

Kansas Highlights

WINTER 2006

NRCS Lends Hand to Hurricane Victims

Kansas NRCS employees are pitching in to lend a hand with post-disaster cleanup and restoration projects in New Orleans, Louisiana, after Hurricane Katrina. Mike Wallace, Soil Conservation Technician, Wichita; John Gardner, Civil Engineering Technician, Lincoln; and Evelyn Conrad, District Conservationist, Junction City, are just a few NRCS employees who served on a 30-day detail to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) with its Debris

Removal Mission. "My wife and I talked about it, and this was our/my way of helping out," says Wallace on his detail. While in New Orleans, he worked at a gigantic refrigeration dump. His job was to extract Freon and clean out refrigerators/freezers by hand so they could be crushed and recycled. "These refrigerator/freezers had to meet COE safety and standards. He estimated that over 50,000 were cleaned out. "It was interesting (Hurricane results) to put it mildly," said Wallace. "I still saw a lot of families living under the overpasses."

When NRCSer John Gardner saw the Hurricane devastation at home on television, he

knew he wanted to help. "I've been taught to help out and when you have kids of your own, you want to lead by example." Gardner measured the capacity of cubic yards as contractor trucks hauled in household goods to dump sites. "You saw anything and everything," said Gardner of the items being hauled into the site. "The work was hard physically and mentally, particularly seeing the destruction and knowing it involved peoples' lives," said (continued on page 5)



Refrigerators and freezers are collected from the Jefferson Parish after Hurricane Katrina. Photo courtesy: John Gardner



Evelyn Conrad (left) poses with other COE workers. Photo courtesy: Evelyn Conrad

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First Kansas Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) Easement Filed

The FRPP signing ceremony took place in Manhattan on December 16 at the Riley County Courthouse. The signing recognized land-owners, Charles Griffin and Denise Wyrick, for their generosity and foresight in

permanently protecting and preserving 205 acres of undisturbed Flint Hills tall-grass prairie. The Kansas Land Trust (KLT), Lawrence, is the first land protection organization in the state to purchase a conservation

easement using funding from the NRCS FRPP.

Submitted by: Sheila Forrester, Visual Information Specialist, Salina SO



Denise Wyrick and Charles Griffin (center) stand with Kelly Kindscher, KLT President and Harold L. Klaege, NRCS State Conservationist



Board Member Defines Dedication

Clarence "Shorty" Michaelis was one of the first supervisors elected to serve on the Edwards County Conservation District (ECCD) when it was organized in June 1943. He has been active as a supervisor and advisor since then.

Mr. Michaelis was born on a farm 12 miles south of Kinsley. His maternal grandfather originally purchased the farm in 1906. Michaelis and his wife, Clara, raised their two daughters Jean and Jane at this location. Currently, Jane and her husband, Dick Wenstrom, reside at the farm making it a third generation farming

operation. Mr. Michaelis started farming on his own in 1934 but continued to help his parents who were still on the farm. His education in diesel and gas engines was received during the winter months.

The face of agriculture has changed dramatically in the last half century. Not only have farming practices changed, but so have the conservation practices which resulted from the disastrous "Dirty Thirties." Mr. Michaelis has witnessed those changes -- from the days when he was a young farmer struggling through the 1930s, through the time he put the

first irrigation well on his farm. Even more importantly, he knows the lessons to be learned from the 1930s, and has seen countless conservation practices incorporated into county (continued on page 4)



Clarence "Shorty" Michaelis has served on the ECCD board since the district was first organized in 1943.



NRCS Student Trainees, Kristen Cuevas (left) and Julie James on graduation day.

Student Trainees Graduate

After spending several semesters working as student trainees here in the Lawrence NRCS Field Office, Julie James (a member of the Muscogee Creek Nation of Oklahoma) and I, Kristen Cuevas (a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma) will be leaving to

begin our post-college careers with the NRCS. We will both graduate with honors from Haskell Indian Nations University with degrees in Environmental Science this December. Much to our excitement, we have been offered positions as soil conservationists in the state.

Julie will be stationed in Linn County, and I will be in Thomas County.

We just want to thank the staff of the Lawrence Field Office for making our time here as student trainees such (continued on page 5)



NRCS Student Trainee, Jody Gienger uses the rainfall simulator to demonstrate the importance of crop cover and water quality.

Soil Conservation and Water Quality Workshop

Fort Hays State University (FHSU) was the site of a Soil Conservation and Water Quality Workshop last October. NRCS Student Trainee Jody Gienger and other FHSU students served as presenters. FHSU President Edward Hammond welcomed everyone. A presentation on collecting water samples, understanding

the water test results, and what it means to the owner and the community was given. Students from the beef cattle production classes discussed nutrient management plans and how to test lagoon water, manure pile and field soil sampling, and interpreting the results. A livestock waste trailer demonstration on how feeding in one space year after

year affects water quality runoff and what can be done to reduce this potential problem was presented. The rainfall simulator was used to demonstrate the importance of crop cover and water quality. Attendees easily saw how using conventional till and no-till affects water quality. In the afternoon, the (continued on page 6)

2005 Volunteer Award State and National Winners

The 2005 Kansas NRCS Earth Team award winners were recently announced. The winners included the following:

Kinsley NRCS Field Office and Edwards County Conservation District as the 2005 Kansas Earth Team NRCS/National Association of Conservation Districts Award recipients for their use of Earth Team volunteers to support a community recycling project.

Stacy Neilson, Kinsley, as the 2005 Kansas Individual Earth Team Volunteer Award recipient for her work in grant writing, the community recycling project, and assisting to provide food for those in need.

Ark River Water Festival Group as the 2005 Kansas Group Earth Team Volunteer Award recipient for their group of volunteers who have been instrumental in providing an educational opportunity for schools in the community and in meeting

the goals of reaching our youth and educating them in conservation awareness.

Carman Guries, Salina, as the 2005 Kansas NRCS Employee Earth Team Volunteer Award recipient for her work as the State Office Volunteer Coordinator and organizing the Earth Team Volunteer luncheon.

Central Prairie Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) as the 2005 Kansas Earth Team RC&D/NRCS (continued on page 4)



Rice County Recognizes Fire Safety Week

Do you know how to properly use a fire extinguisher? If not, just ask one of the Rice County USDA Service Center employees.

In support of National Fire Safety Week last October, USDA employees got a first-

hand demonstration on fire extinguishers and how they are to be used.

Josh Michaelis, Lyons City Fire Department, also discussed the different kinds of fire extinguishers and how they work.

After his talk, the group went outside, and each service center employee was given the chance to actually fire a fire extinguisher.

Submitted by: Ron Klein, District Conservationist, Lyons FO



Rena Billington, Rice County Conservation District Manager practices with fire extinguisher.

Lincoln County Gets First Place

Lincoln Junior High student Kara Cavalli received first place at the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) state competition for her essay, "Conserve OUR Space."

Kara is the first person from Lincoln County to receive first place at the state level since the contest began in Lincoln County in 1993.

Kara wrote her essay as a sixth grader. The essay received first place in Lincoln County Conservation District's 2005 Essay Contest last January and was sent on to the state level this fall.

The KACD Annual Meeting was held November 2005 in Wichita, where Kara presented her essay at the Education

Committee meeting. After reading her essay, Kara received a plaque from the KACD Education Committee and a \$50 check from the KACD Auxiliary.

Kara is the daughter of Tom and Gelane Cavalli, Lincoln.

Submitted by: Patricia Winters, District Manager, Lincoln FO



Kara Cavalli, Lincoln County received first place on her "Conserve OUR Space" essay at KACD.



Human Resources Corner.....

Federal Employees and Computers

Federal employees have tremendous technology at their disposal. From high-speed computers to the Blackberry, employees can improve their efficiency by accomplishing more tasks in less time while staying in constant touch with their fellow employees. However, federal employees must be careful in how they use government technology.

One fact that many federal employees are surprised to learn is that a federal employee has no reasonable expectation of privacy on a

government computer or electronic device. Many employees may think that since the computer or device is assigned to him or her, they have some right of privacy in how they use that device. This is not the case! An agency can access e-mails and documents at any time, even months and years after the fact. This is true even if you "deleted" the e-mail or text message from your computer.

When you send or receive e-mail from a government computer, those messages are stored on a larger government

server. This means that the e-mails can be retrieved by the government in the event of litigation involving the government or a government employee. Therefore, employees should think long and hard before firing off an angry e-mail to a colleague, subordinate, or supervisor. Once sent, it is in the cyberspace of your government network and cannot be retrieved. This means that an ill-conceived, offhand comment could lead to disciplinary action at some point.

(continued on page 6)

Edwards County (continued)

farming operations over the years. Mr. Michaelis has been a member of the ECCD board of supervisors for 61 years and is the only original board member still serving.

The 95-year old farmer doesn't recall what spurred his interest in serving the conser-

vation district. "It's hard to imagine what's happened in the last 60 years, but even more difficult to imagine what will happen in the next 60 years," says Michaelis.

"The ECCD has been extremely fortunate to have had such a magnificent man to

help lead our county in conservation and common sense," says Stacy Neilson.

*Submitted by: Stacy Neilson,
District Manager, Kinsley FO*

Volunteer Awards (continued)

Award recipient for their promotion and use of Earth Team volunteers.

Congratulations 2005 **National Earth Team Award** winners! The National Earth Team Volunteer Service Award—Chief's Cup winner is Kansas. The NACD/NRCS Earth Team Award winner is

Edwards County Conservation District, Kinsley, Kansas. The NACD/NRCS award will be presented at the Annual NACD Conference in Houston, Texas, in late January. The Chief's Cup award will be presented to Kansas State Conservationist Harold L. Klaege at a leadership meeting after the first of the year.

In 2005, Kansas had nearly 600 volunteers log in 56,950 hours! These individuals and groups can be proud of their contribution to soil and water conservation on the Nation's lands. Congratulations!

*Submitted by: Sheila Forrester,
Visual Information Specialist,
Salina SO*

*In 2005, nearly 600
volunteers logged in
56,950 hours in Kansas!*

Student Trainees (continued)

an enjoyable experience. Everyone in the Lawrence office has been a pleasure to work with. Both the NRCS and Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff patiently answered all of our questions and addressed every concern that we had. Honestly, we could not have asked for a better learning environment! We

are very appreciative for the opportunity we had to work here and get to know such wonderful people. Thanks for everything!

Submitted by: Kristen Cuevas, Student Trainee, Lawrence FO
Editors Note: Other student trainees who accepted full-

time positions include Jarred Kneisel, Soil Conservationist in Washington Field Office, and Sean Kelly, Rangeland Management Specialist in South Hutchinson Field Office.

NRCS Lends Hand (continued)

Gardner. Typically, he worked from 5 a.m. until 7 p.m. "For the most part, people were really appreciative," said Gardner. "There were some areas that you were the bad guy because of the red hat and shirt (COE) you were wearing because you weren't going fast enough mainly in the Ninth Ward."

NRCSer, Evelyn Conrad echoed the statement. "These people were grieving," she said. When Conrad first read about volunteering, she wanted to do it. Her supervisor, Ken Hoffman, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist, approved it, and before she knew it, she was flying to New Orleans. "I'm appreciative to those here in NRCS who gave me the approval to go. I'm a planner. I like to know the parameters of what I'm getting into. I thought before leaving for New Orleans this would help me grow beyond this, to develop my flexibility," she said. Conrad worked at a transfer site where vegetative debris such as trees and branches were brought in and run through a chipper. "FEMA works with contractors. I tracked, logged, and kept a running total of

trucks coming into the landfill." Conrad said the hours were long as they worked 12 hours a day with just one day off. When asked if she'd do it again, "Yes!" She added, the unknown isn't quite as scary as I once thought.

Other NRCS employees who volunteered to assist with Hurricane Katrina included: Dan Curtis, Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Coordinator, Great Bend; Lori Graff, District Conservationist, Leoti; Arthur Hastert, Soil Conservationist, Lyndon; Lonnie Miller, Soil Scientist, Olathe; Sharla Schwien, District Conservationist, Ness City.

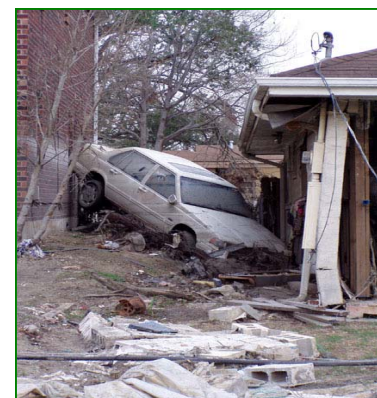
NRCSers Ron Klein, District Conservationist, Lyons, and Troy Krenzel, RC&D Coordinator, Chanute, helped with cleanup from Hurricane Wilma in Florida.

Ron said "I was assigned to provide Individual Assistance (IA) in Naples, Florida. IA's meet with customers to register them, do queries for them in FEMA's data base, and route them to other assistance programs as needed. I met and registered people

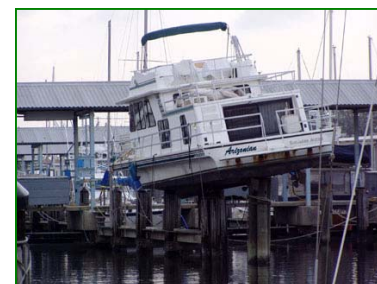
with family roots in many different states and countries. I really enjoyed the cultural diversity and met many good people in a bad situation. Some of their stories would break even the toughest of individuals. At times it was difficult to keep from getting personally involved. This opportunity was rewarding and challenging. I would recommend this duty to anyone who enjoys a challenge and working in diverse situations."

Krenzel related, "The hurricane detail to FEMA was a great experience. My job entailed registering people for FEMA assistance for housing, roof repair, hotel reimbursement, etc. The customers that I met while I was in Florida along with the rest of the Federal Team was what made the experience great. My co-workers were from all sectors of the government, i.e., Social Security, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Interior, Agriculture, and Foreign Service. I would recommend this kind of a detail to anyone."

Submitted by: Sheila Forrester, Visual Information Specialist, Salina SO



Car is found between buildings down near the 17th Street Canal. Photo courtesy: Evelyn Conrad



Boat sits on top of pilings in marina. Photo courtesy: Evelyn Conrad



Household debris sits along the curb. Photo courtesy: Evelyn Conrad

WHAT'S HAPPENING:

January

January 19–20
State Association of Kansas
Watersheds Annual Meeting
Topeka, KS

January 22–24
Kansas Land Improvement
Contractors Association Annual
Convention
Great Bend, KS

January 30–31
No-Till On The Plains
Winter Conference
Salina, KS

February

Black History Month

February 12–17
Society for Range Management
Annual Meeting
Vancouver, British Columbia

February 20
Holiday—Presidents' Day

March

Women's History Month

March 28–30
Mid-America Farm Show
Salina, KS

April

April 22–30
National Wildlife Week

April 23–29
National Volunteer Week

April 30–May 7
National Soil and Water
Stewardship Week

*Helping People
Help the Land!*

USDA is an equal opportunity
employer and provider.

Federal Employees and Computers (continued)

This principle applies equally to private accounts accessed via a government device. If you wish to keep personal e-mails private, do not access them on a government computer. If you do, a copy of any e-mails or documents you view will be transferred onto a government computer.

When computers are used improperly, such as for personal business or illicit purposes, this can be considered misuse or abuse of a government computer, which is a serious allegation that can result in significant discipline up to and including removal. It can also form the basis for revoking an employee's

security clearance, regardless of whether discipline is ever proposed. Such a revocation, which is difficult to overturn, can lead to removal from the federal service and prevent an employee from working again for the government. Furthermore, this fate does not preclude the agency from referring such incidents for potential prosecution under a myriad of criminal statutes enacted to protect against the misuse of computers.

There is no question that computers make our lives much easier. However, if used carelessly or improperly, they can lead to significant problems in the federal workplace.

Managers should remember these basic rules as they make decisions impacting their subordinates and their use or misuse of information technology.

*Submitted by: Jane Medina, Human
Resources Manager, Salina SO*

Water Quality Day (continued)

group headed to the field for demonstrations on measuring crop residue. Two different methods, line transect and picture method, were shown. The day concluded with how to measure the water holding capacity of terraces.

Sponsors for the event included: FHSU Agriculture Department, NRCS, Kanapolis Lake, Smoky Hill River Watershed, Kansas State Research and Extension, and WaterLink-Kansas Campus

Compact. FHSU classes included: Soils, Soil and Water Management, Beef Feedlot Technology and Management, and Techniques and Technology in Beef Cattle Production. This day was made possible through funding from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment along with Environmental Protection Agency 319 funds.

*Submitted by: Jody Gienger, NRCS
Student Trainee, Hays AO*