

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Monday, October 7, 2013, 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 Jim Grego. 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 October 3, 2013, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

Steve Coffman, Financial Management Director, took roll call and the following members were in attendance:

Jim Grego, Chair
Karl Jett, Vice Chair
Mike Rooker, Secretary
Scotty Herriman, Area 3 Member
Dan Lowrance, Area 4 Member

Others in attendance were:

Bcn Pollard, Assistant Director
Steve Coffman, Financial Management Director
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Director
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director
Mike Sharp, Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services Director
Janet Stewart, General Counsel
Johnny Pelley, Watershed Technician
Jeri Fleming, Environmental Programs Manager
Gina Levesque, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Coordinator
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Kirby Smith, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Deputy Public Information Manager
Christie Southern, eCapitol Reporter
Rachael Jett, Visitor

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Jett and seconded by Mr. Herriman to approve the minutes of the September 9, 2013, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Mr. Coffman presented the claims and financial statement as listed in Exhibit #1. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Herriman to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITIONS

Gina Levesque, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Coordinator, was recognized for being named Employee of the Quarter during the full staff meeting held on September 18.

PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #2. He recommended ratification of the amended agreements listed as (a) through (e) as all were previously approved by Chairman Grego through the ratification process. A motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Jett to ratify approval of the amended agreements as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Pollard recommended approval for the amended agreement listed as (f). A motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Herriman to approve the amended agreement as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

Mr. Pollard presented travel requests for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He recommended ratification of the requests as they were previously approved by Chairman Grego through the ratification process. Mr. Jett questioned why the amount to attend the OACD Executive Board meeting was zero. It was explained that Mr. Thralls drove a state vehicle and the rooms were provided so there is no cost to the agency.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Herriman and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to ratify approval of the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT

Mr. Pollard presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #4 and recommended approval. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve district director appointments as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

34TH ANNUAL OKLAHOMA GOVERNOR'S WATER CONFERENCE

Mr. Pollard stated that the 34th Annual Oklahoma Governor's Water Conference will be held at the Sheraton Midwest City Hotel and Reed Conference Center, October 22-23, 2013. Staff will need to register members that wish to attend. Mr. Jett would like to attend and will need lodging for two nights, Mr. Grego will attend and needs lodging for one night and Mr. Lowrance will attend but will not need lodging.

JOINT PLAN OF OPERATIONS

Mr. Pollard recommended approval of the Woods County/East Woods County Conservation District Joint Plan of Operations. A motion was made by Mr. Jett and seconded by Mr. Herriman to approve the plan. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

FY2015 BUDGET REQUEST

Mr. Pollard presented the staff's recommendation for the Commission's FY2015 budget request as listed in Exhibit #5. The request will be submitted to the Governor after approval. Mr. Pollard stated that recommendations include a 16% cost of living increase for Commission and district employees based on the inflation rate over the last seven years; restore the budget hole for operations; and watershed operation and maintenance and rehabilitation. Mr. Pollard stated that the Commission is also responsible for the Geographic Information Council budget. The budgeted amount listed in the exhibit will fund the office and manage operations.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the request as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

DECLARATION OF ABANDONED COAL MINE EMERGENCY

Mike Kastl, AML Program Director, stated that an emergency was approved as listed in Exhibit #6. He stated that the Commission will need to ratify approval of the emergency. Mr. Kastl stated that after the Commission receives notification of a void an investigation is performed to see if the void is caused by coal mining. If so, emergency reclamation work is performed. If not, then the void must be repaired through a different program.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to ratify the AML emergency as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

ADDITIONAL CONSERVATION PRACTICE FOR THE NORTH CANADIAN RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT

Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Director, stated that the North Canadian River Watershed Advisory Group approved the practice of Grid Soil Sampling in June 2013. She recommends approval of adding this conservation practice to the project. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Herriman to approve the additional conservation practice of Grid Soil Sampling. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Ms. Phillips requested that this practice be retroactive to June 1, 2013. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to make the approved practice retroactive to June 1, 2013. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OPEN THE RULE-MAKING RECORD

Janet Stewart, General Counsel, stated that staff needs to open the rule-making record for recommended changes to Title 155 Chapter 20. Conservation Cost-share Program. She is recommending that the Commission approve the rule making record and to give authority to Commission staff to proceed with such filing as necessary to comply with the requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act, 75 O.S. Section 250 et seq. for Title 155 Chapter 20. Conservation Cost-share Program (Amended). Mr. Pollard stated that this action is based on recommendations from districts, particularly urban areas.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Herriman and seconded by Mr. Jett to open the rule-making record and to give authority to Commission staff to proceed with the filings as outlined. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP REPORTS

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry: Kirby Smith, Deputy Public Information Manager, stated that staff in Ag stats and Wildlife Services has been furloughed because of government shutdown. She stated interviews were held for the administration director position.

Secretary Reese and Blayne Arthur, Assistant Director, attended media training to help respond to media inquiries and found it very helpful and beneficial.

Ms. Smith stated that during the board meeting last week, rules for aerial hunting of feral swine were approved to begin the rule making process before the new statutory changes on rule-making take effect on November 1. The notice for rule-making intent on these feral hog rules were filed last week.

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service: No representative present. Mr. Pollard stated that the majority of staff is on furlough but several excepted employees are working including rehabilitation inspectors in South Caddo and Dewey and on-call engineers.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts: Clay Pope, Executive Director, expressed his pleasure with the rule process regarding the cost-share program.

Mr. Pope stated that the executive board retreat was very successful and he appreciated the attendance of Mr. Jett and Mr. Thralls. The board endorsed the Commission's proposed budget request for FY2015. Mr. Pope stated that staff from the OACD and the Commission as well as members of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Association met with the Oklahoma Public Employees Association regarding employee pay and they are excited about this partnership.

Mr. Pope stated that with the government shutdown the soils health event planned in Washington, D.C. for October 24-26 is on hold and if no action is taken by Wednesday it will be rescheduled for a later date. He continues to monitor events nationally. Mr. Pope stated that staff in district-owned buildings are working. Some staff are working from home, in equipment buildings, extension offices and libraries. The NRCS has been very cooperative in this area. Mr. Pope stated that the Farm Bill is on hold with the debt ceiling debate coming up.

Mr. Pope stated that the area meetings are near and agenda topics include soil health and an OETA dust bowl curriculum.

Mr. Pope stated that the OACD endorses the drought fund being open for the southwest portion of Oklahoma. He stated that changes are being considered for cedar and salt cedar.

Mr. Pope reported on the carbon program.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Lowrance began his new job as executive director of the Friends of Lake McMurtry. He will miss working with senior citizens but will try to incorporate senior activities at the lake. He has resigned from his local board where he has served for 22 years. He has submitted a letter to the Governor resigning from the Area 4 Commissioner position. He extended an invitation to members and staff to visit the lake.

Mr. Jett attended the OACD Executive Board meeting and enjoyed it.

Mr. Grego stated that the Oklahoma Farm Bureau is going through some turmoil and will be looking for a new president.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

District Services and Human Resources Division: No representative present. Mr. Pollard will provide an update during his report.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, Director, stated that the Illinois River Watershed has been nominated for an award. She stated that the Blue Thumb Water Quality Education Program will be celebrating twenty years of volunteer monitoring on November 9.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program: Mike Kastl, Director, reported on three active sites as listed in the written report. Maintenance work is being performed on one site near Chelsea because of erosion problems.

Financial Management Division: Mr. Coffman will prepare the approved FY2015 budget request for submission. He stated that he has been working with Akia Hankins, Human Resources Specialist, on the benefits option period for Commission and district employees.

Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services: Mike Sharp, Director, stated that a written report was in the packet. He stated that IT consolidation has had some bumps in the road. Mr. Sharp stated that Judy Jackson has been assigned as the Commission's IT liaison.

Conservation Programs Division: No representative present. Mr. Pollard will provide an update during his report.

Administration - Assistant Director: Mr. Pollard gave a report for the Conservation Programs Director stating that as of September 30, all ARRA projects and final reporting has been completed. He reported on two ongoing projects with the Fort Cobb Lateral 10 and Barnitz 1. Mr. Pollard reported on the Call Okie system. Conservation districts participate to ensure work in watershed easements is reported. He stated that since January 1 districts have received 14,000 Call Okie tickets. This helps districts be proactive with protecting easements. Districts use Google Earth and the Commission's GIS maps to review locations to meet the 48 hour response.

Mr. Pollard gave a District Services Division report stating that Lisa Knauf Owen, Director, was attending the National Association of State Conservation Agencies annual meeting in Arkansas. There have been challenges working with districts on the government shut down as there are some districts that own their buildings and others share office space with federal agencies. For those districts with no access to the office, Commission is urging district staff to review district email, telephone messages and posting signs on the doors advising patrons of how to reach district staff. For some districts that are open they may not have access to computers, telephones, or printers as those pieces of equipment are owned by federal agencies. The Commission has posted on its website the impact on district offices. Mr. Pollard then stated that interviews for the district liaison position have been conducted but no decision has been made at this time.

Mr. Pollard reported on Administration activities for Mr. Thralls stating that he has been working with Senator Schultz from the Altus area regarding a drought declaration. Mr. Thralls serves on the newly formed emergency drought fund committee along with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board.

Mr. Pollard stated that Robert Hathorn has been hired as the new Public Information Officer and that he will be attending the November meeting. Mr. Pollard stated that an executive session will be on the November meeting agenda to discuss the reorganization of the management team due to his retirement.

Mr. Pollard discussed the upcoming vacant Area 4 position stating that Mr. Thralls has been in discussions with Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese and has provided him a list of district directors serving in Area 4.

In closing, Mr. Pollard stated that he met Mr. Lowrance in the 1990's and has enjoyed working with him over the years. Mr. Lowrance has done a great job serving in local, state and national positions and Mr. Pollard thanked him for his service and leadership. The Commission would like to host a farewell reception in his honor at a future date.


NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Monday, November 4, 2013, 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. Herriman and seconded by Mr. Rooker to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Herriman, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on November 4, 2013.


CHAIR