



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 51 No. 4, April 2006

Soil & Water Stewardship Week 2006 *lest we forget ...*



April 30 - May 7 is Soil & Water Stewardship Week in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission asks everyone to remember the work done by our farmers, ranchers and other landowners to protect our natural resources. Never forget how far we have come. Support locally-led, voluntary natural resource conservation.

Photograph by Arthur Rothstein. Courtesy of the Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma Library from the Farm Security Administration Collection.

Conservation Commission Encourages Everyone to be "Water Wise"

Soil & Water Stewardship Week

Governor Brad Henry has proclaimed April 30 – May 7, 2006, as Soil and Water Stewardship Week in Oklahoma. (See related story on page two.)

For over 60 years a national network of conservation districts has helped Americans learn to conserve natural resources. This year America's conservation districts commemorate Soil and Water Stewardship Week with the theme "Water Wise."

Conservation practices in the United States have helped us achieve an historic standard of living and helped protect us from the recurrence of disasters like the Dust Bowl. We enjoy a wide variety of fresh, healthy food. Drinking water supplies are clean and mainly free from disease. Lakes, rivers, and streams are much cleaner than 30 years ago. Air quality has greatly improved in the last 50 years. Conservation practices that helped rescue America from the Dust Bowl continue to protect Oklahoma today. That fact is especially evident during the extended hotter-than-normal, dry, windy weather the plains have experienced this year.

Stewardship Week is one of the largest national annual programs to promote conservation. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD, www.nacdnet.org) oversees the national program. Since 1955 NACD and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) have sponsored the Stewardship Week program. This year the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and Monsanto Company have partnered with OACD to sponsor some activities including production of public service announcements.

During the week local conservation districts will work with media outlets, communities, faith-based groups and local schools to promote the concept of Stewardship. This concept involves personal and social responsibility, including a duty to learn about and improve natural resources as we use them wisely, leaving a rich legacy for future generations.

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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.

"In my judgement, complacency with respect to the security and sufficiency of our land is what we most have to fear."

Hugh Hammond Bennett. The Hugh Hammond Bennett Lectures, Raleigh, North Carolina: The Agricultural Foundation, Inc., North Carolina State College, June 1959.

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on "Calendar" at www.okcc.state.ok.us

- May 1 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Conference Center, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.
- May 2-4 — National Land & Range Judging Contest, Oklahoma City.
- May 3-5 — Forestry on the Grow 2006 Conference and Expo, Western Hills Lodge, Sequoyah State Park, Wagoner.
- May 23-25 — Implementation at the Watershed Scale, Second National Water Quality Trading Conference, Westin Hotel, Pittsburgh, Penn.
- May 29 — Memorial Day State Holiday
- June 2-3 — Project WET Workshop, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah.
- June 5 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Conference Center, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.
- June 8 — OSU Producer Tour, Spavinaw Creek 319 Project Demonstration Farm.
- June 9-10 — Project WET Workshop, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah.
- June 13 — Water Quality Camp, Spavinaw 319 Project Demonstration Farm.
- June 12-15 — Southern Regional Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, "Reconnecting and Enhancing the National Cooperative Soil Survey Partnership," Clarion Meridian Hotel & Conference Center, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma State University and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- June 20-21 — Inter-Tribal Environmental Council 11th Annual Conference, Sheraton Hotel, Oklahoma City. Inter-Tribal Environmental Council.

District Dateline

Cimarron County CD/Boise City NRCS partnership hosted the 2006 Leadership Oklahoma class April 6 at the District office. District and NRCS personnel presented information on county history, the conservation district, and NRCS programs were given by district and NRCS personnel to 32 men and women from across Oklahoma. They were shown a 1930 dust-bowl photo taken in Cimarron County and 1998 photos showing how the land has improved with CRP and conservation farming. Programs Coordinator Iris Imler used the example of flooding in Louisiana to stress the benefits of watershed programs.

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

- Robert Taylor, who recently resigned as Deer Creek CD director, passed away March 9.
- Jay Clark, son of Cimarron County CD Director and former Area I Commissioner Hal Clark and wife Pat, died April 7.
- Dalton Cole Dorsey, 15, son of North Caddo CD Director Jimmy Dorsey, died April 7 as a result of a gun accident.
- Will Chambers, 17, son of Osage County CD Director Charley Chambers, died April 9 from cancer.
- Shirlee Laubach, Cimarron Valley CD director, passed away April 4.
- Please inform Mark Harrison at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. Please include dates!!!!!!!

OACD, OCC present "Out of the Dust" book to Governor

Gov. Brad Henry Records Public Service Announcements for Stewardship Week

On Thursday, April 6, Gov. Brad Henry taped two public service announcements (PSAs) to commemorate Soil & Water Stewardship Week in Oklahoma. The PSAs will be distributed to television and radio stations around the state as well as to print news media.

Public outreach activities for Soil & Water Stewardship Week in Oklahoma are being cosponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Monsanto in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Following the taping OACD and OCC presented Gov. Henry with a copy of *Out of the Dust - The History of Conservation in Oklahoma in the 20th Century*. OACD Executive Director Clay Pope and OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls and Information Officer Mark Harrison made the presentation. Harrison and OCC employee F. Dwain Phillips are the book's authors.

Governor's Proclamation: Soil & Water Stewardship Week in Oklahoma

Whereas, human beings are dependent on fertile soil and clean water to provide our food and fiber; and

Whereas, we are ethically bound to care for the natural resources that sustain our life; and

Whereas effective conservation practices have helped provide us a richer standard of living and protect us from the recurrence of disasters such as the Dust Bowl; and

Whereas our health and happiness, and safety and security depend on healthy soil and clean water; and

Whereas soil and water stewardship calls for each person to appreciate and conserve these precious resources;

Now, therefore, I, Brad Henry, Governor of the State of Oklahoma, do hereby proclaim April 30 through May 7, 2006, as Soil & Water Stewardship Week in the State of Oklahoma.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Oklahoma to be affixed. Done at the Capitol, in the City of Oklahoma City, the 12th day of April, in the Year of Our Lord two thousand and six, and of the State of Oklahoma in the ninety-eighth year.

Brad Henry, Governor; M. Susan Savage, Secretary of State.

District Dateline: Muskogee County Conservation District

Connors State College Soil & Range Judging Contest

Part of Connors State College "Aggie Day" is a Soil and Range Judging Contest sponsored by the college, Muskogee County Conservation District and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The contest includes land judging, range judging and surveying events. In this year's event on April 6 there were 248 high school students in 58 teams from Oklahoma and four other states. Winning teams in the three major categories were Tuttle, Okla., land judging; Roland, Okla., rangeland; and Spiro, Okla., surveying.

The competition includes the use of surveying instruments to measure elevation and slope of land, soil type classification, land use determinations, and rangeland plant species identification.

Article by Andy Qualls, Muskogee County Conservation District; Photo by Danielle Whaley, NRCS District Conservationist.



Following taping of the video PSAs, OACD and OCC presented Gov. Brad Henry with a copy of the book "Out of the Dust." From left are OACD President Clay Pope, OCC Information Officer Mark Harrison, Gov. Brad Henry and OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls.



NRCS Resource Soil Scientist Richard McCright looks on as students participate in the annual Connors State College Soil & Range Judging Competition.

A Summary of the March Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

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

District Director Resignations

Garfield County - Joe Peeper
Haskell County - Gene Stephens
McIntosh - Arvel Baily
North Fork of Red River - Michael Blevins

District Director Appointments

Arbuckle - Creede Speake Jr.
Cherokee County - Garland Phillips
Cleveland County - Sid Calvert
Creek County - Donald Beach
Custer County - Jay Baker
Deer Creek - Alveta Taylor
Deer Creek - Carol Gaunt
East Canadian County - Pam Mach
Garfield County - Everett Cutter
Greer County - John Birdwell
Harper County - Chuck Smith
Harper County - Bret Cosby
Haskell County - Joe Bullard
Hughes County - Wendell Black
Kiamichi - Edna Loftin
LeFlore County - Ed Abernathy
Little River - Terry Baker
Marshall County - Kenneth Duncan
McClain County - Everett Wollenberg
McIntosh County - Tom Shroyer
McIntosh County - Patty Wiedel
Ottawa County - Sue Rendel
Pawnee County - Roy Lee Robbins
Seminole County - Judge Sawyer
Tulsa County - Pat Baker

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, who reported \$1,240,723.40 in claims Jan. 25 - Feb. 19.

Agreements

Commissioners approved amendments to the following agreements as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director:

1. Sec. of Environment, FY2002 104(b) wetlands grant, time extension.
2. OSU, measure roadside erosion and demonstrate practices to minimize erosion and sediment runoff, time extension.

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved seven out-of-state-travel requests for 13 OCC staff members. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

District Director Elected Position No. 2

Commissioners approved a motion to certify candidates as elected to Position No. 2 in districts where only one eligible candidate filed a Notification and Declaration of Candidacy for Election. Commissioners approved a motion to declare Elected Position No. 2 vacant in districts where no eligible candidate filed, effective April 1, 2006. Commissioners approved a motion to authorize the executive director to declare candidates receiving the highest number of votes during the March 14, 2006, election as elected to Position No. 2.

National Land & Range Judging Contest

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the National Land and Range Judging Contest scheduled for May 2-4, 2006, Oklahoma City, OK.

New Business

Commissioners approved a motion to send a letter to the National Association of Conservation District's Presidents Association expressing appreciation for their continued financial contributions to and support of the National Land and Range Judging Contest.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioners made favorable comments regarding the recent OACD State Meeting. Commissioner Dan Lowrance thanked OCC staff for their work with the meeting. Commissioner Rick Jeans stated that a group would go to Washington, D.C., that week for a meeting with NRCS Chief Bruce Knight regarding the NRCS state budget.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, stated that he would be among those attending the NRCS budget meeting in Washington, D.C. Thralls reported construction in the Stamper Project would begin in the next 30 days. The site has been relocated from the Illinois River Watershed to within the Spavinaw Creek Watershed.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, reported on upcoming events at the Capitol including GIS Day, Conservation Day, Agriculture Day and Water Appreciation Day. OCC, OACD and NRCS will be represented with booths at these events. At Conservation Day, an awards ceremony will be held in the Blue Room, and the Governor will present awards to Cooperator of the Year Holton Payne, District Director of the Year Joy Elledge and District of the Year Garfield County Conservation District. Five educators would also be recognized. Pollard stated that, as well as the National Land and Range Judging Contest, the Public Employee Recognition Week is scheduled for the first week in May. OCC staff will have a full staff meeting that week and the OCC Awards and Recognition Committee will recognize staff members. He stated that Soil Stewardship Week is also that week and that the OACD is planning promotional activities.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported a Women In Agriculture session during the recent OACD State meeting was well attended. Knauf reported on assisting the Ellis County CD this month. She thanked OCC staff Chris Dunlevy and Mark Harrison for making the district directory available electronically to district offices.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, reported that OCC received commitments for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) projects from the City of Tulsa for \$1.25 million in the Spavinaw Creek watershed and from the Scenic Rivers Commission for \$191,000 in the Illinois River watershed. Staff met with the Cherokee Nation to discuss monitoring and lab assistance. Butler reported that the Fort Cobb Priority Watershed Project is scheduled to end in nine months, but there is a substantial amount of money left in the grant for sprigging assistance because it has been too dry to sprig in the area over the past three years. Staff is requesting that EPA extend the grant.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, reported that OCC is waiting on a work order from the Department of Central Services for the Kirk-150 project. The Charles Phase 2-258 project is running beyond contract time and the contractor is being assessed \$300 per day until all work is completed. He reported that a certified land surveyor is being used to establish property boundaries on the McPheeters-258 project.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported staff is preparing for an audit of OCC's financial records for FY2005 and the first six months of FY2006 by the State Auditor and Inspector's office. Coffman attended a House committee meeting to

discuss district directors' eligibility to participate in the state's health insurance program. Committee members commended OCC and districts for their work. Coffman will attend CORE training to be able to access to databases and to write queries and reports.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that a work order was issued on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML Project. He reported that work continues on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML project. He met with GMR & Associates concerning the Howerton Tar Creek AML project design. Sharp stated that staff has been preparing for the 12th Annual GIS Day at the Capitol on March 15.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, noted that even with a collaborative initiative going on with the Corporation Commission, watershed structures continue to be impacted by oil and gas drilling activity. With the anticipated increase in drilling activity, the rate of incidents will increase. OCC will continue to strive to improve collaboration with the Corporation Commission and provide tools, training and support to conservation districts.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, stated he would travel to Washington, D.C., to discuss budget issues. He reported there is a rapid decrease in NRCS technical assistance funding to states. During FY05, NRCS in Oklahoma received a \$4 million reduction in technical assistance, which established a baseline. In FY06 another \$2 million was removed from technical assistance. The Environmental Quality Incentive Program financial assistance is up three percent but technical assistance dollars went down nine percent on top of last year's cuts. He stated that because of the reductions office closures will be considered. He also stated that employees in the watershed planning design and construction offices may be moved to other program areas. Dominick stated the reclamation work being done in the Tar Creek area is the most positive work done there in the last 30 years.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Amanda Tye, Cleveland County FSA executive director, reported on policy changes to the Direct and Counter-cyclical Program. She stated that 470,701 acres have been burnt in recent wildfires. The Emergency Conservation Program is available to assist with fence repairs in 27 counties. She reported that 47 counties have been approved under ECP for livestock water assistance and six counties are pending approval. Tye stated that all counties have been declared disaster areas due to drought and that all producers are eligible for emergency loan assistance. The Conservation Reserve Program sign-up begins March 27 through April 17.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, stated that a controlled burn bill passed out of the state House Agriculture Committee earlier that morning. He stated he would attend the meeting in Washington, D.C., with NRCS Chief Bruce Knight, to discuss the NRCS budget. Pope expressed his appreciation to OCC staff for their assistance with the OACD State Meeting. Pope stated that Monsanto and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau agreed to help sponsor Soil Stewardship Week activities this year. He reported meeting with the Cherokee Nation regarding CREP projects.

Next Meeting

Commissioners approved a motion to hold the April Commission meeting in Garfield County CD, recently named the District of the Year, beginning at 10:00 a.m. at a location to be announced.

Agency held April Meeting in 2006 Outstanding Conservation District

Conservation Commission Goes "On the Road"

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission took its regularly scheduled monthly meeting for a road trip. The agency held its April 7 meeting in Garfield County Conservation District. The district was named in March as the state's Outstanding Conservation District for 2006 in a program sponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) and Chesapeake Energy.

The Conservation Commission met at the Atrium Technology Center in Enid. Afterwards, an audio/visual presentation highlighted the accomplishments that resulted in the district being named Outstanding Conservation District.

OACD hosted a luncheon for the Commissioners, staff and guests. OACD presented Garfield County Conservation District with a sign commemorating the district as Outstanding Conservation District for 2006.



The board and staff of Garfield County Conservation District with their state legislators pose with a sign presented to them by Chesapeake Energy and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts. From left are state Sen. Patrick Anderson, district employees Sherrie Nickel and Jason Skaggs, Rep. Curt Roggow, district directors Richard Wuerflein, Kim Farber, Everett Cutter and Dale Milacek, Rep. Mike Jackson and OACD Executive Director Clay Pope.

OCC Employee Awards & Recognition Committee Plans Events for National Public Service Recognition Week

In commemoration of National Public Service Recognition Week OCC's recently-formed Employee Awards & Recognition Committee is hosting the agency's quarterly full staff meeting on May 1 and a series of events beginning that morning and continuing in the following days.

On Monday, May 1, the committee will host coffee and bagels at the OCC office from 9:00 to 9:30 a.m. preceding the May Commission meeting. Following the Commission meeting the OCC employees' full staff meeting, including lunch, will follow be held at the Will Rogers Park Garden Exhibition Center. On Tuesday, May 2, there will be an ice cream social at the OCC office. On Wednesday, May 3, the Water Quality division will host the staff for popcorn and a soil painting demonstration by Cheryl Cheadle, OCC/WQ Blue Thumb Program state coordinator. Finally, on Thursday, May 4, the staff will have a Land Judging Outing, visiting the site of the National Land & Range Judging Contest and having lunch with the contest participants.

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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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