

Laramie County Conservation District

1923 Whitney Road
Cheyenne, WY 82007

Regular Board Meeting

Tuesday, Oct. 8th, 2024

5:30 p.m.

Attendance

Supervisors Present: Ann Sanchez, Chair; Tom Farrell, Vice Chair; Kevin Wells, Treasurer; Jay Berry, Member; Casey Epler, Secretary.

District Employees Present: Shaun Kirkwood, Kathy Cooney, Jeff Geyer.

NRCS: Jesus Lopez-Vargas, Acting DC

1. ROOTED IN CHEYENNE UPDATE – Jackie Suntrup/Program Coordinator/RIC

Jackie thanked the District as being one of their bigger sponsors. Jackie stated this was the biggest planting year since ROOTED in Cheyenne started in 2017. They planted just shy of 300 trees this year utilizing 235+ volunteers. Since 2017, ROOTED in Cheyenne has increased the urban forest with over 1,700 trees.

Jackie explained that continuous education for homeowners is a focus for the future.

2. TOM FARRELL RECOGNITION -

Ann presented Tom with a water bottle and a briefcase in recognition of his 27 years of service as a Board member.

3. CALL TO ORDER

At 6:05 p.m. Ann called the board meeting to order.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING- Sept. 10, 2024

Kevin stated he had talked to Kathy earlier today with a statement in his report from September. It was written as game & fish, and Kevin clarified it to be game fish. Kathy made that correction on page 4.

**Casey moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting with the correction;
Kevin seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

5. TREASURER’S REPORT- Profit and Loss Statement (monthly) – Sept. 2024; Profit & Loss Budget Overview (quarterly/July 2024-September 2024) - Shaun

Ann asked about line item #8310-Office Equipment. Shaun stated it’s for the projector we are using tonight, the OWL for meetings, we have ordered a tv to use for meetings on a stand. Shaun stated anything that has to do with the office.

Ann also asked about line item #6050-LCCD Information and wanted to know if this was the cost for the new brochure. Shaun stated yes. Kathy stated this is for the Little Ole’ Printshop for printing and labeling, and the postage to mail the brochure.

Jay asked about the \$200,000.00 that the District had earmarked for the 4-H & FFA building. Jay wanted to know if that was a commitment that we made that they are going to do in the future or where exactly is that money set to be spent. Shaun stated they do not know that we have that funding. It was a conversation that Shaun started and asked if it was something that we could look into. Shaun stated the money is just sitting there and the District would put up a \$200,000.00 pole barn. Shaun stated we would wait and not address it until after the election. Kevin stated he visited with some FFA advisors at the fair about it, kind of what our thoughts were that we might do the funding, and they would get to some of it. Shaun stated we would give them the money and they would build it because if we did it, we would have to go out to bid. Kevin asked if it was in a line item. Shaun stated it is budgeted under Community Enhancements.

The Board moved to submit it for audit as per Shaun’s report.

6. OLD BUSINESS – review and/or discussion

Ann stated we would like to discuss when new board members assume office. Ann stated it’s been the consensus that the newly elected board members would be asked to attend the Nov. and Dec. board meetings, but they would not have the authority to vote but be an observer until Jan. when the election of officers takes place.

Kevin stated he had gotten an answer from Justin Caudill, WY Dept. of Ag. Kevin stated he was told it is at the discretion of each District. Kevin stated the only rule is that the newly elected board member must take the oath of office within 10 days of being elected.

Shaun stated this all started because it needs to be in the Rule Book. Shaun stated he would add that rule and have it on the agenda for the November meeting.

Tom stated we might want to remind the two new people running for the board that they have to submit their expenses for their election campaigns.

Shaun stated the District is working on a Board Supervisor brochure. It was started several years ago, but it’s never been completed.

**7. PROGRAM REPORTS –
–Public Outreach (Ann)**

Ann stated we had talked about the Ag Expo, and she passed around an article from the Pine Bluffs Post of the event with pictures of the two stations the District had with Rex & Jeff at the Furs & Skulls, and Shaun, Kathy, & Tami, NRCS at the pine seed planting.

Ann showed a copy of the LCCD '20-'24 Highlights Brochure. Shaun asked if everyone had received it. Ann stated she thought we knocked it out of the park with this year's mailing.

-Wildlife & Range (Kevin)

Ann stated she didn't know if anyone saw it on the news, but there was a very good new blip on Rex up at Curt Gowdy with his spray tank on and he did a very good job of explaining what he was doing. Ann stated she thought it was very impressive.

Ann asked what Envue was in Rex's narrative. Shaun stated it was a company that wants to do some test plots. They oversaw the spraying on the forest. Shaun stated they want to do some testing with new chemicals. Rex went and plotted areas and this company wants to monitor the areas. Jeff stated there was left over burn from one of the chemicals they used to spray and they wanted to find out which chemical it was. Jeff thought it affected some shrubs.

Shaun stated Rex did a program today of Furs & Skulls at St. Mary's Elementary and Rex is going to Pine Bluffs tomorrow afternoon to talk to the 4-H down there about conservation districts. What we are about, who we are.

Kevin stated he has found 10 dead Eurasian doves around his house in the last four days. Kevin stated it kind of has him worried. The only thing he can figure is he put some vole poison out and it's down in a hole under a Russian olive. He doesn't know what it is. No other birds are dropping out of the sky, just those.

Kevin stated there are no deer in the desert. He did 180 miles from Bitter Creek all the way to Saratoga. Kevin stated he found a tank with two solar panels and crawled under a panel for shade and went to sleep. When he woke up, 75 wild horses were there. The tank was fenced off and the horses were all around him fighting. Kevin stated the pecking order to get a drink of water is unreal. Kevin stated it took them an hour for them all to get a drink.

- Water (Casey, Jeff)

Casey stated he loved water.

Ann asked about the comment in Jeff's narrative about not being sure we should be doing solar conversions with the state's dollar. Jeff stated so with the small water purse that we tap into, you are supposed to show public benefit and that is what Jeff is struggling with. Jeff stated he thinks he may be one of the only ones doing solar conversions through that state purse, state funds and he was asked last year a question on that, how does this help by one of the water development commissioners. Jeff stated it is really hard for him to show public benefit. How does the public benefit and that's one of the clauses/criteria of this grant. Jeff asked the Board what they thought.

Jay stated he thought it was pretty hard to justify because he thought you had to have a new well in order to do those conversions. Jeff stated it's from a windmill, a stock well. Jay asked if he had to do a pump test to show the viability. Jay stated most of the time you would find that the old windmill that you have probably doesn't have the casing that's going to justify anything that's going to be there. Chances are you are going to have to walk away from a perfectly good tank. Jeff stated he challenged him to come up with a public benefit to it, but Jeff doesn't know if there is one. Jeff stated he had to turn in the application to the state engineers today for the project for Jacobsen.

- Trees (Jay)

Jay stated he had a good talk with Dale today and Jay stated Dale told him he has to come up with maybe a new guy every year that has a tremendous amount of timing and fore sight to know how to make a slit in the fabric where the trees got to pop up and that alone may have us only having one tree planting crew going. Jay stated if we can't find the people to do it we may have to turn away half of our tree calls if we need to and if we can only run one really good crew whether it's a first come first serve or show benefit or what ever it may not be in our best interest to try and just plant every tree in Laramie County every year that we can. It might be more to our benefit to do a few at a time and take care of the asset if we are going to have it.

Shaun stated he was glad Jay hit on that because he and Dale have been chatting a lot about every year, we are doing 40 miles of tree row, 30 miles, and we average 20-24. Shaun stated we are going to cut it off from now on. Shaun stated he has ordered trees and this year 20 miles and we are done. Kevin stated quality vs. quantity. Shaun stated there have been some hiccups. Shaun stated he thinks we need to take pride in our work and slow down. Shaun stated he has talked to Dale, and it is time to hire another technician. It is time to train the new Dale. Shaun stated it would be nice to have that new technician, a Tree Specialist, and Dale running a crew or two crews that are doing quality work. Shaun stated even 20 miles or 45,000 trees.

Shaun stated Dale is starting windbreak designs. He has about 100 to do. He has them mapped and has started grouping them. People are aware we are doing designs from October to January. Shaun stated that any time they submit a request, Shaun sends them a pre-drafted email saying when designs are done, and they can't order until January. Shaun stated they do about 250 designs a year.

Jay stated he thinks Dale is doing the smart thing and he cut off his fencing right now because there is no end. Shaun stated he told Dale Oct. 1st he is going to be doing windbreak designs.

Shaun stated if they had time to Google "ellepot". Shaun stated it is a biodegradable paper. No more plastic tubes for potted trees. OneCanopy is starting to do them. Josh Stoltz from OneCanopy wants to do a test plot and monitor them.

Jay stated to also Google Better Fed Foods. Jay stated he doesn't think we are even scratching the surface for what we can do for soil health in this county.

- Administration (Tom, Shaun, & Kathy)

Tom stated they are doing a wonderful job.

Kathy stated she had an email from the auditor today and she is trying to finish up the audit so hopefully they will be here to present at the November Board meeting. Ann stated it looked like the audit went pretty well. Kathy stated she didn't know how much the auditor beat up on Jeff and Rex.

Shaun stated we had an FFA member come into the office and present the other day similar to the ENR contest. Shaun stated he did a fantastic job. He talked about soil health which was interesting. He was given a scenario and had 10 minutes to prepare and then he presented to Jeff, Kathy, himself, and Dale. He is going to nationals. Kevin asked where he was from. Shaun stated Burns.

Shaun stated he had jury duty for a day.

-NRCS (Jesus Lopez)

Jesus stated for staffing they have selected a candidate for the Soil Conservationist position but have not heard if they are accepting the position. Jesus stated they had a Soil Conservationist direct hire position posted and it was his understanding this post was in case they hadn't selected anyone. Jesus stated he expected to have a new employee in the next 60 days.

Jesus stated they are accepting EQIP applications for the upcoming fiscal year, and they have a lot of certifications on current contracts they are working on.

Jesus stated applications deadline is officially Nov. 1 for all major programs for NRCS. Jesus stated WY has an ACTNOW, Wildfire Recovery Assistance program, that we may not need here, but he just wanted to let everyone know in case someone had family or others to let them know.

Jesus stated he and Tami are working on checkouts, certifications, NAP clipping, and inventories for field work. They will be doing data collection and engineer survey's also.

For outreach, Jesus went to a job fair and in the two days they talked to more than 100 people. Jesus stated he didn't see too much of a future in terms of getting any engineer. They talked to a couple of engineers, but they weren't necessarily interested in working for NRCS. Jesus stated he also did some outreach for the District's Tree Specialist position but didn't see any good candidates there either. Tami helped out with the Ag Expo and told Jesus great things about it. Shaun thanked NRCS for helping the District out with the Expo.

Jesus stated a portion of Laramie County has been changed to a D1 (Moderate Drought 37%). This is a slight change from the last report.

-FSA-Shaun

Shaun read through the highlights of Lori's report.

Farm Plan(s): discussion and/or approval
CRP grassland/new X 2

**Kevin moved to approve the above listed Farm Plans;
Tom seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

Consent:

Discussion Items:

8. Community Enhancement projects 2024-25 – review and discussion.

Shaun stated the sheet in front of the Board is updated as we have more projects than we have money. We have \$5,000.00 available and there are seven projects. They are not all asking for \$1,000.00 but we would be short, roughly \$1,500.00. There is enough money in that line item in the budget because that is where the \$200,000.00 for the 4-H/FFA building is. Shaun asked if the Board wanted to approve them all or kick a couple out. Shaun stated the very last project listed was turned in after the deadline.

Ann stated maybe we should raise the budgeted amount. Shaun stated we could up the amount, but this number of projects stretches the staff. Shaun stated the groups like the District to help. Shaun stated with more projects we may have to tell groups they are on their own. Tom asked if maybe ROOTED could assist with some of the plantings and Shaun stated he could ask but he stated a good amount of volunteers that assisted with ROOTED plantings are landscape companies and they bring their crews in. Shaun stated he just thinks we need to get more aggressive with these groups by telling them we are not going to come in to do the whole project, that they have to help. Jay asked if it says somewhere in the funding that the District will help and Shaun stated yes, it says we will help design, help implement, and then their match can be labor. Kevin asked how many trees would be planted at the Lutheran Church. Jeff stated the District would do the soil prep. Jeff stated the church would pay for the planting with the funds but would install the irrigation and maintain.

Ann asked if Shaun wants the Board to approve the list of projects. Shaun stated to approve them all, the money is in the line item or knock them down to five projects.

**Tom moved to approve all seven listed Community Applications for 2025;
Jay seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

9. Tree Specialist vacancy – update.

Shaun stated we got one or two more applications since the last board meeting, but the applicants do not meet the job description requirements. Kevin stated maybe one could be the Tree Technician and Shaun stated the one from Urban Forestry says he's interested but might not. One guy wants to do a ride along with Shaun. He has 20 years in the industry, but he doesn't know if he can do tree calls, and the other one was a range guy, but Shaun has not heard back from him.

Kevin stated his office has interviewed two people and offered them jobs, but they are not accepting them. Tom stated if someone has to think about the job, it should be a no. Shaun stated that right now we o.k. with not having a tree specialist. Shaun stated Dale can handle the windbreaks but there has got to be someone put on by planting season and Shaun thinks it needs to be a technician and it needs to be the specialist and he's already talked to Dale that he would run one crew and Dale teaches them both.

Kevin asked Shaun what position would help the District now. Shaun stated a technician now but next spring we are going to need a Tree Specialist or we will be turning people away for tree calls and that is our voting public.

Shaun stated we could leave the position open and post for a technician spot. Kevin asked if the one applicant wants to do a ride along, what does he want to know. Shaun stated he wants to do tree calls. He wants to see what Shaun is looking at.

Ann stated the guy could learn about the bugs. It could take a while, he could Google it, he could do some things. Shaun stated he really struggles with a specialist not knowing. A lady called him, and the city went out and looked at her tree and got their book out on the hood of the truck to see what was wrong. She then called Shaun to ask him to come look at the tree. Shaun stated Google is not always the answer like anything else. Shaun stated you have to be able to look at them. You are hiring someone to diagnose insects and disease. Ann stated if you are looking for someone that has the enthusiasm that really wants the job, but it's frustrating that we don't have more candidates.

Shaun asked if we should put a notice out for a technician and leave the Tree Specialist post out there like it is. Jay asked if we are missing young kids coming out of college for forestry, are there technical schools in Nebraska somewhere that are training kids like this. Kevin stated he agreed with Shaun if we can get a technician, get a technician and we can always keep looking for a specialist. Kevin stated if we are cutting back on plantings we can cut back on tree calls. Shaun stated state forestry can do more, but the city's hands are tied. They can look at them if they are in the front yard because they are not allowed to go in the backyard. Shaun stated he would work on it and get a job posting for a technician.

10. WACD State Convention – Nov. 19-22, Jackson Hole, WY attending?

Jay stated he is not going. Kevin stated he would let Shaun know by the end of this week.

OTHER BUSINESS -

Shaun – Shaun stated he wanted to let the Board know Oct. 31st will be his last day. Shaun stated the 25th or the 28th will be his last day in the office. Shaun stated if the sale of his house falls through, he would be willing to stay for 60 more days. Shaun stated he has a list of things that the staff needs to take over. Shaun stated he could post his position when he posts the technicians.

11. Next Board of Supervisors meeting Nov. 12, 2024 @ 5:30 pm.

12. ADJOURNMENT-Ann

Ann adjourned the meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Ann Sanchez, Chair

Casey Epler, Secretary

Transcribed by Kathy Cooney, Financial Coordinator

DRAFT