

# 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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## We Can Do It!

A Message from Mike Thralls, Conservation Commission Executive Director

We have been bombarded day after day with bad economic news. The nation's economic downturn has made its way to Oklahoma and is affecting our state's operating budget, including appropriations for conservation districts and the Commission. It appears inevitable that we will have significantly fewer state dollars for conservation in the upcoming fiscal year. On top of that, the Oklahoma Supreme Court voided our \$25 million conservation bond issue, forcing us to start all over again with a new bill in this year's Legislature. It would be easy to get discouraged from all this bad news. But I remain optimistic because I believe in the people involved in Oklahoma's conservation partnership and their abilities to get the job done.



Hugh H. Bennett in a field about four miles south of Haskell, Okla., in May 1943. It was estimated that about 75 percent of the topsoil had eroded from this field. (J.W. Hammett, SCS.)

Those who heard my talk at the OACD state meeting recently know I am reading a book about Hugh Hammond Bennett. Bennett was the father of the soil conservation movement in our country and the first chief of the Soil Conservation Service, today's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Bennett was the one who through his passion, knowledge and political skills forged the conservation partnership in the 1930s during the bleakest days of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. He had an indomitable spirit, a "can do" attitude, and he refused to fail in his goal to successfully address soil erosion.

Even though we face significant economic and conservation challenges today, when compared to what Bennett faced in the 1930s, ours begin to pale. He was starting with nothing and had to build a delivery system from the ground up. Today in Oklahoma we have incredible human and technical resources, in our conservation partnership, that have blossomed since the 1930s. We have 440 dedicated district directors committed to natural resource conservation. We have 181 exceptional conservation district employees and 62 Commission staff — the most talented group in my eleven years with the Conservation Commission. We have 325 highly skilled NRCS employees. In short, rather than talk about the people we need to get the job done, we need to be excited about the quality folks we have that can get the job done!

During these tough budget times I want all of our directors and employees to know that I am personally committed to finding every way possible to keep our operations intact and keep all of our employees in place. We have more federal, state and local conservation programs to deliver than ever before and we need all of our current employees to get the job done. Governor Henry has urged all state agencies to do their very best to avoid furloughs or layoffs in the coming year and here at the Commission I intend to do my very best to meet the governor's goal.

While we all will be looking at more efficiencies and cost savings in our operations, I am also counting on districts to aggressively explore new partnerships and funding opportunities that can bring new resources into your operations. Think outside the box. At the state meeting I shared

*We Can Do It!*, continued on page two.

## In this Issue

We Can Do It!  
From OCC Executive  
Director Mike Thralls

OACD State Meeting  
Wrap-Up —

"Planting the Seeds..."

Hall of Fame and  
President's Awards

Comanche CCD Wins  
Chesapeake Pickup  
Truck Giveaway

*"When the world was younger and our population much smaller, we could, perhaps, stand such waste. That time is past. It is not defeatism to say the world is fast maturing and must assume now a mature responsibility for its resources. It is not limiting the horizons of the future to say that land exploitation must stop. It is simply a matter of common sense and self-preservation."*

*Hugh Hammond Bennett, Princeton,  
New Jersey, Oct. 2, 1946.*

### 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)

**Resource Management Conference,**  
April 1, Tulsa County CD, Tulsa

**Clean Lakes and Watershed State Meeting**

April 1-3, Quartz Mountain Resort

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,**

April 6, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

**Oklahoma Envirothon**

April 6-8, Beavers Bend State Park

**Oklahoma Tribal Outreach and Training Conference**

April 7-9, Shawnee

**Kiowa County Land Judging Contest**

April 22, Hobart

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,**

May 4, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

**National Land & Range Judging Contest**

May 5-7, Oklahoma City

**Stacey Day**, OCC/WQ environmental projects manager, was recognized at the February meeting of the Conservation Commission for being named Employee of the Quarter in December.

**Kim Tweed**, OCC/Admin executive secretary, was recognized at the March meeting of the Conservation Commission for being named Employee of the Quarter in February.

## In our thoughts...

Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist, lost his mother Bernice Mary Hilliard, in March.

Shelley Hungerford, NRCS administrative assistant, lost her brother, Eddie Dupree, in March.

Elesa Kay Willis, retired NRCS state conservationist in Delaware and daughter of retired state conservationist Roland Willis and wife June, died in Stillwater, OK on March 4 after a brief illness.

Becky Theis, Comanche County CD secretary, lost her husband Dan in a car accident on March 12.

## Congratulations!

Nicole Norris, Latimer County CD education specialist, and husband had a baby boy, Jimmy Lee, on Feb. 27.

Trampas Tripp, OCC/WQ conservation plan writer, and his wife Brooke had a baby boy, Memphis, March 12.

*We Can Do It!*, continued from page one.

several impressive conservation district success stories where new resources were added. I want to encourage all of us to share these success stories with each other so we can get through these tough times together.

And finally I want to encourage districts to pool resources whenever possible to make sure the job gets done. We can no longer put walls around our districts. We need to find ways to share expertise, creativity, equipment and anything else so that our cooperators and our natural resources are served as best we can. We owe it to Hugh Hammond Bennett and to all the conservationists that came before us to get the job done.

When Mr. Bennett was interviewed late in his life, around 1950, he was asked if the severe erosion then occurring around the world caused him great concern. Having come through the Dust Bowl and seeing the positive transformation in our country, he was positive

that the global problems could also be solved. His response was "We Can Do It!!!" To all of us I say, "We Can Do It!!!" Together we can get through these hard times and come out stronger on the other side.



Hugh H. Bennett (right) discusses grassland management with F.S. Hurd, chairman of the Arkansas Verdigris Soil Conservation District, today's Tulsa County Conservation District. (Broken Arrow, Okla., May 29, 1943. J.W. Hammett, SCS.)

## Planting the Seeds for the Future – New Horizons Mean New Challenges

**The 2009 State Meeting of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts**

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) held its 71st Annual State Meeting at the Reed Conference Center in Midwest City Feb. 22-24. The meeting was cosponsored by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

At the Monday morning opening session Oklahoma Lt. Gov. Jari Askins recounted her experiences with natural resource conservation in Oklahoma. She cited the late Nolen Fuqua, a nationally-recognized conservation pioneer, for mentoring her in their mutual home town of Duncan. She commented on attending the dedication ceremony in Cordell on July 3, 1998, to mark the 50th anniversary of Cloud Creek Dam No. 1, the nation's first upstream flood control dam. She urged conservation districts to continue educating the state Legislature on conservation. "Every candidate talks about maintaining Oklahoma for future generations," she said, "but how many are willing to spend the money to do it?"

At the Monday luncheon, new Sec. of Environment J.D. Strong said his education about conservation began with his family who have farmed in Custer County for five generations. His work experience in the Oklahoma Water Resources Board and in the Office of the Sec. of Environment has given him a long history of working in partnership with local conservation districts, the Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. From riparian protection projects to reclaiming "moonscape-looking" land in the Tar Creek Superfund Site to watershed flood control dam rehabilitation, he owed a lot of his education to local conservation districts, he said. "I look forward in our future to expanding from our usual partners in the agricultural sector to more work with urban sectors and more work with the energy industry with carbon sequestration and offset trading."

Morning and afternoon breakout sessions provided educational programs on flood control dams, wind energy, water quality and district management topics.

### Pickup Truck Giveaway

Chesapeake Energy donated a pickup truck that was given to a conservation district selected by a drawing. (See story on page four.)

### Youth Awards

Western Farmers Electric Cooperative cosponsored youth awards for elementary, middle and high school students in categories of poster, essay and speech. Scott Williams represented WFEC in presenting checks and awards to the winners in each category.

OACD, continued on page three.

### Conservation Awards

OACD President Scotty Herriman named James Covey of Custer City and Wayne Spies of Fort Cobb to the Conservation Hall of Fame. Herriman presented the President's Award for 2009 to the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation and Wadell Altom. (See accompanying stories on Covey, Spies and Altom.)

### Employee Recognition

Jolene Sparks, secretary for the Noble County Conservation District, was named Employee of the Year by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees. OACDE also presented Ben Pollard, assistant director of the Conservation Commission with an award for his assistance to conservation district employees.

### NRCS Partner Awards

**Conservation Educator** – Rhnea Stoy, Okmulgee County Conservation District

**Standing in the Gap** – Diane Nation – South Caddo Conservation District

**Conservationist of the Year** – Bradley Hamilton, Pittsburg County Conservation District, and Kurt Atkinson, Oklahoma Forestry Services of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

**RC&D Council Member of the Year** – Jeff Lockett, Wheatland RC&D

### NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Awards

**Volunteer of the Year** – Micah White, Eufaula NRCS Field Office (FO)

**Outstanding Volunteer of the Year** – Bryan Stewart, Stillwater NRCS FO, and Dorothy Lyons, Pauls Valley NRCS FO

**Outstanding Volunteer Efforts of the Year** – Newkirk NRCS FO

**Workgroup of the Year** – Oklahoma Blue Thumb – Statewide Efforts

**Outstanding Efforts** – LeFlore Workgroup

## Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame & President's Award

### Conservation District Director — Wayne Spies

Wayne Spies was named to the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame at the recent OACD State Meeting held Feb. 22-24 in Midwest City.

Spies is a lifelong farmer from Fort Cobb, Okla. He has served on the board of directors of the West Caddo Conservation District for 25 years and recently completed three one-year terms as Area IV Director for the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts.



Wayne Spies

Herriman said Spies represents the foundation of conservation in Oklahoma. A Caddo County farmer and rancher, Spies practices conservation in his own operation and champions conservation and agriculture issues in the state. He and the West Caddo Conservation District have taken innovative steps in protecting the Fort Cobb Lake watershed in a cooperative effort with the Fort Cobb Lake Master Conservancy District. Herriman said Spies has been active with the state Legislature for a number of years, representing OACD and also the American Farmers and Ranchers organization.

### OACD President's Award — The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation and Wadell Altom

Scotty Herriman presented the OACD President's Award to the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation and Wadell Altom at the OACD State Meeting. Altom serves as a senior vice president for the Noble Foundation and is director of its Agriculture Division. He has been with the organization since 1966 and has announced his retirement.

"Thanks to Mr. Altom's leadership and commitment to conservation, the Noble Foundation has been a longtime supporter of the National Land and Range Judging Contest that OACD hosts annually in Oklahoma City," Herriman said. Herriman also said that since 2005 the Noble Foundation has sponsored one of OACD's major conservation awards – the Outstanding Conservation District Director Award. That award is presented, with other OACD Conservation Awards, in the Governor's Blue Room during Conservation Day at the Capitol each March.

"He has shared his expertise in soil management and fertilization issues with Oklahoma farmers for over 40 years at the Noble Foundation," Herriman said. "So it is fitting that we recognize Mr. Altom and the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation."

### Friend of Conservation — James Covey

James E. Covey was named to the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame as a "Friend of Conservation" at the OACD State Meeting.

A Custer County farmer and rancher, Covey recently completed serving six two-year terms for District 57 in the Oklahoma House of Representatives where he "championed conservation, agriculture and rural development issues," Herriman said. "OACD and the Oklahoma conservation partnership had no stronger supporter over the years than this year's inductee, James Covey," Herriman said.

"Representative Covey understood the challenges facing Oklahoma agriculture and he knew the value of soil and water conservation to our state when he went into the Legislature," Herriman said. "He was an advocate of no-till farming and practiced what he preached on his own farm," Herriman said. "He was a consistent supporter of funding for conservation districts," Herriman said.

Among other leadership positions, Covey served as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. He promoted rural development and was an early leader in developing Oklahoma's wind energy industry.



James Covey



Wadell Altom

# Comanche County Conservation District Wins Pickup Truck

Comanche County Conservation District won a pickup truck in a drawing held at the OACD State Meeting Feb. 22-24. Chesapeake Energy donated the truck for use by a conservation district.

The drawing for the vehicle was open to any of the state's 88 conservation districts current with its dues and with at least one district director registered for the entire OACD state meeting. Additional tickets were given to districts for each additional director registered. The drawing for the truck, a three-quarter-ton, four-wheel drive, fleet vehicle, was held at the close of the annual meeting's Legislative Banquet. The ticket submitted by Erma June Hewes, a board member since 1982, was drawn as the winning entry.

"The district recently bought a skid steer (compact track loader)," said Comanche CCD Manager David Kuntz. "When we were considering that purchase, the directors asked how I would move it because the truck I was using wasn't big enough," David said. "I told them 'we'll cross that bridge when we come to it' and they went along with that," David said. "Well, I guess that bridge is crossed now!"

"Chesapeake Energy has been a long time supporter of conservation in Oklahoma," Scotty Herriman, president of OACD said. "We are extremely excited that they have so generously donated this truck to help further conservation work in our state. They are truly committed to the conservation and protection of our soil, water, air and wildlife habitats."

"It's an honor for Chesapeake to partner again with the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts," said Tom Price, Jr., Chesapeake Senior Vice President - Corporate Development and Oklahoma County Landowner/Cooperator. "Donating this truck is a way we at Chesapeake can help highlight the importance of environmental responsibility and further the conservation work that is critical to maintaining a high quality of life in our state."

Chesapeake is Oklahoma's largest independent natural gas producer and its most active exploration company. It employs thousands of Oklahomans directly and indirectly on company-operated wells across the state.



Comanche CCD Manager David Kuntz with the pickup donated by Chesapeake Energy.

**Mailing Tab Area**

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 Karla Beatty, 405.521.2384  
 •  
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