

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

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VISION: Productive Lands – Healthy Environment -- MISSION: Helping People Help the Land

What Can Be Learned From a Wetland.

Inside This Issue

- 1 Grove Valley Wetland
- 2 Water Resources Report
- 5 Program Information
- 5 Engineering Events
- 6 Zone 1 Review
- 8 Zone 3 Review
- 10 Zone 4 Review

Even though when Principal Debbie Straughn usually looks out from Grove Valley Elementary School at the acre of red dirt carefully shaped into a wetland is only half way to meeting her vision, April 22, 2011, she saw her students start to plant the future of learning for her school. Third thru sixth grade students slipped on gloves and got dirty while learning about the wetland plants they planted to help get the project growing.

When Straughn was asked to pioneer a new elementary school in the Deer Creek School District she knew it would have to have an outdoor classroom. Straughn feels it is extremely important for students to put their hands on natural science and that an outdoor classroom facilitates the learning needs of all of her students pre-kindergarten thru sixth grade.

Straughn has been involved in the aspects of Grove Valley Elementary since before the district decided to build the school. She has stressed the importance of creating a community around this outdoor classroom and applied for multiple grants to make it happen. Through Straughn's service as an Oklahoma County Conservation District board member, she leaned from District Manager Don Bartolina and NRCS District Conservationist Rod Shaw that Tinker Air Force Base had to fill in a wetland area on base to reduce the threat of bird strike accidents with military planes. The base had to mitigate by building a new wetland somewhere else and Straughn's project was the right project at the right time. Partners in the project brought together efforts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Deer Creek Public Schools, the Oklahoma County Conservation District, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry. NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Robert Dukes Jr. spent more than 160 hours giving technical assistance to support the project.

Straughn was able to convince the partners to preserve the tree in the middle of the wetland as place where students and community can gather to learn about the wetland. She says the wetland will help demonstrate not only natural science to the students but also math, reading, writing and every conceivable area of education. Straughn only hires teachers for this school who share in her vision for the outdoor classroom.



Students from Grove Valley Elementary spent most of Earth Day planting vegetation in the wetland area of their new outdoor classroom. Students have been excited about this project that not only brought together many partners but will also be a resource for the new neighborhood next door. The community will be able to access the wetland certain days of the year in exchange the community is helping to fund the fencing that will secure the area.

Grove Valley Wetland — ... continued.

At a previous location, Straughn was a strong advocate for the same type of outdoor classroom learning but after she left she saw the project go downhill. While that location has been restored, she is reinforcing the importance of the project with her own staff so that *if* she leaves, the outdoor classroom will continue to serve the students. (Note: she is not planning on leaving any time soon.) She says the students have been very excited about the outdoor classroom from the beginning. She said from the moment the big trucks began moving the dirt, the students were glued to the windows watching the wetland take shape.



The dirt work came to a finish and Straughn, her students and representatives from each of the partnering agencies came together on Earth Day to take Straughn’s vision one step further. Students got their first lesson in the outdoor classroom as their teachers gave them information about the variety of plants they helped to plant along the edges of the wetland, species of plants appropriate to populate the small ecosystem. The whole project has cost more than \$50,000.

April 7, 2011 the dirt work for the wetland area in the Grove Valley Elementary School Outdoor Classroom was nearing completion. Students have been able to watch the trucks as the construction took place. This has also been part of the learning experience .

Water Resources Report — Submitted by Bill Porter

Status of Oklahoma Watershed Rehabilitation Projects as of 4-20-11

Watershed	Dam No.	County	Conservation Dis-	Status
<i>In Planning</i>				
Cottonwood Creek	16	Canadian	East Canadian CD	Estimated completion 10-1-11
Cobb Creek	3	Washita	Deer Creek CD	Estimated completion 9-1-11
Upper Black Bear	62	Noble	Noble County CD	Estimated completion 9-1-11
<i>Planning Completed - Awaiting Design</i>				
Sallisaw Creek	32	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Pending Landrights
Sallisaw Creek	29	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Pending

Water Resources Report — ... continued.

<i>In Design</i>				
Quapaw Creek	15M	Lincoln	Lincoln County CD	Pending
Ft Cobb Laterals	10	Caddo	South Caddo County CD	Estimated completion 8-1-11
Barntiz Creek	1	Dewey	Dewey County CD	Estimated completion 10-1-11
Barntiz Creek	11	Dewey	Dewey County CD	Estimated completion 11-1-12
Barnitz Creek	5	Dewey	Dewey County CD	Estimated completion
Sallisaw Creek	28	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Estimated completion
Sallisaw Creek	30	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Estimated completion
Fourche Maline	7M	Latimer	Latimer County CD	Estimated completion 5-1-13
<i>Planning & Design Completed - Awaiting Construction</i>				
Cottonwood Creek	54	Logan	Logan County CD	Pending Landrights
Sallisaw Creek	34	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Pending Landrights
Upper Clear Boggy	36	Pontotoc	Pontotoc County	Estimated start 5-1-11
Upper Clear Boggy	35	Pontotoc	Pontotoc County	Estimated start 4-15- *ARRA
Sallisaw Creek	26	Adair	Adair County CD	Estimated start 7-1-11
Sugar Creek	L-44	Caddo	South Caddo	Estimated start 6-1-11 *ARRA
Upper Clear Boggy	33	Pontotoc	Pontotoc County	Estimated start 5-1-11 *ARRA
Upper Clear Boggy	34	Pontotoc	Pontotoc County	Estimated start 5-1-11 *ARRA
Cottonwood Creek	15	Kingfisher	Kingfisher County	Estimated start 5-1-11 *ARRA
Sallisaw Creek	33	Sequoyah	Sequoyah County	Pending
Caney-Coon Creek	2M	Coal	Coal County CD	Estimated start 4-1-11
<i>Under Construction</i>				
Sallisaw Creek	18M	Adair	Adair County CD	Estimated completion *ARRA
Sugar Creek	L-43	Caddo	West Caddo	Estimated completion *ARRA
Cobb Creek	1	Washita	Deer Creek CD	Estimated completion
Turkey Creek	9	Washita	Washita County	Estimated completion

Water Resources Report — ... continued.

			<i>Rehabilitation Completed</i>
Sandstone Creek	16A	Roger Mills	Upper Washita CD
Barnitz Creek	14	Dewey	Dewey County CD
Mill Creek	18	Johnston	Johnston County CD
Double Creek	1,2,3,4,5,6	Washington	Caney Valley CD
Cavalry Creek	6	Washita	Washita County CD
Sandstone Creek	12,17A	Roger Mills	Upper Washita CD
Sergeant Major Creek	1,2	Roger Mills	Upper Washita CD
Cobb Creek	2	Washita	Deer Creek CD
Sallisaw Creek	15,16,20	Adair	Adair County CD
Big Wewoka Creek	29	Seminole	Seminole County CD
Cottonwood Creek	17	Canadian	East Canadian CD

*American Recovery
Reinvestment Act

Outreach Efforts — submitted by Jasper Parker

OTCAC Reaches Out in McClain County



The McClain County Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) held a conservation informational meeting to discuss funding opportunities for local farmers, ranchers, tribes and tribal landowners. Attendees received information on the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), USDA Farm Bill Programs and program opportunities from other federal and state agencies. The meeting was held April 7, 2011, at the Mid-American Technology Center located in Wayne, Okla. More than 75 people attended the meeting.

Underserved Communities

Oklahoma NRCS partnered with the Oklahoma Black Historical Project Inc. to host the 6th Annual Economic Development Conference on April 2, 2011. NRCS also partnered with the National Women In Ag Association (an Oklahoma based association) to host the First Annual Symposium April 3-5, 2011. Approximately 70 people attended the Economic Development Conference and more than 180 attended the Symposium. Both events were held in Oklahoma City.

Chris Best, soil conservationist, represented NRCS at the Economic Development Conference.



Programs Report — *submitted by Richard Zetterberg*

Conservation Easements Closed



Janet and Gerald "Joe" Bullard, GRP landowners, with NRCS Program Manager, Suzanne Collier, after closing a 147.5 acre grassland conservation easement on April 25, 2011.

In April, NRCS closed on three FRPP and one GRP conservation easement for the preservation of farm and ranch lands in Oklahoma. Two years of activities, procedures, and paperwork culminated to protect these important resources.

The FRPP properties were enrolled through a cooperative agreement with the Norman Area Land Conservancy. The easements will protect 379 acres of agricultural lands on the southeast side of the city of Norman in Cleveland County. These acquisitions bring the statewide total to 20 FRPP conservation easements held by three non-governmental organizations on 2,354.5 acres from Comanche County to Rogers County.

The GRP acquisition enrolled 147.51 acres of hay land and grazing lands in Haskell County, much of which was historic native pastureland. Gerald Bullard enrolled the land to preserve the native vegetation going into the future, as he had been instructed to do by his grandfather many years

ago. NRCS now holds six GRP conservation easements in Oklahoma protecting 5,679.5 acres of grasslands and livestock operations from the threat to conversion for other uses.

Engineering Events — *submitted by Chris Stoner*

Sugar Creek L-43 RCC Cutoff Wall

April 26, 2011, engineers from the National Design, Construction and Soil Mechanics Center (NDCSMC) in Ft Worth, Texas, met design engineers from the Oklahoma staff at Sugar Creek Site L-43 to observe construction of a roller compacted concrete (RCC) cutoff wall. Dennis Clute, construction engineer, and Tom Brown, design engineer, made the trip because volumetric trucks were used to mix and place RCC at the point of placement. Normally, RCC is mixed at an on-site pug mill and dump trucks haul the mix to the placement site. The visiting engineers thought this method was well-suited for small quantities of RCC placement, but prefer the pug mill for larger applications.



Zone 1 Review — *submitted by Lanny Miller*



Cherokee Field Service Center

The Cherokee NRCS Field Service Center assisted with the 17th Annual Birding and Nature Festival held April 15 – 17, 2011 in Alfalfa County. Denise Turner, grazingland specialist, led a native plant walk on the Great Salt Plains National Refuge. Participants also viewed water fowl on one of the refuge observation decks.

El Reno Field Service Center

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission is funding an estimated \$277,650 dam improvement and repair project at Lake El Reno. With the creation of the 40-foot dam, Lake El Reno was formed in 1965. The lake has a water surface of 170 acres, and the dam controls 4,500 drainage acres. The City of El Reno had a siren for flood warnings before the dam was built. El Reno City Manager Tony Rivera said Monday the city has struggled for months, trying to determine how it would fund needed repairs to riprap on the dam. That's when NRCS stepped in to lend a helping hand. "We've been struggling with our budget process, and we knew this was something we needed to address sooner rather than later," Rivera said. "We were so grateful for the efforts of our local NRCS guys, East Canadian County Conservation District, and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission."

Guthrie Field Service Center

March 21, 2011, NRCS and the Logan County Conservation District presented a program to the Guthrie Rotary Club. Approximately 30 people attended. D'Ann Peterson, district conservationist, presented the history of NRCS, the why and how the agency was started. Peterson talked about the working relationship that exists between NRCS and the districts. Paul Fruendt, equipment manager of Logan County Conservation District, discussed the programs and assistance that is available.

Perry Field Service Center

The Noble County Conservation District and the NRCS conducted an after school land judging workshop March 23, 2011. The workshop was held to help students prepare for land judging competitions. Students participating were from Billings, Morrison, Frontier and Perry Schools.



*District Conservationist Chris Shepherd
(l) El Reno City Manager Tony Rivera (r).*

Zone 1 Review — ... continued.



Steve Alspach (in pit), assistant state soil scientist and Jeremy Dennis (far right), soil scientist, explained some points about Land Judging.



Brent Dugat, Billings, agriculture teacher, working with his Land Judging group.



Volunteers helped plant trees at Perry Elementary.



Students, teachers, Boy Scouts, 4-H members and representatives from First Bank and Trust, NRCS and Noble County Conservation District planting trees.



In a burn workshop Rusty Peterson, district conservationist, presented what is needed for a prescribed burn to the North Central Range Improvement Association.



Jordan Green, range conservationist, assisted with one of the land judging holes at the Alva NRCS and East Woods County Conservation District. This was the interscholastic land judging contest hosted by NWOSU in Alva on April 1, 2011.

Zone 3 Review — Submitted by Richard Kacir

Hollis Field Service Center

Five subsurface drip irrigation systems have been installed this spring on 459.1 acres in Harmon County using EQIP Irrigation Water Conservation cost share funds. Converting from furrow irrigation to subsurface drip irrigation significantly increases irrigation efficiency, thereby conserving groundwater resources.



A filter station for one of the new drip systems.

Altus Field Service Center

The Altus Field Service Center and the Jackson County Conservation District partnered in implementing the Agriculture Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP) in Jackson County. The district wrote a proposal to receive the cost share funds in 2009 and received the first allocation the same year. The AWEP funds for the project can only be spent on a limited number of practices that address water quantity irrigation concerns, water quantity drought mitigation concerns, and water quality for cropland and grazing concerns. During the first two years more than 2,800 acres were treated. During sign up for the third year, there were 27 applicants hoping to receive cost share assistance funds to address these resource concerns on their own land.

Frederick Field Service Center

The Frederick Field Service Center, in conjunction with the Tillman County Conservation District and OSU Extension, hosted a land judging contest on March 30, 2011. The contest was held on the farm of Conservation District Board Member Sonny Stoll near Chattanooga, Okla. More than 150 students participated, including teams from Frederick, Davidson, Grandfield, Tipton, Altus, Elk City, and Thomas/Faye/Custer.



Zone 3 Review — ... continued.

Norman Field Service Center

April 4, 2011, the Norman Area Land Conservancy recognized several landowners who agreed to have conservation easements placed on their properties. The Conservancy's focus of maintaining wise use of the land for future generations has provided an opportunity for NRCS to work effectively with the Conservancy to implement the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Plan (FRPP) program in Cleveland County for the past two years. The Conservancy recognized NRCS for the effort.

Conservancy Board Member Lyntha Wesner stated, "It requires lots of collaboration and it takes lots of people to do it. It takes people who care about the land, people who care about the water and who care about the future ... and you have to have people who are willing to do this with their land and (it) takes partners like NRCS."



Left to right: State Conservationist Ron Hilliard, Norman Mayor Cindy Rosenthal, FRPP Landowner Stan Ward, District Conservationist Dr. Carol Crouch and Assistant Conservationist for Programs Richard Zetterberg.



Cheyenne Field Service Center

The Upper Washita Conservation District's Annual Land and Range Judging contest was held April 6, 2011, on US Forest Service land in Roger Mills County. There were 23 4-H and FFA students from the Hammon, Reydon and Sweetwater areas that participated. The three land judging sites were set up by Clay Salisbury, soil scientist. The three range judging sites and plant id were set up by Laurie Boengen, range management specialist. Jerry Swartwood, conservation technician, was the photographer and a judging card grader.

Zone 3 Review — ... continued.

Duncan Field Service Center

The Duncan Field Service Center held a locally led meeting and Farm Bill meeting April 4, 2011. The meeting was held at the Stephens County Fairgrounds and was sponsored by the OSU extension and Chisholm Trail Ag Credit and First National Bank of Velma.



Max Gallaway, Stephens County Conservation District director spoke at the locally led meeting.

Anadarko Field Service Center

Rehabilitation construction on the Sugar Creek watershed began in April. The Farrow Rock drop site was estimated as a \$2.2 million repair site. Bids were accepted and awarded in February. The site is located north of Anadarko in Caddo County.

The Sugar Creek watershed will also begin rehabilitation of nine drop structures, berms and critical area planting along the channel through the FEMA funding. Partners include South Caddo Conservation District, NRCS, FEMA, and Oklahoma Emergency Management. This damage is a result of the 2007 hurricane Erin that lingered over Oklahoma. This portion of the reconstruction is a two mile section with several more to come.



Construction company representatives met with Agricultural Engineer Curtis Washburn who described the details of the FEMA project.



Extensive damage to the Sugar Creek watershed resulting from a 2007 storm. The sandy structure of the soil in Sugar Creek increases the rate of deterioration.

Zone 4 Review — Submitted by Jamey Wood

Ardmore Field Service Center

Before and after shots of the two Carter County EWP sites (resulting from a 2010 heavy rain event) completed in late March of 2011.



Poteau Field Service Center

The 19th Annual FFA Forestry Judging Contest was sponsored by the LeFlore County Conservation District, Latimer County Conservation District, Talihina Conservation District, Oklahoma Forestry Service, NRCS and the Kerr Center. The contest was held at Cedar Lake on March 31, 2011. FFA students from Wister, Clayton and Whitesboro competed for awards in tree identification, sawlog, pulpwood, compass and pacing, and tool identification.

For tree identification students of identified both common and botanical names. In sawlog, students figured the number of 16 foot sawlogs and board feet produced from each of ten trees. Students competing in the pulpwood section measured the diameter and height of a tree and estimate the amount of pulpwood it will yield. Compass and pacing contestants figured the distance between the placement of ten stakes and used a compass to judge the direction they lay. For tool identification students identify 15 tools used in forestry work.

The top five highest combined-scoring individuals received scholarships and knives and the top three teams received plaques.



Placing first and earning a \$400 scholarship and knife was Kaleb Boren, Whitesboro FFA, received his award from Craig Marquardt, district forester,

Zone 4 Review — ... continued.

Stigler Field Service Center

The Poteau, Sallisaw, Stigler, and Wilburton NRCS Field Service Centers partnered with the Haskell, Latimer, Leflore, Sequoyah Counties, and Talihina Conservation Districts conducted the 5th Annual Eastern Oklahoma Ag Trade Show at the Leflore County Fairgrounds south of Poteau on April 21, 2011. The trade show attracted more than 25 vendors and 350 attendees. During the event, presentations were made by various specialists pertaining to poultry and livestock concerns and issues. Three hours of continuing education credits



were given to those poultry litter applicators and producers needing the mandated credit. Other partners co-sponsoring the event included OK Farms, OSU Cooperative Extension Service, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, Oklahoma Beef Council, and the Leflore County Cattlemen's Association.

McAlester Field Service Center

NRCS participated at the Choctaw Nation Career Development and Career Opportunities Expo on April 6, 2011, at the Southeast Expo Center in McAlester. The Choctaw Nation, Choctaw Nation Career Development Division and the Choctaw Nation Scholarship Division sponsored the event. The theme for the career expo was "Map Your Future".



Chief Gregory E. Pyle and Assistant Chief Gary Batton of the Choctaw Nation welcomed participants. There were 153 exhibits including federal and state agencies, universities, Fortune 500 companies and other companies from across Oklahoma. Approximately 1,820 people attended. Attendees were juniors and seniors from 29 high schools and students currently enrolled in seven Oklahoma Technology Centers in Southeast Oklahoma. Attendees participated in concurrent sessions focusing on job seeking information tips and pathways to career success.

District Conservationist Tim Jones provided local support for the event. NRCS provided a booth during the expo. An invitation has already been extended from the Choctaw Nation for NRCS to attend next year's event.

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