

Bringing it together



MAY 2007

Photo by Bob Buman

**Our Mission:**  
Agren, Inc. responds to agricultural and environmental challenges by providing comprehensive, integrated services to groups and individuals to positively impact our natural resources. The Agren team is dedicated to achieving client objectives through a commitment to quality and excellence.

## Agren Reaches Out to Absentee Landowners Across the Nation

Absentee landowners are very much on the minds of Agren staff. Agren's efforts in this area began with a small pilot project in Carroll County, IA. They have since expanded to current projects in New York, Wisconsin, Michigan and Iowa, and potential work in Montana, Colorado, Ohio and Mississippi.

Absentee landowners are defined as people who own agricultural property but do not live on or operate it. An estimated 42 percent of landowners in the United States fall into this category. This group could include retired farmers who have moved from the land and lease it to others, people who inherit agricultural land, and people who live out-of-state and buy ag land for recreational or investment purposes.

The focus of Agren's involvement with absentee landowners is to help them understand what conservation is, how it might benefit them, and how to identify appropriate conservation practices for their land.

Agren first worked with absentee landowners in 2005 through an educational and outreach project to out-of-state landowners who owned ag land in Carroll County.

As a result of that project, Agren realized a need for a nationwide Center for Absentee Landowners. Agren partnered with Missouri & Mississippi Divide Resource Conservation and Development Council (M&M Divide RC&D) in Carroll to obtain a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) to pursue outreach to absentee landowners on a broader scale.

Grant funds were used to establish a nationwide Center for Absentee Landowners, as well as to implement eight separate pilot projects across the country. Currently, several of those projects are underway or in the planning stages.

### Website & hotline

The vision for the Center is to become a "one-stop shop" to help absentee landowners understand conservation needs on their land, learn about conservation pro-



**The Center for Absentee Landowners website offers a wealth of information for people who own agricultural land that they don't live on or operate.**

grams that are available to them, and easily access financial and technical resources.

The Center for Absentee Landowners website went on-line in 2006. It can be found at <http://www.absenteelandowners.org/> The website is loaded with helpful information for landowners, including tools to assess their need for conservation practices, details

*(continued on inside)*

## Agren Reaches Out to Absentee Landowners Across the Nation (cont.)

about conservation programs, contact information for government agencies that can help with conservation decisions, fact sheets, and much more.

Another service available to absentee landowners is the Conservation Connect Hotline. The hotline was established as a

getting underway in the Great Lakes states of Michigan, New York and Wisconsin. The work is funded in large part by the Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF), with additional support from the CIG. The Great Lakes Protection Fund is a private, nonprofit corporation that funds regional

projects to improve the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

The goal of this project is two-fold. First, to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment that

enters the Great Lakes in the targeted areas through installation of vegetative filter strips, and secondly, to improve the ability of conservation organizations in the Great Lakes Basin to market conservation practices to absentee landowners.

This is a three-year project that is beginning with a demographic survey of landowners in the pilot counties. Based

on the information collected through the surveys, outreach campaigns will be developed to educate and encourage absentee landowners about using conservation practices.

### Chippewa County, Wisconsin

The goals of this project are much the same as for the Great Lakes project, but targeted specifically to landowners in Chippewa County, WI. Chippewa County is located about 100 miles due east of St. Paul, MN. It was chosen as a pilot county because of its commitment to working with landowners to install filter strips.

This educational and outreach project is funded by a grant from the McKnight Foundation, a Minnesota-based private philanthropic organization, with matching funds from the Conservation Innovation Grant.

### Iowa's Loess Hills

Using prescribed fire to sustain and rejuvenate native prairie is the focus of outreach to absentee landowners in the Loess Hills region of western Iowa.

This select group of absentee landowners received a direct mailing to introduce services and upcoming opportunities for education about prescribed fire. The mailing was followed by two small-group meetings and three conference-call interviews, all facilitated by Agren staff. The meetings and calls were reinforced with personal phone calls and one-on-one consultations for those most interested in using prescribed fire on their land.

Results of this outreach effort will be evaluated and shared through the Center of Absentee Landowners and local conservation meetings. The Loess Hills project is funded through a grant from the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP), with matching funds from the M&M Divide RC&D.

### Pending Projects in Four Other States

In addition to work already underway, Agren is exploring new absentee landowner projects in the states of Montana, Ohio, Mississippi and Colorado. The methods used in each project will likely be slightly different, but the overall message is the same – the benefits of conservation practices on private lands.

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simple, free source of information about conservation practices and programs. The hotline can be accessed toll-free at 866-792-6248. It is staffed during business hours five days a week.

### Great Lakes Region

One of the largest of the pilot projects related to absentee landowners is now

## Congratulations, Bob, on your 10th year at Agren.

**Bob joined the Agren team as research director on May 5, 1997. His professionalism & dedication have been a great asset to Agren during the past 10 years.**



**Bob Buman**



## Creative Approach to Designing Prescribed Fire Insurance Coverage

There is no shortage of private contractors interested in conducting prescribed fires on private lands throughout the United States. But there is a shortage of liability insurance to support the work of those contractors.

"The insurance industry has been reluctant to enter into the prescribed fire liability insurance market because of the high degree of uncertainty", explained Tom Buman, Agren co-founder and president. "Insurance companies perceive that prescribed fire is risky, and therefore the cost of insurance is prohibitive. This unavailability of insurance reduces a private contractor's willingness to burn."

Enter Agren and its innovative approach to solving environmental challenges. Five years ago, Agren partnered with the Iowa Bureau of Forestry to initiate a two-phase process to gather the information necessary to develop an insurance policy for private contractors and non-government organizations (NGOs) that use prescribed fire.

During Phase I, Agren collected the actuarial data necessary to write an insurance policy to cover liability during a prescribed fire.



**Prescribed fire is an important management tool for prairie lands, but is sometimes limited by a lack of insurance coverage for private contractors.**

Written surveys and follow-up phone calls were conducted in nine states. Private contractors and NGOs were surveyed about their prescribed fire practices and how often fires "escaped"

under controlled conditions. Also studied was the severity of losses from the escaped prescribed fires.

Of the 545 written surveys that were mailed, 272 were returned (50%). Half of those who responded indicated that they do prescribed burning. Of the private contractors and NGOs who said they did burns, 50% indicated they had experienced escapes.

Based on results of the written surveys, follow-up phone calls

were made to 60 of the 66 contractors who had experienced fire escapes. Both the written and telephone surveys revealed interesting data relevant to prescribed fire liability:

### Characteristics related to a higher risk of escapes:

- ▶ Conducted prescribed burns in the South
- ▶ Sometimes, often or always started burns after sunset
- ▶ Earned less than 25% of their business revenue from prescribed burns
- ▶ Conducted a low number of burns annually

### Characteristics related to a higher severity of escaped prescribed fires:

- ▶ Had 10 or fewer years of fire suppression experience
- ▶ Conducted more than a third of their burns in timber or grass fuels
- ▶ On average, conducted smaller burns
- ▶ Used crews with less than excellent or very good experience

Armed with this data, Agren wrote a sample insurance policy and provided marketing and educational services to encourage the development and implementation of the policy. This second phase of the project was completed in summer 2006.

Although the project does not commit insurance companies to provide insurance for prescribed fires, it does provide the necessary actuarial data to help insurance companies make an informed decision.

"If insurance does become more available for private contractors and NGOs," Buman said, "it should be incorporated into a national strategy to reduce the threat of wildland fires and restore the health of forest ecosystems."

A report of the survey information can be found at [www.agren-inc.com](http://www.agren-inc.com) (click on "survey results" on the right-hand side of the home page). To learn more about the prescribed fire liability insurance policy, contact Tom Buman at 712-792-6248 or at [tom@agren-inc.com](mailto:tom@agren-inc.com).

***Prescribed burning is defined as fire that is applied in a knowledgeable manner on a specific land area under selected weather conditions to accomplish a predetermined, well-defined management objective.***

## Agren Names Third Owner

Effective January 1, 2007, long-time Agren employee Jamie Ridgely was named the third owner of the company. Jamie now is part owner of Agren with founders Tom Buman and Stan Buman.

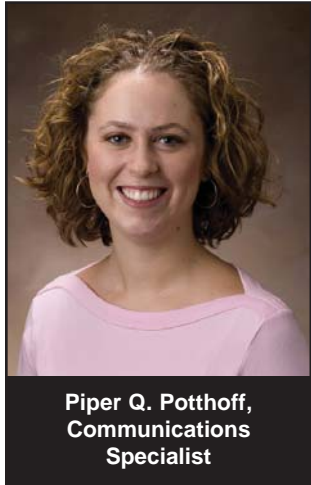
Tom and Stan founded Agren, Inc. in 1997 to meet a perceived need for consulting services dedicated to environmental and agricultural challenges. Both came from a background in natural resources conservation and management.

Jamie joined the company fulltime in March 2000, after working here as a summer intern and part-time employee. As Agren's project coordinator, Jamie helps plan, implement and evaluate projects on a variety of issues related to agriculture and the environment. As a new owner of the company, Jamie will continue to coordinate projects in addition to more administrative and managerial responsibilities.



**Long-time Agren employee Jamie Ridgely became part owner of Agren in January with co-founders Stan Buman (left) and Tom Buman.**

## Get to Know....Piper Potthoff, Agren Communications Specialist



**Piper Q. Potthoff,  
Communications  
Specialist**

Piper Potthoff didn't expect that her first job out of college would be back in her hometown of Carroll, IA. But the challenges of her job at Agren and being close to family and friends has made it a great fit. "I've loved every minute of it," Piper said.

Piper grew up on a farm in Carroll County and graduated from Kuemper High School in Carroll. She earned a double major in public relations and Spanish from Loras College in Dubuque, and spent one semester studying and traveling in Granada, Spain. Shortly after college graduation, Piper replied to an ad for a communications specialist at Agren and began work here in November 2005.

Since starting at Agren, the majority of Piper's time has been spent working on projects targeted toward absentee landowners. She developed the Center for Absentee Landowners website ([www.absenteelandowners.org](http://www.absenteelandowners.org)) and worked with other staff to incubate several pilot projects related to absentee landowners. She

also was instrumental in locating and securing grant funding for absentee landowner projects in Iowa, New York, Michigan and Wisconsin. Other projects are pending in Montana, Mississippi, Ohio and Colorado.

This spring, Piper is focused on landowners in the Great Lakes states of New York and Wisconsin.

"Right now, we're doing a demographic survey in the Great Lakes area to understand more about absentee landowners and how they like to receive information," Piper explained. "Based on the results of the survey, we'll develop two outreach campaigns. The ultimate goals are to encourage landowners to implement conservation practices on their land, and to better understand how to contact and educate absentee landowners."

Among her other responsibilities, Piper is the unofficial technology expert at Agren, answering questions from other staff members and exploring new technologies that might benefit the company. She also lends her graphic design talents to many projects.

When she's not busy with projects for Agren, Piper said she likes to attend her sisters' activities and work on the home she bought in Carroll. She's also played violin since the fifth grade and is a member of the Carroll Area Symphony Orchestra.

