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**Harney Soil & Water Conservation District Special Meeting**  
**90 W Washington St., Burns**  
**December 5, 2024**

Present: Vice Chair (VC) Scott Franklin, Board Director (BD) Ken Bentz; CWMA Tyler Goss; District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, Sage Grouse Coordinator (SGC) Sarah Mundy, newly hired SONEC Braden Morris, Admin Assist (AA) Barbara Pearson

Guests: Sue Ramsay, Michael Angell of Wild Honey Excavation, Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Maria Snodgrass

Remote: Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Board Directors (BD) Carol Dunten and Stacy Davies

Absent: BD Susan Doverspike, BD Ryan Peila

Note: Sue Ramsey was recently elected to the board of directors, but she will not take office until January 2025. She attended the meeting as a member of the public.

Because BC Hussey was unable to attend the meeting in person, VC Franklin led the meeting. The meeting was called to order. Braden Morris has been hired to the HSWCD and there was a time of introductions.

**Item #1: Approve the Meeting Agenda (Action item)**

There were no additions or corrections proposed. BD Dunten moved and BC Hussey seconded the approval of the meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Item #2: Financial Reports (Action item)**

Because the board didn't hold a meeting in November, financial reports for the months of October and November were provided to the board. DM Kesling said contractors and employees are being paid. It's been "business as usual" for the district. There were no questions. BC Hussey moved and BD Bentz seconded approval of both financial reports as presented.

### **Item #3: October Meeting Minutes (Action item)**

The October meeting minutes were provided to the board prior to the meeting and a copy is in their notebooks. There were no questions, comments, or additions. BD Davies moved and BD Hussey seconded approving the minutes. BD Hussey, VC Franklin, BD Davies and Bentz were in favor; BD Dunten abstained.

### **Item #4: Employee Manual (Tabled)**

DM Kesling said the employee manual was reviewed and updated in 2021 and approved in 2022. New laws through the state were recently enacted that necessitated another review. Staff reviewed and provided updates during a two week period. A draft of the manual was presented to the board as a potential action item, along with a key showing the updates. The DM felt the board could either vote tonight or take time to review and then discuss in future meetings.

At the DM's request, the AA advised the board regarding OSHA regulations for workers during times of intense heat and smoke.

The DM also proposed updating the retirement provision for employees. He recently contacted the district's financial advisor. Presently the district has a simple IRA in place and was given the option of a 401K vs. simple IRA. The biggest benefit would be for employees as the district could change the employee match from 3 to 6%. The financial advisor gave pros and cons for both. The biggest con would be an additional cost to the district, about \$3975 yearly. An employee match increased to 6% could increase employee morale and entice them to remain with the district. It would allow people to save more and provide option to retire. It would not be a match system. He suggested the district increase to a flat 6%. BD Dunten asked clarifying questions and DM said it would take away the requirement for employees to contribute. If the employee wants to give or to give additional funds this would allow him or her to do vs. a simple IRA. VC pointed out that BD Doverspike is not in attendance and she would have questions. DM agreed and said the retirement update would be included future meetings. BD Dunten said, "But you've given us an idea as to what employees want."

BD Bentz asked how much additional would the district be paying and DM Kesling said 3%, since the district is already paying 3%. BD Bentz said he would like to see additional expenditures. DM Kesling said the increase would be written into future grants. He said it would cost the district more for a 401K vs simple IRA. In the past, the district went with the simple IRA because it had a smaller staff and it might not have fit within the budget.

The topic was tabled for next meeting. The DM urged the board to read the manual draft and provide comments and edits. He advised approving the new manual could take two or three meetings.

#### **Item #5: Holiday Bonus (Action item)**

Information on the bonus was provided in the meeting materials. The DM proposed a schedule of bonus based on longevity (see attached). Last year the district provided a \$1K bonus for everyone but felt prorating would make everyone's Christmas better. He offered to send out an exact amount of the bonuses to the board. BC Hussey said if the finances allow he had no problem. He made the motion to accept. BD Bentz seconded and the motion was approved unanimously. HSWCD staff present thanked the board for its generosity.

#### **Item #6: Scheduling the Annual Meeting (Action item)**

DM proposed the fourth Thursday of February (the 27<sup>th</sup>). The audit would be presented. It is important that there be a quorum present for the start of the meeting. BD Bentz moved and BD Davies seconded scheduling the annual meeting for Thursday, February 27, 2025. It was unanimously approved and VC Franklin signed the resolution.

#### **Item #7: BLM Contracts (Discussion)**

DM Kesling found he had been pulling money from the BLM sooner than he was allowed. This isn't something the district will face disciplinary action over; he has just been advised and has taken action to correct it. This also means last month approval of transferring the BLM money to LGIP will not be an option. The BLM wants the district to oversee \$2.4 to \$2.6M in its budget for fence replacement from the 2024 fires. The district would contract for fence work and reseeding. He advised the board that this will trigger the need for an additional audit. The district already has a state audit and the federal audit would need to be written into the federal funded projects budgets. The district overseeing the funds would allow work to be completed sooner, jointly working with the BLM and (in reseeding) the Forest Service.

VC Franklin asked about the federal audit. If the district spend \$750K it is required to do a federal audit. The district came close to that 2 FY ago, but the

BLM funding will definitely put the district over the threshold. The BLM sees the value in doing this, too. VC Franklin asked if a different accountant would be required, and DM Kesling advised it doesn't have to be but it would require a different format and two separate payments.

SGC Mundy asked if there would be reporting requirements and DM Kesling said it would be similar to other reports, only on the grants.gov site. There is a five year agreement and budget modification each year. Funds will be put into the existing agreement with modification and the BLM would be provided a scheduled list of prioritized treatments and projects. The DM will then put projects out for bid. The district will act like a pass-through for the majority of the funding.

#### **Item #9: Contractors' List (Discussion)**

A current list of contractors listed with the district was presented to the board in their notebooks. The DM said the district is beginning to contract more and he thought it would be good to present a list of contractors to the board annually. If a project is over \$100K, the full board will select the contractor. If a project is under \$100K, BD Bentz, the DM, and a SWCD employee selects the contractor. If the project is \$10K or less the DM typically makes the decision. Contracted projects totaled \$1.6M in the district budget; currently \$1.2 or \$1.3M has been expended.

Sue Ramsay asked if the list of contractors was available to the public. AA Pearson said she assists with two contractor lists, one for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the district. NRCS provides the list of contractors and services provided to the landowner for the landowner to initiate contact; the district's list is based on services provided and the district then contacts the contractor if a project that fits the contractor's scope comes up. DM Kesling said the district advertises through the Capital Press. AA Pearson added the local paper, the website and Facebook page as well.

#### **Item #10: Adjournment**

BC Hussey requested (he participated remotely while working with calves) the meeting be adjourned but allow the public comment time to take place after. This was at 4:12 pm. BD Bentz moved and BC Hussey seconded adjourning the meeting with the knowledge activity would still be recorded. BC Hussey, VC Franklin, BD Davies and BD Bentz were in favor; BD Dunten abstained. The meeting adjourned.

#### **Item #11 Public Comment**

ODA's Maria Snodgrass said the agency is moving further in modernization; a new website that will be user friendly will premiere December 10, 2025. The

agency is pushing toward digitizing data, which will benefit district reporting. Once everything is digital, then sorting, reporting, adding data will be easier. Internally, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is reframing its work, hearing discussion on specific action plans. She detailed a recent project in Umatilla County. In Harney County, the water issue is quantity.

DM Kesling introduced Braden Morris to the meeting participants. He is newly hired as a conservation planner for SONEC Wetlands FIP. Funding for his position is through the High Desert Partnership legislation funds, OWEB Wetland FIP and ODA Water Quality.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

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District Representative

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Date