



### *A Note from the Director*

It's summer. We didn't get much of a spring here in Portland but we've definitely had enough of the hot weather that we can call it summer. It is field season in the States, and for our Tech Center, we just finished a very intense quarter for training. A couple of those training efforts are highlighted in this quarterly report.

Training is a main focus for what we do at the WNTSC. We hope we are helping your employees become more adept at conservation planning and working with the farmers and ranchers in your communities.

Looking ahead, as the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative comes closer to fruition, we will be here to help the West States prepare for the new tools and improvements to our conservation planning process.

As always, please feel free to contact me, or any of the WNTSC staff, with your training or assistance needs.

*- Bruce Newton*

For contact information on WNTSC specialists, check our website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/ntsc/west/contacts.html>.

## Core Team Highlights

### Sage Grouse Training--Just Do It!

A new Initiative for 11 States. Almost all of those States are in the West. Every State will need field conservationist training within 2 months. What do you do? Well, borrowing from our neighbors at Nike...Just Do It!

And that's just what WNTSC wildlife biologist **Wendell Gilgert** did. Working with WNTSC rangeland management specialist **Pat Shaver**, he pulled together a core group of people from each of the 11 states, determined the 10 best sites across those states, did a little training on "MyMeeting," a software program that allows Internet linkage to multiple sites with materials at the different sites to be uploaded for viewing by everyone, and picked the dates.

When all was said and done, almost 500 NRCS conservationists and partners concurrently received the same 2 1/2 days of classroom and field training to help farmers and ranchers in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming take steps to enhance and preserve important sage-grouse habitat.



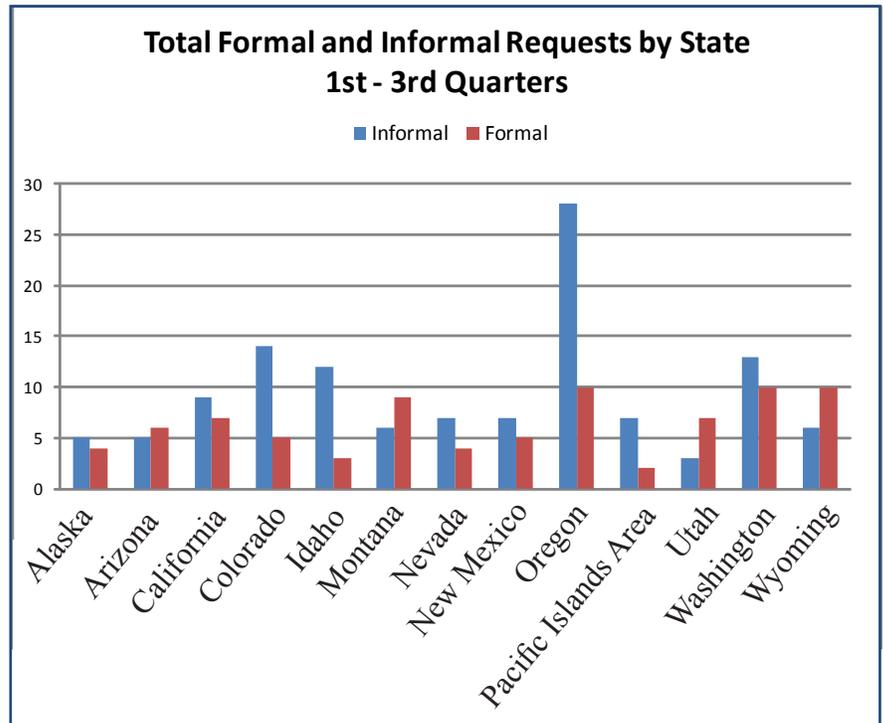
*Each training location made arrangements for field visits. Three Greyhound-type buses brought everyone to the field to examine existing or potential habitat at this Montana site.*

*"After the last of the net training concluded, we talked for another hour and a half. Good stuff," said one attendee. There was a lot of productive dialogue between NRCS and local partners. There was also some down time when the phone system and the Internet went down at one site--"...my computer lost its ability to connect to the Internet...the server went*

*"Just Do It" continued on page 3*

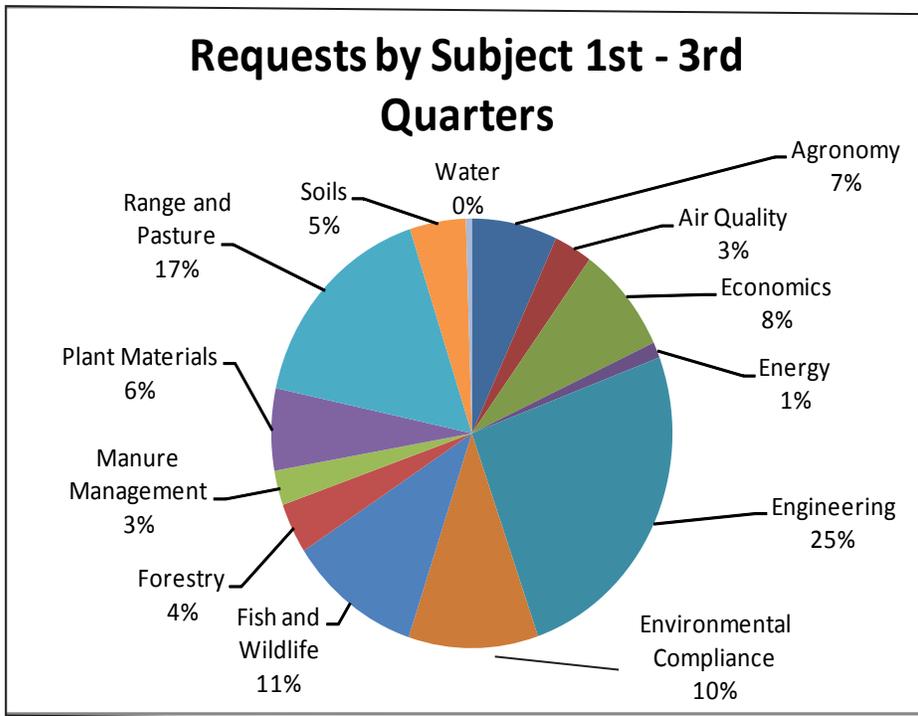
# An Analysis of WNTSC Assistance Third Quarter FY2010

Formal Requests are identified as requests that take more than 2 days to complete. They are often initiated by a letter sent from the State Conservationist.



| FY10 3rd Qtr WNTSC Requests |             |         |           |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| Requested                   | In Progress | Ongoing | Completed |
| 117                         | 164         | 26      | 223       |

For more information or to track a specific request, visit the Assistance Tracker web site at <http://ssiapps.sc.egov.usda.gov/RequestTracker/Default.aspx> or contact Russ Hatz, WNTSC national technology specialist, 503-273-2428 or russ.hatz@por.usda.gov.



Note: Water requests do not include those to the Water Quality and Quantity National Technology Development Team.

down the week before...we ended up at the local Best Western Breakfast Room with 4 cell phones on speaker, but we got ‘er done and we all enjoyed the lectures” was the comment of one site coordinator.



The sage-grouse population in the above mentioned States has been declining significantly over the last several years--primarily because

of the loss of sagebrush that they depend on for food and cover. After an announcement by the Department of Interior saying that, while not listed as an Endangered Species, the sage-grouse warranted special attention, USDA NRCS put together a Special Initiative to protect the bird and its habitat through the use of two conservation programs--the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The use of the two programs will allow farmers and ranchers more alternatives and a targeted approach to improving and protecting the bird's habitat.

“Given the large number of people who needed to receive the training, the dispersed geographical nature of the delivery area, and the short timeframe to prepare, the training was a great success,” said Gilgert. He praised the efforts of the NRCS state specialists--biologists, rangeland management specialists, and resource conservationists. “They made the local arrangements and led the local sessions. They made it work,” he said.

For more information, contact Wendell Gilgert, [wendell.gilgert@por.usda.gov](mailto:wendell.gilgert@por.usda.gov), 503-273-2426.



## Jeopardy? Yes, It's NEPA Training!

Watershed planning, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), laws, regulations, defensible planning, National Handbooks, and Program Manuals. Not topics that are thought of as fun for training. But they were!

Organized as a pilot course, **Meg Bishop**, WNTSC ecologist and environmental compliance specialist, and others focused on delivering training that would help NRCS conservation professionals understand the various regulatory and policy requirements of watershed planning, NEPA, and the various environmental laws, regulations, and executive orders.

Bishop, along with Robin DeMeo, national watershed survey and planning program manager, and Matt Harrington, national environmental specialists --both from NHQ; and David Heffington, ecologist and environmental specialist; Tim Sweeny, water resources planning specialist; and George Townsley, agricultural economist --all from the National Water Management Center (NWMC) located in Little Rock, AR., worked together with 32 students from the West Region (and a couple each thrown in from the East and the Central Regions) to help states develop defensible watershed plans that include the level of robust informational analysis required by NEPA and other environmental laws. This training will help states have a better grasp of legal and policy requirements as well as be able to improve the quality of our products from a technical and compliance standpoint.

The game Jeopardy was used to make the training fun and help the students learn. Different sets of questions were set up each day and scores carried over daily for the 3-day training. Jeopardy broke up the day, and gave the students a chance to laugh as they learned the difficult material. Small “gag” gifts were awarded to the winners. Of the 29 course evaluations returned, 19 said they “Strongly Agree” that what they learned at the session will help them in their jobs. (And hopefully will keep them out of “Jeopardy.”) Other information on the evaluations relayed that students appreciated the knowledge level of the instructors as well as the interactive atmosphere of the training that allowed them to ask questions during the session.

Bishop has made the presentation materials available on the WNTSC Ecologist website at <https://nrsc.sc.egov.usda.gov/st/wntsc/coreteam/Environmental%20Compliance/default.aspx>.



## SDV for ESD Training

SDV for ESD...E I E I Ooooo, right? No longer for several employees from Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Wyoming after they went through extensive training on "Soil Data Viewer as a Tool for Developing Ecological Site Descriptions."

WNTSC soil scientist, **Steve Campbell** provided training to the participants which included a representative from the USDA Forest Service. The purpose of the 2-day training was to provide the participants with tools and techniques for using soil survey tabular and spatial data to develop and correlate ecological sites. Campbell reported that they were able to cover advanced topics such as writing custom queries in the MS Access soil survey database, and using National Soil Information System (NASIS) reports to extract soil survey data for ecological site description development. The participants provided valuable feedback that will help to refine and improve the agenda for future training sessions of this type throughout the West Region.



## Plant Materials Consortium

As the West National Technology Support Center plant materials specialist, Jim Briggs acts as a technical advisor to the West Region PMC Consortium. The Consortium recently held a workshop in Logan, Utah for about 25 representatives from around the West Region.



Briggs coordinated the meeting and led the workshop to discuss and develop coordinated strategies addressing emerging resource issues and to provide relevant training to improve the quality of PMC products. The venue and agenda were chosen to provide maximum opportunity for PMC staff to interact and network with ARS

researchers at the Forage and Range Research Laboratory, Bee Laboratory, and Poisonous Plant Laboratory which are all located at Utah State University.

The workshop was an unqualified success with NRCS participants becoming exposed to new, cutting edge science as well as developing contacts which will help them accomplish their work more effectively. Participants assessed their program needs and looked at what is working and how it can be improved, including maintaining and improving connectivity to Field offices.



The open dialogue made this an especially effective meeting according to feedback from the attendees.



## If It's Summer, It Must Be WEPS Training!

If it's summer, it's WEPS time! At least that's how WNTSC agronomist Rich Fasching's calendar reads. The kickoff was the West Region Agronomy Consortium where he delivered a WEPS (Wind Erosion Prediction Model System) rollout session to all of the States in the West--about 34 people.

Fasching's next step is to start helping States insure that all of the field offices have received the training and are up and running and using the training by September 30, 2010. He currently has training scheduled in 6 different states. WEPS will be a critical part of conservation planning, particularly in areas of the West where soils are loose and the wind is a significant resource factor.

The WEPS tool was developed by members of NRCS, ARS, and others working together, including our Air Quality and Atmospheric Change National Technology Development Team.



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