OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan

Minutes
Regular Meeting, USDA Service Center, Grand Haven MI
7pm, Tuesday April 6th, 2021

ATTENDANCE:
Megan Boos, Executive Director
Lexie Kasper, Administrative Specialist
David Pyle, Chairman
Tim VanDyke, Vice Chair
Douglas Grotenrath, Treasurer
Callie Melton, Director
Lester Langeland, Director
Jack Knorek, MDARD Coordinator
1636 Henderson Dr. Kalamazoo, MI 49006
Heather Varboncoeur, NRCS District Conservationist
16731 Ferris St. Grand Haven, MI 49417

CALL TO ORDER Time: 7:11 PM

- **Invocation:** Tim VanDyke

Oath of Office – Completed and notarized by Sarah Janson

BOARD SEAT ASSIGNMENTS

- **Chairman nominees:**
  - Dave Pyle
  - Vote: Unanimous aye

- **Vice chairman nominees:**
  - Tim VanDyke
  - Vote: Unanimous aye

- **Treasurer nominees:**
  - Doug Grotenrath
  - Vote: Unanimous aye

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **Regular Board Meeting:** March 2nd, 2021
- **Motion:** Tim VanDyke **Second/Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Vote:** Passes

PUBLIC COMMENT

- No public comment

STAFF AND PARTNERING AGENCY REPORTS

Megan Boos, Executive Director- Report given verbally

- Work has been heavily HR focused, as well as tree sale accounting entry and quarterly grant reporting.
- Working to assess where the CISMA is currently to make onboarding a new coordinator more efficient.
- Langeland: Has the warm weather affected the fieldwork we're doing? Boos: We are still finishing surveys and not into treatment season yet, so the weather won't be affecting our current work timeline. Pyle: Are those who do the surveys the same people that do the treatments? Boos: Yes, they all work on surveys and then they all enter into the treatment phase.

Lexie Kasper, Administrative Specialist – Report attached
Heather Varboncoeur, NRCS District Conservationist –Report given

- Small program update: Got first round of pre-approval applications from EQIP, totaling over $300,000. Have 2 ag land easements pending currently.
- Upcoming trainings: Required by USDA policy to give annual civil rights training, this training needs to be done soon. Heather will work with Megan to get training and review on agenda for June. This training will tell the board the specific protocol if there is a civil rights complaint. Next month there will be a longer training for assessing ranking needs for applications, similar to ranking priorities with the Conservation Needs Assessment. This is a great way to get West Michigan specific questions into the application.

Ben Jordan, Conservation Technician- Report attached
Frank Schroyer, Watershed Technician- Report attached
Ben Savoie, Forester-Report attached

OLD BUSINESS

- **Conservation Needs Assessment:** *We will be discussing what this is and how we use it at an organization. In your packet you will find a copy of our survey and the 2016 Assessment.* (Information Review)
    - This is an opportunity for the district to get an understanding for the needs of the community in respect to natural resources. Common community concerns are enhancing deer habitat or reducing erosion or improving backyard bird habitat. The district then gets the opportunity to tailor long term goals to what would benefit the community.
    - Melton: So we completed the needs assessment? Boos: No, the survey is still in the public so we can reach as many people as possible. We will close it early summer, and then when the results are compiled, we will create a five year strategic plan. Langeland: Is it wrong to have priorities in each persons interest? Melton: We would have different priorities depending on interests. Grotenrath: We should be geared towards the MACD focuses. Melton: We should figure our where we want to build capacity in the district and make goals pertaining to that. Megan's desire as we lay out long term goals: if I get hit by a car, the person who comes into my seat can understand right away what the district is working towards. This is not a day-to-day plan, but a large overview. Knorek: reads our mission statement to remind everyone that our goal is overarching natural resource work. When the board created this statement they kept it broad to keep doors open to address needs. Melton: I think a major issue is improving services to farmers, so

maybe a conversation would be looking for what we can do to incorporate services to farmers. Langeland: I helped plant pine trees and dune grass back for the district in high school, do we have a program to plant open spaces into production pine? Boos: Back in those days the district got money from the Civilian Conservation Corps to do that work and they do not fund that currently. We could potentially make that a focus, but we would need to make that decision to go after funding to make that a priority. Melton: Engineering and restoration work is expensive, if we moved into services like that it could save taxpayers a lot of money. Grant priorities change so we should move into fee for service work to make us more stable. Grotenrath: We used to have a full-time forester and gypsy moth person here but those are both gone. It'd be nice to build those basic services back up again. Langeland: It'd be great if we could work with a farmer on 40 acres and document the improvements over a couple of seasons to show the benefits of these practices. Boos: Yes, absolutely. With cultivating resilience, we do demo plots so it's not quite as long term but people do really like it. Langeland: Do you see any misuse of funds like for manure, do we check on cost share funds? Varboncoeur: Yes, everyone who gets funding for an engineering practice signs a contract for maintenance and we do status checks on those (or try to).

- **Tree Sale Update:** *You will find an order form and catalog in your packet for you to distribute as needed.* (Information Review)
    - We are almost out of trees. The only things we have left are sugar maple, bur oak, and lilac. This year we've brought in $11000 already for the district. Tree wrapping is next week, and we could use more hands. On Tuesday and Wednesday next week, free lunch.
    - Langeland: Right after the 2nd war the veterans could get multiflora rose plants as a fence line. How do we know what is offered today is not going to be invasive? Boos: we consult with our forester to ensure trees are safe.
- **COVID policy:** *Review current policy and discuss needed changes* (Information Review)
    - No new updates.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Financial:**
    - **Financial Statements: March bank reconciliations and bill payment:** *See financial packet for our profit & loss, balance sheet, and account reconciliations.* (Vote)
    - Discussion: Taking on the MISGP grant that we were just going to use to funnel money to other districts brought us $12,000 in indirects, which is a big positive. We are on track with fundraisers. VanDyke: Concerning the fee for service work, Drew said we're the cheapest in the state? Boos: We are for industrial work, there may be a way we can bump the pricing a little bit. We may grow it more this year. Close the door fund continues to go up which is also a positive. VanDyke: What did we learn or do differently from last year that makes this year look better? Boos: Nothing. Our reports are on a fiscal year, but grants don't run on a fiscal year, which can make the money look strange. Langeland: is the groundwater funding to do with the aquifers that are drying

up? Boos: Yes, that is from the county to help educate on the aquifer issues we are facing and assist the county in their groundwater work.

- **Motion:** Doug Grotenrath **Second/Support:** Lester Langeland **Vote:** Passes

- **Working Groups:** *We will discuss the formation of working groups to increase the flow of information and create connectedness as an organization. You will find the working group proposal in your board packet.*
  - Discussion: In recent meetings the board has expressed desire to have more information. This proposal is to address that desire and put structure to how to provide the board education on the large amount of work the district does. The board intends to review the proposal and vote on each piece.
    - HR Committee
    - Discussion: This is a committee that already exists, and that Dave Pyle is on. Megan greatly appreciates what Dave brings to the table for HR support. There are no proposed changes to the structure of this committee.
      - Dave Pyle is nominated for the committee
      - **Motion:** Tim VanDyke **Second/Support:** Callie Melton **Vote:** Passes
    - Finance Committee
    - Discussion: Melton: Is finance meant to be treasury or do they deal with strategic planning for fundraising and grants? Boos/Grotenrath: They generally approve funds and move funding, so it is treasury based. Langeland: A couple years ago a conservation district on the east side of the state was stolen from by an employee and Allegan owed us money as well, how do we ensure we're not being stolen from? Boos: All of our funding goes into our savings account, and I doesn't have access to it. I presents all needed funds to the treasurer and then the money is transferred by Doug to be paid out. The district has multiple checks and balances to ensure that funding is properly handled. Melton: We should train a number two who knows those checks and balances. Boos: We can write the policies out so that everyone knows them. There are no proposed changes to the structure of the existing committee.
      - Doug Grotenrath is nominated for the committee
      - **Motion:** Callie Melton **Second/Support:** Tim VanDyke **Vote:** Passes
    - Water Quality/Quantity and Soil Health Committee
    - Discussion: Van Dyke: So what information this person would bring to the full board they would bring to the single person on the committee instead? How will the board learn? Melton: I would take the 3rd and 4th proposed committee groups and turn it into one committee focused on programs. We could do it every meeting and then the board would be educated more frequently. Boos: We could do that. We could do a working group meeting with the program committee quarterly or monthly. VanDyke: When I started coming to board meetings the technicians did an informational update in the meeting. Boos: I wants to keep that piece, it's great for the techs and the board to see each other and connect. I want to make sure that information gets to the board about more in-depth topics as well to avoid the situation we ran into in February concerning the fish ladder grant. Grotenrath: We should try to keep

the information discussed in the program group updated to the pertinent time of year. Melton: This group is also about keeping the organization on track. These decisions help direct the district's focus of work. Fundraising should be an entirely different group because the content discussed would be different. Boos: Fundraising isn't an entirely different group because it's the similar information as to what is going in the program. Many of these items, the grant, the work, the outreach, the fundraising, are all intertwined. I would really like the board to be more educated on our fundraisers so that they can advocate and help us meet our fundraising goals. So another question seems to be how can I help the board advocate for us? Langeland: If it's a major expense, whoever is on the committee should be informed of the costs of a project and how the finances break down. If it's a small expense it might not matter as much. We could set a dollar amount, and anything above it needs to be discussed and items below it don't. Melton presents financials for an engineering project the county completed: My constituents are not happy about this project, and the price of this project seems outrageous. Although this isn't our project, it negatively affects us because people might think it's us and then they won't want to use our resources in the future. Discussion ensues about past projects that were not district projects, and that a portion of the public was not happy with. Melton: While not everything that impacts us is in our control, some of these restoration projects are very expensive and they hurt the vision of the district because people might think it's us. It might be worth making sure we're dotting the I's and crossing the t's to make sure there aren't surprises with costs or negative feedback. Boos: So how do we remedy that? Melton: How do we make sure we get the right contractors? How do we make sure there aren't unnecessary costs or conflicts of interest with who is doing the work? Boos: The district absolutely has to follow a government bidding process. We do not get to choose contractors. They have to apply to bid our projects. The process is fully established, and we follow all rules in regards to hiring contractors. The real solution is for the board to educate the public about these projects, and if someone is doing something the public doesn't like, steer them that way. If a project we are not involved with makes some people angry, it's the boards job to positively advocate for the district and the work we actually do. Pyle moves to finish this discussion topic so the meeting may continue. Langeland: Because we did outreach for Sand Creek it's hard to say we didn't have anything to do with it. Boos: Our involvement in the grant was proposed in 2015. Since that time a Watershed Steering Committee met quarterly all of those sites were discussed and decided upon. Maybe those steering committees would be a good place for the board to be to be educated on these more complicated projects and "see under the hood".

- It is decided that the Programs Committee will be one piece that the board will do a working group monthly and meet at 6 PM. It is decided to not officially vote on this committee.

        - Fundraising/Outreach/Education will be another piece that meets only as necessary leading up to relevant events.

- **Human Resources:**
  All position descriptions are attached for your review. I will also give you an update on the status of each posting

    - **Administrative Specialist**
    - Lexie Kasper will be moving into a full time position.
        - **Motion:** Tim VanDyke **Second/Support:** Dave Pyle **Vote:** Passes
    - **WM CISMA**
        - **Coordinator (1**) *You will find a new position description for both the assistant coordinator and coordinator in you packet. As well as the work agreement for the potential new Coordinator.*
            - Todd Bowen and Dave Pyle have been assisting Megan in finding Drew's replacement. They originally interviewed 5 candidates, 3 made it to the second interview. The position was offered has been officially offered and we are waiting to find out if the candidate will accept it. The position was first offered to another CISMA coordinator but her current district offered her more money to stay so she turned it down. Drew will assist in training a new hire.
        - **Assistant Coordinator** (1)
            - This job was called the Invasive Species Specialist. We have decided to take down this listing and onboard the coordinator first and learn more about what they need before we hire this position.
        - **Ecological Technicians (4)**
            - Megan and Frank are currently hiring for this position.
        - **Forest Pest Technician (1)**
            - Erika Horne is leaving in May for a position in Hawaii, so we will be hiring for that position.
    - **MAEAP Technician (1) update on progress**
        - We have gotten a lot of great candidates but none with Ag experience. We are keeping the listing open until we find someone with the right, balanced background. Mike Ludlam from Allegan is assisting us while we search for a replacement.

- **Board binders**: *Information and introduction*
    - These binders are intended to give the board basic information that isn't always easy to find, such as Robert's Rule, the personnel policy, the open meetings act, board of director trainings, and conservation district law. The board will get printed financials and meeting agendas to put in binder, they will not get full board packets printed every time but they are welcome to print that themselves and use the binder as best suits them.
- **Vehicle purchases:** *I will be giving you an update of where we are at in the process and look for your feedback*

- As discussed in previous meetings our trax lease is up at the end of the month, and we are looking at ford focuses to buy to replace it. We are also looking at buying a new crew truck. Doug got us a good lead on a used truck that we're currently checking out. Truck must be able to haul chemicals, aka have an open bed.

- **Grant Update**
  - Pending:
    - RCPP (3.2 Million, Federal)
      - Will hear back this month
    - Crockery Creek and Sank Creek 319 (700,000, Federal)
      - Rumor has it we are in the final 3 candidates
    - MISGP CORE 21 (60,000, State)
      - Received, these wages pay for the coordinator
    - MISGP HWA (200,000, State)
      - Received, will fund crew for the next 3 years
    - Watershed Counsel (40,000, Federal)
      - Pending

CORRESPONDENCE:
None.

ADJOURN – **Time:** 9:16
Motion: Callie Melton **Second/Support:** Tim VanDyke **Vote:** Passes
Next Meeting: 7:00 PM, May 4th, 2021

Sign: Date: