



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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Governor and U.S. Deputy Sec. of Ag Sign CREP Agreement

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

On April 23 Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry and U.S. Deputy Agriculture Sec. Chuck Conner signed a new \$20.6 million cooperative Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement between USDA and Oklahoma that will create up to 9,000 acres (or 370 miles) of riparian buffers and filter strips. The conservation plantings will reduce the flow of nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watersheds.

"I'm pleased to announce this new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program," said Deputy Sec. Conner. "Through this project, USDA and the state of Oklahoma will help landowners and operators establish effective conservation practices to enhance water quality in eastern Oklahoma."



(Seated, from left) U.S. Deputy of Agriculture Chuck Connor and Gov. Brad Henry signed the Oklahoma CREP agreement on April 23 at the state Capitol. Looking on (standing, from left) were Farm Service Agency State Executive Director Jim Reese, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission Executive Director Ed Fite, Tulsa Metropolitan Utility Authority Chairman R. Louis Reynolds, state Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach, Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert, OSRC Chairman Bill Blackard, Oklahoma Conservation Commission Chairman George Stunkard and Executive Director Mike Thralls.

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See also Lake Eucha & Spavinaw Creek Demonstration Farm Tour, page 5.

Oklahoma 2nd in the Nation for EPA Water Quality Success Stories

Section 319 Nonpoint Source Success Stories

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's list of documented nonpoint source water quality success stories ranks Oklahoma second in the nation, representing 12 percent of the national successes through the 319 Water Quality Program. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's "Success Story" web page recently featured three water quality success stories from Oklahoma — Beaty Creek, Lake Creek and Sandy and Yellowstone Creeks.

Beaty Creek, a tributary of Lake Eucha in northeast Oklahoma, was impaired by pathogens, specifically *E. coli* and *Enterococcus*, due in part to poor waste management practices and direct access of livestock to the stream. Landowner education and implementing best management practices (BMPs) to promote proper animal waste and nutrient management, as well as better riparian zone management, have led to significantly decreased amounts of bacteria in the creek. As a result, Oklahoma expects to remove Beaty Creek from its 2006 303(d) list for *E. coli* impairment. In addition, expected phosphorus loading to Beaty Creek is also decreasing as compared to a control watershed with no BMP implementation. In April 2005 the Conservation Commission announced that analysis of five years of water quality monitoring data indicated a 14 percent reduction of phosphorus entering Beaty Creek since the project began. Beaty Creek water quality continues to improve, reflecting a 31 percent reduction in phosphorus by May 2007.

The success of this project and continued interest in implementing BMPs has allowed the pursuit of a related project in the adjoining Spavinaw Creek watershed. One of the greatest successes of the project is that landowners are beginning to implement the practices without the benefit of

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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.

*Celebrating the Oklahoma
Statehood Centennial and the 70th
anniversary of the Conservation
District Enabling Act!*

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
"Calendar" at www.conservation.ok.gov

Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting, July
2, Agriculture Building Board Room, Oklahoma City.

Independence Day Holiday, July 4.

Inter-Tribal Environmental Council Conference,

July 9 - 10,

Southern Hills Marriott, Tulsa.

Fort Cobb Success Tour, July 17,

Caddo - Kiowa Technology Center, Fort Cobb.

NACD Summer Board Meeting & Legislative

Conference, July 21 - 24, Washington, D.C.,

SWCS National Conference, July 21 - 25,

Saddleback Resort, Wesley Chapel, FL.

NACD South Central Region Meeting,

July 26 - 28., Cherokee Nation Casino & Convention
Center, Catoosa.

Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting, Aug.

6, Agriculture Building Board Room, Oklahoma City.

Oklahoma RC&D Summit, Aug. 12 - 14, Ardmore

Convention Center, Ardmore.

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 3.

Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting,

Sept. 4, location TBA.

Blue Thumb Volunteer Training, Sept. 19 - 20,

Tulsa County CD.

Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting, Oct. 1,

Agriculture Building Board Room, Oklahoma City.

In Our Thoughts

Boone Von Tungeln, Central North Canadian River CD
equipment manager, lost his sister in April.

Joe Sweeden, state representative and former Osage
County CD employee, lost his mother April 16.

Steve Coffman, OCC/FMHR director, lost his father May 7.

Joe Yowell, Upper Washita CD director, lost his mother
May 13.

Harold Parsons, Seminole County CD director, lost his wife
Doris May 18.

Donald Coyle, retired NRCS employee, passed away May 22.

Congratulations!

George Moore, OCC/CP staff, is the proud
grandfather of Zane Edward, born May 1.

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

Thank you.

I want to thank each and everyone of the districts for their
involvement in seeing me through my father's recent
illness and death. The time off that was graciously
donated allowed me to be with my father the whole
time he was sick in ICU, without worry, and the cards I
received upon his death were so wonderful and
uplifting. Daddy is sorely missed, but the sacrifice the
Conservation Districts have made allows me to get
through each day better knowing I got to be there for
him. Thank you so very much. Paula Bush, district
secretary, Tulsa County CD

CREP, continued from page 1

"It is a historic day for Oklahoma to be awarded this Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program as we begin our second century of statehood," Gov. Henry said. "Soil conservation was born in Oklahoma. The partnership between private landowners and our conservation districts has demonstrated that voluntary, locally-driven conservation can successfully address significant environmental issues like the Dust Bowl and now water quality," Gov. Henry said. "With the establishment of this Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, we reaffirm our state's commitment to assist private landowners to practice conservation on Oklahoma's working lands for the next 100 years," Henry said.

Conner and Gov. Henry signed the project agreement during a special ceremony today at the Oklahoma Capitol Building in Oklahoma City. Key CREP partners also include the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), City of Tulsa's Metropolitan Utility Authority, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, five local conservation districts, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"Our water resources in northeastern Oklahoma are key to the economy of Tulsa and the entire state," said Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor, who was unable to attend the ceremony. "This Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program agreement helps to guarantee the future of our state and the Tulsa metropolitan area by assisting in the enhancement of water quality. The Best Management Practices endorsed and funded by this program will enable our citizens to play an active role in promoting high water quality for northeastern Oklahoma for years to come. This guarantee is essential for business growth and quality of life," Mayor Taylor said.

"It has been a long, hard road to get the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program underway" said Bill Blackard, chair of the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission. "The Scenic Rivers Commission is excited to invest some of its resources in this project. With this agreement we will be able to access four federal dollars for every state and local conservation dollar we spend. In the long run our children and our children's children will reap the environmental benefits of the investment we make today," Blackard said.

"Spavinaw Lake is the primary water supply for our second largest city. The Illinois River is our most iconic scenic river," said Miles Tolbert, state Sec. of Environment. "These waters both face serious challenges. With the creation of a CREP we are rising to that challenge," Tolbert said.

The Oklahoma CREP includes parts of Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes and Sequoyah counties and includes participation by the conservation districts in those counties. The project seeks to filter runoff, stabilize stream banks, shade stream channels, and improve drinking water and aquatic habitat by creating 500 acres of filter strips and 8,500 acres of riparian buffers, for a total of 9,000 acres, or 370 miles, of protected streams.

Land owners participating in the program will receive annual rental payments, financial and technical assistance and other incentives for voluntarily enrolling land into contracts. FSA will administer Oklahoma CREP, with support from state CREP partners. Eligible landowners will receive a one-time Practice Incentive Payment and a one-time Signing Incentive Payment. In addition, federal dollars will pay 50 percent of the reimbursable costs of establishing eligible practices, conducting compliance reviews, and providing technical assistance and other services up to \$16.5 million for Oklahoma CREP.

"Farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists. They have to constantly conserve and enhance their land to keep it productive. They live on the land and are intimately tied to it," said Terry Peach, state Sec. of Agriculture. "In this modern world of global trade however, it's not always so easy for a farmer to make a living and still give back to the land what it needs. This CREP program will allow the farmers of these two watersheds to achieve both purposes, and all the citizens of Oklahoma will reap the reward," Peach said.

OCC is the state agency that will oversee implementation of the program. OCC, collaborating with local conservation districts, will identify eligible producers with appropriate land for enrollment in the program. The state will pay 20 percent of the overall costs of the Oklahoma CREP, including payments to participants for fencing and related costs for non-Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage. OCC will also provide staffing for the project and coordinate with other natural resource

CREP, continued on page 4

Dams Save Oklahoma \$33 Million in Flood Damages

“There would have been an additional \$33 million in damages from the heavy rainfall May 4-9 if it wasn't for the flood protection of the state's 2,105 upstream flood control dams,” said Mike Thralls, OCC executive director. This NRCS estimate includes damages such as loss of crops, buildings and livestock, damage to roads and bridges, and damage to land from soil erosion.

Heavy May rains caused some isolated flooding in the state, but when the same amount of rain fell 50 years ago it caused major flooding, not only on thousands of acres of agricultural land, but in many urban areas. The lack of that kind of flooding now, according to Thralls, can be largely attributed to the 2,105 upstream flood control dams that have been constructed in 64 counties over the past 60 years.

“If the remaining 330 planned dams that are awaiting construction had been built, they would have reduced damages by another \$13 million,” added Thralls. The dams built by local project sponsors, usually conservation districts with the help of the USDA Watershed Program, are designed to capture water from heavy rainstorms and slowly release it over a period of several days, reducing the water flowing in streams and rivers.

Some areas of the state received especially intense rainfall in a short time period. An estimated \$585,000 more in damages would have occurred in the Big Wewoka Creek Watershed (Seminole, Hughes and Okfuskee Counties) without the flood protection of 41 dams. Over \$900,000 damages were prevented by the 35 dams in the Upper Elk Creek Watershed in Beckham, Washita, and Kiowa Counties.

“The USDA Watershed Program has provided these kinds of benefits for many years, yet because the dams are relatively small and mostly in rural areas, most people don't even realize they exist,” according to Thralls. “The program is extremely beneficial to Oklahoma and we are concerned about current efforts to eliminate funding for the program.” Congress provided zero funding for the program in the 2007 fiscal year budget and the President proposed zero funding for the fiscal year 2008 budget.

“If funds are not appropriated for the program, it will not only mean that the 330 planned dams won't be built but that the NRCS will no longer be able to provide the much needed engineering assistance to local watershed project sponsors to help maintain the existing dams,” said Thralls. “This could leave conservation districts who have limited funding and staff without the technical help needed to maintain the dams. Many of these dams are 50-60 years old and need continued maintenance or even rehabilitation to keep them safe.”

“We hope that Congress can look at the recent rainstorms not only in Oklahoma but in many other states and see the multiple benefits of the watershed program and the continuing needs of the program,” said Thralls. “It's a program that protects not only the economy but the safety and health of our citizens.”

Envirothon 2007 State Contest

By Karla Beatty, OCC Education Coordinator

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood? More importantly, how much wood was in the tree the woodchuck chucked and do we even have woodchucks in Oklahoma?

You may not know the answers to these questions, but the Lawton Eisenhower High School Envirothon team probably does. The team earned the title of Oklahoma Envirothon State Champions at the 2007 Oklahoma Envirothon competition April 2-4 at Sequoyah State Park on Ft. Gibson Lake. They will represent Oklahoma at the Canon Envirothon competition in New York in July.

The Oklahoma Envirothon is part of a national program for high school students designed to educate and challenge young people in the environmental sciences. It is an exciting, fun way for students to learn about the environment and the issues facing this and future generations. Combining in-class curriculum with hands-on field experiences, Envirothon demonstrates the role people have in important environmental issues such as forestry, wildlife management, water quality, soil erosion, and land use.

The Oklahoma Envirothon competition is sponsored by OGE Energy Corp., Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Samuel Robert Noble Foundation, Oklahoma Association for Environmental Education, Cross Timbers Forestry, Rogers County Conservation District, Oklahoma



Flooding along the Washita River, Chickasha, Okla., May 19, 1949. Soil Conservation Service photo.

Conservation Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ottawa County Conservation District and Canon Envirothon.

Seven teams with five members each participated in this year's competition. The following teams were sponsored by their local conservation districts (CD):

Lawton Eisenhower High School	Comanche County CD
Lawton FFA	Comanche County CD
Ninnekah High School	Grady County CD
South Coffeyville FFA	Nowata County CD
Deer Creek High School	Oklahoma County CD
Fairland FFA	Ottawa County CD
East Central High School	Tulsa County CD



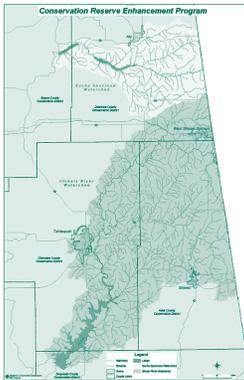
The winning team from Lawton Eisenhower High School with their coach and the Envirothon banner.

CREP, continued from page 2

conservation programs at the local, state and federal levels. The state will provide \$4.1 million in cash and in-kind services for Oklahoma CREP.

“The Conservation Commission and local conservation districts have been helping to implement conservation practices to protect water quality for years,” said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. “Utilizing programs like CREP is the next logical step in implementing that water quality conservation,” Thralls said.

USDA will announce sign-up for Oklahoma CREP at a future date. USDA will accept offers for contracts under this CREP on a first-come/first-served basis until the 9,000-acre goal is achieved or until Dec. 31, 2007, whichever comes first. More information about the program can be found in the Oklahoma CREP fact sheet posted online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>; click on Find FSA Fact Sheets.



CREP watershed in northeast Oklahoma

Jan Kunze and OGE Energy Corp. recognized for ScienceFest Oklahoma

OCC Commends Jan Kunze & OGE Energy Corp.

Jan Kunze, manager of Land Management Services for OGE Energy Corp., received a commendation from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission at the Commission's May board meeting. Kunze and OGE Energy Corporation were recognized for their sponsorship of the annual ScienceFest Oklahoma event. Kunze is also board member of Oklahoma County CD.

ScienceFest Oklahoma is an educational event for fourth and fifth grade students that provides learning opportunities on natural resource conservation and alternative energy. This year's event at the Oklahoma City Zoo in April reached over 3,500 students.

Karla Beatty, OCC education coordinator, said that what started as a small, onetime program at a conference has turned into an annual, statewide event that fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and students look forward to every spring. “ScienceFest is such a great program because of the partnership between all the agencies and organizations involved. No one agency or organization would be able to offer this type of program on their own.”

Kunze has coordinated the ScienceFest program since its inception six years ago. OCC, along with other local, state and federal agencies and organizations, partners with OGE Energy Corporation to plan and conduct the event. Other principal sponsors include the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Commerce and the Office of the Secretary of Environment. Other partnering organizations include the state Department of Education, Tourism and Recreation Department, Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma Mesonet and the OKC Zoo. More information is available at www.sciencefestok.com.

Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, said Kunze's leadership is instrumental in the success of the ScienceFest Oklahoma program. “We appreciate OGE Energy for investing in Oklahoma's youth and providing an outstanding educational event that teaches the importance of natural resource conservation and environmental protection,” Thralls said. “The Conservation Commission is proud to be part of this great statewide event.”

Nonpoint Source Success Stories, from page 1

cost-share assistance, requesting assistance with BMP design and using their own funds. Even landowners outside the watershed are interested in the practices that were demonstrated in Beaty Creek and are beginning to implement them.

Lake Creek, in Caddo County, is in one of Oklahoma's most intensive agricultural areas. It is a 16-mile-long stream fed by shallow groundwater that seeps out continuously along the stream banks. Approximately 92 percent of the Lake Creek watershed is used for producing peanuts, cotton, wheat, alfalfa and other small grain and row crops. Excessive and improper fertilization and pesticide use, along with shallow ground water and very permeable and highly erodible sandy soils led to creek impairments. High levels of nutrients and unknown toxicity thought to be related to pesticides were detected in surface and ground water. Approximately 12 pesticides and the fungicide Botran were detected in surface water and streamside seepage samples. Fish samples at two sites along Lake Creek in 1990 revealed very poor biological conditions relative to area reference streams, based on Index of Biological Integrity scores. Because of these results, Oklahoma placed Lake Creek on the 303(d) list in 1998 as not supporting its Fish and Wildlife Propagation beneficial use because of unknown toxicity and pesticide impairment.

Conducting educational programs and implementing BMPs decreased loading of pesticides, nutrients, and sediment to the creek. As a result, fish communities improved enough to allow removal of Lake Creek from Oklahoma's 303(d) list in 2002 for pesticides and unknown toxicity. Further water quality improvements are ongoing in this region as part of the Fort Cobb Watershed-Based Plan, which EPA named as one of the six best watershed-based plans in the nation in May 2006.

Sandy and Yellowstone Creeks, both in the Salt Fork of the Arkansas River watershed in north central Oklahoma (in Alfalfa and Woods Counties, respectively), were impaired for turbidity due in part to practices associated with crop and cattle production. The Salt Fork is an agriculture-intensive watershed where wheat and alfalfa are the primary crops. Producers often plowed fields to the edge of streams, and cattle often grazed at stream edges, both of which contributed to bank erosion. Agricultural producer education and implementation of BMPs to promote conservation tillage, proper fertilizer application, integrated pest management, and riparian buffer establishment helped to decrease sediment and nutrients going into both creeks. As a result, Oklahoma removed Sandy Creek from its 2004 303(d) list for turbidity impairment, and nominated Yellowstone Creek for removal from the state's 2006 303(d) list for turbidity.



Jan Kunze, OGE Energy Corp. Land Management Services manager (left), and Karla Beatty, OCC education coordinator, play key roles in coordination of ScienceFest.

Lake Eucha & Spavinaw Creek Demonstration Farm Tour

The Conservation Commission's Water Quality Division and the City of Tulsa's Metropolitan Utility Authority hosted a tour of Lake Eucha and the Spavinaw Project Demonstration Farm. On April 27 more than 30 people, including local state legislators, attended the tour that originated at Tulsa's Mohawk Water Treatment Plant. Speakers included OCC's Mike Thralls, Dan Butler, Cheryl Cheadle and Joe Schneider. Lou Reynolds, chairman of the Tulsa Metropolitan Utility Authority, spoke, as did City of Tulsa employees Ray West, Mary Coley and Harry Chichester. The legislators present were state Reps. Pam Peterson, Weldon Watson and John Auffet. Auffet

was previously a OCC/WQ employee.

Lake Eucha serves as the primary source for Tulsa's drinking water supply. In recent years the increase of phosphorus levels in the lake had threaten the quality of the drinking water and increased the cost of treatment. A cost-share and demonstration program in Beaty Creek, a subwatershed of Lake Eucha, has shown significant, measurable improvements in water quality and the reduction of phosphorus through installation of best management practices (BMPs). That project

was funded in a grant under Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and a match of state funds.



OCC Water Quality Director Dan Butler uses a chart to explain land ownership and use in the Spavinaw Creek Watershed.

A similar grant has allowed the implementation of a demonstration farm where a number of BMPs are installed for the education of area landowners and producers. The Spavinaw Creek Demonstration Farm, located east of Jay, was established in 2004 to showcase the types of BMPs necessary to reduce nonpoint source pollution in the Spavinaw Creek and similar watersheds in eastern Oklahoma and western Arkansas. Those practices include riparian fencing to keep livestock away from streams, alternative watering and feeding facilities, cross fencing for rotational grazing and a "Newberry riffle" stream crossing that does not disrupt stream ecology. Feeding facilities are strategically located, covered feeding areas that concentrate livestock, and their waste, away from streams and out of rain. This prevents fecal matter, bacteria, and nutrients from washing into streams, and protects from livestock the sensitive vegetation holding streambanks in place. Road management BMPs, such as water bars, are designed to direct rainfall off of roads without causing soil erosion. Soil eroded from farm, forest and other unpaved roads fills in streams and smothers aquatic habitats. Water bars installed in the sloping roadway act like "speed bumps for water," diverting water from the road



The Spavinaw Demo Farm includes practices like alternative watering and feeding facilities fenced off from the creek.

into a rock-lined ditch where it flows to the stream without causing erosion. Other BMPs for roads include sloping, cut outs and fills, and the use of vegetation to stabilize cut and filled areas.

Earlier in the week of the tour Gov. Brad Henry and U.S. Deputy Agriculture Sec. Chuck Conner signed a new \$20.6 million cooperative Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement between

USDA and Oklahoma The Oklahoma CREP includes parts of Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes and Sequoyah Counties and includes participation by the conservation districts in those counties. (See *Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program*, page 1.)



The Newberry Riffle is a shallowly-submerged stream crossing made of natural materials, like small rock and gravel over placed boulders, that does not disrupt stream ecology. Water bars installed in the sloping roadway act like "speed bumps for water," diverting water from the road into a rock-lined ditch where it flows to the stream without causing erosion.



Blue Thumb Program team members examine the species collected from Spavinaw Creek.



Three students and Blue Thumb volunteer team members use a Secchi disk to measure water clarity at Lake Eucha.

A Summary of the March Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met March 5, 2007, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Beaver County	Terry Kile
Checotah	Ray Ledbetter
Cimarron County	John Schnauer
Coal County	Jim Carter
Craig County	Bill Tallman
Deer Creek	Bertha Miller
Garvin	Trey Lam
Harper County	Steve Terry
Pontotoc County	Ann Wooley
Tulsa County	Craig Thurmond
Upper Washita	Monte Tucker
Valliant	David Richie

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who reported \$1,926,148.66 in claims Jan. 19 - Feb. 20.

OCC Official Logo

Shellie Willoughby, chairwoman of the OCC Awards and Recognition Committee, reported that in a contest for OCC employees to submit designs for a new OCC logo to be used on letterhead, vehicles, shirts, jackets, etc., the committee received 20 designs from eight employees. She presented the top three designs to the Commissioners. Commissioners approved a motion to select the most popular design as the new logo.

BMP, Inc., Agreement

Mike Thralls stated that staff needed additional time to research questions raised regarding poultry litter transport in an agreement with BMP, Inc. Staff are still examining records and may meet with Arkansas counterparts. Sheri Herron of BMP, Inc., stated a system is now in place to move chicken litter but is unable to do so because the agreement between OCC and BMP, Inc., has not been amended. The price of litter has different variables, one being the length of the haul, and another being whether the hauler receives the litter at a cost or for no cost. Herron stated that a 100-mile trip would make the cost of the litter around \$18/ton delivered. No action was taken.

Agreements

Commissioners approved two new agreements.

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved seven out-of-state travel requests for 17 OCC employees.

Director Elections

Commissioners approved a motion to certify candidates as elected to position No. 3 in districts where only one eligible candidate filed; to declare position No. 3 vacant in districts where no eligible candidate filed; and to authorize the executive director to declare candidates receiving the highest number of votes at the March 13, 2007, district director election as elected.

Event Sponsorship

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the Oklahoma Envirothon, April 2-4; the National Land and Range Judging Contest, May 1-3; and the Nation-

al Association of Conservation Districts South Central Meeting, July 27-29.

Strategic Plan For Fiscal Years 2008-2012

Commissioners approved a motion to allow OCC staff more time to work on the Strategic Plan for FY2008-2012.

GIC Strategic And Business Plan

Commissioners approved the Geographic Information Council's Strategic and Business Plan

Amendments to FY2008 Budget Request

Commissioners approved three amendments to the FY2008 budget request approved in October 2006.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Matt Gard reported attending the annual convention of the Oklahoma Farmers Union, noting that Oklahoma Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Company officially changed its name to American Farmers & Ranchers Mutual Insurance Company during the meeting. He also attended a no-till conference in Enid and an issues breakfast meeting with Sen. Owen Laughlin and Rep. Jeff Hickman. He commended OACD on its state meeting and expressed disappointment with the small number of legislators attending the banquet. Commissioners Virginia Kidd, Dan Lowrance and Rick Jeans commended OCC and OACD employees for their work with the successful OACD state meeting. Commissioner Lowrance also thanked OCC employees for their assistance with OACD's strategic plan.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, commended OCC on work with the OACD state meeting. He commended OACD on adoption of its strategic plan and stated that OCC will support it. Thralls reported that Darrel Dominick, Tribal Outreach coordinator, is working on the Stamper Project to assist in getting it back on schedule. He reported that Jim Cox, had resigned as executive director of the National Association of State Conservation Agencies. Lt. Governor Jari Askins confirmed she would attend GIS Day at the Capitol on March 14.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, stated that 30 tables were available for displays at Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 19, with first opportunity going to conservation districts. The awards ceremony in the Blue Room would be held at 10:30 a.m.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending the OACD state meeting and stated that 30 directors attended the training session with Ray Ledgerwood. She prepared and received the first half of the contributions agreement and had been working with Dewey County CD on redefining job descriptions.

Water Quality Program: Dan Butler, WQ director, reported that \$6,000 is remaining in one agreement with BMP, Inc. Mike Thralls stated additional funds for the agreement were requested by Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach. Butler stated the state of Arkansas has \$220,000 remaining of its original 319 budget for this project.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation: Mike Kastl, AML director, provided copies of the Office of

Surface Mining's newest 10-year funding chart and expressed disappointment. The chart showed that Oklahoma would receive \$1.5 million through FY2009, \$2.3 through FY2011, and \$3 million through FY2017. Congressman Dan Boren had stated he would attend the OSM hearing the previous month on the AML funding issue but was unable to do so. Boren would instead submit questions that OSM will be required to answer.

Financial Management/Human Resources:

Steve Coffman, FMHR director, stated that audits for the water quality program and the AML program are being finalized.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, reported that Environmental Sciences students at OSU are helping to address vegetation problems on the Enochs reclamation site at Commerce. He commended Shellie Willoughby for coordinating GIS Day at the Capitol.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, stated that to date, nine watershed rehabilitation projects were complete and construction is scheduled for six in 2007.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, reported that attendance was up at the OACD State Meeting and thanked OCC staff for their assistance and also for their help with the strategic plan. The NACD South Central meeting is being planned with a possible tour in the Beaty Creek Watershed and an event at the Will Rogers Memorial. Tulsa Mayor Taylor has agreed to give the welcome and discuss the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Pope reported on legislative issues of interest to the OACD. One is to create a fund at OCC to assist producers with prescribed burns and liability should a fire get out of control. Another bill will help OCC and conservation districts to partner with the county commissioners on rehabilitation and operation and maintenance of upstream flood control structures. The city of Meeker has a structure supplying drinking water that is in need of rehabilitation and may want to partner with the conservation district. Pope stated that Rep. Dale DeWitt is committed to lifting the cap on REAP funds and obtaining more money for cost share, rehabilitation, CREP and filling the budget gap. Other legislation of interest is for tax credits for conservation easements, carbon sequestration and House Bill 1392 that is being supported by the Poultry Federation. Pope stated that bills classifying animal waste as toxic are being heard and that the OACD does not have an official position on the legislation.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ron Hilliard, state conservationist, reported that he had been traveling across the state visiting field offices and staff members. He attended a cedar event in Woodward. Hilliard stated that USDA named Christina Muedeking as the new NRCS regional assistant chief for Central Region replacing Merlin Bartz.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on April 2, 2007, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

A Summary of the April Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met April 2, 2007, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Alfalfa County	Douglas McMurtrey
Caney Valley	Kirk Darnell
Cotton County	Kenneth Burton
East Canadian County	Marvin Novak
East Woods County	Bob McCray
Garfield County	Richard Wuerflein
Greer County	Linden Haygood
Kiowa County	Justin Krieger
McIntosh County	Mike Beebe
Sequoyah County	Phillip Green
Wagoner County	George Stunkard

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who reported \$1,130,851.71 in claims Feb. 21 - March 18.

BMP, Inc., Agreement

Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, provided a report regarding the poultry litter transport agreement with BMP, Inc. After several meetings, it was agreed to pursue a performance audit of the grant to be conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, at no cost to OCC. A conference call with EPA was scheduled to arrange the audit.

Agreements

Commissioners approved four amended agreements and one new agreement, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director.

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved eight out-of-state travel requests for 10 OCC staff members.

NACD Summer Board Meeting/Legislative Conference

Commissioners approved a motion for up to two Commissioners and one staff member to attend the National Association of Conservation Districts' 2007 Summer Board Meeting and Legislative Conference, scheduled for July 21-24 in Washington, D.C.

Dewey County CD Elected Position No. 3

Commissioners approved a motion to ratify results of the Dewey County CD Director Position No. 3 election held March 12.

Additional Allocation For CD Operating Expenses

Commissioners approved a motion for an additional FY2007 allocation of \$1,000 to each conservation district for other operating expenses.

Farmland Of Statewide Importance

Steve Forsythe, Southern Flint Hills Tall Grass Prairie Preserve manager with The Nature Conservancy, requested OCC to designate certain soils as "farmland of statewide importance" for the purpose of possible enrollment in USDA's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. The program supports the efforts to protect the Southern Flint Hills in Oklahoma. He presented a slide show of the program stating that it is a voluntary program to help farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. It provides matching funds to purchase conservation easements from landowners who agree not to convert their land to nonagricultural uses. The soils named were Blue Stem Hills in western Osage County and eastern Kay Counties; Northern Cross Timber in eastern Osage and Washington Counties; and Cherokee Prairie in Nowata and Craig Counties.

Commissioners approved a motion to tentatively desig-

nate the soils listed above in the listed counties pending approval from the local conservation districts.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Rick Jeans stated that Kay County CD's annual banquet was very successful. Commissioner Dan Lowrance reported serving on the search committee for the department head of the new Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University. He announced that Dr. Keith Owens had been selected and he would plan to invite him to a future Commission meeting. Commissioner Jeans and Matt Gard attended Conservation Day at the Capitol. Commissioner Gard also attended Agriculture Day at the Capitol and an associated reception at the History Center. Commissioner George Stunkard invited members and staff to attend the Wagoner County CD's 52nd annual Soil Stewardship Breakfast April 27.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, expressed his appreciation to NRCS State Conservationist Ron Hilliard for his efforts to continue the contributions agreement. Thralls stated that letters were sent to the congressional delegation in support of watershed funding and the watershed program, which had been zeroed out in the current year.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, stated OCC is sending letters to the congressional delegation regarding funding for NRCS technical assistance and President George W. Bush administration's proposal to eliminate the watershed program. Pollard stated that the Emergency Watershed Protection Program is funded at \$50 million with Oklahoma included for assistance with ice storm debris damage. He encouraged conservation districts to participate in the 42 meetings being held across the state to gather input for a state water plan. Pollard introduced Garfield County CD board member Kim Farber and employees Jason Skaggs and Sheri Nickel and stated they had attended the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Commission meeting that morning to recognize the efforts of ODWC Commissioner John Groendyke for hosting a recent event in Garfield County.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, completed the fourth in the "10-Minute Guide" series, on cooperator agreements. Knauf reported on attending meetings at Harmon County, Garfield County and East Woods County CDs and helping Tulsa County CD with personnel issues.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, stated staff had been working on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) project that will put \$20.6 million to work on water quality issues in northeast Oklahoma.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation: Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that the FY2007 grant has been received in the amount of \$1.7 million. This includes \$100,000 for emergencies, \$100,000 for clean streams, and \$1.5 million for reclamation.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, thanked the Commissioners for approving an additional allocation to conservation districts for FY2007. Coffman will be attending P-Card training in the month. He reported that the CORE team has opened up the budget work program module for FY2008.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, reported on the Tar Creek West Commerce project stating that ground is prepared for grass planting as weather permits. He reported the City of Commerce had decided not to use the Southeast Commerce Project site for soccer fields. Sharp

reported that over 100 exhibitors participated in GIS Day at the Capitol on March 14. Lt. Gov. Jari Askins spent time observing exhibits and visiting with participants.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, CP director, reported that Little Washita Site 13 in Grady County will be decommissioned. He reported a site in Custer County is being turned back to property owners with all duties, responsibilities and liabilities at the request of the landowner. Toole stated there is a trend of land development around watershed lakes that increases the cost of rehabilitation and stated they are assisting with such an issue in the Konawa CD. Toole noted that staff is assisting the Logan County CD to clear land rights on Cottonwood Site No. 26 where over 125 landowners have been identified. There is development on 3 sides of the structure with houses ranging in price from \$350,000 to \$1.5 million. Some of these homes are in the breach inundation area. Toole stated that it will take some type of legislation regulation to alleviate this trend.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, stated that Conservation Day at the Capitol and Ag Day at the Capitol turned out well. The NACD South Central Regional meeting is scheduled in July and Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert and Tulsa Mayor Kathy Taylor are both scheduled to speak. Pope stated that the OACD handbook and bylaws have been re-typed for purposes of updating and distributing. He is working on a policy book based on OACD resolutions passed over the past 10 years. Pope reported working with Public Service Organization (PSO), Sec. Tolbert, and Chesapeake Energy on carbon sequestration issues.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist, stated that NRCS had received its FY2007 allocation, and he will fill the positions of state conservation engineer and state administrative officer for operation as well as two district conservationist positions. Hilliard reported that the initial allocation for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program will provide over \$736,000 to Oklahoma and proposals will be accepted through April 27. Hilliard reported attending the NRCS national leadership team meeting in Washington, D.C., and had the opportunity to visit with Oklahoma's congressional delegation regarding conservation issues. Hilliard reported that the new Regional Assistant Chief will be visiting Oklahoma in early May and will attend a portion of the National Land and Range Judging Contest and meetings at the NRCS state office. Hilliard reported that a rain event overtopped the embankment on Barnitz 14 and that only minor damage occurred. The Office of Inspector General would perform an audit during the month of April.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Rod Wanger, Conservation Programs chief, stated that \$3.2 million has been paid to date in the 2006 Emergency Conservation Program for Drought and that as of Dec. 31 this program will no longer include pond clean-outs. He stated that \$872,000 had been allocated for the 2007 Emergency Conservation Program for ice storm damage and an additional \$500,000 will be requested. Wanger stated that there will not be a Conservation Reserve Program sign up next year. Contracts for the Direct and Counter Cyclical Program must be signed by Aug. 3.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on May 7, 2007, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Commissioners approved design selected by employee vote

OCC Unveils New Logo

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission unveiled the agency's new official logo at the Commission meeting on May 7. The goal of selecting a logo arose from a motion in OCC's Awards & Recognition Committee who then conducted a contest in which OCC employees submitted design ideas. The three most popular designs, selected by employee votes, were presented to the Commissioners who approved the final design (shown at right).

Dianne Ireton, systems coordinator for OCC's Abandoned Mine Land division, designed the winning logo. OCC will make a transition to using the logo on stationery, business cards, signs, the web page and the newsletter. The symbol will also be available for OCC employees to have embroidered on caps, clothing and other items.

Rotary Club, Woodward County & Harper County CDs Offer Ground Water Screening Project

The Woodward Rotary Club joined with Woodward County and Harper County CDs to provide free rural groundwater testing for landowners on March 8. The program was cosponsored by OCC at no cost to participants. A fifth-grade and a sixth-grade class from Buffalo schools observed the testing as part of their earth sciences study.

Instructions were provided to landowners on the proper procedure for obtaining samples, which were then brought to the district office. Kim Shaw of OCC's Water Quality division taught the volunteers how to perform the tests. Tests were performed for acidity, alkalinity, salt, calcium, nitrates, chlorides and sulphur compounds on approximately 70 to 80 samples. After testing, the landowners were provided with results and suggestions for further testing if any areas are out of normal range. The information is kept private and not passed on to any other entity. Most samples were found to be well within standard limits with a few instances of high nitrates. The alkalinity tests showed, as expected, high concentrations of gypsum (calcium sulfates) that is prevalent in some parts of the two counties.

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At the May board meeting the Oklahoma Conservation Commission unveiled the agency's new logo, designed by Dianne Ireton, OCC/AML staff. Above, from left, are Commissioner Matt Gard, Dianne Ireton, and Commissioners George Stunkard, Dan Lowrance, Virginia Kidd and Rick Jeans.

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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- Area II Rick Jeans Tonkawa
- Area III George Stunkard Coweta
- Area IV Dan Lowrance Duncan
- Area V Virginia Kidd Poteau

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