



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Director's Succession Plan

Adopted XX, 2025 *Draft v.1*

Objective of Succession Plan

The Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District (Wasco SWCD, District) Board of Directors (Board) is a 7-person board made up of elected and/or appointed community members who volunteer to provide leadership and governance direction aimed at furthering the Wasco SWCD mission to *work cooperatively with others to promote and encourage conservation and wise use of natural resources.*

The following pages outline the roles, responsibilities, positions, and terms for Board Directors (Directors), as well as the needs and process for recruiting and onboarding new Directors. This document provides a framework to proactively plan for and support leadership transitions in a manner that ensures continued stability, governance, and strategic direction, while prioritizing recruitment and retainment of the diverse skills, expertise, and community representation that is vital to achieving Wasco SWCD's mission.

Role

The roles and responsibilities of Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) boards are unique. In addition, each SWCD must follow statutory requirements directed from the State of Oregon and Directors should be familiar with the scope and limitations of Board and Director responsibilities. The following section provides a high-level summary to help inform the succession planning process. For a comprehensive understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the SWCD Board and Directors refer to the [Oregon Department of Agriculture Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District Guidebook](#), which describes the statutes, requirements, and best practices for SWCD Boards and Directors.

General duties and responsibilities of the Wasco SWCD Directors include regular attendance, preparation for, and participation in Board meetings, awareness of local conservation issues and concerns, and representation and promotion of Wasco SWCD programs with community members, organizations, and with local and regional governing bodies. The Board works collaboratively with District staff and partners to identify needs, programs, and services reflective of the Wasco SWCD's mission, builds those needs into long range plans, and supports District staff in implementation via annual workplans. The Board provides oversight, strategic planning, and direction to the Wasco SWCD.

Board Commitments

Over the years, the Wasco SWCD Board has been successful in working together with District staff and partners to identify, plan for, and implement programs and services that address a wide range of land management and conservation needs. Their success is grounded in the Directors' individual and collective commitment to:

- Provide guidance, strategic direction, and oversight for the implementation of the District's programs.
- Actively engage with communities throughout all zones within the District, through participation in different forums and community events.
- Honor what is important to community members and seek to actively represent the community's broad range of interests and needs.
- Treat each other, staff, partners, and community members with respect, and recognize the value of diverse viewpoints, life experiences, and expertise.
- Support a collaborative approach, listen to and learn from others, and actively seek opportunities to leverage efforts that further the Wasco SWCD mission.
- Encourage continued learning of staff by supporting opportunities for skills building and professional development.

These commitments reflect the values of the Board and focus on leadership, collaboration, and respect to ensure an inclusive, effective, and community-focused organization. As new Directors join the Board, shared commitment to these values aligns future leaders with the mission and culture of the organization, while creating space for new and different perspectives and backgrounds.

Positions

The Wasco SWCD Board includes five Zone Directors and two At-Large Directors; eligibility criteria for these positions are mandated by the State of Oregon and are as follows:

- Zone Directors must be registered voters and reside within the zones they represent in the district. In Wasco County, they must also:
 - Own or manage 10 or more acres of land in the zone they represent and be involved in the active management of the property. Or,
 - Serve at least one year as a Director or Associate Director of a conservation district and have a conservation plan approved by the conservation district.
- At-Large Directors are not required to own or manage land; however, they must live within the district and be a registered voter.

Zone and At-Large Directors are elected through the November General Election process in even-numbered years or, in cases of a vacancy, can be appointed by majority vote by the Board.

To encourage broader access, engagement, and to address gaps in skills or experience, the Wasco SWCD also includes Associate Directors and Director Emeritus (past Directors). These positions are non-voting members; however, they bring perspective, expertise, and institutional knowledge to the Board and offer an avenue to broaden the depth of the Board. Associate Directors may be appointed by the Board to be a Director if there is a vacancy and they meet requirements for the position.

Additional details on Directors positions are available via the Oregon Department of Agriculture's SWCD Guidebook:

<https://www.oregon.gov/oda/programs/NaturalResources/SWCD/Documents/GuidebookChapter3.pdf>

Individual Directors can be designated via Board resolution, motions or policy, to serve specific roles and have specific authority, such as fiscal oversight or signing documents. The Wasco SWCD Board has identified the following positions and authorities to support Board responsibilities:

- **Chair** – The Board Chair is responsible for facilitating Board meetings and the process of conducting business. During meetings, the Chair solicits input and perspectives from Directors and recommendations from staff, ensures all Directors have a chance to weigh in on decisions, and entertains motions. The Chair is also tasked with appointing committees, representing the District in public relations and events, and assisting with onboarding new Directors.
- **Vice Chair** – The Vice Chair assumes Chair responsibilities as needed when the Chair is unable to perform their duties.
- **Secretary** – The Secretary works with District staff to support secretarial or clerical functions such as preparing and reviewing Board minutes, preparing informational materials and agendas, correspondence, reports, and public meeting notices.
- **Treasurer** – The Treasurer works with staff to support fiscal management and transparency, including preparation and review of financial statements, budgets, and audits.

The Wasco SWCD Board meets monthly on the second Wednesday; the Board does not meet in August due to harvest schedules. Typically, Board meetings are 2 hours long and require 1-2 hours ahead of the meetings to review materials. Meeting materials are sent out via email a week in advance of the meeting. Directors that are appointed to special positions dedicate additional hours to fulfill their specific role.

Terms

“In Oregon, conservation district directors are elected in the November General Election held in even numbered years. Directors serve four-year terms. Director terms are staggered so that all positions are not typically elected simultaneously. Staggered terms help provide continuity on the board and maintain operational consistency. A conservation district board may appoint a person to fill a vacant director position between elections” (OR Department of Agriculture, SWCD Guidebook, 2022)

Current Board Directors, positions, and terms are as follows:

Position	Director	Term Ends
Zone 1	Larry Powell	2028
Zone 2 & Secretary/Treasurer	Shawn Sorenson	2026
Zone 3 & Chairman	Bill Hammel	2028
Zone 4	Stan Sheppard	2026
Zone 5 & Vice-Chairman	Bob Krein	2028
At Large	Phil Kaser	2026
At Large	Jeff Crump	2028
Director Emeritus	Pat Davis	n/a

Search and Recruitment Plan

Over the years, Wasco SWCD has relied on word of mouth to recruit Board members and has faced challenges finding new, qualified candidates. Consequently, existing Board members have served for multiple terms and if they do not apply for another term, there would not be any candidates on the ballot. Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) encourages Boards to actively seek qualified people to be candidates for director positions, noting that it is “in the best interest of the conservation district to have at least one candidate for each position listed on the ballot” (ODA, 2022).

To support a more robust search and recruitment process, aimed at broadening the range and diversity of backgrounds, expertise, and community representation of potential candidates, the Board will actively recruit potential candidates using the process outlined below.

1. *Seek to expand the breadth of experience and expertise represented on the Board.*

- Conduct annual Board skills assessments to identify current strengths and gaps in Board skills, expertise and representation. See Appendix A: Board skills matrix, a tool to help conduct the assessment.
- Focus recruitment efforts to intentionally supplement and expand the experience and expertise of the Board, including outreach to people with skills and knowledge identified in the 2024 skills assessment:
 - Small scale farmers
 - Backyard gardeners
 - Teachers/educators
 - Legal professionals
 - Conservation/ biological science practitioners
 - Engineers
 - Financial professionals
- Actively work to increase the age, gender, and cultural diversity on the Board.
- Encourage potential candidates within the City of The Dalles and other urban centers by providing outreach, education, and increasing community awareness of Wasco SWCD programs and opportunities.

2. *Develop a roster of quality candidates and share information about the Board and District.*

- Reach out to partner agencies and organizations, landowners, and community members to identify a list of potential candidates.
- Identify a subset of potential candidates from the list who are ready, willing, and available to join the Board on short notice in case of unexpected vacancies due to resignations, health issues, or emergencies.
- Actively outreach to potential candidates to invite them to Board meetings and Wasco SWCD events to gain familiarity with the District programs and Board responsibilities.
- Encourage candidates to apply in the November elections; provide election information and application packet to potential candidates.
- Review the list annually to ensure that it is up to date and comprehensive.

3. *Utilize multiple tools and techniques to increase community awareness of Wasco SWCD and opportunities to serve on the Board.*

- Develop and regularly update outreach materials that describe the District and Board of Directors, ways to learn more about them all, and opportunities to get involved. Distribute these materials broadly throughout the District.
- Create a dedicated page on the Wasco SWCD's website that outlines the roles and responsibilities of the District, Board of Directors, how to become a Director, application materials, and relevant guiding documents, such as Wasco SWCD bylaws and the ODA SWCD Guidebook.
- Use social media, newsletters, print media, District and partner websites, and radio to share information about the District and Board, candidate application process, and timelines.

- Provide outreach presentations and materials to targeted programs and organizations, such as:
 - Columbia Gorge Community College’s biology, environmental studies, political science, and government programs.
 - Gorge Farmers Collective.
 - Landowners with conservation plans within the District.
 - Local conservation and agricultural groups (Master Gardeners, OSU Extension, Forest Collaboratives, etc.).
 - City Councils, County Commissioners, the Gorge Commission, etc.
- Conduct community information sessions to raise awareness of upcoming position openings, candidate criteria, and application process ahead of elections.
- Issue a press release and share it with local news outlets, the Chamber of Commerce, and partner organizations.
- Attend community events to network formally and informally with community members, share information, and extend invitations to Board meetings.
- Assign a Director to actively work on outreach and recruitment efforts on behalf of the Board.

4. *Develop a Recruitment Calendar.*

- Create a timeline for ongoing outreach and recruitment efforts. See Appendix B: Draft Recruitment Calendar.
- Create a timeline for the succession process, including notification periods for retiring Directors, position advertising, application, and election processes.
- Plan for phased transitions to allow overlapping terms to support mentoring and knowledge sharing.

Onboarding New Directors

To support a smooth and effective transition of leadership, Wasco SWCD staff and the Board Chair intentionally onboard new Directors by providing materials electronically ahead of meeting with them in person to review and discuss the information. New Directors are invited and encouraged to attend Board meetings, District events, and to visit the office to gain familiarity with the space and staff. Wasco SWCD staff provide a tour of the District and key projects, and a ‘Board Buddy’ or mentor is assigned to support the new member during their transition. Further, the Executive Director and Board Chair work with the new Director to identify training opportunities to help supplement the Director’s onboarding and learning process.

The checklist below lists important information and materials that is and will continue to be provided to new Directors during the onboarding process, and discussed at the onboarding meeting(s), led by the SWCD Executive Director and Board Chair.

General Information

- History of the District
- Organizational structure, including the SWCD, Board, and watershed councils
- Vision and mission of the District, Wasco SWCD Long Range Plan, goals, and objectives
- Overview of current services, projects, and initiatives and challenges and opportunities that the District is facing
- A list of key partnerships

- Summary of contractual obligations
- Provide links to minutes from previous board meetings
- Provide a list of board members and staff and their contact information

Roles and Responsibilities

- Review roles: Board, Directors, executive director, and staff
- Review committees and their roles
- Discuss expectations for new board members
- Provide copy of or link to [ODA Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District Guidebook](#)
- Provide copy of or link to [SDAO Board Member Handbook](#)
- Provide copy of or link to [OGEC Guide for Public Officials](#) handout
- Provide copy of or link to [Attorney General’s Public Records and Meetings Manual](#)

Policies and Procedures

- Provide District policies, procedures, and ethical guidelines
- Review Board policies, procedures, and ethical guidelines

Financial Management

- Discuss budget process
- Provide current year’s budget
- Provide a copy of most recent annual report and financial statements

Conclusion

This succession plan outlines how the Wasco SWCD and Board supports leadership transitions, continued stability, and strategic direction, while prioritizing recruitment and retainment of the diverse skills, expertise, and community representation that is vital to achieving Wasco SWCD’s mission. As the needs, goals, and objectives of the District evolve over time, the Succession Plan will be reviewed and updated to respond and adapt.

Appendix A: Board Skills Matrix

The Board and Wasco SWCD staff will work together to complete the following table to assess the strengths of the Board and to identify gaps in specific skills and expertise that will help the Board’s focus during candidate recruitment efforts. This matrix should be updated annually to ensure that the skills and expertise of the Board are responsive to the District’s needs, goals, and priorities. The assessment categories (i.e. leadership and governance, financial expertise, etc.) should be reflective of the District’s oversight, strategic direction, and governance needs.

Instructions for Use:

1. Review the assessment categories to ensure that the Board is evaluated on the current and future leadership needs of the District.
2. List Current Board Members: Enter the names of all current board members in the left column.
3. Evaluate Skill Levels: Assess and rate each member’s expertise in each skill area.
 - High: Significant expertise and experience
 - Moderate: Some knowledge and practical experience
 - Low: Limited or basic understanding
4. Identify Gaps: Analyze the matrix to determine areas where skills are strong and lacking.

Board Member Name	Leadership & Governance	Financial Expertise	Legal & Compliance	Conservation Knowledge	Community Engagement	Outreach & Education

Appendix B: Draft Recruitment Calendar

January	February	March	April	May	June
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Directors take Oath of Office (odd years) • Onboarding new Directors (odd years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Board skills assessment (annually) • Onboarding new Directors (odd years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors signal intent for next election cycle (odd years) • Update potential candidate roster (annually) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused recruitment outreach (annually) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused recruitment outreach (annually) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused recruitment outreach (annually)
July	August	September	October	November	December
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate application period opens (even years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate application period closes (even years) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballot write-in requests due (even years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General elections (even years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact new Directors (even years)