



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – March 2, 2022

Directors via Teleconference: Bill Hammel Bob Krein Shawn Sorensen
Stan Shephard Ken Bailey Phil Kaser

Directors Absent: Pat Davis

Associate Directors Absent: Bryce Molesworth

Staff via Teleconference: Shilah Olson Samantha Filbin Josh Thompson
Drake Gilbert Scott Susi Jennifer Sampson
Karen Lamson Abbie Forrest

Guests via teleconference:

FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
Wy'East: Robert Wallace, Executive Director
Wasco County: Jill Amery, County Tax Assessor
Public: Raz Mason, Candidate for Oregon State Senate, District 26

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 February board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the February board meeting minutes as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the February Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted the District received the longevity credit from SDIS, and the rebate from Northern Wasco PUD for the building lighting upgrade. She also noted the transfer from the General Fund to the District Cost Share budget for Ryan Clausen's approved cost share. There was discussion about the board not receiving the Treasurer's Report until a few hours before the board meeting, and how it is difficult to get it to the board sooner when there is a very short timeframe between the end of the month and the board meeting. Board consensus was that if the board meeting falls within the first three days of the month, to approve the Treasurer's Report at the following board meeting so the board has more time to review the information. Board consensus was to table the February Treasurer's Report and approve it at the April board meeting, to allow more time for review.

Public Comment (5 Min. limit/person) – Raz Mason introduced herself as a Democratic candidate running for Oregon State Senate in District 26. She shared some of her thoughts on climate change and expressed appreciation for the work the SWCD does. She shared her website masoninoregon.com and invited the board to reach out to her with any questions they may have.

Action Items

a. Policy Review – Management – Shilah reported she has read through the management chapter and most of the policies look good. The District property maintenance policy needs updating as it hasn't been updated since the District purchased the building. She will update that policy and bring it back to the board for approval. She also wants to review the emergency and disaster response plan in depth and possibly bring it back to the board as well.

b. Annual Meeting Resolution – Shilah reported the board decided at the February meeting to hold the annual meeting in conjunction with our April board meeting and wait to see how things unfold related to COVID-19, and possibly host an in-person gathering in late spring or early summer. Resolution #20220302 formally sets the date for the annual meeting remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions. *Phil moved to pass Resolution #20220302 to set the date for a virtual annual meeting in conjunction with the April board meeting; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

c. Updating LGIP Designed Agents – Shilah presented Resolution #20220302-1 to designate the chief financial officer and the treasurer; and a letter authorizing individuals on the board who can have access to the LGIP account. The original documents report Stan Shephard as the Secretary/Treasurer, and we need to update them to say Shawn Sorensen is the Secretary/Treasurer. *Phil moved to approve Resolution #20220302-1 and to approve the letter allowing Shilah, Bill, and Shawn to have access to the LGIP account; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

d. Cost-Share Requests – Scott presented one cost share application:

B.Hammel – Scott reported this is a haul road request for Bill Hammel. As it is a conflict of interest, Bill abstained from the conversation. Scott reported this is a continuation of a haul road they did last year. Ken commented that it looks like a road that really needs gravel, and this is a good example of what the cost share program is for. Bob, as Vice Chair, took over the meeting and called for a motion. *Phil moved to approve funding Bill Hammel's haul road application; Ken seconded. Bill abstained. Motion carried.*

e. NCLA Bull Tour Sponsorship – Shilah reported the NCLA Bull Tour will take place on April 8th and will be focusing on the Sherman County area. She commented that this is a good opportunity to reach many landowners and producers. In the past, the District has provided coffee and donuts for this event. Shilah suggested the District may want to offer a \$200 sponsorship instead as it allows the District to include swag in the participants gift bags. Discussion ensued. *Shawn moved to provide coffee and donuts for the bull tour as they did last year; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

f. 15Mile MUS Update & Facilitation Service Agreement Amendment – Shilah reported the District has contracts with DS Consulting and AMP Insights on the facilitated piece of the 15Mile MUS project, and GSI who is working on the science & technical part of the project. She thinks they are going to need a few more facilitated meetings than were initially budgeted for. She’s asked DS Consulting to help her coordinate with agency partners to work with them at a higher level to get them more involved. She estimated this will cost slightly over \$5,200 and is seeking board approval to increase the contract with DS consulting. There are additional funds available through Wy’East, who is holding \$100,000 from Google that will go towards this project. *Phil moved to increase the DS contract by \$5,200 for additional meetings; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

g. Google SIP Agreement – Preferred Distribution Methodology – Ken reported the taxing districts met yesterday and they got a better understanding of how most of them would like the funds distributed. He feels the most favorable option is to divide it at same proportion as the current tax distribution rate. The county has proposed splitting the total 50/50, meaning 50% would be going to the taxing districts and 50% would be going to a “community fund” for a major project in the county. Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue (MCFR) requested an increased amount as they have direct need of the funds to meet the service demand caused by Google, and it would benefit the whole community. Ken is in favor of MCFR’s request. If MCRF receives the full amount of their request, Ken suggested either dividing the rest equally among the taxing districts or dividing the remainder 50/50, with 50% going into a community fund. Discussion ensued. Jill shared that the first agreement with Google from 2005 is going to become taxable this October. They are in process of estimating revenue for the tax districts. For example, if the revenue from Google’s taxes is \$4 million, a little over \$50,000 would go to the SWCD (this funding is separate from the SIP Agreement funds). The SIP Agreement spells out which districts get a vote in how the money is spent. This Agreement covers two proposed data centers, but they are just discussing the first data center at the moment. The SIP agreement will span a couple of decades. Once Google starts paying the full tax amount, the SIP Agreement goes away. Shilah reported there are six districts named in statute as having a percentage of the vote: Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue 50%, SWCD 6%, Library 16% and Parks & Recreation 16%, 4H & Extension 6%, Port of The Dalles 5% vote. There are five more districts eligible to receive SIP funds, but not named in the voting statute including School District #21, Columbia Gorge Community College, Education Service District, City of The Dalles, and Wasco County. Even though the City & County don’t get a vote in the distribution methodology, they both must agree to the final decision and sign the SIP Agreement. Shilah noted the deadline for a decision is March 17th. Once the group makes a decision, the board can then approve or not approve it. The board agreed by consensus to have Ken & Shilah continue negotiations on behalf of the SWCD and agreed with Ken’s line of thinking

Jill Amery, Wasco County Tax Assessor

Jill reported in October, they certified \$4.31 million in tax revenue for 30 districts across the county. A lot of commercial properties trended down, with residential properties trending up. South county passed a \$4 million general obligation bond for school improvements. The County did a hold back for reserve accounts in February. They currently have two appeals that warranted holding back accounts. Lumen (Century Link)

acquired level three communications and have a really large appeal with \$1 million in reserve, and they held back an additional \$200,000. Gas Transmission NW has an appeal they are holding \$108,000 for and set up a new account. The only interest they would receive would be what is accumulated in those separate accounts if the appeal is successful. If the appeals are in the state's favor, they'll redistribute those funds to the districts.

Updates:

a. Next Meeting - The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 6, 2022, 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center (TBD) or Zoom. Including SDAO Board Practices Assessment.

b. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Board Training/Assessment – Shilah reported at the last board meeting, she gave the board a run through the best practices checklist. The Board decided to do the SDAO-led board practices assessment and check it off the list. This is a 90-minute exercise, and it will work best if the full board can get together in person. Shilah suggested they get together mid to late morning and work on the assessment, then have lunch, and then go into board and annual meeting. The District has to present the annual report and audit at the annual meeting. Shilah requested the board report to her in the next few days with availability and feedback. She checked with SDAO, and they said the board can meet in person but still require the public to attend virtually via Zoom. Shilah also needs two board members to sign up for SDAO's board academy. Ken has already volunteered so she just needs one more. Anyone who signs up will have three years to finish the academy training. The board requested more information so this topic was tabled until the April meeting.

c. Weed Control Efforts – Scott reported he is continuing with some noxious weed control projects. Last year he finished up the yellow flag iris grant from the Oregon state weed board. He has applied for a new grant through the Oregon state weed board (through OWEB), and he found out last week it was approved for funding of \$16,994. It is a Wasco County early detection/rapid response grant. When there is a new infestation of a noxious weed, or a weed that's common but not common in Wasco County, they will hopefully be able to eradicate it. He has a meeting with ODA and the City of The Dalles tomorrow to define acceptable ways to eradicate the weeds. Since that grant was approved, the District is eligible to apply for a second \$20,000 grant for weed control equipment. Scott intends to apply for this second grant as well.

d. Mosier Groundwater: Deep Well #2 & Mosier Million #2 – Josh reported Deep Well #2 is getting so close to the end. They have the conduit for electrical service and are waiting on the electrician to hook it up, and then Pacific Power will hook up the transformers, and then they can start pumping water. Mosier million #2 is moving along, but they have not had much progress recently. The agreement with Biz Oregon is still pending, and GSI is working on the priority list.

e. Tygh Valley Water Projects: Highline Ditch & Lindell Dam Removal – Josh reported they are still waiting on the well driller to drill the final well. In the meantime, they are working on bringing the surface water diversion up to code and considering fish screening options. The infiltration gallery wasn't quite working well enough, so they are

looking at other options: turn the infiltration gallery into a well; or put in a river screen and come up with a surface water diversion. They also still have to do electrical work and set pumps on the three Tygh Valley wells that are done.

f. White River Fire Restoration – Josh reported last summer, they received funding from the first round of restoration grants through OWEB for restoration on private lands, but were unable to do any seeding due to the drought. Nor did they get any spraying completed. However, they have Shearer's lined up to do spraying this spring, and then come back and finish seeding. They were able to get an extension for that round one funding. Now round two of restoration funding is available, this time for public lands. There had been previous restoration work done through the state. Unfortunately, cows got into the new seeding, so anything that was coming up failed. He plans to apply for funding for 600 acres of seeding and 1,500 acres of spraying this spring. The due date to apply is in April.

g. FY 20-21 Annual Report – Shilah reported the annual report is very close to completion. She was working on it today and it will be completed in time for the annual meeting in April.

h. River Democracy Act – Shilah reported she has reached out to other SWCD's to see if their boards are taking positions on this topic. The consensus was that other boards are opposed to it as well. The act is still in committee, but they have until the end of the year to try and push it through.

Agency Reports:

a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval) – Emily reported that NRCS staff has been working on status reviews and making sure FSA has what they need. The Deadline for general CSP signup is March 18th. The local working group meeting is scheduled for March 24th.

b. FSA – Lissa reported they are in CRP signup and a week ago they realized the benefits were awry, so the state shut them down for eight days. They reopened yesterday but did not extend the signup deadline. She expressed appreciation to the NRCS and SWCD staff for getting inventories back to them so quickly. ARC/PLC signup deadline is March 15th. If you want changes to existing contracts or elections, this is the time to do it. If you made changes last year, you'll need to re-sign up. Once they're completed with general CRP signups, then grassland signups will begin shortly after and run through the middle of May. There are continuous signups going for re-enrolls for CREP, as well as for the highly erodible land initiative and wildlife initiative. If cherry producers are noticing loss, please notify FSA and your insurance agent right away that you've experienced a potential loss.

c. Wy'East RC&D – Robert shared a snowpack report that showed Wasco County is roughly 70-80% of normal. With that, most of Wasco County is still in D3 or D4 extreme drought. He has been working on projects in Maupin, Wamic area, and others. Irrigators are getting ready to start irrigation in April or May. There are new programs coming out that are related to variable frequency drives. Affective April 1st, they will allow as low as

a 7.5 horsepower drive to help out the smaller producers. This will be available through Northern Wasco County PUD and Wasco Electric Coop. Wy'East has received \$100,000 from Google through their Tides Foundation. The majority of those funds will go to the SWCD to assist with the 15Mile MUS project. The E-Tractor project is continuing. Wy'East has rented a small shop space now, so he has a place to store the e-tractors. This will also be a place for the public to come out and look at the technology they're working with. Over the next 18 months, Robert plans to bring more electric equipment into Dufur.

d. **OSU Extension** – Jacob was unable to attend the meeting, but he did email his updates to staff. Jennifer reported he is hosting a pesticide training on March 18th and a plant identification workshop for forages and invasive plants in the Mid-Columbia on March 31st. Both of these are from 2-4:00pm and will take place at the CGCC in The Dalles, building 3, classroom 3.203. Please contact Jacob if you are interested in attending.

Committee Reports:

a. **Audit Committee** – Phil and Shawn both reviewed the February register and did not have any questions at this time.

b. **Facilities Committee** – Josh reported he will set up a facilities committee meeting before April. The facilities committee has not met since the last board meeting.

c. **Watershed Council** – Drake reported the 15Mile Watershed Council has been heavily involved in stakeholder meetings. He is hoping to schedule a 15Mile Watershed Council meeting on March 16th, but that is not yet confirmed. That meeting should be fairly short, and the council will receive a SNOTEL update and go over changes to the FAST plan. The Dalles Watershed Council will meet on March 24th. They'll mostly be discussing fish monitoring results from last year and what's changed this year. The Bakeoven/Buckhollow Watershed Council will have a meeting on March 30th. The Mosier Watershed Council will have a meeting on April 19th.

d. **OACD/OAHP/SWCC** – Ken reported he is still the Treasurer for OACD until June. However, he hasn't attended a full meeting recently. The SWCC is working on revising statutes on what the commission is and what it can do. They're also looking at what influence OWEB has. The biggest issue they are working with the legislature on is what director eligibility looks like. This was brought up a couple of years ago but was delayed.

District Manager Report:

a. **Work Plan Progress and Grant Status** – Shilah reported the work plan progress and grant status reports were sent out with the meeting packet this morning. Everything appears to be on track. The grants are also on track. There haven't been any huge changes since the last meeting. She just closed out the OWEB CREP TA Grant and has a new one already in place so there will be no break in service. The District currently has 29 active approved grants, with some submitted and pending, totaling \$4 million in approved grants. Since 1990, the District has completed over \$18 million and 315 grants in on the ground projects.

b. **Activity Reports and Schedules** – No activity reports were emailed however they are available for review upon request. The schedule was distributed with the agenda.

Shilah shared with the board that today was Tammy's birthday. The board wished her a happy birthday.

Adjourned: 2:48 PM
Jennifer Sampson