

COMMISSIONS CONTINUE BORDER DISCUSSIONS

By Shawn Ashley
Staff Writer

■(GIT) Just where does the Oklahoma-Texas border lie?

That is the question legislatively-appointed commissions from each state hope to answer. But their efforts nearly hit a road block Friday when the Oklahoma delegation decided to reject its own working draft of a compact between the two states, possibly distancing itself from a major point of agreement between the two groups.

At a meeting in September, the Oklahoma and Texas Red River Boundary commissions reached a tentative agreement that the so-called vegetation line on the south bank of the river would mark the border. Exactly what constituted that line was left to further negotiation, such as that set for Friday.

In a Friday morning meeting of the Oklahoma commission, however, Rep. Howard Cotner, D-Altus, led a charge that resulted in the commission rejecting its working draft of a proposed compact between the two states, a central component of which was the vegetation line theory.

"This whole thing," Cotner said, referring to the working draft, "is based on something we're want to accept on behalf of the State of Oklahoma. I don't agree with that."

Cotner said he disagreed with the concept of relying on the vegetation line as a means of determining the border, largely because it was not permanent and subject, in some cases, to significant movement. Additionally, the retiring state representative said, objections raised earlier in the meeting by the U.S. Department of Interior concern-

ing the impact of such a compact on Native American law made him wonder whether the panel was acting in haste.

Emmitt Rice, with the U.S. Department of the Interior, asked that his agency be given some time to review the proposed compact, noting that proposals which affected the border between Texas and Oklahoma could also affect Indian land. It was preferable that such concerns be addressed now, he said, rather than later, because the compact would require the approval of Congress, which might object if the Secretary of Interior expressed concerns over its impact on Indian issues.

Assistant attorney general Neal Leader defended the working document, saying the neither the state nor the panel would be bound by anything decided Friday.

"We can still do anything we want, even if we adopt this today," he said. "I think we should continue to talk about the issue, even if later we decide to go another way."

Leader's argument, however, was not persuasive enough to sway a majority of the commission's members, and a motion to re-

ject the working draft was approved.

That meant, Leader noted, that Oklahoma would enter a soon-to-follow meeting with the Texas delegation without a working document from which to speak.

That did not sit well with the Texas group when the two panels convened in joint session.

Members of the Texas commission first expressed their frustration with Rice, the Department of Interior and Oklahoma Indian tribes, saying every effort had been made to include them in the discussions at an early point with no apparent success.

"I think this just shows you have been lacking in interest," a member of the Texas panel proclaimed.

The Oklahoma commission's rejection of its working draft of the compact also drew criticism from the chair of the Texas commission.

"By today's vote," Bill Abney, chairman of the Texas commission said, "you are telling us that you are unable to respond to what we gave you six weeks ago."

Abney stressed that it was his commission's position that use of the vegetation line as the dividing point between the states "was the right decision and the only decision that is going to work for the taxpayers of the Red River Basin."

Specifically, he said, such a line would be easily identified by all parties concerned along the river.

"I don't want to spend Texas' money to bring people up here to be told we're not ready to talk about it," Abney added.

When it appeared the day's negotiations were on the verge of ending because of the Oklahoma commission's decision, Leader asked state commission chairman Sen. Robert Kerr, D-Altus, whether it might be possible to question the Texas delegation about some recently suggested changes. Because the Oklahoma commission had lost its quorum and could no longer conduct formal business, Kerr agreed.

While no formal agreement was reached between the two parties, specific language issues, particularly related to the definition of the vegetation line were discussed. Each side is to consider the proposed changes for discussion and possible acceptance a future joint meeting of the commissions.

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whose names did not appear on voter registration rolls were allowed to vote utilizing challenged voter affidavits.

In his Lincoln County allegation, Wedel charges that three voters registered in other counties were allowed to cast their ballots in Lincoln County. The allegation regarding the challenged voter affidavit was not raised by Wedel in Lincoln County.

Additionally, Wedel alleges that electioneering on behalf of his opponent took place while the election was in progress within 300 feet of a Payne County ballot box.

In a separate petition, Wedel also asked that the absentee ballots from seven Logan County precincts be recounted.

The challenges will be heard by judges in the respective district courts covering the counties in which the irregularities are alleged to have occurred.

According to a publication prepared by the State Election Board, "voting by persons who were not registered in a number that exceeded the margin between the two candidates involved in the election and voting by persons who were not registered within the district in a number that exceeded the margin between the candidates involved" are two of a handful of irregularities "that have been found sufficient to have a new election ordered."

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"To lose is to learn."

Anonymous