

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

Spring Issue 2015

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

Oklahoma Celebrates Black History Month

2015 NATIONAL THEME "A CENTURY OF BLACK LIFE, HISTORY AND CULTURE"

Each year beginning on February 1, an entire month of events are planned nationwide honoring the history and contributions of African Americans. Black History Month began in 1926 as part of an initiative by writer and educator Dr. Carter G. Woodson who launched Negro History Week in 1926. Woodson proclaimed that Negro History Week should always occur in the second week of February between the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Since 1976, every American president has proclaimed February as Black History Month. Today, other countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom also devote an entire month to celebrating black history. Over the past century, African American life, history, and culture have become major forces in the United States and the world.

In 1915, few could have imagined that African Americans in music, art, and literature would become appreciated by the global community. Fewer still could have predicted the prominence achieved by African Americans, as well as other people of African descent, in shaping world politics, war, and diplomacy. Indeed, it was nearly universally believed that Africans and people of African descent had played no role in the unfolding of history and were a threat to American civilization itself. A century later, few can deny the centrality of African Americans in the making of American history.

The theme for **NRCS's 2015 Black History Month** is "**Celebrating 'The First' Black Men to Lead the Agency.**" This is in recognition of efforts made by NRCS over the last 50 years to promote hiring of qualified minority employees.

Continued on page 2



In This Issue:

- Administrative Transformation...4
- Women's History Month..... 5
- Mobile Connections..... 6
- Earth Team Volunteer Making a Difference..... 7
- Dust Bowl 80th Anniversary.....10
- Little River Outdoor Classroom..15
- Eastern OK Ag Show19



In recognition of Black History Month, Ryan McCloud, NRCS Oklahoma Black Special Emphasis Program Manager, set up three speaker discussions on February 12th, 19th, and 26th from 9-9:30am. Invited speakers were Wynea Buford-NRCS National Civil Rights Committee Black Female Representative, Malcolm Jones-National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees OK Chapter President, and Dwight Guy-USDA Liaison.

Birdie Neal, Purchasing Agent - State Office, and the Administrative staff coordinated a Black History Month presentation for the State Office.

Speakers were Jasper Parker, retired Assistant State Conservationist and Joe Buford, NRCS Resource Specialist.

Both spoke on their career with NRCS and barriers they have faced in the work place.



State Office Display - complete with Sweet Potato Pie



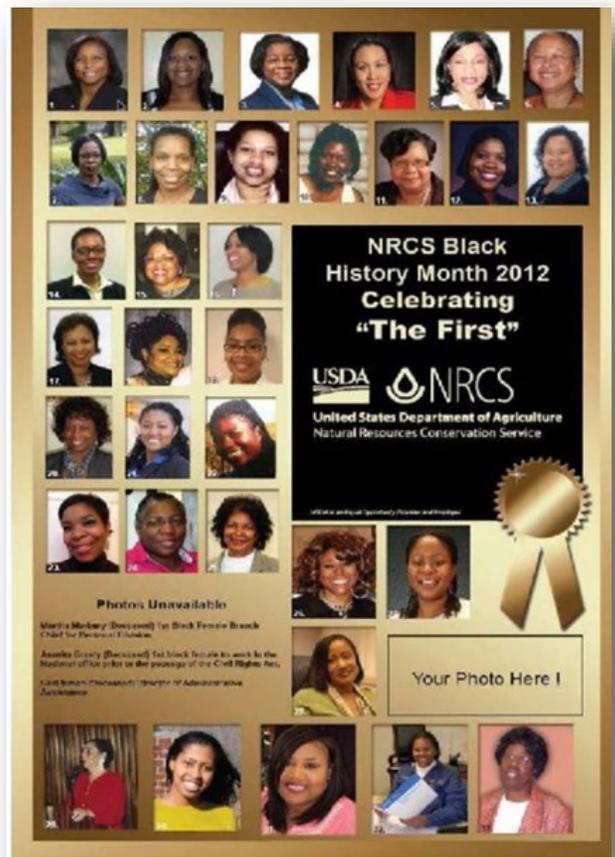
L-R: Terry Kinzie, Joe Buford, David Hungerford

Rishell Bowler, District Conservationist (DC), Muskogee Field Service Center, is Oklahoma's 1st Black Female District Conservationist

(Image 16 is of Rishell Bowler)



Jasper Parker, and Linda Garabedian, Human Resources Specialist



Honey Springs Visitors' Center, a multi-purpose community/visitor center and library, in Rentiesville, OK

History records Rentiesville as one of thirteen remaining "All-Black Towns" that was populated by former slaves after the Civil War. Today, the community is challenged by poverty, but does have historic and cultural assets for tourism. The new visitor center will feature and capitalize on these assets. In January the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opened bids for building a multi-purpose community/visitor center and library in Rentiesville. Highlights of Rentiesville include being home to the great Blues legend D.C. Minner and Rentiesville's annual Blues Festival and the town is the historic site of Oklahoma's largest military engagement, The Battle of Honey Springs and the nation's largest Civil War battle in which African American, American Indian, Hispanic and Anglo American soldiers engaged. The heroics of the Civil War's first African American regiment, the First Kansas Colored, were largely responsible for the Union's victory there. The center is a multi-million dollar partnership between four federal agencies, a state agency, McIntosh County, several local businesses, and a non-profit organization. The federal involvement includes the National Park Service, as well as all three agencies of USDA Rural Development – Rural Business Service, Rural Utilities Service and Rural Housing Service. The site offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy hiking and area wildlife, while learning about the Battle of Honey Springs and the impact of the Civil War on American Indians living in Indian Territory. The Friends of Honey Springs organization will lease the land from the Oklahoma Historical Society to construct the new center. Upon completion of the 5,000 square foot visitors' center, the National Park Service predicts an annual visitation of 150,000 people, which would represent \$9 million in tourism revenues for the local area. USDA Rural Development has awarded nearly \$500,000 in grant funds and over \$600,000 in financing through the Rural Business Enterprise Grant and Community Facilities programs. A portion of the financing includes a guaranteed loan through Peoples National Bank in Checotah. The project also includes a Rural Utilities Service award to Cross Telephone Cooperative to extend high-speed internet access to the area as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. State and local funds will come from \$800,000 worth of site development and in-kind services from the Oklahoma Historical Society and thousands more in road improvements from McIntosh Co.



Battle of Honey Springs Site



Honey Springs Visitors' Center, a multi-purpose community/visitor center and library, in Rentiesville, OK, on April 6, 2015



Rentiesville, OK Town Hall and Community center on Tuesday, April 7, 2015. This facility will be replaced by a new community center funded with assistance of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), rural Development (RD)



Since the 90s, NRCS has seen its business expand and diversify due to a rise in Farm Bill Programs. Meanwhile, the business and administrative structure hasn't kept pace to best support our mission. Now, NRCS is looking ahead and building a better business and administrative structure for the future.

The Administrative Transformation will create a new set of virtual teams to help make our Budget & Financial Management, Procurement & Property, and Human Resources more effective and consistent. And, a new local support team with new roles in each state will continue to provide the on-ground support they need. Additionally, new leadership roles and capabilities will be housed in a realigned national oversight structure that will support each of the three administrative areas.

Three Major Parts of the Transformation

Local Support:

A single business and administrative unit in each state office handles all local and state business activities.

Roles:

- ◆ Business Leader
- ◆ Financial
- ◆ Business Management
- ◆ Clerical

National Service Delivery Teams (NSDT)

Administrative Staff located throughout the country deliver services across state, center, and NHQ boundaries through virtual teams.

Budget & Financial Management

- ◆ Accounts Payable; Accounts Receivable; Budget Support; Financial Administrative Services

Human Resources

- ◆ Benefits; Employee & Labor Relations; Performance, Pay & Recognition; Staffing & Workforce Management Services

Procurement & Property

- ◆ Contracting; Grants & Agreements; Personal Property; Real Property

National Oversight

A national-level oversight structure oversees each function (BFM, HR, P&P) and provides additional corporate capabilities and support to national teams and states.

Enhanced & New Capabilities

- ◆ Analytics & Reporting
- ◆ Assurance & Compliance
- ◆ Information & Technology Management
- ◆ Policy & Business Practices
- ◆ Strategy & Planning

So, what are some of our Oklahoma Administrative Staff up to??

Benefits Team - Human Resources

Kevin Abrahamsen, HR Assistant

Contracting Team -

Sharla Goforth, Contract Specialist

Travel Team -

Sherrye Veselak, Fiscal Technician

Staffing Team - Human Resources

Linda Garabedian, HR Specialist

Grants & Agreements Team - Contracting

Janette Jensen

Reimbursable Team - Financial Mgmt

Gerry Cole, Budget Analyst

Local Area Purchase Card Coordinator (LAPC) - Contracting

Birdie Neal, Purchasing Agent

Leasing Team - Contracting

Terry Kinzie, Real Property Officer

States Gerry services: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, N. Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, S. Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, W. Virginia, Puerto Rico

States Birdie services: S. Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Puerto Rico, Arizona & Utah

States Terry Services: Oklahoma, W. Virginia, assists Texas

Personal Property -

Simon Beuttler, Purchasing Agent - Texas NRCS services Oklahoma

Cynthia Stanford - Arkansas NRCS services Oklahoma

Betty Brooks - Washington DC services Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA FINANCIAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST -

Sam Sites, Budget Officer

OKLAHOMA BUSINESS LEADER - Jamey Wood, Assistant State Conservationist (Management and Strategy)

OKLAHOMA BUSINESS SPECIALIST -

TBA

WOMEN'S ★ HISTORY MONTH ★

March 2015



About Women's History Month

Women's History Month had its origins as a national celebration in 1981 when Congress passed Pub. L. 97-28 which authorized and requested the President to proclaim the week beginning March 7, 1982 as "Women's History Week." Throughout the next five years, Congress continued to pass joint resolutions designating a week in March as "Women's History Week." In 1987 after being petitioned by the National Women's History Project, Congress passed Pub. L. 100-9 which designated the month of March 1987 as "Women's History Month." Between 1988 and 1994, Congress passed additional resolutions requesting and authorizing the President to proclaim March of each year as Women's History Month. Since 1995, Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama have issued a series of annual proclamations designating the month of March as "Women's History Month."

Who was the first woman to work for NRCS? Submitted by Andrea Lane

The first female employee of the Soil Erosion Service, predecessor to the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), was Lillian H. Wieland. On September 19, 1933, Hugh Hammond Bennett transferred from USDA to the Department of the Interior to head the Soil Erosion Service (SES). The following day Lillian H. Wieland entered on duty as his secretary. Among the 12 employees in the Washington office in October 1933 were Wieland, Laura G. Fitzhugh, and Alberta Stanback. Most of the early women employees of the SES and the SCS, as it was renamed in 1935, were in secretarial and clerical positions where they were integral to the success of the operations.

Like their male counterparts, quite a number of the women who found employment in the early days made a career of the work. Secretaries throughout the organization have often been invaluable in providing continuity in cases where heads of office changed frequently. They know the organization and the key conservation partners in state agencies, conservation districts, and other areas.

Though the early secretarial staff may not have worked personally on conservation practices on the farm, they could enjoy the sense of group accomplishment. Estella B. Williams started working in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, in 1935 and later transferred to Maryland. At the age of 91 (in 1989) in a retirement home in Hagerstown she wrote, "I still love to go through the country and see the strip cropping etc."

Women numbered 3,153 of the 12,825 permanent full-time and permanent part-time employees, or 24 percent, in 1992. The continuation and expansion of equal opportunities for women constitute not only the just and legal path to take, but also the one most beneficial to the agency. For a natural resources agency such as SCS to continue with a well-trained, dedicated work force, it will need to make even greater efforts to recruit the best of those available of whatever gender, race, or ethnic group.

Oklahoma Federal Women's Program Manager - Andrea Lane

Greetings! I am Andrea Lane, your Federal Women's Program Manager (FWPM). For those of you who do not know me, let me tell you a little bit about myself. I've grown up around SCS/NRCS. My dad has worked for the agency since the early 1980s. Growing up, we lived in several towns across the state. I graduated from high school in Chickasha and went on to USAO and Canadian Valley Vo-Tech after high school. I received a diploma in Drafting and Design from Canadian Valley in December of 1998. After working in the private sector for a few years, I was hired on with NRCS in October of 2002 as a Civil Engineering Technician with the Design Staff at the state office. I joined the Civil Rights Committee in October 2013. I am married and have two sons. It is my pleasure and honor to serve as your FWPM. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

andrea.lane@ok.usda.gov





Mobile Connections

- Agricultural Apps Worth Downloading -

NRCS offers app to analyze cover crop costs

Planting cover crops is a hot trend but farmers who haven't tried it yet have one question: "What's it going to cost me?" USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service developed a simple digital tool to answer that question. It's called the Cover Crop Economic Decision Support Tool. It helps farmers, landowners and others make informed decisions when considering adding cover crops to their production system. And it's free.

"The tool offers a partial budget analysis," explains Ivan Dozier, Illinois NRCS State conservationist. "It focuses only on operational changes farmers make—actual costs and benefits farmers see when they add in cover crops. We focus on benefits and costs we can easily express in dollars," Dozier adds.

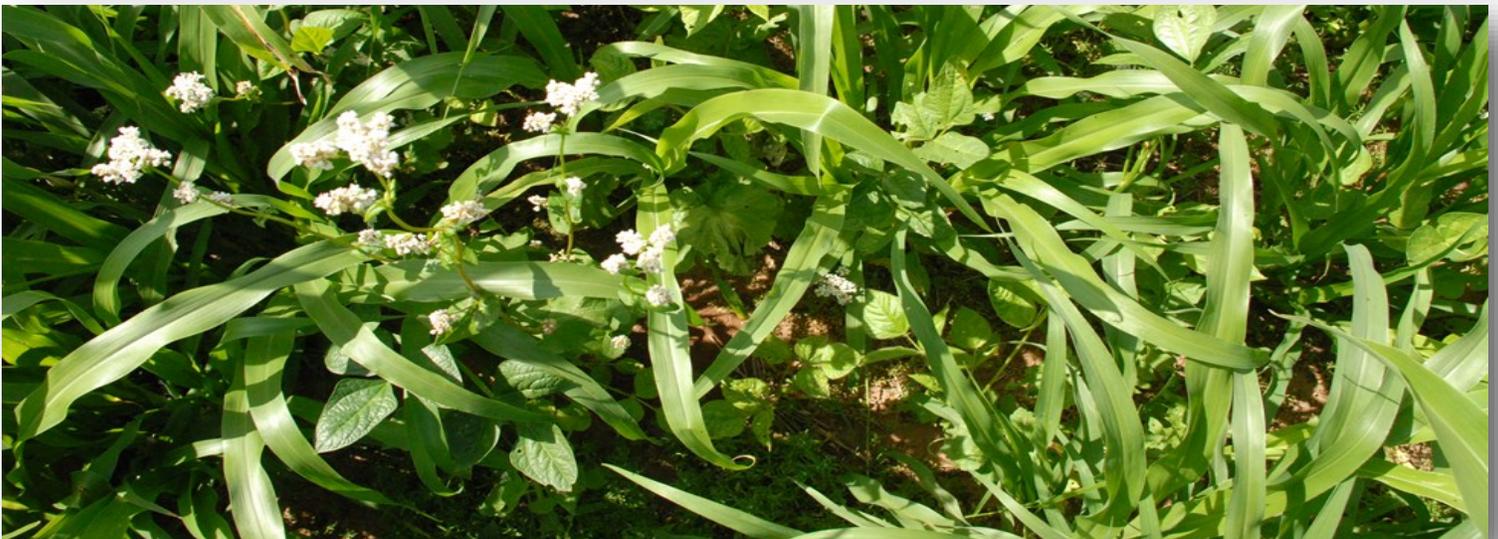
Benefits and costs to measure:

- Direct nutrient credits;
- Input reductions;
- Yield increases and decreases;
- Seed & establishment costs;
- Erosion reductions;
- Grazing opportunities;
- Overall soil fertility levels; and
- Water storage and infiltration improvements.

The tool's analysis depends on data users entry. Users can run "what if" scenarios if they want to evaluate a range of values. The tool offers results in both dollars and graphs, showing short- and long-term benefits.

"Our hope is that answers to some of the big economic questions will help more Illinois farmers give this conservation option a try," says Dozier. According to NRCS and other research, long-term results in renewed soil health offer huge returns in crop yields, water quality and infiltration improvements, weed and pest control and more. "Cover crops are a good trend and one that can actually pay off," Dozier adds.

This NRCS tool, which is being used nationwide, was developed by Agricultural Economists in Missouri and Illinois. Farmers can download the spreadsheet and run it at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/il/soils/health/?cid=stelprdb1269028> or visit the Illinois website and find a factsheet about the tool and download the tool.



Earth Team Volunteer and NRCS Partner are Making a Difference in Rural Oklahoma

Kasey Jo Blevins is an Earth Team Volunteer for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Blevins has been working with Mr. Justin Reed, her agriculture teacher, 34 other 4-H and FFA students and the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) to help the agriculture department grow at the Mill Creek High School in Mill Creek, Oklahoma. This was the first year that Mill Creek has had an agriculture program and funding was very limited, but the goals of the students were high. Blevins organized after school and weekend clean-up sessions for the students to clean and remodel an old barn that will be used by the students for livestock and animal science training. Kasey reached out to NRCS for soil posters, plant identification guides and forage sticks and other resources that were made available to help the students with teaching aids in their classrooms. Blevins plans to continue to work for NRCS as an Earth Team Volunteer until she enrolls at Oklahoma State University to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine. Blevins stated, "I live in a rural community and being an Earth Team Volunteer for NRCS has helped me become a leader in my school and it also helped me to know that NRCS has some cool tools that can be used in my classroom."



Mill Creek Barn – before



Mill Creek Barn – after



"Special thank you to the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council for helping make a difference in our agriculture program at Mill Creek High School. We are your future farmers" stated Mr. Reed. Front Row: Blevins, Mr. Reed and students

Article Submitted by Carol Crouch - State Tribal Liaison

Oklahoma's Forestland Is Expanding – submitted by John Mustain - State Forester/Agronomist

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) indicates that there are 7,525,700 acres of forestland in Oklahoma; now, after a recent tree planting operation, an additional 109 acres can be added to that total. The planting site, which has recently been enrolled into the [Wetlands Reserve Program](#), was an abandoned cropland field located within the Red River valley in southern McCurtain County. The project began with a soil ripping operation in the fall, followed by the planting of nine different native tree species in mid-March. "The weather conditions were perfect for planting trees; wet soils and temperatures in the 50's with a light rain all day" said Greg Allen, Soil Conservation Technician.

Herbaceous weed control is scheduled during the summer to control competition which will help insure tree survival. "The overall objective for the planting was to re-establish the area to its historic bottomland hardwood plant community", said John Mustain, NRCS State Forester. "It took a collaborative effort between the Oklahoma Forestry Services, Arkansas Forestry Commission, Little River Conservation District and various NRCS personnel, from the initial planning and contracting to the actual day of planting, to coordinate a tree planting project of this size", added Mustain.



Greg Allen, Soil Conservation Technician, oversaw the tree planting operation and is seen here selecting proportionate amounts of tree seedlings from each of the nine species of trees so that they can be re-bundled to create a randomly planted acreage of trees.



The tree planting crew unloads bags of trees as they prepare to begin planting.

Specialty Crops and Food Safety Workshop - submitted by Merica Wheesuk-Xiong - Soil Conservationist-Jay Field Service Center

A Specialty Crops Workshop was held at the Leach First Baptist Church in Rose, Oklahoma on February 24th from 9:00am to 3:30 pm. The meeting was free to the public with lunch and refreshments provided by the Hmong Growers Association in Delaware County. The meeting provided information on developing a food safety plan for fresh produce operations and an on farm safety assessment checklist to decrease the risk of pre and post-harvest food safety issues to the over 40 people in attendance. Speakers for this portion were Dr. Lynn Brandenberger, Dr. William McGlynn and Rao Kakarala, all of the Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service. District Conservationist of Delaware County, Michael Ramming was on hand to provide Farm Bill information on the opportunities to apply for programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program as well as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, with an emphasis on the Organic and Seasonal High Tunnel Initiatives.



Food Safety Workshop - February 24, 2015
Rose, Oklahoma

USDA Officials Enjoy Indian Culture in Oklahoma - submitted by Carol Crouch - State Tribal Liaison

On March 26, 2015, a number of high-ranking officials with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) made their way to the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes traditional grounds in Concho, Oklahoma. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes to host the USDA officials at their community center; on their traditional grounds. USDA officials included, USDA Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Gregory Parham; USDA Deputy Under Secretary, Patrice Kunesh; NRCS State Conservationist, Gary O Neill; NRCS State Tribal Liaison, Carol Crouch; Rural Development (RD) State Director, Ryan McMullen; NRCS Regional Conservationist, James Tillman; USDA Administrator, Sam Ridders; USDA Native American Coordinator for RD, Ted Buelow and RD State Directors from Georgia, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, North Carolina, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama and Florida.

The Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes opened their traditional grounds to these USDA officials and honored them by sharing the rich culture. The ceremony began with an introduction by Master of Ceremonies Elder Eugene Blackbear and the posting of colors and flags by the Cheyenne & Arapaho color guard and veterans. Then followed a traditional opening prayer by Cheyenne Chief, Gordon Yellowman and Cheyenne & Arapaho youth group performing the *Lord's Prayer*, in sign language. The Cheyenne & Arapaho drum group performed three traditional ceremony songs honoring the flag, veterans and memorial. Cheyenne & Arapaho Governor Rollin Eddie Hamilton and Lt. Governor Cornell Sankey provided the welcome and introduction of their Tribal Legislators and USDA guests.

Gordon Yellowman provided an overview of the Cheyenne & Arapaho history, the importance of their traditional ceremonies and the significance of the tribes sharing their traditional foods with guests. USDA officials were invited to join them in enjoying their traditional foods which was followed by traditional dances performed by Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes champion dancers. Eugene Blackbear provided a story of the buffalo and how the buffalo played a significant role in their survival as well as ceremonies. The ceremonies concluded with Economic Development Director, Nate Hart, providing a buffalo tour of the Cheyenne & Arapaho buffalo herd. According to Dr. Crouch, "This was a wonderful experience for USDA officials that may have never had the opportunity to experience the performance of traditional dancers, foods, ceremonies and actually have the opportunity to see buffalo as well as take a photo with one. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes provided a cultural experience these USDA officials will long remember."



Left to Right:

Cheyenne & Arapaho Lt. Governor, Cornell Sankey, Governor Eddie Hamilton, USDA Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Gregory Parham and USDA Deputy Under Secretary, Patrice Kunesh



Right: Cheyenne & Arapaho Champion dancers.

Left: Cheyenne & Arapaho Color guard and veterans.





80 years ago in the heart of the Dust Bowl a major dust storm pushed its way across the Oklahoma and Texas Panhandles. This storm was dubbed "Black Sunday" and took place on April 14, 1935. It was one of the worst dust storms in American history and caused immense economic and agricultural damage. It is estimated to have displaced 300 million tons of topsoil from the prairie area in the United States.

The "black blizzard", or dust storm, hit the Oklahoma Panhandle and northwestern Oklahoma first on the afternoon of April 14. It then moved south, hitting Beaver, OK, Boise City, OK and Amarillo, TX. The storm was harsh due to the high winds that hit the area that day. Along with the drought, erosion, and the unanchored soil, the winds caused the dust to fly freely and at high speeds.

At the Oklahoma State Capitol event Tuesday, April 14, 2015, officials with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and U.S. Department of Agriculture told lawmakers those lessons are especially relevant today as Oklahoma enters its fifth year of drought.



Oklahoma State Conservationist - USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Gary O'Neill spoke at the Oklahoma State Capitol Dust Bowl Anniversary



OKLAHOMA DUST BOWL SURVIVORS
 Ernest Herald - Texas County
 Pauline Hodges - Beaver County
 Virginia Frantz - Texas County
 Betty Ann Lam, Beckham County

Prescribed Burn Workshop - Kingfisher Co -

submitted by Brandon Burns - District Conservationist - Kingfisher Service Center

A prescribed burning workshop was held with Natural Resources Conservation Service as the lead and the Oklahoma State University extension and the Kingfisher County Conservation District as partners. Brandon Reavis and John Weir presented on Burn Planning, Tools and Techniques, Burn Insurance and after lunch, a hands on demonstration burn was conducted.



Prescribed Burn Workshop - Kingfisher Co



Airliner shot from 24,000 feet

Soil Health Outreach

Jefferson County Conservation District and NRCS held a Soil Health Outreach program to provide information to local farms and ranchers of the importance of soil health. Clay Salisbury, NRCS Soil Scientist showed the rainfall simulator and how the different management practices impacts water uptake by the soil. Caleb Stone, NRCS State Agronomist provided a slideshow presentation and explained what soil health is and what management practices can be carried out to improve the soil and maintain production. Approximately 30 local producers attended and Jefferson County Conservation District provided lunch.

Article submitted by Sandra Nobile, District Conservationist, Waurika FSC



Clay Salisbury, NRCS Soil Scientist demonstrates the Rainfall Simulator



Caleb Stone, NRCS Oklahoma State Agronomist

On March 25, 2015, a Soil Health Training workshop was held in Harmon County. Oklahoma Conservation Commission staff provided training to District Directors and Employees, as well as interested NRCS employees. They were assisted by NRCS Soil Scientists. Participants were trained to evaluate several aspects of soil health with hands-on training and demonstrations. Soil health factors that were evaluated included soil structure, organic matter content, compaction, earthworms and other life, water infiltration, erosion, salinity, and pH. This was a joint training for Harmon, Jackson, and Greer County Conservation Districts and NRCS offices.

In this photo, Greg Scott of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, is explaining the basics of soil health to (Left to Right): Brent White (HCCD Director), Michael Mefford (HCCD Director), Heath Beanland (HCCD Director), and Jim Bob Wilson (NRCS Soil Conservation Technician).

Article submitted by Melissa Teague, District Conservationist - Hollis FSC



Two Conservation Workshops held in Pontotoc County

On Thursday, March 12, 2015, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council and the Pontotoc County Conservation District partnered with the Chickasaw Nation to hold two conservation workshops.

The first workshop focused on soil health education and an understanding of climate change impacts occurring in Oklahoma. This workshop illustrated the importance of soil health by conducting a *hands on* demonstration with the NRCS soil health rainfall simulator. The soil health demonstration was conducted by Steve Alspach, NRCS State Soil Scientist. Jeanne Schneider, representing the USDA Southern Plains Regional Climate Hub, presented on *Climate Change: Impacts on Agriculture and Plant Life in Oklahoma*.

The second workshop focused on how to develop a Native Butterfly garden or farm, the threatened monarch butterflies and the importance of native plants and native pollinators. Many pollinators are in danger of disappearing which would lead to the collapse of many of the Oklahoma eco-systems and threaten 1/3 of the crops grown in the U.S. Jane Breckinridge, owner of the Euchee Butterfly Farm, presented on how to start a community butterfly garden or farm and how the monarch butterflies are threatened pollinators. David Redhage, Kerr Center Sustainable Agriculture Chief Program Officer, presented on *Native Plants and Native Pollinators*.



Soil Health demonstration



Over 80 Tribal members attended

Soil Health Demonstration - submitted by Don Skiles, District Conservationist - Altus FSC

On Wednesday, April 22, 2015 the Altus Field Office USDA-NRCS and Jackson County Conservation District conducted a soil health demonstration for the Washington Elementary second grade science class. There were sixteen students and one teacher present. The three employees that put on the demonstration were Brandon Taylor, soil conservationist, John Dee Butchee, and Belinda Dimitratos, Jackson County Conservation District. They demonstrated a homemade rainfall simulator and had several soil pans for the students to play in and discover what was actually in the soil. In those pans they discovered the different living and non-living organisms in the soil. For example, they found earthworms, roots, rocks, bugs, moss, and seeds. This was a very educational and fun demonstration for both the students and workers. They asked the NRCS & the Conservation District to come back and partner with them on several other agriculture projects.



soil health demonstration
L to R: Belinda Dimitratos,
John Dee Butchee, Brandon Taylor

Choctaw Nation Partners with NRCS to Improve Agriculture Land

The Choctaw Nation acquired an additional 44,688 acres of agriculture land. The purchase of twin ranches in the Kiamichi foothills has tripled the land base of the Choctaw Nation. The newest acquisitions are located between Daisy and Hartshorne, mainly in Ti Valley, what was formerly known as the “Winding Stair Ranch” or “Arcadia Ranch.” The Choctaw Nation also operates ranches southeast of Idabel, east of Tuskahoma, in Sawyer and Hugo, Oklahoma. The sprawling Winding Stair, which is actually two ranches bisected by the Indian Nation Turnpike, includes heavily timbered hills and valleys. The sheer size and diversity of landscapes fit well into the tribe’s long-range land management plan. With these ranches added to the tribal land base, the Choctaw Nation now holds close to 70,000 acres of ranch land and some 950 head of cattle. Jack Hicks, Director of Agriculture and Ranch Operations, together with new Ranch Manager, Shane Sparks, oversee operations at Winding Stair. The main thoroughfare is a 17-mile path through the hills, where abundant wildlife and lush forests give a sense of what the first Choctaws must have seen when they arrived from the Trail of Tears nearly 200 years ago. There are more than 100 miles of roads and 70 miles of outer fence at Winding Stair Ranch.

According to Hicks, “The overall goals include planting and harvesting hay on some of the acreage, especially southern portions of the ranches. The cattle, hay, timber, and potential recreation will provide sustenance and profit for the ever-expanding economic base of the Tribe. The eastern portion of Winding Stair is likely to be used for hay production and managed recreation, with the western land to focus on cattle ranching operations.” On January 27th and January 28th, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) met with the Choctaw ranch and forestry staff to start conservation planning on the 44,688 acre ranch. Representing NRCS were Jamey Wood, Assistance State Conservationist for Operations; Brent Reavis, acting Assistant State Conservationist for field operations in zone four; Derek Kelso, Soil Conservationist and Choctaw Nation Liaison and Dr. Carol Crouch, State Tribal Liaison. “This is an exciting time for the Choctaw Nation as they move forward to improve and expand their agriculture lands and NRCS is honored to be involved in the conservation planning,” stated Crouch.



Red Angus cattle approach a fence line at the northwest corner of Winding Stair Ranch. (Photo courtesy of Choctaw Nation).

Article Submitted by Carol Crouch - State Tribal Liaison

Little River Conservation District - Outdoor Classroom

The Little River Conservation District (CD) Outdoor Classroom held in Idabel, OK is designed to educate youth about nature, wildlife and our environment. Each station provides information, activities and or experiences to enable students to discover the world around them. We want students to remember and understand the importance of preserving nature. The Outdoor classroom was attended by over 80 children on March 25, 2015.



Frank Acker of the Little River CD explained the role the worm plays in helping our soil health



Robert Bastarache, USDA Forest Service Wildlife Biologist, spoke to students about snakes and how to be safe around them



Danny & Kim McKee of McKee's Bees explained all about bees and how honey is made and the role the bees play in pollination



Brad Bain & Jarred Campbell graciously helped us set up for the Outdoor Classroom



Carl Woods, NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, shows the students how to do a soil profile



Dennis Wilson, OSU Forestry Research Specialist, demonstrates the effects of soil erosion using a stream trailer



Scott Pace, NRCS District Conservationist, demonstrated the role ground cover plays with soil erosion and water quality



Brad Bain of the OSU extension office spoke about pollution of ground water and the negative effect it has on our soils

Pictures and Information submitted by Sherry Weeks - Little River CD

Kay County Spotlight's The Kaw Nation Tribe

On March 30th, 2015 the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) - Newkirk Service Center conducted soil and rangeland health valuation with The Kaw Nation. The Kaw Nation seeks technical assistance from NRCS for application of a detailed rangeland assessment and grazing land management plan. Kaw Nation Environmental Department is recognized for their preservation and land management of their natural resources on this 105 acre property which is just one of their many properties. The Kaw Nation has participated in NRCS programs to better help and preserve their land!

Article submitted by Ryan McCloud - Soil Conservationist - Newkirk Service Center



Oklahoma State Grazing Land Specialist, Brandon Reavis, talks with Kaw Nation Environmental Department about soil and rangeland health, while NRCS Soil Conservationists are gathering forage data
Photo Courtesy of NRCS - Newkirk

poultry waste management education session

On the evening of February 27, 2015 a 2 hour poultry waste management education session was held at the Kiamichi Technology Center in Stigler, OK and conducted by the Haskell County Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service. There were 28 in attendance including poultry producers, commercial and private litter applicators, and other landowners. OSU Extension Specialists presented information pertaining to Nutrient Value Comparison of poultry litter and commercial fertilizer as well as Energy Savings Options. Stigler NRCS District Conservationist, Tom Neumeyer, provided an update of Farm Bill programs and conservation services available with specific information about On Farm Energy audits and practices.

Article submitted by Tom Neumeyer, District Conservationist - Stigler FSC



poultry waste management education session - Haskell County

Texas County Natural Resource Day

The Texas County Conservation District hosted their annual Natural Resource Day for 4th graders on April 22nd, 2015. The 267 students and teachers in attendance participated in eight presentations on various natural resource topics and enjoyed a pork burger and hot dog lunch provided in part by Seaboard Foods. Alan Messenger, Guymon Field Office DC, spoke to the students about maps & soils and David McKay, Resource Engineer, Woodward TSO, demonstrated the principles of water pressure. Other presentations included Oklahoma Farm Bureau's "Grown for You" trailer, Natural Resource Jeopardy hosted by the Texas County OSU Extension office, Skins & Skulls from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife, a "Safe City" electrical demonstration by TCEC, Water Conservation & Pollution Prevention by Seaboard Foods, and "Trees – what do you really know about them?" by the Cimarron National Grassland.

Article Submitted by Clancy Green - Texas County Conservation District



Alan Messenger, District Conservationist - Guymon FSC, presents at Natural Resource Day



David McKay, Resource Engineer - Woodward Technical Service Office, presents at Natural Resource Day

Jackson County Interscholastic Competition

On Saturday, April 11th 2015, the Jackson County USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service and the FFA partnered together for the Jackson County Interscholastic Competition. The event started at 9:00 AM near Warren, Oklahoma. Don Skiles & Brandon Taylor administered the Land Judging/Homesite Competition for the day, with Gary Strickland and the Tipton FFA coach as observers. There were six attendees from Jackson County and the surrounding areas present for the Land Judging/Homesite Competition. The students judged four pits on the slope, depth and texture of the soil, and classification for the Land Competition and for the Homesite judged the pit based on the information listed on the official card for the pit. This was a very educational and competitive event for the students.

Article submitted by Brandon Taylor, Soil Conservationist, Altus FSC



Field day at Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area

April 16th was a field day at Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area. Both Beckham County District Conservationist Mark Benton and Rangeland Management Specialist Lesley Carson attended. The field day included sessions on brush management and pollinator habitat. There was also a session showing juniper thinning with a Marshall tree saw. Many questions about monetary assistance for brush management were asked. District Conservationist Mark Benton informed the attendees of EQIP opportunities.

Field day at Sandy Sanders Wildlife Management Area



Article submitted by Lesley Carson, Rangeland Management Specialist - Sayre FSC

9th Annual Eastern Oklahoma Ag show



The Poteau, Sallisaw, Stigler, and Wilburton NRCS offices partnering with the Conservation Districts in LeFlore, Latimer, Haskell and Sequoyah Counties conducted their **9th Annual Eastern Oklahoma Ag Trade Show** at the Leflore County Fairgrounds near Poteau on April 23, 2015.

The event attracted over 20 vendor booths and 150 attendees. Information was provided pertaining to agricultural equipment and supplies, financial assistance, Farm Bill programs, including "StrikeForce" and available USDA services. Speakers gave presentations about livestock programs as well as poultry topics for both under-graduate and graduate level continuing education credits. Soil Health was emphasized at the NRCS booth on display at the event.

Other partner's co-sponsoring the event included: Farm Credit, The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture, the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, OK Farms, OSU Cooperative Extension Service, OK Farm Bureau, American Farmers and Ranchers, Farm Service Agency, Leflore County Cattlemen's Association, and KTCS 99.9 Radio. Included is a photo of attendees at one of the presentations.



Article submitted by Tom Neumeyer, District Conservationist - Stigler FSC

Another Loss in Our Conservation Family

Our conservation family has suffered another loss with now the third Oklahoma NRCS employee passing away this fiscal year. Erik N. Friend unexpectedly passed away March 18, 2015. Erik was the District Conservationist at the Vinita Field Office. Erik was born in National City, California, and lived in numerous states in the U.S.

Erik graduated from Langston University. He began his career with SCS/NRCS on December 26, 1993 as a Soil Conservationist student trainee in Guthrie, Oklahoma. Erik worked in Guthrie for nearly seven years before being selected as a Soil Conservationist in Holdenville on June 25, 2000. He worked in Holdenville for two years. On June 29, 2002, he was selected as the District Conservationist in Vinita, where he served until his death.



Erik received numerous awards over his years of service, one being the Zone 2 District Conservationists USDA Honor Award for supporting The President's Civil Rights policies in 2003. Erik along with Greg Ritzman created a flow chart to assist NRCS employees in properly issuing the mandatory Receipt for Service. Erik was a lover of Frank Sinatra, classic cars and Harley-Davidson motorcycles. In any other free time he had, he enjoyed finding antiques. He was also a trained electrician.

***"In the night of death, hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."* - Robert Ingersoll**

Miss Langston University

Our very own USDA 1890 Scholar, Miss BlongShia Cha was crowned Miss Langston University on February 21, 2015. Last summer, BlongShia was assigned to the Jay Field Office. This summer she is assigned to the Cordell Field Office. Congratulations BlongShia!

Miss Langston University

BlongShia Cha



Article Submitted by Connie Fitzpatrick,
Stillwater State Office



Article Submissions

To submit an article - send to: sarah.hasenmyer@ok.usda.gov

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report Schedule:

Articles Due by:

Jan. 30 ,2015

April 24, 2015

July 27, 2015

Oct. 23, 2015

Issue Date:

Winter Issue Feb. 9, 2015

Spring Issue May 4, 2015

Summer Issue Aug. 3, 2015

Fall Issue Nov. 2, 2015