



Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)

Board of Directors March 5, 2025, Monthly Minutes

6:34 PM to 8:40 PM

Facilitator: Chair Olson

Recorded by: Brenda Sanchez

Approved: 04-02-25

Directors & Record of Attendance		Associate Directors
At Large 1-Peggy Hart (Secretary-Treasurer)	Present	Leland Hardy
At Large 2-Scott Walker	Present	
Zone 1-Noah Justice (Appointed 2/5/25)	Present	
Zone 2-Nik Ovchinnikov	Present	
Zone 3-Darin Olson (Chair)	Present	
Zone 4-Angela Plowhead (Vice-Chair)	Present	
Zone 5-Rochelle Koch	Absent	
Staff		Guests
Brenda Sanchez		Theresa Brehm-NRCS
Becky Pineda		Carolyn Foland
Cesar Zamora		Dennis Sheehy
		Timothy Fulmer
		Monica McQueen

Note: All documents and materials displayed or referenced are retained in the Board of Directors Meeting file at the Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (Marion SWCD or District).

Minutes

Chair Olson Call to Order: 6:34 PM

Announcements - None

Agenda Additions or Changes - None

Public Comment

A. Wool Pellet Fertilizer Benefits and Costs

Timothy Fulmer presented a product called wool pellet fertilizer made from 100% raw sheep wool. He highlighted its benefits as fertilizer, water conservator, and soil amendment. The product is organic, hydrophobic, and hydroscopic, and conserves water better than peat and moss. It can be used as a substrate for planting bare roots and seeds. The cost is around \$4 a pound at the bulk rate. Some questions were raised by attendees about its longevity and its comparison to other products like perlite.

B. Wildlife Damage Program Discussion

Dennis Sheehy, the Wildlife chair for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, discussed the establishment of a wildlife damage program in Marion County. He proposed a three-component program: prevention of wildlife damage, compensation for wildlife damage, and addressing non-private land issues. Sheehy also mentioned two bills introduced to the legislature, one addressing the prevention part of the damage program and the other addressing the compensation part. He suggested that the soil and water conservation districts could play a key role in running the damage programs in the county. Olson expressed interest in the insurance concept and agreed to forward the information to the Natural Resource Committee for further discussion. The committee also discussed the potential for working with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife on hunting access and hunting programs related to wildlife damage prevention.

1. District Snapshot

Sanchez provided updates and discussed ongoing projects. She announced the start of their landscaping project and the end of their mural artist collaboration, mentioning the need to find a new artist. The budget committee meetings were scheduled for April 14th and 17th. Sanchez also mentioned the progress on the accessibility of their website and the upcoming Oregon Government Ethics Commission training (April 1). In addition, she explained the role of the attestation form in elections and appointments.

Staff Reports

Cesar Zamora (Conservation Planner) reported on his recent winter activities, including attending events and connecting with new groups. He also mentioned working on the new Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) grant application and completing the PSP Strategic Plan.

Becky Pineda shared her team's ag outreach during the winter, including attending meetings and connecting with new groups. She also discussed their involvement in the Council of Water Leaders and the Ag Water Quality Program. The team also discussed site visits, technical assistance, and a plant giveaway at a Strategic Implementation Area and PSP outreach event. Lastly, there was a discussion about the challenges faced by farmers due to financial issues and the potential revival of certain crops and how financial challenges can affect landowners' ability to adopt desired conservation practices .

2. Treasurers Report January 2025

Hart presented the Treasurer's Report. Sanchez mentioned the ongoing development of a Budget vs Actual Dashboard in Excel.

Action: Walker motioned that the Board **accept as presented the January 2025 Treasurers Report**, 2nd by Plowhead. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

3. Board Meeting Minutes – February 5, 2025 Budget Work Session, Annual Meeting, and Monthly Board Meeting

Sanchez presented the draft meeting minutes to the Board, incorporating amendments and corrections.

Action: Walker motioned that the Board **accept as presented the February 5, 2025, Budget Work Session, Annual Meeting, and Monthly Board Meeting minutes**, 2nd by Plowhead. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

4. United States Department Agriculture (USDA) and Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Report

Theresa Brehm announced updates on recent activities and staffing changes at NRCS. The local working group meeting had a good turnout, with about half farmers and half conservation professionals. Priorities for the next decade of USDA funding were discussed, with wildlife habitat and water quality emerging as key focus areas. Staffing challenges continue, with Polk County office losing its forester and Marion County trying to help cover the workload. Despite staffing issues, Marion County was able to assess 55 Environmental Quality Incentive Program applications and received 12-13 stewardship program applications. Brehm also mentions potential further staff reductions of 10-30% nationwide for NRCS in the near future.

5. Appoint Budget Committee Members

No applicants to appoint. Sanchez reviewed the current Budget Committee member terms, stating all members are in an appointed term.

6. Overview of Proposed Budget-Review Discussion

Sanchez presented the most recent draft of the proposed budget to discuss the final determinations for the District's grant programs as recommended by the Natural Resources Team and the Natural Resources Committee. Sanchez

expressed that most of the developed proposed budget has remained the same since the work session. Sanchez showed that the Conservation Assistance Grant budget will remain the same for fiscal year 2025-26 at \$350,000, the Cover Crop Assistance Program (CCAP) budget will increase from \$45,000 to \$60,000, Partner Grant will remain at \$255,000, Special Projects Grant will remain the same at \$20,000, and there is an increase in new Projects and Programs from \$15,000 to \$40,000 to be available for new programs which are being developed Conservation Cover addition to the CCAP. Walker noted that the Board will soon be reviewing pilot programs and advised the Board to be prepared for this. Olson asked Sanchez to provide a process for the July Board meeting agenda.

7. Liability Building Auto Insurance Payment Approval

Sanchez informed the Board that she had inadvertently omitted the invoice detailing the insurance costs from the Board packet. She explained that payment needed to be remitted promptly, as an extension had been granted to allow time for Board approval. Sanchez then presented the invoice, highlighting the outlined costs.

Olson inquired whether the Board was comfortable deciding immediately, despite not having had the opportunity to review the invoice in advance. Walker responded that there was little alternative given the circumstances. Plowhead asked if there were any changes to the insurance coverage. Sanchez noted that the cost was approximately \$800 less than in 2024.

Action: Plowhead motioned that the Board **approve Liability Building Auto Insurance Payment for \$24,631**, 2nd by Walker. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

8. Admin Committee: Grant Limitation Cap and Entity Definition Discussion Report

Plowhead reported that the Admin Committee had an in-depth discussion about the Grant Limitation Cap and the definition of an entity. She mentioned that the committee also explored strategies for addressing these topics moving forward to prevent conflicts or concerns similar to those raised during the previous Board meeting.

Plowhead further noted that the Natural Resources Committee reviewed these issues and forwarded its final recommendations to the Admin Committee for consideration. Based on the input from both committees, Plowhead stated that Sanchez was tasked with drafting new procedures and policy updates reflecting the discussions. Topics of concern were accountability and reporting, and how to

enforce or apply any possible new policies on Grant Limitation Caps. Conflict of interest questions will be initially addressed by consulting the conflict-of-interest policy texts of other agencies.

Sanchez and the Directors then engaged in a further discussion about possible adjustments to the policy. Sanchez sought clarification on whether the draft procedures and policy should be reviewed again by the Admin Committee or submitted directly to the Board. Walker advised that Sanchez should present the revised procedures and policy for consideration at an upcoming Board meeting.

9. Education and Outreach Committee

a. CLEAR Grant Application Approval

Hart reported that three CLEAR grant applications were presented for approval: McKay High School, Community Roots School, and Wi-Ne-Ma Outdoor School.

Walker inquired whether the photography class associated with one of the applications was aligned with the District's mission. Hart clarified that the activity extends beyond simply taking photographs. She explained that the class is part of a broader Conservation Education Day, during which students will embark on an educational trip that includes a guided tour and lecture by a forester. The students will visit a ranger station and spend the day learning about forest management, restoration efforts in burn areas, and sustainable land use practices.

Justice acknowledged that he had also been curious about the grant's alignment with the District's mission and noted that the application did not clearly articulate these benefits but in the end agreed to fund. The Directors then engaged in a thoughtful discussion regarding the merits of the application.

Action: Plowhead motioned that the Board **approve the three CLEAR grant applications**, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

b. Environmental Education Specialist and Communication and Outreach Specialist Job Description Approval

Hart stated that the committee had the opportunity to review the new Environmental Education Specialist and Communication and Outreach Specialist Job Descriptions and the committee supports these descriptions as written.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the Environmental Education Specialist and Communication and Outreach Specialist Job Descriptions**, 2nd by

Justice. Walker shared that he was interested in the long term more district wide approach to education rather than individual CLEAR Grants. He adds that he would like to see the district create teacher training, develop curricula for schools, and provide educational materials; asking if the Board is interested in this. Olson adds that this discussion has occurred a few times. Reactions were basically stating that this would be difficult to complete. Olson thinks it is OK to help teachers who ask for help. Hart adds that we can think about this over time and return to these options as needed. Curricula needs to meet state standards. Walker adds that we need to begin if we expect things to happen. Sanchez adds there is room in the position to take on new programs and projects. Plowhead asked about the leave days, if this was accurate. Sanchez replied yes, these are an average of time off, including holidays, vacation, and sick leave. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Hart also shared that the committee discussed the budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 and recommends that the budget be increased by \$10,000 from \$40,000 to \$50,000.

10. Natural Resources Committee

a. FY 25-26 Conservation Grants Budget Proposal

Zamora stated that the main points of this discussion were to recommend the Cover Crop Assistance Program be increased by \$15,000 and that the CAG be maintained at \$350,000.

b. Special Project Grant Hazelnut Cover Crop Side Discharge

The Natural Resource Committee recommended approving a \$10,000 special project grant for Ioka Farms to purchase specialized equipment designed to discharge grass clippings from hazelnut orchard cover crop rows into bare soil spots beneath the trees. The goal of this project is to control soil erosion, improve soil health, and enhance water conservation. The total estimated cost of the project is \$25,400.

Plowhead reported that the committee engaged in extensive discussion before voting to recommend the grant for approval by the full Board. Olson noted that similar equipment had been used in the past with mixed results but expressed a willingness to further discuss the potential merits of this specific project.

Walker voiced mentioned that he had investigated and found that a narrower 6-foot version of the same equipment was indeed available on the market, and thus the grant application's need for money to build this specialized equipment was not necessary. This narrower version would, therefore, require multiple passes between the rows; other members of the board voiced concerns about potential compaction risks with multiple passes as well as the additional fuel and labor costs. Lee emphasized that this application was particularly well-suited as a "Special Project".

The Directors proceeded with a detailed discussion on the project's potential outcomes and effectiveness.

Action: Plowhead motioned that the Board **approve the Special Project Grant Hazelnut Cover Crop Side Discharge, 2nd** by Ovchinnikov. Discussion. Walker emphasized his concerns regarding the lack of conservation benefits. Hardy added that compaction was not a concern for this practice and we have been supporting grass cover in orchards to prevent soil erosion. Olson would like to see them try this approach and see how it works out. Plowhead adds that she feels this project will address the concerns and meets the District mission. Ovchinnikov believes they are trying to solve a problem that other efforts were unable to complete. Call to question by Hart MOTION PASSED (Aye-5 [Ovchinnikov, Olson, Plowhead, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0 [Walker]).

Zamora was tasked with connecting Ioka Farms with other farms to explore successful cover crop practices on steep hills, which may offer valuable insights for improving the project's approach.

c. Conservation Cover- Addition to the Cover Crop Assistance Program

The Natural Resource Committee recommends implementing a new \$40,000 Conservation Cover pilot program that would cover practices like filter strips, and field borders. The program would be modeled after the existing CCAP with tiered incentive-based payments. The committee clarified that conservation cover is distinct from cover crops and includes permanent cover under trees as well as filter strips and borders. While some concerns were raised about effectiveness on steep slopes, the staff will develop a framework identifying priority areas and applicable practices. The board will vote on this recommendation as part of the overall budget approval process.

Adjourn: Chair Olson adjourned the meeting at 8:31 PM



Marion Soil and Water Conservation District complies with the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. If special physical,

language, or other accommodation is needed for this meeting, please contact the District Manager at 503-391-9927 as soon as possible, and at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.