Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – March 14, 2024

The March 14, 2024 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 (advisor). Others in attendance were Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Mike Linde (Custer Co. Commission), 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 and to approve the meeting minutes from February 8, 2024, was made by Tamarah, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- County Commission: Mike Linde –
  - Nothing to report.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Ben and Lori Brown, TNC, submitted a grant application to NWTF for their Waterways for Wildlife Initiative program. If awarded, funds would be used for beaver dam analog (BDA) structures, plantings, fencing. Would like to do a BDA project in Custer County.
  - Second Century Working Lands Habitat Program – grass seeding program – one applicant from Custer County.
  - Partnering with Ducks Unlimited in their new project funded by USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Goal is to restore 25,000 acres of grassland. Plantings paid for with CRP-like payment, no haying or grazing for 3 years.
  - Landowners Matter newsletter is used to advertise for various programs available from SD GF&P, published twice per year. They also release information via newspaper and radio ads.
  - Willow propagation facility near Rapid should be operational in May and tours can be set up after that. Mike will set up a tour for the Board.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $16,465.09,
  - Grant Checking = $1,490.91,
  - Savings = $35,861.03 ($11.39 interest earned in February).

- No bills to pay or approve
- Motion by Oonagh to approve financial report, second by Greg, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- SDACD legislative updates:
    - Discussion on failure of HB 1209, which would have provided funding for Custer's West Dam. There is optimism for success in future legislative sessions. Board will have early conversation with city to gather support and will try to get support from other legislators.
    - Also some discussion on failure of SB 134, which would have created a forest infrastructure relief and grant program.
- Call for nominations for 2024 SD Leopold Conservation Award – deadline was March 6.
- Invitation to 2024 Black Hills Area Botany & Ecology Workshop, March 1.
- Invitation for producers to attend SD Grassland Coalition's Regenerate 3-Day HRM (Holistic Resource Management) School, March 25-27, Pierre, SD.
- Invitation to Forestry Across the Plains Conference - 2024 Spring Conference Dakotas SAF/Great Plains SAF, April 3-4, Pierre.
- Invitation to Conservation Outreach Training by NWF, April 9-10, Rapid City, SD.
- Information on the South Dakota Wildlife Federation Youth Conservation Camp, June 2-8 at Camp Bob Marshall. $450/camper.
- Information on the 19th Annual Soil Days & 40th Annual Rangeland Days, June 12-13, Watertown, SD.
- Information on the SD Range Management Workshop, June 25-27, Belle Fourche, SD
- Information on the Women on the Range Grazing Workshop, July 8-10, at Wedge Tent Ranch, Faith, SD.
- Information on the Grazing School by the SD Grassland Coalition, September 10-12 (or 12-14) in Oacoma, SD.

Old Business:

- Review of planned workshops in 2024:
    - Potential soil health workshop – no word on our NACD grant application that would fund the workshop. Grants selections were made at the recent NACD Conference, but have not heard which were chosen. Paul discussed his recent observations of soil erosion in plowed fields from a trip to eastern South Dakota.
    - BDA workshop – discussed under Ben's report. Would occur between June and September.
    - Forestry workshop in Argyle area – no updates from Patricia. Mike will reach out to her for details.
    - Arbor Day – planning on either May 13 or May 6 for event with Custer Elementary and City.
- Discussion on purchasing a no-till drill:

- Paul and Tamarah met before today's meeting to further discuss topic. Some interest in a specific no-till that runs about $35K.
- Dave, Tamarah, and Paul will finish up the proposal letter to be used for grant applications and will bring it to the next meeting.

New Business:

- Update on USFS RAC grant:
  - Mike shared update received from Todd Hoover. All cutting and piling completed for 80 acres in project area. USFS is still working on other units in the area that are not part of RAC grant.
  - Todd offered to schedule a field trip with the Board if interested. Board expressed interest. Mike will work with Todd and the Board on scheduling a date.
- Conservation thinning grants:
  - 2022-24 grant update:
    - Mike submitted a request for grant extension with the State Conservation Commission. Their next meeting is scheduled on April 10. Current grant end date is June 30, 2024.
  - Forest Health grant update:
    - Our request to SD DANR-RCF to use the new 2024 docket for this grant is still under review in Pierre.
    - New landowner applications received but they are not ready for Board consideration. Properties were visited by RCF foresters and are waiting on prescriptions.
    - Long-eared bat restrictions will likely prevent any thinning work until fall.
    - In reference to the previous application for a thinning project near Custer by the lessee, not the landowner – the landowner has provided written consent to proceed. Board discussed whether to consider this application now or wait until next month when the other applications should be ready to review. The Board decided to wait because we are still waiting on approval to use the 2024 docket, the bat restrictions will likely prevent any work from commencing until the fall, and the project would likely use up all available funding instead of being spread across a few projects.
  - Our new Forest Health grant application was submitted to DANR-RCF, no word on whether it will be funded.
  - Consideration of reduced cost-share if landowner does the thinning work:
    - Guidance from State was that we would need to ask for a grant amendment from the Conservation Commission if wanted to lower cost-share for this case. Since not an issue now, it was suggested waiting until there is a problem.
- SD Locally Led – 2024 resource concerns:
  - Our year to reevaluate the District's greatest resource concerns. Mike will share with the Board the list of concerns selected in 2021 and the available list of resource concerns for South Dakota.

- Should the District become members of the SD Grassland Coalition and SD Soil Health Coalition:
    - Discussion on benefits of both organizations. Membership costs would be $50/year to SDGC and $25/year to SDSHC. Motion by Paul to become members of both organizations, second by Oonagh, motion carried.

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
    - Burning beetle learning event included in February issue of NACD's Forestry Notes publication. This issue and previous issues are available at https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/publications/forestry-notes/.
    - Mike will attend the South Dakota Grasslands Summit "Connecting around South Dakota's most important resource: Our Grasslands", March 18-19 in Oacoma.
    - New scholarship application received, deadline is March 31.
    - Attended the State Weed & Pest Conference in Spearfish.
    - BHNF Forest Plan:
        - Coop. Agency meetings: Feb. meeting cancelled, virtual meeting on 3/13.
        - Working meeting scheduled on 3/26 in Sundance
        - Rob Hoelscher has retired. Forest hopes to advertise for a replacement soon.
    - Black Hills Resilient Forest Partnership (BHRFP):
        - Was not able to attend Feb. 21 meeting due to overlap with Weed & Pest Conference. Next meeting is scheduled on March 20.
    - Discussed proposed change in Mike's work schedule.

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

Critique:

Adjournment: Regular meeting adjourned at 10:36 AM.