Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – July 11, 2024

The July 11, 2024 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Custer County Courthouse, at 9:02 AM by Dave Thom.

Board members in attendance were Dave Thom, Oonagh Wood, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, and Greg Neugebauer. Others in attendance were Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Micheal Bordelon (SD DANR-RCF), Kari Sanders (FSA), Amanda Wulf (FSA), Mike Linde (Custer County Commission), Justin Boerboom (NRCS), 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.

Request by Dave to add 1) CIS Rangeland and Riparian Health project and 2) Forestry Best Management Practices to New Business on today's agenda. Motion to approve modified agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from June 13, 2024, was made by Paul, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- County Commission: Mike Linde –
  - Nothing to report.
- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon –
  - Working on a new forest prescription and there is a new staff forester in the Lead office.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Will provide update later in the meeting when discussing willow tour and BDA workshop.
- USDA Farm Services Agency: Kari Sanders (County Executive Director, Fall River & Custer) and Amanda Wulf (Farm Loan Manager) –
  - Kari discussed recent drought report and disaster programs that depend on drought condition. Public can comment on drought conditions they are seeing so that refinements can be made to drought maps. To qualify for disaster assistance, areas need to be within D2 drought intensity (severe drought) for 8 consecutive weeks, or within a D3 intensity (extreme drought) for 1 week.
  - Also reviewed 5-member county board with two members' terms ending this year. Nomination deadline for board is August 1. It is a three-year term, not to exceed 3 consecutive terms.
  - Amanda spoke on the Farm Loans program and provided documentation overviewing the various loans and requirements.

- NRCS: Justin Boerboom –
    - Currently wrapping up EQIP operations with 12-13 contracts in Pennington and Custer Counties.
    - Does not appear that the CIS program will continue, at least in the near term.
    - Paige Uher has accepted the District Conservationist position in Rapid City with a starting date of July 29.
    - Provided an overview of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Currently a project in the Belle Fourche River Watershed to fund irrigation projects. RCPPs require matching funds (25-50%, can be in-kind) and work like EQIP. Application deadline is next summer. They are similar to the CIS approach – can be larger areas, even multiple counties. Joint Chiefs funding is another funding option, which can fund work on both public and private land.
    - Provided a brief update on our current CIS projects. Forestry CIS funds are all obligated and there is 1-year of Rangeland CIS funds remain. Mike was under the impression that this was the last year of funding and that all funds were obligated. Justin will check into this.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
    - Main Checking = $14,895.99,
    - Grant Checking = $1,490.91,
    - Savings = $35,908.22 ($11.02 interest in June).
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
    - Bills:
        - SDACD – balance on annual dues, $500.00
        - Hills Area – dues, $75.00
        - SHP Holdings, LLC – legal notice of vacancy in Chronicle, $21.51
        - Black Hills State University – scholarship for Abigail Studt – $1,000
    - Credit card purchases:
        - Vector Design Print & Tech – newsletter & postage, $431.34
        - Arrowwood Resort & Conference Center – hotel stay for Leadership, $131.14
            - Mileage & meals = $229.28
- Motion by Greg to approve financial report, second by Oonagh, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- Forest health virtual workshop (EAB, DED, BOB…Oh my!), Wednesday July 17, 12:00-1:00.

Old Business:

- Field tour of RAC grant project site:
    - Tour held after the June meeting. Good turnout and articles published about the event in the Custer Chronicle and Newcastle paper (News Letter Journal).
    - Board interested in USFS coming to meeting to speak more on the Antelope Canyon proposed project and provide an update on future RAC funding opportunities.

- Field tour of willow propagation / BDA site:
    - On June 17, Mike and Dave met with Ben and Kris Cudmore and toured the Willow Creek area of the old Meeker Ranch. There are roughly 50 BDAs installed and willow planting was done by USFS and SD GF&P.
    - Ben discussed similar project planned for Cottonwood Creek in Fall River County. Through a NWTF grant, they plan to plant 5,000 willows and cottonwoods next spring. They are also hoping to plant 5,000 willows at the Meeker Ranch. If so, will be looking for help.
    - Ben will speak to Kris Cudmore about potentially hosting BDA workshop in the third week of August.
- No-till Drill discussion:
    - Received a response from the newsletter from a landowner in eastern Custer County. He normally rents from Pennington CD. He planted ~300 acres this year but could have done 400-500 acres. Usually plants 200-300 acres per year.
    - Board interested in annual break down of costs for operating a no-till drill. Mike or Paul will contact Yvette from Butte/Lawrence CDs to ask if she can share some information about their annual costs.
    - Oonagh suggested that could offer free use to person who stores and maintains drill.
- Supervisor elections:
    - Except for Dave, Paul, and Oonagh, no other candidates submitted paperwork for the expiring supervisor terms; therefore, they will not be included on the November ballot.
- District workshop:
    - Fall Landowner Forestry workshop, Sept. 7:
        - Discussion on field tour. Patricia commented that it's unlikely there will be active machinery in the area until October due to bat restrictions. Board agreed to drop field tour component. Will schedule workshop later in the day and provide a supper instead of lunch in the hopes of attracting a larger crowd.
    - Beaver dam analog workshop: no update at this time. No response from TNC. Ben will reach out to TNC as well, but GF&P may be willing to host workshop without them. Ben will get back to Mike.

New Business:

- Conservation thinning grants:
    - Commission grant:
        - Waiting on paperwork from Webster to submit reimbursement request to State. No other updates.
    - Forest Health grant:
        - 2023-24 grant: still have ~10.6 ac ($9,520.00) remaining to obligate.
            - Board discussed giving balance to previous applicant who requested 35 acres, but was only awarded 5 acres. Bordelon will speak with applicant to see if he is still interested.

        - 2024 grant: Waiting on award letter for new $25,000 grant. Mike will inquire on status. Currently have a 40 acre application interested in funding.
- Discussion on South Dakota Ag Land Trust:
    - Paul curious if anyone aware of interest in Custer County. Not known, but the Trust has interest in other parts of the Hills.
- CIS Rangeland and Riparian Health project:
    - Discussed by Justin above in NRCS partner report.
- Forestry Best Practices audit:
    - SD Best Management Practices designed to protect soil/water resources during timber harvests
    - Provides guidance on how to do practices
    - Group doing audits includes Dave

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
    - Leadership Conference:
        - Mike attended conference in Oacoma on June 27 & 28.
    - Newsletter:
        - Printed and mailed. Release delayed to accommodate RAC project tour in June.
    - Otherwise, very busy with spray season.

Next meeting: Thursday, September 12 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner's Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Critique:

Adjournment: Regular meeting adjourned at 10:26 AM.