



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – May 13, 2026

Directors: Bob Krein Jeff Crump Phil Kaser
Shawn Sorensen

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods Abbie Forrest
Ryan Bessette Allie Marker Scott Susi

Staff via Teleconference: Drake Gilbert

Guests:

Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director

Guests via Teleconference:

OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent
Watershed Professionals Network: John Runyon
Member of the Public: Michael

1:00 PM Call to Order

Bob called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions or changes to the agenda. Shilah requested an addition to the agenda to discuss an update to the Annual Meeting as a result of feedback from the conservation survey.

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

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the April Treasurer's Report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. *Shawn moved to receive the Treasurer's Report for April; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.*

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

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

Summary of Survey Feedback – Shilah gave a brief summary of the feedback that has been received from the Conservation Survey. Based on the results, water supply and availability, as

well as wildfire mitigation are two of the top concerns. One of the optional questions on the survey asked if respondents would be interested in attending an annual community conservation meeting hosted by the SWCD, and many responses noted that they would be interested if it included practical workshops or guest speakers. Shilah asked the Board to consider expanding the Annual Meeting to include guest speakers. She has reached out to Melissa Napoli, Wasco County Wildfire Coordinator and David Pilz, Managing Partner at Fluent Freshwater Insights and both have responded that they would be interested in doing a presentation. Shilah is estimating that expanding the Annual Meeting, to be held at Bargeway, including presentations along with light snacks would cost anywhere from \$1000-\$2500. Board consensus was to approve spending up to \$2500 to expand the Annual Meeting, which would include speakers and an SWCD presentation that highlights recent District accomplishments.

Action Items

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

B. Hammel – This application is for a 0.5 mile section of haul road. Total project cost is estimated to be \$14,000. The amount requested is \$7000.

T. Dahle Orchards – This application is for a chipping project that includes removing and pruning 3 orchard blocks. The chipped material would be distributed in other orchard blocks, providing a resource that allows better moisture retention in the soil. The amount requested is \$7500.

Jeff moved to approve the district cost share applications for B. Hammel and T. Dahle Orchards as presented; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.

J. Crump – This application will be tabled until the next meeting due to lack of quorum once Jeff declares a conflict of interest.

b. CWDG: Roadside Vegetation Contracting & Advisory Group – The Roadside Fuels Advisory Working Group Charter and the Request for Qualified Contractors documents were distributed prior to the April meeting. These items were previously tabled. Shilah explained that, although a small contractor pool already exists, the updated document reflects revised contracting thresholds and considerations and reopening the pool will allow additional qualified contractors to apply. It was Board consensus to move forward. Bob suggested that it would be helpful if Melissa provided information to the RFPD's regarding where the strategic fire breaks are located.

c. Contracting GSI for Leon Well COBU – The Board was provided a copy of a proposal from GSI Water Solutions for the preparation of the Claim of Beneficial Use (COBU) for the Leon well, which is the final well replacement under the Mosier Million #2 groundwater project. This COBU is the final step required to complete the transfer and move the well toward certification. District staff do not have the technical expertise to complete COBU's in-house. This work is budgeted for in the FY26-27 budget. COBU's will also need to be completed for landowners on the Highline Ditch project, and this contract will provide staff with the opportunity to learn the process. *Phil made a motion to authorize staff to contract with GSI Water Solutions for the completion of the Leon Well COBU; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.*

d. Updated SWCD Employee Handbook – The updated SWCD Employee Handbook is now complete. Shilah has been working on this project with SDAO and HR Answers for quite some time. A copy of the updated Employee Handbook was distributed to Board members prior to the meeting. Once approved by the Board, the handbook will be distributed to staff for a transition period to review and ask questions. *Shawn made a motion to adopt the updated SWCD Employee Handbook; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.*

e. Update Financial Policy & Add A. Forrest as Signer on Bank Account – This item was tabled at prior meetings. The updated financial policy consolidates all prior financial resolutions and establishes clear internal controls, segregation of duties, purchasing authority, reconciliation procedures and financial oversight. The policy also outlines circumstances that would allow a designated staff member to sign checks if the District Manager is unavailable. *Phil made a motion to adopt the updated financial policy and to add Abbie Forrest as a check signer; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.*

f. Meals, Branded Materials, and Employee Recognition Policy – This policy was previously approved in October of 2025. The District has recently learned that gift cards are considered taxable items by IRS standards and must be processed through payroll. The policy has been updated to reflect current federal and state requirements and clarifies that the District will provide tangible, non-cash items for employee recognition to maintain compliance. *Jeff made a motion to approve the revised Meals, Branded Materials, and Employee Recognition Policy; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.*

g. Public Meetings Policy & Training Reminder – Shilah noted that she previously sent the Board instructions for completing the required Public Meetings Law training. This training must be completed by October 31, 2026 for the District to receive the 2% insurance credit. The District's current Public Meetings Policy was previously distributed for Board review. Board consensus was that the policy is fine as-is and does not require any updates at this time.

h. Vehicle Reserve and Replacement Policy – A revised Vehicle Reserve and Replacement Policy was distributed for Board consideration. The policy update increases the annual transfer to the vehicle reserve from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and raises the reserve cap from \$50,000 to \$70,000 to reflect current vehicle costs. The policy also updates vehicle replacement guidelines to ensure reliability and safety, and also allows the District Manager to extend a vehicle's service life when the vehicle condition and maintenance justify the decision. Phil asked if other agencies have similar policies or if there is an industry standard. Shilah will look into this. Jeff commented that the vehicle replacement guidelines aren't really guidelines. Alternative guidelines were suggested. Shilah to check the OSHA rules regarding vehicles. The policy will be revised and brought back to the Board.

Weed Control Program & Discussion of Weed Board Establishment:

Scott led a discussion regarding the weed control program and the establishment of a Weed Advisory Board. He noted that the Weed Advisory Board can be the same as the regular Board. His vision would be that the Weed Advisory Board meet at least twice a year. Scott asked that

the Board consider adopting the ODA Noxious Weed Policy and Classification, which identifies priority target weeds for the weed control program. *Shawn made a motion that the SWCD Board act as the Weed Advisory Board and they adopt the ODA Noxious Weed and Classification list; Phil seconded. Motion carried with Jeff, Bob, Phil and Shawn voting in favor.* The first Weed Advisory Board meeting will be held at the SWCD Board meeting in June.

Updates

- a. **Next Meeting** – The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2026, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom. This will also be the budget hearing and weed board meeting, followed by the Annual meeting and no-host social at Bargeway.
- b. **Director Elections** – Zones 2 & 4 and At-Large 2 are up in 2026. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) oversees SWCD Director elections statewide, including eligibility requirements, filing deadlines and zone-verification rules. Details, forms and the 2026 election calendar are available at ODA’s SWCD Elections webpage.
- c. **Long Range Planning** – A summary document was updated based on feedback from the community survey project and was provided for Board review. The final document should be ready for Board adoption at the June or July meeting. Shilah requested feedback from the Board regarding the identified resource and operational priorities. It was Board consensus to proceed with the Long Range Planning document as outlined in the summary.
- d. **Highline Ditch Elimination** – The Highline Ditch Elimination project continues to move forward. All properties have had alternative wells drilled. Estimated project completion is estimated to be slightly over \$300,000. Staff continue to support landowners with coordination and implementation logistics.
- e. **Bright Night Power Community Investment Plan (CIP)** – The SWCD drafted and submitted a proposal to Bright Night Power. Bright Night has responded with a draft Community Investment Plan (CIP) and a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Bright Night’s budget is a little over \$900,000 and the SWCD is one of three agencies that could receive funding. MCEDD would administer the funds and the Wasco County Board of Commissioners would serve as the final decision-maker on which projects to fund. Jeff expressed interest in serving in an advisory capacity on behalf of the SWCD should their proposed model move forward, which includes a non-voting representative from each of the three approved entities.

Agency Reports

- a. **NRCS** – Emily reported that their funding has not been announced yet. They submitted 70 landowner applications. They are currently working on CRP plans for continuous CRP and doing status reviews for plans expiring next year.
- b. **FSA** – Lissa reported that grasslands CRP is open right now and the deadline is May 29th. She currently has a Program Analyst permanent position open. The application deadline for that position is May 19th. Application information can be found on USAJobs.gov. FSA is still running the 2023-2024 SDRP Disaster program. That deadline is August 12th. Lissa also reported that the FBA program is complete and that spring planting acreage reporting is due by July 15th.
- c. **OSU Extension** – Jacob reminded everyone that the Wasco County crop tour is June 1st at 8:30 am. There will be drone technology guest speakers and the tour will finish at JTI for lunch. The Sherman County crop tour will be June 2nd at 8:30 am, starting at the Sherman County

Extension office. He also shared that sometime after wheat harvest is done, he would like to have a tour day showcasing the fuel break work that has been done in Sherman County.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Robert commented that there are county wide concerns regarding water supply. In looking at the drought map, Wasco County is not as bad as some other Oregon counties. He noted that there is currently a nice incentive program for drip irrigation systems available to producers that are on Pacific Power. Robert reported that some pieces of the C-REP project are moving forward and others have stalled out. He has identified additional funding sources for this project. He noted that Wy'East still has USDA-RD REAP grant funding available, but the REAP application period is currently closed. Robert noted that the Farm Bill contains provisions pertaining to biomass/biochar and that he's interested in seeing what happens with that.

Informational Reports

a. Internal Financial Review – none

b. Facilities Status – no updates

c. Watershed Council Updates – Coordinating Board Meeting to follow.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah noted that the work plan progress is on track and the grant status report is included in the meeting packet. Currently working on 37 open grants with 6 in the works.

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 2:44 pm

Convene Wasco County Watershed Councils Coordinating Board Meeting

Dana Woods