

Kansas Highlights

Summer 2001

NICARAGUA DETAIL FOR NRCS ENGINEER

Marty Soffran, Hydraulic Engineer, Cimarron, returned from a two-week detail to Nicaragua. He served as part of an ongoing effort to aid in the Hurricane Mitch disaster relief. Soffran spent time in the countryside providing technical assistance on water storage that was either recently installed, constructed or on potential sites. This storage is used for irrigation and livestock use.



A native Chilean checks on a stock water tank (half a barrel) that is being filled from a storage reservoir.



A 180 liter plastic barrel being used as a water source for a tomato and chili garden.

Soffran provided input on sprinkler and drip irrigation systems used to water small gardens. He also suggested ways to reduce erosion on steep hillsides that had previously been cleared of the forest vegetation. While there, he worked in the field with two different private volunteer organizations: Save the Children and the Community Housing Foundation. Other days were spent reviewing a draft proposal for a 900-foot long dike directing water away from a village and an access road back into the original river section.

Although the days were long, Soffran felt the experience was very enlightening and productive, as well as promoting international good will. *Submitted by Marty Soffran, Hydraulic Engineer, Cimarron*

OSBORNE HIGH SCHOOL ENVIROTHON TEAM ATTENDS INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

Osborne High School's Envirothon team recently placed twelfth in the Canon Envirothon competition held at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi, July 24 – 29. The team represented Kansas in this competition by winning the state competition in May.



Competing against 42 other states and eight provinces from Canada, the Osborne team had an overall score of 533 points. It was just .83 points shy of tenth place. The first ten teams are recognized with awards and prizes. They also performed exceptionally well in the soils competition placing second. Other areas of competition were in aquatics, wildlife, forestry and an oral presentation.

Team members were Curtis and Chris Mick, Devin Weis, Matt Wallace, and Jennifer Princ. Virginia Montgomery coached the team. Also attending the competition were Don Weis, Sherri Mick, Tiffany Wyatt, Osborne County, Peggy and Gary Ricker, Dighton; and Janice Umscheid, Westmoreland.

The Osborne County Conservation District and Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) sponsored the team. The Canon Corporation provided special funding for awards, scholarships, and funding the international competition. *Submitted by Tiffany Wyatt, District Manager, Osborne County Conservation District*

NRCS, A GREAT PLACE TO WORK

When Actually Employed (WAE) Employee, Travis Thibault, spent his summer working at the Osborne County Field Office. He assisted in a wide variety of tasks that contributed to his understanding of the importance of NRCS. The tasks were assisting with the design of terraces and waterways, measuring residue, taking elevations for pipeline profiles and livestock waste systems, drilling soil to determine if a pit or pond can be installed, planting trees for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and compiling data for fertilizer application.

“Although I am the son of a farmer I must confess that, until this summer, I knew virtually nothing about NRCS. My expectations of learning anything or at least anything interesting to me was very minute; especially since I am planning on being a pediatrician”, said Thibault. “I’ve come to understand the necessity of having rules and regulations on land use and land practices. I know that not all area producers will agree when I say that it is necessary to have regulations on land use. In fact, some may feel a little resentful toward it. The truth of the matter is, NRCS is here to help area producers. All of these are necessary to prevent the washout of topsoil, enhance wildlife, avoid water pollution and, most importantly, help producers to use land to its fullest potential,” he said. *Submitted by Steve Sprick, District Conservationist, Osborne FO*

COMANCHE POOL PRAIRIE RESOURCE FOUNDATION ORGANIZED

Five ranchers in the Comanche county area recognized the need to focus more emphasis towards range management in south-central Kansas and north-central Oklahoma. Meeting frequently, the group developed by-laws and articles of incorporation. In April 1999, the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation was officially organized as a non-profit entity.

This Foundation is dedicated to providing demonstrations, education and consultation to regenerate the natural resources and to promote the economic growth of the rural community. They will focus on a service area that includes the Red Hills region of south-central Kansas and north-central Oklahoma. This area has a unique blend of topography, vegetation, soils and wildlife.

The Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation is a local group that has developed cooperating relationships among many entities, including ranchers, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and urban citizens. They recently inspired a cooperative agreement to fund a rangeland specialist position for the service area to start in September. The Foundation has also “teamed up” with two other non-profit groups in Oklahoma and Texas to address rural economic and natural resource issues on a regional scope. With this partnership, the impact area stretches from Kansas, through Oklahoma, to the Texas panhandle.



So far, the Foundation has sponsored several range meetings and educational opportunities for ranchers. In May 2001, the Foundation sponsored a 3-day grazing school in Comanche County featuring internationally recognized educator Jim Gerrish. Participants at the school represented ten counties in Kansas and Oklahoma.

Through partnerships, the Comanche Pool Prairie Resource Foundation is breaking the typical barriers of government and geographic boundaries for the betterment of our natural resources. *Submitted by Loren Graff, District Conservationist, Coldwater FO*

KIDS PARTICIPATE IN CLEAN WATER FESTIVAL

Fourth and fifth graders had clean fun when volunteers from local and state agencies treated the students to a full day of water-related activities. Over 200 kids from the Garfield Upper Elementary, Abilene, enjoyed learning about water with “hands-on” activities. Some of the activities included the EnviroScape that is a surface model of a watershed that shows sources of pollution and how they get to water bodies. Another yummy activity included an Edible Earth Parfait where students learned about the concept of aquifers, groundwater contamination, and groundwater protection through ice cream, soda, and ice cubes. According to David Gurss, Project Administrator,



Abilene, it is hoped the festival becomes an annual event in the Abilene schools. This event was sponsored by the Dickinson County Water Improvement Program and the Dickinson County Conservation District, Abilene.

Check out the Water Improvement Program website at www.ikansas.com/~water for more information and about some of the products used at the festival. *For more information, contact David Gurss, Project Administrator, Abilene, 785-263-0197*

Steve Henningson, Soil Conservationist, Abilene; uses a streambank trailer to teach kids various stream and riparian issues.

NRCS TECHNICIANS RECOGNIZED

On May 31, 2001, NRCS Soil Conservation Technicians Gary Wolters, Osborne; and Larry Patterson, Phillipsburg; were presented with letters of appreciation and award plaques from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for technical assistance provided to the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFFW).

Wolters was recognized for his assistance in Smith County in obtaining more PFFW project activity than any other 22 counties in the northwest Kansas focus area. Patterson was recognized for his knowledge and supporting role with engineering, native vegetation, and grazing management.

They were both commended for their knowledge of various programs (both USDA and FWS) and their ability to identify opportunities that each presents. Their assistance was recognized as a benefit to the conservation of the nation's wildlife resource. *Submitted by Jan Klaus, Office Assistant, Hays AO.*



L to R: Wolters; Tony Ifland, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, and Patterson

WETLAND DETERMINATIONS AND LARGE DAIRIES

Wide open spaces, plentiful water, lush crops, wonderful climate, and a quality of life second to none are only a few of the things which residents of southwestern Kansas find attractive. These same attributes are now attracting large dairies to the area. This new industry brings both economic development and environmental challenges.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) currently interpret the Clean Water Act as prohibiting the application of dairy effluent on or into the "waters of the United States," including wetlands. For this reason, EPA and KDHE have turned to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for field determination of wetlands before permitting the application of dairy effluent.

A dairy generates a great deal of liquid waste. Water is used to clean milking sheds and liquid waste is generated from holding and feeding pens. EPA requires a dairy to have a detailed plan to dispose of their effluent prior to issuing the required permits for operation. Dairy effluent is rich in nutrients and can be used to both water and fertilize crops used to feed the same dairy animals generating the waste. Effluent diluted with groundwater is pumped from large holding ponds or lagoons through center pivot irrigation systems onto thirsty and nutrient starved crops.

After receiving a request for a wetland determination, the NRCS wetland determination team conducts a detailed field investigation of the area. A soil scientist determines the presence or absence of hydric soils and their extent. Engineers determine the hydrology of the area to see if the area would support a wetland, and what size it would be. Biologists determine the presence or absence of hydrophytic vegetation. To be considered a wetland, hydric soils, hydrology and hydrophytic vegetation must be present. EPA and KDHE "honor" the NRCS wetland determination.

Southwestern Kansas contains thousands of playa lake wetlands. Any one of these could stop, or severely change the construction plans of a large dairy. When you have a ten million-dollar investment waiting on a wetland determination, quality work is vital. NRCS employees in southwestern Kansas are answering the call! *Submitted by Thomas L. Flowers, District Conservationist, Meade FO*

GOVERNOR'S WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE WORKING IN REPUBLIC COUNTY

The combination of the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) and the Governor's Water Quality Initiative has made a big impact in two watersheds in Republic County, Kansas. The Kansas Lower Republican river basin was one of the first in the state to have Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) designations and two watersheds in Republic County, Mill Creek and Salt Creek, were targeted as high priority due to existing impairments.

"This gave us a unique marketing opportunity for the Continuous CRP and for filter strips in particular," said District Conservationist Terry Alstatt. "We took an aggressive approach by identifying all the creeks and streams in the two watersheds and then did a direct mailing to all the landowners that had potential eligible land for filter strips. We explained both the Continuous CRP and the Governor's Water Quality Initiative and how they could benefit the landowner."

The results were immediate. Within the next twelve months, the NRCS office had developed 33 contracts covering 284 acres. These filter strips will buffer approximately 19.5 miles of streams.

"The Governor's Initiative provides the extra incentive needed to get people to commit to the program and even though its been more than a year since we sent the letters, we are still getting contacted by landowners," said Alstatt. "And now that we have some of the practices applied, I think the program will sell itself." *Submitted by Terry K. Alstatt, District Conservationist, Belleville FO*



4-H DISCOVERY DAYS

Each year hundreds of high school age students "seize" Manhattan in an opportunity for learning, fun, and adventure on the Kansas State University (KSU) campus through 4-H Discovery Days. The event gives participants various exciting options with regard to structured class study, hands-on experience, and recreation events. The 2001 4-H Discovery Days were held May 30 through June 1.

Members of the Manhattan Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) volunteered again to sponsor and teach a day long class on the subject of Natural Resource Conservation during the session. Chapter members served as instructors in specialized resource disciplines including soil and water conservation and management, wildlife and fishery resources, and grazing land and forest management. Based on student and instructor preference, this educational experience was facilitated primarily through field trips and demonstrations. Field trips included stops at the KSU Agronomy Farm and Turfgrass Research Farm, Tuttle Creek Reservoir, and Pottawatomie County State Fishing Lake No. 2. The willingness of individuals in the Manhattan Chapter to help with this tradition was appreciated by Lindy Lindquist, 4-H Specialist and event organizer.

The Kansas Association of Conservation Districts and local conservation districts provided scholarships to twenty students who attended the 2001 4-H Discovery Days. Each scholarship covered the cost of the entire session including enrollment in the Natural Resources Conservation Class.

Danny Rogers, KSU Agricultural Engineer; Bill Wehmueeller, NRCS Soil Scientist; Kevin Religa, NRCS District Conservationist; Jerry Erickson, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician; Bob Bergquist, KDWP Wildlife Biologist; Erin Zook, KFS District Forester; and John Piskac, NRCS Resource Conservationist, were primary instructors for the class. *Submitted by John Piskac, Resource Conservationist, Manhattan AO*

RELAY FOR LIFE

Butler County Service Center employees participated in the Relay for Life in June. The Relay for Life is a team event raising contributions for the American Cancer Society. Participants from the Butler County Conservation District, Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service raised close to \$1,000 for the American Cancer Society. The team, enthusiastic and anxious to participate in the walk, designed its campsite in the theme of a barn. During the 12-hour event, at least one member per team walked throughout the night. Entertainment followed by the lighting of the luminaries purchased in honor of someone surviving or fighting cancer or in memory of someone who lost the battle.



The team plans on participating in the Relay of Life next year and challenges other Service Centers to get involved in their community activities. *For more information on this event, contact Gay Spencer, Soil Conservationist, El Dorado FO, 620-321-5814*

UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS

September 7 –16 – Kansas State Fair; Hutchinson, Kansas

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