



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board Meeting Minutes – September 6, 2023

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

**Directors Absent:** Shawn Sorensen

**Associate Directors Absent:** Bryce Molesworth

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

**Staff via Teleconference:** Ryan Bessette      Samantha Filbin      Karen Lamson

**Guests:**  
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director  
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist  
SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus

**12:59 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 July board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the July meeting minutes as presented; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Treasurer’s Report:** Shilah reviewed the July Treasurer’s Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. Ken inquired about the First Interstate Bank CD and if the office has been receiving statements. Shilah will reach out to First Interstate Bank and ask for a statement. Ken requested additional reports in the future, regarding assets, liabilities, and debt, as well as the fixed asset report. *Phil moved to receive the July Treasurer’s Report; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

**Action Items**

**a. Cost Share Requests –** Abbie reviewed the cost share budget tracking sheet and reported if the board approves the four cost share applications she will present today, the District will have used up the first half of the budget, which was intended to be used through December, per discussions during last year’s budget review. She also noted she knows of three more

applications that would be presented at the October board meeting. Abbie led a discussion on how the board wanted to deal with the cost share budget distribution. Board consensus was to continue approving cost share applications on a case-by-case basis, as they have done previously, and to encourage use of small grants where it is appropriate.

Abbie presented four cost share applications:

**Fargher** – This is for a spring development on 5Mile, and they are requesting the maximum of \$7,500. Phil inquired if this was in a CREP contract. Abbie explained that the spring site is on the hillside, and they have previously declined entering a CREP contract.

**McKay** – This application is for two spring developments in separate locations. They are requesting the maximum of \$7,500.

**Dahle** – This application is for orchard chipping, and they are requesting the maximum of \$7,500.

**White** – This application is to installing cisterns for rainwater harvesting for irrigation in Mosier. They plan to install three cisterns and are requesting the maximum of \$7,500.

*Bob moved to approve all four cost share applications; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**b. FY2022-2023 Annual Report** – Shilah reported the draft Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2022-23 was distributed at the board meeting, but it has not been emailed yet. Abbie assembled the SWCD Annual Report and Drake assembled the Watershed Council Annual Report insert. This will be distributed as a special edition of the Groundwork Newsletter. Shilah requested the board get any feedback to her by the end of the week. The board gave positive comments on the layout.

**c. Budget Amendment for GSI Contract for 15mile MUS** – Shilah reported she included information about this in the memo she sent with the meeting packet. The District has been working with GSI on the 15MUS project, and they have been heavily involved in the stakeholder meetings. This limited their time and budget on the other tasks they agreed to do on the project. They are requesting an additional \$8,000 to complete the contract. Shilah proposed to amend the contract for the additional \$8,000 as they did more than was originally budgeted to start with. *Phil moved to amend the contract with GSI for an additional \$8,000; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**d. Professional Services Contract for Attorney/Legal Services** – Shilah reported the SWCD has been under contract with Campbell Phillips for the last four years, in two-year increments, and the contract is currently up for renewal. They increased their rate from \$200/hour to \$225/hour, but it is still well discounted from their general rate. Shilah confirmed the board can direct appoint contracts up to \$50,000. *Ken moved to approve the professional services contract with Campbell Phillips; Bob seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**e. Cost Share Rate for Mosier Million #2** – Josh reported on the priority #2 well, which is an irrigation well, the landowner is a willing participant but he can't afford it right now, after losing money on cherries for years. Shilah reported there is no match requirement from the State with

this funding. On the last Mosier Million, the board agreed to fund domestic wells 100%, and asked producers to pay 10% of the costs on irrigation wells. Josh proposed to cover the priority #2 irrigation well at 100% and not require any match from the producer. Discussion ensued. *Bob moved to approve 100% funding of the priority #2 well, and approve funding levels of the other wells on a case-by-case basis, with staff being directed to leverage other funds when possible; Larry seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

## **Updates**

**a. Next Meeting** - The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 4, 2023, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

**b. OACD Annual Meeting & Conference, October 16-18, Redmond** – Shilah reported in her memo in the meeting packet, there is a link to the conference website and a snapshot of the agenda. Please let her know if you are interested in attending the OACD conference.

**c. FAST 2023** – Drake reported there were no FAST alerts this year. He shared that they doubled the amount of water rights enrolled in FAST as they had a large irrigator join the program, which increased the payment amounts as well. Drake presented a chart displaying weather data for the last several years. The summary of 2023 weather was that it was slightly hotter than 2020, but not as hot as 2022 overall. Discussion ensued on the FAST program and possible in-stream leasing of water rights.

**d. 15mile Managed Underground Storage** – Shilah reported they are working with GSI on getting the final reports on the 15MUS project to OWRD. They are still trying to get the professor out here, but it is proving difficult to get a contract with the university. They did apply for an OWEB grant, which was ranked above their funding line, so hopefully that will be approved.

**e. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Josh had to leave the meeting early to work on the Highline Ditch project.

**f. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire** – Josh reported the District received a \$35,000 grant from OWEB for the Miller Road Fire. They intend to use it for strategic woody debris removal to aid in fire prevention. He has been working with Tiffany in FSA and spending a lot of time on Juniper Flat inspecting fences.

**g. Mosier Million #2** – This was discussed under action items.

**h. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Emergency Preparedness Planning** – Shilah reported the best practices checklist this year includes an emergency preparedness plan. SDAO has a template that she will be updating. They also require at least one staff member to complete some training before November.

**i. Summer Celebration in Partnership with Wy’East, July 20<sup>th</sup>** – Shilah reported she attended the celebration, and it was fun and well received. The attendance was much lower than anticipated, but she thinks the timing was responsible for that. Pat, Shawn, and a few staff members attended. The Monarch electric tractor was there, which was powering the refrigerator and the smoker. Hopefully they will have a greater attendance next year.

**j. Wasco County Fair & 4-H Auction** – Shilah reported the Fair and 4-H Auction were a great outreach opportunity. Josh attended the Fair on Friday and talked to fair goers. Shilah attended Saturday, including the livestock auction, and the SWCD received many positive mentions for donating to the auction pool.

### **Agency Reports**

**a. NRCS** – Emily reported they funded 29 EQIP contracts for just over \$1 million. CSP had 14 contracts (59,000 acres) funded for just under \$2 million. She is anticipating next year to fund even more with the IRA funds coming in. Through EQIP this year, they have funding for forest health, pine beetles, fuels reduction, or even wildlife related on forest land for all forest land in Wasco County. The range CIS did get approved, and she brought maps showing the boundary in South County. Applications for climate smart EQIP practices are due November 17<sup>th</sup>. Staffing is still just her and one other staff member, plus Hilary, the shared ODFW/NRCS biologist. The fish screen CIS was approved in the Fifteenmile watershed, and she has applications with her if anyone would like one. Hilary worked hard to get that CIS approved. This is the first CIS of its kind so it is a pilot project and will hopefully continue in the future. It will be a cost share style program. Emily and Misty have a meeting with Jason Flowers, who is stationed out of Pendleton, and his goal is to make dryland operations match their programs and try to be more innovative and make suggestions on CSP enhancements. Next week, there will be an Agronomist tour with 20 agronomists from the western region from NRCS. Garret will be assisting, and the board is welcome to come on the tour if they are interested.

**b. FSA** – Lissa reported they will have a new employee start Monday: Patty Fields. Patty worked for Sherman County FSA ten years ago, and now she'll be working for Wasco/Hood River County FSA. Patty will be working on NAP, TAP, and some administrative tasks. The FSA office will now be fully staffed, which they haven't been since December. Martha is working on finalizing contracts, which must be done before September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Payments will start coming out in October. They always send out the oldest CRP payments first, and then move on to new contracts. If there are any farm record changes for 2024, those can be submitted when their system starts back up in October, with a deadline of August 24<sup>th</sup>. They are still doing emergency grazing and LFP as we are still in D2 drought. Hood River County is also eligible for LFP payments. She thanked the SWCD staff for putting together emergency grazing plans. As you get your seeding in, the deadline for acreage reporting is December 15<sup>th</sup> for fall planted crops; followed quickly by perennial fruit crops reporting on January 15<sup>th</sup>. ARC/PLC cannot be signed up for after September 30<sup>th</sup> until there is an approved farm bill. The NAP deadline for cherries is November 20<sup>th</sup>. The NAP deadline for hay and rangeland is November 30<sup>th</sup>. Any site surveys for grazing loss will happen after October 30<sup>th</sup>.

**c. OSU Extension** – Jacob was unable to attend the board meeting, but provided an update via email. He is in process of wrapping up four different wheat research projects, and will select dates for fall and winter extension programming starting in November.

**d. Wy'East RC&D** – Robert was not able to attend the board meeting. Shilah reported there is an electric vehicle demonstration on September 15<sup>th</sup> in Mosier, if anyone wants to attend. Pat reported he has been delivering the electric tractors to various events. While the tractors do work, there are still many bugs to work out as they frequently don't work when he rolls them off the trailer. He has seen them catch on fire if you hit a speed bump on the way to a high school

demonstration. He was going to drive the electric tractor in a parade and pull a Conestoga wagon on loan from the forest service, but the wagon had a broken wheel. So, he was going to pull the wagon on the trailer, but then the tractor wouldn't start, and they were unable to get a mechanic to fix the tractor in time for the parade. He was going to demonstrate the electric tractor at a tractor pull, but he couldn't get the tractor in gear, so a 1941 International tractor had to push him out of the way. So, these tractors are very much still in the testing phase.

### **Committee Reports**

**a. Audit Committee** – Phil asked about the interest charges on the Visa card. Shilah reported that while the check was issued early, Visa did not process the check fast enough to not charge interest. Following that incident, the Visa bill is now being paid online to avoid payment processing delays.

**b. Facilities Committee** – The facilities committee has not met since the last board meeting. Josh is continuing to make security upgrades as recommended and is attempting to get those funded by FSA and NRCS.

**c. Watershed Council Updates** – Drake reported The Dalles Watershed Council is meeting on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Fifteenmile Watershed Council will meet on September 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup>. The Bakeoven Watershed Council will meet September 26<sup>th</sup>. The Mosier Watershed Council will meet in October, and the White River Watershed Council will probably meet in November. Drake and Abbie have been working on the Watershed Area Councils Annual Report for 2022-23.

**d. SWCC** – Ken reported the SWCC met last month met in Burns, and the main discussion topic was fire prevention. They are partnering with BLM on clearing fire buffers along roadways and on hillsides to keep fires small if they do get started. They are currently leaving historical trees that are over 100 years old, but all other trees are being cleared. This was his last meeting as part of the SWCC so he will no longer be attending statewide meetings.

### **District Manager Report**

**a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah requested feedback from the board on dates for a local advisory committee review in September. The meeting will cover accomplishments to send to the agriculture board, as well as feedback on pesticide and other priorities. The proposed dates are September 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup>. Board consensus was to meet on the 28<sup>th</sup> at 11am, with lunch to follow. Shilah reported she did not assemble a work plan progress report as the fiscal year has only just started. She reported the 2022-23 Audit is underway and the budget filings are completed with the tax assessor's office. The District currently has 31 open grants with approximately \$2.6 million remaining. Since 1990, the District has completed 332 grants totaling \$19.5 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.

Bob led a discussion on tax dollars with new developments (such as Google, and new solar farms). He heard a rumor about a new solar farm installation and wanted to give the board notice so they could be involved in the tax negotiations. Shilah will contact the county commissioners to inquire about future developments.

**Adjourned: 3:03pm**  
Jennifer Sampson