



# Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 52 No. 12, December 2006

## OCC Begins New Year With Almost \$10 Million in Projects

### Conservation Construction Dollars at Record High

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission will begin the new year with a record amount of dollars under contract for conservation projects. Three Abandoned Mine Land Program projects totaling \$852,376, two Tar Creek Superfund Area reclamation projects totaling \$2,847,676, and six Conservation Programs watershed projects totaling \$4,634,416 were already underway in December. Those 11 projects total \$8,334,468 in construction costs. Two more projects went out for bid in December and are scheduled to begin in January — an AML project and a watershed project have a total anticipated cost of \$1,139,142, which will raise the overall total to \$9,473,610.

“In my 28 years with the Conservation Commission, I have never seen this much conservation construction at one time,” said OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard. “The OCC staff and our conservation district partners are to be commended for their efforts in putting conservation on the ground,” Pollard said.

Two of the AML projects underway, Greer Phase I and McPheeters, are in Rogers County and the third, O’Neal, is in Sequoyah County. The new AML project now out for bid, the 61st Street North NE Project, is in Wagoner County. The two Tar Creek projects underway in Ottawa County are both within the city of Commerce. Two of the watershed projects are in the Double Creek Watershed in Washington County and are rehabilitation projects. The Sandstone Creek Project in Roger Mill County and Barnitz Creek Project in Dewey County are both rehabilitation projects. The other two projects are repair and modification projects in Caddo County. The new watershed project will rehabilitate Double Creek Site 2 in Washington County.

## Keep Oklahoma Beautiful & Wildlife Expo’s Forest of Family Fun

### Rogers County CD Receives Award and Thanks

The Keep Oklahoma Beautiful organization announced that the Rogers County Conservation District and the city of Claremore are recipients of the Award of Excellence in the group’s statewide environmental excellence competition. The awards were presented Dec. 7 in Oklahoma City.

The judges recognized the district for its 120-acre Conservation Education Reserve that provides a hands-on learning experience for students and adults in the importance and management of natural resources. The district and the city worked together to implement a stormwater education program. Claremore’s Stormwater Public Education Program, in turn, provides teaching aides and materials in support of the district.

The *Tulsa World* newspaper published an extensive feature on Nov. 11 about the district winning the award. The article included photos and interviews with district employees Keith Owen and Robert Gibbs.

### Wildlife Commission thanks Rogers CCD and OCC for Forest of Family Fun at Wildlife Expo

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) recently published a full-page “thank you” to Rogers County Conservation District and the Conservation Commission. In its September/October issue of *Outdoor Oklahoma* magazine, ODWC recognized the district and OCC for hosting the Forest of Family Fun at the Wildlife Expo in August. The article carried descriptions of the programs and services offered by the district and OCC.

## In This Issue

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Rogers County CD Receives Keep Oklahoma Beautiful Award of Excellence and ODWC’s Thanks for Forest of Family Fun

Coalition for Conservation Forms to Influence Farm Bill

Garfield County CD Hosts Legislative Shootout

**Our vision:**  
Responsible care for Oklahoma’s natural resources

**Our mission:**  
To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma’s natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts and other partners, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.



*In 2007, we will celebrate the Oklahoma Statehood Centennial and the 70th anniversary of the Conservation District Enabling Act.*

*Look for many commemorative events, products and stories celebrating conservation’s contribution to the great state of Oklahoma and the nation!*



# Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on "Calendar" at [www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)

2007

**Jan. 1** — News Year's Day Holiday

**Jan. 8** — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

**Jan. 12-13** — KNID AgriFest, Chisholm Trail Expo Center, Enid.

**Jan. 15** — Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday

**Jan. 18** — No-Till Workshop, Hollis Civic Center, Hollis.

**Feb. 1** — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

**Feb. 4-8** — Power of Conservation, Annual National NACD Meeting, Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, Ca.

**Feb. 8** — No-Till Workshop, Caddo-Kiowa Technology Center, Fort Cobb.

**Feb. 9-11** — Oklahoma Farmers Union State Convention 2007, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City.

**Feb. 19** — President's Day Holiday

**Feb. 25-27** — OACD Annual State Meeting, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City.

## District Dateline .....

**Alfalfa County CD** held its Conservation Appreciation Program Nov. 9 ..... **Haskell County CD** held its 25th Annual Bankers Awards Program Nov. 13 .....

All Conservation Districts: Please mail, email or fax one-line items about district activities to Mark Harrison/OCC for District Dateline. Thanks!

## In Our Thoughts

Ron Clark, NRCS state conservationist from 1995 to 1999, lost his mother in December.

## Congratulations!

Andy Partain, North Fork of Red River CD, manager, and his wife Jaime had a baby girl, Ainsley Kate Partain, on Dec. 5.

Whitney Bryan, Ellis County CD secretary, and her husband had a baby boy, Walker Daxton Bryan, on Dec. 6.

Georgia Lawrence, Coal County CD secretary for 40 years, retired in October.

Erwin Leaverton, retired OCC/AML engineer, and his wife Joan celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary Dec. 16.

Don Bartolina, Oklahoma County CD district manager and retired NRCS district conservationist, celebrated his 70th birthday in December.

Please inform **Mark Harrison** at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. **Please include dates!!!!!!!**

## Group to support Farm Bill Conservation Programs

### Wildlife, Landowner Groups form "Coalition for Conservation"

In an effort to help build support for USDA natural resource conservation programs in the next federal farm bill, more than 20 wildlife, environmental and landowner organizations announced the formation of the Coalition for Conservation, a cooperative organization to help educate the public and policy makers on the benefits of Farm Bill conservation programs to landowners and the environment.

"When you consider that more than 98 percent of Oklahoma is made up of privately-held land, we must have a strong conservation title in the next Farm Bill if we're going to have good wildlife habitat and a healthy environment," said Andy McDaniels, executive director of the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation. "Farmers, ranchers and other landowners depend on these programs to conserve our natural resources and improve wildlife habitat. We support their efforts and that's why we have formed this coalition," he said.

Made up of groups including the Oklahoma branch of the Safari Club International, Ducks Unlimited, Oklahoma Sierra Club, Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and National Wild Turkey Federation, the Coalition for Conservation is designed to help spread the word on the benefits of the programs under the conservation title of the Farm Bill to both the wildlife habitat in Oklahoma and Oklahoma's agricultural producers and private landowners.

"When you see the improvement in wildlife habitat that has been brought about through

*Coalition for Conservation, continued on page 4*

### Garfield County CD, Dept. of Wildlife Conservation & Groendyke Lodge Host Legislative Shootout

Garfield County Conservation District in cooperation with John Groendyke and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation held a recreational shooting event and conservation program for area legislators on Dec. 4. The event was held at the Groendyke Lodge north of Enid.

Ed Cunniss, manager of ODWC's Shotgun Training Education Program, led a sporting clay shoot, followed by a European-style pigeon shoot. After the outdoor events the lodge hosted a reception and dinner for participants. Following dinner a program was presented on the Drummond Flats Wetlands Project for wildlife and waterfowl. The 1,400-acre project is cosponsored by ODWC, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Conservation Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Garfield County CD.

State Sens. David Myers and Patrick Anderson, Reps. Mike Jackson and John Enns, former Rep. Curt Roggow and County Assessor Wade Patterson were among those participating.

### Conservationists in the News

Major County CD board member and OCC Area I Commissioner **Matt Gard** was recently named chairman of Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Economic Enterprise (OKFREE).

Woodward County CD board member and former OCC Area I Commissioner **J.T. Winters Jr.** was elected president of the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association on Dec. 9. Kay County CD board member **Joe Caughlin** was elected secretary.



(From left) Garfield County CD District Manager Jason Skaggs, State Rep. Mike Jackson, Sen. Patrick Anderson, and Garfield County Assessor Wade Patterson take turns shooting clay pigeons at Groendyke Lodge on Dec. 4.

### Conservation Commission Employees: Awards & Recognition

**Cheryl Cheadle**, OCC/WQ Blue Thumb Program state coordinator, was named "Employee of the Quarter" by the OCC Awards & Recognition Committee at OCC's full staff meeting on Dec. 4 in Oklahoma City.

**Dianne Ireton**, OCC/AML systems specialist, received recognition at the December Commission meeting for 20 years of service to the Conservation Commission and the state of Oklahoma.

## **A Summary of the November Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission**

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Nov. 6, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### **District Director Appointments**

Checotah — Edward Kloeckler

Washita County — Loren Dick

### **Murray County Conservation District**

John Cagle, Murray County Conservation District board chairman, accompanied by Richard Day, board member, and Tammy Curry, district secretary, requested funding to hire an additional employee to help perform maintenance on the district's 60 watershed sites built between 1950 and 1970. Cagle stated the Murray County Cattlemen's Association is receptive to discussion on partnership of the position. Commissioners approved a motion to explore funding for the position and to place the item on the December meeting agenda.

### **Claims/Financial Statement**

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as presented by Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, who reported \$1,447,118.90 in claims Sept. 20 - Oct. 22.

### **Agreements**

Commissioners ratified two agreements previously approved by OCC Chairman George Stunkard due to time constraints, approved four new agreements and approved amendments to five existing agreements, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director.

### **Travel Requests**

Commissioners approved three out-of-state travel requests for three OCC employees.

### **Poteau River CSP Watershed Team**

George Stunkard, OCC chairman, and Jeannette Nance, Governor's liaison, presented a Conservation Commission Commendation and a Governor's Commendation to the Poteau River Watershed Conservation Security Program Team.

### **Recognition of Darrel Dominick**

George Stunkard, OCC chairman, and Jeanette Nance, Governor's liaison, presented a Conservation Commission Commendation and a Governor's Commendation to former NRCS State Conservationist Darrel Dominick for his outstanding work with the Oklahoma conservation partnership during the past six years. Dominick thanked the Commissioners and OCC staff for their work over the past six years. He thanked the conservation districts, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, and the NRCS for their tireless efforts. He said the accomplishments achieved over the past few years will set the stage for generations to come. Commission members expressed their personal appreciation to Dominick for his work with the conservation partnership and wished him well.

### **Schedule of Meetings for 2007**

Commissioners approved dates for regularly scheduled Conservation Commission meetings for calendar year 2007 as presented by OCC Executive Secretary Kim Tweed.

### **USDA Computer Network Security**

Gary O'Neill, NRCS assistant state conservationist/Operations, stated that NRCS would make presentations at the OACD Area meetings to address the issue of background security checks for district employees who work on NRCS computers or use the NRCS network to access the Internet. He stated that since September 11, 2001, changes are being made to heighten security and that the background check for network security requirement is a government-wide directive. Letters were sent to all conservation districts regarding this requirement stating that any associated costs will

be covered by the NRCS in cooperation with OCC. At present the directive is for computer access only; however, O'Neill stated that it could soon be required of all persons working in NRCS offices.

### **Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Stunkard commended the watershed team along with Phoukham Vongkhamdy with whom he had the opportunity to work during OACD strategic planning meetings. Commissioner Dan Lowrance stated that he serves on the panel searching for the new head of the newly-created Department of Natural Resources and Ecology at Oklahoma State University. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the Pittsburg County Banker's Awards program. She has also been working on the Women in Agriculture conference scheduled for next year. Commissioner Matt Gard reported attending the Garfield County CD's Cooperator Appreciation Day. The district also has a legislative quail hunt scheduled for Dec. 8. He commended the district for their work with the local legislators. Commissioner Gard participated in the OACD Area 1 Meeting and the Governor's Bio-fuels Conference.

### **Staff Reports**

**Administration:** Mike Thralls, executive director, commended Darrel Dominick for his work at NRCS. When OCC and conservation districts were facing a budget shortfall of up to 20 percent, Dominick offered assistance through agreements to keep employees in place. Thralls stated that the Tar Creek Reclamation Project was completed with support and guidance from Dominick. Thralls also expressed his appreciation to Pat Leavenworth, NRCS acting state conservationist, during this challenging time. Thralls stated that the state of Oklahoma's lawsuit against poultry integrators is ongoing, and OCC is now involved with the deposition process. Staff is gathering information pertaining to not only the Illinois River but the Beatty Creek watershed as well. The deposition date is Jan. 9, 2007.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, introduced Becka Redding, NRCS state office secretary, and commended Kenneth Risenhoover for his work as NRCS district conservationist in LeFlore County as well as when he was stationed in Latimer County. Pollard recognized Mark Harrison, information officer, for his work in upgrading OCC's new web page and the many hours of work that has gone into that project. He then recognized Kim Tweed, OCC executive secretary, for heading up OCC's State Charitable Campaign in which OCC employees contributed over \$3,000.

**District Services Division:** Lisa Knauf, DS director, provided copies of District Director's Responsibilities: A 10-Minute Guide Series. She reported that it is one in a continuing series of information and discussion topics designed to help directors become more knowledgeable about their responsibilities. These will be sent to board chairmen at home and to the district offices asking that they place the items on their monthly meeting agendas for discussion.

**Water Quality Program:** Dan Butler, WQ director, reported on the poultry lawsuit stating that two full-time employees have been assigned to the task of compiling the requested information. Butler thanked Dominick for his leadership of NRCS while serving as state conservationist.

**Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:** Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that three sites are active — two in Rogers County and one in Sequoyah County. The AML Inspectors's Workshop in Tulsa recently was successful.

**Financial Management and Human Resources Division:** Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, thanked Dominick for the good working relationship between NRCS and

OCC and districts during Dominick's tenure. He reported FM/HR staff held insurance options meetings for district employees in Lawton, McAlester, Oklahoma City and Woodward.

**Information Technology Division:** Mike Sharp, IT director, reported on two active projects in Tar Creek, stating that \$1.5 million had been spent to date on the West Commerce project and that 450 acres are ready for vegetation. Sharp stated that Internet service is being installed in district offices that house OCC employees. Sharp reported that the Geographic Information Council's Needs Assessment Survey was conducted with a response rate of over 70 percent. Two focus groups met to define the needs of the geographic information systems community.

**Conservation Programs Division:** Robert Toole, CP director, stated that at the December meeting he will make a recommendation for the FY2008 Conservation Cost-Share Program about performance-based allocations to districts.

### **Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts**

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, congratulated the Poteau Watershed CSP Team for its work. He reported more than 200 participants attended the Area I Meeting. Western Farmers Electric Cooperative sponsored the youth awards this year. County commissioners have been invited to attend the Area Meetings to discuss cooperative issues. Pope serves on the Natural Resources Subcommittee of the State Chamber of Commerce that met recently and passed two resolutions — the chamber supports lifting the cap on REAP funds and using locally-led methods to address environmental concerns. Pope reported attending the steering committee meeting of the Coalition for Conservation, a group consisting of wildlife- and natural resource-related organizations throughout the state that is interested in working together to influence the 2007 Farm Bill Conservation Title. Pope stated that after the elections, OACD will provide information to new legislators about conservation issues. He reported meeting with the Tulsa Municipal Utility Authority regarding the Eucha/Spavinaw Watershed and a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program project. He stated that OACD will host the NACD South Central Region Meeting next summer.

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Pat Leavenworth, NRCS acting state conservationist, stated that the people in Oklahoma have been warm and welcoming since her arrival. Leavenworth reported that NRCS is operating under a continuing budget resolution. She reported the Upper Washita River Watershed was selected for a CSP project. She reported that Johnny Green had left the state for a position in Fort Worth and that Larry Caldwell had been named acting state engineer. She also reported that Ron Hilliard has been named as NRCS state conservationist for Oklahoma. She stated that the CSP success in the Poteau River Watershed was a shining example of an outstanding year for accomplishments in conservation. CSP allocated \$3.12 million in the watershed and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program received 1,972 contracts and allocated \$23.4 million.

### **Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held Dec. 4, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), the value of USDA conservation programs to Oklahoma wildlife speak for themselves,” said Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts. “This, when combined with the fact that we aren’t seeing another Dust Bowl during the driest year on record in Oklahoma history, shows the benefits to the agriculture industry in Oklahoma and our environment,” he said. “When you consider the help these programs give to producers and to the environment and when you see what this means for the quality of life of all Oklahomans as well as the bottom lines of our farmers and ranchers, it’s easy to come together to support the conservation title of the Farm Bill,” Pope said.

The Conservation Title of the Farm Bill primarily deals with locally-led, voluntary natural resource programs under the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). This title of law also deals with the Conservation Reserve Program under the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). These programs generally work with landowners through financial assistance in the form of cost-share dollars and technical assistance through NRCS technicians to help protect and conserve soil, water, air and wildlife habitats. Last year more than \$20 million in cost-share dollars were available to Oklahoma landowners through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) alone. Additional monies were also available to landowners through programs such as the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and more than 1 million Oklahoma acres are currently in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

“It’s great that agricultural producers and wildlife groups are coming together to support these programs,” Pope said. “Working together we can better educate producers on the programs available, and we can encourage the Oklahoma congressional delegation to support conservation programs that benefit both wildlife and farmers’ and ranchers’ bottom line.”

**Mailing Tab Area**

**WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS**

Project WET Workshops  
Karla Beatty, (405) 521-2384

Project Learning Tree Workshops or Trunks  
Christina Stallings, (405) 521-3864

Project WILD Workshops or Trunks  
Lisa Anderson, (405) 521-6704

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