



Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

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Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes
February 27, 2023

Directors

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

Assoc. Directors/Emeritus

Employees

Cassandra Newton
Brooke Moore
Kristen Neuburger

Others Present

Eric Nusbaum, ODA
DelRae Ferguson, NRCS
Maria Snodgress, ODA
Brandon Ferguson, ODF
Gabe Williams, RSI
Carmen Oakes

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

1. **Oaths of Office**

- a. Director Collins conducted the oath of offices for **David Hunt and Zachery Bruce**.

2. **Agency Reports**

a. **Eric Nusbaum, ODA**

Eric provided an introduction of his role with ODA and SWCDs. He advised that he was in attendance to answer questions and provide input in regard to the staffing model recommendations Cassi developed. *Item 7a was discussed at this time.*

Eric encouraged the directors to attend his training in Madras and stated that it is generally held every two years but this was the first in many years due to the pandemic. He explained that the first half of the training focuses on the basics for new directors including what it means to be a director, directors relationships with ODA, ethics and public records law; and, the second half focuses on fiscal responsibilities of directors.

b. **Maria Snodgress, ODA**

Maria advised that the AgWQ support grants will be offered again next biennium and the request for proposals should be out mid-March. She also advised that the AgWQ Program updated its memorandum of agreement with DEQ. Maria also explained potential changes to the TMDL monitoring that ODA does and how it may affect the John Day Basin in the future. Lastly, she provided an AgWQ staffing and workload update.

c. **Gabe Williams, RSI**

Gabe stated that the engineer that was reviewing Kinzua Culvert took on additional workload, which put Kinzua behind, but ODFW is going to stay in contact with BPA and check in in a couple of weeks. He advised that Brett is working with Brooke on the West Branch assessment and everyone is waiting on a window in weather to get out in the field.

Gabe advised that he has been working with Antone on a couple of projects and stated he wanted to talk to the Board about potentially submitting those and having the District do the project management and administration which had been done in the past. Chair Collins asked Gabe to advise the Board of what was done in the past.

Gabe stated that he will provide some background since the District has had a lot of turnover and he provided the following information- since approximately 2003, RSI had written a good portion of the SWCD grants up until about three years ago when Judy was getting ready to retire, and RSI backed off of grant writing and slowed way down to be able to get the older grants completed. Gabe stated that RSI has been helping Antone with some projects that RSI helped Chase write and some of RSI's larger project workload is working with Antone [with project planning], one of which is a second phase to the Derr Meadow project. Gabe provided a summary of the work completed through phase one. He stated that OWEB and ODFW suggested the original project be

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)

smaller scaled, but when RSI took USFWS and ODFW, some of who were on the OWEB review team, to view the completed work, it was recommended to do a phase two. Gabe stated that the other project that he spoke to Antone about was regarding a continuation of riparian plantings. He also stated that another landowner approached him about doing a forestry grant and he reached out to NRCS because it would be a better fit than writing an OWEB grant.

Chair Collins asked the Board if they had any questions or comments for Gabe.

Cassi stated that if any grant writing is done by RSI on behalf of the SWCD, there needs to be a contract in place. She advised that the current contract with RSI could be used for grant writing assistance. She further advised that if RSI is the contractor on the projects being written by RSI, there needs to be further discussion.

Gabe advised that RSI would be more interested in the construction side and would not be seeking reimbursement for writing or preparing the grants. He stated that RSI did not always do the install on the grants they previously wrote for the District.

DelRae asked for clarification on if designs would be included in the grant preparation from RSI.

Gabe advised that there would be 60% designs on one and 90% on the other, both through building onto designs and surveys previously funded through CTWS, BPA and OWEB.

Cassi stated that the experiences that staff have had through the current projects occurring is that there is no communication. She explained that there was no documentation or correspondence regarding the culvert contract with ODFW, so when she received the contract for signature from ODFW and called them for clarification, it appeared all the communication and planning occurred between Gabe and ODFW, as though Gabe was representing the District. She stated that she understands that there has been turnover, and possibly her predecessor(s) knew about it, but there was no communication from RSI to current staff who are still managing the project. Cassi mentioned a similar situation on the Kinzua Culver project that current staff were just informed a few weeks ago that ODFW was implementing the project, not the SWCD.

Gabe advised that Chase was in the loop on both the culvert conversations with ODFW and that he advised Randy, as well.

Cassi advised that she is not trying to put the blame on anyone, as she is aware there has been multiple transitions over the last few years, but that she is simply trying to reiterate the reasons for contracts to be in place and project documentation.

Gabe stated that he will email Brooke and Cassi regarding further details of the proposed projects.

d. DelRae Ferguson, NRCS

DelRae thanked everyone who attended Wheeler County NRCS Local Work Group Meeting. She advised that the key points of the meeting were that the Kahler funding pool is ending this year and a new funding pool is being proposed in the Waterman area. DelRae stated that the EQIP applications are almost contracted, which includes the woven wire, livestock water and Kahler forestry, but the Ochoco forestry pool is waiting on additional funding so won't be contracted until later this year. DelRae also reminded everyone that she is still currently on detail until March.

Chair Collins asked if the Ochoco pool was going to continue. DelRae stated that for another year or two at least due to an increase in interest.

e. Brandon Ferguson, ODF

Brandon advised that there are two developmental wildfire community foresters currently working in Wheeler, Morrow, Grant, and parts of Gilliam counties and that landowner outreach has occurred. He provided an overview of the Community Assistance Grant, which is a rebate program for landowners to develop defensible space. Brandon also provided an update on SB1501 and a brief update on SB762. Lastly, he provided updates on ODF staffing and open positions.

Cassi asked Brandon to give a small briefing on the burn boss training process.

Brandon stated that there is a requirement to put the burn boss program into effect and it is underway. He explained that ODF is looking to partner with federal partners to implement the actual training, but the program is not fully developed yet. Brandon stated that he will advise the SWCD with any progress.

3. District Reports

a. Administration Manager, Cassi Newton

Cassi stated that she originally told staff they could provide verbal reports, but then the meeting date changed and she never requested reports from them, but that she had a written report in the board packet. She advised that she attended the OVMA conference and received a lot of information regarding Rejuvra, which she made copies and handed out.

DelRae advised that NRCS now has a cost-share for annual grass treatments. She stated that there is no funding pools at this time, but it could be included in the Waterman pool. The Board engaged in discussion with DelRae regarding the Waterman funding pool details.

b. Conservation Technician II, Brooke Moore

Brooke stated that has continued project management on OWEB grants, did some flagging, submitted a project completion report, and did a statement of work modification. She advised that she partnered with Think Wild to submit an application to Oregon Wildlife Foundation for a small grant that is contributing to the planting efforts on Butte Creek and it was awarded. Brooke stated she is working with landowners to finish up job sheets for CREP contracts to be enrolled by September. She advised that she is completing I&E with NRCS for the RCPP, working on multiple OWEB grants to be submitted in May, and exploring a potential OWRD grant for a large scale pipeline project.

c. Conservation Technician I, Kristen Neuburger

Kristen stated that she only has a couple more photos for the central noxious weed grant and it will be ready for the completion report. She advised that there are a couple landowners in the Fossil grant that have completed treatment and Dan Son with ODA will be come out to assist with the treatments that she is responsible for. She further advised that she is still working on the applicator licensing and learning GIS, which Dan Son is also going to spend some time teaching her. Kristen stated that she assisted Brooke with flagging on an OWEB grant.

Cassi advised that the Central Wheeler Noxious Weed grant has additional funds available and she received approval from ODA for a time extension to conduct additional treatments, as well as authorization to purchase a SxS windshield and PPE.

4. Monthly Business

a. Review and approve minutes

- December 27, 2022 regular minutes
- January 26, 2023 Annual Meeting

‡**Motion** made by Vice-Chair Thomas to approve the board meeting minutes from December 27, 2022 and January 26, 2023, Director Hunt seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Review and approve financial reports

- December
- January

‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve the December and January financial reports, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Review and approve Accounts Payable

- February 16, 2023
- February 27, 2023

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

5. Upcoming Meetings & Events

- Staff Meeting, every Monday
- **February**
 - 27th SWCD Board meeting, 6pm
 - 28th Director training, Madras
- **March**
 - Restoring Oregon's Dry Side Forests, multiple
 - 1st-2nd OSWB meeting
 - 14th Gilliam County SWCD Annual Meeting, 6pm
 - 17th Stockgrowers Annual Meeting, 5pm
 - 23rd SWCD board meeting, 6pm
 - 30th Butte Creek Planting Volunteer Event

6. Upcoming Deadlines

- **March**
 - 23rd Wood Innovation
 - 27th Conservation & Recreation
 - 28th WaterSmart
- **April**
 - 26th OWRD funding

7. District Management

a. Staffing

(Discussion and motions occurred prior to agency reports to allow Eric Nusbaum to depart early due to inclement weather)

Cassi provided a recap of the Board decisions from the January meeting for those who were not present. She advised that the Board would need to choose only one position to proceed with recruitment through Cascade Employers Association – either a District Manager **or** Conservation Manager. Cassi recommended to reorganize the staff using a cross between option 1 and 2, which were originally presented to the Board in September after Cassi's research and discussions with other agencies and SWCDs. The Board asked Eric for his opinion of proceeding with a staffing reorganization as Cassi recommended.

Eric provided an example of another SWCD that was in a very similar transition phase and opted to reorganize in the exact manner being proposed. He advised that to date, it has been very successful and he believes it would work well for Wheeler SWCD. Eric agreed with Cassi that due to the challenge of finding anyone to work in the rural area of Wheeler County, that if the focus was solely on a conservation person who would have people working under them, the chance of recruiting the right person is greater. He further stated that with this staffing model, it would leave the management of the District to Cassi who has been successful in the past two years in the role and responsibilities of managing the District as a whole.

Chair Collins asked Eric if there were other models that he could recommend as alternatives. Eric stated that given the rural small size of Wheeler SWCD that he believes the recommended model to be the best fit because it would allow for definite delineation of roles and responsibilities including authority over other personnel.

Director Hunt asked Cassi if the recommended staffing model was what she truly wanted. Cassi advised that it is her preference because the technicians and other staff need and deserve to have a leader who can help advance them to their full potential as conservationists. She stated that conservation is not her background and that her conservation experience is only what she has gained in the three years with the District. Cassi reminded the Board that her education and experience is business and finance.

‡ **Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve recruiting for a Conservation Manager, Vice-Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Cassi advised that the Board will need to also approve a budget to be spent on recruiting through Cascade Employers Association. She reminded the Board the expenditures to date for recruiting is approximately \$1,700 and that the recruitment through the Association would be by the hour. Cassi explained that the recruiting would be solely for locating the applicants and the District would still conduct the review, interviewing, and hiring of all interested applicants. She recommended a budget of \$3-4,000.

‡ **Motion** made by Vice-Chair Thomas to approve a not-to-exceed recruiting budget of \$4,000 for Cascade Employers Association, Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Property

Cassi advised that she has the following committed partners for the engineering, design, manufacturing and research towards the facility project. Cassi stated that she is still working on the Wood Innovation Grant application which will provide funding toward the engineering and design. She also stated that she will be submitting a Congressional Direct Spending application that will provide funding toward construction.

8. Legislation

Cassi provided an overview of HB2298, HB2527, SB530, HB3163, HB3189, and HB3190. She advised that she submitted testimony on HB2298 after consulting with Chair Collins.

9. Projects/Programs

a. BLM Project Management Opportunity

Cassi advised the Board that both Ross and Jason responded to the email she sent about this opportunity. She explained that BLM requested the SWCD to partner as the project manager on their plan of upgrading Priest Hole, and the funds for it will be passed through OWEB. Cassi stated that after consulting with another manager of Good Neighbor projects, she chose to commit to managing the Priest Hole project and will be contracting the MJD Watershed Council to assist with some of the on-the-ground management.

b. ODA SIA

Cassi reminded the Board that at the January meeting, the idea was discussed to explore the possibility of an SIA in conjunction with the new Focus Area. She stated that she had a meeting with Maria that Chair Collins participated in and it was determined that the processes of Focus Areas and SIAs do not align in a manner that current capacity could endure. Cassi explained that depending on the hire time of a Conservation Manager, including an SIA could potentially be feasible, but her recommendation would be to hold off for at least another year to ensure capacity is available to take advantage of the opportunity to partner with BLM.

Maria agreed with Cassi stating that there are quite a few activities that need to occur. She advised that even if the SWCD is not looking at enrolling an SIA at this time, the SWCD should be considering when a good time would be because the five-year schedule is in the works of being developed and she could suggest where Wheeler SWCD should be on the schedule based on the Board's interest.

Cassi suggested that the discussion of an SIA could be included in the near future work session that is planned following hire of the Conservation Manager. Maria offered to provide the Board and staff with a general overview of the SIA Program and answer any questions. The Board agreed.

c. AgriMet Weather Stations

Cassi stated that she met with the BOR coordinator of the WaterSmart funding and it was recommended not to apply for those funds toward installation of stations because it would not be a competitive enough application. She explained that Jama at BOR is urging her to work with the Tribes for the installation. Cassi stated that she has not been able to meet with CTWS or the BOR Tribal Funding Coordinator yet.

d. Butte Creek Planting Volunteer

Cassi advised that Brooke is working with Think Wild, an organization out of Central Oregon to recruit volunteers to implement the planting on Butte Creek. She stated that the volunteer opportunity is open to local persons interested. Cassi advised that the SWCD was able to purchase two planting augers through grant funding and CTWS is also loaning a couple augers for the Butte Creek project. She stated that there will be approximately 1,800 plantings over the course of three to four days.

Cassi informed that there will be two site tours of the Butte Creek project – in April the SWCD staff will be hosting a K-6 field trip and beaver dam challenge for all three schools and in May the SWCD will be hosting the LJDWG for a site tour of the project.

10. Partners

11. Business Not Listed

Next Meeting March 30, 2023

The board meeting was adjourned by Chair Collins at 8:07 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton


James Collins, Chair


Cassandra Newton, Administrative Manager