

# OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts      Volume 53, Issue No. 10/11/12, Oct., Nov., Dec. 2007

## Happy New Year from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission!

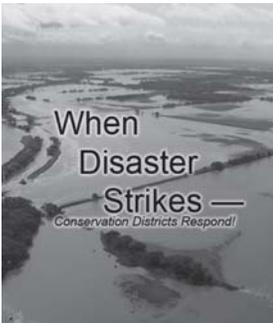


Oklahoma Conservation Commissioners (from left) Mike Rooker, Matt Gard, Virginia Kidd, Dan Lowrance and George Stunkard.



The staff of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

## “When Disaster Strikes – Conservation Districts Respond”



The 2007 Area Meetings of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, cosponsored by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

Conservation leaders discussed issues relevant to Oklahoma at the Area Meetings of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) held across the state Oct. 31 - Nov. 15. “When Disaster Strikes – Conservation Districts Respond,” the theme of the meetings for Oklahoma’s conservation district directors and employees and employees of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, reflected dramatic and unusual weather events that threatened the state this year. Discussion ranged from the Verdigris River flooding in northeast Oklahoma to the pounding that Tropical Storm Erin gave Caddo, Blaine and Kingfisher Counties in western Oklahoma.

At each Area Meeting a local participant gave a presentation about a weather disaster in their area and OACD President Scotty Herriman told how the flood of the Verdigris River wiped out his farm and others in Nowata County. At Area I Blaine County CD Director Steve House showed photos of “Hurricane Erin,” the tropical storm that pounded Oklahoma in August. At Area IV South Caddo County CD Director Charlie Opitz described how the same storm damaged his area and necessitated draining the Sugar Creek L-44 dam before it breached. Nowata County CD Director Leo Dick discussed long-term damage to Nowata County after the Verdigris flood water receded. David Hungerford, NRCS district conservationist at the Stillwater field office, spoke about Payne County flood events at the Area II Meeting. Royce Casey, Pittsburg County CD director, gave a presentation about the ice storm damage to southeastern Oklahoma in winter 2007.

Representatives from two U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies, the Farm Services Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service, outlined federal programs designed to help with weather disasters and the eligibility criteria. Assistant State Climatologist Gary McManus presented findings on data collected worldwide regarding climate change (See *Implications of Climate Change for Oklahoma*, page 8).

## Happy Holidays Fall Issue

*When Disaster Strikes* —  
OACD 2007 Area Meetings

NACD President Olin Sims Dies

Melvin Welch, Centenarian  
Conservationist

Gary Mast, USDA, Speaks at  
Governor's Water Conference

First State CREP Contract Signed

Conservation Districts Host  
Tours for Legislators

OCC & NRCS Announce Aggressive  
Watershed O&M Initiative

Hughes County Conservation  
District Hosts Natural Resource Days

Office of Surface Mining  
Honors OCC/AML Staff

OACD Conservation Awards 2008

Oklahomans Attend Watershed  
O&M Workshop in Texas

Implications of Climate  
Change for Oklahoma

Make Money Using Your Land to  
Fight Climate Change

### 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](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)

## Conservation Calendar

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

**New Year's Day Holiday**, Jan. 1

**KNID AgriFest**, Jan. 11-12, Chisholm Trails Expo Center, Enid

**Martin Luther King Jr. Day Holiday**, Jan. 21

**Kay-Noble Counties Women in Ag Conference**,

Feb. 7, North Oklahoma College, Tonkawa

**NACD Annual Meeting**

Feb. 10-13, John Ascuaga's Nugget, Reno, NV

**No-Till Oklahoma Conference**, Feb. 11-12,

Clarion Conference Center, Oklahoma City

**Presidents' Day Holiday**, Feb. 18

**OCC Full Staff Meeting**, Feb. 20 (location tba)

**OACD State Meeting**

Feb 24-26, Reed Center, Midwest City

**Southern States RC&D Meeting**,

March 2-5, St. Louis, Mo.

**Conservation Day at the Capitol**,

March 19, Oklahoma City

**Ag Day at the Capitol**, April 2, Oklahoma City

**OCC Full Staff Meeting**, May 5 (location tba)

**National Land & Range Judging Contest**,

May 5-7, Oklahoma City

## In Our Thoughts

W.L. "Bill" Sherrill, 36-year Harmon County CD director, passed away Sept. 18.

John Brandon, Pushmataha CD director, lost his father Sept. 25.

Elmer Pankratz, former Roger County CD director, passed away Sept. 26 at the age of 79. He served on the district board from 1987 - 2003.

Jack Ketchum, Stephens County CD director since 1984, passed away Oct. 25. His father Leonard served on the board 1947-1977.

Billie Mayfield, Rogers County CD secretary since 1979, passed away Nov. 8.

Nick Owen, El Reno FO NRCS soil conservation technician, lost his mother Mary on Nov. 13.

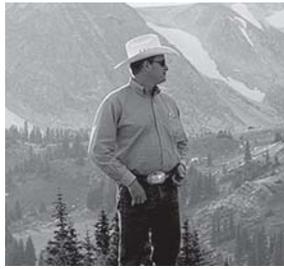
In October Greg Kindell, Tall Grass RC&D coordinator, was detailed from USDA through the Foreign Ag Service to the State Department to Iraq for one year. As an Ag Advisor for the Provincial Reconstruction Team in the Ninewa region which is near the town of Mosul, he will assist in trying to rebuild the country's agriculture industry.

## Congratulations!

Cindy Gerhardt, Custer County CD secretary, and husband, Stephen, have a new baby girl, Madycin Jax Gerhardt, born Nov. 12.

Jason Skaggs, Garfield County CD manager, has a new niece, London Alexis Birchfield, born Sept. 25.

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



## NACD President Olin Sims Dies in Ranch Accident

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission was saddened to learn that National Association of Conservation Districts President Olin Sims has died. Mr. Sims' life was cut short in an accident on his ranch in McFadden, Wyoming, on Dec. 7. "President Sims was an outstanding national spokesman and leader for conservation in the United States.

He truly loved the land and was committed to the work of conservation districts," said OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls. A family man proud of his Wyoming roots, Olin will be deeply missed by the conservation family. For more details at NACD's website, visit <http://www.nacdn.org>.

## Melvin Welch, Centenarian Conservationist

The Oklahoma Centennial Spectacular Celebration, held at the Ford Center in Oklahoma City on Nov. 16, topped a yearlong celebration of one hundred years of statehood. The star-studded event included Reba McEntire, Vince Gill and Garth Brooks, but it was Melvin Welch from Helena that may have attracted the most attention.

Melvin sang the original Oklahoma State song, "Oklahoma, a Toast."

Melvin is a 101-year-old farmer, former teacher and one-time soil conservationist.

Melvin has lots of conservation ties. After graduating from Oklahoma A&M in 1928 he helped establish a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Geary and help plant some of the state's original shelterbelts. He worked for the USDA Soil Conservation Service for 15 years in Seiling, Talihina, Wewoka and Stillwater and a few years in Texas. He later taught junior high science in Wichita, Kan., before retiring back to the farm in Oklahoma. Melvin graduated from high school with OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls' grandfather, Kenneth Thralls, and he said that Mike's grandmother, Grace, was his first girlfriend. Melvin's brother Harold was also an SCS employee.

Throughout his life Melvin has continued to farm and practice conservation on the farm where he was born in 1906 and where he and his wife Martha live today, a mile north of Helena in Alfalfa County. He still drops by the NRCS office and attends conservation district events. "I move a little slower these days, but I can still crawl up on my tractor and do some work," he said.

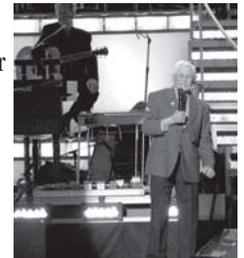
When asked how he thought he did when singing the song, he very humbly said, "Well, they did give me a standing ovation and after I left the stage they tried to get me to come back up and do an encore, but I just didn't want to climb back up those steps and figured folks had heard enough."

## Gary Mast, USDA, at the Governor's Water Conference

USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Gary Mast spoke at the Governor's Water Conference, "Water for Life," Oct. 25 in Oklahoma City. Mast is a past president of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

Mast provided an overview of current Farm Bill programs and explained the importance of conservation planning being funded in the next Farm Bill. He told participants that the first contract for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program in Oklahoma had recently been signed at Tahlequah. Mast stated that over \$340 million in damages had been prevented in the state by upstream flood control dams and structures during the flooding in spring and summer of 2007. He noted Oklahoma's leadership in the flood control program with the first completed watershed project in the nation, the first completed rehabilitation project and the first dam decommissioning.

Mast closed with a discussion of the status of debate in Congress on the next Farm Bill, expressing hope that conservation programs would receive as much support as in the last Farm Bill.



Above, from left, at the Governor's Water Conference are Bill Wilson, Haskell County CD director and NACD past president; Gary Mast, USDA under secretary for Natural Resources and Environment and NACD past president; Mike Rooker, Shawnee CD director and OCC Area II commissioner; and Mike Thralls, OCC executive director.

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - First Contract Signed in Cherokee County CD

An event marking the signing of the very first Oklahoma contract for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was held at Riverside Park along the Illinois River in Tahlequah on Oct. 26. The contract marks the beginning of a \$20.6 million cooperative conservation partnership agreement between U.S. Department of Agriculture and Oklahoma that will create up to 9,000 acres (or 370 miles) of riparian buffers and filter strips. The conservation plantings will reduce the flow of nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watersheds (Oklahoma CREP). Jerry Hammons of Tahlequah is the first landowner to sign a contract for the new program.

Land owners participating in the program will receive annual rental payments, financial and technical assistance and other incentives for voluntarily enrolling land into contracts. FSA will administer Oklahoma CREP, with support from state CREP partners. Eligible landowners will receive up to 90 percent of the cost of practice installation in addition to their annual rental payments and their signing incentive payment.

In Hammons' contract, he will remove 14 acres of his land from agricultural production in a 300-foot wide strip bordering the Illinois River to develop riparian (streamside) buffers and filter strips of vegetation. The conservation plantings will reduce the flow of nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watershed. In return, Hammons will receive \$63 per acre per year plus a \$6 per acre per year maintenance payment for the 15-year life of the contract. He also receives a one-time \$100 per acre signup incentive at the beginning of the contract. The total payment is \$15,990 to take out of cattle production a strip of land 300 feet wide and just under four miles long. And that first piece is a small portion of the total 370 miles the sponsors would like to enroll in the program.

"I have an interest in keeping the Illinois River water clean," Hammons said. "This way, I can accomplish that and receive some compensation for taking the land out of production too," he said.

At the state Capitol in April, Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry and U.S. Deputy of Agriculture Secretary Chuck Conner signed the Oklahoma CREP agreement, paving the way for the program in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) is the state agency managing the Oklahoma CREP. USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) will administer the federal portion of the funding. Key partners include the City of Tulsa's Metropolitan Utility Authority, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, five local conservation districts, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"Spavinaw Lake is the primary water supply for our second largest city. The Illinois River is our most iconic scenic river," said Miles Tolbert, state Sec. of Environment. "These waters both face serious challenges. With the creation of a CREP we are rising to that challenge," Sec. Tolbert said.

"Farmers and ranchers are the original conservationists. They have to constantly conserve and enhance their land to keep it productive. They live on the land and are intimately tied to it," said Terry Peach, state Sec. of Agriculture. "In this modern world of global trade however, it's not always so easy for a farmer to make a living and still give back to the land what it needs.

This CREP program will allow the farmers of these two watersheds to achieve both purposes and all the citizens of Oklahoma will reap the reward," Peach said.

OCC, collaborating with local conservation districts, NRCS and FSA, will identify eligible producers with appropriate land for enrollment in the program. The state will provide 20 percent, or \$4.1 million, in cash and in-kind services for Oklahoma CREP. OCC will also provide staffing for the project and coordinate with other natural resource conservation programs at the local, state and federal levels. USDA will provide 80 percent of the overall costs, making a total of \$20.6 available for the program.

"The Conservation Commission and local conservation districts have been helping to implement conservation practices to protect water quality for years," said Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. "Utilizing programs like CREP is the next logical step in implementing that water quality conservation," Thralls said.



*Landowner Jerry Hammons (left) signs the state's first CREP contract as Cherokee County FSA Committee Chairman Joe Ritter looks on.*



*(From left, standing) OACD Executive Director Clay Pope, Cherokee County Conservation District (CCCD) Director Lloyd Goodwin, OACD President Scotty Herriman, CCCD Director Bill Dudley, OCC Area III Commissioner George Stunkard and OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls join (seated) Hammons, Ritter and CCCD Chairman Garland Phillips at the signing event.*

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### Please Note: Conservation Commission Monthly Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the monthly meetings of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, once approved, are available on-line at <http://www.conservation.ok.gov>. Click on "Commission Meeting Schedule, Agendas & Minutes" in the left menu. Anyone who would like to have a printed copy may contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.

## Conservation Districts Host Tours for Legislators

### Sequoyah County Conservation District Hosts Dam Tour for Legislators

State Sen. Kenneth Corn and Rep. Bud Smithson attended a tour of area watershed flood control dams on Sept. 20. The Sequoyah County Conservation District and the Sallisaw field office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service hosted the tour. Representatives for U.S. Sens. James Inhofe and Tom Coburn and Rep. Dan Boren also attended.

The purpose of the event was to inform and educate state and federal legislators on the importance of flood retarding structures in Oklahoma. The tour included three Sallisaw Creek flood retarding structures that have been classified as high hazard. In many cases dams that were originally built in rural and agricultural settings have now been enveloped by suburban development. In any case where one human life could be endangered should such a dam fail, the rating of the dam changes to “high hazard” status.

Sallisaw Creek Site No. 37 served as an example of a site where operation and maintenance work was recently performed. The site also reflects the average height, length and drainage area of the 2,105 structures in Oklahoma. Sallisaw Creek No. 32 served to demonstrate the purpose of planned rehabilitation to enhance protection to the city of Sallisaw. Site No. 6 demonstrated the need for current operation and maintenance work to keep structures functional and in good operating condition.

Sequoyah County Conservation District (SCCD) directors attending were Harrell Lee, Todd Lenington, Charles Smith, and Virginia Stites. SCCD staff were Gary Taylor, equipment/watershed manager; Pat Fentress, secretary; and Audra Fenton, NRCS district conservationist.

Representing the Oklahoma Conservation Commission were Mike Thralls, executive director; Robert Toole, Conservation Programs director; and Dennis Boney, watershed technician. Larry Caldwell, watershed specialist and engineer, represented the NRCS state office. The tour concluded with a working luncheon in which Robert Toole made a presentation on past, current and future benefits provided by flood retarding dams for the infrastructure.

### Caney Valley Conservation District Discusses Flood Control with Legislators

State Sen. John Ford and Reps. Steve Martin and Earl Sears attended a tour of area watershed flood control dams in the Double Creek watershed in Washington County on Sept. 24. The dams in the Double Creek Watershed protect U.S. Highway 75 and the community of Ramona. Caney Valley Conservation District hosted the tour.

As flood control dams across the nation reach the end of their design life, many need rehabilitation to extend their benefits for the future. The tour of three dams in the Double Creek watershed gave the legislators a close look at one watershed site that is under rehabilitation, one that has not been rehabilitated, and one that has been completely rehabilitated.

“The Caney Valley Conservation District board of directors appreciates the legislators taking time to tour the upstream watershed structures and their continued support of the watershed projects,” said Waymon Montgomery, chairman of the conservation district.

Conservation district representatives also discussed the need to reevaluate the Cotton-Coon Mission Creeks Watershed structures. Not all of the planned structures in the watershed have been built. The sites of those proposed structures are upstream from Bartlesville and Dewey as well as U.S. Highways 60 and 75.

“They were not built due to difficulty obtaining land easements because of mineral rights and a shortage of funding,” Montgomery said. “These watershed structures would have helped greatly in the June 11th flash flood that affected the east side of Dewey,” he said.

For state rainfall, 2007 has not been a typical year. According to the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the state’s \$2 billion infrastructure of 2,105 small watershed flood retarding dams provide an average of \$71 million in annual public benefits. That is estimated at \$39.5 million in flood damage reduction and \$31.5 million in non-flood related benefits including water supply, wildlife habitat, recreation and sediment retention. But this year the record rainfall resulted in an additional \$290 million damage reduction for the period of May and June and an additional \$30 million damage reduction in August. And 330 more dams that have been planned, but for which construction has not been funded, could have provided another estimated amount of almost \$50 million in damage reduction for those two time periods.

Other benefits include 1,532 bridges and 20,541 farms and ranches benefited by the dams. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service estimates that the structures help prevent over nine million tons of sediment from flowing downstream. And 42 of the dams provide municipal water supply in locations across the state, according to the Conservation Commission.

In 2000 Oklahoma Congressman Frank Lucas authored the Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments Act. The law authorized substantial repair and overhaul of flood control dams reaching the end of their design life. As the dams functioned as they were built to do, some have filled with sediment or suffered other effects of time. In many cases dams that were originally built in rural and agricultural settings have now been enveloped by suburban development. In any case where one human life could be endangered should such a dam fail, the rating of the dam changes to “high hazard” status.



*Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs director (left), answers questions from tour participants at Sallisaw Creek Site No. 32.*



*From left, Sen. John Ford and Reps. Earl Sears and Steve Martin review Double Creek Site No. 2 rehabilitation plans with Caney Valley Conservation District Manager Jick Grant.*

Significant changes are required to bring a dam like that into safety specifications. As of January 2007 there were 188 high hazard structures requiring rehabilitation to comply with safety standards. The number continues to grow as more homes are built downstream in the breach inundation area. The average cost to rehabilitate a dam to meet high hazard criteria is \$1 million. When funds are available to rehabilitate a dam, the cost share ratio is 65 percent federal and 35 percent state funding. Rehabilitation extends the benefits of a dam for another 100 years.

## Murray County Conservation District Watershed Tour with Chickasaw Nation

Murray County Conservation District and the Chickasaw Nation joined together for a watershed tour on Oct. 11. The tour focused on watershed sites on Chickasaw land, primarily those needing operation and maintenance for brush control, but also sites with up-to-date O&M for comparison. The goal of the tour was to help the district and the tribe to form a plan for partnering on watershed O&M. Murray County CD board members attending were John Cagle, Bob Dulaney and Richard Day. Kelly Hurt, chief environmental health and safety officer, represented Chickasaw Enterprises. District, NRCS and OCC staff also attended.



*The tower at Chigley Sandy Site No. 2.*



*(From left) Chuck Pyka, Murray County CD watershed aide; Bobby Cline, NRCS district conservationist; Robert Toole, OCC Conservation Programs director; Dennis Boney, OCC/CP watershed technician; Kelly Hurt, Chickasaw Enterprises environmental health and safety officer; Charles Rogers, NRCS soil conservation technician; and Darrel Dominick, OCC tribal coordinator; examine O&M needs at Chigley Sandy Site No. 2.*

## State Legislators Tour Caddo County Flood Damage

State Sen. Ron Justice hosted a tour of Caddo County flood damage for other legislators on Oct. 19. The tour included stops at flood control structures and land damage by spring and summer rain. Sen. Don Barrington and Rep. Phil Richardson participated in the tour.

On Aug. 19 many locations in Caddo County received as much as 12 inches of rain in five hours with significant damage resulting from flooding. Approximately 150 bridges washed out, miles of roads were damaged and several upstream flood control structures were damaged – both earthen dams and spillways. Pond dams and terraces were blown out. Over 100 pipe drop structures were washed out. Since the flooding, the USDA Farm Service Agency in Anadarko has taken, to date, over 2,000 applications from landowners for Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) assistance to begin repairing the damage. The cost estimate for these applications is \$10 million.

“The South Caddo Conservation District appreciates members of the state Senate coming to Caddo County to view the damage,” said Charlie Opitz, district chairman. The tour provided an overview of the damage and the needs to restore the conservation infrastructure he said. Sen. Justice also expressed his appreciation to Sen. Barrington and Rep. Richardson for attending the tour, who both acknowledged the dramatic damage they had witnessed.

Scotty Herriman, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and a Nowata County farmer, traveled across the state to attend the tour. He lost his home and farmland in a flood of the Verdigris River earlier in the year. “The Verdigris flood was a terrible, devastating flood,” Herriman said. “But it was a slow flood. You have to see the damage in Caddo County to understand the violence of the storm that hit here,” he said.

Clay Pope, executive director of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, pointed out that damages had taken place in not just Caddo and Nowata Counties, but also Blaine and Kingfisher and other locations in the state. “The need for restoration of the conservation infrastructure is a statewide issue,” Pope said, “as that infrastructure protected us in emergencies and now needs repair.”

Mike Thralls, executive director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, reported meeting with Gov. Brad Henry earlier in the week. The needs presented, just for restoration of conservation infrastructure from damages of freakish weather statewide in 2007, totaled \$30 million.

“We must explore every possible resource to rebuild what Oklahoma has built since the Dust Bowl to protect our natural resources,” Thralls said. “And we need all the support we can get just to get back to where we were a few years ago,” he said.



*(From left) Sen. Ron Justice, OACD Executive Director Clay Pope, Sen. Don Barrington and South Caddo Conservation District Chairman Charlie Opitz at an S-shaped curve discuss catastrophic damages to Caddo County.*

# OCC & NRCS Announce Aggressive Watershed Operation & Maintenance Initiative

In November the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for Oklahoma sent a joint letter to all conservation district board members and employees and NRCS employees in the state. The subject of the letter, signed by OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls and NRCS State Conservationist Ron Hilliard, was improving operation and maintenance of Oklahoma's watershed dams. The following is the text of the letter:

Oklahoma's watershed flood control dams successfully protected many communities from catastrophic damage during the spring and summer storms of 2007. This very important infrastructure prevented more than \$340 million in flood damages to homes, businesses, roads, bridges, and agricultural lands, as well as protected many people's lives.

Operation and maintenance (O&M) of this important public infrastructure is critical to keep them safe and assure they continue to provide the benefits for which they were planned and designed. Many of these dams need attention to address O&M needs and the repair of storm damage.

The NRCS and OCC are cooperating on an aggressive initiative to assist project sponsors with the O&M of watershed dams and to update the comprehensive O&M needs inventory that was last performed in 2002. Actions include inspecting all watershed dams, verifying hazard classifications, identifying and prioritizing O&M needs, and developing a schedule and cost estimate to address priority O&M needs. Oklahoma NRCS Bulletin 390-8-5 provides details on the required actions. The O&M actions must be completed by March 31, 2008. We realize this will involve extra effort and a true partnership to successfully complete these actions in a timely manner.

The information collected during this initiative will also be helpful in the ongoing effort by conservation districts to educate their state legislators and obtain critical O&M appropriations for the coming years.

We strongly encourage each of you to work closely together to complete this important work.

Thank you for your continued efforts to protect our precious natural resources.

## Hughes County Conservation District Hosts Two Natural Resource Days

Hughes County Conservation District hosted Natural Resource Days at two of its permanent outdoor classroom sites in the last week of September. The sites are located at Moss School east of Holdenville and Thomas Elementary School in Holdenville. At Moss School 194 students and 17 representatives from eight organizations participated including the Highway Patrol; Hughes County Sheriff's Department; Department of Wildlife Conservation; Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry; Latimer County Conservation District; Farm Service Agency; OCC Blue Thumb; and the OSU Extension Service. At Thomas Elementary School 292 students and 25 representatives from 10 organizations participated including the Holdenville Fire Department, OGE, and the Pontotoc County Meat Science Club.

## Office of Surface Mining Honors OCC Staff

The year 2007 marks the 30th anniversary of the passage of the federal Surface Mining Reclamation and Control Act (SMCRA). The U.S. Office of Surface Mining (OSM) has been marking the milestone by recognizing key contributors in the program. At the October Commission meeting Al Clayborne, OSM Tulsa Field Office director, recognized the work of three OCC employees who have worked to reclaim abandoned mine lands for the past 20 or more years. Clayborne presented letters of appreciation to Mike Kastl, Charlotte Stieber and Dianne Ireton of OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation (AML) division. Kastl had previously been honored in an event in Washington, D.C., for 30 years of service.



Above, from left, are Mike Kastl, OCC AML director; Al Clayborne, OSM Tulsa Field Office director; Dianne Ireton, AML systems coordinator; Charlotte Stieber, AML administrative officer; and Dan Lowrance, OCC chairman.

## Conservation Commission Employees: Awards & Recognition

**Brooks Tramell**, OCC/WQ monitoring coordinator, was named as Employee of the Quarter at the OCC quarterly full staff meeting on Sept. 19. The Conservation Commission recognized Tramell at its October monthly meeting.

**Tammy Sawatzky**, OCC/CP administrative officer, received a Conservation Commission Commendation at the October Commission meeting for completing the Certified Public Manager Program through the Office of Personnel Management.

**Johnny Pelley**, OCC/CP watershed technician, was recognized at the October Commission meeting for 20 years of service to the Conservation Commission.

**Charlotte Stieber**, OCC Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program administrative officer, was recognized at the October Commission meeting for 25 years service to the Conservation Commission.

**Chris DuBois**, OCC/WQ Wetlands Program coordinator, was recognized at the November meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for five years of service to the Conservation Commission.

**Chris Dunlevy**, OCC/IT database and network administrator, was recognized at the November Commission meeting for 10 years of service to the state of Oklahoma.

**Wes Shockley**, OCC/WQ water quality specialist, was recognized at the November Commission meeting for 15 years of service to the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

**Joe Schneider**, OCC/WQ Eucha Project coordinator, was named as Employee of the Quarter at the OCC quarterly full staff meeting on Dec. 3.

## Partner Recognition

**Ed Fite**, administrator for the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission (OSRC), was commended at the October Commission meeting for "dedicated partnership with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and its Water Quality Program for the protection of Oklahoma's Illinois River." In June OCC staff members participated in a community involvement project by picking up litter along the Illinois River. Fite and OSRC hosted a reception for OCC employees the evening before the project and provided an overview of OSRC and OCC project collaboration.

## Chesapeake and OACD Again Partner to Recognize the Outstanding Conservation District and Educators in Oklahoma.

Chesapeake Energy Corporation and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) have come together once again to honor the efforts of Oklahomans who devote their time and energy to protect and conserve our natural resources by sponsoring the Chesapeake Outstanding Oklahoma Conservation District Award. The two organizations are also again sponsoring awards for Outstanding Conservation Educators — one teacher in each of Oklahoma's five congressional districts. The Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma and OACD also announced they will recognize the Outstanding Conservation Landowner/Cooperator in Oklahoma. The awards will be presented at the Governors' Conservation Award Ceremony in the Blue Room at the state Capitol during the spring legislative session as part of Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 19, 2008. The winners will also be recognized at the OACD annual state meeting.

"We are truly honored to again have Chesapeake, Oklahoma's most active driller and largest clean natural gas producer, as our partner in furthering conservation in Oklahoma," said Scotty Herriman, OACD president. "We are also honored to join the Nature Conservancy in recognizing outstanding stewardship efforts by landowners who have cooperator agreements with local conservation districts," he said. "The continued sponsorship of these awards by these organizations and their commitment to protecting and conserving our natural resources is greatly appreciated. They are truly committed to the conservation and protection of our soil, water, air and wildlife habitats."

The Chesapeake Outstanding Conservation District Award is presented annually to the Oklahoma conservation district judged as having the best overall conservation program in the state. This program includes the district's efforts to work with landowners to protect and conserve natural resources, education and youth programs, and community outreach activities. The winning district will receive \$2,500 and recognition. The winner will also receive a trophy and a sign recognizing the outstanding conservation district for 2007.

The Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator award is presented annually to the Oklahoma agricultural producer judged as having the most extensive and effective natural resource conservation initiative on the producer's property. This includes efforts to conserve and protect Oklahoma's soil, water, air and wildlife habitats through sound stewardship practices on working agricultural land. The winner of this award will receive \$1,500 and a trophy.

The Chesapeake Outstanding Conservation Educator Awards are presented annually to five Oklahoma school teachers judged as having best incorporated information on the conservation of our natural resources into their lesson plans using inventive and imaginative techniques. Each winner will receive \$3000.

"It's an honor for Chesapeake to partner again with the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts to recognize the outstanding conservation educators in Oklahoma. Chesapeake is committed to being a leader in a wide variety of areas including the protection of Oklahoma's environment and bountiful natural resources," said Tom Price, Jr., Chesapeake Senior Vice President — Corporate Development. "Chesapeake's commitment to environmental education is one we take very seriously. We believe environmental education is essential to ensure future generations of Oklahoma's leaders have the knowledge base to make wise environmental decisions. Those decisions will be critical to the preservation of our quality of life and the strengthening of our economy. That's why we think it is beneficial to honor exceptional teachers who also recognize the importance of environmental education."

"This is a great partnership between Chesapeake and OACD," Clay Pope, Executive Director of OACD said. "By working together we can help ensure that the next generations of Oklahomans, both rural and urban, have the productive base of natural resources we now enjoy while maintaining healthy soils, clean water, and abundant wildlife. We are proud to be working together to accomplish these goals."

The official rules for the Chesapeake Outstanding Conservation Educator Awards contest and additional information are available by contacting your local conservation district office or by contacting Clay Pope, OACD executive director, by telephone at 405-699-2087 or by email at claypope@pldi.net. The deadline for the contest is February 1, 2008.

## Oklahoman Attend Watershed Operation & Maintenance Workshop in Texas

Over 100 people from a half-dozen states, including OCC's Conservation Programs division staff, attended the Operation and Maintenance / Sponsor Responsibility 101 Workshop in Decatur, Texas, Sept. 24-26. The National Watershed Coalition conducted the workshop in cooperation with the Wise County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1, Texas Association of Watershed Sponsors, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Enrollment for the workshop was originally limited to 70, but ... "The interest in the workshop generated great demand and we had a difficult time closing registration," said Dan Sebert, NWC executive director.

Participants represented agencies and organizations including conservation districts, watershed authorities, NRCS employees, city governments, and state conservation agencies. "We were pleased to have Don Gohmert, NRCS state conservationist for Texas; Ron Hilliard, NRCS state conservationist for Oklahoma; Stu Simpson, NRCS National Watershed staff; and Rex Isom, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board executive director; attend and participate in the workshop," said Lou Vee Bridges, NWC secretary/treasurer, Paradise, Texas.

The workshop included time in the classroom discussing topics such as legal issues with watershed dams and easements, sponsor responsibilities in carrying out operation and maintenance, emergency action plans, and other subjects, and a day in the field with a tour of watershed projects, demonstrations of operation and maintenance equipment and tools, and a training session on conducting dam inspections.



*Facing the camera, from left, are Dan Sebert, NWC executive director and former OCC employee, and George Moore, OCC/CP watershed technician.*

## Implications of Climate Change for Oklahoma

Assistant State Climatologist Gary McManus gave a presentation on climate change at each of the five recent Area Meetings of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts. The following are some of the Oklahoma Climatological Survey's conclusions:

- The earth's climate has warmed during the last 100 years;
- The earth's climate will continue to warm for the foreseeable future;
- Much of the global average temperature increases over the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities, particularly increasing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere;
- Oklahoma will be impacted.

Implications for Oklahoma include the following:

- The warm season becomes longer and arrives earlier.
- The cool season warms and shortens, which leads to a longer frost-free period and growing season.
- Earlier maturation of winter wheat and orchard crops leave them more vulnerable to late freeze events.
- Increased year-round evaporation from the ground and transpiration from green vegetation.
- Drought frequency and severity increases, especially during summer.
- Drier and warmer conditions will increase the risk of wildfires.
- Rain-free periods will lengthen, but individual rainfall events will become more intense.
- More runoff and flash flooding will occur.

The Oklahoma Climatological Survey's official position statement on climate change is available online at [http://climate.ok.gov/newsmedia/climate\\_statement.pdf](http://climate.ok.gov/newsmedia/climate_statement.pdf).

## Make Money Using Your Land to Fight Climate Change

Carbon storage refers to increasing the amount of carbon in soil, in plants, underground, and in water bodies. This is done by using technology or plants to pull carbon dioxide from the air. Farmers are ideal partners for carbon trading because certain farming practices store carbon.

Carbon trading occurs when companies that emit excessive carbon dioxide buy "carbon credits" from those that emit less carbon dioxide. Carbon benefits are credited per metric ton of carbon dioxide per acre per year. Credit amounts vary depending on geographic location, soil type, and land use.

A document about carbon storage and credits, prepared by the OCC's Water Quality division is available online at <http://www.ok.gov/okcc/documents/Carbon-OACD-1007.pdf>.

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## WORKSHOPS & TRUNKS

Project WET Workshops  
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Project Learning Tree Workshops or Trunks  
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Project WILD Workshops or Trunks  
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