

CONSERVATION CALENDAR

Oct. 4th - Pittsburg CCD Poster, Speech, and Essay Contest in McAlester

Oct. 9th - Pontotoc CCD 3rd Grade Outdoor Classroom at Pontotoc Technology Center in Ada

Oct. 10th & 11th - Organic Oklahoma Conference at OSU-OKC

Oct. 11th - Okmulgee CCD 5th Grade Natural Resource Day at Kiddies Lake in Okmulgee

Oct. 11th - H2Oklahoma at Keystone State Park in Tulsa County

Oct. 11th - Cowboy Plant ID & Pasture Management in McAlester

Oct. 12th - Hughes CCD 4th Grade Fishing Clinic at Holdenville

Oct. 13th - Blue Thumb Volunteer Training in Stillwater

Oct. 17th - Oklahoma CCD Natural Resource Day at Lake Arcadia

Oct. 18th - 38th Annual Bankers Awards Banquet at Kiamichi Technology Center in Durant

Oct. 25th - Ouachita RC&D Feral Hog Outreach Meeting in Atoka

Nov. 2nd - Area I Meeting at the High Plains Technology Center in Woodward

Nov. 5th - Area II Meeting at the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives in Oklahoma City

Nov. 6th - Area IV Meeting at the Frisco Conference Center in Clinton

Nov. 13th - Area III Meeting at the Mid America Industrial Park Expo Center in Chouteau

Nov. 15th - Area V Meeting at the Museum of the Red River in Idabel

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

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September 2018

OACD Leadership Class Focuses on Water Quality



Brooks Tramell (2nd from left), OCC Director of Monitoring, Assessment, and Wetlands Programs teaching OACD Leadership Class participants how fish collections can help determine water quality.

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) Leadership Class held their third session September 17th and 18th in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. This session focused on two subjects: water quality and the partnership between OACD and the Cherokee Nation.

The class started out at the Cherokee Heritage Center and got a private tour of the Heritage Center. Class members saw demonstrations of traditional Cherokee games and how they made arrowheads, pottery, and archery equipment. Class members also got to walk inside traditional Cherokee buildings and learn about tribal family relations and government. The Leadership Class also ate a traditional Cherokee meal consisting of pork, beans, corn, grape dumplings, and fry bread.

Following the tour of the Cherokee Heritage Center, the Leadership Class had the opportunity to float down the Illinois River in canoes and kayaks. They heard about the history of the Illinois River and how the OCC has helped improve the river from Ed Fite with the Grand River Dam Authority. "It was a pleasure to hear from Ed Fite about the Illinois River and how it's changed over the decades," said OCC Executive Director Trey Lam. "Ed's passion for the river and keeping it clean has helped make the partnership between our two organizations strong. We look forward to continue working with Ed and the GRDA in the future to not only keep the Illinois River clean but to also improve the water quality of other rivers and streams."

Day Two of the Leadership Class saw class participants learn about water quality monitoring from OCC's Water Quality and Blue Thumb Staff. OACD Class Members strapped on waders for a first-hand look at fish gathered from the electro-fisher, and help collect benthic macroinvertebrates. OCC staff helped identify the various fish and bugs and explain to the class members what those fish and bugs tell us about the quality of the water.

The Leadership Class ended with a trip to the Cherokee Nation Tribal Headquarters where they participated in a round table discussion about the new Cherokee Nation Conservation District. The Cherokee Nation Conservation District will be the second tribal conservation district joining the Muscogee (Creek) Nation.



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

THIS MONTH IN PICTURES



OACD Leadership Class right before going on a kayak trip on the Illinois River in Cherokee County.



Candice Miller (pink shirt) teaching a class at a recent Blue Thumb training.



The Soil Health Team conducting a consultation in Coal County.



Flooded field in Pontotoc County.



OCC Staff set to float the Illinois River during a Full Staff Meeting.



Amy Seiger (left) & Blane Stacy (center) help AML Director Robert Toole (right) conduct a soil health test on an AML site in Rogers Co.

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.

PRODUCER SPOTLIGHT

For this month's Producer Spotlight, we are turning our attention not to a producer but an Eagle Scout. Canon Alexander, an Eagle Scout from Coal County, chose to clean a local watershed in his area for his Eagle Scout project. Here is what Mr. Alexander did in his own words:



Satellite image of Upper Clear Boggy, Dam Site 3.

My family and I moved to Coalgate, OK in May of 2015 to be near our grandparents. During our three years there, I joined Boy Scout Troop 4 in Ada, OK. When it came time for me to design my Eagle Project, I wanted to address a local conservation issue that had a direct impact on my community. My first step was to ask my grandfather, Deward Strong, for ideas. He is a rancher and serves on the Coal County Conservation District Board of Directors and suggested that I clear one of the 51 watershed dams in Coal County.

My grandfather put me in touch with Melissa Williams, Coal County CD administrative assistant, and Roger Langston, retired Coal County CD technician, who took me on a tour of several dams that I was able to choose from for my project. I chose the one that need the most help – Upper Clear Boggy, Dam Site #3. After figuring out the details, I presented my proposal at the April 2017 Coal County CD board meeting. They immediately accepted my offer of free manual labor.

On May 23, 2017, I organized a crew of four adults and nine other scouts from Troop 4 to start clearing the dam. We worked for 9 hours removing woody brush and young trees, mostly black locust, on the North and South sides of the dam. Mr. Langston sprayed the stumps with herbicide, my dad operated the chain saw, and my grandfather brought his tractor to drag the brush into burn piles. It was hard work, but the dam looked much better by the end of the day.

I scheduled to meet Mr. Langston back at the dam on October 26, 2017. This follow up visit was a requirement for the Boy Scouts of America Hornaday Conservation Award, which requires all projects to meet the satisfaction of their partnering organizations who are responsible for the ongoing sustainability of the site. It also allowed me, my dad, and Mr. Langston to cut and remove the last remaining black locust trees that were inaccessible in May due to heavy rains and high water levels.

I want to thank the Coal County Conservation District Board, Roger Langston, Melissa Williams, and my grandfather, Deward Strong, for giving me the opportunity to serve my community.

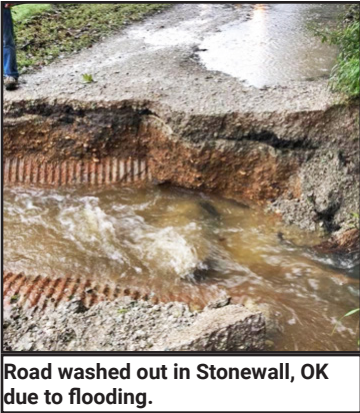
Thank you to Canon Alexander for his hard work keeping one of Oklahoma's 2,107 upstream flood control dams clean. This is another great example of how conservation efforts are achieved with teamwork.

If your district is working with an outside organization, like the Boy Scouts of America, please let Chris Cox know by emailing him at christopher.cox@conservation.ok.gov.



A team of volunteers helping clean Upper Clear Boggy, Dam Site 3 for Canon Alexander's Eagle Scout project.

AREA 5 SPOTLIGHT



Road washed out in Stonewall, OK due to flooding.

Historic flooding occurred throughout South Central Oklahoma on Friday, September 21st, 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 Commissioner 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.”

“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. “These structures not only help protect lives and property but they help protect the soils. 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. We will continue to work with our federal delegation to ensure these vital infrastructures are protected.”



Pontotoc County District Conservationist Clay Horton (left) with Oklahoma House Speaker Charles McCall surveying flooding in Pontotoc County.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT



This month’s Partner Spotlight is focused on the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF).

ODAFF’s mission is to protect and educate people about Oklahoma’s agricultural and livestock production. ODAFF aims to meet the needs of farmers and ranchers, promote agricultural trade and production, work to assure food safety, protect natural resources, foster rural communities, and meet the needs of Oklahomans.

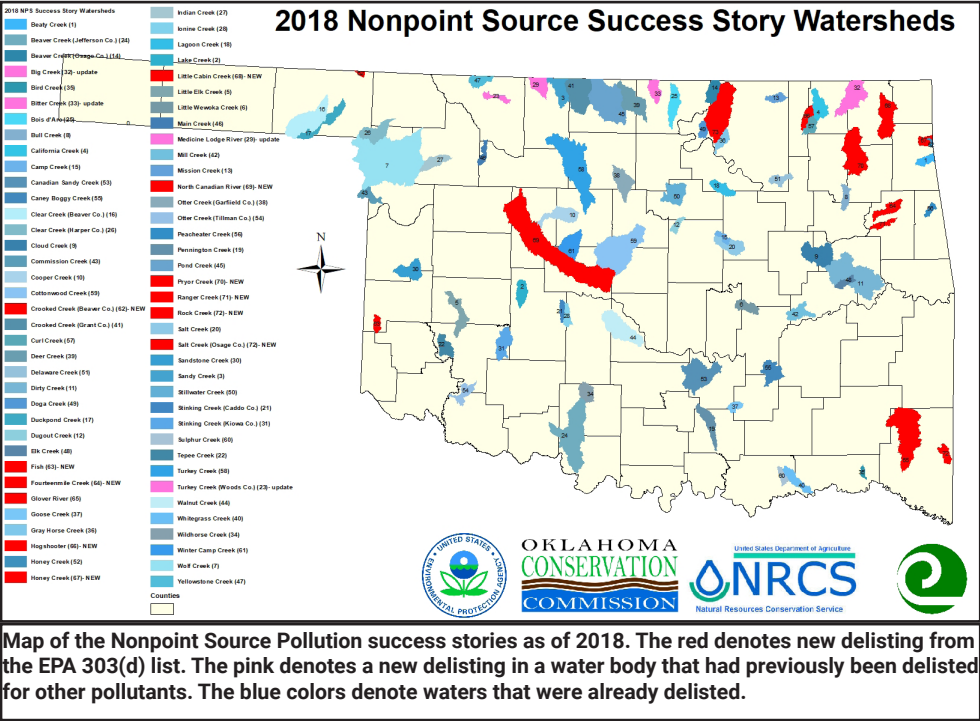
ODAFF oversees a variety of programs and divisions including the forestry service, feral hogs issues (which they help fight alongside OCC and the Conservation Districts), Wildlife Services, Ag In The Classroom, Made in Oklahoma, and the new Industrial Hemp Agricultural Pilot Program.

Similarly to OCC, ODAFF is overseen by the State Board of Agriculture, with the President of the Board also serving as the Secretary of Agriculture. The current Secretary of Agriculture is Jim Reese. The other board members include Ed Hurliman of Broken Bow, Jay Franklin of Vinita, Britt Hilton of Gate, and Karen Krehbiel Dodson of Hydro.

Along with OCC, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry is housed in the Agriculture Building in Oklahoma City.

For more information on ODAFF visit www.oda.state.ok.us.

OCC DIVISION SPOTLIGHT



Map of the Nonpoint Source Pollution success stories as of 2018. The red denotes new delisting from the EPA 303(d) list. The pink denotes a new delisting in a water body that had previously been delisted for other pollutants. The blue colors denote waters that were already delisted.

With more than 700 listings of impaired bodies of water in Oklahoma, Oklahoma Conservation Commission’s Water Quality Division knows monitoring all of that water is impossible. They choose to spend their federal dollars from EPA to monitor smaller bodies of water, like streams and creeks you can wade across. By doing this, Oklahoma Conservation Commission Water Quality Division can get closer to the actual sources of the pollution. Focusing on smaller streams has led to plenty of 303(d) success stories across Oklahoma.

In 2018 the Water Quality Division is expected to have all 12 bodies of water they submitted approved as success stories and have those bodies of water partially delisted or fully delisted from the 303(d). The 12 likely success stories is a large jump from 2017 when the Water Quality Division had seven bodies of water delisted. The additional 12 delistings keep Oklahoma at or near the top of the nation in terms of the number of delistings and the total area delisted.

“Many times it’s hard to see the benefits of the work that we do,” said OCC Water Quality Director Shanon Phillips. “But, when we are able to submit these success stories and have EPA take them off the 303(d) list, it gives us the opportunity to show others what we are doing in Oklahoma with voluntary conservation programs works.” Phillips also touted the work of the Conservation Partnership saying, “NRCS and the Districts are great at spreading the conservation message. With these delistings and the data we collect, NRCS and the Districts now have more physical evidence to show that conservation practices work. Without these partnerships we would not be able to have had all the delistings that we have seen.”

In addition to cleaning up streams on the 303(d) list, OCC Water Quality and their partners also work to keep healthy streams off the 303(d). OCC Water Quality monitors healthy streams on a regular basis to make sure they are staying healthy. In 2014, 251 streams fully supported fish and beneficial wildlife, suggesting that a large number of streams are staying consistently healthy and are not in danger of being placed on the 303(d) list.

For more information on the Water Quality Division visit www.conservation.ok.gov.

One of the more unheralded, but necessary, parts of the Clean Water Act is the 303(d) list. This lists the waters across the country affected by pollution. Most waters on this list are impacted by a type of pollution known as nonpoint source pollution (NPS). NPS is one of the greatest threats to water quality because it generally seeps into water little by little and sometimes when water is out of sight and out of mind. This 303(d) list is critical because it identifies waters that carry various harmful bacteria like E. coli, have excessive amounts of nutrients, are too cloudy, don’t have the proper pH levels and likely do not fully support beneficial fish and wildlife.

AREA 1 SPOTLIGHT



NRCS State Soil Scientist Steve Alspach (far left) giving a presentation to attendees of the Cheyenne & Arapaho Soil Health Workshop and Tour.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, in conjunction with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the USDA Southern Plains Climate Hub, the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, and Redlands Community College, hosted an on-farm soil health tour and a discussion on weather trends in Oklahoma at the Redlands Community College Darlington Campus.

This event provided attendees with more knowledge on soil health and how landowners can not only sustain their soil health but improve it as well. Add to that the knowledge gained from Clay Pope with USDA's Southern Plains Climate Hub, producers left the Cheyenne and Arapaho event armed with plenty of new ideas on ways to work with the weather

and the soil to enhance their production. "The same practices that increase water holding capacity during drought also help control erosion when heavy rains hit," said Pope.

Participants also got a first hand look at the Cheyenne and Arapaho Soil Health Demonstration Project. This partnership between the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes and USDA-NRCS is designed to showcase the effectiveness of soil health practices.

To schedule a soil health event contact Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger at amy.seiger@conservation.ok.gov or 405-522-4739.



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott teaching at the Cheyenne & Arapaho Soil Health Workshop and Tour.

AREA 2 SPOTLIGHT



OKC Utilities worker explaining how the composting program works in Oklahoma City.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission teamed up with the City of Oklahoma City to host a Soil Health 101 Workshop at the Will Rogers Gardens.

The partnership between OCC and the City of OKC is unique in that it brings soil conservation efforts to the forefront of urban landscapes. OCC has tried to make inroads with the urban landscape populations in Oklahoma City and Tulsa and the partnership between OCC and the City of OKC is the beginning of OCC being more involved in urban areas.

Roughly 85 people attended the Soil Health 101 Workshop which featured City of Oklahoma City employees talking about composting and how people can make their own compost and how citizens can conduct a soil test to determine their lawn and garden needs. The Workshop attendees also heard from OCC Soil Health experts Blane Stacy and Greg Scott. They shared knowledge of soils and used the rain fall simulator to demonstrate how mowing and composting can effect water retention in soils.

OCC is hoping to build more partnerships like the one with the City of Oklahoma City. Make sure to be on the lookout for more urban soil health events.



OCC Soil Scientist Greg Scott speaking to attendees at the Soil Health 101 Workshop in Oklahoma City.

AREA 3 SPOTLIGHT



New Blue Thumb volunteers playing an ice breaker game to get to know the other volunteers.

Blue Thumb hosted a one day training for new Blue Thumb volunteers on September 22nd in Tahlequah, OK.

Volunteers started the day with a short talk from Jahna Hill from the Tahlequah Stormwater Program. Jahna has been an active Blue Thumb volunteer for 9 years and constantly uses Blue Thumb and their data for her job. Afterwards, participants went through a Project WET icebreaker called Blue River, and then learned that Blue Thumb works with volunteers throughout the state to protect our river and strams. Following that, they went through another Project WET activity called "Water Quality? Ask the Bugs!" where they learned about how to sample for bugs and how they are important in determining water quality.

Blue Thumb then tested the volunteer's knowledge with a creek visit at Tahlequah Town Branch just behind the Armory and they were able to kick for bugs and seine for fish.

Following lunch participants went through more Project WET activities, including Sum of the Parts and the Enviroscope. These two activites focus on nonpoint source pollution, which is what the Water Quality team monitors. At the end of the day, new volunteers received their own Project WET certificates and a Blue Thumb T-shirt.

Story submitted by Becky Zawalski, Blue Thumb Field Educator



New Blue Thumb volunteers with Blue Thumb staff following the training class.

AREA 4 SPOTLIGHT



Soil Health Team providing a Soil Health Consultation.

The Oklahoma Conservation Soil Health Team (Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger, Soil Scientist Greg Scott, and Soil Health Educator Blane Stacy) traveled to Grady County to provide a Soil Health Consultation for local producers Jennifer and Luis Hernandez. During the day, other farmers were welcome to follow along and ask questions and providing feedback about the area and their operations as well.

During the consultation the Soil Health Team evaluated the Hernandez's current and past land management practices, the health and profile of their soil, and discussed goals for their operation. After compiling data, evaluations, and landowner concerns, the Soil Health Team presented the Hernandez's with options to help achieve next steps of improving their soil health and operation.

The Soil Health Team anticipates assisting more producers throughout Oklahoma to help them establish attainable goals. "Our goal as a Soil Health Team is to help people use their land efficiently and effectively, all while being profitable," said Soil Health Coordinator Amy Seiger. "We are confident that our soils and rangeland experts will be able to come up with an achievable soil health plan for most producer in Oklahoma."

To schedule a Soil Health and Resource Concern Consultation contact Amy Seiger at amy.seiger@conservation.ok.gov or 405-522-4739.



Jennifer and Luis Hernandez's property with cattle in the background.