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JUNE XLT AND PARTNER MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The June XLT and Partner Meetings surfaced a number of issues you may want to learn more about by visiting with your Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations or prime staff supervisor. The following brief report covers only a few of the key agenda items that were covered during the June 25-26 meetings in the NRCS state office.

The new **2008 Farm Bill legislation** was discussed in great detail (via teleconference) with Montana State Conservationist Dave White, who served the past several months with Senator Harkin's staff on the development of the Farm Bill. Both White and Utah State Conservationist Sylvia Gillen praised the bill as innovative and one that helped fix many of the problems associated with earlier conservation titles. The real challenge will come when we are asked to implement the final rules with current NRCS staffing. Especially since 2009 will likely be a transition year when we operate again on a continuing resolution. Among some of the significant features of the new law is a clarification and emphasis on technical assistance, changes to the ranking process, reemphasis on Resources Assessment in the Resource Conservation Act, WHIP contracts only on private land, EQIP added organic farming, new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that will be ranked like EQIP, and inclusion of local work groups as subcommittees of the State Technical Committee. Utah will soon establish a statewide Farm Bill roll out team, supported by area roll out teams. A SharePoint has already been established where official information and communication tools are available for download by NRCS employees. The site is located at: <https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/west/ut/default.aspx>. Look under Farm Bill/Shared Documents.

Administrative news centered on the state's **Efficiency Plan**, which has been developed under the guidance of State Administrative Officer Todd Nielson. The analysis includes potential retirements, projected salary, benefits and support. The good news is that with careful planning, NRCS Utah should be able to withstand any reductions in staff and be able to carry out our workload to the best of our ability. Lisa Rice, who will soon be on a 5-week intern assignment in New York, reported on plans for a National Leadership Development Program and a National Mentoring Program.

Deadlines to be aware of include: 1. Supervisors are to turn in award requests to Sharon Jensen by August 15. 2. The last day to charge to PCMS cards is August 1.

Tim Julander, representing Lisa Coverdale, reported that **EQIP is looking good** and that we may receive additional funding. The state deadline for WHIP and GSW is July 15 and Aug 1 for national. By Sept 1 all AGI issues are to be addressed (back as far as 2003).

RC&D reports from Barb Carey included CWMA work, Utah Prairie Dog Recovery Credit

System, Order of the Arrow/Boy Scout Tamarisk project, Wild Outdoor and Swaner Nature Festivals, and the upcoming Mountain Spirit Heritage Festival at Rockport State Park.

The Partner Meeting held on June 25 included a presentation on the **Hatt Ranch Project** on the San Rafael River. This has grown into an extensive, multi-year partnership effort that restore the watershed to benefit wildlife, agriculture and municipal interests. It includes fish and vegetation monitoring, soils analysis, Tamarisk removal, elevation of oxbows, and weir construction and dike removal. It is one of the largest projects of its kind in the West and plans are to highlight the work as it progresses with Congressional and VIP audiences. The accompanying photo shows initiative partners (left to right) Jim Spencer, Area III Wildlife Biologist; Barry Hamilton, Area III Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations; Kenny Breidinger, DWR Native Aquatics Biologist; Paul Birdsey, Regional Aquatics Manager, Southeast DWR Regional Office in Price; and Karen Fullen, NRCS State Wildlife Biologist.



Orchard irrigation technology work under a Conservation Innovation Grant was discussed by NRCS Area I Agronomist Marlon Winger and USU Associate Professor and Extension Fruit Specialist Brent Black. They outlined current experiments, supported by the Utah State Horticultural Association, that show the value of scheduling irrigation based on evapo transpiration data gathered from weather centers and other instrumentation. Work is also being done to drought-stress tart cherry trees at a certain stage of production to increase sugar content and improve longevity of the trees.

The accompanying photo shows Winger (left) and Black prior to the meeting.



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