

# CONSERVATION CALENDAR

**September 4th-6th** - NACD South Central Region Meeting in San Marcos, TX

**September 6th** - Oklahoma City Soil Health 101

**September 6th** - Strategies to Promoting Soil Health Workshop and Ag Show in Sallisaw

**September 6th** - Central North Canadian River CD 80th Year Celebration in Geary

**September 6th-7th** - Land Judging & Okie Quiz at the Pittsburg County Free Fair in McAlester

**September 6th-8th** - Pottawatomie County Free Fair in Shawnee

**September 6th-8th** - Woods County Free Fair in Alva

**September 6th-8th** - Dewey County Free Fair in Taloga

**September 11th-15th** - Osage County Free Fair in Pawhuska

**September 13th-15th** - Rogers County Free Fair in Claremore

**September 17th -18th** - OACD Leadership Class in Tahlequah

**September 21st** - Wagoner & Muskogee CCD Field Day in Wagoner

**September 22nd** - Blue Thumb Volunteer Training in Tahlequah

**September 28th** - Oklahoma CCD Natural Resource Day in Edmond (Lake Arcadia Education Area)

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



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# Conservation Chronicle

Monthly Newsletter of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
August 2018

## Tribal Leaders Gather in Shawnee to Discuss USDA and State Programs



Potawatomi Nation veterans carrying in the flags during the opening ceremony at the Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation.

The Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) and the Oklahoma leadership for the agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hosted a successful Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation on Tuesday August 21st at the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Grand Casino Hotel and Resort in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

The seventh annual meeting and consultation featured leaders from several of Oklahoma's sovereign nations, leaders from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development (RD), and the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Other leaders from various state and tribal agencies were also in attendance,

including Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Trey Lam and Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director Sarah Blaney. Tribal leaders had the opportunity to discuss which USDA programs are working well, and which are not working well, with several agency heads including NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill, Rural Development State Director Dr. Lee Denney, and NASS Regional Director Wil Hundl.

"This meeting was once again successful in bringing together leaders from USDA, Oklahoma's sovereign tribes, and the State of Oklahoma to discuss agriculture and the issues facing Native Americans who farm and ranch," said Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS State Tribal Liaison. "The more opportunities we have to discuss these agricultural issues facing our native farmers and ranchers, the more opportunities the various USDA agencies will have to improve their relationships and better serve those traditionally underserved farmers and ranchers."

OCC Executive Director Trey Lam said, "These meetings are a great way for us to gauge the conservation issues facing our tribal partners and discuss ways that the Conservation Commission, and the entire conservation partnership, can help our tribal partners reach their goals."

Plans are already underway for the next Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation in 2019.

To view pictures of the event visit the Oklahoma Conservation Commission Flickr page at [flickr.com/conservation\\_ok/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/conservation_ok/).



OCC Executive Director Trey Lam speaking at the Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation.



# THIS MONTH IN PICTURES



Blue Thumb volunteers kicking for bugs with OCC's Becky Zawalski (far left)



OCC Executive Director Trey Lam with a Golden Eagle at the Potawatomi Eagle Aviary



Native American drummer playing during the color guard entrance at the Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation in Shawnee



Volunteers with crops gleaned from Lam Farms for the Farm to Food Bank program



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott (left) teaching a child about soil health at a recent field day in Prague



New OCC Blue Thumb Volunteer Coordinator Cheryl Cheadle



OCC's Kim Shaw with kids after monitoring a creek

# PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT



Jimmy Emmons at a Soil Health Field Day in Hugo, OK.

Oklahoma has been a national leader in soil health since soil health and soil erosion became a part of the national agricultural conversation following the Dust Bowl. It is because of leaders like Jimmy Emmons that Oklahoma has remained, and will remain, a national leader in the soil health conversation for decades to come.

Jimmy Emmons is a third-generation farmer and rancher from Leedey, OK. Emmons serves as President of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and is always happy to share his success in conservation. "The big thing about soil health is it works everywhere. You just have to manage your system for your precipitation and your atmosphere. What we've found here is that we can manage in a 20-inch rainfall very well with a cover crop system and range management." Emmons knows conservation can be tough, especially in northwest Oklahoma where drought and wildfires are always a risk, but he continues to preach the soil health message as he hosts and speaks regularly at field days across Oklahoma.

NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill praised Emmons and his willingness to lead by serving others saying, "Jimmy has become a great leader for conservation in Oklahoma. He is always willing to help, as a local leader on his conservation district board, a state leader as President of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, and as a national leader testifying before the House Ag Committee."

Emmons' leadership in conservation has led to numerous speaking engagements across the state and the country. His leadership even earned him national recognition as he became Oklahoma's first recipient of the prestigious Leopold Conservation Award. "It's truly an honor to receive this award," Emmons said during his acceptance speech. "For us to be recognized is very humbling."

Emmons has learned that conservation helps not only improve your land but also helps your land recover after natural disasters. On the day he received his Leopold Conservation Award, Emmons found out that a wildfire broke out in his hometown. Overall, the Rhea and 34 Complex Fires burned more than 300,000 acres, killed more than 900 head of cattle, destroyed hundreds of miles of fencing, and caused more than \$25 million in damage. Emmons himself lost more than 3,000 acres but he counts himself lucky saying, "It could have been a lot worse. Some of our neighbors suffered much greater loss than we did."



Jimmy Emmons being interviewed for his Leopold Award.



Jimmy with his wife Ginger.

Conservation isn't always an easy adoption in Western Oklahoma, but Emmons knows the hard, and sometimes unconventional, work pays off. "My grandfather did the best he could with the tools and knowledge he had to manage our family's land," Emmons said. "I am trying to continue that legacy by using what we now know are the best practices for improving the health of our soils. My goal is that my grandson, Owen, and his children will be able to farm this land for another 100 years, if they choose. That is only possible if Ginger and I do our part to take care of the natural resources."

Thank you to everyone who submitted pictures. If you would like your pictures in future editions of the Conservation Chronicle please send them by email to [christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov).



# AREA 5 SPOTLIGHT



Blue Thumb QA Officer Kim Shaw teaching new Blue Thumb volunteers at the recent training in Sawyer, OK.

The Blue Thumb team recently held a two day training in the southeast town of Sawyer, OK to teach potential Blue Thumb volunteers the ins and outs of what it takes to be a Blue Thumb volunteer.

On Saturday, potential volunteers gathered at the Senior Center in Sawyer for an Introduction to Blue Thumb. They learned about the history of Blue Thumb and participated in several Project WET activities. They also had the chance to go to a local creek and do some kick net bug collections and seining for fish. While there weren't very many bugs to be found, they did find several species of fish. The highlight was during the last few minutes when they seined up a Log Perch. The species of bugs and fish help determin the water quality of the stream.

Sunday brought the same people back out for the Blue Thumb Monitoring Training. They went back to the previous day's creek and learned how to fill out a data sheet, collect sample water, and do some creekside monitoring. After lunch, the remainder of the day was spent learning how to perform the various chemical tests that Blue Thumb requires. Once they were certified, some of them talked to Blue Thumb staff about adopting a creek to monitor.

Blue Thumb has several more volunteer trainings upcoming. For more information on those visit [www.bluethumbok.org](http://www.bluethumbok.org).

*Story submitted by Becky Zawalski, Blue Thumb Field Educator*



Project WET Coordinator Candice Miller (far right) showing off a bug during Blue Thumb training in Sawyer, OK.

# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS



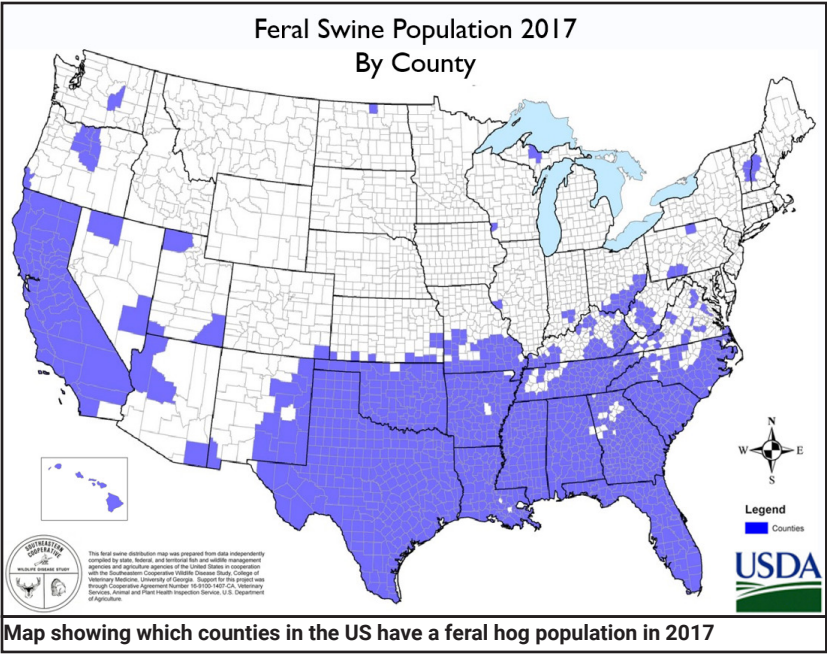
This month's partner spotlight is once again focused on the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD). OACD's mission is "To provide leadership, resources and partnership opportunities for conservation districts and those who manage the land to enhance our natural resources for a better Oklahoma."

One of the ways OACD fufills their mission is by holding annual, day long meetings in each of the five areas of Oklahoma in the month of November. These meetings provide district directors and employees an opportunity to come together and learn about new programs, get information about exisiting programs, and have more in-depth discussions about concerns facing their specific areas than they typically get at the State Meeting. These meetings also allow OCC and NRCS the chance to discuss their programs and divisions.

One of the unique aspects of the Area Meetings is each OCC division has the opportunity to present at one of the five meetings. This presentation allows the division the occasion to talk about events going on in that area or gives them the opning to educate that area on what that specific division does. It's through events like the November Area Meetings, and the State Meeting every February, that the Conservation Partnership can grow and strengthen.

The Area Meetings schedule can be found on the OACD website, [www.okconservation.org](http://www.okconservation.org).

# OCC PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Map showing which counties in the US have a feral hog population in 2017

One way ODAFF has effectively managed the feral hog population is by entering into an agreement with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the local conservation districts to trap feral hogs. With feral hogs destroying soil and contaminating water and other natural resources, ODAFF felt the districts would be the best way to get traps into the hands of the public. ODAFF agreed to give each district a gate that was built by one of nine FFA chapters. while the Oklahoma Conservation Commission with help from ODAFF agreed to provide each district with \$500 to construct a pen-style trap.

OCC Executive Director Trey Lam said trapping has proven to be the most effective form of eradication on his property, mainly because of the unknowns with hunting. "You have private hunters, but you don't always know what they are doing with the hogs. Also, if you're hunting with dogs or rifles you run into problems with driving hogs off or destroying crops by getting into the fields to actually do the hunting."

While these gates and traps are working, Sec. Reese would like to see more high-tech gates in the near future. "We really want to provide the electronic streaming trigger for these traps because we want the public to be equipped with the best hog trapping tools we can provide." Sec. Reese says traps are two to three times more effective with the electronic streaming triggers and he would like to get them out to the districts but that requires more funding from the state legislature. "I think the legislature is attune to the problem. There just wasn't a lot of money to go around. Hopefully, this past session we fixed some problems so that more resources can be targeted toward feral hogs."

Sec. Reese remains positive that the trapping being done through the districts is working. "I think we're increasing our numbers faster than they [the hogs] are increasing production. So, I think we are getting close to catching up."

Feral hogs are a problem in Oklahoma. They have been spotted in every county in the state which means no matter where you go, feral hogs are not that far away. While it's hard to put a total on the number of feral hogs in the state (some estimates say it could be as high as two million) we do know the statewide monetary damage done by feral hogs is between \$100 million and \$200 million annually. That does not consider all of the time and labor that landowners or public officials spend trying to repair the damage done by the hogs.

Oklahoma Agriculture Secretary Jim Reese wants Oklahomans to know that Oklahoma is actually making strides in its fight against feral hogs. "We've eliminated a lot of hogs. We've gone from 2,000 in 2011 to 32,000 (in 2017) and, I think, we're expecting about 45,000 this year," said Sec. Reese. Oklahoma's effectiveness in fighting feral hogs has taken the state from having the third highest feral hog population in 2015 to now the sixth highest population in the nation.





# AREA 1 SPOTLIGHT



Local producers at the field day in Oakwood, OK.

Dewey County Conservation District hosted a Soil Health field day at Larry Rauh's farm on August 17, 2018. Mr. Rauh is determined to improve his soil profile with planting cover crops. He had been told that he can't do it in the sandy soils near Oakwood, OK. But, in his third year planting cover crops, Mr. Rauh is starting to notice a difference in his soil profile.

The field day started out in the field looking at the soil, plant root profile, and sugar content in the plants for cattle production. Mr. Rauh rotates his cattle across different pastures, but, he has wind turbines on his farm

which makes rotating cattle with proper water and shade a challenge, although he can see his cattle moving for shade as the wind turbines shade the ground.

Following the field visit, the 59 attendees moved into the Oakwood Senior center to see a solar pump demonstration from David Stephens with the Oklahoma Black Historical Research RCPP project.

Speakers at the field day included OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott, OCC Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger, landowner Larry Rauh, David Stephens, OACD President Jimmy Emmons. Staff from the conservation district, the USDA field office were available to talk about the various programs they offer.

*Story submitted by Coleta Bratten, Dewey County Conservation District*



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott teaching at the recent field day in Oakwood, OK.

# AREA 2 SPOTLIGHT



Blue Thumb Field Educator Beck Zawalski (left) and Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger (right) at the Women in Ag Conference in Oklahoma City.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission recently attended the Women in Ag and Small Business Conference in Oklahoma City. Amy Seiger, OCC Soil Health Coordinator, and Becky Zawalski, Blue Thumb Field Educator, worked the booth during the trade show portions of the conference. They had the opportunity to interact with many women who were at the conference from a variety of fields. They met with women who own small and large operations. Amy and Becky also spoke with women who were looking to incorporate some of OCC's Soil Health and Blue Thumb education materials.

Conference attendees heard a variety of speakers talk about numerous subjects. Some of the topics covered included no-till agriculture, water resource management and managing cattle.

Attendees also had the opportunity to hear from OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott about how to use cover crops and their benefits. "It was a wonderful opportunity to speak to these women," Scott said. "I love teaching people about the benefits of cover crops and soil health. Speaking at this conference allowed me the opportunity to speak to a group of people I might not always have the chance to teach about cover crops."



Amy Seiger and Becky Zawalski talking to two producers at the Women in Ag Conference.

# AREA 3 SPOTLIGHT



Adair County Conservation District Chairman Marty Hern welcoming producers to the Soil Health and Feral Hog Outreach event in Stilwell.

The Adair County and Sequoyah County Conservation Districts partnered with USDA-NRCS Stilwell and Sallisaw offices to host a feral hog and soil health meeting with landowners and local producers. There were 27 total attendees including guest speakers from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, OSU-Extension office, USDA-NRCS, and USDA-Farm Service Agency.

Wildlife Biologist Curt Allen provided information on trapping and hunting methods for feral hogs. Landowners dealing with feral hogs were encouraged to use the trapping method as opposed to other eradication methods. Allen shared design information of various traps with producers and answered questions about diseases the hogs carry.

USDA-NRCS Resource Soil Scientist Jake Boyett shared soil health information to producers. He gave instructions on how to collect a good soil sample. District Conservationist Andrew Inman and Adair County CD Chairman Marty Hern discussed programs offered in Adair County which included EQIP, CSP, and the State Cost-Share program.

Other speakers at the event included OSU-Extension Educator Jennifer Patterson, USDA-FSA CED Katie Waltman, and USDA-FSA's Logan Gipson.

*Story submitted by Ashlee Teehee, Adair County District Secretary*

# AREA 4 SPOTLIGHT



Students testing water at a mini-academy at Cameron University.

Blue Thumb occasionally hosts mini-academies for groups of high school or college students. A mini-Academy can be scheduled at the teacher's/professor's request after they themselves have been through an official Blue Thumb Training for New Volunteers.

Dr. Clint Bryan with Cameron University in Lawton had Blue Thumb's Kim Shaw come out and work with his students for his upper division class of Chemistry of Water and Wastewater. This lab class had enough time, and their creek monitoring site is just across campus, so they were able to go out to their Wolf Creek site to show the students the onsite part of creek monitoring. Following the trip to the creek, Kim walked the students through the indoor testing part of monitoring in their lab classroom. Dr. Bryan attended Blue Thumb Training in 2009 and since then has requested at least 3 mini-academies with his various classes.

Kim also had the opportunity to teach a mini-academy class with Dr. Steve O'Neal at SWOSU in Weatherford and his Aquatic Entomology students to train them how to do the indoor chemical tests of creek monitoring.

These mini-academies are a great opportunity to spark an interest in Blue Thumb. Several Blue Thumb volunteers got their start at these mini-academies. If you, or someone you know, want to set up a mini-academy contact Kim Shaw with Blue Thumb. You can visit the Blue Thumb website [www.bluethumbok.com](http://www.bluethumbok.com).

*Story submitted by Kim Shaw, Blue Thumb Quality Assurance Officer*



Blue Thumb's Kim Shaw teaching at a mini-academy at SWOSU.