

Conservation Matters

In the Palmetto State

Information for Employees and Friends of SC NRCS



From the Office of the State Conservationist

Ann English
South Carolina NRCS

Helping People Help the Land

Greetings NRCS employees and conservation partners,

As another year comes to a close, thanks to all of you for your contributions toward another successful year helping South Carolina farmers and forest landowners conserve their natural resources.

We have many contributions to be proud of this year. We obligated millions of dollars in Farm Bill program funds in Fiscal Year 2015 to help South Carolina farmers and ranchers install or apply conservation measures. We had a successful start this summer for our Indian Creek Project in Newberry and Union counties.

We could not have achieved this work without the help of our numerous partners and we thank them for their efforts. They are the glue that holds us together, allowing us to leverage our diverse resources to help our farmers and forest landowners get conservation on the ground.

Fiscal Year 2016 will offer NRCS in South Carolina new opportunities and changes for even greater gains in conservation. The additions to our State Leadership Team will enhance our abilities to be innovative and creative in how we deliver NRCS programs and services to farmers and forest landowners in the state.

Our new regional structure is designed to increase efficiency and effectiveness in supporting field offices and providing programs and services to our valued farmers and forest landowners. Our two new Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations—Reginald Hall and Beau Sorenson—are ready and able to lead us toward innovative approaches to program delivery in the future.

Our new State Public Affairs Specialist is eager to carry the NRCS messages to diverse audiences across the state. Jerry Bynum, a Public Affairs Specialist from Risk Management Agency in Washington, D.C., will officially move to Columbia in early January 2016.

With our permanent leadership structure in place, we are ready to face the opportunities and challenges this fiscal year will bring. Some of them include helping communities, farmers and forest landowners rebound from the 2015 flood that occurred in early October 2015 and increasing our outreach to underserved customers and partners.

Please enjoy this holiday season with your families, friends and colleagues.

ANN ENGLISH

In this Issue.....

- Cultural Awareness Training 2015 Highlights.....2-3
- SilvoPasture: A New Wave of the Future in Manning, SC.....4-5
- Longleaf Pine Restoration in Chesterfield, SC.....6-7
- Protecting Water Quality with EQIP in Cherokee, SC.....8
- SC Earth Team Salutes Summer Volunteers.....9
- NRCS and Partners Host Indian Creek Workshop and Tour.....10
- NRCS Welcomes New SLT Members.....11
- Civil Rights Update.....12
- Personnel Update.....13



NRCSSouthCarolina



Like us on Twitter @SC_NRCS

USDA-NRCS is an Equal Opportunity Employer and Provider

SC NRCS Cultural Awareness Training 2015



SC NRCS employees and partners enjoyed a great day of fellowship and camaraderie at Cultural Awareness Training on July 29, 2015. The program was held in Columbia, SC at the South Carolina State Farmers Market, and featured various speakers and entertainers from diverse backgrounds. The theme of the day was **“A Blending of Cultures Standing As ONE”**, and the program kicked off with an opening welcome from State Conservationist Ann English.

Guest speaker Sgt. First Class John Barge gave an engaging presentation on **“Diversity in the Workforce”**, followed by Rev. Fr. Michael Platanis’s **“A Discussion of Greek Culture”** presentation. Employees were also treated to two interactive and hands-on dance presentations, with much audience participation, as daring employees stepped to the beat of traditional Latino and African dances. A major highlight of the day came after lunch, when employees were treated to a variety of delicious food samplings from

Greek, Caribbean and Latino cultures.

This year’s Cultural Awareness training was a great success, as employees came together as ONE to enjoy each other and the lessons learned from enlightening and informative speakers.

A Blending of Cultures Standing As ONE







Lifelong farmer Hezekiah Gibson, and his wife Frances, reside in Manning, SC and farm 1,200 acres. They have been working with NRCS staff for years, including current Clarendon District Conservationist Brandon Durant, to improve the conservation on their farm. In 2013, the couple, through their non-profit organization, United Farmers USA, started a new venture through a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), titled ***“Silvopasture: A New Wave of the Future”***. Through this CIG project, the Gibsons have implemented a Silvopasture demonstration area onto their farm, and have reached out to other farmers in their area and around South Carolina, on its proven benefits.

Silvopasture, which is the integrated practice of combining forestry and the grazing of livestock, is designed to optimize timber, forage, and livestock production from the same acreage, at the same time. It not only increases the beautification of the landowner’s property, but also helps to increase the grazing period under tree canopies, as compared to open pasture. During the hot summer months, it is extremely beneficial in providing shelter for livestock from heat and inclement weather. The Gibsons have found that Silvopasture helps their livestock to maintain their body weight by continuing to graze during the day in the shade, as opposed to grazing only at night when it’s cooler.

If properly managed, Silvopasture can also help farmers become more sustainable by increasing the probability of annual revenue and making better use of forest lands. “Silvopasture is a win-win situation, as you can have value added attributes, such as baling and selling your hay, or cutting your trees for timber,” said Hezekiah.

Silvopasture is not a new concept for the Gibsons, who have been using this conservation practice for years and currently have a total of 120 acres in Silvopasture. However, through the CIG grant, the couple has had the opportunity to share the knowledge they have gained with others. They are to host six two-hour classes for socially disadvantaged and limited resource farmers to educate and demonstrate how to incorporate Silvopasture systems onto their farms.

Currently, they have hosted four educational workshops and eight demonstration tours, which included on-site preparation. The Gibsons have worked with not only NRCS, but the South Carolina Forestry Commission and the Farm Service Agency as well, to implement additional conservation practices on their farm, including a solar-powered water pump that has ensured a reliable source of water and a solar-powered electric fence that has kept their livestock secure.



The Gibsons have practiced Silvopasture for years, and have found that it helps their livestock maintain their body weight because they can continue to graze under trees during the day, rather than in open pasture at night when it's cooler.

The workshops have been a great success for the Gibsons, whose initial goal was to teach at least 30 farmers. However, a total of 68 farmers have attended either the workshops, the demonstration tours or both, which more than doubled their outreach goal. Many farmers were interested in implementing the Silvopasture system and requested to bring additional farmers from their hometown to workshops and tours planned for the future. These farmers come from Berkeley, Chesterfield, Clarendon, Darlington, Florence, Lee, Sumter and Williamsburg counties, and include seasoned farmers, as well as new and beginning farmers.

“So far, we have had a very positive response from the landowners during the demonstrations,” said Frances. “We want this farm to be a place of learning, where other small farmers

can come and see the good conservation work that NRCS can do.”

All of the demonstrations are done at the Gibson’s farm, where they are using the Silvopasture system on 50 acres of farmland, which supports over 200 cows and calves. The demonstrations have shown the progress before, during and after Silvopasture. There will also be additional demonstration sites established in the Low country, Savannah, Pee Dee and Coastal Plain areas, within 60 miles of each other, to reach to even more landowners.

The couple has also implemented conservation practices to improve wildlife habitat, installed various water troughs, and planted 70 acres of coastal Bermuda grass. They have fenced and cross-fenced 300 acres of pasture, and practice rotational grazing for their livestock, by moving their cows to different pastures every week. This prevents pastures from becoming over-grazed and give forage a chance to regrow. The couple also have their hands full farming about 200 acres of row crops, as well as tending a whole bevy of animals, including horses, donkeys, chicken, ducks, turkeys, guineas and a peacock. In the future, they are considering enhancing their property further by installing a duck pond.

Silvopasture has proven to be a successful management practice that can help small farmers increase their farm’s sustainability and profitability. Through this CIG project, the Gibsons are working diligently to help small farmers become successful and sustainable. They have proven to be not only dedicated farmers to their own property, but dedicated farmers in the community as well. They truly embody the NRCS mission, “*helping people help the land*”.

Strong Partnerships Enhance Restoration of Longleaf Pines in Chesterfield, SC

By: Sabrenna Bryant, Public Affairs Specialist, SC NRCS

The restoration of longleaf pine forests is a major priority of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the southeastern United States, due to the decline of longleaf pine forests over the past several centuries. The steep decline from 90 million acres of longleaf pines in the 17th century to 3.4 million acres today, has not only drastically

changed the landscape, but has also affected the hundreds of plant and animals species that call these forests home.

In 2010, USDA-NRCS launched the Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) to help private landowners protect, improve and restore longleaf pine forests. In South Carolina, NRCS works with various conservation partners around the state to bring an awareness of longleaf pine issues and seek solutions for forest restoration. Oftentimes, these partnerships are the key to success when it comes to putting conservation on the ground and increasing conservation on a landscape scale, and this has truly proven to be the case in Chesterfield County, South Carolina.

In Chesterfield, local partners have joined forces to form the Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership to address longleaf pine conservation issues.



Longleaf wiregrass stands at the Carolina Sandhills Wildlife Refuge, above, are regularly managed with prescribed fire to create an open and lush habitat that is preferred by many native wildlife species.

Federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations and private landowners comprise the Partnership. Participants, including the Chesterfield Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and NRCS District Conservationist Charles Babb and Soil Conservation Technician Sue Griggs, share a mutual interest to engage private landowners in the restoration and sustainability of longleaf pine forests. Due to the great demand for financial assistance for forestry management, the Partnership, and especially the Chesterfield SWCD, has played a vital role in applying for additional grant funding to promote the conservation of longleaf pine ecosystems in Chesterfield County.

Currently, the Partnership has received over \$760,000 in grants through both the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Service. These grants have enabled them to offer a variety of incentives to private landowners, including cost-share dollars to implement forestry-related management practices on their land to restore, improve and maintain longleaf pine forests. The grant funding has also enabled the Chesterfield SWCD to hire a full-time employee, Jimmy Lisenby, as the Longleaf Coordinator, to oversee the grants, obligate grants funds and work with private landowners submitting applications for financial assistance.

“This partnership works and functions well among the partners, while drawing in landowners. It has grown into a real community”, said Sue Griggs.

Although the Chesterfield SWCD holds the agreement with landowners, Babb and Griggs provide conservation technical assistance, such as helping with conservation plans, reviewing site checks, and helping to maintain the District’s longleaf pine website. Landowners can use the website to submit applications for funding online.

In addition to offering financial and technical assistance, the Partnership provides landowner education, such as work-



Indian Blanket, Partridge Pea and Aster, above, are some of the native species that are planted to promote understory restoration in longleaf pine forests.

Fish and Wildlife. There are plan in the future to offer the entire four-part series. Landowners can voluntarily participate in the program, which is a three-day training on the restoration of longleaf pine that includes classroom workshops, demonstrations and field trips.

While the grant funding covers several forestry-related conservation practices, such as longleaf establishment, chemical spraying for site preparation and prescribed burning, the Chesterfield SWCD is also supplying landowners with additional resources not covered. To aid in understory restoration, the District has purchased a seed harvester that allows them to harvest native seeds in longleaf pine forests, with minimal damage to the plants, and, in turn, give the seeds to landowners to plant themselves. They also have a specialized no-till seed planter available for landowners to use, which prevents soil disruption when planting the seed and is important for understory growth.

“We are taking the subject of longleaf pine beyond what is usually done”, said Lisenby. “By educating landowners on the entire comprehensive ecosystem of longleaf pine forests, we are helping to ensure the sustainability of the species for decades to come”.

The Partnership has had a major impact on improving the restoration of longleaf pine forest in Chesterfield County. A current total of 2,894 acres of longleaf pine planted through grant funding, with an additional 700 acres of longleaf planned for planting this winter through grant funding recently obligated to landowners. NRCS has also restored 6,164 acres of longleaf through WHIP and EQIP in Chesterfield County.

The Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership is a great example of how partners can work together to achieve a greater conservation impact. By leveraging resources, through dollars obligated or technical assistance applied, they are helping to address a major priority resource concern through the restoration of longleaf pine forests, while improving wildlife habitat and the health and sustainability of private lands for future generations.

shops or hands-on prescribed burning training throughout the year, to help private landowners become a Certified Prescribed Fire Manager (CPFMM). This certification would enable landowners to be qualified to conduct prescribed burning on their own land. Both Babb and Griggs are Certified Prescribed Fire Managers, and are qualified to write smoke management plans.

“We would like to develop a mentoring program to train both landowners and community members to be a CPFMM, and in turn, have those who are trained, to train landowners,” said Babb.

The Partnership is also offering **Longleaf Academy 101**, which is part of a four-part series hosted through the Longleaf Alliance and funded through a grant from the US



To aid in understory restoration, awns from wiregrass seed, above, are harvested by the Partnership using a seed harvester and given to landowners under contract.

Protecting Water Quality through EQIP in Cherokee County

By: Sabrenna Bryant, Public Affairs Specialist, SC NRCS



Willie Sarratt (left) worked with Cherokee District Conservationist Matt Barrington to devise a conservation plan to address water quality issues on his farm.

For Willie Sarratt, farming is not only a way of life, but a passion. Born and raised in Cherokee, SC, Mr. Sarratt has been farming most of his life, even while working a full-time job and raising a family. Even though he encountered several hardships along the way, his love of farming persisted, and he turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service to help him get his farm back on the right track.

Farming began as a family business as Sarratt, his brother and his father began farming 40 head of cattle in the early 1970s. Then, in 1983, he, along with his father and sister, purchased a 49 acre farm and continued to farm cattle. In addition to being a great hobby that linked the family together, farming proved to be productive over the years, even providing additional income to help Sarratt to send his children to college.

However, after several years, Sarratt lost both his father and brother, and the maintenance required for the farm forced him to reduce the size of the herd. And when he faced his own health issues in the mid-2000s, he had trouble maintaining the farm work, and began losing cows due to the poor water quality of a nearby spring.

“It was a real struggle for me to keep the spring cleaned out so the cows could have a safe and clean source of drinking water,” said Sarratt. “I admit that I was ready to throw in the towel.”

Knowing his farm was in jeopardy, Sarratt visited the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for assistance in 2010, and was referred to Matt Barrington, NRCS District Conservation for Cherokee County. With Matt’s help, Mr. Sarratt developed a conservation plan to improve his farm. He received financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to implement conservation practices to improve water quality for his livestock, including fencing for both his pasture and to keep his cows out of the spring. He also installed a well and water trough, which he placed between two of his pastures. This allows him to practice cross-fencing techniques, rotating his livestock between pastures every three weeks, which prevents his pastures from becoming over-grazed. Mr. Sarratt also has a third pasture that he uses to cut hay, which is a great supplement to the cow’s diet, especially during the winter months.

Through the use of conservation practices, Sarratt has seen a vast improvement in the health of his cows, and is currently managing a herd of 14. His experiences prompted him to become an advocate of land conservation, as well as his becoming a commissioner for the Cherokee Soil and Water Conservation District.

“I saw his passion for conservation and dedication to being a steward of the land, and knew he would be a great asset the Cherokee SWCD”, said Barrington.

Aside from being a passionate and dedicated farmer, Sarratt is also an avid gardener. He takes great pleasure in nourishing and growing many vegetables in his yard, including broccoli, tomatoes, beans, and onions. In the future, he has plans to expand his livestock to include chickens and goats.

“Being outdoors, on the land and farming, is something I have always enjoyed doing,” said Sarratt. “I believe in conservation and protecting the land, and look forward to continuing to farm for as long as I can.”



Earth Team

Volunteers in South Carolina



South Carolina NRCS Salutes Summer Earth Team Volunteers!



Anna Kathryn Stoddard, daughter of District Conservationist Brian Stoddard, served as an Earth Team volunteer in the Greenwood Field Office this summer. Anna Kathryn performed various clerical duties such as preparing mailings, filing, and folder maintenance. She is currently a senior at Greenwood High school and is active in National Honor Society, Beta Club, Chorus, Track, and Cross Country. **Thanks Anna Kathryn!**



Tilah Blair, daughter of Programs Support Specialist Lavetta Blair, served as an Earth Team volunteer in the NRCS State Office this summer. Tilah performed clerical duties, such as preparing training materials for the NRCS staff. Tilah is currently a freshman at Richland Northeast High School in Columbia, SC and is active in soccer and the Palmetto Center for the Arts (PCA) dance program. **Thanks Tilah!**



Mallory Jordan served as an Earth Team volunteer this summer at the Lexington Field Office. Mallory performed several tasks, including filing, visiting poultry farmers, flagging water bars on woodlands, and measuring firebreaks. Mallory is a rising senior at Gilbert High School and is active in the Beta Club, Environmental Club, and Student Council for which she will be the Student Body Secretary in the upcoming year. She is planning on attending a four year college after high school and major in Environmental Science. In her spare time, Mallory enjoys playing the guitar and has been taking lessons for 5 years. **Thanks Mallory!**



Elbert Turner IV served as an Earth Team volunteer in the NRCS State Office this summer. Elbert performed clerical duties, such as preparing training materials for the NRCS staff. He is a 16-year-old junior at Spring Valley High School in Columbia, SC, and plays strong safety on the Varsity football team. In his spare time he enjoys watching football and playing video games. He plans to attend a 4-year college/university to major in physical education with aspirations of becoming a football coach on the collegiate or professional level. **Thanks Elbert!**

NRCS and Partners Host Indian Creek Workshop and Tour



Participants visited the property of landowner George Oxner, an Indian Creek Project participant, to learn more about practices he implemented on his property, including prescribed burning, thinning and waterbar construction.

The South Carolina Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), along with the US Forest Service and other partners, hosted an informational workshop and tour on August 27, 2015, in Whitmire, SC. The event was held to encourage participation of eligible landowners in the Indian Creek Project, which received funding through USDA's Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership. Landowners residing in the Indian Creek and Delta project areas of Newberry and Union counties were invited and informed of financial and technical assistance available to implement forestry management practices on private agricultural and forest lands.

Over 40 landowners attended the event, which included agency presentations and a three-hour tour of

both private and public lands within the Indian Creek and Delta areas. The tour sites included examples of forest management practices that landowners could implement to improve wildlife habitat, protect water quality and mitigate wildfire threats.

The workshop included a host of conservation partners, including the USDA-NRCS, U.S. Forest Service, South Carolina Forestry Commission, Newberry Soil and Water Conservation District, Union Soil and Water Conservation District, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, National Wild Turkey Federation, Quail Forever, South Carolina Tree Farm Program and Clemson Extension.

Through USDA's Chiefs' Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership, the Indian Creek Project aims to improve the health and resiliency of forest ecosystems where private and public lands meet. The first phase of the Project began in 2004 in Newberry County, and has now expanded into Union County during the second phase in 2015 to include landowners in the Delta area.

Attention South Carolina Landowners: Apply Now for ACEP Funding for Fiscal Year 2016!



South Carolina farmers and forest landowners are encouraged to apply for financial and technical assistance to protect and restore eligible farmlands, grasslands and wetlands through USDA-NRCS's ***Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)***.

**The application cutoff date for fiscal year 2016 is
January 15, 2016.**

SC NRCS Welcomes New State Leadership Team Members



NRCS South Carolina welcomes Reginald Hall, left, and Beau Sorenson, right, to their new roles as Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations.

NRCS in South Carolina has reorganized into a two-area structure and great changes are underway as the agency welcomes two **Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations** in the state. Reginald Hall is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Area 1 and his office is located in Newberry. Beau Sorenson is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for Area 2 and his office is located in Manning.

Reginald Hall, a Georgia native, brings over 20 years of experience with NRCS to this position. He received a degree in Plant Science from Fort Valley State University and began his career with NRCS as a Co-Op student in Georgia. Upon graduation, Hall served as a Soil Conservationist in Georgia for four years in various field offices.

In December 1999, Hall transferred to South Carolina. Since that time, he has held various positions in the state, including District Conservationist, East Piedmont RC&D Coordinator and Natural Resources Specialist. He has served on various national and state committees, and is currently the South Carolina Civil Rights Committee Chair.

“I’m very excited about the new changes occurring in the state, and I’m dedicated to ensuring excellent customer service to South Carolina’s private landowners and farmers.” said Hall.

Beau is a native of Oregon and was raised on a small family farm. He received a degree from Oregon State University in Rangeland Management, and began his career with NRCS as a Career Intern in South Dakota. Over the course of his career, he worked in various field offices, eventually gaining the position of District Conservationist in South Dakota and Oregon. He has also been detailed to NRCS in Wyoming as an Easement Program Coordinator.

“In my NRCS career, I have focused on building strong partnership with our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, as well as other state and federal agencies,” said Sorenson. “I hope to do the same in South Carolina, while providing the best technical assistance we could deliver to our producers.”

South Carolina welcomes both Sorenson and Hall to their new positions.

Civil Rights Advisory Committee Update



South Carolina NRCS Veterans

Thank you for your *SERVICE!*

NRCS in South Carolina is proud to honor our veteran employees who served in our country's military forces. Thank you for all you have done serving our country, and all the great conservation work you do serving South Carolina landowners through NRCS!



BEVERLY ALEXANDER

SPC (E-4), Army, 4 years

STEVE ANDERSON

MSgt./E-7, Air Force, 22.5 years served – Retired

STEVEN BOURQUE

MSG/E8, Army, 19 years– Retired (Medical)

DANIEL COMPTON

SGT (E-5), USMC, 6.5 years served

CURTIS HALL

SFC (E-7), Army, 21 years served – Retired

JACKIE HEURMANN

*AT (Aviation Electronics Technician) (E-5),
Navy, 4 years served*

PAIGE KOLENDA

Senior Airman (E-4), Air Force, 6 years served

EDDIE MITCHELL

2nd Class Petty Officer (E-5), Coast Guard, 5 years served

ELLIS MORROW

CPT (O-3), Army, 3.5 years served

PATRICE MOSES

1SG (E-8), Army, 23 years served - Retired

ANTHONY PARSON

SSG (E-6), Army, 13 years served

Personnel Update

South Carolina NRCS Welcomes New State Forester



Robert Chambers is the new NRCS State Staff Forester for South Carolina. He is a native of Baton Rouge, LA and holds a BA degree in Urban Forestry with a minor in Plant and Soil Science, MSc degree in Urban Forestry and a PhD in Urban Forestry and Natural Resources Management, all from Southern University and A&M College, Baton Rouge, LA. Robert was a Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) summer intern with the Ochoco National Forest in Prineville, OR in 2006 and Bureau of Land Management in Eugene, OR in 2008 through 2009. Robert is excited to be in a state that enjoys managing natural resources. He looks forward to meeting and working with everyone within SC NRCS.

New Employees

- Samuel Wyatt- Soil Conservationist- Sumter, effective May 3, 2015.
- Alva "Trip" Williamson- Soil Conservationist- Georgetown, effective May 3, 2015.
- Dustin Stoner- Soil Conservationist- Florence, effective May 3, 2015.
- Amanda Hoitt- Soil Conservationist- Aiken, effective May 3, 2015.
- Curtis Hall- Business Service Specialist for M&S Division- State Office, effective May 17, 2015.
- Paige Bennett- Administrative Assistant for the ASTC Management & Strategy- State Office, effective May 26, 2015.
- Fernando Julia Vazquez- Soil Conservationist- Bamberg, effective June 14, 2015.
- Rafeala McCoy—Soil Conservationist Anderson, effective August 24, 2015.
- Colton McClendon—Soil Conservationist, Charleston—effective August 24, 2015.

- Steven Bourque— Financial Resource Specialist, State Office-- effective September 6, 2015.
- Reginald Hall is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for the Newberry Area Office, effective November 15, 2015.
- Beau Sorenson is the new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations for the Manning Area Office, effective November 15, 2015.
- Jerry Bynum is the new State Public Affairs Specialist in the NRCS State Office, effective December 13, 2015.

Transfers/Retired

- Margie Onstad—State Administrative Officer—retired effective May 1, 2015.

If you have questions, contributions, or suggestions regarding the newsletter, please contact Sabrenna Bryant at sabrenna.bryant@sc.usda.gov

USDA-NRCS
1835 Assembly Street
Room 950
Columbia, SC 29201

USDA-NRCS is an equal opportunity and employer.