

## Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Alger Conservation District (ACD) Board

Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 5:00 pm

MSU Research and Extension Center, Chatham, MI

A regular meeting of ACD was held on the above date. The meeting was called to order at 5:00pm by Chair John Highlen. Board members present at roll call: John Highlen, Rowan Bunce, and James DeDecker. Board members absent: Hilary Ludecke and Hans Eriksen. Associate board members present: Charlie Todd and Barb Isom. Staff present: Matt Watkeys, Christy Foye, and Elise Desjarlais. Staff absent: Alex Kolton, Misa Cady, Sara Kelso, Landen Tetil, and Holly Wendrick-Moss.

Guests: None

Public comment: Foye shared that she has accepted a position as the Conservation Administrative Assistant at Marquette County Conservation District. She gave her official two weeks' notice and will end her work with ACD on October 20. Highlen, Watkeys and the other board and staff members present thanked Foye for her service and congratulated her on the new position.

Isom noted the breadth and quality of ACD work over the last month and thanked the Board and staff for their efforts.

Correspondence: Watkeys passed around correspondence.

Approve agenda: Highlen requested addition of New Business Item E: Staffing Backfill/Restructure to the agenda.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker; All in favor, motion carried.

Approve minutes: Motion to approve minutes of the September 12, 2023 regular meeting by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker; All in favor, motion carried.

STAFF REPORTS: Written reports reviewed by the board and highlighted by staff.

- a. NRCS DC: Report received.
- b. NRCS SC: Report received.
- c. FAP FORESTER: Report received.
- d. PRODUCE SAFETY: Report received.
- e. L2L CISMA: Report received.
- f. DM: Report received. Watkeys shared that he, Cady and Kelso each submitted letters to Alpena CD leadership regarding the inappropriate behavior of Alpena CD FAP Forester, Greg Corace, at the recent FAP Camp professional development conference. Alpena CD leadership responded requesting additional information about the situation and how staff reacted to Corace in the moment, which Watkeys and Kelso provided. Although Alpena CD suggested there may be pattern of similar behavior from Corace, no further communication has been received or requested and Watkeys is unaware if any corrective action has been taken.
- g. CONSERVATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR: Report received.
- h. ACD AmeriCorps VISTA: Report received.
- i. MDARD: Report received.
- j. MAEAP: Report received.

MEETING REPORTS: Watkeys reported that he attended a recent Munising Township meeting to explain and seek approval for the planned Lyme Timber land purchase. The Township Board was supportive of the concept but has not yet taken concrete action to pass a resolution, etc. in support of the purchase.

### Old Business:

- a. OTHER GRANTS & FUNDING UPDATE:
  - DHIPI: Watkeys reported that the project is complete and a final reimbursement payment has been received.
  - MISG JAPANESE KNOTWEED: Watkeys reported that there is only one day of monitoring left on the project and a next reimbursement payment is forthcoming.
  - MISG HIMALAYAN BALSAM: Watkeys reported that two HB sites have been identified in Alger Co. to-date.

- MISG SURVEY&TREATMENT: No report.
  - CHATHAM COMMUNITY GARDEN: No report.
  - AUTRAIN FISH HABITAT: Watkeys reported that a no-cost extension of the project has been approved, which will focus on expanded habitat installations in cooperation with a growing cohort of partner landowners.
  - GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE PROPOSAL: Watkeys reported that Kolton has been working on a GLRI proposal focused on planting dunes at Au Train Beach and Christmas, which will include a detailed plant maintenance plan.
  - MISG SURVEY AND TREATMENT: Watkeys reported that a new MISG proposal is underway in collaboration with Desjarlais and the L2L CISMA.
- b. AGRIPALOOZA RECAP: Foye reported that Agripalooza was a success with 344 students attending and garnered excellent media coverage by two TV stations and the Munising Beacon newspaper. There were some last minute changes and cancellations, which were successfully navigated. Tetil sent Thank You emails to presenters and an evaluation survey to participants. Feedback so far has indicated that participants like the late September date, but would prefer greater access to restrooms and hand washing stations. The event will need 30+ presenters in the future to maintain capacity. Some groups, particularly home schoolers and one other group, were outside of the target age range, which was noted by presenters as less than ideal.

**New Business:**

- a. MDARD MOA: Watkeys shared new draft MOA language from MDARD for Board review. This item was tabled pending Board review and an opportunity for Q&A with Guth representing MDARD, and Cady representing NRCS.
- b. MDARD OPERATIONS GRANTS: Watkeys reported that ACD is up-to-date with MDARD reporting and required documents. Motion by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker, to accept the MDARD Grant Agreement as presented; All in favor, motion carried.
- c. MACD NOMINATIONS: Watkeys inquired as to whether ACD Board members could nominate themselves or ACD staff for MACD awards, but did not receive a response from MACD. Assuming that is allowable, Watkeys asked the Board to consider nominating staff and/or partners for MACD awards.
- d. CISMA HIMALAYAN BALSAM AND ROCK RIVER TOWNSHIP PERMISSION: Desjarlais reported that Alger Co. now has two HB sites confirmed, one in Chatham that was identified by a student and parent participating in Desjarlais' station at Agripalooza. The property is adjacent to Rock River Township Park, so Desjarlais requested permission from Bunce as a Township representative to survey the park. Bunce agreed to the survey and will inform the Township Board. DeDecker inquired about identification of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid look-alikes based on recent inquiries and reports from clientele. Desjarlais noted recent new detections of Balsam Woolly Adelgid and Beech Woolly Aphids, which look similar to HWA, but have different host species. Watkeys noted that Pictured Rocks has requested and new service contract with ACD for HWA surveys.
- e. STAFF BACKFILL/RESTRICTURE: Watkeys shared that Kolton is a candidate for Foye's Conservation Program Coordinator position. His current AmeriCorps position is ending in May 2024 after ACD received an extension from AmeriCorps. Watkeys proposed asking AmeriCorps to reinstate the original contract end-date of December 2023, which would allow us to hire Kolton into Foye's former position earlier. Foye reported that she is aware of potential candidates to backfill the AmeriCorps position, if reversion to the December end-date was not requested or approved. Watkeys suggested an alternative approach of pursuing a new AmeriCorps position of seasonal employee for 2024. The Board tabled this item and asked Watkeys to inquire with Kolton regarding his plans going forward and interest in the ACD Conservation Program Coordinator position.

ACCEPT TREASURY REPORT/PAY BILLS: Watkeys presented financial reports for the month and year-to-date. He reported being able to clear outstanding interest line items from our accounts related to long-term debt accounts that have recently been paid down. Accounts receivable shows the recent DHIP grant reimbursement, but not the Japanese Knotweed reimbursement or MDARD operations fund yet, which were just received. We are waiting to request reimbursement for the scrap tire grant until after checks for associated expenses have been processed. Account statements

are complete through the end of last fiscal year. Motion by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker, to accept the treasury report and pay bills; All in favor, motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** Highlen inquired as to whether ACD can supplement Kolton's compensation as he completes his AmeriCorps appointment, and then bring him into Foye's former position come May 2024. Watkeys responded that only in-kind support is allowed according to AmeriCorps policy.

Desjarlais shared photos of the new HB site identified in Chatham and the landowners' successful biocontrol using goats to graze HB.

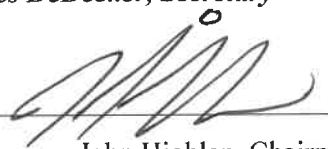
**WATKEYS EMPLOYEE REVIEW AND DISTRICT MANAGER WORK AGREEMENT:** Watkeys dismissed other staff at 6:23pm and presented a draft District Manager Work Agreement including a pay raise for Board approval. Watkeys shared that some CD Managers in MI are paid as much as \$38 per hour. Current ACD grant projects are budgeting \$30/hour for the District Manager's time. DeDecker proposed adopting a more formal annual review process for ACD staff to institutionalize and justify changes in compensation. Highlen suggested tabling this item to allow correction of the Retirement section and to gather input from Directors absent, and the Board agreed.

Motion made by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker, to adjourn at 6:41 pm; All in favor, motion carried.

*Submitted by James DeDecker, Secretary*

*These Minutes are subject to approval until signed below.*

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_



John Highlen, Chairman

OR

James Dedecker, Secretary

Date: 11/14/23