

DISTRICT SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, December 20, 2016

9:00 A.M.

USDA Service Center

FSA Conference Room

Preston, MN 55965

Minutes

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tim Gossman, Brian Hazel, Leonard Leutink, Pam Mensink, Travis Willford

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

OTHERS PRESENT: Donna Rasmussen, Jeanette Serfling, Rick Grooters, Doug Keene, Dean Thomas, Jessica Bronson (NRCS), Mark Kanable (NRCS), Ron Meiners (MDA),

Willford called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. A quorum is present.

I. AGENDA

Motioned by Leutink seconded by Mensink to approve the agenda. Affirmative: Leutink, Willford, Gossman, Mensink. Opposed: none. Motion carried.

II. CONSENT AGENDA

Serfling explained that the funding sources for two of the contracts was omitted from the list of consent agenda items approved at the December 15, 2016 meeting and is required in the minutes.

1. Re-approve the December 15, 2016 Consent Agenda with additional information
 - a. Secretary's Report – November 17, 2016 Regular Board Meeting Minutes
 - b. Payment of Conservation Practice Assistance Contract FY15-09 Rick Hansen, Grassed Waterway, in the amount of \$1,338.00 **with \$757.71 from FY 2015 funds and \$580.29 from FY2016 funds**
 - c. Payment of Conservation Practice Assistance Control FY15-10 Gary Hellickson, Terrace with underground outlet, in the amount of \$4,301.00 **with \$74.00 from FY 2015 funds and \$4,227.00 from FY2016 funds**
 - d. Payment of FSP Phase II Implementation Conservation Practice Assistance Contract BC16-04 Carter Lee, Grassed Waterways, in the amount of \$25,069.00

Hazel entered the meeting at 9:08 a.m.

Motioned by Leutink seconded by Mensink to approve the consent agenda with the additional information. Affirmative: Leutink, Hazel, Willford, Mensink. Opposed: none. Motion carried.

III. NRCS – MRBI UPDATE

1. Updates on planning status of producers being directed to Federal program EQIP
2. Status on what applications you will be directing for FY2018 EQIP MRBI applications

Gossman entered the meeting at 9:10 a.m.

Meiners reviewed the list of producers he has been in contact with for potential projects. He said a discussion is needed with staff to determine workload and who would be best to continue contact with the producers and determine whether Federal (MRBI-EQIP) or State funding is best for the landowner.

Rasmussen reviewed the state funding sources available and grant ending dates for those funds. Kanable discussed the tentative application deadline for FY18 EQIP applications and what needs to be done before the deadline. Early planning is key. He also reviewed the steps for planning, applying, and eligibility. Once planning is done, then determine the funding options and what works best for the farmer.

There was explanation on the terms penalty and liquidated damages. There are no penalties imposed. There may be liquidated damages of up to 10% of the project cost due to NRCS termination if, after twelve months under contract, no work has been started and there has been no communication from the landowner. There is no commitment by the landowner during the application process, and even after the contract is signed, there is some leeway for them to cancel due to extenuating circumstances, such as a death or financial hardship.

3. What training needs are you looking for to accomplish the needs on applications

Training is needed on the forms (e.g. SHPO, NEPA) which are required for an EQIP application. Knowing where to find the forms, what information is required, how to fill them out and training in running RUSLE2 is needed for better efficiency. SWCD staff can fill out the forms but cannot sign to approve them. The planner who is familiar with the site is the best person to complete the forms. Sites where a practice is already in place and needs to be rebuilt to the same specifications may be exempt. If the practice is enhanced, such as adding tile to a waterway, it is considered an undertaking and must have the forms completed.

Kanable said there are on-line courses for form completion. There are also weeklong training courses that technicians may attend which upon successful completion and plan review, the technician can become a certified planner.

Communication between SWCD and NRCS staff is key to successful planning and completion of EQIP projects as demonstrated in the neighboring SWCD/NRCS offices with access to MRBI funding. However, there are Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

considerations in order to share EQIP payment information. Most other information about a project (application status, design, location, etc.) can be shared among the partners. Consent forms are available to be signed by the landowner to allow information to be shared with the TSP, contractor, and others they specify. Gossman suggested having the form signed as part of the application process would eliminate the privacy limitations.

4. What is the next step (accountability) along with priorities on how the SWCD will be conducting and promoting MRBI-EQIP

Rasmussen thought scheduling a meeting in February to review the list of names and identify who will be doing what is needed. In the meantime, the technician assigned to each landowner will communicate with them to create a firmer list of projects. SWCD staff will also get some training on how to fill out SHPO and NEPA forms at the February meeting. Meeting with the producer and having them decide what they want to do is the biggest issue. Once the planning is done and the decision is made to apply for EQIP, NRCS completes the screening and ranking forms. Having the plans done early provides information for NRCS to decide MRBI funding levels needed for 2018.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Motioned by Mensink seconded by Leutink to adjourn the meeting. Affirmative: Mensink, Leutink, Willford, Gossman, Hazel. Opposed: none. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Travis Willford
Chair