

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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Neighbor Helping Neighbor Makes Burn Association Successful

The Cross Timbers Prescribed Burn Association organized in February 2004 with a goal of curbing the invasion of eastern redcedar trees in Lincoln County. The group formed after John Weir from the Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department at Oklahoma State University spoke to a local group of interested land owners and managers. He outlined how an association could be formed to share knowledge, experience, equipment and labor to carry out prescribed burns.

The group organized as a cooperative effort, neighbor helping neighbor, with approximately 30 members. Verlin Hart, a rancher and board member of the Lincoln County Conservation District, was elected president, with Eric Lynch, a local ranch manager, as vice president and Gary Bledsoe, a farmer and retired employee of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, as secretary/treasurer. Bledsoe has since joined the Lincoln County CD board.

"We wanted to carry out prescribed burning, but we didn't know how," Hart said. "We needed training, but had difficulty getting it at first. We did not want to burn with a crew that had never seen a prescribed burn," Hart said. As a result, no burns were conducted the first year.

Burning did begin in February 2005 with assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Along with some classroom instruction, NRCS conducted two training burns, then the group began burning, Hart said. Since the association began it has conducted 45 burns on more than 6,000 acres.

From \$25 per member annual dues the association purchased basic equipment needed for conducting burns. A \$500 grant from Quails Unlimited allowed for the purchase of additional equipment and a 25-gallon sprayer was donated to the association by P & K Equipment. Kurt Meyer, a Cross Timbers member, donated a motorized leaf blower. In 2008, through a grant proposal by Mick Jones, Lincoln County OSU Extension Service, along with NRCS, the Wildlife Department and the Lincoln County Conservation District, the group received \$8,000 to buy two trailers and more equipment for use by the burn association. The trailers proved invaluable by allowing more burns to be conducted when conditions were right.

Prescribed burning requires planning, Hart said, and cannot be done on the spur of the moment. It's really best to plan a year in advance for a burn so there is enough vegetative fuel on the ground to get a fire hot enough to burn red cedars and other invasive species. Where grass is too short, the fire will not ignite trees for an effective burn.

Before the burn event the association carefully monitors weather reports, communicates with members to gather adequate personnel, deliver equipment to the location ready for use, and establish a means of communication for use during the burn — cell phones, walkie talkies, etc. "We take our responsibility very seriously and we will not burn if we question the existing conditions."

In addition to controlling the spread of invasive plant species like eastern redcedar, benefits of burning include reducing cedar pollen that triggers allergies for many people. Burning also improves wildlife habitat and the quality of forage in native range for better livestock performance. And it reduces the threat of wildfire in the area.

"We are seeing a lot more interest from people considering prescribed burning as an effective and appropriate resource management tool," Hart said. "Our goal is to get more people trained in the proper burn procedures to carry out safe burns," Hart said. "Groups like the Cross Timbers Prescribed Burn Association go a long way toward helping land managers pool their resources and labor and identify outside resources — financial or educational — to do just that," he said.

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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 www.conservation.ok.gov

Independence Day Holiday, July 3

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

July 6, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

CTIC Water Quality Credit Trading Course, July 7-8, Canton, Ohio

Blue Thumb Volunteer Training,

July 7-8, Central North Canadian Conservation District

NACD Legislative Conference,

July 19-21, Washington, D.C.

Summer Fire Field Day, July 7-8,

OSU Research Range, Stillwater

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting,

Aug. 3, Agriculture Building, Oklahoma City

NACD 2010 South Central Region Meeting, Aug. 12-14, Baton Rouge, La.

Conservation Commission Meeting,

Sept. 1, Oklahoma City

Labor Day Holiday, Sept. 7

Conservation Commission Meeting,

Oct. 5, Oklahoma City

Conservation Commission Meeting,

Nov. 2, Oklahoma City

Veterans' Day Holiday, Nov. 11

Thanksgiving Holiday, Nov. 26-27

Conservation Commission Meeting,

Dec. 7, Oklahoma City

Christmas Holiday, Dec. 25

NACD 2010 Annual Meeting,

Jan. 31 - Feb. 3, Orlando, Fla.

In our thoughts...

Herman Horn, Little River CD director 1996-2002, passed away May 30. He was chairman during the start of the great debate about water sales in Oklahoma.

Rojane Gilmore, district secretary at Marshall County CD for 23 years, passed away May 30.

Edna Montgomery Loftin, Kiamichi CD director, passed away June 5. She had served on the board since 1990 when she replaced her first husband Henry Montgomery who had served on the board since 1954.

Wayne Gray, Pontotoc County CD director 1971-2006, passed away June 9.

Robert Dotson, NRCS district conservationist, Cherokee FSC/Alfalfa County CD, lost his mother June 10.

Carl Lucero, USDA Ecological Services, Discusses Carbon and Environmental Credits with OCC and OACD

Carl Lucero of USDA's Ecological Services program in Washington met with OCC and OACD on May 27 to trade information about the state's carbon sequestration programs and federal initiatives to help market environmental credits.

Stacy Hansen, OCC's Carbon Sequestration Certification Program director, explained how the program will work and noted that Oklahoma is the first state in which a state agency will serve as the official verifying entity to certify carbon offsets. She reported that the permanent rules for the program had been approved in the 2009 session of the state Legislature which happened to be ending the same day.

Sarah Love, director of Oklahoma Carbon Initiative (a program of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts), explained that the program will "bundle" carbon offsets to be traded on carbon markets with industries in return for payments to landowners.

Lucero explained that he came to work in the Ecological Services from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. He described how the agency is working to help facilitate the marketing of credits for environmental benefits created by agriculture and related endeavors, including water quality improvement and carbon sequestration.

Following the morning meeting in Oklahoma City, OCC, OACD and NRCS took Lucero on a tour hosted by Blaine County Conservation District. Steve House and Brandon Webb, Blaine County CD directors, discussed the fencing of a riparian area through a cost-shared pilot program in the North Canadian River 319 Watershed Project that is enrolled in the Oklahoma Carbon Program.

Kay County Conservation District's "Friend of Education"

Kay County Conservation District helps local schools fill the school year with conservation activities. One school honored the district manager as it closed for the summer.

In February district staff picked up 25 trees at the Keyes Correctional Facility in Fort Supply. The containerized trees are grown by the prisoners in a program funded by Wheatland RC&D. The trees are free to non-profit organizations and schools. They planted nine trees at the conservation district office. With the rest of the trees, Susan Henning, district manager, spent a day planting a tree with each classroom at Tonkawa Elementary School. She also planned and coordinated a week-long Earth Week celebration at the school with an activity for each class.

Pre-kindergarten through first grade students watched the Hopper the Frog puppet explain about "Insect Heroes."

Second-graders made dirt babies and third-graders learned about trees and acted out the "Tree Factory." Fourth-graders got hands-on activity learning about non-point source pollution prevention using the Enviroscape watershed model. Fifth-graders became environmental testing companies and found the "toxic" lemonade buried in pans of sand. Earth Team volunteers Dianne Jeans and Betty Schwanke helped with the dirt babies and Jeans also was the puppeteer. Amber Jeans, also an Earth Team volunteer, helped by taking photographs of the puppet show.

During an assembly on the last day of school in May the school district awarded Henning its "Friend of Education!"



With help from the Hopper the Frog puppet (performed by Dianne Jeans, Earth Team volunteer), Susan Henning, Kay County CD manager, explains to Pre-K through first-grade students at Tonkawa Elementary School about "Insect Heroes" like June Bugs (beetles). (Photo by Amber Jeans, Earth Team volunteer.)

OACD/Chesapeake Conservation Education Awards Presented at School Assemblies in May

Five teachers from across the state – one in each Congressional district – received Outstanding Conservation Educator Awards cosponsored by OACD and Chesapeake Energy for outstanding achievement in Conservation Education. The recipients were Tammie Jones, Okay Public Schools; Caprice Coleman, Moss Public Schools; Sally Schmidt, Alva Public Schools; Jane Dmytryck, Norman Public Schools; and Gloria Vass, Edmond Public Schools. Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach; Sarah Gainer, Chesapeake Energy; and Trey Lam, OACD; presented the awards during Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 25. In May the awards were again presented during assembly programs at each teacher's school.



OCC Area V Commissioner Virginia Kidd, OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard, and Hughes County Director Randy Cotten and Associate Director Dale Jenkins presented the award and check to Caprice Coleman in an assembly at Moss Public Schools on May 21. Above, from left, are Cotten, Pollard, Coleman, Kidd and Jenkins.



Over 100 students participated in the fishing clinic, including this kindergarten student from Fairland Elementary School. (Photo by Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County Conservation District.)

Ottawa County Conservation District Fishing Clinic

Ottawa County Conservation District, in partnership with the Northeast Technology Center and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, sponsored a Fishing Clinic at Afton on June 5. There were 115 elementary students and 57 adults participating.

Kip Whiteley, Earth Team volunteer, handed out bait and baited hooks for students who were reluctant to touch worms! Drawings were held in which the students received prizes including rods and reels, fishing tackle items and tackle boxes.

"Many fish were caught and many memories made," said Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County CD secretary.

Blue Thumb Environmental Education Workshops

Conservation Districts can now offer a new type of Blue Thumb training — a four-hour workshop to engage people with an interest in environmental education, particularly as it relates to protecting streams and rivers. Previous training sessions for Blue Thumb volunteers focused on water monitoring — sampling, testing, field collections and quality control procedures. Those two-day monitor training workshops are still offered across the state. The new environmental education workshops focus on outreach and education for adults and older students.

Muskogee County CD held the first workshop June 10 and Wagoner County CD will hold one Aug. 5.

Call Cheryl Cheadle, 918-398-1804, for more information.

Grant County Conservation District's New Building

Grant County Conservation District moved into a brand new office building, the Grant County Farm Service Center, on April 1, 2009. The board of directors committed their own time, labor and equipment to help in the construction, significantly reducing costs. That is a success story, to be sure. But there is more to the story...

Members of the staff of the district, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Services Agency were having lunch in the old office building one day a few years ago. They got to talking about the fact that in just the previous two years they had lost Don Clover, NRCS technician, and Donna Reed, FSA programs technician, to cancer. Terri McCoy, also an FSA employee, was battling breast cancer and undergoing chemotherapy. They were all wondering if something in the office building could possibly be to blame.

Emily Routon, the FSA county executive director at the time, asked her state office to conduct some tests on water, air, etc., in the office building. FSA contacted an independent entity to conduct three separate tests for radon, mold and mildew. After the second test results came back --all testing extremely high in all three categories, agencies in the building were told on Thursday, Aug. 24, 2006, that they had to be out by Monday, Aug. 28, 2006!

With no vacant space in Medford large enough for all agencies, they had to divide up. Grant County CD moved into the County Commissioner's shop building. FSA moved into the City of Medford's conference room and NRCS worked out of the Enid NRCS field office. Then FSA staff found some trailers to use temporarily and they used the district's lot to put them on, hooked them up to sewer, water and electricity and moved into them on September 20, 2006.

"We were never given an explanation of why there was so much radon, mold and mildew," said Judy Ediger, district secretary, "but we all think it was because the ventilation system in the old building was a closed system, no fresh air was vented in." The building owner was not interested in making changes to the improve the situation.

Greg Kloxin, OCC/WQ senior technical writer, was named as the new assistant director of the Water Quality division at the June Commission meeting.

Stacy Hansen, OCC/WQ Carbon Program director, was recognized at the June Commission meeting for being named Employee of the Year at the OCC full staff meeting in May.

Brooks Tramell, OCC/WQ monitoring coordinator, was recognized at the June Commission meeting for being named Employee of the Quarter at the OCC full staff meeting in May.

Jerry Carr, OCC/WQ water quality specialist, was recognized at the June Commission meeting for five years of service to the Conservation Commission and the State of Oklahoma.

After several failed attempts at the bid process, the contracting bid was awarded to the conservation district! Using their own tractors, and scrapers rented from Kay County CD, the directors built the

Grant CCD's New Building, continued on page 4.

Three Conservation Districts in Caddo County Work Together for Common Goals

The three conservation districts in Caddo County combined forces to host a couple of events recently to accomplish common goals. The North, South, and West Caddo CDs hosted a luncheon April 13 at the South Caddo CD and NRCS office in Anadarko for Caddo County Commissioners and their secretaries. The purpose was to thank the commissioners and ask for continued support. They were asked to include funding for conservation district activities in their June budget requests.

The districts discussed their accomplishments, including \$4.6 million put into conservation practices and infrastructure repair in the county during the period from 2006 to 2009 under the Emergency Watershed Program. Danielle Whaley, NRCS district conservationist for Caddo County, gave a presentation showing EWP project areas before and after completion.

About 25 people attended the first-time event and the reaction was positive all around, according to Rita Niece, West Caddo CD secretary.

On April 21, the three districts hosted a breakfast for landowners whose property includes the location of a flood control dam or flood control structure permanent pool. The meeting was held at the Caddo-Kiowa Career Technology Center at Fort Cobb, beginning at 8:30 a.m. with a complimentary breakfast.

Invitations were mailed to names listed in district files as landowners with either a dam or permanent pool on their property. The letter inviting individuals contained the information outlining the districts' easement, to help explain the purpose of the meeting and interest the landowner in attending. About 100 people attended.

The districts used the occasion to explain landowners' rights and districts' easement rights. Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs director, gave a presentation called *Oklahoma's Watershed Program: The Benefits to Caddo County*.

Grant CCD's New Building, continued from page 3.

concrete pad, saving a lot of money. The rest was built by a construction company that had built three other district buildings. "We have used Danny Kilian's (district chairman) tractors several times to spread gravel and level up the parking area and driveway," Ediger said.

"They (the directors) have pitched in at every opportunity and stayed actively involved throughout the whole procedure," Ediger said. "The county commissioners have also been great partners in our building process by providing machinery and employees to help with the dirt work. If it hadn't been for the directors' determination, I don't know what might have happened to our USDA and district offices. There wasn't anyone else determined enough to stick to the whole bidding and building process, which took over three and a half years," she said.

The success story continues as the district and other tenants appreciate the improved environment. "We're all really proud and can't wait to show it off to everyone," Ediger said.

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>

Commission Members

Area I	Matt Gard
Area II	Mike Rooker
Area III	George Stunkard
Area IV	Dan Lowrance
Area V	Virginia Kidd

Editing and Layout — Mark Harrison
email: Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov
Proofreading and Reviewing — Charlotte Stieber
and Ben Pollard

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Mailing Tab Area

2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105-4201
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