

Walla Walla County Conservation District

June 2020 Board Meeting

Date: June 8th, 2020 Time: 5:00 p.m. Place: Via phone conference

Presiding Officer: Jim Kent

Supervisors Present: Ed Chvatal, Pat McConnell, Jeff Schulke, Associate Annie Byerley

Supervisors Absent: Todd Kimball

Other Agencies: Tom Salzer, WACD; Allisa Carlson SCC

Also present: Renee Hadley, Audrey Ahmann

Members of the Public: none

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Jim Kent.

Minutes: The Board reviewed the May minutes. **Motion by Pat McConnell and second by Ed Chvatal to approve the minutes as presented, motion passed.**

Financial Report: The board reviewed the June Financial Report. **Motion by Pat McConnell and second by Jeff Schulke to approve the June financial report and pay the bills, motion passed.** Checks included 13835 to 13853, total all accounts: \$322,826.35

As of this date June 8th, 2020 the Board by a majority vote does approve for payment checks included in the June financial report and further described as follows: Checks 13835 to 13853, total all accounts \$322,826.35

New Business:

- 1. WACD Update:** Tom Salzer of WACD gave a quick update on his work as the newly hired executive director of WACD. They are drafting letters of welcome for new supervisors and thank you letters for those leaving. WACD is assisting districts in planning for fall area meetings under the Covid-19 restrictions. The annual conference is being planned as a virtual conference. The regular in-person conferences will resume in 2021. He is working with area directors with ways to engage with districts. WACD is closely monitoring

the current state budget situation and the expected special session. In answer to questions, he responded that elections issues will likely be on the back burner as the reduced revenue forecast is a more immediate concern. WACD had a diversity and inclusion letter which was well-received by participants.

2. **SCC:** Allisa reported that SCC submitted their budget reduction plan to the Office of Fiscal Management. Most of the cuts impact SCC (such as delaying hiring an IT professional and needed equipment purchases) instead of districts. The plan keeps districts' Implementation grants intact and retains current staff. Allisa thanked the district for getting the Annual Plan of Work and the Annual Financial report in on time and invited all to phone in to the SCC Conservation Call Friday morning.
3. **Board Self-evaluation:** The board members took a few moments to reflect on their contribution to the district mission of helping landowners protect and maintain the natural resources of the county. Hadley and others expressed appreciation for the way board members work together and provide much-appreciated guidance and leadership. The board also agreed to rotate the board member positions similar to years past.
4. **Building Protocol during Covid-19:** Hadley explained that while the county is operating under Phase 2 rules, the USDA building is following federal guidelines. Restrictions on the number of staff allowed in the building at any given time may be eased by mid-June. Plans call for the reception area to be changed into a waiting area of sorts and visitors will be required to come only by appointment and wear a mask. However, all such plans are continually changing. Given these uncertainties and restrictions, the board decided the July meeting should also be call-in.
5. **Discussion of Medical Benefits:** McConnell looked into options for staff and it appears that with a private insurer, as opposed to the state insurance program, the district maintains more control over eligibility and may have lower costs. Hadley will continue to explore options such as the effect of staff members adding family members to their policy and any legal regulations regarding eligibility.

Program Updates: Hadley reported on behalf of staff. As last month, most are engaged on CRP reviews and making good progress. The contract for construction of McCaw Phase C has been awarded and all is in order for construction to take place in late summer. The Rea bridge project still looks good for installation around the same time. RCO reviewers are working with Lance on the draft design for the Walla Walla River project. Currently Hadley is fielding 3 to 5 calls a week for VSP work. In response to a question on the general nature of these calls, Hadley reported that most are calls related to permitting and critical areas, and she offers technical advice and/or referral to the permitting agencies. Her

assistance is documented for VSP reporting purposes. VSP is providing the funding for two aspects of district work: direct assistance to landowners in protecting critical areas and the cost of monitoring and reporting progress so the county can show the benefit of voluntary actions. Finally, Hadley stated that a district employee was paid out for accumulated comp. hours as per our policy and an employee's identity was used to falsely apply for unemployment. Hadley has informed the state about the fraud. There is no financial risk to the district.

Partner Collaboration: Hadley led the recent NRCS Local Work Group meeting. They decided to give priority to resource concerns that are not currently being addressed by other state or federal sources. Soil health and nutrient management are the two areas that will be given prioritized funding. Hadley has also been helping the Walla Walla Water 2050 group with some baseline numbers, most of which were compiled as part of the VSP Work Plan development. The Water and Irrigation Management Advisory Group which assisted the Community College in this topic has been disbanded, since student interest has waned. Instead, they are folding into the existing Ag. and Natural Resource Management advisory committee as that area of study is gaining students.

Joint Agency Meetings

- 1. Snake River Salmon Recovery Board.** Hadley updated the SRSFB of the status of recently funded projects and other efforts (RCPP and other grant applications, NRI fish barrier removal project, ...) by the WWCCD not funded by SRSRB.
- 2. WW Water Management Partnership:** Chvatal reported on the potential sunseting of the partnership and likely development of an unfunded advisory group along the lines of a water resource forum. The current thinking is that the only solution to the demand on water resources in the Basin is to pipe it in from the Columbia or build a reservoir. The Partnership built a framework for local control of water resources but in the end Ecology and other groups made progress restricted.

Public Comment: There were no public comments.

Misc.: As directed last month, Hadley sent a letter of support to Palouse CD for the Flourish program. She will be stepping down from the WADE president position. She encouraged board members to sign up for a WADE session for supervisors: the Online, On-demand Resources for Supervisors Development from 2 to 3 on Wednesday June 17th.

Annie Byerley mentioned that as of last Friday she has taken a position as a trustee for The Nature Conservancy. She stated her goal in doing so is to bring an

ag. perspective to the group. Board members expressed appreciation for her continued willingness to step forward and volunteer for such endeavors.

With no further action, the meeting was adjourned at 6:40 without a formal motion.

Respectfully submitted,

		
Audrey Ahmann	Jim Kent	Ed Chvatal
Assistant Manager, Finance	Chair	Secretary

Next meeting: July 13th, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.

Motions:

To approve the May minutes as written,

Motion: McConnell
Second: Chvatal
Motion passed

To approve the June financial report,

Motion: McConnell
Second: Schulke
Motion passed