

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met October 4, 2010, at the Agriculture Building Board Room located at 2800 N. Lincoln in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chairman Mike Rooker. 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 30, 2010, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

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

Mike Rooker, Chair
George Stunkard, Vice Chair
Dan Lowrance, Secretary
Jim Grego, Member
Matt Gard, 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 Director
Ron Cardwell, Abandoned Mine Land Program Engineer
Shellie Willoughby, Information Technology GIS Specialist
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director
Janet Stewart, General Counsel
Judith Wilkins, Water Quality Program Environmental Coordinator
Gary O'Neill, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Steve Thompson, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Associate
Commissioner
Kent Bradley, Payne County Conservation District Director
Bob Priess, Payne County Conservation District Director
Clint Sloan, eCapitol
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the minutes of the September 2, 2010, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

DISTRICT DIRECTOR RESIGNATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Mike Thralls, Executive Director, presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #1. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve district director appointments as listed with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. 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. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

Judith Wilkins, Water Quality Program Environmental Coordinator, was recognized for ten years of service.

PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He recommended ratification of agreements listed as (a) through (e) as these agreements were previously approved by Chairman Rooker. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to ratify approval of agreements (a) through (e) as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Pollard recommended approval of amended agreements listed as (f) through (h). A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Grego to approve the amended agreements. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Pollard recommended approval of the new agreements listed as (i) through (n). A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the new agreements. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

Mr. Thralls presented travel requests for approval as listed in Exhibit #4. He recommended ratification of requests (a) and (b) as these were previously approved by Chairman Rooker. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Grego to ratify approval of (a) and (b). Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the request listed as (c). Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE BUDGET AND ALLOCATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Thralls stated this item was tabled at the September Commission meeting. The Budget and Allocations Advisory Committee is recommending that the Commission offer an incentive grant not to exceed \$100,000.00 based on the first three years' general revenue savings to those districts willing to consolidate to county boundaries. The grant dollars may be used for expenses allowed by the Conservation District Act. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the recommendation. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

COMMISSION'S FY2012 BUDGET REQUEST

Mr. Thralls presented the Commission's FY2012 budget request as listed in Exhibit #6. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the FY2012 budget request as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

COMMISSION'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FISCAL YEARS 2011 - 2016

Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission is required to update its strategic plan and submit it with the budget request. The plan is listed as Exhibit #5. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Grego to approve the plan as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OKLAHOMA ABANDONED MINE LAND EMERGENCY PROGRAM POLICY

Mr. Thralls stated that the Office of Surface Mining will no longer provide funding for AML emergencies; therefore, those costs will come from the AML grant. He is recommending approval of the policy listed as Attachment A.

A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the policy as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PAYNE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD MEMBERS ADDRESS THE OCC REGARDING ITS ALLOCATION AND BUDGET REDUCTION

Bob Priess, Chairman of the Payne County Conservation District board, stated that he and Kent Bradley, member, are here to discuss the district's allocation.

Mr. Bradley stated that their district secretary retired July 1 after 30 years. She was at the top of the pay scale and their new employee will be hired at a significantly lower rate. The position has been left open 3 months to account for paid annual leave and benefits. Board members feel that because of this savings they should not be required to take the \$1150 cut that is being required by Commission action at the July Commission meeting.

Commission staff explained that all positions are being looked at and that several positions are not being filled. The equipment manager positions are now a cash allocation position with no benefits. It was also noted that the Commission can be billed for unused sick leave when employees retire if those balances are credited to the retiree as another year of service. Staff explained that each year benefit costs increase without any additional appropriation.

After additional discussions, Mr. Priess stated that the severity of current budget issues came as a surprise to directors who are not familiar with inner workings of the Commission. He suggested that every board member attend a Commission meeting. He thanked the Commission for allowing them to appear.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Gard stated that he will be attending the Governor's Water Conference.

Mr. Grego attended three district board meetings last month and is scheduled to attend two more this month.

Mr. Rooker attended the Governor's SeptemberFest event and the Pottawatomie County Fair.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Administration - Executive Director: Mr. Thralls stated that a full staff meeting will be held on October 6 at the Oxley Nature Center in Tulsa and invited members to attend. Staff will kick off its State Charitable Campaign at the meeting.

Mr. Thralls attended a retirement reception for Duane Smith, director of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. He stated that interim director J.D. Strong has applied for the position.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, Director, stated that she had attended the Payne County Conservation District board meeting to discuss budget issues and invited members to attend the Commission meeting.

Ms. Knauf stated that there are new district employees in East Woods County, Kiowa County, Bryan, Payne County and Pittsburg County Conservation Districts. Positions are still vacant in Pushmataha and Caney Valley. Ms. Knauf continues to work with law enforcement on embezzlement issues. On that note, Ms. Knauf has notified all districts that the use of a stamped signature is unacceptable. She also stated that investigators recommend that the person signing the checks should not have access to the check register.

Ms. Knauf has finalized reporting on prescribed burn project funding and will continue to do reporting on flood plain easement projects.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, Director, provided copies of the 2011 Blue Thumb Calendar to all members and stated that the calendar showcases volunteer monitoring of more than 100 streams. She stated that over 45,000 sampling events have been entered into the water quality database over the last 10 years. This amounts to over 50 site visits per week.

Ms. Phillips reported on a meeting she attended with OACD Executive Director Clay Pope hosted by EPA regarding TMDL on the Illinois River.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program: Ron Cardwell, Engineer, stated that last month the Farley Project had only 35% of the work done with 43% of the contract time elapsed. He met with the contractor and in one month substantial progress has been made. The Bronson project site was planted with vegetation last week to prevent erosion.

Mr. Cardwell reported on future projects stating that the Peevyhouse site will go to bid soon as will the Reeves Phase 2 project.

Mr. Cardwell stated that the contractor started today on the Shouse project in Rogers County.

Financial Management and Human Resources Division: Mr. Coffman will submit the budget request and the strategic plan to the Office of State Finance. He has been finalizing General Accounting Practices reporting. Mr. Coffman stated that the Affirmative Action plan has been submitted to the Office of Personnel Management. Insurance meetings for district employees are being held across the state this month.

Information Technology Division: Shellie Willoughby, GIS Specialist, reported that server maintenance and new server testing is being performed and that all servers will be moved to the new data center soon.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, Director, reported that the buyouts in Kingfisher to address flooding in Kingfisher County have been launched.

Mr. Toole reported that staff will be making a presentation at the Governor's Water Conference regarding the Incident Command System.

Mr. Toole stated that the cost-share program is moving ahead. He stated that the Wildlife Expo attracted 51,000 people and commended Karla Beatty for a great job with staffing.

Mr. Toole reported on Cottonwood 15 rehabilitation stating that it will be the third watershed to be decommissioned.

Mr. Toole reported on the watershed assessment project stating 96 reviews have been completed; 59 breach analysis and mapping have been completed; 29 rehab alternative and rankings have been completed; and 24 assessment reports have been completed.

Mr. Toole stated that new watershed aides have been hired in Grady County and Garvin Conservation Districts.

Administration - Assistant Director: Mr. Pollard reported that Mark Harrison, Information Officer, was in a mower/tractor accident and suffered a broken collar bone.

The comments regarding lack of communication by the Payne County board members present today prompted Mr. Pollard to inquire of the Commission whether or not staff is communicating the budget situation adequately. Mr. Thralls wrote a piece for the newsletter and the website regarding the budget outlook. Mr. Pollard stated that during the upcoming area meetings that a town hall forum will be held featuring leadership from the Commission, the OACD, OACDE and the NRCS.

Mr. Pollard stated that the employee costs alone for districts is over \$50,000 more than the Commission receives in general revenue which emphasizes the seriousness of the budget challenge.

The Budget and Allocations Committee will meet this month and will be looking at performance based district allocations. Staff met with the NRCS regarding this subject and has received information from the National Association of State Conservation Agencies as well.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Clay Pope, Executive Director, stated that it will be an interesting legislative session next spring and that the focus of conservation districts is flood control, the farm bill, water quality, education outreach and technical assistance across district lines.

Mr. Pope stated that the Area Meetings are coming up and topics will include budget, allocations and the delivery system. He stated that Oklahoma will be hosting the 2011 NACD South Central Meeting and the 2011 National Watershed Coalition meeting both at the Renaissance Hotel.

Mr. Pope updated the Commission on the EcoPass initiative with the Department of Tourism stating that a recent conference being held here bought 200 passes for its attendees. This program could provide a funding source for conservation districts. Mr. Pope is working with the Department of Wildlife Conservation on a wildlife credit for the lesser prairie chicken to help landowners protect the bird from becoming endangered. He stated that an event will be held in Watonga on October 25 to announce these programs.

Mr. Pope reported on meeting with Congressman Lucas regarding farm bill issues and Oklahoma State University on wildlife credits and carbon issues. The EPA has formed a Farm and Ranch Advisory Committee and Dr. Larry Sanders from OSU was named to the committee.

Mr. Pope reported on a meeting in Arkansas he attended with Shanon Phillips regarding the TMDL in the Illinois River. He met with United Methodist Church in Norman regarding the Thunderbird project. He met with Representative Skye McNeil to discuss REAP money and districts not qualifying for the money.

The OACD board meeting and retreat is scheduled for October 8 at the Renaissance Hotel.

He stated that the Western Farmers Electric Coop, Nature Conservancy, Chesapeake and the Noble Foundation are on board to sponsor OACD contests this next year.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Gary O'Neill, Assistant State Conservationist, stated that the federal fiscal year ended on September 30. It was a successful year due to the partnership. Oklahoma obligated approximately \$108 million in technical assistance and financial assistance. The NRCS will be operating under a continuing resolution through December 3.

Mr. O'Neill stated that over \$16 million was obligated in the Conservation Stewardship Program and \$9 million in the Wetlands Reserve Program.

Mr. O'Neill stated that the Sallisaw 18M project was named a top 100 ARRA Project and will be completed in November/December. The Department of Agriculture and the White House may be interested in holding a ceremony when the work is complete.

The Conservation Reserve Program sign-up was successful which creates a significant workload to develop the plans.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY

Steve Thompson, Associate Commissioner, reported that SeptemberFest was well received and that Ag had its mobile laboratory on site.

On September 14, he and Secretary Peach toured the Tulsa Public Schools Food and Nutrition Center and talks centered around using locally grown fresh produce in the schools.

Secretary Peach is attending the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture meeting in Dover, Delaware. Discussions will be held on food safety regulations and the quality of communication between federal and state government regarding agriculture issues.

Mr. Thompson attending an interim study meeting to discuss truck weights. A peanut field day will be held on October 23 at Fort Cobb Lake.

Mr. Thompson stated that there will be a larger ag presence during the Governor's Water Conference this year.


NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on November 1, 2010, 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. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on November 1, 2010.



CHAIR