

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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Conservation Day at the Capitol 2012

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) sponsored "Conservation Day at the Capitol" on April 16, 2012. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission cosponsored the event.

Several of the state's local conservation districts displayed exhibits at the event along with partner agencies and other organizations. The exhibits were displayed in the Capitol Rotunda on the fourth floor from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The displays featured the diverse conservation activities addressing local natural resource needs across the state.



Craig County Conservation District accepting the Outstanding District Award and check for \$2,500 from Jimmie Hammontree, Chesapeake Energy (left); joined by OACD President Joe Parker and Sec. of Ag. Jim Reese (right).

An awards ceremony was held in the afternoon in the Governor's Blue Room. Jim Reese, Oklahoma Sec. of Agriculture represented Gov. Mary Fallin and joined Joe Parker, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, in presenting awards. Representatives of sponsoring organizations also joined in the presentations.

Bill Mangels of Lenapah received the Outstanding District Landowner/Cooperator Award, sponsored by the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma. Jan Kunze of Oklahoma City, on the board of directors of the Oklahoma County Conservation District, received the Outstanding District Director Award, sponsored by the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation. Craig County Conservation District received the Outstanding District Award, sponsored by Chesapeake Energy.

In addition, five teachers from across the state – one in each Congressional district – received Outstanding Conservation Educator Awards cosponsored by OACD and Chesapeake Energy. The recipients were Julie Strange, Wagoner; Lance Bennett, Claremore; Keith Dillingham, Drummond; Adam Lifscics, Norman; and Steve Pritchard, McCloud.

Mark Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association, joined Joe Parker in presenting Excellence in Communications awards to Oklahoma County Conservation District, Kay County Conservation District, George Plummer of KOOL 105.5 FM Radio in Chickasha, and the *Thomas Tribune* newspaper.

A special presentation was made to Dr. Robert E. Whitson, who is retiring as head of Oklahoma State University's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

OCC and OACD Participate in White House Water Quality Summit

Oklahoma's successful nonpoint source pollution program was recently part of the discussion at a White House conference on water quality. On Wednesday, March 14, the White House Rural Council held the Working Lands and Healthy Watersheds Roundtable, an event that gathered a group of key stakeholders interested in farming and ranching, conservation, and water quality to review progress in implementing current federal conservation and water quality programs. The program was designed to solicit insights and identify critical needs in order to improve the government's ability to support strong watershed projects that conserve resources, improve water quality, and strengthen agricultural and rural communities. Oklahoma and two other states were selected to present information on their nonpoint water quality programs and outline the reasons for their level of success.

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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.

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
"Calendar of Events" at
<http://conservation.ok.gov>

**Managing Risk with Composting &
Rainwater Harvesting,**
June 2, Clinton

Conservation Commission Meeting,
June 4, Oklahoma City

Ozark Summit,
June 12-14, Springfield, Mo.

**Riparian Ecosystems - American Water
Resource Assoc. Conference,**
June 26-29, Denver, Colo.

Conservation Commission Meeting,
July 2, Oklahoma City

Independence Day Holiday, July 4

NACD South Central Region Meeting,
Aug. 5-7, Hot Springs, Ark.

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Aug. 6, Oklahoma City

Statewide Women in Ag & Small Business,
Aug. 9-10, Oklahoma City

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 3

Conservation Commission Meeting,
September 10, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Oct. 1, Oklahoma City

Awards & Recognition

Doug McMurtrey, Alfalfa County
CD director, was named as a Master
Agronomist by Oklahoma State
University's Agricultural and Natural
Sciences Division.

In our thoughts...

Johnny Pelley, OCC/CP watershed technician, lost his father-in-law on April 19.

Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County Conservation District secretary, lost her father Charles Darland on April 21. Mr. Darland was an Earth Team member.

Randy Hall, NRCS district conservationist, Johnston County CD, lost his mother, Wanda Lee Hall Osborn, on April 21.

Gene Sawyer, a West Caddo CD board member since 1981, passed away April 23. See *Gene Sawyer*, page three.

Josh McNeff, OCC/DS soil conservation technician, received multiple serious injuries in a motorcycle/auto accident on May 3.

Congratulations!

Jimmy Ward, NRCS soil conservation technician at Major County CD, and wife Misty have a new baby boy, Cutter Hayes Ward, born April 6.

White House Summit, continued from page one

Shanon Phillips, director of the Water Quality Division of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), and Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), were invited to discuss what makes Oklahoma's non-point source program so successful and to discuss ways that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) could cooperate to protect water using voluntary programs.

According to Phillips, the presentation Oklahoma gave touched on the keys to making voluntary conservation programs successful and proving that success.

"Our water quality monitoring program is one of the things that sets Oklahoma apart from other states," Phillips said. "Very few states have as large and consistent a monitoring program as Oklahoma does. And monitoring is vital to proving whether your implementation of land management practices is affecting the water for better or worse or indifferently," Phillips said. "Our monitoring program is how we *know* our implementation is having success in improving water quality," she said.

According to Pope, this was a great opportunity to tell federal officials why voluntary, locally-led, cooperative programs are showing such great success in reducing nutrients and other pollutants from Oklahoma's waters.

"We were honored to have the chance to tell Oklahoma's story on water quality and conservation," Pope said. "When you see the success we have had in Oklahoma in taking streams and stream segments off of the EPA impaired list and when you consider the fact that our state consistently ranks near the top in reducing nonpoint source pollution in our water, we must be doing something right. We feel that Oklahoma is showing that if you work with farmers, ranchers and other landowners through voluntary programs that are run correctly, and if you work to maximize cooperation with EPA and USDA, you can make a difference in water quality without heavy-handed regulations and do it in a way that is popular with landowners."

"If you have local people – folks who are trusted by local landowners — taking the lead," Pope said, "it is far different than having someone from the state or federal government being in front and being viewed as trying to push a program on people. We feel the approach we have in Oklahoma is a great model in addressing nonpoint source pollution. We hope our presentation had an effect in helping ensure that effective voluntary programs are the direction the federal government continues to take in addressing water quality."

18th Annual GIS Day at the Capitol

Hundreds of people visited more than 30 display booths during the 18th annual GIS Day at the Capitol on March 14. The audience included state legislators, Capitol staff and many adult and student visitors. The displays were exhibited in both the fourth floor and second floor rotundas of the Capitol.

GIS Day at the Capitol provides an opportunity for public sector agencies and organizations to showcase uses of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) throughout the state of Oklahoma. Mike Sharp, state Geographic Information coordinator, said visitors are asking more relevant questions and displaying higher awareness of using geographic information systems.

"If you have a Global Positioning System (GPS) instrument in your vehicle, on your cell phone or have created a map on a computer program to get somewhere, you have already used GIS and may not have known it," Sharp said.

"GIS integrates computer technologies, people, and detailed information about location that lets you visualize relationships, patterns, and trends in maps for better decisions. GIS can help you answer questions and solve problems by looking at your data in a way that is quickly understood and easily shared. GIS is any system for capturing, storing, analyzing and managing data and associated attributes that are spatially referenced to Earth," Sharp said.

"GIS Day provides a great opportunity to see firsthand the incredible ways these technological advances are impacting the world every day," Sharp said. GIS technology can be used for scientific investigations, resource management, asset management, environmental impact assessment, urban planning, cartography, criminology, history, sales, marketing, and logistics. For example, GIS might allow emergency planners to easily calculate emergency response times in the event of a natural disaster (see *DamWatch Introduced during GIS Day at the Capitol*, page three).

Communicating with New Producers Workshop

More than 70 people attended the *Communicating with New Producers Workshop* on March 20. Participants represented agencies and organizations that routinely provide technical, financial or other assistance to farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers.

The Oklahoma Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society hosted the all-day event at the Oklahoma City Campus of Oklahoma State University. The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation provided support along with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Service, Kerr Center, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and USDA's Agricultural Research Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Stacy Hansen, SWCS member and OCC's Carbon Program director, moderated the workshop.

During the first morning session, speakers from the Noble Foundation, Kerr Center, Oklahoma Forestry Service, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Forestry Service provided Perspectives from the Field. The speakers addressed changes that entities who interact with farmers are seeing in the agricultural community.

In the next session, New Landowner Demographics, Larry Sanders, OSU Extension Service, and Charles Middleton, Great Plains Technology Center, drew on Oklahoma Agriculture Census data to explore the backgrounds, geographic origins, attitudes and learning styles of new producers.

During lunch, Blayne Arthur, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, demonstrated her agency's use of Social Media and Social Networking, primarily FaceBook and blogging.

Following lunch, Korey McMahon of McMahon Marketing addressed pros and cons of traditional and new outreach tools including news releases, direct mailings and flyers compared to FaceBook and Twitter. In his second session, McMahon went into more detail in the use of web-based marketing tools such as YouTube and blogging.

DamWatch Introduced during GIS Day at the Capitol

For the first time, OCC had a display and presentation about the new DamWatch program during GIS Day at the Capitol. OCC employees Jim Henley and Larry Caldwell staffed the display and presented information about the DamWatch program. Using a laptop computer and large monitor, they demonstrated components of the system for legislators and other visitors.

DamWatch is a patented, Internet-based dam and levee monitoring software system developed by US Engineering, Inc. The DamWatch system collects data from sources such as the National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to compare against established thresholds and alert users as specified. Alerts and notifications are distributed electronically (email, sms messaging, fax, etc.) according to client-defined specifications or emergency action plan protocol.

The Oklahoma DamWatch program is collaboration among the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and many of the state's local conservation districts. The primary users of DamWatch are the 70 conservation districts in which there are flood control dams. They are responsible for dam safety and must closely monitor any high hazard dams in their district.

The DamWatch Internet-based user interface includes zoom-able maps that can be overlain with geographic or political boundaries, watersheds, inundation zones or any other user-defined information layer. Dynamic data sets such as real-time meteorological, hydrological or seismological overlays can also be displayed.

"DamWatch is a powerful tool during massive rainfall and potential flood events," said Robert Toole, OCC's Conservation Programs division director. Toole's division manages OCC's participation in the Oklahoma DamWatch partnership. "The system allows us to proactively monitor, in real time, dam infrastructure to better protect against hazardous, costly and potentially catastrophic events," Toole said.



Greg Scott, NRCs state soil scientist, explained how the interactive online Web Soil Survey is an example of tools to make resource information available to nontraditional customers any time of day from almost any location.



Debi Carnott, OCC/WQ staff and former Central North Canadian River Conservation District manager, discussed the challenges of reaching new "ranchette" owners/operators who have day jobs in the city and do farm and ranch work during weekends and evenings.

Gene Sawyer, 1922-2012

Gene Sawyer, farmer and rancher and a West Caddo CD board member since 1981, passed away April 23. He had turned 90 years old on April 18 and celebrated his birthday with family on the day before his passing. Gene served as president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts in 1984 and 1985 and was inducted into the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame in 1993.

Gene was born on April 18, 1922, to A.O. and Ethel Sawyer in Fort Cobb. He graduated from Fort Cobb High School in 1938 and went on to receive a degree in Agriculture from Oklahoma State University. After serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, he returned to Carnegie and taught a veteran agriculture class at the high school. He and Dorothy Bess "Sally" Rodrick were married on Nov. 29, 1947, and had three children. Gene served on the Carnegie Rural Water Board since its beginning and was a member of the Carnegie United Methodist Church.



OCC employees Jim Henley and Larry Caldwell at the DamWatch booth during GIS Day at the Capitol 2012.

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Governor Fallin Proclaims Stewardship Week 2012; Lt. Gov. Lamb Records Public Service Announcements

Governor Mary Fallin proclaimed April 29 through May 6, 2012, as Stewardship Week in Oklahoma. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Conservation District Enabling Act. In February 1937 President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent copies of the federal Act to all state governors as a model law and encouraged its adoption. This year's theme for Stewardship Week, "From Soil to Spoon," commemorates universal dependence on soil for the food and fiber necessary for life.

For 75 years, the state's network of conservation districts has helped Oklahomans learn to conserve natural resources. Conservation practices in the nation have helped achieve a historic standard of living and protect us from the recurrence of disasters like the Dust Bowl. Despite recurrences of drought and other extreme weather events, Oklahomans today enjoy a wide variety of fresh, healthy food and drinking water.

Stewardship Week provides a time to recognize the efforts of farmers and ranchers to protect and conserve the state's natural resources, working with local conservation districts under the support of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Since 1955 the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD, <http://www.nacdnet.org>) and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) have sponsored the Stewardship Week program, one of the largest national annual programs to promote conservation. This year Chesapeake Energy has partnered with OACD to sponsor some activities including production of public service announcements by Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb. (The audio PSAs are available online at <http://conservation.ok.gov>.)



Gov. Mary Fallin



Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb

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