



Nebraska Society News

Soil and Water Conservation Society

November 2008 Newsletter

Officers 2008-2009

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Vice Pres.	Darwin Hinrichs	Darwin.Hinrichs@ne.usda.gov
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Past Pres.	Craig Romary	craig.romary@nebraska.gov

President's Message - Kris Ethridge

Someone recently pointed out a magazine article that really got my attention. The article talked about our nation being in an energy crisis and how the tremendous domestic cost of oil production is rising faster than other prices, putting a severe strain on the country's business-investment capital. The article went on to discuss ethanol as a solution that must be pursued. The author explained how bio-fuels must be immediately used as a feasible alternative to petroleum products and this will only be possible when there is "complete co-operation between the oil, auto, and farming industries".

Bio-fuels and renewable energy seem to be very popular topics these days. But this article didn't stick out to me because of the topic. It stuck out because it was published in 1983 (Barry Commoner, A Reporter at Large, "Ethanol", The New Yorker, October 10, 1983).

The recognition of our need to pursue more efficient forms of energy is nothing new. Ethanol has actually been around since the beginning of the 20th century, but bio-fuels have always been held back because of efficiency issues and our infrastructure's reliance on petroleum products. As is most often the case, necessity leads to action. We now realize that developing more renewable and efficient forms of energy is a critical task that we must develop quickly. Issues that have held bio-fuel production back over the past 25 years since the pre-mentioned article was published have included: technology issues, feedstock availability, lack of a level-playing field with petroleum, access to energy markets, less Btu per volume compared to fossil fuels, food vs. fuel argument, and last but not least, the potential impacts on soil and water conservation.

I'd like to focus on the last issue, the potential impacts on soil and water conservation. As renewable energy becomes one of our nation's highest priorities and we throw tremendous monetary resources into solving the current "energy crisis", it is absolutely crucial that we do not accomplish our energy goals at the expense of the most vital natural resources we have, soil and water.

I'm a big advocate for the production of bio-fuels, however, in 2006 it was estimated that a 50 million gallon per year ethanol plant would use between 3 and 4 gallons

of water to produce one gallon of ethanol (Andy Aden, "Water Usage for Current and Future Ethanol Production", Southwest Hydrology, Sept/Oct 2007, pg 22-23). That's 150 to 200 million gallons of water per year. In the Midwest, most of this is water comes from groundwater sources. If we develop cellulosic ethanol production, the ratio of water used to ethanol produced would decrease to around 2 to 1 (Aden, 2007). This would be very comparable to the current water usage when processing fossil fuels. But that's still using 75 to 100 million gallons of our groundwater per year. That's not mentioning the significant increase in acres of land that are being converted from other uses to cropland in order to feed the ethanol plants. Without proper conservation systems, the potentially significant increase in soil loss from these new acres in production could severely impede water quality and greatly diminish the sustainability of our agricultural lands.

As members of the Soil and Water Conservation Society, now more than ever it is imperative that we actively pursue our society's mission to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation. We can have a strong influence towards ensuring that our soil and water resources are not jeopardized. We can accomplish this by working to combine science and professional judgments for the purpose of improving conservation policy and shaping local, state, and federal policy.

In Nebraska, we can start by participating in our local SWCS chapter activities and promoting our society's goals. A great place to start is by joining the new international SWCS Network (www.swcsnetwork.ning.com/). The SWCS Network is a great way to communicate with other conservation professionals and share your views and opinions on relevant topics, as well as learning from a vast pool of available conservation expertise.

By actively pursuing our society's mission, we can each do our part to ensure that the solution to the current "energy crisis" doesn't contribute to the next generation dealing with a much more severe water or food crisis. Any comments or ideas for increasing chapter activities or to increase memberships in the NE chapter of SWCS are greatly welcomed. Please feel free to contact any of your officers or section directors.

Awards Presented At 2008 Annual SWCS Meeting Holdrege Nebraska

During the 2008 Nebraska SWCS Annual Meeting, our chapter took time to recognize those individuals who have contributed to Soil and Water Conservation activities in our state. This years awards included:

Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN), Sandy Seibert, President – 2008 Merit Award. This award was presented to BAN for their efforts to provide habitat for bluebirds and wood ducks in Nebraska. The Mission of BAN is: To increase the population of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds through the promotion of bluebird awareness among concerned citizens. BAN Members have established trails and constructed and installed approximately 30,000 bluebird nesting boxes since becoming organized in 1993. Monitoring of the trails and boxes reported 26,385 bluebirds fledged in 2006 and 22,856 fledged in 2007. BAN's website (www.bbne.org) provides information and education materials related to their mission.


Ruan Pohlman - 2008 Honor Award. This award was presented to Ruan in recognition for her efforts to provide habitat for bluebirds at Ashfall and Prairie Crest Farm. Ruan has been volunteering at Ashfall State Historical Park near Royal Nebraska for the past 15 years. During 2005-2007 over 250 bluebirds were fledged from the Trail monitored by Ruan at Ashfall. In addition Ruan monitors a trail on her own property in Stanton County which has fledged over 200 Bluebirds since 1999.

Craig Romary - 2008 Commendation Award. This award was presented to Craig in recognition for his efforts and enthusiasm in serving the Nebraska Chapter as a member, Secretary and President. Craig has been a member of SWCS since 1993 and has served as Secretary from 2002-2006 and President from 2006-2008. Craig lives in Lincoln, works for the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and enjoys spending time with his family as well as hunting, fishing and time outdoors.

Nebraska SWCS Scholarship Application

Do you know a student in a Nebraska college studying in the area of Natural Resources? If so, please point them to the Scholarship Application on the Nebraska SWCS Website at: http://incolor.inebraska.com/doug/swcs/Scholarship_Application.pdf. Scholarship Applications are due to Paul Smith by December 6, 2008.

Hinrichs, Darwin Trenton, NE



I was raised on a dryland/irrigation farm near Glenvil, Nebraska. My college education was at UNL in Lincoln for my B.S. and M.S. in soils. I taught at the Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture in Curtis for fifteen years educating students in conservation and natural resource areas. When this program closed I spent seven years in North Dakota with their extension service as the Southwest Area Water Quality Specialist. In the spring of 2003 I started with NRCS in Nebraska as the Resource Conservationist in Hitchcock County at the Trenton Field Office. I am enjoying working with producers on conservation issues.

I love to fish, hunt and work with plants. My wife Marie and I have four kids (two boys and two girls) and five grandkids.

Dig-It!

The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History unveiled "Dig-It! The Secrets of Soil" exhibit on July 17, 2008. Cristian Samper, director of the National Museum of Natural History, declared the exhibit a "Celebration of soil," at the reception and preview. SWCS and SSSA members from all over the US participated.

The grand opening to the public was on Saturday, July 19. The Pritchard Lecture at the SWCS Annual Conference in Tucson, Arizona, will be a presentation about this new exhibit. You can learn more about this presentation at http://www.swcs.org/en/conferences/past_conferences/2008_annual_conference/pritchard_lecture/. "Dig It! The Secrets of Soil" occupies approximately 5,000 square feet in the National Museum of Natural History. It is on display through January 2010 when it will take to the road and will be displayed at over 10 museums around the US.

A soil monolith from each state, territory, and the District of Columbia are on display. Interactive stations include soil texture, color and parent materials, and the distribution of soils in the US. Displays and videos related soils to our daily activities and show water, nutrient, and gas movement in soil, soil formation, and more.

For more information, visit the Smithsonian exhibit Web site: <http://forces.si.edu/soils/> and the Soil Science Society of America web site: <https://www.soils.org/smithsonian/>.

Posted July 23, 2008 on the SWCS Conservation Blogger by Ross Braun (see <http://conservationblogger.blogspot.com/>)

Northern Plains Director's Report
Mary Miller, Vice President and Northern
Plains Region Director

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you some information on Northern Plains and Society happenings. In addition, I enjoyed attending your Chapter's workshop in Holdrege this past June.

2009 Technical Conference—The Northern Plains Chapters are moving forward with our 2009 Technical Conference titled "Conservation – Sustaining Our Future." The conference will be held February 18-20, 2009, in Rapid City, South Dakota. The program committee, headed up by Mike Collins from the North Dakota Chapter, has put together an outstanding program. Craig Romary from your Nebraska Chapter has been active on this committee. Certified Crop Advisors can earn 17.5 CEUs for attending the conference. Certified Professionals in Range Management can earn 11 CEUs.

For more information on the conference, please go to the North Dakota Chapter website at www.ndswcs.org. The preliminary program, registration, sponsorship/exhibitor, poster session, and lodging information are under the "What's New" tab. We will continue to provide updates as things change.

I am very proud of our Northern Plains Region as we have committee chairs and participation from all Chapters.

Executive Director Search—You all should have received an email from Peggie James, our Society's President, letting you know that we are in full swing in our search for a new Executive Director. She also included the job description. The Society's officers and Search Committee, made up of some Society members, are working with a search firm and through our contacts to publicize this opening. If you know of someone who might be interested, please provide them with the information. You can email me at ranchhand@triplembar.com if you need copies of the letter and the job description.

Marketing Program—I am working with Mark Anderson-Wilk and other Ankeny staff on a Marketing Program. We have an outside public relations firm that is looking at the Society's capabilities and challenges in this area. The end result will be information on our strengths, our weaknesses, and a group of recommendations for the Society.

Membership Chair, Robin Foulk

A charge to all members: Ask someone at work if they are a member of SWCS this week and if they are not tell them why you are a member and explain what SWCS is about. And for those who like a real challenge - continue to ask until you find someone who is a member if you do not locate one the first time!!!!

Welcome the following new members:

Northeast Nebraska Chapter

Theresa Smydra

Sarah Reece

Patrick Cowsert

Nebraska Chapter

Duane Hovorka

Tim Weltmer

Aaron Nygren

University of Nebraska Chapter

Carla McCullough

Advertise the blogger:

www.swcs.org/conservationblogger

Nebraska Chapter 2008-2009 Officers

President, Kris Ethridge

Vice Pres., Darwin Hinrichs

Secretary, Cameron Loerch

Treasurer, Dave Langemeier

Past Pres., Craig Romary

Nebraska Chapter 2008-2009 Board of Directors

Jim Mathine (Sandhills) (james.mathine@ne.usda.gov)

Robin Foulk (Panhandle) (Robin.Foulk@ne.usda.gov)

Corey Brubaker (Lincoln) (corey.brubaker@ne.usda.gov)

Scott Bohaty (Blue-Nemaha) (scott.bohaty@ne.usda.gov)

Claudia Stevenson (At Large)

(Claudia.Stevenson@ne.usda.gov)

Randy Gunn (South Central) (randal.gunn@ne.usda.gov)

Charles Reppert (Northeast Chapter)

(creppertfarm@inebraska.com)

Northeast Nebraska Chapter

Pres., Mike Lance, (michael.lance@ne.usda.gov)

Sec/Treas., Dennis Smith (dennis.smith@ne.usda.gov)

Past Pres., Jan Jorgensen, (jan.jorgensen@ne.usda.gov)

SWCS Farming With Grass Conference

The Soil and Water Conservation Society recently hosted a special conference titled "Farming with Grass: Achieving Sustainable Mixed Agricultural Landscapes". The conference was held October 20-22, 2008 at the Sheraton Oklahoma City, OK. Nebraska SWCS Member John Quinn along with James Brandle and Ron Johnson presented at the conference. Following is the abstract of their presentation:

Quinn, J.E., J.R. Brandle, R.J. Johnson Development of a Healthy Farm Index to assess ecological, economic, and social function on organic and sustainable farms in Nebraska's four agroecoregions

John E. Quinn is a PhD student in applied ecology at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, School of Natural Resources. Email: jquinn2@unl.edu

James R. Brandle is a professor of forestry at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, School of Natural Resources. Email: jbrandle@unl.edu

Ron J. Johnson is a professor of wildlife ecology-biosustainability at Clemson University, Department of Forestry & Natural Resources. Email: ronj@clemson.edu

Abstract: As ecological, environmental, economic, and social parameters of grassland agriculture change, monitoring and assessing this dynamic landscape will be essential. Such endeavors require a multidisciplinary approach, principally integration of conservation ecology and production agriculture. Existing assessments of farm success focus on short-term gains, limiting analysis of current systems and future alternatives. This emphasis has come at a cost to human and ecosystem health of \$5.7 to \$16.9 billion annually. Additionally native and agricultural biodiversity have declined. Consequently farm systems have lost their inherent resiliency.

The ultimate goal of this project is to provide a practical assessment tool to farmers interested in restoring ecosystem services on their farm. Initial data generated will provide recommendations to organic and sustainable farmers on enhancing on-farm biodiversity, diversity essential to sustainable production and enhanced ecosystem services.

In the Great Plains, mixed farming methods that include pasture, crop rotations, grass strips,

windbreaks, riparian buffers, and agroforestry are important to ensure that farms remain a source of diverse ecosystem services. The Healthy Farm Index will demonstrate how organic and sustainable farms can optimize farm management to produce food while ensuring the conservation of native biodiversity and restoration and enhancement of ecosystem services.

Developing a Healthy Farm Index requires relevant and measurable indicators that can be quantified and communicated efficiently. We believe that avian diversity and abundance (ecological), water quality (environmental), long-term profit and yield (economic), and farmer satisfaction (social) can provide a foundation to build the index. Ecological and environmental data collection is ongoing on organic farms across Nebraska's agroecoregions. Economic and social data will be collected as part of a continuing effort in support of organic agricultural systems at the University of Nebraska.

A means to recognize ecosystem services that organic and sustainable farms provide would be valuable to farmers, consumers, and policy makers. As human processes increasingly modify agroecosystems, the value of functioning ecosystems and the services they provide within agricultural landscapes is becoming increasingly apparent. A healthy farm optimizes not only production of food, fiber, and fuel but also ecosystem services. Ultimately, sustainable agroecosystems must sustain the people and preserve the land.

CATALOGS: THANKS BUT NO THANKS

They are not only mailbox stuffers. The 19 billion catalogs mailed to Americans every year consume 3.6 million tons of paper and 53 million trees. If you want to stop the deluge at your house, check out Catalog Choice, a new online service that will tell merchants "thanks but no thanks" on your behalf. The service is free, and it's simple. Just register at www.catalogchoice.org to search and decline. The site, endorsed by the Ecology Center in Berkeley California, the National Wildlife Federation and the Natural Resources Defense Council, launched October 9, 2007. As of April 1, 2007, 694,478 people had opted out of 9,181,478 catalogs.

SWCS 2008 International Annual Conference Kris Ethridge

I recently had the privilege of attending the SWCS 2008 International Annual Conference in Tucson, AZ. Nothing makes one appreciate the value of water more than Tucson in July! The conference focused a great deal on bio-fuel production and related conservation issues, but there were many other incredible presentations on topics including Environmental Policy, the Midwest Floods of 2008, and Global Climate Change. The quality presenters and timely subject matter made every presentation a must see.

I attended the State of the Society Address given by current SWCS president Peggy James. She did a great job reaffirming our society's dedication to our mission to foster the science and art of natural resource conservation. She also encouraged each chapter to promote the society and demonstrated the importance of continuing to recruit new members. I also attended a regional roundtable luncheon with other chapter officers from the Northern Plains Region led by Mary Miller, Regional Director. We are very fortunate to have Mary as such a valuable resource within our region. Her enthusiasm and commitment to SWCS was contagious. It was great to make connections and develop friendships with other people in the region, and to share ideas on how to promote our individual chapters.

There were over 650 conservation professionals from all over the world at the conference. I even had the opportunity to visit with a SWCS'er from Canada and one from Great Britain. The experience is one I will treasure and I strongly encourage everyone to attend this conference. I am certain that if more people could see the full reach of SWCS at the national level, there would be much greater support and participation by our members. If you would like to find out more about the 2008 conference and see locations for future conferences, please visit the SWCS website at www.swcs.org.

NE Members Attending:

Kuzila, Mark (UNL)
Chick, Steve (USDA NRCS)
Ethridge, Kris (USDA NRCS)
Mountford, Thomas (LPNNRD)
Dosskey, Mike (USDA FS)

Other Nebraskans:

Swanson, Robert (USGS)

NE Chapter SWCS 2008 Golf Tourney/Fund Raiser

The Twelfth Annual Nebraska Chapter SWCS Golf Tourney was held on October 3, 2008 at Pioneers Golf Club of Lincoln. The originally scheduled September 23rd date was rained out. Thanks to those who did show up on the 23rd. Twenty-five golfers (15 SWCS members and 10 non-members) played. A team, best ball format was used. Winning teams were: 1st - Ed Svendsen, Gus Dornbush, Joe Calder, Byron Fischer; 2nd - Rich Torpin, Ken Carlson, Mike Kucera, Rob Glidden, Cam Loerch; 3rd - Paul Zillig, Tom Keep, Scott Argabright, Marc Crouch; 4th - Mike Dosskey, Norm Kempf, Gary Muckel, Lyle Steffen; 5th - Dave Langemeier, Richard Langemeier, Gary Wells, Steve Nelson; and 6th - Bob Rathjen, Marv Thompson, Jim Carr, Dana Snyder.

Ed Svendsen had the individual low score and Marv Thompson the individual high score. The individual low number of putts went to Mike Dosskey and the individual highest number of putts to Rich Torpin. The team low putt winners were Ed Svendsen, Gus Dornbusch, Joe Calder and Byron Fischer. Flag events were held on all 18 holes.

Everyone went home full of cookies and with more than one prize thanks to the following sponsors: Nebraska Corn Growers, NARD, Lower Platte South NRD, Lower Platte North NRD, Nebraska Soybean Association, State Farm (Dean Hoy), Stock Seed, SWCS National Office, Diers Ford Fremont (Chuck Strand), Union Bank, Walmart South, Austads, Pinnacle Bank, Lincoln USDA Federal Credit Union, Nebraska Department of Agriculture Poultry Department, Security First Bank, Licorice International, ShopKo (66th & O), Larry Langemeier, Glen Langemeier, Richard Langemeier, Tom Langemeier, Lyle Steffen, Cam Loerch and Kris Ethridge. Please thank them when you see them.

This year's golf event will be able to make a donation of about \$800 to the Nebraska Chapters SWCS University of Nebraska Foundation Scholarship Fund.

David Langemeier, Golf Event Coordinator



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Photos from the 2008 Nebraska SWCS Annual Meeting, Holdrege Nebraska



We are seeking a NEW Newsletter Editor for the Nebraska SWCS Chapter, please contact Kris Ethridge or Doug Garrison if you would be interested. Thank you for considering rewarding opportunity to volunteer.