



# RUNOFF

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CHAPTER SWCS – WINTER 2014



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – Rob Roy

Dear Chapter Members,

### A New Year and New Challenges.

Like it or not, problems, or challenges, are a certain part of our everyday life. Whether you choose to call them challenges, as I do, or problems, certainly doesn't change the fact that they exist. However, it does change the way we respond to them and that little shift can make a huge difference in our state of mind!

Subconsciously, encountering a problem causes us to think "There's something wrong here." Our mind hears, "This isn't right, life is not as it should be." How does this perception affect us? It causes our energy to be funneled toward repairing something that's gone wrong. Not a very empowering state of mind.

On the other hand, facing a challenge sends no such mental message. Instead of trying to repair a malfunction, a challenge encourages us to recruit our inner resources and to view the situation as a new opportunity. This can be a very empowering state of mind if you just make that small shift. Remember the words of **Bernice Johnson Reagon**, scholar, composer and civil rights activist, "*Life's challenges are not supposed to paralyze you, they're supposed to help you discover who you are*".

2014 will be a year of conservation challenges – from debate over **fracking** to **drought** to a brand new **Farm Bill** – our approach must be empowering. So **my first challenge** to you all, the membership of the CA NV Chapter, is to view the problems that arise as challenges.

One challenge our professional society has faced in recent years is declining membership. Without getting into societal philosophy on why more conservation professionals do not participate in SWCS, I think it is clear that with more members, our Society could do more – more partnerships, more expertise, more training possibilities, and more conservation. So **my second challenge** to each of you, as current members of the CA NV Chapter, is to bring at least one new member into our Chapter.

One additional challenge we face in our Chapter is the need for participation in activities that make things happen. We have a tremendous Executive Council right now and I truly enjoy the accomplishments we have made over the last couple of years, but these few folks can only do so much. For example, we currently have a need for someone to head up our Communications Committee. This person would be responsible for maintaining our website. So **my third challenge** to all of you is to step up and be involved – join one of our committees - Please.

And one final quote to keep you moving when challenges arise,

*"I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward."* **Thomas A. Edison**

## 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 **139 members** as of January 23, 2014.

**Alec Ching - San Jose**

**Allison Flynn - El Cerrito**

## CHAPTER ELECTIONS IN MARCH

Chapter members will be electing three Executive Council Directors and a President-Elect at the next election in March. Directors **Austin Avwunudiogba**, **Phil Hogan**, and **Zahangir Kabir** will be up for reelection. Directors serve for two years or, if appointed, for the remaining term of the previous Director.

The President-Elect position is also a two year term that has been vacant since July and could be filled by appointment by the Executive Council. If elected on the next ballot, that person would serve a one year term and become our Chapter President for two years.

We need candidates from **Nevada** to meet the requirements of our Bylaws that “At least one officer shall reside in Nevada”. All the members of the Executive Council are officers.

Past-President **Tibor Horvath** will Chair the Nominations Committee. Let Tibor know that you want your name on the ballot or wish to be appointed President-Elect. [Tibor.Horvath@ky.usda.gov](mailto:Tibor.Horvath@ky.usda.gov)

## HELP WITH PLANNING FOR OUR CHAPTER ANNUAL SPRING CONFERENCE

Contact President **Rob Roy** at [robert.roy@ca.usda.gov](mailto:robert.roy@ca.usda.gov) and join the annual conference planning committee. Express your preference for where to hold it during May or early June. We try to rotate the location. The 2013 conference was in Reno and the 2012 conference was at Asilomar in Pacific Grove.

Help select the dates for the two day conference. Work with the committee to select a theme and organize the agenda that includes technology training, installation of officers and awards presentations. Help find speakers and sponsors. Practice your publicity skills.

Water Conservation and Land Subsidence from well water pumping were mentioned as possible themes at the Chapter Executive Council meeting on February 7.

## ATTEND THE SWCS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE THIS JULY

Topics include:

- Adaptive Management of Conservation Efforts
- Agricultural and Conservation Economics
- Biodiversity Conservation and Management
- \*NEW\* Conservation in Nontraditional Agriculture
- Conservation in Urban Settings
- Conservation Models, Tools, and Technologies
- Conservation Policy and Program Design
- Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement
- Soil Health Resources, Indicators, Assessment, and Management
- Water Resource Assessment and Management

In addition to the three conference tracks, there will be two specialized symposia topics:

- Increasing Intensity: Rethinking Precipitation Averages and Outliers in Conservation Design and Planning
- Informing Conservation through Social Sciences: Understanding the Human Component of Land Management Stewardship

Get more details at [www.swcs.org/14ac](http://www.swcs.org/14ac)



## **CHAPTER PRESIDENT ROB ROY SIGNED THIS PARTNERSHIP LETTER URGING SENATE AND HOUSE FARM BILL CONFEREES TO COUPLE CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE MEASURES TO PREMIUM SUBSIDIES FOR CROP INSURANCE**

January 23, 2014

Dear Farm Bill Conferee,

As the House and Senate continue their conferencing of the 2013 Farm Bill, the undersigned groups, representing locally led conservation across the state of California, urge you to work together to quickly pass this legislation. Our nation's farmers and landowners deserve to have long-term certainty to effectively and efficiently manage their land, resources and businesses for the years ahead. Not only do Farm Bill Conservation programs play a key role in supporting clean air, clean water and productive soils, they also help producers avoid unnecessary regulation, and support our nation's long-term economic and food security.

We support efforts in the Farm Bill to help protect grasslands, wetlands, healthy soil and clean water by re-coupling basic soil and water conservation compliance measures to premium subsidies for crop insurance. This measure ensures that conservation compliance provisions continue to cover all income support, including eligibility for crop and revenue insurance premium subsidies. We also encourage you to provide incentives to actually lower the cost of crop insurance to producers who use conservation practices the Secretary determines to provide resilience to weather events. We believe such an incentive would lead to increased adoption of conservation and result in savings to the Treasury as fewer claims would have to be paid out.

Finally, we urge you to ensure a strong commitment to Technical Assistance funding in the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill. Technical Assistance funds are critical to effective implementation of conservation programs.

We thank you for your efforts to complete the 2013 Farm Bill, and we strongly urge you to support these provisions. Doing so will help to ensure long term farm productivity by protecting our nation's vital natural resources.

Signed by:

Placer County Resource Conservation District  
California-Nevada Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society  
California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD)

### **SSSA SOIL ECOSYSTEM CONFERENCE**

The Soil Science Society of America will sponsor a Specialized Conference on **March 6-9** at the Grand Sheraton Hotel in Sacramento, CA titled, [Soils Role in Restoring Ecosystem Services](#)". View details at: [Online Program](#) and [Preliminary Program \(pdf\)](#)

### **HEALTHY SOILS WEBINAR SERIES**

A technology-packed [soil health webinar series](#) is in store for you and the public this year! Webinars presented by leading soil health advocates – several of them farmers – are lined up in 2014 to provide training on topics including the biology of soil compaction, soil health benefits of mob grazing, and regional soil health case studies. Information needed to participate in the webinars will be provided at the Science and Technology Training Library at <http://conservationwebinars.net> as it becomes available. If you can't make a live presentation, each webinar will be offered as a replay from the training library. The USDA NRCS National Soil Health and Sustainability Team is sponsoring the webinar series, which is based on topics submitted to the East National Technology Support Center during its recent webinar survey of NRCS employees.

## DIG IT! THE SECRETS OF SOIL

Dig It! The Secrets of Soil is coming to The California Museum at Tenth and O Streets in downtown Sacramento for an 11-month stay. This is a wonderful opportunity to educate people about the wonders of soil and soil science. Dig It was created by the Smithsonian Natural History Museum staff with assistance from soil scientists across the US. It is a 4000 square foot interactive exhibit with something for people of all ages. A brief video about the exhibit is at: [www.forces.si.edu/soils/video/tour.html](http://www.forces.si.edu/soils/video/tour.html). The creation of the exhibit was funded by individuals, organizations and corporations and managed by the Soil Science Society of America. The original exhibit was scheduled to be on display in the museum in Washington DC for 12 months, but because of its popularity, it was on display for 18 months. Subsequently, the exhibit has been travelling to museums around the United States. Most recently the exhibit was on display at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. It is currently being updated and restored to its original condition in Madison Wisconsin. It will begin its display at The California Museum on **May 1, 2014** and will be on display until the end of March 2015.

A centerpiece of the exhibit is the display of State Soil Monoliths.



The California Museum opened in June 1998 in partnership with the State of California as a private non-profit institution focused on California history and culture. A full description of the museum history is on the web at: <http://www.californiamuseum.org/museum-history>. The museum educates well over 75,000 K-12 students each year. In particular, fourth-grade students visit to learn about California's journey to statehood. Each of the students who visit the museum as part of his/her California history lesson will, in addition, visit the Dig It exhibit. The museum currently conducts a number of educational programs and provides learning materials for teachers and parents to help students learn about California's rich history and culture.

You are invited to participate in furthering the educational efforts of the exhibit by becoming a docent, providing funding, or simply by bringing friends and family to the exhibit. For more information on how to participate or contribute, contact Brent Roath ([brentroath@gmail.com](mailto:brentroath@gmail.com)) or Mike Singer ([mjsinger@dcn.org](mailto:mjsinger@dcn.org)).

## SOIL HEALTH SUCCESS TALES STIR CALIFORNIA AUDIENCES

By Anita Brown, Public Affairs Director, USDA NRCS, | Davis

In Burleigh County, N.D., some farmers have managed to do what may seem like magic: By boosting soil health and organic matter, they have managed to grow robust and profitable commercial crops of corn and sunflowers, while reducing synthetic fertilizer by an average of 25 percent. While most area farmers *do* continue to fertilize their crops, a number of them have decreased the need for inputs thereby increasing their sustainability.

**Jay Fuhrer**, NRCS district conservationist from Burleigh County, was one member of a two-person panel brought to California by UC professor **Jeff Mitchell** to speak to audiences in Davis and Five Points on Dec. 10 and 11.

Jay was joined at the dais by **Brendon Rockey**, an innovative potato farmer from Colorado (the Rockey family worked with Cornell University to grow the first fingerling potatoes in the U.S.). The Rockeys have managed to grow profitable potatoes without the potent nematicides needed by most farmers in their area. Rockey calls his brand of farming “biotic,” which he defines as looking at all living things, not just the crop being grown.

Rockey and his uncle run a consulting company, The Soil Guys ([www.soilguys.com](http://www.soilguys.com)), to help other farmers learn what they “had to learn the hard way” since no one locally was experimenting with low input farming. Jay Fuhrer was one of the people the Rockeys found. “We have learned a lot from him,” Brendon said.

Some audience members in Davis pointed out the obvious: “This is interesting information, but this is California, things are different here...” And Rockey and Fuhrer agreed. They also pointed out that there are substantial differences between sunflowers in North Dakota and potatoes in Colorado—but both scenarios are thriving under good soil health practices. These practices include a diverse above ground biology (crop rotation and cover crops) to feed a diverse and healthy soil microbiology below ground. Conservation tillage or no-till is also important to avoid disturbing the soil biology and oxidizing the soil organic matter.

Fuhrer, now 34 years into his career and well past the point he might have retired, has been reinvigorated by his work with soil health. He travels nationwide and even overseas to share the soil health successes of Burleigh County. “Soil health has been a blood transfusion for our Agency,” he said. Fuhrer’s presentation is available at <http://www.bcsd.com/?id=23>.

## GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER PIONEERED EARLY CROP ROTATIONS

**George Washington Carver** (January 1864 – January 5, 1943) was an American [scientist](#), [botanist](#), [educator](#), and [inventor](#). He studied [botany](#) at [Iowa State Agricultural College](#) in [Ames](#). When he began in 1891, he was the first black student and later taught as the first black faculty member. When he completed his B.S., Carver continued at Iowa State for his [master's degree](#). Carver did research at the [Iowa Experiment Station](#) for two years. In 1896, [Booker T. Washington](#), the first principal and president of the [Tuskegee Institute](#) in Alabama, invited Carver to head its Agriculture Department. Carver taught there for 47 years. One of Carver's duties was to administer the Agricultural Experiment Station farms. From 1915 to 1923, Carver concentrated on researching and experimenting with new uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes, soybeans, pecans, and other crops,

Carver developed techniques to improve soils depleted by repeated plantings of [cotton](#). Together with other agricultural experts, he urged farmers to restore [nitrogen](#) to their soils by practicing systematic [crop rotation](#): alternating cotton crops with plantings of [sweet potatoes](#) or [legumes](#) (such as [peanuts](#), [soybeans](#) and [cowpeas](#)). These both restored nitrogen to the soil and the crops were good for human consumption. Following the crop rotation practice resulted in improved cotton yields and gave farmers alternative cash crops. To train farmers to successfully rotate and cultivate the new crops, Carver developed an agricultural extension program for Alabama that was similar to the one at Iowa State. Carver designed a mobile classroom to take education out to farmers. To encourage better nutrition in the South, he widely distributed recipes using the alternative crops.

## CHAPTER MEMBER CHRIS DAVIS RECEIVES EARTH TEAM AWARD



**Chris Davis**, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Conservationist in the USDA Elk Grove Service Center, was awarded the NRCS Employee Earth Team Award for the West Region for mentoring three Earth Team volunteers and helping them succeed in the volunteer program according to a January 10 news release by the NRCS state office in Davis.

Chris recognized early on how important Earth Team volunteers were for field offices and that these volunteers can turn this volunteer opportunity into something bigger for themselves.

One of Chris's volunteers was so enriched by his experience with NRCS that he has decided to go back to school and complete the necessary college courses to apply for a full-time job with NRCS.

That volunteer accompanied Chris to conservation planning meetings with farmers and really loved the experiences. A second volunteer has been very involved with a project in the Sacramento Delta collecting indigenous seeds and plants.

Even though Chris had his own full workload, he made time available to each volunteer to make sure they were enjoying the program and benefitting from the work experience. He was a mentor to each one of his volunteers and spread the message to other offices that they should consider staffing at least one Earth Team volunteer

### CDFA INTRODUCES DROUGHT INFORMATION WEB PAGE

According to a news release on February 5, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) has developed a [drought resources web page](#), which is intended to be a central location for information about the drought in California and assistance programs available to farmers, ranchers and farmworkers. The web site is also available in [Spanish](#).

The page features links to the USDA's [Risk Management Agency](#), the [Farm Services Agency](#), the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#), and [Rural Development](#). There is also a link to the [US Small Business Administration](#). All of these groups have programs that could be of help to farmers and ranchers harmed by the drought.

The web page builds on efforts already underway at CDFA to support California's drought response. The agency is working with federal and state agencies to plan a number of farmer and farmworker forums on assistance programs; it will continue to work with California food banks to address drought-related impacts; and it is working with the University of California to develop a real-time assessment of drought impacts in farming and ranching communities. Also, CDFA Secretary **Karen Ross** joined USDA Secretary **Tom Vilsack** on February 4 in Washington D.C. to announce [\\$20 million in federal assistance](#) to support water conservation efforts by California farmers during severe drought conditions.

### 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.

## **FOUR PROJECT AREAS ADDED TO NRCS BAY DELTA CONSERVATION INITIATIVE**

DAVIS, Calif., Jan. 15, 2014– The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in California has approved four proposed project areas to be added to its three-year old Bay Delta Initiative (BDI), bringing the total number of project areas to 15. Farm and conservation groups in the approved areas work with farmers from Colusa to Bakersfield on voluntary projects to conserve and protect water and wildlife habitat. Farmers who wish to apply for contracts within these project areas must do so by Feb. 21, 2014, to ensure consideration for funding in 2014. *\$18 million is available for targeted farmland work to conserve and protect water and habitat.*

### **New Projects in 2014**

1. Ingram/Hospital East and West Stanislaus - Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) \$690,000
2. Lower Colusa Basin Drain - Colusa Glenn Sub-watershed Program \$416,000
3. Semitropic & Buena Vista NW Kern RCD Water Storage Districts \$1,600,000
4. Tehama County- Sacramento River - Tehama RCD \$300,000

### **Continuing Projects**

5. Cache Slough Complex - Dixon RCD \$750,000
6. East San Joaquin Sustainable Conservation - Western United Dairymen \$5,000,000
7. French Camp Slough - San Joaquin RCD \$1,500,000
8. Kings River - Kings River Conservation District \$2,000,000
9. Lower Snake River - Sutter RCD \$1,700,000
10. Walker Creek - Colusa Glenn Subwatershed Program \$720,000
11. Waterbirds - CA Rice Commission \$650,000

### **Continuing NRCS-Bureau of Reclamation Sponsored Projects**

12. Firebaugh Canal Water District \$300,000
13. Henry Miller Reclamation District \$500,000
14. Central California Irrigation District \$600,000
15. Tulare Irrigation District \$750,000

“California is seeing some of its most challenging times ever relative to conserving and protecting our vital water resources,” said **Carlos Suarez**, state conservationist for NRCS in California. “Every drop is precious, is valued, and must be used as efficiently as possible. The country and the world looks to our farmers to supply healthy produce, nuts, dairy and other commodities—and wildlife depend upon us for habitat as well. The Bay Delta Initiative helps to focus NRCS aid to farmers and conservation groups working to balance all these needs.”

Eighteen million dollars is available for farmers in the approved areas, through the Farm Bill funded program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In addition, four of the continuing projects also received funding from the Bureau of Reclamation to improve water delivery infrastructure. NRCS funding then complements that investment by funding needed onfarm irrigation improvements. For example, pressurizing a system for more efficient delivery could be funded by the Bureau while delivering the newly pressurized water to fields with leak resistant pipes and systems, may be funded by NRCS. The result is a more efficient water delivery system where all the opportunities for water savings are more fully realized.

In addition to farmers and consumers, water birds in the Sacramento Valley are also benefiting from the Initiative. Farmers of rice and other irrigated crops are continuing work on a BDI project that extends the time water is available on fields to enhance agricultural land for wildlife. BDI project sponsors are required to outline strategies to address one or more of the Initiative’s three priority resource goals: 1) Water conservation and irrigation management on irrigated cropland; 2) Water quality improvements including nutrient management and erosion control on irrigated cropland, dairies, and associated areas; 3) Ecosystem restoration for aquatic and wetland habitat.

Since 2012, the NRCS BDI initiative has brought not only \$48 million in farmland conservation infrastructure and management improvements to the Bay Delta ecosystem, but also increased conservation planning and technical assistance. Additionally, \$32.5 million has been invested in easements to protect historic wetlands in the area.

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**"Conservation farming put first things first by attending to the needs of the soil—by seeing to it that the starting-off place, the base, is put into sound health and kept that way.**

**Any other approach, no matter what it may be, always has and always must lead eventually to agricultural disaster."**

**Hugh Hammond Bennett**

September 18, 1943, Washington, DC

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

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PLEASE SUBMIT PHOTOS, NEWS  
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**BY MARCH 24**

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