

# HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## MEETING MINUTES

**MEETING DATE: 1/7/2025**

Meeting Location: HSWCD Conf. Rm–Bert J. Harris Jr. Ag. Center  
4509 George BLVD, Sebring, FL 33875

**FINAL - Approved 2/18/2025**

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

**MEETING SCHEDULED START: 3:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER: @ 3:02 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
Will Cochlin	Conservation Technician	Highlands Soil & Water	Y
Kasey Deuberry	Environmental Manager	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	N
Carlos Torres	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Natalie Toro	Natural Resource Specialist	USDA-NRCS	Y
Karen Healy	Supervisor of Elections	Highlands County SOE	Y
Lisa Branca	Deputy Supervisor	Highlands County SOE	Y

### II. Swearing in of Supervisors – Supervisors Dr. John Causey and Steve Smith were sworn in by Supervisor of Elections, Karen Healy.

- III. **Election of Officers**
  - a. **Chairman** – Motion to nominate Dr. John Causey (Wohl/Sebring). Nomination accepted. Unanimous approval.
  - b. **Vice Chairman** – Motion to nominate Steve Smith (Wohl/Sebring). Nomination accepted. Unanimous approval.
  - c. **Secretary/Treasurer** – Motion to nominate Doug Deen (Wohl/Sebring). Nomination Accepted. Unanimous approval.
- IV. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to Approve the Agenda as presented (Smith/Deen). Unanimous Approval.
- V. **Approval of Meeting Minutes**
  - a. **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – December 17, 2024** - Motion to approve minutes as presented (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous Approval.
- VI. **Financial Activity**
  - a. **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports, Pending Completion – December 2024:** Review of financial reports. Due to early BOS meeting date this month, bank statements are not yet reconciled and will be reviewed at next meeting. Motion to approve the financial reports as presented (Sebring/Wohl). Unanimous Approval.
- VII. **Agency Partner Updates**
  - a. **FDACS** – Deuberry reported the Florida Cattle Operations and Florida Sod Operations manuals have been adopted and re-enrollment will coincide with the Implementation Verification visits. All other manuals are in production and expected to be released by Summer 2025. The cost share program is still accepting applications. Assistant Director, John Fraites, has taken a position with a different department and the position is currently vacant. Management will solicit feedback regarding the changes to the cost share program at the end of FY 2024-2025 and before FY 2025-2026 begins. No Action.
  - b. **MIL** – Harmon reported that the team is on track to reach quarter 3 goals. No Action.
  - c. **NRCS** – Torres introduced the new Natural Resources Specialist, Natalie Toro. He reported he has started his new position as District Conservationist in the Okeechobee Field Office and will serve as the acting District Conservationist to the Sebring Field Office until a replacement is hired. Torres reported \$83million in funds from the Inflation Reduction Act will be dispersed in Florida this Fiscal Year. Only 30% of applications statewide in FY2024 were approved and will be rolled forward to FY2025. The largest funding pools in FY2025 in Highlands County will be for grazing and invasive species control. Highlands County had 27 approved EQIP/CSP contracts in FY2024 and 3 Act Now. Highlands received 65 applications for EQIP/CSP FY2025 which are currently being evaluated. No Action.
  - d. **HCBC** – Kirouac reported that he will be working with IMWID to develop a plan prior to returning to the district with a request for funding. No Action.
- VIII. **Old Business**
  - a. **Legislative Planning** – Bishop reported that FASD informed her of a bill being drafted using the proposal developed at the Brainstorm Workshop, Option A. She shared the deadline for Bills drafting to be filed is Jan. 24, Final Bill Filing deadline is Feb. 24, 2025. No Action.
- IX. **New Business**
  - a. **Annual Report** – Bishop presented the Annual Report. Motion to approve the report as presented (Wohl/Smith). Unanimous Approval.

**X. Executive Director's Report**

- Bishop reported she attended the virtual meeting for the River to Ridge study being conducted by a consultant for Highlands County BOCC. Next meeting will be on March 4<sup>th</sup> at 2:00pm for a hearing of BOCC priorities for natural resources protection and conservation in Highlands County.
- Supervisors should be on the lookout for Notices via email to submit the Annual Financial Disclosure, which is due on or before June 30, 2025.
- The AgriTest Initiative has had 30 participants to date and currently has a fund balance of \$450.00.
- Bishop and Nickerson will attend the National Association of Conservation Districts annual conference in Salt Lake City, UT February 7<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>.
- US Fish and Wildlife anticipates having to secure office space for employees in the coming months and one individual came for a building tour. HSWCD space is full, but Extension has offered a space for her which adjoins the HSWCD conference room.
- Tomorrow, Jan 8<sup>th</sup>, Bishop will present at the Highlands County Legislative Delegation Listening Session regarding support for maintaining SWCDs in the state (Option A from the Brainstorm Workshop.)

No Action.

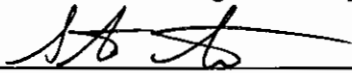
**XI. Citizens Not on the Agenda – None**

**XII. Supervisors Comments**

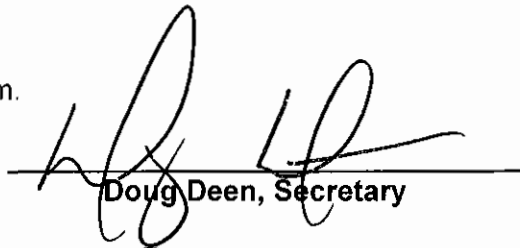
- Smith – None
- Deen – None
- Sebring – None
- Wohl – None
- Causey – None

Meeting Adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 3:00 p.m.



Steve Smith, Vice 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 and policies</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Drafting and review of SOPs and SOW for MIL</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; C. Harmon</i>	<i>Until complete</i>
<i>Future of Community Garden</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Until resolved</i>

<i>Review Language of new BMP Tech SOW</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Jan. 14, 2025</i>
<i>Teach leadership Highlands Ag Day</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Jan. 23, 2025</i>
<i>Balance Tracking for all Contracts</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Jan. 30, 2025</i>
<i>Submit Budget for 2025-2026 BMP Tech Contract</i>	<i>S. Bishop</i>	<i>Jan. 30, 2025</i>
<i>Submit Oaths of Office to Tallahassee</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Jan. 30, 2025</i>
<i>Presentation of 2023-2024 Annual Report to Partners</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Feb. 28, 2025</i>
<i>Legislative Preparation – Bill Review and Testimony</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>May 2, 2025</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD/FCDEA Public Records Policy</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>Postponed</i>