



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 52 No. 8, August 2006

Conservation Districts and County Commissioners Collaborate on Versatile Equipment

County Commissioners in western Oklahoma are taking advantage of an opportunity to help conservation districts maintain the local flood control infra-structure. Custer, Roger Mills and Washita County Commissioners have helped Washita County, Upper Washita and Custer County Conservation Districts obtain pieces of equipment classified as compact track loaders, sometimes called "skid steers." The earth- and material-moving machines are adaptable through the attachment of specialized tools.



Custer County CD's new equipment

George Moore, OCC Conservation Programs watershed technician, noticed one of these pieces of equipment in use one day, installing grass sod along roadside. What caught his interest was the sloping angle of the roadside, much like sloping land on flood control dams. The track loader seemed to have no difficulty maneuvering on the slope. It occurred to Moore that conservation districts might find many uses for such equipment.

"In addition to being able to function well on slopes, the great thing about these machines is the number of attachments available for them," Moore said. "Each district can select the attachments that will best address its local needs." Districts can outfit the machines to clean up storm debris – tree limbs, etc. – around the site and even from downstream culverts. The machines can be fitted to cut

County Commissioners, continued on page 2

Kay County CD: Legislators Learn about Conservation

by Susan Henning, Kay County Conservation District Manager

Kay County Conservation District hosted a tour for legislators and candidates on July 14 to better acquaint them with conservation and natural resource concerns affecting the county. Those attending were Sen. David Myers and candidates Jamie Sears, Ken Luttrell and Stan Paynter. OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls and Assistant Director Ben Pollard, local farm producer Neal Otto, NRCS District Conservationist Caleb Stone, and Kay County CD board members and staff also attended.



Kay County District Manager speaks to the group during the stop at Neal Otto's farm. Photo by Amber Jeans, Kay County CD volunteer.

The tour started off in Newkirk and included farm and ranch land within a close radius. The group visited conservation practices installed through the state Cost-Share Program including terraces, waterways and grass plantings. One stop was at Duck Creek Watershed Dam No. 7, one of nine watershed dams in Kay County.

Neal Otto hosted the next stop on the tour, sharing how he has incorporated no-till farming techniques. No-till leaves crop residue on the soil surface which in turn decreases soil erosion, increases water infiltration and the soil's water holding capacity (especially important during times of drought), reduces the time required for field work and in turn reduces fuel costs as well as yielding benefits for the soil. The tour concluded with a barbecue lunch in Newkirk.

In This Issue

CDs & County Commissioners Collaborate on Equipment

Kay County: Legislators Learn about Conservation

Upper Red Rock Dam 52 Nears Completion

—Oklahoma Team Competes at Canon Envirothon in Canada

District Dateline: "Dress a Beaver" at Lincoln County CD's First Conservation Camp

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.

"National conservation action must spring from people on the land, and to a large extent, be advanced by them as individuals, with the help of government."

Hugh Hammond Bennett. Hugh Hammond Bennett. *Soil Conservation*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1939.

Conservation Calendar

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

Sept. 4 — Labor Day Holiday

Sept. 5 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

Sept. 8 — State Geographic Information Council meeting, 10:30 a.m., 2nd Floor Conf. Room, Water Resources Board Building, 3800 North Classen, Oklahoma City.

Sept. 8-9 — Blue Thumb Volunteer Training, Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, Tishomingo.

Sept. 10 — Field Day, Growing Vegetables Organically, Townsend Farm, Atoka. Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Sept. 19 — Women as Partners in Agriculture, 8:30 am to 2:15 p.m. Muskogee First United Methodist Church, 600 East Okmulgee, Muskogee.

Sept. 24-27 — 2006 Annual Conference, National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Program (NAAML), Sheraton Billings Hotel, Billings, Montana.

Sept. 24-28 — 14th National Nonpoint Source Monitoring Conference, Measuring Project and Program Effectiveness, Courtyard by Marriott, Minneapolis, Minn.

Sept. 29-30 — Blue Thumb Training for Volunteers, Northeastern Oklahoma, Tulsa.

In Our Thoughts

Bob Cooper, Bryan CD equipment manager from 1988 to 2003, passed away July 20. His wife Mary worked for the CD in 1989.

Robert Stafford, South Caddo CD director, lost his mother Loretta in July.

Mike Beebe, McIntosh County CD director, lost his father Aug. 4.

Brooke Taylor, NRCS Zone I programs liaison, lost her mother in a ATV accident in Colorado.

Congratulations!

Robbie Bowles, Stephens County CD manager, and his wife Krista have a new daughter, Karsynn Ann, born Aug. 9.

Amanda Wiley, Rogers County CD education assistant, and her husband Josh have a new daughter, Abigail Joy, born July 15.

Cleta Southern, Muskogee County CD secretary for 23 years, retired June 30.

Anna Sue Armstrong, Caney Valley CD secretary for 18 years, retired Aug. 1.

Vern Hunter, Talihina district manager for 35 years, retired in June.

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

County Commissioners continued from page 1

and move trees or to reshape ground damaged by animal burrows, cattle trails or erosion from weather. Moore said the machines are outfitted with roll bars and other safety features to minimize the risk of injury to employees.

Moore estimates that by the time one machine clears 25 sites, it will pay for itself compared to hiring contractors for the same work. Even at near \$3 per gallon fuel prices, a 10-hour day using the machine would cost around \$100 compared to paying a contractor \$1,000 for the same work.

Moore discussed the idea with Washita County CD employees Yuel Farris and Dudley Griffith to help maintain the district's 124 dams. Then they showed the county commissioners information on the number of watershed flood control dams in their areas and the bridges and roads that those dams protect. The cost of investing in equipment for the conservation district to use in maintaining those sites was much smaller than the cost of replacing washed out bridges and roads. That's not to mention the damage to other property and hazards to public safety that the washout of a bridge or road would almost certainly pose. After Farris and Griffith made a proposal to the Washita County Commissioners, the commissioners helped secure a Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) grant through the Southwest Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA) to purchase a track loader and attachments. J.L. "Junior" Delp, an associate director with Washita County CD, represents the district on the SWODA board and added his support. The district purchased a trailer to haul the machine.

Then Moore helped district employees Nena Wells and Todd Goodall prepare information for a presentation to Roger Mills County Commissioners who agreed to purchase a machine for the Upper Washita CD for maintenance on 174 dams. The district bought a trailer for it.

After Scotty Powell, district manager, helped gather information that Moore presented to the Custer County Commissioners, they agreed to purchase a machine and attachments for Custer County CD to maintain its 120 dams. The district already had access to a trailer to transport it.

Since the REAP grant named the Washita County CD as the owner of its machine, the district is not limited to use in Washita County only, but can also assist surrounding districts. In Roger Mills and Custer County, county funds were used and the machine remains property of the county; therefore, more restrictions apply. However, all the districts are looking to work out reciprocal arrangements to help each other.

Moore said other conservation districts are starting to look into similar projects for their areas, and he expects more districts will follow suit.

Upper Red Rock Dam Construction Almost Complete

Construction of Upper Red Rock Creek Watershed Dam No. 52 is about 95 percent complete, according to Tom Imgarten, Noble County CD Chairman. The new dam, located about 15 miles northwest of Perry and two miles west of Interstate Highway 35 will provide flood protection for agricultural land and for I-35. It is estimated that the dam will provide \$427,000 in annual benefits. "I-35 has been closed by flood water in the last few years and with this dam in place that should never happen again," said Imgarten.

Construction of the earthen dam is complete and final touches are being made on the principal spillway, which is a concrete tower in front of the dam connected to a pipe going through the dam. Riprap rock is being placed on the front slope of the dam and around the outlet pipe downstream.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is constructing the dam under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. Upper Red Rock Creek Dam 52 is one of the larger dams built in recent years in Oklahoma under the Watershed Program and will create a 95-acre lake. The dam will have a drainage area of 5,766 acres and store 2,600 acre-feet of water.

The Red Rock Conservancy District and the Noble County and Garfield County Conservation Districts are sponsors of the Upper Red Rock Creek Watershed Project. The conservancy district purchased the land over a period of years for the dam construction. This will be the 43rd dam built in the watershed (18 in Noble County and 25 in Garfield County) since local people formed the watershed project in 1960. There are 13 more dams planned for construction in the watershed. The sponsors will provide operation and maintenance of the dam.

At a groundbreaking ceremony for the new dam last October, H. B. Evans, a local resident, shared his experiences in helping rescue nine families along Red Rock Creek by boat after a flood in 1957. The 1957 flood caused over one million dollars in damages to land and property of 126 landowners living in the watershed. It was considered the motivating force for local people to contribute money and their energy in developing the flood control project.

A Summary of the Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met July 3, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Adair County - Mildred Hamilton
Cimarron Valley - Brad Blehm
Comanche County - Erma June Hewes
Johnston County - Dean Ross
Little River - Clarence Pratt
North Caddo - Doug Eichelberger
Nowata County - Robin Landrum
Pontotoc County - C.T. Holland
Rogers County - Paulette Hood
Stephens County - Dan Lowrance

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as submitted by Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, who reported \$1,032,635.28 in claims May 2 - June 18.

Agreements

Commissioners approved two new agreements and three continued agreements, presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison, OCC office.)

National Watershed Coalition Workshop

Commissioners approved a request to sponsor up to 12 district directors and employees to attend a National Watershed Coalition workshop, *Organizing for Action*, Sept. 12-14 in Nebraska City, Neb., submitted by Ben Pollard.

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved two out-of-state travel requests for two staff members.

FY2007 Budget and Appropriation

OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls reported on four appropriations bills pertaining to conservation districts and OCC that were passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. (For details, see the *Legislative Review 2006* in the July issue of the *Conservation Conversation*.)

FY2007 Allocations to Conservation Districts

Commissioners approved allocations to conservation districts for personnel and operating expenses, as presented by Mike Thralls. The amounts to districts include an additional \$2.10 per hour per employee along with funds for the legislation-mandated five percent raise effective Oct. 1, 2006. The allocation also includes \$3,000 to each district for operating expenses. District director meeting expense is set at \$1,500 per district; however, this amount is placed in a separate account and is not included in the allocations.

Executive Director's Salary for FY2007

Commissioners approved a motion setting the salary of OCC's executive director as mandated in HB1111XX, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director.

Budget Work Program

Commissioners approve OCC's FY2007 Budget Work Program as presented by Mike Thralls.

Reauthorization of Advisory Committee

Commissioners approved a motion to reauthorize OCC's Advisory Committee for Allocations of District Operating Funds for FY2007 with the following members: Dan Lowrance, Rick Jeans, Royce Casey, Paula Templeton, Mike Thralls, Ben Pollard, Steve Coffman and Lisa Knauf.

Public Comments

Larry Edmison, former OCC Water Quality division director, expressed his appreciation to the Commissioners for employee raises.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the

retirement reception for Talihina CD employee Vern Hunter and the final inspection of the Club Lake West AML project. Commissioner Dan Lowrance commended Dan Butler and the Water Quality staff, along with conservation district staff, on the commendation received from the Environmental Protection Agency for the Fort Cobb Watershed Project, noted as one of the six best plans in the nation. Commissioner Rick Jeans reported reading articles in the *High Plains Journal* with quotes from Commissioners Kidd and Lowrance.

Staff Reports

Administration: OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls thanked the Commissioners for designating salary increases as a priority this year. He commended OACDE President Paula Templeton and OACD Executive Director Clay Pope for their tireless efforts. He stated that passage of OCC's budget was a partnership effort including OACD, OACDE, Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach, NRCS State Conservationist Darrel Dominick, and members of the OCC staff notably Ben Pollard, Steve Coffman and Dan Butler.

OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard also credited commissioners, staff, OACD, and OACDE for their work in getting \$1.5 million new money for salary increases.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending board meetings at Pushmataha, Kiamichi, Haskell County, Okfuskee County, Lincoln County and Oklahoma County CDs and assisting with tax and payroll issues. She stated that annual plans were due June 30 and over 75 percent of the districts had submitted their plans.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, recognized Larry Edmison for his preliminary work on employee pay raises while at OCC. Butler reported that, related to pesticides in Lake Creek flowing into the Fort Cobb Reservoir, previously few fish species had been identified. After an area educational program, 17 to 18 species had been identified.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation: Mike Kastl, AML director, reported on the final inspection of the Club Lake Project and thanked NRCS State Conservationist Darrel Dominick and Commissioner Kidd. In June bids opened on two projects in Rogers County and one job started in Sequoyah County. AML Inspector Henry Roye is working on four emergencies in Pittsburg County. He stated letters were sent to Oklahoma's congressional delegation in support of an amendment to the Pension Reform Act to authorize annual appropriations of \$3 million to the AML program.

Financial Management and Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported working on the FY2007 budget and district allocations. OCC has finalized the new district liability insurance policy for FY2007 with no rate increase. OCC's 18-month audit has been completed and an exit conference is scheduled.

Information Technology Division: Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that work on the West Commerce and the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML Projects continued despite wet conditions. Staff met with GMR & Associates on the design of the Howerton project and preliminary plans were expected in early July. A tour of various Tar Creek projects was conducted on June 27. He stated that the Geographic Information Council received a grant to develop strategic and business plans and that work has begun.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, CP director, along with OACD Director Clay Pope, made presentations to the County Commissioners Association and the Banker's Association on the watershed program. Staff participated in the final inspection for Bitter Creek 18 in Grady County, a new construction site. He stated that a pre-bid conference was conducted for the Barnitz Site 14

Dewey County and a final inspection was conducted for Double Creek 6 in Caney Valley CD.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, thanked the conservation partnership for its work with the Legislature. He stated that OACD will be involved with two interim studies this fall on controlled burning to address invasive species and cooperative work with county commissioners. Pope stated that the Wild Turkey Federation is hosting a meeting July 13 in Canadian, Texas, to address invasive species issues, particularly redcedar and saltcedar. He will also meet with the Cherokee Nation to discuss Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program projects in the Illinois River and Eucha/Spavinaw watersheds, and other partnership issues. He met with the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce to discuss water quality and CREP. Pope continues to work with the Nature Conservancy on the Tall Grass Prairie in Flint Hills and with the Harn Homestead on an outdoor classroom site. He encouraged attendance at Congressman Lucas's Town Hall meetings in July to express appreciation of his support. Pope reported that work will begin soon on the Area Meetings. Oklahoma County CD Director Rick Godfrey obtained a donation in the amount of \$4,000 for the Envirothon.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, reported on the success of the Conservation Security Program in Oklahoma. NRCS staff participated in a review with national headquarters, believed to be successful. He stated that a buffer signing ceremony with the Department of Defense will be held at Ft. Sill on July 10. He congratulated Mike Sharp and his team on work with the Tar Creek AML reclamation projects. Commissioner Kidd thanked Dominick for his support of the Club Lake West AML Project.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held August 7, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Dateline



Lincoln County CD's first ever Conservation Day Camp was held June 11-13 on the Chandler High School Campus. Students learned about soil, water, wildlife and erosion control. Students also got to make an Oklahoma dirt shirt, a water cycle bracelet, a rainstick and did soil painting. Above, two students "Dress a Beaver." Some got a little wet, some got a little dirty and all had a lot of fun learning about conservation!

Oklahoma Team Competes at Canon Envirothon in Canada

A five-member team from Wyandotte High School competed against 51 other teams from across the U.S. and Canada in the 2006 Canon Envirothon. Organized in cooperation with the National Association of Conservation Districts in the U.S. and the Canadian Forestry Association, the Canon Envirothon tests teams on their knowledge of soil and land use, forestry, aquatic ecology, wildlife and other natural resources.

The theme of this year's competition was "Water Stewardship in a Changing Climate" and focused on the role water plays in our lives now and in the future, and included aspects such as water quality, supply, use and allocation, and conservation and management. Each team's knowledge is tested under the supervision of foresters, soil scientists, wildlife specialists and other natural resource professionals. Teamwork, problem solving and presentation skills are evaluated as each team offers an oral presentation containing recommendations for solving a specific challenge to a panel of judges.

The Wyandotte team placed 48th overall. The first place team, from Virginia, received a total of \$25,000 in Canon scholarships along with photographic equipment for themselves and for their schools/organizations to use in science education. Pennsylvania (\$20,000 and equipment) and Texas (\$15,000 and equipment) teams placed second and third, respectively. The fourth place team, from California, received \$10,000 and equipment. The fifth place team, from Ohio, received \$5,000 and equipment.

The Oklahoma team's trip was sponsored by Ottawa County CD and cosponsored by Rogers County CD, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and the Cherokee Hills and Cross Timbers RC&Ds. Forty-three conservation districts contributed along with the Oklahoma Farmers Union, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Poultry Federation.

The weeklong North American environmental education competition was held at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Canada. The organizers took advantage of one of Manitoba Province's premier parks, Bird's Hill Park, to test students on their field knowledge. The Park has been home to two Pan American Games, countless provincial and regional games, and is the permanent home to the Winnipeg Folk Festival. The 2007 competition will be held at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in Geneva, New York, July 29th through August 4th, 2007.



Oklahoma's Envirothon team with support team — Standing, from left, are Kip Whitely (Shirley Hudson's son); Blake McQueen and Robert Gibbs, Rogers County CD; Luke Coffey, Tyler Bureson and Levi Edens, team members; Keith Owen, Rogers County CD; Hannah Hudson (Shirley's daughter); Chuck Hudson (Shirley's husband); Bob Coffey, team advisor. Seated, from left, are Karla Beatty, OCC education coordinator; Kayla Hama and Kaechelle Gideon, team members; Shirley Hudson, team advisor, Ottawa County CD.

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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