



## LA VOZ

Newsletter of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic  
Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees

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### December 2007 Newsletter

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#### President's Message

*By Carlos Suárez*

NOPHNRCSE President



Dear NOPHNRCSE Family!

It has been 3 months since we had our very successful training conference in Bloomington, Minneapolis. This success was due to all of you who assisted as chair and co-chair of committees, committee and national council members as well as those who attended the conference. I want to take this opportunity to say "Gracias" (thanks) to Bill Hunt, State Conservationist in Minnesota and his great staff for hosting us and providing support. Last but not least, a big thanks to Julie

MacSwain and Tammy Buitenwerf, Chair and Co-Chair respectively of the 2007 planning committee for their extraordinary leadership.

As you should know by now, we are going to the great Midwest region in 2008. Due to logistics difficulties that would have made it difficult for many members and NRCS personnel in general to attend the training conference in Anchorage Alaska, as we have voted during the annual business meeting, the national council decided to move the conference to Madison, Wisconsin. Bob Jones, State Conservationist in Alaska continues his support of NOPHNRCSE by supporting 100% our decision to move the meeting to Wisconsin.

Pat Leavenworth, State Conservationist in Wisconsin and her great staff will be hosting us from July 7 to July 11, 2008 at the Madison Concourse Hotel and Governors' Club in downtown Madison. Astrid Martinez and Mike Castillo, chair and co-chair respectively of your 2008 training conference have been working diligently since the day after our last training conference to make the 2008 conference a great one. They are working with the different conference committees to use the 2007 conference as a benchmark and incorporate your feedback to add more training and workshops in 2008.

In my last year as President, my goal is to continue building on the initiatives we started a year ago. I want to increase the number of partners we work with across the nation. In addition, I want to focus on assistance to our members. As you recalled, the national council launched a grants program for our members to assist with paying course for career and professional development. This is an excellent opportunity for those of you who want to enhance your professional career. I invite to participate in this program. For more information about the application process, please visit our website.

Last but not least, I want to invite you to bring any suggestions and/or ideas forward to the council through your regional representatives. By keeping us informed of any ideas or suggestions, it will maintain the lines of communication open, making us stronger in one unified voice!

On behalf of the national council, I wish you happy and safe holidays!

Carlos

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## **Employee Spotlight**

Mario Rodríguez - North Dakota

After earning a degree in Agronomy and Soils from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus (UPRM), Mario Rodriguez left his native Puerto Rico to work in North Dakota as an NRCS soil conservation technician.

Why did Mario decide to trade the sunny skies, year-around 90-degree temperatures, beaches, and lush green forests of Puerto Rico for the cold winters and dry winds of landlocked North Dakota? "I moved to North Dakota for a better job, adventure, and a career opportunity to learn about something totally new," he explained. "Two years ago, I had the opportunity to attend the 2005 UPRM career fair where I met NRCS representatives who shared their experiences, helped me envision a career in conservation, and establish contacts in the agency. A few months later I got a call from the Devils Lake Area Conservationist who convinced me to come to North Dakota."

It turned out to be the best decision Mario could have made. Working as a soil conservation technician satisfied Mario's interest in conservation work and after only

nine months he was offered a position as an agronomist in Golden Valley County, North Dakota, working in his degree fields of agronomy and soils. He now has the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills he received in college and learn more about agriculture in general while helping NRCS accomplish its mission of helping people help the land.

Mario, who is happy to be in North Dakota, hopes to be there for a long time, and is proud of what he does, encourages students in the U.S. and its territories to go to job fairs to seek information about careers with NRCS.

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### **Kudos for Two Outstanding NOPHNRCSE Members**

*Kris Graham Chávez*, Chair Career Enhancement Scholarship Grant

Congratulations go out to Heather Medina and Rick Luna for receiving the Career Enhancement Scholarship Grant in the amount of \$500 each. They both have been members in good standing and have shown their commitment and have been involved with NOPHNRCSE.

Heather is enrolled in a management class that she feels would help her attain one of her goals of becoming a district conservationist. She is 1999 graduate of Michigan State University and was a Peace Corp volunteer in the Dominican Republic. "Heather is an exemplary young woman leader who is committed to her community and underrepresented populations in the sciences. Her positive outlook is contagious and is often asked to speak to incoming environmental studies freshman", said Laurie Thorp, director of Residential Initiative on the Study of the Environment, MSU.

Rick is currently completing his Bachelor of Science at Angelo State University. According to Mario Morales, "he exceeds the criteria established for this scholarship opportunity and is highly regarded by his peers and supervisors as a valuable part of the field office and as a well rounded individual with great career potential."

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### **A New Round of Career Enhancement Scholarship Grant is Announced**

A new round of the Career Enhancement Scholarship Grant is announced. This is a great time for NOPHNRCSE member to improve their skills, ranging from 457 qualifications to leadership development! "We will be focusing on Career Enhancement opportunities for our members. Our organization is at a turning point where we would like to offer grants to members in good standing in exchange for service to the organization", Carlos Suarez said. Some guidelines that we will follow are:

- Applicants must be members in good standing. (Paid yearly dues)

- Willingness of the participant to become involved with NOPHNRCSE as a conference planning member, committee member, committee chair, officer, moderator or facilitator.
- Awards will be distributed equally among the seven (7) regions.
- 10 grants will be offered the first year.
- Upward mobility and series qualification (such as 457 series) will take precedence over personal development.
- A passing grade or a certificate of completion is attained.
- There will be \$500 limit per person per year limit.
- The committee is requesting \$7,000 from the National Council to implement the program.

For more information please contact:

Kris Graham Chávez, chair - [kristin.grahamchavez@az.usda.gov](mailto:kristin.grahamchavez@az.usda.gov)

Irma Hernández, member – [irma.hernandez@de.usda.gov](mailto:irma.hernandez@de.usda.gov)

Edwin Almodóvar member – [edwin.almodovar@mi.usda.gov](mailto:edwin.almodovar@mi.usda.gov)

## **2008 Conference Goes to Madison, Wisconsin**

*Astrid Martínez*, Conference Planning Chairperson

Dear NOPHNRCSE members:

The planning committee is working hard planning the 2008 conference in Madison, WI.

The conference will take place at The Madison Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club during the week of July 7-11, 2008. Hotel Rates are \$89.00 for single rate and \$109.00 for double rate. Per Diem for Madison is \$89.00 for lodging and \$54.00 for M&I.

- Closest Airport to fly in is Dane county Regional Airport (MSN)
- Nearby airports
- Milwaukee, WI- 1.5 hours
- O'Hare Chicago. IL 2.5 hours
- Chicago Midway Airport, IL- 2.75 hours

Since we will be just one block from the State Capitol, you may want to check out the free Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's Concerts, every Wednesday during the summer on the Capitol lawn. This concert is one of the Madison's largest outdoor concerts and is free of charge.

Hotel Highlights/Amenities

- Located in the heart of downtown Madison, the hotel is steps from the Capitol, State Street, University of Wisconsin, Monona Terrace Convention Center, Alliant Energy Center, Overture Center and more.
- 10 minutes from Dane County Regional Airport.
- Complimentary airport shuttle
- Complimentary wireless Internet access
- Live jazz in The Bar every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday
- Underground parking (\$7 per night)
- Avis® car rental reservation phone
- Barber shop/salon
- Massage

Websites of interest for more information about Madison:

- <http://www.concoursehotel.com/>
- <http://downtownmadison.org/>
- <http://www.cityofmadison.com/residents/recreation/>
- <http://www.visitmadison.com/>
- <http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Shopping.pdf>
- [http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Transportation\\_Meetings-4c.pdf](http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Transportation_Meetings-4c.pdf)
- [http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Madison\\_History.pdf](http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Madison_History.pdf)
- [http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/madison\\_attractions.pdf](http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/madison_attractions.pdf)
- <http://www.visitmadison.com/uploads/media/Itineraries2007.pdf>

## **Natural Resources Committee Update**

*Heydsha Cordero*, Great Falls, MT

Accept the challenge and be part of this wonderful experience! Submit an abstract for Technical Poster or Oral Presentation for our Annual Training Conference. It will be an excellent training opportunity for conservation professionals to present the latest innovations and information about conservation. Share your personal experience, work, and knowledge in conservation! The friendly audience in Madison, WI will be eager to listen to you and ask questions in a friendly environment.

For Poster Presentations, each person should carry or mail a frame to display the poster. For Oral Presentations, consider converting your PowerPoint presentation using Flash software.

The first call for Poster and Paper Abstracts will be announced soon!

Topics for Posters and Oral Presentations include the following:

- Experience in providing effective and equitable service to customers with the multilingual and multicultural needs.
- Communication methods and materials that reach minority, historically underserved, and nontraditional groups.
- Experience in cooperative approaches (building partnerships, networking, etc.) for the conservation and protection of natural resources.
- Experience in locally led, watershed-based approaches for attaining effective resource management.
- Uses of market-based approaches to achieve sound resource management and conservation.
- Development and application of Information Systems that allow more effective conservation services. For example:
  - Use of GIS for more efficient management of resources information
  - Use of GIS in conservation planning
- Development and transfer of up-to-date technology (tools, techniques, standards) for resource assessment, conservation planning & implementation.
  - Instruments or tools like remote sensing, satellite imaging for resource assessment, conservation planning and implementation
- NRCS is responsible for administering Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP).
  - Emergencies created by a natural disaster, the type of NRCS assistance showing EWP work: debris removal from stream channels, road culverts and bridge abutments; reshaping and protection of eroding banks; repair of levees and structures, and reseeded of damaged areas.
- Success stories in any of the following:
  - A project or conservation practices installed or completed or close to completion that is making a positive contribution to local air quality, water quantity/quality or another local resource concern.
  - Farm experiences in maximizing fuel efficiency (i.e. program to do conservation tillage or no-tillage, which also improves soil quality and air quality).
  - NRCS support of projects using solar power in farm operations or other renewable energy sources like wind turbines or methane produced by dairy lagoon digesters, which can produce electrical power.

2008 Natural Resources Committee Members are:

- Arturo Carvajal, Water Management Specialist Engineer, Davis CA
- Ronnie Skala, Hydraulic Engineer, Temple, TX
- Edwin Martínez, Soil Conservationist, Tullake, CA
- Heydsha Cordero, Soil Conservationist, Great Falls, MT
- Russell Castro, State Biologist, Temple, TX
- Serafín Aguirre, Soil Conservationist, Henderson, TX
- Angela Biggs, District conservationist, Harlan, IA

Share and forward this announcement to students, NRCS professionals and everyone interested! This will be a great opportunity to share and gain experience, knowledge and to network with other conservation professionals in Madison, WI.

For more information about the Technical Oral Presentations and Posters contact:

Arturo Carvajal (530) 792-5627 or Ronnie Skala (254) 742-9872

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### **Student Outreach**

The National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE) is seeking college students interested in a career in natural resources to attend its 2008 Training Conference. The date for this conference is July 7 through the 10th of 2008 and the conference location is Madison, Wisconsin.

Attendance at this Conference will provide the best-qualified students (college and upper level high school students) with an opportunity to meet, interact, and network with NRCS professionals. Students will also have the opportunity to visit with hiring officials from across the country about federal internship programs and job opportunities. **The organization will provide travel expenses for airfare, lodging (2/room), airport transportation and a \$54/day allowance for meals and incidentals (less those provided at the conference).**

More information

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### **Organization Representatives**

- National Council
  - Regional Representatives
  - Committee Chairpersons
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### **Message from Membership Committee Former Chair**

*Irma Hernández*, Scholarship Committee

I would like to express my gratitude to all of you who assisted me during this past year. Chairing the Membership Committee was a rewarding experience that provided me the opportunity to interact with NOPSI members, National Council members as well as a wide variety of other employees. I encourage other members to become actively involved

and serve the organization by accepting responsibilities on committees or by simply volunteering to serve in different capacities.

As you all know, we had set a goal for 2007 to exceed 2006 membership numbers. I am honored to inform you, we met that goal! This accomplishment would not have been possible if it were not for the hard work of the Regional Representatives and existing members who worked together to recruit new members. Please support and assist the new Membership Committee Chair with a continued effort of recruiting even more new members, inviting passive members to re-join and be creative to reach out to employees in general. There really is strength in numbers. Together we can make this organization the largest and strongest, setting an example of how Hispanics develop leaders and serve our agency.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rocemi Morales for accepting the position of Membership Committee Chair. Rocemi is a self motivated person with a great attitude. I would also like to thank Rubén Pérez for all his hard work assisting me with the Membership database. I could not have done it without him. I am very appreciative of the work he put into this committee. Thank you Rubén!

As the past Membership Committee Chair, I would like to personally thank you for your cooperation and support of our organization during this year.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Irma Hernández

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### **Moderators Needed**

Details are getting into place for the 2008 NOPHNCSE Training Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. If you would like to help out as a moderator during one of the sessions that will be scheduled in the program, please let one of the contacts below know of your interest.

As a moderator, your primary duties will be to help those on a panel or guest speaker get settled for their presentation, welcome everyone to the session, and keep the program on time.

Contact any of the members of the Moderators Committee:

Milton Cortés – Chair - [milton.cortes@nc.usda.gov](mailto:milton.cortes@nc.usda.gov)

Jeremy Roston - Co-Chair - [jeremy.roston@nc.usda.gov](mailto:jeremy.roston@nc.usda.gov)

Misty Falcón - Member - [misty.falcon@or.usda.gov](mailto:misty.falcon@or.usda.gov)

Once you express willingness to be a moderator, you will receive follow-up information.



