

Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2026
MASWCD Office St. Paul MN

Present: President Chuck Rau, Vice President and Southeast Area 7 Director Randy Smith, Secretary/Treasurer and Northeast Area 3 Director Jake Janski, Northwest Area 1 Director Randy Schellack, West Central Area 2 Director Tom Gregory, Metro Area 4 Director John Rheinberger, Southwest Area 5 Director Mona Henkels, South Central Area 6 Director Bob Nielsen, North Central Area 8 Director Ken LaPorte, MASWCD Executive Director LeAnn Buck, MASWCD Assistant Director Sheila Vanney, MASWCD Conference and Events Manager Michele Asmussen, Minnesota Association of Conservation District Employees (MACDE) board member Emme Scheffler (Rice SWCD).

Call to Order. President Rau called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

Approval of Board Meeting Agenda. Motion by Smith and seconded to approve the board agenda as amended. Motion carried.

Approval of Minutes. Motion by Rheinberger and seconded to approve the board meeting minutes from November 13, 2025. Motion carried. Motion by Smith and seconded to approve December 3, 2025, board organizational meeting minutes. Motion carried.

President's Report. President Rau reported to the board on the following items.

- a. MASWCD Area V Director Transition: MASWCD Area V Director Clark Lingbeek (Cottonwood SWCD Supervisor) retired as the Area V Director in December 2025. Mona Henkels, Area V Co-Director (Murray SWCD Supervisor) will serve as the Area V Director as outlined in their area bylaws.
- b. BWSR Board Appointment Recommendation: Wadena SWCD Supervisor Tom Schulz's term on the BWSR Board is expiring in 2026. Schulz is not seeking another term. Governor Walz will be making an appointment to fill the vacancy. In accordance with Minnesota state statute, the MASWCD may submit recommendations to the Governor. Motion by Schellack and seconded to provide a letter of recommendation in support of Koochiching SWCD Supervisor Eldon Voigt, and South St. Louis SWCD Supervisors Paul Fish, for the Governor's consideration to fill the SWCD position to the BWSR Board. Motion carried. Schulz will continue in the position until the appointment is finalized.
- c. Board 2026 Liaison to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Technical Advisory Committee: This NRCS committee meets approximately two times each year to discuss programs and initiatives relevant to federal conservation efforts. Motion by Rheinberger and seconded for President Rau to serve as the 2026 board liaison and LaPorte as the alternate to the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee meetings. Motion carried.
- d. Board 2026 Liaison to Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Board Meetings: The BWSR board meets several times a year to share information and act on programs and grants policies that impact SWCDs. Motion by Rheinberger and seconded for President Rau to serve as the board 2026 liaison to the BWSR Board meetings. Motion carried.

- e. Board 2026 Liaison to MN SWCD Forestry Association: This group is an Association of SWCDs that meets approximately six times a year with attention to woodlands and forest management. Motion by Rheinberger and seconded for Janski to serve as the board 2026 liaison to the Minnesota SWCD Forestry Association. Motion carried.

Tom Gregory, MASWCD Area 2 Director, entered the meeting at 9:53 a.m.

Finance Committee Report.

Janski provided the finance report. Motion by Janski and seconded to accept the report subject to annual review. Motion carried. NACD National Dues Quota: Motion by Rheinberger and seconded for payment of National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) quota at \$1,776. Motion carried. Motion by Schellack and seconded to table NACD North Central Region quota payment. Motion carried. The NACD North Central region board will be submitting a dues invoice to the state association at a later date.

MASWCD Legislative Committee Report.

Vanney provided an overview of the 2026 legislative session and shared the recommendations of the MASWCD Legislative for the 2026 Legislative Platform. The committee met on December 17, 2025, to review the 2025 legislative outcomes, understand the dynamics of the 2026 session, and prepare a draft 2026 legislative platform for the board's consideration and action. Board discussion followed. Motion by LaPorte and seconded to adopt the 2026 MASWCD legislative platform as recommended by the Legislative Committee which includes the following priorities: funding for SWCD Aid; bonding dollars for the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program including attention to asset preservation of wetland easements; and monitoring possible supplemental Clean Water Fund appropriations. Motion carried.

Executive Director's Report.

Buck reported to the board on the following items.

- a. **2025 Annual Business Meeting Resolution Voting Results Confirmation.** Board members reviewed the member action that took place on resolutions at the December convention. Resolutions numbered 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 passed. 2025 Resolutions numbered 2 and 12 failed. Motion by Janski and seconded to ratify the results. Motion carried.
- b. **Local Government Water Roundtable.** Roundtable members include leadership from the MASWCD, Association of Minnesota Counties, and the Minnesota Association of Watersheds. Roundtable staff members met to discuss the status of the Clean Water Fund, Watershed Based Implementation Funding, and the Clean Water Council's development of the FY 2028-29 budget considerations. The Roundtable is submitting a joint letter of support to the Council related to possible supplemental appropriations for the FY26-27 biennium pending the State's February economic forecast. This supports MASWCD Resolution E-1, 2022.
- c. **Draft 401 Water Quality Certification associated with renewal of the Nationwide General Permits for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).** MASWCD submitted written comments to MPCA related to proposed reissuance of nationwide permits. This supports the policy outlined in MASWCD Resolution #7-24.
- d. **Authorization of Video Production related to SWCD Supervisor Roles & Responsibilities.** Motion by Rheinberger and seconded to authorize up \$10,000 for MASWCD to contract with a video production firm to produce a video explaining elected SWCD Supervisor roles and

responsibilities. Motion carried. This supports the policy directive outlined in MASWCD Resolution #18-23.

- e. **MASWCD 2025 Work Plan Accomplishments and 2026 Focus Area Development.** Buck reviewed the Association FY25 for work plan accomplishments. Highlights included: spearheading legislation to address SWCD annual Aid appropriations, advancing the funding trajectory to \$88 million for watershed-based implementation and on-the-ground activities as outlined in locally adopted comprehensive watershed management plans; launching a new MASWCD District Manager Professional Development cohort training, and providing advocacy and support for SWCD and NRCS conservation programs including leveraging local, state and federal resources. Discussion also included future board considerations for outlining priorities.

National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) Report

Shellack and Vanney reported on the following items:

- a. Schellack, MASWCD Board Alternate Delegate to NACD Board of Directors and Vanney represented MASWCD during the NACD North Central Regional meeting on January 13 & 14, in Indianapolis. As part of the event, Vanney served on a panel to highlight Minnesota's activities related to SWCD and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) partnerships. NACD and the USFWS have an MOU that is working to expand the relationship between the USFWS, NACD and conservation districts to deliver conservation to the nation's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners.
- b. MASWCD submitted Resolution #10-25 requesting NACD's continued support for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service staffing at the field office level.
- c. Motion by Rheinberger and seconded to approve up to three MASWCD attendees to participate in NACD's Legislative Fly-in in Washington DC. Motion carried.

MASWCD 2025 Annual Meeting Recap

Asmussen reported that the attendance for the 2025 MASWCD annual meeting included 682 attendees. A primary focus for the annual meeting includes member policy development. The Association also supported existing Association priorities including conducting a plenary panel discussion with the Clean Water Council members and their role with preparing Clean Water Fund appropriation recommendations. The association provided member training opportunities through the District Chair and Manger leadership workshop, the keynote speaker, and breakout sessions. Additional highlights included networking opportunities with thirty-eight exhibitors, increased level of sponsors, and Association award recognition programs to elevate the mission of SWCDs and their work with local landowners across the State of Minnesota. Asmussen conducted a post attendee survey and shared the results with the board. The board also discussed their key takeaways including member commitment, emphasis on leadership trainings, and the Association's partnership with state and federal agency leadership.

Motion by Rheinberger and seconded to approve the 2026 Board Meeting Schedule.

The meeting adjourned at 12:07 pm.