

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 10/21/2025

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

FINAL – Approved Nov. 18, 2025

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

MEETING SCHEDULED START: 3:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER: 3:06 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	N
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	N
Wade Smith	MIL Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	N
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	N
Michael Labron	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	N
Dawn Ritter	Natural Resources Manager	Highlands County	Y

- II. Approval of Agenda** – Motion to approve agenda removing item *VI. b. FY 2024-2025 Budget Amendments*. (Smith/Deen). Unanimous approval.
- III. Presentation of Funding Request** – Ritter presented draft Statement of Work for proposed study and development of a GIS layer she hopes will be accessible to all residents to identify priority lands for conservation and enhancement of water quality and storage within Highlands County. Also, additional information was provided on Ridge to River project development. Discussion. Motion to fund HCBC Natural

Resource's request for proposed study and development of a GIS layer up to \$10,000. (Smith/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

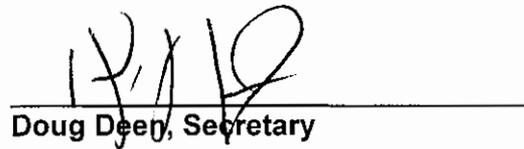
- IV. **Annual Ethics Training** – Nickerson presented Florida Commission on Ethics annual training requirements and provided resources for Supervisors to complete required training. No action.
- V. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
 - a. **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – September 16, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes as presented (Sebring/Deen). Unanimous approval.
- VI. **Financial Activity**
 - a. **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – September 2025:** Review of financial reports. Motion to approve financial reports as presented (Smith/Sebring). Unanimous approval.
- VII. **Agency Partner Updates**
 - a. **FDACS** – Bishop presented on behalf of Ahrens. All cost-share dollars have been allocated for the current fiscal year (July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026.) Bishop informed Board OAWP is testing Direct-to-Producer cost share projects through the MyFloridaMarketPlace site, excluding the use of SWCD services. No action.
 - b. **MIL** – Bishop reported team is progressing towards quarterly deliverables. No action.
 - c. **NRCS** – No report due to Federal Government shutdown.
 - d. **HCBC** – Kirouac reported Ridge to River Workshops will be held next week. No action.
- VIII. **Old Business**
 - a. **Legislative Update** – Bishop reported HB123 was filed and appears to be the same bill as filed last session, removing 35 districts and keeping 15. Based on conversation with Senate staff, she does not believe the Senate bill will match the House bill and may not be filed until later into session. FCDEA voted to carry forward Options A, B & C document created last year and to use them in discussions with legislators this session. AFCD did not vote on a legislative position at the September meeting, but have since met with Senator Truenow separately to discuss the future of Florida SWCDs. Bishop is unsure if all districts are carrying the same unified message. No action.
 - b. **FCDEA/AFCD Update** – Nickerson informed Board she was elected as Vice President of FCDEA for a two-year term. Joint FCDEA/AFCD meeting is tentatively scheduled for July-Sept. 2026, following 2026 legislative Session. Nickerson announced Bishop will be honored as SECDEA District Employee of the Year at the annual meeting Nov. 3-5, 2025 in Pidgeon Forge, TN. Bishop will be the first Florida nominee to receive such recognition. FCDEA-AFCD committee successfully recovered approximately \$112,000 in contract and grant funds for AFCD following lapses in leadership and administrative support last year. No action.
- IX. **New Business**
 - a. **Agricultural Regional Projects Program** – Nickerson informed Board of grant opportunity through FDACS-OAWP. She shared staff has met with Highlands County staff to inquire about applying for funding for IMWID through this program, however the application process was found to be too cumbersome given the quick turnaround time. Nickerson asked for other proposals to be presented. No action.
 - b. **NACD Dues** – Nickerson provided membership level opportunities and requested direction from the Board on which level to sponsor. Consensus to remain at Gold Level Sponsorship.

- c. **Executive Director Evaluation** – Chairman Causey announced results of written performance evaluations totaling 524 of possible 525 points. Gratitude for service this year. No action.
- X. **Executive Director’s Report** – Considering catered lunch from Hartzell’s for Thanksgiving meal provided at next meeting. AgVenture Nov. 4-6, 2025 (K. Nickerson.) SECDEA Annual Meeting Nov. 3-6, 2025 (S. Bishop.)
- XI. **Citizens Not on the Agenda** – None
- XII. **Supervisors Comments**
 - Smith – None
 - Deen – None
 - Sebring – Will not attend next meeting
 - Wohl – N/A
 - Causey – None

Meeting Adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: November 18th, 2025 – 12:00 p.m.


 John Causey, DVM Chairman


 Doug Deery, 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>FY 2024-2025 Budget Amendments</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Nov. 30, 2025</i>
<i>FY 2024-2025 Annual Report</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Dec. 1, 2025</i>
<i>FY 2024-2025 Long Range Plan Evaluation</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Dec. 1, 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>