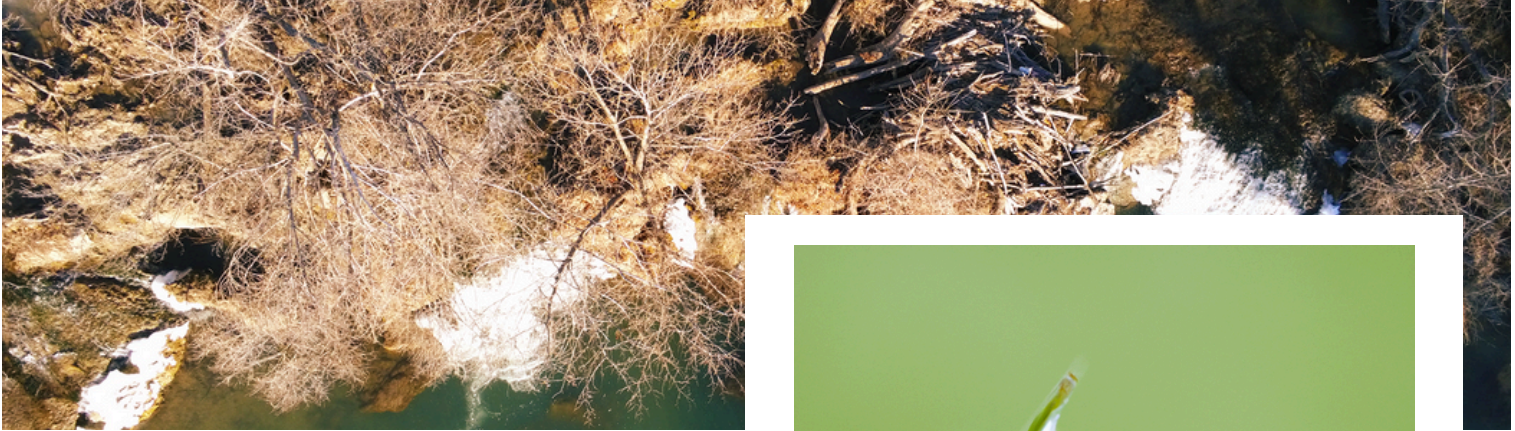




OKA' DROP

THE OKA' INSTITUTE



WELCOME

At the Oka' Institute, we believe in the power of collaboration and innovation to ensure a sustainable water future. Our work is driven by the belief that water is a vital resource for communities, ecosystems, and economies alike. In this inaugural issue, we're excited to share updates on our key projects, highlight partnerships making a difference, and explore the path forward in water resource management. Thank you for joining us on this journey to advance water sustainability. Together, we can create lasting change for future generations.

-Duane Smith, Executive Director

OKA CON'24

OkaCon'24 was a great success, bringing together water experts, industry leaders, and policymakers to discuss critical water sustainability issues. This year marked a significant moment as we officially renamed the event the John and Kay Hargrave Water Sustainability Conference, in honor of their long-standing commitment to advancing water resource management in Oklahoma. The conference featured impactful presentations, including the keynote address from Governor Bill Anoatubby, and fostered meaningful discussions on the future of water sustainability.

[Read More](#)



Kay and John Hargrave

OKA CON '25

SAVE THE DATE

JOHN AND KAY HARGRAVE WATER
SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE

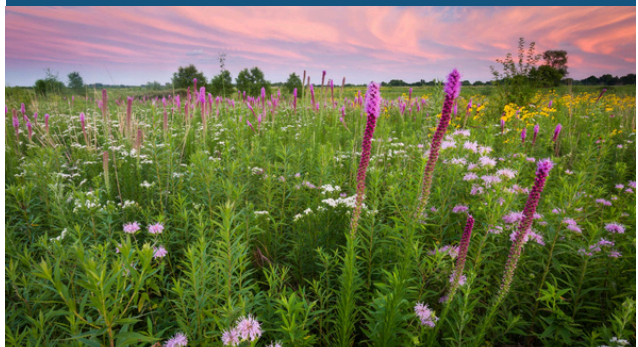
10.21 – 10.23

Advancing Sustainability Through Community Collaboration

Oka' Institute in partnership with The Chickasaw Nation and Ada Jobs Foundation was awarded \$1 million grant for citizen science watershed-based stream monitoring program with the goal of establishing water quality baselines and an early warning system for quality impacts.

AWARDED MILLION DOLLAR GRANT

Collaboratively advancing water sustainability and community-led water monitoring across the region.



[Learn More](#)

Oka' it means water, and that means everything.

STRATEGIC INNOVATIONS IN ACTION

The Oka' Institute employs a range of strategic innovations to address pressing water resource challenges. By blending technology, research, and collaborative efforts, the institute is driving forward innovative strategies for water stewardship and sustainability.



6.2 M

TOTAL PROJECTS

Funding to support various projects aimed at enhancing water resource management, habitat restoration, and community resilience. This includes a \$4.1 million grant for the Blue River Watershed, which focuses on improving water quality and quantity, restoring habitats, and addressing wildfire risks. These projects collectively aim to improve the sustainability of natural resources, benefiting both the environment and local communities.



Dedicated to advancing sustainable water management.

Improving water resource stewardship through practical, real-world strategies. Our mission is to encourage the adoption of science-driven best practices for sustainable water management.

IMPACT ON RESTORING WINTERSMITH LAKE

Partnering with the City of Ada to conduct a bathymetric and sediment survey of Wintersmith Lake. This project aims to estimate the lake's current water storage capacity and assess the potential for sediment removal, dredging, and dam enhancements. Utilizing advanced bathymetric mapping techniques, the survey will provide detailed data on the lake's depth and sediment accumulation, guiding future management decisions.

WATERSHED COORDINATION

Working closely with local, regional, and national partners, Oka' addresses critical issues such as water quality, habitat restoration, and climate resilience. Key initiatives include the Blue River Watershed project, which aims to enhance water quality and biodiversity through habitat restoration, prescribed grazing, and riparian management. Through its integrated approach, the Oka' Institute promotes collaboration among stakeholders to ensure long-term water sustainability and ecosystem health across the region's watersheds.

SUSTAINABILITY NEWS

The beauty of nature



TOP NEWS OF THE MONTH

HISTORIC RECLAMATION BURN IN DAVIS, OK

➤➤➤ [READ MORE](#)

Last fall, Lance and Delana Wheelock conducted a transformative reclamation burn on their property near Davis, Oklahoma, eradicating invasive Ashe Juniper (cedar) and restoring native grasses. With help from local burn associations and the Davis Fire Department, the burn improved wildlife habitat, uncovered wet weather springs, and reduced wildfire risks in an area threatened by arson. This effort, supported by the Oka' Institute, highlights the power of thoughtful land stewardship and community collaboration in ecological restoration.

[READ MORE](#) <<<

Joseph Harris, Community Coordinator at the Oka' Institute, has been honored with the prestigious Fire and Light Award by the Chickasaw Nation for his exceptional leadership in fostering community sustainability and addressing critical infrastructure challenges. Through his work, Harris has been instrumental in helping rural communities secure funding and implement sustainable solutions for water and wastewater systems, enhancing quality of life and promoting environmental stewardship.

HARRIS HONORED WITH FIRE AND LIGHT AWARD



TISHOMINGO WATER ECONOMIC STUDY UPDATE


Oka' Institute is conducting an economic impact study on the ongoing water and wastewater infrastructure improvements in Tishomingo. With over \$41.1 million invested in the city's water resources, this study aims to measure the return on investment and the benefits of securing additional water sources, especially during drought events. The partnership between the City of Tishomingo and Murray State College to regionalize their water systems is a critical focus, as it will enhance water security and sustainability for the community.

[Read More](#)

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES A *PROACTIVE* APPROACH

The Sustainable Communities Hub focuses on building enduring partnerships with communities to advance regional sustainability through wildfire, drought, and flood mitigation strategies. By utilizing the FEMA BRIC grant program, the Hub has established itself as a vital resource for protecting water systems and encouraging sustainable development. Recently, it secured \$1 million in community funding, enhancing its ability to support impactful initiatives. Collaborating with 36 communities, the Hub remains a leader in addressing essential water infrastructure challenges while strengthening relationships across the region.



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BE INSPIRED

»»» OKA' CAMP

Oka' Camp, sponsored by the Oka' Institute and Ada Jobs Foundation, was a huge success! Local citizens and leaders got hands-on experience learning about water sustainability while exploring the Blue River—a unique and vital river in Oklahoma. With engaging lessons in watershed ecology, creative writing, and even live music, participants gained a deeper appreciation for the importance of protecting our natural resources.

»»» GLASS RECYCLING

Thanks to a \$20,000 grant from the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, ECU and the Oka' have already kept over 4,000 pounds of glass out of Ada's landfill! Our goal? To recycle every glass bottle in Ada! Originally funded by a Rotary District Grant from the Ada Sunrise Rotary Club, the glass recycling project has evolved significantly. Grant funds enabled ECU to purchase a glass grinder that supports innovative research and sustainable applications for crushed glass. Oka' has funded summer research projects exploring various uses for recycled glass, such as creating concrete pavers, landscaping fill, and even art materials.

EXPERT ADVICE

Sustainable Holiday Tip:
Save water this season
by defrosting food in the
fridge instead of under
running water.

»»» WATER: THE HIDDEN INGREDIENT

As we come together with loved ones to celebrate the holiday season and share in the joy of a festive meal, it's easy to forget one of the most vital ingredients that makes it all possible: water. Whether it's raising a succulent turkey, growing the fresh vegetables, or baking those delicious pies, water plays a critical role in bringing our holiday traditions to life. In fact, the total water footprint of a classic holiday meal for a family can exceed 1,500 gallons—reminding us of the essential connection between water and the food we cherish.



PARTNERSHIP NEWS

Lake of the Arbuckles Watershed Association Receives Oklahoma Water for 2060 Excellence Award.

CONSERVATION SUCCESS

LAWA was formed as a voluntary, landowner-run conservation organization dedicated to addressing water quality and sustainability challenges in the Lake of the Arbuckles watershed. Guided by a grassroots approach, LAWAs initiatives are driven by the commitment of local stakeholders and supported by partnerships with organizations like the Chickasaw Nation and the Oka' Institute. LAWAs Board of Directors includes community leaders and landowners whose vision and leadership have been pivotal in advancing conservation efforts.



In collaboration with the Chickasaw Nation and the Oka' Institute, LAWA has spearheaded innovative projects to improve water quality and quantity. A pivotal initiative was the 2016 Lake of the Arbuckles Watershed Restoration Plan, funded through the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative

Watershed Management Program (CWMP). This grassroots effort has driven significant progress in addressing sediment and nutrient runoff, ensuring the lake's long-term sustainability and removing it from its impaired status.

YEAR IN REVIEW: 2024

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

PROJECTS:

- FEMA BRIC
- Restoring Wintersmith Lake
- Tishomingo Economic Study

IMPACT:

- \$1 Million Community Grants Awarded
- 36 Total Communities Served
- Economic Development
- Regional Collaboration
- Improved Infrastructure
- Improved Public Health

LAND STEWARDSHIP

PROJECTS:

- BOR WaterSMART
- Blue River Valuation Study
- Lake Texoma Watershed
- Red River Conservation Partnership
- BIA Tribal Climate Resilience
- Bat Study
- NRCS CIG, JET (Juniper Evaluation Tool)

IMPACT:

- 45,724 Acres Served
- Improved Water Quality
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Biodiversity Protection
- Economic Growth



“A DROP OF WATER
A RIPPLE OF
CHANGE”



WATER RESEARCH

PROJECTS:

- Byrds Mill Springs
- Arbuckle Simpson Aquifer
- Enhanced Aquifer Recharge
- EPA STAR

IMPACT:

- Building Capacity at CURL Lab
- Improved Water Security
- Public Health Protection
- Informed Decision Making



WATER PLANNING

PROJECTS:

- EPA Environmental Justice Grant
- EPA Government to Government Grant

IMPACT:

- Ensuring water security for future generations while enhancing economic opportunities.

From the Director's Desk

Dear Friends of The Oka' Institute,

As we draw near the end of 2024, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible year we've had together and express my heartfelt gratitude for your continued support and engagement with the Oka' Institute. This year has been marked by progress, partnerships, and passion for the vital mission of advancing water sustainability and community resilience.

From our impactful projects, such as the Blue River Watershed restoration and the Wintersmith Lake sediment survey, to hosting transformative events like the John and Kay Hargrave Water Sustainability Conference, the strides we've made exemplify the power of uniting in purpose. At the heart of our mission is the Oka' Institute Community Hub, which fosters collaboration and innovation. Guided by our four pillars—sustainable communities, land stewardship, water research, and water planning—we work alongside grassroots organizations and partners to protect and enhance water resources for today and generations to come. One of the highlights of 2024 has been seeing how these shared efforts are creating ripples of change, inspiring global impact from local action. Together, we are proving that when communities come together, the possibilities are limitless.

As we look to 2025, I am filled with hope and determination. Our work is far from over, and the challenges we face require all of us to remain steadfast and creative. With your support, I am confident we will continue to pioneer solutions, spark meaningful dialogue, and deliver measurable outcomes for the communities we serve.

Thank you for being part of the Oka' family and for believing in our mission. I encourage you to stay connected, get involved, and share your ideas as we move forward together. Here's to building a future where every drop counts and every voice is heard.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a prosperous New Year.

With gratitude,



Executive Director, The Oka' Institute