

DUBUQUE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COMMISSIONER’S MEETING

February 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 4:03 p.m. in person at the District office in Epworth, IA and online through Zoom on February 13, 2024. Those present included Staff: Bill Meyer, Allisen Freihage (Conservation Assistant), Eric Schmechel, John Sewell & Scott Hendricks. Commissioners: Wayne Demmer, Mike Freiburger, Jeff Schmitt, Jack Smith & Ron Lindblom. Guests: Denise Bishop, Alycia Willenbring, and Ed Raber.

Adopt Agenda:

The agenda was approved as presented with the addition of a bill from Eric Schmechel for \$30.88 for supplies and moving the WLL sponsorship ask and NRCS update to the beginning of the agenda due to time constraints.

24-13 Motion was made by Schmitt to approve the agenda with the additions and movement of the two items. Motion was seconded by Freiburger. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting:

Demmer called for a discussion of the minutes from the organizational meeting held January 17, 2024 and the minutes from the regular meeting held January 17, 2024.

Demmer pointed out an error on the minutes from the organizational meeting where the date of the next meeting which was being held directly after was incorrect.

24-14 Motion made by Smith to approve the minutes from the organizational meeting held on January 17, 2024 with the amended date of the next meeting and the minutes from the regular meeting held January 17, 2024. Motion seconded by Lindblom. 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
Cook, Thomas	109711	WQI	CC	\$2400.00	Approve Certification
Cook, Travis	107692	WQI	CC	\$2400.00	Approve Certification
Ger Car Farms	107502	WQI	CC	\$255.00	Approve Certification
Hartbecke Cattle Company INC	113023	WQI	CC	\$375.00	Approve Certification
Hermesen, Martin	113463	WQI	CC	\$2250.00	Approve Certification
Ryan, Thomas	112659	WQI	CC	\$1275.00	Approve Certification
Then, Todd	109103	WQI	CC	\$2220.00	Approve Certification
Philip Ungs	108348	WQI	CC	\$240.00	Approve Certification
Zauche, Robert	113280	WQI	CC	\$510.00	Approve Certification

24-15 Motion made by Freiburger to approve all nine WQI certifications. Motion seconded by Lindblom. Motion carried unanimously.

Conservation Plan

None

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

Women Land and Legacy Sponsorship:

Alycia Willenbring and Denise Bishop have joined today to discuss the possibility of a partnership between Dubuque County and the Delaware and Jones County Women Land and Legacy (WLL) chapter. Dubuque County previously had a WLL chapter that dissolved in 2020 due to not enough interest in the office for staff to keep it running. During its height, Dubuque County's WLL held events with attendance in the eighties at times. Willenbring began the WLL joint chapter in Delaware and Jones County and assisted in the creation of a second chapter in Northwest Iowa. Willenbring is proposing the joining of Dubuque and the Delaware and Jones County WLL chapters. According to her, there is a need in Dubuque County for a chapter and Delaware and Jones already hold events within our county on occasion. Their chapter plans on 4 events throughout the year. Unlike many other chapters, their WLL events are chosen by a committee vote. Were we to join the chapter, they would include Dubuque County staff/farmers onto their committee. Possibly Dubuque County committee members including Marissa Waldo were discussed. They're wish is to have individuals who are passionate about soil health and conservation join their committee from Dubuque County. Demmer commented that he is pleased with the voting aspect of the groups committee.

Willenbring mentioned that 47% of land in Iowa is owned by women and that her goal is reaching people. How do we reach these women and encourage them to put conservation on the ground. She wants to use a big event to build interest in WLL because it could create more resources in Iowa for women. Demmer mentioned the saying "pass the land off better than you found it".

Lindblom questioned if we need to approve the merge? Willenbring responded that currently she already invites Dubuque County residents to the events so it should be simple to complete the merge.

Denise Bishop requested a donation of \$500.00 from the district for their Field of Dream soil health event in June.

Freiburger believes that it's a great idea to merge the chapters. Previous CA Colleen Siefken spent a lot of time working on the WLL events when Dubuque's chapter was still active. He wants to confirm that this will not all fall onto our CA again. He believes that the merge would take a lot of pressure off our CA to run a chapter on their own. Willenbring mentioned that currently they have many people represented from many organizations as well as farmers. Lindblom asked if they try to keep a balance between where each person comes from? According to Willenbring they try to have each person bring something different to the table, whether it be knowledge or resources. What they are really looking for from new committee members is farmers as they would like a greater representation from this group. Lindblom questioned the use of Roberts law from the committee to make it more official. According to Willenbring they are following Roberts law when they meet which pleased the commissioners. Their group has also received a 5013C and will be on the news to promote their June Field of Dreams event.

Lindblom questioned how much the other two SWCDs are contributing towards the Field of Dreams event. According to Willenbring Delaware has donated \$250.00 towards the event. Freiburger suggested a donation of \$250.00 instead of \$500.00. Lindblom questioned if Jones County will be donating towards the event. Willenbring stated that they had not planned on asking Jones County for a donation towards this event. Freiburger stated that he believes the donations from counties should be even. He does not want us to join the event and pay the load of the cost. He believes that it should be equal for now. Willenbring stated that the funds for the Field of Dreams event are separate from the WLL funds. Demmer called for discussion the donation for the Field of Dreams WLL event.

24-16 Motion made by Freiburger to approve a donation of \$250.00 towards the WLL event to be taken from the WLL funds we have hold from the dissolved Dubuque Chapter WLL group. Motion seconded by Schmitt. Motion carried.

***Alycia Willenbring and Denise Bishop exited meeting at 4:46pm

***Ed Raber joined the meeting at 4:49pm

NRCS Updates:

- Meyer discussed the Memorandum of Agreement that was signed in 2020 with NRCS and IDALS. Each year we need to go through the Civil Rights Checklist. Meyer explained the checklist items.

24-17 Motion made by Freiburger to approve the checklist. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

- Meyer stated that Dubuque County had two Act Now EQIP applications that have already been approved. One is for a High Tunnel and the other is for a CNMP for a cattle building.
- State Tech interviews will take place on February 15, 2024.

Finance:

January TR, Bank Statement & bills.

Demmer called for discussion of the January TR, bank statement, bills presented with the addition of the bill from Eric Schmechel for \$30.88 for supplies.

24-18 Motion made by Schmitt to approve the January TR, bank statement, and bills presented with the addition of the bill from Eric Schmechel for \$30.88. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

The Financial Site Visit was discussed. There are a few changes that are going to have to take place. First being that all checks being paid out of the district accounts need to be copied once signed and the copy should be included with the bills. Access to the bank account must also be changed so that Lindblom has only read only access to the account and money transfers should be completed by someone with check signing authority, Freiburger and/or Demmer. Discussion was had regarding these changes. Freihage will be reaching out to Shelly Dunnick regarding if both Demmer and Freiburger need to call to request the transfer or if only one needs to.

Watershed Project Update:

- Trevor and Brooke Invoice January

24-19 Motion made by Freiburger to approve the Trevor and Brooke January Invoice. Motion seconded by Lindblom. Motion carried unanimously.

- IRS Standard mileage rate increase was discussed. Mileage rate increased 1.5 cents from 2023 to 2024.

24-20 Motion made by Schmitt to approve the mileage rate increase to 67 cents per mile for the watershed team. Motion seconded by Freiburger. Motion carried unanimously.

- Interviews were conducted for the Watershed Program Manager position on February 8, 2024. The position has been offered and accepted by Allisen Freihage. She has submitted her resignation from IDALS as our CA and her last day will be March 14, 2024. Her first day as the Watershed Program Manager will be March 18, 2024. Craig with Sand County Foundation has been informed that we have hired for this position. All work done relating to RCPP since November 2023 will be considered match towards the RCPP grant.
- Work has continued on RCPP. Schmechel believes we have two main approaches that we may use for spending the money we will be receiving. We do not want to compete with EQIP. The first approach for spending the money would be using a outcomes-based model. This model-based approach would track ecosystem changes/improvements/enhancements. We are hoping to get the partner agreements completed with NRCS in the next thirty days. The second approach would be utilizing a cover crop program focused on mid-August to late-September seeding dates. These seedings would be done using Aerial Drones. The Goal would be to create an application later this summer and provide the seeding completely free. The farmers wouldn't have to do anything. According to NRCS we would not have to go to bid for this. Demmer suggested that we come up with only a few mixes for the farmer to choose from. Discussion was had regarding seeding rate being at a set amount that we will pay for so that some individuals wouldn't be receiving more seeding than others to make it fair. Questions was asked if there would be a set number of acres we could do. Schmechel did not believe so. He believes that we should get as much cover crops out as we can. Meyer suggested that aerial seedings may require higher seeding rates to be successful. Also believes that there should be some limitations set in place regarding seeding directly into corn where there may not be sufficient sunlight for the cover crop to succeed. Schmechel stated that we will not be paying for things like ponds because we will be paying for the ecological impacts. A third approach is being considered regarding a buffer rental program/ incentive program with CRP. Could work with PFI for this. Payment would be upon sign up for the CRP program and then a second payment upon seeding. The RCPP grant will evolve based on w hose spending the money. Meyer asked which practices fair better in each model. This is being investigated. Freiburger asked if there will be any organic matter information required in these models. This may depend on which model is chosen. Demmer questioned if there will be any programs regarding the use of inhibitors. Hendricks stated that this information will likely be used in the models. Meyer stated that usually NRCS requires a CNMP before someone can enroll in this type of program. If interested he can provide a list of NRCS approved places to go through for CNMPs. Schmechel will look into this as a possibility. According to Meyer, adding requirements onto the practices could help us to raise the cost share rates for producers.
- The first annual Farmer to Farmer Conference was held on February 6, 2024. Schmechel believed it was a great event with good attendance. We had nearly 90 attendees. We've received a lot of positive comments regarding the event. A survey was sent out to those who registered online and provided their email. Demmer stated that

for the next conference it would be good if had the cow/calf operation discussion at the end so that anyone this doesn't pertain to would be free to leave without missing other speakers.

***Eric Schmechel, John Sewell and Scott Hendricks exited meeting at 5:55 p.m.

Correspondence Received:

- CDI Connections

Slough Bill Applications:

Demmer called for discussion the Slough Bill Applications received. All applications that were sent out to last years list have been received. Still waiting on Brian Preston to check the two new applications. Freihage will follow up with him again regarding when these will be checked. The possibility of having to schedule a special meeting to approve these applications once they have been checked was discussed.

24-21 Motion made by Freiburger to approve the Slough Bill applications for Corp of New Melleray, Sara Wilgenbusch & Gerald Klaren, and Daphne Idelkope. 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:

None

Other Business:

- The request for reimbursement from IDALS for our NACD employee was reviewed.

24-22 Motion made by Freiburger to approve the reimbursement request for IDALS. Motion seconded by Lindblom. Motion carried unanimously.

- CDI Scholarship applications were due back to the office by February 9, 2024. We did not receive any applications.
- Father Norman White scholarship is usually offered every year although last year it was not due to the change in CAs. Discussion was had regarding Father Norman White and his impact on the area. It was discussed that the generation that is now applying to this scholarship may not know anything about Father Norman White. Freiburger suggested that we require applicants to write a paper regarding soil and water stewardship week and what it means to them. Demmer suggested that we require them to write about Father Norman White since the scholarship is in honor of him. Schmitt inquired about how much we are offering for the scholarship. Would it be possibly to change the scholarship from \$1000.00 to \$500.00.

24-23 Motion made by Schmitt to approve offering the Father Norman White scholarship for \$500.00 and requiring applicants to write about Father Norman Whites impact. Motion seconded by Freiburger. Motion carried unanimously.

Next meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2024. Due to our CA resigning from their current position, it was suggested that we move the meeting to the week before so this would not be added to another CA's workload. The possible days for this meeting were discussed.

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

24-24 Motion made by Freiburger to adjourn. Motion seconded by Smith. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on **Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 5:00 p.m.** at the district office.

Wayne Demmer 3-13-24
Chairperson Date

Alli Fraeh 3/13/24
Secretary Date