Custer County Conservation District
Meeting Minutes – March 12, 2026

The March 12, 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 Paul Nettinga.

Board members in attendance were Paul Nettinga, Oonagh Wood, Tamarah Caster, and Greg Neugebauer (call-in). Others in attendance were Paige Uher (NRCS), Jordan Leach (NRCS), Todd Butler (USFS-BHNF), Ben Pucket (SD GF&P), Matt Lucas (call-in; USFS-BGNG), Steve Esser (Custer Co. Emerg. Mgmt.), Mike Linde (Custer Co. Commission), 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 February 12, 2026, was made by Tamarah, seconded by Oonagh, motion carried.

Partnership/Guest Reports:

- NRCS: Paige Uher & Jordan Leach –
  - NRCS employees recently received programs training. CSP will have some changes.
  - Ranking EQIP and CSP applications. EQIP rankings by end of March, CSP rankings by end of April.
  - NRCS will have booth at Black Hills Area Botany and Ecology Workshop.
  - Jordan provided information on upcoming locally-led training. National and State push to revitalize locally led decision-making through the conservation districts and locals. Upcoming training sessions in Huron and Philip. Goal is to give voice/power back to districts. Districts host local meetings and have a say in NRCS priorities.
- US Forest Service: Todd Butler, USFS Black Hills National Forest –
  - Busy with cleanup from December windstorm event – clearing roads, trails, campgrounds. In the Black Elk Wilderness, had to hand-cut 927 trees that fell across trails.
  - Prescribed burns early this year because of weather. Burn near Jewel Cave was successful. Tried another near Pleasant Valley, but stopped due to fire behavior concerns. Will try a burn in the Shank area (Mann Rd) in the near future.
- SD GF&P: Ben Pucket –
  - Water development funding available (~$10K) through their Ducks Unlimited grant.

    - Working on obtaining additional funding for other grants. Trying to increase cost-share percent from 50 to 75%.
    - Just submitted grant application for 2nd Century funds.
- County Commission: Mike Linde –
    - Nothing to report.
- US Forest Service: Matt Lucas, USFS Buffalo Gap National Grassland –
    - Projects coming in from producers. Producer meeting in April.
    - Fuels project in French Creek Campground area starting next week. Also working on recreation project.
    - Person serving a detail for the vacant Natural Resources Specialist position, starting tomorrow.
    - Moisture concerns but still planning on allowing normal livestock numbers and grazing dates for producers. May adjust these if necessary.
    - Seeking funding for fencing work at campground area.
    - No funds for noxious weed spraying. Asking USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station to help with monitoring efforts.

Financial Report:

- Account balances:
    - Main Checking = $13,608.28 ($1,531.25 deposit, outstanding checks = $175.00, $50.00), Grant = $1,990.91, Savings = $34,272.40 (February interest = $10.50, deposit = $130.00).
- Bills to pay/approve:
    - Credit card expenses:
        - None
    - Checks:
        - None
    - County to pay:
        - SD Public Assurance Alliance = $610.92, annual insurance fee
- CD investments – designate authorized personnel:
    - At previous meeting, board approved depositing $25,000 in a 12-month CD at Black Hills Federal Credit Union. Need to specify who the Board wants to have signing authority and who will be the primary control person. All signers will have access to the account, can make deposits, withdrawals, and transfers.
    - Motion by Tamarah to designate Oonagh, Dave, and Mike Baldwin as authorized personnel with signing authority, and designate Oonagh as the primary control person. Second by Paul, motion carried.

Old Business:

- NRCS Unfunded Cooperative Agreement:
    - NRCS is still waiting for guidance from headquarters for developing new agreements. Possibility of funded agreement – Jordan shared a list of deliverables for these agreements. Mike will email document to the board.
- Fire mitigation RCPP funding proposal (Regional Conservation Partnership Program):

- No update, we are still waiting on the National Funding Opportunity (NFO) to be released.

New Business:

- Update on thinning grants:
  - Forest Health grants:
    - Only one project left incomplete. March 31 is deadline in Tony's office for work to be completed and certified.
  - State Commission grant:
    - Wahle 13.4 acre project now complete. Waiting on documentation from landowner so that Mike can process the reimbursement.
    - Youssef project: Bordelon has spatial data, but needs to convert to ArcGIS format to review. Mike has not received any new inquiries about available funding for cost-share.
- Conservation District personalized clothing:
  - Board tabled discussion until next meeting.
- NRCS locally led sessions in March:
  - Philip (March 25) and Huron (March 24). 9:30 am – 3:00 pm. All NRCS DCs are required to attend one session and conservation district employees and board supervisors are highly encouraged to attend as well. Mike and Dave plan on attending in Philip.

Correspondence:

- Invitations to upcoming events:
  - NRCS locally led meetings 3/24 (Huron) & 3/25 (Philip).
- Legislative updates from Angela Ehlers (SDACD)
- Gunderson, Palmer, Nelson & Ashmore, LLP – recent information regarding PowerTech water permit application for uranium mining.
- SD Wildlife Federation – information about summer youth conservation camp.
- Croell, Inc. – Notice of intent to mine (limestone):
  - Board asked Mike to send standard response letter.

Other Business:

- Office manager report:
  - Spring grant application submitted for thinning funds.
  - Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP):
    - Comments to the plan provided by Dave and Mike. Public comment period from Feb. 23 – Mar. 15.
    - Steve Esser provided additional information on the plan's progress. He provided information on how to access documents and stated there has been good involvement from the agencies.
  - BHNF Plan Revision:
    - Participated in the Vegetation Growth & Yield Working Group virtual meeting yesterday (3/11). In-person meeting is upcoming – probably in April.

        - Cooperative Agency Meeting also on March 11 but could only attend for first 30 minutes due to overlapping working group meeting.
    - SDACDE Board of Directors meeting:
        - Leadership Conference planning
    - Student contests (speech, writing, poster):
        - No entries for the speech contest, deadline past. Writing deadline 3/20, poster deadline 3/27.
        - Scholarship applications – 1 received so far
    - Mike was a co-presenter during webinar for landowner assistance programs for forestry management. Mike spoke about conservation district's thinning programs in the Hills. Other speakers included NRCS, FSA, Wildland Fire, GF&P, and SD FFA.
    - Mike attended the State Weed & Pest Conference, Feb. 18-20.
    - Mike plans on attending the following:
        - Black Hills Area Botany and Ecology Workshop (BHABEW) tomorrow, March 13, in Rapid City.
        - Black Hills Invasive Plant Project (BHIPP) meeting on March 18 in Rapid City.
        - NRCS led forestry management workshop on March 24 in Rapid City.

Public Comment:

- None.

Critique:

- None.

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

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 10:02 AM.