Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – March 13, 2025

The March 13, 2025 meeting of the Custer County Conservation District was called to order in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Custer County Courthouse, at 9:00 AM by Dave Thom.

Board members in attendance were Dave Thom, Paul Nettinga, Tamarah Caster, Oonagh Wood, Greg Neugebauer, and Stuart Adrian (advisor). Others in attendance were Paige Uher (NRCS), Matt Lucas (USFS, Buffalo Gap NG), Micheal Bordelon (SD DANR-RCF), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Tom Miklos (SD GF&P), Patricia Weyrich (call-in; SD DANR-RCF), Mary LaHood (call-in; SD Family Forests Assoc.), 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 agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from February 13, 2025, was made by Paul, seconded by Greg, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS: Paige Uher –
  - EQIP applications are all ranked, waiting on funding.
  - CSP applications need to be ranked by the 21st.
  - Able to pay current contracts funded by IRA, other applications on hold.
  - NRCS lost probationary employees including Jared who attended our last meeting.
- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon –
  - Nothing to report. Continuing to work on projects.
- US Forest Service general: Matt Lucas, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
  - Currently signing up permittees.
  - Drought concerns for upcoming season. Not making adjustments to grazing permits, but will do so later if needed.
  - No new projects at this time.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket & Tom Miklos –
  - Tom – Working on woven wire removal projects in Meade and Ziebach counties. There is a need for water projects.
  - Ben – 2nd Century grass seeding project was awarded RCPP funding in January, but on pause for now due to funding.
  - Ducks Unlimited grass seeding project is also frozen.
  - Willows project moving forward. Bessey Nursery growing willows. They hope to receive willows from nursery in late May. Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation planning promotional video of plantings on June 6-7 at Willow Creek. Will be

~100 high school students helping. Would like representative from Custer CCD to be part of video since we are a sponsor of the project. Mike will contact Chronicle before event to see if they would write an article about it. For sponsorship check, will write check to GF&P for rebar and tree tubes.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $16,110.81, Grant Checking = $1,490.91,
  - Savings = $36,004.74 (February interest = $11.04).
- Deposits:
  - None
- Bills to pay and/or approve:
  - Credit card:
    - None
  - Checks:
    - SDACD dues request - $1,100 request.
- Motion by Paul to approve account balances and pay SDACD dues at $1,100, second by Tamarah, motion carried.
- Rain barrels:
  - Motion by Greg to order 10 barrels, second by Oonagh, motion carried. Barrels will cost $57.50 + freight (to be determined).

New Business:

- Discuss SD Family Forests Association and Forest Stewardship Plans with Mary LaHood, SDFFA Executive Director:
  - SDFFA has 3 federally funded grants with frozen funds ($5 million IRA grant, Forest Health grant, and forest stewardship cost-share grant). The forest stewardship plan cost-share helps landowners with the cost for hiring a forester for plan writing. Funding is not currently available, but still a high demand. Therefore, SDFFA is working with Pennington CD to apply for SD Conservation Commission funding. If awarded funding, SDFFA cannot operate in Custer County without a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with Pennington CD. Current JPA expires this month and is up for renewal. Would need to add "forest management" or something similar to JPA so that stewardship plans are covered.
  - Motion by Greg to approve new JPA with Pennington CD that includes language for forest stewardship planning. Second by Oonagh, motion carried.
- Hills Area meeting date:
  - Mike asked the Board if they would be okay with a potential move from June 10 to Monday, June 9 due to a conflict with Rangeland Days by another District. Board was fine with potential new date.
- Thinning grants:
  - Forest Health grants:
    - BIL funding frozen. Both current projects notified.
  - State Commission grants:
    - 2022-2025 grant:
      - No project updates

- Asked Tony about possibility of using available funds to pay for Forest Health projects – maybe but will wait to see if BIL funding becomes available again.

- 2025-2027 grant:
  - Two new landowner applications were received. Bordelon has them both scheduled for site visits and to work on prescriptions.
  - Advertisement of grant in the March 5 edition of the Chronicle. Board will wait before re-advertising.

Old Business:

- Landowner forestry meeting:
  - Scheduled at 10:30 on Friday, March 28, at Argyle VFD. Field tour on private property with recent thinning work after lunch.
  - About 35 registered so far not including speakers or board members. Mike will confirm that fire hall has enough tables and chairs. Patricia stated that Wildland Fire has tables and chairs if needed.
  - Discussion on lunch choice. Motion made by Tamarah to go with Custer Deli, second by Greg, motion carried. Mike will purchase chips and drinks separately.
- Firewise Communities: outreach to road districts:
  - Dave asked to add text in the outreach letter about our cost-share grant. No other comments were made. Mike will update letter and mail it to the districts. Letter will also include two handouts on Firewise that were shared with us by Logan Brown.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
  - Food Forest Webinar, Feb. 24
  - Black Hills Area Botany and Ecology Workshop, March 7 in Rapid City
  - Weston County NRD:
    - "Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration Workshop", May 20 & 21 near Newcastle.
    - Plus 3 days of speakers starting at 8:30 each day. Talks will be recorded for later viewing.
      - April 16: Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration 101
      - April 30: Project Planning and Partnerships
      - May 14: Project Implementation and Collaboration
- Soil Health Coalition: Soil Health Awareness Week, March 9-15.
- SD DANR: Notice of SD Conservation Commission spring grant round, application deadline March 21. Commission meeting on April 8 @ 7:15 AM.
- SD DANR: Letter placing an immediate pause on funds for grant 2022-BILFT-01.
- SD DANR: Letter placing an immediate pause on funds for grant 2024-BILFT-01.
- Several legislative updates from Angela.
- SD Wildlife Federation Youth Conservation Camp, June 1-7:
  - $500/camper. May 1 is requested deadline. Grades 9-12, and recent 8th grads eligible to attend.

    - Oonagh suggested that the board think about providing a scholarship for a student to attend.
    - After discussion, motion by Oonagh to provide $500 in scholarship funding for student(s) to attend camp at Bob Marshall, second by Paul, motion carried.
- Dave noted that the upcoming DSAF meeting in Rapid City was postponed. Planning to reschedule in the fall.

Other Business:

- Office manager report:
    - Planning Commission review packet:
        - No comments were made on this month's packet.
    - BHNF Plan Revision:
        - Coop. Agency meeting scheduled for March 12 was cancelled. USFS stated they would not be able to attend.
        - Effects of funding and staffing shortages may affect plan timeline.
        - County Commission is moving forward with resolution opposing any new Wilderness Areas or Scenic Rivers in the Black Hills.
    - Mike received conservation district swag for future events. Items included totes, cinch backpacks, stress trees, and wildflower seed packets.

Next meeting: Thursday, April 10 @ 9:00 AM – Commissioner's Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Public Comment:

- Patricia noted that the SDFFA IRA thinning grant, although frozen, has received more applications for acres than they have funding for – almost double. Therefore, she is making sure folks are also aware of conservation district cost-share grants.
- Paul asked that people take the sample seed packs he brought.

Critique:

- None

Adjournment: Regular meeting adjourned at 10:49 AM.