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Board Meeting

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Agency: Summit County Soil and Water Conservation District

Date: Feb. 20, 2024

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Summary

- The Summit County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) board agreed to participate in a new [H2Ohio](#) program that will award funds to area row crop farmers who implement nutrient management plans on their farms.
- The [Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) proposed an initiative to involve area high school students with the state's soil and water conservation districts through a youth board. Each district would receive \$500 to participate.
- The public has until March 5 to purchase native plant kits through [the Summit County SWCD's website](#). The goal of the sale is to improve soil health and keep waterways clean throughout the county by encouraging county residents to start their own native plant gardens. There are four different types of kits, and each costs \$160.

Follow-Up Questions

- Will Summit County SWCD board members implement the OFSWCD's youth board idea for Summit County high school students?
- What is the Summit County SWCD's AI policy and does it affect the public at all?
- State-matched funding for some of the SWCD's [various projects](#) has remained the same for the past two years. Do these funds cover everything, or is more money needed? Can a review of grants and other funding that were distributed to the board be done via a [public records request](#)?

Notes

- The meeting was called to order at 4:01 p.m.

- Ana Burns, Robert Curtis, Catherine Perrow, Greg Zimmerman, Andy Brown, Brian Prunty and Bethany Fortune were present, along with two members of the public.
- An agenda was distributed to all attendees; a packet with additional information for each agenda item was given to members of the board and staff.
- Staff progress reports were given, including an update on the Wingfoot Lake business plan meeting, which 26 attended.
- An Ohio Department of Agriculture program specialist provided updates on the [ODA Watershed Program](#),
 - Background info: According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), a watershed is “a land area that channels rainfall and snowmelt to creeks, streams, and rivers, and eventually to outflow points such as reservoirs, bays, and the ocean.”
 - Summit County has three major watersheds: the Cuyahoga River, the Tuscarawas River and the Rocky River.
 - The watershed management program was created to keep these areas clean, healthy and free of pollutants. SWDC is [involved in this program](#) through partnerships, education, outreach, assessment and implementation.
 - Regional watershed managers completed an assessment of area watersheds and created a list of grants that the SWCD may want to apply for.
- An update was given on the [H2Ohio](#) plan, which is moving statewide. The program is offering [additional training sessions](#) as part of the [Technician Development Program](#) on Nutrient Management and Introduction to Agriculture in Ohio.
- Funds were given to the SWCD for human resource training.
- A new youth board program concept came out of January’s [Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts \(OFSWCD\)](#) meeting, introduced by President Jeff Duling. The idea is to bring local high school and soil districts together. The OFSWCD would designate \$500 to each district if they want to start a youth board.
- SWCD administrative assistant Bethany Fortune provided the Treasurer’s Report and Vehicle Report. Highlights of the report included \$95,000 state-matched funding, \$21,000 community appropriations, \$8,000 segregated inspection fees as part of the district fund and additional funds allotted for supplies, workshops, meetings, certification renewals and more.
- Fortune also provided the board with the 2023 [cash basis](#), which includes the year’s financials and is supplied to the state auditor.
- District Program Administrator Brian Prunty went over 2024 committee assignments. The finance committee was removed and an audit committee will be added next year. They are looking for board members and others to join the

personnel committee, DEI committee, [strategic plan](#) committee, technical committee and more.

- Prunty reviewed old business, including an adjusted employee travel policy for professional development. Ohio designates a certain amount of money for meals while traveling, and the policy was adjusted accordingly. The prosecutor's office also approved the SWCD's AI policy.
- Prunty introduced new business, starting with the [Lake Erie Basin Assessment Framework \(LEBAF\)](#). SWCD will receive \$3,000 in equipment for free to share with the water alliance for monitoring watershed health.
- As part of a grant agreement, SWCD will receive \$171,900 in state-matched funds for natural resource services in Summit County. This is the same amount they have received for the last two years. There will be a second hearing before council Feb. 26 to approve.
- Summit County asked for additional stormwater services, and \$219,000 it will receive to provide those services. The county provides the funds and the state matches it.
- The [Crooked River CWMA](#), a group that several conservation organizations belong to, approached Prunty about SWCD joining. There is no financial commitment. The agreement is to attend meetings. In return, they offer a clearinghouse to pass out resources, borrow equipment, attend work groups and exchange information. The motion was approved.
- The SWCD will receive additional funds from the H2Ohio initiative for a row crop farmer program. The goal is to have 1,000 acres participate in Summit County.
 - Ohio Department of Agriculture H2Ohio staff presented this initiative on Feb. 20.
 - The SWCD would receive \$7,500 for participating, based on the state's bi-annual budget.
 - SWCD would be responsible for assisting with the program through advertising, launching an outreach campaign for row crop farmers to participate and looking for acreage.
 - Farmers would get funding per acreage for creating a nutrient management plan and additional funds for implementing the plan in accordance with specific standards.
 - The goal of the initiative is to reduce 40% of phosphorus.
 - For context: "[Phosphorus occurs naturally in soil](#) and is a critical nutrient for plant growth. For centuries, farmers have added extra to their fields to boost harvests," but now there is a shortage and "phosphorus runoff from farms contributes to widespread water pollution."
 - Prunty estimates SWCD staff would need to invest 300 hours of time into

this program. He feels that is feasible.

- Three motions were passed:
 - a motion to participate in the program and receive funds to implement it
 - a motion that Prunty and stormwater inspector Zach Laughlan are the identified signers to sign related agreements and contracts
 - a motion that Prunty and Laughlan handle it in-house among SWCD staff.
- The board reviewed the SWCD's upcoming events, which include:
 - [Native Plant Sale Kit](#) deadline – March 5
 - ODA HR training – March 5 and 29
 - Next board meeting – March 19
- The board has a goal for 2024 to begin accepting credit card payments for their native plant kit, seed, organic lawn care and tree, shrub and perennial sales. Right now, payment can only be made via check.
- There were no correspondences, complaints or public comments.
- The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Notes to reader: Unless quotation marks are used, all text is paraphrased. If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at documenters@signalakron.org with "Correction Request" in the subject line.