



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 51 No. 2/3, February/March 2006

Administration's Proposed Budget Would End Funding For NRCS Watershed Program.

The Bush Administration's proposed budget for federal fiscal year 2007 would eliminate funding for most of the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Watershed Program. The Administration proposes to end the Watershed Survey and Planning and the Watershed Operations funding for the agency. Should Congress approve this portion of the Administration's budget proposal, it would have significant consequences in Oklahoma. For the past sixty years conservation districts have relied upon the technical assistance of NRCS watershed planning and design staffs to perform operation and maintenance, repair and rehabilitation of the state's 2105 upstream flood control structures. Without this technical assistance conservation districts, who are the local sponsors for nearly all structures, will have to secure this assistance either from the state or the private sector.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission has been communicating with members of Congress outlining the many negative impacts this budget proposal could have on the state. The Commission is sharing these communications and other background information on its Web site at www.okcc.state.ok.us. OCC also encourages those interested in this issue to view the National Watershed Coalition web site for additional information (www.watershedcoalition.org/index.html).

Governor Brad Henry helped present OACD Conservation Awards.

Conservation Day at the Capitol

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) sponsored "Conservation Day at the Capitol" on March 13. Cosponsors included local conservation districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Held in the fourth floor Capitol Rotunda, participants had exhibits featuring the diverse conservation activities across the state addressing local natural resource needs.

Governor Brad Henry joined OACD President Dan Lowrance to present the 2006 OACD Conservation Awards. Three categories were presented.

Holton Payne of Newkirk received the Outstanding District Cooperator Award, cosponsored by the Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma. Joy Elledge of Nowata, Nowata County CD, received the Outstanding District Director Award, cosponsored by the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation. Garfield County CD received the Outstanding District Award, cosponsored by Chesapeake Energy.

In addition, five teachers from across the state – one in each Congressional district – received Outstanding Conservation Educator Awards cosponsored by OACD and Chesapeake Energy.



Conservation Awards: (from left) Gov. Brad Henry; Dan Lowrance, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts; Hopper Smith, Chesapeake Energy; Richard Wuerflein, Garfield County Conservation District; Waddel Altom, Noble Foundation; Joy Elledge, Nowata County Conservation District; Janet Studnicka, Nature Conservancy; Holton and Jane Payne, Rabbit Creek Ranch; Terry Peach, Sec. of Agriculture.



Education Awards: (from left) Dan Lowrance, OACD; Susan Paslay, teacher, Holdenville; Hopper Smith, Chesapeake Energy; Gail Swallow, teacher, Alva; Patricia Johnson, teacher, Edmond; Gov. Brad Henry; Linda Brown, teacher, Tulsa; Connie Huseman, teacher, Ninnekah; Terry Peach, Sec. of Agriculture.

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Our vision:

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources

Our mission:

To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts and other partners, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

"Soil conservation is not just an incidental bit of the mechanics of farming;

it is part and parcel of the whole business of making a living from the land, and is the only way by which we may have permanently productive land for a permanent agriculture to support a permanent nation."

Hugh H. Bennett and W.R. Chapline from *Soil Erosion - A National Menace*.

Conservation Calendar

For more events and information, click on "Calendar" at www.okcc.state.ok.us

April 3-5 — Oklahoma Envirothon Competition, Oklahoma University Biological Station, Willis (Okla.).

April 6 — Women in Agriculture & Small Business Conference & Trade Show, Forest Heritage Center, Beavers Bend State Park, Broken Bow.

April 6 — *Branching Out and Taking Root*, Women in Agriculture Conference, 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Cherokee Strip Conferences Center, Enid.

April 7 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 10:00 a.m., Autry Technology Center, Room 22, 1201 W. Willow, Enid.

April 8-12 — International Conference of Hydrology and Management of Forested Wetlands, New Bern, N.C.

April 11 — Southeast District Forestry Judging Contest for 4-H & FFA. (Location TBA)

April 19 — Capitol Water Day, Fourth Floor Rotunda, Oklahoma State Capitol. Oklahoma Water Resources Board.

April 20 — ScienceFest Oklahoma, OKC Zoo, Oklahoma City.

April 20-22 — Southern Plains Farm Show, State Fairgrounds, Oklahoma City.

April 25-26 — Governor's Conference on Agriculture and Economic Growth, Marriott Hotel, Oklahoma City.

April 27 — Blaine County Conservation Appreciation Banquet, 6:30 p.m., Blaine County Fairgrounds.

In Our Thoughts

F.C. Shubert, Texas County CD director since Dec. 19, 1949, passed away Feb. 2 at the age of 95.

Lorena Males, widow of Upper Washita CD director and watershed program pioneer, passed away Jan. 3 at the age of 95.

Jesse Murrel, former NRCS district conservationist at Cleveland County CD, passed away Feb. 5.

Tom Lucas, High Plains RC&D coordinator, lost his father Feb. 17.

Chuck Smith, Harper County CD director, lost his mother in February.

Bob McCray, East Woods County CD director, lost his son Feb. 7.

Marshall Houck, Delaware County CD director for over 47 years, passed away March 26.

E.L. Fowler, Upper Washita CD director, had knee surgery Feb. 13 and his wife had hip replacement surgery in January.

Mason Mungle, former OCC executive director, underwent surgery and is doing well.

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

Volunteers Honored for Work to Help Wister Lake Watershed

On Jan. 3 the Latimer County and LeFlore County Conservation Districts hosted a dinner to recognize volunteers who had served on an advisory group and committees for the Wister Lake Watershed Water Quality Project.

The two conservation districts sponsored the Wister Lake 319 Cost-Share Demonstration Project. It was funded by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency under Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. Part of the grant called for formation of a Watershed Advisory Group made of local landowners and representatives of agencies, organizations and local government to provide local input and guidance.

At the Jan. 3 reception, Senator Kenneth Corn and Representatives Neil Brannon and R.C. Pruet joined with Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls and Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director Clay Pope to honor the volunteers. Thralls presented Conservation Commission Commendations to Outstanding Latimer County Cooperator Ronald Garner and Outstanding LeFlore County Cooperator Homer Marrow and to the following members of the Wister Lake Watershed Advisory Group:

James Grego, Latimer County Conservation District (CD); Ed Abernathy, LeFlore County CD; Duane Jeffrey, Eastern Oklahoma State College; Chris Parrington, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry; Joe Jeffrey, landowner; Danny Baldwin, City of Wilburton; Jim Enis, Latimer County CD; Bob Bowman, landowner; Sam Johnston, landowner; Don Goforth, Poteau Valley Improvement Authority; Larry Casey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Alan Ware, Kerr Center; Patty Wright, Oklahoma State Cooperative Extension Service; and Fran Johnson, landowner.

Thralls also presented commendations to the project's educational advisory group members Don Stites, Dewayne Norris, Dan Stone, Donna Hannebrink, Lisa Grey, Joe Bullard, Joe Allen and Alan Ware. Educational volunteers Mitch Arteberry, Todd Forwoodson, Rick Manley, and Ward Brown received commendations as did Leland Walker, Eastern Oklahoma State College Agriculture Department director.

LeFlore County and Latimer County Conservation Districts also received commendations as did Conservation Commission employees Nicole Norris and Brandon Faulkenberry.

The five-year grant brought \$1.3 million into the Wister Lake watershed to demonstrate best management practices for land and water management to help improve water quality. Local landowners contributed approximately \$440,000 in cost share. The funding also helped pay for numerous workshops, public meetings and educational activities to help educate several thousand landowners, teachers and students how to help protect water quality in the Wister Lake watershed. In addition, during the course of the grant, the Fourche Maline Outdoor Classroom and LeFlore Outdoor Classroom were built.

A total of 250 landowners cooperated to install land, water and waste management practices to help improve water quality. During the program 33 feeding facilities, one composter and five composter barns were created for livestock, and 11 septic systems were installed to replace standard systems in the watershed. Other management practices installed include cross fencing for rotational grazing for cattle and riparian fencing to protect stream banks.

"We owe all the members of the Watershed Advisory Group our gratitude for providing the local leadership and participation that has made the Wister Lake Watershed Project a success," said Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls.



(From left) OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls presented Conservation Commission Commendations to Donna Hannebrink and Nicole Norris as well as volunteers in the Wister Lake Watershed Water Quality Project.

Commission Employees Receive Service Recognition

Judith Wilkins, OCC/WQ executive secretary, was honored for five years service to the state. She has been with OCC since 2004. Previously she worked for the University of Oklahoma and the Corporation Commission.

Ben Berry, OCC/WQ specialist, received a Conservation Commission Commendation for administering CPR to a person suffering an apparent heart attack.

State Geographic Information Council Sponsors GIS Day at the Capitol Event

Celebrate Your World With GIS

The State Geographic Information Council hosted GIS Day at the Capitol on Wednesday, March 15. The event was held on the Fourth Floor Rotunda of the State Capitol building from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. More than 30 local, state and federal agencies were on hand to demonstrate the power of GIS and mark GIS Day at the Capitol's twelfth year.

Held each year, GIS Day at the Capitol celebrates geographic information system (GIS) technology, an innovative technology that uses geography to bring countless benefits to the state of Oklahoma. GIS Day at the Capitol provides an opportunity for those curious about GIS to see its applications in action. A GIS is a computer-based mapping tool that takes information about a location, such as streets, buildings, water features, and terrain from a database and turns it into visual layers. The ability to see geographic features on a map gives users a better understanding of a particular location, enabling planners, analysts, and others to make informed decisions about their communities.

Although many may not be aware of it, GIS touches their lives daily. It is used throughout the world to solve problems related to the environment, health care, land use, business efficiency, education, and public safety. The power supply directed to homes, the patrol cars and fire trucks that keep neighborhoods safe, and the delivery trucks on the road all function more efficiently because of GIS. This technology can also help businesses place ATMs and restaurants at more convenient locations, allow people to pull maps off the Internet, and help farmers grow more crops with less chemicals.

Most recently we have seen how GIS technology can be used to aid Homeland Security initiatives, map the debris field following the Space Shuttle Columbia tragedy, and monitor the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The applications of GIS technology are endless, limited only by the imagination of its users. From border patrol agents to doctors, and from federal agency employees to local city planners, people in nearly every profession all over the state are reaping the benefits of this extraordinary technology.

"Any of the earth's natural or man-made features can be viewed with a GIS," said Mike Thralls, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and chair of the State Geographic Information System Council. "One of the best features of GIS is that it enables us to see data on a map compared to seeing the same data in a table. It's much easier to draw conclusions and make decisions from a map than a table."

GIS Day at the Capitol serves to make people aware of GIS technology and the important contributions it is making in the fields of science, technology, information, and the humanities.



Mike Sharp, OCC Information Technology director (in dark shirt, in center), at GIS Day at the Capitol.

Oklahoma Department Of Agriculture, Food, & Forestry Sponsors Third Governor's Conference on Agriculture & Economic Growth



The third annual Governor's Conference on

Agriculture and Economic Growth will be held in Oklahoma City at the Marriott Hotel, 3233 NW Expressway, April 25-26. This conference brings state and national leaders together to explore opportunities for enhancing the use of our state's natural resources to promote economic development.

Agricultural producers will also get the chance to learn about what is going on with the development of the 2007 U.S. Farm Bill. Updates on the progress of this new farm policy bill will be provided along with analysis of what the new bill will mean to state producers.

Sessions dedicated to no-till farming and use of the herbicide 2-4-D will also be presented.

New industries and technologies will be featured topics at this year's conference as well. Agritourism, bio-fuel development and production agriculture alternatives will be discussed along with sessions on the National Animal Identification Program and Landowner Water Rights.

This is a conference with a history of results. At the very first Governor's Conference on Agriculture and Economic Growth, participants showed a special interest in the agritourism industry. Bed and breakfast operations, hunting and fishing services and guest ranch operations were just a few of the types of businesses rural Oklahomans were interested in pursuing.

As a result, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry joined with the Oklahoma Department of Tourism, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce to create the Oklahoma Agritourism Program. New and existing agritourism enterprises have begun to flourish across the state and communities are beginning to see supportive business opportunities emerge.

Landowners of all types are increasingly concerned about liability issues when they have visitors on their property. This year's conference will devote an entire breakout session to that topic.

More information on this conference is available on line at www.oda.state.ok.us or by calling (405) 522-5489. Questions may also be emailed to amber.lawless@oda.state.ok.us.

The agenda and registration forms can be found at www.oda.state.ok.us/gov-conference.htm

Proud Past ... Positive Future

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) held its 68th Annual State Meeting at the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City Feb. 26-28. OACD is an independent organization that promotes natural resource conservation through various activities and functions. The meeting was cosponsored by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

Harold Mullins, a Noble County farmer, opened the meeting with a description of how local people formed the Red Rock Creek Conservancy District in 1960 to work on the flood control project. "After a flood in 1957, a survey completed by 126 landowners in the watershed reported over one million dollars in damages in the watershed," said Mullins. "This motivated those living in the watershed to contribute money and their energy in developing the flood control project."

Terry Peach, Oklahoma Secretary and Commissioner of Agriculture, welcomed the attendees on behalf of Gov. Brad Henry and commended the assembled conservationists for the value of their commitment to the state's natural resources.

Bill Wilson of Kinta, Oklahoma, president of the National Association of Conservation Districts and Haskell County Conservation District director, and Congressman Frank Lucas also spoke during the opening session in the morning of Feb. 27.

At the Monday luncheon, state Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert commented on new initiatives at both state and national levels to encourage and support conservation, including President George Bush's proposals to encourage farming of crops like switchgrass for use as alternative and renewable fuel sources.

Conservation Awards

Awards for outstanding contributions to conservation of Oklahoma's natural resources were presented to individuals and organizations during the OACD State Meeting.

OACD Conservation Hall of Fame

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission established the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame in 1985. Each year, one or more friends of conservation and/or conservation district directors are inducted in recognition of a positive influence on Oklahoma's conservation programs. This year OACD inducted two friends of conservation into the Hall of Fame.

OACD President Dan Lowrance inducted State Senator Johnnie Crutchfield and Area V Conservation Commissioner Virginia Kidd into the Oklahoma Conservation Hall of Fame during the organization's banquet on Feb. 27.

Sen. Crutchfield, named to the Hall of Fame as a "Friend of Conservation," is a Carter County native, having grown up on a ranch in the western part of the county. He has had a career in both ranching and teaching, having been a classroom teacher in Ardmore Public Schools for 28 years. He has extensive experience in local government, serving on the Ardmore City Council and then as Mayor. His other local government experience included 13 years as a member of the board of directors for



Sen. Johnnie Crutchfield

the Arbuckle Conservation District. He also served a term on the executive board of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts.

In 1998 Crutchfield left his position on the conservation district to run for the state Senate. He won the election in Senate District 14 that includes Carter, Love, Murray and Garvin Counties.

"As a Senator he has championed conservation and conservation districts," OACD President Dan Lowrance cited at the presentation ceremony. "Having a senator who has been a conservation district director and a state association board member is a great benefit to the conservation cause in Oklahoma," Lowrance said.

At the OACD Area II Meeting in November 2005, Sen. Crutchfield had challenged conservation district directors to consider running for the state Senate or House of Representatives.

"We are honored that one of our own has demonstrated great leadership in the Oklahoma Senate by serving this session as chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee," Lowrance said.

OACD President Lowrance also inducted Oklahoma Conservation Commissioner for Area V and LeFlore County Conservation District Director into the Hall of Fame.

Lowrance cited Kidd as a leader in Oklahoma's conservation movement for the past 20 years. First elected to the LeFlore County Conservation District board in 1986, she built a reputation of action, always willing to fight the odds for a worthy conservation cause, Lowrance said



Area V Commissioner Virginia Kidd

Kidd was recognized for her leadership in the upstream flood control program of the state and the LeFlore County Conservation District. The conservation district is responsible for operating five upstream flood control dams in the Caston Mountain Creek watershed. Most recently she championed the cause of the citizens of the town of McCurtain, leading the charge to devote funds to reclaim a large, hazardous abandoned mine land site just west of the town. That reclamation work is currently underway and will be completed in a few months.

Kidd was first appointed to represent southeast Oklahoma on the Conservation Commission in 1996 and reappointed in 2000 by Governor Frank Keating. She is now serving a third five year term having been reappointed by Governor Brad Henry this past year. During her terms of service on the Commission the state conservation cost-share program and rehabilitation of Oklahoma's flood control structures were initiated.

Kidd has also served her communities in a variety of venues including the Kiamichi Economic Development District of Oklahoma board and as trustee on the Carl Albert State College Foundation. Prior to serving the Conservation Commission she was appointed by Governor Henry Bellmon to serve as a member of the Department of Human Services Commission. She also served on the board of the Oklahoma Heritage Association.

"The cause of conservation has no better friend than tonight's recipient – Virginia Kidd" Lowrance said.

OACD President's Award

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts has presented its "President's Award" since 1983 to one or more individuals or an organization that has shown outstanding support of conservation efforts in Oklahoma or the nation.

OACD President Dan Lowrance presented the President's Award for 2006 to Terry Peach, Oklahoma Secretary and Commissioner of Agriculture, during the organization's banquet. This is the first time OACD has presented the President's Award to a state Secretary of Agriculture.

The Secretary of Agriculture represents the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and 88 local conservation districts on the Governor's Cabinet, as well as other agencies.

"Since Terry became our cabinet secretary over three years ago he has provided outstanding leadership for Oklahoma agriculture and he understands the importance of conservation to this state," Lowrance said. "He meets regularly with OACD's leadership and carries our conservation priorities to the governor. He has been an advocate for our cost-share program and the watershed rehabilitation program," Lowrance added.

Peach is a third generation farmer from Mooreland in Woodward County. The family farming and ranching operation includes several thousand acres of wheat and grassland.

"Terry understands the U.S. Department of Agriculture and conservation programs, having served seven years as the state executive director of the Farm Service Agency in Oklahoma," Lowrance said.

OACD Conservation Awards

The OACD Conservation Awards for Outstanding Conservation District, District Director and District Cooperator were announced at OACD Awards Banquet on Feb. 27. The awards were later presented in the Governor's Blue Room during Conservation Day at the Capitol on March 13. (See *Conservation Day at the Capitol 2006*, page one.)

100% Attendance by Board

Harper County Conservation District was honored for continuing a record of 100 percent attendance of district directors at board meetings.

Excellence in Communication

Mark Thomas, executive vice president of the Oklahoma Press Association (OPA), joined OACD President Dan Lowrance to present the Excellence in Communications Awards, cosponsored by OACD and OPA. The award for Outstanding Press Coverage by an OPA Member Newspaper Employee went to Tippi Rasp, a reporter with the Enid News and Eagle. The feature was entered in the contest by the Garfield County Conservation District. Outstanding Press Coverage by an OPA Member Newspaper Publisher went to Wayne White of the Newkirk Herald Journal.

The Excellence in Communication by a conservation district went to Kay County Conservation District for a yearlong campaign devoted to public awareness. The Excellence in Innovative Communication went to Cimarron County Conservation District for developing a bottled drinking water product that is labeled with a conservation message.



*Sec. of Agriculture
Terry Peach*

Employee Recognition

Tricia Soderstrom, secretary for the Lincoln County Conservation District, received the Adeline Laird Award. The award was established in memory of Adeline Laird, finance officer at the Oklahoma Conservation Commission from October 1974 until her death in 1984. The award is presented to recognize district secretaries or programs coordinators who typify Laird's hard work, dedication, enthusiasm and caring attitude.

Iris Imler, programs coordinator, for the Cimarron County Conservation District, received the Outstanding Conservation District Employee Award from the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees.

NRCS Earth Team Awards

Phoukham Vongkhamdy and Kirk Schreiner of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service presented NRCS Earth Team awards for volunteer service. The following Earth Team Volunteer Awards were presented:

Volunteer: Debbie Eagle, for significant contributions to the conservation effort and successful mission of NRCS and its conservation partners through dedicated service as an Earth Team Volunteer in 2005.

Volunteer Program: High Plains RC&D, for recognition of the diverse efforts working with the Earth Team Volunteer Program in 2005.

Field Office: Wilburton Field Office and Talihina and Latimer County Conservation Districts, for exemplary efforts in recruiting and utilizing Earth Team Volunteers in 2005.

Volunteer Workgroups: Ouachita Mountains RC&D, for exceptional efforts in utilizing Earth Team Volunteer Workgroups in 2005.

NRCS also presented the following Partnership Awards:

Conservationist of the Year: Johnny Corgill, Antlers

Conservation Educator: Susan Henning, Newkirk

District Director or Agency Official of the Year: Wayne Sexton, McAlester

Standing in the GAP: Lynda Rushing, El Reno

RC&D Council Member: Trapper Heglin, High Plains RC&D, Buffalo

RC&D Council: Cherokee Hills RC&D Council, Tahlequah



Tricia Soderstrom



Iris Imler



OPA Executive Vice President Mark Thomas and OACD President Dan Lowrance presented the Excellence in Communication award for Best Communication Campaign to the board and staff of Kay County CD. From left are Mark Thomas, Joe Caughlin, Rick Jeans, Lonnie Stone, Claud Hiatt, Garold DeWitt, Susan Henning and Dan Lowrance.

A Summary of the January Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

Due to daily press briefings by the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry regarding drought, wildfires and the state burn ban, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Jan. 9 in the Agriculture Building Plant Industry Conference Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Caney Valley - Lester Gagan
North Caddo - Jimmy Dorsey
Shawnee - Mike Rooker
South Caddo - Ronald Walzer
West Caddo - Wayne Spies
Woods County - Wesley Nixon

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement as presented by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who reported \$1,304,755.06 Nov. 18 - Dec 18.

Agreements

Commissioners ratified two agreements previously approved by Commission Chair Rick Jeans due to time constraints, and approved three new agreements and one amended agreement, as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved the following travel requests as presented by OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls:

1. Environmental Leadership Training, five sessions in 2006, Kansas State University. (Phillips)
2. Four-State Ecosystem Workshop Planning, Jan. 12-14, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission - Project WILD, Morrillton, Ark. (Beatty)
3. Coordinators Council Quarterly Meeting, Jan. 17-19, Project WET USA, Tucson, Ariz. (Beatty)
4. Regional Conference, South Central ARC User Group, Feb. 6-10, Fort Worth, Tex. (Willoughby)
5. 2006 Winter Business Meeting, National Association of AML Programs, Feb. 6-8, Austin, Tex. (Kastl, Sharp)

Conservation Cost-Share Program Year 8

Commissioners approved the following additional practices in the Conservation Cost-Share Program for conservation districts as indicated, presented by OCC Conservation Programs Director Robert Toole:

1. Fence (NRCS Spec. No. 382) as a stand-alone practice to be used in cell grazing in Woods County CD.
2. Variance on brush management practice to include all non-herbaceous plants, thus qualifying a number of invasive species needing control in Cimarron County CD.
3. Animal Trails and Walkways as a LLCSP practice, allowing cost share on new pond construction for sediment control practices on controlled access area in Little River CD.

Fort Cobb Priority Watershed Project

Commissioners approved the State Guidelines for Conservation Cost-Share Program and Policies and Practices for the Fort Cobb Watershed 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Implementation Project, Program Years 1-3, as presented by Monty Ramming, OCC Water Quality Fort Cobb Project coordinator. He stated that cost share to ease transition to no-till farming is being offered to help meet the phosphorous reduction goal in the watershed.

McPheeters - 258 AML Project

Commissioners approved a motion to adopt a Finding of Fact and the Notice of Intent to Enter for Purposes of Reclamation pursuant to Title 45, Section 740.5(A),

of the Oklahoma Statutes and Oklahoma Administrative Code 155:15-1-8 b, c, and d. The action was requested by OCC/AML Director Mike Kastl, who stated the property in Rogers County poses a public safety hazard as it contains a water-filled strip pit and a dangerous highway near a town and school system.

New Business

Commissioners approved a travel request for Ed Crall, OCC/WQ Fort Cobb education coordinator, to attend the No-Till on the Plains 2006 Winter Conference in Salinas, Kan., Jan. 30-31.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the Water Quality staff meeting retreat. Commissioner Rick Jeans reported attending the Biofuels Conference.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported that he would leave the NACD national meeting early to attend OCC's budget hearing on Feb. 2 to discuss the FY2007 budget request. He stated that Sec. of Environment Miles Tolbert had attended meetings regarding the bond recommendations and the division of REAP funds between the natural resources agencies. Thralls presented framed photos to Commissioners Jeans and Lowrance and NRCS State Conservationist Darrel Dominick commemorating their participation in the Upper Red Rock Watershed dedication.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, stated that staff would participate in the Enid Farm Show on Jan. 13 and 14.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending board meetings at LeFlore County and Atoka County CDs. She has also assisted districts with new payroll and end-of-year tax procedures.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, reported staff submitted several outputs to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and had received approval for six. He reported on activities in the wetlands and monitoring programs. Butler reported that funds remaining in the 2000 grant are being transferred to the Spavinaw Creek project and that the Wister project was coming to a close.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, reported that the Charles Phase 2 - 258 Project in Rogers County is 63 percent complete, the Club Lake West-101 Project in Haskell County is 34 percent complete and bids on the Kirk-150 Project in Haskell County would be unsealed on Jan. 26.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, reported that staff is providing assistance to conservation districts with end-of-year taxes. He commended Lynn Weldon, Human Resources specialist, on completing the Confirmation of Benefits statements for all district employees. Coffman reported that staff has provided information to the Office of State Finance and the state Senate regarding OCC's budget request. He stated that he and Ben Pollard met with the State Risk Management staff to discuss insurance policy renewal.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that 20 contractors attended the pre-bid meeting for the West Commerce AML Tar Creek project at the site on Dec. 12. Bids will be unsealed Jan. 10. Sharp reported on participating in a tour of four projects in the Tar Creek area and commended the Ottawa County CD for its assistance.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, reported on the watershed rehabilitation program stating that 10 projects have been completed, 23 structures are in some phase of rehabilitation, one project is under construc-

tion, six projects are awaiting construction, 10 projects are in the design phase, five projects are awaiting design and one project is in the planning stage. He stated that OCC is requesting \$3.2 million for operation and maintenance to maintain the watershed infrastructure that provides \$71 million in benefits to the state annually.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, reported attending the Wister Lake Watershed Advisory Group appreciation dinner in Poteau (See *Volunteers* on page 2). Pope reported that Garfield County, Kingfisher County and East Canadian County CDs hosted an appreciation dinner for Rep. Roggow where OACD recognized Roggow for his support. Little River CD hosted an appreciation dinner for Sen. Jeff Rabon. Pope stated that the OACD Strategic Plan team would meet at the Noble Foundation in Ardmore on Jan. 12. OACD will participate in the Enid Farm Show Jan. 13-14. He stated that conservation districts, OCC and NRCS had been mentioned in the news media regarding the recent drought and wildfires. This presents an opportunity to discuss cost-share for pond construction and invasive species control. Legislative bills have been pre-filed concerning controlled burn, insurance for district directors, and water projects.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, reported that the recent fires in Oklahoma have been devastating and had taken the home of one of their employees. The NRCS will continue to work on the cedar inventory as funds become available. Dominick reported on the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, stating that 602,000 acres are in contracts for brush management, totaling \$11.3 million, and that 227,440 acres are completed, totaling \$4.5 million. Dominick stated that there are 1600 miles of firebreaks and that there are 2.3 million acres planned for prescribed burn totaling \$1 million with 65,000 acres completed. Dominick reported on the Emergency Watershed Protection Program stating that the NRCS knows of eight upstream flood control structures that have been affected by the wildfires. A team is making a damage assessment to possibly use EWP funds.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program chief, stated that some of the FSA employees have been affected with the recent wildfires. Wanger reported that two employees retired in December and both had over 40 years of service. FSA is looking at using the Emergency Conservation Program to assist with natural disaster damages. Wanger reported that over one million acres are in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Next Meeting

Commissioners unanimously approved a request by Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr that the next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission be changed from Feb 6 to Feb. 8. The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be Feb. 8 in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

A Summary of the February Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Feb. 8, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Appointments

Alfalfa County - Douglas McMurtrey
Harper County - Steve Terry
Logan County - John Kendall
Woods County - John Friend

District Director Resignations

Logan County - Clifton Channel

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement submitted by Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources director, who reported \$1,389,605 in claims Dec. 19 - Jan. 24. Coffman reported that OCC had received \$2.4 million from the REAP fund.

FY03 And FY04 AML and FY04 Water Quality Audits

Bruce Luttrell, auditor, presented the audits of the FY03 and FY04 Abandoned Mine Land Program funds and the FY04 Water Quality Program funds. He stated that all audits received an unqualified opinion with no reportable findings and thanked OCC staff for their complete cooperation and assistance during the audits.

Agreements

Commissioners approved four agreements as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

Travel Requests

Commissioners ratified one out-of-state travel request previously approved by Commissioner Chair Rick Jeans due to time constraints and approved six other travel requests as submitted by Mike Thralls, OCC executive director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

Director Elections Position No. 2

Commissioners approved a motion to authorize the OCC executive director to certify eligibility of candidates for District Director Position No. 2 and to approve polling places in those conservation districts holding elections.

Conservation Cost-Share Program

Commissioners approved a request to offer Fence (NRCS spec. No. 382) as a stand alone cost-share practice for Stephens County CD as submitted by Robert Toole, Conservation Programs director.

Fort Cobb Water Quality Project

Commissioners approved a request submitted by Dan Butler, Water Quality Program director, to raise the maximum limit of cost share per individual from \$20,000 to \$30,000 in the Cobb Creek/Fort Cobb Reservoir Demonstration Cost-share Program.

FY2007 Executive Budget

OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls presented the Governor's FY2007 Executive Budget recommendations for OCC, stating that the recommendations are favorable.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported the Enid Farm Show was one of the best she has attended. Commissioner Dan Lowrance reported attending the NACD Annual Meeting and stated that President Bill Wilson did a great job. He commended Rogers County Conservation District employees Keith Owen and Robert Gibbs on their presentation during an education session. Commissioner Lowrance stated that the federal administration budget recommendations have zeroed out the watershed program along with watershed planning and operations and are only making \$15 million available nationwide for the rehabilitation program. Commissioner George Stunkard stated that the

NACD Annual Meeting was very informative and he commended Commissioner Lowrance on his part in the watershed program session. Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr. reported on a session of director training at the NACD Annual meeting. Commissioner Winters also reported attending the Enid Farm Show, the Southern Plains No-Till Conference in Hollis, the U.S. Composting Conference in Albuquerque, N.M. and the National Association of Wheat Growers annual meeting. He reported that the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association is working with conservation districts on support of their programs. Commissioner Rick Jeans reported attending the NACD Annual Meeting and a no-till conference in Grady County.

Staff Reports

Administration: OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls reported on a tour for members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee in Logan County and commended the Logan County CD board and staff along with OCC's Dan Butler and Robert Toole for their work. Thralls attended a budget hearing called by Rep. Curt Roggow, following which Reps. Roggow and Chris Bengel were taken on the same tour to highlight Oklahoma's watershed program. Thralls stated there are four legislative bills related to the REAP fund and the proposed conservation bond issue. Thralls stated that Rep. John Auffett called regarding a bill to address salary inequities between conservation district employees and state employees. Thralls stated that the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission will hold a special meeting to discuss the use of \$750,000 for a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

OCC Assistant Director Ben Pollard reported presenting OCC's Affirmative Action Plan to the state Affirmative Action Plan Advisory Council.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending sessions at the NACD Annual Meeting pertaining to district director certification and recruiting new board members. Knauf provided Commissioners with copies of annual reports from conservation districts in their respective Commission areas. The plans were produced using the new format developed by staff.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, stated that the Tulsa Metropolitan Utility Authority will consider a financial commitment to a CREP for the Spavinaw Creek Watershed. Butler stated that the sign-up period for participation on the Fort Cobb no-till program began and 3,000 acres were signed up in the first week. Staff feels confident that this program will meet the TMDL in that watershed. According to a recent Agricultural Research Service report, producers are realizing a 30 percent increase in cotton yield in land converted to no-till.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that Mike Sharp, Information Technology director, was attending the AML winter meeting and topics included the federal budget. He stated that the Combined Benefit Fund, which contains funds for health benefits to miners, will keep AML reauthorization in discussion. He reported that OCC extended the contract time on the Charles Phase 2-258 project in Rogers County to allow time to complete items that had been added. He stated contract will be awarded soon for the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Reclamation work continues on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML Project.

Financial Management/Human Resources: Steve Coffman, FM/HR director, commended staff for work with the AML and Water Quality audits. He attended the House

Subcommittee on Natural Resources meeting. Coffman reported the Office of Personnel Management had received approval for OCC's Affirmative Action Plan. Coffman stated that the district liability insurance policy has been extended to June 30 without an increase in premiums. He and Ben Pollard have been working with the Department of Central Services Risk Management Division to develop a plan to move the conservation district liability insurance program to a self-insured program. Coffman stated that this could be achieved by increasing the deductible and placing the premium savings in a self insurance fund. Coffman stated that this would take several years to achieve.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, reported he assisted with program planning and presentor coordination on Watershed Program topics for the OACD State Meeting.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, reported that Oklahoma's conservation districts met quota on paying NACD dues. OACD is working to schedule a tour with Oklahoma's congressional delegation over the Easter break. Pope reported that Monsanto and the Oklahoma Farm Bureau will help sponsor Soil and Water Stewardship Week in April. He is working to prepare public service announcements for the event. Pope reported OACD will be working with the Grazing Lands Coalition, Nature Conservancy, Cattleman's Association and Farm Bureau on several legislative bills pertaining to controlled burns. Sen. Judy Eason McIntyre has filed a bill to allow directors to buy into the state insurance program. Pope stated that discussions among agriculture and conservation groups around the state have been on the development of a conservation license plate that would benefit a common issue, such as invasive species and native plant restoration.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, provided copies of a publication, "Management After Wildfire - Helping People Help the Land." He reported the 2006 Conservation Security Program sign-up will be held Feb. 13 - March 31 in the Poteau River, Spring River and Upper Beaver River Watersheds. Dominick reported that the 2006 budget has been reduced significantly from last year's budget and that NRCS is down 24 employees from last year. To help with the deficit, money will be taken from Technical Service and other agreements. He stated that watershed rehabilitation funds are being cut in half, so NRCS is facing dismantling the watershed program. Field offices will be looked at to see if Oklahoma can maintain the structure now in place. NRCS is sending people to Louisiana to work on Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

USDA Farm Services Agency

Rod Wanger, FSA Conservation Program chief, expressed his appreciation to Mike Thralls for work on CREP. Wanger said that FSA has low interest loans available to assist with repair and replacement of fences destroyed by wildfires. Wanger provided handouts regarding drought, floods and wildfires and showing counties approved for the Emergency Conservation Program assistance. Wanger reported that Conservation Reserve Program contracts signed in 1997 will expire soon and be eligible for renewal or extension.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on March 6, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Oklahomans play important roles at the NACD Annual Meeting

Living a Legacy ... Leaving a Legacy — NACD 2006



NACD President Bill Wilson

A number of Oklahomans played important roles at the 61st Annual Meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). The convention was held in Houston, Tex., Jan. 29 - Feb. 1. The meeting theme was "Living a Legacy ... Leaving a Legacy."

Bill Wilson, a Haskell County Conservation District board member from Kinta, began his second year as president of the national organization. He spoke to participants in several meetings and presented major awards. Bill and his wife Carolyn hosted a reception for meeting participants from Oklahoma on one evening during the meeting.

Dan Lowrance, a Stephens County Conservation District director from Duncan, is currently serving as chair of the NACD Water Resources Committee. Lowrance is also Oklahoma Conservation Commission Area IV Commissioner, president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) and past chair of the National Watershed Coalition (NWC). He moderated a NACD session entitled "Solving Water Management and Drought Challenges on a Watershed Basis." Michael L. Sykes, current chair of NWC from Lincoln, Neb., was among the speakers.

Dianne Jeans, wife of Oklahoma Conservation Commission Area II Commissioner and past president of OACD Rick Jeans from Tonkawa, represented Oklahoma in the Assembly of State Associations ceremony in the opening session. Commissioner Jeans represents Oklahoma on the NACD board of directors.

OACD Executive Director Clay Pope spoke in a concurrent session on the topic "Introduction to District Official Certification."

Keith Owen, Rogers County Conservation District reserve coordinator, gave a presentation on conservation education to the NACD board. Owen represented NACD's education steering committee in presentation of the committee's final report and recommendations for future NACD education endeavors.

This publication, printed by Department of Central Services, Printing Services, is issued by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as authorized by Mike Thralls, Executive Director. Eight hundred copies are prepared and distributed monthly at a cost of \$0.17 each. Copies have been deposited with the Publications Clearinghouse of the Oklahoma State Department of Libraries. All programs and services of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Oklahoma's Conservation Districts are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, gender, marital status or physical disability.

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Oklahoma Conservation Conversation

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Published monthly by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission
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