



Okanogan Conservation District

1251 S. Second Ave, Room 102

Okanogan, WA 98840

TO: The Record
SUBJECT: December 5, 2024; Board of Supervisors Meeting
LOCATION: Okanogan Conservation District Office, Okanogan, WA and
Remotely via Microsoft Teams and Teleconference
FROM: Natalie Torres, Administrative Assistant

PRESENT:

Lorah Super, Chair
Jerry Asmussen, Vice Chair
Steve Colvin, Supervisor
Phillip Dart, Supervisor
Edd Townsend, Supervisor
Randy Kelley, Associate Supervisor
Bob Clark, Associate Supervisor
Craig Nelson, Executive Director
Becky Drenner, Finance Director
Jordana Ellis, Irrigation Planner
Natalie Torres, Admin. Assistant

Emily Bustamante, Education Specialist
Eli Loftis, Wildfire Community & Resiliency Lead
Emmy Engle, Communication & Outreach Specialist
Taylor George, VSP Coordinator
Brant Rosenthal Smith, Science Data & Mon. Coord.
Chevelle Yeckel, Water Quality & Riparian Planner
Sarah Troutman, NRCS
Terri Williams, Planner Training Coordinator
Rosalie Powell, Communication & Technician Fellow
Kim Kogler, Grants & Contracts Director
Jack Owen, Irrigated Ag. Natural Resource Tech

Meeting Call to Order: Lorah Super called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. She completed a roll call of Supervisors, Associate Supervisors, staff, partners, and the public.

Public Comment: There was no public comment.

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

Approval of Minutes: Phil Dart moved to approve the November 7, 2024; board meeting minutes as amended. Steve Colvin seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report #859, which covers the checking account activity from November 8, 2024, to December 5, 2024, inclusive, was presented for the Board's approval. The following checks/payroll/direct withdrawals/electronic payments were approved for payment:
Two direct deposit payrolls, transaction numbers 526 – 539 totaling \$25,901.64 and 547 – 560 totaling \$24,136.86.
Checks – numbers 12594 – 12614 totaling \$147,038.28.
Electronic payments – totaling \$38558.73.
Deposits totaling \$225615.15 were made.

Steve Colvin moved to approve Treasurer's Report #859 as presented. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Supervisor Reports:

Edd Townsend – Edd reported that November was the wettest in 30 years, which adversely impacted the harvest crops. At the plateau, 3 inches of rain were recorded, and snow was observed at higher elevations. Hay sales have slowed, with most people now preparing for winter.

Phillip Dart – Phil shared that the weather has been very wet, with significant snow followed by rain. He also attended the WACD meeting, which he found to be very interesting.

Jerry Asmussen – Jerry mentioned that the rain was beneficial, but at his elevation, it has since frozen, with no snow yet. He noted that the elk are feeding on the remaining alfalfa and expressed hope that they will not need to start supplemental feeding.

Steve Colvin – Steve reported that the weather has been wet and cold. He attended the WACD meeting with the intention of learning something new and was successful. He identified 2-3 key takeaways that were valid and worth discussing at a later time.

Lorah Super – Lorah shared that she also attended the WACD meeting and found it helpful. She may attend the conference in Salt Lake, though her schedule is conflicted as she is temporarily serving as chair on another board while a member is on leave. Additionally, Legislative Day is scheduled for February 5th.

Associate Supervisor Reports:

Randy Kelley – Randy shared he also attended the WACD meeting. He expressed that it was a great opportunity to reconnect with people in person. Additionally, he attended a staff meeting at OCD and was impressed by the organization's structure, particularly how daily tasks were shared. He expressed being incredibly pleased with the setup of the meeting.

Bob – Bob reported hearing that an elk was struck near Riverside, affecting two vehicles.

Staff Reports:

Craig reported that during the WACD event, he had the opportunity to connect with legislators. It was a very busy week filled with interesting sessions, and Craig found it valuable to connect with other district supervisors and gather feedback. In a conversation with Chevelle and James about Bonaparte Meadows, Craig noted that pressure is being applied to the project. The current application requests funding to cover all associated work, and Craig suggested to James that it would be beneficial if he could authorize this funding. Craig also reminded the group that the WACC event is approaching in February. The event organizers have requested his presence, along with that of an additional Executive Director, and Craig is seeking authorization to travel to Salt Lake City for the event. Lastly, Craig shared that the commission completes evaluations, but there is no formal review or evaluation process for the commission itself. He pointed out that the outcome of these evaluations could potentially restrict implementation grants. To address

this, Craig proposed implementing a two-tier evaluation system that includes both district managers and board members in the review process.

Jordana shared a request for assistance from Aeneas Lake Irrigation District, asking for help in numerous areas from planning to system upgrades and efficiency improvements. NRCS was also contacted and though they do not have the staff capacity, there could be a possibility of pass-through funding to the Conservation District to assist. Jon Culp at the Commission was consulted by Jordana, and he assured us that the request for Technical Assistance and planning would not count against our cost share allowance of two projects per fiscal year. Jordana & Sarah Troutman (NRCS) recommended progressing slowly and assessing the full scope of the request to see if there is a possibility of assisting the Aeneas Lake Irrigation District.

Becky reported that the WACD meeting provided numerous opportunities for both personal and professional growth. In speaking with other financial directors, she frequently hears that the Okanogan CD is highly regarded. She noted that a handful of districts are out of compliance but emphasized that it would not be fair to penalize everyone for that. A ranking system based on performance has been discussed, and Becky expressed interest in being part of that conversation.

Eli announced that the CWPP was approved on November 18th, signed by all commissioners, and has been submitted to the Department of Wildlife Services. He also reported that the Okanogan River Air Share meeting was held yesterday, and that Okanogan County meets the necessary requirements. With a 60/40 split, the county will not be placed in nonattainment.

Emmy shared that the calendar has been sent out and we should receive it before Christmas.

NRCS Report

Sarah Troutman – Sarah shared that it's been more of the same, with numerous planning efforts underway before the snow arrives. Regarding the Forestry position in Okanogan, interviews are underway, and selections are expected soon. In Waterville, an offer has been made. For the Cascadia position, there have been 90 applicants, with several promising candidates. Additionally, local working groups are being formed with the goal of holding more localized meetings.

Partner Reports

There were no partners present.

Review, Approve and Sign Contracts and Conservation Plans:

Jackson Ranch Forest Health Project Cost-Share – Eli shared that the Jackson Ranch, located along SR-155 near Nespelem, is owned by Chick and Sindy Jackson. They had been working with WA DNR Service Forestry to harvest and thin the ranch to reduce wildfire risk, improve wildlife habitat, and manage forest productivity. WA DNR connected the Jacksons with Okanogan CD to fill a gap in their treatment plan, aiming to masticate 90 acres of a 102-acre area that had already been harvested and thinned, to further reduce wildfire risk and enhance wildlife habitat. The project prescription was developed by Sam Halvorsen, WA DNR Service Forester, in consultation with the landowners and Eli Loftis. Staff proposed to assist the Jacksons through a cost-share project with an estimated total cost of \$91,412.10. The district would

contribute 75% of the cost-share, up to a maximum of \$22,853.02, to be paid from the district's WSCC forest health funds. Phil Dart moved to approve the Jackson Ranch Forest Health Project Cost-Share agreement and authorize Lorah Super or Craig Nelson to sign the finalized agreement. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Hasegawa Defensible Space Project – Eli shared that the Hasegawa property is located immediately northeast of the Mazama Store within the Chechaquo Ranch HOA and Firewise USA® site in the upper Methow Valley. The property is situated in a moderately stocked stand that borders a larger open field at the heart of the community. Mr. Hasegawa expressed concerns about the proximity of several trees near their home and the potential for a rapidly approaching fire, either as a running crown or grass fire, from either side. Staff proposed to assist Hasegawa through a cost-share utilizing WSCC forest health funds. The project would involve the removal of five hazard trees near the home and the clearing of extremely hazardous ladder fuels, such as multiple small ponderosa pines intermixed with saskatoons, around the building's propane tank. The total estimated cost of the project is \$6,512.44, with the district contributing a 75% cost-share, up to a maximum of \$4,884.33. Edd Townsend moved to approve the Hasegawa Defensible Space Cost-Share agreement and authorize Lorah Super or Craig Nelson to sign the finalized agreement. Steve Colvin seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Center for Technical Development Agreement – Terri shared that the WSCC Center for Technical Development, an organization focused on training technical CD staff across the state, is planning a two-day basic conservation planner training to be held in late February. They have proposed that Terri Williams, OCD's planner trainer, assist in developing the course materials, present parts of the curriculum, and serve as a mentor for follow-up activities with the students. Additionally, CTD will be helping Terri format and upload six shorter trainings and two short videos she has already developed to their online training platform. The attached agreement allows Terri to be compensated up to \$7,000 for her time working on these activities from now until June 30, 2025. Jerry Asmussen moved to approve the WSCC Center for Technical Development Work Agreement and authorize Craig Nelson to sign the contract. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Full Benefits Package Transition – Natalie shared that the Okanogan Conservation District (OCD) is currently enrolled in the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) Medical Only package, which provides employees with medical and vision coverage. However, effective January 1, 2025, PEBB will be removing vision coverage from the Medical Only package. By transitioning to the Full Benefits Package and signing the amended contract provided by the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) by January 1, 2025, OCD will be able to offer employees medical, dental, vision, life, and long-term disability coverage, effective February 1, 2025. The addition of at least dental insurance coverage has been a frequent request from current and former employees. Steve Colvin moved to approve the HCA contract amendment to proceed with the transition to full benefits and authorize Lorah Super or Craig Nelson to sign the finalized contract. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Old Business:

Public Comment – There was no public comment.

Water Bank Update –Jordana provided updates on the acquisitions and planning process. For the first acquisition, there has been no update from Ecology regarding the approval timeline for the purchase price justification, and the search for a title company and lawyer is ongoing. Craig is working on identifying metrics for the request for proposal for legal services.

For the second acquisitions, contracts with Aspect and West Water Research have been signed, as approved by the Board. The seller's legal counsel is still working with Ecology to finalize steps for making the right eligible for sale. Jordana contacted Kelsey Collins, Ecology's Trust Water Right Coordinator, who confirmed that the changes would not impact the appraisal or valuation process. A kickoff meeting is planned for the coming month.

The planning team met last month with Phil attending for the first time in his half-year tenure. During the meeting, Tyson with Aspect shared that OTID is interested in coordinating with the Water Bank and offering up to 100 ac/ft for stream flow restoration. The County Commissioner representative is retiring, and it is expected that John Neal will fill the position. Jordana has started a list of work products and questions to answer and is happy to share this with anyone interested.

Lastly, the Pine Creek application was submitted as noted last month, and the team is still waiting for the public notice.

2025 Final Budget Approval – Becky shared that the 2025 budget was presented at the November board meeting for review, questions, and input. It is now being presented for final approval, with no changes having been made since the initial presentation. Steve Colvin moved to approve the 2025 Final Budget. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Public Comment – There was no public comment.

2025 NACD Annual Meeting Attendance – Craig shared that the 2025 National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from February 8 to February 12. The Okanogan Conservation District sponsored a resolution related to the USDA Community Wildfire Defense Grant scoring, which was approved at the 2024 Washington Association of Conservation Districts (WACD) Annual Meeting. Supporting WACD personnel in advancing the resolution would be a positive and welcomed addition. Additionally, there may be opportunities to engage with USDA Forest Service personnel to discuss concerns regarding the grant program. To send Okanogan Conservation District representatives, the board will need to approve registration and travel expenses. Jerry Asmussen moved to approve registration and travel expenses for the 2025 National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, from February 8 to February 12. Edd Townsend seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Legal Services – Craig reported that the district occasionally needs legal assistance, mainly using Enduris or the State Attorney General for policy reviews and legal clarifications. As the district moves forward with the water bank project, we will require legal counsel to review

documentation, purchase and sale agreements, and more. Leadership staff would also benefit from legal support for reviewing contract templates, setting up cost-share agreements, and updating policies. A draft RFQ is being considered to secure legal counsel for these needs in the near future. Phil Dart moved to approve the legal services Request For Qualifications and authorize staff to solicit Statements of Qualifications and negotiate a legal services contract with the selected individual or firm. Edd Townsend seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Advance Cost-Share Funds – Becky shared that the Conservation Commission allows districts to request advance payments for large cost-share projects, typically up to 50% of the total project cost, with board approval. Requests for amounts greater than 50% require additional review and an exception. The district has a couple of large cost-share payments due this month, but current funds are insufficient to cover both these payments and normal business expenses. Becky suggested that requesting advance payments could be done more efficiently if staff were authorized to make the requests with a blanket approval from the board. Phil Dart moved to authorize the Executive Director to request advance funds for cost-share projects upon review and consent of the staff district directors. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Resolution 2024-05 Public Records Index – Craig shared that Washington State law requires public agencies, such as conservation districts, to provide documents and records to the public in a timely manner under the Public Records Act (RCW 42.56). The act also mandates that each agency maintain an index of all records, unless it is deemed unduly burdensome. Currently, records are maintained in various formats and locations, making it nearly impossible to maintain a public record index, which would require a full-time position. The cost to maintain such a record would consume at least one-third to one-half of the district's annual rates and charges budget. Approval of Resolution 2024-05 Public Records Index will meet legal requirements and allow the district to be exempt from maintaining a public records index. Steve Colvin moved to approve resolution 2024-05 Public Records Index and authorize Lorah Super to sign it. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session – Personnel Evaluations per RCW 42.30.110 (g) – Lorah called the executive session to order at 7:30 PM. At 9:18 PM, the board returned to public session. Jerry Asmussen moved to approve the following personnel evaluations as presented and to approve the following wage/status to take effect January 1, 2025:

- Emily Bustamante, salary range 66, step B, exempt status, \$80,460 per year
- Becky Drenner, salary range 74, step E, exempt status, \$105,612 per year
- Jordana Ellis, salary range 66, step C, exempt status, \$82,512 per year
- Emmy Engle, salary range 66, step E, exempt status, \$86,712 per year
- Taylor George, salary range 57, step C, non-exempt status, \$31.61 per hour
- Kim Kogler, salary range 74, step E, exempt status, \$105,612 per year
- Eli Loftis, salary range 66, step E, exempt status, \$86,712 per year
- Rosalie Powell, salary range 50, step C, non-exempt status, \$26.62 per hour
- Brant Rosenthal Smith, salary range 57, step D, non-exempt status, \$32.43 per hour
- Aaron Wold, salary range 66, step F, exempt status, \$88,800 per year
- Chevelle Yeckel, salary range 66, step A, exempt status, \$78,468 per year

Edd Townsend seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Lorah Super adjourned the meeting at 9:21 PM.

Summary of Motions

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

Phil Dart moved to approve the November 7, 2024; board meeting minutes as amended. Steve Colvin seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously

Steve Colvin moved to approve Treasurer's Report #859 as presented. Phil Dart seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

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Steve Colvin moved to approve the 2025 Final Budget. Jerry Asmussen seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

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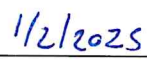
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Edd Townsend seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.



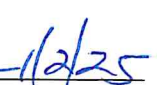
Lorah Super
Chair



Date



Becky Drenner
Finance Director



Date