

# **CLASS ROLL CALL of the STATES**

2005 CLASS Conference

*The CLASS Roll Call is a regular conference agenda item adopted from the Western States Land Commissioner's Association (WSLCA) Conferences. The Roll Call of the States is a reporting and sharing opportunity for each participating state to update the others on school trust land activity in their state. The order of the roll call is different each time according to an undisclosed state ranking. Delegates have the opportunity to guess the order of the roll call and a prize is awarded to the person who guesses the order first.*

*At the 2005 CLASS Conference, the states were asked to organize the reports by reporting something new, something positive and a challenge to overcome.*

## **Utah - Natalie Gordon, PTA Trust Lands Commissioner**

The Utah delegation was introduced and Natalie noted that the CLASS ladies are part of the Utah delegation. New to Utah trust lands is Natalie who was recently elected by the PTA membership as the first Trust Lands Commissioner, a newly created state board position to create some depth of knowledge and ongoing trust lands training for PTA members in Utah. The permanent fund has grown from \$18 million in 1983 to over half a billion in the past year. In recent years the money earned on the fund has been distributed to each public school in the state where school community councils decide how to improve academic learning at their school with the annual dividend through the School LAND Trust Program. Two years ago the legislature placed a cap on revenue to the Program. School Community Councils across the state along with the education groups worked diligently and one on one with legislators to remove it. In the end a compromise was reached that placed the cap at 2% of the annual state appropriation to schools. Of course, as the budget increases so will the value of the 2%. Utah is working to complete an exchange of scenic and recreational lands along the Colorado River corridor for mineral rich lands in the north eastern part of the state. Education beneficiaries are working to prevent attempts to use trust distributions to supplant rather than enhance education. In the upcoming session a bill will be introduced allowing the state treasurer greater flexibility in the investment of the Permanent State School Fund for improved returns.

## **Washington – Quent Goodrich, Washington State School Directors' Association**

Quent began by introducing the WA delegation who had been very involved with school trust lands issues over the past year. Quent represented the beneficiaries on a task force to review and make recommendations for a ten-year plan for a Sustainable Forest Harvest in Washington. Last fall, the Department of Natural Resources Board approved the plan. They are now preparing a Sustainable Forest Policy to implement the new plan. Beneficiaries also participated on an independent review committee composed of legislators and businessmen from the timber industry who recommended increasing the management fee from 25% to 30% to cover the expenses of a larger staff as part of the newly adopted ten year plan. The legislature did not approve the increase. The school directors and the State Board of Education testified in support of the increase and will continue to work towards approval of the increase.

## **California - Kathryn Steinberg, Education Vice President for California PTA**

California PTA participated as "first-timers" in this CLASS Conference. Upon returning home the PTA will begin to gather information and meet with the land commissioners to determine the direction and involvement California PTA will have with school trust lands. California has over six million students and evidently few remaining lands and no permanent fund. The annual revenue goes to the State Teachers Retirement Fund that has a fifty million dollar corpus. California is owed the largest remaining acreage of in-lieu lands promised to the schools since statehood.

## **Oregon – Beth Nead, Oregon PTA President**

Beth introduced the Oregon delegation who have worked together on trust lands issues in the past few years. They have developed a great working relationship with Ann Hanus and the land office.

Diana Oberbarnscheidt, a Past President of Oregon PTA sits on an advisory committee to the Land Board and has worked to educate both the PTA membership and the Land Board about the school trusts and the important relationship of the board and beneficiaries. The PTA legislative team has attended hearings relating to the school trust lands and funds, and has worked to prevent another raid on the permanent fund. They continue to educate and involve the local members, have written editorials and plan to organize a coalition similar to those in other states.

#### **Idaho – Sherrie Feist, Idaho PTA**

Sherrie attended the CLASS Conference for the first time last year in Oregon where goals for the coming year were set. The first goal was to form a coalition. That group met four times over the year and invited experts on the trust in Idaho including a former state controller, the land commissioner, and manager of the endowment fund to educate them. Over the coming year the group plans to expand the coalition and become more active in the legislative process. Working towards the second goal, Idaho PTA has worked to educate their members through an ongoing series about trust lands in the state newsletter. A workshop was provided at the state convention where trust lands were introduced through the PowerPoint presentation prepared by CLASS. A third of the delegates attended the workshop and showed great interest. Idaho PTA also prepared, presented and passed a resolution at the November Convention on School Trust Lands. The Idaho Education Association (IEA) invited a professor to discuss the history of Idaho trust lands with them. Jim Shackelford, Executive Director of IEA has developed a working relationship with Winston Wiggins, the land director and interacted with him regularly during the legislative session assisting each other in legislative activity.

#### **Wyoming – Marguerite Herman**

The beneficiaries worked with the land office to support two important trust land bills in the recent legislative session. It was interesting to hear the testimony on the bills and recognize that there are stakeholders in Wyoming who think they are beneficiaries because they have been users of the land for so long. The agricultural community who has leased the land, environmental groups who want the land set aside for preservation and ATV users who are degrading the asset all view the land asset as something they have “ownership” in. The first bill appropriated funds to repair, sign, and gate the lands to preserve the school land asset. In the second bill the legislature authorized a task force to consider the best asset management of the trust. Lynn Boomgarden spent considerable effort to allay the fears of the people who were afraid of such an undertaking. The bill passed and the task force includes fifteen members, two of which are beneficiaries and Marguerite has been appointed to fill one of the seats. The other members represent mining, oil and gas, and financial expertise and an additional five seats are legislators. The work of the task force begins in September. In addition to the legislative session the beneficiaries have worked with their organizations to increase awareness of school trust lands. The PTA conducted a survey through email connecting the importance of student health and the possibility of replacing revenue from junk food vending machines with the increasing distribution from the trust. Local schools build that revenue into school budgets that continues to encourage unhealthy eating.

#### **North Dakota – Helane Robson**

As a first timer Helane did not have a report from the state but is looking forward to discussing the issue with the North Dakota PTA Board and setting some goals for the 2006 Conference report.

#### **New Mexico – Renate Witte and Debbie Morgan**

The land office has been working to increase revenue to the trust from thinning and cutting in forested areas that has initially been successful. The land office and beneficiaries worked with the legislature to get an appropriation to raise awareness of trust lands to include a request that they not be used as public dumping grounds. The campaign will be called “Don’t Trash the Trust” and will be broadcast over radio stations. The Sonoran Institute is investigating two development projects on New Mexico trust lands as part of a research project. The land office has also been working to protect prairie

chicken habitat to prevent them from being listed resulting in some trust lands being withdrawn to accomplish that goal.

The New Mexico PTA has a good working relationship with Commissioner Lyons. He is working hard and is a responsible trustee. Even with a good year financial year from trust revenues due to rising oil and gas prices, the commissioner is vigilant about collecting outstanding debt owed. The PTA received a grant from the land office to do an education piece about school trust lands. Every school child will receive a take home postcard about the school lands. The outreach will begin with PTA schools and expand in upcoming years.

#### **Wisconsin – Roxanne Starks, Legislative Liaison for Wisconsin PTA**

This is the first year Wisconsin has been represented at the CLASS Conference. Roxanne enjoyed meeting with Doug LaFollette and they have agreed to meet again upon returning home. The Wisconsin trust has 80,000 acres remaining with the permanent fund being used to make loans to schools and municipalities. The interest earned on the permanent fund goes to fund school libraries. The easy goals will be to meet with the land commissioner quarterly, to educate the PTA directors and legislative conference participants about the trust, and educate schools through newsletters. The harder goals will be to find out about the criteria for loans and why municipalities are able to access the funds and then to educate legislators and administrators about school trust lands.

#### **Oklahoma – Terri Silver Oklahoma PTA Vice President, and Oklahoma City Schools Board Member**

Cathy Post was unable to attend the 2005 CLASS Conference and sends her greetings. The new news is a proposed development in a depressed area. The Lake Texoma project is also moving forward. The good news is that the land board was going months between meetings but the PTA has worked with the members and since February regular meetings have been held. PTA attends the land board meetings consistently and the board is getting used to their presence and has begun requesting their input. Revenues are up due to the increase in oil and gas prices. The challenge this year has been to shepherd a proposed constitutional change to allow new permanent fund investment options along with changing the distribution to a rolling average. The challenge is to craft an amendment that would prevent a future legislature from making statutory changes that could threaten the integrity of the trust corpus.

#### **Alaska – Laurel Lloyd, Vice President of Legislative Affairs**

Laurel explained that this was her first time to attend the CLASS conference and the third conference that Alaska PTA has participated in. The primary goal of the PTA over the last couple of years has been to educate the PTA Board and membership. The PTA is now beginning to look for opportunities to form alliances. Alaska PTA has launched a new website page dedicated to school trust lands and have adopted a resolution they are willing to share with other states. In addition the PTA Board has formed a standing committee, and has dedicated resources to pursue the issue as a priority. The PTA has learned that past presidents understand the history of when the school lands in Alaska were combined with other lands ignoring the requirement to maintain the integrity of the trust. A university professor who has followed the issue and kept records is interested in the involvement of the PTA and is collaborating with them. The education process has begun with legislators and though they have never heard of the school trust, there is interest.

#### **Arizona – Janice Palmer, Director of Governmental Relations, Arizona School Boards Association**

Mike Smith sends his best and reports that his next contract will include a clause about participation at the conference next year. The asset in Arizona is land in the path of development which is sold at periodic land auctions. At every auction, there is a seating area for the beneficiaries and they are introduced to those participating as a reminder that the purchases of land are to support Arizona schools. There is a lot of publicity surrounding the auctions. The Arizona School Boards Association includes a commissioner's corner in the quarterly newsletter updating parents about land office progress. After every auction the Association sends a letter thanking the winning bidder for supporting education. It has helped immensely to build alliances with developers. The challenge in

Arizona resulted when the coalition working toward trust land reform splintered and passing any legislation became politically impossible. A small piece of the coalition have splintered and are collecting signatures on an initiative that would accomplish the pieces of the reform they want and that will buy enough support to pass. Most beneficiary groups have not formally adopted a position on the initiative.

**Colorado – Pamela Suckla, Colorado State Board of Education**

The Colorado delegation, as the conference host state, welcomed the CLASS participants. Holding the conference at home facilitated many Colorado delegates the opportunity to participate. The focused effort over the past several years for the Colorado beneficiaries has been to grow the permanent fund resulting in increased distributions to schools over time. The work is beginning to pay off. Some changes in legislative seats have helped secure support of the budget committee to create an investment fund with a cap. In future years any money above the cap will go to the permanent fund to help it increase. The state treasurer is supporting the plan and wants to correct the permanent fund losses. The new news to report was that Colorado has decided to take all the wildlife and endangered species and adopt them as kids! The good news is the support and guidance from CLASS that has motivated and excited us to break the barriers and make a difference for the school kids. Trying to get information from the land board is the biggest challenge because of a court decision stating the State Board of Education has no official standing. The board will continue to be vigilant and are determined to overcome the roadblock.

**Montana – Jeri Anton, Montana PTA and Roy Andes, MonTrust**

As a second time conference participant, Jeri felt a bit overwhelmed but delighted to participate. The new thing in Montana is continual change with the land board and land office. The land board is made up of five elected officials who make appointments and as those that fill the offices change, so do the appointments. Montana has a new governor and the ripple effect is just beginning. The biggest challenge is that most of the general public don't know what school trust lands are. Many that do understand aren't convinced that the lands can make a difference for Montana schools. One of goals of Montana PTA is to make changes so that they do make a difference. The best way to begin that effort is coming to this conference and "stealing" ideas. In addition Jeri is committed to staying with the issue for three more years to create some continuity and the PTA is looking for opportunities to gather allies.

Roy has long worked to protect the trust in Montana and welcomes the PTA as a player in the school trust arena. Mary Sexton has expressed the desire to include all players at the table and when all have equal seats, all be heard. MonTrust looks forward to working with her. MonTrust has been following grazing rights issues in Montana and continue to monitor legislation impacting the trust.

**South Dakota – Bobbie Wirth, South Dakota PTA President**

Scott and Bobbie Wirth were first time participants and the first representatives to attend the conference from South Dakota. Their first meeting with the land commissioner from South Dakota was interesting though it didn't go as planned. He did express interest in talking to the PTA so the goal and challenge will be to build a relationship with the commissioner. They will also work with the PTA Board to educate them along with the general PTA membership. Scott, who is also a school board member has a good relationship with a newspaper writer and will work with them to help spread the word.



The roll call order, determined from largest to smallest by state, was how many captured school lands remain in federal designations. The last five states were listed as zero either because the land office didn't respond or because the acreage has never been calculated. The issue with captured lands is that it's probably better to exchange the lands for bigger and better lands so the prize was REALLY big boxers!