



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – October 5, 2022

Directors: Bill Hammel Ken Bailey Pat Davis
Stan Shephard

Directors via Teleconference: Bob Krein Shawn Sorensen

Directors Absent: Phil Kaser

Associate Directors Absent: Bryce Molesworth

Staff: Jennifer Sampson Drake Gilbert Josh Thompson
Samantha Filbin Scott Susi

Staff via Teleconference: Shilah Olson Ryan Bessette Karen Lamson

Guests:

FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
Damon Brosnan, Basin Team Leader
Wy'East: Michael Kluz, Rural Energy Specialist, RARE AmeriCorps Member

Guests via Teleconference:

NACD: Michael Crowder, President
Public: Dan Hazel

1:01 PM Call to Order

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. Shilah noted she wanted to add newsletter sponsorships and the tree sale to the updates section, but no other changes were needed.

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the August board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the August board meeting minutes as presented; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the August Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted the SWCD received \$90,000 from Wy'East for the Fifteenmile Managed Underground Storage Project. Stan asked what the receipt for foreclosure proceeds was for. Ken explained it was a portion of the property taxes owed when Wasco County sells a property that has been foreclosed on due to lack of payment on property taxes. Ken requested a report on the property taxes received for the last fiscal year. Shilah noted that while

the September Treasurer's Report was completed, there was not enough time to get it to the board for review prior to the meeting today. *Ken moved to receive the August Treasurer's Report; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

National Association of Conservation Districts Update

Michael Crowder introduced himself and spoke about his background. He has been involved in agriculture and natural resources for most of his career, including running a ranch in Washington, and serving as a professor of environmental science at Washington State University. He met Shilah at the NACD Summer Meeting in Puerto Rico. He commented that national conversations are becoming really interesting. He reported they will be receiving \$90 million for climate smart grants that through USDA. And they are anticipating almost \$20 billion for conservation work in the next couple of years. This year, they had \$16 million for conservation TA grants. He recommended the SWCD have representatives at the annual meeting and highly recommended the seminars. He also recommended farmers pay attention to the carbon tools online as it will be something they can use in the future. He anticipates carbon markets being in the private market instead of government. Cover crops are a hot topic right now. There is also a big focus on historically underserved communities. The SWCD board then introduced themselves to Michael. He suggested that the board consider featuring projects as demonstrations (e.g. Bob's solar project), and said he can provide information on advanced large-scale irrigation systems that might be of interest to the irrigation districts. The SWCD board thanked Michael for his time.

Action Items

a. Cost-Share Requests – Josh presented nine cost share applications, including one for Stan Shepard, which was presented last due to his need to declare a conflict of interest:

Horseshoe Bar Cattle Company – Dale Smith wants to replace fence that has been abandoned. The new fence will provide protection of riparian area on the John day River. He is requesting the maximum of \$7,500.

Neil Fullington – He wants to cut and remove fire damaged trees along an irrigation ditch, and then repair the ditch after tree removal. His total cost estimates are around \$19,000 and he is requesting \$7,500.

Dee Jay Swearingen – He is drilling a livestock well and is requesting \$7,500. He has one estimate from Tibbets' but is still waiting on more estimates.

The Way Station – They want to cut and remove fire damaged trees on 4 acres. They are requesting \$6,400.

David Harris & Corrine Davis – They want to remove dead trees from fire damage in the Miller Road Fire on 26.17 acres surrounding their residence and agricultural buildings. They have received an estimate from Steelhead Enterprises. They are requesting \$7,500.

Eugene Walters – They want to remove trees killed from fire damage on approximately 200 acres. They hope to treat 100 acres in 200 hours and are requesting \$7,500.

Nancy Carter – Nancy wants to install a livestock watering facility in an existing 460-acre pasture. The well has been previously used with a generator, but due to the fire, electrical service and permanent troughs need to be installed. A frost-free hydrant for fire and sprayer fill will also be installed. They are requesting \$6,225. Josh noted that their other pastures had burned fencing during the Miller Road Fire, so they need to use this other pasture immediately.

The WHAT LTD. – They have a fairly standard Haul Road. Scott reviewed it and recommended the project. They are requesting \$2,500.

There was discussion on where the District is at on the cost share budget. There were concerns about the fire restoration projects and if there will be another rush of applicants.

Ken moved to approve the eight district cost share applications; Pat seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Avian Lake Ranch – Stan Shephard declared a conflict of interest. Avian Lake wants to install 500ft of pipeline from Three Mile Creek up the canyon and out of the riparian zone. The pipeline will connect two water troughs as well as a full solar system for livestock water. The goal is to protect CREP land. He is requesting \$7,500.

Ken moved to approve the Avian Lake Ranch cost share application; Pat seconded. Stan abstained due to a conflict of interest. Motion carried.

b. Operating Capacity Grant Increase – Shilah reported the District did receive increases from ODA and OWEB, which is sort of found money, the board can shift expenses around if needed. She wanted to bring it to the board now that she has actual numbers. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was to have Shilah put together a proposal on how to distribute the funds, and then the board will discuss it at the November meeting. Ken also requested a report on the tax income received over the last fiscal year.

Updates:

a. OACD Conference, Newport, OR Oct 31-Nov 2, 2022 – Shilah reported the OACD Conference conflicts with the November board meeting and wanted to inquire if anyone was interested in attending to see if we needed to move the board meeting. Ken is planning to go, but no one else is interested in attending at this time. Ken requested the District pay for his registration and the SWCC will pay for lodging and travel expenses.

b. Next Meeting - The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 2, 2022, 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center (TBD) or Zoom.

c. NACD Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, February 11-15, 2023 – Shilah reported the NACD Annual Meeting is in February and asked if anyone was interested in attending. If anyone wants to attend, the District can apply for a stipend to cover travel costs.

- d. Scheduling 15Mile MUS Board Workshop** – Shilah reported the board workshop is scheduled for October 25th, from 12:30-4:00pm with Emily Stranz. Everyone will meet at the USDA Service Center for a district-provided lunch and go from there.
- e. Director Elections (Davis, Kaser, Shephard, Sorensen)** – Shilah reminded the board there is still time to file as a write in. If no one runs for Pat’s position, the board will need to appoint someone.
- f. Mosier Groundwater: Deep Well #2 & Mosier Million #2** – Josh reported on the Mosier Deep Well, one of the oilers was malfunctioning so it was replaced and is now operating as designed. Mosier Million 2 received a rather poor response rate from mailouts. There are four wells that are committed at this time, so more outreach is needed.
- g. Tygh Valley Water Projects: Highline Ditch & Lindell Dam Removal** – Josh reported he is working with a contractor on highline ditch. They are intending to implement the work during the 2023 in-water work period. The Lindell Dam has been removed and Josh shared a picture of the completed project.
- h. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire** – Josh reported he has open OWEB grants for open range fire recovery and is still reaching out to landowners that want to do fencing repair, reseeding, and invasive annual control. FSA is also offering 50% cost share on reseeding.
- i. FY 2021/2022 Audit** – Shilah reported the audit is underway with Friend and Reagan. She has been in communication with Carol, and we are waiting for them to complete the work.
- j. FP Mailing Solutions Collections Notice & Switching to Pitney Bowes** – Shilah reported that she thought we were done with FP, but just this morning they said they didn’t receive one part of the equipment we were leasing. They still think the District owes them a little over \$700. Once that is finalized, she intends to sign up with Pitney Bowes. She will keep the board up to date on this issue as it progresses.
- k. Policy Review – Personnel Handbook/ Landowner Assistance** – Shilah reported she is keeping this on the agenda as a reminder. She had started updating board policies but didn’t make progress due to illness.
- l. Updating Long Range Plan** – Shilah spent some time reviewing the District’s Long Range Plan and NRCS’s Long Range Plan. She did make some edits but needs to send them out for staff review before presenting it to the board.
- m. Health Insurance Renewal** – Shilah reported we are in process of renewing the District’s health insurance. There are price increases in the premium rates, so she is trying to balance options and stay in budget. This may move up to the action items section at the November meeting.
- n. Updating Cost Share Reimbursement Rates (Add Road Grader)** – Shilah reported that Abbie wanted to add a road grader to the reimbursement rates, but as she is on leave this will be tabled

until the November meeting. She requested that any board members with experience on actual costs send her and Abbie information. Stan requested a review of all cost share rates, and cited concerns about the current inflation rate. Shilah suggested Stan bring a proposal to the November meeting and it can be discussed with the board. Stan suggested a 5% increase to cost share rates across the board.

o. ECOP Fire Tour 10/25 (sponsored by SWCD) – Shilah reported the ECOP Fire Tour will be on October 25th and the SWCD is sponsoring it. This conflicts with the 15MUS board workshop, but she wanted to let the board know the District is involved.

p. Tree Sale – Jennifer reported the Tree Sale is open and is live online and invited the board to look at the tree sale website, <https://wascoswcd.square.site/>. Please send any feedback on the website to Jennifer.

q. Newsletter sponsor – Shilah reported Print It! declined to renew their newsletter sponsorship, which is reasonable as the District is no longer having it printed there. Please let her know if you know anyone who is interested in advertising as we have an open space. The cost is \$100 for advertisement from July 2022-June 2023 and will include recognition on the District website.

Agency Reports:

a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval) – Emily reported the EQIP application deadline is November 18th. They still have funding for forest health, fuels reduction, pollinators, and food security. A lot of the projects are more immediate for the Miller Road fire, but she intends to propose that area for Rangeland Improvement funding in 2024. Emily introduced Damon Brosnan, the NRCS Basin Team Leader. Damon shared that there are likely to be billions of dollars coming our way in the future. So, he recommended planning now on how to spend that, such as EQIP, CSP, Easement programs, and RCPP. He acknowledged that staffing is a horrendous problem right now as the private sector is more attractive. There is also the cost of living to consider, and the delay since it takes a month between when a job closes and an offer is made. He suggested that the SWCDs may want to bring on more staff to contract with USDA, in an effort to increase the staffing level at a faster rate. Damon reported that Ron Alvarado is retiring in about a year, and Jay Gibbs is also retiring. He appreciates all the support the SWCD has given to Emily.

b. FSA – Lissa reported they have CRP payments going out right now. Phase 1 is all the contracts that came from 1PL contracts. Next will be the 4PL contracts from the 2008 farm bill, followed by 5PL, and then 6PL from the 2018 farm bill. Very soon there will be a new farm bill, so there will be more changes. With everyone's help, they have approved 120 contracts in the last three weeks. 2021 ARC/PLC payments for Barley have been triggered, but not for Wheat. NAP is coming up, so get your NAP coverage if you want hay, rangeland, or cherries. If you know of anyone looking for employment, FSA is looking for loss adjusters. It is not a full time job, but they do get sent out for different losses, with a focus on cherries in Oregon. If anyone is interested, contact Lissa. FSA hasn't had a farm loan officer in the office since 2018, but they will be flying the position for an officer or a trainee, that would be housed in The Dalles or Pendleton. The

County Committee election should be soon. Tim and Mary Foreman will be on ballot which will go out at the beginning of November.

c. OSU Extension – Shilah reported Jacob was not able to attend the meeting.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Shilah reported that Robert was unable to attend the meeting. She also reported that she, Jenn, and Samantha continue to support Robert. Shilah introduced Michael Kluz, a RARE student who signed on with Wy'East for the next year. Michael shared that the RARE program is through AmeriCorps and they take graduate level students and have them work for non-profits around the state. He is working mainly with energy efficiency and the e-tractor program.

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 will schedule a facilities meeting soon. He commented that Samantha has been cleaning and organizing areas that have been sitting for years and the office is looking much nicer. Josh invited the board to look at the old Pacific Fisheries office space and see the improvements she has made. Fisheries' lease expired at the end of July. Sherman FSA and NRCS have been collocated with Wasco County, so Sherman FSA will be moving into the Fisheries area. The SWCD will not charge USDA more for this but will treat it as goodwill to our Sherman neighbors.

c. Watershed Council – To be discussed during coordinating board meeting to follow.

d. OAHP/SWCC – Ken reported the Oregon Agriculture Heritage program has applications out for easements through the program. The applications are due back this fall, in approximately six weeks. Applications will be reviewed, with decisions made in March for the first round of funding. They are also lobbying for \$10 million in the next legislative cycle. The SWCC hasn't met since the last SWCD meeting. They will be meeting on the 1st of November in Newport. Ken is planning to attend. OACD put on a tour of the Imperial Stock Ranch in Shaniko. Jeannie Carver presented on the wool certifications and their carbon sequestration program. There were a couple of Senators and Representatives participating in the tour. Scott also attended the tour. Ken will be off the OAHP board at end of the year, but he is still on the SWCC at least until the next term. Ken shared that he appreciated the memo that Shilah provided as it was good to review before the board meeting for discussion purposes. Shilah will try to provide the board memos prior to board meetings on a regular basis.

District Manager Report:

a. Work Plan Progress and Grant Status – Shilah reported the work plan progress and grant status reports were emailed to board. Everything is on track, but it is still early in the fiscal year. The first quarter just ended, so she will be working on quarterly reports next. She is already looking at budgeting activities for the next fiscal year and may look at rebalancing some funds as well. The District currently has 31 active grants, totaling over \$4.3 million. There are four pending grant applications and three of them have been recommended for funding. Since 1990, the District has completed \$18.279 million and 319 grants in on the ground work.

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: 2:48 PM

Jennifer Sampson