



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – December 11, 2024

Directors: Bill Hammel Phil Kaser Larry Powell
Ken Bailey Bob Krein Stan Shephard

Directors Absent: Shawn Sorensen

Staff: Shilah Olson Dana Woods Abbie Forrest
Drake Gilbert Ryan Bessette

Staff via Teleconference: Karen Lamson Samantha Filbin

Guests:

NRCS: Dellaina Morse, Soil Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent
Wasco SWCD: Pat Davis, Director Emeritus
Public: Charlie Ernst
Steve Springston

1:03 PM Call to Order

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. Shilah noted there were no changes to the agenda but that she would provide a brief update regarding the weed program since Dean and Scott were not at the meeting.

Minutes: Bill asked if there were any additions or corrections to the November regular board meeting minutes. None were made. *Ken moved to approve the November regular board meeting minutes as presented; Larry seconded. Motion carried.*

Treasurer’s Report: Shilah reviewed the November Treasurer’s Report, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. She noted one large expense to Cascade Well Drilling related to the Mosier Million 2 project. Also noted were two substantial receipts received related to Mosier Million 2 and ODFW Lower Deschutes Grass Treatment. Shilah noted that she is planning on moving some funds from the checking account to the LGIP account to earn a better interest rate. Stan asked about the current LGIP interest rate. Shilah noted that the current rate was 4.85%. *Stan moved to receive the Treasurer’s Reports for November; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

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

Action Items

a. District Cost Share Requests – Abbie presented three cost share applications:

Clausen – Application for haul road. Abbie has reviewed and feels that this project can be completed in one phase. The maximum of \$3000 is being requested.

Phil and Mary Ann Kaser – This application is for upgrading irrigation system from handline to a pivot and two wheel lines. Also replacing the current pumps with a new pump and a variable frequency drive. Project is being done through an NRCS EQIP contract. Funds that are being requested is for the portion not paid for with the EQIP contract. The packet includes all vendor estimates. Requested amount is \$7500.

R. Mobley – This application was for Juniper removal at a couple of locations throughout a 75 acre area. Requested amount is \$6050.

Phil Kaser declared a conflict and recused himself from voting on Project #2.

Bill called for vote on District Cost Share requests 1 and 3 (Clausen and Mobley). *Ken moved to approve the two district cost share applications for Clausen and Mobley; Stan seconded. Motion carried.*

Bill then called for a vote on District Cost Share request 2 (Kaser). *Stan moved to approve the district cost share applications for Kaser; Larry seconded. Motion carried. Phil Kaser abstained from voting.*

b. Approve COLA for Staff Effective January 1, 2025 – Shilah mentioned that each year, she requests a COLA for staff that typically mirrors the increase that Federal employees would receive. She has been watching and it appears that there is nothing solid yet as far as the Federal increase, but it is looking like it will be between 2.0% and 2.5%. Shilah is requesting a 2.5% increase. *Phil moved to approve a 2.5% COLA for staff effective January 1, 2025; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

c. Raise Health Benefit Stipend from \$146.94/mo to \$150/mo – Shilah also requested a slight increase to the monthly health benefit stipend. *Stan moved to approve increasing the monthly health benefit stipend to \$150; Larry seconded. Motion carried.*

d. Fifteenmile Groundwater Issues – Drake reported that he and Shilah had met with Nate Stice from the Governors Office of Regional Solutions on Friday December 6th. This meeting opened the door to bring up groundwater issues and Rowena well issues. Nate was going to take the information to the next meeting with the Governor's office. There is potential for some possible emergency funding.

Charlie Ernst and Steve Springston were in attendance to express their continued frustration with the groundwater declines well issues. Extensive discussion ensued. Charlie reported that OWRD would be sending someone out on Friday December 13th to do some water level measurements at several properties. They shared that County Commissioner Phil Brady wanted to be available during the testing on the 13th but is not able to be at any of the testing sites until

1 pm. Drake did express that he feels that OWRD is the proper agency for Steve and Charlie to deal with on this issue. Charlie expressed that he feels that the aquifer has been overallocated and feels that the State can correct the problem now rather than “kicking the can down the road”.

Pat expressed that he feels that the State’s main concern is the legality of taking away someone’s water rights. Steve indicated that they are not asking for anyone’s water rights to be taken away, just slowed down enough that all can coexist. He indicated that there are no rules for backing down usage as water levels decrease. There is no groundwater regulation as there is with surface water. Steve indicated that he can currently pump his well dry in 9 minutes.

Steve requested a spot on the agenda at the next SWCD meeting so that he can provide updates.

Updates

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

b. SDAO Annual Meeting and Conference, Feb 6-9, 2025, Bend – Shilah is registered for the Conference. It is open to all Board and Staff to attend. Josh Thompson’s family will be attending the banquet dinner on Saturday February 8th to accept a Legacy of Service Award in Josh’s honor. SDAO will provide one complimentary dinner and the District will cover the cost for the rest of the family.

c. Office Administrator Position Update – Introduce Dana Woods – Dana was most recently with Wy’East RC&D. She was the Office Manager for almost 14 years with Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue and was Finance and Operations Manager at Mid-Columbia Economic Development District. She brings almost 18 years of Local Government experience to the District.

d. FY2023-24 Audit – Shilah reported that there are no new updates at this time. Jennifer did a lot of the “heavy lifting” before she left, now we are just waiting to hear from the auditors.

e. Fires: 2024 Season, 2020 White River, 2022 Miller Road, Co. Grant – The 2022 Miller Road Fire work has been completed and approved by OWEB. The District is working with Chase Brown from ODFW for the work in the White River Wildlife Area OWEB grant. Work on the White River Fire includes herbicide application and seeding purchase. Hope to have this project wrapped up by Spring. The County Grant is a Community Wildfire Defense Grant through USFS that will focus on fire mitigation rather than repair after a fire. Areas of focus will be Juniper Flat, Tygh Valley and Wamic. A company by the name of Land & Brush Control has started some of the roadside brush clearing work. There is nothing on the radar for 2024 fire season but the District did assist our Federal partners initiate programs. Larch Creek Fire is not specifically included as part of the County Grant but a portion of its burn scar is in the Grant area. Shilah noted that there was OWEB State funding available for the 2020 and 2022 fires but, so far, there is no OWEB funding for the 2024 fires.

- f. Highline Ditch Elimination** – Shilah reported that the project is moving forward and progress has been made towards project completion, which is currently projected to be in the Fall of 2025. To date, project completion includes transfer of water-rights, four wells drilled and irrigation upgrades. Stan had questions regarding well capacity and ability to support pivot line that landowner wants to install. Discussion ensued.
- g. Mosier Groundwater Restoration & Mosier Million #2** – Drake reported that he did two site visits with the well driller. Two sites have been chosen for domestic well work in late May/early June.
- h. 15mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget** – Drake reported that he is waiting for the final **report from GSI, which includes input from Salini with OSU and Jason with GSA.** It should be here by the end of December.
- i. County Weed Control Efforts & Lower Deschutes CWMA** – The District has received partner funding to help cover Dean’s position. Scott and Dean are currently attending a vegetation management conference. Both have been working on grant writing activities to secure continued weed control funding.
- j. Director Elections & Board Succession Planning** – Director elections are complete, and the results have been certified. Newly elected Director Jeff Crump will start after January 1st. Emily Stranz is working on compiling the information that she has gathered from her conversations with Board members.

Agency Reports

- a. NRCS** – Dellaina reported that the EQIP assistance application deadline was the end of November – they are at 63 and still counting. NRCS is assisting FSA with ECP. NRCS has a local workgroup planning meeting scheduled for January 7th.
- b. FSA** – Lissa reported on a new program that opened December 10th called MASC (Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops). They have not received a lot of information yet –they are working through the details as they go. The application deadline for this program is January 8th with no late file provisions. Acreage reports for fall planted crops are due December 15th. Because that is a Sunday, producers will actually have until December 16th to report. Fruit acreage reports are due January 15th. ECP sign up ended December 9th. Lissa also reported that their new FSA staff member will be starting Monday December 16th. His name is Brad Pickering and he will be filling Martha’s old position.
- c. OSU Extension** – Jacob shared a sample of cotton-batting cudweed. This is a native plant to North America in the Sunflower family and is starting to show a presence in the wheat in Sherman County. Because of the furry texture of the leaves, a good surfactant is required to penetrate the leaves. Jacob will be holding pesticide trainings December 17th at CGCC and December 19th in Moro. There will be a Farm 1st Aid training on January 15th at CGCC from 12:30 to 5:00. Jacob also left AgriStress informational handouts. These handouts include contact information, in English and in Spanish, for the AgriStress Helpline for people in the agricultural community.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Robert was unable to attend this meeting because he was at Groundwater Week in Las Vegas.

Committee Reports

a. Audit Committee – No comments at this time.

b. Facilities Committee – Shilah sent an email to Committee members to see about scheduling a meeting to figure out where Josh left off in regard to building a shop. Bill recommended future cross-training in areas that the District is struggling with since Josh's passing. Phil asked if the District is still receiving assistance from Sherman County. Shilah indicated that both Sherman County and Gilliam County have been extremely supportive during this transitional period while the District considers what the future of Josh's position looks like. Ken expressed that the Assistant Manager position is valuable and that now is the time to be thinking about that as we move into the budget process.

c. Watershed Council Updates – Drake's meeting with Wasco County regarding groundwater issues was the main update. The Dalles Watershed and Fifteenmile Watershed meetings will both be held in January.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah reported the grant tracking spreadsheet is included in the meeting packets. Currently, the District is working on 38 active Grants totaling \$6.4 million dollars. Since 1990, the District has done work on 351 grants.

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: 3:00 pm

Dana Woods