



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

Directors: Bill Hammel Pat Davis Stan Shephard
Phil Kaser

Directors via Teleconference: Bob Krein

Directors Absent: Ken Bailey Shawn Sorensen

Associate Directors Absent: Bryce Molesworth

Staff: Jennifer Sampson Drake Gilbert Josh Thompson
Abbie Forrest

Staff via Teleconference: Shilah Olson Samantha Filbin

Guests: Emily Stranz, Facilitator with DS Consulting
Jason Keller, Geosystems Analysis
Robin Cook, GSI Water Solutions
Larry Powell

Guests via Teleconference: Walt Burt, GSI Water Solutions

1:03 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 October board meeting minutes. None were made. *Pat moved to approve the October board meeting minutes as presented; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the September Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted there were several FAST baseline exceedance payments that were sent. On the last page of the report, Jennifer included a pie chart showing the fiscal year 2021-22 taxes that were received so it can be compared to this fiscal year, which will include some funds from Google. *Stan moved to receive the September Treasurer's Report; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Public Comment (5 Min. limit/person) – Larry Powell introduced himself and mentioned he is running for the open At-Large position on the SWCD board as a write-in candidate. He has an

extensive resume including being retired from the railroad, a meat cutter at Albertsons, worked at the aluminum plant, a code enforcement officer for The Dalles, a Weigh Master for ODOT in Cascade Locks, a volunteer fire fighter, and a foster parent. He now owns six acres of orchard in Mill Creek and has nine grandchildren.

Action Items

a. Cost-Share Requests – Abbie shared the current cost share tracking sheet and noted that there is only a little over \$13,000 remaining in the general cost share project budget and there are three requests for the board to review today. If all three are approved, that would be over the current remaining budget. However, there is \$37,000 remaining in the haul road cost share project budget. Abbie proposed to move \$25,000 from haul roads to general cost shares, which would leave enough for five haul roads and four more general projects. *Pat moved to approve the proposed budget amendment to move \$25,000 from the cost share haul road budget to the general cost share budget; Stan seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Abbie presented three cost share applications:

P. Kaser – Phil declared a conflict of interest and left the room during this presentation. Abbie reported this project is to convert a hand line system into a wheel line. There are two cost estimates attached as one is for a used wheel line and one is for a solar mover. Phil is requesting \$7,500. *Pat moved to approve the cost share application for Phil and Mary Ann Kaser; Stan seconded. Phil abstained. Motion carried.*

B. Gustafson – Abbie reported this is a project to convert flood irrigation to a pumped system with sprinklers. Josh is providing technical assistance on the project. They are requesting \$2,685.

Young Life – Abbie reported this is for a large-scale juniper removal project. Young Life submitted an application to OWEB this last spring, which was not approved for funding as the team recommended a different treatment method or to justify the treatment strategy and costs. This cost share project is a trial run to see if their plan of removing juniper with an excavator and skid steer mulcher is cost and time effective. They plan to treat approximately 100 acres and are requesting \$7,500.

Pat moved to approve both the Young Life and the B. Gustafson cost share applications; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Health Insurance Renewal – Approve 12% Increase – Shilah reported it is time for the District to renew their health insurance. Currently, the District offers plans through Regence/BlueCross BlueShield. Our insurance broker at Wheatland Insurance compared rates among other insurance providers, and Regence still seemed to be the most beneficial for the SWCD staff. The current plan is looking at an increase in premiums of 12%. Shilah noted that we are currently under budget as only six of our staff are enrolled in health insurance. She proposed the District pay for the 12% premium increase for employees, which would increase our payment approximately \$3,000 for the year, but overall we would still be approximately \$5,000 under budget. *Pat moved to have the District pay for the additional 12% increase in health insurance costs; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

15Mile MUS Facilitated Workshop

a. Overview of Session Purpose and Desired Outcomes –

Emily introduced herself as the facilitator and mediator for the Fifteenmile Managed Underground Storage (15MUS) project during the stakeholder engagement process. Emily attended the SWCD board meeting in August and talked about the stakeholder process. At that board meeting, the board decided to have a 15MUS workshop to go over the project in greater detail and how we might move forward. The board was emailed a “roadmap” for implementation. Emily intends to review the scope of work, cost and funding, location and landowners, and legal considerations for the 15MUS project.

b. Overview & Board Discussion

SWCD Staff and consultants presented a summary of each item, along with any known-unknowns, opportunities, and challenges:

Robin, Jason, and Walt shared a power point presentation about the 15MUS project. An overall explanation of the project was provided. During the recharge season (winter), water will be collected from the stream, filtered through alluvial sediments to reduce turbidity and remove contaminants, injected into an underground aquifer/well, and then returned to the creek during the dry/hot season (summer) in an effort to help increase stream flows and reduce stream temperatures when they reach high levels dangerous for threatened steelhead. Several test pits were dug along 15Mile creek, and three primary areas were designated as those landowners were willing to participate in the pilot study. Olson’s property ranked the highest for the pilot project. Just last week, they received notice that the limited license permits will be approved so the pilot testing can continue. When the project is complete, Walt estimated the well will be approximately 600-700ft deep, reaching the upper part of the Grande Ronde formation.

Emily noted that the stakeholder group identified this board and the watershed council as the preferred owner/operator, but the board has not approved that as a decision yet. The stakeholders also encouraged partnerships with ODFW, NOAA, and others as we move forward on the 15MUS.

Now that the stakeholder engagement phase is complete, the 15MUS moves on to phase 3, the pilot testing program. The plan is to build out a 100sqft filtration basin, where water will be diverted, filtered, and then the water quality treatment will be assessed. In the pilot test, the filtered water will be land applied and not put into a deep basalt well or the 15Mile Creek. It was noted that they may need to do a low-level chlorine treatment to the stored water to prevent bacteria growth. If so, the residual chlorine levels will need to be zero so as to not harm the fish. The water will also need to be oxygenated before it is returned to the creek.

Once the test basin is operational, there will be frequent water quality and flow monitoring which will be cost and labor intensive. There are automated systems that can be purchased which will aid in the amount of labor in the long run but will be costly to install up front. Walt presented some cost estimates of the pilot project based on different scenarios. However, as this project is the first of its kind in the area, it is difficult to know exactly what the costs will be. There are quite a few recharge basins and wells in the region, but rarely are those put together, and this

specific project is unique as it will address stream flow and temperatures. Walt estimated the 15MUS will cost approximately \$150,000 per year to operate.

There was discussion on the size of the pump that will be needed to retrieve the water. The pump will likely need to be several hundred horsepower.

Discussion ensued regarding the property of the test site and long-term options. Jim Olson volunteered the use of his property, but a more permanent solution will need to be found, such as purchasing the property or an easement. The SWCD may also take the opportunity to explore other conservation options on the property as it is a unique place along the 15Mile Creek for potential habitat and side channel projects. It was also noted this portion of the property was enrolled in CREP for 15 years, starting in the early 2000s.

The FAST program was mentioned and how the 15MUS will affect that program. Drake estimated that he spent roughly 300 hours on FAST in the 2021 season with 23 alert days, and in 2022 there were 10 alert days. He shared that this program will augment and possibly replace the FAST program, and will likely save him and other staff time in the long run.

Maintenance of other filtration basins was discussed. Some of the other filtration basins are maintained by watershed councils, some are run by large municipalities, and others are privately operated. The majority of owner/operators contract out the monitoring, which is often funded by grants. Shilah commented that she thinks in the long run, the monitoring and maintenance of the 15MUS will be a less than part time position, so she is confident the SWCD can handle the workload among current staffing levels, but she doesn't know if this is the most effective way to do that. The board might consider contracting out some of the more labor-intensive tasks. The SWCD could also seek out some of their local partners to assist in the labor as well, such as ODFW and/or Wy'East technicians.

Phil expressed concern about acquiring permits to do the work. It was noted the permits were applied for a year ago and are almost in hand. The permits were filed in the SWCD's name. However, before the SWCD accepts ownership of the 15MUS, more conversations are needed with the SWCD's legal counsel, SDAO, landowners, funders, etc. SWCD staff intend to continue working closely with Walt to determine final costs and thereby seek funding options. After the permits are received, the filtration basin tests can move forward, and then cost estimates can continue to be refined based on the results of those tests. The best-case scenario for full build-out would be the 2024 irrigation season, but it will more likely be the 2025 irrigation season.

Shilah, Abbie, and Drake had a meeting with Jodi Charrier with NOAA yesterday and they determined that safe harbor agreements would be a perfect fit for this kind of project. If the SWCD owns/operates the 15MUS and irrigators or landowners don't want to buy into the program, it could be difficult to extend safe harbor protections to them. If that is the case, it was suggested the SWCD work with cooperative landowners on other complimentary conservation plans that would allow for safe harbor to be extended to them. Jodi will direct SWCD staff to more local contacts to work on safe harbor agreements. The board discussed and expressed concern over the funding of the maintenance of the 15MUS, but the general consensus was the board is in support of owning/operating the 15MUS. The board and staff requested updated cost estimates from Walt if the SWCD is doing most of the work on the MUS, and another scenario

with a lot of automation involved to save staff time. It was decided that the absent board members also need to be brought up to speed so they can have input on the decision. Shilah plans to meet with Ken and Shawn at a later date to get their feedback.

Board consensus was that the SWCD staff should move forward with the 15MUS project under the assumption that the SWCD will be the owner/operator. Shilah will work with staff and the consultant team over the next couple of months to get closer to the testing phase of the infiltration basin. It was suggested another board workshop be held in the spring to update the board on any new developments.

Updates:

a. Next Meeting - The next regular meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2022, 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center (TBD) or Zoom.

b. Project Updates, Agency Reports, Committee Reports & Manager Report Tabled until December. NRCS, FSA, and OSU Extension provided written updates that were included in the meeting packet. The District Manager's reports were also included in the meeting packet.

Adjourned: 3:32 PM

Jennifer Sampson

DRAFT