



Helping
People
Help
The Land



Celebrating
70 Years
of
Conservation

Oklahoma

2005 Annual Report

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

Message from the State Conservationist

Dear Citizens of Oklahoma:

I am pleased to present the Oklahoma Annual Report of Accomplishment for 2005. This report includes highlights of accomplishments and activities by the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership in our efforts to conserve, maintain, and improve our valuable natural resources.

This past year marked a milestone for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). We celebrated our 70th anniversary as an agency. This also, coincidentally, marked the 70th anniversary of Black Sunday for Oklahoma. In the past few years some of the lowest rainfalls in our state's history were recorded, but we did not see those clouds of dust roaring across the state as they did on Black Sunday 70 years ago. That is because of tremendous voluntary conservation efforts that have taken place since that day. When we look back over the past 70 years and see the conservation efforts that have been put on the land, we should be proud of our accomplishments, proud of our state, and encouraged to continue the proud conservation legacy of Oklahoma.

Despite the current emphasis on change, the conservation mission remains the same. We must continue to focus on what is needed to keep our natural resources productive and in abundance for the future. We may have to work smarter to accomplish our goals. We must continue to embrace and utilize the strength of each partner, and challenge each other to achieve our highest priorities. We must increase our outreach effort to ensure our programs and technical assistance is available to all customers. No doubt 2006 will be another challenging year, but I have tremendous confidence in the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership to meet those challenges.

I look forward to working with the partnership in 2006 to achieve the national and state priorities. I truly appreciate the hard work everyone contributes to keep us moving in the right direction for the next 70 years.

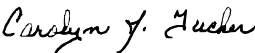

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Conservation Partnerships

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 405 participants and 512 practices installed this year, with approximately \$ 316,047 in cost share assistance.

Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA)

Conservation technical assistance 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 the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) provides the vehicle for delivery of conservation technical assistance in the state. Services provided through NRCS technical assistance to customers contributed to the planning of over 3,051 new conservation systems on 1,199,000 acres. In addition, 3,320 conservation systems were completed on over 1,111,000 acres.

Highlights of conservation practices and systems include:

Conservation systems on grazing lands 872,004

Conservation systems on cropland 259,895

Conservation systems on forestland 7,332

Comprehensive nutrient plans were completed and implemented on 162 farms for 12,461 acres.

Technical Service Providers (TSPs)

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to use Technical Service

Providers (TSPs). The premise behind TSPs is that the public interest to do conservation work and the government's financial commitment are both at historic levels. The Farm Bill increased conservation investment up \$1.8 billion to \$3.9 billion. NRCS and our locally-led partners are committed to getting this money out quickly and efficiently. Helping build a new industry of certified professionals from the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies to provide direct technical assistance and deliver conservation activities will help with this commitment.

Technical assistance includes conservation planning and design, layout, installation, and checkout of approved conservation practices. NRCS and conservation districts have traditionally provided these technical services, and will continue to do so. What's new is that USDA will now reimburse producers for technical assistance provided by certified Technical Service Providers. Oklahoma has engaged public sector TSPs through contribution agreements where the public agency share at least 50 percent of the cost of services, and in 2005 through a competitive agreement process.

The competitive agreement process has resulted in three agreements for services through

Conservation Partnerships

both public and private sources. Since 2003, over \$2.3 million has been obligated for non-NRCS technical assistance services to Oklahoma's land stewards.

New TSP Agreements in 2005

Oklahoma NRCS advertised through a competitive agreement process for technical assistance from private sector and public agencies for technical services in irrigation assistance, grassland baseline inventories, nutrient management planning, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) planning, and engineering design and implementation services.

Agreements were awarded for CRP and engineering services to Conestoga-Rovers and Associates. The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF) was awarded the agreement for nutrient management planning.

Oklahoma NRCS continues work with these TSPs to place additional resources in the field to assist Oklahoma's resource stewards in timely planning and implementation of their conservation systems.

Cooperative Agreement with Ducks Unlimited (DU)

The partnership Oklahoma NRCS initiated with Ducks Unlimited (DU) continued to strengthen through fiscal year 2005. Through two separate agreements, DU provides direct support to NRCS in design and construction management of WRP restoration projects.

The initial cooperative agreement with DU was signed 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 maintain 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.

Beyond the hydrology restoration aspects of the agreement, DU provided technical support,

contract awards and supervision of over 2,004 acres of hardwood tree planting in 2005.

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC)

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) has proven to be an effective partner in the delivery of wildlife habitat development through the WHIP for the past three years. The additional wildlife habitat related technical expertise offered NRCS through this partnership creates a tremendous opportunity to deliver the WHIP technical and financial assistance on the land.

A long-standing partnership exists between both agencies in cooperatively providing technical and financial assistance to private land owners. The level of support by the ODWC continues to contribute to on-the-ground success in wildlife habitat restoration.

Through the contribution agreement process, ODWC contributes at least 50 percent of the funding for four wildlife technicians and part-time secretarial

Conservation Partnerships

assistance. These four wildlife technician positions are responsible for implementation and follow-up assistance to over 380 WHIP contract participants in implementing, evaluating and managing their wildlife habitat plans.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and Conservation Districts

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) has been a key partner and co-leader with NRCS in the stewardship of Oklahoma's natural resources conservation since the very early days of the conservation movement. This partnership continues through agreements with OCC and local conservation districts 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 support activities where conservation districts have the strength and expertise. These activities encompass program information, outreach, conservation practice layout, certifications, and contract administrative support.

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 diverse committee representing Oklahoma's natural resources stewards, serve as an advisor to the NRCS state conservationist in the implementation of conservation programs within Oklahoma.

Currently, 100 representatives from state and federal agencies, community based organizations, agri-businesses, and Indian Tribes serve on the committee. The 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 2005, the committee continued to advise NRCS and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on technical matters and priorities for all 2002 Farm Bill programs including the Conservation Security Program, Grassland Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Conservation Programs

Conservation Programs	Allocation	Contracts	Easement	Acres
Conservation Security Program	\$1,552,602	*160/165	n/a	97,115
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	\$22,842,086	1,907	n/a	653,294
Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program	\$821,000	n/a	4	529
Grassland Reserve Program	\$2,653,666	5	8	9,570
Ground and Surface Water Conservation	\$849,899	9	n/a	10,294
Wetland Reserve Program	\$3,946,852	7	15	2,837
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	\$985,388	49	n/a	28,349

* 160 new contracts obligated and paid in FY2005 and 165 - 2004 contracts modified and paid with 2005 funds.

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. The table at the top of the page summarizes the Federal financial assistance funds obligated in landowner agreements in fiscal year 2005.

A more detailed description of each program will follow.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

In July 25, 2005, Agriculture Chuck Conner announced that \$202 million in 12,700 contracts would be awarded to

farmers and ranchers across the United States in the second year of the Conservation Security Program. In Oklahoma, 160 new contracts for approximately \$780,000 were added to the 165 contracts from the 2004 watershed.

The three Oklahoma watersheds selected for 2005 were:

Lower Cimarron-Skeleton Watershed lies solely within Oklahoma in the wheatbelt region of the state. It covers 2,076,047 acres, 3,780 farms, 8 counties and 10 conservation districts. Major agriculture enterprises include hard red winter wheat production, livestock grazing on native range, introduced forages and small grains, and localized areas of dairy and swine production.

Lower Neosho Watershed lies in northeastern Oklahoma with 95 percent of the watershed in Oklahoma and 5 percent in

Arkansas. It covers 1,330,860 acres, 3,967 farms, 7 counties and 7 conservation districts. Major agriculture enterprises include livestock grazing of introduced forages and native range, poultry production is concentrated in the Spavinaw Creek tributary to the watershed, and swine and dairy production are localized within areas of the watershed in both Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Little River Watershed lies in central Oklahoma entirely within the state. It covers 626,141 acres, 1,998 farms, 4 counties, and 5 conservation districts. Major agriculture enterprises include livestock grazing and hay production on native range, introduced forages and some small grains.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The FSA has announced acceptable applications for enrollment from the Conservation Reserve Program

Conservation Programs

(CRP) general sign-up 29 completed at the end of fiscal year 2004. There were 1.7 million acres offered nationally, 40,852 acres in Oklahoma. Nationally, the offers accepted totalled 1.188 million acres with 35,542 in Oklahoma. The FSA processed the offers and referred the accepted applicants to NRCS for conservation plan development.

All 411 plans were developed, completed, and provided to FSA county offices by July 29, 2005. In addition, NRCS worked with the technical service provider in Grant County to complete the conservation planning requirements on 48 plans.

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 previous years when 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.

For fiscal year 2005, 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 on cropland and grazinglands, irrigation water conservation, 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 2005 allocation for EQIP was over \$22 million, an increase of over \$2 million from 2004. Over 1,900 contracts were approved covering 653,000 acres. There remains an estimated \$19 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.

In addition to the county level allocations, four statewide initiatives are being offered through the EQIP in 2005. Applications offered for these critical resource issues will be evaluated and ranked for approval in four separate statewide evaluation pools.

On October 1, 2004, NRCS began the process of assuming full administrative responsibility for the EQIP. This included assuming all contractual and payment records previously administered by the FSA. Oklahoma NRCS and district field and administrative personnel completed a tremendous workload in the reconciliation of over 6,100 EQIP contracts into ProTracts and executing well over 4,400 payments to contract participants.

Conservation Programs

Statewide AFO/ CAFO Resource Concern Criteria (9

contracts for \$176,156)

The 2002 Farm Bill removed restrictions on the use of EQIP funds for the large confined animal feeding operations. This now allows AFO/CAFO operations to apply for EQIP financial assistance for the storage, treatment, and utilization of animal waste. Also, there have been several concerns raised by dairy, beef, and swine operators scattered across the state that EQIP funds were not being made available because too few AFO/CAFO operations are present in the community to be significant to the locally led process. The State Technical Committee requested a statewide process to address the water quality impacts of these operations to the rivers and streams of the state. As a result, a statewide application and funding process was beginning with the fiscal year 2004 EQIP to address this concern.

An allocation has been set aside to fund animal waste management applications statewide. These funds will be available only to existing and expanding beef, dairy, or swine confined feeding operations. A lower priority will be given to operations that are

planning expansion beyond current levels or capacity, and all applications for new facilities and poultry operations are ineligible for evaluation under the statewide AFO/CAFO resource concern criteria.

Statewide Irrigation Water Conservation Concern (16 contracts for \$577,215)

The 2002 Farm Bill included a specific section in the EQIP providing for specific funding for groundwater and surface water conservation (GSWC) measures. In 2002, the allocation was nationally targeted to the High Plains region of the United States, which includes Oklahoma's three panhandle counties and parts of five other counties. Due to the limited allocation, the significance of the Ogallala aquifer, concentration of irrigation practices, and the backlog of applications, the targeting of the funding was continued in 2003. Oklahoma's 2005 allocation in the GSWC funding of EQIP remains insufficient to address the resource needs and application backlog in the High Plains counties.

The State Technical Committee recommended offering ground and surface water conservation funding statewide to provide

other irrigators an opportunity for cost-share assistance to increase system efficiency and provide for water savings. Therefore, a limited statewide application and funding process (exclusive of the High Plains area) was added to the EQIP beginning in 2004 to address the statewide irrigation water conservation concern. The water conservation and irrigation eligibility requirements of EQIP are as follows:

- ◆ The land must have been irrigated two (2) of the five (5) years previous to application for EQIP.
- ◆ Conservation measures applied through EQIP must result in a net water savings to the operating unit.

Statewide Manure Transfer Resource Concern (36 contracts for \$536,273)

Potential environmental concerns relative to the management of animal wastes in Oklahoma's Nutrient Limited Waters (NLW) and Scenic River watersheds continues to be a high priority for the State Technical Committee. As a result, a new statewide manure transfer resource concern has been developed in EQIP for implementation beginning in FY 2004.

Conservation Programs

The project has two primary objectives:

- ◆ Create an incentive to distribute animal manure to areas of the state that have historically not used animal manure as a fertilizer.
- ◆ Promotion of a long-term market for animal manure as a fertilizer around the state.

Implementation of this project has the potential to reduce animal manure application in areas where it has traditionally been over-applied in the past and should result in better distribution of these nutrients statewide.

Financial assistance available to the participants in the statewide manure transfer resource concerns will be limited to incentive payments, for up to three years, for Manure Transfer (634) and Nutrient Management (590) conservation practices as listed in the current EQIP cost list. No other practices will be available under this resource concern.

Lagoon Closures Animal Resource Concern (1 contract for \$16,919)

This allocation was set aside to assist in the closure of livestock waste treatment lagoons and livestock waste storage ponds where confined animal production operations were discontinued voluntarily, involuntarily, or by termination of an industry contract statewide. Applications are evaluated, ranked by a multi-disciplinary team, and selected for funding at the state level.

Cost-share is limited to the components necessary to complete the closure under the Oklahoma Closure of Waste Impoundments (360) practice standard. This practice provides closure of waste impoundments (treatment lagoons, waste storage ponds, under barn storage pits, and other associated waste facilities) in an environmentally safe manner, that are no longer used for their intended purpose. Closure of these facilities will follow an official closure plan developed by NRCS, the ODAFF, or an approved Technical Service Provider.

Ground and Surface Water Conservation

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 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, over \$834,000 in 2003, over \$940,000 in 2004, and over \$840,000 in 2005. With the limited amount of cost-share available since 2002 and the sensitive conservation issues

Conservation Programs

associated with the Ogallala aquifer, a determination was made to continue focusing the funding to the High Plains. Contracts were developed in 2005 addressing water conservation needs on 9 farms for over 10,000 acres.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

The Grassland Reserve Program (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, FSA, and Forest Service are coordinating implementation of GRP, which helps 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. 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 \$2.06 million in financial assistance for enrollment of easements and rental agreements in the GRP in 2005. NRCS and FSA state leadership have agreed to approve funding for easements from pools 1 and 3 and rental agreements from pool 4 for enrollment in the GRP this fiscal year. Applications for easements were approved as a priority for this fiscal year since the 2004 funding was used exclusively for

rental agreements due to the inability to complete the processes necessary to timely obligate the funds last year. This determination is necessary to balance the ratio funding for easements and rental agreements as required by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002.

Tables 1 and 2 provide summaries of the applications and approvals for this fiscal year. Demand for the program continues to be high with 470 applications covering 364,000 acres and over \$62.9 million in funding. Preliminary funding was for 10 applications covering 6,988 acres and \$2.1 million.

Table 1 ~ Summary of Fiscal Year 2005 GRP Applications By Pool And Offer Type

Application Pools	Type	Number	Acres	Estimated Cost
Pool 1	30-year Easement	25	9,295	\$1,711,186
	Permanent Easement	42	18,406	\$9,369,624
Pool 2	10-year Rental Agreements	69	29,108	\$1,987,347
	15-year Rental Agreements	12	7,637	\$976,482
	20-year Rental Agreements	18	26,310	\$3,490,924
	30-year Rental Agreements	57	28,783	\$8,439,097
Pool 3	30-year Easement	34	25,427	\$3,988,292
	Permanent Easement	49	25,751	\$11,558,883
Pool 4	10-year Rental Agreements	108	115,309	\$8,573,845
	15-year Rental Agreements	11	19,173	\$2,343,834
	20-year Rental Agreements	17	28,976	\$4,581,770
	30-year Rental Agreements	28	30,486	\$5,931,712
Totals		470	364,661	\$62,952,996

Conservation Programs

Table 2 ~ Summary of Fiscal Year 2005 GRP Approvals By Pool, County, And Offer Type

County	Type	Number	Acres	Est. Funding
Pool 1				
Craig	Permanent Agreement	1	472	\$245,440
Nowata	Permanent Agreement	1	660	\$343,200
Osage	Permanent Agreement	1	966	\$502,320
	Easement (30-year)	1	202	\$28,500
Pool 3				
Kay	Permanent Agreement	1	240	\$162,000
	Easement (30-year)	1	1,160	\$242,440
Pool 4				
Beaver	Rental Agreement (30yr.)	1	229	\$48,090
Cimarron	Rental Agreement (30yr.)	1	2,200	\$396,000
Woods	Rental Agreement (20yr.)	1	600	\$99,000
Woodward	Rental Agreement (15yr.)	1	259	\$34,339
Totals		10	6,988	\$2,101,329

Application Evaluation Pools

For Oklahoma, all applications will be evaluated using the same application evaluation criteria; however, applications will be divided into four separate pools for ranking to provide the opportunity to select and fund the applications best serving the objectives of the program. Applicants can offer land under only one enrollment option. There is no specified funding level for each pool and no order of preference granted at this time. These ranking pools are as follows:

Pool 1 Applications for 30 year and permanent easements where the

majority of the offered land resides in Canadian, Carter, Comanche, Craig, Creek, Garfield, Grady, Kingfisher, Lincoln, Logan, McClain, Osage, Muskogee, Nowata, Pottawatomie, Okmulgee, Wagoner, and Washington counties.

Pool 2 Applications for 10, 15, 20 and 30 year rental agreements where the majority of the offered land resides in Canadian, Carter, Comanche, Craig, Creek, Garfield, Grady, Kingfisher, Lincoln, Logan,

McClain, Osage, Muskogee, Nowata, Pottawatomie, Okmulgee, Wagoner, and Washington counties.

Pool 3 Applications for 30 year and permanent easements where the majority of the offered land resides in counties not listed in Pool 1.

Pool 4 Applications for 10, 15, 20 and 30 year rental agreements where the majority of the offered land resides in counties not listed in Pool 2.

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. An estimated 78,000 acres of Oklahoma agriculture land is being converted to non-agriculture uses annually.

On July 30, 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced the availability of nearly \$6 million in FRPP funds. Thirty-two states received this funding to

Conservation Programs

purchase permanent conservation easements on America's farms and ranches. These funds will allow more farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. This program helps to ensure that productive land is protected, and encourages farmers and ranchers to use conservation systems that improve environmental health.

FRPP protects productive agricultural land by purchasing conservation easements to limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to nonagricultural uses. The FRPP provided up to \$1.37 million in financial assistance for Oklahoma this fiscal year ending September 30, 2005. Proposals from eligible organizations for land located in Oklahoma were to be received in the NRCS state office by close of business on April 5, 2005. Only \$821,000 of the financial assistance was obligated due to lack of eligible proposals submitted by the entities.

This is Oklahoma's fourth year to offer financial assistance funding for the FRPP. In 2001, the Trust for Public Land, in cooperation with the Norman Area Land Conservancy, was awarded an agreement for farmland preservation. Land Legacy and the Norman Area Land Conservancy submitted proposals and were awarded

agreements in 2005 for land preservation efforts in Cleveland, Comanche, Rogers, and Tulsa counties.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners develop and enhance wildlife habitat on private lands.

Oklahoma received just over \$985,000 in WHIP cost-share assistance funding for fiscal year 2005. This provided for enrollment of 49 applications for the creation or improvement of wildlife habitat on 28,349 acres. Currently, over 400 contracts are enrolled providing for wildlife habitat improvement on over 95,000 acres in Oklahoma. The demand for WHIP remains high with an application backlog of over 450 applications covering 60,000 acres at an estimated cost-share need of \$2.4 million.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The Wetlands Reserve program (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. In the period 1780 to 1980, it is estimated that Oklahoma lost approximately 1.8 million acres (67%) of the 2.8 million acres of naturally occurring wetlands.

The total WRP financial assistance allocation for fiscal year 2005 totaled \$3.9 million. With this allocation, Oklahoma enrolled land into 7 restoration agreements for 198 acres, and 15 permanent easements restoring and protecting over 2,600 acres of wetlands and associated buffers in 10 counties. Since 1996, Oklahoma landowners have enrolled over 54,000 acres into the WRP through 224 agreements with over \$34 million in federal assistance for acquisition and restoration of wetlands in 48 of Oklahoma's 77 counties. Beginning with the programs inception, NRCS has worked directly with landowners, state and federal agencies, and private conservation organizations to complete hydrology restoration and tree plantings on over 38,000 of these acres.

We are anticipating completing another 7,000 acres of wetland restoration in 2006. Work continues across the state on closing easements and completing restoration activity on existing easements. In fiscal

Conservation Programs

year 2005, 31 easements from current and prior year obligations were recorded on 5,187 acres restoring 4,506 acres of wetlands.

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 62 counties. The digitizing process is ongoing on the remaining 15 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 Canadian, Logan, Noble, Tulsa, Woods, Oklahoma and Okfuskee counties. Tabular data is available on all 77 counties through the Web Soil Survey, and 62 counties have spatial data available.

Small Watershed Rehabilitation

Local watershed project sponsors, assisted by NRCS, have constructed 2,105 upstream flood control dams in Oklahoma since 1948. A total of 132 of these dams have reached or exceeded their 50-year design life. By 2010, 463 dams will have reached this mark, and by 2015, 1,090 dams, or more than half of all dams constructed in Oklahoma, will have reached or exceeded their design life. The average cost of dam rehabilitation in Oklahoma is about \$850,000. Current funding needs, based on dam age alone, are nearly \$112 million. By 2015 funding needs will exceed \$394 million.

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 30 dams, and planning is underway on 3 additional dams.

Construction has been completed on eight dams and another five dams will be under construction in 2006.

Current rehabilitation planning projects involve high priority dams which have been classified as high hazard because of the potential for loss of life should the dams fail. These projects include dams in the Cottonwood Creek Watershed in Logan County, the Big Wewoka Creek Watershed in Seminole County, the Upper Clear Boggy Creek Watershed in Pontotoc County, and the Sallisaw Creek Watershed in Adair County. All of these rehabilitation planning projects have housing development below the dams, which requires that the dams be upgraded to meet current safety criteria and performance standards for high hazard dams.

Emergency Watershed Program (EWP)

Through the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP), NRCS provides assistance to people, and conserves natural resources by

Conservation Programs

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 a 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 damaged areas; and purchasing floodplain easements.

In fiscal year 2006, NRCS is addressing critical problems in nine different counties around the state. About \$4 million will be spent to protect rural bridges, stream corridors, and infrastructure from failure due to additional flooding and sedimentation from future storm events. With the ongoing workload, the present needs exceed funding by more than \$4 million.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

The Resource Conservation and Development 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.

High Plains RC&D

The High Plains RC&D Council assisted several new and existing businesses with expansion during fiscal year 2005. From this assistance, 41 new jobs were created through out the High Plains Region, including an announcement in June pertaining to a new Rails Siding Access at Harrison Gypsum Plant in Mooreland. This new access to the railroad will allow Harrison Gypsum to ship their products across the country,

cheaper and more efficiently. The availability of the rail siding means increased production, which means approximately 16 more new jobs to be created in the area. The rail siding will also be made available for use by other businesses who need rail access for both shipping and receiving products. All of this made possible through the development of partnerships and team work of those involved throughout the region with the common goal of Economic Development for Northwest Oklahoma.

Wheatland RC&D

The Wheatland RC&D coordinated and assisted with securing a life-size bronze statue in honor of the contributions made by the Civilian Conservation Corp. The statue was dedicated October 14, 2005, and placed in the Red River Journey Park in Oklahoma City.

Wheatland received two grants for handicapped accessible playground equipment and one for a school athletic track and walking complex. The Council also received a donation of a hammer mill to utilize in research and development for alternative uses of Eastern Red Cedar. The Council participated in two Women in Agriculture workshops

Conservation Programs

covering six counties with total attendance of 424.

Tallgrass RC&D

The Tallgrass RC&D through partnership with Citizens Bank of Oklahoma located in Pawhuska, established the Central Med EMSA in Pawhuska. The Central Med EMSA will service Pawhuska and four other northern Osage County towns. Revolving loan funds were used for this project from the Tallgrass RC&D revolving loan fund. The Council assisted with two Women in Agriculture programs, where over 225 people attended. The Council is currently assisting with another Women in Agriculture program which will be held in Payne County in March of 2006. Tallgrass RC&D has been selected as the Outstanding Council for 2005 by the Southwestern States Association of RC&D Councils.

Great Plains RC&D

The Great Plains RC&D Council recently sponsored a State-wide Women in Agriculture Conference at Quartz Mountain in Lone Wolf. Planning is under way for the next State-wide Women in Agriculture meeting which will be held in Oklahoma City during 2006.

The Great Plains RC&D Council has supported the Cheyenne's Senior Citizens Center by providing a grant of \$2,000 which will be used for operational expenses to continue meal services and other programs at the center.

Great Plains RC&D council is a sponsor of the Natural Resources Journey, which is a natural resource educational experience at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. This past summer, over 1,000 students experienced this wonderful opportunity. The Council is also sponsoring projects which help market and control Red Cedar. The Council participated in projects with Southwestern Oklahoma State University in the development of the Economic Development Administration University Center.

ASCOG RC&D

The ASCOG RC&D Council recently completed sponsorship for two Women in Agriculture Conferences. The first was a multi-county event with Cleveland, McClain and Garvin County Conservation Districts combining to conduct a conference which was held in McClain County in October 2005. Approximately 85 participants attended, with some 30 sponsors providing donations

for the conference. The second conference was held in Caddo County in November 2005, with an attendance of over 170 participants and over 50 sponsors providing various types of financial, planning and program support for the Caddo County event. Overall response from the women attending these conferences was positive, with most people wanting to know when the next conference would take place.

Fun Country RC&D

The Fun Country RC&D is assisting with the development of a Wholesale Produce Auction to be located in south-central Oklahoma, providing local growers financial savings and opportunities. The RC&D is coordinating efforts between the City of Davis and value-added business owners in the removal and utilization of Eastern Red Cedar from an historic ranch to be converted for Agritourism opportunities. The Fun Country RC&D is assisting in providing leadership and guidance in the establishment of a locally grown Farmers Market to provide quality produce and continued support of revitalization of main street communities.

Conservation Programs

Ouachita Mountains RC&D

The Ouachita Mountains RC&D has a proud history of assisting with educational projects for economic development within its eight county area. Some of those annual projects include the Southeast District Forestry Judging Contest for 4-H and FFA students, Forestry Contest workshops, and the Forestry Contest Scholarship Programs (approximately \$95,000 in college scholarships have been awarded to the district contest high-scoring individuals)

The 10th Annual Forestry On The Grow Conference & Expo is being planned for April 2006, along with two Women In Agriculture & Small Business Conference & Trade Shows.

Cross Timbers RC&D

The Cross Timbers RC&D Council is active with projects that empower the local citizens to improve their areas. Some significant projects include efforts to support the development of the Oklahoma Labor and Mining Museum complex, creation of the area Agritourism Committee, initiation of the Oklahoma Governor's Duck Hunt in Chandler to focus on economic development and

natural resource management in the area, assistance to area leadership programs and the continuation of support to programs like the Lt. Governor's Invitational Turkey Hunt, Oklahoma Forestry Conference and numerous youth programs. A significant improvement to the RC&D is the addition of Oklahoma and Cleveland Counties into the area.

Projects planned for 2006 include the Revolving Loan Fund for Economic Development and a Red Cedar Conference.

Cherokee Hills RC&D

The Cherokee Hills RC&D received the National Council of the Year Award last February at the Leadership Forum in Washington DC. The Council provided financial and technical support to host two Women in Agriculture Conferences. The Council continues to work with Ken Stamper, Production Specialties Inc., to construct a poultry waste processing plant to produce a commercial grade fertilizer and eventually electrical power. This is a five-way partnership with the ODAFF, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, Arkansas Natural Resources Commission and

Outreach

the Poultry Federation. Mr. Scotty Herriman, vice chairman, was recognized as the Outstanding Council member of the year by the Southwestern States Regional RC&D Association.

Oklahoma Outreach Efforts

In 2005, much of the focus of outreach efforts was placed on Women In Agriculture (WIA). Oklahoma NRCS participated in nine outreach meetings targeting WIA with one of those meetings being held statewide. This effort involved working with Resource Conservation and Development Coordinators, conservation districts, local field offices, and local women farmers/ranchers to form planning committees to host these meetings across the state. This effort resulted in over 1,300 individuals, primarily women, attending these well designed meetings.

Our team approach to outreach once again was very successful this year. Through conducting 200 targeted outreach meetings, running 100 radio public service announcements, printing 2,004 news articles and press releases, and exhibiting booths at state and county fairs, along with other events, we reached an

Earth Team

estimated audience in excess of six million individuals in 2005.

Earth Team Volunteer Program

The Oklahoma Earth Team Volunteer Program once again performed very strong this year. The number of volunteers totaled 1,684, with 62,432 hours worked.

The Earth Team has been around since 1981, when Congress passed legislation allowing NRCS to use volunteers in all programs.

Oklahoma had 100 percent participation by all offices for the third consecutive year.

Oklahoma claimed three regional and national awards this past year. They were:

◆ *Group Earth Team Award, South Central Region:*

Tulsa County Blue Thumb Volunteer Program

◆ *NRCS Employee Award, South Central Region:*

Gary Garman

◆ *Regional RC&D/NRCS Earth Team Award, South Central Region:*

Wheatland RC&D

Oklahoma has many projects throughout the state that involve Earth Team volunteers on a regular basis. We also have strong diversity within the ETVP and it continues to grow in this area.

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

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