Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – January 8, 2026

The January 8, 2026, 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, Greg Neugebauer, and Stuart Adrian (advisor). Others in attendance were Paige Uher (NRCS), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Matt Lucas (USFS, Buffalo Gap NG), Mike Linde (County Commission), Micheal Bordelon (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.

Approve Agenda/Minutes:

Motion to approve today's modified agenda and to approve the meeting minutes from December 2, 2025, was made by Paul, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- County Commission: Mike Linde –
  - County doing well. Dave asked about a good date to provide an update to the Commission. Linde stated the next meeting shouldn't be a long meeting so would be a good time to do it. Dave and Mike will schedule an update for the Commission.
- NRCS: Paige Uher –
  - Discussed a new EQIP pilot program for regenerative agriculture. A new way to do EQIP applications.
  - January 15 is the national batching date for conservation programs.
  - Jordan Leach is serving on a detail in Justin Boerboom's old position.
  - National Wild Turkey Federation has pledged $5K per year for four years for administrative expenses if group receives RCPP funding.
- SD DANR RCF: Micheal Bordelon –
  - Working with the Farm Service Agency on the December windstorm. Potential emergency funding would provide 75% cost-share. Landowners should get on FSA's list if funding comes through. SD DANR RCF foresters are going out to sites and writing prescriptions for cleanup.
- US Forest Service general: Matt Lucas, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
  - A few positions are being temporarily filled by persons on details.

- Project plans – same as update in December. Working to treat Russian olive in the French Creek area. Matt will contact Mike when additional details are available. Matt discussed watershed restoration action plan (WRAP).
- Dave asked about the water development project observed during the field tour taken by the Board a couple years ago. Matt said the project is still going.
- Dave mentioned the District's 2019 French Creek Riparian project and asked about things the District can do now/future? Matt will bring WRAP information to the next meeting. Mike will add topic to the February agenda.

- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Helping Custer State Park with tree damage cleanup so other projects are on hold for now. Contractors working on current projects are moving on for other work.
  - New funding for water development funding is expected. Total for our area may be ~$80,000.
  - New Ducks Unlimited grant for virtual fencing, electric fencing. GF&P will run the program.
  - Beaver Dam Analog (BDA) program is resetting. The Nature Conservancy has dismantled their program. TNC was a major supporter of the program. GF&P will continue some projects in Custer County. Fall River work will be paused for now.
  - Possibility of partnering with someone in Fall River County to use their greenhouse for willow propagation. Dave asked about GF&P's sources for willow. Ben said they try to get local cuttings from similar elevations as where the planting will occur.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
  - Main Checking = $5,366.88, Grant Checking = $1,990.91,
  - Savings = $34,120.68 (December interest = $12.34).
- Bills to pay/approve:
  - Credit card expenses:
    - Vector Print - $457.00, newsletter printing and postage
  - Checks:
    - Pennington Conservation District - $200.00, 2026 Arbor Day tree order
- Motion by Oonagh to approve account balances and bills, second by Greg, motion carried.

New Business:

- 2026 officer selections:
  - Motion by Paul to keep officers the same as in 2025 (Dave-Chair, Paul-Vice-Chair, Oonagh-Treasurer), second by Oonagh, motion carried.
- Update on thinning grants:
  - State Commission grant:
    - Swartz 5.8-acre project completed. Reimbursement request of $5,220 submitted to the State. Mike asked about writing check now, but not mailing until reimbursement is received. Greg made a motion to approve writing check now, but delaying mailing until we have reimbursement, second by Tamarah, motion carried.

        - Mike noted that we had a savings from the Green project due to their costs being less than anticipated. We now have approximately 2.4 acres of funding available for thinning work.
- Burning beetle learning event, Thursday, Jan. 15 @ 6:30
    - Group will meet at 5:30 for setup. Mike will bring cookies, coffee, and bottled water.
    - The 7:50 PM slot will be set aside for discussion on the December storm, possible grant options for recovery, and potential beetle response.
- Fire mitigation proposal through NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):
    - Mike provided an update on where things stand and shared an update provided by Laura Bosworth. Board encouraged continued involvement.
- Review of South Dakota open meeting laws:
    - Board reviewed "Conducting the Public's Business in Public: A Guide to South Dakota's Open Meetings Laws (Revised 2025)", prepared by the SD Attorney General's Office.
    - Mike will add a "Draft" watermark to the unapproved meeting minutes.
- 2026 Annual Work Plan:
    - Dave noted little emphasis on eastern side of county.
    - Plan is due to State by March 1. Board will review and make recommendations at February meeting.
- 2026 budget plan
    - Board discussed budget plan presented and possibility of putting some of the funds into CD's. Oonagh will do some research and bring recommendations to the Board.
    - Motion made by Tamarah to approve budget plan with $250 reserved for a financial review and $0 for wildlife camp sponsorship. Second by Oonagh, motion carried.

Old Business:

- Revision of County Ordinance #2 - minimum acreage for development in the county and letter from the Board to the County Commission.
    - Mike is still waiting on documentation from the Planning office. Once that is received, he will pass it on to the Board.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
    - Spring Forestry Workshop, March 24, Rapid City. NRCS, DSAF, CSU. For forest managers and forest landowners.
- Updates from NACD on recent Executive Actions
- 2026 Arbor Day Poster Contest. Theme is "Trees in Mythology!", entry deadline is March 27.
- December storm – information from SDFFA via Patricia Weyrich

Other Business:

- Office manager report:
    - Commission Liaison – Mike Linde will remain our Liaison, and Mike Busskohl will be our alternate.
    - SAM.gov account – renewed our registration, which is required annually. A SAM account is a requirement to receive federal grants.
    - IRS – completed 1099Gs for grant recipients. Completed and mailed documentation to IRS (Form 1096, copies of 1099Gs)
    - BHNF Plan Revision –
        - No Coop. Agency meeting meetings in December (last meeting was in August)
        - Vegetation Growth & Yield Working Group is expected to have its first meeting in February
    - BHRFP:
        - Items discussed included US Fish & Wildlife Service's proposed revisions to the Endangered Species Act, and the cumulative reduction in staffing on the Black Hills NF, which is down ~80 permanent employees.
    - Received monthly review packet from the County Planning – nothing of concern.
    - County Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) stakeholder meetings:
        - No meeting in December
    - SDACDE Board of Directors - 2 meetings held in past month:
        - Advising on a NACD TA Grant for new statewide position. If funded, person hired to position would assist district managers across the state as well as assisting NRCS with various tasks.
    - Newsletter:
        - Newsletter was released 426 addresses (186 print, 240 email including Chamber newsletter "Buffalo Bytes").
    - Photo of our 85th Anniversary Celebration was included in the Custer Chronicle.
    - Website:
        - Continuing to make updates to our website. Suggestions are welcome suggestions – knowing the strict web design restrictions that are in place.
        - Stuart suggested posting a link to recent Tree Pest Update with article about Ips beetle dangers related to wind storm damage. Mike will do this.
    - Working on the annual reports to the State – activities, financial reports. They are due by March.
    - Also working on financial report and annual activities report to County Commissioners.

Public Comment:

- None.

Critique:

- None.

Next meeting: Thursday, February 12, 9:00-11:00 AM, Commissioners Conference Room, Custer County Courthouse.

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn made by Paul, second by Tamarah. Meeting adjourned at 10:44 AM.