



## Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

40535 Highway 19, Fossil, OR 97830  
(P) 541.468.2990 • (F) 541.468.2991  
administration@wheelerswcd.org

Board of Directors  
Meeting Minutes  
February 29, 2024

### Directors

Anna Thomas  
Jason Davis  
Brent Johnson  
Dave Hunt  
Zach Bruce

### Employees

Cassandra Newton  
Ayla Morehouse  
Brooke Moore  
Kristen Neuburger  
Maria Rey

### Others Present

DelRae Ferguson, NRCS  
Alex Makic, US-FS  
Debbi Bunch, MJDWC  
JD Bunch  
Don Sietz

The board meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Thomas at 6:37 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

## 1. Agency Reports

### a. Debbi Bunch, MJDWC

Debbi stated that the Watershed Council is getting more interest for forestry projects.

### b. Alex Makic, US-FS

Alex stated that he attended the meeting with Mitchell Water Board and the SWCD to discuss the drinking water springs grant. He advised he is applying for a different grant for the culvert project that did not get funded last winter.

### c. DelRae Ferguson, NRCS

DelRae stated that she was able to hire one new employee who has a natural resource background. She advised that he will be starting mid-February. DelRae stated that the EQIP ranking has been completed and notifications are going out. DelRae advised that she met with Cassi and Herb to discuss the Thirtymile-Butte RCPP and it was decided to spend 50% of the remaining funds this year then renew the RCPP after next year. DelRae advised that the Wheeler County NRCS Workgroup Meeting will be held virtually on Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup> at 10am and will be screened at the SWCD office.

## 2. District Reports

### a. District Manager, Cassi Newton

Cassi advised that she analyzed the metrics of the facebook posts published the prior two months. She explained that was surprised to see that the posts that have reached the most people are not the conservation education posts, as the top three were regarding the facility and a post shared for American Farm Trust. Cassi advised that the staff are discussing strategies to reach for audience and what types of information is sought the most. DelRae suggested altering the time of day the staff publish the posts.

### b. Conservation Manager, Ayla Morehouse

Ayla stated that field season is gearing up and she's been attending site visits with the Technicians.

### c. Conservation Technician II, Brooke Moore

Brooke stated she is excited to be making progress with organizing the historical and current CREP files since being able to spend a couple days in the Condon office. She advised that she has started working on spring grant applications.

**88Meeting Location:** The Rock in Spray, Oregon

**To Join from a computer or smartphone: 8i8**

<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)

- d. **Conservation Technician I, Kristen Neuburger**
  - e. Kristen stated she's been putting maps together for mapping public and private land to be treated through the BLM Noxious Weed Agreement. She advised that she will be conducting site visits in the coming weeks to develop the treatment schedule. Kristen advised that the weed grant she submitted was awarded and she has another small grant application to submit in March
  - f. **Office Assistant, Maria Rey**  
Cassi introduced Maria and advised that she will have a board report next month.
- 3. Monthly Business**
- a. **Review and approve minutes**
    - i. **January 25, 2024 regular minutes**
    - ii. **February 19, 2024 work session minutes**
  - ‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve the board meeting minutes from January 25, 2024 and the work session minutes from February 19, Director Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  - b. **Review and approve financial reports**
    - i. **February**
  - ‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the financial report for February, Director Hunt seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
  - c. **Review and approve Accounts Payable**
    - i. **February 15, 2024**
    - ii. **February 29, 2024**
  - ‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the check registers from February 15, 2024 and February 29, 2024 as presented, Director Bruce seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- 4. Upcoming Meetings & Events**
- a. Staff Meeting, every Monday
  - b. **March**
    - i. 4<sup>th</sup> NRCS Workgroup Meeting (virtual), 10am
    - ii. 7<sup>th</sup> Wheeler SWCD Weed Clinic, Spray 5pm
    - iii. 28<sup>th</sup> Wheeler Board Meeting, 6pm
  - c. **April**
    - i. 23<sup>rd</sup> LJDWG, 10am
    - ii. 27<sup>th</sup> Wheeler SWCD Soil Workshop, 9am
    - iii. 28<sup>th</sup> Wheeler SWCD Board Meeting, 6pm
- 5. Upcoming Deadlines**
- a. **March**
    - i. none
  - b. **April**
    - i. 29<sup>th</sup> OWEB Applications
    - ii. 30<sup>th</sup> OWEB NRCS TA Application
- 6. District Management**
- a. **Card User Authorization**

Cassi requested that the Board appoint card user authorization to Maria Rey. She advised that Maria will not receive a card until after her probationary period, but need signatory authority to use Cassi and Ayla's cards as necessary for fuel and administrative needs.

‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to appoint card user authorization to Maria Rey, Director Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**b. Employee Evaluations**

Cassi stated that employee evaluations were conducted by Board Officers on January 31<sup>st</sup>. She advised that per Chair Collins request, she scheduled a Board training on evaluations with ODA in November prior to the next employee evaluations.

Cassi and Ayla explained that since a metric based policy has not been developed, they recommend the Board approve a COLA salary increase only and that District Management will work with ODA to develop a metric based policy prior to January 2025. Cassi advised that the current federal COLA is 3.3% and after analyzing the upcoming annual budget, she recommends a 3% COLA increase for all employees.

‡**Motion** made by Director Hunt to approve a 3% COLA increase for all employees, Director Davis seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Committee Chair Davis stated Ayla successful completed her probationary period and exceeded all expectations for the Conversation Manager position. He recommended that the Board approve the previously discussed salary increase.

‡**Motion** made by Director Johnson to approve a salary increase to \$58,000 annually for Ayla Morehouse, Director Bruce seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**c. Budget**

Cassi advised that she anticipates having a rough draft of the 2024-2025 annual budget to present at the March board meeting.

**d. Property**

**i. WIG Status**

Cassi advised of the following updates pertaining to the Wood Innovation Grant and property/facility:

- Updated video with virtual walk-through
- Congressional Direct Spending application submission
- Discussions with potential funders
- Permitting status
- OSU thermal bridge analysis
- Draft preliminary construction budget
- Schematic design

**7. Legislation**

**a. none**

**8. Projects/Programs**

**a. NRCS/SNW – RCPP**

DelRae stated that collaboration meetings have occurred about every two weeks, but NRCS has not announced the application period. She advised that Ayla and Cassi developed a survey and information letter that will be mailed to landowners within the RCPP boundary to gather data pertaining to interested and existing practices.

Cassi stated that Ayla developed data maps for the applications. Ayla provided details of the data that is included in the maps.

**b. ODA Weeds**

Cassi stated that two applications were submitted in December for the ODA Noxious Weed Grant cycle. She advised that the general weed project occurring in the Northeast area of Wheeler County was awarded, but the Tree-of-Heaven project was not awarded due to limited funding and the project being considered low priority. Cassi further advised that both projects receive very high remarks on the evaluations.

**c. 3WP**

Ayla advised that there were no applications received during the first open cycle for the in-house weed program. She stated that staff are exploring outreach options to get the information out to the public. Ayla reminded everyone in attendance that applications for the next open cycle are due May 1<sup>st</sup>.

**d. OWEB**

Ayla provided an overview of 2023 fall applications that were recommended for funding and the applications being drafted for the 2024 spring cycle.

**e. US-FS Ochoco**

Cassi advised that her and Ayla met with the US-FS Ochoco staff, Mitchell Water Board, and the City Recorder to discuss the project and begin planning the components of the application that are due in December. She stated that there are two private landowners who will be involved and she will be inviting ODFW Habitat Division to participate in the project.

**f. HB2010 Juniper Removal**

Cassi advised that DAS denied the request to transfer the grant agreement to the District and Wheeler County chose to pursue a relationship through a MOU with the responsibilities and funding to the District.

**g. BLM – Priest Hole Restoration**

Cassi stated that the 30% design review meeting was held with the BLM state office and the design set was approved with comments. She advised that the 60% design review meeting will be held in-person in Prineville. Cassi presented an overview of the 30% design.

**9. Partners**

a. none

**10. Business Not Listed**

a. none

**Next Meeting** March 28, 2024

The board meeting was adjourned by Vice Chair Thomas at 8:31 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

*Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton*

  
Anna Thomas, Vice Chair

  
Cassandra Newton, District Manager