

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met December 4, 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 Vice Chairman Dan Lowrance. 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 November 30, 2006, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

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

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

Members absent:

George Stunkard, Chair

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
Shellie Willoughby, GIS Specialist
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director
Mark Harrison, Information Representative
Johnny Pelley, Watershed Technician
Dennis Boney, Watershed Technician
Tammy Sawatzky, Administrative Officer
Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator
Dianne Ireton, AML Systems Coordinator
Joann Stevenson, Assistant Attorney General
Bill Wilson, National Association of Conservation Districts President
Scotty Herriman, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Vice President
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Ron Hilliard, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist
Kevin Norton, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist
(Programs)
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 Mr. Gard to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2006, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: 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: 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. Gard to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

SERVICE AWARD RECOGNITION

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, and Mike Kastl, AML Program Director, recognized Dianne Ireton, AML Systems Coordinator, for 20 years of service to the Commission and the state of Oklahoma.

COMMISSION AGREEMENTS

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

Mr. Pollard recommended approval of an amended agreement listed at 3d. A motion was made by Mr. Gard and seconded by Mr. Jeans to approve the amended agreement as listed. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUEST

A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Jeans to approve out of state travel for Water Quality staff members Ed Crall, Cheryl Cheadle, and Monty Ramming to attend the No Till on the Plains, Inc. 2007 Winter Conference on January 30-31, 2007 in Salina, KS at an estimated cost of \$995.00. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CO-SPONSOR OACD ANNUAL STATE MEETING

The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts' Annual State Meeting will be held on February 25-27, 2007 at the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Jeans to co-sponsor the meeting. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

HONEY CREEK WATERSHED 319 NON-POINT POLLUTION COST-SHARE PROJECT

Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Assistant Director, presented the policies and approved conservation practices for the Honey Creek Watershed 319 Non-Point Pollution Cost-Share Project for approval (attachment A). After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Ms. Kidd to approve the policies and practices as presented. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

MURRAY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL EMPLOYEE

Murray County Conservation District directors requested funds for an additional employee for watershed operation and maintenance during the November 2006 meeting and members took their request under advisement. Mr. Thralls stated that the Commission could provide money from rehabilitation funds for the contributions agreement for a temporary employee for six months however, this position would need legislative action to be funded full time. The Commission has placed this position in its budget request and another option would be to see if the legislature will fund it during the upcoming legislative session.

Mr. Lowrance has had discussions with Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, and Dennis Boney, Watershed Technician, about the possibility of working with the Chickasaw tribe as a possible funding source.

No action was taken.

PERFORMANCE BASED ALLOCATION PROCESS FOR THE LOCALLY-LED COST-SHARE PROGRAM

Mr. Toole is recommending the Commission adopt a performance-based allocation process of locally-led cost-share program funds. To obtain a formula staff would review documents submitted by conservation districts such as their long range plans, annual work plans, annual reports, and statements of needs and justification of funds. Staff would also look at the history of conservation districts and their compliance with guidelines and regulations. Another factor would be to determine whether or not districts elected to participate in the program in certain program years. If districts chose not to participate in one year they would not be penalized the following years.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Jeans and seconded by Mr. Gard for staff to develop a performance-based allocation process for the locally-led cost-share program for approval by the Commission at a later date. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

REPORT BY OACDE PRESIDENT PAULA TEMPLETON

Mr. Pollard stated that the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees executive board is meeting today and he introduced President Paula Templeton. Ms. Templeton introduced board members as follows: Carolyn Tucker, Past President; Fredia Rice, past president; Tricia Soderstrom, Secretary; Coleta Bratten, Treasurer; Christina Richard, Area 1; Robbie Bowles, Area IV; Andrea Jones, Area V; and Becky Bailey, incoming Area 3 board member. Ms. Templeton expressed her pleasure of serving with such fine people. She complimented the employees on

accomplishing salary increases for district and commission employees. They are looking forward to working with OACD on another successful legislative session. Mr. Lowrance thanked OACDE for all their hard work.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Bill Wilson, National Association of Conservation Districts President, addressed the Commission and discussed farm bill issues and NRCS program issues. He stated that not one story about the next Farm Bill does not mention conservation. Mr. Wilson stated that budget matters will be the biggest challenge this fiscal year. He urged members to get active in the budget process and to deliver the conservation message.

Mr. Wilson stated that he has known the new state conservationist, Ron Hilliard, for many years and welcomed him to Oklahoma.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Jeans reported on attending the OACD Area 2 meeting and stated it was a good meeting. He participated in the OACD strategic plan funding committee meeting and this committee will make a proposal to the full board on restructuring dues to create new revenue.

Mr. Gard reported on attending the Ag Expo and receiving continuing education credits. He will be attending the Garfield County Conservation District's legislative event later today and he commended Jason Skaggs, District Manager, for his work with local legislators.

Ms. Kidd reported on attending the Haskell County Conservation District Bankers Awards banquet as well as the OACD Area 5 meeting.

Mr. Lowrance had the opportunity to attend three OACD area meetings and stated they were very good meetings. He will be attending a meeting of the newly created Natural Resources Ecology and Management search committee to conduct interviews for a new department head.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Administration: Mike Thralls, Executive Director, reported that Mr. Stunkard could not be here today as the nursery where he is employed had damage from the recent snow and ice storm.

Mr. Thralls reported that House Speaker Lance Cargill has made committee assignments and staff is pleased with those assignments. Senate discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Thralls welcomed the new State Conservationist, Ron Hilliard, to Oklahoma and stated that he spoke to his counterpart in West Virginia and has received nothing but favorable comments about Mr. Hilliard.

Mr. Thralls presented members with a copy of the book, *The Worst Hard Times*, written by Timothy Egan, about the Dust Bowl.

Mr. Thralls provided an update on Oklahoma's poultry lawsuit stating that the Commission has been required to produce all original documents pertaining to the Illinois River watershed. Water Quality staff has the bulk of this information and two staff have been assigned full time to this records request. The deposition is scheduled for January 9.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf, Director, stated that the month of November was spent preparing and attending the OACD area meetings. She reported that all five areas passed resolutions supporting mandatory training for district directors.

Ms. Knauf reported that a new secretary has been hired in Tulsa County and she has spent a considerable amount of time assisting the district with unemployment security issues. Ms. Knauf has also spent time assisting with the preparation for the Commission's portion of district conservationist training scheduled for December 7.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, Assistant Director, stated that several water quality staff attended the area meetings reported that they were very informative.

She reported on participating in a conference call with the Farm Service Agency in Washington, D.C. to discuss Oklahoma's proposed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) proposal and to make recommendations on how the proposal can be agreeable for both sides.

Ms. Phillips reported on the Stamper project stating that it is off to a slow start and has faced several obstacles but the footing is scheduled to be poured this week. This project needs to be completed by September 2007.

The poultry lawsuit is taking a considerable amount of staff time and effort and to date over 75,000 copies have been made.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program: Mike Kastl, Director, stated that a contractor for a project in Sallisaw will not meet the deadline and will be charged \$300 per day in liquidated damages. He reported on active projects as listed in the written report.

Financial Management/Human Resources Division: Steve Coffman, Director, commended Lynn Weldon, Human Resources Specialist, on completing the health insurance enrollment process for Commission and district employees.

Mr. Coffman is working on a budget presentation for the House fiscal staff. Mark Nichols is the new house staff member assigned to the Commission.

Information Technology Division: Shellie Willoughby, GIS Specialist, stated that Director Mike Sharp was in Tar Creek today. She reported on Tar Creek activities as listed in the written report as well as GIS activities.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, Director, offered to answer questions regarding his written report. In addition, he reported that four conservation districts were working with their County Commissioners to secure funding for operation and maintenance equipment including trucks and skid steers. Mr. Toole also reported that two conservation districts were in dialogue with their local Indian Nation regarding supporting the district with funds and/or staff. He commended these districts for identifying alternative funding sources and pursuing them.

Administration: Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, thanked members for their attendance at the OACD area meetings held recently. He also thanked the NRCS for including the Commission and OACD in its district conservationist training scheduled for December 7 and allowing them to make a presentation.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Clay Pope, Executive Director, stated that area meetings went well and he appreciated the assistance he received from the Commission staff. He reported on the following upcoming meetings: the Coalition for Conservation will be meeting on December 7; NRCS district conservationist training on December 7; OSU Farm Bill Forum on December 7; City of Elk City representatives to discuss a CREP project on December 14. Mr. Pope is also scheduled to meet with the Land Legacy, a primary conservation easement organization.

Mr. Pope stated that House Speaker-Elect Cargill has named Representative DeWitt as chairman of the Natural Resources Committee; Representative Armes as chair of the Agriculture and Commerce subcommittee; Representative Hyman as chair of Tourism and Recreation subcommittee; and Representative Richardson to the Environment and Wildlife subcommittee. Representative Benge will remain chairman of the Appropriations and Budget Committee. The OACD will be watching several bills this legislative session with topics including roadside erosion, tax credits on conservation easements, and no-till.

Mr. Pope commended the Garfield County Conservation District for hosting a legislative event this evening for local legislators. The Little River Conservation District will be hosting a dinner for Senator Rabon on December 12. He also commended the Grady County Conservation District for their work with the outdoor classroom at the Harn Homestead.

Work continues on the Association's strategic plan. The state meeting is scheduled for February 25-27, 2007 and Mr. Pope is requesting subject matters for the agenda. Conservation Day at the Capitol has been scheduled for March 19. The NACD South Central Meeting will be held in Oklahoma City next summer and OACD will be the sponsor. The NACD annual meeting is scheduled for February. The executive board will be meeting this afternoon.

Mr. Pope reported on speaking at the Haskell County Conservation District Bankers Award program and the Governor's Water Conference.

Mr. Pope will be meeting with the Keep Oklahoma Beautiful in February and he reported

that the Rogers County Conservation District will receive an award from this group.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, stated that he was happy to be in Oklahoma. He was born and raised in Texas and he still owns and operates 700 acres there. He gave a brief biography of himself.

Mr. Hilliard reported that the NRCS is operating under a continuing resolution through December 8. He stated that Oklahoma's funding level for the current fiscal year amounts to a \$1.6 million deficit compared to last year's budget. His main objective will be to maintain staff and to not fill vacant positions. Staff will develop a deficit reduction plan this month.

Members welcomed Mr. Hilliard to Oklahoma.

USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY

No representative present.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on January 8, 2007, 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 Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Gard to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard and Jeans. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Following adjournment, Commission members will attend the Commission's luncheon and quarterly staff meeting.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on January 8, 2007.

CHAIR