



LA VOZ

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

February 2007 Newsletter

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President's Message

By Carlos Suarez



NOPHNRCSE President

First of all, Happy New Year 2007!

In just a few days, two months will have gone by in a blink of an eye. This also means that we are 6 months closer to our training conference! As you may have seen lately, things are moving at fast speed in order to get ready for our training conference. The members of all the committees are doing an outstanding job in securing speakers, moderators, and the conservation tours. We have listened to your suggestions, and we are including a variety of training courses which would allow members to select from topics such as financial management, leadership, administrative management, and international conservation. In addition, the National Employee Development Center will be partnering with NOPHNRCSE to offer training courses at the conference. Stay tuned for additional information.

I want to shift gears for a minute and talk to you about an idea that has been circulating in my head since I assumed the presidency of this great organization. One of the purposes of our organization is to promote the professional development of our members. In that line, I brought to the National Council consideration, developing a grant program for own members, and they support evaluating this idea. The idea of this program is to provide small grants to pay for courses. These courses could be either by correspondence or workshops and tailored to professional development; either technical, administrative and/or leadership. I will be forming an ad-hoc committee to provide recommendations on how to develop and implement this proposed grant program and provide their recommendations to the National Council. If you are interested in participating in this ad-hoc committee, please provide your name to your regional representative no later than March 5, 2007. I see this as an excellent opportunity to provide ideas and get more involved in the organization.

For those of you who are members of NOPHNRCSE, I thank you for your continuous support, and those who were past members or are considering becoming a member, I welcome you to become member of a great professional organization.

Last but not least, I want to thank the Minnesota NRCS employees and their state conservationist, Mr. Bill Hunt, for the outstanding support that they are providing to NOPHNRCSE to make this training conference the best ever.

Enjoy this issue of the NOPHNRCSE newsletter!

'Otro Gustito' of the 2007 NOPHNRCSE Training Conference Program

Luis Hernández, Program Committee Chairperson

We are rapidly approaching our training conference scheduled for August 6-10, in Bloomington, Minnesota. I hope by now you have formally requested attendance to the event. This year NOPHNRCSE is pleased to be teaming up with NRCS Hispanic Employment Program Managers and NRCS-National Employee Development Center to offer many excellent training sessions, workshops, technical papers, conservation tours and great speakers.

Following are some of the potential activities being planned.

We are currently coordinating with NEDC to offer the following trainings sessions:

- Managing for Excellence
- Effective Instruction I
- Civil Rights in Program Delivery

These are some of the planned professional workshops to be presented at the conference:

- Developing Effective Resume and KSA's
- Effective Presentations & Communication with Customers and Professional Image
- Stress Management, conflict resolution, fitness and wellness
- Financial Planning – Edward Jones
- Moving up to the Executive Service & SES Core Qualifications-
- Urban Conservation

The following are the conservation tours schedule for the event:

- National Wildlife Refuge/Jonathan Padleford ride up the Mississippi River
- Minnesota Landscape Arboretum/Jonathan Padleford ride up the Mississippi River
- Conservation tour targeting 1) an Immigrant Farming Community; 2) the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program; and 3) a tour of MN Rain Gardens and how they are providing environmental benefits these people to share ideas and suggestions.

The program committee is developing a program to meet our membership expectations; we truly hope this conference will help you meet your training needs from the technical aspects to sessions on personal development.

The program committee members are:

Luis A. Hernández, Arkansas State Soil Scientist, Chair, (501) 301-3116
 Gilbert Guerrero, National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager, (301) 504-2336
 Astrid Martínez, Scottsbluff, NE MLRA Project Leader, (308) 632-2195 ext 131
 Juan C. Hernández, Utah ASTC for Operations, (801) 524-4552

Student Outreach

Mario Morales, Student Participation Committee Chairperson

NOPHNRCSE is seeking college students interested in a career in natural resources to attend this year's training conference, August 06-09, 2007 in Bloomington, Minnesota. 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 the students selected. For more information, visit the NOPHNRCSE website.

Scholarships Available

Omar Vega, Scholarship and Endowment Fund Committee Chairperson

NOPHNRCSE provides scholarships to deserving Hispanic students who wish to pursue or are pursuing a bachelor's degree in a natural resources or a natural resources conservation-related field of study at an accredited four-year institution.

Four scholarships of \$1,000 each will be awarded to graduating high school students accepted to an accredited college or university or registered students in their first through third years.

In addition, the Martha Guerra-Arteaga Scholarship of \$1,000 will be awarded to one female student majoring in public affairs or a natural resources conservation-related field of study.

NOPHNRCSE's Scholarship and Endowment Fund Committee is accepting applications for 2007. The complete application package must be submitted to:

Omar Vega
NOPHNRCSE Scholarship and Endowment Fund
Committee
3941 Mammoth Trail
Madison, WI 53719

The application must be postmarked by May 2, 2007. More information at the NOPHNRCSE website.

Moderators Needed

Amanda Hasemeier, Moderators Committee Co-Chairperson

Final details are getting into place for the 2007 NOPHNRCSE Training Conference in Minnesota. If you would like to help out as a moderator during one of the sessions scheduled in the program, please let one of the two 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.

[Carmella Irwin and Amanda Hasemeier](#) – Chairs Moderators Committee

Once you express willingness to be a moderator, you will receive follow-up information. More information at the NOPHNRCSE website.

Members News

Medina Selected to Serve on National Civil Rights Committee

NOPHNRCSE member Heather Medina from Michigan was selected to serve as the Hispanic female representative on the NRCS National Civil Rights Committee. For a list of all members, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights/ncrc/members.html>.

Perez Joins Oversight, Evaluation Staff in Fort Worth

NOPHNRCSE member Aldofo Perez has been reassigned as a Natural Resources Specialist, Oversight and Evaluation Staff, Fort Worth, Texas, effective March 5, 2007.

Be a Member in Good Standing

Irma Hernández, Membership Committee Chairperson

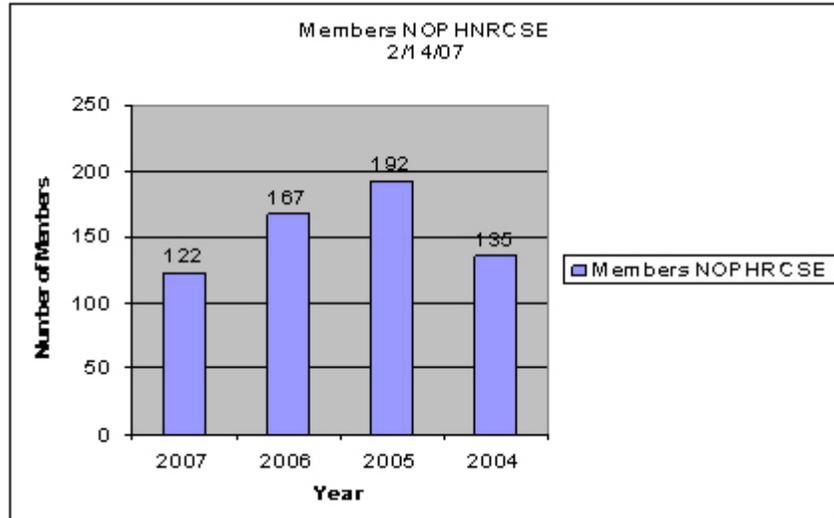
We want to thank all of you that have paid your 2007 dues. It is important that we pay our annual dues to our organization. These dues help us to subsidize the cost of our conferences and other important activities carried out by NOPHNRCSE. By paying your dues you will be able to participate in the decision-making process of the organization. By being a member in good standing, you can participate in the election and be eligible to hold any position on the National Council.

Our success depends on each one of us. We have received a lot of membership renewals during the last few weeks. We are optimistic that our goal of exceeding last year's membership numbers is close to being reached. You can contribute to this effort by recruiting new members and/or sending your 2007 membership dues to:

Irma Hernandez
1 Cobble Creek Curve
Newark DE 19702

Keep in mind that anyone can become a NOPHNRCSE member. Ethnicity is not a requirement to become a member, so do not be afraid to invite others to join NOPHNRCSE.

The following chart shows the membership trends for the last three years.



We would like to invite you to join us in welcoming the following new members:

East

Jon Hall
 Miladys N. Irrizary
 Olivette Miranda
 Joyce Swartzendruber

South Central

Michael Margo

Midwest

Cesar Martinez

West

Kristi Wright

If you are interested in becoming a lifetime member, please contact Irma Hernandez at 302-678-4191 or via email at Irma.Hernandez@de.usda.gov. More information at the NOPHNRCSSE website.

Award Nominations

Marina Barajas, Awards Chairperson

The awards team is soliciting your nominations for award recipients. We feel that there are employees in our agency and organization who contribute far beyond the call of duty. This is an excellent opportunity to voice your appreciation and nominate them for an award. You can find the guidelines, categories and a nomination form on the NOPHNRCS website.

Please be prompt and send them to Marina Barajas by April 30, 2007.

Hispanic Representation in Government Rises - Barely

By *Amelia Gruber*

agruber@govexec.com

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The percentage of Hispanics in federal jobs continues to rise slowly, but the number hired took a step backward last year, according to figures released Thursday.

As of June 2006, Hispanics made up 7.5 percent of 1.7 million federal workers, up just slightly from 7.4 percent at the same time the previous year, a report from the Office of Personnel Management stated. The percentage has increased steadily since 1996, when Hispanics made up 6 percent of the federal workforce.

But while their representation has grown by 1.5 percentage points over the past decade, even the latest figure remains far short of the roughly 12.6 percent of Hispanics in the general civilian labor force.

And the percentage of new federal hires who were Hispanic dropped, from 8.2 percent as of the June 2005 statistics to 7.7 percent in the latest figures. The statistics indicate that Hispanics were "hired into the lowest-paying jobs," said Gilbert Sandate, chairman of the Coalition for Fairness for Hispanics in Government.

Just 4.2 percent of new senior executive level hires were Hispanic, compared to 7.1 percent of hires for blue-collar jobs, 8.6 percent of hires at the GS-1 to GS-4 levels and 10.2 percent of new GS-5 to GS-8 employees.

Hispanics' overall representation by pay level also decreased at the higher grades.

The low overall representation and hiring rates for senior jobs is a very serious problem, said Jorge Ponce, co-chairman of the Council of Federal EEO and Civil Rights Executives.

"It is at the senior pay [level] ... where decisions are made and budgets are approved," Ponce said. "So if you really want to have a positive impact ... I think the senior pay rank is where the first steps should be taken. Then you'll have a trickle-down effect."

OPM's report should serve as a "call to action by the Bush administration and the Congress to fix, once and for all, the broken federal personnel hiring system," Sandate said. "At their current rate of hire, Hispanics will never reach parity with their numbers in the national civilian labor force."

But figures varied widely across government, with some agencies far exceeding the national statistics. The Homeland Security Department employed the highest percentage of Hispanics, at 18.6 percent in June 2006, and brought them in as new hires at the second-highest rate. The Social Security Administration had the highest percentage of new hires that were Hispanic, at 15.7 percent, and employed the third-highest percentage of them overall, at 12.7 percent.

The Justice and Treasury departments placed among the top five in both areas. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was second for percentage of Hispanics employed, and NASA was third for hiring.

OPM's report noted that agencies with good track records on employing and recruiting Hispanics use tactics such as community outreach. DHS, for instance, shared information about employment opportunities with regional Hispanic newspapers and Spanish language media outlets such as Telemundo and Univision.

Officials at some agencies within DHS also circulated job vacancy announcements to Hispanic organizations on a regular basis, and the department established policies to rate senior executives and managers in part based on their commitment to build a diverse workforce.

In a letter to President Bush accompanying the report, OPM Director Linda Springer reiterated a commitment to building "a federal workforce that draws from America's diverse population" and to developing "innovative means of reaching out to diverse communities, including the Hispanic community."

Sandate suggested that the government could do more to recruit Hispanics through flexible hiring such as the Student Career Experience Program, which allows agencies to noncompetitively hire interns to permanent jobs after they complete school and meet a requirement for hours of federal work experience, and the Bilingual/Bicultural program, which allows the hiring of applicants with Spanish language skills or Hispanic culture knowledge.

According to the latest OPM statistics, 7.6 percent of hires through the SCEP were Hispanic. A total of 16 Hispanics were hired through the Bilingual/Bicultural program from July 2005 to June 2006.

The report did not include figures on hiring of Hispanics through the Outstanding Scholar Program, another avenue through which Hispanics could be recruited, Ponce said.