Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – December 2, 2025

The December 2, 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, Tamarah Caster, and Greg Neugebauer. Others in attendance were Paige Uher (NRCS), Micheal Bordelon (SD DANR-RCF), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Matt Lucas (USFS, Buffalo Gap NG), Todd Butler (USFS, Black Hills NF), Lane Ostenson (SD Wildland Fire), and Mike Baldwin (District Manager). Others that joined for the 85th celebration were Gladwin Paulsen (advisor), Keri Cochran (4H / SDSU Ext.), and Steve Caster.

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 modified agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from October 9, 2025, was made by Paul, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS: Paige Uher –
  - Tony Sunseri serving in an acting position at NRCS Headquarters. Jessica Michalski is the acting State Conservationist in his absence.
  - Defer letters going out for denied applications
  - National batching date to be instituted for NRCS programs – a move away from individual state batching dates
  - Paying out for completed practices
  - Dave asked about current funding levels. Paige said it looks good, a bit more than last year.
  - Paul asked about the direction of funding spent. There is an effort to make sure forestry work is not excluded. Also, Justin Boerboom is working with group of partners on potential RCPP proposal. Mike will discuss more later.
- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon –
  - Nothing new to report. Busy working on SD Family Forest Association projects and some NRCS projects.
  - Dave asked if there is still a need for grant funding. Micheal said there are still interested landowners.
- US Forest Service general: Todd Butler, USFS Black Hills National Forest –

    - The furlough did not impact USFS as much as other organizations. The Hell Canyon District only had ~15 employees furloughed, majority of employees continued working.
    - There is a new Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor for the Black Hills.
    - NEPA changes: USFS will initiate a watershed focus for completing NEPA requirements on the Black Hills (e.g., completing 50,000 acres at a time). Will start in 2026 with first watershed. It is expected that there will be 100% NEPA coverage for all 1.2 million acres of the Black Hills NF within 10 years.
    - Muskrat timber sale set for January 15. FRASS Project near completion.
    - Paul expressed concern about OHVs not staying on dedicated trails.
- US Forest Service general: Matt Lucas, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
    - Matt is currently the Acting District Ranger.
    - Their NEPA process is more reactive than BHNF's plan.
    - Pushing a couple projects related to undesirable plants. Plan to treat Russian olive and remove junipers in the French Creek area. May use prescribed fire in same area.
    - Not aware of any producers waiting on NRCS funding.
    - Dave discussed working together with nearby private property. Matt said there is a need for juniper removal on private land near French Creek.
    - Todd mentioned SD Good Neighbor Authority and would be good to invite those folks to a meeting.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
    - 17 acres of hardwood enhancement in October/November. Another 8 acres in progress.
    - Started fencing off a few aspen groves this winter.
    - Attending meeting next week to evaluate cost-share rates and landowner programs. Their goal is to provide 75% cost-share.
    - Agency considering cost-share program to treat cool-season invasive annual grasses. Would apply to West River SD. Ben has a landowner survey. Mike will include survey in upcoming newsletter.
- SD Wildland Fire: Lane Ostenson –
    - No report. Did mention 68 acres of fuel reduction near Hermosa. Work is set to begin near first of the year. Working on various other projects.
    - Dave asked about the District's informational flyer on non-commercial thinning opportunities. Mike updated flyer earlier in the year so should be current.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
    - Main Checking = $10,558.90, Grant Checking = $1,990.91,
    - Savings = $34,108.34 (October interest = $11.58, November interest = $10.46).
- Deposits:
    - To be made today: $5,600.00 – thinning cost-share reimbursement.
- Bills to pay/approve:
    - Thinning cost-share reimbursement to O. Torkelson – $5,600.00

    - 2025 board vouchers to be paid as follows: Dave - $624.28, Paul - $766.44, Oonagh - $652.56, Tamarah - $997.84, Greg - $730.66, Stuart - $586.24, Mike - $19.00.
- Motion by Oonagh to approve account balances and bills, second by Greg, motion carried.

New Business:

- Update on thinning grants:
    - Forest Health grants:
        - Torkelson project completed for 7 acres, reimbursement received. Payment to be made.
    - 2025-2027 State Commission grant:
        - No updates from Micheal at this time.
- Co-sponsoring the 2026 Burning Beetle Learning Event, January 15
    - Discussion on whether to cosponsor event and provide coffee and cookies. Motion by Paul to approve co-sponsorship, second by Oonagh, motion carried.
    - Mike will add expense to future annual budget plans under meeting expenses.
- 2026 district scholarship:
    - Board discussed whether to offer one $1,000 scholarship in 2026 or more than one. Motion by Greg to offer two $1,000 scholarships in 2026, seconded by Tamarah, motion carried.
- 2026 Arbor Day tree order:
    - Tamarah suggested providing honey locust to the kids at Elk Mountain since they will likely do better than spruce. Board agreed, Mike will order 1 bundle (25 trees) of honeylocust and let Mike choose the species for the other 75 trees.
- District's 85th Anniversary @ 10:00 AM
    - Group shared cake and coffee. Mike gave a small presentation about the district.

Old Business:

- Nominations for farm/ranch Natural Resources Conservation Award to recognize America's 250th anniversary.
    - After discussion, board chose to nominate Julie Oswald and Penny Svenkeson. Asked Mike to complete nomination forms
- Minimum acreage for development in the county and letter from the Board.
    - Planning Department is still working on the draft Ordinance 2. They hope to deliver document to the County Commission later this month. Terri will provide Mike a copy of the document once the draft is complete. He will share it with the board so that a letter to the Commission can be drafted.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
    - December 3 meeting on potential fire mitigation proposal through NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).
        - Meeting with potential partners to discuss project idea/goals. Mike will attend.

    - Reminder: 2025 South Dakota Grassland Coalition Annual Conference, December 4-5, 2025 in Box Elder.
- Updates from NACD on recent Executive Actions
- Responses from the offices of Thune, Rounds, and Johnson to CCCD letter sent to each office.
- SD DANR – Arbor Day Calendars
- National Wild Turkey Federation – Request for proposals for funding through Waterways for Wildlife Initiative, due February 6
- 2026 Resource Conservation Speech Contest "Urban conservation: healing our communities", deadline for competition is February 28.

Other Business:

- Office manager report:
    - Mike virtually attended and spoke during the November 17 meeting of the SD Conservation Commission. He spoke on the suggested changes needed to bring the docket up to date. There was a general agreement among the Commission that some practice rates are outdated but they were not sure how to handle it. Commission decided to table further discussion until April meeting – including pipeline updates that were suggested.
    - BHNF Plan Revision:
        - No Cooperative Agency meetings in September, October, November.
    - Notes from BH Resilient Forest Partnership:
        - New acting deputy forest supervisor
        - Bear Lodge Ranger moving to Northern Hills District
        - Rumors of another 1,500 jobs to be lost across the agency and a potential reorganization
    - County Planning IRC (Interagency Review Committee):
        - Nothing of concern identified in last batch received from the Planning Department.
    - Update on County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) stakeholder meetings:
        - Brief meeting on the October 30th. Fire behavior models completed. Draft flyer and community engagement survey completed.
        - Another meeting on November 20th. Community Engagement flyer ready for distribution.
    - Call received about private dam east of Custer from neighbor. Neighbor is concerned about failure. Dam is a road with public access, but is not a county road. Dam was constructed prior to 1945. Neighbor was told that dam is too small for State intervention.
    - Newsletter:
        - Near complete writing the upcoming fall/winter newsletter
    - Website:
        - Working on updating/improving the district website, housed on the County webpage. However, current contract that county uses limits what changes/updates that can be done.

Public Comment:

- None.

Executive Session:

- Motion by Paul to enter Executive Session (SDCL 1-25-2(1) personnel), second by Oonagh, motion carried. Board entered Executive Session at 10:52.
- Board came out of Executive Session at 11:00. Board awarded Mike $750 for his annual performance.

Critique:

- None.

Next meeting: Thursday, January 8, 9:00-11:00 AM, Commissioners Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 11:04 AM.