

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program

Resource Conservation and Development 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.

In this program, the local people in the community 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 total value of projects completed in fiscal year 2001 was \$12.1 million. These projects created local jobs through the development and relocation of manufacturing facilities into Oklahoma, the creation of a revolving loan program for start-up businesses, establishment of tourism and recreational opportunities, and funding for conservation and preservation of natural resources on critical habitat. The Oklahoma RC&D provided technical assistance in the development and passage of the Oklahoma Carbon Sequestration Act during the 2001 legislation.

Oklahoma has 9 authorized RC&D areas, serving 75 of the 77 counties. The Natural Resources Conservation Service administers the program, providing a coordinator and administrative support to each of the areas.

Private Grazing Lands Technical Assistance

Grazing lands, which include rangeland, pastureland, grazed forest, and grazed cropland are the backbone of Oklahoma’s agricultural industry. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides assistance to landowners to improve range and pasture conditions by managing for forage improvement, wildlife habitat, weed and brush control, erosion control, and revegetation.

Partnerships with landowners and other organizations help expand the management of grazing lands. The Grazing Land Conservation Initiative (GLCI) is a voluntary effort to enhance privately owned lands. Over 3,400 customers attended workshops, tours, and training sessions sponsored by GLCI this year. The Oklahoma Grazing Lands Conservation Association was formed through GLCI, to focus on grazing land issues specific to Oklahoma.

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. Both financial and technical assistance are available through WHIP. In fiscal year 2001, NRCS assisted over 360 participants in the program and serviced over 300 applications for cost share through the program. WHIP participants value quality fish and wildlife habitat, and are especially supportive of native grassland and riparian area restoration.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary land retirement program designed to assist landowners in restoring and protecting wetlands. Options available under the program are permanent easements, 30-year easements, or 10-year restoration cost share agreements. The program currently encompasses 32 Oklahoma counties, covering 38,170 acres, with a total of 122 contracts.

Soil Surveys in Oklahoma

Conservation of land and water resources is an important part of all landuse in Oklahoma. The maps and soil descriptions in soil surveys can help in identifying specific conservation problems in a given area and planning measures to reduce erosion, sedimentation, subsidence, slippage, wetness, water quality, and other hazards.

Currently, modern published soil surveys are available in 75 of the 77 counties in Oklahoma. The Natural Resources Conservation Service is the only agency with soils data that can provide these at no-cost to landowners, farmers and ranchers. Oklahoma developed a prototype of an interactive CD ROM that can print 2 by 3 section maps on most user printers.

Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)

The Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) is a voluntary program designed to help assure a reliable supply of timber. Oklahoma’s forestlands are a valued renewable natural resource dependent upon harvesting results and reforestation techniques. The state has approximately 2.6 million acres of timberland, of which less than 60 percent is stocked with desirable trees necessary to meet the timber production needs of our growing nation. In fiscal year 2001, 21 FIP applications were approved which involved 1,048 acres, 639,210 trees, and \$74,811 in funding.

There is a need for additional funding to meet the needs of landowners. There were 42 applications on hand at the end of the year for forest improvement on 2,546 acres. An estimated \$198,600 is needed to meet these demands. Additionally, working with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture-Forestry Services, NRCS assessed the winter storm damages to the forest production in December 2000 and January 2001. It is estimated that over 900,000 acres of nonindustrial private forestland received damage from the ice storm. Additional funds could assist private landowners replanting and timberstand improvement activities.



Oklahoma Conservation Commission



Oklahoma Association of Resource Conservation and Development

Oklahoma



Land



Water



People

Natural Resources Conservation Partnership Activities

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Dear Oklahomans:

Welcome to the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership's 2001 annual report of accomplishments. This report highlights the dynamic conservation work in the great state of Oklahoma. Ranchers, farmers, communities, and landowners are the "stewards of the land" and continue to work on solving natural resource concerns in a voluntary manner.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the conservation agency for USDA, provided technical assistance to over 134,700 Oklahoma customers in fiscal year 2001, and surpassed NRCS national performance goals. These achievements in natural resources conservation help make this nation productive and environmentally sound.

A Customer Satisfaction Index Survey brought national recognition to NRCS by showing that farmers and ranchers are happy with the conservation technical assistance (CTA) they get from the NRCS and the conservation districts. CTA received a satisfaction index of 81 out of a possible 100; which is 10 points higher than Americans rate private sector services, and 12 points higher than the index for other Federal government services. CTA received a trust index of 90 out of a possible 100.

Authorized under the Conservation District Act of 1937, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and the 88 conservation districts provide services to large segments of the public. These conservation districts are legal subdivisions of state government organized by local residents.

In Oklahoma's history as a leader in the conservation movement, our successes have been built on partnerships. While the NRCS, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, OCC, and Oklahoma Association of Resource Conservation and Development, each have our own areas of responsibility, where the "circles" overlap is where we are the strongest. Moving forward as a team, we share leadership, commitment and responsibility, and promote mutual respect, support and trust.

The OCC administers the Conservation Cost Share Program to the State's 88 conservation districts. In its first four years, nearly 3,000 customers have participated in the program. Over 3,300 conservation practices have been installed to help improve water quality and control soil erosion.

The Oklahoma Association of Resource Conservation & Development continue to resolve natural resource issues across the state and impact their communities with business and industrial development.

From the cooperators who produce our food and fiber, to the local conservation district and the NRCS, to the OCC, our past accomplishments, our current goals, and our future achievements are dependent upon the strength of our partnership. We appreciate the working relationship we have and are proud of the benefits to the state from Oklahoma's Conservation Partnership.

Will Rogers stated, "America's good fortune can't possibly last longer than her natural resources." The Oklahoma Conservation Partnership is proud to serve many varied customers across Oklahoma to help maintain and improve our good fortune. There is a statewide commitment to voluntary conservation and to accomplish more on the landscape. We listened, did joint decision-making, and took action on many conservation needs during 2001. There is more work to accomplish, and we are here to get it done.

M. Darrel Dominick
State Conservationist
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mike Thralls
Executive Director
Oklahoma Conservation Commission



M. Darrel Dominick
NRCS State Conservationist

NRCS Mission

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

NRCS Vision

A productive nation in harmony with a quality environment



Mike Thralls
OCC Executive Director

OCC Mission

To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts, on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

OCC Vision

Responsible care for Oklahoma's natural resources

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Oklahoma Conservation Cost Share Program

The Oklahoma Conservation Cost Share Program provides financial assistance, through cost share payments to landowners, to apply conservation practices to help improve water quality and control soil erosion in the state. The Oklahoma Conservation Commission 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.

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. The program provides technical, financial, and educational assistance to farmers and ranchers through 5 to 10-year contracts. Implementing conservation practices such as grassed waterways, filter strips, and pesticide and nutrient management, achieve the most effective environmental benefits possible.

Priority areas and priority resource concerns are identified at the local conservation district level. Local work groups are made up of various local, state, and federal agencies and tribal governments. Thirty priority areas were established in fiscal year 2001, with a total of 570 applications being funded totalling \$3.5 million.

Small Watershed Program

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, and Public Law 83-566 (Small Watershed Program) provides broad authority to USDA agencies and other federal and state agencies to cooperate in watershed planning, surveys, and investigations. The small watershed program helps communities and rural areas reduce flooding. In addition to flood control, the small lakes formed by the dams provide millions of dollars in benefits each year for recreation, municipal water supplies, irrigation, and wildlife habitat. Local watershed project sponsors, usually conservation districts, obtain land rights and easements to build and maintain the dams.

With many Oklahoma dam construction dates dating from the 1940s, several dams have exceeded their 50-year design life. A survey of rehabilitation needs of watershed dams in Oklahoma was conducted. The review indicated that 190 dams were in need of rehabilitation. Chief Pearlie Reed, of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, selected Oklahoma to establish a national pilot project on rehabilitation of aging flood control dams. The Sergeant Major Creek Watershed was selected for this pilot project. This project raised national attention to the fact that many flood control dams would soon reach the end of their 50-year designed life and many would require rehabilitation.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is performing field reviews of all watershed structures in the state. Teams consisting of state, district, and NRCS representatives were established to conduct these reviews.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides emergency restoration for eligible projects that relieve imminent threat to life and property due to impairments of the watershed through the Emergency Watershed Protection program.

Oklahoma committed over \$15.6 million in EWP financial assistance for fiscal year 2001. The work included:

- ❖ Completion of tornado cleanup associated with the May 3, 1999 storms.
- ❖ Debris removal resulting from the ice storm of December 2000.
- ❖ Restoration measures associated with flooding occurring on six different dates.
- ❖ Reclamation of approximately 3,500 acres in Caddo and LeFlore Counties impacted by wildfires.

The majority of the work concentrated on damage resulting from the ice storm. This storm wreaked havoc in the southeastern portion of the state with many residents losing electricity for up to three weeks. The long-term impacts have proven to be even greater, however. Many streams and bridges were clogged with trees and branches resulting in closed roads and flooding of low-lying areas.

These storms have created a tremendous workload within Oklahoma as more than one-third of the staff worked on EWP related measures. In addition, there is still a significant backlog of work when more funding becomes available.

Partnerships In EWP

The EWP Program relies on partnerships to accomplish the work. Sponsors have included cities, counties, and Tribes. NRCS also works closely with conservation districts, County Commissioners, the Oklahoma Forestry Department, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to establish priorities for ice debris removal.

Completed EWP Projects

- ❖ Debris removal due to tornadoes totaled \$1.1 million in Logan, Noble, Payne, and Pottawatomie Counties.
- ❖ Debris removal due to ice storm totaled \$7.7 million in Carter, Garvin, LeFlore, McCurtain, Pittsburg, and Seminole Counties.
- ❖ Streambank restoration projects in 20 counties totaled \$6.4 million.
- ❖ Wildfire restoration efforts in Caddo and LeFlore Counties totaled \$388,000.

Projects that Oklahoma NRCS accomplished:

- ❖ Stream bank restoration projects due to flooding in 11 counties totaled \$3 million.
- ❖ Debris removal due to tornadoes covering 14 counties totaled \$10.3 million.
- ❖ Dead bird disposal from the January 2000 snowstorms in McCurtain County totaled \$48,000.