Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – September 11, 2025

The September 11, 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, Oonagh Wood, and Stuart Adrian (advisor). Others in attendance were Laura Bosworth (NRCS), Justin Boerboom (NRCS; call-in), Paige Uher (NRCS; call-in), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Mike Linde (Custer County Commission), Patricia Weyrich (SD DANR-RCF; call-in), Micheal Bordelon (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.

Approve Agenda/Minutes:

Motion to approve today's agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from July 10, 2025, was made by Paul, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- County Commission: Mike Linde –
  - Nothing to report. Dave asked about desired frequency for updating the County Commission about the District's activities. Linde said once a year.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Thinning projects starting in October. Currently have 13 contracts and a couple more pending. Thinning involves removing pine (dbh 8" or less) around aspen groves. Spacing larger trees between 25-50'. Work is similar to a hardwood enhancement project. They will fence off aspen if necessary. Funds are not restricted to aspen, can be used to enhance oak, cottonwood, and other hardwoods.
  - Currently have four projects to fence off aspen, and another 4-5 projects are pending.
  - Water development funding – GF&P is still waiting to see if they will receive additional funding. If they do, funds will only be available to landowners outside of the Black Hills. Funds are earmarked for grassland bird habitat.
- NRCS:
  - Paige Uher –
    - Finishing up CSPs.
    - Staffing in the Rapid City field office is down to just Paige and 2 vacant positions.

- Justin Boerboom –
  - Accepted a new position within NRCS. Will be training officer for NRCS SD, but start date is unknown. Will not transition until NRCS is able to hire a replacement for his current position.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $11,254.48, Grant Checking = $1,990.91,
  - Savings = $34,074.35 (July interest = $11.57, August interest = $10.83).
- Deposits:
  - $500.00 – reimbursement for thinning grant administrative costs
  - $315.00 – reimbursement for online training
  - $90.00 – DSAF registration payback
- Bills to pay/approve:
  - Hills Area dues – $75.00
  - Paid $1,000 scholarship for Grill
  - Credit card expenses:
    - Registration to DSAF Fall Conference in Rapid City = $90.00
- Motion by Paul to approve account balances and bills, second by Oonagh, motion carried.

New Business:

- Potential fire mitigation proposal for funding through NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):
  - Justin gave a slide presentation to review RCPP. Project would focus on fire mitigation along/near transmission lines. Mike will email the Board the information from Justin.
  - NRCS cannot submit an application, must come from partner(s).
  - Justin has meeting scheduled on October 8 with potential partners including other conservation districts and energy companies. Mike will follow up with BH Electric Cooperative about participating.
- Approval of Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with Fall River Conservation District
  - Board approved creating a JPA with Fall River at the July board meeting. JPA allows for each district to operate within the other District's boundaries.
  - Mike created a draft JPA and shared with Fall River for comment. They had no changes and approved the agreement at their August board meeting.
  - Motion by Paul to approve agreement, second by Oonagh, motion carried.
- SDACD State Convention, Huron, Sept. 21-23
  - Mike asked the Board if they wanted him to attend. Costs are $200 for registration, plus hotel and some meals. Motion by Oonagh to approve Mike attending the conference, second by Paul, motion carried.
- Update on thinning grants:
  - Forest Health grants: Tony is meeting with Torkelson and his contractor later this month. Work can begin in October. No other updates.
  - 2025-2027 State Commission grant: no updates. All funding committed.
- Update on County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) stakeholder meetings:

    - Mike and Dave updated the Board on recent meetings, which are the last Thursday of the month.
    - The District is a collaborator/contributor. Mike will help to advertise the plan when it is ready for public comment.
    - Mike provided comments on the fire history map (issue with data being used).
    - Board is okay with sharing GIS file of the District's thinning projects with the condition that they will not be publicly available.
- Discuss minimum acreage for development in the county:
    - Paul expressed concern about push by some for decreasing minimum acreage for development. Discussed the Star Valley development and talk of a community sewer; however, the research necessary for a sewer has not been completed.
    - Paul asked Linde if a letter to the Commission with the Board's input would be welcomed. He said the Commission would welcome the Board's input.
    - Mike was asked to invite Terri Kester, County Planning Director, to the October or November board meeting to further discuss topic. Also, consideration of inviting engineering firm, but cost would be prohibitive.
- Fall Grant Round for SD Conservation Commission funding, application deadline October 1:
    - Water development grant idea continued from July board meeting.
    - Ben is aware of 10-11 landowners on a waiting list for water projects so believes there is a need.
    - Mike previously spoke with Paige and Brad Humbracht about the idea. Paige was aware of one potential producer. Brad agreed there is a need, but water development projects are expensive, and one producer could take all of money. Suggested also considering applying for grant dollars for seeding projects or fabricated wind breaks.
    - Patricia said a SD Riparian Buffer Initiative (RBI) project might be possible.
    - Ben has one project in mind for pipeline and storage tanks. Could be around $10-20K.
    - Motion by Oonagh for Mike to work with Ben on applying for a Commission grant for water development funding, second by Paul, motion carried.

Old Business:

- Partnering with Fall River CD on their Commission grant:
    - This discussion was tabled at the July Board meeting.
    - Hayley and Micheal were able to obligate all of Fall River's thinning grant dollars, so Custer partnering with them on their grant is no longer needed.
    - Fall River also inquired whether Custer would consider contributing to their no-till drill maintenance costs since Custer County residents rent their drills. Board considered the request but took no action.
    - Patricia suggested that if Custer applies for a new Commission thinning grant, consider adding Pennington and Fall River as partners in case there are issues obligating funds. Board considered this but took no action.
- Revitalize Local Working Groups with NRCS:
    - Board tabled discussion until October meeting due to lack of time. Laura stated that it is an opportunity of have voice heard on how NRCS funds are spent.

- 2026 budget request:
    - Budget meeting is next Wednesday, the 17th. Our request is for the same amount as last year: $9,000 for operating expenses, $900 for insurance, $500 for supplies, and ¼ of Mike's salary.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
    - NRCS State Technical Committee meeting, September 10, Pierre
    - Wind Cave NP annual wildlife survey, Wednesday September 17
    - SD Forest Health Workshop "Conifer Species for Landscape and Windbreaks," September 24, noon
    - SDFFA 2025 Landowner Appreciation and Award Banquet, October 4, Rapid City
    - Fall River CD Soil Health Workshop, October 3, Oelrichs
- Updates from NACD on recent Executive Actions
- Notice of Intent to Continue Mining Operation from M. Busskohl. Mike sent standard response letter to Busskohl acknowledging receipt and provided comments.
- SDACD Convention information
- SD conservation districts challenge to recognize America's 250th anniversary. Submission deadline is December 31. Current Board supervisors and advisors are not eligible.

Other Business:

- Meeting scheduled on September 16 with Safety Benefits, Inc. to conduct a Loss Control Survey for South Dakota Public Assurance Alliance (SDPAA). Mike will attend.
- Office manager report:
    - BHNF Plan Revision –
        - USFS hired University of Montana to conduct a third-party audit of its timber yield/growth models. U. of Wyoming will facilitate meetings with USFS and cooperating agencies to discuss models. Mike will attend as a representative for Custer County.
        - Consultant funding: Mike spoke with the County Commission about an inquiry for additional funds for the consultant working with the counties during the plan revision. Commission will consider it during their budget meetings.
    - BH Resilient Forest Partnership – group is hoping to hire a meeting facilitator/representative for the group. Currently working out details, but funding source is still unknown.
    - County Planning IRC (Interagency Review Committee):
        - Mike still receives monthly updates from Planning. Mike shares information with Paul. Nothing of concern identified in last batch received from Planning.
    - Weed & Pest
        - Season was quite busy, but is wrapping up.

Public Comment:

- None

Critique:

- None

Next meeting: Thursday, October 9, 9:00-11:00 AM, Commissioners Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 11:16 AM.