



Kansas Highlights

December 2002

KIRWIN ECOMET TESTS KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS

First, donuts and juice...then the wildlife test...then the plant identification scavenger hunt, a hot lunch, the bird test, wildlife interpretation role-playing, and finally, refreshments and awards. So went the day for about 70 high school students on October 10th from a five-county area in north central Kansas. The event, known as ECOMET, has now been held three consecutive years at the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge.

ECOMET challenges students to increase their knowledge of the natural environment and ecosystems around them. And a challenge it is! The tests have been compared to college entrance exams and upper level lab tests. For instance, "The lower shell of a turtle is called what?" Or try this one, "Can owls actually rotate their heads a full 360 degrees?"



The wildlife test and the bird test each have 100 questions. Questions may deal with identification of a preserved animal specimen (fish, birds, snakes), knowledge of the life habits of a species (diet, life cycle, habitat), or knowledge of current events (West Nile Virus). The bird test begins with six-recorded birdcalls that must be identified from sound alone.

Most students enjoy the time spent gathering wild plants during the scavenger hunt. During this event, the teams are given a list of plants that are known to occur within the "hunt area". They must gather the plants and then be able to identify what they have gathered. Knowing terms such as riparian, perennial, and warm season, can be worth valuable points.

The interpretive event requires the students to "act out" the lives of wildlife species. This event really brings out the creativity in students. The entertainment value of each presentation is well worth watching, but each team must provide a key number of facts within their presentation. A traveling trophy is awarded to the overall first place team. Savings bonds and medals are awarded to individuals and teams that place first or second. All participants receive tee shirts.

Personnel from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Kansas Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers participated in assisting with the event. Shannon Rothchild, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, organized the competition.

While ECOMET is a relatively new competition, it is structured much the same as the more familiar livestock judging and soils judging events that have been around for many years. Teams that place can go on to compete at the state level. *Article submitted by Steve Wingerson, District Conservationist, Smith Center Field Office*



SEARCH FOR SANTA FE TRAIL GRAVE

Never say never when it comes to receiving a strange request. I never thought that I'd be involved in trying to locate the grave of a nun that died on the Santa Fe Trail in 1867, but I was. This past summer, I was asked by the Diocese of Dodge City to provide some soils information to them for a site along the Arkansas River in Finney County. Why? Because, they were assisting a Missouri woman in her effort to locate the grave of her great-great aunt, Sister Alfonsa, who died of cholera in 1867 enroute to Santa Fe. They wanted the soil information in order to give them an idea of how much soil material may have been deposited on the site over the last 130 years. The exact amount is unknown, but I was able to identify at least five distinct flooding events within the top 18 inches of the soil profile. Based on flooding records, it is possible these deposits occurred within this time period.

The soil investigation was just the precursor of events that were to take place on this site. A couple of weeks later, a geophysical consultant was on site using a variety of instrumentation in order to locate any possible grave sites. These included a couple of electromagnetic devices and Ground Penetrating Radar. My interest in this site at this time was the science involved in trying to locate possible grave sites. Electromagnetic devices, such as the EM38, can detect changes in moisture content of the soil, which might be an indication of soil disturbance. When sites were located by a possible hit using the EM38, and if the site had met some other qualifications, such as being depressional, or having metal associated with it, the Ground Penetrating Radar was used to detect the extent of the disturbance. The geophysical consultant located five or six possible sites, and prioritized them as the most, to the least likely grave site location. A couple of these sites were later excavated by an archeologist but yielded no evidence of a grave. Although no nuns were found, it did provide quite a lot of conversation fodder at the local coffee shops. *Submitted by Steve Graber, Soil Scientist, Dodge City Area Office*

KUDOS

Congratulations to...

Kevin Religa, District Conservationist, Manhattan whose poster entry was selected to go out to ALL Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees for Disability Awareness Month for October 2002. His poster contained all the elements the National Civil Rights Staff was looking for in a winning poster.

Harold Blume, Environmental Engineer, Salina who was selected as the NRCS nominee for the 2003 National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) Federal Engineer of the Year Award (FEYA). Harold will be recognized at the NSPE FEYA awards luncheon in Washington D.C. in February.

SEE-KAN FORMS WATER SUPPLY DISTRICT

About five years ago, See-Kan RC&D received a request from a rural water district that was selling water to in a small town. This water district was facing increasingly higher standards of water quality requirements and could not afford the needed improvements to their water processing facility. See-Kan worked with them in coordinating a meeting inviting the surrounding communities and rural water districts. It was discovered that many others were experiencing the same problems. A Public Wholesale Water Supply District was formed. This Public Wholesale buys raw water from an existing Corps of Engineers Reservoir and processes and distributes to 20 small communities and rural water districts in 7 counties. According to Bob Love, RC&D Coordinator, Chanute, this project was recently funded by USDA's Rural Development at about \$14.2 million, of which \$4.9 million was grant money. Construction is expected to start in the summer of 2003. *Submitted by Bob Love, RC&D Coordinator, Chanute*

RILEY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT RECEIVES GRANT FUNDS

In the fall of 2001, NPS Coordinator Carol Meurisse, Riley County Conservation District, wrote a grant proposal to the Riley County Planning and Development office for funds earmarked for stormwater and flood-control structures. In doing so, the Riley County Conservation district received a total of \$47,200 in grant money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These funds were used to install on a 70 percent cost-share basis, 13 ponds and a dry hydrant in two watersheds that cover one-third of Riley County. The conservation district received \$1,000 of these funds to cover administrative and technical assistance expenses. These structures were designed by the NRCS staff to regulate flooding and limit the amount of sediment that enters Tuttle Creek Lake.

A big thanks to Jeff Ruckert, Soil Conservation Technician, and Kevin Religa, District Conservationist, for all their help with this project. Special thanks to Keith Umscheid, Soil Conservation Technician, Westmoreland, who trained Jeff and assisted with the design work. *Submitted by Brandon Wilson, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Manhattan Field Office*

GLACIAL HILLS RC&D INVOLVED IN GRASSROOTS APPROACH

Lt. Governor and Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing (KDOC&H) Secretary Sherrer announced two new demonstration projects designed to strengthen rural economics by providing vital development assistance to entrepreneurial businesses. The projects are part of the KDOC&H's Enterprise Facilitation Initiative.

Enterprise Facilitation is a grassroots approach that relies on local knowledge and skills to create new jobs by assisting in the development of small businesses. To help businesses succeed, Enterprise Facilitation introduces a "trinity of management" concept in which local volunteers--some with a passion for the product and others with expertise in marketing or financial management--help launch new enterprises.

Enterprise Facilitation of Northeast Kansas and the Midwest Entrepreneurial Association are the latest two designated Enterprise Facilitation communities. The Northeast Kansas consortium is sponsored by Atchison, Brown, Doniphan, Jackson, and Nemaha counties. It is co-sponsored by the Glacial Hills RC&D Council at Valley Falls. Each will receive a \$200,000 grant from the KDOC&H and begin local board selection and training. *Submitted by Gary Satter, RC&D Coordinator, Valley Falls*

TIPS ON STAYING SAFE

Did you know the strongest point on your body is your elbow? If you're ever thrown into the trunk of a car, kick out the back taillights and stick your arm out the hole and start waving. The driver won't see you, but everybody else will. This has saved lives. Approximately 99 percent of women in the U.S. will be exposed to, or become a victim of a violent crime.

Why are women easy targets for random acts of violence?

- Lack of awareness - know where you are and what's going on around you.
- Body language – keep your head up, swing your arms, and stand straight up.
- Wrong place, wrong time – don't walk alone in an alley, or drive in a bad neighborhood at night.
- Be aware when getting into your car in a parking lot, or parking garage. Look around you, look into your car, at the passenger side floor, and in the back seat. If you are parked next to a big van, enter your car from the passenger door. Most serial killers attack their victims by pulling them into their vans while the women are attempting to get into their cars. Look at the car parked on the driver's side of your vehicle, and the passenger side. If a male is sitting alone in the seat nearest your car, you may want to walk back into the mall, or work, and get a guard/policeman to walk you back out.
- Always take the elevator instead of the stairs. Do not be alone in stairwells.
- If the predator has a gun and you are not under his control, always run! The predator will only hit you (a running target) 4 in 100 times. And even then, it most likely will NOT be a vital organ.
- Most often, women try to be sympathetic. Stop! It may get you raped or killed.

Ted Bundy, the serial killer, was a good looking, well-educated man, who ALWAYS played on the sympathies of unsuspecting women. He walked with a cane, or a limp, and often asked "for help" into his vehicle or with his vehicle, which is when he abducted his next victim. *Submitted by Gretchen Cheatum, Office Assistant/Safety and Health Committee Recorder, Salina State Office*

KANSAS HOSTS LOUISIANA BEEF PRODUCERS

The Sunflower and See-Kan RC&D's hosted a busload of beef producers from Louisiana in late summer. The Twin Valley RC&D joined a group of Harper County beef producers for a cookout and meeting. The next day, Barry Barber, District Conservationist, Winfield, and J.D. Rector, See-Kan RC&D, Chanute led the group on a tour of Jarvis Ranch in Cowley County and the Red Buffalo in Chautauqua County Ranch (owned by Bill Kurtis of TV's Justice Files) and Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Oklahoma.

KIDS AND CONSERVATION

On a beautiful mid-October day, approximately 172 Osborne County students were treated to a conservation field day from the Osborne County Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Office (NRCS). All the students rotated through four 25-minute group discussions.

Jim McDowell, NRCS Soil Scientist, Hays talked on the importance of Mother Earth's topsoil. He used great demonstrations to illustrate the need to conserve our precious natural resources. Gary Silvers, Kansas State University's Extension Agent, engaged the students in the importance of trees and their purpose on the earth and on how they grow, root systems, aid in stopping soil erosion, disease and landscaping. Ron Ruthstrom, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Wildlife Biologist, brought his collection of pelts from some of the indigenous animal species in Kansas and spoke about their habitats. Kyle Austin, Fishery Biologist, KDWP, Glen Elder, brought a great sense of humor for his discussion on Kansas indigenous fish. Kyle brought a shocker boat from the lake to explain to the students how he uses the boat for gaining valuable information about the fish under his care. Kyle also brought many other nets and traps to show the students how they were used and their importance. One of the bigger hits of the day for all that attended was the horse tank of live fish that Kyle had caught from the lake the night before using the shocker boat. Using these fish, he explained how to identify the different fish, their habits, and anatomy. For all those in attendance, it was a fantastic learning experience thanks in great part to the four professionals in their fields. *Article submitted by Tiffany Wyatt, District Manager, Osborne County Conservation District*

LEARNING THROUGH LAND JUDGING

Northwest Kansas was the site for two land judging contests this past fall. Cheylin High School (Bird City) hosted the *regional land-judging contest* where over 100 students participated. Trego Community High School won the contest and is eligible to attend the national competition in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Decatur County Community High School hosted the northwest district *land and homesite judging contest*. This contest was held on retired SCS/NRCS Calvin Ufford's farm. Ufford said that after working 38 years for the Service, he couldn't turn the contest away. Approximately 160 students from 13 schools participated.



Students working together texturing the soil

A large pit is dug to show the soil profile. Four sites are used for the land-judging portion and two sites for the home-site portion. The land judging sites use texture, soil depth, slope and erosion that are determined directly from the pit. The home site evaluation uses many of the same soil features, along with new factors, such as flooding and ground water tables, but are

evaluated with regard to foundations for buildings, septic systems, sewage lagoons, lawns and landscaping. Bob Tricks and Jim McDowell, NRCS Soil Scientists, assisted with both these contests. *Article submitted by Lee Scott, Soil Conservation Technician, Oberlin Field Office*

STUDENTS PLAY WATER JEOPARDY

Welcome to “Water Jeopardy”, exclaimed emcee Donna Fay Major, Russell County Conservation District. As Jeopardy theme music played in the background, teams of 4th grade students tested their water knowledge. Topics included Surface Water, Ground Water, Hydrology, Hydrologic Cycle, and Hydrologic Geography. Water Jeopardy was one of 11 stations at the first Smoky Hill River Water Festival held on the Fort Hays State University campus. Approximately 310 students attended the festival.

Sandi Scott, Ellis County Conservation District, used a 3-dimensional display to visually show the water cycle. The display related to several of the answers to the Water Jeopardy game. Students also received an activity sheet and the “Water Connection” booklet. Students also received a whistle zipper pull with the message to “Whistle for Clean Water”. *Article submitted by Sandi Scott, Ellis County Conservation District Manager, Hays Field Office*

CONSERVATION FIELD DAY

A chilly, damp morning welcomed forty-eight fourth graders from Lincoln Elementary School and Sylvan Elementary School as they participated in the 9th Annual Fourth Grade Conservation Field Day at the Oetting Watershed Dam. Students were divided into groups and rotated through six different stations. NRCS demonstrated a soil probe. After a sample of the soil was taken, the students were able to feel the different types of soil textures and were shown the various colors of the soil. NRCS also used the Stream



KDWP showing students a fur example.

Model Trailer to demonstrate the importance of controlling streams and protecting riparian areas. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) had examples of furs, horns, and skeletons. KDWP also spoke about aquatic life using a display of different fish species. Patti Winters, Lincoln County NPS Coordinator, demonstrated the EnviroScape Model and how pollution from houses, fields, factories, etc. can eventually penetrate the water supply. After rotating through the learning stations, the students (in cooperative groups) completed a quiz over the information covered at the stations. The students enjoyed a sack lunch provided by the conservation district. *Article submitted by Lincoln County Field Office*

SO WHAT IS A MATERIAL SAFETY DATA SHEET (MSDS)?

An MSDS is designed to provide workers and emergency personnel with the proper procedures for handling or working with a particular hazardous substance. MSDS is an important component of the Hazard Communication Program that is designed to ensure that federal employees receive adequate information and training concerning the identity, hazards, and safe handling of chemicals.

Manufacturers of chemicals and importers have primary responsibility to determine the physical and health hazards of their products. Chemical manufacturers and importers must develop an MSDS for each hazardous product they produce or import. They also must provide the information automatically at the time of the initial shipment of the hazardous chemical to a distributor or end-user. If you use a hazardous chemical in your work, you should automatically be given an MSDS when the chemical was purchased or delivered. However, the majority of NRCS employees wouldn't be exposed to hazardous chemicals **unless** they visit a producer while they were using hazardous chemicals such as insecticide, fungicide, herbicide or rodenticide.

MSDS's are normally meant for employees who may be occupationally exposed to hazards at work. Employees who need to know the proper storage methods include emergency responders such as fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, hazardous material crews, and emergency room personnel. The MSDS reflects the hazards of working with a material in an occupational fashion. For example, an MSDS for paint is not relevant for the individual who paints once a year, but is extremely important for a painter who paints 40 hours a week in a confined space. There are now internet sites that can be used to access an electronic MSDS that can be downloaded. A couple of the more informative sites are listed here.

<http://msds.pdc.cornell.edu/msdssrch.asp>
<http://www.msdsprovider.com>

Article submitted by Richard Wynia, Plant Materials Center Manager/Hazardous Communications Officer, Manhattan PMC

UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS

Mark your calendars! The Kansas NRCS Retirees will hold their 2003 Annual Meeting in Wichita, Kansas. The meeting will be held on June 11th, in conjunction with the SWCS Annual Meeting on June 12 and 13th.

Headquarters for the meeting will be the Red Coach Inn on west Kellogg. Plans are very sketchy and tentative at this time. However, the Wichita Visitors Bureau has volunteered to help arrange interesting activities for Wednesday afternoon. And for the golfers in the group, the beautiful Auburn Hills has been reserved. *For more information, contact Chuck Gentry, 785-825-0586*

♦ Kansas Highlights is issued three times per year. For more information on how to submit a story, and comments about Kansas Highlights, contact Sheila Forrester, NRCS Visual Information Specialist, at 785-823-4572, or sheila.forrester@ks.nrcs.usda.gov.

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Holiday Greetings 2002

"It snowed!" squealed the children in awe and delight.

They could hardly believe it--the world was wrapped in white.

Bright colors sparkled from underneath blanketed trees

That danced and swayed in the cold winter breeze.

The church beckoned from afar with a warm, inviting glow

As welcoming lights from houses were reflected below.

A joyous holiday season is our sincere wish for you

And that good fortune will follow the whole year through.

**The Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service
State Office Employees Association**