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## ***News Release***

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### **NRCS Statewide Awards Recognize Tukumcari Based Groups and Individual**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM-Three Tukumcari based organizations and one individual were recipients of USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) statewide Earth Team Volunteer awards, April 9, 2008. The awards were presented by NRCS state conservationist, Dennis Alexander, to the Canadian River Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), El Llano Estacado Resource Conservation & Development Council (RC&D), Altrusa International of Tukumcari, and Relissa Nials, Tukumcari's NRCS soil conservationist, in recognition of their volunteerism.

"The dedication of these groups and this individual to conservation, the youngsters of Tukumcari, and their community as a whole is truly remarkable," said Alexander. "It is an honor for NRCS to be affiliated with the people here who are advancing projects like the Tukumcari Outdoor Classroom and events such as the Happy Birthday Earth celebration."

The Happy Birthday Earth celebration, for which the organizations and Nials were recognized, was held in April 2007 when 639 students were provided a full day of classes at the Tukumcari Outdoor Classroom. Ten stations were staffed at the site by seventeen qualified professionals offering instruction in such fields as water quality, goats, birds, butterflies, dinosaurs and fossils, wildlife, and invertebrates. The celebration was organized by an event team and logistics from lunches to flow of attendees were charted out and supported by fleets of volunteers.

The Tukumcari Outdoor Classroom where the event was held is a well-supported community project that was initiated by the Canadian River SWCD. The Altrusa International of Tukumcari supported the construction of a kiva classroom and initial improvements of the site that included planting of a windbreak and installation of a drip irrigation system. Altrusa has co-sponsored with Comcast a clean-up day at the site, with Comcast donating funds that have been used by Altrusa's butterfly project. The butterfly project includes the purchase of butterfly cocoons that give Tukumcari children a hands-on learning project and butterfly release at the Happy Birthday Earth celebration.

The El Llano Estacado RC&D assisted in the planning, facilitation, and securing of presenters and resources for the project. Nials filled an important leadership role in addition to rolling up her sleeves and doing everything from supporting speakers to making signage.

Many from the community contributed to event including the New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Game and Fish, Nature Conservancy, New Mexico Rural Bookmobile, Mesalands Community College, New Mexico State University Ag Science Center, Outlaw Cattle Company, Tukumcari Public Schools, Rotary International, Tukumcari Honor Society, and local businesses.

"My hat is off to all the volunteers who have made a special place like the Outdoor Classroom and its great events happen," said Alexander. "It is a real tribute to what volunteers can do."

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