

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 8/18/2026

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

FINAL – Adopted 9/15/2026

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 BCC	Y
Kayla Nickerson	Executive Director	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Chad Harmon	MIL Manager	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Wade Smith	MIL Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Jared Smith	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Michael Lebron	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Don Buchanon	Rangeland Specialist	USDA-NRCS	N
Vanessa Bauzo	Policy Planning Coord. Liaison	FDACS-OAWP	Y

II. Approval of Agenda - Motion to approve as presented (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous approval.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – June 16, 2026: Motion to approve minutes as presented (Smith/Wohl). Unanimous approval.

IV. Financial Activity

a. Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – June & July 2026: Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Sebring/Smith). Unanimous approval.

b. FY 2026-2027 Draft Budget – Presentation of draft budget for consideration at next meeting. Discussion. No action was taken.

V. Agency Partner Updates

- a. **FDACS** – L. Ahrens reported cost share funds are fully allocated. No action.
- b. **NRCS** – M. Lebron reported that six EQIP and 11 CSP applications have been preapproved for the Sebring Field Office, bringing an estimated \$1.84 million in funding to the county. Lebron also shared that Florida NRCS announced its reorganization plan last week, which will consolidate the Areas from four to two. As part of the reorganization, M. Lebron will be transferred to the Wauchula Office and will spend 50% of his time on State Office duties. The District Conservationist currently assigned to the Wauchula Office will be transferred to Highlands County. The transition will begin in October. No action was taken.
- c. **HCBC** – S. Kirouac reported the IMWID hybrid taxing district proposal was withdrawn from consideration due to a misalignment in the fee structure within the district. HCBC is now exploring the possibility of pursuing a local bill to resolve the issue. The County began IMWID ditch cleaning prior to June 30 and accepted the \$8,000 donation from HSWCD. IMWID also received the anticipated \$150,000 State appropriation and has borrowed funds from the County to continue work until the State funds are dispersed. The funds are being administered through a DEP Capital Improvement Grant, which has certain restrictions that County staff members are working through to ensure eligibility of reimbursement. A question was raised regarding impact fees. S. Kirouac informed the board the fee proposal did not pass; however, the completed study may be used in the future to pursue the assessment of impact fees. No action was taken.

VI. Old Business

- a. **Advanced Agricultural Conservation Technologies (AACT) Program** – K. Nickerson reported drone equipment has been secured, three grants have been applied for, one environmental monitoring bid was submitted, and billable services have been distributed to local environmental labs and organizations. C. Harmon is working towards completion of FAA Remote Pilot Certification. Chairman Causey suggested reaching out to Department of Transportation for partnership opportunities as well as comparing price of drone-based activities versus helicopter use. No action was taken.

VII. New Business

- a. **Community Garden Water** – K. Nickerson reported irrigation water at community garden has been unavailable since July 1 due to replacement of the water storage tank. County installed a water spigot on August 13 for gardeners to fill watering cans as needed. The storage tank is expected to be replaced by mid-October. Board consensus to offer rental extensions or reimbursements as appropriate and at the discretion of the Executive Director. C. Harmon and W. Smith have agreed to assist with garden responsibilities and lawn service will be discontinued at the end of the month.

VIII. Executive Director's Report

- K. Nickerson shared Okeechobee SWCD District Administrator, Audrey Kuipers, was inducted into the SENACD Conservation Hall of Fame at last week's conference. Conservation District shirts are available for purchase, with proceeds benefiting the Employees' Association.
- Nickerson was invited to participate in a selection seminar for the Wedgworth Leadership Institute Class XIII on August 20.
- The Dispersed Water Management Program, in which HSWCD serves as a partner, will release its Request for Proposals (RFP) in the next couple of weeks. Members were encouraged to share this opportunity with landowners within the Sentinel Landscape.

- The Florida Wildlife Corridor's Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) Program application cycle has closed. The program received 32 applications and is currently reviewing the proposed projects.

IX. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None

X. Supervisors Comments

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

Meeting Adjourned at 4:28p.m.

Next Board Meeting: September 15th, 2026 – 3:00 p.m.

John Causey, DVM Chairman

Doug Deen, Secretary

POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

Action	Assigned To	Deadline
<i>FCDEA/AFCD Annual Meeting Planning/Facilitation</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Aug. 25, 2026</i>
<i>FY 2026-2027 Budget Preparation</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Sept. 15, 2026</i>
<i>Community Garden Workday Preparations</i>	<i>K. Nickerson, C. Harmon, W. Smith</i>	<i>Oct. 8, 2026</i>
<i>AACT Program Development & Additional Grant Applications</i>	<i>K. Nickerson, C. Harmon, W. Smith</i>	<i>Dec. 31, 2026</i>
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP operations, revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>AFCD Committee Work</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>REPI Partnership DWM Program outreach and meeting facilitation</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until Complete</i>
<i>Review and updates to Employee Handbook</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until Complete</i>