



California

DECEMBER/
JANUARY 2005

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

**Yolo County:
"The Green Jewel
of the Region"**

***Soil Detectives
in Tulare County***

**Area 4 Watershed
Recovery Update**

***Innovation &
Central Coast
Ranchers***

***Kroschel
fights
wildfires
in Shasta
County***

*Keeping up with
Dale Kroschel,
NRCS Rangeland
Management Specialist*





A Message From Chuck Bell, State Conservationist

to visit new areas and see the many projects and activities NRCS and its partners are involved with. Many thanks to the hosting NRCS offices, Resource Conservation Districts, and others involved.

It was especially nice to be on hand for the **Orroville Service Center** and NRCS Field Office opening celebration in October. The Orroville Service Center, which also houses the Butte County RCD, is a beautiful facility. The district has been very active and has quickly made a name for itself in the county.

NRCS was invited to two **PL-566** anniversary events recently. As you may know, 2004 marks the 50th anniversary of this extremely important NRCS conservation program. NRCS attended one event sponsored by Ventura County and another at Santa Rosa sponsored by the City of Santa Rosa and Sotoyome RCD.

Daniel Mountjoy, Brian Leahy of CARCD, and I were invited to participate in the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award presentation in Sacramento. **Sustainable Conservation** received the award for their *Partners in Restoration* program. Their award was under the category of Watershed and Ecosystem Restoration. NRCS, as you know, has

been a vital partner in this important program to streamline permitting for agricultural producers and others who are implementing conservation measures in selected watersheds. **Ashley Boren**, Executive Director of Sustainable Conservation, requested that NRCS participate in the award event.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) "migration" and the rollout of the Conservation Security Program (CSP) are the "hot items" now in Calif. State Office technical and management staff are scrambling to get ready for the signup sometime in January. EQIP migration will be successful, however, we do have a number of hurdles to overcome, such as software fixes. Many of you have taken up this challenge with a very positive attitude, and that is much appreciated. It will take some time but, when it is over, it will be far easier to develop plans, and track payments and progress. All of you helped us to achieve a banner year for conservation in 2004, and your efforts are greatly appreciated. No one can do it better than committed, trained, NRCS staff. That fact should be abundantly clear by now.

Thanks to everyone for a great year and have a happy holiday season!

Best wishes to all of you during this wonderful holiday season. We have much to be thankful for, and I trust you will enjoy your time together with family and friends.

Thanks to each of you for your continued commitment to conservation and for supporting agriculture and other critical issues in Calif. We were happy to send many NRCS staff to the **Calif. Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD)** meeting at San Luis Obispo and to the **Agricultural Symposium** at Paso Robles. It is always great

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Dale Kroschell: The McArthur Local Partnership Office Rangeland Management Specialist is dedicated to NRCS and his community. See article on page 3. *Photo: Dave Sanden / Design: Jim Cairns*

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California Current Developments magazine is published six times a year
 Next issue deadline: January 24, 2005
 Materials submitted may be edited for content, clarity & length
 Some photos have been digitally enhanced

Kroschel Fights Wildfires In Shasta County

By *Dave Sanden*
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff

About 2 p.m. on August 11, a fire sparked by a lawnmower ignited dry grass and quickly spread to nearby brush and trees. Soon, smoke blanketed Jones Valley as flames roared through pines and blackened hillsides.

The wind-driven **Bear Fire** wreaked havoc throughout the valley and forced evacuations from the community and nearby resorts on Shasta Lake. Homes and structures burned as aircraft zoomed overhead in attempts to drench the flames with water and retardant. The town began to sound like a war zone as propane tanks and ammunition exploded.

On the fire's first day, 75 engines, eight dozers, 10 hand crews, eight air tankers, one air attack aircraft, three helicopters, seven water tenders, and 707 personnel were brought in to fight the blaze. Among the firefighters was **Dale Kroschel**, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist at the McArthur Local Partnership Office.

Kroschel, a member of the **McArthur Volunteer Fire Department** (MVFD), rushed to Jones Valley to help protect 350 threatened homes and suppress the blaze. Eventually, firefighters and resources were called in from all over Calif. to contain the Bear Fire, which charred 10,484 acres and destroyed 80 residences and 30 outbuildings.

As the Bear fire raged, an even larger fire broke out on August 14 along French Gulch in western Shasta County. The MVFD crews were again called to help. But because fire blocked the access road, their trucks had to race straight through flames to reach a threatened trailer park. Kroschel and his crew fought the fire until August 17, helping to save nearly 50 homes. Before fully contained on August 21, the French Gulch fire burned 13,005 acres

and destroyed 26 homes, one commercial property, and 76 outbuildings.

"The fires reinforced my appreciation for the value of firesafe practices around homes," said Kroschel. "In fast-moving wildfires like these, fire response coordinators are forced to use a triage system to quickly identify structures that can be saved," he noted. "Structures with lots of dangerous brush or trash around them are flagged as lower priority. Cleaning up your property and maintaining a defensible space can really pay off."

Kroschel has been with MVFD for more than a year, and is also active in his community in other ways. "Dale is extremely dedicated, and is not only a tremendous asset to NRCS, but also to his community," says **Bob Bailey**, District Conservationist, Redding Field Office. "In addition to his service to the McArthur Volunteer Fire Department, Dale has assisted local 4-H programs and volunteered his time as assistant wrestling coach at the local high school. Dale's Community service activities bring credit to himself and NRCS."



A threatened house sits vulnerable at the bottom of a denuded hillside in the aftermath of wildfire. *Photo: Dave Sanden*

By *Dave Sanden*
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff

Even before the Bear Fire was fully contained on August 16, NRCS staff from Redding and other offices was organizing crucial planning efforts and preventative practices to begin rehabilitation of the wildfire damage to private lands.

The Bear Fire burned 10,484 acres in Shasta County, including 6,909 acres of private lands. Jones Valley, where the fire began, lost many homes and other structures in the blaze. After the fire, the community faced a new threat from storm runoff and debris flow from the steep, denuded hillsides surrounding the valley.

In the days after the fire, NRCS worked with the **Forest Service's Burned Area Emergency Response team** (BAER) to evaluate damage to the watershed and identify potential threats to lives and

property from post-fire flooding and debris flow. District Conservationist **Bob Bailey**, Range Conservationist **Todd Golder**, Agricultural Engineer **Benji "Bo" Hands**, Area Soil Scientist **Jim Komar**, Area Engineer **Tom Benson** and others quickly documented the fire's impact and developed a Damage Survey Report.

On August 30, State Conservationist **Chuck Bell** announced plans for an Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) project to protect Jones Valley residents from post-fire flooding and debris flow.

"NRCS identified several threatened homes and other potential problem areas in Jones Valley during post-fire damage assessments conducted last week," said Bell. "The burned hillsides are highly susceptible to erosion, and lives and property would be at risk from winter runoff and landslides if corrective practices are not implemented."

Funds were immediately made available through the EWP program for the Jones

Valley project. With an estimated cost of more than \$250,000, the project will include mulching and hydroseeding to stabilize steep, denuded hillsides; drainage pipe installation; sandbag placement to convey water away from homes, and installation of trash racks to prevent the clogging of culverts.

"They need protection," Bailey said following the announcement. "Certainly, what we're proposing will not only protect those structures, but have a benefit to the greater area."

The Bear Fire EWP project includes installation of 1,900 linear feet of sand bags to protect 16 threatened homes, mulching on 55 acres, and hydro-mulching on 32 acres. **Shasta County's Department of Public Works** is the project's local sponsor and is providing 6.5 percent of the 25 percent cost share for the work, with the state Office of Emergency Services providing 18.5 percent. **Western Shasta RCD** is coordinating the project.

EWP Project To Protect Jones Valley Residents In Wake Of Bear Fire

Yolo County: “The Green Jewel Of The Region”

By **Phil Hogan**
District Conservationist/Woodland

high quality land, abundant water, strong political will, and a passion shared by a diverse public to protect this part of Calif.

Any beautiful jewel is eventually discovered and coveted. Flat fields, oak-dotted hills and the Interior Coast Range make tempting places to live.

Cracks are forming in the dike of farmland protection efforts here. Construction has increased around Winters, Davis and West Sacramento. Woodland features a Home Depot, Holiday Inn Express, new shopping centers, large subdivisions, and Wal-Mart. Woodland’s population has increased 100 percent in the last 25 years.

John Bencomo, Director of the County of Yolo’s Planning and Public Works Department, stated in the *Sacramento Bee*

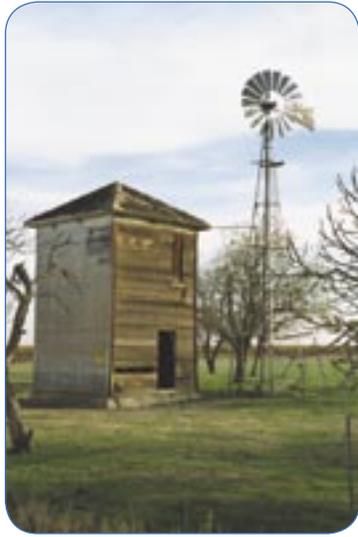
article “Developers Eyeing Rural Yolo County” that “Yolo County is on the map now. People are recognizing it more in terms of speculative development. The County is pretty much staunch in its position of agricultural preservation, and I don’t see that changing.” However, applications for building projects have increased by 30 percent in recent years.

We can learn from other areas that have not been as innovative as Yolo County with farmland protection. If we lose this resource, there will be heartbreak, on a grand scale. There would no longer be the ability to produce food for local consumption, or open landscapes to gaze out upon and dream.

Communities throughout Calif. look to Yolo County for leadership in farmland protection. The Woodland Service Center is a partner in this leadership effort.

Yolo County’s beauty is subtle, but a closer look reveals:

- Lonely oaks that appear to be floating in a sea of fog amid a winter’s fallow field
- A mass of Calif. poppies on a road cut through the Dunning Hills
- Rows of vineyards running up and down the steep slopes of the hills of Oat Valley
- A rare dusting of snow on the Blue Ridge
- Cache Creek’s sinuous curves outlined by blooming Redbuds
- The early morning sun filtered by the haphazard boards of an abandoned barn
- Late February’s profusion of pinkish almond tree flowers
- A patch of intact riparian forest on the Sacramento River



An old pumphouse in Hungry Hollow on County Road 87 in Yolo County. Photo: Phil Hogan

Freeways, railroads, its proximity to Sacramento, and relatively cheap land have long provided the ingredients for growth in Yolo County. Yet, this special place remains largely rural.

Mariko Yamada, member of the Board of Supervisors, calls Yolo County “the green jewel of the region” due to

Innovative Mobile Processor Helps Central Coast Ranchers

By **Jeff Raifsnider**
*Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Salinas*

An alliance of Central Calif. ranchers has adapted new mobile meat processing technology to develop their market niche for home-grown meat products. Government and non-profit organizations rallied to assist the **Central Coast Home Grown Meat Alliance** build the second mobile meat processing unit (MPU) in the U.S.

The MPU was christened just before its inaugural use during a ceremony held on a Parkfield ranch in mid-August. The ceremony followed Parkfield’s first Congressional town hall meeting which was

held by **U.S. Rep. Sam Farr** (D-CA).

The idea to build the MPU came from **George Work**, a Monterey County rancher and a founding member of the Alliance. Work wanted to recreate the success of the first MPU that has operated in Wash. state for about three years.

Work approached Rep. Farr’s Monterey County office for assistance in helping local ranchers meet the increasing demand for locally finished and humanely raised and processed meat products. Rep. Farr was able to find a \$138,000 grant from a non-profit organization to build the MPU.

According to Central Coast RC&D Coordinator **Jeff Rodriguez**, there is currently only one USDA approved cut-

and-wrap facility in the area to process the meat into smaller cuts. The lack of processing makes it difficult to cost-effectively produce and market their products. The MPU enables butchering on remote ranches and provides transport to a USDA approved cut-and-wrap facility. The Alliance is encouraging the development of additional USDA approved cut-and-wrap facilities.

Rodriguez said, “Local ranchers will be able to market meat products directly to the consumer once USDA certification is received. There is a demand for meat raised locally and harvested under

low stress. Now our ranchers have the option of marketing directly to the consumer.”

The **Central Coast RC&D** helped with the formation of the Central Coast Home Grown Meat Alliance. The **Monterey County Agricultural and Historic Land Conservancy Inc.** used its non-profit status to assist the Alliance in acquiring the \$138,000 Federal grant.

The Alliance also received a \$50,000 **USDA Rural Development** grant for value-added agricultural product market development.



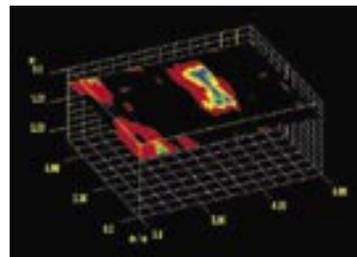
Area 2 ASTCFO Carter Christensen (center) visits with Central Coast ranchers, George Work (left) and Rex Swan after the mobile processing unit’s christening. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider



“Soil Detectives” Use Ground Penetrating Radar To Investigate Buried Anomalies

*By Brian Ziegler
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Fresno*

Frank Deitz (left) and Jim Doolittle use ground penetrating radar to detect anomalies beneath the soil in southwest Tulare County. *Photo: Brian Ziegler*



An ancient artifact? A suspect feature appears in the upper right of this image taken onsite. *Photo courtesy of Brian Ziegler*

“There’s something down there,” Research Soil Scientist **Jim Doolittle** says to Area 3 Biologist **Larry Norris**. “The question now is what is it?”

The two, along with State Cultural Resource Specialist **Frank Deitz**, are in southwest Tulare County examining a field soon to be converted into wetlands. The area is known to have been inhabited by Native Americans dating back some 9,000 years.

Doolittle is trying to locate ancient artifacts before the site becomes flooded with water. He uses a device called a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to help him detect anomalies beneath the surface.

Such a device has been in use by NRCS since 1979, mostly on the East Coast. It typically is used in soil surveys as well as water table and bedrock investigations. On this day, however, the Pennsylvania-based Doolittle uses it to note where manmade objects, or even human remains, might be buried.

“We hired an archaeology consulting firm who came up with a

map of high concentrations of surface artifacts,” says Norris, the NRCS lead person on this Wetlands Reserve Program project. “The design of the project was changed to go around those areas. Now we want to see what else might be underneath.”

The search provides training for Deitz, who will soon be using a similar GPR unit to find underground anomalies in culturally sensitive areas in Calif., the only such device deployed by NRCS west of the Mississippi River.

He says it’s important for NRCS employees to include cultural resource studies when writing conservation plans. “Sites like this may mean something to people whose ancestors lived here long before Europeans arrived.”

Despite having to look through unfavorable soil that has high clay and salt content,

Deitz detects a linear feature about three feet wide by nearly six feet long, and buried 16 inches deep.

“The linearity of this feature is artificial,” Doolittle says, after studying three-dimensional radar images of it. “Natural patterns of soils and soil properties are rarely so linear.”

So what have the soil detectives located? An ancient burial site or a modern irrigation pipe? We may never know. Norris says the property owner and a nearby Indian tribe agree that anything discovered will be left buried and the site be reverted back to its natural state.

NRCS Project Changes Name To Watershed Recovery Project

*By Paul Laustsen
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Riverside*

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has changed the name of its **Tree Mortality Program** to the **Watershed Recovery Project**. The project provides technical assistance and funding to remove dead and dying trees and helps impaired watersheds recover.

The Watershed Recovery Project, which falls under the NRCS **Emergency Watershed Protection Program** (EWP), is a holistic approach to removing

dead and dying trees on private land. This work includes a natural resource assessment of the affected watershed. Cultural resources, endangered species, soil erosion, vegetation, wildlife and community safety are all important factors that are considered before and during project work.

Two years ago, three Southern Calif. counties requested NRCS assistance to help remove dead and dying trees on private lands in mountain communities. District Conservationists and Emergency Watershed

Protection Program managers developed a comprehensive proposal explaining why the project was essential to the health of mountain communities.

After the October wildfires hit last year, legislators realized that NRCS’s plan was solid and addressed the concerns of the community and needed immediate implementation.

While valiant firefighting saved many of the communities, as much as 90 percent of the dead trees remain standing, keeping the threat to life and

property at a dangerous level.

In the beginning of 2004, NRCS was provided with approximately \$150 million in EWP funding. Of this total, \$120 million was apportioned for use in dead tree removal and associated erosion control in priority areas in the three impacted counties of **Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego**.

For more information on the EWP Program, visit www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov or call the Riverside Area Office at (951) 684-3722, ex. 104.



EQIP Projects Help Save Homes From Fiery Destruction



An EQIP brush management project saved this house during the French Gulch fire. *Photo: Todd Colder*

By Dave Sanden

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff

A brush management project funded through the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** saved a home near Highway 299 from incineration during the devastating **French Gulch fire** in August.

The homeowner had built the house himself from foothill pine found on his property. Due to his concern for the area's high fire risk and the house's proximity to the highway, the landowner applied for cost-share funding through EQIP to clear brush and highly flammable manzanita from about two acres around his home, which sits near the base of a steep hill. The work was carried out in phases over a period of months.

When the French Gulch fire came raging down the hill towards the house from the north, it reached the fuel-cleared perimeter and stopped, having nothing to feed on. The fire then moved along the eastside of the cleared perimeter, with the wind helping it to jump a road. The fire renewed its attack from the eastside of the home, but was again prevented from reaching the house. The brush-cleared area also gave firefighters a tactical position to make a stand, enabling them to stop the fire before it jumped the highway and spread into **Whiskeytown National Recreation Area**.

Nearby, a second home was also spared from fiery destruction by another EQIP brush management project.

Cowpea Cover Crops Benefit Citrus Producers In Coachella Valley

By Ryan Bullard

Soil Conservation Aide/Riverside



NRCS Soil Conservationist Raul Alvarado (left) and Sam Aslan visit a Coachella Valley citrus orchard. *Photo courtesy of Paul Laustsen*

It is not easy to farm without using manmade chemicals to treat and protect crops. However, Coachella Valley farmers have found a new tool with the technical assistance NRCS.

Organic farmers in Coachella Valley are using cowpeas, a cover crop recommended by Indio District Conservationist **Sam Aslan**, to protect citrus against three common problems—heat, sunburn and weeds.

Heat, with temperatures that can exceed 100 degrees, is controlled by the cowpeas height. By surrounding the citrus, light is reduced, cooling the plant and minimizing the chance

of sunburn. This affects the micro-ecosystem that the plant creates to put itself in optimal growth range. Less sunburn and more growth means higher yields for farmers.

Another benefit of cowpeas is weed control. By limiting the light that reaches the soil, weeds have a hard time growing. This eliminates the need for herbicides.

There are more benefits below ground as demonstrated by the bean root system. In this system, the root zone houses nitrogen-fixing bacteria. This gives the ground an enrichment of this vital macronutrient making organic farming more productive. When the cover crop falls, the benefits rise.

In the cooler months, cowpeas die down allowing direct light exposure to the plant, which benefits the crop due to the decreased light in the cooler months. The dead matter serves as mulch, protecting the ground from erosion and providing nutrients to the soil.

Using cowpeas as a cover crop was originally intended to help date crops in the Coachella Valley, but the idea was adapted for use on a citrus farm several months later. The successful citrus crop last summer inspired farmers to move it to various types of crops next year.

The Indio Field Office held three field tours to cover the life cycle of the crop. For additional information, contact Sam Aslan at (760) 347-3675, ex. 116.

*'Round
the State*



NRCS at the fair: The NRCS Butte County Team hosted their first fair booth at the 2004 Butte County Fair in Gridley. This year's theme was *Blue Jeans and Country Dreams*. Pictured are Rob Vlach, Rangeland Management Specialist, and Susan Looper, Soil Conservationist. *Photo courtesy of Susan Looper*



Eagle Point on the rise: NRCSers participated in basic training for the new Eagle Point civil design software in Salinas in September. Eagle Point instructor Jim Reinbold also provided training at Riverside and Davis last summer. *Photo: Jeff Raifsnider*



On a wing and a prayer: "This is a picture of the falcon we helped recently," says Bob Hewitt, D.C. in San Jacinto. "It was found at our EWP job site with a broken wing. With the help of U.S. Forest Service biologists, we captured it, took it to the vet, and it is now in rehab in Murrieta. We hope to release it back to the Idyllwild area after it recovers. The prognosis looks good for the little guy!" *Photo courtesy of Bob Hewitt*

NRCS Helps Mosquito Take A Bite Out Of Fire

By Brian Ziegler

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Firefighters in the northern Calif. mountain community of Mosquito, located about 12 miles north of Placerville, will benefit from NRCS efforts to renovate Finnon Reservoir.

At one time the reservoir held 300 acre feet of water. But its dam has been determined not to be earthquake safe, so the state ordered the storage capacity lowered to 50 acre feet until the dam could be retrofitted.

Because of the high cost associated with the renovation, the **Calif. Department of Fish**

and Game sold it and 100 acres of adjoining land for \$1 to the **Mosquito Volunteer Fire Department**.

The Fire Department plans to use the reservoir to fight fires because it's the closest body of water other than the south fork of the American River where it can obtain large quantities of water.

NRCS and the **Georgetown Divide Resource Conservation District** are working on designing plans to renovate the dam and stabilize the reservoir's banks. The RCD is also trying to obtain grants to pay for environmental permits and



An NRCS effort to help renovate Finnon Reservoir will provide a source of water to fight fires in the mountain community of Mosquito near Placerville. *Photo: Jim Cairns*

has already raised \$10,000 from a nearby irrigation district.

Operating Engineers Union Local #3 from Rancho Murrieta has volunteered to rebuild the dam, provided the site can be used to train new construction workers on things such as moving soil. Once permits are in place, re-construction can begin.

Ore-Cal RC&D Achieves Massive MOU Signing For Scenic Byway

By Dave Sanden

Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Red Bluff

On October 14, representatives from seven counties, two states, and 38 government agencies, federally recognized tribes, and nonprofit organizations met in Mt. Shasta City to sign a memo of understanding (MOU) to facilitate the cooperative planning and management of the **Volcanic Legacy Byway, All America Road**. The signing ceremony was held at the former Roseburg Lumber Co. Mill, future site of a planned \$10 million Volcanic Legacy Discovery Center.

"The signing of this MOU by all of these diverse partners is an outstanding example of cooperation," said **John Halligan**, interim president of the **Volcanic Legacy Community Partnership**. The group, working largely through the **Ore-Cal RC&D Council**,

hopes to obtain various grants to promote the All America Road.

Christina Lillienthal, who promoted the idea of All America Road status in 1995 while working for the Winema National Forest in Klamath Falls, was the primary speaker. Lillienthal predicted that publicity will attract travelers and stimulate economies in communities along the route.

"Seeds are being planted to grow a crop of bounty for people of this area. Others will also find creative ways to connect and support each other in rural community development efforts," said Lillienthal. "The opportunities to sprout entrepreneurs throughout this 500-mile backbone to the backcountry are, indeed, unlimited."

Ore-Cal RC&D, **Fremont-Winema National Forests, Lassen National Forest**, and the Volcanic Legacy Community Partnership put

together the MOU, which creates a process that will facilitate Byway planning and development along the 500-mile "linear community" that runs through Klamath and Siskiyou counties. The purpose of the MOU is to establish a joint policy allowing the partners to work cooperatively to plan, implement and manage the Byway in accordance with the Volcanic Legacy Corridor Management Plan.

Through a campaign led by Ore-Cal RC&D, the Calif. portion of the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway—from the Oregon border to Lassen Volcanic National Park—was designated an All-American Road by the Federal Highway Administration in June 2002. According to a 2001 economic impact report, the All-American designation may increase economic output in the region by \$79 million and create as many as 1,232 new jobs by 2025.



John Halligan (center) calls MOU signers to the table as RC&D Coordinator Jim Vancura (left) gives commemorative lapel pins. *Photo: Dave Sanden*



"You have made the commitment to work together, not too unlike a marriage bond—for better or for worse," said speaker Christina Lillienthal (above) during the MOU signing. *Photo: Dave Sanden*

Photo Op

with
The Secretary



Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman is interviewed by Fresno news media after announcing a \$38.3 million loan to expand high-speed Internet access in the foothills of Madera County.

*Fresno Fair,
October 2004*



Veneman meets Will Scott, president of the African American Farmers of Calif., at the Fresno Fair. Earlier, Scott was asked to serve on the Fresno County committee overseeing the Farm Service Agency.



Secretary Veneman during her tour of the Fresno Fair.

*Photos:
Brian Ziegler*

Watershed Recovery Update

*By Tom Schott, Resource Conservationist/Riverside
and Paul Laustsen, Area Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside*

In the beginning of 2004, NRCS was provided with approximately \$150 million in Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) funding, with \$120 million proportioned for use in dead tree removal and associated erosion control in three impacted counties in Southern Calif. A brief update follows for each county:

San Bernardino County: Twelve priority areas with about 350 square miles of private lands at risk. Phase I tree removal costs are \$70 million. To date, \$10 million has been provided to the county to develop local contracts. Fifty-eight projects covering about 4,500 acres/58,000 trees have been put out for bid or are nearly ready for bid. Twenty of the 58 projects have been completed, covering about 125 acres/3,489 trees.

Riverside County: Four priority areas with about 50 square miles of private lands at risk. Tree removal costs are \$20 million. Of the \$7 million made available to the County for tree removal contracts, \$5 million will be done by federal contract and \$2 million will be local contract. Two large parcel federal contracts and one large parcel local contract for about \$1.2 million covering 340 acres, have been awarded and are in operation.

San Diego County: Three priority areas with approximately 200 square miles of private lands at risk. Tree removal costs are \$30 million. Of the \$10 million made available to the County for contracts, \$5 million each will be done by federal contract and local contract. One large parcel federal contract has been advertised and two more are nearing completion of the final phase of contract preparation for \$500,000 covering about 600 acres.

Pietrock Watershed Recovery Project Complete

*By Paul Laustsen
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside*

State Design Engineer **Bill Ward** signed off on the Pietrock Watershed Recovery Project in Riverside County in October. NRCS contractors removed brush and 160 dead or dying trees on 36 acres of private land in Idyllwild.

The project came as a lifesaver for local residents who are mandated to maintain defensible space around their property. Although **Calif. Department of Forestry (CDF)** has a residential program that pays up to 75 percent of tree and brush removal, the Pietrock Project did not qualify because it exceeded CDF's \$10,000 cap. Coordinating agencies of the **Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST)**, which includes both CDF and NRCS, determined priority areas for tree removal and how best to divide the work. It was determined that large parcel projects, like Pietrock, best fit under NRCS authority.

"This is a good example of the type of work we expect from our contractors," said Bill Ward. The project clearly shows conservation practices specified by NRCS, such as the use of mulching on exposed soils and water bars on roads to control erosion. Other conservation practices included keeping wood rat nests and surrounding areas intact, and leaving certain trees used as wildlife habitat in place and undisturbed.

NRCS employees on hand for the signing were State Design Engineer Bill Ward, Area Engineer **Robert Miller**, Project Inspectors **Bob Dunkle** and **Tobiah Salvail**, Foresters **Hal Carey** and **Tim Morin**, District Conservationist **Bob Hewitt**, Soil Conservation Aide **Ryan Bullard**, and Public Affairs Specialist **Paul Laustsen**. Two CDF Foresters were also along to review the work of the contractor Jeff Gray of Global Resources.

CARCD Meets In San Luis Obispo

By **Jeff Raifsnider**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Salinas



NRCS Calif. State Conservationist Chuck Bell speaking during the conference in November. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider

Participants at the 59th annual meeting and conference of the **Calif. Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD)** enjoyed lively meetings, informative breakout sessions, an excellent field tour and great camaraderie during social events. The three-day conference, held in San Luis Obispo, featured keynote speaker **Steve Hearst** during the opening general session. He spoke about the controversial conservation easement that the **Hearst Family Trust** plans to place on 128 square miles of family-owned land.

A Day At The Merced River Awareness Faire

By **Sharon Boyce**
Soil Conservation
Technician/Merced



Youngsters create art from nature, while Sally Magneson tells them the importance of river rock in a healthy watershed. Photo: Sharon Boyce

On an idyllic summer's day in August at the river's edge—with a bullfrog's throaty croak reverberating across the water and the distant cry of a red-tailed hawk soaring high overhead—some fortunate Merced County citizens were on hand to share these beautiful gifts of nature.

The **Community Alliance of Family Farmers (CAFF)**, in conjunction with several other agencies, conducted their second annual **Merced River Awareness Faire** at Henderson Park in Snelling. **Gwen Huff** of CAFF, along with **Sharon Boyce**, NRCS Merced Field Office, **Cindy Lashbrook** and **Teri Murrison** of the **East Merced RCD**, and **Sally Magneson** of the **Merced River Stakeholders' Group**, joined forces to organize the event.

Nature tours, movies, guest speakers, tasty food, bluegrass music, and a Japanese Taiko drumming group provided entertainment and education to the public about the importance of a healthy watershed.

David Hu of the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** showed participants how to make fish prints. **Frank and Carol Rodriguez** of the **Merced Fly-Fishing Club** gave fly-fishing and fly-tying demonstrations. Representatives from the **Calif. Department of Fish and Game** showed youngsters how to identify invertebrates and gave a water sampling demonstration. Sharon Boyce, Sally Magneson and **Kathy Webber** offered many nature art activities such as making "water cycle" bracelets and river rock painting, which the children enjoyed.

As the day ended, many tired, happy children and their parents trudged off to their vehicles with a new appreciation for the gifts of nature that can be found within our watersheds.

In Focus

Meet The New Calif. Civil Rights Advisory Committee!



The new Calif. Civil Rights Advisory Committee is comprised of, from left to right: **Back row: Donald Neilson** (new member, DC-Madera), **David Rose** (Civil Rights Chair, DC-Willows), **Steve Perkins** (Area Range Conservationist-Victorville), **David Smith** (Civil Rights Liaison, State Soil Scientist-Davis). **Front row: Tanya Robles** (Human Resources Assistant-Davis), **Cori Calvert** (Civil Rights Vice-Chair, Soil Conservationist-Livermore), **Reina O'Beck** (new member, Public Affairs Specialist-Davis) and **Cindy Montepegano** (new member, Soil Conservationist-Redlands). **Not pictured: Diane A. Blohm** (Management Assistant-Davis).

The Committee thanks outgoing members **Paul Laustsen** (Riverside), **Carolyn LoFreso** (Lancaster) and **Carol Rutenbergs** (Auburn) for their outstanding service. Job well done everyone. You will be missed!
Photo: Dawn Afman

Calif. Team Competes In '04 Envirothon

By **Sharon Boyce**
Soil Conservation Technician/Merced

Students from **Arlington High School** in Riverside competed against 51 teams from throughout the U.S. and Canada in the **2004 North America Canon Envirothon** at Wesleyan College last summer in Buckhannon, West Virginia. The Envirothon, North America's largest high school environmental education program and competition, involves more than 500,000 teenagers. The students study and compete in environmental issues and natural resource conservation.

Envirothon winners received Canon scholarships and prizes that exceeded \$30,000. This year's winning team from Florida received \$15,000 in Canon scholarships and photographic equipment. Virginia and New Jersey placed second and third, respectively.

The Calif. team consisted of Team Captain **Ryan Bullard**, **Laura DeSilva**, **Tammy Pham**, **Faith Lin** and **Michael Mees**, and led by advisors **Sheri Harris** and **Jose Villarreal**, finished the competition in a very respectable 13th place. The memories and friendships, in addition to the knowledge they gained while participating in the program, will last a lifetime. Calif. Envirothon President **Sharon Boyce**, from the NRCS Merced Field Office, and Canon Envirothon Treasurer **Greg Lowden**, from the Trinity RCD in Weaverville, were there to support their team and help facilitate the event.

The 2005 Calif. Envirothon will be held at the ECCO Conference Center in Oakhurst, April 13-15, 2005.

Rangeland Specialist Does A Swale Job

swale | `swā(e)l | **noun**: a gentle drainage bottom on a cattle range that becomes saturated during the rainy season. Tends to stay green longer into summer than surrounding uplands.

By **Brian Ziegler**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Madera Rangeland Management Specialist **Dennis Dudley** studies swales. He wants to learn how swales work so ranchers can better manage stream water quality.

Once each month, and twice a month in winter, Dudley measures the water depth in wells drilled in several swales throughout the 4,700 acre San Joaquin Experimental Range. The range, located near Coarsegold, was acquired in 1934 by the **U.S. Forest Service** to conduct scientific research.

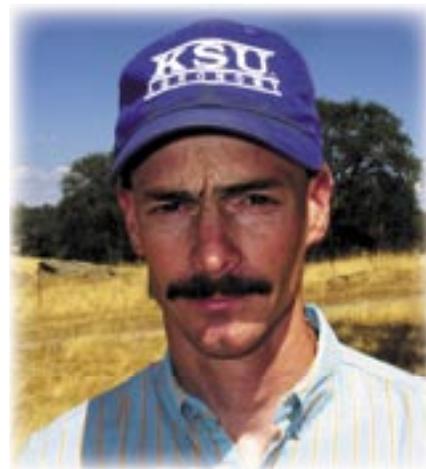
How many rattlesnakes live in oak woodlands (one per acre) and what impact grazing cattle have on stream banks during the dry season (significant erosion) are some of the questions answered by research conducted at the range.

“Everything I do is in partnership with the University of Calif.,” Dudley explains. “Ultimately, some of the things

we learn can be applied to the conservation assistance we provide in Madera County.”

One finding so far is that a late season rain in spring 2003 failed to fill stock ponds. That’s because native grasses in swales and other spots acted like a sponge to suck up ponded water. Ranchers had a difficult time grazing their cattle because there wasn’t any water for livestock to drink.

Water table levels in rangeland swales have been monitored for four consecutive years at the range. Dudley says the data will provide a better understanding of how the hydrologic functions of swales work, especially when combined with stream flow and precipitation data.



NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist Dennis Dudley. Photo: Brian Ziegler



NRCS provided air quality assistance to farmers attending an ag expo in Kerman recently. Pictured, from left to right, are Johnnie Siliznoff, NRCS, raisin grower Bruce Slaven, almond producer Rod Parichan, and John Beyer, NRCS. Photo: Brian Ziegler

Senator Denise Ducheny (right) chats with NRCS’s Elizabeth Lessick. Ducheny mentioned what a wonderful job she thinks NRCS does in assisting private landowners. The first visitors to the NRCS booth (below) were a local family from Blythe.



Elizabeth Lessick informed them about NRCS conservation practices and activities. Photos courtesy of Elizabeth Lessick



Community Awareness And The Spring Street Festival

By **Elizabeth Lessick**
Soil Conservation Technician/Blythe

Nestled deep within Southern Calif.’s low desert, adjacent to the Colorado River in Riverside County, is the unassuming yet lively farming community of Blythe. Over 100,000 acres of well maintained farmland is utilized here in Palo Verde Valley to grow a diversified commodity of crops.

In early November, the Blythe Chamber of Commerce held its annual Spring Street Festival, where hundreds of local residents and visitors walk the street lined with vendors selling everything from delicious food to hand crafted art.

Being new to the Blythe Field Office as a Soil Conservation Technician from Bakersfield, I believed participating in the festival was an excellent way for me to introduce myself to the community. It also provided an opportunity to reintroduce Blythe’s NRCS Field Office to local residents where “community awareness” plays such a vital role.

Amidst a sea of vendors, I provided information on NRCS’s mission, programs, and the available technical assistance on private lands. Some attendees who visited the booth were familiar with NRCS but not aware of our local office, and voiced their appreciation of our environmental commitment to Blythe’s natural resources. Others, however, had never heard of NRCS and were interested in learning about the agency.

The high point of the day was a visit by **Senator Denise Ducheny** (District 40), remarking on what a wonderful job NRCS does working with local producers and landowners in protecting natural resources. Overall, the information booth was a success and the time was well spent focusing on community awareness and attracting interested youth to conservation.



Santa Rosa's Prince Memorial Greenway is a great example of how NRCS's Small Watershed Protection Program benefits communities. NRCS, working with project sponsors, used its authority to create flood protection, enhance wildlife habitat, and improve water quality within Sonoma County. At November's celebration of the Prince Memorial Greenway and Central Sonoma Watershed Project, a group of partners, VIPs and friends of conservation also celebrated the Watershed Program's 50th anniversary. Among the speakers were Congresswoman **Lynn Woolsey** (left) and State Conservationist **Chuck Bell**. *Photo: Jim Cairns*



On September 18, 350 volunteers removed over 6,000 pounds of garbage from Marsh Creek in Contra Costa County. To celebrate, they made a pyramid from the trash, took a group photo (above), then hauled it all away.

RCD Watershed Coordinator **Mary Grim** and Earth Team volunteer **Elizabeth Harshaw** helped organize the creek clean-up. Volunteer groups included **Leos Junior Lions Club**, **Interact Junior Rotarians**, **Liberty High School Environmental Club**, and several Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. *Photo by Brad Shifflett, courtesy of 110 Degrees Magazine.*

—**Lorena Benitez** (Concord Field Office)



In October, Ventura County and NRCS celebrated the completion of the Ventura County Beardsley and Revolon Watershed Projects, and the 50th anniversary of the Small Watershed Protection Program. Work on the Beardsley and Revolon Watershed Projects spanned nearly 40 years to complete. Today, they now provide flood protection to approximately 9,000 acres of highly productive agricultural lands with a crop value of \$200 million. Event speakers included, left to right, **Charles Davis**, State Conservation Engineer; **Chuck Bell**, State Conservationist; Congressman **Elton Gallegly**; **John Flynn**, Ventura County Supervisor, and **Mike Mobley**, Ventura County RCD. *Photo: Jim Cairns*

Go Bats!

Nothing To Fear From These Hardworking Conservation Critters



With a face that only a mother could love and an unwarranted reputation, bats are one of the most misunderstood animals. They aren't bloodthirsty evildoers that need be feared. Quite the contrary! These unique little mammals that fly are more conservation friend than pest or fiend.

Forty-five bat species live in North America and 23 are found in Calif., with more species in the warmer climate of Southern Calif. These warm-blooded night feeders that roost during the day eat hundreds of flying insects each time they feed, and can consume thousands before they're full. Bats hunt by making clicking and chirping sounds, then listen for the echo that bounces off their favorite prey, such as mosquitoes, flies, moths and other night-flying insects. Upon locating an insect, a bat will swoop in and use its wing to scoop the insect into its mouth. *Gulp!*

Nightly, one bat can eat up to 1,000 mosquito-sized insects per hour and nearly 50 percent of its body weight. Bats search for food in insect-rich areas like woods, ponds,

open fields and lighted residential areas. Your yard or garden may be able to provide enough insects to feed dozens of bats!

While roosting at night after eating, they discard unwanted bug parts and groom themselves, much like cats. Night roosts can be found by looking for the insect wings and bat guano that accumulate below. After a busy night of bug eating and roosting, bats sleep during the day.

Bats instinctively choose to squeeze into roosts with narrow openings that keep out predators. In their summer roosts, they like temperatures of 80-100° F, so they often choose sites warmed by direct sunlight. A range of temperatures inside the roost allows bats to move as the sun does, maintaining a temperature that suits them. Bat roosts are both natural (in trees, caves, rock crevices or thickets) and human-made (mines, bridges, cracks in buildings, and overhangs). Many bats will roost in artificial "bat houses" as well, providing bug-eating assistance for their human hosts. You can build a bat house in your yard to keep these voracious bug eaters at home in your neighborhood!

More Bat Information

- Contact the California Bat Conservation Fund if you find a bat in trouble, or for more information: <http://www.californiabats.com>
- Hundreds of bat-related links are available at the Batbox Web site: <http://www.batbox.org>
- Bat Conservation International offers books, educational programs and links to many organizations: <http://www.batcon.org>

Caligrams

Statewide News In Brief

Earth Team Volunteer Great Help In EWP Effort

By **Dave Sanden**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/
Red Bluff

The Emergency Watershed Protection program (EWP) is helping to pay the cost of sandbag protection around homes and mulching and seeding slopes around Jones Valley. But homeowners whose homes aren't considered under "imminent" threat are also getting help from NRCS, through onsite consultations and information packets about erosion control.

The Redding office has been greatly helped in this effort by Earth Team Volunteer **Denise Lerner**, who is herself a Jones Valley resident and narrowly missed having her home destroyed in the fire.

"We have a lot of good



Earth Team Volunteer Denise Lerner lends a welcomed helping hand with EWP. Photo: Todd Golder

information and we've been getting it out to folks as fast as we can," said District Conservationist **Bob Bailey**. "Denise has been extremely helpful in getting the word out about EWP, distributing information, and obtaining needed permissions for emergency protection work."

Conservation Tillage: Agriculture's New Frontier

By **Brian Ziegler**
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

University of Calif. scientists believe they've finessed crop production to the point where

only small improvements are now possible. That's why conservation tillage is generating interest in Calif.

A recent conference co-sponsored by NRCS in Five Points showed how conservation tillage—a practice more common in eastern states where fierce summer rainstorms can wash away the rich top layer of unprotected soil—has the potential to eek out more profits for farmers by making marginal lands productive and by cutting costs.

Merely reducing the number of times a tractor drags through a field lessens fuel expenses and minimizes pesticide and fertilizer requirements.

The economic benefits of conservation tillage are also being linked to what it can do for air, water and soil quality.

Reducing dust, cutting back on contaminated drainage water, and creating healthy soil on lands where previously an impenetrable hard surface

could only be laboriously cracked into rock-like dirt clods are some of the advantages.



Madera Soil Conservationist Rob Roy touts conservation tillage to a group of farmers and scientists at a recent conference. Photo: Brian Ziegler



NRCS West Regional Chief Sara Braasch spoke to CARCD conference attendees during their annual event in San Luis Obispo in November. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider

HR

Personnel Actions

Name	Position	Action	Grade	Location	Date
Nathan Key	Wldlife Bio	CC Appt	GS-9	Colusa	9/5/04
Andrea Souther	Soil Consvst	TERM Appt	GS-9	San Jacinto	9/19/04
John Stern	Pub Aff Splst	TERM Appt	GS-9	S. LakeTahoe	9/19/04
Genett Carstensen	Soil Consvst	CC Appt	GS-9	Hanford	10/3/04
Nick Lasher	Hydrologist	CIP Appt	GS-9	Salinas	10/3/04
Morgan Tyler	FBProgAsst	TERM Appt	GS-5	Tulelake	10/3/04
Cheryl Wilcos	Civil Engr	TERM Appt	GS-11	Redlands	10/3/04
Shea Valero	Biologist	CC Appt	GS-9	Escondido	10/17/04
Richard Rivas	Wldlife Bio	CC Appt	GS-11	Elk Grove	10/19/04
Lorena Bitez	Soil Scntst	Career Promo	GS-7	Concord	9/5/04
Jen DeLorenzi	Edit Assist	Career Promo	GS-7	Davis	9/5/04
Travis Godeaux	Ag Engr	Promotion	GS-9	Visalia	9/19/04
Kirsten Losse	Ag Engr	Career Promo	GS-9	Auburn	9/19/04
Sam Vang	Soil Consvst	Promotion	GS-11	Fresno	9/19/04
Eric Crook	Soil Consvst	Career Promo	GS-9	Visalia	10/3/04
Ha Truong	Ag Engr	Career Promo	GS-11	Woodland	10/3/04
D. Abbott-Blohm	Adm Asst	Promotion	GS-6	Davis	10/17/04
Ven. Hernandez	Soil Con Tech	Career Promo	GS-8	Tulelake	10/17/04
All. Bettencourt	Soil Consvst	Reassign from G. Valley	GS-9	Yuba City	10/31/04
Stephen Smith	Soil Consvst (DC)	Reassign from Colusa	GS-12	Ukiah	10/31/04
Kari Harrison	Soil Consvst	Conv-TERM Appt	GS-9	Escondido	9/19/04
Johnnie Siliznoff	Soil Consvst	Conv-CC Appt	GS-11	Fresno	10/31/04
Stephe Jaouen	Range Consvst	Transfer to CO	GS-9	Woodland	9/19/04
Donald Hansen	Ag Engr	Transfer to WA	GS-11	Bakersfield	10/31/04
Richard Johnson	Soil Consvst	Transfer to ID	GS-11	Dixon	10/31/04