



VolunteerVoice

"The voice of the Earth Team"

USDA--The Natural Resources Conservation Service

Spring 2004

Making a difference one year at a time

by Michele Eginoire

The Earth Team Volunteer Program continues to be an important and vital part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. As the program gets ready to celebrate its twentieth anniversary in 2005, there is still more to do.

Every year the program strives to get better both in word and deed. The following provides information on initiatives for the upcoming year and what you can anticipate in the form of support and products.

This year began with a fresh look for the *Volunteer Voice* newsletter. Not only are we trying to look better, but we're working hard to improve content by expanding the information beyond individual state stories. We included a regular feature on management tips as well as news briefs that will help keep coordinators up to date on scheduled events, important activities, program news and other related items. We're hoping the newsletter will continue to improve and we encourage everyone to support the effort by contributing meaningful stories

that share ideas, spotlight volunteers and generate enthusiasm for the program.

This year, we hope to hire a photographer to travel around the country, taking fresh, exciting photographs so we can develop a photo library of Earth Team Volunteer pictures. These photos will be available for your use when creating briefings, presentations, exhibits, newsletters and other forms of promotion. The library will be housed on our webpage and potentially on the national photo gallery. This is something that has been needed for a long time and we're committed to getting it done this year.

Currently in the development stage is a new brochure that targets high school and college students. Students are an important market for volunteers and this brochure has been needed for a long time. We don't have a printing date, but we're working toward getting it produced and distributed this year.

The Earth Team Volunteer Program will have a new Marketing Plan developed by

Fred Jacobs in NRCS headquarters. Currently in draft form, the plan will steer the program toward its goals of expanding partnerships, increasing awareness, generating publicity, and strengthening relationships with NRCS leadership. Hopefully by the summer edition of the *Volunteer Voice* we'll be able to share the plan with everyone.

We're very excited about the upcoming national conference scheduled for the summer of 2005. It will be the 20th anniversary of the Earth Team Program and will be held in Philadelphia, Pa., the "Home of Brotherly Love."

Earth Team Leadership is working hard to make this a truly memorable conference and once again we'll join forces with the agency's Public Affairs Specialists. We anticipate an agenda packed with opportunities to learn and expand everyone's capabilities. Look for more information in future issues of the newsletter.

Also we are working hard to implement many of the

(cont'd on pg. 5)

Volunteer helps to “go digital”

by Paige Buck, Public Affairs,
NRCS Illinois

Kara Bowen came to the NRCS State office as an Earth Team Volunteer in October 2003 while a senior at Central High School in Champaign, IL.

Since Kara’s primary interests and career goals were focused around Graphic Design, she joined the Public Affairs Team where State Public Affairs Specialist Paige Buck matched up Kara’s interests, skills and goals with a project her staff had on their ‘to do’ list.

The project was a time consuming one, which is why the PAS team hadn’t found the time to dive into it just yet.

But Kara’s schedule allowed her to dedicate 2 hours twice a week for four months-enough time to make a huge dent in this daunting project.

“The project I worked on was to take a guidebook that NRCS created years ago and bring it into the 21st century,” explains Kara. The publication, the ‘Native Plant Guidebook for Streams and Stormwater Facilities in Northeast Illinois’ was developed back in 1996 as a hard copy resource. Its

popularity and use has grown over the years and NRCS figured that the best way to share the information and



Kara Bowen

facilitate access and updates was to go digital.

“The text was no problem, but there are almost one hundred detailed illustrations of plant species in the book which required scanning, enhancing, editing and placing them into the design,” says Kara.

Kara received training on PageMaker desktop publishing software and learned how to operate scanning hardware and software from Illinois’ NRCS PAS Jill Rees.

NRCS is more than pleased with Kara and her accomplishments on the project. “When the project is complete, it will

be posted on the internet and be made available on CD.

Kara’s name will appear in the acknowledgments section because we couldn’t have done it without her!” says Rees. This week, the Illinois PAS Team will welcome another high school student

who comes to NRCS through a mentoring program. They will sign this student up as an Earth Team Volunteer as well.

“There’s always plenty of work and creative projects to do here and it gives all of us a good feeling to help young people make decisions about their future careers,” adds Buck. Kara Bowen will graduate in 2004 and plans to attend Illinois State University where she will study graphic art.

Thanks Kara!

Maine

Earth Team digs for archaeological remains

*by Elaine Tremble, Volunteer
Coordinator, Maine, NRCS*

When a Washington County landowner sought NRCS assistance to plant a riparian forest buffer, prehistoric Indian settlements were probably not on his mind. However, NRCS determined that the land the landowner wanted to protect from erosion with a dense cover of pine and spruce trees had high potential of containing a prehistoric archaeological site. The tract is a terrace overlooking the Mill River and more than 95 percent of the prehistoric habitation and workshop sites in Maine are found in similar settings by waterways. The property could have served as a staging ground for Native American hunting and fishing parties along the stream.

Investigation needed

Certain methods of planting the forest buffer could damage archaeological resources, and mature tree roots eventually might disturb sub-plowzone archaeological features like stone hearths. Therefore, after consulting with Maine's State Historic Preservation Officer, NRCS concluded that a survey was warranted to see if an archaeological site existed on the land. Gary Shaffer, Archaeologist and Cultural Resources Coordinator, developed a survey strategy that included linear transect



Undergraduates from the University of Maine at Machias help to screen soil for artifacts during the NRCS archaeological survey of a proposed forest buffer in Washington County, Maine.

sampling with shovel test pits.

To supplement the help of NRCS's Machias Field Office, Gary sought volunteers for the archaeological field work from the University of Maine at Machias. The Assistant Professor of Anthropology identified three of his undergraduate students who wanted to participate in the survey.

Enrolling students

After enrolling them in the NRCS Earth Team program, Gary arranged for their time in the field. He provided them an overview of cultural resource management and typical field procedures for the identification of archaeological sites in New England.

Then he proceeded to dig

shovel test pits, while the students helped him to sort through the excavated sediment, which was sifted and examined on screens of wire mesh.

Unfortunately for archaeology and the students' expectations, the survey found no artifacts or other traces of archaeological sites. However, the historic preservation review came to a quick end and the forest buffer moved closer to reality. The students also learned a little more about archaeology than in the classroom and contributed 12.5 hours to the conservation work of NRCS. Gary looks forward to working with the University of Maine at Machias again on similar, mutually beneficial projects.



Students who participated on the award-winning 2003 Grayling High School Earth Team, led by teacher Loren Bass, included Josh Poll, Heather Helsel, Stacy Helsel, Dan McCullough, Miranda Millikin, Nicole Roman, Tammy Fryer, Dee Galloway, Kelly Rogers, Joe Poirier, Luke DeLaRosa.

Michigan

Let's hear it for the team

Story courtesy of the Crawford County Avalanche

On behalf of the Grayling High School class, Loren Bass accepted an Earth Team Certificate of Appreciation from the USDA—Natural Resources Conservation Service on January 23, 2004, during a classroom ceremony held at the school.

The students were recognized for collectively contributing 180 hours of volunteer service.

During the project, the students learned about and implemented soil erosion control and water conservation techniques. The USDA-NRCS and Huron Pines Resource Conservation (RC&D) Area Council, Inc., partnered with Grayling High School and

Michigan's Service Learning program.

The students conducted a pilot conservation project at the USDA-NRCS building located on Norway Street during May and June of 2003, constructing a retaining wall and preliminary landscaping work.

Students defined the watershed boundaries on the property using the roof peaks as the topographic high points. They determined the amount of permeable and impermeable surface area and calculated the volume and rate of water runoff, as well as the amount of backfill and gravel required

for placement.

Students hand-graded and used a water-leveling system to direct water away from the building and concentrate the flow into a garden area. They learned techniques that will be utilized in the Grayling Stormwater project, coordinated by Huron Pines RC&D Area Council, Inc.

Kathleen Ryan, Coordinator for Huron Pines RC&D stated the students demonstrated high

quality hard work and showed a willingness to learn new techniques.

The USDA-NRCS and Huron Pines are looking forward to including the Service Learning project on other work planned for the upcoming year.

This work includes a Cedar Restoration Project on the Mason Tract that will be accomplished by working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Cedars for the AuSable project, originated by the AuSable River System Property Owners Association.

Quote

No act of kindness no matter how small is ever wasted.

A esop



Vic Ruhland (right) is pictured with Cutrina Moreland, Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator for Minnesota NRCS.

Minnesota

Telling the story of conservation

by Julie MacSwain, Public Affairs Specialist, Minnesota NRCS

Vic Ruhland has been an Earth Team Volunteer since March, 2003. He eagerly signed up as an Earth Team Volunteer after 46 years of Federal Service with SCS/NRCS. As an Earth Team Volunteer Ruhland has volunteered to compile the story of conservation for the past 70 years in the State of Minnesota. Ruhland recently completed a booklet on the same subject. Currently efforts are underway to develop a non-technical version.

Ruhland began his career in 1957 as a student trainee in Buffalo, Minn. He later worked as a Soil Conservationist in Jordan, Minn., St. James, Minn.; Zumbrota, Minn., and as a District Conservationist in Duluth, Minn. He joined the SCS State office staff in 1966 as an Agricultural Economist and remained in that position

until 1974. From 1974 – 2003 Ruhland worked as a Resource Conservationist on the Water Resource Staff in St. Paul, Minn.

During his career Ruhland developed a keen interest for the history of soil conservation in the State of Minnesota. This interest led him to collect a series of Soil and Water Conservation Journals. As a result, Ruhland has a copy of every Journal of Soil and Water Conservation published since 1935.

Shortly before his retirement from NRCS he started the groundwork for compiling a Soil and Water Conservation history. However, he did not complete the project prior to retirement leading him to sign up as an Earth Team Volunteer for the purpose of completing the task. Ruhland's compassion for conservation is long standing and appreciated.

Making a difference (cont'd)

Volunteer Database suggestions made at the New Orleans conference. To date we've made changes that improve timekeeping; group volunteer management, and login just to name a few. We will continue to improve the system in the upcoming months with a focus on making the system work effectively and efficiently based on your comments.

We are planning to expand membership on the Earth Team leadership committee to include representation from Field Offices. In addition, we're planning to improve the Awards Program to better reflect the good work being done by various groups and individuals. These two items are part of the agenda for the March leadership meeting.

This is just a brief summary of what we have in store as we work to make 2004 another banner year .

World Water Monitoring Day

World Water Monitoring Day is Oct. 18, 2004, with the actual monitoring activities beginning in Sept. 18 and culminating Oct. 18, 2004. This is an outstanding opportunity for the Earth Team Program to participate in a worldwide effort that supports NRCS' commitment to water quality, as well as promote group projects for Earth Team Volunteers.

Additional information will be provided in the upcoming weeks. Stay tuned!



Earth Team Volunteers (left to right) Nancy Buckmeier; Barry Lindgren and Megan Moore measure the velocity of Rainbow Creek in San Diego County, California. (Photo by Beth Brock)

California

Citizens' Water Quality Program

*by Sierra Harris, NRCS Biologist,
Area Earth Team Volunteer
Coordinator*

Fallbrook, California is located in northern San Diego County and is home to acres of avocado orchards and the Mission Resource Conservation District (MRCD). Beth Brock doubles as the District's Water Quality Coordinator and an Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator. She currently manages the *Home₂Ocean* program – a fourteen month water quality monitoring grant for the Santa Margarita River watershed. This grant is funded primarily through the State Water Resources Control Board. Additional support is also

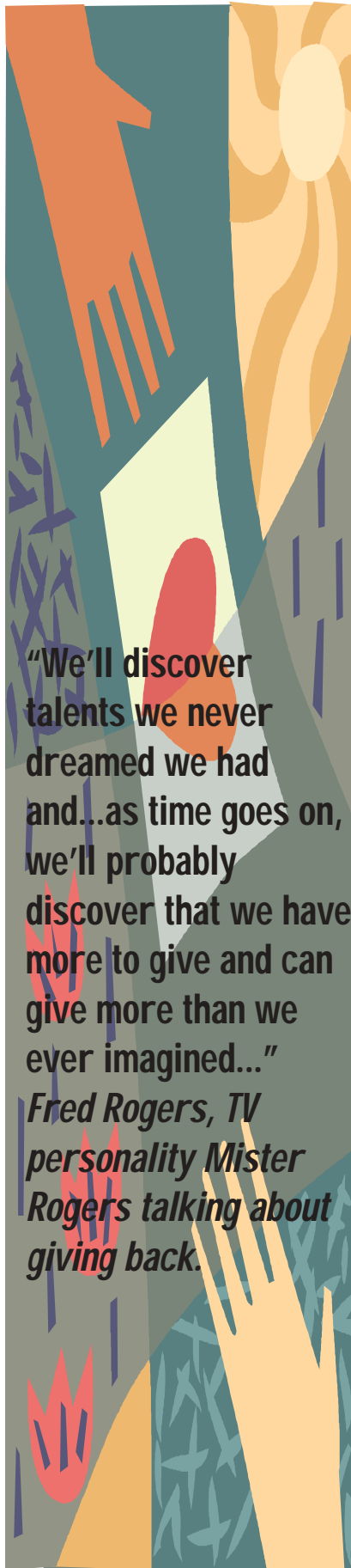
provided by the County of San Diego and Riverside Flood Control. The purpose of this program is to provide general public education on regional water quality issues and to give citizens living within the watershed an opportunity to learn how to test water quality parameters.

The program currently has eight NRCS Earth Team volunteers assisting with the water quality monitoring. The volunteers are local citizens, from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, who all share a common concern for the preservation and well-being

of the Santa Margarita River watershed. Every other Tuesday, for the past seven months, two to three volunteers sample water from three areas: the main stem of the Santa Margarita River, Stone Creek, and Rainbow Creek. Stone and Rainbow Creeks are both tributaries of the Santa Margarita River.

In the field, the volunteers collect data on dissolved oxygen, water temperature, stream velocity, total dissolved solids, turbidity and pH. They also take water samples with them back to MRCD to perform phosphate and nitrate tests. A certified laboratory also picks up water samples to test for total coliform bacteria and E. coli. Twice yearly, the volunteers also survey for benthic macroinvertebrates. These tests will help determine how much agricultural and residential run-off is flowing into the Santa Margarita River. This is important information as the river provides a majority of the drinking water for the Marines living on Camp Pendleton.

Overall, these volunteers are contributing to a valuable long-term study on the health of the watershed that they live in. The data that they are collecting may help to identify possible causes of non-point source pollution into the Santa Margarita River. These Earth Team volunteers are excellent stewards of their local watershed and are to be commended for their efforts.



“We’ll discover talents we never dreamed we had and...as time goes on, we’ll probably discover that we have more to give and can give more than we ever imagined...”
Fred Rogers, TV personality Mister Rogers talking about giving back.

Management Tips

Turn Challenges into Opportunities

by Laura Vescio, Northern Plains Regional Coordinator

When you think or mention the word “volunteers” often your first thoughts go to all the obstacles that stand in the way of being successful. Obstacles such as no time, too busy, too much paperwork, another program to deal with, assigning duties or often the most prevalent obstacle—“where do I find volunteers to do the tasks?”

Perhaps when those obstacles start taking over your thoughts, you need to readjust your thinking and “refashion” those obstacles into OPPORTUNITIES! For instance, “where do I find volunteers to do the tasks?”

In the past many of you have found volunteers in traditional places – churches, senior citizen centers, family members, conservation district board members, RC&D Council members, youth groups, etc.

But often over time, those sources begin to dry up making it more and more difficult to find volunteers. That’s when you need to turn that obstacle into an opportunity by thinking and looking in some non-traditional places.

You will be surprised to find there are various alternatives—people and places that fall into the category of “thinking outside the box.”

Next time you find yourself wondering where to go for your next crop of volunteers, think in terms of:

- Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), which

permanently changed the welfare system by moving welfare recipients back into the workforce. In order for a welfare participant to remain eligible for benefits, they must volunteer in activities that enhance their employability. Contact your local Social Services Department.

- Post a volunteer vacancy notice on www.volunteer.gov/gov. Your state or regional volunteer coordinator can assist in the posting.

- Department of Veterans Affairs – veterans are paid a stipend by the VA making them a hosted volunteer.

- Form a partnership with a high school business or vocational class.

These are just a few recruiting ideas you can find in the Earth Team Creative Recruiting Guide. You will also find numerous position descriptions in the guide to ensure that the volunteer experience is beneficial to both the agency and to the volunteer. This guide can be found on the internet on the NRCS USDA Home Page. Click on the Earth Team Volunteers, then Employee Information, then Creative Recruiting Guide.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers/emp/Creative%20Recruiting%20DRAFT.doc>

Just remember, the most successful way to recruit a volunteer is to just simply ask them. Some of the most powerful words in the English language are—“**I NEED YOUR HELP!**”

Bits and Pieces

New Survey

Earth Team Leadership, the Conservation Communication staff and the Social Sciences Institute developed and randomly distributed a survey designed to assess Earth Team activities and their effectiveness. The selected employees received a survey link the week of March 22 and were asked to return the survey by April 9. In addition, ten State Conservationist participated in a focus group on the Earth Team. Results of the survey and focus group will be released by summer 2004.

National Volunteer Week--April 18-24

National Volunteer Week is a 30-year tradition and designates a special time to recognize and celebrate the tremendous efforts of volunteers. Since its inception, presidents, mayors and other officials have signed proclamations and have

participated in this highly visible, nationwide initiative. This year our theme is "Earth Team Volunteers--Planting The Seeds of Tomorrow." On March 8, all Earth Team Volunteers coordinators were e-mailed downloadable files containing this year's promotional packet of various types of material designed to support National Volunteer Week.

2005 Goals

The Earth Team Goals for 2005 have been set and the task is at hand. We have our work cut out for us so get your engines fired up!

- 100% Office Participation
- 50,000 Volunteers by 2005
- An accountability system that confirms the value of volunteer contributions to the agency.

Earth Day

NRCS takes pride in saying, "Everyday is Earth Day for NRCS," however, we cannot lose sight of the official date of national celebration, which is

April 22. As always, we urge everyone to take a prominent role in local events as well as identify activities that would be enhanced by NRCS leadership participation. The Chief would like expanded visibility for the agency in support of Earth Day. Contact Conservation Communication at 202-720-3210 with opportunities.

Our Sympathy

George Hogg, husband of June Hogg, longtime Earth Team Coordinator for both Virginia state and Southeast Region, lost his battle with cancer on March 23. George was a friend to the Earth Team Program and always gave a helping hand when asked. Our sympathies go to June and her family.

Reminder

The Mid-Year Reports containing total number of active volunteers and hours between Oct. 1, 2003 and Mar. 31, 2004 are due to Ankeny not later than April 15, 2004.

Submission to "VolunteerVoice"

Articles and photographs for publication should be e-mailed, via your State Volunteer Coordinator, to tina.morris@swcs.org. If you prefer, copy can be mailed or faxed to Tina Morris, Soil and Water Conservation Society, 945 SW Ankeny Rd., Ankeny, Iowa 50021, fax number (515) 289-1227.

Articles should be no more than 350 words. Please remember to include photographs to illustrate the article. JPEG images are preferred. Slides and prints are accepted. If you are using a digital camera, remember to set the camera to the highest quality resolution.

For information about the Earth Team and the *VolunteerVoice*, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov or call 1-888-LANDCARE, or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office listed in the telephone directory under "U.S. Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture."

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