

Information Contact: Susan Henning
Kay County Conservation District
Phone: 580-362-2438
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Water Quality Emphasis for Chikaskia River

Submitted by Susan Henning

Rylan West, District Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announces that Kay County has received special funds set aside for a Local Emphasis Area (LEA) for installation of conservation practices to improve water quality and reduce soil erosion in the Chikaskia River Watershed encompassing 217,179 acres. "We are accepting applications for participation in this special LEA program on a continuous basis," adds West, "however, only applications received by January 16, 2015 will be ranked and considered for implementation in 2015." Evaluated applications will be grouped and selected for funding from a list of high priority applications until the funding allocation is obligated. Unfunded applications will be maintained for future funding consideration if the applicant chooses to remain on the waiting list.

The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) recently released a report indicating that many of the streams and water bodies in Kay County have not met the minimum standards of water quality and are considered to be "impaired" and listed on the 303(d) list under the Clean Water Act, the Chikaskia River being one of those listed.

"Voluntary participation by landowners, with assistance from state and federal cost-share programs, puts best management practices on-the-ground to improve water quality while preserving agricultural production interests," states West. The majority of acres in this watershed are currently in cropland. There is a need for conservation practices to help filter sediment and pesticides before it reaches the river. The LEA will utilize conservation practices such as grass plantings, filters strips, field borders, grassed waterways, critical area plantings, and terraces to help lower the soil erosion and pesticide runoff from this watershed. Similar installation of conservation practices have accounted for reductions of more than 60 percent in the nutrient loading in parts of the Illinois River and the Eucha-Spavinaw watersheds in Eastern Oklahoma.

In order to be eligible to participate in the special LEA an applicant must be in compliance with Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions, have an interest in the agricultural operation, and have control of the land for the proposed contract period. If the applicant is a tenant, written concurrence of the landowner is required to apply a structural conservation practice. Applicants must also have their farm records established and an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) certification in place with the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In addition, the applicant must be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetlands conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the conservation agency for the USDA and works hand-in-hand with the American people to conserve natural resources on private and Tribal lands. NRCS provides natural resource assessments, conservation planning assistance, technical assistance for conservation practices and cost share programs for conservation work.

For more information contact the Newkirk NRCS Field office at 580-362-3362 or the Kay County Conservation District at 580-362-2438.

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