Columbia Soil & Water Conservation District

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Minutes of the
Columbia SWCD Board of Directors
Board Meeting
September 16, 2026

Directors Present:
Debra Brimacombe, Director (via Zoom)
Michael Calhoun, Chair
Paul Gibbons, Secretary
Bill Eagle, Treasurer
Alex Devin, Vice Chair
Jason Busch, Director

Directors Absent:
Dave Freytag, Director

Associate Directors Present:
David Taylor
Alison Charbonneau
Rachell Meyers, Scappoose Bay Watershed Council (via Zoom)

Columbia SWCD Staff:
Taylor Murray, Executive Director
Laurel Tappert, Field Technician

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS):
Hannah Isaacs, District Conservationist

Lower Columbia River Watershed Council (LCRWC):
Rachael Barry, Interim Executive Director

Public:
Claudia Eagle
Julia Rutherford
Bill Etter
Brenda Vassau

BOARD MEETING CALL TO ORDER AT 5:00 PM

Prior Month's Minutes: Bill moved, and Alex seconded a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

Vote Record:

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Bill Eagle	☒			☒	
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				☒
Jason Busch	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒				

Financial Report: Alex moved, and Paul seconded a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

Vote Record: Accept the Financial Report for August.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Bill Eagle	☒				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒			☒	
Jason Busch	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒				☒

BILLS TO PAY (US Bank) September 16, 2026					
				Expenditure Splits	
Ck #	Payee	Memo	Amount	CSWCD	GRANT
3266	Pershing LLC	Retirement	$3,056.28	$3,056.28	$0.00
3267	SBWC	Weed grant assistance	$9,841.11	$0.00	$9,841.11
3268	Jennifer Wassmuth	Cleaning services	$600.00	$600.00	$0.00
3269	RA Barry Consulting	LCRWC August/Sept costs	$2,297.40	$0.00	$2,297.40
		SUBTOTALS >>>>>>>>	$15,794.79	$3,656.28	$12,138.51
TOTAL REQUESTS >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>					$15,794.79

Bills to Pay: Jason moved, and Paul seconded a motion to approve paying the bills as presented. Approved. Motion passed unanimously.

Vote Record: Approve payment of the bills as presented

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Bill Eagle	☒				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				
Jason Busch	☒			☒	
Paul Gibbons	☒				☒

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

REPORTS

NRCS: Hannah reported that a final NRCS reorganization plan had begun moving forward but was paused by the courts. She could not yet share details, but said she expected to remain in St. Helens and that no offices were currently expected to close or staff to move. She expects to provide more information at a future meeting.

NRCS and the District are pursuing a Farm Bill technical assistance grant that could support District staff working on NRCS activities. Hannah said the opportunity could be mutually beneficial and, if successful, could be pursued annually. She also reported that NRCS is considering changes to ranking and funding for the next program year so offices with smaller contracts and fewer acres may compete more effectively.

LCRWC: Rachael reported that funds for the Clatskanie Engagement Project had been awarded and contracting was underway. A steering committee with two Board members and three community members had begun work, along with communications planning, material development, and field photography. LCRWC is also developing an employee handbook and preparing to hire its first employee.

Rachael reported continued relationship building with the City of Clatskanie, including a water system tour, a Board-approved letter supporting wastewater treatment plant funding, and discussion of a GIS intern or shared-service arrangement. Upcoming work includes community engagement, drone flights, review of employee policies, and an organizational assessment.

SBWC: Rachell reported completion of the season's Scappoose Bay weed treatments in partnership with West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District. The partner weed grant with Columbia SWCD also supported garlic mustard work and hand pulling of policeman's helmet, with approximately 90 percent eradication reported for the latter. Spurge laurel treatments are next.
The recent knotweed workshop, held in partnership with Columbia SWCD, drew four or five participants and was considered effective. SBWC and the District plan to offer spring educational programming focused on poison hemlock and tansy. SBWC is also preparing for its fall native plant sale, developing fundraising efforts for greenhouse improvements, and considering additional community events.

Rachell also reported that construction at Chief Concomly Park was completed within the in-water work window. A newly awarded small grant will support outreach, education, planting, and revegetation in partnership with Columbia SWCD.

Staff: Taylor noted that Jennifer was absent for a family funeral and Amber was also absent. Staff are continuing work on the previously approved lighting color change and are exploring whether native seed can be used in areas disturbed by utility vegetation clearing.

The recurring written staff report is still being developed. Staff now meet weekly to review projects, assign site visits, coordinate work, and identify opportunities for partner referrals. A review of the budget and current grants showed a need to pursue more grant support for staff salaries, including the NRCS technical assistance opportunity. Several major projects are progressing, and permitting was completed for multiple items.

The District and SBWC reported that the knotweed workshop generated site visit requests and replanting consultations. Members discussed expanding outreach beyond social media and newsletters to local newspapers, libraries, and OSU Extension for future workshops.

OLD BUSINESS

Strategic Plan Retreat: The Board retreat is scheduled for Friday, September 25, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the District office, with food provided. Directors and Associate Directors were asked to review the retreat materials and complete the included survey even if they cannot attend. Taylor will send an email reminder and an electronic copy of the survey.

Stand-Alone Policies: Taylor reported that legal guidance had been received regarding public use of the meeting room. A policy and user agreement are being developed to clarify who may use the space and under what conditions. A draft meeting room policy, travel policy, and training policy are expected for Board review in October. The travel policy will use consistent mileage and meal reimbursement standards, and the training policy will emphasize sharing relevant knowledge with other staff.

The Board discussed the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts convention and the value of training and networking for Directors and Associate Directors. Michael recused himself from the decision because he had requested to attend, and the Vice Chair facilitated the action. **Bill moved, and Jason seconded a motion authorizing District payment of eligible expenses for any Director or Associate Director who wishes to attend the OACD convention or conferences. Approved. Motion passed.**

Vote Record: Authorize District payment of eligible expenses for Directors and Associate Directors attending OACD conventions or conferences.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Bill Eagle	☒			☒	
Michael Calhoun			☒		
Alex Devin	☒				
Jason Busch	☒				☒
Paul Gibbons	☒				

2025 Audit Plan of Action – Sec State: Taylor explained that the Board had already approved a plan of action for the two findings from the 2025 audit at its May 20, 2026 meeting. However, the plan was not submitted in the required format. It must be formally approved by the Board, signed by the Chair and Treasurer, and uploaded through the required portal. As part of the corrective action, reconciliations and journal entries will be reviewed and signed or initialed to document oversight. **Paul moved, and Alex seconded a motion to approve the resolution reaffirming the Board's May 20, 2026, approval of the District's plan of action for the two 2025 audit findings, effective immediately. Approved. Motion passed.**

Vote Record: Reaffirm the May 20, 2026, audit corrective-action plan and implement it immediately.

Director	Yes/Aye	No/Nay	Abstain	Motion	Seconded
Debra Brimacombe	☒				
Bill Eagle	☒				
Michael Calhoun	☒				
Alex Devin	☒				☒
Jason Busch	☒				
Paul Gibbons	☒			☒	

NEW BUSINESS

2026 Audit: Taylor reported that the on-site portion of the 2026 audit was nearly complete. The Chair, Treasurer, and Executive Director had completed their required questionnaires, and the IT questionnaire was ready to be submitted. Any additional documents requested by the auditors would be uploaded through their online portal.

Strategic Planning Charters and Communication Structure:
The Strategic Planning Committee presented draft charters for the statutory Budget Committee, Finance Committee, Personnel Committee, and Strategic Planning and Board Development Committee. Under the previously approved structure, the Board Chair will make committee appointments.

Discussion addressed the definition of investments, the Treasurer's oversight role, the Personnel Committee's relationship with the Executive Director, and legal or human resources review. The drafts will be refined through the retreat. No action was taken.

Quarterly Financial Reporting: Beginning October 1, staff plan to present quarterly expense and revenue information. Taylor expressed interest in convening the Finance Committee in October after the retreat.

32-hr Workweek: Michael asked the Personnel Committee to research a 32-hour workweek with no reduction in pay. Discussion addressed burnout, productivity, flexible field schedules, public access, comparable compensation, and fiduciary obligations. The committee will gather questions and research the topic for later Board consideration. No motion was made, and no change was approved.

Communities Purchasing Watersheds: Michael asked if grants are available to help communities purchase or protect land around their drinking water sources. Discussion was held about local drinking water sources, possible grant opportunities, conservation easements, and the infrastructure needed to treat and deliver drinking water. Taylor will look further into eligibility requirements and share information about possible funding through Business Oregon and the Oregon Health Authority with Rachael and Rachell. The group also discussed including source water protection in the place-based water planning process and revisiting the topic at a future meeting.

Building Lease USDA and CSWCD: Taylor reported that the updated lease was signed and approved. USDA space decreased from 1,860 to 1,364 square feet, while the rate increased from $15 to $25 per square foot and annual rent increased from $27,924 to $34,100. The layout preserves four USDA workspaces, provides the District defined space, and clarifies operations during a federal shutdown. The Board asked that the terms be documented in the minutes.

BOARD REPORTS

Paul reported that the project on his property is moving forward with funding from NRCS and the Private Forest Accord. Crystalyn is managing the riparian portion of the project. Preparation of the wetland area has included repeated mowing, with plans to lightly disk the soil and cover approximately 0.4 acre with nonwoven black fabric for one year to help control reed canarygrass before planting. Paul is also working with the Department of State Lands on removing existing drainage tiles and possibly allowing part of the area to hold water to improve hydrology. This portion of the project would be funded through NRCS rather than the Private Forest Accord.

The Board meeting was adjourned at 6:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by: *Jennifer Chavez,* Operations & Communications Manager