

I'm Sold on the Earth Team

By Tony Thompson
NRCS District Conservationist
Starkville, Mississippi

The Earth Team Volunteer Program is at the top of my list as a source of help for getting work done here in the field office. I've found that you can always count on volunteers to give their very best effort. They're the kind of folks you quickly develop a deep respect for, can learn from, and admire for their special talents and willingness to share with others.

I was very fortunate to recruit such a person as my first volunteer 16 years ago. Dr. Troy Laswell joined the Earth Team after retiring as a geology professor at Mississippi State University. Before last December, when he encountered some health problems, Dr. Laswell worked a full day each week, and he continues to give us a half day of his time weekly. Over the years, he has done everything from filing



Tony Thompson (left) and Dr. Troy Laswell (right)

memos to completing county-wide resource inventories.

Seeing through Dr. Laswell what the Earth Team Volunteer Program could mean to the field office operation really

opened me up to recruiting and working with volunteers. Fifty-two other volunteers have since signed up in the Starkville Field Office.

Some of the volunteers are long-timers, while many have been college students whose service time has been limited to months or even weeks. All have made their own unique contributions, and our environment is in a better state today because of it.

The opportunity to recruit student volunteers has been a major source of personal achievement. Eight of my student volunteers have become NRCS employees, and serve in various roles as conservationists and resources specialists. Many others have careers with agricultural industries, other agricultural agencies, and as consultants. I count them as special friends of NRCS.

Having the opportunity to help these young people develop career paths and life goals is a privilege and responsibility that has made my job very rewarding. The Earth Team Volunteer Program has made it possible.

Earth Team Volunteers Help Shade Nevada

When Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn proclaimed Oct. 19-26 as Nevada Shade Tree Week, local communities sprang into action. Volunteers donated nearly 700 hours to plant 373 trees across Nevada during the shade tree event.

High Desert RC&D, using funds from the Nevada Shade Tree Council, took part by helping a Henderson elementary school enhance its school grounds. Students at Estes McDoniel Elementary School planted 12 ash trees to shade the public parking lot and to enhance the overall appearance of the school. The importance of trees was included as part of the school's classroom curriculum.



Don't Overlook Your Needs, Inventory Them

By Norm Klopfenstein
State Information Officer
Columbia, Missouri

Sometimes we overlook the obvious.

Long before an eager Earth Team volunteer shows up to work, one vital task must be done: you must clearly establish and identify the need for a volunteer. It is your most important action. All subsequent activities -- recruiting, training, evaluating and rewarding volunteers -- are secondary to identifying "need."

How do you identify the need for a volunteer? Start by conducting a simple needs inventory, which will not only show you why you need a volunteer, but will also help you find the right volunteer.

Conducting a needs inventory is simple, and it can be fun. The first step is to discuss with your coworkers how volunteers could be used to expand services in your office. It is important to involve the entire staff because individ-

uals view their jobs differently, and each person may see different opportunities for utilizing volunteers.

During an initial brainstorming session, divide a flip chart page into three columns (or use three separate pages) labeled:

1. Activities that must be accomplished;
2. Activities that we would like to accomplish;
3. Activities that volunteers could accomplish;

A discussion of "activities that must be accomplished" often will help you identify items that are not being accomplished, but should be accomplished. Activities on this list are found in business plans, district long-range plans, and other high-priority work lists. This list may also contain repetitive tasks and "brushfires" that may seem minor, but can become problems if they are neglected.

Your second list, "activities that we would like to accomplish," can be a wish list. It should include those things that you would like to do if you had the time, staff, money, or other resources.

Your final list, "activities that volunteers could accomplish," most likely will contain the bulk of the items on your first two lists.

After you have conducted your needs inventory, prioritize the work. Focus on specific jobs or tasks to be performed. With good recruiting, orientation, and training, volunteers can do many of the items you need or want to do.

This process prepares you for needs-based recruiting, developing volunteer job descriptions, training volunteers and other matters. It is important to remember that no volunteer should replace a trained staff professional. A volunteer also should not be expected to take over a complex, long-term assignment with the same outcome of a salaried employee.

Breaking complex assignments into pieces or individual tasks will result in greater satisfaction for you and the volunteer. This method may involve recruiting several volunteers to complete some jobs.

Sound simple? It is. But too often we recruit volunteers first, and figure out what to do with them later. Don't overlook the obvious; try developing a needs inventory.

REMINDERS:

Following are some important deadline reminders:

- Mid Year Reports are due by April 15, 2003
- Hotel registration for the National Volunteer Convention deadline is July 11, 2003, at the New Orleans Marriott. Any questions please contact either your Regional Coordinator, Bonnie Weller at bonniew@swcs.org, or Tina Morris at tinam@swcs.org.

Earth Day is April 22, 2003.
National Volunteer Week is 4/28/03 through 5/2/03.

Earth Team Leadership meeting May 20-23, 2003 in New Orleans, LA.

The Earth Team Leadership Committee will be meeting at the National RC&D Meeting in San Antonio during the week of July 20, 2003 and July 23, 2003.

The National Volunteer Conference will be held from August 4, 2003 through August 8, 2003 in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Tom Wagner, recipient of the Midwest Region's NRCS Employee Earth Team Award, has been a 15-year proponent of Indiana's Earth Team Volunteer Program. Recently, he creatively involved Earth Team volunteers in removing soil erosion from Lake Shafer, which attracts thousands of tourists annually and pumps millions of dollars into the economy.

Volunteer Gives Soil Tunnel Curriculum a Make Over

British Earth Team volunteers Nicole Shirt and Richard Bonner in 1992 developed a soil tunnel in Massachusetts to teach children from kindergarten to fifth grade about the importance of soil to all life.

NRCS staff helped develop a curriculum, and the soil tunnel was taken to schools in Plymouth and Barnstable counties. The original soil tunnel worked well, but was awkward to carry and came with a curriculum that was a little too technical for the target group.

The Cape Cod Conservation District and the Barnstable County Extension Service formed a partnership to develop a fully portable tunnel with a curriculum that was age appropriate and meeting state educational standards. Extension Service Director Bill Clark secured a grant from the Eisenhower Higher Education Fund, and the conservation district hired a local artist to paint a soils canvas complete with rocks, roots and animal habitat. The "new and improved" tunnel visited numerous schools before getting its most recent curriculum revision.

Earth Team Volunteer Barbara Waters enlisted 28 teachers to help evaluate and revise the curriculum. Two versions of the curriculum were developed -- one for grades K-2 and one for grades 3-5. The new curriculum is age appropriate, fits into Massachusetts' learning standards, and most importantly, it makes learning about soil fun!

The soil tunnel became so popular that the conservation districts funded the construction of another. Today there are two soil tunnels that may be reserved by schools in Barnstable, Plymouth, Norfolk and Bristol counties.

Helpful Hint:
Submit articles for the
Volunteer Voice in
MicrosoftWord and
photos in jpeg format.



Earth Team Volunteer Barbara Waters (left) and Cape Cod Conservation District Administrator Lynne Dowdall unveil the new soil tunnel curriculum at an NRCS outreach meeting.

Ruritan Clubs Valuable Source of Volunteers

You are a landowner who needs to plant 7,500 trees on 15 acres of reclaimed mine land as part of your Forestry Incentives Program contract. It's early April, the wind has been blowing hard, it sleeted most of

the night, and the ground is wet and partly frozen. Where can you get some help?

This particular Ohio landowner got help from Earth Team volunteers and other members of his Ruritan Club. They arrived early, worked hard, and got most of the trees planted in one day, volunteering a total of 162 hours.

Earth Team volunteers and the Ruritan Clubs provide a tremendous resource to Ohio landowners.



Pictured left: Earth Team volunteers and Washington Ruritan Club, Alliance Ohio at a FIP tree planting.

Earth Team Experience Helps Michigan Volunteer Land NRCS Job

After previously working as a park ranger with the National Park Service, Cindy Heyd joined the Earth Team in February 2002 because she wanted to know more about what roles NRCS played in conserving natural resources.

Heyd assisted the Portage Field Office in developing conservation plans for producers by gathering resource information, primarily information about soils. She also assisted with HEL and wetland determinations, was involved with field office outreach activities, and helped

develop a conservation plan for a minority blueberry grower.

Heyd also helped promote the Farm Bill at the Kalamazoo County Fair. She was the group leader conducting the Conservation Tillage survey in Kalamazoo and Van Buren counties. She also had the opportunity to assist the soil scientist, civil engineer technicians, and other district conservationists in the area, thus exposing her to the opportunities available in NRCS.



Cindy Heyd is now a soil conservationist in Colorado.

Volunteer Loves Spreading Manure Message

Half way into her pregnancy, Ujwala Ranade, a native of India who now lives in Beaverton, Oregon, was traipsing into farmers' fields to talk about spreading manure.

"I loved it," said Ranade, who was volunteering during a break after receiving a master's degree in genetic engineering from Washington State University and another in environmental science from the Oregon Graduate Institute.

One of her classmates at Oregon

Graduate Institute was Dean Moberg, water quality specialist at the USDA Service Center in Hillsboro. Moberg, who coordinates the Earth Team program for the Lower Willamette Basin, recruited Ranade.

Ranade helped create a spreadsheet that calculated the correct amount of manure for dairy farmers to apply to their fields. Then she and Moberg toured Willamette Valley farms, typed relevant information into the spreadsheet on their laptop computer, and

came up with personalized manure-spreading guidelines for each farmer.

"Usually they overdo it," she said. "We don't want them to overdo it, because (the manure) gets into our waters."

While Ranade is taking time-out from volunteering to enjoy her new baby, Moberg is recruiting volunteers to take conservation information into local classrooms, and to assist with a computer-mapping program.

Submissions to "VolunteerVoice"

Articles and photographs for publication should be mailed, preferably via state volunteer coordinators, to Tina Morris, Soil and Water Conservation Society, 945 SW Ankeny, Road, Ankeny, Iowa 50021 or tinam@swcs.org. For fax transmissions, dial (515) 289-1227.

Articles should be fewer than 350 words. Please remember to send photographs to illustrate your article. Slides are accepted. If you are using a digital camera, set the camera to the highest quality setting and save the image as a tiff.

For information about the Earth Team and the VolunteerVoice, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov, call 1-888-LANDCARE, or call 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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