

# 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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## Mike Rooker of Dale begins term as Area II Conservation Commissioner

Mike Rooker began serving a five-year term representing central Oklahoma on the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on July 2. Gov. Brad Henry appointed Rooker to the post in May and the state Senate confirmed the appointment the same month. His term officially began with him taking his oath of office at the beginning of the first monthly meeting of the Conservation Commission for the new fiscal year. Gov. Henry's liaison Jeanette Nance attended the swearing-in and meeting.

Rooker, a lifelong resident of Dale, has been a full time farmer since he and his brother took over the family farm when they lost their father in 1952. The operation included a dairy in which he also partnered with his brother until 1994. All the hay and grain for the operation was raised on the farm. He is currently co-owner of Rooker Farms, which includes a cow/calf operation and farming wheat, alfalfa hay, corn and soy bean crops.

Upon graduation from high school, Rooker received the Jr. Master Farmer Award, the Richards Award and the DeKalb Award. He was a member of the Conservation Leadership 2000 class and was named Ag Business Person of Shawnee the same year.

Rooker has served on the board of directors of the Shawnee Conservation District since 1994. Prior to that he served 15 years as a county committee member for the Farm Service Agency. Mike has served on the Sales Tax Advisory Committee for Shawnee twice. He also currently serves on the Cross Timbers Resource Conservation & Development Council.

Rooker's hobby is restoring antique tractors and farm machinery and he serves as chairman of Shawnee Tractor and Engine Club's Vintage Equipment Committee for SeptemberFest held annually at the Governor's Mansion.

Mike and his wife Chris have three sons and seven grandchildren.

Conservation districts in Area II are Arbutle, Cleveland County, Garvin, Kay County, Konawa, Lincoln County, Logan County, Love County, McClain County, Murray County, Noble County, Oklahoma County, Pawnee County, Payne County, Seminole County, and Shawnee.

## NACD South Central Meeting Held July 26-28, 2007

More than 150 people participated in the 2007 South Central Region Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts held July 26-28 at the Cherokee Casino and Resort in Catoosa. The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) hosted the meeting, titled "Water: Don't Gamble With Your Future!" The meeting began with a reception the evening of July 26 where a video presentation featured several recent television news stories related to recent heavy rainfall and Oklahoma's watershed flood control dams.

OACD President Scotty Herriman presided at the opening session in the morning of July 27 where Tulsa Deputy Mayor Tom Baker described the important role the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program will play in helping protect Tulsa's drinking water. Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) Executive Director Mike Thralls moderated a four-state water issues discussion panel. Adrian Baber, assistant director for conservation for the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission explained how his state administers and enforces watershed management related to the poultry industry.



Mike Rooker

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### Our vision:

**Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources**

### Our mission:

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

## Conservation Calendar

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

**Labor Day Holiday**, Sept. 3

### Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting

Sept. 5, Northwest Technology Center, Alva Campus, Alva

### Statewide Women in Ag & Small Business Conference

Sept. 20-21, Moore Norman

Technology Center, Oklahoma City

### Blue Thumb Volunteer Training

Sept. 19 - 20, Tulsa County CD.

### National Watershed Coalition Fall O&M

Conference, Sept. 24-26, Decatur, Texas.

### Monthly Conservation Commission Meeting

Oct. 1, Agriculture Building Board Room,

Oklahoma City

### National Association of AML Programs

Annual Conference, Oct. 7-10, Bloomington,

Ind.

### Blue Thumb Volunteer Training

Oct. 11-12, Norman

### Greater Oklahoma Farm Show

Oct. 12-13, Grady County

Fairgrounds, Chickasha

### GROW: Oklahoma Biofuels Conference

Oct. 16-17, Sheraton Downtown, Oklahoma City

### Governor's Water Conference

Oct. 23-25, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City

### AML Inspectors' Workshop

Oct. 23-25, Embassy Suites, Tulsa

### Oklahoma Farm Bureau Convention

Nov. 9-10, Renaissance Hotel,

Oklahoma City.

### Veterans' Day Holiday

Nov. 12

### Tulsa Farm Show

Dec. 7-8, Tulsa Fairgrounds, Tulsa

### Thanksgiving Holiday

Nov. 22-23

## Congratulations!

Kelly Mockabee, OCC/FM/HR administrative programs officer, and her husband Danny have a brand new daughter-in-law. Their son Matt married Mayme Mahaffey on June 23.

Stacy Hansen, OCC/WQ technical writer, married Mark Andrews on July 1.

Chris DuBois, OCC/WQ Wetlands coordinator, married Abby Wightman on Aug. 4.

Ann Craven, OCC/WQ executive secretary, has a new grandson. Isaac Edward Craven was born Aug. 16.

Mike Kastl, OCC/AML director, became a grandfather with the birth of twin girls, Jamie Marie and Jacey Marie, born Aug. 20.

Please inform **Mark Harrison** at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. **Please include dates!!!!!!!**

[NACD South Central, continued from page 1](#)

Johnny Oswald, Brush Control Project program supervisor, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, discussed a project to enhance water supply through brush management. Brad Spicer, assistant commissioner in Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation, and Don Gohmert, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, provided conservation perspectives on the damages of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and on the recovery progress. Gohmert is state conservationist for Texas currently, but was serving in the same position in Louisiana during the hurricanes. Shanon Phillips, OCC Water Quality assistant director, wrapped up the session with successes accomplished in Oklahoma's Lake Eucha Watershed Implementation Project.

Oklahoma Sec. of the Environment Miles Tolbert spoke at the luncheon and emphasized that Oklahoma continues to be a leading state for conservation. He told how the state had conquered the dust storms, erosion and flooding of the 1930s, '40s and '50s; continues to address the water quality issues of more recent times; and is looking to the future in biofuels and carbon sequestration programs.

Trey Lam, OACD Area II director, moderated the after lunch session in which Larry Caldwell, NRCS watershed specialist; Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs director, and April Burns, NRCS economist, spoke on the topic "Dams in Distress: Making the Best of the Worst." Burns explained the process NRCS uses to arrive at dollar amounts for damages prevented by flood control dams during rainfall events.

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, presided at the last session of the day, a discussion of the 2007 Farm Bill which, coincidentally, passed in the U.S. House of Representatives the same day. Speakers included Olin Sims, NACD president; Josh Bradley, field representative for Congressman Frank Lucas; and Dr. Mike Dicks, professor of agricultural economics at Oklahoma State University.

Karla Beatty, OCC education coordinator, offered a daylong alternative concurrent session for district employees, called "Stacking Your Deck with Conservation."

Friday evening buses took participants to Claremore for dinner and a tour at the Will Rogers Memorial and Museum. A Will Rogers impersonator provided entertainment.

On Saturday, July 28, buses took participants for a tour called "A Closer Look — Protecting Tulsa's Drinking Water." The tour included stops at Lake Eucha and the Spavinaw Creek Watershed Demonstration Farm.

Charlotte Stieber, OCC/AML administrative officer, helped the OACD Auxiliary coordinate activities that included a visit to the Gilcrease Museum and Gardens and a visit to Claremore Main Street, home to numerous antique, collectible and specialty stores.



Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert outlined Oklahoma's conservation leadership throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.



NACD President Olin Sims provided background information on NACD working in Washington, D.C., on the next Farm Bill. At the Friday luncheon, Sims announced he had received word that the legislation had been passed by the House of Representatives that morning.

## Please Note:

### Conservation Commission Monthly Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the monthly meetings of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, once approved, are available online at <http://www.conservation.ok.gov>. Click on "Commission Meeting Schedule, Agendas & Minutes" in the left menu. Anyone who would like to have a printed copy may contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.

## Record Rainfall Proves Flood Control Dams' Worth

As Oklahoma experienced record rainfall during May and June, the state's 2,105 watershed flood control dams proved their worth many times over. According to a report by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), watershed projects prevented \$290 million in damages that would have occurred had the dams not been in place. Another \$46 million in damages could have been prevented if 330 dams that are planned but not built were in place.

During those 60 days water flowed through the auxiliary spillways on 59 dams in 26 watersheds in 20 counties. Of those, 28 flowed in the five days leading up to July 2 when the report was released at the July meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Most of the flows occurred in Kiowa, Stephens, Grady, Tillman, Seminole, Washington and Nowata Counties.

"The foresight of our predecessors is very apparent at times like this," said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. "You can't wait until it floods to put protection like these dams in place," he said. "Today, we should exercise the same foresight by properly providing funding for maintenance and rehabilitation of existing dams, and the construction of new dams that have been planned but not built," Thralls added.

Most of the spillway flow depths were less than one foot, but two had flow depths of over three feet. A flood control structure in the Sugar Creek watershed at Gracemont experienced a flow that falls between estimates for 25- and 50-year frequency storms. Two dams undergoing rehabilitation construction

experienced flows that caused some anxious moments, but no significant damages occurred and the local conservation district sponsors reacted well, according to Ron Hilliard. Hilliard is the NRCS state conservationist for Oklahoma. He gave the report at the Conservation Commission meeting.

"We certainly appreciate the efforts of the conservation district and NRCS employees who went to the field under some very unpleasant conditions after normal work hours to inspect the dams and report flows and damages," Hilliard said. "We are pleased to report that all the dams functioned as designed and there are no known threats to the integrity of any of the dams," he said.



The photo above illustrates the reason conservation districts work to warn landowners about building in a secondary dam spillway area.

Photos by Jason Skaggs, Garfield County Conservation District manager, June 29-30 2007.



State Highway 412 east of Enid



On the back of the dam, the principal spillway pipe at full flow safely released downstream what could have been hazardous floodwater.

## Watershed Aide for Seminole Co. and Konawa CDs

### Two Districts and OCC Sign Watershed Aide Agreement, First in Nation

Seminole County and Konawa Conservation Districts entered into an agreement with OCC at the August Commission meeting to formalize a new strategy for addressing watershed operation and maintenance. Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs director, called the project the first of its kind in the nation. It began as a pilot project at Seminole County CD in January 2005 in which the first watershed aide position was funded for a district employee to work full time on watershed operation and maintenance. OCC watershed technician Dennis Boney represented OCC in co-supervising the position along with the Seminole County CD and Sam Fox was hired as the nation's first Watershed Aide.

OCC and Seminole County CD developed the job description, made appropriate changes during the two-and-a-half-year process and are ready to expand the program, Toole said. With Konawa CD coming on board, OCC was ready to formalize the position with a three-way agreement, Toole said.

Under the terms of the agreement, OCC will fund the salary for the watershed aide position, provided the position is used solely to operate and maintain watershed structures. OCC will also provide funds for watershed repairs, equipment, supplies and materials as deemed necessary. For their part, the conservation districts agreed to use the monies solely for the operation, maintenance and related expenses of watershed structures. In collaboration with OCC the districts will develop a Watershed Operations and Maintenance Plan for the term of the one-year agreement. The agreement also outlines responsibilities for the watershed aide, and directs the districts to sponsor at least one event for the purpose of educating federal and state legislators on the watershed program, operations and maintenance, and rehabilitation.



Commissioners (in back, from left) Mike Rooker, Matt Gard, Virginia Kidd and George Stunkard and Executive Director Mike Thralls look on as (front, from left) Konawa CD Chairman Joe Semtner, OCC Chairman Dan Lowrance and Seminole County CD Chairman Buster Gene Pace sign the agreement.

# Celebrating 30 Years of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Control Act

## Mike Kastl honored at U.S. Capitol

Mike Kastl, director of OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program (AML) was among five people honored recently for significant contributions to the regulation of coal mines and the reclamation of mined lands. Kastl was hailed as an acknowledged pioneer, advocate and leader at the national level in the effort to correct the damage and dangers caused by abandoned coal mines.

The Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) held an "Awards Recognition and Reunion" event on the front lawn of a Department of Interior building in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 3. The event marked the 30th anniversary since President Jimmy Carter signed the Surface Mining and Reclamation Control Act (SMCRA) into law on Aug. 3, 1977.

When Kastl began working for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission 32 years ago, 16 eastern Oklahoma counties had more than 32,000 acres of abandoned surface mined land and more than 40,000 acres of abandoned underground mines. His first assignment was to help the counties deal with the extensive damage while monitoring the work Congress was doing to draft the Surface Mining Act. He coordinated the development of the Oklahoma AML Program and helped develop the national AML guidelines for reclamation programs and projects. He coordinated the formation of the Mid-Continent Coal Coalition, which was instrumental in securing AML funding for "Minimum Program" states and tribes. He helped develop the first AML technical course for state and federal project inspectors and taught other OSM courses.

Over the last 30 years 149 AML projects have been completed in Oklahoma, resulting in the reclamation of more than 4,000 acres. OCC has closed 320 open coal mine shafts and reclaimed 214 water-filled strip pits, some with dangerous highwalls up to 80 feet high. There were 23 known deaths associated with the shafts and pits.

Kastl started with OCC as a planning assistant in 1975, was promoted to agency assistant director in 1978 and has served as OCC's AML Program director since January 1982.



## OCC Commends Asst. State Conservationist

### Kevin Norton named NRCS State Conservationist for Louisiana

Kevin Norton, NRCS assistant state conservationist for programs in Oklahoma, has been named state conservationist for Louisiana. At the August Commission meeting, Norton was commended for his "commitment and 25 years of dedicated service to the conservation of Oklahoma's natural resources as an employee of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and in partnership with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Conservation Districts."



OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls (left) and Chairman Dan Lowrance (right) presented Kevin Norton with a Commendation from Governor Brad Henry and one from the Conservation Commission.

## National Watershed Coalition Fall O&M Conference

### Robert Toole elected NWC vice chairman

At the National Watershed Conference in May, Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs Division director, was elected vice chairman of the National Watershed Coalition (NWC) for a two-year term.

NWC, in cooperation with Wise County, Texas, the Wise County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1, the Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors, the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and NRCS, will hold a watershed operation and maintenance (O&M) workshop Sept. 24-26 at the Decatur, Texas, Civic Center.

"Operation and Maintenance/Sponsor Responsibility 101 Workshop" will encompass a wide variety of useful and current topics that are important to today's watershed sponsors and their associates. The topics will include improving O&M, sponsor responsibilities, emergency action plans and products, and tools and techniques for O&M. There will also be a tour of local projects and field demonstrations. The deadline for registration is Sept. 5. More details and registration information are available online at <http://www.watershedcoalition.com>.

NWC is a nonprofit organization made up of national, regional, state, and local organizations, associations, and individuals, that advocate dealing with natural resource problems and issues using watersheds as the planning and implementation unit.



## Dr. Jim Stiegler Retires

### OSU Department Head is a Leader in the National Land Contest

Dr. James H. Stiegler, professor and head of the Oklahoma State University Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, retired July 31 after 36 years in academe. Stiegler had a distinguished career both as an administrator and as a state extension specialist. He has been the department head since January 2001 and served as interim head in 1990 and 2000. Stiegler's career at OSU included serving as soil management extension specialist, turf specialist and soybean specialist at various times.

Widely recognized for his expertise in soils and conservation tillage, Stiegler was an early advocate of no-till farming. He is also well known around the country for his educational leadership in land judging and as coordinator of the National Land & Range Judging Contest — an event that attracts over 1,000 4-H and FFA youth from across the U.S. to Oklahoma City each year.

At a reception in Stiegler's honor on July 20th, OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard presented him with a commendation for "advocacy for conservation tillage and leadership in the National Land & Range Judging Contest."



At a reception held in his honor, Jim Stiegler received a Conservation Commission Commendation presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. Above, from left, are Don Bartolina, Oklahoma County CD manager; Mason Mungle, Farmers Royalty Company president; Stiegler and Pollard.

## Blaine County Ag Safety Day & Groundwater Screening

Blaine County Conservation District held its first Blaine County Progressive Agriculture Safety Day in April. The sessions included fire safety sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs featuring Smokey Bear (speaking to students in photo); lawn mower safety instructed by Glenn Smoot, district director, and Rob Magness, Western Equipment; grain safety; meth awareness; and tobacco awareness. One hundred and thirty-five Blaine County fourth-grade students attended the event.



Volunteers performed 43 water well tests for area residents on May 23. Volunteers (photo at right) included, clockwise from top, Colby Shepherd, Mary Rusch, Cindy Bierg, Kara Shepherd, Chris Shepherd and Scott Hoar.

## OCC Joins Oklahoma Prescribed Fire Council

Before settlement, wildfires, started by lightning, swept the plains periodically. Native Americans set fires intentionally in the spring and fall to improve habitat for wildlife. The increasing spread of eastern redcedar and other invasive plant species in Oklahoma has increased the interest of many individuals and organizations in prescribed burning. Prescribed burning is the least expensive and a very effective method of dealing with invasive plants species, but does require labor, equipment and specialized knowledge. One purpose of forming associations is to pool and share those types of resources.

“It is just crucial that we use prescribed fire, in safe and legal ways, to prevent the continued degradation of our rural landscapes in Oklahoma,” said Jay Pruett. Pruett is conservation director for the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma, one of the member organizations of the newly-formed Oklahoma Prescribed Fire Council (OPFC). During the May meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the Commissioners unanimously approved a motion for the agency to join OPFC.

“Without fire, ranch land is lost to invasive species such as eastern redcedar and other encroaching tree and brush species, and wildlife habitat is dramatically altered,” Pruett said. “The Oklahoma Prescribed Fire Council is aimed at mustering a concerted effort among agencies, organizations and private landowners to facilitate the implementation of prescribed fire in our rural lands by removing as many barriers to that occurring as possible.”

“Another benefit of removing eastern redcedars is to remove the possible threat of them burning in wildfires,” said Darrel Dominick. Dominick is OCC’s Tribal Outreach coordinator and will represent the agency on the council. “With thin bark and fine, flammable foliage that contains a high volume of volatile oil, redcedars are especially susceptible to wildfire,” Dominick added. The trees can act as a “fire ladder,” carrying the flame from grass fires to the crowns of other tree species, he said. And while many people may like the privacy of the thick growing evergreens, they don’t realize the fire danger of letting them spread too near to homes.

The stated purpose of OPFC is to promote the implementation of prescribed fire as a natural resource management tool. The council’s goal is to make prescribed burning a common and relatively easy land management tool. The group also seeks to facilitate education for the public and training programs for landowners and local burn association members in the safe, legal and effective use of prescribed fire. OPFC will incorporate the principals of the FireWise program endorsed by the Forestry Services Division of the Oklahoma Dept. of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. The group is also attempting to address liability limits for properly-conducted burns through legislation and indemnity funds.

Other organizations that have joined OPFC to date include the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oklahoma State University, OSU Extension Service, Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Noble Foundation and the Cross Timbers Burn Association.

## Garfield County CD Returns Legal Fees to OCC

Jason Skaggs, Garfield County Conservation District manager, appeared at the July Commission meeting and stated that two years ago the district had requested financial assistance from OCC in taking legal action regarding a flood control structure. A landowner had modified an auxiliary spillway on Upper Red Rock Creek in violation of the easement. Working with the Red Rock Conservancy District, the conservation district pursued legal action. In the settlement of the case the landowner agreed to reimburse the district for legal expenses and damages. Skaggs presented a check in the amount of \$11,690.13 to OCC as reimbursement of funds that OCC had provided to the district for legal expenses and part of the damages.

The Commissioners commended Garfield County CD for its perseverance in pursuing legal action to correct the easement violation and for all its work on watershed upstream flood control structures.



At the July Commission meeting Jason Skaggs, Garfield County CD manager, presented a check to OCC, represented by OCC Chairman Dan Lowrance (right) and Conservation Programs Administrative Officer Tammy Sawatzky (left).



Prescribed burning (Photo by F. Dwain Phillips, Soil Conservation Service, 1992.)

## GROW: Oklahoma Biofuels Conference Beyond Corn: Oklahoma Positions Other Alternative Fuel Sources

As Oklahoma continues to research and develop its alternative fuel sources and production, the Governor of Oklahoma will host GROW: Oklahoma Biofuels Conference, Oct. 16-17, in Oklahoma City.

“Switchgrass and other native Oklahoma prairie grasses show great potential for alternative fuels and can offset some of the downside of corn,” said Gov. Brad Henry. “Studies show the U.S. will need many renewable products besides corn to create transportation fuels to replace a portion of imported petroleum.”

Oklahoma is uniquely positioned to help meet that need. Switchgrass and other varieties of perennial prairie grasses, which grow naturally in Oklahoma, are relatively drought resistant, require modest amounts of energy-intensive fertilizers and regenerate yearly. In comparison, corn requires annual replanting, large amounts of water and energy-intensive fertilizers. For these reasons, the conversion of switchgrass to fuel can be far more energy efficient than the conversion of corn to fuel. In addition, farmers, ranchers and American consumers are concerned that using corn as an alternative fuel source drives up food and animal feed prices.

James Woolsey, former director of the CIA, will be a keynote speaker at the conference, addressing the relationship between national security and the development of alternative transportation fuels. Other topics will include the growth in the U.S. biofuels industry, current and emerging research and development initiatives and Oklahoma’s emerging biorefining sector. Additional national presenters include John Ferrell, U.S. Department of Energy; Duane Grant, USDA Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture; Richard Hess, Idaho National Laboratory; Anna Rath, Ceres, Inc.; Robert White, Ethanol Promotion and Information Council; Dr. Steven Phillips, National Renewable Energy Laboratory; Curt Rich, Van Ness Feldman; David Terry, Governors’ Ethanol Coalition and Dr. Jeffery Dahlberg, National Grain Sorghum Producers. Gov. Brad Henry, Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach, Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert and OACD Executive Director Clay Pope are also among the speakers.

Registration is \$45. For more information, a complete list of speakers or registration, visit [www.GrowOK.com](http://www.GrowOK.com) or call 1-800-203-5494. The Oklahoma Biofuels Conference is presented by the Office of the Secretary of Energy, State of Oklahoma, in collaboration with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Secretary of Environment, State of Oklahoma.

## Water for Life

### 28th Annual Oklahoma Governor's Water Conference

The 28th Annual Governor's Water Conference will be held in Oklahoma City at the Cox Convention Center on October 23-25, 2007. This year's conference will be held in conjunction with the Oklahoma Water Resources Research Institute's Annual Water Research Symposium.

The Governor's Water Conference, held annually in the fall, attracts hundreds of people from across the U.S. to discuss water issues that are pertinent to Oklahoma and the nation. The event is hosted by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board and other water-related sponsoring organizations.

## Ben Pollard, OCC Assistant Director, Participates in Governor's Program

The Governor's Executive Development Program for State Officials is a leadership program that is a collaboration of the Governor's Office, the State of Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management, Oklahoma State University, and the University of Oklahoma. The program is designed for cabinet secretaries, agency directors and senior executives within state government. The program is designed around five leadership competencies: Leading Change, Leading People, Results Driven, Business Acumen, and Building Coalitions/Communications.

Ben Pollard participated in this year's program, held on the OSU campus July 29 through Aug. 2, along with 27 other state agency personnel. Governor Henry participated in the closing luncheon and presented certificates to each class member. The program was initiated in 2006 and Mike Thralls participated in the first class.



Gov. Brad Henry (left) presented OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard with a certificate marking Pollard's completion of the program.

## The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Gearing Up for First Contract

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is making progress with Gina Levesque, project coordinator, holding landowner meetings in the project area. The first contract signing is anticipated to happen in early September, with news media invited to a signing event in or near Tahlequah. OCC is in process of hiring two plan writers — one for the Illinois River watershed and one for the Eucha/Spavinaw watershed.

## Poultry Litter Transport Program

At the August Commission meeting Commissioners approved a guidelines for the Eucha/Spavinaw and Illinois River Watersheds Litter Transport Program. The program subsidizes the transportation cost of removing the litter from the nutrient-limited watersheds.

Applicants are eligible to receive up to \$8 per ton, based on a rate of \$0.026 per ton per mile. The subsidy applies only to counties that Interstate Highway 35 passes through and those eastward to the Arkansas border. People in western counties can apply, but the mileage subsidy will stop at the highway.

Conservation districts where the litter is applied and through which subsidy payments are paid, are eligible to receive up to \$1 per ton to provide administrative assistance to buyers for participation in the program.

# Fort Cobb Water Quality Project Tour

## Cobb Creek/Fort Cobb Reservoir Watershed Implementation Project

On July 17 the OCC Water Quality Division hosted a tour of best management practices in the Cobb Creek/Fort Cobb Reservoir Watershed Implementation Project. In spite of being the first day in seven weeks with weather conditions suitable for farmers to begin field work before 10:00 a.m., 32 people participated including area farmers and ranchers as well as others responsible for the care of natural resources. The group assembled at the Caddo/Kiowa Technology Center in Fort Cobb before traveling to locations in the watershed where practices had been implemented to help improve water quality. At each location speakers provided insight into the function and results of the conservation practices.

Brad Elder, Caddo County NRCS soil conservationist, explained the function and maintenance of grade stabilization structures and the benefits of reduced soil loss and improved water quality. He emphasized the importance of proper design, of establishing grass on the dam of the structure, of proper fertilization, and the value of keeping livestock fenced away.

R.L. Dalrymple, a local farmer and retired Noble Foundation agronomist, gave a detailed presentation on managing and utilizing Bermuda grass as pasture in former cropland. He gave tips on the minimum use of fertilization needed to maintain a healthy stand, times to defer grazing in order to achieve maximum plant vigor, and grazing height recommendations to enhance water quality.

Steven Clay, a local farmer, talked about no-till farming of row crops and described how his rotation revolved around peanuts, but also included cotton, corn, and cereal rye. Clay also talked about the importance of growing rye as a cover crop in no-till fields and the importance of 2, 4-d chemical use around cotton fields.



A grade stabilization structure installed through the Fort Cobb Project. (Photo by Candace Cunningham, OCC/WQ)

Local Helena chemical salesman and landowner Bryce King's primary interest is wildlife, especially deer. He also farms no-till wheat on part of his land and he talked about the importance of management to prevent weeds from developing resistance to popular chemicals.

Dr. Randy Taylor, Extension Service machinery specialist, Oklahoma State University, gave brief updates on an Agriculture Technology trade show planned for Chickasha in the near future, and on efforts to develop a support and education organization for Oklahoma no-till farmers. Taylor also gave a brief description about how to begin no-till farming with a minimum investment in equipment.

Keith Brownbeck, Caddo/Kiowa Technology Center, made a presentation to Donna Neumeyer, Caddo County NRCS soil conservationist, commending her for helping the technology center with GPS training.

Garrett King, field representative for U.S. Congressman Frank Lucas, gave a brief legislative update on the Farm Bill currently working its way through Congress.

Dennis Christie, Estes Chemical, gave a presentation on the management of herbicides to prevent the development of and pressure from herbicide resistant weeds.



Texas horned lizard (Cunningham)

At one of the stops on the tour Candace Cunningham, OCC/WQ technical writer, photographed a horned lizard (left), held by Judith Wilkins, OCC/WQ environmental Project coordinator. The Texas horned lizard (*Phrynosoma cornutum*) is one of 14 North American species of spikey-bodied reptiles called horned lizards. The Texas species ranges from Colorado and Kansas to northern Mexico, and from southeastern Arizona to Louisiana and Arkansas. Texas is the heart of its range.

The horned lizard is commonly referred to as a "horned toad," "horny toad", or "horned frog," but it is neither a toad nor a frog. The popular names come from the lizard's rounded body and blunt snout, which give it a decidedly toad-like or frog-like appearance. The lizard's horns are extensions of its cranium and are composed of true bone.

The Texas horned lizard is the largest-bodied and most widely distributed of eight species in the United States. It grows to a maximum length of 4-6 inches. Although its coloration generally serves as camouflage against predation, when threatened by a predator, a horned lizard puffs up its body to cause its spiny scales to protrude, making it difficult to swallow.

About 70 percent of the Texas horned lizard's diet is made up of harvester ants, though they supplement these with termites, beetles, and grasshoppers. In recent years, the Texas horned lizard has declined in about 30 percent of its range, though there is some indication it may be making a comeback. The decline is usually blamed on overuse of pesticides and the spread of nonnative, but highly aggressive and fiercely territorial, Brazilian fire ants. Both eradicate harvester ant colonies, destroying the horned lizard's principal source of food. The Texas horned lizard is now a protected species and is illegal to take, possess, transport or sell without a special permit.



Monty Ramming, OCC/WQ Fort Cobb Project coordinator, explained how a grade stabilization structure reduces soil loss and benefits water quality. (Photo by Ed Crall, OCC/WQ)



R.L. Dalrymple spoke to the group about managing Bermuda grass in former crop land (Cunningham).



## OCC Community Service Day

OCC participated in a community service day when staff members spent a day helping remove litter from the Illinois River on July 11. The Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission hosted a reception for OCC staff the previous evening. From left, standing only, are Stacy Hansen, Shellie Willoughby, Karla Beatty, Brooks Trammel, Kelly Mockabee (behind Brooks), Norma and John Haraughty (Shanon Phillips' parents), and Dr. Edith Haraughty (in front of John, Shanon's grandmother). Seated in back, from left, are Jerry Carr, Ed Fite (kneeling), Jim Leach, Chris DuBois, Jana Chicoine, Dan Butler, Greg Kloxin and his wife Melody, Kim Tweed, and Meredith Lee. Seated in front, from left, are Ben Berry, his wife Channette and their children Kyler and Haiven, Stacey Day, Judith Wilkins, Josiah Kloxin (Greg and Melody's son), and Shanon Phillips with son Cooper. Ed Fite is the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission administrator and Meredith Lee is the OSRC education outreach coordinator.

Mailing Tab Area

## WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops  
Karla Beatty, (405) 521-2384



Project Learning Tree Workshops or Trunks  
Christina Stallings, (405) 521-3864



Project WILD Workshops or Trunks  
Lisa Anderson, (405) 521-6704



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