

Bailey and Burgess – elected officers of the Florida Conservation District Employees Association

On August 14, 2008 at the third annual meeting of the Florida Conservation District Employees Association (FCDEA), two members of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) were selected to become the next President and Treasurer of the statewide organization. The Mission of the FCDEA is to provide leadership, assistance and training for Florida Conservation Districts and Partner programs through the District Employees. The FCDEA assists the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (AFCD) in their efforts of sound conservation practices of our natural resources. Jackie Bailey, Officer Manager for HSWCD was elected President and Corine Burgess, Natural Resources Specialist was elected Treasurer.

The young association has only been in existence since July 30, 2005. Former President, Barbara Gill was very excited about getting district employees to take advantage of opportunities and funding for their areas. She was also involved in getting the various Soil and Water Districts to share success stories and ideas with each other. Thus the FCDEA was born and Barbara has done a wonderful job for the past several years.

With 63 different districts in Florida, networking and communication is vital for success. The FCDEA is a not-for-profit organization whose primary function is to help develop, promote and strengthen conservation districts and their programs in the state of Florida. The Association's governing body is a Board of Directors consisting of the Officers of the Association (President, President Elect, Treasurer and Secretary) and 6 Area Coordinators, all elected.

Conservation district employees throughout the state are involved in many educational programs for children. The Envirothon competition is a hands-on event consisting of testing in the areas of wildlife, soils, aquatics, forestry and current events. The Land Judging competition introduces young people to the differences among soils as to their suitabilities for agricultural and non-agricultural uses, and to techniques for the wise use and conservation of soils. The Speaking Contest educates the public on soil and water conservation needs. It also provides valuable experience to our young speakers who, conceivably, could become our future leaders. The Poster Contest provides kindergarten through twelfth grade students an opportunity to convey their thoughts about soil, water and related natural resource issues through art.

In the nation there are over 6,000 conservation district employees. Associations in other states have existed since the early 1980s. The National Conservation District Employees Association's (NCDEA) mission statement is to strengthen and promote the professionalism of conservation district employees and effectiveness of conservation districts. The vision is a professional, diverse and highly skilled work force dedicated to the cause of conservation. Regional and state associations share these views.

As new officers for the association, Jackie and Corine have high hopes of getting the district employees motivated to be even more involved with their districts. The Southeast Conservation District Employees Association will be held in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee in November and the two HSWCD employees hope to share some ideas and gain some knowledge from and with districts in other states as well as in Florida.

Following in the footsteps of former President, Barbara Gill, Jackie and Corine hope to work as a team and teach and motivate district employees to share experiences, learn from each other and become the best employees they can be for their districts. After all, as a work force dedicated to the conservation of our natural resources, it is important to present a professional, knowledgeable image while teaching others about the value of conservation.