**MINUTES**

**UTAH CONSERVATION COMMISSION (UCC) MEETING**

January 25, 2024

Taylorsville, Utah

**Kelly Pehrson,** *acting for Craig Buttars,**Commissioner, Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF), UCC Chair*

Appointed Conservation District (CD) Supervisors

UCC Voting Members:

**Terry Spackman,** *Zone 1*

**Todd Arbon,** *Zone 2* via video

**Kim Evans,** *Zone 3*

**Scott Mower,** *Zone 4*

**Sam Larson,** *Zone 5*

**Bryan Smith,** *Zone 6*

**Bill Butcher,** *Zone 7* via video

Standing UCC Voting Members:

**Jerry Caldwell,** *Utah Weed Supervisor Association President* via video

**Dr. Ken White,** *Director, Utah State University Extension (USU)*

**Joel Ferry,** *Utah Department of Natural Resources Director (DNR)* via video

Conservation Commission Member (absent)

**John MacKey**,*Water Quality Division Director, Utah Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)*

Conservation Partners Representatives:

**Kristy Davis,** *Utah Association of Conservation Districts (UACD)*

**Michael Larson,** *Utah Association of Conservation Districts (UACD)* via video

Conservation Partners Representatives: *con’t*

**Stuart Bowler,** *Utah Association of Conservation Districts (UACD)*

**Emily Fife,** *Natural Resource Conservation Service*

Department of Agriculture and Food:

**Jim Bowcutt,** *Director, Division of Conservation*

**Sherie Edginton,** *Executive Assistant*

**Jace Farnsworth,** *Resource Coordinator*

**Tracy Balch,** *Resource Coordinator* via video

**Tyce Palmer,** *Resource Coordinator*

**Darrell Gillman,** *Resource Coordinator* via video

**Ryan Jones,** *Resource Coordinator* via video

**Tony Richards,** *Soil Health Program Manager*

**David Little,** *Soil Health Planner*

**Amy Wengren,** *ARDL Loan Specialist*

**Sean Trease,** *ARDL Loan Specialist*

**Shelly Rentmeister,** *ARDL Financial Analyst* via video

**Katie Slebodnik** *AgVIP Program Manager*

**Hannah Freeze,** *Water Optimization Program Manager*

**Brian Christensen,** *Water Optimization Assistant Manager*

**Liz Hamilton,** *Water Optimization Assistant Manager*

**Jeremy Christensen,** *Land Conservation Program Manager*

**Jay Olsen,** *County Land Conservation Manager* via video

**Nicole Hannah,** *Attorney’s Generals Office* via video

**SUMMARY OF COMMISSION ACTION**

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**UCC MEETING – CALL TO ORDER**

Utah Conservation Commission Chair Kelly Pehrson called the meeting to order at 1:01 PM.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Chairman Buttars indicated meeting minutes for the October 11, 2023 UCC Meeting, November 2, 2023 ARDL Loan Subcommittee, November 27, 2023 UCC Video Meeting, were distributed electronically. **A motion was made by Mr. Todd Arbon to approve** **Meeting Minutes for** **the** **October 11, 2023 UCC Meeting, November 2, 2023 ARDL Loan Subcommittee, November 27, 2023 UCC Video Meeting, seconded by Mr. Sam Larson. The motion carried unanimously.**

**ARDL REPORT AND LOAN APPROVAL**

Ms. Amy Wengren, ARDL Financial Analyst, reported on the ARDL program status as of December 2023.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Month End Balance Cash Account | $17,985,945.24 |
| Applications in Process | $7,505,090 |
| Undisbursed Loans Funds | $3,864,114.01 |
| **Net Cash Position** | **$10,001,693.41** |
| Total Active Loans | 226 |
| Loans Past Due 61+ Days | 0 |
| New Applications this Month | 6 |
| Loan Payoffs | 6 |
| 3 Month Projected Payments | $396,213.20 |
| Principal Repayments | $371,089.17 |
| Interest Payments | $73,031.72 |
| Penalty Payments | $48.40 |
| **Total Payments Received** | **$444,169,29** |
| New Loans Approved | 2 |
| Total $ of New Loans | $925,000 |
| Average New Loan Size | $462,500 |

Ms. Wengren, reported on the EDR Program status as of December 2023.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Program Beginning Balance | $5,000,000 |
| Administrative Fee Deduction | $250,000 |
| **Total** | **$4,750,000** |
| Payments made for EDRL | $99,790.13 |
| Funds Disbursed for Program | $5,409,604 |
| Total Active Loans | 70 |
| Loans Past Due 61+ Days | 1 |
| 3 Month Projected Payments | $420,052.45 |
| Principle Payments | $99,790.13 |

**ARDL LOAN APPROVAL**

Ms. Wengren, reported on the loans:

Loan #1, location is Zone 5. Exception: Policy states that chattel loans limit <$52,000, the loan request is at $64,242 and higher than policy amount. The new loan amount is $64,242, existing loan amount is $98,031.21 equaling $162,273.21 to replace an irrigation pivot system. **A motion was made by Mr. Todd Arbon to approve Loan #1, seconded by Mr. Sam Larson. The motion carried unanimously.**

Loan #2, location is Zone 6. The loan amount is $209,167 to install one large pivot and three smaller pivots. **A motion was made by Mr. Kim Evans to approve Loan #2, seconded by Mr. Sam Larson. The motion carried unanimously.**

Loan #3, location is Zone 4. The loan amount is $151,500 to install two automated gates, two pivots, an automated meter and one irrigation pone. **A motion was made by Mr. Kim Evans to approve Loan #3, seconded by Mr. Sam Larson. The motion carried unanimously.**

Loan #4, location is Zone 4. The loan amount is $70,700 to cover a cost over run to purchase and install a new well panel, motor, column, tube shaft and bowls for a new well. **A motion was made by Mr. Todd Arbon to approve Loan #4, seconded by Mr. Bryan Smith. The motion carried unanimously.**

Loan #5, location is Zone 5. The loan amount is $161,600 ($160,000 + $1,600 admin fee) for a hay barn. **A motion was made by Mr. Sam Larson to approve Loan #5, seconded by Dr. Ken White. The motion carried unanimously.**

Loan #6, location is Zone 5. The loan amount is $454,500 ($450,000 + $4,500 admin fee) for a new well, piping a ditch and pivots. **A motion was made by Mr. Sam Larson to approve Loan #6, seconded by Mr. Bryan Smith, the motion carried unanimously.**

**WATER OPTIMIZATION UDATE**

Ms. Hannah Freeze, Water Optimization Program Manager, reported the application period is open and will close January 31, 2024. So far, they have received $16,655,000 in requests with 149 applications submitted and 263 applications pending. Most of the applications received are for on farm projects. Every applicant has to have a consultation with the Division of Water Rights. March 1, the Water Optimization Committee will meet to rank applications. Soon after there will be a UCC meeting to approve the awarded grants. The staff would like to get new grants in place this spring so work can begin prior to irrigation season starting. They anticipate awarding $30 mill in funding, which is the remaining ARPA funds.

She introduced Brian Christensen and Liz Hamilton that are now the assistant program managers.

**SET CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISOR APPOINTMENT DATES**

Mr. Jim Bowcutt, Conservation Division Director, reported that Conservation District Supervisors are appointed biannually by the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Food. On February 20 all CD nominating committee ranking letter and commitment to serve forms will be sent out to the members of each ranking committee. April 8, nominations close all rankings are due into the UCC office. April 29, the compiled list of nominations will be delivered to the Commissioner. May 13, the Commissioner will finalize appointments. May 20, the candidates that have been appointed are notified. At the next CD meeting after May 20 the appointees are sworn in by the CD chair or designee. July 1, the newly appointed CD Supervisors’ terms begin. **A motion was made by Mr. Scott Mower to approve the appointment dates, seconded by Mr. Kim Evans. The motion carried unanimously.**

There are two UCC members whose terms are expiring in May, Kim Evans and Scott Mower. Scott has served two terms so there needs to be a new member appointed. Kim has served one term can serve another them.

**CONSERVATION DISTRICT CERTIFICATIN CHANGES**

Mr. Bowcutt reported there are two Conservation Districts that are applying for federal grants and must apply for a UEI number, these are Blacksmith Fork CD and Northern Utah CD. Their recertification needs to be approved. **A motion was made by Mr. Terry Spackman to approve the recertification of the Blacksmith Fork and Northern Utah CDs, seconded by Mr. Sam Larson. The motion carried unanimously.**

**SOIL HEALTH and AGVIP PROGRAM**

Ms. Katie Slebodnik, AgVIP Program Manager, reported there are 24 new grants awarded totaling $399,456 and adding an additional 10,563 acres enrolled in the program. There are 55 new applications totaling $1.2 million that will be awarded in January. There is $1 million for AgVIP included in the Governor’s budget this legislative session, which she is hoping to use to fund a pilot program to expand AgVIP to include additional conservation practices.

Mr. Tony Richards reported on the pilot program they wish to start. It is called STAR (Saving Tomorrow’s Agriculture Resources). It is a voluntary, incentive-based program that focuses on BMPs for soil and water quality. It is driven by a quantitative individual field evaluation tool that scores on a 1 through 5-star scale. The producer completes a survey on-line for each field.

Ms. Slebodnik reported that some of the AgVIP grantees are completing their grants and have said they are interested in continuing with the program. This could be the STAR program, which would help producers refine management practices and quantify conservation efforts. This will be an incentive-based program.

Mr. Richards reported the Soil Health in the West Conference and Workshops will be held February 6 through 8 in St. George.

**POLLINATOR PROGRAM**

Mr. Bowcutt handed out some education material on pollinator habitat. The application period will start earlier this year to get plants growing earlier so they are bigger. He hopes that there will be a bill issued to eliminate the sunset date and hopefully have a full-time employee to run the program.

**LERAY MCALLISTER UPDATE.**

Mr. Jeremy Christensen, Land Conservation Program Manager, reported the LeRay McAllister fund is to help producers still farm and ranch. The program is voluntary, it is landowner initiated and directed. The land must remain in agriculture, but the day to day management is up to the landowner. It is able to adapt to changing environmental or market conditions. The easement can be sold, mortgaged and leased. The easement is perpetual and binding for all future owners. It qualifies for federal tax incentives. There must be a 25-75% match. In Fiscal years 23/24 $2,275,058 in grants was awarded on six total projects. There is 2,047 new acres of working farm and ranch lands preserved. This program has helped leverage additional funds of $17.3 million. There is a $50-100 million immediate need for non-federal matching funds and 250,000 acres awaiting funding. There was a $5 million building block added to the Governors budget for the LeRay McAllister fund.

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

Chairman Pehrson shared a video on the Food Security Grant Program.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Scott Mower.**

**The meeting adjourned at 2:50 PM.**