



Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Board of Directors July 2, 2025
Monthly meeting Minutes

6:39 PM – 9:02 PM Board Monthly Meeting

Facilitator: Chair Olson

Recorded by: Brenda Sanchez

Approved: Approved 08-06-25

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	Present	
Zone 2-Nik Ovchinnikov	Present	
Zone 3-Darin Olson (Chair)	Present	
Zone 4-Angela Plowhead (Vice-Chair)	Present	
Zone 5-Rochelle Koch	Present	
Staff		Guests
Sarah Hamilton		MacKayla Fithian
Susan Ortiz		Pudding River Watershed Council
Brenda Sanchez		
Amy Zimmer		
Becky Pineda		
Cesar Zamora		

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 – None

Agenda Additions or Changes

13-Letter of Support for the Yamhill-Marion SWCD Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) technician grant application.

1. District Snapshot

Staff Updates

- Native and Invasive Plant Specialist – Sarah Hamilton
Hamilton reported on the District's native plant and invasive pest programs. The native plant program, which includes plant sales, education, and partnerships, distributed over 8,200 plants and 350 seed packets this year, generating approximately \$11,000 in net income—part of which supports a scholarship fund. Hamilton also leads classes, tours, and site visits to promote native plant use.

Hamilton coordinates the Mid-Willamette Cooperative Weed Management Area, which spans three counties and provides weed management education for professionals. She continues to collect Geographic System (GIS) Information data for weed surveys and collaborates with partners on controlling priority invasive plants. Her current focus is on preparedness for emerald ash borer infestations, which threaten native ecosystems and increase pressure from invasive species.

- Conservation Planner-Natural Area Updates – Chelsea Blank
Blank highlighted the need for increased outreach on fuels reduction and Conservation Assistance Grant (CAG) opportunities, echoing concerns about blackberries as a fire hazard. She suggested encouraging neighbors to collaborate on restoration projects and native plant purchases. The group also briefly discussed local native plant nurseries.

Blank provided a progress update on the Wildfire Recovery Landowner Assistance, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Grant, which includes six landowners in Marion and Clackamas counties. Site assessments, documentation, and forest management plans have been completed. Next steps include finalizing planning in July, contract setup in August, and site preparation in fall. Planting will occur in winter 2026–2027, followed by brush management in spring 2027.

She also reported on her work monitoring emerald ash borer populations with traps, participating in wildfire preparedness outreach, wrapping up CAG projects, and contributing to a local radio series aimed at connecting urban and rural communities.

2. Treasurers Report May 2025

Hart explains that the year end is approaching and we have had more tax levies coming in. Hart states that Directors should focus on the second page with budget versus actual and review transactions by vendor because it is more clarifying that

then the check register. Walker asks to clarify if the remaining CAG budget roles over to next year. Sanchez responds that there is still the month of June to pay grant awards. The May report is through May 31, 2025. Walker asked is there will be more payments for grants in June? Hart replies, yes, I just signed checks for grant payments that would be reflected in the June Treasurer's Report.

Action: Koch motioned that the Board **accept as presented the May 2025 Treasurers Report**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

3. Draft May 7 Budget Hearing, and May 7, 2025, Board Meeting Minutes

Hart stated she reviewed the minutes and submitted some small edits; there were some errors related to attendance and facilitating.

Action: Justice motioned that the Board **approve the Draft May 7 Budget Hearing, and May 7, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented**, 2nd by Koch. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

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

Brehme reported via email because she would not be able to attend the meeting. Sanchez read out the email update. Summarized here.

Marion County NRCS has obligated six Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) contracts for FY25. Unfortunately, Oregon did not receive Inflation Reduction Act funds this year, leaving many local projects unfunded. There is hope that funding may be reallocated in future federal budgets.

Of the eight Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications submitted, five were approved for funding in Marion County—significantly more than neighboring counties, which typically had only one or two projects funded. These five-year CSP contracts require a higher baseline of conservation before eligibility. Funded projects include:

- Pollinator habitat plantings on a hops farm
- Forest brush management to enhance wildlife habitat (2 projects)
- Crop rotation and soil health practices on a flower farm
- SmartSpray technology use on hazelnut fields to reduce chemical usage

NRCS continues to close out prior-year contracts, particularly irrigation projects, and currently manages 60 active contracts (50 EQIP, 10 CSP), not including the five new CSP contracts to be obligated soon.

At the end of July, Marion County NRCS will host a Conservation Planning Part 2 training for NRCS and SWCD staff, a key step in the certification process for Conservation Planners.

5. FY 25-26 Budget Resolution No. 050725-A (Amending Resolution No. 050725)

District Manager recommends that the Board approve an amendment to the adopted FY 2025–2026 budget resolution to correct two minor but necessary adjustments:

1. Rounding Adjustment: A \$1 rounding adjustment is needed to align the adopted budget totals with standard reporting practices. This change ensures consistency between the resolution and the accounting system but does not impact any allocations or program funding.
2. Building Reserve Fund Correction – The original resolution included an incorrect amount due to transcription from form to resolution. The correct fund total should be \$295,715.
3. Unappropriated Fund Correction – The original resolution included an incorrect unappropriated amount due to the mistaken subtraction of pass-through funds. The corrected total appropriations across all funds should be \$3,839,929, and the corrected unappropriated ending fund balance should be \$1,231,926.

These amendments are technical in nature and do not affect the total resources or the intent of the adopted budget.

Action: Hart motions to approve an amendment to the FY 2025–2026 Budget Resolution No. 050725 to (1) include a \$1 rounding adjustment to the General Fund balance for consistency with financial reporting standards and (2) correct the Building Fund balance to \$295,715 and (3) correct the total appropriations all funds to \$3,839,929 and the unappropriated ending fund balance to \$1,231,926, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

6. Health and Dental Benefit Renewals

Sanchez presented the new insurance coverage rates for FY 2025–26. She noted that life and dental coverage remain unchanged, while health insurance premiums have increased by 19.3%. Sanchez stated her intention to review the District's insurance coverage and benefits to explore additional or more cost-effective options. Although this review was not completed this year, she plans to prioritize it in the upcoming fiscal year. In the meantime, she recommended continuing with the current insurance provider until a full review and assessment can be completed. Directors discussed the high increase and potential reasons for the increase in coverage costs. Olson adds that we could shop around and seek other options and costs. Sanchez stated she would work on this for the next year. Plowhead suggests that the Admin

Committee can assist with the benefit reviews. Walkers reminds the Directors that changing health plans can have a large impact to staff.

Action: Koch motions to **authorize the renewal of insurance benefits**, 2nd by Justice. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

7. Natural Resource Committee

a. Special Projects Grant Applications

The Board reviewed two Special Projects Grant (SPG) applications for SmartApply, a LiDAR-based spraying system that targets only foliage, reducing pesticide use. Olson declared a conflict of interest and delegated leadership of the item to Hart and Zamora.

The discussion began with a recap of prior conversations about the purpose of SPG funds. Some members saw value in using the grants for innovative pilot projects, while others, including Walker, voiced concerns about funding expensive equipment with limited impact. Zamora, staff and Natural Resources Committee Chair, introduced the applications and explained the system's environmental benefits. Hart emphasized its potential to reduce pesticide runoff and improve water quality.

Walker questioned the system's necessity and effectiveness. Zamora shared that the Committee had considered monitoring pesticide levels in local watersheds to measure impact. Walker asked the Board to consider the boundaries of the SPG program. Hart added that the program exists because there is current budget capacity. Koch noted that conservation practices are evolving and the District should support new technology. Plowhead, Ovchinnikov, Hardy, and others voiced support for the SPG and the applications. Walker added that while he supports the concept, he is concerned about funding equipment with limited impact and suggested clearer guidelines for the program.

Zamora then introduced the Hubbell application and outlined the project and costs. Hart noted her support for its potential to reduce pesticide use. Walker asked whether alternative chemicals or pest management strategies exist for hazelnuts. Justice explained that pesticides remain the primary method, and the Smart Sprayer significantly reduces their use, benefiting the environment. Directors discussed the system's environmental benefits, particularly the reduction in pesticide runoff into soil and waterways

Action: Koch motions to approve the **Special Projects Grant Smart Apply Sprayer for Stuart Olson Farms and Hubbell Farms**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-5 [Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-1 [Walker], Abstain-1 [Olson]). Olson declared a conflict of interest and Abstained from voting or discussing the project.

b. Letter of Support Pudding River Watershed Council Emerald Ash Borer Project

Action: Walker motions to **authorizes a letter of support for the Pudding River Watershed Council Emerald Ash Borer Project**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

c. Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network's Memorandum of Understanding - Soil Health Hub/ Network

Action: Walker motions to **sign the Oregon Climate and Agriculture Network's Memorandum of Understanding to join the Soil Health Hub**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

d. Cover Crop Assistance Program End of the Fiscal Year Report

Grants Coordinator Susan Ortiz presented a brief report on the FY25 Cover Crop Program. The program received more applications and funding requests than the previous year and was successfully awarded the full \$45,000 allocation.

A graph was shared showing the relationship between total acres farmed and acres planted in cover crops by participating growers. Most participants were small to mid-sized farms, with only one large farm testing the program.

Ortiz noted that staff responded to requests for data on acres managed versus acres planted in cover crops, and the results show a strong adoption rate among participants. Some plantings also occurred within the District's priority areas.

She referenced recent discussion on transitioning from seasonal cover crops to permanent vegetative cover. The Natural Resources Committee reviewed a draft program proposal, with updates on payment rates to be finalized. A revised proposal will be brought to the Board in August.

The FY26 program opens for applications on August 1. Ortiz thanked the Board for continued support and additional funding, expressing enthusiasm for expanding conservation efforts.

8. Conservation Assistant Grant Program

a. Conservation Assistance Grant Review Committee Structure

Sanchez explains that she would like the Board to agree to structuring the CAG Review Committee in the same manner as our other committees. In doing so Sanchez shared the current structure and members of committees. Sanchez highlighted that the CAG Review Committee needs a Directors appointed to make it a full five-member committee.

Action: Hart motions to **authorize the Conservation Assistance Grant Review Committee form a five-member structure and approve the reorganization and structure as presented**, 2nd by Koch. Discussion: Walker asked if staff would still review the applications and provide their assessments for the project? Sanchez ensured that the internal CAG review process will remain the same; clarifying that the applications are first reviewed by the staff, then the CAG Committee and then the Board. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

Olson would like the Directors to consider the opportunity and at the next meeting in August. Olson will work with Sanchez to create a process for designating a member. Walker raises his hand and would like to note he is interested in serving on the committee.

b. CAG Extension Requests

Action: Hart motioned that the Board **approve the extension requests for CAG-20-23-005-McKay Irrigation Efficiency and CAG-20-24-027-Scott Creek Pasture Renovation**, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-7 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

c. 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.

9. Admin Committee-Items Moved from June 4, 2025 Board Meeting

a. Conservation Grant Entity and Cap Policy

Sanchez presented the revised CAG policy and highlighted key amendments, including updates to the definition of eligible entities and new accountability measures. The Board reached consensus to define an entity as an individual or organization with a unique taxpayer ID number.

To address concerns about multiple owners of the same land applying for grants, the Board requested additional language. Sanchez shared that the Committee recommended revised wording allowing Board discretion when considering prior awards to entity members or family.

The Board agreed to the revised policy language with one opposing vote. They agreed to have a subcommittee test and review the full grant application process to identify potential streamlining opportunities. The Board also decided to postpone adding new application questions for the current cycle and instead incorporate changes in the next round following further review. There was further discussion regarding the cap and how it may apply to different projects and applications including potential risks of not getting this language correct. Directors discussed the importance of ensuring the application process remains user-friendly and not overly burdensome.

Action: Hart motioned **to accept the Grant Entity and Cap Policy and amended her motion on the floor to include the requested change in language. The motion as amended**, 2nd by Ovchinnikov. Discussion, Koch adds that she is aware of how much work went into clarifying the cap and entity policy and appreciates the work that the Committee completed. Koch adds that she feels much better about the policy. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Olson, Ovchinnikov, Plowhead, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-1 [Walker]).

Olson concluded the discussion by noting that Directors will have the opportunity to complete a sample CAG application to better understand the process. Hart added that this experience will help inform efforts to streamline both the application and pre-application processes. Olson stated that staff will develop a process for subcommittee engagement.

Sanchez clarified that the new language for the CAG application will be incorporated after the subcommittee reviews the applications and all suggested edits and streamlining from the subcommittee will be in added or removed in the next CAG LOI and application cycle after the committee meets.

b. Salary Administration Plan 2025-26-Salary Table

Sanchez presents the updated Salary Administration Plan on the screen, which includes new job levels, a staffing plan, and a revised salary table. The new system features defined job levels (A through G) that correspond to responsibilities and experience, a more consistent pay structure with 3.5% increases between steps and 7% between grades, and a 46% spread from step 1 to step 12. The plan aims to address pay equity issues and improve succession planning. Sanchez shows what data was referenced and how the data was used to create the new table. She also explains how new hires are placed on the salary table and how the system allows for growth within the district. The Board discusses the implications of the new plan, including how it affects current employees and part-time workers. Walker asked whether new hires start at Step 1. Sanchez explained that, in practice, new hires typically begin at Step 1; however, if a candidate brings additional experience, education, or skills beyond what was originally recruited for, they may be placed at a higher step in that grade at the District Manager's discretion.

Justice asked about the purpose of Level A positions, noting that no current jobs are classified at that level. Sanchez confirmed this, explaining that while there are no Level A positions at this time, however the Board has discussed the potential for internships or apprenticeships. Defining Level A in the salary structure allows the District to create and Board-approve a job description if such a position is developed in the future.

Walker asked how a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is incorporated into the salary table. Sanchez explained that the table had already been updated to reflect the 2.5% COLA effective July 1, using a built-in formula that applies the adjustment across all steps. Directors discussed the process for determining the annual COLA, emphasizing that the Board sets the COLA and retains full discretion over its approval. They noted that the Board may use any available data sources to inform its decision each year.

Plowhead noted that the table is accessible and easily modified for future use. Directors discussed how the table applies to staff. Sanchez confirmed that all positions are paid within market pay ranges. She explained that job levels are based on responsibilities, effort, and other factors, while pay grades are determined by a combination of job level, market range, and pay equity considerations.

Plowhead left the meeting due to illness at 8:50 PM

Action: Hart motioned to adopt the amended **Salary Administration Plan through resolution #2025-07-02, approve the FY 2025-26 Annual Salary Table, and authorize the proposed employee salary adjustments required to transition staff from the old table to the new table effective July 1, 2025,** 2nd by Justice. Discussion walker asked about non-exempt or exempt employees. Sanchez replied we have three position that are non-exempt, all other positions are exempt; meaning that exempt is not subject to overtime pay. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

10. Western Oregon Cascadia Recovery Effort 2020 Labor Day Wildfire Forest Landowner Post-Fire Recovery Assistance Program: Memorandum Of Agreement

Sanchez reported that Sustainable Northwest indicated Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District is running low on funds. However, the District still has a significant portion of funds available that are unlikely to be fully spent. As a result, the plan is to cover Chelsea Blank's work in Clackamas using those remaining funds. The Memorandum of Agreement has been amended to reflect this change, and Sanchez requested Board approval of the amendment and Chair's signature.

Action: Walker motioned that the Board **accept the modifications to the Western Oregon Cascadia Recovery Effort 2020 Labor Day Wildfire Forest Landowner Post-Fire Recovery Assistance Program: Memorandum Of Agreement Clackamas SWCD and Marion SWCD,** 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

11. Personnel Action-Step Increase

Sanchez proposed a step increase for Sarah Hamilton based on performance evaluation results.

Action: Walker motioned that the Board **approve the Personnel Action-Step Increase for Hamilton,** 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

12. Letter of Support for the Yamhill-Marion SWCD Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) technician grant application to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).

Sanchez explains that we are in a partnership with Yamhill SWCD for a CREP technician (Rachel Kato-CREP Technician) through an OWEB grant. It is time again to apply to OWEB for the CREP technician funds. This letter of support (displayed on screen) will be submitted with the grant proposal.

Action: Walker motioned that the Board **approve the Letter of Support for the Yamhill-Marion SWCD Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program technician grant application to the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board**, 2nd by Hart. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED (Aye-6 [Walker, Olson, Ovchinnikov, Justice, Hart, and Koch], Opposed-0).

Adjourn: Chair Olson adjourned the meeting at 9:01 PM



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