

RLAT Annual Event and Members Meeting Held on February 15, 2025



RLAT hosted two important speakers at its annual gathering held on February 15, 2025. The first speaker was Texas Commissioner of Agriculture, Sid Miller. The second speaker was retired Houston firefighter, Eric Kellmann, who spoke about Emergency Services Districts.

Commissioner Miller began by stating that agriculture was an eight-billion dollar industry in Texas, but that the Texas Department of Agriculture was about much more than just agriculture products. He stated that the department is Texas' consumer protection agency with a very wide array of responsibilities, including twelve food and nutrition programs serving five million school children, consuming over \$300 million in locally grown products. He stated that the department is also Texas' Chamber of Commerce globally promoting "all things Texas" in 34 countries across the globe.

While he expressed concern about the state legislature's failure to act on the development of water resources, he stated that he had "high hopes" for the current legislative session – noting significant strides in water resource development, rainwater capture/harvest, desalinization, and funding for the replacement of critical water infrastructure.

He noted that the state's production of fruits, vegetables, and other crops has dropped significantly due to the lack of water, noting that the sugar cane industry has now totally disappeared from the Texas landscape.

Commissioner Miller then took some questions from the audience and thanked RLAT for the opportunity to address its members.





Mr. Eric Kellmann then made a presentation on Emergency Services Districts (ESD). In his talk and video presentation he addressed the major questions of: What are they? How are they formed? How are they funded? How are they structured? And why are they becoming so important to rural communities. He noted that areas covered by volunteer fire departments are generally lacking in the number of fully trained volunteers, often because of limited equipment and facilities, as well as inadequate funding for their needs. He noted that ESDs can and do address these critical resource issues.

After a break period, Mr. Don Phillips, President of RLAT, called on Mr. Rick Laden, Volunteer Huntmaster, Texas Youth Hunting Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife. Mr. Laden noted that their mission was to provide Texas young people with the opportunity to learn about, and to participate in, wildlife and safe hunting activities and to promote hunting heritage in Texas. He spoke about the TPW youth hunting program for kids 9 through 17 years-old and how they are in need of more ranches for their young hunters.

Mr. Phillips then chaired the business portion of the meeting of the members where the Treasurer gave his annual report, director elections were conducted, and a general discussion was held regarding RLAT membership and plans.

The meeting concluded with the drawing for a \$100 gift card door prize, which was won by RLAT member Orlando Stephenson.