



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board Meeting Minutes – April 3, 2024

**Directors:** Bill Hammel      Bob Krein      Ken Bailey  
Larry Powell      Phil Kaser      Shawn Sorensen

**Directors Absent:** Stan Shephard

**Staff:** Josh Thompson      Jennifer Sampson      Abbie Forrest  
Drake Gilbert      Scott Susi

**Staff via Teleconference:** Shilah Olson      Ryan Bessette      Samantha Filbin

**Guests:**  
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist  
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director  
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus  
Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director

**Guests via Teleconference:**  
ODA: Nina Caldwell, Interim Water Quality Specialist  
Columbia Grg Nws: Flora Gibson, Reporter  
Public: Sean Keener

**1:02 PM Call to Order**

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. None were made.

**Minutes:** Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the February regular board meeting minutes, the February special board meeting minutes, or the March special board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the February regular meeting minutes, the February special meeting minutes, and the March special meeting minutes as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried.*

**Treasurer's Report:** Due to technical difficulties regarding the sound on the Zoom meeting, Josh reviewed the February Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. *Phil moved to receive the February Treasurer's Report; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

**Public Comment (5 Min. limit/person) –** None at this time.

**Orchard Ridge Piping –** Josh introduced Sean Keener, a landowner on Rail Hollow and Orchard Ridge Ditch user. Sean shared that he has been looking for opportunities to pipe the Orchard

Ridge Ditch. He is now in his fourth year of farming his property and using the ditch for irrigation. However, in his opinion, the open ditch seems like a waste of precious resources, and he wanted to approach the SWCD board to get to know them and discuss a way to get the ditch piped. Josh suggested Sean also talk to the two irrigation districts in the Wamic area. The board understands the need to save water and will further discuss options at a later date. Josh and Sean will set up a meeting to develop a plan for the ditch.

### **Action Items**

**a. Mosier Million #2 Contracting** – Josh reported they started the process on contracting Mosier Million #2 approximately one year ago. They released an RFP to establish a qualified driller pool, but only had one contractor apply for the driller pool. The contractor did submit a bid on the first three wells recommended for Mosier Million, but staff and partners did not feel the bid was competitive as it was significantly higher than other recent water well drilling costs in the area. They reopened the RFP for the driller pool and had a second driller submit a proposal, Cascade Drilling from Goldendale. Josh proposed the board accept Cascade Drilling into the qualified driller pool. *Phil moved to accept Cascade Drilling into the qualified driller pool for the Mosier Million #2 project; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

**b. Lower Deschutes CWMA Lead Entity Status + Weed Control Update** – Shilah reported the Lower Deschutes CWMA has been having staffing issues, and they have not been able to fill their coordinator position since last fall. She sat in on a discussion with the CWMA, including partners such as BLM, ODFW, Sherman SWCD, and Sherman County., She was asked if the Wasco SWCD would be willing to take the lead on the CWMA. This could create a new position by moving the lead coordinator position under the Wasco SWCD. Shilah wanted to bring this topic to the board to get feedback about adopting the weed management area. Scott shared some of his backstory and how he started working for the CWMA back in 2013. He supported the proposal, mentioning that if a coordinator was hired and did not make it the full season, Scott would be able to step in and continue the work. The board had positive feedback. *Phil moved to enter into a partnership and/or contracted agreement to manage the Lower Deschutes CWMA program; Bob seconded. Motion carried.*

**c. Fiscal Sponsorship of Wy'East C-REP Grant Application** – Robert shared a flyer for the C-REP program. Robert reported that he wants to apply for grant funds through the Oregon Department of Energy, who requires the funding to go through a public entity. He requested the SWCD be that public entity. In this case, the SWCD would be the applicant, and in exchange receive admin dollars. The grant would be used to help develop a “mobile battery on wheels” that could power wells, fuel pumps, etc. in the event of an emergency and main power is out. He and his staff will be developing the proposal over the next five weeks. They can apply for a maximum of \$500,000 through this grant. The application is due in early May. Discussion ensued. *Ken moved to be the applicant and fiscal sponsor for Wy'East RC&D on the C-REP grant through Oregon Department of Energy; Shawn seconded. Motion carried.*

### **ODA Program Update – Nina Caldwell**

Nina Caldwell introduced herself and noted she is the interim Water Quality Specialist at ODA, since Theresa Debardeleben's has taken a new position at OWEB. There have been internal talks about restructuring ODA's area divisions, so this could become a permanent position, but that is not certain at this time. She thought it had been approximately three years since the SWCD has

had an update from ODA. Nina reported there have been a few staffing changes, and the reporting frequency for scope of work is changing to a six-month reporting interval instead of quarterly. They are working on making all reporting digital in the future, and will be reporting on this during a session at the CONNECT conference. Eric Nusbaum will talk to the SWCD in the near future about director trainings. Nina will make sure Shilah receives that information when it becomes available.

## **Updates**

**a. Next Meeting** – The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 1, 2024, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom. Budget Committee meets Wednesday, May 1, 2024 at 10:00 AM.

**b. Tree Sale** – Josh reported the tree sale has ended, but there are a few trees leftover if anyone is interested. Scott reported the tree sale went a little better than average this year. They started accepting orders in the fall, with a one-day pickup for preorders and sold some extra trees. They also sold some trees to ODFW for their planting projects.

**c. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS)** – Josh reported there has not been much activity on this project as it is currently being studied by the consultants. The OSU professor, her students, and GSI/GSA have been doing fieldwork testing and evaluation, and we are waiting on the results from that.

**d. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Josh reported that this year should bring the completion of the project. They need to finish up the final connections on the wells and install a new fish screen on White River.

**e. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire** – Josh reported he is still working on ECP fencing. They are approximately three quarters of the way completed. He is almost ready to request bids for the \$35,000 OWEB funds on the Miller Road Fire. These funds will be used for removing dead vegetation on strategic fire breaks. There is still an active OWEB grant for the 2020 White River Fire for aerial seeding on the wildlife area. This should take place in the fall. The \$1 million grant for defensible space in Juniper Flat and Tygh Valley is still pending approval.

**f. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Public Meetings** – Shilah reported she has looked at the best practices checklist, in order to get 10% off insurance premiums, and so far we can check 3 out of 5 boxes. The last two boxes are required trainings for the board, but those trainings aren't available yet. Shilah will update the board as soon as she has confirmed information on the training.

**g. Director Elections** – Shilah reported there are four director positions up for reelection this year: Zones 1, 3, 5, and At-Large 1. ODA has released election information packets which are included in the meeting packet and available online. The first day to file with ODA is July 18<sup>th</sup>, and the last day is August 27<sup>th</sup>. Or you can file as a write-in candidate between August 28<sup>th</sup> and October 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**h. Photo Contest** – Shilah reported SWCD staff are hosting a photo contest for a 2025 calendar. Abbie is leading the project. Staff will select the top 12 photos and then the public will vote online which photo will be on the cover.

### **Agency Reports**

**a. NRCS** – Emily reported she hosted the Local Working Group Meeting on February 29<sup>th</sup>. She thought it went well and hoped attendees found some value in it as well. The conversation focused on CRP and fire fuels, as well as improving soil health. Several producers mentioned concerns about herbicide resistance. Emily estimated they had approximately 30 people attend. She will be attending a wildfire meeting in Wamic on May 11<sup>th</sup> and encouraged everyone to attend. ODF will be there as well as the Fire Marshall and it will be at the Wamic Community Center. Emily will be attending CONNECT in April. There will be a NRCS employee meeting while they are there, and she is happy to bring any concerns the board has to the meeting. CSP is taking up a lot of her time as last Friday was the application deadline. They received 10 CSP applications. There is \$29 million available in Oregon for CSP this year. Emily is still working on EQIP, she is just waiting for more funding to become available. She will have a Pathways intern from June-July. The intern was in Eugene last year so she wants to make sure he has a good experience with this region. She has a few ideas but feel free to suggest other activities for the intern. Discussion ensued on planted fire breaks versus cleared fire breaks. The consensus was more research is needed on the topic.

**b. FSA** – Lissa reported acreage reporting for spring planted crops, and rangeland not in NAP, are due July 15<sup>th</sup>. They have finished general CRP signup, and had 11 bids. They hope to have results on those soon. Continuous CRP signup is being done in batches this year. The first batch was looked at on March 15<sup>th</sup>. The second batch, which includes highly erodible land or safe initiative, will be evaluated by April 12<sup>th</sup>. If you have freeze damage to cherry blossoms, you have 15 days to report it from when the loss happens. The feed and grain program deadline is March 15<sup>th</sup>. ECP for the Miller Road Fire is still ongoing, but they hope to get that completed soon. She also noted they are still running the emergency relief program for 2022 losses.

**c. OSU Extension** – Jacob was not able to attend the meeting so Jennifer presented his updates. Jennifer reported the tentative date for the Wasco County Crop Tour will be June 13<sup>th</sup>. Jacob will relay more information when he has it confirmed.

**d. Wy'East RC&D** – Robert thanked the SWCD for all their support and assistance. He reported they hired a new admin/finance person, Dana Woods. Dana previously worked at MCFR and MCEDD and will be a great addition to the team. Wy'East attended the State FFA Convention with the F-150 Lightning, a side-by-side, and one of the electric tractors. Robert was very impressed with the FFA kids he interacted with. Wy'East gave a formal presentation at the convention, and had great discussions with attendees from their booth and the convention was well attended. They also attended the Northwest Ag Show at the Salem fairgrounds. Michael and Lanier presented at the show in March. Attendance was lower than they were hoping for, but the ag show went well. They will be attending the Central Oregon Ag Show in Redmond this weekend and will be sharing a booth with the Energy Trust of Oregon. Wy'East has been awarded a \$500,000 TAG grant for Rural Development. This is a three-year commitment of funding and will involve subcontractors. Robert expressed interest in hydrogen technology and there is talk of piping hydrogen for Google server farms for backup power. He has also seen designs for a

cabinet signed machine where you can manufacture your own hydrogen. He attended a presentation from a company that is making hydrogen units for transit busses. Robert would like to get Wy'East involved in hydrogen as well. He also mentioned work at the Dufur School. The Dufur School has solar panels on the roof and a battery backup system, but nothing has been done to tie anything to the batteries. Robert shared that both Lanier Fussell (RARE student) and Michael Kluz are leaving Wy'East to attend grad school in the fall. He has applied for two new RARE students: one energy specialist and one focused on resiliency. This Friday, Robert has been invited to meet with Congresswoman Salinas to discuss rural infrastructure. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, USDA Rural Development is going to announce the first round of funding on the TAG grant. On May 9<sup>th</sup>, there will be a "Ride and Drive" event at The Dalles Chamber of Commerce with electric vehicles. Everyone is welcome to attend.

### **Committee Reports**

- a. Audit Committee** – Phil asked about the payment to Sea Reach. Shilah reported that was a sign made for the Hydro mitigation project on Chenoweth Creek.
  
- b. Facilities Committee** – Josh reported there has not been a facilities committee meeting scheduled, but he will attempt to hold one soon. The office building roof has had paint peeling and Dan Wilson was hired to repaint it. The roof is galvanized so it's absolutely necessary, and will be painted so it looks better. Dan is waiting for warmer weather before he paints. Pat asked for an update on building a shop. Josh shared they have preliminary designs from the shop Sherman County built, and he will be sending everything to an architectural firm for estimates on how much it would cost to build. As soon as he has estimates, Josh will schedule a facilities committee meeting. Ken requested a facilities committee meeting take place before the budget committee meeting.
  
- c. Watershed Council Updates** – To be covered in the coordinating board meeting immediately following.

### **District Manager Report**

- a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Josh presented the work plan progress and grant status reports as Shilah was having technical difficulties. He noted that everything is on track with the work plan, with the exception of conservation awards as there have not been any opportunities to do that. The District currently has 28 active grants totaling \$2.5 million in remaining funds. There are currently five pending grant applications for \$2.14 million.
  
- b. Activity Reports and Schedules** – No activity reports were presented; however, they are available for review upon request. The schedule was distributed with the agenda.

**Adjourned: 2:36pm**

Jennifer Sampson