



Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

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Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes
August 28, 2025

Directors

Jim Bob Collins
Jason Davis
Anna Thomas
Dave Hunt
Brent Johnson

Employees

Cassandra Newton
Brooke Moore
Kristen Neuburger
Laurel Tappert

Others Present

Adele Underwood, ODF
Micah Schmidt, OSU
Kiera Klein, NRCS
Debbi Bunch, MJDWC
Brent Smith, ODA

The board meeting was called to order by Chair Collins at 6:19 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

1. **Prescribe Burn Association Presentation**

Micah Schmidt with OSU Extension presented information and answered questions on the Southern Blues Prescribe Burn Association (PBA).

2. **Agency Reports**

a. **Keira Klein, NRCS**

Keira, a soil conservationist from the Heppner office introduced herself as the Acting District Conservationist until Jessica's return in mid-December. She provided updates on staffing and workloads, FY26 funding, and contract obligations. Keira thanked the SWCD and ODF staff for stepping in to conduct field visits and inspections on behalf of NRCS.

b. **Debbi Bunch, MJDWC**

Debbi reminded attendees of the LJDWG meeting in Mitchell during September and provided details of the field tour scheduled after the meeting. She also advised that the Mid John Day Watershed Council Annual Meeting will be held September 11th at their office.

c. **Adele Underwood, ODF**

Adele provided a staffing update and thanked Micah for his presentation on the PBA.

d. **Brent Smith, ODA**

Brent provided an overview of what he has been involved in with the LAC meeting and revisions, the John Day TMDL update, DEQ webinars, and the OWEB review team. He also provided an overview of the new online reporting for the ODA SWCD Capacity grants.

3. **District Reports**

a. **District Manager, Cassi Newton**

Cassi stated that she was able to complete the new phone system installation and it is now working properly. She advised that Wheeler County adopted a new TMDL Implementation Plan; however, she was not involved in the drafting of the plan aside from giving a list of metrics and achievements. Cassi further advised that she requested to be more involved in reviewing the plan prior to adoption in the future and the Planner stated he would reach out when the next revision is due. Cassi stated that with the help of the summer intern, she is fully caught up on financials and the audit files have been submitted to the auditor. Lastly, Cassi advised the Board that OACD invited her to attend the NACD

Meeting Location: The Rock in Spray, Oregon

To Join from a computer or smartphone:

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/954414701> (Contact the office for meeting password)

To dial in using a phone:

(571) 317-3122 (Access Code: 954-414-701)

regional meeting on Golden, Colorado which she will be out of the office for in September.

b. Conservation Technician II, Brooke Moore

Brooke stated that she has continued making progress on organizing CREP files and she submitted the OWEB CREP TA application. She also advised that she has been able to work with NRCS to complete an abundance of training courses required for the next step of her planner certification.

c. Conservation Technician I, Kristen Neuburger

Kristen stated that she her report is current and highlighted that we received additional funding in the BLM agreement to continue that partnership and she is working on surveys for the ODA grant application.

Cassi shared with the Board that we received the agreement from Forest Service for the Crazy Creek BAER and the original plan was to hire contractors to assist Kristen with all the survey and spraying needs. However, she advised that Kristen devoted a significant amount of time to doing the surveying and was able to complete it all in-house and is currently building the treatment plan, which we are only hiring one contractor to assist with.

4. Monthly Business

a. Review and approve minutes

i. June 26, 2025, regular meeting

ii. August 13, 2025, special meeting

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the board meeting minutes, Director Hunt seconded the motion. Chair Collins, Vice Chair Thomas, Director Davis, Director Hunt, Director Johnson voted yes. There were no opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Review and approve financial reports

i. EOY, unaudited

ii. July

iii. August

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the financial report as presented, Director Hunt seconded the motion. Chair Collins, Vice Chair Thomas, Director Davis, Director Hunt, Director Johnson voted yes. There were no opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Review and approve Accounts Payable

i. July 15, 2025

ii. July 31, 2025

iii. August 28, 2025

‡**Motion** made by Director Davis to approve the check registers, Director Johnson seconded the motion. Chair Collins, Vice Chair Thomas, Director Davis, Director Hunt, Director Johnson voted yes. There were no opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Upcoming Meetings & Events

a. Staff Meeting, every Monday

b. September

- i. 3rd-5th ODA Board Meeting
 - ii. 11th-12th OWRD Commission, Warm Springs
 - iii. 17th JDB Partnership Meeting, John Day
 - iv. **18th Virtual Fence Presentation, Spray**
 - v. **25th SWCD BOARD MEETING**
 - vi. 30th OACD Board Meeting, 9am August
- c. October
- i. 2nd-3rd Resilient Pasture and Forage Symposium, Salem
 - ii. 14th-15th Conservation Finance Roundtable, Portland
 - iii. 16th OCEAN Meeting, 1pm
 - iv. 21st-22nd OACD Conference, Pendleton
 - v. 28th-29th SageCon Summit, Ontario
 - vi. **30th SWCD Board Meeting, 6pm**

6. Upcoming Deadlines

- a. July
 - i. None

7. District Management

a. Staffing

Cassi advised that she was able to execute a childcare contract and services will begin on September 2nd. She also advised that the Intern requested to stay on for work-study through the school year. Cassi stated that she permitted the Intern to stay since there has been no applicants for the Office Assistant position.

b. Annual Meeting

The staff discussed logistics with the Board for the 2024-2025 Annual Meeting. Since the turnout was so great last year, it was decided to keep the meeting date in January with setting the date for the 8th. Topics were discussed and it was settled on inviting ODFW to present on the Mule Deer Management Plan and the county trapper present on local predators. The Board directed staff to report back on further logistics throughout their planning efforts.

c. Property

Cassi advised that she submitted the OCF application for the pine certification, as well as a SDAO Safety Grant application for fencing and security.

Cassi stated that she received the revised design back from the civil engineer and will be soliciting for contractors in the next couple of weeks. She advised that while she was looking into mobile construction offices, she found that a brand-new manufactured home was more cost effective. Cassi presented the quotes she received for two different styles, and the Board discussed the various options and details of the two styles.

‡**Motion** made by Director Johnson to approve the purchase of a Springfield model manufactured home from Champion Homes to be placed on the SWCD property and serve as office space until the community center is constructed, Director Davis seconded the motion. Chair Collins, Vice Chair Thomas, Director Davis, Director Hunt, Director Johnson voted yes. There were no opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Legislation

a. HB3135/HB3078

Cassi advised that the juniper removal funding passed through HB5006. She explained that she has not received the grant agreement yet, but she has begun mapping and preparing a project plan. She further advised that preliminary plans show approximately 880 acres of juniper removal to be funded and the focus is West Branch Bridge Creek.

b. SB1061 (*Business not listed*)

Cassi stated that this Senate Bill, known as the "Forests to Homes Act," which allows small mills to self-grade lumber for use in single-family homes and duplexes and it was achieved by establishing a new certification process for individuals through the Oregon State University Extension Service. Cassi advised that she does not recall who asked her previously about if this Bill passed, but she wanted to provide an update. She stated that the Bill did pass and was signed into law that will take effect on January 1, 2026.

9. Projects/Programs

a. FEMA Post-Fire Mitigation

Cassi stated that she received a revision request for the application and she is currently working with the OEM staff to complete those revisions. She advised that she is unaware of a timeline for the awards.

b. BLM Ag Fields

Cassi advised that she completed and submitted another application to BLM for the Ag Fields project due to BLM stating that the existing agreement could not be allocated funding. She advised that the project focus remains the same in terms of restoring the historic ag fields to healthy, native vegetation.

c. ODA Noxious Weed Grants

Kristen stated that she is working on a Perennial pepperweed project for the ODA grant applications that are due in December. She advised that BLM is providing match funding for the grant. Kristen also gave an overview of the species and various locations she has found infestations.

d. ODA AgWQ

Cassi advised that she received information from ODA AgWQ staff that another complaint was made in the Service Creek Watershed. She stated that no case has been open, as the landowner is very cooperative and has several conservation projects being implemented simultaneously from multiple partners.

10. Partners

a. John Day Rendezvous

Cassi stated that she is working with a group of five agencies/organizations across three counties to collaborate on a focused investment opportunity in the following watersheds: Dry, Currant, Rhodes, Muddy, Cherry, and Bear creeks. She advised that Jefferson SWCD is the lead and planning is in the very early stages and discussion thus far has been on historical and current efforts in the watersheds. She further advised that the focus is with the large landowners.

b. Greater Painted Hills Collaboration

Cassi stated that she is working with the National Parks Conservation Association who is leading the establishment of a new partnership with six other agencies/organizations. She

advised that only one meeting has been held which discussed mapping and additional partners who should be included. Cassi further advised that there were five partners who she added to the list to be invited, but the next meeting is not until December.

c. US-Forest Service

Cassi advised that US-Forest Service Paulina District reached out to partner on some forestry work on public lands. She stated that the need they sought partnership for was primarily a significant amount of cultural resource funding. Cassi explained that there is a forest collaborative funding opportunity open with OWEB that she is encouraging the Paulina District to partner on and include additional agencies/organizations in the large planned project in Mountain Creek, Franks Creek, and Rock Creek.

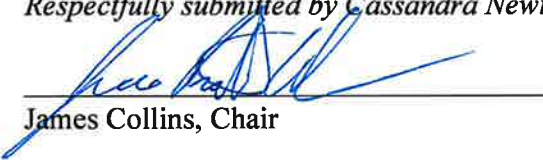
11. Business Not Listed

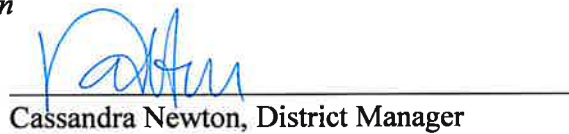
Noted above per chronological order of discussion.

Next Meeting: Thursday, September 25, 2025

The board meeting was adjourned by Chair Collins at 8:35 p.m. by the clock on the wall.

Respectfully submitted by Cassandra Newton


James Collins, Chair


Cassandra Newton, District Manager