

Ashland County Land Conservation Committee
February 7, 2024
Ashland County Board Room

APPROVED

LCC Present: George Mika, George Bussey, Pat Kinney, Gerald Richardson, John Weiner, Dick Pufall

Others: Scott Caven, Seth Hackbarth, Keresha Flint, MaryJo Gingras

Call to order: Meeting called to order by George Mika at 9:00 A.M.

1. Introductions: None
2. Public Comments: None
3. **Approval of Minutes:** Motion to approve January 11, 2024 minutes by Wiener, second by Richardson. MC.
4. **Approval of Revised Equipment and Labor Rates** Hackbarth reviewed the Ashland County Proposed Local Custom Farmer Equipment and Labor Rates. The rates are utilized by the department and set a cost for landowners implementing conservation projects through our cost-share program. The current rates were set in 2021 and were reviewed and updated on February 7, 2024. Hackbarth recommended increasing the "General Labor" rate from the current \$15.00 to \$17.00/hour. He also proposed adopting the rates listed in the Wisconsin DOT Highway Maintenance Manual, which include dozens of equipment rates beyond the County list. Motion to approve the recommended rates and if there is a discrepancy in rates, the higher rate will be used, and increase the Manual Labor Rate from \$15.00/hour to \$17.00/hour by Kinney, second by Bussey. MC.
5. **Approval of No-Till Waived Acreage Fee for Cost-Shared Projects** Hackbarth explained that this approval is for landowners that rent to No-Till for Cost-Shared Projects approved through the Department. He proposed to waive the No-Till Rental Fee if the landowner is using the machine for a cost-shared project. If they decide to use the machine to plant additional acreage outside of the cost-shared project area then they would pay the acreage fee but not the machine rental fee. Motion to approve the No-Till Waived Acreage Fee for Cost-Shared Projects by Ortman, second by Richardson. MC.
6. **Approval of Land & Water Conservation 5-Year Review & 2024 Work Plan** Gingras provided committee members a 4-page written report of the 5-Year Review. The report addressed accomplishments identified in multiple work plans, any area where the county was not able to meet desired outcomes, implementation of the county's priority farm strategy, and changes in work planning for the next five years. Gingras described intentionality reviewing the work plan annually to identify expectations, make adjustments, and ensure that measureable outcomes are implemented or adapted. In addition, the only area we were not able to meet desired progress was an increase in Farmland Preservation Program participation. Program boundaries and constraints limited increased participation. We expected 6-8 new participants and were only able to add one additional farmer. Motion to approve Land & Water Conservation 5-Year Review & 2024 Work Plan by Ortman, second by Wiener. MC.

7. Review 2024 Wildlife Damage Budget implemented by Wildlife Services
Gingras discussed proposed budget from Wildlife Services.
8. Climate Change Adaptation Discussion: Discussion ensued about potential impacts of lack of snowfall, and low moisture this winter and how it may affect our region and work this summer. Caven mentioned likely increase of pests and potential low water levels. Gingras discussed potential drought and impacts for Tree & Shrub Sale planting success and of other perennial plantings, and potential challenge for agriculture production. Discussed variable conditions including overall increased precipitation and seasonal changes of more rain occurring in the spring and fall instead of summer. Ortman discussed practices that we need to work on including: reducing lawn mowing, installing rain gardens, and rain barrel use. These are not well-promoted. Can the County do a better job to promote these? Ask the towns where they mow and why and encourage reduction to help store carbon.
9. Agency & Staff Reports: Seth Hackbarth, Scott Caven, Matt Bolen, & Gingras provided written reports. Hackbarth, Caven, and Gingras provided verbal report overview and answered questions.
10. Other Business: None
11. Next Meeting: Ortman would like to have a discussion on lawns at the next LCC meeting.

Adjourned by Richardson, second by Wiener at 10:50 a.m.