



# Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts Volume 52 No. 11, November 2006

## Governor and Conservation Commission Commend Darrel Dominick

The State of Oklahoma recently recognized Darrel Dominick for his contribution to the conservation of the state's natural resources. Dominick received several honors at the November meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Dominick recently retired from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service as State Conservationist for Oklahoma. Dominick received a Governor's Commendation presented on behalf of Gov. Brad Henry by Jeannette Nance, the Governor's liaison to the Commission.

The Governor's Commendation read "In appreciation of your six years of exemplary service as the State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Oklahoma, your visionary leadership in the conservation of Oklahoma's natural resources and your tireless commitment to making the State of Oklahoma a better place to live."

The Conservation Commission presented Dominick with a commendation honoring him "For unsurpassed leadership as the NRCS State Conservationist in Oklahoma, your commitment and unwavering support of Oklahoma's 88 conservation districts and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, championing the outreach of conservation programs to all citizens of the state, and most of all for being our friend these past six years."

In August the Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), state Sec. of Agriculture Terry Peach and a number of agricultural organizations expressed outrage at the decision *Dominick Commendation, continued on page 2*

## Governor Henry and Conservation Commission Commend the Poteau River Watershed CSP Team

Governor Henry and the Conservation Commission recognized the Poteau River Watershed Conservation Security Program (CSP) Team at the November Commission meeting. The team members received a Governor's Commendation presented on behalf of Gov. Brad Henry by Jeannette Nance, the Governor's liaison to OCC, and a Conservation Commission Commendation presented by Chairman George Stunkard.

USDA Sec. of Agriculture Mike Johanns presented the Poteau River Watershed CSP Team with the Award for Supporting the President's Management Agenda: CSP Chair Rights at the Secretary's Honors Awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 20. The team was recognized "for outstanding outreach to the Conservation Security Program Native American, Asian, and limited resource customers in the Poteau River Watershed, Oklahoma, resulting in the most contracts accepted in the nation."

The Poteau River Watershed CSP Team included the boards and staff of the Latimer County, LeFlore County and Haskell County CDs and Poteau, Stigler and Wilburton NRCS field offices. The team members are Phoukham Vongkhamdy (team leader), Justin S. Brown, Michael D. Bryan, Chris Cheatham, Shawn Fleming, resource customers in the Poteau River Watershed, Oklahoma, resulting in the most contracts ac-



OCC's Commissioners and Executive Director joined to present Darrel Dominick with a Conservation Commission Commendation on Nov. 6 at the monthly Commission Meeting. From left are Executive Director Mike Thralls, Commissioners George Stunkard and Matt Gard, Dominick, and Commissioners Dan Lowrance, Virginia Kidd and Rick Jeans.



OCC's Commissioners presented Conservation Commendations to members of the Poteau River Watershed CSP Chair Rights at the Secretary's Honors Awards ceremony.

*Poteau River CSP Team, continued on page 4*

## In This Issue

—Governor and Conservation Commission Present Commendations —

Darrel Dominick

Poteau River Watershed CSP Team

Cobb Creek Watershed Site 2 Rehab Ground Breaking

OACD 2006 Area Meetings

**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.

**Visit the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's new website:**  
[conservation.ok.gov](http://conservation.ok.gov)

### 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 [Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov) 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.

# Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on  
"Calendar" at [www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)  
2007

- Jan. 1 — News Year's Day Holiday
- Jan. 8 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.
- Jan. 12-13 — KNID AgriFest, Chisholm Trail Expo Center, Enid.
- Jan. 15 — Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday
- Jan. 18 — No-Till Workshop, Hollis Civic Center, Hollis.
- Feb. 4-8 — Power of Conservation, Annual National NACD Meeting, Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles, Ca.
- Feb. 8 — No-Till Workshop, Caddo-Kiowa Technology Center, Fort Cobb. (Larry Wright, 580.832.3661, [Larry.Wright@ok.usda.gov](mailto:Larry.Wright@ok.usda.gov))
- Feb. 9-11 — Oklahoma Farmers Union State Convention 2007, Cox Convention Center, Oklahoma City.
- Feb. 19 — President's Day Holiday
- Feb. 25-27 — OACD Annual State Meeting, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City.
- March 10 — Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference, Payne County Expo Center, Stillwater.
- March 19 — Conservation Day at the Capitol, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Third Floor Rotunda, Oklahoma State Capitol Building.
- May 28 — Memorial Day Holiday

## In Our Thoughts

Joye Avery, Jackson County CD secretary from 1962 to 1982 passed away Nov. 2 in Plano, Texas.  
Dennis Boney, OCC/CP watershed technician, lost his wife Angie Nov. 8 due to a heart attack.  
Diana Ehlers, retired Grant County CD programs coordinator, lost her mother Nov. 10.  
Paul Thompson, Murray County CD director for 55 years, passed away Nov. 13.  
Greg Lyons, Garvin CD watershed aide, lost his mother-in-law Nov. 19.  
Please inform Mark Harrison at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. Please include dates!!!!!!!

## From Dennis Boney

I would just like to thank all the districts, OCC staff and partners for all their cards and thoughts and prayers during this difficult time. Thank you so much! Dennis & Family

## Dominick Commendation, continued from page 1

by Mark Rey, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, to reassign Dominick to a position in Fort Worth, Texas. The reason given for Dominick's reassignment was that he was not effective in working with conservation partners in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's conservation organizations took strong exception to Rey's reasons for the reassignment. According to George Stunkard, chairman of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, "Mr. Dominick has been an outstanding leader in natural resource conservation in the state. He has worked closely with our state agency to ensure that Oklahoma's land managers receive the best possible conservation services. For the Under Secretary to say that Mr. Dominick has not worked effectively with his principal state partner is outrageous."

OACD President Dan Lowrance said "Mr. Dominick was committed to working with Oklahoma's 88 conservation districts. He believes in locally-led conservation where conservation district board members set the conservation priorities in their communities. There was not a more committed conservationist in this state than Darrel Dominick. His leadership will be sorely missed."

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, expressed his appreciation to Dominick for his service to Oklahoma. "Darrel is the third generation of his family to work for the conservation service in Oklahoma," Pope said. "He knew the importance of conservation to the state and worked tirelessly to ensure Oklahoma was a leader in the national conservation movement. When Darrel chose the option of retirement, Oklahoma lost the best NRCS state conservationist in the United States," Pope said. "It was fitting that Governor Henry and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission recognize Mr. Dominick's service to the state of Oklahoma."

## Groundbreaking for Cobb Creek Site 2 Rehabilitation

Kristi Hill, Information and Education Coordinator, Deer Creek Conservation District

Congressman Frank Lucas and state Reps. James Covey and Ryan McMullen recently joined representatives from the Deer Creek Conservation District, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for a ground breaking ceremony at the Cobb Creek Site 2 watershed dam rehabilitation project northwest of Colony. Work on the project should begin by mid-November. Site 2 is at the end of its 50-year life span and is now considered a high-hazard structure.

Congressman Lucas said western Oklahoma is the perfect place for some of the first rehab work. "We understand that either we don't get enough rain or we get it all at once," Lucas said. "The efforts to establish flood control dams began here. Having those first efforts also means having the oldest, most worn structures. It's appropriate we begin here to work hard to extend the life of the structures with the better materials and engineering we have now."

Lucas said he believes, in general, the public takes the watershed dams for granted. "Having worked successfully for 50 years, people don't realize how many millions of dollars in property and how many lives have been protected," he said. "I consider this (watershed rehabilitation) one of the great accomplishments of my congressional tenure."

Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission executive director, said rehabilitation of older, high-hazard dams is critical. "Health and safety issues are at the top of the list. We try to look ahead," he said, adding that after the rehabilitation, the dams will provide flood protection for another 100 years.

Rep. Covey said everyone needs to realize what the effects would be if a dam breached. "Our biggest challenge is educating senators and representatives on the importance of being involved as a state," Covey said. "It's not just a rural concern."

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director Clay Pope said that in the next 10 years over 1,000 of Oklahoma's 2,105 watershed dams will be at the end of their life span and 185 currently carry a high hazard rating.



(From left) OCC Chairman George Stunkard joins Governor Brad Henry's liaison Jeanette Nance to present Darrel Dominick with a Governor's Commendation.



A ground breaking ceremony was held recently at the Cobb Creek Site 2 watershed dam northwest of Colony. On hand for the event were (from left) Clay Pope, OACD executive director; Bertha Miller, Glenn Dickey, and Almeta Taylor, Deer Creek CD directors; Ron Schmidt, NRCS district conservationist; Rep. James Covey; Steve Kelley, NRCS district conservationist; Congressman Frank Lucas; Rep. Ryan McMullen; Mike Thralls, OCC executive director; Sue Harper-Brown, Deer Creek CD associate director; and John Flaming, Deer Creek CD director.

## **A Summary of the Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission**

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Oct. 2 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### **District Director Appointments**

Hal Clark - Cimarron County  
Glen Dale Wilson - Dewey County  
Lee Roy Hudson - Harmon County  
J.R. Gibson - Jefferson County  
Richard Murray - Kingfisher County  
Jerry Coleman - Marshall County  
Neil Hyer - Texas County

### **National AML Awards**

Commissioner George Stunkard reported attending the National Abandoned Mine Land Program Association meeting in Billings, Mont., where the association presented two of its most prestigious awards to OCC employees Mike Sharp and Mike Kastl. Sharp received the Stan Bernard Memorial Award, given to a person who has made significant contributions to the association over the past year. Kastl was the first recipient of the new Dave Bucknam Outstanding Instructor Award. Kastl has taught Office of Surface Mining training courses in several states since 1991.

### **Claims/Financial Statement**

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as presented by Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, who reported \$1,449,193.62 in claims Aug. 21 - Sept. 19.

### **Agreements**

Commissioners ratified five agreements previously approved by the OCC chairman due to time constraints, and approved six amended agreements, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director.

### **Travel Requests**

Commissioners approved five out-of-state travel requests for seven staff members, as presented by Mike Thralls, OCC executive director.

### **FY2008 Budget Request**

Commissioners approved OCC's FY2008 budget request as presented by Mike Thralls. He stated the request includes a recommendation for \$2,962,890 in new general revenue funds. OCC will also request the Legislature remove the cap on REAP fund transfers to provide additional funding for watershed rehabilitation, the Conservation Cost-Share Program, and a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

### **Joint Plan of Operations**

Commissioners approved a Joint Plan of Operations submitted by the Noble County Conservation District.

### **OACD Area Meetings**

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the OACD Area Meetings.

### **Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Matt Gard stated he would attend the Governor's Biofuels Conference in Norman on Oct. 3-4. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported she had revisited the Club Lake AML Project site and that the finished work has given landowners incentive to do work on their own. She also attended an OACD strategic planning committee meeting to discuss association membership. Commissioner Dan Lowrance reported attending the National Watershed Coalition's Organizing for Action Workshop. He stated that district staff who attended the workshop thanked OCC for sponsoring their attendance and Mike Thralls shared letters of thanks from employees. Commissioner Lowrance reported on a conversation with USDA Under Secretary Mark Rey and a meeting he and NACD President Bill Wilson had with NRCS Acting State Conservationist Pat Leavenworth. Both were related to questions Oklahoma had regarding the alloca-

tion of NRCS technical assistance funds. He stated that his questions were answered and that it was now time to move on, although some events could have been avoided if these questions would have been answered earlier in the year. Lowrance stated that Wilson had met with new NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster who has new ideas about the allocation of NRCS funds. Commissioner George Stunkard attended the OCC full staff meeting in Jay and a tour of the Water Quality demonstration farm. He commended staff for a great job they are doing in the area. Commissioner Stunkard also attended a retirement reception for North Caddo CD secretary Carolyn Tucker. Commissioner Rick Jeans reported on participating in the Kay County fair where 700 kindergarten coloring posters were exhibited. He also participated in NACD teleconferences.

### **Staff Reports**

**Administration:** Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported attending the National Association of State Conservation Agencies' (NASCA) annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. NACD President Bill Wilson was in attendance and introduced NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster to the group. Thralls stated that the comments from Chief Lancaster were positive. Lancaster wants to build strong partnerships with state agencies. Comments to the Chief were that states have a good partnership with NRCS but that the partnership has been greatly damaged.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, reported on the first meeting of the Prescribed Burn Task Force. Pollard stated that he is working with NRCS on security background checks for conservation district employees who access NRCS computers. He expressed his displeasure with the Conservation Listening Session held in Enid. USDA Deputy Under Secretary Dave Tenney attended the session representing Under Secretary Mark Rey, but left the meeting before all speakers had given their statements.

**District Services Division:** Lisa Knauf, DS director, also attended the NASCA meeting and workshop where Ray Ledgerwood was the facilitator. Ledgerwood will be attending the OACD State Meeting to discuss leadership development.

**Water Quality Program:** Dan Butler, WQ director, stated that the division has been sending reports to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for approval. Staff has added Honey Creek as a new implementation project, and the Watershed Advisory Group appointed by the Delaware County CD board has held its first meeting.

**Abandoned Mine Land:** Mike Kastl, AML director, reported on three active sites in Sequoyah and Rogers Counties and stated that the annual AML Inspectors Workshop would be held in Tulsa at the end of October.

**Information Technology:** Mike Kastl gave the Information Technology division report, explaining that Mike Sharp, IT director, was attending a meeting in Little Rock, Ark. He reported that work on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project continues as well as work on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Staff worked on providing Internet service to OCC field offices in Bristow, Claremore, Pauls Valley and Tahlequah.

**Financial Management and Human Resources:** Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, submitted a written report of division activities.

**Conservation Programs:** Robert Toole, CP director, stated he gave a presentation at the Cooperation Between Counties and Conservation Districts interim study meeting and is excited about the opportunities that may result. He reported that Karla Beatty, education coordinator, assisted in the Four-State Advanced Project WET Facilitator workshop. She also assisted with the H2O Oklahoma Water Festival in

the Kiamichi CD for five schools where 250 students, 20 teachers, and 50 presenters and volunteers participated. Pre-construction meetings were held for the Sugar Creek Devil's Canyon drop structure project and the Barnitz 14 rehabilitation project with work on both anticipated to begin within the month. A pre-bid conference will be held in the month for the Mill Creek 18 rehabilitation project. Toole stated that the watershed technicians participated in the National Watershed Coalition's Organizing for Action Workshop in Nebraska City, Neb., and will share that knowledge at district board meetings.

### **Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts**

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, thanked OCC for cosponsoring the Area Meetings. Pope reported attending an interim study meeting about controlled burning. He also attended a Cooperation Between Counties and Conservation Districts interim study meeting. Programs for possible district and county commissioner partnership are roadside erosion, invasive species control and watershed operation and maintenance. He reported that OACD Vice President Scotty Herriman gave a presentation at Congressman Lucas's Farm Bill hearing as did Trey Lam representing the National Watershed Coalition. Pope stated he is concerned about suggestions that farmers should plow up their land to plant corn for biofuel and will continue to monitor the issue. The Wildlife Federation has asked OACD to join a task force to discuss the Conservation Reserve Program and the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill. The city of Kingfisher is writing a conservation innovation grant for a trails system along the Cimarron River. OACD is beginning work to revise the handbook.

### **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Pat Leavenworth, NRCS acting state conservationist, stated that NRCS has started the new fiscal year under a continuing resolution and that last year's balanced budget has been closed out. She expressed pleasure with being able to add funds to agreements with OCC. She reported that Oklahoma NRCS achieved 100 percent of its performance plan goals as a result of hard work and dedication. Leavenworth also reported National Resources Inventory rangeland data was complete with 104 primary sampling units. She stated that soil survey digitizing is nearly complete. She reported the U.S. Sec. of Agriculture announced that 51 watersheds will be eligible for the 2007 Conservation Security Program. Oklahoma's Upper Washita watershed was among those selected. Johnny Green, state conservation engineer, has been selected as the new co-director of the National Design, Construction and Soil Mechanics Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Larry Caldwell will be acting state conservation engineer. The FY06 volunteer program is closing and national awards nominations are now available.

### **USDA Farm Service Agency**

Rod Wanger, Conservation Program chief, reported that Conservation Reserve Program payments amounted to \$33 million for Oklahoma. The State Technical Committee extended grazing until Nov. 30. He reported that emergency grazing and managed haying and grazing are being used due to drought conditions. Managed haying and grazing is authorized no more often than one out of every three years after the CRP cover is fully established. Direct and counter-cyclical program payments will be out during the month totaling \$64 million and advance payments will begin in December.

### **Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held Nov. 6 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

## OACD Area Meetings 2006

Each year in November the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts sponsors Area Meetings at five locations in the state for local conservation districts in each region. Each Area Meeting was hosted by one or more conservation districts and cosponsored by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. The theme for the meetings this year was "70 Years — And Still Going! Celebrating the approaching 70th anniversary of the Conservation District Enabling Act!"

Some discussion topics carried from one area to others, while some topics were meant specifically for one area. The meetings for northwest, southwest, central and northeast Oklahoma's conservation district directors and employees included discussion of no-till agricultural methods, soil quality, changing demographics of the state population and roadside soil erosion. The demographics session carried to the Area V Meeting for southeast Oklahoma, while sessions on agritourism and the Poteau River Watershed Conservation Security Program replaced other topics.

At all Area Meetings, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service representatives discussed the tightening security requirements for any personnel using NRCS computers or accessing the Internet through a USDA connection. NRCS Acting State Conservationist Patricia Leavenworth attended several of the Area Meetings to discuss security issues, thank Oklahomans for their hospitality during her stay, and announce that Ron Hilliard would soon arrive from West Virginia to assume the position of NRCS state conservationist.

The Area Meetings include contests for youth in categories of speeches, essays and posters, cosponsored this year by Western Farmers Electric Cooperative. First place winners in the essay and poster contests and first and second place winners in the speech contest are eligible to compete at the state level during OACD's Annual State Meeting to be held Feb. 25-27, 2006, in Oklahoma City.

### [Poteau River CSP Team, continued from page 1](#)

James Harrison, Larry Hood, R. Artie Johnson, Daniel D. Lee, Robin L. Lynch, Tom Neumeyer, Ryan B. Pannell, Brent Reavis, H. Brian Ringels, Kenneth Risenhoover, Amanda Stanford, Rishell Tate, William Thomas, Sammy L. Viles, David B. Wells, Oscar B. Boyd, Brandon Faulkenberry, Kim Goff, Lisa Grey, Donna Hanebrink, and Nicole Norris.

CSP is a voluntary program administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). For the Oklahoma portion of the Poteau River Watershed, 412 CSP contracts received approval. The majority of those — 342 — are in LeFlore County, which contains the largest part of the watershed. "One reason we had an exceptional number of people qualifying for the program is the good job our producers have done over the past 20 years to establish good conservation programs on their land," said Kenneth Risenhoover, NRCS district conservationist at Poteau.

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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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2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160  
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(405) 521-2384 FAX: (405) 521-6686  
<http://www.conservation.ok.gov>

### **COMMISSION MEMBERS:**

**Area I** Matt Gard Fairview  
**Area II** Rick Jeans Tonkawa  
**Area III** George Stunkard Coweta  
**Area IV** Dan Lowrance Duncan  
**Area V** Virginia Kidd Poteau

**Mike Thralls, Executive Director**  
**Ben Pollard, Assistant Director**

Editing and Layout - Mark Harrison  
email: [Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:Mark.Harrison@conservation.ok.gov)  
Proofreading and reviewing - Charlotte Stieber  
and Ben Pollard

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