

## Kansas Highlights

June 2001

### USDA SERVICE CENTERS ASSIST WITH TORNADO CLEANUP

USDA Service Center employees in Ellis, Russell, Barton, Rice, Pratt, Rush, Pawnee, and Stafford counties teamed up to help local residences in Hoisington clean up after the deadly tornado that ravished this small Kansas community on April 21, 2001.

Employees worked together assisting a landowner to clear his wheat field of debris consisting of large pieces of metal, wood, glass, and brick. Employees picked up everything from tabletops to guttering to sections of walls from nearby homes. Other employees helped by donating needed items such as trash bags, batteries, work gloves, and bottled water.



The tornado caused in excess of \$43 million in damage, killing one person and injuring 28 others. It also destroyed at least 182 homes and about 45 percent of the community's 1,284 households sustained some damage.  
*Submitted by Jan Klaus, Office Assistant, Hays AO. Note: Parts of this article were taken from the Hays Daily News. Photos: USDA-NRCS*



### FROM APPRENTICE TO WEST POINT

Masey Wolfe, served as an apprentice for three summers at the Tribune Field Office. "I will reference my community service through the apprentice program when I apply for college scholarships and an appointment at the Air Force Academy," wrote Wolfe in his testimonial. Originally, he applied to the Air Force Academy, but has accepted an appointment at the United States Military Academy, West Point, NY. As an apprentice Masey helped with CRP status reviews and staking out practices and provided computer assistance to Wichita, Scott, and Greeley conservation districts. He was the first student to attend Range Youth Camp from Greeley County Conservation District in several years.



A letter of recommendation from Kevin Nelson, District Conservationist, Tribune Field Office, accompanied his applications for scholarships and appointment to a military academy based on his apprenticeship. At graduation this year, Masey was one of two salutatorians of his class, and he gave a short speech. The highlight was a representative from West Point Military Academy who came to his graduation to say a few words about the Academy and to congratulate Masey. *Submitted by Kevin Nelson, District Conservationist, Tribune FO.*

**Editors Note:** Through the Kansas Natural Resources Apprentice Initiative, high school and college students can be apprentices through the Earth Team. The Initiative provides experience and information for informed career choices; fulfills community service requirements for scholarships, colleges, and technical school; provides work experience on résumés; and provides a reference to natural resources in making lifetime decisions.

## FIFTY-EIGHT YEARS OF SERVICE TO EDWARDS COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

If you were to look up the word, dedication, in the dictionary you would probably see a picture of Clarence "Shorty" Michaelis. Few can even come close to matching his involvement in serving a conservation district. Shorty was a member of the original board of supervisors when the Edwards County Conservation District was formed in 1943. He served as a very active board member until 1996. Since then he has served as an advisor. Even today, he rarely misses a board meeting.

Shorty, 91, has seen many changes over the years. In the early days, he remembers the first annual meetings being held during the day. The board members' wives, Shorty's included, would make coffee and sandwiches for the annual meetings. He has seen many changes in the county over the years. One of the more major changes he has noted is the introduction of irrigation. He also noted how much more efficient irrigation is since its introduction. A Banker's Award winner in 1952, Shorty has always practiced what he preached.

To honor his years of service, the conservation district awards a \$500 scholarship each year to an Edwards County youth working toward a college degree in an agricultural or environmental-related field. Perhaps someday one of these scholarship recipients will carry on Shorty's dedication to conserving our natural resources. Edwards County is extremely fortunate to have a person such as Shorty Michaelis involved with the conservation district.

*Submitted by Greg Henderson, District Conservationist, Kinsley FO.*

## SOIL SCIENTISTS TAKE PART IN ACTIVITIES

Bob Tricks and Jim McDowell, Soil Scientists, Hays AO have been busy these days traveling and explaining about soil. In March, they captivated elementary schools in Gove County for "Agriculture in the Classroom Day." They demonstrated how soils are formed and affected by the forces of nature. The audience even got into the act by participating in the simulation of soil particles and raindrops. "Soil Rocks!" was the reaction from one of the students after the presentation.



Photo: USDA-NRCS

Later in the month, they participated in Fort Hays State University (FHSU) annual Agricultural Contest. Contestants participated in the areas of soils, crops, and animal science. Tricks and McDowell were the official judges for the contest in the soils division. Team members were provided an opportunity to study soils through direct experience in the field. Students learned to describe soil properties. They identified different kinds of soils and associated landscape features and interpreted soil information for agriculture and other land uses. *For more information on these events, contact Bob Tricks, Soil Scientist, Hays AO.*



Photo: USDA - NRCS

## KANSAS WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN AREAS ALLIANCE

The annual meeting of the Kansas Wetlands and Riparian Areas Alliance (KWRAA) was held on May 9, 2001, at Atchison, Kansas. The meeting was hosted by the Glacial Hills Chapter of the KWRAA, one of two new chapters started by the alliance in the past year.

The mission of the KWRAA is, "To ensure the future of wetlands, streams, and their adjacent riparian areas as an integral part of our Kansas heritage and landscape." The organization's vision is, "A public that is well informed and involved in activities that foster the protection, enhancement, and establishment of wetlands and riparian areas in Kansas."

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) along with approximately 60 individuals, groups, and organizations formed the alliance in 1996 to create a greater public awareness and appreciation of the state's wetland and riparian areas. The KWRAA Plan of Action includes goals in the areas of education, alliance communication, research and data collection, facilitating (wetland and riparian areas) project implementation, and securing long-term financial support for the alliance and its chapters.

Along with the NRCS, other partners in the alliance include the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, State Conservation Commission, Kansas Water Office, Pheasants Forever, National Wild Turkey Federation, Kansas Farm Bureau, conservation districts, municipalities, RC&D areas, and a host of others. *For more information, contact Ken Sherraden, Biologist, Salina SO, at 785-823-4551.*

## NATIONAL STATE SOIL SCIENTISTS MEETING



Kansas hosted the National State Soil Scientists Workshop held March 19 – 23, 2001. The workshop was in Lawrence, Kansas, at the Holiday Inn Holidome and on the University of Kansas campus. Over 100 attendees from across the Nation were present. While the meeting was organized and coordinated by the Kansas NRCS State Soils Staff, the agenda came entirely from recommendations by state soil scientists and their staffs.

Soil Data Quality Specialists (SDQS) with NASIS (National Soil Information System) responsibilities from each Major Land Resource Area offices (MO) were given the charge, "How do we exchange information between the MOs in order to enhance productivity while maintaining uniformity?" For a complete listing of topics addressed and proceedings of this meeting, visit [www.statlab.iastate.edu/soils/soildiv/ncss/sssconf.html](http://www.statlab.iastate.edu/soils/soildiv/ncss/sssconf.html).

Many good discussions reached consensus on diverse and complex issues. SDQS were able to agree on recommendations to national guidelines and operational policy with regard to NASIS and other technical soil survey issues. Results of this meeting will be considered by MO leaders at their next meeting in Plymouth, Massachusetts, this summer. *For more information, contact Rick Schlepp, State Soil Scientist, Salina SO, at 785-823-4558.*

## OWLS PROJECT AT OBEE SCHOOL

What was once an idea, has now become a reality for the Obee Grade School in south central Kansas. Hoping to expand their educational curriculum to include natural resource information, the grade school turned to their local conservation office. By working with the NRCS field office in South Hutchinson, the grade school learned of the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site (OWLS) grant administered through the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP).

The OWLS project provides schools an opportunity to develop sites for learning about natural resources. The grant provides funds to establish outdoor learning sites that will attract wildlife. Schools then develop their own proposals by following certain guidelines provided by the KDWP.

The Obee Outdoor Classroom project was met with enthusiasm by interested faculty, parents, and school children and was funded and completed in the late spring. The site includes a wetland and planting site. The Buhler High School horticulture class helped complete the project, as well as other partners. Personnel from the KDWP, Kansas Forest Service, Reno County Extension, Dillon's Nature Center, and NRCS provided technical assistance.



Photo: USDA - NRCS

Other schools have the same opportunity if they would like to pursue this avenue. By working with this project, it allows natural resource conservation to be an active part of the school curriculum. Educating our youth on natural resource concerns will aid in protecting our environment for the future. For more information, contact *Robert Wimer, District Conservationist, South Hutchinson FO, at 620-669-0168.*

## EXCHANGE STUDENT SPENDS DAY WITH NRCS

Mandy Hoffman, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, at Manhattan Field Office, recently participated in an exchange program with the University of Monterrey Technical College. This exchange program was arranged





Photo: USDA - NRCS

through the Kansas State University College of Agriculture in cooperation with Cargill. Vanessa, a Hispanic student studying plant production, visited Kansas State University in April. While here, Vanessa joined Mandy and the Manhattan Field Office and participated in a tree planting, visited the Konza Prairie, toured the Manhattan NRCS Plant Materials Center, and discussed several of the conservation practices implemented throughout Riley County. Vanessa shared with NRCS employees the difference in cropping systems, conservation practices, and government support systems. Later in April, Mandy visited the University of Monterrey Technical College and participated in similar activities. *Submitted by Mandy Hoffman, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist, Manhattan FO.*

## WILSON COUNTY CONSERVATION AUXILIARY

Encouraging responsible stewardship of natural resources and promoting conservation education, whether it is our youth or adults, is one of the main goals of the Wilson County Auxiliary. Every year is filled with informational activities. Last year, they received an award from the Kansas Recycle Association for collecting 15,000 used greeting cards that were recycled by St. Jude's Hospital. Another year, they recruited school children and collected 1,000 tennis shoes. These shoes were sent to NIKE Corporation to be recycled and made into material used underneath playground equipment.

The Auxiliary and the Wilson County Conservation District have participated in different events for Earth Day. Last year, they hired musician Stan Slaughter, Eco-Troubadour, to perform for local grade school students. Slaughter, who is well known for taking his show-on-the-road, uses songs to educate students on composting, recycling, and wildlife habitat. This year, the auxiliary organized a water festival about non point source pollution and even published a coloring book that was given out to 100 students.

Other Auxiliary activities include sponsoring several *Wildflower Greeting Card Workshops*, a *Recycling and Composting Workshop*, and a *Dyeing with Natural Materials Workshop*. Annual bus trips to places like Botanica, the Wichita Gardens; the Tall-Grass Prairie Reserve; the Wichita Garden Show; and the Maxwell Wildlife Refuge are quite popular with area citizens. *For more information about starting a conservation auxiliary or making yours more active, contact Anita Smith at 620-244-3269 or [anita-smith@ks.nacdn.org](mailto:anita-smith@ks.nacdn.org).*

## YOUTH TURKEY HUNT

Six kids were able to harvest their first turkeys, thanks to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Park's (KDWP) second annual youth turkey hunt in April. Over 30 kids applied for the hunt; however due to limited guides and available land, the hunt was limited to only nine youths. The event was coordinated by Steve Adams, KDWP Biologist, Hutchinson, and JR Colson, NRCS Soil Conservation Technician, South Hutchinson also assisted with the hunt.



Photo Courtesy: Marc Murrell, Hutchinson Newspaper

The hunt was started as part of KDWP's Hunter Recruitment and Retention Program, which was developed as a way to address the decrease in hunting license sales in the recent past. Land for the hunt was graciously donated by several area landowners in the Hutchinson area and provided prime opportunity for the kids to experience a memorable hunt. Very knowledgeable hunters who were familiar with the area guided the hunts. *Submitted by Craig Curtis, KDWP Biologist, Dodge City AO.*

## OSBORNE HIGH SCHOOL WINS 2001 KANSAS ENVIROTHON

The Envirothon team from Osborne High School was the winner in the Kansas Envirothon competition recently. The competition took place at Centralia Lake in Nemaha County. Competing against teams from 18 schools around the state, the Osborne team won its first state championship since they began competing in 1998. Tiffany Wyatt, Conservation District Manager, was instrumental in providing resource personnel and extra training for the team.

No one team dominated the event and the scores were close. Osborne High School won the all-around state title with a score of 395 points, edging out Jackson Heights with 391 points, followed by Abilene with 387 points for a close third. The first home-schooled team to compete in the state competition was from Wilson County and was fifth in the all-around competition.

The Osborne team will represent Kansas at the Canon Envirothon competition to be held at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi, July 24-29. The state competition was co-hosted this year by Nemaha and Brown Counties Conservation Districts. They provided in-kind donations and financial support from the local community, equipment, and many volunteers, new designs for the medals and T-shirts, and refreshments. Many thanks goes to this year's committee members for their hard work and support of the 2001 Kansas Envirothon. They are Judy Adams, Eldon Schwant, Margaret Kanel, Matt Sprick, and Janice Umscheid. *Submitted by Peggy Ricker, Conservation District Manager/NPS Coordinator, Lane County Conservation District.*



The Osborne High School's winning Envirothon team. Back: (L to R) Matt Wallace, Curtis Mick, and Devin Weis. Front: Jennifer Princ, Envirothon coach and Osborne Science teacher; Virginia Montgomery, Conservation District Manager; Tiffany Wyatt and Chris Mick.

## **PRESCRIBED BURNING COURSE**

The NRCS National Employee Development Center (NEDC) sponsored Prescribed Burning Course was held April 17, 18, and 19, 2001, in Manhattan, and the surrounding area. Twenty-five NRCS employees from Kansas and other states were in attendance. Instructors for the course were Dr. Allen Rasmussen, Rangeland Resources Dept., Utah State University, and Pat Shaver, Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS, Corvallis, OR.

The purpose of the course was to give participants formal training and experience to meet the educational requirement for prescribed burning job approval authority. Two prescribed burns were successfully completed on rangeland and Conservation Reserve Program acres owned by Lindsey Land and Cattle Co. near Olsburg. Those attending the course received first-hand experience in planning and carrying out all phases of a safe and successful burn. *Submitted by John Piskac, Resource Conservationist, Manhattan AO.*

## **INFORMATION EXPO TAKES STEP BACK IN TIME**

"Calamity Jane" welcomed participants to the Area II Information Exposition on March 21 in Cimarron. Joyce Thierer, who portrays the Calamity Jane character for the Kansas Humanities Council, told stories of this amazing western heroine of Wild West shows. She told how "Calamity" received her name and how she learned to shoot and ride. The Kansas Humanities Council offers speakers through the History Alive Program.

The Info-Expo offered many different programs during the day's activities. Topics covered were Composting, RC& D's, Cultural Resources, Wetlands, Sub-surface Drip Irrigation, Kansas Association of Conservation and Environmental Education, Water Testing, Living Snow Fences, Digital Camera Usage, Master Fire Planning, and Fire Protection for Home Owners. The most popular program was the Jeopardy Game, featuring Pam Howard, NPS Coordinator, Kearny County Conservation District, Lakin. Participants at this game were given answers to conservation questions, as well as general knowledge questions. *Submitted by: Delores Eberle, Soil Conservation Technician, Cimarron FO.*

## **UPCOMING CONSERVATION EVENTS**

Several Kansas Crop Residue Management Alliances will be hosting Field Days across the state. Be sure and mark your calendar!

**July 18** - Marion County No-Till Field Day, Tampa; Contact: Gary Schuler at 620-382-3737  
**26** - Saline County Field Day, Salina; Ken Bowell at 785-825-9581

**August 2** - *"Cover Your Acres" No-Till Field Day*, Wakeeney; Ken Urban at 785-628-3083  
**15** - *Dickinson County Field Day*, Abilene; Jim Krueger at 785-263-2787  
**15** - *Ottawa County Field Day*, Minneapolis; Rod Frack at 785-392-3393  
**20** - *Sumner & Cowley Counties Field Day*, Oxford; Barry Barber at 620-221-1850

Dates to be determined - *Rice County Field Day*, Lyons; Ron Klein at 620-257-3645  
*Summer Tour 2001*, Barton CO; Charles Atkinson at 620-792-3346

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