

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met February 8, 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 Chair Rick Jeans. 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 at 9:30 a.m. on February 7, 2006, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

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

Rick Jeans, Chair
George Stunkard, Vice Chair
Dan Lowrance, Secretary
Virginia Kidd, Member
J.T. Winters Jr., Member

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
Dan Butler, Water Quality Program Director
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director
Mark Harrison, Information Representative
Judith Wilkins, Water Quality Program Executive Secretary
George Moore, Watershed Technician
Monty Ramming, Fort Cobb Project Coordinator
Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator
Eldon Merklin, Cost-share Program Coordinator
Bruce Luttrell, Auditor
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director
Darrel Dominick, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program Chief
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Winters to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2006, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. 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. Regarding the Creek County Conservation District recommendation, Mr. Thralls reported that the board is not recommending the incumbent, Robert Campbell, for reappointment and has submitted a letter stating its reasons. Mr. Stunkard would like more information before making this appointment. A motion was made by Mr. Winters and seconded by Ms. Kidd to approve district director appointments listed as 1st recommendation for Alfalfa County, Harper County, Logan County and Woods County Conservation Districts and to table the Creek County recommendation. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. 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. Mr. Coffman reported that the Commission has received the \$2.4 million appropriations from the REAP fund. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

SERVICE AWARD RECOGNITION

Judith Wilkins, Water Quality Program Executive Secretary, was recognized for her five years of service to the state of Oklahoma.

AUDITS OF THE FY03 AND FY04 AML PROGRAM FUNDS AND THE FY04 WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FUNDS

Bruce Luttrell, Auditor, presented the audits of the FY03 and FY04 Abandoned Mine Land Program funds and the FY04 Water Quality Program funds. He thanked the Commission staff for their complete cooperation and assistance during the audits. Mr. Luttrell stated that all audits received an unqualified opinion with no reportable findings.

COMMISSION AGREEMENTS

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented amended agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Winters to approve the agreements. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

Mr. Thralls presented out of state travel requests as listed in Exhibit #4. He requested ratification of approval for the Office of Surface Mining Training Course on February 7-9, 2006 in Pittsburg, PA. A motion was made by Mr. Winters and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to ratify the request. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none.

Motion carried.

Mr. Thralls recommended approval of the remaining requests as listed in Exhibit #4. It was suggested that two staff members and three Commission members be approved for attendance at the NACD Spring Legislative Conference. A motion was made by Mr. Winters and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the requests with the recommendation for the NACD meeting. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT DIRECTOR ELECTIONS FOR POSITION #2

A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Ms. Kidd to authorize the Executive Director to certify eligibility of candidates for District Director, Position #2 and to approve polling places in those conservation districts that will be holding elections for District Director, Position #2. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

COST-SHARE PROGRAM ADDITIONAL PRACTICE REQUEST

Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, requested approval to offer Fence (382) as a stand alone cost-share practice for cross fencing in Stephens County Conservation District. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Winters to approve this request. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

COBB CREEK/FORT COBB RESERVOIR DEMONSTRATION COST-SHARE PROGRAM MAXIMUM LIMIT

Dan Butler, Water Quality Program Director, requested approval to raise the maximum limit of cost-share per individual from \$20,000 to \$30,000 in the Cobb Creek/Fort Cobb Reservoir Demonstration Cost-share Program. A motion was made by Mr. Winters and seconded by Ms. Kidd to approve the request. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

GOVERNOR S FY-2007 EXECUTIVE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Thralls presented the Governor's FY-2007 Executive Budget recommendations for the Oklahoma Conservation Commission as listed in Attachment A and stated that the recommendations are favorable.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Ms. Kidd reported on attending the Enid Farm Show and stated it was one of the best she has attended.

Mr. Lowrance reported on attending the NACD Annual Meeting and stated that President Bill Wilson did a great job. He commended Rogers County Conservation District employees Keith

Owen and Robert Gibbs on their presentation during an education session.

Mr. Lowrance stated that the federal administration budget recommendations have zeroed out the small watershed program along with watershed planning and operations. There is \$15 million available nationwide for the rehabilitation program.

Mr. Stunkard stated that the NACD Annual Meeting was very informative and he commended Mr. Lowrance on his part in the watershed program session.

Mr. Winters also attended the NACD Annual meeting. He reported on attending a session on working with conservation district directors and director training.

Mr. Winters expressed his condolences to George Moore, Watershed Technician, on the loss of his father and congratulations to Mr. Thralls for the birth of his granddaughter.

Mr. Winters reported on attending the Enid Farm Show, the Southern Plains No-till Conference in Hollis, the U.S. Composting Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico and the National Association of Wheat Growers annual meeting.

Mr. Winters reported that the Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association is working with conservation districts for support on their programs.

Mr. Jeans reported on attending the NACD annual meeting and a no till conference in Grady County.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Mike Thralls, Executive Director, reported on a tour scheduled for members of the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee held in Logan County. He commended the Logan County Conservation District board and staff for their work in setting up an excellent tour, along with Mr. Butler and Mr. Toole.

Mr. Thralls attended a budget hearing called by Representative Roggow. Following the meeting, Representatives Roggow and Benge were taken on the same tour. This was an excellent opportunity to highlight Oklahoma's watershed program.

Mr. Thralls stated there are four legislative bills related to the REAP fund and the proposed conservation bond issue.

Mr. Thralls stated that Representative Auffett called regarding a bill to address salary inequities between conservation district employees and state employees.

Mr. Thralls stated that the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission will be holding a special meeting this week to discuss the use of \$750,000 for a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Lisa Knauf, District Services Director, reported on attending sessions during the NACD

annual meeting pertaining to a district director certification program as well as recruiting new board members.

Ms. Knauf provided members with copies of annual reports from conservation districts in their respective areas. The plans were produced using the new format developed by staff.

Dan Butler, Water Quality Director, stated that the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission is scheduled to meet this week and one topic of discussion is its financial commitment to a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. Mr. Butler stated that the Tulsa Metropolitan Authority is meeting to discuss a financial commitment to a CREP for the Spavinaw Creek Watershed.

Mr. Butler stated that the sign-up period for participation on the Fort Cobb no-till program has begun and 3000 acres were signed up in the first week. Staff feels confident that this program will meet the TMDL in that watershed. According to a recent ARS report, producers are realizing a 30% yield in cotton when land has been converted to no-till.

Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Director, stated that Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director, is attending the AML winter meeting and topics included the federal budget. He stated that the Combined Benefit Fund, which contains funds for health benefits to miners, will keep AML re-authorization on the front burner.

Mr. Kastl reported on the Charles Phase 2-258 project in Rogers County stating that work items were added to the contract and OCC extended the contract to allow time to complete these items. He reported on the Club Lake project in Haskell County. Mr. Kastl stated that he met with Cecil Ray McPheeters, landowner in the McPheeters-258 project in Rogers County, who has previously refused to sign a right-of-entry for reclamation.

Mr. Kastl then gave the Information Technology report highlighting the written report. A contract will be awarded soon for the West Commerce Tar Creek AML project. Reclamation work continues on the Southeast Commerce Tar Creek AML Project.

Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director, commended his staff for their work with the AML and water quality program funds audits. He attended the House Subcommittee on Natural Resources meeting.

Mr. Coffman submitted the agency's Affirmative Action Plan for approval and approval has been received by the Office of Personnel Management.

Mr. Coffman stated that the district liability insurance policy has been extended to June 30, 2006 without an increase in premiums. He and Mr. Pollard have been working with the Department of Central Services Risk Management Division to develop a plan to move the conservation district liability insurance program to a self insured program. Mr. Coffman stated that this could be achieved by increasing the deductible and placing the premium savings in a self insurance fund. Mr. Coffman stated that this would take several years to achieve full self insurance status.

Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director, stated that the Division's activities were listed in the written summary.

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, stated that Administration and Information activities were listed in the written summary.

Written reports from each division are attached.

OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Clay Pope, Executive Director, stated that the recent NACD annual meeting was successful. He reported that Oklahoma's conservation districts met quota on paying NACD dues. The annual state meeting will be held February 26-28, 2006. Speakers have been confirmed including Congressman Frank Lucas, NACD President Bill Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture Terry Peach, Secretary of Environment Miles Tolbert, Secretary of Energy David Fleischaker, and chairman of the House Environmental committee. The meeting will have a large trade show with over 30 exhibitors. Mr. Pope has obtained sponsorship for all breaks including the legislative reception.

The OACD is working to schedule a legislative tour with Oklahoma's congressional delegation over the Easter break.

Mr. Pope reported that Monsanto will help sponsor Soil and Water Stewardship Week in April along with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau. He will be working with the OSU Ag Communications Department in getting public service announcements put together for this event. Mr. Pope reported that he has a new sponsor for the youth awards.

Mr. Pope reported on legislative activities stating there are several bills filed pertaining to controlled burns. The OACD will be working with the Grazing Lands Coalition and the Nature Conservancy as well as the Cattlemen's Association and the Farm Bureau on this issue. Senator Judy Eason McIntyre has filed a bill to allow directors to buy into the state insurance program. He has not had the opportunity to meet with her on this issue. Other bills of interest deal with tax credits and the REAP.

Mr. Pope stated that Conservation Day at the Capitol is scheduled for March 13. He stated that the Commission and OACD have been invited to also participate in Water Day at the Capitol and Agriculture Day at the Capitol.

Judging for the education contests has been finalized and these awards will be sponsored by Chesapeake Energy. The outstanding district award is also sponsored by Chesapeake with the outstanding cooperator award sponsored by the Nature Conservancy and the district director of the year award sponsored by the Noble Foundation. Mr. Pope stated that discussions among the many agriculture and conservation groups around the state have been on the development of a conservation license plate that would benefit a common issue, such as invasive species and native plant restoration.

The OACD is holding a strategic planning team meeting today and he invited all to participate.

Mr. Pope stated that he will be working with the Department of Tourism on partnership opportunities with Oklahoma's state parks.

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Darrel Dominick, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist, provided copies of a publication entitled "Management After Wildfire - Helping People Help The Land." He then highlighted his written report of activities stating that the 2006 Conservation Security Program sign-up will be held February 13 - March 31 in the Poteau River, Spring River and Upper Beaver River Watersheds. Mr. Dominick stated that there on a number of Conservation Innovation Grants available and encouraged members to share this information with those that may be interested in applying.

Mr. Dominick stated that Kevin Norton, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, has been assigned a two month detail at National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In his absence, Dick Zetterburg will be assisting with Mr. Norton's responsibilities.

Mr. Dominick then reported on the 2006 budget stating that it has been reduced significantly from last year's budget. He stated that NRCS is down 24 FTE from last year. Mr. Dominick stated that to help with the budget deficit money will be taken from the Technical Service Agreements; other agreements will not be funded as well. He stated that watershed rehabilitation funds are being cut in half therefore NRCS is looking at a contingency plan to dismantle the watershed program. Field offices will be looked at to see if Oklahoma can maintain the structure now in place. Mr. Dominick stated that the State Administrative Officer and the State Resource Conservationist position will not be filled at this time.

Mr. Dominick stated that the NRCS is sending people to Louisiana to work on Hurricane Katrina relief efforts.

A summary of activities for the NRCS is attached.

USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program Chief, expressed his appreciation to Mr. Thralls for work on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

Mr. Wanger reported on recent wildfires due to drought conditions and stated that FS has low interest loans available to assist with repair and replacement of fences destroyed by fires.

Mr. Wanger provided two handouts regarding drought, floods and wildfires which are attached. The handouts depict counties approved for the Emergency Conservation Program assistance.

Mr. Wanger reported on the Conservation Reserve Program stating that contracts signed in 1997 will expire and will be available for renewal or extensions in the near future.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on March 6, 2006, 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. Stunkard and seconded by Ms. Kidd to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Jeans, Stunkard, Lowrance, Kidd, and Winters. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on March 6, 2006.

CHAIR