

**WHEELER SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES**

April 22, 2020

The board meeting was called to order by Chairman Holmes at 6:05 p.m. by the clock in the office conference area, located at 40535 Hwy 19, Fossil, Oregon.

<u>Directors</u>	<u>Assoc. Directors</u>	<u>Employees</u>	<u>Others Present</u>
Jeremiah Holmes	Rob Wade	Chase Schultz	Damon Brosnan
Wayne Lindquist		Cassandra Newton	Sandi Hiatt
Kale Haberman		Brooke Moore	
Jason Davis		Bodie Brown	
		Debbi Bunch	

AGENCY REPORTS

Damon Brosnan, NRCS: Damon is currently finishing up CSP renewal applications and helping other offices with their heavy workload. Abby and Jessica (new range-con) are working through EQIP local resource reviews, etc. Due to COVID, only one person can be in the office, all others are working remotely, from home. EQIP has a nice, robust application this year in the Kahler and Butte Creek funding pools – over twenty applications, combined for Wheeler County operators. Also, had operators put in applications for the Ochoco Northslope forestry funding pool.

Civil Rights Affirmation was emailed to Directors. NRCS is required to deliver USDA Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity requirements and information with institutions that participate in or administer USDA federally conducted and/or federally assisted programs. In an effort to fully comply with Federal, Departmental, and Agency governing Civil Rights laws and regulations, this check-list serves as an internal guide to assist with the Civil Rights responsibilities and expectation discussion between NRCS and Partners. All Directors need to sign and return the form to the WSWCD office or to Damon.

Wheeler SWCD, Gilliam SWCD, watershed councils and NRCS were just awarded an RCPP project for \$3.9M to be matched with another \$4M (OWEB, Tribes, ODFW). For Wheeler SWCD, the project takes in the Butte Creek watershed, goes north along the John Day River for the other watersheds that flow into the Lower John Day. There were three RCPP awards in Oregon and this one was the number one ranked RCPP proposal in Oregon, with absolutely no negative comments or criticism during review. Out of the three awarded RCPP projects in Oregon, two are for the John Day region, as the watershed council of the South Fork John Day also received one. It shows the strong partnership amongst everyone in the John Day region.

“The RCPP, combined with FIP and OWEB – there is a lot of conservation money being poured into the John Day and WSWCD should be proud and excited about the opportunities that are coming.”

Sandi Hiatt, ODA: The Capacity Grant has been opened up. There is more fluidity between the District Operations and the Scope of Work funds and the requirement of 25% of the Focus Area is listed for right now. The focus is to keep everyone working and work together right now. Sandi is still waiting to hear a response from OWEB regarding the use of grant funds for the CARES act.

DISTRICT STAFF REPORTS

District Manager: Chase stated that all grants that haven't been award, but were either submitted or recommended for funding are currently paused with OWEB.

Do we have any grants that were recommended for funding that are on pause? The SWCD has one, for Shoofly on the Six Shooter Ranch and the Watershed Council has two large (one monitoring/one restoration) and two small grants.

Are all landowners aware of the pause? Yes, they have all be advised.

Has funding been cut for anything else? Not that we are aware of. We have been told that anything that is already funded will remain secure.

Administrative Assistant: Cassi did not have any additions to the report she provided.

Watershed Council: The John Day Basin Partnership will be meeting via teleconference on May 19th and Lower John Day Work Group will be meeting via teleconference on May 20th.

Field Tech II: Bodie stated the 2020 weed grant agreement has been submitted and he can start on that project. The Tri-County Phase 2 will be completed on time without an extension, as Vince will be completing the spraying this upcoming Monday and Tuesday (04.27-28.2020).

Field Tech I: Brooke did not have any additions to the report she provided.

MONTHLY BUSINESS

Minutes: The February 26, 2020, minutes were presented for review. Director Davis **moved that the minutes from February 26, 2020 be approved**, Director Haberman seconded the motion. The **motion carried unanimously**.

Budget Expense Report: The budget reports dated March 16 and April 13, 2020 were reviewed. Director Lindquist **moved that the budget reports dated March 16 and April 13, 2020 be approved**, Director Davis seconded the motion. The **motion carried unanimously**.

Bills: The check register dated March 1, 2020 to March 31, 2020, was reviewed by the group. The register was signed by District Manager, Chase Schultz and Chairman, Jeremiah Holmes on March 30, 2020. The April check register will not be available until next week.

NEW BUSINESS

RCPP RENEWAL: Chase explained the timeline of the renewal process:

September 30th, all self-assessments uploaded

November 15th, Chief announces provisionally renewed projects

December 31st, renewed projects submit streamlined application through RCPP Portal

Chase stated that his opinion is for the District to focus efforts on all the work going on in the Butte Creek area with our other partners and to close this RCPP out.

Chairman Holmes agreed to closing out the current RCPP and focusing efforts with our partners in the Butte Creek and Kahler Creek areas. He stated that with everything happening in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic, he fears that the District could be spread thin due to not having any forecast of what to expect with the Pandemic.

Director Davis also agreed and shared the fear of having limited funding from OWEB and other sources.

Chase mentioned that funding is going to get really competitive and that to keep submitting applications for match to this RCPP while also submitting applications for other projects, the District would be competing against itself.

Director Haberman **moved that the District not renew the RCPP program**, Director Davis seconded the motion. **The motion carried unanimously.**

NOVEMBER 2020 ELECTIONS: Cassi advised that the following directors are up for election

Zone 1 // 2022 // A 01.30.2019	David Hunt, Secretary/Treasurer
Zone 2 // 2020 // O 01.25.2017	Jeremiah Holmes, Chair
Zone 3 // 2020 // A 10.30.2018	Jason Davis
Zone 4 // 2020 // A 03.27.2019	Kale Haberman
Zone 5 // 2022 // A 03.27.2019	Wayne Lindquist, Vice Chair
At Large 1 // 2020 // A 01.30.2019	Rusty Rutherford

Cassi mailed out Candidate Packets to the above directors, should they decide to run in the election. She also provided a timeline of important dates pertaining to the 2020 election.

Chairman Holmes requested the 2020 elections remain on the agenda through November as a reminder of any nearing dates.

OTHER BUSINESS NOT LISTED

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE: Chase advised that the pickup is currently in *limp mode*, it has the check engine light on for an open circuit in one of the injectors. He suggested hiring a tow company to have it taken to Gruners in Madras to be fixed.

How is the budget sitting for vehicle expenses? \$3500 is budgeted and the only expense to date is the trailer.

Chairman Holmes stated that the Sherriff's Office recently had a vehicle towed to Prineville and MacInnes was reasonably priced. He said that all tow companies hold insurance policies for vehicles on their flatbed, which is a good security and worth the fee for the service.

All others agreed that having the pickup towed is the best option.

OLD BUSINESS

EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT ACCOUNT: Cassi explained that the District is required by SB164 to set up the option of retirement accounts for all employees. The Board previously voted on a 5% straight contribution and had discussed setting up employee retirement via a 457b plan. The set up and maintenance costs with the 457b option are relatively high; but there is a 3% match limit with a simple IRA, which is the other plan option. The District does not wish to utilize the State program, OregonSaves, so Chase proposed changing from a 5% straight contribution to a 3% match.

Is there any clause regarding every employee being required to participate? No, the retirement account is optional. If an employee chooses to not participate in the 457b plan, they do not get a contribution from the District. If an employee chooses to not participate in the Simple IRA, they do not get a contribution from the District – however, if an employee chooses to participate in the Simple IRA, they have to contribute in order to get a contribution match from the District.

Do the contributed funds go with an employee, should their employment end with the District? The Simple IRA belongs to the employee and is independently their account, which would remain with the employee, should employment with the District end; but, the District contribution would end. The 457b plan allows an employee to take the contributed funds when employment ends via a distribution,

rollover, or in some cases, remain as is; however, there are some stipulations and limits that have to be met. The 457b plan is a bit more complicated for both the employer and employee.

Have the employees discussed their preference amongst each other and what is their input?

Brooke stated the Simple IRA seems most practical.

Debbi requested that if the Board reduces the contribution from 5% to 3% and approve the Simple IRA that the other 2% be given in an equitable raise.

Bodie stated he has not done much research.

Chase stated he thinks the Simple IRA makes the most sense from an administrative and recording keeping standpoint. As an employee, Chase said he is happy with 3%.

Chairman Holmes stated he liked the idea of the Simple IRA. He prefers how it keeps paperwork in the office to a minimum, it allows the employee accounts to be independent and they can decide how much they want to get involved in their retirement, and how the account goes with them if their employment with the District ends.

Director Davis moved that the District provide retirement to employees via a Simple IRA plan with a 3% match, Director Haberman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The present directors chose to table any further decisions pertaining to employee retirement until the Board can have an in-person meeting with all directors present.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

COVID19: Chase thanked the staff for being flexible and still being productive while having to work from home with limited resources.

Chairman Holmes thanked the staff for everything that is being implemented and completed. He congratulated the staff on the RCPP project funding that Damon discussed.

How much longer is the staff going to have to work from home? Right now, we are waiting for the 'Stay at Home' order to be lifted. Cassi continues to work in the office daily to answer the phone and be able to assist the staff, should they need any files from the office scanned to them. There are no restrictions of the staff being in the office, if needed. They are allowed here at any time – we just keep safe distancing and continually sanitize the office thoroughly.

Cassi stated she included information within the meeting packet pertaining directly to the District and operations that has been provided by various partners and agencies.

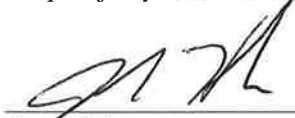
NEXT MEETING DATE: The next meeting date will be on **May 27, 2020** at 6:00 pm. This meeting will be in person, at the Big Sarvice Corral Meeting Room, unless otherwise determined.

Chased advised that prior to the regularly scheduled meeting, we will need to meet for the Biennial Review. Chase will be conversing with Maria Snodgrass to determine a time.

Cassi advised that budget will also be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Holmes at 6:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton



Jeremiah Holmes, Chair



Chase Schultz, District Manager