

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 9/16/2025

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

FINAL – Approved 10-21-2025

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	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
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Michael Labron	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Dawn Ritter	Natural Resources Manager	Highlands County	Y
Jorge Abreu	Regional Director	FDACS-Office of Commissioner	Y

II. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to approve agenda moving item VIII. a. *Proposed FY 2025-2026 Budget* to item V. b. (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous approval.

III. **Presentation of Funding Request** – Ritter provided information regard a proposed study for Highlands County which will result in a GIS layer staff will be able to use to make informed decisions regarding conservation lands and water storage opportunities. Study is expected to cost \$10,000. Discussion. Motion to table

discussion until Oct. 21st meeting with presentation of additional information regarding compatible Ridge to River proposal (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous approval.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – August 26, 2025: Motion to approve minutes as presented (Smith/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

V. Financial Activity

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

b. Proposed FY 2025-2026 Budget – Bishop presented draft budget. Discussion. Motion to approve FY 2025-2026 Budget as presented (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

VI. Agency Partner Updates

a. FDACS – Bishop presented on behalf of Ahrens. Two entry level positions will be advertised soon, one in Hendry County and one in Polk County; resumes may be submitted to Kasey Deuberry. Cost share program has had significant interest with 30 more applications in Central/Southwest area since last meeting (now 90 total), many of which have been approved.

b. MIL – Harmon reported team has completed 20 evaluations this month, exceeding contract requirements for the month and quarter. No action.

c. NRCS – Nickerson introduced new Highlands County District Conservationist, Michael Labron. Labron reported Highlands County has 84 active contracts and 47 applications to be reviewed for FY 2026 funding cycle. Deadline for 2026 applications is Oct. 3rd. No action.

d. HCBCC – Kirouac reported final County budget workshop is tonight at 5:30pm. Milage rate will remain the same for 2026. No action.

VII. Old Business

a. Legislative Update – Bishop reported a bill is expected to be filed by Senator Truenow regarding the regionalizing of Florida Soil and Water Conservation Districts. FCDEA (the district employee's association) and AFCD will be meeting next week to discuss options and action items moving forward. No action

b. AFCD Update – Bishop presented membership letter and application to join. Nickerson stated executive board will meet next week to discuss annual meeting and legislative priorities. No action.

c. Garden Update – Nickerson reported the completion of a successful workday with inmate assistance on Sept. 8th. Four plots are currently vacant. Hired maintenance and rental fee increase will take effect on Oct. 1st.

VIII. New Business

a. Proposed FY 2025-2026 Meeting Schedule – Bishop presented proposed schedule. Motion to approve schedule as presented (Smith/Deen). Unanimous approval.

IX. Executive Director's Report

- Bishop informed Board of Highlands Legislative Delegation Meeting on Oct. 1st.
- Nickerson has been nominated for FCDEA Vice President, elections will be held next week.
- BMP Technician, Will Cochlin, has submitted 2 weeks' notice and his last day will be Sept. 30th.
- Highlands County Citrus Growers Assoc. is looking to hire a full or part-time administrative employee.

X. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None

XI. Supervisors Comments

- Smith – None
- Deen – None
- Sebring – None
- Wohl – None
- Causey – Appreciation

Meeting Adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: October 21st, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

John Causey, DVM Chairman

Doug Deen, Secretary

POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

Action	Assigned To	Deadline
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP operations, revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>AFCD Committee Work</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Prepare Delegation Presentation Packets</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Sept. 22, 2025</i>
<i>FCDEA Annual Meeting preparation/Training</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Sept. 23, 2025</i>
<i>Complete Application for AFCD Membership</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Sept. 23, 2025</i>
<i>FY 2024-2025 Budget Amendments</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Nov. 30, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD Public Records and Purchasing Polices</i>	<i>K. Nickerson & S. Bishop</i>	<i>Until Complete</i>
<i>2026 Legislative Session Preparations</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>