



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 51 No. 5 May 2006

2006 Land & Range Judging Contest First Place Results

Oklahoma City — Over 150 teams of teenage FFA and 4-H members from 34 states competed in the 55th annual National Land and Range Judging Contest, held May 2-4. Oklahoma City has been hosting the national contest since 1952.

The 4-H and FFA participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. The teams match skills in judging the adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and homesite construction. An adult category is provided to allow coaches, team alternates and others interested in soil to compete.

The contestants take turns examining soil in pits and trenches dug especially for the contest. The skills the teens test involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resource conservation, home building and construction.

The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location. They then travel to the site, with a police escort, in a caravan of over 100 cars spanning several miles. This year Art Eckroat Farms hosted the Land Judging Contest and the Ray Springer Ranch at M-D Park hosted the Range Judging Contest. The contest day was held May 4.



Contestants evaluating soil during the 2006 National Land & Range Judging Contest.

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NRCS Chief Visits Oklahoma for Stewardship Week

Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight accepted an invitation to speak at Wagoner County Conservation District's annual Stewardship Breakfast. While here he attended the National Land & Range Judging Contest Awards Banquet and toured conservation practices in Logan County Conservation District. While passing through Oklahoma City, he briefly visited the state Capitol where he gave interviews to the news media.



(From left) Oklahoma Conservation Commissioner and Wagoner County CD Director George Stunkard, NRCS Chief Bruce Knight, and Wagoner County CD Programs Coordinator Paula Templeton.



(From right) NRCS Chief Bruce Knight visits with NACD President and Haskell County Conservation District Director Bill Wilson, Oklahoma Conservation Commissioner and LeFlore County Conservation District Director Virginia Kidd, and Cherokee Nation Agriculture Liaison Steve Swogger. (Photos by Melissa Thompson, NRCS, Wagoner FO)

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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.

“Productive land is neither limitless nor inexhaustible.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett. The Hugh Hammond Bennett Lectures, Raleigh, North Carolina: The Agricultural Foundation, Inc., North Carolina State College, June 1959.

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on "Calendar" at www.okcc.state.ok.us

- June 1-3 — Blue Thumb Volunteer Training, OSU Extension Center, Oklahoma City.
- June 2-3 — Project WET Workshop, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah.
- June 5 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Conference Center, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.
- June 8 — OSU Producer Tour, Spavinaw Creek 319 Project Demonstration Farm.
- June 9-10 — Project WET Workshop, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah.
- June 13 — Water Quality Camp, Spavinaw 319 Project Demonstration Farm.
- June 12-15 — Southern Regional Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, "Reconnecting and Enhancing the National Cooperative Soil Survey Partnership," Clarion Meridian Hotel & Conference Center, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma State University and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- June 20-21 — Inter-Tribal Environmental Council 11th Annual Conference, Sheraton Hotel, Oklahoma City. Inter-Tribal Environmental Council.
- June 25-30 — Black Mesa Ecological Academy, Kenton. Panhandle State University and Cimarron County Conservation District. June 26-27 — Pulling Together: A Stewardship Conference for Environmental Volunteers, Wichita Wildlife Refuge.
- July 3 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m.
- July 4 — Independence Day Holiday

District Dateline

Pittsburg County CD and other sponsors held a fishing clinic for over 170 fifth-grade students in April **Grant County, Logan County, Payne County and Woodward County CDs** all held Conservation Banquets in April **Blaine County, Central North Canadian River and Cimarron Valley CDs** jointly held a Blaine County Ag Appreciation Banquet

All Conservation Districts: Please mail, email or fax one-line items about district activities to Mark Harrison/OCC for District Dateline. Thanks!

In Our Thoughts

Marilyn Newman, Beaver County CD programs coordinator, lost her mother May 8. Please inform Mark Harrison at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. Please include dates!!!!!!

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum when the day's freshly-tabulated results were announced. National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of competition — land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA, 4-H and adult divisions. Bruce Knight, national chief of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, attended the awards banquet. Knight was in Oklahoma for a speaking engagement at the Wagoner County Conservation District Soil & Water Stewardship Week breakfast on Friday morning. (See story on page one.)



OCC Area IV Commissioner and OACD President Dan Lowrance presented the National Land & Range Judging Contest Awards at the Awards Banquet on May 4.

In Land Judging, FFA competition, the Hot Springs FFA Chapter of Truth or Consequences, N.M., won in the team category and the first place individual winner was Samantha Day of that team. In the 4-H competition the Jasper County 4-H Chapter, Rensselaer, Ind., was the winning team, and Randy Lehman of that team was the individual winner. The adult category winner was Shawn Dygert of Kuna, Idaho.

In the Range Judging Contest, the Roland, Okla., FFA chapter won the FFA team competition, and Sarah Lockwood of that team took the first place individual FFA award. The Butte Chapter of Newell, S.D., won the 4-H team category, and Dustin Hawkins of that team placed first in the individual category. Mike Kirpatrick of Fox, Okla., won in the adult category.

In Homesite Evaluation, the Bradenton, Fla., chapter won the FFA team competition, and Carson Nail from Guthrie, Okla., took the first place individual FFA award. The Barbour County, W.V., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Alicia Bosely of that team placed first in the individual category. Shawn Dygert of Kuna, Idaho, won the adult award in the Homesite competition as well as in the Land Judging category.

This year OACD President and contest cochairman Dan Lowrance presented the 2006 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award to Frank E. Evans of Stillwater, Okla. President of the Oklahoma Rural Rehabilitation Corporation and retired employee of Farmers Home Administration, Evans has recruited and coordinated group leaders for the Land & Range Judging Contest for the past 36 years. He served as a group leader himself for several years previous to that.

Robert Dukes, soil conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, stationed in Oklahoma City, was honored for "behind the scenes" work on the contest. For years Dukes has prepared the sites for the contest and then ensured that all holes were filled and litter removed to return the sites to their pre-contest state.

Lowrance extended thanks to the Art Eckroat Farms and Ray Springer Ranch at M-D Park for hosting the contest sites and to the Noble Foundation for sponsoring the printed program.

Lowrance credited the OACD and NACD Auxiliaries, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Association and Oklahoma conservation districts for helping make the contest a success. He also thanked businesses, associations and state and federal agencies for their support.

In addition contest cosponsors include the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, Oklahoma Farmers Union, Oklahoma Farm Bureau and numerous other businesses and organizations.

Conservation Commission Employees: Awards & Recognition

Shanon Phillips, OCC/WQ OCC's Water Quality division assistant director, received the first-ever Employee of the Quarter award presented by the OCC Employee Awards & Recognition Committee (see story on page four).

Karla Beatty, OCC/CP education coordinator, was named WOW (Wonder of Wetlands) Facilitator of the Year by the educational program's founding organization, Environmental Concern, Inc., of St. Michaels, Md.

A Summary of the Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Friday, April 7, 2006, at the Autry Technology Center, Room 22, 1201 W. Willow, Enid, Oklahoma, beginning at 10:00 a.m.

District Director Resignations

Stephens County — Edward Sutton

District Director Appointments

Coal County — Johnnie Bellettini

Creek County — Dwight Luther

Ellis County — Grant Dowler

Mayes County — Jerry Koelsch

Murray County — Richard Day

Okfuskee County — Jerry Rempe

Osage County — Charley Chambers

Wagoner County — J.W. Edwards

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, who reported \$1,119,463.00 in claims Feb. 20 - March 21.

Agreements

Commissioners approved 12 new agreements and two amended agreements, and ratified two agreements previously approved by Chairman Rick Jeans due to time constraints, as submitted by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved six out-of-state travel requests for 16 OCC staff members.

National Watershed Coalition Leadership Conference

Commissioners approved a motion to table discussion and action to reimburse the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts for 12 scholarships for district directors and/or district employees to attend the National Watershed Coalition Leadership Conference, Nebraska City, Neb., May 10-12.

District Director Election Results

Commissioners ratified election results for district director position No. 2 in Kiamichi, Nowata County and Tulsa County CDs.

Spavinaw Creek/Lake Eucha Priority Watershed Project

Commissioners approved the State Guidelines for Spavinaw Creek/Lake Eucha Priority Watershed Project as presented by Dan Butler, Water Quality director.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioners thanked the Garfield County CD directors and staff for hosting the meeting in Enid and congratulated them on being named District of the Year. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported on attending the Women In Agriculture Conference in McAlester. Commissioner Dan Lowrance reported attending the NACD Spring Legislative Conference during which the group from Oklahoma met with the state's congressional delegation and their staff. He also met with NRCS Chief Bruce Knight to discuss the NRCS budget and attended the National Watershed Coalition

meeting. Commissioner Rick Jeans also reported on attending the meeting with Knight. Commissioner George Stunkard reported on participation in Conservation Day at the Capitol activities. Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr. reported on attending GIS Day at the Capitol activities and commended staff members Mike Sharp and Shellie Willoughby on a successful event. He also attended an Ag Appreciation Day in Guymon.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, acknowledged the Garfield County Commissioners in attendance and commended them on their efforts with Garfield County CD in the Emergency Watershed Protection program. Thralls provided copies of a USDA newsletter stating that NRCS employees will be reduced by 1,539 nationwide.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported on attending the annual conference of the Oklahoma Public Procurement Professionals. Agency financial records are being audited by the State Auditor and Inspectors Office for the period of July 1, 2004, through Dec. 31, 2005. Mr. Coffman stated that the Department of Central Services has a new contract for copiers, printers, and faxes where all state agencies must purchase from one vendor.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, summarized the status of watershed rehabilitation projects for 2006, stating that nine projects have been completed, six are awaiting construction, design is underway for seven, five projects have completed the planning process and are awaiting design, and two projects are in the planning process.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, thanked the Garfield County Commissioners in attendance for their work with the Emergency Watershed Protection Program and reported on two active AML projects.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, reported that initial conservation practices have been finished on the demonstration farm in Delaware County and he invited Commissioners to tour the farm.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending board meetings in Ellis County, Mayes County, and Muskogee CDs and assisting East Woods County CD with a job description. She participated in the Women in Ag Conference held in Broken Bow. She also participated in an Envirothon meeting at Lake Texoma.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, reported on Tar Creek activities stating that equipment is moving on the West Commerce project site and that work continues on the Southeast Commerce project.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, reported on legislative bills dealing with the Conservation Re-

serve Enhancement Program, invasive species and controlled burns. He reported that Gov. Brad Henry recorded a Public Service Announcement for Soil Stewardship Week and the Oklahoma Press Association was sending out print public service announcements to state newspapers. He reported that the NACD Spring Legislative Conference went well.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Kevin Norton, NRCS assistant state conservationist, stated he continues to be amazed at the strength of the conservation partnership in Oklahoma. He reported on the NRCS state budget, and he provided a written summary of activities.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Jim Reese, FSA state executive director, expressed appreciation to OCC staff for work on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and stated that 37 states have CREP agreements in place already. Reese reported that FSA is busy with pond clean out and fence repairs and replacements due to wildfires throughout the state. In one county alone, staff has been working on 250 ponds.

Garfield County Conservation District

Richard Wuerflein, Garfield County CD chairman, introduced the district board and staff. He reported on district activities including flood control structure maintenance, the Emergency Watershed Protection Program, youth contests, no-till workshops, Women in Ag conferences, Cooperator Appreciation Days, and displays at county fairs. Jason Skaggs, district manger, and Sheri Nickel, district secretary, presented the District of the Year video and a slide show prepared for the Women in Ag conference.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on May 1 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Please Note

Individuals who would prefer to receive the Oklahoma Conservation Conversation newsletter electronically rather than as a hard copy by mail, please send your email address to markh@okcc.state.ok.us with the message "change newsletter to electronic." Please include your name and mailing address so we can remove you from the hard copy mailing list. The electronic distribution will begin at some future point.

Area IV Commissioner Named to OSU Ag College Advisory Council

Dan Lowrance, Stephens County CD director and OCC Area IV Commissioner, has been named to serve as the conservation representative on the advisory council of Oklahoma State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

OSU Creates Department of Natural Resources

Oklahoma State University regents voted to create a new academic department focused on natural resource conservation and ecology. The Department of Natural Resources, within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, will conduct research in sustainable use of forests, reangelands and wildlife and fisheries resources. Wildfire management and prevention and watershed management will be top priorities for the new department.

OCC Employee Awards & Recognition Committee Hosted a Week of Events

In commemoration of National Public Service Recognition Week, the Conservation Commission's recently-formed Employee Awards & Recognition Committee hosted a week-long series of events May 1-4. The events included a coffee and bagel breakfast, a staff meeting with lunch, a soil painting workshop and a visit to the National Land and Range Judging Contest. At the staff meeting, Shanon Phillips, OCC's Water Quality division assistant director, received the first-ever Employee of the Quarter award (see *Awards & Recognition*, page two).

Kerr Center Newsletter: The Changing Face of Oklahoma Farming

The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture's newsletter, *Field Notes*, reported some interesting items in its Spring 2006 issue, in a feature entitled "The Changing Face of Oklahoma Farming." (Reprinted with permission.)

- Reversing a trend of 50 years, the number of farms in Oklahoma grew by nearly 25 percent between 1992 and 2002. Most of these farms were less than 180 acres. With roughly the same amount of farmland, the average farm size shrank from a historic high of 480 acres to 404 acres.
- Women are the largest minority group in Oklahoma farming. Their numbers doubled between 1992 and 2002.
- Latinos are the fastest growing minority group of Oklahoma farmers. Their numbers have increased sevenfold since 1992.
- Since 1987 the numbers of Native American and Asian American farmers have doubled and African American farmers have increased by a quarter.

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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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