

"Helping People Help the Land"



California

FALL
2007

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS



From the Dust Bowl Days to the New Millennium:

***John DeBoni Honored
for 50+ Years in Conservation***

Plus!

SRM Ethnobotany Symposium

Up Front With Ed Burton

Area News & Civil Rights Corner



with Ed Burton

State Conservationist

I want to commend our employees for setting a new bar for performance and goals in the state of California. We've doubled our conservation planning output, and many other productivity and efficiency goals have been successful thanks to your dedication and hard work over this past year. My intention for FY '08 is not to keep raising the bar, but rather to focus on the follow up and implementation of our planning activity—and continue to pursue our conservation planning first and the implementation of our programs.

I encourage—or even challenge—all of us to maintain the level of performance that we've achieved, and continue to work on our productivity efficiencies.

This coming year, we're going to look at how we can streamline our Farm Bill workload processes. Several teams and some clusters have already looked at this, and we will continue to do so in the new fiscal year.

I'm as proud as I can be with our results in conservation planning over the last 12 months. I put out the call to all of our offices to increase our conservation planning, and the field exceeded my expectations by more than doubling our acres to over 1.6 million, of which 1 million is rangeland. Congratulations to our field staff on this achievement! We need to continue conservation planning efforts, but also focus on implementation, too. We need to continue to support conservation planning and maintain our new planning accomplishments.

The real value that we as an agency bring to the table for our customers is technical assistance. We all know this, of course, but sometimes we need to remind ourselves of that fact. Our partnering and working together in teams of interdisciplinary capability offer something unique in the area of conservation. Our approach to conservation—based on practical and

scientific methods—help solve resource issues in a voluntary manner, which leaves a positive and lasting effect on the landscape of this great state of California.

California leadership is in the process of compiling and putting together our vision of the future based on all of the input that we received from our partners and employees since the implementation of the new Strategic Plan late last year. You can rest assured that the things we've already initiated will be at the core of that vision—no matter what the future holds regarding the new Farm Bill, which based on my study of it, contains a strong conservation commitment.

Whatever obstacles may appear in the new fiscal year, we will work through them together in a coordinated team effort to get the job done—just like we always do. I just want to thank the leadership and staff for all of the great conservation work you are doing, day-in and day-out. I'm so proud of our accomplishments over the last year—as a team, an agency, and a state—and how we get conservation on the ground. And folks, that says a lot for who we are as individuals and as an agency!

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On the Cover

"John DeBoni Honored" (May 2007): California State Conservationist Ed Burton (left), NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster (second from right) and Assistant State Conservationist Dave Heilig (right) gathered to honor John DeBoni's achievements during his over 50 years of conservation service.
Photo: Casey Burns | Design: Jim Cairns

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John DeBoni during a visit to the NRCS Somis Field Office in October 2003. Photo: Jim Cairns

By Paul Laustsen

Area Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside

NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster and California State Conservationist Ed Burton honored John DeBoni of the Ventura County Resource Conservation District (VCRCD) on May 11, 2007, for his 50-plus years of service in conservation.

DeBoni Honored For Conservation Service

DeBoni's efforts with the VCRCD, formerly the **Calleguas Soil Conservation District (CSCD)**, date back as early as 1934 when he led a demonstration project that addressed sheet erosion on 500 acres of cropland in the Somis area. At the time, beans, sugar beets and alfalfa were being farmed on hillsides with a 40 percent slope. To address erosion problems, the CSCD installed terraces and implemented contour farming practices. DeBoni even installed contours on his father's ranch, which continue to function to this day.

"We farmed with mules at the time, and mules naturally followed the contours," said DeBoni.

DeBoni's achievements were many. As a District Director, DeBoni traveled to Washington, D.C., to lobby for Ventura County's first PL-566 Watershed Protection Project. He worked closely with then **Congressman Charlie Teague** to secure funding for the drainage structure that still protects the city of Camarillo and surrounding farmland from flooding. It was around this time that DeBoni led



John DeBoni (center), past director of the Ventura County Resource Conservation District, is credited with many of the county's major conservation projects. In May, California State Conservationist Ed Burton (left), NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster (second from right) and Assistant State Conservationist Dave Heilig (right) gathered to honor DeBoni's achievements. Also pictured to DeBoni's right is his wife, Elenore. Photo: Casey Burns

a tour for the Soil Conservation Service's first Chief, **Hugh Hammond Bennett**.

After many years of dealing with hillside erosion issues, DeBoni, along with the other CSCD directors, helped create the Hillside Erosion Control Ordinance (HECO) program, which protects natural resources, reduces erosion, and improves water quality coming off of agricultural lands in Ventura County.



SRM Symposium basketry display. Photo: Dick McCleery

Ethnobotany: The study of the relationship between plants and people, with a focus on how plants have been or are used, managed and perceived in human societies.

By Lisa A. Hokholt

State Outreach Coordinator/Livermore

Native American viewpoints and traditions about interacting with landscapes and plant communities were shared with about 200 participants at an ethnobotany symposium held recently at the **Society for Range Management's** annual meeting in Sparks, Nevada. According to California NRCS American Indian Liaison **Reina Rogers** and members

Traditional Blends With Conventional At SRM Ethnobotany Symposium

of the **Native American Traditional Plant Use Coalition**, the concept of looking at the land is somewhat different to many Native Americans in comparison to their contemporary non-Indian counterparts. Lands currently managed to produce forage for livestock are the very same landscapes that also produce plants still used by Native Americans for foodstuffs, fibers, medicines, ceremonial objects, and implements such as basketry or weaponry.

Members of the **California Indian Basketweavers Association** showcased the variety of reeds, shrubs, grasses and trees used to make baskets, mats and other woven products, while others showcased weaponry such as bows and arrows and the techniques employed to make them.

"These traditional techniques are often viewed as primitive," according to Rogers, "but symposium participants learned that they are actually quite sophisticated and elegant, in that they reflect unique plant characteristics such as tensile strength, power or durability."

Basket weavers discussed their concern for practices on some accessible public lands where they collect plants. For example, pesticide use is a concern for the weavers who often need to use their mouths for a "third hand" to hold the leaves or stems while weaving. Coalition volunteers are encouraging agencies to limit chemical use and installing "No Spray" signs in popular gathering areas such as public road rights-of-way.

Tribes, organizations, and individuals are also investigating ways to remove invasive species and restore historic plant communities using prescribed burning, pruning and weeding techniques. The **Cache Creek Conservancy**, for example, is evaluating ways to remove Himalayan blackberry infestations, and in Yosemite Valley prescribed burning is being used to invigorate native plant communities.

"Our goal for this symposium was to spark an interest in people to better understand a broader view of people's traditional connection to plants in their own local work areas," said Rogers.

Plum Producer Has A Plan

(See more on this story at www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/news/stories)

Mike Vereschagin says that his decision to convert from flood irrigation to microsprinkler irrigation is having a very positive impact on his 630-acre plum orchard.

Vereschagin (*right*) is a fourth-generation Glenn County farmer who produces dried plums, almonds, and olives on more than 1,700 acres near Orland.

Irrigation water is a major expense for Vereschagin as it is for other farmers in the area. Agricultural water needs often exceed local water district supplies, especially in dry years, leading to increased prices. Rising energy costs for pumping groundwater is another significant financial concern. Vereschagin says that in recent years a lack of groundwater recharge has left his well pumps “sucking air” during the hot summer months.

This motivated Vereschagin to try increasing the irrigation efficiency of his plum orchard. So in 2003, Vereschagin began working with NRCS to develop a conservation and water management plan for his orchards. He was interested in EQIP after he learned that the program had become more supportive of orchards and speciality crops.

“In the past, EQIP was more focused on field crops and range issues,” said Vereschagin. “But over time there was a greater realization that orchards can also have a positive impact on the environment.”

Vereschagin said that he and his neighbors had noticed a strong outreach effort by NRCS to the orchard community.

Working with NRCS staff in Willows, Vereschagin developed a comprehensive conservation plan, not only for his plum orchards, but for his entire 1,700-acre operation. The plan is a road map for Vereschagin, helping define and measure progress to help him reach his conservation goals.

As part of his 10-year plan, Vereschagin used EQIP cost-share assistance to install a microirrigation system for his plum trees. The microsprinklers apply water directly to the root zone. With the flexibility this gives him and the aid of an evapotranspiration data service, Vereschagin is now able to maintain uniform soil moisture for optimum plant growth.



“Microsprinklers have cut my water use to about a quarter of what it was before, and I’m definitely getting better growth on the trees,” says Vereschagin.

Optimum moisture and uniformity were not possible using flood irrigation, Vereschagin said. “Flood is a lot harder on the trees. With flood irrigation it’s either really wet or really dry.”

The best part is that Vereschagin is saving a lot of water and money. He can irrigate more frequently, maintaining moisture uniformity, without excessive water loss or soil erosion. He is getting excellent growth using less fertilizer and is able to add gypsum to the water for better soil structure. “With the new system, I’ve been able to lower the level of nutrients applied compared to flood irrigation and yet maintain or improve nutrient levels based on leaf tissue analysis,” said Vereschagin.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is another important part of Vereschagin’s plan. He uses traps to monitor insect activity and he receives weekly reports from a pest management specialist. This helps to keep pesticide use to a minimum. He’s also chipping rather than burning his brush and orchard prunings. This helps air quality and the soil, and also helps to suppress weeds.

“Everything in a plan adds up,” said Vereschagin. “An improvement on one thing has an impact on something else.”

Vereschagin says that for his operation conservation planning benefits are adding up to better yields, better fruit, fewer weeds and pests, lower costs, and higher profits. And as a bonus, Vereschagin was well prepared in 2005 when the Conservation Security Program (CSP) became available in his watershed.

Planning Workshop Draws A Capacity Crowd

A conservation planning workshop held in Anderson over two evenings in February and March drew a capacity crowd of diverse landowners. Hosted by NRCS and **Western Shasta RCD**, the workshop incorporated talks by NRCS field staff and specialists, as well as several guest presenters from various agencies. Topics included developing a comprehensive plan, benefits of conservation planning, available cost-share funds, and upcoming Farm Bill programs.



“I was pleased with the diversity of agricultural operations that participated in this year’s workshop,” said District Conservationist **Bob Bailey**. “Our outreach efforts brought in olive producers, berry growers, ranchers, timberland operators, and even one of our newer vineyard operators.”

Innovative Outreach: Chinese Farm Water Quality Workshop Held

By State Outreach Coordinator Lisa A. Hokholt



Facing, left to right: Terry Wang and Justin Ly of NRCS speak with workshop participants about Farm Bill programs and conservation technical assistance. Photos: Jeff Raifsnider



California State Outreach Coordinator Lisa Hokholt speaks with participants who listen to live translation via headphones while viewing handout materials translated into their native Cantonese language.

An innovative outreach effort held by conservation partners in Santa Clara and San Benito counties in April, has helped about 50 Cantonese-speaking vegetable and flower growers to voluntarily comply with water quality regulations written in their non-native language. A team of NRCS and UCCE employees put together a soil erosion and water quality workshop, entirely translated into Cantonese.

By overcoming the language barrier, the team helped these growers more easily understand local regulations and to learn about conservation concepts. These Cantonese-speaking growers have now joined the ranks of more than 1,500 farmers and growers who have voluntarily complied with the **Central Coast Water Quality Control Board's** irrigated lands discharge permit educational requirement.

A big challenge facing the NRCS-UCCE Team was to identify specific issues of concern to these growers and then to develop and present technical information tailored to the growers' unique operations and production methods. The **Farm Water Quality Planning Short Course**, produced by UCCE and NRCS, provided basic guidelines for the workshop series.

The team selected significant practices such as vegetated buffers and roof runoff management, and then developed custom technical fact sheets they had translated into Chinese. They also prepared a multi-media presentation, printed as handouts translated into Chinese.

During the 3-hour workshop and tour, each participant was "wired for sound" to hear the presentation translated in real-time by a professional interpreter whose services were funded by the **Santa Clara Water District**.

"California's diverse landscapes are matched only by the diversity of its farmers. That's why it makes sense for NRCS to form flexible multi-disciplinary teams to meet the varying needs of our clients."

— Lisa Hokholt

Workshop topics included identification of natural resource problems and opportunities, such as erosion, weed management, and water conservation. Presenters also discussed practical solutions to resource problems, NRCS conservation technical assistance, conservation plans and Farm Bill programs.

The NRCS-UCCE Team, consisted of District Conservationist **Bob Rohde** (Hollister Service Center), State Outreach Coordinator **Lisa Hokholt** (Livermore Local Partnership Office), Soil Conservation Technician **Terry Wang** (Stockton Service Center), and Biologist **Justin Ly** (Yreka Watershed Office). Special thanks to UCCE's Small Farm Advisor **Aziz Baameur** who played a major organizational role for the workshop series.

Foraging For Knowledge

Area Range Specialist **Jeff Hansen** (right) instructs NRCS employees about forage data collection. This spring he led workshops in Placerville and Hanford to provide staff with a basic understanding of annual rangeland and ranching enterprises. This included major vegetation categories and plant species, livestock grazing management, water quality, and determining forage yield. *Photo: Brian Ziegler*



Kern Earth Team Volunteers Honored

By Raul Ramirez, Soil Conservationist/Bakersfield

Earth Team Volunteers in Kern County were honored by NRCS and **North West Kern Resource Conservation District** staff at a recent luncheon in Bakersfield.

Certificates of appreciation, signed by District Conservationist **Mark Davis**, were awarded to six individuals for helping NRCS with its conservation efforts.

The recipients are **Brian Hockett, Christine Aguirre, James Booth, Edith Frick, Max Rivera, and Roland Levins**.

Levins was honored as volunteer of the year.

He was chosen for his "attitude and enthusiasm that defines the volunteer spirit," said Soil Conservationist **Raul Ramirez**.



Photo: Mark Egbert

Chrome Ridge Gets A Break

Residents of the El Dorado County community of Chrome Ridge are resting a little easier knowing their homes are protected by an 81-acre fuel break (left). It was created through a partnership of several agencies, including the **Placerville NRCS office** and **High Sierra Resource Conservation & Development council**. They obtained \$146,000 in grants to clear brush and create evacuation routes. NRCS is also doing outreach and education to let the community know about available resources.

Tribal Spring

San Joaquin Valley Indian tribes, NRCS staff, and other federal agency representatives toured the Tule River Reservation in Tulare County to see sites where conservation practices are in varying stages of implementation.

Visalia District Conservationist **Floyd Hooker** (left) examines a spring,



Photo: Brian Ziegler

that was developed using Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds, with Tule River Range Supervisor **Willie McDarment**.

(Clockwise, from top): NRCS Soil Conservationists Carol Rush, Raul Ramirez, Daniel Meyer. (Center): Roland Levins. *Photo: Brian Ziegler*



The Ultimate Sacrifice

On July 3, 2007, fallen soldier **Lt. Todd Jason Bryant**, son of NRCS employee **Linda Bryant** (Riverside AO), was commemorated when the Tilton Avenue Post Office in Riverside was renamed in honor of his service to the United States. Lt. Bryant's life was taken when the Humvee he was traveling in hit an improvised explosive device in Iraq on October 31, 2003. He was 23.

Todd proudly served his country after graduating from **West Point** in 2002, and planned to attend law school to prepare for a life in politics.

"Todd was the kind of guy that discussed political issues with his friends, even disagreed with them, and maintained their respect through it all," said Linda Bryant, who serves NRCS as a Contract Specialist in the Watershed Recovery Project. While interning for **Congressman Ken Calvert** during the summer of 2001, Todd began airing his dream of being a politician, telling Calvert that he recommended a run for the Senate because he (Todd) planned on taking Calvert's seat in Congress.

Todd loved working with and reading for the children at the West Hills Elementary School where he spent summers volunteering.

"A parent never wants to see their child go before them, and you think about it everyday," said Linda. "He had a lot of potential."



Todd's graduation picture from West Point.

Todd is survived by his wife Jennifer, who is a science teacher in Manassas Park High School in Virginia, his parents and two siblings.

Both Linda and her husband are Air Force veterans. Their son, **Lt. Colonel Tim Bryant**, currently serves with the Marines, stationed in Quantico, Virginia. Tim fought with the 1st Marine Division on the initial assault on Iraq in 2003. Linda's daughter, **Army Captain Tiffany Bryant**, graduated from West Point in 2000, and served in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003. Tiffany currently works for Smith Aerospace in Germantown, Maryland.

A memorial book fund and a scholarship fund have been set up in Todd's name. The **Todd Bryant Book Fund** at West Hills Elementary's Library is helping low-income children enjoy access to books that otherwise wouldn't be possible.

Donations may be made to:

The Lt. Todd J. Bryant Memorial Fund
c/o Bremerton Schools Foundation
134 N. Marion Avenue
Bremerton, WA 98312

Make checks payable to "Bremerton Schools Foundation," with a notation specifying the Lt. Todd J. Bryant Memorial Fund.

Todd graduated from LaCanada High School, and each year the 1LT Todd J. Bryant Memorial Scholarship will benefit a deserving student with a need for assistance in pursuing their college aspirations.

Donations may be made to:

Community Scholarship Foundation
of LaCanada, Inc.
P.O. Box 111

LaCanada-Flintridge, CA 91012

Make checks payable to "Community Scholarship Foundation," with a notation specifying the Lt. Todd J. Bryant Memorial Scholarship.

EWP Work On Catalina?

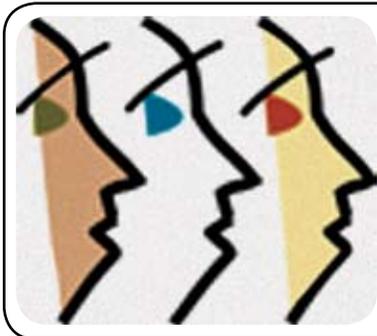
On May 31, Area Engineer **Robert Miller** and District Conservationist **Brooks Engelhardt** traveled to Catalina to meet with representatives from the **Catalina Island Conservancy**, **Island Company** and the **City of Avalon** to discuss and assess the potential for Emergency Watershed Protection after a major fire ripped through several watersheds on May 11.

The fire, which burned nearly 5,000 acres, has impaired several watersheds, including many above Avalon—a popular tourist destination, posing a significant threat to life and property.

The Island Conservancy has identified several conservation issues that complicate the recovery, including non-native deer that feed on native plants trying to regenerate after the fire, extensive goat trails causing erosion, and a plethora of invasive plants.

As of June 26, the City of Avalon is determining who will act as sponsor for the request for EWP assistance, which most likely might be **LA County Public Works**, a past EWP sponsor.





CIVIL RIGHTS CORNER

By *Greg Norris*
California Civil Rights
Committee Member

“I can’t wait until I get to take the next CR/EEO training in AgLearn. I really enjoy taking training classes in AgLearn in my extra time.”

Let’s face it, very few of us utter these words. Typically, we get a notice via e-mail announcing the required training and when it must be completed. We put it off until the last second, then we skim through it, take the test, and print out the certificate of completion. It’s not like you have to be an EEO specialist to pass the test either.

In fact, most of the questions are so common sense, you could just challenge the test and pass with flying colors. But, none of us ever do this, right?

However, if some of us were to complete the training like this, would we really be receiving the critical information that NRCS wants us to have? Would we be applying it in our every day work lives?

Probably not to the extent NRCS and USDA wants us to. Well, since this is such critical information, what if we went back to good old-fashioned training with real people?

Opponents will say, it costs too much to move people all around to statewide training sessions. Okay, what if we develop a training cadre, one for each Area and one for the State Office? Good idea. Let’s try it and see what happens!

During March 26 through March 28, 2007, NRCS employees from throughout



NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster (center) visited the State Office in March during the “Train the Trainer” class for members of the California Civil Right Committee.
Photo: Jim Cairns

the state who were nominated to participate on the cadre to attended a CR/EEO “Train the Trainer” class at the State Office. The group received training from **Cliff Denshire** (National Disability SEPM), **Sharon Nance** (Resource Conservationist), **Bill Scaggs** (GLEAC Program Manager), and **Sharyn Alvarez** (National Women’s SEPM). The training covered the topics of Workplace Harassment, Adult Learning Techniques, the EEO Process, Retaliation, Reasonable Accommodations, and Sexual Diversity.

These topics were then presented by the cadre to all employees this fiscal year. The cadre will be used as a pilot program, and depending on its success, may be adopted by other states in the future. The cadre is currently made up of **Tanya Robles-SO**, **Greg Norris-SO**, **Reina Rogers-A1**, **Dave Rose-A1**, **Mark Steffek-A1**, **Jessica Sternfels-A2**, **Dana Ashford-A2**, **Julie Radder-A2**, **Jennifer Gabor-A3**, **Dawn Afman-A3**, **Elizabeth Palmer-A3**, **Cindy Montepagano-A4**, **Carolyn LoFreso-A4**, and **Paul Nguyen-A4**.

HR Personnel Actions

Name	Position	Action	Grade	Location	Date
Stacy Kavanaugh	Soil Scntst	Career Promotion	GS-09	Sonora	09/02/07
Robert Vlach	Dist Consvst	Career Promotion	GS-12	Willows	09/02/07
Heather Wood	Soil Consvst	Career Promotion	GS-09	Yreka	09/02/07
John Kelly	Ag Engineer	Career Promotion	GS-11	Indio	09/02/07
Troy Jonas	Soil Consv Tech	Career Promotion	GS-07	Somis	08/17/07
Jake Sneider	Soil Scntst	Career Promotion	GS-09	Victorville	08/17/07
Nathan Key	Dist Consvst	Career Promotion	GS-12	Oroville	07/08/07
Alyson Aquino	Dist Consvst	Promotion	GS-11	Concord	06/10/07
Matthew Dreschel	Dist Consvst	Promotion from MT	GS-12	Alturas	06/10/07
Jennifer Walser	Soil Consvst	Career Promotion	GS-09	Yuba City	05/27/07
Leonora Leacock	Adm Asst	Promotion from VA	GS-08	Davis	05/13/07
Marilyn Bravo	Adm Asst	Career Promotion	GS-07	Riverside	04/29/07
Todd Golder	Range Consvst	Promotion	GS-11	Eureka	04/29/07
Haejin Lee	Ag Engr	Reassignment	GS-11	Petaluma	05/13/07
Larry Brewer	Dist Consvst	Retire	GS-12	Lakeport	08/15/07
Larry Norris	Area Biologist	Retire	GS-12	Area 3	08/03/07
Michael Liga	Ag Engineer	Resignation	GS-11	Salinas	08/04/07

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