

NEWS & views

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OFSWCD President Tom Reininger presents a "Cooperator" sign to Governor Bob Taft at the conclusion of the Governor's keynote address.



Ohio Supreme Court Justice Terrence O'Donnell swears in newly elected and re-elected board members.



State Representative Tony Core presides over Awards Banquet.

Annual Meeting Draws Large Crowd

The Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts' 61st annual meeting in January drew more than 500 people to downtown Columbus to attend a variety of workshops, honor conservation peers at the awards banquet, meet with legislative representatives, and hear from Governor Bob Taft.

The annual Legislators Breakfast drew a sizable number of senators and representatives, who were presented with SWCD "cooperator" signs symbolizing the importance of the state-local partnership in serving Ohio's landowners.

In his keynote remarks, Governor Taft acknowledged the role soil and water conservation districts have played in assisting Ohioans with natural resource conservation concerns for more than 60 years and noted Ohio's prominence in providing national conservation leadership. He further highlighted the successes of the Lake Erie and Upper Big Walnut CREP programs and commended districts for their proactive approach to working with small- and medium-size livestock operators to prevent pollution problems, and for their increasing efforts to meet conservation needs in urbanizing areas.

State Representative Tony Core (83rd District) served as toastmaster for the annual Awards Banquet, where Ohio Supreme Court Justice Terrence O'Donnell delivered the Oath of Office to newly elected and re-elected SWCD board members. ■

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When the air began to chill a few weeks ago, I pulled a favorite old coat out of the closet. Shoving my hands into the pockets, I discovered a few ‘treasures’ that reminded me of past activities. There was a receipt for dog food, a film receipt (I’m pretty sure I picked up that film), a paperclip, and a brilliant yellow-green laminated card about the size of an index card. The card –

which many Ohio SWCD board members received at our annual meeting a few years ago – serves as a ready reference about soil and water conservation districts.

Titled “The Function of the Conservation District,” the front side reads, “to take available technical, financial, and educational resources, whatever their source, and focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land user for conservation of soil, water, and related resources.”

The reverse side summarized a conservation district official’s job description – or what I think of as our obligations.

Most of us had the privilege of taking the oath of office before either the chief justice or one of the other justices of the Ohio State Supreme Court during the Federation’s annual meeting. While each of the justices takes a slightly different tack, each in his or her way emphasizes the sacred history and importance of oaths.

As leaders who have taken an oath of office, we serve as examples in our communities and set the standard for others to follow. The obligation that comes to us through our oath of office is to act in the best interest of good soil and water stewardship. To do less than ‘walk the talk’ of conservation on our own farms or in our board meeting decisions would be to reduce our effectiveness as leaders and that of our districts.

The start of a new year is traditionally a time to refocus and re-energize all aspects of our lives – personal and professional. Our beliefs and actions in the efforts of soil and water stewardship in no small measure are our legacy to those who will follow. I hope that each of us will do all we can to make 2004 one of the finest years yet toward fulfilling our obligations and continuing Ohio’s rich conservation legacy.

Tom Reininger, OFSWCD President

Division Welcomes Two New Program Specialists

Clark Hutson will be the new program specialist in Area 1. He has served as the Ohio State University Extension Agent in agriculture and natural resources for Seneca County for the past seven plus years. Clark helped establish the Sandusky River Watershed Coalition and worked closely with producers to develop fertility management plans, practice safe application of pesticides, and educate landowners on conservation and natural resource issues. Other work experience includes seven years as an agronomy representative for Zielke Farm Service, Inc. and one year as the agricultural instructor at Lancaster High School. Clark holds an MBA from Tiffin University and a BS in agricultural education from The Ohio State University.

Joining the Division as Program Specialist for Area 4 is Elizabeth (Liz) Cline. Liz has over 10 years experience with the Preble Soil and Water Conservation District, serving as the district’s program administrator for over 3 years. Her experience also includes 2 years as a customer service representative for Dayton Extruded Plastics and 2 years as an administrative assistant for Lexington Child Abuse Council, as well as owning and managing her own business. Liz is a recent graduate of the Ohio State University’s LEAD program and holds a BA in Communications from Wright State University. She also has completed extensive coursework in accounting at Eastern Kentucky University. ■



Clark Hutson will serve Allen, Auglaize, Crawford, Hancock, Hardin, Marion, Morrow, Sandusky and Seneca SWCDs. Liz Cline will serve Butler, Clermont, Clinton, Fayette, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Preble and Warren SWCDs.

Focus on Education

By Jeanne Russell, Nonpoint Source Education Coordinator

Ohio's two "Teacher of the Year" winners, Anna Creswell of Hardin Northern High School and Mary Lee Minor from Wynford Elementary School in Crawford County, exemplify well-rounded and comprehensive conservation education programs. Their programs help prepare students to become well-informed citizens who understand the importance of protecting our precious natural resources.

Anna's secret to a successful Natural Resources and AgriScience program lies in being excited about what she teaches and giving her high school students the opportunity to become involved in their learning. Involvement can range from making a collage or participating in a simulation to monitoring a stream or investigating wild edibles in the spring. Her students are responsible for monitoring a bluebird trail around the school. They repair and relocate the boxes, record the nests, eggs, and fledglings, and deal with problems like sparrows and raccoons.

The students in Anna's classes have taken what they've learned and applied it to real life situations. They teach second graders about nature related topics and coordinate the school's recycling efforts. The students participate in the Adopt-a-Highway program, assist with community clean-up days, and develop displays for the local Earth Day celebration. Anna requires her students to volunteer a minimum number of hours with a local natural resources agency or organization, such as a park, the Hardin SWCD, OSU Extension, or a wildlife rehabilitator, and she draws upon many resource professionals

in the community to provide her classes with first hand information and experiences.

Although Anna's students have been successful in environmental competitions, she looks forward to the proud day when a team of her students qualifies for the Ohio Envirothon. On a personal note, she hopes that by introducing students to the environment, she can spark an interest that will lead some of them to a rewarding career in natural resource management.

Mary Lee teaches art, health, and language arts, and she has done a wonderful job of integrating natural resource conservation into her sixth grade curriculum at Wynford Elementary in Bucyrus.



Anna Creswell's students practice their seining skills.

Her teaching style emphasizes the practical application of environmental education



Mary Lee Minor works with students to establish a blue bird trail.

and brings her students into authentic interaction with nature and its needs. Her students have maintained a bluebird trail for eight years, and have begun raising mealworms as a supplementary food supply. They wrote an original skit entitled "Little Blue Flying Hood" to share the message of how habitat destruction has impacted the bluebird population.

Mary Lee often tells her students, "You make me look good," and she claims it's true. She has found that when she proposes an idea for a project, no matter how crazy it may

seem, her students readily grab onto it, molding and reinventing as they go along. This gives her students a feeling of ownership and motivates them to get involved in the teaching and learning process.

She and her students have been the driving force in developing the Royal Woods Schoolyard Habitat project, which resulted in a seven-acre outdoor learning environment for grades K-12. They've recruited over 650 volunteers each year for the past three years for activities ranging from spreading woodchips to planting seedlings to building compost bins. ■

Annual Meeting Highlights



OFSWCD Hall of Fame inductee Ed Elliott is congratulated by Senator Lynn Wachtman and Representative Mike Gilb (right).

Elliott, Rockwell Inducted into OFSWCD Supervisor Hall of Fame

During the closing banquet of the OFSWCD's 61st Annual Meeting, Ed Elliott, Hardin SWCD, and Bob Rockwell, Belmont SWCD, became the 71st and 72nd members of the Federation's Hall of Fame.

Elliott served on the Hardin SWCD Board from 1980 to 1996. He served as an OFSWCD officer for



OFSWCD President Tom Reininger (right) welcomes Bob Rockwell to the OFSWCD Hall of Fame.

eight years, and was the organization's president in 1993-1994. He has also served as a Hardin County Commissioner.

Rockwell served on the Belmont SWCD Board from 1965-1998. He served as an OFSWCD officer for eight years, and was the organization's president in 1991-1992. The Rockwells raise apples, sweet corn, pumpkins and other commodities on their Belmont County farm.

OASWCDE Honors Heyman, Adams

The Ohio Association of Soil and Water Conservation District Employees annually honors one SWCD board member and one SWCD employee for their outstanding contributions in advancing conservation locally.



Chase Heyman, who has served as a Huron SWCD board member for more than 40 years, receives his Outstanding Supervisor award from OASWCDE treasurer Don Leeds.



Lynda Adams, Shelby SWCD's energetic and innovative education specialist, receives her 2004 Conservation District Professional award from OASWCDE treasurer Don Leeds.

SWCD Employees, Board Members Recognized for 20, 30 Years of Service

Annually the OFSWCD honors district employees and board members who have achieved 20, 30, or more years' service to local residents and landowners.

The following SWCD employees and board members were recognized for 20 years of service:

- Beth Seibert – Allen
- Ron Schneider – Auglaize
- Glenn Whiteleather –
Columbiana
- Gerald Finlay – Coshocton
- Lawrence Burdell – Gallia
- Buz Mills – Gallia
- Dave Heilers – Shelby
- Vern Harnapp – Summit
- Tom Reininger – Hamilton
- Clark Sheets – Hocking
- Paul Demuth – Huron
- Eric Anthony – Morrow
- Kim Dilsaver – Morrow
- Cindy Fink – Summit

SWCD employees and board members recognized for 30 years of service:

- Dennis Bassett – Allen
- Mike Boff – Defiance
- Don Ruffing – Huron
- Ruby Gilliland – Jackson
- Tom Antesburger – Sandusky
- Lynn Eberhard – Seneca
- Ernie Price – Seneca
- Vince Uetrecht – Warren
- Tom Traxler – Williams

Districts Annual Land and Soil Judging Contests Pose Dilemma for Some SWCDs

By Tim Gerber, Administrator, Soil Inventory and Evaluation Section

The 51st annual FFA State Land and Soil Judging Contest was held this past fall on a sunny Saturday morning at the Prairie Oaks Metro Park in eastern Madison County. Ninety-five teams from 70 Ohio high schools earned the right to compete at the state level. Some schools had two qualifying teams – one to judge the suitability of soils for agricultural uses and another for the urban use contest. The “ag” team from National Trail High School in Preble County won its contest, and the urban team from Teays Valley High School in Pickaway County was the winner in the other contest. The Federation honored both teams by taking them out to dinner in downtown Columbus during the Annual Meeting, in hopes of encourag-

ing the “best and brightest” to apply for jobs in Ohio’s Conservation Partnership in a few years.

About 3,000 high school students compete in the land judging contests every year, yet only one or two is likely to graduate from college as a soil science major. With those odds, it’s no wonder that the 30 SWCDs that hold county-level contests are having difficulty finding a qualified person to serve as an official judge. The number of ODNR and NRCS field soil scientists in Ohio has shrunk to 19, and more than half of them are needed to serve as official judges at the ten Agricultural Education District-level contests. Ohio has about 30 other soil scientists, mostly retired, but only a few SWCDs have

approached any of them about serving as county-level judges.

No easy solution is apparent. In a survey conducted two years ago, less than one-fourth of the SWCD technicians said that they would feel “confident” or “very confident” serving as a judge for a county-level land judging contest. As a group, the teacher-coaches have a distinct advantage over SWCD employees, since agricultural education majors are required to take the introductory soil science course in college. On the other hand, soil science is rarely mentioned in job postings by SWCDs, and about 40 percent of SWCD technicians have taken a college-level soil science course. ■

Land and Soil Judging Teams Recognized



OFSWCD Education and Communications Committee chair Dave Greer (left) and Preble SWCD Board representative Lewis Jones congratulate National Trails High School FFA students, winners of the "Agriculture" competition in the 51st annual FFA State Land and Soil Judging Contest. Team advisor Joe Sloan (right) accompanied the students to the OFSWCD Annual Meeting.



Dave Greer (left) and Pickaway SWCD Board representative Bill Black (right) congratulate Teays Valley High School FFA students, winners of the "Urban" competition in the 51st annual FFA State Land and Soil Judging Contest. Team advisor Don Bucher accompanied the students to the OFSWCD Annual Meeting.

ODNR Honors Robinson, Jeffers

Steve Robinson (Union SWCD) and Harold Jeffers (Morgan SWCD) were honored by ODNR at a ceremony at the department's office complex in Columbus in late October 2003.



Steve Robinson receives Cardinal Award from ODNR Director Sam Speck.

Steve Robinson, a 15-year Union County SWCD board member, past OFSWCD president, and NACD

Board Member received the Cardinal Award from ODNR Director Sam Speck. In his comments, Speck noted Robinson's "strong support to the Division of Soil and Water Conservation through his dedication to the state's soil and water conservation district program." The ODNR Cardinal Awards honor individuals and organizations demonstrating exceptional awareness and concern for ideals reflected in the department's mission: to ensure a balance between the wise use and protection of our natural resources for the benefit of all.

Inducted into the Ohio Natural Resources Hall of Fame was Harold Jeffers, a Morgan County SWCD board member from 1978-1995. Jeffers is widely recognized throughout Ohio for his contributions to



Harold Jeffers receives Hall of Fame Award from ODNR Director Sam Speck.

forestry management in both the public and private sectors. His induction into the Ohio Natural Resources Hall of Fame further acknowledges his pioneering work in reforesting strip-mined lands and his overall advocacy of sound forest management practices.



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