

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Monday, October 3, 2011, 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 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 29, 2011, 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  
Jim Grego, Secretary  
Karl Jett, Member  
Mike Rooker, Member

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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  
Shellie Willoughby, Information Technology GIS Specialist  
Lisa Knauf Owen, District Services Director  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Stacy Hansen, Oklahoma Carbon Sequestration Certification Program Director  
Ron Hilliard, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist  
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director  
Blayne Arthur, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Associate  
Commissioner  
Keili McEwen, Office of the Governor  
Erin Boeckman, eCapitol  
Steve Thompson, American Farmers and Ranchers  
Dean Graumann, Greer County Conservation District Director  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

## **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the minutes of the September 1, 2011, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **DISTRICT DIRECTOR RESIGNATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS**

No recommendations were received this month.

## **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. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Jett to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **RECOGNITION OF EMPLOYEES**

Stacy Hansen, Oklahoma Carbon Sequestration Certification Program Director, was recognized for 5 years of service. Lisa Knauf Owen, District Services Director, was recognized for being named Employee of the Quarter at the recent full staff meeting.

## **PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He recommended approval of the new agreement listed as (a). A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the new agreement as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

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

Mr. Pollard recommended ratification of the new agreement listed as (c). This agreement was previously approved by Chairman Stunkard. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett to ratify approval of the new agreement as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, 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 stated that the request listed as (a) was previously approved by Chairman Stunkard and recommended that the request be ratified. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Rooker to ratify approval the request as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

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

## **CONSERVATION COMMISSION'S FY2013 BUDGET REQUEST**

Mr. Thralls presented the staff's recommendation for the FY2013 budget request as listed in Exhibit #5. He stated that Mr. Grego, Mr. Stunkard, Mr. Pollard and he attended the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Board Retreat this past weekend and presented the budget. It has received endorsement from the board. Mr. Thralls stated it is an ambitious request and that parts of it parallels what the Commission submitted for the Comprehensive Water Plan. The draft plan recommends \$15 million conservation cost-share to protect public drinking water supply; \$457 million to reconstruct high hazard dams; and \$22 million in operation and maintenance needs.

Mr. Thralls stated that the top priority is restoration of budget cuts to hold the Commission and conservation districts together. Mr. Thralls stated that rehab earnings will be declining in the next fiscal year and the new Farm Bill does not guarantee a Contributions Agreement with the NRCS. He then outlined the priorities as listed in the exhibit. Mr. Pollard stated that the Roadside Erosion Program should be listed at \$6,800,000 instead of \$6,700,000.

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

## **COST-SHARE PROGRAM - PROGRAM YEAR 13 SPECIAL REQUESTS**

Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, presented the following special requests for Program Year 13 and recommended approval:

- a. Beaver County Conservation District to add Pumping Plant (533) for solar pumps.
- b. Delaware County Conservation District to add the practice Heavy Use Area Protection (561) to be used in conjunction with Watering Facility (614).
- c. All conservation districts to add Clip & Cut 10-30% and Clip & Cut > 30% as components to the Brush Management practice.

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

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Dean Graumann, Greer County Conservation District Director, appeared before the Commission to discuss the decision to change the district manager position to a cash allocation. Mr. Thralls stated that when the district manager resigned and staff looked at the position it was determined that the position functioned as an equipment manager position.

Mr. Graumann stated that over the past year and a half the district has worked closely with the Commission and the NRCS on a number of issues. He stated the district is requesting a full-time position with benefits. He stated the district expects difficulty in hiring an employee for \$10.00/hour without benefits.

Mr. Graumann asked the commission to understand the history and tradition in Greer County and stated that the board feels like it is not being respected for the contributions it continues to make.

Mr. Stunkard expressed his appreciation to Mr. Graumann for attending and for his leadership in the OACD and to his district. Mr. Stunkard reminded Mr. Graumann that local funds could be used to supplement the hourly wage or benefits and that the board can set the hourly rate for the part-time position up to 1599 hours. He also stated that the Budget and Allocation Committee discussed at length districts using earnings that the equipment manager is generating to supplement the salary.

No action was taken.

### **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Mr. Jett reported on attending a meeting with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe to discuss placing the lesser prairie chicken on the endangered species list. There was a tremendous turnout. Mr. Thralls attended a meeting with the Director the following day at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

Mr. Grego attended the Coal County Conservation District office open house and stated that the building was debt free. He also attended an RC&D banquet in McAlester and the OACD Executive Board Retreat.

Mr. Rooker participated in the SeptemberFest event at the Governor's Mansion.

Mr. Stunkard attended the OACD Executive Board retreat.

### **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration - Executive Director:* Mr. Thralls stated that the debate with the lesser prairie chicken being placed on the endangered species list could impact the oil and gas industry as well as the wind energy industry. He is hopeful the state will have the opportunity to protect the habitat on a voluntary basis. The recommendation is in the rulemaking process.

Mr. Thralls reported on attending the Shawnee Ag Banquet and a full staff meeting at the Conservation Education Center at Lake Arcadia. Staff also kicked off its State Charitable Campaign.

Mr. Thralls stated that the Comprehensive Water Plan continues to evolve and will be a topic at the upcoming Governor's Water Conference. He stated that the Joint Legislative Water Study Committee continues to meet regularly to see what areas of the study will need legislative action. The Commission will be giving a presentation at an upcoming meeting of the committee.

Due to absence of Mike Kastl, AML Program Director, Mr. Thralls provided the AML Division report. He stated that there are 2 active AML sites under construction and a number will be going to bid. He reported that engineer Ron Cardwell has taken a position with the City of Oklahoma and staff is exploring with the NRCS the possibility of contracting for engineering services.

Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission looks at every vacant position and that the Commission has reduced its employees by seven.

*District Services Division:* Lisa Knauf Owen, Director, reported that all conservation districts have delivered audit materials to auditors. She worked with the NRCS and notified districts that they can attend defensive driving training. Ms. Owen notified districts of upcoming Open Meetings Act workshops.

Ms. Owen reported on two new district employees in East Canadian County and Garfield County Conservation Districts. She also reported that four people have been selected to fill the new soil technician positions.

*Water Quality Program:* Shanon Phillips, Director, stated that phase one of the Illinois River Riparian Project was completed in September. This project received \$1 million in special funds in 2007, which was also the year the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program began. Since that time more than 1500 acres have been enrolled in 10-15 year contracts with 454 cooperators.

Ms. Phillips stated that the Carbon Program has over 30,000 acres of contracts. The program was expanded when the Western Farmers Cooperative added rangeland and forestry contracts.

Ms. Phillips stated that she and Cheryl Cheadle attended the Annual Nonpoint Source Monitoring Conference. This conference will be held in the Tulsa area in 2012 and participants will tour the Illinois River and Spavinaw watersheds.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Mr. Coffman will be inputting the approved budget request and submitting it to the Office of State Finance. He stated that the Commission's audit has been completed and published. The State Auditor's office will attend the November Commission meeting to present its findings.

*Information Technology Division:* Shellie Willoughby, GIS Specialist, stated they have been working with the Office of State Finance regarding information technology consolidation requests. The Commission has submitted an exemption request on transferring its employees and IT equipment.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Mr. Toole stated that the 2011 Wildlife Expo was held with 60,000 participants. He reported on watershed rehabilitation stating all projects are in or near construction and that the drought and high temperatures shut down construction on some sites this summer.

Mr. Toole reported that the drought also halted operation and maintenance activities. The NRCS sent out a packet of information to districts regarding the potential for cracks in dams due to the drought.

Mr. Toole stated that Program Year 11B ended and he provided a comparison to PY12 as follows:

- # of PY11B participants - 617; compared to 528 for PY12
- # of PY11B practices - 881; compared to 681 for PY12
- \$ for PY11B - \$1.3 million; compared to \$900,000 for PY12
- \$ paid by participants - 1.1 million; compared to \$1 million for PY12
- 38% of funds were returned for PY11B; compared to 29% for PY12
- total for PY11B - \$2.1 million; PY12 - \$1.4 million (includes producer's share)

*Administration - Assistant Director:* Mr. Pollard stated that a written report was included in the meeting packet.

### **OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Clay Pope, Executive Director, attended the OACD Executive Board retreat held recently and stated that the board endorsed the Commission's budget request. The Conservation Leadership Program will restart and he expressed appreciation to the NRCS for their financial assistance to the program. The Program will be announced at the Area Meetings and will begin at the close of the State Meeting. The area meetings will focus on drought issues.

Mr. Pope stated that OACD has hired Sarah Blaney. She will assist with fund-raising and will be helping with the lesser prairie chicken program. OACD received a Conservation Innovation Grant from the NRCS over \$400,000 for a lesser prairie chicken pilot program. Mr. Pope stated that over 40,000 acres were under contract in the Carbon Program.

OACD continues to work with Oklahoma's congressional delegation on the new Farm Bill as well as with the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Mr. Pope stated that OACD staff will be meeting with a Chinese visitor later in the month to show conservation practices. Also, Fox News 25 will be doing a follow up story on dam rehabilitation.

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

Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, provided a written report. He stated that the NRCS is operating under a continuing resolution.

Mr. Hilliard reported on employee retirements effective September 30 as follows: Terri Daniel, Joni Mustain, Becka Redding, Jim Greene, Carl Smith, Angela Williams, Greg Kindell, and Larry Wright.

Mr. Hilliard will be attending the State Chapter for Society of Range Management meeting in El Reno. The 2013 national meeting will be held in Oklahoma City in February 2013.

### **DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FORESTRY**

Blayne Arthur, Associate Commissioner, stated the Department has been working on a feral hog directory for landowners, hunters and trappers. She also reported that the hay directory is available as well as a pasture directory for producers seeking livestock feed.

Ms. Arthur stated that the Governor's executive order for hauling oversized loads carrying hay has been renewed for another 60 days.

Ms. Arthur stated that a Made In Oklahoma display is set up at the Tulsa State Fair. She also reported that the Board will hold their monthly meeting in Woodward on October 18 and will visit ag venues and sites.

Ms. Arthur stated that the Department has a Uganda intern for 11 days through Oklahoma State University. She also stated that the Public Information Manager position with the Department is open and will be posted this week.

**NEW BUSINESS (further discussion)**

Mr. Stunkard returned to New Business and the request by Mr. Graumann and stated that other districts have made similar proposals. Ms. Owen will provide additional information about the district and this request will be placed on the November meeting agenda. Mr. Lowrance questioned if the district had watershed structures and this information will be provided also.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Monday, November 7, 2011, 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. Jett and seconded by Mr. Grego to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

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Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on November 7, 2011.

  
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CHAIR