



Custer County Conservation District Meeting Minutes – March 12, 2021

The March 12, 2021 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order at 9:07 AM by Dave Thom.

In attendance were Dave Thom, Oonagh Wood, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, Gladwin Paulsen, Matt Walsh, Julie Wheeler, Bob Smith, Wendy Schuyler, Justine Reid (call-in), Stuart Adrian (call-in), and Mike Baldwin.

All motions were approved unanimously unless otherwise noted.

The meeting minutes from February 12, 2021 and this meeting's agenda were approved after a motion by Oonagh and a second by Paul.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS Representative: Justine Reid – Report attached (page 5)
 - Additional notes:
 - CIS – quite a few forestry calls have been received. Additional CIS information provided later in the minutes.
- SDDA Forester: Matt Walsh – Report attached (page 6)
 - Additional notes:
 - Will ask CCCD for letter of support for the Fall River CIS proposal. Matt will follow up on this.
 - Drone footage taken in Elk Mountain area. Can see where thinning and no thinning areas are located. Helps to show landowners differences in pre- and post-thinning projects.
- NWTF Forester: Faryn Klebe –
 - Unable to attend, but provided this update:
 - I am still working on the management plan for the property in Custer County. This property is the highest priority for the forestry EQIP projects so I have been working on getting all the paperwork done in order for it to be ranked. I also visited the property to make sure the snow had all melted on the property so I can complete the cultural resource survey. It has so we will be scheduling that survey very soon.
- Forest Service general:
 - Julie Wheeler, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland:
 - Offices are still closed to public due to COVID, employees operating a max telework schedule.
 - Working with permittees on grazing operations.
 - Drought is still a concern for the Grassland. Just had a 2,500 ac fire near Fairburn.

- Sat in on off-highway vehicle (OHV) summit.
- Wendy Schuyler, USFS-Black Hills National Forest:
 - Big push for thinning projects in the forest. Wendy will speak more on this topic in the Freeland Project discussion.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
 - Main Checking = \$14,258.82,
 - Grant Checking = \$1,458.41,
 - Savings = \$41,100.70.
- 2021 County allocated funds:
 - Funds were received (\$9,000) and deposited into the main checking account on March 1.
- Bills to pay:
 - Checks Unlimited:
 - New checks for main checking account – 4 boxes of duplicate checks = \$77.45.
 - Lynn's Dakotamart:
 - Snacks (cookies, vegetable tray with dip), water, and cups for producer meeting in Fairburn on 3/11 = \$93.89.
- Financial review:
 - Oonagh and Mike have scheduled a financial review with Laurie Arthur for 3/18.
- Motion by Paul, second by Oonagh to approve treasury report and bills as presented, motion carried.
- Fairburn Civic Center:
 - Motion by Oonagh to donate \$75 to the Fairburn Civic Center for allowing us to use the facility for our producer meeting, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- Izaak Walton League of America Wildlife Habitat Award contest:
 - Mike will scan the letter and share with the board. Nominations due Aug. 31.

Old Business:

- Scholarship:
 - No applicants yet. Deadline was set for April 1.
- Resource Conservation Speech Contest:
 - Only one candidate has entered the contest so far.
- Arbor Day:
 - No entries to date for the essay and poster contests.
- Board Supervisor vacancy:
 - Notice of open supervisor position included in letter to producers for CIS proposal. Position will be an appointment for a 2-year term.
 - Bob Smith, resident of the Hermosa area, has expressed interest in the vacancy. Bob provided a brief bio about himself to the board.

- Colton Jones, resident of the Folsom area, is also interested in the vacancy. Colton was unable to attend today's meeting, but provided his bio to the board via email.

New Business:

- U.S. Forest Service Freeland Project:
 - Wendy Schuyler provided a review of the project plans, and brought handouts and maps to share with the board.
 - Updates to the plan include plans to leave residual trees in the Overstory treatment and to drop the Shelterwood Seed Cut treatment.
 - White areas on Wendy's map are not included in current plan, but hope to treat these areas if funding becomes available. Areas do not include commercial trees, but smaller dog-hair stands that need thinning.
 - Proposing prescribed burning in some areas within plan.
 - CCCD Comments Letter (see revised letter sent to USFS on page 7):
 - Weeds – USFS will identify areas and process of work for infestations. Spraying is dependent on budget. Stewardship contracts could include weed treatment, but not sure if any contracts for Freeland will be stewardship contracts. Overreaching goal of this project is to reduce fire intensity.
 - Talks of leaving a few reserve trees in Group Shelterwood treatments. Also old growth set asides.
 - Smaller trees are included in other proposed projects.
 - Wording on prescribed burning a little off – thinning should allow for prescribed burns.
 - Add point about large piles in revised letter.
 - Possibility of getting funds to thin on National Forest lands.
- Thinning grant:
 - Matt discussed a new thinning grant application for the board's approval. Grant would treat 80 acres at a cost of \$52,350 (50% cost-share = \$26,175).
 - These thinning grants are more important now due to EQIP funding changes. Matt stated all counties in the Hills are applying for thinning grants this year.
 - Oonagh made point that available funds should be higher (\$500,000 available for conservation grants in whole state) due to tourist dollars generated in Hills through sales tax revenues. Dave suggested that maybe the Hills Area Conservation Districts should work together on this issue. Paul suggested bringing up the topic in the next Hills Area meeting. Dave will invite Karl Jensen (President, SDACD Board of Directors) to our next board meeting to speak on this topic.
 - Paul motioned to approve thinning grant application, Tamarah seconded, motion carried. Only edit in application is change "Healthier" to "Resilient" in the title.
- Conservation Implementation Strategy (CIS) -
 - Custer Highlands/Elk Mountain:
 - Justine has been contacted by several people interested in the project. NRCS will have a press release 1 month prior to batching date.
 - Landowner meeting:

- Meeting date moved from May 7 to April 30 and will be held at Elk Mountain School.
 - Property for thinning demonstration is available. The contractor is also available.
- Eastern Custer County – Rangeland Health Improvement:
 - Producer meeting was held yesterday, March 11, in Fairburn. Meeting went well and received a lot of feedback on resource concerns.
 - Justine reviewed some of the resource concerns discussed.
 - Weeds and livestock water were two that most everyone agreed were concerns.
 - Stream crossing was a new concern added.
 - Prescribed grazing to be included in proposal but might not generate interest from producers. Required for any cross-fencing. One year requirement (3 years max). NRCS provides recommended stocking rate, producer needs drought contingency plan.
 - Budget still needed for proposal – Justine and Mike will work on this.

Other Business:

- Cottonwood planting site:
 - Mike scheduled a site visit with landowner on April 7. Dave, Faryn, Matt, Paul, and Mike are expected to attend.
- NWTF-NPRRI grant:
 - Potential add-on funds for existing project (e.g., cottonwood planting). Application deadline is April 30 if board is interested. If application is submitted and awarded, Mike cannot commit to ensuring that project is carried out to completion this summer due to Weed & Pest obligations.

Next meeting: Friday April 9th 9:00-11:00 AM – Pine Room, Custer County Annex Building

Adjournment: 11:10 AM

March 12, 2021

NRCS Field Office Report to the Custer County Conservation District

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- 2012 – 2020: 9 Active Contracts
- 2021: 27 Applications
 - Planning review on March 18th (2 Forest, 2 High Tunnels)
 - Ranking deadline is March 26th
 - Obligation deadline is April 30th

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- 2015 - 2020: 23 Active Contracts
 - Finished payments
 - Preparing for 2021 field season
- 2021 Classic
 - Batching date is March 26th
- 2022 Renewals
 - Batching date is March 31st – letters went out to those that are eligible, includes those up for a 3rd contract

Meetings / Trainings / Correspondence / Other

- COVID-19: set back in status (1 person in office); masks and social distancing required in offices; vacates possible if cases within the building
- CIS 2020 (Resilient Forest Landscapes)
 - Answering calls/emails
 - Sending out applications
- CIS 2021 (Rangeland Health in Eastern Custer County) – Call for proposals, deadline of April 15, 2021 to submit proposal

/S/

Justine Reid

District Conservationist

RCF Report for Custer County Conservation District

March 12, 2020

The following is a summary of assistance provided to the Custer county conservation district and projects being worked on within the county.

- Thinning project updates:
 - All 5 projects are moving forward. Landowners are on schedule to complete work by June 1st deadline
- Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) updates for Custer County:
 - I have requests for 3 FSP's from landowners in Custer county
- EQIP Projects:
 - Getting into contact
 - Currently working on a CIS project for Fall River county for the forested lands around Hot Springs.
 - It does border the Argyle priority area of your CIS project.
- Women and Wildland Fire Home Defense Workshop
 - Workshop will take place March 20th
 - Have about 6 landowners signed up right now.

Matt Walsh

Service Forester



CUSTER COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

25363 US Highway 385

Custer, SD 57730

March 16, 2021

Tracy Anderson, District Ranger

US Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest, Hell Canyon Ranger District

Via: comments-rocky-mountain-black-hills-hell-canyon@usda.gov

Re: Freeland Project

Dear Tracy:

This letter provides our comments to the proposed Freeland fuel reduction project. Generally, we support the project as outlined and appreciate the work your staff is doing to implement these sorts of projects. Thanks to Wendy Schuyler for attending our meeting on March 12 to explain the project and for your follow-up phone call. We offer these comments for your consideration in creating resilient forests.

- 1) Invasive/noxious weeds can increase after disturbances, including wildfire, insect infestation and timber harvest, among others. Please include mitigation measures for weed treatment such as equipment washing as Wendy mentioned, and increased funding maybe through stewardship contracting. We appreciate the partnership Custer County Weed & Pest Department has with the USFS in treating noxious weeds on NFS lands adjacent to affected private lands.
- 2) The treatments listed in the table will provide diversity in stand and habitat conditions. Specifically, the "group shelterwood", the most common treatment, includes various methods to provide diversity. In the overstory removal (OSR)/shelterwood removal cuts, we suggest retaining a few "reserve trees" per acre (e.g., 2-3). Such reserve treesⁱ are critical to meeting other resource objectivesⁱⁱ, can be an element of creating a two-aged or multi-aged stand in the long run that is important in creating forest conditions resilient to fire and insect outbreaksⁱⁱⁱ and important for habitat diversity.^{iv} Reserving such large trees, particularly the very old orange-bark trees, will retain some visual variety potentially for 100-150+ years. The economic value of the minimal volume left on the stump is very small compared to the benefits retained. This rush to meet BHNH timber volume outputs should not sacrifice long-term forest resiliency.

- 3) The acres of planned Timber Stand Improvement and Products-Other-Than-Logs was not included in the table, nor were treatment areas shown on the Proposed Vegetation Treatment Map, but Wendy explained will be included in the project via the Black Hills Resilient Forest (BHRL) environmental document. Those treatments are critical to reducing fire hazard, but can be costly, often are not funded, thus not completed, and the project objectives are not met. Please use alternate contracting mechanisms, e.g., stewardship contracts, to package and supplementally fund the non-commercial thinning (and maybe pine encroachment) with the commercial harvest operation so that more work gets done on the ground.
- 4) The Scoping Document (pg. 1) says that “the project area is not conducive to prescribed burning, it is resistant to control of prescribed fire and wildfire, and protection of private lands is difficult...” Wendy explained that prescribed burning is anticipated for this area under BHRL and she will clarify the wording in the scoping document. Fire is an important element in pine systems, so we encourage its use as the final step, after mechanical treatment, to reducing fuels and increasing vegetative diversity to meet wildlife and varied objectives.
- 5) While not specifically discussed in the Freeland scoping document, our supervisors are interested in more utilization of POL and/or large slash piles. We recognize this may be an economic challenge, and are pleased that you are working on it. We were encouraged by your recent success on slash pile chipping on the Pleasant Valley Rd.

We support the overall objectives and treatments proposed for the area and the work you are doing amid funding and workload challenges. We do offer these comments for your consideration. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

/S/ Dave Thom

DAVID M. THOM

Chair, Board of Supervisors

Cc: Board of Supervisors

ⁱ Definitions: <https://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/reforestation/glossary.shtml>

ⁱⁱ Shepperd, Wayne D. & M. Battaglia, 2002. Ecology, Silviculture, and Management of Black Hills Ponderosa Pine. USDA-Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. RMRS-GTR-97. (pg. 70)

ⁱⁱⁱ Graham, Russell T., L.A. Asherin, M. Battaglia, T. Jain, S. Mata. 2016. Mountain Pine Beetles: A Century of Knowledge, Control Attempts, and Impacts Central to the Black Hills. USDA-Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. RMRS-GTR-353. (pg. 169)

^{iv} Graham, Russell T., S. Bayard de Volo, R.T. Reynolds, 2015. Northern Goshawk and Its Prey in the Black Hills: Habitat Assessment. USDA-Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station. RMRS-GTR-339. (pg. 83)