

**Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD)
Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes August 13, 2025
APPROVED**

01:02 PM to 02:05 PM

Facilitator: Cesar Zamora

Recorded by: Chelsea Blank

Approved: October 15, 2025

Committee Member Attendance

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

Staff

Amy Zimmer
Sarah Hamilton
Brenda Sanchez
Becky Pineda

Guests

Jason Marshall
Peggy Hart
Darin Olson arrived at
1:50 pm

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: 1:02 pm

Announcements - None

Agenda Additions or Changes - None

Agenda Item 1: Public Comment – Pudding River Watershed Council (WC) Chair of Directors, Jason Marshall- presented at the recent Board meeting and they deferred this discussion to this committee. The two asks being brought to the committee by Marshall is to request that the Watershed Council receive leftover funds from unused Partner Grant program to help fund watershed council employees staying at full time and that the District consider prioritizing watershed councils as ‘preferred partners’ for the Partner Grant Program. The reason for the first ask is because the current full time employees at the Watershed Council have been funded with flexible funds in the budget, but they will need more funds to keep these employees at full time. Other grants

won't be an immediate source of funds that will help. Budget cuts won't help because most of the budget is payroll, so they want to prevent cutting employees. Fee for service is an option, as City of Silverton has hired the WC employees as contractors, however they can only do this to a limited extent, since the WC is a nonprofit. Due to federal and state grant cuts, they want to secure funding in other ways to help support their full-time employees. Silverton reservoir activities have impacted the results of PRWC salmonoid surveys and reports. If MSWCD can pay the amounts needed, PRWC will flex time during the winter by rolling back the full-time employees to part time again.

The second ask is for the District to make watershed councils preferred partners for the Partner Grant Program, given the uniqueness of the relationship between SWCDs and Watershed councils. This includes North Santiam Watershed Council. This would put WCs into a higher tier of eligible funding, or exceptions to limitations, as an example. PRWC has updated their governance, encouraged donations and fundraising events, and with the increased capacity, they need increased funding from strong partnerships.

Hart acknowledged the exceptional progress that the WC has made, but the District doesn't seem to be able to provide more funds, as the money being requested doesn't exist in the budget. On ask 2, there might be equity issues that arise out of this preferential system. She is interested in learning more about how the WC is approaching local municipalities because they can apply on behalf of the WC and pay them. Hart clarified that she is speaking as a Board member, not a NR committee member.

Marshall replied with a question about closing the budget year out and where the leftover grant money goes. Hart clarified that the cash in the budget dissolves on July 1 and goes back into the general fund.

Sanchez said that the District is entering the third cycle of (Partner Grant), after which it will be reviewed as a pilot program, and then recommended to the Board about its continuation. Any cash roll over goes into other programs at the start of the new fiscal year. This is a good topic to discuss during the pilot program review of the Partner Grant, but not currently.

Ovchinnikov expressed the desire to learn more about the Partner Grant process to understand it better and will then be able to provide more comments and feedback.

Follow up: these requests may be brought to the NR Committee again after the Partner Grant program is reviewed in the winter of 2025.

Agenda Item 2: Board Updates on Committee Recommendations (Zamora)

Special Grants Project (SPG) project for a smart sprayer has been completed, so there will be an update on that soon. The Pudding River applied for a Landscape Resilience grant with the District as a contributing partner, which was signed and approved. The

Soil Health network has been made official. The Board approved of the reorganization of CAG review committee as proposed. The Permanent vegetation/conservation cover/hedgerow program was sent back to Natural Resources committee from Board, although it will need to be a discussion topic at the next committee meeting.

Action: None needed, just discussion.

Agenda Item 3: Natural Resources Committee Meeting Minutes – June, 18, 2025

Action: Ovchinnikov motioned to **accept as presented the June, 18, 2025, Natural Resources Committee meeting minutes**, 2nd by Zamora. No further discussion. **MOTION PASSED** (Aye-3 [Zamora, Ovchinnikov, and Blank], Opposed-0). Hardy and Koch absent.

Agenda Item 4: Ad Hoc CAG Review Committee Appointee (Sanchez)

Sanchez stated that although Ortiz is out today, she will be running this project. This topic was suggested by the Board chair during the June 2025 meeting to help Directors understand the CAG application process. All Directors will have a chance to participate in this.

There was discussion between Hart and Sanchez about the goals of this idea, which is to help familiarize the Directors with the process, and determine if there have been requested additions to the process that are already present. As Olson has discussed before, the applications have gotten more complicated over the years by request of the Board. When Olson's family member applied, it raised attention the complexity of the process and whether that level of complexity is necessary.

Sanchez asked how this process should be approached, for example, does the Board want to come up with their own projects to apply for, or be assigned an existing project?

Discussion ensued about these options, and Ovchinnikov and Hart stated that they prefer to fill it out using a base project that is the same for all Directors.

Sanchez suggested a conservation cover or hedgerow project that is a good balance of technical needs, which Hart replied that it might be best to let Olson decide on the project being used, since he is the director that brought it to attention, and he can determine an appropriate representative project. The LOI will be included in this process since that seems to be the main problem.

Next steps: Sanchez said that the NR team can draft up a scenario project to use. It will probably be as basic as possible and note the importance of having planner interaction. All members and guests agreed the Fall season would be the best time to start this project. Sanchez offered that Ortiz would send it out by October 1, and the Board will

provide feedback by the November board meeting. The final review of the process will occur in the December board meeting. The recommendations likely won't be able to be incorporated into the CAG application until next fiscal year.

Action: No action needed, just discussion.

Agenda Item 5: Pilot Grant Program Process (Sanchez)

The Board asked Sanchez to create a process for reviewing pilot programs almost a year ago. She shared updates and questions for the committee and plans to come back to next committee meeting with a proposal of the draft of the process ready for review. The Partner Grant was established as a 3-year pilot program, giving flexibility for the Board to determine whether or not to continue the program as is, eliminate it, or change it. No metrics were established when the program was created, this outline includes some ideas for metrics that may be used to help with review. Sanchez proposed questions to help guide the outline: do we want to have Board review, a separate review committee, staff review only, or other? This will be used to help review the success or failures of a pilot program after it's completed its pilot term.

Sanchez gave an overview of the items in the outline she drafted, including types of practices, geographic scope and priorities, technical assistance or training provided, enough outreach provided, recommendations for adaptations, decision-making on continuing the program, etc.

Ovchinnikov and Hamilton suggested that staff review of a pilot program after its completion would be best, since the staff are currently the ones to review it throughout its process. Hamilton also suggested surveying applicants to get external feedback.

Ovchinnikov would like to see what types of projects were funded, the costs, and impact of the program through qualitative measures.

Next Steps: this needs to happen as soon as the Partner Grant cycle is completed and awarded because it will influence budget decisions. This will go to the Board in January.

Action: No action needed, just discussion.

Agenda Item 6: Special Project Grant Budget (Zamora)

The District has awarded all available SPG funds allocated in the budget already and it is only one month into the new fiscal year. Zamora opened the discussion as to whether the District should use funds leftover from grants last year to allocate additional SPG projects.

Sanchez mentioned that there is a line item that funds could be allocated from, as much as \$20,000, and it would require Board approval to do that.

Discussion ensued between Ovchinnikov, Zamora, Pineda, Sanchez, and Olson about if there are any other requests for SPG applications currently, if it is necessary to open more funding for these projects since they typically are not as popular as the other District grants, and if there could be more outreach efforts to increase the popularity of this program, now that we have Zimmer on staff as our outreach specialist.

Olson recommended allocating just \$10,000 for now to the SPG budget just in case there is any other interest over the next few months, and if there are no more applications then it can be moved back. The rest of the members agreed with this recommendation.

Action: Ovchinnikov moved to **recommend \$10,000 into the SPG budget with Board approval of where in the budget it comes from.** 2nd by Zamora. No discussion.

MOTION PASSED: Three ayes (Ovchinnikov, Blank, and Zamora) two absent members (Hardy and Koch).

Committee discussed scheduling the next meeting and determined the next meeting is 10/15/25 1-2:30 pm.

Adjourn: Chair Zamora adjourned the meeting at 2:05 PM.

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