



**FREEBORN COUNTY**  
**SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**  
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING OF BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 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 Thursday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026, at 8:30 am.

### Attendees

- a. In attendance: Curt Helland (District Chairman), Vickie Heers (Treasurer), Brad Kramer (Secretary), 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), and Nathan Bird (NRCS District Conservationist).
- b. Absent: Mark Trnka (Conservation Engineer)

### 2. Approval of Minutes of April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026

- a. A motion to approve the minutes of the previous regular board meeting on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, was made by Kramer and seconded by Heers. **MOTION CARRIED.**

### 3. Treasurer's Report

- a. Heers reported that the balance in the checking account was \$33,616.77, savings \$1,456,608.98, 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 Kramer and seconded by Lightly. **MOTION CARRIED.**

### 4. Easement group project, DNR financial transfer request

- a. Billat presented a visual of an easement group project with the board, an overview of what's included in the project, and how the project is being funded by BWSR and DNR. Billat asked if the district would be in favor of accepting funds from DNR to directly in turn pay contractor(s) on this project to best streamline the project. If so, a formal contract/agreement would come to the board in the future. Lightly made a motion to be in favor of the District accepting DNR funds to in turn pay contractors for this easement group project. Kramer seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

### 5. Cost Share & Grant Items

- a. Cornell shared a status update on the latest RCPP grant request with the board members.
- b. **New Requests**
  - i. Cornell presented two well sealing contracts for approval. Heers made a motion to approve both contracts. Madson seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

Contract Number	Practice	Project Estimate	Encumbered	Fund Source
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-31	Well Sealing	\$1,387.50	\$1,387.50	C24-0197
WBIF-SW-FREE-24-32	Well Sealing	\$1,262.50	\$1,262.50	C24-0197

- c. Cornell requested authorization to amend contract total and approve payment for contract number FY23-01 which is time sensitive. Kramer made a motion to allow Cornell to amend the contract total, authorize payment for FY23-01 along with anything else needed to close out the FY23 State Cost Share grant by the end of May. Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**
- d. Cornell requested authorization to approve well sealing contract #WBIF-SW-FREE-24-33 for \$1,500 pending signatures. Kramer made a motion to authorize Cornell to approve contract WBIF-SW-FREE-24-33 once signatures are received. Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**
- e. Viktora requested approval to apply for a Managing Invasives for Resilient Landscapes grant. Heers made a motion to approve applying for the grant. Kramer seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 6. NRCS Agency Report

- a. Nathan Bird provided an NRCS update on Equip federal funding, and the number of contracts approved in Freeborn County for structural practices. Additional updates included: Conservation Stewardship Program contracts funded in Freeborn County, Albert Lea NRCS staffing, CRP Re-enrollments, Forestry Practice changes, upcoming local work group meeting on May 20<sup>th</sup>, Pheasants Forever Biologist starting May 18<sup>th</sup>, and NRCS team lead applications for Austin based team lead has now closed.

## 7. BWSR Report

- a. Cornell provided the board a brief BWSR update. Our back-up BWSR Board Conservationist's responsiveness, timeliness, and support provided during Annie Gunness' leave has been great.

## 8. Supervisor Reports

- a. Kramer provided the board with updates from the Shell Rock River Watershed District, including a water retention project by I-90/Highway 35 in partnership with MnDOT, starting of dredging activities in Bancroft Bay, participation in the State Watershed Tour in Detroit Lakes, and the Watershed's recent purchase of a 6-foot drill.
- b. Heers attended the Cedar/Waspi 1W1P quarterly policy committee meeting on May 6, where Houston Engineering provided mid plan assessment and plan amendment updates to the group. A public hearing for a plan amendment is scheduled for August 6, followed by the regular quarterly Policy Committee meeting.
- c. Madson attended the LeSueur 1W1P policy committee meeting on April 24<sup>th</sup>. He reported that the primary topic of discussion was for the purchase of a watershed model display to be used for public outreach and education.
- d. Lightly will be hosting a Field Day in coordination with Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) on Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup> from 4-6 pm focused on diversifying a row crop farm. Lightly shared event flyers with the board members. Flyers will also be shared with the Freeborn Area Soil Health Team (FASHT) and FASHT outreach email list by manager Cornell.

## 9. Manager's Report

- a. Cornell provided updates to the board on the manager cohort training, tree sales/tree week outcomes, seeding/cover crop equipment meeting with Hiniker, CRP incentive grants e-Link reporting completed, Pheasants Forever hire, and time spent preparing the 2027 budget.

## 10. Staff Reports

- a. Viktora provided an update on the 2026 SE Area Envirothon that took place on May 18th in Byron. The event included 162 middle school and high school students in grade 6-12 competing on 31 teams from 10 schools in SE MN.
- b. Billat shared highlights of a tour he took with Supervisor Madson through District #1 that included numerous stops, and thoughtful discussions throughout the route that the two planned. This was a great learning opportunity and was offered to other board members if they wanted to participate as well.

## 11. Fair booth ideas

- a. Viktora asked the Board for input they may have for the 2026 Freeborn County Fair Booth. She reminded them of the key topics that were featured in 2025 and 2024. Wind erosion, soil erosion, and forestry (local tree disease education) were a few items suggested.

## 12. Soil loss discussion

- a. Cornell opened the soil loss discussion by summarizing recent board meeting conversations from January and April board meetings. After the April meeting as suggested by the board, Cornell reached out to Freeborn County Environmental Services regarding their input on the potential for a soil loss ordinance in Freeborn County and shared feedback from them with the Board. The board had thoughtful discussions on soil loss, a potential soil loss ordinance, soil loss prevention and education, and most notably what steps to take next. A motion to create a Soil Loss Advisory Committee to allow staff and the committee to look into the soil loss issues/information/education/options further was made by Kramer. Madson seconded the motion. Three board members affirmed the motion, and two members opposed the motion. Results of a roll call vote approved (3-2): Kramer, Helland, and Madson were aye votes. Lightly and Heers were nay votes. **MOTION CARRIED**
- b. Kramer made a motion to nominate Madson and Lightly to serve on the Soil Loss Advisory Committee. No second occurred. **MOTION FAILED.**
- c. Kramer made a motion to table the Soil Loss Advisory Committee discussion for the June board meeting. Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 13. 2027 Budget for presentation to Freeborn County

- a. Cornell reviewed the proposed draft 2027 budget for presenting to the Freeborn County Commissioners at a county board workshop. Heers made a motion to approve the draft budget and take to the county for presentation. Kramer seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 14. Financial Discussion

- a. Cornell brought to the board a suggestion to create a strategic plan for the district that involves all Supervisors and Staff focusing on the district and staff goals. Heers made a motion to move ahead with a strategic plan process, timeline, and seek out grant funding opportunities to cover expenses. Kramer seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 15. Election Filing reminder

- a. Opens May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2026, and closes at 5:00 pm on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2026.

## 16. 2026 National Strip-Tillage Conference & Bus Tour August 5-7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- a. Kramer made a motion to cover expenses and per diems for any Board Supervisors or Staff who attend the National Strip-Tillage Conference and Bus Tour hosted by Steele & Rice SWCD's in August.. Madson seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 17. Meal reimbursement for Kramer

- a. Lightly made a motion for the district to cover meal expenses for Kramer on May 21<sup>st</sup> for the ISG Field Tour in Madison Lake that he will be attending. Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 18. NRCS Team 19 Local Work Group Meeting

- a. NRCS is hosting the team 19 local work group meeting on Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-10:30 am with virtual and in person options. Kramer made a motion to authorize staff and supervisors to attend. Lightly seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 19. Area 7 Resolutions Meeting

- a. MASWCD Area 7 will be hosting the Resolutions meeting on June 9<sup>th</sup> in Stewartville. Kramer made a motion to approve registration costs and expenses for staff and supervisors to attend. Heers seconded the motion. **MOTION CARRIED**

## 20. Adjournment

- a. There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made by Kramer. Lightly seconded. **MOTION CARRIED**. Next meeting Thursday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 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, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

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**Brad Kramer, Board Secretary**

**Date**