Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – October 10, 2024

The October 10, 2024 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order in the Pine Room at the Custer County Courthouse Annex, at 9:00 AM by Dave Thom.

Board members in attendance were Dave Thom, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, and Oonagh Wood. Others in attendance were Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Micheal Bordelon (call-in; 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.

Request by Dave to add '10-year review of District's thinning program' under 'Thinning grants' in New Business on today's agenda. Motion to approve modified agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from September 12, 2024, was made by Paul, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon & Patricia Weyrich –
  - Micheal will have updates during the thinning grant discussion.
  - Patricia – approaching the 5-year review of DANR's Forest Action Plan.
- US Forest Service general: Julie Wheeler, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
  - Julie was not able to attend today's meeting, but provided a brief update via email:
    - They will be entering Stage 2 Fires Restrictions across the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands. This should happen within the next couple of days. It will be very similar to what the Black Hills NF recently did.
    - The Grassland is facing some budget challenges going into Fiscal Year 2025. As a result, the Forest Service is not hiring non-fire seasonals.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Working on 4 thinning projects that have started or will start this week. Anticipate will be done by spring.
  - Recently completed a couple aspen exclosure projects. Also have a couple new signups for about 7 total aspen projects.
  - Low on funding for pipelines and water development projects.
  - 2nd Century program on hold for now.
  - GF&P meeting in December to go over all cost-share programs. Let Ben know if have any comments or recommendations on current programs.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $12,163.74,
  - Grant Checking = $1,490.91,
  - Savings = $35, 945.23 (September interest = $12.21).
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
  - Credit card purchases:
    - Ramkota Hotel, Watertown – hotel stay for SDACD Convention – $213.98
  - Bills:
    - Annual dues for NACD. Mike will inquire into cost for lifetime membership. Board will decide payment amount at November meeting.
- SDACD Convention travel:
  - Mileage costs were $377.40 (740 miles @ $0.51/mile); meal costs were $63
  - Expecting $420 in cost-share for attendance at convention.
    - Other cost-share payments expected in near term:
      - Attendance at Leadership Conference, ~$200
      - Attendance during NCDEA September Professional Development Webinar, unknown $$
      - Attendance during Forest Health Webinars, ~$325
- Motion by Oonagh to approve financial report, second by Paul, motion carried.

Correspondence:

- SD Grassland Coalition Annual Meeting, December 5, Rapid City:
  - Mike is inquiring on whether all board members can attend for free or if this is restricted to one person.
- Regenerate 3-day School, November 19-21, Pierre
- Pasture Walk + SD Society for Range Management annual meeting, October, 23, Faith

Old Business:

- SDACD Convention:
  - Mike updated board on activities during convention including tour of Big Sioux Nursery and tour of Lake Area Technical College in Watertown.

New Business:

- Thinning grants:
  - State Commission grant:
    - Patricia stated that one landowner started work again, but had to shut down due to fire concerns – their masticator started a fire. Will wait for improved conditions to begin again. Work is approximately 70% complete.
    - Micheal Bordelon will contact landowners with outstanding projects to get updates.
  - Forest Health grants:
    - 2023-24 grant and 2024-25 grant:

        - Tony Seidl approved of dividing remaining funds equally between Paulsen and Webster ($17,010.00 each). Tony is sending begin work letter to landowners. Bordelon is updating the project maps for both landowners.
    - 2024 Fall Grant Round for SD Conservation Commission:
        - Application was submitted for $61,200 – $60,000 for thinning and $1,200 for administrative costs. Could have asked up to $9,000 for admin (15%), but would have to account for $18,000 in administrative costs, not feasible. SD Conservation Commission will meet on November 6 to review applications.
        - Mike expressed some concern about remaining funds in the Commission grant. Although all funds are obligated, it might give the Commission pause. Mike will be prepared to discuss fire concerns, long-eared bat restrictions, Ips beetles, and some contractor issues at the Commission meeting.
    - 10-year review of the District's thinning program:
        - Dave discussed accomplishments of program and what changes may be needed (e.g., do the priority areas need to be revisited, are we missing areas).
        - Talk with partners (SD Wildland Fire, NRCS, SD DANR-RCF, SD GF&P, USFS, County Planning) and arrange meeting in early December to discuss future priorities. Dave will work with Mike on scheduling.
- 2025 budget:
    - In 2025, the District will receive $9,000 in operating expenses, $500 for supplies, and insurance costs.
    - Mike will work with Oonagh on draft 2025 budget. Will present budget to the Board at the December meeting. Items that Mike would like the Board to consider include mileage rates and meeting pay.
        - The State increased their mileage rates from $0.51/mile to $0.66/mile. Does the Board want to adopt those changes?
        - Mike shared a summary of meeting pay by districts across the state. Our current meeting pay is tied for 3rd lowest in the State and 2nd lowest in the Hills Area at $30/meeting. Does the Board want to increase the pay? If increased, annual expenses will increase by $405 for every $5 increase in meeting pay (based on 2023 meeting expenses).
    - Mike will work with Oonagh on drafting 2025 budget, will present to board at the December meeting.
- 2025 Arbor Day tree order:
    - Black Hills spruce not available this year thru Big Sioux Nursery. Will need to find an alternative. Mike was going to suggest only buying BH spruce for next year since students usually don't care for the "sticks" (bare-root deciduous seedlings). Fall River CD is selling Colorado blue spruce, but it's not clear how

well they would do here. Dave suggested speaking with Josh Larson for his thoughts. Mike will bring proposal to the November board meeting.

Other Business:

- Miscellaneous office manager updates:
    - Mike recently communicated with Stephenie about whether she wished to stay on the board as an Advisor. She stated that she is too busy to continue as an advisor but wished to be included on emails concerning the District.
    - Tamarah received a Certificate of Achievement for completing the Board Development Modules 1-11. Certificates were awarded during the SDACD Convention.
    - The Hills Area is hosting a Legislative meeting on October 23, at 1:00 PM, at the Walt Taylor Building, Rapid City. Beverages and snacks will be served at 12:30. Legislative candidates from the surrounding districts were invited to speak. Registration deadline is the 15th. Mike will let the Board know if any candidates plan on attending.
    - Mike attended the SD Grassland Initiative Quarterly Partner Meeting on October 1 in Rapid City.
- Paul discussed attendance at recent soil health meeting hosted by Fall River CD.

Next meeting: Thursday, November 14 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner's Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Critique:

Adjournment: Regular meeting adjourned at 10:06 AM.