Custer County Weed and Pest Board
Meeting Minutes – December 9, 2025

The December 9, 2025, meeting of the Custer County Weed and Pest Board was called to order at 1:00 PM by Rittberger.

Board members in attendance were Klinton Rittberger, Jim Lintz, June Johnston, Tom Patterson, Marci O'Connell, and Bob Smith. Also in attendance was Mike Baldwin.

All motions were approved unanimously unless otherwise noted. For the purpose of continuity, these minutes are not necessarily in chronological order.

Approve Minutes/Agenda:

- Request by Mike to add "Potential fire mitigation proposal through NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)" to New Business.

- Motion made by Smith to approve the modified agenda and the meeting minutes from the September 9 board meeting, second by O'Connell, motion carried.

New Business:

- Herbicide cost-share summary:
  - Final numbers for 2025 season: 89 individuals submitted receipts totaling $44,314.79. The total cost-share paid (all at 50% cost-share rate and adjusted for max payment) was $21,345.39. The average payment per household was $239.84.
  - Individuals that used a commercial applicator: 26 individuals (29.2% of total), submitted receipts totaling $18,986.82. The cost-share paid was $8,681.23. Average payment per household was $333.89.
  - Individuals that did not use a commercial applicator: 63 individuals (70.8% of total) submitted receipts totaling $25,327.97. Cost-share paid was $12,664.16. Average payment per household = $201.02.
- Locally noxious weed designations – common mullein expiring in 2025:
  - The designation of common mullein as locally noxious in the county will expire on December 31. Board considered a five-year renewal for mullein or requesting a different species.
  - Motion made by Smith to request renewal of common mullein as locally noxious in the county. Seconded by Patterson, motion carried.
- Review of South Dakota open meeting laws:
  - Board members 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. Each board member received a copy of the document by email prior to today's meeting and also a hardcopy was provided today. Mike made note of requirements regarding teleconferences and email communications.

- 2026 State Weed & Pest Conference:
    - Conference will be hosted at the Lodge in Deadwood, February 18-20. Mike and Nathan Benjamin will plan on attending, but board members are also welcome to attend. Mike will email the conference agenda to the board.
- Prairie dog updates:
    - Gregerson property:
        - At recent site visit, Mike observed roughly 60 prairie dogs on their property and 6 active burrows on the neighbor's property. The Hunsakers (neighbors that made the original written complaint) have sold their property. Mike has not heard from the new landowner. Mike spoke with Kyle Gregerson, he said that he wants to be a good neighbor and will treat his property. Will continue to monitor.
    - Right-of-Way prairie dogs:
        - South Fork Rd (Bies Ranch): at recent visit there were still a few prairie dogs on the property, but did not observe active burrows in the right-of-way.
        - South Fork Rd (Clyde Gorsuch): Mike discovered 1 active burrow in the right-of-way, no complaint had been received. Mike gave Clyde a call, he said that he would treat.
        - Pilger Mountain Rd (Jim Watkins): still has large prairie dog colony (about the same number or more dogs as last winter) and several active burrows were observed in right-of-way. Burrows in right-of-way were treated by Fall River W&P. Mike plans on doing a new count of Watkins property this Thursday and will send a follow-up letter to Watkins. Mike asked for input from the Board about asking Watkins to attend the next board meeting and have him bring records of his control efforts.
            - Motion by Smith for Mike to conduct new count, send letter to Watkins that expresses Board's concern with the prairie dog situation, ask him to attend the next meeting, and let him know that the Board will make a decision on whether to issue a Declaration of Infestation based on his control efforts. Seconded by Johnston, motion carried. Mike will conduct follow-up count shortly before the board meeting to gauge any change in population size.
    - Prairie View Rd. properties:
        - Ervin and Erin Morse: property was treated by a commercial applicator last year. At recent visit, Mike did not observe any prairie dogs on their property.
        - Mike Melius (Morse's neighbor to the south): treated his property last winter but still has several dogs on his property. Mike did not observe any active encroachment onto the neighbor's property.
        - Charles Lyons (Morse's neighbor to the west): treated earlier this year, still has several dogs on property, but did not see any active encroachment onto neighbor's property.
        - Mike would like to contact both Melius and Lyons and ask them to retreat while the numbers are still manageable.

        - Smith made a motion to send letters to both landowners encouraging them to treat their prairie dogs, seconded by Patterson, motion carried.
- Potential fire mitigation proposal through NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP):
    - Mike discussed potential proposal for wildfire mitigation funding. Custer County Conservation District would be a partner on the project, and possibly the lead partner on the project. If Custer CCD is the lead, it may use a private consultant to administer the project. Partners would be the Black Hills area conservation districts, power companies, SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources-Resource Conservation and Forestry, and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Monies expended by power companies to maintain their powerline right-of-ways would be used as matching dollars. If project was funded, could mean between $1-4 million for fire hazard reduction / forest health work on private land in the Black Hills. None of the funding would go towards maintaining the powerline right-of-ways, It would only be used to treat forest stands on private land with priority given to landowners adjacent to or near transmission lines. If the district were to move forward, the Conservation District Board would want the Weed and Pest Board to be aware and would ask for their blessing since Mike's time is split between Weed & Pest and the Conservation District. Mike is unsure what the time commitment would be and is gathering information.
    - After discussion, board chose to table the topic until the next board meeting.

Old Business:

- None

Other Business –

- Miscellaneous updates:
    - County weed booklet: Mike spoke with Nina Steinmetz, Fall River Weed & Pest, about combining county weed booklets and producing a single booklet for both counties. Nina and Mike plan on doing this; however, Mike still has more than half of his booklets remaining, so they will hold off until next year to create a combined "Southern Hills" booklet for 2027.
- Potential agreement with BHNF for additional spraying in 2026:
    - Funding would go towards spraying weeds on a timber harvest area west of Pringle. Justin McConkey, Rangeland Management Specialist, stated that they are still waiting on direction on their budget. Not sure if they will get funds this fiscal year or not.
    - It would be helpful for them to know a drop-dead date for when the County would need to know whether we are receiving funding or not. Board discussed and settled on March 15 to allow for time to advertise for bids. Mike will convey this to Justin and will also ask for more specifics on project dates and inspection requirements.
    - If funding is received by USFS past our drop-dead date, there is potential to do something in 2027 via a Supplemental Project Agreement, but this is not guaranteed.

Public Comment:

- None.

Next meeting:

- Motion by Lintz to schedule next meeting on Tuesday, January 13, 2025, at 1:00 PM, second by O'Connell, motion carried.

Adjournment:

- Motion by Smith to adjourn meeting at 2:15 PM, second by O'Connell, motion carried.