



American Forest Foundation

News Release
February 17, 2009

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AFF Names the 2008 Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Awardees

Washington, D.C. - AFF announced the 2008 Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist for Forest Stewardship Awardees at the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in New Orleans, La. this month.

This award recognizes NRCS state conservationists and their staff for outstanding technical and financial assistance to private forestland owners on forest conservation activities. The NRCS State Conservationists work everyday to provide resources and support for private family forest owners to continue to be great stewards of the land.

Gary Kobylski, Alabama State Conservationist, East Region

Kobylski is chair of the Alabama Natural Resources Council State Technical Committee. Under his leadership as state conservationist, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funding for forestry and wildlife practices has grown 110 percent to \$1.7 million. Today, the NRCS and the Alabama Forestry Commission collaborate under a memorandum of agreement that created a new Forest Health Initiative under EQIP.

Kobylski initiated an innovative use of the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) for forestland conservation. Traditionally used for debris removal in streams. He recognized the benefits of dealing with the debris before it reaches streams. Following Hurricane Katrina, Kobylski approved the use of EWP funds for debris removal in woodlands and addressed the rapid spread of invasive species. To date, this funding has assisted Alabama landowners with debris removal and prescribed burning on more than 325,000 acres.

Roger Hansen, Missouri State Conservationist, Central Region

Under Hansen's leadership, Missouri's NRCS has dramatically increased funding for forestry related practices in the EQIP program. Hansen welcomes participation of governmental and landowner-based interests on state technical committees and is responsive to ideas that advance forestry related spending in NRCS programs.

Recently, NRCS and the Missouri Department of Conservation have jointly funded an effort to contract with private forestry consultants to prepare 125 EQIP Prescribed Forestry plans. This project is viewed as a way to help create an environment conducive to increasing private forestry consultants in the state.

Gus Hughbanks, Washington State Conservationist, West Region

In Washington state, Hughbanks fostered an effective partnership between the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and the U.S. Forest Service. He authorized the adoption of Forest Stewardship plans as a component of NRCS conservation plans that made it possible for

many family forest landowners to qualify for and obtain financial assistance and support from the NRCS.

Hughbanks is a distinguished action oriented leader who guides and supports his staff to pioneer innovative ways to use NRCS programs to support forestry conservation activities on private forestlands. Under his leadership, the NRCS recently developed a highly innovative marketing campaign to promote EQIP participation among family forest landowners. Through this effort and others, EQIP funding in Washington has increased to \$1.2 million in 2008.

Richard "Dick" Coombe, Leadership Recognition, Regional Assistant Chief, East Region

Coombe has served as the Regional Assistant Chief for the NRCS's Eastern region since 2004. He provides overall direction to NRCS programs and activities; and leadership and supervision to state conservationists in 24 states. In 2008, Coombe encouraged and directed his state conservationists to partner with state forestry agencies and to expand their conservation activities to include private forestland.

During his NRCS tenure, EQIP financial assistance to forest landowners in the Eastern region increased by 42 percent. Also, available funds from the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program increased 55 percent. Forestry related conversation also increased significantly under Coombe's management. Coombe knows first hand the benefits of these programs as the owner of a working farm and forest in New York state that has been in his family for three generations.



Photo (Left to right): Bob Simpson, Senior Vice President, American Forest Foundation; Gary Kobylski, Alabama National Resources Council; Roger Hansen, Missouri Department of Conservation; and Acting Chief Dave White.

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is a nonprofit conservation and education organization that strives to ensure the sustainability of America's family forests for present and future generations.

AFF's vision is to create a future where North American forests are sustained by the public which understands and values the social, economic, and environmental benefits they provide to our communities, our nation, and our world.

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