

Conservation Partnership Report

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Spring 2018 Issue

Helping people help the land



USDA Under Secretary Bill Northey (center) looking at a map of bodies of water taken off the EPA's 303(d) list. Also pictured: Gary O'Neill (far left), Shanon Phillips (second from left), and Rep. Frank Lucas (far right)



Jimmy and Ginger Emmons accepting the first Leopold Conservation award for Oklahoma



Student competing at the 2018 National Land and Range Judging Contest

Message from NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill



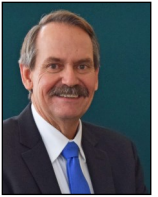
This quarter has been one of change for NRCS. Oklahoma transitioned to a new structure featuring three zones and 21 teams. This transition is designed to help spread the workload across the teams and fill in the gaps where necessary due to staffing challenges. NRCS was also approved to hire 21 District Conservationist positions for this transition. As with any change, there have been some challenges but I am proud of the flexibility shown by all during this period.

This past quarter also saw devastating wildfires hit northwest Oklahoma. NRCS is pleased to be able to offer some assistance in the recovery through the Oklahoma Wildfire Initiative, which is funded through EQIP. NRCS received 139 EQIP wildfire applications, which are currently being reviewed. NRCS has also continued the ranking process for CSP applications. Currently, 862 CSP applications are eligible for potential funding.

Finally, NRCS received over \$6 million dollars in funding for watershed projects last year, of which \$4.95 million has been designated for the design and construction of the Lower Bayou 12 watershed dam in Love County. The remaining funds are designated for remedial repairs on 10 existing watershed dams. Proposals have been developed and submitted for FY18 funding as well. All of this activity shows a renewed interest in the Watershed program both nationally and in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma NRCS and the entire Partnership are doing great things across the state. Thank you for your help in supporting private land conservation in Oklahoma.

Message from OCC 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.

Message from OACD Executive Director Sarah Blaney



These past three months were highlighted by several legislative successes for OACD. The budget battle at the Capitol garnered national attention due to the teacher walkout and OACD was able to use that budget fight to help secure pay raises for district employees. Our district employees work incredibly hard and OACD is glad that Oklahoma's lawmakers recognized their hard work and dedication.

OACD is also happy that the Oklahoma Legislature has agreed to fund a \$5.1 million bond to match federal funds for the upstream flood control dam projects across the state. This is something OACD has been working on for several years and we know these funds will go a long way in keeping Oklahoma's 2,107 upstream flood control dams up to date. OACD also helped secure a flat budget for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission for the first time in several years. By allowing OCC's budget to stay the same, our state partner will be able to continue the work they are doing without having to find areas to cut back. All of these legislative accomplishments are made possible by the Conservation Partnership and the hard work of our districts.

OACD also would like to urge conservation districts to invite legislative candidates on the ballot to any field days that are scheduled. These field days are a great opportunity to show the work we do and the way state dollars are spent. For a list of candidates please contact me, Sarah Blaney, at sarahblaney@okconservation.org.

NRCS SPOTLIGHT



Leadership Development Class at a meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico

Oklahoma NRCS joined forces with NRCS in Colorado and New Mexico to help train the next generations of leaders. The Tri-State Leadership Development Program brings together 15 NRCS employees (five from each state) to learn about the challenges that face producers today and will face in the future. The five producers from Oklahoma are Melanie Oliver (Stillwater), Chris Best (El Reno), Roderick Dukes (Okmulgee), Brandy Pietz-Jones (Clinton), and Rishell Bowler (Muskogee).

The Program participants gathered in Albuquerque, New Mexico in April for their first face to face meeting. At this three-day introductory meeting, participants learned ways to be more effective communicators. Through workshops, one on one work with a coach, and with role-playing exercises, participants learned ways to better communicate NRCS programs and goals with producers and people they interact with on a daily basis. Participants also learned about interpersonal communications and ways to help facilitate communications through their local and state offices. The next face to face meeting will be in September in Denver, Colorado.

OCC SPOTLIGHT

In recognition of Employee Appreciation Month, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission held a full staff meeting at Executive Director Trey Lam's farm in Pauls Valley. The full staff meeting featured team building exercises, an update on the Commission, issues at the Capitol, and a bar-be-cue lunch.

Mike Sharp was also recognized at the full staff meeting as the 2017 Employee of the Year. Mike is Director of the Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services and also serves as AML's Assistant Director. He is always there to help with GIS related issues and to provide equipment and expertise to Commission staff. But, his duties at the Commission go beyond those job titles. He maps out office layouts, pieces together computers, maintains the computer network, and travels extensively to help out in any way needed. He also traveled to Texas to help emergency responders with GIS services after hurricanes devastated parts of the state. Mike Sharp is an outstanding example of leadership, partnership, and service and a well deserving Employee of the Year.



Mike Sharp receiving his award as OCC Employee of the Year at the Full Staff Meeting in May

OACD SPOTLIGHT



Dewey County CD board with District Secretary Coleta Bratten (3rd from right), Rep. Mike Sanders (3rd from left), and Sen. Casey Murdock (2nd from right)

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts announced their annual awards for Outstanding Conservation District, Outstanding Conservation District Director, and Outstanding Conservation District Cooperator.

The Dewey County Conservation District received the Outstanding Conservation District award. Ed Casey from the Nowata County Conservation District was presented with the Outstanding Conservation District Director award. Curt Roberts from the Oklahoma County Conservation District was awarded the Outstanding Conservation District Cooperator award.

OACD and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission also presented communication awards in two categories on April 12th. The first award for Excellence in Communications was presented to the Deer Creek Conservation District for their work with the local media to share information about conservation. The Excellence in Innovative Communications was presented to the Caney Valley Conservation District for creating creative communication materials for outreach efforts.

ONE BIG STORY

2018 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) on May 3rd. 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.

National 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 home site 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.

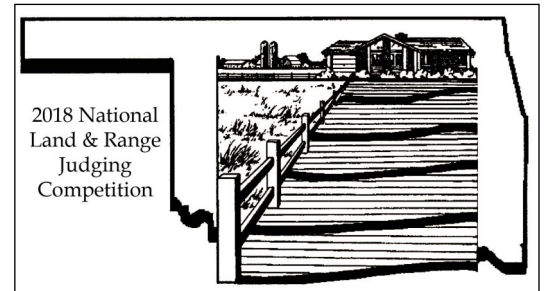
The national team championship trophies for home site evaluation were awarded to the Hico, Texas FFA Chapter and the Wessington Spring, South Dakota 4-H Club. National individual championship trophies for home site evaluation were awarded to Devin Gonzales of the Hondo, Texas FFA Chapter and Katelyn 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 home site evaluation contest. Terry Baize of Hamilton, Texas won the range judging contest.

The Oklahoma State University (OSU) Department of Plant and Soil Science will offer a \$1,500 scholarship to the top-scoring individual in the land judging contest, and a \$1,500 scholarship to the top-scoring individual in the home site evaluation contest. The winners' eligibility is contingent upon enrollment at OSU as a Plant and Soil Science Major. In addition, if the students have a high school GPA of 3.5 or better and ACT scores of at least 24, OSU will add an additional \$1,500 to the scholarship for a total of \$3,000.

Jimmy Emmons, OACD President and co-chair of the contest steering committee, presented the 2018 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award to Kendall Brashears. Emmons described Brashears as "a wonderful partner," and said "he has been a great ambassador for agriculture education in Oklahoma."

Complete contest results can be found at www.judgingcard.com. Pictures from the event can be found at www.flickr.com/conservation_ok and the video slideshow can be found at <https://youtu.be/6<I05jXrziw>.



OACD President Jimmy Emmons with a winning team



Student competing the National Land and Range Judging Contest

NORTHWEST OKLAHOMA



Fire damage in NW Oklahoma

Northwest Oklahoma is, unfortunately, no stranger to wildfires. But, the region experienced one of the more devastating fires in recent memory in April of this year. The 34 Complex Fire in Woodward County and the Rhea Fire in Dewey County combined to burn roughly 350,000 acres, numerous homes and buildings, and several thousand head of cattle. The recovery from those devastating fires has been tough but those affected by the fire have shown their resiliency.

Dewey County Conservation District Secretary Coleta Bratten has helped lead the charge in getting donations and other forms of help to the community.

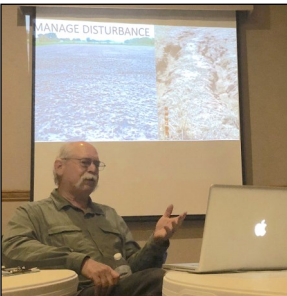
She has coordinated efforts between multiple relief groups and helped answer questions from those effected, all while continuing to keep the Dewey County CD running smoothly. USDA-NRCS has also been able to offer some help through the EQIP program. Over 130 producers applied for funding through EQIP to help get them through these challenging times.

While the recovery efforts have been strong, more help is needed. To volunteer time and resources, contact any of the effected counties conservation district.



Burnt barn and equipment in NW OK

NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA



Greg Scott, OCC Soil Scientist, at OFRA's Plant ID & Grazing Management Workshop

Photo by Grant Crawford, Tahlequah Daily Press

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and USDA-NRCS had the opportunity to help educate Oklahoma Farmers and Ranchers Association (OFRA) members on Soil Health, Plant Identification, and Grazing Management in Tahlequah June 29th and 30th.

OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott and OCC Soil Health Educator Blane Stacy spoke to attendees during the two-day workshop about basic soil health principles. Scott and Stacy also had an opportunity to tour OFRA members' farms with participants and demonstrate how to test and evaluate the health of their soil. They also took the opportunity to discuss the importance of soil health and the positive impact on sustainable agriculture.

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. OCC and OFRA plan on setting up more in depth conservations and workshops to discuss implementing the five soil health principles with OFRA's members on their land.

Story submitted by Amy Seiger, OCC Soil Health Coordinator

SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA

May was a month full of feral hog outreach meetings. The Pittsburg County, Latimer County, and Tahlequah 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 six different counties across southeast Oklahoma. That proves that a Conservation District's reach can, and does, go beyond the district boundary.

The feral hog meeting started out with a welcome address from the 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. 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, attendees saw a demonstration of five different types of hog traps.



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

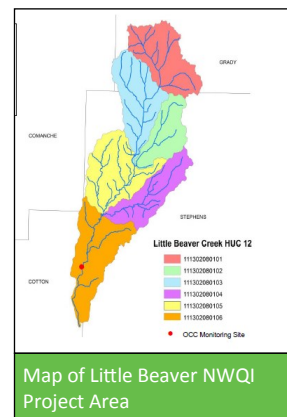
Story submitted by Amy Isbell, Pittsburg CCD District Secretary

SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA

Nationally, NRCS Partnered with the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC), WaterComm and Purdue University to host forums within five of the successful NWQI Project areas. The Little Beaver Watershed Project Area was one of the selected forum sites and hosted the final forum of this effort on May 10th in Duncan. The forum brought together 25 local NRCS, district staff, state agency staff, landowners, producers and other key partners to get feedback from local leaders regarding watershed management in the Little Beaver Watershed.

The Little Beaver NWQI project area comprises portions of Grady, Stephens, Cotton and Comanche counties. Sediment and bacteria are the major source of impairments being addressed. The project began in 2015 as a joint effort with OCC and the four counties in the project area.

The forum was made possible through the efforts of all the local NRCS and Conservation District Staff who sent out invitations and made personal contacts. NRCS and District staff provided a tour for the team the day before the forum and also made local arrangements for meeting spaces and meals.



Story submitted by Steve Glasgow, NRCS State Resource Conservationist

CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

The Noble Research Institute hosted Dr. Christine Jones, a world leader in the soil conservation movement, for a day long soil health training. 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. Christine Jones (center) speaking to at the Noble Research Institute

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's work as a ground cover and soils ecologist has had a profound impact in Australia as around the world.

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



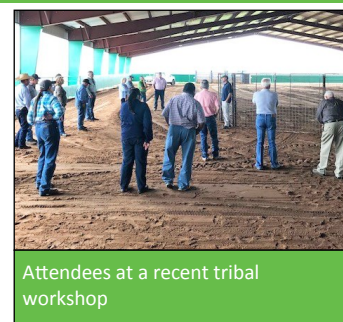
Dr. Christine Jones (left) with Brett Peshek of Green Cover Seed (center) and OCC's Blane Stacy (right)

TRIBAL DISTRICTS

Producers, Tribes, and tribal members gathered to learn what's new with USDA's Farm Bill Programs, the important of soil health principals, why the agriculture census is important, and have hands on training to control feral hog issues on their land.

NRCS, USDA partners, the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, and the Cotton, Dewey, Greer, Harmon, Jackson, Jefferson, and Love County Conservation Districts partnered to hold the workshops.

The highlight of the workshops were the feral hog trap demonstrations. The workshops also taught attendees soil health principles through demonstrations by NRCS State Soil Scientist Steve Alspach and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Soil Scientist Greg Scott. Attendees also heard from Scott Alls of the Oklahoma Wildlife Department and Josh Gaskamp from the Noble Research Institute regarding feral hog management and control. Other partners included the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), OSU extension offices, and the Oklahoma Black Historical Research Project. Strong partnerships made these workshops successful.



Story submitted by Dr. Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison

UPCOMING EVENTS

7/11—Blue Thumb Kids Day Camp (Ages 6-8)

7/12—Stephens County Soil Health Field Day

7/12-7/13—Blue Thumb Kids Day Camp
(Ages 9-12)

7/19—Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribe Soil Health Day

7/20—Women in Ag Conference in McAlester

7/26—Pasture Management Workshop in Stigler

8/1—Soil Health Workshop in Marietta

8/1-8/3—Soil Health Institute 3rd Annual
Meeting in Albuquerque, NM

8/2-8/8—NACD Summer Meeting

8/9-8/10—Women in Ag & Small Business in
OKC

8/16—Jackson County Soil Health Field Day

8/17—USDA-NRCS Conservation Reserve
Program Deadline

8/21—Nation to Nation Meeting of Oklahoma's
Sovereign Nations in Shawnee

9/4-9/6—NACD South Central Region Annual
Meeting in San Marcos, Texas

9/29—Okfuskee County Pasture Management
Day

Dates and locations are subject to change. Check with local conservation districts or agency calendars for more information.

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**Story ideas and pictures for future issues may be submitted to Chris Cox.*

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