

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Monday, March 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 scheduled regular 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 1:30 p.m. Thursday, February 27, 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
Gary Crawley, Area 5 Member
Joshua Haven, Area 4 Member
Grant Victor, Secretary, Area 3 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, Attorney I
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
Tom Goode, Conservation Programs Field Operations Manager
George Moore, Conservation Programs Watershed Technician
Johnny Pelley, Conservation Programs Watershed Technician
Clancy Green, District Services Director
Brandon Welborn, District Services Administrative Programs Officer
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Director
Greg Kloxin, Soil Health Director
Maryanne Dantzler-Kyer, Water Quality Environmental Projects Coordinator
Trampas Tripp, Land Management Division Director
Jeanne Jasper, NRCS State Conservationist
JanLee Rowlett, ODAFF Deputy Commissioner
Sarah Blaney, OACD Executive Director
Marla Peek, Oklahoma Farm Bureau

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS REGULAR MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Crawley and seconded by Mr. Victor to approve the minutes of the February 3, 2025; Commission 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 is in the packet, and she would be happy to answer any other questions. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Victor 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 ratification of the following amended agreement (Exhibit #2), item “a.” which required approval prior to the Commission meeting. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Crawley and seconded by Mr. Victor 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 “b-e.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Victor and seconded by Mr. Haven to approve the amended 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 new agreement (Exhibit #2), items “f-k.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Crawley to approve the new agreement 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 ratification of the following essential out of state travel requests (Exhibit #3), item “a.” After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Crawley and seconded by Mr. Victor to approve the travel request as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

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

PROGRAM YEAR 27 COST SHARE GUIDELINES

Ms. Sawatzky discussed with Commissioners the proposed guidelines for the program year 27 locally led cost share. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Crawley and seconded by Mr. Haven to approve the Program Year 27 Cost Share Guidelines as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Victor, Crawley and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

REVISED AGENCY IN-OFFICE TELEWORK ARRANGEMENTS POLICY

Ms. Stewart presented an updated Commission in-office telework arrangement policy. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Crawley for approval for the Agency In-office Telework Arrangement Policy as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Crawley, Victor and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

REVISED AGENCY PURCHASING POLICY

Ms. Stewart noted that the Agency's purchasing policy is required to be updated every two years. She presented the updated agency purchasing policy with a few minor changes with the threshold amounts to be raised to \$25,000 and changes with IT purchasing. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Victor for approval of the Agency Purchasing Policy as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, Crawley, Victor and Haven. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

SPONSORSHIP FOR THE OKLAHOMA CLEAN LAKES AND WATERSHED ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Ms. Owen requested to approve the sponsorship of the Oklahoma Clean Lakes and Watershed Conference in Stillwater, OK, which also includes the booth and attendee registration. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Haven and seconded by Mr. Crawley for approval of the sponsorship as presented. Those voting aye were: Priess, 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): ODAFF were not in attendance at the meeting.

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS): State Conservationist Jeanne Jasper provided updates on staffing changes, including the loss of 35 employees in probationary status and the offer of deferred resignation for retirees. As a result, most of the NRCS offices will not be fully staffed and will transition to a smaller administrative team next week to better cover the locations. Staff across the state will assist in covering areas as acting supervisors. A new district coordinator is expected to join Team 10 in Stillwater, OK. Roderick Dukes will be moving back to Okmulgee with Team 21 starting next week, and applications for that position are due by Friday, March 7, 2025. Ms. Jasper also discussed budget updates, noting limited spending and travel while still providing technical assistance and outreach events and continuing to work with producers. She mentioned that agreements and contracts are still under review, with some areas losing their

GSA leases, and it is expected that USDA will be next. They are awaiting further notice, which could impact field offices as well. She noted that federal employees received emails requesting they provide five bullet points summarizing their work accomplishments from the past week, applicable only to full-time federal employees. Ms. Jasper emphasized the need to keep moving forward with EQIP, CSP, and ACEP funds to ensure they are obligated. They are currently working on obligating the EQIP FY 25 funds, and they have been authorized to move forward with new contracts with Farm Bill funds, while IRA contacts are currently on pause. Lastly, they are looking forward to the Agency's 90th Birthday this year and working on putting a celebration for the end of April for the Soil Conservation and NRCS with all the work that was done in the past years.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts (OACD): Executive Director Sarah Blaney expressed her gratitude to OCC for their attendance and support of the annual meeting. She reported that a total of 411 people registered for the event, with 44 elected officials attending the banquet. Blaney announced the election of Ed Casey from the Nowata County Conservation District as the new President, and Donnie Nero from the Okfuskee County Conservation District as the new Vice President. The Leopold Conservation Award was presented to Scotty Herriman. Ms. Blaney mentioned her attendance at the NACD meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she was elected as the President of the Association of Conservation Executive Directors. She noted that the recent layoffs of federal employees across the nation have a significant impact on the organization. She also attended the National Healthy Soils Policy Network in Washington, D.C., which focuses on state-level statutes for healthy soils. Additionally, she highlighted the Yard-by-Yard Program, which currently has a wildlife habitat grant open for applications until March 31, 2025, with a total funding amount of \$40,000. Ms. Blaney invited the Commissioners to a private event with the Historical Society on April 14, 2025, marking the 90th Anniversary of Black Sunday. This event will include legislators, a leadership class, and meetings with CARE champions. The following day, April 15, 2025, will be Conservation Day at the Capitol. Regarding staffing updates at OACD, Ms. Blaney stated that they would be reaching out to districts due to federal freezes, and each employee would receive an advocacy packet. Currently, there are two employees on unpaid leave, and some are taking pay reductions. She expressed concern that within five months, OACD may not have any full-time staff remaining. The organization plans to proceed with the National Land & Range Judging Contest, although they are facing challenges due to denied travel requests from NRCS, which will impact the contest. On a positive note, General Mills has agreed to allocate funding to retain herself, Jean Lam, Taylor Marshall, and Amanda Fitzpatrick in their positions at OACD, allowing them to continue the CARE program with the same funding level. No grants have been officially canceled, and OACD will keep reporting its needs.

STATUS REPORTS

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Priess – reported no rain in his area.

Mr. Haven – reported his area received ½” -1” rain, which was much needed.

Mr. Crawley –reported no changes in his area and waiting on spring season, with the warm weather has plants budding.

Mr. Victor – reported snow in his area, making roads and feeding problems, need moisture.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Water Quality Program: Director Shanon Phillips mentioned that Director of Monitoring, Assessment, and Wetlands Program Brooks Trammell and his team wrapped up the installation for the monitoring devices for the Terry Peach Project. Practices and payments for the SHIP program are underway. She mentioned they received a grant from Wildlife Conservation and surveyed all the basins for fish passages which help them apply for funding with local communities thru the unpaved roads program to replace bridges in the southeast area. The southeast part of the state will be the start of the project, that part of the region has the greatest diversities of fish species. She stated the report is in the packet and would be happy to answer any other questions.

Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services: Director Mike Sharp noted that the aerial photography team is working diligently to take pictures now that the leaves are starting to come out in the next two weeks. Additionally, GIS Day will be held on March 5, 2025, at the Capitol from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Popcorn will be served, and special thanks go to Shellie Willoughby for lining up all the agencies for the event. He stated the report is in the packet and would be happy to answer any other questions.

Land Management: Director Trampas Tripp announced that there are openings for a new cedar technician in Purcell, OK, as well as positions for conservation planning in Area I. The application period for these positions will close at the end of the week. In Burns Flat, 31 individuals are currently enrolled in the unpaved roads training, and there are plans to conduct additional training in other counties. The "Fighting Fire with Fire" event was attended by 60 participants, including 18 representatives from fire departments. The Muskogee Creek Nation's Agriculture and Natural Resources department expressed a desire to collaborate with the Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) on this initiative. Mr. Tripp highlighted the success of various counties in assisting the Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) with controlled burns in their areas. Applications for prescribed fire from landowners have doubled recently. He also provided updates on the Jackson County Land Restoration project, specifically regarding the design of the shell pit. Tripp thanked Project Engineer Valerie Rogers for her efforts in saving the program money through sediment reduction initiatives. He stated the report is in the packet and he would be happy to answer any other questions.

District Services: Director Clancy Green reported a great turnout for the employee session during the state meeting, emphasizing the importance of strengthening our partnership with local connections. She noted that the continuing resolution expires on March 14, 2025, and highlighted the need to monitor the passing of votes and potential government shutdowns. Additionally, she mentioned that she and Ms. Owen will be traveling to Stillwater on March 4, 2025, to discuss the shared agreement with NRCS, which expires in September. This month's training will focus on the Cost Share Program Year 27, led by Tammy Sawatzky, and the Yard-by-Yard Program, led by Cheryl Cheadle and Jack Titchener. She stated the report is in the packet and would be happy to answer any other questions.

Conservation Programs: Director Tammy Sawatzky discussed the drought committee met last week and provided updates on the report, in the first round of the program year of the previous drought about over \$33 million was paid out to the districts, and this funding has now been closed out as final claims are being processed. With these funds, a total of 6,000 individuals were able to benefit. The current drought program currently being worked on will expire on July 31, 2025. Since the current program began in November of 2024, so far, \$3.3 million in claims have been

submitted, with 3,000 participants applying for assistance. She stated the report is in the packet and would be happy to answer any other questions.

Assistant Director: Lisa Knauf Owen noted that a workgroup has been developed to provide input to the Drought Committee. They are tasked with suggesting guidelines for when the Committee should be activated to initiate a program, when meetings should be held, should rules be established, and the process for handling denied applications. The work group is comprised of legal counsel for Agriculture, Conservation and the Water Board along with Tammy Sawatzky and Trey Lam. Additionally, she mentioned attending the NACD Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT. There are several bills related to the OCC for invasive species pending approval. Ms. Owen highlighted that the renovations of the office building could potentially take up to a year for completion. The ongoing audit for fiscal years 2021-2024 is in progress, and OCC are working to provide information until it is finalized. The budget revision has been completed, approved, and funds have been received for the fund from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which has been allocated for the next three years to support brush management and fire payments to landowners. Lastly, they are working on finalizing the policy to ensure compliance with executive orders.

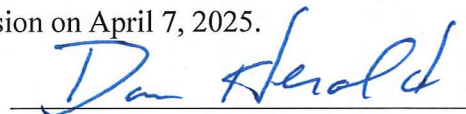
NEXT MEETING

After discussion, the Commissioners next scheduled meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission that was set for Monday, April 7, 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 11:05 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on April 7, 2025.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dan Herald", is written over a horizontal line.

Chair