



STATE OF NEVADA
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
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MINUTES
STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING

Thursday, June 27, 2013, 1:00 p.m.
NDEP Great Basin Conference Room 4th Floor, Richard H. Bryan Building
901 S. Stewart Street, Carson City, Nevada 89701

The Nevada State Conservation Commission held a public meeting on June 27, 2013, in the NDEP Great Basin Conference Room, 4th Floor, in the Richard H. Bryan Building, 901 S. Stewart Street, Carson City, NV, 89701. The State Conservation Commission considered and acted on the following items on June 27, 2013.

Board Members Present: Chairman Joe Sicking, Paradise/Sonoma CD, Leland Wallace, Esmeralda CD, Vance Vesco, Big Meadow CD, Eric Rieman, Carson Valley CD, Ed Foster, NV Dept. of Agriculture, and Dr. Sherm Swanson, CABNR-NAES. **Board Members Absent:** Maggie Orr, Lincoln County CD and Kathy Mort, Stillwater CD. The Southern Nevada CD position is vacant at this time.

Others Present: Joe Locurto, Conservation Districts Program Manager, Tim Rubald, Sagebrush Ecosystem Program Manager, Sandy Quilici, DCNR Director's Office, Bruce Petersen, State Conservationist, Clint Koble, NV Farm Service Agency, Jake Tibbitts, NvACD (by telephone), Kevin Benson, Deputy Attorney General, Doni Bruland, Conservation Specialist, Nancy Sicking, and Craig Bruland. Connie Lee with the Department of Wildlife tried to call in to the meeting, but the phone system did not accept the call.

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Chairman Sicking called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.
- B. Chairman Sicking welcomed Joe Locurto, the new Conservation Districts Program Manager; Mr. Locurto said he looks forward to working with the Commission and getting projects done.
- C. Chairman Sicking introduced Doni Bruland who is the Conservation Staff Specialist for the Elko area. Ms. Bruland said she has been in the field and will have some projects in place soon.

II. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA – *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Commissioner Vesco made a motion to approve the agenda, Commissioner Rieman seconded the motion; there was a vote and the motion passed unanimously. ***ACTION TAKEN***

III. PUBLIC COMMENT – There was no public comment.

IV. REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF MINUTES-*FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

Commissioner Rieman made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 7, 2013 meeting, Commissioner Wallace seconded the motion; there was a vote and the motion passed unanimously. ***ACTION TAKEN***

V. REPORTS TO THE COMMISSION - *NOT FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

For the record: Bruce Petersen, Dr. Sherm Swanson, and Clint Koble have joined the meeting.

Joe Locurto gave an update to the Commission. He said Commissioner Orr is attending a Society for Range Management meeting in Ely.

Mr. Locurto attended the Strategic and Targeted Grazing Symposium provided by UNR Cooperative Extension in Elko. Presentations include grazing, grazing in riparian areas, how grazing can be used in fire suppression/fuels reduction, and utilizing sheep and goats for green strips creation. Hopefully there will be PowerPoint presentations to follow. There was talk of how targeted grazing can help the sagebrush ecosystem (touched on sage grouse) and pinyon/juniper issues.

On May 23rd he attended a Stewardship Alliance of NE Elko County (SANE) meeting in Wells. Mike Lunn provided the consensus training in Elko. The SANE group is applying for a Public Lands Council Grant to have a consultant research the planning used for the Bi-State Plan to assist with the planning for the sage grouse ecosystem issues.

On May 29th he travelled to Elko to meet with Conservation Staff Specialist Doni Bruland. Her office is at the NRCS office in Elko.

He has attended the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council meetings to understand their plans.

On June 12-13 he attended the Shoesole Tour near Wells. The tour included the Boies, Cottonwood, and Home Ranches. He visited riparian areas, sagebrush habitat, and burned areas. The burned areas were showing marked recovery.

Mr. Locurto has been maintaining and updating the meetings and minutes for the C.D.'s. He has received all but the Ruby Valley Work Plan and Budget Plan for 2014. He provided a spreadsheet.

The Conservation Staff Specialist for the Winnemucca Area will be Steve Weaver who will start on July 15th.

Doni Bruland said she attended some district meetings; Owyhee was one and they are ready to move forward on projects with existing plans like the sage grouse initiative. She was in Northeast Elko looking at water development projects with BLM and NDOW. NRCS in Elko is providing her office space.

VI. AGENCY UPDATES - *NOT FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

A. Nevada Dept. of Agriculture – Ed Foster, Regional Manager/Plant Industry Division. Commissioner Foster said Agriculture has absorbed 3 divisions which form the new Division of Food and Nutrition: the Nutrition Education Program, the Dairy Commission, and the Commodity Foods Program. There are 32 new staff members in Reno and 12 in Las Vegas. This will bring \$150 million to the agency.

The Plant Industry Division is filling the Public Information Officer position and a building facilities position (Commissioner Foster has been performing these duties). Commissioner Foster said he is now the Deputy Administrator for the Plant Industry Division. Lynn Hettrick will be the new Deputy Director of Agriculture as of July 1, 2013.

There will be a powdered milk plant built; some of the product will be sent to China.

AB264 passed and gives Agriculture the ability to fine people for feeding wild horses; first is a warning and second is a gross misdemeanor. Agriculture will have a position for the management of wild horses, natural resources, and land use planning. There will be the development of cooperative agreements with federal and local agencies.

Commissioner Vesco asked how many horses can the advocacy groups assume. Commissioner Foster said about 120 horses. He said there are 2500 to 3000 on the range. Any horses Agriculture gathers (for public safety) will not go to auction, but to advocacy groups.

B. UNR-College of Agriculture Biotechnology and Natural Resources – Dr. Sherm Swanson, Range and Riparian Extension State Specialist for the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and Scientist for the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station. Commissioner Swanson provided a handout of his report to the members.

New Hires:

Antonio Fasciola is the new Livestock nutritionist. Ralph Phillips is the new Development Officer. Ian Wallace is a Plant Geneticist hired to work on drought resistance in plants and we are going to hire a second Plant Geneticist. Paul Verberg is a Soil Scientist who will be teaching soils in the fall. There will be a second Soil Scientist hired after negotiations and her husband may be hired in the Geology Dept. Jerry Thiem has been hired as a Plant Taxonomist in the Herbarium. An Agronomist position has been approved and is being recruited. The search for a new Dean of CABNR is in process. UNCE will be getting new leadership for an interim of two years. In the future CABNR and UNCE may combine.

Program:

The Great Basin Life Science Teaching and Learning Center will be combined with the herbarium and the preserved animal specimens from the Biology Dept.

The High Desert Farming Initiative is building six new greenhouses on Valley Road; four for the production to local markets, one for teaching and one for research. This was developed with help from the Small Business Development Center and combines CABNR/NAES, UNCE, and Urban Roots.

The Multistate Range Program - Rangeland Education Across Institutional Borders has been approved. This will help with teaching range management. There may classes offered online.

The Agricultural Education Program at UNR will include Animal Science/Pre-vet, Plant Science, and Business Economics.

The Rangeland Ecology and Management Program and the Agriculture Program have a number of new students.

There will be a Field Day on September 14, 2013 at the Main Station Field Lab and the Commission members are invited.

The Main Station Field Las now has camellina, canola, teff, grapes, guar, a plot to study insect bio-control, and a plot to study biodegradable pots.

Wolf Pack Meats remains open and conducted four workshops for the Herds to Harvest program at UNCE.

Clint Koble asked if hoop houses are in use on Valley Road – yes. Commissioner Rieman asked if Wolf Pack Meats increased their prices-yes, they are a little higher.

Tim Rubald asked about this years Range Camp – Commissioner Swanson said there were 25 youths and it was a success.

- C. **Natural Resources Conservation Service** – Bruce Petersen, State Conservationist. Mr. Petersen said NRCS has received about \$29 million in financial assistance; easement programs received \$19 million and \$10 million for the EQIP, WHIP, and AMA programs.

Due to sequestration cuts their staff is down to 58 from 78 and there may be more cuts next year.

The Senate has passed a new Farm Bill, now the House is working on their version. We expect to have a farm bill shortly.

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and the Tribal Relations Director Leslie Wheelock were in Nevada. It was good for them to see what Nevada is doing.

The Winnemucca District Conservationist is Andy Laca who previously worked for NRCS in Lovelock.

Liz Warner is retiring; she will be sorely missed. Heather Emmons from BLM is her replacement.

NRCS is working with the districts and partners regarding the Bi-State Sage Grouse. Commissioner Vesco asked about the regional equity money; Mr. Petersen said they hope to maintain the minimum.

Commissioner Swanson asked if the Senate Farm Bill remains the same. Mr. Petersen said there are some cuts, maybe 7%. There will more limited travel dollars.

D. Farm Services Administration – Clint Koble, State Executive Director. Mr. Koble said it has been a challenge not to have a new Farm Bill as some programs are not funded. Particularly disaster programs such as the Livestock Forage Program (LFP), the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), and the SURE Program.

There has been some Emergency Conservation Program work with limited funding. There is cost sharing in rebuilding fencing after fire damage and water hauling due to losses from the drought. It is unfortunate that the Farm Bureau cannot allocate monies to specific needs.

The FSA has worked closely with DRI in forming a Drought Assistance and Information page; the site is: <http://gbdash.dri.edu>. A drought plan is needed especially after a second year. Cattle losses have increased and hay is more expensive.

Low interest loans are available through the new MicroLoan Program. These are flexible and easy to qualify for and may be available within five days. These are up to \$35,000. Counties are eligible for emergency loans with a 1.7% rate.

The April 24, 2013 Indoor Agriculture Conference in Las Vegas was well attended with about 240. It was shown that arid states can gain locally grown food with greenhouses and hoop houses in metropolitan areas which also reduces transportation costs. The controlled environments are efficient with less pesticide use.

Secretary Vilsack said there is a need for the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) to be more flexible; particularly for the western states with unique challenges.

Commissioner Vesco asked about the proposed Immigration Bill. Mr. Koble said it is not clear yet – it would not provide amnesty, perhaps create fines and provisions. For the farmers it would mean extra work as they must register migrant workers who would receive a blue card.

E. NV Dept. of Wildlife – Connie Lee, Farm Bill Coordinator. Unfortunately, Ms. Lee tried to call in to the meeting, but the phone line would not allow her call.

F. NV Association of Conservation Districts – Jake Tibbitts, President. Mr. Tibbitts said he has been trying to organize the paperwork and it will take some time. It is three years behind on tax filing. The tax exemption has to be extended. He is still waiting on appointments.

The NvACD Annual Meeting will be November 5-6 in Elko at the Great Basin College. He would like to have Grant Writing and Training for Supervisors classes at the meeting.

He was at Range Camp and said the propane was all donated which was a savings.

He attended the National Meeting in San Antonio and said it was a worthwhile experience.

G. NV Sagebrush Ecosystem Program – Tim Rubald, Program Manager. Mr. Rubald said the Legislature passed AB461 which make the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, the Sagebrush Ecosystem Technical Team, and the staff specialists official. The Council is nine members and six ex-officios. There has been a lot of public input and attendance at the meetings. The next meeting is July 30, 2013, at the Legislature. The meetings are video conferenced to Winnemucca, Elko, and Ely at the community colleges.

The BLM Sage Grouse EIS draft is due July 1, 2013.

The data call for the USFS is September 20, 2014.

Mr. Rubald is involved in developing the credits which will come from funds paid when there are disturbances to the ecosystem. Examples would be mining, road building, oil and gas lines; not from agriculture.

In 30 days there will be \$500,000 available to be used on private lands for fire projects with a 75-25 match. These will include fuels reductions, fencing, fuel breaks, and water areas.

Mr. Rubald supplied a handout that was a letter of support from the Sagebrush Ecosystem Council for projects to benefit sage grouse.

H. Others – There were no other agency reports.

Break at 2:40 p.m. and Reconvene at 2:50 p.m.

VII. DISCUSSION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS PROGRAM BUDGET RESULTS FROM LEGISLATIVE SESSION - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

A. Tim Rubald said a Competitive Grant Pool funded by the Legislature of \$40,000 per year was approved for the Conservation Districts. This is for sage grouse habitat, now regulations need to be written.

Joe Locurto said we need guidelines. Would this grant program be available only to C.D.'s in good standing?

Commissioner Rieman asked what if a C.D. does not have sage grouse. Mr. Rubald said there are four districts with no sage grouse which would make them ineligible. They are Southern Nevada-Clark County, Southern Nye, Nevada Tahoe, and Stillwater C.D.'s.

Mr. Locurto asked what the maximum amount of dollars would be to be applied for by one district. Would there be a match? It does say the funds can be combined with matching funds from other sources including federal funds; it was agreed the match should 25%.

How many applications per fiscal year per C.D.? Chairman Sicking said the applications could be prioritized.

Mr. Rubald asked about having the SET review the applications decided by the Commission. The Commissioners agreed to the review. Commissioner Vesco said there is a ranking process for the EQIP program with NRCS that this could be patterned after.

It was agreed the C.D. would have to be in good standing. A match will be considered, but not mandatory. Maybe use a match in considering the ranking.

Mr. Rubald helped the Commission make of list of regulations in this order:

1. The C.D. must be in good standing.
2. The sage grouse habitat a potential habitat per the Sagebrush Ecosystem Team.
3. A cap will be at the discretion of the Commission.
4. As a ranking tool there would be more ranking points if there is a match.
5. The project should be ground ready.
6. A C.D. can have multiple applications which will then be prioritized.
7. Monitoring of the project must be included.
8. Multiple agency/landowner projects will be ranked higher.
9. One main application per year at the Commission's discretion.
10. Use NRCS specifications for what to appropriate for projects.
11. There will need to be reporting requirements.
12. What is the disbursement timeline?
13. The State Conservation Commission will have the final authority.

Commissioner Swanson made a motion to consider adopting the regulations; Commissioner Vesco seconded the motion. There was a vote and the motion passed. ***ACTION TAKEN***

B. Joe Locurto said the Legislature approved an additional \$28,000 for the Conservation Districts. This means each C.D. in good standing will receive \$3500 instead of \$2500 in the next fiscal year.

VIII. CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING *THE 2013 NEVADA AGRICULTURE ANALYSIS AND OPPORTUNITIES REPORT* - *FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

C. Mr. Rubald asked the Commission if they would consider a resolution to support the 2013 Nevada Agriculture study report and the inclusion of Agriculture as a Target Industry Sector for economic development. There was a handout of a recent press release. Commissioner Rieman made a motion to support; Commissioner Wallace seconded the motion. There was a vote and the motion to support passed unanimously. ***ACTION TAKEN***

IX. DISCUSSION ON STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION ABILITY TO ACCEPT

GRANTS - *NOT FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

- A. Deputy Attorney General Kevin Benson said the Commission does have the authority to accept grants. This is per Nevada Revised Statute 548.175 - Line 13: *“To apply for any available grants and to accept and use any grants, gifts or donations to make available grants of money to qualified conservation districts to aid the districts in carrying out the provisions of this chapter.”*

X. COMMISSIONER ITEMS - *NOT FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

- A. Chairman Sicking said Humboldt County signed with NDF's Fire Protection Plan.
B. Chairman Sicking presented Chairman Vesco with a plaque thanking him for his service to the Commission. He explained how Chairman Vesco's service goes beyond the Commission to help Agriculture, Agriculture in the Classroom, FFA, and 4H. He will be deeply missed. Commissioner Vesco said thank you and he is a firm believer in educating our youth about agriculture. He truly appreciates his award from the Commission.

XI. NEXT COMMISSION MEETING - * FOR POSSIBLE ACTION*

- A. Joe Locurto said perhaps a teleconference meeting before September 30th regarding the new regulations. Tim Rubald said there will be a Doodle poll sent for dates and times of availability.
NO ACTION TAKEN

XII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Tim Rubald said Liz Warner's retirement party is tonight in Reno and provided the members with directions.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Vesco made a motion to adjourn and Commissioner Wallace seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.