



Soil and Water Conservation Commission Minutes

DATE	LOCATION	START TIME	END TIME
April 2, 2026	Seaside Convention Center Necanicum East 415 1st Avenue Seaside, Oregon 97138	8:30AM	12:00PM
CHAIR/ VICE CHAIR	COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT	ABSENT	
Barbara Boyer & Tim Kerns	Alec Hrynyshyn, Jerry Ward, Jim Bob Collins	Robin Vora, Bob Webb	

ATTENDEES:

Abbie Forrest, Wasco County SWCD

Andrea Kreiner, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Bryan Wolcott, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Carolyn Sufit, Water Resources Department

Delani Herb, Linn Soil and Water Conservation District

Eric Nusbaum, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Eric Williams, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

Karin Stutzman, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Kevin Fenn, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Makenzie Oakes, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Sandi Hiatt, Oregon Department of Agriculture

Shiloh Simrell, Oregon Department of Agriculture

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The regular quarterly meeting was called to order at 08:32AM by Chair **Barbara Boyer**.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

October 2025

Chair **Barbara Boyer** introduced a motion to approve the October meeting minutes. **Alec Hrynyshyn** moved to approve the minutes as presented, and **Tim Kerns** seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

February 2026

Chair **Barbara Boyer** introduced a motion to approve the February meeting minutes. **Al Hrynyshyn** moved to approve the minutes as presented, and **Jerry Ward** seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

RECOGNITION: SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT LEADERSHIP IN TMDL PROCESS

Kevin Fenn (ODA) introduced a late agenda item to recognize ongoing watershed partnership efforts as part of ODA's 2026 water quality work. He provided context on recent awards presented to watershed councils and conservation partners, highlighting their contributions to water quality improvement efforts. He then recognized the Baker County Soil and Water Conservation District for their leadership and collaboration throughout the Powder Basin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) process. He explained that the district has demonstrated strong technical expertise and a commitment to working with landowners, agencies, and community members to ensure the TMDL process reflects both sound science and the realities of working lands. He noted the district's responsiveness to stakeholder concerns, including the implementation of DNA monitoring to better identify sources of bacteria and inform future water quality

efforts. He emphasized that these efforts are helping to build trust, improve understanding, and support long-term water quality outcomes in the basin.

ADVISOR REPORTS

Andrea Kreiner (OACD) provided a legislative update related to funding and policy priorities impacting soil and water conservation districts. She highlighted the passage of House Bill 4134, which will generate ongoing funding for fish and wildlife conservation efforts, including programs such as the ODFW Wildlife Action Plan, invasive species response, wildlife connectivity, and stewardship initiatives, noting potential opportunities for district engagement. She also noted that the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program maintained its funding despite earlier concerns, and that additional funding was allocated for Japanese beetle mitigation. She discussed Senate Bill 1541, the proposed Climate Superfund legislation, which did not pass but is expected to return in a future session and could provide funding for resilience and infrastructure projects. She emphasized that land use remains a key policy issue moving forward, particularly related to housing and energy, and noted ongoing interim discussions. She also provided an update on OACD's best practices project, including work on human resources, strategic planning, and board operations, with results expected at the November conference. She added that OACD continues to be engaged in OWEB capacity grant rulemaking efforts.

Eric Williams (OWEB) provided an update on current grant solicitations and program activities. He highlighted the open regular grant solicitation with an August 3 deadline, which will provide approximately \$18 million for restoration, technical assistance, and engagement projects, with awards anticipated in January 2027. He noted that small grant offerings are open across all 28 regions following recent rule changes that expanded eligibility, and recognized staff efforts to implement those updates. He also shared information on additional open opportunities, including a forest collaborative grant program with an April 9 deadline, Klamath Basin water quality improvement grants funded through PacifiCorp-related funds with a May 11 deadline, and the Focused Investment Partnership initiative, which supports large-scale partnership projects over multiple years. He noted that several programs funded through one-time legislative appropriations, including the Drinking Water Source Protection Program, Natural and Working Lands Program, and Ag Heritage Program, will not have future funding cycles, and that associated staff positions are expected to end at the close of the biennium. He also noted an upcoming OWEB board meeting on April 28–29 in Canyonville and shared that engagement is ongoing for capacity grant rulemaking, with water acquisition rulemaking recently completed and expected to move forward for public comment.

Sam Angima (OSU) provided his update in writing to the Commission.

Steve Mrazik (DEQ) provided an update on ongoing Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) development efforts across multiple basins. He shared that DEQ has been conducting informational webinars, rulemaking advisory committee meetings, and local advisory meetings in recent months to present technical and implementation information and gather feedback. He highlighted ongoing work in the John Day, Rogue, Columbia, Umpqua, and Snake River basins, and provided an overview of upcoming milestones, including advisory committee meetings and anticipated public notice timelines. He noted that several temperature-related TMDL and Water Quality Management Plan efforts are progressing, with advisory meetings scheduled throughout the spring and public notice periods expected to occur between summer and late 2026, depending on the basin.

Carolyn Sufit (OWRD) provided an update on statewide and regional water issues, noting that drought conditions are emerging across Oregon, with declarations already in place for several counties and additional declarations anticipated. She shared information on OWRD tools available to support drought response, including a public dry well reporting system used to track impacts, and emphasized that reporting is voluntary but valuable for understanding statewide conditions. She also discussed ongoing rulemaking efforts and upcoming rulemaking related to Division 250. Regionally, she highlighted work underway to develop a legislative concept for the Deschutes Basin Mitigation Program, which is set to sunset in 2029, including upcoming engagement with partners and key April milestones. She also noted collaboration with the Deschutes Soil and Water Conservation District and OSU Extension on an irrigation

and water management course. Commission members asked about the dry well reporting system and whether reporting trends are increasing; in response, she clarified that reporting is open to all well users and that recent data has not yet been reviewed for current trends. Additional questions addressed drought declaration processes and available tools, including emergency drought transfers, as well as the scope of outreach and coordination efforts tied to the Deschutes Basin work.

PRESENTATION: OREGON PLAN, OWEB HISTORY, AND LOCAL MANAGEMENT AGENCY ROLE

Kevin Fenn (ODA) provided a presentation on the history and structure of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds and its connection to soil and water conservation districts serving as local management agencies. He shared an overview of the program's development, including early Technical Assistance Local Management Agency (TALMA) funding and the transition to OWEB-administered grant funding following changes in statute and constitutional direction of lottery funds. He outlined how funding is divided between operating and grant funds, noting that the Legislature controls the operating portion while the OWEB Board oversees the grant portion, and explained how capacity funding for districts and councils has shifted over time. He also reviewed the statutory framework guiding the Oregon Plan, emphasizing the role of state agencies, watershed councils, and soil and water conservation districts in implementing locally led, voluntary conservation efforts.

He further described the role of soil and water conservation districts as local management agencies, including their responsibilities in coordinating with ODA, supporting area plan implementation, and working with landowners through technical assistance, engagement, and project development. He noted that agreements with districts have evolved over time from intergovernmental agreements to grant agreements, while still maintaining expectations tied to local management agency responsibilities.

Discussion included questions regarding the distinction between operating and grant funds and how those funds may be used, particularly in relation to staffing, grant administration, and project development. In response, it was clarified that grant funds must be used for eligible project-related activities and cannot be used for agency administrative costs, while operating funds support staffing and program delivery. Additional discussion addressed how "project development" is defined within grant programs and whether flexibility should be maintained or further clarified through rulemaking. Commission members also raised questions about the role of soil and water conservation districts relative to nonprofit organizations in competitive grant processes, and it was noted that partnership and coordination are considered during project review, including whether appropriate local partners are involved.

SWCC MEMBERS REPORTS

Jerry Ward (SWCC) provided an update on coordination between the Harney and Malheur Soil and Water Conservation Districts. He shared that Harney SWCD has been working with Malheur SWCD to address capacity challenges, including support through the CCAA program, and that both district boards have approved an intergovernmental agreement to share staff, time, and resources across all district activities. He noted that Malheur's current district manager is planning to retire, and that discussions are underway to transition leadership, with a potential timeline of three to six months, pending additional board discussions. He added that upcoming steps include developing staffing plans, evaluating compensation for expanded roles, and considering an assistant district manager position to help address capacity needs. **Tim Kerns (SWCC)** reported nothing to share.

Jim Bob Collins (SWCC) reported nothing to share.

Alec Hrynyshyn (SWCC) provided an update on recent district activities and outreach efforts across multiple regions. He shared observations from visits to several districts during the legislative session, highlighting strong advocacy efforts in Clackamas and East Multnomah, as well as leadership changes in East Multnomah and ongoing outreach work in Marion

and Linn counties. He noted challenges related to service boundaries raised in Marion County and ongoing efforts by districts to engage their communities. He also provided an update on Upper Willamette SWCD, including the recent acquisition of a 300-acre property near Springfield for long-term conservation work, plans for future restoration and partnerships, the addition of new staff, and the return to a full board of directors. He highlighted increased engagement in advocacy efforts, noted recent recognition received by the district, and emphasized continued collaboration with watershed councils and network partners, including recent funding support to sustain those partnerships.

Barbara Boyer (SWCC) shared updates from Yamhill Soil and Water Conservation District, including recent board member resignations and subsequent recruitment efforts, emphasizing the importance of having associate directors prepared to step into roles. She also noted the adoption of a director guidebook to clarify board roles and expectations. She added that she will be providing public comment in support of upcoming City of McMinnville planning and natural resource protection efforts and encouraged continued engagement and partnership with local governments.

DISCUSSION: SWCC GUIDEBOOK AND 2026-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

Karin Stutzman (ODA) led a review of the draft SWCC guidebook, explaining that the document was developed to support onboarding and provide consolidated guidance on the Commission's purpose, structure, roles, and procedures. She noted that the guidebook compiles existing statutes and rules into a single reference and includes information on membership, leadership roles, meeting procedures, quorum, decision-making, and commissioner responsibilities. She also outlined onboarding materials that may be provided to new members and sought feedback on additional resources to include. During discussion, Commission members supported distributing meeting minutes more broadly beyond GovDelivery, including directly to district managers and boards, and provided minor feedback on formatting and consistency. It was agreed that members would review the document further and provide additional input before finalization.

Karin also presented the draft 2026–2028 strategic plan, noting that it largely mirrors the previous plan with the addition of an action item for Commission participation in the OWEB Rules Advisory Committee related to capacity grant rulemaking. Discussion included whether participation should be designated to a specific member and the importance of keeping the full Commission informed. Commission members expressed general support for the plan, and Karin indicated that a revised version will be brought back for further review.

NEW BUSINESS

Call For Upcoming Meeting Agenda Items

The following items were identified:

- Review of finalized versions of the SWCC Guidebook and 2026–2028 Strategic Plan
- Annual report-style presentation (similar to a recap of recent work and activities)
- August meeting details confirmed for August 18–19 in Reedsport, including a field tour

Newsletter Content

Recommended topics included:

- Highlight recent awards presented
- Include information on capacity grant rulemaking / capacity discussions
- Share or reference the OWEB/Oregon Plan history presentation, including access to materials or recordings for broader audiences

Additional discussion

- Interest in sharing the OWEB/Oregon Plan presentation more broadly, including potential opportunities for future presentations or incorporation into director training

- Brief mention of an upcoming “Farm to Farm” conference, focused on supporting veterans in agriculture, as a potential outreach opportunity for districts and councils

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 10:44AM