

Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District October 27, 2021 @ 1pm, Zoom - Board Meeting Minutes

Directors on call: Joe Rothermel, Steve Stierwalt, Eleanor Blackmon, Lennie Heiser, Eric Suits

Staff on call: Erin Gundy, Renee Weitekamp, Bruce Henrikson, Morgan Cauble

Guests: Bruce Stickers, Pete Frey (left at 1:22 pm)

Meeting was called to order on Wednesday, October 27, 2021 @ 1:06 pm

Minutes – Steve Stierwalt moved to approve the September 22nd board meeting minutes. Lennie Heiser seconded; motion carried.

Financials – Eric Suits moved to approve the October financials. Lennie Heiser seconded; motion carried.

Reports

Associate Director – Lennie was able to chat with Kenneth recently. Lennie would like to send him hard copies of the Board Meeting minutes each month to keep up to date with District projects. Morgan will start doing that after this meeting.

NRCS - See attached report. Program deadlines are coming up. FY22 CRP site visits (check-ins, establishments, re-enrolls) have continued. Need to finalize the plan for the Local Work Group by the end of the year. Pete needs to submit some sort of materials. Still waiting on hearing when program sign up dates will be. Steve asked Pete if he heard anyone talking about pulling carbon samples on CRP contracted lands. Pete had not heard of anything as of yet. Erin talked about Amanda still not being able to log onto the NRCS system and how we are working to fix the issue. Joe asked how IT has been helping, and Pete said that she was input incorrectly into the system. When the issue was corrected, links were broken and the login was invalid. IT has had recent employee turnover, so they are having difficulty communicating across offices/states.

STAR – Bruce has been working 10-12 hours per week. He has distributed 44 STAR signs and has more to go. Talked to Farm Credit who will give \$5,000 for signs, and made a connection with an Indiana representative from Farm Credit to receive funding for Indiana county signs. Working with IDOA to collect field forms; 81 field forms turned in so far. Received 41 other efield forms since the start of 2021. Bruce attended IFCA's 4R field day last month. Steve is doing a presentation for a Climate Smart Ag group tomorrow. Bruce started to write bylaws, which are needed to form a nonprofit organization.

PCM – No report.

Old Business

ADM Cares – No update. Renee and Erin plan to sit down soon and create a plan for spending the funds. Erin is thinking about using some of the funds for MSU Farmer-Led Watershed Protection mini-grant events. We have used approximately \$1,000 of the \$30,000 grant so far, and the funds need to be used for outreach and education. Steve suggested we start paying Bruce’s salary with the funds, which would cover outreach and education. Erin and Renee agreed.

Annual Meeting - Morgan presented the results from the survey the board took regarding speakers, theme, etc. for the 2022 Annual Meeting. Joe proposed a short meeting with intro to board and staff, awards, and speaker, not to exceed an hour. Steve agreed. Steve will contact Jean Payne to ask if she will speak at the meeting. Joe asked about a theme, and Erin suggested we wait and see what Jean will talk about. Lennie also suggested carbon credits, but Joe decided Steve should talk to Jean first before we pick a theme. Steve asked about a video and Renee said we could make one to play before the award or during the event. Renee mentioned that Eleanor is not running for reelection, so the board needs to start thinking about a new candidate.

Lake Decatur RCPP Partnership - Erin made edits to the collaboration letter after discussions with Jeff Boeckler to add a few sentences and make STAR a more explicit partner under CCSWCD; all RCPP contracts would turn in STAR forms and we could use STAR to track improvement throughout the project; we still have time to fill out partner letters for Jeff’s grant.

Local Work Group - Morgan asked what Vermilion county completed to meet their Local Work Group deliverable. They had a short meeting with a few partners and discussed recent and ongoing projects. Morgan asked the board if this is something we’d like to do. Eleanor asked if the meetings we did last winter would suffice. Joe and Morgan will follow up to make a plan.

New Business

Barnhart Agreement - Amber Barnhart contacted Joe and proposed we renew the easement agreement for the Barnhart Prairie that is expiring at the end of this year. The board reviewed the documents, which give SWCD first rights of refusal if an owner wants to sell the land. Eleanor said we should renew and keep the rights. The board agreed to sign. Steve moved; Eleanor seconded. Motion carried.

Douglas County Payroll Assistance - Renee explained that Allison from Douglas County needs help with payroll, and she proposed we could help them with our payroll service. Lennie suggested we should talk to the auditors to make sure that would work. Steve said we should figure out all the logistics before going into it, but he would approve if the transition was smooth. Joe noted that everyone generally agreed, and Morgan and Renee will look further into it before making a final decision.

AISWCD Annual Meeting - Joe is interested in attending the AISWCD Annual Meeting to represent the CCSWCD as delegate. The board approved the two resolutions: the first to encourage STAR adoption on public lands, and the second to remove the phrase “conservation tillage” from AISWCD language. Eleanor moved; Steve seconded. Motion carried.

STAR Trademark - Bruce had submitted an amendment to remove the periods from the STAR logo, but his request was not approved. We could reach out to partners to see if anyone has worked with trademarks in the past and could give us guidance. If we have grounds to appeal, we can contact an attorney to help us. Erin asked the board for advice or recommendations of who to contact. The board gave Erin and Bruce approval to keep pursuing this. Erin may consult Illinois Soy, which recently changed its logo. Erin will contact the trademark office and ask if we have grounds to appeal.

Cover Crop acres reporting - Steve suggested we make some moves to help push folks to report their fall-seeded cover crop acres, which is due to FSA December 15. We can send a blurb to Brad Uken at Farm Bureau for them to circulate in their newsletters from now until December 15th. Create a flier for FSA to put on their desk if folks come into the office.

NACD - Steve wants to create an enhanced relationship with NACD and STAR. He will be in Washington, D.C. during the beginning of December to discuss this with NACD representatives. He feels it is very important for this to be broadcast at a national level.

Reports

R.C. – See attached report. The Walton Grant was received and will go toward covering salaries for a STAR Program & Operations Manager. Erin, Morgan, and Renee met with Brad Uken from Farm Bureau to discuss hosting a drainage meeting. Erin has been working on a lot of STAR stuff.

A.C. – Working on bringing Morgan up to speed on district projects and duties of the AC. Submitting quarterly reports at the end of this month. Big Ditch outreach has been slow, and we have minimal interest from producers. Still working on getting strategies approved by Chris Davis for the Big Ditch grant. Held a successful MS4 virtual event on October 20th. Helping with the Conservation Cropping Seminars planning meetings; looking at a 2 hour event in early February.

C.C. - See attached report. Morgan has been getting acquainted with District projects via Renee and Erin, attending calls, etc.

Survey Aide - No report.

RC&D – Bruce told the story of how they decided to pursue hiring Renee - we will miss her! Working on burn plans. The wetland had some loss of trees due to standing water. Magnolia would like to plant some more trees. They'd like to bring in a local group to do the planting. Bruce Stickers spoke with Bruce Hannon (sp?) recently; he's concerned with where the tree planting took place, FYI. He's been working with the Illinois Crop Improvement Association here and there; some folks have been coming in to ID weed grasses for germ tests - red flag! We don't want to plant more weeds! Morgan asked Bruce about billing Magnolia.

Joe thanked Renee for all her hard, dedicated work to the district! Renee will still plan to join future meetings as needed based on ongoing projects.

Next board meeting is tentatively set for November 17th at 8:00 am via Zoom. December 1st will be the backup date if harvest is ongoing.

Joe Rothermel moved to go into executive session for personnel discussion. Eleanor Blackmon moved, Lennie Heiser seconded.

Steve Stierwalt moved to exit the executive session. Eric Suits seconded, motion carried.

Eleanor Blackmon moved to adjourn at 3:10 pm. Lennie Heiser seconded; motion carried.

Minutes prepared by Morgan Cauble and Erin Gundy for Eric Suits, Secretary

Champaign County SWCD