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**Harney Soil & Water Conservation District Regular Monthly Meeting**

**August 28, 2025**

Present: Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Board Directors (BD) Carol Dunten, Stacy Davies; HSWCD District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, Braden Morris, SONEC Breanna O’Connor, Kaylee McCall, Admin Assist (AA) Barbara Pearson

Present, remote: BD Sue Ramsay

Guests: Alfred Dunten, Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist (DC) Rachel Beaubien

Absent: Vice Chair Susan Doverspike, Secretary/Treasurer Scott Franklin, BD Ken Bentz

BC Hussey began the meeting at 3:39 pm. Because BD Ramsay was participating remotely, those in the conference room introduced themselves.

**Item #1: Agenda (action item)**

There were no proposed additions or changes. BD Dunten moved, and BD Davies seconded approving the agenda as presented. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #2: June and July Financial Reports (action item)**

DM Kesling said there were no areas of concern. There was reimbursement with billing which will be shown in next month’s financial report. Stinkingwater funds were received yesterday so that they will no longer have a negative balance. BD Dunten asked about SIA Malheur. DM Kesling said the District was in discussion with OWEB and ODA to reallocate funds to do more monitoring vs. attempting to regulate landowners. There is no staff capacity to monitor in the Drewsey area. Currently there is $70 to $80K in monitoring funds to identify areas and recruit landowners. DM Kesling said the agencies need to agree and he hopes it will take place at the end of September-first of October. The agencies do not want the funds back. Additional discussion followed. There were no other questions.

Prior to the vote, DM Kesling realized he had submitted the financial report for June 2024, so it was removed for board approval. Next month’s meeting will include June 2025. BD Davies moved, and BD Dunten seconded the board approving the July 2025 financial report. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #3: June 2025 Monthly Meeting Minutes (action item)**

Prior to the meeting guest Alfred Dunten noticed the year on the minutes was incorrect. AA Pearson will make the correction. BD Davies moved, and BD Ramsay seconded approving the meetings with correction. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #4: CREP/CRP Grassland Signature Authority (action item)**

No materials were presented to the board. DM Kesling explained the program and acreage report. NRCS Conservationist Rachel Beaubien verbally presented one requiring modification. The HSWCD is a signer working with FSA and NRCS. DM Kesling wondered if it made sense to present to the board every time or should the SWCD director have latitude to approve. It is the FSA’s policy for the District to sign off. Discussion following with the board attempting to understand why this was in place and what would happen if the District ever chose to not sign. BD Davies asked for a review. BD Dunten said during her tenure on the HSWCD Board there was one occurrence when an agreement was returned for further work prior to signing.

The agreement presented to the board today was due to a name change/death. Further discussion followed with the Board learning that three choices could be made regarding agreements: modification, renewal or approval of a new agreement. The process and agencies involved were discussed and if this step was in fact necessary and the rationale behind the practice. There was no ready answer to this. Kesling said he hoped to streamline this process. DC Beaubien said there are three groundwater agreements pending and the timeline involved.

BD Davies asked if the Board wanted to review all agreements. BD Ramsay said she would like to see them. “I think it would be good to see the first three to see what is coming and then if we’re happy with the process.”

DC Beaubien will contact the state office for additional information. DM Kesling said that DC Beaubien will return for the October HSWCD meeting.

Following discussion BD Davies moved that the DM would sign CREP and CRP Grassland agreements until the October meeting, at which point the board will review jurisdiction and future approvals. BD Ramsay seconded this. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #5: CCAA FOIA Request Update**

DM Kesling said the USFWS will review the request by High Country News with HSWCD and the Watershed Council. An email dated August 22nd was included in the board notebooks. The review period will be extended. The Board will have the opportunity to review the USFWS response prior to it being sent out. There will be redacted information. There were no further questions.

**Item #6: 2024 Annual Meeting Resolution (action item)**

The District office thought it was following the law as it advertised for the annual meeting but was advised that it did not. Legally there needs to be two announcements—the last notification is to be 15 days prior to the meeting and the first one seven days prior to that. DM Kesling said not following this could have affected District funding, so another annual meeting will need to take place to satisfy this requirement. BD Davies moved and BD Dunten seconded approval of the resolution scheduling the 2024 Annual Meeting to be held Thursday, September 25th prior to the regular scheduled meeting. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. BC Hussey signed the resolution which DM Kesling will forward onto the ODA.

**Item #7: OWRD Discussion**

BD Ramsay withdrew her request to speak. She said she was concerned about whether the Board wanted to be more vocal. DM Kesling said the staff supports the NRCS program moving pivots from MESA to LESA. A few landowners have made this change funded through Bonneville Power. Currently a groundwater CREP technician has been approved through OWEB to help NRCS with the site visits. HSWCD staff can react to policies, but to document or take a position stance should be directed by the Board. OWEB does offer a water right buy- back. County Commissioner Robb Frank advised the DM he is very interested in the state paying landowners who are losing water rights. In the CREP program landowners give up water rights forever to participate in a 15-year program. BD Davies asked if there is a process in place to give a dollar amount to the water. BD Ramsay said she recently looked at property and the water rights were dramatically reduced. DC Beaubien discussed the financial compensation limitations to CREP.

**Item #8: NRCS State Conservationist Visit (discussion)**

The new NRCS state conservationist Greg Becker is scheduled to visit the area September 24th. Damon Brosnan has coordinated the visit and has invited the Board to visit, which will be held at the USDA Service Center. Presently no field site visits are planned. BC Hussey said he would participate. BD Dunten thought it good for the Board to get acquainted. No formal action was taken; DM Kesling said he will make sure interested board directors are informed.

**Item #9: OWEB Small Grant Review Committee Designation (action item)**

DM Kesling said OWEB small grant is in process of bringing funds to Harney County. In the past former HSWCD board member Ryan Peila served on the committee awarding grants; a new member needs to be appointed. Usually, nine projects are funded. The member is contacted with materials and then attends a meeting (remote is allowed) and votes (proxy voting is allowed). BD Davies said he would be willing to participate. BC Hussey moved, and BD Ramsay seconded BD Stacy Davies serving on the OWEB Small Grant Review Committee. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

**Item #10: Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Item #11: Adjournment (action item)**

BD Ramsay moved; BD Davies seconded adjourning the meeting. All eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 4:24 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

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| District Representative |  | Date |