



Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Board of Directors June 4, 2025
Monthly meeting Minutes

6:30 PM – 9:10 PM Board Monthly Meeting

Facilitator: Chair Olson

Recorded by: Brenda Sanchez

Approved: 08-06-25

Directors Record of Attendance		Associate Directors
At Large 1-Peggy Hart (Secretary-Treasurer)	Present	
At Large 2-Scott Walker	Absent	
Zone 1-Noah Justice	Present	
Zone 2-Nik Ovchinnikov	Present	
Zone 3-Darin Olson (Chair)	Present	
Zone 4-Angela Plowhead (Vice-Chair)	Absent	
Zone 5-Rochelle Koch	Absent	
Staff		Guests
Brenda Sanchez		Teresa Brehme
Susan Ortiz		

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: 6:32 PM

Public Comment – No public comment, in person or written, was submitted.

Announcements

1. Olson reminded the Board that a quorum requires the presence of four Directors. He noted that when exactly four Directors are present, unanimous approval is required for any motion to pass, as all four must vote in favor.
2. Olson asks the Directors if they are Ok with still meeting on July 2 or would they like to move to July 6 to schedule around the July 4th holiday? Directors decided to keep the July 2 date for the meeting.
3. The Chair noted that the District Manager's annual performance review is conducted by the Board Officers (Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary-Treasurer) every other year, with a full Board review taking place in the alternating years. This year the officers will complete the review process and report back to the full

Board once completed. Olson clarified that a full Board review occurs every other year to help streamline the process and avoid an overly burdensome workload.

Agenda Additions or Changes

- Addition Item 11: Purchase Requests for Plant Sale
- Addition Item 12: Providing Public Comment to Oregon watershed Enhancement Board

1. District Snapshot

Sanchez provided updates on various projects and activities. She mentioned that she would be out of the office for a few days (June 5-June 10). Sanchez stated that she directed staff to contact Susan Ortiz (Staff) for any grant-related questions and Tom Wilson (Staff) for any admin assistance and to contact Olson in case of an emergency. Sanchez shared that Sarah Hamilton (Staff) initiated garlic mustard treatments and she and Chelsea Blank (Staff) had installed traps for emerald ash borer monitoring. Sanchez discussed ongoing work with the Wildfire Recovery Landowner Assistance, Planning & Implementation (WOCRE-RCPP) Reforestation & Recovery Grant program, including the need to rewrite a memorandum of understanding due to funding changes. Sanchez highlighted Blank's efforts with the Pudding River Watershed Council and her work on high school biology studies. She also mentioned upcoming activities related to conservation education and outdoor school programs.

2. Treasurers Report April 2025

Hart starts by saying that she was able to review the report and noted that there are some rounding influences that do not add up correctly as written. Sanchez will address the rounding errors. Hart states she likes the format change. Olson reminds the Directors they can suggest edits and revision if needed. Hart explain that she reviews the entire report.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **accept as presented the April 2025 Treasurers Report**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

3. Draft April 2, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes

Hart stated she reviewed the minutes and submitted some small edits.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the April 2, 2025 monthly board meeting minutes as presented**, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

4. United States Department Agriculture Services (NRCS) Report.

Brehme reported that the team is finalizing stewardship work for current projects ahead of the upcoming Friday deadline and is also assisting Polk and Clackamas counties. All EQIP funds for the year have been obligated, supporting six projects in Marion County—two irrigation, two forest management plans, and two soil health programs. The agency's reorganization plan remains on hold due to a court injunction in California, and staff are continuing regular operations until further notice. Brehme has a meeting scheduled with Caesar Zamora (staff) on Friday to discuss potential proposals related to hedgerows and filter strips. He is also collaborating with Chelsea Blank (staff) on WOCRE-RCPP efforts.

Hart inquired whether plant health is considered a legitimate conservation practice, specifically referencing the use of misting for heat protection in berries. Brehme confirmed that NRCS does support plant health as a conservation objective, citing high tunnel programs as an example. Practices that improve the productivity and resilience of cropping systems, including drought resistance, may qualify. However, Brehme noted that the eligibility and ranking of specific practices, such as misting systems, would depend on the assessed conservation benefit compared to alternative cooling methods. Directors continued to discuss plant health and clarifying different scenarios that may apply to plant health.

5. Fiscal Year 2025-26 Proposed Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)

Sanchez displayed a document that shows COLA increases from the past and a recommendation to provide a two and half percent COLA for fiscal year 2025-26. Sanchez adds that this amount was figured into the salary budget for fiscal year 2025-26. Justice asked Sanchez to explain her recommendation. Sanchez replied that based on 2025 social security COLA determination (Director Walker suggestion), current Consumer Price Index inflation rate, and the year over year (June 2024-June 2025) inflation rate. Hart was concerned that the inflation rate could rise in the next six months, asking if the Board is tied to this percent. Olson explained that the Board can always adjust the COLA at future Board meetings if needed.

Action: Justice motions to approve the recommended 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment to start July 1, 2025, 2nd by Koch. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

6. Conservation Assistant Grant Program

a. CAG Extension Requests

Action: Olson motioned that the Board **approve the request for extension for CAG-20-24-003-Riley Land Restoration**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the request for extension for LAP-20-23-007 HRFS MSWCD 121422**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the project change request for CAG-20-25-022-Terry Behrens**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

b. Grants Completed

Olson informed the Board that completed grants have already received prior approval. Staff submits a brief report upon project completion and is responsible for following up with the Board. No action is required; Directors may review the reports independently. There was no discussion.

7. Admin Committee

a. District Grant Program's Entity and Cap Policy and Conflict of Interest Safeguards – Report

Olson suggested forming a subcommittee to complete a sample application in order to gain firsthand experience with the application and review process. Directors expressed that they also find the application process to be burdensome. Susan Ortiz (staff) noted that members of the public can preview application questions in the Foundant system, providing an opportunity to better guide applicants. Directors discussed elements of the policy they would like to bring to the full Board for further consideration. By consensus, the item was deferred to the July meeting to allow additional Directors interested in the discussion to be present.

b. Employee Professional Growth Policy

Sanchez explained the need for a formal policy regarding employee professional growth and training. The policy would clarify the types of support

available, what expenses may be covered, and how approval is granted. She presented and summarized the proposed policy language. Sanchez noted that each fiscal year, she allocates the approved training budget equally among full- and part-time employees. She also informed the Board that, based on consultations with Human Resources, access to training opportunities and support is considered a pay equity factor.

Sanchez reported that she collaborated with Wilson (staff) to develop an online automated form for employee professional growth support requests, streamlining the request and approval process for trainings and related activities. She noted that the proposed policy includes a provision stating that all professional growth support is subject to available funding, and the District may deny requests if funds are unavailable or if the request does not align with the District's mission.

Directors discussed various scenarios involving staff requests. Justice asked whether unused training funds roll over. Sanchez explained that the District operates on a cash basis and begins each fiscal year with a new budget. Hart recommended that the policy include language clarifying that the District Manager allocates training funds annually. Sanchez confirmed that this is already included in the policy. Hart emphasized that professional growth is essential for staff retention.

Hart also inquired who is responsible for covering registration fees, citing a case where a staff member was unable to attend a conference due to the inability to pay upfront. Sanchez responded that she prefers staff not use personal funds and will make efforts to cover costs in advance to avoid placing that burden on employees. While this approach is not written into the policy, she is willing to accommodate such situations when informed. Olson suggested the District could provide a prepaid cash card to assist staff with upfront payments.

Justice asked whether unused training funds from one staff member could be reallocated to another. Sanchez replied that while there is no formal policy addressing this, the general practice is not to allow fund transfers between employees.

Action: Ovchinnikov motioned that the Board **adopt the Employee Professional Growth Policy Resolution No. 2025-06-04**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

- c. **2025 Revised Salary Administration Plan & Annual FY 25-26 Salary Table-**
Sanchez reviewed the 2024 update to the District's Salary Administration Plan (displayed new plan), which included a comprehensive review and a pay equity study. The results highlighted the need for a new annual salary table and the introduction of job levels to better reflect differences in responsibility and effort across positions. She explained that the salary table is a key tool for establishing pay grades and that the proposed updates ensure equity and consistency. Sanchez offered to walk through the proposed job levels and demonstrate how the new salary table was developed. Before proceeding, Directors discussed whether to postpone the item until the Administration Committee Chair could be present. By consensus, the item was deferred to the next meeting.

d. **Office Support & Accounts Payable Assistant Job Description**

Sanchez explained that following the retirement of the Office Coordinator in February, it became clear that a restructuring of job duties was needed—particularly those of the Office Coordinator and Financial Administrator. She recommended combining the two roles into a single full-time position: Office Support and Accounts Payable. This change would eliminate the two former positions and create a more streamlined and organized structure for the District's administrative functions. Sanchez noted that this restructuring also impacts the duties of the Grants Coordinator and District Manager, as some responsibilities previously held by the eliminated positions had been distributed to them.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the Office Support & Accounts Payable Assistant Job Description**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Action: Justice motioned that the Board **retire the Financial Administrator position as of July 31, 2025**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **retire the Office Coordinator position as of June 2, 2025**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

Olson explained to the Board that the District Manager has full delegation to flex positions and staff regarding staff changes in roles and hiring for up to six months.

8. Facility-Third Avenue Electric Building Sign Transition to Mural Art Project

Olson states that this project is within the District Manager's spending authority and would like this project to be managed by the District manager; stressing that there is no need to bring this project to the Board again.

Action: Olson motioned that the Board **give the authority for the District manager to move forward with the mural with Sanchez's discretion**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

9. Vehicle Purchase Authorization

Sanchez reported that she was unable to sell the District truck or purchase a new vehicle during the current fiscal year. Although she met with staff to identify the type of vehicle needed, the process proved more difficult than anticipated, and time ran out before a purchase could be made. She acknowledged that funds were not re-appropriated in the FY 2025-2026 budget for a new vehicle and requested guidance from the Board on how to proceed. Sanchez proposed that, if she finds a suitable vehicle in FY 2025-2026, she will return to the Board to request a lump-sum spending approval in advance, allowing her to act quickly when a vehicle becomes available. Olson and Hart asked whether such a change would need to be brought before the Budget Committee. Sanchez responded that the purchase could likely be funded by reallocating existing line items within the General Fund, subject to Board approval. She will confirm this with the state's budget law guidance. Justice suggested the District consider leasing a vehicle as an alternative to purchasing. Directors discussed where to find a vehicle.

10. Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) Annual Dues

Sanchez asked the Board for approval to pay the OACD (Oregon Association of Conservation Districts) dues. She noted that she has been actively utilizing OACD resources, such as the District Manager Roundtable, and will be serving on the OACD Conference Planning Committee. She explained that OACD recently revised its fee structure based on budget needs, resulting in dues that are nearly half of what the District previously paid.

Hart commented that it would have been helpful if OACD had included its budget in the dues letter to provide better context for the changes. She added that paying the dues is a good faith effort to support all SWCDs in the state, even if OACD's work does not always directly impact Marion SWCD. Directors discussed the value of membership and whether the benefits justify the cost.

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve paying the assessed amount for Oregon Association of Conservation Districts FY 25-26 Annual Dues**, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

11. Purchase Requests for Plant Sale

Sanchez requested clarification on the approval process for a purchase request related to the annual plant sale. The request is for a lump-sum amount intended to cover the cost of plant orders, which must be approved in advance of placing any orders. She noted that, in previous years, individual plant sale purchases were not brought to the Board for approval; however, the total amount now exceeds the District Manager's authorized spending limit. Sanchez asked whether the Board could authorize a broader spending limit specifically for the plant sale, to cover incoming invoices that will arrive following plant pickup in March.

Action: Olson motioned that the Board **approve the Manager spend up to \$18,000 for the purchase of plants for the plant and bulb sales for the fiscal year 2025-26 plant sale**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-4 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, and Hart], Opposed-0).

12. Providing Public Comment to Oregon watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)

Sanchez requested clarification on whether the District Manager may provide public comment at the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) meeting to express gratitude for Capacity and Scope of Work (SOW) funding. Directors discussed the distinction between offering comments that suggest changes or improvements—where the Manager would be speaking on behalf of the Board—and comments of appreciation, which may be made on behalf of the District. In this case, Directors agreed it would be appropriate for the District Manager to speak without prior Board approval.

Adjourn: Chair Olson adjourned the meeting at 7:52 PM



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