



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – January 14, 2026

Directors: Bill Hammel Stan Shephard Shawn Sorensen Bob Krein
Jeff Crump Phil Kaser Larry Powell

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods Ryan Bessette
Drake Gilbert Allie Marker

Staff via Teleconference: Karen Lamson Abbie Forrest

Guests:

Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wasco SWCD: Ken Bailey, Director Emeritus
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director

Guests via Teleconference:

Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director

1:00 PM Call to Order

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

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the December regular board meeting minutes or the December Special meeting minutes. None were made. *Shawn moved to approve the December regular and special board meeting minutes as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the December Treasurer's Report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. Phil asked about the USDA contract length. Shilah noted that it was just renewed for another 5 years. *Phil moved to receive the Treasurer's Report for December; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

The loans payable/loans receivable report was also included for information.

Public Comment (5 Min. limit/person) – none

Action Items

a. Officer Elections: Bill called for officer nominations. Shilah reviewed the current officer positions: Bill is Chairman, Bob is Vice-Chair, Shawn is Secretary/Treasurer. With those positions, Bill and Shawn are signers on the bank accounts. *Shawn moves to nominate Bill for the position of Chairman. Phil seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor. Phil moves to nominate Bob as Vice-Chair. Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor. Jeff motioned to nominate Shawn as Secretary/Treasurer. Bob seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

b. Budget Committee Appointments – McNamee and Warnock: Currently, there are 2 budget committee terms expiring. Budget committee members Jim McNamee and Jerod Warnock have both expressed willingness to serve an additional 3 year term. *Bob moved to appoint Jim McNamee and Jerod Warnock to another 3 year term on the budget committee. Shawn seconded. The motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

c. District Cost Share Program: Abbie presented three District Cost Share applications:

M. Gerlick – This application is for a rainwater harvesting project. Landowner would like to complete a sustainable water harvest system for irrigation that would lessen the burden on the diminishing water table in their area. The amount requested is \$3635.

Horseshoe Bar Cattle Co – The applicant is requesting cost share assistance for spring development that would provide water on a year-round basis and improve grazing distribution. The amount requested is \$7500.

R. Wilson – This application is for a 1/2 mile of haul road. The full \$3000 is being requested.

Bob moved to approve all three district cost share applications as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.

Abbie initiated discussion regarding an already approved district cost share fencing project. The landowner had also applied for a small grant through OWEB to assist with the overall cost. The small grant request was denied because OWEB considered it a maintenance project. The landowner reached out to see if the Board would consider approving a phased project, completing half of the project this year and half next fiscal year when they could apply for additional district cost share funding. Abbie noted that in the past, fencing projects have been all one project, not phases. Board consensus was that this project should move forward as one project as originally presented, and not a phased project.

d. District Cost Share Policy – Haul Roads – Abbie presented a proposal to restructure the haul road program. The current policy allows for a maximum reimbursement of \$3000 for rock only. Roads longer than ½ mile are phased over multiple years. Landowners are allowed one haul road per fiscal year. The proposed change would increase the maximum reimbursement to \$7500 and continue to reimburse for rock only. The proposal would also eliminate phasing, allowing for the entire road to be completed in one application. *Phil moved to approve the revised district cost share haul road policy effective January 14, 2026; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

e. Contracting for Larch Creek Fire – In partnership with ODFW staff, SWCD staff solicited quotes for development of a Post-Wildfire Recovery Plan for the 2024 Larch Creek Fire. This technical assistance project is funded through OWEB and follows intermediate procurement requirements, including seeking at least three quotes. A jointly developed scope of work was sent to four qualified firms. Two firms responded with proposals, one firm responded with interest but declined to submit a proposal due to workload constraints and one firm did not respond. Both responding firms, Institute for Applied Ecology (IAE) and Mt. Adams Resource Stewards (MARS), are qualified, however IAE submitted the lower cost proposal as well as a more detailed and clearly defined approach. IAE has extensive experience with oak woodland and shrubland restoration, invasive annual grass management and post-fire ecological assessment across Oregon. *Jeff made a motion that Shilah negotiate and execute a contract with IAE for the Larch Creek Fire post-wildfire recovery plan; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

f. Approve COLA for Staff Effective January 1, 2026 – 1% Increase – Shilah mentioned that each year, she requests a COLA for staff that typically mirrors the increase that Federal employees would receive. The Federal increase is 1% for 2026. Shilah is requesting a 1.0% increase for staff. *Phil moved to approve a 1.0% COLA for staff effective January 1, 2026; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

g. Staffing Agency Option for Continued CWDG Crew Employment – At the December regular Board meeting, the Board provided tentative approval to use a licensed staffing agency for the seasonal CWDG crew. At the Board’s request, staff confirmed with the District’s attorney that contracting through a staffing agency is legally appropriate for short-term seasonal work. Staff have been in communication with Atkinson Staffing Inc. and have received a draft staffing agreement. Upon review of the draft, Shilah has requested several standard revisions. Once those revisions are incorporated, the agreement will be ready to be signed. To avoid delaying the transition, Shilah requests that the Board delegate authority to finalize and execute the staffing agreement to District management and administrative staff. This will allow the agreement to be completed as soon as ASI provides the final revisions rather than waiting until the next Board meeting. The delegated authority would apply to Shilah Olson, District Manager, Abbie Forrest, Acting District Manager for the period of January 19-30 during Shilah’s scheduled leave and Dana Woods, Office Administrator. *Shawn made a motion to delegate authority to the District Manager, Acting District Manager during the District Manager’s leave, and the Office Administrator to finalize and execute the staffing agreement with Atkinson Staffing, Inc.; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

h. Policy Review – Updating Employee Classifications, Benefits and Leave – Shilah reviewed a proposed update to the District’s personnel policies that would clarify that individuals hired through a staffing agency are not District employees and therefore not eligible for District benefits. The staffing agency would be responsible for payroll, taxes, workers compensation, unemployment insurance and any benefits offered to its employees. *Shawn motioned to approve the proposed update to Employee Classifications, Benefits and Leave policy; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

i. Board Member Mileage Reimbursement Policy – Shilah requested an update to the Board member mileage reimbursement policy. The current policy reimburses board members for mileage to and from regular board meetings. The update would allow board members to also request mileage reimbursement when the District Manager asks them to make a special trip to perform essential District duties, such as signing checks or completing other time sensitive administrative actions. *Jeff moved to update the board member mileage reimbursement policy to allow for mileage reimbursement when the District Manager asks them to make a special trip to perform District duties, including but not limited to signing checks, provided the travel is solely for that purpose; Bob seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

j. Updating Long Range Plan – Review Priorities & Objectives – In the interest of time, Shilah suggested tabling this item for Board review and discussion at the next meeting.

k. Feedback to OWEB on Grant Review Process – The Round 2 -15Mile MUS Pilot Testing grant that the District submitted to OWEB was not recommended for funding. After reading the review team evaluations, Abbie met with Greg Ciannella, the Region 4 Program Representative for Restoration Grants, regarding the direction of the Grant review process. Abbie and Drake are in the process of drafting a letter to OWEB addressing the current review process and requesting changes to the process going forward. The letter is requesting that at least 5 reviewers are present at site visits and that OWEB provide a period for protest after the review team evaluation. Shawn encouraged a review of OWEB policies to see if the review process is specified in their policies. After discussion, Board consensus was that Abbie and Drake should finish the letter and send it to OWEB.

Updates

a. Next Meeting – The next regular meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2026, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

b. SDAO Annual Meeting and Conference, Feb 5-8. Seaside, OR– written update provided.

c. NACD Annual Meeting and Conference, Feb 15-19, San Antonio, TX – written update provided.

d. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2 – written update provided.

e. Highline Ditch Elimination – written update provided.

f. Fires: CWDG Grant – written update provided.

g. East Cascade Oak Partnership – CR Surveys, USFS, ODFW Stockton – written update provided.

h. Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program – written update provided.

i. Updating SWCD Employee Handbook– written update provided.

j. FY 2024-2025 Audit – written update provided. The auditors will provide a presentation at the February meeting. There were two findings noted in the audit so the District must provide an Audit Plan of Action letter to the Secretary of State Audits Division. A draft Plan of Action letter was provided for review. If approved, the letter will need to be signed by the District Manager, the Board Chair and the Board Secretary/Treasurer. *Phil motioned to authorize Shilah, Bill and Shawn to sign the Audit Plan of Action letter for submission to the Secretary of State's office. Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Stan, Shawn, Bob, Jeff, Phil and Larry voting in favor.*

Agency Reports

a. **NRCS** – Emily reported that Dellaina is working on a special assignment for the Beaver Creek office until April. Emily is currently covering the Hood River office. Emily noted that all programs have the same deadline of 1/15/26. They have received 80 applications, most of which are EQIP. CSP is changing significantly. CSP will be capped at \$4000 regardless of size and will still be a 5-year contract. The changes in CSP may give more opportunities for funding. Emily also noted that she is working on scheduling the Wasco County Local Work Group meeting, which will most likely be scheduled for late February or early March.

b. **FSA** – Lissa reported that they are still trying to get temporary staff hired. SDRP – Stage 2 is open and is geared towards quality of losses. Stage 1 and Stage 2 are open until April. The Farmers Bridge Assistance program payments will be going out in February. Acreage reporting is ongoing. Livestock forage program available for 2025 losses due to drought, the same with ELAP. She also noted that the office is working on ECP sign-up for the 2025 fires.

c. **OSU Extension** – Jacob was unable to attend the meeting but provided an update via e:mail that noted that there will be a free drone training on Tuesday, February 10th from 1pm to 4pm at the Sherman County Extension Office in Moro. This training is for producers that want to purchase and use drones for spraying or imagery purposes. Mike Davis with CGCC will be providing the training. Jacob will also be putting on more First Aid classes, mainly in February. There are no dates set yet.

d. **Wy'East RC&D** – Robert had to leave the meeting early due to another obligation, but he provided comments regarding concern for the snow pack this year and its potential effects. He also provided some current weather temperature data.

Informational Reports

a. **Internal Financial Review** – none

b. **Facilities Status** – Pat made a suggestion that the District look into pre-engineered metal buildings once the proposed building plans are received from AKS.

c. **Watershed Council Updates** – Coordinating Board meeting to follow.

District Manager Report

a. **Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah noted that the grant status report is included in the meeting packet. The District currently has 37 active grants and seven pending applications.

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.

Adjourn Regular Board Meeting at 2:55 pm

Convene Wasco County Watershed Councils Coordinating Board Meeting

