



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – April 6, 2022

Directors: Bill Hammel Bob Krein Stan Shephard
Ken Bailey Pat Davis

Directors via Teleconference: Phil Kaser

Associate Directors: Bryce Molesworth

Directors Absent: Shawn Sorensen

Staff: Shilah Olson Samantha Filbin Josh Thompson
Drake Gilbert Jennifer Sampson

Staff via Teleconference: Abbie Forrest Tammy Tripp Ryan Bessette

Guests:

FSA: Martha Blair, Key Program Technician
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist

Guests via Teleconference:

Wy'East: Robert Wallace, Executive Director
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent

1:13 PM Call to Order

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. Shilah requested to have FSA give their update early as Martha has a meeting with producers at 2:00 pm.

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the March board meeting minutes. None were made. *Pat moved to approve the March board meeting minutes as presented; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the February Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted the payment to the Deschutes Weed District was \$7,500 instead of the budgeted \$10,000, as they had staffing issues, so they only billed for 75% of the agreement. She also noted the transfer from the General Fund to District Cost Share as the board approved a cost share for Ryan Clausen that was beyond the budgeted cost share funds. *Ken moved to receive the February Treasurer's Report; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Shilah reviewed the March Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted the transfer from the Savings account to the LGIP account, and the transfer from the General Fund to the 8Mile SIA project as the board voted to cover 75% of the cost of Tyler Neal and Tom May's planting projects. Bob asked if the district's insurance was why they met early today. Shilah explained the board met early for a work session with SDAO and noted for the record that no decisions were made during the session. The district receives 2% off our insurance for participating in the work session. Stan asked what percentage the interest on the building loan is. Shilah confirmed the district is paying 3.35% interest on the building loan. Stan inquired who Donna Silverberg is. Shilah confirmed Donna Silverberg Consulting is the firm that Emily Stranz is with, one of the facilitators for the 15Mile MUS project. *Ken moved to receive the March Treasurer's Report; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

Action Items

a. Policy Review – Personnel – Shilah requested to table this chapter as she has not spent adequate time with it.

b. Bereavement Leave Policy – Shilah reported she has been doing some policy reviews and looking at best practices. A couple of staff members have had loss in their family recently and she suggested the board approve an official bereavement leave policy, retroactive to the first of the fiscal year. Most agencies provide three days of bereavement leave with the death of an immediate family member. Staff have been previously allowed to use their own accrued leave, but Shilah thought that was kind of a burden to use the leave they've been saving. There was discussion about whether this applied only to immediate family or if it could be anyone close to the staff member. *Ken moved to approve three days of bereavement leave, retroactive to the first of the fiscal year, with the stipulation that Shilah will bring the policy back to the board for complete approval when she has official wording on what types of loss are allowed; Bob seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

c. Cost-Share Requests – Abbie/Shilah presented one cost share application:

WHAT LTD/A. Tagliafico – increased cost request – Shilah and Abbie presented a mainline project from WHAT LTD that was previously awarded an OWEB small grant for \$12,326, and he is now requesting cost share funds as match, as his out-of-pocket cost has significantly increased. He is estimating his current out of pocket cost to be around \$24,000 based on the new cost of materials and is requesting \$11,004 from a District Cost Share. Abbie informed him that the maximum is currently \$7,500, and that the board has currently maxed out their budget for this fiscal year but is approving projects on a case-by-case basis depending on the time sensitivity of the project. His small grant was awarded over a year ago and he has not started the project yet. He attempted to reach out to Abbie when she was on maternity leave but did not appear to reach out to other staff. Abbie reported that if the board were to fund this project, it would use up all remaining DCS funds and be over the budget by \$2,070, unless the board wanted to pull funds from somewhere else in the budget. It was noted he did a haul road project earlier this year. Abbie reported he has until February 2023 to complete his project. He has not purchased

any materials for the project yet and said it's not feasible if he does not get the extra funding. Discussion ensued. *Bob moved to table his application until July 1 and the new fiscal year begins with a new budget, as the project does not appear to be time sensitive; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.* The board did note that he is always welcome to come and present his request to the board should he desire to do so.

d. Presentation of FY 20-21 Annual Report & Audit – Shilah reported this meeting serves as our legal requirement to host the Annual Meeting, where the Annual Report and audit are presented to the public. The board has previously approved the audit, but hard and digital copies were available for anyone who wanted one. The board reviewed the annual report and consensus was it looked great. While this is the formal presentation to the public, please let staff know by the end of the month if they have any suggestions, comments, or questions about the Annual Report. The board previously voted on meeting the legal requirement with this presentation of the annual report and considering having an in-person celebration at a later date, COVID-19 dependent. It was suggested that the board host a celebration in the Fall of 2022, after harvest season.

Updates:

a. Next Meeting - The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 4, 2022, 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center (TBD) or Zoom. The Budget Committee meeting will be Wednesday, May 4, 2022, at 10:00 AM. Lunch can be provided if the board is interested.

b. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Board Training/Assessment – Shilah reported the board completed the assessment today. Bill commented that he was impressed with the board and staff and what they were able to accomplish and thinks it's a good thing for the board to look at themselves every now and then. Bob commented that he was impressed with the staff and how they handle a majority of the workload, versus the board, and that they've done an excellent job adapting to COVID and getting things done. Ken commented that these last few years show how resilient the staff and board are, dealing with and adapting to all these recent challenges. There was discussion about the SDAO insurance and the discounts the SWCD receives. Shilah shared that by being a member of OACD that's a 2% discount. Having the board update policies is another 2%. There is a new training requirement for board members this year, where they need to have two board members sign up for SDAO's board leadership academy. Ken has already signed up and they need one more board member to sign up. Stan offered to pay the SWCD for the 2% discount instead of sitting through training.

c. Mosier Groundwater: Deep Well #2 & Mosier Million #2 – Josh reported they are getting very close to completing deep well #2. They have the conduit installed and have everything to mount, and just have to wait for the electrician. Then all that is left is to get Pacific Corp to hook the power up. There is also some plumbing left to install but the Roots are working on that. Robert Wallace will be working with Josh to hook up a data logger. The deep well should be complete in approximately two weeks. Mosier Million is progressing. He had a meeting last week with the team to put an outreach letter together for their initial priority list.

d. Tygh Valley Water Projects: Highline Ditch & Lindell Dam Removal – Josh reported that Mike was supposed to drill the final well last week, but his drilling rig broke down again. As soon as he is back up and running, he will go drill the Wassenniller well. Josh is working on the RFP for three pumps. Stan expressed frustration at all the delays and suggested they look for a different well driller on the next project. Josh reported that the Mosier Million project will be going out for bid so they will have a new pool of contractors.

e. River Democracy Act – Shilah reported she has a strong drafted letter. Sam and Abbie have been assisting her with it, but she still needs to review it further before she sends it to the board for approval. The act is still in committee, but she's keeping watch on it.

f. Bull Tour – Shilah reported the Bull Tour is Friday and they will be focusing on Sherman County. They are meeting at 8:00 am at the Grass Valley Pavilion. The SWCD board agreed to provide coffee and donuts and the porta-potties, so Josh and Sam will be taking them on the tour. The tour will visit a few ranches in Sherman County and end at the fairgrounds in Sherman County. There will be a stock dog demo, team branding, and dinner.

Agency Reports:

a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval) – Emily reported they have obligated just under \$700,000 in EQIP funds for 24 contracts. She still doesn't have any staff, but the new soil conservationist, John Ludovico, will start work on April 25th. They are also advertising for a GS9-11 planner located in The Dalles Field office. The advertisement will close April 25th. As they are short staffed, Sherman and Wasco offices are working together to manage 62 CSP applications that they received. NRCS is assisting FSA with the technical side of CRP Grasslands during the sign-up period from April 4-May 13th. NRCS and the SWCD are writing a CIS proposal for rangeland improvement in South Wasco County to complement the Bakeoven OWEB grant. This will be submitted in April, and they should know whether it is approved for funding or not this summer, for the 2023 funding cycle. NRCS reviewed the Civil Rights for Partners checklist, as required annually. NRCS and partners will not discriminate in our program delivery and outreach and aim to create and maintain a diverse work environment. The present board members signed the affirmation of this policy. NRCS also requested the participation of a producer/board member in the upcoming QAR interview. Bob Krein volunteered for this.

b. FSA – Martha gave the FSA report as Lissa is in Redmond. General CRP signup has ended, but continuous signup is still ongoing, especially for CREP and highly erodible land. Grassland CRP signup just opened and runs through May 13th. There has been a lot of interest in the grassland/working lands program as it is up to \$13 per acre. It has the same payment limitation as general CRP and CREP, so if someone has a lot of acres you could hit that before you put all your acres in. It used to be \$3 per acre so it wasn't worth enrolling in, but last year it was \$15 per acre and this year \$13. May 13th is the deadline. They have 10- or 15-year contracts and it has a competitive ranking process like general CRP so everyone is not guaranteed to get in. Disaster assistance is also available. ELAP is a program that helps with water hauling and feed transportation costs. It is retroactive to

2021, and there is an added component to pay on livestock that was hauled to pasture you wouldn't normally have utilized. ELRP is a new program that was just announced in the last week: the emergency livestock relief program. Phase 1 just deals with livestock, and they are pushing out payments to any 2021 LFP approved applicants. Those approved automatically get payment through ELRP and those will be going out this week. There will be additional phases beyond livestock, such as specialty crops. For those enrolled in NAP for fruit, this is the time of year if there is a loss event, you need to notify the office within 72 hours for hand harvested crops. Acreage reporting is due by July 15th for perennial forage and any spring planted crops.

c. Wy'East RC&D – Robert reported he has been working on a lot of irrigation projects throughout the county. He anticipates a rough year for Central Oregon as the irrigation districts are reporting greatly reduced numbers for this summer. He has been working with the SWCD to make sure he gets both District Cost Share and rebate payments for producers, and he has found a couple that still need to apply for rebates. He is working on getting FAST monitoring started for the season. Two new E-tractors are expected to arrive in a couple of weeks. He went to California a couple of weeks ago to visit Monarch and Soletrac e-tractor manufacturers. He has a couple of outreach events coming up. On April 12th, he'll be presenting to the Lion's Club at Spooky's in The Dalles; and on April 20th, he'll be speaking at Freebridge Brewing. The Merkley funding was approved at the national level and Robert will be working with the US Department of Energy to receive the funds. He plans to buy 10-12 pieces of e-equipment next year. And he has applied for a RARE student through University of Oregon.

d. OSU Extension – Jacob reported there will be a Crop Tour on June 9th for Wasco County, where Robert would be welcome if he wanted to demonstrate the E-tractor. The crop tour will begin at 9am in Dufur. Jacob requested use of the District's porta-potties, and possibly provide donuts or something else. On June 15th, at the experiment station in Sherman County (Moro), there will be a field day. He's still confirming the details, but they will likely look at wheat trials near Kent. Starvation Ridge Farms also has a field day coming up. He's been working with Ashley Thompson, and they are planning some biochar experiments on wheat fields to see how it affects the yield following a fallow year.

Committee Reports:

a. Audit Committee – Phil reviewed the March register and did not have any questions at this time.

b. Facilities Committee – Ken reported there has not been a facility committee meeting since the last one.

c. Watershed Council – To be discussed in the coordinating board meeting, immediately following the SWCD board meeting.

d. OACD/OAHP/SWCC – Ken reported OACD and the SWCC have not met since the last board meeting. The SWCC will be meeting next month. OAHP was able to confirm a \$5 million allocation from the legislation this year. These funds will mostly be going towards easements, and they might do some planning next month.

District Manager Report:

a. Work Plan Progress and Grant Status – Shilah reported her reports were handed out with the meeting packets. Everything is still on track with the work plan progress. The tree sale has been wrapped up so she could check that off as being completed. We sold over 7,000 trees, exceeding our goal. After today's meeting, we'll check off the annual meeting task as well. There are currently 29 active grants. Since 1990, the District has completed over \$18 million in on the ground work, through 315 grants.

b. Activity Reports and Schedules – No activity reports were emailed however they are available for review upon request. The schedule was distributed with the agenda.

Bill thanked everyone for their participation in the long meeting day.

Ken shared some news on the Google SIP. They have had two or three meetings of the taxing districts but could not come to any agreement. The most recent suggested solution (as of yesterday) is to distribute the funds at the same proportion that property taxes are currently distributed to 11 taxing districts. If this is approved, it will still be two or three years before we see any funds from this. A community fund was discussed, but at this point in time it will not be set up. The City, County and the 6 taxing-districts with a vote in the matter may elect to start one at a later date. Ken suggested the board vote on the current option, and if a different agreement is reached, he will bring it to the board to vote on that instead. *Ken moved to divide the Google SIP funds between the 11 taxing districts at the same rate as the current tax proportions; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Adjourned: 2:36 PM

Jennifer Sampson