



Grant Soil and Water Conservation District
721 S. Canyon Blvd. - John Day, OR 97845 - Phone (541) 575-0135

**MINUTES OF GRANT SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S
November 5, 2020 MEETING**

Attendance

Directors Attending:

Pat Voigt - Director
Phil St. Clair – Director
Rick Henslee – Director – Via Telephone

Roger Ediger – Director – Via telephone
Joanne Keerins – Director – Via telephone

Staff Attending:

Pat Holliday – Program Assistant
Matt Wenick – Weed Control Coordinator

Kyle Sullivan – Via telephone

Visitors:

Aaron Roth – Via telephone

Mark Webb – Via telephone

ADMINISTRATION

1. Call Meeting to Order – Pat Voigt called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.
2. Approval of Minutes – **Phil moved to approve the September 3rd, 2020 meeting minutes. Joanne gave the second with the motion passing unanimously.**
3. Introduction of Visitors – There were no visitors attending.
4. Public Input – There was no public input.

REPORTS

5. NRCS – Aaron provided an update on several program deadlines; mid-November 2020 and mid-April 2021 for EQIP and RCPP. Landowners interested in participating should contact Aaron for specific dates. Office staff are wrapping up 2020 Conservation Security Program (CSP) payments and will start CSP contract renewals soon. The CSP program was allocated 50% less funding in the new Farm Bill. Signups for the Classic CSP program will start in the spring of 2021. Aaron stated the John Day office held interviews for the Soil Conservationist position. A selection was made on November 2nd, with the job offer accepted by the successful applicant. Aaron said he is hoping to have the new hire in the office by December or January. The John Day office will also be adding a Soil Conservationist Technician position to its staff. The position has been advertised and plans are to conduct interviews in the next few weeks. Aaron stated he believes there is a good candidate pool in the county. The Technician position will assist in administering NRCS programs.

Upper South Fork Watershed Council – Joanne stated Hanna and Amy have been completing their work schedule, touring potential project sites and visiting with landowners regarding future RCPP projects.

DISTRICT PROGRAMS

6. Weed Control – Matt reported treatments are completed on private lands, but are continuing, weather permitting, on the Malheur Forest and BLM. Recently “Canada Thistle Rust” was released in three areas on the Malheur Forest. Matt stated in the last few weeks he has focused on annual grass treatment using the herbicide, Rejuvra. Grant Weed Control received five gallons of Rejuvra from Bayer to use on sample plots. To date, Rejuvra treatment has been completed on 12 different sample plots. He has been working with Valley Air, from Caldwell, Idaho, to implement aerial application of Rejuvra for annual grass control, on three Bayer pilot projects as well as on three additional properties. Treatment occurred on October 14, 15, and 16th on a total of 1,948 acres. There were several properties that treatment was not able to be completed due to the limitations of the fixed wing aircraft. Matt stated the project went well and he is looking forward to seeing the results this spring.
7. District Programs – Kyle reviewed the written report with the Directors. Kyle and Cole are putting the finishing touches on several potential future BOR task orders. Pat stated Kyle does a good job of providing information in the Program

Status Report sent out in the Director's packet.

DISTRICT BUSINESS

8. Strategic Implementation Areas – Pat stated he appreciated the comprehensive background information Kyle provided in the Director's meeting packet. He is confident the District will provide Director Taylor with several key points at our upcoming meeting. Kyle stated his thoughts were to have the meeting follow a similar format as the Work Session with Representative Owens and Senator Findley. The District has good support from its partners, Monument SWCD and the North Fork Watershed Council. Rick asked about support from the South Fork Watershed Council. Kyle stated he has been in communication with Amy on the issue. Joanne and Phil said they will bring it up at the Council's Nov. 9th meeting. Phil agreed the District needs to have an alternate strategy to treat water quality issues to present to Director Taylor. The District is on record with its disagreement with SIAs. Rick asked Mark how we can address the issue of the District and local ranchers being offended by ODA's approach without alienating Director Taylor. Mark provided several comments; Grant SWCD has a very clear history of decades of successful conservation work implemented on private lands without any regulatory oversight; could there be a more effective approach to addressing water quality issues than SIAs; will ODA consider a different approach if the District provides one; is there anything that prevents ODA from having a different approach to addressing water quality in Grant County than the rest of the State. Mark said the District needs to be respectful but blunt with their concerns and alternate approach. It will be a risk for ODA to do something different in Grant County than is being done in the rest of the State. Joanne stated ODA set a precedence of taking a different approach with Grant SWCD when they accepted the District's request to have ODA choose a Focus Area. Mark said it is important to ask ODA what they would like to see on a landscape level in the next five years, and to stress that the District and landowners can do it in a more effective manner with voluntary participation. Another way to say it is; what does ODA want to see on the ground and how do they want to get there; and how can we more accurately report the conservation that has and is being accomplished? Rick said how do we show what the landowners in Grant County have accomplished? Can ODA help us tell our story or are they interested in what has been done? Pat wondered if a map showing the diversions replaced and the miles of riparian fence built would help. Rick said the John Day River and every stream in Grant County looks better than it did 40 years ago. Phil wondered if the fish data ODFW has gathered over the years would show an improvement in water quality. Rick said all he is responsible for as a rancher and steward of the land is streamside vegetation and health. Kyle said he has several points he believes should be a part of the meeting with Director Taylor. 1. Introduce the District using the restoration work that has been accomplished in the county. 2. State the District believes there is a more effective way to meet ODA's responsibilities than using the SIA approach. 3. Ask the question, can ODA do something different in their approach to water quality. 4. ODA has presented the SIA package in tandem with OWEB funding, which has been significantly reduced. 5. Can the District meet ODA's standards using a different approach. The Directors agreed with the points Kyle presented. Rick asked Kyle to put together a list of outcomes the District hopes to achieve at the meeting with Director Taylor and provide them to the Directors prior to the meeting. Kyle stated two of the outcomes would be; a pause in the SIA process with the District offering a different approach; and the District providing a different method to address water quality. Kyle said he is concerned that ODA feels very strongly about the methods currently being used to determine potential water quality issues. Mark said Section 5 of the MOU between ODA and DEQ gives the District some latitude and suggests focusing on that. Kyle hopes the District can build a program that provides water quality improvements and benefits landowners. Rick hopes Grant County can become a model for pristine water and streamside habitat resulting from voluntary landowner participation not through regulatory action. He believes we can show how to have the best habitat because we already do. The District has the tools and staff to be able to accomplish this. Kyle said the Directors will be provided an outline of the issues discussed today in preparation for the meeting with Director Taylor.
9. Conservation Easement Discussion – Pat suggested due to time constraints, postponing this conversation to another time. Roger agreed as currently the District has a major issue with the upcoming meeting with ODA Director Taylor. The Directors agreed.
10. Harassment Policy - Kyle stated the Grant SWCD Workplace Harassment Policy sent out in their packet is an update to the District's current Sexual Harassment Policy, adopted in May of 1993. The new policy meets requirements of Oregon SB 479 and if adopted will replace the 1993 policy. **Joanne moved to approve the Grant SWCD Workplace Harassment Policy. Phil gave the second and the motion passed unanimously.** Rick asked Kyle how he would handle a harassment complaint. Kyle replied he would follow the District's policy.
11. Update on ODFW Habitat Program – Kyle stated the ODFW Habitat program has seen a reduction in funding over the past years. He provided a graph showing the program's construction and administrative funding since 2004. Kyle stated he plans to research the issue in more detail and talk to our partners as well as make a presentation to the John Day Basin Partnership on the issue. Over the years, the program has been used as seed money for many other restoration programs.
12. Other – Kyle stated he hopes to be back at work on Thursday, the 12th. The office will have a full staff in the office on

Monday.

13. Other - Pat thanked the Directors and Mark Webb for the discussion regarding Strategic Implementation Areas.

FINANCIAL BUSINESS

14. Financial Report/Financial Summary – Financial reports for the month of September and October 2020 were reviewed.
15. Approve Bills – Joanne moved to approve the bills and financial reports for the months of September and October, 2020. Phil gave the second with the motion passing unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45.



Board Chair

12-3-20
Date



District Manager

12-3-2020
Date