




LOWER PLATTE SOUTH natural resources district

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Memorandum

Date: February 12, 2021
To: Board of Directors
From: David Potter, Assistant General Manager 
RE: Land Resources Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

The Land Resources Subcommittee met virtually at 5:30 pm on Wednesday, February 10, 2021 via Zoom to take action on two agenda items and discuss a few others. Subcommittee members present included Gary Hellerich, Gary Aldridge, Bruce Johnson, Dave Landis, Anthony Schutz, Mark Spangler and Ken Vogel. Members absent included Ron Nolte. Others present included Deborah Eagan, Paul Zillig, Cindy Spilinek, John Albert, Evan Sisel, Cory Schmidt, Tracy Zayac, Donna Reid, Jeff Steffen with Healthy Soils Task Force, and David Potter. Hellerich called the meeting to order and gave a brief welcome. Potter reviewed the agenda.

a. The first action item on the agenda was to consider the applications for farm pond cost-share. Potter stated that the District received nine farm pond applications for 2021. There is one in Lancaster County, seven in Cass County, and one in Butler County. Our technicians (Spilinek, Albert and Sisel) have reviewed the applications for eligibility requirements. Albert and Spilinek presented maps and information on each application to the subcommittee. Compiled information pertaining to each of them was also sent to the subcommittee members. Of the nine applications, only three meet the criteria of the farm pond cost-share program and NRCS specifications for design and permitting. Information on the nine applications is attached (Exhibit A). Questions were asked by the members regarding the program criteria and eligibility, pond design, alternate practices for those applications not recommended, and the many benefits of farm ponds.

It was moved by Landis, seconded by Vogel, and unanimously approved by the Subcommittee to recommend the Board of Directors approve the farm pond applications for Kevin Schneider at a cost-share not to exceed \$22,000; Colleen and Dennis Lux at cost-share not to exceed \$16,000; and for Ryan Stohlmann at a cost-share not to exceed \$42,000.

b. The second action item was consideration of the Twin Lakes Watershed Application to Section 319 Cost-Share Assistance Program and the proposed Project Implementation Plan. Potter and Zayac informed the subcommittee that the District-wide Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) approved in 2019 identified the Twin Lakes Watershed as one of the priority areas. The WQMP is on the District's website. Staff noted that the

District's FY21 Long Range Implementation Plan has budgeted for 319 funding application, formation of a watershed work group to identify watershed needs, and to implement BMPs in the watershed utilizing 319 funding for additional incentives. Zayac then walked through components of the Project Implementation Plan and timeline for the project. The subcommittee was provided the attached budget and BMP incentive table (Exhibit B). Upon acceptance to EPA's Section 319 program, the subcommittee and Board will then consider the cost-share agreement with NeDEE for 319 funding. The subcommittee discussed the benefits of the identified BMPs in the watershed, the incentive program, and targeted watershed designation.

It was moved by Vogel, seconded by Landis, and unanimously approved by the Subcommittee to recommend the Board of Directors give tentative approval to the Twin Lakes Watershed, Section 319, cost-share assistance program, dependent upon the approval of a Section 319 Agreement with the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy.

c. The first discussion item on the agenda was on the Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force and Report. Potter stated that LB 243 created the Healthy Soils Task Force to develop a Nebraska Healthy Soils Initiative and a comprehensive action plan to carry out the Initiative. The Nebraska Healthy Soils Task Force Report and Action Plan was prepared and submitted to the Governor and Legislature on December 31, 2020. LPSNRD provided a letter of support along with other NRD's that was submitted with the Report. Background information and the Report is at: <https://nda.nebraska.gov/healthysoils/index.html> A legislative resolution (LR 5) was introduced this session that accepts the report, findings and recommendations of the Healthy Soils Task Force submitted. It further resolves the Legislature supports and encourages a voluntary grassroots effort to accelerate means to protect and enhance Nebraska's soil and receive the benefits described in the report from the Task Force. LR 5 was passed by the Agriculture Committee on Tuesday, February 9th. Jeff Steffen who served on the Healthy Soils Task Force and is on the LCNRD Board, gave a power point presentation on the Report and requested LPSNRD review the report and consider submitting a letter of support identifying how we can participate.

Potter reminded the subcommittee that the District offers many conservation cost-share programs that relate to soil health. Our land treatment practices and cover crop programs are widely used by producers in the District and directly benefit soil health. The District continues to work closely and successfully with our NRCS county offices in preparing and administering these programs. Director B. Johnson shared his thoughts on soil health and use of cover crops in the District, specifically how cover crops may play in to Lincoln's Salt Creek Resiliency Study and Climate Action Plan.

d. The next discussion item was review of Natural Resources Benefits of Practices and Programs Table for Land Resources Subcommittee. The subcommittee was provided the attached table (Exhibit C) and Potter explained that at one of the Finance and Planning Subcommittee meetings last year, there was discussion on the need to improve our recognition, documenting, and reporting of all that we do and clearly attribute it to our efforts in the adaption to and mitigation of changes in climate. There was also interest to include other natural benefits as well. From that discussion, staff developed a summary table of natural benefits of the NRD's programs and conservation practices. Staff asked the subcommittee to review the table and provide any comments on natural benefits of programs and conservation practices as they pertain to the Land Resources Subcommittee. The goal is to have the final summary table ready as the subcommittees begin the budget process and to be included in the LPSNRD LRIP and other planning documents.

e. The next agenda item was to discuss the status of fall cost-share applications and inform the subcommittee of the construction deadline extension to April 30th. Potter stated that producers and contractors had taken advantage of the weather and early harvest this last fall to get conservation on the ground. A number of land treatment projects had been completed and others are well-underway, while a few had not yet been started. Recent weather changes have halted all staking and construction. Reid presented the number of total fall cost-share applications, those completed and paid, those completed and not yet paid, those cancelled, those started but not finished, and those not yet started. The District had established a construction deadline of February 1st for the fall cost-share applications to give us an opportunity to evaluate the number cost-share projects during the construction period with the remaining budgeted funds. With some projects not completed or started and money in the budget, staff has extended that deadline to April 30, 2021. The District's Summer Conservation Program construction period begins May 1st so this would complete those fall applications before the start of that program. Even if all the work is done with the outstanding applications, the District will still be within budget. This has been extended in past years when the current budget allows in order to get more conservation practices completed. We extended the construction deadline last year to April 30th and it worked well. Since the Board has approved a new docket and increased the maximum cost-share amounts in December, no new 2020 fall applications will be taken. Potter also stated that the technicians have been informed of the extension and are to notify the applicants having active fall cost-share applications.

f. The last discussion item was on the NRCS Local Working Group Meeting. Cory Schmidt, District Conservationist provided information on the Local NRCS Working Group. He stated that the group is to provide advice on the priorities for many U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs and will meet virtually via Zoom on Thursday, February 25, 2021, at 10:00 AM. There is a Local Working Group in each NRD and membership on those groups includes Federal, State, County, Tribal or local government representatives. The Local Working Group recommends to the NRCS State Conservationist how conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) would be used most effectively in their area. Recommendations from the group can include special target areas, cost share rates on conservation programs, which conservation practices should have cost assistance, or how many dollars could be needed. Potter added that the meeting will again be hosted by LPSNRD and is open to the public. Subcommittee members were invited to attend and can contact the LPSNRD office for the Zoom link. A public notice will be in the Journal Star and a news release has been sent to other media sources.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:13 pm.

Encl. 3