

# 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 56, Issue No. 1 January 2010

## Sugar Creek L-43 Rehabilitation Groundbreaking First dam repair using state bond and federal stimulus funds

The damage caused to Oklahoma's conservation infrastructure by the record flooding of 2007 came one step closer to being repaired with the groundbreaking on Dec. 10 for the state's first flood control dam repair project funded in part by dollars from the Oklahoma conservation bond. The funds from the bond will be matched with additional dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) federal stimulus plan.



Among those attending the groundbreaking ceremony were, from left, Trey Lam, Oklahoma Association Conservation Districts president; Jamey Wood, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service assistant state conservationist; Wayne Spies, West Caddo Conservation District chairman; state Sen. Ron Justice; Carlos Squires, Caddo County commissioner; and Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission executive director.

The bond, passed by the Oklahoma legislature in 2009, appropriated \$25 million for conservation work to repair damage caused to the state's conservation infrastructure by the weather events of 2007. Of the funds, over \$15 million is dedicated to repair and operation and maintenance of upstream flood control dams. In addition, over \$14 million was provided to Oklahoma for dam rehabilitation under the federal stimulus plan. According to Trey Lam, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), the combined investment by the state and federal governments will help not only repair damage today, but also ensure future flood protection as well.

*Sugar Creek L-43, continued on page 3*

## Record Funding for Conservation Cost-Share Program

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) at its Dec. 7 meeting approved guidelines for the state-funded Locally-Led Conservation Cost-Share Program for Program Year 12. The amount allocated in the last session of the state Legislature, \$948,391, is being combined with \$443,809 of unobligated funds from previous years. The result is a total of \$1,392,200 of program funds to be used to install natural resource conservation practices on farms and ranches.

This will be added to the \$2.6 million made available by the conservation bond, passed by the Legislature for a variety of conservation projects in the state, described below. Cost-share practices funded with bond dollars must repair or restore flood-damaged conservation systems.

The conservation bond, passed by the Oklahoma Legislature in 2009, appropriated \$25 million for conservation work to repair damage caused to the state's conservation infrastructure by weather events of 2007. Among projects approved for funds from the bond proceeds, along with the Cost-Share Program, is more than \$15 million dedicated to repair and operation and maintenance of upstream flood control dams. A flood protection project for the Kingfisher area was also included as well as state match for a Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) project. The FEMA project will repair flood control structures in south Caddo County, the

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## Going Green?

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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 he 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)

**NACD 2010 Annual Meeting,**  
Jan. 31 - Feb. 3, Orlando, Fla.

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
Feb. 4, Oklahoma City

**American Farmers & Ranchers  
Convention,** Feb. 12-13, Oklahoma City  
**President's Day,** Feb. 15

**OACD 2010 Annual Meeting,**  
Feb. 21-23, Midwest City

**Carbon Verifier Training Part 1,**  
Feb. 23, Midwest City

**USDA Agricultural Research Service  
Showcase,** March 2, St. Louis, Mo.

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
March 8, Oklahoma City

**Conservation Day at the Capitol,**  
March 8, Oklahoma City

**GIS Day at the Capitol,** March 10,  
Oklahoma City

**Dewey County CD Open House and  
Locally-Led Meeting,**  
March 10, Taloga

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
April 5, Oklahoma City

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
May 3, Oklahoma City

**National Land & Range Judging  
Contest,** May. 4-6, Oklahoma City

**Prescribed Fire Day at the Capitol,**  
May 10, Oklahoma City

**Memorial Day Holiday,** May 31

**Conservation Commission Meeting,**  
June 7, Oklahoma City

## In our thoughts...

Karen Beek, Little River CD, was hospitalized in November for high blood pressure. She also lost her stepmother on Dec. 1.

Jack Penner, former OCC Area II Commissioner and long-time Murray County CD director, lost his wife Mardel on Dec. 21.

Cindy, wife of Beaver County CD equipment manager Jerry Pierson, is being treated for a recurrence of cancer.

Chuck Nuttle, OCC/AML project inspector, and wife Nila, lost their son Rodney, age 40, on Jan. 4, after a long illness.

## Congratulations!

Tom Wilson, NRCS soil conservationist at Kiowa County CD, has a new grandson, Slaton Haskel Wilson, born Dec. 4.

Tashina Kirk, OCC/WQ project coordinator, and husband Albert, have a new baby boy, Logan Keith Kirk, born Jan 2.

Brandon Chandler, district conservationist at Garvin CD, and his wife Becky have a new baby girl, Cordie Jo Chandler, born Jan. 3.

## OCC and ODOT Collaborate on Project to Support U.S. Highway 270

### The largest AML emergency project in OCC history

OCC and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) are cooperating on an emergency project on U.S. Highway 270 near Alderson in Pittsburg County. It is the largest amount of funding for a project in the history of OCC's emergency abandoned mine land reclamation program.

Voids under the highway caused by abandoned underground coal mining have been suddenly subsiding, causing portions of the highway to sink. This is not the first time this has happened – the two agencies cooperated on a similar, smaller project in 2006.

In the current project, ODOT is drilling holes from the surface in and alongside the roadway down into the voids. OCC has hired a contractor to pump concrete grout down into the holes to create pillars in the voids to support the highway. Initially pillars are pumped to create a box-shaped containment area, then more pillars are pumped to fill in the open, box-shaped area. The project is 1,080 feet of Highway 270 in the city of Alderson. OCC has a budget of \$800,000 of federal funds from the Office of Surface Mining to complete the project. Completion is anticipated early in 2010.

"We really appreciate the partnership of ODOT in this project," said Mike Kastl, director of OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program (AML). "If ODOT were not drilling the holes, the cost of this project to the AML Program could easily run over a million dollars, maybe a million and a half," Kastl said.

The majority of emergency projects in Oklahoma have been in Pittsburg and Latimer Counties. Emergency projects occur when an abandoned mine site, usually an underground mine, suddenly poses a public safety hazard that needs to be addressed immediately. OCC receives funding for both the AML emergency program and the regular reclamation program from the federal Office of Surface Mining. These funds come from a tax on current coal mining. According to Kastl the AML emergency program has been a successful and positive program in the state abating many serious public safety hazards. OCC is working to ensure that federal emergency funds continue to be available to the state to address serious mine-related emergencies, leaving regular program funds free to address the reclamation of known hazardous abandoned coal mining sites.

## Awards & Recognition

**Karla Beatty**, OCC/CP education coordinator, was recognized as Employee of the Quarter at the January Commission meeting.

**The following recognitions were made at the 2009 OACD Area Meetings: The Southwestern Oklahoma Development Authority (SWODA)** received a Conservation Commendation from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts for using Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) grants to help seven conservation districts in southwest Oklahoma to acquire nearly \$600,000 in equipment for operation and maintenance on flood control dams and structures.

**Steve Clark**, NRCS resource specialist at the NRCS Claremore Technical Service Office, received a Conservation Commendation from OCC for assisting OCC Water Quality staff in obtaining Level II Conservation Plan Writing certification.

**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** received two Conservation Commendations, one for working with conservation districts to support prescribed burning efforts in northwest Oklahoma and one for providing grass drills to conservation districts to promote re-establishment of native grasses in northeast Oklahoma.



An ODOT crew drills holes into the highway so the contractor hired by OCC can pump concrete grout into the cavities beneath the road.

### *Sugar Creek L-43, continued from page 1*

“The dam repair project we are breaking ground on today signifies another step in what promises to be a huge investment in the conservation infrastructure of Oklahoma,” Lam said. “The dollars made available by the state conservation bond combined with funds from the stimulus package will help us repair the damage caused by the record rains of 2007 and make sure that the flood protection we have all enjoyed for the last 50 years is maintained for future generations. Each year the upstream flood control dams of Oklahoma save the state at least \$70 million in damage that does not happen because they are in place on the ground. Repair projects like this will make sure that protection continues for years to come.”

Located near Fort Cobb, the Sugar Creek L-43 dam is one of 51 dams in the nearly 190,000-acre Sugar Creek Watershed. The dam was constructed in 1970 with assistance from the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The West Caddo Conservation District is the local sponsor of the project and is responsible for operation and maintenance of the dam. Classified as a high-hazard dam, a failure of this structure would result in damage to homes and roads downstream, causing possible loss of life and significant damage to private property.

In August 2007 the area around the dam received over 8.3 inches of rainfall in a six-hour period, severely damaging the dam's auxiliary spillway. According to NRCS engineers, failure of this dam is likely if another large storm occurs. To prevent this from happening, the top of the dam will be raised more than four feet and a new principal spillway will be installed. The work will result in a lake that will have a permanent pool of water covering 30 acres during normal periods and 122 acres at flood stage.

Bids were opened for the project in November. The work will be done by Southern Rock Equipment Company of Davis, Okla. The contract is for \$1,625,586 with 65 percent, or \$1,056,631, provided by federal stimulus funds and 35 percent, or \$568,955, by funds from the state's conservation bond. Work is scheduled to be completed in 360 days.

“This is a critical project for our conservation district,” Wayne Spies, chairman of the West Caddo Conservation District board of directors, said. “It is important that we get the dam and spillway back in working order and maintain the flood protection benefits the dam provides,” he said.

Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist, commended the local conservation district and the state for being prepared.

“By having matching funds available for watershed rehabilitation from the conservation bond, we have been able to secure these federal stimulus funds for this needed project,” Hilliard said.

According to Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, this project shows the leadership that state and federal government have shown in the area of flood control.

“The work we are starting today is a real testament to the Oklahoma Legislature, the Governor and the folks in Washington who made these funds possible through the state conservation bond and the stimulus act,” Thralls said. “We are excited to be able to ensure the flood protection this structure and others like it provide to the citizens of Oklahoma. That's something we couldn't do without these funds.”

### *Cost-Share Program, continued from page 1*

area that suffered the most damage when Tropical Depression Erin devastated western Oklahoma in August 2007.

The Conservation Cost-Share Program year 12 approved Dec. 7 will extend through June 30, 2011. The board of directors at each of Oklahoma's 87 local conservation districts selects from a state-approved list the conservation practices they feel will best address the highest priority problems affecting renewable natural resources in their area. Examples of approved practices include brush management to control invasive plant species like eastern redcedar or to improve or restore native wildlife habitat. Brush management may also be used to protect life and property from wildfire hazard. Ponds, terraces and water diversions are practices that help control soil erosion and improve water quality. In Critical Area Planting, vegetation is planted on highly erodible soil to reduce damage from sediment and runoff to downstream areas. Fencing is a practice used to exclude livestock from areas that should be protected from grazing such as tree plantings, wildlife areas or cropland.

“In a time when the economic climate of Oklahoma is starting to be compared to the time of the Great Depression, it is vital that we not let our guard down in protecting our natural resource environment,” said Mike Thralls, OCC executive director. “These conservation practices are indispensable in protecting our great state from a recurrence of the Dust Bowl, especially in years like 2006 that was drier than any during the Dust Bowl. We are especially pleased to have leveraged our resources to be able to increase our assistance to landowners during this difficult time,” Thralls said. “The Conservation Cost-Share Program also helps stimulate local economies,” Thralls said. “Each dollar spent on conservation in local areas can multiply as much as two-and-a-half times as it is spent and rolls over in the local economy.”

Conservation practices must be carried out according to specifications provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. That ensures practices such as ponds, diversions, terraces and other structural practices are constructed properly and function as designed. To date the Locally-Led Conservation Cost-Share Program has assisted 7,885 landowners since it began in 1998.



Grassed waterway conservation cost-share practice

## District Dateline

### Grant County CD Holds Open House

Grant County CD held an Open House Dec. 9 for its new office building. The district moved into the new office building last April, but had to postpone its Open House celebration due to weather slowing down final landscaping and other outside finishing work.

After noticing a number of health issues including the loss of two employees in the former building to cancer, the Farm Services Agency had tests conducted in August 2006. The results were high for radon, mold and mildew, forcing the occupants to move immediately.

The board of directors committed their own time, labor and equipment to help in the construction of the new office, significantly reducing costs. The district, NRCS and FSA made do with temporary space such as could be found until the new building was ready for occupancy.



Grant County Conservation District's new building

### Cotton County CD Burns Mortgage

Cotton County CD held a reception on Dec. 18 to burn the mortgage on its office building.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act made it imperative that government offices be accessible for people with disabilities, and the landlord of the district's previous location would not make the needed modifications, the district and USDA offices began to look for a new location.

Construction of an office building on farm land owned by the district began Dec. 31, 2002. The district moved into the building in July 2003 and paid off the mortgage on Dec. 11, 2009. Using locally-earned funds, the district paid off the building three and a half years early.

### Mailing Tab Area



In front of the Cotton County Conservation District building, from left, are OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls; Cotton County CD directors David Hilbert, Jack Hudman and Louise Peterson; district employees Bobby White and Fredia Rice; director Kenneth Burton; and state Sen. Don Barrington.

## 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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