



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting & Budget Hearing Minutes – June 7, 2023

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

Associate Directors Absent: Bryce Molesworth

Staff: Shilah Olson Jennifer Sampson Josh Thompson
Abbie Forrest Drake Gilbert

Staff via Teleconference: Ryan Bessette

Guests:

FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus

Guests via Teleconference:

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

1:01 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 April or May board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the April and May 2023 board meeting minutes as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.* Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the Budget Committee meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the Budget Committee meeting minutes as presented; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the April Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted a few of the larger expenses were for the 15MUS project, watershed assessments, and others. Stan inquired about the profitability of the annual tree sale. Shilah shared that the tree sale was more of a public outreach event than a for-profit event. *Stan moved to receive the April Treasurer's Report; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.* Shilah reviewed the May Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. Shilah noted the large expenses for FAST payments which are reimbursable expenses. *Stan moved to receive the May Treasurer's Report; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

Action Items

a. Diversifying Bank Accounts – First Interstate Bank Options – Shilah reported Robert Wallace brought First Interstate Bank to her attention and she’s been researching interest rates for financial investments. First Interstate Bank has a little better rate than the LGIP account at over 4% compared to the average 3.75% we’ve been getting lately. Umpqua Bank offers CDs as well, but it has to be new money to the bank so the District wouldn’t qualify. There is over \$200,000 in the building reserve fund that the District is not planning to touch for a while so it might make sense to invest it and earn more interest on it. *Ken moved to open a CD at First Interstate Bank to invest \$200,000 from the Building Reserve Fund; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

b. Contracting with OSU for 15mile MUS studies – Shilah reported they submitted a grant application for \$75,000 to OWEB for technical assistance for the MUS. If approved, OWEB funding won’t be available until November at the earliest. GSI has submitted a draft scope of work and fee estimate for the \$75,000. GSI has recruited Dr. Sasidharan with Oregon State University (OSU), who is a leading expert in this type of work and is available this summer with graduate student assistance. This work is enumerated in Task 4 of the GSI scope of work. While it would cost more District funds to keep the project going over the summer, SWCD staff believe the project is worthwhile and the District will benefit from everything learned on the first attempt. Josh shared the legislative discretionary funding request is still a possibility for funding. Under this proposal, Dr. Sasidharan could be contracted through GSI and the District would pay GSI directly as our consultants on the MUS project, or we could opt to contract with OSU directly. *Phil moved to contract for the work with Dr. Sasidharan of OSU and approve the scope of work and fee estimate for Task 4; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

c. IT Service Providers – Jennifer reported she has been interviewing and seeking bids from IT service providers in the area and has provided a comparison chart between three companies she received bids from. While SWCD staff have been doing their own in-house tech support for years, technology is getting too advanced for staff to be able to do this while still maintaining their regular workload efficiently. Shilah explained that the SWCD is attempting to separate from the USDA computer network for greater reliability and stability in the event of a government shutdown. She has also received recommendations from the District’s legal counsel to separate from the federal system. Discussion ensued on the pros and cons between IT service providers. *Ken moved to contract with Global Network Support for IT services for the District; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

d. Summer Celebration in Partnership with Wy’East, July 20th – Shilah reported Robert has invited the SWCD to partner on a celebration on July 20th. Robert shared that the SWCD has been such a huge help to him on the administrative side that at the very least he wants to invite the SWCD to Wy’East’s Summer Celebration, but perhaps the District would be interested in coordinating the celebration with him as well. Details are still being developed. Board consensus was to partner with Wy’East on the celebration on July 20th.

Convene Budget Hearing & Budget Discussion – 1:32pm

Bill convened the budget hearing.

Shilah reviewed the budget summary and discussed the changes that have been made since the budget committee meeting and shared the budget on Zoom for those who were not present at the meeting. There were quite a few changes to various line items, but the overall budget did not change greatly. The budget committee approved the budget at \$8.8 million, and after changes the budget has increased slightly to \$8.9 million. Shilah reviewed the new departmental breakdown in the budget and noted that as this is the first time we've done this, it probably won't entirely reflect reality to begin with, but we will be able to improve it going forward. There was discussion on the 15MUS pilot project, and board consensus was to reimburse the landowner for the bridge expenses in the current fiscal year if the bridge is complete. There was also a discussion on the SWCD potential weed program and how they might coordinate with Wasco County. It was requested that the Budget Committee receive a final copy of the approved budget with an explanation on all the changes that occurred since the Budget Committee meeting.

No changes were made to the proposed budget at this time.

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

Budget Hearing Closed – 2:17pm

a. Resolution: Adopting the Budget, Making Appropriations, Imposing the Tax, and Categorizing the tax – Shilah reviewed Budget Resolution 230607-BGT. The budget resolution reflects a total adopted budget of \$8,996,718. *Shawn moved to approve Budget Resolution 230607-BGT as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Updates

a. Next Meeting - The next regular meeting is scheduled for July 5, 2023, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

b. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) – Josh reported this was previously discussed during the contracting with GSI/OSU discussion.

c. Highline Ditch Elimination – Josh reported the three smaller wells are complete with pumps and electricity, and they have one well remaining. He also needs to address the fish screen issue on the Harvey diversion.

d. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire – Josh reported they are partnering with ODFW to do spraying on the wildlife area for the White River Fire. They do have some funding available for that. On the Miller Road Fire, they need to repair or replace over 3 miles of fence on 13,000 acres. Josh did most of the inventory for those, which will be paid via ECP through FSA. There were concerns about the cost share not being what was initially promised, but it ended up being contracted at the 2023 rate of \$5.60 per foot, which is more than expected.

e. Mosier Million #2 – Josh reported he still needs a couple of access agreements signed. GSI is working on the specifications we will use to contract with the driller. Hopefully work can begin in the next few months.

f. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Emergency Preparedness Planning – Shilah reported this is just a reminder for herself and the board.

Agency Reports

- a. NRCS (update via email)** – Emily was not able to attend the meeting, but she did send an update via email, which is included in the meeting packet.
- b. FSA** – Lissa reported she attended the Pre-Harvest Cherry Tour yesterday and will be at the Wasco County Crop Tour tomorrow. PARP and ERP deadlines were extended to July 14th. It is time for COC elections for Northern Wasco County, which is everything west of Five Mile. They have started LFP as of May 26th. Wasco County is in the 8th consecutive week of D2 drought, so Wasco is eligible for drought payments. If you are eligible, Lissa recommended applying early with Tiffany. Leases have to be on file in order to receive payment. You can also apply for emergency grazing of CRP. It is the primary nesting season through July 15th, so you can emergency graze with permission, but you will be limited to half your stocking rate or half the time while in nesting season. This applies even if you begin emergency grazing on July 14th. It won't increase on July 15th even though it's not primary nesting season anymore. Acreage reporting is ongoing for spring planting. CRP needs to be certified by July 15th. CREP is never allowed to be grazed, even during drought. Phil inquired about the popularity of emergency grazing on CRP. Lissa reported they have seen an increase in the last couple of years as some of the rules have been relaxed. They are anticipating the emergency relief program for 2022 but they don't have many details on it yet. They are still working on ERP for 2020 and 2021. Stan asked if he could purchase crop insurance on rangeland. Lissa reported if you received a letter, it means you have a NAP eligible crop and can file late if you choose to. If you are a multi-county producer, you will need to file separately for each county.
- c. OSU Extension** – Jacob thanked the SWCD board for supporting the crop tours with donuts, coffee, and porta potties. The Wasco County crop tour is tomorrow starting at 8:30am at the Dufur Community Cemetery which is next to the OSU wheat variety trials. There will be Source representatives there to talk about spray and bio controls. Agcopter was going to do a drone spraying demo, but he's not able to make it. The Sherman County Experiment Station field day is Wednesday, June 14th. At this point, the current wheat crop looks below average. The wheat in Moro is looking better than Wasco County due to more rain, but overall, it's looking like an early harvest year. Shilah thanked Jacob for his help on the PSP strategic plan. Shilah reported the final draft is complete if anyone wants to read it.
- d. Wy'East RC&D** – Robert reported he is continuing to work on irrigation projects; however, most of the landowners he works with are currently cutting hay, so they aren't irrigating. He has all the soil moisture probes for the SWCD installed now. Robert reported the Prineville Reservoir completely filled up with one of the thunderstorms a couple of weeks ago. Hopefully, by the end of this month, Wy'East will have a larger Monarch e-tractor, which will head to Crook County Fairgrounds for indoor arena grooming. Robert also has two more of those tractors on order for general use. The Monarch tractors are driver optional. Michael has been working on the REAP grants, and substantial federal funding is going into those projects. In the first round, Oregon received 10 times the normal amount of funding. Wy'East will be helping local landowners apply for that funding through USDA. Robert attended the Cherry Tour yesterday and will be at the Wasco County Crop Tour tomorrow with one of the e-tractors. Robert attended a meeting this week with stakeholders from Mosier, Maupin, Tygh Valley, and other areas to strategize on where to place e-charging stations and develop a plan for Wasco County as e-vehicles become more common in the next several years. Shaniko is slated to get one of the fast-charging stations.

Committee Reports

a. Audit Committee – Phil asked what the payment to Dryside Enterprises was for. Shilah explained it was for trenching on the Tygh Valley wells project.

b. Facilities Committee – Shilah reported Josh is continuing to work on security upgrades. The District is still looking for a custodian if anyone knows someone who is interested. They are also considering putting out an RFP to see if they can find a contactor to clean the building. The District has had very low application rates for the custodian position. Shilah thanked Abbie for all her hard work on the interior painting project.

c. Watershed Council Updates – Drake reported that fish tagging is wrapped up for the year in Fifteenmile Creek and Mill Creek. They did not fish tag in Threemile and Chenoweth Creek due to low numbers. They tagged fewer in Mill Creek than normal, and more in Fifteenmile Creek than last year. Drake started e.coli monitoring in May, including sampling in some of the tributaries of Mill Creek to try and pinpoint some of the contamination in that watershed. He is working on getting the FAST program set up for the year and is hoping we don't have any alerts. The final draft of the PSP Plan was completed and sent over to ODA and DEQ to finalize and approve. In June, Fifteenmile and Bakeoven Watershed Councils will have meetings, but the dates are not yet confirmed.

d. OAHP/SWCC – Ken reported the SWCC met at The Dalles Service Center last month. They had a tour of Orchard View the first day, followed by their regular business meeting the second day. Josh presented on current Wasco SWCD projects. DEQ gave a presentation on TMDLs. Their contact at DEQ, Gene Foster, is retiring, but hopefully the SWCC's relationship with DEQ will continue. Ken shared that members of OACD received a letter from Stan Dean, the advocacy chairman for OACD. A couple of years ago OACD went through the eligibility requirements for directors for local districts. The rules currently state that zone directors must be owners or managers of at least 10 acres of land in their zone. There is dissension among the districts as to whether this rule should be changed. OACD and SWCC have not been able to take a position on this rule, due to significant differences between districts. Private parties outside the districts have initiated the process to change this rule a few years ago. It was introduced as a bill in the legislature this year, which would eliminate the 10-acre requirement at a county population level of 250,000 or more, which would affect five counties in the state. Ken's term on the SWCC will end in August and he will not be running for his position again, and encouraged anyone interested to sign up.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah reported the 15mile MUS proposal is still alive in Salem, but it is at the mercy of the Senate. It is part of house bill 2010. Shilah's reports were emailed out and are included in the meeting packet. Things are quickly being checked off on the work plan as this is the last month in the fiscal year. The District currently has 33 open grants, almost half of which are wrapping up. Current grants total almost \$4 million, with almost \$2 million remaining. The District currently has seven submitted grant applications with six more in process. Since 1990, the SWCD has completed 326 grants, and a little over \$19 million in on-the-ground work.

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: 3:16pm

Jennifer Sampson