

# **HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**MEETING DATE: 6/24/2025**

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

**DRAFT**

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

**MEETING SCHEDULED START: 3:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER: 3:00 P.M.**

**PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT READ BY CHAIRMAN**

### **I. Welcome & Introductions**

#### **List of Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Present</b>
Dr. John Causey	Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Steve Smith	Vice-Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Doug Deen	Secretary/Treasurer	Highlands Soil & Water	N
Sara Sebring	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
T.J. Wohl	Supervisor	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Scott Kirouac	Liaison	Highlands County BOCC	Y
Susie Bishop	Executive Director	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Kayla Nickerson	Administrative Specialist	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Chad Harmon	MIL Manager	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Wade Smith	MIL Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Will Cochlin	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Sara Espinosa Puig	Acting District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Don Buchanan	Range Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
John Davis	Auditor	Wicks, Brown, Williams & Co.	Y

### **II. Approval of Agenda – Motion to approve agenda as presented (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.**

- III. **Presentation of FY 2023-2024 Financial Audit** – Davis presented the Audit Management Letter and the Independent Accountants’ Audit/Financial Report explaining a minor finding regarding budget amendments. Motion to accept the Annual Financial Report as presented and submit to the Auditor General (Smith/Sebring). Unanimous approval.
- IV. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - a) **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – May 20, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes as presented (Smith/Wohl). Unanimous approval.
- V. **Financial Activity**
  - a) **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – May 2025:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Smith/Wohl). Unanimous approval.
  - b) **CD Investment Options** – Nickerson reported 3 of the District’s 4 CDs matured last week and were redeemed for consideration of alternate investments. Current rates from Qualified Public Depositories were provided. Discussion. Motion to deposit earned interest in general fund and reinvest \$600,000.00 in Heartland National/Seacoast bank at 4% interest for 3 months (Wohl/Sebring). Motion passed unanimously.
- VI. **Agency Partner Updates**
  - a) **FDACS** – No report.
  - b) **MIL** – Harmon reported team has completed and exceeded fiscal year requirement by 69 additional evaluations. No action.
  - c) **NRCS** – Espinosa-Puig reported 4 applications have been approved and are moving to contract: 2 EQIP and 2 CSP. Currently accepting applications for next calendar year. Emergency Watershed Protection program is available for public entities to apply in the event of a natural disaster. Nickerson reported the State Technical Committee reached out regarding letter sent in May. The committee agreed with the need to prioritize funding for improvements on abandoned citrus groves, however they do not have the funds to meet demand and encouraged further pursuit of partnership funding. The agency intends to pursue adding Whitehead Broom to the list of eligible species for multiple treatments. No action.
  - d) **HCBC** – Kirouac reported solutions are still being sought for ongoing revenue sources for IMWID. No action.
- VII. **Old Business**
  - a) **Elected Officials Financial Disclosures** – Bishop informed Supervisors documents are due June 30, 2025. No Action.
  - b) **RFP for Services for FDACS-OAWP** – Bishop reported HSWCD was awarded the bid for the Central and Northeast Florida Mobile Irrigation Lab Services Request for Proposals. The District will subcontract the Gilchrist Soil and Water Conservation District to carry out the contract obligations. No action.
- VIII. **New Business**
  - a) **District Policy** – Bishop reported staff is developing a District Travel Policy and sought feedback from the board on per diem rates. Discussion of options with consensus for staff to bring draft policy to August board meeting. Per consensus, Staff will pilot per diem payments versus receipts for travel expenses incurred in June and until next scheduled Board Meeting.
  - b) **Legislative Concerns** – Bishop reported Senator Truenow has shared with a few constituents a desire to file legislation concerning SWCDs in 2026. FCDEA voted at the Mid-Year meeting to proceed with unified position developed in November 2024 Workshop (Options A, B & C) for 2026 Legislative Session and to appoint Bishop as FCDEA legislative liaison, corresponding with ag

associations and lobbyists to inform them of FCDEA's position. Bishop will be scheduling appointments and meeting with industry representatives in the months to come. No action.

c) **Federation of Florida Soil & Water Conservation Districts, Inc.** – Bishop reported some supervisors from SWCDs previously who were on the list to be dissolved in 2025 proposed legislation have formed a new statewide SWCD Federation. No action.

d) **FCDEA Role with AFCD** – Bishop shared FCDEA has formed a new committee to assist AFCD with administrative duties to ensure the association remains active. Bishop and Nickerson serve on the committee and have been in touch with AFCD president, Buck Carpenter, regarding meeting scheduling and amendments to the bylaws. No action.

**IX. Executive Director's Report**

- Attended Corridor Connect in Orlando; excellent conference with a lot of opportunities for networking.
- 2025 FASD Annual Conference provided very good trainings applicable to administrative work of the District.
- FDACS-Office of Commissioner Wilton Simpson Regional Directors, Jorge Abreu and Ellen Cruz, may attend August Board meeting to observe.
- Bishop will attend SENACD Meeting August 3-5 in Louisville, KY.
- Florida Governor has awarded 2% raise for all State employees and granted an additional holiday of July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Proposal for increases for district employees will be presented at August meeting for discussion.
- AgVenture board voted to discontinue the program. HSWCD \$2,000 donation made earlier this year will be returned to the district. If the program continues through another avenue, Board will need to decide how involved to be. A meeting of interested parties will be held on July 8<sup>th</sup>.

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

**XI. Supervisors Comments**

Smith – None  
Deen – N/A  
Sebring – None  
Wohl – None  
Causey – None

Meeting Adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

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**John Causey, DVM Chairman**

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**Doug Deen, Secretary**

## POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Purchase Certificates of Deposit</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>June 30, 2025</i>
<i>Submit FY 2023-2024 Annual Financial Audit</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>June 30, 2025</i>
<i>FDACS-OAWP Contract 27694 &amp; 26243 Closeouts</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>July 15, 2025</i>
<i>Review and Execute FDACS-OAWP AgNPS &amp; BMP Tech Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>July 30, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD Public Records, Purchasing and Travel Policies</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>August 19, 2025</i>
<i>Create and Implement MOU with Gilchrist Soil and Water Conservation District to carry out services under Central and Northeast Florida MIL Contract</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>August 30, 2025</i>
<i>Review and Execute Contract for Central and Northeast Florida MIL Services</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>August 30, 2025</i>
<i>Community Garden Maintenance Plan</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>
<i>2026 Legislative Session Preparations</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>