

Stateside Statewide

by Manly Wilder



In the spring update to districts, I stated a commitment about strengthening the Conservation Partnership, establishing a strong connection between the division and districts, and working to strengthen conservation districts. After 10 months on the job, I believe we have made good progress and are developing a foundation upon which to further improve our state and local conservation initiatives. It is an exciting time to be working in soil and water conservation activities.

Legislative and Budget News

During the past legislative session and expansion budget cycle, we spent considerable time working with DENR leadership and the legislature on budget and legislative initiatives. The end result of our collective efforts was an increase of approximately \$2 million in appropriations. Those appropriations included:

- \$333,778 for ACSP-TA.
- \$400,000 for ACSP-FA.
- \$1,000,000 for CREP plus three positions for expansion.
- \$25,000 for supervisor travel.
- \$200,000 for poultry waste management.

This progress was due to the Secretary's support for private lands conservation, districts' legislative contacts, and a conservation awareness day attended by more than 600 people, including more than 50 state senators and representatives.

In addition to the budget, the legislature unanimously passed H2129, the Community Conservation Assistance Program. Rep. Carolyn Justice, of Pender County, and Sen. Charles Albertson, of Duplin County, provided leadership for this bill. This was authorizing legislation, but we will be asking for appropriations in the next legislative session.

Financial support for soil and water conservation includes \$11 million in state appropriations, \$14 million in grants the division administers that go to districts and between \$10 million and \$12 million in county appropriations to districts. There are about 270 district employees and 62 division employees. Because of this state and local government support, North Carolina has one of the strongest conservation programs in the nation.

Communications & Partnerships

As part of my commitment to you to improve communications in the division and to strengthen the Conservation Partnership, the following are examples of actions and activities underway and/or completed:

- Established the *e-source* newsletter, issued on a bi-monthly basis.
- Established a districts listserv for posting messages and sharing information.
- Conducted a two-day division retreat to improve internal communications, planning and teamwork.
- Attended functions and activities in 30 soil and water districts.
- Participated in the Farm Family of the Year competition, Envirothon, Resource Conservation Workshop, District Employee Workshop, SENACD annual meeting, N.C. Association of RC&D Councils and Conservation Awareness Day.
- Currently represent the Secretary on the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Trust Fund Advisory Committee for Farmland Protection.
- Meet regularly with Mary Combs and the NRCS management team on coordination of activities and programs.
- Established a positive working relationship with the Clean Water Management Trust Fund on CREP, meeting bimonthly with the trustees.
- Participated in the Farm Bureau Policy Review Day. I especially appreciate the support and working relationship we have with the Farm Bureau.
- Worked in partnership with Environmental Defense, DENR, NRCS and others helping NCSU secure a Conservation Innovation Grant to evaluate and pilot test added value of swine waste for compost and other uses.

- Provided assistance with Frontline Farmers and Environmental Defense for the leadership of Region 4 EPA to tour swine farms and see developing technologies that may one day replace lagoons and spray fields.
- Rollout of the new CREP is progressing. The governor has signed the amended agreement and it is awaiting the signature of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns. We also plan to expand CREP to the White Oak and Lumber River basins.
- Currently working with DENR Secretary Bill Ross on the working lands piece of a Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPASS) in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Defense on land use adjacent to military installations. Districts will soon be hearing more about this initiative.

Staffing

There have been a number of recent staffing changes including:

Kristina Theodorson and Bill Dunlap joined the division as area coordinators.

- Natalie Jones replaced Tom Potter as CREP manager.
- Julie Henshaw was promoted to the watershed project coordinator position vacated by Natalie.
- Bridget Munger is our new PIO, replacing Andrew Sleeth.
- Paula Day joined the ACSP staff.
- Cindy Safrit is a new engineer in Mooresville.
- Jill Slankas is the new NPS planning coordinator.

We continue to work to hire two additional engineers, fill the three positions authorized by the CREP expansion and maintain our surveying capability. In summary, the division has sound, solid, capable employees. I have been pleased with the level of expertise in the division and the willingness of employees to respond to new and changing priorities as needs arise.

Current Priorities

There are a number of conservation and environmental issues and activities at the state and national level that will be coming to the forefront in the near future including:

- Work for the upcoming legislative session.

- Development of a comprehensive community conservation program.
- Rollout of the new CREP.
- Continued work with partners on development of superior technologies for managing and marketing animal waste.
- Continued work with DENR on a workings lands strategy.
- Continued work with the NCDA on farmland preservation efforts.
- More clearly defining the role of conservation districts in holding easements.
- Working with the EPA on their new national agricultural strategy.
- Assessing the potential impact of bio-fuel and ethanol development as it relates to impact on workings lands and districts.
- Providing leadership in DENR regarding the 2007 Farm Bill.
- Development of a solution for district technician job approval authority.

Looking Ahead

The recent DENR reorganization, which named Richard Rogers as Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources, strengthens our ability to work and partner with other DENR divisions as well as other groups working for private lands conservation.

It is my goal to work with you doing all we can to improve and strengthen our conservation programs and districts. Our mission is to be the recognized leader for the natural resource management of private lands using a voluntary, incentive-driven approach. The job is large and the opportunities many, but working together we can make a difference.

Districtly Speaking

by Lynn Sprague, chief



Districts Operations

The N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts hosted the National Association of Conservation Districts' 2006 Southeast Regional Meeting in Asheville on Aug. 27-29. It was the largest meeting in more than 20 years with

more than 400 participants. Five years ago, the meeting only drew about 75 people. What made the difference? The Grove Park Inn location and a trip to Biltmore House helped, but the real difference was the working program. Conservation districts are rising to the challenge of new programs. Speakers from nine states brought new information to the table, with topics ranging from private working lands conservation to establishing partnerships through land care to stepping forward with leadership in community conservation. At the same time, we strengthened the traditional conservation role with agriculture through an in-depth look at the 2007 Farm Bill and new challenges of bio-fuels and a world economy. Each presentation had our best people from North Carolina on panels with other state leaders and national experts. With this meeting, we made a difference in our own state, in the Southeast and nationally.

From the logistics side, the Conservation Partnership deserves a pat on the back for doing an incredible job. More than 25 volunteers, headed by Kila Thompson from the Haywood SWCD, helped serve 350 people at the opening night reception. The Buncombe SWCD, with lots of energy from Laurie Brokaw, headed a tour of Biltmore House while the District Employee's Association made sure everyone had a place for breakfast. The speakers did a tremendous job and folks like Bryan Evans from the Pitt SWCD worked 14-hour days. Out-of-state guests saw our folks as the "N.C. conservation team." This meeting set a standard that will be talked about for years.

After a summer of special events, I don't mind getting back to the desk. We have elections and re-appointments coming up in November. The position of district supervisor is either elected or appointed, and it is a position of respect. Make the most of this upcoming opportunity and write an editorial, be interviewed or take part in the swearing-in ceremony.

Other items to work on are the amendments to the operational agreements, area meetings and planning the state meeting set for January at the Riverside Hilton in Wilmington. If you haven't attended an annual meeting recently, consider going. The meeting will focus on private working lands, community conservation and looking at ways to work with coastal natural resource issues.

BMPs and Beyond

by David Williams, NPS Programs



Agriculture Cost Share Program

At the August meeting, the SWC Commission delegated authority for approving ACSP contracts to an additional 14 districts. There are now 30 districts to whom the commission has delegated contract approval including Alamance, Beaufort, Bertie, Buncombe, Camden, Catawba, Chatham, Columbus, Craven, Currituck, Davidson, Forsyth, Guilford, Henderson, Iredell, Johnston, Lee, Madison, Moore, Onslow, Orange, Pasquotank, Pender, Pitt, Surry, Wake, Warren, Wayne, Wilkes and Yancey districts. Final delegation is subject to the district boards receiving training on the ACSP contract process. Other districts interested in being considered for delegation should send a request letter to the division office in Raleigh.

Also at its August meeting, the commission added a cost share practice for decommissioning abandoned wells on agricultural land.

The Technical Review Committee is requesting feedback from districts on a proposed manure/litter transportation incentive for ACSP. The purpose of the incentive is to facilitate transportation of manure and poultry litter from areas with concerns about excess nutrients to areas that can more effectively use the nutrients for crop production or other value-added uses. If approved, this incentive will take the place of the Offsite Poultry Litter Utilization Incentive, which has had only 10 contracts approved since 1985. The TRC will consider this change at its Nov. 21 meeting in Morganton. For more information or to submit comments on the proposed draft, contact David Williams in the division office.

Poultry Mortality

Gasification Demonstration Project

The N.C. General Assembly appropriated \$200,000 to the division to implement a demonstration project for innovative poultry mortality gasification, a promising system that offers potential advantages in odor and air quality and in fuel costs. Forms have

been mailed to districts for requesting funds for demonstration projects. One aim of the allocation process is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the gasification system on different types and sizes of birds and to geographically distribute demonstration systems so that poultry producers can see one in operation near them. Funding requests should be based on approved applications from eligible poultry producers and are due to the division by Oct. 31, 2006.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

The CREP management team is planning to implement several program changes proposed in an amendment to the division's agreement with the USDA. These changes include a revised payment structure to increase attractiveness of permanent conservation easements under the program plus other changes to assure greater water quality benefits. The division and the USDA held three training sessions in August to educate partnership staff on the changes. The changes will take effect when U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns signs the amendment. Governor Mike Easley has already signed it.

The division is beginning the process of working with the USDA to conduct an environmental impact study of expanding CREP into additional watersheds as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The assembly appropriated funds and staff to enable CREP expansion into the White Oak, Lumber and Yadkin-Pee Dee basins. The division has proposed an expansion into the Roanoke basin with the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Any program expansion is subject to approval by the USDA and would require an amendment to the current program agreement. So it will likely be a year or more before CREP can be expanded into additional watersheds.

High Rock Lake Watershed

The division has received a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Grant from the NRCS to do rapid watershed assessments for three watersheds that drain to High Rock Lake. These watersheds include parts of 19 districts. The division will partner with interested soil and water conservation districts to complete this project. An information meeting was held in August and we look forward to implementing this project with strong district support.



Engineering Job Approval Authority

The division continues to address the recent change in delegated job approval authority for certain conservation practices. The change took place when the NRCS rescinded engineering job approval authority for practices identified as engineering by the N.C. Board of Examiners for Professional Engineers and Surveyors. A meeting with representatives from the SWCC, NRCS, DEA, DSWC, NCDA, CES, Farm Bureau, Pork Council and the PE Board was held on Sept. 18 to discuss the impact of the board's decision on technical specialists and district technicians. A report will be submitted to the legislature in November. We will keep you updated as this issue develops.

Animal Waste Rule Changes

The EMC's new 2T rules have been approved and went into effect on Sept. 1, 2006. The 2T rules replace the existing .0200 regulations. These rules do not represent a significant change for animal operations. However, section 1400 does contain new rules for third-party applicators of waste, called manure haulers in the rule. A manure hauler is anyone who accepts or purchases waste and applies the waste on land not covered by the generator's permit. All manure haulers must apply at agronomic rates and maintain a setback of 25 feet from perennial streams and waterbodies. Haulers that land-apply more than 100 tons were required to register with the DWQ by Sept. 1, 2007, and they must comply with additional record keeping and reporting requirements. Haulers are required to make annual reports to the DWQ beginning in 2008.

NPDES General Permits

The DWQ expects that the new NPDES Animal Waste Management System general permits will be finalized by November. There are currently more than 1,100 facilities in the state holding NPDES permits. Due to a recent court ruling, the majority of these facilities will not be required to apply for a new NPDES permit but will have the option of applying for a state general permit instead. The most significant requirements of the new NPDES permit are that permit holders must comply with standards related to phosphorous applications. In addition, they must meet more stringent land application

setback requirements that specify a 100-foot setback or a 35-foot vegetated setback from down gradient surface waters, including field ditches. The DWQ plans to mail applications for both the NPDES general permit and the state general permit to all current NPDES permit holders once the new NPDES permit is finalized. Operators must decide which permit to apply for and must submit an application to the DWQ by the end of December.

Let Us Hear From You

Plans are underway to revise and update the NCASWCD Web site. Are there specific things you would like to see added to the site? Or have we missed reporting on news that interests you? If so, please be sure to let us know by contacting Bridget Munger, DSWC public information officer, at 919-715-6680, or bridget.munger@ncmail.net.

Coming Soon: NCASWCD Annual Meeting Jan. 7-9, 2007

The N.C. Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' annual meeting will be held Jan. 7-9, 2007 at the Hilton Riverside in Wilmington. This year's meeting theme is *Private Lands – Public Benefits: Meeting the needs of society and the environment*. Workshops topics will include community conservation, private working lands preservation and coastal resource management issues. A full agenda of the meeting, including scheduled speakers, will soon be available at the state association's Web site, www.ncaswcd.org.

Organizers have made every effort to keep this meeting affordable. Registration for the meeting is \$75 and inclusive registration (with meals) is \$150. Please contact Donna Stearns at 919-715-6094, or donna.stearns@ncmail.net for more information or to register.

Arrangements have been made for a group rate of \$69 per person per night at the Hilton Riverside (910-763-5900). When all rooms become booked at the Hilton, nearby Riverview Suites (910-772-9988) and the Coastline Inn (910-763-2800) will also honor this rate.



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

