LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Trailblazer Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council, I am pleased to present the 2011 Annual Report. This report serves as an introduction to Trailblazer as well as a measure of success over the past year. As you read it you will meet our leaders, our members, and our staff.

I have served on the Trailblazer Board as a volunteer for more than 24 years. Over that period, we have worked together to bring quality projects to help the people in our area and to protect our environment.

2011 was a year of CHANGE for us. Early in the year, Congress defunded our (RC&D) Resource Conservation & Development Program which was administered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service since 1966. This caused major issues for the Board of Directors; this brought up a lot of questions and undermined any plans we might have for the future.

The good news is Trailblazer has a great track record covering 25 years of helping our communities. Also, there are plenty of opportunities for new projects. So, the decision was made to continue to operate Trailblazer as a nonprofit corporation; new priorities needed to be defined for the future.

I have been honored to serve as Trailblazer President over the past year and watch the organization grow. Trailblazer will continue to be successful due to their hard line approach and deep roots in all communities.

Gilbert Pickens
President

Special Note: After 24 years, Gilbert Pickens has decided not to serve on the Trailblazer Board of Directors in 2012. In the December 13th meeting, Mr. Pickens was recognized for outstanding service to the organization. It was agreed that he would be available when needed.
Early in 2011, Congress defunded our (RC&D) Resource Conservation & Development Program which was administered by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service since 1966. This caused major issues for the Board of Directors; this brought up a lot of questions.

**Why was this tiny program cut?** Truth is over the many years of the program, there was a saying, “the only people who like the program are the people themselves”. The deep meaning of this is that none of the big government bosses liked the program because they could not control it. This program was being guided by volunteers who care about their community.

Board members were wondering: **Do we keep going or discontinue services?**

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Proposed changes were mailed BOD members on November 11.

Here are the major changes that were approved on December 13 and became effective on January 1, 2012:

- The name of the organization will remain: Trailblazer RC&D.
- Future sponsors are being asked to contribute at higher levels.
- The governing board of Trailblazer will be established from nominations of fully supporting sponsors.
- The organization will have four classes of membership: Charter members, Regular members, Associate members, and Corporate members.
- New Board Members must be nominated by fully supporting sponsors and receive 2/3 approval of the standing BOD.
- Nominations to the Board of Directors (BOD) may come from traditional sponsors.
- Nominations fully supporting sponsors’ will receive the highest consideration.
- Board meetings will be scheduled four times per year.
- Officers will be Pres., VP, Sec. and Treasurer.
The Bistineau Task Force (BTF) was organized in February, 2010. Within a few weeks, the Bienville, Bossier and Webster Parish Police Juries plus the Saline SWCD, Dorcheat SWCD and Bodcau SWCD each passed a resolution creating the BTF for the purpose of assisting the state in the battle against Giant Salvinia.

In 2011, Trailblazer helped facilitate five public meetings of the Bistineau Task Force. Actions included keeping the public informed through bimonthly public meetings, web updates and media releases. Discussions centered around the BTF Action Plan, educational events, status of spraying program, Giant Salvinia and Alligator weed control updates, the Backyard Spraying Program, Weevil Program update, and tree removal plans.

Recommendations of the task force are recorded in the BTF ACTION PLAN. The following were included:

- Implement the elements of the BTF Grassroots Plan;
- Develop a BTF ACTION FUND;
- Work toward the development of a watershed management plan for all areas affecting the water quality in Lake Bistineau;
- Encourage effective waste disposal systems;
- Conduct a special “contract spraying program (targeting GS and other aquatic weeds)”;  
- Conduct a “Bistineau - Water Conservation” campaign;
- Purchase special “contract services” for lake improvement, as needed; (NEW!)
- Purchase special equipment to be used in the War on Giant Salvinia. (NEW!)

SUMMARY: Support for the BTF is stronger than ever! This is a great partnership between stakeholders and agencies.
Here is one of many examples of Water Quality educational outreach by Olivia Ward:

Olivia Ward had a Water Quality/Nonpoint Source Pollution booth set up in the Ike Hamilton Expo Center for the annual Ag Expo. The 2011 expo ran for two days and was attended by over 10,000 people as reported by North Louisiana Agri-Business Council. The trade show featured 125 exhibitors in 165 booths, plus the Ag Alley educational center presented by LSU AgCenter. Exhibitors came from all over Louisiana and 18 additional states from around the country; as far as North Dakota. Attendees came from a regional area including Louisiana and extending to Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas.

At Olivia’s booth the public was able to see at a glance common non-point source pollutants and their causes, learn what non-point source pollution is, what a watershed is, and which watershed they live in! Also, on the display board was a DEQ “Be The Solution” poster, polluted water pictures, water facts, and actual possible pollutants such as an empty motor oil container and seven’s dust pesticide package. In addition, there were several educational brochures, handouts, pamphlets, and promotional items available at the booth for the public to pick up.

Dr. Stuart Johnson, Assistant Secretary for Louisiana State Parks, generously donated a weekend cabin stay at any state park of the recipient’s choice within Louisiana as a winning prize at Olivia’s booth. This created an extra incentive to visit the water quality booth, and a way to approximately count how many people specifically stopped by and saw water quality information. Not counting children, the grand total of booth visitors that registered came to 680. The winner of the weekend cabin stay went to Audie Maxey of Marion, La.
The National Association of RC&D Councils has made a concerted effort to increase the capacity of local RC&D Councils to foster communication between and among the economically and culturally diverse communities that lie within RC&D Council areas. To help facilitate this effort, the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) has provided the NARC&DC with a limited amount of funding.

On November 17, 2011, Trailblazer was notified of a new approved project to ensure that socially disadvantaged rural residents and communities in our area, have the capability to access financial and technical assistance for natural resource and economic development activities. This will be done by:

- Hosting a collaborative training workshop;
- Creating outreach materials;
- Prepare a final report that states the participation of socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and community leaders in the collaborative training workshops and any access by these participants to USDA and other Federal programs?

March 3, 2011
Trailblazer Annual Meeting
Quitman, LA.
Guest Speaker:
Clarence Hawkins,
USDA—Rural Development