



Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

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Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes
June 27, 2024

Directors

Anna Thomas
Zach Bruce
Brent Johnson
Jason Davis
Jim Bob Collins
Jeremiah Holmes, Emeritus

Employees

Cassandra Newton
Ayla Morehouse
Brooke Moore
Kristen Neuburger
Maria Rey

Others Present

Ken Thiemann, OWRD
Don Sietz
Gary Fischer
Dave Boise
Scott Mengis
Todd Harvey
Eric Smith
Ryan Nead

The board meeting was called to order by Chair Collins at 6:13 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

1. Agency Reports

a. Ken Thiemann, ODF

Ken introduced himself as the OWRD Watermaster for District 21, which covers the greater part of Wheeler County. He stated that there is pressure from Salem to obtain an accounting of data in the lower 180 miles of the John Day River, specifically the difference in calculations between the Kimberly and McDonald Ferry gauges. He further stated that due to the push from Salem, there has been more presence of watermasters on private land conducting site visits that include photos of pumps, flow meters, power boxes, and electrical meters.

Ken stated that if a landowner uses more than 1CFS, they are considered a significant POD and it is required to have a flow meter. He advised that there is a 75/25 cost-share program to assist landowners with installing flow meters. He further advised that the program is voluntary only, so if the watermaster notifies the landowner to require a flow meter to be installed, the landowner is ineligible to receive assistance.

An abundance of questions and clarifications were asked by the Board of Directors and general public, some remain unanswered.

2. District Reports

a. District Manager, Cassi Newton

Cassi stated that her report was current. She provided highlights pertaining to a grant being written for place-based education kits, additional funding received from BLM for noxious weed treatments, the BLM Ag Field project being approved, and the planning of a forestry project tour.

b. Conservation Manager, Ayla Morehouse

Ayla stated that her report is current. She provided highlights pertaining to two grant applications to be submitted in July and DSL monitoring.

c. Conservation Technician II, Brooke Moore

Brooke stated that her report is current. She provided highlights pertaining to project management, fire season, the Mountain Creek survey, and a shout out to Maria Rey for her assistance with flagging.

d. Conservation Technician I, Kristen Neuburger

Meeting Location: Fire Hall 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)

Kristen stated that her report is current. She provided highlights about locating and releasing knapweed gall wasps, BLM applications, ODA reporting, and repairs needed for the SxS sprayer.

e. Office Assistant, Maria Rey

Maria was unable to attend the meeting.

3. Monthly Business

a. Review and approve minutes

i. May 30, 2024 regular minutes

‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve the board meeting minutes from May 30, 2024, Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Review and approve financial reports

i. May

Cassi advised that she did not get a financial report completed, and that a full 2023-2024 budget summary will be provided at the August meeting.

c. Review and approve Accounts Payable

i. June 19, 2024

ii. June 27, 2024

Director Hunt abstained due to conflict of interest.

‡**Motion** made by Vice Chair Thomas to approve the check registers from June 19, 2024 and June 27, 2024 as presented, Director Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Upcoming Meetings & Events

a. Staff Meeting, every Monday

b. July

i. 4th Independence Day, OFFICE CLOSED

ii. 11th Wheeler SWCD Forestry Tour, 9am

iii. NO Wheeler SWCD Board Meeting

c. August

i. 15th OCEAN Board Meeting

ii. 29th Wheeler SWCD Board Meeting, 6pm

5. Upcoming Deadlines

a. July

i. 2nd RCPP Applications

ii. 9th WaterSMART Water Efficiency App.

iii. 10th OWRD Irrigation Applications

b. August

i. 14th NFWF Cons. Partner Program

6. District Management

a. Annual Work Plan

Cassi presented the 2024-2025 Annual Work Plan.

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to adopt the 2024-2025 Annual Work Plan as presented, Director Bruce seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Annual Audit

Cassi presented the audit contract for review.

c. District Vehicles

Cassi provided an overview of her search for a pickup to dedicate to the Weed Program. She advised that she is still working on accessing the government surplus system, but that she will be reaching out to ODOT directly to inquire about surplus vehicles. Cassi recommended the Board set a not-to-exceed amount that she can directly purchase without Board approval. Director Johnson volunteered to be available to assist with vehicle review before purchase.

‡**Motion** made by Vice Chair Thomas to authorize Cassandra Newton to purchase a pickup for the Weed Program that costs up to \$30,000 and with review by Director Johnson up to \$50,000, Director Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Employee Stipend

Cassi stated that earlier this year a director suggested an employee stipend for personal phones being used for District business. She explained that the topic was tabled, but she had forgotten to put it on the agenda and since the budget was needing to be revised, she wanted to give the opportunity to continue the conversation.

‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve a \$50 monthly stipend to employees who utilize their personal phone for District business, Vice Chair Thomas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. 2024-2025 Annual Wage Schedule – *business not listed*

Cassi presented the 2024-2025 Annual Wage Schedule, noting a correction to the years in the title.

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the 2024-2025 Annual Wage Schedule with correction, Director Hunt seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

f. 2024-2025 Annual Budget – *business not listed*

Cassi presented the revised 2024-2025 Annual Budget with the changes previously discussed and approved.

‡**Motion** made by Vice Chair Thomas to approve the revised 2024-2025 Annual Budget, Director Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

g. District Website

Cassi stated that Streamline advised of new ADA compliance rules that take effect July 1, 2024 and will significantly increase the cost of websites. Cassi explained that she is working with Streamline to ensure compliance. She presented the slides from Streamline.

h. Family BBQ

Cassi asked the Board if they were still interested in planning the Family BBQ for July. After discussion, the event was scheduled for July 20th.

i. Property

i. WIG Status

Cassi advised that both the Conditional Use Permit and ODOT Upgrade Access permits were approved. She stated that the building permits are now being prepared. Cassi also advised that she is still working with the design team to obtain milling specifications.

ii. Roundhouse Foundation

Cassi advised that it has been difficult to secure any juniper furnishings locally, so she will seek juniper furnishings already constructed and talent outside the county.

iii. Congressional Direct Spending

Cassi advised that Senator Merkley presented her with a folded flag that was flown over the U.S. capitol. She stated that Chair Collins accompanied her to receive the flag at the townhall in Mitchell on June 13 and Senator Merkley expressed his appreciation for the work that Wheeler SWCD is doing for residents, wildlife, and landscape of Wheeler County.

7. Legislation

a. Countering CCP Drones Act

Cassi explained that the Countering CCP Drones Act could limit the future use of Chinese manufactured drone technology, including DJI drones which is what the District and many other agencies and individuals own.

8. Projects/Programs

a. NRCS/SNW – RCPP

Cassi advised that this application is ready to submit with an ask of approximately \$24M and approximately \$9M in match funds.

b. NRCS/Grant RCPP

Cassi advised that she is working with Grant SWCD to get this application completed by July 2nd. She stated that she is unaware of what the ask will be, but Wheeler SWCD is providing approximately \$5M in match funds.

c. USFS Mitchell Springs

Ayla provided an overview of the multi-agency site visit and stated that meetings are continuing in preparation for a December submission.

d. HB2010 Juniper Removal

Cassi stated that there is no update at this time for the HB2010 funding due to still waiting on specifications.

e. BLM – Priest Hole Restoration

Cassi stated the construction bid solicitation is currently open and a mandatory bid tour is scheduled for July 8th.

9. Partners

a. none


10. Business Not Listed


a. none

Next Meeting August 29, 2024

The board meeting was adjourned by Chair Collins at 8:12 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton


James Collins, Chair


Cassandra Newton, District Manager