



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – March 12, 2025

Directors: Bill Hammel Larry Powell
Jeff Crump Stan Shephard

Directors Absent: Shawn Sorensen Phil Kaser Bob Krein

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods Abbie Forrest
Drake Gilbert Ryan Bessette Scott Susi
Allie Marker Dean Dark

Staff via Teleconference: Samantha Filbin

Guests:
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Brad Pickering and Josh Hanning
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wasco SWCD: Ken Bailey, Director Emeritus
OACD: Andrea Kreiner
Wasco Co. Tax: Jill Amery

Guests via Teleconference:
Public: Dan Hazel

1:00 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 regular board meeting minutes. None were made. *Larry moved to approve the February regular board meeting minutes as presented; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Larry, Jeff, Bill and Stan all voting in favor.*

Treasurer’s Report: Shilah reviewed the February treasurer’s report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. Shilah reviewed the loan report noting loans receivable and loans payable amounts. Bill inquired about funding for the CWDG Grant. Shilah has been in touch with Wasco County and it sounds like the first reimbursement request may be in process. Shilah also presented an updated January treasurer’s report which contained a correction to the January income as well as an entry to account for two voided and reissued checks.

Stan moved to receive the Treasurer's Report for February; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Larry, Jeff, Bill and Stan all voting in favor. Jeff moved to receive the updated Treasurer's Report for January. Stan seconded. Motion carried with Larry, Jeff, Bill and Stan all voting in favor.

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

OACD Update: Andrea Kreiner introduced herself. She noted that the focus with conservation partners this year is media publicity and getting the word out about the good stories and work that is being done. She noted that opportunities for funding went live two weeks ago on the new Grant Hub. Andrea also noted that the OACD will be sending out a survey in the near future to request feedback on how the OACD can best support Districts. She reviewed the new dues structure that is in place, replacing the previous structure that the OACD felt was not equitable. The new structure is based on the District's previous year revenue as reported to the Secretary of State through the annual audit process. Under the previous dues structure, the District's dues would have been \$6400. Based on the new structure, the District will see a decrease in dues with the new amount being \$3000.

Tax Assessor Update: Jill Amery was present to provide an overview of the District Tax Revenue to the Board. Jill stated that the District had a 5% increase in estimated tax receipts for the current year, noting that the County has a good collection rate of approximately 98%, according to the Oregon Property Statistics annual report. Information was presented regarding the new tax revenue from Google Data Center 1 and what those taxes look like for each of the taxing Districts.

Action Items

a. Introduce Water Shed Tech Intern – Allie Marker: Allie introduced herself. She lives in Sherman County and grew up helping on the family farm. She studied animal sciences and ag marketing in college and is excited for the opportunity to work with the SWCD.

b. District Cost Share Requests – Abbie presented four cost share applications:

K. Johnson Irrigation Upgrade– This application is to replace handline with wheel line on 13 acres of irrigated alfalfa/hay ground, resulting in improved irrigation efficiency as well as improved coverage of field. Requested amount is \$7,500.

J. Dillon Irrigation Upgrade – This application is for a proposed installation of a center pivot irrigation system that will service 17.82 acres of a 20.8 acre alfalfa field. This project would address water efficiency concerns resulting in significant water savings. Requested amount is \$7,500.

N. Carter Haul Road – Nancy Carter submitted an application for a .34 mile haul road. This will be a multi-year project, but Board policy is to limit haul roads to one haul road per applicant per year. The request is for the maximum of \$3,000.

B. Markman Fencing – For this application, the landowner proposes to install approximately 1,250' of cross fencing to create an alleyway between two adjacent fields. The purpose of this project is to establish a dedicated corridor allowing cattle to access the main water source which is currently available in only one of the two fields. Requested amount is \$2,250.

Jeff asked if there was a limit to how many times a landowner can apply for District Cost Share. Abbie responded that yes, there is a limit of one haul road and one DCS project per landowner per fiscal year. Larry asked if the wheel lines in the irrigation upgrade applications are to decrease the burden to the 15Mile Watershed. Abbie responded that yes, irrigation efficiency would decrease that burden.

Jeff moved to approve the four district cost share applications as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Larry, Jeff, Bill and Stan voting in favor.

c. Review Practices: Terraces – Scott led a discussion on terraces as a conservation practice to get board feedback on whether terrace reshaping would be an appropriate practice to fund under the District Cost Share Program. He’s had several landowners express interest in this practice and worked on terraces in his prior role at Sherman SWCD. Originally, terraces were installed to capture water during a flooding rain event. Since no-till farming has been implemented, terraces have become a burden to landowners making it challenging to farm. Ken feels that providing reshaping services would incentivize landowners to leave the terraces in place. Bill agreed with Ken. The Board consensus is that terrace reshaping would be an appropriate practice under the District Cost Share Program, but terrace removal would not be. Jeff recommended adding language to the District Cost Share Policy regarding terrace reshaping with certain conditions.

d. Weed Control Updates / Hiring Seasonal Staff for Weed Control – Scott reported that the SWCD was successful with the State Weed Board Grant that he submitted, resulting in a grant award of \$35,000. The focus of this grant is noxious weeds in Wasco County. The contract with The Port of The Dalles was renewed. Scott also noted that the USFS Botanist has approached the SWCD about possibly doing some invasive grass and noxious weed control in the National Forest. Bill asked if this is an application where a drone could be utilized. Scott answered that he was unsure about that because of forest cover, but potentially in the open grassy areas.

Shilah commented that Dean was also successful with the OSWB Grant, and proposed hiring two grant funded Seasonal Weed Tech. positions that would assist with the completion of the work outlined in these grants.

Stan motioned that the SWCD hire two seasonal grant funded positions; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Larry, Jeff, Bill and Stan voting in favor.

Updates

a. Next Meeting – The next regular meeting is scheduled for April 9, 2025, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

b. 15mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget – Drake met with the consultants to review the report and the findings. The study of the soil conditions within the basin resulted in two alternatives to resolve the turbidity issue. The first alternative being a canister filter and the second being installing 1” of crushed pea gravel capped with 3’ of sand. Things to consider would be the cost of each option. The capacity of sand trap filters to filter coliform is not ideal. Stan asked how many gallons are going into the ground. Drake responded

that the hope is to get 200 gallons a minute. The basin was originally set at 400 gallons a minute but had to be dropped because of infiltration issues.

c. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2 – The RFP for the final two wells has been prepared and will be issued soon.

d. Highline Ditch Elimination – Shilah reported that she and Abbie will touch base with ODFW regarding the fish screen issue.

e. Fires: 2020 White River, CWDG Grant, 2024 Larch Creek Funding – Shilah reported that the 2020 White River project is complete, with the exception of the final report. The final report will be submitted once pictures are taken of the new grass that's growing. Shilah noted that the CWDG funding is currently frozen. The 2024 Larch Creek funding opportunity is currently open with the application deadline being the end of May.

f. FY 2023-24 Audit – The 2023-24 audit is still underway. Dana reported that there have been no updates from the Auditor's office in regards to completion date. The District has an approved extension through March 31, 2025 but may have to request additional time if the auditor cannot complete the work in time.

g. Updating Long Range Plan & SWCD Employee Handbook – Shilah noted that the updates are in process. The draft updated copy will be presented to the Board for approval once all of the updates are complete.

h. SDAO Best Practices Checklist– Shilah noted that each year, SDAO/SDIS send out a Best Practices Survey. By completing the survey each year, we are able to receive up to a 10% discount on insurance premiums. The SWCD did receive the full 10% discount for the 2025 renewal and the goal would be to do the same for the 2026 renewal. The deadline to complete the survey is November 7th.

Agency Reports

a. NRCS – Emily reported that they are currently working on 8 eligible EQIP applications out of the 60 that were submitted. The Local Working Group meeting that was held on February 27th had a good turnout. Fire breaks seemed to be a topic of interest to a number of meeting attendees. Federal agencies have been asked to submit RIF (reduction in force) plans by March 13th. Emily noted that they have also been asked to “scrub” funding requests of certain key words. There is a CWDG Grant dinner in South Wasco County on March 13th.

b. FSA – Brad reported that the ARC/PLC deadline is April 15th. They will soon be working on a new E-CAP program related to commodity crops. The FSA will be mailing applications directly to producers who will then bring the applications to the local office for processing. Brad also noted that acreage reporting deadline is July 15th.

Josh elaborated on the Federal RIF that is receiving much attention. He indicated that the plan is to do it in two phases. Each agency must provide a phase one RIF proposal by March 13th. Phase two proposals will be due April 13th.

c. **OSU Extension** – Jacob was unable to attend the meeting.

d. **Wy'East RC&D** – Robert reported that they have approximately \$900,000 in funding held up in the Federal Funding freeze so they're trying to figure out what that looks like going forward. They are currently finishing up a grant through NRCS. They have submitted an invoice and are still waiting for payment. Robert is unclear if that grant is funded with IRA funds. He has shifted staff workloads over to internal administration projects that are not federally funded. Currently working on the C-REP grant project, which has some funding for project management to cover some staff time. SWCD is the grant recipient of this project. There is a CPA attestation requirement for this project. Robert has found a CPA that has done similar work in the past, who would be willing to contract with the SWCD to fulfill this grant requirement. Robert indicated that they could potentially have equipment related to this grant on the ground by March 31st. Robert also noted that he has signed a contract with Non-Profit CFO Services to assist Wy'East with their financial transition. He expressed appreciation to the SWCD for providing payroll and financial support during their transition.

Committee Reports

a. **Audit Committee** – The audit committee had nothing to report.

b. **Facilities Committee** – The facilities committee did not have a meeting in the last month.

c. **Watershed Council Updates** – Drake reported that The Dalles Watershed Council will meet March 12th. The next Mosier meeting will be April 29th.

District Manager Report

a. **Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah reported that the progress on the work plan is on track to meet the goals by the end of the current fiscal year. The District currently has 37 open and active grants.

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.

Adjourned: 2:45 pm

Dana Woods