Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – July 10, 2025

The July 10, 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, and Greg Neugebauer. Others in attendance were Julie Wheeler (USFS, Buffalo Gap NG), Todd Butler (USFS, Black Hills NF), Micheal Bordelon (SD DANR-RCF), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Kari Sanders (FSA), Benita Trump (FSA), 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 Custer County Community Wildfire Protection Plan to New Business on today's agenda. Motion to approve modified agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from June 12, 2025, was made by Tamarah, seconded by Paul, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon –
  - Nothing new to report. Continuing to work on SD Family Forests Association projects. Noted that we have a thinning grant application, but no more funding.
- US Forest Service general: Julie Wheeler, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
  - Forage drying out, but forage is still decent. Working on two range projects in the county.
  - Staffing is down to 4 people. Range Con. and Wildlife Biologist gone, front desk person leaving soon.
  - Recent fire in Pennington Co. – Railroad Butte. District has a fully staffed fire engine.
  - Willow/BDA project in Fall River Co. – NWTF funded.
  - Roadless rule rescinded. Rule had restricted road construction in certain areas.
  - NEPA has also changed.
- US Forest Service general: Todd Butler, USFS Black Hills National Forest –
  - Saw the discussion on the Forest Plan Revision in the previous meeting minutes, offered that we could ask Lou to attend a meeting to provide additional information.
  - FRASS Project – contractor already working in area – putting down trees, but not dragging due to fire danger. Could have temporary road closures.
  - ~3-4-acre fire near Elk Mountain. Moisture about average in the southern Hills.

- Vegetation Management Projects. Antelope Canyon and Hay Draw (sic, north of Custer Highlands), to be repackaged and reoffered. No bids were previously received.
- Roadless Rule change – Black Elk and Norbeck only ones in the county.

- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Willow plantings went well. Little over 10K willows planted at Willow Creek. Also willow and cottonwood plantings in northern hills and in Fall River.
  - Installed BDAs at Outlaw Ranch. Attendee at our BDA workshop last August, asked for them to be installed at the Ranch.
  - Water funding available, $55K allotted in our district. Used for water development for grazing. Mike reminded board that similar cost-share dollars are available through the SD Conservation Commission. Kari mentioned ECP funds that provide cost-share for similar projects. May have had more people interested in funding than was available. Tamarah suggested the Board look into applying for grant funds through the State Commission. Ben estimated that he is aware of ~10 people in Custer County looking for funding. Board asked Mike to look into applying for a grant this fall. Could use FSA, NRCS, and Ben for guidance.
- USDA Farm Services Agency: Kari Sanders (County Executive Director, Fall River & Custer) and Benita Trump –
  - Kari and Benita shared an informational packet with information about the upcoming County Committee election, the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program, Youth Loan program, and the Drought Monitor.
    - County Committee election: 2 positions in Fall River County will end their terms this year.
    - Supplemental Disaster Relief Program: provides disaster relief payments to producers with qualifying losses in 2023 and 2024. Mailings going out to producers now.
    - Youth Loans: designed to help youth get involved in agriculture. 10-20 year olds are eligible with loans up to $10K available.
    - Drought Monitor: much of Custer Co. still in moderate or severe drought. Producers hauling hay can get assistance
  - Kari offered that, if the District has information that it would like to share with producers, they could assist by including it in their monthly newsletter.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $12,226.53, Grant Checking = $15,424.54,
  - Savings = $34,051.95 (June interest = $11.56).
- Deposits:
  - $170.00 into business checking for rain barrels
  - $13,933.63 – grant checking for thinning reimbursement
- Bills to pay/approve:
  - Thinning grant reimbursement:
    - Webster - $13,933.63
  - Credit card expenses:
    - Leadership Conference:

- hotel, 2-night stay at Quality Inn = $233.14
- gas, = $53.91
- no meal costs – covered by registration fee, sponsors, and cost-share grant

- Motion by Paul to approve account balances and bills, second by Tamarah, motion carried.

New Business:

- New legislation on open meeting laws:
  - Mike discussed changes to open meeting laws that went into effect this year. Board is now required to annually review the State's publication "A Guide to South Dakota's Open Meetings Laws". Board agreed to set annual review for January.
- Leadership Conference:
  - Tony Sunseri:
    - Strongly pushing the use of 'local working groups' by the Districts. The groups have the ability to convene meetings, set agendas, and prioritize where federal resources are going. Can also pitch ideas for new NRCS practices. Board involvement is important.
    - Tony would need feedback by September for input into next Farm Bill. Recommend sending feedback through the Resource Unit Conservationist.
    - IRA funds could be rolled into next Farm Bill
  - Board meeting:
    - Focus on training needs of staff – training coordinator from ND assisted. Board is developing an action plan. Virtual meeting planned for next Tuesday.
    - Conservation awards for 250th US anniversary. Angela wants nominations from every district. Applications available on SD DANR's website. Supervisors and employees are not eligible.
  - Upcoming SDACD Conference, Sept. 21-23, in Huron:
    - Deadline for service award nominations is Aug. 15
    - Deadline for room reservation is Aug. 25. There will be a room lottery again this year.
- Partner to the SD Grassland Initiative:
  - Mike inquired whether the Board wanted to become an official partner of the Initiative. SDACD and several districts are already partners. Since SDACD is already a partner, no action taken.
- 2026 budget request:
  - The County Commission budget meetings will occur prior to the boards next meeting. Therefore, Mike inquired if the board wanted to make any changes to their budget request. Board asked Mike to work with Oonagh and one other board member on drafting request.
- Thinning grants:
  - Forest Health grants:
    - No updates. Tony remains in communication with the participants about staying on schedule with their projects.

- State Commission grants:
  - 2022-2025 grant:
    - Final report submitted. Expecting $500 check for administrative costs.
  - 2025-2027 grant:
    - No updates
  - Partnering with Fall River CD on their Commission grant:
    - Hayley Mauer, District Manager for Fall River CD, joined via telephone to discuss their forest thinning grant. They have unobligated grant dollars and Hayley and Mike previously discussed possibility of Custer using the funds if they were unable to.
    - Hayley's Board discussed option of adding Custer to their grant and use of no-till drills in Custer County. Her Board suggested that Custer CD could contribute to cost of drill maintenance since county residents use their drills.
    - Fall River has ~15 acres of thinning grant dollars available.
    - Tamarah expressed concern about just sending grant dollars back to State Commission so worried about sending back more.
    - Board will sit on it for now. Mike will put topic on the agenda for the next meeting.
    - Motion by Greg to enter into a Joint Powers Agreement with Fall River CD, second by Tamarah, motion carried.
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan:
  - Meeting held on June 26. Dave attended; Mike was unable to attend since he was at the Leadership Conference. Dave shared a copy of the slide presentation with the board. Contractor is revising the CWPP and will be meeting with stakeholders monthly until ~February 2026. One topic to be discussed is defining priority treatment areas; therefore, our effort to do the same will cease for now.

Old Business:

- Letter to Sunseri concerning EQIP funding for forestry projects:
  - Mike sent letter to Sunseri but has not heard a response. Mike also reached out to the other Districts in the Hills to see if they shared the same concerns. Lawrence was looking into it. The Pennington Board shares the concerns and made a motion to support the letter. They inquired if we would like to add them to the same letter or is each district sending their own letter? The Board appreciates their support, but since our letter was already sent, the Board asked for Pennington to send its own letter.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
  - SD Stockgrowers Convention. July 14-16. Rapid City
  - Herbaceous Plant Establishment Field Session. July 16. Sturgis
  - Women on the Range Grazing Workshop, July 22-24, in Faith

    - Forest Health webinar - Trees to plant and some to avoid, July 23, 12 pm
    - National Buffalo Association Conference, Tour. Aug 29-30. Rapid City
    - Dakotas Society of American Foresters conference: Silviculture for a Changing World. September 3 – 4. Rapid City
    - Pennington's ag workshop – probably in September
- Updates from NACD on recent Executive Actions
- Thank you card from Brylee Grill for scholarship
- 4-H judge needed – Keri Cochran
- 2024 Annual Reports: from NACD and National Conservation Foundation
- A second thank you card from S. Owens for sponsoring the youth camp.
- Request for partners to collaborate on 2026 Grasslands Summit.

Other Business:

- Office manager report:
    - Letters concerning Section 319 funding were sent to the offices of Representative Johnson, Senator Thune, and Senator Rounds. No response was received.
    - BHNF Plan Revision – no cooperative agency meeting this month. Comments on wilderness areas due to USFS next week.
    - Weed & Pest article published in the Custer Chronicle.

Public Comment:

- Ben – mentioned Commission meeting this week, during which they will review recommendations for mountain lion season. Under consideration is expanding the area where dogs can be used.
- Greg – asked if the District will have a booth at the county fair. Fair is August 8-10. Board will pass on it this year.

Critique:

- None

Next meeting: Thursday, September 11, 9:00-11:00 AM, Commissioners Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse. NOTE: NO MEETING IN AUGUST.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 10:34 AM.