



**Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Natural Resources Committee Meeting
Wednesday, August 16, 2023, 9:00 am to 10:30 am**

HB2560 requires that all Oregon public meetings held by a governing body of a public body, excluding executive sessions, must provide to members of the public an opportunity to access and attend the meeting by telephone, video or other electronic or virtual means. This meeting will be held by video conference and by telephone.



Link to Video Conference: [Zoom Link Here](#)



Meeting Call in Number: 1 253 215 8782

Meeting ID: | **Passcode:** 838 1782 7407 | 507254



Staff Contact: Becky Pineda, becky.pineda@marionswcd.net

Agenda

Chair: Call Meeting to Order, Agenda Changes & Approval

Item #	Topic	Presenter	Time
	Approval of Minutes	Chair	
1	Updates	Staff	5 min.
2	Partial Payments	B. Pineda	20 min.
3	Strategic Planning Recommendations	B. Pineda	10 min.
4	CAG Policy Discussion	C. Blank	20 min.
5	Special Project Grant	B. Pineda	10 min
	Meeting Adjournment	Chair	

Agenda Brief

Item #	Brief	Action
1	Program updates by the staff.	No action needed
2	The Board gave approval at the November 2022 board meeting for the NR Committee to look further into the topic of partial payments.	Discussion, recommendation
3	Strategic planning is coming up for the District. Does the NR Committee have any topics or recommendations we would like to see brought to the strategic planning process?	Discussion



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4	Should CAG's with forest management practices be required to have Forest Management Plans in place before applying for a CAG?	Discussion, recommendation
5	Review and possibly re-define the purpose of the grant. Review/revise application in future meeting.	Discussion, recommendation

Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members	Present/Absent	Staff	Guests
Dave Budeau	Present	Brenda Sanchez	
Rochelle Koch	Absent	Sarah Hamilton	
Leland Hardy	Present	Chelsea Blank	
Becky Pineda	Present	Kassi Roosth	
Susan Ortiz	Absent		

Item #	Minutes	Action/ Vote Count
	Meeting called to order at 9:03	
0	Becky led the meeting. Reviewed the agenda Approval of minutes June 21, 2023 – motion by Lee, 2 nd by Dave. Passed unanimously.	June 21, 2023 Meeting Minutes- motion by Lee, 2 nd by Dave. Passed unanimously.
1	Updates from staff. Becky shared that staff is doing outreach for the Cover Crop Grant, including flyers, emails, and word of mouth. The 2 nd cycle of CAG grants for this fiscal year is currently open, with a few applications already in process. The Board approved the Partner Grants at their last Board Meeting; a timeline for implementation will be created.	
2	Partial Payments for CAG grants. Under the District's CAG (and LAP) grant programs grant funds are released on a reimbursement basis either upon project completion or in some cases, upon completion of a practice. This is a financial hardship for some clients as they do not have the resources to cover the upfront costs. NR Committee previously discussed a partial payment option of releasing up to 40% of the grant award upon submission of receipts/invoices;	

allowing 1 partial payment per practice per grant, i.e. 1 practice = 1 advance, 2 practices = 2 advances OR partial payments per grant.

Discussion regarding what recourse the District has if client is advanced funds, but does not complete the project.

Becky relayed that there are clients that choose to not implement conservation projects simply due to lack of financial resources to cover the upfront costs. Sarah noted that projects that require several years of preparation work, such as brush management, can incur a significant cost to the grantee, however under the current rules reimbursement for those costs is not available until all the work is completed.

Chelsea noted that under current grant practices such as brush management are not eligible for partial payment as the ground is disturbed.....would like the grantee to be able to get reimbursed after completion of any practice.

Brenda recommended adding a question to the application to inquire if the application needed upfront funding; Sarah recommended that if such a question was included that it not be part of the evaluation for funding.

Chelsea noted that particularly with the large CAG projects (overall cost in excess of \$45,000)

Lee stated that he is concerned about the misuse of fundsin the past the SCS (now NRCS) had a policy that an applicant could only be eligible for funding if they would not be able to do the project to the extent if they did not have these funds. Need to have a control on this, that advancing these funds is actually a benefit to get conservation on the ground.

Dave noted that it is a balance between ensuring that conservation can get on the ground vs. providing funding. Would the grantee have the means to complete the project, if they didn't have the funds to begin with. What would the District's action be if someone got advanced funds, but then didn't complete.

Brush management without covering the disturbed ground, is adding to soil erosion rather than mitigating it.

Becky noted that in 2013 the Board approved an option (that was not implemented) to allow advance payment of up to 50% of the grant amount when 1) receipts/invoices are submitted to Marion SWCD within 120 days of issuance of the advance, and 2) only 1 advance or partial payment allowed per grant.

Brenda said an invoice can be landowner time; Sarah noted that landowner time is not reimbursable. Risk would be limited, on a \$7,500 grant to \$3,750.

Suggestion to limit to a dollar amount, up to \$1,500 or 40% of the total grant award whichever is higher.

Topic will be continued at next meeting.

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- 3 Strategic Planning Recommendations
Brenda noted that staff will be meeting to review the strategic planning process.
Nothing further to discuss.
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- CAG Policy
In response to Forest Management Plan conversation at August Board Meeting, Chelsea provided some resources for Oregon Forest Management Planning.
The question posed is whether a client would need to complete a plan
What is the risk of not having a Forest Management Plan? Chelsea advised that if the property has not been inventoried and there is not a forest plan in place work could do more harm than good by just guessing that the client is doing practices that are harmful.
- 4 Brenda inquired if there is similar risk with other practices, or is this limited to forest related practices. Lee noted that if an applicant is applying for \$22,500 then they definitely in a forest management plan, but it could be overkill for a \$7,500 grant; staff would need to provide the client with advice. Brenda recommended to base it on acreage rather than cost.
Dave relayed that the project that brought this to the forefront was that the application did not include any quotes or bids from someone who is qualified to do the work, nor was there any written plan for managing the property.
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Sarah noted that one of the issues that has arisen is that clients struggle to find contractors to provide bids and even harder to get written bids; contractors to do forest work are very limited making it even harder to get those bids. Dave inquired as to what assurance the District has that the proper practice is implemented and the funds are properly spent.

Brenda responded that the District's planner work with the clients to develop the project and a plan; Dave inquired if anyone on our staff has the capacity to develop such a plan. Brenda responded that staff can assist with guiding a client through the planning resources.

Sarah noted that the NRCS Steps conservation planning workbook is available; the District could require clients to go through the conservation planning process either utilizing the Steps workbook or another planning process.

The question would be will we require clients to complete the STEPS conservation planning process prior to applying for a CAG grant, or would it be something that was completed concurrently with a grant award?

It was noted that the STEPS conservation planning workbook is not available on-line, only in hard copy.

Kassi suggested that maybe planners could attest that they went through the planning process with the client. Chelsea noted that it would likely double the amount of time a planner would need to spend with a client if they were to go through an assessment or conservation planning.

Dave said that the more information included in the application the better the application will be; would be concerned about requiring a forest management plan for any forest project.

The STEPS conservation planning workbook could be one way to work with clients, with initial focus on forest projects and then other land use areas.

Can staff go through these books and create a worksheet that clients can go through to plan for their property? Chelsea indicated that staff could create worksheets; Sarah noted that the STEPS workbook is not conservation planning rather it is an assessment of the property.

It is up to the conservation planners to determine what types of assessments and planning are needed in working with each client.

Recommendation to staff is to work with clients to implement assessments on client properties, followed by conservation planning.

Special Projects Grants (SPG)

Becky noted that there is at least one client interested in applying for a SPG grant for a drone sprayer.

Lee noted that the Special Projects Grants that they are not an ongoing practice, that could further the interest and mission of the District. He noted that more recently it has become more of a grant for those projects that don't fit into another grant category.

"Special Projects Grant Program (SPG) was established to provide examples of practices that if widely adopted, could solve a local area resource concern through either new and innovative technologies or proven but under-represented technologies."

Dave and Lee both agreed that the stated purpose of the SPG grant remains the same.

Regarding allowable expense, one of the stipulations is "consultation fees, overhead costs, and equipment purchase will not be reimbursed by grant funding."

5 Dave noted that he can see where equipment would qualify. Becky inquired about the eligibility of using the grant to purchase a drone sprayer; Dave stated that in his opinion drone sprayers are already a proven well represented technology.

The current purpose of the Special Projects Grant Program (SPG) remains valid.

What types of projects would qualify for a SPG grant versus a CAG grant?

Dave stated that under the CAG grant program the District can fund any conservation project, regardless of whether or not it has an NRCS practice associated with it.

Lee stated in the past some applications for SPG funding did not qualify as the risk was too high.

Dave noted that he would be open to funding projects under the CAG program that do not necessarily have an NRCS practice associated with the project.

Sarah inquired regarding how to create a Job Sheet, which closely follow the NRCS practice standards, when there is not a NRCS practice to utilize as guidance.

Item for a later meeting: clarification regarding what types of projects –
Dave noted that in his view a project that does not have a conservation practice would more than likely qualify for a SPG grant rather than a CAG grant.

Next meeting October 18, 2023 at 9:00AM

Meeting adjourned at 10:30AM
