

CONSERVATION CALENDAR

JULY 2018

- July 11** - Blue Thumb Kids Day Camp (Ages 6-8) in Langley
- July 12** - Stephens County CD Soil Health Field Day
- July 12-13** - Blue Thumb Kids Day Camp (Ages 9-12) in Langley
- July 18-20** - Riverology 101 Educators Workshop in Langley
- July 19** - Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribe Soil Health Field Day
- July 20** - Women in Ag Conference in McAlester
- July 24-25** - OACD Leadership Class at Noble Research Institute in Ardmore
- July 26** - Pasture Management Workshop in Stigler

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



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Oklahoma Conservation Commission



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Conservation Chronicle

Monthly Newsletter of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission
June 2018

Welcome Letter

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Conservation Chronicle, your monthly source of conservation news and notes. As summer temperatures rise new challenges face Oklahoma’s farmers and ranchers, hopefully, this newsletter will highlight some of the way the various districts are helping producers in their area battle the summer conditions. Another goal of this newsletter is to provide new ideas for districts trying to reach out to local farmers and ranchers. The Commission is always looking for ways to help districts grow their numbers and, hopefully, highlighting specific programs and ideas in this newsletter will help.

Again, 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. Digital copies are available online at ok.gov/conservation/News/Publications. Please contact me, Chris Cox, with any story ideas at christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov or by calling 405-522-5954. Thank you and I hope you enjoy this edition of the Conservation Chronicle.

Message from Executive Director Trey Lam



The Oklahoma Conservation Commission continues to expand education outreach to numerous farmers, ranchers, students, and general public in several events held across the state. OCC, NRCS, and OACD used their combined expertise to provide impacting soil health events throughout Oklahoma communities. From each of these events, more classes, workshops and conservation practices have been established. The Soil Health program is scheduling two to three events per week as the expansion of soil health knowledge grows throughout Oklahoma. Blue Thumb educators reached 4,700 kids and adults at 40 different water quality events. Educating landowners and the general public is a continued source of support of conservation programs and practices.

New state revenues are allowing more sustainable conservation programs. Through steady state funds and appropriations, conservation districts can create solid budgets to implement practices. Continued rehabilitation of flood controls in watersheds, like Rock Creek 15 and 16, will have resources to complete needed updates. Oklahoma partnership programs have given many fire affected landowners the opportunity to start the process to recovery and rebuild. Oklahoma’s conservation has a promising future ahead as we turn the corner into a new fiscal year.

Finally, as we begin the second half of 2018, I am hopeful that our conservation message will grow and more people will come to the realization that conservation practices will not only help their bottom line but also ease the burden on their land now and in the future.

MONTH IN REVIEW



Blane Stacy teaching people how to ID plants at the Creek County CD Soil Health Field Day

June brought hot weather but that did not keep Commission staff from getting out in the field.

The Soil Health team helped with numerous field days across the state, traveling from Bristow in Creek County to Covington in Garfield County to Vinson in Harmon County. Finally, the Soil Health team ended the month in Tahlequah with a two day Soil Health and Plant Identification class for the Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association. This is the first meeting with the Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association but won't be the last as OFRA seems very open to the message of soil health, conservation, and the economic benefits.

Those interested in soil health also got a rare treat as Dr. Christine Jones spoke at the Noble Foundation in Ardmore about soil health. Dr. Jones is a world renowned expert in the field of soil health. She spoke to attendees about the soil health, various soil health practices, and ways to spread the message about soil health.

While June is not as hectic of a month as April and May, the Blue Thumb team was still quite busy. One of the most exciting things about this past month was the start of summer fish collections. Each summer, Blue Thumb staff, along with volunteers, conduct fish collections as part of the biological collections (bugs and fish) which provide invaluable data about the quality of the water in Oklahoma's creeks and streams. June also included opportunities to deliver environmental education around the state. Blue Thumb also got to teach kids about water quality at the Eastern Shawnee Fishing Derby in Wyandotte, a Forestry Festival in Broken Bow, the Otoe-Missouria Tribe's Environmental Youth Day, and summer camps in Jenks and Tahlequah. The camp in Tahlequah is one which Blue Thumb helped to organize and run, in partnership with Grand River Dam Authority and OSU Extension 4-H, was an exciting opportunity to work with these other organizations to bring a fun, educational, multi-day and water-focused camp to area children.

June also brought the beginning of the Farm to Food Bank gleanings. Oscar Nelson held two gleanings on his farm near Chickasha. OCC staff members and volunteers picked several types of produce that was all donated to the Resurrection House in Chickasha as a part of the Farm to Food Bank Program. Mr. Nelson, along with other farmers across the state have all agreed to plant cover crop mixes with the goal of donating the gleaned crop to the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, and their partners, to help combat hunger in Oklahoma.



(L to R) OACD President Elect Larry Wright, landowner Oscar Nelson, and Food Bank Gleaning Coordinator Kayden Kennedy looking at the crops gleaned during the Farm to Food Bank gleaning near Chickasha



OCC Volunteers gleaning crops near Chickasha for the Farm to Food Bank Program

PRODUCER/PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS



Volunteers gleaning crops at Oscar Nelson's farm in Grady County

temperature is around 75 to 80 degrees. Cover crops keep the soil insulated in the summer and provide shade from the scorching Oklahoma sun. Cover crops also put nutrients back into the soil to help restore the health of the soil.

The Farm to Food Bank Program allows OACD and the Conservation Districts the opportunity to not only provide producers with free cover crop seed to promote soil health but it also allows OACD and Conservation Districts the opportunity to use their talents to give back to their local communities.

One farmer who gave back to his community through this program was Oscar Nelson of Chickasha. He planted a low intensity cover crop consisting of leafy greens like lettuce, kale, and spinach. Also included in his mix were some radishes. Nelson recognizes the multiple benefits of being a part of this program saying, "We got to build our soil health. My whole farming practice is that way and the Regional Food Bank here is just a deal to help the community out." All of the gleaned crops from Nelson's farm went to the Resurrection House in Chickasha.

For the Regional Food Bank's part in this project, they help coordinate the gleanings by getting volunteers out in the fields. The Regional Food bank also uses it network of food banks across the state to make sure the produce gleaned goes to a food bank in the farmer's area.

This is the second year of the Farm to Food Bank Program and OACD notes the program is already growing. There were four pilot farms in 2017 and there are already 12 sites committed for 2018. The sites for this year are in Custer, Grady, Dewey, Garfield, Caddo, Beaver, Garvin, and Nowata counties. For more information on the Farm to Food Bank Program, and to sing up to receive information about gleanings in your area, visit www.okconservation.org/farmtofoodbank or www.regionalfoodbank.org.



Oscar Nelson talking to AFR's Sam Knipp about his cover crop garden

AREA 5 SPOTLIGHT



Blue Thumb volunteer Jim Leach teaching kids at the Kiamichi Owa-Chito Festival of the Forest

Blue Thumb volunteers are an essential element to the success of the program. Not only do they dedicate their time to monitor the water quality of streams across Oklahoma, but many of them also devote hours of their time to education events, outreach to community leaders, and engaging young people in conservation and protection of natural resources. One such dedicated volunteer is also a former Conservation Commission employee, Jim Leach. Jim brought an interactive education display to the Kiamichi Owa-Chito Festival of the Forest held July 15-16 in the Forest Heritage Center at Beavers Bend State Park in McCurtain County.

While spreading the “stream protection through education” message with fish printing and

EnviroScape demonstrations, Jim also teamed up with several local youths to get them involved! He had an excellent young volunteer, Adia Reed, who was immensely interested in aquatic bugs and sharing them with visitors. Jim and Adia ried to stress the importance of a healthy riparian area. Jim also said “The Blue Thumb exhibit received about 300 visitors (from the US, Norway, England, and Thailand), some very interested and other just listening and cooling off” but that “the message of water quality protection and conservation was shared with all.”

Story submitted by Candice Miller, Blue Thumb Education Coordinator. Photos courtesy of Calista Stephens with the Oklahoma Forest Heritage Center



Youth volunteer Adea sharing her knowledge at the Kiamichi Owa-Chito Festival of the Forest

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



“Fighting Hunger...Feeding Hope”™

Through the Farm to Food Bank Program, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is proud to call the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma a partner in conservation.

The Regional Food Bank’s mission “Fighting Hunger...Feeding Hope” speaks to the necessity of having good, health, and fresh food to eat. With one in every four children and one in every six adults in Oklahoma struggling with food insecurity, the Food Bank relays on donations of food and volunteer hours to feed those in Oklahoma who are struggling with food insecurity. OCC, along with OACD and

USDA-NRCS are proud to partner with the Regional Food Bank to help fight hunger in Oklahoma. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma feeds more than 136,000 hungry Oklahomans every week, with 37% being children. In 2017 the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma distributed roughly 52 million pounds of food including roughly 7,000 pounds of fresh produce through the Farm to Food Bank Program.

OCC Executive Director Trey Lam said, “Soil health is based on feeding the community of organisms below the ground, just as the Oklahoma Food Banks are feeding the communities here in Oklahoma. It seems a natural fit to partner with the Oklahoma Food Banks; we can do more when we work together.”

For more information on the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma visit www.regionalfoodbank.org.

OCC DIVISION SPOTLIGHTS



The Oklahoma Conservation Commission’s Upstream Flood Control Program might be one of the more under-the-radar programs at the Commission but it serves a valuable role as a program that truly saves lives.

Oklahoma leads the nation with 2,107 upstream flood control dams constructed under the USDA Watershed Program. The state has always been a leader in flood control beginning with the construction of the first upstream flood control dam in the nation in 1948, Cloud Creek

Dam Number 1. The dam located near Cordell, Oklahoma, is in the Cloud Creek Watershed, a tributary to the Washita River and was built by local watershed project sponsors with assistance from the USDA Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS). The Flood Control Act of 1944 authorized funding and technical assistance from the USDA Soil Conservation Service. This law authorized pilot watershed projects in eleven watersheds in the nation, including the Washita River Watershed in Oklahoma.

Congress saw the success and benefits of these eleven watershed projects and in 1954 passed the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 that expanded the program to other approved watersheds.

Oklahoma also completed the first watershed project in the nation, Sandstone Creek Watershed Project in Roger Mills County. Twenty-four dams were constructed in the watershed between 1950 and 1953. Oklahoma was also the first state to construct a multi-purpose dam, Wildhorse Creek Dam No. 22 in Stephens County in 1957.



The 2,107 upstream flood control dams constructed in the state have established a \$2 billion infrastructure that provides multiple benefits to thousands of citizens. It is estimated that the dams and the established conservation practices in the watersheds provide approximately \$81 million in benefits each year.

The lakes not only provide flood and erosion control, but they are sources of water for livestock and irrigation and they provide wildlife habitat and recreational areas. The dams provide flood protection to over two million acres of agricultural land in downstream flood plains.

Forty-two of the dams were constructed as multi-purpose structures that provide municipal and rural water supplies or recreation areas for local communities.

These 2,107 flood control dams:

- Protects 1,439 county and highway bridges.
- Provides flood prevention for 21,206 farms and ranches.
- Traps 9.4 million tons of sediment each year. Much of this sediment would end up in major streams or lakes, like Lake Texoma, if not trapped by the flood control dams.
- Has created or enhanced 45,326 acres of wetlands.

For more information on the Upstream Flood Control program, contact Tammy Sawatzky at 405-521-4823 or by emailing tammy.sawatzky@conservation.ok.gov.

AREA 1 SPOTLIGHT



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott (left) showing producers what healthy soil does in water

The Garfield County Conservation District, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and USDA-NRCS, hosted a field day at Brian Grantz’s farm in Covington, Oklahoma.

The day started with a trip to three separate fields. OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott and OCC Soil Health Educator Blane Stacy were on hand to teach area producers about soil health and about certain plants that many people think are weeds but actually have a positive impact on the soil and a producers bottom line. OACD President Jimmy Emmons and Green Cover Seed’s Brett Peshek were also on hand to talk about cover crops and how they help maintain a healthy soil system.

Following the time in the field, the field day attendees enjoyed burgers and chips while representatives from NRCS and FSA spoke about their various programs.

The FSA office in Garfield County said over 13,000 acres were impacted by the Garfield County field day. One farmer also committed to switch to no-till after making one-on-one connections at the field day. This is another example of how these field days help spread the conservation message in Oklahoma.



Brian Grantz cover crop field in Garfield County

AREA 2 SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Christine Jones (left) with Brett Peshek of Green Cover Seed (center) and OCC Soil Health Educator Blance Stacy (right) at the Noble Research Institute

The Noble Research Institute hosted Dr. Christine Jones, a world leader in the soil conservation movement, for a day long soil health training in Ardmore. Numerous soil health experts and leaders in Oklahoma attended the field day and education event. “Soil Health impacts the health of the environment but also everyone who lives in or eats and drinks from that environment. Dr. Jones shared ideas and encouraged the Partnership to continue our work trying to teach Oklahomans about soil health,” said OCC Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger.

Dr. Jones, a native of Australia, founded Amazing Carbon and Carbon for Life Incorporated to help educate Australians about soil health practices and greenhouse gas emissions. Dr. Jones’ work as a ground cover and soils ecologist has had a profound impact in Australia and around the world.

The Noble Research Institute has a full slate of events scheduled. For more visit www.noble.org/events.



Dr. Jones (center) at the Noble Research Institute

AREA 3 SPOTLIGHT



A kid with his fish at the Ottawa CCD Annual Fishing Clinic



Shirley Hudson teaching kids at the Eastern Shawnee Tribe Fishing Clinic

The Ottawa County Conservation District co-hosted two kids fishing clinics in June.

The first was the Annual Fishing Clinic the Ottawa CCD co-hosts with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Northeast Technology Center at Afton. That clinic hosted 48 children from ages 3-12. The clinic started with a fish identification lesson. Following the fish ID lesson, the kids were taught how to cast their line. Within minutes of the children casting their lines into the water, the fish were biting and the kids were reeling in catfish and blue gill fish. Overall, the kids spent about two hours fishing.

Ottawa County CD also co-hosted a fishing clinic with the Eastern Shawnee Tribe. That event, also at the Northeast Technology Center in Afton, hosted 52 kids. The second event featured a similar schedule as the first clinic.



Shirley Hudson fishing with a girl at the Eastern Shawnee Tribe Fishing Clinic

Story and photos submitted by Shirley Hudson, Ottawa County Conservation District

AREA 4 SPOTLIGHT

Field days were front and center in June despite the hot temperatures and periods of much needed rain. These field days truly highlight the partnership that takes place between USDA-NRCS, OCC, and OACD. It is generally the conservation districts that schedule the field days while NRCS and OCC provide the speakers and education materials for the producers who attend. These educational opportunities are a great way to share the conservation message and show producers how conservation practices can work all across Oklahoma.

That partnership was on display in Harmon County as the district held a field day for about 25 participants. OCC’s Greg Scott and Blane Stacy spoke to the group about soil health and showed them how to identify certain plants. Harmon County DC Melissa Teague was there to help answer questions and tell the producers about programs NRCS offers to help them with conservation practices on their own land.

For more information on soil health field days contact Oklahoma Conservation Commission’s Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger at amy.seiger@conservation.ok.gov or 405-522-4739.



Harmon Co. DC Melissa Teague (far left) and OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott teaching Harom CCD Field Day participants