



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION

Marion Soil and Water Conservation District
Minutes

Tuesday, July 14, 2026, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, Colm Willis and Danielle Bethell.

Board's Office: Alvin Klausen, Kendall Hall and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Steve Elzinga and Andrew Mittendorf.

Public Works: Roxanne Toepfer and Brian May.

Marion Soil and Water Conservation District: Angela Plowhead, Kassi Roosth and Amy Zimmer.

Commissioner Colm Willis called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Colm Willis

2. Marion Soil and Water Conservation Presentation

-Dr. Angela Plowhead

- Overview of Marion Soil and Water Conservation District (MSWCD) structure:
 - Seven board positions with five zone-specific and two at-large.
 - Positions up for election in November - Zones 1, 2, 3, 5 and at-large 2.
 - Nominations open July 16th, applications due August 25th.
- Mission and strategic focus (2024–2029):
 - Support thriving lands, clean water, and healthy habitats.
 - Work through planning, technical assistance, education, and partnerships.
 - Goals include:
 - Inspiring conservation.
 - Promoting healthy soils and clean water.
 - Creating healthy habitats and productive working lands.
 - Strengthening partnerships.
 - Maintaining organizational health.
- Funding and tax base:
 - Primary funding from permanent property tax base of approximately \$0.05 per \$1,000 of assessed value.
 - Additional funding from external grants and plant sale revenue:
 - Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Fisheries Association.
 - One of few conservation districts in state with tax base:
 - Many others rely solely on grants.
- Grant programs and conservation impact - last fiscal year:

- Nearly \$470,000 in grants awarded.
- Nearly \$800,000 total conservation and education funding across programs.
- Conservation activities on approximately 12,190 acres countywide.
- Around 1,300 acres affected through grant-funded projects:
 - 850+ acres in cover crops.
- Key grant types:
 - Conservation Assistance Grant (CAD):
 - Supports best management practices (erosion control, weed control, overgrazing solutions, other resource concerns).
 - Cover Crop Assistance Grant:
 - Offsets seed, labor, and equipment costs.
 - Eight grants totaling about \$45,000, covering 851 acres in eight watersheds.
 - Special Projects Grants:
 - Support innovative or underused conservation technologies.
 - Smart sprayer using lidar to reduce pesticide over-application.
 - CLEAR (Conservation Learning, Education, and Resources) grants:
 - 20 grants totaling nearly \$43,000.
 - Support K–12, college, trade, and community-based conservation education.
 - Salmon Watch sub-grants for field trips for 830 students:
 - Grades 3–12.
 - Partner Grants:
 - 16 awards for habitat restoration, education, outreach, and capacity building.
 - Now a permanent offering.
 - Individual awards up to approx. \$30,000–\$35,000.
- Examples of funded projects:
 - Tribal harvest area enhancement at Champoege Heritage Area:
 - Three acres improved via hand-weeding and planting culturally important species.
 - Installation of interpretive signage on Indigenous land stewardship.
 - Over 100 volunteers and 10 workshop events.
 - Watershed council capacity support:
 - Funds to expand landowner outreach, planting events, and education.
 - Used as match for larger restoration grants and develop master plans.
 - Education and signage projects:
 - Compost interpretive area and compost systems at Oregon Garden:
 - Used by thousands of visiting students annually.
 - Eight educational signs at Pringle Creek Community on various topics:
 - Urban farming, pollinators, rain gardens, stream health, and the Little Habitat Project.
 - Web-based walking tour with QR codes to support self-guided learning.
 - Student field experiences:
 - Multiple schools visiting Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge, Willamette Mission State Park, Oregon Garden Youth Farm, Silver Falls State Park, Detroit Lake, and the Willamette National Forest.
 - Topics include biodiversity, water quality, forest ecology, wildfire recovery, and land management.
 - Integration of art and photography into ecological learning.
 - Student work shown at school art events with hundreds of attendees.
- Native plant sales and scholarships:
 - Two annual native plant sales:

- Winter bare-root sale at district office in January.
 - Spring container sale at Baumann's Farm & Garden, March:
 - Online pre-orders in Nov-Dec.
 - Approximately 8,124 native plants distributed in last fiscal year.
 - About 25 volunteers contributed 80 hours to plant sale events.
 - Plant sale revenue supports district scholarships with at least \$6,500 awarded.
- Little Habitat Project (yard/community habitat certification):
 - Launched approximately three years ago.
 - About 200 sites currently enrolled.
 - Provides technical assistance and planning:
 - Create certified habitat in yards and community spaces.
 - Focuses on soil health, water conservation, native plants, sustainable infrastructure, and education.
 - Participants receive a yard sign upon meeting certification criteria.
 - 152 Little Habitat sites across 10 communities last fiscal year.
- Technical assistance and field work:
 - 629 landowner contacts, 63 site visits, 29 on-the-ground conservation projects implemented last year.
 - Approximately 1,290 acres served directly by technical projects in that period.
 - Assistance covers agriculture, forestry, urban lands, and natural areas.
- Youth education:
 - Over 8,200 youth engaged through district-supported programs.
 - Key initiatives:
 - Salmon Watch:
 - Watershed-based field instruction on salmon life cycles, water quality, and river ecology.
 - Outdoor School - Salem-Keizer coalition partner.
 - Envirothon competition:
 - Multi-station natural resources academic event.
 - Soil, water, forestry, wildlife; district authors water ecology test.
 - Farm and school field trips and "Ag Fest School Day."
 - Strong homeschool programming.
- Adult education, outreach, and citizen science:
 - 10,000 adults engaged through workshops, tours, and outreach events.
 - 135 public outreach and education activities in the last year:
 - 17,874 residents reached.
 - 290 volunteers across nine volunteer events.
 - Example programs:
 - Rain garden workshops through Mid-Willamette Outreach Group.
 - Tour of Recology Organics.
 - Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) education and monitoring workshops:
 - Citizen science traps on private lands to detect EAB presence.
 - Education on invasive pest spread.
 - Ongoing communication channels:
 - Monthly "Conservation Spotlight" radio segment.
 - First Friday presentations on rotating conservation topics.
- Office in downtown Stayton, in the historic district:
 - About nine staff including technical specialists, communications, education, and a dedicated grants position recently added.

3. Discussion

-All

- Funding and collaboration with the County:
 - MSWCD funding is through dedicated tax base plus grants and earned revenue:
 - Similar in rate to the OSU Extension Service District.
 - Explore opportunities for county departments to apply for MSWCD grants to support replanting and restoration efforts and to leverage volunteers.
- Eligibility and geography:
 - Any entity with tax ID, including cities, school districts, watershed councils, and county departments, can apply for grants:
 - As long as the work occurs within the district.
 - Exclusion zone near Woodburn where residents do not pay SWCD tax:
 - Not eligible for certain services.
 - Most of Woodburn is served, but excluded area is not.
- Weed and invasive species issues:
 - Tansy Ragwort has become major countywide concern:
 - Especially in agricultural areas such as Stayton and Sublimity.
 - Limited county resources for roadside weed management and need for coordinated approaches.
 - Explanation of biological control and multi-year management strategies.
 - Landowners often feel overwhelmed by invasive species.
 - MSWCD offers site visits, technical plans, and grant support to make control efforts manageable.
- Urban and recreational conservation:
 - Collaborative work in urban parks and natural areas.
 - Importance of accessible green spaces for city residents and role of district partnerships in maintaining habitat and water quality.
- Habitat, wildlife, and pollinators:
 - Pollinator gardens, nesting habitat and opportunities for private landowners to enhance habitat through the Little Habitat Project.
 - Personal properties used to illustrate challenges and successes.
- Invasive pests and climate / movement:
 - Oregon is seeing an increasing number of new invasive pests annually.
 - Climate change versus human movement and trade is primary driver of introductions.
 - Question better suited for state agencies like Oregon Department of Agriculture.
- Engagement with state and federal partners:
 - Agencies such as Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
 - Tours and educational visits around North Santiam, Detroit Lake, wildfire recovery areas, and fish passage infrastructure, including past engineering missteps.
- Elections and board service:
 - Zone positions:
 - Candidates must live in the zone.
 - All voters in the district vote on all positions.
 - At-large positions:
 - Candidates may live anywhere in the district.
 - Previous rule allowing board members to qualify by owning land was changed by recent legislation:
 - Residency is required in larger, more urbanized counties.

- Encourage interested community members to consider running for positions:
 - Informational materials available and posted on the district's website.

4. Other

All

- Informal sharing and relationship-building:
 - Exchanged personal backgrounds related to conservation, education, and outdoor experiences.
 - Local venues as both recreational and educational spaces.
 - Highlight of local golf course achieving habitat-related certification through conservation planning and implementation.
- Communications tools and public perception:
 - Mention of increasing public sensitivity around data collection and how that can affect operational changes, even when intended to address cost equity.
 - Recognition that conservation and resource-management initiatives often intersect with public trust and communication challenges.

5. Next Steps

-All

- For Marion Soil and Water Conservation District:
 - Continue current open grant cycles and outreach:
 - CAD Grant:
 - Letters of Interest deadline already passed (July 9).
 - Full applications due July 30.
 - Cover Crop Assistance Grant:
 - Applications open August 1.
 - Deadline October 31.
 - CLEAR (education) Grants:
 - Applications currently open; deadline August 25.
 - Partner Grants:
 - New regular cycle opens August 1.
 - With increased maximum award amounts.
 - Maintain and expand community education efforts.
 - Provide exact year district's nickel-per-thousand tax base was established.
- For Marion County (Commissioners and staff):
 - Explore opportunities relevant departments to apply for MSWCD grants.
 - Share information about MSWCD grant cycles.
 - Consider participating in field tours, conservation club events, and site visits highlighting collaboration.
 - Coordinate with MSWCD on education and outreach around priority noxious weeds.
- Joint / Ongoing:
 - Maintain open communication between Board and MSWCD leadership on:
 - Grant opportunities relevant to county projects.
 - Issues like invasive pests, wildfire recovery, and watershed restoration.
 - Public education efforts that benefit from joint visibility and support.

Adjourned – time: 2:47 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L White