

MEMO TO BOARD: for April 8, 2026

Action Items

- a. **District Cost Share Requests:** Abbie will review applications for the board's consideration. Dana sent several requests with the original board mail out packet.

- b. **CWDG: Chipper Lease Agreement & Roadside Vegetation Contracting:** The four supporting documents together refine our administrative, legal, and operational framework needed to implement the CWDG roadside fuels-reduction work.
 - The Intergovernmental Equipment Lease Agreement with Wasco County formalizes the District's responsibility for the County-owned chipper, including maintenance, insurance, and oversight.
 - The companion Equipment Use Agreement with Mid-Columbia Fire & Rescue (MCFR) allows the District to sub-lend the chipper to MCFR for wildfire-mitigation work under clear safety, liability, and reporting requirements.
 - The Roadside Fuels Advisory Working Group Charter documents the multi-agency process used to prioritize road segments, develop prescriptions, and support transparent decision-making consistent with the CWDG grant, CWPP, and NHMP.
 - Finally, the Request for Qualified Contractors outlines the updated contracting pathway (developed with County and legal counsel) to pre-qualify vegetation-management contractors and ensure procurement aligns with Oregon public contracting law.

Together, these documents provide the structure needed for safe chipper use, coordinated project prioritization, and compliant contracting as the District continues implementing CWDG roadside vegetation and defensible space work.

- c. **IGA with Wasco County for Weed Abatement:** Wasco County has adopted an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) and companion Resolution 26-007 that delegate administration of the County's noxious weed control program to the SWCD. Under this structure, the District would coordinate inspections, education, voluntary compliance, and administrative steps in the abatement process, while the County retains responsibility for actions such as adopting the weed list, appointing Weed Inspectors, issuing formal Board Orders, and certifying liens. The Resolution also designates the SWCD Board as the County's Weed Advisory Board and transfers a surplus spray truck to support program operations. Although the IGA includes enforcement terminology required under ORS 569, the County retains all actual regulatory authority and the District's role remains administrative and non-regulatory; I have reached out to ODA for concurrence on this interpretation and will share any clarification at the meeting.

- d. **MOA with CTWS for Weed Abatement:** The Memorandum of Agreement between the SWCD and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs establishes a cooperative framework for noxious weed control across jurisdictional boundaries. The MOA allows the District, with notification to CTWS Natural Resources, to treat noxious weeds on Reservation and Trust lands as part of a coordinated, integrated vegetation-management strategy. Both parties agree to follow all applicable Tribal, federal, state, and county laws, and CTWS may provide in-kind assistance when available. The

agreement strengthens cross-boundary weed management, supports shared ecological and agricultural objectives, and remains in effect until terminated by either party with 30 days' written notice.

- e. Contracting Helicopter for Aerial Rejuvra Spraying with ODFW:** The District is working with ODFW to contract aerial application services for a fall 2026 Rejuvra treatment on approximately 1,300 acres in the lower Deschutes River area, continuing the work initiated in 2024. The SWCD–ODFW agreement for this project remains active, with \$45,000 in unspent funds available for this phase. ODFW has secured two of the required three quotes from Central Valley Helicopters and Leading-Edge Aviation, with both applicators confirming availability within the desired fall treatment window. ODFW is continuing outreach to additional operators, and we are hopeful a third quote will be received before the Board meeting on Wednesday. Once the final quote (or documentation of attempted outreach) is in hand, the District can proceed with contractor selection consistent with procurement requirements.
- f. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Public Meetings – Policy & Training:** I previously sent an email to the Board with instructions for completing the updated Public Meetings Law training required under Oregon HB 2805 and the SDAO Best Practices Program. This training must be completed by October 31, 2026, for the District to receive the 2% insurance credit associated with the Public Meetings category. At the meeting, we will briefly review our existing Public Meetings Policy to ensure it aligns with SDAO's updated checklist requirements for the additional 2% credit. The remaining Best Practices items for this year are already complete.
- g. Update Financial Policy & Add Abbie Forrest as Signer on Bank Account:** At the February meeting, the Board tabled the discussion on adding Abbie Forrest as a backup check signer and requested a broader policy review to clarify the circumstances under which a staff member may sign checks when the District Manager is unavailable. The draft Financial Management & Internal Controls Policy responds to that request by consolidating all prior financial resolutions into one modern, comprehensive policy and by clearly defining roles, internal controls, and safeguards, including the limited conditions under which a designated staff member may serve as a functional backup signer. This update strengthens segregation of duties, formalizes reconciliation and oversight practices, and aligns District procedures with Oregon Local Budget Law and best-practice internal control standards.
- h. Overtime, Comp Time, and Holiday Preservation Leave Policy:** The draft policy updates and clarifies the District's practices for overtime, compensatory time, flex scheduling, and a proposed Holiday Preservation Leave benefit. This revision consolidates existing guidance, aligns District procedures with FLSA and Oregon labor requirements, and provides clearer expectations for both exempt and non-exempt staff. Key elements include standardized comp-time accrual rules, annual usage requirements, supervisor approval protocols, and a structured approach for managing overtime costs while supporting operational flexibility. The policy also formalizes Holiday Preservation Leave to ensure employees do not lose the value of a District-recognized holiday when workload requires them to work during the holiday or additional hours that week.

- i. **Cancel VSP Contract:** With vision benefits now embedded in our SDIS medical plan, staff recommend discontinuing the standalone VSP contract, which requires 30 days' notice and must be canceled by May 1 to avoid entering into a new two-year agreement. The District currently pays \$166.62 per month (nearly \$2,000 per year) for VSP, and only one employee who is not on the District's medical plan currently relies on this coverage. To ensure equitable access to vision support for employees who waive District-sponsored medical coverage, I would like to explore offering a small vision waiver/opt-out stipend or modestly increasing our existing health-waiver stipend. I will bring a fully costed proposal to the May Budget Committee and Board meetings, but I am requesting Board approval at this time to proceed with canceling the VSP contract.

Updates

- a. **Next Regular Mtg, May 13th, 2026, 1:00 PM USDA Service Center:** The budget committee meets at 10:00 am the same day.
- b. **Director Elections – Zones 2 & 4 & At-Large 2 are up in 2026:** These positions held by Shawn Sorensen, Stan Shephard, and Phil Kaser are up for election in November 2026. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) oversees SWCD director elections statewide, including eligibility requirements, filing deadlines, and zone-verification rules. Candidates must file a Declaration of Candidacy or a Declaration of Intent and Request for Write-In Votes to be Tallied by the statutory deadlines, and zone-position candidates must meet landownership or residency requirements within the zone they seek to represent. Additional details, forms, and the 2026 election calendar are available on ODA's SWCD Elections webpage: <https://www.oregon.gov/oda/natural-resources/swcd/pages/elections.aspx>. Directors and prospective candidates are encouraged to review these requirements and timelines to ensure compliance.
- c. **Long Range Planning:** Following the Board's March discussion, staff finalized the community survey and EDDM postcard and submitted both to Minuteman Press for printing and distribution. The postcards should begin reaching Wasco County households any day. In addition to the mailed survey, staff will continue gathering input through partner processes already underway. Specifically, we plan to work with our consultant, John Runyon, to facilitate additional public and partner feedback during the NRCS Local Working Group meeting on April 16, ensuring that the Long-Range Plan update reflects both broad community perspectives and technical stakeholder input. This information will also be folded into the District's FY 2026–27 budget development process, and I intend to share both the LWG meeting summary and preliminary survey results with the Budget Committee and the Board at their May meetings.
- d. **Highline Ditch Elimination:** The Highline Ditch Elimination Project continues to advance toward its long-term goal of removing a major fish-passage barrier on Tygh Creek and restoring continuous flow to approximately 5.2 miles of stream habitat for native redband trout. The project will ultimately eliminate the seven-mile Highline irrigation ditch, which has historically lost up to 50% of its diverted water.

The project comprises five participating properties, including four well-based replacements (Wassenmiller, Cubic, Martin, and Mayfield) and one consolidated point-of-diversion change on the White River for the Simer family. All wells have been drilled, and the Simer POD change is

approved. Each permit expires this year, so landowners will need to either complete installation and irrigation this season and file a Claim of Beneficial Use (COBU) or submit an Extension of Time. The Watermaster completed the required March static water-level measurements for all four wells and noted that the smaller systems may be able to prove up this summer, while Wassenmiller and Simer may require extensions due to the scale and cost of their installations.

Design work for the Simer diversion continues with ODFW, the landowner, and their contractors refining pump and screening requirements. Preliminary estimates indicate the need for additional pumping capacity, new River Screens, a gravity-feed configuration to the well casing, and excavation for a fish bypass and channel connection to the reservoir. Kerns Irrigation is preparing a formal cost proposal, with early estimates suggesting approximately \$100,000 for pumps, tie-ins, and screens, not including significant power-service upgrades that may be required. Staff are also assisting Art Wassenmiller with implementation needs, including coordinating with BBSI to secure short-term labor for trenching and electrical conduit installation. Additional visuals (maps, diagrams, photos) will be provided at a future meeting as design elements are finalized. Installation of the Simer fish screen remains targeted for the end of the 2026 irrigation season, followed by ditch decommissioning and site restoration.

- e. **Bright Night Power Community Investment Plan:** BrightNight provided a draft description of the conservation initiatives they are interested in potentially funding, including cost-share programs, soil health and water-quality improvements, invasive species control, wildfire-resiliency work, and agricultural infrastructure upgrades. Before responding, I am doing some due diligence to ensure our approach aligns with other local jurisdictions and avoids duplicating or fragmenting efforts.
- f. **Updating SWCD Employee Handbook – Working with HR Answers:** The full draft of the updated Employee Handbook is nearly complete, and I am working with Dana to refine the Benefits chapter to ensure accuracy and consistency with current District practices. I have a scheduled review meeting with HR Answers on April 15 to go through the full document and prepare it for rollout. As part of this update, there are a few areas where I will need Board guidance. One example is the grievance-escalation process when a concern involves the District Manager. Our current policy directs staff to bring such concerns to the Board Chair; however, HR Answers recommend shifting the first point of contact to the Vice-Chair to keep the Chair in a neutral position for any second-level review or final decision. I will bring this and any other policy questions to the Board as we move toward finalizing the handbook.