

# A Working Program: Natural Resource Education for Youth In Grades 3-12

Donald L. Holloway and Rick Orr

## Background:

Ninety-eight and one half percent of the 6,806,169 acres of land in Lincoln County, Nevada are owned and controlled by different government agencies. Through a county-wide needs assessment and through informal communication, it was determined that a program was needed to help the youth of Lincoln County understand natural resource management.

## Objective:

The objective was to create a natural resources educational program that would be suitable for 10% of our youth to learn about the natural resources in Lincoln County.

An Ag Committee (a group of educators and interested individuals) came up with a three-step program that has become successful in reaching and surpassing our objective.

### Step 1:

4-H became the natural vehicle for introducing youth to the program "Investigating your Environment" by the USDA-Forest Service. Using this series of exciting activities, the youth are introduced to soil, water, plant life, animal life, and etc. We have used this material to teach our younger youth in clubs and through summer camp and day camp programs. We find that younger youth have open minds and are eager to learn.

### Step 2:

Youth in very small communities tend to be competitive in all aspects of their activities. With this understanding in mind, we developed a program where over 18% of the high school youth are involved in soil and range management activities that allow them to compete at the State Contest and also at the National level, if they desire.

A soil judging manual was developed and is now in use across the State of Nevada in the FFA and 4-H programs. Eight to ten point teams, with five members per team, and another three or four non-point teams are involved in the State activity yearly.

At the Lincoln County Agriculture Education Day, the youth are taught about natural resources, career opportuni-

ties, etc., as well as being given an opportunity to judge soil. At this event, there are more youth involved with natural resource activities than there are point teams youth at the State contest.

The Ag Committee feels it is very important to learn about the soil first as all else in life is somehow related back to the soil.

We now have introduced a range management program, building on the soils program. This program is reaching about 16% of the high school population at this time.

### Step 3:

This step adds to what has been learned and teaches the youth about wildlife habitat improvement to our local area. They learn how to manage wildlife and their habitat, including wildlife in their own back yard. They learn how to write up management plans and how to work through problems as a team.

## Results:

In a county whose youth population is around 1,000 (or one-third of the total population), about 200 are involved in a natural resource education program, both in and out of the school classroom.

We have had youth qualify during the last four years for a \$1,250 scholarship in soils at Southern Utah University, Cedar City, Utah. We have helped the University set up a range management contest and a scholarship will be offered in 1997.

Our senior youth are going to college with careers in education, agriculture, and other areas when the natural resource education has given them a basic background for future jobs.

A state can send up to five teams to the National soil and range contest. Lincoln County has had at least one team attend every year for the past four years.



Authors are Extension Educator, Nevada Cooperative Extension and Resource Specialist, Natural Resources Conservation Service respectively.