

Missouri Department of Natural Resources



MINUTES

Missouri Soil and Water Districts Commission Open Conference Call Meeting

Department of Natural Resource Conference Center
1101 Riverside Drive
Jefferson City, MO
April 17, 2020

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Gary Vandiver, H. Ralph Gaw, Jeff Lance, Tim Martin, Kenny Lovelace, and Keith Stevens.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS: CAROL S. COMER, DIRECTOR, DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES: Dru Buntin; CHRIS CHINN, DIRECTOR, DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE: Ken Henderson; SARA PARKER PAULEY, DIRECTOR, DEPT. OF CONSERVATION: No representative; DEAN CHRISTOPHER R. DAUBERT, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI: Rob Kallenbach

ADVISORY MEMBERS PRESENT: SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION PROGRAM (SWCP): Colleen Meredith; **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS):** Nate Goodrich; **MISSOURI ASSOCIATION OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS (MASWCD):** Ryan Britt; **ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE:** Benjamin Walker

SWCP STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Jim Boschert, Bill Wilson, Jim Plassmeyer, Jake Wilson, Stacy Breesawitz, Kelsey Kempker, Madeline Behlke-Entwisle, Jennifer Pellett, and Tina Stockman

OTHERS PRESENT: LAWRENCE COUNTY SWCD: Amy Carter; **MONROE COUNTY SWCD:** Lena Sharp; **RIPLEY COUNTY SWCD:** Rachel Griffin; **WASHINGTON COUNTY SWCD:** Tiffany Woods; **MO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES:** Kyra Moore and Van Beydler

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Vandiver called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. He appreciated having everyone on the call with the trying times we are having. A roll call was taken to establish a quorum.

B. MINUTES FROM THE APRIL 1, 2020 MEETING

A motion was made by Commissioner Ralph Gaw to approve the April 1, 2020 meeting minutes. Commissioner Keith Stevens seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The motion passed with all in favor.

C. REPORTS AND UPDATES

1. Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Dru Buntin reported that yesterday the Governor extended the stay at home order until May 3, 2020. The Department will continue to largely operate remotely through at least that time. The Department of Health has been working with Washington University on development of a state model that looks at Missouri data, and the trends that we are seeing in different areas that will ultimately inform a phased approach to the state reopening for business. For now the Department and state government will be operating in the same mode that we have been in for the last few weeks, at least through May 3, 2020.

At the last meeting, the Commission voted to allocate some funding to address the harmful algal bloom issue at Mozingo Lake by Maryville. In working with the city they have determined that the algal bloom has dissipated, but it will still be important to look in that watershed for actions that can be taken to reduce the possibility of that happening again.

He reiterated that he and all of her colleagues in the Department appreciate Colleen's leadership of the program. This is her last day in the office and last Commission meeting so we wish her all the best and are going to miss her.

2. Soil and Water Conservation Program Director's Comments

Ms. Colleen Meredith reported that she was glad to be here with us. Our staff have been working closely with the districts and partners to keep the business moving. Everyone is doing as much as they possibly can and things are going quite well considering people doing a lot of work remotely. She has appreciated working with all the Commissioners, districts, partners and staff that have helped in this effort.

D. NEW BUSINESS - REQUESTS

(Approval Needed)

1. Temporary Change to Grazing School Policy for DSP 3 Grazing Practices

Mr. Jim Plassmeyer reported that the issue for the Commission to address today is the policy requirement in DSP 3 grazing practices for attending grazing school.

The applicability statements in the DSP grazing practices state: "The system operator must attend an approved grazing school provided by University of Missouri (MU), in conjunction with NRCS, prior to the district's submittal of a contract for review." Attending a grazing school is one of the validations program staff do when reviewing the grazing contracts.

Last week MU and NRCS sent out a joint press release stating the grazing schools are postponed through May and possible early summer. They stated in late May they will assess the situation and consider reopening the schools in the summer.

For the 2020 grazing school year, there are 28 schools scheduled statewide with nine of those planned for April and May.

In response to Governor Parson's Executive Order 18-05 addressing the drought of 2018, the Commission deferred the requirement to attend a grazing school for up to one year after contract payment. The waiver applied only to DSP 3.1 Water Development and DSP 3.2 Water Distribution practices and only 1 watering tank was allowed. The remaining system could be installed after the operator attended a grazing school. The intention of the waiver was to help producers who needed an immediate water source during the drought and were planning to install a grazing system.

The program heard from three districts that are working with producers developing a system, but cannot move forward with the contract because those producers have not attended a grazing school yet.

Mr. Plassmeyer offer this consideration for discussion - to suspend the policy requirement in the DSP 3 grazing practices that the system operator has to attend a grazing school prior to the district submitting the contract for program office approval, until the grazing schools are reinstated by University of Missouri Extension and NRCS. Additionally, require the system operator for the contracts approved under the suspended policy to attend a grazing school prior to the contract being submitted for payment.

Commissioner Ralph Gaw said he had a few concerns upon first review and contacted the program office. He wondered about how much funding this would be on average for a contract, and also how long it would be before the grazing schools would be reinstated. The policy should be such to go ahead with the approvals and he has no problem with withholding funds for a relatively short period of time. He discussed the possibility of an online grazing school which may be a consideration down the road if this closure goes for a considerable amount of time. He said he is in favor of the change proposed by staff with the caveat to put this back on the agenda for the June meeting to see where we are on the grazing school closures.

Dr. Rob Kallenbach said that MU wants to get back to having in person grazing schools as soon as they can, but the public health situation is preventing it. Although they have considered online options he feels they would lose a lot of the value of the schools if they were entirely online. There may be some hybrid options with part online and part in person but they will not be ready for a while. Commissioner Gaw said that he absolutely agrees that in person classes are far more valuable than an online class would be, but on the other hand he wants to get the practices going full force and operators may be reluctant to front the money for a year or two. Dr. Kallenbach agreed that the University of Missouri is also behind that.

Commissioner Stevens said he talked with NRCS about an online plan as well and discussed at a local board meeting and agreed that a lot would be missed without an in person class, but don't want to hold people up from moving forward. He asked if there is an idea at this point of the numbers of contracts and people that would be waiting on payment. Mr. Plassmeyer said there were only three producers at this time that districts let the program know are falling into this situation.

Chair Gary Vandiver said that he agrees with the caveat to revisit this in June. Commissioner Kenny Lovelace added that this is starting to be a very busy farming time and unless a producer is strictly a cattle farmer that they may not have time to implement a system now, and agreed that we may know more in June where we are with the virus.

Commissioner Ralph Gaw made a motion to suspend the policy requirement in the DSP 3 grazing practices that the system operator has to attend a grazing school prior to the district submitting the contract for program office approval, until the grazing schools are reinstated by University of Missouri Extension and NRCS. Additionally, require the system operator for the contracts approved under the suspended policy to attend a grazing school prior to the contract being submitted for payment. Commissioner Keith Stevens seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The motion passed with all in favor.

Commissioner Ralph Gaw asked that the program staff to please put this on the June meeting agenda for discussion purposes.

2. Mozingo Lake followup

Commissioner Ralph Gaw asked Mr. Dru Buntin if any of the soil and water funds the Commission designated to Mozingo Lake at the last meeting were used to help with the dissipation of the algae that he mentioned in his earlier comments. Mr. Buntin reported that no funds from soil and water were used that the Commission allocated for practices to be implemented in the watershed aimed at reducing nutrients. The harmful algal bloom was unusual since it persisted through the winter months but dissipated before the authorized soil and water funds were used. Commissioner Lance commented that he thought the funding was going to be used for practices whether the bloom went away or stayed as a preventive measure. Mr. Plassmeyer said the Nodaway board will be meeting on Monday and they will be proactive in this watershed with the funding.

Dru mentioned that due to the COVID situation the Department is looking closely at all revenue sources. The Department may not be filling positions and taking other actions to reduce funding impacts down the road.

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E. FUTURE MEETING DATES

June 24, 2020

Lincoln University George Washington Carver Farm

3804 Bald Hill Road

Jefferson City, MO

1:30 p.m.

F. CLOSED SESSION

The Commission did not go into closed session.

G. MEETING ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Ralph Gaw made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:30 p.m. and Commissioner Jeff Lance seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. The motion carried with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Wilson

for

Colleen Meredith, Director

Soil and Water Conservation Program

Approved by:

Gary Vandiver

Gary Vandiver, Chairman

Missouri Soil and Water Districts Commission