

# HIGHLANDS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## MEETING MINUTES

**MEETING DATE: 12/17/2024**

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

**FINAL – Approved January 7, 2025**

Recorded by: Kayla Nickerson

**MEETING SCHEDULED START: 3:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER: @ 3:02 P.M.**

**PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT READ BY VICE-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
Lauren Ahrens	Environmental Specialist III	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Tyler Baker	Environmental Specialist I	FDACS-OAWP	Y
Carlos Torres	District Conservationist	USDA-NRCS	N

II. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to Approve the Agenda as presented (Sebring/Wohl).  
Unanimous Approval.

### III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

a. **Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes – November 19, 2024** - Motion to  
approve the minutes as presented (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous Approval.

### IV. Financial Activity

- a. **Overview & Approval of Financial Reports – November 2024:** Review of bank statements & financial reports. Motion to approve the financial reports as presented (Wohl/Deen). Unanimous Approval.
- V. **Agency Partner Updates**
  - a. **FDACS** – Ahrens reported that applications are being accepted again and staff is working through changes to the cost share program. No Action.
  - b. **MIL** – Harmon reported the MIL team has fulfilled the contractual obligations for the quarter and is still completing additional work as needed. No Action.
  - c. **NRCS** – Nickerson reported Carlos Torres' last day in Sebring will be Dec. 27<sup>th</sup>. Torres will be splitting time between Okeechobee and Sebring until the new District Conservationist is hired. The new Natural Resource Specialist will start Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>. No Action.
  - d. **HCBCC** – Commissioner Kirouac reported a change to the fire tax assessment on agricultural properties that he is working with county staff to correct. No update on IMWID. No Action.
- VI. **Old Business**
  - a. **Legislative Planning** – Bishop provided the "Options for Reorganization in 2025 Legislation Session" document that was drafted from the Brainstorm Workshop in November. She reported 4 SWCDs have now joined FASD, and a formal request was made for the association to add SWCDs to its list of legislative priorities for the upcoming 2025 legislative session. No Action.
- VII. **New Business - None**
- VIII. **Executive Director's Report** – Bishop reported the Master Gardeners/Extension are very interested in taking over the community garden but will need approval before acting. AgVenture has raised funds to cover the coordinator position for the next year (2025) but may return with a request for funding in the future. Bishop and Nickerson are working diligently to produce the Annual Report and District Policies/Procedures for Board approval at next board meeting. No Action.
- IX. **Citizens Not on the Agenda** – None
- X. **Supervisors Comments**
  - Smith – None
  - Deen – None
  - Sebring – None
  - Wohl – None
  - Causey – discussed the October evaluation of Executive Director's score of 523 out of 525. Causey and Smith led discussion about Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) and merit increases. Having received no increases for 3 prior years and based on increased workload on a Local and State level, motion made to grant a 25% increase to Bishop's annual salary effective October 1st, 2024 (Sebring, Wohl). Unanimous Approval. Bishop shared Nickerson's years of service and current annual leave asking she be granted 5 years' service earned annual leave of 15 days. Motion to grant Nickerson 15 days of annual leave (Wohl/Sebring). Unanimous Approval.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:24 p.m.

Next Board Meeting: January 7<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>Legislative Preparation</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>
<i>Develop HSWCD/FCDEA Public Records Policy</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>Dec. 31, 2024</i>
<i>Develop and implement HSWCD Records Inventory</i>	<i>K. Nickerson &amp; S. Bishop</i>	<i>Dec. 31, 2024</i>
<i>2023-2024 Annual Report</i>	<i>S. Bishop &amp; K. Nickerson</i>	<i>Dec. 31, 2024</i>