

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met January 5, 2009, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chairman Dan Lowrance. He stated this was a regularly scheduled meeting in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, Title 25, Sections 301 and following as amended. The agenda for this meeting was posted at 7:30 a.m. on Friday, January 2, 2009, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary, took roll call and the following members were in attendance:

Dan Lowrance, Chair
Virginia Kidd, Vice Chair
Matt Gard, Secretary
Mike Rooker, Member
George Stunkard, Member

Others in attendance were:

Mike Thralls, Executive Director
Ben Pollard, Assistant Director
Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director
Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director
Dan Butler, Water Quality Program Director
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Assistant Director
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director
Mark Harrison, Information Representative
Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator
Jeanette Nance, Office of the Governor
Regina Switzer, Assistant Attorney General
Ron Hilliard, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Steve Thompson, Associate Commissioner, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry
Bryan Smith, eCapitol.net
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Rooker led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the minutes of the December 1, 2008, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

DISTRICT DIRECTOR RESIGNATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Mike Thralls, Executive Director, presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #1. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve district director appointments listed as First Recommendation in Exhibit #1 with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director, presented the claims and financial statement as listed in Exhibit #2. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the agreements as presented. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

Mr. Thralls presented out of state travel requests for approval as listed in Exhibit #4. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CO-SPONSORSHIP OF EVENTS

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Ms. Kidd to co-sponsor the following events: No-Till Oklahoma Conference, February 9-11, 2009, Oklahoma City; Environmental Education Expo, January 30, 2009, Oklahoma City; and Oklahoma Envirothon Program, April 6-8, 2009, Beavers Bend State Park. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

ADOPTION OF RULES

Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission received comments on Chapter 40. Water Quality Programs, and that those comments were made by the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. Staff will be reviewing those comments. He recommended approval of all rules as listed below. Chapter 40 will be brought before the Commission in February.

A motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Ms. Kidd to adopt the following rules. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Title 155 Chapter 1. Operations of the Commission (Amended - Permanent).
Title 155 Chapter 10. Conservation Districts (Amended - Permanent).
Title 155 Chapter 20. Conservation Cost-share Program (Amended - Permanent).
Title 155 Chapter 35. Coordination of Oklahoma's Geographic Information
(New - Permanent).

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to table Title 155 Chapter 40. Water Quality Programs (New - Permanent) until the February meeting. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

COMMISSION'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission is required by law to have a Strategic Plan. Mr. Toole provided copies of an updated plan as listed in Attachment A. After discussion, a motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Gard to adopt the plan as presented. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PRIORITY WATERSHED COST-SHARE ALLOCATIONS FROM THE OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION INFRASTRUCTURE REVOLVING FUND

Mr. Thralls stated that allocations from the Conservation Commission Infrastructure Revolving Fund is in three parts. In July 2008, the Commission allocated 20% of the fund for operating funds for conservation districts and the Commission. In December 2008 the Commission approved \$1.3 million for the locally-led cost-share program. Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Assistant Director, recommended the remaining \$750,000 be allocated for priority watershed cost-share allocations as follows: Illinois River - \$ 77,000; Eucha/Spavinaw - \$250,000; CREP - \$200,000; Wetlands - \$10,000; North Canadian River - \$213,000, for a total of \$750,000.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the allocations as presented. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

FY 2009 AND 2010 CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 319 PROPOSED WORKPLANS

Ms. Phillips presented the FY2009 and 2010 Clean Water Act Section 319 proposed workplans for approval as listed in Exhibit #5. She stated that the workplans have been streamlined into four categories: funding for technical support of 319 responsibilities as well as funding for conservation districts to purchase equipment for conservation practices; monitoring efforts; education programs (Blue Thumb); and implementation in priority watersheds.

After discussion, a motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the workplans as listed in Exhibit #5. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CHANGES TO THE CREP PROGRAM COST SHARE RATES ON FENCING

Ms. Phillips stated that due to an increase in NRCS, and therefore FSA, cost share rates for fencing, staff is requesting an increase in cost share rates for fencing in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Fencing would increase from 90% of \$1.30 per linear foot to 90% of \$1.88

per linear foot. This change would bring CREP rates equal to those of NRCS and therefore FSA rates for fencing.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the rates on fencing as presented. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CAP FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS OFFERED THROUGH THE 319 PROGRAMS AND CORRECTION TO COST-SHARE RATE FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS UPGRADED THROUGH THE NORTH CANADIAN RIVER PROJECT

Ms. Phillips stated that during the November Commission Meeting, the Commission approved changes to implementation plans for the Illinois River, Eucha/Spavinaw, Honey Creek, and North Canadian River Priority Watershed Projects that affected the cost-share rates for septic tank upgrades through the program. Since that time, the Delaware, Cherokee, and Adair County Districts have reviewed the costs of septic system installation in their districts and recommended a cap of \$4,375 for the invoice amount allowing for exception in instances where the board approved an exceedance of the cap. Therefore, cooperators would be reimbursed for 80% of the invoice amount.

Ms. Phillips also stated that a correction of cost-share rates for the North Canadian Project needed to be made. The Project Implementation Plan for the North Canadian Project designated that septic systems will be cost-shared at a rate of 90%. This cost-share rate was selected by the watershed advisory group for the practices they felt were highest priority. Therefore, the November request to alter the cost-share rate to 80% for septic systems in all water quality priority watershed projects was in error. The rate for the North Canadian Project should remain at 90%.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the cap as recommended and to correct the cost-share for septic system upgrades. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICES FOR COST-SHARE PROGRAM - PROGRAM YEAR 10

Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, presented additional practices for Program Year 10 of the Cost-share Program for approval as listed in Exhibit 6. A motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve additional practices as listed in Exhibit #6. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

DISCUSSION OF THE CONSERVATION BOND

Mr. Thralls stated that an objection has been filed regarding the conservation bond issue. A hearing before the Supreme Court Referee will be held this week and staff is planning to attend. The objection could delay the bond for up to a year. Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission will ask the legislature to craft a bill that contains only the conservation bond issue which should neutralize objections of "log-rolling." If the bill is passed and signed by the Governor it should speed up the process of getting the bond sold.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Gard requested to attend the No Till on the Plains 13th Annual Winter Conference, January 27-28, 2009, Salina, Kansas. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the request. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Mr. Gard abstained. Motion carried.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Stunkard attended the staff meeting and luncheon following the December meeting. Mr. Rooker reported on being in three Christmas parades. Mr. Gard stated that the KNID Farm Show in Enid is January 9-10. The Blaine County Conservation District is hosting a luncheon on January 14. Ms. Kidd attended the Tulsa Farm Show.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Administration: Mike Thralls, Executive Director, stated that the legislature convenes in February. The Senate will be under new leadership with Senator Coffee serving as President Pro Tempore. The state is looking at a tough year financially with 4.4% less than last year. The Commission is scheduled for a Senate Performance Review on January 15 and has been asked how it would take a 2.5% cut and a 5% cut. Mr. Thralls stated that six years ago the Commission took a 20% cut in general revenue and those funds have not been restored.

Mr. Thralls reported on an economic stimulus package stating that information on conservation needs has been provided to the National Association of Conservation Districts, the National Governors Association, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Mr. Thralls reported that Dan Butler, Water Quality Programs Director, is retiring effective January 8. He expressed his appreciation to Mr. Butler and the knowledge of water issues in Oklahoma he has shared. Ms. Phillips will be named interim director.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, Director, has been assisting districts with end of year taxes and reports. It was also noted that seven districts made errors in payroll in 2008; therefore, staff will audit the 2009 payroll beginning in January to ensure these are correct and that employees are paid correctly.

She has scheduled a meeting with NRCS personnel to discuss joint issues as well as the future of the contributions agreement.

Mr. Knauf has been working on the state meeting registration packets for districts and exhibitors.

Staff has been assisting the Creek County Conservation District as its secretary suffered a stroke in early December. She is doing well and should be back at work soon.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, Assistant Director, reported that staff attended 10 district board meetings this month. She stated that a public hearing is scheduled for January 16 at 10:00 a.m. on the carbon rules.

Ms. Phillips reported that the 2004 Grand Lake project wrapped up in December. This was a large project involving four conservation districts, the states of Kansas and Missouri, work with the Oklahoma State University and several other state and federal agencies. The Grand Lake Watershed Alliance Foundation will hold a public meeting on January 13 at 11:00 a.m. in Joplin to discuss the watershed.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program and Information Technology: Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director, reported that a work order was issued today for the LeFlore County Underground Mine #5 project.

Mr. Sharp has been collaborating with the National Watershed Coalition as well as the USGS to develop standards to define inundation areas below watershed dams.

Financial Management and Human Resources Division: Steve Coffman, Director, reported that he and Mr. Thralls appeared before the Affirmative Action Review Council and received approval of the agency's Affirmative Action Plan.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, Director, reported that the first meeting regarding the Kingfisher Flood Initiative will be held next week and that staff is working on legislation regarding downstream development in watersheds. He stated that a first draft of economic impact of conservation funds to the state has been completed.

He reported on an alleged violation of Cost-share Program rules in Payne County that is being investigated and gave an update on the watershed lawsuit in Sequoyah County.

Mr. Toole reported on watershed rehabilitation activities stating that Sandstone 16A is finalized, the final inspection for Cobb 2 is February 12, the contract for Double Creek 3 is proceeding rapidly and this will be the first watershed project where all sites are rehabilitated. Work will begin today on Sallisaw Creek sites 15, 16, and 20.

Mr. Toole stated that there continues to be increased violations of easements on watershed structures.

Administration: Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, stated that a portion of the bond issue is set aside for the South Caddo Conservation District's FEMA project. Currently, federal dollars are being used to pay for work which is scheduled to begin in February. Because of the objection to the bond issue this project may be delayed until we know when bond money would be available.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Clay Pope, Executive Director, reported that the state meeting registration packets have been sent and that Chesapeake Energy may donate another pickup to raffle this year. There will be no dance and no Tuesday lunch this year.

Mr. Pope reported that he and Sarah Love will be making a carbon presentation during the National Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in February. He has visited with the Oregon Executive Director who is heading the Western Coalition to team up on common issues.

The OACD has been in contact with the congressional delegation regarding the economic stimulus plan as well as the NACD and the National Watershed Coalition. The plan by the President-Elect's transition team does include money for upstream flood control and 319 programs. He expressed his disappointment with USDA and its lack of leadership in Washington, D.C. on the economic stimulus plan.

Mr. Pope also reported on the economic input plan being prepared by OSU for conservation dollars. The plan suggests that for every dollar spent for conservation there is a \$3 dollar economic impact.

Mr. Pope stated that the legislature will convene soon and he will be meeting with them regarding the bond issue, downstream development and other conservation issues.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, reported that NRCS employees Jim Henley, Jack Echroat and Gary Garman retired January 2.

Mr. Hilliard stated that he certified the completion of the NRCS audit on December 31 and thanked conservation districts for assisting with this daunting task. There were a number of audit exceptions that could not be completed and they now have until January 31 to finalize those.

Mr. Hilliard stated that he received funds for the Environmental Quality Incentive Program which contains a \$1.3 million deficit. He also received the full \$19 million for the Emergency Watershed Program. The NRCS will remain under a continuing resolution through March 6. Mr. Hilliard stated that the NRCS absorbed a 2.9% cost of living allowance and there is no money to fill vacancies.

USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY

No representative present.

NEXT MEETING

Mr. Thralls stated that the No Till Conference is scheduled for February 9-10, 2009 at the Sheraton Conference Center in Oklahoma City. He suggested that the time of the next meeting be changed to 9:00 a.m., delete the status reports section of the agenda, and attend the Conference upon adjournment of the Commission meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to hold the next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on February 9, 2009, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:00 a.m. and to delete the status reports from the agenda. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business a motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on February 9, 2008.



CHAIR

Oklahoma Conservation Commission

Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2008 – 2012



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Januray 5, 2009

Executive Summary

Life depends upon the earth's three basic natural resources: soil, water and air. Our quality of life is significantly influenced by productive soil, clean water, healthy air and the myriad of other natural resources that are generated from these three basic resources. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) is charged with administering programs and services that directly and indirectly conserve the three basic resources and their related natural resources. Utilizing the most effective delivery system devised by government, the Conservation Commission administers its programs and services through Oklahoma's 88 local conservation districts. Land conservation, flood prevention, preserving water quality, preservation of working farms and ranches, protecting wildlife and enhancing natural areas are outcomes of the Conservation Commission's strategic plan. These outcomes will improve the quality of life for current and future generations.

This strategic plan represents a review and revision to produce a more efficient and effective plan that is sensitive to current needs, existing trends and anticipated conditions. The three goals of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's strategic plan --- natural resource stewardship, conservation district capacity, and OCC capability --- build upon one other. To advance the stewardship of Oklahoma's natural resources to improve the quality of life for current and future generations, we must strengthen conservation districts by increasing their capacity. To strengthen conservation districts and address Oklahoma's changing natural resource conservation needs, we must enhance the capability of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Enhancing the capability of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission enables us to accomplish our legislative charge to conserve Oklahoma's natural resources to improve the quality of life in Oklahoma for today's citizens and future generations to come.

Renewable productivity of the state's working lands, and thus the assurance of a dependable and plentiful food supply are visibly enhanced with conservation cost share. Clean water, necessary for both industrial and personal well being and future economic growth, is promoted and protected through priority watershed programs. Flood damage to both urban and rural infrastructure is demonstrably reduced through maintenance and rehabilitation of Oklahoma's 2100 upstream flood control dams. Reclaiming the eyesores of damaged land whether in Tar Creek or as a result of unenlightened past mining methods will make this state more livable. These areas of environmental protection work hand in hand with the Governor's natural resources goals and are the heart and soul of the Conservation Commission's mission "to conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources working in collaboration with conservation districts and other partners, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma."

The accomplishment of the agency's mission occurs within the context of several business environment considerations that were assessed through the strategic planning process. The state's economy is relatively stable and should remain so because of its unique dependence on the combination of oil, manufacturing and agriculture. However, the agriculture economy is notably volatile making farmer and rancher participation in soil and water conservation very challenging. In addition, there are increasing pressures to regulate nonpoint source pollution of surface and ground water adding additional burdens to agriculture producers. In excess of \$500,000,000 of public monies have been spent in Oklahoma since 1972 to improve point source water treatment

facilities. Similar investments must be made to address nonpoint source pollution and ensure the quality of Oklahoma's waters.

The Commission's historic customer and support base has been rural and agricultural Oklahoma. Future indications are that population will continue to shift away from rural Oklahoma. Full time farmers and ranchers are becoming fewer. At the same time, the number of part time farmers and ranchers is increasing. Population shifts and trends in turn affect the composition of our customer base. The conservation district's and the Commission's methods of marketing programs and services must change to meet this growing trend. The message of land conservation, flood prevention, preserving water quality, preservation of working farms and ranches, protecting wildlife and enhancing natural areas carry significant importance to both rural and urban Oklahoma.

The most noticeable business trend within the conservation community is the steady decline in the number of employees within the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service workforce. Historically, the Commission and conservation districts have been dependent on NRCS technical expertise in a variety of areas. Over the past decade the Commission and districts have developed limited technical expertise. While our fundamental mission of delivering technical, financial, and educational assistance to private landowners remains the same, who and how those services are delivered have become more complicated. The need to deliver technical assistance from districts and the Commission will continue to grow.

Many state and federal agencies with responsibilities for natural resources compete for the same financial and human resources. However, the same agencies that we often view as our competitors, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and Department of Mines are also our partners. The Conservation Commission's overriding goal is to improve Oklahoma's renewable natural resources; therefore we promote a model of working collaboratively to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

The current production and internal environment at the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is one of an agency with a programmatic "can do" attitude. At the same time the agency recognizes the reality of limited human and financial resources. We have enjoyed success in developing and implementing new and innovative programs to address critical resource needs while still maintaining important traditional program functions. The strategic planning process has helped us identify structural changes needed to better address and focus the agency's attention to accomplishing our mission. It has also helped identify those areas needing a more prolonged period of study before further adjustments are made.

Over the next five years at least three new challenges will face the agency: operation, maintenance and rehabilitation of Oklahoma's 2100 flood control dams; protecting Oklahoma's water resources from agricultural pollution, and agriculture sequestration of carbon dioxide. Rehabilitation of flood control dams is authorized by federal statutes. To take advantage of 65% federal cost share for rehabilitation during the short window of authorization, the state must appropriate the 35% match required for local sponsor participation in the program. Additional funds will be needed to expand the USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and thus gain a fourfold match of federal funds as well as adequate state funding to match EPA funding for water quality protection. With the likelihood of a cap and trade system to limit atmospheric carbon dioxide the Commission and districts will play a vital

role within their statutory authorization by verifying carbon storage in agricultural lands as well as through carbon dioxide injection for the purpose of tertiary oil recovery. The agency's initial program is funded by EPA section 319 funds but will be designed to be self supporting through a fee structure.

In order to accomplish the goals set forth in the strategic plan, the Conservation Commission will request approximately \$8 million of new appropriation annually.

Natural resource conservation, protection and restoration are inseparably intertwined with Oklahoma's future well being. Oklahoma's conservation districts, the Conservation Commission and our federal partners in the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Department of Interior are committed to assuring that future is bright. This strategic plan is the culmination of many hours of diligent work to outline how that commitment will unfold and be implemented over the next five years. My sincere appreciation goes to the Commissioners who govern this agency, the dedicated men and women in conservation districts and in this agency. These are the people whose hard work, stewardship ethic and bold initiative help Oklahoma set the conservation standard for the nation.

Mike Thralls
Executive Director
Oklahoma Conservation Commission

OCC Strategic Plan

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Introduction

Pursuant to Section 45.3 of Title 62, a new strategic plan for FY-2008 through FY-2012 was developed per the Office of State Finance (OSF) instructions. OSF instructions encouraged an update of the existing two-year old plan using an abridged process to be approved by OSF. A process for updating the existing plan was developed and submitted to OSF for their approval. A Strategic Planning Team (SPT) was formed, an in-house facilitator was appointed and the team proceeded to engage the process approved by OSF. Midway through the first SPT meeting, the team agreed that a comprehensive revision of the existing plan was in order. An extension of time was requested from OSF based on a more exhaustive process and an extensive revision ensued. Each element of the strategic plan was addressed and a total re-write of the goals and key performance measures resulted, along with minor changes in other areas.

The Conservation Commission provides its services and programs through a delivery system that involves 62 agency employees, 88 local conservation district offices (subdivisions of state government), 440 conservation district directors, 180 local conservation district employees and over 300 employees of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. The strategic plan revision is a significant upgrade that involved input from all of our organization and partners.

The Strategic Planning Team is to be complimented for the quality work they performed in a relatively short period of time. We have more accurately defined our mission and reaffirmed our vision for the agency. Our goals, performance measures and action plans are more focused on improving efficiency and effectiveness as an agency committed to improving the quality of life for Oklahoman's and our visitors.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) is 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.

The OCC will fulfill its mission by:

- Providing Tools, Training and Support
- Finances, legal assistance and information, technical expertise, programs, data, policies, rules, criteria, training, equipment, people and guidance
- Providing Leadership;
- Guidance, policy, priorities, direction, goals and objectives, voice, accountability, coordination, feedback and dialogue
- Providing Planning and Assessment
- Providing Public Information
- Providing Protection: Human health and safety, Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) safety, Water Quality (WQ), flooding, soils, wildlife, environment
- Providing Restoration
- Providing Education
- Providing liaison services between federal and state agencies and conservation districts

The OCC will fulfill its mission on behalf of the following:

- Citizens of Oklahoma
- Conservation Districts
- OCC Staff and Commissioners
- Local, State and Federal Agencies
- State Legislature
- General Public
- Private Organizations
- Flora and Fauna
- Educational Institutions
- Congress
- Tribes

Vision Statement

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources.

Values and Behaviors

Rules of Conduct

Personal accountability and responsibility are two core values that are seen as critical for the employees as well as the governing body of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Those characteristics serve as the basis for the strength of our Agency. These values, coupled with integrity, give rise to the type of behavior we desire in our business environment. The values and behaviors that are important to an organization must start on a personal, individual level for each member of the organization. When the conduct of our employees in our daily operations adheres to these values we project the image we all desire ...that of an efficient professional organization which values its human resources, demands excellence and can stand on its reputation, track record and work product at every level.

We expect our employees as well as our governing body to function with loyalty to our mission as well as reflect the leadership necessary for its success. Our staff will support leadership and our governing body by providing honest, accurate and timely information based on best professional judgment and delivered with respect and courtesy. We will strive to maintain positive, productive, professional relationships even at times when we agree to disagree.

Our staff will treat coworkers and clients with courtesy and respect. Our staff will make timeliness, communication, and quality of work products a priority. We acknowledge a wide spread workforce with varying levels of intensity in daily supervision. We acknowledge the increase in program responsibilities that have preceded and exceeded an appropriate increase in human resources. Based on the core values and behaviors mentioned above we will focus our efforts and look within our resources for creative strategies to manage human and financial resources to reach our objectives. In the face of adversity we will remember those core values and rules of conduct which will enable us to weather the storm and remain true to our mission.

Effective incorporation of these core values will create an agency image counter to the negative image sometimes attributed to state government and the bureaucracy. Such a positive image by a state agency that honors responsibility, accountability, honesty and effective communication will enhance the ability to accomplish our mission.

Long-term Goals

1. Advance the stewardship of Oklahoma's natural resources to improve the quality of life for current and future generations.
 2. Strengthen Oklahoma's grass roots natural resource conservation delivery system by increasing the capacity of conservation districts 25% over the next 5 years.
 3. Address Oklahoma's changing natural resource conservation needs by enhancing the capability of the OCC 25% over the next 5 years.
-

OCC Key Performance Measures And Agency Wide Action Plans

Goal 1: Advance the stewardship of Oklahoma's natural resources to improve the quality of life for current and future generations.

KPM 1: Soil Quality

Description: Sustain or improve soil quality by increasing and diversifying the number of participants implementing best management practices through the state locally led cost share program.

Unit of Measure: # of participants – 700/yr

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	522	FY – 2009	700	FY – 2010	700
FY – 2008	500			FY – 2011	700
				FY – 2012	700

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Provide at least \$2.5 million each year in state appropriated funding for the state Locally Led Cost Share Program.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Administer the LLCSP in a user-friendly, efficient and effective manner that encourages district participation. Rules – Guidelines – Training – Assistance	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaborate with NRCS to provide technical assistance and training to CD's for certifying design and implementation of conservation practices according to NRCS standards and specification.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaborate with NRCS, ARS, and OSU to identify criteria and develop process for measuring soil quality.	X	X	X			

KPM 2: Water Quality

Description: The OCC will reduce nonpoint source pollution (NPS) loading statewide.

Unit of Measure: Tons of pollutants removed

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	67 tons	FY – 2009	67 tons	FY – 2010	67 tons
FY – 2008	67 tons			FY – 2011	67 tons
				FY – 2012	67 tons

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Monitor water quality, habitat, and biology in 250 streams in the State through a rotating program lasting five years, beginning in 2002.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Update the current Unified Watershed Assessment (UWA) specifically for NPS or implement some other revised NPS watershed prioritization within two years as the current UWA becomes obsolete	X	X	X	X	X	X
Implement, demonstrate, and educate to remedy water quality problems associated with NPS pollution in watersheds each year, depending on resources and current needs in the priority watersheds.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide training for watershed coordinators and advisory group members on current methods and technologies in watershed management through seminars, symposiums, and various other training sessions.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Follow-up monitor and evaluate performance of each implementation project.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continue to coordinate the State of Oklahoma's NPS Working Group to advise and assist in planning NPS programs to control NPS pollution through 2015.	X	X	X	X	X	X
The NPS Program will contribute to federally mandated State planning requirements including NPS components to UWA, 303(d) list, EQIP planning.	X	X	X	X	X	X

The NPS Program will contribute to and assist with the Oklahoma Water Resources Board's development of biological criteria, nutrient criteria and sediment criteria as related to water quality standards.	X	X	X	X	X	X
The NPS program will include NPS watershed planning and technical assistance to conservation districts and other entities.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coordinate and conduct training programs, sample collection, and quality assurance activities for Blue Thumb volunteers involved in sampling stream and ground waters of the State.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide educational tools and technical assistance to volunteers and the conservation districts in which programs exist in order to increase the effectiveness of Blue Thumb activities in these districts.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continually seek new volunteers as well as new partners to support Blue Thumb programs in additional Conservation Districts throughout the State.	X	X	X	X	X	X

KPM 3: Wetlands

Description: The OCC will promote a net gain of wetlands in Oklahoma.

Unit of Measure: Net wetland acres gained

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	200	FY – 2009	200	FY – 2010	200
FY – 2008	200			FY – 2011	200
				FY – 2012	200

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Coordinate the state wetlands working group to facilitate a cooperative working effort amongst agencies, bring additional resources to bear on wetlands conservation efforts, and provide an opportunity for information exchange.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Increase wetland restoration efforts through landowner education and implementation projects.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide common sense wetlands information and technical assistance to conservation districts and Oklahoma citizens.	X	X	X	X	X	X

KPM 4: Reduce Flooding

Description: The potential for flooding will be reduced by operating, maintaining or rehabilitating the 2,105 small watershed flood control structures throughout the state.

Unit of Measure: # of structures – 2,105/year

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	2,105	FY – 2009	2,105	FY – 2010	2,105
FY – 2008	2,105			FY – 2011	2,105
				FY – 2012	2,105

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Assist 15 CD's per year with the rehabilitation process.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop system, processes and tools for engaging and assisting CD's with rehabilitation projects. Education – Assistance – Public Affairs media packet – Gov't. Affairs strategy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct two (2) Rehabilitation Program seminars per year for CD's.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Conduct O&M workshops at least every third year for CD's.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide at least \$1.2 million in state appropriated funds for the 35% local sponsor cost share required for the federal Watershed Rehabilitation Program.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide at least \$750,000 in state appropriated funds to CD's for O&M.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide technical assistance with operations and maintenance (O&M) to the 68 CD's with structures.	X	X	X	X	X	X

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KPM 5: Reclaim Scarred Lands

Description: OCC, working with conservation districts and other units of government, will reclaim abandoned mine sites that are hazardous to the public and/or degrading the environment.

Unit of Measure: # of projects and acres reclaimed

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	4 – 210	FY – 2009	5 – 325	FY – 2010	5 – 325
FY – 2008	52 – 225			FY – 2011	5 – 325
				FY – 2012	5 – 325

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Administer between \$1.75 to \$5 million each year in the Federally funded abandoned mine land (AML) reclamation programs.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaborate with the Office of Surface Mining, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other state and federal agencies in the oversight of the reclamation programs.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Design reclamation projects utilizing both the Oklahoma Conservation Commission staff and the private sector.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Permits approved by the Department of Environmental Quality	X	X	X	X	X	X
Respond to all AML emergencies within 24 hours of notification that a potential emergency exists.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Using the most cost effective methods, provide temporary and permanent vegetation on completed reclamation projects utilizing conservation districts and/or the private sector.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Field investigation of potential AML projects in Rogers, Tulsa, and Wagoner Counties.			X			

Field investigation of potential AML projects.				X	X	X
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KPM 6: Conservation Education

Description: Increase the knowledge and awareness of Oklahoma's natural resources and improve the natural resource decision making process of Oklahoma's citizens through conservation education efforts.

Unit of Measure: # of clients reached – 65,000/yr

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	63,142	FY – 2009	65,000	FY – 2010	65,000
FY – 2008	69,654			FY – 2011	65,000
				FY – 2012	65,000

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Coordinate conservation education activities among OCC's divisions to eliminate duplication of effort and increase cooperation, coordination and networking among divisions.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coordinate conservation education activities among state agencies as mandated in Title 27A-Section 1-3-101(F)(8) in order to eliminate duplication of effort and increase cooperation, coordination and networking among agencies.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coordinate and conduct training programs for formal and non-formal educators on the soil, water and wetland resources in the state.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Provide educational tools and technical assistance to conservation districts in order to increase the effectiveness of district education efforts.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Goal 2: Strengthen Oklahoma’s grass roots natural resource conservation delivery system by increasing the capacity of conservation districts 25% over the next 5 years.

KPM 1: District Revenue

Description: Identify, diversify and increase the conservation district revenue stream.

Unit of Measure: Increase in non-appropriated funds. (Calculated from a baseline of \$580,000 in FY 2006.)

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	30%	FY – 2009	32%	FY – 2010	25%
FY – 2008	14%			FY – 2011	25%
				FY – 2012	25%

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Pursue funding opportunities with new and existing partners public, private, and tribal.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pursue a funding strategy for the newly established equipment revolving fund.			X	X		

KPM 2: District Employees

Description: Improve the capabilities of conservation district employees in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation districts.

Unit of Measure: Improved retention rate of employees.

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	91%	FY – 2009	95%	FY – 2010	95%
FY – 2008	92%			FY – 2011	95%
				FY – 2012	95%

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Implement study to explore pros/cons of district employees becoming state employees.	X	X	X	X		
Provide training and professional development opportunities to increase employee retention rates.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Implement one-on-one new employee orientation within first 2 weeks of hire.		X	X	X	X	X

KPM 3: District Directors

Description: Improve the capabilities of conservation district directors in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of conservation districts.

Unit of Measure: Number of contacts

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007	1025	FY – 2009	2500	FY – 2010	3000
FY – 2008	1756			FY – 2011	3000
				FY – 2012	3000

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Increase the training and leadership development opportunities available to district directors.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Increase diversity of conservation district boards by identifying and implementing improved methods of recruitment.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Improve financial management capabilities of conservation districts.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Goal 3: Address Oklahoma’s changing natural resource conservation needs by enhancing the capability of the OCC 25% over the next 5 years.

KPM 1: Organizational Development

Description: Identify, better utilize and pursue the human and financial resources needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency.

Unit of Measure: Percent (%) of Strategic Plan actions accomplished/year

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007		FY – 2009	90%	FY – 2010	90%
FY – 2008				FY – 2011	90%
				FY – 2012	90%

Agency-wide Action Plans – Cont.	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Utilize strategic planning in the day to day operations of the agency. Review performance and make revisions as agency tasks are completed and/or agency responsibilities change.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop and/or improve the resources available to employees. These resources to include personnel handbook, affirmative action, employee performance evaluation, and technology.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strengthen the existing workforce by engaging leadership development, professional development, participation in professional organizations, continued training and cross training within the agency.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Improve and address the workplace environment as needs and responsibilities change.	X	X	X	X	X	X

KPM 2: Communications

Description: Improve communications with the general public, conservation districts and commission staff.

Unit of Measure: Number of People Reached

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007		FY – 2009	750,000	FY – 2010	750,000
FY – 2008				FY – 2011	750,000
				FY – 2012	750,000

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Cooperate with the NRCS on a year-long media campaign to provide the print media with feature articles on conservation success stories in Oklahoma.	X	X				
Upgrade conservation display materials for all conservation districts for their use at public events and display Commission information at farm shows, trade shows and related events.	X	X				
Facilitate the production of opinion/editorials on conservation and distribute them to state newspapers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Produce monthly news releases on conservation activities and projects for use by conservation districts with their local newspapers and produce monthly agency newsletter to facilitate communication with districts, district directors and interested public.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continually improve the agency's web site by adding current news features on conservation projects and activities.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Continually improve e-mail communications with conservation districts by upgrading computer hardware and software and providing training for employees.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Improve communication between the Commission and districts by increasing Commission staff presence at district board meetings and district functions.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Improve internal communications among staff by holding monthly principal staff meetings, quarterly full staff meetings, division field days, conducting joint division staff meetings, and continually upgrading the agency e-mail system.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Maintain open communications with principal conservation partners (NRCS and OACD) through a monthly teleconference and through formal and informal discussions and meetings between management teams.	X	X	X	X	X	X

KPM 3: Partnerships

Description: Enhance and expand partnerships with federal, state, local and private entities.

Unit of measure: Dollars

Success will be measured by the amount of new dollars, human resources, equipment and technology that are contributed by existing and new partners for use by the Commission and conservation districts in advancing our mission.

	Actual		Budget		Estimated
FY – 2007		FY – 2009		FY – 2010	\$6 million
FY – 2008				FY – 2011	\$6 million
				FY – 2012	\$6 million

Agency-wide Action Plans	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
Aggressively work with key federal partners (NRCS, EPA and OSM) to maximize federal conservation funds coming to the state and seek out other federal partners (e.g. tribes) to identify and secure new federal conservation funds.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Actively participate in state efforts to reduce duplication and improve efficiency. Maintain a presence in the following groups: Environmental Education Coordinating Committee, the Geographic Information Systems Council, the Non-point Source Working Group, the Wetlands Working Group, and the State Water Quality Monitoring Council.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Explore ways of partnering with and accessing local governmental resources including county commissioners, municipal governments, conservancy districts and school districts.	X	X	X	X	X	X
Explore ways of partnering with and accessing resources from businesses, non-profits, and associations.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Business Environment Assessment

There are eight dimensions of the business environment within which the Oklahoma Conservation Commission functions that were assessed by the agency. Each division of the agency was asked to gather information using a wide variety of resources including current practices, the Legislature, interviews, comparable state or federal agencies, and Internet research. The following is a synopsis of those findings.

Economy

The state's economy is becoming more diverse and income levels are on the rise. An increasingly affluent population will likely spend more time and dollars on outdoor recreational pursuits which many of our conservation programs directly impact. While the state's overall economy has prospered over the past 10 years the agricultural economy has not improved at the same pace. The Commission and districts' primary customer group—farmers and ranchers, do not share the same optimism of the economy as the non-farm population does. Their ability to participate in conservation cost-share programs or invest in conservation practices without government assistance is directly impacted by the relatively poor farm economy. The state cost-share programs administered by OCC are critical to preserving working farms and ranches, land conservation, preserving water quality, protecting wildlife and enhancing natural areas for the benefit of all citizens.

Social/Political/Demographics

Population Shifts - Our historic customer and support base has been rural and agricultural Oklahoma. The population and economic shift away from rural Oklahoma and agriculture will be reflected by a similar shift in political power. The state legislature will increasingly consist of a larger number of urban and suburban legislators.

Lifestyle Changes, Affluence Levels, and Education Levels - With steadily increasing amounts of leisure time there is a growing demand for outdoor recreational opportunities. Quality of life issues are receiving more attention. The conservation work performed by the Commission and the districts can have a major impact on quality of life issues (water quality, air quality, wildlife habitat, public health and safety). The public's demand for outdoor recreational opportunities and clean water will likely drive future funding needs for conservation programs.

As the educational level of Oklahoma's population rises there will likely be higher expectations for environmental protection and natural resource conservation. The Commission faces the challenge of being able to attract and maintain a highly educated workforce with a wide range of expertise. We are challenged to attract expertise in soils, water quality, engineering, reclamation, public administration, human resources, computer technology, and risk management to name a few. Salary levels for Commission and district employees lag far behind comparable state, federal and private sector employees in similar jobs.

Government and Regulatory

The Commission anticipates changes in the level of responsibility regarding nonpoint source total maximum daily loads (TMDL's). The agency may play a larger role in the future in defining loading reduction goals for watersheds impaired by nonpoint source pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is developing new guidance for EPA-sponsored water monitoring programs. The OCC Water Quality Program has proactively adjusted its rotating basin monitoring program as necessary to follow this guidance. However, additional changes may be necessary as the guidance becomes finalized.

Many OCC state programs are linked directly to federal programs and funding: the Water Quality Program is limited by Federal Clean Water Act funding; the Abandoned Mine Land Program is limited by the U.S. Department of Interior Office of Surface Mining funding, and; the Conservation Programs Division's Rehabilitation of Upstream Flood Control Structures is limited by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service funding. The levels of federal funding can change dramatically from year to year based on the nation's economy and political decisions, thus impacting OCC's ability to perform.

Competition

The Conservation Commission's competitors are primarily in the public sector. Many state and federal agencies with responsibilities for natural resources compete for the same financial and human resources. However, the same agencies that we often view as our competitors, such as Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, and the Department of Mines to name a few, are also our partners. The Conservation Commission's ultimate goal is to improve Oklahoma's renewable natural resources; therefore it chooses to work in the many areas of its responsibility using a collaborative model as opposed to a competitive one.

Technology

Communication is and will continue to be a vital key in enabling the Conservation Commission to fulfill its mission of conserving, protecting and restoring Oklahoma's natural resources. The OCC will maintain up to date awareness and position itself to take advantage of current and future technological advances in communicating its mission to its customers through a strategic partnership with conservation districts and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The Internet has become the most revolutionizing communication media since the invention of the printing press. Presently, the use of the Internet for fulfilling the agency mission to its customers is limited. Although the OCC does have a high speed network connection to the Internet, most of the conservation districts do not. This limits access to conservation resources at the local district office. The OCC will work toward obtaining high speed internet access for all conservation districts. This may be accomplished by working with NRCS, the state regents OneNet system or creative partnerships with local community Internet Service Providers (ISP's).

It will be necessary for OCC to stay abreast of technological changes in computer systems, office machine systems, electronic networking, data capture systems and software (enterprise management, computer-aided design, geographic information system and natural resource management). OCC will take advantage of software environments that are constantly evolving into more robust and user friendly systems allowing focus on using technology to accomplish a task rather than conforming users to time consuming and inefficient software processes.

There are several areas within the OCC where the application of GIS and GPS technologies would greatly improve the ability to capture and manage natural resource data. The application of GIS and GPS technology at the conservation district level will be expanded. Impediments to this have been a lack of funding for equipment and training as well as having qualified people in technical job classifications in the districts who can apply these technologies to local conservation and natural resource management issues.

The OCC has a number of employees who are eager to adopt new technologies for accomplishing tasks related to their work assignments. The OCC has made a significant investment in new computers, servers and updated software which will enhance productivity. It is necessary to upgrade the training and technical ability of conservation district employees in order to address natural resource management issues and improve the use of GIS and GPS technology in several areas of activity within the agency. The Commission will work to improve coordination between NRCS and the OCC in providing computer and high-speed internet support for conservation districts and provide conservation districts the technology tools that will enable them to have a local website for citizens to access information about issues of local concern.

Markets and Customers

There is an increasing clientele of landowners who are part-time or hobby farmers living on the urban-rural interface. Historically, our customers were traditional farmers and ranchers who knew the types of programs and services conservation districts provided. Today, many of Oklahoma's landowners are part-time farmers, small lot/ranchette, or absentee landowners. Our methods of marketing programs and services must adjust to meet this growing trend. The Commission and districts will also have to find ways to communicate the value of our programs to urban/suburban legislators (water quality, recreation, wildlife habitat, quality of life issues) to be successful in this changing environment.

Industry Trends and Best Practices

One of the major industry trends within the conservation community is the steady decline in the number of employees within the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service workforce, our primary federal partner. Historically, the Commission and conservation districts have been dependent on NRCS technical expertise in a variety of areas. Over the past decade the Commission and districts have developed technical expertise in a variety of areas that now matches or exceeds that of our federal partner. While the partnership's fundamental mission of delivering technical, financial, and educational assistance to private landowners remains the same, who and how those services are delivered is increasingly a state or local district function.

In a review of other states' conservation programs, OCC found states with larger and more stable funding for best management practice cost-share programs. Many also had technical assistance made available by local conservation districts. In addition, the OCC found innovative or different methods of organizing conservation districts. Some states have fewer, larger districts, others have smaller more numerous districts. In some states all directors are elected on the general ballot. One state conducts interviews with all prospective directors. Conservation districts in some states have taxing authority.

Weaknesses the Commission recognizes are an aging of local grassroots leadership and a culture sometimes slow to innovate or move ahead.

Production and Internal Environment

The current production and internal environment at the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is one of an agency with a programmatic "can do" attitude in spite of limited human and financial resources. The agency has enjoyed success in developing and implementing new and innovative programs to address critical resource needs while maintaining important traditional program areas. The price of success has been the neglect of other areas such as vehicle and equipment maintenance and replacement, adequate staffing for newly mandated program responsibilities, and adequate work space to house agency staff. In the long term these issues effect production.

Recent changes in the agency program and management structure represent a first step in matching appropriate human resources to current program priorities.

Recent investments in information technology hardware and software resources at the state office level have resulted in needed capability upgrades. Efforts are underway to insure that this investment in hardware and software benefits both district and agency productivity. Information technology field resources are not uniformly distributed and include outdated less efficient technology. Additional resources will be committed to this area of concern over the next five years.

In order to improve conditions internally the agency will pursue increased efficiency utilizing current resources. We will also have to seek additional human and financial resources as needed.

We recognize a need for improvement in budgeting and financial analysis. We recognize the demand for increasingly sophisticated technical employees at the state and field levels. We acknowledge the necessity to provide our existing workforce with both technical and employee support to cope effectively with the current internal environment while maintaining productivity. We recognize the need to adequately compensate district and state employees.

Financial Performance

The Conservation Commission has experienced a significant increase in expenditures in the ten-year period from FY 1999 to FY 2009. The increase in expenditures occurred in three major program areas: water quality, operation and maintenance of upstream flood control structures and the conservation cost-share program. Most of the increase in the water quality program area came from the addition of Environmental Protection Agency Clean Water Act funds. New state general fund appropriations were added for the operation and maintenance of flood control structures. Funding for the state conservation cost-share program has come from several sources, most notably the establishment of the Conservation Infrastructure Revolving Fund (CIRF). The initial authorization period for the fund will expire in FY 2010. The increased expenditures by the agency can be attributed to several factors: 1) an increasing emphasis on controlling nonpoint source water pollution; 2) protection of the billion dollar investment in flood control structures in the state; 3) the importance in working with landowners to put conservation practices on the ground to conserve land and preserve water quality; and 4) federal financial commitment to reclaim the Tar Creek superfund site.

In the period covered by the strategic plan we propose increases in several program areas. In the flood protection program area, federal funding through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service makes money available for the rehabilitation of dams. Since Oklahoma has over 2100 dam structures it is critical that we participate in this rehabilitation effort. This program requires a state match (35%). The Commission will need to secure either state general fund monies or monies from some other source in order to capture adequate federal funds thus ensuring the rehabilitation of flood control structures. Another significant need for increased programmatic funds is for the Locally Led Conservation Cost-share Program. While eligible to be funded from CIRF cost share is funded only when rehabilitation needs have been fully funded which sometimes may leave no funds for that purpose. A larger permanent base funding source needs to be secured for rehabilitation, cost share CREP and priority watershed protection. The other major funding need identified in the strategic plan is the upgrade of our conservation district employee's pay. Currently, district employees with only a few exceptions are paid at a wage lower than comparable state employees. In addition, the responsibilities of our conservation districts and their employees continues to increase. To be able to provide quality service and program delivery at the local level, there must be a larger investment in district employees pay and training. Funds for this initiative will need to be put in our base budget and will need to be appropriated from the state general fund.

We are requesting limited funds for increasing the number of Commission employees. We used the strategic planning process to revise our organizational structure to more efficiently manage agency operations. Several existing positions have been revised and redirected to ensure that we are maximizing our personnel resources. There is a critical need, however, to equalize pay for Commission employees consistent with that of other state agencies. Currently, Commission employees are paid 18-20% less than like positions in other agencies. This has a very negative effect on employee moral and in time will negatively impact the ability of the Commission to perform effectively.

Because of the constant challenges the state faces in land conservation, flood protection, water quality, preservation of working farms and ranches, protecting wildlife and enhancing natural areas we anticipate broad based support for increasing the state's investment in Commission programs. Our strategic plan outlines an appropriate and aggressive approach to natural resource management that will enhance the quality of life in Oklahoma.