

NOPHNCSE Provides Outreach to the NYC Institute & Professional Development Training to NRCS Employees

by Heydsha R. Cordero—Acting NHEPM and Gisela Carmenaty

On the afternoon of June 29, eight members of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNCSE) East Region collaborated with the National Hispanic Environmental Council (NHEC) and attended the New York City Minority Youth Environmental Training Institute on Staten Island, N.Y. The Institute is designed to help build the environmental leaders and professionals of tomorrow by educating, engaging, and inspiring youth, especially Latinos/Hispanic and other minorities, on a range of environmental and natural resource issues. During the event, NOPHNCSE sponsored a field tour and provided hands-on training to 22 inner city students, 17-19 years of age, from Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, California, Illinois, Massachusetts and Puerto Rico. The field tour was located at Gericke Farm on Staten Island, N.Y.

(Continued on page 2)



NOPHNCSE members and NYC Institute students and instructors group picture

2014 Outreach & Ag Education Expo
Sponsored By:
National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees

Atlanta, Georgia
DECEMBER 2014

Atlanta Airport Marriott
4711 Best Road, Atlanta, GA 30337

For more information visit our website at:
www.thenopbnrcse.org/expo

Announcement

SAVE THE DATES: The 2014 Outreach & Ag Education Expo sponsored by the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) will be held December 5-7, 2014 in Atlanta, Georgia.

More details to come this summer!

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Special Emphasis Program Managers Training

Wednesday, August 13, 2014/ 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

Jefferson Auditorium – South Building*

Hosted by the Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life Division

Office of Human Resources Management—USDA

More details regarding speakers, agenda, and registration link are forthcoming.

If you need reasonable accommodations to access this program, please contact Frederick.Cheng@dm.usda.gov by July 25, 2014.

For more information, please contact Jacqueline.Padron@dm.usda.gov.



Edwin Muñiz, NJ Assistant State Soil Scientist, explains how ground penetrating radar is used in soil survey while students receive hands-on experience.

Gericke Farm was established in the late 1700s and was the last working farm on Staten Island when it was sold to the State of New York in 1979. Today, the farm is used primarily for educational purposes. NOPHNRCSSE members established four field stations on the farm to teach the students about the work of NRCS. Field stations included: Soil Health, Irrigation, Conservation Planning, and Careers in Conservation.

The “Soil Health” station was led by Edwin Muñiz, Assistant State Soil Scientist in New Jersey, and assisted by Luis Hernandez, Soil Survey Regional Director in Amherst, Massachusetts. The students were enthralled with the high-tech equipment that was demonstrated. One such equipment was the Delta X-Ray Geochemistry Soil Analyzer, which uses x-rays to penetrate the soil and detect pollutants. The principles of soil chemistry, texture, and the different relationships that crops have with the soil were also discussed.



Rubén Pérez, Soil Conservationist/Irrigation Specialist, NJ, with students at the Irrigation and Engineering station.

Ruben Perez, Soil Conservationist/Irrigation Specialist in New Jersey, led the “Irrigation/Engineering” station. Ruben showed the students a small scale of an irrigation system and demonstrated how the water table influences the water availability for crops.

The “Conservation Planning” station was led by Noel Soto, Soil Conservationist in Pennsylvania, and assisted by Bianca Diaz and Gisela Carmenaty, Soil Conservationists in Maine and Pennsylvania, respectively. The students learned about water quality and got introduced to the clinometer and a dumpy level that are used in the field.



Noel Soto, Soil Conservationist- PA, teaching a student how to use a clinometer.

Last, but not least, was the “Careers in Conservation” station led by Astrid Martinez, NOPHNRCSSE President and Wyoming State Conservationist. Astrid led a roundtable discussion on the various career opportunities with NRCS. Students were also provided a packet of information about NRCS careers and programs and had an opportunity to ask questions about NRCS.

On Monday June 30, after the conclusion of activities with the Institute, a training session was held for professional development sponsored by NOPHNRCSSE. This training was hosted by Carrie Mosley, New Jersey State Conservationist, and moderated by Astrid Martinez. The training was offered to all NOPHNRCSSE members via video telephone conference.



Astrid Martinez, NOPHNRCSSE President and Wyoming State Conservationist, shares her NRCS experience with the students at the Careers in Conservation station.



(L to R) Bianca Diaz Deliz, Soil Conservationist, ME and Gisela Carmenaty, Soil Conservationist, PA, help a student at the Conservation Planning station.

Approximately 75 members tuned in to learn about budget and appropriations, leadership development, including a panel discussion with four State Conservationists (Astrid Martinez-Wyoming State Conservationist, Carlos Suarez-California State Conservationist, J.R. Flores-Missouri State Conservationist and Edwin Almodóvar-State Conservationist for the Caribbean Area). Veronica Villalobos, OPM Director for Diversity and Inclusion, wrapped up the training with a presentation about OPM Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plans. NOPHNRCSE has received positive feedback about the training and hopes to continue offering training opportunities in the future.

The recorded version of the Professional Development Training is available by accessing the following link: <http://199.134.135.78/tcs/?id=81a1660d-f75a-4d42-a7d3-b67836f7cf43>

photos taken by Kristina Wiley, NOPHNRCSE East Region Representative and Workshop Coordinator

USDA and NRCS Build a Bright Future for LGBT Employees and Customers

Submitted by Meghan Walter, P.E., National LGBT Program Manager



“This month, as we mark 45 years since the patrons of the Stonewall Inn defied an unjust policy and awakened a nascent movement, **let us honor every brave leader who stood up, sat in, and came out, as well as the allies who supported them along the way.** Following their example, **let each of us speak for tolerance, justice, and dignity** -- because if hearts and minds continue to change over time, laws will too.”

--President Barack Obama, in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month 2014 Presidential Proclamation ([click here for link](#))

June is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Pride month at USDA and around the world. The USDA theme for the 2014 LGBT Pride month was “Build Our Bright Future”. We honor the many LGBT leaders and allies who helped build a more inclusive future, such as [Bayard Rustin](#), [Sally Ride](#), [Eric Alva](#), [Harvey Milk](#), and [Edith Windsor](#). Progress is spreading from state to state in the nation, as our citizens recognize that every American deserves an equal chance to pursue a bright future of health and happiness, to earn a living and be safe in their communities, to serve their country, and to take care of the ones they love. These are the fundamental dignities we all strive for, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or ability. **Here at NRCS, each one of us has a role in creating a safe future for our coworkers and customers, a future that provides for these fundamental dignities. Let each of us as NRCS employees speak for tolerance, justice and dignity.**

USDA held its official Pride celebration on Thursday, June 5 featuring guest speakers Chef Art Smith and Professor Kylar Broadus. NRCS field offices across the nation also celebrated LGBT Pride month with potluck lunches, guest speakers, and outreach booths at Pride festivals. A cornerstone of the NRCS Pride celebration this year was a tri-state tour of USDA offices and outreach events featuring Ashlee Davis, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. Davis visited with USDA customers and employees in Utah, California, and Oregon to get the message out that USDA and LGBT communities occupy the same space. Davis stated that **“USDA has offices in 2200 counties and same-sex couples live in 99.3% of U.S. counties. They’re our customers and they’re underserved.”** It’s just good customer service to connect with the populations that live and work in the areas that USDA serves.

This year we also mark the 50th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, signed into law on July 2, 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, and national origin and now serves as the foundation for sexual orientation and gender identity protections. The 1964 Civil Rights Act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to implement the law. It is the EEOC that issued the [Macy decision](#) in 2012, which determined that discrimination against an individual because that person is transgender is discrimination because of sex and is therefore covered under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. This is also known as gender identity discrimination. The EEOC also found that claims by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals alleging [sex-stereotyping can make a sex discrimination claim under Title VII](#) of the Civil Rights Act as well. (Source: [EEOC website](#)). In celebrating LGBT Pride month, we recognize those civil rights activists who made a career out of humanity and made a greater nation of our country, those men and women who [marched on Washington in 1963 for jobs and freedom](#).

It was at the March on Washington that a young man from Georgia told America about [his dream](#) for the nation, that his children “will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” **Because of the noble struggle of Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others who fought for equal rights for the African American community, we can now advocate for equal rights for all Americans, including our LGBT community.**

“Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., District of Columbia, 1959

We can make a greater department of USDA by recognizing that many in the LGBT community choose to live, work, and raise their families in the rural communities that USDA is proud to serve. Contrary to widely held myths that the LGBT community is largely living in affluent metropolitan areas, studies show a very different and more realistic picture of the LGBT community. Same-sex couples reside in 99.3% of counties across the nation; same-sex couples are most likely to be [raising children](#) in Mississippi, Wyoming, Alaska, Idaho, and Montana.

LGBT families living in rural America are more likely to be low-income and almost twice as likely to receive public assistance, according to a report by The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The transgender community is particularly vulnerable, especially transgender people of color, as they experience disturbingly high rates of poverty and are four times as likely to have a household income under \$10,000 and twice as likely to be unemployed as non-transgender people. In an effort to elevate the voices of the LGBT community living in rural America, USDA and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) is launching the #RuralPride campaign. The centerpiece of this campaign is a series of day-long summits hosted by USDA, NCLR, and a number of local partners based in rural communities across the country.

Bob Abell, NRCS LGBT Program Manager in North Carolina and State Conservationist Tim Beard attended the kick-off summit at North Carolina A&T University on June 6. The next LGBT Rural Summit is July 11 in Lost River, West Virginia. For more information visit: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/lgbt_rural_summit_series.html



Navajo Nation 5th Annual Agriculture and Youth Conference

April 29-30th
Window Rock, AZ

By Chambliss Lantana

Window Rock, AZ – The Navajo Nation Dept of Agriculture (NNDA) hosted there 5th Annual Agriculture Conference on April 29-30th. New Mexico and Arizona Natural Recourse Conservation Service employees that have field offices on or near the Navajo Reservation were in attendance with a booth from both State agencies. Folks of all ages were in attendance; from young to seasoned age farmers and ranchers. Both state agencies field questions from producers as they had questions relating to their operations.

Cliff Sanchez, NM AStC-Programs, discussed the New 2014 USDA Farm Bill and discussed some of important changes to the NRCS Farm Bill Programs to begin the General Session for the Agriculture Conference.

Felix Nez, District Conservationist, out of the Dilkon Field Office provided a power point presentation to a handful of Ag producers in one of the afternoon sessions about 'NRCS Conservation Planning' on Tribal lands. A lot of quality information was given to the audience about the NRCS Farm Bill programs from Felix's presentation.

Those in attendance from NRCS:

NM NRCS:

Xavier Montoya, State Conservationist, NM SO
Cliff Sanchez, AStC-Programs, NM SO
Tommy Marshall, AStC/O, NM SO
Steve Kadas, AC, NM AO
Richard Montoya, DC, Grants FO
Kevin Branum, SC, Grants FO
Claudia Willeto, SC, Crownpoint FO
Leonard Notah, SC, Gallup FO
Pearl Armijo, DC, Los Lunas FO
Chambliss Lantana, SC, Aztec FO

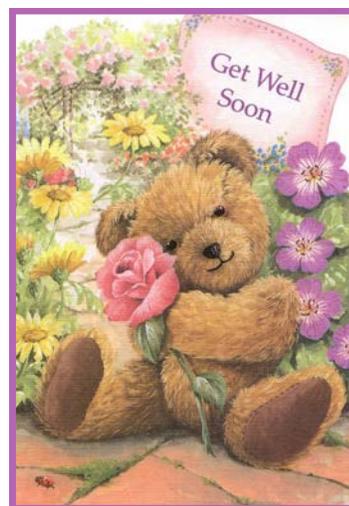
AZ NRCS:

Ray Dotson, AStC, Flagstaff AO
Larry McBride, SC, Flagstaff AO

Felix Nez, DC, Dilkon FO
Gary Smith, DC, Shiprock FO
Ivan Joe, DC, St. Mikes FO
Lyndon Chee, DC, Chinle FO

Nevada NRCS:

Sharon Nance, Strike Force Outreach Coordinator, NV



**Sending our warmest
wishes for Sharyn
Alvarez to get well
soon.**

ESGR Offers Help for Supervisors of Reservists

By William Hensel

Do you have a National Guard or Reserve component member working in your section? If the answer is Yes, do you know your responsibilities as a supervisor? Do you know the rules and regulations of USERRA that apply to you and your employee? Do you know where you can get information regarding the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)?

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a grass-roots volunteer organization under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. Established in 1979, it provides speakers, mediation services, education, and serves as a liaison with the military member, his unit and his employer. Volunteer members come from all walks of life, both military and civilian. Each state has a local ESGR committee. Each state committee has four tasks to perform: Military Outreach, Employer Outreach, Ombudsman Services and Employment Assistance.



The Military Outreach mission is to provide reserve component service members with current

information about USERRA—most often via unit briefings held on drill weekends. Reserve component family members are also briefed on USERRA and the military support section of FMLA. Military outreach events also included veterans muster and other veteran-oriented activities, military retiree days, and yellow ribbon events. But its most important activity is participation at pre- and post-deployment briefings, where they answered questions for service members and their families.

The Employer Outreach mission is to seek and contact any employer, manager, or human resource professional who may impact their workforce's participation in the Reserve components. While it is a stand-alone function, it also complements the ESGR awards and military outreach programs by providing current information about USERRA—most often in face-to-face meetings or seminars to the leadership of public and private organizations. It gives them the tools they need to understand the rights and responsibilities of their workers who are members of the National Guard or the Reserve. Profit and non-profit organizations, along with governmental entities and fraternal associations such as Elks, Moose, Rotarians, and chambers of commerce, are all preferred candidates of employer outreach.



ESGR volunteers provide free Ombudsman services to resolve disputes between employers and employees regarding their military service. Ombudsman are trained and certified as impartial mediators. Ombudsman provide free services to employers, military members and to military spouses.

Employment Assistance is the final area that ESGR volunteers work. ESGR working with state employment assistance agencies, veterans organizations and other groups host hiring events in each state. Military members and their spouse can enroll in the DoD sponsored Hero 2 Hired program (www.h2h.jobs). This program partners with military friendly employers with military members and their spouses seeking employ-

Earth Team Volunteers in Missouri

Contributing author, Morgan Rodery, Earth Team volunteer



Sgt. 1st Class Richard Dysinger began serving as a hosted Earth Team volunteer in St. Clair County field office in Oseola in February 2014 while participating in the Operation War Fighter (OFW) internship program through the Department of Defense (DOD). OFW offers internships for wounded, ill and injured service members.

The internship, funded by the DOD, enables Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff to benefit from the talent, dedication, and experience of one of our nation's recovering service members. It also provides an opportunity for additional training, experience, and networking for the participant. Dysinger has served the country for 18 years and is based out of Ft. Leonard Wood. He is the first OFW participant in Missouri.

Dysinger was familiar with NRCS before entering the program. He grew up on a farm in Kansas where his family worked with the agency.

Although he has only been in the OFW for a short time, he says, "I would recommend this program for anyone retiring from the military who is interested in starting a farm or other agricultural pursuit."

"Having a volunteer that is part of the OFW internship has definitely been a benefit to our offices and gives us a chance to do something for a veteran who has spent his career serving this great country," NRCS District Conservationist Gorman Bennett said.

Dysinger said this has been a positive experience for him too. Office work, such as updating case files, is not the only thing he has assisted with. He has helped with designing waterways and rotational grazing plans in addition to obtaining slope data for highly erodible land determinations, surveying stream crossings, and checkouts of Environmental Quality Incentive Program practices.

"Richard has been ready and willing to take on any challenge and it's been a good experience having him work in our office as a hosted volunteer through OFW," commented Mr. Bennett.



HOSTED Earth Team Volunteer - Richard Dysinger

Area 4

A hosted volunteer is paid through a source other than NRCS.

Earth Team Volunteer Categories:

- Individual
- Recurring Group
- Friends of Conservation
- One-time Group
- Hosted

Celebrate Volunteers

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

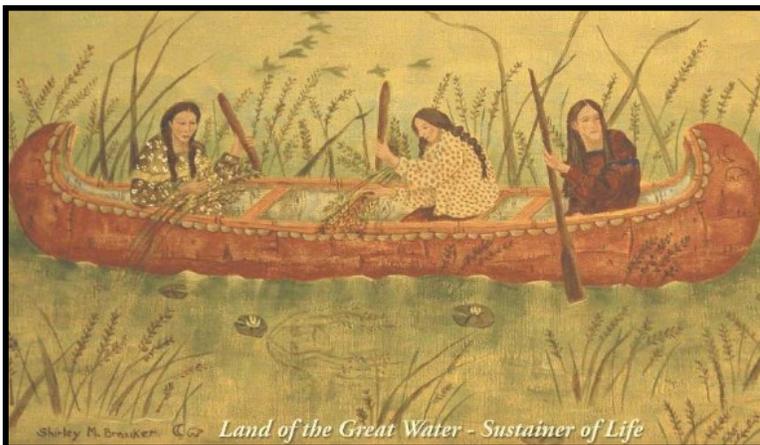
About Susan Looper—Nevada AIAN SEPM

Nevada AIAN SEPM Susan Looper is a State Programs Resource Conservationist for NRCS in Reno. Looper was selected in February 2013 for a three-year term as the Nevada American Indian Alaska Native Special Emphasis Program Manager (AIAN SEPM). Looper serves on the Nevada Interagency Civil Rights Advisory Committee and is a member of the American Indian Alaska Native Employee Association. Her own tribal heritage is Osage/Creek. Looper is enrolled in the Osage Nation and is a tribal member.

One reason she applied for the Nevada AIAN SEPM position was to develop a more effective means to recruit tribal students for employment opportunities. Looper believes a major barrier for recruiting tribal students, or any Special Emphasis group for that matter, is lack of student exposure to the agency before entering college.

“Nevada tribal youth don’t know who we are, what we do or why we do it. That needs to change,” Looper said. Looper wants to create a recruiting program for Nevada NRCS that provides tribal students comprehensive exposure to the agency. “It’s my understanding some Nevada Tribes track their community youth from kindergarten through college. Somehow, NRCS needs to be part of that process as a potential employer. USDA Farm Bill Programs, like the Farm to School Program, The People’s Garden and EQIP High Tunnel (hoop house) structures provide a wonderful means for NRCS to get involved with participating schools. We need to get these tribal students excited about the science of conservation long before they head to college,” explains Looper.

Looper has learned that some tribal communities are challenged to keep their community hoop house structures managed and productive on a day-to-day basis. In the same tribal community, she found one such hoop house located at the elementary school and a second one very near the high school. She thought, why couldn’t the students



manage these structures through the schools? “Over this past year, I have been sowing possibility seeds with the tribal school principals, indicating how their students could benefit from managing these hoop houses. Specifically, I proposed an educational internship be developed for high school students to manage both structures two or three days a week, including the seasonal crop production,” Looper said. “An internship could give high school tribal youth an opportunity to lead in their community and earn school credits toward graduation. The tribal community would also have the benefit of hoop house management on a day-to-day basis.”

Looper’s personal feelings about programs that actively promote equal employment opportunity for historically underserved groups come from first-hand experience. Prior to working for NRCS, Looper worked in the agriculture and road construction industries as a commercial truck driver and heavy equipment operator—both male-dominated industries. In 1986, northern California suffered extensive flooding which affected her job transporting dry rice due to high water and road closures. Looper ended up joining the Teamsters Union and was dispatched to an emergency construction job involving the water tunnel of a hydro-electric power plant flooded by mud and debris. The construction company awarded the job was required to hire three women based on Affirmative Action policies at that time. Looper was the third woman hired for the job. If Affirmative Action had not been implemented at that time, she knows she would not have been hired.



“Working Effectively With American Indians” training session in Lander, WY 2013. L to R: Brenda Ling, WY NRCS PAS and Susan Looper, NV NRCS AIAN SEPM.

~ Conservation ~
Preserving Our Land for Future Generations

"A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children."
- John Muir

"After working three years as a Teamster, I bought my own commercial tractor and a set of bottom-dumps, and continued working in road construction. Again, Affirmative Action gave way to programs like Women in Business Enterprises (WBE), which I participated in as a Certified WBE bottom-dump trucking business. Being a Certified WBE expanded my opportunities for bidding on road construction jobs or direct hire, for which I am grateful," states Looper.

Looper graduated from California State University, Chico (CSUC) in 2003 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, and emphasis on Agriculture Education. Her first position with NRCS was a STEP Soil Conservation Technician during the summer of 2002, as an undergrad.

"It was a good fit for me and the field office," said Looper.

Looper had planned to teach high school Agriculture Education after completing the Credential program in the fall of 2004, but was recruited by NRCS that spring for a two-year Career Internship Program position as a Soil Conservationist in California.

Since that time, Looper has worked as a District Conservationist and Soil Conservationist in Idaho, and currently works at the Nevada NRCS State Office in Reno as a Programs Resource Conservationist

WHAT'S UP NEXT...?

Celebrating 24 Years of the ADA

Submitted by: Kelly Oliver, DEPM- South Dakota

July 26, 2014 marks the 24th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990. This law was intended to allow "every man, woman, and child with a disability" to enter a "new era of equality, independence, and freedom," as stated by George H.W. Bush at the signing of the ADA.

The ADA is the world's first comprehensive civil rights law for people with disabilities. The ADA was authored and sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA). During the introduction speech, Harkin provided sign language so his deaf brother could understand.

The ADA provides equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for people with disabilities. The ADA has provisions for employment, public services (including public housing) and transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications.

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 was enacted September 25, 2008 and became effective January 1, 2009. These amendments broadened the coverage of the ADA where the Supreme Court had narrowly interpreted several portions of the original ADA.

These narrow interpretations resulted in multiple denials of protection that Congress had originally intended, in addition to clarifying that the focus is on "whether discrimination occurred," not on whether the person qualifies as having a disability.



The ADAAA also clarified and broadened the term “disability” to expand the protections offered. The new definition states a disability as “an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.” This definition now included persons with amputation, intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, and cancer. When considering the disability, the ADAAA prohibits consideration of reasonable accommodations and mitigating measures when determining whether the impairment substantially limits a major life activity. The ADAAA also includes medical conditions that are episodic or in remission to be assessed in their active state.



The ADA and ADAAA positively impacts people with disabilities and their families and support networks. In 2012, 12.1% of the US population had a disability.

Age Group	Percentage
4 and under	0.8
5-20	5.4
21-64	10.4
65-74	25.0
75+	50.0

SOURCE: http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/StatusReports/2012-PDF/2012-StatusReport_US.pdf?CFID=12685670&CFTOKEN=75c9672939ed02e8-BB9FFCBA-5056-B400-0D36375334158FD6&jsessionid=84301eb0eaff21ce1cb547626b5a356c7359

REFERENCE: <http://adaanniversary.org/>

NRCS SEPMs Team



National Federal Women's Program Manager

Sharyn C. Alvarez



National LGBT Emphasis Program Manager

Meghan Walter



National American Indian/ Alaska Native Emphasis Program Manager

Deborah Clairmont



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Danny Jones



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National Veteran Emphasis Program Manager

Wade R. Minami



National Black Emphasis Program Manager

Tiffany Justus



National Asian American/ Pacific Islander Emphasis Program Manager

Kurencio B. Ngowaki

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