LCCD Public Meeting Minutes

LOCATION: Laramie County Conservation District Office
DATE: January 7, 2026
TIME: 6:00 PM

In Attendance: Casey Epler, Jason Crowder, Ann Sanchez, Kevin Wells, Jay Berry
Staff Present: Kevin Wells, Kathy Cooney, Jeff Geyer, Dale Beranek, Chris, Tami Jorns, NRCS

PROJECT STATUS - Kevin Wells

- Kevin Wells verified Supervisors had a copy of Status Reports and offered Supervisors to look at those and ask questions.
- Kevin referenced the December report and explained a few projects that have been removed due to completion, including Natural Area Dry Pond, Phase II.
- Kevin indicated they are starting on germinating and seeding different projects. Staff expressed concern about early germination because of weather.
    - Activity Report of Staff: Director Wells referenced Board packet highlighting staff activity and encouraged Supervisors to ask questions about the packet.

FINANCIAL REPORT – Ann Sanchez

Supervisor Sanchez provided the Financial Report.

- Ann Sanchez referenced the snapshot of the financials for review. Total income for month showed a 200% increase, with the main source the Dec mill levy.
- Jason Crowder added the district received a gift in the amount of $55,000 from Eolian Corp. Jeff Geyer was responsible for facilitating the gift. Jason suggested the gift could be allocated for the solar panel project, since **Eolian** is a renewable energy company.
- Ann indicated a beginning checking balance of $1,402,040.87. Income received was $510,554.55 and total expenses of $166,866.42. Net ordinary income of $1,745,729 and total cash on hand $2,978,454.22. Scott Cherek asked how these numbers compared to same period in 2024. Staff member Kathy Cooney relayed that the mill levy is down about $97,000 compared to 2024. Director Wells indicated that he thought it was around $90,000 less than last year.
- Chairman Casey Epler asked Kevin Wells to review the December P&L. Kevin reviewed the numbers and explained that expenses equated to approximately 33% of the mill received, leaving 66% of the levy as cash on hand.

SUPERVISOR OVERSIGHT REPORTS

Supervisor Oversight Reports

- **Water** – Chairman Epler: nothing to report.
- **Wildlife Range** – Supervisor Jason Crowder: Nothing to report.
- **Trees:** Supervisor Jay Berry: The trees have been available for sale. Staff member Dale Beranek and the rest of the crew have sold the bulk of the tree inventory, and they only have about 9000 trees left. Kevin Wells noted that 19,000 trees sold last Friday.
    - Scott Cherek asked about how to acquire trees.
    - Dale Beranek stated that last year the district purchased lilacs, but they did not sell.
    - Kevin Wells said there continues to be misinformation in the county that the trees are free.
- **Administration** – Ann Sanchez: Nothing to report.

NRCS

- Tami Jorns noted that the district is getting a new soil con this coming Monday, a student pathways conversion.
- Tami explained there is a federal program through the Noble Research Institute in Laramie County to help "Keep Working Lands Working" and they are having a grazing school February 17-19th at Little America. Instead of the usual $600.00, the cost will be $300 to attend. Tami thought there would be one hour of assistance included in the cost. Flyer available in the NRCS office for more information.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Jay Berry moved to approve the minutes with an amendment to the name of the fencing company revised to Nemo. Ann Sanchez seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Awards Banquet

- Kevin Wells mentioned that a couple Supervisors mentioned the need to do an annual awards banquet. Kevin asked the Board if they wanted to proceed with an awards banquet and if so, how he should proceed.
- Scott Cherek mentioned he thought it was a great idea and asked the number of landowners eligible. Director Wells explained that it is usually classes of awards for a variety of purposes. Cherek said he was impressed with several projects, especially the riparian/grassland projects he personally visited in East County.
- Casey Epler entertained a motion but requested more discussion.

- Jason Crowder asked if the event was always a banquet and if there was a budget allocated for the event. Kathy Cooney indicated the line item fell within the category of special meeting with a budget amount was $3,200 and awards allocated at $2,000.
- Scott Cherek moved to plan and host awards dinner during the month of April, with expenses not to exceed the budget allocations outlined. Jason Crowder seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

Election of Officers

- Chairman Casey Epler invited motions for the election of new officers.

Ann Sanchez motioned for **Jason Crowder to become the Chairman.** Cherek seconded =Three Supervisors voted in favor for Supervisor Crowder to become Chairman: Cherek, Crowder, and Sanchez. Two supervisors voted no for Chairman Crowder: Berry and Epler. The motion passed 3-2.

Jay Berry nominated **Casey Epler for Vice Chairman.** There were no other nominations. The Board voted unanimously for Vice Chairman Epler.

Jason Crowder made a motion for **Cherek for Secretary.** Cherek expressed concern about the time necessary to prepare the monthly minutes and other responsibilities The Board voted unanimously for Secretary Cherek.

Jay Berry nominated **Ann Sanchez for Treasurer.** There were no other nominations. The Board voted unanimously for Treasurer Sanchez.

Chairman Epler nominated **Jay Berry to serve as the Member.** No other nominations were received and the Board voted unanimously for Berry to serve as the Member.

Other:

- Chairman Epler invited a motion to move to executive session to discuss a personnel matter.

Epler made a motion to go into executive session. Supervisor Berry seconded. Supervisors Cherek, Crowder, and Sanchez voted no and Supervisor Epler and Berry voted aye. Motion failed.

- Epler asked Board when and how they want to evaluate the District Manager. Supervisor Crowder asked if there was a normal period for when evaluations were conducted. Epler explained that typically evaluations were done at the beginning of the year.
- Epler stated that he considers it standard operating procedure and Jay Berry asked the Board why they are not doing it. Cherek stated that he thought it was important for the Board to conduct an annual evaluation, that it is important for all staff to get feedback good and bad.
- Kevin Wells indicated other staff received evaluations occurring in May prior to the budget to evaluate COLA's and other benefits. Wells further added there are mid-term evaluations and final evaluations conducted on a fiscal year. Jay Berry requested an updated copy of the policy handbook.

- Crowder expressed his support of Supervisor Cherek explaining it is important employees do not think we are laying the hammer down but to make sure they are doing the job we expect them to do and give them an opportunity to grow if there are deficiencies. Crowder further explained he voted no to the executive session because there was no expectation for District Manager Wells to be aware there was a potential evaluation until days ago and does not feel that is fair.
- Epler invited the Board to determine when it would be fair to conduct an evaluation. Wells said an evaluation should happen about every 6 months, so no one is blindsided, at least as applied to the other staff and that is now occurring in April.
- Cherek asked if an evaluation should happen in April to maintain consistency with the rest of the organization. Berry relayed that the Board could schedule in April but there is more going on than what one could call normal and he did not feel a normal year was occurring.
- Chairman Epler also said waiting until April is not good for him either as that time of year is challenging. Epler expressed his concern to try and relay the Board's obligations but feels it has gone unnoticed.
- Chairman Epler ended the discussion and moved on to the next agenda item.

Vacancy Announcements

- Kevin Wells provided three drafts of vacancy announcements. Manager Wells asked the Supervisors to review and provide any feedback.
- Marketing and Outreach Coordinator is a new position. Supervisor Berry asked what exactly is happening with the position.
- Wells then communicated to the Board that Staff Member Rex Lockman was resigning as of February 12, 2026.
- Scott Cherek identified that an interview committee should be created with consistent people participating in all interviews.
- Casey Epler suggested retaining a consultant, person, or organization to do prior screening to filter out unqualified candidates to not waste time.
- Jason Crowder shared that he thought this was Manager's role and they should filter out applications. Kevin Wells explained that historically they had a committee to weed out applications and then they would decide the top candidates to schedule.
- Cherek relayed the importance of prioritizing positions to be filled and creating a timeline for each, specifically referencing Kathy Cooney's position due to its complexity.
- K Jay Berry expressed the critical need for a timeline and further expressed support for a recruiter and encouraged a vote.
- Crowder shared that he feels uncomfortable talking about new employees long before the current employees have formally announced their retirement, treating them as if they are easily replaceable.
- Kathy Cooney noted her retirement is in June 2026.

- Cherek identified Kathy Cooney's role and complimented her on a tremendous job and was concerned she would be difficult to replace. With that, Cherek proposed we consider an outside firm to do monthly P&Ls with the new employee taking on a less extensive role. Cherek reminded the Board that the auditors recommended the district create more checks and balances. Berry agreed with Supervisor Cherek that outsourcing some responsibilities may be effective.
- Epler replied that the CFO is entirely capable of completing her duties until she retires. Cooney relayed that the job has changed significantly compared to previous years when the organization had a much smaller budget.
- Cherek identified the additional need to silo the grant accounting based on the auditor's recommendations. The new grants have additional responsibilities with more complication and so he believes more expertise is required post Cooney's retirement. Kevin Wells shared those concerns and stated that the district has been informed multiple times of the need for additional checks and balances what has now become a $3,000,000 budget.
- Cooney relayed that she suggested training for her replacement for one quarter or 3 months. Chairman Epler said he was against outsourcing and hoped that we could hire an employee with experience.

Cherek made a motion to have a comprehensive job description for financial coordinator at next board meeting with intent to direct positing job at that time. Seconded by Ann Sanchez. The motion passed unanimously.

Manager Wells asked for guidance on the remaining three job vacancies and approval for salaries. He indicated he would not advertise without approval from Board and asked for approval on job descriptions, explaining they are just a template.

- Jason Crowder asked about approval for salaries and the salary ranges. Wells explained that he looked at other similar jobs and used that as a reference point and then "shot gunned" it a little.
- Crowder asked about budgeting for positions. Manager Wells explained that all positions but the new proposed position (Marketing & Outreach Coord.) are budgeted for.

Cherek made a motion to approve the Wildlife and Resource Specialist job vacancy notices and move forward with those positions so long as budget parameters are followed. Jason Crowder seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

- Scott Cherek mentioned the solar project, and it was determined to add to February Agenda.
- Cherek asked about natural area and directed the question to real estate subcommittee. Ann Sanchez relayed that the meeting in December was cancelled. Cherek asked if progress was being made.
- Crowder stated that the committee was created and he was seeking information from Dante on what was needed and to organize future meetings.

- Epler asked about Supervisor Training and Kevin Wells explained that District will be hosting training in February.

ADJOURNMENT

Ann Sanchez made a motion to adjourn the meeting and move into Executive Session. Motion seconded by Jason Crowder. Motion passed unanimously.

Time of Adjournment: 9:10 PM MST

Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 12, 2026 @ 6:00 PM.

Casey Epler, Chair

Scott Cherek, Secretary

(All board meetings are audio recorded)