



COLORADO SWCS

CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

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President's Message

By: Catherine Dix



I'd like to wish the members of the Colorado chapter of SWCS a very happy new year!

Allow me to welcome our newest chapter members, officers, and committee chairs and also to thank you for your participation and commitment to SWCS and conservation. I was asked to join SWCS a mere two years ago, but in that time I have had the opportunity to meet some won-

derful people, visit new and interesting places within our state, and learn so much about conservation through summer tours and training opportunities offered by SWCS. I would encourage all of our newest members to reach out to other members, attend as many of our events as possible, and invoke conversations about it with your colleagues, co-workers, customers, and other conservation enthusiasts.

Speaking of events, I would like to thank everyone who helped to make our 2012 annual meeting/technical conference in Vail a success. A special thank you goes out to Mike Collins. With the help of his technological savvy, we doubled the amount of people who viewed the two-day event via live-streaming.

I'm still learning and networking and making connections within our organization. I look forward to meeting more of you, and I hope that you won't hesitate to contact me with your ideas and share your stories of conservation experiences in 2013.

SHERRI BRANDT—
NEWSLETTER EDITOR

HAPPY NEW YEAR

New Chapter Officers for 2013

At the Colorado SWCS Chapter annual meeting in November 2012, the chapter welcomed Catherine Dix as President for 2013; Greg Langer as East Slope Director and Andy Laca as West Slope Director. You can get to know our new chapter officers a little better by reading their biographies below.

CATHERINE DIX — PRESIDENT 2013



Catherine grew up in the small town of Deming, New Mexico, a place known for pure water, fast ducks, and 360 days of sunshine. She studied soil science at New Mexico State University and began her career with NRCS as a co-op student trainee in 1994. While attending school, she served as President of the Plant and Soil Association and also participated in a pilot program wherein she helped recruit students for NRCS on campus. Upon graduating, she accepted a position as a soil conservationist in Stilwell, Oklahoma. In 2001 she accepted a District Conservationist position in Alamosa, CO and has worked throughout the San Luis Valley over the last decade. She's now serving as the Area Resource Conservationist for Programs in Area 4. In her spare time, Catherine writes novels.

KYLE FRANZ — PRESIDENT ELECT



Kyle grew up on a farm in Western Kansas. He earned a degree in Agriculture from Kansas State University in 1980. Kyle has been married for 33 years and has 2 children and 2 grandchildren. For 25 years after graduating from college he was self employed as a farmer/rancher where he managed 2500 acres of irrigated and non-irrigated cropland in addition to backgrounding 500 head of cattle yearly. In 2002 Kyle got bored with production agriculture and took a part time job with NRCS and the Burlington Conservation District. By 2004 Kyle's enthusiasm for conservation had evolved to a level that he changed his career path from a Farmer/Rancher to a Soil Conservationist and took an appointment with the NRCS in Cheyenne Wells, CO. Kyle has been a member of the Soil and Water Conservation Society since his appointment with the NRCS in 2004.

Kyle's passion is teaching about sustainable agriculture through conservation to youth and to farmers and ranchers. He is a firm believer that nothing creates interest like enthusiasm and believes that he provides that to our customers

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GREG LANGER — EAST SLOPE DIRECTOR



Greg grew up on a farm in Ness City, Kansas where they grew primarily wheat, milo, and alfalfa on over 2000 acres. They also ran a stocker steer operation of up to 200 head. Greg graduated from high school and attended college at Dodge City Community College, Dodge City KS and Cameron University, Lawton OK where he achieved a BS in Agriculture. After college he began work for SCS in Western KS. Two years after starting with SCS he left and went to work as a crop consultant for Servi-Tech Inc but then came back to NRCS after a little more than 2 years.

Since then Greg has worked as a Soil Conservationist in Pratt and Phillipsburg Kansas and got his first DC appointment in Johnson Kansas. After 3 years in Johnson, Greg went to Guymon, OK as DC for a year and a half. He then moved to Colorado Springs and worked as a Soil Con for a couple years until he got the DC position.

ANDY LACA — WEST SLOPE DIRECTOR



Andrew Laca is the Soil Conservationist in the Alamosa Field Office. He was raised on a commercial cattle/hay operation in Fallon Nevada. He earned his Associate of Arts degree in Agriculture from College of Southern Idaho and Bachelors of Science in Agriculture Education from University of Idaho. He spent 2 years as an Agriculture Teacher / FFA Advisor at Mountain Home High School in Mountain Home, Idaho. He then became a Soil Conservationist in Lovelock, Nevada in 2002, and transferred to Alamosa in 2006.

Welcome New Officers!

2012 Technical Conference

Submitted by Mike Collins

The annual SWCS Technical Conference was held in conjunction with the Colorado Association of Conservation Districts Annual meeting in Vail, Colorado, November 12 -13, 2012. The meeting was well attended with a total 32 natural resource professionals in the audience. The Conference began with the first of a two part presentation on leadership given by John Lestina and Boyd Byelich. John and Boyd are District Conservationists with offices located in Dove Creek/Longmont Colorado. John's talk entertained the question of how we let first impressions influence our opinion of an individual. Boyd's talk had an historical look at leadership, both talks are on ustreamtv.

We were privileged to receive an impromptu talk from nationally recognized speaker Jay Furher who is the District Conservationist in Bismarck North Dakota. Mr. Furher shared his thoughts and approaches of resource management and resource protection based on his personal journey down the Soil Health movement path.

Keith Berns co-owner of Green Cover Seeds gave a good talk on how to design a cover crop using an updated version of his Smart Mix Calculator which he developed to give farmers and planners a tool to improve the success and benefits of planting cover crops.

Tim Steffens, the Multi-County Rangeland Management Specialist from southeast Colorado, gave a thought provoking presentation on Ecological processes based on resilience thinking which provided some insights on how systems evolve and function over time. The discussion of the connectivity of all systems and their members lead to an interesting discussion by most of the audience.

We closed out the first day with the SWCS annual meeting which was also well attended.

Andy Kwapniosky, a Kansas Agronomist, who has done some interesting work with cover crops using the Aqua Spy technology which helped to illustrate cover crop water use and benefits observed in western Kansas during a dry year. Andy's talk is on YouTube.

Keith Berns followed with a presentation on during cover crops in arid regions which helped to address some of the concerns often raised by producers, conservationist and consultants who are seeing information on the Soil Health approach for the first time.



Members of Colorado's Soil Health Team; Storm Casper, Tim Steffens and Joel Moffet.

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Technical Conference from page 4

Scott Ravencamp, an agriculturist from Lincoln County Colorado, was able to provide us with a synopsis of his experiences using cover crops on his farm in eastern Colorado this past year.

We wrapped up the second day of the conference with a panel discussion featuring Andy Kwapniosky, Keith Berns, and Tim Steffens.

Anita Nein gave a brief talk about her experiences serving as the Northern Plains Director of the SWCS and she also brought some door prizes which helped make this year's meeting successful and informative.



Keith Berns, Andy Kwapniosky and Tim Steffens answerer questions during the panel discussion.

All of the presentations are posted to USTREAM for this year's conference except for Andy's talk is on YouTube. We were able to get some great feedback from this year's attendees and we look forward to helping Kyle Franz with next year's conference.



Volunteers Needed

The Colorado Chapter of SWCS is looking for two enthusiastic members to fill vacancies for the Science Fair Committee Chair and serve as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee.

The Membership Co-Chair will work closely with Kristi Gay, our current chair to promote membership within the chapter.

The Science Fair Chair is responsible for getting in contact with the Colorado Regional Science Fair Directors for dates; lining up judges to judge the natural resource related projects at the fairs and distributing awards and ribbons to the judges for use at the fairs.

For more information on either of these positions with CO SWCS please contact Barb Gohlke at 719-632-9598 ext 107 or Barbara.gohlke@co.usda.gov.

CO SWCS Offers Scholarship

As part of our mission, the SWCS Colorado Chapter has created an Undergraduate Student Scholarship Program that offers two \$500 scholarships to juniors or seniors attending a four year Colorado college or university studying natural resource related fields. This scholarship was created to recognize student leadership, consistent academic achievement, and civil contribution related to natural resources, especially soil and water conservation.

Each scholarship consists of a certificate and \$500 honorarium. The \$500 scholarship is intended to assist the student in completing his or her degree. Scholarship recipients will be invited to attend the SWCS CO Chapter Annual Fall Workshop where they will be recognized for their achievements. Their registration fees for this workshop will be waived.

Application packages must include a completed SWCS Colorado Chapter Undergraduate Student Scholarship Program application form (available on our website www.swcs.org/en/colorado_chapter click on awards) and supporting information. Email completed applications and supporting documents to Beth Fortman, Elizabeth.fortman@co.usda.gov, Chairperson of the Undergraduate Student Scholarship Committee no later than March 31, 2013. The committee will make selections by July 31, 2013 and the award check will be mailed to the scholarship winners after they provide proof of enrollment for the fall semester of their junior or senior year.

Soil Testing: Not Just For Nutrients

Submitted by Andrew Laca

In the past, the talk at the coffee shop or co-op usually circled around what fertilizer prices were going to do to your farm budget this year and whether or not you soil sampled. For years we have taken the chemical and tillage approach to try and improve the soil fertility and ignored biological structure. There are more microbes in a teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth, and conventional farming has greatly ignored them and their role in the health of your soil.

Rick Haney from Agriculture Research Service (ARS) is currently working on a test that can be adopted by commercial soil testing labs. The San Luis Valley of Colorado contributed 360 soil samples from all over the valley to establish a baseline for the soils found in that area. The Solvita test is utilized to record the amount of CO₂-C released by soil microbes after your soil has been dried and rewetted. The test results give you an N-P-K and nutrient value per acre. It also lists a soil health value based on the Solvita test as well as water-extractable organic Carbon and Nitrogen and C:N ratio to create a Soil Health Calculation and cover crop mix to improve your score. The values are relative and could be used to monitor trends over a period of time. The Solvita test kit containing enough materials for 6 tests including the re-useable jars and beakers can be purchased on their own from <http://www.solvita.com> starting at around \$160.

Ward Labs in Kearney, NE uses a gas chromatograph instrument to perform a phospholipid fatty acid test (PLFA) test. Phospholipid fatty acids are an essential structural component of all microbial cellular membranes. As the phospholipids of different groups of bacteria and fungi contain a variety of somewhat unique fatty acids, they can serve as useful biomarkers for such groups. This test will be listed on the website <http://www.wardlab.com>, or call 1-800-887-7645 and ask for Lance Gunderson. The price is \$37 for the PFLA test, and should be used in conjunction with a standard soils test. They also offer a 35% discount for universities or conservation organizations.

As we move from the mindset of soil health being the amount of nutrients available to the crop to a functioning ecosystem, we need a method to perform annual “census” of all the microorganisms to monitor and improve soil health.

“Soil to Spoon” Field Trip Educates Kids

Submitted by Dori Seamans

The Burlington Conservation District, in partnership with NRCS and the SWCS, hosted a field trip for 125 sixth graders to learn about where our food comes from. Students traveled to Worden Farms and Vineyard north of Burlington, Colorado to see how grapes become wine and sugar beets become sugar. The field trip helps students prepare for the Sixth Grade Poster Contest sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Worden's farm was the perfect place to showcase this year's theme of "Soil to Spoon" and students were allowed to pick grapes and see sugar beets and corn growing in the field. Soil Conservationist, Kyle Franz, demonstrated the slake test, and District Conservationist, Kristi Gay, talked about native grasses and grazing management. Students made edible soil with Soil Conservationist, Jennifer Griffin, and Wildlife Biologist, Shannon Bowling, took students on a wildlife walk by the farm pond. Students looked at the farm equipment used to harvest sugar beets, and saw bushel baskets of corn, wheat and soybeans. They learned what it takes to process crops and animals into hamburgers and a glass of milk.

Sixth grade teacher, Mary Pat Weingardt, said, "The field trip is a great way to engage students in agriculture and it helps me learn how to teach conservation". The Burlington Conservation District gives special thanks to the SWCS for their financial assistance in supporting this fun and educational day.





EVENTS TO WATCH FOR

- ☺ **UNCOMPAHGRE SOIL HEALTH WORKSHOP**
DELTA, CO JANUARY 24, 2013
- ☺ **NO-TILL ON THE PLAINS WINTER CONFERENCE**
WWW.NOTILL.ORG
SALINA, KS JANUARY 29-30, 2013
- ☺ **CCTA HIGH PLAINS NO-TILL CONFERENCE**
WWW.HIGHPLAINSNOTILL.COM
BURLINGTON, CO FEBRUARY 5-6, 2013
- ☺ **NEBRASKA NO-TILL CONFERENCES**
HALLAN, NE FEBRUARY 12, 2013
HOLDREGE, NE FEBRUARY 14, 2013
- ☺ **PANHANDLE NO-TILL CONFERENCE**
GERING, NE FEBRUARY 20-21, 2013
- ☺ **SWCS NORTHERN PLAINS REGIONAL MEETING**
WYOMING, SPRING 2013
DATE AND PLACE TBA — WATCH YOUR EMAIL
- ☺ **68TH SWCS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
WWW.SWCS.ORG/13AC
RENO, NV JULY 21-24, 2013



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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Colorado Chapter of SWCS is to promote the wise use of soil, water and related resources through scientific, educational and service oriented functions. The members promote a stewardship ethic that recognizes the interdependence of people and natural resources.