



Conservation Commission

FY 2025 Budget Hearing Presentation

Submitted by: Trey Lam, Executive Director



Trey Lam

Executive Director

- **The Conservation Commission serves as the agency responsible for administering programs and services that conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma’s natural resources.**
- **Founded in 1971, this agency now encompasses the following divisions:**
 - a) Administration
 - b) Conservation Programs
 - c) District Services
 - d) Land Management
 - e) Water Quality
 - f) The Office of Geographic Information Services
- **The Conservation Commission administers its programs and services through 84 Conservation Districts. Partnering with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Conservation Commission and its Districts have proven to be an effective and efficient delivery system for locally led non-regulatory solutions to Oklahoma’s most complex conservation challenges.**

Agency Vision, Mission and Core Values

Vision: Responsible care for Oklahoma's renewable natural resources

Mission: To conserve, protect and restore Oklahoma's natural resources, working in collaboration with the conservation districts and other partners on behalf of the citizens of Oklahoma.

Core Values: Personal accountability and responsibility are two core values that are seen as critical for the employees as well as the governing body of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Those characteristics serve as the basis for the strength of our Agency. These values, coupled with integrity, give rise to the type of behavior we desire in our business environment.



Accomplishments

Top accomplishments for FY 2023 – FY 2024

- 1) **CONSERVATION PROGRAMS** -- Completed rehabilitation of two dams so that they meet current state dam safety criteria. Completed remedial repairs on 11 dams replacing outdated corrugated metal pipe components and utilizing a \$2 million federal match. Partnered with 11 Conservation Districts to employ watershed aides that provide day to day O&M services to 25 Conservation Districts with 1,235 flood control dams. Inspected 2,107 dams and performed repairs and maintenance on 386 dams. Responded to 16,795 OKIE One-Call locate tickets to prevent damage to the \$2 billion public infrastructure of dams. Began modernizing easement data by digitizing watershed dam easements by converting the recorded paper documents into a format that can be processed by a computer.
- 2) **DISTRICT SERVICES** -- Conservation Districts delivered over \$2 million of state cost-share funds to landowners to improve soil and water quality. At the direction of the Emergency Drought Commission, provided \$19.2 million in drought relief payments to 3,423 land managers. Assisted USDA-NRCS in delivery of \$53.6 million of federal conservation assistance on 590,275 acres to Oklahoma landowners through Farm Bill Programs.
- 3) **LAND MANAGEMENT** -- Completed inventory of non-coal mines in 75 of 84 Conservation Districts. Initiated new statewide Unpaved Roads Program; developed a partnership with OSU-LTAP for course delivery statewide; created training course for Oklahoma Unpaved Roads Course; hosted 4 Environmentally Sensitive Maintenance (ESM) trainings for unpaved roads; awarded 10 grants to counties; fulfilled grant obligations totaling \$447,563. Conducted first Fighting Fire with Fire training for 22 rural fire departments and prescribe burn associations with 62 participants as part of the Terry Peach North Canadian Watershed Restoration Project. Hired 4 Conservation District cedar eradication technicians to create brush free zones within the project.

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Accomplishments (continued)

Top accomplishments for FY 2023 – FY 2024

- 4) **WATER QUALITY** -- De-listed 3 additional streams from Oklahoma's Impaired Waterbodies List (303(d)) list increasing the Oklahoma total to 100 streams, more than any other state in the nation; ranked in the top 5 nationally in combined nutrient load reductions for the 11th year in a row; maintained over 300 water quality monitoring sites around the state and collected over 1,000 water samples. Conducted more than 60 fish collections including aquatic habitat assessments and more than 230 invertebrate collections. Expanded Soil Health program in partnership with federal USDA programs; educated more than 12,000 people on the benefits of soil health in terms of water quality, economics, and sustainability. Supported volunteer teams of water quality monitors at 81 sites that would not have otherwise been sampled; educated more than 6,000 Oklahomans about water quality.
- 5) **OFFICE OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY** -- For FY23 the volume of data downloaded per month has increased 103 % over FY22 averaging 218 GB per month. Over the same period, the number of pages viewed has increased 112% averaging 5.5 million pages/month and the number of visits to the site have remained relatively flat averaging 16,580 visits/month. The Office of Geographic Information provides various GIS related services to the 911 Management Authority to support the implementation of the statewide Next Generation 911 system in addition to operating the NG911 State Repository. Three training courses were developed and offered to PSAP staff at locations across the state. In FY23 a total of 9 classes were taught reaching 147 students.



Challenges

Top Challenges (current & upcoming years)

1) CONSERVATION PROGRAMS –

- Changing weather and rainfall patterns across the state challenge producers and directly affect their bottom line and natural resources. The state Cost Share Program is an important tool in meeting this challenge and conserving soil and water resources while protecting and enhancing agriculture production. Soil health and water quality concerns also factor into the increased need for applying Cost Share Program conservation practices on the land.
- As the number of flood control dams reaching the end of their 50-year design life increases there is increased emphasis on watershed sponsor responsibilities. The need for maintenance and risk increases as more dams reach this 50-year mark. There is increased pressure to produce adequate funding and staff so operation and maintenance can keep pace with the increased risk and age-related deterioration of dams.

2) DISTRICT SERVICES--

- Finding innovative, creative, and effective ways to provide support and training to conservation district staff and directors. Continue to work through the challenges of providing IT support to 84 offices spread across Oklahoma, including continued education of OMES on the role of Conservation Districts. Working to modernize and streamline delivery of programs and processes.

3) LAND MANAGEMENT—

- Changing the Land Management program to focus on non-coal hard rock mines presents many challenges when starting with a new inventory and expanding from 16 counties to all 77 counties. The abandoned non-coal hard rock mines inventory is currently at 3,164 and growing. Eliminating the safety hazards present on these sites and returning the land to productive agricultural use when it is needed most presents many challenges.
- There are approximately 16,000 miles of unpaved roads in the state. The Unpaved Roads program has been well received from counties across the state with more trainings requested and higher numbers of grant applications to improve the rural roads infrastructure. The Unpaved Roads Program strives to implement best management practices on unpaved roads to reduce sediment loading into Oklahoma streams to lower the cost of maintenance for the counties.

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Challenges (continued)

Top Challenges (current & upcoming years)

3) LAND MANAGEMENT (continued) –

- Conservation and Nutrient Management Planning becomes more essential as the state deals with new shifts in weather patterns and the demand for agriculture goods rises. Proficient staff working with Conservation Districts and landowners to implement critical conservation practices for sustainable agriculture is needed.

4) WATER QUALITY –

- Expanding conservation program planning and delivery through use of improved data and technology. In support of multiple federal, state and local partners, we have been developing a computer modeling system to predict geographic areas where conservation practices could be most effective and to estimate the impact of potential conservation programs which will help OCC and partners design better programs. We are also cooperating with numerous state partners and industry to develop a more automated, standardized process for poultry growers to get updated nutrient management plans that protect the natural resources and the grower.
- Working with local Conservation Districts, landowners, and other stakeholders to update a watershed plan for the Illinois River: The OCC has participated with many other Oklahoma and Arkansas State Agencies and the Cherokee Nation to plan the update to the plan and the process for involving stakeholders in that update. Many of the parties involved on both sides of the border have limited experience with watershed planning or stakeholder involvement; however, parties have been meeting regularly and public stakeholder meetings began in 2023 and will continue through 2024.

5) OFFICE OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION –

- Nearly 80-90 percent of the data involved in day-to-day decisions can be classified as geographic information. This is data that involves a point, line or area somewhere below, above or on the surface of the earth. Decision-makers rely on this data to be accurate and timely and coming from an authoritative source. One of the major challenges that the OGI is facing is being able to devote time (staff time) to work with the various agencies that have jurisdiction and authority over these critical datasets. There is an urgent need to develop protocols and procedures that will ensure the data meets certain authoritative standards. For this to occur there needs to be a funding mechanism to staff the OGI to accomplish this objective. The FY24 appropriation to the OCC is providing some funding to the OGI that will be used to expand efforts toward this goal. The included budget provides continuing support in reaching that objective.



Savings & Efficiencies (Current or Planned)

Savings or Efficiency Name	Brief description of how savings were achieved	Savings in Unit of Measurement*	FY 2023 (Actual \$ Savings)	FY 2024 (Projected \$ Savings)	FY 2025 (Projected \$ Savings)
Emergency Drought Assistance Program	Delivered a \$52 million Emergency Drought Assistance Program to the land users of Oklahoma with no additional FTEs, overhead, or administrative costs.	Dollars	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
State Vehicles	Repurposed 4 watershed trucks for use in the Land Management Division for Cedar Eradication Program. Best Value.	Dollars	0	\$104,000	0
Reuse of State Equipment	Purchased “gently used” surplus office cubicles to upgrade the agency office space; purchased surplus lateral files and office chairs. Best Value.	Dollars	\$20,000	0	0
State Vehicles	Turned back 4 OMES leased vehicles within the Soil Health Program	Dollars	0	\$8,000	\$8,000

* Hours, FTE, square feet, etc.



Agency Goals and Key Performance Metrics

Goal		Metric	FY 22 Actuals	FY 23 Actuals	FY 24 Target	FY 29 Target
1	Prevent flood damage to homes, crops and infrastructure while capturing sediment and improving water quality in streams and water supply lakes.	The 2,107 small upstream watershed flood control structures throughout the state will be inspected, operated, maintained and modified to extend the operational life, reduce flooding and capture rainfall runoff for water supply determined by number of structures	2,107	2107	2107	2107
2	Improve water quality of Oklahoma streams through voluntary non regulatory programs.	Develop at least five EPA Success Stories each year that detail stream segment/parameter de-listings from the 303d list.	4	3	5	5
3	Improve local conservation delivery system while assuring responsible use of state financial resources.	Number of Districts implementing 75% of actions and strategies outlined in their Long-Range Plan.	60%	65%	65%	75%
4	Support and encourage the conservation and responsible management of Oklahoma's renewable natural resources to improve the quality of life for current and future generations.	Restore abandoned non coal mine sites, # of sites, # of acres and improve the unpaved road system that are hazardous to the public and/or degrading the	4/91	3/150	3/150	3/150
5	Increase production of agricultural land through proper regeneration of the soil, creating a more long-term sustainable system.	Reduce erosion & improve soil health by increasing the # of participants & the # of best management practices implemented through state supported cost share programs. (# participants / # practices)	817/962	746/1,132	650,750	650/750
6	Ensure proper management of state and local resources by developing citizen led local boards.	Provide the knowledge base and enhance skills that district directors need to properly perform public duties.	420	420	420	420
7	Train, educate, and provide financial assistance to County Commissioners and staff on unpaved road maintenance projects	Train and partner with County Commissioners to improve erosion on unpaved road systems causing public hazard, # of projects	NA	10	14	14



Projects for FY 2024 - 2025

Projects

- 1) Implementation of the Terry Peach North Canadian River Restoration Project
- 2) Expansion of the Unpaved Roads Program
- 3) Maintain the \$2 billion public infrastructure and sustain the \$96 million in annual benefits by continuing to perform the inspections, operation and maintenance of the state's 2,107 upstream flood control dams
- 4) Continued development of the Soil Health Program
- 5) Administration of the Emergency Drought and Locally Led Cost Share programs
- 6) Obtain high-resolution, leaf-off, full color aerial photography, a key element of modernizing the state's digital infrastructure



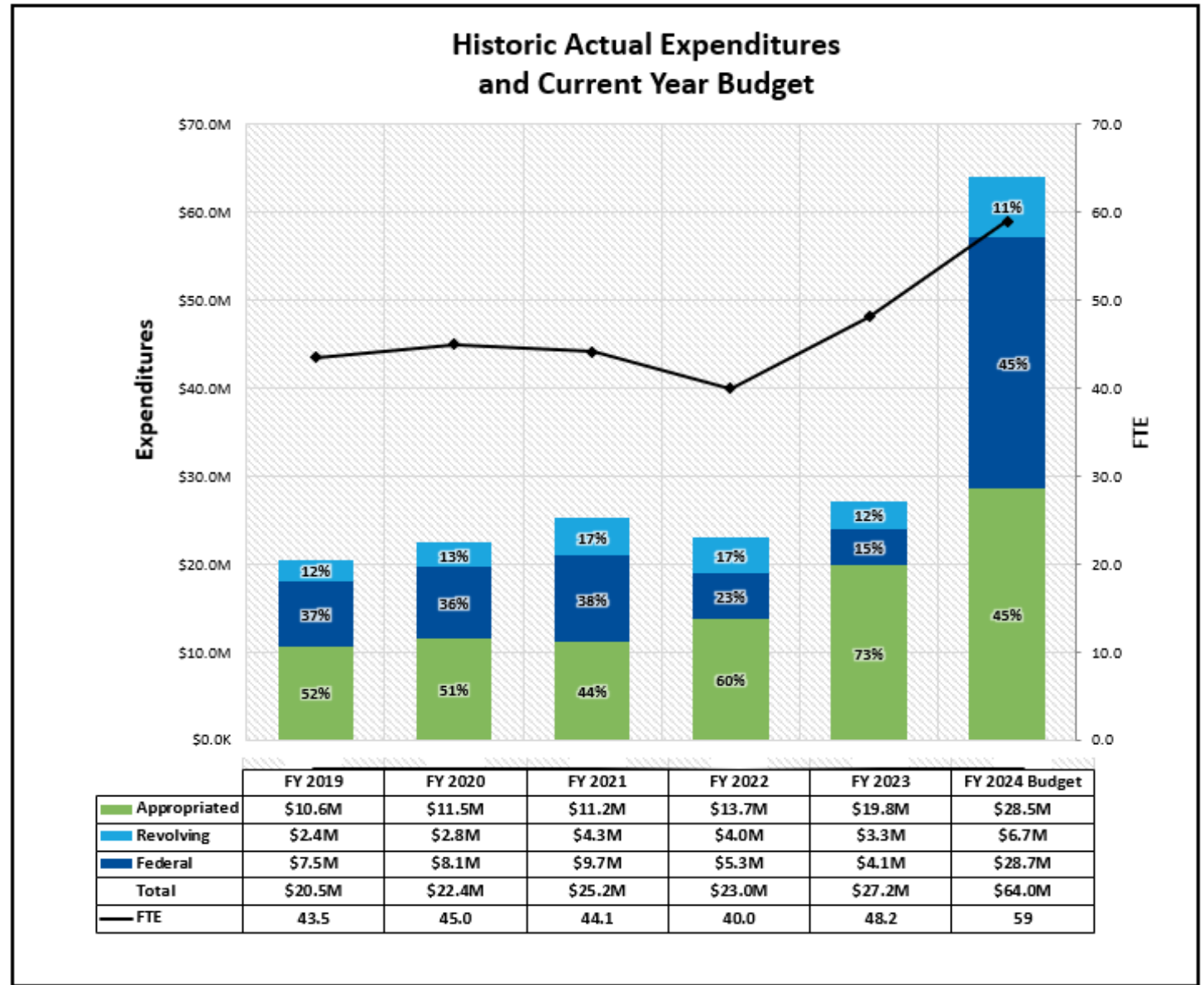
Historic Actual Expenditures (FY 2019-23) and Current Year Budget (FY 2024)

Explanation of Significant Changes and Trends

Spending is relatively constant over the period.

Much of the increase in FY24 budget expenditures is for potential large federal projects in flood control.

State appropriation increases in FY23 *actual* expenditures and FY 24 *budget* expenditures are targeted toward specific projects and programs: reducing erosion on unpaved roads and cedar eradication.



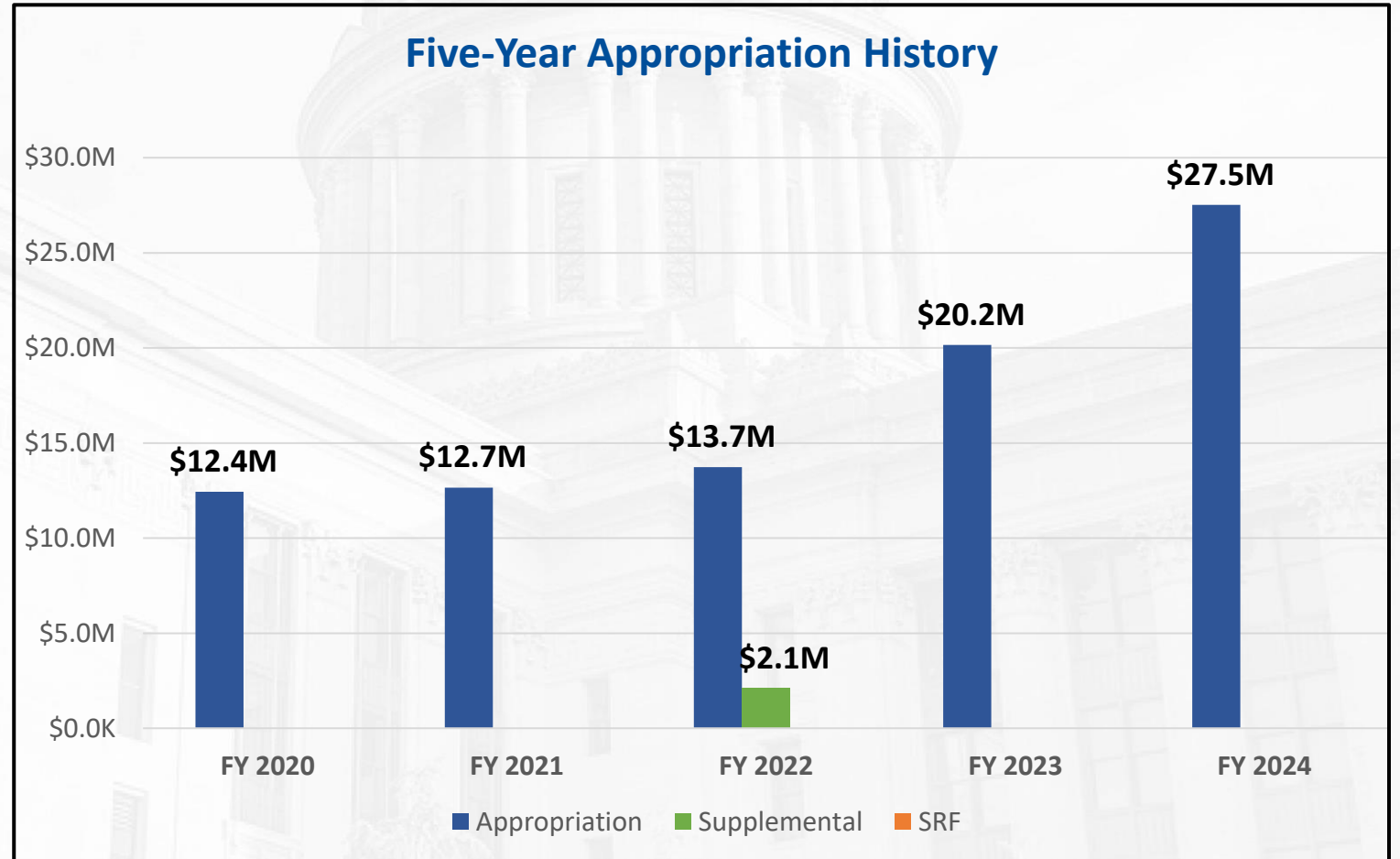


FY 2024 Budgeted Full Time Equivalents (FTE)

	FY 2024 Budgeted FTE
Total FTE	55
Supervisor FTE	18
Supervisors to Total FTE Ratio (%)	33%

Appropriation History

Fiscal Year	Legislated Appropriation (\$) (Includes supplementals and SRF/ARPA.)
FY 2020	\$12,437,815
FY 2021	\$12,658,644
FY 2022	\$15,826,932
FY 2023	\$20,162,988
FY 2024	\$27,527,454



*Includes Supplemental and Statewide Recovery Fund (ARPA) appropriations.



Financial Resource Analysis

Carryover	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Total appropriated carryover amount expended (\$)	\$2,206,243	\$3,474,523	\$5,314,851	\$7,234,628

Historical Cash Balances	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023
Year End Revolving Fund Cash Balances <i>(All Revolving Funds)</i>	\$7,405,306	\$6,811,396	\$6,034,044	\$5,671,738

Class Fund # <i>(Unrestricted only)</i>	Class Fund Name <i>(Unrestricted only)</i>	Current cash balance (\$)
200	Small Watershed Flood Control Fund	\$203,802
205	GIS Revolving Fund	\$68,349
220	Carbon Sequestration Assessment	\$17,616
245	Donation Fund	\$411,881
250	OK Conservation Commission Infrastructure Revenue	\$4,956,147
	Total Current Unrestricted Fund Cash balance:	\$5,657,795

Fiscal Year	Agency's plan to deploy unrestricted cash (including amounts):
FY 2024	Funds included in FY-24 Budget Work Program for use in performance of agency duties with the largest expenditures from Fund 250 for the implementation of conservation practices state-wide. Unexpended funds to be deployed in subsequent years BWPs.
FY 2025	Funds will be included in the FY-25 Budget Work Program for use in performance of agency duties with the largest expenditures from Fund 250 for the implementation of conservation practices state-wide. Unexpended funds to be deployed in subsequent years BWPs.
FY 2026	Funds will be included in the FY-26 Budget Work Program for use in performance of agency duties with the largest expenditures from Fund 250 for the implementation of conservation practices state-wide. Unexpended funds to be deployed in subsequent years BWPs.



Unrestricted funds are those that are not limited by state or federal law, rule, regulation, other legally binding method, or donor restriction.

FY 2022 Incremental Appropriation Review

<i>Purpose of appropriation increase / decrease</i>	<i>Amount of increase or decrease (\$)</i>	<i>Included in FY24 appropriation? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If yes, included in appropriation for same purpose? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If not included for same purpose, please explain.</i>
FY 2022				
Net Change in OCIA Lease Payments	\$4,782	Yes	Yes	
Emergency Capital Assistance	\$50,000	No		
Irrigator Training & Ogallala Aquifer Water Table	\$140,000	Partial	Yes	Funding for the mobile classroom not included Funding for the participants included: \$50,000
Log Jam Corrective Action	\$250,000	No		
OCIA Dam Issue Annualized Lease Payment	\$622,575	Yes	Yes	
Total adjustment	\$1,067,357			



**Do not include SRF / ARPA appropriation increases.*

FY 2023 Incremental Appropriation Review

<i>Purpose of appropriation increase / decrease</i>	<i>Amount of increase or decrease (\$)</i>	<i>Included in FY24 appropriation? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If yes, included in appropriation for same purpose? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If not included for same purpose, please explain.</i>
FY 2023				
Net Change in OCIA Lease Payments	\$3,409	Yes	Yes	
Budget Base Adjustment	-\$250,000			
Upstream Flood Control Infrastructure – Dam Safety	\$2,000,000	Yes	Yes	
Staffing and Salary Increase for Conservation Districts	\$730,000	Yes	Yes	
Unpaved Roads/Roadside Erosion Training and Grant Program	\$400,000	Yes	Yes	
Operations Funding for State Office of Geographic Information	\$444,988	Yes	Yes	
Land Reclamation Program	\$3,000,000	Yes	Yes	
Lease Payments OCIA High Hazard Dams	108,590	Yes	Yes	
Total adjustment	6,436,987			



**Do not include SRF / ARPA appropriation increases.*

FY 2024 Incremental Appropriation Review

<i>Purpose of appropriation increase / decrease</i>	<i>Amount of increase or decrease (\$)</i>	<i>Does this need to be included in your FY 2025 appropriation? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If yes, included in appropriation for same purpose? (Yes/No)</i>	<i>If not included for same purpose, please explain.</i>
FY 2024				
OCIA Debt Service	\$1,206,806	Yes	Yes	
Continuation of Dam Repair Funds	\$2,000,000	Yes	Yes	
Unpaved Roads/Roadside Erosion Education	\$600,000	Yes	Yes	
Oklahoma Geographical Information Services	\$42,660	Yes	Yes	
Terry Peach North Canadian Watershed Preservation	\$3,280,000	Yes	Yes	
Soil Health Program	\$985,000	Yes	Yes	
Waterway Restoration Clear Boggy Creek	\$250,000	Yes	TBD	Pending directive from Legislature on special projects
Total adjustment	\$8,364.466			



**Do not include SRF / ARPA appropriation increases.*

Budget & Supplemental Request Summary

Request Name		FY 2025 Appropriated Request Amount (\$) {or FY 2024 for Supplementals}	Type of Request: Operating, One-time, or Supplemental
1	Expansion of the Terry Peach North Canadian Watershed Restoration Act, Cedar Eradication Program	\$2,000,000	Operating, Recurring
2	Enhanced Aerial Photography	\$750,000	One-Time, 2 years \$750,000 FY25 \$750,000 FY26
3	Conservation Districts - Restore 2 District Manager positions and provide salary market adjustment	\$778,000	Operating, Recurring
4	Salary Market Adjustment for Agency Staff	\$417,808	Operating, Recurring
5	WETLANDS - Conservation Coordinator position salary and equipment	\$100,000	Operating, Recurring



(1) Budget Request

Name of Request: Expansion of the Terry Peach North Canadian Watershed Restoration Act, Cedar Eradication Program	
Type: Operating, Recurring	Amount: \$ 2,000,000 FY25 Ongoing Request
<p>Funds are needed for salaries and equipment for seven fully outfitted cedar technicians to cover 14 Conservation Districts to extend the control and eradication efforts of invasive woody vegetation in western Oklahoma watersheds. Technicians will be employees of Conservation Districts and will not add to agency FTEs but are funded by reimbursements to the Conservation Districts. By reducing woody invasive species, the Commission will help to reduce wildfire risk to Oklahoma citizens. In addition, these efforts will protect Oklahoma's water supply and improve grazing lands and wildlife habitat. Short / Long term cost effectiveness can be measured by the reduction in property damage cause by wildfire.</p>	



(2) Budget Request

Name of Request: Enhanced Aerial Photography	
Type: Operating, One-time, 2 years	Amount: \$750,000 FY25 \$750,000 FY26
<p>High-resolution, leaf-off aerial photography is needed for multiple applications within multiple state, local and tribal agencies, including law enforcement, emergency response, broadband applications, numerous natural resource and environmental applications including red cedar identification and eradication, transportation, commerce and business development. Having high-resolution, leaf-off, full color aerial photography brings one of the key elements of the state's digital infrastructure up to modern standards in keeping with a top ten state. The Office of Geographic Information is tasked by statute to operate a statewide geographic information clearinghouse which is called OKMaps. One of the key data layers that is available through OKMaps is aerial photography for visualization as well as for the public to download. The availability of a high-resolution, leaf-off data layer in OKMaps will be of high demand by all users of OKMaps. This will replace the existing resource which is black and white low-resolution leaf-off photography collected in 1995. Due to the short window of time that is available to collect leaf-off photography, this current request is for one-half of the state to be collected in FY25. A new request will be made for FY26 to collect the second-half of the state.</p>	



(3) Budget Request

Name of Request: Conservation Districts - Restore 2 District Manager positions and provide salary market adjustment

Type: Operating, Recurring

Amount: \$778,000 Ongoing Request

Funding needed to fill two district manager positions to provide full-time staff in each of the 84 Conservation Districts and provide a 10% cost of living salary increase to current district employees. Protecting and conserving Oklahoma's natural resources requires a local work force to deliver conservation programs in partnership with USDA -NRCS. To keep quality workforce, it is imperative to provide a living wage. A 10% cost of living increase will help the districts become more competitive in the local job market.



(4) Budget Request

Name of Request: Salary Market Adjustment for Agency Staff	
Type: Operating, Recurring	\$417,808 FY25 Ongoing Request
<p>Market and cost of living adjustment for agency staff for successful retention of staff with highly specialized knowledge, skill and experience. Tenured experienced and skilled workers are very productive and also provide a natural transfer of their knowledge and expertise to less experienced coworkers resulting in continuous improvement. The cost-effectiveness of retaining highly skilled workers for accomplishing the duties of the Conservation Commission is undeniable. Providing fair compensation is key to worker retention for continued workforce development.</p>	



(5) Budget Request

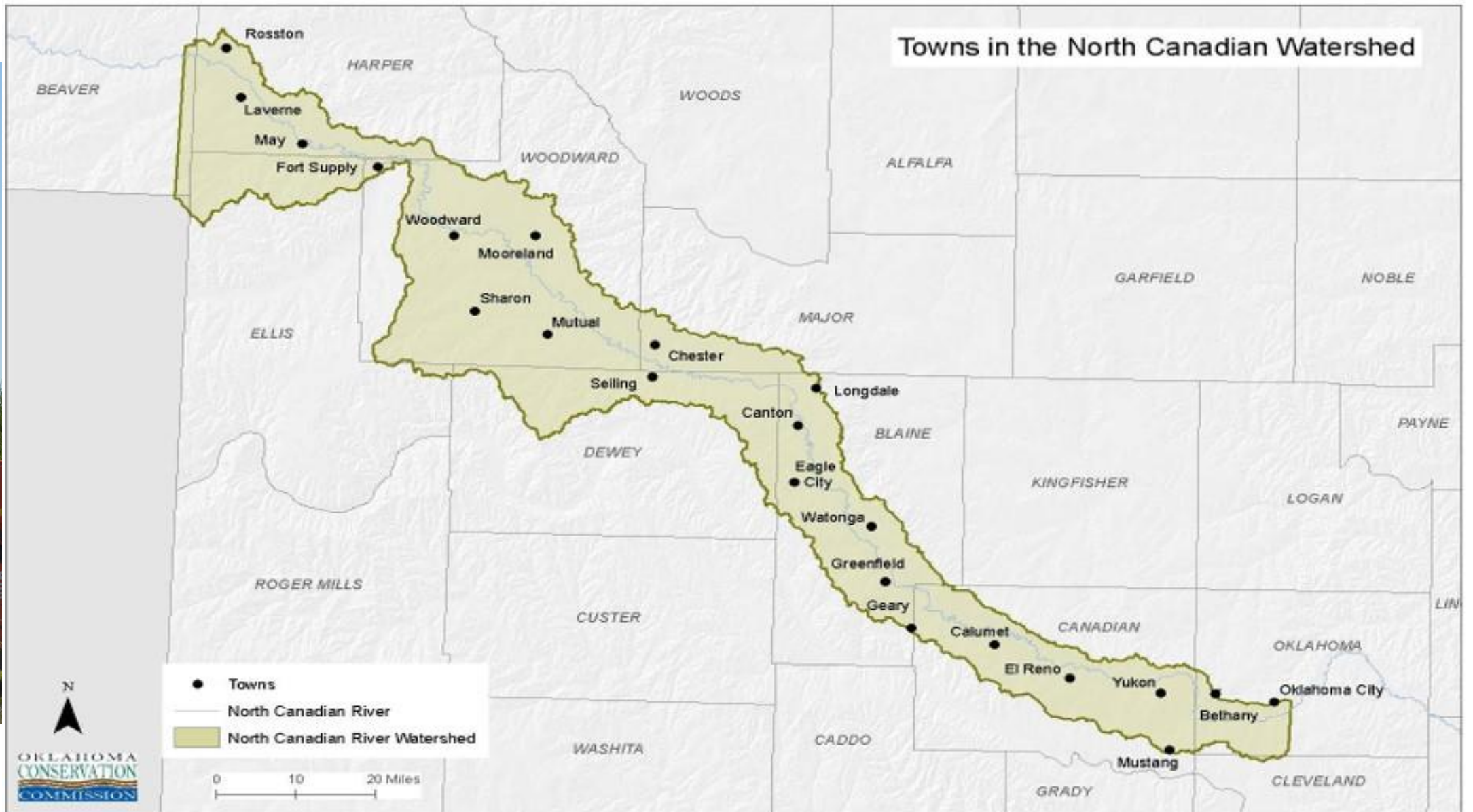
Name of Request: WETLANDS - Conservation Coordinator position salary and equipment	
Type: Operating, Recurring	\$100,000 FY25 Ongoing Request
<p>Funding will match nonprofit and corporate partnerships who want to pursue federal grants to offer voluntary conservation programs to Oklahoma landowners. Many national grants need a state partner to be eligible for application and as the state's lead agency for wetland program development, OCC has statutory authority in keeping with this role. In some years, these matching funds may bring as much as \$3 million in partner and federal funding that will go straight to landowners for installation and maintenance of conservation practices that conserve water, soil, and wildlife.</p>	



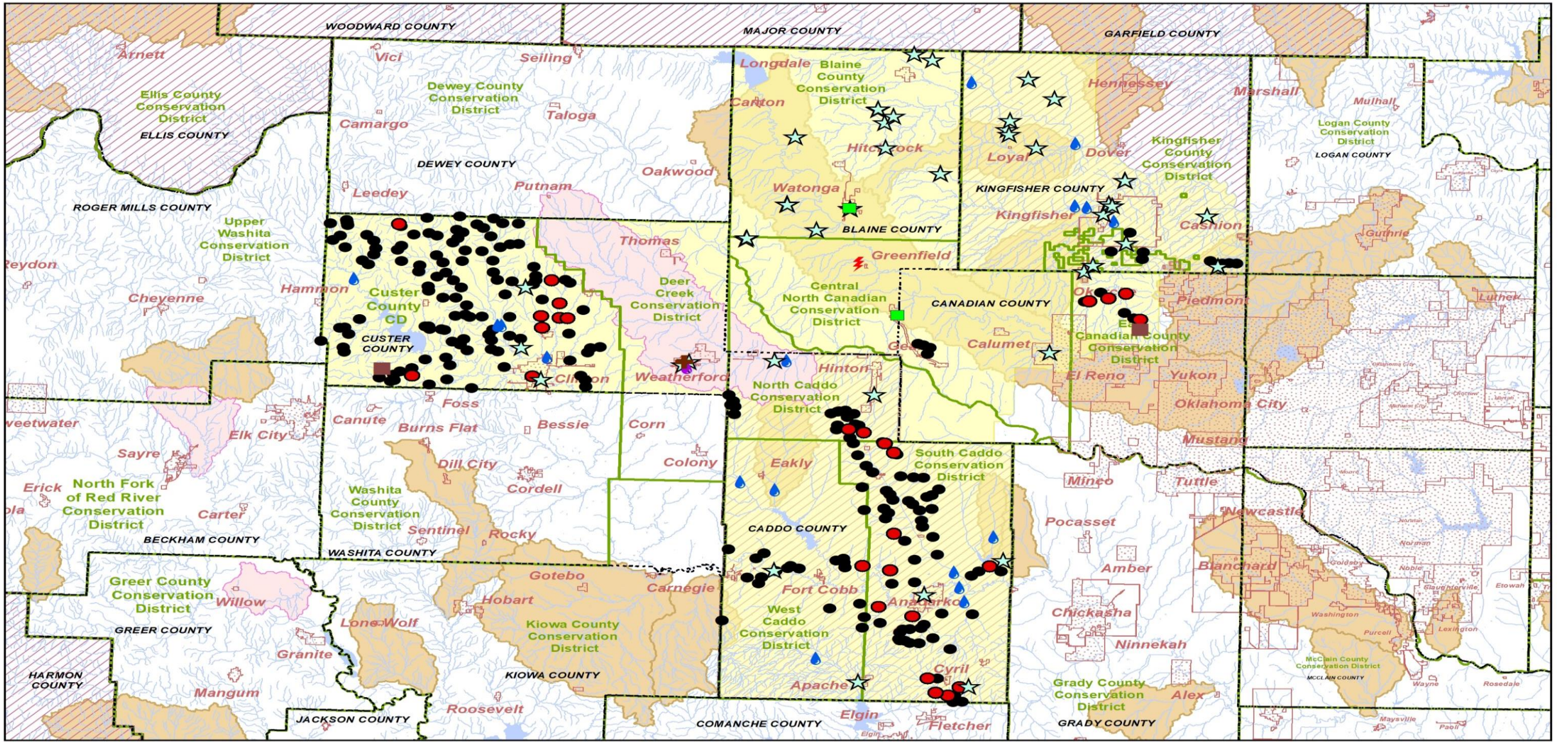
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Appendix

Cedar Eradication Project



Senate District 26 Conservation Impacts



- ☆ Soil Health Activities: 58
- High Hazard Watershed Dams: 27
- ⊕ Unpaved Roads Training: 1
- ⬜ 2022 WQ 303(d) Delisted Success Stories
- ⬜ Cities or Towns
- 💧 WQ Rotating Basin Sites: 17
- Watershed Dams: 246
- ⚡ Prescribed Burn Training: 1
- ⬜ WQ 303(d) Delisted Success Stories
- ⬜ Counties
- 💧 WQ Blue Thumb Sites: 1
- Unpaved Roads Projects: 2
- Cedar Technician: 2
- ⬜ Conservation Districts
- ⬜ Oklahoma Senate District 26

