



# RUNNOFF

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2007

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by David Rose

Hello to all the members and potential members in the California/Nevada SWCS family. This time of the summer always gets me enthused about the Fall. Time marches on, the kids are in school, and conservation remains a high national priority. I hope you have all had a great summer.



First, let me ask how we are doing with membership. Have you talked to a non-member and talked about the advantages of joining the society? We can list off a number of benefits that are of value to a wide variety of people. But back to my question. If you haven't talked to someone, asked someone to join us, the question is really why? Only you can answer that question by talking to your reflection in the mirror, but if you do talk to someone and we gain a member, it makes all of us in the chapter and parent society better. Remember shirts and vests are still available to proudly show your association with the chapter and society. Thanks to you all for your efforts.

Second, it appears that the 2007 Farm Bill is on track to be passed by Congress. The House has passed their version, though the Senate has yet to take up the baton. It seems unlikely that passage will occur before the end of September. That being said, there are some interesting items in the bill that the House passed. It would continue many of the programs in Title II that have funded improved conservation. It would

create a new Regional Water Enhancement Program (specifically including the Klamath Basin) and redesign and restrict the Conservation Security Program. Title IX would be continued to promote bioenergy in agriculture. Of interest in California is the proposed Title X for Horticulture and Organic that would address specialty crops for the first time. It is interesting to note that as the House bill moves to the Senate, the Bush administration has voiced some concerns. The Senate Committee Chair, Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa, has indicated he wants to have the Farm Bill through his committee by the third week of September, and brought to the Senate floor by the end of the month. The debate in the Senate should be very interesting.

Third, throughout this year we will be planning for an annual conference next spring. Our President-elect, Lisa Hokholt, is taking the lead by chairing the annual conference committee. Many of you may be interested in serving on the committee or helping in some way. Please contact Lisa if you do have an interest. Keep in mind also that the annual conference is an excellent forum to present a poster paper or a formal presentation. If you have some great conservation work going on, please consider sharing with all of us at the annual conference. Conservation takes many forms and the states of California and Nevada have much going on.

Fourth, the Executive Board of the California-Nevada Chapter SWCS continues to be available to hear from members regarding issues, programs, funding levels, policy, etc. We need to hear from you so that we can direct our chapter's energies toward the most important concerns.

Finally, my year as President is well on its way. As we continue to be an interactive and positive professional organization, think about how you can be a positive force for conservation.

Yours in conservation,

*Dave*

## AGRICULTURE'S CHANGING FACE WILL BRING BOTH OPPORTUNITY AND HUGE CHALLENGES, SAYS AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST'S RALPH GROSSI

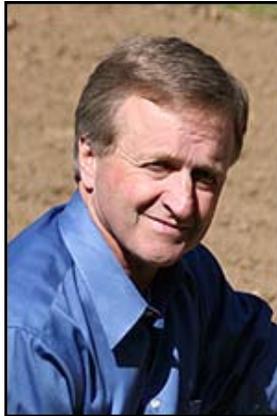
by Phil Hogan

Agriculture in the United States has a promising future, but there will be many challenges to overcome as well. This is the message brought to northern California from Ralph Grossi, President of the American Farmland Trust, as he addressed a large audience at the Fairfield Hilton Garden Inn for the Solano Economic Development Corporation's Dinner Event on June 27.

Citing what he describes as an "agricultural bifurcation," Grossi is bullish on agriculture. "Ag is booming," said Grossi. "There is record farm income for 2007, demand is growing, and U.S. farmers are well-positioned as the purchasing power of other countries continues to rise." However, there are signs of trouble as well. "America's mid-size family farms are caught in the middle, not able to take advantage of the economies-of-scale that the larger corporate farms can. Twenty years ago, there were over 400,000 middle-size family farms, and now there are only 140,000," said Grossi.

The increasing demand to grow crops for renewable fuels is a trend that will have implications worldwide. Grossi said that 7.5 billion gallons of ethanol will be produced in the United States this year. By the year 2025, 35 billion gallons are anticipated to be produced. "That will require 75 to 90 million acres in this country to produce corn just for ethanol" Grossi said. "This year, the total for all uses of corn is 81 million acres. We are not going to be able to rely on corn alone for ethanol production. We will have to

increasingly look at cellulosic ethanol so that we won't have to rely so much on prime farmland to produce the corn." Cellulosic ethanol can be obtained from vegetation grown on forests and grasslands instead of cropland.



Ralph Grossi

Noting the rising prices that growers are receiving for the corn that they grow, Grossi said that "the rising tide is lifting the boat for all corn growers. However, this is not good for those that have to buy feed for their livestock, and prices in the grocery stores for American consumers will start going up as well." Americans, Grossi said, only use 9% of their domestic incomes for purchasing food. "In other countries, especially developing ones, that percentage is much higher. Look at what is happening to the price of corn tortillas in Mexico. It is placing a real hardship on the people there."

Another promising trend for agriculture is the value that farmland and open space has for renewable goods. "Renewable goods," Grossi said, "are those intangibles such as clean water, open space, and healthy watersheds. These all have great value, but we do not have good techniques for defining what these values are and how much growers should be compensated for these." He said that the field of 'environmental services' is growing,

and the challenge for this field will be how to capture the values of non-food commodities that farms and ranches produce.

The growing awareness of food safety is another issue that farmers will have to pay increasing attention to. "Consumers are taking this seriously now," Grossi said. "We are seeing a growing number of farmers markets. There are four times as many of these as there were a decade ago. Consumers like these markets because they can talk to the farmers directly. They know the food was produced locally, and they feel safer." Opportunities for farmers near urban areas will also increase, according to Grossi, because of this growing demand for locally-grown food. "The challenge will be," stated Grossi, "how do we keep land available and prevent it from being developed as this transition from commodity-driven agriculture to locally produced food has a chance to take place?"

And yet, there are still even more challenges for agriculture. "Competition for land is fierce," Grossi said. "Food and fiber needs to be produced on an ever-shrinking land base. Urban, industrial and commercial use consumes more land every year. The United States loses 1.2 million acres of land annually to development. And environmental uses such as wetlands development are also a competitor for land."

Concerned with how this country is going to meet these demands, Grossi told the audience that California is a microcosm of what

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**RALPH GROSSI, CONT.**

is happening across the whole country. "Much of the development in California is happening on prime farmland, which is pushing agricultural development onto more marginal lands," stated Grossi. This is a concern, because agricultural production on marginal lands often has a higher environmental price – higher rates of erosion, runoff, and degradation of water quality. Marginal lands, although not as valuable for food production, often harbor more rare plants and animals.

At the local level, Grossi said that "Agriculture gets what's left over in the planning process. We plan for residential, commercial and industrial, and agriculture is the 'A' left on the map when everything else is planned for. We need a long-term vision for agriculture, we need to plan for agriculture, and agriculture needs to be as much of a priority for land use as all the other uses."

Grossi reminded the audience that protecting agricultural land itself, through zoning, easements, or other tools, is not enough. "We also have to provide for the long-term sustainability of the support industries for agriculture," Grossi said. "If we save the land but a processor pulls out, what have we gained?"

Grossi noted that the average age of the farmer today and the unwillingness of sons and daughters to continue in agriculture will also be a determining factor whether agriculture survives in the United States. He left everyone thinking with, "Who's going to own the land in the future?"

**BOOK REVIEW: THE CONSERVATION PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE TO WORKING WITH PEOPLE, BY SCOTT BONAR**

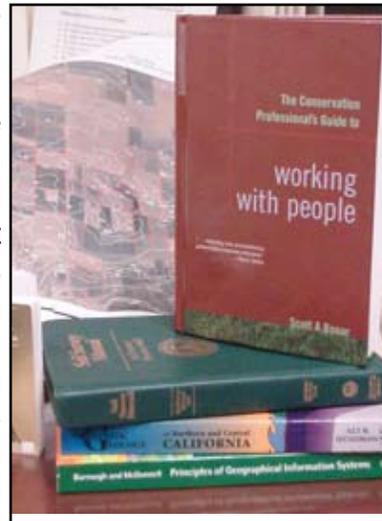
*by Wendy Rash*

Most of us in conservation professions entered the field because of our love for the outdoors and a sense of responsibility for our environment. In training for our chosen professions, we learned the science of how the natural world functions, and it is our intellectual achievements that are often the yardstick for success. However, as Scott Bonar points out in his new book, "The Conservation Professional's Guide to Working with People", the health of the environment at all scales depends heavily on human behavior. Therefore, we not only need technical knowledge to solve environmental problems, we need to know how to change human behavior in an environmentally friendly direction.

In nine succinct chapters, Bonar explores different arenas of social interaction and shares simple tools for shaping those interactions. Communication techniques for turning hostile or skeptical stakeholders into supporters, principles of persuasion that can help "sell" conservation ideas or projects, non-confrontational yet effective negotiation tactics, and dealing with negative attacks in a dispassionate manner are all skills that can promote conservation projects and build an organization's reputation. As salaries are usually the major part of a conservation

organization's budget, Bonar also addresses workplace efficiency, offering techniques for improving personal productivity and enhancing personnel management. Bonar also briefly reviews basic tenets of field work etiquette that may seem like common sense to many.

Bonar's writing is engaging, and he uses anecdotes and examples drawn from conservation projects around the United States to illustrate his points. The works cited in the book range from scholarly journal articles, to conservation literature, to well-known titles in the self-help genre; Bonar manages to weave these together in readable style. Each chapter ends with a synopsis and



bulleted summary points, useful for finding that nugget of information that you'd like to refresh in your mind.

Bonar closes with a short chapter reminding us of the environmental achievements of recent decades, and exhorting us to open our eyes to the communication skills necessary to make conservation happen. Environmental benefits must be gained in a world governed and populated by people, and so negotiation, persuasion, and political skills will always be necessary for success in translating our scientific and technological knowledge into real, on-the-ground natural resource conservation.

## WALT BUNTER RECEIVES COMMENDATION AWARD

by Wendy Rash

Walt Bunter, longtime Treasurer for the California (now the California-Nevada) Chapter SWCS, was honored at the SWCS Annual Conference with a Commendation Award. Walt was one of seven individuals who received this international recognition for service to their Chapters. The award program stated:

“Walter Bunter worked with the Western Chapter of the International Erosion Control Association (IECA) to have them as a partner in the SWCS Annual Conference. Walt also arranged for IECA

speakers and for a proctor to conduct tests for certification as an erosion and sediment control specialist during the conference. Bunter successfully arranged for continuing education credits for the IECA presentations and two Natural Resources Conservation Service presentations. Bunter also serves as publisher for the chapter newsletter that is distributed both electronically and hard copy and also serves as the California Chapter treasurer.”

Walt was nominated by Past-President Mark Steffek for the award. His nomination was supported by many positive comments from co-workers and peers and a long list of activities that Walt undertakes to serve the Society, the NRCS as an Earth Team volunteer, and the

cause of conservation in general. Walt is one of the main reasons why the California-Nevada Chapter has been so successful, and we are lucky to have him as a member and leader of our Chapter.

Congratulations Walt, and keep up the good work!



Walt Bunter accepts his Commendation Award from SWCS Executive Director Craig Cox (l) and SWCS President Theo Dillaha. Photo by Mark Anderson-Wilk.

## CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER MEMBERS ATTEND TAMPA CONFERENCE

by Lisa Hokholt

Four CA-NV Chapter members, Mark Steffek (past-president), Lisa Hokholt (president-elect), Walt Bunter (treasurer) and Rob Roy attended this year's SWCS National Conference held in Tampa, Florida. Almost 600 soil and water conservation professionals attended the conference, held amidst Florida's beautiful sub-tropical cypress trees, golf courses, and swamplands, home to alligators, armadillos and tree storks.

Mark, Lisa and Rob were some of the first to arrive at the conference, participating in the Leadership Development Session held the first

day. The highlight of this session was a discussion with Norm Berg, former Chief of NRCS (retired 1982) and life-long member of SWCS. Berg shared memories of his career with the Soil Conservation Service as well as his role in helping to establish the Soil Conservation Society of America, now known as SWCS. He recalled that the first issue of the Journal showcased Hugh Hammond Bennett's national soil erosion policy. Bennett, often dubbed the “father of soil conservation” made his indelible mark by advocating the national importance of soil erosion and conservation and by establishing and supporting grass-roots leadership through conservation districts.

Berg also recalled, from his own personal experiences, that advocacy for establishment of conservation districts was often not such an easy task during the economic and political climate of the time (1930's – 1950's). Berg expressed his continued desire for a national policy on soil, similar in effect to the existing national policies on water and air. He also explained that there have been many positive changes over the years which give reason for staying positive and hopeful that past efforts and current initiatives will continue to address and solve conservation problems in the future.

“Conservation tillage changed the landscape”, Berg pointed out, adding that new efforts with carbon sequestration could have just as significant an effect to our lives, indicating global warming and other soil-related resource challenges. “We can do it”, he concluded.

**CHAPTER MEMBERS  
MEET WITH NRCS CHIEF  
LANCASTER**

*by Mark Steffek*

CA-NV Chapter Past-President Mark Steffek and new member Tom Esgate met with NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster at the SWCS International Conference in Tampa, Florida on July 24th. Esgate presented a poster on his NRCS funded Conservation Innovation Grant project for Cooperative Sage Steppe Initiative in northeast California. Esgate explained to Chief Lancaster that the project is to work with private landowners to develop conservation plans and implement projects to restore sage-steppe ecosystem which will improve sage grouse habitat, grazing conditions

for ranch operations, and improve water quality and quantity. Steffek, who is the North Cal-Neva RC&D Coordinator in Alturas during the day, made an oral presentation about the Pit River Watershed Alliance, a watershed stakeholder group also involved in sage-steppe ecosystem restoration. Chief Lancaster was impressed and happy to hear about the multiple partnerships involved and the connection to SWCS and NRCS. The next SWCS International conference will be in Tucson, AZ in July next year. "It is an excellent venue

for presenting your projects and networking with other soil and water conservation professionals", says Steffek. He hopes other CA-NV Chapter members will be able to go to Tucson and have the opportunity to learn more and meet others involved in SWCS.

*Please see the abstract from Tom's poster below.*

*-Ed.*

**COOPERATIVE SAGEBRUSH  
STEPPE RESTORATION  
INITIATIVE: REMOVING  
WESTERN JUNIPER FROM  
RANGELANDS THROUGH  
BIOMASS UTILIZATION**

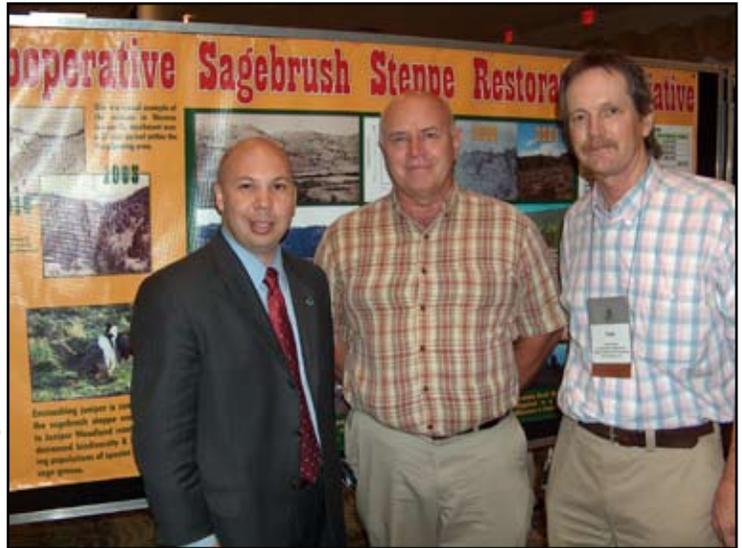
*by Tom Esgate*

Our project is the implementation phase of the Cooperative Sagebrush Steppe Restoration Initiative, a planning project that was funded with a NRCS Conservation Partnership Initiative (CPI) grant. The primary work of the partnership is to assist Producers in restoring sagebrush steppe and related ecosystems through the removal of invasive western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) and applying post treatment adaptive management techniques. Ancillary work includes the installation of structural practices

that aid in the implementation of the adaptive management techniques.

The ancillary practices are being funded, primarily, with leveraged funds from additional partners. The partnership is implementing its innovative restoration prescriptions on producer operations that have had plans completed through the CPI program, and on lands of additional producers. We are cross sharing information with a parallel USFS/BLM project that focuses on federally managed lands. Our treatment prescriptions include the use of conventional and modified forestry equipment to remove invasive juniper on producer grazing lands. The removed material is to be chipped and delivered to a biomass power facility where it will be used

as a renewable energy source in the production of electricity. Post treatment grazing and management prescriptions will be applied that ensure restoration and persistence of vibrant sagebrush steppe habitat. Benefits to producers and the community include increased forage production, restoration of critical wildlife habitat, an improved water cycle and reductions in hazardous fuel loads, sediment transport and soil erosion.



*NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster (l), Mark Steffek (c), and Tom Esgate (r) at the SWCS Annual Meeting in Tampa, FL.*

**2008 ANNUAL  
CONFERENCE:**

**JULY 26-30  
TUCSON, AZ**

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER  
SWCS

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**FIRST CLASS**

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***Submit articles and  
photographs for the Fall Edition  
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