



Custer County Conservation District Meeting Minutes – July 13, 2023

The July 13, 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, Oonagh Wood, Tamarah Caster, Greg Neugebauer, Julie Wheeler, Ben Pucket, Tom Miklos, Brad Humbracht, Matt Odden, Justin Boerboom, Patricia Weyrich (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.

Motion to approve today's agenda and the revised meeting minutes from June 8, 2023 was made by Paul, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS Representatives:
 - Joel Milos was unable to attend, but provided a report which Mike reviewed with the Board – Report attached
 - Justin Boerboom provided additional information:
 - NRCS expecting \$14 million in IRA funds to South Dakota. Could be used on grazing lands (prescribed grazing is required) and for brush management (potential to do more fire mitigation work).
 - NWTF forester position – waiting for an agreement renewal. If approved, hopeful they will have someone in place by end of summer.
 - NRCS also hiring another full-time forester in the Rapid City office.
 - CIS – unknown if NRCS will seek new proposals in 2024
 - Easement programs – lots of recent interest in NRCS easement programs. Justin reiterated the goal is to stop agricultural land from development and keep land in agricultural production.
- SD DANR RCF: Patricia Weyrich –
 - Conducting interviews for the forester positions in Hot Springs and Lead.
 - Currently working on thinning grant applications and forest stewardship plans.
- Buffalo Gap National Grassland: Julie Wheeler –
 - Precipitation much higher compared to past couple years. Some permittees are having issues with foot rot.
 - They are meeting with all permittees. Continuing with new projects (with pipelines) despite the rainfall this year.
- SD Game, Fish & Parks: Ben Pucket & Tom Miklos –

- Private lands meeting held in February to discuss expanding habitat programs. Ben provided a handout of the proposed programs (Riparian Habitat Enhancement Program, Food Plot Program, and Hardwood Release Program) and answered questions from the group.
- Do not have approval to sign up people, but hopeful they will by the end of the summer.
- In regards to public outreach for the GF&P private land programs, information is included in the Landowner Matters newsletter. Could include an article in the Custer CD newsletter.
- Board could potentially include GF&P on future workshops that the District hosts.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
 - Main Checking = \$16,589.89,
 - Grant Checking = \$1,633.41,
 - Savings = \$35,740.30 (interest earned in June: \$11.75).
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
 - Credit card – JR’s Rhodehouse BBQ Pit - catering (\$444.97)
 - Credit card – Arrowwood Resort & Conference Center – SDACDE Leadership Conf. (\$260.62)
 - Stuart Adrian – \$3,965.00 – cost share reimbursement
 - SDACD – 2023 Convention registration (\$165.00)
- Deposits to be made:
 - Millborn Seeds (\$200.00) – Business checking
 - Hefty Feed & Seed (\$200.00) – Business checking
 - Participation in NRCS training (Tamarah & Oonagh) (\$200.00) – Business checking
 - Dave Thom – Jim Huges (\$25.00) – Development
 - State of SD – thinning cost-share reimbursement (\$3,965.00) – Grant checking
- 2024 budget request from County:
 - Board agreed to keep our 2024 operating budget request at the same levels as 2023.
- A motion by Oonagh to approve financial report as presented, seconded by Greg, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- Thank you card from SD Family Forests Association for the contribution to the recent forestry workshop.
- Thank you card from Elk Mountain School for Mike presenting a student award for the Arbor Day creative writing contest.
- SDACD Convention – Information received from Angela on the 2023 Convention this September. They are seeking donations for the silent auction, which supports their scholarship program. They are also seeking nominations for the Area 3 position on the Conservation Commission. Area 3 includes the Hills Area districts. Also, Mike will

provide information on Jim Hughes passing to Angela so that he can be included in the ceremony that honors board supervisors that have recently passed away.

- Hills Area Endowment honoree – Pearl Geis was nominated as the endowment honoree at the Hills Area Employees meeting. Pearl used to be the District Manager for the Butte County Conservation District. Paul made a motion to contribute \$100 to the endowment fund in Pearl's name, second by Oonagh, motion carried.

Old Business:

- Soil health workshop
 - Approximately 30 participants in the workshop. Feedback from attendees was very positive. Board would like to host a similar workshop in the future.
 - Pennington CD owes Custer CD \$110.07 for the balance owed on the lunch.
- SDACD Hills Area meeting
 - Dave, Paul, and Mike attended the June 12 meeting in Rapid City. Partner agencies provided reports. The 2024 Hills Area meeting has been scheduled for June 12 @ 1:00 PM
 - The upcoming 2023 SDACD Convention is in Aberdeen at the Ramkota, Sept. 17-19. Mike plans on attending.

New Business:

- NRCS field office organization – discussion on Custer County:
 - Group had a long discussion on the administration of the Custer County Conservation District – whether it should stay in the Rapid City field office (FO) or move back to Hot Springs. The Rapid City FO would like to keep Custer whereas Hot Springs (HS) would like Custer moved back to its office.
 - Brad outlined his reasoning for moving Custer: current workload for Custer producers (~90% out of HS FO), most producers use FSA office in HS, project files stored in HS, communication issues between offices. If Custer moved back to Hot Springs, producers would still have the option to go through either field office.
 - Board discussed their thoughts and asked Brad and Justin questions.
 - Dave summarized:
 - If there is a change in organization, producers can stay where they are currently working
 - FSA – the FSA office used should be the same as the NRCS office used by the producer
 - Miscommunication – NRCS should send an informational letter to all producers
 - NRCS workload – this is an internal NRCS issue
 - Justin spoke on Tate Lantz's perspective – wants what is best for the county and the Board's preference is important. Asked that the Board send letter to Tate on its recommendation. Justin outlined three options: no change in administrative

- structure, split county into 2 units (portion administered by Rapid City and the other by Hot Springs), or move county administration to Hot Springs.
 - Board asked Mike to draft a letter, send to Board, then send to Tate, Justin, Joel, and Brad.
- Conservation thinning grants:
 - 2021-23 grant update:
 - No updates on unfinished projects
 - 2022-24 grant landowner applications:
 - Landowner applications with completed forest prescriptions and maps were summarized and presented for the Board to review. These were:
 - Adrian Ranch – 6.2 acres in Ghost Canyon/Box Canyon CIS priority area, grant funds needed = \$2,015.00. Prescription completed by SD DANR, RCF.
 - Westwind Corporation (Robert Quinn) – 50 acres in Argyle CIS priority area, grant funds needed = \$16,250.00. Prescription completed by SD DANR, RCF.
 - If the Board approves both applications, total acreage granted would be 56.2 acres and total funds needed to reserve is \$18,265.00. The remaining grant balance would be approximately 28 acres available. There is one other outstanding grant application that is waiting on a prescription before it can be reviewed by the Board. This application is for less than 10 acres. Therefore, it is Mike's recommendation to approve both applications presented so that landowners can begin lining up contractors.
 - Motion made by Paul to approve applications by Adrian Ranch, and Westwind Corporation as presented, second by Tamarah, motion carried.
 - Forest Health thinning grant:
 - No updates at this time
 - 2024 State Docket – Conservation Commission Approved Practices Costs:
 - Mike would like the Board to consider a request to increase State-approved cost-share dollars for forest thinning and slash disposal. Current contractor costs can greatly exceed the State-approved costs. Mike provided as evidence a summary of contractor costs on thinning projects that received cost-share funds through our grants since 2015.
 - In Custer and Fall River counties, we have lost applications due to our low cost-share amounts and/or landowners have reduced the acreages on their applications.
 - Board agrees that Mike should explore increasing the State-approved costs.
- Update on pine loopers near Pringle:
 - Mike, Dave, and Oonagh attended a landowner meeting on Monday, July 10. Meeting provided information to area property owners about the likelihood of a

second outbreak of pine loopers in the Bowman ridge area. Meeting was organized by Dr. John Ball, SDSU Extension, NRCS, and USFS Black Hills NF. SDSU has been sampling for looper eggs and larvae in the area impacted last year and also in the surrounding area. Based on these observation, it appears likely there will be another outbreak of the pine loopers. Landowners were provided information about protecting valuable trees. If landowners chose to spray their trees, they were encouraged to have them chemically treated this week or next.

- Mike provided an update at yesterday's County Commission meeting. Also, an article about the loopers is in this week's Custer Chronicle.
- OHV use on the Black Hills NF:
 - Paul would like to see Custer CD provide a formal comment to the USFS about off-trail use by OHVs in the Black Hills National Forest. Discussed potential erosion issues that could result. Board agreed that the District should go on record - write a letter to the Hell Canyon District Ranger with our concerns. Paul will draft a letter and send to Mike.
 - Justin suggested looking into a Tread Lightly grant. Can be used to educate the public. Could provide a brochure/handout to riders when they obtain their permits.

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
 - Leadership Conference:
 - Mike attended the conference in Oacoma in June.
 - Forest Plan Revision:
 - Revision is on hold for now. Release of final Assessments has been delayed so that they can undergo review in the USFS Washington DC office. It is not known when the process will start moving again due to staff turnover and other factors.

Next meeting: No meeting in August. Next meeting on Thursday, September 14 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner's Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Critique:

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 10:57 AM.



July 13th, 2023

NRCS Field Office Report to the Custer County Conservation District

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- 2019-2023: 11 Active Contracts
- 2023:
 - General EQIP: Ranking deadline was March 3rd.
 - One contract obligated – High Tunnel, Composting Facility, Micro-irrigation, and Cover Crops.
 - EQIP-CIS (Forestry & Rangeland/Riparian):
 - Batching deadline for applications: March 10th
 - 1 application preapproved for Forestry CIS – 3.3 acres of Brush Management & 44.4 acres of thinning/residue treatments.
 - Working with Hot Springs FO on prioritizing/ranking Range/Riparian CIS.
 - EQIP-IRA:
 - No pre-approvals currently

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- 2019-2023: 9 Active Contracts, additional 2 CSP-GCI
- 2023: Classic CSP, Obligation Deadline – April 21st.
 - CSP-IRA:
 - One application pre-approved with late funding
 - CSP Renewal, Batching deadline April 28th
 - 3 applications received

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

- 2023:
 - RCPP Classic and AFA (Alternative Funding Arrangements) application period is not open for partners: Deadline August 18th

Meetings / Trainings / Correspondence / Outreach / Other

- June 16th: Custer/Pennington Soil Health Meeting. ~29 attendees, mostly producers and some agency staff attended. Positive feedback from attendees – especially on rainfall simulator.
- June 24th: Andrew Oxford and Joel presented Rainfall Simulator to SD Stockgrowers in New Underwood
- August 24th: Tanse and Joel presenting Rainfall Simulator and discussing soil health with Canyon Lake Community Garden in RC

/S/

Joel Milos
District Conservationist

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