



Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District
Board Meeting Minutes – October 9, 2024

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

Directors Absent: Shawn Sorensen

Staff: Shilah Olson Jennifer Sampson Abbie Forrest
Drake Gilbert Dean Dark Scott Susi

Staff via Teleconference: Karen Lamson

Guests:

NRCS: Emily Huth, District Conservationist
FSA: Lissa Biehn, County Executive Director
OSU Extension: Jacob Powell, County Agent

1:00 PM Call to Order

Bill called the meeting to order and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. Shilah noted she accidentally listed ECOP Cultural surveys under action items and updates, so she will cover everything under action items.

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

Treasurer’s Report: Shilah reviewed the July, August, and September Treasurer’s Reports, noting income, expenses, account and fund balances. Stan inquired about who Andrew Spaeth was. Shilah explained he is the facilitator for the Forest Collaborative. Phil inquired about Emily Stranz and the Board succession planning as he has not reached back out to her to complete his part of that. Bill noted he has not reached back out to Emily either. Shilah will ask Emily to reach back out to Bill and Phil. Shilah noted on the September Treasurer’s Report there was a large expense to Cascade Well Drilling for the Mosier Million project, and there was a receipt for the first reimbursement on that project. On the September Treasurer’s Report, Ken noted a high balance in the Checking Account. Shilah planned to move the majority of the balance to LGIP, but was leaving it for now to deal with some large expenses on the Mosier Million project. Phil inquired how long the rental agreement with USDA was contracted for. Shilah reported the USDA rental agreement was for three years, but it had an extension added so it is probably up for renewal in the next year or two. Stan shared that there is a new federal law where if you don’t maintain a savings account at least once a year, the bank has the right to cash you out and take

taxes out as well, and then you have to start over. *Ken moved to receive the Treasurer's Reports for July, August, and September; Phil seconded. Motion carried.*

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

Action Items

a. District Cost Share Requests – Abbie announced that the District received \$100,000 through Google Grants funding, the Tides Foundation, for Urban Conservation Projects. This program will be run the same as regular District Cost Share agreements, but will be targeted towards projects on small acreages in The Dalles/Mosier area. At the July board meeting, Abbie had presented a cost share application from Lance and Misty Stern for rain water harvesting, which the board had tabled in anticipation of this new funding pool. As the Sterns wanted to complete this project before winter, Abbie approved their application without board approval after the funding was secured. Abbie requested the board's forgiveness and approval of Stern's cost share project after the fact. They requested the maximum of \$7,500. *Bob moved to approve the Stern's Urban Cost Share Application; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

Abbie presented six cost share applications:

Smeraglio – This application was for two haul roads, but one section is only 250ft long so Abbie had Smeraglio submit it as one application. Abbie has verified the site and has walked it. She is requesting the maximum of \$3,000.

Horseshoe Bar Cattle Co – Abbie and Scott have been working with Dale Smith, the new owner of the old Mary Mauer Ranch, on a spring development and livestock water project. They both agree it is a good project, and they are requesting the maximum of \$7,500.

B.Markman & J.Markman – Bill and Jeff Markman submitted separate applications for half mile sections of the same road. One application is for the north side of the road and one is for the south, and they plan to meet in the middle. They are requesting the maximum of \$3,000 each. This road has the same owner and is on the same parcel. Board policy is to limit haul roads to one haul road per applicant per year, but Abbie noted the board has allowed multiple entities applications in the past. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was to continue allowing this kind of application as long as it is not being abused. Should that change, the board may need to revisit the policy.

Dahle Orchards – This is for an orchard chipping project. Dahle has done several of these in the past and is requesting \$7,500 for 11.5 acres of chipping. The trees have already been removed and are just waiting to be chipped.

M.Malefyt – Josh was working with Marni Malefyt and the last page of the application is an explanation from her. This application is incomplete because there's no budget, and Marni didn't really know what she was doing either. The project is to replace an existing pipeline that stretches across the Deschutes River and waters a campground. The plan is to replace the pipe, replace sprinklers, etc. Abbie will assist her with a developing a budget and cost list, and suggested she request the full amount of \$7,500.

Phil moved to approve all six district cost share applications; Bob seconded. Motion carried.

Abbie noted she will remove Misty Stern's application from the cost share tracking sheet and make a new tracking sheet for the Urban Cost Share program.

Bob inquired as to how long the cost share haul roads were intended to go before they could reapply and request more gravel. Scott reported that NRCS specifications on a haul road claim the road should last ten years, so in theory, after year ten someone could reapply for the same haul road. Scott plans to take monitoring pictures of previously done haul roads to see how they are holding up over time.

b. RFP for Helicopter Services for 15mile LWD project w/ USFS – Shilah reported they released an RFP for large wood placement on upper Fifteenmile in partnership with the Forest Service. Columbia Helicopters was the only bidder and Josh was in process of negotiating with them. The Forest Service has now taken that over, and Shilah would like to finish negotiating that contract if the board approves. The total contract is for \$116,000 with a possible option to add a few more hours at \$9,000 if needed. This project will likely be done summer of 2025. *Ken moved to authorize Shilah to negotiate the contract with Columbia Helicopters; Bob seconded. Motion carried.*

c. GSI Contract for Mosier GW & Mosier Million #2 Update – Shilah reported the District has been under contract with GSI on the Mosier wells project, but after Josh passed, she asked GSI to pick up some of the work load to keep the Mosier Million #2 project moving forward. They have roughly \$2,000 remaining in their contract, and have unbilled time totaling \$12,000. GSI estimated to complete the project, it would cost them \$28,300. Shilah has \$5,000 remaining in the budget and is requesting the board approve an additional \$23,300 for GSI to keep Mosier Million #2 moving forward. Discussion ensued. Drake reported they currently have four wells drilled, two have been decommissioned and two still need to be decommissioned. *Phil moved to approve an additional \$23,300 towards Mosier Groundwater and extend the contract with GSI for an additional \$28,300; Larry seconded. Motion carried.*

d. GSI Contract for 15Mile MUS – Shilah reported the District received a grant through OWRD for the 15MUS and needed assistance answering ecological flow questions. They asked GSI to assist, which caused them to go \$8,000 over budget to close out that grant. Shilah is requesting forgiveness from the board and an extra \$5,000 or \$6,000 to pay GSI. The grant has roughly \$6,000 in admin funds that can be used to pay GSI. Drake reported the OSU research has been completed and GSI has the final report. They are in process of cleaning up the report before they release it. Overall, the water quality in 15mile creek was better than they were anticipating, and the turbidity is fairly low, so they are currently leaning towards using an inline canister filter on the MUS system. They are also considering other options such as chlorine. *Phil moved to pay GSI up to an additional \$6,000 to cover the additional cost on the MUS; Stan seconded. Motion carried.*

e. Contracting Geovisions for ECOP Cultural Resources Study – Shilah reported this project will be similar to the RFP sent out for helicopter services for the forest service. The District has a grant through OWEB to assist the East Cascades Oak Partnership with contracting for cultural resource studies. The grant was originally going to be run through the Friends of the Columbia

Gorge, but their project manager passed away last spring, and they asked the District to step in at the last minute as the fiscal agent. Shilah is requesting authorization to enter into contracting with GeoVisions on behalf of ECOP for cultural surveys on State and Federal owned land in the Gorge. Discussion ensued. *Ken moved to authorize Shilah to contract with GeoVisions for cultural resource studies for ECOP; Bob seconded. Motion carried.*

f. Health Insurance Renewal – Shilah reported she and staff are in process of the annual health insurance renewal and have received four different rate quotes from Wheatland Insurance via our health insurance broker. Bend Chamber had the highest insurance rates, and Pacific Source excluded some of the staff’s doctors, so she has been comparing Regence BCBS or Moda. Regence will cost approximately \$85,000 for the year and Moda will cost approximately \$80,000. Shilah requested the board’s permission to choose the best fit for staff, even if it is the more expensive option. Discussion ensued. Board consensus was that it may cost \$5,000 or more in time to switch from Regence to Moda and they didn’t think it was worth going to the effort and paperwork of changing providers at this time. *Phil moved to authorize Shilah to re-enroll health insurance with Regence BCBS; Ken seconded. Motion carried.*

g. SDAO Best Practices Checklist – Public Meetings Training (short video) – Shilah reported the required public meetings training is now available. The video was played at the meeting for those who had not yet taken the training.

Updates

a. Next Meeting – The next regular meeting is scheduled for November 13, 2024, at 1:00 PM, at the USDA Service Center and via Zoom.

b. Assistant Manager – Josh Thompson – Shilah shared that this was the first board meeting since losing Josh and she wanted to formally update the board. Josh was driving back to the District office from a meeting and he was in the 2022 Silverado truck when another vehicle crossed the center line and hit his truck head on. The insurance has totaled out the truck and they have already paid the District for it. Shilah did not think we needed to immediately replace the vehicle as they have already been promised a truck from Mosier that will be great for the weed spraying program. The District is under an OSHA investigation and they have everything they need from us and are just waiting on official reports from the police. Oregon State Police (OSP) have completed their investigation and handed everything over to the DA’s office to determine if this was the result of a crime. OSP is still in possession of the District’s truck, and they will keep it until they complete their forensic investigation and the case is adjudicated, with Lieutenant Calloway taking lead.

District staff have been amazing at stepping up and helping where they can. Shilah has also been leaning on consultants and neighboring SWCDs and other partners to keep projects moving forward. Josh was a huge part of the District and had his hands on a lot of things. Staff are still trying to put the pieces back together from managing alarms and door locks, to general building maintenance, and more. She does not think they are ready to create a position description and try to hire someone, and she wants staff to take a step back and see what is needed for that position. Shilah and staff have lessons learned that can be taken moving forward. Bill and Phil suggested that the Board consider naming the office building after Josh as a tribute, but nothing

has been decided yet. Shilah thanked the board for their support during this difficult time. Discussion ensued regarding filling Josh's position. Board consensus was that Shilah should wait, but not too long, and possibly reallocate Josh's projects to existing staff rather than trying to hire someone directly into that position.

c. OACD Annual Meeting & Conference, Oct 14-16, Hood River – Shilah reported the OACD Annual Meeting & Conference will be October 14th-16th next week and is in Hood River. The fee for attending the conference is \$375 for three days, and they are still accepting signups if anyone is interested.

d. Lower Deschutes CWMA – Introduce Dean Dark – Shilah reported the Lower Deschutes CWMA Coordinator position has been filled and introduced Dean Dark. Dean shared he has lived in Sherman County since 2009. He was the federal trapper in Sherman County for 10 years and has a wife and 4 kids, with one just turning 18. He is looking forward to starting a new chapter of his working career. He also shared his wife is the Manager at Frontier Chamber of Commerce out of Condon. Board members introduced themselves.

e. FAST 2024 – Drake reported that it was a mild summer this year so there were no FAST alerts. There was a hot week in July with 6 days over 100 degrees, but the creek was around 20cfs so it attenuated all negative impact from the heat wave. Next year, he and Abbie have been considering offering a five-year FAST contract with an opt out option every year, instead of new contracts every year, in an effort to save staff time. For those enrolled who have a lot of lease changes every year, that wouldn't be an option, but they would offer it to those enrolled with minimal changes from year to year. Discussion ensued.

f. FY2023-24 Annual Report & Audit – Abbie presented the 2023-24 Annual Report to the board and noted that it was sent to the entire SWCD mailing list. The board complimented Abbie on putting together a nice report. Jennifer reported the 2023-24 audit is underway. She has uploaded many documents to the auditors and the last update she heard was that the auditors were in process of reviewing all the documents.

g. Director Elections – Shilah reported there are four director positions up for re-election this year, with only three current directors running. Zone 5 does not have a candidate on the ballot as Bob filed as a write-in candidate. Larry is running for Zone 1, and Bill is running for Zone 3. To date, no one has filed for the At-Large 1 position. Write-in candidates can be filed until October 22nd. Or, if no one runs for the At-Large 1 position, the board can appoint someone who will then have to run for election at the next major election date.

h. Board Succession Planning – Shilah reported Emily Stranz is working for the board on succession planning. This is a requirement of the NACD TA grant and should help with board recruitment going forward. If Emily has reached out and you haven't responded, please do so. Shilah is hoping to have Emily attend the November board meeting, but that can be pushed to a later date if needed.

i. 15Mile Managed Underground Storage (MUS) & Water Budget – Drake reported the Water Budget study was presented at the Fifteenmile Watershed Council meeting recently. OWRD is going to do a water budget study for the Fifteenmile watershed. They are interested in dry wells

in Eightmile and Fifteenmile area as they have seen some pretty pronounced declines in ground water monitoring wells. To support that work, they have put in three stream gauges, and plan to put in two more. They are getting ready to start reaching out to landowners and getting access to properties to complete the work.

j. East Cascade Oaks Partnership Cultural Surveys – Discussed during the ECOP line under action items.

k. Fires: 2024 Season, 2020 White River, 2022 Miller Road, County Grant – Shilah reported there were several fires in the county this summer and staff have been helping NRCS and FSA plan for ECP funding to replace fencing. The District could apply during open solicitation to OWEB for fire assistance, but at the moment they do not have any dedicated funding for this summer's fires. Shilah is working with ODFW to close out the White River Fire grant and may spend the remaining funds on seeding or spraying. The 2022 Miller Road Fire work has been completed. Shilah just needs to get the information from Josh's computer to close that grant out. Abbie and Shilah have been working on the Wildfire Defense grant for South Wasco County for roadside vegetation removal and fencing. Bob suggested OWEB offer funding for preventative measures, such as water tanks. Geo-fencing for cattle was also brought up. Discussion ensued.

l. Highline Ditch Elimination – Abbie and Shilah met with Simers a couple of weeks ago and brainstormed alternatives on how to complete the project. Drake is rapidly learning LiDAR to take over from Josh. Stan asked if Simers even wanted to turn the ditch off. Abbie replied that she thinks an efficient irrigation system will benefit everyone. Stan expressed that he does not agree with this project. Discussion ensued.

m. Chenoweth Creek Restoration Project – Shilah recruited Norie at Gilliam SWCD to assist with permitting on the Chenoweth Creek project. It was questionable as to whether this project would be approved in time, but the District was granted an extension and ODFW has been assisting as well. The project work should occur later this month.

n. Wasco County Fair & 4H Auction – Shilah reported that both she and Josh were planning to go to the Livestock Auction, but there was a bad storm that day so they didn't go. Both Shilah and Josh ended up fighting fire instead. However, Shilah attended the auction the previous year and shared that the 4H kids were very grateful and they received a lot of mentions from the auctioneer. Shilah recommended the board continue to support the Livestock Auction next year.

o. Tree Sale – Jennifer reported the 2025 Tree Sale is now open for orders via the paper form or online, and the new Tree Sale lead is Samantha.

Agency Reports

a. NRCS – Emily reported a summary of the last fiscal year. NRCS awarded \$3.7 million for over 50 projects in Wasco County – double the amount from two years ago. Currently NRCS now has over 160 active contracts in the county that they're managing. This year, they had over 50 applications during the EQIP sign-up. They are in their second to last year of IRA funding (2026 will be the final year). Emily has been funding irrigation projects, and has about 15 applications for irrigation upgrades from wheel lines to pivots. She has hired a GS-11 Resource Conservationist, Michael Cistulli, who will start on November 4th. He currently works for NRCS-

Idaho and has experience with dryland wheat and should provide the agronomy knowledge they have been lacking. On October 19th, there will be a Disaster Fair at the Wasco County Fairgrounds. Emily will not be able to attend but they are going to review defensible space and general emergency preparedness planning. There will be a free lunch for the first 200 attendees.

b. FSA – Lissa reported Martha has accepted a position as a State Conservation Specialist for FSA. So now they are advertising for her open position. Martha will still be in the building, but now she'll be in Josh Hanning's old office. If anyone knows someone interested, the job will be advertised until the 21st of October on USA Jobs. ECP started Monday morning for burned up fences in Wasco and Hood River Counties for 2024. It will have a 60-day sign-up period, ending December 5th. EFRP for timberland on non-industrial private forest signup also started Monday and the deadline is April 4th. Lissa shared no one has reached out yet about ELAP on burned up state or private land, and the deadline to signup is January 30th. Mike Kelly and Amy Kaser are running for County Committee for LAA2. Ballots will come in the mail early November, and you can turn them in until early December. December 15th is the deadline for acreage reporting for fall planted crops.

c. OSU Extension – Jacob reported OSU Extension has had a busy summer. The Farm Manager position in Moro was vacant so Jacob spent much of the summer on a combine. Extension has hired a new Farm Manager, and they started October 1st. Jacob will be working on a couple of research trials this month, and had six different trials in Moro and one in Pendleton. He will likely reduce the number of research trials going forward. Extension's Office Manager position is open in Wasco County. The position is currently open and applications will close October 22nd. There is a Tri-County Hazardous Waste collection event coming up Oct 25th from 10am-2pm. The event is free but they request producers register a week before the event. Steve Kramer and Josh Thompson were previously working to reduce the number of plastic containers laying around the county, and now Steve is looking into developing additional recycling events. Beef Quality Assurance training will be November 13th at the Columbia Gorge Community College from 10am-3pm. This is a free training that is good for three years. Sherman County landowners have been getting approached by solar developers. Jacob has worked with ODFW to put on a solar meeting on November 6th at the Grass Valley Pavilion to walk landowners through the solar approval process. The Extension newsletter will be emailed and printed soon. NRCS in Sherman County has been working with producers to put in fuel breaks. Jacob is working on a grant that is due at the end of this month for trials with three wheat producers.

d. Wy'East RC&D – Robert was unable to attend the meeting. Shilah reported Robert is in Washington DC to meet with Secretary Vilsack. The SWCD was just awarded a grant for almost \$1 million as the fiscal agent for Wy'East. The grant is to increase rural energy resiliency.

Committee Reports

a. Audit Committee – No comments at this time.

b. Facilities Committee – Shilah reported she will have a FAC meeting with Lissa and Emily soon, to discuss building concerns for the District's tenants. Drake has been assisting with learning how to program the door locks and other building items. New solar lights have been installed in the back parking lot. This was an item that SDAO flagged during a walk-through. Josh obtained a grant for the lights, which Ryan implemented.

c. Watershed Council Updates – To be covered in the coordinating board meeting immediately following.

District Manager Report

a. Work Plan Progress & Grant Status – Shilah reported the grant tracking spreadsheet is included in the meeting packets. The District currently has 36 open grants totaling a little over \$6 million, with a little over \$4.8 million remaining. They have two grant applications pending, but one will probably fall below the recommended funding level. Sherman County has pledged some funds to support Dean’s position. Dean is working on an invasive species council grant that’s due next week. It is still early in the fiscal year, but everything seems to be on track aside from setbacks.

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: 3:31pm

Jennifer Sampson