

SOIL & WATER NEWS

Brent Dykes, Executive Director

A Word From The Director

August 2013

I recently participated in a Forestry Tour of Middle Georgia highlighting the many accomplishments in re-establishing longleaf pines and the importance of prescribed burning in establishing habitat conducive for wildlife.

I was impressed by the leadership shown by the Central GA Conservation District. The District Supervisors planned, promoted and led the tour with great skill and pride. Month after month, conservation districts plan and implement events such as these, and the Conservation Commission is pleased to work alongside these dedicated individuals.

The budget outlook for the state seems to be stabilizing, which is good news for everyone. The agency was pleased to receive full funding of the agricultural metering program for FY14, a program that continues to benefit all Georgians by providing information to make wise water planning decisions for the future.

The wet weather season has changed our daily focus from drought to how to handle an abundance of rain, but it has reminded me personally of how little control we as natural resource professionals have over the natural world. I am glad that God has allowed me the opportunity to work alongside staff and partnering agencies that approach each day with a servant's heart to make the most of the resources we have been given.

As the school year begins, let's remain focused on teaching a new generation of conservationists!

Brent Dykes
Executive Director



Inside this Issue:

NACD SE in Savannah

Local Work Group Meetings

Ag Water Metering Data

Farm Bill Update

NRCS Requesting Proposals
for Outreach Grants

Around the Districts

The Urban Update -
Citizenship Verification

The Urban Update

GSWCC is Hiring

GSWCC Reorganization

GSWCC Regional Offices

NACD SE in Savannah

The NACD Southeast Region Meeting was held in Savannah, Ga., from August 11-13, 2013, at the Hyatt Regency. Conservation District Supervisors from around the Southeast met to share best conservation practices and learn more about issues affecting states in this region. Conservation tours of Georgia Port Authority and Bethesda Academy Farm and Gardens were offered also. More information about the meeting is on the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors website at <http://www.gacds.org>.



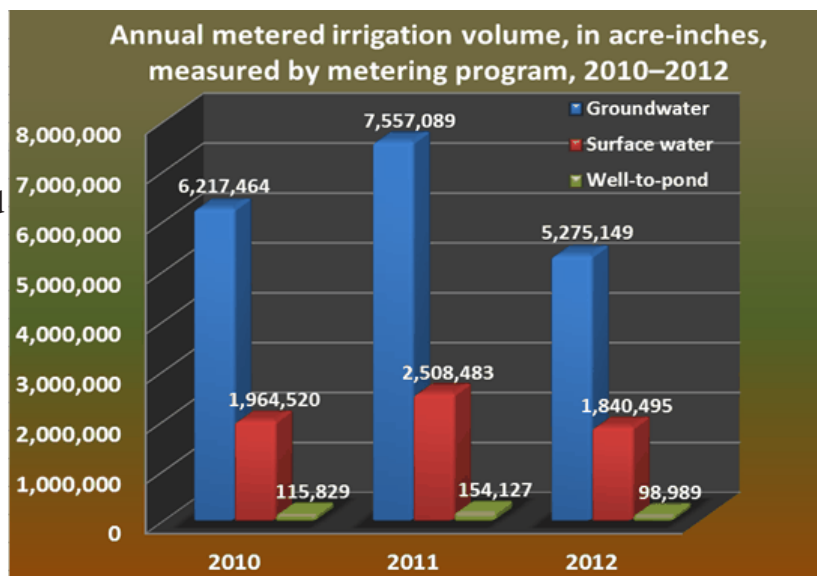
Local Work Group Meetings

Local work groups will be meeting in August to provide feedback for 2014 Program Delivery of Farm Bill Programs. Specifically, Natural Resources Conservation Service is seeking feedback in four areas: prioritize resource concerns, propose allocation of funding by resource concern, set high priority practices by resource concern, and establish local ranking concern questions. The results of these groups will inform NRCS as they move forward with conservation programs in Georgia for FY14. Check out the district meeting web pages at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/soil-water-conservation-districts> to see when your local work group meets.

Ag Water Metering Data

The U.S. Geological Survey has posted results of a cooperative analysis of agricultural water use in Georgia Water Planning Regions during 2012. Information is provided for both metered acres and irrigated acres by water planning region and subbasin based on data collected by the GSWCC.

GSWCC monitors the volumes of agricultural irrigation supplied by groundwater, surface-water, and well-to-pond sources for over 10,000 meters in southern Georgia. GSWCC staff collects data annually with assistance from the Georgia Forestry Commission.



GSWCC contracts analysis of the collected data to the U.S. Geological Survey and the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center in Albany, Ga. Information is available at <http://ga.water.usgs.gov/projects/agwater>

Farm Bill Update

Activity on the 2013 Farm Bill continues. GSWCC Executive Director Brent Dykes traveled to Washington, D.C., in July to participate in the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) 2013 Legislative Conference. More than 140 people from 45 states and territories attended the event. The focus of the meeting was on the pending Farm Bill.

Speakers included Senator Debbie Stabenow, Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. One day of the conference was dedicated to NACD members taking to the Hill to share the locally-led conservation message with members of Congress.

Both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives have passed farm-related legislation, but the two bills differ widely and will need to be reconciled when Congress reconvenes in September before legislation can be sent to the President for his signature.



The Senate has chosen its conferees and Georgia Senator Saxby Chambliss has been selected to participate in the conference. The House of Representatives have not chosen their conferees yet.

You can stay updated on the Farm Bill legislation by checking the GSWCC web page at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/farm-bill-2013>.

NRCS Requesting Proposals for Outreach Grants

NRCS is making a Request For Proposals (RFP) to applicants for outreach and related activities that will improve USDA-NRCS program promotion and delivery to new and underserved individuals, groups that serve and support veterans, women and the impoverished communities in Georgia. For FY 2013, up to \$400,000 is available for the Georgia NRCS program delivery enhancement competition. Cooperative agreements under this RFP will not exceed \$50,000, and must be equal to or more than \$10,000 from NRCS, with a required 25 percent local match for any level of funding received.

Priority will be given to those projects that:

- o Target veterans, beginning, organic, minority, non-traditional producers, and other communities that have been historically underserved.
- o Develop partnerships and working relationships with new and underserved individuals, groups, veterans, and communities that will increase participation in USDA programs, especially those that have significant participation disparities of historically underserved customers.

Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive cooperative agreements process. Applications must be received in the Georgia NRCS State Office by 4:30 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on August 30, 2013. The RFP is available at http://www.gacds.org/storage/2013_georgia_cooperative_agreement_posting-final1.pdf



Around the Districts

The **Blue Ridge Mountain** SWCD partnered with the Chestattee Chattahoochee RC&D, NRCS, and Georgia Organics to sponsor the Innovations in Organic Farming Field Day held at Ladybug Farm in Clayton. Eighty-eight participants learned about the inner workings of small-scaled organic farming through presentations about Farm Bill programs, marketing, nutrient and pest management, and irrigation management for small scale operations. Representatives from the NRCS were on hand to give presentations about how the Farm Bill was equipped to handle the needs of small organic farms and how those operations could apply for the programs. A representative from Georgia Organics gave a presentation on the need for small scale organic farms and how those farms could partner together and market their products. Terry Blincoe, owner of Ladybug Farm, gave a presentation about how she got started farming and how she operates her rainwater irrigation system.



The **Broad River** SWCD, through an outreach grant they received through NRCS, held a sustainable agricultural field-day in Elberton. Over 40 producers were in attendance to hear about the programs available through NRCS and how the Broad River local workgroup helps set the priorities for some for these programs. Participants also learned about soil fertility, pasture management, cover crop management and micro-irrigation. The event ended with a tour of local farms that showcase best management practices that have been installed with the assistance of NRCS cost-share programs.

A Poster Contest Awards Picnic was hosted by the **Catoosa County** SWCD at the Elsie Holmes Nature Center to thank students who had prepared posters on the National Association of Conservation Districts' 2013 theme of "Where does your water shed?" District supervisors were impressed with the level of education the students had about watersheds.



Catoosa County SWCD hosts picnic celebrating NACD poster contestants



Central Georgia SWCD held its 51st Conservationist of the Year Banquet in Cochran with over 140 people attending this year's dinner. The district includes Bleckley, Dodge, Johnson, Laurens, Twiggs, Washington, and

Wilkinson counties. Each county selected a Conservationist of the Year and all the selected individuals were honored at the banquet. Special guests included Mr. William Dixon, banking officer from Morris Bank of Dublin, GSWCC Executive Director Brent Dykes, and Senator Ross Tolleason who delivered the keynote address.



Pictured left to right: Brent Dykes, Executive Director of Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission; Senator Ross Tolleason; Frank Wall, Chairman of the Central Georgia Soil and Water Conservation District

Around the Districts

Gully Branch tree farm held its annual field day for Bleckley County kindergartners and fifth graders. The award winning tree farm, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Earl and Wanda Barrs, hosted 480 students who enjoyed many activities such as a wagon ride through the forest with Smokey the Bear, forestry educational activities, water quality demonstrations, and history lessons of Native Americans. State agencies involved with the event included the Georgia Forestry Commission, the Bleckley County Extension Agent, and the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Students received water quality educational materials that were donated by **Central Georgia SWCD**.



Students participate in outside learning activity at Gully Branch Tree Farm



Participants in Cobb SWCD's small farm workshop learn how they can benefit from NRCS programs

Cobb County SWCD partnered with the Rolling Hills RC&D, NRCS, and the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension to host the Small and Beginning Farmers Workshop at the Cobb Water System Lab in Marietta. Around 35 farmers heard presentations on soil quality, integrated pest management, produce safety, and Farm Bill programs. Alice Champaign introduced the Cobb Soil and Water Conservation District to the group and how the district can assist with natural resource conservation on small farms. A representative from the UGA Cooperative Extension gave a presentation on how to maintain good soil health by knowing what nutrients are available through soil sampling and proper nutrient management techniques. The Farm Service Agency gave a presentation on how to set up a farm for Farm Bill program participation. Information was presented on how the EQIP onprogram can assist small and organic farms.

Coosa River SWCD hosted a Farm & Nutrition Field Day at Oakdale Farms in Rome. The Saturday event took place from 9 AM to 3 PM and saw 15 break-out sessions on topics varying from raised bed construction and cooking demos to wildlife management and forage production. Professionals from Cooperative Extension, the Georgia Beef Board, NRCS and private enterprises were on-hand to discuss the topics of the day. Sessions were geared to four primary areas: Livestock, Produce, Nutrition and Beginning Farming.

All ages were welcomed and attendees as young as 15 months were able to participate in the kids' garden tour. A hamburger lunch was provided by the Floyd County Cattlemen's Association. Rolling Hills RC&D and Floyd County Farm Bureau also provided food and drinks throughout the day. Additional sponsors included the Georgia Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition and Two Rivers RC&D.



Beef Board offers a cooking demo at Oakdale Farms Field Day



Floyd County Cattlemen's Association provide lunch



Children learn about the joys of gardening during Field Day outing

Around the Districts

The **DeKalb County** SWCD held its 26th Annual Erosion and Sediment Control Seminar and Exposition at the Callanwolde Fine Arts Center. The meeting was well attended with the participants getting information on various urban erosion control issues. DeKalb County District chairwoman Dell MacGregor organized the event to help provide grassroots solutions to environmental issues facing DeKalb County and foster networking opportunities to those looking to strengthen their knowledge on a variety of environmental issues. This year's event covered topics ranging from new rules that effect how development is regulated to ideas on how individual citizens can better the environment around them. The event was a great success and many participants commented they could not wait until next year's event.

Lamar County and **Towaliga** SWCDs sponsored a small farmer workshop made possible by a grant received by the Lamar County Soil and Water Conservation District from the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts. The workshop was held at The Garden Patch restaurant in Barnesville with more than 60 attendees. A speaker from the Georgia Department of Agriculture explained the benefits of having products labeled "Georgia Grown" and discussed how producers could join the different levels of Georgia Grown certified. NRCS spoke about cost-share programs, and a local farmer from D&A Farms discussed the success of his hoop houses and shared his experiences in using them. NRCS spoke on the benefits of micro irrigation and the use of micro irrigation in conjunction with hoop houses.



NRCS District Conservationist Carmen Westerfield addresses small farmer workshop on benefits provided by NRCS to farmers

Pine Mountain SWCD hosted its 28th annual Forestry Day at the Marion County Middle/High School in Buena Vista. Over 150 students from 10 surrounding counties participated in this educational event that helps prepare the students for area and state forestry competitions. More than 65 volunteers provided hands-on experience to assist with the Technical and Conclave competitions. Bleckley County won first place overall in the Senior Division with Treutlen County finishing second and Marion County taking third place. This event is held to prepare students for area and state forestry competitions coming in the next months.

The Pine Mountain SWCD also sponsored a Farmer's Field Day as part of a cooperative grant agreement with the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors (GACDS). The day was designed to increase educational opportunities to historically underserved agricultural producers in the district.



Attendees examine hand tools needed for forestry work in Georgia



Natural Resources Conservation Service talks about its history of conservation



Students compete for the fastest time in team sawing competition

Around the Districts

The **Walton County** SWCD sponsored a pollinator habitat field day that was made possible by funding provided by the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors.

Mr. Hal, Mrs. Cheryl and Mr. Clay Brady hosted the event at the Foster-Bradley Farm in Monroe. More than 50 participants learned about the importance of pollinators in the environment including a presentation by the UGA bee lab on current honeybee research. Speakers from NRCS and UGA Extension talked about available funding opportunities and ways to improve pollinator habitats. The day concluded with an instructional tour to demonstrate optimal farming practices.



Attendees at pollinator habitat field day learn why protecting bee habitat is important to all agricultural producers



At Foster-Bradley Farm, participants are shown examples of plants that attract desirable pollinators

Warren County SWCD hosted a Pond Management Field Day at a pond owned by District Supervisor Dan Crumpton. Approximately 40 people learned the history of the pond followed by presentations on pond management by the Department of Natural Resources, fertilization and weed control presented by UGA Extension Service, and rules for pond construction and maintenance given by GSWCC.

The Urban Update - Citizenship Verification

Effective January 1, 2013, applicants seeking to obtain or renew Erosion & Sediment Control Certification for land disturbing activities must provide the GSWCC with the following items:

1. A signed and sworn affidavit verifying the applicant's lawful presence in the United States
2. One of 16 secure and verifiable documents as required by Georgia law.
3. A Checklist for Verification of Lawful Presence within the United States.

Amendments to O.C.G.A. § 50-36-1, requires the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (Commission) to obtain a signed and sworn affidavit verifying the applicant's lawful presence in the United States.

With the passage of Senate Bill 160, U.S. Citizens and Legal Permanent Residents have to submit lawful presence documentation to GSWCC only once. Qualified Aliens are still required to submit lawful presence documentation for each certification and re-certification course they attend.

The Urban Update

The Urban Program is responsible for administering the Education and Certification Program for individuals involved in land disturbing activities and providing technical support and guidance to local soil and water conservation districts, local issuing authorities and the citizens of Georgia on erosion and sediment control issues.

NPDES Permits

The GA EPD has made two important announcements:

1. The draft 2013 NPDES Permits are now available for public comment. Public comment closes August 30, 2013. See below for links.
2. No Action Assurance (link to memo) – This is necessary because the new NPDES State General Permits to replace the existing NPDES State General Permits will not be final and effective prior to the expiration date, July 31, 2013, of the existing NPDES State General Permits (Nos. GAR100001, GAR100002 and GAR100003).

Urban Program at a Glance

ES&PC Plans Reviewed – 1,236

Individuals Certified – 1,282

Individuals Re-certified – 1,475

Reporting Period March 2013 – June 2013

For each Notice of Intent (NOI) – Version 2008 filed on or after August 1, 2013, EPD's No Action Assurance is conditioned upon compliance at the construction site with all requirements and conditions of the applicable NPDES State General Permit issued on August 1, 2008.

EPD will hold a public hearing on August 30, 2013 at the EPD Training Center, 4244 International Pkwy, Suite 116, Atlanta, GA 30354. More information is available at <http://www.gaepd.org/npdes/>

NPDES Construction

Storm Water General Permit Re-Issuance:

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is proposing to reissue NPDES General Permits No. GAR100001, No. GAR100002 and No. GAR100003 for storm water discharges associated with construction activity. Written comments should be received at EPD by the close of business on August 30, 2013.



Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control

The Manual is currently being revised and GSWCC is developing a new process for approving new practices. Proposed revisions to the Manual will be posted for public comment.

GSWCC is Hiring

GSWCC is filling two vacancies. A vacancy announcement has closed and candidates are being considered for an Erosion and Sediment Control Specialist position to be located in Gordon County. Currently, there are vacancy announcements for an Agricultural Water Quality Project Specialist to be located in Terrell County and an Administrative Assistant to be located in Bulloch County. Current GSWCC vacancy announcements are maintained on the GSWCC Careers web page at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/careers>.

GSWCC Reorganization

On June 28, the GSWCC Regional Office in Conyers closed. The administrative functions for the soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) previously handled by that office were reassigned to other GSWCC Regions.

Effective July 1, Region I (Rome) will support Cobb County and Fulton County. Region II (Athens) will support DeKalb County and Gwinnett County. Region IV (Milledgeville) will support Clayton County, Henry County, and Rockdale County.

As part of the reorganization, the Statesboro office has been renumbered Region III and will continue to support the same districts as in the past. The office's new email address is region3@gaswcc.org.

Contact information is available on the GSWCC website at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/reorganization-gswcc-regions>.

GSWCC Regional Offices

Region I Rome Office – John Loughridge, Region1@gaswcc.org (706) 295-6131

Region II Athens Office – Robert Amos, Region2@gaswcc.org (706) 552-4479

Region III Statesboro Office – Rahn Milligan, Region3@gaswcc.org (912) 681-5241

Region IV Milledgeville Office – Keegan Malone, Region4@gaswcc.org (478) 445-5766

Region V Dawson Office – Luke Crosson, Region5@gaswcc.org (229) 995-6001

Communications / Information Resource Specialist – Michael Wald, mwald@gaswcc.org (706) 552-4489

Visit us on the web at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov>