



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – February 12, 2025

Directors: Phil Kaser Larry Powell
Jeff Crump Bob Krein Stan Shephard

Directors Absent: Shawn Sorensen Bill Hammel

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods Abbie Forrest
Drake Gilbert Ryan Bessette Scott Susi
Samantha Filbin

Staff via Teleconference: Karen Lamson

Guests:

NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Wasco SWCD: Ken Bailey, Director Emeritus
Public: Steve Springston
Wheatland Ins: John Anderson

Guests via Teleconference:

NRCS: Dellaina Morse

1:00 PM Call to Order

Bob called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. None were made.

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

Treasurer's Report: Shilah reviewed the January treasurer's report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. Shilah reviewed the loan report noting loans receivable and loans payable amounts. *Phil moved to receive the Treasurer's Report for January; Stan seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan all voting in favor.*

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

SWCD Insurances – Wheatland: John Anderson was in attendance to provide an update on the SWCD's Insurance. Insurance premium rates are up 21% from the previous year. John indicated that renewal rates are up industry wide. Liability premiums are based on budget and the SWCD's materials & services budget increased for the current fiscal year. Stan asked about all the fires in Oregon and if that affects rates. John responded that insurance companies have been using a map similar to the Wildfire Risk Assessment map for years.

Action Items

a. CWDG Fire Project – Shilah provided updates on the project. SWCD has been working with Eugene Walters, the Wasco County Wildfire Coordinator Melissa Napoli, John Anderson and legal counsel to develop contract documents and define the scope of work for each project. All contracts issued or proposed so far have been below the \$25,000 small procurement threshold and are eligible for direct appointment, allowing us to move forward more efficiently. The goal of the roadside fuels reduction is to complete 20 miles of road each year for 5 years. Shilah provided the Board with a copy of the Request for Qualified Contractors solicitation document as well as a list of contracts already granted and in progress. Shilah would like Board approval to continue on this path and revisit each year to revise plan as needed. *Phil moved to approve the Request for Qualified Contractors document and to approve the contracts already granted. Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

b. District Cost Share Requests – Abbie presented two cost share applications:

Three Quarter Circle LLC – This application is for an approximate ¼ mile haul road. Abbie has verified the site and is requesting the maximum of \$3000.

Duling Natural Pasture – This application is for an approximate ½ mile haul road. Abbie has verified the site and is requesting the maximum of \$3000.

In reference to the Duling request, Jeff asked what differentiates a haul road vs a driveway. Abbie noted that the section related to this request is not the driveway to the main home. Stan *moved to approve both district cost share applications; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

Abbie then presented a revision and additional funding request for a previously approved cost share project. Nancy Carter was originally awarded \$6225 for her Livestock Well. The project came in over the original budget estimate due to an increased cost of running power to the site. Based on the increase in project cost, Nancy would be eligible for an additional \$1257.49. This would bring the total district cost share amount to \$7482.49, which is under the maximum allowable threshold of \$7500. Bob asked for questions or comments. *Phil made a motion to approve the additional district cost share funding request; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

Scott was unable to be at the meeting, but Abbie informed the Board that Scott has been working on a terrace reshaping project and asked if the Board would consider adding this type of project to the District Cost Share Program. The idea is that it would be for gradient terraces only for the purpose of making it easier to farm. Phil commented that he would like to see this as an agenda item at a future meeting to discuss. Ken commented that he wondered if when the original

terrace was funded, was there a restriction on how long the landowner was supposed to maintain them. Shilah asked Emily if there is a Practice Standard for this. Emily indicated that there is but she hasn't worked with it in a while, but she would be willing to research. Shilah asked the Board if it should be made an eligible practice under the current program? There was no decision made and the topic tabled until the next meeting.

c. Set Annual Meeting Date & Pass Resolution – Shilah led a discussion on the annual meeting, and how in the years since COVID, the board has held the annual meeting in conjunction with a board meeting. Staff suggested this year, the annual meeting should present the legally required annual report and audit in conjunction with the June board meeting. Resolution 20250212 is included in the packet and establishes the date of the annual meeting as June 11, 2025. *Jeff moved to approve Resolution 20250212 to host the annual meeting in conjunction with the June 11 board meeting; Stan seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

d. MOU w/ Jefferson SWCD for Work in Trout Creek & JD Watersheds– Shilah presented the Board with a copy of the MOU between Wasco SWCD and Jefferson SWCD. This MOU outlines the collaboration between the two agencies to address conservation efforts in the Trout Creek and Lower John Day watersheds, where landowners have properties in both counties. This MOU acknowledges that landowners may seek services from either district, regardless of where the property is. *Phil moved to authorize Shilah to enter the MOU with Jefferson County SWCD; Stan seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.*

e. Staffing Restructuring & Watershed Tech Intern Position – Shilah provided updates to the Board regarding the 1:1 meetings that she had with each staff member. She is working to identify where the strengths and weaknesses are to determine if there needs to be any shifts in workloads. Cross-training has been identified as a priority. Shilah also expressed interest in hiring a Watershed Tech Intern for the remainder of the current fiscal year and feels that Allie Marker would be a good fit. Allie recently completed a job shadow with Shilah and Abbie and is interested in the work that the SWCD does.

Stan moved to approve hiring a Watershed Tech Intern through June 30, 2025: Phil seconded. Motion carried with Phil, Larry, Jeff, Bob and Stan voting in favor.

Bob asked as positions and workloads change, how do we make sure that people are compensated correctly? Shilah responded that she reviews and does salary comparisons.

Updates

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

b. SDAO Annual Meeting and Conference Recap, Feb 6-9, 2025 Bend – Shilah and Dana attended the SDAO Conference in Bend this year. The Conference had some good sessions on the agenda this year including information regarding public meetings law, website ADA compliance, managing change in your organization, strategic planning as well as legislative updates. Along with the valuable information, it was a great networking opportunity. Josh

Thompson was honored with a Legacy of Service award during the banquet on Saturday evening. Josh's family was able to attend and his children accepted the award on his behalf.

c. Donation to S. Wasco School District for Josh Thompson Memorial – Based on direction from the Board at the January meeting, Shilah looked into the legality of the SWCD making a donation in Josh's honor. She consulted with legal counsel, who researched public entity gift laws and found nothing that indicated that the SWCD could not make such a donation, so a check in the amount of \$5000 was sent to South Wasco School District.

d. Fifteenmile Groundwater Issues – Fifteenmile Watershed Council met last month. Next steps would be contacting the OWRD folks and see about getting them back out on Fifteenmile.

e. 15mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget – Drake reported that the results of the sediment study are back and the main recommendations are an inline sand cannister filter and a basin constructed of three feet of sand and one foot of native sediment. Hoping to have this completed by next winter.

f. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2 – Drake reported that the Mosier Watershed meeting was last month. Met with some Rowena residents who have been having water issues. The Mosier Million water rights transfer ended up costing more than originally anticipated.

Drake also commented that Daniel Bonham could potentially be a good resource for the water issues in the area. He assisted with the original Mosier Million funds.

Phil commented that at the last meeting, Steve Springston's request was left open ended and he would like to hear from Steve. Steve had requested funding to help address the well issues that he has been having. Discussion ensued.

Bob commented that he felt that the SWCD could be able to assist with a livestock well but not for a domestic well.

g. Highline Ditch Elimination – Shilah reported the project is still in progress. The fish screen has been the primary cause of delay.

h. Fires: 2020 White River, CWDG Grant, 2024 Larch Creek Funding – Shilah reported that the White River work is mostly complete. The final report will need to be submitted along with pictures of the spring grass. The 2024 Larch Creek Grant Funding application will be due May 29th. CWDG grant was covered under action items.

i. County Weed Control Efforts & Lower Deschutes CWMA – Neither Scott nor Dean were able to make the meeting. Shilah reported that they are both working hard on securing funding and partnerships to move weed control forward in Wasco County. Pat suggested reaching out to the County Commissioners ASAP if we are hoping to secure any funds through them for the coming FY, as they are already in the budget process.

- j. FY2023-24 Audit** – Shilah reported that the audit is still in progress. Phil expressed concern about an audit firm from outside of the area and their unfamiliarity with the practices in this area. Shilah noted that staff is still open to looking for other potential auditors.
- k. OACD Dues Structure**– Shilah noted there were no updates today and that the new dues structure was previously sent out to the Board via e:mail.
- l. Updating Long Range Plan & SWCD Employee Handbook**–Shilah has been working with HR Answers on updates to the SWCD Employee Handbook.

Agency Reports

- a. NRCS** – Emily reported the CSP application deadline is February 28th. The local work group meeting is scheduled for February 27 in Dufur at the Parish Hall. Justin McLaughlin has been hired to backfill for Hilary’s position. He will be working in the NRCS office a couple of days a week, incorporating the wildlife component into EQIP projects. OSU will be sponsoring a baked potato dinner as a CWDG landowner outreach event on March 13th. There will be a wildfire preparedness event May 23rd at Maupin School. Most of the EQIP funding was through the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) and is currently frozen.
- b. FSA** – Lissa reported that the ARC/PLC deadline is April 15th. Gov.delivery is the preferred method of Federal communication and her office is able to assist people with getting signed up to receive updates. They are still unsure of when the CRP signups will be.
- c. OSU Extension** – Jacob reported that the Farm Safety / 1st Aid Classes have been keeping him busy and has another one scheduled for February 22nd. In mid-March, there will be a drone training with ODA. The ODA Pesticide Exam can no longer be taken at CGCC. Currently, testing would be in either Hermiston or Portland. Jacob has been working on a research project looking at soil acidity levels for wheat producers. He is unclear if NCLA is interested in putting on the Bull Tour this year. Last year’s event was held at the Sherman County Fairgrounds rather than a farm tour, but the event wasn’t well attended. He is open to ideas on how to assist the cattle folks. Stan asked about drone spraying for junipers. Jacob responded that he wasn’t sure if drones were being used for junipers because it is hard to get spray to penetrate the junipers. On February 18th, there will be a Master Gardeners presentation about defensible space. Jacob is working on an Extension publication regarding fuel breaks.
- d. Wy’East RC&D** – Robert was unable to attend the meeting.

Committee Reports

- a. Audit Committee** – no updates.
- b. Facilities Committee** – no updates.
- c. Watershed Council Updates** – Upcoming Watershed Council Meetings: Fifteenmile – March 25; The Dalles – March 12; Mosier – April 29.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah reported that there are currently 36 grants in progress with roughly \$4 million dollars in grant funding remaining.

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: 3:13 pm – Josh’s SDAO Legacy of Service Award Video was played following the meeting.

Dana Woods