



RUNOFF

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER SWCS –SPRING 2017

PRESIDENT'S CORNER – JOE WILLIAMS



Greetings California-Nevada Chapter SWCS members,
Mark your calendars!!! The California-Nevada Chapter will host our annual meeting in *Reno, Nevada on October 19 and 20, 2017.*

The working theme is “Planning for Extreme Water Conditions” and will highlight the issues of current historic, record-breaking snowpack in the Sierra Nevada immediately following a period of historic drought conditions in both states.

Are California and Nevada prepared for this run-off? Is it too much of a good thing all at once? How can state and local agencies, conservationists, farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and other partners prepare for both extremes going forward in the future?

These are just some of the important items of discussion that we hope to address at this annual meeting.

The California-Nevada Chapter Executive Council is currently working on the full agenda and field trip locations but the beautiful Lake Tahoe area is sure to be included as a stop! Additionally, we hope to improve member engagement at the conference by including a networking social along with a student poster session.

As always, your input is always appreciated. If you would like to help in planning this event or have suggestions for invited speakers, please let us know.

Sponsorship opportunities will also be available so if you or your company would be interested please let us know.

The Executive Council is also looking for your help in getting the word out about this event, so please share any of our MailChimp or Facebook announcements with colleagues or friends.

I look forward to seeing you in beautiful Reno, Nevada soon!

CHAPTER ELECTION

PLEASE RETURN YOUR BALLOT BY MONDAY - MAY 22.

Only 28 ballots had been returned by Friday - May 12. Use the return envelope that you received and put a stamp on it. Yes, the results of this election were predetermined when the Nominating Committee submitted the minimum number of candidates. We should expect the next Nominating Committee to do better.

It is also time for the Executive Council to take action to amend the bylaws to allow for electronic voting.

SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

Scholarship Committee Chair **Tina Vander Hoek** announced that only one student applied for this year's CA-NV Chapter SWCS Scholarship. The \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded at our Annual Conference in Reno in October.

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

We have **85 members** as of April 11, 2017.

72ND SWCS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Monona Terrace Convention Center
Madison, Wisconsin
July 30 to August 2, 2017

The theme is **Conservation Connections: Building Pathways to Sustainability**.

Registration for the 72nd SWCS International Annual Conference is now OPEN, and we can't wait to see you in Madison!

Take advantage of the opportunity to learn about the latest research, policies, and practices in natural resource conservation, as well as network and connect with the world's leaders in environmental affairs.

This year's conference will feature workshops, concurrent training sessions, symposia, posters, plenary sessions, and technical tours designed to raise awareness of recent developments in the science and art of natural resource conservation and environmental management.

Register now at www.swcs.org/17ac to receive the \$100 early registration discount

More details are available at www.swcs.org/17ac.

RENO, NEVADA - OCTOBER 19-20, 2017

Your California-Nevada Chapter Executive Council is pleased to announce our 2017 **Annual Conference**. The working theme is "**Planning for Extreme Water Conditions**". The recent high flows in both California and Nevada which followed a period of significant drought provide a great context for this discussion.

The exact agenda is still being worked on and an integrated training opportunity may be offered earlier in the week. For now, we are committed to providing you with meaningful discussion and a relevant field trip on October 19 and 20. Additionally, we hope to improve member engagement at this conference by including a networking social as well as a student poster session.

Input from local experts is always appreciated, so if you would like to help in planning this event or have suggestions for invited speakers, [please let us know](#). We are also looking for help in getting the word out about this event, so please [share this notice](#) with anyone who may be interested.

As details are finalized, we will share them with the Chapter.

MEMBERSHIP DUES CHANGES

The SWCS Board of Directors voted to increase membership dues effective April 3, 2017. This increase reflects the increased operational costs for the Society since dues were last raised. The new rates keep us aligned with other similar science-based societies and allow SWCS to provide the best programs and opportunities for conservation professionals. New Annual Rates are:

Conservationist	\$115 (chapter receives \$9)	Leader \$180 (chapter receives \$12)
President's Club	\$275 (chapter receives \$16)	Student \$40

Your annual support is invaluable to the Society. Not only does it make exciting conservation programs, projects, and publications possible, it allows us to gather collectively to advance conservation efforts at events like the 72nd International Annual Conference, in Madison, Wisconsin, this July, followed by the National Conference on Cover Crops and Soil Health in Indianapolis, Indiana, in December. SWCS is also in the process of rebranding the Society to more clearly articulate our mission, core values, and what we do for our members and resource conservation. In addition, watch for two special issues of the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation that will feature important and timely research topics.

SWCS believes these initiatives will benefit our membership, strengthen the organization, and contribute to our conservation mission.

CONSERVATION RELIES ON PROFITABILITY

By SUZY FRIEDMAN, Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), | Published: MAY 5, 2017



Whether in agriculture or any other business, if you don't have enough money coming in to pay the bills, it's hard to find the time or resources for anything other than working to turn a red budget spreadsheet black.

A wheat farmer friend from Washington recently told me that current prices are \$4/bushel, the same as 40 years ago. Take into account inflation, and that's a significant decline. Nationally, the USDA predicts that net farm income will drop by almost 9 percent this year, the fourth year in a row of declines after reaching a record high in 2013.

Farmers also face enormous volatility in income, with fluctuations in yield, demand, as well as crop and input prices. It's no surprise then those environmentalists' calls to cut crop insurance, disaster programs or other conservation payments fall on deaf ears in the agricultural community – or serve only to raise blood pressure levels across the Corn Belt.

Advocating for sustainability from an ivory tower will never get us anywhere. If we really want to see farmers embrace conservation practices, doing so needs to add value to them and make it easier, not harder, to make a living. Faced with economic uncertainty, it is human nature to protect family above all else – even if it means choosing short term benefits over stewardship.

EDF understands the economic challenges that farmers face, and we support approaches and programs that protect farm income and profitability. Yes, our mission is to protect natural resources such as water quality and climate stability – and we will advocate for the environment no matter who is in office. But when it comes to sustainable farming, we believe the most effective way to get results is to take into account economic viability. It's also important to note that conservation is not inherently a drain on the balance sheet for agriculture. In fact, the opposite is true when taking an integrated and multi-year view of farm management and profitability.

Contentious debates on Capitol Hill often skip over the valuable role conservation measures can play in protecting farm profits. Practices like using nutrients more efficiently enable farmers to get more bushels per pound of fertilizer. This is a win-win, with farmers getting more value out of the inputs they buy and less fertilizer ending up in the air or water. Cover crops, more diverse crop rotations, and reduced tillage can deliver more consistent and thus higher yields over time. These practices reduce the negative yield impacts of weather extremes like this weekend's loss of winter wheat from heavy snowfall in Kansas, improve soil quality, and reduce soil erosion, weeds and pests.

A long-time farmer and advisor to EDF recently told me that by digging into the economics of crop management systems and sustainability practices, he discovered that conservation is a method of profit protection. And this profit protection really shines through if you look at the data for practices in combination and over multiple years.

But right now, we cannot sufficiently document conservation's ability to protect profits. We need a lot more data on the economics of different conservation practices across key geographies. Instead of pointing fingers and lobbying for cuts to programs that support farmers, environmentalists can and should invest in creating the business case for sustainable agriculture.

Gathering these data won't happen overnight, but we're working on it, as are many others, including the National Corn Growers Association's Soil Health Partnership, the Conservation Technology Information Center, and many university programs. Our ability to continue enjoying a diversity and abundance of food depends on the economic viability of farming.

MARIN FARMS A NEW CROP: CARBON

By **Mark Prado**, *Marin Independent Journal* POSTED: 04/28/17,



Mulch is spread at the Corda Ranch in West Marin, one of three demonstration sites for carbon farming. (Courtesy **Lynette Niebrugge**/Marin Resource Conservation District)

West Marin ranches look to have a new type of crop: carbon. Not a product to produce and sell, the goal is to bury carbon into soil to get it out of the air, which in turn clears air by reducing greenhouse gases. The practice can also help recharge groundwater tables.

The state Coastal Conservancy has provided \$200,000 to the Marin Resource Conservation District to implement carbon farming projects on up to 10 ranches as part of the [Marin Carbon Project](#).

“When you improve the health of the soil it acts like a sponge,” said **Nancy Scolari**, who heads the Marin Resource Conservation District. “So it can hold carbon. It can hold more water, which drains into aquifers.” Scientists estimate that over the past 150 years, between 50 and 80 percent of topsoil worldwide has been lost and that more than a third of the carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere during that time has come from changes in land use.

Soil carbon absorption, or “sequestration,” is the process of moving carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into the soil. Through photosynthesis, plants pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and transfer that carbon below ground via roots and to the soil surface. Plantings, creating windbreaks, mulching, composting and rotating grazing are some of the methods that promote carbon absorption in the soil.

“When you spread compost, it’s only a half-inch thick,” said Scolari, adding three pilot sites in Marin have shown good results. “Just that small amount makes a difference.” By this fall, projects will begin in earnest. There is no lack of interest: 30 ranchers came forward to apply to take part in the project.

In order to measure results, baseline soil samples will be collected to test for organic carbon. Samples will be taken in the first and third years of the project and then compared to five- and 10-year results.

“This grant helps MRCDD to build on their already completed groundbreaking research, and start to implement agricultural practices that can improve soil health, increase water storage and sequester carbon,” Assemblyman **Marc Levine**, D-Greenbrae, wrote to the conservancy in support of the work.

The practice is not only good for the air and water, but farmers too, said **Su Corbaley**, project manager for the coastal conservancy. “Carbon farming has many economic and environmental benefits,” she said. “It increases rangeland production up to 70 percent.”

The healthy soil movement is also being done at the state level. The state Department of Food and Agriculture set aside \$7.5 million to develop a new incentive and demonstration program as part of the “Healthy Soils Initiative.” It’s funded from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. A set of hearings is being held this spring to hear comments on the soils initiative.

Corbaley ticked off benefits beyond air and water quality. “(It) improves resilience to climate change. It increases soil health,” she said. “(It) reduces runoff rates and enhances riparian and aquatic habitats for fisheries in addition to providing bird and fish habitat, and improving water quality conditions in streams that enter into our oceans.”

(Reach the author at mprado@marinij.com)

LARGE GRAIN STOCKS REVIVE DEBATE OVER U.S. LAND RETIREMENT

By Chuck Abbott in Successful Farming at Agriculture.com on 4/3/2017

Three years ago, Congress voted as part of the 2014 farm law to wind down the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to a maximum of 24 million acres, its smallest size since 1988. Enrollment in the long-term land-idling program was down by 30% from its 2007 peak as farmers chased profits in the commodity boom, so the cap was a painless step that incidentally helped lawmakers meet their target for budget savings.

Land retirement is on the table again as Congress prepares for the new farm bill. This time, the argument is whether to divert U.S. cropland from production in the face of large grain inventories worldwide. The lead Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee, **Collin Peterson** (MN), says the CRP ceiling ought to be raised to as high as 40 million acres. The larger CRP would bolster crop prices as well as improve water quality, he says, and “address the declining wildlife populations we’ve experienced in my region.” Pheasants Forever says “a robust CRP of 40 million acres is both needed and sought” as a benefit to habitat for game birds and economic support to rural communities.

Senator **John Thune** (R-SD) is backing what some call a “CRP lite” approach aimed equally at soil health and helping farm income. Farmers could idle marginal land for three to five years with a USDA payment set at half the local CRP rental rate. They also would get a larger premium subsidy on crop insurance.

A few weeks ago, National Farmers Union delegates endorsed a similar approach for its policy book, saying, “We support a flexible short-term land-idling program that compensates farmers for reduction in acres for crop production.”

“It’s an approach we haven’t had in a while,” says **Ferd Hoefner** of National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition in comparing Thune’s bill to the annual set-asides that were part of the farm program until the 1996 Freedom to Farm law. A short-term land retirement would provide more flexibility to meet demand for food than a 10-year CRP contract while providing some conservation benefits, says Hoefner. “Definitely, we are taking a very close look at it and are likely to be favorable.”

It’s not clear sailing for either of the land retirement ideas, however. They have few backers among lawmakers in the early days of farm bill discussion. The top issue, so far, is getting more money for crop and dairy supports. There is formidable opposition.

“We support keeping CRP at 24 million acres,” says **Mary Kay Thatcher** of the Farm Bureau. The largest U.S. farm group says conservation funding ought to go to working lands programs, such as the cost-sharing Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. It’s reviewing the Thune plan.

At a House Agriculture subcommittee hearing, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and the USA Rice Federation said EQIP and CSP are the workhorses of USDA’s conservation programs. The National Association of Conservation Districts, in calling for larger funding for soil and water conservation, urged a commitment to working lands.

Some analysts say land retirement would be the wrong answer to large supplies – a U.S. pullback might encourage farmers to expand production overseas.

Record-setting world grain harvests this decade have been accompanied by vast increases in consumption, says **Sal Gilbertie**, owner of Teucrium Trading, citing record soybean imports by China and record U.S. production of corn ethanol. “Global production levels for the coming year need to stay high to meet seemingly insatiable global demand.”

This article was produced in collaboration with the Food & Environment Reporting Network, an independent, nonprofit news organization producing investigative reporting on food, agriculture, and environmental health.

FARM CONSERVATION FUNDING ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

Excerpts from article by **BRYCE OATES** that was referenced in SWCS CONSERVATION NEWSBREFS ON 3-23-17

The Trump Administration has proposed cutting \$4.7 billion, or 21 percent, of the U.S. agriculture budget. If made, those cuts will come from discretionary spending, which includes on-farm conservation funding—as well as food safety, rural development, and international food aid.

The threat to conservation is especially worrisome to **Roger Noonan**, New Hampshire farmer and president of the New England Farmers Union. Like many farmers, Noonan relies on conservation dollars to run his diversified organic produce and livestock operation. When he put in a \$10,000 high tunnel on his farm recently, conservation dollars covered \$4,000.

There are several pots of federal money that are designated help pay farmers to be good environmental stewards of the land and water on their farm—or set the land aside entirely for wildlife. And those funds often play a key role in helping farmers stay in business.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also funds thousands of Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) staff positions around the country. But the proposed budget would “reduce staffing in USDA’s Service Center Agencies to streamline county office operations, reflect reduced Rural Development workload, and encourage private sector conservation planning.”

“Conservation programs and NRCS staff are the number-one investment USDA makes in our region,” said Noonan. “NRCS staff walk around the farm with you, point out things farmers can do to address water quality, soil quality, and forest quality. And then direct you to resources that you can use to make positive changes on the land.” From promoting better soil health to conserving critical habitat or improving water quality, **Jeremy Peters**, head of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), said “NRCS, in its local county offices, the service centers, are the entry point. The local staff help farmers and landowners in identifying conservation concerns and creating conservation plans to help farmers mitigate those concerns.”

In 2015, the program served more than 20 million acres of private land. According to USDA data, the agency made major NRCS investments in conservation-based crop rotations, cover-cropping systems, expanded habitat for pollinators, improved grass-based grazing systems, irrigation efficiency, and wetland restoration, among other practices. **Craig Cox**, vice president of agriculture and natural resources for the Environmental Working Group (EWG), remarked that “USDA’s Technical Assistance Program funding has been cut and cut and cut over the years already. These are the professionals in the field, making conservation programs work.”

Like many budget provisions in the President’s proposal, the latest proposed cuts to USDA conservation program have been repeatedly pushed by the conservative think tank the Heritage Foundation. The group’s most recent budget blueprint sought to privatize, and de-fund, more than \$700 million in annual spending for USDA’s Conservation Technical Assistance Program. Funding from the program is one of the biggest sources of support for local NRCS staff.

“Private landowners, not government, are the best stewards of property,” wrote Heritage. “If necessary, they can seek private solutions to conservation challenges. Federal taxpayers should not be forced to subsidize advice that private (and public) landowners should be paying for on their own.”

Back in New Hampshire, **Roger Noonan** is concerned about the proposed conservation cuts in a broader context of climate change. “We are now seeing major droughts and major flooding in the same year,” he says. “Hurricanes have been more frequent. It is conservation practices—the health of soil, the resilience of our working lands—that get us through the hard times.” Noonan sees conservation programs as an important piece of an overall funding system for public goods on private lands. They “are an investment that leverages private funding from the farmers themselves, as well as additional state and local dollars,” he says. Peters agrees with Noonan’s explanation. “The cuts suggest a movement away from the traditional nexus of NRCS support along with state agencies, local conservation programs and local conservation districts,” he said. “These organizations provide the technical support and cost-share payment to farmers that have a huge multiplier effect on both local economies and for conservation results.”

EWG’s Cox said private-sector funding for conservation programs will likely be limited. And while he agreed that it could and should play a role, he added: “If we really wanted to get on top of agriculture’s environmental footprint, if we really wanted to maximize government investment in the conservation dollar, we would need to increase conservation technical assistance instead of privatizing it.”

CROP RESIDUES FOR ADVANCED BIOFUELS WORKSHOP



Crop Residues for Advanced Biofuels- Exploring Soil Carbon Effects

August 15-17, 2017

Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel, California

Hosted by ASA, CSSA and SSSA

Significant scientific uncertainty exists about crop residue removal and potential effects on soil carbon.

Advanced biofuels and bioproducts are being made from crop residues in the US and elsewhere; however, the market value and sustainability of this emerging industry is dependent on maintaining soil health.

This three-day workshop will provide an opportunity to address critical research and policy issues associated with determining the carbon intensity of advanced biofuels from crop residues. This workshop is designed to improve our mutual understanding of soil carbon results from crop residue removal, soil carbon modeling efforts related to residue removal, and current status of life-cycle assessment modeling to determine the carbon intensity of advanced biofuels from crop residues.

Check out the robust [Program & Schedule](#).

Join us to contribute to the development of a publication summarizing the science of these integrated fields, and to provide a stable basis for policy and biofuel industries.

To foster discussion, registration is limited to 200 attendees. Register by July 20 or Before - \$295.

Register on July 21 or After - \$395. Register for One Day - \$200. <https://www.agronomy.orloging//links/258>

Full registration includes all three days, the evening reception, and three lunches.

One day registration includes lunch.

RECAP OF THE 2016 CHAPTER CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP

Forty photos, selected from over 300 photos taken by Executive Council Director **Phil Hogan** at the last annual Chapter Conference/Workshop, will be posted on our website. Half of them give you a sense of the Field Tour held on September 27, 2016. The rest portray the presenters and participants at the Workshop held on September 28 at the Amador County Agriculture Conference Room at 12200-B Airport Road in Jackson, CA

The theme was: **“Building Resilience and Healthy Ecosystems in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.”**

Some photos have limited information due to the lack of feedback from the Conference leadership.

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.

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

CHAPTER EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Joe Williams, President
Ladi Asgill, President-Elect
Rob Roy, Past President
Erika Boyland, Secretary
Tom Esgate, Treasurer
Austin Avwunudiogba, Director
Phil Hogan, Director
Zahangir Kabir, Director
Jim Komar, Director
John McCann, Director
Patti Novak-Echenique, Director

CHECKOUT THE CA-NV CHAPTER SWCS WEBSITE

www.caswcs.org

PLEASE SUBMIT PHOTOS,
NEWS ITEMS, AND
FEATURE ARTICLES
TO THE EDITOR FOR THE
SUMMER ISSUE OF RUNOFF

BY JULY 25

RUNOFF is the official California-Nevada
Chapter SWCS newsletter.

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

RUNOFF reserves the right to edit all submissions.



U.S. Secretary of Agriculture **Sonny Perdue**

Sonny Perdue came by his knowledge of agriculture the old fashioned way: he was born into a farming family in Bonaire, Georgia. From childhood, and through his life in business and elected office, Perdue has experienced the industry from every possible perspective.

He is uniquely qualified as a former farmer, agribusinessman, veterinarian, state legislator, and governor of Georgia. He became the 31st United States Secretary of Agriculture on April 25, 2017.

Perdue's policies as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture will be guided by four principles which will inform his decisions. **First**, he will maximize the ability of the men and women of America's agriculture and agribusiness sector to create jobs, to produce and sell the foods and fiber that feed and clothe the world, and to reap the earned reward of their labor. It should be the aim of the American government to remove every obstacle and give farmers, ranchers, and producers every opportunity to prosper. **Second**, he will prioritize customer service every day for American taxpayers and consumers. They will expect, and have every right to demand, that their government conduct the people's business efficiently, effectively, and with the utmost integrity. **Third**, as Americans expect a safe and secure food supply, USDA will continue to serve in the critical role of ensuring the food we put on the table to feed our families meets the strict safety standards we've established. Food security is a key component of national security, because hunger and peace do not long coexist. And **fourth**, Perdue will always remember that America's agricultural bounty comes directly from the land. And today, those land resources sustain more than 320 million Americans and countless millions more around the globe. Perdue's father's words still ring true: We're all stewards of the land, owned or rented, and our responsibility is to leave it better than we found it.