



**PENNINGTON SWCD BOARD MEETING
(Held at the USDA/SWCD Meeting Room and
Via Zoom Video Conferencing)**

December 21, 2023

9:00 A.M.

Supervisors Present:

Linda Hanson, Chair
ADawn Nelson, Vice Chair
Kevin Wilde, Secretary
Greg Hilgeman, Treasurer
Ricky Peterson, PR

Staff Present:

Peter Nelson, District Manager
Donna Christianson, District Coordinator
Bryanna Grefthen, Water Resource Specialist
Larissa Fitzgerald, District Technician
Erika Olson, Resource Technician
Logan Handyside, Engineer
Justin Muller, Engineering Technician
Nico Bennett, NRCS

Absent:

Micah Ranum, Farm Bill Biologist
Grant Nelson, Ag Services Coordinator

Guests:

Luther Newton, NRCS
Senator Mark Johnson
Representative John Burkel

The meeting was held at the USDA/SWCD Meeting Room and via Zoom Video Conferencing. Linda Hanson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. Linda completed a roll call of all supervisors and staff and welcomed guests.

Ricky made a motion, seconded by ADawn to approve the revised agenda. All in favor, motion carried.

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ADawn made a motion, seconded by Kevin to approve the November 16, 2023, meeting minutes. All in favor, motion carried.

Donna reviewed the November 2023 Financial Report. **ADawn made a motion, seconded by Kevin to approve the November 2023 Financial Report. All in favor, motion carried.**

Ricky made a motion, seconded by ADawn to approve payment of the following bills:

Sjoberg's	\$ 66.95
RMB Lab	\$ 1,384.12
Marco	\$ 62.46
Marco	\$ 58.94
Verizon	\$ 95.68
Chase Card Services	\$ 10,798.39
Minnesota IT Services	\$ 60.90
Lakes Country Service Coop	\$ 467.74
Hensch's Septic Service	\$ 50.00
Frontier Precision	\$ 886.50
DVS Renewal	\$ 21.25
DVS Renewal	\$ 21.25
DVS Renewal	\$ 21.25
DVS Renewal	\$ 21.25
DVS Renewal	\$ 21.25
Marshall SWCD	\$ 10,867.13
Area 1 MASWCD	\$ 300.00

All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Ricky to approve the 2022 final audit as presented by Peterson Company Ltd. All in favor, motion carried.

Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn to use the IRS standard mileage rate of \$0.67 per mile for mileage reimbursement starting January 1, 2024. All in favor, motion carried.

Ricky made a motion, seconded by ADawn to pay the following percent-based State Cost-share contract for a streambank restoration:

FY23_01 \$5,823.75

All in favor, motion carried.

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Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn to pay the following percent-based Clean Water Fund Thief River Grade Stabilization Cost-share contract for six SWI's:

TRSWI_FY20-07 \$14,114.10

All in favor, motion carried.

Kevin made a motion, seconded by Ricky to pay the following percent-based Clean Water Fund Thief River Grade Stabilization Cost-share contract for four SWI's:

TRSWI_FY20-08 \$8,148.00

All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Kevin to pay the following percent-based Clean Water Fund Thief River Grade Stabilization Cost-share contract for two SWI's:

TRSWI_FY20-09 \$4,248.00

All in favor, motion carried.

Ricky made a motion, seconded by Greg to pay the final payment on the following percent-based Clean Water Fund contract for the CD96 Phase 2 Project:

FY21CWF-01 \$30,026.61

All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Kevin to extend the expiration date on State Cost-share contract FY22-07 from 12/31/23 to 12/31/24. All in favor, motion carried.

Greg made a motion, seconded by Ricky to extend the expiration date on State Cost-share contract FY22-08 from 12/31/23 to 12/31/24. All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Kevin to cancel Clean Water Fund Thief River Grade Stabilization Cost-share contract TRSWI_FY-05. All in favor, motion carried.

Larissa presented a revised SSTS Upgrade Grant Income Limits table for 2024 that meets the requirements for both the MPCA Upgrade and BWSR Grants. **Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn approving the 2024 SWCD SSTS Upgrade Grant Income Limits. All in favor, motion carried.**

Senator Mark Johnson and Representative John Burkel joined the meeting. Some of the topics discussed included:

- SWCD's are growing and expanding. SWCD Aid along with its flexibility for projects will be a huge benefit to Districts. Support of this aid is greatly appreciated.
- One Watershed, One Plan and Clean Water funding has been crucial for the implementation of projects and structural practices.

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- Requests for septic system replacements have been increasing in our area over the past few years. More funding is needed to prevent potential public health risks for residents of our county due to a failing septic system. The cost of installing a septic system has greatly increased while contractor availability has been decreasing.
- AgBMP Program requests have skyrocketed due to the interest rate and the help this program can provide for landowners looking to improve water quality issues on their land. This program provides loans at a 3% rate over the term of the loan.
- How will Minnesotan's really see and measure the benefits of Soil Health funding?
- Rim Funding on permanent easements provide the tax paying public benefits they can see and measure.
- The District continues to make sure land owners are complying with the Buffer Law. The county is responsible for enforcement of the law.
- The District supports the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa by employing an intern to shadow our staff and learn about what the District does to promote conservation practices in our county.
- The resolution that the Pennington SWCD brought to the MASWCD this year giving SWCD's authority to incur debt for capital expenses passed. Support for taxing authority would also be useful.

The Board thanked the legislators for listening and sharing their thoughts with us.

The Board meeting was closed while the Personnel Committee discussed the 2024 wage review with the entire Board. When the Board meeting reopened, **Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn to approve the Personnel Committee's wage increase recommendations as stated below effective the first pay period of 2024:**

District Manager - \$2.00

District Coordinator – No increase as wage was increased in November.

Water Resource Specialist - \$2.50

District Technician - \$2.00

Resource Technician - \$1.00

Outreach Coordinator - \$1.00

Engineer - \$3.95 or GS Grade 13, Step 8 (per employment agreement)

Engineering Technician - \$2.50

All in favor, motion carried.

Peter reviewed a new Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) policy for the Employment Policy Handbook. ESST is a new Minnesota law that takes effect January 1, 2024. The policy states how the time is earned, how to request leave time, and establishes by definition of law how this time can be used. Current policy provides four hours of sick leave per pay period, which meets ESST requirements. **Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn to incorporate the Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) Policy into the Pennington SWCD Employment Policy Handbook. All in favor, motion carried.**

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Greg made a motion, seconded by ADawn to use the following prices for tree sales in 2024:

Keep the cost of potted black hills spruce trees at \$15.00 per pot.

Keep the conifer tree price at \$60.00 for a bundle of 25.

Keep the deciduous tree price at \$50.00 for a bundle of 25.

Keep the matting price at \$.60 per foot installed.

All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Greg to purchase 400 tree fabric squares at a cost of \$344.00 and sell the product for:

1. Uninstalled - \$3.00 per kit (which includes 5 staples)

2. Installed - \$2.00 per tree plus a \$75.00 minimum installation fee

All in favor, motion carried.

ADawn made a motion, seconded by Greg to sponsor a Science Museum water assembly at Challenger Elementary School at cost of \$965.00. All in favor, motion carried.

Peter, Erika, Larissa, and Bryanna attended the MASWCD State Convention. Greg Homme had to cancel. The Pennington SWCD resolution regarding SWCD's incurring debt for capital expenses passed after discussion. Fund raising for the Envirothon was held and there was much discussion regarding soil health funding.

Pennington SWCD was the host for the Area 1 SWCD Meeting held at the Shooting Star Casino in Mahanomen. Greg Hilgeman spoke and the 75th Anniversary Video composed by Bryanna, Erika, and Grant Nelson was shown.

The 2024 Planning Meeting is scheduled for February 8th, from 9 a.m. – noon with lunch after. Peter will check on the availability of the Joint Operation meeting room. Topics include:

1. Soil Health Funds
2. Staffing
3. Space Needs

For the months of January – April of 2024, the Board will meet on the third Thursday of each month from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Preparations are underway for the 2024 Pennington SWCD Banquet. The Board would like to reserve the Legacy Events Center for April 9th or 11th. Donna will check into that. The Board and staff were asked to brainstorm entertainment ideas for the event.

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Two pictures were submitted for December's photo contest. The Board chose the photo "Pine Cones" submitted by Shayla Langlie as the winner.

The Board was then asked to choose the grand prize photo winner for 2023. All the monthly winners from this past year were viewed. The "Wheat" photograph submitted by Cori Bregier was chosen as the 2023 grand prize winner.

Employee reports were available for review.

The NRCS report was available for review.

The Farm Biologist report was available for review.

Grant Nelson's report was available for review.

Correspondence:

- The Board was reminded to recertify their Statement of Economic Interest in January of 2024.
- Thank you notes from Barb Molskness.
- Open Meeting Law and Remote Participation Webinar Training provided by MCIT on January 17th.

The next Board meeting will be held at the USDA/SWCD Meeting Room on January 18th at 1:00 p.m.

Ricky made a motion, seconded by ADawn to adjourn. All in favor, motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 1:34 p.m.

Kevin Wilde, Secretary