



## Rice Soil and Water Conservation District

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RICE S.W.C.D.

### REGULAR BOARD MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY – January 14, 2026 – 8:00 am

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

Others in attendance: Steve Pahs, Alan Kraus, Emmie Scheffler, Teresa DeMars, Chris Schmidt NRCS, Cody Holubeck NRCS, Commissioner Charlie Peters, Jim Fisher

Absent: John Larson

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

#### **Supervisor positions for 2026:**

Positions for 2025 were: Chairman – Richard Peterson, Vice Chairman – John Larson, Treasurer – Gene Kuntz, Secretary – Roger Bongers, Public Relations & Information – Al Malecha.

A motion by Gene Kuntz, seconded by Roger Bongers for the supervisors to all rotate up one position for 2026 as follows: Chairman – John Larson, Vice Chairman – Gene Kuntz, Treasurer – Roger Bongers, Secretary – Al Malecha, Public Relations & Information – Richard Peterson. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

At this point, Vice-Chairman Gene Kuntz took over running the meeting.

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

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

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the December 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. MCIT Insurance PC renewal for 2026 - \$4,797.00
- B. MCIT Insurance WC Renewal for 2026 - \$6,156.00
- C. CRWJPO 2026 member Dues - \$3,750.00
- D. MASWCD Dues for 2026 - \$7,654.59
- E. MACDE 2026 Dues - \$150.00
- F. DVS Renewal – 2025 Chevy Silverado - \$21.25
- G. DVS Renewal – 2024 Ram 2500 - \$21.25
- H. DVS Renewal – 2018 Ram 1500 - \$21.25
- I. Shane Peterson SWCD-25-04, cover crop payment - \$1,448.00
- J. Far-Gaze Farms SWCD-25-06, cover crop final payment - \$2,400.00

K. Jack Volkert 25-RC-008 - \$15,584.67

L. 2026 Envirothon Dues - \$175.00

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

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**A. Clean River Partners donation - \$150.00 - action:**

Clean River Partners is a non-profit organization that assists and works with us in the promotion of clean water, reducing soil erosion and improving the soil.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to make a donation of \$150.00 to Clean River Partners. All aye. None opposed.

**B. Rice County Master Gardeners native plant kit donation - action:**

The Rice County Master Gardeners have asked for a donation of a native plant kit for their upcoming event. The Rice SWCD will also have a display booth at their event.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve the donation of a native plant kit to the Rice County Master Gardeners upcoming event. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**C. NACD annual membership dues - \$1,000.00 – action:**

NACD – National Association of Conservation Districts: National organization of all conservation districts. This organization lobbies for conservation districts at the Federal level.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to continue at the “gold level” of dues with \$1,000.00 for 2026. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**D. Designate the Faribault Daily news as the official newspaper for the Rice SWCD - action:**

A motion by Roger Bongers, seconded by Richard Peterson to designate the Faribault Daily news as the official newspaper for the Rice SWCD. All ayes. None opposed. Motion carried

**E. Designate Community Resource Bank as the official depository - action**

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha to designate Community Resource Bank as the official depository for the Rice SWCD. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**F. Faribault Daily News annual subscription renewal - action:**

The subscription is up for renewal. Looking to renew the digital version for another year.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to renew the annual Faribault Daily news subscription, digital or print. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**G. Strategic Planning meeting – follow up from December meeting - action:**

District Manager has reached out to our BWSR board conservationist to assist with strategic planning. The BC and another BWSR staff will be available on February 27<sup>th</sup> to assist with this meeting.

A motion by Al Malecha, seconded by Richard Peterson to proceed with scheduling a Strategic Planning Meeting on February 27th. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

H. **Propose moving Board meetings to 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month due to conflict with BALMM meetings – action:**

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to move the monthly Board meetings to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month beginning in February 2026. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

I. **February Board meeting date change – action:** no action, null and void

J. **No-Till drill data 2025 - informational:**

Drill use statistics for 2025 were presented.

K. **Authorize District manager to encumber up to \$50,000.00 from local funds to use on Soil Health RCPP contracts - action:**

District Manager would like authority to temporarily encumber up to \$50,000.00 for an RCPP contract in the next batching period, until the next round of funds is received for contract 66-03-16.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to approve contract 66-03-16 for \$41,574.00 using district funds. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

L. **Supervisor committee assignments for 2026– action:**

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to postpone the Supervisor Committee assignments for 2026 until the next meeting. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

M. **Audit engagement letter with Peterson Co, LTD - \$5,300.00 - action:**

Annual audit engagement letter.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha to approve the audit engagement letter with Peterson Co, Ltd for the 2025 audit. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

N. **RCPP policy change – action**

Current policy states that the seeding plan needs to be approved by SWCD and NRCS. It is recommended that the policy be changed to reflect approval by SWCD or NRCS, as long as SWCD as JAA authority.

A motion by Richard Peterson, seconded by Roger Bongers to amend the RCPP policy substituting “and” with “or”. All aye. None opposed. Motion carried.

**NRCS REPORT: written by Taylor O’Bryan, presented by Chris Schmidt and Cody Holubeck: see next page**



January 14th, 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.

### **Farm Bill Updates:**

#### **CSP:**

- ⇒ FY26 Sign up deadline is January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026
- ⇒ Ranking deadlines still to be determined

#### **EQIP:**

- ⇒ EQIP FY26 Sign Up 1 deadline is January 15<sup>th</sup> 2026
- ⇒ Ranking Deadlines still to be determined

#### **CRP:**

- ⇒ Rice county CRP payments are going out

### **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 15<sup>th</sup>
- Cody Holubeck has accepted a new position in New York, and his last day with us will be January 23.

**FSA report prepared by Taylor Carlson: written report: No report**

**DISTRICT MANAGER'S REPORT:**

**January 2026 District Manager's Report**

December work included finishing the policy on the Paid Family Medical Leave program, continuing work on the Soil Health RCPP program, and finalizing the budget and staff reviews. I also gave a presentation to the County Commissioners and took some time off.

Other activity this past month:

- Attended the MASWCD Convention in Bloomington
- Helped with the Agronomist workshop planning
- Participated in a watershed strategy meeting with county staff
- Met with the personnel committee for reviews
- Batched and ranked RCPP applications and approved contracts
- Working on a new copy machine lease/purchase

The outlook for the rest of January into February is more RCPP contract work, several planning meetings for workshops, planning for the interseeding program, workshops and the usual watershed and TSA meetings, and prep for the strategic planning session.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Pahs

**SUPERVISOR REPORTS:**

**Gene Kuntz:** no report

**Al Malecha:** not much frost in the ground.

**Roger Bongers:** not much frost in the ground. Not seeing much soil erosion.

**Richard Peterson:** met with staff in December as a member of the personnel committee. Always good to hear what staff are doing, what their concerns are, etc.

**Staff Reports:**

**Emmie Scheffler:**

This past month, I have been working on engineering designs, helping with RCPP maps, and Cannon work. I touched up a RIM application that got selected for funding from the state. Coming up, I will be doing Cannon reporting and preparing for the next board meeting, working on designs, helping the Northfield FFA group on web soil survey, and attending the MASWCD board meeting as the MACDE board rep.

In addition: is on the MASWCD Board as the SE rep. Will attend quarterly meetings. Upcoming CIG meeting and quarterly CRWJPO meeting. Helping the Northfield FSA class with web soil survey. Potential for 5 engineering plans.

**Teresa DeMars:**

## Past Month

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

## Next Month

- CRWJPO marketing/Planning webinars
- Website upgrades
- February newsletter
- Envirothon marketing
- Winter Soil Health Workshop Marketing

**Al Henderson:**

## Last month:

- RIM Peatland Restoration Training
- Answering technical WCA questions for landowners
- Organizing 2025 data
- Wrapping up 2025 notes
- Buffer management - organizing data
- Buffer aerial review

## Next month

- WCA violations to review this winter
- Restoration Orders for violations
- Creating 2026 data organization
- WCA Report due Feb. 1
- Buffer aerial review for next section of 1/3 of county

**Al Kraus:**

- Soil Health Incentive Programs – RCPP Funding
  - Assisting with new contracts
- Bridgewater Streams project
  - Presented project to MPCA & published newspaper article
  - 2025 crop data & water quality results finishing up
  - New contracts for 2026-2027 cover crops started
  - Farmer meeting being planned
- Rice-Steele Soil Health Nitrogen Rate Project
  - 2025 Final Report completed
  - Mtg with farmer group set for Jan 21, 2026
- Agronomist training workshop set for February 10-11 2026 in Owatonna
- Looking ahead
  - Continue working on RCPP contracts with farmers for cover crops & reduced tillage
  - Working with Hiniker on warranty maintenance on Interseeder
    - Evaluating custom service outcomes/future options
  - Working on a summer bus tour to National Strip-till Conference

In addition: The Rice Creek project will be presented at two upcoming meetings. Submitted a grant request for funding for the August bus trip. Asked to speak about the results on the Haney trials at the office of soil health in March.

Commissioner Charlie Peters: County Rd 20 hearing in progress. The reduction in USDA funds will affect SNAP benefits. All union agreements have been finalized and signed. The new FMLA program has started and numerous people have requested leave. Looking at possible temp staffing to cover.

**OTHER/CORRESPONDENCE:** CRWJPO is still working on the flood study. Lower MN had a recent meeting prioritizing the next round of funding. The Zumbro WS has a new tracking system for projects.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

**January 13** From Field to Faucet: Nitrate Risks in Karst Regions (Webinar) by the CRWJPO, 12:00 - 1:00 pm on Zoom.

**January 20-21** MN Ag Expo in Mankato.

**January 18** Grazing Guidance: Getting to the Root Cause of Better Pastures (Webinar) by Minnesota Women in Conservation, 12:00 - 1:00 pm on Zoom.

**January 31** Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) for Goodhue and Rice Counties Interest Meeting, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm in Cannon Falls.

**February 3** I-90 Soil Health Tour - Reducing Tillage for Input Savings & Soil Health, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, in Heron Lake.

**February 4** I-90 Soil Health Tour - Reducing Tillage for Input Savings & Soil Health, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, in Wells

**February 5** I-90 Soil Health Tour - Reducing Tillage for Input Savings & Soil Health, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, in Rochester.

**February 6** I-90 Soil Health Tour - Reducing Tillage for Input Savings & Soil Health, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, in Hokah

**February 10 – 11** Soil Health Workshop for Agronomists by Agronomists by the Rice & Steele SWCDs, in Owatonna.

**February 17** HWY 14 Soil Health Winter Workshop Strip Till Makes Dollars and Sense, 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, in Owatonna.

**February 18** HWY 14 Soil Health Winter Workshop Strip Till Makes Dollars and Sense, 9:00 am - 2:30 pm, in Lamberton

**February 19** HWY 14 Soil Health Winter Workshop Strip Till Makes Dollars and Sense, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm, in Lake Benton.

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

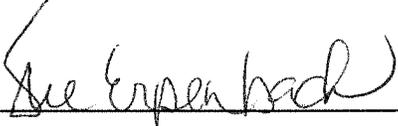
February 25-26

Reclaiming Profitability: Farming Smarter in 2026 with Ray Archuleta by Profit Pro Ag in Albert Lea.

**ADJOURN:**

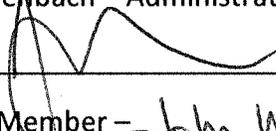
Motion to adjourn by Richard Peterson, seconded by Al Malecha. All aye, none opposed. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 9:32 am.

Submitted by:



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Sue Erpenbach – Administrative Assistant



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Board Member – John W. Larson