

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met December 3, 2007, at the Reed Conference Center, 5720 Will Rogers Road, Midwest City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by 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 28, 2007, at the front entrance of the Agriculture Building at 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

### ROLL CALL

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

Dan Lowrance, Chair  
Virginia Kidd, Vice Chair  
Matt Gard, Secretary  
Mike Rooker, Member  
George Stunkard, 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  
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Assistant Director  
Tammy Sawatzky, Conservation Programs Deputy Director  
Janet Stewart, Attorney  
Joann Stevenson, Assistant Attorney General  
George Moore, Watershed Technician  
Dennis Boney, Watershed Technician  
Johnny Pelley, Watershed Technician  
Eldon Merklin, Cost-share Program Coordinator  
Ed Crall, Ft. Cobb Education Coordinator  
Coleta Bratten, Dewey County Conservation District Secretary  
Gary O'Neill, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist  
Becka Redding, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant  
Jeanette Nance, Office of the Governor  
Richard Parker, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Area 2 Director  
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director  
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency Conservation Program Chief

Steve Thompson, Associate Commissioner, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry  
Paula Templeton, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees President  
Fredia Rice, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Past President  
Jo Callison, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Area 3 Director  
Bradley Hamilton, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Area 5 Director  
Jason Skaggs, Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees Area 2 Director  
Debi Carnott, Central North Canadian River Conservation District Secretary  
Mark Schlachtenhaufen, Capitol Network News  
Jeff Packham, Journal Record  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

### **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to approve the minutes of the November 5, 2007, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

### **BRIEFING BY AGENCY STAFF REGARDING THE FILED INJUNCTION ON LITTER SPREADING IN THE ILLINOIS RIVER WATERSHED**

Janet Stewart, Attorney, provided an overview of the preliminary injunction filed on November 14 in federal district court on litter spreading in the Illinois River Watershed. Facts were presented that the water is used for recreation, drinking, well waters and that it is part of the scenic rivers in Oklahoma. The Integrators have not responded as of this date.

Ms. Stewart stated that the counties of Adair, Cherokee, Sequoyah and Delaware have a large number of poultry facilities that produce 340,000 tons of poultry waste per year and that most is land applied in the Illinois River Watershed.

Ms. Stewart stated that the soil type in that area is porous allowing seepage into well water and runoff into the river. The studies are not based on phosphorous but on bacteria, such as salmonella, staph, and ecoli. It is being argued that these bacteria cause an imminent health danger to the public.

Ms. Stewart stated that the Attorney General is requesting preliminary arguments be heard in January; however, the integrators are asking for a May hearing. The Judge will come down with a schedule on December 7.

### **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. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve district director appointments listed as First Recommendation in Exhibit #1 with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. 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. Gard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented new agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He called on Mike Kastl, AML Program Director, to present the AML simplified grant. Mr. Kastl stated that the Commission is seeking \$3 million for its 2008 grant instead of the usual \$1.5 million. He stated that staff is working with Congress to obtain the funding this year. The Commission is scheduled to receive an increase to \$3 million in 2012.

After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the agreements as listed. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **REQUEST FROM GREER COUNTY CD TO ADD MESQUITE TO THE BRUSH MANAGEMENT (314) PRACTICE FOR THE COST-SHARE PROGRAM**

Tammy Sawatzky, Conservation Programs Deputy Director, presented a request from Greer County Conservation District to add Mesquite to the Brush Management (314) practice for the Cost-share Program. A motion was made by Ms. Kidd and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the request. Those voting aye were: Lowrance, Kidd, Gard, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **REMARKS BY PAULA TEMPLETON, PRESIDENT OF OACDE**

Paula Templeton, President of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation District Employees, appeared before the Commission. The board consists of the following employees: Keith Owen, Tricia Soderstrom, Coleta Bratten, Jason Skaggs, Julie Gordon, Jo Callison, Robbie Bowles, and Bradley Hamilton. She recognized past officers Diana Ehlers, Carolyn Tucker and Fredia Rice for organizing the association.

Ms. Templeton expressed her appreciation to the board, the Commission, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts and the Natural Resources Conservation Service for their work. She reported on legislative issues and stated that the OACDE would be supporting the Commission's budget, employee retirement buyback, and additional salaries for employees. The OACDE also supports activities such as the National Land and Range Judging Contest, earth day activities, FFA, county fairs, soil stewardship, women in agriculture, bankers awards and the farm bill.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

None.

## **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Mr. Rooker attended the OACD Area 2 meeting.

Mr. Gard attended the Oklahoma Ag Retailers meeting where topics included the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, the Conservation Reserve Program, and buffer strips.

Ms. Kidd attended the Haskell County Conservation District's bankers awards banquet where Representative Ed Connally received the Governor's Award. She also attended the OACD Area 5 meeting.

Mr. Stunkard attended the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program signing ceremony of the first contract in the Illinois River and stated it was a great event. He attended the OACD Area 3 meeting and stated it was the best area meeting he has attended. He appreciated President Scotty Herriman's story of disasters in Oklahoma.

Mr. Lowrance attended the OACD Area 4 meeting and he thanked the Commission staff for their work and commended them on a great job. He commended the OACDE for their work with the poster and essay contests.

## **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration:* Mike Thralls, Executive Director, expressed his appreciation to the OACDE board. He introduced several guests as follows: Debi Carnott, Central North Canadian River Conservation District secretary; Jeanette Nance, Office of the Governor; OACD vice president Richard Parker and executive director Clay Pope; NRCS employees Becka Redding and Gary O'Neill; Steve Thompson, representing Secretary Terry Peach; Awards and Recognition Committee members Sheryl Gibson and Johnny Pelley. Mr. Thralls presented members with a portfolio notebook.

Mr. Thralls stated that a budget committee meeting is scheduled on December 10 with the Senate and that two meetings are being scheduled in January with the House. The Senate meeting is an opportunity to review the Commission's performance and to present the budget request.

Mr. Thralls will keep members posted on the poultry litter injunction and its effect on Commission projects.

*District Services Division:* Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, gave the report in Lisa Knauf's absence. He stated that staff continued work with Alfalfa County and East Woods County Conservation Districts to finalize an agreement to hire a shared employee. Mr. Pollard thanked Gary O'Neill for his assistance with this agreement.

Ms. Knauf has advertised for a new district liaison position and the closing on this position will be December 21. She hopes to have a new person on board by January 1.

Mr. Pollard reported that there are four secretary vacancies at this time as follows: Cherokee County as Tommy Coffman is moving to Greer County; Pontotoc County; Marshall County as Ro Jane Gilmore is retiring this month; and Rogers County due to the death of Billie Mayfield.

*Water Quality Program:* Dan Butler, Director, reported that 34 people have applied to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program but that 4 were ineligible and five withdrew leaving a total of 25 eligible applications.

Mr. Gard questioned payments to producers as listed in the claims exhibit. Mr. Butler explained that those payments were made to producers at a rate equivalent to the CREP rate.

*Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:* Mike Kastl, Director, stated there is one active project and hopefully with the new grant request, additional projects can be approved in the near future.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Steve Coffman, Director, stated that staff is gearing up for budget meetings in December and January. He recognized his staff on their recent training with the new CORE system and appreciates their willingness to institute changes.

The Commission's Affirmative Action Plan has been approved.

*Information Technology Division:* Mike Sharp, Director, reported on a subsidence on the Southeast Commerce site in the Tar Creek area. Staff worked with the city of Commerce to fill the hole.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Tammy Sawatzky, Deputy Director, reported on four rehabilitation projects that are ongoing and stated that 2 should be finished by February.

*Administration:* Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, stated that climate change and carbon discussions were held at all five area meetings. A proposal has been made to OG&E on partnering in the North Canadian River to buy carbon credits to no-till farmers. He thanked the water quality staff for their work with this proposal.

Mr. Pollard stated that he, Mr. Toole, George Moore, and Richard Parker toured Caddo County for a first hand look of the flood destruction.

Mr. Pollard reported that Darrel Dominick and Robert Toole have met with the Chickasaw Nation to discuss ways to partner on watershed and water quality issues.

The Tulsa Farm Show begins Thursday, December 6 and will run through December 8. Mark Harrison has a brochure on its activities.

Mr. Pollard expressed appreciation to Rod Wanger and Gary O'Neill for participating in the recent OACD Area Meetings to discuss Oklahoma's disasters and the federal response to these disasters. The Commission has sent a letter to the congressional delegation regarding funding for the Emergency Conservation Program and the Emergency Watershed Program to address these disasters.

Mr. Pollard stated that lunch will begin at 11:30 a.m. today and that the OACD Executive Board will meet at 1:30 p.m. The OACDE board is meeting now and invited attendees to that

meeting upon adjournment. A tour of the Reed Center will be held at 12:30 p.m. as this will be the site of the 2008 State Meeting.

Mr. Pollard expressed appreciation to Commission members for their dedication and support.

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

Clay Pope, Executive Director, reported on the area meetings stating that an increase in attendance was seen at most meetings. He thanked the host districts and Commission staff for their work with the meetings.

The Reed Center is the site of the 2008 State Meeting. Information was sent this morning to all districts regarding hotel information.

Mr. Pope reported on meeting with the Chickasaw Nation on cooperative issues and is excited about the partnership. The Kiowa Nation has formed the first tribal conservation district in the state and a formal signing ceremony will be held during a meeting in Las Vegas next week. The Creek and Cherokee Nations have made a donation to the Muskogee County Conservation District for the purchase of a no-till drill. He expressed appreciation to Representative Jerry McPeak for his assistance.

Mr. Pope met with the Rural Republican Caucus recently to discuss the disaster money request. He reported that Senator Wyrick and Representative DeWitt will carry the bill with proposed changes to the Conservation District Act. Senator Bass will carry legislation to establish funds to match with conservation districts on rehabilitation and clean water projects through the 319 and CREP programs. He also reported that a bill dealing with tribal consolidation policy is being considered.

The Farm Bill is still tied up in Congress. There is an additional bill on climate change. The OACD newsletter is being finalized.

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

Gary O'Neill, Assistant State Conservationist, stated that the NRCS is under a continuing resolution through December 14 which could be extended through March 2008. They have received 20.4% in discretionary funds. The Chief has lifted the freeze on hirings and agreements but cautioned staff to be conservative.

He reported on the Emergency Watershed Program stating that there is a \$106 to \$110 million backlog nationwide. He stated that the national leadership is looking at watershed structures and is re-emphasizing operation and maintenance plans. This will be part of the State Conservationists performance review in 2008. The NRCS has received a bulletin to complete o&m by March, to prioritize needs, and review agreements with sponsors. Hazard classification needs verification by the end of July.

Mr. O'Neill reported on staffing stating that Teresa Stewart has been hired as the Assistant for Field Operations in Zone 3 replacing Lanny Miller. Announcements will be made next week regarding the district conservationist positions in Hugo and Kingfisher.

As stated earlier, the Kiowa Tribe has formed a conservation district. Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, talked to them about NRCS assistance and encouraged them to get connected with the OACD. EQIP funds could be available as they are with other conservation districts.

#### **USDA-FARM SERVICE AGENCY**

Rod Wanger, Conservation Program Chief, expressed his appreciation of being included in the area meetings. Staff is working on crop disaster programs such as the livestock compensation program and the livestock indemnity program.

Mr. Wanger reported that the Emergency Conservation Program has \$46 million in requests nationwide and that \$16 million has been authorized for distribution to states.

Mr. Wanger attended the CREP signing ceremony along the Illinois River and stated it was a good event. In the event a Farm Bill does not get passed that program may have to be amended.

Mr. Wanger attended the Kiowa Tribe conservation district event as well.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on January 7, 2008, 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, Rooker and Stunkard. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

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Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on January 7, 2008.

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CHAIR