

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met October 2, 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 September 28, 2006, at the front entrance of the building.

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
Jana Chicoine, Financial Management and Human Resources Administrative Officer
Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director
Dan Butler, Water Quality Program Director
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director
Mark Harrison, Information Representative
Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator
Joann Stevenson, Assistant Attorney General
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Pat Leavenworth, Natural Resources Conservation Service Acting State Conservationist
Kevin Norton, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program Chief
Hal Clark, Cimarron County Conservation District Director
Jeff Packham, Journal Record
Amber Theinert, Capitol Network News
Larry Edmison, Sierra Club
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. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Jeans to approve the minutes of the September 5, 2006, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. 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 Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Jeans to approve district director appointments listed as 1st 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.

PRESENTATION OF NATIONAL AML AWARDS

Mr. Stunkard reported on attending the National Abandoned Mine Land Association meeting in Billings, Montana. The Association presented two of its most prestigious awards to Commission employees Mike Sharp and Mike Kastl. Mr. Sharp received the Stan Bernard Memorial Award. This award is given to a person who has made significant contributions to the Association over the past year.

Mr. Kastl was the first recipient of the new Dave Bucknam Outstanding Instructor Award. Mr. Kastl has taught Office of Surface Mining training courses in several states since 1991.

CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Jana Chicoine, Financial Management and Human Resources Administrative Officer, presented the claims and financial statement as listed in Exhibit #2. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Ms. Kidd 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

Prior to presenting agreements, Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, stated that four agreements with the Natural Resources Conservation Service are recommended for ratification today. Money is being added to these agreements because retired State Conservationist Darrel Dominick took a stand and questioned the lack of technical assistance dollars coming to Oklahoma. Since Mr. Dominick's reassignment by NRCS, which he declined and chose early retirement instead, the Conservation Commission has received an additional \$472,000. In addition, NRCS has received new technical assistance funds to fill positions that have been vacant for some time, for instance the District Conservationist position in Stephens County that has been vacant for 7 months and will now be filled. The additional funding from Washington NRCS has also allowed the NRCS to fulfill agreements with the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Ducks Unlimited and the RC&D Councils.

Mr. Pollard stated that his first reaction would be to decline these funds but that Mr. Dominick would want the Commission to accept the money and then do the best it can to put conservation on the land. Mr. Pollard acknowledged the work of NRCS staff members Kevin Norton, Gary O'Neill and Bill Porter for their work in getting these agreements ready for approval.

in such a short time frame. He also acknowledged Acting State Conservationist Pat Leavenworth for signing the agreements.

Mr. Pollard then presented agreements as listed in Exhibit #3. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to ratify approval of agreements (a) through (e). 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 Mr. Jeans to approve agreements listed as (f) through (k). 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 as listed in Exhibit #4. A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Ms. Kidd to ratify approval of request (a). 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 Mr. Jeans to approve requests listed as (b) through (e). Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

GOVERNOR'S WATER CONFERENCE

The Governor's Water Conference will be held November 13-14, 2006, at the Cox Business Convention Center in Oklahoma City. Action will be taken at the November meeting regarding attendance.

COMMISSION'S FY2008 BUDGET REQUEST

Mr. Thralls presented the Commission's FY2008 budget request as listed in Exhibit #5. Staff is recommending that the request include \$2,962,890 in new general revenue funds for priorities as listed in the exhibit. The Commission will also be requesting the legislature to remove the cap on REAP fund transfers to provide additional funding for watershed rehabilitation, conservation cost-share, and a conservation reserve enhancement program.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the request. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

JOINT PLAN OF OPERATIONS FOR NOBLE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

A motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the Joint Plan of Operations for the Noble County Conservation District. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CO-SPONSORSHIP OF THE OACD AREA MEETINGS

A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Jeans to co-sponsor the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Area Meetings as listed below. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Area 1: November 2, Rock of Restoration Church, south of Geary

Area 2: November 9, Biltmore Hotel, Oklahoma City

Area 3: November 15, Hillside Christian Church, Nowata

Area 4: November 8, Western Oklahoma State College, Altus

Area 5: November 16, Pittsburg County Expo Center, McAlester

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Gard will be attending the Governor's Biofuels Conference in Norman on October 3-4.

Ms. Kidd revisited the Club Lake AML project site stating that the finished work has given the landowners an incentive to do work on their own. She questioned if funds would be available for a Phase II project. Ms. Kidd also reported on attending an OACD strategic planning committee meeting to discuss association membership issues.

Mr. Lowrance reported on attending the National Watershed Coalition's Organizing for Action Workshop. District staff that attended the workshop thanked the Commission for sponsoring their attendance. Mr. Thralls shared letters of thanks from employees.

Mr. Lowrance reported on a conversation he had with USDA Under Secretary Mark Rey and a meeting he and NACD President Bill Wilson had with Acting State Conservationist Pat Leavenworth. Both were related to questions Oklahoma had regarding the allocation of NRCS technical assistance funds. He stated that his questions were answered and that it was now time to move on although events could have been avoided if these questions would have been answered earlier in the year. Mr. Lowrance stated that Mr. Wilson has met with new NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster and that Mr. Lancaster has new ideas about the allocation of NRCS funds.

Mr. Stunkard attended the Commission's full staff meeting held in Jay, Oklahoma as well as the tour of the water quality demonstration farm. He commended staff for a great job they are doing in the area. Mr. Stunkard also attended a retirement reception for North Caddo Conservation District Secretary Carolyn Tucker.

Mr. Jeans reported on participating in the county fair where 700 kindergarten coloring posters were exhibited. He also participated in the teleconferences hosted by the NACD.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Administration: Mike Thralls, Executive Director, congratulated Mike Sharp and Mike Kastl on receiving awards during the National AML Association meeting. Mr. Thralls reported on attending the National Association of State Conservation Agencies annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas. NACD President Bill Wilson was in attendance and introduced NRCS Chief Arlen Lancaster to the group. He was accompanied by Doug McCaleb, NRCS Information Officer. Mr. Thralls

stated that the comments from Chief Lancaster were positive. Mr. Lancaster wants to build strong partnerships with state agencies. Comments to the Chief were that states have a good partnership with NRCS but that the partnership has been greatly damaged.

Mr. Thralls expressed condolences to Water Quality Director Dan Butler on the loss of his mother. Mr. Thralls expressed appreciation for condolences he has received on the loss of his grandmother.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, Director, also attended the NASCA meeting and workshop where Ray Ledgerwood was the facilitator. She too heard Chief Lancaster's comments and is not as optimistic as some. Mr. Ledgerwood will be attending the OACD State Meeting to discuss leadership development.

Water Quality Program: Dan Butler, Director, stated that the division has been sending reports to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval. Staff has added Honey Creek as a new implementation project. The Watershed Advisory Group has been appointed by the board and held its first meeting.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program: Mike Kastl, Director, reported on attending the National AML Association meeting in Montana and stated that the Governor of Montana was the keynote speaker. He stated that Mr. Sharp was well deserving of the award he received at the national meeting and he felt honored to receive his award as well.

Mr. Kastl reported on three active sites in Sequoyah and Rogers Counties and stated that the annual AML Inspectors Workshop will be held in Tulsa at the end of October.

Mr. Kastl gave the Information Technology report as Mike Sharp is attending a meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. He reported that work on the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project continues as well as work on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Staff worked on providing internet service to Commission field offices in Claremore, Tahlequah, Pauls Valley and Tulsa..

Financial Management and Human Resources Division: Jana Chicoine, Administrative Officer, stated a written report of activities was in the meeting packet.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, Director, reported on his presentation at the County and Municipal Government Committee interim study meeting. He is excited about the possibilities that can be accomplished through that Committee.

Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator, assisted in the 4-State Advanced Facilitator workshop. She sits on the national governing body of Project WET. She also assisted with the H2OKlahoma Water Festival in the Kiamichi Conservation District for five schools where 250 students, 20 teachers, and 50 presenters/volunteers participated.

Claims continue to be processed for the cost-share program. Mr. Toole stated that dollars sent to conservation districts multiply four to seven times within the local economy as a result of the

people who are customers of the Districts.

A preconstruction meeting for the Sugar Creek, Devil's Canyon drop structure project was conducted and work should begin this month. A preconstruction meeting was conducted for the Barnitz 14 rehabilitation project and work should begin this month. A pre-bid conference will be held this month for the Mill Creek 18 rehabilitation project.

Mr. Toole stated that the watershed technicians participated in the National Watershed Coalition's Organizing for Action Workshop in Nebraska City and will be multipliers of that knowledge as they visit District board meetings.

Administration: Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, reported on the first meeting of the Prescribed Burn Task Force.

Mr. Pollard expressed appreciation to Mr. Stunkard for his participation in the full staff meeting and tour.

Mr. Pollard stated that he is working with the NRCS on security background checks for conservation district employees that access NRCS computers. He expressed his frustration at the federal government dictating how states do business and then calling it a partnership. Mr. Pollard stated that as long as the current administration is in charge of the NRCS, that Oklahoma should keep up its guard. He expressed his displeasure with the recent Conservation Listening Session held in Enid, Oklahoma. USDA Deputy Under Secretary Dave Tenney attended the session representing Under Secretary Mark Rey and left the meeting before all speakers had given their statements.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Clay Pope, Executive Director, thanked the Commission for approving co-sponsorship of the area meetings. Work is continuing on the agendas for these meetings. The Western Farmers Electric Cooperative has agreed to sponsor the youth awards.

Mr. Pope commented on legislative interim studies stating that he attended a meeting of the controlled burn legislative study. The committee will be asking for ideas and thoughts from the Farmers Union, Farm Bureau and the Cattlemen's Association. He also attended a meeting of the County and Municipal Government Committee Chaired by Representative Guy Liebmann. Programs for possible district/county commissioner partnership are the roadside erosion program, invasive species control and watershed operation and maintenance.

Mr. Pope reported that Scotty Herriman gave a presentation at Congressman Lucas' Farm Bill hearing as well as Trey Lam who was representing the National Watershed Coalition.

Mr. Pope stated that issues are arising concerning biofuel production and the planting of canola, sunflowers, and switch grass. He's heard comments that producers should plow up their land and plant corn. OACD will be watching this issue.

The Wildlife Federation is putting together a task force and has asked OACD to join to discuss the Conservation Reserve Program as well as the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill.

The city of Kingfisher is writing a conservation innovation grant for a trails system along the Cimarron River.

The OACD newsletter was emailed last week and work is beginning on the handbook. Mr. Pope will be attending the state Grange meeting in Tulsa on October 20.

Mr. Stunkard reported that years ago when the Roadside Erosion Program was in existence a legislator suggested that the program be changed from the Roadside Erosion Program to the Roadside Enhancement Program; enhancement may be more receptive than erosion. He suggested OACD look at this.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Pat Leavenworth, Acting State Conservationist, stated there are similarities between Oklahoma and her state of Wisconsin. She stated that the NRCS has started the new fiscal year under a continuing resolution and that last year's balanced budget has been closed out. She expressed her pleasure of having the opportunity to add money to agreements with the Commission and that the NRCS has now met its technical service provider goal.

The NRCS hosted a booth at the recent State Fair of Oklahoma along with the Farm Service Agency.

Ms. Leavenworth reported that the Oklahoma NRCS achieved 100 percent of its performance plan goals which was a result of hard work and dedication. She also reported on the completion of the rangeland National Resources Inventory data with 104 primary sampling units. Ms. Leavenworth stated that soil survey digitizing is nearing completion.

Ms. Leavenworth reported the Agriculture Secretary announced that 51 watersheds will be eligible for the 2007 Conservation Security Program. Oklahoma's selected watershed is the Upper Washita watershed.

Johnny Green, State Conservation Engineer, has been selected as the new Co-Director of the National Design, Construction and Soil Mechanics Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Larry Caldwell will be acting state conservation engineer.

The volunteer program for FY06 is closing out and national awards nominations are now available for FY06.

Ms. Leavenworth stated that the Poteau River Watershed Team will be traveling to Washington, D.C. this month to receive the 2006 USDA Honor Awards for the area of "Supporting the President's Management Agenda and Civil Rights."

USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Rod Wanger, Conservation Program Chief, reported that the Conservation Reserve Program payments were released today which amounts to \$33 million for Oklahoma. The State Technical Committee agreed to a grazing extension until November 30. Mr. Wanger reported on emergency grazing and managed haying and grazing and these programs are being used due to drought

conditions. Managed haying and grazing is authorized no more frequently than one out of every three years after the CRP cover is fully established. Mr. Wanger reported that a lawsuit has been filed by the National Wildlife Federation regarding haying and grazing on new contracts.

Direct and counter-cyclical program payments will be out this month totaling \$64 million. Advanced payments will begin in December.

Mr. Wanger reported that the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry has sent out information regarding the Livestock Assistance Grant Program.

Mr. Wanger reported on the Emergency Conservation Program stating that a large number of counties are included in the program due to severe drought.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on November 6, 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. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Gard to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on November 6, 2006.


CHAIR