

MINUTES

HOUSE & SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

June 14, 2012

The House and Senate Interim Committees on Agriculture, Forestry and Economic Development met on Thursday, June 14, 2012, Room B – MAC, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Committee members present: Representatives Jerry Brown, Chair; John Burris, Vice Chair; Senators Gene Jeffress, Chair; Stephanie Flowers, Vice Chair; Representatives Charlie Collins, Robert Dale, John Charles Edwards, Lane Jean, Greg Leding, Homer Lenderman, Uvalde Lindsey, Frederick Love, Walls McCrary, Stephen Meeks, Mike Patterson, Mark Perry, James Ratliff, Matthew Shepherd, and Garry Smith; Senators Mike Fletcher, Randy Laverty, and Mary Anne Salmon.

Non-voting members present: Representatives Lori Benedict, Josh Johnston, Sheilla Lampkin, and Bruce Westerman.

Other legislators present: Representatives Nate Bell, Mark Biviano, Linda Collins-Smith, Billy Gaskill, Jeremy Gillam, Clark Hall, Justin Harris, Buddy Lovell, James McLean, Bobby Pierce, Tommy Thompson, John Vines, and Butch Wilkins; Senators Jonathan Dismang, Bill Pritchard, and Larry Teague.

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order.

Consideration to Approve Minutes from the February 6, 2012 Meeting (Exhibit B)

Without objection, the minutes from the February 6, 2012, meeting were approved.

Consideration to Adopt for Interim Study (Exhibit C)

Interim Study Proposal 2011-204 “To Study the State’s Rights, Responsibilities, and Options with respect to the Natural Resources that may be obtained from the beds of the navigable waters of the state and from tax-delinquent lands.” Representative John C. Edwards, sponsor, said while searching for funding for Arkansas’s two veteran’s homes, he received a report by the Office of the Land Commissioner showing the office has jurisdiction over the beds of the navigable waters of the state and the natural resources that may be obtained from the beds. He contacted the office and was told the office has never received any lease payments or royalties from these resources. Representative Edwards asked the committees to adopt ISP 2011-204 in order to study the state’s rights and responsibilities regarding natural resources contained in the beds.

After much discussion, Chairman Brown reminded members that ISP 2011-204 is being considered for adoption only, and if adopted, will be studied further by the Committees.

Upon motion by Representative Lenderman, and second by Representative Patterson, ISP 2011-204 was adopted.

Review of Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality Proposed Changes to Rules and Regulations No. 15 (Pollution Control and Ecology Commission) (Exhibits D.1 & D.2)

Ryan Benefield, Deputy Director; and Jim Stevens, Chief of Mining Division, briefed the Committees on the proposed changes to Rules and Regulations No. 15.

Chairman Brown declared the Proposed Changes to Rules and Regulations No. 15 stand reviewed.

Presentation on the Growing Production of Peanut Farming in Arkansas

Greg Gill, Peanut Grower, Lawrence County, said he farms 1600 acres of peanuts and has a contract with Birdsong Peanuts. Currently there are approximately 18-20,000 acres of peanuts planted in the state. Birdsong Peanuts is spending \$10 million to build a buying facility in Lawrence County, which along with Randolph County, has the largest number of peanut acreage.

Mark Cochran, Vice President, University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture, said the Division has assisted peanut farmers with weed and disease control over the past two years and also conducted fertilizer and seed trials. He expects peanut farming to expand into other counties such as Clay, Crittenden, Greene, Jackson, Monroe, and Phillips, and said the Division will be available to assist them.

Chris Henson, Buying Point Manager, Birdsong Peanuts, said his company will open the buying facility in September and hopes to contract with area peanut farmers. Currently, farmers are taking their peanuts to Mississippi to be processed.

With no further business, the committees adjourned at 10:45 a.m. and toured the Skippy Peanut Butter Plant in Little Rock.