

# JOURNAL OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

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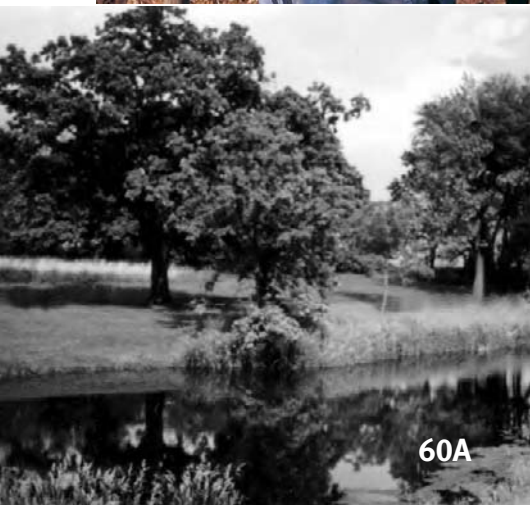
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## RAISE YOUR VOICE

YOUR FORUM TO REACT TO PUBLISHED ARTICLES, TO EXCHANGE IDEAS, AND DESCRIBE INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO CONSERVATION INCLUDING LEGISLATION

### You get what you pay for

Recent years have seen growing support for easement programs such as the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, and Grassland Reserve Program, which would lead one to believe that they have proven to be effective for conserving at-risk agricultural resources and wetlands habitat. I can only speculate based upon their growing popularity and funding nationwide that these programs really do make a difference. But my innate skepticism urges a deeper evaluation into the motivation behind landowner support for programs that, at least from my limited geographic perspective, provide minimal incentive for participation and competition for funds. When payments for agricultural or environmental easements are set too low, lands most at-risk for conversion to more profitable uses are not offered. As a result, our government may essentially be giving money away to landowners whose land use options are limited to those same uses promoted by the easement programs. As the saying goes, "You get what you pay for."

—James Newman, program specialist  
NRCS-Caribbean Area

### Soil loss tolerance—Fact or Myth?

Recent contributor Jerry Crew is to be commended for his cogent insight regarding the non acceptability of soil loss, and the possibility of achieving virtually zero soil erosion through minimal tillage. The late University of Wisconsin Professor Francis Hole, opined some 20 years ago that the appropriate T value should be zero. In reflecting on these matters one also is reminded of an obscure article, "Soil Loss Tolerance: Fact or Myth," published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* about 17 years ago.

What we have chosen to deem "tolera-

ble" might more accurately be called "a level of soil loss that subjectively seems pragmatically achievable." Sociologists, economists, psychologists, and sundry other students of human behavior, along with soil scientists, might haggle over the nature and scope of the personal, cultural and physical factors involved in such determinations.

As for T values serving as indicators of soil quality, such a relationship seems tenuous at best. Soil quality, along with qualitative and quantitative specification of the soil properties that lend it objective reality, must be viewed in the context of the purposes(s) for which a particular soil body is to be used. And, to the extent that soil characteristics determinative of soil quality also influence soil erodibility, T values might serve as proxy indicators, albeit of dubious utility, of the value of a soil body for certain uses.

—Leonard C. Johnson  
Moscow, ID

### Grassland reserve—not a grassland preserve

The guest editorial by Clay Ogg in the March/April 2005 *Journal* is a stunning disappointment. The article misrepresented the goals and environmental performance of current U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation efforts. In general, the piece provided few useful suggestions for the future that are not already being implemented.

Ogg claims that the 2002 Farm Bill amended the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to enroll grasslands that do not merit federal payment. As the leader of the federal agency that provides technical input on CRP acreage, I am puzzled at Ogg's distortion of how CRP actually operates and the merits of long-term protection of grasslands. It is important to note that any acreage in general

CRP enrollment would be located on highly erodible land that had, or was susceptible to, severe erosion problems if withdrawn. Ensuring that these lands are continually protected is an important objective and a wise use of conservation program funding resources.

With respect to Ogg's discussion of the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), I can only assume that he is not familiar with the program's rule. The entire point of this working lands conservation program is to ensure the mutually beneficial results of sound grazing practices and long-term protection of grasslands. The program is site-specific with conservation and restoration as key priorities. The easement features of GRP protect grasslands from conversion to many other uses—not just conversion to cropland.

The charge by Ogg that CRP and GRP create windfall gains for farmers and ranchers is wrong. The payments in both programs compensate the landowner for the loss of the option to crop or develop the land enrolled. GRP easement payments also are clearly not a windfall to the producer because the program is paying the appraised fair market value for the

#### Readers are invited to express their views on land and water management.

Please make your letter less than 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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— Deb Happe, editor

easement. Whether it is a rental payment or an easement purchase, GRP and CRP participants enter into a willing seller-willing buyer relationship that compensates farmers or ranchers for certain land rights and are not windfall gains.

The inclusion of grassland as eligible land in both GRP and CRP seeks to maximize public environmental benefits. Since its inception, CRP increasingly has targeted environmentally sensitive lands. CRP protection of these lands is done to enhance the program's contribution to protecting the flow of environmental amenities from the producer's land. The same can be said for GRP rental agreements. In addition, the kind of incentives Ogg advocates for hay rotation is largely already part of existing USDA conservation activities.

Our programs are about achieving conservation results in concert with farming and ranching. Neither American agriculture nor American taxpayers would benefit from the creation of a grassland preserve in a glass case. Conservation policy professionals who view green payments as something new for the future need to take a closer look at what USDA conservation programs already are accomplishing today. They also occasionally may want to visit a farm.

—Bruce I. Knight, Chief

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Washington, D.C.

### **Use erosion control blankets with care**

In your March/April issue of the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*, you ran an article entitled "Do Erosion Control and Snakes Mesh?" In this article, authors Christopher Barton and Karen Kinkead talk about snakes becoming trapped in netting used on erosion control blankets. Members of the Erosion Control Technology Council (ECTC) are very concerned about protecting both the environment and wildlife. The ECTC has provided an explanation below

for your readers on how erosion control blankets should be selected and used so that these occurrences are minimized or eliminated altogether.

1. ***Erosion control blankets must be properly installed.*** Installation of blankets includes appropriate preparation of the soil and a sufficient stapling pattern as specified. In environmentally sensitive areas, the erosion control blankets could be installed using a heavier stapling pattern and ensure the edges of the product are either firmly trenched or stapled securely to the soil surface. It has been the experience of ECTC members that proper installation of erosion control blankets can reduce the possibility of wildlife entanglement and the potential for animals to get under the net.

2. **Loosely woven, degradable nettings are available.** The use of erosion control blankets with 100 percent degradable woven components is an excellent selection for areas where wildlife concerns exist. These materials allow the erosion control blankets to provide soil stabilization until vegetation is established and then the products degrade within a predictable time frame. The netting on these products is not fused at its intersection but is loosely woven to allow for movement of the yarns. The woven nature of these nets allows the openings to widen and accommodate snakes and other forms of wildlife walking on or moving through the netting.

3. **Netless erosion control blankets are also available.** Several manufacturers have created products without the use of plastic nettings. These are available by contacting members of the ECTC.

We encourage all users to carefully examine parameters (i.e. erosion potential, wildlife concerns, vegetation type, etc.) of an area before deciding on the most appropriate type of erosion control blankets for the installation. Erosion control blankets provide a fantastic way to control soil movement and accelerate vegetation growth. These features provide wildlife a natural habitat in which to live. As is so often the case with our work, we need to carefully balance the construction needs with the environmental aspects of the area, including the protection of wildlife and habitat.

Please visit the [www.ectc.org](http://www.ectc.org) website for a list of manufacturers who provide the various products mentioned or call the association office and we will be happy to direct you to the manufacturers of the various products.

—Laurie L. Honnigford, executive director, Erosion Control Technology Council  
St. Paul, MN

### **Erosion control blankets are not created equal**

In your March/April issue of the *Journal*, you ran an article entitled, “Do Erosion Control and Snakes Mesh?” In this article, the authors write about snakes becoming trapped in netting used in rolled erosion control products. There was reference in

the article to both temporary erosion control blankets and permanent turf reinforcement mats. The inference from the article was that these rolled erosion control products all use net-like mesh and stitching to hold the materials together. Considering this, I feel obligated to point out that not all rolled erosion control products are created equal.

Intuitively erosion control blankets are the most obvious culprits because they utilize netting and stitching and are used extensively as an economically quick cover-up for bare soil. But many turf reinforcement mats may be also be suspect since most also use layers of netting and stitching to produce a composite material. When these are installed on top of the soil surface, prior to vegetation establishment they can create a precarious situation as well.

I am certain that the entire rolled erosion control product industry has the utmost regard for the environment and great concern for the welfare of wildlife and in deed some erosion control blanket

manufacturers are now offering “netless” alternatives for this very reason. My company for one has always held environmental stewardship as a core value.

Colbond Inc. manufactures the Enkamat product line of turf reinforcement mats. We have manufactured Enkamat erosion control products for more than thirty years—without the use of nettings and stitching. When Enkamat turf reinforcement mats are installed properly, with intimate contact to the soil surface or even preferably, soil-filled, it is very unlikely that snakes or other animals are at risk. In fairness, I believe your readers need to know that for both erosion control blankets and turf reinforcement mats, net-less and stitch-less alternatives are available.

—Richard Goodrum  
Colbond, Inc.  
Enka, NC