

## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Tuesday, August 3, 2010, 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 Mike Rooker. 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 30, 2010, at the front entrance of the building.

### ROLL CALL

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

Mike Rooker, Chair  
George Stunkard, Vice Chair  
Dan Lowrance, Secretary  
Jim Grego, Member  
Matt Gard, 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  
Greg Kloxin, Water Quality Program Assistant Director  
Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director  
Mike Sharp, Information Technology Director  
Lisa Knauf, District Services Director  
Mark Harrison, Information Representative  
Stacey Day, Senior Technical Writer  
Charlotte Stieber, Abandoned Mine Land Program Administrative Officer  
Eldon Merklin, Cost-share Program Coordinator  
Gary O'Neill, Natural Resources Conservation Service Assistant State Conservationist  
Clay Pope, Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director  
Dan Sebert, National Watershed Coalition Executive Director  
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

### MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the minutes of the July 1, 2010, Commission meeting as written. Those voting aye were: Gard, 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. Gard to approve district director appointments as listed with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Gard, 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. Stunkard to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **EMPLOYEE RECOGNITIONS**

The following Commission employees were recognized: Stacey Day, Water Quality Program Senior Technical Writer, for 5 years of service; Greg Kloxin, Water Quality Program Assistant Director, for 10 years of service; and Mike Kastl, Abandoned Mine Land Program Director, for 35 years of service.

## **PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS**

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #3. He recommended ratification of the new agreements listed as (a) through (f) as these agreements were previously approved by Chairman Rooker. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to ratify approval of the new agreements as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Pollard recommended ratification of amended agreements listed as (g) through (h) as these agreements were previously approved by Chairman Rooker. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Grego to ratify approval of the amended agreements as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, 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. A motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Gard to approve the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **JOINT PLANS OF OPERATIONS**

Lisa Knauf, District Services Director, presented Joint Plans of Operations for approval as listed in Exhibit #5. A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Lowrance to approve the requests as listed. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

## **REPORT ON STIMULUS FUNDS MANAGED BY THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

Mr. Pollard reported on stimulus funds being managed by the Conservation Commission as listed in Exhibit #6. Mr. Lowrance thanked OACD Executive Director Clay Pope and National Watershed Coalition Executive Director Dan Sebert for working with the National Association of

Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Congress to make sure the watershed program was included in the American Recover and Reinvestment Act legislation. Mr. Pollard thanked the leadership at the NRCS for working with the Commission as this money is helping to fill the budget hole for the current fiscal year.

### **12<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL WATERSHED CONFERENCE**

Dan Sebert, National Watershed Coalition Executive Director, stated that the conference will be held on May 15-18, 2011 at the Renaissance Hotel in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It will be a 3 day event attended by approximately 150 people. Sponsors of this national conference are generally the state conservation agency, the NRCS and the watershed sponsors of the host state. In Oklahoma the OACD would be considered to represent the watershed sponsors. Mr. Gard questioned how much it would cost and Mr. Thralls stated that no money was pledged only staff time.

A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to co-sponsor the 12<sup>th</sup> National Watershed Conference as stated. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

None.

### **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS**

Mr. Gard attended the RC&D fish fry in Kremlin. He reported on new lease contracting requirements with NRCS including new requirements for computer rooms. He also stated that his district is working to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act in order for their building to be eligible for contract renewal consideration.

Mr. Grego stated that his district is trying to buy a building from the Choctaw Nation in the hope that the district will qualify to provide offices for the NRCS when the lease is renewed. He also talked with the Pushmataha Conservation District. Mr. Grego stated that the Commission needs to have a discussion about district audits and auditors. He suggested the Commission bid out and then designate certain auditors to conduct district audits.

### **OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF**

*Administration - Executive Director:* Mr. Thralls stated that Mr. Sebert, Watershed Coalition, and Rick Jeans, NACD Board member, attended the National Association of Conservation Districts Legislative Conference and met with Oklahoma's congressional delegation. Mr. Sebert stated that some NACD board members and staff attended the meetings with him where they discussed farm bill issues. The NACD has set up a farm bill task force. Discussions also included FSA and NRCS issues. Mr. Thralls met with Congressman Cole and reiterated funding needs for conservation needs

Mr. Thralls stated that the Budget and Allocation Committee will be meeting this week to discuss incentives for conservation districts considering consolidation. He worked with Mark

Harrison on an article published in the newsletter regarding the coming year. They will be working on an article about master agronomists and those district directors that have received the honor from the OSU Department of Plant and Soil Science.

Mr. Thralls attended the funeral of District Conservationist Kenneth Risenhoover and expressed his appreciation of Mr. Risenhoover's ability and service. He expressed appreciation to Ms. Knauf on her work with conservation districts as well as appreciation to Gary O'Neill for his work at the NRCS state office.

*District Services Division:* Lisa Knauf, Director, has been working in district offices where retirements have occurred. They are also using assistance from neighboring districts. She has been fielding questions from districts concerning the fiscal year allocation memo that was sent to districts. Ms. Knauf continues the investigation at Pushmataha Conservation District regarding the mismanagement of funds. Mr. Grego stated that district directors should be required to attend mandatory training on financial management. Ms. Knauf stated that when the statute was opened for changes last year this was a suggestion, however, the OACD did not endorse the proposal.

*Water Quality Program:* Greg Kloxin, Assistant Director, stated that the next few months are a good time for members and staff field visits with the monitoring staff and extended an open invitation to accompany them. Mr. Thralls stated that a full staff meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 6 and will focus on water quality monitoring.

Mr. Kloxin stated that staff completed and submitted a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative proposal for \$2.5 million over a five year period.

*Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program:* Mike Kastl, Director, stated that before construction can begin on AML projects, a beetle survey is required by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He also stated that sites to be reclaimed within the next year will need to be cleared of all trees before April 1, 2011 because of the migratory bird fly zone through Oklahoma from April 1 to July 31.

Mr. Kastl reported that approximately \$350,000 will be turned back on the highway job in Pittsburg County. He stated that the emergency program will no longer be funded by the Office of Surface Mining but rather with Oklahoma's AML grant funds beginning October 1, 2010 unless Congress intervenes.

*Financial Management and Human Resources Division:* Mr. Coffman stated that FY10 has been completed. The FY11 budget work program has been inputted in the Office of State Finance system and has been approved.

*Information Technology Division:* Mike Sharp, Director, stated that the Commission's servers and email system are being upgraded.

*Conservation Programs Division:* Robert Toole, Director, reported on Administration activities stating that the City of Kingfisher is moving along with its \$4 million flood initiative. Mr. Toole reported on the Incident Command System team and how it is activated. The Oklahoma

Water Resource Board has been invited to join the team. He stated that a new set of rules has been approved by the OWRB revising how the agency addresses dam safety issues.

Mr. Toole reported that program year 10 has been completed. He stated that the education arena has been busy this month.

Under watershed activities, Mr. Toole reported that the lawsuit concerning Sallisaw 32, 33, and 34 which challenges the validity of existing easements was lost in district court and the Court of Appeals sustained the decision by the district court. A motion to appealing the decision has been sent to the Supreme Court and if it refuses to hear the case the original district court ruling will stand.

Mr. Toole reported on the criminal situation in Sequoyah County stating that it has gone to federal court and will be heard this month. He stated that should staff be contacted by Bill Teter, private investigator, to not speak with him unless agency legal counsel is present.

Mr. Toole reported on operation and maintenance stating that 2 new requests for watershed aides have been received and that one has been approved. He stated that \$2 million of the \$7 million of bond dollars for operation and maintenance has been allocated to 46 conservation districts.

The Okie One Call system is working well. He stated that a dam failure in the state of Iowa shows the importance of dam maintenance.

*Administration - Assistant Director:* Mr. Pollard stated that staff met with the Oklahoma Capitol Improvement Authority to discuss the bond process and learned that the bond money has to be encumbered within a 3 year period.

Mr. Pollard stated that rules were passed for the Prescribed Burn Indemnity Fund to assist landowners with additional insurance protection when they are doing a prescribed burn.

## **OKLAHOMA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Clay Pope, Executive Director, is anticipating an announcement from the NRCS regarding the Conservation Incentive Grants as OACD submitted one application and the Commission submitted two applications.

The NRCS has completed the second sign-up of the Conservation Stewardship Program. Oklahoma ranks seventh in the nation in total number of acres and dollars contracted. The average payment is \$17.00 per acre for producers. The OACD is concerned there is an attempt in the U.S. House Ag Appropriation Committee to zero out funding for this program. Mr. Pope has been working with the OSU Ag Econ Department on an analysis of CSP to show the benefits of the program.

Mr. Pope reported on a new initiative of the Fish and Wildlife Service called the Landscape Conservation Cooperative. The program has the potential to partner with the OACD and the Commission on issues with the lesser prairie chicken, the Illinois River, and the North Canadian River.

The NACD South Central meeting is August 16-18 in Lubbock, Texas.

Mr. Pope stated that the invasive species council met and discussed musk thistle, red cedar as well as bermuda grass.

A legislative tour is being planned in October in Dewey County. Mr. Pope stated that it is critical that the new administration understands conservation.

Mr. Pope reported on a proposed agreement with the Department of Tourism and Recreation pertaining to a "Green Tourism Pass." The pass would allow visitors to offset their carbon footprint for a fee.

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

Gary O'Neill, Assistant State Conservationist, stated that State Conservationist Ron Hilliard was attending the Boy Scouts Jamboree. He also stated that the NRCS will pay written tribute to Kenneth Risenhoover, District Conservationist in the near future.

Mr. O'Neill gave a NRCS programs report as listed in Attachment A.

Mr. O'Neill stated that a national editorial on the recovery act is being prepared for the Secretary of Agriculture's signature. He stated that the NRCS is contracting for the Turkey Creek Watershed Site 8 rehabilitation and that the bid opening was held this week. The scheduled completion date is March 2011. Mr. O'Neill stated that the NRCS is tentatively preparing for a media event in November for Sallisaw Watershed Site 18M.

Mr. O'Neill expressed his appreciation for the conservation partnership stating that without the Commission doing the contracting for the rehabilitation work those dollars would not have stayed in Oklahoma.

Mr. O'Neill reported that a formal audit of Oklahoma NRCS will be conducted the week of August 16 and that a human resources audit will be conducted the week of August 23. Staff is working on end of year budget issues.

Mr. O'Neill expressed appreciation to Mr. Toole and Larry Caldwell for their participation in the NRCS all employees meeting held recently.

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

No representative present.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

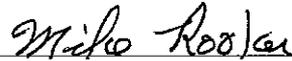
The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Thursday, September 2, 2010, in the Agriculture Building Board Room, 2800 N. Lincoln Boulevard, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma beginning at 9:30 a.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business a motion was made by Mr. Lowrance and seconded by Mr. Stunkard to adjourn. Those voting aye were: Gard, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

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Approved as amended by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on September 2, 2010.

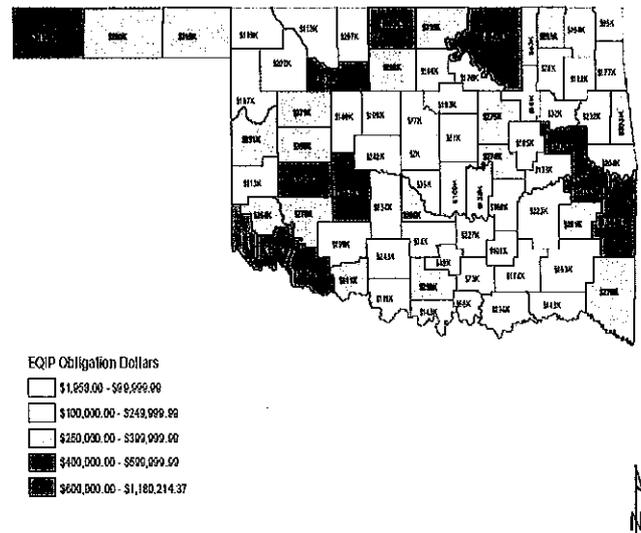
  
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CHAIR

**Programs Report – July 2010**

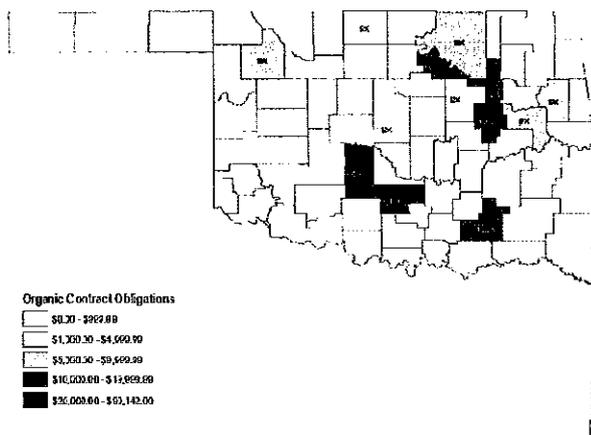
**EQIP activities** – The field offices are wrapping up activities to support EQIP in 2010. Some field offices continue to obligate reallocated funds in support of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the many Initiatives offered through this program.

- **EQIP General** – During the 2010 fiscal year, Oklahoma has obligated \$20.56 million dollars in support of 1,156 EQIP contracts to date. Historically underserved participants accounted for \$5.2 million. Additionally \$2.7 million was obligated for projects to improve irrigation efficiency on 32,000 acres. Brush management, including control of invasive cedars was one of the most commonly planned practices with over 82,000 acres of brush management planned in 891 contracts. Another common practice was fencing with over 300 miles of fence planned in 756 contracts. That’s enough fences to stretch from Fort Smith Arkansas all the way to Elk City. Other common practices included: nutrient management (1,272), pasture and hay planting (24,471 ac.), No-Till residue management (168,836 ac.), Ponds (396), Pest management (87,134 ac), and Watering Facilities (150). Additional funds have been requested and field offices are working diligently to obligate these additional funds.

**EQIP Obligations in Oklahoma for Fiscal Year 2010**



**EQIP Organic Contract Obligations in Oklahoma for Fiscal Year 2010**

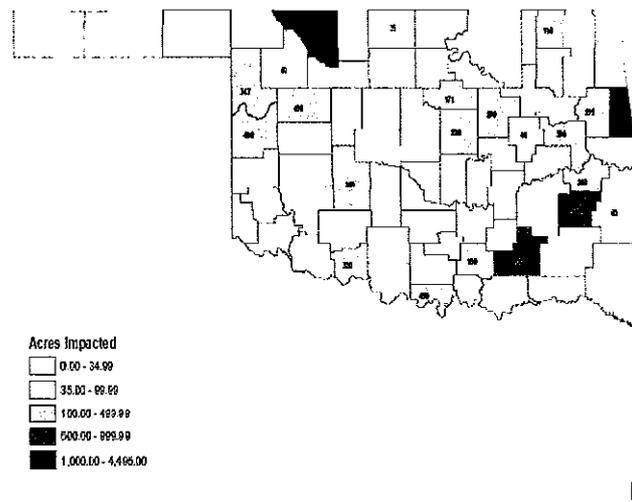


- **EQIP Organic Initiative** – field offices developed 21 contracts totaling over \$185,000 in cost-share assistance for organic and transitional organic producers throughout the state. The most common practice planned was the seasonal high-tunnel house. Seasonal high-tunnel houses were offered this year as an interim practice to evaluate their effectiveness at addressing a variety of resource concerns for organic producers.

- Ag Energy Audit Initiative – The agricultural energy audit initiative was offered for the first time in Oklahoma through the Conservation Activity Plans. Producers could receive cost share assistance to hire a technical service provider (TSP) to complete an audit of all energy use on their property. Though only two contracts were developed, both in Ottawa County, there was a great deal of interest in the program and TSPs have been certified for future years.
- LEPC – Oklahoma is part of a 5 state initiative designed to improve habitat for the lesser prairie chicken. The LEPC is a candidate species that is currently found on only a fraction of its historic range which included most of western Oklahoma. \$623,000 was allocated for this initiative and field offices are in the process of developing contracts.
- Ogallala Aquifer Initiative – Oklahoma is currently developing contracts to offer over \$400,000 of cost share assistance to implement conservation practices throughout the Ogallala aquifer in Oklahoma. The program is intended to reduce groundwater discharge and improve irrigation efficiency on irrigated cropland. Selected practices include conversion to dryland farming, conversion to permanent vegetation, increasing the efficiency of irrigation systems, and improvements to tillage systems.

WHIP Acres Impacted in Oklahoma for Fiscal Year 2010

WHIP Activities - The field offices continue to obligate funds in support of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. Over \$672,000 has been obligated to assist producers with implementation of conservation practices to benefit Wildlife throughout the State. The most common practices include: prescribed burning (11,500 ac), brush management (2,200 ac), Range Planting ( 271 ac) and fences (9,600 ft). In addition to the general WHIP program Oklahoma also is offering funds through the lesser prairie chicken initiative in NW Oklahoma. There is approximately \$100,000 available for the implementation of practices to benefit the LEPC.



CSP – The 2010-1 signup is in the books and Oklahoma developed 464 contracts to provide over \$7.5 million in payments annually to producers who are willing to achieve a higher level of management. The average payment rate during this first signup was \$17.67/acre/year.

The 2010-2 signup resulted in over 900 applications statewide representing just less than 1 million acres. Oklahoma received an initial allocation of 402,000 acres of agricultural lands and 20,000 acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest lands. Applications have been evaluated and selected for preapproval. Field offices are currently in the process of extending offers to successful applicants and conducting field verification of the information provided by applicants.

AWEP – Oklahoma currently has two Agricultural Water Enhancement Program areas. The Jackson county area is administered by the Jackson County Conservation District and the Ogallala High Plains is administered by the high plains RC&D. Over \$887,000 has been provided to local producers through these two areas for the reduction in groundwater discharge and the increased efficiency of irrigation systems.

CCPI – The Oklahoma Conservation Commission applied for and was awarded a Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative in 2010. This project will provide EQIP funds to producers within the Sugar Creek Watershed of Caddo County to implement conservation practices to stabilize streambanks and repair conservation structures damaged during 2007 when tropical depression Erin produced excessive rainfall throughout the area. The local field office is working with local conservation districts and OCC to solicit applications and obligate nearly \$100,000 this year. The project is intended to last 5 years and is budgeted to provide over \$2 million in NRCS funds and an additional \$1 million in State and other funds for needed conservation activities.

CIG – The Conservation Innovation Grants Program received 5 applications from entities proposing work in Oklahoma. Awards for successful projects are expected to be announced on July 26, 2010.