



SOIL
AND WATER
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY

MI-SWCS Newsletter

Soil and Water Conservation Society
Michigan Chapter

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Of Interest:

**Conservogram: Are you
On-line?**

Conservogram is
SWCS's national
newsletter and it is
available to members
on-line.

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Michigan Chapter
Newsletter Editor
Daniel F. Kesselring

Michigan Chapter Annual Meeting

6:30 p.m. Wednesday, December 6, 2006
Kewadin Casino and Conference Center
Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

Attention: All Chapter members and friends

If you're interested in an enjoyable and educational evening with fellow conservationists and conservation supporters, come to the Michigan Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society's 2006 Annual Meeting and dinner at the Kewadin Casino and Convention Center in Sault Ste. Marie. The Chapter is holding its Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention on December 6th.

Last April NRCS State Agronomist Jerry Grigar visited Belarus to provide technical assistance on no-till farming. As part of his volunteer mission, Mr. Grigar would like to share his experience in Belarus with groups in the United States.

In Belarus, the combination of moldboard plowing in the fall and the resulting sheet and rill erosion creates soil loss in excess of 14 tons per acre. Exposed red subsoil and ephemeral gullies scar fields where wheat, barley, oats, flax, sugar beets, cabbage and perennial grasses are grown. Belarusian farmers issued an international SOS to address this major resource concern.

Mr. Grigar traveled to Belarus as a volunteer through the Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs Agribusiness Volunteer program. CNFA is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to stimulating economic growth in emerging and developing world markets.

Mr. Grigar spent three weeks in Minsk and on the Kholodon-Agro Farm near the village of Volma. Specifically, he was asked to teach Belarusian farm workers how to adjust, operate and maintain their new 13 foot Great Plains No-Till Drill.

No-till has been a big success at the farm Mr. Grigar visited. After a recent visit to the farm, Michigan State University staff reported that the farm experienced increased yields and lower operational costs.

The dinner is \$25 per person before November 20, or \$27 per person after. Use the registration form in the MACD Convention packet to register for this meeting.

Annual Meeting Cont'd

The Annual Meeting Program will also include:

- Introductions
- Approval of 2004 Annual Meeting Minutes
- Treasurer's Report
- Committee Reports
 - Scholarship Committee
 - Elections Committee
 - Awards Committee
- Commendation Award
- President's Report
- Installation of New Officers
- Plans for 2007

"Marketing Conservation" Workshop Planned

MARKETING CONSERVATION is the theme of the Professional Development Workshop being planned for Wednesday, December 6th from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m. **Conservation** is what Conservation Districts do, and if they aren't doing conservation then there's no reason for them to exist. So, **Marketing** conservation must be an important part of what a Conservation District does to sustain its program.

The Workshop kicks off with "**WIIFM – What's In It For Me**", a look at economic and social considerations in Marketing Conservation, by June Grabemeyer, Agricultural Economist, USDA-NRCS, East Lansing, MI.

Then we'll take a look at **CanVis**, a photo image editing software program that can help a Conservation Planner show a landowner what a conservation practice would look like on their property. The software is available free from the USDA National AgroForestry Center.

We also plan to allow time for participants to share marketing ideas with each other. **So come join us on December 6th.**

Summer Tour visits Dairy, Orchard and Vineyard

Last August 25th, 35 Michigan Chapter SWCS members and friends joined for a day of farms, fun and fellowship in Northwestern Lower Peninsula. They visited a sustainable dairy operation and drank some fresh milk (or Chocolate milk for the kids at heart), learned about how Oriental mustard is being used as a natural biofumigant, toured a vineyard and sampled local Michigan wines.

The tour started at 10:00 a.m. on the Shetler Dairy in Kalkaska County, then stopped for a Cajun-style lunch in Elk Rapids. Following lunch we visited a biofumigant field trial at Dave White's Fruit Farm in Antrim County, where George Bird, Entomologist at M.S.U. gave a very enlightening discussion of nematodes. Then we proceeded to Shady Lane Cellars and Winery in Leelanau County for a vineyard tour and wine tasting.

The Planning Committee, made up of Aaron Lauster, Kelly Goward, Becky Otto, Jim Robinson and Walt Summers, planned an outstanding program that was educational and fun.



All aboard! The capacity of this hay wagon at the Shetler Dairy Farm is apparently 35 people! Everybody on the tour was able to ride, but you didn't have to worry about falling over!

4th NRCS Conservation Planning Course Presented

The Michigan Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) presented its fourth session of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Conservation Planning Course (Modules 6 through 8) to 20 participants October 23 through 27, 2006, in Marshall, Michigan.

The one week course included classroom and field exercises for training in the Conservation Planning process. Dan Kesselring, retired NRCS District Conservationist and Michigan Chapter SWCS member, was the lead instructor. He was assisted by Walt Summers, retired District Conservationist and current private consultant, George Heffner, retired District Conservationist, Sharon Williams, Conservation Planner, Calhoun Conservation District, and Vicki Anderson, Resource Conservationist, NRCS, and Chapter Vice President.

The Chapter has now presented this class to 60 people, including 45 Conservation District employees 5 Michigan NRCS employees and 10 Private Consultants. This is an example of SWCS carrying out one of its core functions - professional development for conservationists in the field.



FALL 2006 PLANNING CLASS

Conservation Planning Course A Student's View

By Jim Hayes

It is October 2006 and I am sitting in the Marshall Township Hall attending the first session of a five day training course in modules 6 thru 8 of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Planning Course.

During the introductions of the twenty participants, I soon realized that I was probably the least prepared of all the participants for this course. My fellow students all had degrees in areas associated with conservation and agriculture, whereas, my educational background was limited to two degrees with majors and minors in Philosophy, English, Latin and art. I did not grow up on a farm and my only experience with agriculture has been gained through eight years as a groundwater technician with the Michigan Groundwater Stewardship Program working with producers in Lapeer, St. Clair and Macomb Counties.

I had not been especially looking forward to taking this course since during the preparation for it I had experienced a great deal of frustration while working through the online courses for modules 1 thru 5. I found the material to be redundant and a bit confusing. This feeling was exacerbated while taking the on line test for each segment. The preparer of the test seemed to concentrate more on individual words rather than the concepts behind the words.

Back to the training session. The twenty participants were assigned to four teams designated as teams A, B, C and D. I was on team D. I couldn't help thinking, was this a precursor of what I should expect at the conclusion of the course - a D grade? I reassured myself that surely the other highly qualified members of my team would successfully carry me through.

Continued on next page

For the next four days we went through the NRCS nine step planning process, including an all day visit to a local crop farm for the purpose of identifying resource concerns. Our final task was, as a team, to develop a resource management plan for an assigned portion of the farm. I think we worked well together as team and produced a plan that would meet NRCS standards.

We were then asked to make a presentation of the plan to a retired NRCS conservationist standing in for the farmer whose farm we had visited. Other NRCS conservationists, active and retired, stood in the wings ready to evaluate our work.

Do you remember the first test with an instructor at the beginning of a term, how poorly, maybe, you did? The first test was a great learning experience in itself. Following it you now knew how the instructor's mind worked and what he/she expected as answers. Subsequently, you did much better on tests. Well, the first team, team A, was hit fairly hard by the evaluators, especially by the one who had not been present during the training.

As team D, we were last, and were able to make adjustments to our presentation based on the critiques of those that preceded us. I think we did fairly well and did not receive some of the rather severe criticisms made about the other presentations. Ah, sometimes it pays to be last.

If I were to make a suggestion, it would not be concerning the training course itself but rather about the material upon which it is based. I think Dan Kesselring and his cohorts did a great job considering the material and length of time allowed for the training. The nine step planning process is great, logical and well thought out. It seems, however, the resource material as presented in the National Planning Procedures Handbook and eFOTG, could be organized in a way that would make it more user friendly.

The programs and resource materials of the NRCS have developed over decades in sort of an accumulation of morphing concepts and methodology. It is only a thought, but maybe the time has come to look at the content of the NPPH and eFOTG and reorganize them into a more logical and less redundant presentation.

The foregoing should only be taken as the musing of a seventy plus year old student as he steps on the road to becoming a certified conservation planner.

Instructor's Note: Other student feedback included: "*Great class! Thanks for putting the workshop on. And, Excellent class – Thank you!*" Of course, I picked the best ones! We try to learn from student feedback after each class, so all comments are welcome. Coincidentally, NRCS is in the process of revising the NPPH right now.

Jim shouldn't have been worried about his grade. The only way to fail Modules 6 through 8 is by not showing up! DFK

Outgoing President's Message

By Daniel F. Kesselring

I really don't recall when I first joined the Soil and Water Conservation Society, but since I became a full-time employee of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) on 11/6/66, and the oldest Journal of Soil and Water Conservation I still have in my possession is the November-December 1967 issue, it was pretty early in my career. Back in those days, most SCS employees were members of SWCS and they, along with SCS leadership, actively recruited new members.

SCS's first Chief, Hugh Hammond Bennett, was one of the founders of the Society. The following quote is from a speech titled **Soil Conservation and SWCS: A Forty-year Retrospective** presented at the SWCS 2004 Annual Conference by Max Schnepf.

(Cont'd on page 5)

Outgoing President's Message (Cont'd)

"The year was 1941. Hugh Bennett, first chief of the Soil Conservation Service, and a small group of conservationists met in November to talk about the need for a new professional society that could accommodate the interests of the growing number of men and women who were joining the fight to control soil erosion and protect the productivity of American agriculture."

"Numerous professional societies existed at the time. Most represented specific academic disciplines. Some were already contributing to the soil conservation cause. None, however, focused on soil conservation to the extent soil conservation leaders at the time thought necessary. A major concern among proponents of the new soil conservation society was the preoccupation with basic research in many of those professional societies and a lack of attention to the applied research that was an essential underpinning for soil conservation efforts."

"While the intention to form a new society was clear at that 1941 meeting, it was not until September 1943 that a public announcement of that intention was made. World War II put many things on hold. Temporary officers were then elected, and qualified members were invited to participate in the new endeavor."

It was then called the Soil Conservation Society of America. The **History of the Michigan Chapter** states *"In the summer of 1947, Washington R. O'Brien ("Wash") began promoting a Michigan Chapter for the Soil Conservation Society of America, (SCSA or Society), a national organization of soil conservation workers which was established on September 1, 1943."*

There were 67 Charter Members in the Chapter in 1947. *"Membership on December 31, 1960, was 249 (17th in the nation)."* There were 239 members at the beginning of 1974. In 1977 *"The Chapter had four student chapters, the latest started at MSU this year, with 120 student members."*

1980-*"Five hundred twenty SCSA members were*

guests of the Michigan SCSA Chapter at the Society's 35th Annual Meeting at the Hyatt-Regency Hotel in Dearborn, August 3, 4, 5 and 6."

1985 - *"During the year, the Chapter grew from 199 members to 235 members. This was the largest chapter growth recorded by the Society in either number of new members (36) or percent growth (18%) during 1985."*

The History of the Michigan Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society ends in the year 1986. We don't have records of membership growth or decline rates since then. However, in 2004 the membership was 70, and our current membership is 83. National membership has had similar declines.

So, why am I giving you all this history? One reason is to give current members, and especially you newer members, a perspective on why the Society was formed, where it has been and where it is now. Obviously, I've also focused on membership numbers, and that's my second reason.

Today's Chapter membership consists of 24 NRCS employees, 19 Conservation District employees, 10 Private Consultants, 10 retired NRCS employees, 4 other retirees and 15 in other categories. And, we have just one Student Chapter, the Grand Valley State University Chapter. We have a much broader representation of interests in our Chapter, but a much smaller representation from the original core group, the NRCS employees.

Why this happened is probably anybody's guess, but it's interesting to note that the Chapter history ended shortly after the 1985 Federal Farm Bill, *The Food Security Act*, was passed. Did the decline in membership also follow?

Membership is a challenge the incoming leadership will face. And, leadership will need all the help that Chapter members have to offer, so I challenge you to lend a hand!

The focus of the Society is still advocacy and professional development for its members.

New Members in 2006

Welcome our new members who have joined in 2006.

Rebekah Dewind
 Amy Gilhouse
 Jim Hayes
 Kevin Kowalk
 Kurt Krug
 Dale Ledebuhr
 Rick Pierson
 Adam Shedd
 Rob Stein
 Carrie Vollmer-Sanders
 Sarah Zeiler

Student Members

Heather Patt
 Cecilia Govrik
 Misa Cady
 Rob Myllyoja
 University of Michigan –
 Dearborn
 Grand Valley State University Chapter
 Stephanie Baker
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 William Poelma
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