

MINUTES
MORTON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
AUGUST 2, 2007

Bob called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. with open doors. The meeting was held at the Morton County Conservation Office.

The purpose of this meeting was to meet with Harold Klaege about keeping the local NRCS office open vs. consolidating with the Stevens County office.

Present were: Bob Boaldin, Chairman; Allen Tucker, Vice-Chairman; Ron DeGarmo, Commissioner; Mary Gilmore, County Clerk; Vienna Lee, Economic Development Director; Randy Edelman; Troy Coen; Liz Easterwood; George Atwood; Samantha Scott, representing Tri-State News; Dan Myerhoff; Harold Klaege; Tim Watson; Kent Elkins; Rick Claassen.

Troy Coen mentioned that there are landlords who are talking about taking out their CRP; you can do this right now with no penalty. Troy also stated that farmers come to town to do their business as they have the time and do not always appreciate someone coming to their house to take care of their business, especially if they are in the middle of farming. Troy said that Stevens County could care less about the farmers in Morton County and he can't see any cost savings by consolidating and having Morton County farmers drive to Stevens County. Also, some younger farmers have started utilizing some of the newer NRCS programs but will, no doubt, drop out of the programs because there will be no one available to help them.

Vienna Lee showed Mr. Klaege some pictures of the dust bowl days – pre-CRP days. She also had pictures of the National Grasslands. Vienna mentioned that NRCS has helped preserve the National Grasslands (a large portion of Morton County is Grasslands.)

Mr. Klaege stated he has a budget and the funds continue to diminish. He questions how he can maintain the staff needed for the NRCS programs while keeping the costs down and continue to serve the consumers. Mr. Klaege said he plans to close all one-person offices; he considers Morton County's office a one-person office. The reduction in offices is based on funding and staffing. It may also be necessary, in the future, to close additional offices, depending on what funding is available. Tim Watson corrected Mr. Klaege and stated that the Morton County office is actually a one and one-half person office. Mr. Klaege said that Morton County only has 18 "Equip" contracts, while Stevens County has over 200 contracts and Marysville has over 400 contracts.

Mr. Klaege was not open to the idea of Morton County helping with some of the expenses in an effort to keep the Morton County office open. He did say, however, that if the Morton County office refuses to consolidate, NRCS could consider writing an agreement that would permit the office to continue to using a computer, a printer, and

copier, until they no longer worked. It would then be up to the local office to purchase any needed new equipment. Morton County would have to provide funds for their own rent and utility expenses, computer access and home line, as well as a desk, and internet. The District Manager would also have to have access to a desk and the computer.

Bob Boaldin stated that it would appear that Mr. Klaege has lost sight of the customer and has already chosen where he will put his budget money. Bob further stated that Morton County has had to cut jobs but still has managed to provide the needed services of the people.

Mr. Klaege said, again, that after closing nine offices, it may become necessary to consolidate more offices.

Bob said that we all need to partner and work together to help the “customers” of Morton County. It appears that Mr. Klaege will not see things our way, and we do not view the consolidation as he does.

Bob thanked Mr. Klaege and Don for coming to Morton County to visit with everyone. Mr. Klaege said his decision to meet in Morton County was the result of a letter from Morton County to Jerry Moran. This letter was shared with Mr. Klaege and Mr. Klaege was encouraged to come to Morton County for this meeting.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.