

Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District Meeting of the Board of Supervisors

April 14, 2025 @ 10:00 AM

Location: HSWCD Office/4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL/33566

Supervisors and staff in attendance: Terri Parke, (Seat 1), Betty Jo Tompkins, (Seat 2), Gretchen Hoke, (Seat 3); Dr. Joe Walsh (Executive Director); K. Eckdahl (Office Manager) via video-conference: Aly Sullivan (Seat 5)

Absent: Absent/Vacant (Seat 4); Special Council Tom Gonzalez

Items 1-4

1.-4. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/Introductions: Chair Parke called the meeting to order at 10:01 A.M.; led the Pledge of Allegiance; Vice Chair Hoke led the prayer; Chair Parke welcomed attendees; and asked for introductions.

Partner Agency and Vendor Representatives in Attendance: video-conference attendees – Simon Bollin, Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development; Jeremy Ansel, NRCS/Plant City, Acting District Conservationist; Ken Griner, SWFWMD FARMS; Troy Green, HCBOCC-Div Env. Mgt.

Public in Attendance: Christian Padgett, (Chapter President, FNGLA)

Item 5. Public Comment: None at this time.

Item 6. Public Correspondence: None at this time.

Item 7. Review and Approval of Agenda: Supervisor Tompkins moved to accept the agenda for April 14, 2025. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 8. Local Working Group NRCS/HSWCD Planning: Jeremy Ansel reported he was working with former NRCS District Conservationist to provide the survey utilized for the LWG meeting. The survey will include the top 10 resource concerns tailored to Hillsborough County. The LWG meeting is scheduled for May 19, 2025 at 6 pm at FSGA/Lewis Gallagher Rd building. Dr Walsh said he plans to hand out the LWG survey using paper copies and a QR code at the FSGA's Agritech event held May 13th and 14th, 2025. Chair Park requested a door prize from local artist, Angie Klein from Plant City, FL to help incentivize and increase participation in the surveys; art/print cost is less than \$60; that being below financial controls thresholds, Board Supervisors Hoke, Sullivan and Tompkins concurred with the purchase.

9. Partner Agencies (introductions and reports):

- a. FDACS – Dr. Walsh briefed on the Alafia Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP rule), based on separate conversations with Hillsborough County (Troy Green/David Glicksberg), FDACS (Vanessa Baez), FDEP (Anita Stiles) and Carole Estes (SWFWMD). FDEP is updating the BMAP rule for the Alafia River, which is expected to go into effect on July 1st. Essentially all of the smaller BMAP basins of the Alafia River are being consolidated as a single Alafia watershed-

wide BMAP. Further, Dr. Wash was previously unaware that the rule carries a mandate of participation for all agricultural land operators and always did. Dr. Walsh shared that he had not understood the mandate part, because he had not heard much about penalties - he characterized the situation as an “unfunded mandate”. He said he knew that the approach had always been to get land operators enrolled either via Best Management Practices or via a surface water quality monitoring plan, particularly when an operator asked for an updated or new water use permit, but that he had never seen any kind of “stick” for the vast majority of small agricultural operators. He characterized the new rule along with the restructuring of FDACS operations as creating what he saw as new opportunities for HSWCD to contribute to the effort.

- b. SWFWMD Intergovernmental Affairs – no report at this time.
- c. SWFWMD FARMS Program Group – *Ken Griner* reviewed Cost Share reimbursement dollars and the Mini-Farms program. Mini-Farms has a \$10,000 per project limit, with a per customer/property-limit of 5 projects in a lifetime, and a pace of 2 project maximum per year. Ken encouraged participation in the SWFWMD programs.
- d. Hillsborough Agri-business Development – *Simon Bollin* reported there being no recent meetings of the Agricultural Economic Development Council, and no upcoming dates had been scheduled. Simon confirmed that he would keep HSWCD informed of opportunities to collaborate.
- e. HC’s Environmental Services Division – *Troy Green* reviewed the mission of Hills. Co. Environmental Services. Environmental Services provides water quality monitoring in collaboration with the EPC, including for rural monitoring stations within the Alafia BMAP. The monitoring program’s goal is to characterize sources of harmful bacteria, identify Hot Spots (indicating a nearby point source) and to characterize the contributions of Human versus Agriculture in the BMAP area. Environmental Services wants to work with producers to help lower the agriculturally-sourced bacteria levels. Dr. Walsh indicated that he sees the opportunity for HSWCD to collaborate with Environmental Services, with HSWCD stepping up to do a better job of tying its marketing of the cost-shares, the BMPs, and the BMAP requirements for participation by agricultural producers. He indicated that he didn’t want to make any undue claims on Environmental Services in terms of “mandates” and saw the HSWCD as the “good hands” people in the District, being that it does not have a regulatory enforcement role. Troy reiterated that Environmental Services was able and willing to provide water quality monitoring data to support district efforts.

Item 10. District Seat 4 Vacancy: Dr. Walsh presented Myke Morris’ application and qualifications to the Board for consideration in filling the District Seat 4 vacancy. Dr. Walsh confirmed that Mr. Morris provided his voter registration, agricultural property ownership (Gilchrist County) and proof of management of it, and thus was qualified to serve the office as described under F.S. Chapter 582. Supervisor Tompkins moved to nominate Myke Morris for District Seat 4. Chair Parke seconded and opened the item for discussion. Chair Parke noted for the motion that Mr. Morris was not in attendance at the meeting to answer questions. Supervisors Sullivan, Hoke, Tompkins and Parke each noted what they knew of his background and previous performance as District Supervisor, as follows:

Supervisor Tompkins read a list of Mr. Morris’ many public service activities, his engagement in agriculturally vested activities, as well as leadership activities related to his service on the Board:

- Attended a variety of local and statewide events

- served as Board Treasurer
- Participated in the 2024 LWG meeting
- Attended Hillsborough 100 event(s)
- Served as Area Vice President of Assoc. of Florida Conservation Districts
- Participated in an advocacy trip to Washington, DC to promote the Farm Bill with US Congressional members

Supervisor Sullivan: reported only knowing that Mr. Morris had served on the Board, as treasurer, and had seen him at various events; beyond that she knew nothing of his agricultural activities.

Supervisor Hoke:

- Wanted to know why Mr. Morris was interested in serving so soon after having allowed his first term to lapse without registering to run for a second term in the November election. She pointed out that it's only been a few months since the election and yet he's seeking appointment back to his seat. Supervisor Hoke used the word "concerned" to describe her reaction to his choices as she described them.

Supervisor Parke:

- Acknowledged the long list of Mr. Morris' activities provided by Supervisor Tompkins. Supervisor Parke made note of Mr. Morris' absence from the meeting, because she had questions that she'd wanted to ask him today. She said she did not hear anything in Supervisor Tompkins' list that sounded like Mr. Morris had taken an "active role in advocating for" any agricultural practices while serving on the Board and did not know him as an agricultural leader in that sense. She pointed out that since the legislative changes to F.S. 582, her sense was that the expectation on the conservation districts was to focus on technical services. She added that while many agencies were responsible for managing water quality, none of the other local agencies were working with farmers to better manage their soils. Further, despite the long list of Mr. Morris' activities mentioned, none of those had been focused on the actions necessary to get and keep the district off the dissolution lists, and that she believed the Board's first priority needed to be focusing on those issues.
- Chair Parke opined that the Board needed to "move in a different direction" than it had in the past, and that "we need members on the board who have the same goals".

Chair Parke called for a vote. Motion failed (vote 1 aye to 3 nay) with Supervisor Tompkins voting "aye" to Myke Morris' appointment; Supervisors Parke, Hoke and Sullivan each voted "nay".

Item 11. Minutes of March 10, 2025, HSWCD Regular Board Meeting: The Board's meeting minutes from March 10, 2025, were presented. Supervisor Sullivan moved to accept the meeting minutes as presented. Supervisor Hoke seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

Item 12. Supervisor Reports:

- a. **Supervisor Parke:** reported she had contacted several FL Legislature members with respect to SB 986 and HB 973. She noted there are Legislative members supporting Hillsborough being removed from the dissolution list (no names reported).
- b. **Supervisor Hoke:** reported she had participated as a station leader for the Florida Wildlife Corridor station at Hillsborough's Ag Venture. She and the students had a very positive experience with her presentation. She spoke to her contacting 17 FL legislators about SB986 and will be headed to the State Capital to support HSWCD being removed from the dissolution list; in answer to a question from Supervisor Tompkins, she clarified that she would be going in her capacity as owner/operator of Rain Frog Ranch.
 - i. **Feb 2025 – March 2025 Bank Account Report:** The financials were reviewed. Chair Parke moved to accept and file for audit the Feb 2025 – Mar 2025 Bank Report. Vice Chair Hoke seconded. Motion carried: 4-0.

- c. **Supervisor Tompkins:** reported she had participated in the Hillsborough Land Judging Event. There was a great turn out and many sponsors supported the event. She reported she had contacted members of FL Legislature with reference to SB986 and there is a statewide group gathering to write an opinion on the impacts of the proposed bills.
- d. **Supervisor Sullivan:** no report at this time.

Item 13. Director's Report:

Executive Director's report:

- Dr Walsh reported having received a letter from the Joint Legislative Audit Committee demanding explanation of the District's actions to address its material weaknesses described in our FY2021, FY2022 and FY2023 audits. The District's response letter, signed by Chair Parke, was sent to the JLAC Chairman Senator Collins, in March. Supervisor Tompkins requested a copy of the email from the JLAC along with the Chair's response Letter.
 - The lease for the fire station is on the BOCC's Consent Agenda for this Wednesday. Updates on building: a new roof was completed, paid for by BOCC Facilities Maintenance with a price tag of ~\$100K. The clean-up of the grounds after the installation is ongoing; there are low-lying cables which pose a pedestrian hazard, which have been reported to Hills Co. maintenance and Hills Co. IT Dept.
 - Dr Walsh attended the Plant City Chamber's Ag Tour on April 11th and spoke about some business development leads he wants to pursue – particularly G5's Hay Exchange and their access to the sod growers and equestrian agricultural sectors.
- c. FY24 Social Media Analytics Report: Office Manager Kathy Eckdahl presented her statistics from the webpage and Facebook. The website is receiving about 30,000 hits per month. Google, Facebook, and the PC Chamber are increasing in hits per month. The Board was asked to provide individual feedback on specific stats they want to continue to track and on format of the report going forward.

Supervisor Sullivan left the meeting at 10:55AM

Item 14. Upcoming/Proposed Business Schedule: Upcoming event dates were reviewed.

Item 15. Adjournment: Chair Parke adjourned the meeting 11:10 AM

Next Board Meeting:

May 12, 2025 @ 10 AM

HSWCD Office 4503 Coronet Rd/Plant City/FL 33566