



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
September 3, 2020 MEETING**

Attendance

Directors Attending:

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

Roger Ediger – Director
Joanne Keerins - Director

Staff Attending:

Kyle Sullivan - District Manager
Matt Wenick – Weed Control Coordinator

Pat Holliday – Program Assistant

Visitors:

Aaron Roth – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Maria Snodgrass - ODA – via telephone

ADMINISTRATION

1. Call Meeting to Order – Pat Voigt called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm.
2. Approval of Minutes – **Roger moved to approve the July 2nd, 2020 meeting and the July 22nd, 2020 Work Session minutes. Phil 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 reported Emma will be leaving her position with NRCS the end of September. The position will be advertised and the hope is to fill it in the next several months. Phil stated Emma does a great job and he will miss working with her. Aaron stated the office staff is working on the RCPP program with five additional applications funded. Conservation Security Program (CSP) contract documentation is due September 30th. A current payment form will need to be signed and returned by November 1st. The new CSP program rules will require payment to be made in the calendar year activities occur.

ODA – Maria reported ODA has made a 10% budget cut to the agency for the remainder of 2020. The budget cut has put on hold the hiring of a SWCD and Water Quality Project Manager as well as two Water Quality Specialist positions. Remaining staff are taking on new roles and additional responsibilities. The Upper Mainstem and South Fork John Day River Local Advisory Committee will meet in early 2021.

Upper South Fork Watershed Council – Joanne stated the Council has been busy working on multiple projects.

DISTRICT BUSINESS

6. Adoption of Grant County Multi-Jurisdictional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan – Kyle stated he has been attending the meetings and reviewing copies of the plan as it has progressed. The District's most substantial connection to the plan is the Mapping and GIS services that we provide for the Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Emergency Services supported by Title II funds under the direction of Irene Jerome. Other than the mapping services, the Plan does not really involve the District. However, the County needs to have the plan approved to be able to apply for FEMA funds in the case of a natural disaster and all agencies involved need to adopt it. **Joanne moved to adopt the Grant County Multi-Jurisdictional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan. Phil gave the second with the motion passing unanimously.**
7. Vacation Policy Change – Kyle stated the District's current Vacation Policy provides for vacation time increases every 5 years up to 20 years of District service. An employee has exceeded the 20-year threshold; the proposed revised policy provides an increase in vacation hours up to 25 years of service at a rate consistent with the increases in the existing policy. **Phil moved to adopt the revised Vacation Policy. Roger gave the second with the motion passing unanimously.**

8. Conservation Easement Discussion – Kyle stated Roger approached him and wished to have the Board discuss the District's possible future role with Conservation Easements. Kyle has spent a lot of time reviewing the Picnic Creek Easement, which the District holds, as well as other easements. Pat V. said he feels the first issue is; should the District hold additional easements and will that have an effect on the level of trust with landowners the District currently has. Roger recapped his personal history with Conservation Easements. He believes cooperators in the John Day valley need different options with Conservation Easements than are currently available. Pat has concerns with the current Easement the District holds and feels the District would need to be financially compensated if it chooses to hold an Easement in the future. Phil said the District is not going to be able to make a decision on the issue tonight but feels it is something that should be looked into. He would like to further discuss and explore the issue. Joanne stated it is unknown what options will be available for agriculture in the future and she is not against Easements if there is a place for them. Rick said he has multiple questions, concerns, and skepticism. The District should have been in the lead on this issue 15 years ago. Easements are now being dictated by state and federal agencies. He agreed the issue will need many hours of discussion among the Directors. As District Directors our job is to set policy and the Easement question would be the most difficult issue the District has taken on to date. Between tonight and when or if, a final policy is adopted, there is a lot of work for the District staff and Directors to do. This issue is not going to go away, as federal legislation has provided millions of dollars in funding. Kyle said he believes the funding liability is in two categories; annual monitoring and enforcement of Easement guidelines. The issue of landowners not being willing to follow Easement guidelines is becoming more common. The Land Trust Alliance offers liability insurance to Easement holders; however, the holder must be organized as a non-profit. Kyle said he is still exploring how to reduce the liability of both issues, monitoring and enforcement, to the District. Kyle suggested a starting point for the Directors would be to review Roger's draft Easement and see if it is something the District would like to be involved with. The Directors agreed by consensus to have Kyle compile the known pros and cons of the District holding an easement; as well as what steps would need to be taken to hold an Easement. If time allows, the Directors stated they would like to review the information at the November meeting.
9. Highway 395 Sidewalk Project – Kyle presented the recent proposal from ODOT for the sidewalk along Highway 395. Kyle, Cole and Aaron met with ODOT to communicate the District's concerns. The District has received ODOT's Auto Cad files in order to more accurately see the plans. The major issue is the loss of parking along Hwy 395 as well as a strip of unused land that will be left in front of the building. It appears the existing plans will still accommodate 13 parking spaces in the gravel parking area north of the building. Kyle stated he is hoping he can negotiate with ODOT for compensation for the loss of parking spaces as well as other parts of the District's property. Pat stated he is supportive of the District negotiating to receive compensation for its property loss.
10. SIA Update – Maria stated there is some uncertainty within the SIA program because of OWEB's funding shortfalls. ODA may have to reduce three staff members in the Agricultural Water Quality program which may result in a slower implementation schedule for the SIA program than had been previously planned. It is also possible that the number of SIA's implemented in the future may be reduced. Monument SWCD requested and was granted a postponement for the 2021 proposed implementation of the John Day River-North and Middle Forks Strategic Implementation Area. Senator Findley and Representative Owens have requested to participate in the demonstration on the remote evaluation process. Maria stated she is continuing to work on answers to the questions from the Annual Meeting. She will need to send it to her supervisor for approval and then will forward it to the District. Senator Findley met with ODA Director Taylor, who was appreciative of the concerns expressed. Director Taylor stated she would like to meet with the Directors in the future on the SIA issue. Roger reminded all that prior to the pandemic Maria and other ODA representatives were planning on having a more physical presence and interacting personally with landowners. He hopes they follow through with this in the future. Maria said that ODA has been instructed to work remotely until December 31, 2020.
11. October Directors Project Tour – Kyle asked the Directors if they were interested in touring the four Ricco diversions on October 1st and then having dinner after the tour. All enthusiastically agreed.
12. Other – Kyle reported three Directors, Pat Voigt, Phil St. Clair and Rick Henslee are up for reelection in November.

DISTRICT PROGRAMS

13. Weed Control –Matt reported weed treatment implemented through the 25% Cost-Share program has been completed and work has begun on the 50% Cost-Share applications. Treatments are currently occurring on the Malheur Forest. The 2020 agreement with BLM has been received. It is for three years and will provide more flexibility in funding. Matt has been working with Bayer on the Cheatgrass Pilot program, using the herbicide Rejuva. Bayer has provided Grant Weed Control five gallons of Rejuva to apply on 2-4-acre test plots throughout the county to show landowners the potential of the treatment. Matt stated in areas with existing decent perennial grasses Rejuva can make a huge difference. Kyle stated he gives kudos to Matt and hopes Grant Weed Control will become well known for its work with annual grasses.

14. District Programs – Kyle reviewed the written report with the Directors.

FINANCIAL BUSINESS

15. Financial Report/Financial Summary – Financial reports for the month of July and August 2020 were reviewed.

16. Approve Bills – **Roger moved to approve the bills and financial reports for the months of July and August, 2020. Phil gave the second with the motion passing unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15pm.



Board Chair

11-5-20

Date



District Manager

11-12-2020

Date