

# Wyoming County Soil & Water Conservation District



MAY 2013



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## Students Compete for Top Spot in Regional Envirothon Competition

Since January, teams of high school students across Wyoming and Allegany Counties were busy studying environmental topics for the Annual "Trailside Envirothon Competition" which was held on April 24, 2013 at Letchworth State Park in Castile. This annual outdoor, hands-on, environmental education competition is run by Wyoming and Allegany County Soil & Water Conservation Districts. Teams of five students in grades 9-12 are tested on topics including: wildlife, aquatics, forestry, soils/land use, and a current environmental issue.

This year's event brought a total of 101 students or 20 teams from both Wyoming and Allegany Counties. Representative schools from Wyoming County were Perry High School, Warsaw High School, and Attica High School. Cuba Rushford High School and Fillmore High School attended representing Allegany County. After a long day, and a tough competition, two winners emerged. The Wyoming County Envirothon Champion was Attica High School Team #1 with a score of 399 out of a possible 532. The Allegany County winning title went to Cuba Rushford High School Team #1 with a score of 440. These teams will be attending the New York State Envirothon held on the campus of Morrisville State College in Morrisville on May 30th & 31st.

The Wyoming County SWCD Board of Directors and Staff would like to sincerely thank the Letchworth State Park



**Wyoming County Winning Team: Attica High School Team #1 (Standing left to right) – Christina Cutter, Lindsay Chamberlain, Kassie Johnston, (Kneeling left to right) – Peter Bertoldo, Gregory George. Advisors (not pictured) – Beth Winters, Jessica Jones - Attica High School Science Department.**

staff, sponsors, and volunteers that made the 2013 Trailside Envirothon a success. Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the state help organize annual County and Regional Envirothon competitions. Essential support is provided by school science teachers, school districts and local businesses that donate supporting funds. To learn more about the Envirothon please visit its website at: [www.nysenvirothon.net](http://www.nysenvirothon.net).



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Thank You!



## Note to producers: Conservation buffers still work . . .

## economically & environmentally

### More opportunities than ever

#### Ask your neighbor about the advantages



Are conservation buffers a good economic choice for your operation? Your neighbor may be the best person to ask. Farmers and ranchers are among the strongest and most credible advocates for use of buffers and supporting practices.

- More than 250,000 buffer contracts with USDA have been signed.
- Nearly 160,000 farms and ranches have buffers, installed under voluntary programs that provide annual rental payments and other financial incentives.
- There is no bidding, no waiting. Offers are automatically accepted if eligibility and other requirements are met.
- Payments vary across the country, with an average of about \$97 an acre per year.

Many farmers and ranchers find that setting aside environmentally sensitive land makes a lot of economic sense. Employees at your local USDA service center or conservation district office can tell you more. Or you can ask a neighbor!

#### Good for you and the environment



In addition to providing economic benefits, buffers can help you achieve a number of important conservation objectives. When used with supporting practices, buffers can help you:

- Prevent soil erosion.
- Improve water quality by removing sediment, fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants from runoff.
- Improve air quality.
- Enhance fish and wildlife habitat.
- Control flooding.
- Improve farm safety.
- Protect buildings, roads and livestock.
- Conserve energy.
- Beautify the landscape.

USDA's voluntary incentive programs, including the continuous Conservation Reserve Program — CCRP — are stronger than ever. They are valuable tools that can help you sustain your operation and protect the environment. That's good news for today and tomorrow!

#### Partners say: 'We're with you'



America's farmers and ranchers often must "go it alone," but when it comes to buffers, other partners have jumped in to help. Their message is, "We're in this together!"

- Groups like Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited and Quail Unlimited believe so strongly in buffers that they are committing thousands of dollars and volunteer assistance to increase buffer establishment.
- Citizen groups are providing funding and volunteer support for buffer programs.
- States and cities are supporting buffer programs on rural land, in recognition of the positive impacts buffers have on drinking water supplies.
- Rural lenders often promote buffers as a wise economic choice.
- Many farm-related groups and businesses, including cooperatives, also support buffer use.

Talk to USDA service center or conservation district personnel about partners in your area.

# Conservation Buffer Options & Eligible Practices

## Now, more than ever, buffers are the right choice

Conservation buffers are a simple way for you and many other farmers and ranchers to stay profitable while protecting your land. USDA supports the use of buffers on cropland, pasture and rangeland through several conservation programs, including the continuous Conservation Reserve Program, or CCRP. Unlike the regular CRP, sign-up for the CCRP is available year-round.

Financial incentives available through CCRP are especially attractive. They include:

- A signing incentive payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, shelterbelts, field windbreaks, living snow fences, farmable wetlands and wetland buffers, and marginable pastureland wildlife habitat and wetland buffers.
- Up to 50 percent cost sharing for practice installation.

- A practice incentive payment of up to 40 percent of eligible practice installation costs.
- A 20 percent rental rate incentive for riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways and field windbreaks.
- A 10 percent rental rate incentive for wellhead protection areas.
- Higher annual maintenance payments per acre for certain activities.
- Competitive rental rates nationwide for installing riparian buffers on marginal grazing land.



### More options for producers

Today, more than ever, USDA's conservation programs are complementary, so that farmers and ranchers can combine conservation practices to do what's best for their working land. The programs are also voluntary, and most provide incentives and cost sharing.

One of America's largest private land conservation programs is the CCRP. Incentives and cost sharing make it a wise economic choice, and it's recognized by farmers and ranchers across the country as common-sense conservation at its best.

A related program available in about half the states is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. CREP is a federal-state-local program that addresses specific conservation needs, primarily water quality, in the states where it operates.

You'll find that, in addition to CCRP and CREP, several other programs can help you install conservation buffers. Here are

just a few examples:

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program** — Significant increases in funding for EQIP in the 2002 farm bill make it an attractive program. Livestock-related natural resource concerns and other conservation priorities, including buffers, are among the practices EQIP funds. Local input helps establish local conservation priorities under EQIP.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program** — WHIP is a voluntary program for landowners who want to develop and improve fish and wildlife habitat on private land.

**Wetlands Reserve Program** — Landowners can protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property with this voluntary program.

**Forest Land Enhancement Program** — A new program in the 2002 farm bill, FLEP provides cost sharing, technical assistance and education to owners of

private forest land. Planning, tree planting, fish and wildlife habitat, riparian restoration and forest improvement are among the practices that states and private landowners may focus on with FLEP.

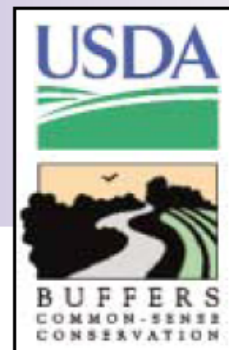
### 'OK, where can I learn more?'

- Ask a neighbor who has installed conservation buffers about the economic and environmental benefits.
- Your local USDA service center or conservation district office can provide details about rental payments, cost-share options and other buffer assistance programs available in your area.
- Your state forester's office or consulting foresters can offer advice about what tree and shrub species are appropriate for use in buffers in your area.
- You can also talk to agricultural consultants and representatives of agribusiness firms to find out more about conservation buffers and their use on your farm or ranch.

### Eligible practices

*One or more of these buffers may be right for your farm or ranch*

- Grassed waterways
- Contour grass strips
- Shelterbelts/field windbreaks
- Living snow fences
- Vegetation to reduce salinity
- Filter strips
- Riparian buffers
- Wetland restorations
- Cross-wind trap strips
- Farmable wetlands
- Farmable wetland buffers
- Marginal pastureland wildlife habitat buffers
- Marginal pastureland wetland buffers
- Shallow water areas for wildlife
- Public wellhead protection buffers



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# WHAT A FARMER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WETLANDS AND USDA CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE

WRITTEN BY ROBERT HALBOHM, DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST

& EDITED BY MIA M. HALTER, DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST

USDA NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, WARSAW, NY

Over a period of 200 years, the lower 48 states lost an estimated 53 percent of their original wetlands. About 87 percent of the wetland losses from the mid-1950's to the mid-1970's were due to agricultural conversion. The environmental functions of wetlands such as flood control, sediment retention, groundwater recharge, water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation, and esthetics are lost when wetlands are converted to other land uses.

The Wetland Conservation Compliance provisions (Swampbuster) were introduced in the 1985 Farm Bill, and amendments were made in later Farm Bills. High rates of wetland conservation and increased national awareness of the environmental benefits associated with wetlands prompted Congress to enact the legislation to protect them and their beneficial functions. The purpose of the provisions is to remove certain incentives to produce crops on wetlands that were converted after the Farm Bill was passed.

As defined in the Farm Bill, a wetland is an area under natural conditions that meets three criteria. First, the area has a predominance of hydric soils. (soils formed under wet conditions). Second, the area is saturated often enough to support vegetation that is adapted to live in wet soils. Third, the area, under normal circumstances, supports a prevalence of such water-tolerant vegetation.

Farmers who plant a crop on wetlands that were converted between December 23, 1985 and November 28, 1990 will be ineligible for USDA program benefits in any year a crop is planted unless an exemption applies. Farmers who convert a wetland making crop production possible after November 28, 1990 will be ineligible for program benefits until the functions of the wetland that was

converted are mitigated, unless an exemption applies.

Farmers participating in USDA programs who are not in compliance with wetland conservation compliance provisions are not eligible to receive benefits for most programs administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). If a farmer has received program benefits and is later found to be out of compliance, the farmer will be required to refund all payments received and may be assessed liquidated damages. A wetland conversion violation results in ineligibility beginning with the year in which the conversion occurred and continues for subsequent years, unless the converted wetland is restored or mitigated before January 1 of the subsequent year. Ineligibility applies to all current and future participants associated with the wetland.

Farmers who are found to be in violation of wetland conservation compliance provisions, but did so in good faith and without the intent to violate, may file a request to regain eligibility for the period in violation at the FSA office. If the request is approved, farmers are required to take corrective action within an established period not to exceed one year.

When farmers apply for Farm Bill programs, they certify on a form AD-1026, Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification that they will not plant an annually planted row crop (agricultural commodity) on converted wetland or convert a wetland to make possible the production of an agricultural commodity. Farmers planning to convert woodlots or brushland to cropland, install new drainage, or improve or modify existing drainage must notify FSA and update their AD-1026 form well in advance of the planned conversion. The FSA will notify NRCS and NRCS will then provide wetland determinations to the farmer before the conversion takes place.

## WETLANDS AND USDA CONSERVATION COMPLIANCE

Converting a wetland to make crop production possible does not necessarily only entail installing ditches, land leveling, diverting run-off water from a wetland or tile drains. It can be as simple as clearing trees and shrubs from the wetland and removing the stumps.

The following two aerial photos demonstrate an example of a conversion that took place. In the 1995 aerial photo, there is a ditch through the center of the field, which apparently was not effective enough to adequately drain the field and enable crop production to take place. There are several areas of trees and shrubs present in 1995. In the 2011 aerial photo, most of the trees and shrubs

have been removed. According to the county soil survey, the entire area that was converted is mapped Ashville silt loam, which is a hydric soil.

Using these maps, it appears that a wetland conversion took place, which could make the farmer ineligible for Farm Program benefits. NRCS will make the final determination on this conversion based upon an onsite evaluation of the soils, combined with an evaluation of the vegetation present on similar soils on an adjacent site, since most of the native vegetation has been removed from the field site. If a farmer disagrees with NRCS determination, they will be provided the opportunity to appeal the determination before it comes final.

**1995 Aerial Photo**



**2011 Aerial Photo**



Addressing a wetland violation after it occurs could be a challenging, expensive process for the farmer, NRCS, and FSA. It is always preferable to have NRCS make the wetland determination before land is cleared and drainage systems are improved. Farmers who are thinking about a conversion should contact FSA, outline the proposed conversion area on an aerial photo, and update their AD-1026. NRCS will evaluate the area for the potential presence of wetlands and assist the farmer in avoiding a costly wetland violation. This article is not intended to cover all possible situations, but can be used as a quick reference for a farmer to become familiar with USDA wetland compliance provisions. Farmers who want more information on the process may contact their local NRCS office. A list of NRCS field offices may be found at: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=ny> The Wyoming County USDA Service Center is located at 31 Duncan Street, Warsaw, NY.

## TRUCKLOAD OF AG PLASTICS BALES TO BE SHIPPED for RECYCLING

By Debra Welch, Ag Program Community Educator



Producer delivers Ag Plastic for Baling



District Chairman, Daryl Heiby along with Nathan Leonard Cornell University loading the Ag Plastic Baler

At the end of March, the first 40,000 lb. truckload of used agricultural plastic bales from Wyoming and Livingston County were shipped via King Cole for recycling. The plastic will be reclaimed, processed and converted into new items such as sidewalk paving blocks and plastic decking lumber. Within 5 months or so a new plastic plywood will also be manufactured from the waste plastic.

Many Wyoming and Livingston County farms have chosen to set aside and bale their waste plastic. The plastic comes largely from bunk covers but also includes bale wrap and bale netting. This recycling helps to relieve the farms from the cost of hiring a weekly or monthly farm dumpster to dispose of the plastics. The reality is, farm operators do not want this plastic to go to landfills when there is a better alternative available. "It's just as easy to fold the bunk strips for recycling as it is for the dumpster."

Wyoming County Soil & Water Conservation District and Cornell Cooperative Extension recognize the contributions and help provided by the County Highway Department and Todd Gadd, who have generously hosted the RAPP baler and assist with moving the baler to farms and assembling bales to a central location for shipping.

New aspects of the Ag recycling program include helping dairy farms deal with empty plastic soap and acid containers. These will be shredded and also shipped for recycling. Another aspect will be collecting and shredding used maple tubing. In addition to the new products described above, another market for reclaimed ag plastics converts the plastics to crude oil.

To learn more about the Recycling Ag Plastics Project, contact Debra Welch at CCE Wyoming, 585-786-2251 or email [djw275@cornell.edu](mailto:djw275@cornell.edu)



# Wyoming County Drinking Water Taste Test Results

In observance of New York State Water Week, the Wyoming County Health Department and Wyoming County Soil and Water Conservation District conducted the water taste test at the 2013 Trailside Envirothon held on April 24<sup>th</sup>. Activities held during water week, such as the taste test, are designed to help citizens understand the importance of protecting and conserving our valuable water supplies. Samples from 6 municipal water systems throughout Wyoming County, including Warsaw, Castile, Wyoming, Arcade, Attica, and Perry, were taste tested and ranked. The 2013 best tasting water for the third year in a row, earning the most votes was the Village of Arcade; second place went to the Village of Attica. Special thanks to the Rick Stevens and the Wyoming County Health Department for their assistance in conducting this year's contest!



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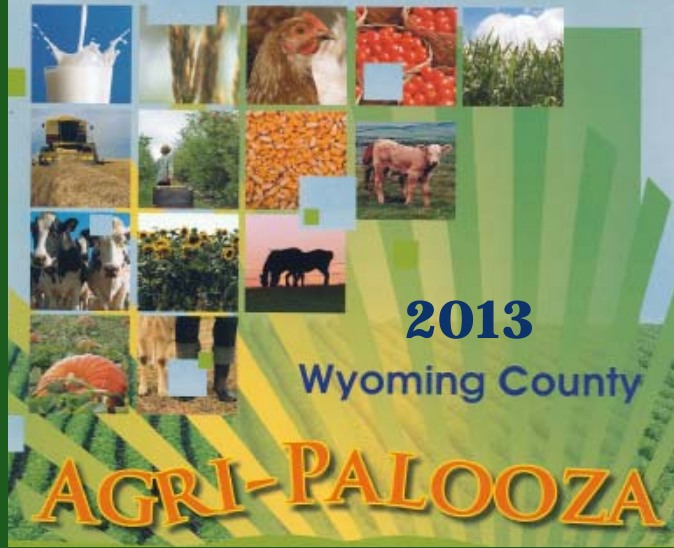
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