



# Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 49 No. 3, March 2004

## State Legislature Honors Conservation Districts and Individuals

### Conservation Day at the Capitol 2004

Conservation Day at the Capitol began with a welcome and expression of appreciation in the House of Representatives, led by Representative Joe Sweeden. Rep. Sweeden introduced House Concurrent Resolution 1057 as a citation, acknowledging the importance of conservation districts to natural resource management and naming March 10 as Conservation Day in the state of Oklahoma. Shortly afterwards, Senator J. Berry Harrison introduced HCR 1057 in the Senate Chamber, where the participants were acknowledged also.

Over 100 people filled the Governor's Blue Room for an awards ceremony. Randy Beutler, legislative liaison to Governor Brad Henry, welcomed the participants. Beutler, along with Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) President Royce Casey, presented the OACD Conservation Awards.

Nowata County Conservation District received the OACD Outstanding District Award for its multifaceted program to address natural resource needs in the northeastern Oklahoma district. Senator Jim Dunlap commended the district for its work and congratulated the directors and staff on their award. The directors of Nowata County Conservation District are Scotty Herriman, Sherman Shanklin, Joy Elledge, Bob Willis and Robin Landrum. District employees include Brenda Waltman and Steve Rowe, and Danny Stone is the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist.

Carol Gaunt received the OACD Outstanding District Director Award. Gaunt has been on the board of directors of the Deer Creek Conservation District since 1982. He served as president of OACD for two terms in 1999 and 2000. He was commended for his efforts to further natural resource conservation at local, state and national levels, as well as for his civic leadership and conservation practices on his own farming and



(From left) Carol Gaunt with Randy Beutler and Royce Casey.



(From left) Mike Thralls, Royce Casey, Mike Mass and Virginia Kidd join Joe Sweeden in the House Chamber as Rep. Sweeden reads a House Citation naming March 10 as Conservation Day at the State Capitol. Sen. J. Berry Harrison introduced the same Citation in the Senate Chamber.



Nowata County Conservation District board and staff with Randy Beutler and Royce Casey.

## In This Issue

Conservation Day at the Capitol Highlights

Oklahoma Watershed Dams Prevent \$18 Million in Damages

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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.

*"The greatest thing a man can do in this world is to make the most possible out of the stuff that has been given him.*

*This is success, and there is no other."*

Orison Swett Marden

## Conservation Calendar

Agriculture Day at the Capitol  
March 25, Oklahoma City



Oklahoma Farm Show  
March 25-27, State Fairgrounds, Oklahoma City



Governor's Conference on  
Agriculture & Economic Growth  
April 13-14, Oklahoma City



State Envirothon Contest, St. Groves Camp  
April 14-15, Glencoe, OK



"Forestry on the Grow" 9th Annual Forest  
Utilization Conference & Equipment  
Exposition  
April 27-29, Wagoner OK



National Land & Range Judging Contest  
May 4-6, Oklahoma City

### District Dateline .....

**Kay County CD** held its Annual Awards  
Banquet March 9 in Tonkawa .....

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

### In Our Thoughts

Boone Von Tungeln, Central North Canadian  
River CD equipment manager, lost his father  
Henry Jo on Feb. 28.

Hubert Phillips Jr., Konawa CD equipment  
manager, lost his wife Dorothy March 2.

Area 1 Commissioner J.T. Winters' father, J.T.  
Winters Sr., passed away March 14.

Robin Toole lost her mother Pat Ellis. Both Robin  
and her husband Robert are former OCC  
employees.

### Congratulations!

Dee Surber, Grady County CD programs  
coordinator, has a new granddaughter with the  
birth of Madison Jade Surber on March 4 to  
parents Matt and Deah Surber.

Lincoln County CD held a reception for Delbert  
Hubbell who is retiring after more than 30  
years service on the district board.

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



### Conservation Day, continued from page 1

ranching operation. Senator Gilmer Capps  
presented Gaunt with a Senate Commendation  
for his outstanding conservation leadership.

Harold and Mary Ellen Wooderson and  
Wooderson Farms of Kay County received the  
OACD Outstanding Cooperator Award. Kay  
County Conservation District had nominated  
Wooderson Farms for the number of conservation  
practices in place and the stewardship ethic  
displayed on the large farming and ranching  
operation. Sen. David Myers and Rep. Dale  
DeWitt jointly honored the Woodersons with a commendation from the House and Senate.

During the Conservation Day event, from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., participants had exhibits on display in the Capital Rotunda on the fourth floor. The exhibits featured the diverse conservation activities across the state addressing local natural resource needs. Conservation District directors and staff, as well as staff from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, explained programs and activities at work in Oklahoma.



Rep. Dale DeWitt (left) and Sen. David Myers (right) honored Mary Ellen and Harold Wooderson with a Legislative Citation they cosponsored.

### **From a National Aeronautics and Space Administration News Release**

## NASA Explains 'Dust Bowl' Drought

NASA scientists have an explanation for one of the worst climatic events in the history of the United States, the "Dust Bowl" drought, which devastated the Great Plains and all but dried up an already depressed American economy in the 1930s.

Siegfried Schubert of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Md., and colleagues used a computer model developed with modern-era satellite data to look at the climate over the past 100 years. The study found cooler than normal tropical Pacific Ocean surface temperatures combined with warmer tropical Atlantic Ocean temperatures to create conditions in the atmosphere that turned America's breadbasket into a dust bowl from 1931 to 1939.

These changes in sea surface temperatures created shifts in the large-scale weather patterns and low level winds that reduced the normal supply of moisture from the Gulf of Mexico and inhibited rainfall throughout the Great Plains.

By discovering the causes behind U.S. droughts, especially severe episodes like the Plains' dry spell, scientists may recognize and possibly foresee future patterns that could create similar conditions. For example, *La Ninas* are marked by cooler than normal tropical Pacific Ocean surface water temperatures, which impact weather globally, and also create dry conditions over the Great Plains.

The model showed cooler than normal tropical Pacific Ocean temperatures and warmer than normal tropical Atlantic Ocean temperatures contributed to a weakened low-level jet stream and changed its course. The jet stream, a ribbon of fast moving air near the Earth's surface, normally flows westward over the Gulf of Mexico and then turns northward pulling up moisture and dumping rain onto the Great Plains. As the low level jet stream weakened, it traveled farther south than normal. The Great Plains dried up and dust storms formed.

The research shed light on how tropical sea surface temperatures can have a remote response and control over weather and climate. It also confirmed droughts can become localized based on soil moisture levels, especially during summer. When rain is scarce and soil dries, there is less evaporation, which leads to even less precipitation, creating a feedback process that reinforces lack of rainfall.

Analysis of other major U.S. droughts of the 20th century suggests a cool tropical Pacific was a common factor. Schubert said simulating major events like the 1930s drought provides an excellent test for computer models. While the study finds no indication of a similar Great Plains drought in the near future, it is vital to continue studies relating to climate change.

More information is available on the agency's web site, <http://www.nasa.gov>.

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

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met March 1, 2004, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### **District Director Resignations**

J.D. Denton - Pushmataha

### **District Director Appointments**

Cherokee County - Garland Phillips Jr.

Creek County - Robert Campbell

Harper County - C.R. Chuck Smith

Hughes County - Wendell Black

Kiamichi - Edna Loftin

LeFlore County - Edward J. Abernathy

Little River - Terry Baker

McClain County - Everett Wollenberg

McIntosh County - Tom Shroyer

Ottawa County - Sue Rendel

Pawnee County - Roy Lee Robbins

Seminole County - Judge Sawyer

Upper Washita - Wesley Harden Jr.

Woods County - John Friend

### **Claims/Financial Statement**

Commissioners accepted claims as presented by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who stated that claims were paid totaling \$638,516.34.

### **Conservation Commission Agreements**

Commissioners approved the following agreements, submitted by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director:

1. Noble County Conservation District, to provide clerical support and assistance in writing and implementation of conservation practices in the Stillwater Creek Watershed Project.

2. Kingfisher County Conservation District, Amendment 1, adds project inspection to the conservation district duties in the emergency watershed protection agreement.

3. Logan County Conservation District, Amendment 1, adds project inspection to the conservation district duties in the emergency watershed protection agreement.

OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls presented the following agreement, stating that the agreement with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFA) will transfer funds to support the Poultry Litter Demonstration Project in Delaware County. The agreement is for \$550,000 with \$500,000 coming from EPA 319 funds and \$50,000 in state funds. The project will be carried out in partnership with the State of Arkansas, which is providing a similar match of state and federal funds, and with poultry producers. Some details of the agreement are still being completed. Commissioners authorized Thralls to finalize the following agreement once details are complete:

4. Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, to demonstrate a method to remove excess nutrients, primarily phosphorous, from nutrient-sensitive watersheds and cost effectiveness of technology on commercial scale.

### **Director Elections**

Commissioners approved a motion to certify candidates in districts where only one eligible candidate filed a Notification and Declaration of Candidacy for Elected Position No. 3. Commissioners also approved a motion to declare Elected Position No. 3 vacant in districts where no eligible candidate filed.

### **Governor's Conference On Agriculture And Economic Growth**

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the Governor's Conference on Agriculture and Economic Growth, April 13-14, 2004, Oklahoma City, by purchasing

a display booth space.

### **National Land and Range Judging Contest**

Commissioners approved a motion to cosponsor the National Land and Range Judging Contest, May 4-6, in Oklahoma City. The sponsorship requires no money but allows staff assistance.

### **NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program And Watershed Rehabilitation Agreements**

Thralls updated the Commissioners on the status of the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program and Watershed Rehabilitation agreements. OCC is earning a percentage for administering the EWP program. It is estimated that this program will generate \$3.2 million in contracts with OCC receiving \$480,000, and has received \$85,000 to date. Watershed rehabilitation contracts have earned OCC \$117,000 in administration fees to date.

### **FY2003 Carry-Over Funds**

Steve Coffman stated that the Office of State Finance redirected FY2003 money to agencies. OCC received \$83,256. Commissioners approved a motion to designate those funds to help pay increased cost of health insurance for OCC and district employees.

### **Commission Members Reports**

All Commissioners concurred that the OACD State Meeting was well attended and successful. Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr. reported on attending a burn demonstration in Dewey County.

### **Staff Reports**

**Administration:** Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported on the following legislative bills:

HB 2457, sponsored by Rep. Clay Pope, would place conservation districts under the state's risk management program. HB 1877, sponsored by Rep. Pope, reorganizes the State GIS Council and provides more authority. Rep. Randall Erwin is sponsoring a bill to buy back years of service for district employees that were employed prior to going under the state system. Rep. Elmer Maddox is looking under a bill that would make district directors eligible to participate in the state health insurance program. Thralls stated that Karla Beaty, OCC education coordinator, attended the Oklahoma Association of Environmental Educators awards reception and accepted the Outstanding Organization Award on behalf of the Oklahoma Environmental Education Coordinating Committee. Staff is proceeding with the audit of EPA 319 funds, AML funds, and NRCS funds.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, reported that 18 applications were received for the Conservation Programs Division director position by the Feb. 27 application deadline. He stated that Conservation District Week begins March 7 with district director elections on March 9, and Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 10. During Conservation Day there will be an awards ceremony in the Governor's Blue Room at 10:30 a.m. to recognize the outstanding conservation district, district director, and district cooperator of the year. The Conservation Partnership will have display booths at the Governor's Conference on Agriculture and Economic Growth. Pollard stated that distribution of the new history book began at the OACD State Meeting.

### **Financial Management and Human Resources:**

Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported that three applications were received for the Human Resources Specialist position by the Feb. 27 deadline. Coffman stated that the new state accounting system, CORE, is moving along and staff is preparing for the payroll module to begin in July.

**Conservation Programs:** Tammy Sawatzky, CP acting director, reported working on landowner issues in Caney Valley on rehabilitation projects.

**Water Quality:** Larry Edmison, WQ director, reported the Quapaw Tribe is working with the Office of Secretary of Environment and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board on their draft report and comment period for water quality standards. Edmison stated that the tribes are sovereign and have the power to adopt standards.

**Abandoned Mine Land:** Mike Kastl, AML director, highlighted active grants and reported attending Coal Day at the Capitol. Kastl stated that three bills have been introduced in U.S. Congress to reauthorize the AML program.

**Information Technology:** Mike Sharp, IT director, has been working with the NRCS on funding for a new Tar Creek project. Sharp reported on a training group from Texas that will begin providing computer software training for NRCS and district employees via the Internet. He commended Shellie Willoughby, GIS specialist, for all her work on GIS Day at the Capitol.

**District Services:** Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported that there are 23 new district employees and the employees association would like OCC to provide a new employee training session. NRCS has invited district employees to participate in conservation planning level one training. Knauf reported on attending the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council meeting where Mike Thralls was the keynote speaker. Knauf stated that all districts have signed the partnership agreement, and she is working with them on getting their paperwork finalized. The deadline for Long Range Plan drafts is April 15.

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

Royce Casey, OACD president, stated that during Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 10 OACD would present a copy of the new history book to each legislator. Commissioner Rick Jeans congratulated Casey on being elected to another term as president of OACD. New members include Scotty Herriman as vice president, Steve House as Area I director, and Wayne Spies as Area IV director. OACD will appoint a director for Area III. Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees President Carolyn Tucker expressed appreciation to OACD and OCC for including the employees association in state meeting planning and other events. Commissioner George Stunkard thanked the OACDE for its selection of Paula Templeton, Wagoner County Conservation District programs coordinator, as Employee of the Year.

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

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, stated that the OACD State Meeting was very successful. NRCS has received the remainder of its budget and it appears to be fairly level compared to last fiscal year. The budget contains funds earmarked for a Tar Creek project. Dominick stated that the budget does not contain financial assistance for PL-566, PL-534 or watershed rehabilitation projects. Dominick met with the Tribal Conservation Advisory Council and the Indian Nation Conservation Alliance on conservation issues. The third annual conference will be held in Las Vegas, Nev., in December. Dominick reported on work in the Eucha watershed and stated that the NRCS held its ground on standards and specifications for nutrient management.

### **Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be April 5, 2004, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

## Oklahoma Watershed Dams Prevent \$18 Million in Damages

Watershed dams prevented an estimated \$18.6 million in damages during recent rainstorms across Oklahoma, according to Dan Lowrance, National Watershed Coalition chairman. "Although localized flooding occurred in places like Kingfisher, there would have been much more flooding if not for Oklahoma's 2,100 watershed dams," said Lowrance.

Eleven hundred watershed dams on tributaries to the Washita River prevented \$8.6 million in damages, according to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) estimates. Another 995 dams in other parts of the state prevented an additional \$10 million in damages. The estimated damages that would have occurred if the dams were not in place included such things as loss of livestock, damage to crops and fences, soil erosion, and damage to roads and bridges. The watershed dams are built on tributaries to major rivers or streams to trap floodwater during heavy rainfall events and slowly release the water through pipes in the dams over a period of several days.

Although heavy rains fell in Washington County, the flood control dams on Double Creek and Cotton-Coon Mission watersheds functioned as designed and there was no flooding downstream from the dams, according to Karla Stephens, NRCS district conservationist for Caney Valley Conservation District.

Major flooding in Kingfisher did occur along Kingfisher Creek where there are no watershed dams. But flooding would have been much worse in the area if it had not been for the watershed dams in the Uncle John's Creek watershed, according to Michael Sheik, NRCS district conservationist for the Kingfisher County Conservation District. NRCS estimates that the 12 dams in the Uncle John Creek Watershed prevented between \$150,000 and \$200,000 in damages.

"The reduction of \$18.6 million in damages from one storm illustrates the value of the dams, many of which have provided flood protection for over 40 years," Lowrance said.

Local watershed project sponsors, mainly conservation districts and municipalities, built the dams with assistance from NRCS. The 2,100 dams in 119 watersheds across the state provide flood protection for 1.4 million acres and \$147 million in average annual benefits. The dams protect 774 highway bridges, 3,926 county bridges, 429 miles of highways and 1,660 miles of county roads. They trap 9.3 million tons of sediment each year preventing it from reaching rivers and large lakes like Lake Texoma. The dams provide 44,361 acres of aquatic habitat and associated wildlife habitat and 42 of the lakes provide municipal and rural water supplies. "These dams, while built mainly for flood control, provide so many more benefits and have become an important infrastructure in our state," said Lowrance.

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