



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 52 No. 1, January 2007

Celebrating the Oklahoma Statehood Centennial and the 70th Anniversary of Conservation Districts in Oklahoma!

In 2007 Oklahoma marks its statehood Centennial Anniversary, becoming the 46th state on Nov. 16, 1907. Thirty years later, on April 15, 1937, Oklahoma became the second state to pass and the first to enact a statute authorizing conservation districts. On that day Gov. E.W. Marland signed the state's Soil Conservation District Law, which became effective immediately. Arkansas was the first of 22 states to enact such a law in the first year after President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a model law to all governors with a letter urging its adoption. But the Arkansas law did not become effective until June 10, 1937, two months after Oklahoma's law. The first soil conservation district in the nation was chartered on Aug. 4, 1937, in Anson County, N.C., the birthplace of soil conservation pioneer Hugh H. Bennett.



For events in Oklahoma's conservation history, go to www.ok.gov/okcc/News/Conservation_History on OCC's web site. (See **This Month in Conservation History** on page four for some of those events.)

Winter Weather Pounds State

Disaster Unites Partnership To Assist Cimarron County Residents; Several Conservation Districts and NRCS Offices Forced to Close.

Beginning in late November and continuing throughout January, a series of winter storms hammered across Oklahoma disrupting the lives of thousands and forcing the closing of some conservation district and NRCS offices.

An early winter storm blasted Oklahoma in late November, dumping more than a foot of snow across much of the state and prompting Gov. Brad Henry to reduce services at state offices for Nov. 30-Dec. 1. Many central Oklahoma schools remained closed for the following week.

Dec. 29 marked the beginning of a blizzard that crippled the Panhandle. In Cimarron County, freezing rain turned to snow accumulating in amounts of 10 inches to 4 feet, with winds creating drifts 8 to 20 feet high in places. All contributed to downed power lines and extended power outages.

Cimarron County Conservation District and the Boise City NRCS Field Office and Farm Service Agency assisted Federal Emergency Management Administration, state Highway Patrol, Department of Emergency Management and Cimarron County sheriff's office with maps, rancher lists, hay supplier information and equipment during the emergency.

State Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach, along with members of an emergency response team, arrived to assess damage and arrange airlifts of hay to stranded cattle. An Oklahoma Army National Guard Chinook helicopter airlifted animal feed, medicines and other emergency supplies to several snowbound locations in the county. Cimarron County CD assisted with gathering loss information to establish assistance needs.

On Jan. 12 a storm marched farther across the state carrying snow, freezing rain and sleet, causing Gov. Henry to again reduce services at state offices in Canadian, Cleveland, Lincoln, Logan, McClain, Oklahoma and Pottawatomie Counties. The damage increased in eastern Oklahoma, with loss of electricity closing McIntosh County CD/Eufaula Field Office, Delaware County CD/Jay Field Office, Pittsburg County CD/McAlester Field Office, Mayes County CD/Pryor Field Office, and Haskell County CD/Stigler Field Office .

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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.



Celebrating the Oklahoma Statehood Centennial and the 70th anniversary of the Conservation District Enabling Act!



www.ok.gov/okcc/News/Conservation_History

Conservation Calendar

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

Feb. 1 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

Feb. 4-8 — Power of Conservation, Annual National NACD Meeting, Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, Ca.

Feb. 5-8 — Helping Communities Grow Naturally. Conference on Urban Protection hosted by the Oklahoma Stream Team. Clarion Meridian Hotel, Oklahoma City.

Feb. 6 — Alternative Cropping and Tillage Seminar, Pioneer Technology Center, Ponca City.

Feb. 8 — No-Till Workshop, Caddo-Kiowa Technology Center, Fort Cobb.

Feb. 9-11 — Oklahoma Farmers Union State Convention 2007, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City.

Feb. 16 — Conservation Tillage 101, Pavilion Bldg., Garfield County Fairgrounds, Enid.

Feb. 19 — President's Day Holiday

Feb. 25-27 — OACD Annual State Meeting, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City.

March 1-2 — Soil Profile Certification Course, Grove.

March 7 — Resource Management Conference, Tulsa Garden Center.

March 8 — Kay County Conservation District Annual Conservation Awards Banquet, Moose Lodge, Ponca City.

March 8-9 — Soil Profile Certification Course, Grove.

March 10 — Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference, Payne County Expo Center, Stillwater.

March 14 — GIS Day at the Capitol, State Capitol, Fourth Floor Rotunda, Oklahoma City.

March 15-16 — Blue Thumb Training, Miami.

March 19 — Conservation Day at the Capitol, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Third Floor Rotunda, Oklahoma State Capitol Building.

In Our Thoughts

Senator Charles Wyrick, former Ottawa County CD director, lost his father in January.

Kenneth Rose, Cimarron County CD director, lost his mother Jan. 8.

Lloyd Fisher, 30-year Konawa CD director, lost his wife Geneva Jan. 8.

Bret Cosby, Harper County CD director was hospitalized for injuries from an auto accident on Jan. 16.

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

Congress Passes Abandoned Mine Land Legislation

On Dec. 9 the 109th Congress passed the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006, which included the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act Amendments of 2006. NACD members advocated for reform during the Legislative Conference earlier in 2006.

The proposal extends the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program (AML) for fifteen years with slight decreases in the coal production fee over time and ensures that reclamation funds collected from the fees will be distributed to the states that have the most dangerous abandoned mine sites. The legislation allows for funding to be dispersed to historic mining states with unreclaimed sites while returning a portion of the fees to current mining states.

Annual appropriations since the program's inception have been severely limited due to ongoing budget constraints, but significant problems remain in many states that threaten the health and safety people who live near them. In addition, the legislation repays states the money they paid into the AML Fund. Each year, fees imposed on coal production are held in the fund and have not been fully redistributed.

The proposal also requires annual transfers of AML Fund interest to pay for the health benefits of orphan beneficiaries in the Combined Benefit Fund. In addition, coal receipts received through the Mineral Leasing Act will be used as needed to pay for any benefits not covered by the AML Fund interest. This provision addresses the problem of the current structure for financing orphan benefits, which are no longer sustainable because of the declining number of contributing employers.

This legislation is important to conservation districts throughout the country that are facing serious environmental and safety issues associated with abandoned mines. Critical funding will be provided to states to assist in cleanup efforts.

New series intended to help explain roles & responsibilities

District Directors 10-Minute Guides

In time for January 2007, the Conservation Commission's District Services Division launched a new effort to provide training to help conservation district directors better understand and carry out their responsibilities. The "District Directors' Responsibilities: A 10-Minute Guide Series" is a continuing series of informational/discussion topics designed to help conservation district directors become more informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities.

The guides are being distributed at the rate of one per month, in time for directors to review and then discuss at the next board meeting. A hard copy of the first guide was mailed to board chairmen to introduce the series and an electronic version was posted on the OCC's web site. In late January, in time for February board meetings, the second guide was emailed to all conservation district offices for local distribution and posted electronically, and that method will be used to distribute the rest of the series.

The topic of the first 10-Minute Guide covers Oklahoma's Open Meeting/Open Records Act as it pertains to conservation districts. The second guide explains state laws that apply to how a district board holds an Executive Session. Topics for future installments include Conducting Effective Board Meetings, Recruiting New Board Members and Supervising and Managing Employees, among others.

"We are already getting feedback that these guides are a great help to both directors and district staff," said Lisa Knauf, District Services director. To read more and access the guide series, navigate to www.ok.gov/okcc/News/10-Minute_Guides_for_Directors.html on OCC's web site.

Conservationists in the News

Major County CD board member and OCC Area I Commissioner **Matt Gard** was named Volunteer of the Year by the Fairview Chamber of Commerce on Jan. 8. This was reported by Osage County CD board member and former OCC Area III Commissioner Sandra Drummond who was there to see her cousin Susie Martens named Citizen of the Year.

Conservation Commission Employees: Awards & Recognition

Jana Chicoine, OCC/FMHR administrative officer, received recognition at the January Commission meeting for 25 years of service to the Conservation Commission and the state of Oklahoma.

District Directors' Responsibilities: A 10-Minute Guide Series

A Summary of the November Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Dec. 4, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Atoka County	Troy Gammon
Cimarron Valley	Terry Strader
Konawa	Jerry Surber
Murray County	John Cagle
Noble County	Kirby Ream
Sequoyah County	Harrell Lee

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as presented by Steve Coffman, FMHR director, who reported \$1,766,041.93 in claims Oct. 23-Nov. 17.

Agreements

Commissioners approved three new agreements and one amended agreement submitted by Ben Pollard, assistant director.

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved an out-of-state travel request for three OCC employees to attend the No-Till on the Plains Winter Conference in Salina, Kan., Jan. 30-31

OACD Annual State Meeting

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts' Annual State Meeting, Feb. 25-27 at the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City.

Honey Creek Watershed Project

Commissioners approved the Policies and Approved Conservation Practices for the Honey Creek Watershed 319 Non-point Pollution Cost Share Project as presented by Shanon Phillips, WQ assistant director.

Murray County Conservation District

Commissioners heard a request by Murray County Conservation District to fund an employee position for watershed operation and maintenance. Mike Thralls explained that at the current time OCC could only fund a temporary position for six months. To fund a permanent position, OCC will need to seek additional funding in the 2007 legislative session. Commissioner Dan Lowrance commented that he had discussed with Conservation Programs staff the possibility of discussing a partnership for the position with the Chickasaw Nation. No action was taken.

Locally-Led Conservation Cost-Share Program

Commissioners approved a motion for Conservation Programs staff to prepare a performance-based allocation process for the Conservation Cost-Share Program, as submitted by Robert Toole, CP director. Toole explained that to obtain a formula, staff would review documents submitted by conservation districts such as their long range plans, annual work plans, annual reports, and statements of needs and justification of funds. Staff would also look at the history of conservation districts and their compliance with guidelines and regulations. Another factor would allow districts to elect to not participate in the program in certain program years without being penalized in following years.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees

Paula Templeton, OACDE president, introduced the group's board members Carolyn Tucker, past president; Fredia Rice, past president; Tricia Soderstrom, secretary; Coleta Bratten, treasurer; Christina Richard, Area I director; Robbie Bowles, Area IV director; Andrea Jones, Area V director; and Becky Bailey, incoming Area 3 director. Templeton expressed her pleasure of serving with such fine people. She commended the employees on gaining salary increases for district and OCC employees. They are looking forward to

working with OACD on another successful legislative session. Commissioner Lowrance thanked OACDE for all their hard work.

National Association of Conservation Districts

Bill Wilson, NACD president, addressed the Commission to discuss Farm Bill issues and NRCS program issues. He stated that every news story about the next Farm Bill mentions conservation. Wilson stated that budget matters will be the biggest challenge this fiscal year and urged members to get active in the budget process and to deliver the conservation message. Wilson stated that he has known the new NRCS state conservationist, Ron Hilliard, for many years and welcomed him to Oklahoma.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Rick Jeans reported participating in a meeting of the OACD strategic plan funding committee that will make a proposal to the full board on restructuring dues to create new revenue. Commissioner Matt Gard reported on attending the Ag Expo and receiving continuing education credits. He stated he would attend the Garfield County CD's legislative event and commended Jason Skaggs, district manager, for his work with local legislators. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the Haskell County CD's Bankers Awards Banquet as well as the OACD Area V Meeting. Commissioner Dan Lowrance stated the three Area Meetings he attended were very good. He will attend a meeting of the newly-created OSU Natural Resources Ecology and Management Department search committee to conduct interviews for a new department head.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, executive director, reported that Speaker of the House Lance Cargill has made committee assignments and staff is pleased with those assignments. Senate discussions are ongoing. Thralls welcomed the new NRCS State Conservationist Ron Hilliard to Oklahoma and stated that his counterpart in West Virginia had only favorable comments about Hilliard. Thralls presented Commissioners with copies of the book *The Worst Hard Times*, written by Timothy Egan, about the Dust Bowl. Thralls provided an update on Oklahoma's poultry lawsuit stating that OCC has been required to produce all original documents pertaining to the Illinois River Watershed. Water Quality staff has the bulk of this information and two staff have been assigned full time to this records request. The deposition is scheduled for Jan. 9.

Ben Pollard, assistant director, thanked members for their attendance at the OACD Area Meetings. He also thanked NRCS for including OCC and OACD in its district conservationist training on Dec. 7 and allowing them to make a presentation.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, stated that the month of November was spent preparing and attending the OACD Area Meetings. She reported that all five Areas passed resolutions supporting mandatory training for district directors. Knauf reported that a new secretary has been hired for Tulsa County CD, and Knauf has spent considerable time assisting the district with unemployment and Social Security issues. Knauf has also spent time assisting with the preparation for OCC's portion of district conservationist training.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, WQ assistant director, stated that several Water Quality staff attended the Area Meetings and reported that they were very informative. She reported on participating in a conference call with the Farm Service Agency national headquarters to discuss Oklahoma's proposed Conservation Reserve Enhancement

Program (CREP) proposal and to make recommendations on how the proposal can be agreeable for both sides. Phillips reported on the Stamper Project stating that it is off to a slow start and has faced several obstacles but construction is beginning. The project needs to be completed by September 2007. The poultry lawsuit is taking a considerable amount of staff time and effort, and to date over 75,000 copies have been made.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation: Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that a contractor for a project in Sallisaw will not meet the deadline and will be charged \$300 per day in liquidated damages. He reported on active projects.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FMHR director, commended Lynn Weldon, Human Resources specialist, on completing the health insurance enrollment process for OCC and district employees. Coffman is working on a budget presentation for the House fiscal staff. Mark Nichols is the new House staff member assigned to OCC.

Information Technology: Shellie Willoughby, GIS specialist, stated that Mike Sharp, IT director, was in Tar Creek. She reported on Tar Creek reclamation activities as well as GIS activities.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, reported that four conservation districts were working with their county commissioners to secure funding for operation and maintenance equipment including trucks and skid steers. Toole also reported that two conservation districts were in dialogue with their local tribal nations regarding assisting the district with funds or staff. He commended the districts for identifying alternative funding sources and pursuing them.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, stated that House Speaker-elect Lance Cargill named Rep. Dale DeWitt as chairman of the Natural Resources Committee; Rep. Don Armes as chair of the Agriculture and Commerce Subcommittee; Rep. Terry Hyman as chair of Tourism and Recreation Subcommittee; and Rep. Phil Richardson to the Environment and Wildlife Subcommittee. Rep. Chris Bengel will remain chairman of the Appropriations and Budget Committee. OACD will be watching several bills this legislative session with topics including roadside erosion, tax credits on conservation easements, and no-till. Work continues on the association's strategic plan, which will be a principal topic at the OACD State Meeting for Feb. 25-27. OACD will host the NACD South Central Region Meeting in Oklahoma City next summer. Pope will be meeting in February with Keep Oklahoma Beautiful and he reported that Rogers County CD will receive an award from the group.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Commissioners welcomed Ron Hilliard, new NRCS state conservationist. Hilliard reported that the NRCS is operating under a continuing resolution through December 8. He stated that Oklahoma's funding level for the current fiscal year amounts to a \$1.6 million deficit compared to last year's budget. His main objective will be to maintain staff and to not fill vacant positions.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Jan. 8, 2007, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 n. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

This Month in Conservation History

(Note: Page numbers in parentheses are citations to the book "Out of the Dust - The History of Conservation in Oklahoma in the 20th Century," published by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts in cooperation with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.)

January 1999. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission approved state guidelines for the state Cost-Share Program that had begun operation in August 1998.

January 1946. A group of district officials from 17 states, including Nolen Fuqua of Stephens County Conservation District, Okla., assembled in Chicago to begin putting together a national organization. In two days the group organized what they called the National Association of Soil Conservation District Governing Officials, adopted a constitution and elected temporary directors and officers. They adopted the slogan, "Nail Down the Topsoil." The 17 men went back home and began gathering support and collecting dues from districts. The first annual meeting was held in Chicago on February 25, 1947. The organization grew into what is today the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

January 1, 1941. Craig County Conservation District received its certificate of incorporation. The district began operations March 4, 1941. (page 23)

January 1, 1945. Cimarron Valley Conservation District began operations. (page 23)

January 1, 1954. Ray Walker became state conservationist for Oklahoma for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

January 1, 1972. Hampton Burns became state conservationist for Oklahoma for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

January 2, 1946. Deer Creek Conservation District began operations. (page 24)

January 5, 1939. LeFlore County Conservation District (originally named East Central Oklahoma Soil Conservation District) began operation. (page 22)

January 9, 1942. South Caddo County Soil Conservation District (now South Caddo Conservation District) received its certificate of incorporation. The district began operation November 16, 1943.

January 12, 1971. Leonard Solomon became executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission following Marvin Emerson. Mr. Solomon served until October 31, 1985. (page 30)

January 15, 1946. Nowata County Soil Conservation District (now Nowata County Conservation District) received its certificate of incorporation. The district began operation December 19, 1946.

January 16, 1938. Earl Lowe began as executive secretary of the State Soil Conservation Committee, the precursor of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. (page 30)

January 16, 1950. Grady County Conservation District began operation.

January 16, 1961. The final portion of Oklahoma land came within conservation district coverage when the last portion of Beaver County consolidated into the existing Beaver County Conservation District. (page 17)

January 24, 1946. Adair County Soil Conservation District (now Adair County Conservation District) began operation.

January 27, 1947. Pawnee County Soil Conservation District (now Pawnee County Conservation District) received its certificate of incorporation. The district began operation April 30, 1948

January 27, 1986. Mason Mungle became executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, filling the vacancy left by Leonard Solomon who retired October 31, 1985. Mr. Mungle served until October 17, 1997.

January 31, 1939. Little River received its certificate of incorporation. The district began operations November 27, 1939.

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