

Rice Soil and Water Conservation District

2211 2nd Ave NW Suite 200 Faribault, MN 55021

Phone: (507) 332-5408 www.riceswcd.org

RICE S.W.C.D.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY – December 10, 2025 – 8:00 am

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Richard Peterson, Al Malecha, Roger Bongers, John Larson, Gene Kuntz

Others in attendance: Steve Pahs, Alan Kraus, Emmie Scheffler, Taylor O'Bryan, Lucas Altwegg, Teresa DeMars

Meeting called to order at 8:00 am by Chairman Richard Peterson.

November Board Minutes:

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the November board minutes as written. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

November financial statement and bills payable:

The district manager reviewed the financial statement and bills payable for November.

A motion by Roger Bongers, seconded by Gene Kuntz to approve the November financial statement and bills payable, subject to audit. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. Project encumbrance report – information: this report was reviewed.

CONSENT AGENDA: (payment approval):

- A. John Becker CRP24-08-CC – pymt 2 of 2 - \$3,617.25
Payment 1 of 2 made on 5-14-2025
- B. John Becker CRP24-09-CC – pymt 2 of 2 - \$700.00
Payment 1 of 2 made on 5-14-2025
- C. Tony Kuchinka 25-RC-004, cover crop - \$585.00
- D. Tony Kuchinka 25-RC-005, cover crop - \$300.00
- E. Creighton Houglum SWCD25-08 one year cover crop - \$2,924.00
- F. Jim Sam SWCD25-07 one year cover crop - \$3,072.00
- G. Al Malecha SWCD25-05 one year cover crop - \$1,616.00
- H. Steve Devney CRP24-22-CC one year cover crop - \$2,597.00
- I. KC Betzold 23-RC-007, cover crops yrs 2 & 3 - \$10,530.00
- J. Charlie Albers CRP24-23-CC, cover crops 1 yr - \$3,920.00
- K. Steve Trnka CRP24-24-CC, cover crops 1 yr - \$1,400.00
- L. Phillip Little CRP24-06-CC, cover crops 2 yrs - \$661.50
- M. Tom and JoEllen Wierson CRP24-17-CC, cover crops, yrs 2 & 3 - \$9,280.00
- N. Tim Little CRP24-11-CC, cover crops - 700.00
- O. Tim Little CRP24-10-CC, cover crops - \$700.00
- P. Mark Legvold CRP24-19-CC, cover crops - \$276.32

- Q. Mark Legvold CRP24-16-CC, cover crops - \$465.50
- R. Mark Legvold CRP24-15-CC, cover crops - \$1,084.00
- S. Dave Legvold CRP24-18-CC, cover crops - \$262.50
- T. William Skluzacek CS-24-01, grassed waterway - \$15,045.95

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the consent agenda items as listed. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried. Al Malecha abstained from voting.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Short term CDs with Edward Jones - action:

District Manager proposes taking \$140,000.00 from savings account and placing it into a 6-month CD with Edward Jones at 3.9% interest rate. The question was asked about FDIC insurability of CD's thru Edward Jones. District Manager will confirm.

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by John Larson to invest \$140,000.00 into FDIC insured CD for 6 months with Edward Jones. All aye. None opposed.

B. Wage adjustment for A. Henderson - action:

Al Henderson reached her one-year anniversary with Rice SWCD in November. At the time she started, her wage was negotiated and didn't quite fit the steps on the wage scale. She did not receive a COLA increase on January 1. The district manager would like to approve a wage increase for her that would put her on the closest step to her current wage but would reflect an increase, retroactive to her anniversary date.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by John Larson to approve the wage adjustment for Al Henderson moving her to step 2, range 24 for all of 2026 and retroactive to Pay Period 23. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

C. Letter of support for project "Optimizing Nitrogen Management in Wide-Row Corn-Forage Systems: Economic Returns and Environmental Benefits for MN Beef-Crop operations – action:

Alan Kraus was part of the work that Clean River Partners did on "Optimizing Nitrogen Management in Wide-Row Corn-Forage Systems: Economic Returns and Environmental Benefits for Minnesota Beef-Crop Operations." Clean River Partners is applying for another grant with the MN Department of Agriculture and would like a letter of support from the Rice SWCD to submit with their grant application. This new grant would allow them to continue their work in this area.

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the letter of support for the project "Optimizing Nitrogen Management in Wide-Row Corn-Forage Systems: Economic Returns and Environmental Benefits for MN Beef-Crop operations. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

D. PFML policy - action:

District Manager reviewed the Rice SWCD PFML policy, which follows the State policy, but will be administered through Shelterpoint, a private insurance company. This policy will split 50/50 the premium cost between the district and the employee.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the Rice SWCD PFML policy as presented. All ayes. None opposed. Motion carried

E. FY26 Soil health Delivery RFI - action

This is a three-year grant for \$30,000.00 from the Clean Water Fund. District manager recommends applying for this grant.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by John Larson to submit a grant application for the FY2026 Soil health Delivery Grant. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

F. James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP1, CRP new enrollment, \$1,882.50 - action:

This contract is a one-time incentive contract for new CRP enrollment thru the Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Organization.

G. James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP1, payment - \$1,882.50 - action:

This is a one-time payment for the contract listed as item F.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP1 CRP incentive contract, listed as item F, and the James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP1 payment of \$1,882.50 listed as item G. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

H. James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP2, CRP new enrollment - \$796.00 – action:

This contract is a one-time incentive contract for new CRP enrollment thru the Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Organization.

I. James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP2, payment - \$796.00 – action:

This is a one-time payment for the contract listed as item H.

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP2 CRP incentive contract, listed as item H, and the James Thompson 2025-Cannon-RC-CRP2 payment of \$796.00 listed as item I. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

J. FY2026 Final Budget - action:

The District Manager reviewed three different budget proposals of 2%, 2.5% and 3% increases for 2026.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Gene Kuntz to approve a 3% COLA increase with steps for 2026. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

K. Mark and Terry Rydberg Trust 25-RC-006, amended amount to \$63,497.76:

This contract was previously amended to extend the completion date due to the Federal Government shut-down. Contractor was able to get the tiling done this fall but the rest will be completed in the spring. The amended amount includes pre-construction cover costs. The pre-construction cover would be at a rate of \$150/acre for ten acres total.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Al Malecha to approve the Mark and Terry Rydberg Trust 25-RC-006 amended amount of \$63,497.76. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

L. Mark and Terry Rydberg Trust 25-RC-006 payment - \$22,275.60 – action:

A motion by Roger Bongers, seconded by John Larson to approve this partial payment for the tile work on the Mark and Terry Rydberg Trust 25-RC-006 contract. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

M. Strategic Planning Meeting – discussion:

Board supervisors would like to have a strategic planning meeting in early 2026 to lay out the long-range plan for the Rice SWCD. This meeting could be facilitated by our BWSR BC, or hired out. Staff and Board Supervisors will look at potential resources, gather information from last strategic plan and discuss at January Board meeting.

N. 2026 Staff Wage Adjustments – action

Item J on the agenda was the Final 2026 budget, which was approved as a 3% increase.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongrs to approve a 3% COLA adjustment with steps for staff. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

NRCS REPORT: presented by Taylor O'Bryan: see next page



December 10, 2025

NRCS Report for the Rice SWCD Board Meeting

General:

- ⇒ Cody, Elenor and Lucas are working out of the Faribault Office
- ⇒ Taylor is working out of the Faribault office 3 days a week and the Farmington Office 2 days a week
- ⇒ Taylor is covering Farmington office with counties of Washington, Ramsey, and Dakota now that Matt Lundberg (Farmington DC) has taken another job
- ⇒ Chris is working out of the office a few days a week, will be in other offices in our team the rest of the time.
- ⇒ Government shutdown – We have returned to work and are focusing on getting payments out to producers before the end of the year

Farm Bill Updates:

CSP:

- ⇒ FY26 Sign up deadline is January 1st, 2026
- ⇒ Ranking deadlines still to be determined

EQIP:

- ⇒ EQIP FY26 Sign Up 1 deadline is January 1st 2026
- ⇒ Ranking Deadlines still to be determined

CRP:

- ⇒ Rice county CRP payments have started going out as of last week – they were unable to be paid until then due to the shutdown.

WETLAND/HEL:

- ⇒ Rice County has 25 requests awaiting HEL determination for new land from the compliance team
- ⇒ Rice County has 36 requests awaiting a certified wetland determination from the compliance team

Upcoming Events/Deadlines:

- EQIP and CSP deadlines moved to January 1st



Rice County, Minnesota

2800 1st Avenue NW, Suite 500
Faribault, MN 55021
Taylor.Carlson@usda.gov
(507) 332-7418 ext 108

TO: Rice County Soil and Water Conservation District Board

FROM: Rice County Farm Service Agency

SUBJECT: December 2025 Board Meeting

Old Business

- None

New Business

2023/2024 Supplemental Disaster Assistance

- Supplemental Disaster Relief Program
 - Sign-up began July 10, 2025, for indemnified losses
 - Sign-up began November 24, 2025, for uncovered losses
 - Both stages have a deadline of April 30, 2026

COC Elections – Postponed

- The ballots will be mailed to eligible voters in December and will need to be returned by February 2, 2026.
- Rice candidates: LAA 1 – Daniel Pieper and James Duban

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

- Annual Payments
 - 2025 annual payments are sent out after Oct 1 of each year. Payments started processing December 1, 2025.
- Notice CRP-1069
 - County Offices are authorized to make routine modifications to CRP-1s and Cost-Share agreements, in addition to certifying payments for C/S practices through the 1-year extension of the 2018 Farm Bill passed on November 12, 2025.

Fall Seeded Acreage Certification

- November 17, 2025, fall-seeded crops certification date has been extended to February 2, 2026.

County Committee (COC) Meeting; Regular sessions are open to the public (0:15-0:30)

- No current meeting scheduled

Farm Service Agency

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

DISTRICT MANAGER'S REPORT: Busy month working on a lot of year-end processes, i.e. budget, staff reviews, soil health contracts, grant reporting.

SUPERVISOR REPORTS:

Gene Kuntz: seeing more bean ground tilled black.

Al Malecha: attended Lower MN River East meeting where a new software was approved that will help track and manage projects and allow public to view. \$6,000.00 annually.

Roger Bongers: cover crops are coming up. Great outlook for spring. Great harvest this year.

John Larson: no report.

Richard Peterson: attended one day of the MASWCD annual convention. 8 of the resolutions presented were passed. Watched two of the CRWJPO webinars. Well done.

Staff Reports:

Emmie Scheffler:

This past month, I attended the MASWCD conference, worked on surveying and engineering projects, and misc. Cannon items. My NRCS computer is down so will not be able to utilize that for ARCpro until it is fixed. Working on JAA – great relationship with our area office. Recent TAG meeting talking about flooding and groundwater. Cities of Northfield, Owatonna and Faribault present.

Teresa DeMars:

Past Month

- December Newsletter
- CRWJPO Webinar Marketing/Planning
- Website upgrades
- Tree Sale Launch
- December newsletter

Next Month

- Vacation
- January newsletter
- CRWJPO Webinar Marketing/Planning
- Website upgrades
- Native plant sale planning

Also attended the Career Navigation Day at South Central college. Presented to 9th graders from Faribault Schools.

Al Henderson:

- Finishing last push of WCA applications
- Buffer aerial review for next section of 1/3 of county
- Organized Harmful Algal Bloom data for MPCA
- MASWCD Conference
- Answering lots of technical WCA questions for landowners
- Several new WCA violations to review this winter

Al Kraus:

- Soil Health Incentive Programs – RCPP Funding
 - Assisting with new contracts
- Rice SWCD Cover Crop Interseeder
 - Interseeder in storage at Peterson Farm
- Bridgewater Streams project

- Presentation to MPCA on outcomes
- 2025 crop data collection underway
- New contracts for 2026-2027 cover crops started
- Rice-Steele Soil Health Nitrogen Rate Project
 - Data analysis underway
 - Mtg with grp set for Jan 21, 2026
- Conducted field visits to verify cover crop planting
- Obtained JAA for Residue & Tillage Management – No-till
- Looking ahead
 - Continue working on RCPP contracts with farmers for cover crops & reduced tillage
 - Working with Hiniker on warranty maintenance
 - Evaluating custom service outcomes
 - Working on agronomist training workshop
 - Set for February 2026 in Owatonna
 - Working on a summer bus tour to National Strip-till Conference

Feb 19th meeting for Freeborn Area Soil Health in Owatonna.

August 2026 – National Strip-till conference. Possible funding available to take a bus load to it.

OTHER/CORRESPONDENCE:

UPCOMING EVENTS: keep checking our website for event information:

December 15 Land Rent Workshop by University of Minnesota Extension, 10:00 - 12:00 pm in Faribault.

December 15 Land Rent Workshop by University of Minnesota Extension, 1:30-3:30 pm in Owatonna.

December 17 Challenges and Successes of Animal Conservation with Larry Vorwerk by River Bend Nature Center, 12:00 - 2:00 pm in Faribault.

December 18 Deadline to apply for the Urban Farm Conservation Mini-grant Program

January 13 Birds on the Farm: Balancing Biodiversity and Food Safety Webinar (online) by Wild Farm Alliance.

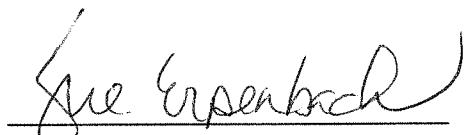
January 13-15 Soil Management Summit/Dirt Conference 2026 by the University of MN-Extension and NDSU, in Fargo, ND

February 18 Small Grains Gathering by the University of Minnesota-Extension, 10:00 am - 3:00 pm in Rochester.

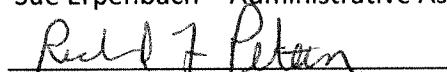
ADJOURN:

Motion to adjourn by Roger Bongers, seconded by John Larson. All aye, none opposed. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:34 am.

Submitted by:



Sue Erpenbach – Administrative Assistant



Board Member –