

# **HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**MEETING DATE: 5/20/2025**

---

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: 3:03 P.M.**

**PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT READ BY CHAIRMAN**

### **I. Welcome & Introductions**

#### **List of Attendees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Present</b>
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	N
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
Will Cochlin	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Carlos Torres	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Sara Espinosa	Soil Conservationist, LaBelle	USDA-NRCS	Y
Don Buchanan	Range Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	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 – April 15, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

**IV. Financial Activity**

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

**V. Agency Partner Updates**

- a) **FDACS** – Ahrens reported FDACS completed 97% of the Implementation Verification visits due this Fiscal Year. FDACS will contract 23 employees from FL. Division of Citrus to enroll an estimated 487,000 acres in the newly adopted Small Farms BMP manual. The State of Florida FY 2025-2026 Budget has not yet been adopted; however, administration is anticipating a \$34-50 million budget for Office of Ag Water Policy. The Cost Share program will no longer fund sprayers or feed wagons and will begin funding flow meters (permits will remain the producer's responsibility.) Cost share applicants must now turn in a W9 with applications. The online cost-share portal has been updated to reflect live status of applications (i.e.: submitted, under review, approved /denied.) No action.
- b) **MIL** – Bishop reported MIL is ahead of schedule for current quarter requirements. SOPs are still under review and will not be finalized until Jan. 2026. No action.
- c) **NRCS** – Torres reported more announcements to come regarding restructuring of the agency, reduction of force and consolidating of USDA offices. Funding is still available for traditional Farm Bill programs (i.e.: EQIP, CSP) and urges interested producers to apply for FY 2026 funding. Sara Espinosa has been named Acting District Conservationist for the Sebring Field Office until October 2025. No meetings, training, travel or outreach events are authorized until further notice. No action.
- d) **HCBC** – No Report.

**VI. Old Business**

- a) **Elected Officials Financial Disclosures** – Bishop informed Supervisors documents due June 30, 2025. No Action.

**VII. New Business**

- a) **Landowner Assistance Expo** – Bishop reported the event will be held June 10, 2025 at 8:30am in the auditorium at the Bert J. Harris Jr. Agricultural Center. HSWCD has sponsored lunch since event inception. Event organizer, Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC), has offered HSWCD \$500 to support increasing meal cost. Proposals presented for lunch offerings. Motion to accept quote from Gator Shack and \$500 offer from CFRPC (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous Approval.
- b) **RFP for Services for FDACS-OAWP** – Bishop reported that HSWCD has submitted a proposal for the Central and Northeast Florida Mobile Irrigation Lab Services Request for Proposals. Award announcement is anticipated May 27<sup>th</sup>. No action.
- c) **Leadership Highlands Application** – Bishop presented application and program requirements, proposing K. Nickerson apply for the 2026 program. Motion for Nickerson to apply for 2026 Leadership Highlands program (Smith/Wohl). Unanimous Approval.
- d) **Biotech Applied Research 501c(3) (BAR) Funding Request** – Nickerson presented request for funding. Board determined the request does not fit within the mission and focus of traditional sponsorships. Motion to deny BAR request for funding (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous Approval.

- e) **Local Working Group, Priorities for FY 2026** – Torres informed board of purpose and procedure for LWG. Nickerson provided recommendations submitted by other interested parties. Discussion. Consensus reached on top 6 natural resource priorities for Highlands County. Staff will work with Espinosa to complete LWG survey response and will draft a letter of LWG recommendations for FY 2026 programs to be sent to the State Technical Committee which will meet on June 10<sup>th</sup> in Gainesville, FL. No action.

**VIII. Executive Director's Report**

- Staff has resumed update of District Policies: Bishop presented proposal of *HSWCD Drug and Alcohol Free Statement*. Motion to adopt HSWCD Drug and Alcohol Free Statement (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous Approval.
- FY 2024-2025 Audit will be presented at next board meeting

**IX. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None**

**X. Supervisors Comments**

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

Meeting Adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.

---

**John Causey, DVM Chairman**

---

**Doug Deen, Secretary**

## POST MEETING ACTION ITEMS

<b>Action</b>	<b>Assigned To</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<i>Monitor, review and discuss FDACS-OAWP revised procedures, policies, contract language, scopes of work.</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Community Garden Maintenance Plan</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>
<i>Application for Leadership Highlands</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 22, 2025</i>
<i>Monitor Award for Central and Northeast Florida MIL Services</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 27, 2025</i>
<i>Complete Local Working Group Survey</i>	<i>K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 30, 2025</i>
<i>Balance Tracking for all Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>June 5, 2025</i>
<i>Submit Letter of Recommendations to USDA-NRCS State Technical Committee for FY 2026 Planning</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>June 10, 2025</i>
<i>Planning and Conduction of Landowner Assistance Expo</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>June 10, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD Public Records, Purchasing and Travel Policies</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>June 24, 2025</i>
<i>E-Verify Registration and Training</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>June 30, 2025</i>