

Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Board Meeting Minutes

February 22, 2005

Radisson City Center Hotel, St. Paul, MN

Attending: President Carol Berg, Vice President Loyal Fisher, Area I Director Ken Pedersen, Area II Director Mary Ann Scharf, Area III Director Ted Lovdahl, Area IV Director Mary Wetter, Area V Director Clark Lingbeek, Area VI Director and MASWCD Secretary/Treasurer Greg Roiger, Area VII Director Ralph Breuer; Area VIII Director Tom Schulz; MASWCD staff LeAnn Buck and Sheila Vanney; Incoming Area III Director Bill Saumer; Ann English, NRCS; Ron Harnack, BWSR; Marilyn Bernhardson, MASWCD Legislative Committee Chair and Redwood SWCD Manager; Doug Ralston, Hubbard SWCD Supervisor.

1. **Call to Order** – President Berg called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. and led the board in the pledge of allegiance.
2. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes** – Motion by Scharf, seconded by Breuer, to approve the agenda with additions. Motion carried. Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Wetter, to approve the January 26 meeting minutes. Motion carried.
3. **President's Report – Carol Berg**
 - a. Berg reported on the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) annual convention which was held February 5-9 in Atlanta, Georgia.
 - b. MASWCD 2004 resolutions that pertained to federal policy were addressed during the NACD annual convention. The resolution to reinstate NRCS as the technical agency for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) (submitted by Brown SWCD) failed at the NACD annual meeting. The resolution relating to CRP contract acreage measurements and changes (submitted by Pipestone SWCD) was approved. And the resolution relating to revisions in cost-rates for SWCD participation as Technical Service Providers (submitted by Pine SWCD) was approved. Resolutions that were approved at the NACD annual meeting become NACD policy and their staff and members will support these changes with the appropriate agencies.
 - c. Berg called on the newly elected MASWCD Area VIII Director, Tom Schulz, for an update on the status of the newly developed eighth Area. Development of the eighth MASWCD Area was approved by the membership at the 2004 December annual meeting. Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Breuer, to officially recognize Schulz as the Area VIII Director, having full voting privileges starting today. Motion carried. The formation of the eighth Area had an effect on the Area Director position in Area III. Area III had a reorganization meeting at which a new Director was elected – Bill Saumer from the Pine SWCD. He will have voting privileges at the next meeting. This will be Lovdahl's last meeting and he will have voting privileges today.
 - d. Berg appointed Lingbeek as the MASWCD representative to the NRCS State Technical Committee.
 - e. Berg appointed Wetter as MASWCD liaison to Association of Minnesota Counties. Wetter will coordinate communications and action with Buck.
 - f. Berg noted a request from the Roseau SWCD to consider the Shooting Star Casino in Mahanomen, Minnesota as a site for the 2006 convention. Berg said that the Association will gather information for this location the same as all other locations that submit proposals. The Board of Directors will make the final decision later this spring.
 - g. Berg called on Breuer for comments on the 2005 convention. Breuer expressed interest in the MASWCD board holding a reception for attendees the Sunday night prior to the convention.

Motion by Roiger, seconded by Lovdahl, to approve the idea and for the planning committee to look into this and whether it can be done for a reasonable price. Motion carried.

- h. Motion by Scharf, seconded by Roiger, to allow Fisher to distribute his notes from the NACD annual meeting to the members at tonight's Legislative Briefing. Motion carried.

4. Finance Committee – Greg Roiger

- a. Roiger presented the monthly financial report and Berg accepted it subject to annual review.
- b. Roiger reviewed with the board members the process for an SWCD to request a hardship waiver from dues payment: it has to be formally requested by the SWCD; then a letter goes out from the President asking for the SWCD's financials, annual work plan, fund balance information and the amount they feel they should pay; this information goes to the Finance Committee for review and they make a recommendation to the Board of Directors for action.
- c. Roiger reported on the fund raiser he and Breuer have been working on. They would like to raffle off a 6 wheel drive Polaris Ranger with trailer, along with four \$500 cash prizes, with tickets to be sold throughout the year and the raffle to take place at the annual convention. Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Pedersen, to go ahead with the raffle and authorize the purchase of these prizes with additional miscellaneous costs to be covered. Motion carried.
- d. Roiger noted the approved MASWCD budget includes payments of NACD dues. Motion by Roiger, seconded by Breuer to pay NACD dues. Motion carried.

5. Area Director Reports

Area 1 – meeting will be held March 16 at the University of MN Crookston

Area 2 – meeting will be held March 10 in Alexandria

Area 3 – had a reorganization meeting February 12. The new director will be Bill Saumer. They will likely have a meeting the first Friday of June and a fall meeting some time in September.

Area 4 – will hold a meeting March 31. Wetter has been visiting all the districts in the Area, attending their board meetings, finding out their resource needs and getting their feedback on the Association. She posed the question to the board as to whether a non-member can attend MASWCD functions. Consensus of the board was that the only opportunity for non-members to participate in an MASWCD function is the annual convention and that then, as bylaws state, non-members do not have voting privileges at the annual meeting. Buck will confirm this in writing and present for board ratification at the next meeting.

Area 5 – meeting will be held March 17 and will include legislators

Area 6 – meeting will be held March 30 and will include legislators

Area 7 – convention planning will kick off at a March 29 planning committee meeting. The next Area meeting will be held some time in April.

Area 8 – had their organizational meeting on February 17. They approved bylaws and elected officers. They tentatively set the next meeting for the third week in June, with a fall meeting the third week in November.

The board recessed the meeting at noon and reconvened at 12:45 p.m.

6. Executive Director's Report – LeAnn Buck

- a. Buck showcased some districts in the news media and gave an overview of the Clean Water Legacy bill. The Association has served as a G-16 member for over a year.
- b. Buck reported on a bill introduced by Ramsey County legislator Rep. Mahoney, that would require SWCD board members to be elected by county commissioner boundaries. The bill now has a companion in the Senate. A draft board resolution was presented for review.

Motion by Roiger, seconded by Schulz to approve the board resolution which opposes this legislation and supports local decision making about SWCD nomination districts. Motion carried.

- c. MASWCD is coordinating Conservation Security Program workshops for SWCDs and NRCS. This is being done in conjunction with a contribution agreement MASWCD is receiving from NRCS.
- d. Buck reviewed the notes from the Board Retreat and asked for feedback. Scharf noted she was hoping for the facilitator to draw more conclusions and present an analysis of the board's retreat discussions. Buck will communicate this to the facilitator.
- e. Vanney reported on the upcoming SWCD Supervisor Orientation Conference. Board members were asked to encourage newly elected supervisors to attend this event. The conference is also a good opportunity for veteran SWCD supervisors to get a refresher on board responsibilities and leadership.
- f. Lovdahl noted that he and Schulz would like to see the issue of a MOU on forestry be deferred to the MN SWCD Forestry Association and have them report on the status at future board meetings.

7. NRCS Report – Ann English

English reported on a meeting NRCS State Conservationist Bill Hunt attended with State Representative Aaron Peterson and others to discuss the issue of leveraging the Farm Bill programs in conjunction with the Clean Water Legacy bill. She stated that this Friday the second sign-up for EQIP will close. At the national level, it is looking like there is a fix to the problem where monies were being taken from EQIP and other programs to pay for the technical assistance for CRP. Now each program has to pay for itself. English also reported that the President's proposed budget is fairly good for conservation. Discussions on the 2007 Farm Bill will likely get rolling later this year.

8. BWSR Report – Ron Harnack

- a. Harnack reported on the status of BWSR Board Appointments. There are vacancies for citizen member, county commissioner and SWCD representative. MASWCD submitted a letter of recommendation for Steve Sunderland for the SWCD position. Harnack noted that MASWCD may want to consider submitting additional names, as statute indicates the ability to submit three names and the Governor is looking for a larger pool of applicants.
- b. The BWSR St. Paul office has moved from Water Street to the second floor of the MPCA building on Lafayette Road. All BWSR phone numbers and e-mails will remain the same. Harnack noted that he is confident MPCA Commissioner Corrigan sees the success and merit in the BWSR business model and that being located in the same building doesn't mean there will be any change in the way BWSR does business.
- c. BWSR Executive Assistant Mary Jo Anderson is out on medical leave and is having back surgery. Harnack encouraged those who know Mary Jo to send her well wishes.
- d. Harnack reported on the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget. All the agencies are being faced with cuts, some more than others. The Governor's proposal reduces BWSR's operating budget by \$300,000. Harnack noted that cut would be addressed through savings incurred from moving their office, through job sharing, and through reducing clerical and administrative support in both the field and state offices. Harnack stated the more problematic funding issue is the proposed requirement for BWSR to once again absorb inflationary costs within their budget. This would likely lead to decreases in program staff, such as wetland and cost-share support.

- e. One of the proposals BWSR worked to include in the Governor's budget is to allow districts, for a period of two years, to use cost-share monies for technical assistance if they feel it will help get more conservation on the land. Should this take effect, BWSR Board Conservationists may be asked to help districts identify whether or not to go that route.
- f. Harnack reported on the issue of wetlands and some of the things being said in the media recently. He commented on the effectiveness of the State's Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) and that at its inception in 1991, because of the exemptions built into it, it was never a legitimate goal for WCA alone to achieve no net loss of wetlands. He noted that BWSR will be coming out with a biennial report on wetlands next month, which will show that the combination of WCA and voluntary incentive based programs, has achieved a net gain in wetlands in Minnesota.
- g. Harnack commented on the policy issues currently arising in the legislature, including a bill to clarify the length of buffers adjacent to drainage ditches, and a bill to change election requirements for SWCDs. He noted that historically, SWCDs were looked at as having geographical, resource-driven representation, as opposed to populous representation.

9. MASWCD Resolution #7, Re-Determination of Ditch Buffer Area – Greg Roiger

Roiger presented the board with an outline of the background on this resolution, which was submitted by Brown SWCD and approved at the December 2004 annual convention. Board discussion followed. There is a bill that was recently introduced by Rep. Hansen that addresses this, but it may need amendment to satisfy the intent of the resolution. Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Breuer, to support Roiger in moving this resolution forward with the legislature with the caveat that MASWCD supports a 16.5 foot buffer from the top of the spoil. Motion carried.

In response to earlier discussions, the board addressed the issue of MASWCD recommendations on BWSR Board Appointments. Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Schulz, to add Clark Lingbeek and Vic Ormsby to the list of MASWCD recommendations for SWCD representative on the BWSR Board. These two names will be added to the previous recommendation for Steve Sunderland, for a total of three names. Motion carried.

10. MASWCD Legislative Platform – Marilyn Bernhardson

Bernhardson presented an overview of the MASWCD legislative platform and fielded questions and discussion from board members. She commented that members should thank legislators for their support of SWCDs during their meetings at the Capitol tomorrow.

11. Schedule Next Board Meeting & Adjourn

The next MASWCD Board of Directors meeting will be held 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Best Western Kelly Inn in St. Cloud, just prior to the SWCD Supervisor Orientation Conference. Tentative dates for future meetings include:

- April 26 (which will include an exercise to prioritize resolutions with the Co-Directors)
- June 28
- August 23
- September 27

Motion by Lovdahl, seconded by Breuer, to adjourn the meeting at 3:10 p.m. Motion carried, meeting adjourned.