

Garrett Soil Conservation District Supervisor's Meeting

February 18, 2025

Garrett Soil Conservation District Board Room

Participants

- Smokey Stanton, Board Chair
- Kristen Enlow, Board Vice Chair, Via Phone
- Butch Helbig, Board Treasurer
- Nevin Sines, Board Member
- Dorsey Guard, Board Member
- Seth Metheny, District Manager (DM)
- Chad Bucklew, District Conservationist (DC)
- Jeannie Frazee, Administrative Assistant

Call to Order

Board Chairman, Smokey Stanton certified a quorum and called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. All Board members were present.

Approval/Correction of December 17, 2024, Minutes

The January meeting was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. Members were asked to review the minutes for the last meeting, which was on December 17, 2024. There were no changes and no objections. The minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report

Butch Helbig told the group that he, Seth and Jeannie had met and gone over the statements.

January Monthly Income Statement

Brinker is now closed, so it made no money. The Money Market made \$2.74. Total Revenues were \$11,868.17.

The Total Net Surplus is -\$8,752.07. The negative surplus is mostly because all the rent for the year was paid in January.

Financial Report Quarterly and YTD

For income, Local is at 62.68%, MDA General Fund is at 75.00%, Administrative Assistant is at 70.63 %, and Sediment and Erosion is at \$56.17%. Total income is at 64.58%. The District is at or above expectation on income.

For Expenses, Local is at 53.42%, MDA General is at 64.05%, Administrative Assistant \$48.67%, and E&S \$15.24%. MDA General is high because of the rent payment. E&S was expected to be below because the District is saving for future expenses of hiring an employee. The total for Expenses is \$39.64%.

Total income YTD is \$138,397.25. Total expenses is \$84,795.93.

Kristen Enlow asked about the raffle ticket money. She wants to make sure it goes toward the scholarship fund. Seth said that \$425.00 was collected at the dinner for the auction and the raffle. For the 50/50 raffle the total was \$260.00. Smokey asked how much we have in the scholarship fund so far. There would be \$250.00 from Farm Credit and \$260.00 from the 50/50 raffle.

Dorsey Guard made a motion to approve the FY25 MDA General Fund December Statement, and the Financial Report Quarterly and YTD. Nevin Sines seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Brinker Transfer to First United Investment Group

Butch Helbig and Smokey Stanton met with Preston Sharps after the last Board Meeting. It was tight but the transfer was made by December 30. The fund management at First United Investments wants funds to be in "Income and Growth". It is very conservative. The statements should show how much was made each month.

Nevin said he feels that Preston should give a presentation once each quarter. Butch said that he thinks the Board should run that by Preston to see how that would work. Preston works with the Investment Group, but the investment is not through him only.

Seth went over the First United Investment report for February 1, 2025.

Butch Helbig made a motion to accept the FY25 MDA General Fund January Statement, the January Income Statement, and the February First United Statement. Nevin Sines seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman's Report

Thompkins County 2022 Work Plan

Smokey included a copy of the Thompkins County Work Plan in the Board Packet. It is a different kind of plan.

Smokey said that he proposes that the Board set some goals for the year instead of the loose way they have been doing the Work Plan for some time. He feels that the Board should say what they want to have done. For example, for collecting E&S Fees, the Board would say that E&S fees must be used to administer the E&S program.

Smokey said that he feels it should not have taken three years to get a budget in place. Once goals are stated and agreed upon by the Board, then Seth and the staff will know the priorities. This will hold the staff and District Manager accountable.

He said that the Board does not need to be as sophisticated as Thompkins County, but it is time the Board move into the 21st Century with management.

District Manager's Report

Smokey asked Chad Bucklew to update about the Federal cuts. Chad replied that there was not much that was unusual during most of the month of January, but toward the end of January, the President gave some executive orders. On January 28 – the “Fork in the Road” email was sent. There were 3 pillars in the email.

1. Every Federal Employee Must Return to the Office – No telework, not even ad hoc if there is a doctor's appointment part of the day. Previously, employees would work the rest of that day at home. This does not affect the District a whole lot. Our NRCS employees are in the office five days a week.
2. Enhance Performance – Enforce high standards
3. Streamlined and Flexible Workforce – it is likely NRCS will down-size. Furloughs. At-Will employment.

For the “Fork in the Road”, employees were offered leave with pay through the end of September 2025. They should be out of the office by early March. It is a deferred resignation program. By doing this, the government is hoping to downsize. Regular downsizing in a year is 6%. But there is also a hiring freeze. If it is a critical position though, hiring can be considered.

Suzy Daubert may become an “at-will” employee and a political appointee.

In our office, we have lost Craig Zimmerman. He took the “fork in the road” deal. That will put us down one more in Garrett.

The IRA funding, which was a significant chunk of funding last year, is frozen. It is to be held at a minimum of 90 days while the use of the money is being reviewed. In a typical year, there is \$11 million across the state in funding. With the IRA, there was \$18 million more for the year. We are business as usual for the regular EQIP funding, but for the 30 contracts that were funded last year with IRA, we cannot reimburse those 2024 contracts. They go back to September last year and before. The money tied to those contracts is in an account in Annapolis for the particular contract. They are funded, but frozen. We cannot pay them. There are two here in Garrett County who are almost finished and would have been funded. One is for \$200,000 and the other \$9,000. Even the \$9,000 one is a big problem for this producer. We do not know how long the money will be frozen. Suzy Daubert is updating Chad weekly. A decision about unfreezing the funding cannot be made until the new federal Secretary of Agriculture is in place.

The Continuing Resolution is ending Friday, March 14. Our local office is trying to get as many things obligated as possible. We are shuffling the money around trying to get contracts obligated. There are 9 high tunnel contracts, 1 forest stewardship, 3 forestry/wildlife, and 3 Golden Wing Warbler. \$355,000 has been pre-approved, which is non-IRA funding. However, some of these projects would have originally been funded through IRA.

Butch asked if the people who were terminated were all questionable. Chad replied that they were all new hires. Termination was regardless of position and experience. There have been 20 people terminated from the Probationary Period Terminations across the state. They also offered a 20-year retirement instead of 30 years.

The effect to our office right now is the loss of one employee, consequences to 9 contracts from last year, and 5 – 6 contracts from this year. In the case of limited funds, money does not filtrate to Garrett County well because Garrett is not in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The State NRCS doesn't see filling Jacob Metcalf's vacant position in Garrett County as a priority.

Smokey said that he received an email at 4 pm today from MASCD asking that all Districts get in touch with legislators asking that the NRCS funds be released from what is happening in Washington. The Board need to modify the letter from what was sent. He asked if the Board wants to send a modified version to legislators. The Board needs to address:

1. Should each Board member sign the letter OR
2. Should the Board Chairman sign it
3. If the Board does or does not want the letter to go

The letter needs to go to Congresswoman April McClain-Delany, Senator Chris Van Hollen, and Senator Angela Alsobrooks. Dorsey agreed that the Board should send the letter. Butch asked how the letter should be worded. Smokey said he was not sure if the Board would approve the letter, so he had not attempted to reword the letter yet. Smokey said that he would word-smith the letter and send it to staff to send out to the Board members.

Smokey asked if there were any objections to changing the wording of the letter to fit Garrett County. There were no objections. Butch said he should go ahead and do it and get it out for the Board members to see.

Included in the Board packet was a FY24 Progress Report. It contains an overview of District activities for 2024. The GSCD completed 66 Soil and Water Conservation Quality Plans covering 4,060.3 acres. There were 473 Best Management Practices installed by 56 Farmers. There were 242 Sediment and Erosion Control plans reviewed. 192 of them were approved, covering 1,929.58 acres. There was 33 Forest Harvest Plans written covering 2,344.71 acres. There were 1114.9 acres of cover crops planted by 17 farmers.

Smokey said that in light of the late hour, the Board should address the Annual Work Plan at another meeting.

New Business

Activity Report

In January there were 8 Single Family Plans approved, 4 Timber Harvests, and 2 Commercial. 5 Commercial plans were reviewed and need revisions. Currently under review are: 1 Single Family plan, 3 Timber Harvests, and 3 Commercial plans.

Old Business

District Scholarship

The District needs to start advertising the scholarship. Last year, the rubric was favorable to those who had never won the scholarship. The Board has also discussed adding large animal veterinarian to the list of qualified majors.

The Board unanimously voted to keep the 3.0 GPA requirement. They also want to keep Agriculture and Natural Resources covered majors. Butch said that he does not want to penalize previous winners. Nevin agreed with Butch. If they are doing their work and doing well, they should be able to apply again. Dorsey and Smokey both agreed. The points for not being a previous winner will be removed from the rubric. The Board agreed to keep the rubric section providing for more points for applicants involved in agriculture and work experience in agriculture and natural resources. It was determined that Large Animal Medicine should be added.

The Board determined unanimously that the phrase Large Animal Medicine should be used instead of Large Animal Veterinarian so that other positions in Large Animal Medicine (such as Vet Tech) could qualify. Large Animal Medicine will also be added to the acceptable majors in the 3 point section of the rubric.

The Board determined that it will address the Budget Modification and Work Plan at next month's meeting.

Dorsey Guard made a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was unanimous. The meeting adjourned at 9:22 pm.