

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, October 4, 2021

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors Meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Jeff Hewitt at 12:30 p.m., via Zoom Meeting ID 848 0412 8422, in accordance with AB 361 due to state or local officials recommending measures to promote social distancing.

2. ROLL CALL

Board of Directors/Alternates Present

Kevin Jeffries
Karen Spiegel
Chuck Washington*
Jeff Hewitt
Colleen Wallace
Julio Martinez
Jeff Cervantez
Larry Greene
Tony Daddario
Jocelyn Yow

Board of Directors Absent

V. Manuel Perez
Natasha Johnson
Jonathan Ingram

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Dawson.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Board Member Martinez wanted to remind the RCA that the City of Beaumont is still open to assisting with the manual update and procedures. The city would also like to strongly recommend looking at the pre-payment of mitigation fees and including it in the manual.

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 (Edwards/Benoit) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

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

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Fee Collection Report for August 2021.

At this time, Board Member Washington joined the meeting.

6C. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

Board Member Sobek wanted to know if the acquisition status report was now organized by date. Hector Casillas, Right of Way Manager, noted the list is now ordered by close of escrow or proposed close of escrow, if available. If the property is still in negotiation, and the close of escrow is not known, they are listed in the order they were started.

Board Member Sobek also wanted to know how the RCA decides which properties to move forward with due to the limited amount of funds. Mr. Casillas stated that the types of acquisitions were treated differently. Grant property acquisitions are already named in the grant and their order is determined by when the grant is set to expire. Development HANS properties are based on what is submitted to the County or cities for development purposes and are out of RCA control. When a Development HANS property comes in, they are prioritized based on the expected close of escrow date. Non-Development HANS are also from the County and cities, these types of properties only have a certain amount set aside in the budget, and therefore are first come first served. Willing sellers is the category where RCA has the most input. When RCA prioritizes willing seller properties, a vegetation and acquisition map is prepared, and the team discusses if the property in question has what is deemed as a priority for conservation. Not all willing seller properties will qualify and moving forward with an acquisition is not required for these properties unlike the other types of properties.

M/S/C (Sobek/Edwards) to:

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisitions status report as of August 31, 2021.

7. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

Tricia Campbell, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, provided a presentation on the Joint Project Review (JPR) status report. This presentation was a follow-up to the Getting to Know the MSHCP presentation a few months ago. The dashboard summarizes the project compliance procedures that the RCA is completing or has completed from January 1st through August 31st of this year. As of today, the RCA is processing 15 JPRs and has completed 19 JPRs. The majority of the completed JPRs (14) came through the County of Riverside and most are for private development such as residential, and 5 JPRs have been completed for public projects. There are currently two staff members at RCA who process JPRs, 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) 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.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPS) monthly status report as of August 31, 2021.

8. STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS UPDATE

Aaron Hake, Interim Regional Conservation Deputy Executive Director, presented items 8 and 9 concurrently as they were related. Mr. Hake provided an update on state and federal grants, focusing on the three S's - struggle, success, and stand-by. Last week, the RCA received a state grant to study the Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (QCB), an endangered species in Western Riverside County. The grant was for \$15,000, to study how soils affect the hostplant that the QCB likes, in turn helping RCA better manage property to protect the QCB and direct future acquisitions. Having this kind of information or research can play a role in deciding what properties to purchase that would be ideal for the QCB.

The RCA partnered with the San Diego Natural History Museum on a grant that was also awarded last week, to study the Burrowing Owl, a species in Western Riverside County. There is another partnership with UC Davis that was successful on a grant announced last week to study

the Mountain Lion, to better track and understand their movements in and around the Santa Ana Mountains.

Agenda Item 9 is a resolution that would allow the RCA to receive the grant funds for the QCB study and allow the research to get started as soon as possible.

Agenda Item 8 is regarding land acquisition grants that have been both successful and a struggle. RCA's success starts with the 2017 Section 6 grant that was awarded for \$2 million in Fiscal Year 2017. 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 California Department of General Services (DGS) reviews all appraisals and they can sometimes be rejected. There was one property that was rejected on this grant which took negotiation and discussion until it was eventually approved by the DGS.

RCA has started to prepare for the next Section 6 grant and expects the Fiscal Year 2022 funds to be made available any day now. For the last several months, RCA and RCTC have been reviewing properties with willing sellers and critical for conservation. RCA has identified 8 properties that can be put forward for the next grant as soon as it is made available.

RCA also secured a state grant for \$14.7 million, from Assemblymember Cervantes to acquire area in the Jurupa Mountains. In the last two weeks, the RCA has closed on the first two properties with this grant, buying 57 acres for \$320,000. It is not possible for RCA to spend the total grant amount as the land values are lower in this area and there are few willing sellers, but RCA has reached out to the 31 property owners in grant area again. RCA has been talking to Assemblymember Cervantes to extend the grant term for an additional year and expand the geography of the grant beyond the mountain into other parts of the plan area. The boundary extension is possible via an administrative process, but Assemblymember Cervantes' approval in writing is needed for the California Natural Resources Agency. 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 and standing-by.

Board Member Daddario wanted to know if one of the issues to acquiring property was the inability to engage in bidding wars and only make purchases on the stated value. Mr. Hake confirmed that the RCA is limited by the appraised value, with appraisals having to meet certain state and federal guidelines. Every offer presented to property owners is fair market value, the struggle is when an owner wants more for their property and the RCA has limited capability to offer more. This is an issue, so RCA has started trying to do outreach earlier, discussing with the property owners the process and only bringing forward those properties where owners have a good understanding and are amenable to the outcomes.

Board Member Daddario also wanted clarification on the expiration and extension of the Jurupa Mountain grant and whether the Board could step in to assist in getting the extension granted. Mr. Hake stated the grant is set to expire in March 2022, and RCA is requesting to extend the grant by one year. The extension is done administratively through the State Natural Resources Agency, and they have already expressed willingness to comply. The expansion of the

geography of the grant can also be done administratively, but the state has asked for an expression of support from the assemblymember. If Board Members have an opportunity to communicate with Assemblymember Cervantes, they certainly could express their opinions on the priority of this grant expansion.

Board Member Sobek thanked staff for their work on the grants and asked for further details on the Burrowing Owl and Mountain Lion grants. Tricia Campbell, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, noted that the Burrowing Owl grant will be processed and worked through the San Diego Natural History Museum. The grant is focused on creating a protocol to assess foraging habitat to help with relocations and focus efforts on existing lands. The Mountain Lion grant work will be done through UC Davis, supplementing work they have already performed along with the Nature Conservancy. The grant is focused on the Mountain Lion population in the Santa Ana Mountains, along the 15 Temecula Creek Corridor.

Vice Chair Hewitt noted that the QCB grant is based on finding soil that is more hospitable to be able to grow more plants and in turn, have more butterflies. The grant is a good one, as there is only a 25% match, which will only cost RCA around \$5,000. Mr. Hake noted that all RCA will pay is staff time.

Board Member Sobek mentioned a biology teacher in her city posted information this summer regarding the Monarch Butterfly and their life cycle by planting Milkweed in her yard. The teacher approached the city and wanted to know if some of the native plants that attract butterflies could be planted in parks or other city areas. If RCA had information on any plants that would attract butterflies and information on which would be too invasive, it would be helpful to the cities.

Board Member Edwards noted that some of the butterfly attracting plants can be invasive, as she's seen with her butterfly garden. The City of Temecula established a natural plant park in the rural panhandle where Murrieta Hot Springs turns into Butterfield Stage Road, it would be a good idea for the city to look at adding some butterfly attracting plants.

Board Member Bash informed the Board of the Monarch Butterfly Pledge for Mayors. The City of Norco is part of the pledge and has been for years. There are Milkweed plants in city parks and near city hall. Board Member Sobek asked that the pledge information be shared, as she was previously unaware.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file an update on state and federal grants.

9. ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION NO. 2021-015 AUTHORIZING THE APPLICATION AND ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT FUNDS FOR EVALUATING QUINO CHECKERSPOT BUTTERFLY (*EUPHYDRYAS EDITHA QUINO*) HOSTPLANT MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENT SOILS

M/S/C (Greene/Barajas) to:

This item is for the Board of Directors to adopt Resolution No. 2021-015, "Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Authorizing the Application and Acceptance of Grant Funds for Evaluating Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (*Euphydryas Editha quino*; QCB) Hostplant Morphological Characters Associated with Different Soil Types Predominant in the Vicinity of a QCB Metapopulation in Southwestern Riverside County, with Relevance to QCB Population Ecology and Conservation.

10. LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

David Knudsen, Interim External Affairs Manager, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. RCA's state priority this year was to advocate for increased state investment in habitat conservation and land acquisition. While the Legislative Affairs team advocated for \$500 million in dedicated funding to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), first in the proposed Wildfire and Climate Resiliency Bond Measures and later in the state budget, the legislature and the governor instead opted to increase WCB's local assistance budget to \$96 million for Federal Fiscal Year 2021, a \$31 million increase. While appreciated, it is still somewhat disappointing considering the budget proposes to dedicate \$15 billion for climate action over three years and specifically \$3.7 billion for climate resiliency programs.

Officials at the California Natural Resources Agency indicated that they intend to increase investment towards the 30 by 30 goal, to conserve 30% of the state's land and coastal waters by 2030, once the state finalizes the 30 by 30 strategy. The Legislative Affairs team has consistently engaged the public comment process and will continue to do so, to promote Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) as a ready tool to implement the 30 by 30 goals. State HCP Coalition members have recently received information that the state intends to increase funding to WCB in Fiscal Year 2022/2023 and again in Fiscal Year 2023/2024. It is important to note the funding levels rumored to be under consideration are well below the \$500 million that was advocated for, and no budget may obligate the general fund spending of future fiscal years, so the legislature will need to be reminded of the three-year funding commitment with increased and dedicated funding to WCB.

On the federal side, congress just averted a government shut down by passing a continuing resolution to fund the government through December 3rd. The senate is expected to continue the mark-up of their appropriation bills until then. The Legislative Affairs team will closely follow the legislative process on RCA's pending earmark requests with Senators Feinstein and Padilla to fund the Wolfskill Acquisition Project. After a positive meeting with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in mid-September, RCA is optimistic that the local BLM office in Palm Springs will be a ready partner should RCA receive the earmark funding. The senate

appropriations process may continue for some time, but the Board will be kept apprised of the funding requests.

Lastly, a letter was received from Assistant Director Gary Frazer of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in response to RCA's February 2021 letter to the Department of the Interior Secretary Holland for proposed reforms to the Section 6 program. While the remarks in the letter struck a positive tone, RCA does not expect any changes to how Section 6 grants are administered. The Legislative Affairs team looks forward to hearing more from the Assistant Director Frazer and others at the National HCP Coalition's Annual Conference this week and will report back to the Board on any new developments.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file an update on state and federal legislation.

11. PRESENTATION – SPECIES OF THE MONTH

Betsy Dionne, Senior Management Analyst Management and Monitoring, provided a presentation on the species of the month, the San Diego Desert Woodrat.

Board Member Hewitt noted that the Woodrat looked like a bigger version of the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat. Ms. Dionne stated they were different as the Kangaroo Rat have long back legs that are used to hop around, and their diet consists of mostly seeds. The Woodrat eats vegetation and leafy greens. Though they would both be prey for similar predators.

Board Member Spiegel wanted to know if they were called the San Diego Woodrat because they were predominantly in San Diego, and whether there were many in the Riverside County area. Ms. Dionne noted that the Woodrat is in our area and all-over Southern California. The species name is sometimes based on where the species was first discovered.

Board Member Sobek wanted to know if their habitats were typically in Yucca Cactus as shown in the presentation. Ms. Dionne noted that they show a preference for large cactus patches or pokey brush to deter predators.

12. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Overview

Board Member Sobek asked staff, if possible, to provide Board Members with information or resources about plants that could or shouldn't be used to attract butterflies.

Board Member Edwards announced the Temecula State of the City on October 14th at 7 p.m., at Pechanga Resort and Spa sponsored by the Temecula Chamber of Commerce.

Board Member Bash announced the Norco State of the City on October 14th.

Board Member Yow announced the Eastvale State of the City on October 7th at 6 p.m., at Vantage Point Church.

Board Member Wallace announced the Banning State of the City on October 14th at 1 p.m., at Sun Lakes.

Board Member Sobek announced the Menifee State of the City on October 21st at 8:30 a.m., at the new Fairfield Inn and Suites.

Board Member Benoit announced the Wildomar State of the City on November 4th at 6 p.m., at Marna O'Brien Park.

Board Member Daddario noted that the Corona State of the City meeting had already passed but invited the Board Members to the only California stop of the Wall that Heals, starting October 7th. The Wall the Heals is a $\frac{3}{4}$ replica of the Vietnam War Memorial and will be at Santana Park, open 24-hours a day until October 10th.

Board Member Krupa announced the Hemet State of the City on November 5th at 6:30 p.m., on the upstairs patio at the library.

Aaron Hake, Interim Regional Conservation Deputy Executive Director, on behalf of Chair Natasha Johnson, noted the application process for the Stakeholders Committee is now open and applications can be found on the RCA website, under the Committees tab. In addition to the email Board Members received from Executive Director Anne Mayer, additional information will also be sent out later this week as well as social media posts. Board Members are encouraged to share the social media posts and emails with potential applicants. More details about the committee will be forthcoming, with appointments expected to be made to the committee by the end of the year.

12. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors, Vice Chair Hewitt adjourned the meeting at 1:23 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, November 1, 2021.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Manager/
Clerk of the Board