

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

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Jim Grego Appointed as Area V Conservation Commissioner

James "Jim" Grego of Wilburton has been appointed by Gov. Brad Henry to serve a five-year term as Area V Conservation Commission beginning July 1, 2010. He will fill the position vacated by Virginia Kidd who is retiring from that post as of June 30, after serving three five-year terms. Mr. Grego has served on the Latimer County Conservation District board of directors since Sept. 5, 1995.



Grego was born on a ranch in southwest Latimer County to Bill and Helen Grego in 1955, and is the eighth of 12 children. He graduated from Wilburton High School and Eastern Oklahoma State College, finishing his education at Oklahoma State University in 1977 with a degree in Animal Science. He worked as a federal meat grader for the USDA for 8 years prior to going to work for the Postal Service in 1986. He then served as Postmaster at Talihina, Okla., and retired in 2009.

Jim currently is a full-time, self-employed farmer/rancher maintaining a cow/calf/stocker and haying operation in southwest Latimer County. He is a third-generation farmer/rancher following his granddad who started farming in 1930, his dad in 1953, and beginning himself in 1986.

Jim and Sandy, formerly Knight of Red Oak, Okla., have been married since 1978 and have two grown children and one grandchild. Their son, Justin Grego, is vice president for Safety Services of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. Their daughter, Landi Grego, is majoring in Agriculture at OSU. Their grandson, Baylor Cash Grego, is one year old.

Jim has served on the Kiamichi Economic Development District of Oklahoma board of trustees since April 2007. He is active in the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and the West End Fire Department in Wilburton.

A Brick Wall Ahead: The FY2011-2012 Outlook

A Message from Mike Thralls, Executive Director

As we enter a new fiscal year with a budget for districts and OCC significantly less than we had two years ago, it is useful to discuss the challenges we face.

We have managed to ride out the recent wave of budget cuts to date without impact to personnel through furloughs and reductions in force, other than leaving vacant positions unfilled. The primary source of that relief is the earnings OCC has generated by managing NRCS construction contracts including a number of projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). But those funds will run out.

If state collections remain at the current level or continue to decline, times could get tougher and the cuts will go deeper and the current "buffer" that ARRA funds are providing will be absent. Even if state collections improve, it will be difficult to replace all that has been lost. That is the "brick wall" in the road ahead for conservation districts and OCC if we are not careful. Aside from the dollars appropriated to make this year's payment on the Conservation Bond, OCC and districts are operating with \$1.5 million less of state appropriations than two years ago. In addition, an Interim Study currently in the Legislature as well as statements by the gubernatorial candidates all indicate a strong drive for smaller government.

Unless we make maximum use of our current "buffered" position to ready ourselves for a leaner, more efficient future, we will find those cuts to funding for programs and personnel forced upon us.

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Going Green?

Want to receive the electronic newsletter instead of the paper one? Just email Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov asking to be moved to the email subscription list!

Our vision:

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources.

Our mission:

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

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
“Calendar of Events” at
www.conservation.ok.gov

Inter-Tribal Environmental Council,
July 27-28, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Aug. 3, Oklahoma City

NACD South Central Meeting,
Aug. 16-18, Lubbock, Texas

**Conservation Cost-Share Program
Year 11B Ends,** Aug. 31

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Sept. 2, Oklahoma City

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 6

Women in Ag & Small Business,
Sept. 14, Muskogee

Blue Thumb Training for Volunteers,
Sept. 18-19, Tulsa

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Oct. 4, Oklahoma City

**Women in Ag & Small Business
State Conference,**

Oct. 14-15, Oklahoma City

**Renewable Energy Funding
Workshop,**

Oct. 27, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Nov. 1, Oklahoma City

In our thoughts...

Glen Miller, NRCS retiree, continues
undergoing medical treatment for
ongoing health issues.

Nicole Norris, Latimer County CD
TSP/education specialist, lost her
mother on June 28.

Teresa Wright, NRCS technician,
McAlester FSC, lost her mother July 11.

Tyson Morley, NRCS soil scientist,
Altus Soil Survey Office, and wife
Deena have a new daughter, Emma
Leigh Morley, born June 30.

Kenneth Risenhoover, NRCS district
conservationist, Poteau FSC, passed
away July 8. A memorial scholarship
fund has been set up in his name,
coordinated by LeFlore County CD.

Jason Skaggs, Garfield County CD
manager, underwent back surgery July 8.

Congratulations!

Lisa Payne, Kiamichi CD secretary, has
a new grandson, Wylie Lynn Marsh,
born June 11.

Kelly Mockabee, OCC/FMHR admin-
istrative programs officer, has a new
granddaughter, Maeli Beth Mocka-
bee, born June 12.

Jason Stegemoller, NRCS range man-
agement specialist at Mangum FSC,
and his wife have a new son, Cody
Briscoe Stegemoller, born June 18.

Debi Carnott, OCC/WQ conservation
plan writer/education coordinator,
has a new granddaughter, Holland
Grace Carnott, born June 21.

Conservation Commission Partners to Assess High Hazard Dams

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service have begun a project to perform assessments on 141 Upstream Flood Control Dams in the state. Of the more than 2,100 such dams in the state, the 141 under study are rated as “high hazard” due to the potential threat to human lives should one of them breach during a flooding event. The purpose of the project is to examine all considerations with regard to rehabilitation of each dam and identify the highest priority candidates for rehabilitation.

The project entails collecting all existing data for each dam, performing an on-site inspection, analyzing the breach areas and developing a breach inundation map, documenting all potential damage locations, performing failure and risk index computations and determining all potential rehabilitation alternatives. In determining rehabilitation alternatives that meet current NRCS and state standards, cost estimates are developed based on recent contracts for similar work including the cost of removing at-risk structures where that is a practical alternative.

In a narrative report with photographs and appropriate attachments, a final assessment report for each dam will include the following:

- Description of the condition of the existing dam and appurtenances
- Breach inundation map for the entire structure
- Status of the dam’s operation and maintenance
- Potential conceptual rehabilitation alternatives including site-specific restraints
- Estimated cost ranges for the identified potential rehabilitation alternatives
- Completed NRCS National Watershed Manual Exhibit 508.1 Priority Ranking Spreadsheet

OCC’s Conservation Programs Division is overseeing the project using OCC employees with help from NRCS. OCC/CP watershed technicians George Moore, Johnny Pelley and Dennis Boney are conducting the on-site inspections along with photographing the site and videotaping the interior of the spillway pipe whenever possible. Ray Riley, OCC/CP engineer also makes a site visit to review and supplement the documentation of the watershed technicians. Riley and Jim Henley, OCC/CP GIS specialist, prepare aerial photos and maps including a preliminary breach inundation map. Riley reviews the map in the field, takes measurements of bridges and culverts and documents each potential damage location (PDL). Henley and Riley work to finalize the inundation map, prepare a PDL database and complete documentation for breach analysis. Henley then prepares the final breach inundation map and PDL summaries. Larry Caldwell, OCC/CP engineer, is coordinating the project. OCC part time employees Lil Holcum and Dwain Phillips are participating in the project, with Holcum providing clerical support and Phillips providing technical writing and editing support. Gary Utley, NRCS hydraulic engineer, is providing technical expertise throughout every phase of the process.

The completion date for the project is Sept. 30, 2011.

“Funding for rehabilitation assessments has been the weak link in the chain of necessary steps that result in the rehabilitation of a watershed dam,” said Robert Toole, OCC/CP director. “When the opportunity for assessment funding presented itself, the Conservation Partnership in Oklahoma moved quickly to collaborate on a proposal, which resulted in full funding for our entire project” he said. “This has placed a stress on the Partnership due to the short time frame for completion but it will be a tremendous benefit to our conservation district sponsors and a boost to Oklahoma’s rehabilitation efforts. It behooves the local conservation district partnership to make these assessments a top priority and provide the necessary local assistance,” Toole said.



The city of Sallisaw sits immediately below Sallisaw Creek Dam No. 32.

Awards & Recognition

Mike Sharp, OCC/IT director, was recognized at the July 2010 Commission meeting for 30 years of service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma.

Shanon Phillips, OCC/WQ director, was recognized at the July 2010 Commission meeting for 15 years of service to OCC.

Carbon Sequestration Training for Senior, Returning and New Verifiers

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service held a three-day training event in April for Carbon Program Verifiers in three locations across the state.

Day one, April 18, at Stillwater was for senior verifiers only, who will be certified to train other verifiers. These are second-year verifiers selected based on their performance and test scores at 2009 training. These select seven conservation district employees and 10 OCC Water Quality employees were given intensive instruction by NRCS staff.

Days two and three were held on either side of the state to cut down travel for participants and to give them experience in the part of the state where they work. Senior verifiers from the west side of state attended at Hobart on April 19 and those from the east attended at Wagoner on April 20. Both days two and three were open to conservation district employees who were not trained in 2009 or who wanted a refresher course. On these days, both group and individualized education occurred. Senior verifiers were paired with verifier trainees for one-on-one instruction, which gave senior



The seven district employees selected for senior verifier training were (from left) Clancy Green, Texas County CD; Amy Weathers, North Caddo CD; Trish Luckie, Harper County CD; John Dee Butchee, Jackson County CD; Paul Fruendt, Logan County CD; Andrew Qualls, Muskogee County CD; and (not pictured) Greg Robertson, Kiamichi CCD.

verifiers experience in teaching and provided one-on-one learning opportunity for new and returning verifiers.

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“OCC is pleased that all seven district boards approved participation of the senior verifiers selected for participation,” said Stacy Hansen, OCC Carbon Program director. “This group of more highly trained verifiers will be a support network to other district verifiers across the state as we move the carbon program forward,” she said.

OCC Water Quality staff participating were Debi Carnott, Monty Ramming, Ed Crall, Gina Levesque, Tashina Kirk, Bullit Farris, Jerry Starkey, Chris DuBois, Stacey Day and Jean Lemmon.



Scott Grant, Tulsa County CD (kneeling); and Greg Robertson, Kiamichi CD; during carbon sequestration verifier training at Wagoner.



Carbon sequestration verifier training at Hobart.



Doris Anderson Retires from Payne County Conservation District

Doris Anderson retired from the Payne County Conservation District on June 30 with 30 years of service as secretary to the district. The district hosted a reception for Doris on June 24 at the office in Stillwater. Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, presented her with a Conservation Commendation that read “In appreciation of your 30 years of dedicated service to the Payne County Conservation District and the State of Oklahoma in the conservation of natural resources.”

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director (right) presented Doris Anderson with a Conservation Commendation as Robert Priess, Payne County CD chairman (left) applauds.



Reva Maddox Retires from East Woods County Conservation District

Reva Maddox, East Woods County Conservation District programs coordinator, retired June 30 after 25 years of service to the district. A reception was held for her on June 30 in Alva. Lisa Knauf OCC District Services director, presented Reva with a Conservation Commendation that read “In appreciation of your more than 25 years of dedicated service to the East Woods County Conservation District and the State of Oklahoma in the conservation of natural resources.”

From left are (standing) Kayla Puffingbarger, Alfalfa CCD; Judy Ediger, Grant CCD; Anna Lee Murray, Woods CCD, retired; Christina Richard, Harper CCD; (seated) Iona Hunter, Dewey CCD, retired; Reva Maddox; and Coleta Bratten, Dewey CCD.

A Brick Wall, continued from page 1

To help address our challenges, OCC created a Budget and Allocation Committee consisting of Conservation Commissioners George Stunkard and Mike Rooker; OACD President Trey Lam and Vice President Kim Farber; and OACDE Past President Bradley Hamilton. The committee is identifying ideas to help OCC and districts adjust to what lies ahead, and presented five recommendations to OCC at the July 2010 Commission meeting. The Commissioners approved all five of the following recommendations:

1. Make district allocations for six months, July through December, instead of 12 because of the possibility of rescissions and the uncertainty of contract management income during FY 2011.
2. Approve a six-month budget that reduces conservation district allocations by \$216,801 and reduces OCC general revenue expenditures by \$97,009.
3. As equipment manager positions become vacant, they will transition to non-benefitted positions. All other OCC and district positions that become vacant will be evaluated and adjusted if appropriate before refilling.
4. Develop a plan that offers an incentive for districts that decide to consolidate.
5. Develop a performance-based evaluation of districts to be used to guide future allocations to districts.

Of the recommendations, the last two will be the focus of the committee going forward — incentivize district consolidation and develop a performance-based evaluation to use for district allocations.

Mailing Tab Area

To date there has been a negative perception of district consolidation and few incentives encouraging it. For example, in a county with two or more conservation districts, a district may receive an allocation equal to that received by a district that covers the whole county. That is a disincentive for consolidation. The challenge is to provide incentives to encourage consolidation with the goal of having fewer, but stronger, more active and more efficient conservation districts.

The committee and OCC agree that a performance-based allocation of funds is lacking in the current system but will be vital to the future success and strength of the state's conservation program. The most critical objectives for evaluation in the future are flood control programs, Farm Bill and state conservation programs delivery, and nonpoint source water quality protection.

We currently have the opportunity to make decisions to help shape our future as conservation districts and the Conservation Commission. If we do not act wisely and expediently, the decisions will be forced upon us because the funding simply will not be there.

The Budget and Allocation Committee and OCC welcome suggestions and ideas from the conservation community to help guide and inform the actions that must be taken. Ideas, suggestions or comments may be sent to me and I will forward them to committee members. Or you may contact committee members George Stunkard, Mike Rooker, Trey Lam, Kim Farber or Bradley Hamilton directly.

I remain confident that districts and OCC and our loyal NRCS partners will face and resolve this latest challenge successfully.

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
Oklahoma Conservation Commission
2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105-4201
405.521.2384, FAX: 405.521.6686
<http://www.conservation.ok.gov>

Mailing Tab Area

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- Area III George Stunkard
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