

NDASCD

N.D. Association of Soil Conservation Districts

CONSERVATION NEWS

To advance the interests of North Dakota Soil Conservation Districts



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PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

By LeAnn Harner

Conservation=Preparation

"Be prepared" is the Boy Scout motto. I'd suggest that conservationists live that motto. We are looking forward - saving and preparing for the future - while remembering our roots.

The McIntosh County SCD supervisors are prepared. They are the latest board of supervisors to complete the certification process. How did they do it? They decided that doing 1-2 lessons per meeting was going to drag out the process and some members would surely miss some lessons. Instead, they dedicated an entire day just for the lessons. Meeting in the office, they spent the day going through training and answering questions. When two new supervisors came on board in January, they immediately went through the training as well. Now the entire board has the same understanding of the rules and laws which govern their SCD. They're ready for the future.

Our SCDs were asked to send NDASCD email addresses for at least one supervisor who would serve as their legislative contact. Of course, you could send more addresses - the entire board if you wished. Those individuals are receiving Tom's weekly legislative reports. Why just to the supervisors? NRCS has specific prohibitions on anything close to lobbying being done on their computers. As public employees are scrutinized more and more, NDASCD doesn't want anything that may make it difficult for NRCS to continue to provide computers for our districts.

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EXECUTIVE LINE—Tom Hanson

The North Dakota Legislative Session is half over and so far-so good for the legislation NDASCD is most interested in. HB 1020 contains the appropriations for the NDSU Extension Service and the Experiment Station.

On the Extension side, NDASCD is supporting the three positions for salinity/sodicity specialists. Two specialists are outreach staff who will work closely with

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The second reason is that supervisors are ultimately responsible for decisions made by SCDs. Though we thought it would be a quiet legislative session for us, you never know what issues will arise. The number of tiling bills has been a surprise, though it appears the final outcome will be beneficial. However - moving forward it's very possible that an amendment could radically change things and we'd want your feedback. When we're working over a weekend, getting information to supervisors as quickly as possible is important.

Finally, the Federal budget picture - including funding for technical assistance - is a fluid situation. Will there be a budget for FY 2011? A continuing resolution? A shut-down? How will that impact SCDs? Will SCDs have a computer access if there's a shutdown? Again, having a contact supervisor in every SCD that we can quickly reach is important. Being able to send things in writing - without waiting for the postal service and in a form that you can quickly reply to or send on to your fellow supervisors - just helps everyone know what's happening.

NACD is the one organization who consistently supports funding for technical assistance. During the last Farm Bill debate, NACD was the only organization selected to testify at every Congressional Farm Bill hearing. They are recognized as a key player in the conservation title. **If every SCD could send an extra \$50 to NACD, it would raise \$150,000 nationwide to support our core - technical assistance.** By the way, NACD offers a weekly emailed newsletter - e-Notes - with great information about current conservation funding, programs and efforts. There's also plenty of links for specific information. Go to NACDnet.org to sign up.

Finally, your NDASCD Board is preparing. Before our January meeting, I asked board members to complete a quick questionnaire - just on their own without outside discussion. Every single person offered at least one different viewpoint at some point in the survey. We also had a whole lot of the same responses. The responses were so interesting that we're including a brainstorming session in our future meetings to address the needs of the Association. Some you will have a chance to do a similar exercise with Area Meetings. I hope you participate.

As always - feel free to call or email your concerns, comments and suggestions.

LeAnn

Executive Line continued from page 1

SCDs to find solutions for the salinity/sodicity problems farmers and ranchers are experiencing. An NDSU campus based specialist will support the other two specialists with sound science in addressing projects.

The Experiment Station position is a soil microbiologist. SCDs have been promoting soil health and using management to leave residue on the soil surface along with green cover crops to maximize roots in the soil during the year. The goal is to enhance the soil microbes which in turn aid mineralization and providing useable plant food to the subsequent crops. So another soil microbiologist is greatly needed to augment the work of Kris Nichols at the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory at Mandan.

All of these positions were supported by the State Board of Agriculture Research and Education (SBARE) and were fully funded in the Governor's Executive Budget. They are still in the amended bill as it has passed the House of Representatives and now will be considered by the Senate. The hearing for HB 1020 will be March 10 before the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Legislative contacts designated by the SCDs have been receiving my Legislative Update every week. They should be sharing this with the rest of their board supervisors. The Update details the legislative action on quite a few bills which may be of interest to SCDs. I do not sit in all these hearings unless it is suggested to me by the directors or other supervisors. I have sat in on some of the hearings for EPA and tile drainage just to see what is transpiring (no testifying).

Area meetings are being planned and the Area II meeting will be held in Cooperstown on March 7. This meeting will also include a very interesting tour of the missile command site located near there. On March 21, Area I will have their meeting in Pembina. We will get a flavor for the history of the oldest settlement in North Dakota and also day to day life of living on the Canadian border. Of course these meetings are the very best opportunity for supervisors to visit and learn from each other. Supervisors constantly tell me they need to learn from each other how things are working in their districts. All SCDs are looking for new programs, services, and ways to be of service to their residents. We provide that at the area meetings - don't let the opportunity pass you by. Look for the agendas at your area meeting when it comes out and take advantage of this opportunity.

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Executive Line continued from page 2

On a very somber note, the U.S. Congress is bent on budget cutting due to the unsustainable deficit we currently experience. As you might expect, the programs which will be cut first are those which lawmakers feel they won't get a lot of feedback from constituents. In the continuing resolutions which are being considered now (in lieu of a regular budget) conservation program funding has been heavily cut, in my opinion. Another component to the sustainable and long term production of food in America is research and that also has received large cuts proposed. The deficit problem is fueling the fire to slash expenses and conservation programs are positioned for long term benefits to this country, not immediate benefits. So they are vulnerable. I do not believe it is in the interests of a strong food security policy to overdo the cuts to conservation and research. It's just my opinion and I would be happy to print in this newsletter any of your opinions regarding the ongoing budget battle, farm policy, and/or conservation policy. Let me know what you are thinking.

Hopefully, spring is coming and another growing season is at hand. I truly wish farmers and ranchers the very best for the coming year and to see the rewards of their conservation practice and ethic.

Tom

KRYSTA HARDEN IS USDA CHIEF OF STAFF

USDA has announced Krysta Harden as USDA's new Chief of Staff. Since April of 2009, Krysta has worked as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations at the department. Before arriving at USDA, Krysta served a Chief Executive Officer for the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) from 2004-2009. Operating from NACD headquarters in Washington, D.C., she was responsible for the association's policy development and member services programs and coordinated strategic planning, budget formulation and related business operations.

"Beyond the Beginning: The Zero-Till Evolution"

The Manitoba-North Dakota Zero Tillage Farmers Association held its 33rd Annual Zero Till Workshop and Tradeshow at the Keystone Centre in Brandon, Manitoba, on Feb. 1-3, 2011.

The event unveiled the Association's third production manual, *Beyond the Beginning: the Zero-Till Evolution*. The content of the new manual is shaped by both farmers and researchers discussing today's growing need – and evolving tools – for shaping a site specific, biological systems approach to zero-till.

"Zero-till has evolved into something more than a moisture-saving and erosion-control practice," says Ted Alme, North Dakota's state agronomist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "It has transformed into a dynamic, biological systems approach to resource management."

Zero-till's ongoing evolution into a biological system presents a need for new knowledge. The challenges lie in learning to let natural synergies work and in finding ways to mimic Mother Nature's rhythms for the prairie.

"We need to increase our knowledge and our management skills," says Jeff Thiele, soil resource specialist, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Agri-Environment Services Branch, Dauphin, Manitoba. "We don't understand, for instance, all the interactions in different plant communities with insects and the organisms in the soil. We must learn to work with synergies between crops. We can learn to work with Mother Nature - learn to work with what we have."

For additional information about the Brandon workshop and the production manual, visit www.mandakzerotill.org or contact Alan Ness, Association executive secretary, at mandak@westriv.com or (701)220-5141.

Congress Passes Continuing Resolution

The funding process for the U.S. Government continues with new developments. On February 26, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a continuing resolution to fund the government for the remainder of 2011. This CR had significant cuts which would have impacted conservation programs significantly. The Senate had said they would consider a 30 day extension of current government funding (the current CR expired on March 4).

Earlier this week, the House passed another CR for two weeks with \$4 billion in cuts. The Senate also passed the legislation and the President signed it, thus avoiding a government shutdown on March 4. It appears these two week CRs will continue until a budget bill (2011) can be agreed to. The 2012 budget process is also underway and many are already considering what should be done for the 2013 budget.

In all of this mess, cuts are the order of the day. It appears that besides discretionary spending, mandatory Farm Bill funding will also be considered. Already, indications are for cuts to Conservation Technical Assistance, RC&D, Watershed and Flood Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation, WRP, CSP, EQIP, and research and extension programs. We are watching the NACD updates and making contacts with Congressional Offices regarding impacts with these possible cuts.

NACD Calls on Senate to Support FY11 Conservation Funding

In a letter sent to members of the Senate on March 1, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and other conservation groups urged lawmakers to support fair and reasonable funding levels for rural America, agriculture, and agricultural conservation within the 2011 appropriations legislation.

“We understand the critical need to right America’s fiscal ship, but spending cuts must be done in a tempered and equitable way,” stated the letter. “Rural America’s contribution to deficit reduction should not be larger than other sectors, and within agriculture, conservation’s contribution should likewise be proportional.”

The House-passed FY2011 appropriations bill, H.R.1, singles out funding for agriculture and rural America for a disproportionately high cut. The bill includes a \$51 million cut to Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), \$20 million cut from the Watershed Rehabilitation Program and eliminates the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operation completely.

“We’re calling on the Senate to oppose disproportionate cuts to conservation programs,” said NACD President Gene Schmidt. “While we’re facing a high workload for conservation programs, technical assistance funding is at a

critically low level. This assistance is vital in ensuring critical, locally-led conservation initiatives, which not only help our communities maintain clean air, clean water and productive soils, but also help decrease energy-use and reduce damage from severe weather and other natural disasters. These important conservation benefits ultimately provide considerable economical savings to individuals and our communities.”

H.R. 1 also targets mandatory 2008 Farm Bill spending, specifically making cuts to many important conservation programs including the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), as well as renewable energy programs which passed both the House and Senate with broad bipartisan support.

“Ensuring that cuts are minimized today will give Congress the latitude to address these crucial issues in the upcoming farm bill debate,” the letter continued. “With increased pressures on working lands to produce food, feed, fuel and fiber for our nation and the world, both farm bill conservation programs and discretionary funding for technical assistance are needed now more than ever. These conservation programs are crucial to the health and viability of agriculture and rural America.”

To view the full letter, go to:
[nacdnet.org/policy/input/letters/Senate Ag Letter FY11](http://nacdnet.org/policy/input/letters/Senate%20Ag%20Letter%20FY11)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 2011

- 4 NDASCD Education Committee Meeting, Lincoln-Oakes Nursery, Bismarck
- 7 Area II Annual Meeting, Cooperstown, ND
- 14 NDASCD Board of Directors' Meeting, Lincoln-Oakes Nursery, Bismarck
- 16-17 Tree Promotion Workshop, Bismarck
- 21 Area I Annual Meeting, Pembina, ND
- April
- 18 “Keep North Dakota Clean” Awards, Washburn, ND
- 24 to May1 NACD Stewardship Week 2011 “Forests for People-More Than You Can Imagine!”





NACD REPORT By Jim Teigen

Dick Faught and I represented the state association at the NACD convention in Nashville, TN, from January 29 to February 2. We were pleased to see about twenty supervisors, spouses, and district employees from North Dakota, as well as our NRCS State Conservationist Paul Sweeney, also in attendance. I think that's about the largest number from our state since I have been attending.

Dick and I were kept busy with Board meetings, and also served on the District Operations and Member Services Committee, one of five national committees to which the states are assigned. This committee helped develop the supervisor training program, and approved those states which have developed programs thus far. North Dakota was one of 13 states recognized with a plaque for establishing a district official training program. The DO/MS Committee also continues to develop the Friends of NACD program, which encourages supervisors and other interested people to become yearly members at either the \$50 or \$100 level, or lifetime members for \$1000. There are currently 24 lifetime members and there were 110 yearly members last year. A subcommittee was formed to further develop this initiative.

Another duty of the committees was to consider resolutions presented by various states, and make recommendations to the full board for action. Some of those resolutions studied by our committee which were adopted by the full board called for adequate technical assistance funding, allowing individual states to have more flexibility in allocating financial assistance among conservation programs, and for regulatory agencies to consult with local conservation districts prior to any regulatory action being taken against land owners or managers for ineffective buffering of lakes or streams adjacent to their operations. A wide variety of other resolutions were considered by the other committees, and then by the full board, to help set priorities for NACD's work during the coming year.

We also spent one afternoon meeting with other states in our Northern Plains Region. One topic was the status of living snow fence (LSF) programs in the region, and included a report on a NRCS assessment of the current situation and future possibilities in eleven states where LSF have been or are being used. The report outlines programs in various states, the need for education, outreach, and partnerships, and that the 2008 Farm Bill allows NRCS to account for income forgone in payment schedules when a conservation practice directly results in lost income, such as converting cropland to a windbreak in certain programs. Several barriers and limitations to adoption of LSF are listed, as well as potential approaches to address those barriers. This is a good, informative report, which I hope we

can make available to anyone who is interested.

The full board also carried out several items of business, including final discussion and adoption of the Strategic Plan which was developed over the past year, election of officers, discussion of financial reports, and legislative priorities for the coming year. A Farm Bill Task Force had been appointed and working for the past year to develop principles for the 2012 Farm Bill. Main principles adopted include calling for programs that are resource - driven and locally led., full funding for technical assistance needs, funding levels at or above 2008 Farm Bill levels, easy accessibility by customers, education and outreach, commitment to working lands, support for sustainable and renewable energy from agriculture and forestry, support for the Forestry Title, development of new approaches to deliver conservation, and support for new conservation technologies.

A Missouri River States meeting was also held to discuss current (pardon the pun) developments. SCDs lost the seat which our region had on the Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee, but we are attempting to regain it. Wyoming and South Dakota have initiated projects in the Missouri River Basin. South Dakota is doing a sedimentation study with the Corps of Engineers, and the Corps is doing all of the work and funding the project under a provision for the Dakotas. Wyoming's project is for a working land program to restore and improve riparian health, which will benefit wildlife, stream bank and water quality, and provide feed and shelter for livestock. Each state has been asked to prepare a one-page summary of its state's perspective regarding the Missouri River.

There were several speeches and discussions on various topics throughout the convention, as well as opportunities for tours in the area, but most of those were held concurrently with our Board meetings, so Dick and I weren't able to participate in those. I will leave you with one quote from Clay Burns of the Canon Envirothon, which is relevant to each of us. He concluded his remarks to us by saying, "Keep the passion. If you don't keep the passion for what you do, you won't do your job."

Next year's convention will be January 29 through February 1, 2012 at Las Vegas. More details on this year's convention can be found on the NACD website (nacdn.net) and in the e-Notes, the weekly NACD newsletter which is available to any interested person.

