



# Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 50 No. 12, December 2005

## Reclaiming Seventy Acres of Abandoned Mine Land

### Club Lake West Project

State Senator Richard Lerblance and state and national conservation leaders attended a tour of a reclamation project in Haskell County on Wednesday, Dec. 14. National Association of Conservation Districts President Bill Wilson, Oklahoma Conservation Commissioner Virginia Kidd and Executive Director Mike Thralls, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Darrel Dominick and Haskell County Commissioner Kenny Short toured the Club Lake West Reclamation Project. Wilson is also on the Haskell County Conservation District board of directors.

Thirty-three acres of abandoned coal mine land, less than a mile from the town of McCurtain in Haskell County, has not only been an eyesore on the landscape, but has been a dangerous area. Concerns about the hazard to public safety has put this site as a high priority for reclamation.



Examining the reclamation plan as work continues in the background are, from left, Haskell County Commissioner Kenny Short, Sen. Richard Lerblance, Conservation Commissioner Virginia Kidd, landowners Wayne Warren and Bob Byrum, and Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls.

“The area known as the Club Lake West Project consists of old spoil piles, highwalls, and deep water pits. It is not only a dangerous place, but it has also become a dumping ground for household waste and rubbish of all kinds,” said Conservation Commissioner Virginia Kidd. “State Highway 26 is adjacent to the site and a county road runs through the property; there is a concern that a vehicle could run off one of these highwalls.”

*Club Lake West, continued on page 2*



### Oklahoma Conservation Leaders Provide Watershed Program Testimony to Congress

Congressman Frank Lucas of Oklahoma convened an oversight hearing Dec. 6 in Washington, D.C., to review USDA's Watershed Program. Congressman Lucas chairs the House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research that heard testimony from a number of people including Bill Wilson, president of the National Association of Conservation Districts and a member of the Haskell County Conservation District board of directors. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight also was called to testify.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts provided the subcommittee with written testimony about the importance of the watershed program to the state and recommendations on the future of the program.

“The impact of the decline in funding for the program nationally can certainly be seen in Oklahoma. We have a number of projects that remain uncompleted, face federal staff shortages in this program area and have seen progress on rehabilitation of older structures slowed by

*Watershed Testimony, continued on page 2*

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OACD & Nature Conservancy Partner to Honor Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator

**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.



# Conservation Calendar

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

2006

- January 2 — Holiday: New Year's Day
- January 13-14 — KNID Agrifest, Chisholm Trail Expo Center, Enid.
- January 16 — Holiday: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- January 19 — Southern Plains No-Till Seminar, Hollis Civic Center, Hollis.
- Jan. 29 - Feb. 2 — NACD Annual Meeting, *Living a Legacy - Leaving a Legacy*, Hilton Americas-Houston, Texas.
- Feb. 6-8 — National RC&D Leadership Conference, Washington, D.C.
- Feb. 9 — Women in Agriculture Conference, St. Francis Catholic Church, Newkirk.
- Feb. 10-12 — Oklahoma Farmers Union 101st State Convention, Biltmore Hotel Oklahoma, Oklahoma City.
- February 16 — Environmental Education Expo, OKC Zoo, Oklahoma City.
- Feb. 26-28 — 68th OACD State Meeting, Biltmore Hotel Oklahoma, Oklahoma City.

**Regular Meetings of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for 2006, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City, 9:30 a.m. ([kimt@okcc.state.ok.us](mailto:kimt@okcc.state.ok.us))**

- Monday - Jan. 9
- Monday - Feb. 6
- Monday - March 1
- Monday - April 3
- Monday - May 1
- Monday - July 3
- Monday - Aug. 7
- Tuesday - Sept. 5
- Monday - Oct. 2
- Monday - Nov. 6
- Monday Dec. 4

## In Our Thoughts

Brad Elder, NRCS soil conservationist, Anadarko FO, lost his mother.  
 Alvin "Buck" Clements, retired SCS area conservationist and member of the Oklahoma Agriculture Hall of Fame, passed away.

## Congratulations!

Earl Weisner, NRCS district conservationist, Duncan FO, will be retiring after 35 years of service.  
 Please inform **Mark Harrison** at OCC of district directors or employees who have been ill, passed away or had babies. **Please include dates!!!!!!!**



*From left are Commissioner Virginia Kidd, Sen. Richard Lerblance, NACD President Bill Wilson and USDA Natural Resources Service State Conservationist Darrel Dominick.*

## Club Lake West, continued from page 1

A reclamation project on the area began in October and is to be completed March 1, 2006. It includes filling strip pits to eliminate 3,400 feet of dangerous highwalls and two hazardous water bodies and reclaim 10 acres of residential waste. The project is funded through the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Program, administered by the Conservation Commission, and will cost approximately \$565,000. In addition, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service contributed \$58,000 to help with the design of the project.

"The pits will be backfilled against the highwalls using the old spoil materials," said Mike Kastl, AML program director. "The disturbed areas will be graded and shaped to conform with adjacent topography and will be planted to grass." Because the county road had to be relocated, 1.7 acres of wetlands were affected by the project and 5.7 acres of new wetlands will be created to mitigate that loss. The McCurtain FFA and 4-H Chapters in coordination with the Haskell County Conservation District are helping to plant 2,000 trees and five acres of grass plantings for the newly created wetland, along with the introduction of 300 water plants (Button bush, Marsh Hibiscus, soft stem rush, and soft stem bulrush).

The Conservation Commission has worked closely with the landowners Bob Byrum and Wayne Warren and the Haskell County CD in planning and carrying out the project.

"Projects like this not only help in the care of our natural resources, but also benefit the local economy," Sen. Richard Lerblance said.

"Haskell County Conservation District is pleased to be partnering with the Conservation Commission on this project," said Bill Wilson, Haskell County Conservation District director and National Association of Conservation Districts president. "This site has been a top priority for reclamation work for our board for some time," he added.

## Watershed Testimony, continued from page 1

inadequate funding, said OCC Chair Rick Jeans in the Conservation Commission's written submission. "For the Watershed Rehabilitation Program (Small Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000), the Conservation Commission is seeking long term funding commitment from the state legislature for the local sponsors share of match funds. We need assurance from Congress that the Rehabilitation Program will be authorized and funded for at least another 10 years," the statement went on to say.

In a submitted statement from the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, OACD President Dan Lowrance said "Today in Oklahoma 329 dams have been planned but not constructed. For this reason, many watershed projects are not achieving the full benefits originally planned since they are only partially completed. Many communities still suffer the affects of flooding in our state due to the lack of dollars to get these projects off the drawing board." Lowrance also touched on the loss of experience and institutional knowledge as NRCS senior watershed employees retire and current funding levels fail to address replacing them. "We would ask that some mechanism be provided to allow a stable funding base for NRCS to assure a experienced and well trained staff."

The complete testimony of the National Association of Conservation Districts, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is available on OCC's Web site at [www.okcc.state.ok.us/Home/house\\_watershed\\_testimony/house\\_watershed\\_testimony.htm](http://www.okcc.state.ok.us/Home/house_watershed_testimony/house_watershed_testimony.htm)

## **Commission Employees Receive Service Recognition**

**Margaret Blevins**, OCC/WQ data manager, was honored for 20 years service to the state. She has been with the OCC since 2000. Prior to that she had worked for the Cleveland County District Attorney's office for 15 years.

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

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Nov. 7, 2005, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

### District Director Appointments

Jim Manning Jr. - Creek County  
Ralph Morgan - Grady County  
Herbert Turner - Jackson County  
Royle Reagan - Jefferson County  
Jasper Rabourn - LeFlore County  
Ewell Rudd - Logan County  
Mark Moehle - Oklahoma County  
Lee Ray Stiles - Payne County

### Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, who reported \$1,063,191.58 in claims Sept. 20 - Oct. 23.

### Request For O&M Funds

Commissioners approved a request to allocate watershed operation and maintenance funds to Bryan Conservation District to purchase an easement on a flood control structure that was built 20 years ago using state funds and not federal watershed program funds.

### Southeast Commerce AML Project

Commissioners ratified an agreement, as presented by OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard, previously approved by Commission Chair Rick Jeans due to time constraints. The agreement is with the City of Commerce for the City to serve as contractor for the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML Reclamation Project.

### Water Quality FY2005 Grant

Commissioners approved the FY2005 319(h) grant from the Office of Secretary of Environment to provide staff support and funding to implement Oklahoma's Comprehensive Nonpoint Source Pollution Program including planning, assessment, education and implementation activities, as presented by Dan Butler, Water Quality Program interim director.

### Travel Requests

Commissioners approved three out-of state travel requests for seven OCC staff members.

### Schedule of Meetings For Calendar Year 2006

Commissioners approved the schedule for regular Commission meetings for 2006 as presented by Kim Tweed, OCC executive secretary. (See *Calendar*, page two.)

### Conservation Cost-Share Program Year 8

Commissioners approved requests, listed below, from conservation districts for additional conservation practices for Conservation Cost-Share Program Year 8 as recommended by OCC/CP Director Robert Toole:

1. Brush Management (NRCS spec. 314) for specific species: Greer County (mesquite); Harmon County (mesquite, saltcedar, shinnery & sagebrush); Latimer County (persimmon).
2. Fence (382) as a stand-alone practice: Woodward County.
3. Pipeline (516) as a stand-alone practice: Greer County; Woodward County.
4. Pest Management (595) for specific species: Latimer County (musk thistle); Nowata County (sericea lespedeza).
5. Heavy Use Protection Area (561): Delaware County.

### FY2006 Joint Plan Of Operations

Commissioners approved the FY2006 Joint Plan of Operation for the Oklahoma County Conservation District, as submitted by OCC/DS Director Lisa Knauf.

### Additional Office Space

OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls stated that the Department of Agriculture received funding for the construction of a new laboratory, scheduled for completion in September 2007. This will open up office space in the Agriculture Building. Commissioners approved his recommendation to write a letter to Commissioner of Agriculture Terry Peach officially requesting more office space for OCC.

### Geographic Information Council FY2007 Budget

Commissioners approved a motion to amend OCC's FY2007 budget request to include a budget proposal for Geographic Information Council.

### EWP Final Report

Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program director, presented the final report of the Emergency Watershed Protection Program in which OCC, through an agreement with NRCS, managed a number of debris removal contracts as a result of a 2002 ice storm. He commended AML Systems Coordinator Dianne Ireton and FM/HR Grants Accountant Sheryl Easton for their work with the program.

### Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the ground breaking ceremony for Upper Red Rock Site 52 watershed construction project. She also attended the Governor's Water Conference. Commissioner Dan Lowrance also attended the Upper Red Rock ceremony and commended Noble County CD for hosting the event. Commissioner Lowrance attended the OACD Area I meeting and commended the districts for a good meeting. Commissioner George Stunkard praised the Conservation Programs division for the recent operation and maintenance workshops. Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr. commended OCC and OACD staff on the Area I meeting. He attended rural economic development meetings in Woodward and Elk City. He also attended the Wheatland RC&D annual banquet. He reported on the land judging event held by Ellis County, Dewey County, Woodward County, Woods County, East Woods County and Harper County CDs. Commissioner Rick Jeans also attended the Upper Red Rock Creek ceremony and a rural economic development meeting in Blackwell.

### Staff Reports

**Administration:** Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported on attending the Red Rock Creek ceremony. He stated that within the last few months he has attended 50th anniversary bankers awards programs in Pawnee County, Murray County and Pittsburg County Conservation Districts. Thralls also commended the Conservation Programs division on their work in hosting the operation and maintenance workshops. Thralls reported on attending the Area I meeting and commended Ben Pollard, Lisa Knauf and Clay Pope for a great job with the program.

**District Services:** Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending board meetings in Texas, Stephens, Blaine, Garfield, Beaver and North Caddo Conservation Districts. She also participated in the Women in Agriculture Conference hosted by the McClain County, Cleveland County and Garvin CDs. Knauf provided training to the new district secretary at Grant County CD.

**Water Quality:** Dan Butler, WQ interim director, reported attending the Governor's Water Conference and stated the topics were more on water quantity than water quality. Staff is continuing to get caught up on reports to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of the Secretary of Environment. Staff had ten reports approved

and submitted an additional 22 for approval.

**Abandoned Mine Land:** Mike Kastl, AML director, reported two active projects in Rogers County. He stated that there will be a photo opportunity the Club Lake West Project on Nov. 22 with area legislators. He reported that staff will submit AML's 2006 grant for approval during the month.

**Financial Management and Human Resources:** Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, stated that staff held health insurance option period meetings during the month and is finalizing the FY2007 budget request. The division will be hosting the full staff meeting Dec. 5 at the Harn Homestead and invited Commissioners to attend.

**Information Technology:** Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that staff is struggling with the issue of email spam for OCC and the districts and is looking at a new in-house system to reduce spam email. He provided copies of pre-bid specifications for the Tar Creek West Commerce Project.

**Conservation Programs:** Robert Toole, CP director, commended his staff, Tammy Sawatzky, George Moore, Dennis Boney and Johnny Pelley on the success of the recent operation and maintenance workshops. He thanked Ben Pollard for providing the risk management session along with Karla Beatty and Eldon Merklin for their participation. He thanked NRCS employees Johnny Green, Larry Caldwell and Arville Bass for their participation. A total of 112 people participated in these workshops.

### Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, thanked OCC staff for work getting conservation articles published and/or broadcast, for work with the operation and maintenance workshops and with the OACD Area Meetings. The planning committee will meet soon to begin preparations for the state meeting. Pope stated that Kingfisher County CD has approached him about hosting a burn workshop this spring. He reported a meeting held with Dewey County and Ellis County CDs, the High Plains RC&D and the Nature Conservancy regarding eastern redcedar. Pope will attend the budget meeting scheduled for Nov. 15. He also reported that an interim study meeting will be held on Nov. 22. Pope stated that conservation district directors have been attending rural development meetings hosted by a legislative committee. Pope reported that the Nature Conservancy will be sponsoring the Outstanding Landowner Award in Oklahoma with a \$1,500 contribution. Chesapeake Energy is sponsoring the Outstanding District Award with \$2,500. He reported meeting with the Oklahoma Municipal League regarding water quantity and quality issues. Pope reported that the Oklahoma County CD is working with the Harn Homestead to construct an outdoor classroom on that property. He also attended a meeting in Utah with his counterparts. Pope will attend a meeting with the Nature Conservancy and the Scenic Rivers Commission to discuss the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

### USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, thanked the OCC Commissioners and staff for their leadership. Dominick thanked the staff for their work with the operation and maintenance workshops. He also thanked Mike Kastl for his work with the Emergency Watershed Protection program. Dominick stated that the NRCS may receive a 20 percent cut in FY2006 technical assistance dollars.

### Next Meeting

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

## OACD & Nature Conservancy to Recognize Landowner

The Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts announced they will join forces to honor the efforts of the citizens of Oklahoma who protect and conserve our natural resources. They will present the Nature Conservancy Outstanding Conservation Landowner/Cooperator Award to the Oklahoma landowner chosen for best incorporating natural resource conservation on their property.

“We are honored to have the Nature Conservancy as our partner in furthering conservation in Oklahoma,” OACD President Dan Lowrance said. “Their sponsorship of this award and their commitment to protecting and conserving our natural resources are greatly appreciated. They are truly committed to the conservation and protection of our soil, water, air, and wildlife habitats.”

The Outstanding Landowner/Cooperator award is presented annually to an Oklahoma agricultural producer judged as having the most extensive and effective natural resource conservation initiative on their 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 will receive \$1,500 and a trophy recognizing their accomplishments in the Governor’s Blue Room during Conservation Day at the Capitol in the spring legislative session.

“The Conservancy prides itself on developing collaborative, market-based approaches to conservation that aim to conserve Oklahoma’s diverse landscapes for future generations to use and enjoy,” said Mike Fuhr, the director for the Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma. “These approaches are only successful when done in partnership with landowners – no single organization can do it alone. That’s why we feel it’s so important for the Conservancy to work with a group like OACD to help honor an excellent steward of the land.”

The Nature Conservancy is an international, nonprofit organization whose stated mission is to conserve plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. In Oklahoma, the Conservancy is best known for its Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in Osage County.

“This is a great partnership for the Nature Conservancy and OACD,” OACD Executive Director Clay Pope. “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.”

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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

Mailing Tab Area

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