

Laramie County Conservation District

1923 Whitney Road
Cheyenne, WY 82007

Regular Board Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 10th, 2024
5:30 p.m.

Attendance

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

District Employees Present: Shaun Kirkwood, Kathy Cooney, Rex Lockman.

NRCS: Tami Jorns & Jesus Lopez-Vargas, Acting DC

1. CALL TO ORDER

At 5:30 p.m. Ann called the board meeting to order.

At 5:30 p.m. Ann closed the regular board meeting and opened the Budget Amendment Hearing.

2. BUDGET AMENDMENT HEARING

Shaun presented the two budget amendment items. Income: Added #4227 WWNRT Lodge Pole Creek grant for \$100,000.00. Expenses: Added #7082 WWNRT Lodge Pole Creek for \$100,000.00.

**Casey moved to approve the amended budget items as presented by Shaun;
Tom seconded the motion. MOTION CARRIED.**

At 5:33 p.m. Ann closed the Budget Hearing and opened the regular Board Meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING- Aug. 13, 2024

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

4. TREASURER'S REPORT- Profit and Loss Statement (monthly) – Aug. 2024; - Shaun

Shaun presented the Profit and Loss Statement for Aug. Kevin asked about line item #7069-Crow Creek State Sec.-Meta/FB. Shaun stated it's the BDA's Jeff is installing on Rd. 207. Kevin stated Jeff listed it differently in his narrative. Shaun stated Jeff has some really nice videos of the last storm that we had and how the BDAs are working. Kevin asked how the tree lines are doing. Shaun stated those were on the state section that they did the four rows for wildlife and then they actually got some of

the money and the District paid to put in drip irrigation and they got the well running. Shaun said it's sad though because it went two years without any irrigation. Kevin asked if the well was solar, and Shaun stated yes.

Ann asked about the Bond coverage for the bank balances. Shaun stated it depends on when they mature. Kathy stated right now we are covered for \$2.8 million, and our bank balances are \$1.9 million. The District just needs to stay below the \$2.8 and we are insured. Tom asked about the expenses for the District. Shaun stated a lot of the current balance is from the spraying on Curt Gowdy that was reimbursed. Shaun stated a lot of this money is for grants. Rex asked if that is money in the bank or just on the books. Kathy stated its cash on hand in the bank. Kevin asked about the Reserve Accounts. Kathy stated Cash Reserve is the account set aside as per the auditor of 6 months of operating expenses.

The Board moved to submit it for audit.

5. OLD BUSINESS – review and/or discussion

No old business.

6. PROGRAM REPORTS – –Public Outreach (Ann)

Ann stated the District went to the Fair in August and we were well represented. Ann stated judging from the Thank You notes it was much appreciated. Ann stated the District will be at the Ag Expo Sept. 17th & 18th. The District will take the furs and skulls and also plant pine tree seeds. Shaun stated Rex and Jeff will be doing the furs and skulls and Tami, Kathy, and himself will be doing the seeds.

Ann asked what's happening with the highlight's brochure. Ann asked if it would go out before the election. Shaun stated yes, before early voting which is Oct. 8th. Rex stated we decided to get it professionally done this year and so we contacted West Edge. Shaun dropped a bunch of information about the last four years of stuff that he usually sends to the Dept. of Ag and the highlights that we do. They actually just got back to us this morning and so we've actually spent all day going over it. Rex stated we are sending it back to them tomorrow morning and they hope to have it finalized by tomorrow afternoon. Tom asked what line item did that come out of. Shaun stated advertising. Tom stated in the past it's always been a challenge that we couldn't use money from the conservation district. Kathy stated these don't say "Vote Yes". This is just a summary of the last four years of what we've done. Shaun stated it will go to every registered voter's household. Kathy stated about 25,000. Kevin asked how large it is. Shaun stated this one is a fold in half 8 ½" x 11".

Ann stated she will recap what went on at the Area II meeting. Ann stated attorney Karen-Budd Fallen spoke and the majority of her speech was about industrial siting. There are certain business projects that could happen in our state and the conservation districts would be one entity that would go over those plans to check and see if it would be a good project. Ann stated our conservation district doesn't seem to be picking up the loop on these industrial siting projects. Kevin stated they have about four right now at DEQ. Shaun stated he doesn't get notified. Kevin stated he will ask how they get notified, if it's Public Notice. Shaun stated he gets about two a day from County Planning

telling him to go this portal. Kevin stated he thought they had to meet certain criteria to be an industrial siting.

Ann stated there are two big projects that are underway in our state. One is called the Sidewinder Project and the other is called the Pronghorn Project. Ann stated if the Pronghorn is developed it is going to be a wind turbine farm up in Converse County and all the electricity is going to go down to the Sidewinder Project in Lusk and they are going to be working on changing water into hydrogen. Ann stated from what she heard they have no clear idea what they are going to do with the hydrogen. Ann stated this is the part that got her. They need so much water and once they use it it's not going to be around anymore. Ann stated they said it could use as much water as two to five pivot sprinklers running 365 days a year. They stated they had three sources where they were going to get the water. One was a defunct coal plant, they were hoping to get their water rights, drill some wells, and hoping to buy peoples water rights, private individuals. Ann stated it seemed a little vague but if it comes to fruition it's going to impact those towns and the state. Ann asked Tami if she had anything to add and Tami stated she thought they mentioned using surface water. Kevin asked what kind or quality of water it would need. Ann stated she thought they said turbid water, a far underground well.

-Wildlife & Range (Kevin, Rex)

Rex stated he is trying to get Curt Gowdy buffer areas sprayed. Rex stated there is a 50' buffer around reservoirs and streams. Rex stated he is getting the sprayers calibrated and will be starting that full force tomorrow and will be working on that probably over the rest of this month and maybe next spring depending on how much manpower they can get.

Ann asked Rex where he went for the Range Management. Rex stated they were up in the north end of the Big Horns and went down into Yellow Tail Reservoir and visited a ranch and they were talking about juniper removal and the amount of water they are returning back to the streams. They talked to some ranchers that are grazing sheep up there and talked about grazing management. They looked at a cheat grass project in Shell Canyon and saw good results from that.

Rex stated they did get to see a drone that sprays weeds. It has a five-gallon tank on it that they can do an acre with it. Rex stated it takes about 10 minutes to do an acre. Rex stated it's about an \$80-\$100-thousand-dollar unit. Ann asked about the terrain it can spray. Rex stated it can spray all terrain. Rex stated they had another drone that was like an airplane that could go up and survey everything and they've got it down to about where it can pick out specific weeds so they can map all the area with that and use the other one to spot spray. Ann asked if that is something we could use here and Rex stated Matt Haas, with Laramie County Weed and Pest, has actually purchased one. Shaun stated they have two.

Kevin stated speaking of weeds, he asked if anyone had seen on Facebook the guy in Texas with the weed gun. It's this gun and you just shoot these pellets at different things that you want to kill, and it kills them within about a week.

- Water (Casey)

Casey stated good job to Jeff. Casey stated thankful we got rain locally.

Kevin asked about the netting Game & Fish did on the pond, and if they only got one of six nets of nongame fish, so did they not get any game and fish. Kevin asked if they put some game & fish in there. Kevin stated he didn't know what to make of that statement. Shaun stated the Game & Fish guy is supposed to be getting back to us to see how they are going to increase the oxygen levels out there.

Kevin asked how the Mariah Project is going. Kevin asked if it had been fenced and Rex stated not yet. Rex stated we will probably do that the end of this month or next month. Kevin asked when did they think they were going to start digging, next year and Rex stated yes.

- Trees (Shaun)

Shaun stated Dale has been fencing like crazy, some living snow fences that are being refenced up on Farthing. Shaun stated he will be done by the end of the month. He has to so he can start doing windbreak designs because we've been telling people that we will start doing them in October and we don't have a Tree Specialist yet. Shaun stated whatever is left will have to be contracted out or see what other people can help.

Shaun stated he has trees ear tagged for next year. Shaun stated the deciduous trees he still needs to work on. Evergreen trees will come from OneCanopy. Shaun stated he needs to contact Josh again. Shaun stated he has been doing a lot of tree calls yesterday and today.

- Administration (Tom, Shaun, & Kathy)

Kathy stated she had mailed out two certified letters to past due customers and those have both been paid. We still have one customer that owes but we have talked to her. She was out of work for medical reasons and she would start back to work in September, so we are hoping we get a payment from her this month. Kathy stated we didn't have this in place prior to talking to this customer but we came up with a document that if the customer cannot initially make their payment, we are going to have them sign a payment agreement and let us know when the payments will be made. This would be one more thing we could use if we end up taking a customer to small claims court. Shaun stated we were afraid if someone came in and made one payment then didn't pay anymore, we would have to begin the whole process again. We didn't have a document for payment.

Kathy stated the auditors were here last week, and they were done in three days. There will be some follow-up calls and emails before it is completed.

Shaun stated he has been doing tree calls, he finished up the Annual Plan, Annual Report, Executive Summary, and he has one more report to do. He completed the Long Range Plan 2025-2029 and it is out for Public Comment for 45 days.

Ann asked what kind of tree concerns he is seeing these days. Are trees drying up or are there diseases coming up. Shaun stated he hasn't seen a lot of diseases for as dry as it's been. Diseases have been really down this year. Shaun has seen quite a bit of tip moth, needle miner, not so much. Shaun has seen a lot of Zimmerman Pine Moth. It is commonly on the leader, so you lose the top

out of the tree. Shaun stated he's also been seeing a lot of Red Turpentine Beetle and a little bit of Mountain Pine Beetle which is kind of interesting that they've always been around.

-NRCS (Tami Jorns)

Tami stated Jesus is with the local office for 120 days acting as the DC. Tami stated he is coming over from Laramie. Tami stated they posted a Soil Con position, and they haven't heard anything back yet as it closed on 9/4/24.

Tami stated they are accepting new applications for EQIP. Tami stated they had one CSP-GCI application come through and she's hoping it will be accepted. Tami stated they are pretty slim on new projects currently. Ann asked what CSP-GCI stood for. Tami stated it is the Conservation Stewardship Program and Grassland Conservation Initiative. Tami stated FSA has a program called PLC. Tami stated for producers who have historically grown wheat usually have half of their acreage eligible for PLC. Tami stated her understanding is that through that program if your wheat yields are less than average on that scale you pick, then you get a check to help with that yield difference. When people plant to grass, they are still eligible for that program for she believes 3 or 5 years, she's not sure which, but they still have these base acres that they are getting paid on if the wheat yield is under but they are not in wheat. Tami said to help phase them out of that, they came up with the CSP-GGI program. People are notified that they are going to be eligible for this program after so many years with their acreage being in grass and it's under their Conservation Stewardship Program but it's only for those base acres. Tami stated they don't have a ton of people that want to do it because they have grazing restrictions.

Tami stated field work has been cranking doing tons of check outs and inventories on new projects.

Tami stated they did get two CRP contracts for grassland that did get processed, actually finished today so she's hoping they get accepted.

For outreach, Tami didn't have it on her report, but she is going to be helping with the Ag Expo Sept. 17th & 18th. Tami stated Jesus will be going to a job fair those same days in Laramie.

Tami stated she went to a soil health training this last month and they had some real cool toys. They had a rainfall simulator that she needs to get trained on before they can borrow it to take to things like the Ag Expo. Tami stated they also have a super cool wind erosion simulator that will mimic wind, and you can check the wind speed and see how much soil is blowing off of the area.

Tami stated she has a drought map in her report and Laramie County is now in D0 (Abnormally dry) except for a small portion in the NE corner which is in D1 (moderate drought).

Shaun stated he would love to host an event with the rainfall simulator and have the public see it. Maybe on tree distribution day.

-FSA-

Farm Plan(s): discussion and/or approval

CRP mid contract management, grazing X 2
CRP, mid contract management, discing x 1

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

Consent:

Discussion Items:

7. Tree Specialist vacancy – update.

Shaun stated the job has been posted through the government website that Kevin suggested, it's been on Monster, LinkedIn, social media, and WACD shared. Shaun stated he has eight that have applied. Shaun stated most do not have the background for the position. We had one that came in today that has a 20 some year background in landscaping, he understands trees, tree diagnosis, but Shaun doesn't know if he knows insects and disease. One that applied is more range management background. Shaun stated he one application from Cheyenne City Urban Forestry. He's an arborist. He has a background and understands some insect and diseases.

Shaun wonders if we let it go for another month and see if we get any more, is it time to interview. Shaun stated he had asked Dale to stop fencing so in October he can start doing designs. Shaun stated he has no problem helping him one day a week doing a few designs. There are about 80 some requests on the list. There will get more as the wind starts up, but Shaun stated we need to get them done by Jan. 1st.

Shaun stated it's not a problem if we don't hire. Tree calls are going to go down.

Shaun asked if the Board wanted to take copies of the applications. Shaun stated he has reached out to the individuals and told them we have left it open. Shaun stated he doesn't believe these applicants are qualified. Kevin asked if we wanted an entomologist or a warm body. Kevin asked if we needed to change something in the job description. Shaun stated the job description is detailed. It says you need to have a background in insect and disease. Ann stated once you diagnose the problem you have to be able to tell them what to do to stop the problem.

Shaun stated he had talked to Dale and maybe we only run one tree crew this year so the new person can learn the ins and outs and maybe we limit plantings. Kevin asked if there would be any potential to hire a young person that's good in AutoCAD temporary just to work on tree designs until Jan. 1st. Shaun stated getting 80 designs done by January is not the problem.

Kevin said to run the opening until we get someone that meets the District's needs. Shaun stated he would leave it open and maybe talk to some of them. Ann stated it would be interesting to meet the ones that are somewhat qualified. Ann stated you have to take a chance on training them if it's the right person.

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

Ann stated she would be attending. Shaun told them if they are thinking of going, they need to register and get their hotel reserved.

9. Awards Banquet – moving awards banquet closer to fiscal year end?

Shaun stated we had a conversation at one time about moving the date. It's not a Christmas party so why can't we have the awards banquet after the fiscal year, maybe in July or August.

Kevin stated he wouldn't have one this December and just have one next year. Rex stated people are a lot busier in the summer. Shaun stated it was just an idea of where we could go, thanking the landowners for their projects. Rex stated we could do it in Jan. or Feb. Ann stated she thought we should change.

OTHER BUSINESS –

Shaun stated he has Gator tickets for WACD convention.

10. Next Board of Supervisors meeting Oct. 8, 2024 @ 5:30 pm.

11. ADJOURNMENT-Ann

Ann adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

Ann Sanchez, Chair

Casey Epler, Secretary

Transcribed by Kathy Cooney, Financial Coordinator