

Resource Conservation and Development



photos: NRCS Oklahoma

The purpose of the Resource Conservation & Development program is to promote the conservation, development and utilization of our natural resources to improve the general level of economic activity and to enhance the environment and standard of living within RC&D areas.



Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

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's Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D). Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers this program within USDA. RC&D work through a council of local citizens and USDA staff to find resources to benefit these rural communities. Oklahoma has eight authorized RC&D areas serving 67 of the State's 77 counties.

Oklahoma is seeking USDA authorization and funding for an additional RC&D area: High Plains RC&D in northwestern Oklahoma. High Plains RC&D will serve Beaver, Blaine, Cimarron, Ellis, Harper, Texas, Woods, and Woodward counties.

RC&D 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, or 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

ASCOG RC&D sponsors the Bio-solids Removal and Beneficial Reuse Program that assists smaller communities in rehabilitating wastewater treatment lagoons and incorporates the waste material on environmentally sensitive sites. The disposal sites typically are old landfills, salt damaged or other highly eroded areas. ASCOG facilitates the program by bringing together county commissioners, community leaders, local conservation districts and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality.

Cherokee Hills RC&D

Cherokee Hills RC&D operates a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and Intermediary Re-lending Program (IRP) for small business development with a combined capital pool of \$805,000. The RC&D RLF and IRP committee has made to date a total of 28 small business loans targeted to individuals who are minorities, females, disabled, and/or are in the low-to-moderate income category. Over 80 percent of the loans have been made to Native Americans. The RLF has created 16 new

businesses and expanded or retained eight existing businesses. This activity has created 50 full-time and 10 part-time jobs in addition to retaining 20 part-time jobs.

Fun Country RC&D

Fun Country RC&D has provided landowners and land users within the RC&D area invaluable services by providing technical assistance in establishing control burns on rangelands. It also has provided equipment that includes drip torches, backpack sprayers, ATV's with mounted sprayers and blowers, and other hand-tools. The project has seen an increase in conservation controlled burns within the region, an increase in program participation with the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) as a result of providing the equipment needs to local landowners.

Great Plains RC&D

Great Plains RC&D is working with the North Fork of Red River Conservation District in developing a 100-acre regional outdoor classroom located on an upland flood control structure. The Great Plains RC&D secured over \$175,000 in grants and donations for the outdoor classroom. Ameri-Corp National Civilian Community Corps volunteered more than 3,000 hours while building three miles of walking trails at the facility. To date, 700 students and teachers have used the facility.

High Plains RC&D

High Plains RC&D sponsored the first in a series of "Ranch Conversation Forums" for the Lesser Prairie Chicken. The initiative served as a model in how to build strong coalitions and partnerships with private citizens, local, state and federal governmental agencies on threatened and endangered species. As a result of these meetings, High Plains secured \$250,000 from outside sources to place 45,502 private land acres and 240 public land acres placed under habitat management agreements in the High Plains RC&D area.

High Plains assisted in locating three remote site manufacturing centers for communities within the area, creating 98 new jobs. The total estimated revenue generated from these new facilities will approach \$8.5 million over the next five years.

The Ouachita Mountain RC&D

The Ouachita Mountain RC&D Council assisted in the development of the Wood Industry Association of Oklahoma, a growing organization for increasing awareness of the wood industry and the importance of adding value to its products.

Ouachita Mountain RC&D hosted the 5th Annual Forest Utilization Conference and Equipment Exposition, with approximately 200

attending from 17 states. The exposition conducts equipment demonstrations using the latest technology, and a wide variety of informational topics are presented.

College scholarships, in the amount of \$3,200, were awarded to winning 4-H and FFA students at the annual Southeast District Forestry Judging Contest. The RC&D has sponsored this district contest for the past 25, years and the total scholarships to date exceed \$43,000.

The second edition of *Backroads of Native Oklahoma*, is currently being developed to promote tourism in the eight counties of southeast Oklahoma that are encompassed in the RC&D area.

The Ouachita Mountain RC&D Environmental Education Center continues to progress with the development of outdoor classroom settings, an interpretive trail system, and a wetland with walkway and observation tower. The RC&D continues to seek a funding source for their cooperative Agroforestry project with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Tallgrass Prairie RC&D

The Tallgrass Prairie RC&D held it's Sixth Annual Rural Tourism Conference in Broken Arrow. Featured speakers included former Governor George Nigh, Bill Kurtis, A&E Network, and Karen Keith, KJRH Channel 2 TV Tulsa. The conference provided training opportunities to community leaders, with topics such as marketing & advertising, community hospitality, historical & tourist signage, and organizing for success. Success stories were presented by a variety of entrepreneurs from small communities in Oklahoma. The conference has renewed and strengthened partnerships with numerous private citizen groups, as well as local, state, and federal agencies. The Tallgrass RC&D Rural Tourism Conferences send the message out that rural Oklahoma is a fun destination. Money that is raised through the Rural Tourism Conference is used to reprint the visitors guide, "Tallgrass Prairie Area in Oklahoma".

Oklahoma's RC&D Areas

