



2015 Grass Roots Award Recipient Michael Willson and TSSRM President Cody Scott

Texas Section Society for Rangeland Management
Grass Roots Award-NRCS
Michael Willson

Education:

05/2009

Tarleton State University, Stephenville, TX

Bachelors of Science Agronomy and Range Management

Honors: Distinguished Student (3 semesters)

Relevant Coursework, Licenses and Certifications:

- The Agriculture Industry, Fundamentals of Crop Production, Animal Science, Production Economics, Agriculture Marketing Systems, Soils, Introduction to Genetics, General Entomology, Conservation of Natural Resources, Introduction to Forestry, Business and Professional Speaking, Animal Feeds and Feeding, ArcGIS Geographic Techniques, Wildlife Conservation and Management, Range Ecology, Range Plants, Plant Taxonomy, Plant Pathology, Organic Chemistry, and Watershed Management.

- Completed as a member of the Tarleton State University Plant Identification Team.

Work Experience:

9/13 to Present **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Guthrie Field Office

District Conservationist GS 11

The DC position in Guthrie has allowed me the chance to work on some of the state's largest historical ranches and work closely with cooperators employing different management styles. I've had the opportunity to see firsthand how varying market strategies affect management decisions and how conservation practices implemented on large-scale ranching operations can improve grazing systems.

I am responsible for all program delivery in the Guthrie Field Office. There are a relatively small number of active cooperators due to the significant size of their land-holdings, but this does not diminish the workload. An extensive amount of resource inventory and planning is required to develop quality conservation plans on these large rangeland tracts. An assortment of ecological sites offers a variety of resource concerns, and I utilize my experience with conservation practices and components to address them. I work with local cooperators to address resource concerns through a variety of cost-share and non-cost share programs. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) account for the majority of program activity in this field office.

I have worked side by side with local cooperators to develop numerous progressive plans with the potential to achieve a Resource Management System (RMS). In the last five years I have developed several RMS plans on crop, range, and pasturelands. Many of these plans have since led to program application and successful implementation.

During the extreme drought and wildfire conditions that we have experienced over the last 4 years, I have assisted local livestock producers in the development and implementation of grazing plans and alternative strategies to aid in disaster recovery.

I provide sound technical assistance upon request, working closely with local landowners to apply and maintain conservation practices.

I work closely with producers and zone staff to ensure compliance with the Food Security Act of 1985 through wetland determinations, Highly Erodible Land (HEL) compliance, and HEL plans.

I have worked with many landowners to develop conservation plans that address wildlife concerns such as habitat, food, and water sources. These plans have focused primarily on bobwhite quail, dove, turkey, whitetail deer, and mule deer. These species are all beneficial to the local economy, causing many livestock producers to consider implementing wildlife-friendly practices as a secondary objective in their conservation plans.

I work with the Grazing Lands Coalition (GLC) to determine resource concerns, recommend stocking rates, and develop conservation plans. For example, the Pitchfork Land & Cattle Company requested a full resource inventory and conservation plan from NRCS. This approximately 165,000 acre ranch is administered out of King County, but an undertaking of this size required a team of conservation planners to complete within a reasonable timeframe. With support from Stan Bradbury, Zone 1 Range Management Specialist, Jeff Goodwin, State Rangeland Management Specialist, and Matt Coffman, GLCI Specialist we coordinated a two-week inventory effort with 20 employees in October 2014. After analyzing forage data and identifying resource concerns we developed a comprehensive grazing plan, a series of detailed maps, and a conservation plan. Our findings and recommendations were presented to the Pitchfork Land & Cattle Board of Directors in May 2015 and I continue to work closely with the ranch manager in planning and applying conservation measures.

08/10 – 09/13 **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Spur Field Office

Rangeland Management Specialist GS-9

As a Rangeland Management Specialist in the Spur Field Office, my responsibilities included program delivery, conservation planning, outreach, SWCD activities, and providing sound technical assistance. I took advantage of every opportunity to learn from the two RTLs that I worked with in this field office, as well as from the other team members.

06/09 – 08/10 **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Clarendon Field Office

Rangeland Management Specialist GS 7

My role as a Conservation Planner in the Clarendon Field Office gave me the opportunity to interact directly with Donley County producers, and work in all phases of conservation planning to help achieve their goals. Under the daily supervision of Weldon Sears, DC, I was involved in the planning, development, and administration of EQIP, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), CStP, Conservation Security Program (CSP), and Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) contracts. I developed skills in task management and recognized the importance of being thorough during the design, planning, check out, and certification of practices. This also allowed me to become proficient in program payment preparation and reporting processes.

07/08 – 08/08 **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Eden Field Office

Student Career Employment Program (SCEP)

Student Trainee Rangeland Management Specialist GS 4

Under the guidance of Brad Teplicek, DC, I gained a basic understanding of farm bill program delivery and administration of EQIP and Water Quality Senate Bill (SB) – 503 applications and contracts. I worked with other field office personnel to obtain signatures on over 100 EQIP contracts in the short time that I was stationed in the Eden Field Office.

01/05 – 03/06 **USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Brownwood Field Office

Student Career Employment Program (SCEP)

Student Trainee Rangeland Management Specialist GS 3

I began my career with the NRCS through the Brownwood Field Office under the direction of Terry Been, RTL of the Brownwood Resource Team. Here I was introduced to the history and objectives of the agency. I became familiar with various NRCS policies and procedures and the many technical resources used in conservation planning, such as the Field Office Tech Guide (FOTG), the National Planning Procedures Handbook, the National Range and Pasture Handbook, and soil surveys. I learned about the working agreements between different agencies, both federal and state, as well the relationships between the NRCS, the National Association of Conservation Districts, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board. I learned how to use equipment utilized by agency personnel both in the office and out in the field. Working with John Hrebik, Civil Engineer, I used an engineering level and Philadelphia rod and kept survey notes that were later referenced to plot channels and cross-sections of those channels. During this time period, the Brown County area received an excessive amount of rainfall. This gave me the opportunity to spend many hours with senior field office personnel monitoring the 57 FP sites in the county and learn different aspects of watershed management. I became proficient at reading aerial maps, soil surveys, and identifying erosion processes. I studied and collected grasses, forbs, and woody plants and completed a plant collection which was reviewed by Lem Creswell, Zone 5 Range Conservationist. I was trained on data collection through brush transects, forage inventories, and the TX-802 Similarity Index Worksheets.

11/02 – 11/10 **United States Army Reserve**

Fort Hood, TX US

Petroleum Supply Specialist E-5

As an enlisted soldier in the U.S. Army Reserve, I served in many capacities with several different units. For the first three years of my eight year commitment, I trained monthly with the A co. 7/158 Aviation Brigade, a heavy-lift Chinook helicopter company based at Fort Hood, Texas.

Task Force Quake, Pakistan:

In 2005, in the wake of a devastating earthquake, I was placed on active duty status and deployed to the Kashmir Province of Pakistan with B co. 7/158 Aviation Brigade. As a Petroleum Supply Specialist, I was responsible for daily fueling

operations, fuel quality control, equipment testing, enforcement of specific safety measures, and fuel accountability. My knowledge of petroleum operations was instrumental in designing and constructing a fully functional fueling system using parts from previously non-functional, non-compatible equipment. In support of Task Force Quake for a four-month period, my team would issue over 70,000 gallons of fuel to aircraft from three different countries.

Operation Enduring Freedom VII, Afghanistan:

After completion of our mission in Pakistan, I was attached to the 10th Mountain Division and deployed to Afghanistan for the next nine months in support of Operation Enduring Freedom VII. Upon arrival to Kandahar, I was immediately deployed to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Tarin-Kowt as a senior specialist to man a Forward Area Refueling Point (FARP). I performed fueling operations in this remote setting for up to 120 days at a time, issuing over 530,000 gallons of fuel to aircraft from at least four different countries. I played a key role in the training and execution of a mobile FARP team, which utilized a Chinook helicopter and security personnel to change fueling point locations quickly in order to avoid enemy contact with incoming aircraft. My knowledge of petroleum and combat operations combined were key in the success of these missions, giving the entire Coalition Aviation Task Force more flexibility on the battlefield.

Other:

After my return to United States, I was returned to reserve duty status at Fort Hood, where I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant. As a Non-Commissioned Officer, my duties were to ensure the fulfillment of soldiers' training requirements, leading physical training, and helping my assigned soldiers achieve goals required to receive promotions. My communication and management skills were imperative to the success I enjoyed in this role.

In the summer of 2008, while on a training exercise in Colorado, I was called out of training to help battle a 30,000 acre wildfire that had broken out in the southeastern part of that state. I used the logistical training and methods that we had developed in the combat theater to quickly relocate fueling points in relation to the critical areas of the fire. This strategy allowed fire-fighting aircraft to devote more time to battling the wildfire and less time flying to and from the nearest airfields for fuel, which were over an hour's flight from the area of operation.

Awards:

For my actions in support of Task Force Quake and Operation Enduring Freedom, I was awarded the Army Commendation Medal, the Combat Action Badge, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Medal, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Medal, the Overseas Service Ribbon, and the Humanitarian Service Medal. For my actions in the Colorado wildfire effort, I was presented with the Army Achievement Award.