“The 2011 Drought and Beyond”
Local Conservation Representatives Attend Area Meetings of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Conservation leaders discussed issues relevant to Oklahoma at the five Area Meetings of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts held across the state during November 2011. “The 2011 Drought and Beyond — Will we keep the dust at bay?,” the theme of the meetings for Oklahoma’s conservation district directors and employees, reflected the challenges faced by natural resource conservation entities during the hottest and second driest year in state history. The meetings were sponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) and cosponsored by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Garrett King, field representative for Oklahoma’s U.S. Congressman Frank Lucas, spoke at the meetings about the process underway in Congress to craft the next federal Farm Bill and the role of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (“Super Committee”) in that process.

Gary McManus, associate state climatologist for the Oklahoma Climatological Survey, gave a presentation featuring facts about climate conditions in Oklahoma in 2011 and in state history. He stated that this year’s extremes of heat and drought were neither forecast nor expected.

Representatives from the Oklahoma State University Co-Honey Creek Implementation Project Shows Water Quality Improving

Recent monitoring data shows that implementation of best management practices (BMPs) by farmers and ranchers is improving water quality in a sub-watershed of Grand Lake, according to Shanon Phillips, director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission’s (OCC) Water Quality Division.

In 2006 the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Delaware County Conservation District, and in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, began working with local landowners in the Oklahoma portion of the Honey Creek watershed on a project to improve water quality. The implementation project is funded primarily through EPA under Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act, along with some state funding. The purpose of the project is to demonstrate the beneficial effects of BMPs in reducing the amount of “nonpoint source” pollutants (those carried in runoff) entering into streams that empty into Grand Lake. The pollutants specifically targeted in the project are phosphorus and bacteria. The program provides cost-share assistance to landowners in implementing those BMPs as well as education.
In our thoughts...

Karl Jett, Beaver County CD director and Area I Conservation Commission member, underwent an outpatient CyberKnife procedure on Dec. 1.

William “Bill” Tallman, longtime Craig County CD board member, passed away Dec. 3 after a long illness.

Conservation Calendar
For more events and information, click on “Calendar of Events” at http://conservation.ok.gov

Christmas Holiday, Dec. 26-27
New Year’s Day Holiday, Jan. 2
Martin Luther King Jr. Day Holiday Jan. 16
NACD Annual Meeting, Jan. 29-Feb. 1, Las Vegas, Nev.
Presidents’ Day Holiday, Feb. 20
OACD State Meeting Feb. 26-28, Oklahoma City
Oklahoma Envirothon, April 3, location TBA
National Land & Range Judging Contest May 1-3, Oklahoma City
Memorial Day Holiday, May 28

OACD Area Meetings, continued from page one
operative Extension Service spoke on agronomy and livestock subjects related to drought conditions. Representatives of the USDA Risk Management Agency spoke about the role of crop insurance during drought.

Oklahoma County and Logan County Conservation Districts hosted the Area II Meeting for central Oklahoma on Nov. 1 in Oklahoma City. North, South and West Caddo Conservation Districts hosted the Area IV Meeting for southwest Oklahoma on Nov. 2 at Fort Cobb. Muskogee County Conservation District hosted the Area III Meeting for the northeast region of the state on Nov. 10 in Muskogee. Woodward County Conservation District hosted the Area I Meeting for northwest Oklahoma on Nov. 15 in Woodward. Latimer County Conservation District hosted the final meeting of the series in Wilburton on Nov. 17. From 120 to 150 adults and students attended each of the five meetings.

Area winners of the OACD Conservation Awards were recognized at each meeting. The winners from each area of the state will be considered for recognition at the state level in the categories of Outstanding Conservation District, sponsored by Chesapeake Energy; Outstanding District Director, sponsored by the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation; and Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator, sponsored by the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma. The state winner will be announced at the OACD State Meeting Feb. 26-28, 2012, in Midwest City and recognized during Conservation Day at the Capitol.

The Area I honorees were Woodward County Conservation District, Outstanding Conservation District; Mead Ferguson, Woodward County Conservation District, Outstanding District Director; and G.E. Mitchell, Woodward County Conservation District, Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator. The Area II honorees were Kay County Conservation District, Outstanding Conservation District; Jan Kunze, Oklahoma County Conservation District, Outstanding District Director; and Sue Ann Prithoff, Kay County Conservation District, Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator. The Area III honorees were Craig County Conservation District, Outstanding Conservation District; Robert Willy, Craig County Conservation District, Outstanding District Director; and Bill Mangels, Nowata County Conservation District, Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator. The Area IV honorees were Upper Washita Conservation District, Outstanding Conservation District; John Flaming, Deer Creek Conservation District, Outstanding District Director; and David Eyester, Deer Creek Conservation District, Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator. There were no entries in the competition for Area V.

The OACD Area Meetings include contests sponsored by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees (OACDE) for youth in categories of speeches, essays and posters. Oklahoma Farmers Royalty Company provides awards for the OACD/OACDE Contests. First place winners in the essay and poster contests, as well as first and second place winners in the speech contest, are eligible to compete at the state level during OACD’s Annual State Meeting to be held Feb. 26-28, 2012, in Midwest City.

Links to presentations made by speakers at the Area Meetings are available on the OCC website, http://conservation.ok.gov.
Record Earthquakes Leave Flood Control Dams Undamaged

After a four-day period, Nov. 5-8, when a series of earthquakes shook Oklahoma, including the largest in state history, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission reports that the state’s small watershed flood control dams showed no significant visible damage.

The earthquakes centered around 35.55N latitude and 96.76W longitude in northwest Lincoln County, or about 8 miles southeast of Perkins. On Nov. 5 a 4.7-magnitude quake occurred at 2:12 a.m., followed by lesser tremors during the day, capped by the record-breaking 5.6-magnitude quake at 10:53 p.m. The 5.6 earthquake broke the state’s previous record for strongest recorded earthquake—a 5.5-magnitude quake in El Reno in 1952, according to the Oklahoma Geological Survey and the U.S. Geological Survey. Smaller quakes were recorded over the next two days and another earthquake, registered at 4.8-magnitude, was centered slightly to the southwest on Nov. 7.

Within 48 hours after the 5.6-magnitude quake, a cursory inspection by local conservation districts determined that no visible damage had occurred to the high hazard structures within the area closest to the heart of the quake. Over the course of the next 48 hours, additional inspections were conducted on other structures to determine if the earthquake had any negative impact on them.

“With over 36 high hazard dams within 50 miles of the epicenter of the quake that hit Saturday, Nov. 5., and a reduced staff due to tight budgets, it took us some time to evaluate the system, but reports indicated that
the structures came through the tremors without significant visible damage” said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

According to Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), this recent event again shows the importance of adequately funding conservation in Oklahoma.

“With the tight budgets we have been facing at the state, local and federal levels these last few years, we are struggling to make sure we have the staff and funding necessary to maintain the integrity of our flood control system,” Pope said. “Luckily we seem to have suffered no significant damage due to these last earthquakes. This event shows however, that it is extremely important that we keep the system of Conservation Districts and the staffing at the Conservation Commission funded at the level sufficient to maintain and operate these structures because you never know what kind of challenge will come next. It might even be a record earthquake in Oklahoma.”

“Assistance from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is available to conservation districts and municipalities who feel the need to video inspect spillway pipes,” said Robert Toole, director of OCC’s Conservation Programs division. “OCC has a robotic camera and an experienced team who can perform this type of inspection,” Toole said.