

**HILLSBOROUGH SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
MINUTES**

Board of Supervisors Meeting / December 17, 2021 / 4:30pm
Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Dover

SUPERVISORS IN ATTENDANCE

Kathy Eckdahl — Chair
Andrew Brooks — Vice Chair / via Zoom
Sonja Brookins — Treasurer
Karen Cox Jaroch — Supervisor

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Betty Jo Tompkins — HSWCD Executive Director
Linda Chion — HSWCD / PT computer graphics
Anthony — HSWCD / Volunteer

WELCOME

Introductions made of all attendees.

REVIEW OF THE MINUTES

Jaroch moved to accept / Brookins seconded
Approved unanimously

TREASURER'S REPORT

Sonja Brookins, treasurer, reviewed the documents included in the supervisors' meeting books, offering the following numbers for the following accounts:

- General Account — \$2,849.68
- Hillsborough 100 — \$5063.87
- Mini Farms — \$81,181.23
- Tampa Bay Envirothon — \$395.66

Jaroch moved to approve the Treasurer's Report / Brooks seconded
Approved unanimously

NRCS REPORT

NRCS District Conservationist Alvarez was not in attendance as she was on vacation and out of town.

Tompkins reviewed the materials in the supervisor's book, including:

- EQUIP — 52 applications for FY 2022. Accepting applications for 2023.
- Conservation Stewardship Program — 3 applications pending/accepted at this time
- FSA Assisted Farm Bill Programs — 1 pending.

- Memorandum of Understanding — Tompkins reviewed carefully and noted a lot of specifics as per federal requirements; a lot of boilerplate as well, from a legal perspective. Tompkins signed Dec. 3 on behalf of the district, as its executive director. Next step is NRCS approval. Note also, NRCS, as a federal agency, still is requiring masks, and all federal employees have to be vaccinated. They are allowing visitors to their offices at 75 percent.

SWFWMD

No representatives at the meeting due to the fast-approaching holidays, but many were in Tallahassee during Farm Bureau Day. Tompkins reported bureau officials are in support of soil and water conservation districts in light of the proposed, companion bills in the Florida House and Senate to abolish the districts in July.

AGRI-BUSINESS REPORT

Simon Bolin reported informally before the official meeting started, as he had to leave early.

NON-AGENDA ITEMS

1. Supervisor Jaroch inquired about email addresses for supervisors, raising the issue of whether they should be personal or through the Hillsborough County account. Since the district is a separate agency from the county, she does not want to go through the county. She prefers to go through HSWCD's Wix web site and said she would take the lead in getting that done.
2. Chion presented, from the National Association of Conservation Districts, an Honorable Mention certificate Tompkins received for her service and that as well of her husband and son. Attached is the text of the nomination that led to receipt of the award. Upon the conclusion of the presentation, which included a framed certificate, the supervisors stood clapping and Tompkins said she was truly humbled by the receipt of the recognition and duly touched as it honored her husband and son posthumously. Collectively, the Tompkins family has more than 50 years of collective service in the soil and water conservation district business.

EDUCATION OUTREACH

- Tompkins reported the district's participation in Ag-Venture, four days in October and five days in November. Tompkins and Collins, the district's former Community Outreach employee, were recognized for their work at an Ag-Venture luncheon. Tompkins said 821 students participated in public and private school groups along with an additional

263 homeschooled students. As a result, more than 1,000 students made water conservation bracelets at the HSWCD booth and looked at the district's presentation. Written applications were collected from the teachers and Tompkins said she is happy to report that the HSWCD team received the highest number of points out of all the groups participating. More important, she said, the kids enjoyed their time and learned about water conservation in the process. Another Ag-Venture is set for the spring, to cover one week instead of nine days.

- The poster contest is now in its 2022 cycle with the theme, "Healthy Soil, Healthy Lives." HSWCD seeks applications from private, public, parochial, charter and homeschooled students. Likewise, the speech contest has the same theme, entry rules and deadlines.
- HSWCD aims to reinstate Envirothon and the Land Judging Contest as post-pandemic events. Both have been on a COVID-19 hiatus. Nevertheless, Tompkins said, HSWCD has been "very fortunate, impacting a couple thousand kids over the past few months" through other activities, including at the Hillsborough County Fair and Hillsborough County Fall Festival.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- At the 2021 SECDEA Annual Meeting in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., Tompkins, presented a well-received slideshow presentation entitled, "Funding Streams: Maximizing Your District's Potential." Tompkins said she has received many requests for a copy of the presentation, which now is posted online on the HillsboroughSWCD.com web site, in a blog entitled, "HSWCD reviews funding streams, conservation initiatives at 2021 Southeast Region Meeting." (Also on the web site, a link to download the 44-page snapshot review of HSWCD 2021 programs, projects and activities that Tompkins made available at the meeting. It's with the blog entitled, "HSWCD celebrates year of impact engaging communities, securing resources for conservation.")
- At the Florida Ag Expo on Nov.18, Tompkins was in attendance, along with volunteer Bolesta, Collins and Supervisor Brookins, all of whom participated in the HSWCD booth. According to Bolin, there were some 850 people in attendance.
- HSWCD hosted the second of two Local Working Group meetings this year on Nov. 24, at the Florida Strawberry Growers Association in Dover. Twenty-seven people were in attendance to review and comment on funding opportunities and priorities for FY 2023. Supervisor Brooks said HSWCD put on a good meeting and that he would like to see more help from other organizations. Tompkins said NRCS will not provide the district access to their database of people who use their services and that if they would, that list represents the people who are likely to apply and receive funds in the future.

- Farm Bureau Legislative Day in Tallahassee was held November 30, 2021. Tompkins, Collins and Supervisor Brookins were in attendance at the Legislative Breakfast and to visit legislative offices. HSWCD had a booth at the Fresh From Florida reception. It was noted that this year's attendance was especially important given the introduction of companion bills in both the House and Senate to abolish soil and water conservation districts statewide as of July 1, 2022. Brookins said she believes there is a personal attack on the districts from one legislator in particular and that "there's a lot of work we need to do." As elected officials, she added, "this is nothing to play with. We represent people and we need to fight to represent them."
- The AFCD on Dec. 20 hosted a Zoom conference call to discuss the legislative bills to abolish soil and water conservation districts. Tompkins said it is "absolutely critical" to launch and leverage a grass-roots effort to contact legislators and bring a lot of people together in support of the districts. She noted that Rep. Truenow, who introduced the House Bill, appears to have issues with districts in another part of the state and around Lake County, including Orange, Clay and St. John's counties. Both HB 783 and its companion bill (SB 1078, introduced by Sen. Hutson), "are very specific," Tompkins said, and their intention, in a nutshell, is "to abolish all the districts in Florida and turn over their assets to water management districts."

MORE ON HB 783 and SB 1078

Tompkins noted in her opinion, the bills are ill-conceived because she finds they are based on the premise that DEP and water management districts "do exactly what we do," and that "nothing could be further from the truth." Both are regulatory in nature, she added, "and they have a specific task, and that is to focus on water quality and quantity." Soil and water conservation districts "are not regulators," Tompkins added. "We are educators, and can have bigger and more direct impact on the public." She also finds fault with the premise that SWCD's, started in the 1930's, "don't know what they do and have no connection to the public." She said at the Farm Day legislative breakfast in Tallahassee, Rep. Truenow, while extremely polite when she talked to him, would not meet with the groups as a whole later that day. Farm Bureau had Rep. Truenow, who serves on his local Farm Bureau board, as its first legislative breakfast speaker and was unaware of his intention to file the abolishment bill. She said she believes Farm Bureau does not support the movement to abolish soil and water conservation districts in Florida. Also, she believes water management district officials are not interested in taking over SWCD duties.

Meanwhile, AFCD is working with its members to compile by Dec. 20 talking points on the matter and draw up a resolution in support of SWCD's. Tompkins requested the Hillsborough SWCD Board to consider a resolution as well. The legislative session starts Jan. 10.

Discussion ensued and it was agreed that a Zoom meeting to discuss and vote on an HSWCD resolution would be held Dec. 29. Chair Eckdahl said she would help set up the meeting link.

Supervisor Brooks said he is going to reach out to his business and political contacts to get their thoughts and support on the issue. He believes this is a crucial element in the drive to prevent the bills' passage and suggested also reaching out to like-minded corporate sponsors, including The Mosaic Company. Tompkins agreed that this is critical, to have a direct contact with any legislator or public official people know personally. Brooks noted as well that a lot of the legislators might not know that the supervisors are not elected by party affiliation, and that the overall work of the soil and water conservation districts is not political "and strictly for the betterment of our local communities." Tompkins added that there is a presumption disbanding SWCD's will bring a cost savings, but supervisors are not paid and staffs are very small compared to other agencies. Also, while the proposed bills call for a transference of assets, that is not possible, as the SWCD's have assets that "are not ours to give," Tompkins said. Jaroch agreed, noting SWCD's are "pass-through agencies for the bigger-ticket items."

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS ANNUAL MEETING

The annual convention is set for Orlando Feb. 12-16. Early bird registration (\$500) was to close this week but had been extended to Thursday, Dec. 23.

Tompkins noted that many of the scheduled NACD convention events conflict directly with HSWCD's Florida State Fair obligations. Supervisor Jaroch said it is impossible for Tompkins to be in two places at the same time, and said she will sign up to help with HSWCD booth at the fair, or wherever the critical need is.

FLORIDA STATE FAIR EXHIBIT

Tompkins reviewed her plans for the booth, which at 1,800 square feet is a larger space than ever before, necessitating a lot of people to help manage. She said there is a definite need for people to man the booth the first day of the fair and on weekends, if not more. She discussed some ideas for the smaller spaces within the larger space (which amounts to 18 spaces). In one space, children will draw pictures of bees to take home or to leave behind for display, with the words: "Bee Kind. Bee Generous. Bee Respectful and other messages."

NACD URBAN AND COMMUNITY GRANTS

Tompkins attended a Dec. 14 webinar and spoke as a past recipient of a \$50,000 grant, which was used for the Hillsborough 100 Conservation Challenge. She proposes to apply for another NACD urban and community grant, for which the HSWCD Board of Supervisors must approve a resolution. "It's hard, but not impossible, to win a second time," Tompkins said. The focus will be on using the money to hire an urban technician to run the HSWCD school program, which would engage schools in gardening and composting challenges. The focus will be on Title 1 schools. There are 165 such schools in the School District of Hillsborough County.

The board agreed to meet Dec. 29 via Zoom to vote on the NACD urban grant resolution.

HILLSBOROUGH 100 CONSERVATION CHALLENGE KICKOFF LUNCHEON

Scheduled for Jan 18 at The Regent in Riverview (please note, since the meeting and because of the developing wave of the omicron variant, the luncheon has been pushed back to April.)

Donations for goodie bags are needed. HSWCD gives awards at the luncheon. Tompkins proposed giving two awards this year in the category of, "Volunteer Family of the Year." She proposed for these awards both the Holt and Humphreys families, for the many HSWCD projects in which they have been engaged.

For the "Cooperating Partners" award, Tompkins proposed Fancy Farms, for the HSWCD Strawberry U-Pick, and Duggal and Sons Farms (for the HSWCD Blueberry U-Pick).

Eckdahl proposed an award as well for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, which offers its event space for HSWCD meetings.

Tompkins proposed an award as well for Judy Whitson, who is retiring in April after 30 years with Hillsborough County Farm Bureau. Among her accomplishments is running Ag Venture.

Brookins moved to recognize with awards the Holt and Humphreys families; Fancy Farms and Duggal and Sons Farms; Florida Strawberry Growers Association; and Judy Whitson. Jaroch seconded. / Motion passes unanimously.

PLANT AUCTION UPDATE

Tompkins reported Roy Davis delivered framed certificates to roughly 30 to 40 of the participating nurseries this year, which features colorful plants from this year's auction at the Hillsborough County Fair. He also gave them an invitation to the Hillsborough 100 Kickoff Luncheon and shared with them the Plant Show Reconciliation flyer, which noted the more than \$7,000 raised at this year's plant auction, a record. Nurseryman Doug Holmberg reportedly said he believes the Auction can raise \$10,000 next year, and that if he gets a list in advance of plants people would like to buy, he will make an effort to get them for the plant auction.

MEETING ADJOURNED

NEXT MEETING

Via Zoom on Dec. 29, to consider and approve the NACD urban grant resolution and the resolution against HB 783 and SB 1078.