



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 48 No. 9, September 2003

Formerly known as the Tulsa Fair Conservation Awards Program

Enter the OACD Conservation Awards Program!

Districts may enter in any or all of these categories:

Outstanding Conservation District Cooperator

Outstanding Conservation District Director

Outstanding Conservation District

Contest Entry Deadline: December 1

The awards program formerly known as the Tulsa State Fair Conservation Awards Program has now become the OACD Conservation Awards Program. The rules and procedures are the same as found in your OACD Handbook on pages 4-10 through 4-13 except for the following changes:

1. The name of the award program has been changed, as noted above.
2. The deadline is Dec. 1 instead of the earlier deadline.
3. The Outstanding Cooperator, Director and District will be announced at the OACD State Meeting in February instead of at the Tulsa State Fair.
4. The photos can now be slides, prints, or high resolution digital format.
5. Winners and sponsoring districts will be notified by February 1.

In brief, each entry consists of a set of photos and a script that together illustrate what makes the entrant an outstanding cooperator, director or district, depending on category entered. Each entry must be submitted by a conservation district, and districts can enter one, two or all three categories.

Previously, participation in this awards contest was primarily by districts in the northeast quarter of the state. By moving the contest recognition to the State Meeting, the sponsors hope to have **STATEWIDE PARTICIPATION BY CONSERVATION DISTRICTS!!**

The OACD/Oklahoma Press Association Scrapbook Contest has the same deadline — Dec. 1. For more information on the scrapbook contest, see pages 4-7 through 4-9 in the OACD Handbook. If your district does not have an OACD Handbook, contact Don Bartolina, OACD executive director.

Governor's Blue Room to be included in the day's events

Conservation Day at the State Capitol

Following last year's first ever and very successful Conservation Day at the State Capitol, OACD has again reserved the Oklahoma State Capitol Building Fourth Floor Rotunda for the Second Annual Conservation Day at the State Capitol. The date is March 10, 2004 — right in the middle of Conservation District Week in Oklahoma and the day after district director elections.

New for this year, OACD has also reserved the Governor's Blue Room for a time period on Conservation Day. The association will announce the agenda of events for the day at a later date. OACD will also be distributing information about booth reservations as the time approaches.



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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, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

"Tis not knowing much, but what is useful, that makes a wise man."

Thomas Fuller

Conservation Calendar

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Meeting
Oct. 6, Oklahoma City

Cost-Share and Long Range Plan Training

Oct. 7, Stillwater
Oct. 9, Alva, OK
Oct. 14, Muskogee, OK
Oct. 15, Wilburton, OK
Oct. 16, Ardmore, OK
Oct. 20, Claremore, OK
Oct. 27, Burns Flat, OK
Oct. 28, Lawton, OK
Oct. 30, Guymon

Women in Agriculture & Small Business
Great Plains RC&D
Oct. 21, Weatherford

2003 Area Meetings

Area I Fairview Nov. 6, Fairgrounds
Area II Oklahoma City Nov. 18, Biltmore Hotel
Area III Hominy Nov. 5, First Baptist Church
Area IV Duncan Nov. 13, Simmons Center
Area V McAlester, Nov. 20, Expo Center

2nd National Conference on Grazing Lands
Nat'l Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
Dec. 7-10, Nashville, Tenn.

In Our Thoughts

Glenn Smith, Seminole County Conservation
District director, passed away Aug. 30.

OACD President Royce Casey's wife Linda has
responded well to medical treatment and is
much improved.

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



**is Coming
to the
OACD Area Meetings!**

The long-awaited book about Oklahoma's
conservation history will soon be here.

At the OACD Area Meetings, come see a multi-
media presentation and pre-order your copy!

Melvin Heath Retires After 50 Years of Service to Grady County CD

Grady County CD held an informal reception for board member Melvin Heath following the district's September board meeting. The event was held to express appreciation to Heath who is retiring from the board after more than 50 years of service. Heath was appointed at age 23 to fill his father Carl's position on the board in April 1953 after his father died in a farm accident. The district credits Heath's untiring work for obtaining land rights and easements to many of the small watershed flood control structures now in place. He has also supported conservation education and other district programs.



Susan Baggett, assistant state conservationist for Zone 3, represented NRCS in presenting Heath with a certificate in appreciation of his years of service.

From left are Susan Baggett, Melvin and (wife) Betty Heath, Ralph Morgan, Grady County CD board member and new chair, and Dee Surber, district programs coordinator. Photo: Gary Scammerhorn/ NRCS

Fish Seining with Blue Thumb

 by Cheryl Cheadle, OCC Blue Thumb State Coordinator

Excerpted from the *Volunteer Monitor*, Summer '03 Newsletter, and edited for the *Oklahoma Conservation Conversation*. Like many volunteer stream monitors, participants in Oklahoma's Blue Thumb Program perform regular chemical and macroinvertebrate monitoring at their sites. But every three to five years, they do something a little more unusual — wading repeatedly into the stream with a seine, they spend many hours collecting fish along a 400-meter reach (approximately 1/4 mile). It's an exciting, fascinating, and physically demanding job that leaves everyone wet, muddy, and tired.

Fish collections are an integral component of stream health assessment. The diversity and abundance of fish at a site represent an integration of many variables that would be too costly to assess individually. As with macroinvertebrates, some fish species are pollution-tolerant, and others are very sensitive.

Blue Thumb follows the Oklahoma Conservation Commission's standard operating procedures for fish collection with a few minor differences, the main one being that no electroshocking is done with volunteers present. We usually work in teams of three to six, including at least one Blue Thumb staff member present.

Before we start catching fish we perform a habitat assessment of the reach, evaluating 50-meter segments at a time. We observe and record how deep the stream is, how wide, whether its full of woody debris and has other places for fish to hide, what the bottom is like, how much shade covers the stream, and so on.

When the habitat assessment is finished, we go back to the beginning of the reach and begin seining. We use 1/4-inch mesh seines that are generally 4 feet high and 12 to 15 feet long. We

Fish Seining, continued on page 4

Tulsa County CD Employee Wins Geographic Teaching Award

Carolyn Mathews, a part time water quality employee of the Tulsa County CD, has been selected to receive one of the Distinguished Teaching Achievement Awards for 2003 from the National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE). Twenty-eight K-12 teachers and eight college/university teachers from North America were chosen to receive the award this year. The awards acknowledge outstanding achievement in geographic education. Mathews will be honored during the NCGE annual meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, Oct. 8-11.



Best Wishes John!

John Gober, OCC grant management specialist, retired in October after 28 years of state service. Gober, seated at left, had worked for other agencies before joining OCC's Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program in 1981. At a brief reception Mike Kastl (right), AML director, congratulated John and thanked him for his service.

A Summary of the Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Sept. 8, 2003, in the Agriculture Building board room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Resignations

Ted Dosh - Bryan
James Stephens - Coal County
Floyd Mace - Mountain View

District Director Appointments

Arbuckle - Linda Hendrix Baylis
Kingfisher County - Greg Borelli
Kiowa County - Manuel Quintero
Latimer County - James Grego
North Fork of Red River - Jimmy W. Smith
Okfuskee County - Johnnie Wallis
Seminole County - Harold Parsons
Stephens County - Rusty Harris
Washita County - Hos Hostetter

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who reported that 516 claims were paid for a total of \$1,178,740.53.

Agreements

Commissioners ratified the following agreement previously approved by Vice Chair J.T. Winters due to time constraints, as presented by OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard:

NRCS, to contract with vendors to provide training for 100 district & 200 NRCS employees on the use of Windows XP and XP Office including Word, Excel and Outlook.

Commissioners approved the following agreements presented by Pollard:

1. Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, to provide office space for three OCC/WQ division personnel.
2. MediaSoft, Amended to extend deadline to Oct. 31, 2003.
3. NRCS/No. 67-7335-0-61, Amendment 3, to provide funding to support training/education opportunities for district directors and employees and NRCS employees.
4. NRCS/No. 68-7335-0-65, Amendment 4, remedial watershed repairs.
5. NRCS/No. 68-7335-1-77, Amendment 2, funding support for the Conservation Leadership Program.
6. NRCS/No. 68-7335-2-88, Amendment 1, to provide funding for construction of Haner AML project and Martin/Equels/Mallory Rural Abandoned Mine Program project in Rogers County.
7. NRCS/No. 68-7335-3-16, administrative and technical coordination in completion of Emergency Watershed Program debris removal projects.
8. NRCS/No. 69-7335-0-95, Amendment 4, remedial watershed repairs.
9. NRCS/No. 69-7335-1-57, Amendment 1, work with media on dam failure events. Develop watershed rehabilitation progress report.
10. NRCS/No. 69-7335-3-70, Amendment 1, remedial structures, North & South Binger Drop, Sugar Creek Watershed.
11. NRCS/No. 69-7335-3-71, Amendment 1, rehabilitation of floodwater retarding structures on Double 2, 3 & 5; Calvary 6; and Sandstone.
12. Kiamichi Conservation District, to purchase equipment.
13. Pushmataha Conservation District, for equipment manager position and related expenses.
14. Talihina Conservation District, to purchase equipment.
15. Valliant Conservation District, to purchase equipment.

Out-of-State Travel

Commissioners approved six out-of-state travel requests, presented by OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls.

FY2004 Joint Annual Plans of Operations

Commissioners approved FY2004 Joint Annual Plans of Operations for 43 districts, presented by Lisa Knauf, District Services director.

OACD Area Meetings

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the OACD Area Meetings (see *Calendar*, page two).

FY 2005 Budget

Thralls stated that staff will begin the process of preparing an estimate of budget needs for the coming fiscal year and present the request at the October Commission meeting before submitting to the Office of State Finance. Coffman stated that to comply with zero-based budgeting a new requirement is to prioritize programs and list required funding. OCC has also been requested to submit a plan for a five percent budget reduction if needed. Thralls suggested that OCC request funding for the final year of the Wister Project, funding for the Cobb Creek Priority Watershed Project, watershed rehabilitation, Cost-Share Program, employee benefits and salaries, and restoration of severe budget cuts to OCC. Commissioner Virginia Kidd, OCC chair, concurred with Thralls' suggestion that staff work with the Budget Reduction Committee consisting of Commissioners George Stunkard and Rick Jeans, OACD President Royce Casey and Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees President Carolyn Tucker on FY2005 budget priorities and bring those recommendations to OCC in October.

FY2003 Intergovernmental Agreements

Pollard stated that during the FY2003 legislative session, Kiamichi, Pushmataha and Talihina CDs received funds through House and Senate committees in response to districts contacting their local representatives and senators to request special consideration. OCC does not request these funds from the Legislature or the Governor, nor does OCC have the authority to place this money in other areas. OCC entered into intergovernmental agreements with the districts regarding these funds, and the districts have met the terms of the agreements. Pollard provided copies of final written reports from the districts detailing the expenditures of the FY2003 intergovernmental agreements. Funds for these agreements come from the Rural Economic Action Program. Pollard stated that OCC had in the past requested that a revolving fund be implemented to support a loan program for equipment to districts but the request was not approved.

Commission Member Reports

Commissioners Jeans, Kidd, Stunkard and J.T. Winters attended the NACD South Central Leaders Forum. Commissioner Winters reported on attending the RC&D State Summit meeting, a demonstration to control eastern redcedar sponsored by the Northwest Burn Association, and a Grazing Lands Association meeting. Commissioner Jeans also attended a town hall meeting held by Congressman Frank Lucas. Commissioner Terry Wyatt expressed her appreciation to those who extended thoughts and prayers during her daughter's illness.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls stated that Dan Seberty, Conservation Programs director, will retire effective Nov. 1. Thralls has been working on the Stamper anaerobic digestion of poultry litter project. A letter of commitment has been received from poultry integrators for \$150,000 to serve as matching funds for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding. Oklahoma and Arkansas will submit a joint proposal to the EPA during the week. NRCS is still looking

at office closings throughout the nation; however, no word has been received of the impact on Oklahoma. Pollard reported on sending information to all conservation districts and all chairmen at home regarding the contribution agreement between OCC and NRCS. It is critical for this agreement to be in place and working to assist with budget issues. This will be a topic of discussion at the OACD area meetings. Staff attended the Interim Study committee meeting sponsored by Rep. Randall Erwin to discuss conservation district employee retirement. There are 70 district employees who have years of service prior to 1989, when district employees became eligible for state retirement. OACD members Carolyn Tucker and Paula Templeton appeared before the committee. The retirement system will analyze the cost of crediting the service years. OCC has a new Office of State Finance budget analyst, Jonathan Small. Staff met with Small to discuss the agency's operations and budget. Staff has been working on recommended changes to election laws and rules. These recommendations will be brought to the OACD executive board for their input. Staff has distributed draft copies of the conservation history book for review. A prototype will be available at the OACD area meetings.

Financial Management and Human Resources:

Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported the new accounting system for the state of Oklahoma, CORE, will begin Oct. 1. Extensive training is required and he and his staff will attend this month. Staff has been working on the FY2005 budget request and scheduling benefits option period meetings for district employees. Coffman reported that the benefits cost increase will be 16.3 percent amounting to approximately \$78,925. Coffman completed the Affirmative Action Plan and submitted it to the Office of Personnel Management.

Conservation Programs: Dan Seberty, CP director, provided copies of the Program Year 5 Conservation Cost-Share Program report and the annual watershed operation and maintenance report.

Water Quality: Larry Edmison, WQ director, reported staff completed a draft of the Seven-Year Wetlands Strategy with the Wetlands Working Group. Edmison stated that the Oklahoma Water Resources Board received a letter from the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma regarding culturally significant waters. The Nation has asked for almost 20 streams, rivers and lakes to be listed as culturally significant. Staff spoke at the Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators national meeting. EPA held the conference to look at 2004 guidance for the 319 and other Clean Water Act programs.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, reported on a new Clean Streams project. He stated that because two contractors have gone beyond their deadline, OCC will deduct actual costs incurred from the amount of the contract. Two Emergency Watershed Program contracts, containing 73 sites, were to be opened during the week.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, reported that construction began on the McNeely AML project July 28. On Aug. 8 media personnel attended an on-site briefing held by Sen. Rick Littlefield and Rep. Larry Roberts. A large amount of time the previous month was spent dealing with various computer virus attacks. Staff prepared a CD-ROM with service packs, software patches and anti-virus software for districts.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported fielding questions on the newly-signed agreement with NRCS. Training is scheduled for October throughout the state on

Minutes, continued on page 4

Minutes, continued from page 3

the Cost-Share Program and long range planning.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Royce Casey, OACD president, reported that teleconferences were to be used for planning Area Meetings. Over 100 people attended the NACD South Central meeting. He reported that a group of western states want to leave NACD to form a new association.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Kevin Norton, assistant state conservationist for Programs, reported that staff had been busy finalizing budget issues at the end of the federal fiscal year. He reported that offices are developing contracts in anticipation of an additional \$640,000 for the state in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Oklahoma received an allocation of over \$19.9 million for rental agreements and easements in the Grassland Reserve Program. The competitive sourcing study for 17 soil conservation technicians and one clerical position in Oklahoma has been completed and both studies concluded that all 18 positions would be retained.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Rod Wanger, Conservation Program chief, reported crop disaster program drought declaration in 62 counties allows producers to apply for low interest loans. A total of 78,000 acres was offered in the Conservation Reserve Program and 44,000 acres were accepted.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be Oct. 6, 2003, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Fish Seining, continued from page 2

work each habitat until we stop getting new species of fish, which can take 20 or 30 hauls for a big pool. Fish that can be identified by the lead collector are recorded and released; those that cannot are preserved for later identification by Oklahoma Conservation Commission staff. One example of each species identified and released in the field must also be preserved.

During demonstrations, Oklahoma's Blue Thumb volunteers have sometimes found 12 to 15 different fish species within an hour in a nice rural stream, only to travel 10 miles to a more impacted stream, work just as hard, and find only three different species and far fewer individuals. This type of experience leaves volunteers sadder, wiser, and extremely motivated to tell their neighbors about pollution prevention and the importance of making land use decisions that allow streams to maintain their integrity.

It isn't just the volunteers who learn and grow from the fish collection experience. This is such a visible activity that crowds often gather, and the excitement is contagious. The folks watching become invested in the outcome of the next seine haul. There is a magical quality to pulling a seine through a stream and finding it full of fish. Pulling a seine time after time and finding nothing is a bitter experience, and one that Oklahoma's Blue Thumb volunteers are working to prevent.

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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