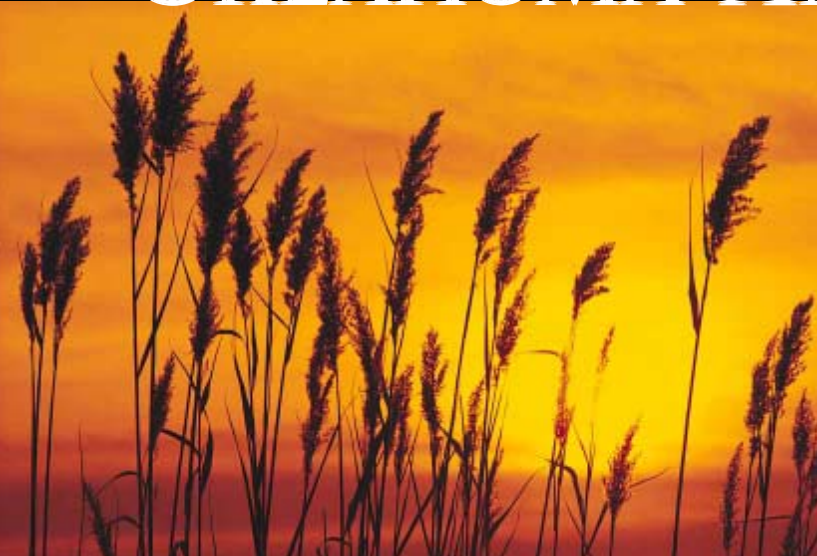


# 2007

# OKLAHOMA ANNUAL REPORT



Message From  
Ronald L. Hilliard, State Conservationist

Dear Oklahomans:

The past year 2007, was an exciting and eventful year for the NRCS in Oklahoma. When I came to Oklahoma in the fall of 2006, the state had just experienced one of the worst droughts in history. Since that time, there have been two ice storms, heavy snow in the panhandle, flooding rains throughout the spring and summer, and even an inland hurricane that produced as much as a 500 year storm event.

We have the distinction of having approximately 20 percent of the upstream watershed structures in the nation, with a total of 2,105. Many of these are reaching the end of their designed life of 50 years. Even with that, each structure that was filled to capacity performed as designed, receiving the runoff and slowly releasing it to protect life and property downstream. The project sponsors and the Oklahoma partnership are to be complemented on their operation and maintenance efforts that have allowed these structures to function properly.

Even with these catastrophic events, the employees of NRCS, along with the Oklahoma conservation partnership, put thousands of acres of conservation practices on the ground, improved water quality throughout many of the state's watersheds, and had a positive impact on Oklahoma's rural economy. We have reached out to the underserved communities and individuals thus establishing many new cooperators and partnerships. As I have stated, there will always be change, but our goal should never change – we must continue to see the vision of conservation on the landscape. We must keep our attention on doing what is right for the people and the land in Oklahoma. We will always have goals that must be met, but our true goal of getting conservation on the land will always be our highest priority. The conservation partnership is one of our greatest strengths and we must continue to build upon that strength.

I know that with the continued support of the conservation partnership, we can all work together in 2008 to provide the best possible service to our customers.



**MAIL**

USDA, NRCS  
100 USDA, Suite 206  
Stillwater, OK 74074

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**PHONE**

405-742-1204

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**FAX**

405-742-1201

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

**INTERNET**

[www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov)

## 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.

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (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 324 participants and 375 practices installed this year, with approximately \$311,930 in cost share assistance.

## Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA)

Services provided through NRCS technical assistance to customers contributed to the planning of over 3,531 conservation systems on 1,403,398 acres. In addition, 4,497 conservation systems were applied on over 1,564,889 acres.

Highlights of conservation practices and systems include:

- ◆ Application of conservation systems on grazing lands ~ 967,802 Acres
- ◆ Application of conservation systems on cropland ~ 370,767 Acres
- ◆ Application of conservation systems on forestland ~ 9,373 Acres
- ◆ Comprehensive nutrient plans were applied on 84 farms for 14,205 acres.

## Food Security Act Conservation Compliance

There were 417 tracts assigned for review in Oklahoma from the national random sample. Field offices added 164 tracts to the sample which were assigned by FSA for county committee

members, FSA employees, and 569/whistleblower requests. The national sample selection process was refined to the extent that almost all of the tracts in the random sample were valid tracts requiring review. This reduced the workload significantly, as offices did not have to select additional replacement tracts for review. NRCS employees spent nearly 1200 hours on compliance review activities on 581 tracts.

Due to extreme weather conditions in 2007, there were

	Random Tract	Replacement Tract	USDA Employee Tract	Whistleblower or Agency Requested Addition	Variance Tract in 2006
In Compliance	65,579	3,124	6,844	12,081	1367
Non-Compliance				633	160
Variance	672		322	160	294

some variances granted in situations where the producers were unable to get into the fields in a timely manner to plant the required cover. Eleven variances were granted in 2007 and three tracts were found to be out of compliance. The variances accounted for less than 3 percent of the total evaluated acres, which was over 91,000 acres.

## Farm Bill Conservation Programs

The programs authorized through the 2002 Farm Bill provide a broad array of conservation opportunities for Oklahoma's private land stewards. The programs provide significant levels of financial and technical assistance to address natural resource issues on working lands, and opportunities to restore and preserve wetlands and agricultural lands for future generations. On the following page, a table summarizes the federal financial assistance funds obligated in landowner agreements in fiscal year (FY) 2007. A pie chart on the next page shows the breakdown of FY 2007 conservation payments by program. A total of 14,175 payments for just over \$71 million were made to Farm Bill program participants in 2007, including FSA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). A total of 4,479 payments for just over \$35.5 million were processed for programs administered by NRCS.



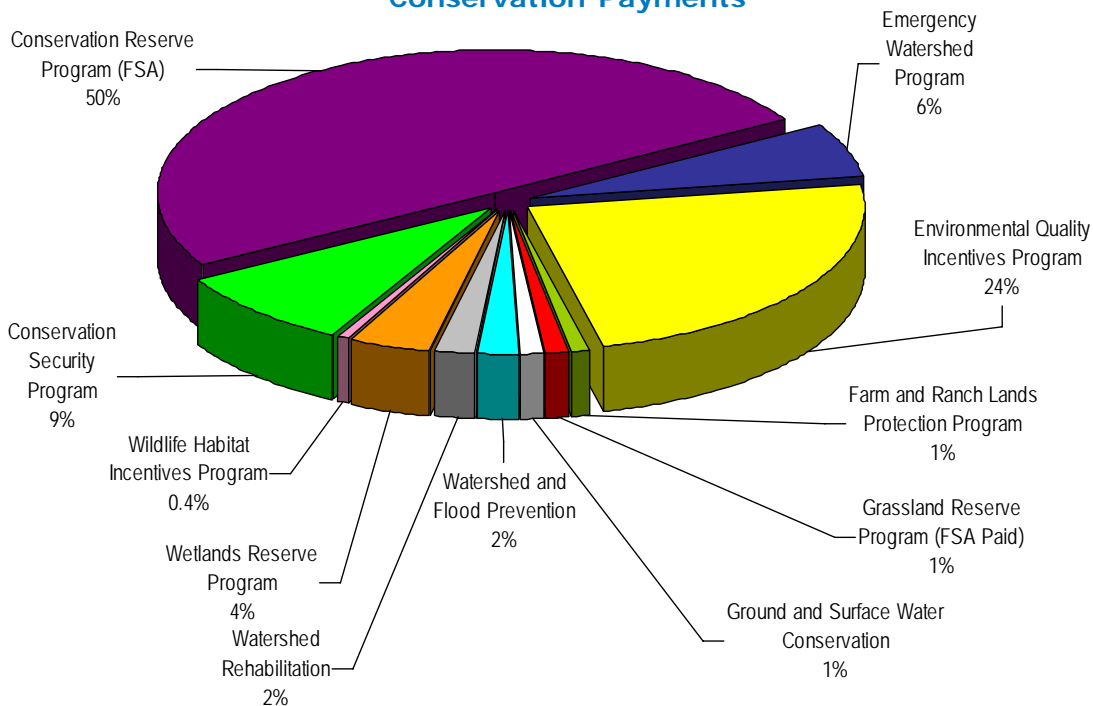
**Farm Bill Conservation Programs**

Conservation Programs	Allocation	Contracts	Easement	Acres
Conservation Security Program (CSP)	*\$4,623,900	766	n/a	371,500
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	\$23,328,434	1,649	n/a	590,896
Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP)	**\$0	n/a	5	426
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	\$1,391,297	48	1	9,527
Ground and Surface Water Conservation	\$416,534	9	n/a	2,364
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	\$3,715,994	10	9	1,843
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	\$627,126	64	n/a	26,503

\*No new signup conducted in 2007. Allocation is for annual payments of existing contracts.

\*\*No new agreements, all funding from prior year activities.

**Conservation Payments**



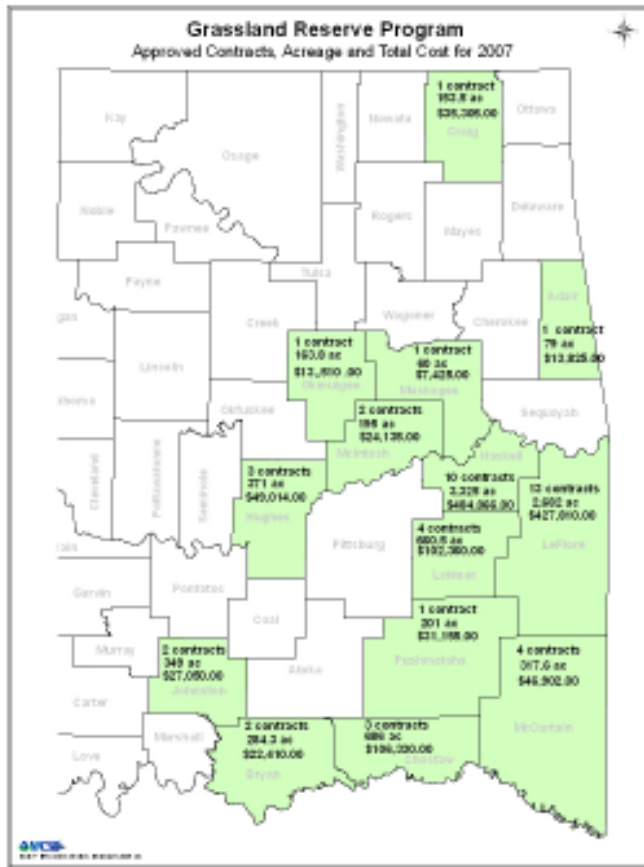
**Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)**

In July 2007, NRCS received an allocation of nearly \$1.5 million in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). This funding was provided for Limited Resource Farmers or Ranchers (LRF) and Beginning Farmers or Ranchers (BFR) to offer grasslands into GRP rental agreements of 10, 15, or 20 years. FSA and NRCS worked together to establish a target area in which the highest concentration of the eligible land and applicants might fall. This encompassed land in 30 eastern Oklahoma counties. A signup was completed in less than a two month window from signup until

contract obligation. The program resulted in contracts on over 9,500 acres with 48 producers in 14 eastern Oklahoma counties.

The following table shows the current status of GRP permanent and 30 year easements:

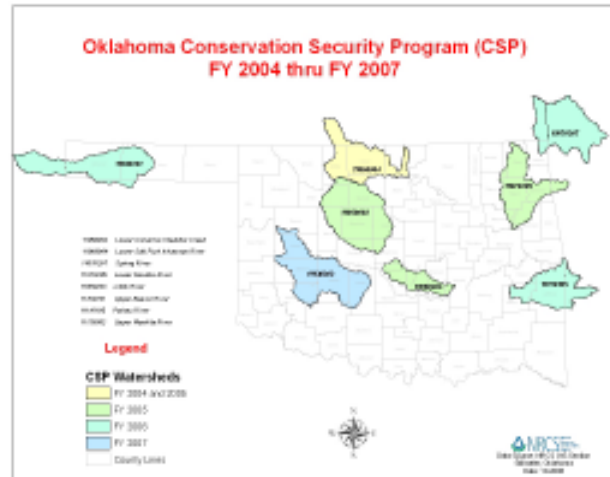
County	Easement Type	Number	Acres	Status
Craig	30 Year	2	1,495.6	Approved-03
Nowata	30 Year	1	631	Approved-03
Osage	Permanent	1	969.3	Approved-05
Woodward	30 Year	1	69.5	Approved-07
Kay	30 Year	1	3,280.7	Approved-07



### Conservation Security Program (CSP)

The Upper Washita River Watershed was announced as the CSP watershed for FY 2007. The watershed is comprised of 2.06 million acres in Dewey, Custer, Washita, Kiowa, Caddo, and Grady Counties in southwestern Oklahoma.

Data sources indicate that there are 724 farmers/ranchers operating 8,218 farms/ranches in the watershed that are potentially eligible to participate in CSP. No CSP signup was conducted in FY 2007 but a signup is anticipated in early calendar year 2008.



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

Since 2001, Oklahoma NRCS has entered into cooperative agreements with four private land trust organizations for FRPP purchases. In 2007, Oklahoma doubled the number of FRPP easements in place in the state and nearly doubled the acreage under easements. Five additional easements on 426 acres were acquired by Land Legacy in Comanche County. All these easements are part of the Army Compatible Use Buffer Program (ACUBP), which is an attempt to deter development and urban land uses within one mile of a military base, so that training missions and related activities will not impact or be impacted by uses on these adjoining lands.

FRPP easements in Oklahoma total 565 acres on properties located in the counties of Cleveland, Comanche, Oklahoma, and Rogers. Work continues on additional FRPP acquisitions in Cleveland, Comanche, Johnston, Oklahoma, and Rogers.

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Again for FY 2007, sixty percent of the state's base allocation was provided to NRCS field offices to work with each conservation district in addressing the local priority resource concerns as determined through the locally led process. Additional funding continued for established local priorities (15 percent of state allocation) that correlated to the State Technical Committee (STTC) identified priorities. The STTC identified the following as Oklahoma's top resource concerns:

- ◆ eastern red cedar invading grazing lands
- ◆ soil erosion on cropland and grazinglands
- ◆ irrigation water conservation, and
- ◆ water quality concerns from animal waste/fertilizer applications

Enhanced funding was also available for conservation assistance in addressing geographically localized

**Top Ten Resource Concerns for 2007 EQIP Contracts**

Category	Resource Concern	Applications Received	Application Acres	Contracts Obligated	Obligation Amount	Contracted Acres
Plant Condition	Productivity, Health and Vigor	1183	397,010	877	\$12,864,885	335,826
Domestic Animals	Inadequate Stock Water	1059	396,614	767	\$12,809,507	330,111
Plant Condition	Noxious and Invasive Plants	1084	418,930	734	\$11,322,202	335,336
Soil Erosion	Sheet and Rill	760	261,376	580	\$10,096,735	225,882
Plant Condition	Forage Quality and Palatability	675	213,115	489	\$7,725,608	171,803
Domestic Animals	Inadequate Quantities and Quality of Feed and Forage	686	198,252	467	\$7,091,481	148,122
Soil Erosion	Classic Gully	549	168,791	374	\$6,745,808	136,541
Water Quality	Excessive Nutrients and Organics in Surface Water	322	82,400	198	\$3,493,553	65,251
Soil Erosion	Ephemeral Gully	302	95,982	224	\$3,114,342	82,526
Water Quantity	Inefficient Water Use on Irrigated Land	93	14,788	67	\$2,732,556	11,818

**2007 EQIP Top Ten Planned Practices**

Practice	Cost-Share	Amount	Cost/Unit	Count
Brush Management	\$3,587,208	147,195 AC	\$24.37	2,178
Fence	\$2,654,707	3,522,240 LF	\$0.75	1,527
Pasture and Hay Planting	\$2,424,499	72,473 AC	\$33.45	1,685
Nutrient Management	\$2,140,678	96,869 AC	\$22.10	3,141
Pond	\$1,911,436	936 NO	\$2,042.13	886
Irrigation System, Sprinkler	\$1,557,701	6,823 AC	\$228.30	66
Grade Stabilization Structure	\$1,504,018	301 NO	\$4,996.74	264
No-Till	\$1,278,403	86,570 AC	\$14.77	312
Irrigation System, Micro	\$852,050	1,664 AC	\$512.05	15
Pest Management	\$588,096	94,217 AC	\$6.24	385
<b>Total Top 10</b>	\$18,498,796	78.6%		
<b>Total All Practices</b>	\$23,524,502			

resource problems, and to stimulate conservation activity with tribes and other communities with historically low participation in conservation programs.

This year’s allocation for EQIP was over \$23.5 million and 1,649 contracts were approved covering 590,896 acres. At fiscal year’s end, an estimated \$16.2 million in the 2,853 unfunded applications for conservation needs where producers are ready and willing to

complete conservation practices as assistance becomes available.

In addition to the county level allocations, the four statewide initiatives were continued through the EQIP in 2007.

**Statewide AFO/CAFO Resource Concern Criteria**

Three contracts were funded with a total value of \$54,938. A total of 4 applications were received

**Statewide Resource Concerns Fund Codes**

Fund Code	Applications Received	Contracts Funded	Contract Dollars	Contract Acres	Unfunded Applications
Irrigation	71	21	\$834,803	2,634	34
Manure Transfer	151	33	\$312,933	7,991	98
Animal Waste Management	4	3	\$54,938	800	0
Lagoon Closures	1	1	\$29,048	910	0
Quail Habitat	59	16	\$578,898	29,653	36

requesting \$197,094 in financial assistance.

This statewide resource concern was established in 2004 and has continued through 2007. An allocation was set aside to fund animal waste management applications statewide. These funds were available only to existing and expanding beef, dairy, or swine confined feeding operations. A lower priority was given to operations that are planning expansion beyond current levels or capacity, and all applications for new facilities and poultry operations were ineligible for evaluation under the statewide AFO/CAFO resource concern criteria.

**Statewide Irrigation Water Conservation Concern**

Twenty-one contracts were funded with a total value of \$834,803. A total of 62 applications were received requesting \$1.9 million in financial assistance.

This funding pool, along with the Ground and Surface Water Conservation (exclusive to the three Panhandle counties), continues to provide irrigators the opportunity for cost-share assistance to increase system efficiency and provide for water savings.

**Statewide Manure Transfer Resource Concern**

Thirty-three contracts were funded with a total value of \$312,933. A total of 151 applications were received requesting \$1.3 million in financial assistance.

The statewide manure transfer resource concern, which was developed in EQIP beginning in FY 2004, was continued through 2007. This resource concern addresses potential environmental concerns relative to the management of animal wastes in Oklahoma’s Nutrient Limited Waters (NLW) and Scenic River watersheds.

**Ground and Surface Water Conservation**

Nine contracts were funded with a total value of \$416,532. Water conservation measure will be applied to more than 2,364 acres through these contracts.

A special section of the EQIP program’s legislation in the 2002 Farm Bill allowed for additional funding for targeting water conservation measures in the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer region in 2002. 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, over \$834,000 in 2003, over \$940,000 in 2004, over \$840,000 in 2005, and over \$712,000 in 2006. With the limited amount of cost-share available since 2002 and the sensitive conservation issues associated with the Ogallala aquifer, a determination has been made to continue focusing the funding to the High Plains.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**

Sixty-four contracts were funded with a total value of \$627,126. In addition to the obligated contracts, a total of 635 applications were received, requesting \$4.1 million in financial assistance.

The 2007 enrollment of 64 WHIP contracts will result in the creation or improvement of wildlife habitat on 26,503 acres. Currently, there are 258 active contracts providing for wildlife habitat improvement on over 103,000 acres in Oklahoma.

### Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The WRP financial assistance allocation for fiscal year 2007 totaled \$3.7 million. With this allocation, Oklahoma enrolled land into one restoration agreement for 120 acres, and nine permanent easements restoring and protecting over 1,843 acres of wetlands and associated buffers in three counties. Since 1996, Oklahoma landowners have enrolled 57,812 acres into the WRP through 239 agreements with over \$34 million in federal assistance for acquisition and restoration of wetlands in 49 of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

Beginning with the program's inception, NRCS has worked directly with landowners, state and federal agencies, and private conservation organizations to complete hydrology restoration, bottomland hardwood reforestation, native wet meadows, rangeland reestablishment and natural regeneration on 52,644.2 of these acres. The Oklahoma conservation partnership has completed restoration action on over 91 percent of the enrolled property at the end of 2007. In 2007, hydrology restoration was completed on 10 easements totaling 2558.2 acres protected. Over 28,000 containerized tree seedlings were planted in the fall of 2007 on 1,400 acres. One unique accomplishment completed in 2007 was the

establishment and enhancement of 1,400 acres of wetland buffers, utilizing containerized tree seedlings on 41 easements encompassing fourteen counties. Twelve species of native oaks were planted making this the most site specific and complex planting of bottomland hardwoods on WRP, to date.

The much needed precipitation received in the spring and summer of 2007 hampered hydrology restoration at previously planned levels but we anticipate the completion of 2,700 acres of wetland restoration in 2007, and 400 acres of bottomland native grass restoration. Work continues across the state closing easements and completing restoration activity on existing easements.

### Watershed Program

Program	Number of Watershed Projects	Number of Dams Constructed To Date	Number of Dams Planned but not yet Constructed	Number of Dams Rehabilitated To Date	Number of Dams with Rehab Plans Authorized
PL-566	68	985	319	0	17
PL-534	55	1107	14	6	11
Pilot	1	6	0	4	6
RC&D	4	7	0	0	0
Totals	128	2105	333	10	34

Oklahoma has had a strong history in the watershed program since its inception in the 1940s. The 2,105 watershed dams constructed to date represent a \$2 billion public infrastructure that provides average annual monetary benefits exceeding \$75 million. Oklahoma's watershed projects provide protection for over two million acres of agricultural land. The dams provide protection from flooding of roads, utilities, homes, and commercial properties. These lakes are sources of water for livestock, irrigation, and recreation. Water storage has been added to 29 watershed lakes for water supplies to cities and rural water districts.

Many farming operations and property development have been designed based upon the protection and resources provided by these lakes. Oklahoma's watershed infrastructure is aging. More than half of the 2,105



*Oklahoma has 2,105 watershed dams that provide an average annual monetary benefit exceeding \$75 million.*





*Oklahoma received record rainfalls in 2007. With flooding events, 121 auxiliary spillways flowed, only 20 sustained damage*

*Left, Sugar Creek L-44 flood control dam held water but eventually the floodwaters caused erosion in the spillway and the dam..*

watershed dams in Oklahoma are now more than 40 years old; 250 have already exceeded their 50 year design life. Operation and maintenance of these dams is an increasing workload.

Most of the dams were originally planned and designed to protect agriculture land. However, homes and businesses have been built downstream from some of these dams so they are now classified as high hazard. There are now 188 dams that are classified as high hazard; most do not meet current safety criteria.

There is over a \$100 million backlog of the 333 dams that are planned but not yet constructed. Oklahoma NRCS has received funding and did construct 18 new dams in the past ten years. The table below shows the status of Oklahoma's watershed projects.

### Watershed Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation projects involve high priority dams which have been classified as high hazard because of the potential for loss of life should the dams fail. Rehabilitation requires that the dams be upgraded to meet current safety criteria and performance standards for high hazard dams.

Since 1998, when rehabilitation planning started on the nation's first flood control dam to be rehabilitated in the Sergeant Major Creek Watershed in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma, rehabilitation plans have been completed on 34 dams and construction has been completed on 10.

By 2010, 463 dams will have reached or exceeded the end of their designed life, and by 2015, 1,090 dams, or more than half of all dams constructed in Oklahoma, will have reached this mark. The average cost of dam rehabilitation in Oklahoma is about \$900,000. Current funding needs, based on dam age alone, are nearly \$135 million. By 2015 funding needs will exceed \$450 million.

### Emergency Watershed Program

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, NRCS provides assistance to people, and conserves natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by flood, fire, drought, tornado, and other natural occurrences. All projects undertaken, with the exception of the floodplain easements, must be sponsored by a political subdivision of a state, such as a city, county, or conservation district or a tribal government.

NRCS may bear up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures. The remaining 25 percent must come from the local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services. EWP funds are not an annual line item in agricultural appropriations such as other NRCS programs. Funding is from special congressional authorizations that appropriate money after the storm has occurred and sites have been selected for assistance.

EWP work can include removing debris from the

floodplain in stream channels, road ditches, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting stream banks; reseeding critically eroding areas; and purchase of floodplain easements.

In FY 2007, NRCS spent \$4.7 million in helping Oklahoma recover from flood damages. The funds were used to protect rural roads and bridges, stream corridors, and infrastructure from failure due to additional flooding and sedimentation from future storm events.



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

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program helps 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.

Oklahoma has nine authorized RC&D areas, serving all 77 counties.

Local people make the choices for their community – 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.

### ASCOG RC&D

For FY 2007, the ASCOG RC&D Council completed 18 projects across the eight-county ASCOG RC&D area, totaling \$554,830 going into local communities

for rural and economic development projects.

In cooperation with the High Plains and Cross Timbers RC&D Councils, the ASCOG RC&D Council conducted three Level One and one Level Two Grant Writing Workshops. Forty-two participants represented city and county governments, private business, local leaders and Tribal Governments. A fifth workshop is scheduled for January 2008.

The ASCOG RC&D Council continues to provide review oversight to the Oklahoma Scenic Byways Advisory Council to establish scenic byways across the state to promote tourism and economic development. At the present time, one national byway has been designated, seven routes have received state designation, and four other proposed routes are in the planning and application stage. This statewide project will continue to dramatically impact Oklahoma's economy.

### Cherokee Hills RC&D

The Cherokee Hills RC&D Council recruited one new council member from Adair County and three new members from Sequoyah County. The Council assisted Westville Public Schools in a successful Cherokee Nation Learn and Serve Grant application for \$40,000.

Cherokee Hills hosted an outreach meeting on March 14<sup>th</sup> where participants were provided information about programs and services from various USDA agencies.

Cherokee Hills RC&D partnered with Tallgrass RC&D to host another outreach meeting for Mayes and Wagoner Counties. Each Council provided \$200 for facilitation of the meeting. Over 110 people attended the meeting. Attendees heard about ethanol fuel production and the importance of proper stocking rates during drought years.

The Cherokee Hills RC&D approved the Stilwell Cultural Events Center Project, and has been working with the local committee on developing a brochure, and realizing the benefits of forming a 501(c) 3 non profit foundation to enhance their funding potential for the project.

The Council helped Ouachita Mountains RC&D council with the Forestry on the Grow Conference and Expo held in May. The Council also provided grant resource assistance to Greasy School for constructing a community walking track located at the school.

Cherokee Hills RC&D hosted and moderated the Cherokee County Locally Led meeting in conjunction with an all agency outreach meeting in July. The partnership included NRCS, FSA, OSU Extension, OCC, OSRC, ODWC, and RC&D. The meeting was a huge success.

The Council continues to work on the Poultry Waste Processing Project. The buildings are now 80 percent complete, and all the concrete has been poured. When construction is finished, the installation of the process train will begin. Cherokee Hills RC&D received a grant from the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture for \$150,000 for the project. The Council met with representatives from the EPA and OCC at the site, and all participants were encouraged by the progress this year and anxious to get the facility running. The Council is currently working on the 2008-2013 Area Plan Community Surveys.

#### **Cross Timbers RC&D**

The Cross Timbers RC&D serves ten counties in east central Oklahoma. Led by 36 Council Representatives from this region, the Association is active with projects addressing issues affecting the communities in this area.

In 2007, the Council continued to work with facilitating projects including the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, Lt. Governors Invitational Turkey Hunt, the Youth Disability Fishing Derby, assistance to the Annual Forestry Conference, the continuation of the Oklahoma Youth Forestry and Wildlife Camp, Regional Grant Writing Workshops, and Area Leadership Programs.

In addition, new projects were created to expand job opportunities through two Revolving Loan Funds now available to the public. Also, efforts with biofuels, agritourism and community water supply systems were

continued through the efforts of the Council and their supporting partnerships.

#### **Fun Country RC&D**

South Central Oklahoma offers a gold mine of tourism and recreation opportunities. Fun Country is actively involved in working with communities and businesses in meeting the growing demands of the visitors and vacationers. However, after years of drought, this area was inflicted with extreme rainfalls and flooding concerns. A partnership of federal, state, local and civic organizations joined together to try and mitigate the damaging effects of the weather and loss of local tourism dollars.



A strong alliance of business and industry professionals exist to focus on the needs and concerns of area economic development. Several dynamic workshops were presented around the area to better train managers, negate workforce deficiencies and provide ample networking opportunities with service providers. Agritourism businesses are also a thriving enterprise and a statewide Agritourism conference was held in the Fun Country area with local tours of agribusiness ventures.

Natural resource opportunities exist in both areas of water and eastern red cedar. The state water planning process is of considerable interest in this area with the Arbuckle-Simpson aquifer. Four area meetings were held in this area for public input. While eastern red cedar is still considered of nemesis of South Central Oklahoma, local entrepreneurs continue to look for opportunities for value-added product development. Biofuels is a growing interest with local ag producers, area communities and on-going research at Noble Foundation.

This year, Fun Country hosted the OARC&D Annual Conference and gained local support, interest and new members, while providing a diverse informational and educational program.

#### **Great Plains RC&D**

Great Plains RC&D is the statewide leader in the effort to provide technology transfer through numerous



workshops and producer meetings promoting no-till conservation cropping systems. The Southern Plains Agricultural Resources Coalition was created to develop market based incentives for implementing conservation practices and improving soil quality.

The Great Plains RC&D provided educational opportunities through the statewide Women in Agriculture & Small Business Conference, the Oklahoma BioBlitz, and through natural resources outdoor classrooms. Alternative agriculture enterprises and agritourism are continually assisted and developed. New farmers markets and the Farm-to-School project provide additional economic opportunities. The Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma successfully creates synergy and regionalism along with promoting economic development through tourism in western Oklahoma.

#### High Plains RC&D

High Plains RC&D serves eight northwestern Oklahoma counties including the Oklahoma Panhandle. High Plains RC&D is on the cutting edge of many local resource development and conservation programs and over the past eight years has utilized over \$10 million in grant and program monies to create over \$120 million in completed project costs and new and expanded businesses, most of which were tied to the natural resources of the area. High Plains RC&D is one of the six national biomass conversion to energy project study areas and leads a large partnership in clearing Eastern Red Cedar along the North Canadian River, monitoring changes in stream flow, ground water, revegetation, and using the cedar for economic development. High Plains RC&D also is leading an effort to develop ways to gasify Eastern Red Cedar for electricity generation. High Plains RC&D helped discover commercial lignite deposits in the region and is involved in projects to use geothermal energy from iodine production for electricity generation, as well as iodine production through a newly invented ion-exchange process developed by one of its partners that will result in the creation of many new jobs that will manufacture a safe fumigant for vegetable production worldwide.

#### Ouachita Mountains RC&D

Ouachita Mountains RC&D hosted the 12th Annual Forestry on the Grow Conference & Expo which attracted attendees and exhibitors from 14 states.

In 2007, the Council sponsored the First Annual Southeast District Land Judging Contest with assistance from area conservation districts and Eastern Oklahoma



State College.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma was selected as the Outstanding Supporting Organization by the Southwest States RC&D Regional Association for its contributions to the Ouachita Mountains RC&D area.

The Council hosted two Women in Agriculture & Small Business Conferences in the area to provide opportunities for the underserved.

The Council continues to support and assist with the annual Deer Hunt that is specially conducted for the physically disabled, as well as with the Lt. Governor's Turkey Hunt for economic development in Southeast Oklahoma.

Other annual projects include the Southeast District Forestry Judging Contest for FFA and 4-H students, forestry contest training workshops, and the Forestry Contest Scholarship Program (approximately \$95,000 in college scholarships have been awarded to the district contest high-scoring individuals).

#### Tallgrass RC&D

Tallgrass RC&D continues to utilize the resources from



its revolving loan fund to create jobs across the area. Since its inception the program has helped create 5 new businesses and 12 new jobs. In addition the Association's membership is working with assisting Prairie Song, a period village near Bartlesville used to introduce tourists to Oklahoma's colorful past. Along with Prairie Song, the Association is actively working on capturing the living histories of some of the area residents on video as a means of preserving the personal influences on Northeast Oklahoma's history. In addition the Association is coordinating a statewide conference showcasing the opportunities across rural Oklahoma, which will be held in May 2009 in Oklahoma City.

### Wheatland RC&D

Wheatland RC&D became a distributor for the Gifts in Kind Program, and has received the first shipment of printers, scanners and copiers for distribution to Title I schools. Several pieces of equipment have already been delivered to area schools with a limit of ten per qualifying school.

Wheatland RC&D delivered several hundred pounds of seeds to the William S. Key Correctional Center, where inmates will grow the seeds into viable trees. The trees will then be transplanted to public properties. The project is in its tenth year, and has assisted many towns and cities replace trees damaged from ice storms.

Wheatland assisted in securing a Community Development Block Grant Community Revitalization for \$100,456, and a USDA Community Facility Grant of \$18,000. Funds will be used for improvements to the Frontier Country Museum and Historical Center located in Crescent. Improvements include restoration of the historic Alpha Schoolhouse, moving the Shiloh Primitive Baptist Church to a foundation on the museum property, paving the parking area, and adding security fencing. Frontier Country Historical Society volunteers will provide most of the labor as a match for this project.

The Town of Breckenridge will make repairs to their sewer lagoon with funds received through a Community Development Block Grant Phase I Engineering. Wheatland RC&D assisted in obtaining the \$240,500 grant. The town is under a Consent Order from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality until this project is completed.

Wheatland also helped obtain a Tribal Historical Preservation Grant for the Peoria Indian Tribe of Oklahoma. Funds will be used for Phase II of the restoration of the Peoria Tribal Schoolhouse. The schoolhouse and cemetery are the only two remaining properties belonging to the Tribe after they were relocated to Oklahoma.

Wheatland RC&D and the Great Plains RC&D obtained an RBEG for \$61,349. The funds will be used to purchase equipment for a mill in Hobart. The mill will grind whole wheat flour using local produce. Much of the wheat will come from no-till farms, and wheat produces a healthier product.

Wheatland RC&D purchased a no-till drill to be used by producers on their farms. No-till improves soil quality and helps conserve topsoil and moisture. This type of farming also uses fewer pesticides, resulting in a more organic product that health-conscious customers prefer.

Wheatland concluded a successful Outreach Program utilizing an NRCS grant for \$40,000, with matching funds and in-kind services, for a total of \$82,000 from the Career Tech Centers, OCC, the OACD, RD, RC&Ds, OSU Extension Service and FSA. The project consisted of eight statewide meetings providing information for disadvantaged farmers. The programs offered information on USDA technical and financial assistance programs.

In September, Wheatland RC&D co-hosted the statewide Women in Ag and Small Business conference in Oklahoma City. Attendees were presented with a wide range of farm issues. The conference offered a great opportunity for networking among the women, where they shared experiences and valuable information.

### Oklahoma Outreach Efforts

Oklahoma continues its efforts to reach the underserved and provide information about NRCS' technical and financial assistance and programs.

Mark Habiger, Assistant State Conservationist (Field Operations), was recognized by the USDA for his continuous efforts in directing field operations, and targeted outreach in Zone Two. For his leadership efforts in outreach, Mark was presented an award, "For Contributions in Meeting the Secretary's Objective in

Program Delivery for American Indian/Alaska Natives”.

The public affairs and outreach staff participated in seven Women In Agriculture (WIA) meetings throughout the state. The WIA meetings celebrate women and their accomplishments in agriculture. Various topics and farming issues are presented to attendees. The meetings are the result of a wonderful partnership effort between RC&D areas, conservation districts, NRCS staff, local planning committees, 1890 University personnel, community based organizations, and other local, state and federal agencies. Through this effort, a meaningful and informative conference is presented, targeting local women farmers, ranchers and producers. Over 1,000 attendees, primarily women, attended this year’s meetings. The RC&D coordinators are to be commended for taking the lead in this most successful outreach effort.

By conducting numerous outreach meetings, attending recruiting and job fairs, setting up booths at state and county fairs, farm shows, and conferences, and through the distribution of printed materials and media releases, it is estimated that millions of people were reached in 2007.

## Earth Team Volunteer Program

The Earth Team has been around since 1981, when Congress passed legislation allowing NRCS to use volunteers in all programs. In 2006, nearly 45,000 Earth Team Volunteers donated almost one million hours of their time to conservation practices. Total value of volunteer time in 2006 was over \$17 million.

In 2007, Oklahoma utilized a total of 444 Earth Team volunteers. Sixty-nine percent of field offices used ET volunteers. An incredible 53,203 hours were logged by our volunteers this past year.

Tulsa County’s outstanding efforts earned them the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) / NRCS National Partnership Award. The award was presented in February, during the NACD meeting in Reno, Nevada. Last year, the 100-plus members of ET volunteer group worked over 3,500 hours to benefit Tulsa and surrounding communities through conservation events and activities. Earth Team awareness and commitment to conservation in Tulsa County has continued to grow over the years. Their work includes setting up and assisting at various events, including the Oklahoma Education Association Conference, the Greater Tulsa Home & Garden Show, the Tulsa Environmental Expo, EarthFest at the Tulsa Zoo, and various other events at schools, colleges, 4-H groups and more.

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