

Oconee River Resource Conservation & Development Council
P.O. Box 247
Watkinsville, GA 30677
(706) 769-7922

The Oconee River Resource Conservation and Development Council has an exemplary record of service to their 14-county area of responsibility. Past and current projects are highlighted below.

Rooty and Crooked Creeks Watershed 319 Project

In June 2005, the RC&D Council signed a contract with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources - Environmental Protection Division to financially assist producers with the installation and management of conservation practices. An Advisory Board representing local groups, including Putnam-Baldwin-Jones Cattlemen's Association, Farm Bureau, and the Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District, provides guidance. The Putnam County offices of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Extension Service are partnering with the RC&D Council to provide technical and educational assistance.

The water quality in Rooty Creek is of particular concern since there is a drinking water intake facility being proposed for the Rooty Creek embayment of Lake Sinclair. The intake facility would help provide water for the city of Milledgeville. In addition to public water quality benefits that will result from the project, implementation of Best Management Practices oftentimes helps the bottom line and management capabilities of the producers that implement them.

This project will directly serve approximately 20 landowners, with a total of \$258,000 grant funds to be administered by Oconee River RC&D.

Lagoon Pumpout

This program continues to be a mainstay of the Council's efforts to protect water quality and source water reservoirs. Thought to be a temporary program, it is now self-sustaining and in its 13th year of operation. The Piedmont Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), which serves major dairy producing counties of Putnam, Morgan and Greene Counties, assists the Council with the administration of the lagoon pumpout program. Since 1991, over 16,000 acres have been treated, and approximately 240 landowners have been assisted.

Polly Hardigree Ward Memorial Scholarship

The 2005 Polly Hardigree Ward Memorial Scholarship was presented to Oconee County High School senior Anna Kyle Shealy on May 19 at the school's annual Honors Day. Anna plans to pursue an animal science degree and is attending Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton. The Council has provided \$3,650 in scholarships to 9 students since 1997. A permanent trust has been established to assist students pursuing careers in natural resource conservation and related fields.

Wheels to Work

The Wheels to Work program assists Georgians coming off of welfare with the purchase of reliable transportation to go to work. Program participants receive zero interest and low down payment loans to buy approved vehicles. The Wheels to Work program is enabling individuals moving from public assistance to employment to solve their own transportation problems by providing them with independent transportation solutions. Georgia is one of the few states in the nation with a fully-funded, fully-operational Wheels to Work program. Since 1997, 215 clients have been assisted, and \$1,004,050 in grant funds have been administered in the Council's 14-county area.

Lower Lake Oconee 319 Project

The Lower Lake Oconee Watershed 319 Best Management Practices (BMPs) demonstration project began in 2003 and was completed in 2005. The project involved producers in seven Council counties. The Natural Resources Conservation Service provided technical assistance for the project through its Field and Area Office staff, while the Council administered the project. The purpose of the project was to implement BMPs in the watershed to reduce pollution caused by animal waste and runoff resulting from agricultural production. In addition to assisting producers with the implementation of BMPs, the project focused on educational outreach, which included field days and presentations for producers and a variety of agricultural and environmental organizations

This project directly assisted 41 producers, and \$919,000 in grant funds were administered.

Cooperative Development

Golden Triangle RC&D Council in Blakely, Georgia received a grant from USDA-Rural Development in 2004 to expand their successful Cooperative Development Center and extend services statewide by involving and promoting the cooperative business structure through each RC&D Council in Georgia. The Georgia Cooperative Development Center is designed to bring the agriculture and tourism industries together and provide technical assistance to interested cooperative groups. Cooperatives allow farmers and others to work together to add value to existing enterprises or to find new enterprises which will increase their bottom line. The end result is a better economy for rural Georgia. Oconee River RC&D Council has provided funding assistance for feasibility studies and business plans in the amount of \$32,000 for three proposals in their Council area, and continues to be active in the partnership. A Cooperative Development Seminar was held in February 2006 educating 80 producers on the advantages of cooperative marketing and adding value to agricultural products.

Fire Protection

Oconee River RC&D participated in a state-wide RC&D program for the installation of dry hydrants. This program benefited rural communities by providing fire protection from natural water bodies, resulting in lower insurance premiums. From 1987 through 2002, Oconee River RC&D installed over 650 dry hydrants with a value of \$362,000.

Farmland Protection

Oconee River RC&D was instrumental in the development of the "Oconee County Partnership for Farmland Protection", and remains active in the partnership. After many years of hard work and through the efforts of the partnership, 63 acres in Oconee County were preserved through a conservation easement in 2004. Development rights were purchased for the easement utilizing funding from the USDA-NRCS Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the Georgia Greenspace program, Oconee County, and a donation from the landowner. The farm was the first in the state to be put into a conservation easement through the joint efforts of federal, state, and local governments. This concept was considered so successful that it has been used as a model for other counties, and was used in developing guidelines for a new state program. In 2005, an additional 47.6 acres in Oconee County were selected for funding in the amount of \$158,500, with a total easement value of \$316,800. The Partnership also provided assistance for a second proposal, in Clarke County, which was selected for funding in the amount of \$83,750, with a total easement value of \$167,000. The Partnership continues to explore options to develop a permanent funding source to match other available funds in purchasing conservation easements in Oconee County, and is currently reviewing applications for the 2006 proposal.

Conservation Equipment Programs

Oconee River RC&D successfully administered programs, working in partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, to provide no-till and hydroseeding equipment to landowners. The programs were initiated as demonstration projects to educate landowners about the benefits of no-till and hydroseeding in reducing soil loss and stream sedimentation. Since the programs began in 1988, over 77,000 acres were treated and over 3500 clients were served. In 2005, the Council decided to close out the no-till and hydroseeding programs, as the educational and resource objectives of the programs had been met. Four new businesses were created with the transfer of equipment to independent operators.

Landscape Architecture

A grant was received from the National Endowment for the Arts to demonstrate the benefit of landscape architecture to enhance rural communities. From 1991 through 2002 Oconee River RC&D provided services to local communities for more than 40 projects designed to improve school grounds, downtown rejuvenation, and road placement to minimize changes to rural character.

Wildlife Enhancement

Through a project designed to reintroduce a blight resistant chestnut tree in the Georgia Piedmont, over 5,000 trees and 1000 citizens were served from 1998 through 2002.