custom mixtures for pollinator plantings and estimating costs.

More good news! Plant Materials Fact Sheet No. 4 is being updated for 2012. Updates include a listing of additional native Florida flowering plants that have become commercially available in the past two years, the addition of better instructions on how to use the pollinator mixture calculator (Fig. 1), flagging species that might be toxic to livestock (Fig. 2), and an updated price list.

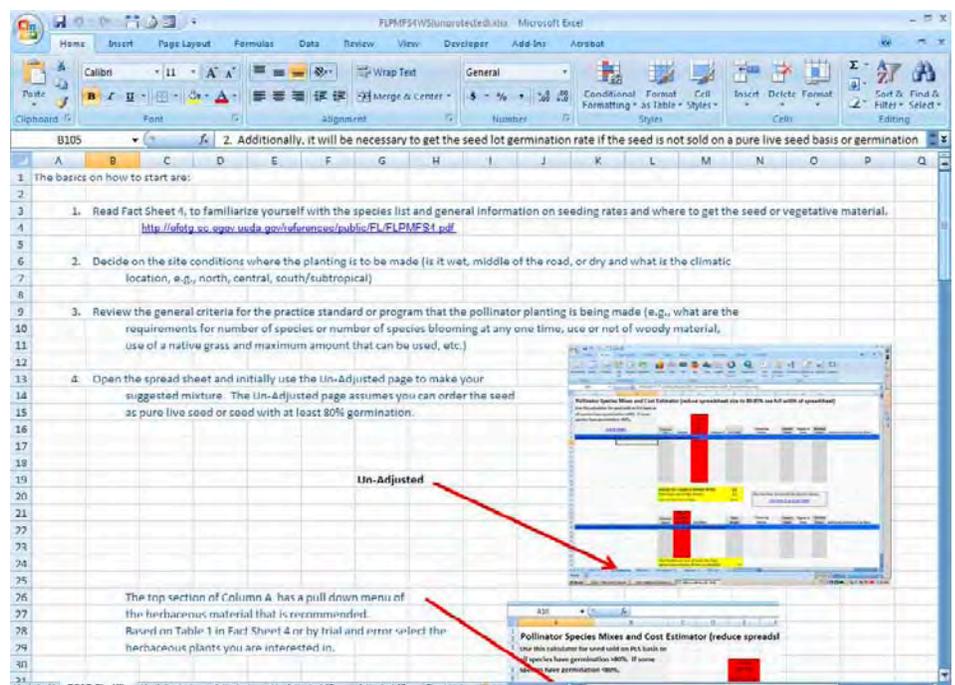


Figure 1

	A	B	C	D
6				
7		CLICK HERE!	Estimated	
8			s/lb	Seed/lb
9	SEEDED Species in Mix (Click on cell in column A to use pull down menu to select)			
10	Annual Phlox	<i>Phlox drummondii</i>	50	241,500
11	Common Sneezeweed (ecotype)	<i>Heinenium autumnale</i>	80	1,200,000
12	Bitterweed (ecotype)	<i>Heinenium amarum</i>	0	1,900,000
13	Big Bluestem	<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	10	144,000
14	Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	25	1,700,000
15				
16				
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				Total Seed per Sq Ft (needs
22				Total Lb per Acre of Mix Pla
23				Seed Cost per Acre of Mix:
24				
25				

Figure 2

Training Courses in Florida

Conservation Planning In Kissimmee

By ECS Staff

Florida NRCS employees, along with staff from Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, gathered in Kissimmee for a five day intensive course in conservation planning. The training, led by Greg Hendricks, State Resource Conservationist and the Ecological Sciences staff, was held at the NRCS field office/Extension conference room at the Osceola Heritage Park. Participants were introduced to a diverse array of concepts including the theory and principles of conservation planning, laws and policies that frame conservation planning and technical assistance on Florida working farm and ranch lands. Participants received in-depth instructions on specific topics such as grazing land management, rangeland, pasture, wildlife habitat, and cropland management. Other presentations covered a variety of topics such as nutrient and pest management, the importance of pollinators, economics of planning, and using GPS in conservation planning.



Participants were clustered into 4 groups and charged with developing a conservation plan for cropland in traditional agriculture, cropland in transition to organic farming, a cow-calf operation, and wildlife on rangeland. Field visits were coordinated by the local District Conservationist, Chuck O'Rourke, who also doubled

as "the producer" in lively sketches where participants engaged him with questions related to their respective planning assignment. On the last day of the course, each group presented the conservation plans and alternatives that were prepared and fielded questions from the audience.

Based on the increase in post-training testing scores and comments submitted by the participants the training session was a real success.



Ecological Site Description Training

By Gail Hendricks, PAS

Florida NRCS partnered with the Society for Range Management (SRM) to conduct an Interagency Ecological Site Applications Workshop on Archbold Biological Station in November. The three day workshop brought together representatives from many federal and state agencies, including state, regional and national NRCS employees.

The objective was to enhance the knowledge, skills and understanding of Ecological Site Descriptions (ESD). Many Florida NRCS employees served as trainers in the classroom and field training portions of the workshop. Tom Weber, state soil scientist, 3rd from left above, and Greg Hendricks, state resource conservationist, far right, were involved in organizing and conducting the workshop.



Rick Robbins, right, and Howard Yamataki, left, discuss Florida's soil characteristics on one of the workshop field trips.



Photo Contest



1st Place: Brian McGraw, DC - Look and Tremble. "When the Chipola River is low, the lime rock is exposed and creates rapids for tubing and canoeing. Many local families grew up recreating at Look and Tremble."

2nd Place: George Johnson, DC - "A pollinator doing his thing while I was checking out an irrigation system."

3rd Place: Eric Theurer, Soil Con Tech - I've got my eye on you. "Taken on a trip along the Manatee River in my kayak. The kayak affords me quite a bit of "stealth" in obtaining some really nice wildlife photos while I'm out."



Leadership Team Works to Solve Task

At the November meeting, members participated in a fun Team Building exercise.



WRP Workshop in Gainesville

NRCS employees and partners gathered in Gainesville for a Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Workshop in November. Roney Gutierrez, ASTC for Easements, 4th from right, made the opening remarks. Crenel Francis, Easement Specialist, left of Gutierrez, ECS staff members, and the WRP Team assisted with the training.



Report Fox Squirrel Sightings

The fox squirrel, named for its fox-like tail, is a charismatic mammal approximately twice the size of the common gray squirrel. The coloration of the fox squirrel is highly variable, ranging from a creamy tan to all black. In Florida, the fox squirrel can be found in almost every county, but the distribution is patchy and not well understood. To better understand fox squirrel distribution, a new research project conducted by the University of Florida Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is asking members of the public across the state to report their fox squirrel sightings at the following website <https://public.myfwc.com/hsc/foxsquirrel/GetLatLong.aspx>



Questions?

Please Contact Courtney Hooker foxsquirrel@ifas.ufl.edu

Courtney Hooker, (FWC) works in the NRCS Alachua County field office providing Donna Hopwood, DC, with biological assistance through a partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Courtney is also working on her masters degree and is coordinating a statewide fox squirrel tracking study. She would like NRCS employees to report sightings of fox squirrels, which will likely happen while you are out working on private lands. Website on poster, left.

Make sure to get permission (verbally or written) from the landowner prior to reporting.

The Mouse is Everywhere!

Submitted by Donna Hopwood, DC

Courtney Hooker, Wildlife Biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission found this.

"I was entering a fox squirrel sighting for a landowner down near Clermont and came across this....someone actually planted their pine trees in the shape of Mickey Mouse's head!"



Don't Forget to Submit Your Photos For the Next Photo Contest

The contest is open to all employees of Florida NRCS and SWCD staffs. Submissions can be either print or digital pictures, (digital pictures must be at least 150 ppi). Photos must be taken in Florida and should include one or more of the following elements: soil, water, air, plants, animals, and/or employees. They can not be previously used photos. When submitting photos include your name, contact information, and detailed information about the photo and subject matter (location, name, title, date taken, event, etc.) See rules sheet for more information.



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Send questions, comments or contributions to:

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