



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board Meeting Minutes – July 6, 2022

**Directors via Teleconference:** Bill Hammel      Bob Krein      Pat Davis  
Ken Bailey      Shawn Sorensen      Stan Shephard

**Directors Absent:** Phil Kaser

**Associate Directors Absent:** Bryce Molesworth

**Staff:** Samantha Filbin      Drake Gilbert      Scott Susi

**Staff via Teleconference:** Shilah Olson      Ryan Bessette      Josh Thompson  
Abbie Forrest      Jennifer Sampson

**Guests via Teleconference:**

FSA:                      Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director  
NRCS:                    Emily Huth, District Conservationist  
Wy'East:                Robert Wallace, Executive Director

**1:02 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 June board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the June board meeting minutes as presented; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Treasurer's Report:** Shilah reviewed the May Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted there was a large payment to M&M Well Drilling for the Wassenmiller well. Pat asked about the checks to GSI that were destroyed and how that affected the accounts. Shilah explained we voided the checks and reissued them, so the notes on the Treasurer's report are to reflect that money coming in and going out again. *Ken moved to receive the May Treasurer's Report; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.* The June Treasurer's Report was tabled until the September meeting as there was not enough time to present it to the board before the meeting. Ken requested that some of the extra financial reports be consolidated into a single report.

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

**Action Items**

**a. Cost-Share Requests –** Abbie presented three cost share applications for haul roads for Stan Shephard, Tyler Neal, and Richard Neal. She looked at both Neal haul roads and Scott looked at

Stan Shephard's road. All three are requesting the maximum of \$2,500. While both Tyler's and Richards haul roads are on the same tax lot, they are at opposite sides of the property, and Tyler's is the second phase of a previously completed haul road cost share. *Pat moved to approve all three haul roads; Ken seconded. Stan abstained due to a conflict of interest. Motion carried.*

Abbie suggested the board approve NRCS operation and maintenance standards for longevity of haul roads. Discussion ensued. *Ken moved to approve the NRCS length of time on haul roads; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

When the budget committee met, they set the District Cost Share budget line item at \$150,000 but did not specify what portion of that was for haul roads versus general conservation projects. *Ken moved to split the cost share allocation at \$50,000 for haul roads and \$100,000 for general conservation projects; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**b. Fifteenmile Managed Underground Storage Pilot Project** – Shilah reported last month the board heard from David Pilz, who presented on the identified options for who would own and operate the Fifteenmile Managed Underground Storage Pilot Project. Discussion ensued on whether or not the board thought the SWCD should explore owning and operating the project. Board consensus was to have a separate meeting with the board and the two facilitators to expand on some of the details on this project and make sure the entire board is up to speed. Shilah will coordinate a meeting sometime in September or later in the year.

**c. FY 2022/2023 Annual Work Plan** – Shilah reported she sent a draft of the 2022-23 annual work plan to the board last week. This is a requirement from ODA as part of the District capacity funding. Shilah and staff still need to do some internal tweaking on the plan, but it is very close to completion. She has the work plan at an estimated completion rate of exactly 100%, which is the first time that has happened. The annual work plan was approved by board consensus.

**d. Auditor for FY 2021/2022 Audit** – Shilah spoke with Rick Cyphers this morning to see if he's available and interested in doing our audit for the 2021-22 fiscal year. He is available, but his firm is getting out of the audit business. One of their partners is retiring and they have yet to find a replacement, so they are going to cut down on their services. He was willing to provide his services this year and estimated the cost around \$9,300-\$9,500; although he strongly encouraged the District to reach out to other auditors to get on their books for next year. Friend and Reagan are the only other CPAs in The Dalles that do audits and they have been contacted about their availability and pricing. Friend and Reagan will likely absorb many of Cyphers' clients so their availability may be limited. Shilah asked the board for their feedback and discussion ensued. Board consensus is to plan on using Rick for the 2021-22 audit and immediately start shopping for an auditor for next year, which could involve putting out a request for proposals.

**e. FP Mailing Solutions Collections Notice** – Shilah reported we received a demand letter from a collections attorney saying we owe over \$5,000 to FP Mailing Solutions. While we originally thought this was a scam letter, it was determined we are in arrears on our postage meter payments. The billing for FP went automated about the time COVID hit, which was roughly the same time Tammy started working on retirement, and the FP billing was overlooked. FP claims they tried to reach out to us, but we never saw any of those communications. Shilah thinks they were sending invoices to an empty email box. She has reached out to our legal counsel, Kristen

Campbell, and determined we actually owe \$1,007.05. The difference in dollar amounts is likely the cost of the postage meter and collection fees. Kristen sent the collections attorney a cease-and-desist letter and we are waiting to hear their response.

**f. Credit/Debit Card Payment Policy** – Shilah reported the District started accepting credit and debit card forms of payment a couple of years ago. At that time, the board decided to only accept cards that were presented in person and pass the processing charges along to the customer. While it has been beneficial to be able to accept payments by card, there have been complaints from customers about the fees; and we’ve had strong suggestions to take payments over the phone. Plus, staff want to create an online portal for the tree sale where folks can place orders online and then come pick up their trees. Jennifer estimated the total cost to the District would be minimal, but it is difficult to say what that cost will be as we are uncertain how popular ordering online or over the phone will be. Taking credit card payments over the phone and online would also be safer in terms of COVID for both clients and staff. Being able to set up an online ordering portal would also likely save staff time on compiling the orders and inventory. Ken remarked that so many payments are made by card these days that the board needs to just absorb the processing fees as a cost of doing business. *Ken moved to amend the credit card policy to internalize processing fees and allow the District to accept card payments remotely by phone or online; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Updates:**

**a. CONNECT+ Conference** – Shilah reported the CONNECT Conference is coming back on September 6-8 at the Seaside Convention Center. It has been on a break because of COVID for the last couple of years. The board is welcome to attend, so please let Shilah or Jennifer know if they would like to register. However, the conference does conflict with the regularly scheduled board meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup>. There was discussion on alternate meeting dates.

**b. Next Meeting** - The next regular meeting is tentatively scheduled for August 31, 2022, 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center (TBD) or Zoom. The August meeting has been cancelled. The September 7<sup>th</sup> meeting was rescheduled for August 31<sup>st</sup> due to a conflict with the CONNECT Conference. Shilah will send out an email to the board to confirm the meeting date.

**c. Director Elections (Davis, Kaser, Shephard, Sorensen)** – Shilah reported this is a reminder that this is an election year for Pat, Phil, Stan and Shawn. Jennifer sent out election information to those who are up for re-election. If you intend to run for your position, you need to fill out your declaration of candidacy form and petition sheet with at least 10 signatures and turn those into ODA between July 21<sup>st</sup> and August 30<sup>th</sup>. Please note, you must take the signature sheet to the county elections office before turning it into ODA. Shilah commented that staff are unable to do this for you, but we can provide you with any information you may need.

**d. Staff Promotions (Thompson & Sampson)** – Shilah reported both Josh and Jennifer were on track with their training & development plans. Per the approved budget, Josh has been promoted to Assistant Manager and Jennifer to Office Administrator. Tammy officially retired as of June 30<sup>th</sup>.

**e. Mosier Groundwater: Deep Well #2 & Mosier Million #2** – Josh reported on Deep Well #2 and the only thing left is to install the pump. They are still waiting for Mather and Sons to program the variable frequency drive.

**f. Tygh Valley Water Projects: Highline Ditch & Lindell Dam Removal** – Josh reported the Lindell dam removal is contracted and should start this month. The contractor agreed to honor his bid price from last year, even though inflation has caused price increases. All four of the Tygh Valley wells have been completed, and he is in process of ordering pumps for the Wassenmiller well. On two of the wells, there was a collapse so they will need to install liners. On Highline, they are submitting a plan to Fish and Wildlife for approval on a reverse drain field that will be in the river and can be flushed out. The goal is to get that installed before winter.

**g. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Ethics Law, ORS 198 & 568, Training** – Shilah reported the District has already received our 10% discount. This is on the agenda to keep it in the forefront of the board’s minds.

**h. Policy Review – Personnel & Board Duties, Landowner Assistance** – Shilah reported this is on the agenda as a reminder and hopefully by the next meeting it will move up as an action item. She is still working on it.

**i. Updating Long Range Plan** – Shilah reported NRCS is updating their long-range plan, and suggested the District update ours at the same time. She sent the board the approved long-range plan from 2019. She recommended syncing up our timeline with NRCS and requested board members try to review the approved long range plan this summer and get her any input by September, to approve at the October board meeting if possible.

**j. NACD Summer Meeting** – Shilah reported she, Shawn, and his wife will be attending the summer meeting. They are flying out next week to San Juan, Puerto Rico. She plans to meet with other TA grant recipients and bring back a report for the board.

#### **Agency Reports:**

**a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval)** – Emily reported the EQIP signup deadline will be this fall sometime, and they have pollinator funding, Barlow forest health CIS, some funding in Pine Hollow Jackknife watershed for range improvement, and funding for orchard smudge pots or mulching practices. They are working with ODF and USFS on wildfire risk reduction west of Dufur. They received 22 EQIP contracts and received \$650,000 in funding. CSP had nine contracts approved for 16,000 acres, and they requested more funds so hopefully that will also be approved. They are always taking CSP applications. 40 CRP plans were accepted, and 72 grassland offers were submitted but they haven’t heard which ones were funded yet. Emily thanked the SWCD staff for all their support working on these plans. She reported NRCS is working on updating their long-range plan. She is filling in data since the last plan and will send that out for review and partner input before finalizing in September. She is also in the very early stages of writing irrigation upgrade CISs. Range improvement CISs did not get approved this year, but they’ll tweak it a bit to reduce the boundary (maybe Bakeoven-East) and try again next year.

**b. FSA** – Lissa reported that acreage reports are due next Friday for CRP or rangeland. They still have the livestock program for 2022. If you want to participate, you must file leases so they can include the ground in the program. ERP is still going. They have 50 people who haven't returned applications to FSA yet so those need to be turned in. If you received the letter you qualify. County Committee elections are underway. You have until August 1st to get nominees in for Tygh Ridge south. They have not received any nominations yet. The Dalles FSA office is still covering the Central Oregon office, and they have even more limited staff due to an outbreak of recent illness.

**c. OSU Extension** – Shilah reported Jacob was not able to join the meeting as he is currently putting on a pre-harvest fire training for wheat producers. Jacob did want to share that there will be a pesticide training workshop in The Dalles on July 11<sup>th</sup> at the college from 3-5pm.

**d. Wy'East RC&D** – Robert reported he shared a link to the new soil moisture probe that they're working with in Dufur Valley/Fifteenmile area for the FAST program. One of the challenges of soil moisture probes in hay fields is there is quite a bit of hardware above the ground. This new style is a completely below soil moisture probe, with the exception of a marker flag above ground. They are designed for use with potato crops but can also be used for soil moisture monitoring in general. He currently has two in place. He is waiting for final instrumentation for The Mosier deep well, and once that is installed, he'll be able to upgrade the data collectors. He participated in the Wasco County Crop Tour with Jacob Powell, and the Wasco Electric Co-op annual lunch in Tygh Valley and provided demonstration E-tractors for both events. The E-tractor program has received a couple of feature articles in The Capital Press, and now OPB wants to do a story on them. They only just received enough equipment to rotate them around to different farms for on-farm trials. One will be going to Turner, OR, one is at the Crook County Fairgrounds in Prineville, and one is in Medford at Rustic Gate Farm. They are expecting a Monarch brand E-tractor, which is driver optional, at some point this year. And he is anticipating receiving a 70hp E-tractor which will eventually end up at East Multnomah County SWCD's demonstration farm. Wy'East was accepted into the RARE program through University of Oregon. He will hopefully be getting a RARE student in September to work on Wy'East projects through the following June. He expressed thanks to Shilah and the SWCD staff for all of their support.

#### **Committee Reports:**

**a. Audit Committee** – No comments at this time. The audit committee did not review anything.

**b. Facilities Committee (Fisheries Lease Update)** – Josh reported he received an email from SDAO, and they will be sending a consultant on July 11<sup>th</sup> at 12:30pm to do a walkthrough appraisal at the building and to evaluate structures that we have insurance on. If any committee members want to join, they are more than welcome. They are doing this for all their members to make sure they have an accurate statement of values to capture any underwriting data they may need. Samantha has been helping Josh get quotes for some landscaping around the building. They have only received one quote so far but are expecting a second quote anytime now. The quotes are to pull back bark chips that have been dumped over the years, have some shrubs removed, and clean up areas to create a more inviting outdoor eating area. There is also paint peeling off the roof, so they want to have a roofer come and see what we need to do to maintain the roof. Scott's been taking care of spraying the weeds around the building and parking lot.

**c. Watershed Council** – To be discussed during coordinating board meeting immediately following the SWCD board meeting.

**d. OACD/OAHP/SWCC** – Ken reported OACD has not met since the last board meeting. OAHP has a review session and will be getting together later this year to review applications. The SWCC has not met since the last board meeting but has a meeting coming up later this month.

**District Manager Report:**

**a. Work Plan Progress and Grant Status** – Shilah reported both the work plan progress and the grant status reports were emailed out this morning. On the work plan progress report, we have closed the fiscal year and Shilah thinks we accomplished all the goals we set out to. We had set a goal on small grants and were only able to do four, but they were still successful and worked with landowners that wanted to be involved. There aren't any opportunities for conservation awards right now, but they keep it on the list to get recognition if and when we can. She wanted to do at least six articles on the District but didn't keep track well. She does know she wrote some articles in coordination with Hood River, and has some nice articles published about the 15Mile MUS project. Admin and legal requirements are staying on track. The District currently has 32 active grants. The OWRD Deep Well grant is almost completed, and we'll be finalizing that as we finish the project. The FAST grant is also closing, which we had for the last couple of years. They were going to close out the Eightmile SIA grant but had a couple of projects with Neal and May, so they'll keep the grant open for another year of monitoring. The BPA grant was also closed out and a new one is coming online. They currently have five grant applications pending, and the OWEB review team meets on July 21<sup>st</sup>, so they can find out how those projects were ranked. Since 1990, the District has completed over \$18 million and 316 different grants.

**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.

**Adjourned: 2:28 PM**

Jennifer Sampson