

# Resource Conservation and Development

The "Building Educational Partnerships" Conference sponsored by Great Plains RC&D, Southwestern OSU for Distance Learning and Continuing Education, and the American Indian Institute for Progress, attracted representatives from half of the state's federally recognized Tribes.



Cherokee Hills RC&D project B.E.S.T. passed the \$1 million milestone in lending for small business development.



photos: NRCS Oklahoma

Ouachita Mountains RC&D was host to the Annual Forest Utilization Conference and Equipment Exposition. The latest forest industry technology is offered through speakers and equipment.



## Resource Conservation and Development

Making community improvement, maintaining a safe, quality water supply, and increasing recreational opportunities are all challenging actions. Often these actions are more challenging in rural Oklahoma.

One opportunity to support these actions is through the USDA--Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the program and RC&Ds work through a council of local citizens to find resources to benefit these rural communities. Oklahoma has 9 authorized RC&D areas serving 75 of the state's 77 counties.

### RC&D Councils and Priorities

RC&D councils set their own goals and objectives, but most aim to accomplish the following:

- ☒ Develop land and water resources for agricultural, municipal, and industrial use, recreation and wildlife.
- ☒ Improve local and extended marketing of crops, livestock and forest products
- ☒ Improve infrastructure of rural communities
- ☒ Promote improved rural standards of living through economic and rural development

## Associated of South Central Oklahoma Governments (ASCOG) RC&D

The ASCOG RC&D Council, in cooperation with the ASCOG Sub-State Planning Board of Trustees, assisted approximately 53 communities with planning and financial assistance by providing \$1.5 million for infrastructure improvements and construction of public facilities. This included street improvement, new local fire department buildings, drainage improvement, local community centers, water line replacement, sewer line repair, and historic preservation.

The Council worked with the Jefferson County Health Department to organize an immunization coalition. The goal is to ensure that all children from birth through five-years of age are immunized. The coalition includes state and county health officials, private businesses, local hospital representatives, and volunteers. The coalition has provided immunization information and assistance to over 500 children within the county. The coalition also works with local law enforcement to sponsor car-seat safety events. Financial support is provided by local businesses, private donations and fund raising events.

### Cross Timbers RC&D

**Tress for Conservation**--sponsored by the National Tree Trust and the Hughes County conservation district, continues to provide trees to communities throughout the

photo: USDA

state. Over 10,000 trees were delivered in 2002, with an additional 11,500 on order for 2003. Trees are containerized and managed by inmates from the Corrections Corporation of America facility in Holdenville, Oklahoma.

**Muscogee (Creek) Nation Interpretive Center**--is sponsored by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation Tribe. An interpretative walking trail on Tribal ground will be created, displaying native plants as well as depicting the importance of the Tribe's heritage. Tribal Resource Conservationist Lester Ligons, serves as the liaison on this project.

**Oklahoma Rural Leadership Initiative**--Entering it's fifth year, the program provides an advanced leadership training program to rural areas on Oklahoma. To date, over 400 participants have benefited from the program by learning how to improve their leadership skills in order to assist in the future of their rural communities. The program is delivered by volunteer facilitators certified in the, "7 Habits of Highly Effective People" training program.

### Great Plains RC&D

**Growing Together**--Fifty-seven schools in eighteen conservation districts participated in the project this year. Seven thousand, six hundred children received a tree kit and a National Tree Trust activity guide. The kit included two tree seeds and soil to take home and plant, thus letting the seedling and child "grow together".

**Outdoor Classroom Cleanup**--Eighteen AmeriCorps volunteers cleaned up the Deer Creek Conservation District outdoor classroom area by removing debris caused by the January ice storm. The brush and limbs removed were used to create a habitat for wildlife. A mechanical clipper and operators were provided by Custer County Commissioner Raymond Ford. Chairman Alfred Miller constructed and installed a 25-foot walking bridge across a ravine to join a wetland site. The wetland was made possible through a grant and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Two hundred and fifty 4th graders attended the 20th annual outdoor classroom.

**Solid Waste Management and Recycling Project**--A grant received from USDA Rural Development was used to survey, evaluate and educate residents in the southwest part of the state on how to improve solid waste disposal and recycling. Solid waste management plans were revised and adopted in all eight counties in the area. Education, information, workshops, and community outreach efforts have made a positive difference in the utilization of proper waste disposal and thus, reducing illegal roadside dumping. Through the efforts of Project Assistant Codie Lee, an educational CD-ROM for the project, along with numerous other informational material, was developed and distributed. All materials are available to the public through the Council's resource library.

### The Ouachita Mountains RC&D

**Forestry Judging Contest and Scholarship Project**--The Ouachita Mountains RC&D conducted a forestry judging training workshop for 125 FFA and 4H youth. The workshop prepared the students for the district contest. The Council sponsored the 27th annual southeast district contest held at Beavers Bend, where 130 students participated. The Council awarded six college scholarships, totaling \$3,200, to the high scorers. The scholarships are funded through conservation districts, area businesses and financial institutions, and the Oklahoma Rural Rehabilitation Corporation.

**Forest Utilization Conference & Expo**--Approximately 165 people attended the 7th Annual Forest Utilization Conference, which is hosted by the Council. Included in the conference are speakers and demonstrations of the latest equipment technology in the forest industry.

### Tallgrass RC&D

The Tallgrass RC&D just completed processing a small business loan in Skiatook, and is nearing completion on another one in Pawhuska. Funding for these loans came from a \$99,000 grant the Council obtained from USDA Rural Development.

A tourism brochure that the Council has been working on will soon be printed. Each town in the six-county RC&D area will be highlighted. Nearly 20,000 copies will be distributed throughout the state.

The Council partnered with the NRCS and other USDA agencies to conduct outreach meetings. The purpose of the meetings were to inform farmers, ranchers, and Tribes of the new Farm Bill provisions. The Council also plans to host the upcoming Rural Tourism Conference in Claremore.

### Wheatland RC&D

Through the Council, 23 abandoned water wells were plugged this year. The public was invited to two plugging demonstrations where proper procedures and protection of the underground water supply was demonstrated. This was a joint effort between NRCS, the Department of Environmental Quality, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, conservation districts and the Council.

**Southern Wildland Urban Interface Cedar Control**--Because of an increased influx of urban population to rural areas, this project was developed to educate residents on the potential fire safety hazards to life, property and homes from Eastern Red Cedars. Partners on this project include conservation districts, Oklahoma Forestry, Federal Emergency Management Agency, rural fire departments, NRCS, the Council, and private landowners.