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2011 Governor's Range Tour will be hosted by Lower Musselshell Conservation District and held in Roundup.

MACD

**Helena-NOV 16-17
Ray Arhuletta-speaker**

President's Message

Tommy Bass, Montana SWCS President



Greetings SWCS friends and colleagues. I hope everyone was able to enjoy some summer activities with friends and family. Your MT Chapter SWCS board and committee chairs have continue to meet via conference call over the last few months and have been discussing how to better serve the Society and the Montana Chapter. My favorite aspect of SWCS is the great membership, who as individuals, provide diverse and valuable perspectives on conservation and natural resource management. Conservation practices are applied within complicated natural and managed systems, so it takes a variety of technical backgrounds and effective collaboration to best serve land owners and managers. SWCS is made up of so many different types of natural resource professionals, scientists, educators, and policy experts.

Considering this, what can our chapter do to help us all have more productive interactions and professional development? How can the Society facilitate the sharing of knowledge amongst our membership, and how can the chapter help us do our jobs better right here in Montana? These are not rhetorical questions. I really would like to hear ideas and suggestions from all our members. We are wrestling with issues such as how often we need to promote our major state chapter meeting, what other trainings or workshops would be beneficial, and how to better engage, youth, college students and young professionals. We will be reaching out through future newsletters to get your thoughts on potential events and programs; but please don't hesitate to contact me anytime to share your ideas for the future of the Montana Chapter of SWCS.

Tommy
tmbass@montana.edu

New Member Spotlight !

Stacy Thornbrugh-NRCS-Shelby

Shanna Huckins, NRCS, White Sulphur Springs

I grew up near Broadus, MT on a cattle and sheep ranch along the Powder River. I graduated from MSU-Bozeman with a Bachelor's of Science in Agriculture Education – Extension and am the NRCS District Conservationist in White Sulphur Springs. By joining SWCS, I hope to keep current with conservation research and application, meet and interact with people with common objectives, and participate in promoting conservation stewardship worldwide.

Welcome to Shanna! We look forward to having her on board with Montana Soil Water Conservation Society.



Erik Suffridge, Soilbiology@aol.com

Greetings from Bozeman! It pleases me to have the opportunity to help direct the Chapter's activities. For my inaugural rambling I wanted to discuss two aspects of the Chapter that are near and dear to me – the Chapter's annual meeting and the soil painting kit fund raiser.

First, the annual meeting and employee training plans. Discussions prior to this year's meeting centered on agency training budgets and attendance. Due to these related concerns the Board is currently discussing a move to biennial meetings. This would hopefully allow the Chapter to put on a larger meeting every other year while allowing for members to better lay out their training plans. As an NRCS employee my personal training plans (individual development plan, or IDP) have always been set up on an annual basis. A couple of years ago, I started setting up plans on a multi-year basis. Perhaps this will work for you as well. NRCS is currently putting together 2012 training needs for the employees and all known, potential training opportunities need to be listed. I would encourage our NRCS members to put the SWCS Annual Training Conference on your IDPs. Other agencies that have similar systems for planning individual employee training should consider this as well. Remember that an IDP does not guarantee that you will attend the training. Your supervisors may not approve it as the training approaches. But, not putting it on there may guarantee that you do not get to attend. Also, if the Chapter does move to a biennial format, or if you go with a multi-year IDP, place the conference on the IDP for both 2012 and 2013. If you have questions or would like to comment on the biennial proposal please email me.

One of the primary fundraisers that we conduct as a Chapter is the sale of Soil Painting Kits. These kits help us to provide funds for scholarships or other activities. I am looking for someone to take over the duties of coordinating this aspect of Chapter activities. It is of course a volunteer position that pays you only with the knowledge that you are not only helping to raise funds for the Chapter but you are also promoting soil awareness to students and teachers that use the kits. I want to turn my in-chapter focus towards my duties as President-Elect so that I can represent us all effectively when my time comes to take over as President. If you are interested in this duty or have questions then please let me know. If you know of someone that might be interested then encourage them to contact me for more information.

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Soil Painting with First Graders

Stacy Enoboe, District Conservationist, Conrad FO

This past spring I had the privilege of working with a group of first graders who learned to paint with soils. I picked up a soil painting kit at the MT SWCS Annual Meeting last winter. After looking at the kit for a couple of months I decided to share it with a first grade class at the local grade school. After a short 15-20 minute discussion on MT soils and soil basics the kids broke for recess. During the 15 minute break, the first grade teacher and I mixed four sets of soil paints, arranged the classroom into four groups, and we were just about ready when the kids returned. Instead of providing the kids with something to color, each student received a paint brush and a blank piece of watercolor paper. I hung example pictures on the wall and encouraged the students to draw their own picture. Some of the kids needed help with ideas but after about 10 minutes all the kids were drawing. They painted landscape pictures, teepees, trucks, race cars, birds, horses, fish, and sharks.

The kids had a lot of fun and they all had a new appreciation for soil not dirt. At the local county fair in July, I had the privilege of seeing four of their works of art in the school art exhibit. All four exhibits had a beautiful ribbon hung on their soil painted pictures.

The soil painting kits can be purchased from the MT SWCS chapter. Information about the kits and potential teaching materials can be found at the MT NRCS website: <http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/about/soilpainting.html>. My only caution to anyone using the soil painting kits is that once the soil is mixed with the acrylic to it is very hard to wash out of clothing or carpets. Stains can usually be scrubbed out while the paint is still wet. Unfortunately, after it dries, the spill becomes permanent. Hopefully, there were a few very understanding first grade parents.



2011 Northern Plains Regional Meeting a Success

By Ann Fischer

The Northern Plains Regional SWCS Meeting was held in Mandan, ND March 10-12, 2011. The workshop began Thursday evening at the North Dakota Heritage Center. I made it to the Mandan ARS Station on Friday, March 11th, just prior to the onset of a North Dakota Spring blizzard. That didn't daunt those of us intent on hearing the lineup of technical speakers they had in store for us. All six states were represented and resulted in 39 participants.

Friday's agenda leaned heavily toward addressing soil health, fulfilling the conference title promise "Soil Critters and Waste". Jon Stika, NRCS, gave insight into the underground biology in soil systems. Brent Gustafson, NRCS, discussed his experiences addressing salinity issues with cover crops. Jerry Doan, Burleigh County, ND rancher, gave a powerful presentation about the history of the Black Leg Ranch and the techniques they are using to improve soil health and fuse generational gaps, while improving their bottom line. Jay Fuhrer, NRCS, added to Jerry's presentation and concluded by adding what has been going on with soil health, plant health and compost tea at the Menoken Farm east of Bismarck

Jennifer Klostreich, Richland (ND) SCD, presented their accomplishments in Septic Repair/Replacement in their county, particularly addressing systems along stream corridors.

Jim Gulliford, SWCS Executive Director, introduced himself and gave updates about the SWCS strategic plan, member development, conservation science and policy, leadership and financial sustainability. It was great to meet Jim and have him there.

The blizzard prevented us from touring the Menoken Farm, but did allow us to see some of the projects at the Mandan ARS Station. Nor did it stop the NDSWCS Board from serving a fantastic steak lunch at Cal's Steakpit on location at the ARS Station.

The banquet was held Friday evening at the Best Western Seven Seas Hotel with a speaker describing "Bakken Black Gold", the extensive oil development in Northwest North Dakota. The Saturday morning successful business meeting included reports on chapter activities in the future, discussion of chapter reports presented by the SWCS International Committees, chapter presidents or their representatives. Also included was an update of the developing student chapter at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming. The next Northern Plains Workshop will be held in Colorado March 2012.

CELINA, Ohio (Aug. 4, 2011) — Ohio State University Extension, in conjunction with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Ohio No-till Council, have developed a third tillage system for farmers to consider.

ECO Farming is a new concept and way of farming in the 21st century. "ECO Farming stands for Eternal no-till, Continuous living cover, and Other best management practices," says Jim Hoorman, assistant professor with OSU Extension. "In other words, absolutely trying to eliminate tillage as much as possible."

Hoorman, along with Ray Archuleta of NRCS' East National Technology Service Center, Ohio No-till Council President Dave Brandt, and Mark Scarpiti, Ohio NRCS agronomist, collaboratively defined the ECO Farming concept. The team will introduce ECO Farming to producers at a series of field days throughout August.

"Continuous Living Cover means that farmers try to keep a living crop on the soil 100% of the time," Archuleta says. "The goal is to protect the soil from soil erosion, increase water infiltration, and decrease nutrient runoff."

Examples include grain crops followed by cover crops, pasture or hay systems, or perennial plants. Other best management practices (BMPs) include the concept of controlled traffic, water-table management where applicable, manure management, and integrated pest management (IPM).

"The goal is to use an integrated system of conservation practices to solve environmental nutrient issues associated with hypoxia and eutrophication to improve water quality," Scarpiti says.

From an on-farm standpoint, Brandt has been practicing the concept for 15 years. "I have reduced my fertilizer inputs by 50-70%, herbicide costs by 50%, and reduced my fuel consumption," Brandt said. "All while adding soil organic matter (SOM) which improved my soil health and increased my crops' yields over the past 15 years."

"This system closely mimics natural cycles in virgin soils by feeding the microbes," said Hoorman, who also is an agriculture and natural resources educator for OSU Extension. "You have 1,000-2,000 times more microbes associated with live roots."

Plants supply 25% to 40% of their carbohydrate reserves to feeding the microbes, which in turn recycle nitrogen, phosphorus, and water back to the plant roots. This natural process improves soil structure and increases water infiltration and water storage.

The ECO Farming innovators insist that for farmers to accept this system, it must be economically viable, and in the long run should also be ecologically sound and environmentally sustainable. This system appears to have all three attributes.

"For 100 to 200 years, farmers have been tilling the soil and basically mining it of nutrients, destroying soil structure and losing 60% to 80% of soil organic matter," said Archuleta. "Now we can use advanced knowledge of soils, soil health, and soil ecology to work with Mother Nature rather than against her."

Farmers will have an opportunity to see ECO Farming demonstrated on the Dave Brandt farm, including two field days at 6100 Basil Western Road, Carroll, Ohio on Aug. 16 and 17, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The cost is \$28 per day and attendees may register on-line at: <https://www.regonline.com/816soilhealthcovercropsday>



WHO WE ARE

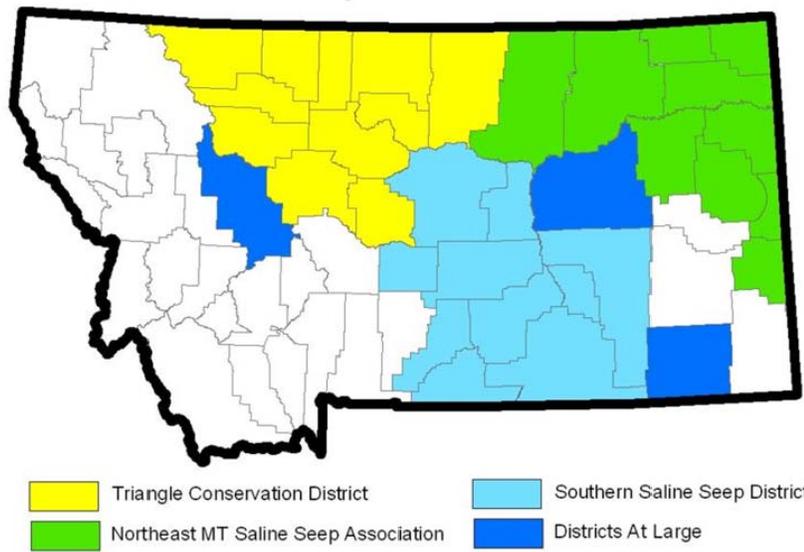
MSCA is a satellite organization of Montana's Conservation Districts. CD's grew from public concern for the condition of our natural resources in the early 1930's - nobody wanted to re-live the dust bowl. Today, MT's 58 conservation districts provide local citizens with an opportunity to shape resource planning in their areas. Membership from conservation district supervisors in 33 counties make up the Montana Salinity Control Association. This internationally recognized organization is headquartered in Conrad, MT, and provides expert technical assistance in the reclamation and control of saline seeps in agricultural areas.

WHAT WE DO

Saline seep reclamation. MSCA works with landowners, watershed groups, Conservation Districts, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation - Conservation and Resource Development Division (DNRC - CARDD), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and other individuals and entities to improve surface soil and water quality. MSCA does this by providing technical assistance for reclaiming agriculture-related saline seeps. Below is a map showing regions within the MT Salinity Control Association. The areas of yellow and green are where most agriculture-related, and therefore reclaimable, dryland saline seeps are located (northern glaciated plains).

Montana Salinity Control is located in Conrad Montana and the phone and email are: msca@3rivers.net or 406-278-3071

Montana Salinity Control Association



- **The** Amarillo Globe News dated July 17, 2011 titled “Landscape changes, lessons learned make new Dust Bowl unlikely “
- **The** Indiana Prairie Farmer dated July 13, 2011: “Young Farmer Proves Just How Deep Roots Can Go”
- Not an article but type in “Ray the soil guy” in your web browser to get to Ray’s Soil health page and many interesting VIMEOs!

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Soil Painting Kit: Erik Suffridge
Earth Bracelets: Heidi Brewer

Please direct all submissions, comments and suggestions to: NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Joyce Trevithick, NRCS Agronomist
Great Falls Area Office - 406/727-7580 ext.128- joyce.trevithick@mt.usda.gov



The **mission** of the Soil and Water Conservation Society is to foster the science and art of soil, water, and related natural resource management through advocacy, professional development, and educational activities to achieve sustainability. The Montana members stand for a stewardship ethic that recognizes the interdependence of people and the environment.

Your **support** can make a difference! It's individuals like you that make healthy land and clean water for life possible. If you are not already a member, please consider joining. SWCS members benefit from professional development opportunities, in-service training and quality publications. Formal recognition for good work, awards programs and fellowship are also enjoyed. For more information please visit:

www.swcs.org/en/join_swcs