



Custer County Conservation District Meeting Minutes – February 9, 2023

The February 9, 2023 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Custer County Courthouse, at 9:02 AM by Dave Thom.

In attendance were Dave Thom, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, Greg Neugebauer, Oonagh Wood, Stuart Adrian, Joel Milos, Mike Linde, Patricia Weyrich (call-in), Gavyn Priest (call-in), and Mike Baldwin.

All motions were approved unanimously unless otherwise noted. For the purpose of continuity, these minutes are not necessarily in chronological order.

The meeting minutes from January 12, 2023 and today's agenda were approved after a motion by Paul and a second by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- County Commission report: Mike Linde –
 - Nothing to report.
- NRCS Representatives: Joel Milos – Report attached
 - Additional notes:
 - Joel will check on whether the NRCS news releases for the two CIS projects were shared with the Custer Chronicle.
 - Board asked about Faryn's availability to assist producers with questions. Joel said that she is available and can do implementation projects (e.g., wildlife and forest stewardship plans).
- SD DANR RCF: Patricia Weyrich –
 - DANR Forest Health grant – District should receive notice soon concerning new grant.
 - Couple new forest prescriptions were completed.
- US Forest Service general: Julie Wheeler, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland (provided an email update prior to today's meeting) –
 - Hired a GS-9 Rangeland Management Specialist that will be working with the 40-plus grazing permittees in the Northeast Geographic Area which includes Custer and Pennington Counties. This is an additional and much needed position to our range program.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
 - Main Checking = \$10,090.26,
 - Grant Checking = \$12,073.41,

- Savings = \$35,681.59 (\$12.51 interest earned).
- Deposits:
 - \$10,440.00 – reimbursement from DANR for thinning work completed
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
 - Svenkeson for thinning work – \$6,440
 - Schnurr for thinning work – \$4,000
 - SDACD annual dues – \$550
 - SDACDE annual dues (\$50) & Leadership early registration (\$125)
- Budget request was made to the Auditor's office
- Mike reached out to Laurie Arthur for financial review
- A motion by Greg to approve financial report as presented, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- NRCS Climate-smart activities list from Joel Milos
- SDACD legislative updates from Angela Ehlers
- NWTF quarterly report:
 - Mike shared Faryn's Oct.-Dec. report with the Board.
- Notice of Intent to Continue Operation – Simon Contractors of SD, Inc.:
 - The only change is the change in anticipated completion date. Mike will send a letter to the company with comments.
- Spring grant round notice:
 - No action taken since District received a grant during the fall grant round.
- Spink County Winter Soil Health Workshop – Feb. 21
- Black Hills Area Botany and Ecology Workshop – March 10
 - Dave asked Mike if he was interested in presenting this year or next year. Mike said he would prefer next year.

Old Business:

- Landowner thinning grant updates:
 - 2021-23 grant:
 - Svenkeson and Schnurr projects are complete.
 - Clarke project status uncertain, crew working by hand. Patricia reaching out to her for update.
 - Piper project – Patricia will try to visit property on 2/24. Status is uncertain. Thinning work was completed by SD Wildland Fire so confusion exists if any additional work fell under our grant.
 - Reyelts – increased acreage from 6.8 to 17.3 ac at last meeting. Reyelts said he can complete work by June. DANR completed prescription for additional acreage.
 - Adrian Ranch – contractor for project is behind and will not finish this spring. Stuart worked with DANR forester Jack Connelly to revise forest prescription. Acreage will be reduced to 12.4 acres and will include a 0.5

acre area of hardwood enhancement. There is a question about whether the acreage in the revised prescription included the hardwood enhancement or not. Stuart will seek clarification.

- Motion by Tamarah to offer surplus acreage from Stuart to Reyelts, second by Paul, motion carried. Patricia stated that Gavin already completed surveying all 70 acres of Reyelts, so revision of forest prescription would not be difficult.
- 2022-24 grant:
 - Mike informed the Board that current applications are not ready to be voted on. Not all properties have been surveyed and DANR would like guidance from the Board on maximum acreage they would consider for grants. There are currently applications totaling 700-800 acres (largest = 500 ac) and DANR does not want to waste time by surveying all areas when the Board may only approve a small portion.
 - Discussion by Board on acreage limits used in the past and the desire to not allow one large landowner to use up all funding. Patricia noted that in the past, larger landowners were handed over to NRCS for EQIP funding and CCCD handled smaller landowners. However, due to the change in how EQIP dollars are distributed, it can be very difficult for landowners to obtain these funds now. Patricia also noted that the larger the area, the easier it is to find a contractor.
 - Motion by Paul to set maximum acreage allowed for a thinning grant to be approximately 50 acres per landowner, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.
 - Policy for grant applications and application deadlines:
 - Board discussed topic of setting deadlines for landowner applications to be received instead of how they are handled now (i.e., first come, first served). Mike reminded the Board that the handling of applications was a Board decision made approximately 1.5 years ago. Board agreed but would like to change the current system and set an application deadline, perhaps once or twice a year.
 - Patricia outlined a potential issue in that landowners may be forced to wait for an extended time and that no work can begin or reimbursed for until application has been approved by the Board.
 - Board asked Mike to come up with an application deadline for current grant.
 - Publicity for grant –
 - Stuart suggested trying to advertise grant in the SD Family Forest Ass. Newsletter.
 - Patricia noted DANR's virtual workshops to promote these grants; however, they have been poorly attended.
 - Dave suggested that we promote public outreach.

New Business:

- Landowner meeting in 2023:
 - Mike and Dave met earlier in the week to discuss ideas and spoke with Joel for his thoughts. Two topics discussed were a soil health workshop and a forestry workshop.
 - Soil health workshop ideas: could have a range and farmland focus, maybe include a riparian component; however, NWTF just hosted a riparian workshop in Rapid City. Meeting likely in the Hermosa area. Could potentially have a joint workshop with Pennington CD. Rachel Crowther (NRCS soil scientist) and Katy Christianson (NRCS agronomist) have been discussing a similar workshop in the area, but they have not spoken to Pennington CD about the idea.
 - The forest health workshop ideas: would be similar to others done in the past. Could discuss wildfires, forest pests. Potential sites could be Argyle, Outlaw Ranch, Custer, Hermosa, Elk Mountain.
 - In reference to soil health workshop, Joel suggested a focus on hay and forage production. Could also cover topics such as soil testing, fertilizers, cover crops, partners, and wildlife benefits. He also noted that after CIS projects are complete, those areas could be used as demonstration sites for future workshops.
 - Paul suggested teaming up with Pennington CD to do a soil health workshop and also do our own forest workshop.
 - Dave and Mike will plan forest workshop for this fall.
 - Greg, Mike, and Joel will work on soil health workshop for this spring or summer.

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
 - Black Hills NF Forest Plan revision update:
 - Mike sat in on a State-led virtual meeting on December 29 that discussed the State's activities in the revision process.
 - Senate Bill 21 – request by DNR to obtain funding for county cost-share dollars and hire a forester for four years.
 - Scholarship and contests:
 - To date, no scholarship applications have been received and no interested participants for various contests.
 - State Weed and Pest Conference:
 - Mike is attending the conference next week in Huron (Feb. 15-17).
 - Thunder Basin Research Initiative Symposium:
 - Mike sat in on some of the talks that concerned Ventenata control and prairie dog dynamics on the National Grassland.

Next meeting: Thursday, March 9 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner’s Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Critique:

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 10:58 AM.



February 9th, 2023

NRCS Field Office Report to the Custer County Conservation District

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- 2019-2022: 10 Active Contracts
- 2023:
 - General EQIP, Eligibility Deadline – February 3rd, 2023. 16 Applications received by batching date.
 - **EQIP-CIS Application Timeline (Batching, Eligibility, Ranking, Obligation) – Public announcement made on February 8th. Batching date for applications - March 10th.**

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- 2019-2022: 9 Active Contracts, additional 2 CSP-GCI
- 2023: Classic CSP, Eligibility/Ranking Deadline – March 10th, 2023. 6 Applications received by batching date.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) [Joint NRCS/FSA program]

Meetings / Trainings / Correspondence / Outreach / Other

- Inflation Reduction Act: Tentative funding estimates for SD NRCS*:
***May be less \$ for 2023 than anticipated.**
***IRA funds cannot be combined with other EQIP/CSP funds.**

	2023	2024	2025	2026
EQIP	\$23.75 million	\$61.25 million	\$92.5 million	\$103.75 million
CSP	\$18.05 million	\$24.3 million	\$36.8 million	\$49.3 million

- **IRA Efficiencies Committee still working through ideas submitted.**
- **Feb. 2nd - Laura Schmitz worked booth at Black Hills Stockshow.**
- **NRCS working on sending out outreach postcards on Custer CIS' to gather more applications.**
- **Feb. 14th - Justin Boerboom attending SDSU Bringing the Farm to School: Producer Training.**
- **TBD – Working with SDSU on assisting with Native Plant ID course this semester.**

/S/

Joel Milos
District Conservationist