



Oklahoma

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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

NRCS Mission

2004

Annual Report



State Conservationist Message

Dear Citizens of Oklahoma,

Welcome to the Oklahoma 2004 Annual Report of accomplishments. This report on the conservation of our natural resources provides highlights of activities and accomplishments by the Oklahoma conservation partnership.

We faced many challenges in 2004, but none greater than implementing the 2002 Farm Bill, and the newly funded Conservation Security Program (CSP). Oklahoma, one of 18 states chosen for a pilot CSP watershed (The Lower Salt Fork of The Arkansas River), utilized the team approach to achieve the successful implementation of the program to the landowners in the selected watershed. The coming year will also be a challenge as the CSP is fully unfolded.

Implementing the CSP will continue to be a strong challenge to the partnership. One that will test our limits, as we will have new customers at our doors demanding high level conservation plans to qualify for the highest tier level possible under the CSP.

We continue to grow as a conservation partnership utilizing the strength of each partner to achieve a common goal. That ultimate result of the Oklahoma partnership efforts is to get the most effective conservation practices and systems on the ground at the least amount of cost to the landowners and taxpayers.

We will continue our outreach efforts to reach many varied customers across Oklahoma to provide the most up-to-date information on assistance and services available through federal and state agencies.

This year was a challenging year for the partnership and 2005 will undoubtedly provide as many challenges. We are confident that given the successes of the conservation partnership and the strong conservation ethics of Oklahoma producers, we will again achieve continued success in our efforts to conserve natural resources in Oklahoma.




State Conservationist Darrel Dominick honors Bob Diemer as Oklahoma's first Conservation Security Program Partner.


*"Conservation
 Security Program...a
 new chapter in the
 history of
 conservation in
 Oklahoma is being
 written."*


*Darrel Dominick
 State Conservationist*

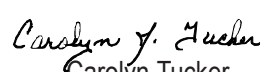

 M. Darrel Dominick
 State Conservationist
 NRCS

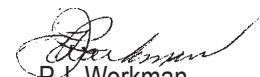

 Mike Thralls
 Executive Director
 OCC


 Royce Casey
 President
 OACD


 Jim Bailey
 Chairman
 OARC&DC


 Kim Barker
 President
 OGLCA


 Carolyn J. Tucker
 President
 OACDE


 P.J. Workman
 President
 OTCAC





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 862 participants and 956 practices installed this year, with approximately \$698,000 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 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 3,250 new conservation systems on 1,247,000 acres. In addition, 2,432 conservation systems were completed on over 847,000 acres. Oklahoma’s land stewards continue to make significant progress in addressing the natural resource conservation concerns through planning over 70,000 new conservation practices and completing installation of 19,772 practices.

Highlights of conservation practices and systems include:

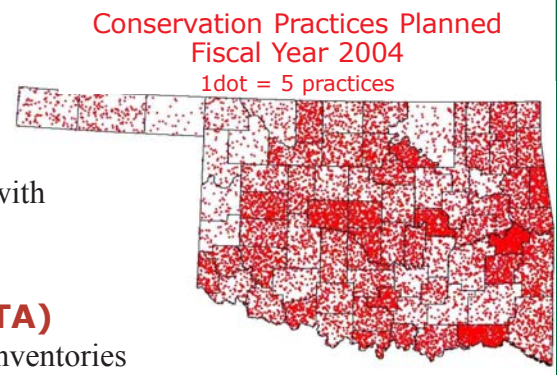
- Conservation systems on grazing lands 952,195
- Conservation systems on cropland 228,040
- Conservation systems on forestland 6,655

Comprehensive nutrient plans completed and implemented on 109 farms for 26,887 acres.

Technical Service Providers

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



USDA will now reimburse producers for technical assistance provided by certified Technical Service Providers.



producers for technical assistance provided by certified Technical Service Providers. Oklahoma has engaged public sector TSP's through contribution agreements where the public agency share at least 50 percent of the cost of services, and in 2004 through a competitive agreement process. The competitive agreement process has resulted in three agreements for services through both public and private sources. In total, over \$1.1 million was obligated for non-NRCS technical assistance services to Oklahoma's land stewards.

New Technical Service Provider Agreements in 2004

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 completed the year establishing the agreements and protocols 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)

In fiscal year 2004, NRCS advertised for competition the technical assistance for design and installation of wetlands under the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). DU was awarded the agreement for projects enrolled in fiscal year 2004. In addition, they are continuing the cooperative agreement for technical and financial resources for the restoration of wetlands enrolled through the WRP in program years 2000 - 2003. 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.

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) in fiscal year 2003. The first of its kind contribution agreement between Oklahoma NRCS and ODWC was extended in 2004 to continue ODWC's support of the WHIP. A long-standing partnership exists between both agencies in cooperatively providing technical and financial assistance to

Oklahoma entered into a landmark agreement with the ODWC in 2003 for technical assistance in support of the WHIP...that agreement continues today.



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 contributes at least 50 percent of the funding for four new wildlife technician positions and part-time secretarial assistance. These four wildlife technician positions are responsible for implementation and follow-up assistance to over 350 WHIP contract participants in implementing, evaluating and managing their wildlife habitat plans.

Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and Conservation Districts

A technical assistance contribution 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.

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, 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 2004, 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.

The committee continued to advise NRCS and the Farm Service Agency on technical matters and priorities for all 2002 Farm Bill programs including the Grassland Reserve Program, Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program,

Currently, 90 representatives from state and federal agencies, community based organizations, agri-businesses, and Indian Tribes serve on the Oklahoma State Technical Committee.



Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

On August 26, 2004, Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman announced that \$41 million in contracts will be awarded to farmers and ranchers in 22 states who will be the first in the nation to participate in the new Conservation Security Program. In Oklahoma, one of 22 states to participate in this debut

program year, 166 contracts will be awarded to agriculture producers in the Lower Salt Fork of the Arkansas River Watershed. Producers will receive between \$100 and \$41,325 for a broad range of conservation work that is protecting and enhancing natural resources including water quality, soil quality and wildlife habitat.

A ceremonial first contract signing for CSP was held on the farm of Bob and Carol Diemer, near Tonkawa, Oklahoma. The Diemers run a 4,476-acre farming operation in Kay County. Crop production includes wheat, corn, soybean, milo, and alfalfa. They utilize no-till cropping systems on the entire farm. Part of the farm was homesteaded by Diemer's grandfather in 1893. Speaking at the event were representatives from the Diemer Farm, J.T. Winters and Mike Thralls of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Rick



A ceremonial first contract signing was held on the farm of Bob and Carol Diemer. Signing were (l to r) Mike Thralls, OCC, Darrel Dominick, NRCS, Rick Jeans, OACD, Bob Diemer, Claud Hiatt, Kay County Conservation District, and J.T. Winters, OCC.

Jeans, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, and Garold DeWitt, Kay County Conservation District.

CSP applicants will be participating on three different tiers reflecting both their documented historical conservation management as well as their agreement to do additional practices to further enhance the environment. These applicants are model conservationists who we can

point to as our first line of defense in managing

ecosystems like the Lower Salt

Fork of the Arkansas River Watershed with both

productivity and careful stewardship as twin goals.

Work done by the producers in the Lower Salt Fork of the Arkansas River Watershed will significantly benefit both their own watershed and the people and resources downstream.

CSP represents the first time agricultural producers are being paid for ongoing

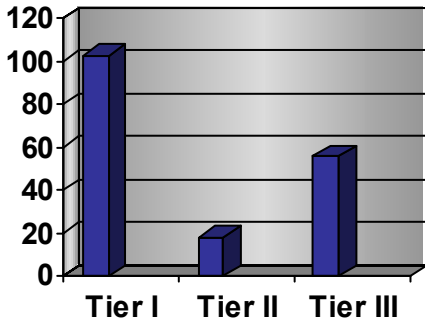


Bob and Carol Diemer, Kay County, run a diverse 4,400-acre farming operation where they utilize no-till cropping systems on the entire farm.



177 Total Approved Contracts

(166 in Oklahoma, 11 in Kansas)

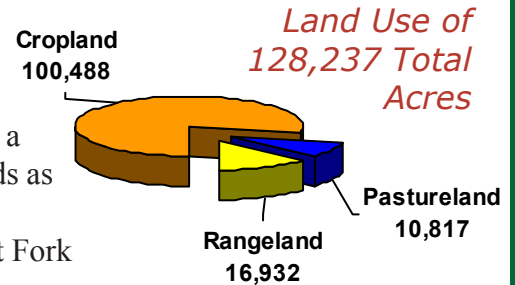


of the Arkansas River:

stewardship.

Other states participating in CSP sign ups include Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. The program will be offered each year, on a rotational basis, in as many watersheds as funding allows.

CSP Statistics for the Lower Salt Fork



FY-04 Payments		Average FY-04 Payments (includes advance payment)	
Total Payments	\$1,306,317	Tier I	\$4,981
Tier I	\$513,040	Tier II	\$14,092
Tier II	\$253,648	Tier III	\$9,636
Tier III	\$539,629		

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that addresses serious threats to soil, water, and related natural resources.

Unlike in 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 2004, 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 2004 allocation for EQIP was over \$20 million. Over 1,983 contracts were approved covering 817,000 acres. There remains an estimated \$24 million in the over 5,400 unfunded applications for conservation needs where producers are ready and willing to complete

Sixty percent of the state's EQIP base allocation was provided to field offices to work with each conservation district in addressing the local priorities.



conservation practices as assistance becomes available. Since 1997, over \$57 million in EQIP assistance has been allocated to over 7,300 farms for installation of conservation practices to protect Oklahoma's natural resources.

In addition to the county level allocations, four statewide initiatives are being offered through the EQIP in 2004. Applications offered for these critical resource issues will be evaluated and ranked for approval in four separate statewide evaluation pools.

Statewide AFO/CAFO Resource Concern Criteria (5 contracts for \$74,900)

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 has been added to 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 (12 contracts for \$521,000)

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 2004 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

A manure slurry is applied to this field to help manage the animal waste and to add nutrients to the soil.



EQIP funds are available for existing beef, dairy, or swine confined feeding operations in Oklahoma.





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 fiscal year 2004 EQIP 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 (33 contracts for \$285,000)

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 in FY 2004.

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.

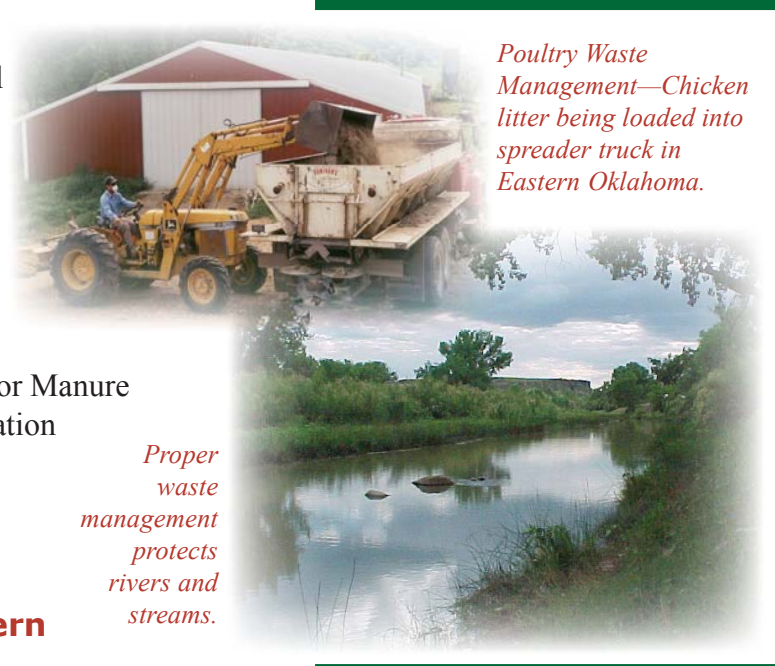
Implementation of this project has the potential to reduce animal manure application in areas where it has traditionally been over-applied in the past and should result in better distribution of these nutrients statewide.

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 Environmental Quality Incentives Program Cost List. No other practices will be available under this resource concern.

Lagoon Closures Animal Resource Concern (3 contracts for \$134,000)

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



Poultry Waste Management—Chicken litter being loaded into spreader truck in Eastern Oklahoma.

Proper waste management protects rivers and streams.



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 Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF), or an approved Technical Service Provider.

Ground and Surface Water Conservation

The 2002 Farm Bill reauthorized 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, over \$834,000 in 2003, and over \$940,000 in 2004. With the limited amount of cost-share available since 2002 and the sensitive conservation issues associated with the Ogallala aquifer, a determination was made to continue focusing the funding to the High Plains. Contracts were developed in 2004 addressing water conservation needs on 21 farms for over 10,000 acres.



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 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 NRCS and FSA issued joint approvals for fiscal year 2004 GRP contracts on September 1, 2004. Oklahoma received an allocation of \$2.3 million in financial assistance for enrollment of easements and rental agreements in the GRP in 2004. In addition, Oklahoma is allowed to retain approximately \$1.58 million from 2003 that was unused due to landowners declining easement offers. The total GRP financial assistance available for obligation this fiscal year is \$3.88 million.

NRCS and FSA state leadership agreed to approve funding only for enrollment of rental agreements in the GRP this fiscal year. Applications or easements will not be approved for obligation with 2004 funding due to the inability to complete the processes necessary to obligate the funds this year. This determination was necessary due to the late delivery of funding to the state, notification of program availability, as well as the sizable application workload associated with the program. Easement offers and acquisition will be a priority for GRP enrollment in 2005.

Once fiscal year 2005 GRP funding is appropriated, the 2005 easement process will be initiated beginning with the higher ranking applications from this year's ranking pool.



The major grasses of the tallgrass prairie are big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass, and switchgrass.

Summary of Fiscal Year 2004 GRP Applications By Pool And Offer Type				
Application Pools	Type	Number	Acres	Estimated Cost
Pool 1	30-year Easement	10	2,093	\$405,403
	Permanent Easement	27	12,645	\$5,720,423
Pool 2	10-year Rental Agreements	86	27,525	\$2,800,116
	15-year Rental Agreements	17	8,497	\$1,116,705
	20-year Rental Agreements	22	15,565	\$3,234,685
	30-year Rental Agreements	49	33,021	\$9,811,670
Pool 3	30-year Easement	16	13,524	\$1,729,544
	Permanent Easement	49	20,656	\$10,943,644
Pool 4	10-year Rental Agreements	129	151,060	\$11,221,815
	15-year Rental Agreements	10	14,773	\$1,815,180
	20-year Rental Agreements	19	26,895	\$4,242,352
	30-year Rental Agreements	49	53,912	\$12,967,448
Totals		483	380,166	\$66,008,985

Table provides summary of fiscal year 2004 GRP applications.



Table
provides
GRP
approvals by
pool, county
and offer
type.

Approvals By Pool, County, And Offer Type				
County	Type	Number	Acres	Funding
Pool 2				
Craig County	Rental agreement (10yr.)	1	316	\$36,340
	Rental agreement (30yr.)	9	2,915	\$1,005,641
Pool 4				
Beaver County	Rental agreement (30yr.)	4	3,286	\$690,060
Kay County	Rental agreement (20yr.)	1	611	\$116,090
	Rental agreement (30yr.)	3	2,925	\$882,645
Noble County	Rental agreement (30yr.)	1	36	\$9,990
Roger Mills County	Rental agreement (10yr.)	1	430	\$32,250
Woods County	Rental agreement (10yr.)	4	3,843	\$317,023
	Rental agreement (20yr.)	2	1,935	\$319,193
	Rental agreement (30yr.)	7	1,706	\$422,137
Woodward County	Rental agreement (10yr.)	1	160	\$13,720
	Rental agreement (30yr.)	1	150	\$34,875
Totals		35	18,312	\$3,879,964

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.

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 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. Oklahoma received an additional \$131,257 through this reallocation. In distributing the funds, NRCS considered the conversion of farmland, the conversion of prime farmland and states' requests for additional monies to complete specific projects. This additional funding brings the total FRPP financial assistance funding for this year to \$1.35 million.

The Land Legacy and Edmond Area Land Conservancy hosted an easement signing ceremony at the Chitwood Farm in Edmond. The easement acquisition was created through a unique partnership involving two nonprofit organizations, a local development company, and NRCS, resulting in the preservation of a family farm in eastern Edmond. The conservation easement acquired on the farm will be held by Land Legacy, which is nonprofit, dedicated to preserving open spaces across Oklahoma. The Edmond Land Conservancy will help monitor the property to ensure that the provisions of the easement are forever upheld.



Landowner receives last minute details from NRCS personnel prior to an FRPP signing ceremony at the Chitwood Farm in Edmond.

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 \$960,000 in WHIP cost-share assistance funding for fiscal year 2004. This provided for enrollment of 79 applications in 41 counties for the creation or improvement of wildlife habitat on 27,707 acres. Currently, over 400 contracts are enrolled providing for wildlife habitat improvement on 73,000 acres in Oklahoma. The demand for WHIP remains high with an application backlog of over 300 applications covering 61,000 acres at an estimated cost-share need of \$1.5 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.



Since 1996, Oklahoma has enrolled 52,036 acres into the WRP, covering 47 of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

The total WRP financial assistance allocation for fiscal year 2004 totaled \$4.5 million. With this allocation, Oklahoma enrolled land into 8 restoration agreements for 226 acres, one 30-year easement covering 450 acres, and 28 permanent easements restoring and protecting over 4,311 acres of wetlands and associated buffers. Since 1996, Oklahoma has enrolled 52,036 acres into the WRP with over \$31.6 million in federal assistance for acquisition and restoration of wetlands in 47 of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

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 43 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 Canadian, Logan, Noble, Tulsa, Woods, Oklahoma and Okfuskee counties.



Rehabilitation construction on Double Creek site 5, in Washington County.

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 \$500,000. Current funding needs, based on dam age alone, exceed \$65 million. By 2015 funding needs will exceed \$545 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 18 dams, and planning is underway on 13 additional dams. Construction has been completed on 6 dams and another 5 dams will be rehabilitated in 2005.

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 six dams in the Sallisaw Creek



Watershed in Adair and Sequoyah Counties. Sallisaw Creek site 20, in Adair County, is built immediately above the Dahlongah School, which has a Cherokee Indian student enrollment of 135 students. Other projects include Caney-Coon site 2, a municipal water supply site in Coal County, and four dams in the Cottonwood Creek Watershed in Canadian, Logan and Kingfisher Counties, which have housing development below the dams.

Emergency Watershed 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 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 2005, NRCS is addressing critical problems in 22 different counties around the state. Work is continuing on a \$7.5 million debris removal job that should be completed this fiscal year. About \$5 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 and the fiscal year is only half complete.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

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. Oklahoma has nine authorized RC&D areas, serving 75 of the 77 counties. 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.

The **High Plains RC&D Council** received a \$95,705 grant to assist a small emerging business. This grant will be used to purchase a whole tree chipper and lease it to Sun-Belt/C-Anchor Products, who will use the machine to process Eastern Red Cedar. This project will add additional jobs to the area. Members of the Council recently returned from an Economic Development mission to Iceland. Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture (ODAFF), Director of

Natural Resources Conservation Service



Approximately \$6.12 million was spent on debris removal activities through EWP, to clean up ice storm and flood damage around the state.

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*The
Wheatland
RC&D has
created 26
jobs and
preserved 43
jobs through
projects
promoting
new or
existing
businesses.*

Marketing with DAFF, and members of High Plains RC&D met with private business, U.S. Embassy officials, Iceland government officials and energy representatives, to discuss geothermal energy potential in Oklahoma. Iceland, which powers its country using geothermal energy, has plants similar to one that could be built in the High Plains Area. An invitation was extended to the Icelanders to visit here to continue the discussions.

The **Wheatland RC&D** worked with the Cheyenne/Arapaho Tribes on planning for five miles of windbreaks at the entrance to the Tribal headquarters. The RC&D is also fundraising to build a bronze Civilian Conservation Corps statue in Oklahoma City, along with a display case of memorabilia to help preserve the history of the CCC. The RC&D has created 26 jobs and preserved 43 jobs through projects promoting new or existing businesses, which greatly impacted the economic benefits of the 10-county region. The Council served 11,051 socially or economically disadvantaged citizens, constructed 6 community buildings and improved 23 community facilities. For every federal dollar received for the Wheatland RC&D Program Area, there was a return of 1:83 dollars.

The **Tallgrass RC&D** is promoting natural resource education in northcentral Oklahoma by two projects the Council is sponsoring. The “Recycling Annie” program has been presented to over 50,000 students, partnering with the Oklahoma Educators Association. Another project the Council has promoted has been featured on Oklahoma Education Channel (OETA). The Soils Painting workshops educate students on the importance of soils, conservation of soil and soil contribution to the history of Oklahoma. Through a partnership with Tallgrass RC&D and Citizens Bank of Pawhuska, Central Med EMSA was established in Pawhuska. The Central Med EMSA will service Pawhuska and two other northern Osage County towns. Revolving loan funds were used for this project from the Tallgrass RC&D revolving loan fund.

The **Great Plains RC&D Council** is cooperating with the Agricultural Research Service Grazing Lands Laboratory on a project to provide outreach and informative data on climate change. This information is a valuable resource for county hazard mitigation committees. Great Plains RC&D has received funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency to create a resource center and to conduct a statewide Women in Agriculture Conference.

The **ASCOG RC&D** assisted with the location of Stampede Steel in Marlow. This livestock equipment manufacturer will work with existing manufacturers to mutually boost business operations.

The **Fun Country RC&D** is assisting with the development of a Wholesale Produce Auction to be located in southcentral 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.

The **Ouachita Mountains RC&D** assists with a Deer Hunt for the



Disabled held annually in Southeast Oklahoma’s deer hunting paradise. This event combines community commitment with a host of volunteers to provide a 4-day hunt for the physically challenged, both young and old. There is a great deal of satisfaction from seeing the smile on the face of a successful hunter who fulfilled a dream that was previously thought unachievable. Partners were the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, and 30 volunteers. Other educational projects that are sponsored, planned, and conducted annually by Ouachita Mountains RC&D include “Forestry on the Grow” Conference & Expo; Women in Agriculture & Small Business Conference; Southeast District Oklahoma Forestry Judging Contest & Scholarship Program for 4-H & FFA, and others. Volunteer assistance was conservatively estimated at 10,885 hours for 2004.

The **Cross Timbers RC&D Council** has worked with the Muscogee Creek Nation and has established a resource committee to look at expanding the opportunities on the land holdings of the Nation. Opportunities from expanded livestock production to Alternative Agriculture Enterprises to tourism related to the Nations’ tribal history could provide opportunity for the Nations people. Collectively, the supporting organizations have offered programmatic assistance and professional advice to the Nation with these efforts. The Council is assisting a planning committee with the establishment of the Oklahoma Museum of Labor and Mining near the community of Henryetta. The Council has also co-assisted for the last five years, the Youth Wildlife Heritage Day, with the National Wild Turkey Federation and other conservation partners.

The **Cherokee Hills RC&D Council** is collaborating with state and federal agencies as well as private enterprise in a joint project to: 1) reduce nutrient pollution, 2) add value by processing poultry litter into a liquid concentrate fertilizer and 3) utilize the by product of methane gas and biomass fuel to power turbines to produce electricity. Poultry production in northeast Oklahoma and northwest Arkansas has been a mainstay for farmers over the past several years. However, it has been demonstrated that land application of poultry waste has been one of the contributing factors to the degradation of water quality in two major watersheds in the area. Both watersheds have experienced elevated concentrations of phosphorus which contributes to accelerated algae growth. Contracts have been signed with Arkansas Soil & Water Conservation Commission, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and the Poultry Federation, to facilitate the demonstration of new technology developed by Production Specialties, Inc.

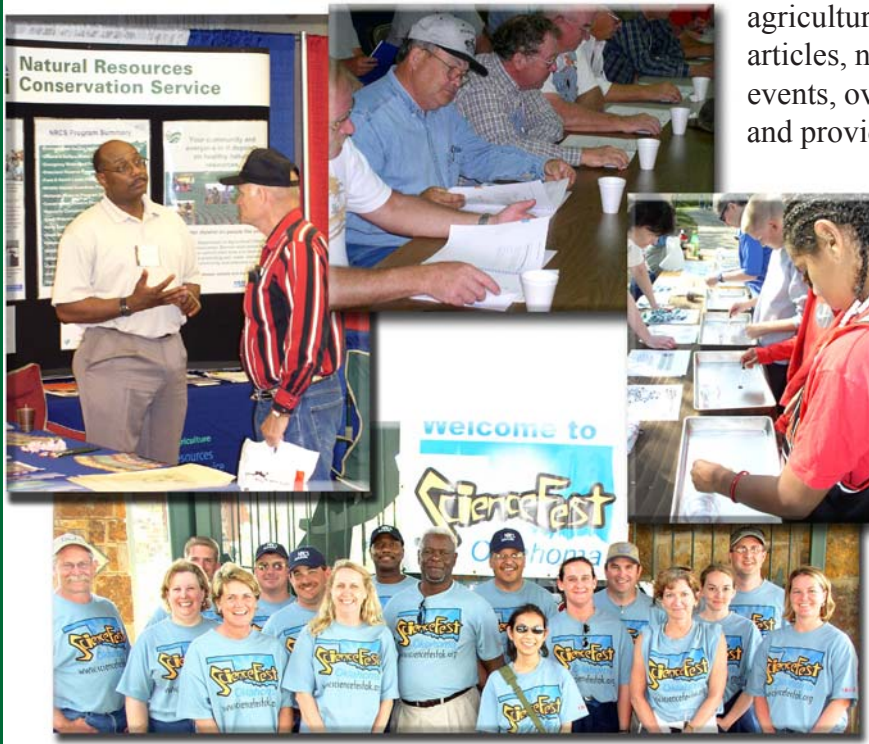
Oklahoma Outreach Program

In 2004, Oklahoma NRCS’s strategy to inform the public about the availability of programs and services was again very successful. Utilizing a team approach to conduct outreach, Oklahoma participated in 537 informational meetings, career fairs, workshops, farm shows, and other such events. The team strategy included field service centers, community based organizations, the Oklahoma partnership, and the Oklahoma Tribal

Through state and county fairs, career days, farm shows, outdoor classrooms, informational and locally led meetings, and other such events, more than 4,000,000 folks were reached in Oklahoma.



Conservation Advisory Council that represents the Native American agriculture population in Oklahoma. Through news articles, newsletters, outreach meetings, and other events, over 4,000,000 customers were reached and provided valuable and timely information.



Earth Team Volunteer Program

The Oklahoma Earth Team Volunteer Program once again performed strongly this year. Volunteers totaled 2,571 with 89,832 hours worked. This was the most hours worked by any other state and the fourth highest number of volunteers. Oklahoma also had 100 percent participation by all offices for the second consecutive year.

Oklahoma continued to build upon the bluebird trail that began two years ago as a regional project with

support of two conservation partners, the Oklahoma Bluebird Society and the North Fork of the Red River Conservation District. These partners supplied the funds to put together 750 more boxes for distribution in the state. This has been a very popular project among a diverse group across the state. 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 as long as interest continues.

Oklahoma claimed two national awards this year. The Wilburton Field Service Center won the Chief's field award for the South Central Region, and the Cross Timbers RC&D won the NRCS/RC&D Award for the South Central Region.



Oklahoma received two national Earth Team awards this year... Wilburton Field Service Center was presented with the Chief's Field Award, and the Cross Timbers RC&D received the NRCS/RC&D Award for the region.

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