

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 4/15/2025

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

FINAL

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

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

PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT READ BY VICE CHAIRMAN

I. Welcome & Introductions

List of Attendees

Name	Title	Organization	Present
Dr. John Causey	Chairman	Highlands Soil & Water	N
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	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
Kasey Deuberry	Environmental Manager	FDACS-OAWP	N
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Kati Lawson	County Extension Director	Highlands UF-IFAS Extension	Y
Ally Bastien	Livestock Extension Agent	Highlands UF-IFAS Extension	Y

- II. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to approve agenda replacing Chairman Causey with Vice-Chairman Smith on items I. and II. (Sebring/Deen). Unanimous approval.

- III. AgriTest Initiative Fund Update** – Since inception in March of 2024, 29 unique agricultural producers have been assisted through the program with a total of 69 soil and water samples processed, covering 1,476 ac in Highlands County. Lawson requested a renewal of funding for the initiative. Motion to grant \$750 for renewal of the AgriTest Initiative fund (Deen/Wohl). Unanimous approval.
- IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes**
- a) **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – March 18, 2025** - Motion to approve minutes with corrected start time of 3:00pm (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.
- V. Financial Activity**
- a) **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – March 2025:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous approval.
- b) **Budget Amendments** – Review of proposed amendments. Motion to approve budget amendments as presented (Sebring/Wohl). Unanimous approval.
- VI. Agency Partner Updates**
- a) **FDACS** – Ahrens reported that all funds are fully obligated for the current Fiscal Year. Environmental Specialist position mentioned last month was filled and new employee, Erik Moretuzzo, will be housed in Hillsborough County. 9 new positions will be advertised in the new Fiscal Year. New cost share program procedures will go into effect in July, details forthcoming. Ahrens and Cochlin set up a booth at the Warner Career Fair last week and will be stationed at a booth at the Ona Field Day this coming Thursday. All BMP manuals are now live and ready for enrollment. No action.
- b) **MIL** – Harmon reported team is on track to complete required evaluations for the quarter. SOP development workshop was successful. More updates will be made to the document by administration prior to finalizing. The MIL handbook is also being updated. No action.
- c) **NRCS** – Nickerson reported the HSWCD Cooperative Agreement is still frozen with no news regarding reimbursement for invoices submitted. A second Federal buyout offer was presented to all employees, and it is unknown who has elected to accept the offer. A further reduction in force is set to be announced in the coming weeks. No action.
- d) **HCBCC** – Commissioner Kirouac thanked the Board for the donation to IWMID. Pumps are back in operation and staff is prioritizing maintenance tasks to make the most of the donation. Current burn ban is for residential only; agricultural and commercial burn permit requests are still being processed.
- VII. Old Business**
- a) **Legislative Update** – Bishop reported SB 986 and HB 973 have likely died. No action.
- b) **Community Garden** – Bishop and Nickerson performed a garden workday last week and the garden is in good condition. Plots are filling back up. No action.
- VIII. New Business – None**
- IX. Executive Director’s Report**
- Proposal to become an allied member of Highlands County Citrus Growers Association (HCCGA). Motion to join HCCGA (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous approval.
 - Proposal to join Florida Farm Bureau Federation (FFBF). Motion to join FFBF, pending verification of eligibility (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous approval.
 - Lake MIL duties have now been issued in a State of Florida Request for Proposal which was released last week. HSWCD may submit a proposal.

- Bishop will take annual leave May 5th-16th. Nickerson will assume ED responsibilities during this time.
- Financial Disclosure documents due June 30, 2025.
- June 3rd -5th Bishop will attend Corridor Connect Summit in Orlando, FL.
- June 4th -5th Nickerson will attend Florida Conservation District Employees Association Mid-Year meeting in which she will take the Advanced Accountability course as first step in becoming a Florida Certified Contract Manager through the Florida Department of Management Services.
- June 16th -19th Nickerson will attend Florida Association of Special Districts Annual Meeting where she will be awarded her Certified District Manager Certificate and earn continuing education credits.
- AgVenture will be held November 4th – 6th.

X. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None

XI. Supervisors Comments

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

Meeting Adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

Local Working Group Meeting: May 20th, 2025 – 1:00 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: May 20th, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.



Steve Smith, Vice Chairman



Doug Deen, Secretary/Treasurer

POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

Action	Assigned To	Deadline
<i>Issue payment Highlands UF-IFAS Extension for AgriTest Initiative</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>April 21, 2025</i>
<i>Seek clarification on eligibility of joining Florida Farm Bureau</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>April 30, 2025</i>
<i>Submit registration and payment to become allied member of Highlands County Citrus Growers Association</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>April 30, 2025</i>
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Community Garden Maintenance Plan</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>
<i>Monitor NRCS Cooperative Agreement</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
<i>Legislative Watch</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 2, 2025</i>
<i>Balance Tracking for all Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>May 5, 2025</i>
<i>Submit Bid for Mobile Irrigation Lab RFP</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 12, 2025</i>
<i>Preparation for Local Working Group Meeting</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 20, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD/FCDEA Public Records Policy</i>	<i>K. Nickerson & S. Bishop</i>	<i>Postponed</i>