

Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District

ANNUAL REPORT 2009

The District Board held twelve regular meetings, one workshop and a Local Working Group meeting in the year 2009. The District was represented at the annual meetings of the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD), Southeast Conservation District Employees Association, the Florida Conservation District Employees Association and the Florida Lake Management Society. Doug Lewis, Resource Soil Scientist retired from NRCS after 36 years.

Our Annual Report for 2009 reflects the following accomplishments:

Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs:

- 41 active contracts in the Sebring Field Office
- \$4,119,000.67 obligated to Highlands County
- One EQIP-09 Beginner Farmer application pre-approved by State Office
- Improved soil quality on 2,922 acres of cropland
- Improved water quality on 8,738 acres
- Improved irrigation efficiency on 2,838 acres
- Improved 9,455 acres of grazing and forest land
- Improved fish and wildlife habitat quality on 3,484 acres
- Wetlands, created, restored or enhanced on 1,742 acres
- 113 individuals were provided technical assistance with conservation planning or application
- 245 citizens were assisted through inventory and evaluation
- EarthTeam volunteers were featured nationally in VolunteerVoice and NRCS This Week.

The District was the lead agency on two completed projects:

- Avon Park Air Force Range Levee Restoration Project with a budget of \$504,242.
- Lake Jackson Shoreline Restoration Project with a budget of \$101,000.

The District administered contracts for FDACS, WWF, FHREDI and SFWMD.

A total of \$1,216,863.43 was paid to producers and contractors to develop Best Management Practices (BMP) to comply with water quality regulations set by the DEP.

The District set aside \$50,000 for the Istokpoga Marsh Watershed Improvement District project.

The District sponsored two teams at the Southwest Florida Gulf Coast Regional Envirothon in December and the winning team, from Avon Park participated at the state level in April. At the April board meeting, eight young people competed in the 2009 District Speaking Contest, speaking on the subject, "What is One of the Many Land Uses in Florida?" First-place contestant was presented a cash prize of \$150.00; the \$100.00 prize went to second-place contestant and \$50.00 to third-place contestant. In May Okeechobee SWCD hosted the Area VI Speaking Contest; the contestant from the Indian River SWCD represented the Area at the State Contest.

The District received three educational grants:

- SWFWMD - The Rain Sensor Give A Way grant for \$4,950.00
- SWFWMD - Mobil Irrigation Lab Grant for \$10,000.00
- Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council - Tame Your Wildside – Go Native for \$1,000.00

The District spearheaded the following events:

- Career Academy
- Conservation Connection Day
- Earth Day at Lake Jackson
- Earth Team Volunteer Appreciation Lunch
- Lake Symposium

Highlands SWCD participated in and/or funded the following events:

- 4H's "Rockin' It Outdoors" camp
- Ag in the Classroom Literacy Day
- Ag Venture
- Career Academy
- CCC Festival at Highlands Hammock State Park
- County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship Recognition Dinner
- Diversity Day
- Envirothon, regional and state competitions
- Florida Lake Management Society Symposium
- FRESP field trip
- "Greening Up Highlands"
- Highlands County Fair
- Lake Clean-ups
- Lake Watch Picnic
- Lake Placid Middle School Career Day
- Renaming the Ag Center
- SFCC Volunteer Appreciation Event
- National County Government Day

The District reached 50,079 citizens throughout the year.

Continuing activities:

- Published "News from the Watershed" weekly in the local paper
- Wrote articles for the Heartland Sun Times
- Quarterly newsletter published and distributed to over 300 entities
- Continue to update website
- Continued classroom presentations as requested by county teachers
- Continued environmental presentations for Rotary, governmental agencies and clubs
- Utilizing Earth Team volunteers
- MRRP – Fishing line recycling program
- Perennial Peanut Patch, Composter Display and vermiculture