

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

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OETA, Oklahoma Conservation Partnership launch Dust Bowl Education Project

The statewide outreach effort is inspired by the fall debut of a new PBS documentary, **THE DUST BOWL**, from filmmaker Ken Burns.

The Oklahoma Educational Television Authority and the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership consisting of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have launched a statewide community engagement initiative to explore the history and lessons of Oklahoma's Dust Bowl experience.



The project was developed to work in conjunction with the fall premiere of a new PBS documentary from iconic filmmaker Ken Burns (*The Civil War*, *Baseball*, *The War*). **THE DUST BOWL**, premiering Nov. 18 and 19 at 7 p.m. on OETA, primarily focuses on Oklahoma and the state's Dust Bowl survivors.

"OACD and the rest of the Conservation Partnership are excited to be a part of this important event," said Clay Pope, OACD executive director. "It's been said that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. It's important that we tell the story of the struggles of the Dust Bowl and the heroic work that was done to turn back the tide of dust while remembering that we must remain vigilant to protect our soil, water, air and wildlife habitats."

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Conservation Commission Reorganizes for FY 2013

**Mike Rooker Reappointed;
Mike Thralls Returns to Work**

At the July 2012 Conservation Commission meeting, Mike Rooker was sworn in to serve a second term representing Area II. Gov. Mary Fallin reappointed Rooker in March and the Senate confirmed the appointment in May.



From left are Mike Rooker, Area II member; Karl Jett, Area I member and secretary; Jim Grego, Area V member and vice chair; Dan Lowrance, Area IV member and chair; George Stunkard, Area III member; and Mike Thralls, executive director.

The Commission members assumed their officer positions for fiscal year 2013 at the meeting as well. Dan Lowrance, Area IV member, will serve as chair, with Jim Grego, Area V member, serving as vice chair and Karl Jett, Area I member, as secretary. George Stunkard continues to serve as Area III Commission member.

Mike Thralls, executive director, returned to work in time for the meeting. He underwent surgery in May for cancer affecting his spleen, pancreas and one kidney. He began returning to work on a part-time basis during the last week of June and attended the July 2, 2012, Commission meeting.



Lisa Knauf Owen, OCC District Services director (left), swore in Mike Rooker for a second term as Area II Commission member.

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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.

www.conservation.ok.gov

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on
"Calendar of Events" at
<http://conservation.ok.gov>

NACD South Central Region Meeting,
Aug. 5-7, Hot Springs, Ark.

**Delaware County Conservation District
Open House,** Aug. 8, Jay

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Aug. 13, Oklahoma City

Statewide Women in Ag & Small Business,
Aug. 9-10, Oklahoma City

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 3

Conservation Commission Meeting,
September 10, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Oct. 1, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,
Nov. 5, Oklahoma City

OACD Area IV Meeting,
Nov. 8, Chickasha

Veterans Day Holiday, Nov. 12

Awards & Recognition

The Canton, Okla., sixth-grade students who presented a Dust Bowl dramatization at the June 2012 Conservation Commission meeting (as described in the June 2012 Conservation Conversation) won third place in the National History Day Program out of 84 entries from all over the world.

In our thoughts...

Wade Helm, Lincoln County Conservation District manager, lost his father July 7.
George Moore, OCC/CP watershed technician, lost his sister July 8.

A Cruise 4 A Cause

Josh McNeff recently started his career as a soil technician with OCC. Now he faces an uphill battle recovering from a serious motorcycle accident that was not his fault and that left him with staggering medical bills and no way to support his young family.

East Canadian County Conservation District is hosting a fundraising event for Josh on Saturday, Aug. 11. The event will begin at the district office at 9:00 a.m. and includes a Dice Run, 50/50 drawing, live auction and door prizes. For more information contact Erica Armstrong, 405-262-1958 ext. 3, ecanadianccd@conservation.ok.gov.

The Dust Bowl, continued from page one

John McCarroll, OETA executive director, said the partnership with OACD and the Conservation Partnership will help create a larger discussion around important topics addressed in the film.

THE DUST BOWL examines, through the stories of people who lived through the period, the experience of the worst man-made ecological disaster in American history. The two-part, four-hour film documents the history of the Dust Bowl, as well as its causes, but focuses primarily on the personal stories of survival – how Oklahomans lived, worked and persevered.

"While the film is very much a historical documentary – focused on the past – the subjects of conservation and sustainability are highly relevant today," McCarroll said. "Built on the essential themes explored by the film, THE DUST BOWL project presents a unique opportunity for rich community discussion and engagement about the past and current environmental challenges facing Oklahoma."

Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission agreed. "The Dust Bowl was a landmark event in the history of our state. It is important that all Oklahomans understand this piece of our history," Thralls said. "The release of the Ken Burns' documentary on the Dust Bowl provides a tremendous opportunity for Oklahomans to learn that each of us by our actions can destroy the land or with proper conservation efforts we can make it both productive and sustainable for future generations."

THE DUST BOWL effort will include screenings and panel discussions across the state, locally produced Dust Bowl content, customized classroom materials, survivor story collection, social networking and multi-media projects, including a comprehensive project web site (www.oeta.tv/dustbowl) that will feature event details and community resources.

"OETA is excited to use THE DUST BOWL community engagement initiative as a vehicle to educate Oklahomans statewide – in the classroom and in the community – about the legacy of the Dust Bowl and to connect its impact to our current environmental reality," McCarroll said. "We hope Oklahomans of all ages will take the opportunity to participate in this important conversation to learn about our state's history, to appreciate our spirit and perseverance and to help plan our future."

South Caddo Conservation District Honors Charlie Opitz

The South Caddo Conservation District held a luncheon on June 15, 2012, to honor Charlie Opitz. Opitz retired from the board when his term expired at the end of June. He has served on the board of directors for 28 years, beginning in 1984. He was preceded by his father Curtis Opitz, one of the original directors elected to the district board, who served 38 years from 1945 to 1983.

State Sen. Ron Justice and Rep. Phil Richardson attended the luncheon and presented Opitz with a Legislative Citation commending him for his service on the conservation district board. Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, presented Opitz with a Conservation Commendation that read "For 28 years of dedicated and distinguished service to the South Caddo Conservation District and the State of Oklahoma in championing the cause of conservation." Pollard commended Opitz for his leadership and support of Small Watershed Upstream Flood Control projects in the area. Specifically Pollard mentioned Opitz' support of watershed rehabilitation and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) projects.

"The damage to the conservation infrastructure from Hurricane Erin in 2007 was extensive," Pollard said. "Charlie's leadership was instrumental in securing funds and working with local landowners to make the needed repairs," Pollard said.

Opitz said his father taught him to respect the land and to respect people who take care of the land and natural resources. He said he has always tried to leave the land in better condition than when he found it, whether he owned or rented it. Through conservation practices, he said, the land will continue to be productive for years to come.



Charlie Opitz with the South Caddo Conservation District board of directors. From left are Stan Manschreck, Gloria Stearns, Charlie Opitz, Ron Walzer, Ralph Myers and Robert Stafford. Stearns, having served as an associate director, was appointed to fill Opitz' position.
(Photo by Lisa Knauf Owen.)

Ribbon Cutting held at Crowder Lake, Cobb Creek Watershed Site One

Two-year dam rehabilitation complete

Submitted by Kristi Hill, Deer Creek Conservation District

Deer Creek Conservation District and Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) hosted local and state officials at a ribbon cutting for Cobb Creek Site 1 (Crowder Lake) on July 2, 2012, to officially re-open the facility for all activities. It marks the completion of an approximately two-year, \$4.2 million flood control structure rehabilitation project. DCCD and SWOSU are co-sponsors of the project.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service constructed Cobb Creek Site 1 for flood control in 1958 with the Deer Creek Conservation District as the local sponsor with assistance of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. The dam was originally designed as a low hazard dam and constructed to protect rural agricultural land from flooding. The dam was reclassified as high hazard in 2006 because of later development downstream.

The dam was rehabilitated to bring it up to current dam safety criteria and extend its life for another 100 years. Rehabilitation included raising the height of the dam, replacing the principal spillway and widening the auxiliary spillway.

Flooding occurred frequently in the watershed before the watershed project was implemented. From 1923 to 1942 there were 13 floods where water covered more than one-half of the watershed flood plain and 67 smaller floods.

In 1983 the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) created a state park around the lake and it became known as Crowder Lake State Park. In 1997 SWOSU took over management of the park and in 2003 the OTRD transferred the lake to SWOSU and it became known as Crowder Lake University Park. Southwestern utilizes the lake in conducting courses such as a ropes course, wilderness first aid, sailing, canoeing, hiking and climbing. What started out as a single purpose flood control dam has been turned into a great location for college students to learn skills outside the classroom, a recreational area for the university and area citizens, and a lake with enhanced fish and wildlife habitat areas.

Deer Creek Conservation District has three watersheds in its boundaries. Rehabilitation on Cobb Creek Site 2 was completed at the end of 2008 and Cobb Creek Site 3 is currently on the design priority list awaiting funding.



Randy Beutler, SWOSU president (yellow shirt, holding scissors), and (immediately to the right) Glen Dickey, Bertha Miller and Alveta Taylor, DCCD directors, help cut the ribbon held in the center by state Rep. Harold Wright (green shirt). Also in the photo are Ben Pollard, Oklahoma Conservation Commission assistant director; Ron Hilliard, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist; and Garrett King, field representative for U.S. Congressman Frank Lucas.



Members of the Deer Creek Conservation District (DCCD) board of directors Glen Dickey, Bertha Miller and Alveta Taylor attended the Caddo Creek Watershed Site 1 (Crowder Lake) ribbon cutting ceremony, as did DCCD staff members Christine Harper and Kristi Hill. Ben Pollard, Oklahoma Conservation Commission assistant director; Ron Hilliard, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist; and Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts executive director, also attended. From left are Clay Pope, Glen Dickey, Bertha Miller (front), Kristi Hill (back), Alveta Taylor, Ron Hilliard, Christine Harper, and Ben Pollard.

Mount Saint Mary High School Visits Rogers Reserve

Submitted by Robert Gibbs, Rogers County Conservation District

The Oklahoma History class at Mount Saint Mary High School has been visiting the Rogers County Conservation District Conservation Education Reserve for the past two years as a part of their curriculum and returned on July 17, 2012. Mount Saint Mary High School is a Catholic private school located in Oklahoma City that offers Oklahoma History as a two-week class during the summer for ninth- to 12th-graders.

David Anderson, one of their instructors learned of the Reserve, located in Claremore adjacent to Rogers State University, on the television show Outdoor Oklahoma. He began bringing his students two summers ago where they learned not only about the diversity of Oklahoma but also participated in one of the most popular programs offered at the Reserve. The students put on waders, gathered specimens from wetlands and then brought the specimens back to the reserve's aquatic lab to analyze them.

"The students and their instructor had an enjoyable experience and, as good news travels fast, we now have had other instructors from the Mount Saint Mary High School Oklahoma History program visit the Reserve and more scheduled," said Robert Gibbs, Rogers County Conservation District education coordinator. "In the last few years, we have had many groups visit us from around the state as the quality of our programs becomes better known," Gibbs said.



In the rehabilitation construction, the auxiliary spillway was reduced from 700 feet wide to 300 feet, but roller-compacted concrete replaced the earthen spillway.



Mount Saint Mary Oklahoma History students visiting the Rogers County Conservation District Conservation Education Reserve.

Erosion Demo helps Hughes County Boy Scout Troop Earn Environmental Science Badge

Submitted by Andrea Jones, Hughes County Conservation District

Andrea Jones, Hughes County Conservation District, was the featured speaker at the monthly meeting of the Holdenville Boy Scout Troop 456 on April 23, 2012, at the Holdenville Methodist Church. Jones presented a soil erosion demonstration and told the Scouts about the different varieties and colors of soils in Oklahoma. She showed them pictures from the Dust Bowl as well as pictures from dust storms that swept through parts of Texas and Arizona in 2011.



Holdenville Boy Scout Troop 456 participating in a soil erosion demonstration.

Jones explained how vegetative ground cover can protect soil from washing away during rainfall. She led the Scouts in a erosion demonstration pouring water over three boxes of soil. One box of soil had no vegetative cover, one had moderate cover and the third had heavy vegetative cover. Through the demonstration the Scouts were able to recognize differences in soil loss in each of the samples.

Scout leader David Cowart told the Scouts that even small changes can affect the environment. He emphasized that it is the Scouts' responsibility to ensure their actions don't harm the environment. Jones reminded the Scouts that all of the food to feed the planet comes from a thin layer of topsoil on a fraction of the earth's surface.

The Scout Troop earned an Environmental Science Badge as a result of participating in the discussion and demonstrations and by demonstrating an understanding of the topic.

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