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NEBRASKA CONSERVATIONIST RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD.

Jeff Nichols with the Natural Resources Conservation Service wins top honors for rangeland conservation.

NORTH PLATTE, March 21, 2011 – Jeff Nichols, Resources Conservationist with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in North Platte, Neb., was recently named National Rangeland Conservationist of the year.

The Rangeland Conservationist of the Year award recognizes professionals who have exhibited superior accomplishments in rangeland conservation. One winner is selected from nominated NRCS professionals from across the Nation.

Nichols began his career with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist after graduating from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1990 with a degree in Agronomy – crop production and range management. He started his career with NRCS in Schuyler, Neb., and then was transferred to Chadron, Neb. A year later, he was promoted to a Range Management Specialist position in Ogallala, Neb. In 2003, he moved to his current position as a Resource Conservationist in the North Platte NRCS Field Office.

According to Nichols, the best part of his career has been helping farmers and ranchers manage their natural resources. “The thing I enjoy most is working with landowners and having that exchange of ideas - being able to learn from them about their operation, and then share my ideas and technical assistance with them.

“Seeing the success of a landowner implementing a grazing system or invasive plant control strategy that improves their rangeland and the bottom line of the operation is a rewarding feeling,” Nichols said.

Nichols has worked with many ranchers to help them improve their rangeland, one of which was rancher, Mike Kelly. Nichols assisted the Kelly Ranch with developing grazing management strategies for improving ecological conditions and production along the Birdwood Creek in McPherson County.

Kelly said, “Jeff has always been a dedicated professional that offers sound advice in a cordial and helpful manner. He is respected both among area ranchers and peers. I especially admire his work ethic and enthusiasm for his job. It is obvious that he has a love of the land. Professionals such as Jeff truly help keep ranchers on the land.”

As part of his work with NRCS, Nichols has been involved with several local workgroups and organizations, including: the West Central Weed Management Area, the Loess Canyon Rangeland Alliance, and the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition.

Nichols is an active member of the Society for Rangeland Management (SRM). He has been a member of the Nebraska SRM Section since 1993 where he has; served as the Historian for ten years, assisted with the Nebraska's Range Youth Camp since 1995, and has served as a member of the Nebraska Sections Range Judging Committee for more than fifteen years. He is a Certified Professional in Rangeland Management as recognized by the Society for Range Management.

Despite all of his accomplishments, Nichols is quick to point out that he hasn't achieved success alone.

“Awards like this are really a reflection of the people I work with, landowners and peers. It's not just one person. It's a team effort that has helped me do what I do,” Nichols said.

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Note to reporters: Photos of Nichols are available by contacting Joanna Pope at joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov or (402) 437-4123. Low resolution copies are shown below.



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