

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners
Tuesday, October 18th, 2022, 1:30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
Jim Detro (JD), BOCC District 3
Lanie Johns (LJ), County Clerk
Dan Higbee (DH), Building Official
Larry Hudson (LH), Pest Board
Craig Nelson (CN), Executive Director, Okanogan Conservation District
Justin Stanley (JS), Voluntary Stewardship Program Coordinator
Leah McCormack, Treasurer
Pam Johnson, Candidate for Treasurer
Jake Santistevan (JS), State Audit Manager
Cinthya Medina, Assistant Audit Manager
Cari Hall, Auditor
Lisa Copp, Payroll and Accounting

Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at: https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/live_streaming_of_meetings.php

Summary of Important Discussions:

- *Fairgrounds toilets getting plugged up.*
- *152 building permit applications out for pot growers, many in Chiliwist; Building Dept. praised for being user-friendly.*
- *Pest Board still not allowed to treat Twisp farm for scotch thistle; Osoyoos milfoil treatments working, will likely be approved by Canada; town hall meetings envisioned to ease tensions with Chesaw farmers.*
- *Voluntary Stewardship Program needs new work group members; encourages compliance with critical area protection initiatives as alternative to added government regulation; wildlife reaping benefits.*
- *Fairgrounds tractor trade-in promises to be costly*
- *Treasure and Auditor proud of Stewardship award, a rare recognition by State Auditor's office of excellence in audit compliance.*
- *Meeting adjourned at 4:00.*

1:30 - *Toilets at the Fairgrounds Agriplex are plugged up. JD speaks of "terrible design"; AH says one of the pop-up inspection ports shows full, the other empty. They'll have to pump the line, "get it snaked out".*

Building Official's Report - AH asks for building permits to be posted on line on a weekly rather than monthly basis; DH says it can be done, and more easily once their new program is running next spring: Anyone will be able to get information from the portal. He reports a huge rise in permit applications in February when Planning started working with pot growers, and in August

as the deadline approached—152 in all. These are mostly for the Chiliwist area. **DH:** I had kind of been expecting, with interest rates, the numbers to go down. I've been surprised this year and last year, but I think it's going to slow. It's been busier in the north end than in quite some time. Four to five inspections twice a week was pretty common; now it's eight to ten... **JD:** On the reservation I see just one. Are they not communicating? **DH:** The Tribe is handling 99.9% issuing of permits. We used to do a lot until they got their own building department. *AH asks about staff.* **DH:** Larry is hoping to retire next fall so (*we'll need*) a new trainee next spring... Cass will be able to work up to building inspector with two certifications... Randy retired this year so I'd like to hire in February. **JD comments on permit applications:** I really appreciate the format you have. I can even follow it. Easy, laid out very well. **AH:** A guy that taught me a lot about building told me we were one of the best departments in the state. ...**JD:** I hear a lot of compliments.

Pest Board Report - AH asks LH about a lien on the property of Bernard and Diane Thurlow, Twisp ranch owners. A sum of about \$3,000 is three years overdue. **LH:** In the spring of 2020 we set a meeting with everybody who had an easement. (*Diane*) said "You have to do all the weed treating and you're not allowed on my property. Our son is a Marine." Kind of a threat. Scotch thistle is not going to get done by this agency. They have acknowledged it has to be done every year... The WDFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) was willing to treat the roadway but restrictions were put on that by Diane then. **JD:** I know Bernard. That's where the problem started, How much they want to take responsibility for. If they do the right of way... **AH:** They want to limit where we can go but we have imperatives for time. **JD:** Chemical treatment is not the only solution. You can clip heads. **LH:** In McClure Canyon there's a draw. It's just loaded. **AH:** Is arial application possible? **LH:** They say they need 10,000 acres to spray. There's not that much land or money. **JD:** How about a 4H or FFA common project? **LH:** Diane wouldn't want that liability because of snakes or bears.

2:01 - *The subject turns to the fall pesticide license re-certification to be scheduled for December 8th at the the Omak Theater. It will be advertised.* Lake Osoyoos milfoil treatment - **LH:** We have good results in the buffer area (*with Canada*). Aquatechnics was allowed to go ahead with an experimental treatment in BC. Seapro (they make Proselicor) expects Canada will decide by the end of the year if that product is approved. It's a good sign that the test area worked. Next year Proselicor will eat up our whole budget. Thanks to carry-over from last year we were able to treat all but the buffer zone. I took a trip in my boat. Hard to find milfoil and what we found was pretty sickly. *LH says in their budget discussion they will announce increased costs. The last budget hike was in 2016 and without a new one the budget will be "pretty squeaky".* The board also needs a new member to represent the central district, someone involved in agriculture, even working for an agency. They must submit a letter of interest and gather ten signatures from within the district. *LH says they'll have fewer sub-contractors for work next year since one has moved and there were "some issues" with the other. He and AH discuss never recommending a particular contractor to anyone, in the interest of fairness, providing instead a list.* **LH:** After the August board meeting, to which Jim (*Detro*) came, Chesaw people expressed problems with the weed board. I thought of putting on town hall meetings this winter for improvements, programs, where weeds are priorities. **JD:** It's a good idea. Some are old old pioneer families. They take offense when the county sends letters saying they're not doing their work. It was a wet spring; need to do spraying again... **LH:** Maybe meet between late November and January... **AH:** What's the best chemical for curly dock? **LH:** Milestone, if you're near water. If you're away from water, add some Escort. (2:18) Treat it in the spring before it bolts. Tri-County Weed Board - **LJ:** We'll have an assessment hearing on sources of revenue because it's (*financed by*) taxes.

2:31 - Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) - **CN:** I want to talk about how to go about re-appointing members to the work group. People are moving away. They have things they would rather be doing. **JS:** In 2018 we opted for the VSP so we weren't regulating farmers and ranchers

with ordinances. With the VSP we report to the State Conservation Commission, Ecology, WDFW and WSDA (Washington State Department of Agriculture) to show that critical areas on agricultural land are being protected voluntarily. Last year in the five-year report the four agencies said we had met our benchmarks. As of now four out of nine work group places are vacant. They've expired. Only two are willing to move on, the others will attend meetings until replacements are found. *Members are required to attend four meetings a year and are asked to deliberate on issues. AH says they'll advertise on line, in the local newspaper, with the Farm Bureau, Cattlemen's Association and "the Horticulture folks"*. CN: Last time we were able to represent these groups as well as the three districts. Dick Ewing of the Farm Bureau and George Thornton of the Environmental (*inaudible*) want to continue. I'd like to stagger appointment terms, have an agreement to commit to four years which would carry them beyond the next five-year report. *They compare need to let people serve with need to open up the representation to new members, and letting old ones re-apply. CN says, of next five-year plan: It's "make or break". We'll initiate practices on ag land. They come up with recommendations on how to meet benchmarks. Having experience will help. We'll have to update the plan. Practices (irrigation, grazing rotation) change over time and we need to change benchmarks. You can "sell for port": "I'll leave a corner of my field for habitat", or "I'll irrigate a corner, leave food for wildlife. It helps tremendously... We're looking at hitting our (goals), staying safely within these norms so we don't have to worry about additional regulations.*

- 2:51 - **AH:** Fencing of waterways is challenging; it means maintenance. **CN:** It's mostly springs, keeping cows from mucking that up, or widening the pasture, flash-grazing to reduce fuels, then moving the cows back out. Also people are tired of losing calves from the ice. **AH:** If people are interested in doing that, I'd push for funding through salmon recovery.
- 2:53 - **CN:** So far we're able to handle most of the requests. There's a risk of creek moving, one of the things really at play. In 1984 Ecology said under water resource law you're not allowed to divert water away from surface water but water quality law says to keep your cows out of the creek. In 1994 they said you can divert water a minimal distance to a trough if you 1) put a float on it so they don't take more than they need and 2) re-divert it back to the creek as near as possible; then they added restrictions regarding water rights. Cattlemen objected so revising the policy was put on hold but it's starting up again. If I can't promise water for cows I can't tell them to fence. In open range they have direct access. That's a big reason for putting on pause. It was short-sighted. As organizations have tried for 100% compliance they only get 20% willingly complying. They shut down voluntary compliance. The VCP program is about counting what people do. *AH talks about few deer on their property in 1977, now they number 200, with 200 geese. CN: With active management we find deer not far from cows, and escape routes for little critters. ... We are doing far greater good than negative impact by doing this.*
- 3:09 - *The fairgrounds has a tractor that, AH says, doesn't have the oomph in the loader. JD says it was good at the time but now a John Deere would perform better. The state has a contract with them so multiple bids not needed and 14% reduction accorded. Including a trade-in for \$10,430, a new John Deere should cost \$35,868.*
- 3:30 - State Audit Exit Conference - *LM arrives with PJ. They ask if everyone got the email. It seems there has been some sort of honor bestowed on the treasurer. Without giving any details the board proceeds with the State Auditor's presentation of the results of the County's 2021 financial and federal audits. JS: Audits are one of the tools government can use to show the seriousness with which we (spend) public money. Response to (an audit) can show commitment. Okanogan County's results show this. CM: I'm happy to report there are no significant deficiencies in internal control, no non-compliance, no un-corrected misstatements. The same with the Federal Grant Compliance Audit. We audited two programs—Covid Recovery (\$1,578,240) and the Homeland Security Grant (\$334,000). Costs are in alignment. (CH and her co-worker rush in.) ...JD: kudos to our financial team. This is the first year in 12 years I will not be issuing a*

reprimand to you for costing us too much money. *Laughter.* (The remote 2021 audit saved the County \$25,000.) **JS:** A large body of work will (from now on) be conducted remotely. You've stepped up to allow us to do that. Next week we'll have a separate meeting for the stewardship letter.

CH: We're very, very, very proud. **LM:** We've never been recognized before. **CH:** It makes the last 18 years worth it. (Upon request it is explained that the County's financial team has received a State Stewardship Award for how well they complied with the audit. This honor comes a year after the county was the object of a State Auditor's finding for an accounting irregularity in the paying back of Covid funds, causing exaggerated publicity.) **CH:** In the last fifteen years, the State has given out only two stewardship awards and never in Eastern Washington. She praises the positive attitude of the Audit Managers. **LM:** One reason for the award is the easy way they worked with both our offices to go through the numbers. **JD:** Do a press release, how we've come from this to this. Taxpayers should realize how hard you guys have worked. *CH wipes away some tears. All agree they should share this event with the press.*

4:00 - Meeting adjourned until Monday morning.