

HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MEETING MINUTES

MEETING DATE: 8/26/2025

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

II. Approval of Agenda – Motion to approve agenda with the addition of item VII. c. REPI Support Letter (Smith/Sebring). Unanimous approval.

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
Will Cochlin	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Don Buchanan	Range Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a) **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – June 24, 2025:** Motion to approve minutes as presented (Sebring/Wohl). Unanimous approval.

IV. Financial Activity

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

- b) **Banking Updates** – Bishop reported accounts have smoothly transitioned over to Seacoast bank. No account numbers will be changed. Executive Director assigned Nickerson online access to perform administrative tasks. No action.

V. **Agency Partner Updates**

- a) **FDACS** – Ahrens reported cost-share applications are being accepted and approved on a first come, first serve basis. 60 projects have been approved this fiscal year to date in Southwest Florida. FDACS – Office of Agricultural Water Policy and FDACS – Division of Fruit and Vegetables will be undergoing reorganization and possible merger in the coming months. Additional information forthcoming.
- b) **MIL** – Harmon reported team has completed and exceeded monthly contract requirements for July and August. No action.
- c) **NRCS** – Buchanon reported a total of 4 EQIP and 4 CSP applications were funded this year. The deadline for 2026 applications is Oct. 3rd. No action.
- d) **HCBC** – Kirouac reported solutions are still being sought for ongoing revenue sources for IMWID. No action.

VI. **Old Business**

- a) **Central and Northeast FL MIL Services** – Bishop reported the contract was cancelled due to a formal complaint against the FDACS-OAWP MIL program. Additionally, all contracted MIL staff will become employees of FDACS rather than via a SWCD contract. Transition to occur by contract end date of June 30, 2026. A request was received for Highlands MIL to complete evaluations out of territory (former RFP area.) Bishop intends to request funds to cover additional expenses to complete the work requested. No action.
- b) **District Policies: Travel and Public Records** – Nickerson presented draft Travel Policy for consideration. Motion to adopt Policy Resolution No. 2025-1 implementing Travel Policy and Per Diem rates as presented (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous approval. Public Records Policy presented. Discussion regarding proper payment types and appropriate pricing for services. Discussion tabled until further review.
- c) **Legislative Update** – Bishop reported having successfully met privately with Ag Association Representatives, Senator Truenow, Senate President Albritton. Bishop also addressed the Hardee Legislation Delegation Meeting. A bill regarding Soil and Water Conservation Districts is highly anticipated in the 2026 session and Bishop will continue to engage with legislators to promote the desires of the collective group of compliant districts. No action
- d) **FCDEA-AFCD Committee** – Bishop shared AFCD has elected a new Executive Board and amended the bylaws to only allow membership of compliant districts. The group has garnered the support of the National Association of Conservation Districts who now acknowledge AFCD as the only association representing the districts of Florida and are willing to support AFCD's members through potential legislation. No action.
- e) **Ag-Venture Update** – Nickerson reported the program will continue and many new board members have been appointed to fill vacancies; herself included. There will not be a steak dinner fundraiser this year. Letters are being mailed requesting volunteers and donations. Board consensus to continue annual support of \$2,000, which was paid previously this year. No action.

VII. **New Business**

- a) **2025 SECDEA Employee of the Year Nominee, Susie Bishop** – Nickerson shared Bishop has been recognized as Florida Conservation District Employee of

the Year and will be considered for Regional Employee of the Year at the SECDEA Annual Meeting in Pigeon Forge, TN next month. No action.

- b) **C.O.L.A. Increases** – Bishop reported FL Governor approved 2% C.O.L.A increases effective July 1, 2025. Board consensus to grant increases in line with Governor's directive.
- c) **REPI Letter of Support** – Bishop presented a request from Archbold Biological Station regarding partnership on their proposal to the Department of Defense – Readiness and Environmental Protect Initiative for water storage projects in the area. Motion to send a letter of support and agreement of partnership with Archbold Biological Station (Smith/Wohl.) Unanimous approval.

VIII. Executive Director's Report – Susie handed the floor to Nickerson for a few comments:

- Nickerson presented a request from Biotech Applied Research (BAR) regarding HSWCD generating producer interest in participating in a Biochar Field Day September 11th & 12th. Board consensus to deny request.
- Nickerson has been accepted into the Leadership Highlands Class of 2026.
- Mower repairs have caused an increase in community garden expenses and additional repairs are needed. Proposal to hire a lawn maintenance service and raise garden rental prices was presented. Motion to hire a lawn service for up to \$2,600/yr for the monthly maintenance of the Community Garden and to raise rental prices to \$25/6mo and \$40/12mo effective Oct. 1st (Sebring/Wohl.) Unanimous approval.

Nickerson returned the floor to Bishop:

- Bishop sought direction from the board on preparing the FY 2025-2026 Budget, regarding the implementation of the succession plan of Executive Director and employee positions/expenses considering FDACS restructuring and proposed legislation. Board consensus to prepare budget with consideration of consulting services needed through legislative session, Nickerson increasing administrative duties effective Oct. 1st and all other positions remaining in place through the end of their contract.

IX. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None

X. Supervisors Comments

- Smith – Condolences
- Deen – Condolences
- Sebring – Condolences
- Wohl – Condolences
- Causey – Appreciation

Meeting Adjourned at 5:51 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: September 16th, 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>Deliver Letter of Support Partnership to Archbold Biological Center</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>August 28, 2025</i>
<i>Develop FY 2025-2026 Budget</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Sept. 16, 2025</i>
<i>Hire Lawn Maintenance Service for Community Garden</i>	<i>S. Bishop & K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Sept. 16, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD Public Records and Purchasing Policies</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>