

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

# CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

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## Successful Eucha/Spavinaw Water Quality Improvement Projects Extended

Located in far northeast Oklahoma, Spavinaw Creek is an important tributary to Lake Eucha, and eventually, Lake Spavinaw. These sister lakes provide water to citizens in Tulsa, Jay, and Spavinaw with total service nearing half a million people. Lakes Eucha and Spavinaw have been on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) list of impaired waters since

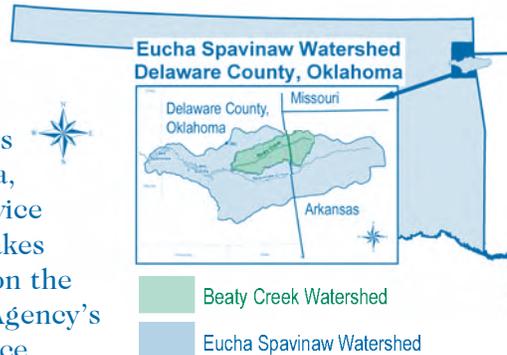
at least 2002 due to high nutrient levels (primarily phosphorus) and low dissolved oxygen. Both reservoirs are considered to be eutrophic, experiencing excessive algae growth in response to the high nutrients, particularly phosphorus. These algal blooms have resulted in significant taste and odor problems and have led to considerable water treatment costs for the City of Tulsa.

To improve the water quality of Lakes Eucha and Spavinaw and their supplying streams, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and the Delaware County Conservation District initiated a series of watershed projects beginning in 1998 to address the significant sources of pollution. Funded by the EPA's 319 Nonpoint Source Program, the Oklahoma legislature, and local landowners, these projects work to implement "Best Management Practices" (BMPs) in order to reduce nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. Nonpoint sources are those that supply pollutants to surface waters diffusely, rather than delivery from a single location such as a pipe outfall. These sources typically involve land management activities that contribute bacteria, sediment, and nutrients to surface water as a result of runoff during and following rainfall events.

Through these projects, BMPs are installed on a voluntary, cost-share basis with approximately 60 percent of the cost being paid by EPA funds and the remainder funded by the state and participating landowners. The process of planning and implementing these practices involves one-on-one meetings with landowners to evaluate current practices and educate them about things they can do to improve land production while conserving natural resources on their land. Approximately 200 landowners in Delaware County have participated in these projects to date, resulting in a total of \$3,524,606 spent in Spavinaw Creek projects.

BMPs for the project were selected by the local stakeholders in the

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*"Courage is resistance  
to fear, mastery of fear  
- not absence of fear."*

*~Mark Twain*

### Our vision:

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources.

### Our mission:

To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts and other partners, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

[www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)

## Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on "Calendar of Events" at [www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting**, Aug. 4, Agriculture Bldg., Oklahoma City

**Grazinglands Strategies**, Aug. 7, Dewey County Conservation District

**Oklahoma RC&D Summit**, Aug. 10-12, Oklahoma City

**NACD South Central Region Meeting**, Aug. 21-23, Hot Springs, Ark.

**Labor Day Holiday**, Sept. 1

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting**, Sept. 4, Deer Creek Conservation District, 300 S. Broadway, Weatherford

**Blue Thumb Training**, Sept. 13-14, Tulsa

**Women in Ag State Conference**, Sept. 18-19, Moore/Norman Tech Center, Oklahoma City

**Joe Schneider**, OCC/WQ watershed coordinator supervisor, was commended for being named Employee of the Year and recognized for 10 years of service OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

**Karla Beatty**, OCC/CP education coordinator, was recognized at the July Commission meeting for 10 years of service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

## In our thoughts...

Brad Nelson, Bryan CD equipment manager, lost his son Josh Hollingsworth, age 19, in a car accident June 27.

Murray County CD Director John Cagle's wife Keatha passed away June 29.

Reva Maddox, East Woods CCD secretary, lost her father in June.

Jim Leach, OCC/WQ Cost Share/ Finance director, lost his father July 4.

Candy Sexton, Okfuskee County CD secretary, lost her father July 6.

Frank Acker, Little River CD manager, is recuperating after being treated for blood clots.

## Congratulations!

Erica Bartolina, daughter-in-law of Oklahoma County CD manager Don Bartolina and wife Darlene, will compete in pole vaulting at the Olympics in China. Her coach is her husband Michael, son of Don and Darlene.

watershed functioning through a Watershed Advisory Group (WAG). Established by the local conservation district, the WAG comprises representatives from principle stakeholder groups including cattlemen, poultry growers, dairymen, representatives of the City of Tulsa, and conservation district board members. Upon selection of BMPs most appropriate to address the water quality challenges, the WAG then determines the cost-share rates for each BMP based on conservation priority. Practices known to be most effective at reducing pollution or more difficult for the landowner to maintain receive a higher cost-share rate than those which are widely implemented but less effective for water quality improvement goals.

Water quality monitoring associated with the Beaty Creek Project demonstrated that a similar implementation effort reduced phosphorus loading to Lake Eucha by at least 31 percent over loading rates without BMPs. This water quality success, combined with overwhelming local support from landowners, the Delaware County Conservation District, and USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, has resulted in a recent approval of a two-year extension for the program to spend an additional \$1.5 million in BMP installation. In total, the two programs will spend at least \$5 million dollars to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the Eucha/Spavinaw watershed.

Joe Schneider, OCC watershed coordinator supervisor, explained that the success of water quality projects such as these in Spavinaw and Beaty Creeks is only possible because landowners have willingly invested time and money to install BMPs. Through this voluntary, cost share approach, landowners are able to make improvements to their operation and land that also benefit water quality in the area. To date, participants have contributed over \$1.2 million of their own funds plus countless hours of time toward practices that improve the area along streams (termed the riparian zone), improve and maintain healthy pastures, stabilize streambanks, dispose of animal and human wastes properly, and facilitate effective fertilizer application.

In addition to these 319 projects, OCC, conservation districts, the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, USDA Farm Services Agency, NRCS, and EPA are partners in a follow-up program to implement additional management efforts in the watershed. This program, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), will devote at least \$20.6 million dollars towards the long-term protection of riparian areas in the Eucha/Spavinaw and Illinois River watersheds. As part of the overall CREP, the City of Tulsa has partnered with the Land Legacy to devote at least \$1.25 million towards the permanent protection of riparian areas in the watershed.

In addition to the implementation, Eucha/Spavinaw watershed project staff have provided many educational events and workshops to area producers and citizens. Since 2006 more than 300 people have toured the Spavinaw Creek Demonstration Farm near Jay, which showcases many different BMPs on a single farm. Project staff have also implemented self-guided tours for individuals.



A structure like the one above can be used for either feeding cattle or manure storage. In front is a freeze-proof watering tank. All three practices help keep animal waste out of streams.

# Governor Henry and Secretary of Agriculture Peach Visit Cimarron County by Kiley Whited, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist

Gov. Brad Henry and Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach visited Boise City on July 16 to survey the drought conditions and discuss issues with concerned residents. After landing at the Boise City airport around noon the Governor's party proceeded downtown to tour businesses and visit the local newspaper. Gov. Henry met with Cimarron County citizens outside the courthouse, where he listened to and addressed the concerns of the crowd. There, local NRCS District Conservationist Cherrie Brown and Cimarron County Conservation District Programs Coordinator Iris Imler greeted the Governor and Secretary and expressed their appreciation for the visit and for the Governor's assistance in conservation efforts statewide. The Governor reciprocated gratitude for the conservation work that the federal and local partnership has accomplished in the county.

Next the Governor's party met with a small group of local agricultural producers, business owners and county and federal conservationists at a county barn. Gov. Henry and Sec. Peach fielded questions ranging from direct emergency relief for producers and businesses to the state's role in helping local landowners generate income through nontraditional means.

Gov. Henry explained that if the federal disaster status was approved, impacted producers would be eligible for low interest loans to relieve economic hardships. The concerns of local business owners seeking aid to ease the economic downturn caused by producers' troubles rippling through the community were also discussed. The Governor expressed doubt that Small Business Administration loans would be available, but that aid to farmers and ranchers should translate into help for businesses indirectly.

Livestock production issues focused mainly on School Land Trust grazing leases and recent notice to some lease holders that they must remove cattle because of lack of forage and poor range conditions. Gov. Henry and Sec. Peach expressed their regret that it was impossible by law to forgive lease payments owed to the state. Sec. Peach did, however, suggest that due to these circumstances he would consider working out a compromise in which lease holders might be eligible for free or reduced grazing privileges in future seasons if livestock owners formally submitted requests to his office.

Livestock owners also expressed their concern about the ongoing litigation involving critical grazing of federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. Both Gov. Henry and Sec. Peach reiterated the state's position in supporting Oklahoma ranchers' option to responsibly use these lands, as the extreme

drought and high price of forages have left few other options and thus jeopardized the survival of many livestock operations in the county. Sec. Peach assured the group of the Governor's commitment to this issue, noting Oklahoma had as yet been the only state to formally challenge the ruling to halt critical grazing of CRP. (Editor's note: A federal judge in Seattle ruled July 24 that ranchers who had prepared to use CRP land for haying and grazing could do so for a limited time.)

The Governor was also asked about aid beyond immediate disaster assistance. Specifically, how his administration is addressing possibilities of a less predictable climate and decreasing water supply due to groundwater overuse, causing producers to seek less traditional sources of income from their land. In response, Gov. Henry outlined the state's support for development of transmission lines for electricity generated by wind power on land leased from local producers in the Panhandle. He said his administration also supports development of technology to convert alternative, less input-intensive crops, such as native prairie grasses, to usable fuel. Although still in development, once it is in use the process could provide a market for a potentially more profitable and sustainable crop than what has been traditionally grown in Cimarron County.

After discussion at the county barn, the Governor's party drove northeast of Boise City to observe the devastation to crops and native range. The party then left the Boise City area to survey conditions en route to Guymon where they returned by air to the Capitol.



Above, Gov. Brad Henry, third from left, and Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach, far right, toured Cimarron County drought conditions on July 16. At right, a news crew from Nippon Television documented the drought damage.



## No Dust Bowl: Modern practices have kept agricultural crisis from being worse

By Terry Peach, Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture

During my recent visits to Cimarron County and other parts of the Oklahoma Panhandle I have been constantly reminded of the great strides made in agricultural practices during the past century. The drought conditions that plague our producers in the Panhandle rival or surpass those of the 1930s in every way but one: no Dust Bowl.

This nation's soil conservation efforts were born as a response to the Dust Bowl days and today it is easy to see exactly how effective modern conservation practices really are. The lack of moisture has effectively halted any type of vegetative growth (unless the land is irrigated), but the soil is not blowing — at least we aren't experiencing dust storms of the intensity they saw in the "dirty thirties."

The conservation practices being used are literally saving the land for the future when the drought is finally broken. Sure, there are some instances of wind erosion on the parched acres of Cimarron County, but the damage has been limited by good conservation practices.

Today our farmers and ranchers fighting to survive this tenacious drought are also struggling with a problem our forbears didn't face: greatly increased input costs. Fuel, fertilizer and seed grain prices have increased up to four times during the past year. Some of the farmers I spoke with earlier this month in Cimarron County said that even if they had irrigation wells in place, they couldn't afford the fuel it would take to irrigate their land.

These higher costs of production are challenges faced by all Oklahoma agriculturists — indeed the entire American agricultural industry. Just as our producers were forced to learn and practice good conservation techniques back in the 1930s, we must now learn to do more with less, develop alternative fuels and become even more efficient and sustainable.

We have merely scratched the surface in our research of alternative fuels and energy sources. Ethanol, biodiesel, solar and wind energy are areas we are currently exploring for the future. The future will undoubtedly bring more possibilities for exploration for our energy needs.

The development of seed genetics that require less fertilization and protection from weeds and diseases is under way also. Drought-resistant varieties of grains and other crops are subjects of research and could help reduce our need for irrigation and reduce the costs of production while ensuring food for the world.

Agriculture today faces a crisis just as it did during the Dust Bowl era. I believe programs such as Gov. Brad Henry has initiated to study and promote renewable fuels and our land grant universities' research capabilities will ultimately prevail and give us the tools we need to overcome this 21st-century challenge.

The future of our state and our nation depends upon our success in these arenas. I know we will meet these challenges with the same results as our predecessors did so many years ago.



### WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops  
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•  
Project Learning Tree  
Workshops or Trunks  
Christina Stallings, 405.521-3864

•  
Project WILD Workshops  
Lisa Anderson, 405.521-3857

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