



Minutes from the November 20, 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 7:32 a.m.

Members Present: Chair: Bruce Juntunen
Vice Chair: Tom Schulz
Secretary: Ken Berg
Treasurer: Brett Dailey

Members Absent: Public Relations: Jerry Kern

Others Present: County Commissioner: Murlyn Kreklau
NRCS District Conservationist: Ivan Reinke
Assistant District Manager: Anne Oldakowski
Administrative Secretary: Chantal Tougas

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

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

Treasurer's Report: Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Ken Berg to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. Opposed: none, motion carried.

Bills Paid and Bills Payable: Motion made by Brett Dailey, second by Tom Schulz to approve the Bills Paid and Bills Payable as presented. Opposed: none, motion carried. Tom Schulz brought up a discussion on putting some of our savings into CDs and what that amount should be looking at the Treasurer's Report. Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Brett Dailey to move \$250,000 from savings into CDs of 6 months and 12 months pending a rate of at least 4%. Opposed: none, motion carried.

COST SHARE

LCCMR Cost Share P23-2944:

07-2023; Lausch, Steven; Authorization to approve payment for a forest stewardship plan, with a total cost of \$962.00, cost share payment not to exceed \$721.50 or 75%, whichever is less in North Germany Township, section 3. (128 acres, written by consultant) Motion made by Tom Schulz, second by Ken Berg to approve. Opposed: none, motion carried.

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County Commissioner's Report: County ditches and The Conservation Fund land was discussed. Overall is a 2% levy increase.

District Manager's Report: Written by Darren Newville, presented by Anne Oldakowski.

NRCS District Conservationist's Report: Presented by Ivan Reinke

- EQIP – Making payments on the installed practices & management 2023. New applications still coming in, first signup has passed. Putting Conservation plans together & making site visits with Engineers. RCPP MAWQCP Funds & signup opens December 15.
- CSP – Making contract payments for Calendar year 2023 payments. Certifying practices.
- Making payments on RCPP for those that installed items.
- Presented to the CLC Agronomy Class and toured the new pig farm in Aldrich Township.

Other Agency Reports: No other agencies present.

Forestry Update: Tom Kroll, private forestry consultant, gave a presentation at the last SWCD Forestry Association meeting about the increased roles that SWCDs are having in private forest management and the consultants input on the state FSP standard. Of all the plans written, SWCDs make up 8% of those, with consultants at 88%. BWSR plans to limit support staff for these meetings so there was a discussion on funding support. Discussion regarding increasing dues from \$60 to \$375 was held, this will be on the agenda for the next meeting. At the forestry meeting they have been using an Owl video conferencing camera that has really benefitted virtual attendees. Tom also had a handout on historical Costa Rica forest cover and how they have incentivized bringing forests back.

TSA 8 Report: Tom noted they are still in their first year of restructuring and have funds available with invoices due to Melissa by the end of November. Next meeting will be in March.

Meetings/Trainings: The Annual Convention in Bloomington was discussed and who would be attending.

Public Comments: None

Meeting Adjourned: Adjourned at 8:36 a.m.

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**District Managers Report
November 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 received confirmation on our 2024 orders placed and will be finalizing the 2024 order form soon. Our plan is to have the online store go live on Jan. 1st.
- **Forest Stewardship:** Anne is currently working on 4 plans. She also met with DNR staff to plan the Dec. 6 MFRC meeting in Browerville. The agenda will include speakers on climate predictions and adaptations, updates from around the area, and updates on the landscape fund availability. We submitted the quarterly invoice and report for this contract.
- **Drill Rental/Custom Seeding/Seed Sales** – The drill was rented to 2 landowners in October. He also distributed the seed that was ordered by 9 landowners. He completed one custom seeding job for 86 acres and rototilled two sites. The equipment is put away for the winter.
- **RIM/CREP/CRP** – Staff continue to assist with CRP workload. They are also working with landowners on RIM applications at the various stages of the process and doing the required site inspections on easements that need them. They have been working with landowners to resolve title issues that need to be taken care of before easements can be finalized.
- **MAWQCP** – Staff continue to assist Jim with the work on the MAWQCP assessment, certifications, endorsements, and cost-share. A farm in Cass County was certified and Jim presented their sign to them in early October. Alyson continues to work with Jim on news release articles for those producers who have been certified. I have been working with MDA staff on a budget for the next round of agreements to continue this work. I hope to have the new agreement in place by the end of the year. I submitted the quarterly report and invoice for this contract.
- **MDA NFMP/NMI Project** – Mitch has been visiting the weather stations to conduct the annual maintenance and replace components as scheduled. Mitch submitted the quarterly report and invoice for this contract.
- **AgBMP Loan Program** – Both offices continue to take calls, answer questions, and aid landowners requesting information or loans. We have one Otter Tial County application in the hopper waiting for funds when repayments are made.
- **Irrigation RCPP** – Some of our funded projects are completed and staff have been working on certifying those projects and getting cost-share vouchers completed for approval of payment. We continue to work with partners to get the BWSR funding pooling agreements in place. The Mille Lacs SWCD has approved one for the work with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MLBO) for their micro irrigation project on an orchard they have. The Admin Committee continues to meet, and we held an all partners meeting to discuss another application in 2024 for additional funds. We will follow up on that in early 2024.

- **Red Eye Watershed** – The TAC met on August 8th. 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 next TAC meeting is scheduled for November 14th.
- **SWAG** (Surface Water Assessment Grant) The quarterly report and invoice were submitted to MPCA. Staff will work on the final project report due by year end.
- **MDA Central Sands:** Submitted quarterly invoice, budget sheet, and report to Kim Kaiser at MDA.
- **Oak/Bluff Creek Sub-Watershed** – We held a staff meeting to discuss this grant as we are getting calls from the letters that were sent out and staff were wondering how to approach these site visits. It was stressed with the staff that we should meet with these landowners to identify the landowners' resource concerns and then figure out if there is a source of funding available for that. Not try to force a particular project because of a funding source. Pete has created a spreadsheet to track landowner contacts and what follow-up needs to be completed.
- **Red Eye Culvert Inventory** - Staff continue to field verify culvert locations and collect information. They have completed North Germany, Lyons, Meadows, and Red Eye, Rockwood, and Paddock Townships, and continued to go out a couple time a week. They will continue to do the field inventory at least one day a week 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. There have been some frustrations with a BWSR/DNR staff member who seems to be trying to micromanage the work on this project. I have had a conversation with him about that and the fact that this is not our only project and while it is important, it is not the highest on our priority list. I am hopeful that this conversation will help with the issue.
- **Otter Tail River Watershed** – The TAC met on November 6th. We reviewed where we are with the budget. 14% of the funds have been expended and partners are encumbering funds regularly. The committee also discussed 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.

- **Crow Wing Watershed** – The Policy Committee will meet on October 30th. There was not a quorum present at the meeting. They reviewed priority issues, the land and water resource narrative, work on visioning and review priority resources. The committee also requested that there be language added to the plan about the vast amount of recreation that happens in the watershed with a focus on promoting responsible recreation to help protect the water resources.

The Steering Committee is still meeting monthly to plan the Policy and Technical Committee meetings.

The TAC met on November 1st and reviewed and discussed prioritizing the focus lakes and stream stretches in the Watershed. It was a productive meeting. They will be meeting again December 6th.

- **Irrigation Scheduling Program** – Staff completed and sent out the end of year reports and invoices. They are now working on planning the winter producer meeting.
- **Shoreland Program** – Liz and Pete continue to work with landowners to review plans and get projects approved for installation in 2024. Liz indicated that they have completed 20 designs so far this year after visiting 73 sites. They continue to do site inspection on past projects.
- **A.I.S.** – Alyson picked up the finished AIS high viz-vests that we ordered. She picked up our tubs at the end of the season. Alyson also coordinated the completed the end of season reports for the DNR and compiled the data for this season’s surveys to create a summary report. This report has been uploaded to Wadena’s website page.
- **Feedlots** – Mitch has been working with Savanna in the process of bringing her up to speed on the program. They are working on inputting the 2023 inspection data into the MPCA online program (TEMPO).
- **County Ag Inspector** – We received one complaint about thistles in the last month. We reached out to the township, and they took care of the issue. Alyson proctored 4 pesticide tests this past month.
- **Engineering Assistance** – Our joint engineering staff continue to help support us with projects needing engineering assistance. They assisted with surveying several stream sites in Wadena County in early October.
- **Extension Educator Position** – We conducted interviews for the position on Monday, October 16th. Olivia Olson will start in this position on November 20th. We will start working with her as soon as she gets settled in and through the U of M onboarding process.
- **Education and Outreach** – The Wadena Conservation days were held Oct 3-4 at Old Wadena Campground. 338 students and 30 teachers/paras attended. We received many

thank you notes and cards from schools. Kristi has continued to work on the update of the Wadena SWCD webpage and managing our social media posts. I attended the Leaf Lakes Association meeting on October 26th, as requested to talk about lake levels.

- **Otter Tail River Dam Modifications** – The Rush Lake Dam will likely be completed before the board meetings and Hough is planning to move right to the Otter Tail Lake Dam the week of November 13th. These projects should be completed by the end of November to early December. While our staff have not been on site at the Rush Lake project a lot, while we have been there, we (including the DNR staff) have had very positive conversations with people stopping by to watch the project.
- **Administration** – Staff continue to do the important work of the day-to-day tasks needed to keep the SWCDs running smoothly. Chantal is processing the quarterly invoices from our watershed partners and tracking the grant expenditures. Staff also completed and submitted the quarterly reports and invoices for several of our agreements.
- **Training and Meetings** – Most of the staff attended at least parts of the BWSR Academy October 24th – 26th. I presented on Shared Services for one of the sessions.
- **Staffing** –Savanna Anderson was selected for the Technician Position in the Wadena office and started on October 2nd. She has been busy trying to get up to speed on programs and doing a lot of online training and asking a lot of questions. Mitchell Janson has transitioned to the Perham office. Interviews were conducted for the Watershed Planner/Coordinator position on November 3rd. Nicole Lundeen was offered and accepted the position and will start on December 4th. Nicole has a Bachelors in Natural Resources Management from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point. She has several years of experience in various watershed based, or county-based positions. She worked for Crow Wing County in the Land Services Department leading their A.I.S. program and representing the county at the 1W1P TAC meetings before relocating to the Frazee area. Her current position is with RMB Labs as a project Manager.