

CONSERVATION CALENDAR

MAY 2018

- May 8th** Mayes CCD Soil Health and Cover Crops Field Day
- May 8th** Woods CCD Soil Health & Locally-Led Workshop
- May 9th** Cotton CCD Outdoor Classroom and Natural Resource Field Day
- May 15th** Blaine Co./North Central Canadian/Deer Creek CD Feral Hog Workshop
- May 15th** Pittsburg Co./Latimer Co./Talihina CD Feral Hog Workshop
- May 19th** 24th Annual Creek Clean-Up in Tulsa
- May 22nd** Texas CCD Soil Health Field Day
- May 24th** Hughes Co./Konawa/Pontotoc Co./Shawnee CD Feral Hog Meeting
- May 30th** Coal CCD Soil Health and Range/Pasture Management Workshop
- May 31st** Strategies to Promoting Soil Health Workshop in Jay, OK

**For details on specific events, visit the calendar on the Conservation Commission website or check with the local conservation districts*



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Conservation Chronicle

Monthly Newsletter of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission
April 2018

Welcome Letter

Welcome to the second edition of the Conservation Chronicle, your monthly source of conservation news and notes. This newsletter is designed to highlight some of the great work being done at the Commission and at the district level. Hopefully, these stories will not only showcase the work being done, but also spark ideas for other ways to reach out to those we serve in the various districts.

I hope this newsletter proves to be a valuable source of information and a way that the conservation story can be spread across the state. Please print as many copies as you would like for distribution at your local district offices. Thank you to everyone who submitted stories. If your story was not included in this edition, please continue to submit stories to me, Chris Cox, at christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov or by calling 405-522-5954. My goal is to highlight different districts every month, if possible. Thank you and I hope you enjoy the April edition of the Conservation Chronicle.



Curt Roberts (2nd from right) was named the 2017 OACD Cooperator of the Year

OACD District Awards

The 2017 OACD District Awards took place on April 12th, 2018 at the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry building in Oklahoma City.

The Dewey County Conservation District was named OACD District of the Year. They were also presented with a commendation from Rep. Mike Sanders (R-Kingfisher) and Sen. Casey Murdock (R-Felt). Dewey CCD works with over 1,100 cooperators to preserve the natural resources of the community. The district is involved in educating farmers, ranchers, and young people in many areas like soil health and feral hog management. The district also operates and maintains 22 flood control structures, including 6 high-hazard dams.

Ed Casey of Nowata County Conservation District was named OACD Outstanding District Director. Mr. Casey, who was also honored at the OACD state meeting in February, works tirelessly to educate people of all ages on the importance of conservation. Mr. Casey is currently the Chairman of the Nowata County Conservation District and is a part of the OACD Leadership Program.

Curt Robert (pictured above) was named the OACD Outstanding Conservation District Cooperator. Mr. Roberts, who is a part of the Oklahoma County Conservation District, is a third generation farmer and his father signed the first cooperative agreement with the Oklahoma County Conservation District in 1947. Mr. Roberts has removed over 100 acres of invasive species brush and planted 17 acres back to native range. He has also worked to restore monarch habitat.

Congratulations to all of the 2017 District Award winners!

MONTH IN REVIEW

April was a busy month for the Conservation Commission and the Districts.

The warmer weather means Field Days, Outdoor Classrooms, and Feral Hog Outreach meetings are now in full swing. In April, six field days or outdoor classrooms were held across the state reaching numerous producers and showing the benefits of soil health and conservation practices. Those events truly highlight the partnership between the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Without each individual partner stepping up, these field days would not be nearly as educational or successful.



OACD President Jimmy Emmons, USDA Under Secretary Bill Northey, & Rep. Frank Lucas

Upcoming field days and outdoor classrooms will likely be more imperative now as the recent fires in Western Oklahoma have scorched hundreds of thousands of acres. Thanks to the work done by the firefighters, and some cooperative weather, the fires in Dewey and Woodward counties are now virtually completely contained. As of April 27th, 98% of the 34 Complex Fire in Woodward County was contained and the Reah Fire in Dewey County was 100% contained. These fires create new concerns for farmers and ranchers as they not only deal with the immediate issues like safety, housing, replacing equipment, and loss of income but, also, the longer term impacts like regrowth and soil regeneration.

The fires drew national attention with state and federal leaders making the trip to western Oklahoma to see the extent of the damage. Newly confirmed USDA Under Secretary Bill Northey toured the fire sites with OCC Executive Director Trey lam, OACD President Jimmy Emmons, State Conservationist Gary O'Neill, and State FSA Director Scott Biggs. Congressman Frank Lucas was also part of that tour.

April is always a very busy month for the Commission's Blue Thumb program. With Earth Day towards month's end, it's really Earth Month, as schools and conservation districts hold many events, including Earth Day festivals, natural resource days and outdoor classrooms. This April is no different from other years, keeping the Blue Thumb team very busy. There were Natural Resource Days in Kingfisher, Sulphur, Marlow, Noble County, and Kay County, Earth Day Events at Martin Nature Park in OKC as well as in Tulsa and Norman, an Outdoor Classroom event in Caddo County, Conservation Fair in Pawnee, and Arbuckle Simpson Nature Festival in Tishomingo. It's one of the most important things Blue Thumb does as a program and April provides one of the most exciting times for achieving our mission of stream protection through education.



Blue Thumb team member Becky Zawalski teaches elementary school kids in Pawnee about nonpoint source pollution using the EnviroScape

PRODUCER/PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

Instead of highlighting a producer this month, I wanted to take time and recognize one of our district employees who has gone above and beyond her role of district secretary. Coleta Bratten, district secretary at the Dewey County Conservation District, already has a tough job managing one of the biggest and most active districts in the state. She also helps manage the schedule of OACD President Jimmy Emmons, who is constantly traveling and speaking on soil health. With Coleta's help running the day-to-day business, the Dewey County Conservation District, was awarded the 2017 Outstanding Conservation District Award at the OACD Annual Awards Banquet on April 12th. Soon after winning that award, Coleta took her role to the next level helping coordinate the wildfire relief efforts in Dewey



State Rep. Mike Sanders (3rd from left), Coleta Bratten (3rd from right), State Sen. Casey Murdock (2nd from right), and the Dewey CCD board accepting their Outstanding Conservation District Award

The wildfires in Dewey County burned for a couple of weeks before they were fully contained and scorched approximately 300,000 acres. Losses also included houses, barns, livestock, and equipment. The area has been devastated. But, in times of crisis certain people rise to the occasion and Coleta was one of those people during this crisis. Coleta has been helping coordinate relief efforts, keeping the OCC, NRCS, and OACD informed about everything going on in the area, and helping victims out wherever she can. Coleta has a passion for conservation and her district. Her efforts these past couple of weeks prove that.

Coleta began working at the Dewey County Conservation District in March of 1998. Since then she has been a model district employee and was elected to serve as president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees. "The Employees Association, under the leadership of Coleta Bratten, has been a wonderful partner for conservation in Oklahoma," said OACD Executive Director Sarah Blaney. "Coleta works tirelessly to make sure things are done correctly. She is a strong advocate for conservation district employees. OACD greatly appreciates her leadership and tenacity." OCC Executive Director Trey Lam said "Coleta Bratten's passion for conservation is obvious. Her willingness to lead through service is what the Conservation Partnership is all about. Without the work and dedication of district employees like Coleta, the Partnership would not be as strong as it is today." If you talk to Coleta's peers, they also share the same message. "Coleta Bratten is a person that every day serves family, people, and the community in many different ways. In her spirit of dedication to others, she brings encouragement of strength to others," said Ottawa County District employee Shirley Hudson. She went on to say, "Coleta brings an exceptional dedication to her job, her family, and her community. She is a role model for all District Employees. I am so thankful for her example of selfless dedication and passion in spreading conservation through Oklahoma." Clancy Green, Program Coordinator at the Texas County CD, said, "I feel lucky to have been able to work with her through the District and on the Employee's Association Board. Her knowledge base is huge and her contacts list even larger! She's someone who is absolutely irreplaceable and the world could use more of us out there like her."

Thank you, Coleta for all of the work that you do serving your community and spreading the word on conservation. Your hard work and dedication has not gone unnoticed.

AREA 5 SPOTLIGHT

The Little River Conservaiton Districted hosted two land and forestry contests this year, the McCurtain County Land and Forestry Contest and the Southeast Land and Forestry Contest. The Southeast Land and Forestry Contest is co-hosted by the Ouachita Mountains RC&D and other southeast Oklahoma conservation districts. These contests are unique to Eastern Oklahoma due to its environment. At each contest, the district relays on its partners to assist with setting up the contest in a different area of the 1.2 million acre county each year. The district also relays on donations from supporters around the state to help purchase awards, food, and fund three scholarships.

This year's land judging contest was held at the OSU Forest Research Center east of Idabel and featured seven teams. This winner was a sophomore from Eagletown. He walked away with \$900 in scholarship money.

The forestry contest, which is truly unique to eastern Oklahoma, features five different events: Tree I.D., Compass and Pacing, Sawlogs, Pulpwood and Equipment I.D. The forestry contest this year was held at the U.S. Forest Service Center near Haworth. The Oklahoma State Forest Service helped set up and score this year's competition, which featured eight different teams. The high scoring student was from Broken Bow.



Student from Smithville competeing at a recent land and forestry judging contest in southeast Oklahoma

Story submitted by Frank Acker, Little River Conservation District Manager

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



Natural Resources Conservation Service

For the second edition of the Conservation Chronicle, I want to focus our partner spotlight on the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS.

NRCS is a federal agency under the Department of Agriculture. NRCS was formed out of the Dust Bowl after Hugh Hammond Bennett saw the need for soil conservation practices to be put in place. But NRCS has grown to much more than just soil conservation. NRCS has expanded their programs through the years to include all types of natural resources like water, air, plants and animals, and even people.

NRCS works with OCC and OACD to form the Conservation Partnership in Oklahoma. All three organizations play a specific role in the partnership with NRCS securing federal funding for farmers and ranchers and providing technical assistance for producers implementing conservation practices on their land. NRCS offers several grants and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers.

"NRCS is critical to preserving Oklahoma's soil and water," said OCC Executive Director Trey Lam. "Their ability to provide federal funds and technical assistance to producers across the state allows the Conservation Partnership to grow and truly meet the needs of Oklahomans at the local, state, and federal level."

For more information on programs, funding opportunities, and field office locations visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

OCC DIVISION SPOTLIGHTS

For this month's Oklahoma Conservation Commission Division Spotlights, let's focus on OCC's education programs: Blue Thumb, Project WET, and Soil Health.



Oklahoma's Blue Thumb Program is a statewide citizen science program that trains volunteers to monitor creeks and streams and share their knowledge of water quality with others. With the mission of "stream protection through education," the goal of Blue Thumb is to empower people to protect water in their region from nonpoint source pollution. Blue Thumb works closely with Oklahoma's conservation districts and is always willing and able to support events such as natural resource days and outdoor classrooms. We can bring activities ranging from a creek walk to models that demonstrate erosion or nonpoint source pollution, all offered free of charge. These kinds of educational programs are also available to classroom teachers and can usually be adapted to any grade level and an indoor or outdoor setting. For more information contact the Blue Thumb team at bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov.



Water Education for Teachers

Project WET, or Water Education for Teachers, provides educators the tools they need to teach about the value of water through fun, interactive lessons. It is water education designed for K-12 teachers, and promotes awareness, appreciation, knowledge, and stewardship of water resources through classroom-ready teaching materials and educator workshops.

Project WET workshops are held periodically throughout the state and include the award-winning, National Science Teachers Association recommended Curriculum and Activity Guide 2.0 which is interdisciplinary and developed, field-tested, and reviewed by educators and professionals and correlated to the current Next Generation Science Standards. For more information on Project WET contact Candice Miller at candice.miller@conservation.ok.gov or 405-521-6788.

The final education program Districts need to be aware of is the Soil Health program. Maybe the most well-known OCC education program, Soil Health teaches people that soil is more than just what is on the surface. Soil Health emphasizes the fact that soil is a living, breathing organism that needs to be taken care of and is key to an abundant, affordable food supply, healthy water, and clean air. Soil Health teaches principles that can change the way people treat their soil and can have positive effects on a producer's bottom line now and for years to come.

Soil Health has several different types of educational programs depending on your needs. You can learn about the basics of Soil Health with Soil Health 101 and Soil Health 201. You can also learn how to assess the health of your soil with the Soil Health Tool Bucket or an Assessing Soil Health Field Day. Finally, you can learn how to restore and improve soil health by hosting a Soil Health Field Day for you and other producers in your area. For more information about our Soil Health program contact Amy Seiger at amy.seiger@conservation.ok.gov or 405-522-4739.



AREA 1 SPOTLIGHT



Award winners at the 60th Annual Bankers Award Banquet in Woodward

It was a fairly busy month for Area 1 with a leadership class, awards banquet and, of course, the wildfires which are featured in other parts of this edition of the Conservation Chronicle.

The Cimarron County Conservation District hosted the Leadership Oklahoma Class on April 12, 2018 at the District office in Boise City, OK. Approximately 45 people attended the brunch and listened to Alan Messenger, Guymon NRCS District Conservationist and acting Boise City NRCS DC, explain and share information on land, soil, and conservation practices in Cimarron and Texas County. Conservation District Director Hal Clark and Programs Coordinator Iris Imler shared information on the Conservation District and Cimarron County.

The 60th Annual Bankers Award Banquet was held on April 19th, 2018 at the Woodward Conference Center. Woodward County Conservation District, in cooperation with The Stock Exchange Bank, BancCentral, Central National Bank of Enid, Great Plains National Bank and Bank 7, hosted the event. Three recipients this year were recognized for their outstanding conservation practices. Tom and Roxy Merklin, Chris Craighead and Dead End Ranch, and David Story were all honored. Special thanks to the Mooreland FFA group, Jackson Stinnett, Cooper White, Marty Mullins, Logan Maher, Braden Lewis, Clayton White, Ben Brown and Mr. Kinney for assisting with the meal, K & T Catering did a fantastic job. OCC Executive Director Trey Lam and Area 1 Commissioner Karl Jett were also in attendance.

Stories submitted by Iris Imler with Cimarron CCD and Stephanie Murlin with Woodward CCD

AREA 2 SPOTLIGHT

The Kay County Conservation District hosted and organized this year's Natural Resource Day in Newkirk. The day was specifically designed to teach 3rd and 4th graders in the area about soil and water health, sustainability, and the kind of impact that people have on natural resources. 160 kids from Newkirk, Blackwell, Kildare, and Peckham attended the natural resource day. Representatives from OCC's Blue Thumb, USDA-NRCS, Oklahoma Wildlife Department, and Agriculture in the Classroom were also in attendance.

The day of hands on learning was opened by retired Conservation District Representative Susan Henning with a puppet show. Hopper the Puppet was played by volunteer Melanie Miller. Ms. Henning and Hopper introduced the Oklahoma Wildlife Department who taught the kids about fish biologies and showed them how to identify fish. Blue Thumb brought creek bugs for the kids to look at and identify. Blue Thumb also talked about water quality and ways that the kids can help keep their local waters clean. The NRCS representative brought a soil station and showed the students how to take a soil sample and what to look for.

Presentations were also given by Kay Electric Co-Op, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, and many others. Lunch was provided by Oklahoma AgCredit.

Story provided by natural resource day volunteer Melanie Miller and Kay CCD District Secretary Debra Stafford



Bob Rodgers teaching kids at the Kay CCD Natural Resource Day

AREA 3 SPOTLIGHT

The Craig County Conservation District and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service field office held their first annual Agriculture Trade Show and Cattle Conference on April 10th, 2018 at the Vinita Fair Grounds. This year the speakers included Earl Ward, Cattle Feed Nutritionist from Oklahoma State University Extension Service and Roger Callison of Frontier Trading Company of Ada who spoke on alternative feeds for cattle. Trey Lam, Executive Director of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, was also in attendance. Over thirty agriculture vendors representing Craig and surrounding counties took part in the trade show.

Craig County CD knows their first ever conference and trade show would not have been a success without their partners including First National Bank of Vinita, Welch State Bank of Welch, and Oklahoma State Bank of Vinita. Craig County CD also thanks the USDA-Farm Service Agency for their support of providing the building rental.

The event, which Craig County CD views as a huge success, will likely be larger next year as neighboring counties and districts have expressed interest in joining.

Story submitted by Jo Callison, District Manager of the Craig County Conservation District



Attendees at the Agriculture Trade Show and Cattle Conference in Vinita

AREA 4 SPOTLIGHT



NRCS State Soil Scientist Steve Alspach speaking to attendees at the Greer CCD Soil Health Field Day

On April 23rd, Mark Thornbrough from Greer County hosted a soil health and cover crop field day. NRCS State Soil Scientist Steve Alspach and OCC Soil Health Educator Blane Stacy spoke at the event. Mark worked with OACD and OCC for the OK Healthy Soils Program in his cotton fields. His cover crop seed was provided Green Cover Seed.

Greer County has been in a drought for the last 160 days and has only received a few tenths of rain since winter. But, due to conservation practices Mark has implemented on his land, the soil pit showed water throughout the profile a few inches below the surface. Signs of life and earthworm activity appeared throughout the profile as well. All of those are places for the water to be stored for later use. However, due to the lack of surface water and cold temperatures, the cover crop was not as full or tall and left little residue on the ground.

Though the cover crop was not ideal due to the environmental conditions, attendees did see a fresh reminder of things that they can experiment with in the future. One thing producers did learn was that establishing a cover crop in Southwest Oklahoma should begin before the cotton is out. With the limited moisture that area of the state receives, it is critical to plant the cover crop before the cotton is out to help mitigate evaporation. Producers also learned about utilizing crop rotations to build residue and soil health. While these sound like easy steps to take, and they are, producers were reminded that soil health should be viewed in short term goals with a long term beneficial gain.

Story submitted by Amy Seiger, OCC Soil Health Coordinator and Brett Peshek with Green Cover Seed