

## **Written updates for December 10, 2025 board meeting:**

- **SDAO Annual Meeting:**

- The SDAO Annual Meeting and Conference will be held February 5–8, 2026 in Seaside, Oregon, hosted by the Special Districts Association of Oregon. This statewide gathering brings together district board members, managers, and staff to focus on governance, risk management, and best practices, while offering training sessions, networking opportunities, and updates on legislative and program changes. Registration is open through Jan 29th. More details are available here: <https://www.sdao.com/2026-02-05-upcoming-events-2026-sdao-annual-conference>

- **NACD Annual Meeting:**

- The NACD Annual Meeting and Conference will be held February 14–19, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas, bringing together conservation district leaders, agency partners, and industry professionals to discuss national conservation priorities, share best practices, and strengthen collaboration across districts. Early bird registration is available through Dec 19th and the deadline to register is Jan 26th. More info here: <https://www.nacdnet.org/news-and-events/annual-meeting/>

- **Poster Contest Update:**

- Karen facilitated the statewide contest this year, though only two districts participated. Winners included students from Sherman and Wasco SWCDs, with first-place posters by Liliana Salazar (grades 4–6) and Daisy Proctor (grades 7–9) representing Wasco County. Photos of the winning posters will be posted on the Wasco SWCD website, and all state winners have been submitted to the National Contest to be held in February 2026 at the NACD Annual Meeting in San Antonio.

- **Solar Development Discussion:**

- We are hoping that we have time to spend discussing this during the meeting. Staff have had conversations with BrightNight Power on the Deschutes Solar and Battery Energy Storage System, which is moving through the EFSC process, providing a review of their mapped agricultural practices, vegetation and soil management plans, and potential mitigation options. In parallel, we've had conversations with ODFW and reviewed a separate proposal for Yellow Rosebush Energy. Together, these developments highlight the growing number of utility-scale energy projects in Wasco County and raise important natural resource considerations, including impacts on farmland, habitat, and the need for coordinated mitigation strategies.

- **Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget:**
  - The grant application submitted to OWEB to fund another round of MUS pilot testing was not recommended for funding. Oregon Water Resources Department is requiring that all diversions in the Fifteenmile Watershed have a working flow meter in advance of their water budget study.
- **Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2:**
  - Mosier Million #2 grant has been successfully closed out. Final work is underway on the Diego Leon replacement well; Cascade Drilling is awaiting delivery of the control panel, after which installation will be completed and the project fully wrapped up.
- **Highline Ditch Elimination:**
  - The OWEB grant has been extended through December 31, 2026, with the OWRD transfer approved through October 1, 2026. Two critical components remain before the Highline Ditch can be decommissioned: installation of the Simer fish screen and getting Wassenmiller’s well fully operational. ODFW engineers are finalizing the fish screen design, with staff time estimated at \$25,000; if ODFW cannot fund this internally, the board may need to consider an agreement to reimburse their time to ensure completion. On the Wassenmiller project, the SWCD has already made board-approved purchases (pumphouse, pump deposit, electrical and wire contracts), and the current phase of work—pump, electric, and related infrastructure—is projected to cost about \$103,000. Art has cancelled his NRCS EQIP contract and will move forward with whatever irrigation design best suits his management objectives and budget. While this means the \$6,299 assignment of payment will not be realized, OWEB has confirmed the revised approach is acceptable under the grant terms. After more than a decade of effort, all parties agree the priority is to complete the remaining components efficiently and close out the project by 2026
- **Fires:**
  - CWDG Grant: The current grant is progressing well, with the seasonal crew from MCFR conducting assessments and creating defensible space around homes in the Wamic and Tygh Valley areas. Their 90-day employment concludes in early January, and we are exploring options to transfer them to a staffing agency so they can continue working through approximately April 2026, before rejoining MCFR. We will discuss this in more detail under action items. The crew is highly capable and interested in continuing; however, extending their employment directly through the SWCD would trigger benefit obligations and regular employee status, which is not sustainable under the

available grant funds. Cost comparisons indicate that private contracting (currently limited to one provider with this capacity) is the next most feasible option. We remain in close coordination with JFRFPD on roadside defensible space projects on Juniper Flat, with scope adjustments under discussion with USFS via Wasco County. In parallel, Chief Walters is identifying additional priority projects across the Flat, and we have proposals underway with Land & Brush Control, LLC and H&A Land Solutions. Meanwhile, CWDG R4 is in progress with the next application due in January. This proposal will focus on the northwest portion of the County.

- 2024 Larch Creek Planning: We are working with ODFW to solicit quotes from at least three contractors, pursuant to OAR 137-047-0270 (intermediate procurement), for consulting work on the post-fire restoration plan. Quotes have been requested and are due by the end of the year, with the goal of starting planning work in early 2026.
- 2025 Recap: Abbie has been working with Jefferson SWCD and agencies across Eastern Oregon (OSU, ODFW, Sustainable NW, and ODA) on the Threat Based Conservation Strategy for post-fire assessment and recovery efforts and IAG's, with focus areas including the Cram and Black Rock Fires. Ryan is engaged in multi-agency task force work on the Rowena Fire, supporting coordination across partners and landowners as recovery continues. Post-fire concerns across these incidents include fence repairs, erosion control, invasive weed management, and re-seeding to stabilize soils and restore habitat. Together, these projects reflect the long-term natural resource challenges that follow major wildfire events and highlight the importance of cross-county collaboration.
- **East Cascade Oak Partnership– CR Surveys, Block Grant, USFS, ODFW:**
  - Cultural resources surveys are complete, and we are awaiting USFS and OPRD staff review and approval of the final report before closing out the OWEB grant. The block grant concept has been tabled and will be removed from future updates. Both USFS and ODFW have submitted new FIP grant applications with SWCD serving as fiscal sponsor; we have minor edits to submit to OWEB and expect awards in early 2026.
- **Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program:**
  - We have contracted John Runyon to lead the project for the 2025–27 biennium. John is beginning work on Malathion best management practices (BMPs) and has engaged OSU Extension to help convene producers for dialogue on current application practices, barriers to adopting alternative BMPs, and the feasibility of incentive-based approaches. A producer meeting

is being planned in late January to gather input and guide development of practical recommendations. In addition, John will support restoration action planning under the PSP grant, ensuring outreach and feasibility study components are aligned with district priorities.

- **Updating Long Range Plan & SWCD Employee Handbook:**
  - LRP: We will review an outline of the Long-Range Plan, based on the adopted 2019 plan / 2023 draft. A six-month timeline is proposed to align with the district's budget cycle: priorities and objectives will be refined in January–February 2026; integration with the draft budget process and input from the budget committee will occur in March–April; a draft will be presented to the budget committee for feedback in May; and final adoption by the board, with submission to ODA, is targeted for June–July 2026. Board and staff input will be sought at each stage to ensure the plan reflects current priorities and resource concerns.
  - Employee Handbook: Staff are continuing review & updates.
- **FY 2024-2025 Audit**
  - The audit is well underway; we anticipate a presentation from our auditors at the January meeting.