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Brent Dykes, Executive Director

A Word From the Director

As we enter the summer months, the State of Georgia is already experiencing a shortage of rain in the southeast and southwest. This quickly brings back memories of the challenges faced during past drought cycles. However, we endured and persevered through those times, and I am confident that we can face whatever lies ahead now. I choose to believe that whatever trials we endure currently will make us stronger for the next challenge we will face. As we work with smaller state and federal budgets, along with a slow economic recovery, my faith is strengthened daily by my personal belief that God is in control. I hope you have the same confidence about the future.

In this edition of the newsletter, you'll find news on multiple soil and water conservation district events aimed at educating landowners about conservation. You might be surprised by the diverse topics, but conservation affects every aspect of our lives - from where we live, to what we eat, to our general welfare and safety.

Thanks for reading,

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[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Calendar of Events

National Walk in the Woods Day

May 21

[Click here to plan your Walk in the Woods activity](#)

USDA-FSA Biomass Crop Assistance Program

Project Proposals Due

May 27

Georgia Egg Association - 50th Annual Meeting

June 1-3

St. Simons Island, Ga

[Call \(770\) 536-2476 for more info.](#)

North American Agroforestry Conference

UGA Campus - Athens, Ga

June 4-9

Natural Resources Conservation Workshop - 50th Anniversary

ABAC Campus - Tifton, Ga

June 5-9

www.abac.edu/dnr

National Get Outdoors Day

GACDS Friends of Conservation

Become a member of the GACDS *Friends of Conservation* to help protect natural resources and promote conservation education in Georgia.

[For more information, click here!](#)

Georgia Land Conservation Program

Over the past year, the Georgia Land Conservation Program (GLCP) made substantial advances toward protecting Georgia's land, water, forest, and agricultural resources. With the help of public and private partners, the program is responsible for ensuring the permanent conservation of over 75,000 acres last year. To view the 2010 Annual Georgia Land Conservation Report [click here](#).

The Land Conservation Council governs the GLCP Program and is comprised of five state agencies (including GSWCC) and four gubernatorial appointees.

Tucker Turf LLC is currently working with the Georgia Forestry Commission and GSWCC to donate a conservation easement of 1,055 acres in Houston County. This property will be the first agricultural row crop conservation easement under the GLCP, and contains significant floodplain habitat along Big Indian Creek. This land easement will protect the natural value of the property while assuring it's ability to be used for agricultural production.

June 11

www.nationalgetoutdoorsday.org

Georgia/Florida Tobacco Tour

June 13-15

www.georgiatobacco.com

Farmland Succession Workbook

The Rolling Hills Resource Conservation and Development Council has developed a farm workbook for individuals that are looking to keep their farm in production as it passes to future generations.

[Visit the Rolling Hills RC&D website to download your free copy.](#)

Master Gardener Certification Now Offered to Elementary Students

The UGA Cooperative Extension Service now works to provide Master Gardener certification to kids. The 2011 effort to 'Grow Green Kids' through the Jr. Master Gardener curriculum is taught locally by volunteer staff from the Georgia Association of Conservation District Supervisors and GSWCC. Volunteers offer weekly classes at Clarke County's J.J. Harris Elementary School for 3rd - 5th grades. Classes started the first week of February and work to cover a new topic each week. Students have learned about container gardening, the best time to plant new seeds, the water cycle, soil properties and plant basics. J.J. Harris offers "cluster" periods every Thursday where students can sign up for a one hour class of their choice. The twelve week course recently concluded in April and eleven students successfully earned a Jr. Master Gardener's certificate.



Instructor & GSWCC Staff Jennifer Standridge and Jr. Master Gardeners stand beside their newly planted container garden.

Public Notice & Comment Period Now Open for Regional Water Plans

Georgia's Regional Water Planning Councils have regularly met since February 2009 to prepare draft regional water plans. The State Water Plan requires that the initial draft recommended regional water plans are subject to public notice and a comment period prior to adoption of the plans by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

A public notice and comment period for these initial regional plans will be open until June 22, 2011. Please take the time to review the regional water plan for your area and provide the council with your remarks. Visit www.georgiawaterplanning.org for more information.

Regional Office News

Region I-Northwest Georgia

The Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) joined up with the Chattoe-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) office and the Blairsville Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) to host the 134th Union County Arbor Day Celebration on February 17th, 2011. Attendants planted a tree at the Veterans Administration Building near Blairsville, Georgia.

The Limestone Valley SWCD partnered with the Limestone Valley RC&D to plant trees and teach a soils course at Dawnville Elementary School in Whitfield County. The district also hosted a Level 1B course for the Local Issuing Authorities in the district, providing the course at cost, in

order to show their appreciation for the authorities' continued support for local erosion and sedimentation programs.

This spring, the Coosa River SWCD sponsored Project WET, a water education workshop for K-12 teachers, at the Arrowhead Environmental Education Center in Floyd County. The Coosa River District supervisors honored the Bartow County Road Department and the Bartow County Commissioner for their continued maintenance of county watershed flood control structures and presented officials with a certificate of appreciation. The district was also active during Georgia Ag Awareness Week (March 14-20), participating in Agricultural Days at Floyd and Polk County Elementary schools.



Mrs. Loughridge's 3rd Grade class plants trees with (L-R) Will Matson, Doug Cabe, and John Loughridge.

The West GA SWCD sponsored three teams in the annual Georgia Envirothon competition. The district's 2010 scholarship was awarded to Savannah Brown; her future education plans include attending Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College to study diversified agriculture and natural resource conservation.

Joel Keith, chairman of the Roosevelt SWCD, was recently honored for 25 years of service to the district and Troup County. The district is currently making plans to host its annual Youth Wildlife Field Day in the fall of the year at Troup County High School.

Region II-Northeast Georgia

The Oconee River SWCD, in cooperation with the Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC) & the Oconee River RC&D, hosted a Small Farm Conference in Athens, Ga. Athens Mayor, Nancy Denson started off the conference activities with a warm welcome on Thursday March 31st. Conference sessions targeted small, limited resource farmers and drew over 130 attendees and exhibitors to the two day event. Breakout sessions provided



attendees with the chance to learn about GSWCC Staff Ben Ruzowicz performs a sheep shearing demonstration at the Small Farm Conference in Athens. state and federal agricultural programs, organic and naturally grown certifications, effective ways to market to a consumer, safe food handling techniques, and more. Individuals toured Plow Point Farms and Whippoorwill Hollow Farms in the Athens area and learned about individual success stories and agritourism related activities that farmers had effectively incorporated into their own operations. The Small Farm Conference came to a close on Friday, April 1st as Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture, Gary Black gave the closing keynote address.

Region III-Metro



Congressman Hank Johnson with members of the Friends of Friendship Forest, DeKalb District Supervisors, GSWCC staff, and Clarkston officials.

The City of Clarkston's Friendship Forest was recently awarded a \$10,000 federal grant administered through GSWCC to restore wildlife habitat. The funds came from the US Fish and Wildlife Service through their Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to assist in the protection of habitat types that conserve or restore native vegetation, hydrology, and soils associated with imperiled ecosystems. The largely urban area of Clarkston, just east of Atlanta, provided an ideal setting to display conservation and education practices for the

protection and restoration of impaired fish and wildlife habitat.

In March of 2002, the City of Clarkston designated the 15 acres of fields, tree stands and streams as public greenspace, renaming the protected area Friendship Forest in 2003. Since its inception, Clarkston and the Friends of Friendship Forest have worked to transform the acreage into a wildlife sanctuary with the long-term goal of protecting wildlife habitat.

GSWCC worked with the City of Clarkston and other partners to plan, implement and monitor the project. Cooperating agencies include the DeKalb County SWCD, the USDA-NRCS, the Georgia Forestry Commission, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division. The city recently welcomed Congressman Hank Johnson, 4th Congressional District, to Friendship Forest to view their restoration efforts.

Region IV-Central Georgia



Benny Smith and son, Kevin Smith stand in front of PFW exclusion fencing.

Since February of this year, Region IV has worked with seven landowners to complete conservation agreements through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program. In addition, the Milledgeville office is currently lagoon accepting pump-out applications for the Piedmont SWCD and Oconee River RC&D. Approved applications will receive aid collecting lagoon and soil samples from animal operations. Once sample results are returned, Nutrient Budget Worksheets are developed for participating producers and GSWCC

staff help coordinate a schedule for lagoon pump-out in order to fertilize on-farm crops while protecting water quality in nearby streams.

Approximately 40 guests attended the Upper Ocmulgee River SWCD's Conservationist of the Year Banquet held at the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield on March 15, 2011. Supervisor Charlie Lane presented the Jasper County Conservation Award to Charles Brock, and Supervisor David Hays presented the Newton County Conservation Award to Crystal Organic Farm.

The Central Georgia SWCD held their 49th annual Conservationist of the Year Program at the First Baptist Church in Cochran on April 12. Two hundred guests were in attendance. Bleckley County District Supervisor, Paul English gave special recognition and honor to deceased Bleckley County Supervisor David Dykes, Sr.; a scholarship has been established in remembrance of Mr. Dykes. The district honored the following conservationist award winners: (Bleckley Co.) Michael Yearty, (Dodge Co.) Clay, Brian, and Brodie McCranie, (Johnson Co.) Bobby Edward Hall, (Laurens Co.) Bill A. Mathis, (Twiggs Co.) Jerry Newby, (Washington Co.) Bobby Brantley, (Wilkinson Co.) Carbo Ceramics.

Cochran Office



On April 20th and 21st the GSWCC Cochran office participated in a field day at Gully Branch Tree Farm attended by 1st graders from the Susie Dasher School in Dublin. Approximately 250 students and 25 teachers were in attendance. 2011 marks the third year that the Cochran office has been invited to Gully Branch for the two day event. GSWCC staff, David Hall and Brian Horne informed students about the importance of water conservation and resource protection. Irrigation

GSWCC Staff Brian Horne teaches water conservation to 1st graders at Gully Branch. Technician, Brian Horne stated "It is good to know that our children are learning the value of conservation at a young age."

The Cochran office has also been busy contracting 15 irrigation pivot retrofits for the GSWCC Mobile Irrigation Lab Program. The Pond Program has completed seven contracts since January 2011 and is currently working on designs and cost estimates for additional pond agreements.

Region V-Southwest Georgia

The Middle South Georgia and Flint River SWCDs hosted the Ochlockonee River Basin 319 Water Quality Field Day on March 10 in Meigs. Heavy use areas and buffer exclusion fencing practices were installed through the Upper Ochlockonee River Basin TMDL Implementation Project. This is a federally funded program administered by GSWCC and made possible through an agreement with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division using Section 319(h) funding of the Clean Water Act. GSWCC Project Coordinator Jonathan Hall highlighted the agricultural best management practices installed on Gene Willis' farm targeting water quality improvements. Field day attendants toured the farm on trolleys generously provided by the Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. Regional Representative, Luke Crosson discussed irrigation efficiency and the GSWCC Ponds Program. Stay Tuff Fencing offered field day attendants a demonstration displaying the proper way to brace fencing.



Project Coordinator, Jonathan Hall addresses field day attendants.

Region VI-Southeast Georgia



(L-R) Ag Commissioner Gary Black, Hazel Stafford, Cecil Stafford, Governor Nathan Deal.

Coastal SWCD Supervisor, Cecil Stafford was selected as a district winner of the 2011 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Agriculture as presented by the Honorable Nathan Deal and The Honorable Gary Black at the National Agricultural Week Kick-off Program on March 22, 2011 in Atlanta. Cecil and Hazel Stafford were nominated for their exemplary stewardship on Blueberry Hill Farm, a 33-acre blueberry operation near Ludowici, Georgia. The Stafford family worked for years to clear their land, three acres at a time, in order to establish rabbiteye blueberries. In addition to their berry crop, the Staffords have created silvopasture to allow high quality forage for 75 goats,

while also producing timber on the same land. Cecil Stafford has a history of soil and water conservation and has worked to install best management practices on his farm so that he may "preserve something for future generations."

GSWCC Joins Governor's Water Supply Task Force

The Governor's Water Supply Program was created by Governor Nathan Deal's executive order on January 25, 2011. The order called for the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) to develop and implement the program, which will assist local governments to cultivate new sources of water supply in order to adequately meet future water demands in Georgia. As part of the order, GEFA assembled a Water Supply Task Force to provide skilled guidance for the program's development.

The Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission is proud to be a member of the Governor's Task Force.

Cogongrass in Georgia



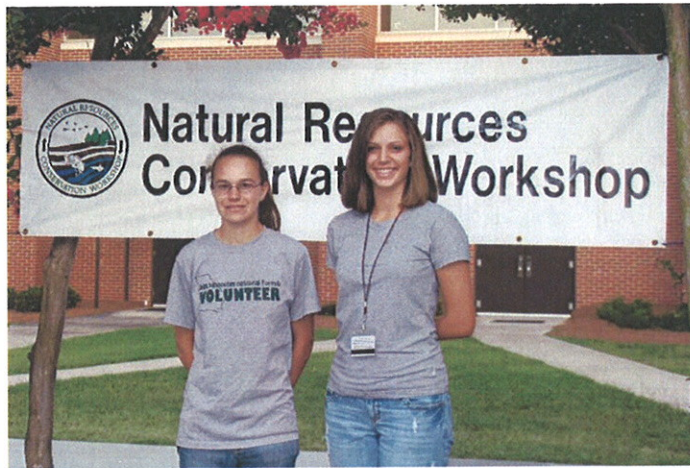
Cogongrass is an aggressive perennial grass that invades both natural and disturbed areas across the Southeastern U.S. The grass is classified as a Federal Noxious Weed, due to its ability to successfully disperse, colonize and spread, competing with other native vegetation. The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) has launched an effort to eradicate cogongrass in Georgia. A flowering seed head makes this grass easier to identify from March through June.

To find out more about this noxious weed, view the [GFC 2011 Cogongrass Update](#) and help statewide efforts to identify and eliminate this invasive species.

District Spotlight Walton County Soil and Water Conservation District

Since its inception, the Walton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has maintained a strong focus, treating each acre of land in Walton County in accordance with its needs and using each acre in accordance with its capabilities. This group of land stewards is responsible for setting priorities for Walton County's soil and water resources and educating local citizens about resource conservation. The district pledges annual commitments to local conservation-minded groups, sponsoring students in their attendance to the Natural Resources Conservation Workshop and recognizing local landowners who achieve outstanding accomplishments in the field of soil and water conservation.

The district has supported outdoor education classrooms for the public, like the Julian E. Brown Environmental Study Area in Monroe, Georgia. Walton County District Supervisors helped to plant wildlife plots to encourage healthy habitats and monitor for undesirable plant species. The district partnered with the Oconee River RC&D to erect a series of signs for the classroom in order to identify key resources within the Environmental Study Area.



The Walton Co. SWCD sponsored NRCW students Jessica Crow and Haley Broach in 2010.

The Walton County District is actively involved in community forestry efforts. District Supervisor Crista Carrell (who is also the GACDS Executive Director), along with the Oconee River RC&D, administers a \$16,870 grant from the Georgia Forestry Commission to benefit the City of Monroe's community forests. The grant provides for an inventory of trees on city properties, a management plan, and educational programs for city and county employees. In 2010, the district sponsored a 'Making the Shade' project at Atha Road Elementary School and helped plant over 40 trees on campus. In addition, the Walton County SWCD was awarded a grant from the Oconee River RC&D for purchasing live trees (\$6,000 in estimated value) to plant in Matthews and Childers Parks in Monroe.

Walton County Supervisors work in cooperation with GSWCC and NRCS to help mitigate erosion and sedimentation issues inside the county. District supervisors regularly receive updates on local erosion and sedimentation plan approvals from NRCS reviewers. In order to help target agricultural resource concerns, the district works with NRCS to set local annual priorities for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Looking for more information? Contact your local GSWCC office!

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Region VI

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