

O K L A H O M A C O N S E R V A T I O N CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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EPA Offers Oklahoma Watershed Based Plan as Model One of four states' plans selected as best in nation

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has offered Watershed Based Plans from Oklahoma, Kansas, Virginia and Maryland as models to help other states in creating their plans. EPA stated that these are the best of 49 plans the agency reviewed during 2008-2010. Watershed based plans are developed to support implementation efforts leading to attainment of water quality standards in currently impaired waterbodies within a specific watershed. EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds sent the "Watershed Based Plan Review, Final Report, July 2011" to watershed groups across the nation as a guide with examples to help produce better plans.

The watershed based plan for the Lake Eucha/Spavinaw watershed, developed and submitted by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, was one of four selected by EPA as the best of the plans reviewed.

"We are proud that the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Water Quality division staff are once again being recognized nationally for the high quality of their work," said Mike Thralls, OCC executive director. "Last April Oklahoma was recognized as a national leader in documented water quality success stories. High quality planning combined with excellence in implementation and monitoring, and working with landowners through conservation districts and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, in a voluntary and cooperative manner, are the keys to Oklahoma continuing to be a national leader in natural resource conservation," Thralls added.

EPA reviewed the 49 plans to determine the level of progress that states and other stakeholders have made in addressing essential components of watershed based plans.

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Rain Welcome But May Be Too Late to Save Crops

by Susan Henning, District Manager, Kay County Conservation District

The northern one-fourth of Kay County received some much needed rainfall recently, but the majority of the county still remains in the grip of severe drought as does three-fourths of the state. The Oklahoma Mesonet reported that north-central Oklahoma has experienced temperatures over 100 degrees, or about nine degrees warmer than normal, since mid-June while receiving only 46 percent of the normal precipitation — a deficit of over eight inches. Topsoil and subsoil moisture conditions are estimated as 70-78 percent very short. Spring row crop conditions have deteriorated rapidly. Livestock producers are noting hay and grazing forages are becoming limited and water sources for livestock are dangerously low. Susan Henning, district manager for the Kay County Conservation District contacted a few local livestock producers and farmers to get their take on the drought situation.



Corn fields in Kay County, especially those on the west side of the county are not only burned up from the extreme temperatures and drought conditions, but have also lodged or fallen down

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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.

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Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
"Calendar of Events" at

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Sept. 1, Oklahoma City

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 5

Illinois River 4-State Watershed Academy,
Sept. 29-30, West Siloam Springs

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Oct. 3, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Nov. 7, Oklahoma City

OACD Area III Meeting,
Nov. 10, Muskogee **Oklahoma Farm**
Bureau Annual Meeting, Nov. 11-13,
Oklahoma City

Veterans Day Holiday, Nov. 11

Thanksgiving Holiday, Nov. 24-25

In our thoughts...

Bill South, Dewey County CD director
1982-2000, passed away on July 22.

Dee Passmore, retired NRCS soil conserva-
tionist at North Fork of Red River CD,
passed away July 31.

Lisa Knauf Owen, OCC/DS director, lost
her brother-in-law. Kirk Avery Owen, a
staff sergeant in the Oklahoma National
Guard, was killed in action in Afghani-
stan on Aug. 2.

Alfred Thompson, retired NRCS employee
Wagoner County CD, has cancer and is
under hospice care at Clarehouse in Tulsa.

Rod Shaw, NRCS district conservationist at
Oklahoma County CD, lost his brother
on Aug. 14.

Jack Hudman, Cotton County CD director,
had knee replacement surgery Aug. 16.

Hal Clark, Cimarron County CD director,
was hospitalized for cracked ribs suffered
in a fall.

Congratulations!

Cleao Bradford, NRCS district conserva-
tionist, Mayes County CD, and wife
Alicia have a new daughter, Brin Camille
Bradford, born July 15.

Larry Jarrell, NRCS Zone 3 engineer, has
a new granddaughter, Leah Camryn
Fernandez, born July 28.

Jeremy Hughes, NRCS soil conservationist,
Grant County CD, and his wife Laurie
have a new son, James Luke Hughes,
born Aug. 1.

Brian Dillard, NRCS design engineer, state
office, and wife Cheryl have a new son,
Tad Houston Dillard, born Aug. 4.

Scarlett Jenson, Pittsburg County CD secre-
tary, and husband Toby have a new baby
girl, Macey Kate Jenson, born Aug. 9

Ann Craven, OCC/WQ executive secretary,
has a new grandson. Nathaniel James
Craven was born Aug. 13.

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Joe Kreger, manager of Bois d'Arc Beefmaster Cattle, southwest of Tonkawa, reports that land west of Interstate 35 has missed out on recent rains. He is grazing his hay meadows instead of baling them for hay due to the short supply of pasture grass. He estimates he has 30-40 percent of the hay he needs to make it through this winter. Forage and hay supplies are going to be limited this fall. He believes that rotational grazing and improved pasture management implemented in the last decade is paying off during this dry spell, although he is culling the lowest priority cattle and may wean some calves earlier than usual. Joe says he is blessed with wells and rural water to ensure enough water for his cattle for now, but has had to fence off drying up ponds to prevent cattle from getting mired in the mud. Right now the demand for cattle for exports and domestic use is still high; he feels they just need to "hold on" through this tough time to be able to grow their herds again in the next couple years.

Neal Otto, a farmer in the Kildare area, says there will be little to none of his corn harvested. The corn is brown all the way up the stalk. The high temperatures also killed the pollen in the tassels and only spotty kernels if any appear on ears. Neal feels there could be some hope for late-planted soybeans, but only if temperatures cool off and some more rain falls. In the high temperatures, the early-planted soybeans have aborted blossoms that are needed to set pods. He has baled some prairie hay, but jokingly says "when people see you on a hay swather they chase you down to ask about buying hay."

Dale Wooderson, Blackwell farmer and seed dealer for DeKalb corn and Asgrow soybeans, echoes Neal Otto's prediction that no corn will be harvested for grain in Kay County this year. Not only has corn in the western side of the county burned up but most of it has lodged or fallen down on the ground. Dale says 2011 brings back memories of years 1954-55 which were almost a carbon copy. He remembers coming back from the army after six weeks training and finding his soybeans looking like cured tobacco, it was so hot and dry. The flurry of soybean seed business he usually sees around July 1 was practically nonexistent this year, as producers hesitated to put in after-wheat beans with the looming dry soil conditions. Dale says that he views this year as a "salvage operation," collecting enough from crop insurance to barely pay the fertilizer costs.

Warren Frantz, livestock producer and custom hay operator from the Ponca City area, reports that hay yield is down about two-thirds, the native grasses yielding better than Bermuda or plains bluestem. He has had requests for hay as far away as Ardmore, but supplies are limited. He suggests that producers check with the Noble Foundation and the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture for sources of hay.

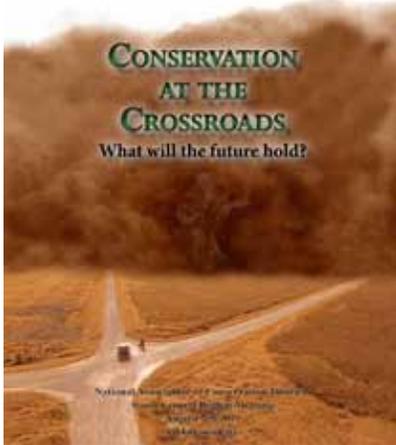
Gary Potter, Blackwell Livestock Auction, reports increased volume of cattle sold recently. Many producers are calling to inquire about strategies for reducing herd numbers due to scarce pasture grasses and ponds that are drying up. The Oklahoma City Stockyards reports increased cattle numbers with slightly declining prices. Temperatures above 100 degrees are hurting the demand for light cattle. National Public Radio was on location in western Oklahoma at the Elk City Livestock Auction during the month. Cattle in the auction were the highest number ever recorded at over 4,300 head. The sale lasted nearly 12 hours. The Oklahoma Mesonet reported that Elk City has a 12-inch rain deficit.

Livestock producers are also worried about using failed corn crops for hay or silage due to high nitrate levels. Nitrates chemically change to nitrites in the ruminant animals' digestive tract, leading to death through asphyxiation because of lowered transportation of oxygen by hemoglobin in the blood. Johnsongrass and sorghum also have a high potential for accumulating nitrate. OSU Extension fact sheets PSS-2903 Nitrate Toxicity in Livestock, PSS-2904 Prussic Acid Poisoning in Livestock, and PSS-2589 Collecting Forage Samples for Analysis are valuable resources for producers. Whenever corn is cut and baled like hay or chopped up for silage, there is also a risk of aflatoxin contamination if ears with seeds are present. Therefore, testing forage for nitrates, prussic acid, and aflatoxin contamination before cutting for hay or silage is highly recommended.

Dan Collins with the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center says that it is highly unlikely that current drought conditions across Oklahoma and Texas will be broken before the end of summer, and odds are not much better to see the drought totally break by the end of the calendar year. This shortage of soil profile moisture will affect the planting of winter wheat this fall.

Conservation at the Crossroads — What will the future hold?

2011 South Central Region Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts



Conservation leaders from four states gathered in Oklahoma City on Aug. 7-9, 2011, for the South Central Region Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). The NACD South Central Region consists of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas.

Much of the discussion at the meeting focused on the creation of the next federal Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is the primary agricultural and food policy of the federal government in the U.S. The current Farm Bill, formally titled the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 runs through 2012 when it will expire.

“The nation is currently going through difficult economic times,” said Congressman Frank Lucas. Lucas, (R-Cheyenne, Okla.) represents Oklahoma’s Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives. “But better times will come again,” he said. “And it’s important that we keep our base conservation programs intact through the hard times so they can be ready when better times and more funding come again,” Lucas said. When asked about the Small Watershed Upstream Flood Control programs, in which Oklahoma



Congressman Frank Lucas

leads the nation with 2,107 dams constructed, Rep. Lucas said “I believe it is important that we keep the Watershed Program alive even if funding is at a reduced rate.”

“Government is supposed be ‘of the people, by the people, for the people.’ There is no program closer to that than the conservation delivery system,” Terry Detrick, president of the American Farmers and Ranchers organization, said in a statement about the importance of protecting the nation’s conservation partnership of local conservation districts, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), state conservation agencies like the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and other partners.

Steve Miller, Idaho farmer and rancher and NACD secretary/treasurer, presented 10 principles supported by NACD regarding the Farm Bill. Among those principals are support for fully funding Farm Bill conservation programs and for technical assistance for planning and implementing conservation programs. The single largest provider of technical assistance for conservation programs in the nation is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Dr. Bob Blackburn, director of the Oklahoma History Center, spoke to the group on the role of the Dust Bowl and the conservation movement in the history of Oklahoma. Gary McManus, assistant state climatologist for the Oklahoma Climatological Survey, spoke about the causes and history of drought in the state such as the one Oklahoma is currently suffering. “If it wasn’t for the efforts of the conservation movement, the state and the nation would have suffered recurrences of the Dust Bowl several times,” McManus said.

Other speakers included Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission executive director; Jeanette Hale, National Conservation District Employees Association South Central region representative; Tom Christensen, NRCS regional conservationist; Mike Fuhr, Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy executive director; Jimmy Wayne Kinder, Oklahoma Farm Bureau member; and Dr. Jody Campiche, Oklahoma State University assistant professor.



Steve Miller, NACD secretary/treasurer



Jeanette Hale, South Central NCDEA representative



Tom Christensen, NRCS regional conservationist

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The three major purposes of the review as stated by EPA were to improve understanding of states’ ongoing efforts to develop watershed based plans and identifying needs for improvement; identify effective and innovative approaches to watershed planning and management that can be shared with states, tribes, and local partners; and to help guide future activities to promote improved watershed planning and management.

EPA developed scoring criteria based on the nine essential components of a watershed based plan, with several critical elements for each part. In most cases, EPA said, states have done well identifying causes and sources of pollution and management measures needed, developing outreach components for the public and designing monitoring programs to measure change. Where most states struggle is in estimating load reductions expected for the management measures selected, and setting criteria that can be used to determine whether load reductions are being achieved over time and if substantial progress is being made towards attaining water quality standards.

The Lake Eucha/Spavinaw plan addressed each of the nine components with adequate specifics for each, the report states. In particular, “the plan contains clear quantitative goals complete with an explanation for choosing those goals and how the goals correspond to the load reduction and interim water quality criteria.” And “all of the information in the plan was tied back to the goals of the plan, so there was very little extraneous information which made the plan very easy to read and comprehend,” the report states.

“Overall, the Lake Spavinaw/Eucha plan was one of the best reviewed, and should be shared as another example of an excellent watershed based plan,” the report from EPA states.

Oklahoma Prescribed Burning Association forming to help landowners and local prescribed burn associations

A new organization is in the process of forming to provide landowners and local prescribed burn associations with an organization that can assist them with acquiring liability insurance, finding funding for equipment and training, and providing a voice for prescribed burning throughout the state.

A three-year ConocoPhillips challenge grant from the Playa Lakes Joint Venture through the High Plains Resource Conservation and Development Council is helping with the formation of the Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association (OPBA). Ron Voth will be the executive director of this first-of-its-kind organization to assist landowners with all aspects of prescribed burning.

Prescribed burning is a useful and important habitat management tool employed to remove accumulated litter, encourage new vegetative growth and to control excessive



Prescribed burning demonstration during an Fire Field Day hosted by Oklahoma State University

Mailing Tab Area

invasion of brush and woody cover. Native rangelands that are burned periodically have a wider diversity of plants that are beneficial to wildlife than unburned prairies. Wildlife such as quail benefit from burns because they increase mobility by removing ground level clutter, attract greater density and diversity of insects used by quail chicks as food and increase the ability of birds to feed on those insects.

The main goal of the OPBA is to become the umbrella organization for landowners and local prescribed burn associations to receive reasonably priced liability insurance for conducting prescribed burns. Through the OPBA, the insurance will be available to burn association members at an affordable rate. The insurance covers escaped fires, suppression costs, injury to people assisting with the burn, and problems caused by smoke.

A five-member board of directors has been formed to assist with the development of this organization. Members include Alva Gregory, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation; Darrel Dominick, Oklahoma Conservation Commission; Paul Clark, Natural Resource Conservation Service; Karsen Davis, Roger Mills Prescribed Burn Association; and John Weir, Oklahoma State University's Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department.

There will be a minimal annual fee, and a charge for each burn the landowner would like to have insured. There will be some requirements for each burn, which are currently being developed by the association and the insurance company.

WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops
Karla Beatty, 405.521.2384

Project Learning Tree
Workshops or Trunks
Christina Stallings, 405.521-3864

Project WILD Workshops
Lisa Anderson, 405.521-3857

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