

Walla Walla County Conservation District

Nov. 2019 Special Board Meeting

Date: November 12, 2019 Time: 4:00 p.m. Place: District Conference Room

Presiding Officer: Jim Kent

Supervisors Present: Jim Kent, Jeff Schulke, Pat McConnell, and Associate Annie Byerley

Supervisors Absent: Ed Chvatal, Todd Kimball

Representatives of other agencies: Lindsey Williams, WWCC; Bryce Krueger, NRCS

Also present: Renee Hadley, Lynda Oosterhuis, Lisa Stearns, Joanna Cowles Cleveland, Cat Garza, and Audrey Ahmann

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chairman Jim Kent.

Minutes: The Board reviewed the October minutes. **Motion by Jeff Schulke and second by Pat McConnell to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.**

Financial Report: The board reviewed the November Financial Report. **Motion by Pat McConnell and second by Jeff Schulke to approve the November financial report and pay the bills, motion passed.** Checks included 13665 to 13688, total all accounts: \$383,092.17

As of this date November 12th, 2019 the Board by a majority vote does approve for payment checks included in the November financial report and further described as follows: Checks 13665 to 13688, total all accounts \$383,092.17

New Business:

- 1. NRCS update:** Krueger reported attendance at the mini-sessions was good and the presentations effective. The CRP field work that district staff completed was very appreciated. The Snake River team completed 54 contracts, with the most acres, highest dollar amounts, and most contracts of the 10 state teams, accounting for 24% of the work. Krueger said they couldn't have done this without district help. NRCS is launching a comprehensive planning tool. In 2020 the CSP and EQIP programs will continue, but then NRCS will migrate toward a new system, called CART. Under this system, the Local Work Group will follow a new model (no longer assigning local priorities and setting funding pools). The chairs of the Local Work Groups will need to attend a meeting where changes will be explained. Krueger

also asked folks to spread the word that there is funding this year for forestry practices, including for small 20-40 acre holdings.

2. Resolution to set the time, date of Annual Meeting: Hadley suggested January 30th at the usual spot (Walla Walla Regional Airport) for the annual meeting. **Jeff Schulke moved and Pat McConnell seconded to host the annual meeting on January 30th, 2020, at the Walla Walla Regional Airport from 8 to noon, motion passed.**

3. Election Changes: Ahmann presented some questions from a Commission survey regarding election options. There have been rumblings, mostly from the West side, about the way districts run elections. The enabling legislation for conservation districts (RCW 89.08) defines how elections are handled, but there is a possibility that a legislator will propose changes. The Commission is asking for district supervisors' comments. Ahmann reviewed each question with the board and recorded their comments (attached) to submit these to the SCC survey on their behalf.

Grant Applications: **Oosterhuis** spoke of her Western SARE grant application. The program is to help publicize new research to ag producers. These funds, if awarded, will present to vineyard owners and viticulture students ways to create habitat for beneficial insects that help keep the most common vineyard pests in check and below the threshold for the need for insecticide. It will involve two private vineyards and the one associated with the local community college. There will be funds for outreach including workshops and adding an online guide and other information to the website. **Hadley** then spoke about the RCPP grant process which will be a 5-year grant to do conservation easements and water quality improvement projects on Mill Creek and other waterways. The funds are run through NRCS and function almost like having an additional (large) pot of EQIP funds. The Commission provides about 1.5 million in match. The district will be the lead agency and control the funds. Partners include the SRSRF Board, the WW Basin Watershed Council, and the Blue Mountain Land Trust which will hold the conservation easements. **Pat McConnell moved and Jeff Schulke seconded to approve moving forward and submitting the SARE and RCPP grant proposals, motion passed.**

New Projects: **Stearns** is working on a meter project. This is for VSP funding and Hadley explained both the VSP and district boards need to approve it. Stearns is presenting to the district board first because it meets more often. The landowner applied for a pivot under EQIP and needs two meters replaced. These were installed about 12 years ago. Discussion included verifying that meters are a component of the

VSP work plan. The meters will cost about 8,000. **Pat McConnell moved and Jeff Schulke seconded to approve replacing the VanBuskirk meters, motion passed.**

Program Updates:

1. **Cowles Cleveland** said FSA is updating computer software for CRP. Major changes for CRP are possible; rental rates may decline (again). There are two large CREP projects planned and a small (1.2 acres) one. All the CRP field work and reports were completed in time, but there are additional bottlenecks in the process beyond our control. In response to questions from the board, Cowles Cleveland reported that most contracts had at least several good fields; there were weed issues present but about 90% were approved for reenrollment. CSP reviews are in progress. These require interviews with landowners and updating files that appear to be incomplete. Some of this is due to previous folks having knowledge of the producers' operation sufficient to approve contracts, but not actually documenting all information. The goal is to have 47 done by November 22nd, though this is a real challenge.
2. **Hadley** reported moving forward on the REA bridge project now that she has the 60% design document. McCaw Phase C is getting closer to contracting; there will be a meeting to review funding. HEC-RAS modeling is in progress. The Irrigation Technology Advisory Committee met and the CC is suspending the Watershed Ecology program; currently enrolled students are transferring to other programs. Hadley also described the SE Area resolutions (adding prescribed grazing as a mid-contract management practice, allow more flexibility with NRI funds, and work to ensure that certain farm chemicals remain available to ag. producers).

Joint Agency Meetings

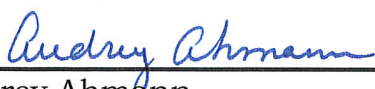
1. **Snake River Salmon Recovery Board.** There is no November meeting but they will have the 2020 grant round kick-off meeting.
2. **Walla Walla Watershed Management Partnership:** Some members are up for election. Annie Byerley was appointed to the Pollinator Health Risk Force.
3. **Burn Task Force:** Stearns attended and reported that there were only 8 air quality complaints last year; 6 of those were related to pile burning after harvesting trees for pulp. The task force discussed burning after hemp seed production; this seed production is part of WSU research into hemp. The residue is hard to deal with using mechanical means (tough fibrous plants do not chop) and there are no protocols. Ecology came up with four steps 1) Verify via lab testing that there is no THC in the residue 2) confirm acres are in university research programs 3) send map and application to Ecology for review 4) when Ecology approves, issue the permit. The ag. task force will need to develop BMPs

for this. Stearns then reported that the task force discussed timing of burning. Currently, growers need to seed in the season burned, but there is a case to be made for burning in the spring when it is safer (less danger of fire escaping and burning adjacent fields) for a planned fall seeding. There was also discussion of the self-certification by growers that their conservation plan allows for burning. The task force also discussed the spread of grassy weed seed and air quality issues related to straw transport.


Misc. Discussion and Public Comment: There were no public comments. Hadley reported a written complaint about a district project and a perception that the installation of a project resulted in lower water flows. Hadley contacted the individual and after explanation, he seemed satisfied that the project did not cause low flows.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted,


Audrey Ahmann
Assistant Manager, Finance


Jim Kent,
Chairman


Jeff Schulke
Vice-Chair

Next meeting: December 9th, 2019

Motions:

To approve the Oct. minutes as written,	Motion: Schulke Second: McConnell Motion passed
To approve the November financial report,	Motion: McConnell Second: Schulke Motion passed
To host the district annual meeting on January 30 th , 2020, from 8 am to noon,	Motion: Schulke Second: McConnell Motion passed
To approve moving forward and submitting the Western SARE and RCPP grant proposals,	Motion: McConnell Second: Schulke Motion passed
To approve replacing the Van Buskirk meters,	Motion: McConnell Second: Schulke Motion passed

Election discussion:

The three elected board members on each conservation district board would be included on the regular general election ballot.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: Ahmann told the board that the county auditor estimated a cost of 17,000 to put elections on the ballot. The board felt this was a poor use of public funds since it would not affect election outcomes, only add cost. Discussion included that there has been only one instance in recent memory when more than one person volunteered to run for a supervisor position, and in that case, the second had volunteered on a lark.

Conservation districts above a certain population threshold or annual budget threshold would be included on the regular general election ballot and be granted the authority to set Rates and Charges (used, in part, to cover election costs)

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: Comments included that such a measure would probably not pass. To raise funds in order to spend 17,000 on an election is still a waste of funds. The district does not have a large tax base: the last time we investigated rates and charges, it was estimated the tax would raise 70,000, less county accounting fees, so some 25% would be used just for elections that aren't needed.

Conservation districts having the option (but not required) to participate in general election ballot.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: none

All conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: Loss of local control, the board needs local input and the insight of local landowners in terms of who should be on the board. Local landowners know the community better and can provide a better vetting process than a distant agency relying on applications and interviews.

Two conservation district supervisors should be appointed by the SCC and 3 should be appointed by county legislative authority.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: This is better than having the SCC appoint board members but still oppose as it reflects a loss of local control, putting a lot into the hands of three people, and still diminishes landowner input.

Hybridized structure where conservation districts above a certain threshold (such as population or annual budget) would conduct elections for three supervisors and those below that threshold would have all supervisors appointed by SCC or the SCC and county legislative authority.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: Same as above, would result in a loss of local control. The people closest to the district have a better idea of who should be on the board. Local people have local knowledge of the issues and who is best able to address them.

Pursue funding to support technological improvements, such as online voting, that could be used to assist with conservation district elections.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: None

Make no changes to current CD election process, but encourage all CDs to work with the county auditors to have the county auditor assist, as much as they are willing and able, with the CD's election.

Support support but concerned live with it oppose

Concerns: as long as county personal are willing and can provide help at no cost, but skeptical that they would be able to do so.