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**Harney Soil & Water Conservation District Regular Monthly Meeting
October 26, 2023
Harney County Courthouse Basement Conference Room**

Present: Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Vice Chair (VC) Scott Franklin, Board Directors (BD) Susan Doverspike, Stacy Davies; CWMA Tyler Goss; HSWCD District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, Admin Assist (AA) Barbara Pearson

Remote: Secretary/Treasurer (S/T) Ryan Peila (note: BD Peila dropped off the call in the course of the meeting)

Absent: BD Ken Bentz, Carol Dunten

BC Hussey called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm

Item 1: Approve Meeting Agenda

DM Kesling advised Agenda Item #10 had been added in the past two days. BD Davies moved and VC Franklin seconded approval of the meeting agenda as presented. This was approved by all present who were eligible to vote.

Item 2: Approval of September Financial Report

DM Kesling noted top line of each report page, which indicated when funds came in. The district collected a significant amount of money in September, \$538K was added. These funds had been anticipated, as billing is completed each quarter. The district finances are in good standing. There were no questions. BD Doverspike moved and VC Franklin seconded approval of the September Financial Report. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed.

Item 3: Approval of September Meeting Minutes

DM Kesling said that once the meeting minutes are approved an application can be submitted for the LGIP. This is an investment group. VC Franklin said that his wife (who is the former County Treasurer) utilized the LGIP investment pool and that it was safe.

As another September meeting minute update, the CWMA truck is expected to be delivered sometime between November 16th and 18th.

BD Davies moved and VC Franklin seconded approval of the meeting minutes as presented. This was approved by all present who were eligible to vote.

Item #4: Meeting Determination for November and December 2023 Meetings

HSWCD board meetings are regularly scheduled for the fourth Thursday of each month. The November meeting will conflict with the Thanksgiving holiday. In times past the board has determined to cancel the November and December meetings and schedule a special meeting sometime in those two months. Often a Christmas party is also scheduled for staff, board directors and spouses. After discussion of personal schedules and availability, BD Doverspike moved and VC Franklin seconded canceling the regularly scheduled November and December meetings and instead hold a special meeting on December 14, 2023 with a meal following. On December 14th the LAC will hold a meeting at the Harney Chamber of Commerce building and the special meeting will be held immediately following with a meal after. This was approved by all present who were eligible to vote.

DM Kesling advised AA Pearson that the newspaper is to be notified two weeks' prior to when the November and December meetings would regularly be held and publicize the December 14th date.

Item #5: Update on USDA Service Center Purchase (discussion)

DM Kesling provided an update: BD Bentz, the current landlord (Deanne Godlove of Benton Rentals) have been in negotiations regarding the purchase. The building is scheduled for a remodel. BD Bentz and the Ms. Godlove felt it best to slow down and work toward the new lease agreement aspect. The asking price is \$800K. BD Bentz is a realtor and has offered his expertise to negotiate during the process and then ask the district to bring a lawyer in to finalize.

The remodeling project will be reimbursed by the USDA government. The building will be transformed into an L-shape. Office space will accommodate more cubicles for district employees, a larger breakroom set away from the restrooms, and additional parking space.

DM Kesling said BD Bentz thought the building is worth \$600-800K. DM Kesling thought the building would be worth more (\$800K) after remodeling. Currently the landlord would like \$30K down, then an additional \$70K after a year, then a balloon payment after 5-12 years. The landlord will finance the remodel, complete the paperwork (which would mean negotiating the lease with the USDA) and then be reimbursed. She is eager to sell the building to the district but not necessarily to sell to anyone else. She will present a spreadsheet to the district once a new lease is completed. DM Kesling said he is approaching the deal that the district benefit or it not go through it.

DM Kesling said if the purchase goes through, FSA and NRCS will pay rent, which would go toward payment. The district would borrow on the purchase price, minus the \$30K and \$70K listed previously. The district would be responsible for housekeeping and snow removal.

There was additional discussion. BD Davies opined the deal seemed too good to be true. Other options and potential roadblocks were discussed a reconsolidation of federal agencies or if another potential buyer entering into the discussion. After the update, BD Doverspike said to "keep plugging along," and the rest of the board present were in agreement.

Item #6: OACD Board Elections (Action item requiring signature)

Included in the board director notebooks was a ballot for OACD positions. One for an at-large position on the eastern part of the state and two positions for at-large in the state. Discussion followed, with BD Peila choosing to not participate as he did not have the materials with him but that he would agree to what was decided. BD Davies moved and BD Doverspike seconded the district votes be cast for the following: Tim Newton for the eastern Oregon at-large and Stan Dean and Jan Lee for the Oregon at-large positions. The vote was recorded and BC Hussey signed the form. This was approved by all present who were eligible to vote.

Item 7: Update on BLM Sage Grouse Amendment (Discussion)

DM Kesling and BD Dunten attended the meeting. He felt nothing exciting was presented and the information presented was from the Fish and Wildlife Department. DM Kesling said the BLM and Fish and Wildlife ideas may conflict. The BLM is going very slow, perhaps due to Agenda #8. The amendment is not at a place to present documents to the board.

Item 8: ODFW Sage Grouse Mapping (Update)

Two maps were presented to the board, in their notebooks. DM said there are winners and losers on this. The comment period time has passed. He said it is hard to give comments countywide, as there will be some who will really like the map and others will not. A lot of general habitat is proposed to be removed. BD Doverspike opined the proposed map "looks ugly." BD Davies felt this map was better than the last one. DM Kesling said he attempted to contact as many landowners/managers who would be affected (both favorably and not) to inform them.

The Roaring Springs had some concerns re: Home Ranch, which DM Kesling thought would be addressed. Overall, he didn't think the map would affect agriculture but could affect land divisions and building projects, which could make a ranch more difficult to sell if the owner could not subdivide. Pivots and water developments are exempt, but if a landowner wanted to put in a rock pit, it might be prohibited. Oregon is morphing sage grouse leks/pac's into corridors.

BD Davies noted the map lines would follow a mountain rim and then cross a canyon. DM Kesling the map used data and built-in buffers; landowners would need to advise the fine tuning. DM Kesling offered to produce maps for individual concerns. He also noted the Miller Homestead Fire was removed from primary habitat into general habitat. "Less birds, but protecting more area," which he felt was the wrong approach. He believed ODFW should have started with what the birds needed and not keep expanding the habitat. Steens bird population going down and requires HC to protect more land.

BD Davies felt West Nile has affected sage grouse populations. When there is less water it means a higher concentration of birds and mosquitoes, and more water developments could benefit. West Nile is deadly to sage grouse. He noted the Pueblos and Beatty Butte are seen as optimal bird habitat sites, but West Nile has affected bird populations there. He also said that science is catching up to the benefits of grazing.

Item #9: SB77 (Discussion)

DM Kesling said the Oregon State Legislation passed a law with the intention of making serving as a board director on a Soil and Water Conservation District more available to all. In the past a board director needed to live in the zone he/she represented but could also service if that person managed 10 acres of more in a zone and not live there. The way SB77 was written was a director has to live (registered to vote) in the zone he/she would serve on.

The problem for HSWCD is that BD Bentz serves in zone 5 as he manages more than 10 acres of land in that zone but does not live there. This means that BD

Bentz will be considered ineligible to serve beginning January 1, 2024. BD Bentz lives in zone 3, is registered to vote and receives his mail in zone 3.

DM Kesling said the HSWCD is not the only board affected; for instance, Crook County will lose three board directors. DM Kesling said he contacted State Representative Mark Owens to see if anything could be done and was told not at this point.

After further discussion and viewing the current zone map and solutions. Solutions presented were:

- 1) After BD Bentz is removed from the board attempt to locate a new board director. DM Kesling advised the board the district staff could not attempt to recruit—the board would have to do this. The staff can only provide information to interested individuals.
- 2) Or the board redraws the zones (which would be approved by the ODA). This could take 2-6 months.

The DM will consult the county to learn of tax lots for equal representation, population densities, etc., before the December meeting. A proposed map change will be drafted and presented for the next meeting (the special one scheduled for December 14th). BC Hussey agreed and asked for the proposed map and for the board to consider another person to serve in zone 5.

Item #10: OWEB Small Grant Program (action item)

DM Kesling said the board participates in a small grant review. One of S/T Peila (who had dropped off the call at this point) duties on the board is to help select small grant applicants for the area. Grant applicants go through the watershed in the closed basin area. Every two years the county receives \$100K for small grants less than \$15K each. The board was asked to approve small work group documents. To identify with OWEB, we are organized to receive the funds. BD Davies moved and VC Franklin seconded approval of the small work group. All who were still present in the meeting (BC Hussey, VC Franklin, and BD Doverspike and Davies) were in favor and the meeting passed.

Item #11: Public Comments

- 1) AA Pearson advised that ODA AgWater Specialist Maria Snodgrass will hold an LAC meeting December 14, 2023. She was ill and unable to attend the meeting but requested the board be advised of the event.
- 2) CWMA Goss advised he will be serving on the Harney County Weed Board. Based on his CWMA role he was asked to serve and advise.

There was no further discussion.

BD Doverspike moved and VC Franklin seconded adjourning the meeting. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 5:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

District Representative

Date