

# OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 57, Issue No. 4/5 April/May 2011



## National Watershed Conference held in Oklahoma City

The 12th National Watershed Conference was held in Oklahoma City, May 15-18. More than 160 local, state, tribal, regional, and federal watershed, floodplain, and natural resources program managers and project sponsors from 22 states attended. Presentations and discussions at the conference included flood control, water quality, rehabilitation of aging flood control dams, emergency action plans, current and future budgets for the USDA Watershed Program and other water resource and conservation issues.



Oklahoma Congressman Frank Lucas gave the keynote address at the Monday morning session of the National Watershed Conference.

Speakers for the conference included Oklahoma Congressman Frank Lucas who authored the Rehabilitation Amendments to the PL-83-566 Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. These amendments authorized the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to provide technical and 65 percent cost-share assistance to rehabilitate high hazard flood control dams. Dave White, NRCS chief, and Dr. Ed Knipling, Agriculture Research Service administrator, also spoke at the conference.

A special ceremony was held during the conference to recognize the designation of the USDA-Small Watershed Program as a national historic landmark in agricultural engineering by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE). (See *Small Watershed Program Recognized as a Historic Landmark*, page 4.)

Congressman Lucas, chair of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee, said Congress faces the challenges of a large number of freshman legislators and the increasing number who have no direct link to agriculture or rural life or significant knowledge of the Small Watershed Program. The ongoing efforts by concerned groups and individuals to educate legislators about issues of interest is vital to continuing support of the programs like the Small Watershed Program, he said.

*NWC Conference, continued on page 2*

## Quality Oklahoma Team Day 2011

OCC was awarded a blue ribbon for an entry in the Quality Oklahoma Team Day program on May 5. Entries consist of a written nomination and a display exhibit depicting the program. The OCC team project recognized was titled "Field and Lab Connection: Cross-Training for Better Understanding."

The project came about when personnel in the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) Water Quality Division and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry Laboratory Services Division (ODAFF) recognized the need for greater understanding between the OCC staff collecting water samples out in streams and the ODAFF staff analyzing the samples in the lab to produce water quality data. Supervisors of both agencies encouraged personnel to spend a day or two cross-training with the other group in order to increase their understanding of the entire process. As a result, OCC field staff and ODAFF lab staff have greater communication with each other and more fully appreciate the work being done by both agencies in partnership to accomplish the shared goal of accurately assessing Oklahoma's waters.

OCC Water Quality Division personnel involved were Brooks Tramell, Greg Kloxin, Stacey Day, Jerry Carr, Daniel Franke,

*Quality Oklahoma Team Day, continued on page 2*

## In This Issue

National Watershed Conference held in Oklahoma City

Quality Oklahoma Team Day 2011

Deer Creek Elementary's Grove Valley Outdoor Classroom

Kay County Conservation District's Eco Trail

Watershed Program named National Historic Landmark



## Going Green?

Want to receive the electronic newsletter instead of the paper one? Just email [Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov) asking to be moved to the email subscription list!

### 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.

[www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)

## Conservation Calendar

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

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
June 6, Oklahoma City

**OACDE Board Meeting,**  
June 8, Oklahoma City

**North Canadian River Traveling  
Educator Workshop,**  
June 14-16, El Reno to Beaver

**Independence Day Holiday, July 4**

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
July 7, Oklahoma City

**NACD Summer Legislative Conference,**  
July 19-19, Washington, D.C.

**NACD South Central Meeting,**  
Aug. 7-9, Oklahoma City

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
Aug. 9, Oklahoma City

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
Sept. 1, Oklahoma City

**Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 5**

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
Oct. 3, Oklahoma City

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
Nov. 7, Oklahoma City

**Veterans Day Holiday, Nov. 11**

### *In our thoughts...*

Jim Belford, Cimarron County CD equipment manager, lost his mother-in-law on March 26.

Donnie Donahoo, retired NRCS district conservationist, passed away on April 3.

Hugh G. Taylor, retired 38-year employee of SCS, passed away April 6 at age 87.

Former Grady CCD Director G.T. Parks passed away April 8. He served 25 years on the Grady CCD board, 1965-1990.

Judith Sherrer, wife of Gary Sherrer, Sec. of Environment and former Sec. of Ag and state legislator, passed away on April 11 after a brief and unexpected illness.

Jackie Norris, 45-year Kiamichi CD board member, passed away on April 23.

Becky Inmon, Oklahoma County CD secretary and secretary on the OACDE board, lost her sister Nancy Jane Eberle on May 4.

Leola Lee Hayden, retired NRCS accounting technician, passed away May 10.

Donna Burkhalter, retired District Secretary of the Bryan Conservation District, lost her husband on May 15.

### *Congratulations!*

Daniel Franke, OCC Water Quality specialist, and wife Sarah have a brand new baby girl, Lillian Skylar Franke, born April 26, 2010.

*NWC Conference, continued from page 1*

The budget agreement recently reached in the nation's Capitol for the remainder of fiscal year 2011 contained no funding for continuing the Watershed Program and only \$18 million nationally to continue the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

"Just because the funding has gone away does not mean the need has gone away," NRCS Chief Dave White said. It is estimated that the Watershed Program has created a \$15 billion infrastructure of flood control dams and associated conservation practices that provide over \$2 billion in average annual benefits to 48 million people.

Oklahoma has been a leader in flood control for over 60 years constructing 2,107 flood control dams in 61 counties that provide \$82 million in annual benefits to the state. The first flood control dam built under the USDA Watershed Program was in Washita County in 1948. Oklahoma was also the first state to rehabilitate a USDA - assisted flood control dam (Sergeant Major Creek Dam No. 2 in Roger Mills County in 2000). Oklahoma's 87 conservation districts are primary sponsors of most of the watershed projects and are responsible for operation and maintenance of the dams.

The four-day conference, "From Local to Landscape: A Watershed Based Approach," was cosponsored by the National Watershed Coalition, Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts.

The first National Watershed Conference was held in Oklahoma City in 1989, when the National Watershed Coalition was formed replacing the Watershed Congress which had been active since 1951. The National Watershed Coalition is a nonprofit organization composed of national, regional, state, and local organizations, associations, and individuals who advocate using watersheds as the planning and implementation unit when dealing with natural resource problems. The headquarters for the NWC is located in Chandler, Okla., and the NWC website address is [www.watershedcoalition.org](http://www.watershedcoalition.org).

*Quality Oklahoma Team Day, continued from page 1*

Jeanette Lamb, Leonard Moore, Jason Ramming, Ashley Rhea, and Wes Shockley. ODAFF Laboratory Services Division personnel involved were Mike Talkington, Brenda Snodgrass, Robert Whitney, Paul Kerr, Tanna Kilpatrick, Nina Patton, Thuy Ta and Yvette Turner.

Two other OCC projects were entered in the Quality Oklahoma Team Day program.

"Oklahoma's Watershed Program" explained that through the program partnership 2,107 small watershed flood control dams have been constructed throughout the state. These flood control structures have established a \$2 billion public infrastructure that provides more than \$81 million in benefits annually to the state and our citizens. In addition to the monetary benefits, protection is provided to 1,439 bridges and 21,206 farms and ranches. Forty-two cities receive their municipal water supply from a flood control water impoundment. More than 9.4 million tons of sediment are captured each year and more than 45,000 acres of wetlands have been created or enhanced.

The "Awards and Recognition Committee: Improving Unity, Recognition and Morale" entry explained that OCC's Awards and Recognition Committee came about as an effort to create greater understanding among its seven divisions and more public appreciation of its employees. The Awards and Recognition Committee instituted Employee of the Quarter and Employee of the Year Awards, based on nominations submitted by staff. In addition, the committee organizes quarterly full staff meetings incorporating team-building exercises and providing opportunities for the entire staff to learn about other divisions. The committee also organizes opportunities for staff to participate in community service each year and has boosted the State Charitable Campaign contributions.

### **Awards & Recognition**

**Don Bartolina**, Oklahoma County CD manager, received a Conservation Commendation at the April OCC meeting in recognition of 50 years of service as professional conservationist and contribution to Oklahoma's conservation partnership. Prior to going to work for the district, Don had retired as a NRCS district conservationist and then worked five years as OACD executive director.

**Dianne Ireton**, OCC/AML systems coordinator, was recognized as Contest Honoree at the National Land & Range Judging Contest on May 5, 2011.

**Mike Kastl**, OCC/AML Program director, received the VIP Award from the Oklahoma FFA Association. The presentation took place on May 3, 2011, during the 85th Annual State FFA Convention in Oklahoma City.

## Deer Creek Elementary's Grove Valley Outdoor Classroom

Deer Creek's Grove Valley Elementary School, in partnership with Tinker Air Force Base, held a dedication ceremony for an outdoor classroom that includes a federally-protected wetlands. The ceremony was held on April 22, at the site of the outdoor classroom adjacent to the school in Edmond and helped mark Earth Day Celebration activities. Students from the school participated in the event with the planting of native aquatic plants.

Construction began in January and is nearing completion. The air force base involvement is the result of a wetland mitigation effort. The newly-created wetland will replace a small wetland at the base that was removed because of Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard concerns for aircraft taking off and landing.

Grove Valley Elementary is pleased to be the off-base partner and location for the wetland, according to Debbie Straughn, school principal and a board member of the Oklahoma County Conservation District. Straughn testified before Congress about the project last spring and has nominated it for the Pride in America Schools Award, which is presented by the U.S. Department of Interior.

According to Tinker Air Force Base officials, "The celebration involving multiple government and public agencies as well as local schools and non-governmental agencies demonstrates how partnering activities can benefit both the military and the communities in which they reside. In times of economic crunch, these types of initiatives are more important than ever."

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet Barresi participated in the dedication as well as Jim Denny, chairman of the Land Legacy board of directors; Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission executive director; Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist; and J.D. Strong, Oklahoma Water Resources Board executive director. Representatives from Tinker Air Force Base, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture also participated. In addition to Straughn representing Oklahoma County Conservation district, Richard Parker, district chairman; Don Bartolina, district manager; and Rod Shaw, NRCS district conservationist; also participated. Third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students from the school carried out the planting of the aquatic plants.



Among those participating in the ribbon cutting at the outdoor classroom were, from left, J.D. Strong, executive director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Janet Barresi, state Superintendent of Public Instruction; and, far right, Debbie Straughn, school principal and Oklahoma County Conservation District board member.



Third, fourth and fifth graders planted aquatic plants in the soil at the outdoor classroom dedication.

## Kay County Conservation District's Eco Trail

Kay County Conservation District held a grand opening event on April 28, 2011, for its new outdoor classroom, the Kay County Eco Trail. Congressman Frank Lucas was the keynote speaker. In his remarks, Lucas, chair of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee, stated that 23 of the 46 committee members are freshman Representatives. And an equal number of members were not connected with agriculture. He commended the Eco Trail as an important part of the ongoing process of educating and reminding the public about nature and where our food and other necessary products come from. About 50 people attended the event, including representatives from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

In the afternoon 125 local third- and fourth-grade students rotated through natural resource stations presented by OCC's Blue Thumb Program, the state Department of Wildlife, and the NRCS soil science program. They tasted samples cooked on site by the world's second place dutch oven cooking champion, Curtis Grace. Wade Warren, Noble County Conservation District equipment manager, used the OSU stream table to demonstrate principals of flooding and soil erosion for students.



Wade Warren, Noble County Conservation District (right), used the OSU stream table to demonstrate principals of flooding and soil erosion for students.

The site features both in-ground and raised-bed gardens with a focus on butterflies, hummingbirds and vegetables. The site also has a covered meeting facility with electrical power and a storage room.

The Kay County Eco Trail outdoor classroom was funded through the Oklahoma Recreational Trails federal transportation grant program along with funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local sponsors.



Congressman Frank Lucas with the Kay County Conservation District board. From left are Curtis Vap, Joe Caughlin, Congressman Frank Lucas, Garold DeWitt, Rick Jeans and Nancy Bowling.



Students gather around the Blue Thumb education station to learn about determining stream health through examination of living organisms present in the water. Second from the right is Jean Lemmon, Blue Thumb Program. In back, from left are Joe Caughlin, board member, and Susan Henning, district manager.

## Watershed Program named National Historic Landmark

The USDA Small Watershed Program has been designated as a national historic landmark in agricultural engineering by the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers (ASABE). A ceremony was held at the National Watershed Conference (NWC) in Oklahoma City on May 17th with 150 people in attendance to mark the event. Speakers included Oklahoma Lt. Governor Todd Lamb, ASABE President Ron McAllister, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White, USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Administrator Dr. Edward Knipping, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director Clay Pope, Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District Director and former NWC Executive Director John Peterson, and ARS Research Hydraulic Engineer Dr. Sherry Hunt.



(From left) Mike Thralls, OCC executive director; Ed Knipping, ARS administrator; Dave White, NRCS chief; and Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist; standing by the granite monument at the state Agriculture Building in Oklahoma City.

The ceremony included unveiling a brass plaque recognizing the USDA Small Watershed Program. A granite monument recognizing the designation has been placed at the state Agricultural Building in Oklahoma City. Brass plaques will also be placed at the ARS Hydraulic

### WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops  
Karla Beatty, 405.521.2384

Project Learning Tree  
Workshops or Trunks  
Christina Stallings, 405.521-3864

Project WILD Workshops  
Lisa Anderson, 405.521-3857

### Oklahoma Conservation Conversation

Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105-4201  
405.521.2384, FAX: 405.521.6686  
<http://www.conservation.ok.gov>

#### Mailing Tab Area

Engineering Research Unit at Lake Carl Blackwell and the NRCS State Office in Stillwater.

The ASABE Historic Agricultural Engineering Landmark activity commemorates significant past accomplishments with appropriate landmarks. Only 57 historic landmarks have been recognized by ASABE since 1926 including other significant developments such as the John Deere plow, the cotton gin, vegetated waterways, and the skid steer loader. For a listing of all ASABE Historical Landmarks and the criteria for selection visit <http://www.asabe.org/awards>.

The USDA Small Watershed Program established the principle of combining conservation practices in a watershed with flood control dams on tributary streams. In order to implement the program, innovations in engineering, hydraulics, hydrology, and soil mechanics were developed by USDA Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS) and ARS engineers and scientists.

"It was appropriate to have the dedication ceremony in Oklahoma," said Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, "because the state has always been a national leader in the Small Watershed Program with several national 'firsts,' including the first flood control dam constructed in July 1948 and the first dam rehabilitated in April 2000." Oklahoma also leads the nation in quantity 2,107 USDA-assisted flood control dams constructed since the program began.

Since 1948, 11,000 USDA Small Watershed Program flood control dams have been constructed in 47 states with associated conservation practices implemented in more than 2,000 watershed projects encompassing 160 million acres. The projects have improved the quality of life and the environment in rural communities by protecting people's lives and property, conserving soil and water resources, reducing flooding, providing economic development, recreation, and water supplies, enhancing water quality, and improving wetlands and wildlife habitat.

#### Mailing Tab Area

### Commission Members

Area I Matt Gard  
Area II Mike Rooker  
Area III George Stunkard  
Area IV Dan Lowrance  
Area V Jim Grego

Editing and Layout — Mark Harrison

email: [Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov)

Proofreading and Reviewing — Charlotte Stieber and Ben Pollard

This publication is issued by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as authorized by Mike Thralls, Executive Director. Eight hundred copies are printed at a cost of \$0.13 each. This publication is also available electronically on the agency website. All programs and services of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Oklahoma's Conservation Districts are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, gender, marital status or physical disability.

Published by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105-4201



PRSRSTD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
OKLAHOMA  
CITY OK  
PERMIT NO.  
317