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# Maine NRCS Conservation News



## Message from the State Conservationist

This Agency has been, is, and will continue to be on the receiving end of changes that may or may not seem desirable in the short term. Contemporary changes, ranging from cost accounting to the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative to the Soil Survey Program restructuring, are meant to strengthen our service to the country and to increase the efficiency with

which that takes place. As these changes occur, and as programs and their guiding rules and policies change, I want to bring to light a few things.

1. What NRCS does is fundamentally important and worthwhile to this country. Agriculture-centered resource conservation and sustainable productivity are national security and economic stability issues, and this Agency has a proven record of incentive-based cooperative assistance to producers that is a significant part of the success story of American agriculture. Provision of the technical assistance to cooperators to maintain sustainable productivity and environmental quality is a good investment, and this Agency's excellence at it has sustained it through periods when other agencies or programs were centralized, drastically cut, or eliminated. Look at the role we have played in a highly-productive and resource-conscious agricultural sector in this country! Fly over any major agriculturally-important area of the country and see the conservation tillage, contours, cover crops, terraces, small reservoirs, healthy fields, and crop rotations that have the mark of this Agency's technical assistance all over them. That is a thing of beauty, it is tangible, and it will benefit future generations.



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## Message from the State Conservationist (continued)

2. The Federal government has unprecedented debt, and accountability and efficiency are rightfully paramount in the eyes of the American public. This Agency must maintain an active pursuit of continuous improvement (efficiency and effectiveness), and be able to readily identify the value of what we do. I urge you to be positive and to engage new initiatives and programs so that they can be as effective and beneficial as possible. NRCS is relatively well-positioned among discretionary-budget government agencies in that there is a tangible and valuable product coming from our efforts. Your positive attitude and willingness to communicate that value is very important.

3. Keep in mind that NRCS runs along two distinct but important and interdependent lines. One is that we have a core mission and structure based on sustainable land use and cooperative technical assistance. The second is that our core and structure are affected by legislative programs, including major shapers—like Farm Bill legislation—and other or related legislation/rule making items that are diverse—ranging from audits to environmental protection statutes. Sometimes the incorporation of these things is turbulent and difficult to handle at the State and field office levels, but we must handle them the best that we can. In fact, NRCS has been doing just that all along, but much more so recently. I appreciate the work you do to manage this with minimal interruption in service to your clients.

4. Stay focused on success, support appropriate locally-focused initiatives, administer programs with a local focus,

and be proud of the good things that have come from our Agency's cooperation with the nation's producers. Keep in mind that we are all human, mistakes show up in many things. No leader, no employee, no program, no farm plan, no tractor design - nothing is perfect. A good attitude is required to get the best from all things. We are all in this together, so again I urge you to positively engage all challenges.

So when I say I am proud of NRCS employees, it is not just a platitude. It is based on *principle*, and in *fact*. The *principle* is not only that public service is a public trust that tax money is well spent ethically, it is NRCS' special charge that we help people to use the land in a fashion that leaves it in as good or better shape for future generations. The *fact* is that the out-



put of NRCS has been a good return on investment of tax dollars -and that each of you is integral to maintaining this fact. So I urge you to please keep in mind the value of this Agency and your work, and strive with me to maintain and enhance it.

I feel fortunate to work for this Agency, and I hope you feel the same. Thank you for all that you do for conserving Maine's natural resources.

  
 JUAN C. HERNANDEZ  
 State Conservationist



## USDA Celebrates 150 Years

*A message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack*



In 2012, USDA is commemorating and celebrating the 150th anniversary of our founding in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act of Congress establishing the United States Department of Agriculture.

Two and one-half years later, in what would be his final annual message to the Congress, Lincoln called USDA “The People’s Department.” At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about 2 percent today. But through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a host of issues, USDA still fulfills Lincoln’s vision—touching the lives of every American, every day.

As we commemorate 150 years of accomplishments, USDA is learning from past experiences and looking to the future. In the years to come, we must help address the changing needs of agriculture and rural America. We must continue to help provide a safe, ample food supply for our nation and the world.

To meet those goals, we are working to make USDA a more modern and effective service provider and to deliver the best possible results for all of the American people.

Over the course of the year, I hope that Americans will acknowledge and join in our commemoration of 150 years of USDA.

It is a great time to learn about our contributions to the strength and health of this nation, and to see how we can continue to partner with Americans working to provide a better life for their families.



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## 38 Resource Professionals Receive Training to Become TSPs—by Chris Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Special Projects

Maine NRCS held two 1-day training sessions for foresters and other resource professionals that wanted to become Technical Service Providers (TSP) this past spring at the University of Maine at Farmington. The training was held at the Computer Lab at the University which allowed NRCS employees to assist the attendees to fill out their “TSP applications” on the TechReg website (TECHREG.gov) on the computers in the lab.

Presentations included TSP Orientation, Conservation Planning, National Conservation Planning Procedures and Field Office Technical Guide. NRCS employees providing this training included Jim Johnson, Resource Conservationist; Jerry Barnes, Forester; and Chris Jones, Assistant State Conservationist for Special Projects. Resource professionals were assisted with their Level 2 E-



*NRCS Forester Jerry Barnes makes presentation to 38 resource professionals at TSP Training Session in Farmington.*

Authorization by Resource Conservationist Susan Arrants and Soil Conservationist Seth Jones. Susan and Seth also answered questions on NRCS Programs. The majority of the classes were foresters but there were also professionals in Wildlife and Energy in the class.

As a result of this outreach and a similar outreach session to potential TSPs held in January, 2012 Maine has 60 Foresters certified in the Forest Management Plan-Conservation Activity Plan category and 66 Foresters certified in the Forestry practice implementation category.

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## Engineer in the Making? Part I

This little guy, Jack, had the opportunity to receive hands-on training while checking construction at a manure pit with his mom, Agricultural Engineer Candi Gilpatric.



## Early Findings on High Tunnel CIG Grant—

by Chris Jones, Assistant State Conservation for Special Projects, and Caragh Fitzgerald, Cooperative Extension Service



The 2012 Maine Vegetable and Fruit School was held in Portland and in Bangor this past spring. At these meetings Caragh Fitzgerald (in photo), Assistant Extension

Professor of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, presented some of the early findings on the Maine NRCS-funded Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) on High Tunnels. The CIG titled “Evaluating Conservation Systems that Use Seasonal High Tunnels” is with the University of Maine. The purposes of this CIG include providing Maine NRCS information to further refine and develop the high tunnel practice standard that can be used to help determine if high tunnel is an appropriate technology to be a conservation practice. Currently the High Tunnel Conservation Practice is an interim conservation practice that is being evaluated. Some of the early findings by Fitzgerald and Mark Hutton, Extension Specialist and Associate Extension Professor, on identifying areas for improvement on Maine’s high tunnel production include:

- ✓ In 2011 and 2012, three interviews or visits were conducted with 31 Maine high tunnel owners to identify practices, benefits, challenges, and areas for improvement. Basic data was collected on 52 tunnels and detailed production data was collected on 31 tunnels. Soil samples were collected in mid-summer and analyzed for nutrients using standard soil test methods, saturated media extract, and other measures of soil quality.
- ✓ Twenty-four tunnels were a year or less old at the start of the project. Eight farms were certified organic, 23 were not. At these 31 farms, the primary crop grown was tomatoes (81%), followed by greens (56%), cucumbers (47%), and peppers (44%).
- ✓ They identified production challenges where additional education is warranted. Forty-eight percent of farmers reported addressing site or soil drainage either before or after construction. Existing management of pH was inadequate with 70% of the tunnels having soils with pH of less than the recommended minimum of 6.5 (32% had pH less than 6.0, n=37). Ninety-four percent of growers applied compost or manure prior to the cropping season. Some farmers did not wait the recommended 120 days between applying uncomposted manure and harvesting, potentially increasing food safety risks.
- ✓ Organic matter levels over 8% (the upper range of standard for Maine soils) were found in 54% of 37 tunnels sampled. In addition to being an unnecessary expense, these high application rates contributed to high soil salt levels. Thirty percent of tunnels had salt levels above 2 millimhos per centimeter (mmhos/cm), which can be detrimental to some crops.

The final report of this CIG is due in September 2012.

## Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative

The Salmon Falls River is fed by an ecologically diverse land area shared by the states of Maine and New Hampshire, and drains into the Great Bay Estuary, a coastal ecosystem of national importance. Approximately 28,000 people currently rely on the Salmon Falls watershed to provide clean drinking water. The watershed is threatened by increases in polluted runoff resulting from rapid population growth and conversion of forested land to developed areas.

The Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative (SFWC) is an action-oriented partnership between local, state and federal partners working to protect and sustain high quality drinking water in the Salmon Falls River watershed.

The Salmon Falls River presents a number of challenges when it comes to source water protection. The water supply watershed encompasses 18 towns; consequently, the stakeholders in the source water protection planning process are numerous.

To overcome these obstacles, the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative has developed an innovative action plan which was finalized in October 2011. The plan emphasizes five strategies to keep source water protection moving ahead:

1. Conserve land that is most important for producing clean drinking water.
2. Promote low impact development and improved

stormwater management techniques.

3. Promote shoreland and aquifer protection ordinances.
4. Identify and address potential sources of contamination.
5. Engage and inspire stakeholders to participate in source water protection.

Funding for the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative has been provided by New Hampshire's Department of Environmental Sciences, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and EPA. NRCS in Maine and New Hampshire is providing funding for the planning and implementation of conservation practices in the watershed.

### U.S. Water Prize Awarded

The Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative was awarded the 2012 U.S. Water Prize Award by The Clean Water America Alliance in Washington, D.C. on April 23, 2012.

NRCS awardees were Rick Ellsmore, NH State Conservationist (standing, 3rd from left) and Maine State Conservationist Juan Hernandez (Standing, 2nd from right).



## Many Honored at Franklin County's 2012 Conservation District's Annual Meeting—by Rosetta Thompson, District Office Manager

Thayden Farrington was honored at the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Franklin County SWCD. Thayden has been on the Board of Supervisors since 1980 and has only missed four meetings throughout his 32 years of faithful service.

Close to 50 individuals attended the Annual Meeting. Certificates of appreciation were presented to District and Earth Team volunteers. The Farmington Field office earned an award as the #1 NRCS/Conservation District office in Maine for nearly 2,000 hours of donated Earth Team volunteer work. Juan Hernandez, State Conservationist, presented the plaque to District Conservationist Paul Hersey, and Soil Conservationist Jade Gianforte.

Juan also presented a special plaque to the Franklin County Conservation District honoring Marcy Libby who had served as a volunteer for the District and the NRCS Earth Team. She volunteered from December 1993 through March 2012, when she passed away unexpectedly. This special award was accepted by her daughter and the District's Executive Director, Rosetta Thompson.

Robert Zundel and his family were honored for their woodlot work. Peter told the life cycle of the property and emphasized how the Zundel's are

working to bring the property back to its full potential. Patty Cormier shared in the presentation to honor them. Peter and Patty presented the family with a 2' x 3' "Conservation Woodlot Owner Of The Year" sign.



*Thayden Farrington (third from right) is honored for his 32 years of faithful service to the district.*

FCSWCD Board Secretary Bruce Tracy and District Conservationist Paul Hersey, jointly presented the Marble family with a "Conservation Farm of the Year" sign to honor their hard work and the USDA program involvement that has increased productivity on the Marble Family Farm.



*Rosetta Thompson accepts Earth Team Volunteer award honoring her mother's 18+ years as a volunteer.*

Thayden Farrington's son, also named Thayden, of Thayden's Photography gave a presentation showing much of his work capturing Maine's wildlife, agriculture, nature and coastal scenery.

The evening cumulated with the Department of Agriculture's Commissioner Walt Witcomb telling the audience about the proposed forthcoming merging of the Departments of Conservation and Agriculture.



*Paul Hersey and Jade Gianforte accept the #1 NRCS/Conservation District office award for most Earth Team volunteer hours in 2011.*

# Outdoor Classroom Combines with Community Service for FA Students — by Carol Weymouth, District Office Manager; Carl Bickford, Forester; and Seth Jones, Soil Conservationist, Skowhegan Field Office

Foxcroft Academy students traveled to Concord Township recently to participate in a project that provides benefits in a multi-level approach. Planting trees that will improve wildlife habitat will also help restore a former asphalt plant site that is currently being rehabilitated by landowner Jon Sferazo.



Part of the restoration project includes creating handicap accessible areas for those with a wide variety of challenges. Wounded Warriors', 9/11 First Responders, and military and law enforcement personnel benefit from programs and activities held on site.

“We were really impressed by how hard the students worked

Austin Chambers, a senior at Foxcroft Academy, participated in the outdoor classroom experience to learn more about wildlife habitat plantings. “Also,” said Chambers, “I enjoy the opportunity to provide community service.”



Owen’s Marsh Restoration Project in Concord Twp was once a gravel pit heavily mined for material for a pavement processing plant. Through his non-profit organization, American Greenlands Restoration, Inc. (AGRI) landowner Jonathan Sferazo is in the process of restoring the multi-

hundred acre area with heritage and native species of trees, shrubs and groundcover.



A group of seven Foxcroft Academy students volunteered to plant trees and shrubs. The event at Owen’s

Marsh Restoration Project provided them with the opportunity to participate in an outside classroom activity while providing community service, something AGRI strongly supports.

today,” said Yvonne Montpelier, a horticulturist who arranged the site preparation for the event. “They planted a lot more trees than we expected.”

NRCS Forester Carl Bickford arranged the schedule for this event. “It’s important for students to be involved,” said Bickford, “and they really gain a lot of self confidence and new found experience from being able to help others. As Earth Team volunteers, they are contributing to the Owen’s Marsh Restoration Project.”

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## Outdoor Classroom (Continued)

“It’s great to see these students giving back,” said NRCS Soil Conservationist Seth Jones. “Not only giving back to the community locally, but on a much larger scale. People all across the nation will benefit from the efforts these students have put in today.”

The Foxcroft Academy students have a keen interest in following the progress of the landscape they have worked to improve. The trees and shrubs will be flagged and photographed, said landowner Jonathan Sferazo, and will be viewable at the AGRI website. “This stand of trees will be a great addition to the Owen’s Marsh Restoration Project for years to come.”

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## Residents, Officials Celebrate Completion of Two Fish Passages in Kennebec County

Federal, State and local officials and residents got together recently to celebrate the completion of the Pullen Mill Bypass on the West Branch of the Sheepscot River in China and the Webber Pond Fish Passage in Vassalboro. Attendees were able to hear from the project partners and see first-hand the finished product and its benefits at each location.

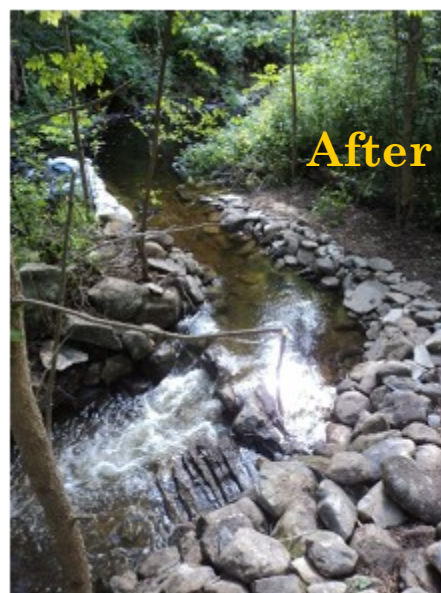
Project partners were excited that by putting together their technical expertise and available funding that they were able to improve water quality as well as fish passage in these two areas. “Partnership is key in carrying out major projects, as demonstrated here today,” said State Conservationist Juan Hernandez. “With the limited funding that local, state and federal agencies and organizations are operating under, no one can achieve all of their goals alone. Partnerships make it possible to accomplish mutual goals, which benefit communities and the state as a whole, and in these cases fish and wildlife habitat.”

### Pullen Mill



**Before**

Pullen Mill is an 1800’s mill site that was an obstruction to fish migration. When the mill was constructed, rock was brought in to create an impoundment for the water-powered mill and to direct water flow over a section of ledge. The ledge was worked to create a larger drop (head) for the mill dam but also created a barrier to fish passage. When the mill impoundment was breached it left a large area of rock debris that further impeded fish passage. Fish passage at the site is important because the



**After**

## Fish Passage Celebration (Continued)

Sheepscoot River has a surviving wild population of endangered Atlantic salmon and because of the potential for alewife restoration.

To restore fish passage, the contractor, using all low-impact methods, removed all the debris in the area and created a new bypass for fish to move upstream outside of the existing stream channel. The work involved using hand tools to remove several large rocks and trees along the side of the stream. Smaller debris was removed and placed further from the stream. Once the ledge was exposed outside of the stream channel a concrete saw and hand tools were used to create pools and weirs within the ledge.

The project was dedicated to Melissa Laser, a respected employee of the Maine Department of Marine Resources who passed away in 2010. She was a steadfast advocate for the environment, working tirelessly to achieve and maintain healthy ecosystems for the watersheds of Maine, and she had a special place in her heart for the Sheepscoot River. She introduced this project to the project managers. She was the inspiration, along with restoring fish runs, for seeing this project through to completion. In memory of Melissa, the Pullen Mill Bypass was dedicated to her at the ceremony. “As a colleague

and friend of Melissa’s, I was very glad to see her commitment to river restoration honored at the Pullen Mill event,” said Patrick Keliher, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Marine Resources. “I hope that those who visit that site are inspired by Melissa’s love of Maine’s rivers and her dedication to her work. I know she would be proud of what has been accomplished there, and honored to be recognized for the part she played in making that project a reality.”

Partners involved in restoring fish passage at Pullen Mill included NRCS, Maine Department of Marine Resources, Sheepscoot River Watershed Council, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Sheepscoot Valley Conservation Association, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Construction on this project was completed by Linkel Construction.

### Webber Pond



Webber Pond saw huge anadromous (sea-run) alewife spawning runs over 200 years ago. The alewives swam up Seven-mile Stream from the Kennebec River and into Webber Pond. The 1800’s construction of the Webber Pond dam significantly curtailed alewife spawning efforts. When the Edwards Dam in Augusta was constructed in 1837, the spawning migration was completely blocked.

Fisheries restoration efforts began in the 1990’s, and in 1999 the Edwards Dam was removed. For about ten

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## Fish Passage Celebration (Continued)

years the idea of installing a fish ladder at the Webber Pond dam to restore native spawning habitat had been discussed, debated and researched. Species that would benefit from the fish ladder included alewives, striped bass, American eel, sea lamprey and white sucker. These species, which were historically abundant in the Kennebec River watershed, play an important role in the food web and in maintaining healthy ecosystems. A connection had also been made between the

reintroduction of alewives and improved water quality. Alewives could improve the water quality by sequestering phosphorous and taking the nutrients with them when they leave the pond in the fall.

Between 2009-2011 construction was completed on the fish passage and an eel passage, as well as a new gate structure at the dam.

Partners involved in the Webber Pond fish passage included the NRCS, Maine De-

partment of Marine Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership, Fish America Foundation, Webber Pond Association, and the Town of Vassalboro. Project design was completed by Kleinschmidt Energy and Water Resource Consultants, a Technical Service Provider with NRCS. Construction on this project was completed by CPM Constructors and H.E. Callahan Construction Co.

## Maine NRCS' First Energy Implementation Project



This project was funded under the EQIP Energy Initiative. A new refrigeration unit was installed for cooling milk in the bulk tank. This new unit is powered by a scroll compressor which is extremely energy efficient. An energy audit conducted identified the existing compressor for cooling milk was using a lot of energy and by replacing it with a new compressor it would save the farm 964Kwh annually.

## NRCS Outreach to Women in Agriculture! — By Helena Swiatek, Federal Women's Program Manager and Asian American/Pacific Islander SEPM

Maine has seen a recent influx of women farming operations in the last 30 years; nationally the number of women-operated farms grew from a mere 5 percent in 1978 to 15 percent, according to 2002 and 2007 Census of Agriculture reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In Maine, a stunning 37 percent of all farm operators in Maine were women according to the 2007 census. I got to view this for myself at a Beginning Farmer Workshop co-hosted by the Women's Agricultural Network (WAgN) and the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

On a cold and windy Sunday, eleven women gathered in Waterville to learn the art and science behind farming. The operations were mostly small vegetable with a few diversified livestock, vegetable and layer operations. Both Lance Gorham, District Conservationist in Lewiston, and myself attended as part of the Land and Infrastructure planning course. We provided an in-

teractive discussion showing typical examples of resource concerns and engaged the women on how to correct these issues. We then related these back to NRCS practices.

It was refreshing to see eager smiling faces and hear them talk about their future farming plans and dreams.



*Enjoying a locally-grown lunch.*

After the presentation we joined them for a local, home-cooked lunch and connected with the participants on a more personal basis. While some had worked with NRCS before, many had not. "This is just great!" one new Lincoln county farmer commented. "I think this is just the best service!" She indicated she would be visiting the service center for the first time very soon.



*Helena Swiatek speaking to the group.*

The group will continue to meet, with classroom sessions merging into field visits as appropriate. They will learn more business planning and marketing as well as soil and plant fertility. I hope, however, that their education will be bolstered as they meet their local NRCS representative.

## Maine Holds Third Embracing Unity and Diversity Day

— by Helena Swiatek and Coleen Churchill, State Civil Rights Committee

Feb 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012 marked the third and final Embracing Unity and Diversity Day in Maine. Two sessions were held simultaneously in central and southern Maine and were the continued joint endeavor of the NRCS and FSA Civil Rights Committee to introduce employees to different cultures and special emphasis groups. Throughout the three years employees had the opportunity to learn more about the eight different special emphasis areas on a rotating basis.

This year's sessions included the following:

- ✓ The central Maine session was opened with the National Anthem performed by the Army National Guard Band Ensemble. The topics of presentations and discussions were: Differences between Chinese and American Culture; Challenges and Rewards from a Female's Political Perspective, presented by four female congressional representatives; Understanding Your Veteran Customer; The Underground Railroad; Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgenders; and Challenges and Triumphs as a Person with a Disability.
- ✓ The southern Maine session included presentations and discussions on the following topics: Honoring the Past in Today's World; Penobscot Indian Nation Language History; Diversity of Countries, Latino Populations and Immigrants in the Workforce; and Life as an Immigrant from the Dominican Republic to the US and the Role of Art in the Caribbean.

Maine State Conservationist Juan Hernandez thanked the Civil Rights Committee for their hard work in making these events happen. This was the culmination of three years of effort, and that was evident in the outstanding programs.

*Christine Chou, Author of "A Chinese Woman's thoughts on American Culture" talks about the differences between Chinese and American cultures.*



*Carl Perry, NRCS Program Assistant, passes on information on how to understand your Veteran customers and the Veteran subculture in America.*

*Sharon Nance, National GLBT SEPM from NRCS in California, shares information on Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transgenders.*



*Cara Clark, Visual Specialist with NRCS in Illinois, tells of the challenges and triumphs as a person with a disability.*

*Handouts were available for training participants.*



## Maine NRCS Employee Granted Certified Forester Status

Congratulations go out to NRCS Forester Gerald Barnes who was recently granted Certified Forester status from the Society of American Foresters (SAF).

According to the letter received by Barnes from the SAF, certification recognizes only those who meet professional forestry education and experience requirements. Certification also publicly acknowledges those who uphold high standards of professional practice in their management of forest resources.

SAF developed certification as a means for the public to distinguish individuals who satisfy criteria established by the profession and for foresters, as a way to evaluate past personal achievements and future professional development. For employers, certification serves as both a measure of assessing performance and as a tangible commitment to excellence for customers and stakeholders. In meeting certification objectives, the practice of forestry and the abilities of Certified Foresters are enhanced.

Congratulations, Jerry!



## Engineers in the Making? Part II—by Candi Gilpatric, Agricultural Engineer, Lewiston Field Office



Candi Gilpatric, Agricultural Engineer in the Lewiston Field Office, volunteered a “craft” with her son Jack’s preschool friends. They mixed up concrete and put it in foil cake pans. They then decorated the concrete with beads, shells, sea glass, etc. After it set they had beautiful stepping stones or decorations for their homes. They all enjoyed getting their hands dirty and creating. Candi enjoyed showing them something a little out of the ordinary.

This activity came about as a result of Jack taking pictures for show and tell of one of the job sites that he had been to with his mom where they were placing concrete. The kids were fascinated. So she thought they might like to see what concrete was all about.