



Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

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Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes
March 30, 2023

Directors

James Collins
Anna Thomas
Ross Ryno
Zach Bruce
Brent Johnson
Dave Hunt

Assoc. Directors/Emeritus

Employees

Cassandra Newton
Brooke Moore
Kristen Neuburger
Emma Logan

Others Present

Kevin Chen, ODF
Garry Sanders, USFS
Dan Son, ODA
Don Seitz

The board meeting was called to order by Director Davis at 6:05 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

1. Agency Reports

a. Dan Son, ODA

Dan stated that he is updating a management plan for Yellow floating heart. He advised that he will be spending the of April 3rd in Wheeler County with Cassi and Kristen to do some training with mapping, treatments, and monitoring.

b. Kevin Chen, ODF

Kevin introduced himself and advised he is in attendance on behalf of Brandon Ferguson. He advised that they received funding for fuel mitigation projects in Grant County, which they are aiming for a five-year timeline with. He further advised that the 2020 Community Assistance Grant for Wheeler and Morrow counties was extended and is still active with funding of \$100,000 still available. Kevin stated that ODF received legislative approval to proceed with the Burn Management Program and a timeline for trainings is being developed, but will be on the website once completed. He also provided a staffing update in that ODF is recruiting two new Stewardship Foresters and one NRCS Forester.

2. District Reports

a. Administration Manager, Cassi Newton

Stated her report is current.

b. Conservation Technician II, Brooke Moore

Stated her report is current.

c. Conservation Technician I, Kristen Neuburger

Stated her report is current.

d. Temporary Office Assistant, Emma Logan

Cassi introduced Emma to the Board and attendees. She advised that Emma started on March 27th and will be assisting staff with both office and field tasks until July.

3. Monthly Business

a. Review and approve minutes

- February 27, 2022 minutes

‡ Motion made by Director Ryno to approve the board meeting minutes from February 27, 2023, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Review and approve financial reports

- March

‡ Motion made by Director Davis to approve the March financial report, Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Review and approve Accounts Payable

- March 16, 2023

Meeting Location: The Rock in Spray, Oregon

To Join from a computer or smartphone:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/954414701> (Contact the office for meeting password)

To dial in using a phone:

(571) 317-3122 (Access Code: 954-414-701)

- **March 30, 2023**

‡ **Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the check registers from February 16, 2023 and February 27, 2023 as presented, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Upcoming Meetings & Events**

- Staff Meeting, every Monday
- **April**
 - 6th JDBP Upland Prioritization, 10am
 - 8th PALEO meeting, 12pm
 - 12th Coordination meeting, 9am
 - 19th OWEB training (John Day), 10am
 - 19th Wolf Committee meeting, 4pm
 - 20th BCRR K-6th Field Trip
 - 25th – 26th OWEB meeting
- **May**
 - 10th WC Budget Committee meeting, 10am
 - 16th BCRR site tour w/ LJDWG
 - 17th JDBP meeting, 9am
 - 17th Thirtymile site tour, 1pm
 - 25th SWCD board meeting, 6pm
 - 29th Memorial Day - SWCD office closed

5. **Upcoming Deadlines**

- **April**
 - 26th OWRD
 - 28th WaterSmart
- **May**
 - 1st OWEB
 - 3rd ODA AgWQ Support
 - 31st ODA Capacity

6. **District Management**

a. **Training**

Cassi advised that per request of Chair Collins, she spoke Eric Nusbaum about conducting his New Director and Ethics training to our Board and he agreed. The Board chose to hold the training prior to the April board meeting at 4pm.

b. **Annual Meeting**

Cassi explained to the Board of the ORS stated requirements for the Annual Meeting. She advised that the legal notice she sent for publication was published on December 1st, which was only 14 days prior to the meeting date. Cassi explained that ODA advised her of this and the SWCD would need to hold another Annual Meeting that is properly noticed; however, right before the board meeting she received confirmation that the District was able to meet the 15-day notice requirement because The Times-Journal delivers the publications on Wednesday each week to all subscribers. Cassi stated that she will ensure the notice is published well in advance of the 15-day requirement going forward.

c. **Staffing**

Cassi requested that the Board authorize Emma Logan as a card user.

‡ **Motion** made by Director Davis to authorize Emma Logan as a card user, Director Ryno seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Cassi advised the Board that there was no motion made to offer her the District Manager position.

‡ **Motion** made by Director Davis to offer the District Manager position to Cassandra Newton with an annual salary of \$62,000 effective April 1, 2023, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Collins called a recess at 6:30 p.m. so the Personnel Committee could meet.

Chair Collins called the meeting back to order at 6:41 p.m.

Personnel Committee Chair Davis recommended to the Board that the Conservation Manager hiring process consist of an application to be completed for a virtual interview of the top five candidates, then the mock project form be provided to the top two candidates with an offer for an in-person interview.

‡**Motion** made by Vice-Chair Thomas to approve the recommended hiring process; Director Bruce seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Policy Revision

Cassi explained that in December 2020 it was recommended that the District have a Children in the Workplace policy to not allow employees' children to be at the office for more than a short visit during working hours and through a few months of discussion a policy was developed that did not allow for any exceptions. She further explained that it was during this discussion when the Maternity Leave policy was also adopted. Cassi asked the Board to consider revisiting the discussion of this policy and revise to allow for exceptions. Cassi advised that she is aware of the reason to have a policy and she has discussed this with the current staff.

She explained that as she has been covering the multiple positions the last seven months that there have been a few times that given her workload and commitments, she could not telework when childcare was unable and she has had her daughter in the office for a few hours here and there. She stated that she did not work full days with her daughter in the office, but it was still technically against policy to even have her at the office for the few hours that she did on those occasions.

The Board agreed that the policy should be revised and discussed the revised draft provided in the packet. The Board provided revisions and additions to the drafted policy and requested that Cassi provided a second draft at the April meeting.

e. Handbook Update Plan

Cassi stated that Cascade Employer's Association offered a handbook revision package for \$2,400 which includes the development and two annual reviews of a workplace handbook, but the membership has to be active for the full three years during this package. She recommended that the District pay the hourly rate for the Association to assist with the handbook she is currently drafting and she will continue to work with SDAO HR Answers, as well. The Board agreed.

f. SDAO Service Agreement

Cassi reminded the Board that SDAO/SDIS will no longer offer Workers' Compensation Insurance to special districts as of July 1, 2023 and that our District participated in the survey to source premium quotes. She stated that SAIF will be the new Workers' Compensation Insurance offered to SDAO members and SDAO will continue to provide the 4% discount on SDIS property/liability, criminal defense coverage, OSHA defense coverage, and HIPAA defense coverage.

g. Property

Cassi advised the Board that she recently sent an update email out regarding the four applications for funding towards the facility. She stated she has submitted the following applications which will contribute to the engineering and design, as well as some research and collaboration:

- US-FS Wood Innovations
- Roundhouse Foundation
- Oregon Community Foundation

She advised that she submitted also a proposal for Congressional Direct Spending towards the construction of the facility. Cassi explained that she will continue to apply for additional funding sources in an effort to cover the match committed to in the Wood Innovation application in full.

Cassi stated that the following partners have been secured

- Architect, LEVER Architecture
- Engineer, DCI Engineers
- Design assistance and Research, University of Oregon
- Manufacturer, Mercer Mass Timber
- Additional partners include Sustainable Northwest, TallWood Design Institute, U.S. Forest Service, and Wheeler County Planning

Cassi explained that at this time she is awaiting award announcements from the applications submitted before submitting any further applications.

7. Legislation

a. HB3142

Cassi stated that HB3142 was mentioned by a speaker at the Wheeler County Stockgrowers Association and she has since received a handful of questions from various people, so she put it on the board meeting agenda. She explained that this house bill was the bill that Rep. Smith was referring to when he advised that he included the SWCD in a \$1M proposal of drought funding; however, he wrote in Wheeler County, not the SWCD. She further explained that she has studied the bill and it is strictly for Juniper removal. She stated that she will be attending the Wheeler County Court meeting on April 5th to request those funds be passed through directly to the SWCD in full to administer the funds for the intended purpose.

8. Projects/Programs

a. Build America, Buy American Act

Cassi explained that OWEB receives a portion of its funds from federal sources, including the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and, when OWEB grants out these federal funds, OWEB must ensure all federal requirements are included in the grant agreement, and that grantees comply with these requirements. She further explained that in November 2021, the Build America, Buy American Act (BABA) was enacted as a part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. BABA requires that all the iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials utilized in projects are produced in the United States. Cassi stated that OWEB provided notice that beginning in March 2023 any grant that is awarded with federal funds or amended to include federal funds must comply with BABA requirements, and special conditions will be included in all applicable grant agreements or grant amendments.

b. ODA AgWQ Application

Cassi advised the Board that ODA has opened the next solicitation for the AgWQ Support Funding. She stated that the staff has discussed not applying for these funds due to the capacity required through the OWEB TA application which is continuing efforts on West Branch Bridge Creek. Cassi asked the Board if there were any specific needs that this funding could fulfill which the staff may not have thought of. The Board did not have any eligible suggestions.

c. Weed Program

Cassi stated she is on the Wheeler County Court agenda for April 5th to request that they recruit to fill the open positions on the Wheeler County Weed Board, which includes a director from the SWCD. Cassi asked the Board to appoint a director to the Weed Board.

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to appoint Brent Johnson to the Wheeler County Weed Board, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Cassi stated that the other thing she is requesting is funding assistance for the SWCD to have an in-house cost-share weed program. Cassi explained that the SWCD proposed funding assistance

for a shared position in March of 2022, but the County declined to provide any funding assistance for a weed program through the Weed Board or the SWCD. She further explained that the SWCD created the position of Conservation Technician Assistant and hired Kristen despite the County not assisting with funding; and, the position is currently vacant and now called Office Assistant but has the same roles/responsibilities. Cassi stated that the goal is to have Kristen's current position become full-time focused on noxious and invasive weeds, similar to Grant County SWCD's program, but the funding is not secured to be able to do that. She stated that since March 2022, she has gained partnerships with BLM and USFS, as well as other neighboring weed personnel and is slowly securing weed funding agreements from these partners, but would really like the County to step up and be a partner in this effort. Cassi presented the proposal she drafted for the County Court meeting that included five years of past funding and treatments the SWCD administered, the ODA/OSWB Noxious Weed Program overview, and the organization of the intended in-house cost-share program. She stated that she is requesting funding assistance to aid in launching the program and she will be working with Kristen to develop the in-house program application and processes to be launched fall of 2023.

The Board asked what the BLM and USFS agreements entailed. Cassi advised that those agreements are for Kristen to assist with treatments on publicly accessed land and adjacent private lands.

The Board agreed that they would like to see the County step up as a partner in assisting landowners with noxious weed treatments, as well as get the Weed Board active again to be that partner.

9. Partners

a. LandUp

Cassi stated that a proposal was received through OACD from an organization in Washington state called LandUp and they are seeking landowners of at least 300 acres, but preferably more than 1,000 acres who are interested in carbon sequestration and restoration projects. She explained that LandUp is offering to work with the landowners through the SWCD to determine carbon sequestration opportunities and if the SWCD initiates the connection between LandUp and the landowner, LandUp will pay the SWCD 15% of any revenues earned by LandUp. Cassi advised that she sent this out to a few landowners she thought may be interested, but is presenting it in case directors or others can think of landowners who may be interested in receiving this assistance from LandUp.

10. Business Not Listed

Next Meeting April 27, 2023

The board meeting was adjourned by Chair Collins at 7:48 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton



James Collins, Chair



Cassandra Newton, Administrative Manager

