

Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council – One Year Later

About this time last year, when I was Chest/Chatt's New Kid on the Block, I wrote an article describing the Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council, what it had done since its beginning in 1962; what our plans were for the future of Chest/Chatt, and described our mission statement which is: "To assist local people in planning and carrying out activities that conserve natural resources, support economic development, enhance the environment, and improve the standard of living for all citizens." During 2013 we worked every day to live up to our mission and we slowly began to push this once highly regarded, no longer federally funded, program back on the road to recovery by offering our citizens several highly successful programs that actually were useful and contributed to improving their way of life. During our re-building in 2013, we started to look under new rocks for projects rather than the same old mossy places where plentiful federal dollars used to be found. We knew that we had to think outside of the old box in order to survive and offer services that would help our communities in Northeast Georgia. Here are a few of the successful projects and programs that Chest/Chatt provided in 2013:

1. Firewise Communities – Towns County had a very successful Firewise Communities program and we decided to try to improve on it and work on wildfire safety education projects since Firewise fits in our mission of helping people improve their standard of living by helping them protect their property and homes. Since the Firewise program was started in Towns County, wildfire calls have dropped 75% which has saved the county, community, and citizens many dollars by reducing wildfire risks that reduce costs for firefighting and property losses. We increased the number of Firewise Communities in Towns County from 3 to 12 in 2013, and since the total number of Firewise Communities in Georgia is 44 our 12 made us stand out.

2. Fire Adapted Communities – The notoriety that we gained with the successful Firewise program caught national attention and Chest/Chatt was invited to develop one of 8 national Fire Adapted Communities pilot projects in Towns County. Fire Adapted Communities is a National, comprehensive wildfire preparedness program designed to prepare the entire county to survive a wildfire event. Fire Adapted includes Firewise plus many other wildfire prevention and safety components including Ready, Set, Go an evacuation plan for our citizens. Funding for the Fire Adapted program has been extended thru the end of 2015, and when the concept is fully developed in Towns in mid-2014, Chest/Chatt will spread the program across North Georgia and eventually the Southeast.

3. Wildfire, Safe, Sound and Code Smart workshop – Chest/Chatt hosted a 2 day workshop sponsored by FEMA, Homeland Security, the US Forest Service, and the National RC&D Council to present the new Wildland, Urban Interface, building code that the State Fire Marshall has endorsed for Georgia.

4. Forest Action Plan Workshop – Chest/Chatt hosted a one day workshop sponsored by the US Forest Service at the Dillard House to give our citizens the opportunity to learn about the plans developed by the Georgia Forestry Commission for management of Georgia's publically owned forests and to learn about opportunities available to private forest land owners.

5. Mud Creek EPD 319h grant – Chest/Chatt is administering an EPD grant in Habersham County that funds projects to improve water quality in the Mud Creek and Little Mud Creek watershed.

6. Coldwater Creek EPD 319h grant - Chest/Chatt is administering an EPD grant in Hart and Elbert counties that funds projects to improve water quality in the Coldwater Creek watershed.

7. Town/Tesnatee Creek EPD 319h grant - Water quality improvement project in White County upcoming in 2014.

8. Lady Bug Farms field day - Chest/Chatt, along with the NRCS, hosted a field day at Lady Bug Farms in Rabun County to showcase organic alternative farming methods.

9. NRCS Outreach program – Chest/Chatt hosted a one day workshop at Jaemor Farms for County Extension agents to learn about available NRCS programs. Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council will continue to work for you, the citizens of Northeast Georgia, in 2014.

10. Fire Adapted Communities Public Service Announcement – the International Association of Fire Chiefs chose our program to build a PSA around and filmed it in Towns County in late December. Chest/Chatt will get recognition in the credits on the National 30 second and 60 second PSAs that will be promoted all over the world by the IAFC and NFPA when finished.

Upcoming and Ongoing projects 2014:

News Articles - I will continue to write an RC&D column for our local newspapers each week. I have a regular column space in the North Georgia News and the Towns County Herald. I send the articles to all 13 county newspapers each week also. Last year I only missed 3 weeks and get RC&D on the front pages any time I can.

NRCS TSP - I have completed course work and am in the process of writing a Conservation plan in-order to become a Technical Service Provider (TSP) for the NRCS. This will allow Chest/Chatt to offer our professional services to the NRCS for projects that require the technical expertise and certification for their grants and programs.

EPD Coldwater Creek 319 h grant – we have taken over from the GMRC, the administration, outreach, promotion, field days, project management, and landowner contacts for this grant in the Coldwater Creek watershed in Hart and Elbert counties. We need 10 projects and in two weeks I have signed up 6 with three more waiting for a visit

EPD Town/Tesnatee Creek 319 h grant – White County. We will administer and manage this grant when it is signed.

Firewise Community Assessment grant - \$15,000 – from the Georgia Forestry Commission to improve and expand existing Firewise communities in Towns County. More \$\$ may be available for other counties in our work area. The grant administrator wants to use RC&D because he can't give the funds to a community that is not a 501c3 entity. Chest/Chatt is a perfect conduit for the funds.

Fire Adapted Communities grant second half - \$5,565 – the second half of the FAC grant that we have worked on during the second half of 2013. The program has been funded through December 1st 2015. Chest/Chatt will be the Southeast hub for the program when it is fully developed in Towns and ready to spread across the land

International Association of Fire Chiefs – the IAFC has invited me to speak at their 2014 Wildland Urban Interface convention at the Peppermill Resort in Reno, NV March 17-19. With the Executive Board's approval, I will present our successful FAC program that we have developed, how we did it, what worked, and what did not. The trip will be funded by Towns County Title III funds and the FAC grant funds so Chest/Chatt will not incur any costs, but will get the benefit of the publicity.

FAC Hub Coalition yearly meeting – FAC will fund the trip entirely. The first meeting was held in Boise, ID last April and this year it is planned for Colorado.

Chest/Chatt RC&D - We must develop a business that creates an ongoing cash flow for Chest/Chatt in order to have funds to develop programs and projects for the citizens of our member counties and to fulfill our mission which is to "Assist local people in planning and carrying out activities that conserve natural resources, support economic development, enhance the environment, and improve the standard of living for all citizens".