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**Grant Soil and Water Conservation District**  
**Kenneth H. Delano Agricultural Service Center**

721 S. Canyon Blvd. - John Day, OR 97845 - Phone (541) 575-0135

**MINUTES OF GRANT SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT'S**  
**March 5, 2026 Meeting**

**Attendance**

**Directors Attending:**

Phil St. Clair – Director – Via phone  
Pat Voigt – Chairman  
Rick Henslee – Director

Alec Oliver – Associate Director  
Roger Ediger - Director  
Joanne Keerins – Director

**Staff Attending:**

Kyle Sullivan – District Manager  
Danielle Kimball – Program Assistant

**Visitors:**

John Rowell – Grant County Commissioner  
Chase Bloom/Jason/Jan – Malheur Forest Service  
Brandon Ferguson - ODF  
Amy Stiner – SFJDWC  
Sarah Ugalde – FSA

**ADMINISTRATION**

1. Call Meeting to Order – Pat called the meeting to order at 4:00pm
2. Approval of Minutes – Joanne moved to approve the February 5, 2026, meeting minutes. Rick gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, Rick Henslee, Joanne Keerins, and Roger Ediger voted in favor. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.
3. Introduction of Visitors – There were no visitors to introduce.
4. Public Input – There was no public input.

**REPORTS**

5. NRCS – A representative was not able to attend.
6. FSA – Sarah reported that they're still heavily focused on fencing and forest restoration related to the 2024 wildfires, and while that's ongoing, we are making progress with inspections, partial payments, and getting funds out the door. Staffing continues to be a challenge since Kailey Heiple left FSA, so I've been traveling from Harney County a couple times a week to keep coverage in the Grant County office. It's still unclear whether the vacant position will be permanently filled, though I'm advocating for it, and we do currently have a temporary position available through the end of the fiscal year. On the program side, we qualified for a one-month Livestock Forage Program payment due to last summer's drought and are processing a high volume of those applications, along with our normal annual acreage reporting. USDA has also rolled out several new programs recently, including the Farmer Bridge Assistance Loan, though locally it's limited and mainly applies to specialty crops like wheat, oats, and rye.

7. South Fork John Day Watershed Council – Amy reported they are currently in the thick of rolling out RCPP, getting landowners signed up and out on the ground to verify projects. Working closely with ODF on forestry components, and that’s expected to be a significant lift throughout the summer. We’re also entering into an agreement with the Ochoco National Forest to administer their fire recovery project funding, which will include about 76 miles of fencing, purchasing horse traps, and implementing virtual fencing through virtual towers, all of which will keep us busy during the summer months.
8. Malheur Forest – Chase reported they are finally starting to see some daylight on hiring, with more boots on the ground expected for the upcoming field season, including seasonal forest positions and some internal movement, which is really encouraging. I also want to flag that the House Agriculture Committee has passed a version of the Farm Bill out of committee, which reauthorizes programs like Joint Chiefs and other Forest Service authorities, so that’s positive momentum. Beyond that, we’re still working through getting contracts and agreements in place for the coming season, and there are some relatively new changes to the agreements process, so folks working with us should expect more guidance as that unfolds. We’ll provide clearer updates at the next meeting and work through any impacts individually as needed.

Jason: Chase covered the major points well. We touched briefly on Alternative 2 and the forest plan, and I’m happy to answer any questions on that. Overall, we’re very encouraged by where things are headed with staffing for the upcoming season. We’re expecting to bring on around ten seasonal employees, primarily focused on range, recreation, and timber, which aligns well with the administration’s emphasis on access, timber, and active forest management. In addition, we’re working through some internal hires, which won’t expand our overall footprint but will help place people more effectively, recognize the work they’re already doing, and improve retention by offering better opportunities and pay alignment. That’s positive for the long term.

Jan: Just to add one more note on grants and agreements. If your program manager hasn’t reached out yet, please be aware there are some significant changes to terms and conditions that are coming. I’ll plan to forward that information along soon so you can review it, but everything is moving forward, so just flag anything new or concerning and we can talk it through. And finally, thank you for helping with the Natural Resources Fair, we’ll have a booth there and really appreciate the support.
9. ODA – A representative was unable to attend.
10. OR State Forestry – Brandon report started with staffing, our new state forester, Casey Casey, was vetted by the legislature in late February and officially started last Monday. She’s coming to us from Nevada and will be working remotely until June due to her kids being in school, arriving just in time for fire season. We couldn’t secure exceptions to bring staff on as early as hoped, so most seasonal staff are planned to start June 1, with a small number—primarily forest officers—coming on in May. We also hired a new forest officer, Danny Weaver, who joined us from Baker, and Brandon Boss, our stewardship forester, is back from medical leave and working at a light field capacity. Overall, staffing levels look good as we move into the season. On reforestation, we’re planting 200,000 trees in total this year, with 100,000 going in starting next week on three northern fires, and the second shipment arriving mid-month. Our community assistance and community wildfire defense grants are fully committed and moving into contracting, and we’ve submitted additional funding requests, including a \$3.3 million landscape resilience grant and a disaster relief grant to help close a major gap in tree supply—we currently have funding for about 450,000 trees, but project we’ll need over a million, primarily ponderosa pine. Finally, we have several upcoming events: an ODF unit meeting and chili cookoff on March 24, benefiting the Oregon Food Bank, and the Natural Resources Fair on April 17, which will include our operator breakfast as part of a full-day event.
11. OR Dept. Environmental Quality – A representative was unable to attend.
12. John Rowell County Commissioner – John reported that the County Court voted down the Road District. At the most recent BIC meeting, we discussed the forest plan alternatives, and it looks like Alternative 2 is likely to move forward as the primary option. It’s a more aggressive plan than the current one, with increased timber harvest and forest treatment, and overall seems like it could be more effective than what’s been done historically. Alternative 1 closely mirrors the existing plan, and Alternative 3 includes some elements we weren’t as supportive of. Public comments are open through the 19th, and I’m cautiously optimistic. One point I emphasized in the meeting was the importance of not losing momentum once the plan is finalized—since supervisors and commissioners change over time, I suggested continuing with at least biannual check-ins to evaluate what’s working, what’s not, and keep this effort active after the roughly five years already invested.

## DISTRICT PROGRAMS

13. Grant Weed Control – Kyle reported that Matt and Nate have been busy coordinating large aerial seeding project for landowners that's now up to roughly 11,000 – 13,000 acres. Acreage continued to grow right up to the last minute, with landowners adding more ground, but the seed company has been very accommodating and was able to supply additional mix even after we nearly wiped out their original stock. Bids were finalized back in February, and since then they've been busy staging seed and prepositioning it across a wide area, from Prairie City to Fossil, down the South Fork and up to Ritter, making sure everything is in place. Matt has done an excellent job, as usual, lining up equipment, coordinating staff, and working with the vendor to get seed where it needs to be. The helicopter started flying this week in the Prairie City area, then they shifted west toward the Spray area where conditions were drier, although wind slowed things down a bit yesterday.
14. District Programs – Kyle reported due to the mild winter weather that contractors have been able to work on three of the commercial thinning projects. We also held a recent work session, and Danielle is still finalizing the minutes, which should be ready for review in the next few weeks. Additionally, I met yesterday with Didgette along with John Stroup from Malheur ESD to follow up on the idea discussed at the work session about engaging local youth and schools around careers in natural resources and agriculture. Given the technical capacity we have, engineering, GIS, drone work, and other tools. We see a real opportunity to partner with ag teachers and introduce students to the increasingly high-tech career paths available here in Grant County. We're in the early stages and plan to set up a meeting with John Day and Dayville to explore how we might fit into what schools are already doing, so you'll likely see more development on this over the next month.

## DISTRICT BUSINESS

15. Review of DEQ Letter – Kyle Reviewed the letter he prepared to DEQ regarding the temperature TMDL rulemaking, focusing specifically on the required fiscal impact statement. I raised four primary concerns. First, DEQ significantly underestimated the number of small agricultural businesses impacted in the John Day Basin by relying on employment data rather than county assessor records; after flagging this, DEQ has now acknowledged the number is likely several thousand and is revisiting that analysis. Second, the rule relies on either a shade-gap analysis or a default 120-foot buffer on each side of streams, which could have devastating impacts on agricultural operations, particularly given uncertainty over how broadly streams and draws will be defined. Third, the fiscal analysis concludes the rule will not impact non-agricultural small businesses, which overlooks the ripple effects on the broader local economy where agriculture is the largest private-sector employer. And fourth, DEQ suggests economic benefits from recreational fishing would offset impacts, but that claim both misrepresents statewide data and fails to account for the economic losses associated with reduced agricultural land use. I concluded that DEQ has not met its statutory obligations with this fiscal impact statement, and this is just the first step—there are additional statutory requirements and documents we'll be engaging on as this rulemaking process continues.
16. Joanne: Joanne has decided that she will be finishing her term as a director.
17. Annual Meeting Resolution: Directors reviewed the resolution that establishes the time and date for Grant Soil and Water Conservation District's 2026 Annual Meeting to comply with Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District Laws.  
**Joanne moved to approve Grant SWCD's Resolution to Change the 2026 Annual Meeting date to April 2, 2026 at 4:00pm. The resolution enables the district to comply with Oregon Revised Statute 568.580 states that each year after the creation of the first board of directors at a time fixed by resolution of the board, the board, by giving due notice, shall call an annual meeting of the landowners in the district and present an annual report and audit. Roger Ediger gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, Rick Henslee, Joanne Keerins, and Roger Ediger voted yes. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.**

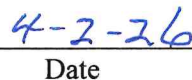
## FINANCIAL BUSINESS

18. Financial Report/Financial Summary – Financial reports for the month of February 2026 were reviewed by the Directors.

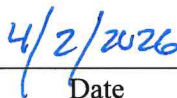
19. Approve Bills – Roger moved to approve the bills and financial reports for the month of February 2026. Joanne gave the second. Phil St. Clair, Pat Voigt, Rick Henslee, Joanne Keerins, and Roger Ediger voted yes. No opposing votes. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 4:54

  
Board Chair

  
Date

  
District Manager

  
Date