

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Tuesday, August 9, 2011 at 1:00 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel - Egbert Room, 2nd Floor, 10 N. Broadway Avenue in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.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 July 28, 2011, at the front entrance of the Agriculture Building at 2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

### 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  
Steve Coffman, Financial Management and Human Resources Director  
Robert Toole, Conservation Programs Director  
Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Program Director  
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director  
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director  
Kevin Varner, District Services Liaison  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Tammy Sawatzky, Conservation Programs Deputy Director  
Ron Hilliard, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist  
Gary O'Neill, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant Conservationist  
Blayne Arthur, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Associate  
Commissioner  
Lucas Cannon, Shawnee Conservation District Director  
Steve Thompson, American Farmers and Ranchers  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

### MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the minutes of the July 11, 2011, 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. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett 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**

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

## **PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3 and recommended approval. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett 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 the travel request for approval as listed in Exhibit #4. A motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Grego to approve the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **FY12 JOINT PLANS OF OPERATION**

Kevin Varner, District Services Liaison, presented FY12 Joint Plans of Operation for approval as listed in Exhibit #5. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the FY12 Joint Plans of Operation. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **CO-SPONSORSHIP OF THE FOLLOWING EVENTS**

Mr. Thralls recommended that the Commission co-sponsor the following education events:

- a. Wildlife EXPO - Family Fun exhibit area, September 23-25, 2011, Lazy E Arena, Guthrie, Oklahoma.
- b. 4-State Advanced Facilitator Workshop for WET/WILD/PLT facilitators from Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and Arkansas, October 6-9, 2011, Keystone State Park.
- c. H2Oklahoma Water Festival - date and location to be announced.
- d. Environmental Education Expo (EE Expo) - date and location to be announced.
- e. Oklahoma Envirothon Competition - date and location to be announced.

A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Rooker to co-sponsor the events as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**EMERGENCY GRAZING ALLOWANCE FOR RIPARIAN TOTAL EXCLUSION CONTRACTS IN PRIORITY WATERSHED PROJECTS**

Shanon Phillips, Water Quality Director, recommended an emergency grazing allowance for riparian total exclusion contracts in priority watershed projects as outlined in Exhibit #6. She stated that due to drought conditions some participants may leave the project. Mr. Thralls stated that Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency, sent an email stating that grazing should not be allowed since it is not allowed in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and some participants have acres in both programs. After discussion, a motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett to approve the recommendations as outlined. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

**TELECONFERENCE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HARPER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Members held a teleconference with Chuck Smith and Lynn Easterwood, directors with the Harper County Conservation District to discuss the district's proposal for a full-time employee and request for an exemption to the existing Commission policy. The district lost one full-time employee in August 2011 and the Commission did not allow them to fill the position back but rather gave them a \$12,000 allocation for an unbenefitted part-time position, which was consistent with the personnel policy adopted at the July 2010 Commission Meeting. Mr. Smith would like the Commission to grant them an exemption from the policy and grant them approval to hire a full-time person with the Commission paying the salary and the district paying for health insurance. He stated the district advertised but no one applied for the part-time position. Several questions were centered around how much money the district lost due to this position not being filled.

Members expressed concerns in granting one district an exemption saying it would set an undesirable precedent and increase the Commission's operating deficit.

**HARPER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS REQUEST FOR A FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE AND AN EXEMPTION TO THE EXISTING COMMISSION POLICY**

After the teleconference ended members had further discussion. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Jett to deny the request from the Harper County Conservation District. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. Members directed staff to draft a letter to the district stating action taken for Mr. Stunkard's review and signature.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS**

None.

**OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Members reported on attending the NACD South Central meeting stating it was a good meeting.

Mr. Lowrance and Mr. Rooker attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Sugar Creek L-44 site. Mr. Rooker also viewed the completion of L-43 and the Sugar Creek Farrow Drop.

Mr. Jett reported on attending a town hall meeting with Lt. Governor Todd Lamb.

Mr. Stunkard stated that he visited with Chuck Smith, Harper County Conservation District Director, last month regarding the district's request for a full-time employee.

## **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration - Executive Director:* Mr. Thralls reported that members have been named to the newly created water committee and that the OACD will be sending an introductory letter to each member. Mr. Thralls stated that the State Auditor's office has completed the Commission's audit and the findings from that audit will be presented to members at the September Commission meeting.

Mr. Thralls congratulated the OACD for a successful South Central Region meeting as well as Ms. Phillips on her presentation.

*District Services Division:* Kevin Varner, District Liaison, stated that a written report was included in the packet and he was available for questions.

*Water Quality Program:* Shanon Phillips, Director, stated that she and Clay Pope attended the Soil and Water Conservation Society meeting in Washington, D.C. to give a presentation on successful nonpoint source projects. While in Washington, they had the opportunity to meet with Oklahoma's congressional delegation regarding farm bill programs and continued support of the 319 program. She stated that the Environmental Protection Agency performed a review of watershed based plans nationwide and chose 4 plans including Oklahoma's Eucha/Spavinaw as exceptional examples of a well developed watershed based plan.

*Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:* Mike Kastl, Director, stated that there are two projects under construction and additional sites are under review by the State Reclamation Committee and/or in the design phase.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Mr. Coffman stated that a written report was in the packet and he was available for questions.

*Information Technology Division:* Mike Sharp, Director, stated that a written report was in the packet and he was available for questions.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Robert Toole, Director, stated that a written report was in the packet and he highlighted watershed rehabilitation stating that 6 sites are contracted and 2 are in the pre-bid stage. The watershed rehabilitation assessment is going well and should be completed by the end of September. Due to the drought watershed operation and maintenance is very challenging.

Mr. Toole referenced an e-mail that was sent to all districts by Mr. Thralls regarding shared resources and the importance of districts to communicate needs to one another. He stated that the Commission has 6 watershed aide positions with requests for 6 more.

Mr. Toole stated that Cost-share Program - Program Year 12 was closed out and he provided each member with a report for their specific area. He commended Tammy Sawatzky on her work in compiling the data for these reports. Mr. Toole stated that since 1998 there have been over 9,800 participants in the program; they have installed over 11,000 practices; using \$9.5 million through cost-share program funds; and that the participants have provided \$15.8 million resulting in a total of 25.3 million of conservation practices put on the ground.

*Administration - Assistant Director:* Mr. Pollard recognized Mr. Toole, Mr. Varner, Ms. Phillips and Mark Harrison for their work with the South Central Meeting. He stated that the meeting showcased Oklahoma's conservation partnership.

Mr. Pollard stated that the Commission has between \$10 million and \$15 million worth of contracted projects going on now which is more than ever before.

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

No representative present.

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

Ron Hilliard, State Conservationist, attended a regional NRCS meeting in St. Louis. There will be reorganization in the next few months due to the budget.

Mr. Hilliard stated that Oklahoma has submitted its 2012 budget for \$39 million in technical assistance funds. A review will take place for all 50 states and regions on August 22 and Gary O'Neill has been selected to serve on the review team.

Mr. Hilliard reported on the following personnel changes: P.J. Martin is moving from Durant to Beaver; Kevin Spears is moving from Hugo to Pawhuska; Derek Kelso is moving from Miami to Hugo. The new district conservationist for Muskogee is Rishell Bowler from Okmulgee; Dennis Ware will be the district conservationist at Pawhuska transferring from Texas; and Colin Walden is moving from Pawhuska to Taloga. Mr. Hilliard stated that the summer students finished up last week.

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

Blayne Arthur, Associate Commissioner, stated that wild fires are consuming lots of time and resources at the Department and that the forestry division will be requesting assistance from out of state.

Ms. Arthur reported on a meeting regarding castor bean and the uses for it. The department will be discussing rules for the bean and the effect it would have on grain and livestock producers.

Ms. Arthur stated that SeptemberFest at the Governor's Mansion is scheduled for September 10. The American Quarter Horse Youth Association is holding a horse show in Oklahoma City

which is estimated to provide a \$10 million economic benefit to the city. She reported on meeting with customs and border patrol to discuss ag products coming in from overseas.

**NEXT MEETING**

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Thursday September 1, 2011, 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. Grego to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.

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Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on September 1, 2011.



CHAIR