



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- The Big Springs RC&D Council used a USDA-EQIP education grant and a National Forest Foundation grant to help the **Eastern Ozarks Forestry Council** promote sustainable forest management in the Southeastern Ozarks Region. The two councils staffed a booth at the Heartland Agriculture and Natural Resources Exposition in Poplar Bluff, funded a timber stand improvement demonstration in Wayne County, hosted a tour in Bollinger County of new harvesting techniques, completed a mobile forestry display, and sponsored a workshop in Reynolds County on alternative forest products. They will provide chainsaw safety workshops in March in Bollinger, Wayne and Reynolds counties.
- The USDA Forest Service is funding a **regional eco-tourism marketing specialist position**. The Missouri Ozarks Regional Explorers (MORE) will utilize the specialist to promote natural-resource-based tourism in a 15-county area within the Big Springs RC&D and Top of the Ozarks RC&D areas. MORE is sponsoring a convention of the Audubon Society of Missouri. It will be April 23-25 in West Plains.
- The **Top of the Ozarks RC&D Forestry and Wildlife Committee** received a grant to produce a video targeted to new landowners in southeastern Missouri who are unfamiliar with forestry or wildlife habitat management. In cooperation with the University of Missouri, segments of the video will be used during statewide conferences. The video also will be distributed to libraries, realty offices and some public offices.
- The **Missouri Bootheel/Southern Illinois Small Farmer Produce Cooperative**, with assistance from RC&D, is helping a vegetable cooperative construct a bulk produce distribution center. The Bootheel RC&D Council will own the building and lease it to the cooperative. Several grants to the council support the project, including \$83,418 from USDA Rural Development and \$128,000 from the Delta Regional Authority. The vegetable cooperative borrowed \$30,000 from the Southern Illinois Development Enterprise Zone to purchase equipment, and the Missouri Department of Agriculture awarded \$33,000 to hire a cooperative manager to oversee the operation.
- Construction of the **Chillicothe Wetland Interpretive Center**, sponsored by the Green Hills RC&D Council, has wide applications for tourism, education and recreation. The project started as a 240-acre mitigation site with the Missouri Department of Transportation, and has grown into a locally supported community project. More than 1 million cubic yards of soil were removed to

create a wetland. Elevated boardwalks, fishing docks, handicap access and trails are being designed. A local foundation has committed \$250,000 for future development. With total contributions and services from the partnership, the project is estimated at \$3.5 million to \$5 million.

- Northeast Missouri RC&D partnered with the **Scotland County Community Fitness Center** board to write a grant requesting state tax credits for contributors to the fitness center gymnasium project. The board's goal is to provide health and wellness activities for people of all ages and recreational opportunities for youth. Adding a gymnasium to the existing facility will cost approximately \$400,000. Contributions from the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program will contribute about 75 percent of the needed funds, with in-kind contributions and volunteer support representing the remaining 25 percent. The RC&D council will continue to advise the Scotland County Community Fitness Center board during the fundraising campaign.
- The Prairie Rose RC&D helped secure grants and low-interest loans to establish a **home repair partnership**. The \$85,000 obtained from both sources was used to repair 10 homes for low-income residents.
- Southwest Missouri RC&D received a \$415,000 **fire protection grant** from the USDA Forest Service to increase fire protection throughout Missouri for forestland, homes, businesses, and other natural resources. A fire protection specialist is working extensively with fire departments, and provides dry hydrant installation and wildfire prevention training. Four hundred dry hydrant kits will be distributed statewide, along with \$400 per kit to offset installation costs. Maps of installed dry hydrants – plotted using global positioning system technology – will be developed and distributed to rural fire districts.
- Discussions are under way that could produce five additional RC&D project areas within the next two to five years. Then, the RC&D program would be available to all 114 Missouri counties. RC&D program appropriations nationally for Fiscal Year 2004 are \$52 million. The National Association of Conservation Districts recommended \$69 million in Fiscal Year 2004, which is similar to the annual appropriation the National Association of RC&D Councils says is necessary to one day have national RC&D coverage.