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NRCS Marks Its 70th Anniversary

April 27, 2005, marked the 70th Anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

NRCS was created as the Soil Conservation Service within the USDA on April 27, 1935, in response to the devastation of the Dust Bowl on the nation's agricultural land.

The agency's primary mission then was to conserve soil on agricultural land. It became NRCS on October 20, 1994, to better reflect its expanded role of servicing other natural resources such as soil, water, air, plants, and animals on private and tribal lands.

Earth Team Celebrates 20th!

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Earth Team – the agency's volunteer program. The Earth Team Program, created in 1985, offers all types of opportunities to anyone over the age of 14 who is interested in volunteering and making a positive difference in the nation's natural resources.

Earth Team volunteers help NRCS conservationists provide everything from conservation technical assistance to teaching and generating awareness about conservation through the use of community projects. Volunteers often can be found helping with projects impacting water quality, community beautification and erosion control. In addition, Earth Team volunteers can work in NRCS offices providing clerical, computer, and writing skills.

During Fiscal Year 2004, more than 40,000 Earth Team volunteers donated over 960,000 hours nationwide. This equals 645 staff years. In Kansas, 452 volunteers donated 28,289 hours to assist 120 offices with conservation efforts.



Together We're Making History
Celebrating 20 Years • 1985 - 2005



Additional information about NRCS programs and the Earth Team volunteer program is available on-line at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Vow Accomplished Through Teamwork

When Clint Evans received notification of the new Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) practice CP33 Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds, the first thing he noticed was the state map. The western two-thirds of Kansas was allocated only 5,000 of the states 20,000 acres. At the next Kingman County Conservation District (KCCD) Board meeting Clint made a vow that Kingman County alone would enroll one thousand acres.

The Kingman County USDA Service Center started actively promoting the Quail Habitat Initiative in October 2004.

"We used area newspapers and the KCCD's newsletter to help get the information to

our producers."

Clint Evans, NRCS District Conservationist and Greg Weaver, Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Executive Director, teamed up to present information about the program to the Kingman County Young Farmers and Ranchers

Organization, the Lyons Club, and the Rotary Club. Jeff Rue, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) Biologist, also played an instrumental role in helping promote the program through his contacts with the KDWP Walk-In Hunting Program. The program has been a huge success thanks to excellent teamwork

between the KCCD, KDWP, FSA, and NRCS. Working together as a team to prioritize workload and promote the program were the major factors that led to approval of 952 acres on 58 CCRP contracts. When asked why he was interested in the Quail Habitat Initiative, Loren Beshore, Kingman County landowner said "Hunting and fishing have been a Beshore Family tradition. I want to preserve and enhance as much wildlife habitat as I can so that my children and grandchildren can enjoy the outdoors."

Bud Oak entered the program to help improve wildlife habitat on his farm. Bud is also an avid hunter but said he feels a

healthy quail population shows testament to good stewardship.

According to Evans, local producers have begun to help sell the program as well by informing their neighbors about its benefits. We have new inquiries about the program daily and are looking forward to seeing the results in years to come. And those

results will be a benefit to the producers, wildlife, natural resources, economy, and overall well being of Kingman County, and ultimately Kansas. Kingman County has shown that working together, as partners, anything can be accomplished. Congratulations. Submitted by Jon Ungerer, Natural Resource Specialist (Buffer Coordinator), Topeka



NRC Ser Mike Debes Involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom

I was recently asked to describe my experiences while on active duty for Operation Iraqi Freedom. The process began in mid-November of 2003 with a friendly phone



call from Uncle Sam! We spent three weeks in Great Bend, Kansas, accumulating equipment and personnel. We then spent three weeks in Fort Riley gathering more equipment and training. It is always good to train in subzero weather and snow for duty in a desert!

My unit is a heavy transport company. Our "truck" makes an 18-wheeler look small! The tractor, made by Oshkosh is an 8-wheel drive version with space for two drivers and a four man tank crew. The trailer has 40 tires arranged in groups of four on aircraft type landing bogies. Each bogie has independent hydraulic suspension and is steerable by means of cylinders alongside the kingpin. Our "truck" weighs 90,000 pounds empty; it has a payload capacity of 140,000 pounds. I can now state that it is capable of hauling in excess of 150,000 pounds!

We rail loaded our vehicles in early January and saw them 30 days later being craned out of a ship in Kuwait City. We arrived in Kuwait on

January 17, 2004. My job was Operations Sergeant/Truckmaster for the company. I received the orders requesting movement of other units' vehicles and equipment. Then my section planned the convoys, made any needed arrangements for the convoy, such as fuel, water, lodging, escorts. We then assigned the convoy to one of our platoons and briefed them on it. A small number of our trucks had a Global Positioning System (GPS) based system installed called 'Movement Tracking System' or MTS. This had a very small computer screen that allowed for one or two sentence e-mails to be sent from our Company Headquarters to the convoys that were on the road. We had a laptop in our Operations Section that we used to track the convoys using a Geographic Information System (GIS) based mapping system. Believe me, the maps were not near as good as we use for ArcView!! They resembled a scanned in United States Geological Survey map.

In mid-February, we moved the company to a camp called Speicher, about 15 kilometers northwest of Tikrit, Iraq. Speicher is about four miles square, surrounded by open fields, mostly wheat. Our area of operations was all of Iraq and Kuwait. Our convoys ranged from the Syrian border to the Iranian border, to the middle of Kuwait. The closest we got to Turkey was about 50 miles. My convoys accumulated over 1,100,000

convoy miles. We transported over 50,000 tons of equipment. We transported everything from 75-ton armored D9 dozers and 70-ton main battle tanks to civilian contractor pickups. We hauled lots of standard engineering equipment because of the tremendous amount of rebuilding infrastructure needed. The temperatures ranged from winter highs of 40 degrees to summer highs of 120 plus. The truck cab temperatures in summertime reached 135 degrees. We usually had access to ice for our drinking water. Even at those temperatures, the best coolers held ice for only so long! Except for about three weeks in April and a few other short periods, we had plenty of drinking water.

We had three of our trucks destroyed on convoys, but had only a few soldiers slightly wounded. All of our wounded returned to duty with us in Iraq and came back to the States with us.

Iraq is a very diverse country - in topography, weather, religion, ethnic groups, and modernization. The south is desert sand dunes inhabited by nomadic herders that look like they haven't changed since the time of Christ. The Tigris and Euphrates River valleys are fertile, irrigated areas growing a tremendous amount of produce. They have been irrigated since centuries before Christ. I'm sure any retired

Debes' Duty in Iraq (continued)

NRCS employee with irrigation experience will be able to get a job there in a few years modernizing the irrigation systems!! North of Baghdad a lot of winter wheat is grown. Yields are low, but the acreage is large. I saw nothing I would call rangeland. Any native rangeland was grazed out centuries ago. The Iranian border is mountainous deserts inhabited by Kurds, who are not Arabs. The Turkish border is mountains that have snow caps and blue mountain lakes. We saw modern dress next to attire not changed in 2,000 years. Very few of the women wear veils. Maybe half wear the traditional long-hooded dress called, I believe 'chador.'

Iraq is a large country with about 25 million people. They have a fair work ethic. They have tremendous natural resources. They are self sufficient in food. The potential is great. We hear lots of news about the oil for food program. The Iraqi's didn't need food, they grow their own. My experience with the people was varied. Virtually all Kurds were very glad the Americans came. Most of the Shiites were glad we came. The Sunnis would usually not comment one way or the other. About 75 percent of the current insurgents in Iraq are not Iraqis. The society up to now has always been tribal.



The tribe is everything. The Sunnis were the tribe in power with Saddam. Any infrastructure that was built was in the Sunni area. The rest of the country had only basic roads, schools, hospitals, electricity, water, etc. It is very easy to see when one leaves the Sunni Triangle by the quality of the roads, and public and private buildings. Under Saddam, only the government radio and TV stations could be listened to. Anyone caught listening to BBC world news was

executed on the spot, slowly. The stories of oppression and cruelty are too numerous to mention. It is safe to say that the news stories we heard before the invasion were just the tip of the iceberg!

The common questions asked, are we winning? Yes, we are,

slowly but surely. In America we don't realize the impact of the elections because we take peaceful elections for granted. In the third world countries it is huge. Should we be there? I can't really say, we are making a difference. Like millions of others over the years, I was told to go, I went. Will Iraq be better when we leave? It really could only get better. Barring a major upheaval, Iraq, with a government remotely friendly to its own people, will be a major player in the international world. *Submitted by Mike Debes, Resource Conservationist, Dodge City*

Meade County Birds: Sandhill Crane

With the recent shooting of three endangered Whooping Cranes in Kansas, the more common Sandhill Crane is receiving a lot of attention. In Kansas, Sandhill Cranes are considered as a game species and a fall hunting season is coming under close scrutiny by many environmental groups. The slate gray Sandhill Crane can be distinguished from the white Whooping Crane by the color, size, and presence of black wing-tips in the Whooping Crane.

Sandhill Cranes are a winter resident in Meade County in most years (depending upon water in playa lakes) and a common spring and fall migrant. Sandhill Cranes have been recorded from late August through mid-June. Highest numbers are usually in February and March when numbers can exceed 100,000

in the Fowler area. Sandhill Cranes are thought to mate for life, and often travel in small family units consisting of a breeding pair and one or two young. In captivity, Sandhill Cranes have been known to live up to 24 years!

Sandhill Cranes are often blamed for crop damage, especially on winter wheat. Wet soils coupled with huge numbers of cranes can cause soil compaction and other damage to tender wheat plants. My experience is that cranes most often are in wheat fields digging out grubs and cutworms feeding on the wheat roots, and may be beneficial to the health of the plant. In the spring, you may be lucky enough to see the spectacular courtship dances the cranes do during migration. To see a bird with a seven-foot wingspan hopping and jumping about is

not something you will soon forget. Another thrill is to watch huge flocks of cranes flying into a playa lake to roost for the night. The photo associated with this article was taken in New Mexico at Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge and is used by permission of Dr. Mark Chappell. To see more Sandhill Crane photos by Dr. Chappell, go to <http://www.biology.ucr.edu/personal/MACphotos/MACphotosBosque.html>.

Look for “V’s” of Sandhill Cranes migrating this spring and listen to their distinctive “trill” as they head north to their summer nesting areas in Canada and the Northern United States. *Submitted by Tom Flowers, District Conservationist, Meade*



Kansas River Valley - Soil Survey Beyond the County Line

Rolling down the river...just as the song goes, so does the soil survey. However, this wasn't always so. The Kansas River Valley, extending for 170 miles between Junction City and Kansas City covering parts of nine counties, was originally mapped as each county's soil survey was completed. This created inconsistencies between county boundaries in part due to the difference in completion times of each county's soil survey. During the 1990's, the entire Kansas River Valley was updated without regard for county boundaries.

The field work began in 1994 and was completed in 2000. The map units were separated based on their geomorphic position, soil properties, and estimated flooding frequency. The original map lines were then adjusted to meet these criteria. The final product was a seamless soil survey coverage of the Kansas River Valley. The Kansas River coverage has been incorporated into each county soil survey. *Submitted by Bruce Evans, Soil Scientist, Lawrence*

From the Human Resources Corner....

Rules and regulations

Rules and regulations are a way of life for federal employees. Many rules make sense and ensure that we perform our work properly and fully support our customers. On the other hand, some rules just make me want to scream. Although regulations are necessary, there are times when employees and managers believe they should ignore a particular regulation in order to increase efficiency, improve morale, or administrative simplicity. An example of such rule-bending often occurs in the form of excusing tardiness or allowing extra smoking breaks or extended lunch periods. Employee awareness of selective enforcement of such regulations will cause employees to question which rules can or cannot be "bent." The result can be a culture of insubordination where little is accomplished because too many employees are doing

things their own way. Selective enforcement of regulations can lead to situations where one employee is disciplined for failure to follow regulations that are not followed by other employees. Non-enforcement of regulations may lead employees to believe that a manager condones his/her actions. Another perception might be that an employee feels as though they are being singled out for punishment. Usually the focus is on the manager's failure to put the employee on notice of the specific rule, or on the manager's implicit authorization to disregard the regulation. In these cases, a disciplinary action can quickly turn into a referendum on the manager's conduct. How do we avoid this situation? Seek clarification before engaging in conduct that might run afoul of agency rules or regulations. Ask your

supervisor, the Ethics Officer, or Human Resources Manager. Conversely, supervisors must clearly communicate that they expect every employee to comply with the regulations governing our federal employment. When you face a rule or regulation that seems to be unworkable, ask to see if the regulation can be modified, or you can be exempted based on your unique situation. It is not appropriate to knowingly disregard a regulation because "this way makes more sense" or "the ends justify the means." Doing so sets a bad precedent for future situations. When supervisors clearly spell out expectations, and enforce regulations uniformly, employees will know what behavior is expected of and everybody will be more productive and effective. *Submitted by Jane Medina, Human Resources Manager, Salina*

POLICY: Lunch Periods

General Manual 360 Part 427.13 Establishment of lunchtime periods for all employees.

- (a) The lunchtime period must be for a minimum of 30-, 45 minutes, or a maximum of 1 hour.
- (b) An employee who works more than 6 hours a day **must** take a lunchtime period.
- (c) The lunchtime period should be taken during the normal “lunch-band” established for the office; (e.g., lunch will begin no earlier than 11:00 am and end no later than 1:00 p.m.)

KS GM 360 Part 427.14 Establishment of lunchtime periods for all employees.

- (c) The “lunch band” hours established for Kansas NRCS offices are 11:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

This means that every single employee, regardless of the type of position to which he/she is appointed, who is scheduled to work more than six hours in a single day must have a lunch period scheduled.

Whether he/she takes it or not, the 30 to 60 minutes approved as a regular part of the employee’s duty schedule is time “off the clock” and “without pay.” During that lunch period, the employee is totally free to leave the work area, indulge in activities of their own choosing (that are not otherwise prohibited or offensive), or even—eat lunch.

Other rules place restrictions on lunch periods such as GM 360 Part 427.11(c)(3)(vi) which states “Employees are not permitted to take extra time at lunch, and then “make up” the time either at the beginning or the end of the workday, thereby not being charged for leave.” While this quote is from the section on maxi-flex tours, it applies to everybody. This means that extended lunch hours are to be charged as annual, sick, credit, or other recognized leave; not charged to “good will,” “the boss owes me,” or other unofficial categories. This is a day-by-day reckoning—skipping lunch today doesn’t mean an employee is allowed to take twice as long tomorrow.

We all know the supervisor has to approve an employee’s duty schedule (if you don’t, read GM 360 Part 427.3(d)-better yet, read Part 427 in its entirety). Be reminded, the supervisor also has to approve deviations from and alterations to an employee’s duty schedule. Lengthening or shortening the lunch hour is a change to the duty schedule. If you want to change your lunch hour, let the boss know before the fact--not after the boss asks why she/he is getting phone calls about your lunch period.

Bottom line:

Skip lunch? Stop it. You perform far better after you’ve had a break and fuel.

Extended lunch? Charge it to leave.

Now that you’ve read this, you want to change your lunch period? Talk to the boss.

Questions? Want to add your two cents worth? Feel the need for equal time on rebuttal? Send me an email, Jane.Medina@ks.usda.gov Submitted by Jane Medina, Human Resources Manager, Salina

What's Happening

May

American Wetlands Month

30

Holiday – Memorial Day

June

12 - 14

NACD Northern Plains Regional Meeting
Holiday Inn
Hays, KS

14

Flag Day

17

Kansas SCS/NRCS Retirees Meeting
Travel Lodge
Salina, KS

Contact: Charles Gentry, 785-825-0886

17

Kansas Councils of Soil and Water Conservation
Society Annual Meeting
Ag Hall of Fame
Bonner Springs, KS
Contact: Mechele Foos, 785-985-3524

24

NRCS Volunteer Picnic
Sunset Park
Salina, KS
Contact: Carman Guries, 785-823-4538

July

4

Holiday - Independence Day

5 - 8

Range Youth Camp
Rock Springs, KS

August

1 - 4

Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Meeting,
Rochester, NY

9 - 11

Asian American/Pacific Islanders Annual Meeting
Wichita Marriot
Wichita, KS

21 - 23

State Association of Kansas RC&D Councils Annual Meeting
Huck Boyd Center
Phillipsburg, KS
Contact: Darla Juhl, 785-425-6647