

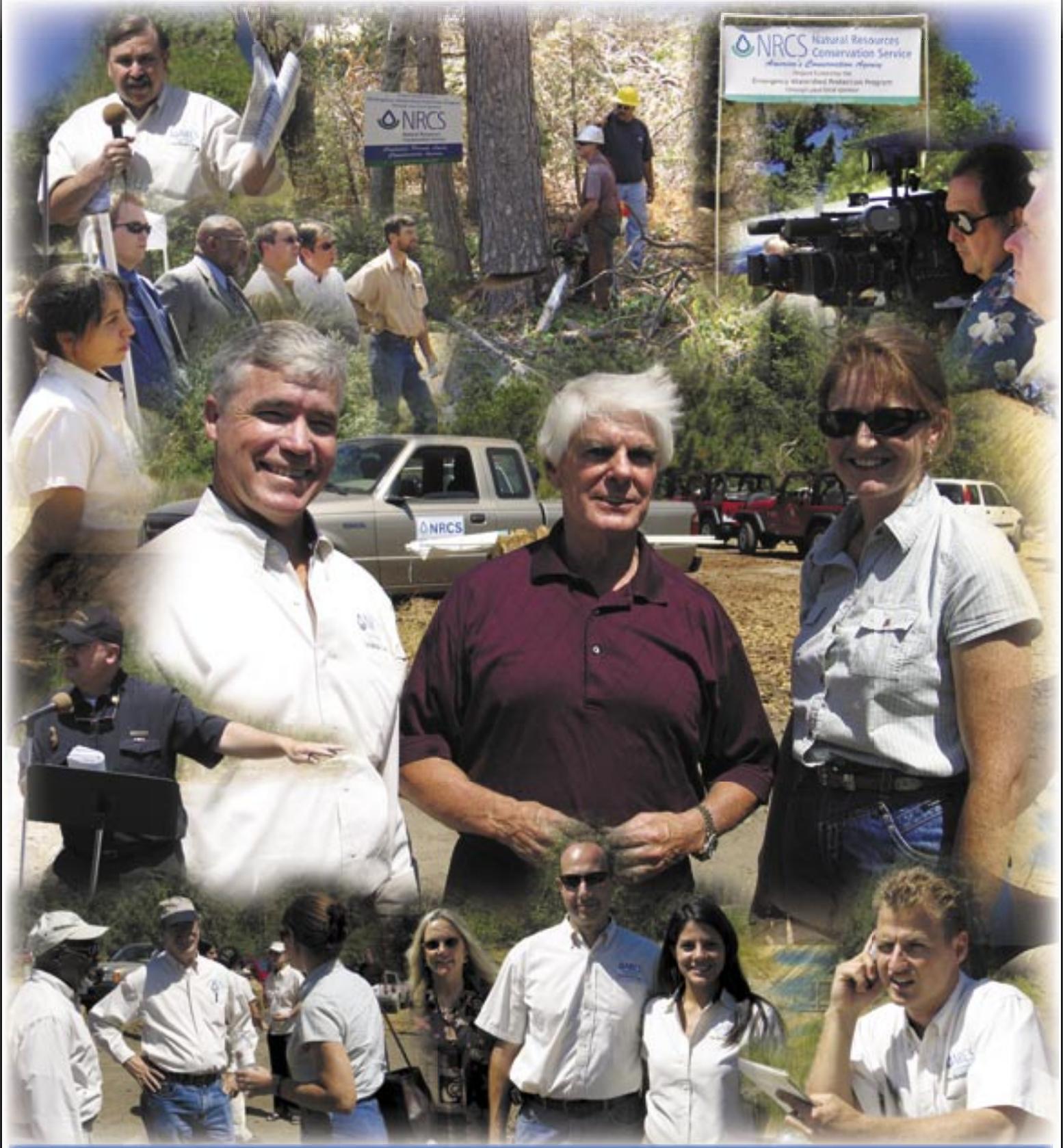
"America's Private Lands Conservation Agency"



# California

SEPTEMBER/  
OCTOBER 2004

## CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS





# A Message From Chuck Bell, State Conservationist

and be prepared for the future.

Recently, I participated in the Rural Legislative Caucus at Fresno. We were asked to participate in a special panel to discuss critical challenges on air quality as it relates to agriculture. Our agency was repeatedly recognized as an important leader in terms of providing technical and financial assistance to farmers in the San Joaquin Valley.

NRCS hosted a congressional tour in mid-August of the Southern Calif. EWP project area at Twin Peaks near Lake Gregory. **Area IV Public Affairs** sponsored and coordinated the event, while **Charles Davis, Bill Ward, Rick Aguayo, the State Office Public Affairs staff**, and a host of others participated in the event. Representatives from the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, the County Fire Department, Calif. Department of Forestry and Forest Service participated, as did **Congressman Jerry Lewis** and representatives from **Senator Feinstein** and **Senator Boxer**. As usual, I was very proud and impressed with the fine work our people have done to meet this emergency, and by the words of support expressed by participants.

**Sara Braasch**, our new Regional Assistant Chief (West), joined us recently as we

participated in the second leg of the Calif. Agriculture Innovation and Stewardship Tour. It showcased work in the San Joaquin Valley, and almost every stop included a discussion of NRCS participation and successes in key conservation objectives. I know that **Carter Christenson** and **Curtis Tarver** were also very pleased, and I really appreciate support from their offices and their Area's Resource Conservation Districts.

Finally, I'd like to remind all of you that beginning October 1, NRCS will take over remaining responsibilities relating to our Farm Bill programs that were previously handled by the Farm Service Agency. Obviously, this will be an additional workload and we are in the process of "gearing up" for the change. I want to thank all of you in advance for helping to make this transition as smooth as possible.

Like all of you, I look forward to closing out the fiscal year with continued successes. I know that everyone will do everything possible to assure that our Calif. goals are met. It is far easier to secure continued funding for staff and programs when we can adequately demonstrate how we have been responsible stewards of the resources made available to us.

**G**reetings to NRCS staff and conservation partners in Calif. This has been an extremely busy summer and we have accomplished much.

In July we hosted the Calif. NRCS All-Employees Training Conference in Sacramento. It was a wonderful opportunity to improve technical skills and meet people from throughout Calif. I think we were all surprised to see the number of new employees that have joined our ranks in the last three years. We want to do everything we can to help them expand their skills

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## On the Cover

*Southern Calif. Watershed Recovery Program Project Tour.* NRCS, conservation partners, legislators and media were on-hand for the August 16th event at Twin Peaks highlighting working partnerships. See article on page 3.

*Photos & Design: Jim Cairns*

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# Southern Calif. Watershed Recovery Projects

## Highlight Working Partnerships

By Paul Laustsen  
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside

On August 16, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) joined with its partner agencies of the **Mountain Area Safety Taskforce (MAST)** to update Congressman **Jerry Lewis** and other legislators on the watershed recovery process taking place, including dead and dying tree removal and erosion control in the San Bernardino Mountains. State Conservationist **Chuck Bell**, State Emergency Watershed Protection Project Coordinator **Charles Davis**, District Conservationist **Rick Aguayo**, and Forester **Adam Lerner** addressed the group before and after a tree removal and erosion control demonstration at the Pine Crest Conference Center in Twin Peaks.

Along with Congressman Lewis, **Alton Garrett** representing Senator **Barbara Boxer**, **James Peterson** representing Senator **Dianne Feinstein**, **David Caine** representing State Senator **James Brulte**, **Steve Johnson** representing State Assemblyman **Dennis Mountjoy**, and San Bernardino Board of Supervisor **Dennis Hansberger** were all on hand.

The Pine Crest Conference Center Large Parcel project covers approximately 245 acres and is estimated to remove 3,000 trees. The work will help protect a youth camp and conference center by creating a buffer zone free of dead and dying trees.

The fuel break greatly minimizes the chance of losing structures to fire and creates a buffer for fire fighters. In addition to the tree removal, Soil Conservationists will implement several different erosion control practices on newly exposed parcels minimizing natural resource degradation.

This large parcel project was contracted out at the cost of \$260,000. The project is representative of nearly \$5 million worth of Emergency Watershed Protection contracts awarded to San Bernardino County for work that is either completed or underway. Another \$5 million will be allocated shortly to remove more dead and dying trees and implement erosion control devices.

Calif. NRCS State Conservationist Chuck Bell emphasized the agency's commitment to awarding tree removal contracts as quickly as possible. "NRCS has long been involved in emergency situations under the authority of the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, but this is the first time we have been able to use the program in a proactive manner to prevent emergencies," said Bell. "We are funding these projects as soon as they are approved by the counties."

NRCS, in coordination with the other member agencies of MAST, is working with County officials to award tree removal contracts. The MAST team establishes the tree removal priority areas.

"The partnership effort has allowed this program to move forward at a steady



State Conservationist Chuck Bell (left), Congressman Jerry Lewis (center) and new Regional Assistant Chief for the West Sara Braasch chat during post-event activities. Photo: Jim Cairns



The 50-plus person turnout included reporters from San Bernardino, Lake Arrowhead and Riverside newspapers, plus Los Angeles TV Ch. 7 News. Photo: Jim Cairns

## Tribal Nations In Area 3 Benefit From NRCS Assistance

By Brian Ziegler  
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno



The Tule River Indian Reservation has benefited from NRCS help in eliminating brush to reduce fire hazards and improve forage land for deer herd grazing. Photo: Brian Ziegler

Keeping livestock out of the Tule River—a major source of drinking water for the **Tule River Indian Reservation**—is a big concern for those that live and work there.

"We've got an open cattle range and you can imagine how that impacts part of the watershed," says Environmental Manager **Kerri Vera**. That is one reason why the tribe in southeast Tulare County sought help from NRCS.

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the tribe was awarded a \$125,000 contract to install 14 miles of fencing that keeps cattle out of the river and away from the tribe's residential area.

Over the years, NRCS has aided the tribe in projects that eliminated brush to

pace. Never before has government taken the responsibility to remove so many trees in a unified effort," says **Laura Dyberg** of the Mountain Rim Fire Safe Council.

"We conduct our work in a watershed approach," said Chuck Bell. "Erosion control and maintaining wildlife habitat are a tremendous concern to us as we remove trees."

Bell also noted that the tree mortality emergency in Southern Calif. has helped the agency prepare for the likelihood of similar situations. "As always with our Emergency Watershed Protection Program, our goal continues to be the reduction of any hazardous conditions that threaten life and property."

To view a video clip of tour highlights, go to the Calif. NRCS Web site at <http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ewp/socalwrp.html>.

reduce fire hazards and improve forage land for deer herd grazing.

Vera says a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program contract is providing funds to restore meadows and riparian areas, which will also improve water quality.





## Alternative Enterprises Can Bring Higher Profits To Farmers & Ranchers

By Dave Sanden  
Area Public Affairs  
Specialist/Red Bluff  
Photo: Dave Sanden



A rice farm in the Central Valley probably is not the first place that comes to mind when you're looking for a new place for entertainment or recreation. But if you overlook working farms as potential venues for fun, you might be missing a surprisingly rewarding and unique experience. That point was clearly illustrated at an Agritourism and Nature Tourism workshop at a Colusa County farm in August.

The workshop, the second in a series of three, was presented by **Central Sacramento Valley RC&D** in conjunction with **Yosemite/Sequoia RC&D**. This session, "Assessing Your Resources," was attended by 17 Central Valley farmers and ranchers. It was part of a series of six hands-on workshops to help farmers and ranchers decide whether an Agritourism or Nature Tourism enterprise would work for them. The course was developed for the RC&Ds by training specialists from Farm and Agriculture Collaborative Training Systems (FACTS), under a grant from the USDA Forest Service.

The workshops enabled participants to learn about the tourism industry. At the end, participants could use the work they did in each module to construct their own enterprise-specific business plan, including a marketing plan and budget.

The training site was a fifth-generation family farm near Grimes. The hosts, **Chip Struckmeyer**

and his wife **Rachel Sullivan**, are developing alternative enterprises on the farm. Initially, they plan to create an elaborate medicinal herb garden and a distillery for essential oils and herbal extracts. They are also planning to establish bird blinds on their property for use by bird watchers. The rice fields, situated right along the Pacific flyway, attract an amazing variety of birds, including ibis, herons, egrets, swans and bald eagles.

Agritourism and Nature Tourism are in an entirely different industry from traditional farming and ranching. Landowners who are interested need to learn about this new industry and look at their resources from a different point of view. Choosing the right alternative enterprise can bring higher profits to farmers, which means more money and opportunities to keep their farm in the family. It also helps the local economy and increases awareness of the value of farming and natural resources.

For those interested in the concept of profitable alternative enterprises on agricultural land, there is a list of ideas for possible alternative enterprises in the NRCS brochure *Alternative Enterprises For Higher Profits and Healthier Land*. An even longer list is available in a NRCS fact sheet of the same name available at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/RESS/altenterprise). To find out more about agritourism and alternative enterprises, contact your area's RC&D office.

## 'Round the State



**ZZ Top? No, NRCS:** Grass Valley Soil Conservationist Dan Taverner (center) was told that as a mentee he shouldn't be a clone of his mentor, Auburn Resource Conservationist Paul Lake (left), but he thought he'd give it a try anyway. Meanwhile, Fresno Air Quality Specialist Johnnie Siliznoff insists that he is the best looking of the three bearded guys attending the recent Area 3 Mentor Workshop in Fresno. Photo: Brian Ziegler



**Lights, Camera, Action:** Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman (right) met with several local media outlets at the opening of the Stockton Service Center. See article on page 7. Photo: Shelby Gatlin



**Setting New Standards:** The Calif. Agricultural Innovation and Stewardship Tour visited innovative Sacramento Valley growers on August 17. Tour stops included a visit to the Wingsetter Ranch in Stanislaus County. Shown, from left to right, are ASTCFO Carter Christenson, Regional Assistant Chief-West Sara Braasch, District Conservationist Mike McElhiney, State Conservationist Chuck Bell and Deputy State Conservationist James Tillman. Photo: Jeff Raifsnider

## Education Accord Reaches New Heights For Ag Industry

By Brian Ziegler  
Area Public Affairs  
Specialist/Fresno

Calif. is the first state in the country to require continuing education of farm labor contractors. The goal is to improve worker safety, increase grower compliance with laws governing agriculture, and educating contractors. A formalized working relationship between the U.S. Department of Labor and Fresno City College to provide training has received the endorsement of Area 3 NRCS officials.

The agreement stipulates that the college will offer continuing education and grower compliance seminars to farm labor contractors. NRCS will assist with seminars, providing the latest information on such subjects as air quality and agriculture dust control. A signing ceremony to formalize the agreement was held at the school in July.



Johnnie Siliznoff, NRCS Air Quality Specialist (back row, from left), Curtis Tarver, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations; (front row, from left) George Friday, U.S. Department of Labor Regional Administrator, Dr. Ned Doffoney, Fresno City College President. Photo: Brian Ziegler



## Water Quality Field Day Held In Monterey County

RCD of Monterey County Hydrologist Bryan Largay (far right) instructed the group on the design, usefulness and maintenance of sediment basins. *Photo: Jeff Raifsnider*

*By Jeff Raifsnider  
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Salinas*

**T**he Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Monterey County and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the University of Calif. Cooperative Extension (UCCE), and Monterey County Farm Bureau to hold the county's second "Tailgate Follow-Up" to their water quality short course. The event reinforced concepts learned by participants of this partnership's Farm Water Quality Planning short course. The course was held for growers to address farm water quality and to meet educational requirements of the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

RCD Board Vice President **Benny Jefferson** and his son, **Martin**, hosted the "Sediment Basins and Grassed Waterways Field Day" for local growers at his farm in August. Participants visited two sediment basins and a grassed waterway while listening to presentations from NRCS, UCCE, RCD of Monterey County, and the Farm Bureau. Presentations included: the design, maintenance and usefulness of sediment basins and waterways, measuring sediment capture, and plants for grassed waterways. Benny Jefferson led much of the discussion about his sediment basins and grassed waterway.

Benny said, "Conservation equals economics. Through conservation, you can save yourself a lot of money in the long run. It is one of those 'pay me now or pay me later' things."

Benny has served on the RCD Board since about 1990. Benny, his brothers and his son, double-crop to raise about 2,400 acres of artichokes, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, mixed lettuces and iceberg lettuce. He is also in partnership on another 500 acres.

Other presenters at the tailgate included RCD Hydrologist **Bryan Largay**, UCCE Farm Water Quality Program (FWQP) Representative **Julie Fallon**, NRCS Water Quality Specialist **Terry Hall**, **Traci Roberts** of the Monterey County Farm Bureau and NRCS District Conservationist **Pedro Ramos**.

During the Water Quality Planning short course, participants receive field and classroom training on conservation, including irrigation management, erosion control, nutrient and pesticide management, and conservation planning. According to the Central Coast Regional Board, farmers who wish to qualify for a Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Agriculture under the Calif. Water Code, must complete 15 hours of farm water quality education within three years of adoption of the waiver. They must also develop and implement water quality management plans.

## In Focus

### Veneman, Pombo Celebrate Stockton Service Center Opening



*By Shelby Gatlin  
Public Affairs Specialist/Davis*

#### Secretary Veneman Meets With NRCS Staff

From left to right: Linh Nguyen, Terry Wang, Ann Veneman, Amy Rocha, Dave Simpson and James Tillman. *Photo: Shelby Gatlin*

**O**n August 21, Agriculture Secretary **Ann Veneman** and Congressman **Richard Pombo** celebrated the opening of the USDA Service Center in Stockton. District Conservationist **David Simpson** and his staff hosted the open house along with the **Farm Service Agency**, **Rural Development**, and the **San Joaquin County Farm Bureau**.

The open house was well attended, with dozens of producers walking through the facility. Secretary Veneman arrived early and met with each USDA staff member. Many local farmers and ranchers came to the service center to share stories and concerns with the secretary. They were not disappointed. Veneman made time to listen to each of them, and didn't leave until late in the morning.

During a short presentation, Secretary Veneman was very complimentary of the NRCS staff: "I appreciate the hard work and the commitment of the USDA team members who are based here in the Stockton Center. You and your co-workers nationwide continue to do outstanding work, such as the extraordinary effort that was put into implementing the 2002 Farm Bill. I thank you all very much."

In her remarks the secretary stated that the recent levy break in San Joaquin County will be designated a natural disaster and will be covered by crop insurance policies. The crowd, anticipating a decision from the White House, responded with cheers and applause.

Congressman **Richard Pombo** also participated in the day's events. **Kenny Watkins** from the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau presented the congressman with the Golden Plow Award for his agriculture-friendly voting record and support of Farm Bureau policies. Pombo, who is also a rancher, recently helped negotiate the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act.

Overall, the open house was a great success. Everyone and everything was in tip-top shape, including a couple fish bowls that sported service center nametags for the finned inhabitants. Staff members prepared fresh produce from local growers, and homegrown flowers decorated the office. Guests learned about USDA services, and NRCS employees had a chance to do what they do best—help their local community.

# Caligrams

## Statewide News In Brief

### Mastication & Healthy Forests In Butte County

By Robert Vlach  
Rangeland Management Specialist/  
Oroville

In Butte County local forestland owners are using mastication equipment to improve the health of forest. Mastication is one way to improve forest resources by reducing fire hazard, thinning overstocked trees while at the same time enhancing the soil. The project is funded by the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

A masticator is a piece of heavy machinery consisting of a backhoe-type vehicle with an articulating arm. On the end of the arm is a device that chops or flails woody vegetation. The machines come in various sizes for different needs and land characteristics.

The masticator turns woody material into a mulch that remains on the ground, protecting the soil as well as adding nutrients. The mulch also inhibits the return of shrubs such as Greenleaf manzanita that need bare soil

to germinate.

Masticators can be used in many types of terrain and can operate on slopes of up to 35 percent. They are often used to reduce vegetation along access roads and along driveways.

It is important to be clear about what you want left in place; once it's gone it's too late. A skilled operator can leave small trees and minimize the environmental footprint left behind by the machine.

### NRCS Briefs Lawmakers At Fresno Ag Forum

By Brian Ziegler  
Area Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Improving air quality throughout Calif. has become a major natural resource concern State Conservationist **Chuck Bell** told state and federal lawmakers at a recent summit held in Fresno aimed at finding solutions to tightened regulations.

"I grew up in Calif. and 10 to 15 years ago air quality was not a big issue," Bell told participants. "Today it has become a dominant issue."

The event was sponsored by the 40-member Calif. Rural Caucus of Lawmakers, which is seeking a stronger voice on issues vital to small communities. The bipartisan group is headed by



**Team Power:** NRCSers attending the Watershed Recovery Tour in August were, left to right: Chuck Bell, Bill Ward, Rick Aguayo, Jim Earsom, Rita Bickel, Tom Schott, Charles Davis, Sara Braasch, Adam Lerner, Jim Cairns, Paul Laustsen, Veronica Lopez and Cindy Montepagano. See article on page 3. Photo: Hank Wyman/CARCD

Assemblyman **Dave Cogdill** (R-Modesto). He was joined at the Fresno meeting by U.S. Rep. **George Radanovich** (R-Mariposa), State Senator **Chuck Poochigian** (R-Fresno), and Assembly Members **Barbara Matthews** (D-Tracy) and **Bill Maze** (R-Visalia).

Among the concerns discussed were alternatives to agricultural burning. Many participants at the summit said they believe farmers are stuck with a disproportionate share of cleaning up the San Joaquin Valley's air. Bell said NRCS can help them by offering financial incentives through its Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

For example, EQIP cost-share funds can be obtained to chip orchard prunings instead of burning them, replace old diesel engines with cleaner burning ones, and suppress dust on unpaved farm roads.

"These practices do work and we intend to continue refining them with the help our partners," Bell said.

### Oops!

In the July/August issue of *California Current Developments*, we inadvertently did not give credit to **Bruce Champion** for the road oiling photo on page 3 in Brian Ziegler's article "Farm Plans Ready To Settle The Dust." Thanks, Bruce! —Ed.

# HR Personnel Actions

Name	Position	Action	Grade	Location	Date
Gabe Clark	Res Consvst	CIP appt	GS-7	Yreka	8/22/04
Terry Dean	Ag Engr	CC Appt	GS-11	Stockton	8/22/04
Kelly Stecker	Forester	TERM Appt	GS-7	Escondido	8/23/04
Linda Bryant	Contract Splclst	CC Appt	GS-11	Riverside AO	9/5/04
Gary Decker	Ag Engr	CC Appt	GS-9	Escondido	9/5/04
Kristan Flynn	Rangeland Consvst	Career Promo	GS-9	Petaluma	7/25/04
Reina O'Beck	Pub Aff Splclst	Career Promo	GS-9	Davis	8/8/04
Thomas Schott	DC to Res Consvst	Reassign	GS-12	Riverside	8/22/04
Dawn Brunmeier	Soil Consvst (Air)	Resign	GS-9	Modesto	5/14/04
Therese Bates	Soil Consvst	Resign	GS-9	Tulelake	5/28/04
Heidi Carpenter-Harris	Range Mgt Splclst	Resign	GS-9	Eureka	7/23/04
Amy Bastone	Ag Engr	Trans to MI	GS-9	Livermore	6/13/04
Rona Peters	St Adm Officer	Trans to USGS	GS-13	Davis	6/26/04
Sierra Hayden	Biologist	Trans to FWS	GS-9	Escondido	7/9/04
Karen Fullen	Biologist	Trans to UT	GS-11	Elk Grove	7/11/04
Lori Metz	Range Mgt Splclst	Trans to MT	GS-12	Davis	7/25/04