



## GLCI SPOTLIGHT

### The National Association of Conservation Districts

Serving America's Conservation Districts

The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is the nonprofit organization that represents the nation's 3,000 soil and water conservation districts and 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. For 65 years, local conservation districts have worked with the more than 2.5 million cooperating landowners and managers of private working lands to help them plan and apply conservation treatments to control erosion and improve the quality of our soil resources, water supply, fish and wildlife habitat, and woodlands, pasturelands and rangelands for the benefit of all citizens in America.

From its founding in 1946, NACD leaders have promoted the concept of locally led self-government to achieve land conservation objectives. Today, incentive-driven and locally led conservation programs offer the most practical and reasonable approach to conservation of natural resources. But, our conservation success continues to depend on the voluntary cooperation and conservation efforts of private landowners—especially farmers and ranchers.

NACD believes providing progressive incentives for American producers is the most efficient way to promote effective conservation today, and well into tomorrow. One of the most significant achievements of the recent Farm Bill conservation title is the new nationwide Conservation Security Program (CSP), which provides incentive, cost share and bonus payments to producers to maintain existing conservation practices or install new ones. The CSP compensates producers for the environmental benefits they provide to the American public.

"I believe ranchers and farmers want to do more to protect the environment, if they can afford it," said NACD President Read Smith. "This is one of the most significant pieces of conservation legislation to come along in many years, and our local districts worked long and hard to help make this piece of legislation the best-ever for ranchers and farmers, and the American public."

#### Grazing Lands Commitment

NACD worked to make sure the Farm Bill included important grazingland provisions, such as the Grasslands Reserve Program and continued availability of technical assistance. NACD's grazingland initiatives are directed by its Grazingland and Public Lands Resources (GPLR) Committee.

The mission of the GPLR Committee is to identify current and emerging issues affecting conservation districts that are associated with grazing lands, both public and private. The committee develops and advances policy that is scientifically sound, economically feasible, and environmentally beneficial.

The GPLR Committee has identified three priority areas of focus for 2002: Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI); Outreach & Education; and, Land Policy and Management.

NACD's priority for the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative involves collaborative efforts on items of mutual interest, such as the Conservation on Private Grazing Lands (CPGL) Program, the National Conference on Grazing Lands (NCGL) and Technical Assistance for Grazing Lands.

Nevada rancher Joe Sicking, who chairs the GPLR Committee, outlined the following objectives: "For the Conservation on Private Grazing Lands Program we planned to get the rule published and to extend the program in the 2002 Farm Bill with adequate funding authorized. Our objective for the National Conference on Grazing Lands is to integrate the proceedings of the conference into public policy where applicable. Finally, our objective for Technical Assistance for Grazing Lands is simply to increase the technical assistance available to operators of grazing lands."

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#### GRETCHEN SAMMIS

Since 1954, Gretchen Sammis has owned and operated the 11,000-acre Chase Ranch near Cimarron, New Mexico. The Chase Ranch was originally established in 1867 by her great-grandfather. She prides herself on "sleeping in the same bed in the same room as she was born." Gretchen taught school in Cimarron for over fourteen years.

She has been involved in the Soil and Water Conservation District movement since 1973, serving as Director of the Colfax County SWCD and holding leadership positions with the New Mexico Soil and Water Commission and as Chair of NACD's Grazing Lands and Public Lands Committee. She has served as a NACD representative on the National GLCI Steering Committee since 1994.

Gretchen manages a 250 head Hereford cow/calf operation. The ranch operation is based upon adoption of rotational grazing practices on native range and hosts an excellent population of elk, deer, turkey, mountain lion and bear. Gretchen's work in the education community and her leadership in natural resource management and public policy led to her induction into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame in 1986.

Gretchen strongly believes NACD's mission of promoting the wise use of our nations resources is critical to every landowner. She states the adoption of sound conservation practices is key to the sustainability of our American farms and ranches. The National GLCI Steering Committee goal of "increasing technical assistance on our nation's 634 million acres of privately owned grazing lands, in a voluntary basis, and in respect of private property rights" is vital.

The two major accomplishments achieved by the National GLCI Steering Committee is creating a greater national attention on the need for improved grazing lands management and the passage of the Conservation of Private Grazing Lands (CPGL) section in the 2002 Farm Bill. The biggest challenge facing the National GLCI Steering Committee is assisting State GLCI Coalitions as they work to achieve full funding for CPGL.

#### J.K. "ROOTER" BRITE

J.K. "Rooter" Brite of Bowie, TX has represented the (NACD) on the National GLCI Steering Committee since 1997. He is currently a Director of the Upper Elm-Red Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) and has been involved with SWCD since 1980.



Rooter, his wife Lynda and son J.K.III represent the third generation on the 3400-acre ranch, originally purchased by his grandfather in 1931. The Brites operate a 225 head cow/calf herd, maintain 40 to 75 replacement heifers, and produce 400 to 500 stockers annually. Brite's forage base is native tallgrass prairie managed to totally supply feed for the ranch. Key management practices include rotational grazing of pastures designed to match their productive ability to the climate, soils and topography. He notes the ranch is home to excellent populations of whitetail deer, turkey and quail.

Rooter believes the primary role of NACD is to pool natural resource management assistance for the benefit of today's agricultural producer. He cites working with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through the Great Plains Conservation Program in the early 1960s. He strongly maintains today's landowners always make sound, informed management decisions if provided quality technical assistance and economic alternatives. The adoption of rotational grazing practices on his ranch has saved their operation during recent drought periods.

He says the principal goal of GLCI is to achieve a more equitable focus of limited conservation dollars on the nation's largest land use...grazinglands. He notes two major accomplishments of GLCI have been creating a greater national awareness of the importance of the nation's 634 million acres of privately owned grazinglands, and achieving dedicated funding for grazing lands technical assistance through USDA-NRCS. The biggest challenge faced by GLCI is to maintain a balanced approach to the education of our leaders and land managers of the value of sound management of our grazing land resources. ♣