

MINUTES**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development
House Committee on Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development
Meeting Jointly****Thursday, September 17, 2020****1:30 PM****Room A, MAC, Little Rock, Arkansas**

Committee Members Present: Senators John Cooper, Chair; Matthew Pitsch, and David Wallace; Representatives Dan Douglas, Chair; David Hillman, Vice Chair; Rick Beck, Stan Berry, Ken Bragg, Harlan Breaux, Les Eaves, Vivian Flowers, Jack Fortner, Steve Hollowell, Joe Jett, Ron McNair, Dan Sullivan, and Carlton Wing

Other Members Present: Senators Alan Clark, Lance Eads, Trent Garner, Kim Hammer, Bart Hester, Gary Stubblefield; Representatives Bruce Cozart, Jim Dotson, Brian Evans, David Fielding, Jimmy Gazaway, Lee Johnson, Jack Ladyman, Fredrick Love, Tippi McCullough, Reginald Murdock, Marcus E. Richmond, Johnny Rye, Brandt Smith, Dwight Tosh, and DeAnn Vaught

Representative Douglas called the meeting to order.

Consideration to Approve Meeting Minutes of August 17, 2020 [Exhibit C]

Without objection, the Minutes of the August 17, 2020, meeting were approved.

Update Regarding Feral Hogs

Wes Ward, Secretary, Department of Agriculture and J.P. Fairhead, Feral Hog Coordinator, Department of Agriculture, provided an update regarding the feral hog situation in Arkansas. The Feral Hog Eradication Task Force was formed during the 2017 Legislative Session by Act 1010. The task force expired a year later, but still exists to date. The task force completed their report and submitted a series of recommendations to the legislature prior to the 2019 Legislative Session. These included, but were not limited to: clarifying the definition of feral hogs, increased penalties on transporting feral hogs, the implementation of an aerial gunning permit through the Livestock and Poultry Commission, and broadening of authorities for law enforcement. The federal Farm Bill of 2018 created a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pilot program that enabled the department to submit a grant proposal on behalf of the state of Arkansas, which resulted in the awarding of \$3.4 million in funds. The initial counties involved in the program are Arkansas, Ashley, Drew, Hempstead, Howard, Sevier, Baxter, Izard, Marion, Logan, Sebastian, and Yell. The grant funds were used to hire ten conservation district technicians and to purchase equipment needed for the projects. The project also includes an educational outreach component, as well as a damage assessment survey. The current focus of the program is equipment procurement and training for the technicians. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced additional funding to the 2018 Farm Bill. The department applied for supplemental funding to expand the program into Boone, Fulton, Searcy, Polk, Scott, Pike, Clark, Nevada, Desha, and Chicot counties. The Livestock and Poultry Commission issued 27 aerial gunning permits which resulted in the removal of 850 feral hogs. Efforts are being made to optimize the

aerial gunning permit application process. The Feral Hog Handbook was finalized and includes extensive feral hog control resources and information.

Follow-Up Regarding Dicamba Report [Exhibit E2a]

Wes Ward, Secretary, Department of Agriculture, and Scott Bray, Director, Plant Industries Division, Department of Agriculture, provided an update on dicamba concerns. The State Plant Board has received 487 case files associated with pesticide enforcement. Of these, 215 are alleged dicamba, and 74 of them were generated from call-ins by the Audubon Society. In 2019, there were 462 cases, of which 210 were alleged dicamba and 12 were called in by the Audubon Society. There have been 65 cases issued with settlement proposals, which amount to \$1.8 million.

Dr. Dan Scheiman, Bird Conservation Director, Audubon Society, provided a report on dicamba related symptomology found in native flora throughout the Audubon Society's study in Eastern Arkansas. Research conducted by the University of Arkansas shows that the current dicamba formulations are volatile. The product can move off target in all directions, damaging 1.5 times more acres than are treated. Research shows that high temperatures and humidity levels dramatically increase volatility and exacerbate collateral damage. Dr. Scheiman stated that his findings indicate that the use of dicamba herbicide endanger not only native plants, but also native birds by damaging their habitat and the plants they feed on.

Discussion of Water Quality Issues in Northwest Arkansas [Exhibits F1, F2]

Dr. Nicole Hardiman, Executive Director, Illinois River Watershed Partnership, provided a report on streambank erosion in the Illinois River. Streambank erosion occurs because of loss of wetlands, straightening or trenching, loss of riparian forests, and urbanization. The area is estimated to lose 40 acres of productive land every year due to erosion. Along with this, erosion presents a safety hazard to people and livestock, threatens infrastructure, and causes sediment and nutrient loading, which is expensive to treat, and negatively impacts aquatic wildlife. The Illinois River Watershed Partnership offers one-on-one consultations, custom conservation plans, and serves as a liaison between landowners and organizations offering financial assistance. The organization hosts free school-year field trips to Illinois River Watershed Partnership's Watershed Sanctuary, mobile learning labs, and provides water quality focused, STEM-based online curriculum.

Dr. Bob Blanz, Associate Director of Water Quality, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), Bryan Leamons, Senior Operations Manager/Water Permits, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, ADEQ, and Michael Grappé, Chief Program Officer, Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, provided an overview of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit Programs. The three types of permit programs discussed were the Construction Stormwater General Permit (CGP), the Stormwater Associated with Industrial Activity General Permit (IGP), and the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4). The CGP authorizes stormwater discharges from large and small construction activities that disturb one or more acres. The IGP authorizes stormwater discharges from regulated industrial facilities. MS4 is a system of conveyances that is not a sewage system and typically owned by governmental entities unless designated by the state. Dr. Blanz also provided an update on the pending lawsuit regarding the Illinois River.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.