



### *A Note from the Director*

Our specialists have been especially busy on State assistance projects this past quarter. I worry about how their families are bearing up under the strain of them being away so much. But we are making exciting progress in some key areas. One of these is riparian ecological site descriptions (ESDs). There are currently projects in several States to develop preliminary ESD's for these particularly challenging ecosystems. Another area is NEPA compliance. Every State was able to send at least one participant to an Advanced NEPA training workshop we held this quarter.

You will notice that there are no graphs or charts on assistance requests in this report. Unfortunately, there were server and program problems with our Assistance Tracker system during the quarter. We will certainly get those numbers to you as part of the year-end review.

We are working hard to maintain the necessary mix of discipline specialists to serve the States. We welcomed Russ Hatz as the new National Technology Specialist. Russ was formerly the State Resource Conservationist for Oregon. We also welcomed Evelyn Johnson, our new Office Assistant, who moved from South Carolina to join us and federal service. We hope to announce the selection of an Energy Conservation Specialist soon. And the vacancy announcement for our Soil Scientist should be out by the time you read this. Lyn Townsend, our Forester, retired on July 2 and we hope to advertise for that position in the Fall.

As always, don't hesitate to contact our specialists. And please let me know if there is any way we can better serve you.

- Bruce Newton

### Core Team Highlights

#### Riparian Ecology Training - New Mexico

**Gene Fults**, GLCI Rangeland Management Specialist, was one of a cadre of interagency interdisciplinary instructors for the pilot Riparian Ecology Course held the week of May 18<sup>th</sup> in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The 33 participants included employees from NRCS, conservation districts, Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service; consultants; and University professors. The course included field and classroom activities on riparian classification, scale, functions and modification of functions, ecological processes, and management objectives.



#### Advanced NEPA Training - Western States

An Advanced NEPA Workshop was held in Portland for 23 Biologists, SRCs, ASTCs, Cultural Resource Specialists, and others from all of the **Western States** June 23-25, 2009. Co-sponsored by **Meg Bishop**, Environmental Compliance Specialist on the Core Team, and Matt Harrington, National Environmental Compliance Specialist, the session provided an excellent opportunity for staff involved in various aspects of environmental compliance to exchange information and to enhance their knowledge of NEPA and the various "Cross-Cutting" laws such as the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and others.

The training was targeted to those NRCS employees who are responsible for overseeing general environmental compliance protocols related to NEPA and other environmental laws, as well as those involved in developing formal NEPA documents for individual and watershed-level actions. Powerpoint slide presentations for all 3 days of the session, along with the agenda, supporting materials, and some of the handouts are available on the WNTSC Environmental

Compliance Sharepoint site (click “NEPA” in the left margin) at <https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/st/wntsc/coreteam/Environmental%20Compliance/default.aspx>.



## Endangered Species Recovery - Great Plains

The Wyoming Game and Fish Deputy Director, on behalf of the Black-footed Ferret (BFF) Recovery Executive Committee, contacted NRCS to ask for assistance to create habitat to promote the recovery and eventual removal of the BFF from the Endangered Species List.

Once one of the most endangered mammals in the world, the last population of less than 80 BFFs was discovered on the Pitchfork Ranch in Meeteetse, Wyoming, in 1987. Eighteen of those animals were captured for a reintroduction program. The BFF is the only North American Ferret. Their historic range was twelve states in the U.S. as well as Canada and Mexico, the same home range as 4 species of prairie dog. Their sole prey is the prairie dog.

NRCS is working with the BFF Recovery Executive Committee to explore possibilities for using Farm Bill Programs to create habitat for the reintroduce BFF's. A group of SRC's and Program Specialists from the proposed recovery area, along with National Farm Bill Program Specialists, are developing ideas for conservation (incentives, easements, cost-share) as well as which Farm Bill programs are appropriate to interest producers in providing acceptable conditions for reintroduction. **Wendell Gilgert**, WNTSC Wildlife Biologist, is the point of contact for this effort.

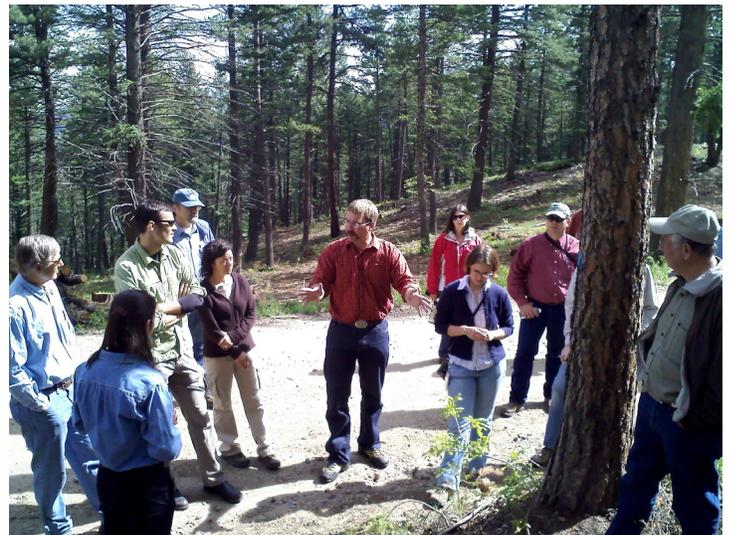


## Farm Bill and Forestry -- West Region

WNTSC Forestry Specialist, **Lyn Townsend** helped the West Joint Forestry Team tackle a number of Farm Bill Forestry provisions at their second annual meeting June 8-10 in Lakewood, Colorado. A group of 30 foresters, directors, and specialists represented state and local offices of NRCS and State forestry agencies as well as the

West NTSC, Central NTSC, NRCS West Forestry Consortium, NRCS-NHQ, USFS State and Private Forestry National Office, National Association of Conservation Districts, National Agroforestry Center, West Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC), Western Governor's Association, Western Coalition of Conservation Districts, and the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts.

The Team is an ad hoc group sponsored by the NRCS West Forestry Consortium and the West Forestry Leadership Council (<http://www.wflcenter.org/index.php>). Their main purpose is to create an understanding and synergy among the 17 member states for implementing Farm Bill forestry-related provisions such as Technical Service Provider development, templates and criteria for Forest Management Plans, 'first contact' arrangements for non-industrial private forest landowners, and the coordination of EQIP practice payment schedules. Townsend, who also moderated part of the session, reported, "Frank Gariglio (NRCS-ID), Greg Sundstrom (Colorado State Forest Service), Jonas Feinstein (Jefferson CD Forester), and Bob Carnes (WFLC Business Manager) were the people behind the scenes that made this meeting a reality. They went above and beyond their normal duties to organize and facilitate a much needed and productive session that focused on 2008 Farm Bill Forestry. The invited speakers provided a wealth of information and stimulated meaningful discussion among participants."



*Jonas Feinstein of the Jefferson County Conservation District, Colorado, speaking on funding and specifications for a defensible space fuel break near Conifer, Colorado*

## **Grazing Inventory, Analysis, and Planning on Tribal Lands -- Washington and Oregon**

**Jeff Repp**, Rangeland Management Specialist on the Core Team, is working with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a private contractor in conducting a rangeland inventory of the Reservation grazing lands. The Tribe has an effective and active natural resources program and wants to design grazing prescriptions that maintain or enhance the quality of their rangelands. Protecting cultural sites and historically significant food gathering (root digging) areas are also important to them. Repp provided procedures and protocols for carrying out the inventory with the BIA and their contractor. The range inventory will be tied to a GIS system and the field data is being collected with the ARS/NRCS Range Database using tablet PCs. Individual allotment grazing plans will be modified using the updated inventory. Analysis of the data will be completed later.



## **Plant Materials Protocols, Projects, and Planning -- West Region**

**Jim Briggs**, Plant Materials Specialist, has been working with NRCS technical staff, PMCs, and Agricultural Research Service personnel in Texas and Nevada to develop protocols for measuring plant attribute data needed for Almanac, a model used in the grazing lands portion of the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). Pilot studies are expected to begin in the spring of 2010 and will involve the West Region PMCs. Briggs is also developing training for plant materials staff with Dr. Steve Smith from the University of Arizona on plant development using genecological techniques. The 1.5 day Webinar training scheduled for January 2010 will focus on an ecologically sensitive method for selecting native plant populations best suited to a given ecological region. Briggs continues to support western PMCs through work with National NRCS and the Bureau of Land Management leadership to identify and coordinate the development of joint projects with BLM funding support. To-date, projects have been identified in California, New Mexico, and Arizona.

## **Training for Burning Associations -- Colorado**

**Pat Shaver**, Rangeland Management Specialist, recently provided Prescribed Burning training to 26 NRCS employees, state agency employees, and landowners/operators in Colorado. After classroom training on safety issues and what determines favorable and unfavorable conditions, Shaver took the class to the field for dramatic demonstrations. The training was delivered as part of a NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant received by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory to develop a prescribed burning association in the State.



## **Pest Management on the Web - Nationwide**

With interest from several states in pest management training as part of a grazing management plan, **Gene Fults**, GLCI Rangeland Management Specialist, developed a Web training course that was offered live in June. It was a success. The telephone lines were maxed out when over 240 participants from across the US logged in. Many watched the presentation without sound.

Dr. Edward Vasquez and Dr. Brenda Smith, with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, assisted with the training. Dr. Vasquez presented scientific and ecological foundations for effectively reducing the favored establishment of micro sites for invasive species such as knapweed and cheatgrass. He promoted the practices of Range Planting, Brush Management, Prescribed Fire, and Prescribed Grazing as part of pest management. Dr. Smith discussed organizing Weed Prevention Areas and the work and benefits of such an effort. She is planning an ecologically-based Invasive Plant Management Workshop for sometime in September 2009. For more information, see [www.ebipm.org](http://www.ebipm.org).



## National Technology Development Team Highlights

The **Air Quality and Atmospheric Change National Technology Development Team** (AQAC) has put a significant effort into developing air quality guidance in support of the NRCS Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI). The Team completed resource concern specifications and definitions for each of the four primary air quality resource concerns (particulate matter, ozone precursors, greenhouse gases, and odors), as well as delineation of planning criteria, and assessment tools and methodology. The CDSI will culminate with the development of a conservation planning business model for the Agency that will enable planners to do more on-site planning and technical assistance with landowners. With the new, step-wise planning process developed by the AQAC Team, planners will be able to more readily make air quality assessments and recommendations.



The **Air Quality and Atmospheric Change Team** has begun initial testing of updates to COMET-VR ([www.cometvr.colostate.edu](http://www.cometvr.colostate.edu)). When incorporated into the web-accessible version of the model, these updates will allow users to make estimates of carbon sequestered in woody species used in agroforestry applications, including carbon sequestered in windbreaks, woodlots, riparian areas, silvopasture, and alley cropping. The user can select from two modes of operation: modeled predictions, where COMET-VR predicts carbon sequestration in the woody biomass, or user determined, where the user can input actual measured values of tree type, size, and planting density, and the model will estimate current stored biomass carbon and predict future carbon sequestration in the biomass. A further model enhancement will estimate soil emissions of nitrous oxide from soil nutrient management. Inputs include crop rotations and tillage intensity, information on chemical and organic nitrogen fertilizer applied to the soil, and whether or not a nitrification inhibitor was used. COMET-VR will return an estimate of annual nitrous oxide emissions from the soil and a determination of the uncertainty of the estimate (a measure of how close the estimate is to observed research values).



The **National Energy Technology Development Team**, focused on training for the FY09 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter. Along with the **National Air Quality and Atmospheric Change Team**, they prepared and delivered Air Quality and Energy Training in Burlington, VT, and Madison, WI. In addition, both Teams worked hard to complete web-based training for NRCS employees and others. That training includes an introductory course on Energy and Air Quality plus detailed courses specific to each resource. The 7 web-based courses were the product of several months of dedication by Team members. Additional courses are under development.



The **Water Quality and Quantity National Technology Development Team** has been working hard on the Nutrient Trading Tool (NTT). They have demonstrated the tool to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, Deputy Under Secretary Ann Mills, and NRCS Chief Dave White. Many hours have gone into demonstrations and discussion with leadership as well as with leadership of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The tool looks at climate as well as soil type, conditions, and expected behaviors; and combines them to determine the ability of specific practices to keep nutrients and chemicals from animal waste and pesticides out of surface and ground water sources. Producers can earn credits for reducing those pollutant loads (through the installation of the appropriate practices). Those credits can be collected for market trading.



The **Water Quality and Quantity National Technology Development Team** has also provided training on HEC-RAS recently. Much of the work involved updating and improving previous training materials. HEC-RAS (Hydrologic Engineering Center-River Analysis System) is a one-dimensional hydraulic model which can be employed to compute water surface profiles for subcritical or supercritical flow or both.

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