

OKLAHOMA WATER NEWS

Bimonthly Newsletter of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board



*from
the desk
of the
Director*

Duane A. Smith

I am proud of the accomplishments of this agency in 1998, realized only through the support of the Board, Governor Keating, the Legislature and a staff of dedicated employees committed to upholding the OWRB mission and providing responsive customer service. I am excited about the possibilities for success in achieving the goals we've set for 1999. Chief among these initiatives is resolution of the Sardis Lake purchase, clarification on the waste by pollution issue, completion of 20 maximum annual yield studies and support for a Hazard Mitigation Fund.

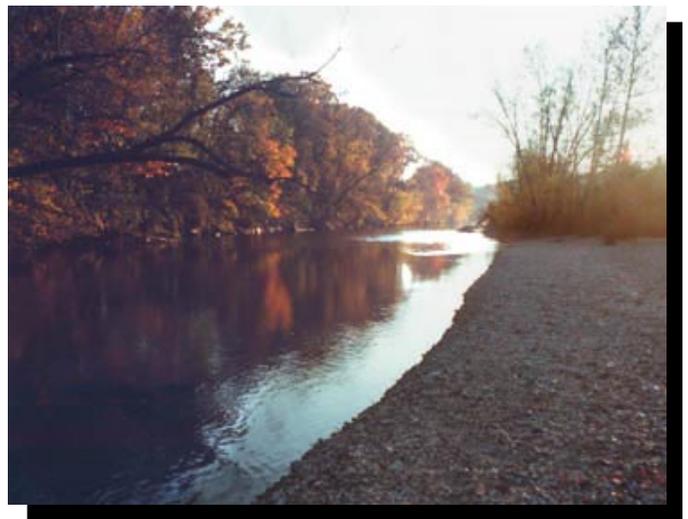
Publication of the first Beneficial Use Monitoring Report is forthcoming and the formalization of the Water Quality Standards implementation into areas such as remediation, nonpoint source and CAFO permitting will be an important step in improving the quality of the state's water quality.

We soon will see completion of the \$75 million bond issue for the Statewide Water Development Revolving Loan Fund and the \$2.3 million state match for the FY99 federal Clean Water Capitalization Grant enabling our successful loan programs. We need to identify state matching funds for the Drinking Water SRF program. The Financial Assistance Division will continue work on developing a nonpoint source loan and grant program for public entities and investigating a similar program for the private sector.

The OWRB Team -- Board members and staff -- together, through commitment to quality service and fiscal responsibility, have laid the foundation for this organization to be the benchmark agency in state government.

Baron Fork River to be Target of First Instream Flow Study

An issue as confusing as the correct spelling of the Baron Fork River in northeast Oklahoma is that of quantifying the minimum flow needed to ensure the well-being of the cool water aquatic community that inhabits the river. Add to the puzzle, balancing the beneficial needs of the domestic water users, irrigators, a rural water district, poultry growers and others who rely on water from the Baron Fork. Still more pressure is put on the puzzle when drought, such as that experienced in 1998, steals much of the available flow. However, the weightiest consideration in appropriating water from the northeast Oklahoma stream is its status as a "scenic river," one of six rivers in the state awarded special protection by Oklahoma Statutes. (Others protected by the Scenic Rivers Act are Flint Creek, the Illinois River, Upper Mountain Fork, Lee Creek and Little Lee Creek.)



Baron Fork near Eldon, Oklahoma

“The Scenic Rivers Act requires the preservation and protection of instream flows for natural scenic beauty, water conservation, fish and wildlife and outdoor recreation,” said Derek Smithee, chief of the Board’s Water Quality Programs division. “The scenic river designation, along with increased demands on its waters, made the Baron Fork the state’s first candidate for a study of minimum instream flow to support the habitat and species,” he said.

The cooperative study, to begin with field work this summer, will be conducted under contract with Dr. Bill Fisher, assistant director of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at OSU. “The aim is to develop a formula for determining a minimum instream flow regime for the Baron Fork, then eventually adapting it as a template in studying other scenic rivers and outstanding resource waters in Oklahoma. In the long term, we expect the formula to prove a valuable tool in protecting habitat and allocating waters of other rivers,” Smithee pointed out.

Instream flow has been an issue for at least two decades.

The need for such scrutiny was made apparent by the request from Adair County Rural Water District #5 for an additional 85 acre-feet of water to supplement the 75 acre-feet appropriated in 1988. RWD #5 serves 350 customers in a rapidly growing area in Adair and Cherokee Counties. The earlier permit allows the district to



The study of instream flows on the Baron Fork River in Adair and Cherokee Counties is the first step in a process that will elevate quality issues to equal standing with quantity issues in allocating the waters of the state's scenic rivers and other outstanding resource waters.

pump raw water directly from the river to its water treatment plant. “The permit granted by the Water Resources Board in June 1998 approved the district’s plan to establish a diversion point and build an off-stream reservoir to capture water during periods of high flows,” said Mike Mathis, OWRB Planning & Management Division chief. To protect the flow of the Baron Fork, a restriction on the permit will allow the taking of water only when flows registered at the nearby Eldon Gauge exceed 75 cubic feet per second. “In ordinary years, the river can supply abundant water to meet all the needs, but the heat and drought of 1998 emphasized the vulnerability of the Baron Fork and other rivers,” he said. “Off-stream storage will assure the water district and its users an adequate year-round supply of water.

“It's a little like holding hands with an octopus”

Establishing minimum instream flows is very difficult and controversial, involving consideration of many biological, hydrological, economic and legal issues. “It’s a little like holding hands with an octopus. Whatever policy emerges must satisfy all beneficial uses and be acceptable to the water users and all other interests,” Smithee said. “You can be sure that when we have all the facts and figures, we’ll take them to public meetings for review and comment.”

Smithee looks forward to the time when minimum flow requirements for the state’s streams and rivers are included in the Oklahoma Water Quality Standards promulgated by the Water Board.

Executive Director Duane Smith sees these recent events as enormous progress on a difficult and long-standing issue. “Until now, we have dealt with water quality and quantity as separate issues. It is time we ‘married’ those concerns and give them equal consideration. This is a very healthy step for Oklahoma’s waters and will greatly improve our allocation of stream water for beneficial use,” Smith said.

Baron, Barren, Barron Fork?

Even “official” maps disagree on the proper spelling of the scenic river in Adair and Cherokee Counties. *Oklahoma Place Names*, a book by George H. Shirk, declares the nearby town is Baron, but “the local name for the community is Barren Fork, from the Barren Fork of the Illinois River.”

The Geographic Names Information System of the U.S. Geological Survey agrees on Baron, but lists as variations Barren Fork and Barron Fork. Local residents stand by Barren Fork, and the *Oklahoma Water Quality Standards* lists the river that way. However, water use permits issued by the Planning and Management Division allocate water from the Baron Fork.

The “up” side of the confusion is that no matter which version you choose, someone will agree with you. What’s in a name? A river by any other name would flow as deep.

Board Approves \$1.9 Million in REAP Grants at January Meeting

Some improvements will be visible landmarks for miles, such as the 100-foot water storage tank proposed for rural McClain County; others will be underground and out of sight, such as the sewer system to serve the town of Hanna in McIntosh County or the new water lines to supply drinking water to rural water customers in Sequoyah County. Although vastly different, all are critical to the quality of life in rural Oklahoma, emphasized Ross Kirtley, OWRB chairman.

These projects are among the 20 water and wastewater projects totaling more than \$1.9 million approved for Rural Economic Action Plan (REAP) grants by the Water Resources Board January 12 at its regular monthly meeting in Oklahoma City. The OWRB administers the water/wastewater portion of REAP. The staff of the Board’s Financial Assistance Division receives, reviews and prioritizes applications from eligible entities. The REAP grants were enabled by a \$4.5 million appropriation by the 1998 Legislature -- the third such allocation since creation of the program in 1996, said Kirtley. Since then, the Board’s Financial Assistance Division has awarded \$10.6 million in 139 REAP grants to eligible communities and rural areas.

Grants approved January 12 include awards to the Town of Davidson, Tillman County, \$72,850; Rural Water District #2, McClain County, \$91,000; Kendrick Municipal Authority, Lincoln County, \$99,999; Weleetka Public Works Authority, Okfuskee County, \$65,500; Hanna PWA, McIntosh County, \$99,999; RWD #5, Sequoyah County, \$99,883; Colcord PWA, Delaware County, \$94,800; and Bluejacket PWA, Craig County, \$141,307.

Also Keystone Development Authority, Creek County, \$79,000; Soper PWA, Choctaw County, \$139,000; Haileyville PWA, Pittsburg County, \$99,900; Waukomis PWA, Garfield County, \$96,850; Carmen PWA, Alfalfa County, \$51,000; Drummond PWA, Garfield County, \$89,900; and Town of Deer Creek, Grant County, \$16,750.

And RWD #1, Woods County, \$99,990; Laverne PWA, Harper, County, \$105,000; Tupelo PWA, Coal

County, \$59,000; Bromide PWA, Johnston County, \$85,000; and the Town of Headrick, Jackson County, \$109,220.

REAP grants target rural communities with populations of 7,000 or less, but favor entities smaller than 1,500, said Kirtley. He emphasized that the program aims to fund water and wastewater improvements in Oklahoma's small communities that are unable to secure financial assistance from traditional funding sources. "There are enormous needs in remote areas in which populations, access to services and quality of life are declining," said Kirtley. "The hundreds of REAP applications to the OWRB Financial Assistance Division show the desperate need for assistance."

The REAP grants for infrastructure improvements were first authorized in 1996, when Governor Keating and the legislature explored means of restoring the economic health of Oklahoma's small communities. The 1996 legislature allocated \$17 million in REAP funding, \$4.5 million of it specifically directed to water and wastewater projects, then revitalized the program with additional appropriations in 1997 and 1998.

Eligible projects include construction or repair of sanitary or storm sewers or water distribution lines, water treatment facilities, and projects to acquire, distribute or recover water. □

OCLA, Region 6 Monitors Meet in March

Oklahoma Clean Lakes Association will host its Eighth Annual Conference March 24-26, back-to-back with the EPA Region 6 Volunteer Monitors Conference March 26-28 at the University of Oklahoma Biological Station at Lake Texoma. The theme of both conferences emphasizes "Stewardship in Action."

According to Kendra Eddlemon, OCLA conference coordinator, the agenda will focus on lake restoration, remediation, research, Geographic Information System (GIS) and environmental monitoring.

The 1999 U.S. EPA Region 6 Volunteer Monitors Conference agenda begins with registration/check-in from 2-5 p.m. on Friday, March 26.

Saturday offers a welcome by Mike Bira, EPA Region 6 Volunteer Monitoring Coordinator, keynote address by Dr. Bob Carlson, professor of biological sciences, Kent State University; discussions of innovations in volunteer monitoring, concurrent sessions and a Quality Control Mixer. March 28 will feature breakfast, farewell and field trips/workshops.

Registration for the OCLA Conference costs \$85 (\$75 for volunteers and students) before February 26; \$100 after that date. Registration for the Volunteer Monitors Conference costs \$35 before February 15; \$50 after that date. Non-monitors' registration is \$75; \$100 after date. Accommodations are available at the Biological Station without charge, but conferees must provide their own bedding and personal items. Rooms are available at the Lake Texoma State Lodge (17 miles away) for \$53, where a block of rooms is reserved until February 24.

The conference is sponsored by the U.S. EPA Region 6 and the Office of the Secretary of Environment, Clean Lakes Association, Water Resources Board and the Conservation Commission in Oklahoma. Other sponsoring states in Region 6 include Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico and Texas.

For more information on the OCLA Conference March 24-26, please call Kendra Eddlemon at 405-979-2209. For information on the Volunteer Monitors Conference March 26-28, contact Leslie Nance at 405-530-8997. □

Watch for OWRB Samplers on Bridges

Teams of water quality specialists are collecting water samples throughout the state, often lowering containers from bridges to scoop water from rivers and streams. Sampling from two-lane bridges with narrow or no shoulders is particularly dangerous, says Derek Smithee, chief of the OWRB Water Quality Programs Division. "It requires parking our truck in one lane, turning on the flashers and a portable strobe light on the cab."

Although sampling teams erect warning signs on both bridge approaches and set out orange cones, some motorists



Gene Doussett

pass dangerously close at high speed, Smithee pointed out.

Ordinarily, staff catch samples from the bank or wade to midstream, but sometimes, steep terrain, dense woods or flooding make it difficult to reach the water's edge or to wade safely.

Sample teams work closely with the Oklahoma Highway Patrol at some busy locations which have very narrow bridges," said Smithee.

The intense effort to cover the state is motivated by the Water Board's Beneficial Use Monitoring Program (BUMP.) To accomplish the program, the OWRB will sample 175-200 river and stream sites up to 10 times a year and 35-40 lakes quarterly.

"We have to get our people out to banks and bridges and we want them to be safe. We ask motorists to be on the lookout and to approach those bridge sampling sites with care," Smithee said. □

Attend the 1999 Great Plains Symposium March 10-12

The Fifth Great Plains Symposium will be held March 10-12 in Oklahoma City at the Clarion Airport West Hotel, 737 South Meridian. The announcement was made by Dr. Jayne Salisbury, director of the OSU Spatial and Environmental Information Clearinghouse, and Oklahoma coordinator for the Symposium.

The theme of the 1999 Symposium is "The Ogallala Aquifer, Steps to Sustainability."

Registration begins at 8 a.m., followed by welcoming remarks by Governor Frank Keating. The Wednesday, March 10 agenda includes discussions of sustainable production systems, drought forecasting, innovative methods of regulating animal waste, water rights administration, weather modification and potential impacts of climate change on agriculture and food supply.

On Thursday, topics will include water quality protection, the National Water Quality Assessment, the High Plains Partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a wrap-up by Lori Triplett of the Great Plains Foundation.

The afternoon will be devoted to breakout groups concerned with artificial recharge projects, Mesonet monitoring of soil moisture, historic streamflow records and relationship to groundwater discharge, and groundwater modeling of the High Plains Aquifer.

Friday's agenda will include updates on the High Plains Regional Groundwater Study and National Water Quality Assessment Program.

Registration for the Symposium costs \$85, payable by check or money order mailed to Agricultural Conference Services, 430 OSU Student Union, Stillwater 74078. Registration includes all sessions, refreshments, and Wednesday and Thursday luncheons.

The Great Plains Foundation (GPF) seeks to raise awareness, appreciation and knowledge of the Great Plains ecosystem through education, conservation and exchanges of ideas.

The Oklahoma Symposium is the fifth in a series focusing on the resources of the Great Plains.

The Oklahoma Symposium is

Great Plains Symposium

Agricultural Conference Services

430 OSU Student Union, Stillwater, OK 74078

**Please enclose \$85 check or purchase order
payable to Oklahoma State University**

Name _____

Organization _____

E-mail _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone (____) ____ - _____

sponsored by GPF, the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Oklahoma State University and U.S. Geological Survey.

For further information, please call Jayne Salisbury at 405-744-8433 or Kathy Peter, USGS District Chief, at 405-810-4417. □

Board Hosts Training for 41 Oklahoma Floodplain Managers

Federal, state and county officials from throughout Oklahoma attended a week-long workshop for Oklahoma Floodplain Administrators hosted by the Water Resources Board January 11-15. The course was held at the Oklahoma Center for Continuing Education in Norman. Instructors for the course were Ken Morris, state



coordinator for National Flood Insurance Program, other members of the Water Resources Board staff and representatives of FEMA and the Tulsa District Corps of Engineers.

The course, previously offered only at the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland, is presented only once a year in Oklahoma through special arrangements with FEMA. According to Morris, 41 students earned 16 continuing

education credits on various aspects of floodplain management. Morris pointed out that 25 students took the Oklahoma Floodplain Management Association certification exam. He said after the year 2000, the course will be mandatory for all state floodplain managers.

Morris has already scheduled next year's annual training for January 10-14, 2000, and encourages participants to enrol early. Attendance will be limited to 36. For more information on the course or NFIP, call Morris at 405-530-8800. □



Drought Continues in Southwest

Despite fog, drizzle and ice since the first of the year, some areas in southwest Oklahoma have received little or no measurable precipitation. What precipitation has fallen has come sporadically and in little dribbles.

According to the *Waurika News-Democrat* in Jefferson County, the area has received less than four inches of rain since October 20. Over the last nine months, the area has received just 15 inches of rain, a third less than normal

The dry weather, following closely on the heels of one of the driest and hottest summers in state history, causes concern among ranchers about drinking water for their livestock. Mike Jeffcoat, OSU county agriculture agent, pointed out that ponds drawn down by drought last summer have not been replenished. He attributes those low levels to the lack of soaking rains that produces runoff to refill the stock ponds. Jeffcoat said that lack of runoff has also impacted the streams that lace the area.

Forms Available on the Web

Getting a permit application or any form offered by the Water Resources Board has never been easier! To better serve our customers, the OWRB has made six categories of forms available on its web site. Downloading the forms is easy. Come to the website at www.state.ok.us/~owrb and click on the “Form Center” link and follow the directions.

Executive Director Duane Smith heralded the Form Center as beneficial for customers as well as the OWRB staff. “Our customers can download a form and save a phone call or letter, while the staff saves time and money on long distance phone calls and postage.”

Ed Eckenstein, OWRB webmaster said Adobe Acrobat Reader computer software, which can be downloaded free from the Adobe website, is necessary to download, read or print these forms. The OWRB asks that only clearly legible forms printed on white paper with a laser jet or inkjet printer be submitted. If you don't have access to the Internet, need a form, or have questions on filling out the forms, you can reach a friendly voice at the OWRB by calling 405-530-8800.

This newsletter, Oklahoma Water News, is also available on the website. You can read/download the latest issue at www.state.ok.us/~owrb. If you choose to read the newsletter at the website, or no longer wish to receive Oklahoma Water News by mail, please let us know so we may save postage by removing your name from our mailing list.

Cauthron Receives Award

Bill Cauthron, Water Quality Programs Division employee since 1988, was named Employee of the Quarter at a staff meeting held December 23. Duane Smith, executive director of the OWRB said, “Bill is a person well respected by his peers throughout state government. He has demonstrated his ability to write grant requests for special projects and sees tasks through to completion.” His fellow employees praise his excellence in technical support and training. Cauthron's most recent project has been coordinating the first year of the state's Beneficial Use Monitoring Program and overseeing preparation of the special report to the Legislature.

Born in Ada and raised in Coalgate, Cauthron has a B.S. in Biology from East Central University and M.S. in Environmental Health from the University of Oklahoma.



Bill Cauthron

USFWS Lists Arkansas Shiner

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Arkansas River Basin population of the Arkansas River shiner, a small, silvery minnow, as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The classification means the FWS must determine if it is likely to become an endangered species in the near future in all or most of its range.

The Arkansas River shiner once flourished in wide, sandy-bottomed rivers and streams throughout the basin in Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas. Today, it is found only in scattered reaches of the Canadian River. According to the FWS, threats include loss of habitat from the construction of lakes, reduction of stream flows caused by diversion of surface waters, or groundwater withdrawals, water quality degradation and inadvertent collection by the bait fish industry.

The protection offered by the Endangered Species Act is needed to prevent the Arkansas River shiner from becoming endangered. In the last 25 years, this species disappeared from more than 80 percent of its range. The minnow has a small, flattened head and a rounded snout and grows to a length of two inches.

The species is listed as endangered by the states of Kansas and New Mexico; threatened in Oklahoma; not listed by Texas and Arkansas.

Westward Ho! Zebra Mussels

In 1986, the tiny freshwater mollusk called the zebra mussel first hitched a ride to the Great Lakes via a Russian freighter. In just 12 years, the nuisance has spread throughout the Mississippi River basin, clogging the waterways and intake pipes as far west as the Oklahoma portion of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System

Officials in California report 13 sightings of the mussels, brought in on boat trailers from the east. The mussels had been out of the water for 48 hours or more, but they were alive and capable of infesting any waters they contacted.

Although they are troublesome in the east, zebra mussels could do enormous damage to the canals and pipes that transfer water throughout the west. Biologists point out that the zebra mussels can seal a pipe up to a foot in diameter and cause significant losses in canal capacity. The biologists say since the larval mussels are free-swimming, they can go wherever the water goes.

At Lake Powell, Utah, officials inspecting boats coming into the Colorado River system report up to 1,000 infested boats a year. To stop the migration, state and federal agencies hope to set up hot water washes at checkpoints for boats entering the Colorado River system.

At the January Board Meeting:

In his report to the Board, Executive Director Duane Smith pointed out the highlights of the agency's activities in 1998, including the processing of 1,165 water use permits and maintenance of 12,024 active permits by the Planning & Management Division. He pointed out that the Financial Assistance Division continues to grow, adding innovative programs to an already successful array of traditional financing programs. Smith estimated that 926,000 Oklahomans have been touched by projects enabled by the FAP. He mentioned the award of 61 REAP grants totaling \$4.9 million; 22 emergency grants totaling \$1.95 million and 30 loans totaling \$106.2 million. The Water Quality Division revised Water Quality Standards and Implementation Documents and dealt with such difficult issues as nutrient criteria, nutrient-limited waters and groundwater vulnerability. Under Derek Smithee's leadership, the division set in place protocols to support the \$1 million Beneficial Use Monitoring Program.

Looking forward, the executive director emphasized that the Sardis Lake issue will again have high priority, and hopefully, be resolved.

On the regular agenda, the Board approved two emergency grants, one Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan, one Clean Water SRF loan and 20 Rural Economic Action Plan grants. Division Chief Joe Freeman reported progress on the state match for the CWSRF loan program and the issuance of OWRB State Loan Program Revenue Bonds.

The Board approved three temporary permits for groundwater use; amended four groundwater permits and two prior rights applications. The Board approved eight regular permits for the use of stream water.

The Board approved Operator Certifications for water well drillers Alva Howard, Robert L. Griffin, Phillip Howard, Tony Mills, Christopher King, Ronnie Davis, Todd Ian Simpson and Edward Byrd. □

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM UPDATE		
Approved at December 1998 & January 1999		
Board Meetings		
FAP Loans		
1997 Bonds; 29-year maximum term - Variable Rate		
None	\$	0.00
CWSRF Loans		
El Reno MA	\$	1,600,000.00
Emergency Grants		
Wilburton PWA	\$	100,000.00
Wagoner Co. RWSG&SWMD #4	\$	100,000.00
Kendrick MA	\$	61,705.00
Town of Davidson	\$	99,500.00
Hughes Co. RWD #4	\$	84,991.00
DWSRF Loans		
Bryan Co. RWS&SWMD	\$	576,675.00
Hardship Grants		
None	\$	0.00
REAP Grants		
(See Article on Page 3)		
TOTALS AS OF JANUARY 12, 1999		
	FAP Loans	CWSRF Loans
APPROVED	205	77
Amount	\$296,070,000.00	\$278,612,057.48
	Emergency Grants	REAP Grants
APPROVED	423	132
Amount	\$23,922,226.35	\$9,903,401.65
	DWSRF Loans	Hardship Grants
APPROVED	2	2
Amount	\$10,677,000.00	\$1,038,752.30