

COLUSA COUNTY CONSERVATION

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WELCOME

by Mary Fahey, Watershed Coordinator, CCRCD

The holidays are upon us! For a lot of people, this means rushing to the malls for bargains, bargains, bargains. For me, it means meandering out to the back of my property to see the Toyon bursting with beautiful red berries! It's also that time to reflect on another year gone by. I started my job at the CCRCD just over one year ago, and it's been a year filled with learning and meeting many wonderful people. I consider that a very good year.

It's been a good year for the CCRCD too. We have had plenty of projects to keep us busy (see our website: <http://www.colusarcd.org/nodes/projects/projects.htm>), and have continued to strengthen our very important partnerships. Recently, new grant funding opportunities have become available and we are hopeful for future new projects to allow us, as well as our fellow RCD's, to build on the important natural resource work that we do in our communities. We are also working closely with our NRCS staff to get the word out about available Farm Bill assistance opportunities. (see page 3 for upcoming workshop announcement).

We at the CCRCD hope that you have had a good year too, and we wish you the happiest of holidays!

**Happy
 Holidays!**



Toyon (aka: the Christmas Berry) in a native shrub hedgerow, photo by Mary Fahey

MISSION

The mission of the CCRCD is to assist local landowners to protect, conserve and restore natural resources through information, education, and access to technical assistance programs. In doing so the CCRCD will always take measures to protect the individual landowner's rights and fully support "from the ground up" conservation planning that promotes local, social, and economic sustainability through wise land use.

(Adopted: March 21, 2002)

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE:
WWW.COLUSARCD.ORG

ABOUT THE COLUSA COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT (CCRCD)

THE CCRCD FOCUSES THEIR EFFORTS ON:

- Promoting resource management and conservation practices that will improve the health of Colusa County Watersheds
- Supporting measures that provide for the best use of the land while sustaining our natural resources and local economy
- Providing conservation education to insure Colusa County's natural resources will be valued and protected in the future

CCRCD'S NATURAL RESOURCE PRIORITIES:

- Identify natural resources issues and concerns within all Colusa County Watersheds
- Reduce erosion and sedimentation
- Work with all agencies of authority to reduce and control flooding
- Improve water quality and development
- Promote conservation practices for municipal, industrial and residential use
- Encourage the use of native vegetation and removal of non-native invasive species
- Improve Rangeland and Forest Resources
- Improve and Conserve wildlife and fishery habitat
- Reduce roadside pollution
- Protect agricultural viability
- Promote conservation education
- Promote director and staff development



photo: Mary Fahey, CCRCD

MEETING AND WORKSHOPS

NRCS TO HOST TWO LANDOWNER WORKSHOPS IN JANUARY

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Colusa County Resource Conservation District are teaming up to provide two local workshops. The first will present an overview of the USDA Farm Bill assistance programs available in our area and a second workshop will assist interested participants begin the application process. It is our goal to enable local producers to take full advantage of these programs to address resource issues on their land and ensure that Colusa County producers can successfully compete for government program funding directed at improving our local natural resources.



The first workshop, titled *“Navigating NRCS Programs and Processes,”* is scheduled for **January 20, 2011 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Colusa Industrial Park conference room, 100 Sunrise Blvd., Colusa, CA 95932.** The date for the second workshop has not yet been announced.

NRCS technical experts will be available at these meetings to answer questions and assist local landowners with their plans. These workshops are free and will provide valuable information to landowners.



COLUSA COUNTY GENERAL PLAN UPDATE MEETINGS

Colusa County is in the process of updating its General Plan. The first four of nine Steering Committee meetings have taken place. The next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for December 15 from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Colusa Industrial Park conference room and will focus on Conservation and Noise. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend all Steering Committee meetings. For more information, visit the General Plan Update website at: www.countyofcolusageneralplan.org



COLUSA COUNTY RCD BOARD MEETINGS

CCRCD Board meetings are held the first Wednesday of every month at the Colusa Industrial Park conference room. Meetings start at 5:00 p.m. For more information, visit our website: www.colusarcd.org

all photos this page: Mary Fahey, CCRCD

Invasive Weeds



Getting to the Root of the Problem

INVASIVE WEED CAMPAIGN

Management of invasive plant species is a big part of the CCRCD's work in the Colusa Basin Watershed, and a goal in our Long Range Plan. We have begun an Invasive Weed Awareness Campaign, featuring the logo you see at the top of this page. The campaign will include articles appearing in the CCRCD newsletter, on the CCRCD website, and in local newspapers. We will also be investigating the possibility of taking the campaign to the airwaves via public service announcements on local radio stations. Our goal is to spread the word about the extreme impact that invasive plant species have in the Colusa Basin Watershed.

Another exciting project we are working on at the Colusa County RCD is setting up GIS mapping of invasive weeds in the Colusa Basin Watershed. The watershed map has been created and the next step is to populate the map with information on location and spread of invasive weeds. We are beginning with mapping of five species: Arundo, Tamarisk, Tree of Heaven, Purple Starthistle and Perennial Pepperweed. This map will be a "living document" in which information will be added as it is gathered.

We are obtaining information from existing sources to create this initial map. If you are aware of any weed mapping that has been completed in the Colusa Basin Watershed, please contact our watershed coordinator at 530.458.2931 X 117

For more information on invasive weeds and their impact on our natural resources, visit the "projects" page of the Colusa County Resource Conservation District website: www.colusarcd.org or the California Invasive Plant Council website: www.cal-ipc.org

COMMON INVASIVE PLANTS IN THE COLUSA BASIN WATERSHED

In the last issue, we featured Giant Reed and Saltcedar. We now introduce you to two more noxious invaders:



YELLOW STARTHISTLE (*Centaurea solstitialis*)

Impacts:

- Invades rangelands, grainfields, orchards, vineyards, cultivated crops, pastures, roadsides, and barren land
- A single plant can produce as many as 150,000 seeds
- Poisonous to horses
- Adapted to a wide variety of environments
- Ability to out-compete desirable, native plant species for nutrients and moisture
- Plant diversity and native wildlife habitats are reduced
- Dense stands of can drastically reduce forage production and grazing capacity in rangelands
- Cropland yields are also reduced



TREE OF HEAVEN (*Ailanthus altissima*)

Impacts:

- Fast-growing and a prolific seeder that can take over quickly
- Replaces native plants and forms dense thickets
- Produces chemicals that prevent the establishment of other plant species
- Its root system may be extensive and has been known to cause damage to sewers and foundations

A HISTORY OF GRAZING IN COLUSA COUNTY

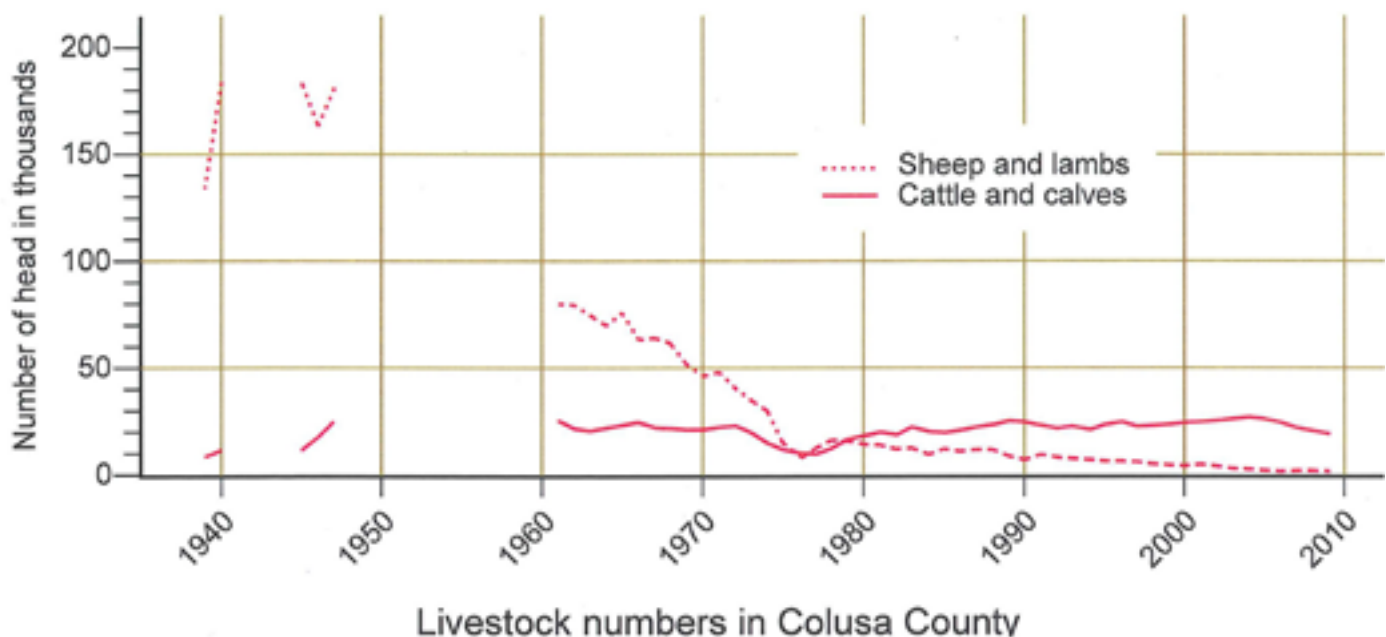
by Jack Alderson, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Colusa Field Office

It is common to find sheep fencing in Colusa's rangelands, but sheep are not so common. I looked through the Agricultural Commissioner's Crop Reports for Colusa County to see how sheep and cattle numbers had changed over time. Unfortunately, the Crop Reports changed over time too. The earliest that I found, 1928 and 1930, did not include livestock. No reports were issued for 1931 thru 1938 and 1941 thru 1944. Total livestock numbers were reported for 1939 and 1940 and for 1945 and 1946. From 1947 through 1960, the reports included only market livestock, not total numbers. Total livestock numbers have been reported regularly since 1961. This graph shows the numbers of cattle and calves and sheep and lambs as reported in the Crop Reports. There has been a dramatic decline in the numbers of sheep over time, particularly during the thirty-year period from 1946 to 1976. In 1946 there were about 181,000 head of sheep and lambs. By 1976, the number had declined to 9,900. In 2008 only 2,200 were reported.

Cattle numbers have been relatively constant. Since 1946 the numbers of cattle and calves have fluctuated between 20,000 and 25,000 head except during the drought of the mid 1970s when the numbers fell as low as 10,000.

Is grazing less intense than it was sixty years ago? Sheep are smaller animals than cattle, and require less forage per animal. Range managers measure the difference in animal units. A cow and calf pair is 1.0 animal unit and a ewe with lambs is 0.2 animal unit. Cattle and sheep herds have different age structures, so it is not as simple as just dividing the number of sheep by five to compare their needs to cattle, but that is a crude approximation. By this approximation, today's livestock forage requirements, cattle and sheep combined, are something less than one-half what they were in 1946.

The 1946 Crop Report was quite detailed in listing the forage types available including 51,250 acres of Valley pasture; 241,560 acres of Foothill and mountain pasture; 39,870 acres of Mendocino Forest pasture, 10,500 acres of Irrigated pasture mixtures; 7,000 acres of Alfalfa pasture; 1,000 acres of Sudan pasture; and 138,280 acres of Stubble pasture. Today there is relatively little grazing on lands other than irrigated pasture and rangeland. The 2008 Crop Report reported 10,000 acres of Irrigated pasture and 190,000 acres of Other pasture. Although livestock numbers and forage requirements have declined significantly since 1946, so has the forage base.



WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTED INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN COLUSA COUNTY ORCHARDS

(From the Nov. 20, 2010 issue of the Williams Pioneer Review)

Arbuckle, CA (November 2, 2010) – The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) and the Colusa Almond Project presented a workshop in Arbuckle on November 2, 2010 educating almond growers and land managers on sanitation, Navel Orangeworm management, best management practices and conservation project opportunities. It was a beautiful fall morning and the workshop was held in an almond orchard with a backdrop of native shrubs and grasses that were planted to reduce creek bank erosion, improve water quality coming off the farm and bring wildlife back to the area, all part of the Colusa Almond Project. The Project is a collaborative effort between CAFF, Audubon California's Landowner Stewardship Program, the Colusa County Resource Conservation District (RCD) and the Colusa County Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), working with Arbuckle almond growers to install best management practices in their orchard systems.



Workshop attendees examining moth trap

Dr. Elizabeth Boyd (PCA and professor of Plant Sciences at CSU Chico) and Dr. Justin Nay (PCA and president of Integral Ag. Inc.) spoke about orchard sanitation and new trapping methods they are utilizing to monitor and control Navel Orangeworm (NOW). The two emphasized that mummies in nut crops are the major contributor to NOW populations and that good orchard sanitation practices are critical to keeping the pest populations down. However, the existence of mummies does not necessarily mean that NOW is present. By placing moth traps in the orchard, growers can know for certain if NOW is present. Dr. Boyd and Dr. Nay have been getting encouraging results in their research using an innovative mass trapping system that traps the actual moth. This method is showing great potential as being superior to egg traps by giving the grower a very accurate idea of the NOW populations in their orchards. With egg traps, you do not know how many moths are present, however, by trapping the female moths, you get an accurate count while also killing the egg-laying moth.



Dr. 's Nay and Boyd discuss NOW

After learning about orchard pest management, workshop attendees listened to Miles DaPrato from Audubon California's Landowner Stewardship program discuss habitat restoration opportunities that can be integrated into a farming system. DaPrato was joined by Mary Fahey from the Colusa County RCD who spoke about her experiences installing natural resource conservation practices on her own land. Fahey also supplied attendees with information on the financial and technical assistance programs available to help landowners with these types of projects.

The workshop was well received and many attendees stayed on the farm afterwards to take a closer look at the project site and to chat with the speakers.

SPREADING CONSERVATION AWARENESS

by Mary Fahey, CCRCD Watershed Coordinator

Perhaps the most satisfying part of my job is having the opportunity to share natural resource conservation awareness with other landowners, just as RCD and NRCS employees shared their knowledge with me ten years ago. I had some creek bank erosion issues on my land back then, as well as a desire to incorporate native habitat into the landscape. Working with RCD and NRCS staff, we installed native grasses along the creek banks, native shrub plantings in the upland areas and a native shrub hedgerow along the north and west sides of the property. The result: the creek banks are stable, water quality running off the farm is improved, the shrub plantings are alive with insect and bird activity, fox and coyote are seen regularly, and this year quail have returned to the area after a very long absence. My goals were met beyond expectation. Aside from the important natural resource benefits, these naturalized areas add a great deal of beauty to my land.

I am fortunate in my job with the Colusa County RCD to have the opportunity to share this story with other landowners through workshops and site tours. I have found that getting people out to a site to see these projects in action is the most effective way to encourage other landowners to become involved in conservation. So, if you or someone you know is interested in seeing conservation in action, give me a call or send an email, and I would be happy to set up a tour: email: mary.fahey@ca.usda.gov or 530.458.2931 X117

A FEW OF CCRCD'S PROJECTS

COLUSA BASIN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives for the Colusa Basin Management Plan have been identified. The next step is to work with our Technical Advisory Committee on identifying voluntary actions to achieve the plan's goals.

BEAR CREEK WATERSHED

A cooperative effort to enhance the ecological, agricultural and recreational conditions in the Bear Creek Watershed in Colusa, California.

COLUSA ALMOND PROJECT

The Colusa County Resource Conservation District in conjunction with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), and Audubon California's Landowners Stewardship Program is currently working with local almond growers on a demonstration project to reduce sediment and pesticides in runoff from their orchards.

COLUSA BASIN WATERSHED STREAMBANK ANALYSIS

Completed in February, 2010, The Streambank Analysis contains mapping and reporting on erosion potential, riparian habitat and invasive weeds on 32 important foothill streams in the Colusa Basin Watershed. Each of these streams drains into the Colusa Basin Drain, affecting water quality in the Sacramento River and the Bay Delta region.

COLUSA BASIN WATERSHED ASSESSMENT

Completed in December, 2008, The Colusa Basin Watershed Assessment can be characterized as a "current conditions report" for the watershed, and was the first step to developing a Management Plan for the Colusa Basin Watershed.

For more information on our projects, please visit our website at www.colusarcd.org