

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Redlands Community College and Concho Cheyenne and Arapaho hosted 60th National Land and Range Judging Contest

First Place Results Noted

Oklahoma City — More than 700 FFA and 4-H members competed in the 60th annual National Land and Range Judging Contest, held May 3-5, 2011, according to contest cochairman Joe Parker of Talala, Okla. Parker is president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the contest's principal sponsor. The Redlands Community College hosted the Land Judging and Homesite Evaluation Contests on its farms near El Reno on May 5 and hosted the contest luncheon for participants at its Darlington Farm Agricultural Education near the contest site. The nearby Concho Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency hosted the Range Judging Contest. Total registration for the event exceeded 1,000 with coaches, sponsors, officials and group leaders in addition to the contestants.

Parker noted the idea of a land judging contest was invented by three Oklahoma conservationists in 1943. They decided which soil qualities could be judged and developed score cards to test skills. The idea caught on and Oklahoma has been hosting the national contest since 1952. Oklahoma City serves as headquarters for registration and other activities, with the actual contest held somewhere near the metro area.

The 4-H and FFA participating teams qualified for the national event by placing among the top five teams at contests held in their home states. Parker said the teams match skills in judging the adaptability of land for various purposes including farming, range management, and homesite construction.

The first two days of the three-day event offer contestants opportunities to visit nearby practice sites to get acquainted with Oklahoma soils and plants with information available from soil experts. A dance in the evening of the second day gives the participants a chance to socialize with other teens from across the nation.

The actual contest site remains a secret until contest day, so no one has an unfair advantage. Contestants and coaches gather on contest morning to find out the official contest location. They then travel to the site, with a police escort, in a caravan of over 100 cars spanning several miles.

"The contestants take turns examining the soil in pits and trenches dug especially for the contest," Parker said. He noted that the skills the teens test at the contest involve principles that can be valuable in career fields like environmental and agricultural management, natural resource conservation, home building and construction.

The event ended Thursday night with an awards banquet in the Great Hall of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum when the day's freshly-tabulated results were announced. Lt. Gov. Todd Lamb welcomed all the participants and Oklahoma Conservation Commission Executive Director Mike Thralls offered the invocation. Kendell Brashears, executive director of the Oklahoma FFA Foundation, emceed the awards program.

National championship trophies were awarded to team and individual winners in each category of competition including land judging, range judging, and homesite evaluation. Each category included FFA and 4-H.

In Land Judging, FFA competition, the Tyler, W.Va., chapter won in the team category. Kaleigh Mangrum, Cleburne FFA, Texas, won first place in the individual category. In the 4-H competition the North Miami, Ind., chapter was the winning team and Travis South, Monroe County, W.Va., was the 4-H individual winner.

In the Range Judging Contest, the Stockton, Mo., chapter won the FFA team competition, and Rubisel Ramirez, Hamilton, Texas, won the FFA individual award. The Butte County, S.D., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Gina Pate, Stockton Seekers 4-H Chapter, Mo., placed first in the 4-H individual category.

In Homesite Evaluation, the Tyler FFA, W/Va., chapter won the FFA team competition. Quaid Zoda, Southern Wells, Ind.. won the FFA individual category. The Barbour County, W.Va., chapter won the 4-H team category, and Tyler Yamada, 4-H Dirt Devils Chapter, Hawaii, placed first in the 4-H individual category.

Parker presented the 2011 National Land and Range Judging Contest Honoree Award to Dianne Ireton. Ireton is an employee of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. During her 25 years of assisting with the contest, she helped streamline and modernize registration and contest rules among her other contributions. Following the presentation of the honoree award, contest cochairman and co-emcee Russell Pierson, age 99, was recognized with a standing ovation for participating in 59 of the 60 years of the contest. Don Bartolina, contest coordinator, was also acknowledged for 50 years of participation in the contest.

"I would like to thank all the conservation districts, businesses and associations who sponsored this educational contest," Parker said. "It takes a tremendous amount of time, effort and money to put on an annual event like this."

"Special thanks go to the Redlands Community College and Concho Cheyenne and Arapaho Agency for hosting the contest," Parker said, "Thanks also to the Noble Foundation for sponsoring the printed program and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum for hosting the awards banquet, along with many other sponsors."

Parker said the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Auxiliary sponsored and hosted the Social Hour and Dance. Members of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Employees

assist with the very vital contest tabulating, which takes place in the few hours between the end of the contest and the beginning of the awards banquet.

In addition to OACD, contest cosponsors also include Oklahoma Farm Credit, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Sirloin Club of Oklahoma, Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, American Farmers & Ranchers, Oklahoma Farm Bureau, National Conservation Foundation, Biltmore Hotel Oklahoma and numerous other businesses and organizations.

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