OREGON DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Soil and Water Conservation Districts Program
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Soil and Water Conservation Commission Minutes

DATE	LOCATION	START TIME	END TIME
February 19, 2026	Virtual Only	12:00PM	3:00PM

CHAIR/ VICE CHAIR	COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT	ABSENT
Barbara Boyer & Tim Kerns	Jerry Ward, Robin Vora, Bob Webb, & Barbara Boyer	Tim Kerns, Al Hrynyshyn, & Jim Bob Collins

ATTENDEES:

Abbie Forrest, Wasco County SWCD
Andrea Kreiner, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
Brenda Sanchez, Marion County SWCD
Bryan Wolcott, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
Carolyn Sufit, Water Resources Department
Debra Paul, Linn County SWCD
Dennis Sheehy, Oregon Cattlemans Association
Eric Nusbaum, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Eric Williams, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
Jed Arnold, Hood River County SWCD
Kate Harper, Jefferson County SWCD
Kevin Fenn, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Makenzie Oakes, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Misty Buckley, Klamath County SWCD
Rick Cowlishaw, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Sandi Hiatt, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Shiloh Simrell, Oregon Department of Agriculture
Stan Dean, Jackson County SWCD
Steve Mrazik, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Taylor Murray, Columbia County SWCD

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 12:04PM by Chair **Barbara Boyer**.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 2025 MEETING MINUTES

Chair **Barbara Boyer** introduced a motion to approve the October meeting minutes. **Jerry Ward** moved to approve the minutes as presented, and **Robin Vora** seconded the motion. A vote was called, and Jerry Ward, Robin Vora, and Bob Webb voted in favor. Barbara Boyer abstained, as she was not present at the October meeting. The motion carried.

ADVISOR REPORTS

Andrea Kreiner (OACD) provided an update on recent organizational activities and leadership changes within the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts. She reported that OACD held board elections for the West At-Large, Columbia Plateau, and Eastern Oregon positions, with Dean Moberg, Cassie Newton, and Andrea Mann elected. The OACD Board also elected new officers in January, including Whitney Rohner as President, Stan Dean as Vice President, Cassie Newton continuing as Treasurer, and Al Hrynyshyn continuing as Secretary. Andrea shared that the recent OACD Conference was successful and highlighted the launch of a Best Practices Project focused on identifying best practices in human resources and personnel management, including recruitment and retention, as well as strategic planning and board operations, with findings expected to be presented at the November conference. She also noted that OACD submitted comments to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board as part of the capacity grant pre-rulemaking process and referenced a recent compensation survey conducted among districts to support efforts related to staff retention.

Eric Williams (OWEB) provided an update on recent and upcoming grant opportunities administered by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. He reported that the Board recently awarded 17 open solicitation grants totaling more than $3.8 million to conservation districts and received 115 applications for the next grant cycle, with funding decisions expected in July. Eric highlighted several active funding opportunities, including Forest Collaborative Grants, Klamath Water Quality Improvement Grants totaling nearly $5 million for projects focused on nutrient reduction in the Klamath Basin, and the Focused Investment Partnership Program, which provides up to $15 million over six years to support landscape-scale restoration through established partnerships. He noted that match requirements vary by grant type, with technical assistance, engagement, and monitoring grants typically requiring a 5% match, while restoration grants generally require a 25% match to demonstrate partner collaboration and align with statutory requirements.
Sam Angima (OSU) provided his update in writing to the Commission.
Terry Preeg-Riggsby (NOWC) was not present. Chair Barbara Boyer reported that the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils Board requested removal of their advisor role to the Commission. She plans to follow up directly with the Chair of the Board to gather additional context and will report back to the Commission at a future meeting.
Andrea Kreiner (OACD) provided an update in the absence of the OCEAN advisor regarding the upcoming CONNECT Conference, which will be held March 31 through April 2 in Seaside. She noted that the conference will bring together watershed councils, land trusts, and conservation districts and will provide opportunities for collaboration and information sharing among partner organizations.
Carolyn Sufit (OWRD) provided an update on staffing, drought conditions, and agency initiatives. She reported that five positions were recently filled, including a groundwater data specialist, Northwest Region manager, public information resiliency specialist, senior water advisor, and transfer program advisor, while 18 positions remain vacant as the agency evaluates its budget outlook. Carolyn noted that drought conditions persist across much of the state, with significant portions of Oregon experiencing moderate to severe drought, prompting several counties to pursue drought declarations and creating the potential for a challenging regulatory season. She also shared positive developments related to salmon returns in the Klamath Basin following dam removal, with monitoring showing strong fall Chinook migration and spawning activity. Additionally, Carolyn reported that OWRD is implementing changes to its water right transaction process following passage of House Bill 3544 to improve efficiency and consistency and noted that multiple rulemaking efforts are currently underway across the agency.
Steve Mrazik (DEQ) provided an update on Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development and nonpoint source water quality program efforts across the state. He reported that multiple TMDLs are currently in progress, including temperature TMDLs in the John Day, Rogue, Snake River–Hells Canyon, and Middle Columbia and Hood River basins, along with ongoing work to develop a water quality management plan for the Umpqua Basin. Steve also noted that DEQ is updating its statewide Nonpoint Source Program Plan, a five-year planning effort required to track and report nonpoint source water quality activities and coordinate efforts among partner agencies. In response to a question from Chair Barbara Boyer regarding how the plan is used, Steve explained that the plan supports statewide reporting to EPA and helps coordinate water quality efforts across agencies and partners. Additionally, he shared that Oregon has submitted its Coastal Nonpoint Source Control Plan to federal partners for approval, with a final decision anticipated later this year following federal review and public notice.

OWEB AND ODA PRE-RULEMAKING LISTENING SESSIONS

Kevin Fenn (ODA) provided an overview of the upcoming capacity grant rulemaking process and discussed how the Commission would like to engage. He explained that the rulemaking is intended to establish consistent rules governing capacity grants for both soil and water conservation districts and watershed councils, ensuring alignment with statutory requirements and supporting continued investment in local capacity to implement water quality, habitat protection, and watershed restoration efforts. He noted that while watershed councils currently operate under OWEB rules, soil and water conservation districts do not have rules directly associated with their capacity grants.

Kevin shared that the process is in its early engagement phase, with listening sessions scheduled statewide and virtual participation options available to gather input from conservation districts, watershed councils, and partners. Feedback collected through listening sessions and surveys will inform development of proposed rules. He noted that OWEB is expected to seek Board authorization to begin formal rulemaking in mid-2026, at which time a Rulemaking Advisory Committee (RAC) will be established. Final rule implementation is anticipated prior to the 2029–2031 capacity grant cycle.

Eric Williams (OWEB) provided additional context regarding the development of formal rules governing capacity grants for soil and water conservation districts and confirmed that the RAC will likely include balanced representation from both watershed councils and conservation districts.

Commission members discussed the importance of ensuring appropriate representation and engagement throughout the rulemaking process. Chair **Barbara Boyer** emphasized the importance of district representation on the RAC, including consideration for geographic diversity and differences between districts with and without taxing authority. She also expressed support for including SWCC representation on the RAC and encouraged Commission members to participate in listening sessions, particularly the final virtual session scheduled for May 18, to better understand stakeholder perspectives.

Andrea Kreiner (OACD) encouraged conservation districts to actively participate in listening sessions and provide feedback throughout the engagement process.

Kevin confirmed that ODA and OWEB staff will continue to provide updates to the Commission as listening sessions progress and feedback is compiled. Commission members requested that listening session dates and registration information be shared directly to support participation and engagement.

OVERVIEW OF THE OCA'S PROPOSED WILDLIFE DAMAGE PREVENTION AND COMPENSATION PROGRAM

Dennis Sheehy (Oregon Cattlemen's Association) provided an overview of the proposed Wildlife Damage Prevention and Compensation Program and ongoing efforts to address wildlife damage affecting private landowners across Oregon. He explained that wildlife species such as elk, deer, pronghorn, turkeys, and geese can cause significant damage to agricultural lands, and the proposed program is intended to both prevent wildlife damage and provide compensation to landowners when damage occurs. He noted that the Oregon Cattlemen's Association previously pursued legislation to establish pilot areas to better assess wildlife damage and develop prevention and compensation strategies. Although the legislation received unanimous approval from policy committees, it did not advance through the Ways and Means Committee due to funding constraints, and the next opportunity to pursue legislative funding will be in 2027. In the interim, the association is working with private landowners to collect data on wildlife damage to support future legislative efforts.

Dennis emphasized the importance of collaboration among state agencies, landowners, and local partners, including soil and water conservation districts, which he identified as well-positioned to help monitor wildlife damage and support locally driven solutions. Commission members discussed the extent of wildlife damage across the state, particularly impacts associated with elk populations, and the potential role of pilot programs and data collection in supporting future funding requests. **Chair Barbara Boyer** noted that conservation districts are already engaged in discussions with wildlife agencies regarding wildlife impacts and indicated that the Commission will continue to monitor the issue and consider opportunities for district involvement as efforts move forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Commission invited public comment. No public comment was received.

SWCC MEMBERS REPORTS

Bob Webb (SWCC) reported that the Illinois Valley Soil and Water Conservation District is recruiting for an additional staff position and continues to work on several ongoing initiatives, including irrigation modernization efforts in partnership with Trout Unlimited, water quality monitoring, and Strategic Implementation Area work in the northern portion of the valley. He also shared updates on early detection and rapid response efforts for invasive weed management, coordination with NRCS through a local work group, and continued planning for the Thompson Creek property, including engagement with neighboring landowners to inform future management of the site. He also commented on the Cattlemen's position, stated he was concerned about whether or not anybody was listening to and commenting on the SWCD capacity grant OWEB rule making, and he was looking forward to hearing more about those two issues at the very least.

Robin Vora (SWCC) reported he conducted an outreach to conservation districts in north central Oregon to solicit input for this OSWCC meeting but no specific items were brought forward. The Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District is hiring for an irrigation and watershed specialist following a recent retirement and continues recruitment efforts to fill Board vacancies in the Tumalo and Terrebonne areas. The district will also be reviewing program priorities in the coming months as part of planning efforts related to its tax base and future funding considerations.

Jerry Ward (SWCC) reported that there were no updates to share.

Barbara Boyer (SWCC) reported on recent engagement at the state level, including participation in legislative outreach on behalf of OSU Extension related to proposed budget reductions and their potential impacts on rural and urban communities. She also shared that the Yamhill SWCD recently approved its Board of Directors Policy Handbook and adopted a resolution related to recreational immunity provisions under ORS 105.668 to help protect the district from certain liability claims associated with public use of district lands, and plans to share additional information with ODA staff. Barbara further reported that the district recently experienced a board vacancy following the retirement of a long-serving board member and has since filled the position in coordination with ODA, restoring the district to full board membership.

NEW BUSINESS

Call For Upcoming Meeting Agenda Items

The following items were identified:

- Review of the water quality section of the Oregon Plan to better understand SWCC's role in relation to capacity grants
- Discussion of indirect cost considerations associated with capacity grant funding
- Update on the SWCC Charter following an upcoming coordination meeting

SWCC Strategic Plan

Barbara Boyer (SWCC) noted that updates to the SWCC Strategic Plan would be discussed following upcoming planning discussions, with additional information to be shared at a future meeting.

Newsletter Content

Recommended topics included:

- Recreational immunity provisions and district participation
- Capacity grant rulemaking and listening session updates
- Conservation success stories, including salmon recovery efforts

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 2:10 PM