

Conservation Notes

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New Conservation Initiative Assists Ranchers of Ruminant Animals

A new initiative in Mississippi aims to encourage ranchers of ruminant animals like sheep and goats to make conservation improvements to their operations. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering financial and technical assistance through the Small Ruminant Farmer Initiative to help these ranchers enhance their lands while cleaning and

conserving water and improving soil.

This initiative was created to help meet the need of a growing commodity in Mississippi. Part of NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), this initiative offers about \$500,000 to Mississippi landowners. April 19 is the deadline for applications.

Assistance through this

initiative will help ranchers install a variety of conservation practices that aim to boost water quality and quantity and increase soil health. Practices include fencing, ponds and heavy use protection areas.

Ruminants are characterized by their "four" stomachs and "cud-chewing" behavior. There are about 150 different domestic

See "EQIP-Ruminant" on page 3



Brad Mitchell, NRCS, Phillip Mikell, Hinds SWCD and Don Lackey, NRCS prepare seedlings for Tree Day 2013. For more information on Tree Day see page 4.



Congratulations Rogerick! Rogerick Thompson has been promoted to Resource Conservationist, USDA, NRCS for Area 2 (21 counties) in Central Mississippi. Reginald Spears, Chairman of Hinds County SWCD, left, and Cindy Ayers, Commissioner SWCD present Rogerick with an appreciation plaque.



Laura Anderson, NRCS Earth Team Coordinator, presents Nancy Lau, Hinds Earth Team Volunteer with the Individual State Volunteer Award. Congratulations Nancy!! Hinds County had several other state winners recognized at the MACD (MS Association of Conservation Districts) Annual Meeting. See page 7 for additional winners.



Earth Team Volunteers grabbed their hats and read to students in celebration of "Read Across America." For more information on the event see page 7.



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Public Land Offer Youth Hunting Opportunities

By Brad Mitchell, USDA NRCS, Soil Conservationist



Youth duck hunts provide an opportunity to pass the sport on to the next generation. In the above picture Peyton Wilkerson and Peyton Long show their limit for the day.

I grew up in Tallahatchie County in the Delta, my dad and I would drive the back roads on Friday afternoons looking for fields and flooded timber full of ducks to hunt for the weekend. Back then (25 years ago) all you had to do was call the landowner and ask for permission. More times than not, he wouldn't mind you going at all as long as you shut the gate behind you and didn't rut up his turn roads. I can remember many mornings being back at the house by 8 a.m. eating breakfast with a limit of ducks in the back of the truck waiting for us to clean. Those were some of the most memorable times that I've had hunting and can remember them like they were yesterday. There is no better way to spend some quality time with a young person than sitting together in a duck blind and waiting for the birds to come in. In between the flights of ducks and geese there is plenty of time to talk about any subject on your mind and you can enjoy a memorable outdoor experience at the same time.

Nowadays it seems those days are few and far between for most of us. More hunters, high lease costs, and decreased numbers of

birds making their way down the flyway are some reasons people no longer take part in waterfowling in the south. However, the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Fisheries and Parks (MDWFP) and local National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) in Mississippi are responding to the need of getting youth back involved in wing shooting. Youth hunt days are now being set aside both before and after the regular hunting seasons on both state WMA's and Federal NWR's. These hunts are available for doves in September and ducks in November and late January. Some NWR's that haven't been duck hunted in 50+ years are opening their doors and allowing several youth weekends. Most of these areas have been set aside and not bothered so the birds won't be as wary when the youth hunters arrive. These hunts can be excellent opportunities to introduce novice hunters to the wing shooting experience and hopefully make them hunters for life. Always remember, when you take your kids hunting and fishing you don't have to hunt your kids.

Conservation Partnership Visits with the Mississippi School for the Blind

By: Jason Keenan, Wildlife Biologist, USDA NRCS

Sometimes as employees of NRCS and the Conservation District 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, Lynn Porter and I 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



Jason Keenan, NRCS wildlife biologist, lets students and teachers at the MS School for the Blind feel the pelt of a bobcat. Jason discussed with the students native wildlife species in Mississippi, the importance of good habitat and other topics concerning wildlife.



Vivian Smith, MS School for the Deaf and Bryan Gueltig, MS School for the Blind are long time friends of Lynn Porter's. Both teach science in their respective schools and share everything... even a live mouse that a student caught.

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!

EQIP-Ruminant

continued from page 1

and wild ruminant species, including sheep, goat and red deer.

Eligible land includes pastureland, cutover, abandoned agricultural areas and converted cropland. Incidental wooded areas are eligible when existing vegetation will support grazing and browsing animals. To be eligible, small ruminants must already be present.

"We want to engage Mississippi's ranchers and encourage them to use conservation to boost production and improve the quality of our waterways and soil," NRCS State Conservationist Homer Wilkes said. "We are seeing more ranchers of ruminant animals in Mississippi, and we created this initiative to ensure conservation practices are available for these operations."

All participants must meet conservation program eligibility requirements to receive financial assistance. This initiative places special emphasis on historically underserved producers during the ranking of applications.

For more information, contact the Jackson Field Office at 601-965-5682 Ext. 3 or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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Tree Day 2013



Ladies making sure the office ran smooth for Tree Day 2013 included: (left to right) Sylvia Nutt, Carolyn Crechale, Nancy Lau, Mary Katherine Callahan, Margie Sasser and Mary Sue Bullock.



Men assisting with the distribution of trees to citizens on Tree Day included: (left to right) Dale Bullock, Ramon Callahan, Don Lackey, Ed Porter, Phillip Mikell, Craig Royston and Brad Mitchell.



A special thank you to Shintri Hathorn, JPS Career Center. Ms Hathorn's class wraps the individual seedlings that are distributed to third grade students after an Arbor Day program is presented.



Sylvia Nutt, left, and Faye Reed, right, places stickers on the individual boxes of crayons being distributed from the MS District Employees Association.



When the line for trees slowed down Earth Team members started judging poster entries. In the above picture Margie Sasser, left, and Mary Katherine Callahan, right, judge posters.



Tree Day is about the future; planting trees for the next generation to enjoy. In the above picture John Rushing and his daughter Regan came to the office for tree seedlings. Regan was given a coloring book and crayons and her dad picked up seedlings.

Earth Team Volunteers



Earth Team Volunteers (left to right) Ann Cox, Sara Williams, Rosa Pittman, Margie Sasser and Pat Sigrest assist with sorting, folding and mailing hundreds of District membership notices.

The **Hinds County SWCD** has available for purchase **Non-woven Geotextile cloth** for \$1.90 per linear foot.

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USDA Announces 45th General Sign-Up for the Conservation Reserve Program

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct a four-week general sign-up for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), beginning May 20 and ending on June 14. CRP has a 27-year legacy of protecting the nation's natural resources through voluntary participation, while providing significant economic and environmental benefits to rural communities across the United States. Under Secretary Vilsack's leadership, USDA has enrolled 11.7 million acres in various CRP efforts.

"Since the 1980s, the CRP program has established itself as a benchmark in voluntary conservation efforts, providing American producers with assets to address our most critical resource issues," said Vilsack. "Last year, during one of the worst droughts in generations, the CRP proved vital in protecting our most environmentally sensitive lands from erosion. Emergency haying and grazing on CRP lands also supplied critical feed and forage for livestock producers due to the drought. And the program continues to bring substantial returns to rural areas, attracting recreation and tourism dollars into local economies while sustaining natural and wildlife habitat for future generations."

Producers that are accepted in the sign-up can receive cost-share assistance to plant long-term, resource-conserving covers and receive an annual rental payment for the length of the contract (10-15 years). Producers also are encouraged to look into CRP's other enrollment opportunities offered on a continuous, non-competitive, sign-up basis and that often provide additional financial assistance. Continuous sign-up dates will be announced at a later date.

Over the past 27 years, farmers, ranchers, conservationists, hunters, fishermen and other outdoor enthusiasts have made CRP one of the largest and most important USDA efforts. CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to improve water and air quality, and to prevent soil erosion by protecting the most sensitive areas including those prone to flash flooding and runoff. Highlights of CRP include:

CRP has restored more than two million acres of wetlands and two million acres of riparian buffers;

Each year, CRP keeps more than 600 million pounds of nitrogen and more than 100 million pounds of phosphorous from flowing into our nation's

streams, rivers, and lakes.

CRP provides \$1.8 billion annually to landowners—dollars that make their way into local economies, supporting small businesses and creating jobs; and

CRP is the largest private lands carbon sequestration program in the country. By placing vulnerable cropland into conservation, CRP sequesters carbon in plants and soil, and reduces both fuel and fertilizer usage. In 2012, CRP resulted in carbon sequestration equal to taking about nine million cars off the road.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, call the local FSA office at 601-965-5682 Ext. 1; or visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Out & About With Don...

Don Lackey, NRCS, Conservation Technician



An unusual snow scene at the office; the snow was melted by mid-morning but it was pretty while it lasted.



High tunnels are becoming a popular practice in Hinds County. Pictured above is Betty Strachan's high tunnel. Ms. Strachan is raising satsumas and vegetables in her high tunnel.

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Applications for Initiatives Due April 19

JACKSON, Feb. 7, 2013 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications to help producers improve water and air quality, build healthier soil, improve grazing and forest lands, conserve energy, enhance organic operations and achieve other environmental benefits.

April 19 is the deadline for the second signup period; however, applications for these initiatives are taken on a continuous basis. The initiatives include:

On-Farm Energy: Makes agricultural lands more energy efficient through conservation practices like agricultural energy management plans and farmstead energy improvements. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Gulf of Mexico: Improves water quality in Gulf of Mexico, Bay St. Louis and Jourdan River through conservation practices like grade stabilization structure, tree planting, longleaf pine establishment and wildlife habitat management. Producers in the Bayou La-Terre and Rotten Bayou watersheds in Hancock and Harrison counties are eligible to apply.

Longleaf Pine: Restores and enhances longleaf pine forests through conservation practices like longleaf pine tree planting and site preparation. Producers in counties with suitable soil types are eligible to apply.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds: Improves water quality in Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi River through conservation practices like irrigation water management and drainage water management. Producers in the Coldwater River and Sunflower River watersheds in the Delta region are eligible to apply.

Working Lands for Wildlife:

Creates and enhances habitat for threatened and endangered species like the gopher tortoise through conservation practices like planting longleaf pine trees and using prescribed burning. Producers in counties with suitable soil types are eligible to apply.

Organic: Supports organic operations through conservation practices like conservation crop rotation, residue management/no-till/strip till/direct seeding and cover crop. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible.

Seasonal High Tunnel: Supports local food systems and lengthens growing season through this practice. Producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Beginning Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like fencing and prescribed grazing. Producers who have operated a farm for less than 10 years are eligible.

Limited Resource Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like ponds and heavy use protection area. To be considered a limited-resource farmer or rancher, an applicant must meet both of the following criteria:

Direct or indirect gross farm sales of not more than the current indexed value (\$172,800) in each of the previous two years;

Total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in the previous two years.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer: Provides support to new farmers through practices like fencing and ponds. A socially disadvantaged producer is a group whose members have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to

their individual qualities. This includes:

- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- Asians
- Black or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

Applicants self-certify. Gender alone is not a covered group for the purposes of NRCS conservation programs.

Specialty Crop: Encourages and supports growers of specialty crops (i.e. sweet potatoes, greens, squashes) through practices like mulching and cover crops. Specialty crop producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

Livestock: Encourages and supports livestock operations through practices like stream crossings, cross fencing and ponds. Livestock producers in all 82 counties are eligible to apply.

"Conservation programs offer farmers, ranchers and forestland managers a variety of options to conserve natural resources while boosting production on their land," State Conservationist Homer Wilkes said. "This conservation investment helps improve environmental health and the economy of Mississippi rural communities."

These initiatives are funded through Farm Bill conservation programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, which provides financial assistance for a variety of conservation activities. Applicants can sign up at their local NRCS service center.

For more information about EQIP or other technical or financial assistance programs offered by NRCS, please contact your local service center: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrns>.

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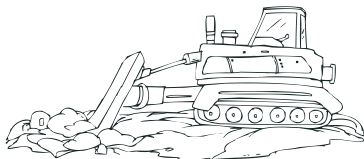
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Read Across America 2013



Volunteers reading at Oak Forest Elementary school include: (left to right) Ed Porter, Lynn Porter, Mary Sue Bullock, Carolyn Crechale and Dekeither Stamps, son of Delmer Stamps, NRCS, state office. The "Cat" pictured is Ms. Lorenda Cheeks, principal of Oak Forest Elementary School. (Photo credit - Judi Craddock, NRCS)



In addition to celebrating reading at Oak Forest students also worked Oak Forest's gardens. Mr. Darwin Robinson, teacher at Oak Forest, assists students with weeding a container garden in front of the school.



Nancy Lau used her calligraphy skills to write in each book acknowledging the Soil and Water Association's donation of a copy of "The Lorax" to each class that a volunteer read to.



Volunteers reading at Watkins Elementary included: (left to right) Peggy McKey, Wyvette Robinson, Margie Sasser, and Cindy Ayers.



Mary Sue Bullock, left, and Carolyn Crechale, right, take turns reading to a first grade class at Oak Forest. (Photo credit - Judi Craddock, NRCS)



It was an outstanding "Read Across America" celebration at Oak Forest. Students sang several songs accompanied by students playing percussion and a student play.

Hinds County Has Several State Award Winners at the 2013 MS Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting



Schvaie Moaten, front, placed first in the 2nd & 3rd grades conservation poster contest. Pictured with Schvaie are, from left, his teacher at Lake Elementary, Amanda Terrell and his grandparents, Sarah and William Moaten.



David Barton, center, Hinds County SWCD Commissioner, registers for the 68th Annual MACD Meeting. Greeting David Barton are Don Underwood, Executive Director and Patrick Vowell of MS Soil and Water Conservation Commission.



Jim Harrelld, left, MACD, presents Jonathan Thomas, right, with a certificate and check for winning first place in the 9th & 10th grade conservation essay contest.



Participating in the MACD Endowment Auction to raise money for student scholarships are (left to right) Faye Burrell, Jo Patrick, retired District clerk Hinds SWCD, and Evelyn Greenwood, Jo's sister.



Brandy Nichols, center, student at JPS Career Center, placed first in the 11th & 12th grade conservation essay contest. Pictured with Brandy are her mother, Regina Nichols, left, and her teacher, Shintri Hathorn, educator at JPS Career Center.

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Bringing Song and Color to Your Backyard with Birds

By Glynda Clardy, Wildlife Biologist

The National Bird-Feeding Society (NBFS) helps to sponsor and promote National Bird-Feeding each year. The theme for 2013 is "Bringing Song and Color to Your Backyard". National Bird-Feeding events were created in 1994 to advance and publicize wild bird feeding and watching. Activities during these events highlight the joys of bird feeding by providing tips and techniques to create a successful bird feeding and watching experience.

Want to know how to "bring song and color to your backyard" for your enjoyment? Just find out what bird seed and bird feeders are needed to attract the type of birds that live or migrate through your area. The National Bird-Feeding Society has updated their web-site at

<http://www.birdfeeding.org/> with new information guides such as:

- Bird Food Preference Chart
- Bird Feeder Preference Chart
- Top Ten Bird Feeding Tips
- Plants to Attract Wild Birds
- Bird Identification Sheet
- Backyard Bird Field Guide
- Prevent Disease at Bird Feeders
- Prevent Bird-Window Collisions

Below are some additional cost-saving tips for feeding birds

from my own experiences:

- Best bang for the buck if you are only going to put out one feed with one feeder: Black oil sunflower seed (BOSS) on a medium size platform or a tube feeder.
- Stretch your money by planting natural foods in your yard. Plant trees and shrubs with berries and fruit. Plant flowers such as coneflowers and sunflowers. The butterflies, bees and you will enjoy them in the summer, and if left standing after the flowers mature, the birds will eat the seed heads in the fall and winter. Flowers such as red buckeye and native honeysuckle provide early nectar sources for hummingbirds. Now is the time to plant trees and shrubs and plan those flower gardens.
- Not all bird species are attracted to feeders, but the majority of bird species are attracted to water. For even more variety in your bird watching set up a bird bath, a shallow fountain (birds are very attracted to dripping or running water), or a water feature such as a shallow pond.

To attract a variety of birds to watch use a wide variety of feeders and bird food, such as:

- Slightly elevated (about 2 feet high) platform and/or ground platform feeders and/or Hanging tubular feeders with wire around them filled with BOSS alone or a mixture of BOSS with some safflower seed, hulled peanuts and/or dried fruit;
- Hanging socks with thistle (nyjer);
- Hanging square baskets with suet;
- Decorative bowls or cups with meal worms for insect lovers, such as bluebirds;

and last but not least,

- Nectar feeders (there have been several documented winter sightings of hummingbirds and orioles this year).

More information on feeding birds can be found at the following web-sites:

- http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/index.html
- <http://www.enature.com/Articles/detail.asp?storyID=607>
- <http://www.birdstars.org/> and <http://www.birdzilla.com/>.

Have fun year round bringing song and color to your backyard by feeding and watching wild birds.