



655 Parfet Street, Room E200C Lakewood, CO 80215-5505 P-720.544.2819 F-720.544.2965

Insights & Highlights

by
Allen Green
State Conservationist



Our goal is for every employee to be able to see themselves and their works within the Plan, as well as for our key partners and constituents to be able to link our products, services, and activities to assist them.

I am committed to working toward those goals. I am hopeful that you are as well, within the next fiscal year and many more years to come. Again, my thanks and appreciation to everyone for another successful fiscal year.

Once again, we're at the end of another fiscal year; and once again, I find myself more than pleased with our results. I know the main ingredient for such consistent productivity is you: the highly motivated NRCS employee. I also know that we are all being asked to do more with less; and in this age, to be able to make the impacts that you make on our natural resources with our customers and partners is no small feat.

Within every organization new processes and products are introduced, all in an effort to make that organization even more effective and efficient; NRCS is no different. Within the next year, you will see the launching of many new processes including the roll-out of Activity Based Costing (ABC), the Agency's progression to an incentive-based funding process for our Farm Bill programs.

ABC is a major component in the Agency's accountability systems, and it provides the baseline information that our leadership needs to help develop and strategize budgets, and to analyze and evaluate program activities and accomplishments. It also helps in the management of our human resources. It's an important management tool and your assistance will be the driving force behind its success.

The incentive-based funding process is a nationally directed course of action that provides the most flexibility possible for states to develop an approach to determine an appropriate typical cost for each structural practice and practice component. More information about this new procedure will be shared within the near future.

Other initiatives coming down the pike include increasing some program modification authorities within field offices, as well as increasing the visibility of our works and their connection to our five-year National Strategic Plan. The Plan is not new to you; however, within the up and coming fiscal year, you will begin to recognize more concerted efforts to link our everyday business directly with the Plan.

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New NRCS Chief

Arlen Lancaster was appointed the new Chief of NRCS on August 23. As the thirteenth Chief for the Agency, he will direct the work of 12,000 employees and manage a budget totaling nearly \$3.2 billion.

Before joining NRCS, Lancaster served as USDA Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations. Previously he worked for the Congress in a variety of positions including senior policy advisor for **Senator Mike Crapo**; staff director for the Senate Subcommittee on Forestry, Conservation, and Rural Revitalization; and staff member for **Senator Robert Bennett**. He played a key role in crafting the conservation title of the 2002 Farm Bill.

As NRCS chief executive officer, Lancaster guides the agency in helping people help the land through locally-led, cooperative conservation programs. Under his direction, NRCS works with private landowners and partners to conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources, which supports sustainable agriculture and enhances the environment. NRCS conservation partnerships provide public environmental benefits such as a cleaner environment, clear and abundant water, increased biological diversity, and a scenic landscape.

A graduate of the University of Utah, Lancaster is the first Asian American Chief of NRCS. He is an avid fly fisherman and outdoorsman. He and his wife Staci live in Alexandria, VA. ♦

What's New at www.co.nrcs.usda.gov

- ♦ The online **State Employee Directory** was updated in July.
Go to www.co.nrcs.usda.gov. From the top menu select "**Contact Us**" to access the directory.
- ♦ Several **Colorado Bulletins** which may require employee action can be accessed online.
Go to www.co.nrcs.usda.gov. From the right side menu and beneath the *Information For* heading, select "**Colorado NRCS Employees.**" Click on **Bulletins** from the intranet page.
- ♦ Some years ago, the **Colorado Soil Survey Program** produced a series of pamphlets to assist soil survey users. The pamphlets are available online.
Go to www.co.nrcs.usda.gov. From the left side menu Click on "**Soil Survey.**"
- ♦ A meeting of the **State Technical Committee** is scheduled for September 27. A letter of invitation and agenda can be accessed online at:
Go to www.co.nrcs.usda.gov. From the top menu, Click on "**Technical Resources.**" Select **State Technical Committee** from the technical resources program page.
- ♦ Colorado's 10 geo-political **Watershed Profiles** can be accessed online. The documents include the photography of field personnel who work in these watersheds.
Go to www.co.nrcs.usda.gov. From the top menu Click on "**Technical Resources.**" Select **Water Resources** from the Technical Resources program page.



NRCS's online Energy Consumption Awareness Tools can help farmers and ranchers identify where they can save energy. Go to <http://energytools.sc.egov.usda.gov>

Area 3 Busy With Drought Educational Efforts

By **Mary Miller**, *Area 3 Public Affairs Specialist*

With some areas of Southeastern Colorado in their fourth or fifth year of drought, Area 3 offices held drought workshops and other events to educate ranchers and the public on the drought and its effects on the natural resources in that part of the state.

In May and June, NRCS in conjunction with conservation districts, Farm Service Agency (FSA), CSU Cooperative Extension (CSUCE), and many other local organizations organized four drought workshops. Speakers talked about managing blowing soil, FSA programs to assist with drought recovery, managing risk to safeguard natural and financial resources, current drought conditions in the various areas, and continuing to manage rangeland for drought recovery.

Prior to some of the workshops, NRCS, FSA, and CSUCE staffers went on local radio stations to discuss drought conditions and the workshops.

Also in June, the Pueblo field office and the La Junta area office assisted State Senator **Ken Kester** from Las Animas with a drought meeting and tour on the **Emmett Seal** ranch south of Avondale. Senator Kester represents much of the area that has been hardest hit by the continued drought. The Associated Press, The Pueblo Chieftain, and all three major TV stations out of Pueblo and Colorado Springs covered the event. Many concerned ranchers, farmers, local officials, the Colorado State Conservation Board, and conservation district officials from the Upper and Lower Arkansas Watersheds attended the meeting. ♣



Area 3 Conservationist John Knapp and Colorado State Senator Ken Kester address land managers on an Area tour about drought and drought recovery practices.



District Conservationist David Miller conducts a drought workshop in Rocky Ford.



District Conservationist Rick Romano conducts a drought workshop in Canon City.

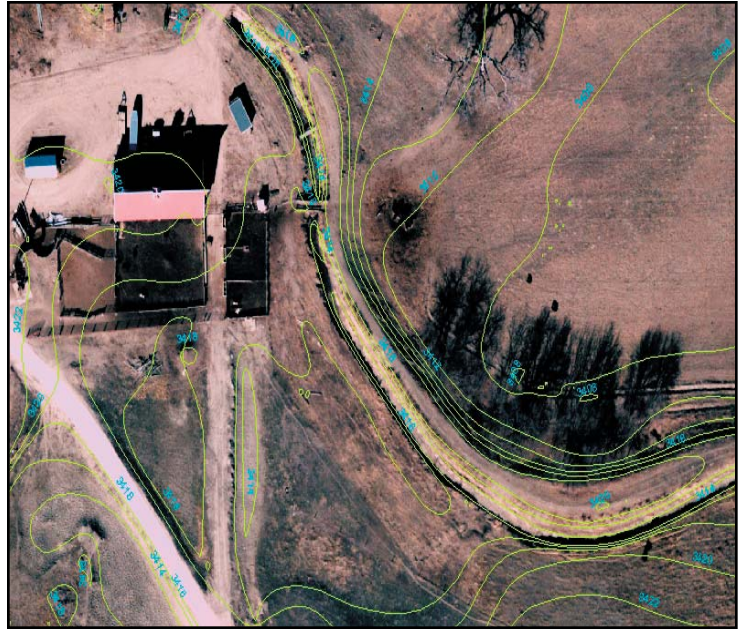
The U.S. drought monitor indicates that most of Colorado is still abnormally dry, and some areas in the State remain in moderate drought. An area in the northeast quadrant of Colorado continues to be designated as being in severe drought.

Technology CORNER



APPLICATIONS OF LIGHT DETECTION AND RANGING TECHNOLOGY (LIDAR)

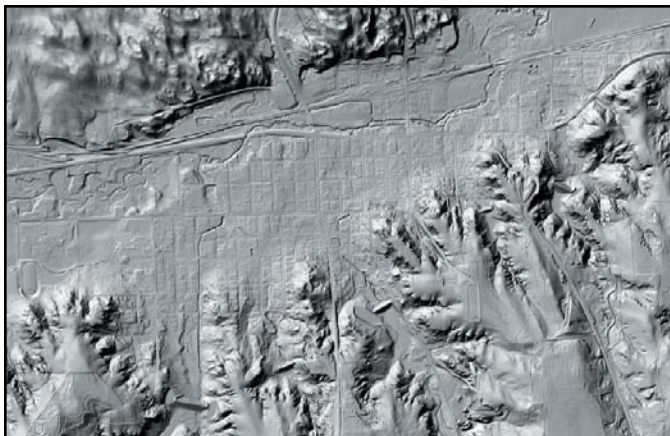
By **Chris Mueller**, State Technology Team
State GIS Specialist/Coordinator



2-foot contour intervals derived from FEMA standard LIDAR elevation data with a 6-inch resolution color orthophotograph as a backdrop.

Current technological advances have made it possible to collect elevation data over large areas at a scale that until recently was not feasible. In addition to current GIS technological applications, NRCS programs that in the past relied on field collection and photogrammetric techniques to derive elevation data can now realize the tremendous benefits associated with remotely sensed elevation data that is highly accurate and has a resolution high enough to satisfy field-based program applications.

The new technology for gathering and subsequent availability of elevation data is **Light Detection and Ranging**. LIDAR technology uses a laser and sensor to transmit and receive pulses from reflected surfaces. LIDAR data can be collected day or night, as long as the plane is below cloud cover and is most accurate during leaf-off. LIDAR can be edited to create bare-earth surface that is devoid of vegetation and man-made features that represent the ground surface



Bare-earth hillshade image derived from a LIDAR bare-earth digital elevation model.

Potential benefits of LIDAR in comparison to traditional methods of DEM generation include:

- ❖ Creation of highly accurate Digital Elevation Models
- ❖ A larger area can be covered in less time
- ❖ Quantity of derivative products produced
- ❖ Canopy penetration to ground; wooded areas are more reliable
- ❖ High density of elevation points with random spacing
- ❖ Timely data delivery, 2 to 6 months
- ❖ Cost-competitive over large geographic areas
- ❖ Current topographic and built-up surfaces collection
- ❖ Greater number of applications/programs can utilize the data

In February of this year, Spectrum Mapping was contracted by NRCS to fly LIDAR data for the town of Wray, Colorado. Approximately 18 square miles of the area was flown to support NRCS's Dam Rehabilitation program. Results of the Dam Rehab analysis are due to be completed in the fall of 2006.

For information on additional uses for LIDAR data, or if you would like to obtain a copy of the Wray data for other NRCS applications, please contact Chris Mueller at 720.544.2845 or chris.mueller@co.usda.gov.



AN EVALUATION OF GPS-PHOTO LINK SOFTWARE

By **Charles Pannebaker**, State Technology Team
Area 3 Resource Conservationist for Technology

GPS-Photo Link from Geo Spatial Experts is a software that connects digital pictures with GPS locations, without connecting wires, by using the timestamp of the camera with the time of the GPS waypoint or tractlog.

GPS-Photo Link can be used with any digital camera that stores the date and time photos are taken, and can be used with most GPS units. The equipment I used for the evaluation was a Garmin GPSmap 76 GPS unit (the standard GPS for NRCS in Colorado) and an Olympus C-5000ZOOM digital camera.

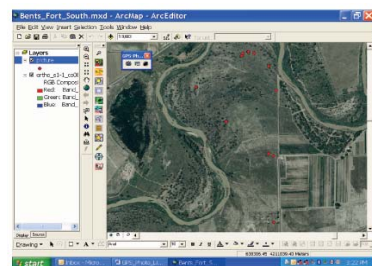
To use this product, install the GPS-Photo Link software on your computer; set the date and time settings on the camera to the time setting of the GPS; take a picture and a GPS location of each point of interest (either by taking waypoints or tracts); run the GPS-Photo Link software which creates a shapefile of the combination of the GPS locations and photos; and add the shapefile to an ArcMap project. The software will also customize the photos. The location, date and time are shown as watermarks and the colors of the watermarks can be changed. All the photos in the series can be named, and individual photos can be named as well.

Cindy Schleining: Loading the software was not a problem, and I found the camera (setting date and time stamp) and GPS easy to use. I did have some difficulty running the software the first time through, as the written instructions were not as clear and concise as I would have liked. I called data support; they were extremely helpful and very prompt. The problems were easily resolved by choosing the correct settings. As with any software, it would take me a couple of times using the program to run through it without missing any steps. I was impressed with the ease of loading the shapefile into Toolkit and the way it functioned with the existing data, especially the map files. I can see several good applications for this software, including monitoring sites, presentations, and documentation with photo and location of special concerns.

Charles Pannebaker: The GPS-Photo Link software loaded without any problems. I am very familiar with the Garmin GPS unit and had no problem operating it, but it was the first time I used the Olympus digital camera and I had some difficulty setting the date and time. I liked that I did not have to have the camera and GPS connected. It did not matter if I took the picture first and then the GPS location or vice-versa. I had some minor problems running the GPS-Photo Link software, but the problems were no different than running any new software for the first time. The difficulties can all be attributed to not selecting the proper settings (I used the default datum the first time rather than changing it to the correct datum for UTM or Lat/Lon display). I had no difficulty loading the shapefile, bringing up the GPS-Photo Link toolbar, or bringing up the linked pictures in ArcMap. The program cannot be used with differential correction, however, and instructions direct users to set the Serial Interface to Garmin. For differential correction the Serial Interface needs to be set to RTCM In/NEMA Out. I think this software has potential to be used extensively by NRCS.

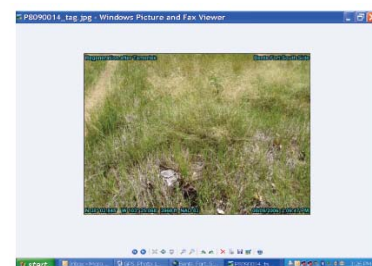
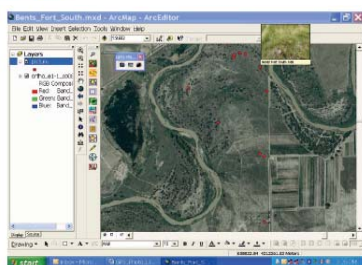
Skills needed for operating this software are the ability to use a GPS unit to take waypoints or tracts; skill in using a digital camera; knowledge of ArcMap to create a project, add layers, and bring up a new toolbar; ability to develop knowledge of GPS-Photo Link software settings. Tasks this technology might be used for are photo points for range condition, WRP, or other easements; linking a conservation practice picture with its GPS location; weed mapping; having a picture with a specific construction job location, date, and time; linking a benchmark picture with its GPS location; linking NRI points with a picture; and soil description location with a picture of the soil profile. The software also creates .htm files that can be used on a webpage.

This product is "legal" to load on NRCS computers, the GPS-Photo Link software has Common Computing Environment (CCE) approval, and is listed in the GSA schedule for \$231. 



The shapefile will add a point Layer to an ArcMap project.

Select the GPS-Photo Link toolbar and select the camera icon from the toolbar and move the cursor to a point. A thumbnail picture will appear on the map.



If you click on the thumbnail a PDF picture will come up. The picture will have the location and date and time displayed.

Two NRCS employees evaluated this software. District Conservationist **Cindy Schleining** and **Charles Pannebaker** provide their remarks:

Drought continues to plague state

Reprint from *The Pueblo Chieftain* -- Anthony A. Mestas, Writer

Rangeland specialists told a group of farmers and ranchers this week that Eastern Colorado remains locked in a serious drought and conditions aren't going to get much better.

"The drought is not over, folks. Even during a drought it rains and I know it rained a little this week, but not nearly enough to mitigate our problems," Roy Roath, a Colorado State University Extension range specialist, said. "If I could make it rain, I would do it," he added.

That was wishful thinking shared by an estimated 25 ranchers in attendance at a drought recovery workshop that was held at the Prowers County Courthouse Annex building.

"There's not going to be a whole lot of good news today, but what I hope to do is provide you with some insights and maybe an alternative or two in terms of how you might approach managing your land," Roath said.

Rangeland specialists say that an estimated 7,000 Southeastern Colorado farms and ranches valued at an estimated \$89 million are in jeopardy as a result of the current drought.

Roath said managing water is critical to recovering from a drought. *"Precipitation in and of itself is pretty helpful, but how you manage that precipitation, when it comes, is critical," he said.*

The onset of the drought began in 2000 when dry weather caused many rangeland areas to have appreciably less forage, placing stress on perennial plants.

Roath said the worst year was 2002, when a dry winter caused many range plants to greatly reduce the number of new buds for forage material to be produced in the spring.

"In 1999, nobody would have guessed that in 2000 we would have the onset of a several-year drought. The town of Rocky Ford alone had record rainfall with 29 inches of precipitation in 1999 . . . That was pretty extraordinary," Roath said.

Roath said that some of the effects of the drought will get worse.

"We can expect to see low water flow in streams on the plains. Streams that would normally have pockets of water well into the year are becoming increasingly difficult to depend upon. Heck, in a couple of weeks from now they may not even have water," Roath said.

Roath said there was a record of dispersed livestock in 2002 with an estimated 60 percent in Southeastern Colorado either being moved or sold.

"That's pretty sizable and many of those have yet to be replaced," Roath said. "We have a real issue right here in terms of what are we going to do with the livestock we have."

Roath said some ranchers have told him that the conditions on their land are worse now than they were in 2002.

The current dry spell has caused a decrease in the production from cool-season grasses, such as western wheatgrass and



Roy Roath, Colorado State University Extension range specialist

green needlegrass. Roath said several plants on loamy plains ecological sites in Eastern Colorado have been lost. He told ranchers that the most important objective in managing land in a drought situation is to increase ground cover with plants.

"I've been working in Colorado for 24 years and I don't think I have ever seen ranges as bad as they are now and I am discouraged with that. We need a lot more coverage and structure on the land," he said.

Roath said that the period from Oct. 10, 2005 - May 1, 2006 was the driest period of time on record in the state - exceeding the winter of 2002.

"We had lots of temperatures in the 60s during the winter and we had record low humidity, some below 10 percent. It was a

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Drought continues to plague state

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winter drought and right now we are seeing its effect on the health of the plants," Roath said.

Roath said that some ranchers in the eastern and southern portions of the state received good spring moisture, but plants did not show good productivity.

"The drought will end if and when there is sufficient rainfall to replenish deep soil moisture in the area's pastures," Roath said.

Heavy rainfall that provides runoff for reservoirs may not recharge deep moisture levels.

However, according to Roath, once rainfall is sufficient in quantity and occurs over a long enough time period to replenish soil moisture to 60 inches or more, many other drought symptoms like low reservoirs will likely go away.

"I would say that even if we got pretty good moisture this year, the plants that we have are not in good enough condition to take advantage of that moisture," Roath said. *"Management needs to be in place to foster recovery,"* he added.

Chad Hart, executive director of Prowers County Farm Service Agency, presented information on programs available through FSA to assist with drought recovery. Much of his presentation centered on the topic of emergency grazing.

Emergency grazing is authorized under certain conditions to provide emergency relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster.

Emergency authorization

is provided either by a national FSA office authorization or by a state FSA committee determination utilizing the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Hart said Prowers County has applied for emergency grazing, but it hasn't been granted.

In order to receive emergency grazing, the land must suffer a 40 percent loss in precipitation and a 40 percent feed reduction loss.

He said Prowers County is currently suffering about an 84 percent loss in precipitation and a 50 percent feed reduction loss.

"Mother Nature seems to be treating us pretty severe, but I am assuming that we will get approved for emergency grazing because Baca County was approved two weeks ago. They are allowed to graze until July 1," Hart said.

Roath said that he isn't a crystal ball prognosticator and doesn't know when the drought may end.

"Everybody wants to know how long this drought is going to last. I tell them that I don't know," he said.

Roath said that it will be different for every rancher depending on where they are situated.

"If someone would have asked me in 2000 would this drought last until 2006, I would have told them probably not," Roath said. *"This drought is like a marathon and the goal is to finish the race and if you can't manage water in the system then it will never end,"* Roath said. ♣

El Paso County Rancher Receives Aldo Leopold Award

At its recent meeting, the Colorado Cattlemen's Association honored **Dick Tanner**, El Paso County rancher, with the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), nominated Tanner, who operates the Bohart Ranch.

Tanner has been involved in the conservation of natural resources for many years. As a board member of the Central Colorado Conservation District, he has brought his dedication and expertise to managing the resources of the district. He was involved with **Kirk Hanna** and other board members in establishing an education scholarship fund for students seeking to advance careers in natural resource conservation.

Tanner has also worked with NRCS over the last 20 years to install livestock watering facilities, livestock pipelines, and a grazing management system that allowed the Bohart ranch to be highlighted by TNC as a unique forage resource in the plains region. His operation of the ranch for cattle grazing, hunting, education, and protection of all species is noteworthy.

Tanner continues to work with adjacent ranches and the surrounding community to provide a dedicated resource in natural resource conservation. ♣



A stock tank being installed on the Bohart Ranch.

on the pulse

Area Office News

Area One

Sandra Geer, Area Administrative and Earth Team Coordinator, set up an NRCS exhibit at the Earth Day celebration in Grand Junction. More than 200 people visited the display, which provided promotional giveaways, informational brochures, and a water demonstration.



A young observer selected some coloring pages to take home after seeing the water demonstration.

Area Two

The Leadership Team held its annual Sensing Session in Area 2 this year. The session is designed to help improve communication between the state and field offices, and provides a forum to listen/discuss the concerns and issues of the Area and Field Offices. The two-and-a-half-day session was held in Greeley and included field tours to Sterling and Brighton.

Area Three

NRCSers from the Pueblo field office, Sangre de Cristo RC&D, the La Junta area office, and a Turkey Creek board member worked at this year's "Discover Water in Pueblo" children's water festival. Workers included **Jane Rhodes**, **Rich Rhoades**, **Jane Wustrow**, **Kathy Trujillo**, **Beth Fortman**, and **Mary Miller**.



RC&D Coordinator Jane Wustrow talks about the riparian river trailer.



Beth Fortman, Soil Conservationist, gives a riparian trailer demonstration.



District Conservationist Rich Rhoades and Turkey Creek board member Jane Rhodes field questions from young festival goers.

Hugo field office staff worked with the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory staff to put on a field demonstration on the marking of Rocky Mountain Plover nests. The demo was held at the **Don Knutson** ranch north of Genoa.

Area 3 hosted a Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative Rangeland School in Limon, June 15-16. **Ben Berlinger**, La Junta area office, and **Harvey Sprock**, Greeley area office, were two of the instructors.

Charlie Pannebaker, La Junta area office, recently gave a presentation on GPS and ArcMap to a group of teachers participating in the TENS program held at Otero Junior College.

Area 3 is proud to announce the completion of its second River and Riparian Study Center. **Mary Miller**, La Junta area office, and **Jane Wustrow** and **Kathy Trujillo**, Sangre de Cristo RC&D, obtained grant money from the Bureau of Reclamation to fund this project. Although the trailer is complete, it will not be ready for use until August or September when it will have been fully stocked with all the necessary supplies for demonstrations.



The Colorado Connection

Ben Berlinger, **Kimberly Diller**, and **Leon Kot** conducted a rangeland training session for the Palmer Land Trust. Approximately 35 people attended the day-long session. The purpose of the workshop was to teach the volunteer stewards of the Land Trust about rangeland ecological principles, grazing management "101," and the different methods of rangeland monitoring so that they can track land conditions on the working ranches involved with their conservation easement program. Partial funding for the workshop was provided by the Teller - Park CD and the Palmer Land Trust.



Area Rangeland Management Specialist Ben Berlinger discusses rangeland at the workshop held on the historic Clark Ranch near Divide.

Kimberly Diller, **Jim Sperry**, and **Ben Berlinger** conducted a rangeland training workshop for Area 3 employees and land owners in early August. The session was held on the **Rob Canterbury** ranch located near Hillside in Custer County. About 40 participants learned about rangeland inventory procedures, grazing management principles, and grazing animal nutrition. Lunch was served by Rob and his wife.

Lorenz Sutherland, **La Junta** AO, recently hosted the CSU Watershed Science Class. The class is studying the water and natural resource issues in the Arkansas River Basin. Lorenz took the class to the field to show them various sites and discuss issues with class members.



Employees of the Trinidad Field Office participated in Earth Day celebrations at the K-8 Hoehne School and at Trinidad Middle School. Soil Con Tech **Dennis Lane** and District Conservationist **Levi Montoya** explained to the students the importance of Cultural Resources; Farmbill Clerk **Francine Aranda** and Conservation District Manager **Diana Iuppa** demonstrated the importance of recycling; Soil Con **Margaret Gigante**, who has since transferred to New Mexico, along with Soil Con **Haydee Thillet** operated the water trailer, which showed the students the effects of soil erosion, water quality, and overall impacts within a watershed; and STEP **Shannon Sciacca** and Earth Team Volunteer **Tracy Dailey** assisted all the groups and took pictures throughout the day. Other partners that participated in the activities included the U.S. Army-Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site, U.S. Forest Service, and the Colorado Division of Wildlife. The Earth Day activities were provided to approximately 650 students.



Volunteer Francine Aranda and Conservation District Manager Diana Iuppa discuss recycling to middle school students.

Levi Montoya, District Conservationist; **Margaret Gigante**, Soil Conservationist; **Dennis Lane**, Soil Conservation Technician; and **Tracy Dailey**, Earth Team Volunteer participated in an Earth Day Celebration at Trinidad Lake State Park, where they partnered up with the Colorado State Forest Service, Nature Conservancy, Trinidad Lake State Park, and the Spanish Peak Purgatoire River Conservation District. Dennis and Tracy participated as volunteers on a half day work session in the park. The NRCS staff operated the water trailer and demonstrated

the importance and affects of natural resources within a watershed. Later in the afternoon Levi Montoya participated in a workshop which explained the importance of controlling Tamarisk and Russian Olive within riparian areas. The activities were provided to approximately 30 individuals of all ages.

Area 3 staff assisted the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) during their 2006 Technician Training at Pueblo Lake State Park. **Raquel Wertsbaugh**, Biologist, discussed how wildlife issues are addressed in basic conservation planning, farm bill programs, and general technical assistance provided to partners such as CDOW. **Levi Montoya**, District Conservationist, discussed the mission of the agency, roles and responsibilities for farm bill programs, conservation partnership, locally led conservation, and typical assistance available to partners, cooperators, and others. **Ben Berlinger**, Range Specialist, provided a field range demonstration on specie identification, range inventory, ecological site descriptions, clipping, and general range information. CDOW technicians will use the knowledge gained from this training in the future to help livestock producers with grazing management plans and grazing agreements.

Area 3 was well represented during the concurrent sessions at the International Soil and Water Conservation Society Conference held at Keystone. **Storm Casper**, **Leon Kot**, and **David Miller** gave presentations.

Casper's presentation was titled "Evaluation of Subsurface Drip-irrigated System Performance in Southeast Colorado," Kot's was on "Fire Rehabilitation Measures Under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program: Some Recent Colorado Experiences," and Miller's was titled "Revegetating Formerly Irrigated land in Colorado's Lower Arkansas River Valley." All three submitted abstracts to the Society when it sent out a call

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for papers, a competitive process, for the 2006 Conference.



From left, Storm Casper, Springfield F.O.; Leon Kott, Woodland Park F.O.; and David Miller, Rocky Ford F.O.

The Colorado Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), Colorado Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS), and NRCS sponsored a range management school in July at Keystone. **Robbie Baird LeValley**, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension; **Dave Bradford**, U.S. Forest Service; **John Murray**, NRCS; and **Harley Metz**, Bureau of Land Management, were the instructors. Topics covered included grass, forb, shrub growth, response to drought, rangeland monitoring, grazing management, animal behavior, and rangeland nutrition.



Margaret and Clinton Peterson, Mary Miller's parents, help make the range hoops each participant received at the Range Management School.

Area Four

La Jara Soil Conservationist **Raymond Gekosky** has been working with producers on Irrigation Water Management (IWM) with guidance from Area 4 Water Specialist **Dick Sparks**. La Jara has nine contracts for 2006 with cost-share for IWM. A workshop was

held to explain the requirements for cost-share, along with techniques to help implement the requirements. Producers have welcomed NRCS staffs regular field visits, technical assistance, and recommendations, and see the benefit of using available water more efficiently.



Gekosky will continue IWM work when he transfers to the San Luis F.O. DC Tracy Miller will continue her role in the LaJara F.O., and will also perform DC duties in the San Luis F.O.

Scott Woodall, Rangeland Management Specialist, spent a day at Utah State University with **Dr. Fred Provenza** and a FRWS 3900 class. The class, "Managing Dynamic Ecological Systems," focuses on an ecological approach to natural resource management.



Scott, as guest lecturer and lab instructor for a day, introduced students to real life challenges and issues brought on by the rapidly changing landscape of Southwest Colorado.

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe in Ignacio, and staff from the Southern Ute Wildlife Division, including **Chris Olguin**, **Ben Zimmerman**, **Danielle McGraw**, **Josh Batchelor**, and NRCS Resource Conservationist **Sterling Moss**, conducted a bison education field trip for students from the Tribe's Indian Academy. Students learned how much grass bison need to eat each day, and how to use a handheld GPS unit to navigate to selected sampling sites in the bison pasture. At the sites, students collected forage samples and clipped grass

into paper bags. Later they weighed the dried samples and recorded the production data.



Sterling Moss and Ben Zimmerman talk pasture management with Southern Ute Indian Academy students.

Costilla County's 2006 Colorado EQIP Invasive Plant project area includes all of the county with emphasis on the headwaters of Culebra and Trinchera Creeks. **Joseph Lobato**, Farm Bill technician, is working with the Conservation District and County Weed Supervisor **Zigmund Gulczynsky** in the use of mechanical and biological controls.



Joseph Lobato applies *Trichosirocalus horridus* beetles to musk thistles.

The Alamosa Soils Office assisted a post-assessment team with the Mato Vega Fire in Costilla County. **Alan Stuebe** and **Jim Harigan**, soil scientists, provided onsite technical assistance to determine the potential erosivity of the area.



Staff in the Durango Field Office threw a special celebration for the 80th birthday of Soil Scientist J.P. Pannell. Pannell has over 50 years of service with NRCS.

on the pulse

State Office News



Lynne Price is our new Supervisory Human Resources Specialist. She comes to us from the General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., where she served in the same capacity, overseeing four personnel offices. Her team serviced 1,400 employees in the D.C. metropolitan area. Lynne has spent most of her government career with the Department of Interior, at the U.S. Geological Survey and the Bureau of Land Management.

In addition to human resources, Lynne has worked on a large IT project, developed hydrology programs for international visitors, and worked for an international magazine.

Lynne, and her husband John, have one daughter, Amanda, who is seeking fame and fortune in Los Angeles as an actor. Amanda graduated from Radford University and a month later, drove from DC to CA to find a job in Hollywood. Right now, Amanda is a hot item in the food and beverage industry with four plays under her belt.

Lynne and John like to dabble in

home improvements and pretend that they are wine connoisseurs.



Joanne Smith joined NRCS as a Voucher Examiner. This is her first career with the federal government. She moved to Denver five years ago from Cincinnati, Ohio, where she was employed in the scrap metal business.

Joanne enjoys all kinds of science-related activities. She especially enjoys astronomy and owns an observatory in Thoreau, New Mexico, which is located near Bluewater State Park in the northwestern part of the state. Joanne's fiancé, John, bought the observatory four years ago for Joanne as an engagement present.

Other hobbies that Joanne takes pleasure in are sewing, rock-crawling and baking. About a year ago, she became interested in coral reef. Currently, she owns a 55-gallon reef tank that holds corals, fish, shrimp, and other kinds of saltwater organisms. You can see pictures of these proudly displayed in her office.



Karma Anderson comes to the State Office as a Resource Conservationist and will be working on watershed planning, water quality and CAFO issues.

She has been with NRCS for two and one-half years and much of that time she spent working as District Conservationist in the San Luis Field Office.

Prior to NRCS, Karma worked for five years as a Geoscientist Supervisor for the Ground Water Quality Bureau with the State of New Mexico Environment Department.

In 1993, Karma received her Bachelor of Science degree from CSU in Agronomy with a concentration in Environmental Soil Science. She earned a Master of Science degree in Environmental Policy from University of Denver in 1998. She has also completed one year of graduate studies in Environmental Conflict Resolution at Antioch University.

In her spare time, Karma has horses, dogs, and cats that keep her busy. She spends a lot of time with

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her parents who reside in the Denver area. When opportunity allows, she hopes to do some backpacking, travel, and continue her education.



Jason Peel joined the NRCS

State Office in May 2006 as an Irrigation Water Management Specialist. Prior to that, he held the same position with the Delta Conservation District in Delta, CO.

Jason received his Bachelor of Science degree from Missouri Valley College where he majored in Biology. He then went on to complete his Master of Science degree in Rangeland Ecology and Watershed Management/Water Resources at the University of Wyoming. Jason's wife, Samantha, is currently attending Colorado Christian University working on a Master of Arts in Counseling.

Jason and Samantha have four dogs: Toby-san, Faith, Ariel, and Tessie. They also own a Macaw named Pin-Pin.

In his spare time, Jason enjoys outdoor activities, especially golf, and restoring classic vehicles. He also coaches football for the Golden-Applewood Midget Football Association.

Jason is available to provide direct technical assistance at the field office level on irrigation water management and salinity concerns.

Marsha Sims, State Archeologist, led a Cultural Resources Management training in late April

for a group in Area 3. The group included **Calvin Melcher**, Holly FO; **Tim Steffens**, Springfield FO; **Janet Tanski**, Woodland Park FO; **Haydee L. Thillet**, Trinidad FO; **Tim Macklin**, Lamar FO; **Mike Reed**, Lamar FO; **Sarah Nehr Korn**, Holly FO; **Michael Daskam**, Holly FO; **James Wittler**, and **B.J. O'Doherty**, Springfield FO.



The CRM training took place in Vogel Canyon and on private land.



Ron Gilberston, Area 4 Earth

Team Volunteer Coordinator, has been with NRCS since March 1996. He began his career as a WAE and now serves as a Soil Conservation Technician in the Center Field Office. In the past, he has assisted on several Earth Team projects and received an award for Group Winner (1998) for a Living Snow Fence Project.

Ron, along with other volunteers, designed the Buddy Wilson Memorial River Trailer for the San Luis Valley. Ron enjoys the outdoors, hunting, fishing, and being with his wife. He has two daughters, ages

28 and 21, and four grandchildren. His youngest daughter is in college at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs. For the past ten years, Ron has worked with several volunteers in the Center Field Office and feels that Earth Team is a worthy cause for all aspects of NRCS.

Colorado welcomed five Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) students from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff to the ranks this summer: **Lana Armon**, Colorado Springs Field Office; **Candace Hubbard**, Pueblo Field Office; **Tim Wallace**, Byers Field Office; **Jennifer Griffin**, Brighton Field Office; and **Charles Holmes**, Greeley Field Office. While earning academic credit, students received paid on-the-job training by working side-by-side with NRCS specialists to experience and learn the day-to-day activities of employees who work directly with farmers and ranchers to get conservation on the ground. All of the students except Armon returned to school in late August. Armon, a senior this term, will continue working in the Colorado Springs Field Office during the fall semester. Area 2 Soil Conservationist **TaTrecia Wesley**, a 2001 graduate of UofA/Pine Bluff was instrumental in the recruitment of this year's SCEP students.



Kudos to Jami Shepherd, Budget Analyst, who recently graduated from The Women's College at Denver University with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. Jami graduated Cum Laude!

NEDC FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING HELD IN COLORADO SPRINGS

The NRCS National Employee Development Center (NEDC) conducted Fish and Wildlife Habitat training in Colorado in early June. Four NRCS Colorado employees contributed to the training by providing instruction in their areas of expertise, including State Biologist **Terri Skadeland**, recently retired Area 3 District Conservationist **John Valentine**, Area 4 DOW Biologist **Chanda Garcia**, and former Area 3 Biologist **Raquel Wertsbaugh** (Raquel recently accepted a position with the CDOW). Other instructors included NRCS National Biologist **Randy Gray**, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biologist **Katy Fitzgerald**, as well as trainers from the three NEDC Centers and the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. Area 3 Soil Conservation Aid **Janet Caolo-Tanski**, was a training participant and the designated photographer who captured the entire five day training on film.



Someone wrestled the camera away from Soil Conservation Aid and photographer Janet Caolo-Tanski long enough to make sure there was at least one photo of her.



State Biologist Terri Skadeland talks macroinvertebrate sampling while Soil Conservationist Kyle Wait and Soil Con Tech Travis McKay look on.



Aquatic macroinvertebrate



A Colorado Department of Wildlife Technician leads an electrofishing demonstration with Range Management Specialist Fred Cummings.



A catch from the electrofishing demonstration



Participants from left, *RMBO Techs* Seth Gallagher and Tammy Vercauteren, *Soil Conservationist* Ed Kilpatrick, and *Resource Conservationist* Holly Horner listen as recently retired *DC* John Valentine discusses the management practices at Chico Basin.



From left, Margaret Gigante, *New Mexico soil con*; Wendell Gilgert, *NEDC*; Raquel Wertsbaugh, former *Area 3 biologist*; and Randy Gray, *national biologist*. Wertsbaugh led a session on riparian habitat.



Area 3 SCEP students Lana Armon and Candace Hubbard strike a pose after a session about Playa Lakes.



NEDC Biologist Steve Brady, *Soil Con Tech* Dennis Lane, and *Soil Conservationist* Kyle Wait are evaluating wetland habitat.

Training participants studied shortgrass prairie, playa lake, and riparian habitat on two ranches southeast of Fountain, and spent an afternoon at the Air Force Academy doing riparian evaluations and assisting with an electrofishing demonstration.



Class participants taking a break around an abandoned water tank standing from left include Jim Sperry, Krista Wilson, Kathy Boyce, Lana Armon, Stacey Brown, Valerie Lovett, Sarah Nehrkorn, Sylvia Hickenlooper, Cindy Schleinig, and Raquel Wertsbaugh. Katy Fitzgerald, a biologist with the Colorado Department of Wildlife who works from the Colorado Springs Field Office, is seated.

On Diversity

SO Celebrates Cultural Awareness with FSA, RD, and CASS



NRCSers from left, Christina Lucero, Marta Villano, Pat Davey, Joanne Smith, and Tom Weber.



IT specialist Dave Ueda and RD's Irene Etsitty worked together at the grill.



From left, NRCSer Ed Spence, CASS's Eric Norris, and the Jefferson County Conservation District's Stefan Reinhold sit down with CASS staffers Kiff Hurlbut and Tom Vesey.



FSA staff Mary Moore and Diana Williams wait in line at the potluck luncheon.



RD staff from left, Jeremy Anderson, Laurie Batcheller, Dave Cook, and April Dahlager.

May
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

Sept 15 - Oct 15
Hispanic Heritage Month

October
Disability Employment Awareness Month

Deer Trail and East Adams Conservation Districts present: **2nd Annual Noxious Weed Workshop**

By Sheryl Wailes, *Conservation District Manager*

On a warm and beautiful Colorado spring morning, 25 people gathered in Strasburg to attend the 2nd Annual Noxious Weed Workshop sponsored by the Deer Trail and East Adams Conservation Districts.

The first hour of the workshop was held in a meeting room where **Thaddeus Gourd** and **Kelly Uhing**, from the CSU Extension Service for Adams County, presented an informational discussion on the identification of noxious weeds. They provided ways of controlling noxious weeds using a combination of mechanical, biological, cultural, and chemical methods to rid the land of these pesky plants. Some members of the group brought in plants that were identified by Thad and Kelly.

The second part of the workshop was a field tour. The first stop was located west of Bennett on the **Lowell Piland** property where Thad, in cooperation with the two Conservation Districts, had set up a test plot with Lowell to do a demonstration plot of controlling noxious weeds using the four different methods of control (chemical, biological, cultural and mechanical). The group was asked to evaluate the percentage of kill using the four different methods of control for Canada thistle. They got to observe some of the test plots and use that valuable information on their own property. On the second stop, Kelly gave a talk about Musk Thistle and Russian Knapweed. There were several of these plants and Kelly explained some of the different methods of control for these



STEP students Jennifer Griffin, Brighton F.O., Tim Wallace, Byers F.O.; and Charles Holmes, Greeley F.O.



Workshop participants pose for a group photo.

two noxious weeds. The people in the group were in awe on what it takes to get rid of these plants and that it is not an easy thing to do. It takes both time and money to address the control of these two species.

The final stop was north of Strasburg where the tour stopped along Kiowa Creek to look at Leafy Spurge. Kelly explained the deep root system on this plant and that it is very hard to control once it gets established. She explained about the poisonous milk in the root and how harmful it is not only to livestock who eat it, but to humans who come into contact with this plant. The session ended here, and everyone who attended gave positive feedback to the presenters and the hosts and will work with the Byers Field Office in the future for more specific recommendations for their properties. 💧



Workshop instructor Kelly Uhing, Colorado State University Extension Service, takes pictures of noxious weeds during the field tour.

Teachers Workshop Held by Kristi Gay, Area 2 District Conservationist

The Flagler Conservation District and NRCS staff were host to the High Plains TEN (Teaching Environmental Science Naturally) teachers workshop. Teachers participated in hands-on workshops as they traveled from Burlington to Hugo during the week learning fun activities with natural resources that can be repeated in their own classrooms and/or similar sites in their area.

During this four day environmental workshop, the teachers were the students! Instructors were fellow teachers, **Cherie Wyatt** and **Charlotte James** from Burlington Middle School; natural resource professionals from NRCS **Kristi Gay**, **Matt Reddy** (Flagler), **Julie Elliott** (Wray), and **Steve Cal-kum** (Burlington); from the Colorado Division of Wildlife **Linda Groat** (Lamar), **Tom Seamans** (Kit Carson County), and **Warren Cummings** (Lincoln County). Also assisting was **Kent Minor** from Colorado State Parks and Recreation (Bonny Dam).



Area teachers enjoyed bird watching on a hike at Flagler Lake in Kit Carson County as part of the High Plains TEN teachers workshop hosted by area middle school teachers and individuals from the planning committee made up of local agency personnel from NRCS, CDOW, and Colorado State Parks

This is the third year a teachers workshop has been planned in and around Kit Carson County. This year, the workshop theme was “*Do You Hear What I Hear? Songs of the Prairie,*” with the main theme being bird watching. Planned activities highlighted bird watching skills at the Burlington session, natural history of turkeys and wetlands at Hugo and Limon, and a bird observation hike at Flagler Lake. The final day included Greater Prairie Chickens, birds and human interaction, and classroom activities.

Locally, **Mike Grant**, Flagler Conservation District board member, was host to

the group for ‘Flagler Day’ as they observed mountain plover habitat, burrowing owls, and important playa habitat. A visit to the **Terry and Sally Gaines** farmstead north of Flagler, was a must as teachers were treated to a quick look at a Great Horned Owl and her nest.

Several sponsors assisted with activities including Wagner Wild Bird Food, LLC which provided specialty bird seed items as prizes for the “Jeop-birdy” game; the Flagler Conservation District provided drinks one day; and the Colorado Chapter, Soil and Water Conservation Society assisted with presentation materials. ◆

Lower Arkansas River Watershed Tour

By **Misty George**, *Conservation District Manager*

The apex of the Lower Arkansas River Watershed Tour was the dynamic information exchange and interaction between the 55 producers, legislators, conservation districts, NRCS, county commissioners, and the Lower Arkansas Watershed Association. Baca County Conservation District (BCCD) hosted the event, beginning the day with thought-provoking presentations on cutting-edge conservation practices and issues. These presentations planted the seed for the animated discussions that were to continue throughout the day on the busses, at lunch, and at the various tour stops. The presentations were engaging and challenged participants to think of new conservation possibilities from carbon sequestration and ag energy generation/conservation to a National Priority Area for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Max Smith, BCCD President, summarized past droughts southeastern Colorado has endured and the environmental benefits of CRP. **Pat Esch**, BCCD Secretary, gave an impassioned presentation on the need for establishing a prairie bird National Priority Area to keep acres in the CRP program. Lively, meaningful discussion followed both presentations and ideas were put forth on how to sustain the level of CRP acres.

The program continued with **Seth Gallagher** detailing Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory's work with Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat in CRP. **Fred Hefley**, Baca Green Energy, explained community wind farms (1-10 towers/distributed generation), large wind farms (100+ towers), and farmstead wind generation. **Kay Lynn Hefley**, Farm Bureau, educated the crowd on carbon sequestration. **Kevin Larson**, Superintendent of CSU Plainsmen Research Center, gave a dynamic presentation on the possibility of using sorghum for ethanol production.

The conservation education portion of the day was followed by site visits of conservation practices. Attendees saw one of Baca Green Energy's anemometers on the way to a CRP site near Vilas. Participants put "boots on the ground" there as **Tim Steffens**, Area 3 Rangeland Management Special-

ist, entertained and educated the crowd with a water infiltration race. Attendees learned first hand how important ground cover and residue is for capturing and retaining precipitation.

From there the entourage traveled south of Vilas to **Terry and Marcy Swanson's** lovely home. The tour group feasted on an excellent barbeque lunch catered by Kim's Ribs. Around the tables participants took the opportunity to dialogue with the legislators present: **Representative Wes McKinley**, **Doris Morgan** for **Senator Wayne Allard**, and **Allison Cortner** for **Senator Ken Salazar**.

Following lunch, the bus convoy headed west observing many well-managed CRP tracts along the route. At the next stop, participants were greeted by the pungent aroma of onions at **Brent Morris'** field. Attendees inspected a side-by-side field of onions and corn grown with subsurface drip irrigation (SDI). **Max Smith** and **Kevin Larson** educated participants on the challenges and benefits of SDI. The grand finale was touring Springfield's municipal wind turbine, whose silhouette rising from the prairie encouraged everyone to think of future generation possibilities. This 1.5 MW behemoth is one of the most efficient turbines in the contiguous 48 states. Attendees explored inside the turbine and learned that it supplies between 50% to 100% of Springfield's energy needs.

It was an outstanding day of conservation education. The highlight of the day was the substantive discussion amongst participants. This discourse helped everyone, from legislators to producers, come away understanding the strides conservation districts are making towards natural resource conservation, and some of the challenges that lie ahead. 🍏



State Representative Wes McKinley (far left) and other tour participants listen intently as Max Smith, BCCD President, details some of the challenges that come with drip irrigation. Brent Morris allowed the tour to inspect his onions and corn grown on subsurface drip irrigation.

Canon City Field Office Employees “Band” Together

By Janet Barnhart, Conservation District Manager

Ten thousand dollars raised in four years: not bad for the Canon City Field Office and friends in raising funds for the Orchard of Hope Foundation. The Orchard of Hope’s “Walk for Hope” raises money to help cancer survivors and their families deal with expenses that are not always covered by insurance.

NRCSers from Canon City, Silver Cliff, Alamosa, and Monte Vista plus the Fremont CD, FSA, friends, and family gather each June and raise funds for the Orchard of Hope in memory of **Krissy Barnhart**. Krissy was the daughter of district employee **Janet Barnhart**.

“Everyone in the Service Center knew and loved Krissy. Her death impacted everyone. They knew first hand how hard she fought her cancer. They also knew the financial impact it had on us. The Service Center decided we wanted to help others going through the cancer battle, so they could forget about the financial devastation, even if it was for a short time, and focus on what is important, their loved one,” says Janet.

So each year, around 25 “Team USDA” members gear up in their teal t-shirts with logo “Best Friends are Never Forgotten” and meet in Veteran’s Park in Canon City. The team walks the track, works at the team’s “tic-tac-toe” and “Plinko” boards, talk,

eat, spend money, and listen to tunes in the park.

The Rocky Road Gals who are NRCS’s and FSA’s own **Kimberly Diller, Kathy Gaylord** and daughters, have volunteered their band for the past two years to play for the walkers. This years “Walk for Hope” raised over \$125,000.

So when the Canon City Service Center employees say they “band” together for a great cause, we really MEAN it! ♦

Team USDA sport “Best friends are never forgotten” t-shirts at Veterans Park during the Orchard of Hope Walk for Hope. The 25-member group formed in memory of Krissy Barnhart of Canon City, who died of cancer in 2002 at the age of 11. They have raised more than \$10,000 in four years of participation with the Walk for Hope. Team members from left are Eric Hovland, Janet Barnhart, Rick Romano, Becky Romano, and Howie Wertsbaugh.



Southeast Colorado RC&D and Baca Green Receive Rural Development Grant

By **Mary Miller**, Area 3 Public Affairs Specialist

Mike Bennett, Rural Development State Director, recently presented Southeast Colorado Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) a grant award check for \$80,115.

Matt Heimerich, Southeast Colorado RC&D Council Chair, said the RC&D was pleased to partner with Baca Green Energy in its efforts to establish a wind farm in Baca County. The grant will be used to purchase and install four meteorological towers that will gather wind data in Baca County.

Fred Hefley, speaking on behalf of Baca Green Energy, stated getting anemometers in place to collect specific onsite wind data is the first step towards building a wind farm. Baca Green Energy LLC was formed in 2003 with the mission of developing and operating a wind energy company in Baca County. The group is 28 members strong, and comprised of local county stakeholders. They



Southeast Colorado RC&D and Baca Green Energy (BGE) Board Members receive the award check. Pictured from left are Fred Hefley, BGE; Tim Macklin, Southeast Colorado RC&D Coordinator; Matt Heimerich, Southeast Colorado RC&D Council Chair; Vic Doyle, BGE; Mike Bennett, Rural Development State Director; Steve Harmon, BGE; Tex Buckhaults, BGE; Sam Mundell, BGE; and Charles Thompson, Rural Development Manager, Las Animas.

are hoping to build a large wind farm of 100 or more generators. Hefley said the contractor will be installing the meteorological towers sometime this month. 🍀

Zapata Homeowners Association Mitigate for Fire Incident

By **Jim Mietz**, RC&D Coordinator

The Zapata Homeowners Association (ZHA), an Alamosa County subdivision, is mitigating its properties and subdivision lands for wildfire. In 2002, a wildfire mitigation plan was developed for the subdivision and most full-time residents created defensible space around their homes. In addition, the ZHA fire committee removed insect riddled pinyon and ponderosa pine.

The ZHA will install an NRCS designed water and dry hydrant system on the upper slopes of the subdivision. The system consists of three 2,000

gallon water tanks with a pipeline to a dry hydrant. The system is designed at 250 gallons per minute and is available only for fire control. This system meets the Insurance Service Organization (ISO) standards.

ZHA has purchased a Sentry Siren for alerting residents for evacuation due to wildfire. Sentry designed the siren for the conditions at ZHA. A community firehouse is foreseen in the near future. The San Luis Valley RC&D staff facilitated a conversation and action plan for the fire house. There has been excellent participation and commitments

from local residents including the Great Sand Dunes National Park, ZHA, The Nature Conservancy, the Oasis Lodge, Uracca Road residents, et al. The fire station will be a substation of the Mosca-Hooper Fire Department and will meet another ISO standard.

ZHA members value the beauty and solitude of California peak, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, and the woodland that they call home. After the 2000 fire on the north end of the ZHA property, they organized to protect themselves from future fire incidents. 🍀

Plot Master 400

Available at the Durango Service Center

By Valerie Lovett, Area 4 Soil Conservationist

The Durango Field Office, the Division of Wildlife-Habitat Partnership Program, and the La Plata and Pine River Conservation Districts are providing the use of the Plot Master 400 and trailer to landusers in the San Juan Basin. The Durango Field Office approached the HPP Committee with the proposal to plant food plots and forage for wild turkey, ducks, geese, dove, elk, and deer on private lands in order to mitigate wildlife damage claims and to improve wildlife habitat. The seeder was purchased by the Division of Wildlife HPP committee at a cost of less than \$6,000 through the Whitetail Institute and Tecomate Seed Company, and the conservation district became the owner of record.

The Plot Master 400 is the complete package for pasture planting, food plots, wildlife crops, etc. It is designed to be used in rough environments, including hard soils that haven't been cultivated. It can be pulled

by a variety of machines, including ATVs, small tractors, large lawn mowers, or pickup trucks. It has an electric lift system which is used to raise and lower the unit for transportation and proper depth control for tillage and planting.

The Plot Master is equipped with six 16-inch heavy-



duty disks with sealed bearings used to disk and break up soil prior to planting. The disk angle can be adjusted depending on the amount of tillage desired. It comes with an electric drop seeder that allows you to plant almost any type of seed. It dispenses directly behind where you cultivated, rather than broadcasting your seed into unwanted areas. The unique dual-use cultipacker packs the soil to ensure good soil/seed contact, which generally improves seed germina-

tion. The Plot Master levels soil and covers the seed with the proper amount of soil for optimal production. The flexible metal grating attachment connects to the dray system and provides a smooth "infield" finish and helps provide even coverage of soil over your seed for improved production. It can also be used to smooth and prepare your seedbed prior to planting in rough, uneven areas.

The Plot Master can disc, plow and furrow, drill the

seed, pack the soil, cover the seed, and smooth the soil over the seed all at the same time in a four-foot swath.

Attaining the Plot Master 400 is another unheralded joint partnership project to get conservation on the land. Sincere thanks to the Durango Division of Wildlife and the Habitat Partnership Program from the Durango Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Pine River and La Plata Conservation Districts. ♣

Gunnison/Dolores River Watershed Tour Showcases Conservation Efforts

By **Katherine Burse-Johnson**, *Public Affairs Specialist*

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, Gunnison/Dolores River Watershed, joined forces to host a tour of conservation efforts in the Gunnison area.

Approximately 55 tourists, including congressional representatives **Matthew McCombs**, representing U.S. Senator **Ken Salazar**; **Ray Rose** - State Representative District 58; **Gail Schwartz** - 5th State Senate District; **Kathleen Curry** - State Representative District 61; **John Whitney**, representing **John Salazar**; and **Lewis Entz** - 5th State Senate District, were able to see first hand what is happening in the world of natural resources conservation in the Gunnison area.

The tour began with project reports from the Delta, San Miguel, Shavano, and Gunnison conservation districts. Each district discussed its top natural resource concerns, ongoing and completed projects, educational efforts, and partnerships.

After the information exchange, the group was transported over to Representative Kathleen Curry and her husband, **Greg Peterson's** ranch, where they enjoyed a lunch filled with savory delicacies raised right there in the valley. The group was able to hear a brief word from current congressional representatives and those who are running for office.

Following lunch, the group headed to Razor Creek Ranch, a ranch owned by Peterson, who is also the Secretary/Treasurer for the Gunnison Conservation District. There, the group listened to discussions on a study that was conducted to improve sagebrush habitat for Gunnison Sage-grouse in combination with managed livestock grazing on approximately 400 acres of Peterson's ranch.

The group was also shown the Gunnison Sage-Grouse hay meadow interface inter-seeding project. This project included 62 landowners and the seeding of a total of 1676 acres, or 115 miles, of sagebrush/wet meadow interface.

This was a clover inter-seeding project that aerially applied Alsike Clover and Mammoth Red Clover into a 150-foot buffer below irrigation ditches next to the sagebrush interface. The goal of the project was to increase the clover component that sage-grouse use for brood rearing in hopes of increasing the supply of insects and high quality leafy protein for adults and their chicks.

At the end of the tour, members of the group expressed a sincere appreciation for the work being done in the Gunnison/Dolores Watershed by the conservation districts, NRCS, and other natural resource partners. Another tour is projected for next year. ♦



From left, Ray Rose- State Representative District 58, Lewis Entz- State Senator, and Kathleen Curry- State Representative District 61, converse at the luncheon.



David Doty, Area Conservationist, and John Scott, District Conservationist, discuss the Gunnison Sage-Grouse hay meadow interface inter-seeding project.

Soil-Vegetation Correlation on Southern Ute Land

By **J.P. Pannell**, *Soil Survey Project Leader*

In 2005 the NRCS entered into an agreement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to conduct a vegetation inventory on the Southern Ute Reservation in Archuleta County. There are about 192,000 acres of tribal lands in the county.

To accomplish this task two college students were hired for the summer. They were Nathan Strode from Colorado City, Texas and Dave Bibicki from Bryan, Texas. The first few days were used for training and getting acquainted with the area. Training was provided by Herman Garcia, State Range Conservationist. Herman also provided oversight and assistance to the two range students.

The sites to represent typical soil and vegetation for an area were selected before the range students went to the field. They then proceeded to the site and made an inventory of the vegetation. The plants were clipped and bagged for drying and weighing later.

This information was then used by Range Conservationists Herman Garcia and Scott Woodall and Soil Scientist J.P. Pannell to assign ecological sites to the map units on the Southern Ute lands. This was needed for the soil survey of Archuleta County and has now been entered into NASIS (National Soils Information System). This is a start to getting the soil-range correlation on the entire Archuleta Soil Survey Area. ♦

NRCS Begins to Learn its ABCs

NRCS recently implemented an innovative workload analysis data collection process called Activity-Based Costing – 2006 (ABC-2006). ABC provides the foundation from which NRCS leadership strategizes budgets, analyzes Farm Bill program activities and accomplishments, as well as manages human capital. In the up and coming months, ABC-2006 will prove to be one of the agency's highest priorities.

During the second week of September, NRCS will hold a training session designed to educate representatives from each state, who will in turn provide ABC training within their home state. After states complete their individual training sessions, the week of October 23, 2006 will

be designated for mandatory ABC data entry within every NRCS field office.

“This is just one of the components of our Agency’s accountability system and our field office employees are an integral part of ensuring its success,” says **Allen Green**, NRCS State Conservationist, Colorado. *“The information that can be extracted from ABC is vital to our mission. It’s an important component of our accountability system and we understand its benefits. Training and data entry is crucial.”*

Upon the implementation of ABC-generated information, employees will notice an increase in the time they have to deliver NRCS programmatic products and services. ABC-

2006 data will also provide a solid foundation for State Conservationists and other managers to perform analysis for performance planning. Data will be collected by District Conservationists in each field office and by selected state-level program managers using a web-based tool to allow for more efficient data collection and real-time quality assurance.

NRCS is directed to complete a workload analysis every third year based on Agency programs, Agency mandates, or as otherwise directed by the Deputy Chief, Strategic Planning and Accountability. The last workload analysis WLA 2001 was completed in 2000. ♦

Colorado Hosts NACD Annual Executive Directors' Conference

By **Petra Barnes**, *State Public Affairs Specialist*

"This was a great information sharing and networking opportunity," said **Callie Hendrickson**, Colorado Association of Conservation Districts (CACD) Executive Director.

Callie was referencing some of the benefits of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Executive Directors' Conference. This year's meeting was held in Colorado, August 7 – 9.

The three-day conference was packed with speakers and hands-on workshops with topics ranging from the Farm Bill, to Fundraising Opportunities, to Board Development.

"This is one our most important conferences," says **Beth Mason**, NACD Administrative Assistant, North Central Region and conference coordinator. "It is one of the few opportunities our Executive Directors have to first come together as a unit, and then to come together for the sole purpose of gathering and sharing information and ideas that will enhance their abilities as Executive Directors."

There were a total of 12 Directors who attended this year's conference.

"Although in 2006 we had 35 State Association Directors, only about 1/3 were able to attend this year's meeting," Mason goes on to say. "We, of course, would love to have full participation, but we know funding can be an issue as well as staffing the office in the Director's absence. Some states have no additional help, so the Executive Director is it; and taking time off, for even the best of reasons becomes problematic."

The purpose of the meeting is for the Executive Directors to share information, become familiar and network with one another, and then go back to their states with knowledge and education that will enhance their state association.

"We at NACD know that these Directors are under a lot of pressure and again with limited funding and often times limited staff, the load can get heavy. This is an opportunity to re-charge and become rejuvenated," Mason further states. "I have seen the light bulbs of inspiration come on during this conference. That feels good."

Featured speakers for the conference included **Keira Franz**, NACD Director of Government Affairs; **Lisa Lerwick**, NACD Director of Communications; **Scott Carter**, Director of Development, YMCA of the




Callie Hendrickson, CACD executive director, and Todd Boldt, Fort Collins Field Office district conservationist, talk during a field tour.

Rockies; **John Larson**, Washington Association of Conservation District's Executive Director; **Nathan Clark**, Economist, Chicago Climate Exchange; **Fred Hammon**, Administrator, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Ohio; and **Debra Bogar**, NACD Regional Representative.

"In addition to all the great speeches and workshops, we did make time to get out and see some conservation on the land," said Hendrickson. "We visited the MacGregor Ranch in Estes Park, toured the 2,000 acre property and enjoyed hearing about its rich and important history."

Eric Adams, Executive Director of the MacGregor Ranch, explained that the ranch's roots date back to the 1870s. **Muriel MacGregor's** grandparents left the ranch to her and upon her passing she commissioned the property to perpetually serve as a working ranch as well as an education facility for young people.

"This is the fourth year I've been a part of coordinating the conference," Mason goes on to say. "And they just keep getting better with each year. I am very much looking forward to seeing everyone again and what the next conference brings."

The 2007 conference will be held in New York State. For additional information about this year's conference as well as next year's, please contact Beth Mason at beth-mason@nacdn.net or by calling 317-738-3849. You may also visit www.nacdn.net. 

Former CACD President Participates in NRCS “Walk-A-Mile in My Boots” Program

By Katherine Burse-Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist



From left, Mike Byrne, California; John Boelts, Arizona; former Chief Bruce Knight; and Randy Loutzenhiser, Colorado; during Walk-A-Mile visit in Washington, D.C.

Flagler farm producer and former Colorado Association of Conservation Districts President **Randy Loutzenhiser** recently participated in the “Walk-A-Mile in My Boots” program in Washington, D.C.

Through this program, Loutzenhiser spent one week at NRCS National Headquarters visiting and working with Regional Assistant Chief - West, **Sara Braasch**. He also had the opportunity to meet with former NRCS Chief **Bruce Knight**.

“I think this program was a worthwhile event and I felt privileged to have had the opportunity to learn about the different activities and programs that NRCS offers,” said Loutzenhiser.

Loutzenhiser, along with two other producers from Arizona and California, were given a tour of headquarters and briefed on various NRCS conservation issues. They met with staff specialists who explained the conservation watershed approach, talked about soil survey and the avian flu, and provided an update on the next farm bill.

“I especially enjoyed hearing about the new NRCS strategic plan and receiving the book that outlines where NRCS is headed in the future,” said Loutzenhiser.

Loutzenhiser initially heard about the program through NACD but was approached by NRCS State Conservationist **Allen Green** to give the program a try. He said that he was glad that he participated in the program and would do it again if the opportunity presented itself.

The “Walk a Mile in My Boots” initiative is a work-exchange program between agricultural producers and government employees. NRCS is working with the National Association of Conservation Districts to implement this partnership program that was developed by the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

During the one- to two-week exchanges, ranchers and farmers participate as Earth Team volunteers and visit NRCS offices at the field, State, or national headquarters level where they shadow an NRCS employee.

For more information about the “Walk a Mile in My Boots” program, visit our website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/volunteers/walk-mile/walkamile.html or contact **Bonnie Weller**, NRCS National Volunteer Liaison, at 515-289-0325, ext. 105. ♦

Pleasure in the Job puts Perfection in the Work

Renovation of C-4 dam complete

Reprint with two corrections with permission from the Canon City *Daily Record*
 Debbie Bell, Writer

Work on a flood control dam just south of town has been finished following a state order to fix it or breach it.

"The dam got to the point it really did need to be repaired," said **Larry Wilson**, civil engineer with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. *"The old dam started developing cracks and holes."*

Known as C-4, the earthen dam was originally built in 1971 by the NRCS with support from the Fremont Conservation District. That organization also provided support for the restructuring of the dam. Wilson said if C-4 was not fixed, the state would have ordered the destruction of the dam.

"We came in and removed the upstream face (facing south) of the dam," Wilson said. *"We dug out the bad foundation."*

Workers added a drainage system and then replaced more than 50,000 cubic yards of soil. Work began on the project in May. **Rob Fontaine**, NRCS construction inspector, said the operation ran smoothly.



At the dam completion ceremony from left are Rick Romano, Canon City F.O.; Rob Fontaine, Canon City F.O.; Ed Norden, Fremont County Commissioner; Dana Angel, Fremont County Finance Director; Larry Wilson, Rocky Mountain Engineering Team; and Larry Lasha, Fremont County Commissioner.

Progress Comes Slowly

Doug Ramsey, RC&D Coord.



Volunteers and D-TAG members cut and treat tamarisk at the McElmo Demonstration Site. Just a half-acre of cut tamarisk created enough slash to fill a boxcar.

With the sound of chainsaws, the effort to reclaim what was begins. Over the last decade, the detrimental effects that invasive plants have had on our watersheds and wild places has been recognized. With vast expanses of tamarisk and Russian Olive dominating the riparian zones of the San Juan Basin, a group is beginning to make progress in controlling

these invaders and reclaiming these important areas in our watersheds.

The Dolores River Action Group (D-TAG) is making progress on several fronts. During the fall of 2005, over 50 miles of shoreline on McPhee Reservoir were treated. In addition, 25 landowners participated in the inventory and treatment of Lost Canyon. Follow-up surveys in 2006 have identified "escapees" missed during the initial treatment and have since been treated. Initial success is encouraging, but the true measure of success will be measured in the coming years.

While large treatment projects on public lands are very important, the efforts will be diminished without the control of tamarisk on private lands. The Dolores Conservation District and NRCS have promoted the EQIP Invasive Plant Program as a tool to move control to private lands. Their successful efforts have yielded over 300 acres of private land that will be treated for tamarisk control. The 11 separate land owners represent a commitment of

over \$200,000 toward revitalizing and improving the local watersheds.

While these control projects are moving forward, there remains much to be done. The largest effort is to educate and motivate the remaining land owners to the problem and risks. The D-TAG project has set in motion a strong educational program to provide outreach to the community. Realizing that action speaks louder than words, a demonstration project will show the results that can be achieved in restoring these riparian areas. Located along a highly traveled county road with proximate signage and exposure, the McElmo Demonstration Site will show the effects of several methods of control. This strong educational program can show the benefits to everyone.

While progress is being made, it will take many years to reverse the decades of infestation by these aggressive plants. Progress comes slow, but each acre treated is slowly helping to improve the watershed.

Dry times test farmers' patience

Reprint from *The Pueblo Chieftain* -- Chris Woodka, Writer



State Senator Ken Kester, R-Las Animas, listens as Avondale rancher Emmett Seal explains the effect the current drought is having on his operation. Kester met with a number of local farmers and ranchers as well as agriculture officials on Seal's ranch.

Almost on cue, the sun beat down and winds whipped the parched prairie on **Emmett Seal's** Avondale ranch as farmers gathered to discuss the effects of the drought.

A small group that included some state and federal agriculture officials as well as irrigated and dryland farmers gathered at the request of State **Sen. Ken Kester**, R-Las Animas.

Kester said he and others will ask **Gov. Bill Owens** to declare a drought emergency for the Southern Colorado as hot, dry conditions worsen the farm outlook. Rainfall is about half of average in the region, while high temperatures accelerated snowmelt and runoff.

Kester used the opportunity to speak out against allowing any more urban water purchases and leases.

"I can't imagine what it's going to look like," Kester said. "The whole valley is going to look like Crowley County if this continues. We can't continue as a state to grow by 1 million people every 10 years. We've got to slow it down and not let them take the water off the land."

Seal said his pasture land actually is in good shape, compared to the 2002 drought, when the grass actually died.

"Compared to 2002, this looks like an oasis," Seal said. "With good rains, the grass comes back. This is forgiving country, but you have to be patient."

But the drought set up an invasion of weeds in 2003. For the past two years, the grass has recovered, but it is taking a hit again.

"It's a lot worse other places. We've been lucky here because we had a couple of nice rains. A week ago, this was pretty green," said Seal, a retired Pueblo pharmacist who has farmed at Avondale for 30 years. *"But in a drought, the rains are hit and miss - more miss than hit."*

Irrigated farms have seen large early runs, but will probably have to cut back as supplies are expected to dwindle later this summer, said **Tom Rusler**, who raises pinto beans, onions, wheat, corn and peppers at Avondale.

"The drought has affected us in planning," Rusler said. *"We're just guessing how long the water will last. . . It's tough. You don't know whether you'll have water or workers for that matter, because of the immigration laws."*

Rusler farms on the Bessemer Ditch, which takes high-quality water directly from Pueblo Dam to irrigate 20,000 acres of farms on the St. Charles Mesa.

Prices for commodities like wheat and hay are higher than they've been in years, Rusler said. But that's only because production throughout the state has decreased so much. On his own farm, about 20 percent of the land is in "preventive planting," which preserves the soil but produces no revenue.

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He said the regional drought in other states is having ripples in Colorado. For instance, onion sets planted at his farm are harvested from farms in Avondale, Ariz.

“Those onions went all winter without water. The yields were pretty low,” Rusler said.

Rusler also criticized farm water sales or leases to cities, saying it hurts the area economy. His father, **Bill Rusler**, is an implement dealer, with business dependent on the agricultural economy. The Ruslers also ship produce and must make decisions about investing in new equipment for that operation.

“Where are the cities going to get water from the river? We’re in a big bull’s-eye out here,” Rusler said. *“If the water leaves, all these businesses will fail. If it stays, they might fail anyway.”*

He said leases are no better than sales in terms of their impact on the farm economy.

Leases just don’t work. You can’t turn on and turn off a farm,” Rusler said. *“And what am I going to do with the 15 people I employ?”*

Bessemer Ditch water quality and delivery is superior to other ditches in the Arkansas Valley, Rusler said. Salinity increases as the river flows east and flows are lost as it moves down a river increasing choked with tamarisk.

The poor conditions further downstream were confirmed by **Leroy Brase**, whose family has farmed on the Fort Lyon Ditch near Lamar for more than 50 years. He said this drought is worse than past decades, because the dry years have not been punctuated by above-average years.

“Only about 10 percent of the land in corn got planted,” said Brase, who in recent years has only planted 240 acres of his 400-acre farm. *“You can’t irrigate enough. There’s not enough moisture to grow weeds.”*

Rod Johnson of the Farm Service Agency said grazing land in Kiowa County has deteriorated during five years of drought, because it has not been grazed.

He said government programs will make conservation reserve lands available for emergency grazing.

Ed Hiza, who ranches north of Fowler, argued more lenient grazing rules are already in place, but Johnson said each rancher’s individual circumstance should be looked at to determine if emergency grazing is needed.

Federal drought assistance could mean low-interest loans to help farmers, but some aren’t sure that’s the right answer.

“We don’t need loans; we need income,” Brase said. *“You can’t borrow yourself out of debt.”* ◆



Tom Rusler talks about the effect the drought is having on his farming operation near Avondale.

Colorado River Watershed hosts its first conservation tour

By Katherine Burse-Johnson, *Public Affairs Specialist*



Scott Nock, a board member of the Bookcliff Conservation District, explains his recent endeavor -- energy development and an EQIP irrigation project system designed around a drill pad.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Bookcliff, Mount Sopris, and South Side Conservation Districts hosted its first Colorado River Watershed Conservation Tour in Silt, Colorado.

The purpose of the tour was to show congressional representatives and others a small portion of what has been accomplished in the last several years in the Silt/Rifle area through partnerships and through the determination and hard work of landowners.

The tour kicked off with a welcome from **Dave Abbott**, Colorado Watershed President.

After that, approximately 50 attendees boarded a bus and spent the entire day touring projects and other NRCS and conservation district activities.

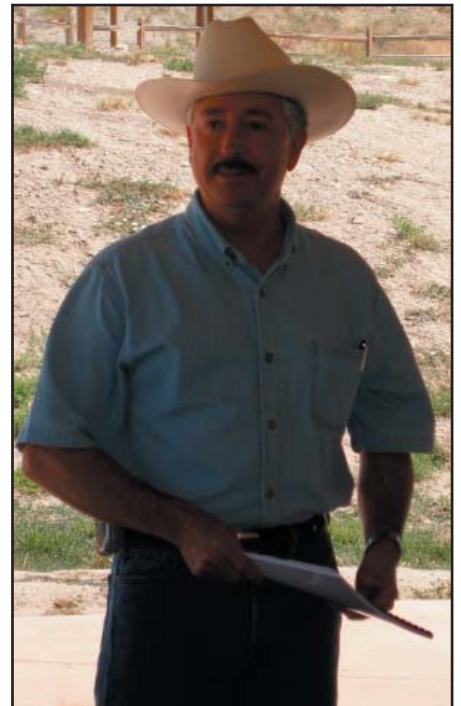
During the first stop, the tourists were taken to the Silt Diversion Project, which is a cost-share program involving NRCS, Colorado River Conservation Board and other partners. The project was built in 2000 and is a concrete and rock diversion with the headgate structure in a side channel approximately 1,000 feet upstream.

The Silt Diversion was built on the off-channel of the Silt Canal and directs water to a pumping station, which is then used in irrigation systems. The old structure was vulnerable to seasonal flooding and was rebuilt on an annual basis.

"This new system was a great investment for everyone," said **Carl Zimmerman**, Colorado State Soil Conservation Board, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Zimmerman said the new structure was virtually maintenance-free from runoffs and flood events because it uses current technology to reduce habitat loss, increase river stability, improve aquatic habitat and improve riverbank vegetation.

The next stop on the tour involved visiting knapweed control test plots. Knapweed infests approximately 25 percent of the Dry Hollow drainage area, which is located in Garfield County. NRCS, along with the conservation districts, Garfield County weed commissioners and weed management, worked together to provide treatment options for this noxious weed. **Dennis Davidson**, District Conservationist, NRCS Glenwood Springs Field Office, provides technical expertise to the review committee. The project is in its sixth year and continues to be a success.



Congressman John Salazar addresses the need for alternative energy for the future of agriculture during the lunch break at Rifle Gap State Park.

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Moving on, the group found themselves exploring the Silt Salinity Control Project, which was designed to reduce the salt loading to the Colorado River from irrigated agriculture. This includes the irrigation water delivery systems in the project area. The project was funded through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds and through the Colorado River Conservancy District funds.

NRCS and its partners completed the project using a group of four landowners with approximately 434 acres. Five sideroll sprinklers, big gun sprinklers, and gated pipe were installed to properly irrigate and manage the resources.

After that, the group took a break and headed to Rifle Gap State Park and had lunch with **Congressman John Salazar**. There he addressed the need for

alternative energy for the future of agriculture. Other congressional representatives in attendance at the event included: a representative for **Ken Salazar**; State Representative **Al White**; State Senate Candidate **Gail Schwartz**; Garfield County Commissioner Candidate **Steve Reynolds**; Mesa County Commissioner Candidate **Eric Rechel**; and Eagle County Commissioner Candidate **Mike Lederhaus**.

The last part of the tour involved visiting landowner **Scott Nock**'s ranch to learn about energy development and an EQIP irrigation project system designed around a drill pad. Nock, who is also a board member of the Bookcliff Conservation District, runs a small cow/calf operation featuring registered Dexter cattle on his 350-acre farm.

He is working with NRCS and a small gas company, Noble Energy, to create a new farm product called "natural

gas." Nock claims that today's ranches cannot exist on its own income and says that landowners who have retained their mineral rights can now benefit by being able to fund some of the neglected practices of the past such as renovating pastures, repairing ditches and putting in new irrigation systems.

"Landowners who were forced to sell their land parcels to survive can now use the ownership of mineral rights to spend not only on themselves and their families but also on their ranches," Nock said. "They can now install a pipeline and sprinklers through an EQIP program, something they were unable to do in the past."

In conclusion, the group saw conservation efforts demonstrated by NRCS, conservation districts, and other partners to keep conservation on the ground. Through these projects they continue in their mission of helping people help the land.



A landowner in Garfield County explains the rapid spread of knapweed, a troublesome noxious weed that plagues the area.



Attendees at the Colorado River Watershed tour were able to view the Silt Diversion Project that was built in 2000 as a means to divert water that will be used in irrigation systems.

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