

PO Box 848

530 Hwy 20 South, Hines OR 97738

Phone: 541-573-6446 admin@harneyswcd.net

**Harney Soil & Water Conservation District**

**May 23, 2024**

**Harney County Courthouse Basement Conference Room**

Present: Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Vice Chair (VC) Scott Franklin, Board Director (BD) Carol Dunten; District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, CCAA Range Biologist (RB) Alex Dohman, Admin Assistant (AA) Barbara Pearson

Guest: Alfred Dunten

Remote Board: BD Stacy Davies

Remote Guest: Karin Stutzman, ODA

BC Hussey called the meeting to order at 3:32 pm. New employee Alex Dohman (CCAA Range Biologist) was introduced to the board members present.

**Item #1: Approval of Agenda (Action item)**

There were no changes proposed. VC Franklin moved and BD Dunten seconded approval of the agenda as presented. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion carried.

3:33 pm Karin Stutzman of ODA joined the meeting. BC Hussey welcomed her.

**Item #2: April Financial Report Approval (Action item)**

The report was included in the director notebooks and a copy was emailed to them prior to the meeting. DM Kesling explained the report. Most district expenditure went to payroll, travel, and mileage. Otherwise, the district has received a lot of funds, some of which are allocated to contractors. There were no questions. LGIP has been operating well. BD Davies suggested additional funds be moved into it if there are additional funds available. DM Kesling said he had been advised to keep no more than a $250K balance at the Bank of Eastern Oregon due to overage not being covered by FDIC.

VC Franklin moved and DB Dunten seconded approving the April Financial Report as presented. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion carried.

**Item #3: Approval April Meeting Minutes (Action item)**

The April meeting minutes were in the director notebooks and board directors received an emailed copy of the minutes prior to today’s meeting. DM Kesling said he and the AA reviewed and edited the minutes prior to them being received by the board. There were no questions or corrections. VC Franklin moved to approve the meeting minutes; BD Dunten seconded. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion carried. BD Dunten said her approving vote deferred to the rest of those in favor.

**Item #4 HSWCD/CWMA Budget Grant Update (Discussion)**

DM Kesling explained the report (active grants on the top portion of the report, monitoring grants on the back page). The budget includes $1.8M for salary. BD Dunten asked about the grant SIA/Marching Down the Malheur and discussion followed regarding the grant balance, where funds are applied (currently DM Kesling has billed the grant when he participated in the quarterly SIA ODA meetings), and under what circumstances might funds be returned to ODA. BD Dunten said she needs to visit with the DM later regarding landowners who have participated with this grant.

**Item #5:** **Bid Selection for State Lands Prescribed Burn**

DM Kesling explained the SOWR II budget. There are $235K in remaining funds and this was set aside for a prescribe burn in the Drewsey area near Otis on a state grazing allotment. The request for bid submission was advertised as required. Only one bid was submitted and it is under budget. Randy Wiest of the Oregon Department of State Land directed the DM to put excess funds into more juniper cutting. ODLS wants to sign the contract as well due to risk. VC Franklin asked if this is the first burn project contracted by district (it is). The submitting contractor (Grayback) has done burns in the local area and Grant County. Discussion followed regarding liability (who is liable, what risks are involved and how they can be mitigated, the layout of project land, can cattle be placed onsite after the burn). One board member has a grazing allotment in a portion of the burn project and disclosed this project has the potential to benefit him. Ms. Stutzman said it is alright as long as it is discussed and the board is aware.

Because the project over $100K, board approval is needed. Following discussion, BD Davies moved and VC Franklin seconded awarding the bid to Grayback Forestry. All present who are eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item#6: Streamline Web Service (information and a potential action item)**

The subject is continued from the last board meeting regarding the district’s website not being in compliant to ADA requirements. Streamline has proposed an initial change with a cost and a choice of monthly subscriptions (information in the board notebooks), which would put the district in compliance. The DM didn’t think many current HC landowners use the website, but that will change with future generations. The developer of the current website was contacted. She could do an upgrade, but also said with the price point it would be best to go with Streamline. The DM recommended the board proceed with a one-time fee of $1500 and then the lower subscription of $140 monthly with Streamline. Details of the proposal and how it may benefit the district were discussed. DM reminded the board of the potential fine of $40K for noncompliance to ADA requirements. If the subscription with Streamline is later canceled, the district can keep the upgraded website.

BD Davies moved to contract with Streamline for a $1500 upgrade and the $140 monthly subscription; BD Dunten seconded. All present who are eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item# 7: SWCD Employment retirement (information and a potential action item)**

DM Kesling said staff reviewed the employee handbook in 2021 and the subject of other retirement options was brought up. Currently, the district contributes 3% per employee. Other options were researched and the information was provided in the board meeting material. A 401K could be an option, which may mean a district cost increase of $3,975.00 annually. The DM felt this could take the place of the yearly bonus. A simple IRA is in place now. If updated, the SWCD could choose a different contribution percentage of salary, giving the district the ability to save money in staff retirement. He offered to bring investment counselor Kevin Arrien in for a board meeting to discuss. Discussion followed on options, how the district could switch or combine. BD Davies said he was not ready to vote at this time, but he was in favor of a 401K. The subject was tabled to a later meeting when more board members are able to attend. The decision to invite Kevin Arrien to attend a future meeting was left up to DM.

**Item#8: Election 2024 (discussion)**

Information from ODA was provided to the district and board directors for positions open for election. Karin advised any petitions submitted prior to August will be returned to the candidate.

**Item #9 Grasshopper Funding (this was changed from a discussion to action item)**

Oregon State Representative Mark Owens obtained $100K funding for Harney County grasshopper treatment. County Commissioner Kristen Shelman approached CWMA Coordinator Tyler Goss for the district to administrate funds, making sure applications are received and treatment documented. The County will forward the funds for distribution. The Fields area was targeted and has already been treated. This is a program outside of the district’s 5-year program, but because board members have expressed interest in grasshopper mitigation the district is undertaking it. Admin costs are not included, but the district will discuss if it is asked to manage a future project. VC Franklin said he has advocated the district take on this project as landowners and producers have approached the office for grasshoppers treatment. BD Davies thanked DM regarding this and said he was in favor. There was discussion on the agreement and funding, why Fields was targeted for first treatment, chemicals/fungus used for treatment. The DM said in retrospect he should have made this an action item for the board to confirm. BD Davies moved and VC Franklin seconded that the board ratify the agreement between Harney County and the district for grasshopper and Mormon cricket treatment. All present who are eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Public comment**

Karin thanked the district for the “awesome work you are doing and getting the work going.”

The DM said the building that the district, FSA, and NRCS occupy is in process of being remodeled and occupants will need to find other business arrangements for the next four months. Most SWCD staff will work from home, but he is unsure what will happen with the AA. There was a communication problem between federal government, property owner, and contractor about where office, files, and office equipment will be during the remodel. BD Davies said his business has a vacant office in Burns and it is available. The DM said he didn’t want to make a decision at this time as he is still waiting to hear from federal agencies. Discussion followed about the phone system and forwarding calls, the importance of landowners contacting a human being, and storage of confidential material. The DM said formal action didn’t need to be taken at this time; he just wanted the board to be aware of it.

VC Franklin advised the board that HSWCD vehicles are now at the Forest Service (this was in response to recent gas theft and vehicle vandalism).

VC Franklin moved and BD Dunten seconded adjourning the meeting. All present who are eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. The meeting ended at 5:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

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| District Representative |  | Date |