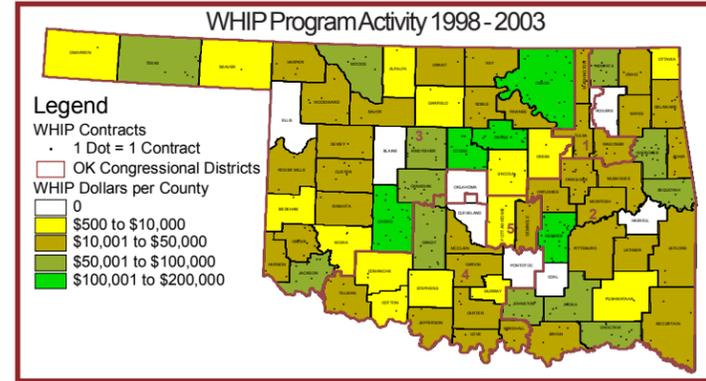
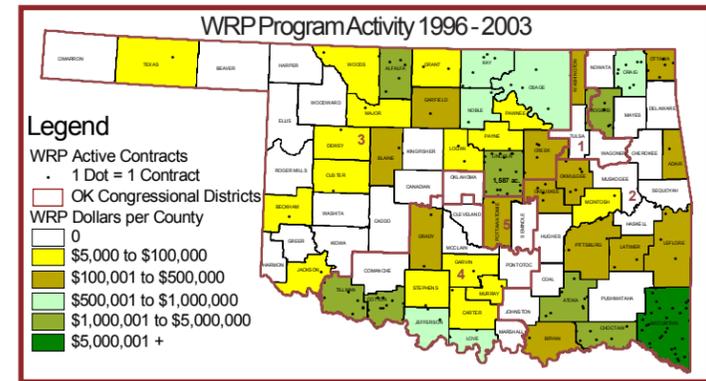


## Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)



WHIP is a voluntary program that helps landowners develop and enhance wildlife habitat on private lands. Oklahoma received just over \$500,000 in WHIP cost-share assistance funding for fiscal year 2003. This provided for enrollment of 50 applications in 25 counties for the creation or improvement of wildlife habitat on 9,958 acres. Currently, over 400 contracts are enrolled providing for wildlife habitat improvement on 59,000 acres in Oklahoma. The demand for WHIP remains high with an application backlog of over 580 applications covering 230,000 acres at an estimated cost-share need of \$4.5 million.

## Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)



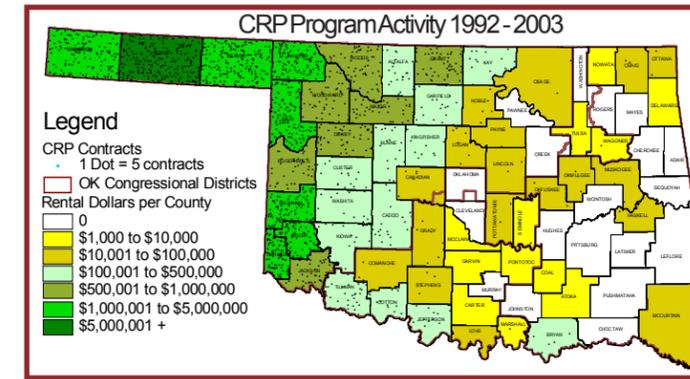
WRP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private and Tribal lands.

The total WRP financial assistance allocation for fiscal year 2003 totaled \$4.6 million. With this allocation, Oklahoma enrolled land into 14 restoration agreements

for 548 acres, two 30-year easements covering 167 acres, and 23 permanent easements restoring and protecting over 4,408 acres of wetlands and associated buffers. Since 1996, Oklahoma has enrolled over 48,279 acres into the WRP with over \$27.5 million in federal assistance for acquisition and restoration of wetlands in 44 of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

## Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

USDA Secretary Veneman announced a CRP general sign-up (Sign-up 26) for May 5-30, 2003. In late August, the Secretary announced the acceptance of two million acres of the nation's most environmentally sensitive land into the CRP.



In Oklahoma, a total of 886 offers were received for enrollment, totaling 78,686.8 acres during the May 5 to June 13, 2003, signup period. Of that total, 500 offers for 44,222 acres met the acceptable offer criteria and were developed into contracts. All offers were ranked on the same basis and offers with an EBI score of at least 269 were considered acceptable for enrollment.

Visit our website at [www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov)

All programs and services of the Natural Resources Conservation Service are provided in a nondiscriminatory manner.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact the USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC, 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment NRCSMission

# Oklahoma 2003 ANNUAL REPORT



Dear Oklahomans:

Welcome to the 2003 Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report. Fiscal year 2003 provided many challenges to the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership, but none bigger than delivery of the 2002 Farm Bill. The conservation partnership in the great state of Oklahoma rose to the task and accomplished another successful year of providing leadership in a voluntary effort to conserve our natural resources. This report highlights the accomplishments of the partnership.

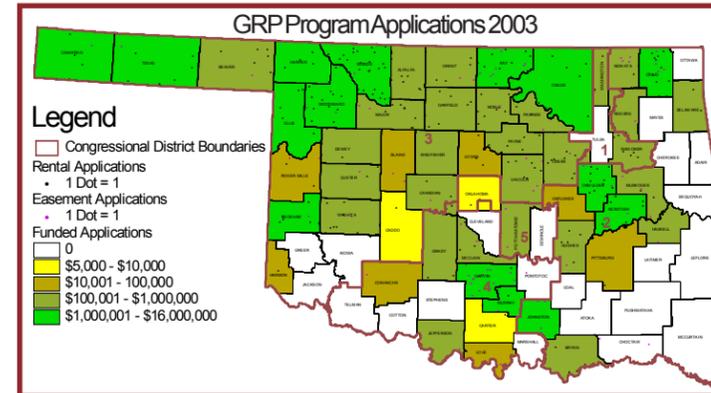
The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which is the lead conservation agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), speaks for the health and survival of America's private lands. The technical assistance provided by NRCS is an invaluable service that helps private property owners understand soils, water, air, plants, and animals to help reach their goals. To provide the maximum technical assistance to those who work with the land, NRCS collaborates with many partners to set goals, develop conservation agendas, provide leadership, and leverage federal contributions for conservation on private lands.

Partners, such as the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), the 88 conservation districts, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Indian Tribes, Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC), Earth Team Volunteers, Universities, community-based organizations and groups, Oklahoma Grazing Lands Coalition Association (OGLCA), Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees (OACDE), and other county and federal agencies provide the unique links in the conservation chain that connects to all.

NRCS serves all people who work on the land, and we understand that local people know about their local needs and concerns. Through locally led conservation, we are able to target our resources to those identified local resource concerns. The majority of our technical assistance is to help farmers and ranchers develop conservation systems uniquely suited to their land, individual needs, and local concerns.

We again want to show appreciation and thanks to the partnership, NRCS and district employees, private landowners, and others for the commitment demonstrated time and time again to protect and conserve our valuable natural resources and make a difference.

 M. Darrel Dominick State Conservationist NRCS	 Mike Thralls Executive Director OCC	 Rodyce Casey President OACD	 Garold DeWitt President OARC&DC
 Larry Hensley President OGLCA	 Carolyn J. Tucker President OACDE	 Douglas Broyles President OTCAC	



landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands. The program will conserve vulnerable grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses and conserve valuable grasslands by helping maintain viable ranching operations.

GRP offers producers several enrollment options: permanent easements, 30-year easements, rental agreements (10, 15, 20 or 30-year duration), and restoration agreements. Applications must have been received by August 1, 2003, to be considered for evaluation and funding in fiscal year 2003. Evaluated applications were grouped for the state and selected for funding by August 15, 2003. Priority resource issues for this application period include the threat of conversion to other land uses, primarily urbanization and cultivation. Consideration is also given for risk to invasive plants and loss of biodiversity.

Oklahoma received an allocation of over \$2.5 million for the acquisition of rental agreements and easements under the GRP. The availability of the GRP for 2003 was announced through a Notice of Fund Availability beginning June 30, 2003. Similar to the other conservation programs, applications are accepted on a continual basis. Applications received by NRCS and FSA by close of business on August 1, 2003, were evaluated for funding in fiscal year 2003. Field offices

Grassland Reserve Program			
Offer Type	Number	Acres	Estimated Cost
<b>Rental Agreements</b>			
10-year	134	167,310	\$11,303,817
15-year	20	14,961	\$2,239,159
20-year	28	41,492	\$8,671,614
30-year	50	63,409	\$28,208,806
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>287,172</b>	<b>\$50,423,396</b>
<b>Easements</b>			
30-year	33	18,416	\$3,220,484
Permanent	59	33,784	\$14,580,057
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>52,200</b>	<b>\$17,800,541</b>

completed this process and reported information on evaluated applications by August 7, 2003.

A total of 324 applications were received for approximately 340,000 acres in rental agreement and easement offers. These offers represented an estimated program cost of over \$68 million. Offers were received from 58 counties. Applications are evaluated according to evaluation criteria developed specifically for Oklahoma. Successful applicants with high priority resource concerns will be contacted to develop contracts to obligate the current funding allocation. Unfunded applications will be maintained for future funding consideration if the applicant chooses to remain on the waiting list. While maintaining these deferred applications for future consideration, NRCS will continue to work with producers to implement their conservation plans. USDA is still reviewing easement requirements, and final determinations of accepted offers will be completed in early fiscal year 2004. USDA will continue the formal rulemaking process for the program and continue implementation in 2004.

### Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

FRPP is a voluntary program that helps farmers, ranchers and Indian Tribes keep their land in agriculture, and prevents conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses.

The final rule for the FRPP was published in the Federal Register on May 16, 2003. The request for proposals for easement acquisitions closed on May 19, 2003. Oklahoma proposal requests were sent directly to the state conservationist. Proposals received were evaluated, ranked, and selected for funding by July 1, 2003.

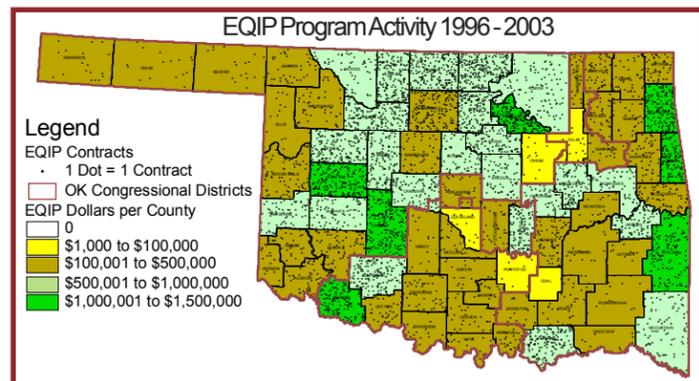
Two nongovernmental organizations submitted proposals for nine projects. These proposals are distributed across the state and represent protection of over 5,000 acres at an estimated cost of \$1.66 million. Over \$1.1 million was available for purchase of development rights through seven conservation easements, covering 1,116 acres in Cleveland, Comanche, LeFlore, Roger Mills, and Tulsa Counties. NRCS payment is limited to an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement. The applying organization is responsible for the balance of the purchase cost and the administrative costs associated with recording and filing the easement.

## Oklahoma... Getting Conservation On The Ground Through Strong Partnerships



Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council





For fiscal year 2003, sixty percent of the state's base allocation was provided to NRCS field offices to work with each conservation district in addressing the local priorities. Additional funding was provided for established local priorities (15 percent of state allocation) that correlated to the State Technical Committee identified priorities. The State Technical Committee identified eastern red cedar invading grazing lands, soil erosion, and water quality concerns from animal waste/fertilizer applications as the top resource concerns impacting Oklahoma. Enhanced funding was also available for conservation assistance in addressing geographically localized resource problems, and to stimulate conservation activity with Indian Tribes and other communities with historically low participation in conservation programs.

The fiscal year 2003 allocation for EQIP was over \$10.7 million. Over 950 contracts were approved covering 345,000 acres. There remains an estimated \$32 million in the over 5,000 unfunded applications for conservation needs where producers are ready and willing to complete conservation practices as assistance becomes available. Since 1997, over \$37 million in EQIP assistance has been allocated to over 5,400 farms for installation of conservation practices to protect Oklahoma's natural resources.

## Ground and Surface Water Conservation

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) reauthorized the EQIP. A special section of this program's legislation allowed for additional funding for targeting water conservation measures in the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer region in 2002. The legislation allowed for the expansion of the water conservation program nationwide in 2003.

The purpose of this special section is specifically to promote ground and surface water conservation activities to improve irrigation systems; convert to the production of less water intensive agricultural commodities; improve water storage through measures such as water banking and groundwater recharge; or

institute other measures that improve groundwater and surface water conservation, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The majority of the conservation measures are installed through a cost-share agreement not to exceed 50 percent of the cost of approved practices. Oklahoma received \$950,000 in funding in 2002, and just over \$834,000 in 2003. With the limited amount of cost-share available in 2003 and the sensitive conservation issues associated with the Ogallala aquifer, a determination was made to continue focusing the funding to the High Plains in 2003. Contracts were developed in 2003 addressing water conservation needs on 22 farms and 6,885 acres. There remains approximately 200 unfunded applications covering an estimated 62,000 acres and \$7.1 million in needed cost-share assistance.

## Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

Through the EWP program, NRCS provides assistance to people, and conserves natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, drought, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

All projects undertaken, with the exception of the purchase of floodplain easements, must be sponsored by a political subdivision of the state, such as city, county, or conservation district.

NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures. The remaining 25 percent must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP work can include removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; reseeding damage areas; and purchasing floodplain easements.

In fiscal year 2003, NRCS addressed many of the critical areas throughout Oklahoma. Approximately \$9.6 million was obligated to clean up ice storm debris from streams and state bridges. Another \$1.8 million was spent repairing bridges and county road abutments for stream restoration due to flooding. In all, the property protected was valued at over \$360 million.

## Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

GRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property. Section 2401 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Pub. L. 107-171) amended the Food Security Act of 1985 to authorize this program. NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Forest Service are coordinating implementation of GRP, which helps

## PROGRAM SUMMARY

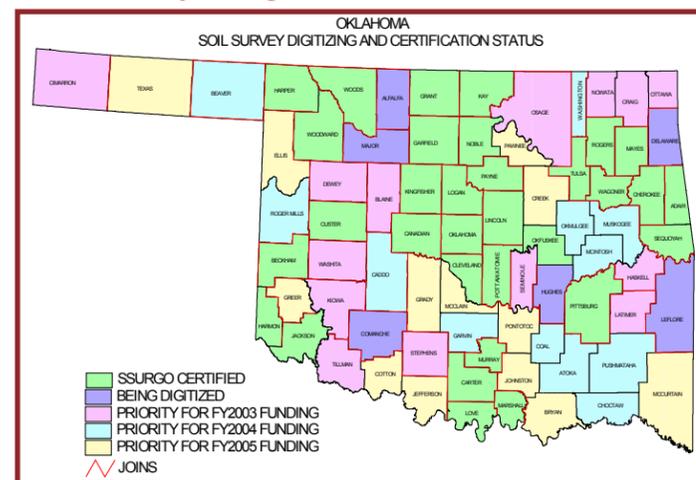
### Oklahoma Conservation Cost Share Program

The Oklahoma Conservation Cost Share program provides financial assistance through cost share payments to landowners, to apply conservation practices to help improve water quality and control soil erosion in the state. OCC administers the program at the state level and conservation districts administer the program locally. NRCS provides technical assistance and works closely with landowners to ensure that practices are carried out according to specifications. There were 1,119 participants and 1,198 practices installed this year, with approximately \$1 million in cost share assistance.

### Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA)

Provides natural resource inventories and assessments, planning assistance, and technical assistance in applying conservation systems and practices to protect and enhance natural resources. NRCS has the responsibility to provide conservation technical assistance to individuals, groups, communities, Indian Tribes, state and local government and other federal agencies. A close partnership between NRCS, 88 local conservation districts, OCC, and OACD provides the vehicle for delivery of conservation technical assistance in the state. A total of 189,964 customers received assistance in fiscal year 2003.

### Soil Survey Program



Soil surveys provide a field-based scientific inventory of soil resources, including soil maps, data about the physical and chemical properties of soils, and information on the potentials and limitations of each

soil. NRCS is the lead federal agency responsible for the soil mapping of private lands. Soil surveys have many uses but are intended for people to determine the best uses of the land based on soil type. Soils data can be used to determine highly erodible areas, potential wetlands, sites where livestock manure could be distributed with little environmental impact, prime farmland, or other soil interpretations critical to natural resource management. Soils data is also useful to urban planners and other government agencies.

Oklahoma currently has digital soil survey data (SSURGO) available for 34 counties. The digitizing process is ongoing on an additional 18 counties. Oklahoma hopes to have all 77 county soil surveys available in electronic format by 2007. New update soil surveys and supplements to published soil surveys are now being formatted to CD-ROM. Oklahoma currently has soil surveys on CD-ROM format for Tulsa, Woods, Logan, Oklahoma and Okfuskee counties.

## Technical Service Providers

### Cooperative Agreement with Duck's Unlimited (DU)

In fiscal year 2003, NRCS modified their ongoing cooperative agreement with DU to include technical and financial resources for the restoration of wetlands through the Wetlands Reserve Program. The original cooperative agreement with DU was initiated in 2000 to facilitate restoration work and alleviate the restoration backlog in engineering and contracting that had grown due to limited NRCS staff resources. Through this agreement, DU established a private lands conservation presence in Oklahoma that had not previously existed. Initially, two individuals were staffed to work 80 percent of their time on WRP. With the completion of this year's agreement, DU will have a presence of approximately 4.5 full time equivalent employees assisting in survey, design, contracting, and construction oversight of WRP projects across the state of Oklahoma.

### Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC)

NRCS in Oklahoma entered into a landmark agreement with ODWC for technical assistance in support of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The contribution agreement was the first of its kind between Oklahoma NRCS and ODWC. A longstanding partnership exists between both agencies in cooperatively providing technical and financial assistance to private land owners. In fact, ODWC personnel have assisted NRCS in the evaluation of every WHIP application since the beginning of the 1996 Farm Bill without any transfer of funds between agencies. This level of support will continue and be strengthened to

ensure on-the-ground success in wildlife habitat restoration. Through the contribution agreement process, ODWC will contribute at least 50 percent of the funding for four new wildlife technician positions and part-time secretarial assistance. These four wildlife technician positions will assume the responsibility for implementation and follow-up assistance to over 300 WHIP contract participants in implementing, evaluating and managing their wildlife habitat plans.

### **Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and Conservation Districts**

A technical assistance agreement was initiated with OCC to fund technical and administrative assistance to NRCS in the delivery of the Farm Bill programs. The agreement builds on the close partnership between NRCS and conservation districts. Conservation district personnel assist NRCS in the wide range of activities of the Farm Bill conservation programs in support activities where conservation districts have the strength and expertise. These activities encompass program information, outreach, conservation practice layout, certifications, and contract administrative support.

### **Watershed Rehabilitation Projects Outsourcing**

In fiscal year 2003, NRCS in Oklahoma spent approximately \$1.96 million dollars on federal contracts in lieu of having permanent staff complete the projects listed below.

There were five different vendors selected to initiate the work on the following projects. Six rehabilitation plans: Sandstone Creek Site 16A; Cobb Creek Site 2; Cobb Creek Site 1; and Sallisaw Creek Sites 32, 33, and 34. Four detailed engineering designs: Double Creek Sites 2, 3, and 5; and Sandstone Creek Site 16A. Oklahoma NRCS lacked an estimated 8.2 staff years to complete the work in-house.

### **Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program**

RC&D programs help people in rural areas plan and carry out activities that increase conservation of natural resources, stimulate and support economic development, and enhance the environment and standard of living in local communities.

Local people make the choices for their community – whether they work on land conservation, water management, environmental enhancement, community development, or something unique to their particular area. In every case, local people are the decision-makers.

Oklahoma has nine authorized RC&D areas, serving 75 of the 77 counties. This year, the RC&D councils completed 145 projects, assisting 523,587 citizens and 48

communities. A total of \$101,280,997 was utilized to complete these projects. NRCS administers the program, providing a coordinator and administrative support to each of the areas.

### **Small Watershed Rehabilitation**

Local watershed project sponsors, assisted by NRCS, have constructed 2,098 upstream flood control dams in Oklahoma since 1948. Fifty-nine of these dams have exceeded their 50-year design life. By 2005, a total of 132 dams will have reached or exceeded their design life, and by 2010 that number climbs to 463 dams. By 2015, 1,090 dams, or more than half of all dams constructed in Oklahoma, will have reached or exceeded their design life. A survey of rehabilitation needs of watershed dams in Oklahoma indicated that 190 dams were in need of rehabilitation at an estimated cost of \$52.7 million.

A Supplemental Watershed Plan - Environmental Assessment (EA) for rehabilitation has been completed in the Sandstone Creek Watershed in Roger Mills County. The world's first completed upstream flood control project was also the first rehabilitation project to be funded under PL-106-472.

A Rehabilitation Watershed Plan - Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been completed and approved for funding for the six flood control dams in the Double Creek Watershed, Washington County, Oklahoma. The alternative selected calls for upgrading the dams to class "C" high hazard criteria to protect homes, businesses, and schools downstream. Oklahoma began construction on Double Creek sites 1 and 4, and completed construction on Sandstone Creek site 17A in 2003. In 2004, there will be ten new rehabilitation projects under construction.

### **Oklahoma State Technical Committee**

The State Technical Committee provides recommendations for establishing criteria, priorities, and other state-level initiatives on the Farm Bill and other USDA conservation programs. The committee serves as an advisor to the NRCS state conservationist in the implementation of conservation programs within Oklahoma. Currently, 90 representatives from state and federal agencies, community based organizations, agribusinesses, and Indian Tribes serve on the Oklahoma USDA State Technical Committee. This committee reviews proposals from the local level and provides advice and recommendations to the state conservationist on conservation priorities and initiatives. They also make recommendations on statewide program assistance, eligible conservation practices, cost-share and incentive payment limits, and on criteria to prioritize all Farm Bill conservation

program applications.

In 2003, the Oklahoma State Technical Committee reviewed conservation priorities established by local conservation districts and eleven Indian Tribes in meeting the conservation needs at the local level. Sixty-one separate natural resource conservation issues were identified and prioritized by the 88 conservation districts serving all of Oklahoma. Through this process, resource treatment needs were identified on over 32 million acres at an estimated cost of over \$911 million.

### **Earth Team Volunteer Program**

The Oklahoma Earth Team Volunteer Program exceeded its goals as well as set national records this fiscal year. Volunteers totaled 1,559, and 93,365 hours worked. This exceeded the set goal for Oklahoma as well as set the national record for number of hours worked within a state, in fiscal year 2003.

Oklahoma did its part in constructing the nation's largest bluebird trail by linking the four states in the South Central Region. Volunteers built and erected more than 600 nesting boxes and linked adjoining counties in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana with the trail. The trail provides habitat for the Eastern bluebird, where they can lay their eggs and raise their families. Oklahoma plans to continue working on this project yearly.

### **Oklahoma Outreach Program**

Oklahoma, in its dynamic approach of providing valuable and timely information to the people of Oklahoma, achieved some tremendous numbers in fiscal year 2003. To inform the public about the availability of programs and services, NRCS developed a team strategy that included the field service centers, community based organizations, the Oklahoma partnership, and the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council that represents the Native American agricultural population in Oklahoma.

Through this effort, 2,959 newspaper articles were published in local newspapers throughout the state that reached an audience of over 6,000,000 people.

There were 360 outreach meetings conducted. These meetings included workshops, farm shows, conferences, state and county fairs, and career fairs to high schools and universities.

### **Small Watershed Program**

Oklahoma is a national leader in upstream flood control with 2,098 floodwater retarding structures in place. The state has always been a leader, beginning with the first flood control dam, Cloud Chief Watershed,

in the Cavalry Creek Watershed, a tributary to the Washita River, completed in 1948. The dam was built under Public Law 78-534 (Flood Control Act), which was passed in 1944, and covered 11 watersheds in the nation. Oklahoma also has the first completed upstream flood control project in the nation, Sandstone Creek Watershed in Roger Mills County. In 1954, Congress saw the benefits of the 11 authorized watersheds, and passed Public Law 83-566, which expanded the program to the rest of the nation's watersheds. Oklahoma now has seventy-one PL-566 projects.

Oklahoma's watershed projects provide protection for over two million acres of agricultural land in the floodplains. The dams also provide protection from flooding of roads, homes, and other structures.

Water storage has been added to 42 watershed lakes for water supplies to cities and rural water districts. Water storage has also been added to other lakes for irrigation, fish and wildlife, and recreational use.

Under the Authority of PL-566, local sponsors have requested assistance on over 100 watersheds in Oklahoma. From these requests, work plans have been completed and approved for 71 watersheds, 982 structures have been completed, and another 324 structures are awaiting construction.

In the Washita River Basin, planning under the authority of PL-534 is essentially complete. However, a continuing need exists for supplements and revisions of the 64 project plans to meet new requirements. The planned sub-watersheds contain 1,117 structures, of which 1,103 have been constructed. Currently, 14 structures remain to be constructed.

### **USDA COST SHARE PROGRAMS**

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that addresses serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources.

Unlike in previous years when the EQIP was delivered through priority areas and statewide ranking criteria, the 2002 Farm Bill renewed the emphasis on locally-led conservation, and prioritized resource concerns at the local level. NRCS, working through Oklahoma's 88 conservation districts and USDA local work groups, established conservation priorities and application evaluation criteria. EQIP cost-share funding was allocated to the local offices working through the conservation districts for conservation measures to address the locally identified resource concerns.