SORA ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Virtual Agenda & Minutes

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

12:30 to 4 pm EST

**Please join the meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.**   
meet.google.com/mdw-txzs-mjj  
  
**You can also dial in using your phone.**   
United States: +1 904-900-0878‬  
  
**Access Code:** 876 839 769‬#   
  
**More phone numbers:**   
Canada: +1 437-781-4585 (Code - 619 491 683 3870#)

12:30 – 12:40 Welcome; Member Introductions – Travis Sterner (MD), President

Attendees: Amanda Clark, Annamaria De Sanctis, Chuck Cousino, Marcia Degen, Eric Folks, Heidi Faller, Janice Vollero, Jeffrey R., Jeremy Simmons, Kaitlin Rinke, Marisa Faraldo, MC Belanger, Michael Broussard, Michael Mezzacapo, Mike Mettler, Nicholas Huber, Robert Beers, Sheryl Ervin, Steve Marshall, Tom Groves, Travis Sterner, Tricia Scott, Eric Casey, Brian Schlauderaff, Charles Klinger, Angela Billings

12:40 – 12:50 President’s Remarks – Year in Review – Travis Sterner (MD), President

2023 Golden Flush Award: Matt Pace (OK). Matt has been on the Board since 2016 and was a founding member as SORA transitioned to a self-sustaining entity. Matt served in numerous capacities, including President and Secretary.

12:50 – 1:20 USEPA Decentralized Program Update – Heidi Faller & Michael Mezzacapo, EPA

See SORA website for copy of the presentation.

Highlights:

* MOU Partnership: 7th renewal December 2023 with 5 new partners
* Wastewater Community Assessments with Solutions Plans: 11 projects are wrapping up. The projects were started in the Fall of 2022 and included assessments of the needs and potential options to address water and sewer infrastructure needs. Solution plans are now being developed.
* Septic Smart: There were 10 Septic Smart Week Proclamations this year. Newletters and listservs are being used to spread the word on septic smart. EPA is assessing social media impacts from septic smart engagement.
* Workforce Development: EPA is highlighting the decentralized industry with a series of industry posters. They also are producing short videos to build interest. 6 videos are completed. They also did a creative challenge for young adults 14-22. EPA noted that MO did a career day for the industry.
* [Mezzacapo.michael@epa.gov](mailto:Mezzacapo.michael@epa.gov) and <https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicsmart-education-materials> <https://www.epa.gov/septic/septicsmart><https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-08/Fact%20Sheet%20Closing%20the%20Wastewater%20Access%20Gap%20FINAL.pdf>

for more info

* Question about the status of adding a new question to the census to count onsite vs central residences. It’s expected to be added to the 2025 census with data coming in 2026.

1:20 – 1:50 USDA Loan and Grant Programs Update – Steve Polacek USDA Rural

Utilities Service

See SORA website for copy of the presentation.

Highlights: USDA provided $1.8 billion to rural communities in FY2023. Generally, the funding is for communities with a population of 10,000 or less, but certain funds can be used for up to 50,000 population. Funding for drinking water; sewage collection, treatment, disposal; solid waste; storm water collection conveyance and disposal.

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<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs>

1:50 – 2:20 NOWRA Update – Tom Groves, Executive Director

See SORA website for copy of the presentation.

Highlights:

* 5500 to 6000 members with 23 affiliates representing 28 states
* NOWRA was one of the original MOU partners
* Very successful Mega Conference in VA with over 700 attendees
* New online training programs available
* Grant from RCAP to fund the development of new training modules

2:20 – 2:30 SORA – Eric Casey, Executive Director

Highlights:

* Eric Casey is the part-time Executive Director for SORA
* Tasks to date: Planning and coordination of SORA activities at the NOWR conference; development of a newsletter; process improvement for membership applications, renewals, and changes.
* Eric will represent SORA at the MOU signing in December.
* SORA has joined with NOWRA on a grant proposal for workforce development. SORA is asking for $100,000 to provide training scholarships/stipends to SORA members. It’s a 3-year grant so that translates to 150 stipends each year of $200. The stipends will be available for online training or in person training. An application process will be developed.

2:30 – 3:00 Captains of Industry (COI) – Sheryl Irvin and Dick Bachelder, COI Board Reps.

Sheryl and Dick are serving as co-reps, but for now, Sheryl is the lead. The primary task is to work with the SORA treasurer to bring COI accounts current and to address subsidies of the SORA reception. Sheryl asked for suggestions for new COIs. Please send Sheryl any suggestions and she’ll follow up. [servin@infiltratorwater.com](mailto:servin@infiltratorwater.com)

**3:00-3:10 Break**

3:10 – 3:40 SORA Business Meeting

* Treasurer’s Report – Michael Broussard (NM) Region 9 Board Member
  + The transition to a new bank account is almost complete. This new account allows for the transition of officers and signatories on the account without having to be physically at the bank. Michael is working to integrate the membership list with the listserv to facilitate automatic updates of the listserv.
  + 2023 budget
  + Review proposed 2024 budget
* Secretary’s Report – No report.
* Election of select Regional Board Representatives (Positions expire in 2023) Current reps willing to continue to serve.
  + Region 5: Mike Mettler (IN) – nominated and elected
  + Region 10: Jeremy Simmons (WA) – nominated and elected
  + Canada: Derek Smith (Manitoba) – nominated and elected
  + Tribal: Michael Bolt has retired and there is no current nominee. Nicholas Huber has some contacts in OK. He’ll reach out for a potential nominee.
  + At-Large: Lance Gregory (VA) is willing to serve in this capacity.
* Committee Reports
* Strategic Planning – Travis Sterner (MD), President
  + - * + The Strategic Plan was due to be updated. Travis chaired a committee that reviewed the plan, recommended edits, presented it to the Board, and the recommended edits were approved by the Board
* Membership – Dave Cotton (MI), chair
* Conference – Chuck Cousino (CO), President Elect

3:40 – 4:00 New Business

* Open Forum for member comment

Website – Suggestions for improvement?

-out of date things are in the process to update

- consider driving visitors to online videos, etc to educate – add links to EPA septic smart

-ask for links from members to good training info

-question about results from listserv questions – concerns about folks making comments that they may not want posted; comment that data derived from listserv questions should be posted

-Eric C asked about putting the listserv data into a password protected section of the website, but would the same concerns exist.

- Board discussion was to have a password protected section for Board Docs, member lists, SOPs, etc.

- may be able to do through dream hosts

-SORA has an obligation to relay a list of current contacts for state programs to EPA; Michael says that we can generate the state links from quick books for our members.

* + Newsletter – What kind of information would be of interest to our membership? Eric Casey showed a draft of the newsletter and stated the goal is to publish twice a year.

-SORA benefits

-activities like conference, septic smart week

-data resources

**- Adjournment of Annual Business Meeting @ 3:10 pm –**

3:10 – 4:20 Board meeting:

Attendees: Travis Sterner, Michael Broussard, Nick Huber, Steve Marshall, Eric Folks, Jeremy Simmons, Mike Mettler, Eric Casey, Chuck Cousino, Marcia Degen

Election of Officers: President (Chuck Cousino, CO); President Elect (Nicholas Huber, OK); Secretary (Marcia Degen); Treasurer (Michael Broussard, NM)

Meeting Adjourned.