



SOIL & WATER NEWS

Brent Dykes, Executive Director



A Word From The Director

September 2013

The Fall Season is a busy time for the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

As we embark on major upgrades to two flood control watershed dams in North Georgia, we are also beginning to conduct annual meter readings of agricultural water use in South Georgia.

A new watershed improvement project is beginning in Middle Georgia and planning is underway for the annual meeting of the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors.

Our Urban Program is busy completing the final edits to the Manual for Erosion Control (Green Book), just in time to begin making necessary revisions to the Erosion Control Certification curriculum to coincide with the release of the new NPDES permits.

All of these activities coincide with the agency's mission to work alongside local conservation districts and private landowners to conserve Georgia's natural resources.

These activities require coordination and cooperation of multiple agencies (local, state, and federal) and partners to get the job done.

Thank you for partnering with us to leave a conservation legacy for future generations.

Brent Dykes
Executive Director

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Importance of Farm Bill to Conservation

The Farm Bill is reviewed and reauthorized by Congress every five years. Conservation programs contained in the national Farm Bill and administered by the USDA-NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) provide significant opportunities for Georgia's private landowners to protect and improve their soil and water resources.



NRCS's programs help producers reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce damages caused by natural disasters. Conservation programs in the Farm Bill includes:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).
- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The 2008 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2012. In January 2013, Congress took short-term action to extend many 2008 Farm Bill programs for nine months. While the conservation-funding portion of the bill does not represent a major part of Farm Bill expenditures, it is vital to the long-term health of soil and water conservation programs in the United States and affects not just agricultural producers.

As this important piece of legislation moves forward, you can find updates on the GSWCC website at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/farm-bill-2013>.

Envirothon - Stephens County represents Georgia

Stephens County High School team placed the highest of any Georgia team in Envirothon history, coming in 16th at the national Envirothon held in Bozeman, Montana in August.

The team, led by Dr. Terry Seehorn, competed in categories that included Soils/Land Use, Aquatic Ecology, Forestry, Wildlife, and, Sustainable Rangeland Management.



The annual competition for high school-aged students is designed to test teams' knowledge of environmental science and natural resource management. Teams at the North American Envirothon compete for recognition and scholarships.

In 2014, the national competition will be hosted by Georgia on the University of Georgia's Athens campus from July 20 to 24. Each year, the host state is allowed to pick one category for the competition. For 2014, that category will be Sustainable Local Agriculture /Locally Grown.

The Envirothon competition depends on volunteers and donations to continue. If you would like to help, you can contact the Georgia Envirothon by calling 912.529.6652 or emailing jstandridge@gaswcc.org.

Watershed dams - Maintenance is Key to Longevity



Example of a properly maintained earthen dam.



An earthen dam in need of maintenance.

Georgia is home to 357 watershed dams built to provide flood protection. While much of this protection was originally meant to protect agricultural land, over time the increase in downstream development means that a number of these dams now protect roads and bridges, commercial development, and residential development.

Conservation districts, with the assistance of GSWCC, are actively working to develop a dam maintenance program that will ensure that Georgia's watershed dams will continue to protect the property and people downstream who depend on them. Many of these dams were built in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s; and so are more than 50 years old now. The dams were built by the NRCS and are now operated by local soil and water conservation districts under perpetual easements from landowners.

With proper maintenance, these dams can last indefinitely, but neither counties nor districts receive any significant funding to maintain the structures. In some cases, maintenance means merely annual mowing and removal of saplings to protect the integrity of the dam, while in other cases, metal parts need replacing and spillways must be repaired or replaced.

It is easy to assume that a dam that has stood for 50 or more years will last forever, but these structures require regular maintenance just like other infrastructure.

GSWCC is in the planning stages of a new watershed maintenance initiative to prioritize available funding to address the greatest needs. For more information about watershed dams in Georgia and efforts to maintain them, see <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/watershed-dams>.

Multicultural Sustainable Agriculture Conference in Gwinnett County



The Upper Ocmulgee River RC&D Council sponsored a one-day conference in Gwinnett County for beginning and established multicultural farmers. Supported by funding from USDA, the meeting saw 125 participants of diverse backgrounds exchange information on small-scale intensive agriculture. Farmers markets, the state's Georgia Grown program, as well as restaurants looking for locally-grown products are giving small producers an opportunity to be successful on as little as 2 - 5 acres and opening doors for non-traditional farming.

Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary Black addresses attendees at the Multicultural Sustainable Agriculture Conference



Sustainable Agriculture Conference for New and Beginning Farmers - October 3



The Athens Land Trust and UGA Cooperative Extension are sponsoring a one-day conference on October 3 at the Oconee County Civic Center in Watkinsville from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Topics will include integrated pest management, USDA Support Programs, Georgia Organics, food preservation and meat processing, and more. Keynote speaker will be Quinton Robinson, USDA Rural Development State Director. Register online at <http://www.athenslandtrust.org>.

NACD Forest Resource Policy Group Visits Georgia

The NACD Forest Resource Policy Group (RPG) had a chance to view Georgia's best managed private forestland during its annual summer meeting held in Macon, Ga. GSWCC Executive Director Brent Dykes and NRCS State Conservationist James Tillman met with the group to give it an overview of Georgia's conservation efforts in forestry. Ninety-one percent of the state's 24.4 million acres of forestland is privately owned and represent a big part of the state's economy – roughly 20% of Georgia's total economic impact.

The general session covered wildlife habitat, trends in wood certification, wildfire management in the southeast, and findings from the National Woodland Owner Survey. Attendees also learned how southeast resource professionals are working to re-establish longleaf pine. During the field tour, Forest RPG members and partners were able to view a longleaf planting site and visit a pair of National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year, including famed musician and nationally-recognized conservationist Chuck Leavell.



Central Georgia SWCD Supervisor Dan Dixon serves on the RPG, and his efforts made this a very successful event.

The Urban Update - Changes to Manual of Erosion and Sediment Control & NPDES Permits

GSWCC has proposed a number of revisions to the Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia, known as the Green Book. The Manual provides technical guidance to erosion and sediment control of land-disturbing activities conducted as part of any urban land development in Georgia. The comment period ends September 30.

NPDES General Permit Nos. GAR100001 (Stand Alone), GAR100002 (Infrastructure) and GAR100003 (Common Development) have been issued by the GA EPD and are effective September 24, 2013. Existing construction sites must submit the new NOI – Version 2013 within ninety (90) days after the effective date of the permits in order to obtain coverage. More information has been posted on the EPD website at www.gaepd.org/npdes.



Partners For Fish & Wildlife Report



The final counts are in and GSWCC completed nine partners' projects in six different counties from Sept. 1, 2012 thru Aug. 31, 2013. In total, 27,956 feet of riparian/wildlife buffers, which included fencing and alternative watering systems, were restored at a cost of \$102,000. Projects were undertaken in Appling, Bulloch, Gordon, Jackson, Jeff Davis, and Screven counties.

A description of the program, conducted in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, is on the GSWCC website at <http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/partners-fish-and-wildlife>.

Around the Districts

The **Central Georgia SWCD** hosted an irrigation workshop in Laurens County. The workshop was made possible by an outreach grant awarded by the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors. Over 75 people participated in the event's success. Topics included withdrawal permitting, grid sampling, metering program, importance of pivot water application uniformity, and the basics of chemigation/fertigation techniques. Pesticide credits were given to those in attendance. Cost-share opportunities were discussed by NRCS and FSA. Various agencies were available to answer questions including NRCS, FSA, GSWCC, Extension Service, and GA-EPD.



Ochoopee River SWCD sponsored an Irrigating for Greater Profits workshop in Lyons. Participants learned the basics of irrigating as well as the benefits of protecting a crop investment by supplying water when it is needed resulting in greater profits.

Piedmont SWCD held a Landowner Field Day that focused on managing pine plantations. The day began at Pennington Farms in Madison. A representative from Pennington Seed spoke on managing forestlands and the use and benefits of wildlife food plots. Afterwards there was a presentation on estate planning for forest landowners.

West Georgia SWCD sponsored a Grazing and Pasture Management Workshop and Field Day at the Haralson County Recreation Center in Buchanan. Topics covered included: Rotational Grazing Systems, Soil Testing and Interpreting Results, Winter Grazing, Stockpiling Fescue, No-till Drill Calibration, and a Pasture Walk and Discussion with Grazing Specialists. All attendees that pre-registered received a free soil test.



Region I Office is Moving



The Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission's Region I Office will be relocating to new and larger quarters in Calhoun in October. All of the region's activities will remain the same, and the office will continue to serve the same Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Check the GSWCC website in October for the office's new contact information
<http://gaswcc.georgia.gov/region-i>

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