



Conservation Conversation

Information for and about Oklahoma's Conservation Districts

Volume 52 No. 7 July 2006

Area I Commissioner Completes Term

J.T. Winters Jr. completed his five-year term as Area I Conservation Commissioner on June 5. Winters chose not to seek reappointment but will continue to be active as a member of the board of directors of the Woodward County Conservation District.

State Senator Owen Laughlin and Representative Jeff Hickman (Winters' home area legislators), along with Winters' fellow Commissioners and others, expressed their appreciation for Winters' service during his term.

Following the June meeting of the Conservation Commission, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts hosted a luncheon in honor of outgoing Commissioner Winters. Sen. Laughlin and Rep. Hickman attended the luncheon and presented him with a Legislative Citation, commending his devoted efforts to conservation, agriculture and rural economic development.

Winters' fellow Commissioners - Rick Jeans, George Stunkard, Dan Lowrance and Virginia Kidd - presented him with a Conservation Commission Commendation in recognition of his service to OCC and the state of Oklahoma. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Darrel Dominick expressed his appreciation to Winters, as did Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts President Dan Lowrance and Executive Director Clay Pope.

Winters was appointed to the Conservation Commission July 1, 2001. He has been a farmer/

Commissioner Winters, continued on page 2



J.T. Winters Jr.

Another Significant Milestone for Conservation District Employees

Legislative Review 2006

by OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls

The highlight of this year's state budget is the compensation package approved by the Legislature for conservation district employees. The legislature funded a pay equity adjustment for all conservation district employees beginning July 1, 2006. In addition, conservation district employees will receive a five percent pay increase on Oct. 1 along with state employees. The funding for these raises is included in each district's allocation. Districts are also able to claim reimbursement for director meeting expenses at \$25 per meeting for up to 12 regular meetings per director in FY2007.

We are very pleased with the improved compensation package for conservation district employees, which makes their salaries comparable to those of state employees. This has been among OCC's priorities for several years, but this year our Commissioners, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees set pay equity as the top priority for the 2006 session of the state Legislature.

This marks a significant milestone and caps a long effort to improve salary and benefits for district employees. In 1989 legislation enabled district employees to enroll in the state employee insurance program, purchase their back years of service in the state retirement system and made them eligible for longevity benefits. In 2003 we gained an increase in health care benefits for conservation district employees to the same level as state employees. And now pay equity has been achieved. The efforts of district directors, district employees, OACD President Dan Lowrance, OACDE President Paula Templeton, OACD Executive Director Clay Pope and OCC combined to achieve this remarkable success.

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Mike Thralls

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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.

"From every conceivable angle — economic, social, cultural, public health, national defense — conservation of natural resources is an objective on which all should agree."

Hugh Hammond Bennett. The Hugh Hammond Bennett Lectures, Raleigh, North Carolina: The Agricultural Foundation, Inc., North Carolina State College, June 1959.

Conservation Calendar

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

July 30 - August 1 — Resource Conservation & Development State Summit, Clarion Meridian Hotel and Convention Center, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma Association of RC&D Councils.

August 7 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

August 11-12 — Developing Grassfed Livestock Production Systems, 5th Annual Grazing Lands Dollar\$ and Sense, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City. Oklahoma Grazing Lands Conservation Association.

September 4 — Labor Day Holiday

September 5 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

September 8-9 — Blue Thumb Volunteer Training, Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge, Tishomingo.

October 2 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Conference Center, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

October 26-27 — Blue Thumb and Oklahoma Water Watch Volunteer Training, Grand Lake Association, Grove. Oklahoma Conservation Commission Blue Thumb Program and Oklahoma Water Resources Board CLEAR Grand Project.

November 6 — Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, 9:30 a.m., Agriculture Building Conference Center, 2800 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City.

November 10 — Veterans Day Holiday

In Our Thoughts

Iris Imler, Cimarron County CD programs coordinator, lost her uncle June 20.

Ralph Watson, former Murray County CD director, passed away June 22.

George Huebsch, Marshall County CD director, passed away June 23.

Congratulations!

Steve Enos, Hughes County CD director, got married in May. His new wife's name is Angie.

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

Commissioner Winters, continued from page 1

rancher in Mooreland for more than 26 years. His operation produces hay, wheat, sorghum, oats and cattle, using no-till and conventional methods and controlled grazing. He became a cooperator with the Woodward County Conservation District in 1976 and served on the district board from 1984 to 1997, and was elected back to the board in 1999. During his previous term on the district board, he served on the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts' executive board as Area I director in 1989 and as vice president from 1990 to 1992.

Commissioner Winters also serves on the Woodward County Farm Bureau board of directors, the Oklahoma Wheat Growers board of directors, served nine years on the Woodward County Farm Services Agency Committee, and belongs to the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, Quail Unlimited, Farmers Union and is a lifetime member of the Hereford Association. He and his wife Betsy are members of the Mooreland First Methodist Church, and have four daughters.

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The second major accomplishment is the five-year designation of one-third of the Water REAP fund to OCC. OCC will be responsible to decide how the Water REAP money will be divided, but the legislation sets watershed rehabilitation as the top priority for REAP funds with Locally-Led and Priority Watershed Cost Share Programs and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program also eligible. OCC's share from this fund is capped at \$2.4 million annually for each of the five years.

Unfortunately, no progress was made in restoring the district and OCC's operating budget deficit of \$870,000, and funding from the NRCS contributions agreement to offset that hole is not available at this time. Filling that deficit was the second priority of this year's budget request. However, the legislation will allow up to 20 percent of the REAP fund to be used to cover the budget hole. Sadly, that means less money available to put conservation on the ground. Should additional federal funds become available during the year OCC will consider a supplemental allocation of operating funds for districts.

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Oklahoma Leads Nation in Approved CSP Contracts

On June 6 U.S. Sec. of Agriculture Mike Johanns' announcement about USDA's Conservation Security Program (CSP) included news that Oklahoma had more CSP landowner contracts approved than any other state in the nation. Out of a total of 439 contracts for the state, the vast majority are in a watershed in southeast Oklahoma.

CSP will provide \$2.6 million to 412 farmers and ranchers in LeFlore, Latimer, and Haskell Counties in Oklahoma this year. Subject to program funding, annual payments will be dispersed to contract participants for the next five to 10 years. These farmers and ranchers live in the Poteau River Watershed, which was recently approved as a CSP project.

For the Oklahoma portion of the Poteau River Watershed, 412 CSP contracts received approval. The majority of those — 342 — will be in LeFlore County, which contains the largest part of the watershed. "One reason we had an exceptional number of people qualifying for the program is the good job our producers have done over the past 20 years to establish good conservation programs on their land," said Risenhoover.

"The CSP will not only help farmers and ranchers continue and add to their conservation programs, but it will be a boost to the local economy," said Virginia Kidd, LeFlore County Conservation District director and member of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. "Much of the annual payments to producers will be used to buy fertilizer, seed, and fuel, fencing materials, equipment, and pay contractors to build ponds and other practices. That means many people in the area other than just the producers will benefit from the program."

To be eligible for a CSP contract, producers had to have an ongoing conservation program that usually includes proper pasture or cropland management that incorporates practices like rotational grazing, ponds, erosion control structures, conservation tillage, and wildlife habitat. Poultry producers also had to be managing chicken litter properly, which included having litter storage facilities and a plan to ensure proper distribution of the litter on their pastureland. Other CSP participants plan on using payments to build more fences for rotational grazing and more ponds for water supply.

CSP Contracts, continued on page 4

A Summary of the Monthly Meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met June 5, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

District Director Resignations

Greer County - John Birdwell

District Director Appointments

Beaver County - Lonnie Bailey
Central North Canadian River - Joe Funck
Craig County - Dale Tullis
Dewey County - Jimmie Purvine
Grant County - Rodney Hern
Greer County - Dean Graumann
Kay County - Joe Caughlin
Lincoln County - Ola Bon Fouquet
Muskogee County - Floyd Ken Silver
Okmulgee County - Tom Porter
Stephens County - Todd Robertson

Claims/Financial Statement

Commissioners approved the claims and financial statement presented by Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, who reported \$1,536,672.49 in claims April 18 - May 19.

Agreements

Commissioners approved three new agreements, 15 continuing agreements and six amended agreements as presented by Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

Travel Requests

Commissioners approved three out-of-state travel requests for three staff members and up to four Commissioners. (For details, contact Mark Harrison in the OCC office.)

FY2007 Appropriation and Budget

OCC Executive Director Mike Thralls reported that the Legislature adjourned its regular session without approving a budget for the state and had been called into special session to pass a budget before July 1.

Commissioner Reports

Commissioner Rick Jeans reported attending the National Land and Range Judging Contest. Commissioner Dan Lowrance reported that he has been asked to serve on the Natural Resources Advisory Committee for OSU. Commissioner Virginia Kidd reported attending the Wagoner County CD Stewardship Breakfast and a Teacher of Year awards presentation in Holdenville. Commissioner George Stunkard thanked those that attended the Wagoner County CD Stewardship Breakfast. He also reported on attending the OACD Conservation Educator of the Year Award presentation in Tulsa and was very impressed with the ceremony. Commissioner J.T. Winters Jr. attended the OACD Conservation Educator of the Year Award presentation in Alva and also was impressed with the ceremony. He attended the National Land and Range Judging Contest, a SPARCS meeting in Weatherford, and the North Central Oklahoma Research Station tour at Lahoma.

Staff Reports

Administration: Mike Thralls, OCC executive director, reported on attending the Wagoner County CD Stewardship Breakfast. He stated that the State Auditor and Inspector's Office has almost completed OCC's audit and should report at the next meeting. He stated that Joann Stevenson, assistant Attorney General, was in attendance and staff has initiated monthly meetings with her to discuss legal issues. Thralls expressed appreciation to Congressman Frank Lucas for his work to address the budget issues of the NRCS in Oklahoma. He also expressed appreciation to Clay Pope and Ben Pollard for their work on the successful OACD Conser-

vation Educator of the Year presentations. He also expressed appreciation to Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, for his work during tough budget times.

Ben Pollard, OCC assistant director, thanked Jeanette Nance, Office of the Governor, for working with OCC on conservation issues. He also recognized Mark Harrison, OCC information officer, for his work with the National Land and Range Judging Contest. Pollard thanked OCC members for their participation in the OACD Conservation Educator of the Year events held recently.

District Services: Lisa Knauf, DS director, reported attending the awards assembly for OACD Conservation Educator of the Year at Tulsa. She also attended board meetings at Creek County, Payne County and Oklahoma County Conservation Districts. Knauf met with NRCS state leadership to discuss continuation of the contributions agreement, ideas for the training agreement, changes to the Joint Plan of Operations, and computer security requirements. Knauf notified seven districts of expiration of technical service agreements with NRCS and developed modifications to agreements with Latimer County and LeFlore County CDs for continued technical service.

Water Quality: Dan Butler, WQ director, reported attending the National Monitoring Conference in San Jose, Calif. He stated that the Conservation Security Program sign-up in the Wister Watershed is going well and he contributed it to the success of the 319 program in that area. Butler invited members to attend the Lake Euchla/Spavinaw Creek Watershed demonstration farm field day on June 8.

Abandoned Mine Land: Mike Kastl, AML director, stated that there are two active sites in Haskell County. The final inspection of the Club Lake West project will be held June 8. Kastl reported on Senate Bill 2616 dealing with Congressional reauthorization of the AML program.

Financial Management and Human Resources: Jana Chicoine, FM/HR administrative officer, reported that staff is waiting on a budget to begin their work with the coming fiscal year financial activities.

Information Technology: Mike Sharp, IT director, stated that work on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML Project continues along with reclamation work on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML Project.

Conservation Programs: Robert Toole, CP director, reported that the Wilson-Grey project has been completed and the file closed. He reported that the three watershed technicians attended land rights training to allow staff to better assist districts with land rights issues.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Clay Pope, OACD executive director, reported that the National Land and Range Judging Contest was a success and expressed his appreciation to OCC staff for their assistance. He also thanked NRCS and the Oklahoma County Conservation District, particularly Don Bartolina, for work with the contest. He stated that districts were doing a good job of keeping the conservation message in front of the Legislature and the Governor. Pope stated that a bill passed for cities and towns to assist with conservation easements but that a district director insurance bill did not materialize this session. Pope stated that OACD continues to work with the Farm Bureau and the High Plains RC&D on a cedar project in northwest Oklahoma. He also stated that a preliminary study with the City of Oklahoma City on water availability continues. The City of Tulsa, Osage County, Nowata County and the Nature Conservancy are doing a project in the Flint Hills. Work with Native American tribes regarding water quality and CREP also continues.

Darrel Dominick, NRCS state conservationist, stated that budget issues remain a priority and that additional resources have been requested. He expressed concern about the contributions agreement with the Department of Wildlife Conservation that supports four employees. He reported that computer security special training and background checks need to be completed by mid-July for NRCS employees and conservation district employees who have access to NRCS computers. Dominick reported that the NRCS is developing Conservation Resource Briefs that partners may find useful in developing sound conservation decisions and policies. Dominick reported that district conservationist positions in Duncan and Buffalo have been filled.

USDA Farm Service Agency

Rod Wanger, FSA Conservation Programs chief, reported that FSA is not making loan deficiency payments on wheat because of the good price, but it is making small payments on barley. He stated that county committee filings run June 15 - August 1.

Next Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on July 3, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Officers For FY2007

Commissioners approved a motion to rotate offices as follows: chair - George Stunkard, Area 3; vice chair - Dan Lowrance, Area 4; and Secretary - Virginia Kidd, Area 5.

Conservation Commission Employees:

Awards & Recognition

Dennis Boney, OCC Conservation Programs watershed technician, was recognized for 20 years of service to the State of Oklahoma.

[Legislative Review, continued from page 2](#)

Our next challenge is to improve state funding for the operating budgets of conservation districts and to continue to seek additional dollars for conservation programs like cost-share, watershed operation and maintenance, watershed rehabilitation, invasive species control, and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Clay Pope has suggested the theme for the coming year should be "Lift the Cap" (on the REAP fund) and "Fill the Hole" (in the operating budget).

All in all it has been a good year. The cause of conservation has moved forward. Thanks to each of you for the part you played in making it happen!

Please Note

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Other watersheds approved as CSP projects in Oklahoma this year are the Upper Beaver Creek Watershed in the panhandle and Spring Creek Watershed in the northeast part of the state. Texas and Cimarron Counties received approval for 27 contracts in the Upper Beaver Watershed. To date no contracts have been approved for the small portion of the Spring Creek Watershed that extends into northeast Oklahoma. CSP projects approved in prior years include the Lower Salt Fork River Watershed in the northern part of the state, Lower Cimarron River-Skeleton Creek Watershed in north-central part of the state, Little River Watershed in central Oklahoma, and the Lower Neosho River project in the northeastern part of the state.

Fort Cobb – One of Six Best Watershed Plans in the Nation

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has named Oklahoma's Fort Cobb Watershed Plan as one of the six best watershed-based plans in the nation, according to a report issued May 11. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Water Quality division prepared and submitted the plan as part of its Fort Cobb Reservoir Watershed Implementation Project that is now in the implementation process. EPA's Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, Assessment and Watershed Protection Division, Nonpoint Source Control Branch conducted the study and issued the report.

The purpose of the Fort Cobb Reservoir Watershed Implementation Project is to restore water quality in the Fort Cobb Reservoir using nonpoint source pollution controls. Objectives include protecting and reestablishing buffer zones and riparian areas, demonstrating practices necessary to achieve the sediment, nutrient and pesticide control to improve water quality. The project includes watershed resident education along with financial and technical assistance to implement conservation and best management practices. Recently, no-till drills were purchased for conservation districts in the watershed to be available to landowners converting from traditional crop farming to no-till.

EPA said the Fort Cobb Watershed plan "did an excellent job evaluating current loads, identifying the primary sources, and establishing an effective management scheme for reaching mitigation goals." The report praised the model used in the plan to predict implementation costs, stating "This user-friendly tool is something that can be easily replicated by other watershed groups that may lack sophisticated technical resources." A water quality model, developed by the state Department of Environmental Quality, was used in the plan, as well as some data supplied by DEQ.

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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
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- Area IV Dan Lowrance Duncan
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