

Rice Soil and Water Conservation District

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RICE S.W.C.D.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY – October 8, 2025 – 8:00 am

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

Others in attendance: Steve Pahs, Al Henderson, Teresa DeMars, Alan Kraus, Emmie Scheffler,
Commissioner Charlie Peters, Shane Bugeja BWSR

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

September Board Minutes:

A motion by Roger Bongers, seconded by Al Malecha to approve the September board minutes as written. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

September financial statement and bills payable:

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

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by John Larson to approve the September 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. Project acres will be added

CONSENT AGENDA: (payment approval):

- A. Kuball Dairy #SWCD-25-03, 1-year cover crops - \$3,200.00
- B. Chris Donkers #25-RC-007, waterway - \$7,052.83
- C. Chris Donkers #23-RC-008, waterway - \$11,115.50

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

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Open money market savings account with Edward Jones – follow-up:

Further research was done, checking with both the Office of the State Auditor and the District's auditor and both stated clearly that all grant money needs to be insured by either FDIC or pledged collateral. The Edward Jones money market is not insured. Community Resource Bank, who holds the checking and savings account for the district, was asked about interest rates on our current savings account. The current account was earning .35% interest. They recommended switching over to a United savings

account, a tiered account, which offers a much higher interest rate. With the current value in our savings account, the interest rate would be 2.38%. The District Manager made the decision to switch to the higher earning account.

B. 2025 Conservation Delivery grant close-out – action:

This grant has been fully expended and all reporting complete.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongers to close out the 2025 Conservation Delivery grant. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

C. 2025 Resolutions, process, online voting - discussion:

The MASWCD resolutions process was reviewed, as well as the on-line voting procedure and deadline. The SWCD district manager will review the resolutions and provide recommendation to the supervisors as to which resolutions are higher priority, etc. The deadline for voting on-line is November 1st.

D. PFML quote from Shelterpoint and funding – action:

The State of Minnesota is rolling out a new program for paid family medical leave, effective January 1, 2026. Every employer is responsible for paying into this program, at least 50%. Shelterpoint is a private insurance company that has provided a quote for the PFML program. Their quote is less than the state program rate. This company would manage everything. A lot of SWCD's are opting for private insurance instead of the state program. Rice County has opted out of the State Program.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Gene Kunts to opt out of the State of Minnesota PFML program and proceed with an application to Shelterpoint. All ayes. None opposed. Motion carried

E. RCPP Soil Health Grant Round 2: \$120,000.00, authorize DM to sign grant - action

Rice SWCD has applied for and will receive the 2bd round of funding of RCPP Soil health money. All of this round will go into project funding as there is enough T/A left from the first round. District Manager is requesting the authority to sign the grant agreement when it becomes available.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by Roger Bongers to authorize the District Manager to sign the grant agreement for the 2nd round of RCPP funding. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

F. Authorize District Manager to sign upcoming program and operations grant and buffer grant - action:

The operations grant and buffer grants have been delayed. District manager is requesting authorization to sign the grant agreements when they become available. These grants are a little different as they are a "request for interest" grant. Meaning the SWCD can request the full grant amount or less. District manager is requesting for the full grant amount.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by John Larson to authorize the District Manager to sign the grant agreements when they become available. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

G. 224 Draft audit - review:

The 2024 draft audit was shared, as well as the year-to-year comparison worksheet. The final audit will be approved when it is available.

Discussion: the board would like to see a budget vs. actual expenses periodically, at least mid-year.

NRCS REPORT:



United States Department of Agriculture

October 8, 2025

NRCS Report for the Rice SWCD Board Meeting

General:

- ⇒ Taylor, Cody, Elenor and Lucas are working out of the Faribault Office
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ Cody, Taylor, and Eleanor participated in Dakota County Outdoor Education days as teachers
- ⇒ Government shutdown – we are furloughed until further notice

Farm Bill Updates:

CSP:

- ⇒ FY26 Sign up deadline is October 31, 2025

EQIP:

- ⇒ EQIP FY26 Sign Up 1 deadline was August 1
- ⇒ Sign up 2 is open and taking applications
- ⇒ January 9th is our ranking Deadline

CRP:

- ⇒ 38 contracts selected and moving forward in Rice County to begin October 1st
- ⇒ We have completed all selected contracts in Rice County.

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:

- CSP sign up deadline Oct 31st

FSA report prepared by Taylor Carlson:

No report provided due to Federal Government Shut-down.

DISTRICT MANAGER'S REPORT:

The past month has been very busy. Most of the work has been focused on the RCPP Soil Health Program. So far, we have approved eleven contracts totaling about \$145,000, and we have two more contracts ready to go in the next round for another \$128,000.

Other activity this past month:

- Did one sampling event for algal bloom testing
- Attended the Area 7 Fall meeting
- Visited one site for erosion control in Webster Township
- Set up a new CD with Reliance Bank

- Attended the open house for Rice County CFO Paula O'Connell
- Worked closely with Al Kraus on setting up the fall interseeding program, including contracts for renting equipment, and setting up insurance for the tractor and tender

The next 30 days are focused on getting our cover crop seedings completed and finishing up the current applications for RCPP Soil Health. If the federal government shutdown continues into late October, we may see an impact on the RCPP program, as we cannot prepare new contracts until NRCS and FSA staff return to work.

I will also be working on staff reviews, setting up the policy for the new Paid Family Leave program, and preparing final budget numbers for 2026. I also will review the health insurance renewal information and present that at the November meeting.

Last, I want to recognize our staff a bit. Teresa De Mars, Emmie Scheffler, and Sue Erpenbach all will have completed eight years of service with the SWCD by the end of the year. Congratulations to each of them! Having trained, competent employees who work hard every day to put conservation on the land is a true asset, and I appreciate each of them for what they bring to the people of Rice County.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Pahs

SUPERVISOR REPORTS:

Gene Kuntz: attended the MASWCD Leadership Training in St. Cloud. Recommends any supervisor to attend. Keynote speaker very good. Other presenters were okay. Very High Praise for the Haney Workshop in August. Heard about the DNR Public water inventory and wondering where to go to get more information? Look up public water inventory update on DNR website.

Al Malecha: Soybean harvest wrapping up.

Roger Bongers: helped with clean up at the Cannon River Wilderness Area, along with St. Olaf students. Surprisingly little trash. Cover crops flown on September 16th. Beans are almost harvested. Could use some rain to get covers going.

John Larson: Saw two producers near him planting cover crops after harvest.

Richard Peterson: have recently driven between Faribault and Mankato and still see plowed fields.

Staff Reports:

Sue Erpenbach:

Over the last month or so, I've spent a great deal of time building a new website base that combines our on-line store and our website into one site. This new site will be ADA compliant as well as new and refreshed. Teresa and I will be managing the new site and store. Hope to publish this new site by December 1st. The new site will be www.riceswcd.gov.

Emmie Scheffler:

This past month, I have been working on engineering, RCPP, RIM, and some CRP. Looking forward, I will be completing cost share inspections and surveys once crops are off and CRWJPO work. In addition; have completed most of the cost share and RIM inspections. Will start surveying projects after harvest. The CRWJPO is conducting an Upper Cannon Flood Study in early 2026. Also received a grant from the U of M for promotion of the flood study.

Teresa DeMars:**Past Month**

- CRWJPO Webinar Marketing/Planning
- CRWJPO Video Outreach Project
- BWSR Academy/Presentation
- Website upgrades and compliance planning
- October newsletter

Next Month

- November newsletter
- CRWJPO Webinar Marketing/Planning
- CRWJPO Video Outreach Project
- BWSR Academy/Presentation
- Website Upgrades
- November Newsletter
- Vacation

Al Henderson:**Last Month:**

- Vacation
- End of season WCA applications
- Batched Buffer letters sent out
- Harmful Algal Bloom sampling
- DNR wells
- Wetland Restoration Training

Current Month:

- End of season WCA applications cont.
- Sending more buffer letters out - second attempt and first attempt for next section of county monitoring
- Wrapping up HABs sampling
- DNR wells
- Intro to Ag training – 3 sessions thru Central Lakes College
- BWSR academy

Al Kraus:

- Soil Health Incentive Programs – RCPP Funding
 - Worked with Steve on contracts
 - Round 2 of funding has been requested

- Rice SWCD Cover Crop Interseeder
 - Checked nearly all the fields that were interseeded in Spring – preparing report on outcomes
 - Fall custom planting service is ready to go – ~400 ac contracted. Update – 100 acres done, 300 left to go
- Bridgewater Streams project
 - Funding from Clean River Partners confirmed
 - Beginning to work on contracts for 2026-2027 cover crops in Bridgewater
- Rice-Steele Soil Health Nitrogen Rate Project
 - Followed-up attendees of the Haney Soil Health Testing Master class – very positive feedback
 - Communicated with all the farmer cooperators regarding plot yield reporting
- Received Job Approval Authority (JAA) for cover crops through NRCS
- Looking ahead
 - Finish/obtain JAA for Residue & Tillage Management – No-till
 - Continue working on RCPP contracts with farmers for cover crops & reduced tillage
 - Complete custom planting service obligations

In addition: looking to apply for another grant thru the Office of Soil health to fund participants to the Soil health Conventions held in December and January. Also looking to apply for funds for a soil health bus tour. Would like to hold a training event for agronomy team as they are not yet on board with soil health practices.

Commissioner Charlie Peters: 8.71% levy increase set for 2026. Received an update on the Landfill. Life cycle is ending in the next three years on PFAS. Dumping and Recycling rates will go up. Extension office is hoping to get funding to bring back the position they lost.

Shane Bugeja: will be teaching class on E-Link at upcoming BWSR Academy.

OTHER/CORRESPONDENCE:

UPCOMING EVENTS: keep checking our website for event information:

October 10 Soil Health Bus Tour: Sustaining the Soil and Growing Profitable Fruit & Vegetable Farms by the University of Minnesota Extension, 9:00 am - 3:30 PM by Marine on St. Croix.

October 15 Buzzing Back: Restoring Habitat for the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee (Online webinar) by the CRWJPO, 12:00 pm.

October 25 Bat's, Bones, and Bonfires by River Bend Nature Center, 2:00 -5:00 PM in Faribault.

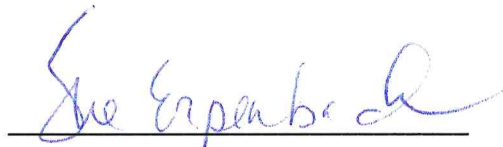
December 2-3 Premier Soil Health Event by the Minnesota Soil Health Coalition in Mankato.

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

ADJOURN:

Motion to adjourn by John Larson, seconded by Roger Bongers. All aye, none opposed. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:30 am.

Submitted by:



Sue Erpenbach – Administrative Assistant

Board Member –

Ruth Pelan

