

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met March 5, 2012, 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 March 1, 2012, 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

Others in attendance were:

Mike Thralls, Executive Director  
Ben Pollard, Assistant Director  
Sheryl Gibson, Financial Management and Human Resources Assistant Director  
Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director  
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Director  
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director  
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director  
Lisa Knauf Owen, District Services Director  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Dennis Boney, Watershed Technician  
Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator  
Dianne Ireton, AML Administrative Officer  
Gene Spurlock, AML Inspector  
Tracy Reed, AML Inspector  
Cheryl Cheadle, Blue Thumb Program Coordinator  
Shellie Willoughby, Awards and Recognition Committee Chair  
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  
Justin B. Henry, University of Oklahoma student  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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

## **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the minutes of the February 6, 2012, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **DISTRICT DIRECTOR RESIGNATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS**

Mike Thralls, Executive Director, presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #1. A motion was made by Mr. Jett and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve district director appointments as listed with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **CLAIMS/FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

Sheryl Gibson, Financial Management and Human Resources Assistant Director, presented the claims and financial statement as listed in Exhibit #2. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **RECOGNITION OF CONSERVATION COMMISSION EMPLOYEES**

The following employees were recognized at the meeting:

- a. Cheryl Cheadle, Blue Thumb Program Coordinator, for 20 years of service
- b. Gene Spurlock, AML Inspector, for 30 years of service.
- c. Dennis Boney, Watershed Specialist, for being named Employee of the Quarter.

## **PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented amended agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3 and recommended approval. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the agreements 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 Mr. Stunkard had previously approved requests listed as (a) and (b) therefore he is recommending ratification of these requests. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to ratify approval of the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

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

**CO-SPONSOR THE NATIONAL LAND AND RANGE JUDGING CONTEST**

A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Rooker to co-sponsor the National Land and Range Judging Contest on May 1-3, 2012, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2013**

Mr. Thralls presented the Governor's budget recommendations for the Commission for FY2013 as listed in Exhibit #6 which outlines level funding for the next fiscal year. He stated that staff will emphasize additional funding for water quality monitoring due to the 24 percent cut in Section 319 funding this year. After discussion, it was noted that the Commission needs to be proactive with the state as well as the federal budget.

**ADDING THE OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION TO HOUSE BILL 2768**

Mr. Thralls stated that Secretary Jim Reese had approached him about the possibility of adding the Conservation Commission to House Bill 2768 which requires that the State Board of Agriculture meet in regular session a minimum of eight times a year rather than monthly. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to endorse adding the Conservation Commission to House Bill 2768. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS**

None.

**OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Members reported on attending the OACD State Meeting and stated that it was well attended with informative sessions. They commended the Commission and OACD staff as well as members of the OACDE on a job well done.

Mr. Jett reported on a meeting he attended hosted by Clean Line Transmission to discuss the the construction of power lines to transmit wind generated electricity to the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Mr. Grego attended an NRCS outreach meeting in Stigler.

Mr. Lowrance stated that he is looking forward to the Conservation Leadership Program that was kicked off at the State Meeting.

**OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration - Executive Director:* Mr. Thralls commended the Commission, OACD and OACDE on a successful state meeting. He commended Ben Pollard and Lisa Knauf Owen on their work with the meeting planning.

Mr. Thralls referenced a letter sent by the USDA-NRCS regarding the Field Office of the Future. Staff will be working with other organizations to address this letter.

Mr. Thralls reported that the Environmental Protection Agency has frozen \$793,000 which the Commission was scheduled to receive. Staff will be contacting Oklahoma's congressional delegation as well as weighing in on the President's budget proposals for the USDA watershed program as well as Abandoned Mine Land program funding.

*District Services Division:* Lisa Knauf Owen, Director, appreciated the assistance of the Commission staff for work on the state meeting, which had excellent attendance by both districts and USDA.

*Water Quality Program:* Shanon Phillips, Director, stated that Oklahoma's performance in nonpoint source load reduction is second in the nation. She stated that EPA special funds have been frozen and this includes funds for the North Canadian River project and around \$127,000 for the base program. Ms. Phillips stated that the Commission will ask support from Oklahoma's congressional delegation to restore this funding.

*Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:* Mike Kastl, Director, stated there are three active sites in the 2010 grant. He reported on the McSpadden project in the 2011 grant and the Bacon project in the 2012 grant. Mr. Kastl stated that he will be meeting with the NRCS staff to discuss AML engineering and design.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Ms. Gibson stated that House Bill 1086 requires the State Treasurer's office to make all payments electronically which will include all cost-share payments made by the Commission. The transition is scheduled to take effect July 1, 2012.

*Information Technology Division:* Mike Sharp, Director, reported on attending the National AML Programs Association Winter Meeting. He stated that members will be testifying before the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee to discuss the need for AML emergency funding.

Mr. Sharp stated that GIS Day at the Capitol is March 14.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Robert Toole, Director, stated that the President's budget is very concerning as it zeroed out funding for watershed planning and operation last year and those items are not even mentioned in this year's budget. It also zeros out funding for watershed rehabilitation which received a total of \$15 million last year nationwide.

Mr. Toole continues dialog with OG&E personnel on transmission line construction on watershed easements and structures and methods to better communicate so to avoid problems.

Mr. Toole gave a presentation to the OSU Ag Econ class along with the Farm Service Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation regarding cost-share and natural resource conservation and economics.

Mr. Toole fielded a question from Mr. Grego regarding the Cottonwood 54 lawsuit and stated that the Commission continues to monitor this lawsuit. He also fielded questions regarding Cottonwood 55 where the Logan County Conservation District has been sued by developers.

*Administration - Assistant Director:* Mr. Pollard stated that Mr. Jett and staff has been working with the Woods County and East Woods County Conservation Districts and those two districts will now be sharing two employees.

Mr. Pollard stated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will place another \$75,000 to \$125,000 with the Commission for prescribed burn associations and no-till drills. He stated that an event is scheduled for March 9 in Caddo County for the \$30,000 no-till drill placed in the South Caddo district.

Mr. Pollard reported on the Conservation Leadership Class that kicked off during the recent state meeting. The class consists of 20 district directors, two NRCS employees and one conservation district employee. He thanked NRCS State Conservationist Ron Hilliard for support of this program and for allowing Scott Pace, district conservationist at Idabel field office to participate in the first session. The class will meet again on April 16-17 for Conservation Day at the Capitol and legislative activities. The Commission's water quality division will host the class in Tahlequah in June or July.

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

Clay Pope, Executive Director, stated that Clean Line Energy as mentioned earlier by Mr. Jett was a primary sponsor of the recent state meeting. He then thanked Mr. Pollard and Ms. Knauf Owen for their work with the meeting.

Mr. Pope stated there is still a chance the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission may be consolidated with the Commission. He stated that because of the flat budget this year, OACD is looking at the water plan to provide additional funding.

Mr. Pope will be attending a meeting in Washington, D.C. next week regarding nonpoint source pollution and success stories in Oklahoma. He will also be going to Capitol Hill to visit with congressional members about these issues. Mr. Pope stated that the National Association of Conservation Districts will hold a fly-in on March 19-20 regarding the farm bill.

Mr. Pope referenced the Field Office of the Future letter received by the USDA-NRCS. The NACD South Central Region will hold a conference call to discuss this and Mr. Pope believes this is an opportunity for Oklahoma to highlight its partnership.

Mr. Pope stated that Prescribed Fire Day at the Capitol is March 21 and Conservation Day at the Capitol is April 16. He reported on the Conservation Leadership Class and stated that OACD staff continues to raise money to fund the program.

Mr. Pope will be attending the event in South Caddo Conservation District this week and will tour the North Canadian River Watershed in May with the Oklahoma Farm Bureau members.

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

Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, provided a written report of activities. He then stated that Gary O'Neill is back in Oklahoma after serving as Acting State Conservationist in Michigan. Mr. Hilliard stated that the Oklahoma NRCS will work with the partnership regarding the Field Office of the Future directive.

Mr. Hilliard will be attending a meeting regarding conservation delivery initiative in Kansas. A retirement luncheon is planned for Jasper Parker, former Assistant State Conservationist, for March 16 in Stillwater.

Mr. Hilliard reported that the NRCS is implementing a new financial system and payments may be delayed during this transition period.

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

Blayne Arthur, Associate Commissioner, participated in the Ag Leadership Program international tour this past month. She reported that Ag Day at the Capitol is April 5 and that the Ag Hall of Fame winners will be announced prior to that day. The Youth Expo will be held next week and livestock inspectors and ag staff will assist.

Ms. Arthur stated that the Department converted one of its vehicles to CNG making it the 2000<sup>th</sup> vehicle to be converted.

## **NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on April 2, 2012, 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. Rooker 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.

---

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on April 2, 2012.

  
CHAIR