



# Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 52 No. 10, October 2006

## Matt Gard, New Conservation Commissioner for Northwest Oklahoma

Matt Gard, a Major County Conservation District board member, joined the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as Area I Commissioner representing 18 conservation districts in northwest Oklahoma. Gard, from Fairview, replaced J.T. Winters Jr. who concluded his five year term on the Commission June 30th and did not seek reappointment. Commissioner Gard was appointed on Aug. 22 and began his five-year term at the monthly meeting of the Conservation Commission on Sept. 5.



Matt Gard

Matt and his wife Kathy live in Fairview and have two sons and a daughter. A graduate of Oklahoma State University with a degree in animal science, Gard is a Certified Crop Advisor and has a commercial pilot rating. He and his family belong to the Fairview United Methodist Church, for which Matt serves as a lay leader.

Gard became a cooperater with the Major County Conservation District in 1989 and first joined the board of directors in 1993. He has served on the executive board of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts as Area I director and vice president. A board member of the Fairview Chamber of Commerce for four years, he also served as vice president in 1997 and president in 1998. He has served as a member of the steering committee for the OSU Extension Program for Major and Dewey Counties and is a certified instructor for trap and archery under that program. He has served as a board member and president of both the Oklahoma Alfalfa Hay and Seed Association and the Major County Surface and Mineral Owners Association. He served as the director of the membership committee for the National Forage and Grasslands Council. He also serves on the Oklahoma Biofuels Advisory Board.

Gard is a member of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Oklahoma Farmers Union, Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association, and is on the board of OKFREE. He is also a member of the National Corn Growers Association and placed second in that organization's National Corn Growers Contest. He grows cotton, alfalfa, soybeans, millet, wheat, and canola. Gard is a commercial applicator of pesticides, has a custom applicator business and does custom planting, sowing, and haying.

The conservation districts Gard represents in Area I are Alfalfa County, Beaver County, Blaine County, Central North Canadian River, Cimarron County, Cimarron Valley, Dewey County, East Canadian County, East Woods County, Ellis County, Garfield County, Grant County, Harper County, Kingfisher County, Major County, Texas County, Woods County, and Woodward County Conservation Districts.

## Oklahoma Sweeps Awards at National AML Conference

OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation (AML) staff received both awards presented at the 28th Annual Conference of the National Association of Abandoned Mine Land Programs (NAAMLPL) held in Billings, Mont., Sept. 24- 27.

Dr. Mike Sharp, director of the OCC Information Technology Division, received the "Stan Barnard Award." The award is presented in memory of a past NAAMLPL president and administrator of the Wyoming AML program. The award is given to an individual who exhibits "Stan-like" qualities of outstanding dedication, commitment, and hard work toward the enhancement of the NAAMLPL programs. Sharp serves on several NAAMLPL committees and chairs the Abandoned Mine Land Information Systems



(From left) Mike Sharp, OCC Information Technology director; George Stunkard, OCC chairman, and Mike Kastl, OCC Abandoned Mine Land director, at the NAAMLPL conference.

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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.

*"The threat of nuclear weapons and man's ability to destroy the environment are really alarming. And yet there are other almost imperceptible changes - I am thinking of the exhaustion of our natural resources, and especially of soil erosion - and these are perhaps more dangerous still, because once we begin to feel their repercussions it will be too late."*

- The Dalai Lama's Little Book of Inner Peace: 2002, Page 74, Element Books, London

## Conservation Calendar

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

- Nov. 2 — OACD Area I Meeting, Rock of Restoration Church, South of Geary.  
Nov. 6 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.  
Nov. 8 — OACD Area IV Meeting, Western Oklahoma State College, Altus.  
Nov. 9 — OACD Area II Meeting, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City.  
Nov. 10 — Veterans Day Holiday  
Nov. 10-12 — Oklahoma Farm Bureau State Convention, Tulsa Marriott Southern Hills Hotel, Tulsa.  
Nov. 15 — OACD Area III Meeting, Hillsdale Christian Church, Nowata.  
Nov. 16 — OACD Area V Meeting, Pittsburg County Expo Center, McAlester.  
Nov. 23-24 — Thanksgiving Holiday  
Dec. 4 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

### *In Our Thoughts*

- Sue Armstrong, former district secretary at Caney Valley Conservation District, lost her husband Bill Oct. 8.  
Eldon Merklin, OCC/CP staff, lost his father-in-law, Oct. 9.  
Phyllis Wilson, the mother of Dewey County CD's newest board member Glen Dale Wilson, and wife of late board member Keith Wilson, passed away Oct. 15.  
Checotah CD Director Dana Watson's mother passed away Oct. 19.  
Duane Crider, NRCS district conservationist, El Reno FO, lost his brother in an auto accident.

### *Congratulations!*

George Fraley, Rogers County CD director, and his wife, Wilma, Claremore NRCS/TSO clerk, have a new grandson — Parker William Stanbro. He is the son of the Fraleys' daughter, Pam, and her husband, Billy. Parker's grandfather George has served conservation for over 30 years and is a member of the Conservation Hall of Fame. He was born Sept. 30 on what would have been the 106th birthday of his great-grandfather, Clyde J. Fraley, a founding and 34-year director of Rogers County CD.

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

### *To my Conservation Family:*

Thank you for the caring words, cards, and prayers I have received while my father has been so ill, and since he has been gone. You have genuinely uplifted me, and I cannot thank you enough. —Cheryl Cheadle

## Carolyn Tucker retires after 35 years of Service to North Caddo

Approximately 70 people attended a retirement luncheon for Carolyn Tucker on Sept. 21 in Weatherford. Tucker retired after 35 years of service to the North Caddo Conservation District. The district board hosted the luncheon for Tucker's family and friends from across the state. The group included past board members, employees of North Caddo and other conservation districts, current and former employees of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Conservation Commission employees.

OCC Chairman George Stunkard and Assistant Director Ben Pollard presented Tucker with a Conservation Commission Commendation for her "service to the North Caddo Conservation District, her contribution to the conservation of natural resources in the state of Oklahoma, and service to the state's conservation district employees." During her term as president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees, the group visited the state Capitol and worked to improve conditions for district employees. That work helped lead to a pay raise for all Oklahoma conservation district employees in the 2006 state legislative session.

### [NAAML P. continued from page 1](#)

(AMLIS) committee. He participated in development and implementation of two AML courses and is an instructor of five Office of Surface Mining (OSM) courses. Sharp formed the AML Users Group to encourage OSM to provide computer hardware, software and training support to AML Programs for designing reclamation projects. Sharp has testified before Congress on behalf of "minimum program" AML states (like Oklahoma and seven other states whose coal production falls below the amount needed to generate \$1.5 million in reclamation funds taxed at the rate of 15 cents per ton on underground-mined coal, 35 cents per ton on surface-mined coal and 10 cents per ton on lignite coal) to appropriate the annual \$2 million allocation, as mandated in Public Law 95-87.

Mike Kastl, director of OCC's AML Division, received the other award, the Dave Bucknam Outstanding Instructor Award. This was the first year to present the award honoring the director of Colorado's AML Reclamation Program, who succumbed to cancer in 2004.

"Dave had a passion for training and was chairman of the Association's Training Committee," Kastl said. Bucknam is credited as having been the driving force in the initiation, development and instruction of the first OSM-AML course and helped implement several AML design courses. "Dave was the ultimate instructor, who had the knack of engaging his students in discussion and imparting to them his many AML experiences," Kastl said. Of the 189 instructors teaching a variety of OSM courses each year, Kastl was selected to receive the first Bucknam award. Kastl had worked with Bucknam and others to develop the first OSM-AML course offered to state and tribal AML staff. The purpose of the course was to provide identification, planning, design, implementation, maintenance and evaluation of actual reclamation project work. Kastl helped launch the course for the first time as an instructor with Bucknam and Alan Kraps (OSM staff member from Washington, D.C.) in Norton, Va., in May 1991. In the years since, Kastl has had the opportunity to teach, with Bucknam and other instructors, hundreds of students in several states.

Kastl and Sharp were recognized again at the October Conservation Commission meeting on the Monday following the NAAML P conference. OCC Chairman George Stunkard and Executive Director Mike Thralls posed for a photograph with Kastl. Sharp was not present at the Commission meeting but was attending a conference of the National Society of Geographic Information Councils in Little Rock, Ark.



*OCC Chairman George Stunkard (left) and Assistant Director Ben Pollard (right) presented Carolyn Tucker with a Conservation Commission Commendation in appreciation of her service.*



*(From left) OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls, AML Director Mike Kastl and Chairman George Stunkard at the October meeting of the Conservation Commission.*

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

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Sept. 5 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### **District Director Appointments**

Terry Boston - Beaver County  
Vernon Anderson - Bryan  
Lester Gagan - Caney Valley  
David Lyon - East Woods County  
Clifford Frick - Logan County  
Jackie Tow - Love County  
Byron Hobson - Major County  
Kathy Carter - North Fork of Red River  
Fred Eberhart - Payne County  
Herbert Moody - Talihina  
John Lamb - Tillman County  
L.A. Todd - Tillman County

### **Claims/Financial Statement**

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as presented by Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, who reported \$1,773,751.09 in claims July 25 - Aug. 20.

### **Agreements**

Commissioners approved two amended agreements and ratified eight agreements previously approved due to time constraints, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. Commissioners also approved a correction to an agreement amended previously. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

### **Travel Requests**

Commissioners approved five travel requests for 11 OCC staff and one Commissioner.

### **FY2007 Joint Plans of Operations**

Commissioners approved FY2007 Joint Plans of Operations for five conservation districts as presented by Lisa Knauf, District Services director.

### **FY2008 Budget Request**

Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, presented the proposed FY2008 budget request that is due to the Office of State Finance by Oct. 1. He stated that staff will meet with Commissioners and representatives of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts to finalize the request and bring to the Commission for approval in October. Lisa Knauf presented compiled Statements of Needs and Justifications of Funds received from conservation districts. Districts have requested a total of \$53,000 for increased hours for current district employees; \$505,000 for new positions; and \$394,000 for equipment. The personnel request totals do not include FICA, medicare, retirement and benefits. Staff will review the requests to comprise a total for OCC's budget request. No action was taken.

### **Locally-Led Cost-Share Program**

Commissioners approved recommendations presented by Robert Toole, CP director, to allocate \$600,000 to conservation districts for Program Year 8 of the Locally-Led Conservation Cost-Share Program and to approve an additional allocation of FY2007 REAP funds for the program in a performance-based strategy.

### **Commissioner Reports**

Commissioner Rick Jeans reported attending the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session in Enid and stated that a large group, including representatives from the Farm Bureau and Farmers Union, was in attendance showing support for Oklahoma's NRCS state conservationist. He also attended the National Association of Conservation Districts' Board Meeting and stated that NACD would host teleconferences to discuss local issues. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending a media event for the Club Lake West AML Reclamation

Project. She also attended the Wildlife Expo in Guthrie. Commissioner Matt Gard encouraged conservation district directors to express conservation needs to the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Oklahoma Farmers Union resolution committees, as policy set at the local levels would dictate requests at the state level.

### **Staff Reports**

**Administration:** Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported on meeting with new Area 1 Commissioner Matt Gard prior to the Commission meeting to brief him on OCC activities. He reported on attending the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session in Enid. Thralls expressed his appreciation to Commissioners George Stunkard and Rick Jeans, and OACD Executive Director Clay Pope for their participation and comments. Pat Leavenworth, Wisconsin NRCS state conservationist, had been named acting state conservationist for Oklahoma for a 90-day detail.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, reported that work continues with Public Service Company of Oklahoma (PSO) and its involvement with conservation plans and the establishment of riparian areas.

**District Services:** Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending board meetings in Shawnee, Coal County, Oklahoma County, North Fork of Red River and Kiamichi CDs. She also assisted with new secretary training in Kiamichi. Knauf assisted Haskell County with payroll and IRS issues. She also attended the "Forest of Family Fun" at the Wildlife Expo.

**Water Quality:** Shanon Phillips, WQ assistant director, stated that Clay Pope was approached by the Elk City city manager requesting assistance about a lake being on the 303(d) list. The lake is listed because of bacteria and it soon may be listed due to nutrients. Staff met with city officials and stated that the best assistance to protect the riparian area would be Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The program would cost approximately \$5 million with the city committing \$275,000 and the remainder coming from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**Abandoned Mine Land:** Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that projects listed as complete under the FY2004 grant still lack some vegetative work due to the drought. He thanked Commissioner Kidd for help with the Club Lake Project. He reported that two projects have begun under the FY2006 grant. He reported on the emergency program.

**Financial Management/Human Resources:** Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported completing the following reports for FY2006: Cash and Investments, Capitol Assets, and Compensated Absences GAPP Conversion Packages. The telecommunications and inventory reports were completed. He stated the health care option period beginning Jan. 1 will see a rate increase of up to 20 percent.

**Information Technology:** Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that a change in superintendents on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project has been positive as far as work is concerned. He stated that reclamation work continues on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Final plans for the Howerton project have been reviewed by OCC and are in the final state of preparation by the contractor. Sharp stated that staff is working in districts where OCC employees are housed, to get computers on a dedicated Internet line due to NRCS computer compliance issues. He stated that staff has worked on strategic and business plan development for the Geographic Information Council and the Office of Geographic Information. A needs assessment survey will be discussed at the Council meeting on Sept. 8.

**Conservation Programs:** Robert Toole, CP director, stated that several of his staff were featured speakers at the National

Watershed Coalition workshop on Operation & Maintenance of Watershed Structures. Toole reported that the Wildlife Expo was a tremendous public education event again this year with more than 30,000 people participating. Toole stated that the performance-based approaches to allocating funds to districts were the primary focus of attention in the Locally-Led Cost-Share, Program. He stated that the second allocation of FY2007 O&M funds were processed based on district requests for funding. Numerous requests for watershed aides and equipment remain unfunded. O&M funding continues to fall short of identified needs. Toole reported that the Barnitz Site 14 watershed rehabilitation project in Dewey County CD had been contracted and the Sandstone Site 16A project in Upper Washita CD had been bid. The Sallisaw Site 33 Project in Sequoyah County CD is pending land right negotiation and the Cobb Site 2 Project in Deer Creek CD is pending a pre-bid conference.

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

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, on scheduling and planning for Area Meetings. Pope reported he was pleased with the turnout at the USDA Listening Session. He reported that P&K Riverside donated a sprayer and Estes Chemical provided the spray to use in the outdoor classroom area at Ham Homestead. Pope reported on legislative interim studies, stating that the County and Municipal Government Committee would meet Sept. 14 to discuss cooperation between counties and conservation districts and that a committee on prescribed burning would meet Sept. 21. He thanked the Water Quality division for their work with the Elk City.

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

Kevin Norton, NRCS assistant state conservationist, stated he would pick up Pat Leavenworth, acting NRCS state conservationist later that afternoon. Norton highlighted the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session and provided a summary of Farm Bill Program activity. He reported that U.S. Sec. of Agriculture Mike Johann announced several actions for drought assistance and Oklahoma received \$1.25 million in financial assistance for enrollment of rental agreements in the Grassland Reserve Program in 2006. The money has been allocated for use on existing applications for 10-, 15-, and 20-year rental agreements. Norton stated that personnel positions are being filled including all district conservationist positions, one RC&D coordinator and 3 technical positions before the end of the fiscal year.

### **USDA Farm Service Agency**

Rod Wanger, FSA Conservation Programs chief, reported that \$6 million had come to Oklahoma in the Livestock Grant Assistance Program. The Direct and Counter-cyclical sign-up would begin Oct. 1. Wanger reported that 36 counties were approved for the Emergency Conservation Program for drought assistance and stated that producers are eligible for emergency loans at a rate of 3.75 percent.

### **Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Oct. 2 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### **Conservation Commission Employees: Awards & Recognition**

George Moore, OCC Conservation Programs watershed technician, was named "Employee of the Quarter" by the OCC Awards & Recognition Committee. The announcement was made at OCC's full staff meeting on Sept. 13 in Jay.

## Johanns Honors USDA Employees In Annual Awards Ceremony

WASHINGTON, Oct. 20, 2006-Agriculture Secretary Michael Johanns honored U.S. Department of Agriculture employees from across the nation for exemplary service and achievements in the 59th annual USDA Honor Awards Ceremony. Included among the honorees were the Poteau River Watershed Team from Oklahoma. 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 Team included staff of the Latimer County, LeFlore County and Haskell County Conservation Districts and Poteau, Stigler and Wilburton NRCS Field Offices. The team members are Phoukham Vongkhamdy (group leader), Justin S. Brown, Michael D. Bryan, Chris Cheatham, Shawn Fleming, 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 Standord, Rishell Tate, William Thomas, Sammy L. Viles, David B. Wells, Oscar B. Boyd, Brandon Faulkenberry, Kim Goff, Lisa Grey, Donna Hanebrink, Nicole Norris.



*Poteau River Watershed CSP Team*

"The Honor Awards recognize truly outstanding service by USDA employees who have achieved great things through their dedication, leadership and hard work," said Johanns. "The men and women we are honoring today deserve our gratitude and I am proud to celebrate their contributions to the Department of Agriculture."

The Honor Awards are the most prestigious awards presented by USDA. This year there are 34 individual and group award winners. They are honored for outstanding service in many fields, including stewardship of natural resources, scientific research, animal and plant disease control, environmental innovations, education outreach, emergency response to disasters, food safety, farm and food program delivery, trade and export development, and rural economic development. USDA is also honoring employees who performed individual acts of heroism and courage.

## Partnership Presents Brush Management Seminar

The Oklahoma Commissioners of the Land Office, Cimarron County CD and Boise City NRCS field office sponsored a Brush Management and Program Outreach Seminar on Sept. 28. Iris Imler, Cimarron County CD programs coordinator, used newspapers, letters and phone calls to reach ranchers in a five-state area.

In the morning, 57 producers met at the Kenton Easter Pageant Grounds where the land suffers from encroachment of mesquite, junipers, and cholla. Jodie Stockitt, Dow Chemical Co., and Jack Lyons, Dupont Chemical Co., discussed a variety of chemical treatments and equipment available to address invasive plant species. Producers gained hands-on experience in assessing plants per acre.



*Cimarron County brush management workshop*

At the Hoot Owl Ranch, owners George and Terry Collins served lunch, funded by Dow and DuPont Chemicals. Cherrie Brown, NRCS district conservationist, and Michael Roberts, soil conservationist, discussed cost-share programs. James Spurgeon, Commissioners of the Land Office, Real Estate Division, spoke about land lease opportunities. A shortgrass identification contest followed, led by Ernest Romero, NRCS district conservationist from Clayton, N.M.

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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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