



**Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes April 16, 2025**

APPROVED

09:30 AM to 11:00 AM

Facilitator: Cesar Zamora

Recorded by: Chelsea Blank

Approved: June 18, 2025

Committee Member Attendance

Cesar Zamora (Committee Chair) - Staff	Present
Rochelle Koch - Director	Present
Nik Ovchinnikov - Director	Present
Chelsea Blank - Staff	Present
Leland Hardy - Associate Director	Present

Staff

Brenda Sanchez
Becky Pineda
Sarah Hamilton
Kassi Roosth

Guests

Darin Olson
Kurt Berning
Mackayla Fithian
Emma Smith

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

Minutes

Call to Order-Chair: 09:31 AM

Announcements - None

Agenda Additions or Changes – Change the title name for Agenda item #6 from “Landscape Resilience Grant” to “Landscape Scale Restoration Grant”.

- 1. Public Comment** – No Comments
- 2. Board Updates on Committee Recommendations**

Zamora updated the committee with the previous Board meeting’s decisions about two topics that were relevant to the Natural Resources Committee. First, the SWCD participation in the Soil Health Network as regional pilot hub was approved by the Board on May 7th. Zamora will continue meeting with Sage Fairman with OrCAN to discuss an outline of our scope of work and role in this project. Second, the Board decided to wait to approve the PSP grant application

until we hear more from the Pudding River Watershed Council Board decision. This grant project will be done as a partnership between the two organizations.

3. Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes – March 12, 2025

The committee voted to approve the March 12, 2025 Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes as is.

Action: Ovchinnikov motioned to accept as presented the March 12, 2025 Natural Resources Committee meeting minutes, 2nd by Koch. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-5 [Zamora, Ovchinnikov, Koch, Hardy, and Blank], Opposed-0).

4. ODA Scope of Work focus area for Ag Water Quality Management Plan (Pineda)

Pineda discussed the upcoming opportunity to renew the ODA Scope of Work (SOW) focus area for the next biennium. Pineda gave an overview of the previous SOW project which helped the District provide landowner engagement, technical assistance and outreach in the headwaters of the Pudding River focus area. This project is focused on providing assistance for landowners with bare ground to implement conservation practices such as cover crops to improve soil health and water quality. The previous focus area, the headwaters of the Pudding River, was located between Sublimity and Silverton. Pineda suggests shifting the focus area to where the current Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) focus area is located, in the Howell Prairie Creek subbasin. Pineda discussed the need that is still present in the Howell Prairie Creek area for assistance with bare ground coverage and water quality improvement and discussed the importance of ongoing relationship building with the landowners there. Pineda will work with SWCD staff and ODA to determine the monitoring plan for the new SOW focus area, which would be very similar to the drive by visual surveys that the District has used before in other ODA Ag Water Quality programs to assess the needs of landowners. The new SOW biennium starts in July 2025, and the SIA ends in December 2025, so there will be a few months of overlap with the two programs.

Koch asked for a map of the PSP Pudding River focus area, and if there's a watershed council for the Howell Prairie creek subbasin that would help with the project. Pineda said that this subbasin is included in the Pudding River watershed and is covered by the Pudding River watershed council and included that Howell Prairie is included in the PSP focus area, but the PSP covers a larger area than the SOW focus area.

Sanchez also mentioned the importance of building strong relationships and continuing assistance to the landowners in this subbasin.

Ovchinnikov expressed his approval of Pineda's idea to shift the SOW focus area to the current SIA focus area.

Pineda gave an overview of the SOW application timeline, which is due to ODA by the end of May 2025. Pineda will be working on the application and will go to the May 7th Board meeting for approval. The committee supports this idea and agrees with Pineda's proposal to change the new SOW focus area to the Howell Prairie Creek subbasin.

Action: No motion or recommendation needed at this time, just discussion.

5. Should the District Provide Comments on Projects? (Sanchez)

Sanchez brought a discussion topic to the committee, based on an email that she received from the Department of State Lands requesting the SWCD to review and comment on an application for a Remove and Fill permit. Sanchez posed two questions: is this an appropriate role for the District to provide comments on projects? And does this topic need to go to the Board to approve this role?

Koch said that this discussion can go either way, but the staff are educated on these issues and would be able to provide comments, although it might not be a good fit for the District. She asked if it's necessary and mentioned concerns about being involved in any kind of compliance or regulatory issues.

Sanchez mentioned that the staff person to work on this would be Blank since she is the Natural Areas planner who works with wetland type of projects.

Olson commented that some SWCDs do have a history of getting involved in land use issues, but Marion SWCD has always stayed uninvolved because we have no control over compliance. There are other agencies that are better fit for this type of request.

Hardy, Blank, and Ovchinnikov agreed with Olson's statement. Koch suggested leaving this topic open for review on a case-by-case basis for Board approval.

Sanchez mentioned that other SWCDs have also received this request from DSL and have a template that is used for response that is very vague and mostly points to statewide regulations and rules.

Ovchinnikov commented that the state agencies already have safeguards in place to mitigate construction projects, and our comments are not necessary.

Zamora pointed out the potential issue with timing of receiving these requests and not being able to get them approved by our Board in time needed by DSL.

Overall, the committee all agreed that it would be best for the District to stay uninvolved with these requests, unless there is a particularly significant and large project that would have watershed level impacts that should be brought to the Board for review and approval on a case-by-case basis.

Action: No action needed, just discussion.

6. Introduction and Discussion of Landscape Scale Restoration Grant Proposal for Emerald Ash Borer. (Blank and Fithian, Pudding River Watershed Council)

Fithian joined the committee meeting to present a grant proposal that the Pudding River Watershed Council is putting together to apply for funding to help mitigate the impact of the invasive pest, the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Fithian presented a PowerPoint that gave a brief overview of EAB, the impacts on our waterways and natural areas, and the need for a landscape level project. She listed several of the potential partners that include Clackamas SWCD, Marion County, Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation, City of Salem, City of Woodburn, Oregon Department of Forestry, ODA, and more. The pre-application deadline is May 18th. If approved, formal application cycle will be in summer 2025 with applications being awarded in 2026. Fithian expressed the need to determine the extent of Butte Creek infestation area to help decide management actions and save money in the future. Objectives of this grant proposal include tree inventories, visual surveys, outreach and education to landowners, Slow Ash Mortalist (SLAM), and replanting. Fithian also noted that the requested contribution to the grant would include some staff time from Hamilton and Blank to help with visual surveys, since they have already done EAB survey trainings through ODA.

Sanchez asked what the budget request would be, which Fithian has not finalized the number yet but estimates that the request of Marion SWCD will be \$5-\$10,000. Fithian said that her first draft of the budget estimates come out to around \$200,000 project total. That means they are seeking a \$100,000 contribution as match from partners. Fithian will bring a budget and grant outline to the NR committee and Board for approval by July 2025 before the final LSR grant application is submitted. Sanchez recommended bringing the budget as soon as possible. The match does not need to be secured by the pre-application deadline in May.

The committee expressed support of this grant proposal and for the District to participate as a contributing partner to provide funding and technical assistance.

Action: Zamora made a motion that Marion SWCD be listed as a contributing partner on the LSR grant application. 2nd by Koch. MOTION PASSED (Aye-5 [Zamora, Ovchinnikov, Koch, Hardy, and Blank], Opposed-0).

7. Plant Health Conservation Practice (Chair):

Zamora brought this topic to the committee for discussion. He asked the main question of what types of 'plant health' practices will the District fund going forward with grants? Zamora gave some examples of how this resource concern has been used in District grant projects in the past, including funding micro irrigation sprinklers for blueberry fields to cool the plants to improve the plant health and vigor. He pointed out the difference between what a resource concern is and what is just actual benefit. He pointed to another example of an NRCS

practice that helps with plant health, which is high tunnels. In the same way, this doesn't solve a resource concern but improves the vigor of plant health. Koch mentioned that 'plant health' is very vague and can be applied to many things. Zamora offered the idea to narrow down the definition of 'plant health' for the district grant policy use. Olson commented on the need to define 'working lands' in this context and pointed out that any practice that's done with District funds needs to have a direct conservation benefit. Hardy commented that with the sprinkler example, temperature control is not the same as irrigation system improvement. The only function of that micro irrigation system is temperature control. Sanchez asked whether temperature control would impact pests on plants, leading to an eligible resource concern. Zamora answered that it's a hard question, but if we agree to help fund pest and diseases on plants, that could lead to getting more requests that aren't conservation related. Olson commented that most crops have drip irrigation, and that particular use of a conservation practice for 'plant health' of blueberries is more helpful for fruit quality and health, not plant health. The difference is between plant health and fruit quality, and the District shouldn't fund fruit quality projects. Koch suggested keeping this topic open for discussion and approval of plant health projects on a case-by-case basis. Zamora suggested that we agree to go forward with projects only focusing on plant health, and the Board will determine approval on a case-by-case basis.

Action: No action needed at this time, just discussion.

8. Cattleman's Association Wildlife Damage Prevention and Compensation Program (Sanchez and Chair)

Sanchez brought this topic to the committee after a representative, Dennis Sheehy, from the Cattleman's Association came to the board meeting with a plan to address wildlife damage to livestock that was approved by the legislature. He is looking to create pilot areas for a program providing insurance for farmers and ranchers to be compensated. The Board asked the committee to discuss this program and proposal for the District to agree to be one of these pilot areas to implement the program. Sanchez said that Sheehy is asking for the District to establish pilot sites in Marion County. This would perhaps include monitoring work and landowner engagement. Zamora clarified that Sheehy wants the District to participate in the insurance, implementation, and administrative staffing portions of the program and we would likely need to hire a crop consultant to help with this. Koch asked if the landowner pays for the insurance. Ovchinnikov asked what it would cost the District, to which Sanchez answered that the Association would pay the District to implement the program. Blank mentioned that it seems to be based on a previous wolf-livestock compensation program and seems to be more relevant to rangeland owners. Sanchez suggested that this

proposal would be a better fit for OSU. Koch asked whether the program would continue with or without our participation. Ovchinnikov, commented that this program would be beneficial for landowners, and the District's role should be to educate landowners about this opportunity, but not to implement the program. Sanchez mentioned that the District staff would not have the capacity to help with this, if the committee and Board wanted to participate, until next year. The committee agreed to decline the offer for the District to participate in implementing this program.

Action: Ovchinnikov made a motion to decline the SWCD participation in this program implementation. Hardy 2nd. MOTION PASSED (Aye-5 [Zamora, Ovchinnikov, Koch, Hardy, and Blank], Opposed-0).

9. Help Facilitate City of Salem Planning Commission Meetings (Sanchez)

Brenda received an email from Michael Slater, a student at Willamette University. He's also the chair of the planning commission for Salem. They reached out to the District to ask for assistance facilitating the upcoming meetings between partners to address the recent wetland decisions in the City of Salem. These decisions were based on FEMA regulations, which are working to implement NOAA assessments of violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). They are enforcing floodplain rules that require wetland mitigation for any new development within the City of Salem. There is a need for partnership to identify city property that could be used as mitigation sites in the floodplain. Sanchez said she would ask Blank to be the lead planner to help with this request. Sanchez mentioned that they (NOAA and City of Salem) have been working on Mill Creek for riparian restoration projects. These partner meetings will begin in July or August of this year. Sanchez stated that our role would be in helping connect the partners and running the meetings to support this partnership. Sanchez offered to provide reports after these partner meetings to update the committee and Board.

Action: No action or recommendation, just discussion.

10. Next Committee Meeting date

The committee discussed the schedule for the next Natural Resources Committee meeting. Koch asked if it would be in May, to which Blank mentioned that the committee's regular schedule is typically every other month, unless there are items that need approval sooner. That would put the next meeting in June. The committee agreed that June 18th at 9:30 am will be the next meeting date. Koch and Ovchinnikov asked if the committee packets could be shorter in the future, with less of the background information documents included. Sanchez offered to use Sharepoint to upload the supporting documents for the Committee packets to minimize paper use. Koch and Ovchinnikov said they prefer to print out the packets to read them, they would just like them to be shorter. Zamora offered to reduce the packet items and keep each agenda item to three pages or less from now on.

Adjourn: Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:04 AM



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