



West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District (WMSWCD) Board Meeting Minutes 02/18/2025

**1. Meeting Location and Time:**

Location: remote via Zoom meeting. The meeting was called to order by Chair Preeg Riggsby at 6:03 PM.

**2. Introductions and Agenda Approval:**

Directors Present: Sowder, Oliver, Preeg Riggsby, Topaz, Hamer, Looney; Associate Directors Present: Josh Spector, Kevin Foster, Roy Elicker, Jane Hartline (6:15 PM); WMSWCD Staff Present: DM Barlow, Williams-Conway, Scipioni, Mauser; NRCS District Conservationist: Galland (6:13 PM); Public Members: Lazar (7:21 PM)

The agenda was approved by acclamation.

**3. Minutes:**

Board members reviewed the WMSWCD Board Meeting minutes from 01/21/2025<sup>1</sup>.

Director Topaz noted a mistake in ODA Staff Cowlshaw's presentation in section 12. He originally indicated that the Sauvie Island Strategic Implementation Plan (SIA) would monitor groundwater nitrates. Following Director Topaz's follow up conversations with other meeting attendees and a 1/22/2025 conversation between Director Topaz and ODA Staff Cowlshaw, it was clarified that the SIA will focus on mercury rather than nitrates, and the minutes were amended to include this update.

Director Oliver made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Director Topaz seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with the following votes: Director Preeg Riggsby: Yes, Director Sowder: Yes, Director Oliver: Yes, Director Topaz: Yes, Director Hamer: Yes, Director Looney: Yes. The Zone 4 seat is currently vacant. The motion passed with a vote of 6-0.

**4. Review of Treasurer's Reports:**

Staff Williams-Conway presented the financial statements for January 31, 2025. She reported that the District's net income (income over expenses) currently stands at \$875,000, compared to the budgeted \$726,000. While tax revenues are lagging slightly, coming in about \$7,000 below the projection for this point in the fiscal year, interest income is approximately \$26,000 above budget, and prior-year property tax collections are about \$15,000 ahead of budget. Grants are lower than forecasted due to one grant that will not be received; however, overall income is \$2,500 ahead of budget. Additionally, all spending to date is at or below projected levels, thereby strengthening the District's net position.

Staff Williams-Conway further noted that the District's operational account balance is intentionally kept lower than in prior years to hold more funds in interest-bearing accounts, which has contributed to the higher interest income. In the five-year cash comparison, the District is trending slightly below historical levels due to slower property tax collections; however, more tax revenue payments continue to be received each month with larger payments expected in March and June. Although there is some concern about the meeting the budget projections with tax, reduced spending levels are helping maintain a positive overall financial position.

The following reports were reviewed:

- a) WMSWCD-Balance Sheet as of January 31, 2025<sup>ii</sup>
- b) WMSWCD-Budget Performance Report for January 31, 2025<sup>iii</sup>
- c) WMSWCD Financial Snapshot as of January 31, 2025<sup>iv</sup>

#### **5. Appointing Associate Directors:**

Director Preeg Riggsby introduced three applicants—Kevin Foster, Roy Elicker, and Josh Spector—for associate directorships. Elicker’s application arrived more recently but had been shared with the Board, and Foster and Spector had previously submitted theirs. Director Preeg Riggsby noted there is no limit to the number of Associate Directors and that several Board Directors already knew Elicker from past collaboration.

Following discussion, Director Sowder moved to appoint all three applicants as Associate Directors. Director Looney seconded the motion. The motion carried with the following votes: Director Preeg Riggsby: Yes, Director Sowder: Yes, Director Oliver: Yes, Director Topaz: Yes, Director Hamer: Yes, Director Looney: Yes. The Zone 4 seat is currently vacant. The motion passed with a vote of 6-0.

Director Preeg Riggsby reminded everyone that Associate Directors cannot vote on official matters but are otherwise encouraged to join committees and share their expertise; she also welcomed the new Associate Directors and said the District looks forward to learning from and working with them.

#### **6. Appointing Board Officers:**

Director Preeg Riggsby reminded the Board that at the January 2025 meeting, nominations were made to retain the current officers and add Director Oliver as Treasurer to replace the departed Treasurer, Director Miller. Hearing no additional nominations, Director Sowder moved to appoint Director Preeg Riggsby as Chair, Director Sowder as Vice Chair, Director Oliver as Treasurer, and Director Looney as Secretary; Director Hamer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (6–0) with the following votes: Director Preeg Riggsby: Yes, Director Sowder: Yes, Director Oliver: Yes, Director Topaz: Yes, Director Hamer: Yes, Director Looney: Yes. The Zone 4 seat remains vacant.

#### **7. Appointing Citizen Budget Committee Members, Reminder of resolution 2024.01.23 and acknowledgement of DM as budget officer in perpetuity:**

Director Preeg Riggsby introduced the process for appointing Budget Committee members, reminding the Board that the Committee comprises the elected directors and an equal number of citizen members. Nine new applicants applied to fill three open seats—one for a seat that will expire on 12/31/2025 (one year), one that will expire on 12/31/2026 (two years), and one for a full three-year term expiring on 12/31/2027. It was also recommended to reappoint Xuan Sibell to her current seat for a three-year term ending 12/31/2027. Referring to page 13 of the Board packet, Chair Preeg Riggsby noted that DM Barlow and Staff Williams-Conway used a scoring rubric aligned with the application questions to evaluate and rank the nine applicants.

Staff initially identified three top-scoring candidates, but one had moved outside the District since applying and is no longer eligible. Consequently, the Board selected the next three highest-scoring applicants: Richard Adelman, Shari Raider, and Jeremy Smith.

Director Preeg Riggsby then shared an Excel spreadsheet with a randomizing formula onscreen to assign their term lengths, which resulted in Raider serving one year ending 12/31/2025, Adelman serving two years ending 12/31/2026, and Smith serving three years ending 12/31/2027. She also reminded the Board of resolution 2024.01.23<sup>v</sup> designating the District Manager as Budget Officer in perpetuity—a practice that continues to serve the District well.

Director Oliver made a motion to appoint the recommended citizen budget committee members and to reappoint Xuan Sibell to her current seat. Director Looney seconded the motion; it passed unanimously with the following votes: Director Preeg Riggsby: Yes, Director Sowder: Yes, Director Oliver: Yes, Director Topaz: Yes, Director Hamer: Yes, Director Looney: Yes. The Zone 4 seat is currently vacant.

#### **8. Director Email Addresses:**

While not on the agenda, Director Topaz raised the topic of official District email addresses for Directors and Associate Directors to avoid using personal email accounts, which could be subject to public records requests. DM Barlow explained that staff have already begun working with the District's IT provider to explore email options and will provide additional information once available. Director Preeg Riggsby requested the forwarding of District emails to personal addresses for convenience.

#### **9. Urban Conservationist Presentation:**

Urban Conservationist Scipioni began by outlining her professional background, including work in wildlife biology with species such as kiwi in New Zealand, slaty antshrike and capuchin monkeys in Panama, and swift fox in Colorado. She noted her previous roles with ODFW, the Audubon Society of Portland, and as a habitat biologist focused on permitting and mitigation. Since joining WMSWCD six months ago, Ms. Scipioni has met with 25 District partners, managed the paused Partner Grant Program, and provided technical assistance to landowners on beaver, native plants, invasive species, and conservation planning. She highlighted a \$200,000 NRCS grant ("People's Garden") designed to serve refugee and under-resourced communities in Southwest Portland, efforts to expand the Stormwater Stars program beyond city limits, and a canopy weed-removal initiative to reduce wildfire hazards in collaboration with Tryon Creek neighbors.

Scipioni also described her involvement in a Northern red-legged frog demographic study, working with USGS. There is also a project by ODFW and PSU to monitor frog movement via a 54-inch "undercrossing" under Highway 30 (known as the Palensky undercrossing). She noted she submitted WMSWCD's letter of concern regarding PGE's Forest Park application, with a final city decision expected in mid-March, and shared updates on existing grants: Wisdom of the Elders will resume its internship program after an organizational pause, and Sauvie Island Center is now part of PSU's Learning Gardens Laboratory. She is active on the Regional Habitat Connectivity Steering Committee and works on habitat connectivity suggestions for Metro's 2023 Regional Transportation Plan. She mentioned strong interest—95 applicants—for the District's upcoming internship. During discussion, Board members praised the undercrossing project and suggested signage or outreach once construction is fully complete; the final decision will be up to ODFW. Board members also noted the possibility of another undercrossing at NW Harborton Drive where it crosses Highway 30 and expressed enthusiasm for continued frog conservation efforts.

#### **10. NRCS Update:**

NRCS District Conservationist Galland introduced herself to new Board members and described the agency's longstanding partnership with local SWCDs, referencing its origins as the Soil Conservation Service in 1935 and its ongoing commitments to privacy ("1619 compliance") and civil rights. The Memorandum of Agreement with the District was updated in 2022. She noted that in 2022, NRCS invested \$1.1 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and \$700,000 via the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) on forestry, high tunnel, organic, and irrigation projects.

Galland explained that Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds are currently frozen, jeopardizing an additional \$4 million in funding. As a result, some farmers who have fulfilled contract obligations remain unpaid, and NRCS staff in the nine-county region face potential termination or are taking deferred resignations. Chair Preeg Riggsby noted similar challenges nationwide, adding that the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is advocating to restore IRA funding. DM Barlow reminded everyone of the NRCS Local Working Group meeting on February 27 (11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.) at the Clackamas SWCD office, and Ms. Galland invited those interested in learning about NRCS's application assessment process to contact her directly.

#### **11. District Manager Update:**

DM Barlow reported that the OSU Board of Trustees is meeting March 14 to consider the grant agreements for acquisition of a >3,000-acre commercial forest land parcel for OSU to manage as a Research Forest. Trust for Public Land (TPL) has indicated they have sufficient funding from the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program and Metro to cover the acquisition, so any District contribution could support future projects (e.g., culvert replacements to improve fish passage, invasive vegetation removal, habitat restoration). TPL has hired Trout Mountain Forestry to initiate a forest management plan; once OSU takes ownership, the District and other stakeholders will help finalize the forest management plan within six months. Barlow has also been connected directly with OSU's College of Forestry to discuss the District's role and engagement moving forward.

As part of the upcoming budget process, DM Barlow and Staff Williams-Conway recommend formalizing the purpose of the District's "reserve for future expenditures." Currently, these funds are not clearly designated. A Board resolution will clarify the intent of the funds whether for conservation projects or economic stabilization, making it accessible throughout the budget year with a resolution transfer.

#### **Additional Highlights**

- The District will reapply for the USFS Community Wildfire Defense Grant, which was not awarded to the District last year. The application deadline has shifted to March.
- Board members are reminded to complete the required Public Meetings Law training; Staff Mauser can assist with registration.
- District staff will present annual work plans at the March Board meeting, which will be in person at the Multnomah Arts Center (pizza provided).
- The NRCS Local Working Group meeting is scheduled for February 27 (11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.) at the Clackamas SWCD office; advance registration is required, link provided in chat.

#### **12. Director and Associate Directors Check-In:**

Director Preeg Riggsby briefly recapped her participation in the NACD annual meeting, noting ongoing federal funding challenges. Director Hamer thanked staff for their informative presentations. The Board welcomed its three new Associate Directors and acknowledged the three community members added to

the Budget Committee. Staff Mauser will send out training opportunities to newly appointed Associate Directors.

**13. Upcoming Meetings:**

The next Board meeting will be held in person at the Multnomah Arts Center, starting with a social gathering at 5:00 p.m. before the official 6:00 p.m. Board meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 PM.

<sup>i</sup> *WMSWCD Board meeting minutes January 21, 2025*

<sup>ii</sup> *WMSWCD Balance Sheet as of January 31, 2025*

<sup>iii</sup> *WMSWCD Budget Performance Sheet as of January 31, 2025*

<sup>iv</sup> *WMSWCD Financial Snapshot as of January 31, 2025*

<sup>v</sup> *Resolution 2025.01.23 -Resolution appointing District Manager as Budget Officer in perpetuity*

<sup>vi</sup> *Staff Reports*