

THE AQUAHOMAN

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From the Director's Desk:



An Excellent Adventure

This is my last contribution to the Aquahoman as OWRRI Director. On August 16, I will return to the faculty to pursue a full-time engagement in scholarly pursuits. In particular, I have a couple of books- that I have been wanting to write for a couple of years. In the mini-history that follows, I want to express my sincere thanks to all those who helped make our Institute a success over the last nine years.

Humble Beginnings

I was hired in August 2002 primarily as Director of the Environmental Science Graduate Program, assuming leadership of OWRRI and Environmental Institute as part of the package. I had much to learn about the OWRRI, which was made all the more difficult by the fact that the previous Director had left OSU in December 2001, leaving OWRRI without a Director for nine months. The following spring, the new OSU President hired in January 2003, defunded the Environmental Institute (which at that time included the OWRRI) and eliminated all five of its staff positions – leaving only me. To make matters worse, the US Geological Survey requested that all Institutes submit reports that outline activities conducted over the previous five years – as required by the federal Water Resources Research Act. To complicate things a little more, the two people who hired me (Graduate College Dean and Vice President for Research) also resigned their positions that spring, leaving me with no budget, no staff, and no bosses. Finally, to learn more about the Water Resources Research Act program, its umbrella organization known as the National Institutes for Water Resources (NIWR), and how Institutes operated, I toured the Institutes in Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. The NIWR President at that time informed me that OWRRI had lost much of its national reputation over the previous decade and was considered to be in the bottom fifth of the nation's 54 Institutes. Things couldn't be much worse.

A New Dawn

As it turned out, that time was OWRRI's low point. My optimism was initiated with the hiring of a new Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer, Dr. Steve McKeever, in late summer 2003. Recognizing the importance of water and environmental research at OSU, he restored some of our funding in 2004.

The restoration of limited funding by the VPR allowed me to hire an assistant. I recruited Mike Langston with whom I had previously worked on other research projects. It is no surprise to readers of the Aquahoman that he has proven to be a miracle worker in running OWRRI operations. Over the last nine years, thanks in part to Mike's able management expertise, OWRRI has issued 29 awards to water researchers at four Oklahoma universities. Last year, we submitted our second five-year USGS evaluation report, which earned national recognition for our outreach and public participation activities. In addition, Mike worked with OSU investigators to win OWRRI's first two national competitive grants.

Jenny Jafek-Jones has played a key role in the OWRRI for the past three and one half years serving as office manager. Jenny keeps the office running smoothly.

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OWRRI Staff:

DIRECTOR:

Will Focht, Ph. D.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR:

Mike Langston

PROJECT MANAGER:

Jeri Fleming

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT:

Jenny Jafek-Jones

STUDENT SUPPORT:

Stephen Rogers

AQUAHOMAN STUDENT

EDITOR:

Anna Facci

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In the fall of 2004, Dr. Glenn Brown and I arranged and hosted our first annual Water Research Symposium, held in Stillwater. Since 2006, we have coupled our symposium with the Governor's Water Conferences sponsored by the Oklahoma Water Resources Board (OWRB).

Also in 2004, we began the Aquahoman newsletter, which we try to publish quarterly.

In 2005, we created OWRRRI's first external relations group – the Water Research Advisory Board (WRAB). WRAB is comprised of two dozen leaders in the water community, including those from government, industry, and non-government organizations. This Board meets with us twice each year to define research priorities, select OWRRRI research grant winners, and learn about research results.

High Noon

Perhaps our most important accomplishment was winning a 4.5-year, \$1.5 million contract from the OWRB in 2006. This contract not only matched 1:1 OWRRRI's federal funding of water research projects, but also allowed OWRRRI to lead a robust public participation effort in the revision of Oklahoma's Comprehensive Water Plan. The public participation effort was just completed, we believe, successfully. Fraught with significant potential risk, our embrace of a fair, inclusive and transparent process resulted in recommendations that have been incorporated into the draft water plan, which will be considered for adoption by the OWRB this fall.

It is no exaggeration to report that the success of the public participation effort lies squarely on the work of Jeri Fleming – an attorney whom we hired at the beginning of this project. She has worked tirelessly and selflessly, working long hours and on weekends, to ensure that citizens all across Oklahoma are informed and treated with respect in shaping recommendations. The satisfaction expressed by participants and the willingness of the OWRB to accept their recommendations is testament to her work. I cannot thank Jeri enough for her effort.

Other OWRRRI staff instrumental in the success of the public participation effort include Alison Stone and especially Diana Leggett. Diana's contribution was very important to the process and I thank her for her guidance and patience.

I want to express my appreciation for OWRB's partnership. Duane Smith, Executive Director until very recently, supported OWRRRI in its efforts in water planning, creation of the WRAB, and joining the research symposium to the Governor's Water Conference. I also thank Mike Mathis, Dave Dillon, and most importantly, Kyle Arthur, directors of OWRB's planning division, for their support and guidance in the water planning effort. In particular, Kyle has proven to be a most valuable collaborator in water planning; he has made our work pleasant, productive, and rewarding. Last, but not least, I want to thank the appointed members of the OWRB for their support, particularly OWRB chairs Mark Nichols and Rudy Herrmann as well as Board members Ed Fite and Joe Taron who devoted much of their precious time attending our meetings.

I also want to recognize the efforts of OSU's Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils of Government, the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, and the hundreds of citizens who actively participated in the numerous meetings and seminars held over the last five years. I particularly want to point out the valuable contributions of the Cooperative Extension agents helping us set up and advertise our local and regional meetings, as well as facilitating our planning workshops.

I would be remiss if I didn't express sincere appreciation for the support of the U.S. Geological Survey in our water research. In particular, I want to thank Dr. John Scheffer, national program manager in Reston, Virginia for his patience, sage advice, and tireless efforts in bridging the gap between Congress and the Institutes. Equally important was the support offered by the Oklahoma USGS office headed by Dr. Kim Winton, who screens our research proposals and actively participates on the WRAB.

Thanks to Mike and Jeri, OWRRRI has greatly expanded its outreach activities. Over the last five years, we have hosted a student research poster competition at our annual research symposium and give monetary awards to the top three presentations. We have upgraded our OWRRRI website, established a new website (okwaterplan.info) to keep the public informed about the water planning process, and created an OWRRRI Facebook site and Twitter account. In partnership with Sustainable Stillwater, we instituted a two-year, ten-part film and discussion series on water issues. In cooperation with 4H, we sponsored a statewide water conservation essay contest among seventh through twelfth graders on occasion of OWRB's 50th anniversary.

Reaching Beyond Oklahoma

Long a proponent of transboundary Institute collaboration, we joined with the River Systems Institute at Texas State University in 2007 to form a consortium for watershed excellence. The consortium won an EPA research grant to

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study pathogenic risks in the Red River watershed lying between Texas and Oklahoma. In 2010, the consortium invited the Institute Directors from New Mexico, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas A&M to join. We have renamed our group as the South-Central Consortium for Watershed Excellence and are pursuing research initiatives in the energy-water nexus, best management practice assessment, and transboundary water quality database compatibility.

Nationally, OWRRI has restored much of its prior reputation, particularly within NIWR. In 2008, I was elected as President-Elect and was responsible for the conduct of NIWR's 2009 annual meeting in Washington, DC. In late 2009, I assumed NIWR's Presidency, during which time I prepared testimony on behalf of NIWR to various Congressional Committees, submitted comments on proposed legislation, and met with representatives of several Executive Branch agencies, delivered presentations on NIWR to the Universities Council on Water Resources and the Western States Water Council.

The Future Looks Bright

On August 16, OWRRI will be administratively relocated from the Division of Research and Technology Transfer to the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. DASNR created a Water Research Extension Center (WREC) in 2008 to focus its efforts on water research related to agriculture, and has invested significant resources toward its success. The move of OWRRI to DASNR is consistent with this enhanced dedication to water resources research and thus promises to be a good move for both OSU and Oklahoma. Moreover, the University of Oklahoma has just this year established the Oklahoma Water Survey and its own water research center that can work with OWRRI to advance water research, education, and outreach to benefit all Oklahomans over the next decades.

The new OWRRI Director will be Dr. Dave Engle, who is the current WREC Director. I am particularly pleased to report that Mike Langston, current OWRRI assistant director, will transfer with OWRRI to DASNR and will continue his exemplary efforts to advance its mission.

I, along with all of you interested in the future of the sustainable management of water resources in Oklahoma, look forward with optimism to the future of OWRRI. It has been an excellent adventure indeed.



DASNR Welcomes OWRRI

Effective August 16, 2011, OWRRI will be housed in OSU's Division of Agriculture Sciences and Natural Resources. This move comes after 46 years of being housed administratively in the OSU's Office of the Vice President for Research.

Mike Langston, whom many of you have worked with, will remain as Assistant Director. Dr. Dave Engle, Director of DASNR's Water Research and Extension Center and Professor in the Department of Natural Resources Ecology and Management, will serve as Director of OWRRI. Dr. Will Focht will return to the faculty in the Department of Political Science, after serving as Director for 9 years.

The change in administration will be a seamless transition to you as a stakeholder of OWRRI. OWRRI's commitment to addressing the water research needs of Oklahoma will not change. Contact information, web page, and telephone numbers will remain the same.

Join me in thanking Dr. Focht for his many years of capable leadership of the Institute and in wishing him well as he pursues his academic interests.

Dr. Robert E. Whitson, Dean and Director
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
Oklahoma State University



Dr. Dave Engle, incoming OWRRI director

Summer WRAB Meeting to Set Research Priorities

The 2011 summer Water Research Advisory Board meeting will be held Friday June 17 to determine research priorities for the upcoming 2012 grants competition. The Oklahoma Water Resources Board has been matching OWRRI's research funding for the past five years, so the priorities have been focused on the research needs of the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan. As that project nears completion, the WRAB has shifted its emphasis to funding research designed to foster plan implementation.

Last year's priorities were:

- Develop an in-stream (environmental) flow model that incorporates one or more of the following:
 - a. methods for estimating in-stream flows for Oklahoma streams
 - b. evaluation of the ecological costs and benefits of implementing in-stream flow recommendations
 - c. evaluation of the economic impacts to the consumptive water users in Oklahoma
- Develop and evaluate strategies for implementing the recommendations of the Marginal Quality Water Workgroup (convened by OWRB).
- Evaluate water infrastructure, including USDA-constructed dams, for irrigation, water supply, and additional beneficial uses. Project may include an inventory, a list of current uses, and a list and evaluation of potential uses.
- Quantify the economic impacts of invasive plant species on water supplies.
- Identify and quantify the extent of erosion and sedimentation attributable to stream bank, road crossing, and roadside erosion, utilizing currently available information wherever possible.
- Evaluate the feasibility of alternative water storage options, including water banking, in Oklahoma.
- Develop a monitoring plan for groundwater quality across Oklahoma, and identify existing sources of data in addition to those already included in national databases.
- Develop models that improve our understanding of and develop solutions for water quality degradation resulting from nutrients, including identifying pollutant pathways, and chemical and biological effects.

Once the 2012 priorities are determined they will be included in a request for proposal sent out to researchers across Oklahoma and will be included in the next issue of the *Aquahoman*.

2011 Legislative Update

The Oklahoma legislature started the most recent session with about 33 water-related bills on the table; of those only 5 were approved by the Governor.

Two of the approved bills address water reuse. Senate Joint Resolution 24 requires the OWRB and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality to develop a report on the means and processes developed for water reuse. The resolution could pave the way for some new rules to allow for water reuse by municipalities. House Bill 1575 provides a definition of gray water for municipalities that enact ordinances to regulate gray water use.

House Bill 1059 requires entities providing water to the public to obtain construction permits before supplying water or performing any construction on waterworks. The permit is to be obtained from the Department of Environmental Quality.

In Senate Bill 248 the legislature set a maximum the OWRB can charge for groundwater permit reports at \$25 per permit and allows the OWRB to assess a late fee of no more than \$25 on reports filed after the due date.

Senate Bill 597 applies only to the Arbuckle-Simpson aquifer. It requires the OWRB to work with the Department of Mines to develop rules for the use, taking or disposal of water from a producing mine pit coming from a sensitive sole-source basin or sub-basin. Oklahoma only has one such designated basin – the Arbuckle-Simpson aquifer.

One other bill of note is House Bill 2172. It relates to state-tribal relations. It transfers the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission into the Oklahoman Native American Liaison. The bill requires that the liaison be one-quarter American Indian and be appointed by December 1, 2011. The position could serve as the Secretary of Native American Affairs. As the governor's designee, the liaison will be able to negotiate cooperative agreements with the federally recognized tribes within the state.

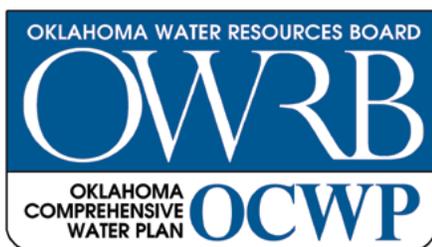
Next year's session should be quite busy on the water front as the much anticipated comprehensive water plan will be complete and presented to the legislature at the beginning of the session. However, the legislature is already beginning to think about implementation of the plan and what Oklahoma's future water policy should be. The formation of a joint legislative committee was ordered by House Speaker Kris Steele and Senate Pro Tem Brian Bingman this month. The committee will review the water plan and develop a long-range state water policy. The committee will be co-chaired by Rep. Phil Richardson of Minco and Sen. Brian Crain of Tulsa. Membership will be bipartisan and with all areas of the state and interests represented.

Save the Date!

2011 Governor's Water Conference and Research Symposium

October 18 - 19, 2011

Norman, OK



Water Plan Project Completed

The OWRR was privileged to be involved in helping the state of Oklahoma, through the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, update the comprehensive water plan. OWRR's work on that project is complete, the recommendations developed during the process have been submitted to OWRB and a draft water plan is available to citizens for comment.

The process involved over 2,300 people and well over 2,500 comments. While the work has not been without its struggles and critics, over all it has been viewed a success. It was a daunting task that had never been done on this scale before and the OWRR's hope is that the citizens of the Oklahoma feel their voice has been heard.

The OWRB is putting the finishing touches on the water plan which will be voted on by their board in October. The OWRB has tentatively identified seven priority water policy recommendations for implementation. Topics covered in the recommendations include monitoring and studies, instream/environmental flows, state/tribal water consultation and resolution, water project and infrastructure financing, water management and supply reliability, excess and surplus water and local and statewide water planning. Once the plan is finalized the work will only really be just beginning as plan implementation begins.

The OWRR would like to thank the many citizens who gave of their time to help the state determine what issues need to be addressed. The contribution of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service was instrumental in advertising, locating meeting facilities and meeting facilitation. The 11 councils of government also helped make the project a success by spreading the word about meetings and finding meeting facilities. (Jo Montana of GGEDA deserves a special thank you for the wonderful dinner she cooked for everyone in 2008 at a regional input meeting.) We thank the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals for conducting the town hall. Several state and federal agencies, associations and non-governmental organizations provided support by informing their constituents of meetings and when information became available. The project would not have been as successful without the support we received.

Thank
you!

