

MINUTES
SUSSEX CONSERVATION DISTRICT
Board of Supervisors
June 27, 2023

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Joel Wharton at 7:05 p.m. at 23818 Shortly Road, Georgetown, DE.

Also present were:

Joe Booth	David Baird	Tyler Brown
Mark Nardi	Debbie Absher	Ziggy Savage
Cory Whaley	Stephen Gissy	Jen Nelson
Roland Hill	Jessica Watson	
John Rieley	Dan Lee	

Moved by Joe Booth and seconded by Roland Hill to approve the June 27, 2023, agenda. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

Moved by Mark Nardi and seconded by Joe Booth to approve the May 23, 2023, board meeting minutes. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

Items Requiring Board Action:

1a. Cost-Share Payment: Large Animal Mortality

Received request for the following cost share payment:

May		
Total Cost:	\$5,150	Cows: 6
SCD Cost:	\$5,150	Horses: 6
SCD Admin:	\$780	

Moved by Mark Nardi and seconded by John Rieley to approve the Sussex Conservation District requests for cost-share payment to John Kohout for animal mortality pick-up in the amount of \$5,150. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

1b. Conservation Cost Share- Yoder Wildlife Pond and Water Control Structure

Received request to approve the proposed project to create a wildlife pond in an overgrown area on the landowner's property. The finished excavated area would be approx.—.9 acres in size. The pond area would have a wetland bench around the entire pond and microtopography within the pond to provide different water depths. A water control would be installed to manipulate the water level based on significant rain events and times of the year. Excavated material will be used around the adjacent area to create minor topography and additional habitat. Breakdown of funding on the following page:

Pond Construction Costs: \$57,260
Proposed SCD Conservation Cost Share- \$ 37,500 Per 2023 Conservation Cost Share Guidelines

Water Control Structure Installation Costs: \$ 6,662.50
Proposed SCD Conservation Cost Share- \$4,996.88 Per 2023 Conservation Cost Share Guidelines

Landowner Cost: \$21,665.42

Total Conservation Cost Share Request: \$42,496.88

Funding for this project will come from the special projects category, which has a current balance of \$144,493. (\$101,996 after this project)

Moved by Joe Booth and seconded by Roland Hill to approve conservation cost share payment to complete the Yoder Wildlife Pond and Water Control Structure Project for \$42,496.88. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

2. Local Workgroup Recommendations to NRCS

Received request to approve the recommendations made by the Local Workgroup to NRCS. Some recommendations for consideration include Cover Crops (improving current policy), Drainage Issues, Continuation and Finalization of the Upper Nanticoke Study, Resiliency, and Facilities. The meeting minutes are attached.

Moved by Joe Booth and seconded by Mark Nardi to approve the recommendations made by the Local Workgroup to NRCS. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

3. Tax Ditch Commissioner Appointment

Received request to recommend the appointment of a new Tax Ditch Commissioner and alternates.

In accordance with State Tax Ditch Law, the Board of Supervisors is charged with providing names for consideration for appointment as Tax Ditch Commissioners (3-year term) and alternates (1-year term). DNREC recommends that the following names, also included in the attached letter, be considered by the Board.

Leogla Wright
28272 Warwick Road
Millsboro, DE 19966
3-year term as Commissioner, ending 7/31/26

James H. Baxter, IV
23073 Zoar Road
Georgetown, DE 19947
1-year term as Alternate, ending 7/31/24

John Mills
7317 Hickman Road
Greenwood, DE 19950
1-year term as Alternate, ending 7/31/24

Bryan Jones
34214 Peppers Corner Road
Frankford, DE 19945
1 year term as Alternate, ending 7/31/24

Moved by John Rieley, seconded by Roland Hill to recommend the appointment of Leogla Wright as Tax Ditch Commissioner and James Baxter IV, John Mills, and Brian Jones as Alternates. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

4a. Equipment Purchase: Excavator

Received request to purchase a new #20,000 rubber track excavator for SCD's Equipment Program. This size machine is between a mini excavator and a full-size excavator. We have rented this size machine various times in the past. This size machine will be needed based on upcoming projects and can also be utilized on tax ditch work, private drainage projects, and RC&D projects where access is tight, or we are working in developments where a steel track machine cannot be used. We see more of these projects where this machine will be utilized yearly. We have priced both John Deere and Caterpillar on comparable machines.

Jesco (John Deere) 85 G- \$153,348.06 with Approx Lead Time of 7 Months

Carter (Caterpillar) 308- \$160,685.27 with Approx lead time of 2-3 Months

Jesco Rental- \$5400 Less 20% discount= \$4320/ Month x 7 = \$30,240

Carter Rental- \$4,860 Less 50% Discount= \$2,430/ Month x 3 = \$7,290

SCD recommends approving the purchase of a Caterpillar 308 from Carter Machinery due to the shorter lead time and offers a 50% discount on a rental machine until ours arrives in 2-3 months versus an approx. 7-month rental from Jesco with only a 20% discount. This would result in an approx. \$ 15,250 overall cost savings.

Moved by Joe Booth and seconded by John Rieley to approve the purchase of a Caterpillar 308 excavator from Carter Machinery for \$160,685.27. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

4b. Equipment Purchase: Pipe Trailer

Received request to purchase a 22' #15,000GVWR utility trailer to deliver pipe and materials to jobs for the Equipment Program. We currently have (1) an older 20' trailer used for this task, but we are finding more construction jobs requiring pipe and materials to be delivered to multiple jobs on the same day. We are proposing 22' of deck length keep the gate/ramps on the trailer and allow the pipe to fit without removing the ramps while still being able to haul concrete structures, buckets, trench rollers, and other small tools. We have quoted from (2) vendors, and the pricing is listed below.

Kaufman Trailers- \$7,721.60

Kruger Trailers- \$14,245.00

Moved by Mark Nardi and seconded by Roland Hill to approve the purchase of a 22' trailer from Kaufman Trailers for \$7,721.60. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

4c. Equipment Purchase: Mowing Tractor

Received request to purchase a new mowing tractor for the Equipment Program. This proposed tractor would have a 60" side rotary mower and an 18" offset 8' rear rotary mower. This tractor would allow us to mow more area per pass and will enable us to cut the first 5' of slope on each pass down a tax ditch saving the tax ditch time on their mowing bill and saving time with the arm mower tractor allowing us to add more ditches to our mowing schedule. There have been requests from various ditches throughout the county wanting the district to mow, but our current capacity did not allow any more systems. Initial estimates from Wes indicate we could increase our mowing schedule by 30-50%.

We have priced (3) mowers:

Alamo- \$55,975.80

Tiger- \$39,275.46

Diamond- \$36,880.00

We have priced (2) John Deere 5120M tractors:

Atlantic Tractor- \$79,007.76

Taylor & Messick- \$77,000.00

(All three mower dealers were able to price tractors, and they ranged from \$88,000-\$112,000)

Pricing for (1) 8' - 18" Offset Rear Rotary:

Taylor & Messick- Hardee 1198RWO mower- \$8,400.00

SCD recommends the purchase of the John Deere 5120 and Hardee Offset Mower from Taylor & Messick and the 60" side rotary from Diamond Mowers for a total set-up price of \$122,280.00.

John Deere 5120M tractor	\$ 77,000.00
Hardee 1198RWO	\$ 8,400.00
Diamond Side Rotary Mower	<u>\$ 36,880.00</u>
	\$122,280.00

Moved by Joe Booth and seconded by Roland Hill to purchase the John Deere 5120 and Hardee Offset Mower from Taylor & Messick and the 60" side rotary from Diamond Mowers for a complete set-up price of \$122,280.00. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

5. September Board Meeting- Date Change

Received a request to reschedule the September 2023 board meeting from 9/26 to 9/19 with a start time of 7 p.m. due to a scheduling conflict.

Moved by Mark Nardi and seconded by John Rieley to reschedule the September board meeting from 9/26 to 9/19. Motion passed. (6 yes, 0 no)

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

The next board meeting will be held Tuesday, July 18, 2023, at 7 p.m. at 23818 Shortly Road, Georgetown, DE.

Sussex County Locally Led Workgroup Meeting Minutes March 10, 2023

The meeting was called to order by David Baird, District Coordinator at 9:02 a.m.

Also present were:

Chris Bohinski - NRCS	Siobhan Kelley – SCD
Ziggy Savage – NRCS	David Baird – SCD
Shantel King - NRCS	Chris Thompson - Farmer
Caitlin Sheffer - FSA	Brad Ritter - Farmer
Will Carlisle – SCD/Farmer	Blaine Hitchens - Farmer
Ben Coverdale - DNREC	Bryan Jones - SCD
Holly Walker - DNREC	Marcia Fox - DNREC
Jay Baxter – Farmer	Debbie Absher – SCD
Benny King – SCD	Bobbi Heck - SCD
Amanda Fabi - SCD	

David Baird – District Coordinator

David stated that the purpose of this meeting is to establish what the conservation needs are in Sussex County. The information discussed will be used to develop local cost share programs that SCD directly administers as well as provide input to NRCS through their State Technical Committee process which drives a lot of local decisions that are made here in Delaware as far as the use of the program funds coming through NRCS.

Ziggy Savage, District Conservationist

Ziggy stated this meeting is a request from the State Conservationist to gather local information to help support or build our farm bill programs for FY24. The State Conservationist requests input on eligible conservation practices, resource concerns, payment rates, ranking criteria, and high priority practices for FY 2024.

Ziggy discussed the various Farm Bill programs funded in FY 2023. They include:

- Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
- Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Also discussed were the source water protection areas that are critical areas to manage and improve water quality. Following are additional practices added for the Source Water Protection

funding in FY 2023:

- Critical Area Planting
- Anaerobic Digester
- Field Border
- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management
- Grade Stabilization Structure
- Grassed Waterway
- Access Control
- Trails and Walkways
- Streambank and Shoreline Protection
- Tree/Shrub Establishment
- Vegetated Treatment Area
- Water and Sediment Control Basin
- Constructed Wetland

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers different nationwide initiatives. Delaware has taken part in two of these initiatives for several years to address specific resource concerns. They include:

- On-Farm Energy
- Organic
- Working Lands for Wildlife
 - Black Duck
 - Northern Bobwhite

Zig also gave a recap of FY 2022 programs. There are national mandates that dictate a percentage of funds need to be allocated for resource concerns or demographics. Following are the funding mandates:

- Beginning, Socially Disadvantaged, and Limited Resource farmers – 5% of funds must go towards these groups.
 - 55% of Delaware funds went to beginning farmers and 25% went to socially disadvantaged farmers.
- Livestock Practices – 50% of funds must go towards livestock practices.
 - 67% of Delaware funds went towards livestock practices.
- Wildlife Practices – 10% of funds must go towards wildlife.
 - 3.7% of Delaware funds went towards wildlife practices (all applications were funded)

Below is a summary of FY 2022 Sussex County contract obligations by funding pool:

Row Labels	Sum of Sussex Dollars	Sum of Sussex # Contracts
Beginning Farmer	\$918,425.00	12
Chesapeake Cropland	\$50,230.00	2
Conservation Planning Activities	\$42,821.00	9
Cover Crop Sussex	\$37,723.00	3
Cropland	\$850,983.00	16
DWM	\$0.00	0

EQIP CIC	\$153,407.00	2
Forestry	\$60,796.00	2
Livestock	\$215,727.00	3
On Farm Energy	\$406,897.00	11
Organic Transition	\$18,713.00	1
PHQ Sussex	\$915,988.00	10
SDF	\$838,375.00	17
Urban Ag	\$8,295.00	1
Wildlife 10%	\$94,382.00	3
Grand Total	\$4,612,762.00	92

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Overview:

The purpose of this program is for producers to address resource concerns by completing new conservation practices, and by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. The program provides for annual enhancement payments that vary according to the signup. This a nationally managed program which means suggestions are accepted, but the following are predetermined by the agency when the program is announced:

- Eligible enhancements
- Resource concerns
- Payment rates
- Ranking criteria

Total Statewide Farm Bill Programs Funds Obligated in 2022

- EQIP - \$7,558,621
- CSP - \$509,807
- AMA - \$218,830

In Sussex, all eligible and high priority applications were funded.

In past years, we usually had a substantial number of unfunded applications.

Zig then reviewed the FY 2023 High Priority Practices:

- 329 - Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till
- 390 - Riparian Herbaceous Cover
- 391- Riparian Forest Buffer
- 393- Filter Strip
- 554 - Drainage Water Mgt
- 587 - Structure for Water Control
- 604 - Saturated Buffer
- 605 - Denitrifying Bioreactor
- 612 – Tree Planting
- 620 - Underground Outlet, Blind Inlet

There was discussion on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The IRA was signed into law by President Biden on August 16, 2022. This will provide for additional funding for EQIP, CSP, ACEP and RCPP to implement Climate Smart conservation practices over the next five (5)

years. The FY 2023 national allocation is \$850 Million for EQIP. Here is a breakdown of those funds for Delaware.

Delaware

- EQIP- \$786,770
- CSP- \$483,375

There will be a separate application deadline for IRA funds

- EQIP-IRA - March 17th
- CSP-IRA - March 24th

Zig reviewed the FY2023 Program Application Deadlines:

Application (Batching) Dates

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) General and Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA)—November 18, 2022.
- EQIP/AMA second and third batching dates – March 17, 2023, and May 19,2023, respectively.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Classic application deadline – March 24, 2023
- EQIP-CIC application deadline – February 10, 2023
- IRA-EQIP application deadline – March 17, 2023
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) dates to be announced in the Spring 2023

Debbie Absher, Director of Ag Programs

Debbie gave recap of the Sussex Conservation District Cost-Share Program. SCD established a goal of 75,000 acres for cover crops planted in Sussex County. The acres planted exceeded that goal with 84,856 acres total counting the other cost share programs as seen in the chart below.

FA Program	Ac. Planted	C/S Requested
SCD	81,641.8	\$ 4,366,565
RCPP	605.5	\$ 43,426
EQIP	595.3	\$ 37,723
CSP	2,013.4	
Total	84,856.0	\$ 4,447,714

The following funding sources for the cost-share programs were discussed:

- DNREC (Bond Bill)
- DNREC – Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program

- DNREC – Nonpoint Source Pollution (NPS) Program
- Delaware Department of Agriculture
- DHSS/DNREC – Drinking Water SRF Program
- NRCS
- Sussex County Council

Debbie also shared the breakdown of cover crops planted by watershed & early vs. late planting.

FY 2023 by Watershed

Watershed	Early	Late	Total
Chesapeake Bay	20,422.9	31,172.4	51,595.3
Delaware Bay	5,051.4	12,660.6	17,712.0
Inland Bays	5,575.7	6,758.8	12,334.5
Totals	31,050.0	50,591.8	81,641.8

FY 2023 Acres Compared to FY 2022, FY 2021 & FY 2020

Watershed	FY 2023	FY 2022	FY 2021	FY 2020
Chesapeake Bay	51,595.3	42,886.5	30,456.4	39,036.9
Delaware Bay*	17,712.0	14,290.6	12,911.6	15,313.0
Inland Bays*	12,334.5	9,936.2	8,236.2	10,306.4
Totals	81,641.8	67,113.3	51,604.2	64,656.3

Other Discussion Items:

- Blaine Hitchens stated a concern with tree planting for a high priority practice. Blaine stated there are many farmers concerned with trees being planted on acres of farmland because it would potentially take productive land out of production.
- Dave and Ziggy discussed the increased funding available from the IRA as well as Delaware’s allocation of EQIP money and how to get these dollars spent.
- Jay Baxter questioned if some of this influx of money could come to the conservation district, or does it have to come through EQIP and then go directly to the farmers? Shantel King confirmed that the money will be coming down through farm bill programs however, we are working with conservation districts in terms of technical assistance to help with the workload.

- Jay Baxter emphasized that the farmer would rather work through the Sussex Conservation District rather than NRCS or EQIP for the same type of programs even if there is a slightly less financial advantage to the program simply because of the ease of the program. There will be less hoops to jump through working with SCD, and the willingness of SCD to bend to make the practice work for the climate of that particular year. Jay's concern is the more money that is coming from EQIP, that will sit in a pool and will not be utilized for best management practices in the state of Delaware. Jay would like to see practices funded that are already being utilized in the county in a very efficient way.
- Ziggy talked about the need to get creative about reaching people that would be interested in signing up for farm bill programs due to the increase in millions of funds coming to Delaware.
- Shantel King discussed the climate smart practices list and how can we get producers interested in the next level or even bring people in to getting that baseline? The climate smart list is a moving list and some of the practices on the list may not be on it next year. The goal is to create a new adoptive list for the climate smart practices that can evolve as people either gain interest or participation. Shantel said they are asking for input back from the state not only through the local workgroup but also the feedback from the State Conservationist.
- Ziggy discussed how important and crucial the cover crop program is and asked if there is a way to implement cover every year to help save the bay? Ziggy asked for any ideas that we can take forth to the State Conservationist to present at the State Technical Committee.
- Ziggy stressed the importance of getting the conversation started earlier than later at the local level so we can get that information to congress & headquarters. We need to do everything that we can to support the farmers here at the local level. Ziggy asked if the farmers' conservation needs are being met when it comes to the programs and the practices we have to offer. If not, let us talk about ideas and what you would like to do and see happen. Are we also effectively targeting the new farmers?
- Will Carlisle talked about the cost of some practices in regard to the payment rates. Ziggy stated the payment rates need to be discussed now so that when the practice is ready to be implemented, the payment rate will match where we are with the economy.
- David Baird discussed the influx of funds coming to Delaware over the next several years. The dollars will run through the NRCS EQIP program. SCD and partners will help with technical assistance along with helping landowners and producers put their applications together. Even though Delaware will have over \$50 Million over the next several years, we need to keep in mind that there will be a match that will be required as well.

David Baird thanked everyone for their input and time. David asked if anyone has a thought or idea that they would like to discuss, please reach out to someone at SCD or NRCS.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:37 a.m.