

**KOOCHICHING SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
REORGANIZATIONAL BOARD MEETING
MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT IN PERSON: Supervisors Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller.

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: None.

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT IN PERSON: Pam Tomevi, Jolen Simon, James Aasen, Austin Wallin, Austin Vinar

OTHERS PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: Michael (Guest)

As per District policy to elect the chairman and vice chairman on a rotational basis, Supervisor Jody Reller was elected Chair and Supervisor Ralph Lewis was elected Vice Chair for calendar year 2026.

**2026/1-1 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Voigt electing Supervisor Reller as the Chair and Supervisor Lewis as the Vice Chair for calendar year 2026.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

Chair Reller called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

**2026/1-2 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Reller to approve consent agenda items as presented: 1/5/2026 Agenda, 12/8/2025 Minutes, Ratification of paid bills for November 2025 totaling \$53,911.76, Treasurer Report ending 11/30/2025, Accounts Payable in the amount of \$16,576.10, and to allow payment of ordinary and necessary bills not to exceed budget.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

**2026/1-3 Motion by Voigt, seconded by Lewis appointing Mary-Jean Becker as the District V Supervisor, acknowledging that she is filling the current term, expiring 12/31/2026.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

Supervisor Voigt accepted the office of Board Treasurer and Supervisor George Aitchison accepted the office of Board Secretary for calendar year 2026.

2026/1-4 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Aitchison approving reorganizational business items as revised per discussion:

- **Budget Committee:**
 - Ralph Lewis/Eldon Voigt/Administrator
- **Personnel Committee:**
 - Ralph Lewis/George Aitchison/Administrator
- **Education/Public Relations Committee:**
 - Jody Reller/Mary-Jean Becker/Administrator/Program Coordinator
- **TSA 8 North Central MN JPB:**
 - Jody Reller (Eldon Voigt – Alternate)
- **Laurentian RC&D Council:**
 - Jody Reller (Eldon Voigt – Alternate)
- **Big Fork River Board:**
 - Mary-Jean Becker/ George Aitchison
- **Little Fork/Rat Root River Board:**
 - Jody Reller/George Aitchison

- **MN SWCD Forestry Association:**
 - **Eldon Voigt (Ralph Lewis – Alternate)**
- **Keep monthly meeting date as the first Monday of each month; 8:30 a.m at the Cobblestone Hotel & Suites meeting room;**
- **Keep supervisor compensation rates at \$125 for all meetings;**
- **Adopt the 2026 mileage reimbursement rate set by the IRS;**
- **Keep Old National Bank and Border Bank as official depositories of the Koochiching SWCD**
- **Keep the Rainy Lake Gazette as the official newspaper;**
- **Keep district check signing authority assigned to Pam Tomevi, Jolén Simon, Ralph Lewis, and Eldon Voigt.**
- **Keep definition of ordinary and necessary bills to mean all bills, not to exceed approved operating budget, with the following exceptions (requiring prior Board approval): Dues, publication subscriptions, employee expense reports, and special projects/expenses not included in the approved operating budget.**
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.

Guest Introductions

One guest present online, full name unknown as audio did not appear to be working properly.

Supervisor Reports

Supervisor Aitchison reported on upcoming 1W1P meetings.

Supervisor Voigt reported that the Chairman/Manager’s meeting for Area VIII will be scheduled soon.

Discussion also included Area VIII meeting schedule, which will be voted on at the next meeting.

2026/1-5 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Voigt authorizing the District Administrator to vote at Area VIII Manager/Chair meeting in the event that the Chair is unable to attend.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.

Committee Reports

2026/1-6 Motion by Voigt, seconded by Lewis approving Budget Committee recommendation “BC 2026-1 Operating Budget” as presented, as an interim budget, to be revised after year end financials are completed. (details on file).
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.

2026/1-7 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Aitchison approving Personnel Committee recommendation “PC 2026-1 Staff Wages and Benefits” as presented (details on file).
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.

NRCS District Conservationist Report

None.

Program Coordinator

Discussion included coordination for Keep It Clean, Envirothon planning, website updates, attended and took notes on Little Fork River 1W1P Steering Committee meeting; attended Big Fork River 1W1P Steering Committee meeting; general tasks such as minutes updates.

Resource Conservationist Report

Discussion included wood ash permits; georeferencing 1972 aerial images, beaver impoundments mapping which may be important for future tracking of emerald ash borer infestations.

Clean Water Forester Report

Discussion included beaver impoundment mapping, completed first forest plan and was approved as a DNR certified plan writer, completed training for commercial drone license and test is completed/passed; buckthorn removal assistance.

Watershed Coordinator Report

Discussion included buckthorn removal on Riverside Drive, showed pictures of progress (it was noted that this would be a good article for the paper); recertified as a tree inspector and has looked into a lilac disease.

District Administrator Report

Discussion included personnel and budget; preparing the PRAP grant, coordination with the consultant will begin in January; 1W1P coordination, next Rainy River-Rainy Lake WBIF funding round is available to apply for in April; January will be busy with year-end work; it was noted that because the cost of the financial audit has increased significantly the District Administrator will do a request for bids this year to compare service pricing.

OLD BUSINESS

Clarification of MN Paid Leave Rates

The District Administrator clarified that rules surrounding SWCD percent minimum 50% required coverage has been clarified in recent emails and within our QuickBooks accounting system; the SWCD is considered small business at .66% and the state standard split is .22% SWCD and .44% staff/supervisors – not the .33% even split as discussed at the November board meeting. If the board covers any more that their required percentage, employees will be taxed on the additional amount as a fringe benefit.

**2026/1-8 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Voigt approving small employer state percentages for MN Paid Leave Rates in the amount of .44% paid by staff and Supervisors, and .22% paid by the SWCD.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

Draft Cost Share Policy

The District Administrator reviewed the updated draft cost share policy.

**2026/1-9 Motion by Voigt, seconded by Lewis approving the Cost Share Policy with the recommended changes as presented.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

NEW BUSINESS:

Resolution to establish 2026 SWCD Aid Guidelines

**2024/1-10 Motion by Voigt, seconded by Lewis establishing 2026 SWCD Aid Guidelines as presented and authorizing the digital signature of the Chair.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried**

Upcoming Meetings:

**2024/1-11 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Aitchison authorizing all staff and Supervisors to attend the Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum March 11-12, 2026 at the Minnesota North College – Rainy River Campus in International Falls.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried**

Permits:

None.

General Business:

- Supervisors received annual paperwork from the state MN Campaign and Finance Office due 1/31/2026;
- The SWCD is partnering with the local VFW and Boondocks Bar & Grill to repurpose empty bingo daubers to use for buckthorn treatment;
- There will be a workshop “Ranching for Profit” in Bemidji on February 12th. A flyer was passed around.

**2026/1-12 Motion by Voigt, seconded by Aitchison approving all Supervisors to attend the Ranching for Profit workshop in Bemidji on February 12th.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

- Printer lease: The District Administrator explained that the current printer lease with Marco for a Konica C300i will expire mid-2026 and a recent meeting with the rep indicated that, due to tariffs, leasing costs are increasing substantially as of 1-1-2026. The rep offered the choice to keep the existing machine and extend the lease for 36 months at the current rate or upgrade the machine to a newer floor model with a 60-month lease for approximately the same current monthly rate. Due to the projected price increases, the Administrator accepted a quote for the newer model and is seeking Board approval to sign a new 60-month lease agreement for an upgraded floor model (Konica C360i).

**2026/1-13 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Aitchison authorizing the District Administrator’s signature on a new 60-month lease with Marco to lease a Konica C360i.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

Confirm Next Meeting Date:

The next regular board meeting of the Koochiching SWCD will be held on **Monday, February 2, 2026 at 8:30 a.m.** at the Cobblestone Hotel & Suites meeting room with teleconference available for guest attendance.

Adjourn Meeting:

**2026/1-14 Motion by Lewis, seconded by Aitchison to adjourn the meeting at 10:07 a.m.
Voting yes: Lewis, Aitchison, Voigt, Reller. Motion carried.**

Approved:

_____ **Chair, Jody Reller**

_____ **Date**