

**DUBUQUE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONER'S MEETING**

**March 13, 2024**

**210 Bierman Road, Epworth, IA 52045-9529**

**Call Meeting to Order:** The monthly meeting of the Dubuque Soil & Water Conservation District Commissioners was called to order by Chairperson Wayne Demmer at 5:06 p.m. in person at the District office in Epworth, IA and online through Zoom on March 13, 2024. Those present included Staff: Bill Meyer, Allisen Freihage (Conservation Assistant), Eric Schmechel, John Sewell & Scott Hendricks (Zoom). Commissioners: Wayne Demmer, Mike Freiburger, Jeff Schmitt, Jack Smith & Ron Lindblom. Guests: Helen Backes.

**Adopt Agenda:**

The agenda was approved as presented with the addition of a bill from Eric Schmechel for \$267.50 for supplies and a discussion on the new Dubuque County Solar ordinance.

**24-25** Motion was made by Schmitt to approve the agenda with the additions. Motion was seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

**Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting:**

Demmer called for a discussion of the minutes from the special meeting held November 28, 2023 and the minutes from the regular meeting held February 13, 2024.

**24-26** Motion made by Freiburger to approve the minutes from the special meeting held on November 28, 2023 and the minutes from the regular meeting held February 13, 2024. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

**FARMS Program Summary:**

Current **FARMS '23** Account information:

REAP P \$916.62

REAP F/NG \$119.65

Cost Share \$0.00

**Cost Share Application:**

None

**Cost Share Cancellations:**

None

**Farms Cost Share Amendments:**

None

**Cost Share Certifications & Maintenance Agreements:**

Applicant	Practice ID	Program	Practice	Total Cost Share	Approval Status
Boevers, Dale	108620	REAP F/NG	Forest stand Improvement	\$3384.00	Approve Certification
Kearney Brothers	106134	REAP F/NG	Site Prep for Natural Regeneration	\$622.50	Approve Certification

**24-27** Motion made by Smith to approve two REAP F/NG certifications. Motion seconded by Freiburger. Motion carried unanimously.

**Conservation Plan**

None

*(Board voted 6-13-22, motion #22-72 to not sign CRP Conservation Plans)*

**Finance:**

February TR, Bank Statement & bills.

Demmer called for discussion of the February TR, bank statement, bills presented with the addition of the bill from Eric Schmechel for \$267.50 for supplies.

Lindblom brought up the changing of the bank online access. Will need the two signature authorities to go with him to the bank to have his online access removed.

**24-28** Motion made by Schmitt to approve the February TR, bank statement, and bills presented with the addition of the bill from Eric Schmechel for \$267.50. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

Women Land and Legacy (WLL) funds were discussed. Questions were voiced on how we became the keeper of these funds and where they originally came from. Freihage informed the commissioners that the previous Dubuque WLL chapter had done some fundraising and that the funds belonged specifically to the WLL group. Since the Dubuque Chapter has now merged with the Delaware and Jones Chapter, discussion was had regarding where this group keeps their funds currently. Freihage said that Delaware County SWCD are the keepers of the WLL funds for the newly joined group.

**24-29** Motion made by Smith to approve the transfer of the remaining \$804.50 of Women Land and Legacy funds currently held in the Dubuque SWCD account to the Delaware SWCD who hold the Women Land and Legacy funds for our newly joined chapter. Motion seconded by Lindblom. Motion carried unanimously.

Trevor Brooke Invoice February

**24-30** Motion made by Smith to approve the February invoice for Trevor and Brooke. Motion seconded by Lindblom. Motion carried unanimously.

### **Watershed Project Update:**

- Schmechel discussed the upcoming RCPP meeting scheduled on March 19, 2024. Schmechel mentioned all the work that Haleigh from Sand County has been doing for us. The watershed team has narrowed the programs for RCPP down to a drone applied cover crop program and an outcomes-based program. A press release just went out to promote the cover crop program. Hendricks has already begun signing producers up. There is still more work to be done to figure out how exactly how stacking with this program will work. Flyers were handed out at the Farmer-to-Farmer meeting held March 12, 2024. Smith questioned who has discretion on how money is spent with this new grant. Schmechel informed that it will come down to eligibility from NRCS, Sand County Foundation, and the watersheds/SWCD agreement. We want to get to a spot where everyone's thoughts have been heard and we can create a comprehensive model that works for many. Now looking at the possibilities of longer-term contracts within the outcomes-based program. Many pieces are going to go into this grant and its supplemental agreement. Demmer questioned how will what we're doing affect NRCS cover crop programs? He also voiced his interest in the drone cover crop program. Schmechel stated they've been discussing with Sand County Foundation a lot about how we're verifying these cover crops. All cover crop programs are competing. This will be no different. Some producers will choose to continue planting cover crops and using the programs they are currently in and that is fine. Sewell mentioned that it could be more of the people who don't have the time to get cover crops on their fields that would be interested in this program. Meyer believes that this program will not compete too much with the NRCS EQIP program but may compete more with the state WQI cover crop program. Schmitt mentioned the 160 acre limit on state program vs the 200 acre limit on the new program. Hendricks spoke on how we are seeing more producers choose multispecies blends with this program. Demmer voiced his hopes of the plantings being more successful than some airplane applications he has seen. Meyer stated that we will see better successes simply because of the rate of application that is being used for this planting being significantly more than the minimum rate along with drone applications being more accurate than airplane applications. Freiburger brought up the outcomes-based program and questioned how we are looking at verifying the program. According to Schmechel, we are looking at using the FieldPrint program field to market to determine the outcomes. Schmechel stated that there is never a perfect model but this one tracks most of the things we may be interested in looking at. Its hard to say for sure on most things regarding this program yet due to not having the supplemental agreement with NRCS finished yet. Our projects will be unique because more other RCPP grant recipients are overseen by a state agency, but our commissioners and watershed team are overseeing ours.
- Schmechel discussed the current MS4 system. We have for many years been using the MS4 web system for tracking urban stormwater. This program tracked a variety of things needed to preform our stormwater monitoring and MS4 duties. Unfortunately, the company that provides the program will be closing in the coming month and we will lose access to the program shortly after. The data will be migrated somewhere else in the coming weeks. Schmechel has been taking a dive into what is next. Researching Cloud based systems versus ESRI system. Cloud comply was the closet one from the cloud-based systems that they have found. We have not gotten a full response from ESRI but was estimated to be around \$25,000 per year to create and use their systems. MSA has offered to build Dubuque County Watersheds a program with no subscription fees. This is

estimated at around \$25,000-\$26,000 to build with the occasional fees for changes to the program. City of Dubuque met with their city engineer to talk about what the program would look like and were able to remove some line items from the cost of the program meaning we would be looking at roughly \$22,000-\$25,000 potentially. The timeframe we've been giving on building this program would be around 2 months which is when we will lose complete access to the current program. Schmechel believes that the district has a responsibility to provide this program. County GIS didn't want to host the program but the City of Dubuque was okay with hosting. The City of Dubuque agreed to pick up half of the bill for the program creation. The City of Asbury has approved paying for around \$4,000-\$5,000. That would leave the district responsible for roughly \$8,000 towards the development. Demmer questioned what is being done with the current data? Sewell stated that right now it can be pulled out on the current program and they will work with MSA so the new system can pull it similarly. The new program would integrate with permitting processes. We may not need to pull all the data from the old program. Only through the last 3 years. There will be a cost for hosting info online. Freiburger asked if the current system tracks the locations of sites. Sewell answered that yes, the current program tracks the latitude and longitude for sites. This should be able to be transferred onto the new system fine but there will likely need to be some clean up preformed for anything that was marked by only a point in the middle. Demmer voiced that he believes it is a direction that we should and need to go. Sewell mentioned that we would have to spend significantly more if the City wasn't hosting the GIS site for us. Lindblom questioned what about adding things to the program? Sewell answered that he believed it will only be small updates at first and he should be able to maintain the site with his GIS background just fine. Schmechel stated that this will have an impact on other collaborations as well. The cover crop program is also hosted by an ESRI and may be able to be added to just one system instead of Sand County hosting it. Freiburger asked about our current ARCGIS agreement with the County. Schmechel stated we will still have to pay the county annually for access to ARCGIS because we use their desktops for the program.

24-31 Motion made by Schmitt to approve up to \$8000 to be paid by the district for the creation of the new stormwater MS4 program by MSA. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

- A short discussion was had regarding the new stormwater bill, SF455.

#### **Correspondence Received:**

- CDI Connections
- Demmer complimented the work done for the CDI Region 4 Spring Regionals hosted by Dubuque County SWCD this year. Believes that Hendricks and Sewell did a great job on their presentation. Requested that they look into providing a piece to the CDI Connections newsletter to discuss the work they are doing within our district. Freihage will provide them with the previous months CDI Connections for review.

#### **Slough Bill Applications:**

Demmer called for discussion the Slough Bill Applications received.

24-32 Motion made by Freiburger to approve the Slough Bill applications Eric Schmechel, Timothy Giellis, and Herbert Hazewinkel. Motion seconded by Schmitt. Motion carried unanimously.

#### **Meeting Updates:**

- Erin Erickson from Maquoketa River WMA would like to attend an upcoming meeting to give an update on the Maquoketa River WMA.

#### **Personnel Updates:**

The state technician position has been offered and accepted. The new employee is working through the background check process. It was asked how long that process is taking now. Meyer stated that it is still taking at least a month but it depends on turnover rates in HR. Freihage's last day as CA is March 14, 2024 and first day as Watershed Program Manager is March 18, 2024. Sarah Kelchen, CA for Delaware County, will be filling in until the position is filled. Kelchen is unable to attend evening meetings. Next meeting date and time was discussed. Decision was made to have the future meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 1:30 until a new CA is hired and can perform meetings on their own. Freihage will confirm with Kelchen the date and time. Kelchen will reach out to commissioners if there is a problem. All questions can be directed to Kelchen in the future.

#### **NRCS Updates:**

- Meyer discussed that the first round of EQIP and CSP have been ranked but we have not heard back on who has been approved. There is some interest in the easement program as well and they are working through this currently.

\*\*\* Bill Meyer exited meeting at 6:22 p.m.

**Other Business:**

- Financial Site Visit letter was discussed. A response letter to the financial specialist was reviewed.

**24-33** Motion made by Lindblom to approve the Financial Site Visit response letter. Motion seconded by Schmitt.

Motion carried unanimously.

- IDALS awards discussed. Schmechel recommended Lillie Berringer as Conservation Women of the year. Discussion was had regarding what county she farms in. Will reach out to Jones County SWCD to discuss with them doing a joint nomination. Other awards were looked at and commissioners will reach out to office staff to discuss if there is anyone they know of that they believe would be good candidates for the awards.
- Demmer discussed the possibility of doing some fundraising for the district. Freihage gave an overview of where we are standing with 1M expenses and savings right now. Discussed that for several years now, the district is spending more than their allocated 1M funds. Last fiscal year there was about \$500 spent over the 1M funds. Demmer suggested going to businesses/banks and discussing the importance of conservation and requesting their support. Schmechel mentioned the Silt presentations that are done at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium each year. This kind of banquet could be hosted by the SWCD as they had done many years ago. Schmechel offered the watershed teams assistance for putting a banquet together if interested. Discussion was had regarding a fundraising field day as well. Discussion will continue in the coming months.

\*\*\*Helen Backes exited meeting at 6:41 p.m.

- Demmer called for discussion the Dubuque County's future solar ordinance. Demmer asked Schmechel what his opinion from a watershed standpoint is. Schmechel discussed a visit he had recently to a solar farm. Stated that he did not see a lot of run off caused by the panels he visited and there were prairie plants planted beneath it. He believes this is more of a policy debate which is difficult. He believes that a comprehensive plan needs to be created outlining how and where these arrays can be implemented. We need to protect HEL ground Solar power and is getting better. Stormwater is Schmechel's focus when looking at it. It is important for Dubuque to make a plan specific to Dubuque. Freiburger questioned what happens down the road when the panels become outdated? He believed that the land should have to be reverted to its original use. Schmechel discussed that none of us can predict how things will progress. Everything is always evolving. Schmitt voiced his concerns of how the solar panels are installed. He believes that it will make it difficult or impossible to reclaim the land back to agriculture. Demmer suggested that solar panels be put on industrial lands and places no one wants, not our farmlands or forested areas. Schmechel stated that Dubuque is also looking at creating an environmental sensitivity ordinance which may help. Demmer asked what if the commissioners address a letter to the Dubuque County Supervisors saying this should go slow and we'd like to have input because they are concerned. Schmechel believes it may be helpful to look at other areas that have done big solar farms. He is hoping that Dubuque goes slow and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of it and how it differs from a farm field. He questioned if this should be discussed at the state level. Should the DNR be discussing this. Schmitt mentioned SF 411 regarding energy sources. Commissioners will continue discussion of this at a future meeting.
- Remnant ecosystems was called to discussion by Demmer. Lindblom is requesting that a flyer be created by the district that provides information about prairies, old growth forests, and savannahs. One side should give information about the ecosystems. The other would provide programs and contacts available to landowners who have these ecosystems on their property. Schmechel believes a resource sheet like this could be a tremendous resource for the county.

\*\*\* Schmechel exited 7:20 p.m.

- Lindblom does not believe that it would have suggestions for reconstructed lands. Freiburger stated we used to have more conversations with landowners when we would go to their farms when creating conservation plans but not as often anymore. He stated there is not much of these remnants left in the county. Overall, everyone was interested in what could be provided. Lindblom will work on getting something put together with the CA.

Being no further business to discuss, Demmer requested a motion to adjourn.

**24-34** Motion made by Schmitt to adjourn. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on **Tuesday, April 9, 2024 at 1:30 p.m.** at the district office.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson Date

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Secretary Date