ALPENA-MONTMORENCY CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Alpena-Montmorency Conservation District

1900 M-32 W
Alpena, MI 49707
989-356-3596 ext. 108

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 18, 2025 Board Meeting (AMCD Office)

Attendance: Board Members: Skarbek, Lizon, Lewis, Brown; Staff: Dr. Greg Corace (FAP) (virtually), Charlie Doan (CTAP), John Schmitz (DM), Emily Frechette (CA); Brian Zabel (NRCS); MDARD Regional Coordinator Christine Roman. Meeting was called to order at 5:01 PM, by Skarbek, Chair. Not present: Estlack, Associate Board Members: Houston.

Motion made by Lewis to open public budget hearing, supported Lizon.
Roll call vote: Ayes: Brown, Lewis, Lizon, and Skarbek. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Revision to 2025/2026 budget:
District Manager John Schmitz presented the budget revisions and answered questions from directors.

Income: Wildlife Risk Mitigation (WRM) grant has been removed. We were previously at Level 2 certification for Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTAP), formerly known as the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) grant. Charlie was approved to level up due to his involvement in the development of the CTAP training program. However per Christine, all CTAP grants are going to remain the same for 2026 as they are in 2025 (as one-year grants). It will be known in December whether CTAP/MAEAP will continue after 2026. Legislative approval is required every 5 years, 2025 being one of those years. The State budget has not yet been approved, so figures are the same in this budget (FAP). With decrease in 14K due to loss of WRM, grant admin income is reduced by that amount. A budget amendment will likely be necessary towards the end of the fiscal year.

Expenses: Payroll expenses have been moved towards the end of the budget. District Manager wages have been reduced from 2024 (due to having two managers in one year); current raise of 3K has been included; Communications Associate budget allows for approximately 8 hours/week – reduced from 20 hours/week due to seasonal limitation on availability and loss of WRM.

Discussion about fund balance, possible ways to invest, and need for investment policy.

Public hearing closed at 5:35 by Skarbek.

- Motion made by Lizon to approve 2025/2026 Budget and Appropriations Act; supported Brown.

Roll call vote: Ayes: Brown, Lewis, Lizon, and Skarbek. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Approval of Consent Agenda:
Meeting minutes (August, 2025)
Financial Report, Payment of AMCD bills

- Motion made by Lizon to approve the consent agenda; supported Brown.

Roll Call vote: Ayes: Brown, Lewis, Lizon, and Skarbek. Nays: None. Motion carried.

Reports:

The Reports were handed out and reviewed by the Board prior to the meeting. There was no conversation on the MDARD Partner Report, the FAP Report, the MAEAP Report, the District Manager's Report, the Communications Report, or the NRCS Report.

NRCS report – Conservationist Brian Zabel reported on his activities with the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and bringing contracts and payment approvals complete by deadlines. Inflation Reduction Act funding has been discontinued. Application deferrals were discussed, and cancellation of applications is now allowed when no response is obtained from applicant.

District Business:

OLD:

- Fall Tree Sale update- 23 orders so far.
- Spring Woody Plant Sale Update – all species have been ordered except Butternut. Seed shortage on red pine has created outage. We may be able to get red pine from our supplier. DM Schmitz is working with townships and City of Alpena to introduce ourselves to the urban population. Cost for saplings is considerably more due to increased transportation cost. $40 - $50 per tree.
- Discussion of native species vs. naturalized in tree sale. Some species become invasive in certain environments. NRCS plans can accommodate non-native species. Non-native grasses in pastures are encouraged for soil and livestock health, for example. AMCD's policy does not preclude the inclusion of non-native species in the tree sale, and is intended more to prevent the mistakes of the past. Including too many species is detrimental to our tree sale. Handling of special orders – payment up front is required.
- Discussion on salary increases vs. bonuses. Salary increases are included in the annual budget. Bonuses are not typically budgeted but given if funds are available, and are typically available for all staff. If staff become accustomed to getting bonuses and then don't get one, they get upset. Staff may also be motivated not to purchase needed equipment, etc. during the year in order to leave surplus for bonuses. Per Christine, auditor would say for government, bonuses should be solely performance-based if any bonuses are given at all. Once a salary increase is made, it is permanent. Making decisions in an atmosphere of fiscal uncertainty is difficult. Considering all factors facilitates decision-making. Making addition to policy about the use of fund balance could help mitigate unanticipated shortfalls. Alternatives such as time off may be considered. Creating more revenue sources increases flexibility by providing more admin dollars that are added to fund balance.

- Motion made by Lewis to give 5% raise (instead of 3%) to District Manager John Schmitz starting October 1st; supported Brown.

Roll Call vote: Ayes: Brown, Lewis, Lizon, and Skarbek. Nays: None. Motion carried.

- Discussion on progress with outreach occurred following the announcement of an upcoming two-month, seasonal limitation on part-time Communications Associate's availability due to maintenance of her full-time job. Perspective on the conservation district's overall trajectory was discussed, considering what Charlie had to start with in 2021 as a new District Manager. Success with outreach will make it possible to give other staff raises in the future. Once there is less uncertainty (January) the budget could be revisited. After that, a policy could be developed for fund balance. Investments could be made with fund balance to get returns with very little effort.

NEW

- Discussion on 2025 Antlerless Deer Tag Program. Other districts become members of the Farm Bureau to get more involvement. Do we want to participate again? Many deer camps are not open yet due to ice storm damage. If state doesn't issue a budget by October 1, hunting licenses cannot be issued.
- Discussion on Lake Conservation Grant with info provided by MDARD Regional Coordinator Christine Roman. Opportunities to link with partners on watershed education. October 8th is next meeting with Huron Pines at Brush Creek Mill. Per DM Schmitz, watershed management plan must be completed to open doors to grant opportunities (EGLE, MDNR).
- Invasive species traction can be increased by District Manager Schmitz becoming a board member on Huron Pines' Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA). Lizon suggests grant to fund temporary staff to carry out work. Demand must be registered; offering a bounty for invasive species is suggested. Pay landowner for each specimen removed. This would require supervision with pesticide license.

Next Board Meeting is **Thursday, October 16th at 5:00 p.m. at Brush Creek Mill.**

Motion to adjourn was made by Lizon at 7:06 p.m. seconded Lewis.

TASKS TO BE COMPLETED:

- Annual meeting & election information. Nominating petitions due October 11th.
- Update to policy manual re: specific items changed over the course of the year.
- Work with Charlie and Greg (DM Schmitz) on work agreements.

John Schmitz, District Manager

Ed Skarbek, Board Chair
Approved / Amended / Disapproved