

# CONSERVATION CALENDAR

## JUNE 2018

- June 1st** - Ottawa County CD Children’s Fishing Clinic
- June 5th** - Creek County CD Soil Health field Day
- June 8th** - Ottawa County CD Fishing Clinic
- June 22nd** - Harmon County CD Rangeland and Soil Health Field Day
- June 26th** - Dr. Christine Jones at the Noble Research Institute in Ardmore
- June 27th** - Garfield County CD Soil Health and Plant ID Field Day
- June 27th-28th** - Blue Thumb Kids Day Camp in Tahlequah
- June 29th-30th** - OFRA Soil Health and Plant Basics

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



Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 200  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105  
405-521-2384  
[www.conservation.ok.gov](http://www.conservation.ok.gov)



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# Conservation Chronicle

Monthly Newsletter of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
May 2018

## Welcome Letter

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



**Student competing in the 2018 National Land and Range Judging Contest**

## National Land and Range Judging Contest

More than 700 4-H and FFA students from over 30 states competed in the 67th National Land and Range Judging Contest hosted by the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD). After two days of practice at sites in Oklahoma City, the contest was held outside of El Reno, Oklahoma at the El Reno Correctional Institute Farm.

Championship trophies were awarded at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum to team and individual winners in each category of competition: land judging, range judging and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H awards.

The national team championship trophies in land judging were awarded to the Gunter, Texas FFA Chapter and the Barbour County, West Virginia 4-H Club. National individual championship trophies in land judging were awarded to Dylan Taylor of the Sonora, Texas FFA Chapter and Luke Farnsworth of the Barbour County, West Virginia 4-H Club.

The national team championship trophies in range judging were awarded to the Hondo, Texas FFA Chapter and the Meade County, South Dakota 4-H Club. National individual championship trophies in range judging were awarded to Preston Twilligear of the Hondo, Texas FFA Chapter and Ryan Wilen of the Meade County, South Dakota 4-H Club.

The national team championship trophies for homesite evaluation were awarded to the Hico, Texas FFA Chapter and the Wessington Spring, South Dakota 4-H Club. National individual championship trophies for homesite evaluation were awarded to Devin Gonzales of the Hondo, Texas FFA Chapter and Katelyn Winber of the McCook County, South Dakota 4-H Club.

In the adult category, John Smith of New Martinsville, West Virginia won both the land judging contest and the homesite evaluation contest. Terry Baize of Hamilton, Texas won the range judging contest.

Complete contest results can be found at [www.judgingcard.com](http://www.judgingcard.com). Pictures from the event can be found at [www.flickr.com/conservation\\_ok](http://www.flickr.com/conservation_ok).



# MONTH IN REVIEW



Student in a soil pit during the 2018 National Land and Range Judging Contest

May was another busy, yet successful, month for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Districts.

It started off with the 67th Annual National Land and Range Judging Contest. Don Bartolinia, Becky Inman, the Oklahoma County CD, and everyone involved continued the tradition of making this one of the premier FFA and 4-H events in the country. Over 700 students from over 30 states participated in the contest with many already looking forward to next year's event. The three day event included two practice days at Lake Arcadia near Edmond before the actual competition took place at the El Reno Correctional Institute Farm. The awards banquet took place at the Western Heritage Museum and National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. OCC Executive Director Trey Lam said, "The Land and Range Judging Contest is a wonderful event that helps students learn about different aspects of soil health and management. These students are learning at a young age the role conservation plays in any successful operation and that can only mean good things for the future of the land."

May also saw three more feral hog meetings and numerous field days across the state. The Soil Health team and Blue Thumb program are working more closely at these field days to show attendees how water quality and soil health interact and how both have a direct impact on the producer's land and, ultimately, bottom line. Several CDs continued hosting their annual soil health events in May, including Creek County. Creek CCD hosted their 75th Annual Ag Tour on May 17th. The tour started off with a welcome at the Mid-America Stockyards in Bristow and took attendees across the county where they learned about the history of the Ag Tour, ways to better grow and manage pecan operations, soil health, prescribed burning, and animal agriculture practices.



Creek County Ag Tour attendees learning about pecan grafting from Travis Wilcher



OCC volunteer team (bottom to top): Judith Wilkins, Trey Lam, Mike Sharp, Chris Cox, Shellie Willoughby, Lisa Knauf Owen, Karla Spinner, & Blane Stacy  
Not pictured: Amy Seiger



Lisa Knauf Owen, Karla Spinner, Shellie Willoughby, & Mike Sharp sorting food

May was also Employee Appreciation Month at the Conservation Commission. Shellie Willoughby scheduled several events for Commission employees to express the Commission's appreciation. It started off with an ice cream day where employees brought homemade ice cream and were able to relax and get to know each other a bit better over some cold, tasty treats.

One of the most popular events was when several Commission employees spent the afternoon volunteering at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. Working with a team of volunteers from Farmers Insurance, Commission employees helped the Food Bank package over 12,000 pounds of food. That equates to roughly 10,000 meals according to USDA standards.

Employee Appreciation Month wrapped up with an all-staff meeting at Executive Director Trey Lam's farm south of Pauls Valley on May 30th. OCC Staff learned more about Lam Farms and soil health. They also discussed OCC's future plans and got to know their co-workers a little better through team building games and exercises.

# PRODUCER/PROGRAM SPOTLIGHTS

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation District and the Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project are partnering to increase USDA programs in agriculture and conservation among socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDA). Through the Conservation and Agriculture Reach Everyone (CARE) program, two of those SDA Champion farmers and ranchers are highlighted here.

Donnie and Shirley Nero are ranchers from Okfuskee County who started in agriculture after moving back to Shirley's family farm in Clearview, OK. The Neros began working with conservation programs in 2002 when they received cost share money from the Oklahoma State Cost Share Program to build a pond for their livestock. The Neros have since gone on to complete several EQIP contracts and CSP contracts. Okfuskee County District Conservationist Mark Maples told a local newspaper, "the Nero's land looks ten-fold better than the day he stepped on it." The Neros recently purchased more land in Okfuskee County and say they plan on following a similar conservation plan on the new land. The Neros longterm goal is to grow their herd to 50 cattle. They also want to help future generations realize the benefits of proper land stewardship.



Donnie Nero of Okfuskee County with one of his cows. Mr. Nero is one of the OACD's SDA CARE Champions



CARE Champion Pershon Davis of Caddo County with he cows.

Another Champion is Pershon Davis of Caddo County. Mr. Davis is a rancher who owns 260 acres and leases more land for his cow/calf operation. Mr. Davis has been involved in agriculture since childhood. In 2009, as he was preparing to retire from the United State Army, Mr. Davis decided to start his own farm. Mr. Davis was approved for the Farm Service Agency's ownership loan as a beginning farmer/rancher. Mr. Davis worked with his local NRCS office and Conservation District to participate in the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program. These programs allowed Mr. Davis to expand his operation, build a much needed water well, and purchase equipment. Knowing what he knows now, Mr. Davis is excited to help other beginning farmers and ranchers reach their goals.

The CARE program objective is to increase minority participation in USDA programs, specifically conservation programs. CARE Champions will serve as ambassadors in their local communities sharing their experiences working with USDA programs. For more information on the Champions featured here, and the CARE program as a whole, visit [www.okconservation.org/care](http://www.okconservation.org/care).



Donnie and Shirley Nero story submitted by Candye Sexton, Okfuskee County CD District Secretary. Pershon Davis story submitted by Amy Weathers, North Caddo CD District Secretary



# AREA 5 SPOTLIGHT

As mentioned earlier, May was a month full of feral hog outreach meetings. The Pittsburg County, Latimer County, and Talihina Conservation Districts teamed up to host one of the bigger feral hog meetings in the state at Lightning C Arena in McAlester. Over 80 people attended the meeting. Those 80 plus people were from 6 different counties across southeast Oklahoma. That proves that a Conservation District’s reach can, and does, go beyond the district boundry.

The feral hog meeting started out with a welcome address from he Pittsburg County Conservation District Manager, Bradley Hamilton. Hamilton then turned the mic over to Scott Alls, Assistant State Director of Wildlife Services with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture. Alls spoke about latest hog population census totals, which estimates the feral hog population in Oklahoma to be anywhere between 600,000 and 1.5 million. Alls also spoke about the do’s and dont’s of transporting feral hogs. Russell Stevens of the Noble Foundation was the next speaker and he spoke about the diseases feral hogs carry, the dangers of consuming feral hogs for food, and different techniques to bait and trap feral hogs.

Following Stevens, meeting attendees saw a demonstration of five different feral hog traps, including the trap at the conservation district office that is available for public use.



Attendees at the Feral Hog Meeting in McAlester waiting on a demonstration of various hog traps

Story submitted by Amy Isbell, Pittsburg County CD District Secretary

# PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



**Protecting nature. Preserving life.** The Partner Spotlight for May is shining on the Nature Conservancy. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a non-profit organization that works to achieve their mission to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.” TNC’s reach is worldwide with dedicated efforts to impact conservation in 72 countries. TNC also has offices set up in every state in the US to partner with local, state, and federal agencies to help raise awareness and achieve gains in conservation.

The Nature Conservancy works directly with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and its partners, OACD and USDA-NRCS, to conserve and protect several areas across the state including places open to the public like Black Mesa Preserve, J.T. Nickel Nature and Wildlife Preserve, Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, and the Keystone Ancient Forest Preserve. The Nature Conservancy also works directly with OCC through the bison themed license plates. A portion of the proceeds from the bison license plates are funneled through OCC and back to TNC to help conservation efforts in Oklahoma.

For more information on The Nature Conservancy, visit [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).



# OCC DIVISION SPOTLIGHTS



Mine land reclamation wrk being done at Jackie Brannon Correctional Center in McAlester, OK

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission division spotlight is focusing on the Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Division and the Wetlands Program.

The Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Division (AML) is a federally funded division that has the stated mission of “protecting the public from hazards left as a result of past coal mining practices.” The primary objective of the AML Program is to reclaim surface and underground coal mine sites abandoned prior to August 3, 1977 which pose the highest threat to the public’s health, safety, and general welfare. The AML Program is coordinated with 16 local conservation districts in eastern Oklahoma.

AML is a critical division because much of this abandoned mine land presents public health, safety, and environmental problems. Hazards range from dangerous highwalls and hazardous water bodies to open mine shafts, acid mine drainage, and dilapidated mine structures. Numerous deaths and injuries have been, and continue to be, associated with these problem areas. The work AML does is truly life saving.

For more information on AML contact Robert Toole at 405-521-4818 or [robert.toole@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:robert.toole@conservation.ok.gov).

The Wetlands Program provides Oklahomans assistance with wetland related issues. Many state and federal agencies and tribal governments are involved in different aspects of wetland management, regulation, and restoration in Oklahoma.

Wetlands perform many services that are beneficial to the people that live near them. Wetlands are sometimes called “ecological supermarkets” because of the rich biodiversity and extensive food webs they support. Many organisms that we enjoy observing and hunting are dependent upon wetlands for at least some part of their life cycle. Many amphibians, shorebirds, waterfowl, songbirds, mammals, and insects need to utilize wetlands for food or reproduction. Wetlands are also called the “kidneys of the landscape” because of their ability to clean polluted water.

The Conservation Commission and other wetland agencies in Oklahoma have a variety of ongoing wetland projects to meet the goals and objectives of the state strategy which are funded through the Wetlands Program of the Environmental Protection Agency Region VI. The ultimate goal of each project is to provide land-owners, students, and agency personnel commonsense approaches to wetland issues through education, demonstration and restoration.

For more information visit [www.ok.gov/wetlands](http://www.ok.gov/wetlands). You can also contact Brooks Trammell at 405-522-6908 or [brooks.trammell@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:brooks.trammell@conservation.ok.gov).



Wetland site in Oklahoma



# AREA 1 SPOTLIGHT

Woodward County Conservation District held its annual 3rd Grade Outdoor Classroom event on May 3rd at Boiling Springs State Park. Students from Woodward public schools, Mooreland Elementary, and Woodward Christian Academy participated. Stephanie Murlin with the Woodward CCD said, “It was a beautiful day and everyone enjoyed it.”

Presenters at this year’s Outdoor Classroom included Pioneer Museum, Oklahoma Highway Patrol, Master Naturalist, USDA-Agriculture Research Service, Red Cross, Forestry Service, Army Corp of Engineers, Quail Forever, OSU Extension Center, Woodward EMS, Woodward Fire Department, and the Woodward Sherriff Department. Also, the Woodward CCD thanked the events sponsors: United Supermarket, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, and The Stock Exchange Bank.

NRCS also partnered with the Woodward CCD to set up and coordinate the 3rd Grade Outdoor Classroom.



3rd grade students hearing a presentation from the Forestry Service at the Outdoor Classroom in Woodward County



Students looking at an exhibit from the Pioneer Museum at the Woodward CCD 3rd Grade Outdoor Classroom

Story submitted by Stephanie Murlin, Woodward CCD Program Coordinator

# AREA 2 SPOTLIGHT

Langston University hosted their 23rd Small Farmers Conference May 22nd-24th.

It was busy conference that started off with a tour highlighting some of the work and research that Langston is doing. The first stop on the tour was at one of Langston’s test plots where they were growing various vegetables. The next stop was the American Institutue for Goat Research. Attendees heard from two different Langston professors and researchers about the work they are doing with goats and sheep. The final stop was Tres Sueños Vineyard and Winery. The owner of Tres Sueños told attendees about the different grapes they grow, some of the trials they encountered as the first winery in the state, and allowed attendees to tour the vineyard. Tres Sueños also provided dinner and a tasting for those wanting to try genuine Oklahoma wine.



Hair sheep lamb at the Langston University Goat Research facility



Diane Cullo, Dir. of OPPE at USDA, speaking at the Langston University Small Farmers Conference

While Day 1 featured tours and field trips, Day 2 and 3 featured an impressive lineup of speakers talking about the challenges small farmers face and the various programs that small farmers can take advantage of. The keynote speaker at lunch was Diane Cullo. Ms. Cullo is the Director of OPPE at USDA in Washington, D.C. and is Advisor to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue. Ms. Cullo updated everyone on the Farm Bill negotiations and USDA programs. She also encouraged attendees to be upfront with their legislators about what they wish to see in the upcoming bill.

Overall, the conference was a success for Langston as they continue to grow their influence and reputation among farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma.

# AREA 3 SPOTLIGHT

The Wagoner County Conservation District hosted its 63rd Annual Soil Stewardship Week Breakfast on May 4th. The breakfast, held every year in conjunction with NACD’s Soil Health Week, had over 80 attendees including legislative representatives, community leaders, OCC Executive Director Trey Lam, NRCS State Conservationist Gary O’Neill, and Robert Davis with the Muscogee Creek Nation.

Attendees heard from keynote speaker Doug McKinney of the Cattlemen’s Association. He spoke about the partnership and common interests that the Cattlemen’s Association shares with OCC, the districts, and NRCS. Wagoner County CD also introduced the Program Year 2019 State Cost Share Program.

The breakfast not only emphasized the partnership between the Wagoner CCD and outside partners, but also the partnership between the districts. Representatives from the Tulsa, Mayes, and Muskogee CCDs were also in attendance to show that district staff not only care about their own county but also the surrounding counties and communitites.

Story submitted by Rhonda Bowman, Wagoner CCD District Manager



Crowd at the 63rd Annual Soil Stewardship Week Breakfast in Wagoner Co.



Rhonda Bowman, Wagoner CCD District Manager, speaking at the Soil Stewardship Week Breakfast

# AREA 4 SPOTLIGHT



A hog trap demonstration to attendees of the Feral Hog Workshop in Weatherford

Feral hog meetings have been occuring across the state with conservation districts teaming up to host these meetings. The Deer Creek, Central North Canadian River, Blaine County, Custer County, and Washita County CDs joined forces to host one of these meetings on May 15th at Southwest Oklahoma State University.

Roughly 40 people attended the meeting where they heard from Josh Gaskamp of the Noble Research Institute, Clint Carpenter with Oklahoma Department of Willife Conservation, and Eric Cowan of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Attendees included State Sen. Darcy Ject (R-Kingfisher) and Kirby Smith, Field Representative for Rep. Frank Lucas.

Gaskamp spoke about the rise in hog populations, the difficulties of hunting hogs, and the different eradication methods being used. He also spoke about the various traps available, their effectiveness, and the pros and cons of each type of trap. Carpenter talked about the laws and regulations of hog hunting. Finally, Cowan gave attendees a demonstration of two different types of traps: a corral trap and the BoarBuster.

For more information about feral hogs, contact your conservation district office.



BoarBust Hog Trap developed by the Noble Research Institute and W-W Manufacturing