

County Stands to Lose \$75,000 Annually

Chickasaw SCS Office Curtailed

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NEW HAMPTON — Chickasaw County's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) office has been placed on limited hours by the state office in a move that indicates a conflict between the state office and at least some members of the county commission.

In a terse announcement, the state office said hours at New Hampton would be cut to Monday morning and Wednesday afternoons effective immediately.

The Chickasaw County needs would be served by neighboring county offices under the move, meaning the county stands to lose at least \$75,000 annually in

federal funds.

While the announcement of the change was brief, its motivation was more fully explained in a letter made available this week by Michael K. Kennedy, state representative from New Hampton. The letter written to Kennedy was signed by Fred Cherry, chairman, State Soil Conservation Committee, and Wilson T. Moon, state conservationist, Soil Conservation Service, and gave the department's reason for the action.

'Personal Differences'

Referring to the decision to limit the services of the Chickasaw County office, the letter states, "... As you know, the Department and Service have

for the past several years encountered problems in this particular district and office location. The problems have arisen largely because of personal differences between the commissioners, the state clerk, and Soil Conservation Service personnel ..."

The five-man Chickasaw County Committee has as its members, Neil Kahn and Max Steege of New Hampton, Stan Ellison of Fredericksburg, Orlo Erion of Alta Vista and Ardwin Reicks of Lawler. Steege, Ellison and Reicks were elected commissioners the past June. Kahn said Thursday morning the committee would have a statement later.

The State Department claims an attempt to remedy the situation was made when it agreed to transfer an employee from the local office a year ago, but, it states, "... the situation has worsened."

"The program in the Chickasaw District has deteriorated in the past four or five years and has resolved itself mostly to assisting landowners and operators with tiling problems ..."

Returns Not Adequate

"As a result," the explanation continues, "the Department of Soil Conservation ... and the Soil Conservation Service does not feel adequate returns are being obtained for the funds invested in the Chickasaw District ... Therefore, the Department, members of the Committee, and the Service have agreed that state and federal funds should be withdrawn from the Chickasaw District until such time the commissioners demonstrate a desire to conduct the program in a manner which will be of benefit to all concerned ..."

Explaining that the Assistant Director of the Department, Fred Higginbottom, had visited the Chickasaw District on "several occasions" to seek a solution, the letter continues, "... He (Higginbottom) has informed members of the State Soil Conservation Committee that the problem is compounded by the fact that the interest on the part of other governmental agencies, and many individuals, relative to the Chickasaw District program seems to be rather negative ... This situation does not exist in the other 99 soil conservation districts throughout the State. In fact, these districts are experiencing work loads which are very difficult to service ..."

"We realize the action being taken to correct the problem in the Chickasaw District is drastic; however, there seems to be no other alternative available to us ..."

Contacted this week, Kennedy said he had made a considerable investigation of the problem and had contacted both State Department and local ob-

servers. Kennedy released a letter he had written to Department Director William H. Greiner, in which he stated in part:

'Aware of Conflict'

"... I am fully aware that there is a conflict between Soil Conservation personnel and one or more of the local commissioners ... I am also aware that 'he who controls the purse

strings' has the absolute power to determine policy and its implementation but it does not make me at all happy that your bureau has taken it upon itself to pull both State and Federal funds from the Chickasaw County district.

"It is almost inconceivable to me that the Chickasaw County situation is as unique as you portray it. I have been told, subsequent to your decision, that some four or five years ago the Chickasaw County service office had a heavy workload also but this had dropped off in the past five years. I somewhat doubt that this is totally the fault of the local commissioners ..."

Kennedy said he believes the department has developed an attitude "that nothing can be done" and "this is without just cause." He points to the recent elections in making his point, "... three new commissioners were elected and this action was taken by the State Department before these commissioners were certified or had a chance to take any steps to alleviate the present situation ..."

Raps 'Investigation'

Kennedy and numerous other local observers also make a point of "investigative work" that was done by the department following the elections. "... This (the investigation)," Kennedy states, "was not received very well in the county, and, frankly, it was taken by some people who are members of a particular farm organization as evidence that the Soil Conservation Department is backing members of another group and trying to bring the leadership of the second group into active participation, and possibly dominance, of the Chickasaw County Soil Conservation District.

"If you have done nothing else, the apathy that has been present was cracked by this investigative work and now certain individuals in the county are hopping mad ..."

Kennedy concludes, "... In the final analysis, I believe that this is basically a conflict between two spoiled children who are saying, 'It's my football and if you don't play my way I'm going to take my ball and go home. ...'"