



FREEBORN COUNTY
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Tuesday, August 4th, 2026, at 8:30 am

1. Call to Order

- a. The regular meeting of the Freeborn County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) was called to order by District Chairman Helland at the district office located at 1400 West Main Street, Albert Lea, MN, on Tuesday, August 4th, 2026, at 8:30 am.

Attendees

- a. In attendance: Vickie Heers (Treasurer), Curt Helland (District Chairman), Scott Lightly (District Vice-Chairman), Casey Madson (Supervisor), Chad Billat (Project Manager), Lindsey Cornell (District Manager), Linda Mestnik (Finance & Administrative Specialist), Senja Viktora (Outreach & Technical Specialist).
- b. Special guests: Josiah Olson (NRCS Team Lead) and Nathan Bird (NRCS District Conservationist).
- c. Absent: Brad Kramer (Secretary) and Mark Trnka (Conservation Engineer).

2. Approval of Minutes of July 9th, 2026

- a. A motion to approve the minutes of the previous regular board meeting on July 9th, 2026, was made by Heers and seconded by Lightly. **MOTION CARRIED.**

3. Treasurer's Report & Payment of Bills

- a. Heers reported that the balance in the checking account was \$22,700.94, savings \$1,385,708.26, CD (Security Bank) \$250,000.00, and CD (Merchants Bank) \$235,000.00. A motion to approve the treasurer's report and payment of bills was made by Lightly and seconded by Madson. **MOTION CARRIED.**

4. IRS standard mileage rate change

- a. Cornell brought to the board the July 1st, 2026, change to the standard IRS mileage rate that is increasing to \$0.76 per mile. Madson made a motion to approve District reimbursement rate to \$0.76 per mile effective July 1st, 2026. Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

5. Cost Share & Grant Items

a. New Requests

- i. Cornell presented a well sealing contract to the board. Madson made a motion to approve the contract and Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

Contract Number	Practice	Project Estimate	Encumbered	Fund Source
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-09	Well Sealing	\$1,412.50	\$1,412.50	C24-0197

- ii. Cornell presented four cover crop contracts to the board. Madson made a motion to approve all four contracts and Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

Contract Number	Practice	Project Estimate	Encumbered	Fund Source
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-35	Cover Crops	\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	C24-0197
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-36	Cover Crops	\$3,720.00	\$3,720.00	
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-37	Cover Crops	\$7,062.00	\$7,062.00	
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-38	Cover Crops	\$6,125.00	\$6,125.00	

- b. A RCPP batching period was brought to the board. Cornell presented a contract #24-5-2 requesting approval pending signatures for this batching period. Lightly approved the contract pending signatures. Motion was seconded by Heers. **MOTION CARRIED**
- c. Cornell presented an opportunity to partner with Freeborn County on a DNR grant application for removal and replacing of ash trees affected by emerald ash borer (EAB). Lightly made a motion that the District look into this further and apply if the staff wish to move forward. Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**
- d. Cornell requested board approval to enter into an agreement with the Olmsted SWCD to implement the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) regional Groundwater Protection Program (GWPP) cover crop program when released. Lightly made a motion to authorize Cornell or Billat to sign the agreement for the LCCMR regional GWPP cover crop program once received from the Olmsted SWCD. Madson seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**
- e. Cornell requested that the board authorize Cornell or Billat to approve time sensitive cover crop contracts. Heers made a motion to authorize Cornell or Billat to approve time sensitive cover crop contracts. Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

6. NRCS Agency Report

- a. Josiah Olson (NRCS Team Lead) introduced himself to the board as the new NRCS Team Lead for our office. Olson shared with the board his conservation experience and position he's held, as well as his new role and territory with NRCS. Olson provided updates on several changes that are forthcoming with NRCS headquarters along with a rough timeline.
- b. Nathan Bird (NRCS District Conservationist) presented the Board with a summary of current projects, forestry activities, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) funding updates. He also explained how the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) collaborate to identify opportunities for landowners. Bird and the district staff engaged in additional discussion regarding CRP incentive funding.

7. BWSR Report

- a. No BWSR update was provided. Cornell shared with the board anticipated return of Annie Gunness (BWSR South Region Board Conservationist) in late September. Jill Sackett Eberhart (BWSR South Region Board Conservationist) will be facilitating contract and voucher training on August 19th, 2026, at our District office for staff.

8. Supervisor Reports

- a. Lightly attended the Oat Field Tour in Byron, MN on July 9th, hosted by the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team (FASHT) and other partners. He reported that the tour was excellent and was glad he attended. Lightly is looking forward to participating in the Southeast Minnesota Soil Health Bus Tour and attending the National Strip-Tillage Conference in Springfield, IL August 5-7th. He also shared that his winter camelina and oats were very successful this season.
- b. Heers had no meetings to report on since the last board meeting.
- c. Madson attended the LeSueur Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting with Cornell on July 24th in Waseca, MN. During the meeting, members received a demonstration of an interactive on-line dashboard that displays the locations and practice types of grant-funded conservation projects through the LeSueur watershed. Madson looks forward to seeing the tool further developed and hopes a demonstration can be provided at a future board meeting. Additional topics discussed included alum treatments for lakes within the LeSueur watershed and pending cover crop contracts awaiting approval through the Waseca SWCD.
- d. Helland attended the Technical Services Area (TSA) meeting on July 17th in Rochester, MN.

9. Manager Report

- a. Cornell distributed an event flier to the board for an Interseeding Field day near Owatonna on September 16th that is being hosted by the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team (FASHT). Cornell is preparing the SWCD team for her upcoming leave. Cornell is attending the last Manager Cohort training next week in St. Paul on August 13-14th. The booth at the Freeborn County Fair was set up on Monday, August 3rd.

10. Staff Reports

- a. Billat reported that he completed the renewal process of his Level 3 NRCS Conservation Planning Certification. Billat also shared that he has been conducting recent site visits and wrapping up some large projects. Additionally, Billat provided the Board with an update on the MDA 2027 Soil Health Equipment Grant. Applications are currently being accepted through August 31st.
- b. Viktora completed the Fair Booth set up on Monday, August 3rd. Viktora starts her yearlong Leadership Cohort series on August 26-27th, 2026, in Moorhead, MN.
- c. Mestnik attended the SE MN Area 7 quarterly admin meeting on July 14th in Rochester, MN. The MN Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) announced on July 31st that premiums for PFML will remain unchanged in 2027.

11. Training Request for BWSR Academy

- a. Manager Cornell requested approval for registration, lodging, and travel expenses for any staff interested in attending BWSR Academy in Brainerd, MN on October 20-22, 2026. Heers made a motion to approve BWSR Academy training request for staff. Madson seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

12. Soil Loss Advisory Committee Discussion

- a. Heers made a motion to end the discussion to form a Soil Loss Committee and discontinue formal soil loss discussions, while continuing the District's existing efforts to encourage and educate landowners on soil loss prevention practices. Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

13. SE MASWCD & SE MACDE Joint Fall Meeting

- a. Cornell requested approval for registration and travel expenses for staff and supervisors interested in attending the Southeast Minnesota Association for Water Conservation Districts (SE MASWCD) and Southeast Minnesota Association for Conservation District Employees (SE MACDE) Joint Fall Meeting on September 23rd in Steele County. Lightly made a motion to approve expenses related to any staff and supervisors to attend the Joint Fall Meeting on September 23rd, 2026. Madson seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

14. MASWCD Annual Convention

- a. Cornell informed the Board that the Minnesota Association for Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD) Annual Convention will be held December 1-2, 2026, in Bloomington, MN.

15. Adjournment

- a. There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Heers. Madson seconded. **MOTION CARRIED**. Next meeting Thursday, September 10th, 2026, at 8:30 AM.

These are preliminary minutes subject to board approval at the next regular monthly meeting of the Board of Supervisors on Thursday, September 10th, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Brad Kramer, Board Secretary

Date