

## MINUTES

### For the regular meeting of the Alger Conservation District Board

Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 5:00 pm \* MSU Research and Extension Center, Chatham

#### Call to order:

A regular meeting of ACD was held on the above date. The meeting was called to order at 5:02pm by Chair John Highlen.

#### Board members present:

#### Staff present:

Board members present at roll call: John Highlen, Rowan Bunce, James DeDecker, Hans Eriksen. Board members absent: Hilary Ludecke. Associate board members present: Charlie Todd and Barb Isom. Staff present: Matt Watkeys, Alex Kolton, Misa Cady, Sara Kelso. Staff absent: Elise Desjarlais, Landen Tetil and Holly Wendrick-Moss.

#### Board members absent:

#### Staff absent:

**Guests:** Alger Co. Commissioner Mickey Rondeau

**Public comment:** Commissioner Rondeau joined the meeting to discuss ACD's planned acquisition of the Alger Co. Soil and Sedimentation program. Watkeys shared a proposed Soil and Sedimentation permit fee schedule and draft Alger County resolution language for board review.

**Correspondence:** Watkeys passed around correspondence received since the last regular meeting.

#### Approve agenda:

Watkeys asked to add New Business item D, "Soil and Sedimentation Program". DeDecker asked to add New Business item E, "Blight". Motion by Bunce, seconded by Eriksen to approve the agenda as amended. All in favor; motion carried.

#### Approve minutes of January 9, 2024 regular meeting:

Motion by Bunce, seconded by Eriksen, to approve the minutes of 4/9/24. All in favor; motion carried.

#### Board and Staff Reports: review written reports:

Written reports were reviewed by the board and highlighted by staff.

a. **NRCS DC: Report received.**

Cady shared that EQIP General funding is still open. New high tunnel applications are currently under review. Alger Co. has twelve landowners under NRCS contracts currently, with more to be presented for approval soon.

b. **NRCS SC: Report received.**

c. **FAP FORESTER: Report received.**

Kelso reported that she has been busy with spring site visits. A Forestry for Birds workshop is upcoming. Watkeys asked if Delta or Chip/Luce/Mac Counties are posting vacant forester positions, but Kelso was not aware of planned postings.

d. **PRODUCE SAFETY: No report received.**

e. **L2L CISMA: Report received.**

f. **ACD DM: Report received.**

Watkeys reported that he is wrapping up the Japanese Knotweed grant with deliverables met.

g. **ACD PC: Report received.**

Kolton reported that he is partnering with Alger Co. 4-H and Master Gardener/local farmer Olivia Kingery on an upcoming series of gardening workshops.

h. **MDARD: Report received.**

i. **MAEAP: Report received.**

### Meeting Reports:

- Watkeys shared that he recently reported on the Japanese Knotweed grant project as part of a webinar, which was well attended and received.
- Watkeys and Cady reported that the recent Coffee and Conservation event at Gallery Coffee in Munising was better attended and more productive than previous iterations at the Eben Snack Bar.
- DeDecker reported on a recent conversation with Mike McCarthy of the Chip/Luc/Mac CD regarding a possible research collaboration and federal grant funding focused on assessing water quality implications of CRP supported riparian buffers in the Eastern UP.

### Old Business:

#### a. **Summer Field Position Job status and Work Agreements**

Watkeys reported that he recently interviewed two people and offered them both positions. One is an NMU Environmental Studies student and another is moving from Detroit. The later could potentially be a longer-term employee depending on fit and funding. The board reviewed two draft Outreach Coordinator and Field Crew Member work agreements for Eryn Grupido and Helena Moleski. Motion by Eriksen, seconded by DeDecker, to approve the two new work agreements. All in favor; motion carried.

#### b. **Tree Sale recap**

Watkeys reported that the tree sale was a success, with over 8,000 plants sold. Day-of sales were half that of the previous year, approximately \$3K. Left over stock was made available for sale the following Friday, but only generated \$20. Leftover trees (\$800) were donated to Superior Central School and Alger Co. Parks and Rec Dept. Bunce suggested possibly holding overstock for one year or selling at farmers markets, etc. in the future.

#### c. **Grant submissions and status – DHIPI, GLRI, NACD UAC, review current grants spreadsheet**

Watkeys reported that the ACD GLRI proposal was not selected for funding for the second year in a row, but he will be reaching out for reviewer comments. The Urban Ag grant proposal is still under review. Work has begun on year two of the Au Train Fish habitat project. The 2023 MISG survey and treatment grant project is complete. The scrap tire grant proposal was approved, with the first collection event held in Mathias Township the previous Saturday filling two dumpsters. Watkeys also reported that tires found behind the Chatham Community Garden can be recycled through the grant project. The Himalayan Balsam survey and treatment project will be busy this summer. The Pictured Rocks contract for HWA survey is complete, with no finds as expected. The Grand Island Quarry Park project is wrapping-up.

### New Business

#### a. **Native Grasses and Wildflower Sale**

Watkeys reported that sales have been slow to-date, though catalog downloads have been increasing. Catalogs were not sent through regular mail, as in the past. Extending the sales deadline from May 24 to 31 was proposed to maximize revenue. Bunce suggested planting demo areas at the Chatham Community Gardens to promote plant sales.

#### b. **NACD Membership Dues**

The board discussed that ACD has not previously been an NACD member and we will not contribute this year.

#### c. **MACD Membership Dues**

Watkeys noted that ACD paid MACD \$1,100 last year at the Gold membership level. Motion by Bunce, seconded by Eriksen, to renew ACD's MACD membership at the Gold Level for \$1,100. All in favor; motion carried.

#### d. **Soil and Sedimentation Program**

Watkeys shared a draft permit fee schedule and Alger Co. Board resolution language and reported that he passed the required exams to take-on the Soil and Sedimentation program from Alger Co. He also attended a recent Alger Co. board meeting to request their official approval. The previous workload was around forty permits per year, vs. the eighteen previously stated. Watkeys and Rondeau suggested that 2024 could be a pilot year for ACD to assess income and expenses related to the program. Rondeau requested a service agreement contract between Alger Co. and ACD with professional legal review. DeDecker suggested reaching out to other CDs that handle Soil and Sedimentation for example contracts and to gauge their experience. Watkeys mentioned the potential risk of being viewed as a regulatory vs. education agency, but noted that local development is often pursued by non-residents, which could separate the political risk of regulating soil and sedimentation from our millage support, etc. Kolton suggested that we review fees carefully and consider a thoughtful increase. Rondeau suggested waiting until after a pilot year before increasing fees. The issue was tabled pending drafts of a contract between Alger Co. and ACD.

**e. Blight**

DeDecker brought up the issue of blighted buildings and cars in Alger Co. The board commented that blight ordinances are difficult to enforce because complaints must be public with complainants named.

**Accept Treasury Report; pay bills:**

Watkeys reported that the Madigan's Hardware expense had a decimal misplaced, so the check was voided and reissued. Line 850 telephone expense is over budget. Watkeys noted that Alger Co. is deducting a full year of rent and utilities from millage monies before they are distributed to ACD. DeDecker noted that payroll taxes are also over budget. Motion by Bunce, seconded by DeDecker, to accept the Treasury Report and pay bills. All in favor; motion carried.

**Public comment**

Rondeau shared that he and Jerry Ducette attend a MI Association of Counties conference and found value in learning about a veterans support program that the county has since taken advantage of. He suggests that ACD similarly attend MACD conferences.

**Dismiss Staff for Employee Evaluation: Alex Kolton and BOD**

Alex Kolton has been with ACD for one year, six months as a regular employee after serving with Americorps. Watkeys reported no issues or concerns, and expressed satisfaction, with Kolton's performance. Watkeys and all staff other than Kolton left the room.

Highlen expressed that Kolton is a great fit, bringing marketing skills, is good with customers and is mentoring new hires. Kolton shared that his role with ACD is different from his past corporate experience in a positive way. He reported that Watkeys has provided great leadership and support. Kolton would like to pursue more digital work, especially videos, to increase visibility. DeDecker and Eriksen suggested implementing more formal performance reviews for staff. Kolton suggested developing more formal policy to help onboard new staff, and reinforced the idea that updated work agreements and more formal staff performance reviews would be helpful.

**Adjourn**

Motion by Bunce, seconded by Eriksen to adjourn at 7:06 pm. All in favor; motion carried.

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING: June 11, 2024, 5:00 pm**

Submitted by James DeDecker, Secretary, and Matt Watkeys, District Manager

These minutes are subject to approval until signed below.

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JH', written over a horizontal line.

John Highlen, Chairman

OR

James DeDecker, Secretary

DATE:

6/11/24