

# Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

Spring Issue 2016

[www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov)

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



As careful stewards of the land, American farmers, ranchers and forest landowners are leaders in innovation, risk management and adaptation, embracing their duty to conserve and protect our natural resources. It was true when the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was established in the years when sweeping dust storms ravaged the Midwest during the Dust Bowl. It was true when the Forest Service was founded at the turn of the twentieth century to manage forest resources and guard against massive wildfires. And it remains true today...

Read more of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's assessment of conservation work over the last eight years at [bit.ly/ConservationResults](http://bit.ly/ConservationResults).

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# 2015 Conservation Partner Awards

The 2015 Conservation Partner Award winners were recognized at the Reed Center on Feb. 29, 2016 during the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting. Each winner received a personal letter from Oklahoma NRCS State Conservationist Gary O'Neill.

The annual awards recognize Oklahomans who are committed to natural resources conservation and who are vital to the NRCS mission of assisting private landowners in implementing voluntary conservation practices. The 2015 award winners are:

**Outstanding Conservation District Employee:**  
Anita Kaufman, Payne County Conservation District



**Outstanding Conservation District Director:**  
Dale Jenkins, Hughes County Conservation District

**Outstanding Conservation Partner:**

Oklahoma Conservation Commission Watershed Technicians  
Dennis Boney, Southeast Region  
George Moore, West Region  
Johnny Pelley, Northeast-Southcentral Region

Conservation District Watershed Aides  
Chuck Pyka, Murray County Conservation District  
Greg Lyons, Garvin Conservation District  
Rusty Adams, Okfuskee County Conservation District  
Tony Harrison, Kiowa County Conservation District  
Trent Drennan, Grady County Conservation District



**Conservationist of the Year:**  
John Dee Butchee, Jackson County Conservation District

# Recruiting the Next Generation

The Civil Rights Advisory Committee traveled around the state in effort to attract new talent to NRCS. Members visited Cameron University, Connors State College, Eastern Oklahoma State College, North Eastern Oklahoma A&M College, Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Panhandle State University and Redlands Community College.

Assistant State Conservationist, Outreach, Gilbert Guerrero described the recruitment activities as one of the highlights of his year.



**Above:** Josh McNeff, Guthrie FO soil conservation technician, leads a recruitment and outreach session.

**Left:** Liana Jones, Stillwater FO soil conservationist, Derek Kelso, Hugo FO soil conservationist, and Cody Parker, Stilwell Native American SC soil conservationist, describe working in a field office.

Submitted by Civil Rights Advisory Committee

# Supporting Women in Ag

The Southwest Oklahoma Women in Ag & Small Business Conference was held in Altus, OK on February 2nd. There were 128 women involved in agriculture or small business attending to learn about the newest developments. Belinda Dimitratos, Jackson County Conservation District secretary, and Don Skiles, Altus FO district conservationist, staffed a booth to inform participants about the NRCS and Conservation District's mission. The theme was backyard conservation. Dimitratos and Skiles answered questions about soil health concerning everything from rose beds to wheat fields.



**Don Skiles staffs the NRCS booth.**

Submitted by Don Skiles, Altus FO district conservationist



# Mobile Connections

## Stay up to date with NRCS and OCC

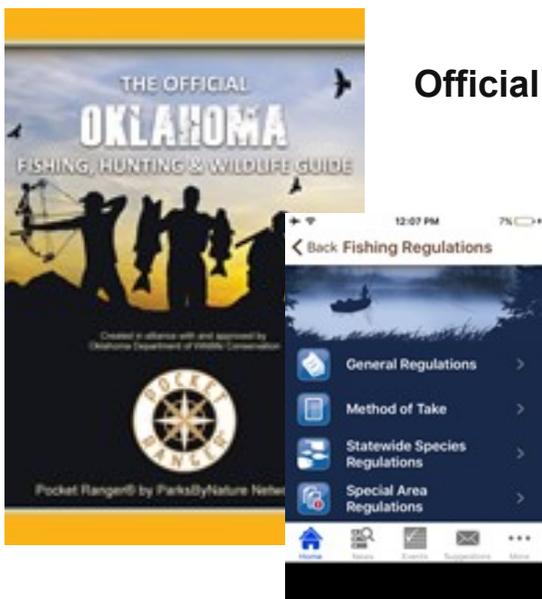


NRCS and OCC are now using GovDelivery to keep subscribers up to date about programs, events and news. The service allows the public to decide the type of information they receive from agencies and how often. You can even receive NRCS updates specific to your county. Visit the following links to subscribe with your email address and encourage your customers to do the same!

NRCS GovDelivery: [bit.ly/NRCSOKGovD](http://bit.ly/NRCSOKGovD)

OCC GovDelivery: [bit.ly/OKCCGovD](http://bit.ly/OKCCGovD)

After clicking the link, simply enter your email address and select the topics you'd like to get updates about. Existing NRCS subscribers should note we have consolidated many of our topics and added the option to input your county in order to receive updates specific to your area. We encourage you to return to the subscriber page to update these preferences.



## Official Oklahoma Fish & Wildlife Guide



Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has partnered with Pocket Ranger to develop a free iPhone and Android app that provides rules, regulations and important permits and licensing details even when you're in the backcountry without a phone signal.

Download links are available here:

[bit.ly/](http://bit.ly/)

Submitted by Connie Fitzpatrick, secretary to state conservationist

# USDA Celebrates Black History and Women's History Months



USDA views diversity in the workplace as key to successfully meeting the agricultural needs of a diverse nation. The Stillwater state office administrative team helped celebrate by setting up Black History and Women's History Month displays in the break room during the months of February and March.

**Black History Month display, left to right: Birdie Neal, contracting services, Gerry Cole, accounts receivable, Cara Crane, financial administration, Sam Sites, financial resource specialist, Sharla Goforth, contracting services, and Sherrye Veselak, accounts payable.**

The Civil Rights Advisory Committee partnered with USDA Club to host a Black History Month session where attendees learned about locations important to the Civil Right Movement and shared stories about sites important to them.

**Joe Buford, resource conservationist, presents Victor Slowik, design engineer, with a commemorative baseball cap for correctly answering Black History Month trivia.**



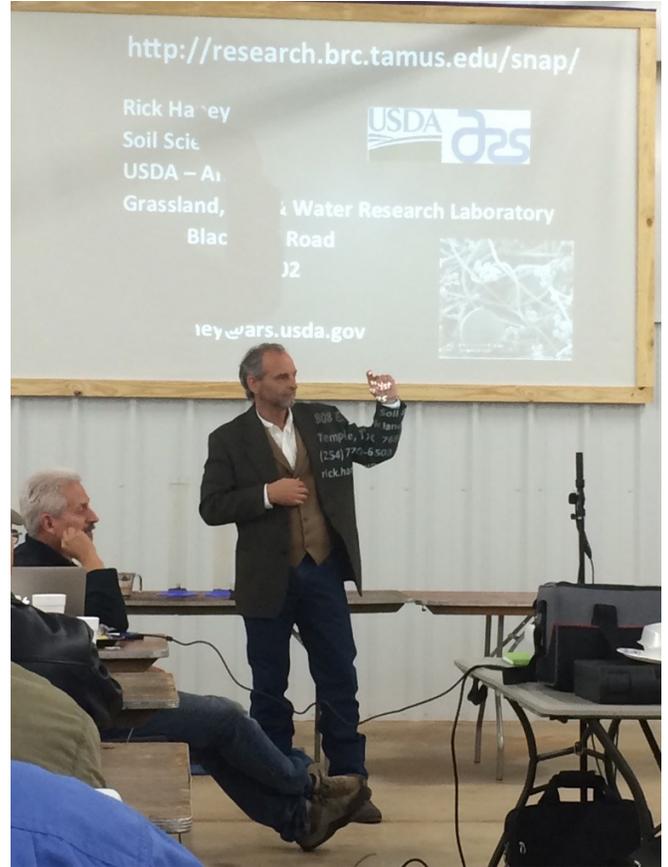
Following the Black History Month session, attendees enjoyed a soul food potluck featuring black eyed peas, collard greens and vinegar pie.



# Soil Health Pros Tour Oklahoma in Conference Series

Ray Archuleta, NRCS soil health specialist, and Gabe Brown, North Dakota farmer, rancher and soil health champion, were the special guest speakers for a series of soil health conferences held in Elk City, Alva and El Reno in late March. Rick Haney, ARS soil scientist, and Jimmy Emmons, everyone's favorite Dewey County farmer, rancher and soil health champion, also gave presentations.

Unique among other soil health events open to the public, these conferences offered an intensive, lecture-style one day course on the principles and practices of soil health from both scientific and financial perspectives.



**Rick Haney describes the Haney test, a revolutionary new soil health test that, among other things, identifies many forms of nitrogen that traditional tests miss.**



**Gabe Brown shows local producers detailed input and yield reports from his operation.**

**Ray Archuleta explains the biological processes in play that provide resiliency to a healthy soil.**



# Josh Hall Receives Oklahoma Tribal Advisory Council Scholarship



Gary O'Neill, NRCS state conservationist in Oklahoma, presents Josh with the scholarship award.

Josh Hall, NRCS Pathways student, was awarded a \$250.00 scholarship from the Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) for his academic achievement. Josh grew up in Edmond, Oklahoma and is the middle child of three children. He has a B.A. in history but he decided to return to college in 2013 to get a second degree.

According to Josh, "I have a B.A. in history, and I had several jobs since earning my first degree in history, but in all of them I was learning about environmental problems that we are creating that need to be prevented or remediated. So, I decided to return to school in 2013 to understand how exactly this can be done."

He is currently completing his degree in environmental science at Oklahoma State University. He is expected to graduate this May 2016 with a 3.7 GPA.

Josh stated, "I believe that I am now prepared to execute on the concepts I have been learning over the past two years, so I plan to continue my career with the NRCS upon graduation. I look forward to the future that has been provided for me by Oklahoma State University, NRCS, and those that assisted me in my pursuit of this degree."

Submitted by Carol Crouch, state tribal liaison

## Oklahoma County Feral Hog Workshop

Oklahoma County Conservation District had a great turnout at its Feral Hog Workshop at the Luther Community Center on March 30. The District appreciates its conservation partners: Langston University, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, and USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) for providing the latest information on feral hog movement in our region, wildlife depredation, control measures and the potential for spreading diseases. Speakers included Dr. George Luker with Langston University, Tim Campbell and Jeff Pennington with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, and Kevin Grant and Dr. Mike Pruitt with APHIS. NRCS partners D'Ann Peterson, Josh McNeff and Dwight Guy also assisted with the program, and the Church of the Living God provided refreshments for the workshop.



Submitted by Becky Inmon, Oklahoma County Conservation District secretary



## Kingfisher Prescribed Burn Workshop

Kingfisher NRCS hosted a prescribed burn workshop in conjunction with OSU extension and Kingfisher County Conservation District. The workshop consisted of a discussion on burn plans and burn planning/preparation. John Weir with OSU Extension discussed tools and techniques along with burning affects and objectives. Brandon Burns provided information on NRCS programs and technical assistance, including how to get assistance in your area and finding out about resource priorities in your area. Many of the attendees were not from Kingfisher County. A demonstration burn was conducted on 80 Acres. Lunch was provided by the Kingfisher County Conservation District. There were approximately 28 in attendance from as far away as Dallas, TX.

Submitted by Brandon Burns, Kingfisher FO district conservationist

## Texas County Natural Resource Day

The Texas County Conservation District hosted their annual Natural Resource Day for fourth graders on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The 307 students and teachers in attendance participated in six presentations on various natural resource topics and enjoyed a pork burger and hot dog lunch provided in part by Seaboard Foods. Alan Messenger, Guymon FO district conservationist, spoke to the students about maps and soils. David McKay, Woodward TSO resource engineer, demonstrated the principles of water pressure. Troy Collier, Woodward TSO soil scientist, explained the tools and techniques used by soil scientists. Other presentations included Skins & Skulls from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, a "Safe City" electrical demonstration by TCEC, and "Trees – what do you really know about them?" by the Cimarron National Grassland.



David McKay

Alan Messenger

Submitted by Clancy Green,  
Texas County Conservation District program coordinator

# Kay County Cattlemen Learn Pasture Management Tips

USDA partnered with the Kay County Conservation District and Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) to host a Pasture Management Seminar on April 21 at Pioneer Technology Center in Ponca City.

The conference opened with a presentation by Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS tribal liaison and StrikeForce coordinator. Brandon Reavis, NRCS state rangeland management specialist, introduced the concept of matching management practices with natural historically occurring burns, grazing and rest periods for grasses. He encouraged producers to find out the carrying capacity of their pastures by taking soil type and vegetation diversity into consideration. He emphasized the “take half-leave half” rule of leaving at least 50% of the vegetative top growth to ensure recovery of the grasses from grazing. Research has shown removal of more than 50 percent can stop root growth.



Dr. Doug Shoup, SE Kansas Extension crop and soil specialist provided information and handouts on controlling invasive plant species in rangeland including Eastern Red Cedar, blackberry, osage orange, sericea lespedeza, thistles and honey locust. John Weir, OSU NREM research associate, presented information on prescribed burning, including defining goals and objectives of burning rangelands to stimulate vegetation, control invasive species and improving wildlife habitat. He emphasized safe burning tactics including the use of firebreaks, trained personnel and use of proper equipment. Weir also stated the 60:40 rule of burning when temperatures are less than 60°F and relative humidity is greater than 40 percent. Landowners should also be aware of weather conditions and potential of wind shift or frontal boundary changes within 12 hours of burning.

Dr. Margaret Bowman, DVM from Pioneer Veterinary Clinic in Ponca City, explained details of rule changes going into effect in 2017 in the use and prescription of livestock antibiotics. Veterinarians must be familiar with a producers' herds by visiting their operation before prescribing antibiotics and other medications. Medicated feed supplements will also fall under these new rules. Woody Colbert explained the work of the OK Black History Research Project in finding marketable ways to use products from Eastern Red Cedar, an invasive species that is taking over 850 acres a day in Oklahoma, reducing forage production for livestock, degrading wildlife habitat and drinking up available water in the soil profile.

Lunch was provided by the OTCAC.

Submitted by Susan Henning, Kay County Conservation District manager

## Outreach Briefs



**Julie Norem, Holdenville FO soil conservationist, interacts with a producer at Wes Watkins Technology Center**



**NRCS booth at 2016 No-Till Conference in Norman**

**Gilbert Guerrero, NRCS assistant state conservationist for outreach and civil rights, and Janlyn Hannah, FSA civil rights manager, interact with a producer during Ag Day at the Capitol.**



# Tillman County Learns Secrets of Soil Health at StrikeForce Workshop

NRCS, Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) and Tillman County Conservation District partnered to hold a soil health workshop and lunch for producers. The workshop was held at the Great Plains Technology Center in Frederick, Oklahoma. NRCS state soil scientist Steve Alspach provided a soil health demonstration with the NRCS rainfall simulator that illustrated the importance of soil health. NRCS resource specialist Caleb Stone made a presentation on the benefits of best management practices on pasture and cropland to promote soil health. Dr. Carol Crouch, NRCS StrikeForce coordinator provided information on the benefits and opportunities available through the StrikeForce Initiative. Representatives from NRCS, Farm Service Agency, Rural Development, Risk Management Agency and the National Agriculture Statistics Service provided information on their 2014 Farm Bill programs and community based funding opportunities.

NRCS Frederick FO district conservationist Andrew Bennett said "Having the soil health demonstration with the rainfall simulator and a tour to evaluate local producers soil health status is a unique opportunity to gain knowledge on how using soil health management systems can improve the health and function of the soil."



Steve Alspach, NRCS state soil scientist, conducts a soil health demonstration.



Submitted by Carol Crouch, state tribal liaison

## Tribal Outreach



Attendance at a two-day pollinator workshop in Shawnee.



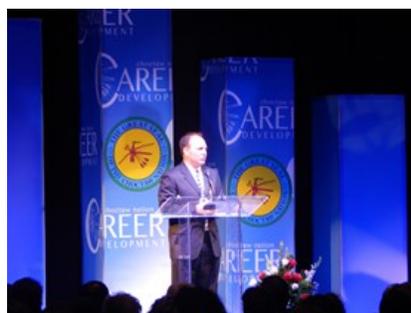
Tribal members attend a StrikeForce workshop



Derek Kelso, Hugo FO soil conservationist, presents a poster to a Choctaw Veteran.



A Golden Eagle cared for by the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.



Chief Gary Batton of the Choctaw Nation.



USDA information booth at Choctaw Nation Career Expo.

# Choctaw County Land Judging Contest



Over 100 Choctaw County students and their FFA and 4-H advisors participated in the Choctaw County Land Judging Contest held on March 24, 2016 on the John Worthy Farm in SW Choctaw County. “The event was a great opportunity for area FFA and 4-H students to showcase their land and soils judging capabilities,” said Greg Robertson, district manager for Kiamichi Conservation District. Winners from this contest will participate in the Southeast District contest in Poteau. Students were awarded plaques for individual and team efforts. The Kiamichi Conservation District also provided a BBQ meal to all involved in the contest. Hugo NRCS field office staff along with Carl Woods, Zone 4 soil scientist, members of the Choctaw Nation and the Hugo FSA office participated in the contest activities. “Helping young people to learn the value of our natural resources and having fun at the same time is a win-win for all” said Scott Pace, Hugo FO district conservationist.

Submitted by Scott Pace, Hugo FO district conservationist



## Reaching the Public in Elk City

The Sayre FO and North Fork of Red River Conservation District partnered in outreach to local producers at the Southwest Oklahoma Farm and Home Expo in Elk City on April 2-3. This year marked the 32nd anniversary that the Expo has been held in Elk City. A Soil Health Display from OCC was utilized to convey the message of managing to maximize soil health.

Patrons also learned about the importance of developing pollinator habitat whether in a rural or urban setting. A unique brochure from Pollinator.org allows individuals to reference Planting Guides for pollinator plants that are best adapted to the various ecoregions of the U.S. One can determine their ecoregion simply by typing in a zip code on the website.

The two day event was well attended and provided an excellent opportunity to communicate the partnership mission and showcase the services available to local private landowners through the Field Service Center.



Submitted by Mark W. Benton,  
Sayre FO district conservationist

## Photo feature



Remember to always give credit to the photographer or organization that originates a photo. In the case of these photos, “Photo credit: Sandra Nobile” would be appropriate.



These beautiful pollinator photos, including a truly exceptional shot of a monarch butterfly (right), come to us from Sandra Nobile, Waurika FO district conservationist. For the shutterbugs among us, these were taken on a Kodak Z740. You can find more of Sandra’s photos and all of NRCS Oklahoma’s photos here: [bit.ly/NRCSOKPhotos](http://bit.ly/NRCSOKPhotos).

## Remembering Bill Porter



Bill Porter with granddaughter, Kelody.

Billy Ray Porter, age 60, passed away on March 16, 2016. He graduated from Rush Springs in 1973 and OSU in 1980 with an Agricultural Economics degree. Bill worked for NRCS for over 36 years. He started in Woodward then went to the Claremore Watershed Planning Staff as the Ag Economist. Bill was one of the first employees to have a computer. He later transferred to the state office as the Ag Economist on the Watershed Staff. In 1993, he became the ASTC for Water Resources and was instrumental in the Watershed Rehab Program nationwide. The impacts that Bill made on the watershed rehab program is almost too many to name—Oklahoma has the most structures; first structure completed, first ARRA structure, first multi purpose and the list could go on. Bill also helped write the Watershed Manual and policies. Bill also served as the IT liaison and a particularly challenging responsibility he took on was as acting ASTC, Operations. It was in that position that the nickname of “Teflon” was no longer valid. He led the effort to develop the current field office restructure plan. Outside of the office, he also served as a youth football coach in Stillwater for more than 20 years with many of his state office coworkers.

Bill meant so very much to all of us. He was generous to a fault. He always had a smile. He was always positive and never blamed anyone—just said—how can we fix it? His legacy, through all of the watershed dams, coworkers, and friends that he had an impact on will live on because of him.

Bill leaves his wife Pamela, son Christopher, daughter in law, Katy, and his precious granddaughter Kelody.

# Oklahoma NRCS employee updates:

## RETIREMENTS

**Jon Lillie**, Stillwater Watershed Office construction inspector, February 2016

**Julie Adams**, state office cartographer, February 2016

## NEW HIRES, NEW POSITIONS

**PJ Martin**, was selected as Watonga FO district conservationist starting February 2016

**Jeremy Hughes** was selected as Beaver FO district conservationist starting February 2016

**Audra Fenton** was selected as Stigler FO district conservationist starting April 2016

**Marcus Griffin** was selected as Newkirk FO soil conservationist starting March 2016. He comes to us from Kansas.

**Grayson Fields** was selected as Miami FO soil conservationist starting April 2016.

**Axel Barner** was selected as Muskogee FO soil conservation technician starting March 2016. He was hired under veterans recruitment authority.

**James Harris** was selected as Enid FO soil conservation technician starting March 2016. He was hired under veterans recruitment authority.

**Clancy McClintock** was selected as geologist at the State Office starting May 2016. Clancy comes to us from Arkansas.

## New NRCS AFFILIATES

**Heather McElhaney** was selected as Guthrie FO farm bill specialist starting February 2016

## ACTINGS

**Brent Reavis**, McAlester TSO Resource Specialist, is acting assistant state conservationist for Zone 4, until further notice

**Clint Fleharty**, Sallisaw FO soil conservationist, is acting district conservationist in that location starting April 2016 not to exceed 120 days

**Cord Colwell**, Claremore FO district conservationist, is acting assistant state conservationist for Zone 2 until further notice

**Brandy Pietz-Jones**, is the acting CSP program manager until June 14, 2016

**Michael Bryan**, Wilburton FO district conservationist, is the acting resource specialist for Zone 4 until further notice

**Andy Bennett**, Frederick FO district conservationist, is acting Program Liaison for Zone 3 until June 14, 2016

## Article Submissions

Please submit articles to: [robert.hathorne@ok.usda.gov](mailto:robert.hathorne@ok.usda.gov)

Special thanks to **Sarah Hasenmyer** for the amazing work she has done producing the Partnership Report over the years. Your work has been an important part of keeping the partners connected and informed. I hope you'll find I've done your work justice. Thank you. —H