

# OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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## Governor Signs Conservation Bond Legislation

Gov. Brad Henry signed Senate Bill 238 into law on Monday, April 27, 2009, at the state Capitol. SB 238 authorizes the issue of a bond for \$25 million to help conservation in Oklahoma. The House passed the bill by a vote of 79 to 12 on April 9 and the Senate passed it 44-2 on April 20.

On April 6 U.S. Sec. of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced just over \$14 million of federal funds is coming to Oklahoma for dam rehabilitation under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Part of the bond money — \$8,800,000 — will make up the state's 35 percent cost match on about \$12 million in construction costs in that program. Another \$7.1 million from the bond will go for much-needed operation and maintenance on existing dams in the state. Other funding planned from the bond include \$2.1 million for the state's locally-led Cost-Share Program; \$3 million for state cost match for the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; and \$4 million for a flood control project in Kingfisher County.

In 2007 record flooding resulted in damage to flood control structures throughout the state, including two dams in Caddo County that suffered near breaches. In addition, millions of dollars of damage was done to additional conservation infrastructure state-wide. The Sugar Creek Dams L-44 and L-43 in Caddo County are slated for rehabilitation in the ARRA projects and bond money will provide the state portion of the cost.

The bond issue reauthorized April 27 by Gov. Henry was originally passed in the 2008 legislative session to start the process *Conservation Bond*, continued on page 2.

## Muskogee County Conservation District's No-Till Drill

In the fall of 2008 Muskogee County Conservation District (MCCD) purchased and put to work a new Great Plains No-Till drill.

"We are especially grateful to Rep. Jerry McPeak and Sen. Earl Garrison for their assistance in getting sponsors together to help fund this very valuable and important piece of equipment for Muskogee County," said Andy Qualls, MCCD equipment manager. Grants from the Cherokee and Creek Nations, along with Clean Water Act Section 319 funds from OCC's Water Quality Program, made the purchase possible.

"The order for the drill was placed the same week that the final part of the funding — the allocation from OCC — was received and the drill came in eight months later. We made about half a dozen rentals last fall and received quite a few inquiries in the winter," Qualls said. "We have been renting the drill for \$125 per day, and planting 10-20 acres per day has not been uncommon," Qualls said.

The drill is equipped with a regular seed box, a small seed box for clovers and similar seeds, and a fluffy seed box for native grasses. The drill is used for planting grass, wheat and clover as well as pasture mixtures. There are some clovers, warm season grasses and other crops that can be planted in the spring and summer seasons. Qualls pointed out that the Oklahoma State University Extension Service is a good source to find out planting dates and other information for forage and other crops.

More success stories continued inside.



Oklahoma Governor  
Brad Henry

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### Going Green?

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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](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)

### Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

June 1, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

### Independence Day Holiday, July 3

### Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

July 6, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

### CTIC Water Quality Credit Trading Course, July 7-8, Canton, Ohio

### NACD Legislative Conference, July 19-21, Washington, D.C.

### Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

Aug. 3, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

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

### Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 7

### Conservation Commission Meeting, Oct. 5, Oklahoma City

### Conservation Commission Meeting, Nov. 2, Oklahoma City

### Veterans' Day Holiday, Nov. 11

### Thanksgiving Holiday, Nov. 26-27

### Conservation Commission Meeting, Dec. 7, Oklahoma City

*Conservation Bond*, continued from page 1. of repairing the 2007 damage. After its initial passage the bond, which was included in a larger measure with additional funding for non-conservation projects in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, was struck down by the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The version signed by the Governor on Monday was written to address the concerns the court expressed in its ruling.

"I think the support shown all the way through the legislative process for the conservation projects to be funded by this bond reflects the understanding that the Governor, Senate and House of Representatives have for the value of conservation in the state of Oklahoma," said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. "The House and Senate each passed this bill by an overwhelming majority and Governor Henry signed it within a week of it being presented to him. I think that reflects well the job done by the state's conservation districts in communicating and educating our elected leaders about how vital the flood control programs and other conservation projects are to the well being of the state of Oklahoma," Thralls said.

## Stephens CCD Office on Donated Land Dedicated to Late Director

On May 11, 2009, the Stephens County Conservation District held a ceremony to dedicate the Jack Ketchum Ag Center in memory of the late Jack Ketchum who served as chairman of the district board for 17 years. The memorial honors Ketchum's instrumental role in the success of the Stephens County Conservation District and his dedication to the conservation of Oklahoma's natural resources.

In 1993 a landowner named Geraldine Dunham willed 34 acres to the conservation district to be used for soil conservation purposes and conservation education. In 2003 the U.S. Department of Agriculture approached the district about increasing office space to add Rural Development and the ASCOG Resource Conservation & Development offices to the existing service center that already housed the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency and the conservation district. Ketchum, district board chairman, took the lead to find funding and enable the district to create the additional space by building a larger office on the land donated by Dunham. In July of 2005 NRCS, FSA, RD, ASCOG RC&D, and the conservation district moved into the USDA Service Center located at 3901 W. Beech Avenue, now called the Jack Ketchum Ag Center.

Recently a construction company working for the Dept. of Transportation contacted the district about purchasing dirt from the property to help build exit ramps from U.S. Highway 81 Bypass to Beech Avenue. The district saw this as an opportunity to gain revenue as well as an opportunity to have a wetland area created in the location where the dirt was being removed — a win - win situation. The district is currently investigating grant opportunities to continue development of the wetlands with a permanent outdoor classroom on the land and around the pit area.

## In our thoughts...

Harold Dawson, Cimarron CCD director, lost his father in March.

Karl Jett, Beaver CCD director, lost his father in March.

Cartwright Weaver, NRCS soil conservation technician. Pryor FSC, lost his father in March.

Jeanie, wife of Frank Acker, Little River CD manager, lost her brother in an airplane crash March 26.

Becky, wife of Greg Scott, NRCS assistant state soil scientist, lost her mother in April.

Lloyd Goodwin, Cherokee CCD director, lost his wife Nadine April 26.

Mack Graham Keathley, SCS retiree, passed away in May at age 90.

Tony Harrison, Mountain View CD manager, lost his father in May.

Tony Wright, NRCS soil conservationists, Norman FSC, lost his father in May.

Everette Balkman, former Pittsburg CCD director, passed away in May.

Larry Edimson, former OCC/WQ director, passed away May 25 following a traumatic stroke.

## Congratulations!

Marc Harland, Harper CCD director, and his wife Kim had twin girls on Feb. 11.

Ashley Rhea, OCC/WQ conservation plan writer, and her husband Rodney had a baby boy, Braden Lane, April 4.

Sheryl Gibson, OCC/FMHR grants accountant, and her husband Paul, had a baby girl, Cassidy Gayle, April 13.

Glen Miller, NRCS geologist, retired in May.

Coleta Bratten, Dewey CCD, has a new granddaughter, Lanie Grace, born May 19.

## Thank you...

Thank you all for your loving support during this time of loss. Your calls, cards, words, and other expressions of support have not gone unnoticed.

Becky, Ethan and Beth Theis, Comanche CCD.

## SWODA Helps Upper Washita CD Get Drills

Upper Washita Conservation District (UWCD) recently received a group of grass drills through a grant from the South Western Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA). The grant funding came from the state's Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP). The district applied for the \$75,000 grant in October 2008 and received approval in December of that year. The grant enabled the district to purchase four standard grass drills and two no-till drills, all with small and fluffy seed boxes, and three hitches. Under a previous SWODA grant the district had purchased a one-ton pickup with a flatbed and tool boxes and a laptop computer.

SWODA, headquartered in Burns Flat, was created in 1971 in a joint effort by municipalities, counties and the ten conservation districts in Beckham, Custer, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Kiowa, Roger Mills and Washita counties. Leaders in those communities recognized that some problems shared by many of these governmental entities could be better solved if they worked together. From these governmental units and from other population segments in the region, 30 representatives are elected to serve on SWODA's governing board. A five-member board of trustees determines policy for SWODA.

Since the early 1980s, SWODA has assisted all the conservation districts in the region to prepare and to adopt their five-year long-range plans. A few of the ten districts have also received assistance in their annual work plans.

UWCD pays approximately \$530 per year in dues to be a member of SWODA. The district board feels like it is a worthwhile investment, said Nena Wells, district manager.

## Farm Bureau Provides Scraper to Garfield CCD

In February the Garfield County Farm Bureau (GCFB) and Garfield County Conservation District (GCCD) held an Appreciation/Legislative Breakfast event to announce to the public the availability of a new piece of land moving equipment — an eight-and-a-half yard land scraper.

Jason Skaggs, GCCD district manager, said Joe Peeper, a GCFB board member and former GCCD board member, told Skaggs the Farm Bureau wanted to make a piece of equipment available to area landowners. He asked the district to be partners in the effort.

"The county Farm Bureau wasn't set up to operate rental of the equipment," Skaggs said, "but thought the conservation district would be perfect to do that since we work with all producers in the county."

GCFB purchased the scraper and pays for insurance and parts as needed. GCCD rents the equipment and performs maintenance. The two entities split the proceeds equally. Producers in the county will use the scraper to build or rebuild terraces, clean out waterways or ponds or build new ones, build pads or level land. "It will be useful for just about anything where you would be moving dirt," Skaggs said.

**Henry Roye**, OCC/AML emergency coordinator, was recognized at the April meeting of the Conservation Commission for 20 years of service to the Conservation Commission and the State of Oklahoma.

**Kim Tweed**, OCC/Admin executive secretary, was recognized at the May meeting of the Conservation Commission for 30 years of service to the Conservation Commission and the State of Oklahoma.

## Bankers Program Success Spans 28 Years

For 28 years the Pittsburg County Conservation District (PCCD), in a successful partnership with area banks and other sponsors, has held the Pittsburg County Bankers Conservation Awards Banquet. Four banks and Farm Credit of East Central Oklahoma currently sponsor the annual event, most recently on Oct. 21, 2008. The banks are The Bank N.A., First National Bank and Trust Company, Arvest Bank and BancFirst. State Sen. Richard Lerblance's law firm sponsors the location of the event at the Southeast Oklahoma Expo Center.

Bradley Hamilton, PCCD manager, said about 280 people attend the banquet. PCCD presents first and second place awards in each division of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts' poster, essay and speech contests. The district also presents awards to the first place team and individual awards for junior and senior divisions in the county land judging contest. Three Outstanding Cooperators are honored as well as an Outstanding Educator, and occasionally a Governor's Conservation Award is presented.

"It's a great opportunity to educate the public on conservation and to showcase district activities," Hamilton said. The awards presented, especially to youths, help get attention from the news media, he said.

The Bankers Awards program is a success story in itself, but this year the district had the opportunity to showcase another success — the purchase of a new poultry litter spreader available for rent from the district by local agricultural producers. The purchase was made possible through a Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) grant from the Kiamichi Economic Development District of Oklahoma (KEDDO) with support from the Choctaw Nation, Oklahoma Conservation Commission and state Rep. Brian Renagar.

## Tax Benefits Two Conservation Districts

Since 1998 one percent of a one cent per dollar sales tax has been divided between Shawnee and Konawa Conservation Districts. The funding was originally voted in for a five-year term, then renewed for a 10-year term. In 2008 voters made the one cent tax permanent beginning in 2013 including the percentage earmarked for the two districts.

Since Shawnee CD covers approximately two-thirds of the county area and Konawa CD covers the remaining area, the funds were divided along the same proportion.

Shawnee CD uses the money in the form of a purchase order for recurring expenses such as office supplies, truck repairs, shop supplies, building lease, electric and gas payments. They have also used the funds for capital outlay such as the district's one-ton truck, Lawson aerator and refurbishing Bermuda grass spriggers.

Konawa CD acquired several pieces of equipment for rental through the Pottawatomie County sales tax. Most of the equipment purchased was requested by cooperators through the district's Locally Led meetings. A number of deer hunters requested a Landpride ATV Disc/Seeder/Cultipacker so they could rent it to prepare wildlife food plots. Several cooperators requested a 10-foot Brillion Cultipacker seeder to assist them in planting small seed such as Bermuda grass seed and alfalfa. The district also purchased a 10-foot pasture aerator and a hay trailer with capacity to haul six round bales.

## Honey Creek — Upstream Neighbors Impressed with Conservation Practices

Board members from a regional citizens group, the Grand Lake Watershed Alliance Foundation (GLWAF), toured the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Honey Creek Demonstration Farm, a cattle operation in Delaware County, on April 14. The group is comprised of members from Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma because the land draining toward Grand Lake is from these states — about 90 percent outside Oklahoma. One purpose of the foundation is to facilitate use of conservation practices to improve water quality throughout the Grand Lake Watershed.

The board members were impressed with the conservation practices adopted on the farm and with reports of water quality improvements in Beaty Creek, a nearby stream. Widespread voluntary adoption of similar practices in Beaty Creek have resulted in reductions in bacteria and a 66 percent reduction of phosphorus — pollutants that also threaten Grand Lake. The board members believe implementing the practices highlighted at the Honey Creek Demonstration Farm on a broader scale throughout the Grand Lake Watershed will help achieve that goal.

"I would like to share this information with the upstream folks to show what a great job you are doing in Oklahoma," Dr. James Triplett, a board member from Kansas, said. As chair of the Neosho Basin Advisory Committee, Dr. Triplett has distributed handouts from the tour to others in Kansas and plans to share his impressions at the next committee meeting.

"This is a voluntary effort. I want to commend the landowners for stepping forward to protect our land and water resources," said John Gillette, GLWAF president.

The Honey Creek Demonstration Farm was established about 15 miles east of Grove by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, in cooperation with the Delaware County Conservation District, to showcase management practices such as cross-fencing, heavy use areas, feeding and waste storage facilities, and partial exclusion from areas along streams with alternative watering sites.

Farm tours allow potential participants and others to see how these practices benefit the environment while improving the producer's profitability. The Conservation Commission and local conservation district offices cost share with producers in certain watersheds, including Honey Creek, to improve their cattle operations and reduce their impact on the environment.

"The more producers who participate, the better results for local water resources," said Marti Mefford, Honey Creek Project coordinator.



One practice to improve water quality in the Honey Creek watershed is a new design for a waste storage/feeding facility allows access from two pastures and uses less concrete than earlier models.

Mailing Tab Area

### WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops  
Karla Beatty, 405.521.2384

Project Learning Tree  
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Project WILD Workshops  
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