OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan

OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Minutes

Regular Meeting, USDA Service Center, Grand Haven MI
6 pm on Tuesday, January 13, 2026

Matthew Hehl

2-10-26

CALL TO ORDER - 6:05 PM

ROLL CALL

Becky Huttenga - Present
Doug Grotenrath - Present
Matt Hehl - Present
Rivka Hodgkinson - Present via zoom online (not voting this meeting)
Tim VanDyke - Present (Arrived at 6:17 PM)

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve minutes and agenda: Becky **Support:** Doug **Vote:** Motion approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT - no public comment

QUESTIONS ON BOARD REPORTS - no questions on board reports, congrats to Sarah Bowman on employee of the year for Region 7 at the MACD Fall Conference.

Murielle Garbarinos- CISMA Coordinator – Report
Will Latham- Invasive Species Specialist - Report
Morgan Anderson- Produce Safety Technician - Report
Forest Pest Technicians - Report
Ben Jordan - Acting Executive Director - Report
Sarah Bowman, Watershed & Conservation Specialist - Report
Meghan Bannink, RCPP Project Manager - Report
Tracey Weatherwax, Soil Conservation Technician - Report
~~Andrew Booher – CTAP/MAEAP Coordinator~~
Ben Savoie, Forester - Report
Annaleese Rasanen - Bookkeeper Report
MDARD - Report
NRCS -Report

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT - Ben Jordan is getting acclimated to the job as Acting ED. He's meeting with staff on how he can meet needs and help with reporting, prepared for Annaleese leaving on Maternity leave. Ciera (temporary financial specialist) is getting trained up with Ben on financials and quickbooks. They have been prepping for taxes and our audit is scheduled for March 3rd, 2026 with Lake MIchigan CPA Services so there will be prep for that. Ben reached out to accounting firms Rivka sent our way to figure out how to update our quickbooks, ZZZ Business Services got back to staff and they are putting together a quote. Becky asked if Ben reached out to Jack Knorek's recommendation (Brian Huget) and Ben hadn't yet but he will soon, Becky can give Ben his information. Lots of District events are coming up, tree sale, plant sale, annual meeting, and Cultivating Resilience. He is also looking into continued funding for Tracey and Meghan.

PARTNER REPORTS (NRCS/MDARD) - MDARD report was in packet, no questions from the Board.

- **Human Resource:**
  - Plan to permanently fill the Executive Director Role (discussion)
    - Becky requested this agenda item and just wanted to keep it in everyone's mind so we don't wait too long to think about the plan for this role.
    - Doug wanted to hear Becky's thoughts on the process. Becky shared that the next steps would be to create an updated job description and have an application period since we are a public entity and a public application process would be best practice.
    - Matt currently views Ben as the ED and doesn't necessarily see the difference between part time vs full time ED if he can get the job done.
    - Tim asks Ben and staff how it's going having Ben as a part time Acting ED. Sarah, Ben, and Tracey share that overall so far so good in the first month, Sarah mentions that it would be good to do a staff survey to get input on how the role is going to ensure staff needs are met.
    - Rivka asks how we audit the current role. Natalie Bekins (a previous OCD ED) made a good month to month task list of ED tasks and could serve as metrics for how the current arrangement is working.
    - Doug highlights that with Ben doing the ED role part time, the District is saving about $30,000 a year and when Annaleese is back from maternity leave, a lot of the financial tasks will be off Ben/ED partial role.
    - Becky mentioned that no decision is needed tonight, we can come back with performance metrics at the next board meeting.
    - Doug asks if staff could send a job description for ED to all board members to come up with performance metrics.

  - Internships & future internship opportunities (update & discussion)
    - OCD Watershed Staff have 4 unpaid GVSU interns (working for credit) helping with field work. Tracey will work as the "crew lead."
    - Becky asked about agreements for liability. Ben said we signed agreements for GVSU credit with the school for each student. The District has some general liability in our insurance that may cover intern workers comp if needed and they will sign a liability waiver.

  - Updating district policy - scheduling policies to update for future meetings? (discussion)
    - Ben wanted to put this on everyone's radar again so we can potentially start discussing District and Employee policy updates at future board meetings. It would be good to clarify some policies so ED's know what their role is for certain tasks.
    - Ben asks if everyone could look at the policy handbook to identify any policies that may need to be updated.
    - Matt added that Ben and Matt have been talking about this and asked about having a board work session outside of a regular board meeting to tackle as

many policies as we can before spring or do we take 20-30 min at each board meeting to talk about one or two policies. A work session would still need to be publicly posted.
    - Matt suggests giving the board a couple policies to review between board meetings and then discuss one or two at the next meeting.

- CTAP position hiring timeline & interview committee (update & discussion)
    - Becky provided some recommendations for the position description prior to the board meeting. Jack Knorek and Alex Svoboda from MDARD also provided comments. Rivka commented to make sure the job posted lists that it is grant funded for expectations. Position will be listed soon.

- Update on grants & gap funding for Tracey's position (discussion)
    - Unfortunately, OCD was not awarded the NFWF conservation partners grant and staff are still waiting on the NACD grant which will be announced in March. Tracey is currently being funded through 319 watershed, water monitoring, groundwater funding, and RCPP for a combination of tasks and we will reevaluate in February. Tracey can also take over doing Vegetative Assurances which is a for-hire service OCD offers. OCD staff are continuing to look into diversifying funding for not only Tracey, but for all OCD staff.

- **Financial:**
    - December bank reconciliations and bill payment: *See the financial packet for our profit & loss, balance sheet, bill list, and checking account reconciliation.* (VOTE)
        - **Motion to pay the bills**: Becky Huttenga **Support:** Doug Grotenrath
        - **Discussion:** Ben added the $250 invoice for the Board mediation meeting in the bill pay list in the printed packets.
        - **Roll call vote:** Becky - yes, Tim - yes, Doug - yes, Matt - yes, Motion passes.

    - Cash Flow Forecast - Explanation (Ben)
        - Board had questions on NACD payments, OCD received a partial payment ($14,448.26) on 12/23/25 and is awaiting remaining funding.
        - Ben added in a "budget to actual" document to the printed board packet since it wasn't ready ahead of time. This document shows how much money we've spent so far in each of the district's annual operational budget line items. Tim asked if Ben could identify which areas were above or below on future documents.

    - Chase Credit Card - Update on credit card process & authorized users (updates)
        - OCD does not need to apply for a new credit card type like we originally thought.
        - Staff is currently in the process of changing authorized users (waiting on assistance from the Chase representative), which will remove Natalie from the card and install Ben as the authorized user.

    - Audit and CPA Services/cleaning up previous books (update and discussion)
        - Audit is scheduled for March 3rd, 2026

- Working with ZZZ Business Services out of Grand Rapids to look at Quickbooks issues & options for updates
    - ZZZ feels confident that they can help with the updates we need and is working on a quote.

- **Operations:**
    - Vehicle Maintenance (update)
        - Blue Silverado got into a fender bender, insurance claim was filed, truck is in the shop and only cost is deductible (about $1000).
        - Some trucks are due for brakes.

    - Upcoming tree & plant sale (update)
        - Ben gives an update on tree and plant sale. Materials are getting updated and Tree and Plant sale preorders go live FEbruary 2nd, 2026.
        - Holland BPW also asked to do another sale at their property this spring.

    - 2026 election & Annual Meeting
        - Nominating petition deadline was Friday Dec 9
        - Next steps - Notice of Annual Meeting, preparation of ballots, accepting ballots starting on Jan 23rd
        - Annual Meeting Location (Vote)
            - Update: 4 nominating petitions were turned in and certified by Grand Haven clerk. The four board director contenders are Matt Hehl (incumbent), Jeff Vredeveld, Rivka Hodgkinson (incumbent), and Kelly Goward. Staff will be prepping 300 absentee ballots at their next staff meeting to prepare for absentee voting.
            - The district is looking at two annual meeting location options: Watermark Church (lots of events hosted there, 500 person capacity, used to be a boat showroom) and Hemlock Crossing Nature Center (OCD has used this space in the past but the space is limited).
            - **Motion to host OCD 2026 Annual Meeting at Watermark Church:** Doug Grotenrath **Support:** Becky Huttenga **Vote:** Motion passes.

    - Board meeting times/days (decision and vote)
        - Ben brought up that at the end of last meeting, it was requested to bring up at this meeting to discuss updated times/days of board meetings.
        - Matt asked if we should wait till after the election to make changes.
        - Tim would like to change time and suggested an hour later or a different day.
        - **Motion to move OCD Board Meetings to 7 PM on Tuesdays:** Tim Vandyke **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Discussion:** Doug doesn't want to move it another hour and he's used to the day, Rivka said a different day would be preferred than pushing the meeting back later. Matt would prefer a 7 pm meeting but is pretty flexible on what day. Doug suggests a 6:30 start time. Rivka also mentions 6:30

would work for her. Becky suggested a friendly amendment to Tim's motion, changing the 7 PM time to 6:30 PM

- **Amended motion to move OCD Board Meetings to 6:30 PM on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (same day, slightly later time) starting in February.** Tim Vandyke **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Roll Call Vote:** Becky- yes, Tim - yes, Doug - yes, Motion passes.

- **Grants:**
  - **Grants Discussion:** NFWF Conservation Partners program grant was not awarded (found out right before board meeting). Matt mentions that Coopersville Brewing is making a Hehlden Farm brew which he realized related to the brewery research grant OCD applied for. Tim asked if grants are getting harder to get and Ben said sometimes yes depending on the grant they are getting more competitive.
  - **Preparing:**
    - Watershed Program
      - County Proposal (Monsanto Fund) - $4.7M available - County Wide Investment in Watershed Health, Point Source Prevention and Land /Water Improvements. A holistic approach to watershed improvement and sustainability. Will include staffing funds (Ben, Sarah, Annaleese, Tracey(?) and district administered cost share that gives the community access to implementation funds. Potential ask of **$699,899K over 2years.**
  - **Pending:**
    - Technical Assistance
      - NFWF - Conservation Partners Program (CPP) - This grant will extend our technical assistance support with NRCS by maintaining a staff member that can help local farmers/producers learn about and engage EQUIP and CSP programs. The project will fund Meghan B. for 3 years and offset some of Jamie R. and Annaleese R. salary expenses. In the event NFWF MBPCF is not granted Jamie and Annaleese R. funds can shift to Tracey W. **Requesting: $547,418.09 Indirects @ 14% = $67,226.78 - Additional Inclusions: $41,406** (Software/Computers/Cell Phones) - (Notice expected Dec/Jan.)
      - NACD TA Collaboration w/ NRCS - $27M available (Notice expected March)
      - Michigan Craft Beverage Council Research Proposal - Integrating Native and Invasive Plants into Microbrewing: Assessing Market Demand and Educational Impact: Project evaluates the production feasibility and market potential of using native and invasive Michigan plants as craft beer ingredients, filling a research gap at the intersection of brewing innovation and ecological sustainability. **1 year grant requesting $40,000.**
    - CISMA Funding
      - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (CWMA)- This grant will continue the surveillance and treatment of European Frog Bit in the West Michigan area as well as increase outreach and education to youth about the spread of this species. **Requesting $82,965.** (Notice expected in March/April 2026)

- Grand Haven Area Community Foundation Impact Grant - This grant will fund the Invasive Species Specialist position for two years in order to assist municipalities in the Tri-Cities with Invasive species needs. **Requesting $34,073.05**
- EGLE sub-award for European Frog-bit in order to fund treatment over the next two years. EGLE holds the funding for the project but multiple CISMAs are bidding for the sub-award. **Requesting $45,567.52**

o **Executing:**
  - Watershed program
    - Midwest Glacial Lakes Lake Conservation Grant - Two-year grant requesting funds to support a shoreline naturalization technical assistance and cost-share program with accompanying water quality monitoring for Spring Lake and Crockery Lake. Funds to support watershed staff, monitoring supplies, and landowner cost share. **Requested $99,673.48, received $68,385.**

o **Not received:**
  - NFWF - Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Conservation Fund (MBPCF) - This grant will develop a technical assistance program and shovel ready implementation project for the high need, high demand county wide desire for a pollinator and native plant support program. The project is a collaboration between the County, ODC, Parks, Local Churches and Nonprofits. The project will fund Tracey W. and Annaleese(.25). for 2 years. **Requesting: $299,865.50 Indirects @ 14% = $42,000.00**

Board updates: (2 minutes)
Hehl, VanDyke, Grotenrath, Huttenga, Hodgkinson

- Becky Huttenga had no updates
- Tim Vandyke asked for clarification on a board report which ended up being the HWA technician report)
- Doug Grotenrath had no updates
- Rivka Hodgkinson had not updates
- Matt Hehl asked if the Board needed another mediation session, Tim said he felt like there was tension in the room and wondered if it would help to have another session as well. Doug suggested the Board wait until after the election and also asked if there was something he wanted to comment on not relating to board business (relating to personal board relations) if he can just contact the whole board about it. Matt said board members can personally contact each other with personal issues. Doug thinks there's more to discuss and that the first mediation meeting was getting stuff off their chest and the next mediation meeting could be fixing some issues. No decision was made on another mediation session at this time.

CORRESPONDENCE: none

ADJOURN – next meeting: February 10, 2026 at 6:30 pm
Motion to adjourn: Tim VanDyke **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Vote:** Motion Passes