



Grant Soil and Water Conservation District

Kenneth H. Delano Agricultural Service Center

721 S. Canyon Blvd. - John Day, OR 97845 - Phone (541) 628-5045

MINUTES OF GRANT SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S September 3, 2026 Meeting

Attendance

Directors Attending:

Phil St. Clair – Director

Pat Voigt – Chairman

Joanne Keerins - Director

Staff Attending:

Kyle Sullivan – District Manager

Danielle Kimball – Program Assistant

Matt Wenick – Grant Weed Control

Jack Vaughn – Partnership Coordinator

Visitors:

Hannah Smith – NRCS

Jennifer Bush – Malheur Forest

Chase Bloom– Malheur Forest

Trea Nance – ODEQ

Brandon Ferguson – ODF

John Rowell – County Court

ADMINISTRATION

1. Call Meeting to Order – Pat called the meeting to order at 4:00pm
2. Approval of Minutes – **Phil moved to approve the June 4, 2026, meeting minutes with corrections. Joanne gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, and Joanne Keerins voted in favor. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.**
3. Introduction of Visitors – There were no visitors to introduce.
4. Public Input – There was no public input.

REPORTS

5. NRCS – Hannah Smith reported that NRCS finished obligating their 2026 contracts, with approximately six CSP contracts and one EQIP contract for the entire county, making it a slower year than usual. The next step will be completing CSP documentation, which is due by the end of September, followed by processing CSP payments. An official application deadline has not yet been announced, but November 13 is being discussed as the likely deadline for all programs. There are still some uncertainties regarding how EQIP will be handled this year.
6. FSA – A representative was unable to attend.

7. South Fork John Day Watershed Council – Joanne reported on behalf of Amy that the South Fork John Day Watershed Council secured a \$2.2 million contract with the Ochoco National Forest to implement Rail Ridge Fire Recovery projects, including wild horse corrals, approximately 70 miles of fencing, three water developments, and multiple aspen protection projects, with projects currently going out for bid. The Council is also wrapping up RCPP sign-ups, with more than 20 landowners applying, and has been conducting field verification and engineering site visits. This is the final year of mussel surveys in Murderers Creek, with plans to synthesize and publish the collected data within the year. In addition, the Council is beginning to contract and implement the ODF Landscape Restoration Program, which will support juniper removal and forest thinning across seven different ownerships.
8. Malheur Forest – Jennifer Bush reported that recent changes to agreements appear to include additional requirements and increased matching contributions, creating more challenges for partners. Agreements involving subcontractors are also receiving greater scrutiny, with several larger agreements being declined because they were determined to be more appropriate as direct contracts rather than cooperative agreements. More information is expected as these requirements continue to develop. Zane Murray with Blue Mountain is currently working on comments for the Austin Project, while the Upper Long Creek Project continues to move forward, with existing conditions information expected to be completed sometime in December.

Chase Bloom reported that the Austin project received a substantial number of public comments, which the team is currently reviewing as it works toward a final decision, with multiple options under consideration for moving the project forward. He noted that fire restrictions are expected to ease to IFPL Level 3 and Public Use Restriction B, allowing hunters to have campfires in designated campgrounds and enabling some field work to resume after restrictions halted operations in July. Although fire season is not over, planning is shifting toward the upcoming fall prescribed burn window, and Bloom emphasized the importance of communicating the benefits of prescribed fire and recognizing the fuels-reduction work occurring across the basin. At the agency level, the Forest Service continues to work through its reorganization, with Jacqueline Buchanan expected to serve as the new state director, providing some leadership continuity. A continuing resolution is being considered that would extend federal funding through December 11, providing greater predictability through the end of field season. The Forest Service is also making gradual progress in filling permanent positions, particularly entry-level field positions.

9. ODA – A representative was unable to attend.
10. OR State Forestry – Brandon Ferguson reported the district remains in extreme fire danger and under public use restrictions, with conditions expected to remain elevated despite recent rain and the potential for additional lightning and holdover fires. With several wildfires beginning to wind down, attention is shifting toward fire repair and rehabilitation work across the landscape, including work associated with Second Flat, Bologna, Salmon and Olive Butte, and McCully. Ground verification confirmed that the McCully Fire did not enter the private lands in Grant County as initially believed. Although the area has experienced significant fire activity, improved preparation and lessons learned from the 2024 fire season, including early deployment of additional personnel, incident commanders, and other severity resources, helped keep many fires smaller and improve overall response. Some fires, including the Austin and Narrows fires, remain challenging due to low containment, terrain, and safety concerns. Moving forward, the district will continue working with partners on recovery efforts, including coordination with FSA regarding EFRP assistance for fire-affected properties. The EFRP application period may remain open into approximately April of next year, providing additional time to identify projects, order seedlings, and plan restoration work. While Grant County was relatively fortunate, substantial recovery and rehabilitation work remains, and the district will also continue supporting fire recovery efforts across the other counties it serves.
11. OR Dept. Environmental Quality – Trea Nance provided an update on the TMDL process, noting that DEQ has been steadily working on the plan over the past several months and is finalizing additional technical details. The TMDL will enter a 45-day public comment period beginning October 16 and running through November 30. A public hearing will be held November 19 at the Grant County Regional Airport, with both in-person and virtual participation options available. Comments provided during the hearing will be recorded and formally addressed in writing as part of DEQ's public comment response process. Oral comments at the hearing will be limited to two minutes. Nance encouraged interested individuals to participate and noted that extensions to the public comment period may be requested if additional time is needed.

12. John Rowell County Commissioner – John Rowell reported that the forest planning process is nearing completion, with additional opportunities still available to submit comments before the BIC is finalized. If everything proceeds as planned, a new Forest Plan should be completed soon. Changes are also anticipated for the Austin Project, with work expected to move forward first on the north side of the road while road-related issues are addressed. On the south side, two treatment units are expected to remain. Discussions have included reducing road density by identifying roads that are already physically closed and removing them from the official road map, although it is unclear whether that approach has been finalized. Additional fire mitigation measures may also be needed because the project is taking longer than anticipated. Moving the Austin Project forward remains a priority so necessary forest treatment work can be completed, although the process has proven more difficult and time-consuming than originally expected.

DISTRICT PROGRAMS

13. Grant Weed Control – Matt reported that the weed department has been focused on treating areas impacted by the 2024 fires, including work on Forest Service and BLM lands. A new patch of rush skeleton weed was discovered along the North Fork John Day River, making containment and monitoring a high priority. Nate completed his drone training and will apply for his applicator license, allowing drone herbicide treatments to begin soon. Annual grass treatments are also moving forward, with approximately 6,000 acres of BLM land and 5,300 acres of private land scheduled for aerial treatment, along with potentially another 1,500 acres near Post. After aerial treatments are completed, work will return to fire-related weed control and seeding work.
14. District Programs – Kyle reported that culvert installation is underway at the Iz Ranch through an arrangement involving funding received by the landowner through ODF, with the district managing the contract and providing project oversight. One culvert has been installed, and the second is nearing completion. The project progressed from agreement to construction in approximately 13 months, which was considered a significant accomplishment. Staff remain optimistic that the Belshaw Creek irrigation project will move forward. The project includes removal of a gravel diversion dam and installation of irrigation piping. Initial survey work dates back to approximately 2016, with considerable effort devoted to the project during the past three to four years, particularly in navigating permitting requirements. Remaining CWDG funding originally designated for annual grass treatments may be modified to include a seeding component. Working with the Forest Service on the proposed change to allow seeding in previously treated areas where natural regeneration has been slower than anticipated. Approximately 16,000 acres could potentially be seeded. Budget modifications are being finalized, with hopes of beginning work in January or February. The overall project must be completed by March 2028. Seeding would primarily occur on private lands previously treated with Rejuvra where sufficient time has passed to allow reseeding. Other projects, including work on the national forest, remain on hold. With hope to resume fencing projects, as there are miles of fence work remaining and a contractor prepared to continue. Tyler is also working with a Prairie City landowner on a controlled burn planned for this fall, with assistance from Micah Schmidt of OSU Extension. The burn would be conducted under the established Prescribed Burn Association (PBA). The district's agreement with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs was amended to include \$200,000 for a riparian program. The program is intended to provide another option for landowners in light of DEQ's TMDL efforts and challenges or changes affecting other available programs. Staff anticipate using DEQ modeling and analysis to help prioritize areas for treatment. Potential practices include temporary riparian enclosures similar to those that have been successful on Fox Creek. These enclosures could provide additional protection from deer and elk browsing within livestock-fenced areas or be used as smaller, more robust enclosures in locations where conventional four-strand barbed-wire fencing is impractical.

DISTRICT BUSINESS

15. Jack Vaughn Introduction – Jack Vaughn was introduced as the new Partnership Coordinator, replacing Roy Walker and taking responsibility for the Southern Blues Partners. Jack was hired on a part-time basis in late July. He shared that he previously worked locally for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), serving as the John Day Watershed Wildlife Habitat Program Manager at the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area. Coming from a family with several generations in the timber industry, Jack developed an early interest in natural resources and later graduated from Oregon State University with a fisheries and wildlife background. After several years with ODFW, he left the agency in 2022 and began contracting, including fence construction. Jack said he has missed being involved in natural resource work and felt the Partnership Coordinator position was a good fit for

his background and skills. He emphasized that his priority will be bringing partners together, maintaining momentum, improving efficiency, and helping move natural resource projects forward.

16. Annual Meeting Resolution – **Joanne moved that the annual meeting be held on November 5th, 2026. Phil gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, and Joanne Keerins voted in favor. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.**
17. 2026/2027 Budget Review and Approval – The 2026/2027 budget was reviewed by the Directors.
Joanne moved to approve the 2026/2027 Budget. Phil gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, and Joanne Keerins voted in favor. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.
18. Other - Two director positions will appear on the ballot this fall. Candidates include Alec Oliver for Zone One, which includes the area currently represented by Joanne, as well as Didgette McCracken for the at-large position currently held by Roger.
- 19.

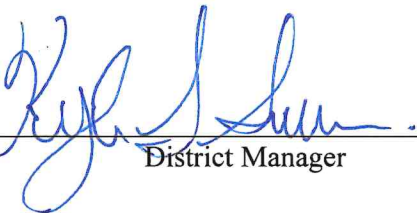
FINANCIAL BUSINESS

19. Financial Report/Financial Summary – Financial reports for the months June, July, & August 2026 were reviewed by the Directors.
20. Approve Bills – **Joanne moved to approve the bills and financial reports for the month June, July, & August 2026. Phil gave the second. Joanne Keerins, Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt voted yes. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 5:06


Board Chair

10-1-26
Date


District Manager

10/1/2026
Date