

News from the 4th Section

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John Thurston Arkansas Commissioner of State Lands

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Welcome to the Commissioner of State Lands office and the Fall edition of *News from the 4th Section*. It has been, and continues to be, busy here at the land office! Nine months in and I have managed to visit almost every county courthouse in the state, stopping by and visiting with the officials that my office works with everyday. It has been a pleasure getting to meet all of these fine people, and my staff and I look forward to working closely with them over the coming years. We are putting together some great plans that, in the long run, will help out the counties and taxpayers alike.

In this issue, you will learn what we have been up to since the last newsletter. For starters, we welcomed some temporary land commissioners, received a grant for document restoration and began accepting credit cards. Also, our 2011 land auctions wrapped up in September and will start up again in April of 2012. Until then, check out our website where we have the parcels that did not sell listed on the negotiated sales list. You can find a link for it right on the home page.

Look for our next issue to contain a recap of our annual office meeting where I will present my first State of the Commission address outlining our multiple accomplishments from this first year, as well as our goals for the coming year. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the land office. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,


John Thurston
Commissioner

COSL Office Welcomes Boys & Girls State Commissioners



Boys State Land Commissioner, Andrew Heffington of North Little Rock, AR.

For two days in June, Commissioner Thurston stepped down from his post to allow two young up and comers to take over the reins. Andrew Heffington and Inez Whitt were elected as the 2011 Commissioner of State Lands by their peers during this year's Boys State and Girls State.

Boys State and Girls State were created in 1935 and 1937, respectively, by the Americanism Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary. Their goal is to provide training for Arkansas high school senior boys and girls in the fundamental aspects of citizenship and practical government on the local, county and state levels. Each year hundreds of students attend the week long activities held at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway's and Harding University in Searcy's campuses.

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Boys State Commissioner, Andrew Heffington, is a senior at North Little Rock High School where he is active in his school's soccer and cross country teams. He is the son of David and Diane Heffington and plans to attend the University of Arkansas majoring in civil or mechanical engineering after high school. Andrew said he made some really good friends, learned that he is a better speaker than he assumed and that "politics is fun," during his week at Boys State. Andrew selected Colin Devine of Fayetteville High School as his chief deputy for the day.

Girls State Commissioner, Inez Whitt, is a senior at Pine Bluff High School where she is active in many school groups including band, choir and Beta club. She is the daughter of Ralph Whitt and Freddie McLemore and plans to attend Berklee College of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, majoring in music, after high school. Inez won her campaign with a slogan of "the smaller the person, the bigger the change" and said she learned a lot about the different positions in government and how they operate during her week at Girls State. Inez selected Kyra Lewis of Pine Bluff High School and Taylor Douglas of Benton High School as her chief deputies.

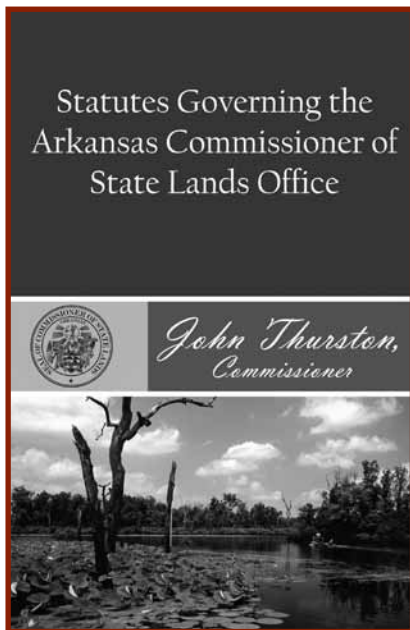


Girls State Land Commissioner, Inez Whitt of Pine Bluff, AR, center, Chief Deputies Taylor Douglas of Benton, AR, left, & Kyra Lewis of Pine Bluff, right.

All of the students got to spend the day in the Commissioner's office learning its day to day functions and visiting with staff about the different positions in the office. "Boys and Girls State is an excellent opportunity for young men and women to be exposed to public service and leadership in their state government," said Commissioner John Thurston. "I am proud that my office is able to participate in the education of these young men and women and hope that they consider choosing a career in public service," he added.

New Brochure Available

The Commissioner of State Lands office has recently released a new booklet, *Statutes Governing the Arkansas Commissioner of State Lands Office*, containing the statutes and rules and regulations followed by the office. The first section includes the statutes for county certification, tax delinquent property auctions, distribution of funds and donations. In the second section are the statutes for the application process and lease and permit issuance of natural resources on state-owned lands. Also included are the rules and regulations followed for these processes.



If you are interested in receiving this informative booklet, please call our office at 501-324-9422 to request a free copy or visit our website at www.cosl.org to view it or have it emailed directly to you.

Donated Properties

Did you know that the Commissioner of State Lands has the authority to donate delinquent properties to entities through the Urban Homestead Act and our donation program?

The Urban Homestead Act allows the Commissioner to donate tax delinquent properties, that have already been through the auction process, to non-profit organizations and cities. The property must be used to develop housing for low income families to purchase.

The Commissioner may also donate tax delinquent properties to state agencies, state colleges and universities and local county governmental units for public use. Interested governmental units must contact our office to make application for a property and must include a proposal of the property's usage and the expected duration of that usage. The Commissioner will determine if the project meets the criteria and is in the best interest of the state. For more information on this process, please see our website at www.cosl.org or call us at 501-324-9422.

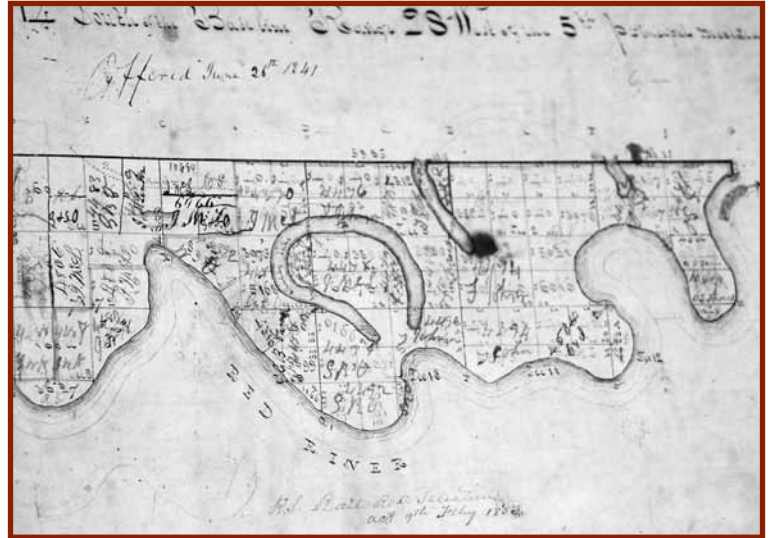
COSL Receives ANCRC Grant for Historic Document Preservation

In May of this year the Commissioner of State Lands office was awarded a grant from the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council to assist in preserving and digitizing some of the historic documents housed in the COSL office. The project has begun and the documents currently being preserved are the typed set of Louisiana Purchase Field Notes. The typed and bound volumes were part of a Works Public Administration (WPA) project back in the 1930's and are the only such set in existence. These field notes are still used today by surveyors and once the project is complete, they will be available online making them more easily assessable to the public. They will be arranged so that when a user performs a search, the typed version will be available alongside the original handwritten notes already on our website as well as the corresponding plat maps if available. We hope to have this project complete and online by next summer.

A portion of the grant money will also be used to preserve and digitize the bound set of U.S. Government Plat Maps. This set of 61 volumes dates from the late 1800's, with hand drawn plats showing the growth of the state, township by township over the years. Each plat details geographical terrain, homesteads and the emergence of communities and cities. Once complete, these images will also be avail-

able on our website in the same searchable format.

When the project is finished, all of the original documents will be permanently housed in the vault, and on display, in the COSL's capitol office. If you have historical inquiries, or need assistance viewing the images on our website, please contact our office at 501-324-3422.



A page from the US Government Plat book containing Township 14 South, Range 28 West, featuring a portion of the Red River lying in Little River County on the Arkansas-Texas border.

Speakers Available

If you are interested in having the Commissioner or one of his staff members speak at your event or meeting, please contact Sandra Blount at 501-683-3031 to schedule a time or fill out the "Event Request" form on our website.



Commissioner Thurston visits with members of the Red Hatters Society at the Maynard Pioneer Days Parade in Randolph County.

Credit/Debit Cards Now Accepted

Commissioner Thurston is pleased to announce that his office is now accepting credit and debit cards as a form of payment for delinquent property taxes. Right now this service is limited to walk-in customers only with long-term plans to expand it to mail-in, telephone and online payments. This is an option that taxpayers have been asking about for a long time and we are happy to finally have the system in place to accept them. Delinquent property taxes may also be paid by cash, check, certified check or money order.

Taxpayers may come into our Records office, located at 1020 West 4th Street, 5th Floor, Little Rock, AR to pay their delinquent taxes. They can also access their delinquent tax information on our website (www.cosl.org), or call our office at 501-683-3053, to learn how to begin the payment process.

The Counselors Corner

This is a new feature in our newsletter, each quarter we will focus on a commonly asked question and our General Counsel, Carol Lincoln, will give a concise answer along with what statutes and laws apply to it as applicable.

“What happens to a municipal clean-up lien when it is certified to the Commissioner of State Lands along with delinquent real property taxes?”

By statute, cities of the first class and second class can order the owner of real property to abate unsafe and unsanitary conditions. (see A.C.A. 14-54-901 et seq.) In the event an owner does not comply with an order, the city can then take action to correct the condition. The cost of abatement by the city can be charged to the owner of the property. Further, the city is given a lien against the property for the clean-up costs.

A lien may be enforced and collected at any time within ten (10) years in either one of the following manners:

- (1) By an action for foreclosure in the circuit court by the city; or
- (2) The amount of the lien, plus a 10% penalty for collection, can be certified to the county tax collector and placed on the tax books as delinquent taxes and collected accordingly.

Upon certification of the lien to the Commissioner of State Lands it is treated as any other delinquent tax. As long as the Commissioner of State Lands is required to collect all delinquent taxes certified, the lien is included in that amount and will be collected through the sale of the property. However, if the property has not sold and remains on the Commissioner's records for more than two (2) years after the date the property was offered at public auction, the Commissioner has the authority to sell the property for whatever amount deemed to be in the best interest of the state and the other governmental entities. In other words, the property may be sold for less than the delinquent tax amounts certified. If that occurs, the municipal lien certified as a delinquent tax, will not be collected in full or maybe not collected at all. On the other hand, if the property is redeemed as opposed to sold, all delinquent taxes including any certified liens are collected in full regardless of how long the property has remained on the Commissioner's records.

News from the 4th Section Now Available Via Email

The Commissioner of State Lands office is pleased to now be able to offer our quarterly newsletter, “News from the 4th Section” electronically. As a subscriber, you may opt out of the print version and receive it via email, or by simply viewing it on our website. If you wish to discontinue the print version and add your email address, please send an email to land@cosl.org with “newsletter” in the subject line. For new subscribers you may email or visit our website at www.cosl.org and click on “Publications” then “Subscribe.”



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