



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – May 1, 2024

Directors: Bill Hammel Phil Kaser Shawn Sorensen
Stan Shephard

Directors Absent: Bob Krein Ken Bailey Larry Powell

Staff: Shilah Olson Josh Thompson Jennifer Sampson
Abbie Forrest Drake Gilbert

Staff via Teleconference: Samantha Filbin

Guests:

NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wy'East RC&D: Robert Wallace, Executive Director

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. Stan referenced the fires in Texas in relation to the fires in 2020 and 2022 in Wasco County, and asked if landowners were being paid both by their insurance companies and by FSA for burned fences. Josh explained that landowners might receive a payment from both entities, but FSA is specifically reimbursing for fence costs and private insurance could be covering burned pasture, buildings, fence, etc. Discussion ensued.

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the April board meeting minutes. None were made. *Stan moved to approve the April meeting minutes; Phil seconded. Motion carried.*

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the March Treasurer's Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. Phil inquired if it would be helpful to staff to move board meetings to the second Wednesday of the month instead of the first Wednesday, to allow staff enough time to put together the Treasurer's Reports for the immediately preceding month. As opposed to being a month behind. Discussion ensued and Shilah shared it was ultimately up to the board whether or not they wanted to change their meeting day. Bill asked about the fund balance on the Tygh Valley Wells project. Josh said he will review that in more detail. Stan asked about the Nursery expenses. Jennifer explained that a space heater has been running on a thermostat in the pump house to prevent pipes from freezing. Shilah reviewed the loan report, noting loans receivable and payable. She noted the building loan is the one the board could start paying off

early in January 2025 if the board chose to do so. Stan strongly recommended not paying the loan off early given the current interest rates. *Stan moved to receive the March Treasurer's Report; Shawn seconded. Motion carried.*

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

Action Items

a. FAST Plan & Policy Review – Drake reported they are considering changing the eligibility requirements of irrigation ditches in the FAST program. Currently, irrigators that use ditches are eligible, regardless of where they are located on the ditch. Without shutting off the entire ditch, there is not really a way to monitor that the regulation is being done. Staff propose to change the policy to say that irrigation ditches can be enrolled in the program only if all irrigators on the ditch participate in the program. Then in the event of a FAST alert, the entire ditch can be turned off at the headgate and the water will definitely be left in the stream. *Shawn moved to change the FAST policy to make irrigation ditches eligible for the FAST program, so long as all irrigators on the ditch participate; Phil seconded. Motion carried.*

b. Cost-Share Requests – Review Rates for FY24-25 – Abbie presented one district cost share application:

Williamson – Abbie asked Josh to report on this application. Josh reported that currently, the Mobeys are doing woody residue treatment (dead juniper removal) from the Miller Road Fire. Emily Williamson's property is adjacent to the work that is being done, and is requesting cost share funds for them to remove hazard/dead trees around the infrastructure on her property. She is requesting \$2,600, which is the remaining amount in the cost share budget. *Shawn moved to approve the cost share application for Emily Williamson; Phil seconded. Motion carried.*

Abbie presented a draft of updated cost share reimbursement rates. For the 23-24 fiscal year, the board approved a 10% increase due to inflation. For the 2024-25 fiscal year, Abbie is proposing a 3.5% increase, based on the current CPI, with the individual rates rounded up to an even number for easier calculations. Discussion ensued. *Shawn moved to approve the proposed district cost share reimbursement rates for 2024-25 as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried.*

Abbie led a discussion on district cost share policy overall. She previously distributed a policy guidance document and requested the board continue to provide suggestions. She noted that Ken previously recommended adding a "print name" line on the application in addition to the signature line. Historically, the board has approved cost share application on a first-come first-served basis. However, with the increase in rainwater harvesting applications and other creative or unusual projects, the board may need to reconsider this policy and how they want to deal with these new applications. Drake and Abbie reported they have been approached with possible funding for some new projects and they are currently putting together a proposal for an Urban Conservation Cost Share program that could possibly handle some of these non-traditional projects on smaller acreages. Shawn requested SWCD Staff research how other SWCDs are handling rainwater harvesting projects. Discussion ensued. Abbie and Drake will continue working on their proposal and will bring a summary to the board in June.

c. Wy'East Continued Advanced Precision Ag Support – Shilah reported she typically brings this topic to the board each year. The Advanced Precision Ag Support is not funded by outside grants or contracts. She requested the board continue to support the project as Wy'East assists with the FAST program and soil moisture probes and monitoring. Current support is budgeted at \$10,000 per year. *Shawn moved to approve supporting Wy'East and the Advanced Precision Ag program at \$10,000; Stan seconded. Motion carried.*

d. USGS Mosier Gaging Station Cooperative Agreement – Shilah shared this project is also not funded by outside grants or contracts, but the board has historically supported this. The gaging station provides good water data for the Mosier wells program. She increased their level of support to \$15,000 in the budget as the cost has been increasing each year. *Phil moved to approve the USGS Mosier Gaging Station Cooperative Agreement for a budgeted \$15,000; Stan seconded. Motion carried.*

e. Natural Resource Career Day – Shilah shared a flyer on the career day is included in the meeting packet, as well as a sponsorship request from the organizer, Danny Cosgrove. The District will be sending some staff to the event to encourage younger students to consider a career in natural resources. *Phil moved to sponsor the natural resource career day for \$500; Shawn seconded. Motion carried.*

Updates

a. Next Meeting – The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 5, 2024, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom. This meeting will also serve as the budget hearing, as well as the annual meeting. To be followed by a no-host social at Bargeway Pub at 3:00 PM.

b. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) – Josh reported the consultants are planning to do some on the ground testing at the MUS site.

c. Highline Ditch Elimination – Josh reported he and Shilah have adjusted the budget to attempt to complete the project this year. They still need to work with the big landowner to commit to a design for the new conversion. The ditch will still be visible when the project is complete, but it won't be used anymore.

d. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire – Josh reported they still have an open OWEB grant for the White River Fire, and are partnering with ODFW for aerial seeding this fall. Josh is still working on inspecting fence for the Miller Road Fire. The OWEB grant for the Miller Road Fire for \$35,000 was awarded to Mobley Fencing for woody debris removal.

e. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Public Meetings – Shilah reminded the board the District has 6 out of 10% discount on insurance premiums secured. The last two requirements are trainings for board members, but those trainings have not been developed and released by SDAO yet.

f. Director Elections Reminder – Shilah reminded the board it is an election year and there are four positions up for election: Zone 1 (Ken), Zone 3 (Bill), Zone 5 (Bob), and At-Large 1 (Larry). If any board members need an election packet, contact Jennifer.

Agency Reports

a. **NRCS** – Emily reported they are winding down on EQIP, but they have a few more contracts to have signed. She had requested \$2 million in the second funds request, and Oregon as a whole only received 37% of what they asked for. This meant she only received \$740,000. The total EQIP obligations awarded were \$1.75 million over 33 contracts, and that was only half of the applications they received this year. She has received 10 CSP applications for approximately \$1.1 million. She will be getting an intern for June and July, and requested the board let her know if they have any interesting projects they would like the intern to see. She will be attending a wildfire preparedness outreach event on May 11th in Wamic at the Wamic Community Center from 2-5pm. The Oregon State Fire Marshall will be there, as well as ODF and other partners. They will be discussing available grants and defensible space, in addition to other topics.

b. **FSA** – Lissa reported grasslands CRP signups are coming soon. They expect that to open within the next couple of weeks, and it will be a month-long signup period. It is CRP except you are allowed to graze it every year without a penalty. She sent out an e-blast yesterday to remind producers to report cherry losses. There was a freeze last week and they need to be notified within 72 hours of the loss. COC elections are coming up soon for LAA2 (mid Wasco County). The incumbent is Mike Kelly, but anyone can be nominated. If you are interested in running, talk to Lissa in early June. They are trying to finish up ECP on the Miller Road Fire. Acreage reports for the spring planting are in process now. General signup for CRP was in March, unless it is HELI or SAFE CRP which are continuous signups.

c. **OSU Extension** – Jacob reported the dryland wheat crop looks ok so far. They are concerned about rust but haven't seen it too much yet this year. He has been doing applied research projects and organizing the annual crop tours. The Sherman County Crop Tour will be June 4th, and the Wasco County Crop Tour will be June 13th, starting at 8:30am in Dufur at the wheat variety plots. He is interested in demonstrating some newer technology on the crop tour and is trying to get Ag-Copter to demo some drone field mapping. He requested if anyone has any topics they would like covered or specific things they'd like to see on the crop tour to let him know. Jacob requested the SWCD sponsor the crop tours with donuts, coffee, and the porta-potties if they are available. The Sherman Field Day will be at the experiment station in Moro on June 12th at 8:00am. Jefferson SWCD will be hosting a Soil Health Day in Madras sometime soon. There will be an agricultural pesticide container recycling event on May 29th. The event is free but they require you to register by May 14th.

d. **Wy'East RC&D** – Robert reported he had previously requested the SWCD be the applicant on the C-REP grant application for an estimated \$1 million. They submitted another grant yesterday for \$1.9 million that is in line with the C-REP grant. These grants are focusing on resiliency and innovative ideas on how to provide electricity in an emergency. Wy'East is also applying for a grant for a second RARE student next year to work on energy backup systems. Robert took a drive with Josh around the county to look for strategic sites that could be in need of a solar powered charging station for electric vehicles and/or emergency power sources. On May 9th, there will be a Ride and Drive event at The Dalles Chamber of Commerce. This is a non-sales event and several companies will be there with equipment for you to try, including Polaris, Ford, Forth, Tesla, and more. Robert shared he is willing to participate in the crop tours if needed,

and he will also be attending the Pre-Harvest Cherry Tour on June 7th. Robert will check-in with Drake to discuss the FAST season and see what kind of monitoring he can provide this year. Wy'East currently has use of an F150 Lightning, but it is having range issues so they are investigating that.

Committee Reports

- a. Audit Committee** – The audit committee had no comments at this time.

- b. Facilities Committee** – Bill reported the Facilities Committee met on Monday and they discussed the back lot. They were thinking to develop it in stages and to start by paving the lot and putting in conduits for electrical service.

- c. Watershed Council Updates** – Drake reported Mosier Watershed Council met last week and received the yearly ground water results. The trends look promising. He needs to reschedule the Fifteenmile Watershed Council meeting and schedule a meeting for The Dalles Council. He also needs to plan a White River and Bakeoven Council meetings.

District Manager Report

- a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah reported the work plan progress report and grant status report are included in the meeting packets. The District currently has 29 open grants for over \$4 million, with approximately \$2.6 million remaining. Since 1990, the District has completed 343 grants totaling over \$20 million. On the work plan, the tree sale has been completed, and she has an idea for conservation awards through the SDAO conference. All other tasks are on track.

- 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.

Phil requested to add a discussion to the agenda at the June board meeting regarding changing the regular board meeting date from the first Wednesday to the second Wednesday of the month.

Bill thanked the SWCD staff and said everyone was doing a great job.

Adjourned: 2:42pm

Jennifer Sampson