

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met September 5, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chairman George Stunkard. He stated this was a regularly scheduled meeting in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, Title 25, Sections 301 and following as amended. The agenda for this meeting was posted August 31, 2006, at the front entrance of the building.

### WELCOME OF NEW COMMISSION MEMBER

Mr. Stunkard welcomed Matt Gard, new Area I member, to the Commission. Mr. Gard stated that he has already taken his Oath of Office and submitted it to the Secretary of State's office.

### ROLL CALL

Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary, took roll call and the following members were in attendance:

George Stunkard, Chair  
Dan Lowrance, Vice Chair  
Virginia Kidd, Secretary  
Matt Gard, Member  
Rick Jeans, Member

Others in attendance were:

Mike Thralls, Executive Director  
Ben Pollard, Assistant Director  
Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director  
Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director  
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Assistant Director  
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director  
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director  
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Tammy Sawatzky, Administrative Officer  
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director  
Kevin Norton, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist  
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program Chief  
Steve Thompson, Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry  
Larry Edmison, Sierra Club  
Brian Ervin, Capitol Network News  
Jeff Packham, Journal Record  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. Jeans led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Lowrance to approve the minutes of the August 7, 2006, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Mr. Gard abstained. Motion carried.

## **DISTRICT DIRECTOR APPOINTMENTS**

Mike Thralls, Executive Director, presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #1. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Jeans to approve district director appointments listed as 1<sup>st</sup> Recommendation in Exhibit #1 with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director, presented the claims and financial statement as listed in Exhibit #2. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **PRESENTATION OF COMMISSION AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He recommended approval of amended agreements listed as 8a - 8b. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the agreements. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to ratify approval of agreements 8c - 8j. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Ms. Kidd to approve correction to agreement 8k. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS**

Mr. Thralls presented out of state travel requests for approval as listed in Exhibit #4. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to ratify approval of 9a. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve requests 9b - 9e. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**FY2007 JOINT PLANS OF OPERATIONS**

Lisa Knauf, District Services Director, requested approval of FY2007 Joint Plans of Operations for Cimarron County, Garfield County, Kiamichi, Mayes County and Oklahoma County Conservation Districts. A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Ms. Kidd to approve the plans. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**COMMISSION'S FY 2008 BUDGET REQUEST**

Mr. Thralls presented the proposed FY2008 budget request as listed in Attachment A which is due to the Office of State Finance by October 1. He stated that the funding requests are not listed by priority but by need. Staff will be meeting with Commission members and representatives of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) to finalize the request and bring to the Commission in October for approval.

Ms. Knauf compiled Statements of Needs and Justifications of Funds received from conservation districts. From these reports, districts have requested a total of \$53,000 for increased hours for current district employees; \$505,000 for new positions; and \$394,000 for equipment. The personnel request totals do not include FICA, medicare, retirement and benefits. Staff will be reviewing these requests to comprise a total for the Commission's budget request.

Clay Pope, OACD Executive Director, stated that work with the legislature to lift the cap on REAP funds needs to take place this coming legislative session.

**LOCALLY-LED COST-SHARE PROGRAM**

Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, presented recommendations for the Locally-Led Conservation Cost-share Program as listed in Exhibit #5. Staff is recommending that \$600,000 from FY2007 REAP funds be allocated to the Program. From this allocation, staff is recommending that allocations to districts be made on a performance based strategy. There are a number of districts each year that utilize all Program funds and then there are a number of districts that under-utilize the Program funds. Staff is recommending to allocate funds to districts that have Program year 8 alternate participants pending availability of Program funds.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Jeans to allocate \$600,000 to conservation districts for Program Year 8 of the Locally-Led Conservation Cost-share Program and to approve an additional allocation of FY2007 REAP funds for the locally-led conservation cost-share program on a performance-based strategy. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS**

None.

## **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Mr. Jeans reported on attending the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session held last week in Enid and stated that a large group was in attendance showing support for Oklahoma's State Conservationist. The group included representatives from the Farm Bureau and Farmers Union.

Mr. Jeans also attended the NACD Board Meeting and stated that the NACD will be hosting teleconferences on September 5, 7 and 12 to discuss local issues.

Ms. Kidd reported on attending a media event for the Club Lake AML Reclamation Project. She also attended the Wildlife Expo in Guthrie.

Mr. Gard expressed his appreciation in serving on the Commission. He stated that the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and the Oklahoma Farmers Union resolution committees will be meeting soon to develop policy for the coming legislative session. Mr. Gard stated this is a good time to express conservation needs to these groups as policy set at the local levels dictates requests at the state level.

## **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration:* Mike Thralls, Executive Director, stated he met with new Area 1 Commission member Matt Gard last week to discuss Commission activities. He then reported on attending the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session in Enid where approximately 160 people attended. Mr. Thralls expressed his appreciation to Mr. Stunkard, Mr. Jeans, and Mr. Pope for their participation and comments. Mr. Thralls stated that September 15 is the effective date of retirement of NRCS State Conservationist Darrell Dominick. Pat Leavenworth, Wisconsin State Conservationist, has been named acting State Conservationist for Oklahoma for a ninety day detail.

*District Services Division:* Lisa Knauf, Director, reported on attending board meetings in Shawnee, Coal County, Oklahoma County, North Fork of Red River and Kiamichi Conservation Districts. She also assisted with new secretary training in Kiamichi. Ms. Knauf assisted Haskell County with payroll and IRS issues. She reported on compiling data from Statements of Needs and Justification of Funds. Ms. Knauf also attending the "Forest of Family Fun" at the Wildlife Expo.

*Water Quality Program:* Shanon Phillips, Assistant Director, stated that Mr. Pope has been approached by the City Manager at Elk City regarding a lake being on the 303(d) list and requested assistance. The lake is listed because of bacteria and it soon may be listed due to nutrients. Staff has met with city officials and stated that the best assistance to protect the riparian area would be Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The program would cost approximately \$5 million. The city would need to commit \$275,000 with the remainder coming from EPA.

Mr. Lowrance thanked the water quality staff for their assistance with this project.

*Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:* Mike Kastl, Director, stated that projects listed as complete under the FY2004 grant still lacks some vegetative work. He expressed appreciation to Ms. Kidd for her assistance with the Club Lake project. Mr. Kastl reported that two projects have begun under the FY2006 grant. He also reported on the emergency program as listed in the written report.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Steve Coffman, Director, reported

on completing the following reports for FY2006: Cash and Investments, Capitol Assets, and Compensated Absences GAPP Conversion Packages. The telecommunications report as well as the inventory report were completed.

Mr. Coffman stated the health care option period beginning January 1 will see a rate increase of up to twenty percent.

*Information Technology Division:* Mike Sharp, Director, stated that a change in superintendents on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project has been positive as far as work is concerned. He stated that reclamation work continues on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Final plans for the Howerton project has been reviewed by the Commission and are in the final state of preparation by the contractor.

Mr. Sharp stated that staff is working in districts where Commission employees are housed to get computers on a dedicated internet line due to NRCS computer compliance issues.

Mr. Sharp stated that staff has worked on strategic and business plan development for the Geographic Information Council and the Office of Geographic Information. A needs assessment survey will be discussed at the Council meeting on September 8.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Robert Toole, Director, stated that several of his staff were featured speakers at the National Watershed Coalition workshop on Operations & Maintenance of Watershed Structures. Mr. Toole reported that the Wildlife Expo was a tremendous public education event again this year with more than 30,000 people participating.

Reporting on the Locally Led Cost Share, Mr. Toole stated that the performance based approaches to allocating cost share funds to districts were the primary focus of attention in the cost share program. He stated that the second allocation of FY07 O&M funds were processed based on district requests for funding. Numerous requests for watershed aides and equipment (primarily vehicles) remain unfunded. O&M funding continues to fall short of identified needs.

Mr. Toole reported on rehabilitation activities stating that the Barnitz 14 in Dewey County Conservation District was contracted and the Sandstone 16A in Upper Washita Conservation District was bid. The Sallisaw 33 in Sequoyah County Conservation District is pending land right negotiations and the Cobb 2 in Deer Creek Conservation District is pending a pre-bid conference.

*Administration:* Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, reported that work continues with PSO and its involvement with conservation plans and the establishment of riparian areas.

## **OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Clay Pope, Executive Director, expressed his appreciation to Oklahoma's conservation partnership.

Area meetings are scheduled as follows: Area 1, November 2, Rock of Restoration Church, south of Geary; Area 4, November 8, Altus; Area 3, November 15, Nowata; Area 5, November 16, McAlester; Area 2 is not confirmed but is being hosted by the Oklahoma County and Shawnee Conservation Districts.

Mr. Pope reported on attending the USDA Listening Session and was pleased with the turnout. Mr. Pope reported on the partnership at Harn Homestead stating that P&K Riverside donated a sprayer to use in the outdoor classroom area and that Estes Chemical provided the spray.

Mr. Pope reported on interim studies stating that on September 14 the County and Municipal Government Committee will meet to discuss cooperation between counties and conservation districts. He also stated that a committee on prescribed burning will be meeting on September 21.

Mr. Pope stated that the OACD newsletter will be published soon. He then stated that the NACD will be holding conference calls to discuss local conservation issues. Calls for Oklahoma are scheduled for September 5, 7, and 12.

Mr. Pope stated that the OACD will be sending a letter to Agriculture Secretary Johann's for agreeing to review the reassignment of State Conservationist Darrel Dominick.

Mr. Pope thanked the water quality division for their work with the City of Elk City.

#### **USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**

Kevin Norton, Assistant State Conservationist, expressed congratulations to Mr. Gard for being appointed Area 1 member. He stated this is the most difficult time for him personally to represent State Conservationist Darrel Dominick at the meeting. Mr. Norton is picking up the acting state conservationist this afternoon; Pat Leavenworth will be in Oklahoma for a 90 day detail.

Mr. Norton provided a written monthly activities report. He highlighted the Cooperative Conservation Listening Session and the summary of Farm Bill Program Activity as listed in the report.

Mr. Norton reported that Secretary Johanns announced several actions for drought assistance and as a component of the package, Oklahoma received \$1.25 million in financial assistance for enrollment of rental agreements in the Grassland Reserve Program in 2006. The money has been allocated for use on existing applications for 10, 15, and 20 year rental agreements.

Mr. Norton then responded to a question from Mr. Lowrance concerning the budget stating that Oklahoma has received a substantial amount of money and is struggling to find ways for legitimate obligations of that money. He also stated that personnel positions are being filled including all district conservationist positions, one RC&D coordinator and 3 technical positions before the end of the fiscal year.

#### **USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY**

Rod Wanger, Conservation Program Chief, reported on the Livestock Grant Assistance Program for producers stating that \$6 million has come to Oklahoma.

The Direct and Counter-cyclical sign-up will begin October 1.

Mr. Wanger reported that 36 counties were approved for the Emergency Conservation Program for drought assistance. He also stated that producers are eligible for emergency loans at a rate of 3.75 percent.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on October 2, 2006, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business a motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Ms. Kidd to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

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Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on October 2, 2006.

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CHAIR