

The regular teleconference meeting of the Natural Resource Conservation & Development Board (NRCDB) was held March 30, 2016 at 10:00 a.m. at the conference room located at 1800 Glenn Highway, Suite 12, Palmer, Alaska.

Board members present and establishing a quorum were:

- Mr. George Woodbury, Board member (telephone)
- Ms. Cheryl Thompson, Board member (telephone)
- Ms. Ina Jones, Board member (telephone)
- Mr. Bernie Karl, Board member (telephone)

Board members absent: Mr. John Schirack

Others in attendance:

- Mr. Ed Fogels, Deputy Commissioner, DNR (telephone)
- Mr. Arthur J. Keyes IV, Director, Division of Agriculture
- Ms. Lora Haralson, Administrative Officer I, Division of Agriculture
- Mr. Todd Pettit, President, Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) (telephone)
- Ms. Dee Pond, Chief Administrations Officer AACD (telephone)

Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels introduced Arthur Keyes as the new Director for the Division of Agriculture. He stated that Commissioner Mark Meyers retired and that Marty Rutherford is currently the Acting Commissioner.

Deputy Commissioner Fogels gave a budget update:

The House passed an additional million dollar reduction to DNR.

- (335.0) Commissioner's office
- (335.0) Plant Materials Center
- (147.0) Seed potato Program
- (320.0) Division of Parks

The Senate put all the reductions back into the budget for DNR.

- 335.0 Commissioner's office DNR
- 335.0 Plant Materials Center
- 147.0 Seed potato Program
- 320.0 Division of Parks

The House and Senate conference committees will be meeting to determine what will be the budget compromise.

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

It was determined that a quorum was present and the meeting was called to order by Board member Woodbury at 10:00 a.m.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

There were no changes to the agenda.
The agenda was approved.

C: PUBLIC COMMENT/SESSION (three minutes per person)

(No members of the public were present).

D. MINUTES OF PRECEDING MEETING

November 9, 2015 Draft Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Board member Jones moved to approve the minutes of November 9, 2015.

SECOND Board member Thompson seconded the motion.

VOTE: The motion passed without objection.

E. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE

Acting Executive Director Keyes:

He grew up in Alaska, moved to Palmer in 2001 with his wife comes from the farming community. In 2003 he started growing specialty crops and in 2006 he started the South Anchorage Farmers Market which has been known nationally and voted the best Farmers Market in the State of Alaska. He held the following positions below until he was appointed the Director of Agriculture on February 17, 2016.

- 2007-2016 – Board of Directors for the Palmer Soil & Water Conservation District
- 2007-2008 – Board of Directors for the State Farm Bureau and from 2015-2016
- 2008-2010 - President of Mat-Su Chapter Farm Bureau
- 2010-2016 - USDA Chairman for the State Farm Service Agency
- 2010-2016 – Board of Directors of the Alaska Farmland Trust

He stated he is a farmer first and he wants to hear any concerns or questions from the Board.

Board member reports from district activities:

Board member Woodbury – Southeast Soil & Water Conservation District:

- A sustainable southeast partnership has been formed with the Southeast Soil & Water Conservation district and they are working together to help get the farmers markets going in southeast.
- Efforts are underway to restore the timber supply and keep the remaining medium sized sawmill running.
- The forest industry in the State is important. If the State could acquire 2 million acres of the 17 million acre Tongass National Forest it could create 2000 jobs by selling 300 MMBF of timber each year and provide the State \$300,000,000 new revenue annually.

Board member Thompson – Northwest Soil & Water Conservation District:

- The northwest district was the newest district that was formed and is not currently operating.
- \$200,000 grant was given to the consortium and they are attempting to revitalize fields at Pilgram which is 60 miles out of Nome. The main problem is there are no farmers to support it.
- She attended the SARE conference and appreciates that kind of meeting.
- She teaches a greenhouse class for the local college.
- She stated high tunnels are being built from the NRCS program and are growing Rhodiola.

Board member Jones – Homer Soil & Water Conservation District:

- Stated the Homer District, is planning to complete a three year study to help determine the benefits of two conservation practices, cover cropping and reduced tillage on soil health which will be promoting NRCS practice Adaptive Nutrient Management and the funding is coming from the USDA and NRCS.
- The district is holding the annual meeting of the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area, scheduled for May 5th. The workshops held are in conjunction with the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management area, DNR, UAF and Cooperative Extension Service. This year's event will be with training for invasive weed identification, certification, proper response protocols, field management techniques and training for individuals interested in certifying gravel as weed free and weed free certification for hay producers.
- The Homer District has completed a project to address a priority resource concern in the Fox River Flats. With the help of a Cooperative Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the District addressed several

bridge crossings along fingers of Wallace Creek. ORV traffic through the Fox River Flats Critical Habitat Area crosses this drainage system and the old bridges were no longer safe or suitable to accommodate existing traffic.

- The district has fabricated five new bridges and refurbished two of the existing bridges. To address channel fluctuations the bridges are designed for movability, they have built them on skids with hooked eyes and hinged ramps.
- For the 2016 and 2017 schedule, they are working on a proposal to identify and establish a trail or route between Fox Creek and Fox River. This route would connect to the bridges that cross the Wallace Creek drainages. There are 184 private stake holders that this route serves. Information needs to be gathered, consensus taken and a plan developed that would serve the community, and the users of that area while protecting the habitat of, Fox Creek and Fox River.
- The District in collaboration with CIRI are developing a plan to restore a piece of CIRI land that the Watermelon Trail has encroached upon.
- The Homer District received a Rural Business Development Grant to purchase processing equipment (vegetable washer, slicer, dicer and steel burr mill) to assist with the harvest of Rhodiola.
- The Homer District received an \$8,000.00 IPP grant for a proposal for follow up surveys at Bradley Lake and continuation of work at Port Graham and Nanwalak.
- The District is currently developing a proposal to develop a school based market garden that can be used for agriculture vocational training and they are expanding the School yard habitat project at McNeil Canyon School and are seeking projects that address fish passage related issues.
- The district continues to conduct the annual snow survey.
- The office continues to help applicants for the high tunnel program, and help with off site wet lands delineation.
- With spring approaching the Homer district will process soil samples that are dropped of at the office. Assisting local growers in acquiring information on nutrient recommendations for their areas of cultivation.

Board member Karl – Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District:

- Stated that tree sales will be held in April.
- The District is working on the invasive weeds problems with grant money from USDA, State and Fairbanks North Star Borough.
- The District has hired three new employees to assist with soil testing and sampling.
- Stated the Fairbanks Farm Bureau meeting will be held on April 9, 2016.

- The first ever Alaska Grown Dinner reception was held at the Governor's mansion on February 10, 2016.
- The Governor is buying Alaska grown food for his family.
- He stated that Arthur is the poster child of Agriculture. He was not in favor of the appointment for Director for the Division of Agriculture because we will lose a good farmer.
- He has planted tomatoes that have grown 6 foot tall in 30 days in high tunnels with LED lighting on the walls that have produced tons of fruit. He is putting in four more high tunnels.
- The State needs to stay focused because before there was oil there was an income tax, school tax and sales tax and now we have done away with logging.
- He stated that our Forest is agriculture and he can't understand why we don't put more effort into the forest industry which could produce more jobs and revenue for the State. The State puts all their efforts into the oil industry. It is not too late for the State to start tapping our forests.
- Remember the biggest agriculture crops we have are trees.
- He stated "when the oil stops flowing the trees will still be growing".

AACD President Todd Pettit:

- Stated that the AACD is a non-profit operation and are struggling to function without funding.
- Dee Pond, Chief Administrations Officer has been in discussions with Senator Murkowski's office to find funding sources to help fight Elodea.
- The next AACD meeting will be held on April 20-21, 2016 in Anchorage and invited the Board to attend.
- He asked if the Board could provide support to the legislature for funding.

F. NEW/OLD BUSINESS

AACD Chief Administration Officer Dee Pond:

- Asked if she could make changes to the NRCDB District Operations Manual.
- She stated that the annual report and certified financial reports would still need to be submitted. Semi annual reports should be removed.
- She will ask the Districts of their input on changes and offered to make the changes to the manual.

The NRCDB approved for Dee Pond to make revisions and submit them at the next Board meeting.

G. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Deputy Commissioner Fogels suggested that the Board invite Director of Forestry, Chris Maisch to the next NRCDB meeting for timber discussions.

Board member Woodbury stated an education trust is another opportunity to get Tongass timber lands to create another trust to produce jobs and revenue for the State.

Director Keyes stated he has been following Prop 90 dealing from the Alaska Board of Game that would require all goats and sheep owners to have a permit. Erik Johnson from the Division has been taking the lead on this issue. He sent a comment letter to the Alaska Board of Game. He will send the Board a copy of that letter.

Board member Thompson asked about why the Department of Environmental Conservation stated land owners can't spray on land. This issue will be brought up at the AACD spring meeting and Board member Jones will keep Board member Thompson informed.

H. SET NEXT MEETING & AGENDA ITEMS

The next meeting will be scheduled in June 2016 date to be determined. An agenda item will be to invite Director of Forestry Chris Maisch.

I. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.