

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

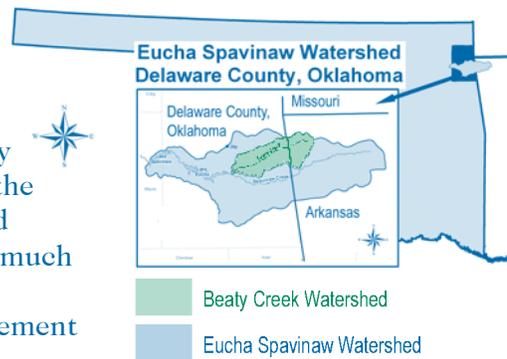
Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 55, Issue No. 1, January 2009

Water quality continues to improve in Spavinaw Watershed

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) has announced monitoring results that show continual improvement in water quality in the Spavinaw Creek watershed. The improvements result from programs offered through the Delaware County Conservation District and in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to help landowners install land management practices to keep nutrients, sediment and bacteria out of runoff into streams. Recent analysis of water quality monitoring data shows a 66 percent reduction in phosphorus loading into Beaty Creek in Delaware County compared to a nearby stream, according to the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Beaty Creek is a subwatershed within the larger Spavinaw Creek watershed that supplies drinking water for much of the Tulsa area.

"The longer these land management practices are in place, the more improvement we see in the water quality in the watershed," said Mike Thralls, OCC executive director.



Spavinaw, continued on page 2.

Despite state's low ranking for funding, many state dams are inspected regularly

While Oklahoma is one of the lowest states in the nation in funding for dam safety, it does not mean all the dams are going without inspection. An article distributed by the Associated Press in January 2009 points out that Oklahoma is one of the lowest states in the nation for dam safety funding, with a budget of \$395,336 for 2006. That is the budget for the dam safety activities of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board and not for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission or the state's 88 local conservation districts. All of the inspections carried out by local conservation districts and the assistance provided by the Conservation Commission, NRCS and county Emergency Management Agency staff take place without receiving any funding from that budget.

Of the 4,477 dams regulated by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB) in the state, 2,105 are inspected annually by local conservation districts. These are small watershed upstream flood control dams that were constructed as floodwater-retarding structures. And it is not just the high hazard structures that are inspected — conservation districts inspect all of their dams including those designated as low hazard.

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"Our job as conservationists is not only to identify problems, but also to solve them. That's what we do."

*Mike Thralls, executive director
Oklahoma Conservation Commission*

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

NACD Annual Meeting, Feb. 1-4, Sheraton Hotel, New Orleans, La.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting, Feb. 9, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

Presidents Day Holiday, Feb. 16

OACD State Meeting, Feb. 22-24, Reed Center, Midwest City

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting, March 2, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

GIS Day at the Capitol, March 11, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City

Blue Thumb Training, March 13-14, Cleveland County CD, Norman

Blue Thumb Training, March 18-19, Muskogee (Creek) Nation, Okmulgee

Conservation Day at the Capitol, March 25, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City

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

In our thoughts...

Iris Imler, Cimarron County CD secretary, lost her mother Joy Cochran, age 76, on Dec. 2.

Jeff Kuhn, Payne County CD manager, and family lost their home in a fire on Dec. 22.

Teresa Boswell, Creek County CD secretary, suffered a stroke Dec. 2.

O.B. Boyd, former Hughes County CD aide, lost his mother on Jan 5.

Jim Leach, OCC/WQ staff, lost his mother Jane, age 98, on Jan 18.

Congratulations!

Jo Callison, Craig County CD secretary, and husband Ernie celebrated Christmas with a new granddaughter – Emersyn (Emy) Grace Stendebach born Dec. 9.

Brandon Faulkenberry, LeFlore County CD manager, and his wife Billie Jo, have a new baby girl, Maggie, born Dec. 26.

To all district directors and employees and OCC and NRCS employees:

I would like to thank everyone for their prayers, call & cards during my recent stroke. Without your prayers and support I could not have made it as far as I have. I am doing very well and am improving each day. Thank you so much, Teresa Boswell

Spavinaw, continued from page 1.

In the 1990s Eucha and Spavinaw Lakes began to have algae blooms and Tulsa's water supply had taste and odor problems. A Clean Lakes Study in 1997 concluded that the problems were due to excessive phosphorus loading from the watersheds and that animal waste was one of the likely sources. With nonpoint source program funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act, OCC began a demonstration project in the Beaty Creek watershed in 1998 to test the potential to improve water quality through implementation of best management practices (BMPs). The BMPs focused on establishing and protecting vegetated buffer areas along streams, establishing and maintaining good pasture land, proper disposal of animal waste, exporting poultry litter out of the watershed and upgrading or repairing septic systems. State regulation of litter application, and further reduction of litter application due to the 2003 settlement between the city of Tulsa and the poultry integrators, have also contributed to the reduction of phosphorus.

Throughout the project, water samples were taken from Beaty Creek and also from a nearby stream, Little Saline. Little Saline Creek served as the "control" watershed, where geographic conditions and potential pollution sources were similar to Beaty, but where BMPs were not installed. Monitoring this control stream allows analysis of water quality data that represents what would have happened without BMP implementation while compensating for environmental factors such as drought conditions or heavy rains.

The Beaty Creek demonstration project proved to be effective. In 2003 OCC expanded the effort with a similar project under Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act funded through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to encompass the entire Oklahoma portion of the Spavinaw Creek watershed. To date, the program has invested more than \$4 million in BMP implementation in the Spavinaw Creek watershed.

The benefits from BMP installation in Beaty Creek have continued to improve. In April 2005 OCC announced a 14 percent reduction in phosphorus loading into Beaty Creek. In May 2006 results climbed to a 31 percent reduction. Latest monitoring results, which includes four years of data after BMP installation, show that the program has resulted in a 66 percent reduction in phosphorus loading into Beaty Creek.

"We expect that similar results will be obtained in the larger Spavinaw Creek watershed, and eventually Lakes Eucha and Spavinaw, after the recently installed BMPs have been in place for at least a couple of years, and with continued efforts in the watershed" said Shanon Phillips, acting director of OCC's Water Quality division.

Conservation Day at the Capitol and Awards Presentation

Conservation Day at the Capitol will be held March 25 in the in the Fourth Floor Rotunda where conservation districts will again host display booths.

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and cosponsors will again present awards in a ceremony in the Blue Room. In the OACD Conservation Awards, Chesapeake Energy is cosponsoring the Outstanding Conservation District award; the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation is cosponsoring the Outstanding Director award; and the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma is cosponsoring the Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator award.

Chesapeake Energy is also cosponsoring an Outstanding Educator award for a teacher in each of the state's five Congressional districts, and the Oklahoma Press Association is again cosponsoring the Excellence in Communication awards.

Dam Inspections, continued from page 2.

Two-hundred and twenty-nine of the 2,105 dams are classified as “high hazard” since they have the potential for loss of life if they should fail. For many of those the reclassification to high hazard has been a recent development – in recent years or even months. Case in point – 42 low hazard dams were reclassified as high hazard dams by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) within the last six months due to downstream development since the dams were originally constructed.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission, working with local conservation districts, the NRCS and local county Emergency Management Agency personnel, are approaching the end of a campaign to update and standardize emergency action plans (EAPs) statewide for the 229 high hazard dams under the care of local conservation districts. Two hundred and twenty-seven of the dams have EAPs that were updated in the last year, including Bellcow Lake in Lincoln County, and the remaining two have EAPs that are 90 percent complete.

An upstream flood control dam originally built as far back as the late 1940s in a rural location becomes high hazard if the situation changes to where loss of life could occur if the dam breached – that could be only one residence or business built below a dam. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission and NRCS in Oklahoma continually review watershed dam inspection reports for operation and maintenance needs and determine if reclassification is required.

Some high hazard dams are being upgraded extensively to meet dam safety mandates for increased public safety. The upgrade usually requires raising the height of the dam, widening the secondary earthen spillway and possibly replacing the concrete principal spillway. The average cost of modifying one such dam in Oklahoma is currently about \$1 million.

Currently there are no restrictions on development below classified dams. The Oklahoma Legislature may consider legislation this session that would limit development in the breach inundation areas below dams. By eliminating development in these areas, fewer dams will be reclassified as high hazard in the future. This restriction on development downstream from dams would significantly reduce the liability and expense to the state and private citizens for dam modification to meet high hazard standards.

Oklahoma’s 2,105 upstream floodwater retarding structures — watershed dams – represent a \$2.1 billion infrastructure that provides the state with an average of \$75 million in benefits annually according to NRCS

Economic Stimulus?

Don’t Forget Conservation!

By Clay Pope, Executive Director,

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Congress and the incoming administration are getting ready to undertake the largest government plan to jump start the economy since the Great Depression. Everything from tax cuts to road projects are being bandied about for this package. One area of importance, however, that isn’t receiving the attention it deserves is stimulus spending for conservation infrastructure.

If you are looking to give the economy of rural America a shot in the arm, few projects could have more impact than putting dollars toward efforts like flood (control) dam repair, abandoned mine clean-up, water quality work, operation and maintenance of existing flood control structures and the construction of new flood control dams in flood-prone areas.

In Oklahoma alone, over 300 dam sites have been identified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and are only waiting for federal funds to begin construction. In addition, over 1,000 Oklahoma dams will be past their design life in the next ten years. At an average cost of \$1 million per dam, many millions of dollars could be spent over the next 24 months on ‘shovel ready’ rehabilitation projects that would hire Oklahomans and spend money directly in rural communities. On top of this, ongoing operation and maintenance of existing dams face a nation-wide backlog. Dollars spent on maintenance needs such as brush clearing, erosion repair and maintenance of spillways also result in fuel and equipment purchases, metal and concrete purchases and the hiring of individuals to undertake this work.

On top of the economic benefits of flood control spending, work in areas such as nonpoint source pollution control to protect water quality would also provide needed dollars to help the economy. In our state, well over 50 percent of all streams are considered impaired by nutrients or bacteria. By cost sharing with landowners to undertake projects such as riparian restoration, pasture management and conversion to no-till farming, we are helping the environment and saving downstream cities the cost of cleaning up their water. We are also stimulating the rural economy by ensuring that dollars will be spent hiring land contractors and fence crews, purchasing new farm equipment and fencing supplies, and increasing spending on inputs like seed and fuel.

In the area of abandoned mine reclamation, Oklahoma has thousands of acres of hard rock mine locations that are in desperate need of attention. Work to clean up these sites, reclaim the land and ensure against subsidence would provide additional economic stimulus through the purchase of inputs and the labor needed to undertake the work providing additional help to our rural areas.

Our country is facing grave economic challenges. Over the course of the next few months many choices must be made. One thing, however, is clear — if you want to stimulate the economy of every part of the United States and protect our resources for future generations, conservation infrastructure spending needs to be in the mix of any recovery package.

OACD State Meeting 2009

Planting the Seeds for the Future –
New Horizons Bring New Challenges

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts' 2009 State Meeting will be held Feb. 22-24 at the Reed Center in Midwest City. Congressman Frank Lucas, the new ranking minority member of the U.S. House of Representatives, has been invited to speak at the opening general session on Monday morning.

Chesapeake Energy has for the second year donated a pickup truck to be given to a conservation district through a drawing.

The OACD Auxiliary outing this year is called "Healthy Cooking with Herbs." Participants will board a bus at 9:45 a.m. on Monday to travel to the Oklahoma County OSU Extension Center. Instructor LaDonna Dunlop will present a cooking workshop. Lunch is included and participants will receive a cookbook.

Due to rising costs and a decline in participation, the Tuesday luncheon has been cancelled this year.



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

Oklahoma Conservation Conversation

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