

# HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 2/18/2025

Meeting Location: HSWCD Conf. Rm–Bert J. Harris Jr. Ag. Center  
4505 George Blvd., Sebring, FL 33875

**FINAL – Approved March 18, 2025**

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	Y
Steve Smith	Vice-Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Doug Deen	Secretary/Treasurer	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Sara Sebring	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
T.J. Wohl	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Scott Kirouac	Liaison	Highlands County BOCC	N
Susie Bishop	Executive Director	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Kayla Nickerson	Administrative Specialist	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Chad Harmon	MIL Manager	Highlands Soil & Water	N
Wade Smith	MIL Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	N
Will Cochlin	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Kasey Deuberry	Environmental Manager	FDACS-OAWP	N
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	N
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Scarlett Jackson	VP of Ag Programs & External Relations	Warner University	Y
Zack Farr	Treasurer	The ROCI Group	Y

- II. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to Approve the Agenda, amended to move items VII. a. and VII. b. to become items III. a. and III. b. respectively. (Deen/Wohl). Unanimous Approval.

**III. New Business**

- a. **Warner Program Update** – Jackson thanked the Board for their continued support of the ag programs via scholarships to upperclassmen. She provided updates and statistics on student enrollment, activities and successes beyond graduation. Bishop asked if the college had difficulty finding suitable candidates for the HSWCD scholarship. Jackson shared there are limited upper classmen who meet the qualifications. The Board discussed possible amendments to the scholarship qualifications, most notably the idea to open eligibility to sophomore students. Plans to continue discussion at next board meeting. No action.
- b. **The ROCI Group** – Farr shared information on grant applications in progress for funding the development of a hemp and biochar processing facility at the Avon Park Executive Airport. He is asking for a letter in support of The ROCI Group's funding request to the FDACS - Office of Agricultural Water Policy which will be submitted in the coming months. Chairman directed Farr to provide further information in writing to be reviewed at our next meeting for approval/support. No action.

**IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

- a. **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – January 7, 2025** - Motion to approve minutes as presented (Sebring/Deen). Unanimous Approval.

**V. Financial Activity**

- a. **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – December 2024 & January 2025:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve the financial reports as presented (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous Approval.

**VI. Agency Partner Updates**

- a. **FDACS** – Baker reported the cost share application cycle is closed for FY 2024-2025. Staff are currently working on new enrollments and IV visits. Bishop reported new cost share contracts are anticipated to replace current contracts on July 1<sup>st</sup>. No Action.
- b. **MIL** – Bishop reported HSWCD will host a workshop to finalize statewide development of MIL Standard Operating Procedures in April in Lake Placid. No Action.
- c. **NRCS** – Nickerson reported Natural Resource Specialists in the Sebring Field Office, Josilin Day and Natalie Toro, have been terminated as a result of the Federal dismissal of all employees with less than 1 year of service. Newly hired District Conservationist will not be reporting to the office as planned, as leadership is still awaiting direction from the National office regarding the Federal hiring freeze parameters. Sara Espinosa, Soil Conservationist from the LaBelle Field Office, and Carlos Torres will be assisting Sebring Field Office until further notice. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds are frozen including payments for IRA contracts. The Cooperative Agreement between HSWCD and USDA-NRCS is funded with IRA funds creating doubt that it will stay in place. HSWCD was told by the Florida State Conservationist to continue to uphold the agreement terms until notice of a work-stop order is received. No Action.
- d. **HCBCC** – No report.

**VII. Old Business**

- a. **Legislative Planning** – Bishop reported a bill regarding the future of SWCDs is anticipated to be formally filed later this week. Bishop was informed Option A developed during the Brainstorm Workshop in October 2024 will be the language in the Bill. Once the Bill is filed, Bishop and Nickerson will begin travel to Tallahassee to testify during committee meetings scheduled to hear the Bill. No Action.

- b. **Community Garden** – Bishop reported a trespassing warrant has been served to a previous gardener following an incident reported to the sheriff's office on the community garden grounds. Bishop also shared UF-IFAS has declined the opportunity to take ownership of the community garden. Discussion regarding the financials and future of the garden ensued. No action.

**VIII. Executive Director's Report**

- Bishop shared a recap of the networking and training opportunities afforded at the NACD Annual Conference in Utah last week.
- A US Fish and Wildlife employee has been approved to make office space of the UF-IFAS extension breakroom adjoining the HSCWD conference room.
- Bishop reported having good engagement with legislative aides following her presentation at the Highlands County Legislative Delegation Meeting last month.
- Leadership Highlands Ag Day tour was successful despite the loss of many ag operations in our county within the past year.
- Bishop is actively working with leadership at FDACS-OAWP to review and edit language for new cost share and potential new regional contracts.

No Action.

**IX. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None.**

**X. Supervisors Comments**

Smith – None

Deen – None

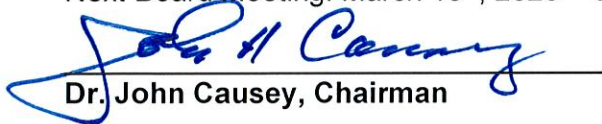
Sebring – None

Wohl – None

Causey – Question regarding hyacinth removal project near Lake Istokpoga.  
Discussion regarding the purpose and benefits. No action.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

  
Dr. John Causey, Chairman

  
Doug Deen, Secretary/Treasurer

### POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP revised procedures and policies</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Future of Community Garden</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>
<i>Review Language of new Regional Projects SOW</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until completed</i>
<i>Monitor NRCS Cooperative Agreement</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
<i>Presentation of 2023-2024 Annual Report to Partners</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until completed</i>
<i>Evaluate Warner University Scholarship Qualifications</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>March 18, 2025</i>
<i>Balance Tracking for all Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>March 31, 2025</i>
<i>Drafting and review of SOPs and SOW for MIL</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; C. Harmon</i>	<i>April 2025</i>
<i>Legislative Preparation – Bill Review and Testimony</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 2, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD/FCDEA Public Records Policy</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>Postponed</i>