



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – April 5, 2023

Directors: Bill Hammel Ken Bailey Stan Shephard
Larry Powell

Directors via Teleconference: Bob Krein

Directors Absent: Phil Kaser Shawn Sorensen

Associate Directors Absent: Bryce Molesworth

Staff: Shilah Olson Jennifer Sampson Josh Thompson
Abbie Forrest

Staff via Teleconference: Drake Gilbert Samantha Filbin

Guests:

FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wasco County: Jill Amery, Wasco County Tax Assessor
LDCWMA: Tyler Holeman, Program Coordinator

Guests via Teleconference:

OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent
Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director
WPN, LLC: John Runyon, Watershed Ecologist
Mosier WC: Mary Bushman, Co-Chair

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 March board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the March 2023 board meeting minutes as presented; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the February Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted the 15mile MUS project is well underway. They are in the process of closing out existing MUS grants and looking towards the future. Shilah reported that Columbia Bank is now Umpqua Bank so board members will see that change on future Treasurer's Reports. Ken inquired about the long-term legal standing of the MUS project.

Shilah reported that the SWCD has an understanding with the landowner, but long term nothing has been decided yet. *Ken moved to receive the February Treasurer's Report; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

Action Items

a. Presentation of FY21-22 Annual Report & Audit – Shilah reported the District has a legal requirement to hold an annual meeting each year to present the annual report and audit to the public. The District used to do an annual dinner, but had to stop due to covid. The board discussed having an event outside of the annual meeting, and to have the official annual meeting in conjunction with a board meeting to meet the legal requirement. The FY 21-22 annual report and audit are on file with the Oregon Secretary of State, and there are copies here today. This was advertised per legal requirements.

b. Mosier Million #2 Driller Pool Award & Update – Shilah reported the RFP has closed and they only received one proposal from Jensen Drilling, out of Eugene. She sent the proposal to our technical review team for input. Shilah noted that Jensen doesn't have a lot of experience with Columbia River basalts, and that there just isn't much competition in this area at the moment. Shilah asked the board for input on whether we move forward and contract with Jensen, realizing they may need extra assistance from us as they are new to work in the area? Josh commented that Cascade Well Drilling might be interested, but they were not interested in filling out the paperwork. Discussion ensued. It was suggested to have them bid on a few wells to start, with a clause that each subsequent well would be contingent on successful completion of the prior one. *Ken moved to approve Jensen Drilling and admit them as a qualified driller for the driller pool, and to contract them to do one well at a time; Larry seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

c. Cost Share Requests – Abbie reported one cost share project was cancelled, so that freed up some of the current cost share budget funds. Whitney Cabral submitted a cost share application for cross fencing for cattle. This was originally going to be a small grant project. Their budget was approximately \$10,000, and they are requesting \$5,450. OWEB Small Grants require 50-75% match, so a district cost share would end up with more money in their pocket. They will be cross fencing for cattle to one of the rock bluffs below their pasture. *Stan moved to approve the cross-fencing cost share for Cabral; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Shilah reported she was working with Jim Olson on a district cost share for a bridge, but she and Ken discussed it and thought it would make more sense to find funding outside the cost share budget since it's for the MUS. It might be wiser to do it in the new fiscal year. Jim is estimating it will cost roughly \$3,000 to build the bridge and he would donate his time. They attempted to apply for a small grant, but they couldn't make it work with the restrictions. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was to budget for funding the bridge out of the general budget, not the cost share budget.

Wasco County Tax Assessor Update – Jill Amery

Jill introduced herself and invited the SWCD board to reach out to her anytime with questions. Jill noted the MUS project and said she could set up an A1 account for those improvements, then

the landowner wouldn't be paying any additional tax on the SWCD's improvements. Jill reported taxes were up for all districts (there are just over 30 districts dividing \$59.8 million). Google paid their first tax bill as the enterprise zone ended on their first project. However, they still received a 3% discount. Jill explained that when real market values drop below tax value, then we would see our taxes reduced, but otherwise they should be steadily increasing over time. All of the large-scale utility appeals have been settled in the last year or two. The Lumen/Century Link appeal was the longest running appeal across the state and was run through the tax courts for 10 years. There are currently no large-scale appeals, but they will hold some of the tax funds in reserve just in case, which they can then refund or distribute to the districts. The collection rates are good this year. Wasco County was at 94.3% tax collection in the 2019-20 tax year, and 95% collection in the 2020-21 tax year, so they continued to go up during covid. Compression has stayed in check, but it has increased a little bit because of Google. As the maximum assessed value gets closer to the real market value, the more compression you'll have. There won't be any major changes in the Enterprise zone this year. Google's next abatements come off in the 2030s.

Jill noted the county has begun using Lidar on the GIS maps via Eagleview. Eagleview will fly drones around the county for tax appraisals so they can get a 3D image without having to go out into the field (where trees do not block the drone's view). Eventually, the county intends to offer this service to partner organizations as well. They are going to launch their first flight any day now. Discussion ensued regarding current tax issues in Wasco County. Jill noted that tax base typically increases annually in the 3-5% range. This year they saw a 17% increase (due to Google), but next year it should go back to a 3-5% increase. She offered to run tax comparison reports for the SWCD if we ever needed them. The solar farm in Bakeoven was discussed in terms of taxes. The farm has had roadblocks during their construction so it will be some time before they are operational and start paying taxes for the improvements.

Lower Deschutes Weed Control Update – Tyler Holeman

Tyler introduced himself and asked for introductions around the room. Tyler is the Coordinator for the Lower Deschutes CWMA and discussed the program. He worked as a seasonal employee for the program for four years prior. Last year they started hiring contractors which consisted of youth crews out of Prineville and Bend. The crews would come camp for a week at a time. They were able to do four trips last year, and hope to do more this year. Tyler noted last year they found four Leafy Spurge plants that have not been seen on the Deschutes River before now. He requested that if anyone has seen this plant elsewhere in Wasco County to please let him know. Part of the agreement they have with the BLM is to spray grasses on BLM land. Last year, that was not very successful but they are hoping for better results this year. They were able to build their spray-raft, which was paid for by BLM, and this will help them treat the Wasco County side of the river. He has completed drone spray training, but the perfect conditions are needed to make it successful, and good spray drones are expensive, so they are only pursuing that as a contracted option at the moment. Their 2023 goals include more coverage in Wasco County, working on pre-emergent treatments for puncturevine, and look at more integrated pest management. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was to have the budget committee discuss increasing the SWCD's contribution from the current \$10,000 to \$15,000, as that has been the same for many years.

Updates

- a. Next Meeting** - The next regular meeting is scheduled for May 3, 2023, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom. The budget committee meets Wednesday, May 3, 2023, at 10:00 AM.
- b. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS)** – Shilah reported they constructed the pilot project, ran into some obstacles but they are working overcoming them. To date, the SWCD has spent a little less than \$370,000 on the project. Josh shared they constructed the MUS as designed, although both the contractor and he had concerns about the clay content in the soil. They raised those concerns to the design team, but the design team believed the project should still be successful. They ran into some technical difficulties along the way but solved those with the assistance of Robert Wallace. The main issue they ran into was with the soil, it was determined it was too loamy and as such, sealed off too quickly for the water to filter through. They worked with the design team and decided to bring in washed sand to test as a filtration medium instead of the loamy soil, in order to try and get additional data on the project and see if this might be a viable option. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was that if any data can be recovered on the project, it would be beneficial to prove the concept moving forward.
- c. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Josh reported that he has been slowly making progress. Ashley Pump installed a replacement well. Josh is working with Mayfield to get the materials required for EQIP for their irrigation system. Pat asked about the trees near the ditch when it is decommissioned, expressing concern that the trees will fall over when the water dries up. Josh reported that they haven't turned the ditch off yet, but the trees are already dying and falling over so we may need to budget for tree removal when the ditch is decommissioned (likely next year). Concern has also been raised for the wildlife that use the ditch as a water source. Discussion ensued.
- d. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire** – Josh reported he was contacted by one landowner interested in removing burnt vegetation from the White River Fire, but they only had 3 acres to get cleaned up. They weren't able to accomplish much with the 2020 grant as they had planned to partner with ODFW on spraying and seeding, but that didn't happen, and the grant expired. For the 2022 grant, they were planning to partner with ODFW again and Josh needs to circle back on that. For the Miller Road Fire, they have \$35,000 available and close to \$3 million in lost fencing. It was a 13-acre fire. There was some miscommunication on the ECP program with the fire-affected landowners regarding the payment amounts, but Lissa and her staff at FSA are trying to get more funding to help cover burned fencing costs. Discussion ensued on what the SWCD can do to help get funding to these landowners.
- e. Tree Sale** – Jennifer reported that they have finally received the conifers, so they will hopefully get those distributed in the next couple of weeks and wrap up the tree sale.
- f. Weed Control** – Scott was not able to attend the meeting. Shilah reported that weed control is a passion of Scott's, and he has been writing grant applications for funding through state weed board grants. Scott intends to focus on A, B, and T level weeds. He is also looking out for new invaders (i.e., yellow flag iris, musk thistle, etc.) to stop them before they become entrenched. Currently he is not interested in taking over the county weed program to spray their road rights-of-way. He has met with Merle Keys, the current Wasco County Weed Master, who plans to retire in the next year. Scott is hoping there is a possibility to partner with Wasco County and

use their facilities for herbicide storage. There is also concern about other pests like lantern flies and more. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was to invite Scott to present to the budget committee to discuss how we might approach weed control in the future.

g. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Emergency Preparedness Planning – Shilah reported the best practices program brochure is included in the meeting packet. The SDAO Best Practices program is how the District can get up to 10% off insurance premiums (2% off for each item). This year the SWCD needs to update the district emergency preparedness plan, participate in training, and more.

Agency Reports

a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval) – Emily was not able to attend the meeting.

b. FSA – Lissa reported general CRP signup ends Friday. They have four contracts up for renewal, and they've been able to contact three of them. Two of them are already done, but they haven't been able to get ahold of the last one. If anyone knows how to reach Ed Limmeroth, they need to contact him before Friday. CREP, HELI and continuous CRP are ongoing now that April 1st has come and gone. A grasslands signup will be coming, but they have to finish general CRP before grasslands hits. Next Monday, they will be announcing an open position in FSA for a permanent program technician. The position will be open through April 24th on USAjobs. Spring acreage reporting is right around the corner, so please submit those reports to Tiffany. Acreage reporting includes not only what you've planted this spring, but CRP, rangeland, NAP, etc. PARP program and ERP deadline is June 2nd.

c. OSU Extension – Jacob reported he has crop tours coming up in June. The Wasco crop tour will be June 8th. It will start at 8:30am at the wheat variety trials next to Dufur community cemetery. Jacob requested the SWCD provide coffee, donuts, and porta-potty as in years past. He is open to suggestions on where to make stops on the tour. Jacob is on the hiring committee for a new agent for Gillam County. The application period is open through the end of April.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Robert reported he has been working on strategic planning and budgeting with Shilah and Jennifer. He is trying to secure funding for the next 3 budget years for the e-farms program. He is also working on evaluating the Wasco County area for electric vehicle charging stations. There will be millions of dollars coming through federal and state systems for charging stations in rural areas. He knows they are discussing charging stations along I84 and Hwy 26, but he also wants to see them in Dufur, Maupin, and other rural areas. He assisted the Dufur School with installing a charging station that is currently operational. He still has several open irrigation projects that Wy'East is working through. He and his staff attended the agriculture show in Salem a few weeks ago. He has been working with Josh on MUS project. Robert complimented the SWCD on their new newsletter layout and he especially likes the email format.

Committee Reports

a. Audit Committee – The audit committee was not able to attend the meeting.

b. Facilities Committee – Josh reported a dimmer switch was installed in the conference room for \$650. He is continuing to work with FSA on the planned security upgrades.

c. Watershed Council Updates – To be discussed at the coordinating board meeting immediately following.

d. OAHP/SWCC – Ken reported OAHP is looking for funds for the next biennium. The SWCC will meet in The Dalles on May 10th and 11th, and he is working with Josh and Shilah to coordinate that meeting. Pat inquired about the current interest level in conservation easements. Ken noted interest does seem to be picking up statewide.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah stated her reports were emailed and printed in the meeting packet. The SWCD currently has 33 open grants, totaling over \$4 million, with a little over \$2.5 million remaining balance. They have pending grant applications totaling approximately \$5 million, most of which is for the 15mile MUS. Since 1990, the District has completed 323 grants and approximately \$19 million in on the ground work. Today the Annual Meeting was completed on the work plan, and the Highline Ditch was extended but is expected to be completed this year.

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: 3:09 PM

Jennifer Sampson