

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 3/18/2025

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 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	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
Kasey Deuberry	Environmental Manager	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	N
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y

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

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a) **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – February 18, 2025** - Motion to
approve minutes as presented (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

IV. Financial Activity

- a) **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – February 2025:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

V. Agency Partner Updates

- a) **FDACS** – Deuberry reported funds are still available in the Northern Everglades Area for this fiscal year (through June 30, 2025) and recommended interested producers apply. One field staff position has opened in LaBelle, FL and applicants are welcomed. Megan Seward has been selected as new Assistant Director of OAWP. No action.
- b) **MIL** – Harmon reported team has completed 54 of 42 required evaluations this quarter. SOP development workshop scheduled next month with the intent to finalize the document. No action.
- c) **NRCS** – Nickerson reported previously terminated employees, Jo and Natalie, have been reinstated, but placed on administrative leave with pay until agency reduction of force plan is in place. Employees from surrounding offices will be handling the workload for Sebring Field Office until Federal hiring freeze is lifted. No action.
- d) **HCBC** – Commissioner Kirouac reported FDACS OAWP has requested return of advanced funds for the development of IMWID phase 2 construction. HCBC will be issuing repayment to FDACS-OAWP this week. Due to exhaustion of funds, IMWID pump units have been disconnected from electric hookup. County has confirmed the ability to implement a taxing unit for IMWID and will begin collecting such taxes in November. Kirouac requested HSWCD contribute funds to the County in the amount of \$25,000 to enable reconnection of electricity to pumps to assist farmers with flooding issues and for the critical maintenance needs in the IMWID area. Motion to contribute up to \$50,000 to IMWID. (Smith/Sebring). Discussion. Motion amended to contribute \$25,000. (Smith/Sebring) Amended motion passed unanimously.

VI. Old Business

- a) **Legislative Update** – Bishop reported SB 986 and HB 973 have been filed and are predicted to be heard at committee meetings starting next week. She expects an amendment to be filed to remove a few lines regarding FDACS' oversight of SWCDs. Bishop and Nickerson will travel to Tallahassee next week for Special District days and to testify during committee meetings if the bill is scheduled to be heard. No action.
- b) **Community Garden** – Bishop and Nickerson have agreed to continue operation of community garden. Staff will develop a new maintenance plan to implement upon Bishop's retirement. Bishop released newspaper article last week announcing plot availability. No action.
- c) **Warner Scholarship Qualifications** – Bishop recapped discussion at February Board meeting regarding desire to adjust qualifications. Motion to extend qualifications to include sophomores entering their 2nd semester (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous approval.
- d) **The ROCI Group Letter of Support** – Nickerson summarized proposed research project Biotech Applied Research (BAR) is submitting to FDACS-OAWP for consideration of funding. The organization is requesting a letter of support from HSWCD to accompany their request. Motion to issue letter of support for BAR's research proposal to FDACS-OAWP (Smith/Wohl). Unanimous approval.

VII. New Business

- a) **June Meeting Date Conflict** – Bishop informed Supervisors staff has a conflict with June Board meeting date. Consensus to postpone June meeting to June 24, 2025, and to cancel July meeting.
- b) **Local Working Group Meeting, May 20, 2025 @ 1p.m.** – Nickerson stated meeting will take place in Conference Room 1 prior to May board meeting. Board members are welcome to invite interested participants. No action.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

- Bishop and Nickerson have met with all Highlands County Commissioners and Administration to present the Annual Report
- USFWS employee was informed office space is not available in the Bert J. Harris, Jr. Ag Center
- Heartland National Bank sold to Seacoast Bank. Consensus of the board to keep accounts with Seacoast. If additional fees or complications are incurred through the transition, staff is directed to shop other institutions.
- Bishop reported no new updates from AFCD.
- Financial Disclosure documents due in June.
- Audit has commenced
- FDACS contracts will be terminated June 30 with new contracts to replace them at the start of the next fiscal year. Bishop reported she is in discussion to ensure no lapse in funding for the contracted BMP Technician.
- MIL staff have reached 2-year work anniversary. Bishop proposed salary increases for Harmon and Smith, as well as a bonus. Motion to grant 3% COLA to annual salaries and 5% one-time bonus (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous approval.

IX. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None.

X. Supervisors Comments

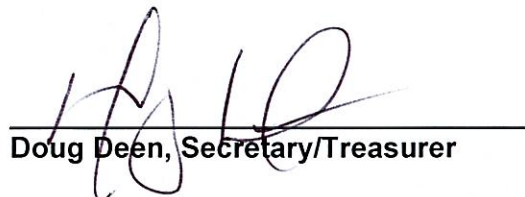
- Smith – Discussion on new crop trails on sandy soils. No action.
- Deen – N/A
- Sebring – None
- Wohl – None
- Causey – None

Meeting Adjourned at 4:51 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: April 15th, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.



Dr. John Causey, Chairman



Doug Deen, Secretary/Treasurer

POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

Action	Assigned To	Deadline
<i>Issue payment to HCBCC for contribution to IMWID Project</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>March 20, 2025</i>
<i>Issue payment to Warner University for Scholarship and notify VP of Ag Program change in qualifications for the Scholarship</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>March 20, 2025</i>
<i>Conduct Annual Evaluation of MIL Team Staff members, issuing pay increases if warranted.</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>March 19, 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>Review Language of new Regional Projects SOW</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until completed</i>
<i>Monitor NRCS Cooperative Agreement</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
<i>Balance Tracking for all Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>April 30, 2025</i>
<i>Drafting and review of SOPs and SOW for MIL</i>	<i>S. Bishop & C. Harmon</i>	<i>April 3, 2025</i>
<i>Preparation for Local Working Group Meeting</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 20, 2025</i>
<i>Legislative Preparation – Bill Review and Testimony</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 2, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD/FCDEA Public Records Policy</i>	<i>K. Nickerson & S. Bishop</i>	<i>Postponed</i>