Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – December 14, 2023

The December 14, 2023 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Custer County Courthouse, at 9:03 AM by Dave Thom.

Board members in attendance were Dave Thom, Oonagh Wood, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, Greg Neugebauer, and Stuart Adrian. Others in attendance were Tom Miklos (SD GF&P), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Jake Disney (NRCS), Melissa Riley (NRCS), Caleb Carter (Weston Co. Nat. Res. Dist.), Micheal Bordelon (SD DANR-RCF), Patricia Weyrich (call-in; SD DANR-RCF), and Mike Baldwin (District Manager).

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 with the addition of 1) Caleb Carter to Guest Reports and 2) Burning Beetle Learning Event to New Business, and to approve the meeting minutes from November 9, 2023 was made by Paul, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS Representative: Jake Disney –
  - The DC position in the Rapid City office is still vacant. Kamira Miller's detail has finished and Jake will be acting DC for up to 120 days. Applicants for the position were received but no interviews have been made.
  - Interviews were recently completed for the NWTF Forester position. Hopefully will have position filled soon.
- SD DANR RCF: Patricia Weyrich –
  - A person has accepted the Northern Hills Forester position, but no start date announced.
  - New forester hired to work with Marcus Warnke, will be starting in January.
  - New grants and loan specialist, Allison Kiner, hired to work with Alex and Jordan in state office.
- US Forest Service general: Julie Wheeler, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland (provided an email update prior to today's meeting) –
  - They are beginning seasonal hiring.
  - Julie and Mandy really enjoyed the field trip to the Grassland and our recent Newsletter. Julie thanked everyone for spending part of the day with them.
- SD Game, Fish & Parks: Ben Pucket & Tom Miklos –
  - Ben currently working on 2 contracts under Hardwood Release program. Tom likely to work on a few more. Forestry plans for this work involve State and NWTF foresters.

- Beaver dam analog structures (BDAs):
  - Working with a landowner in eastern part of county to have them installed on his land and adjacent federal land.
  - Ben communicating with Lori Brown, TNC, on BDA workshop this spring. TNC making a new hire and new person will likely be tasked with planning workshop. Ben will invite Lori to attend our February Board meeting.
  - Applied for NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant in Meade county, but was not awarded. Grant would have addressed cedar encroachment on Cheyenne River. Plan was to use cedar slash as erosion control.
- Weston County Natural Resource District: Caleb Carter, District Manager –
  - Caleb discussed ideas of potential collaboration opportunities between Weston and Custer Districts. Topics discussed included water erosion projects (Zeedyk structures and BDAs) along the state border and cheatgrass control on Elk Mountain.
  - Board agreed to officially cooperate with Weston County NRD on potential projects.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $13,555.72,
  - Grant Checking = $1,633.41,
  - Savings = $35,825.29 ($11.77 interest earned in November).
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
  - Credit card purchases:
    - Newsletter – printing & postage ($441.25)
  - Annual vouchers:
    - Accumulated expenses for meeting attendance, mileage, and miscellaneous items in 2023 are as follows:
      - Dave Thom = $779.93; Oonagh Wood = $590.83; Paul Nettinga = $701.33; Tamarah Caster = $1,076.28; Greg Neugebauer = $468.30; Stuart Adrian = $718.34; Mike Baldwin = $287.28.
- Deposits:
  - None
- A motion by Oonagh to approve financial report as presented, seconded by Greg, motion carried.
- 2024 budget planning:
  - Oonagh and Mike drafted the budget plan for next year. Draft was shared with the Board prior to today's meeting. Mike and Oonagh sought input from Board on how much funding to obligate towards landowner meetings/workshops. Also discussed potential overages.
  - Board discussed potential workshops/meetings which would include: 1) Burning Beetle event in January, 2) partner with SD GF&P & TNC to co-host a beaver dam analog (BDA) landowner workshop, and 3) soil health workshop in Hermosa (possibly funded by NACD grant). Patricia also suggested idea of a 4) forestry related meeting in Argyle area in the fall.

- Board discussed obligating $1,000 for workshops/meetings in 2024.
- Motion by Oonagh to approve 2024 budget plan with $1,000 obligated to workshops, and that any budget shortfalls will be covered by funds from the savings account, second by Paul, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- Soil award nominations:
  - Call for nominations, please let Mike know if you would like to nominate someone for this award.
- South Dakota Grasslands Initiative:
  - Quarterly partner meetings scheduled in January. Our area meeting will be on Tuesday, January 16th in Wall, SD, 1-4 pm MST, at the Wall Community Center.
  - South Dakota Grassland Summit scheduled for March 18th-19th in Oacoma, SD.
  - New podcast released - "Partners on the Prairie".
- National Wild Turkey Federation - 2024 Waterways for Wildlife Initiative Request for Proposals:
  - Deadline is February 9, 2024.
- Card from NRCS to conservation partners:
  - Happy Holidays card from Tony Sunseri in State NRCS office.
- USFS, Black Hills National Forest, Forest Plan Revision Assessments are complete
- SD DANR – Arbor Day Poster contest "Trees are Terrific… in Cities and Towns!", 3/29 deadline, $125 for 1st place and student's teacher gets $175 for classroom supplies, $100 prize for 2nd, $75 for 3rd.
- Speech contest – theme for contest is "Working Grassland, Why Should We Care?". Scholarship awards to 1st-3rd place: $1,200 for 1st, $800 for 2nd, $500 for 3rd.
- Christmas card from Chamber of Commerce received.

Old Business:

- Discussion on purchasing a no-till drill:
  - Dave has been working on a draft proposal based on previous discussion with Tamarah and Paul. Will continue working on proposal for 2024.

New Business:

- Conservation thinning grants:
  - 2021-23 grant update:
    - Rita Clarke 10.2 acre project is complete. Reimbursement request submitted to State, just waiting on payment.
    - Dave Reyelts 22.3 acre project is complete. Waiting on contractor invoice – needed prior to submitting reimbursement request.
  - 2022-24 grant update:
    - Wood Argyle project is complete, reimbursement request submitted, waiting on payment from State.
    - Robert Rosenquist withdrew application due to financial costs.

- Forest Health grant update:
  - Paulsen application on hold because applicant leases the property, the State requested written approval from landowners prior to proceeding with grant application. Waiting on approval from landowners.
- November State Conservation Commission meeting:
  - At Nov. 14 meeting, Commission approved increases in Forest Stand Improvement cost-share rates. In the 2024 docket, thinning rates will be 50% of costs up to $1,500/ac. Slash disposal will increase to 50% cost-share up to $300/ac. Maximum payments will be $900/ac if both thinning and slash disposal are completed.
- Approval from Board to submit request to use 2024 docket for existing grant:
  - Mike requested the Board consider submitting a grant amendment request to the State Conservation Commission for our 2022-2024 Resilient Forest grant. The request would seek permission to use the new 2024 docket for the existing grant.
  - Motion made by Greg to approve grant amendment request, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

- Burning Beetle Learning Event:
  - Board previously agreed to provide coffee and cookies for this event on January 18. Dave provided a draft agenda of speakers. Overall theme of event is "A forum for newcomers and long-term residents of the Custer and Black Hills area to gain new information and have a discussion about living in community with our natural environment."

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
  - NACD grant – Friends of NACD program:
    - Paul wrote primary text for grant application. Mike completed the rest and submitted application. Awards announced at next NACD meeting.
  - Newsletter
    - Sent out to email distribution list on 11/15, mailings sent out on 11/20.
  - 2024 Annual Work Plan
    - Plan was revised based on input from the Board at previous meeting. Mike shared with Board.
    - Board asked to include potential workshops discussed earlier in the meeting.
    - Motion by Paul, second by Tamarah to approve work plan with changes.
    - Long Range Plan will be reviewed next November.
  - BHNF Forest Plan
    - Revised assessments were released to Cooperating Agencies on 11/15, and then to the public two weeks later.
    - Shawn Cochran named new Forest Supervisor for the Black Hills, start date is January 14, 2024

        - Cooperative Agency meeting held yesterday, 12/13
            - NOI for next phase (plan development) is expected in spring
    - BH Resilient Forest Partnership:
        - Meeting on 11/15, small group of participants, called-in late due to other obligation.
    - US Census Bureau - 2023 Annual Survey of Local Government Finances:
        - Mike completed and submitted survey.
    - Scholarship
        - One application received so far.
    - DSAF Symposium held on 11/29, attended by Mike, Dave, and Stuart:
        - Speaker topics included: Review of 2012 Planning Rule, Forest resilience, Mountain pine beetles, Plan revision case study, Unevenaged management.
        - Forestry Across the Plains – DSAF & Great Plains SAF annual conference in Pierre, April 3-4.
    - NACD Forestry Notes – expecting that our resilient forest video will be mentioned in the December issue of Forestry Notes
    - Mike missed most of last week due to jury duty.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 11 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner's Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Critique:

Adjournment: Regular meeting adjourned at 10:40 AM.

Executive Sesson: Board entered into executive session at 10:42. Ended at 10:47. Board agreed to award Mike with $350 performance award.