



Grass Roots Award Recipient Mandi Ligon and 2012 TSSRM President Ken Cearley

Texas Section Society for Rangeland Management
Grass Roots Award-NRCS
Mandi Ligon

Mandi's path to the NRCS started with her ranching heritage. At 16 she went to work for the local SWCD. Mandi says "What I found there was more than just a summer job; I found my passion and my future career." She is highly respected by the producers she serves in Nolan County. It is the hands on experience and agricultural upbringing that helps her relate so well with producers.

She was raised on the Boone-Ligon ranch in the Rolling Plains of Baylor County. She helped with processing, branding, vaccinating, de-horning, and castrating; and also helped with the feeding of the stockers.

She bought her first cow when she was 5 years old with the winnings she received at a Stock Show. She and her sister started a partnership 3 years later and now run a registered cow/calf herd.

The tradition of stewardship started with her Great Grandfather, who was an avid conservationist in the early 1900's. Since her Father's passing eight years ago she and her sister have continued the same conservation ethic. She utilizes the skills she has learned from the NRCS on rangeland health and forage inventories to determine an effective grazing plan. Currently they are implementing a three herd-eighteen pasture rotation. She grew up working

beside her Dad, learning how to determine proper grazing use of a pasture and where to place water troughs to balance out the grazing. She has built miles of fence and has experience with drilling water wells, laying pipeline and installing water troughs. She has also run a dozer to clear mesquite in patterns. From a young age she was helping with wildlife census, evaluating the data and working with the game Warden and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on their recommendations to increase the quality of their whitetail deer, bobwhite quail, dove, turkey and wild hogs. They use this information to manage the wildlife on their year round hunting operation.

In the 11 years she has been in Sweetwater, she has personally measured and certified 35,269 acres of brush management and range seeding. There are 96 active EQIP contracts, 12 WHIP, 3 CSP, 21 CCRP Waterways, 2 CCRP Buffer contracts and 1 Quail buffer CCRP contract in the Sweetwater Field Office.

Nolan County lost 85,000 acres to a wildfire in 2011. Mandi held 3 town hall meetings to find out what the landowners needs were and figure out what the NRCS could do to help them. She developed 25 grazing plans for deferment on 68,000 acres and 18 EQIP contracts totaling \$800,000.00 for 82 miles of interior fences to be rebuilt. Some of these contracts also included treating prickly pear.

She has provided technical assistance to producers utilizing tree dozing, root plowing and chaining on cedar and mesquite, chemical control of mesquite, cedar, sumac, prickly pear, shin oak, tasijillo and prickly ash, cross fences, range seeding, pasture planting, wildlife upland habitat management, prescribed grazing, wildlife watering facilities, livestock pipelines, water storage facilities, critical area treatment, and pipe outlets. Additionally, she has Class Ia Burning authority to assist her producers with prescribed burns.

Prior to her arrival in Sweetwater, she served in Stanton, Stephenville and Seymour in various capacities. She attended County Extension Field days and continued her burn education, doing several burns through those years. She attended a summer burn course held at the Experiment station in Sonora and spent a week in the hill country helping with large summer burns in Kerr, Bandera, and Gillespie County. She attended a workshop updating grazing management research. While there, she learned the concepts for grazing management and planning, analysis, and monitoring tools for rangeland. She spent two weeks at the Parrie Haynes Camp assisting with Range transacts on the Fort Hood Project. She also attended Brush Busters Training and Livestock Health workshops. In addition she attended a two part workshop on Resource Management Systems presented by Charles Anderson.

As a student trainee in the Seymour Field Office she received range training from Reggie Quiett. This training laid the foundation for her future with the NRCS.

She was 16 years old when she went to work for the Miller-Brazos SWCD in the summer of 1991. During her time there she helped plan tree dozing, root plowing, chaining and range seeding. It was there that Cyril Keith helped her start her grass collection and began teaching her how to classify grasses. While working as a District Technician for the Miller-Brazos SWCD in Seymour, her duties also included planning the Annual Ag Day, writing and distributing the Districts Annual Newsletter, as well as preparing the Conservation Farmer and Rancher of the year presentations.

She believes it is very important to be involved with organizations within the NRCS as well as outside groups. She has said that the more involved you are, the more your people

skills improve. She has learned through her involvement with numerous organizations how to work well with diverse types of people. People feel comfortable with Mandi and this helps when working with the public.

Mandi has been an active member of the Society of Range Management since 1998, where she has served on the planning committees for 6 separate TSSRM annual meetings. In 2005 the International SRM meeting was held in Fort Worth and she served on the Daily Trail Boss committee. She has served on the Publicity, Scholarship and the Awards Committee; and for 3 years she served as the Information and Education Committee Chairperson with 12 committee members. She is currently serving on the Texas Section Board of Directors.

She is a graduate of the Texas Agriculture Lifetime Leadership (TALL). TALL is leadership program that creates a cadre of Texas leaders to help ensure effective understanding of and encourage positive actions on key issues, theories, policies and economics that will advance the agriculture industry. With the TALL program, she traveled to Germany, Russia, and Poland to learn about agriculture in those countries.

She has been a member of Toastmasters, volunteered at the Midland Soup Kitchen, volunteered with Therapeutic Riding Programs that allows mentally and physically challenged children and adults to ride horses for physical therapy in Stephenville and in Midland. She is a member of the Texas Wildlife Association and serves as Treasurer of the Nolan County Livestock Show Committee.

She received a QSI in 2011 for writing 45, FY 2011 Contracts totaling over 2.1 million dollars for Nolan County. Additionally she received 9 Certificates of Merit from 1998-2008; 1 Certificate of Appreciation and she is a Certified Level II Conservation Planner.

She has been heavily involved with recruitment of NRCS employees. She has assisted 12 individuals with their resumes and NRCS job applications, four of which were hired for the Student Temporary Employment Program and worked in the Sweetwater Field Office. Two were hired through the Career Intern Program and three were in the student Educational Employment Program.

She chaired the Wildlife Alliance for Youth (WAFY) contest for Region II and VII for 2 years and has assisted with the contest for 12 years where she also served as the NRCS representative on the WAFY State Board for 6 years. She was an adult leader for the 4-H groups in Roscoe, Champion and Highland, holding monthly meetings and helping the kids with their projects for 3 years.

In the past 11 years she has helped with the NRCS program at Farm Bureau 1 s Planet Agriculture during the Abilene Fair and Rodeo. She has assisted the Local Boy Scouts by providing tours and presentations helping them achieve their Conservation and Wildlife Badges. She also helped the 11th grade Biology class collect and identify a 60 plant grass collection at the Seymour ISD. She has worked after hours helping train the Sweetwater High School Wildlife, Plant Id and Range FFA Judging Teams over the last 6 years. Mandi has also provided programs to the local Lions Club and Rotary Club about the NRCS and our programs, and written several articles for the NRCS Lone Star Link, local newspaper and been a guest on KXOX's morning Ag program. She has aided with the planning of the SWCD Annual tours and helps plan and put on Nolan County's Annual Land and Range Judging contest.

This past year Mandi helped start Kids on the Land {KOL) in Nolan County. Holistic Management International developed the program which provides a day of hands-on activities to help students reconnect to the land where they live. 4th graders from 3 different elementary schools came out for a day of learning about the history dating back 10,000 years, plant identification, how seeds are spread and plant taxonomy. This year KOL will be a 2 day event with 4th and 5th grades participating.

Mandi has participated in 4 range training sessions with Joe Franklin. She also requested Joe to help her with a one acre test plot where they are testing the effectiveness of different chemical applications on different types of brush. She assisted Allen McGinity on testing a new chemical for Dow. Once the results are available she will have a rancher's field day. She has a contractor that is going to do the different types of Mechanical brush control across the road from the sprayed plots.

She has put so much into her career and she loves helping landowners achieve their conservation goals. She is a very hard worker and does a great job on every project she completes. She is very deserving of this award, though you will never hear her brag or boast about anything she has accomplished.