

Kansas NRCS Wins Three National Volunteer Awards

The U. S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of Kansas recently received three national volunteer awards to include the agency's highest volunteer award.

Chief Dave White presented the **2012 National Volunteer Service Award—Chief's Cup** to Kansas NRCS State Conservationist Eric B. Banks during a recent meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Chief's Cup is the highest award a state can receive for its volunteer management. It is a national award given to the one state that most creatively uses NRCS Earth Team Volunteers to meet the agency's mission—Helping People Help the Land.

Kansas also received the National Volunteer Coordinator Award—Jan Klaus, Hays, Kansas, State Earth Team (ET) Volunteer Coordinator for Kansas, has guided and managed the ET Volunteer Program for 95 field offices, four area offices, the state office, the Plant Materials Center, and nine Resource Conservation and Development offices. Klaus has served as the State ET Coordinator for four years.

The Earth Team Partnership Award was also awarded to Kansas—The Central Prairie Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, Great Bend, Kansas, was recognized for its use of volunteers and its varied projects, especially its work with the National Honor Flights Organization. This past year, three flights carried 233 World War II veterans and 182 guardians to the Nation's capital to see the monument built in their honor. Through this ongoing project, 1,515 veterans and their guardians have taken a flight to Washington, D.C. to visit the monument.

The Earth Team is a program that partners volunteers with NRCS employees to help conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources and the environment.

Banks gives credit to his state's Earth Team success to staff members simply taking a personal interest in each volunteer and encouraging them to explore new interests. "Staff interviews each volunteer in order to find where they can best be used, and then we find appropriate jobs to fit their abilities and interest," said Banks. "I am very proud of the many dedicated Earth Team volunteers who have committed their time and talents in conserving and protecting the soil, water, and wildlife in Kansas."

Banks said he was also pleased that seven current Kansas NRCS employees first started their conservation work as Earth Team volunteers. "This program offers many benefits to the environment and to taxpayers and our clients. The Earth Team also allows our volunteers a chance to see if our conservation work is a career path they would like to follow," Banks said. "These dedicated employees are another reminder of the value of this program."

In fiscal year 2011, every Kansas field office used Earth Team volunteers to help its staff. Over 3,500 Kansas volunteers donated 37,039 hours assisting NRCS employees with conservation

mission.

National Volunteer Week is April 15-21, 2012. "The NRCS theme for this year puts it best," said Banks. "We are 'Celebrating Earth Team Volunteers in Action.' Earth Team volunteers allow us to stretch available resources and help us put additional conservation practices on the ground. Their volunteer efforts help us improve our land and wildlife habitats, clean our water and air, and help us improve the environment for

everyone.” Banks hopes National Volunteer Week will motivate others to volunteer to help NRCS with our conservation mission.

For more information about being an Earth Team volunteer in Kansas, contact Jan Klaus, Volunteer Coordinator, 785-625-2588, or go to the Kansas NRCS homepage at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov, and click on Earth Team Volunteers.

Additional information on the Earth Team Volunteer Program is available online at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers>

or by calling (toll-free) 888-526-3227. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

