

# Conservation Partnership Report

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OK*

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## **Summer 2018 Issue**

Helping people help the land



Cherokee Nation Secretary of Natural Resources Sara Hill accepting a plaque from Former OACD President George Fraley highlighting the partnership between OACD and the Cherokee Nation.



Veterans from the Potawatomi Nation carrying flags at the Nation to Nation Meeting.



Road washed out in Pontotoc County due to heavy rains.

## *Message from NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill*



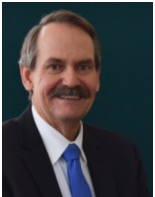
Last quarter NRCS announced its transition plan to three zones and 21 teams. This past quarter NRCS was able to fully begin implementation of the plan. To date 16 of the 21 District Conservationists positions have been selected, with the remaining 5 positions being re-advertised. These positions are the key to the restructure plan and will provide leadership for the 21 field teams. While this transition has been long, and sometimes a bit tedious, we are excited about the probable benefits these changes will potentially result in.

Parts of our state received record flooding in late September. We are happy to report that our flood control dams did do their job. Some of these dams experienced a 1,000 year flooding event and only sustained minimal damage. These dams prevented roughly \$20 million dollars of damage. While these numbers are wonderful to see, NRCS believes that we can do even more to help. There are currently 330 proposed structures in Oklahoma that have been planned and authorized but have not been constructed due to a lack of federal funding. If we can get funding for those dams, then I am sure we will be able to protect more lives and save more land.

Finally, our Soil Health partnership with the Conservation Commission and OACD continues to grow and expand. Through these partnerships we are continuing to work with producers to assist them to plan and implement soil health systems on their operations. We continue to learn more about which practices seem to have the most positive impact on our harsh Oklahoma climate. Thank you.

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## *Message from OCC Executive Director Trey Lam*



The summer of 2018 reiterated Oklahoma is the state of weather and climatic extremes. Northeast, West and Southwest Oklahoma suffered from periods of extreme drought while parts of the Panhandle and Central Oklahoma experienced flooding. Southern Pontotoc CCD was inundated with over 16 inches of rain and it may be another 4,000 years before we see rain this heavy again. Or, with our weather extremes it may happen next month. Having directors and staff working around the state is more important than ever. Conservation is the best mitigation for droughts and floods. Thanks to all the Partners who are protecting our natural resources in these challenging times.

Our Soil Health team partnered with numerous organizations, including USDA-NRCS and OACD, to reach new groups of people. One unique opportunity was the Soil Health 101 class with the City of Oklahoma City. While many people might think conservation practices are only possible in rural areas, our Soil Health team taught OKC residents that they can practice conservation, and see the numerous benefits of conservation, on their yards and in their urban communities. The Soil Health team has also started conducting Soil Health Consultations with producers who are wanting to improve their land.

OCC and Districts are focusing on exciting upcoming Area Meetings. These meetings are a great opportunity for the Conservation Partnership to come together and focus on area specific challenges and opportunities. OCC is glad to have the opportunity to present material at all of the area meetings.

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## *Message from OACD Executive Director Sarah Blaney*



This quarter OACD continued its Conservation Leadership Class with two sessions. The first session focused on soil health while the second session focused on water quality. The first session saw the OACD Leadership Class travel to Ardmore to visit the Noble Research Institute. The Class had the opportunity to tour the Noble facilities and speak with researchers about their work. The second session took the Leadership Class to Tahlequah to learn about OCC's Water Quality division and how they monitor the cleanliness of Oklahoma's rivers, streams, and creeks. The Class also had the opportunity to tour the Cherokee Heritage Center and speak with Cherokee Nation leaders about their efforts in establishing a new conservation district.

This quarter also featured four more field days for the Oklahoma Healthy Soils Project. The field days in Kiowa, Craig, Dewey, and Shawnee Conservation Districts featured multi-species cover crops. The research being gathered through this project is going to be key in how the Conservation Partnership shares the benefits of conservation in Oklahoma.

Finally, the Farm to Food Bank Program continued with six gleaning sites throughout the state. The sacrificial nature of our producers who are willing to donate part of their crop to food banks across the state has allowed those food banks to give the hungry and vulnerable in Oklahoma fresh, healthy food to eat.

A busy fourth quarter is already being planned with all five Area Meetings set. Visit [www.okconservation.org](http://www.okconservation.org) to see the full list of meeting times.



# NRCS SPOTLIGHT



Attendees of the National Engineering Operational Meeting at USDA-ARS Hydraulic Engineering Research Unit in Stillwater, OK.

The National Engineering Operational Meeting was held July 17-19 in Norman, Oklahoma. It was the first meeting featuring all State Conservation Engineers, Geologists, and Landscape Architects since 2005 and had roughly 110 people in attendance.

Oklahoma State Conservation Engineer Chris Stoner hosted the events and called the meeting a success. "I have never been to a meeting where everyone was focused and engaged for the entire meeting. When it ended, unlike a lot of week-long trainings where everyone can't wait to leave, very few left the room. Most hung around for even more discussion."

"It's always great when we can host a national meeting and show the work being done in Oklahoma," said State Conservationist Gary O'Neill. "We face a variety of challenges in Oklahoma that require team work with our USDA partners and local conservation partners. I hope sharing our experiences with leaders from other states will help NRCS better serve our customers and protect our natural resources nationwide."

# OCC SPOTLIGHT



OCC Area III Commissioner Scotty Herriman with EPA Region 6 Administrator Anne Idsal.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Water Quality division had the opportunity to host the EPA Region 6 Administrator, Anne Idsal, for a tour on July 26th. The group met at Fourteen Mile Creek near Hulbert, OK in Cherokee County.

On the tour with Regional Administrator Idsal were OCC Executive Director Trey Lam, Area III Commissioner Scotty Herriman, ODAFF Secretary Jim Reese, OCC Water Quality Director Shanon Phillips, and other staff members from OCC, EPA, and ODAFF.

OCC Water Quality Director Shanon Phillips said, "Our trip with the regional administrator was a great opportunity to speak with her about ways that EPA is an important partner to the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership by supporting efforts to use voluntary programs to solve water quality challenges."

Following the tour of Fourteen Mile Creek, the group went to lunch where they discussed a variety of topics including OCC's success in having streams and creeks delisted from the EPA 303(d) Impaired Waters list.

# OACD SPOTLIGHT



OACD Leadership Class touring the Noble Research Institute with Education Manager Dr. Frank Harden (left).

OACD hosted two more Conservation Leadership Classes this quarter.

The first in July took class members to Ardmore for a tour of the Noble Research Institute. This class was heavily focused on Soil Health and gave class members a first hand look at Noble's research facilities and gave them the opportunity to look at current research. The Leadership Class also had the opportunity to hear from long time Arbuckle Conservation District Director Creede Speake. Mr. Speake, who will be awarded NACD's Distinguished Service Award in February, gave a first hand account of how conservation really took off in Oklahoma and how districts are a crucial part of the Conservation Partnership.

The second took class members to Tahlequah for a in-depth look at water quality and a float trip down the Illinois River. Leadership Class members also got to tour several Cherokee Nation facilities and had the opportunity to speak with Cherokee Nation leaders about the benefits of starting a conservation district.

The OACD Leadership Class will meet two more times before adjourning.



OACD Leadership Class getting ready for a float trip down the Illinois River.

# ONE BIG STORY



Pontotoc Co. DC Clay Horton showing Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall (R-Atoka) some of the flooding damage.

Historic flooding occurred throughout South Central Oklahoma on Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) would like to extend our sincere sorrow to those affected by the floods.

"These floods were devastating," said OCC Executive Director Trey Lam. "The full extent of the damage to the land and the loss of property and livestock will not be fully known for some time. However, due to OCC's partnership with USDA-NRCS and the funding we received from the State of Oklahoma, we know the losses are not as catastrophic as they could have been thanks to our upstream flood control dams."

With numerous areas in South Central Oklahoma receiving from 10 to 17 inches of rainfall on September 21<sup>st</sup>, USDA-NRCS estimates the small watershed flood control dams saved the state \$19.6 million in damages. These are damages that would have occurred had the dams not been constructed. The hardest hit counties were Pontotoc County and Coal County where several flood control dams experienced a greater than 1,000 year flooding event.

"As a rancher, business owner, and resident of Pontotoc County I saw the devastation caused by the flooding," said OCC Area V Commissioner Bill Clark. "I also know that without the upstream flood control dams and the partnership between OCC and USDA-NRCS to maintain those structures, the damage could have been much worse. These structures not only help protect lives and property but they help protect the soils. If a fence gets washed away that can be replaced fairly quickly. If our soil erodes and washes away that could take decades to replace. I am thankful Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall was able to visit with me and tour some of the flooded sites so he could get a first-hand look of how these flood control dams can mitigate some of the potential damage."

"Upstream flood control continues to be a priority for Oklahoma," said McCall, R-Atoka. "Last session, the Legislature appropriated the maximum amount toward federal matching dollars for rehabilitation of flood control facilities in Oklahoma. The weather events of last week are confirmation that upstream flood control needs to remain a priority for Oklahoma and that dollars invested toward this mission will result in a significant return on investment into the distant future. We will continue to work with our federal delegation to ensure these vital infrastructures are protected."



OCC Area V Commissioner Bill Clark with Speaker McCall.

Oklahoma has the most upstream flood control dams in the United States with 2,107 dams, the first of which was completed in 1948. Since more than half of these dams have exceeded their design lives, rehabilitation needs to occur on several upstream flood control dams throughout Oklahoma. Many of the dams are in different settings than they were when originally constructed and need to be rehabilitated to meet the current safety requirements.

"We are pleased to report that the upstream flood control dams functioned as designed," said USDA-NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill. "The dams did their job by protecting lives and reducing downstream damages. The flooding was so severe that the \$19.6 million in estimated savings equates to nearly 20 percent of the average annual benefits from Oklahoma's upstream flood control dams."



Flooded field in Pontotoc Co.

While OCC and USDA-NRCS are pleased that the flood control dams performed as they were intended, both agencies recognize the need for additional funding to maintain and repair existing dams and build new ones. O'Neill also said that USDA-NRCS currently has 330 proposed structures that have been planned and authorized but have not been constructed due to a lack of federal funding, "If federal funds had been available and we had those dams in place, the State could have realized another \$7.5 million in benefits from this storm alone." Lam said, "This past session we saw a real commitment from the State Legislature to provide funding for repair and rehabilitation of our flood control dams. I hope to see even greater appropriations next year so the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, with help from their federal partners at USDA-NRCS can better protect Oklahomans during flooding events."

For more information regarding OCC's Flood Control program contact Tammy Sawatzky at [tammy.sawatzky@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:tammy.sawatzky@conservation.ok.gov). For more information on NRCS's Flood Control program contact April Burns at [april.burns@ok.usda.gov](mailto:april.burns@ok.usda.gov).

# NORTHWEST OKLAHOMA



Local producers at the Soil Health Field Day in Oakwood.

Soil Health field days continued across the state as the summer weather hit Oklahoma. Dewey County Conservation District hosted one of these Soil Health field days at Larry Rauh's farm in Dewey County. Mr. Rauh is determined to improve his soil profile with planting cover crops but, he had been told that he couldn't do it in the sandy soils near Oakwood. However, 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.

These soil health field days are not possible without the partnership between NRCS, OCC, OACD, and other numerous partners.

# NORTHEAST OKLAHOMA

Throughout the year, Conservation Districts have been teaming up to host meetings regarding feral hogs. The Adair County and Sequoyah County Conservation Districts partnered with USDA-NRCS Stilwell and Sallisaw offices to host one of these feral hog meetings. The districts also taught producers about soil health practices that work best in those areas at the same meeting.

Oklahoma Department of 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 hog diseases.

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.



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

# SOUTHEAST OKLAHOMA



Attendees at the Ouachita Mountains RC&D Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference.

The Ouachita Mountains Resource Conservation & Development Council hosted a Women in Agriculture and Small Business Conference Friday July 20th. Approximately 100 people from across Southeast Oklahoma attended the conference which was held at the McAlester campus of Eastern Oklahoma State College. The conference featured sessions on food modernization, aquaponics, NRCS and Conservation District cost share programs, value added beef, property leasing, and much more.

At the lunch session, 13 nominated women were honored for their achievements and one was selected for the Ag Woman of the Year. This year's honoree was Julie Grant. Julie co-owns the McAlester Union Stockyards in McAlester while volunteering and sponsoring several projects and organizations such as 4-H and FFA.

The Women in Ag Conference was presented by Ouachita Mountains RC&D, the southeast Oklahoma conservation districts, Eastern Oklahoma State College of Agriculture, OSU Extension, and the Choctaw Nation.



# SOUTHWEST OKLAHOMA



Dr. Carol Crouch discussing Farm Bill programs at a Cheyenne & Arapaho Soil Health event.

The Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes hosted two field days alongside USDA-NRCS and OCC this quarter with an emphasis on soil health and grazing management.

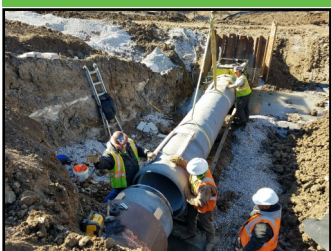
The first, which was held in Clinton, was an overview of soil health, grazing management practices, and featured several speakers discussing USDA programs. The second field day took place at Redlands Community College-Darling Campus and featured an on-site look at the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes Soil Health Demonstration Plot and a conversation on climate trends in Oklahoma with Clay Pope of the USDA Southern Plains Climate Hub.



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott teaching at a recent Cheyenne & Arapaho Soil Health event in Darlington.

“Connecting with our tribal partners through these events is a great way for the Conservation Partnership to get our ideas to tribal members. These events help us further connect with a group of people that have meant so much to our state’s history,” said USDA-NRCS State Tribal Liaison Dr. Carol Crouch.

# CENTRAL OKLAHOMA



Reinforced Concrete Pipe being installed steel pipe.

The rehabilitation of Rock Creek Watershed Site 16 in Murray County was completed on July 19, 2018. The final contract cost was \$1,219,674.44.

The project included widening the auxiliary spillway to 200 feet, and raising the crest elevation from 1029.7 feet mean sea level (msl) to 1030.4 feet msl. The top of dam was raised from 1034.7 feet msl to 1036.5 feet msl, and the principal spillway was enlarged from 24 inches in diameter to 30 inches. The new principal spillway was installed by boring and jacking, and the existing pipe was grouted full and abandoned in place.

The contractor for this project was C-P Integrated Services of Oklahoma City, OK. Russell Miller from the Pauls Valley Watershed Office served as Construction Inspector for NRCS.



Steel Casing being bored and jacked into through an embankment.

# TRIBAL DISTRICTS



NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill speaking at the Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation in Shawnee.

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 August 21<sup>st</sup> 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. Tribal leaders had the opportunity to discuss which USDA programs are working well, and where improvements can be made.

“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,” said Dr. Carol Crouch, USDA-NRCS State Tribal Liaison.

Plans are already in the works for next year’s Nation to Nation Tribal Consultation.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- 10/9** — 3rd Grade Outdoor Classroom in Ada
- 10/9** — 5th Grade Natural Resource Day at Lake Arcadia
- 10/10 & 10/11** — Organic Oklahoma Conference at OSU-OKC
- 10/11** — Cowboy Plant ID & Pasture Management Workshop in McAlester
- 10/11** — 5th Grade Natural Resource Day in Okmulgee
- 10/12** — 4th Grade Fishing Clinic in Holdenville
- 10/13** — Blue Thumb Volunteer Training in Stillwater
- 10/17** — 5th Grade Natural Resource Day at Lake Arcadia
- 11/2** — Area I Meeting in Woodward
- 11/3 & 11/4** — Blue Thumb Volunteer Training in Tulsa
- 11/5** — Area II Meeting in Oklahoma City
- 11/6** — Area IV Meeting in Clinton
- 11/13** — Area III Meeting in Chouteau
- 11/15** — Area V Meeting in Idabel
- 12/11 & 12/12** — OSU Winter Crops School in Stillwater

*For a full list of events please visit Oklahoma Conservation Commission and Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts calendars*

## CONSERVATION PARTNERS



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Bald eagle at the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Eagle Aviary in Shawnee



Teachers learning about the Stream Trailer at a Blue Thumb workshop



Lisa Owen speaking at a field day in Muskogee & Wagoner Counties



NRCS Soil Conservationist Joshua Hall handing out info to a teacher at the Adair County Fair



OCC Soil Health Team conducting a Soil Health Consultation in Coal County



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott at a recent Cheyenne & Arapaho field day



OACD Leadership Class members at the Cherokee Heritage Center



Washed out road in Pontotoc Co.



Attendees learning about composting at the Soil Health 101 Workshop in Oklahoma City