



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board Meeting Minutes – February 6, 2023

**Directors:** Ken Bailey Stan Shephard Phil Kaser  
Larry Powell Shawn Sorensen

**Directors via Teleconference:** Bob Krien

**Directors Absent:** Bill Hammel

**Associate Directors Absent:** Bryce Molesworth

**Staff:** Shilah Olson Jennifer Sampson Josh Thompson  
Abbie Forrest

**Staff via Teleconference:** Karen Lamson Drake Gilbert Samantha Filbin

**Guests:**  
NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist  
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director  
SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus

**Guests via Teleconference:**  
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent  
Wheatland Ins: John Anderson, AAI  
Public: Dan Hazel

**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. Shilah requested to swap the order on the policy reviews and talk about District Cost Share policies first and then board policies.

**Minutes:** Bob asked if there were any additions or corrections to the January board meeting minutes. None were made. *Shawn moved to approve the January 2023 board meeting minutes as presented; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**Treasurer’s Report:** Shilah reviewed the December Treasurer’s Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted there was one large payment to Cascade Well Drilling for the repair on one of the Tygh Valley wells. She also noted a transfer to the Building Reserve Fund, as was budgeted. The Building Reserve Fund is slowly being built up to pay for the loan’s balloon payment in the future, as well as save for construction of a shop. *Ken moved to receive the December Treasurer’s Report; Shawn seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

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

**Wheatland Insurance Renewal Update + Board Q&A**

John shared that he met with Shilah recently and has renewed the District’s insurance as of January. John noted that the worker’s comp policy will renew in July and will no longer be provided by SDIS. SAIF will be providing worker’s comp insurance starting in July and as they are the largest worker’s comp insurer in Oregon, the District will likely see a decrease in rate. John reported he just renewed the District’s pollution policy, which is required for certain grants, and everything looks good on his end. There was discussion on whether the District was carrying enough general liability now that they own the office building, and general concerns about the 15Mile MUS project. John’s opinion was that the liability coverage is sufficient for now, and staff have been working closely with him on the 15Mile MUS to ensure appropriate coverage as the project develops.

**Action Items**

**a. Budget Committee Appointments** – Shilah reported she found five possible candidates for four positions on the budget committee. Jim McNamee agreed to serve another term, and Jason Lewis agreed to serve a term as Dave Wagenblast’s replacement. Bryce Molesworth and Robert Lindell are stepping down from the committee. Lacy Underhill (with Farm Credit Services), Jerod Warnock (a local rancher), and Chris Sorensen (retired from law enforcement) are all willing to serve a term on the budget committee. *Ken moved to appoint Jim McNamee, Jason Lewis, Lacy Underhill, and Jerod Warnock to the budget committee, and appoint Chris Sorensen as an alternate committee member; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**b. Annual Meeting Resolution – Proposed Date April 5, 2023** – Shilah reported as previously discussed, the board preferred to handle the legal requirements of the annual meeting in conjunction with a regular board meeting, and then when the weather is nicer, host a gathering of some kind. It was suggested that at the public gathering, the District still provide a presentation of the financials and the annual report. It was also suggested that Darrell France (Dusty Eddy’s friend and assistant) receive some recognition for his volunteer work on the nursery. *Phil moved to approve resolution #20230206 to have the SWCD Annual Meeting in conjunction with the regular April board meeting; Larry seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**c. Policy Review – Updating Board Policies** – This was tabled until the March meeting due to time constraints.

**d. Cost-Share Requests** – Abbie presented a comparison between current cost share reimbursement rates and a 10% increase per the board’s request in January. This did not include an increase on minimum wage and hand labor as those numbers won’t be available until July. Shilah noted as a point of interest that the rates were originally indexed to diesel prices at the pump, which roughly the same as they were in 2018, and the rates are about the same with the 10% increase. The reimbursement rates only apply to owned/operated equipment, not contracted equipment. Discussion ensued regarding the purpose of the program, the tax base as the program funding source, and inflation. It was noted that the District now bases their reimbursement rates off of FSA’s rates, and this last year only rounded up from FSA’s rates so as to have round numbers. Board consensus was that this program was designed to help subsidize

conservation projects instead of paying for the projects in entirety. It was also noted that the program is increasingly popular, so the rates are clearly agreeable to most. *Ken moved to approve a 10% increase on all cost share reimbursement rates, except for minimum wage and hand labor to take effect July 1, 2023; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

Abbie presented proposed policy changes to the Cost Share program, the same as was presented in January. Discussion ensued regarding cost share qualifications, restrictions, etc. Abbie presented several questions she has received on various projects throughout the years and asked if the board wanted to add policies approving or denying certain types of projects. Board consensus was to leave the official policies open ended and deal with applications on a case-by-case basis. The board did not want to have such stringent policies that someone in an emergency situation would not be able to apply for cost share funding.

Guidance on haul road cost shares was also discussed. There was concern expressed over applicants requesting to use rock from their property instead of purchasing base rock per the haul road guidelines. Board consensus was to leave the policy as it is and deal with these special requests on a case-by-case basis. The board approved by consensus to allow Ryan Clausen to use his own shale rock as base for his current haul road project. Discussion also ensued on the maximum allowable cost for rock (currently at \$2,500), given the current inflation. *Ken moved to increase the haul road maximum to \$3,000, and to split the cost share budget into two funding cycles of 6 months (July-December and January-June) beginning in the 2023-24 fiscal year; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**e. Cost of Living Increase 4.64% retroactive to 1/1/2023** – Shilah reported the federal government has issued a 4.64% COLA increase in the pay schedule and suggested the board implement this for staff retroactive to January 1, 2023, instead of waiting until July and the new fiscal year. Due to Dusty not working many hours, the District is well below budget on personnel expenses, and this will assist with inflation. *Shawn moved to approve implementing the 4.64% COLA salary increase retroactive to January 1, 2023 for all salaried staff; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.* Ken suggested the District may want to consider implementing COLA pay increases in January as opposed to July going forward as well. Shilah will take this into consideration as she works on the budgeting process.

**f. Promotion for Watershed Coordinator retroactive to 1/1/2023** – Shilah nominated Drake for a promotion, which is something that would normally occur in July, but the board is implementing COLA raises as of January 1, she is requesting he receives the promotion as well as of January 1. This raise is in line with the Equal Pay Act and will not put the district over the current approved personnel budget. *Shawn moved to promote Drake, the Watershed Coordinator, to GS8-1 retroactive to January 1, 2023; Ken seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

## **Updates**

**a. Next Meeting** - The next regular meeting is scheduled for March 1st, 2023, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

**b. SDAO Annual Meeting, Sunriver, OR, February 9-12, 2023** – The SDAO Annual Meeting is coming up this week. Shawn, Jennifer, and Samantha are planning to attend. This conference is beneficial for best practices and risk management.

**c. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS)** – Shilah reported they had a really good meeting this morning with OWRD, ODFW, DEQ, and NOAA fisheries on how they would manage the system roles and responsibilities. Josh has been helping with construction oversight. Scott Carlon with NOAA will be our regional contact and will be the lead on safe harbor agreements. Shilah was contacted by Greg Smith’s office last Wednesday for information on the MUS project. He is looking to add the project to the Governor’s budget and possibly secure some funding. Josh invited board members to join him on a site visit to see the project if they were interested.

**d. Mosier Groundwater: Mosier Million #2** – Shilah reported she has the RFP ready to go, she is just having some technical difficulties with OregonBuys – the new Oregon procurement system. She hopes to have the RFP posted this week.

**e. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Josh did not have any progress to report on the Highline Ditch. The project has been delayed due to poor weather and that Wassenmiller had an injury.

**f. 2020 White River Fire & 2022 Miller Road Fire** – Josh reported he has been working with FSA to get the ECP going. Signup has closed, but there was a significant list for total fencing needed. The total request on the Miller Road Fire was for \$2.7 million in fencing at a payment rate of \$5 per foot at a 75% cost share rate. The total distance was 543,875 feet over 13,000 acres. Landowners are concerned with the cost share on their fence, plus many are wanting to reseed. The funding available isn’t going to go very far, so perhaps another OWEB grant will be applied for in the future. Discussion ensued on boundary fencing funding rules.

**g. Policy Review – Personnel Handbook; Landowner Assistance** – Shilah reported this topic is left as a placeholder as staff are still working on the policies.

**h. Operating Capacity Grant Increases & Budget Reallocations** – Shilah reported this topic is left as a placeholder on the agenda. It is part of the District’s ODA capacity grant, which has been spent down, but it is something to keep in mind during the budgeting process. She is also considering how the District uses contingency funds and perhaps developing a policy surrounding that. She will also be remodeling the budget as the Department of Revenue has changed their requirements.

**i. Updating Long Range Plan** – Shilah reported she is very close to completing the updates to the long range plan.

### **Agency Reports**

**a. NRCS (Conservation Plan Review/Approval)** – Emily reported the local working group meeting will be held on February 28<sup>th</sup> from 9am-11am at Cousin’s banquet room. There will be a short presentation and then the floor will be open for input. Rick Fletcher with ODF is going to be presenting on rangeland fire protection. Robert Wallace with Wy’East will also be presenting. She received approval for the Joint Chiefs funding which will be focused on the area west of Dufur, and she is anticipating approximately \$1.2 million coming in over the next couple of years. They were just one of two Joint Chiefs proposals in Oregon that were funded this year. She is also anticipating another influx of funding later this summer from the Inflation Reduction Act, which should be a few million dollars.

**b. FSA** – Lissa reported they had some new programs open on January 23<sup>rd</sup>. One program is the Emergency Relief Program Phase II, which is a revenue-based program. This program has a lot of moving parts, so talk to FSA or go to farmers.gov to see what you need to do. If you think you had losses based on a natural disaster in 2020 or 2021, you will need to know revenue numbers from 2018 and 2019. Farmers.gov has tools you can use to assist with this. The other new program is the Pandemic Assistance Relief Program which is for 2020 only. This program is for an allowable gross revenue loss of greater than 15% from 2018 or 2019, but this program also has a lot of parts to it, so she strongly recommends going to Farmers.gov to see what data you will need. The goal of these programs is to make the producer do the work, but you can also gather the data and come talk to FSA for assistance. They also want to see mostly electronic signatures to try and cut down on the acres of federal records taking up storage space for paper copies. ARC/PLC signup is going on now, with a deadline of March 15<sup>th</sup>. They are finishing up the 2022 NAP payments for losses from last summer. The County CEDT is in the office right now and will be switching with the next one within the next couple of weeks. They did advertise a position announcement to replace Lauren, which has closed, so they will be advertising it again on USA Jobs soon.

**c. OSU Extension** – Jacob reported the new Petersburg RFPA participated in training last week at the CGCC. There will be a Wildfire training class tomorrow at CGCC at 11am and on Zoom from 1-4pm, focusing more on defensive space and creating field breaks. The Oregon State Fire Marshall will be there to discuss defensible space mandates, including mandates for more rural areas. This will partially satisfy OSHA training requirements for producers. Jacob will also be hosting a Farm Succession Planning course on March 13<sup>th</sup>, held at CGCC. On March 13<sup>th</sup>, from 9am-Noon they will offer pesticide training for CPE credits, and then the Succession training will begin at 1pm with Oregon Agriculture Trust. He invited NRCS/FSA/SWCD staff to attend and provide updates on other succession planning options if they are interested. There was discussion on how OSHA was defining a defensible space, and nothing is definite yet as they are still drawing up the maps. There is also debate about agriculture zoning and whether that is exempt or not.

**d. Wy'East RC&D** – Robert was not able to attend the meeting.

### **Committee Reports**

**a. Audit Committee** – The Audit Committee did not review anything this month. Shilah reported the District contracted last summer with Friend & Reagan to perform our fiscal year audits. Now that Carol Friend is retiring, they are restructuring how they do business and intend to bill for actual hours worked on audits, as opposed to the flat base rate which was on our previous contract. They have sent out a proposed new contract, which shows hourly billing rates depending on the seniority level of staff working on the audit and financial statements. This year, the District paid \$13,710 on a contracted base rate of \$10,000. Next year had a contracted base rate of \$10,500 but it will likely cost around \$15,000. Friend & Reagan is now RTO and are the only option locally for special district audits. Otherwise, the next closest auditors are likely out of Portland. *Ken moved to approve the updated contract with RTO; Phil seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

**b. Facilities Committee** – Josh reported they have received three quotes for painting the office, with an apparent low bidder at a little under \$15,000. The possible low bidder will be coming into the office tomorrow to make sure we're on the same page and that he received the same information as the other bidders. The whole office interior, except for the old Fisheries office will be painted. This will likely be done in a phased approach and what works with staff schedules. Updating the interior paint is a requirement of USDA and the building is overdue. Josh recommended having a facilities committee meeting before the next board meeting to talk about moving forward on the shop and changes in the parking lot. He would like them to consider acquiring an estimated bid so it can be added to the 2023-24 budget.

**c. Watershed Council Updates** – Drake reported the Mosier Watershed Council met a couple of weeks ago and it was the last meeting for Kris and Bryce as co-chairs. Unfortunately, there were not enough attendees there to elect new co-chairs, so they are having a special meeting this Wednesday. Staff are still working on the Bakeoven Watershed upland enhancement project. Implementation will hopefully begin in the spring. Activities in the White River Watershed were discussed by Josh earlier in the Highline Ditch and fire restoration topics. In The Dalles Watershed, Drake needs to meet with Ken and Steve to refine the sampling plan for E.coli monitoring. The Fifteenmile Watershed Council will have their next meeting in early March. And all staff are actively working on the Fifteenmile MUS.

**d. OAHP/SWCC** – Ken reported he has nothing new to report on OAHP. The SWCC is meeting Wednesday and Thursday this week and are still discussing director eligibility. They will be meeting at the Clackamas SWCD and will hopefully receive tours of their facilities.

#### **District Manager Report**

**a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah reported the work plan and grant status reports were emailed out this morning. Things are on track on the work plan. The Mosier Deep Well has been checked off the list and the grant was closed out. The highline ditch project received an extension, so hopefully that will be completed this year. The District currently has 32 active grants, two of which are ready for closeout, totaling a little over \$4 million. Of that, \$2.6 million is remaining on those various projects. There are two pending grant applications to OWEB: one for the partnership with Wy'East and one for weed control. Since 1990, the District has completed 332 grants for a little over \$19 million in conservation projects.

**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 asked about any weed control programs we're doing and how we could get Wasco County to fund some of that work. Wasco County does not currently have a weed program, but Sherman SWCD does receive funding from Sherman County for a weed program. Consensus was that if the District decided to develop it's own weed program, it would likely be very popular and would need funding and perhaps a dedicated employee. It was suggested this be discussed with the budget committee.

**Adjourned: 3:06 PM**

Jennifer Sampson