

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Executive Committee was called to order by Vice Chair Jeff Hewitt at 12:03 p.m., via Zoom Meeting ID: 859 8121 6633, pursuant to Governor Newsom’s Executive Order N-29-20.

2. ROLL CALL

Members/Alternates Present

Kevin Jeffries
Jeff Hewitt
Natasha Johnson*
Lesa Sobek
Jonathan Ingram
Kevin Bash

Members Absent

Crystal Ruiz

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Bash.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no requests to speak from the public.

5. ADDITIONS / REVISIONS

There were no additions or revisions to the agenda.

6. CONSENT CALENDAR – *All matters on the Consent Calendar will be approved in a single motion unless a Board Member(s) requests separate action on specific item(s).*

Board Member Sobek requested Agenda Item 6C be pulled from the Consent Calendar for further discussion.

M/S/C (Sobek/Bash) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – AUGUST 18, 2021

6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR AUGUST 2021

- 1) Receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Fee Collection Report for August 2021; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6C. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

Board Member Sobek wanted to know if closing escrow on 13 parcels, starting the process on 31 new parcels, and staff managing 45 acquisition projects was above and beyond expectations or the normal workload. Hector Casillas, Right of Way Manager, noted that while reviewing and preparing for the budget process, it was determined that the current workload would not affect the level of performance. To better understand the workload compared to previous years, data from 2020 will be included in the staff report going forward, the data will also include current acreage.

Board Member Sobek thanked staff for including the acreage information, as this information had previously been presented to the Board regularly on what had been acquired for the month, as well as overall.

Board Member Ingram noted that the acreage was previously reported quarterly.

At this time, Chair Johnson joined the meeting.

M/S/C (Sobek/Bash) to

- 1) **Receive and file the acquisitions status report as of August 31, 2021; and**
- 2) **Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

7. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

Tricia Campbell, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, provided a presentation on the Joint Project Review (JPR) Dashboard. This new agenda item is a follow-up to the Getting to Know the MSHCP presentation given to the Board several months ago. All information in the dashboard is for the time period of January 1st to August 31st. RCA is processing 15 JPRs as of today and has completed 19 JPRs this year. The majority of the JPRs come from the County of Riverside as well as some from private developers for residential properties. There are currently two staff members at RCA who process JPRs, there is a third vacant position that is currently in recruitment, and a consultant who provides supplemental staff to ensure the 14-day timeline is met.

The dashboard includes a snapshot on where RCA is on processing and completing the other forms of MSHCP compliance, Participating Special Entity (PSE) Projects and Criteria

Refinements. PSE is a procedure where an entity, such a utility company, that would not be processing their projects through the City or the County, can receive MSHCP coverage for their project. Only RCA and the Wildlife Agency review PSEs for MSHCP consistency. There are currently two PSEs in process both are which amendments to the original. Criteria refinements are necessary when a project wants to develop land that is described to go into MSHCP reserve. As of today, RCA is processing one criteria refinement which is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

- 1) **Receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) monthly status report as of August 31, 2021; and**
- 2) **Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

8. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Tyler Madary, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. Last week, the State Legislature concluded the first year of the two-year legislative session. RCA's priority this year has been to advocate for increased state investment, and land acquisition. Through the Board adopted legislative platform, the Legislative Affairs team advocated for the proposed Climate and Wildfire Resiliency Bond Measures (AB 1500 and SB 45), to include \$500 million in dedicated funding to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) with a \$100 million carveout for Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP). As a result of the \$85 billion surplus, the Legislature opted to table the bond measures in favor of an expansive one-time climate spending package, including a proposal to spend \$3.7 billion over three years for climate resiliency. However, only \$440 million of the plan has been allocated for Fiscal Year 2021/2022. It's important to note that no budget may obligate the general fund spending of future fiscal years, therefore, the \$3.7 billion should only be viewed as advisory.

The Legislature followed an irregular budget cycle this year, setting spending levels in June and July, with the details to be negotiated in the following months. During that time, the Legislative Affairs team engaged with the Western Riverside Delegation and worked with the State HCP Coalition to engage legislative leadership to advocate for \$500 million in dedicated funding to the WCB. It was just last week that the Legislature unveiled details of the negotiated climate resiliency package, which included a \$31 million increase to WCB's local assistance budget, a total of \$96 million for Fiscal Year 2021/2022. While the modest increase is welcome, the real fight is in the Legislature upholding the three-year funding commitment with increased and dedicated funding to the WCB.

On the federal side, the House plans to take up the bi-partisan Infrastructure Investment and Job Act by September 27th, as well as pass the budget reconciliation resolution which is being drafted concurrently by the House and Senate. The House and Senate have a debt limit increase to contend with, as well as a continuing resolution ahead of September 30th, the fiscal year deadline.

The Legislative Affairs teams will continue to closely follow the mark-up process to track RCA's pending earmark requests with Senators Feinstein and Padilla to fund the Wolfskill Acquisition Project. Staff has scheduled a meeting with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) this afternoon to further discuss the request that BLM acquire the land for conservation. The Senate appropriations process may continue past September, so long as a continuing resolution is passed.

Lastly, the Legislative Affairs team will continue to monitor the progress of the efforts to establish the Western Riverside County Wildlife Refuge. While the language is no longer included in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill, Representative Calvert's bill (HR 972) continues to move through the House Committee process and Senator Feinstein is drafting language for her own bill with RCA's consultation.

Board Member Sobek noted the recent letters that were sent out from RCA and wanted to know if there was anything that could be done at the city level to assist with the process. Mr. Madary stated that the Legislative Affairs team will be strategizing further this fall to work on ways to better engage in the legislative process, though letters go a long way. If sending letters is something the Board would be interested in, those opportunities can be presented as they arise. Board Member Sobek asked that any opportunity to support the RCA via a letter be forwarded to the Board Members.

Board Member Sobek also wanted to know if the Chair or anyone on the Executive Committee made trips to Sacramento to meet with legislatures on behalf of the RCA. Chair Johnson noted that there had been some lobbying trips to Washington, DC but nothing to Sacramento in the last few years. Board Member Ingram added that there had been a couple trips to Sacramento, but at the time there wasn't much funding available.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, noted that the approach to both Sacramento and Washington, DC issues is to try and be as responsive as possible while also being in the right place at the right time. That includes sending letters at the right time, sometimes getting letters from broader groups, sending an e-blast in a newsletter, or using social media to engage the public. Lobbying visits or meetings in Washington, DC and Sacramento are planned so that it's the right time. There are meetings that occur at the staff level that don't require elected official involvement and those are handled at the staff and advocate level. Opportunities are sought out with our advocates to put RCTC and RCA in a position for elected officials participate in meetings to testify or be part of the panel when appropriate. To avoid traveling unnecessarily or at the wrong time, regular, yearly trips are not planned.

Board Member Ingram inquired whether the RCA was still engaged with Douglas Wheeler and Kadesh & Kadesh as they were an integral part of working with Feinstein and Calvert as bills were moved through the last four years. Ms. Mayer confirmed that RCA is still engaged. Ms. Mayer also noted that at the start of the transition the Legislative Affairs team coordinated with the current advocates from RCA and RCTC, to be as efficient and effective as possible by taking advantage of the vast knowledge the advocates have.

Board Member Sobek thanked Ms. Mayer for her explanation on how and when lobbying trips are planned and scheduled and Mr. Madary for his presentation.

Board Member Jeffries noted that Cal Cities is having an in-person conference in Sacramento next week. While there probably won't be an organized presence there, it wouldn't hurt to be able to mention the MSHCP and be unofficial ambassadors for RCA.

Chair Johnson reminded the Executive Committee that during the merger for management acquisition of RCA to RCTC, one of the top priorities was to make sure lobbying efforts were utilized as it wasn't done in the past.

Board Member Ingram wanted to bring carbon credits to everyone's attention, as this is an untapped resource that the RCA has not been able to take advantage of, and to see if there was a means to get and use that money. Mr. Madary noted that the Legislative Affairs team is currently in discussions with one of the lobbyists to see what opportunities would be available to tap into the various mitigation credits the state is exploring.

Aaron Hake, Interim Regional Conservation Deputy Executive Director, offered the Board Members a cheat sheet of sorts with 4-5 bullet points that can be used if an opportunity arises or during a conversation with a legislator. This list would include the hot topics currently in Sacramento and include the lingo to help sync up RCA's message. In the future, if a need ever arises, the list can be updated and resent as necessary.

Board Member Sobek thanked Mr. Hake for the suggestion, stating it would be very helpful.

Chair Johnson also thanked Mr. Hake and noted that it was something that the RCA should be doing regularly and distributed to all the Board Members.

- 1) **Receive and file an update on state and federal legislation; and**
- 2) **Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

9. STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS UPDATE

Aaron Hake, Interim Regional Conservation Deputy Executive Director, provided an update on state and federal grants, focusing on the three S's - struggle, success, and stand-by. Some grants have been a struggle, but we have been successful, and now we are on stand-by. During a previous Board Meeting, Board Member Jefferies made appropriate and accurate comments about RCA needing state and federal partnership to get things done and bringing them to the table when necessary. The whole of the organization has a part in the development of grant requests including Finance, Right of Way, the Executive team, and Legislative Affairs.

The first grant RCA is trying to close out is the 2017 Section 6, a federal grant for \$2 million. There were a number of properties on the grant RCA was able to close, but a six-month extension was needed from the Fish and Wildlife Service to spend the remainder of the grant. At the August meeting of the State Wildlife Conservation Board, RCA was approved for two

properties, and three more are going to the November meeting. There was some struggle involved as the State Department of General Services (DGS) reviews all appraisals and they can sometimes be rejected. On this grant there were four that were approved, but one was rejected. The rejection took negotiation and discussion and was eventually approved by DGS. RCA was informed yesterday that U.S. Fish and Wildlife may have some questions about the appraisal, so while there might be some issues ahead, the team is prepared and on stand-by. This grant was specifically for habitat for mountain lion movement.

As Section 6 grants can be difficult, in preparation of the release of funding for Fiscal Year 2022, RCA has already gotten a jump start on next year's grant, identifying 8 properties with willing sellers. RCA wants to be ahead of the game this time and have the most competitive grant application possible.

RCA's also has a state grant for \$14.7 million, to acquire area in the Jurupa Mountains. It is not possible for RCA to spend the total grant amount, not due to a lack of trying, but rather the land values, limited number of parcels, and few willing sellers. This week, RCA has been able to close the first two properties for the grant, spending \$320,000 for over 51 acres. RCA is currently extending offers to the next batch of willing sellers. RCA has been talking to Assemblymember Cervantes to extend the grant term for an additional year and extend the boundary of the grant beyond the mountain into other parts of the plan area. The state has informed RCA that the boundary extension is possible via an administrative process, but Assemblymember Cervantes' approval in writing is needed, as she is the one who appropriated the funds in the budget. RCA wants to fully take advantage of all the funds tied with this grant and while we haven't heard back from the assemblymember yet, RCA will keep pursuing the request.

- 1) **Receive and file an update on state and federal grants; and**
- 2) **Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

10. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS

Chair Johnson informed the Board of her work with RCA staff on a plan for the Stakeholders Committee. More information will be forthcoming, with the goal being to review the plan and have it in place by the end of the year. This is provided by the by-laws and the Stakeholder Committee has the authority to review implementation plans, helping the Board to ensure its' effectiveness. Any ideas or suggestions would be appreciated while the plan is in the initial process.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, reported that yesterday was the first meeting with member agency Planning Directors to start the comprehensive review of the fee implementation manual. The fee implementation manual is the guidance for all the member agencies staff in terms of processing the fee. The document is being reviewed with a working group that includes the cities of: Beaumont, Banning, Riverside, Menifee, and the County of Riverside. The review of the manual will be to ensure it is an effective tool for member agencies. The committee will also be seeking comments from all other jurisdictions, so everyone has an opportunity to provide comments and feedback, which are due by October 11th. In early 2022, a summary of

requested changes will come back to the Executive Committee to adopt an updated manual that suits the needs of member agencies and is proactive in helping to implement the Nexus Study. This effort initial started in January, with RCA staff being in communication with member agency staff, noting their comments and concerns.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:47 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Wednesday, October 20, 2021**, via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Mobley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Manager/
Clerk of the Board