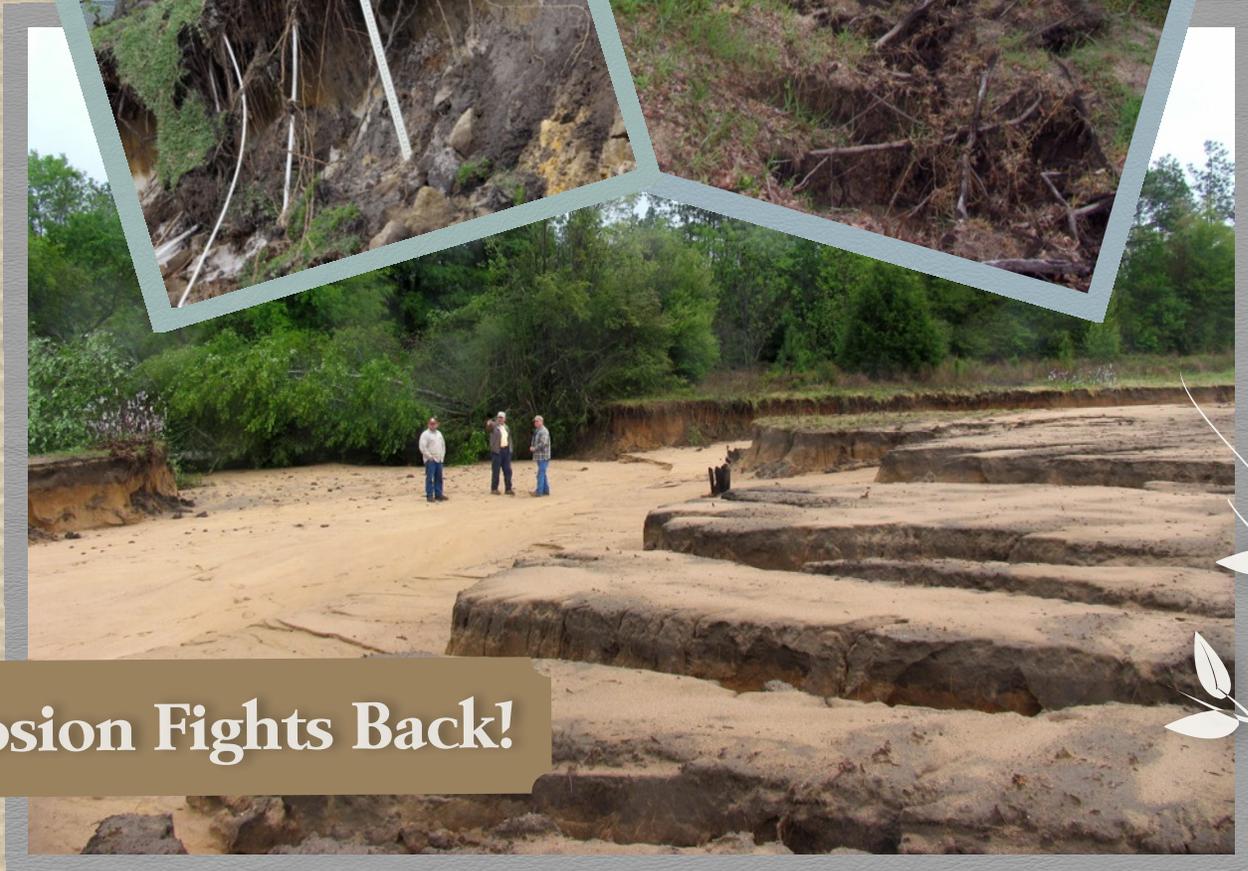


Blackwater Soil & Water Conservation District

Annual Report 2014



Erosion Fights Back!

OVERVIEW



The year 2014 was an especially hard one for our area farmers and ranchers. From devastating rain events to farm bill program funding cuts, Santa Rosa County landowners struggled on many fronts. However, despite all these difficulties they continued on with their work determined to do the best they can with whatever comes their way. They do this all the while hoping that their efforts are enough to keep themselves and the land viable in the coming years. It is in times like these that landowners will reach out to the Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District, who's mission it is to partner with these folks and assist them with the implementation of conservation practices that protect our natural resources. A task that has been getting unfortunately more and more difficult to accomplish, over the last few years, as a result of federal program and funding uncertainties.

Farmers this spring had to deal with more than their fair share of wet weather. Rainfall amounts associated with many of the storms were well above normal and in some areas records were even broken. The April 29-30th event, for instance, dropped some 20+ inches of rain in southern portions of the county, resulting in severe flooding and erosion problems in many areas. The northern farming communities did not see the extreme amounts of rain from this storm that the south end experienced but several previous rain events meant the ground was already super-saturated and had no where to go, thus causing field erosion, ponding, and planting

concerns. It is estimated that the northern farming portions of the county received 21.85 inches of rain between April 1st and May 16th.

The newly adopted farm bill, the Agricultural Act of 2014, was also an area of concern for local farmers. Conservation program changes included a consolidation of programs from 23 down to 13 and a reduction in mandatory funding by almost \$4 billion over the next ten years. The Conservation Stewardship Program remains pretty much intact but with a reduction in the annual acreage enrollment cap of 10 million, down from 12.8 million under the last farm bill. This new acreage cap will result in roughly 2.8 million fewer acres being enrolled per year into this program. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) had its funding levels reduced by almost \$500 million over the next ten years. The former Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) was consolidated into EQIP, with five percent of the program's funds being set aside for practices previously prioritized under WHIP.

These farm bill changes will certainly have an impact on our local area and limit the amount of conservation practices being put on the ground. In fact, federal spending cuts put in place over the last few years have already negatively affected our farming community with federal assistance this year coming in at one-sixth what it was three to four years ago. Regardless of these current challenges, the District as always will press onward and strive to meet the conservation needs of our local farmers and ranchers.



EDUCATION

Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District, once again, participated in several conservation education activities. Every year the District takes part in a variety of events like the annual Land Judging Contest, School Career Days, Bay Day, and the NACD Poster Contest in an effort to spread awareness among local students about the importance of caring for and protecting our natural resources.

The District teamed up with the Santa Rosa County School Board and held this year's Land Judging Contest at the West Florida Research and Education Center's Jay Research Farm. The event tests local high school FFA

teams' knowledge of soils and various soil characteristics such as texture, permeability, slope, erosion, and drainage. Students examine four sites during the competition in which the soil has been exposed for several feet. They evaluate specific conditions at each of these sites and answer questions regarding them. The team and individual with the most correct responses wins the contest. The winning team this year was from Jay High School and the individual high

scorer was from Milton High School.

The District also takes part in a number of school career and science day events throughout the year. Functions like these provide the District with the opportunity to speak to students ranging from



Winning Team - Jay High School
Satchel Starling, Olivia Moore, Alisha Roberts, and Makenzie Bray.

High Scorer - Milton High School
Madelyn Anderson



elementary through high school about subjects like the environment, agriculture, and our role in conservation. The soil tunnel, along with many other fun interactive exhibits, was utilized several times this year and continues to be a very successful tool with helping students learn about our soil and water resources.

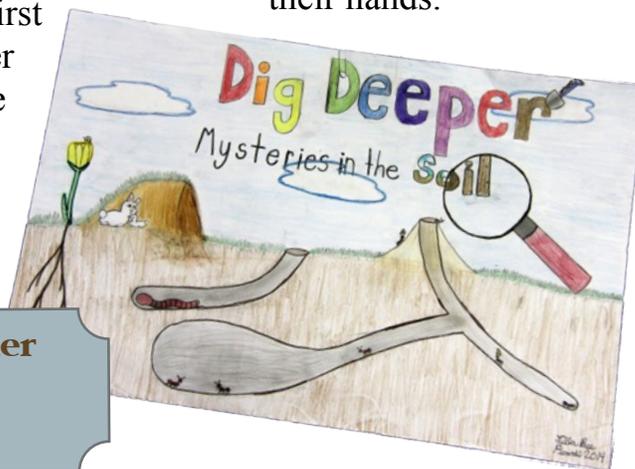


Another education activity entered into by the District was the National Association of Conservation Districts' annual poster contest. This year's theme was "Dig Deeper - Mysteries in the Soil." The contest gives students a chance to express their own unique viewpoint about the conservation topic through a creative process. There are five age categories and four advancement levels in the competition - local, area, state, and national. Posters are evaluated and judged based on their conservation message, visual effectiveness, originality, and universal appeal.

First place winners at each level advance to the next. Of the forty-seven local district entries, four advanced to the area competition. Three of these then advanced to the state competition and one of those (see poster below) for the first time ever since the District joined into this contest

advanced on to the national level.

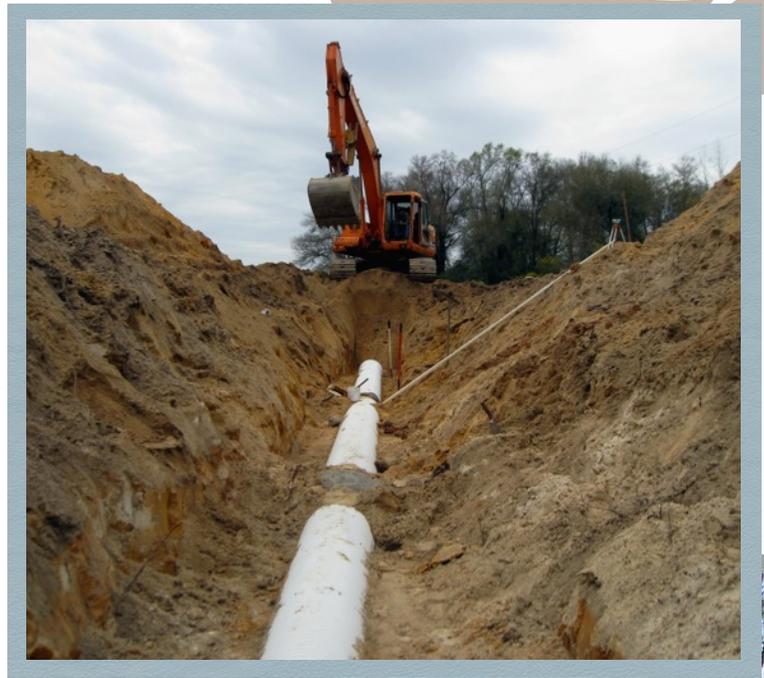
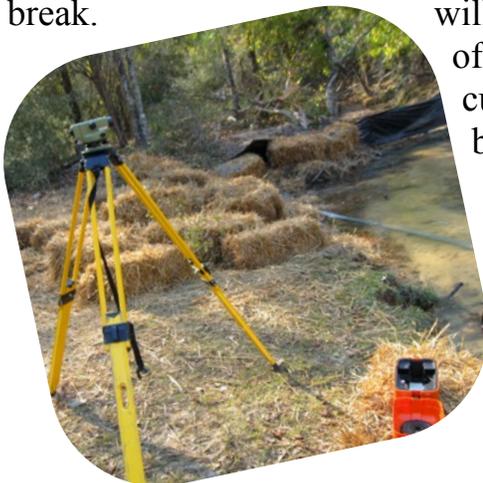
For Blackwater SWCD these education efforts are an important part of its yearly duties, as these students will eventually have our natural resources in their hands.



First Place Winner
Grade 4 -6
Tulla Picardi

PROGRAMS

The bulk of conservation practices approved for implementation in the county this year, came from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This valuable program offers cost-share assistance to landowners for the installation of site-specific conservation measures that will address particular natural resource concerns. Practices authorized under the newly funded contracts included mulch till, nutrient management, cover crop, diversion, grade stabilization structure, seasonal high tunnel, pollinator field border, critical area planting, water well, pumping plant, livestock pipeline, watering facility, forage planting, fence, tree planting, brush management, prescribed burning, herbaceous weed control, and fire-break.



The pollinator field border is a brand-new conservation practice for EQIP. It is one of several core practices approved under the Florida Honey Bee and Native Pollinator Initiative. The aim of this initiative is to establish and enhance our native pollinator plants; as well as encourage the use of more integrated pest management style practices. It is hoped that these new practices will help offset some of the threats that are currently facing our bees, wasps, etc...

Another initiative to benefit our area was the Gulf of Mexico initiative. This three year program was part



of an effort to restore the Gulf of Mexico and its surrounding watersheds following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill back in 2010. It identified 7 major river basins and 16 priority watersheds in which landowners could implement conservation practices that improve

PROGRAMS

water quality and ecosystem health. The Escambia River was selected as one of these priority regions.

The District also assisted with the installation of two previously funded grade stabilization jobs in the county as well. These structures prevent

further gully erosion by putting in place the necessary components on site in order to transport the area's surface runoff safely down in elevation to the bottom of the slope. They usually consist of a pipe and riser, which directs surface waters downhill to a rock-riprap basin. The surrounding area is then reshaped to include an embankment, a diversion, a principal spillway, and an emergency spillway. Each site is then seeded with grass, fertilized, and mulched for further stability. These grade stabilization structures, properly maintained, can often



provide erosion protection for over twenty five years.

Farmers also received financial assistance through the Emergency Conservation Program this year. This program provided emergency funding and technical assistance to many local landowners needing help rehabilitating their lands from damages sustained during the spring floods. The program will help these folks implement much needed emergency practices such as debris removal, restoration of various conservation structures, and fence repair on 193 farms.

These farm bill cost-share programs are so important because they not only help farmers restore and protect their land's resources but because they also help ensure them of a future sustainable production of food and fiber.





in the annual Farm Tour, an event hosted by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Cooperative Extension Service. This all day tour of Santa Rosa County farms promotes agricultural awareness and its role in our local economy. This year's tour was held in the fall so that local peanut crop harvesting

and production could be the focus.

Another one of Blackwater SWCD's yearly initiatives is local community outreach. The District participates in a wide variety of civic activities throughout the year, trying to reach out and provide assistance to

Participants learned all there is to know about peanut crop growing, harvesting, hay baling, and final processing by visiting stops along the way such as Roy Ward's peanut field, the UF's IFAS/WFREC Jay Research Farm, Mickey Diamond's peanut field, Golden Peanut Company, and Bruce Holland's Farm.



as many folks as possible with any resource concerns or problems.

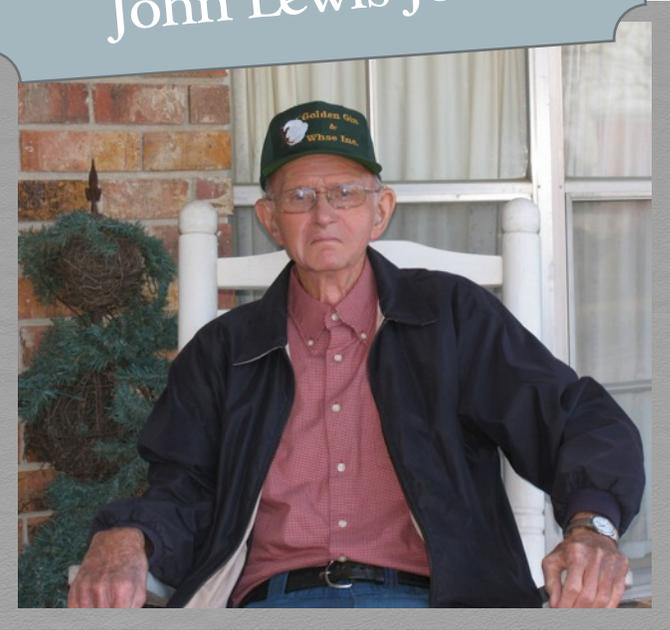
The District once again participated

By taking part in events such as this, the District strives to raise awareness of its program and services among a diversity of individuals within our local community.



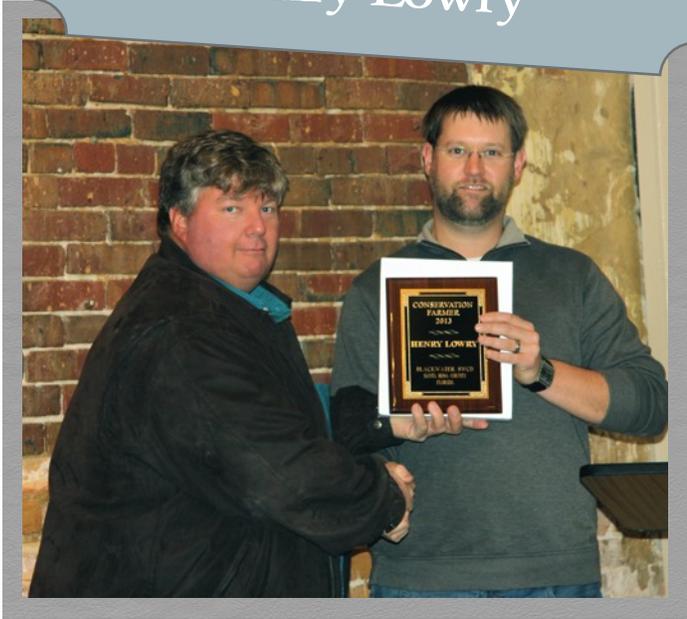
John Lewis Jones was well known and loved in the local Santa Rosa County farming community. Following in his parents' footsteps, he actively farmed land in the Allentown and Berrydale communities for over four decades. Season after season he worked hard at various operations from raising cattle to growing peanuts, cotton, and soybeans. He strongly believed in taking care of what was his; this land which gave him and his family sustenance. This was evident by his installation of countless conservation practices over the

Hall of Fame Award
John Lewis Jones



years from rotational grazing to terraces. Mr. Jones was very much a 'salt of the earth' kind of person. He just had at his core a deep love, passion, and respect for the farming tradition, for his family, and for the community.

Conservation Farmer
Henry Lowry



Henry Lowry is a local farmer with plenty of first-hand experience when it comes to utilizing conservation practices on his farm. He has applied many conservation strategies over the

years, from terrace building to precision agriculture, in order to protect his natural resources. Never one to back down from a challenge; he now farms most certainly more terraced land than anyone else in the county. He is not only a big advocate of using conservation measures on his own farm but supports pro-farming and conservation issues at the local and state level as well, by serving on various agricultural committees like the Farm Bureau Board or the

Farm Services Agency Board. For all of these pro-conservation efforts and more, Henry Lowry was selected as this year's Conservation Farmer honoree.

Blackwater Soil & Water Conservation District

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Northwest Florida Water Management District



Three Rivers RC&D Council, Inc.



Extension Office UF - IFAS



UF - West Florida Research and Education Center



Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm Services Agency



**Santa Rosa Board of County Commissioners
Santa Rosa County School Board**

The District Would Like To Acknowledge These Agencies For Their Valuable Support And Cooperation.