



RUNOFF

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER SWCS –SPRING 2015

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - ROB ROY



Greetings California Nevada SWCS members,

One can't help but notice that the Soil Health movement is coming of age and many developments are ushering in this change. Granted it is not new – in 1935 the US Congress recognized the wastage of soil and moisture resources as a menace to our national welfare. While soil erosion is far from vanished, conservation challenges over the years have expanded to include the promotion of resiliency and soil health to guide the stewards of our soil.

Recognition of the importance of soil health is now reflected in many places including pending legislation and soil health initiatives. For example, the General Assembly of the United Nations has designated 2015 as the International Year of Soils.

This important recognition states that ***“the sustainability of soils is key to addressing the pressures of a growing population and that recognition, advocacy and support for promoting sustainable management of soils can contribute to healthy soils and thus to a food-secure world and to stable and sustainably used ecosystems.”***

Here in the US, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is devoting substantial resources to promote soil health management systems and incentivize practices to improve soil health across our nation. In California, the Governor's administration recognized the importance of soil health in the Governor's 2015-16 proposed budget. In the upcoming year, the Administration, coordinated by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) will work on several new initiatives to increase carbon in soil and establish long term goals for carbon levels in all California's agricultural soils.

The promotion of “healthy soils” generally refers to ensuring that our agricultural soils have adequate soil organic matter (SOM) or soil carbon content. In 2001, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists developed a national estimate of how much carbon U.S. farm and grazing land soils are currently storing: 20 million metric tons of carbon a year. This estimate included the speculation that with improved soil management, farms and rangelands have the potential to store an additional 180 million metric tons annually, for a total of 200 million metric tons a year. This would be 12 to 14 percent of total U.S. emissions of carbon, estimated at 1.4 to 1.7 billion metric tons a year. (One metric ton equals 1.1 English tons.).

In this first week in June, the California Senate will vote on SB 367 which, if appropriated, will direct \$50 million to CDFA for a grant program to support on-farm projects related to soil carbon including soil building and carbon sequestration. It's hard to miss the rising tide of widespread support for conservation of our soils. If you can accept the aphorism generally attributed to John F. Kennedy, ***“a rising tide lifts all boats”***, this rising tide of support for conservation may signal a new national consciousness of concern for our natural resources.

It's a great time to be part of conservation in America.

SAVE JULY 22-23 FOR THE ANNUAL CHAPTER CONFERENCE/WORKSHOP IN RENO

See more details on page 3.



2015 CHAPTER SWCS SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Jacquelyn (Jackie) Marie Wasche has been selected to receive the \$1,000 scholarship that will be awarded at the Chapter's Annual Conference in Reno scheduled for July 22-23, 2015. Jackie is in her 2nd year at Chico State majoring in Agricultural Science with an emphasis in Land Resource Management, and a minor in Agriculture Business. Jackie's goal after CSU Chico is that she would like to continue her education and achieve a Masters in Soil Science and learn all aspects of the agriculture industry and the environment, and how these two systems can work together toward sustainability. She has future plans of starting her own farming business, and hopes to add to California's legacy of innovative, hard-working farmers.

Tina Vander Hoek, Scholarship Committee Chair and Chapter Executive Council Director, has announced that "We had 14 applicants this year - this is a record - and deciding on one recipient was not an easy task. Thanks to President Elect **Joe Williams** and Executive Council Director **Zahangir Kabir** for aiding in making that decision. Well done and thank you to all who applied, and congratulations Jackie"! Jackie plans to attend our Annual Conference in Reno.

Chapter President **Rob Roy** congratulates last year's committee for picking a young man that continues to demonstrate achievement and leadership. 2014 scholarship winner **Armando Guzman** is one of Fresno State's nine Undergraduate Deans' Medalists for the class of 2015. Each medalist is recognized as the outstanding student in one of the university's eight schools and colleges of academic discipline and the Division of Student Affairs. Selections were made by the dean of each college and school.

Armando Guzman, Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology: One of six boys born to Mexican immigrants, he graduated as salutatorian from Tulare Western High School. While at Fresno State, Guzman engaged in a variety of research projects and assisted other students with additional studies related to weed science. He co-authored a presentation accepted to the 2015 annual meeting of the Weed Science Society of America, presented in Lexington, Kentucky. He had a 3.95 GPA.

NEW CHAPTER MEMBERS

We extend a **GREAT BIG WELCOME** to the following two members who recently joined the SWCS and our California-Nevada Chapter SWCS. We have **108 members** as of May 18, 2015.

Bianca Alexandru - Salinas

Julie Fallon - San Luis Obispo

CHAPTER ELECTION RESULTS

Executive Council Director **Ladi Asgill** from Modesto won election to serve as President-Elect for two **years**. Treasurer **Tom Esgate** from Penn Valley won re-election to serve two more years. **Jim Komar** from Red Bluff, **John McCann** from Reno, NV and **Patti Novak-Echenique** from Silver Springs, NV won election to serve two years as Executive Council Directors. They will be installed at the Annual Conference in Reno on July 23. Only 14 ballots were returned from the 112 mailed out – a 12.5 percent return.

HOUSE AND SENATE INTRODUCE SOILS RESOLUTION

The National Association of Conservation Districts and the Soil Science Society of America have been working jointly to have a Concurrent Resolution introduced in Congress which recognizes the designation of 2015 as the International Year of Soils and commemorates 2015 as the 80th anniversary of the signing of the Soil Conservation Act. The Senate resolution, S. Con. Res. 10, was introduced on March 17, 2015 by Agriculture Committee members Senators **Joe Donnelly** (D-IN) and **John Boozman** (R-AR). It designates 2015 as the International Year of Soils; supports locally led soil conservation; encourages public participation in activities celebrating the importance of soils to the United States; supports soil conservation through partnerships with local soil and water conservation districts and landowner participation in federal conservation programs. The House resolution, H.Con.Res.30, was introduced on March 26, 2015 by the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee's Conservation and Forestry Subcommittee Representatives **Glenn Thompson** (R-PA-5) and **Michelle Lujan Grisham** (D-NM-1), and Representatives **Gregg Harper** (R-MS-3) and **Walter Jones** (R-NC-3). It also designates 2015 as the International Year of Soils and supports locally-led soil conservation.

ANNUAL CHAPTER CONFERENCE/WORKSHOP

Theme: Sage Grouse Conservation

When: Wednesday -July 22 and Thursday –July 23, 2015.

Where: Field Trip on Wednesday - July 22. Workshop on Thursday – July 23 at the USDA NRCS Nevada State Office, 1365 Corporate Blvd. in Reno and at several NRCS offices via video teleconferencing.



Plans are to mail the agenda and registration packet in mid-June. You will be able to register for both days or for any single day. A discounted fee will be offered for early registrations. Late registrations will also be accepted at each video teleconference site. The Chapter is making it easier for you to improve your technical development in light of restricted training and travel budgets. You won't have far to go to participate. **Save July 22 and 23 on your calendar.**

Video Teleconference (VTC) sites around California and Nevada that are being considered:

Bakersfield – NRCS Service Center, 5000 California Ave., Bakersfield, CA
 Davis – NRCS State Office, 430 G Street, Davis, CA Room 215
 Fresno – NRCS Area Office, 1907 N. Gateway, Suite 101, Fresno CA.
 Lockeford – NRCS Plant Materials Center, 21001 N. Elliott Road, Lockeford, CA
 Red Bluff – NRCS Area Office, 1345 Main Street, Red Bluff, CA
 Salinas – NRCS Area Office, 318 Cayuga Street Ste 206, Salinas, CA
 Caliente - NRCS Service Center, 360 Lincoln Street, Caliente, NV
 Elko – NRCS Service Center, 555 West Silver Street, Elko, NV
 Ely – NRCS Service Center, 744 E. North Industrial Way, Ely, NV
 Fallon – NRCS Service Center, 111 Sheckler Road, Fallon, NV
 Las Vegas – NRCS Service Center, 7080 La Cienega Street, Ste 100, Las Vegas, NV
 Lovelock – NRCS Service Center, 1155 Lovelock Ave, Lovelock, NV
 Minden – NRCS Service Center, Hickey Building, 1702 County Road, Suite A1, Minden, NV
 Winnemucca – NRCS Service Center, 1200 Winnemucca Blvd., East, Winnemucca, NV
 Yerington – NRCS Service Center, 215 West Bridge St., Suite 11-A, Yerington, NV

CALIFORNIA WATER TUG OF WAR CONTINUES

By Walt Bunter, Editor

The drought in California has intensified the debate on beneficial water use. Recent press reports and water conservation requirements on homeowners has aroused awareness of the amount of water used by agriculture for crop production. Water for nut crops and rice that are mostly exported has been questioned.

Continued urban expansion being planned and under construction in some areas to accommodate our expanding population will require more water for urban use. We have already seen that water will go to the highest bidder. Farmers are willing to sell their water when that is more profitable than farming their land. Recently, the Metropolitan Water District in Los Angeles County found willing sellers when it offered rice growers \$700 for each acre foot of water.

Water conservation on farms in California has greatly improved over the last 20 years with the adoption of drip and micro-sprinkler systems on vineyards and orchards and drip-tape systems for crops that were previously furrow irrigated. Even with all these improvements, water availability and the cost of water rule the economics of farming.

When water deliveries are reduced, some land on the farm will not be planted and be left idle. Drilling deeper wells leads to higher water costs and in some cases reduced water quality. Over drafting the ground water has led to subsidence problems in some areas. When the planned crops will not produce a profit, some land on the farm will not be planted and be left idle.

The impacts of the drought and the need for more water for urban use will require more soil conservation efforts to manage these idle (sometimes referred to as fallowed) fields. Wind erosion control practices will be needed on idle fields in the San Joaquin Valley that have soils that are prone to wind erosion.

Protection of our soils and soil quality is imperative in order to help feed our expanding state and world population.

BI-STATE SAGE-GROUSE DOES NOT NEED ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PROTECTION

RENO, Nev. April 21, 2015 – U.S. Secretary of the Interior **Sally Jewell** announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse does not require the protection of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Secretary Jewell joined with USDA Under Secretary **Robert Bonnie**, Nevada Governor **Brian Sandoval**, California Natural Resources Agency Secretary **John Laird** and other state and local partners to celebrate an extensive and long-term conservation partnership on behalf of the bi-state greater sage-grouse population. Federal, state and private partners have come together to proactively conserve key habitat and significantly reduce long-term threats to this distinct population segment of greater sage-grouse.

A key factor in the decision not to list the bird was the development of **The Bi-State Action Plan**, a conservation plan developed by partners in the **Bi-State Local Area Working Group** over the past 15 years and secured with \$45 million in funding. This adds to nearly \$30 million worth of conservation work USDA and other partners have already completed to implement this plan.

“Thanks in large part to the extraordinary efforts of all the partners in the working group to address threats to greater sage-grouse and its habitat in the Bi-State area, our biologists have determined that this population no longer needs ESA protection,” said Jewell. “What’s more, the collaborative, science-based efforts in Nevada and California are proof that we can conserve sagebrush habitat across the West while we encourage sustainable economic development.”

“This is welcome news for all Nevadans. I applaud the local area working group, private citizens, Tribes, the Nevada Department of Wildlife and our federal partners for their tremendous efforts to develop conservation actions that preclude the need to list the species while still allowing for sustainable economic development,” said Sandoval. “Today’s announcement highlights the critical partnerships that must exist for our conservation strategies to be effective and demonstrate that sage grouse and economic development can coexist in both the bi-state area and across the e range of the greater sage grouse.”

“Together, we’ve worked with ranchers, conservation groups, local governments in Nevada and California to take proactive steps to restore and enhance sage-grouse habitat while also helping them improve their ranching operations,” Bonnie said. “The decision to not list the Bi-State sage-grouse proves this work has paid off.”

“The efforts of the local working group and the partnerships they’ve built over the past decade are truly unprecedented,” said **Dan Ashe**, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director. “They have set the stage for the next generation of conservation and convinced us that the sage-grouse population has a bright future in the Bi-State region.”

“California is committed to continue working with our public and private partners in implementing this strong, science-based conservation plan into the future,” said Laird. “This partnership between California and Nevada serves as a model for effective conservation of the Greater sage-grouse in other Western states.”

As its name suggests, the Bi-State Distinct Population Segment straddles the California-Nevada border, where biologists estimate that between 2,500 and 9,000 of these ground-dwelling birds inhabit about 4.5 million acres of high-desert sagebrush. Greater sage-grouse are known for the males’ flamboyant springtime mating displays on traditional dancing grounds, also known as leks. The birds use a variety of sagebrush habitats throughout the year on private, state and federal lands.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared the Bi-State population of greater sage-grouse a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) under the ESA in 2010 because genetic analysis shows it has been separated from other greater sage-grouse for thousands of years and the genetic differences are significant.

Continued on next page.

BI-STATE SAGE-GROUSE DOES NOT NEED ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PROTECTION-CONT'D

In October 2013, the Service proposed listing the Bi-State DPS as threatened under the ESA based on significant population declines due to the loss and fragmentation of its sagebrush habitat from urbanization and associated infrastructure development, encroachment of sagebrush by conifers, and a vicious cycle of wildfire and fire-adapted invasive grasses. These threats, combined with the relatively limited number of birds, the small population size and their isolation, were determined to pose a significant threat to the species.

The Service is withdrawing this proposal in large part because of the success of the Bi-State Action Plan. The plan is the product of the Bi-State Area Local Working Group, comprising federal, state and local agencies and landowners from Nevada and California, which has been pursuing sage-grouse conservation since the early 2000s.

Since then, the working group's technical advisory committee has finalized plans on nearly 80 science-driven conservation projects specifically designed to reduce identified threats and protect the sagebrush-steppe habitat.

The working group's executive oversight committee has raised more than \$45 million in federal and state funding to ensure the projects are implemented and completed over the next 10 years. Long-term projects implemented under the Bi-State Action Plan include population monitoring, urbanization abatement measures, livestock management, wild horse management, pinyon and juniper removal, disease and predation studies and other habitat improvement and restoration projects.

Each of the projects is tied to a specific population management unit within the region, led and funded by a specific agency or partnership, and ranked by the immediacy of the threat to the species. The comprehensive plan and funding commitments give the Service confidence that effective conservation measures needed to address threats to the species are highly likely to be implemented.

The working group members include private landowners in California and Nevada, Nevada Department of Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Nevada Division of Forestry, California State Parks, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, nongovernmental organizations such as Nevada Wildlife Federation, Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Conservation work on private lands – through easements and habitat restoration – has played an important role in connecting national forests and other public lands, working to keep habitat intact. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service has already invested nearly \$20 million in conservation assistance to ranchers through this effort. This has helped ranchers protect 7,300 acres of key summer habitat through easements, with an additional 4,500 acres in process. This investment has also helped them remove invading juniper and pinyon trees, enhancing nearly 4,000 acres of important sagebrush-steppe habitat.

This summer, the Forest Service will begin treatments to improve sagebrush ecosystem health on 29,000 acres of key habitat for the sage grouse. The USGS has been a key partner in monitoring the Bi-State population and interpreting data collected to assure the Bi-State partners are using the best science in their conservation efforts.

Along with withdrawing the listing proposal, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also withdrawing proposed rules under section 4(d) of the ESA and the proposed designation of critical habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is concurrently conducting a separate status review for the greater sage-grouse across its 11-state range. In 2010, it determined the greater sage-grouse was warranted for protection but that action was precluded by higher priorities. A determination on whether the species still requires protection is due Sept. 30, 2015. For more detailed information on the Bi-State DPS of the greater sage-grouse and its habitat, along with more information about conservation projects that are being done to help protect this unique species, visit www.fws.gov/greatersagegrouse.

CALIFORNIA CLIMATE AND AGRICULTURE NETWORK HELD YOLO COUNTY TOUR

Photos by: Phil Hogan, District Conservationist, USDA NRCS, Woodland, CA

The California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN) brings a sustainable agricultural perspective to climate change and agriculture policy. Their efforts are aimed at increasing funding for research, technical assistance and financial incentives for farmers whose practices reduce GHG emissions, sequester carbon, and provide many environmental co-benefits. Moreover, they aim to build capacity among sustainable agriculture advocacy organizations and our farmer members to engage in climate change debate. CalCAN represents sustainable agriculture organizations and allied groups that work directly with California's sustainable and organic farmers.

On March 24 and 25, 2015 CalCAN hosted the **4th California Climate and Agriculture Summit** at the UC Davis Conference Center. The Summit began with a farm tour in western Yolo County on March 24th, followed by a full day of plenary, workshop, and poster presentations and ending with a wine and cheese reception.

The Summit explored the science, policy and practice of climate change and sustainable agriculture in California. Participants include farmers and ranchers, agency staff, technical service providers, policymakers and advocates concerned with climate change challenges and opportunities for California agriculture. More information is available at [4th California Climate and Agriculture Summit](#)

CalCAN and the Yolo Resource Conservation District hosted the tour, which visited three separate Yolo County farms, all models of innovative water conservation, riparian restoration, biodiversity and climate resilience. About a hundred tour participants had the opportunity to hear from the growers and see examples of their management practices.

Highlights of the farm tour in western Yolo County on March 24th.

10:00 – 11:30 Rominger Brothers Farm — Mr. **Bruce Rominger** showed his tail-water ponds and drip irrigation system. He discussed the tradeoffs and practical considerations of cover cropping in a tomato system and the connection to groundwater recharge.



Winters area (Yolo County, CA) farmer **Bruce Rominger** lead a discussion on the challenges that farmers have to protect the environment, while, at the same time, earn a sustainable living.



Renata Brillinger, CalCAN Executive Director, and **Bruce Rominger**, Winters area farmer.

1:00 – 2:30 Yolo Land & Cattle Co.- **Casey Stone** discussed the role of ponds on this cattle ranch, native grass restoration efforts, and the ranch’s involvement in NRCS research to quantify carbon sequestration on rangelands.



Casey Stone, co-owner and manager of Yolo Land & Cattle, gave the tour group an overview of the ranch operations



Casey Stone described to the tour group the conservation activities that Yolo Land & Cattle has been involved with for the past 20 years.

2:30 – 3:00 Yolo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) restoration project on Cottonwood Slough.



Jeanette Wrynski, Yolo County RCD, explained the high level of coordination amongst different partners needed to revegetate Cottonwood Slough south of Madison, CA.



One-half mile restored section of Cottonwood Slough, south of Madison, CA.

3:00 – 4:00 Hedgerow Farms —The importance of diverse hedgerows and riparian plantings (storehouses of carbon) for erosion control, riparian health, insect and wildlife habitat, and the connection to climate resilience were discussed.



Jon Obrien, Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, explained the revegetation effort on part of its waterway system. This photo was taken at Hedgerow Farms, north of Winters, CA.



A section of the water delivery system for the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District. Vegetated section at left prevents erosion and provides for wildlife habitat, while the section at the right, not vegetation, delivers sediment into local waterways.

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER SWCS
430 G STREET #4172
DAVIS CA 95616-4172

MISSION STATEMENT

The Chapter is a multidisciplinary scientific and educational organization dedicated to natural resource enhancement through an ethic which recognizes the interdependence of human communities and natural systems.

The Chapter achieves its mission through its members using mutual cooperation and understanding to create opportunities for improving soil and water conservation in California and Nevada.

CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Editor and Publisher:
Walt Bunter – wbunter@pacbell.net

Please submit articles via email to the Editor.
RUNOFF reserves the right to edit all submissions.

“Usually it is marginal land that breeds marginal farming and marginal farmers.

Land use according to its capability conforms with natural law.

The ready availability of good land and wildlife for so many generations gave rise to a careless and prodigal attitude toward our wealth of natural resources.

Soil has long been confused with land. It is but one part of land. For conservation purposes land must be regarded in terms of all its component parts: soil, slope, climate, susceptibility to depreciation by erosion, over-cropping or other processes of deterioration.

Permanent soil conservation is an essential first step toward solution of the farm problem.

Productive land is neither limitless nor inexhaustible.

Land must be expertly cared for if it is to be maintained in a productive state.

Productive land must assume an ever more prominent position in the thinking of the people and their leaders.

We have found there is no blanket, short-cut method for getting the conservation job done. There is no quick and easy way out.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett

The above quotes are from: Hugh Hammond Bennett. *The Hugh Bennett Lectures*. Raleigh, North Carolina: The Agricultural Foundation, Inc., North Carolina State College, June 1959.

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PLEASE SUBMIT
PHOTOS,
NEWS ITEMS, AND
FEATURE ARTICLES
TO THE EDITOR FOR THE
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