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**Harney Soil & Water Conservation District**

**Regular Monthly Meeting**

**Harney County Courthouse, Basement Conference Room**

**January 25, 2024**

Present: Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Secretary/Treasurer (S/T) Ryan Peila, Board Directors (BD) Susan Doverspike, Ken Bentz; District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, CWMA Coordinator Tyler Goss, Rangeland Biologist (RB) April Mack, NRCS Sage grouse Partner Biologist Danielle Reynolds, Admin Assist (AA) Barbara Pearson

Attending remotely: BD Stacy Davies, Carol Dunten

Guest/Present: Emma Gabriel, Farm Services Agency (FSA)

Guest/Remote: Rob Gaslin, Gaslin Accounting

Absent: Vice Chair Scott Franklin

BC Hussey called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm.

**Item #1: Agenda**

DM Kesling requested the following changes to the agenda prior to approval:

1. With the item #10 USDA Service Center Purchase, there is currently no update. Instead, the DM requested to remove that from the agenda and add two items:
   1. A decision about the March HSWCD monthly meeting
   2. Discussion regarding a new position at SWCD

BD Doverspike moved to approve the agenda with the proposed additions and changes. BD Bentz seconded. All present eligible to vote were in favor and this motion was approved.

**Item #2: FSA New Programs and Updates**

Emma Gabriel from FSA presented new programs:

The FSA office in John Day is combined with the Hines office.  A new technician has tentatively been hired for the John Day office, and the Hines office is attempting to secure a temporary position.  She presented a good report for her office for FY 2023—the two counties pushed out $21.5M in FSA funding; Harney County alone did $15M—the highest in the state.  She commended her staff’s hard work, though said it is currently behind processing applications. Half of four hundred applications have been completed; quite a few applicants haven’t turned in livestock numbers to the office for the January 30th deadline for LFP.

Another deadline next week is applying for compensation for last year’s winter storm (January-May 2023).  This would assist ranchers if additional feed needed to be purchased; applicants will need to turn in receipts.  Register timeframe is three weeks long following the deadline, she has asked for additional staff to assist in workload.

Another program is for livestock indemnity (livestock loss).  It currently has over 100 applications. The enrollment deadline is March 2nd.  Please submit notice of loss and loss documentation.  Producers to submit acreage reports by the March 15th deadline if you have the NAP insurance through FSA. ARC/PLC program sign-up for 2024 is underway and has a deadline of March 15th. Brenda mailed out information.  CRP—Harney Water Ground water CREP.  Test scenario run today but wrong information input for area.  Hopes to run it again soon. Sign up active.

New leases for new year, bring in when you can so office can add.  There were no questions.  Emma was thanked for her input

BDs Davies and Dunten both arrived remotely around 3:38 pm. BD Davies said he would need to leave shortly; BD Doverspike said she would need to leave at 4:20 pm

**Item #3: Audit Overview and Approval**

Board directors received a letter from Rob Gaslin and copies of the audit with their meeting materials.

Mr. Gaslin explained the purpose of the letter, which reviewed responsibilities of the auditor and the board directors. The auditor then shares his opinion on the state of the board. He said, “Everything’s fine.” The letter also touches on communication, ethical requirements, risks, policies, etc. He said some adjustments were suggested. There were no questions regarding the letter.

The audit report was reviewed. He said the district was in a good financial position. Assets have grown and include the purchase of the new pickup. There has been a revenue increase and a decrease in total expenses.

The only note was that Oregon requires a district to obtain three quotes for any purchases over $10K. This was not done for the new pickup, but this was addressed so it will not reoccur. Other than that, everything in place.

There were no questions. Rob Gaslin left at 3:51 pm.

The DM said that the audit doesn’t have to be formally adopted, but the district has done so in the past. BD Bentz moved to approve the 2023 SWCD Audit as presented; S/T Peila seconded. Those present at the time of vote (BC Hussey, S/T Peila, BD Doverspike, Dunten, Davies, and Bentz) were in favor and the motion was approved.

**Item #4: Review/Approve December Financials**

DM Kesling had sent out meeting materials via email to the board of directors. He advised since then he had added a profit/loss report to their notebooks. One profit/loss was a summary of previous months and the other was for December 2023. There were no questions. DM Kesling said the district is on track to spend more. S/T Peila moved and BD Bentz seconded approval of the financial report as presented. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #5: Review/Approve December Meeting Minutes**

AA Pearson took notes at the previous meeting and the created minutes; DM Kesling reviewed the minutes and sent them to the board of directors earlier in the month. The office did not receive any comments regarding corrections or additions.

BD Doverspike asked the DM if he knew what interest rate the district was receiving through the LGIP? DM Kesling said that he has been checking but the district is in the first month of participation. An LGIP is not like a stock market where the interest changes daily. He said he would report to the board when he has information to present.

BD Doverspike moved and S/T Peila seconded approval of the meeting minutes as presented. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #6: Grant and Budget Update**

DM Kesling described the report, which includes information on open and closed grants. He offered to go line by line or just provide the highlights (one director requested highlights). DM Kesling went through the report.

The report did not cover continued funding like SONEC and Pheasants Forever, and a three-year agreement with the BLM. This is due to how those agencies pay annually.

The Admin fund currently has only been used for bonuses, admin email, website not salary.

S/T Peila asked about how funding through CWMA is processed. The DM said the CWMA pays the coordinator (Goss) for his time; reporting has just been completed. The CWMA board will then approve the DM moving funds into the CWMA admin.

This was presented as an update; no action was required.

**Item #7: Review/Approve Purchase of a Security System**

The director notebooks included a spread sheet of different security systems available, with general quotes from businesses. The DM recommended proceeding through Oregon Data System (ODS) as it is local and available to troubleshoot if necessary. While it is more expensive, it does come with more benefits.

BD Bentz agreed that ODS is worth it; BD Doverspike agreed that it is good to have a local business. There were no further questions. BD Doverspike said, “Do what you need to do.” There was no vote, but a general consensus approval was given.

**Item #8: Approval of HC-42 SSP**

DM Kesling said that RB Mack has submitted her first HC, which means there are twenty-five total SSPs for Harney County. The meeting materials for this included a letter from the US Fish and Wildlife and then the SSP summary. DM Kesling explained the letter indicating the property is enrolled and regarding “take” allocation for Harney County. The take protects landowners if the bird is listed.

RB Mack presented information regarding HC-42. It encompasses 1,422 acres and consists three different pastures (descriptions and conservation measures were listed). Recommendations include juniper removal (some pastures have quite a bit of encroachment) and weed treatment. Cheat grass is scattered through the pastures, and one pasture has three heavy spots of medusahead. Other conservation efforts include escape ramps in troughs and markers for five miles of fence. The US Fish and Wildlife has approved; the landowner has agreed; now the board needs to adopt the land into the program.

Somewhere during this presentation BD Davies dropped off the call.

BD Doverspike moved and BD Bentz seconded the HSWCD include HC-42 into the CCAA program. Those approving were BC Hussey, S/T Peila, BD Doverspike, BD Dunten, and BD Bentz.

**Item #9: Burns High School Intern**

DM Kesling said that the SWCD has taken on a new intern. Her name is Olivia Blute, and she began working this week. Her schedule will be Monday-Thursday from 1:30-3:30 pm with opportunities do field work all day on Fridays. Her interests are soil and hydrology. SONEC Sam Artaiz has been working with her directly to line her out on projects work.

There were no questions. The board members voiced their approval.

**Item #10: March Meeting**

DM Kesling said in the past the board has canceled March meetings since this is calving season. He suggested canceling it in 2024, and if there are any pressing issues to address them prior to the Annual Meeting in February. BD Bentz moved and S/T Peila seconded canceling the March meeting. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #10a: New Position**

The High Desert Partnership received HB2010 funding to address irrigation improvements within Harney County. SONEC Partner Biologist Artaiz has been working on five OWEB grants to fund technical assistance in implementing new structures where an engineer would be needed. Some projects will include replacement and/or repair of ditches. The district may receive around $60K for salary, and the remaining position needs can include CCAA monitoring and Ag Water. The position would be the equivalent or a HSWCD biologist. DM Kesling requested the board to give approval to develop a new position that will be decided on February 22nd board meeting prior to the annual meeting. The board members voiced their approval.

**Item #11: Public Comments**

AA Pearson reminded board to RSVP if they planned to attend the annual meeting (which will be held Thursday, February 22, 2024 at the Historic Central Hotel). DM Kesling said he has lined up a speaker on the topic of V Fencings. Other topics will include an update on SWCD activities and then a roundtable for landowners. The district will invite 30 to 40 ranchers to attend and request their feedback.

BD Dunten asked where the district stood with the BLM/sage grouse amendment. She felt the district was making a mistake not being a cooperating agency. Jason said the BLM gave two weeks to give comments on approximately 80 pages of material. Due to his absence from the office, he was unable to review and provide comments, and missed the opportunity to present to the subcommittee at that time. The BLM has not said anything since. BD Dunten said she was, “Afraid we’ve missed the boat to be a part of that in that planning process.” DM Kesling said HSWCD is still listed as a cooperating agency. The amendment is still in planning phase (Oregon realigned sage grouse mapping), now they are looking at completion at August.

BD Dunten suggested the board create a committee to take the load from DM Kesling. She asked if the public was in the dark as to who was writing the amendment. DM Kesling said yes, the local BLM is not involved in this process. There was more discussion on this subject; DM Kesling is to send the board emails he has received on this.

**Item #12: Meeting Adjournment**

BD Bentz moved and BD Dunten seconded adjourning the meeting. All present eligible to vote were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 4:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

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| District Representative |  | Date |