

## Rice Soil and Water Conservation District

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RICE S.W.C.D.

### REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY – March 12, 2025 – 8:00 am

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

Others in attendance: Steve Pahs, Emmie Scheffler, Allison Henderson, Al Kraus, Commissioner Charlie Peters, Commissioner Jim Purfeerst, Taylor O’Bryan NRCS, Cody Holubeck NRCS, Chris Schmidt NRCS, Dean Sunderlin, Peggy Keilen, Dante Rand

Absent: Gene Kuntz

Meeting called to order at 8:00 am by Chairman Roger Bongers.

#### **February Board Minutes:**

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by John Larson to approve the February board minutes as written. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

#### **February financial statement and bills payable:**

The district manager reviewed the financial statement.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Richard Peterson to approve the February financial statement and bills payable, subject to audit. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS:** No old business.

#### **CONSENT AGENDA: (payment approval)**

A. SE MASWCD annual dues - \$300.00

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha to approve the consent agenda items as listed. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. **Circle Lake Improvement District- Request for a letter of support for Federal Funding for our Lake Restoration Project – discussion:**

Dean Sunderlin presented a proposal requesting funds from legislation part one of three to improve Circle Lake water quality. The proposal is not asking for money from Rice SWCD, just local support. Discussion on the method being proposed and if approving this proposal opens up drafting letters of support for all lake proposals. Board recommendation is to draft a general template in the future for requests similar to this one being presented.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by John Larson to approve a letter of general support to Circle Lake to implement practical lake management practices. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**B. Personnel Policy changes - action:**

The changes were presented as shown in the packet.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Richard Peterson to approve the personnel policy changes as presented in the packet. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**C. Mark Legvold CRP24-15-CC, one year cover crop - \$1,084.00 - action:**

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha to approve the Mark Legvold CRP24-15-CC contract for \$1,084.00. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**D. Consider adjustment to Brian McFadden pay – 5% – action:**

Current wages for Brian McFadden are \$20/hour. A 5% increase matches the COLA the rest of staff received.

A motion by John Larson, seconded by Richard Peterson to approve a 5% pay increase for Brian McFadden. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**E. RCPP Soil Health Practices Grant- Review of allowable practices – discussion:**

The list of allowable practices was reviewed. This funding is required to have a ranking process and ranking periods. Staff will generate a list with descriptions of each practice and available technical approval for each of them for the April board meeting.

**F. Farmers Protecting Bridgewater Streams- Update on findings- information:**

Al Kraus presented the findings. He is willing to share the results at other meetings if needed.

**G. Updates from NACD on Recent Executive Actions - March 7, 2025 :**

The memo from NACD is attached in the packet given at the board meeting.

**NRCS REPORT:**

Chris Schmidt introduced himself. The hiring freeze for the federal government could last more than a year. Steve Breaker in LeCenter retired and they are short staff currently. A new Pheasants Forever person was hired and is located in the Le Center office. She will be assisting in the surrounding counties also. Funding for practices is going to be competitive in the upcoming years.

Taylor O'Brien scheduled the local work group meeting for immediately following the April 9<sup>th</sup> Rice SWCD board meeting with a 10am start time at the Rice SWCD office.



March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## NRCS Report for the Rice SWCD Board Meeting

### **General:**

- ⇒ Taylor, Marlene, Cody, 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.
- ⇒ Staffing changes in NRCS team – All probationary employees let go as of February 14<sup>th</sup>.

### **Farm Bill Updates:**

#### **CSP:**

- ⇒ FY25 Sign Up 1 Deadline is past, we are taking applications for sign up 2
- ⇒ CSP SU1 Ranking Deadline is on March 21<sup>st</sup>

#### **EQIP:**

- ⇒ EQIP sign up 1 deadline is past. Producers can still sign up under sign up 2 for potential funding this year.
- ⇒ All IRA applications from this year on hold – can not make contracts. Rice county has 10 selected applications affected.
- ⇒ One left to obligate (that is non IRA) in Rice County

#### **CRP:**

- ⇒ Until a new Farm Bill or other legislation is passed, CRP applications and approvals are at a halt.
- ⇒ We are beginning year 4 and expiration spot checks that will continue through the summer.

#### **WETLAND/HEL:**

- ⇒ Rice County has 17 requests awaiting HEL determination for new land from the compliance team
- ⇒ Rice County has 18 requests awaiting a certified wetland determination from the compliance team

#### **Upcoming Events/Deadlines:**

- Uncertainty with Government funds – an update
- Possible Government shut down March 14<sup>th</sup>
- Deciding the 2025 Local Working Group Meeting date – Next meeting?

**DISTRICT MANAGER'S REPORT:** 1) The move went smoothly. 2) The soils cabinet is being loaned to Carleton College due to lack of space here. 3) The 2024 annual report should be completed by the next board meeting. 4) There are 1,300 trees left to sell. 5) Working on getting the interseeder up and running. 5) focus will be on the RCPP funds this next month.

**SUPERVISOR REPORTS:**

**Richard Peterson:** attended legislation day virtually and met with Jasinski and Draheim. The budget situation is not looking good.

**Al Malecha:** Cover crop is already growing.

**John Larson:** No report.

**Roger Bongers:** attended the February 25<sup>th</sup> dam meeting in Le Center.

**Staff Reports:**

**Emmie Scheffler:**

Now sitting on the MACDE state board for the SE area representative.

This past month has been busy with the move. I have been working on the RIM and CREP signups with landowners and BWSR. I am working on designs to get our money allocated in the next few months.

**Al Kraus:**

Nitrogen rate trials start beginning of April.

- Ag Water Quality Certification
  - 3 farmers attended a breakfast meeting to get info on the program
  - All 3 signed applications after the meeting
  - A total of 11 farmers were added to the list for certification from this outreach in Jan & Feb
- Soil Health Incentive Programs – RCPP Funding
  - RCPP Funding is waiting for confirmation
  - Attended RCPP Funding training
  - Met with Rice & Steele SWCD staff to discuss outreach & program details related to RCPP funds
- Rice SWCD Cover Crop Interseeder – Status same as last month
  - Working with Hiniker to get new design and manufacture of press wheel scrapers
  - Mike & Shane Peterson agreed to do the custom planting service in 2025 – this will include nitrogen fertilizer application & providing seed and fertilizer deliveries
  - We agreed to host an Interseeding “Pop-up” event with UMN Extension
  - Promotion of our custom service now underway
    - Article in Feb Newsletter
    - Contacting farmers directly
- Farmer-to-Farmer Shop Talk
  - Set for March 13<sup>th</sup> at Rice SWCD Office
- Bridgewater Streams project
  - Presented water quality & farm cropping results at meeting with collaborating farmers and other partners March 4<sup>th</sup> in Dundas
- MDA Grant for Rice-Steele Soil Health Nitrogen Rate

- Held initial meeting farmers & other partners
- Office move – assisted

**Teresa DeMars:**

Past Month

- Winter Soil Health Workshop in Owatonna
- Moving
- Pocket of Prairie planning
- Rice County Garden Day

Next Month

- Pocket of Prairie Planning
- Finishing off CRWJPO webinar series
- April newsletter
- Unpacking/organ
- Earth Day Events

**Al Henderson:**

Presented issues on working through Buffer compliance letters between the SWCD and Rice County. Presented the procedure currently suggested from the county and the procedure BWSR has proposed. County commissioners and staff are recommending the 1<sup>st</sup> letter coming from the Rice SWCD and then following letters from the county. A notice letter template will be sent to the board and county commissioners. Commissioner Peters will connect with the county staff to schedule a meeting with them and Rice SWCD staff on the matter.

Past Month:

Completing trainings: WCA trainings, Soil Health workshop, Trimble Trainings

Buffers work, monitoring and working with landowners

WCA applications have started coming through, reviewing applications and prepping for spring season

WCA Violations, meeting with landowners

Upcoming:

WCA spring follow ups starting soon

Buffers monitoring continues

April vacation

**Commissioner Jim Purfeerst:** Only one union is left to settle with for the county.

**Commissioner Charlie Peters:** The state has cut funding by 20% for mandated practices that the county will have to pick up through cuts or a possible levy. The JD6 contracts have been approved. All ditches should have a completed viewing by the end of 2025.

**Watersheds-** The CRWJPO native plants workshop had 38 attend and hoping to be a yearly workshop. Projects are working on being allocated for all the watersheds. The Lower MN does not have funds for soil health practices currently.

**Dante Rand, Cedar Lake Association:** The annual meeting for the lake association is on May 31<sup>st</sup>. A number of lake member will be attending the ISG southern lakes conference.

**OTHER/CORRESPONDENCE:**

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

**March 8** Native Plants 101 & Native Plants Project Workshop by the Cannon River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, 8:00 am - 12:00 pm in Faribault.

March 8 Rice County Garden Day by the University of MN Rice-Steele Master Gardeners, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm in Northfield.

**March 19-20** 2025 Midwest Grazing & Soil Health Summit by the Sustainable Farming Association. in Wilmar.

**March 20** 8th Downstream Environmental Film Festival by Clean River Partners, 6:00 pm in Faribault.

**March 20 – 22** North American Farm and Power Show in Owatonna.

March 21–22 The Future of Southern Minnesota Lakes Conference by ISG, in Mankato.

**April 2**

Farm Safety Lunch and Learn by University of Minnesota Extension, 10:00 am - 2:00 pm at Faribault Fire Department. Email: [kellyw@fbocoop.com](mailto:kellyw@fbocoop.com) or call/text 507-412-0155.

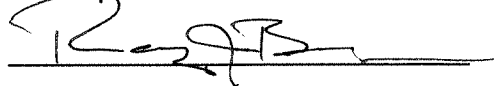
**ADJOURN:**

Motion to adjourn by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha. All aye, motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:43 am.

Submitted by:



Sue Erpenbach – Administrative Assistant



Board Member –