

Laurel Watershed Improvement District

Minutes – September 11, 2023, 10 AM

Board Attending:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mike Boxx	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rich Appel	<input type="checkbox"/> Jon Maberry
<input type="checkbox"/> Leroy Plagerman	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eric Sundstrom	

Others Attending:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gavin Willis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Henry Bierlink	<input type="checkbox"/> Alan Chapman
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fred Likkel	<input type="checkbox"/> Jay Chennault	<input type="checkbox"/> Katie Faber
<input type="checkbox"/> Frank Corey	<input type="checkbox"/> Bill Clarke	<input type="checkbox"/> David Haggith
<input type="checkbox"/> Cynthia May	<input type="checkbox"/> Brandy Reed	<input type="checkbox"/> Sarah Faubion

x – present o – absent with notice t – teleconference p – proxy

Mike called the meeting to order at 9:59.

1. Consent Agenda

- a. June 12 minutes were reviewed.
- b. Financial report was reviewed.
- c. Rich moved to approve the consent agenda. Eric seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Ag Water Board / Water Supply

- a. ECY has indicated that April 1 is their current target date for filing the adjudication. Given staffing issues and how complicated the process will be, that could be pushed back further.
- b. AWB will be co-hosting an event on Sep 13th about how to prepare for the upcoming adjudication. Will include a brief introduction from Robin McPherson from ECY, and then presentations from consultants at AESI, Aspect, and RH2.
- c. A memo about the federal settlement process has been completed by Ramsey and distributed to members of the WMB Local Government Caucus. It has also been sent to tribal lawyers. We understand that the federal settlement team will be meeting with the tribes later this month.
- d. No update from the Watershed Management Board.
- e. The WMB Local Government Caucus has been meeting. County consultants have been looking at potential water supply options. One option they have done some preliminary investigations of relates to a series of out-of-stream reservoirs and pump exchange systems. These reservoirs would be filled in the winter, and would be used to distribute water for irrigation in the summer. WID board and staff note that high costs make this project unlikely to be completed, but it is a starting point for discussions.

- f. AWB staff met with tribal staff about water projects. The meeting was overall positive. The general message is that tribes want to exhaust all natural solution options before going to artificial solutions.
- g. Bill provided more info about the work of the federal settlement team.

3. Drainage / Habitat / Flood

- a. Fred provided an update on flood issues. The county has been modeling a number of different ways to manage flows and the flow split. Widening the river channel between Nugents Corner and Everson, along with ring dikes around the cities of Everson, Nooksack and Sumas are all being considered. Sending some floodwaters down Scott Ditch is also under consideration.
- b. Fred provided an update on issues with the CREP program.
 - i. The CREP program works with FSA and the state to fund riparian buffers, primarily on farmland. The program initially only was utilized on eligible streams that contained ESA-listed species.
 - ii. Approx. 20 years ago, FSA staff at the state level expanded the program to include all salmon-bearing streams. However, they did not approve that change through the proper channels. As a result, about 50% of CREP projects in Washington state are not eligible for federal funds.
 - iii. A waiver was issued so that landowners did not have to pay back any monies they had received through the CREP program on ineligible projects. However, the projects now are either being cancelled, reduced in size, or being re-offered through different programs at significantly reduced rental rates. Landowners have been told that they have until September 30th to sign any new contracts.
 - iv. Whatcom Family Farmers, along with a number of agricultural and environmental organizations, is planning to send a letter to the governor asking him to use state funds to maintain the contracts that will be cancelled by the FSA.
 - v. Brandy provided an update on what the CD will be doing to provide support for producers in Whatcom County who are impacted. SCC is having discussions about how they might be able to route some of the \$30m in riparian grant funding to address in part this situation. Also looking at funding options for maintenance for sites that are no longer in the program but that the landowner isn't going to remove.
- c. Fish passage improvements via culvert replacements were briefly discussed.
- d. Potential acquisition of Hawley property by WDFW was discussed.

4. Water Quality

- a. Cynthia provided an update on water quality via email.
 - i. Past 3 years of Portage Bay water quality data has shown a significant trend of improving water quality. Maintaining low numbers through the upcoming rainy season could allow Portage Bay shellfish harvests to be open year-round in some areas that are currently restricted.

- ii. WQ data shows that a number of sites are slightly elevated, but nothing that points to any significant pollution. Mainly showing low flow periods aligning with moderately elevated counts.

5. Education / Communications

- a. 3 seats up for election in November (Mike, Rich, & Eric)
- b. Website – laurelwid.com

6. Other Items from Commissioners

- a. None

7. Next Meetings

- a. Next meeting is Oct 9.
- b. October meeting will include setting a budget, setting the assessment rate, determining any annexations and setting the rolls, and dealing with expiring board positions.

Mike adjourned the meeting at 11:32

Submitted by Gavin Willis, Ag Water Board

Approved by _____