HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 9/15/2026

Meeting Location: HSWCD Conf. Rm.– Bert J. Harris Jr. Ag. Center

4505 George Blvd., Sebring, FL 33875

FINAL – Adopted 10/20/2026

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

Meeting Scheduled Start: 3:00 P.M.

Call To Order: 3:01 P.M.

Public Meeting Announcement Read By Chairman

I. Welcome & Introductions

List of Attendees			
Name	**Title**	**Organization**	**Present**
Dr. John Causey	Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Steve Smith	Vice-Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Doug Deen	Secretary/Treasurer	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Sara Sebring	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	No
T.J. Wohl	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Scott Kirouac	Liaison	Highlands County BCC	Yes
Kayla Nickerson	Executive Director	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Chad Harmon	MIL Manager	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Wade Smith	MIL Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Jared Smith	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Yes
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Yes
Michael Lebron	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Yes
Kasey Deuberry	Environmental Manager	FDACS-OAWP	Yes

II. Approval of Agenda - Motion to approve as presented (Smith/Wohl). Motion passed unanimously.

III. Approval of August 18, 2026 Meeting Minutes: Motion to approve minutes as presented (Wohl/Smith). Motion passed unanimously.

IV. Financial Activity

a. **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – August 2026:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Smith/Deen). Motion passed unanimously.

b. **Proposed FY 2025-2026 Budget Amendment –** Review of proposed Amendment 03. Motion to approve 2025-2026 Resolution #4 to adopt Amendment 03 as presented (Deen/Wohl). Motion passed unanimously.

Nickerson will begin FY 2025-2026 fiscal year close out accounting and prepare final budget amendments for adoption at the October or November meeting.

c. **Proposed FY 2026-2027 Budget –** Presentation of proposed budget for consideration. Discussion. Motion to approve 2026-2027 Resolution #1 to adopt FY 2026-2027 Budget as presented (Wohl/Smith). Motion passed unanimously.

V. Agency Partner Updates

a. **FDACS –** K. Deuberry reported all funds are allocated for the fiscal year statewide. The SWFL field staff team has reported the highest number of Implementation Verification visits and cost share projects/dollars statewide. A new Environmental Specialist III will begin in Polk County this month to assist with workload. She reported Highlands BMP Tech, J. Smith, is learning quickly and is a great asset to the team. No action was taken.

b. **NRCS –** M. Lebron reported the reorganization plan is on hold until the first week of October, however Lebron still anticipates a move to Wauchula prior to the next meeting. Two additional contracts have been awarded in Highlands County, bringing the total to $2.1 million in conservation funding. Highlands County ranked 5th for number of contracts/funding statewide. Program eligibility requirements are changing, Lebron encouraged producers to update records with the Farm Service Agency and discuss changes. No action was taken.

c. **HCBCC –** S. Kirouac reported HCBCC is continuing to pursue a local bill to restore IMWIM funding. They have also received clarification that the maintenance activities will qualify for reimbursement through the DEP Capital Improvement Grant. No action was taken.

VI. Old Business

a. **AACT Program –** K. Nickerson reported that C. Harmon passed the FAA Part 107 certification exam. Drone liability and property insurance coverage has been bound. Staff is seeking a vehicle and hopes to make a purchase within the month. Partnership opportunities are being explored. Billable services have been advertised. Staff continues to monitor and apply for grant opportunities. No action was taken.

b. **Community Garden Update –** K. Nickerson reported one garden plot was issued reimbursement and many have received extensions due to the water system being down. The Highlands County Sheriff's Office will provide inmate assistance on Oct. 8, 2026 for annual workday and tilling of garden plots. C. Harmon and W. Smith have taken over lawn maintenance and garden cleanup following plot vacancies. S. Kirouac suggested modifications to rental agreement to ensure plots are clean upon rental end. Board consensus to consider modifications.

c. **AFCD Update –** K. Nickerson reported annual meeting had good attendance. All current officers were re-elected to the executive board. Dues returned to $500 for the year. The association is discussing an agreement with a lobbyist to improve District relations and explore the possibility of state appropriations for districts. No action was taken.

VII. Executive Director's Report

- FGCU student thesis survey request.
- SECDEA T-Shirt fundraiser reminder.
- Executive Director evaluation sheets provided for collection and evaluation next meeting.
- Preparing review of annual long-range plan for formal review next meeting.
- Working through Dispersed Water Management (DWM) Project Proposals.
- Begin development of FY 2025-2026 Annual Report.

VIII. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None

IX. Supervisors Comments

Smith – None.
Deen – Will not attend next meeting.
Sebring – Absent.
Wohl – None.
Causey – None.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:22 p.m.
Next Board Meeting: October 20, 2026 – 3:00 p.m.

John Causey, DVM, Chairman **Doug Deen, Secretary**

POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

Action	***Assigned To***	***Deadline***
FY 2025-2026 Year-End Close Out	*K. Nickerson*	*Sept. 30, 2026*
Community Garden Workday/Preparations	*K. Nickerson, C. Harmon, W. Smith*	*Oct. 8, 2026*
Review of Garden Plot Rental Agreements	*K. Nickerson*	*Nov. 10, 2026*
Annual Long Range Plan Review	*K. Nickerson*	*Nov. 10, 2026*
AACT Program Development & Additional Grant Applications	*K. Nickerson, C. Harmon, W. Smith*	*Dec. 31, 2026*
FY 2025-2026 Annual Report	*K. Nickerson*	*Dec. 31, 2026*
Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP operations, revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.	*K. Nickerson*	*Ongoing*
AFCD Committee Work	*K. Nickerson*	*Ongoing*
REPI Partnership DWM Program outreach and meeting facilitation	*K. Nickerson*	*Until Complete*
Review and updates to Employee Handbook	*K. Nickerson*	*Until Complete*