

Okeechobee Soil and Water Conservation District

April BOS Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Time: 1:00pm

Location: 200 NW 5th Street Conference Room

Chairman Corona called the meeting to order at 1:04pm.

Mariano Corona-Chairman-Present

Jared Figley-Supervisor-Present

Donald Sellers, Jr.-Supervisor-Present

Douglas Burnham-Supervisor-Present

Glynn Rutledge-Treasurer-Present

- I. Motion to approve the March 11, 2026 Meeting Minutes (Sellers/Figley). Motion passed unanimously.
- II. Motion to approve the Financial Report as presented (Sellers/Burnham). Motion passed unanimously.
- III. Staff Program Reports
 - a) OSWCD Program Specialist, Vicki Wheeler gave the NRCS Report due to Carlos Torres' required attendance at the Glades/Hendry Local Working Group meeting. The Okeechobee Service Center received 177 program applications (Glades: 8-CSP, 20-EQIP and Okeechobee: 52-CSP, 97 EQIP). District Administrator, Audrey Kuipers responded to the Board's concern about staffing. She plans to have another discussion with Carlos Torres to further utilize the assistance the District can provide through the contribution agreement.
 - b) FDACS Environmental Manager, Sheila Kitaif reported that the plan is to have a \$75k cap on cost share per Notice of Intent (NOI) to help fund more applications. Cost share will only be offered at 75% of reimbursement and continuing discussion on not accepting in-house labor. There is one more position to fill in the Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin area, then south Florida will be fully staffed.
 - c) Audrey Kuipers reported that the 2025 Livestock Forage Program (LFP) for drought has been extended to April 24. The 2026 LFP program has opened with no current deadline. The Tree Assistance Program (TAP) continues to be

the only program offered for the freeze that occurred earlier in the year. Applicants have 90 days from the notice of loss to apply. She encouraged the Board to continue to remind producers to sign up at Farmers.gov and create a login.gov account to stay current on programs. This account will also enable producers to view their contracts and update entity information virtually.

- d) Vicki Wheeler and Audrey Kuipers gave the OSWCD Report. Ms. Wheeler continues with monthly collections for the Monofilament Recovery & Recycling Program. There were 8 participants in the local contest; 3 will be moving forward to the state contest on April 8.

Collier SWCD reserved the soil trailer March 13-April 6 for Glades/Hendry and Immokalee Ag-Ventures.

Audrey Kuipers discussed the Board's Natural Resources Conservice Service (NRCS), Board of County Commissioners, FDACS-Office and Ag Water Policy, and National Association of Conservation District Association's grants and agreements.

No new applications for feral swine management, small farms, or educator grants received.

Ms. Kuipers will certify the FY25 Financial Audit with the State after her appointment with P.J. Rader on May 6. The deadline is June 30.

Ms. Kuipers will attend the Sentinel Landscape Partnership, Public Risk Management of Florida, and SE Conservation District Employee Association meetings April 9-April 17. Served as a judge for FFA district competition.

Ms. Wheeler will work on the state poster contest and served as a judge for the FFA district competition.

Matt Dorriety was introduced as the new BMP Conservation Technician. Start date was March 25. Shadowing several Implementation Verification and Enrollment visits with FDACS staff and served as a judge for the FFA district competition.

The Board signed the Florida Association of Special Districts ballot approving Ms. Kuiper's participation. Douglas Burnham was awarded a 20-year service award.

IV. Unfinished Business

- a) Sarasota SWCD was officially dissolved on April 1, 2026. Ms. Kuipers is in contact with their Chairman, Matt Palmer and Kenesha Reynolds, NACD, Conservation Program Director. Ms. Kuipers will work with Mr. Palmer and NACD to close out their Feral Swine Management Grant. She is in discussion

now to amend the Okeechobee NACD grant. NACD would prefer new program participants to be given preference over previous recipients.

V. New Business

- a) Motion to support and join the Association of Florida Conservation Districts (Sellers/Rutledge). Motion passed unanimously.
- b) SFWMD staff: Sara Ouly, Justin Nolte, and Libby Pigman gave a presentation on the Bassinger Dairy Legacy Phosphorous Removal Project. Discussion on using reservoir water through drip tape was discussed, as well as the best crop to take up available phosphorus. Supervisors feel strongly that sugarcane is the best crop to meet this objective. Ms. Ouly stated that various crops will be utilized to demonstrate rates for future remediation opportunities; however, sugarcane was not one of them on the project due to recommendations from Hilliard Brothers-Florida.

Libby Pigman encouraged attendance at the Bringing Voices Together for the Northern Everglades-April 16 Workshop in West Palm Beach. Ms. Kuipers will forward the email invitation to all Supervisors.

- VI. Supervisor Figley asked for a Board discussion on the Data Center being constructed on US 441 North. The Board expressed concerns about noise pollution and water resources used to cool the center. Is the water being recycled or dumped into Taylor Creek? What is the water quality after usage? Legally, was the land supposed to go back to the original owners if not used for educational or rehabilitation services?

The Board did not have enough information at the time to take any action.

VII. Upcoming Events and Deadlines

- a) CFRPC Agricultural Land Use Conservation Kickoff Meeting, April 10: 9:00-10:00am; Virtual
- b) SECDEA Mid-Year, April 13-15: North Carolina
- c) NACD Stewardship Week: April 25-May 6
- d) FCDEA Mid-Year Meeting, April 27-28: Gainesville, FL
- e) Landowner Expo, May 6, 9:00am: Highlands County Ag Center
- f) Local Working Group Meeting, May 13; 12:00pm: Extension Office
- g) Board of Supervisors Meeting, May 13, 12:00pm: Extension Office

- VIII. Chairman Corona adjourned the meeting at 3:00pm.

Approved at the May 13, 2026 Board of Supervisors meeting.