

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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Conservation Commission Initiates Carbon Certification Program

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission has initiated a Carbon Sequestration Certification Program. The program is designed to assist Oklahoma landowners and companies to take advantage of opportunities created by recently-established national and global carbon markets. Gov. Brad Henry approved rules for the carbon program on July 3.

The carbon program is the first of its kind in the nation. The Conservation Commission will certify and verify emission offsets in an effort to protect buyers and sellers.

"What the Conservation Commission has done is create an added layer of assurance that buyers of CO₂ offsets are getting what they pay for and offset providers are selling a high-quality product that did not harm water, soil or air quality," said Stacy Hansen, director of the carbon program. "We also want the public to understand that the state is not buying or selling carbon offsets. We have merely set standards and protocols to assure a quality product for those who are." Any offset that goes through the voluntary program and meets criteria is eligible to become a State Verified Offset and may then be marketed as such. Carbon offsets that meet quality standards and carry the state's certification are expected to be valued more highly and as a result may be worth more money when sold. OCC expects to begin accepting program applications in the fall.

Carbon markets have been established as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many companies are already taking steps to reduce or offset emissions and are paying to do so. Others are buying up offsets in hopes of using or selling them at a profit should the price of carbon rise higher.

An emission offset occurs when greenhouse gases are removed from the atmosphere and stored in vegetation, soil, or underground. For example, trees take in CO₂ during photosynthesis so a certain number of trees can offset a certain amount of CO₂ by storing it in their trunks, roots, and soil. Grasslands and soils under no-till agriculture also store more carbon than degraded lands or soils under conventional tillage. Carbon can also be stored deep underground in geologic formations. The burgeoning demand for emission reductions and offsets is driving up the price of carbon, which topped \$7 per metric ton in 2008, twice what it was last year.

OCC, along with the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and Western Farmers Electric Cooperative, is planning to commemorate the sale of the state's first certified carbon credits with an event on Aug. 28. News media and legislators are being invited to a contract signing event in Central North Canadian Conservation District on the land of the first official participant.

Make Money Using Your Land
to Fight Climate Change



There's a price on carbon and your
land is a carbon store. Stock up!



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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.

Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

~Margaret Mead

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 www.conservation.ok.gov

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 1

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting, Sept. 4, Deer Creek Conservation District, 300 S. Broadway, Weatherford

Blue Thumb Training, Sept. 13-14, Tulsa

Women in Ag State Conference, Sept. 18-19, Moore/Norman Tech Center, Oklahoma City

Statewide Tribal Outreach Meeting, Sept. 23, Citizen Potawatomie Nation Reunion Grounds, Shawnee

Oklahoma Wildlife Expo, Sept. 26-28, Lazy E Arena, Guthrie

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting, Oct. 6, Agriculture Bldg., Oklahoma City

Greater Oklahoma Farm Show, Oct. 24-25, Comanche County Fairgrounds, Lawton

Governor's Water Conference, Oct. 28-30, Sheraton-Reed Conference Center, Midwest City

Leonard Moore, OCC/WQ specialist, was recognized at the August Commission meeting for 25 years of service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

In our thoughts...

Elwin (Jackie) Cook, Washita CCD director for 30 years, passed away Aug. 3.

J. Claude Brannan, Love CCD director for 50 years and OCC Area II Commissioner 1959-1972, passed away Aug. 5.

Jessica Jones, age 20, granddaughter of Mary Rusch, Cimarron Valley CD secretary, was critically injured in a car accident on Aug. 2.

Dennis DeLozier, Mayes CCD director, and wife Rita, lost his father and her mother recently, and his mother suffered a broken hip.

Congratulations!

Jessie Morris, daughter of Dewey CCD Director Michael Morris, was crowned Seiling Rodeo Queen on Aug. 1.

Don Bartolina, Oklahoma CCD manager and retired NRCS district conservationist, and his wife Darlene celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary Aug. 31.

Virtual Oklahoma

At the August 2008 Commission meeting, OCC/IT director Mike Sharp announced an agreement with the Oklahoma Office of Homeland Security to help in development of a resource for emergency and disaster first responders, patterned after one created for the state of Alabama. OCC Commissioners approved the agreement in which Homeland Security will provide funding to OCC for up to \$250,000 to develop a data warehouse and geographic information systems (GIS) visualization tools.

Virtual Alabama uses a 3D globe interface to retrieve images from a merged global imagery dataset. This dataset transforms massive amounts of data into useful information for technical and non-technical users. As an example, Virtual Alabama provides the common operating picture and situational awareness needed by Alabama's first responders to protect lives and safeguard citizens before, during, and after a disaster.

The purpose for a tool like Virtual Oklahoma is to leverage existing state asset imagery and infrastructure data into a visualization tool that is affordable, scalable, maintainable, and capable of employing the power of existing and evolving internet-based applications.

"We think this will be an invaluable tool for natural resource, conservation and environmental professionals," Sharp said. "But it will be especially important to emergency and fire services, law enforcement and military in case of disasters and emergencies," Sharp said.

News Media Continue to Rain on Cimarron County

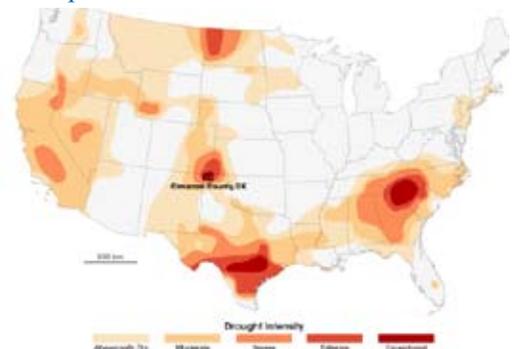
News media representatives continue to roll into the Panhandle to witness one of the worst droughts since the Dust Bowl. Cimarron County Conservation District employees Iris Imler and Jim Belford, along with Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist Cherrie Brown, toured the county with Association Press reporter Murray Evans and photographer Sue Ograckie. At the Sandhill Charolais Ranch west of Boise City, Evans interviewed John Elmer Williams and Sara Williams. Williams took them to various sites and showed what the drought conditions had caused on their livestock, grass, and planted crops.

NRCS, Farm Services Agency, Farm Loan Services, and Cimarron County Conservation District held meetings for agricultural producers in Kenton, Keyes and Boise City on Aug. 6 to share information on cost share programs and loans available, rangeland conditions and invasive plant species that accompany drought. Irrigators were encouraged to use panametric flowmeters to check and improve efficiency and management options were discussed.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has posted photographs, map images and detailed information about the Oklahoma Panhandle Drought on its Earth Observatory website at <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Study/OklahomaDrought/page1.html>.



(From left) John and Sara Williams help AP photographer Sue Ograckie visualize the height difference between the dryland crop (foreground) and the irrigated crop (background).



Map by Robert Simmon, based on data from the U.S. Drought Monitor, July 22, 2008. From Earth Observatory website.

Poultry Litter Transfer Incentive - New Program Begins

(Information on locating ineligible areas for the incentive is noted below.)

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission is once again providing an incentive program to help defray the cost for hauling poultry waste (litter) out of the Illinois River and Spavinaw Creek watersheds. The U.S Environmental Protection Agency has provided to the Conservation Commission a grant of \$370,000 for the program. The time period of the program will extend until the money runs out. The new program begins Aug. 1, 2008, and will provide transportation incentive for all litter delivered after that date so long as the request for payment is pre-approved. The previous program, modeled after a program by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to move animal waste, ended in May.

The information required of the applicant will remain the same as in the previous program, but there are some changes in the operation of the program.

To be guaranteed payment of the incentive, all buyers of litter must have their request for payment pre-approved through their local conservation district office before their litter is ordered. The conservation district will then seek pre-approval from the Water Quality Division of the Conservation Commission before the application can be approved. Pre-approvals will expire six months after they are granted.

The new program will pay only \$.03/ton/loaded mile instead of the previous higher rate. The cap will remain at \$8.00/ton. This means that litter transport incentive extends up to a maximum distance of 266 miles. A purchaser whose litter is transported more than 266 miles must pay the full cost of any transport beyond that point. Conservation districts will still receive a per ton fee for all the claims they process.

A \$10,000 cap applies to each purchaser of litter regardless of whether they applied for the incentive under the previous grant, the current one or a combination of the two. For purposes of this grant, a purchaser is a farm or ranching operation. Family members who all live on the same operation and apply for and receive funding are governed by one \$10,000 cap the same as a single individual. Other requirements remaining from the earlier program still apply.

Ineligible Areas

The incentive cannot be collected for poultry litter spread in the area of nutrient-limited watersheds or areas designated as those with high or very high vulnerability of groundwater to pollution from surface activities.

Maps of nutrient-limited watersheds and more details on the program can be found online at Litter Ineligible Areas Unofficial Map at www.conservation.ok.gov under Poultry Litter Transfer Incentive. PLEASE NOTE: This is an unofficial list of nutrient-limited watersheds. There is no guarantee of accuracy implied. For the most up-to-date information, please contact the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Water Quality Division, at 405-530-8800, <http://www.owrb.ok.gov/>.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Commits \$50,000 to help Prescribed Burning Associations

At the August meeting of the Conservation Commission an agreement was approved wherein the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide funding up to \$50,000 to help prescribed burning associations. OCC will work through local conservation districts to reimburse burning associations for use of fire to restore wildlife habitat on private lands, benefiting federal trust species in western Oklahoma. The agreement will be in effect for two years and calls for prescribed burning on approximately 8,000 to 10,000 acres of native rangelands.

Conservation Community Participates in Regional Water Plan Sessions

The Oklahoma Water Resources Research Institute is carrying out the second phase of public participation in development of the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan, on behalf of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, by holding a series of regional input meetings. The meetings are being held in each of the 11 Councils of Oklahoma Governments (COG) regions. The stated purpose of these meetings is "to ensure that the full range of Oklahoma's water issues -- and eventual policy recommendations -- are identified for inclusion in the final statewide plan."

Regional teams, each consisting of 30 representatives nominated by the public, will review findings from the listening sessions, validate regional issues and concerns, consolidate issues into categories based on similarity, and suggest priorities for further consideration in the planning process.

The list of representatives includes 18 conservation district directors and three former directors, two conservation district employees, six OCC employees and three retired employees, one OACD employee and three NRCS employees. Among them are two current OCC Commissioners, George Stunkard and Dan Lowrance, and Executive Director Mike Thralls; three past Commissioners, Hal Clark, Rick Jeans and J.T. Winters Jr.; and current OACD President Scotty Herriman and Past Presidents Royce Casey, Bill Wilson and Ervin Mitchell. The district employees included are Paul Freundt, Logan County CD; and Frank Acker, Little River CD. The list of alternate representatives includes a number of members of Oklahoma's conservation community including OCC Area I Commissioner Matt Gard.



South Caddo Conservation District Receives FEMA Project

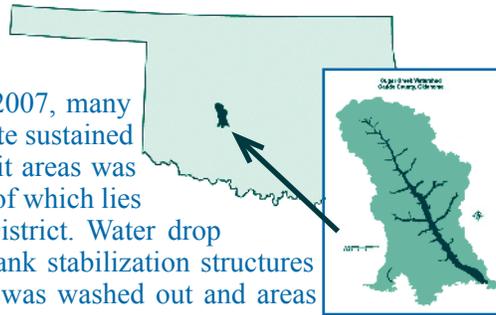
As the remainder of Tropical Depression Erin swept across Oklahoma on the weekend of Aug. 18-19, 2007, many counties in the western part of the state sustained severe damage. One of the hardest hit areas was in the Sugar Creek Watershed, much of which lies in the South Caddo Conservation District. Water drop structures, berms, water jacks and bank stabilization structures were damaged or destroyed. Riprap was washed out and areas were inundated with silt.

South Caddo CD applied to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for disaster funding and received approval for a disaster program. Scheduled for repair or replacement are 43 pipe drops, 79 berms, 55 water jacks, 11 riprap installations and other structure repairs and silt removal. The number of repair jobs listed totals 198.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission will assist South Caddo Conservation District with project management. The local 12.5 percent match for the project will come from the Conservation Bond passed in the 2008 session of the state Legislature. The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management (OEM) will provide the state 12.5 percent match with FEMA providing the remaining 75 percent with federal funds. The funding will result in an estimated total of over \$7.3 million for repairs in South Caddo Conservation District. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has agreed to provide designs and inspections for the project.

"This will be a multi-year project," said Charlie Opitz, chair of the South Caddo Conservation District. "We hope to have engineering designs and plans done and begin construction by the summer of 2009," Opitz said. "And it will take several years after that to complete it all."

Other projects facilitated by various state and federal programs and agencies are also in the planning stages to augment repair and rehabilitation from damages caused by weather disasters in 2007. In total there were seven major weather-related disaster declarations in Oklahoma in 2007, according to a list on the FEMA web page at http://www.fema.gov/news/disasters_state.fema?id=40.



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