



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board Meeting Minutes – October 8, 2025

Directors: Bill Hammel Larry Powell Shawn Sorensen
Bob Krein Jeff Crump

Directors via Teleconference: Stan Shephard

Directors Absent: Phil Kaser

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods
Drake Gilbert Allie Marker
Ryan Besette Abbie Forrest

Guests:

Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wasco SWCD: Ken Bailey, Director Emeritus
Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director
AKS Engineering: Darrin Eckman

1:02 PM Call to Order

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions or changes to the agenda. Shilah would like to add discussion regarding District Health Insurance to the agenda as Action Item G.

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the September regular board meeting minutes. None were made. *Jeff moved to approve the September regular board meeting minutes as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Shawn, Bob and Jeff voting in favor.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the September Treasurer's Report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. *Shawn moved to receive the Treasurer's Report for September; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Jeff, Shawn, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

The loans payable/loans receivable report was also included for information.

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

Action Items

a. District Cost Share Program: Abbie had four District Cost Share Applications and one partial payment request to present.

The first two applications were presented together.

B. Markman – Application is for a haul road project. This is a phased project that will meet up with the section of haul road that is being requested by J. Markman. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

J. Markman – Application is for a haul road project. This section of haul road will meet with the section that is being requested by B. Markman. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

S. Erspamer– This application is for a rainwater harvesting project. The landowner has been experiencing declining groundwater and low well water levels and would like to harvest rainwater for irrigation purposes. The application does contain some fire suppression components. Abbie communicated to the landowner that those costs may not be covered. The Board does not feel that the cost of the fire suppression components should be included. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

M. Duling – The application is for a cross fencing project. The landowner will remove existing downed fence and have a contractor install 4 strand wire fencing with steel posts. The amount that is being requested is \$4100.

Bill called for a motion to approve the rainwater harvest project with modifications to exclude fire related equipment. Jeff recommended postponing the vote until the next meeting when an updated application with revised equipment costs could be presented.

Bob asked about the cross fencing project and whether this would qualify for the small grant program. Abbie responded that yes, it would qualify, and they are working on that for the match.

Shawn moved to approve three district cost share applications as presented to include two haul roads and one cross fencing project; Bob seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.

B. Casady Partial Payment Request – This application for a livestock solar water system was approved in 2024. The cost share amount that was approved is \$1705. The landowner had reached out to Abbie to see if it's possible to receive a partial reimbursement in the amount of \$513.37 for the completed portion of the project. *Shawn motioned to approve the partial reimbursement; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.*

b. Policy: Official Compensation – Meals, Materials, Recognition Items – In May of 2025, the Oregon Government Ethics Committee issued an advisory opinion that prohibits providing food and beverages to employees unless such provisions are part of an official compensation package. Shilah has drafted an Official Compensation policy for the Board's consideration. The policy includes meals and refreshments for employees and staff under certain work-related conditions. The policy also includes District branded materials and apparel as well as employee recognition and morale support items. Employee recognition items shall not exceed \$50 per

occasion. *Bob made a motion to adopt the Wasco County SWCD Official Compensation policy as presented; Shawn seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.*

c. CWDG: MOU with MCFR & Hiring Seasonal Staff – MCFR is also a sub-recipient of the CWDG grant. They have been using their seasonal crew to complete some of the defensible space work in South County. The seasonal crew is wrapping up for the season, but they are interested in continuing the work. The District has grant funds available to hire the MCFR crew as seasonal staff for a period not to exceed 90 days. The Draft MOU outlines the responsibilities of each party, with the SWCD providing payroll, HR support and worker’s compensation coverage while MCFR would provide equipment, vehicles and tools necessary for field implementation as well as technical guidance and field supervision. Shawn asked who determines the target area that they work in? Shilah responded that it is based on assessments and landowners who sign up and would like to have the work done. The focus is on primary residences as well as people who are unable to do the work themselves. *Shawn made a motion to move forward with the MOU with MCFR; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.*

d. FY 23-24 Audit Deficiency Plan of Action – In the FY 23-24 Financial Audit, Pauly Rogers identified two deficiencies. The District is required to submit a deficiency Plan of Action letter to the Secretary of State that outlines the plan to address the deficiencies that were identified. *Bob made a motion to accept the Audit Deficiency Plan of Action letter as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.*

e. Contracting John Runyon for PSP Study – John Runyon is a consultant with Watershed Professional Network who the District has worked with on several projects. John worked on the 2015 Action Plan and is working on the current Action Plan for the District. The 2025-27 PSP Grant has \$24,000 written into it for best management practices outreach and education as well as an incentive feasibility study. Shilah would like to contract with John to perform the work that’s outlined in the PSP Grant. *Shawn motioned to move forward with contracting with John Runyon for the strategic survey work as outlined in the District’s Grant with ODA; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Larry, Bob, Shawn and Jeff voting in favor.*

f. Back Lot Expansion & Shop Options – AKS Consultants – Darrin presented a draft site plan for Board review and comment. The draft plan included two different building floor plans. Extensive discussion ensued including Board feedback regarding the different floor plans, zoning and flood plain questions. Darrin appreciated all of the comments and feedback and will revise the site plan based on discussions. The revised plan will be ready for the November meeting.

g. District Health Insurance Rate Increase – Shilah reported that when the District received it’s Health Insurance renewal information, it reflected a 19% increase in premiums. With the assistance of Wheatland Insurance, the District was able to review rate quotes for several other insurance plans that are comparable to the current plan. By switching to an SDIS offered Blue Cross plan, the District would be looking at a 9% increase compared to a 19% increase. Shilah would like to ask the Board to consider picking up a percentage of the employee paid premium for spouse / dependent coverage. She feels that 25% would be reasonable and affordable,

noting that the USDA lease agreement increase could help cover the cost. Bill commented that he feels the District has good staff and would hate to see folks leave, would like to see more compensation. Shawn asked what the cost per year would be. Shilah commented that covering 25% would be about \$16,000 a year. Shilah noted that Gilliam County pays 100% of the premiums for employee and spouse, and dependent coverage is paid by the employee. Robert Wallace commented that they ran into this at the Dufur School District and they ended up starting an HSA that was funded by the School District. It was Board consensus to explore other options such as HSA's or flexible spending accounts to see if there is anything available that could be used to assist with employee out of pocket premium expenses.

Updates

- a. Next Meeting** – The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2025, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

- b. OACD Meeting & Conference – Pendleton, Oregon Oct 21-23, 2025**– Shilah noted that there is still time to sign up. Reach out to Shilah or Dana for registration assistance.

- c. 15mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget**– Drake reported that on October 14th, the review team will meet to evaluate the MUS Grant that the District submitted. He also reported that the Watermaster will be requiring flowmeters on Fifteenmile by 2027.

- d. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2** – Drake reported that the second of the two domestic wells is currently being drilled. There is still one irrigation well to be completed now that the water rights transfer is done. Drake then moved into Watershed Council Updates – informational reports item c.

In order to allow for adequate time to review and discuss the draft site plan for the back lot expansion and new building construction, Shilah suggested that the remaining update items be tabled until the end of the meeting, if time allows.

- e. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Tabled

- f. Fires: CWDG Grant, 2024 Larch Creek Funding, 2025 Recap** – Tabled

- g. East Cascade Oak Partnership-CR Surveys, Block Grant, USFS, ODFW** – Tabled

- h. Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program** – Tabled

- i. Updating Long Range Plan & SWCD Employee Handbook** – Ongoing.

Agency Reports

- a. NRCS** – There was no update from NRCS due to the Government shut down.

- b. FSA** – There was no update from FSA due to the Government shut down.

- c. OSU Extension** – Jacob was not in attendance.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Robert provided updates regarding the continued uncertainty of their federal TA grants. He also noted that most of the funding for their E-Farms program comes from the Department of Energy, who had paused funding but it appears that Senator Merkley has got that funding moving forward again. Wy'East just finished up with EVMath campaign which focused on rural EV drivers to show the potential cost savings compared to a standard gas vehicle. Robert also provided an update on the C-REP grant, which the SWCD is the recipient of. He indicated that the units in Wamic and Antelope have not been working as expected.

Informational Reports

a. Internal Financial Review – none

b. Facilities Status – none

c. Watershed Council Updates – Drake reported that at the Bakeoven Watershed Council meeting that was held on October 2nd, there was discussion regarding whether or not the District should be involved in meetings with potential solar farm developers. It was noted that solar farm developers must have plans in place for wildlife impact mitigation, managing noxious weeds and implementing plans for revegetation. These requirements align with the work that the District does, so would it make sense to be involved in the process. Lengthy discussion ensued. Bob commented that the first step to getting involved would be to reach out to Andrew Meyers at ODFW. Shawn asked if there is something in the District's plans that could potentially give the District a seat at the table. Larry commented possibly the invasive weed plan. Jeff asked if there have been any discussions with other SWCD's regarding this same issue. Shilah noted that there is a State level task force that SWCD's are involved in. We've also been contacted directly by the solar developers in the past, which was something Josh typically took a lead on.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Distributed prior to the meeting.

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.

Adjourn Regular Board Meeting at 3:28 pm