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|  | Harney Soil & Water Conservation District  PO Box 848  530 Hwy 20 South, Hines, OR 97738  Phone: 541.573.5010  Email: Hswcd1@gmail.com |

**Special Business meeting**

May 20, 2021 at Harney County Courthouse Main Floor Conference room

Present: HSWCD Staff District Manager (DM) Jason Kesling, Ag/CWMA Coordinator (A/C) Tyler Goss, Sage-grouse Coordinator (SGC) Sarah Mundy, Sage-grouse Habitat and Rangeland Restoration Planner (RRP) Danielle Reynolds, Admin Assist (AA) Barbara Pearson; HSWCD Board Chair (BC) Jeff Hussey, Vice Chair (VC) Scott Franklin, Board Director (BD) Ken Bentz, NRCS Staff District Conservationist (DC) Zola Ryan and Damon Brosnan,

Online Secretary/Treasurer (S/T) Carol Dunten,BD Ryan Peila, and SONEC biologist Carlton Strough.

Absent: BD Susan Doverspike.

The meeting was called to order by BC Hussey at 3:35 pm

As there wasn’t a quorum when the meeting began, DM Kesling began explaining Item # 5 on the Agenda, hiring a Sage-grouse Habitat and Rangeland Restoration Planner. He said DC Ryan, SGC Mundy, and BD Susan Doverspike assisted with interviews. A person was hired and then declined after she was unable to secure housing. Range Technician Danielle Reynolds was then asked about the position and has agreed to assume that role. Previously, she had been working two days a week (Thursday and Friday) as a tech doing flagging and reporting, and NRCS contracting. She began full time work for the district last Monday, doing mostly CCAA program work and some NRCS. The district plans to backfill her current position only if a need arises.

DM Kesling said the HSWCD Employee Manual was reviewed to see if the waiting time to receive benefits could be waived. The manual states an employee is eligible after 60 days employment, but Danielle has worked for the District part time for nearly two years.

The district is otherwise fully staffed aside from seasonal workers. DM Kesling has not found anyone interested but believes the staff may be able to cover those roles. He may offer a one-year appointment to the other person interviewed.

VC Franklin asked how many days does the AA currently work, which prompted DM Kesling to move to Agenda item #9 and provided a history of AA Pearson returning to work first part time, then full time temporary, and now full time permanent with funding through June 2022, jointly NRCS/SWCD. He would also like to waive her benefit waiting time as well.

DM Kesling asked the board if anyone had a problem with him attempting to see if the employee waiting time to receive benefits could be waived? If not, would the board want to approve waiving? AA Pearson is working on revising the Employee Manual and creating Operations Manual for board directors and then have the board review. It is not a major priority; he suggested it in six months.

BD Ken Bentz arrived at the conference room at 3:39 pm; BD Ryan Peila arrived about 3:40 pm via dial in. With a quorum present, the meeting could proceed with agenda items requiring a vote.

Visitor Damon Brosnan arrived in person at about 3:45 pm.

1. VC Franklin moved and BD Bentz seconded canceling the regularly scheduled business meeting on Thursday, May 27th and allow this meeting to suffice. All present eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. Attached voter tally.
2. Monthly financials. The board received a sheet explaining the open and closed grants prior to the meeting, what monitoring funds are still available, and what grants have been applied for. The BPA energy efficiency program has expressed interest in reestablishing a relationship with the district. DM Kesling is also creating an FY 22 budget with projected funding and will present later.

Finances are currently good. The district has gone from not having enough to having sufficient funds that need to be spent by the end of the fiscal year or returned. He is having all staff salary (other than SONEC Carlton Strough) and purchases applied to the ODA TA grant, such as the ATV helmets and goggles, and a laptop for the Ag/CWMA Coordinator. VC Franklin asked if any funds could go toward a new vehicle, emphasizing the need for a dependable rig. DM Kesling said if the BPA relationship could be reestablished then those funds could be applied toward a vehicle.

BD Bentz moved and VC Franklin seconded approving the financials as presented. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. Attached voter tally.

1. VC Franklin moved and BD Bentz seconded approval of the April 2021 business meeting minutes as presented, with no additions or comments. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor; the motion passed. Attached voter tally.
2. Employee Annual Review: DM Kesling explained the evaluation process for HSWCD employees Strough, Mundy, and Reynolds. The evaluation/recom- mendation for Danielle Reynolds is void since she has assumed a new role as rangeland biologist and she would fall under a new salary rate with her new role and will be eligible for benefits package. He requested the board take action, with the salary increase to take place in the next pay period, June 1, 2020. A competitive salary should be a district goal.

DM Kesling’s evaluation as new DM will occur in six months (September 2021).

Salary steps would be determined by evaluations and available funds. BC Hussey asked about board discretion and gave the example of an employee being hired and at the district for less than a year but does an outstanding job. Would the employee receive a raise or would that set a precedence? DM Kesling suggested the board decide when that situation arises. VC Franklin moved and BD Bentz seconded step increases based on employee evaluations. All present who were eligible to vote were in favor and the motion passed. Attached voter tally.

1. Rangeland Biologist (already presented)
2. The Five-Year Plan was to have been submitted last June. District operates under the last plan until it is changed. District staff began reviewing the existing plan in January 2021. The DM wanted the board to consider submitting additions and review changes. The staff will incorporate edits and simplify the language, but the Bboard would need to approve. He asked the board to be prepared at the next meeting and is looking for approval for the plan at the July board meeting.
3. Full time permanent employee wage classification. DM Kesling explained exempt vs. nonexempt employees. He proposed moving all regular employees to nonexempt. They would receive comp time instead of overtime for any hours worked beyond 40 per week. He believed as DM he had the authority, but wanted board approval. He didn’t think the current staff would have problems demanding overtime but it could be problematic in the future, since the district is funded by grants.

The DM fielded questions from the board and staff. Staff members had been asked their opinion. BD Bentz remarked that the district appears to already be operating as such. DM Kesling concurred, but said the employee manual lists exempt and nonexempt employees. BD Bentz said it is easier to address now than in the future.

VC Franklin moved and S/T Dunten seconded changing full time employee wage classifications. All present eligible to vote were in favor. Attached voter tally.

1. Cost of living adjustment (COLA) to HSWCD employee incremental Salary increase: DM Kesling reviewed the history of motion, which began with former DM Brubaker. He cited recent lumber and gas price increases to justify the COLA 2% increase, and suggested it be reviewed annually. Salaries were compared to NRCS, state agencies, and other SWCDs. He wants the district to be competitive to retain employees. The pay rate changes are proposed to start on July 1, 2021 coinciding with the new fiscal year. Five employees will receive a 2% COLA increase, two employees will receive a step increase and the COLA increase (total 5%) VC Franklin asked if there was room in the budget. DM Kesling said, “We have room, yes. In the future, we will write this into grants.” BC Hussey asked if all future grants will include the hire salary for staff time. DM Kesling said, “Yes. We have begun this with recent grants. OWEB supports paying employees a reasonable rate.” BC Hussey said the district is a training ground for employees, sometimes we train them just to leave us. DM Kesling said the reason past employees have been leaving is for increased salary, a desire to live in another location, or increased benefits compared to the District.

BD Bentz moved and VC Franklin seconded the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) to the HSWCD Employee Incremental Salary Increase. All present eligible to vote were in favor and the motion carried. Attached voter tally.

1. NRCS/SWCD Joint Admin Assist Grant Awarded. S/T Dunten signed the grant. DM Kesling recapped, and said based on the Delegation of Authority and Employee Handbook that he is technically the signor for grantee. In the future, how should he proceed—does he get approval to apply? Even if it is mentioned, the duties aren’t well defined. He would appreciate clarity. After further discussion it was determined as long as the grant fits into The Five-Year Plan and Statement of Work the DM should be comfortable in applying for grants and then updating the Board. If it falls outside the plan and SOW, he would want to seek approval from the Board prior to submission.

BD Bentz asked if it would be possible to obtain a grant from someone we shouldn’t--is it possible some funding agencies the district would not want to partner with? The DM would go to the Board for final say. DC Ryan said the district could obtain funds for a project the Board would not want to support.

For the Admin Assist Grant, BC Hussey asked what NRCS’s role was. DC Ryan and Damon Brosnan explained.

BD Bentz asked if instead of an exhausting review if grants could be presented to the board as an ongoing list and if the Board isn’t comfortable with a particular group to address it then. BC Hussey agreed, telling the DM he didn’t want him to wait on the board.

DC Ryan said that she would want to review a grant if after it is written and submitted it was denied as written or if it was approved with strings and conditions. Otherwise, she urged trusting employees. DM Kesling said it might be needed under unusual funding sources. Currently most funding sources for the district are usually ODA, USFW, OWEB, SONEC. Those groups may make changes, but it is unlikely that the district wouldn’t accept them.

BC Hussey asked DM Kesling, “What do you need from us?” DM Kesling said he wanted to update the board and make it aware. He said he and S/T Dunten recently discussed this and he will try to clarify the process in the operations manual.

SGC Mundy asked, “What did we decide?” Providing a running list of grant submissions was decided to be the policy until it isn’t. DM Kesling said the first financial report he submitted is quarterly and will show existing grants and the grants the District is applying for.

VC Franklin asked if there is ever a situation for a short timeline to get paperwork in for a grant submission? DM Kesling said the Specialty Crop Grant recently submitted was one. He submitted it and then sought approval, and if the board had not granted approval, he would have rescinded the application. The District can also turn money down if the board disproves. VC Franklin said, “I want you to go for as many grants as you possibly can within the Five-Year-Plan.”

The CCAA program was discussed. DM Kesling said he had recently given SGC Mundy and Reynolds a goal of four to six enrollments per year.

1. NRCS Brosnan introduced himself. He was formerly a rancher. He said he didn’t think the HSWCD dropping its telephone landline and using FSA/NRCS telephone number would be a problem.

S/T Dunten thanked DM Kesling for his great work, organization, and transparency. VC Franklin concurred.

1. DM Kesling asked if there were any items to put in future agendas. None were provided.

S/T moved and BD Bentz seconded adjourning the meeting. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Pearson, Admin Assist

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| District Representative |  | Date |