



**Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Commission
Regular Quarterly Meeting
Monday, May 1, 2017
Red Lion Hotel, Yakima Conference Center
304 NE Nye Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801**

Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) Members Present

Chair Barbara Boyer; Vice Chair Tim Kerns; Gary Jensen; Ted Molinari; Mel Omeg; Jerry Ward

Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) Staff Present

John Byers, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and Ag Water Quality Management (Ag WQ) Program Manager; Manette Simpson, SWCD Program Lead; Jim Johnson, Land Use and Water Planning Coordinator; Sandi Hiatt, SWCD Grants Administrator; Eric Nusbaum, SWCD Operations Specialist; Jason Eck, Ag WQ Support Specialist

Advisors Present

Mark Saelens, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) President; Courtney Shaff, OWEB Capacity Coordinator; Pat Fitzgerald, OACD Vice President; Jerry Nicolescu, OACD Executive Director

Visitors Present

Ken Fetcho, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) Effectiveness Monitoring Coordinator; Whitney Collins, Baker County SWCDs District Manager; Janet Greenup, Morrow SWCD District Manager; Brian Lightcap, OACD Board Member

Call to Order

Chair Barbara Boyer called the regular quarterly meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, May 1, 2017. Introductions were made.

SWCC Member Appointment

John Byers presented Ted Molinari with a Letter and Certificate of Appointment, and swore him in as a member of the Soil and Water Conservation Commission. The term ends June 30, 2018.

Approve February 2017 Meeting Minutes

The SWCC reviewed the minutes from the February 8, 2017, meeting held in Portland, Oregon.

Gary Jensen moved and Ted Molinari seconded the motion to approve the minutes from the February 8, 2017, SWCC regular quarterly meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

Working Lunch: CREP Effectiveness Monitoring Study Update

Ken Fetcho presented a report on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Effectiveness Monitoring Study. OWEB completed the study with the assistance of a contractor (Stillwater Sciences) and an advisory group; a final report is available at:

http://www.oregon.gov/OWEB/MONITOR/pages/monitor_crep.aspx#hide2017. The study detected a significant improvement in vegetation metrics for CREP buffers when compared to control sites that were not treated with conservation actions; the contractor provided recommendations, and OWEB will be following up with the CREP partners to discuss the potential and feasibility of implementing these recommendations in an adaptive management approach.

SWCD and Water Quality Management Updates

John Byers provided several updates. Regarding the 2017 legislative session, he thanked the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts and the conservation community for supporting the Ag Water Quality and SWCD programs. John recognized Sandi Hiatt, who took six forms and combined them into one for streamlining SWCD financial reporting, and ODA staff for updating the Scope of Work and Focus Area Action Plan reporting forms. John explained the new process to select the next round of Strategic Implementation Areas (SIAs); he said the Governor's Natural Resources Office (GNRO) requested that ODA reach out to interested parties as to the location of future SIAs; GNRO sent ODA a contact list of private citizens and the conservation community; ODA then sent a packet of outreach information (maps, outline of SIAs, ODFW prioritization process) asking where they would like ODA to prioritize work; the deadline for responding is May 8; ODA has not received recommendations yet. ODA has requested \$1 million from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to fund the next round of SIAs; this year's proposal would allow districts to use funding for technical assistance, which would provide people to help write grants; he explained that previously, districts without capacity did not have the staff to write grants in support of SIA identified work. Courtney emphasized that the money would be only for technical assistance, not to bolster the personnel of a district; the Clean Water Partnership was developed by the GNRO to bring several agencies together to be sure all were moving ahead in a cohesive manner in terms of monitoring; the goal of the GNRO was agriculture and reducing the pollution that could come from agriculture. John said a new timeline would be implemented for the next six SIAs, which will be identified by June 30, with compliance evaluations completed by October 30; the Open House process and letters to owners will follow; OWEB large grants are due in May 2018, which will allow plenty of time for districts to write quality grants with the proposed money for technical assistance.

John said Yamhill County SWCD obtained an approximate \$15,000 grant from the Oregon Community Foundation, an organization committed to conservation work; the grant allowed a facilitated process, with staff from SWCDs, OWEB, and ODA, to talk about how the SIA process worked, the perception of districts and agencies, and adjustments and improvements that could be made for the future. In mid-May, ODA water quality specialists from across the state will go through compliance calibration training for how they document their work; training has not been offered in a long time; ODA complaints and workload have increased considerably as a result of the SIA process. ODA recently joined with the grass-seed industry to prepare an outreach document to help growers with alternatives to water-quality issues on their land; the publication, "Guidelines for Stream and Ditch Maintenance," offers growers ways to manage erosion; the guide will be distributed soon. He noted huge amounts of rain have fallen in the Willamette Valley this winter and spring, resulting in increased erosion complaints; ODA is preparing a companion document, "Erosion Control Challenges: Changes, Adaptations, and Strategies," which offers rainfall figures, compliance information, potential solutions, and anticipated issues; he emphasized that ODA is concentrating enforcement on repeat offenders.

John said ODA and DEQ are working together on comments DEQ Basin Coordinators provide for Ag Water Quality Area Plans; in the past, ODA would hear broad comments about the Ag Water Quality Program instead of specific comments targeted at an Area Plan; to address this, the two agencies are going to have a two-prong approach: first, have a programmatic review every other year to answer specific questions about the program, and secondly, ODA and DEQ staff will talk more frequently to one another.

Advisor Reports

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)

Courtney Shaff reported that at their April meeting the OWEB Board awarded Restoration, Monitoring, Outreach, and Technical Assistance grants from applications submitted in October 2016. OWEB's proposed budget for the 2017-19 biennium is up 11 percent as a result of increased lottery sales, which is not connected with the state's general fund; in anticipation of the increased lottery funding, the OWEB Board discussed increasing funding for districts and watershed councils, not knowing if it would ever be able to do so again in the future; the proposed budget is \$6.75 million each for districts and watershed councils; she does not anticipate any change before the July board meeting. Other OWEB funding proposals are: \$1 million for Strategic Implementation Areas (SIAs), \$3 million for weed grants, a \$1 million increase as funding was set at \$2 million since the program began; \$500,000 for Conservation Partnership grants, an increase of \$250,000; same funding for Small grants; \$30 million for Open Solicitation grants in 2018, up from \$26.8 million in 2017; a \$600,000 increase for Technical Assistance grants and a \$250,000 increase for Monitoring grants. OWEB proposes to again offer Focused Investment Partnership Capacity Building grants again next biennium but will not offer any new Implementation Focus Investment Partnership grants until the 2019-21 biennium. Courtney said a Rules Advisory Committee is working through defining Community Engagement and what are eligible outreach projects; language in Measure 76 prevents OWEB from funding education; any Measure 76 funding, which includes watershed council and district Capacity grants, must comply with the language in the measure; funds can not be used for education; OWEB is working on clarifying the definition of outreach, but in short, work must be tied to on-the-ground restoration. OWEB will add a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service position to the Board. Courtney said OWEB staff are working on its strategic plan.

Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)

Mark Saelens said it has been a pleasure, honor, and challenge to serve as OACD's president; he said he will continue to serve as an officer with OACD and has offered to continue his work with NACD on the Urban and Community Work Committee if the new OACD officers so choose.

Jerry Nicolescu said he recently met with Jeff Stone, Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, about how to strengthen the new Farm Bill for Oregon; districts will soon receive a letter seeking input on what Oregon needs most from Farm Bill programs, especially in terms of resources; also talked about ways to have less paperwork for getting into programs and keeping the successful delivery system currently used; an Oregon delegation will travel to Washington D.C. to talk about Oregon's needs. On the legislative front, OACD testified in support of ODA and OWEB agency budgets and had good response; he said OACD has support for continuing work on sage grouse; OACD also is moving the Oregon Ag Heritage program forward; OACD is following the Recreational Immunity Act, regarding accidents that may happen on a landowner's property. He said OACD continues its work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a recent Willamette Valley conservation study regarding species of concern; there is interest in working at a region-wide or ecosystem-wide basis rather than species by species. OACD Board elections are May 2 and Jerry said good people are running, however, OACD needs more people to consider running. OACD is in the process of developing its strategic plan at the same time new officers are coming on; he said the plan is going to help the association and districts learn the future direction and priorities of OACD at the same time it is seeking a new executive director. Jerry said his departure as executive director has nothing to do with the current board members, officers, or future configuration of OACD; he said it's time to move on and spend more time with his family; and he has enjoyed working with the partners. In terms of transition, he said the current officers and board will take the time needed to

review the strategic plan and develop the best personnel description; they want agencies and districts to be involved in getting the best candidates. Jerry said Baker County SWCDs has offered to allow its district manager to help OACD with business management; OACD Vice President Pat Fitzgerald will take on partnership meetings; and Treasurer Jerry Ward will track the expenses; he encourages districts to reach out to let OACD know what it needs; he truly believes that the organization is only as good as the entities that put it together; he tried to put the board in the best position to undergo the highs and lows of any association. He thanked his board and the commission for their support.

Mark Saelens outlined two challenges the association faces with Jerry's pending departure: 1) "how to keep the lights on" after Jerry leaves in two months and until a new executive director begins, and 2) the challenge of the actual recruitment itself. Mark said OACD will take the next 60 days to look at every task the association accomplishes and to form two committees to help with the recruitment; the Executive Director Search Committee will be made up of members from the Strategic Planning Committee, and others to help develop a position description based on direction from the strategic plan; then a subset of the Executive Director Search Committee, will develop a recruitment notice with the requirements of the position; a final version of the notice will be developed and sent to partners; he hoped the recruitment notice would be out by mid-June and the new executive director in place by late September or early October.

Oregon's Right to Farm Law

Jim Johnson offered a presentation titled, "Protecting the Ability to Farm: Right to Farm and Land Use Planning in Oregon". Jim also gave a legislative update; he said about two-thirds of the approximately 75 bills he was tracking are dead. Some key bills he is still tracking are: HB 2893, which would allow urban growth boundaries east of the Cascades to expand on to farmlands if they include "poor" soils; this bill is focused on the city of Bend; HB 3012, which would allow a landowner to build a second dwelling if the landowner has a historic dwelling on the property; HB 2023, which would change the definition of high-value farmland to remove some of the viticultural designations; this bill involves Umatilla County and siting of solar facilities; SB 644, which would make mining east of the mountains a permitted use outright in the exclusive farm use zone with no review; SB 432, which would allow local governments east of the mountains to adopt land use plans without complying with statewide land use planning goals; he said ODA is very concerned about this bill because of its broad potential.

Morrow SWCD Presentation

Janet Greenup presented a report about the Morrow Soil and Water Conservation District; she said over the past 10 years the district has committed \$249,000 in OWEB funds for small grant projects that include mostly upland projects, such as pipelines, troughs, fencing, and Russian Olive removal; the district also has OWEB large grants covering juniper removal, wetland improvement and elk friendly fence. The district works in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to increase wildlife habitat in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) properties; the district buys Wildlife Watering Facilities (Bird Guzzlers) that qualify for mid-management practices in CRP; the district makes little money on this venture, but landowners appreciate it. A free spray day is offered each year in area towns and the district is on the Weed Advisory Committee and advises the county on weed issues. The district offers a watershed field day each year for all county fifth graders. The district does not have a tax base but does receive \$55,000 per year from Morrow County; and so far, is able to accomplish all of the work with three full-time employees: a district manager, a resource technician, and a habitat technician.

SWCC Member Reports

Jerry Ward said Clatsop SWCD is looking for a new resource technician. He said he was unable to attend any of the ODA Director Training because of weather; he met with West Multnomah and will continue to do so on a quarterly basis.

Gary Jensen said the South Willamette Valley endured one of its heaviest rainfall years; he expects a better water season and property owners dealing with erosion issues. He is currently in the budget cycle to keep the district's three employees going; he said the outlook for lumber markets are solid; the population of Eugene and surrounding areas are growing and yet it remains a challenge to find support for a tax base.

Tim Kerns said Baker and Malheur districts have raised a concern about sage grouse Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) regarding 30 year monitoring requirements; that is a lengthy time commitment for the current boards to make into the future.

Barbara Boyer said it is exciting to see Benton SWCD researching the possibility of sharing office space with several other partners; it is a collaborative model for organization capacity. Yamhill's Cruickshank Woodland Tour, a two-day event for fifth graders, is set in May.

Ted Molinari said Wheeler earned a \$5.4 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) grant from NRCS; it required the district to provide match over a five-year period and the district is at 70 percent of the match entering the third year of the grant. He said a staff member has come up with procedures to help the district speed up cultural reviews on projects. The district has hired a new administrative assistant and has a new director who previously served two years as an associate director.

Mel Omeg apologized to ODA staff for the one district in the Deschutes Basin that has been an ongoing concern for at least five years; John Byers said with a new Scope of Work, ODA is going to take the tact of laying out the contract such that the district needs to fulfill its obligations or will not receive grant funds; ODA is responsible for ensuring that public dollars are being spent appropriately and help ensure the district is progressive and functioning. Chair Boyer asked at what point is enough enough? John said if this tact doesn't work, he would then approach the SWCC and the Oregon Board of Agriculture.

Public Comment

None received.

Follow Up Assignments

None.

Upcoming Meetings

- Aug. 10-11, 2017: Medford area, TBD
- Nov. 14-15, 2017: Salem area, TBD

Chair Boyer adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.