



# VolunteerVoice

"The voice of the Earth Team"

USDA--The Natural Resources Conservation Service

Winter 2005

## In This Issue...

NRCS Earth Team:  
Looking Back 20-  
Years p.2

Earth Team Volun-  
teer "Lights-up"  
Lawrence County  
p.2

Serious About Wa-  
ter Quality p.3

Making Things Hap-  
pen p.4

Earth Team and  
RC&D Partner for  
Recycling p.5

Community Gar-  
dens Get Earth  
Team Assistance  
p.6

Management Tips  
p.7

Bits and Pieces p.8

## Arizona

# Conservation Garden Adds Beauty to Yuma

*George Couch, NRCS Earth Team volunteer coordinator*

From October through April, when many throughout the country are shivering in their winter coats, the residents of Yuma, Arizona,

are enjoying warm desert breezes, plenty of sunshine, and the Saguaro Cacti and sparkling ponds at the Yuma Conservation Garden. To get the garden ready for winter "prime time," ten NRCS Earth Team volunteers spruced it up by painting signs,



*NRCS Earth Team volunteer, Brian Loadholt helps paint signs at the Yuma Conservation Garden*

pulling weeds, and trimming trees to get the garden and education center ready for visitors. Sheryl Christenson, Yuma Conservation Garden coordinator for the past five years said, "I couldn't keep the garden looking this good without our volunteers. They're wonderful!" Last year, volunteers logged-in more than 2,700 hours helping to maintain and improve the garden.

As for the volunteers, "I hate ladders; I'm afraid of heights; and I'm not much of a painter," said volunteer Brian Loadholt. "But I couldn't pass up the opportunity to be here and help out."

*Continues on page 3, "Yuma"*

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# NRCS Earth Team: Looking Back 20-Years

Since the organization of local conservation districts in the 1930s, people have volunteered their time and talent to assist NRCS in achieving its' conservation goals. Through the decades, volunteering has remained an important part of America's conservation movement. Expanding the volunteer concept, congress passed legislation in 1981 that provided authority for NRCS to use volunteers.

*Please go to page 6, "Looking Back"*

In 1982, the National Volunteer program started with 327 volunteers who donated 29,000 hours. In 2003, 43,834 Earth Team volunteers donated more than one million hours of help to NRCS.

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## Illinois Earth Team Volunteer "Lights-up" Lawrence County

*Betty Joubert, Wabash Valley RC&D coordinator and Mary Hess, NRCS Earth Team volunteer coordinator, Illinois*

Jim Osborn has taken conservation to another level with his participation in the Lawrence County Energy Conservation Project. As an Earth team volunteer with the Wabash Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) office headquartered in Lawrenceville, Illinois, Jim, an independent contractor, offers his expertise to the RC&D Council's energy conservation project that aims to reduce energy usage through lighting upgrades, geothermal systems, pressure diagnostics technology, and weatherization. Using pressure diagnostics equipment to

*Please go to page 5, "Lawrence County"*



*NRCS Earth Team volunteer Jim Osborn (left) explains his energy-saving technology to a Lawrence County Business and Home Show participant*

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*California*

# Serious About Water Quality

*Sierra Harris, NRCS biologist and area Earth Team volunteer coordinator, California*

Eight California NRCS Earth Team volunteers assisted by Beth Brock, who doubles as the Mission Resource Conservation District water quality and Earth Team volunteer coordinator, are performing water quality monitoring in the Santa Margarita River watershed. As part of the Home2Ocean program – a 14-month water quality monitoring grant effort for the watershed – Beth and her Earth Team volunteers sample water from Stone Creek and Rainbow Creek, both tributaries of the river. They collect data on dissolved oxygen, water temperature, stream velocity, total dissolved solids, turbidity, and pH. They also take water samples back to the district office to perform phosphate and nitrate tests. A laboratory also picks up water samples to test for total coliform bacteria and E. coli and twice yearly, the volunteers survey for benthic macroinvertebrates. These tests help determine how much agricultural and residential run-off is flowing into the Santa Margarita that provides a majority of the drinking water for the U.S. Marines living at Camp Pendleton. Through the Home2Ocean program the Earth Team volunteers also work to educate area residents on regional water quality issues and provide them an opportunity to learn how to test for water quality.



*Whitewater kayaking on the Santa Margarita River in California*



*Yuma Conservation Garden's most unusual resident, Baloo, a 67-year old tortoise.*

## Yuma *continued from page 1*

Not only is the garden a beautiful place, but it's also designated by the Arizona State Land Department as an Environmental Education Center. Christenson and teachers from the Yuma Public Schools have created lesson plans tailored specifically for the 2,000 students who have visited the garden each year for the past four years.

The Yuma Conservation Garden sits on 28-acres neighboring the Yuma County Fairgrounds. The Yuma and Laguna Natural Resource Conservation Districts manage the garden, where visitors can follow trails past Sonoran Desert plants, a duck pond, antique farm machinery, an outdoor classroom area, and have an opportunity to meet the garden's most unusual resident, Baloo, a 67-year old tortoise.

## Delaware

# Making Things Happen

*Jan Pertruzzi, NRCS Earth Team volunteer coordinator, Delaware*

NRCS Earth Team volunteers, Delaware's First State RC&D Council, and the Group Workcamps Foundation of Loveland, Colorado, recently pitched in to complete repairs on 56 homes in the Dover, Delaware, area. Emergency Home Repair Project Workcamps are an intensive week of community service offering teenagers an opportunity to perform hands-on home-repair projects for needy families. The workcamp, dubbed the Delaware Bay Workcamp, was the result of a local partnership of the RC&D Emergency Home Repair Project, the Natural Resources Conservation Service Earth Team, local churches, community groups, individuals, and St. Thomas More Academy.

The First State RC&D Council supplied a list of Emergency Home Repair Project clients needing assistance and the required local funding necessary to qualify for matching dollars from the Group Workcamps Foundation. Local helpers, who signed on as Earth Team volunteers, provided ladders, tools, and plenty of "sweat equity" for the repair projects.



*NRCS Earth Team volunteers perform hands-on home-repair projects for needy families during the Delaware Bay Workcamp*

St. Thomas More Academy was a major contributor to the success of the Delaware Bay Workcamp that was faced with the problem of finding a place to house its 400 campers and chaperones. Officials from St. Thomas More eagerly agreed to open the school's facilities for the campers who slept on air mattresses in classrooms, the library, and the gym; ate breakfast in the cafeteria; and were made as comfortable as possible by school students, parents, and staff, helping make the week a success.

At first light, campers and chaperones rolled out of their makeshift beds, loaded their vehicles with tools and materials, and headed to their work sites by 7:30 a.m. Campers and adult chaperones logged 15,600 hours; support staff, 1,760 hours; worksite estimators, 456 hours; and local volunteers, 1,040 hours for a total of nearly 19,000 Earth Team hours for the week.

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Nebraska

# Earth Team and RC&D Partner for Recycling



*A "sea" of scrap tires is destined for re-cycling thanks to NRCS Earth Team volunteers and the Northeast Nebraska RC&D*

*Jan Jorgensen, NRCS Northeast Nebraska RC&D Council Coordinator*

A "sea" of scrap tires is destined for re-cycling thanks to NRCS Earth Team volunteers and the Northeast Nebraska Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D).

Fifteen NRCS Earth Team volunteers with help from the Northeast Nebraska RC&D recently collected over 150 tons of scrap tires for recycling. Grants from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality; NRCS Lower Elkhorn Natural Resource District (NRD); Lewis & Clark NRD; Northeast Nebraska RC&D Council; Pierce, Dixon, and Cedar Counties; and Husker Ag, LLC along with

*Please go to page 7, "Recycling"*

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## Lawrence County *continued from page 2*

detect cracks or breaks in home siding or insulation, Jim has performed 42 free onsite energy usage "check ups" to date. He recommends measures home and business owners can take to lower their utility costs and conserve energy.

Jim, who is the son of Lloyd Osborn, soil conservation technician in the Lawrenceville Service Center, has volunteered 300 hours to the project since 2003, helping with planning, grant proposal development, and project implementation. In addition to testing homes and businesses, Jim actively participates in the Lawrence County Business and Home Show explaining the techniques he uses for the Energy Conservation Project. Jim also participates as a speaker in project workshops and staffs displays at events throughout the county to educate community members of the project and its benefits.

Project participants receive two free fluorescent bulbs to replace their incandescent bulbs so they can realize immediate energy cost savings. Following Jim's check up, the Wabash Valley RC&D pays up to \$50 to install the recommended energy conservation treatments. To date, 16 incentive payments have been made, and eight rechecks to evaluate after-treatment energy savings completed or scheduled.

The Wabash Valley RC&D Council offers technical and financial assistance to communities in Clark, Crawford, Edwards, Lawrence, Richland, Wabash, and Wayne Counties to address social, economic, and environmental concerns; promote wise use of natural resources; and improve resident's quality of life. Volunteer community leaders make up the council and NRCS provides staff to facilitate council efforts.

# Community Gardens Get Earth Team Assistance

Judy Carter, NRCS administrative assistant, California

With the help of NRCS Earth Team volunteers in partnership with local RC&D councils and others, community and children’s gardens in the three Trinity and Siskiyou County towns of Weaverville, Hayfork, and Dorris, California, have become a reality.

Please go to page 7, “Gardens”

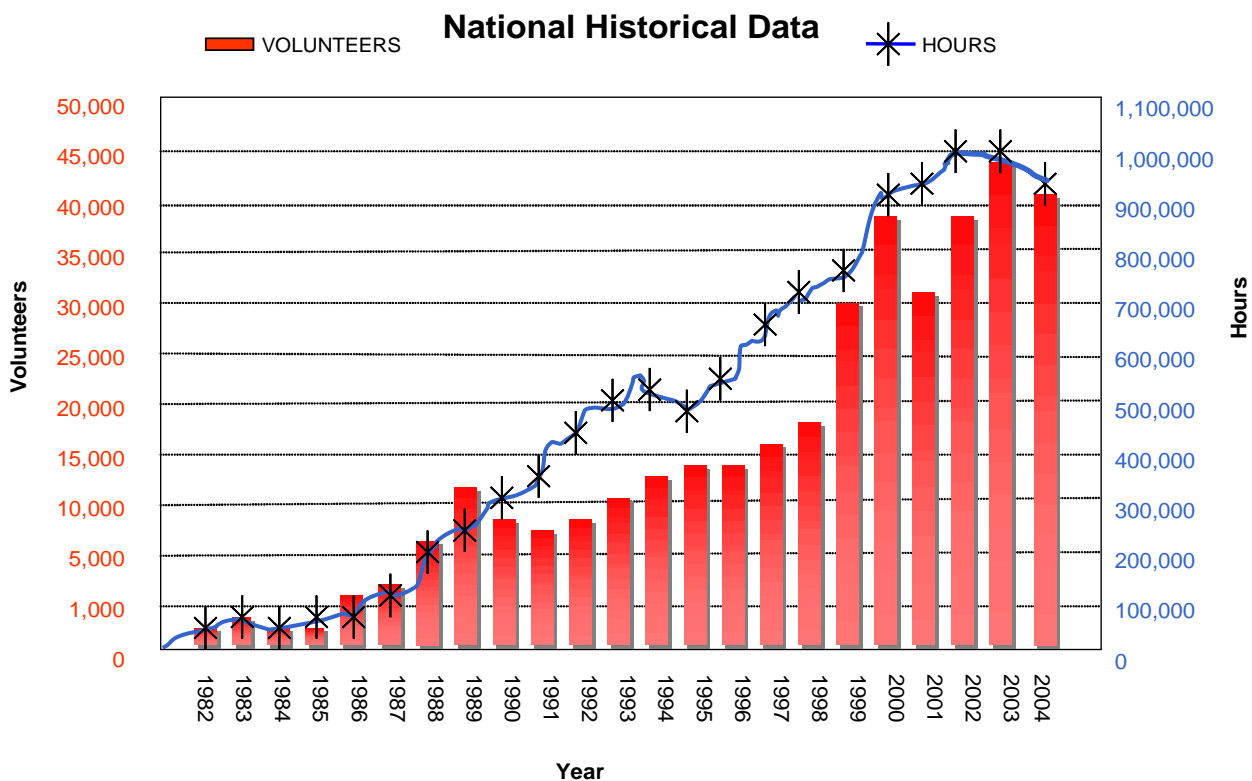


A child studies a nature lesson in a children's garden created and operated by NRCS Earth Team volunteers and local RC&D councils

## Looking Back *continued from page 2*

It wasn't until 1985, when the Farm Bill increased the agency's workload, that leadership encouraged all States to begin using the National Volunteer Program to help achieve the agency's conservation goals.

In 1985, the National Volunteer Program became the Earth Team – the volunteer arm of NRCS. The purpose of the Earth Team is to use volunteer time, talent, and energy to help achieve the agency's conservation goals.



# Recycling

*continued from page 5*

donations from private citizens covered the cost of transporting the tires to a commercial center and the actual recycling. Keep Northeast Nebraska Beautiful helped organize the event and a local pizzeria donated lunch for the Earth Team volunteers who came from local FFA chapters in Plainview, Creighton, and Randolph, Nebraska, to help with the tire re-cycling project.

# Gardens

*continued from page 6*

Earth Team volunteers have dedicated their time and energy to building planting beds, bridges, rock gardens, pathways and shaded gazebos and assisting in the organization of educational activities at the Weaverville community garden and two Trinity RC&D children's garden projects in Weaverville and Hayfork. The goal of the children's garden projects is to provide young children with the opportunity to care for their own garden in order to learn about health, nutrition, and nature. During the growing season children's garden activities include weekly educational field trips focused on plants and nutrition and a visit during the fall harvest to a pumpkin patch.

In the small town of Dorris in Siskiyou County, more than 100 volunteers have spent many hours mowing, tilling, removing rock, installing an irrigation system, and painting a mural to help create the



## Management Tips

### *Becoming a Successful Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator*

The primary ingredient to becoming a successful Earth Team volunteer coordinator is... **ENTHUSIASM**. It's contagious and it's the first quality that your volunteers and others notice about you. In certain situations it can even make up for shortcoming like lack of experience. Try it. You'll like it!

Another essential quality to becoming a successful volunteer coordinator is exhibiting a genuine personal commitment to the Earth Team. Be an Earth Team volunteer yourself; "walk the talk," so to speak. Ask your volunteers to help you help other coordinators with chores like needs inventories, recruiting, and managing volunteers.

Talk-up "Earth Team" every chance you get. Keep the Earth

Team presence alive in your State or district by reporting on volunteer opportunities and accomplishments at staff meetings and other sessions.

Attend as many volunteer meetings and events as possible. There are multi-State and regional meetings that provide an excellent opportunity to learn from other coordinators and get management updates from NRCS leadership.

Learn as much as you can about the Earth Team. Your State or district look to you as THE source for information about policy, procedure, and details on the program. Keep a set of references handy and know where to find information on the Earth Team website.

Becoming a successful Earth Team manager takes time. Always be looking for a creative or positive contribution you can make to the program. Be patient. The road to success can be a long journey. But even the longest journey always begins with a single step

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100 X 130 ft. Dorris Community Garden designed to help educate community members on gardening techniques.

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## *Bits and Pieces*

### *Subscribe to VolunteerVoice*

The *VolunteerVoice* is now an on-line publication. Beginning with the fall issue, mass printing and distribution of paper copies ceased. The *VolunteerVoice* will now be produced as an Adobe portable document format (PDF) file which will reside on the NRCS Earth Team website. Readers can “subscribe” to the *VolunteerVoice* by going to NRCS news lists page at <http://news-source.nrcs.usda.gov/> and following the simple instructions. When the latest issue goes up on the NRCS Earth Team website, subscribers will receive an e-mail with a hyperlink to link directly to the publication.

### *VolunteerVoice Deadlines*

The following are the submittal deadlines for *VolunteerVoice* articles for the 2005 editions. Please remember to submit the

stories as Word files and the photos as separate JPG or TIFF files. Photos that are imbedded in a word document or are part of a webpage present printing problems because they are not high enough resolution to reproduce well. The deadlines are as follows:

- Spring 2005--Distribution April 2005. Deadline to submit: 3/15/05
  - Summer 2005--Distribution July 2005. Deadline to submit: 6/15/05
  - Fall 2005--Distribution October 2005. Deadline to submit: 9/15/05
- Deadlines

### *LANDCARE, Publications, and You*

The LANDCARE operation has moved from Ankeny, Iowa to a location in Des Moines. Although LANDCARE is still taking orders for publications, it is estimated that it will be March before the operation is staffed-up, running, and publications going out. Stay tuned.

### *Mark Your Calendars*

Mark August 8-11, 2005, on your calendars as a reminder to

attend the next National Earth Team/Public Affairs Conference at the Marriott Hotel and Convention Center in Philadelphia. Lots of great workshops, guest speakers and some new ideas are planned. The agenda is almost finalized. So be looking for information soon.

### *February is Black History Month*

February is National Black History Month, and the 2005 theme is “The Niagara Movement 100th Anniversary. The Niagara Movement was a meeting of African Americans, led by W.E.B. Dubois, who called for full civil liberties and an end to racial discrimination. The meeting was held in July 1905, at Niagara Falls, New York. The Niagara Movement was a forerunner to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Your support and commitment for Black History Month will help NRCS and the Earth Team create a better workplace for all employees.

### *Submission to VolunteerVoice*

Articles and photographs for publication should be e-mailed, via your State Volunteer Coordinator, to [fred.jacobs@usda.gov](mailto:fred.jacobs@usda.gov). If you prefer, copy can be mailed or faxed to NRCS Attn: Fred Jacobs, room 6114-S, PO Box 2890, Washington, DC 20250, fax number (202) 720-1564.

Please remember to include photographs to illustrate the article. JPG 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](http://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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