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NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter for Retired Conservation Service Employees

Vol. 53, No. 2 March/April 2026

The **ARCSE Newsletter** is published bi-monthly by the Association of Retired Conservation Service Employees (ARCSE)

Website: www.arcse.org

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Becky Fletcher, ARCSE President

March brings with it the promise of spring – depending on where you live, that is. I heard the forecast today of 4 feet of snow in Wyoming, a massive “bomb cyclone” blizzard hit the Northeast on Monday, and it’s been a bit chilly here in Indiana. Still, it’s a good time to think about what’s ahead, like garden and flower bed planning, cleaning out the garage, St. Patrick’s Day, Daylight Savings Time, Women’s History Month, Easter, March Madness, and more. ARCSE continues to be busy even during winter-like weather with our many projects.

Again this year, ARCSE is sponsoring a summer intern, in partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation Society. This endeavor gives at least one college student the opportunity to have real job experience, learning to work with two nonprofits while working to plan the student forum and activities at the annual conference and assisting ARCSE with online communication efforts. We are also beginning to plan our annual meeting, which will occur the week of July 26–28 in St. Louis, MO. We are planning for a big turnout since we will be centrally located.

Other projects include our exciting discussions with the National Association of Conservation Districts, NRCS, and other members of the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) about providing trainers and mentors who can help employees attain their conservation planning certification. We are also taking another look at our operating policies and procedures this year to ensure that we are doing our best to keep up with the times. And finally, don’t forget we are nearing the end of our Membership Drive – ask someone to join today!

While watching the days turn from cold winds and gray skies to milder temps and white fluffy clouds and back again, I am reminded that we continue to deal with a world of change. Change can be scary and I’m not always a big fan. It creates both opportunities and challenges in society, our culture, the workplace – even at home. It can change us.

Spring is a time of change and renewal. As we break free from the stagnation and cold of winter, let’s try to put our energy into positive ways to grow and to understand why and how change is affecting others around us. Think about this question: how can our organization change to meet the needs of our members? We would love to hear from you!

The promise of spring means the air will be warmer, the days longer and brighter, and the days filled with promise. Enjoy your spring!

ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED CONSERVATION SERVICE EMPLOYEES

NOTES FROM THE POTOMAC

–Craig Derickson
Feb. 25, 2026

Government Shutdown Merry-Go-Round

The longest Government shutdown of all time began on October 1, 2025, and lasted for 43 days through November 12, 2025. Democrats were demanding an extension of enhanced Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium tax credits as a critical health care fix to prevent large premium hikes. Negotiations between the parties to end the shutdown resulted in passage of a Continuing Resolution (CR-1) to keep Government funded through January 30, 2026 and to allow time for resolution of the health care debate. According to National Public Radio (NPR), “As of early February 2026, the health care debate is dominated by a major partisan standoff over the expiration of enhanced ACA subsidies, which have now ended, causing significant premium increases for millions. Despite a House vote in January 2026 to restore them, the Senate has blocked the measure, leaving the issue in legislative limbo.” See: <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/08/nx-s1-5662625/house-vote-affordable-care-act-subsidies>.

With no resolution to the health care crisis and strong objection to intensified Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations in Minneapolis, budget negotiations between the parties stalled again and resulted in another short-term Government shutdown for four days from January 30, 2026, through February 4, 2026. The ICE project in MN, the "Operation Metro Surge," was driven by a political standoff regarding accountability reforms for ICE and Customs Border Patrol (CBP) officers following the fatal shootings of two American citizens by federal agents. Another short-term CR (CR-2) was put in place to allow two weeks for Republicans and Democrats to come to agreement on less aggressive tactics by ICE and CBP officers, including the use of body cameras and the removal of masks on enforcement personnel. See more at: <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/16/nx-s1-5677712/ice-surge-sparks-fear-and-resistance-in-minneapolis>.

The only silver lining for USDA, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in all these budget shutdowns, is that the resolution agreement to end the 43-day shutdown in November 2025 (CR-1), provided full fiscal year 2026 funding for USDA. According to the Beginning Farmer Network at Iowa State University, "this negotiation provides full year funding for USDA, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) protecting them from further shutdowns until September 30, 2026. This legislation ensured continued operations for agricultural programs, loans, and, for a time, farm services." See: <https://beginningfarmer.iastate.edu/post/government-reopened-usda-funded-farm-bill-extended>.

During all this budget chaos, Congress was able to pass, and President Trump signed a major "minibus" five-bill appropriations package (H.R. 7148, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026) to fund 96% of the federal government, and an end to the early February shutdown. This package, passed around February 3, 2026, included funding for Defense, Labor–Health and Human Services–Education, and Transportation–Housing Urban Development. However, it did not include funding for Department of Homeland Security (DHS) due to objections over the immigration enforcement tactics used by ICE and CBP officers. See more at: <https://appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/house-repasses-five-full-year-funding-bills-restores-government-stability>.

At the end of the first week of February, The Hill news network reported: "Senators in both parties say they expect funding for the DHS to lapse at the end of CR-2 on February 13, as negotiations over Democratic demands for restrictions on ICE and CBP had fizzled with Republicans. A DHS shutdown would shutter not only ICE and CBP, but also the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), among other federal agencies housed in the massive department." The shutdown affects an estimated 250,000 employees of the affected agencies. As of February 16, 2026, DHS is now shutdown, and House members left Washington on February 12 for a 10 day recess. It is unclear when the parties will resume negotiations to resolve the DHS shutdown. See more at: <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/5725706-ice-cbp-reforms-stalemate/>.

Congress Fails to Adopt Year-Round E15 Ethanol Sales

On January 22, 2026, the Renewable Fuels Association (RFA) reported that after weeks of negotiations, the House funding bill expected to advance legislation to allow nationwide, year-round access to E15, a lower-cost gasoline blend containing 15 percent ethanol. Instead of the year-round E15 provision, the RFA article suggested that Congress may be considering a new "Rural Domestic Energy Council" that would develop potential legislative proposals on E15 and other renewable fuels for possible future adoption.

Renewable Fuels Association President and CEO **Geoff Cooper** offered the following comments in response to these developments: "We are extremely disappointed that Congress appears to have failed again in adopting a simple technical fix that would have made lower-cost, American-made E15 available to consumers nationwide all year long. Allowing year-round E15 would have provided a lifeline to farmers who are facing the worst economic crisis in almost 50 years, while also helping American families struggling with higher energy bills."

Mr. Cooper went on to say that "Kicking the can down the road and creating a new council to study future legislative options just exacerbates the uncertainty and apprehension already being felt across rural America. Starting from scratch makes absolutely no sense. Farmers need real solutions right now, not more foot-dragging and more debate. The agriculture sector is facing a historic economic crisis, and the only way out is to immediately open new markets for American crops." See more on renewable energy at: <https://ethanolrfa.org/media-and-news/category/news-releases/article/2026/01/rfa-extremely-disappointed-by-congress-failure-to-adopt-year-round-e15>.

Subsidy Payments and Big Yields Indicate More Corn in 2026

After a year of very low farm commodity prices, many US farmers may have wondered if they should pass on corn for 2026. In a report of the Farm Journal Ag Web news network, **Scott Irwin** is predicting they won't. The report suggested by the University of Illinois agricultural economist thinks producers will fully embrace growing corn once again, supporting the old adage that "corn is king."

Mr. Irwin said: "I think my overall bottom line is we're probably going to end up with more corn acres than we were thinking a few months ago." He thinks that will likely be the case even though the 2026 soybean-to-corn price ratio slightly favors soybeans, and enterprise crop budgets indicate that soybeans will be more profitable than corn. Irwin suggested two reasons why corn acres will likely rule again this season. "For one, farmers 'just prefer' growing corn over soybeans. Second, and a greater factor, are recent bridge program payments, which are likely to shape farmers' behavior."

Irwin also suggested that "recent bridge (subsidy) program payments from USDA basically have backfilled a lot of corn losses, and there's expectation that a third round may be in the plans." That perspective is shared by **Ben Brown**, an economist with FAPRI (Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute). "Some of the per-acre planted rates that we've seen with the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) and now the farmer bridge assistance payments, those are tied to planted acres, and corn's had the higher payment rate relative to soybeans and some of the other competing crops as well," Brown reports. He offered: "I also look at some of the changes on the crop insurance side, the increased subsidy rates up to 80% for the supplemental

coverage option, the enhanced coverage option.” See more at: <https://www.agweb.com/news/crops/crop-production/bridge-payments-and-big-yields-will-tilt-2026-corn>.

The ECAP provides up to \$10 billion in one-time, direct payments for 2024 crop year losses, aiming to help farmers with increased input costs and low prices. Administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), it supports producers of eligible commodities (e.g., corn, soybeans, wheat) based on planted and prevented planted acreage. The deadline for program enrollment ended August 15, 2025. See USDA website for more information at:

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/resources/programs/emergency-commodity-assistance-program>.

Work on New Farm Bill Confirms Economic Challenges

On February 2, 2026, **John Newton**, Vice President of Public Policy and Economic Analysis with the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBB), wrote a paper titled: “Updated Farm Bill Math Confirms Challenging Farm Economy.” The article by John Newton, PhD, provided an excellent overview of many complex issues to be addressed in a new farm bill. The report began by citing three key take-aways of the current situation, including:

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) made significant modifications to USDA mandatory farm programs and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Following these changes, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) now projects 10-year spending for farm and nutrition programs at \$1.4 trillion.

Despite persistent low crop prices, high input costs and tight margins, current farm bill safety net programs delivered only about \$2 billion for the 2024 crop year, according to CBO. With support from the OBBBA-enhanced programs not arriving until fiscal year 2027, many farms continue to face financial strain — making additional bridge assistance critical for weathering the upcoming growing season.

While OBBBA made a historic investment in farm bill risk management tools, several farm bill programs were left out, and Congress must still pass a bipartisan farm bill reauthorization to address those remaining gaps.

Mr. Cooper’s paper reported: “Following several years of high input costs, declining crop prices, and stagnant congressional investments in critical farm programs—including risk management tools, trade promotion programs, marketing assistance loans and disaster programs— Congress advanced a historic investment in farm bill programs as part of the OBBBA. However, not every program in the farm bill was addressed in the OBBBA; e.g., the Conservation Reserve Program, and efforts continue to pass a bipartisan farm bill reauthorization for those programs. To facilitate this effort, CBO recently provided an early release of their baseline projections for USDA’s mandatory farm programs and the SNAP. CBO’s full 2026 budget and economic outlook is expected to be released in early February.

The Cooper paper goes on to report: “Congressional Budget Office’s February 2026 baseline for mandatory farm programs highlights the significant investments made in critical farm risk management tools and is projecting total outlays for those programs at \$392 billion from fiscal years 2027 to 2036. Of the \$392 billion, additional investments of more than \$60 billion in important risk management tools, such as Price Loss Coverage and Agriculture Risk Coverage, and more than \$23 billion for federal crop insurance are now projected by CBO.”

The report by Mr. Newton can be found on the American Farm Bureau Market Intel website at: <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/updated-farm-bill-math-confirms-challenging-farm-economy>.

Proposed New Farm Bill Legislation for Soil Health Act of 2025

The Innovative Practices for Soil Health Act of 2025 (H.R. 5902), introduced in November 2025 by Reps. **Beyer**, **Lawler**, and **Pingree**, aims to modernize the farm safety net by incentivizing soil-enhancing practices through USDA programs. The bipartisan bill focuses on promoting regenerative agriculture, increasing technical assistance, and supporting agroforestry to improve long-term farm viability and sustainability. This bill was reported to be part of negotiations planned for February 13, 2026, but it is unclear what became of those plans, with all the focus on immigration and budget. Key Components of the Act:

- **USDA Program Improvements:** The bill directs the USDA to enhance programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to better support innovative, sustainable soil practices.
- **Focus on Soil Health:** The legislation promotes practices such as reduced tillage, cover cropping, and increased biodiversity to enhance soil structure and water retention.
- **Perennial Systems and Agroforestry:** It provides increased technical assistance for farmers adopting perennial systems and invests in agroforestry research and development.
- **Economic & Environmental Benefits:** The initiative seeks to help farmers reduce input costs, improve profits, and increase resilience against climate-related disasters, acting as a modern safety net.

This legislation reflects growing federal efforts to integrate conservation with agricultural financial security, aiming to improve soil health on a broader scale. According to a new release on Congressman **Don Beyer’s** (R-VA) website: “Successfully designing, installing, and maintaining perennial systems and agroforestry on farms, however, is a long and complex process that comes with real costs. The Innovative Practices for Soil Health Act would support these farmers by improving USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), increasing technical assistance for farmers installing perennial systems, and designating four national and regional agroforestry centers.” See more on the Soil Health Act of 2025 at Congressmen Beyer’s website.

New Report on PFAS Contamination on Agricultural Lands

A new report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine was released on February 12th, 2026, and provides an initial framework to help NRCS and other land conservation agencies at USDA address PFAS contamination on

agricultural working lands. The report examines the scope of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) challenges in agriculture and identifies potential actions agencies could take to address their impacts on natural resources and agricultural productivity.

The report provides the following description of PFAS substances: “Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS, are widespread, persistent chemicals that can move through soils, water, crops, livestock, and food systems and can negatively affect human health. In agricultural settings, PFAS can enter lands through pathways such as organic soil amendments, irrigation water, atmospheric deposition, or off-site industrial sources. As the primary federal agency responsible for helping conserve and improve the condition of natural resources on privately owned working lands, the Natural Resources Conservation Service seeks to help producers minimize and mitigate the harmful effects of PFAS on these lands through its conservation practices, processes, and programs.”

“Through local, state, regional, and national partnerships, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for tens of millions of acres of privately owned farm, ranch, and forested lands on an annual basis,” said **Jim Ippolito**, Rattan Lal Endowed Professor of Soil Health and Soil Fertility at the Ohio State University and chair of the committee that wrote the report. “We hope this report offers a path forward for USDA and others who may face PFAS challenges.”

The report focuses on NRCS’s conservation planning process and identifies opportunities regarding research, available data, and conservation practices and programs to address the effects of PFAS on agricultural land. **Tom Christensen**, retired Chief Operating Officer at USDA and long-time NRCS employee, was one of the committee members who wrote the report and provided much input on the NRCS conservation planning process.

Some of the report’s conclusions include:

- There are opportunities within existing USDA conservation programs, e.g. EQIP and CSP, to help address on-farm PFAS contamination and mitigation, such as prioritizing funding for PFAS-related pilot initiatives.
- Existing conservation practices can be used to mitigate PFAS, or new conservation practice standards could potentially be developed specifically for this purpose.
- More information is necessary, and a coordinated, nationwide network of experts focused on applied research could assist in improving existing resources and help close research gaps in the field.

The study, undertaken by the Committee on Assistance to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Building a Framework for Addressing PFAS on Agricultural Land, was sponsored by USDA and NRCS. **Craig Derickson**, retired NRCS State Conservationist in Nebraska was one of the reviewers of the report. For more on the report see:

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/guidance-for-federal-conservation-programs-on-pfas-on-agricultural-lands-offered-in-new-report>.

Melvin Womack sent in this notice:

Rollins, Vaden, and Forst Announce Disposal of Dilapidated USDA Facilities

“The return of both the South Building and Braddock Place to GSA is long overdue”

(Washington, D.C., February 25, 2026) – Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture **Brooke L. Rollins** and Deputy Secretary **Stephen A. Vaden**, joined by General Services Administrator **Edward C. Forst**, announced the imminent disposal of the South Building and Braddock Place, returning resources to the American taxpayer, effectuating the vision of **President Donald J. Trump**, and reducing the real estate footprint of the U.S. Government in the National Capital Region.

“This is a long overdue move to protect American taxpayer dollars from being wasted on expensive real estate inside the Washington, D.C. area when our government should be closer to the farmers and ranchers we serve,” said Secretary **Brooke Rollins**. “More than 85 percent of the South Building is unoccupied and there is a \$1.6 billion backlog in deferred maintenance. It is simply unacceptable to put these costs on the taxpayer. We are being strong stewards of taxpayer dollars while also ensuring top notch customer service and fulfilling our promises to American farmers.”

“President Trump made clear his second term would include relocating the sprawling federal bureaucracy to locations outside the National Capital Region,” said Deputy Secretary **Stephen Vaden**. “The prior administration not only burdened the taxpayer through questionable policymaking but also by maintaining a massive, underutilized real estate footprint that USDA’s budget could not sustain. Today’s announcement cements the beginning of USDA’s larger reorganization, ensuring this Department delivers on its mission to the American people within the bounds of its financial resources.”

“GSA remains committed to executing President Trump’s vision of reducing the bloated federal real estate portfolio and turning fiscal drain and empty space into economic opportunity,” said GSA Administrator **Edward Forst**. “I commend Secretary Rollins and USDA leadership for the proactive approach to meeting the needs of their workforce and saving taxpayer money.”

Today’s event marks the start of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Reorganization Plan. Each phase will be thoughtful, and completed according to law, and with mindfulness to USDA employees, Congress, and accountability to the American taxpayer.

DEADLINE FOR THE MAY-JUNE 2026 NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS IS APRIL 25TH, 2026.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Paul Benedict, Membership Chair

New Life Members

Ruth Montgomery – Bedford, Indiana
R. Phou Vongkhamdy – Coventry, Rhode Island

New Members

Lorrie Bundy – Callahan, California
Gary R. Struben – Muncie, Indiana
Laurence “Larry” E. Brown – Lincoln, Nebraska
Robert Engel – Lincoln, Nebraska

New Affiliate Member

Jessica Rock – Nashua, New Hampshire

**FINAL REMINDER: 2026 ARCSE MEMBERSHIP DUES and
HARD COPY NEWSLETTER FEES were due Jan. 1st, 2026.**

Members who do not renew by **April 15, 2026** will no longer be considered active members, and their contact information will not be included in the 2026 ARCSE Directory.

For your convenience ARCSE annual dues and hard copy fees can be paid by credit card via **PayPal**:

<https://arcsecommunications.wordpress.com/renew/>.

Or you can pay by check. Make the check payable to **ARCSE** and mail to: **ARCSE, PO Box 131, Stillwater, OK 74076.**

The **annual membership dues** are **\$25/year**, and **hard copy fees** are **\$15/year**. If you are a **Life Member** or are an **Honorary Member** (Member with 5 or more years of paid membership who turned 91 in 2025 or earlier), you do not owe annual dues. Life and Honorary members receiving the printed newsletter in the mail must still pay \$15 for that service. If you have questions about your membership or newsletter status do not hesitate to contact me at soilwarden@verizon.net.

2026 Membership Contest is Still Underway:

Don't forget, the Membership Contest for 2026 is now underway. The person who recruits the most new members in each ARCSE Region will be awarded a Lifetime ARCSE membership, or a \$200 gift card if already a Life member. If you have any questions about the contest don't hesitate to email me.

2026 ARCSE Directory – Do you have changes from 2025?

If you have moved, changed your phone number, email address, or made any other changes to your contact information, please let me know before April 15th, 2026. We want the Directory to have the correct contact information for everyone. Every year I tell people to send their changes to me ahead of time and every year I get emails or calls from about 20 to 30 members telling me their contact information in the directory is incorrect, after the directory is published.

ARCSE MEMBERSHIP DUES Due by January 1st, 2026

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Member | \$25 per year |
| Affiliate | \$25 per year |
| Life (One-time payment) | |
| Age 64 or younger | \$325 |
| Age 65 thru 74 | \$275 |
| Age 75 or older | \$175 |

NOTE: Dues payment includes receipt of the bimonthly electronic newsletter only. All members (both life members and those who pay annual dues) who desire a hard copy of the newsletter must pay an additional fee of \$15.00 per year.

Please submit Dues to ARCSE at P.O. Box 8965 Moscow, ID 83843

ARIZONA

Wade Biddix, ARCSE Representative

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In early January, **Steve Black** and **Wade Biddix** and their wives, **Lecia** and **Joanne**, met for lunch at Barrio Queen in Surprise, Arizona. It was great catching up and reminiscing about their careers and old friends. Things were well with both families, even though Wade was recovering from a partial knee replacement.



From left to right – Wade and Joanne Biddix, Lecia and Steve Black.

In January and February, Wade and Joanne visited their two sons and their families in Boston and Richmond, VA. They got to spend some quality time with their three granddaughters. The cold weather, snow, and icy conditions made them appreciate the warmer winter weather in the Arizona desert.

CALIFORNIA

Bill Ward, ARCSE Representative

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Editor's Note: Bill Ward has been in the hospital recently for extensive treatments. He is home now. His contact information is listed under the Board on the first page of this newsletter.

COLORADO

Jack Carlson, ARCSE Representative

Email: pspicata@gmail.com

Fort Collins breakfast club retirees convened in January: **Chuck Hart, Stu Keil, Frank Geter, Owen Unangst, and Tim Carney**. No report yet on February attendees, but late this month we were sad to learn of the passing of Sherry Casper, who worked several years as a security specialist at the NRCS Information Technology Center. More details likely in the next newsletter.

Frank Geter, George Peacock, Eric Hesketh, and Jack Carlson continue to provide help with agro-ecosystem model and data development and support at Colorado State University, assisting conservation partner organizations. A current focus is on a universal crop management format, providing input to multiple models at once, providing quick results for field-scale assessments of water, nutrient, and carbon balances, and projected effects on long-term crop productivity. They'll also be helping with grazing site data integration in the HERDS project.

CONNECTICUT, RHODE ISLAND, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Carl DuPoldt, ARCSE Representative

Email: cdupoldt@gmail.com

In March and April 2026, Connecticut conservation and natural resources activities focus on spring preparation, including land stewardship conferences, volunteer training for wildlife, maple sugaring, and the start of hiking challenges. Key regulatory changes regarding site cleanup also take effect.

2026 Connecticut Land Conservation Conference (March 21): Held at Wesleyan University, this is the largest gathering of land conservation professionals in the state.

Sustainable CT Spring 2026 Virtual Equity Training: Interactive workshops on March 11 (Equity in Action), March 25 (Trust-Building), and April 8 (Measuring Progress).

Sustainable CT Spring 2026 Virtual Equity Training: Interactive workshops on March 11 (Equity in Action), March 25 (Trust-Building), and April 8 (Measuring Progress).

In March and April 2026, New Hampshire conservation activities focus on spring preparation, including the NOFA-NH Winter Conference (March 7), Rockingham County Local Working Group meeting (March 25), and Discover Wild New Hampshire Day (April 18) at Fish and Game HQ. Key events include UNH Extension sustainable workshops on hydric soils and drones in April, plus spring birding, hiking, and volunteer training.

March 7: NOFA-NH Winter Conference, focusing on sustainable agriculture and food networks.

March 11–May 2: "Party Animals" exhibit at the McLane Center, Concord (NH Audubon), featuring native plants.

March 16 – April 20: NOFA-NH Spring Book Study.

March 25: Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) Local Working Group Meeting.

April 7, 9 AM - 12 PM: Harris Center Homeschool Program: Wild at Home, Hancock.

April 7: Advanced Identification and Documenting Hydric Soils workshop, Portsmouth (UNH Extension).

April 18, 10 AM - 3 PM: Discover Wild New Hampshire Day at NH Fish and Game HQ, Concord.

April 24: Wetland Function and Value Assessment, Manchester (UNH Extension).

Late April: Annual NH Environmental Educators Spring Conference.

In March and April 2026, Rhode Island will host several key conservation, natural resource management, and environmental education activities, ranging from major summits to local field, forest, and coastal initiatives. Key events include the Land & Water Conservation Summit, vernal pool explorations, and Earth Month "plogging" events.

RI Natural History Survey Conference (March 7, 2026): Held at the Quonset O Club in North Kingstown, focusing on "Diversity and Trends in Rhode Island's Plant, Insect, and Vertebrate Communities".

RI Licensed Arborist Workshop (March 4, 2026): A full-day workshop at Rhode Island College for arborists and tree stewards, hosted by the RIDEM Division of Forest Environment.

Northern RI Local Working Group Meeting (March 18, 2026): Held at the William Hall Library in Cranston, this meeting focuses on natural systems-based approaches to conservation in Providence County.

In March and April 2026, Vermont's conservation and natural resource activities will focus on early spring ecological shifts, including vernal pool monitoring, bird migration, and preparing for spring planting and trout season. Key events include community wildlife programs, environmental leadership trainings, and public hearings for upcoming seasons.

Environmental Leadership Training (March 31): Session 1 of a three-part online workshop for community conservationists hosted by VT Fish & Wildlife.

"The Wild Bees of Vermont" (March 26): VCE bee biologist Spencer Hardy presents on native bee species as part of the St. Johnsbury OLLI Spring Program.

Muskrat Hunting/Trapping Season: Continues through April 19.

Environmental Leadership Training (April 7, 14): Sessions 2 and 3 of the online training series to foster community engagement in conservation.

Vernal Pool Walk (April 25): A guided walk at Otter Creek Gorge with Master Naturalist Andrew L'Roe to explore ephemeral springtime pools.

Finch & Owl April Break Forest Camp (April 20–24): A Lamoille County NRCD youth program focusing on fire building, birding, and bushcrafting.

Franklin County NRCD Tree & Trout Sale: Deadline to order trees, shrubs, and trout is April 13, with pickups in early May.

Turkey Youth & Novice Weekend (April 25-26): Youth and novice turkey hunting weekend.

Mentoring Podcast Mentoring Podcast –

<https://embeddedcomputing.com/technology/ai-machine-learning/ai-dev-tools-frameworks/teaching-investing-in-the-next-generation-of-engineers>

INDIANA

Jane Hardisty, ARCSE Representative

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Feet of snow instead of inches, subzero windchills, freezing fog, tornado touchdowns in February, extreme temperature fluctuations from 10 to 72 degrees — it must be Indiana! Who knows what March and April will bring, but one thing is for sure, we are ready for spring. Monthly get togethers are important to us – we never know who will be there or what we will talk about.



(L–R) Chris Torp, Jane Hardisty, Paula Mulligan, Tom Mulligan, Becky Fletcher, Mike Wiggington, Mike Cox, Amie Lester, Marla Sparks, William Elliott and Susan Meadows.



Bob Eddleman celebrated his 88th birthday in February



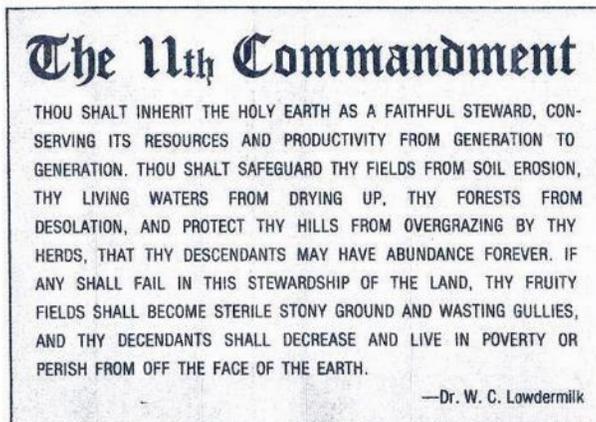
Bob Eddleman with his daughters: Susan Gregory, MaryBeth Brown, Donna Sweeney, and Julie Eddleman

IOWA

Mark Jensen, ARCSE Representative

Email: amjens1@gmail.com

Roger Link was the District Conservationist in Storm Lake in 1978. That year was the 31st anniversary of the Buena Vista Soil and Water Conservation District. Roger found a copy of the District's Annual Report, which was published in the Storm Lake Pilot Tribune Newspaper. The Annual Report highlighted "The 11th Commandment" that was written by **Dr. W.C. Loudermilk**. Dr. Loudermilk was a former Assistant Chief of the Soil Conservation Service. When Dr. Loudermilk was invited to broadcast a talk on soil conservation in Jerusalem in June of 1939, he gave for the first time the "11th Commandment" that is shown in the picture copied from the District's Annual Report. Many of you may have read or at least heard of the booklet entitled "Conquest of the Land Through 7,000 Years." This booklet was a report Dr. Loudermilk wrote as a result of a study he made in 1938 and 1939. I read this many years ago and just finished rereading it. It's an interesting read. If you don't have a copy, it can be downloaded from the internet by googling the title of the booklet.



Page from the Buena Vista SWCD 1978 Annual Report with the "11th Commandment"

Jim and Colleen Schneider live on a 20-acre farm near Dixon, California. Dixon is between San Francisco and Sacramento. Jim was a geologist, and Colleen worked on the information staff in Iowa early in their careers before they moved west. Jim said they grow about 15 acres of English walnuts. Their son works for a painting company and lives about 20 miles from them. Jim said they still have their farm near Elgin, Iowa, so he comes back to Iowa once or twice a year to "mess around" on it. It's all in CRP. He said he always "comes back in the nice months – April or September." That's probably good planning on his part!

Lyle Asell reported that his son **Andy** and **Josh Shipman**, Park Ranger at Walnut Woods State Park, recently went fishing in a Decatur County lake at the Little River Recreation Area. The lake was created by a dam constructed in the Little River Watershed as part of the PL-566 Watershed Program. Fishing was good. In a couple hours of fishing they caught about 45 crappie, as well as a nice largemouth bass and a nice walleye.



Walleye, Crappies, and Largemouth Bass from the Little River Watershed Lake

After **Roger Schnoor** retired from NRCS, he went to work for the Southern Iowa Rural Water Association (SIRWA). He worked for them for about three years. During that time he helped get Three Mile Lake tied into the SIRWA system. This lake was constructed by NRCS as a PL-566 Watershed Project in the Three Mile Creek Watershed. Roger still lives on his farm in Ringgold County. He has some CRP ground and leases the rest out to a couple of other farmers. Roger's daughter and his son each have farms adjacent to his. Several years ago prairie chickens were re-introduced into southern Iowa. A primary lake viewing area is located about a mile east of Roger's farm. There's more wildlife on his farm. Every year Roger and his son host a large group of deer hunters for a three-day hunt. Last fall the group filled 38 deer tags during the hunt. Roger said that after the group had gone back home, mostly to Minnesota, he went out and drove through the area where they hunted and counted 25 more nice deer. It should be good hunting again next year! Roger will celebrate his 92nd birthday this year.

Daryl Carpenter and his wife **Norene** have lived in the same house in Fort Dodge for 55 years. Daryl told me that they are the third owner of the family farm west of West Bend. He said his grandfather owned the farm for 57 years, his mother owned it for 52 years, and he has owned it for 25 years. There is a tourist destination attraction in West Bend called the Grotto of the Redemption. Daryl said their farm had a lot of large rocks on it. His grandfather had the largest of the rocks dynamited so they could be cleared from the cropland fields. The Priest that started and oversaw the construction of the Grotto of the Redemption came to their farm to ask if he could have the dynamited rocks to use in the foundation. He wanted the rocks because they had sharp edges from the blasting and thought that they would hold together better. Daryl's grandfather agreed, so rocks from their farm formed the foundation for the Grotto of the Redemption.

During the past several months, there have been a number of retirements: **Jonathan Tesdell**, SCT on the Audubon Resource Team; **Doug Adams**, CET at Fort Dodge; Lori Altheide, ASTC-FO in Atlantic; **John Bruene**, Resource Team Leader (RTL) in Vinton; Brian Holmes, RTL in Red Oak; **Tony Maxwell**, DC in Washington; **Jason Moore**, DC in the Garner FO; **Cindy Slagle**, Secretary in the Des Moines SO; **Sue Thomas Snyder**, RC in the Des Moines SO; **Lawrence Green**, RTL on the Garner Resource Team; **Mike Henderson**, SRC in the Des Moines SO; **Lorne Miller**, DC in Denison; **John Paulin**, RC in the Des Moines SO; and **Carolyn Schwartz**, CET in Audubon.

In December we were saddened by the passing of **David Tackett**. Dave was a long-time Soil Conservation Technician in southwest Iowa.

MAINE

Mary Thompson, ARCS Representative

Email: mpthom@roadrunner.com

It has been pretty quiet here in Maine with the cold weather and snow. However, one of our recent retirees, **Candi Gilpatric**, was in Florida visiting her Dad and decided to look up a former engineering supervisor, **Edward "Ed" Snow**. Candi and Ed designed many ponds and manure storages in Candi's early years. Those were the days before computers, so that the Engineering Field Manual and the Engineering Field Handbook Chapter 4 and others were bookmarked and dogeared. Ed was a Field Engineer in Penobscot County, and Candi became a Field Engineer in southern Maine where she retired. See photo.



Maine retirees' breakfast, February 2026.



Candi Gilpatric and Ed Snow

We have had good attendance at our breakfasts in January and February. Much of the talk has been about rooftop solar installations; **Norm Kalloch's** (retired Maine State Soil Scientist) recent book, Washed Out, and others that he has written; how everyone is faring this winter; and our ailments and our blessings as well. Below is a photo from our February breakfast at Dysart's in Hermon. We were there the week before the State High School Basketball championships, so there was no line or waiting to get our table. The High School championships have been "the go to" event for many years. In the 1970s to early 1990s they were broadcast on Maine Public television. They may have been watched more than the Olympics.

MIDATLANTIC STATES

Terry D'Addio, ARCSE Representative

Email: tmdaddio@aol.com



VA retirees meet for breakfast the first Tuesday of each month at the Bob Evans in Woodbridge, VA. Snow and ice didn't stop these from showing up. L-R: Jerry Bernard, David Thackeray, Bill Irwin, Paul Benedict, and Ron Marlow.

John Peterson reported that he is mending from his recent fall. "My PT told me that [next Tuesday] he would be recommending I go home on 23 FEB. I think all my therapists will agree. That was also my surgeon's recommendation. I am now back home from 2 months of dealing with a badly broken leg in hospitals and rehab centers. The leg will not be fully healed for another 5 months,

so I am learning to walk again. I will be using a walker and canes. Guess I am done with yard work. And I am one who enjoyed doing it. Whoever said 'growing old isn't for sissies' was right. But it beats the alternative."

Editor's Note: John has begun publishing his Pete's Washington Wire again.

MISSOURI

Dave Rastorfer, ARCSE Representative

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The Columbia area retirees met for their quarterly breakfast on Feb. 11th. Those in attendance were **Gail Sallee, Dennis Hoffman, Jean Herman, Marilyn Gann, Frank Gordon, David Gruber, Jerry Edwards and Dave Rastorfer.**

Dennis Shirk: We are well. No news from the Shirks.

Jim Rickman: Still traveling, hunting and fishing quite a bit.

Did some engineering work, building a house. To be honest it was a doll house for my great granddaughter. Luckily it was precut and required some assembly. I've got help and am still working on it.

Hoping to plant tomatoes this week, as we are having temperatures in the 80s.

Also hoping to catch a skunk tonight – have a live trap set. I've caught several in the trap, but never know what I might catch. Thus far possums, skunks, squirrels, and one fox. Using pecans for bait.

Hope everyone is doing great health wise. Who'd thought we'd live long enough to have great grandkids?

Ed Smith: I'm at home doing recovery and rehab after having my 3rd hip replacement on my left side. Trying to get back in shape to join my buddies on the golf course.

Bill Pauls: Everything at the Lake of the Ozarks (i.e. Camdenton, MO) is peachy! We're just back from Kauai, Hawaii where I was running my 3rd race in Hawaii. Still trying to run a marathon or 1/2 marathon in all 50 states three times. Have about 12 races left in the NE, NW, and Alaska. Hope to get that all completed before I turn 80 in 2029. Grandkid activities keep us "on the road" as well. Always look forward to climbing aboard my big green JD tractor Tram at the MO State Fair for 10 days. Had to thaw ice out around our dock in the lake this past month. "Bubbling" is always fun to watch. 70 degrees yesterday, in the low 20s tonight, so always entertained by the weather. Still doing a lot of volunteering at our church and cemetery operation, which I helped create (cemetery, not church) and run. Great retirement job for a retired soil scientist. Speaking of retirement, I started this phase of life waaay back in 2007. It's been a hoot so far—loved almost every minute. I always say I loved what I did with SCS/NRCS, but I love this more. God bless you all, hope you all are having a blessed Lent. First Knights of Columbus fish fry Friday tonight. Jesus is the ultimate answer.

Mike Blaine: We have had a busy winter on Blaine Hill. We made a trip to the Eastern Parts to see family, grands, and a new great grand over the holidays. We made a trip to the Arkansas border to see old friends in February. I cut and split three big, beautiful Ash trees from around our house last fall. The Emerald Borer got them. I probably have enough firewood now for at least two years. We keep a fire going all the time in winter. We love the wood heat in our family room, and it helps in the rest of the house. Here's a picture of my wood pile. I have hardly dented it this winter.



Al is amazing. This still photo was turned into me riding off on this deer!

Hope all are well! Have a great spring!

NEBRASKA

Norm Kempf, Jim Culver, ARCSE Representatives

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First Friday of the Month NRCS/SCS Retirees Breakfast Club

Participating for a good attendance during the January 2nd 2026 First Friday of the Month Retirees breakfast were **Dennis Schroeder, Ed Chmelka, Jim Harder, Mike Kucera, Steve Scheinost, Jim Culver, Norm Koester, Steve Chick, Steve Grube and Dave Griffith.**

Participating in the February 6th, 2026 First Friday of the Month Retirees breakfast were **Jim Harder, Harold Klaege, Craig Derickson, Steve Scheinost, Jim Culver, Dennis Schroeder, Dave Griffith, Ed Chmelka, Steve Chick, and Ken Noonan.**

Steve Chick has had excellent response and success in establishing a Nebraska NRCS Facebook Group page where we can share updates about what retired and current NRCS/NRD employees are up to. Steve has done several feature stories about past SCS/NRCS employees' excellent work across Nebraska working with landowners, Natural Resources Districts, and many other agencies. Lots of super photos of people doing good conservation resource activities.

Current/past NRCS employees with ties to Nebraska can join by searching for Nebraska NRCS on Facebook and requesting to join.

The longest continuous group of SCS/NRCS retirees coffee group in Lincoln, Nebraska has met every Monday afternoon at two o'clock since about 1971. The group has met at various locations over the years. Currently the group is meeting at the HY VV near 70th street and Pioneers.



Attending the January 12th Monday coffee were left to right – Ron Hoppes, Steve Scheinost, Lou Buller, Jim Culver, Bob Engels, Larry Brown, Gary Muckel, Craig Ditzler, and Norm Helzer.



There was a good attendance during our First Friday of the month breakfast. Left to right – Craig Derickson, David Griffith, Jim Culver, Steve Chick, Ken Noonan, Jim Harder, Harold Klaege, Steve Scheinost, Dennis Schroeder, and Ed Chmelka.



There was a good turnout for our January breakfast. Left side – Mike Kucera, Dennis Schroeder, David Griffith, Steve Chick. Right side – Norm Koester, Ed Chmelka, Steve Grube, Steve Scheinost, and Jim Harder.

Wednesday Lincoln NRCS Retirees Club

Chairperson **Doug Christensen** opened the January Retiree Meeting with the following in attendance: **Bob Engel, Harold Klaege, Gary Muckel, Norm Helzer, Dana Snyder, Dave Camper, Gerald Montgomery, Larry Brown, Steve Scheinost, Jim Culver, Thomas Reinsch, Gus Dornbusch, Craig Derickson, Arlis Plummer, JoAnne Thiele and Donna Dornbusch.**

The February meeting was called to order at 8am by Acting Vice Chairperson **Steve Schienost** who was filling for **Craig Derickson**. Attending were **Donna Dornbusch, Larry Brown, Steve Scheinost, Gus Dornbusch, Gary Muckel, Keith Sheets, Karen Overturf, Craig Derickson, Arlis Plummer, Ron Hoppes, and Harold Klaege**.



Doug Christenson, standing, our Chairperson – getting our January breakfast meeting off to a good start. Left to right – Norm Helzer, Gary Muckle, Harold Klaege, Bob Engel. Back row – standing, Donna Dornbusch and Gus Dornbusch.



A somewhat smaller but excellent group at our February retirees' breakfast. Left to right – Larry Brown, Gus Dornbusch, Donna Dornbusch, Ron Hoppes, Arlis Plummer, Gary Muckel, Karen Overturf, Keith Sheets, and Harold Kleagle. – Photo by Steve Scheinost.

Doug Christensen, our regular Chairperson, was traveling for a winter getaway with his wife.

Donna Dornbusch was presented with a floral bouquet for her service as secretary to the retirees group. She has diligently been secretary for nearly a decade taking notes, keeping the roster, writing up minutes for the national newsletter, and other important duties. **Thank you, Donna!**



Doug Christen, our Chairman, presenting Donna a beautiful bouquet of Roses in appreciation for all of her cheerful, excellent work over the years for our active club.

Donna has been our Lincoln NRCS Retirees Club outstanding Secretary for many, many years. Through her efforts plans have been approved to have all of the Historical documents of our Club stored by the Nebraska State Historical Society – A permanent record for future viewing by all.

Harold Klaege announced that the Nebraska chapter of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) attempted to find a state senator to introduce a bill that would exempt annuitants of the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) from having their annuities taxed in Nebraska. This exemption would provide significant tax relief for retired federal employees living in the state. However, NARFE members were unable to find any support for this initiative.

Harold also discussed using a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), a direct transfer of funds from an Individual Retirement Account (IRA) to a qualified charity, to support the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Foundation. QCDs can only be applied toward the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), which is the minimum amount that must be withdrawn annually from an IRA once the account holder reaches a certain age.

Only 3 members of our group are not members of ARCSE. They were given applications and encouraged to join.

Steve Schienost opened the meeting and asked for updates on birthdays, anniversaries, health issues or other information to share with the group.

Lou Buller recently had foot surgery and is recovering.

On a sadder note, **Steve Stover** suffered a fall on January 2 and broke his hip. He will be in rehab for an extended period.

Suzanne (Suzie) Harder, age 80, of Lincoln Nebraska passed away at home on January 21, 2026. She was the wife of **Jim Harder**, a retired NRCS employee. See the In Memoriam section for more information.

Arlis Plummer's son, Ian, is getting married February 1.

Gary Muckel reported that he recently traveled to Louisville Ky to attend a large military collectables fair. He enjoyed the event and other sites along the way.

Craig Derickson reminded us that **Harold Klaege** recently presented to the ARSCE organization on the benefits of being a member of NARFE. ARCSE members are asking about managing their TSP accounts after retirement, and NARFE is a good source of information and advice.

The group also discussed athletic events from the University of Nebraska, including the men's basketball team loss to Iowa the night before in close game. The Husker men's team is now 23-3 for the season and has been ranked #9 in the AP polls. Their ranking may drop after the loss to Iowa.

Meeting notes were compiled by Craig Derickson, with input from Donna D, and Steve S.

NEW JERSEY

Nancy Paolini, ARCSE Representative

Email: npaolini@comcast.net



Tom Drewes

Last year NJ started a series called "Where Are They Now?". This issue will feature **Tom Drewes**, who served SCS/NRCS for 36 years and retired as State Conservationist from NJ in 2010. He provided this update on his recent activities. Tom and his wife **Donna** still live in New Jersey and are enjoying their activities, travels, their children, and grandchildren.

"Did you ever wonder how much rain or snow has fallen in various parts of your town, or at a friend's place in another state? One great place to get locally sourced, citizen science collected data is on the CoCoRaHS website, <https://www.cocorahs.org>. CoCoRaHS is an acronym for the Community Collaborative Rain Hail and Snow Network. It's a unique community-based network of volunteers of all ages and backgrounds working together to measure precipitation (rain, hail and snow). I became a daily reporter to CoCoRaHS in May 2008. There are now hundreds of fellow volunteers in NJ and thousands across the country. The National Weather Service (NWS) and many other organizations utilize this locally based daily data.

It's a rather simple job to check my 12" NOAA rain gauge at the same time each day and report the information online. Since May 2008 I have provided nearly 6,000 reports, missing only a few days. During winter it gets more complicated with the need to measure snow depth and take a snow core to melt down to determine the snowpack water equivalent. This provides NWS with data to predict the flood potential if the snowpack melts during a rain event. I also volunteer with NWS as a spotter trained to observe and report severe weather to Skywarn website, <https://www.weather.gov/skywarn>. These timely, significant storm observations (i.e. thunderstorms, flooding, high winds, snowfall, hurricanes) help NWS to alert communities about severe weather.

A few years ago I became a member of our town and county Office of Emergency Management Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). CERT provides backup to first responders during emergency situations (severe storms, accidents, fires, search/rescue, etc.). We also manage public safety (directing traffic, etc.) during community events (parades, fairs, etc.). My meteorology knowledge and experience in post storm NRCS watershed activities has been a valuable contribution to my CERT team." –Tom Drewes

Attention NJ retirees. Look for an invitation to an online meeting Sunday, March 22, 2026 at 7pm to 8pm. Email npaolini@comcast.net for a link to the meeting using Google Meet.

OKLAHOMA

Randy Freeland, ARCSE Representative

Email: freelandrandy50@gmail.com

Randy sent in this historical picture with names.



DATE: 4/13/83 NO.
 SUBJECT :
 PHOTOGRAPHER :
 LOCATION : Stillwater, OK; SCS State Office
 SCD OR WATERSHED :
 PEOPLE :
 THIS PICTURE SHOWS: (Left to right, back row) Thomas Rockenbaugh, Asst. Chief, SW; Robert Halstead, Deputy Chief for Administration; Don Vandersypen, Asst. St. Conservationist (WR); Gene Bollinger, Asst. St. Engineer; Chuck Thomas, WR Plng. Staff Coord.; Roland Willis, St. Conservationist; Billy Wagner, St. Soil Scientist; Bob Huneycutt, St. Administrative Ofcr.; Fred Fortney, St. Resource Conservationist; Bill Littlefield, Asst. St. Conservationist (P); Dwain Phillips, Public Affairs Specialist.
 PLEASE CREDIT: USDA-SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

The next meeting for Oklahoma SCS/NRCS Retirees is scheduled for Thursday, April 23rd, 2026, at the Golden Corral Restaurant on MacArthur Boulevard in Oklahoma City. The Golden Corral opens at 10:30am, so there is extra time for visiting before the meeting starts at 11:30am. No reservations are needed, and visitors are welcome!

OREGON

Denise Troxell, ARCSE Representative

Email: nisetrox@gmail.com

Oregon retirees are on the move this winter despite the rain—or as we call it, liquid sunshine! The quarterly luncheon was held January 26th at Elmer's Restaurant in NE Portland and was well attended. Highlights from members include:

Tom Finegan made it to the luncheon—all the way from Polk County! He's been retired about 10 years. Currently he is serving on the Polk SWCD Board. He recently traveled to Arizona and has a cruise to Panama coming up.



Jon Lea (left) and Anne Derting (right) enjoying their conversation

Jon Lea reports snow levels are lower than they've been in quite some time. He and Jolene have 5 acres outside of Battleground WA that keep them busy as well as pure-bred dog breeding and Kennel Club activities.



Casual conversation after the luncheon with (L-R) Gail Voge, Anne Derting, Bobbi Hart, Joe Sahlfeld, and Kay Denfeld

Jolene has been active in dog shows and is a delegate to the AKC. She was also the Chair of the Western Snow Conference.

Cliff Hillebrandt has been retired almost 30 years (SAO for Oregon but engineer by trade) and reports is involved with work for Habitat for Humanity.

Joe Sahlfeld is active in the family farm with his brother and enjoys fishing and clamming.

Don Stettler has become a professional fritterer now. He enjoys movies and assembling mechanical puzzles. He said it is nice to come to the luncheon as a participant.

Terry Mitchell is enjoying Tai Chi classes

Karen Robbins talked about her 2nd Cuba trip in November. She had an accident and was very grateful to be travelling with doctors, as medical care in Cuba is rather lacking. It took about 6-8 weeks to fully recuperate.

Lamont Robbins shared that he's holding out on more travel for a bit. Been working on getting his new computer set up with his daughter's help. He recently attended NARF meeting and there were attendees older than him!

Gail Voge continues her work with Meals on Wheels and enjoys Tai Chi and time with her nephews.



Casual conversation after the luncheon with (L-R) Gail Voge, Anne Derting, Bobbi Hart, Joe Sahlfeld, and Kay Denfeld

Bobbi Hart was soon to be heading to their beach place for a week. Her husband had taken a fall in the recent past but is doing okay now.

Kay Denfeld had back surgery and is doing lots of PT. She has a new great niece. She has been the lead for coordination of her class reunion and has enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with folks. She still plays the ukelele and has also been taking dulcimer lessons for about a year. She is going to be learning how to make a ukelele and will be making it out of walnut wood from their family farm.

Louise Davis has been dealing with OPM and talked about the difficulty getting things done with them. She is involved in quilting groups, and folk dancing. She is looking for cabinets for her famous salt and pepper collection.



Russ Hatz (left) and Tom Finegan (right) catching up at the Oregon retirees' luncheon on 1/21/26.

Russ Hatz shared that **Tom Fuji** couldn't make the luncheon because of a medical appointment. **Russ** and Sue have been babysitting their 3-year-old granddaughter while their daughter and her husband run their restaurant in Forest Grove. He continues to be involved in Food Alliance inspections. He and Sue are planning a 4-month trip to Europe soon.

Anne Derting is involved in quilting, needlepoint, cross stitch, and machine embroidery. She has been working on tree removal at her home and is planning a trip to New Orleans in April.

Me, I'm getting my (other) knee replaced on 2/26. So, I'll be laid up and doing lots of physical therapy. But I've already got my gardening station set up indoors, and seeds on warming mats are already germinating. I might be gardening with a walker, but I will be gardening! Hopefully I'll be using a cane by the April luncheon.

Our next luncheon will be April 22nd at Stir Crazy Chinese restaurant in Aloha, Oregon. It looks like the Oregon State Conservationist, **Greg Becker**, will be able to join our July luncheon, so looking forward to that!

PENNSYLVANIA

ARCSE Representative: Currently vacant

Exerpts from The PA Bugle, courtesy of Tim Murphy, vindemurph@verizon.net.

With 2025 behind us, I wish everyone a happy, healthy and prosperous new year! Stay safe and warm this coming week. I am hoping to do some cross-country skiing.

Ed and Susie Sanders have offered to host our annual fall get together to be held on the evening of Sunday, September 20th and Monday the 21st in the Gettysburg area. They have been busy checking out venues and activities, and shared those with **Rosie Updegraff, Gary and Anne Smith, and Tim and Gina Murphy** to flesh out an itinerary. A block of rooms will be reserved for Sunday night at a local hotel. We will meet for Sunday dinner at the Dobbin House restaurant, built in 1776. On Monday morning we will have our business meeting at the Sanders' barn and welcome a guest speaker who will discuss the project to bring the landscape on the Gettysburg battlefield back to its 1863 appearance. A catered lunch will be provided at the barn. That afternoon, we will be visiting the Eisenhower National Historic Site with a tour of the former President's home. More details and registration information will follow in the next PA Bugle.

Have a great 2026, and I hope to see you at our meeting in September!

Jim and Maria Cropper celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary in December on board the Carnival Cruise liner, "Sunshine," as they returned from the Bahamas. They sailed out of Norfolk, Virginia on a 7-day cruise.

Ed Brzostek had a great time fishing Lake Erie this fall with old conservation friends that he worked with in western PA. His friend had a camper at Lampe Campground with a 27-foot boat in the marina. Everyday we caught our limit of nice walleyes, and the PA Fish Commission had a great fish cleaning station right on the marina. We could clean and pack 18 walleyes in under 30 minutes! Lots of good eating and good times!



Alan and Judy Wood spent Christmas in Colorado, visiting family and friends. Got in some snow hiking and sleigh rides.

Tim and Gina Murphy drove the Pacific Coast Highway from San Francisco to Los Angeles in November, with a major detour due to a 2024 landslide that still blocked the road south of Big Sur. We had great weather, enjoyed the coastal scenery and wildlife, and ended up in Palos Verdes for Thanksgiving with family. We took a side trip from there to Palm Springs and San Jacinto State Park with snow at the top



Ed Brzostek recalls the blizzard of 1978: "I was a new GS-9 Soil Conservationist in Erie County. **Willie Ruffin** was the DC and **Ed Lewandowski** was the seasoned technician who taught us how conservation worked there. Well that morning I went out hoping to complete a conservation plan with a dairy farmer before the heavy snow was to come later in the day. I just started going over the fields with the farmer when the snow started coming down. The farmer advised me to head back to the office unless I wanted to sleep in his hay mow that night. I left and just made it back when the blizzard hit.

All three of us lived in Erie and car-pooled to Waterford. Ed, who had driven that day, said "no way am I going to spend the rest of the week trapped in this Ag Service Center. I am going to head home, and it's your choice to come along or not." Well, Willie and I said you can't drive out in the blizzard alone and we crazily went with him. I sat in the passenger seat and looked for electric poles to direct Ed to go left or right to stay on the road. It took us over 2 hours to go the 15 miles to Erie but somehow we managed to stay on the road and make it home safely. Those 2 hours were totally terrifying and seemed like an eternity.

That year we ended up with over 12 feet of snow on the ground. The chairman of the District said we shouldn't let a little snow stop us from going out and working with farmers, so I still did conservation planning all winter, riding the farmers' snowmobiles and a lot of imagination of what the fields looked like below!"

TEXAS

Mike Bogard, ARCSE Representative
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This is a meeting of some of the retirees from the National Design and Soil Mechanics Center in Fort Worth. March meeting will be at the Blue Mesa.



Attending were John Fripp, Johnny Green, Kathy and Gary Miller, Karl and Susan Visser, and David Buland.

The Texas SCS/NRCS Retirees Reunion Planning Committee met January 20th, 2026, in Temple, Texas. Chairman **Arnold King** presided.

The 2026 annual reunion will be in the Temple/Belton area Wednesday April 15th, 2026. The golf tournament will be on Tuesday, April 14th, 2026.



L–R: top row: Charles Melton, Phillip Tillman, Brian Wenberg, Arnold King, Rhett Johnson, John Mueller, Mike Bogard. Bottom row: Cathy Tillman, Mary Beth Bogard, Willeene King, Sharon Johnson, Laurie Kiniry.

Ronald Hillard wrote:

January and February have been very busy with **Edith** and I traveling to Antarctica via Buenos Aires. In addition to Antarctica, we visited South America, Chile, the Falkland Islands, and Uruguay aboard the Sapphire Princess cruise ship.



Weather was beautiful and we saw many penguins, seals, whales and lots of beautiful glaciers and snow packed mountains in Antarctica. One of the highlights was visiting Point Wild where **Ernest Shackleton** and his men spent 4 grueling months after their ship was crushed by the ice. The cruise was a history lesson and filled with tidewater glaciers.



On our return, we traveled to Houston, Texas with the Ranching and Wildlife Committee, where we hosted the Young Guns competition with 550 4H and FFA students shooting trap, skeet, and five stand. There were over 120,000 shotgun rounds fired,

and over \$150,000 in prize money was awarded at the end of the competition for the students that competed and placed in their specific divisions.

We're back home for a weekend and again on the 20th we will return to Houston and set up for the world championship barbecue, where about 300 teams will compete in Ribs, Brisket, and Chicken during the week of February 26 through the 28th. After we finish the barbecue, we will begin set up for the Ranch and Wildlife symposium that will cover Ranching, wildlife, and laws and regulations for chemicals in our seminars. On March 6th we will host a live silent auction to raise money for scholarships for the students. We will return back home on March 10th, after basically a full three months of travel.

WISCONSIN

Deb Legear, ARCSE Representative

Email: deb.legear@gmail.com

Submitted by Deb LeGear:

What do retirees in Wisconsin do on a very cold winter day? Most would stay home by the fireplace. I, on the other hand, ventured out with a friend to Maiden Rock to take photos of ice formations that sit ovetop an artesian aquifer on Roger Nelson's 420-acre farmstead. Enjoy!

Five years ago, Cheryl and I bought a used NuCamp Tab 320 camping trailer. I cannot stand up in it, but we really love it. We have spent 165 nights in campsites from Madison, Wisconsin to Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming so far. Last summer we spent 47 nights in our little camper. Our favorite is just down the road at Brunet Island State Park at Cornell where we can walk around the island, bicycle on the Old Abe state trail (all the way home if we wanted) and kayak on the Chippewa River.



There were about 2 dozen formations



Submitted by Roger Dahl – Retired Soil Scientist from Chippewa Falls, WI



Roger Dahl by the kayak with Kayak staff looking on from the background



Cheryl looking at the Pictured Rocks on Lake Superior



Cheryl and Roger Dahl in the Kayak by Pictured Rocks



Sunset at the campsite



Campsite

Our bucket list trip happened last summer when we kayaked on Lake Superior along the Pictured Rocks. The day was sunny and Lake Superior was calm. The 5-mile trip was way too easy and quick. It was a beautiful day for a great experience to see the rocks at a relaxed pace. We are looking forward to this summer for more camping trips. Maybe we will see you out there.

WYOMING

Roni Shadegg, ARCSE Representative

Email: schadegg2@bresnan.net

Al DeStefano Birthday—100 years

Hey all, **Al DeStefano** turned 100 this year. His address is 2302 Aspen Grove Dr., Sheridan, WY 82801. Al was Engineer Tech. at Sheridan, Wyoming

Donald James Zimmerman passed away on Feb. 7. See the In Memoriam section for more details.

SENIOR CONSERVATIONISTS – Paul Benedict. Senior Conservationists have reached the minimum age of 83 years and have completed the Senior Conservationist Questionnaire (download at <https://arcsecommunications.wordpress.com/senior-conservationists/>). See IN-MEMORIAM for the Senior Conservationists who have left us since the last Newsletter. Please help us identify retirees who should be named Senior Conservationists. Please provide their contact information to your ARCSE Representative or Regional Vice-President.

OBITUARY INFORMATION

Paul Benedict, Membership Chair

When you receive word of someone passing, with little other information provided to you, obituaries can often be found by doing an advanced search using Google, using the full name of the deceased. If you do not have access to the internet, Paul Benedict will be glad to do the search. PLEASE SEND DEATH NOTICES AND OBITUARY INFORMATION DIRECTLY TO PAUL BENEDICT AT soilwarden@verizon.net. Always include the position or the spouse's position with SCS/NRCS.

| Surname | Year | <i>In-Memoriam</i> (Note: These are recent notices. For a complete list, please see www.arcse.org) |
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| Albertella | 2026 | Joan Frances Albertella (85) of Locust Grove, Virginia, passed away February 18, 2026. Joan was born January 10, 1941, and raised in a close-knit Italian family in New York, shaping her lifelong devotion to faith, family, and service to others. She was a proud graduate of Saint Joseph's College for Women where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History/Secondary Education. She traveled the globe as an Army spouse, teaching English at a university in South Korea, navigating life overseas, including driving in the streets of Seoul and exploring Europe with curiosity and confidence. She worked for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service as an Executive Assistant to the Chief in National Headquarters in Washington, DC. No matter where life took her, Joan had an extraordinary ability to make any place feel like home for her five children/Army "brats". After retiring, she settled at Lake of the Woods, Virginia. There she served for several years as Program Co-Chair of the Lake of the Woods AARP Chapter. At St. Patrick Catholic Church, she faithfully served on the Ladies Auxiliary and Martha's Caring Hands, participating in fundraising events and helping to host funeral receptions. Joan was also a member of the Battlefield Ladies Auxiliary of Fredericksburg, Virginia. She loved cooking for family celebrations and traveled near and far to stay connected with her family. She attended birthdays, graduations, weddings, sporting events, and band concerts, always ready to show her support and celebrate. Her love was strong and deeply felt by all. Joan is survived by her five children: Robin (Don) Schulz, Matthew (Kristin) Albertella, Christopher Albertella, Stephen (Elizabeth) Albertella, and Dana (Dan) Ensley; her brother, Nicholas (Lesley) Patrone; 11 grandchildren; 4 great-grandchildren; and her former spouse and dear friend, Raymond (Rose) Albertella; and brother-in-law John (Mary Margaret) Albertella. |
| Coller | 2025 | George N. Coller (93) of State College, Pennsylvania, passed away on October 15, 2025. He was born June 30, 1932. George worked for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service (SCS) starting as a Soil Conservationist. He moved to State College in the late 1970's to be the first Area Conservationist for the new Area 5 that covered central Pennsylvania from Tioga County down to Cumberland County. George retired from the SCS on June 30, 1988. George was known for his laugh. He spent the remainder of his life in the same home in State College living with his wife Joyce Coller. |
| DeGroot | 2021 | Member Jon Vierling DeGroot (82) Knoxville, Tennessee, passed away October 22, 2021. He was born to William and Katherine DeGroot on October 22, 1939, and was raised in Falls Church, Virginia. He had a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Engineering. Jon first worked for the Army Corps of Engineers and then as an engineer for the USDA Soil Conservation Service. He was an Assistant State Conservationist when he retired in 1994. He was a member of Farragut Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. Golfing, fishing, traveling, and reading were his favorite past-times. He was a consummate engineer and loved to build and fix just about anything. He always helped others by taking people to doctor's appointments, participating in Habitat for Humanity through the Church, and doing small projects for widows. A memorial service was held November 6, 2021, at Farragut Presbyterian Church, 209 Jamestowne Blvd, Knoxville, Tennessee. Burial was in Ironto, Virginia. |
| Egbarts | 2025 | Rodney D. Egbarts (81) of Olathe, Kansas, passed away July 19, 2025. An obituary was not available. Rod was born November 1, 1943, to Henry and Esther (Harms) Egbarts of Gilead, Nebraska. He married Nancy Jane Ells at the York Baptist Congregational Church in York, Nebraska on February 16, 1969. Rod served in the United State Army National Guard from 1966 to 1972, including being a Platoon leader at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Fort Carson, Colorado. He was a graduate of the University of Nebraska. He worked for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service in at least three states, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas. When in Kansas he was on the State Office Planning staff. I could not find information on his survivors. |
| Eisberner | 2026 | Timothy Alvin Eisberner (67) of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, passed away on January 16, 2026. In 1987, Tim married Sue Redman. Though later divorced, they always remained good friends. Their two children, Alyssa and Emily, were Tim's pride and joy. Later, Tim graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and became a soil conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service as a Soil Conservation Technician in Wisconsin at the Chippewa Falls Service Center, Durand Service Center and the Altoona Area office. Throughout his life, Tim was an avid outdoorsman. He loved deer hunting, fishing, and walking in the woods. His athleticism endured as a member of many softball leagues. He loved classic cars, classic rock, singing, dancing, good meals, and good times. Tim is survived by children, Alyssa (Patrick) McCaughin and Emily (Kamrin) Eisberner; granddaughter, Rowan McCaughin and grandson Ian McCaughin; brothers, Edward (Janet) Eisberner and Chris (Tami) Eisberner; sister, Elissia Joyce Moschkau and many beloved nieces, nephews, and cousins. He was preceded in death by his parents and sister, Bonnie Eisberner. His children would like to express special gratitude to Chris and Tami Eisberner, Steve and Sue Marczinke and Sue and Pete Lokken for everything they did to help Tim live out his last years in dignity at his home. |
| Garcia-Sais | 2025 | Rosabeth Garcia-Sais (57) of Belen, New Mexico, passed away peacefully on December 31, 2025, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She was born on June 10, 1968, in Belen, New Mexico. Rosabeth earned her bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of New Mexico. She devoted 36 years of service to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, where she served as Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy. She retired on February 10, 2025, leaving behind a legacy of professionalism, leadership, and commitment. Outside of her career, Rosabeth found great joy in fishing, traveling, baking, putting puzzles together and spending time with her family. These |

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| | | passions brought her happiness and created lasting memories with those she loved most. Rosabeth is lovingly remembered by her spouse of 36 years, Patricia "Trish" Garcia-Sais; her mother, Rosalie Carvalho (Manual); her father-in-law, Julian Garcia; her brother, Barney Sais (Vickie); her brother-in-law, Julian Garcia (Shaun); and her sister-in-law, Sandra Mendoza (Rosemary). Connie & Rick Apache and Vickie & Alberto Suazo-Chanza. She is also survived by her nephews Brandon Sais (Jenna), Kyle Sais (Sam), Julian Garcia, and John Garcia; her nieces Jaclynn Mendoza (Jordan) and Gabrielle Mendoza; and her great-niece Savannah Sais and great-nephews Sterling Sais and Elias Mendoza-Padilla. Rosabeth was preceded in death by her father, Barney Sais; her stepfather, Alfonso Peralta; and her mother-in-law, Helen Garcia. |
| Gerloff | 2026 | Bobby Sue Gerloff (100) of Woodward, Oklahoma, passed away January 5, 2026, in Woodward. Bobby Sue (Owen) Ham Gerloff was born in Searcy, Arkansas to Carl Owen and Norma (Benedict) Owen. Bobby moved to Oklahoma and graduated as Valedictorian from Seiling High School and attended Woodward Junior Business College. In 1942 she married Eugene Earl "Jimmy" Ham, and they lived in Woodward until Jimmy enlisted in the United States Army which then took them to Vancouver, Washington. While living in Washington, Bobby worked at both Aluminum Company of America and Kaiser Shipyard. In 1945 while deployed in the Philippines, Jimmy was killed in action. This brought Bobby back to Woodward to be close to her in-laws. In 1951 she began working at the local radio station (KSIW), where she stayed for several years, eventually beginning her long career with the USDA-Soil Conservation Service. During her 50 plus years with the USDA she served in several positions including being the longtime Area Clerk in Woodward. She earned many awards and certificates of achievement. She was also an Equal Opportunity Representative for several areas of the state. In 1980 she married Lynton Gerloff of Freedom, Oklahoma and they were together until his death in 2004. Bobby loved to travel and especially enjoyed the many trips with Lynton. She enjoyed, often participating in state and national tournaments. She was an active member of the Church of Christ in Woodward. Bobby is survived by daughters Nicki Hauser and Gail Fitts; stepson Gary (Vanessa) Gerloff; grandchildren: Julie (Rob) (Robbie and Dylan) Wilson, Jayson (Erin) (Jackson and Landon) Hauseer, Jacob Fitts, Lori (Gerloff) King, Josh (Amy) Neese, and Chance (AlyJea) Gerloff; several great-grandchildren; niece Sharon (Miller) Johnston, and nieces and nephew Cindy, Lisa, Cliff (Whetstone). |
| Glocker | 2024 | Member Carl Leonard Glocker (88) of Colorado Springs, Colorado, passed away on June 10, 2024. He was born in Chicago, Illinois on June 21, 1935, to Hans and Rose Glocker. The family moved to Wichita, Kansas, after Carl had completed two years of high school at Loyola University. Carl attended Kansas State University where he majored in Agronomy. He was a member of Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) fraternity, Air Force ROTC and Pershing Rifles. After graduation he was inducted into the United States Army March 25, 1958, where he served two years in the Army Chemical Corps working on biological agricultural experiments. After separating from the service in 1960, he went to work for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service for 35 years working as a Soil Scientist. His first duty station was Madison, Wisconsin. His last duty station was at the National Soil Survey Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. While working in Madison he met Elsbeth (Liz) Storch. They were married June 10, 1961. Son, William was born in 1962 and Andrew in 1964. Surviving him are his wife, Elsbeth (Storch) Glocker, sons William P. (Sharon) Glocker, Andrew (Janet) Glocker; grandsons Eric (Samantha); Adam, Kyle and Hans Glocker; granddaughter Ana Thoman (Taylor) and two great Granddaughters Petria and Rosalee. |
| Gwinn | 2026 | Life Member Gary Augustus Gwinn (83) of Hambleton, West Virginia, passed away peacefully at his home on January 11, 2026. He was born on August 2, 1942, at Fort Benning, Georgia to the late John and Eva (Hanshew) Gwinn. Gary was a wildlife biologist for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service, registered professional forester and member of the Wildlife Society. Gary retired as State Biologist in 1996. He was honored for identifying and mapping all of the wetlands in West Virginia. He was a devoted West Virginia University supporter and loved the Mountaineers, his alma matter. He was also an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed passing on his knowledge of the outdoors to anyone who wanted to learn. Those left to cherish Gary's love and memories are his wife of 65 years Carol Smith Gwinn, daughter Susan Gainer (Paul), granddaughters Eva and Chesley Gainer, sister Debbie Neely (Gary), brother-in-law Cecil Hall, sister-in-law Nancy Gwinn and many cherished nieces and nephews. A funeral service was held January 18, 2026, at Smathers Funeral Chapel, Rainelle, West Virginia. The family requests that donations be made in Gary's name to Tucker County EMS. |
| Harder | 2026 | Suzanne (Suzie) Harder (80) of Lincoln, Nebraska, passed away at home on January 21, 2026. She the wife of James "Jim" Harder , retired Resource Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. Suzie was a dedicated nurse with a varied career in patient care, teaching, management, and consulting. She received her Nursing education from Cornell School of Nursing, New York Hospital, New York City. She was a lifelong learner receiving additional degrees from Chadron State College, University of Nebraska at Kearney, and the University of Phoenix. She was an active member of Southern Heights Presbyterian Church and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Suzie is survived by her husband Jim of 53 Years; daughters Janelle Oppenheimer, of Flower Mound, Texas, Ruth (Richard) Kroner, of Oro Valley, Arizona, and son Steve (Katie) Harder, of Urbandale, Iowa; grandchildren, Owen, Avery and Anneliese Oppenheimer; Ethan, William, and Matthew Kroner; and Vaughn, Faye and June Harder. |
| Holt | 2025 | Donna Joyce Holt (89) of Asheville, North Carolina, passed on December 2, 2025. Donna was the wife of Senior Conservationist and Honorary Member Francis (Frank) T. Holt , retired State Conservationist for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service. Donna was born on July 8, 1936, in Valley Park, Missouri, the daughter of the late A.R. (Lonnie) and Bernice (Bunny) Mottesheard. Donna married Francis (Frank) Holt and would have been married 71 years December 25, 2025. She was preceded in death by her parents and an infant daughter, Vicky. Surviving is her husband, her daughter, Debi Holt, and son, David Holt and wife Donna; sister Sue Miller and husband Tom; granddaughters Brittany Hobbs and husband Stephen and Megan Davis and husband David; two great grandchildren Adeline Davis and Jacob Davis. Surviving also are three nephews, Mark Holt, Tom Rea and Tommy Miller; and five nieces, Becky Alexander, Shirley Uehle, Carrie Hopley, Nancy Rea and Kerri Routsong. |
| Lewis | 2026 | Jimmy Noel Lewis (91) of Plainview, Texas, passed away on February 13, 2026. Jimmy was born on August 19, 1934, in San Saba County, Texas to Ben and Virginia Estep Lewis. He married Mary Lynn Bigham on September 28, 1970. She preceded him in death in 2019. Jimmy served in the United States Army. He worked for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service for 46 years, retiring in 2004. He was the District Conservationist in Plainview for many years. He |

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| | | is preceded in death by his wife, Mary Lynn Lewis; his son, James Colvin; his daughter, Pam Lewis and his son-in-law, Randy Ware. Jimmy is survived by his brother, Jack Lewis; his daughters, Jo Beth Ware and Dewana (Joe) Wynn; his grandchildren, Jeremy (Beth) Ware and Tiffani (Coby) Niell; his great grandchildren, Jameson Ware, Halston Ware, Kenzli Blackburn, Caleb Niell and Caysen Niell. A memorial service was held February 17, 2026, at Seth Ward Baptist with Robert Malcolm officiating. |
| Rakestraw | 2021 | Life Member Bobby E. "Curly," "Bae" Rakestraw (85) of Monrovia, Maryland, passed away at Johns Hopkins Hospital on March 21, 2021. Bobby was born in Slaughters, Kentucky on March 15, 1936, the son of the late Marvin A. and Helen E. (Woods) Rakestraw. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Western Kentucky State College in Bowling Green, Kentucky in 1959. He was a United States Army Veteran serving from October 1959 to February of 1962. In 1962 he was employed by the USDA-Soil Conservation Service until his retirement in 1996 as the RAMP National Program Manager. Bobby was a lifetime member of the New Market Lions Club for almost 50 years. One of his favorite activities was organizing the club's Basket Bingo fundraiser. He was also the chairman of the Frederick County Soil Conservation District, a member of the Frederick County Farm Bureau, and a member of the Providence United Methodist Church in Kemptown, Maryland. Bobby enjoyed restoring tractors and was a member of the Mid Atlantic Alis Chamblor Tractor Club as well as the MDIHCC Tractor Club. He loved visiting family and spending time on the farm he grew up on in Kentucky. He was the loving husband of Donna (Hammers) Rakestraw, his wife of 55 years. In addition to his wife, Donna, survivors include his daughter, Wendy (Rakestraw) Wilson of Frederick, Maryland and son, David Rakestraw of Pembroke Pines, Florida; and his beloved grandchildren, Craig Wilson, Jason Wilson, Rachel Wilson and Emily Wilson. |
| Roberts | 2026 | Charles Vernon Roberts (75) of Hendersonville, Tennessee, passed away on February 11, 2026. He was born on February 25, 1950, the beloved son of Ray Roberts and Amanda Cook. Charles earned his Bachelor of Science in Agronomy with honors from Tennessee State University (Nashville, Tennessee) in 1972 and completed additional post-graduate studies from 1978 to 1980. Charles dedicated 38 years of service to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), building a career grounded in stewardship and public service. Over the years, he served in numerous roles including Student Trainee, Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, IRM Coordinator, Area Resource Conservationist, Area Conservationist, and Assistant State Conservationist. Charles was also deeply involved in professional and civic organizations. He was a past member of the Soil and Water Conservation Society of America, a Life Member of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees where he served six years as National Treasurer. He also contributed as an Instructor at the National Employee Development Center (NEDC). His community presence was just as strong. Charles was a member of St. John African Methodist Episcopal Church, supported alumni and civic efforts through multiple organizations, and served in leadership roles including President of the Bransford High School (BHS) Alumni Class of 1968 and Chairman of the BHS Alumni Parade for multiple years. He was also a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Masonic Universal Lodge #239, and Hason Temple #150 (32° Shriner), along with other service-minded community groups. Charles' survivors include daughter, TaJuan Roberts Watson (Donald); and his granddaughter, Zoey Browder. Funeral services were conducted February 16, 2026, at Oakhurst Chapel of Robertson County Funeral Home with Rev. James Brown officiating. Burial was in Restlawn Memorial Gardens in Cedar Hill, Tennessee. |
| Sheets | 2026 | Alice Marie Sheets (84) of Somerset, Pennsylvania, passed away peacefully on January 25, 2026. She was the wife of Phillip Sheets, retired Soil Conservationist for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service, who retired in 2005. Alice was the daughter of the late Alfred and Louise (White) Fortunato. She was a member of St. Peter's Catholic Church and was active in Catholic Daughters of America. She enjoyed bible study and sang in the choir. Alice was a member of the Red Hats, Newcomers of Somerset, T.O.P.S., Track II Squares and Wheelers and Dealers Square Dancing Club. She enjoyed dancing any chance she got. Alice traveled 3 times to the National Square-Dancing Convention. Alice volunteered for Meals on Wheels. Alice was preceded in death by son, Michael Sheets. She is survived by her loving husband of 62 years, Phillip Sheets; daughter, Sharon (Mark) Stuart; grandchildren, Evan (Alicia) Sheets, Ashley Walther, Alexander (Larry) Lang, Anthony Lubinski and Jacob Sheets; and great-grandchildren, Aden and Liam Walther and L J Lang and Easton Sheets. |
| Skemp | 2025 | Samuel J. Skemp, Jr. (60) of La Crosse, Wisconsin, passed away on December 7, 2025, after a medical emergency on the family land. He was born July 31, 1965, to Samuel J. and Jean Skemp. Sam attended Fox Valley Tech School in Appleton, Wisconsin, for 2 years and earned his Conservation degree at the University of Wisconsin Platteville. He had a long career with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, working at offices in Onalaska, Sparta, Richland Center, Wisconsin; and finally serving as District Conservationist for Vernon County starting in 2006. He enjoyed providing fellow farmers and other clients with advice and guidance on agricultural land use and native prairie restoration. He deeply appreciated being in the Driftless area and enjoyed giving tours and talks about its unique history. His kind and friendly demeanor, sense of humor and jovial laugh will be greatly missed. Sam loved driving tractors and raising beef cows and listening to music and often attended concerts and music fests. He was an avid rock and arrowhead collector and took great pride in the prairie restoration work he had completed to over twenty acres located on the ridge of his family's farm. Sam is survived by his parents and his 4 siblings, Sheila, Jeff, Andy (Ana), and Matt as well as 8 nieces and nephews and many family relatives. His sister, Julie, died in 2021. |
| Tackett | 2025 | David Leroy Tackett (72) of Shenandoah, Iowa, passed away on December 23, 2025, at home with his wife and four sons by his side, after a hard fight against cancer and Parkinson's. He was born on September 20, 1953, at Hand Community Hospital, in Shenandoah, Iowa, to David and Arlene (Sugden) Tackett. David spent his life rooted in hard work and dedication. In his early years, he held many jobs, including grain bin construction, working at Eaton Corporation, and farming. Those experiences shaped his strong work ethic and practical approach to life. He later built a long career with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, where he worked as a Soil Conservation Technician from 1991 until he retired in 2018. David was a dedicated member of the Page County Chapter of Pheasants Forever, and a faithful member of the First United Methodist Church in Shenandoah. He is survived by his wife, Denise (Sligar) Tackett of 51 years; their four sons: Nathan (Tekyn) of Grimes, Iowa, Kyle (Katie) of Dillon, Montana, Jordan (Lindsey), of Ames, Iowa, and Seth (Krissy) of Shenandoah, Iowa; and six grandchildren: Sawyer, Garrett, Baker, Eli, Sloan and Mesa. Services were held at the First United Methodist Church in Shenandoah, Iowa, on December 31, 2025. |
| Thomas | 2026 | Member Brenda Kay McDonald Thomas (76) of Herndon, Virginia, passed away on January 1, 2026, after a short illness, following a long journey with rheumatic heart disease and rheumatoid arthritis, which she had met with strength, |

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| | | <p>grace, and resilience. Brenda was born on September 22, 1949, in Barbourville, Kentucky, to Lewis and Sylvia McDonald, the youngest of five children. After high school, she went on to attend Union College, choosing a home economics degree with an accounting minor. It is here she met her future husband Dennis R. Thomas. They married the evening before graduation and relocated to the Washington D.C. area to set roots and build their family. Brenda spent most of her professional career working in the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service budget office at National Headquarters. After 30 years of service, she retired in 2004 as a Chief Budget Analyst to dedicate herself to caring for her grandchildren, a role she cherished much more than her career and approached with deep love and pride. Brenda expressed her love through baking. Whether cookies, banana or zucchini bread, cake or pies, she found happiness in sharing homemade treats with family and friends, an enduring symbol of her generosity and care. Throughout her life, Brenda was an active member of the Herndon United Methodist Mary Martha Women's Circle and in recent years dedicated her time as leader and chair of the group. She was very proud of their ongoing mission of collecting and providing new socks for the homeless. She is survived by her devoted husband, Dennis R. Thomas; her daughters, Jennifer (David) Gentry and Sara (John) Simanski; and her beloved grandchildren, Annabella Gentry, Lily Simanski, Emma Simanski, and Tate Simanski, who brought her immense joy.</p> |
| Vrana | 2026 | <p>Jon David Vrana (71) of Fairfax, Virginia, passed away at home on February 1, 2026. Jon was born November 22, 1954, to Elaine and Verlon "Tony" Vrana (Jon's father served as Associate Deputy Chief for the USDA-Soil Conservation Service, retiring in 1980). He graduated from Virginia Tech (Bachelor of Science in Agronomy, 1977) and George Washington University (Master's of Science in Information Systems Technology, 2004). At Tech, he met Mary Helen Miller, the daughter of a colleague at the USDA Agricultural Research Station. Jon worked for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service for 43 years. Jon was a passionate and driven man, devoting his life to work and a series of hobbies, from historical interpretation to volunteer rescue squad, Challenger Little League Baseball to just about any musical instrument he cared to pick up. He loved to sing and tell stories. In Franklin, North Carolina he played in the house bluegrass band Southbound and Down at the world premiere of the Foxfire play. He was a Boy Scout and a science guy who loved soil science, agronomy, computers, and wetlands. He valued conservation (environmental) and preservation (historical). He wanted the land and our human stories to be carefully kept for future generations. In later years, he took a keen interest in Ireland and Irish-American history, a way of connecting with his own genealogy. A licensed soil scientist and management analyst, he won too many awards to name comprehensively, but he was especially proud of a few: Soil and Water Conservation Society Berg Fellowship, the USDA Secretary's Award, and the USDA Chief's Award. He celebrated local Virginia history at Burke, Vienna (where he wrote a short play to celebrate the town's 1890 incorporation and was Volunteer of the Year in 2015), Sully Plantation, Pamplin Park, and the Silas Burke House. He co-created numerous programs and displays with the Burke Historical Society, Historic Vienna Inc., and the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum. He performed twice at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. He is survived by Mary (wife); Heather and Anna (children); siblings Verlon, Tim, and Carolyn; Laura Wyatt (sister-in-law); nieces and nephews Julie, Tony, and Maggie and their families; and hundreds of friends. In lieu of flowers, we ask that you donate to your favorite environmental conservation or local historical organization. May his memory remind us to live life fully and loudly.</p> |
| Warren | 2026 | <p>James "Jim" Edgar Warren (94) of George West, Texas, passed away on February 2, 2026. Jim was born February 20, 1931, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the son of George Edgar Warren and Emily Amanda (Petty) Warren. After high school he worked a few jobs before joining the Air Force on December 19, 1950. Jim served in the Air Force until 1954, most of his service being in Honshu, Japan on the Johnson Air Force Base. He then attended Texas College of Arts and Industries in Kingsville, Texas (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville) working toward a degree in animal husbandry. Jim married Joyce Elaine Lauderback on June 1, 1958, at the George West Methodist Church. They were married for 55 years before Joyce passed away in 2013. Jim and Joyce were members of the George West Methodist Church for more than 50 years, where Jim was part of the choir. Jim worked at the USDA-Soil Conservation Service where he eventually became an archeologist. He held many titles in his life. He was the first Archeologist for the Soil Conservation Service nationwide, Ranch Manager of the Longfellow Ranches, President of the Texas Longhorn Cattle Breeders Association, President of the Texas Archeological Society and President of the George West Lions Club. Jim also served as Chairman of the Grace Armantrout Museum Board of Trustees in George West, as well as Archeology Chair for Live Oak County Historical Commission. Aside from the many contributions Jim has contributed to Live Oak County, he also oversaw the archeological dig on Calliham before Choke Canyon was placed between Three Rivers and Tilden. He worked right up to the age of 82 with his last job being an archeological dig in Laredo. He wrote two books, The Fort Merrill Letters and The Falls of Miquihuana. Survivors include his sons, Wade (Tammi) Warren and T.E. Warren; grandchildren, Starla (Christian) Harber, Samantha (Clayton) Sebesta, Kayce (Cody) Oxford, Colton (Kelsey) Warren and Jayme (Tyler) Bruce; and great-grandchildren, Randon Sebesta, Cale and Kullen Oxford, John and James Warren and Wayden, Wylie and Waverly Bruce. Preceding Jim in death include his wife, Joyce Elaine Warren.</p> |
| Zimmerman | 2026 | <p>Donald James Zimmerman (86) of Buffalo, Wyoming, passed away February 7, 2026, at the Billings Clinic Hospital following a short illness, surrounded by his family. Donald was born on August 21, 1939, in Casper, Wyoming to Ed and Betty Zimmerman. After high school he drove truck for Zimmerman Crude Oil. He was married on July 8, 1972, in Casper to Barbara (Kuykendall) Bias and they made their home in Casper. In 1975 he was sent by his company to attend the University of Wyoming where he studied Civil Engineering for 3 years. Don and Barbara moved back to Casper in 1978 where Don worked for USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service as a draftsman who designed retention ponds, dams including Flaming Gorge Dam. In 1996 they moved to Glenrock, Wyoming for a short period and in 1997 Don retired. After retiring, they bought an RV and spent the next 20 years on the road. From 2012 until 2018 they were campground hosts and later mountain managers in the Bighorn National Forest. Shortly after they moved to Buffalo where they have lived until his death. Don was a member of the Odd Fellows and was an avid bowler and in 1988 he bowled a 300-game. He loved woodworking and made each of his daughters a jewelry box and hope chests. He enjoyed hunting, fishing and golf. He is survived by his wife Barbara of Buffalo; five daughters, Beckie Terzich (John), Robyn Landsiedel (Joe) and Lisa Hemsath all of Buffalo; Pam O'Connell of Casper and Kathy Boehler of Billings, Montana; three sons Brad Zimmerman of Buffalo, Scott Zimmerman of Casper and Steve Zimmerman of Rapid City, South Dakota; twenty-two grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by one daughter Lori Clark, two sons-in-law, Moe Hemsath and Rodney Clark and one grandson Matthew Hemsath.</p> |

