

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

The Oklahoma Conservation Commission met Monday, May 6, 2013, at the Agriculture Building Board Room located at 2800 N. Lincoln in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The meeting was called to order at 9:34 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 May 2, 2013, at the front entrance of the building.

ROLL CALL

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

Dan Lowrance, Chair
Jim Grego, Vice Chair
Karl Jett, Secretary
Mike Rooker, Area 2 Member
George Stunkard, Area 3 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, Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services Director
Lisa Knauf Owen, District Services Director
Mark Harrison, Information Representative
Cheryl Cheadle, Blue Thumb Coordinator
Jeri Fleming, Water Quality Environmental Programs Manager
Gary O'Neill, Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist
Blayne Arthur, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Deputy
Commissioner
Kim Tweed, Executive Secretary

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the minutes of the April 1, 2013, Commission meeting as written. 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 #1. A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett to approve the claims and financial statement. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITIONS

Mr. Lowrance stated that Debi Carnott, Water Quality Program Conservation Plan Writer / Education Coordinator, was unable to attend today. She will be recognized for her 25 years of service at the July meeting.

PRESENTATION OF AGREEMENTS

Ben Pollard, Assistant Director, presented agreements for approval as listed in Exhibit #2. He recommended approval of the continued agreement listed as (a). A motion was made by Mr. Stunkard and seconded by Mr. Rooker to approve the continued agreement as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

Mr. Pollard recommended approval of the new agreements listed as (b) through (e). A motion was made by Mr. Grego and seconded by Mr. Jett to approve the new agreements as listed. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, Stunkard, Lowrance and Grego. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

OUT OF STATE TRAVEL REQUESTS

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

USDA-NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE REPORT

Mr. Lowrance moved this report up on the agenda. Gary O'Neill, State Conservationist, provided a written copy of his report. He appreciates the kind words about his recent selection as State Conservationist and looks forward to continuing the strong conservation partnership.

Mr. O'Neill stated that a budget has not yet been received for program dollars. He stated that there are currently six vacant district conservationist positions but will have two more. Stacy Riley has been named Assistant for Field Operations for Zone 1 and David Hungerford has been named for Zone 3.

Mr. O'Neill reported that the Conservation Security Program will have a signup in May or early June with full funding for 12.5 million acres nationwide. Rankings will be performed this summer.

He stated that a new watershed in Oklahoma, Camp Creek, has been approved in the National Watershed Initiative. This brings the number of state watersheds under this initiative to five. A sign-up will be held in these five watersheds using Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds.

Mr. O'Neill reported that the Acting Chief has made some administrative changes for State Offices. The human resources, budget and finance, and procurement functions will be supported by regional teams.

Mr. Stunkard expressed his appreciation to Mr. O'Neill for attending the Wagoner County Stewardship Breakfast. Mr. O'Neill also attended a retirement reception in Cotton County for district director Jack Hudman and district secretary Fredia Rice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT

Mr. Thralls presented recommendations for appointment of conservation district directors as listed in Exhibit #4. A motion was made by Mr. Rooker and seconded by Mr. Jett to approve district director appointments as listed with terms to expire as indicated. Those voting aye were: Jett, Rooker, and Lowrance. Mr. Stunkard and Mr. Grego abstained. Nay votes: none. Motion carried.

DISTRICT DIRECTOR ELECTED POSITION #3

Mr. Thralls stated that to meet requirements for the Conservation District Director Elections Position #3, the Commission would need to authorize the Executive Director to:

- a. certify eligibility of candidates Filing a Notification and Declaration of Candidacy for District Director (Form OCC-3F) for Position #3 during the filing period from May 1-14, 2013; and
- b. approve polling places in those conservation districts that will be holding elections for District Director, Position #3 on Tuesday, June 4, 2013.

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP REPORTS

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry: Blayne Arthur, Deputy Commissioner, stated that the Board of Agriculture is meeting on May 7. The board has a new member, Karen Krehbiel, who is the first woman to serve on the board.

Ms. Arthur stated that the Governor's Conference on Fire Preparedness will be held on May 14 at the Oklahoma History Center.

Ms. Arthur was pleased that the emergency drought fund was funded with \$3 million. The Agriculture budget is decreased by \$1.7 million however this is misleading in that the department received \$2 million last year for the Oklahoma Youth Expo. The net difference of \$300,000 of

additional funds will be used for the Commercial Pet Breeders Program which the Department took over last year.

Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts: No representative present.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEMBERS

Mr. Rooker attended Ag Day at the Capitol, the Lt. Governor's turkey hunt and the National Land and Range Judging Contest banquet.

Mr. Jett stated that it is still dry in his area and that wheat is nearly non-existent west of Woodward. He attended a reception at the Cimarron Territorial Celebration for Harold Kelcher as well as the Woodward County Conservation District's 55th annual bankers awards program.

Mr. Grego had no report.

Mr. Stunkard attended the Wagoner County Stewardship Breakfast and stated that John Cummings with the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Association was the featured speaker. He also attended the retirement reception for Cotton County director Jack Hudman and secretary Fredia Rice.

Mr. Lowrance has been working on his agency's budget. He thanked the Awards and Recognition Committee members for the goody bags as well as the bagels and coffee they hosted this morning.

OKLAHOMA CONSERVATION COMMISSION STAFF

Administration - Executive Director: Mr. Thralls attended the retirement reception for Mr. Hudman and Ms. Rice and stated that between them there is 80 years of service. He attended the Wagoner County Stewardship Breakfast and spoke about Mr. Stunkard's service to the state.

Mr. Thralls expressed his appreciation to Senator Ron Justice and Representative Don Armes for work in obtaining money for the drought fund and for an additional \$400,000 for the Commission in operating funds.

Mr. Thralls invited members to the Commission staff meeting scheduled for May 14 at the Chickasaw Cultural Center in Sulphur. He will be attending a National Association of State Conservation Agencies board retreat this week in Paris, Arkansas.

District Services Division: Lisa Knauf Owen, Director, has been working with districts on getting vacant positions filled. She stated that Cotton County Conservation District chose to hire a part-time secretary with local funds while the balance of annual leave paid is being absorbed.

Ms. Owen stated that the fire protection emergency plan will be completed by June 30. She has been working with the Oklahoma Prescribed Burn Association in getting that organization up and running. Ms. Owen stated that she, Mr. Thralls, and Mr. Pollard viewed a DVD developed by the Oklahoma and the Texas A&M forestry regarding prescribed fire. They are hoping to make this available to districts.

Water Quality Program: Shanon Phillips, Director, introduced Jeri Fleming, new water quality employee. Ms. Fleming will be working with the Blue Thumb program, finding funds for the Blue Thumb Foundation, working with the Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) on Wetlands Reserve Program contracts as well as others; and assisting the Nonpoint Source Watershed Advisory Group to update their plan.

Ms. Phillips reported on meeting with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation regarding streambank stabilization projects. They will be providing \$900,000 for a restoration project along Highway 10 in the Illinois River watershed.

Ms. Phillips stated that the Oklahoma nonpoint source program was ranked number one in phosphorous and nitrogen load reductions by the EPA.

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program: Mike Kastl, Director, reported on the Broken Arrow project and the Oolagah project. He stated that an emergency subsidence was reported last Friday near Krebs, Oklahoma. He stated that the Northeastern State University project is running behind their contract's construction schedule.

Financial Management and Human Resources Division: Mr. Coffman has been working with the OMES to get the budget backbone built. When the budget is received it will be entered into the computer program. He then reported that Lynn Weldon, Human Resources Specialist, has taken a position with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Office of Geographic Information and Technical Services: Mike Sharp, Director, has been working with the OMES to prepare for agency IT consolidation.

Conservation Programs Division: Robert Toole, Director, reported that the Commission continues to buy property for the Kingfisher project. He stated that new guidelines have been provided on water well testing for districts and the NRCS. He said that before a well is approved for cost-share it must have the water quality tested for new parameters for livestock water (total soluble solids and nitrates).

Mr. Toole reported that two watershed projects are in pre-construction, the Fort Cobb Lateral 10 in South Caddo and Barnitz 1 in Dewey County.

Under watershed operation and maintenance, Mr. Toole discussed the explosion of seismic activity in central Oklahoma, particularly Pawnee, Payne and Noble Counties and how it pertains to watershed structures. Staff is working with the Corporation Commission to develop a notification process along the lines of the Intents to Drill process already in place.

Mr. Toole stated that Karla Beatty, Education Coordinator, has been busy with activities such as the National Land and Range Judging Contest and redesigning of the watershed display. Ms. Beatty has been selected for a two year term on the National Project WET board.

Administration - Assistant Director: Mr. Pollard stated that the Checotah Conservation District board voted to close the office in Checotah and move their operation to the Field Office in

Eufaula. They are not consolidating with the McIntosh County Conservation District however a few efficiencies will be seen as a result of the two districts co-locating.

Mr. Pollard informed the Commission that Mark Harrison, Information Representative, will be retiring at the end of June 2013.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission will be held on Monday, June 3, 2013, 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 Mr. Lowrance declared the meeting adjourned. The meeting adjourned at 10:36 a.m.

Approved by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission on June 3, 2013.


CHAIR

Oklahoma Conservation Partnership Report

April 2013

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Gary O'Neill, Ponca City native, has been named Oklahoma State Conservationist for the USDA– Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Jason Weller, acting NRCS Chief in Washington, D.C, made the announcement April 11, 2013. He said that, "Gary O'Neill is a long time NRCS employee with a distinguished career. He has served this agency well in various positions in four states over the past 30 years. Most notably, in addition to being Assistant State Conservationist in Oklahoma, he is also serving at the national level as the agency representative for the USDA Field to Market, Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture." He added that, "O'Neill also served at the headquarters level as Acting National RC&D (Resource Conservation & Development) Program Manager in 2009 and 2010. He also served as Acting State Conservationist in Michigan in late 2011 and early 2012."



O'Neill was raised on a dairy and small grains farm in Osage County. He graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree Agricultural Economics. He began his career with NRCS in 1983 in Oklahoma as a watershed planner. Seven years later, he moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he served as State Economist on the Ecological Sciences staff. He was promoted to Management Analyst on the Strategic Planning and Oversight and Evaluation Staff in the NRCS Midwest Regional Office in Madison, Wisconsin. After eight years in that position he returned to Oklahoma and has served as RC&D Program Manager, State Administrative Officer, and currently Assistant State Conservationist for Operations.

O'Neill said, "I look forward to helping Oklahoma NRCS continue to be viewed as conservation leaders and working closely with the partnerships that make this happen. NRCS has a critical mission in delivering conservation to Oklahoma farmers and ranchers. Oklahoma has a rich conservation legacy that is the result of the efforts of dedicated employees, strong partnerships, and innovative leadership." He also said, "Having been raised on a farm in Oklahoma, I have a great deal of passion for assisting agricultural producers address their conservation and natural resource issues in a way that can be economically viable. The Farm Bill programs that NRCS administers have proven to be a great vehicle for making this happen."

The announcement brought praise and support from members of the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership and former NRCS leaders. "The Oklahoma Conservation Commission enjoys an excellent working relationship with Gary," said Mike Thralls, OCC Executive Director. "We look forward to working with him as State Conservationist," Thralls said.

Ron Hilliard, who retired as State Conservationist in January said that "Gary O'Neill is uniquely qualified to serve as State Conservationist. He has great leadership ability and understands the importance of the Oklahoma Conservation Partnership working together to put conservation on the land."

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Engineering Review

ENGINEERING: Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Workshop

Chris Stoner, State Conservation Engineer; Severo Cosyleon, Head of Design Staff; and Brian Dillard, Project Engineer, attended the 2013 Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Workshop in Tulsa March 25-26, 2013. These individuals were invited to the workshop because of the involvement that NRCS has with the design and construction monitoring on current AML projects. Representatives from OCC, OCC-AML, NRCS, and the Office of Surface Mining were present at the meeting. On the first day of the workshop, Chris, Severo, and Brian gave presentations to the attendees on topics concerning the design and construction monitoring process and engineering licensure. In addition, Mike Kastl gave status updates on recently completed, on-going, and future AML projects and Henry Royce, with AML, provided a presentation on past and future AML Emergency Projects.

The second day consisted of a tour of six different AML projects that were in various stages, from construction initiation to final completion. Seeing the varying stages allowed the attendees to understand the mine land reclamation process from the beginning to the end. This meeting was very informative and allowed both the NRCS and AML staff's to come together to help grow and improve this new partnership between two agencies.



Early stage of AML project on Northeastern State University property near Broken Arrow, OK



Completed "Bates-Fullerton" AML project located in Rogers County, Oklahoma

Outreach Review

USDA Agencies and OTCAC Partner with Kay & Noble Conservation Districts to hold the 2013 No-Till Conference & Tribal Training Workshop

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Risk Management Agency (RMA), the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Wheatland R C & D, Oklahoma State University Extension Service, Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC) and Oklahoma Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (OTCAC) partnered with the Kay and Noble County Conservation Districts to hold a no-till conference and tribal training workshop. The workshop was held on Tuesday, March 26, 2013 from 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM. The workshop was hosted by the Pioneer Technology Center, in Ponca City, Oklahoma. The workshop provided producers, tribes and tribal members with valuable information about no-till and its benefits, on on-site tour, *hands on* demonstration of soil health and presentations by specialist on herbicide resistance, no-till and crop cover.