



Okanogan Conservation District

1251 S. Second Ave, Room 102

Okanogan, WA 98840

TO: The Record
SUBJECT: July 2, 2024; Board of Supervisors Meeting
LOCATION: Okanogan Conservation District Office, Okanogan, WA and
Remotely via Microsoft Teams and Teleconference
FROM: Craig Nelson, Executive Director

PRESENT:

Lorah Super, Chair
Jerry Asmussen, Vice Chair
Steve Colvin, Auditor
Phillip Dart, Supervisor
Edd Townsend, Supervisor
Randy Kelley, Associate Supervisor
Ivan Oberg, Associate Supervisor
Craig Nelson, Executive Director
Celeste Acord, NRCE
Richard Funk, Walden
Andrea Hildenbrand, Walden
Greg Shiels, Walden
Kyle Bergen, Walden
Marty Nelson, Walden
Jesse, Walden
Skaidra Shiels, Walden
Katelyn, Walden

Becky Drenner, Finance Director
Natalie Torres, Admin. Assistant
Jordana Ellis, Irrigation Planner
Dylan Streeter, Wildfire Resiliency & Recovery Planner
Eli Loftis, Wildfire Community & Resiliency Lead
Emmy Engle, Communication & Outreach Specialist
Taylor George, VSP Coordinator
Brant Rosenthal Smith, Science Data & Mon. Coord.
Steve Fletcher, Walden
Kelsey Taylor, Walden
James Combs, Walden
Anders Taylor, Walden
Bailey Glass, Walden
Gene Hainey, Walden
Sita Oraniaga, Walden
Shayla, Walden
Matthew Fironed, Walden

Meeting Call to Order: Lorah Super called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM. She completed a roll call of Supervisors, Associate Supervisors, staff, partners, and the public.

Public Comment:

Steve Fletcher stated that his grandson works at Walden and questioned why the board would turn down funding that has come their way, especially when the state is financially stable. "Why would you reject free money?" he asked. Chairwoman Super explained this is a time for public comment, not discussion. Mr. Fletcher said he understood and ended his comments.

Richard Funk, age 30 and a lifelong resident of this valley, urged the board to reconsider rejecting this funding. "We are conscientious stewards of the land," he emphasized.

Kelsey Taylor stated, "I urge the board to reconsider canceling the contract. I own a neighboring farm to Walden Farms and sell many flowers from my farm to them. We worked together to secure bipartisan funding from the legislature. We are committed to helping our community, as we did during the Cold Spring Fire."

Miles Boyd, lab tech at Walden Cannabis, expressed, "I'm surprised to find myself in this position. I thought we had resolved this issue over the past year by ensuring compliance with government regulations. Treating these individuals as drug dealers is unfair—they are American farmers. I depend on this paycheck, and the people at Walden are good-hearted."

Kyle stated, "Regarding this whole DDE fiasco, this contamination was deposited into the Earth long before I was born. Closing Walden would be a huge mistake, as it would deprive these hardworking people of their livelihoods and healthcare. It was devastating to inform my employees that they might need to seek other employment. If we can remediate the soil and rectify mistakes made by previous generations, I believe we should."

Anders Taylor stated, "I am here to urge the board to reconsider their decision to reject the grant. We purchased the property ten years ago and rehabilitated it following the Carlton Complex Fire. Our operations came to a sudden stop last year on April 6 due to DDE contamination in the plants. With just two weeks left in the legislative session, we secured a proviso to support the project. Director Nelson has raised several concerns and issues with the project, but I urge you to also consider the positive impacts on our business and community if we accept the grant."

Bailey Glass has been with Walden for the past five years. "Depending on the outcome of this meeting, my employment at Walden may continue or cease after today," Bailey stated. "The financial impact has resulted from mismanagement by the Liquor and Cannabis Board. Director Nelson stated that managing the project was challenging, but the responsibility for these challenges falls on us, not on you."

Marty Nelson expressed concern for future generations and the environmental impact. "I reflect on what has been done and its implications for our children and their children," he stated. "I believe many of these challenges can be addressed more effectively at the local level rather than through broad, centralized approaches." Marty emphasized that allocating these funds locally would better serve communities. Therefore, he urged the board to reconsider and allocate resources to support local efforts in restoring and benefiting our community and environment.

Gene Hainey thanked the board for hearing from everyone here. "I'm not used to seeing such a human element from a board," he remarked, referring to their response to the first gentleman's comment. "I was planning my child's first birthday when I received a call to cease operations, and it was devastating because it really shook my wife and family to the core. Please do not reverse this decision. Please work with us."

Greg Shiels thanked the board for taking the time to hear from everyone. "I've worked for Walden for eight years. Everyone there is like family. This funding is crucial to rehabilitating the soil. We've generated over \$20 million in sales and tax revenue. I urge the board and executive director to reconsider your decision."

James Combs stated, "I'm the senior account manager for Walden and have been with the company for 3 years. The decision impacts many more people than you possibly realize. I strongly urge you to reconsider this decision. This isn't just a chance to save a company in the county; it's a chance to remediate soil and increase the quality of the environment. Walden means a lot to the community, and it would be a shame if that wasn't returned."

Skaidra Sheils has been working at Walden since 2018 and had a prepared presentation, but most of what she was going to say has already been covered. She has been collaborating with Ecology on recycling product packaging. Skaidra implored the board to reconsider due to the potential social impacts on the community.

Katelyn, a crew member at Walden and part of the sales team, mentioned that she had been on the job for about two weeks when the LCB shut down the operation, which greatly impacted her because this was the first job she had loved. She also expressed gratitude for her co-workers, who have banded together to support her in various ways.

Andrea Hildenbrand stated she has been with Walden for about seven months as the brand ambassador representing the company in shops. She emphasized having spoken with many individuals who use their product for medical reasons. "I wouldn't be able to stay in the location I currently live in if I didn't have this job," she added.

Lorah Super thanked everyone for attending and for their bravery in speaking up.

Agenda Approval: Jerry Asmussen moved to approve the agenda as presented. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes: Phil Dart moved to approve the June 6, 2024, board meeting minutes as amended. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report #854, which covers the checking account activity from June 7, 2024, to July 2, 2024, inclusive, was presented for the Board's approval. The following checks/payroll/direct withdrawals/electronic payments were approved for payment:

Checks – numbers 12452 – 12469 totaling \$112,106.09.

Two payroll direct withdrawals – numbers ACH4832 – ACH4859 totaling \$49,924.08.

Electronic payments – numbers EFT3427 – EFT3441 totaling \$23,103.55.

Deposits totaling \$230,465.15 were made.

Phil Dart moved to approve Treasurer's Report #854 as presented. Steve Colvin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Supervisor Reports:

Jerry Asmussen – Requested that everyone be very cognizant of celebrating the 4th of July because it is very dry and there is lots of fuel. Mentioned that last week, there were two days of frost.

Steve Colvin – Reported that there's no crop, but the plants are growing rapidly. Mentioned thankfully avoiding the situation Canadians are facing, where replanting is necessary at exorbitant prices due to extreme lows of -18 degrees for three or more consecutive days. Noted that despite plants above ground dying, his roots didn't freeze as soil at 8 inches deep remained at about 34 degrees, enabling new growth from the roots.

Lorah Super – Reported the occurrence of the first wildfire in the Methow Valley last week. There was ample air support available, so the residents of Gold Creek narrowly avoided a disaster. Noted that there is now a new red stripe on the hillside visible for the next few years.

Edd Townsend – Described the current conditions as the wettest drought ever experienced. Noted a successful wheat crop on the south half, highlighting that the situation is better than it has been in the past 10 years for the first of July. Added a cautionary note, 'It's all fun and games until it hits 100 degrees the first time'.

Phillip Dart – Reported timely rains and announced the start of the second cutting of hay on Monday.

Associate Supervisor Reports:

Randy Kelley – Reported that he's been conducting many status reviews on CRP ground in Douglas County. Some properties may not be eligible for contract renewal next year. He noted an abundance of wildlife, including twin fawns and even some bears. Randy expressed appreciation for the public comments, especially since such participation is rare during meetings.

Ivan Oberg – Mentioned the arrival of a new baby elk on his property. Noted the appearance of orange hawkweed on his property.

Staff Reports:

Craig reported that he spoke with Washington State Conservation Commission staff about the upcoming tour and meeting in September and found out that attending the Rotary Fundraising dinner isn't a good option. The commission staff want something that is more like a restaurant or option where attendees can interact primarily with Commission members and staff. Craig reported that if board members have suggestions for locations to reach out to him in the next couple of weeks and he will finalize some plans prior to the August board meeting.

Craig will be meeting with representatives of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation next week along with Conservation Commission Executive Director and other area conservation districts to discuss projects of mutual interest. Three items of highest priority that Craig intends to address include riparian management and habitat, water resources and drought, and forest health and wildfire. He will also engage with Cody Desautel, Executive Director of the Tribe, about renewing our expired memorandum of agreement.

Eli reported that the CWPP is not yet ready for public comment due to various reasons, which he explained. He anticipates it will be fully completed by the end of August or early September. Lorah inquired about partners adding priority items, and Eli noted there is still time, but there will eventually be a deadline. Eli expressed gratitude to the board for approving his travel to

Australia. He engaged with researchers from Oregon State University who will be conducting work in Okanogan County, and there is potential for us to receive credit for our assistance. He gained valuable insights into how Australians and others manage private forests and wildfire, which he believes will be highly beneficial.

Jordana reported that we received the Drought Preparedness and Planning Grant. Negotiations for the contract are currently underway.

Brant reported that the VSP monitoring plan has been submitted to the Conservation Commission and has been accepted. He will now shift focus to implementing the monitoring plan.

Chevelle reported that she was elected WADE President on June 12. She mentioned meeting with her new Vice-President, Alison Crowley, who is from Walla Walla CD. Alison noted receiving support from her manager, who is also a past WADE President, which she greatly appreciates. Chevelle continued by reporting that she is working on coordinating a tour with Ecology to showcase the impacts of riparian plantings and evaluate project effectiveness.

Taylor commended Brant for completing the monitoring plan a week ahead of schedule. It was noted that the monitoring plan will not be immediately published to the public.

Becky reported that Natalie Torres is the new Administrative Assistant, starting on June 10. The transition to Springbrook is moving forward, with the aim to launch towards the end of July. Currently, we are meeting with a Springbrook representative 2-3 times/week to train in grant and payroll setup.

NRCS Report

Celeste Acord stated that the state office has selected Christofer Clemens from Oklahoma for the Area Conservationist position, and he is expected to start in a couple of months.

Partner Reports

There were no partners present.

Review, Approve and Sign Contracts and Conservation Plans:

WSCC Grant Addendums – Craig reported the Fiscal Year 2025 Washington State Conservation Commission grant addendums are coming around for approval. This year, because it's the middle of the biennium, we should only have the Implementation Grant to approve. The Washington State Legislature awarded one-time additional funding to districts that increased each district's allocation an additional \$70,000. This means, for FY 2025, we will be budgeting just over \$200,000 in total. Jerry Asmussen moved to develop and submit all Fiscal Year 2025 Conservation Commission addenda. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Conservation Planner Training Travel Authorization – Jordana reported she was accepted into the Conservation Planning Part 2 training session (Cropland/Pasture) to be held August 13th to 16th in Columbus, Ohio. This course meets the requirement for conservation planning procedures core competency as a conservation planner for all states and U.S. territories. Jordana

is requesting authorization for airfare, lodging, ground transportation, per diem, and other eligible incidental expenses to attend the training session. Phil Dart moved to approve travel for Jordana to attend the Conservation Planner Training Part 2 in Columbus, Ohio. Steve Colvin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

WACD Dues – Craig reported the Washington Association of Conservation Districts annual dues are due. He shared that fully paid dues support WACD that works for all 45 Washington CDs through collaborating with partners, communicating CD priorities, and advocating for public policies important to voluntary conservation. Along with fully paid dues, CD board members will be allowed to vote during upcoming WACD Area and Annual meetings. Staff recommends the board move to authorize payment of the WACD annual dues in full. Steve Colvin moved to authorize staff to pay the WACD annual dues in full. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Confluence Environmental Company Personal Services Contract, Amendment #2 – Chevelle reported that after the presentation of the Loup Loup Creek Reach Assessment (LLCRA) in May, the Upper Columbia Regional Technical Team (UCRTT) submitted comments that were more extensive than anticipated and required additional technical work from Confluence Environmental Company to address these comments. Chevelle requested an increase to the budget by \$1,136.25, bringing the contract total to \$47,136.25, to accommodate for the necessary work to complete the Scope of Work. Jerry Asmussen moved to approve Amendment #2 for the Confluence Environmental Company personal services contract, increasing the budget by \$1,136.25. Phil Dart seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Old Business:

Public Comment – No public comment.

Water Bank Update – Jordana reported that the amendment to add Barkley acquisition tasks and funding to the existing grant has been edited and returned to Ecology's hands. They are currently awaiting official submission of the amendment until the PRPR is approved. An extension request for the grant deadline has been approved, extending it from June 30th, 2025, to June 30th, 2027, to accommodate these additional tasks. The district was informed of a rule change from last year requiring a justification letter to support the appraisal done for the value of the water right. Craig drafted and submitted that letter, which is currently under review by DOE. The planning team did not meet this month due to conflicting schedules. However, Aspect Consulting and the County held a meeting to discuss their application and budget. Jordana and Kim were invited to provide advice on determining an appropriate budget for a project of this size. Jordana also met with Emmy and Rosalie to discuss outreach for the water bank. They are continuing to plan for an outreach event in August in the Okanogan Valley, and their goal is to have the public survey ready before advertising for the event. As they wait for Barkley funding to be allocated, their focus will be on developing business and guidance documents, creating a website, organizing a public meeting, and launching the survey.

New Business:

Public Comment – No public comment.

COLA Wage Adjustment – Craig reported the Washington State Office of Financial Management has released a Cost-of-Living wage adjustment that will be going into effect on July 1. Due to this being the structure used for staff wages, the staff recommends the board approve revised Washington State General Services Salary Schedule for non-represented employees dated and effective July 1, 2024. Steve Colvin moved to approve the Washington State General Services Salary Schedule COLA wage adjustment effective July 1, 2024. Phil Dart seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Lorah Super adjourned the meeting at 7:46 PM.

Summary of Motions

Jerry Asmussen moved to approve the agenda as presented. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Phil Dart moved to approve the June 6, 2024 board meeting minutes as amended. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Phil Dart moved to approve Treasurer's Report #854 as presented. Steve Colvin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Jerry Asmussen moved to develop and submit all Fiscal Year 2025 Conservation Commission addenda. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Phil Dart moved to approve travel for Jordana to attend the Conservation Planner Training Part 2 in Columbus, Ohio. Steve Colvin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Steve Colvin moved to authorize staff to pay the WACD annual dues in full. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.


Jerry Asmussen moved to approve Amendment #2 for the Confluence Environmental Company personal services contract, increasing the budget by \$1,136.25. Phil Dart seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Steve Colvin moved to approve the Washington State General Services Salary Schedule COLA wage adjustment effective July 1, 2024. Phil Dart seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

 8/1/24

Lorah Super
Chair

Date

 8/1/24

Becky Drenner
Finance Director

Date