

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Monday, February 3, 2025, in the Agriculture Building located at 2800 N. Lincoln Blvd in Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Vice Chair Robert Priess. He stated this was a regular scheduled meeting held in accordance with the Open Meeting Law, Title 25, Oklahoma Statutes, Sections 301 and following as amended. The agenda for this meeting was posted at 3:00 p.m. Thursday, January 30, 2025, at the front entrance of the Oklahoma Agriculture Building, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, as well as on the agency's website conservation.ok.gov.

ROLL CALL

Bert Bitseedy, Administrative Assistant, took roll call and the following members were in attendance:

Robert Priess, Vice Chairman, Area 2 Member
Grant Victor, Secretary, Area 3 Member
Joshua Haven, Area 4 Member
Gary Crawley, Area 5 Member

Absent:

Dan Herald, Chair, Area 1 Member

Others in attendance were:

Trey Lam, Executive Director
Lisa Knauf Owen, Assistant Director
Bert Bitseedy, Administrative Assistant
Jeannie Parsley, Comptroller
Janet Stewart, General Counsel
Stephanie Acquario, Assistant General Counsel
Justine Anderson, Public Information Manager
Mike Sharp, Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services Division Director
Tammy Sawatzky, Conservation Programs Division Director
Moriah Manuel, Conservation Programs Administrative Assistant
TJ Hathcock, Conservation Programs Division GIS Specialist II
Paige Porter, Conservation Program Administrative Programs Officer
Tom Goode, Conservation Programs Field Operations Manager
George Moore, Conservation Programs Watershed Technician
Johnny Pelley, Conservation Programs Watershed Technician
Kyle McGregor, Conservation Programs Watershed Technician
Wendie Sharp, Conservation Programs Division GIS Specialist III
Clancy Green, District Services Director
Brandon Welborn, District Services Administrative Programs Officer
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Director
Maryanne Dantzler-Kyer, Water Quality Environmental Projects Coordinator
Trampas Tripp, Land Management Division Director
JanLee Rowlett, ODAFF Deputy Commissioner
Sarah Blaney, OACD Executive Director
Steve Glasgow, NRCS State Resource Conservationist

MINUTES OF JANUARY SPECIAL MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Victor and seconded by Mr. Crawley to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2025, Commission special meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Commissioners reviewed the claims register, p-card statement, revenue summary and allotment budget / available cash report as provided by Ms. Parsley in Exhibit #1. Ms. Parsley stated the finance team report in the packet, and she would be happy to answer any other questions. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Crawley and seconded by Mr. Haven to approve the financial reports as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

Ms. Owen requested the approval of the following new agreements (Exhibit #2), items “a-e.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Victor and seconded by Mr. Haven to approve the new agreements as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Ms. Owen requested the approval of the following amended agreements (Exhibit #2), items “f-j.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Crawley to approve the amended agreements as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

ESSENTIAL OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

Mr. Lam requested the approval of the following essential out of state travel requests (Exhibit #3), item “a-c.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Victor and seconded by Mr. Crawley to approve the travel request as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT DIRECTOR APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Green discussed with the Commissioners recommendation of Conservation District Director Appointments shown on Exhibit #4. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Victor to approve the district director’s appointments as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

RECONSIDERATION OF PROVISIONAL REAPPOINTMENT OF A CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ms. Green presented meeting attendance information for Kingfisher County Conservation District Director Jared Yost. The Commission took action in April 2024 to approve Mr. Yost appointment provisionally and to revisit the appointment after six months. Mr. Yost has attended 83% from July to December 2024 as shown in Exhibit 5. Ms. Green recommended approval of Mr. Yost to the Kingfisher County Conservation District for the remainder of his term. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Crawley for approval for Mr. Yost’s reappointment as presented. Those voting aye were: Herald, Crawley, Victor and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments

NEW BUSINESS

No new business

CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP REPORTS

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry (ODAFF): JanLee Rowlett, Deputy Commissioner of ODAFF, noted that the legislative session will begin at noon today. During this time, they will be busy at the Capitol with budget hearings, and the House will be addressing a request regarding the ongoing need for state meat inspectors. The Farm to School Program continues to launch with funds allocated from last year. She noted that the scales have all been updated for accurate weight measurements. Additionally, she stated that the local Ag Summit was a successful event that created valuable resources for producers. Regarding biosecurity protocols, highly parthenogenic influenza guidelines are in place. Lastly, the use of feral hog poison has been approved, although a license is required to use it.

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): State Resource Conservationist Steve Glasgow discussed the impact of the Presidential executive orders, the hiring process, and the pathway to readvertise, all of which will influence student trainees and new staff. He noted that the Farm Bill, along with the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, has significant implications due to federal funding. Additionally, employees are being relocated to the nearest home base facilities. As for the climate smart and ACT NOW funds, these initiatives are currently on hold, affecting around 100 applications, although the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is still operational. All existing agreements are paused, preventing the processing of new agreements and claims. Currently, there are 2 million federal employees resigning, with a February 6 deadline for deferred resignations. Remote employees without official duty stations will need to transition to a nearby duty station.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD): Executive Director Sarah Blaney mentioned the executive orders effect 199 districts. Upcoming Events:

- February 9-12, 2025- NACD Annual Meeting
- February 23-25, 2025- State Meeting
- March 6, 2025 - Land & Range Judging Contest
- April 15, 2025 - Conservation Day

She mentioned that the majority of OACD programs are 99.9% federally funded, but there is currently no money flowing into them. The Climate Smart Commodities program is experiencing financial losses, and payments to districts are on hold while waiting for approval. The Yard by Yard program will be expanding, and the Oklahoma for Monarchs initiative will be led by Amanda Fitzgerald and Marcus Long. Additionally, a new program called Prison by Prison, aimed at educating people about pollinators, will also be managed by Amanda Fitzgerald.

STATUS REPORTS

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Priess – reported in his area there were some moisture and wheat surviving.

Mr. Haven – reported 75 days with less than 1/4” of rain and is in need of rain.

Mr. Crawley –reported there was good rainfall in his area and blessed with moisture. The area received 10-12” of snow and a few barn damages.

Mr. Victor – reported the area is dryer than normal, received 10” of snow and frozen

ground, more rain was needed, with a late start for planting wheat and looks to be coming through with some concerns.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Executive Director: Trey Lam discussed the emergency drought situation and mentioned an upcoming meeting to wrap up the program, along with the potential for extending it. The Conservation Programs Division is continuing to process claims for the program. There will also be an appropriation meeting with the House, which includes new members, to discuss the flat budget and one-time funding. A presentation on the budget is scheduled, and expansion of the Terry Peach invasive species project is on the agenda as well. Additionally, Trey has traveled to Woodward County and Major County for ranch conversations meetings and to Payne County for fire training with Trampas Tripp. He noted the end of telework due to an executive order, which poses challenges due to Ag Building renovations coinciding with this order. The construction will focus on the east half of the building first, and Mr. Lam is requesting an exemption from telework during this time. The estimated completion time for the construction is six months. Due to the executive order regarding federal funding, there is a pause in some programs, but he will continue to provide updates to everyone involved.

Water Quality Program: Director Shanon Phillips provided an update on the SHIP program, stating that it is progressing well and has received its first claim. She mentioned that the watershed management plan is currently in progress, and the non-point source program is under revision. Additionally, the septic tank replacement program training is ongoing, and efforts are being made to process payments. Some participants may qualify for full reimbursement while others may not. She noted that they will collaborate with DEQ and local septic installers to expedite the permitting process. She stated the report is in the packet and she would be happy to answer any questions.

Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services: Director Mike Sharp announced that the Surdex Corporation will manage the statewide aerial photography project. He stated that the flight lines have been organized and that the work is currently focused on the eastern part of the state. However, progress has faced delays due to a recent snowstorm. He mentioned the \$1.5 million was spent well and there is \$8,500 remaining. Additionally, he mentioned the upcoming GIS Day event scheduled for March 5, 2025, at the Capitol. He stated the report is in the packet and he would be happy to answer any questions.

Land Management: Trampas Tripp, Director of the Land Management Division, shared the success of the recent fire training hosted by Payne County, which focused on proactive fire management. Positive feedback was received, and the next training is set for February 21, 2025, with spots filling quickly. Cedar technicians have been busy and currently there are open positions in Payne and McClain County. Unpaved roads training is growing with new commissioners contacting us for interest in attending. He highlighted ongoing land restoration projects in the design phase for this fiscal year. He also mentioned the unpaved roads project in Spiro, OK is complete having used the French mattress technique. This was a joint project with the Water Quality Division. Currently there is one conservation planning position yet to be filled. Land restoration projects are progressing with new projects identified for the fiscal year. He stated the conservation planning position filling up. He stated the report is in the packet and he would be happy to answer any questions.

District Services: Clancy Green, District Services Director, mentioned that January was focused on assisting districts and training related to taxes. She is currently preparing for the upcoming OACD meeting and presentations. In February, there will be TEAMS training on the septic tank remediation program, presented by Jeri Flemming. In March, Cheryl Cheadle will conduct training for the "Yard by Yard" program. Clancy also discussed the DIG program in

collaboration with Pittsburg County concerning a proposal for feral hog management, aiming to gather more information for funding. She provided updates on hiring, including open positions with Mr. Tripp and his team. The report is included in the packet, and she is available to answer any further questions.

Conservation Programs: Director Tammy Sawatzky discussed the flow of funding related to conservation programs, particularly addressing the operations and maintenance costs associated with front slope repairs. The team is starting to plan for the cost-share program for Program Year 27, with the goal of providing a review at the March Commission Meeting. Additionally, she announced the hiring of a new watershed technician, Kyle McGregor, who will support conservation programs. She is pleased to announce that the long-standing issue regarding land rights with upstream flood control site Sallisaw 33 has been resolved with the assistance of Janet Stewart. Currently, NRCS is working on the bid packet, aiming to release it this year. She stated the report is in the packet and she would be happy to answer any questions.

Assistant Director: Lisa Knauf Owen announced that Gary Crawley has been reappointed to the Commission for another 5-year term. She participated in the fire training north of Alva for a Kansas fire field day on equipment and technology. She noted that Mr. Tripp was interviewed by the OSU program SunUp and should be airing soon. The finance team have been answering some questions with the state audit regarding the previous four fiscal years and will soon be completed, after completion we will receive a report. She also spoke about communication regarding renovations for our portion of the Ag building. Additionally, she brought to our attention the concerns from USDA regarding disgruntled producers, who will be banned from USDA centers. She stated letters will be sent out and working with NRCS on language to address the issue.

NEXT MEETING

After discussion, the next regular scheduled meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission has been set for Monday, March 3, 2025, at the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Building, 2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma at 9:30 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Mr. Priess declared the meeting adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on March 3, 2025.


Chair