

## Report to NMCCD Members

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Annual Meeting

By Carole Glade, Interim Executive Director

February 2015

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) annual meeting was held in New Orleans, LA from February 1-4, 2015. Carole Glade, Interim Executive Director of NMCCD and other members attended the conference. The following is a report of information gathered at the conference which may be of interest to NMCCD. Additional information can be obtained from the NACD website at [www.nacdnet.org](http://www.nacdnet.org).

The recurring theme is that Supervisors/Commissioners/Directors (called by various names in various states) may be unpaid but they are not volunteers. They are elected leaders and must take this role seriously.

- A. **Southwest District Legislative Priorities** were expanded to include water quality, quantity and regulation and Forest health. Other suggestions include supporting NACD in opposing a new rule to define the Water of the US; amending areas in the Farm Bill to change “wolf” to “federally protected predators or species”; Supporting the release of some smaller Wilderness Study areas by the BLM; Work to release SWCDs from antiquated easements on flood control dams in Districts or fund the removal of old NRCS dams from the 1950’s (note: there may be money for this in the Farm Bill) – hazard classes for dams have changed due to building/development around dams. It was suggested that a Western Regional Policy Group (RPG) be formed to discuss various issues important and specific to the region (i.e. coastal forests). WY representatives noted that trespassing litigation has been filed by a group of landowners against a firm that was taking water quality samples without access permission. It was suggested that SWCDs check state trespass laws.
- B. **NACD comments on improved services to NACD members:** Addition of conservation delivery system information, improved website with more current information, e-library, a “did you know” section, more information for the public.
- C. **US Army Corps of Engineers** – Commander of Mississippi Valley Division, Major General Michael Wehr: The US Army Corps of Engineers is charged with environmental stewardship. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act guides their actions on such things as debris removal, dams, mud slides, etc. Stewardship includes watershed initiatives, archeological collections, ecosystem restoration and planning, environmental management, and education and recreation. He noted 4 Revolutions for today:
  - a. Explosive growth of agricultural production due to increased and improved technology
  - b. Hydrocarbon and natural gas production
  - c. Return to manufacturing due to infrastructure improvement
  - d. Accelerating impact of climate change
- D. **US Department of Agriculture** – Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Krysta Harden
  - a. The Farm Bill focuses more on conservation than ever before. More money has been allocated for conservation so she suggests that SWCDs dig deeper, be better, and include more.
  - b. Partnerships are key. Bring people to the table who haven’t been there before.
  - c. Biggest opportunity is now preset for SWCDs to learn; current leaders need to embrace this opportunity and empower themselves, staff, and partners.
  - d. SWCDs must reach out to young people to get them involved.

- E. **NRCS** – Former Chief of NRCS, David White
  - a. Fresh water issues are fueling regional conflicts around the world.
  - b. The USA will be the food producer for the world. With 9 billion people projected for 2070, a 70% increase in food production is needed; food production will take place in an erratic climate. Producers will need to provide as much food as was needed of the last 10,000 years totaled.
  - c. SWCD leaders MUST take action locally and play a larger role, especially in the legislative process.
  - d. The tie between agriculture and conservation must be the basis for all actions.
  
- F. **US Forest Service** – Forest Stewardship Program Manager, Karl Dalla Rosa.
  - a. The Forest Service is taking a more holistic approach to forest management focusing on forest health and resiliency and legacy.
  - b. Public and private partnerships have the biggest impact.
  - c. Actions must be more than keeping forests as forests. Actions must include pests, fires, management, etc.
  - d. Areas new to the Farm Bill include Good Neighbor Authority which extends to federal land and Stewardship Contracting Authority for better management of FS land.
  - e. Landscape Skill Restoration is a competitive program based on state action plans. Each region has a process and information is available through the state forester.
  
- G. **BLM** – Liaison to State and Local Government, Cynthia Moses-Nedd
  - a. BLM operates under the FLPMA – Federal Land Policy Management Act
  - b. 6 Priorities for BLM which tie to SWCD priorities are:
    - i. Federal land management and the protection of riparian areas
    - ii. Wildfire and fuel reduction
    - iii. Forest health
    - iv. Invasive species
    - v. Wild horses and burros
    - vi. Habitat restoration
  - c. The National SEED strategy involves 12 agencies and includes the federal highways system. The highway programs are encourage to use viable native seeds when planting along roads. Local input about which seeds are most effective is needed in this strategy.
  - d. “Planning 2.0” is a landscape approach to planning and working with local partners on BLM issues.
  
- H. **Department of Defense** – Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program Director, Kristin Thomasgard
  - a. The REPI program is an innovative partnership program between military installations and local groups to protect the land and water around the installations.
  - b. Installations are local and are closer to large populations than ever before.
  - c. DOD needs more partners and encourages SWCDs to get involved. The Sentinel Landscape Partnership is a joint project with conservation groups and private land owners. Funding is available and will be announced soon. Projects and funding are coordinated directly through the military institution.
  - d. DOD funds can be used to match money for other grants such as NRCS projects.

- I. **EPA** – Senior Policy Advisor, Ellen Gillinsky
  - a. The EPA 319 Program is money provided by EPA to state environmental agencies for Best Management Practices planning. The state agencies determine distribution of the funds.
  - b. The Source Water Protection Collaborative has an online tool-kit for SWCDs to use
  - c. The National Water Quality Initiative is money for priority watershed to teach best management planning practices (with NRCS).
  - d. Nutrient Monitoring and reducing nutrient runoff into water is a key issue. Project must show results; EPA offers free testing if there is a nutrient reduction project.
  - e. Other EPA programs include the Smithsonian Waterway Project and the HERO project concerning farming practices.
  
- J. **NRCS** - Vision for the Future – NRCS Chief Jason Weller. 4 key issues were noted:
  - a. **PLANNING** -- SWCDs need to get back to the basics of conservation planning and communication to landowners and the public; SWCDs must show significant impact and results for programs and activities; Work to empower new generation of conservation-minded youth with training, tools, and processes; Resource Stewardship Planning is a pilot in 11 states;
  - b. **ENGAGING THE MARKET PLACE**: Educate and inform the public and partners; Client Gateway is a new tool being tested on which contracts can be signed, resources located, and applications made and payments tracked; Mobile planning tools are needed, too. Engage and support effective regulatory action and pressure.
  - c. **HARNESSING FINANCIAL CAPITAL**: Develop market mechanism to buy and sell products; Work to develop field-to-market sustainable agriculture with retailers and companies; Reach out to institutional investors for support of conservation work.
  - d. **SAVING CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DIVERSITY** – Recognize the history and diversity of the land and its people (i.e. acequias); Work to keep people on the land and develop economic hope and vitality; Target poverty stricken areas in new ways and see conservation as a social service issue; Participate in new partnerships; Find new solutions; Use new innovative approaches to reach the unreached.
  
- K. **RCPP (Regional Conservation Partnership Program) Grants and Application Suggestions** – RCPP is a 4-year project. Start with the NRCS state conservationist. This is the first year of the project and the next 3 years will have 50% less money and more demand. NRCS must fund its own part of the project and will take a percentage of the funds awarded to cover staff costs. The new proposal deadline will be released in the Spring. A 60-day turnaround is needed for pre-proposals. Suggestions for success include the following:
  - a. Bring in new partners
  - b. Be innovative as to how partners work together
  - c. Private or corporate funding is not required by non-federal funding is required
  - d. States and regions can work together on a proposal
  - e. Have clearly stated outcomes which are accomplishable
  - f. Be realistic on the amount of money requested and how it will be spent
  
- L. **Minimum Elements of a Watershed-based Plan**
  - a. Identification of casus of impairment and pollutant sources that need to be controlled to reduce load and reach other goals

- b. An estimate of the load reductions expected from management measures
- c. A description of nonpoint source management issues that will be used and description of critical areas
- d. Estimate of the amounts of technical and financial assistance needs and sources and authorities that will be relied upon to implement the plan
- e. Information and education component to enhance public understanding and to encourage early participation
- f. Schedule of implementation
- g. Description of interim measurable milestones
- h. Set of criteria that can be used to determine if load reduction are being achieved
- i. Monitoring component to evaluate the effectiveness over time

### **Partnership Ideas:**

**HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TEAM AND FARMING:** A project with the local football team in a food distressed area was formed with the SWCD and a local farmer; the football coach wanted the students to eat healthier; the farmer gave the team a ½ acre plot for a garden and taught them how to select and grow the food. The SWCD helped with training and seed selection. Students now grow food and sell it to the local churches as part of a community food program. Students make a small profit from the sales. Church members can use their food stamps and other benefits to buy the food. All benefit. The football team is now a 4-H club called the George Washington Carver Future Scientists.

“FIELD OF OPPORTUNITY” is a project to help farmers plant new cover crops to reduce soil erosion and to improve soil quality. The SWCD worked with several local farmers in a pilot program to develop a mapping strategy of the farms and planting areas for monitoring. Seeds were provided free in the pilot. The SWCD provided soil monitoring. The next year, additional farmers requested to be in the program because of its success. Seeds are now sold. Soil quality has improved and output has improved.

**URBAN FARMS:** The SWCD worked with neighborhood leaders in a distressed urban area. Many vacant lots existed that were eye-sores. The group came together to develop urban gardens. One gardener has turned his project into an urban vegetable garden business. SWCD provided information and assistance with training, irrigation, plant selection.

**RIPARIAN PARTNERSHIP:** Several SWCDs joined together to work to protect and improve a large bay area. The partners each applied for and received a grant of some type and size. The partners equally shared the grants to provide services in their areas. Urban areas did projects on pet waste reduction while rural areas did projects on soil enhancement and cover crops. Other SWCDs wanted to join the partnership. The “entry requirement” is to bring a grant for the group to share.

**TEEN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:** A SWCD wanted to get more involvement by young people. They established a Teen Board of Supervisors who attend the regular Board’s meetings, conduct at least one conservation project each year, and bring in other youth to the projects as a way to enhance conservation education and stewardship. The SWCD hope that this teen board will serve as new talent for the District in the future.

### **Funding and Information Resources:**

Department of Defense: <http://www.repi.mil/Home.aspx> (for conservation projects in conjunction with military installment; grants are through each installation)

EPA: [http://water.epa.gov/grants\\_funding/](http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/) (listing of various grant opportunities)

American Farmland Trust: [http://water.epa.gov/grants\\_funding/](http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/)

EPA Tool-Kits: <http://toolkit.climate.gov/tools>

<http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/septic/local-outreach-toolkit.cfm>

<http://www2.epa.gov/nutrient-policy-data/toolkit-resources-provide-states-flexibility-adopting-and-implementing-numeric>

Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW)

<http://www.fs.fed.us/ficmnew/index.shtml>

The Watershed Academy (EPA's Office of Water) – training and information on implementing watershed approaches <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/watershed/wacademy>

Center for Watershed Protection <http://www.cwp.org>

River Watch Network <http://www.riverwatch.org>

Interesting Issues in SWCDs:

- Connecticut – merged districts and changed from government to nonprofit
- Wisconsin – some smaller SWCDs merged to form county conservation planning districts
- Maryland – SWCD can charge fee to do inspections due to law change
- Arkansas – Business model is key for local SWCDs
- Ohio - a study was done to streamline the districts; small districts are presented an offer to consolidate
- Some states are heading toward watershed districts rather than SWCDs
- SWCD staff is moving from clerical to technical skills (i.e. project management).
- Some states are considering term limits for Supervisors/Board members
- Iowa – is trying to standardize job duties and description of SWCD staff

**KUDOS** to NEW MEXICO NMCCD MEMBER Peter Vigil of Taos SWCD who was awarded the employee of the year award from NACD.

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