

SUWANNEE COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT MEETING MINUTES

March 18, 2021

The Suwannee County Conservation District Board of Supervisors held their regularly scheduled meeting Thursday, March 18, 2021 via teleconference. Supervisors attending via teleconference were Andy Jackson, Chairman; James Williams, Secretary/Treasurer; Ronnie Lawson, Supervisor; and Larry Sessions, Supervisor.

Also attending via teleconference were Joni Fortner, SCCD Staff Assistant; Garrett McCray, SCCD Administrator; Ryan Lawson, SCCD Technician; and Chris Menhennett, District Conservationist (NRCS). Due to COVID-19, there was no meeting held in February.

Chairman, Andy Jackson, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. James Williams motioned for those minutes to be approved. This motion was seconded by Andy Jackson.

Due to the fact not enough Supervisors had a copy of the Financial Reports, The Board decided to wait until our next Board Meeting in April to review and approve them. James Williams motioned to approve this decision. This motion was seconded by Ronnie Lawson.

Garrett McCray, SCCD Administrator, discussed our current contracts. The BMP Tools Contract is on schedule and nearing completion. For the RESTORE Energy Contract, Alexander Mack is preparing an amendment which will increase the maximum amount for each CSA from \$25,000 to \$50,000.

Chris Menhennett, NRCS District Conservationist, gave an update on NRCS activities. He stated that NRCS was in process of finishing the ranking and cost-estimates for 2021 EQIP. He also went on to report that NRCS was taking applications for CSP 2021 classic and CSP 2022 Renewal. In addition, NRCS was implementing a large amount of conservation practices that included cover crops, residue management, mulch till, tree planting, fire break, irrigation system sprinklers, fencing, livestock pipeline, nutrient management, and pest management practices. Chris thanked the Board for their continued support and the help of Joni and Garrett through the NACD TA Grant. Chris commended both Joni and Garrett for the quality of work they were doing and noted that the only reason that the Live Oak NRCS office was as successful as it is was directly related to the help the SCCD District was providing through the NACD TA Grant. Chris noted that he could not do what he does without the help of the District Staff.

OLD BUSINESS:

Chris Menhennett with NRCS discussed the SWCD MOU and CWA, as well as the Annual Civil Rights & Equal Opportunity documents. It was agreed upon to table both matters until the next in-person meeting.

NEW BUSINESS:

FDACS sent a new amendment for the Technician Contract which changed some of the deliverables, as well as the Contract Manager from FDACS, The Board has agreed to sign the amendment. Larry Sessions motioned to approve this decision. This motion was seconded by James Williams.

Chris Menhennett with NRCS discussed the upcoming Local Working Group Meeting. The Board agreed to have it along with our regular Board Meeting on April 15th.

The Board agreed upon the normal annual sponsorships to FFA and 4H. They are as follows:

**Suwannee High FFA - \$100.00
Suwannee Middle FFA - \$100.00
Branford Middle/High - \$100.00
State Land Judging - \$500.00
4H/Suwannee County Extension - \$100.00**

The ordinary bills to be paid were presented. James Williams motioned to pay the bills. This motion was seconded by Larry Sessions.

The next District Meeting will be held at 6:00pm Thursday April 15, 2021.

OTHER BUSINESS:

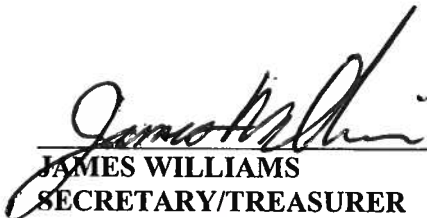
Chairman, Andy Jackson, asked Chris Menhennett, NRCS District Conservationist, to provide the Board with an update regarding the NACD TA Grant. Chris explained to the Board that he was asked by Mr. Juan Hernandez, Florida NRCS State Conservationist, about the existing NACD TA Agreement. During that conversation, Mr. Hernandez expressed concerns about his understanding of the present NACD TA Grant and the fact that he was not sure if he was going to support the renewal of the NACD TA Grant for the upcoming 2021/2022 funding period. Mr. Hernandez was not fully aware that Suwannee County Conservation District Staff Joni Fortner and Garrett McCray were being contracted for services by the Suwannee County Conservation District to perform the deliverables outlined in the NACD TA Grant. Chris went on to report that when he explained to Mr. Hernandez that NACD both knew about and supported the fact that the SCCD was utilizing their staff to perform these duties, and that the SCCD had been audited for three years while administering this grant, Mr. Hernandez was more understanding and supportive. Chris went on to report that he also shared with Mr. Hernandez all of the 2020/2021 reports submitted to NACD and the success story featured in the NACD eResource. Discussion ensued by the SCCD Board to recall how they came to utilize their existing staff for doing the work in the NACD TA Grant. Chairman Andy Jackson recalled for the Board that when the NACD TA Grant first became available to the SCCD, there was a short window to respond. Since the NACD TA Grant was an opportunity for capacity building for the SCCD, and an opportunity for the SCCD to help the NRCS office, who was overloaded at that time, the Board submitted an application not fully knowing all the expectations and/or requirements for the grant. When the SCCD was awarded the grant, they initially tried to hire a qualified person to perform the deliverables. Chairman Jackson recalled for the Board that they approached retired NRCS District Conservationist Bernard Smith and was turned down because Mr. Smith did not want to work full time. After that, the Board approached former NRCS Soil Conservationist Clifford Starling about working in this position, but could only guarantee him one year of employment with future employment being contingent on the availability of grant funds. Mr. Starling could not take the job without some sort of guarantee that he would have future employment. After being turned down by Mr. Smith and Mr. Starling, the Board recognized that they had two employees that were well experienced in the culture and work of NRCS that could perform the duties outlined in this NACD TA Grant. The Board offered to both Joni Fortner and Garrett McCray the opportunity to do this work on a trial basis. It was contingent upon them being able to perform their official SCCD duties. Chairman Jackson went on to recall for everyone that this arrangement of using their District staff worked extremely well, as Joni and Garrett welcomed the additional work and were extremely successful in helping NRCS and meeting the intent of the NACD TA Grant. Chairman Jackson went on to report that the reason the SCCD Board was continuing with the NACD TA Grant was the fact that it had been so successful, both helping NRCS to become one of the largest, if

not the largest workload county in the state of Florida. He recalled that the Live Oak NRCS Field Office obligated approximately 1.8 million the first year of the grant (2018), 3.2 the second year of the grant (2019) and 5.5 million the third year of the grant (2020). Chris noted that the success of the Live Oak NRCS office was primarily due to the NACD TA Grant and the help of the SCCD Staff. Chairman Jackson turned it back over to Chris to finish the update. Chris reported that Mr. Hernandez would give his full support to renew the SCCD NACD TA Grant under one main condition. Mr. Hernandez understood the NACD TA Grant to be a capacity building grant, defined by him to add staff if at all possible. Mr. Hernandez wants the SCCD to advertise a SCCD staff position to do the work in the NACD TA Grant. He understands that it may be difficult for the SCCD Board to find a qualified person, but if the SCCD Board is willing to advertise, then they have met the intent of the capacity building component of this agreement and he will support it. Hearing Mr. Hernandez's concerns and recounting the fact that the SCCD Board originally did try to hire an employee to do the work outlined in the NACD TA Grant, the Board moved to advertise the job. They are going to use the requirements of a GS-9 Soil Conservationist to come up with a job description for this position. The SCCD Board will advertise the job and report back to Mr. Hernandez with their results.

There being no further business presented, James Williams motioned to have the meeting adjourned. This motion was seconded by Larry Sessions, and Andy Jackson adjourned the meeting.



ANDY JACKSON
CHAIRMAN



JAMES WILLIAMS
SECRETARY/TREASURER