



Board of Supervisors Monthly Meeting
SWCD/NRCS Conference Room
USDA Service Center
Wednesday, February 19, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Supervisor's Present:

Michelle Andresen, Chair
Curt Ballard, Vice Chair
Tony Beck, Treasurer
Travis Schauer, Secretary

Staff Present:

Bryan Malone, District Administrator
Jamie Bischoff, Office Manager
Christy Johnson, Office Assistant
Logan Riedel, Program Technician
Ed Musielewicz, NRCS District Conservationist
Ed Clem, Resource Technician
Amy Moors, Program Technician
Brandon Gill, County Ag Inspector
Claire Olson, Project Coordinator
Owen Reding, Resource Technician
Karl Koenig, AIS Coordinator
Mary Steinlicht, GIS Specialist
Phil Doll, Private Lands Biologist
Wes Drake, District Engineer(virtual)
Bob Guetter, NRCS Team Lead

Guests:

Hayley Courneya, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist
Matt Preis, NRCS Soil Scientist
Lisa Johnson, NRCS Administrative Assistant

Absent

Eugene Pavelko, Public Relations

Call to Order

Chair Andresen called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m.

Agenda

Andresen called for approval of the agenda.

Motion (Beck, Ballard) to approve the February agenda. All in favor, motion carried.

Minutes

Approval of January 2025 meeting minutes

Motion (Beck, Ballard) to approve January 2025 minutes. All in favor, motion carried.

Financial

2024 Final Report

Malone gave the final financial report for 2024.

Motion (Beck, Schauer) to approve the 2024 Financial Report. All in favor, motion carried.

January 2025 Financial Treasurers Report and Bills for Approval

Bischoff presented the Treasurers Report and Bills for Approval.

Motion (Schauer, Ballard) to approve the January 2025 Treasurer's Report and February bills to pay. All in favor, motion carried.

All in favor, motion carried.

2025 Revised Budget

Malone presented the revised 2025 budget.

Motion (Schauer, Ballard) to approve the revised 2025 budget. All in favor, motion carried.

FY2024 Audit Agreement

Peterson Company provided a quote to perform our annual audit of \$5,500.

Motion (Beck, Schauer) to approve the Peterson Company quote to audit our books for FY2024. All in favor, motion carried.

2025 Sale Items

Our sale items list was updated with current prices.

2025 Fee Schedule

The 2025 Fee Schedule with current billable rates was presented.

Motion (Beck, Ballard) to approve the 2025 Sale Items and 2025 Fee Schedule. All in favor, motion carried.

Soil Health Bus Tour Contribution

A request was sent to each SWCD in Area 1 for a \$500 contribution to this training event. There will be 1 staff, and 2 producers invited from each district. Malone requested \$500 contribution.

Motion (Schauer, Ballard) to provide \$500 contribution for the 2025 Soil Health Bus Tour. All in favor, motion carried.

Cost-Share

Watershed Based Implementation Cancellation

1W1P-02-RE RoGe, Grazing

A certified letter was sent advising the options to repay all cost-share paid for the incomplete project or apply for new contract to complete the project installation. A check for repayment was received in the mail.

Motion (Ballard, Beck) to cancel contract 1W1P-02-RE due to not installing the practices by the completion date. All in favor, motion carried.

Watershed Based Implementation Approval

1W1P-04-WR ScHo, Forest Management – Project Cost \$928; 75% Cost Share \$696

Motion (Schauer, Beck) to approve contract 1W1P-04-WR. All in favor, motion carried.

Policy

Shoreland Restoration cost-share

Malone presented a single cost-share policy combining the state cost-share policy and the CWL policy.

Motion (Ballard, Beck) to approve the Shoreland Restoration cost-share policy. All in favor, motion carried.

SSTS Upgrade Grant

Logan updated the application and guidance form. April 1st will be the deadline to complete the applications for 2025 installation and ranking of applications will follow. The USDA Rural Development income guidelines were the basis for determining eligibility for the grant.

Motion (Schauer, Ballard) to approve the application and guidance for the SSTS Upgrade Grant. All in favor, motion carried.

Data Practices

It appears that the District has not approved a policy on the requests for Becker SWCD data from the public. A policy was drafted and Malone presented that to the Board and data request form that is to be submitted for specific items.

Motion (Beck, Schauer) to approve the Data Practices Policy and designees. All in favor. Motion carried.

Engineering Technician

There have been 2 interviews and 1 more interview today.

Agreements

Buffalo Watershed Competitive Grant

We were awarded this grant in the amount of \$800,000. It is very similar to the Top Down – Phase II grant that provides financial and technical assistance to landowners for the installation of structural practices in the Buffalo River watershed in Becker County.

Buffer Law

We will receive \$20,000 from BWSR for implementation of the Buffer Law in 2025.

Soil Health Tour Training Grant

The MN Tech Training grant has awarded us \$10,565 to cover approximately one-third of the budgeted expenses. It is hopeful that the other third will be covered by a MOSH grant and the remainder from SWCD contributions for the training event.

Motion (Ballard, Schauer) to approve the Buffalo Watershed Competitive Grant, Buffer Law Grant, and the Soil Health Tour Training Grant agreements. All in favor. Motion carried.

Engineering Shared Services

Malone explained the South Pod shared services agreement expired the end of 2024. This renewed agreement had a minor adjustment as EOT SWCD reduced their allotted time from 15% to 10% and Traverse increased from 5% to 10%. Exhibit B includes the payments from each SWCD to cover Mike Yrjo of WOT SWCD and Wes Drake's time.

Motion (Ballard, Schauer) to approve the Engineering Shared Services agreement. All in favor. Motion carried.

Soil Health Implementation – RCCPP

Malone submitted a Request For Interest survey. We should receive the money of \$180,000 in April and once it is all encumbered, we may request another \$120,000.

NRCS Cooperative Agreement

This shared services agreement spells out what the District provides NRCS in return for the items they supply to us. NRCS provides our phones and 3 computer seats. We provide storage space and 281 hours of technical assistance and outreach events.

Motion (Schauer, Ballard) to approve the NRCS Cooperative Agreement. All in favor. Motion carried.

MASWCD Legislative Agenda - FYI

Legislative Priorities Webinar – February 4th

Legislative Briefing March 5-6, 2025 – St. Paul

Open Forum

Ed Musielewicz explained the personnel downfalls with NRCS during the last week as those new employees still on probation were let go due to the presidential executive order. This included one field office staff person and 2 Area Office staff.

Staff Reports

District Administrator - Bryan Malone

1W1P – The Crow Wing Policy Committee met to select officers, delegated Hubbard SWCD as the Plan Coordinator, Cass SWCD the Grant Administrator and Crow Wing SWCD as the Fiscal Agent. They also approved the by-laws, budget and workplan to implement the CWMP. Crow Wing SWCD will submit the WBIF Funding request by the end of February. The FY21 grant expired December 31st for the Redeye and will be going through a BWSR PRAP to evaluate how we did. Not sure if we will need to do that for the Buffalo-Red and Wild Rice. The Otter Tail and Redeye TAC met for our quarterly meeting. Jamie and I worked on creating a new Reimbursement Request form for all the watersheds to help streamline the process.

Projects – One application for a SSTS AgBMP Loan. Working with Logan to get our forms updated and a new sign up period for the SSTS Upgrade Grant. Received the grant agreement and should see funds soon for the new competitive Clean Water Fund Grant Buffalo Watershed Lakes and Mainstem Region Improvement project to install structural practices. Worked on revising the Shoreland Restoration cost-share policy.

Personnel – Interviewed two candidates for the Engineering Technician position. Continued working with Jeff Hrubes, BWSR Clean Water Specialist on our Core Values exercise at the February Board Retreat. Worked on Data Practices Policy.

Meetings and Other – Met with Ed M and Bob regarding the Cooperative Agreement between the SWCD and NRCS. Worked on the grant agreement from the MTTC for the Soil Health Bus Tour and the Soil Health round table in March. Will hold a Soil Health Roundtable in Sebeka for our eastern county producers, along with Hubbard and Wadena SWCDs. Soil Health RCPP training was held but weather was bad, Ed and I were ill, so will have to make that one up. Attended the Becker County Extension Ag Awards committee meeting to select the Farm Family, NDSU Harvest Bowl and the Leadership award. Held the Area Technical Training Team meeting to determine training priorities for the Area. Soil Health practices are popular due to the RCPP grant coming our way. NRM and WCA TEP meetings. The last week in January was dedicated to completing elink reporting for all 30 BWSR grants held by Becker SWCD. Joined in the MASWCD Legislative webinar. Between now and the Board meeting I will be working on revising the 2025 Budget, fee schedule, data practices policy and preparing for final Jeopardy!

TSA – Worked on the new Engineering services agreement and Jamie determined Wes's billable rate so we could let the partnership know what to expect to pay each quarter. Completed the TSA accomplishments report that is attached in elink and also completed the required elink reporting. Preparing now for the TSA meeting in Mahnomen on February 27th.

TSA Accomplishments Report - Bryan Malone

2024 was a year to monitor how things are going as we went through our second full year of reorganization. There were revisions with the distribution of grant funds due to expiration dates but grant balances are good so far. Funds are allocated to the SWCDs that employ the TSA funded staff. They report back to us each quarter with how those funds are being spent. Becker SWCD employs an Engineer and GIS Administrator. An Engineering Technician job opening was announced in March and readvertised two other times during the year. There were no applications received with the qualifications desired. WOT SWCD employs an Engineering Technician. Pennington SWCD houses an Engineer and Engineering Technician. They hired a Conservation Technician in the fall of 2024 that will split their time between engineering and soil health. Wilkin and Clay SWCDs attain their engineering services from outside sources and is given an allowance from the NPEETA grant funds to assist with those efforts.

The Becker Engineer and WOT Technician cover their respective SWCDs along with the other 3 SWCDs in the south including Traverse, Grant and East Otter Tail making up the "South Pod". Pennington Engineering staff provide services to the north 9 SWCDs including Norman, Mahnomon, West Polk, East Polk, Red Lake, Pennington, Marshall, Roseau and Kittson called the "North Pod". Becker SWCD's GIS Administrator provides service to all 16 SWCDs. At the end of 2024 there are 5 FTEs available for Engineering Assistance and 1 FTE for GIS support.

The workload has been handled by the existing staff, but timing of efforts could be adjusted with additional staff. The North Pod may be set up for the near future with an additional engineering technician. Due to the dry fall, we experienced a never-ending construction season. South Pod staff were limited in the amount of Inventory and Evaluation, surveying and preliminary designs worked on. An engineering technician could solve that problem.

The North Pod worked on 149 requests (128 in 2023) and received 74 new request. Mahnomon continues to lead the pod in the number of projects with 39 (42). Other requests included: Marshall 33 (22), Norman 15 (15), West Polk 9 (2), Pennington 16 (11), Red Lake 10 (15), Kittson 13 (11), Roseau 5 (5), East Polk 9 (5).

The South Pod worked on 122 requests (171 in 2023) and received 40 new requests. West Otter Tail 52 (57) and with 17 new requests; Becker 29 (31) with 14 new requests; East Otter Tail 19 (36) with 3 new requests; Grant 6 (19) with 1 new request; and Traverse 16 (28) with 4 new requests. Traverse and Grant continue to increase their capacity not only in getting jobs completed but training new staff in their efforts to attain JAA.

Clay and Wilkin SWCDs worked on 4 (4 in 2023) Site Investigations and 2 (4) Designs and 1 (0) Construction Assistance. Total cost estimates for projects designed equaled \$681,000 (\$868,382) which included 9 (1) Streambank Stabilizations, 5 (0) Critical Area Plantings, 4 (0) drainage water management practices and 2 (31) Grade Stabilizations.

TSA staff worked on a total of 271 (299 in 2023). This required 131 (162) site visits and surveys. There were 125 completed plans (115). The engineering staff were involved with construction on 69 (77) projects with an estimated cost of \$3,550,537 (\$2,024,639). Total amount of all projects worked on in 2024 = \$10,775,507 (\$9,441,230)!

Practices installed included: 410 Grade Stabilizations 70 (23), 412 Grassed Waterway 3 for 2,365 feet (2,750 feet), 580 Streambank Stabilization 12 for 1,767 feet (2,751 feet), 638 Water and Sediment Control Basins 140 (63), Wetland Restorations 1 (2), and 468 Lined Waterway or Outlet 7 (7) for 1,540 feet. There are \$4,047,675 (\$4,665,931) worth of shovel ready projects for construction in 2025.

The North Pod held a Technical Training Meeting in March, with 9 in attendance. The North Pod staff are providing On the Job Training for two other SWCD technicians. South Pod SWCDs are also

using the TSA funded staff to train their employees so their SWCD staff can tackle the simple tasks on their own allowing the Engineering staff to work on other projects.

The South Pod provided Technical Training in January with 15 staff attending from 6 field offices and 1 NRCS technician. On the job training throughout the field season included site assessments, surveying, and construction inspection.

The TSA has an ESRI Enterprise license purchased through the ESS and NPEA grant match provided by the 16 SWCDs. The GIS Administrator manages that account and assists SWCD staff with installation of software, provides troubleshooting and technical support to SWCD staff.

The GIS Administrator created 18 mailing lists from parcel maps for many SWCDs to use on project development mailings. Over 4,000 direct mailings were produced from these mailing lists. Most of the SWCDs are now running ArcPro 3.4 or 3.1 if they are running the NRCS Engineering Tools. The new LiDAR DEMs were acquired from the International Waters Institute, and they came in as one file. The file was clipped down to county boundaries for easier use. That data is great to use with the NRCS Tools in ArcMap, but many users get errors when using ArcPro. It's an ongoing issue that they are still trying to get to the bottom of. About 325 hours were spent on Training in ArcPro, ArcGIS Online and our mobile application Field Maps. A new ArcGIS Online application was built for Otter Tail River 1W1P with mapping layers from Houston Engineering. 5 maps were created for the Red Lake River CWMP update.

2024 Becker SWCD Jeopardy

Bischoff and Koenig hosted the Jeopardy game for the staff and board to review the accomplishments of the SWCD for 2024. The group was split into 3 teams and most of the SWCD programs had a category with 5 answers for each team to answer with a question.

Lunch & Board /Staff Photo

The staff and board had lunch and took a staff picture.

Jeopardy Continued & Core Values Exercise

Bischoff and Koenig finished the Jeopardy game.

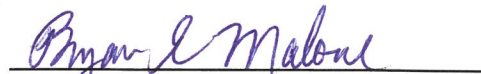
Jeff Hrubes, BWSR Clean Water Specialist, assisted with the discussion about core values.

Adjourn

Hearing no further business, Chair Andresen adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.



Board Secretary



District Administrator

20 Mar 2025

Date

3/20/2025

Date