



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District  
Board Meeting Minutes – September 10, 2025

**Directors:** Bill Hammel Larry Powell  
Phil Kaser Jeff Crump Stan Shephard

**Directors Absent:** Shawn Sorensen Bob Krein

**Staff:** Shilah Olson Dana Woods Abbie Forrest  
Drake Gilbert Allie Marker Holly Miles  
Ryan Bessette Dean Dark

**Guests:**

NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist  
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director  
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus  
Wasco SWCD: Ken Bailey, Director Emeritus  
Friends of The Gorge: Francis Fischer and Sara Woods

**1:01 PM Call to Order**

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions or changes to the agenda. Shilah noted one change and asked that the draft letter to the Wasco County Court be added to the agenda as Action Item E.

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

**Treasurer’s Report:** Shilah reviewed the July Treasurer’s Report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. Phil asked if the 15Mile Fish monitoring is reimbursed. Shilah responded that it is reimbursable under the OWEB grant which has 2 years remaining. Bill commented that it would be nice to hear about the results of the monitoring. Drake responded that the District can see if Derek (ODFW) would be available to come to a meeting to discuss the results with the Board. Phil commented on the electric bill for the nursery and asked if the District is watering. The nursery contains several varieties of plants and shrubs, some leftover from previous plant sales and Scott does have a watering system set-up. Stan commented that he thought that the District did away with the feral pig project. Shilah confirmed that and noted that the project should be closed out. *Stan moved to approve the Treasurer’s Report for July; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry, Jeff and Stan voting in favor.*

Shilah then reviewed the August Treasurer’s Report, noting beginning balance, income, expenses, account and fund balances. Phil asked if the US Forest Service Funds have to have their

own audit and would the District be involved. Shilah responded that outside grantors typically conduct audits through their own agencies, and the District may or may not be involved. As an example, she noted that OWEB has performed audits of grant funds in the past. In order to receive the funds, the District would have already provided receipts for any reimbursable expenses but OWEB could possibly ask for payroll records or additional information pertaining to expenses. *Phil moved to approve the Treasurer's Report for August; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry, Stan and Jeff 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:** There were six District Cost Share Applications to present. Friends of The Gorge were in attendance, so Abbie presented their application first. Francis Fisher of Friends of The Gorge was at the meeting to talk about the project. Friends of The Gorge manages the Mt. Ulka preserve above the golf course, and they are working on preserving native plants and eliminating invasive weeds. This cost share request would help fund the control of invasive Rush Skeletonweed and planting native seed in areas that were heavily impacted by the Rowena Fire in June. Their intention would be to hire the SWCD to do the spray work. Ryan asked about what is included in the seed mix that they plan on using. Francis responded that they would be using BFI Native Seeds. BFI is based in Moses Lake and the mix would consist of 80% grasses and 20% forbs. Ryan asked if it was the plan to seed in the fall. Francis responded that the plan is to spray now to October and seed during October and November. *Phil motioned to approve the district cost share application as presented for Friends of The Gorge; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry, Stan and Jeff voting in favor.*

The next three applications were combined as a group for approval.

**T. Myers / Wamic Recreation** – Application is for a haul road project. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

**L. Lindell** – This application is for a haul road in a heavy use area. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

**D. Bridges** – The application is for a rainwater harvesting project. The amount that is being requested is \$4100.

*Jeff moved to approve all three district cost share applications as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry, Stan and Jeff voting in favor.*

**Avian Lake Ranch – Stan Shephard** – This application is for a haul road project. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested. Stan Shephard declared a conflict of interest and recused himself from the vote. *Phil motioned to approve the district cost share application as presented for Avian Lake Ranch; Jeff seconded. Motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry and Jeff voting in favor.*

**B. Hazel** – This application is for phase 2 of a haul road project. The first phase was approved in 2021 and funded in 2023. The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase would continue the road past the house towards Rock Creek. Abbie recommended that this request be tabled until she is able to go out and take a look at the site.

**b. Paid Leave Oregon Policy for SDAO Best Practices Program** – A Draft Paid Leave Oregon policy was provided for the Board’s consideration. Having this policy in place will enable the District to be eligible for the last 2% Best Practices premium discount, bringing the total eligible discount to the full 10% that’s available. The Draft policy as well as the Draft Employer Notification form were created using a template that was provided on the SDAO website in their resource library. The employer notification is not mandatory, but an employee would face a decrease in benefit for not providing the recommended notice. *Jeff made a motion to adopt the Paid Leave Oregon Policy and Employer Notification Form as written; Larry seconded. The motion carried with Bill, Phil, Larry, Stan and Jeff voting in favor.*

**c. FY2024-2025 Annual Report** – Abbie reported that the fiscal year 2024-2025 Annual Report is complete. A copy of the report was sent to Board members prior to the meeting. The Watershed Council Annual Report was included as well.

**d. FY 2023-2024 Audit Presentation & FY 2024-2025 Audit Update** – Shilah reviewed the fiscal year 2023-2024 Audit, noting income, expenses and financial position. The District received an unmodified opinion with two deficiencies noted. The District will now submit a Plan of Action to the Secretary of State’s office to address the noted deficiencies. The Letter to the Governing body was reviewed. Shilah & Dana expressed disagreement with Pauly Rogers’ characterization that staffing changes within the SWCD were the primary cause of the report’s delay, noting that all requested materials were provided promptly and follow-up efforts were consistently made throughout the audit process.

**e. Draft Letter to The Wasco County Court** – Prior to the meeting, a draft letter was sent to the Board members for their review and feedback. The letter, signed by Shilah, was addressed to the Wasco County Court advocating for a timely trial in the case of Josh Thompson. Phil commented that he has no objections to the letter and asked Shilah if she has talked with the Court or if this letter is going to blind-side them. Shilah noted that she did have some discussions early on and she did not think that this letter would come as a surprise. Stan also commented that there are several people in the Wamic area that are also writing letters. Consensus of the Board was that there are no objections to the letter and would like to see a Board signatory line added.

## **Updates**

**a. Next Meeting** – The next regular meeting is scheduled for October 8, 2025, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

**b. OACD Meeting & Conference – Pendleton, Oregon Oct 21-23, 2025**– Shilah communicated to the Board that if anyone is interested in attending, let her or Dana know and they can assist with registration. Ken commented that OACD would be a good organization to get involved in the audit challenges at a statewide level.

**c. Summer Intern Report to Board** – Holly thanked the Board for the opportunity to intern with the District and reported that she had a great summer, learned a lot, and appreciated the chance to build meaningful connections. She shared that she also interned with Deschutes River Alliance and introduced their executive director to Shilah, noting the potential for future collaboration. Holly is returning to Oregon State University to complete her final year and expressed gratitude for the experience.

**d. 15mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget**– Drake reported that he applied for an OWEB Grant for the second round of pilot testing to start August 2026.

**e. FAST 2025 Summary**– Drake commented that there is not a lot to report. There were a couple of hot periods shouldered by cooler periods. There have been no alerts this summer. Drake and Abbie met with Washington Water Trust, who has money available to pay for in-stream leases and permanent water purchases. Drake and Abbie are both interested in the valuation process and how you put a value on water. Stan asked if the fires this year have affected the water levels. Drake responded that he's not sure if fires affect the ground water level.

**f. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2** – Drake reported that well drilling has started again. The well drillers are running behind schedule for various reasons. For this particular well, they have had to drill 100 feet deeper than what was anticipated. There is one more well to be drilled with the Business Oregon funding. Stan asked how many feet and how many dollars? Drake responded that this well was bid at 270' with an estimated cost of a little over \$159k. The completed depth is 390' at a cost of a little over \$180k.

**g. Weed Program Update** – Shilah reported that both Scott and Dean are doing great work at tracking down funding for the program. Scott sent his update to Shilah to share with the Board, he's been working on the State Weed Board Grant, working on a Ravenna Grass infestation in town, doing work on the upper BLM Grant and spraying Skeleton Weed near Rowena. Dean reported that he has treated over 55 net acres this year via backpack sprayer, and 1000 gross acres treated. The ODA grant dollars are almost completely spent. Noted that he'll be spraying Skeleton Weed for the rest of fall. Bill asked what they are using for Skeleton Weed. Dean responded that they are using OpenSight and it seems to be working pretty well. ODFW is working on getting Dean a new UTV for use next season.

**h. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Shilah reported that quite a bit of progress has been made since the last meeting. The Wassenmiller pump and pump house have been installed. The landowner has been having difficulty with electrical contractors. Phil asked what exactly the electrician needs to do. Shilah responded that the electrician needs to run the wire across the field to the site. The power pole to pump electrical will be done by Wasco Electric. For the Simer property, the fish screen is still in process. ODFW has all of the readings that they need to return to the design process.

**i. Fires: CWDG Grant, 2024 Larch Creek Funding, 2025 Recap** – CWDG project is underway. The Defensible Space Pilot Project is being worked on by the contractor. There is also a contract in place with MCFR for their seasonal staff to complete some of the work. The MCFR seasonal staff funding ends October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Shilah and Chris Grant with MCFR are working on creative solutions to keep the seasonal staff longer, possibly bring them on at the District for 90 days. The

2024 Larch Creek funding has been secured. The District will work with Chase Brown on the wildlife area work.

**j. USFS Fifteenmile Creek Large Wood Enhancement-** Shilah reported that this project is complete. A total of 233 logs were dropped over a two day period. Phil asked where exactly the project was. Shilah noted that it started at Penny Bridge and went upstream two miles.

**k. East Cascade Oak Partnership-CR Surveys, Block Grant, USFS, ODFW –** Shilah reported that the cultural resources surveys are complete. The District is the pass-through entity, so now waiting on next steps. The Block Grant was written and shelved. Shilah and Abbie worked two days with Chase Brown of ODFW on an oak habitat restoration and conifer removal grant. The East Cascades Oak Partnership is focused on honing in on where the legacy oaks are at. Pat commented that it's interesting that 50 years ago, we were trying to figure out how to get rid of oaks.

**l. Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program –** The new PSP Grant for the new biennium is in place. There is funding in this biennium to hire a consultant to look at some different alternatives including BMP recommendations and evaluating engagement strategies. Three Mile Creek will be dropped as a testing site due to safety issues and the focus will be on Mill Creek.

**m. Retaining Legal Counsel – Sagebrush Legal LLC –** Shilah met with Joanna Lyons-Antley and feels that she would be a good fit for representing the District in legal matters, so the Contract to retain her services has been signed.

**n. Updating Long Range Plan & SWCD Employee Handbook –** Shilah reported that the Draft long range plan is almost ready to be sent out for review. Employee Handbook updates and revisions are ongoing.

### **Agency Reports**

**a. NRCS –** Emily reported that they are working on closing out the fiscal year. They are working on 5 new CSP projects and they'll be closing out 2027 with 137 contracts total. Phil asked about the status of CRP. Emily deferred to Lissa who indicated that she did not know if there would be new sign ups next year.

**b. FSA –** Lissa reported that there is emergency grazing available for drought noting that producers should be sure to work with FSA and NRCS first. Brad can assist with grazing requests. Stan asked why it took so long for this to be available. Lissa responded that we need to be in D2 drought status and that happened in August. Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) is ongoing for Stage 1, Stage 2 will be coming soon for producers that experienced shallow losses or those that did not have crop insurance. South County election ballots will go out in November.

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

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

### **Informational Reports**

**a. Internal Financial Review** – No updates at this time. Phil commented that all of his questions have already been answered.

**b. Facilities Status** – Shilah reported that Wy'East has moved out of the building, and that the weed crew has moved over to that space. AKS is working on the shop expansion and they plan to be at the next meeting for a presentation.

**c. Watershed Council Updates** – Drake provided information regarding upcoming Watershed Council meetings: White River and Bakeoven will be October 2, The Dalles is scheduled for October 6. Drake proposed October 14<sup>th</sup> for the Fifteenmile meeting. Neither Bill or Phil had any objections to that date and asked Drake to go ahead and schedule it. Mosier will meet in October as well but there is no meeting date set yet.

#### **District Manager Report**

**a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status** – Shilah reported the work plan progress is on track and the grant status report is included in the meeting packet. The District currently has 37 active grants and eight pending applications.

**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 3:15 pm**