

2007 Indiana Individual Earth Team Volunteer

By Nancy Manion, State Volunteer Coordinator, Indiana



Bill Swern (left) and Don Donovan, District Conservationist

Bill Swern, 2007 Indiana Individual Earth Team Volunteer Award winner, knows the value of volunteers, perhaps better than most. As a retiree from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, he knows that there is more conservation work to be done than can be accomplished by employees alone.

For more than 15 years, Bill has served the conservation effort in Parke County as an Earth Team volunteer at the Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development office. He uses the knowledge and experience of his career to benefit youth, local citizens, and the natural resources around him. Bill has been an active member of the Forestry Committee, assisting with at least 15 Timber Stand Improvement field days, and producing spot announcement tapes for the promotion of forest management on local radio stations.

Bill continues to be an inspiration to many in the conservation community. "We are stewards of the land. It's ours for a lifetime, but just for a lifetime," he proclaims. Bill has certainly been a good steward in his lifetime.

Earth Team Volunteers Reforest Area Damaged by Hurricane

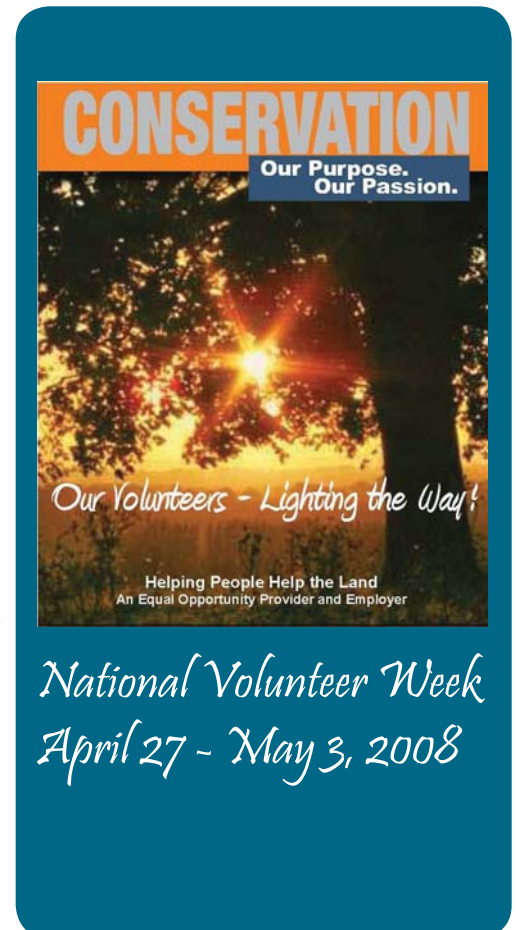
By Mitzi Dohrman, Vermilion SWCD, Louisiana

Natural Resources Conservation Service Earth Team volunteers assisted the Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District (VSWCD) in planting 1,100 bare root tree seedlings along two marsh areas of Vermilion Parish. Earth Team volunteers are reforesting areas that were destroyed by high winds from Hurricane Rita. The seedlings were purchased due to generous monetary donations from the South Brown Conservation District in South Dakota and Sussex, Kent and New Castle Conservation Districts in Delaware. NRCS and VSWCD have been able to replace trees that were lost and also educate young and old on important issues such as conservation and community involvement.



Earth Team volunteers Ashlee Marceaux (left) and Mark Shirley planting seedlings

VSWCD will work to monitor the progress of the seedlings and will report back to the donating districts on the survival and growth of the various plantings.



Earth Team Volunteer Works to Complete Internship

By Betty Stibbe, State Volunteer Coordinator, Wisconsin

Gwendolyn Cory is currently assisting the Richland Center Area Office staff with filing, copying, spreadsheets, and correspondence. She graduated from Riverdale High School in 2005 and is currently attending the Southwest Technical College. Gwendolyn has received her Technical Certificate in Office Aide and will graduate in May with an Associates Degree in Administrative Assistance. Her Earth Team experience will qualify as the 72 hour internship required for graduation. Gwendolyn appreciates the “on-the-job” experience that her volunteer work with NRCS has provided.



Gwendolyn Cory

2007 North Dakota Individual Earth Team Volunteer is Recognized

By Lynette Linnick, State Volunteer Coordinator, North Dakota

Earth Team volunteer Jennie Kautzman was recognized as the North Dakota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Earth Team Individual Volunteer for Fiscal Year 2007. J.R. Flores, State Conservationist, selected Jennie from 76 active individual volunteers in 31 offices in the State.

Andy Wingenbach, Assistant State Conservationist of NRCS Field Operations, presented Jennie the award at the Carrington Field Office. She has volunteered more than 1,000 hours every year since 2003.

Some of Jennie’s many duties include greeting customers, keeping the filing system current, entering data, assisting in the distribution of newsletters, answering the phone and taking messages. She also helps coordinate the Foster County Soil Conservation District’s semi-annual Women’s Ag Night.

Don Olds, District Conservationist at the Carrington Field Office, noted that, “It’s people like Jennie who are willing to commit their time and talent to conserving and protecting our natural resources that make a difference.”

Volunteers throughout North Dakota serve in many different capacities and the hours they dedicate help NRCS accomplish resource goals and lighten field office workloads. Jennie has been a very important member of the field office staff as they continue the NRCS mission of “Helping People Help the Land” in Foster County.



Jennie Kautzman (right) and Andy Wingenbach, Assistant State Conservationist

Earth Team Volunteers Assist With Watersheds

By Allison Anthe, Volunteer Coordinator, Illinois

Evergreen Lake was designated a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) watershed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) in 2004. A planning process, funded through the Association of Illinois Soil & Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD) began in February 2005 and will be completed in 2008. The committee members were signed up as Earth Team volunteers and consisted of a wide range/cross section of individuals including local stakeholders, bankers, township supervisors, city managers, watershed partnerships, educators and other interested parties. The volunteers worked with the NRCS and the McLean County SWCD to develop and implement a plan.

Lake Bloomington was designated a TMDL in 2006, and many of the Evergreen Lake Earth Team volunteers agreed to help with the watershed planning process. The McLean County NRCS and SWCD value and rely on their volunteers. The staff is very proud to have accumulated over 2,100 Earth Team Volunteer hours!

Venessa is looking for articles for the next issue. Deadline for submissions is May 15th. Remember to submit photos with captions and keep your articles to a maximum of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page. Questions? Contact her: venessa.alvarado@ia.usda.gov

Volunteers Provide Valuable Irrigation Season Assistance

By Curtis Scheele, Water Quality Specialist & Joanna Pope, State Volunteer Coordinator, Nebraska

Three students from the University of Nebraska-Kearney – Josh Johnson, Jason Garris and Dave Zorn - were recruited by the Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (NRD) and signed up as hosted Earth Team Volunteers in 2007, to assist with irrigation projects.

The volunteers completed survey data that NRCS specialists use to design conservation projects. They also assisted NRCS staff to complete field checks for compliance with federal conservation programs, ensuring use of no-till farming or the conversion from irrigated acres to dryland. All irrigation-related Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts signed in 2003 through 2007 with dryland and no-till obligations were field checked. This task would have been nearly impossible to meet without the assistance of Josh, Jason and Dave.

The volunteers' help allowed NRCS to provide better technical assistance to the producers. The work performed was extremely time-sensitive since it could only be conducted during irrigation season. Without the help of the Earth Team volunteers there simply would not have been enough "hands" to complete the work.

The Holdrege NRCS Field Office has opened the door on how to use volunteers and the staff has an increased trust in allowing them to do the job. Prior to this experience they believed that only NRCS employees could do the work. This volunteer opportunity created a win-win situation for everyone involved. The volunteers gained valuable work experience and the agencies gained valuable assistance in meeting the challenging workload during the short irrigation season.

The interns' assistance has helped provide critical information to landowners during the recent drought years in south-central Nebraska, and remains vital, especially in the Republican and Platte river basins where irrigation water supplies are limited.



Photo courtesy of Kearney Hub Newspaper, Kearney, Nebraska

Michigan Master Gardener Joins the Earth Team

By Brian Buehler, State Public Affairs Specialist, Michigan

For over 30 years Susan Anderson helped provide lunches for low-income students at Michigan schools. Today, as an Earth Team volunteer, she is helping the people who grow that food.

Mrs. Anderson has served as an Earth Team volunteer in the Big Rapids Field Office since 2004. She retired from the Michigan Department of Education as the state administrator for the USDA's child nutrition program in 2003 and sees a relationship between her career with the state and her volunteer work. "I'm seeing the full spectrum," said Mrs. Anderson.



Susan Anderson

She became a volunteer through her involvement with the Michigan State University Extension Master Gardener Program. The Mecosta Conservation District sought Master Gardeners to volunteer with their tree and plant sales. Mrs. Anderson has gone on to perform a variety of office tasks for the Mecosta

County NRCS Field Office and the Conservation District. During 2006 and 2007 she donated over 800 hours as an Earth Team volunteer.

Mrs. Anderson was looking for interesting and rewarding volunteer work. "The two organizations help people solve a lot of problems. I think it really makes a difference to the community and it's rewarding to be a part of that," she commented.

Her office tasks have included answering telephones, scanning slides of aerial photographs, promoting the household hazardous waste cleanup and teaching at Ag and Natural Resources Days to name a few. She enjoys the variety of tasks she is able to do as a volunteer.

"Having Mrs. Anderson in the office frees up a lot of time for other tasks and her service is greatly appreciated by the NRCS and Conservation District staff," said Jennifer Taylor, District Conservationist.

From Earth Team Volunteer to NRCS Employee

By Vickie Fontenot, Office Assistant, Louisiana

Tania Nanna, originally from Brazil, has been a Louisiana Earth Team volunteer working at the NRCS State Office in Alexandria, La., since 2005. Tania has lived in the United States for 18 years earning a Master of Science Degree in Soil Science and Computer Science from North Dakota State University (NDSU). She was the first student at NDSU to earn a MS in both Soil Science and Computer Science. Her area of research involved soil nutrient management, GIS and precision agriculture.

Tania moved to central Louisiana after graduating from NDSU. "After moving to Louisiana, I immediately fell in love with the landscape, the pine trees, and the charming South," said Tania. Once settled, she contacted Don Gohmert, former Louisiana State Conservationist, about working as a volunteer for the NRCS Earth Team. "I wanted to volunteer in an area that involved both my soils and computer/GIS skills," stated Tania.

Within one week after conversations with Jerry Daigle, State Soil Scientist, and Bob Capezza, GIS Specialist, Tania started working with the state soils section as an Earth Team volunteer. Her main duties included quality control of soil maps for SSURGO using GIS software and working on the Cameron-Creole watershed project and digitizing water/land interfaces from ortho-imagery using various GIS tools. Tania was encouraged to develop new techniques to solve problems and complete tasks, which made the volunteer work very interesting and rewarding.

"Volunteering allowed me to apply my experience and skills to help others while, at the same time, it gave me the opportunity to meet other professionals at NRCS," said Tania. "The Earth Team gave me practical insight into the importance of GIS technology for NRCS and how I can help as a professional in this organization," she adds.

Tania applied for the cartographic technician position and is now working full-time assisting the GIS specialist with various projects and one of her newest responsibilities is to maintain and update the Louisiana NRCS website. Tania's story exemplifies how the Earth Team can assist with recruiting NRCS employees.




Tania Nanna

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT TIP

Spring into action! Complete your Needs Assessments and get ready to use Earth Team volunteers this summer!

Visit the Earth Team website and download the Needs Assessment Fact Sheet TODAY!

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers/>

 Needs Assessment - The Place to Start
The Earth Team

A thorough "needs assessment" should precede any volunteer recruiting effort.

It's important to involve the entire staff, because individuals view their jobs differently, and each person may see different opportunities for the use of volunteers.

A needs assessment should ask:

- What do we need to accomplish?
- What's not getting done?
- What are activities we'd like to accomplish?
- What tasks could be accomplished using volunteer help?

1. Use a flip chart and divide a page into four columns labeled: Activities that Must Be Accomplished, Activities Not Being Accomplished, Activities We'd Like to Accomplish, and Activities that Volunteers Can Accomplish.
2. With your staff, make a list of activities that your office must accomplish (refer to the business plan, district long range plan, etc.). Write these activities in column 1: Activities that Must Be Accomplished.
3. After completing the first column, begin listing activities that aren't being accomplished. Write these activities in column 2: Activities Not Being Accomplished. Some of the activities listed in column 1 may also be included in this list.
4. Column 3 is your wish list. Write down activities that you and your staff would like to accomplish if you had ample time and staff. Write these activities in column 3: Activities We'd Like to Accomplish.
5. Now that you have completed the first three columns, you are ready to identify those tasks that a volunteer could do. Begin by reviewing column 1. Transfer any activity that you feel a volunteer could accomplish from column 1 to column 4: Activities that Volunteers Can Accomplish. Complete this same process for columns 2 and 3. You may want to break down larger jobs into specific tasks that volunteers can perform.

At this point, the assessment should have activities in all four columns. Prioritize the needs and focus on specific jobs and tasks to be performed. (This helps in recruiting and matching talent to task.)

If you think you may have trouble finding work space for volunteers, take the assessment process one more step and identify which tasks volunteers can do outside the office.