

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

June 22, 2026

Location: HSWCD Office / 4503 Coronet Road, Plant City, FL 33566

Board Supervisors in attendance: Terri Parke (Seat 1); Betty Jo Tompkins (Seat 2); Gretchen Hoke (Seat 3); Casey Simmons Runkles (Seat 4); Matt Shivers (Seat 5).

Staff Support: Dr Joe Walsh (Executive Director); Dawn Chancey (Office Manager); Kylie Chapman (Conservation Technician).

Item 1-4 Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance/ Introductions: Chair Parke called the meeting to order at 10:00 am; Led the Pledge of Allegiance; Vice Chair Hoke led the prayer; Chair Parke welcomed attendees and asked for introductions.

Partner Agency and Vendor Representation in Attendance: *In person* - Simon Bollin (Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC); Ellen Cruz (FDACS – Regional Director); Madison Atkins (City of Plant City Environmental Land Management Supervisor); David Royal (The Nature Conservancy – Nutrient Stewardship Project Manager). *Virtual conference hub* - Ellerbe Bittner (Bank of Tampa – Treasury Management Advisor); Dawn Lardin (Global Payments – Relationship Manager); Andrew Kearse (USDA/NRCS – District Conservationist); Vanessa Bauzo (FDACS – OAWP Environmental Consultant; Ken Griner (SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS).

Public in Attendance: Harold “H.” Fry (cattle producer), Keira Carmen; Raelynn Burr; Joshua Young (organic farmer and AEA Fertilizer LLC)

Item 5. Public Comment: None requested at this meeting.

Item 6 Public Correspondence: on May 26th, 2026, Amanda Dorsett submitted an inquiry on the website that she was interested in learning more about local elected service and the role of the Hillsborough Soil and Water Conservation District. Ms. Dorsett expressed a strong interest in conservation and environmental stewardship, citing previous involvement with the Red Rock Audubon Society and experience supporting local political campaigns. The correspondence highlighted an interest in issues including soil and water conservation, stormwater management, agriculture, land use, wildlife habitat protection, and community education. Ms. Dorsett requested information regarding the District’s mission, responsibilities, volunteer and educational opportunities, and guidance for those considering future public service through the Soil and Water Conservation District. Dr. Walsh advised she is not an agriculturalist. So

she would not qualify to serve on the board, but she is very interested in seeing how she can engage with the Board.

Item 7 Review and Approval of Agenda: Chair Hoke motioned to accept the agenda; Supervisor Shivers seconded the motion; motion carried 5-0.

Item 8 Minutes of the May 18th Regular Board: Dawn Chancey presented the draft minutes for the May 18th, 2026, Board meeting; Supervisor Runkles made a motion to accept the meeting minutes; Supervisor Hoke seconded the motion. motion carried 5-0.

Item 9 Financial Report for May 2026: Dawn Chancey presented the May 2026 Financial Report. Vice-Chair Hoke reported that she had reviewed the draft financial report with Dawn prior to the meeting and expressed her satisfaction that the District had successfully completed its transition to Bank of Tampa. Vice-Chair Hoke further commented on the exceptional customer service and professionalism demonstrated by Bank of Tampa staff so far, noting that she wished the District had made the move much sooner. Dawn Chancey advised the Board that all District funds had been successfully transferred to Bank of Tampa. She also noted that Wesley Joyner had waived the fee associated with ordering the District's new checks.

Chair Parke called for a motion to accept the May 2026 Financial Report. Supervisor Hoke made the motion, which was seconded by Supervisor Shivers. The motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

Item 10 Plant City Memorandum of Understanding (McIntosh Preserve):

Dr. Walsh provided an overview of a proposed Plant City Memorandum-of-Understanding for the MacIntosh Preserve. He explained that the opportunity to assist in updating the Preserve's conservation plan started with his meeting Madison Atkins in March-April timeframe, and the opportunity is a good match with the District's strategic goal of expanding conservation planning and technical assistance services.

Dr. Walsh noted that the preserve's original management plan, developed when the property was acquired through Florida Communities Trust more than twenty years ago, had not been comprehensively updated despite significant changes in the surrounding area. As urban development has expanded around the preserve, management strategies must evolve to continue meeting the property's conservation objectives.

The proposed project would allow the District to gain practical experience in conservation planning while providing a valuable public service. Dr. Walsh stated that

the initiative aligns with multiple priorities identified in the District's Strategic Plan, including leveraging partnerships and providing technical services to the community.

Madison provided a brief overview of the proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). She explained that the City Attorney's Office prepared the initial draft, which was subsequently reviewed by Special Counsel Tom Gonzalez. Mr. Gonzalez asked for confirmation that the MOU would not negatively affect Hillsborough County Conservation and Environmental Lands Management (CELM). Dr. Walsh reported that discussions with CELM had already taken place; CELM staff had provided historical documents, confirmed they did not have capacity to do more than serve as subject matter experts and expressed support for the project.

Board members discussed the proposed arrangement and requested clarification regarding any financial obligations associated with the partnership. Madison explained that no funds would be exchanged between the parties. Each organization would contribute staff time and resources through its existing operating budget, and any applicable intellectual property or legacy planning documents would be shared as needed. The project would be completed using existing staff resources during normal working hours.

Dr. Walsh requested that the Board authorize signature authority to Chair Parke for execution of the MOU once City of Plant City had delivered their authorizing signature. Chair Parke called for a motion to Authorize Board Chair Parke to execute Memorandum of Understanding, as long as no substantive changes are made to the draft presented to Board during the June 22nd, 2026 meeting. Vice Chair Hoke made the motion which was seconded by Supervisor Runkles. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Item 11 Bank of Tampa. Buy Now (presentation): The presentation was provided for information and discussion. Bank of Tampa representative Ellerbe Bittner introduced Dawn Lardin, representing Global Payments. Global Payments is Bank of Tampa's contracted partner for delivering digital-direct payments from consumer to business accounts. Ms. Lardin provided an overview of the Buy Now payment system; the Conservation District would pay a monthly fee of \$20.00 and a transaction processing fee of 2.6 percent. Ms. Lardin provided a demonstration of the Buy-Now phone app, showing how donors and fee customers would be able to make payments to the District through a dedicated webpage. No motions made.

Item 12 Partner Agency Reports:

- *USDA/NRCS, District Conservationist Andrew Kears:*
 - Andrew Kears reported on several cost-share contract field visits and noted that approximately 50% of participants had fully implemented the required practices outlined in their contracts, while the remaining participants had either partially completed the requirements or missed certain elements. Several issues were identified regarding cover crop implementation, particularly with approved cover crop mixes. In some cases, producers planted only one plant species, instead of the required species mix; USDA-NRCS is considering either reducing the reimbursements on a per-acre basis or contract modifications.
 - Inquiries regarding cover crops continue to increase, with more than 100 emails currently awaiting review. Several of those communications specifically relate to cover crop practices, and follow-up contact will be made in the coming weeks.
 - Andrew's short-range commitments are to complete required training and addressing computer-related operational matters.
 - Regarding EQIP, Andrew stated that pre-approval notifications have not been received. Applicants whose submissions were assessed and remain under consideration are still eligible for funding, and funding decisions are expected to be announced in the near future.

Dr. Walsh noted the significance of Andrew's arrival to the Plant City office and stated that the Board's continued investment in his development as a resource to the local area is critical. The local field office operated without a District Conservationist for approximately one year, creating a substantial backlog of work that Andrew has been working diligently to address since arriving.

Andrew's manager, Walter Albarran, recently expressed concerns to Dr. Walsh regarding NRCS cost-share program performance for the Hillsborough operating area. As a result of the 2025 reduction in force, EQIP enrollment numbers dropped to 10% of the previous year's levels. The conversation focused on the District's capacity to directly support Andrew's efforts, with in-kind contribution of Kye Chapman's time.

While acknowledging that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is not expected to cooperatively fund additional positions in the foreseeable future, Andrew currently represents only one third of the technical capacity that was available several years ago, as two vacant positions that previously supported the office remain unfilled.

Dr. Walsh offered Kye Chapman's time to Andrew in support of the cost-share programs as soon as she had on-boarded, and Walter Albarran gratefully accepted that

support in the phone call. The technical aspects of the relationship are the same as if Kye's position was supported on a cooperatively funded agreement. Because NRCS enrollment information is maintained behind the USDA firewall, Kye goes to the NRCS field office to perform the work – currently doing customer contacts for 21 enrollment contracts. Dr. Walsh concluded this commitment fulfills the District's proscribed role under the Code of the Federal Register as the local sponsor of NRCS operations and he remains committed to assisting with service delivery wherever possible.

- *FDACS, Regional Director – Ellen Cruz:*

- The State of Florida budget is not yet signed but anticipated that the Governor would take action before the June 30 deadline. Some budget items may be vetoed, but the Legislature may get enough votes to override certain vetoes during a subsequent session. As long as the budget is signed by June 30, state government operations will continue uninterrupted. Ellen expressed confidence that several key FDACS funding requests remain in good standing. Among the anticipated appropriations is approximately \$132 million to support modernization efforts within the Florida Forest Service, including enhanced drone technology for wildfire detection and response. The upgraded systems are expected to significantly reduce wildfire response times and improve overall effectiveness.
- An additional \$38 million is expected for the Florida Farmers Feeding Florida program. Ellen reported that approximately 43 million pounds of Florida-produced food, including fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and other commodities, have been distributed through the program to date.
- The Legislature has also proposed nearly \$200 million in agricultural research funding, along with an additional \$1 million for FFA programs. Additional FFA funding will support scholarships and educational programming for nearly 70,000 students statewide, helping to strengthen leadership development, workforce training, and personal growth opportunities.
- The Fresh From Florida program is expected to receive an additional \$19 million in funding. Additionally, the Bronson Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory is anticipated to receive approximately \$42 million for facility modernization and equipment upgrades to strengthen Florida's ability to protect its agricultural industry and food supply.
- New World Screwworm threat – no detections have been reported in Florida to date. FDACS has implemented emergency measures requiring enhanced inspections and certifications for warm-blooded animals entering the state. Particular attention is being directed toward livestock movements from Texas

and New Mexico. Florida proactively modernized its screwworm trapping and detection systems after the pest was identified as a potential threat to the United States. Florida's upgraded detection equipment is now being deployed to Texas and New Mexico to assist with monitoring and containment efforts. FDACS's posture is intended to make its response to a screwworm detection in Florida "immediate, aggressive, and science-based." Board members and agricultural producers should report any suspected cases or concerns immediately, as early detection remains critical for preventing establishment of the pest within the state. Additional informational materials and press releases regarding the New World Screwworm would be provided to the District for distribution and posting on the District website.

- Pasture Mealybug – sudden appearance in May and already detected in fourteen Florida counties. First identified in May 2026, the pest has spread rapidly and poses a threat to pasture and turfgrass systems. The University of Florida IFAS Extension Service is actively involved in monitoring, outreach, and response efforts. Producers were encouraged to contact their local Extension office if suspicious symptoms are observed in pasture or forage systems. Educational sessions regarding the Pasture Mealybug would be offered during the Florida Cattlemen's Association meetings, including presentations by University of Florida specialists focused on identification, reporting procedures, and management strategies.
- *FDACS, OAWP Environmental Consultant – Vanessa Bauzo:*
 - Vanessa will be attending the Florida Cattlemen's Convention this week and anticipated providing additional updates at the next meeting.
- *SWFWMD – Environmental Engineer, FARMS – Ken Griner:*
 - Ken advised that Jeff Whealton, Agricultural Programs Manager, could not participate in today's meeting.
 - Ken offered a summary of the SWFWMD-FARMS program, highlighting their favorite cost-share items such as irrigation system weather stations and moisture probes. They also contribute to tubular recovery ponds, the pump stations the pump filters, and the main line that goes out to the manifolds. They currently have a lot of strawberry projects under funding. As always, if anyone knows of someone wanting to participate in FARMS cost-shares, please send them Ken's contact information.
- *Hillsborough County Agribusiness Development/AEDC/Cooperative Extension Service – Simon Bolin:*
 - Fire marshal inspections of farmworker housing – legislation has been delivered

to the Governor's desk for signature. The bill provides additional guidance and clarification to the State Fire Marshal's Office regarding inspection procedures and expectations for farmworker housing facilities. If signed by the Governor, the legislation will take effect 30 days after passage.

- Military spouse event at MacDill Air Force Base. Simon presented information regarding agriculture in Hillsborough County and opportunities for military families to engage with local agricultural operations and educational activities. A representative from the food industry also participated in the program. Mr. Bolin noted that the presentation was well received and generated positive discussion regarding agricultural tourism and community engagement opportunities.
- Agriculture Economic Development Council (AEDC) meeting is scheduled for August 4 and will be hosted at the FSGA in Dover.
- Opportunities to engage military/technology contractors in agricultural “biothreats: - Simon has been engaging with military contractors and technology providers regarding emerging tools for pest detection and monitoring; there may be opportunities for greater collaboration between agricultural agencies and military organizations in addressing biosecurity threats associated with ports, transportation networks, and interstate commerce. While discussions remain preliminary, Simon expressed interest in exploring future partnerships and potential agreements that could strengthen detection and response capabilities for agricultural threats within Florida.

Item 13: Supervisor Announcements:

Chair Parke:

- Attended Bank of Tampa Training
- Attended I-4 Urban Expansion Meeting
- Attended Commissioner Christine Miller Committee Office Hours

Supervisor Hoke:

- Attended the Lost Girl Prairie Conservation, Cattle and Wildlife Event, which brought together landowners, ranchers and conservation partners to discuss the importance of protecting Florida’s working lands and wildlife habitats.
- Commissioner Wilton Simpson’s Ever After Farms Citrus event - she had the opportunity to connect with conservation and agricultural partners, fellow elected officials, and community leaders.
- Attended an event hosted by the Conrads and learned more about the work Bea Valenti and private land stewardship efforts across Florida.
- Attended a meeting with the Tampa bay Estuary Program and learned about the results of their Tampa Bay Community Survey, which gathered input from more than 1,200 residents across the Tampa Bay watershed regarding conservation priorities, recreation, environmental concerns, and quality of life. The survey is

helping inform future restoration and conservation efforts by incorporating community perspectives alongside scientific data.

- Sent emails to all members of the Hillsborough County BOCC regarding farmland preservation. This is a message she will continue to echo in every room: if we want to protect agriculture, wildlife habitat, water resources and heritage, we must secure and preserve the remaining working lands. It is an issue that requires continued attention at both the county and state level.

Supervisor Tompkins:

- Hillsborough County Fair Board – continued plans for conservation exhibits, youth horticulture competition, rain barrel decorating contest and plant auction (events sponsored by Florida Conservation Coalition).
- Executed work as co-chair for the Harvest Awards at the Hillsborough County Fair.
- Presenter at annual county 4-H awards.
- Attended Tampa Bay Beekeepers meeting.
- Worked on Timberly Trust projects.
- Participated in activities with Preserving Brandon, Hillsborough County 4-H Foundation and Rotary Brandon South Eco Club.
- Worked on conservation activities and watermelon eating contest at Greater Brandon July 4th Parade and Fun Fest.
- Continued distribution of Florida Conservation Coalition mini-grants to schools, youth groups and individuals to conduct conservation projects.

Supervisor Runkles:

- Attended Commissioner Wilton Simpson Meeting in Dade City.
- Met with Commissioner Joshua Wostal.
- Attended an event hosted by the Conrads and learned more about the work Bea Valenti and private land stewardship efforts across Florida.

Supervisor Shivers:

- Supervisor Shivers did not have anything to report as he has been out of town with family obligations.

Item 14. Secretary's Report (Dawn Chancey):

- Social Media Report, May, 2026: Dawn is now tracking the District's Nextdoor profile performance. This is a new assignment from Joe, and she reported that the District had approximately 1,600 views during the October–December 2024 hurricane period. Dawn intends to begin posting regularly on the platform moving forward.
- District's homepage traffic continues to increase significantly. The website recorded approximately 89,000 clicks during the month of May, a figure described as surprising and encouraging. To support continued growth, staff are focusing on maintaining current, relevant content and increasing the frequency of updates.
- Dr. Walsh emphasized that relevance remains the primary goal of the District's communications strategy, noting that visitors increasingly seek specific information when accessing the website. He observed that our website activity increased dramatically during the hurricane events, when the District became a key source of timely information for agricultural producers and rural residents.
- He acknowledged the support of partner organizations that have helped promote the District's resources and outreach efforts. Dr. Walsh specifically referenced positive feedback received from Michelle Williamson (SWFWMD Governing Board Chair) encouraging the District to continue its current communications approach.
- Dr. Walsh noted that Simon Bollin had suggested early on that one advantage of the District's independent status is the ability to quickly publish information and establish communication priorities without external delays. This flexibility allows HSWCD to provide timely updates and resources to the public. He concluded by stating that the District's communications efforts remain focused primarily on agricultural topics and information relevant to rural residents, and that the current strategy appears to be producing positive results.

Item 15. Executive Director's Report : Dr. Walsh provided an update on current staffing efforts and recent personnel additions.

- **Conservation Technician:** Kylie Chapman has officially joined the District and has quickly become a valuable asset to the team. Her extensive knowledge and experience in botany have enabled her to independently identify opportunities and develop our projects at a pace beyond expectations. Additionally, her previous experience with CELM is helping with the McIntosh Preserve project. Dr. Walsh also noted that Ms. Chapman is certified as a Firefighter Type 2, bringing additional expertise to the District.

- **Land Conservation Specialist:** Dr. Walsh is currently in communication with a candidate to fill the vacant Land Conservation Specialist position. While some details remain to be finalized, the District hopes to bring the individual onboard soon. The candidate has experience with prescribed burns on Hillsborough County Environmental Lands, which would be beneficial to the District's conservation efforts.
- **Public Policy and Communications Intern:** Dr. Walsh announced that Raelyn Burr has been selected as the District's Public Policy and Communications Intern and is currently completing the onboarding process. Ms. Burr is expected to begin next week and will work approximately 20 hours per week. She is currently pursuing a master's degree at the University of Florida and brings experience in project management, conservation land management, and design. Dr. Walsh noted that Ms. Burr will be eligible for employment with the District through the completion of her graduate studies.

Item 15. Upcoming Events:

- July 1st, 2026 – Annual Financial Disclosure Forms Due
- July 13th, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting
- August 4th, 2026 – Plant City Chamber Candidate Forum
- August 17th, 2026 – Regular Board Meeting
- Meeting Adjourned at 11:15am.