

NCRS, FWS Reach Agreement on Conservation

TEMPLE – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) Chief Dave White and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Dan Ashe have announced an agreement that will provide long-term regulatory predictability for up to 30 years to Texas farmers, ranchers and forest landowners participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) initiative.

Participants voluntarily imple-

ment proven conservation practices designed to protect wildlife habitat and species, such as the lesser-prairie chicken, on private lands.

"This agreement will change the way we manage at-risk species on private lands," said NCRS Texas State Conservationist Salvador Salinas. "It will provide landowners with a mechanism to keep working lands in production while complying with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and will facilitate restoration of habi-

at for at-risk species. It also will help Texas farmers and ranchers rest a little easier knowing their operations are protected for the long term and that they are contributing to conserving vital natural resources."

"The American conservation movement has called for a new approach in species conservation," Salinas said. "We are working to remove fear around the Endangered Species Act and to empower private landowners across the country to keep working lands working while simultaneously protecting and sustaining at-risk species."

The agreement builds on a \$33 million investment NCRS announced last spring dedicated toward producers who develop and implement conservation plans to manage and restore high-priority habitats for seven specific wildlife species across the country. The species are the greater sage-grouse, New England cottontail, bog turtle, golden-

winged warbler, gopher tortoise, lesser prairie-chicken and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. NCRS, FWS and numerous state and local entities are partnering to implement WLFW. NCRS, FWS and numerous state and local entities such as Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Pheasants Forever, Playa Lakes Joint Venture and many others are partnering to implement WLFW in Helping People Help the Land.

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer Texas With this agreement, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who implement and voluntarily agree to maintain the proven conservation practices in WLFW will have addressed the related ESA regulatory responsibilities for up to 30 years. These landowners will be able to operate their farms and ranches as agreed upon, providing economic benefits and species conservation simultaneously.

Under the WLFW partnership,

federal, state and wildlife experts jointly identified at-risk or listed species that would benefit from targeted habitat restoration investments on private lands. Using the best available science, these wildlife experts prioritized restoration actions on a large regional scale to focus assistance most cost effectively.

WLFW attempts to remove uncertainty from the ESA for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners by converting the potential for regulation into proactive, voluntary approach that provides incentives and assistance to landowners who improve species habitat.

NCRS or one of its partners will visit the farmer or rancher's property to run an initial assessment and work with the landowner to develop a conservation plan that fits his or her needs and desires. The conservation plan identifies a core set of proven conservation practices that will benefit the species.

NCRS sets aside financial as-

sistance to implement the recommended conservation practices. During FY12, Texas NCRS obligated \$662,000 for LPCI on 32,000 acres.

The federal government will grant farmers, ranchers and forest landowners regulatory predictability in return for voluntarily making wildlife habitat improvements on their private agricultural and forest lands.

Participating producers must adhere to the requirements of each conservation practice during the term of their contract, which can last from one to 15 years. If landowners would like to receive regulatory predictability for up to 30 years, they must maintain the conservation practices as outlined in the NCRS and FWS agreement.

For more information about Working Lands for Wildlife, please visit www.tx.usda.gov.

Oil and Gas:

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(thousand cubic feet) a day.

Texas production in July 2012 came from 143,666 oil wells and 89,578 gas wells.

The Texas average rig count as of Sept. 21, was 877, representing about 49 percent of all active land rigs in the United States. In the last 12 months, total Texas reported production was 474 million barrels of oil and 7.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

The Commission's estimated final production for July 2012 is 49,002,732 barrels of crude oil and 524,613,151 Mcf (thousand cubic feet) of gas well gas.

The Commission derives final production numbers by multiplying the preliminary July 2012 production totals of 40,321,511 barrels of crude oil and 441,853,913 Mcf of gas well gas by a production adjustment factor of 1.2153 for crude oil and 1.1873 for gas well gas. (These production totals do not include casinghead gas or condensate.)

Texas natural gas storage reported to the Commission for August 2012 was 391,994,296 Mcf compared to 353,961,061 Mcf in August 2011. The September 2012 gas storage estimate is 404,036,307 Mcf.

The Texas Railroad Commission's Oil and Gas Division set initial October 2012 natural gas production allowables for prorated fields in the state to meet market demand of 9,784,268 Mcf (thousand cubic feet). In setting the initial October 2012 allowables, the Commission used historical production figures from previous months, producers' demand forecasts for the coming month, and adjusted the figures based on well capability. These initial allowables will be adjusted after actual production for October 2012 is reported.

The Commission issued a total of 2,048 original drilling permits in August 2012 compared to 2,051 in August 2011. The August total included 1,808 permits to drill new oil and gas wells, 58 to re-enter existing well bores, and 182 for re-completions. Permits issued in August 2012 included 634 oil, 163 gas, 1,169 oil and gas, 63 injection, one service and 18 other permits.

In August 2012, operators reported 967 oil, 230 gas, 34 injection and one other completion compared to 365 oil, 240 gas, 46 injection and zero other completions in August 2011.

Total well completions for 2012 year to date are 9,965 up from 5,341 recorded during the same period in 2011.

Operators reported 828 holes plugged and five dry holes in August 2012 compared to 175 holes plugged and zero dry holes in August 2011.

TXSC: Robin Hood Schools to Contribute \$1 Billion This Year

AUSTIN – The Texas School Coalition (TXSC) submitted written testimony to a Joint Interim Committee that the Robin Hood system is expected to require districts to contribute more than \$1 billion for the tenth year in a row, as the number of Robin Hood districts reaches a record high number.

High Robin Hood growth was attributed to the fact that the threshold for determining whether school districts are deemed property wealthy has dropped from the 90th to the 64th percentile of property wealth when comparing the start of the recapture system to today.

The analysis, which also shows that recapture affected one percent of students in 1994 when compared to 34 percent today, was submitted to the Joint Interim Legislative Com-

mittee to Study the Public School Finance System by TXSC Executive Director, Christy Rome.

"The State has lowered the standard of wealth, and rather than bringing districts up and investing in education, more districts are seeing their level of funding being brought down," Rome said. "Robin Hood was meant to raise the floor, but now the ceiling is being brought down on the heads of Texas students."

TXSC examined Texas Education Agency (TEA) data and the State's investment when Robin Hood began in the 1993-1994 school year compared to the current school year to determine growth rates and funding levels.

"The exception has now become the rule. What started as a system intended to rein in 35 outli-

ers has now become a list of 374 districts, which could soon be 500, or more than half the districts in the state," Rome said. "Recapture is no longer fulfilling its original purpose. Instead, it is only holding more districts back."

Record setting numbers of school districts have been identified

under Chapter 41 due to district enrollment compared to rising property values, largely due to oil and gas industries.

"The continued increase in Robin Hood is a symptom of a larger problem—an inadequately funded system of school finance," Rome said.

Medical Fund, Raffle to Benefit Local Resident with Cancer

A medical fund and raffle have been established for Seminole resident Sylvia Perez Rascon. The raffle will include a chance to win three large crosses and a handmade, queen sized Dallas Cowboys quilt.

The medical fund, according to organizers, has been set up at First United Bank of Seminole. For more information about the medical fund or raffle, contact Pat Perez at (432) 847-7212 or Amber Stevenson at (432) 758-0923.

All proceeds from the fund and raffle will be used to offset medical expenses for Rascon.

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