



**SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR'S
 EDITION
 EARLY SPRING
 NEWSLETTER
 APRIL 2013**

THE PEARL PREVIEW

Dear Conservationists,

Welcome to a new year of conservation and exciting times for Area 2. This special issue of The Pearl Preview is a tribute to contributors who have written excellent stories about the work they are doing in the field, as well as our State Office Public Affairs Staff that have highlighted Area 2 and our landowners working hard to improve their natural resources on their land. Due to the many stories contributed, and just not enough space, there will be another newsletter (Late Spring) coming soon that will hold other contributions!



David Brunson
Area Conservationist

A note of gratitude goes to the talented field employees who wrote and/or contributed to the stories in this issue of the Pearl Preview. Also included are stories written by Justin Fritscher highlighting Area 2 employees and landowners. All of his stories were published on the USDA Blog! We have a lot of interesting stories to tell in this area, and we are grateful to the Public Affairs Staff for telling them!

An outstanding WRP video narrated by Area 2's own Jason Keenan, and produced by Justin Fritscher, is accessible at the link below. The Late Spring issue will feature Justin's write-up! Special thanks goes to Dr. Eric Dibble, Wallace Cade, Terry Todd, Justin and Jason for their contributions to this terrific video!

[Landowner Transforms Hayfield Into Wetland—YouTube video:](#)

In addition, here is another outstanding video, Thigpen Tree Farm (National/MS Outstanding Tree Farm) Field Day-Jasper County News Article, along with NNFP Video of Field Day. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyPITSOSVpM>

Please keep these great stories coming! I am looking forward to another productive year in Area 2!

David Brunson
 Area Conservationist

Right: What do you think this is? Give up? According to Mike Lilly who waded into the pond to make this interesting picture, and Jason Keenan who clarified it, this is a bed of ants most likely flooded from their home. They were trapped in air bubbles which allowed them to float also known as "sticking together in rough weather!"



**What's Going On In
 DeKalb and Meridian? 2-3**

**Oktibbeha County's
 Small Forest Landowner
 Has Success with
 Pre-Commercial
 Thinning on Slow
 Growing Pine Stand 4-5**

**Noxubee County Small
 Farmer Improves Land
 and Cattle Production 6**

**Lowndes County Cattle
 Farmer—An Example of
 Excellence in
 Stewardship to Family
 Land 7-8**

**NRCS Helps Choctaw
 Tribe Keep Hominy
 Tradition Alive and
 Profitable 9-10**

**Conservation
 Partnership Visit
 Mississippi School for
 the Blind 11**

**Mississippi Landowner
 Nurtures Healthy Forest 12**

**Read Across America
 2013—Hinds County 13**

Area 2 MACD Awards 14

**Mike Lilly Instructs
 Piney Woods School
 Students 15**

**FFA and 4-H State Land
 Judging Contest 16**

**Area 2 Envirothon,
 Crystal Springs, MS 17**

**Miscellaneous Pictures—
 New Employees, Etc. 18-19**



An energetic team of concerned citizens made up of a big variety of organizations and agencies (see story for details) met recently in DeKalb to confirm and coordinate plans for the first Great American Cleanup planned for the City of DeKalb. Our own Dawn Brace (back row, fourth from the right); Lee Wilson (hiding third from the right on the back row); and Jeannine May (far right) are among the NRCS and MS&WWC partners active in this tremendous team effort.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN DEKALB ?

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN FRITSCHER AND JUDI CRADDOCK

On April 12, 2013, come join the excitement as DeKalb, MS, plans a major community Great American Clean-up event and improvement effort with help and leadership from Dawn Brace, Soil Conservation Technician in DeKalb; Kelvin Jackson, Supervisory District Conservationist in Meridian; Dwight

Jackson, Soil Conservationist in DeKalb; State Office Public Affairs staff, Pearl Area Office staff, Mayor Homer Hall, and many others.

➡ Please double-click on flyer at left to see a larger picture version for more information.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Help Keep Mississippi Beautiful, Mississippi Power & partners clean and green DeKalb as part of the **Great American Kickoff in Mississippi** Friday, April 12 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

We're looking for volunteers to help us:
+ Create a new park by planting trees, shrubs and flowers and laying a walking trail.
+ Clean up litter.
+ Improve our community.

Schedule:
8:30 a.m. - Kickoff ceremony at Barney Brown Sr. Citizen Center
9 a.m.- noon - Clean up and green up
12:30 p.m. - Lunch

Want to join us?

Return the below form to KMB to sign up. If you have any questions, please contact: Keep Mississippi Beautiful, (601) 853-4441
USDA's Natural Resources Conser. Service, (601) 917-7399
This event is a great opportunity for service hours.

National Sponsors



SIGN ME UP!

To RSVP, please mail this form to Keep Mississippi Beautiful (208 Key Drive, Suite B, Madison, MS 39110), fax this form to (601) 853-4150 or email your contact information to webmaster@keepmsbeautiful.com.

Name _____ Affiliation _____
I plan to attend: ____ April 12 in DeKalb.
Phone # _____ Email _____
During our event, help us show how Mississippians are giving back. Post photos and updates on Keep America Beautiful's Facebook page or include #KeepAmericaBeautiful in your tweets on Twitter.



Left: Kelvin Jackson, Dawn Brice, and Jeannine May present a plan for the walking trail and other improvements by E. J. Tynes.

Right: E. J. Tynes, Area Soil Conservation Technician, surveyed the site with Dawn Brace for the walking trail in DeKalb that will be a first for the city. Future plans include gazebo, amphitheater, and playground. A "farmer's market" is also being considered adjacent to the property.





VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Help Keep Mississippi Beautiful, Keep Meridian/Lauderdale Beautiful & partners clean and green Meridian as part of the:
Great American Kickoff in Mississippi
 Saturday, April 13 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

We're looking for volunteers to help us:

- + Spruce up parks and other public places by planting trees, shrubs and flowers.
- + Clean up litter.
- + Improve our community.

Schedule:

- 8:30 a.m. - Kickoff ceremony at Highland Park
- 9 a.m.- noon - Clean up and green up
- 12:30 p.m. - Lunch

Want to join us?

Return the below form to KMB to sign up. If you have any questions, please contact:

Keep Mississippi Beautiful, (601) 853-4441
 Keep Meridian/Lauderdale Beautiful, (601) 917-4344

This event is a great opportunity for service hours.

National Sponsors



SIGN ME UP!

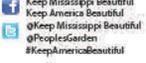
To RSVP, please mail this form to Keep Mississippi Beautiful (208 Key Drive, Suite B, Madison, MS 39110), fax this form to (601) 853-4150 or email your contact information to webmaster@keepmsbeautiful.com.

Name _____ Affiliation _____

I plan to attend: _____ April 13 in Meridian

Phone # _____ Email _____

During our event, help us show how Mississippians are giving back. Post photos and updates on Keep America Beautiful's Facebook page or include #KeepAmericaBeautiful in your tweets on Twitter.



WHAT'S GOING ON IN MERIDIAN?

PHOTOS BY JUDI CRADDOCK

Another Great American Clean-up event will be kicking off in Meridian on **Saturday, April 13**. Keep Lauderdale County Day/Keep Meridian Beautiful will join together to improve their community by sprucing up Highland Park, James Chaney Park, and the Boys and Girls Club area with plantings of trees and shrubs, flower boxes, litter removal, park benches, picnic tables, recycling bins and trash receptacles, clean-up around Merrihope Antebellum home, and paintings by local artists on a power box grid 8th Street, a tourist and historical area near downtown.

Double-click on the flyer at left for a larger picture version for more information.

Volunteers are welcome!

Dignitaries for both DeKalb and Meridian events include Governor Phil Bryant and First Lady; Lt. Governor Tate Reeves, City leaders, Mayor and Department heads, Supervisors, area Legislators, Chamber of Commerce, Keep Mississippi Board, and others.



Folks were getting excited about improving their local community! This photo was in DeKalb as Sarah Kountouris with Keep Mississippi Beautiful led the group for both DeKalb and Meridian Great American Clean-up events, April 12 and 13. USDA has also joined Keep America Beautiful on People's Gardens and Native Planting Day. According to Jeannine May, "there are limitless possibilities" for projects involving beautification of Mississippi!"



Pictured above are Justin Fritscher, taking notes at the planning meeting in DeKalb; Mark Smith, Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS, Washington, D.C.; and Dawn Brace, Soil Conservation Technician in DeKalb, major planner for the DeKalb event!



This “before picture” shows thick growth of young, poorly formed and diseased pine trees as well as competitive understory vines and other plant species. Very little sunlight is present which endangers the overall health of this timberland.

OKTIBBEHA COUNTY’S SMALL FOREST LANDOWNER HAS SUCCESS WITH PRE-COMMERCIAL THINNING ON SLOW GROWING PINE STAND

STORY BY TERRY TODD AND ALAN HOLDITCH
PHOTOS BY ALAN HOLDITCH

Mrs. Essie Griffin (photo not available) is a limited resource forest landowner near Starkville, in Oktibbeha County, Mississippi. She came into the local NRCS office back in the fall of 2011 requesting information and possible assistance on clearing up undesirable competition inside her 21-acre pine stand.

With NRCS assistance in gathering all the necessary information, Mrs. Griffin made out an Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) program application; and a field visit was scheduled to see what could be done to assist her.



Shown above is NRCS Soil Conservationist Terry Todd (right) standing with contractor that just finished completing Forest Stand Improvement on 21 acres of dense, heavily overgrown pine plantation.

Terry Todd, NRCS Soil Conservationist in Starkville, MS, requested assistance from the NRCS State Forester Allan Holditch to help make some suggestions on what could be done on this particular pine plantation. The onsite visit revealed that the pines had seeded in naturally and the stand was too thick for adequate growth of the crop trees (*shown at left*). This overstocking of young pine trees can cause the stand to stagnate and make the stand susceptible to insect and disease attack. Healthy pine stands that are growing rapidly can repel insect and disease attacks. Not only is the health of the pine stand in danger, the financial health of the forestland owner is also in danger because the pine stand is maturing at an extremely slow rate.

The solution was to use a pre-commercial thinning practice that eliminates the competition for sunlight and nutrients among the competing trees and gives the crop trees

more room to grow and mature. The goal of the landowner is to select the best trees to remain as crop trees and remove the poorly formed, diseased, forked, stunted, over topped, crooked, and smaller trees from the stand.

Mrs. Griffin was signed up for EQIP as a limited resource farmer and was approved in March 2012 for Forest Stand Improvement Heavy Mechanical at the HU cost rate. She had a total of 21 acres at a unit cost of \$389.41 per acre for a total of \$8,178.00.



(Continued from Page 4)

Allan Holditch believed that a mulching machine would have the best overall success for this site. He stated, “When the stand is too old for a commercial bush hog or disk, then the cull trees must be cut with a chainsaw or mulching machine.”

A small mulching machine (*shown at left*) was used on this property. The cutting drum removed all saplings, small trees, understory vines, bushes, and shrubs. The remaining stand is now well spaced and free to grow. These remaining trees will reach commercial size in a shorter time and increase the landowner’s economic return on the timberland.

NRCS Soil Conservationist Terry Todd (left) standing with contractor shows small mulching machine with cutting drum for removal of saplings, small trees, understory vines, bushes and shrubs that compete with the growth of the desirable commercial trees.

USDA funds were successfully used in assisting this historically underserved landowner to improve her natural resources and increase her economic return on timberland. When the next opportunity arises,

NRCS in Oktibbeha County stands ready to provide further technical assistance to Mrs. Griffin.

PHOTOS AROUND AREA 2



Spring has sprung with a new family at the Madison NHQ Office. Submitted by Photo by Nancy Magee.



Patrick Smith gets involved with assisting landowner Percy Brown with installation of a new watering trough for his livestock. More on this story to come in the Late Spring issue!

Right: *The one and only SNOW DAY at the Area Office! Snowman by Suzanne Rimes!*



NOXUBEE COUNTY SMALL FARMER IMPROVES LAND AND CATTLE PRODUCTION WITH EQIP

STORY BY NICOLE MAY KITCHENS,
PHOTOS BY JEANNINE MAY



Pictured are Mr. Frank Draper and Soil Conservation Technician, Jeff Fortenberry. Jeff has been providing assistance to Mr. Draper and has helped him sign up for needed EQIP practices on Mr. Draper's farm. As a Noxubee County small farmer and landowner, Mr. Draper highly recommends NRCS and appreciates their willingness to assist him with various conservation practices that will improve his land and cattle production.

A long-time native of Noxubee County, Mr. Frank Draper owns 40+ head of beef cattle near Macon, MS. His father taught him to have an appreciation for raising livestock and taking care of the land. Mr. Draper is a member of the Mississippi Cattlemen's Association, which helps him to network with vendors and other farmers. "Cost share has been beneficial in helping with my farm operations. Building the pond and establishing cross-fence will allow me to expand my herd and divide the property into more grazing areas. The fence will also help to wean calves from the cows, and reduce grazing stress on the land."

"Currently, rising feed prices make operations difficult," stated Mr. Draper. Going into the winter with as much grass as possible, and storing hay that he cut from his pastures will keep the cows fed. Jeff Fortenberry, Soil Conservation Technician for the Macon Field Office, said that Mr. Draper enjoys working his cattle and farming, and is constantly trying to improve his herd and his land. Mr. Draper has implemented other NRCS practices in the past, such as manure transfer, pasture and hay planting, nutrient management, and prescribed grazing. He said that he has enjoyed working with NRCS.

NRCS District Conservationist Wallace H. Cade, Jr., said Mr. Draper is a fine example of being a better steward of the land. Mr. Draper's operation is visible from the county roads and is a perfect example for people to see what ongoing conservation efforts, new conservation practices, and the benefits these conservation practices have on a well run cattle operation.

In the future, Mr. Draper plans on signing up with NRCS for other practices such as pest and weed control, heavy-use area implementation, and building shade structures for his cattle. NRCS wishes Mr. Draper the best in his farming endeavors, and will continue to work with him on future conservation land management practices.



Shown at right is the newly dug pond that will increase water quantity in the future grazing cell that cross-fencing will provide.

Pictured from left to right are Mr. Frank Draper, and Soil Conservation Technicians Nicole Kitchens and Jeff Fortenberry, Macon Field Office, Noxubee County.



Mr. McCarter standing with District Conservationist Wallace H. Cade, Jr., on newly constructed heavy use area protection pad. Photos by Justin Brassel and Wally Cade, NRCS Mississippi.

LOWNDES COUNTY CATTLE FARMER—AN EXAMPLE OF EXCELLENCE IN STEWARDSHIP TO FAMILY LAND

**STORY BY NICOLE MAY KITCHENS
PHOTOS BY JUSTIN BRASSEL AND
WALLACE CADE**

William “Mac” McCarter has been farming cattle on his family land nearly all of his life. “Most kids today don’t know where their food comes from, and that bothers me,” the Crawford, Mississippi, farmer said. “I remember as a young boy, we made our living from our land. We ate vegetables from our garden. We raised our own cattle, hogs, and

chickens. We would buy staple items from town, like sugar and flour, but mostly we raised our own food. My father

taught me to have an appreciation for the land.”

Mr. McCarter first heard about NRCS through news and word of mouth. Several years ago when the formerly ASCS existed (now Farm Service Agency) an agent in Columbus, MS, told Mr. McCarter that he could sign up for conservation practices. Then, after seeing a Lowndes County NRCS newsletter, he signed up with NRCS for conservation management practices. He has been working with NRCS ever since.

Mr. McCarter is a recent retiree from a nearby industrial plant. He and his wife run their family-owned convenience station in Crawford full-time, but he will tell you that his real job is farming cattle. He owns and maintains nearly 100 head of cattle, still on his family land in Crawford, MS. He and his wife raised six children who all live away now, but visit home to help with the cattle operations when they can. Education is important to him. All six of his children completed college; and today, he worries youngsters are not exposed enough to the outdoors and agriculture.

His nephew, Eric, helps him with the daily operations. Mr. McCarter operates 600+ acres in cattle and hay production. He has recently completed construction of a new watering pond and heavy-use area protection through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).



Mr. McCarter has also renovated an old pond through EQIP. The ponds will provide drinking water for his cattle, and heavy-use area protection will reduce feeding costs.

At left: New dug-out pond on Mr. McCarter’s farm.

(Continued from Page 7)

District Conservationist Wallace H. Cade, Jr., says that Mr. “Mac” is one of the most dedicated farmers he has been privileged to work with in Lowndes County. He genuinely puts his faith in his family, and continues to work hard at his cattle operation. We’re working with Mr. McCarter on implementing more conservation practices in the future.”

Before installing heavy use area protection, Mr. McCarter stated that feeding cows and calves during the winter months was tough. Wet, muddy ground, along with rain and cold temperatures would cause him to lose calves and waste feed and hay. Now, though, he says he has a “savings plan” in the heavy-use area. Cows and calves no longer get “stuck” in the mud, and he has zero calf loss. There is now much less wasted feed.

Soil Conservation Technician Justin Brassel has been working closely with Mr. McCarter to implement his practices through the EQIP program. He stated that, “Mr. McCarter is the perfect example of how farmers should care for their land and be passionate for what they are producing. He begins and completes a project with the intention of implementing conservation practices to show good stewardship towards his land. I like to use Mr. McCarter as an example of excellence when working with other farmers in the county.”

Mr. McCarter could also benefit from pest and weed management practices, cross-fencing, and renovation of another watering pond. These practices are already on his conservation plan. Mr. McCarter will pursue EQIP opportunities for these practices as well.



Shown above: Spreading new material for heavy use pad.



“I love cattle farming. It’s in my blood,” said Mr. McCarter. “In past years, I also farmed hogs, but I love cattle.” Mr. McCarter also stated that since implementation of heavy use area protection, it has paid for itself four times over in his savings. “NRCS has been very beneficial to work with,” he stated. “I will definitely continue to work with the agency on future practices.”

Mr. McCarter and Soil Conservation Technician Justin Brassel standing on newly constructed heavy use area.

NRCS HELPS CHOCTAW TRIBE KEEP HOMINY TRADITION ALIVE AND PROFITABLE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUSTIN
FRITSCHER

For special meals like those on birthdays and Christmas, members of the [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians](#) include hominy on the menu—but hominy, essentially dried corn kernels, is expensive to purchase.

That's why USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) is working to help the tribe grow and harvest hickory king corn and other heirloom white varieties and process them to make hominy.

Hominy is a traditional food for Native Americans during the winter. To help restore this tradition, NRCS provided the [Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians](#), comprised of about 10,000 members across the region, with conservational technical assistance, helping them transform idle land into a hominy-making enterprise.



A member of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians removes the kernels from a corn of cob, one step in the hominy-making process.



Members of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians are making corn into hominy, a process that allows for better storage of the crucial grain.

Besides enabling the tribe to provide their own locally grown, fresh produce, growing the corn has trimmed expenses for them. It costs about \$25 to purchase the corn used to make one gallon of hominy. If grown and made on site, the hominy costs about \$16 per gallon.



A kiti, being made in this picture, is a wooden mortise that Native Americans use to pound corn into hominy.

(Continued from page 9)

Making hominy starts in the fields, when the corn is left to dry for 120 days. Then, the corn is harvested and kernels are removed from cobs. The kernels are stored in a cool location and left to dry for an additional three months. This step is important because it kills the seed germ inside.

Next, the work begins. The Choctaw pound the corn, using a wooden mortise called a kiti (pictured at left). The smashed kernels are sifted and cleaned, resulting in the final product—powdered corn that is used for cornmeal.

The whole hominy experience, from soil to spoon, gives the tribe's members a chance to rekindle the agricultural traditions of their ancestors.

Keeping those traditions alive is a major emphasis of NRCS' work with Native Americans, says Tim Oakes, the agency's tribal liaison to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians.

The tribe has two acres of corn for hominy, and some of the tribe's members have planted corn at home. NRCS helped the tribe locate the optimal soil for growing corn as well as other plants, such as giant cane, another significant plant to Native American cultures.

Information on the plants that have played integral roles in the lives of Native Americans can be found on [NRCS's PLANTS Database](#).

NRCS provides conservation programs and technical services to American Indians, Alaska Natives and tribal governments, **including the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians**, through a network of field offices located on and off tribal lands. NRCS has about 75 field offices on tribal lands and employs about 150 tribal liaisons to help put conservation practices on the ground.

SPECIAL NOTE: A big thank you goes to Justin Fritscher for allowing the editor of this newsletter to include his story that was published on the USDA Blog. Also another big thank you goes to Tim Oakes who arranged this incredible interview of the MBCI and staff.



Jason Keenan, NRCS Area 2 Wildlife Biologist, makes a hit with MS School for the Blind students who have most likely never felt the pelt of a Bobcat. The experiences Jason and Lynn Porter, Hinds County District Administrator, gave them were unforgettable; but the capabilities of the students impressed Jason and Lynn even more!

CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP VISITS WITH MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

STORY BY JASON KEENAN AND LYNN PORTER
PHOTOS BY LYNN PORTER

Sometimes as employees of NRCS and the Conservation Districts we are asked to assist with educational opportunities at various schools. These normally last less than an hour long, consist of show and tell using various wildlife skulls and pelts. Conservation programs help support our local schools and students. In early January, we were asked to help with a unique endeavor: assisting the MS

School for the Blind with conservation education. This was a new and exciting experience!

The afternoon started with the students providing a mock news report on local conservation efforts and wildlife facts. The ability of those students to perform in front of their peers and teachers really amazed us. Next, it was our turn to teach, although I feel like they taught me more than I taught them. Each time I had a skull or pelt to show, their hands went to flying! Even with a lack of vision, these students proved that though vision is an asset, not having it was not a disability either! They could describe the sharp canines of the black bear, the flat molars of the beaver and could describe why a bobcat has its spots! After almost an hour with those students, we just didn't have the time available that we *could have* spent discussing more wildlife facts and tidbits. We can only hope that we were able to leave half the impression on them that they left on us!



MISSISSIPPI LANDOWNER NURTURES HEALTHY FOREST, HELPS WILDLIFE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUSTIN FRITSCHER

Variano “Chino” Suarez manages four restaurants in Mississippi. You could say that he appreciates his free time more than most. When it’s time to unwind, Suarez retreats to his forest acres in the red clay hills of eastern Mississippi. Here, wildlife thrives and ponds are filled with bream and bass.

Suarez has always loved hunting, fishing, watching wildlife and just enjoying time outside—all experiences he shares with his wife and two daughters. A native of Mexico, Suarez grew up in a rural town, which strengthened his bond with the outdoors.



Variano Suarez (right) worked with NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist Kelvin Jackson and other staff members to plant native legumes on his land, providing food and shelter for dove and other wildlife.

Unfortunately, the previous owners of his 220 acres had not practiced proper conservation techniques, resulting in a dim future for the wooded areas due to invasive or undesirable trees and shrubs. Thankfully, with the help of USDA’s [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#), Suarez and the agency’s conservation team were able to heal and enrich his lands.

He enrolled 40 acres in NRCS’ [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), which helped him plant trees, apply herbicides and implement prescribed burning to put his forests on a healthier track. These practices improve the forest by reducing weedy vegetation, allowing the trees to grow more quickly and develop robust understory plants.

Suarez expects to end up with a forest that has more marketable trees, more food for wildlife and better resiliency to insects and invasive species. He knows that if he manages his forest properly, it will not only provide him



Variano Suarez monitors growth of loblolly pine trees with NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist Kelvin Jackson and consulting forester Eric Entekin.

benefits from timber sales after selective harvests, but it also ensures higher populations of wildlife.

A healthy forest supports three times the wildlife than an unhealthy one because of the food and sanctuary found in thriving ecosystems. These benefits are important to Suarez, who spends the bulk of his fall and winter hunting and watching wildlife on his property.

While using conservation does take some work, he says it’s well worth the effort. He is already seeing higher wildlife populations, and he is applying for more financial and technical assistance from NRCS to continue the conservation improvements to his land. He is always appreciative of his visits to his woods, whether it’s to hunt deer, relax on the back porch of his cabin or spend time with his family. As he says, sometimes you need to “get lost in the woods.”



Variano Suarez peers from a deer stand into a field. Suarez purchased the land for recreational activities like fishing, hunting and relaxing in nature.

READ ACROSS AMERICA 2013

SUBMITTED BY LYNN PORTER
PHOTOS BY JUDI CRADDOCK

A Read Across America 2013 Celebration was held at Oak Forest and Watkins Elementary Schools in Hinds County on Friday, March 1, 2013. Hinds County Earth Team Volunteers read "The Lorax" to students in honor of Dr. Seuss' birthday. In addition to the reading, students at Oak Forest Elementary presented a skit, "Dr. Seuss on the Loose," and sang several songs accompanied by students playing percussion. The school's officials also prepared a luncheon for all the PTA Board members, parents, and volunteers.



Above: Volunteers reading "The Lorax" at Oak Forest Elementary and Watkins Elementary schools included from left: Ed Porter, Lynn Porter, Mary Sue Bullock, Carolyn Crechale, Margie Sasser and Wyvette Robinson. Not pictured are Cindy Ayers and Peggy McKey.



Above: The Cat in the Hat (Lorenda Cheeks, Principal), Thing 1 and Thing 2, were part of the day's celebration of Dr. Seuss! Pictured with Hinds County Earth Team Volunteers is Dekeither Stamps (son of Delmer Stamps) at far right.



Above: Mary Sue Bullock and Carolyn Crechale read "The Lorax" to Mr. Dunham's first grade class at Oak Forest Elementary.



Left: The students and teachers work together in their "People's Garden," on the school campus. Above: Students at Oak Forest Elementary present, "Dr. Seuss is on the Loose," a skit to celebrate the birthday of Dr. Seuss. Ms. Lorenda Cheeks, Principal.



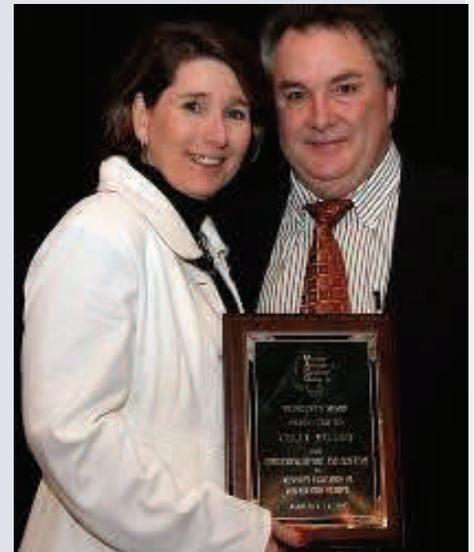
Bill Russell is presented with a Special Recognition Award from Mississippi Envirothon.



Malcolm Lowe is presented with the NRCS Employee of the Year Award!



Ondine Rudolph (Area 3), Nancy Melancon (Area 4), and Julie Darden-Kent (Area 2), are presented with Certificates of Appreciation for their outstanding services as Area Earth Team Volunteer Coordinators.



Celia Miller received the President's Award for Outstanding Support and Dedication to MACD!



Kelvin Jackson accepted the MACD Poster Contest for Special Education Award for Destiny Foshee.

Right: Simpson County resident Nell Hughes was honored at the Mississippi Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting for her role in environmental education in the state. Recently, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service rebirthed the "I'm a Conservation Grandparents Campaign" that Nell helped create. This new campaign, called "Conservation: Pass It Down," was created because of Nell's dedication and persistence in educating youngsters about the outdoors.



Mike Lilly Instructs Piney Woods School Students

Story and Photos by Judi Craddock

The Piney Woods School is a co-educational, independent historically African American boarding school for grades 9-12. Celebrating over 100 years in existence, their mission is to provide excellence in education to ensure that all students learn, develop a strong work ethic, and lead extraordinary lives through academic achievement and responsible citizenship. They are located in rural Rankin County 21 miles south of Jackson on Highway 49 near Florence.

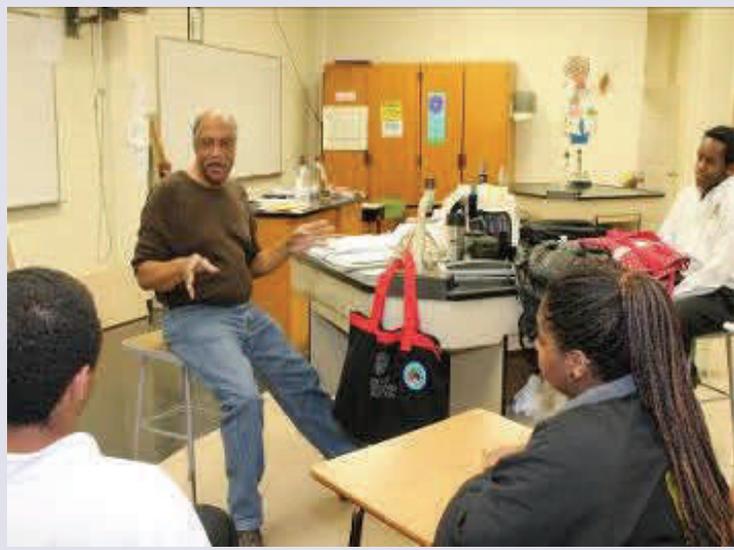


While there, Mike Lilly, ACES employee in the Pearl Area Office, talked to several students from other states as well as Indonesia. These students were simply amazing—so bright and full of young, eager enthusiasm and unending questions. Mike spent a February evening with them preparing them for the soils portion of the Envirothon competition.



Below are photos from that event. You can see that Mike was certainly in his element! Also present was Barbara Johnson, Professor of Chemistry/Human Anatomy/Physiology. For further information, click on website:

<http://www.pineywoods.org/about-us/presidents-welcome>



FFA AND 4-H STATE LAND JUDGING CONTEST

STORY BY JOE ADDY
PHOTOS BY JUDI CRADDOCK AND
MIKE LILLY

This year on March 21, Madison County SWCD co-sponsored the FFA and 4-H State Land Judging competition with MACD Auxiliary as the financial sponsoring organization. This year the contest expanded to bring 4H and FFA “back together” into a single contest event.

This new partnership improved the quality of both organizational contest events by merging resources and staff support. It also provided the potential for reaching many more of our youth with conservation education as the partnership expanded the competition and encouraged new teams to participate. Conservation Districts, Soil and Water Conservation Commission field staff, and NRCS field staff were in great positions to further the outreach efforts in this area of conservation education. They were also in positions to provide technical assistance to local team coaches that helped individual teams better compete.

FFA Land Judging Results:

High Scoring Individual was Ben Kirksey from Mantachie - 332 points

1 Mantachie - 873

2 Strayhorn - 744

3 Noxapater - 652

4 Newton County - 628

5 Purvis - 581

6 Nanih Waiya - 562

7 Nettleton - 545

8 Vardaman - 497

9 Puckett - 249 (2 person team)

10 Clarkdale/Lauderdale 4H - 239

Juniors - 1 Mantachie - 709, 2 Vardaman - 398

Jr. High Individual - Gabby Simpson - 268



Joe Addy, NRCS Supervisory District Conservationist, in Forest, is a long time supporter of FFA and 4-H. Every year he serves as one of the main coordinators for this worthy and educational event.



Above and below: Competition this year was in Flora, Madison County, MS. One of the four soil pits dug for judging according to various land uses.



LUNCH!!! Provided by Madison County.



AREA 2 ENVIROTHON

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JUDI CRADDOCK

The Area 2 Envirothon, sponsored by Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission, was held March 26 at Lake Chautauqua in Crystal Springs. It was also one of the coldest days I've ever felt in March!

Five conservation testing stations included Wildlife (leader Jason Keenan), Soils (leader Mike Lilly), Aquatics (leader Lynn Porter), Forestry (leader Bill Kitchings), and Current Events (leader Julie Kent)—Rangeland was selected by Montana as they will sponsor the national competition. Teams from Piney Woods, Copiah Academy, Puckett, and Hillcrest Christian competed for a chance to go to state competition scheduled for May 2 at Roosevelt State Park in Morton.

Helpers for this event included Earth Team Volunteers, MS&WCC, NRCS, MSU, Extension Service, and Mississippi Forestry Commission. Lunch was provided by Copiah County SWCD.

Winners to state competition were Copiah Academy, Puckett and Hillcrest Christian! Congratulations!



Students from Piney Woods are being tested by Jason Keenan at the Wildlife station.



Left: Nathan Tadlock and Julie Kent rest a moment at Current Issues station.

Above: Lynn Porter testing students at the Aquatics station.



Randy Kimble, Judi Craddock and Mike Lilly—three very cold NRCS ACES employees at work!



Students at the Soils Stop pose for a quick picture before running off to the next testing station.

MORE PHOTOS FROM AREA 2



Left and upper right: Jason Keenan saves the day when he rescues a poor baby bat (Eastern Pipistrelle aka Tri-Colored Bat) from being power-washed at Judi Craddock's son's home. The bat had not moved for three days. Jason released the bat safely into nearby woods. Our hero! Photos by Judi Craddock.



*Look familiar?
Kurt Readus is STILL on that phone! Photo by Deborah Logan.*



Above: Harvey Huffstatler, retired NRCS biologist, has a new partner in catching otters and raccoons—Heather Cook, District Clerk in Brandon FO! (Photo by Murray Fulton.)



Above: A teachable moment between Mike and David...but actually who is teaching who?



Two very special Smith County Earth Team Volunteers who didn't mind the cold day at Envirothon! Thank you, ladies!

Miscellaneous Pictures and New Employees, Etc.



At the Newton County SWCD Annual Meeting held on March 7, 2013, Cindy Hyde-Smith, Mississippi's Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, was the guest speaker for the evening. Pictured above with her is her friend and fan, Austin Williams, son of Melinda Williams, District Clerk in Decatur.



Rogerick Thompson
New Resource Conservationist

Area 2 welcomes Rogerick Thompson who recently was selected at the new Resource Conservationist! Rogerick's career with the agency was initiated in the summer of 1993 in Leflore County as a WAE. The experiences continued in as a student trainee in the following counties: Tallahatchie, Grenada, Warren, Sharkey and Issaquena. After graduating from Alcorn State University he received an assignment to the Hinds County Field Office. It was during this time where his technical strength was established and introduced to the quantity of a workload, at lot of this is credited to multiple field visits and surveying with district technicians. His experience as soil conservationist ended after 4 years and ten months in the Hinds County Field Office.

The next chapter in his career began as a District Conservationist in Montgomery County with a trip through Holmes County as a DC, making a full circle by returning to Hinds in 2005. In 2007 he became the Supervisory DC for both Hinds and Madison Counties. The chapter of the District Conservationist came to an end early this year where he was granted and accepted the Area 2 Resource Conservationist position. He is one who believes a positive attitude and effort are keys to managing challenges we experience.

Welcome Rogerick!!



Yeah, yeah...we SEE it is SPRITE, Rogerick and Marion! (Photo by Deborah Logan.)

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