



Minutes from the December 18, 2023, Board Meeting

The regular monthly board meeting of the Wadena Soil and Water Conservation District was held at 7:30 a.m. in person at the Sheriff's Building at the fairgrounds.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Bruce Juntunen at 9:59 a.m.

Members Present:

Chair: Bruce Juntunen
Vice Chair: Tom Schulz
Secretary: Ken Berg
Treasurer: Brett Dailey
Public Relations: Jerry Kern

Others Present:

MN House of Representatives: Representative Knudsen
NRCS District Conservationist: Ivan Reinke
Assistant District Manager: Anne Oldakowski
Administrative Secretary: Chantal Tougas
Watershed Coordinator: Nicole Lundeen
UofM Extension: Olivia Olson

Adopt Agenda: Motion made by Ken Berg, second by Tom Schulz to adopt the agenda as presented. Opposed: none, motion carried.

10:09 Olivia Olson entered the meeting.

Approve Board Meeting Minutes: Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Jerry Kern to approve last month's Board Meeting Minutes. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Treasurer's Report: Motion made by Brett Dailey, second by Jerry Kern to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Bills Paid and Bills Payable: Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Brett Dailey to approve the Bills Paid and Bills Payable as presented. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Cost Share: No cost share this month.

County Commissioner's Report: not present.

District Manager's Report: Read by Darren Newville.

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NRCS District Conservationist's Report: Presented by Ivan Reinke

- EQIP – Finishing up payments for 2023. New applications coming in. Busy putting conservation plans together and making site visits with engineers. The 2024 docket was released. Assessment & ranking deadline is January 19, 2024. ACT NOW Fund Pools: Act Now is an expedited process to approve and obligate designated ranking pools. Those practices include High Tunnels, Energy efficient improvements, and Animal mortality facilities.
- CSP – Finished certifying practices for 2023 and payments are on schedule.
- IRA Funds – Carbon Smart Agriculture & Forestry Practices, visit your local office for that listing.
- Payments are going out to those who installed items for the RCPP 2365 Irrigation Program. We will now be taking application for the RCPP 2129 MAWQCP.
- Attended the MFRC West Central Area Landscape committee meeting in Browerville. Will be attending the Tailor-Made Cattle at the Tri County Sales Barn meeting on February 2, 2024.

Other Agency Reports: No other agencies present.

Forestry Update: The Forestry resolution passed at the Annual Convention with an additional funding amendment. Dues will be increasing. Although we do not know that amount yet, there was a motion made to allow up to a 400% increase. The current amount is \$60. Motions were discussed at our meeting to support this; however, it was decided to be tabled until the January meeting.

10:52 Alyson & Savanna entered the meeting.

TSA 8 Report: nothing to report at this time.

Meetings/Trainings: The 24-25 meeting schedule was presented. There was a conflict with the January meeting. Motion made by Jerry Kern, second by Tom Schulz to move the meeting to Monday, January 22, 2024. Opposed: none; motion carried.

Service Agreement with EOT SWCD: Motion made by Brett Dailey, second by Ken Berg to continue the agreement with East Otter Tail SWCD. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Personnel Recommendations: Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Brett Dailey to add in the Juneteenth Holiday and the Sick & Safe time policy to the existing policy. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Cost Share Policies: Cost share and payment rates were reviewed. Staff recommendations were presented to the board. Motion made by Ken Berg, second Brett Dailey to move forward with the recommendations of the staff. Opposed: none, motion carried. Changes will take place on January 1, 2024, and will affect only those contracts approved after this date.

JAA Approval: Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Jerry Kern to approve Alyson's JAA for Cover Crops. Opposed; none, motion carried.

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AIS: Alyson presented her yearly report.

Soil Health Shared Position: There will be roughly \$75m coming from BWSR to the Soil & Water Districts. These will be 4-year grants for hiring of these positions which BWSR will oversee. We discussed at the meeting the possibility of partnering with other districts for this position.

Public Comments: None

Meeting Adjourned: Adjourned at 11:38 a.m.

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**District Managers Report
December 2023
Submitted by Darren Newville**

- **Tree Program** – Staff continue to meet with landowners to provide technical assistance with potential projects for next year. Tanner has met with 4 landowners and sent out 3 plans. The online tree store is ready to roll out on January 1st and we will start taking orders for spring of 2024.
- **Forest Stewardship:** Anne submitted 3 plans to the DNR for approval and is working on one more. She assisted with the organization and attended the MFRC West Central Committee meeting in Browerville. Nicole, Olivia, and I also attended the meeting. The agenda included speakers on climate predictions and adaptations, updates from around the area, and updates on the landscape fund availability.
- **Drill Rental/Custom Seeding/Seed Sales** – Tanner continues to work with landowners on getting seed orders placed for the 2024 spring planting season. He has taken an additional 4 orders for seed.
- **RIM/CREP/CRP** – I invoiced MASWCD for the EOT SWCD CRP contribution agreement work done in 2023. MASWCD indicated that they have submitted everything to NRCS, and we should expect payment in February or March. Staff continue to work on RIM easement work as needed.
- **MAWQCP** – Staff continue to assist Jim with the work on the MAWQCP assessment, certifications, endorsements, and cost-share. They also worked to notify eligible producers about the RCPP application deadline and NRCS to help process applications. I DocuSigned the JPA for FY24/25 last week to continue the MDA funding for this program.
- **MDA NFMP/NMI Project** – Mitch completed the weather station maintenance and is working with MDA and NDAWN staff on the process of getting some of the components recalibrated. He is also collecting the harvest data from the NMI plots and will be working with MDA on the process to get payments out to participating producers.
- **Irrigation RCPP** – Most of our local projects have been completed and certified. This has led to an increase in interest from producers who are considering adopting these practices. We continue to work with partners to get the BWSR funding out to completed projects. The Steering Committee continues to meet. We will be holding an all-partners meeting in February to discuss a future application and partner commitments.
- **Red Eye Watershed** – The watershed partners continue to encumber implementation funds for priority projects. We requested a one-year extension for the first WBIF grant. BWSR has already approved the extension and I have signed the grant amendment. The TAC met on November 14th. We will be working with Pete Waller on a workplan and budget amendment for our first grant in early January. We will also be developing the budget and request for the next round of WBIF funding soon. The next Policy Committee meeting is tentatively

scheduled for March 11th. Huston engineering has been working on the goal tracking spreadsheet for the Red Eye Watershed. We had a quick review with them, and they are currently making a few edits we requested.

- **Oak/Bluff Creek Sub-Watershed** – Staff continue to respond to landowner inquiries from the mailing we sent out to landowners in the watershed.
- **Red Eye Culvert Inventory** - Staff continue to field verify culvert locations and collect information. They have completed North Germany, Lyons, Meadows, Red Eye, Rockwood, Paddock, Homestead, and Butler Townships. They will continue to do the field inventory until weather conditions don't allow it.
- **LCCMR Tree Planting Pilot Program** – Staff sent out two rounds of letters to conservation easement landowner promoting the program. They are being sent out in batches to help with workload issues for the DNR Foresters. We are still waiting for the agreements from the DNR for the tree planter purchases. We will purchase the tree planters and then get reimbursed. We will be organizing and holding another Local Forestry Team meeting in the next month or so.
- **Otter Tail River Watershed** – Partners continue to incur funds and process payments for completed projects. We will be meeting with Pete Waller in early Jan to discuss a few budget adjustments, a possible request for supplemental funds, and the process of starting the next funding request. The TAC will meet again in February and have tentatively scheduled a Policy Committee meeting for the end of February to give them an update on progress and to review/approve the next WBIF funding request. Nicole and Pete spent some time working on entering project info in the plan goal tracking spreadsheet. We will share this information with the TAC and Policy Committees in February.
- **Crow Wing Watershed** – The 1W1P process is proceeding at the pace expected and we hope to have an approved plan in mid to late 2024. The TAC met November 1 and December 6th in Staples. We reviewed and prioritized lakes, streams, and groundwater resources. The TAC & Policy Committee will meet in January.
- **Irrigation Scheduling Program** – Mitch has started the process for planning the winter producer meeting. It will likely be held in early March.
- **Shoreland Program** – Liz and Pete continue to make site visits and work with landowners to review plans and get projects approved for installation in 2024. Liz indicated that they have completed 27 designs so far this year after visiting 75 sites. They continue to do site inspection on past projects. They have 7 sites that have committed to installing projects in 2024 and are working with others to get things in line. They also worked together to submit the request for the Conservation Corps Crew assistance in 2024.

- **A.I.S.** – Alyson completed the end of the season reports for both the DNR and our board and has posted the report on our website. She also participated in some A.I.S. webinars.
- **Feedlots** – With Mitch’s assistance Savanna has uploaded the 2023 inspection information into the TEMPO program. They will be working on the year end reporting soon.
- **Buffer Law** – We are working on the eLINK workplans for the 2024 grants. The Wadena SWCD was informed of a potential violation in Wadena County. Staff contacted the landowner and are currently working with them to come in compliance. They will have to field verify it in the spring to make sure they have come into compliance.
- **Engineering Assistance** – Our joint engineering staff continue to help support us with projects needing engineering assistance. They assisted with site visits and surveys on sites in Otter Tail County.
- **Education and Outreach** – I made a presentation to the EOT Master Gardner’s in November. There were about 30 people in attendance. I gave them a brief overview of our work, discussed the types of projects we do, and what resources we use in the process of making plan recommendations for conservation tree plantings. At the end of the presentation, they asked a lot of questions about the resource concerns for our area. We continue to do our social media outreach on a regular basis. We will be working on our 2023 annual year in reviews in the next month or so.
- **Otter Tail River Dam Modifications** – The contractor finished up the Rush Lake and Otter Tail Dams in November. We will be processing payments for the project. We are holding back 2% of the cost that will be paid out in the spring early summer in case we need the contractor to come back in and do some seeding or add chinking stone after everything settles over the winter. We have had a lot of positive feedback on these projects, and some folks expressing some concerns, most of which have to do with the low water levels we have been seeing over the past few years. Not really anything specific about the modifications. I received an email from Nick Klundt, DNR Red River Fisheries Specialist, thanking us for our work on the projects, our education and outreach efforts and answering a lot of questions from residents.
- **Administration** – Staff continue to do the important work of the day-to-day tasks needed to keep the SWCDs running smoothly. Chantal is prepping and adjusting the 2024 timesheets and getting prepared for year end reporting. We are still inputting projects and expenses into eLINK monthly, which will make the annual reporting deadline in February much easier.
- **State Convention** – Several Staff and Supervisors attend the MASWCD state Convention in Bloomington. Overall, I thought it was a good event, and we all had the opportunity to sit in on several learning sessions, network with supervisors and staff from around the state, and accomplish the work of the MASWCD Annual Meeting.

- Personnel Committee – I completed the annual performance reviews and met with the Personnel Committee. Because of state statute we need to make some adjustments to our Personnel Policies. We will be discussing them later in the meeting.
- **Staffing** – Nicole Lundeen started in her position as our Watershed Planner/Coordinator. We have thrown her right into the various meetings and have introduced her to the plans and workplan for the watershed. There will be a very steep learning curve.

I am sad to report that Liz Wiese has taken a position with MPCA and will be leaving the SWCD. While we are happy for Liz and wish her the best, she will be missed in her role with the SWCDs. Her last day will be January 4th. We will be working through a staffing needs evaluation and will be posting a position notice very soon.