

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Executive Committee was called to order by Chair Natasha Johnson at 12:00 p.m., via Zoom Meeting ID: 868 0185 0465, in accordance with AB 361 due to state or local officials recommending measures to promote social distancing.

2. ROLL CALL

Members/Alternates Present

Jeff Hewitt
Natasha Johnson
Lesa Sobek
Jonathan Ingram
Crystal Ruiz

Members Absent

Kevin Jeffries
Kevin Bash

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Hewitt.

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).*

M/S/C (Ruiz/Ingram) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JANUARY 19, 2022

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

- 1) Receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Fee Collection Report for December 2021; and

- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6C. QUARTERLY INVESTMENT REPORT

- 1) Receive and file the Quarterly Investment Report for the quarter ended December 31, 2021; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6D. ACQUISITION STATUS REPORT

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

6E. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

- 1) Receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) status report as of January 31, 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6F. QUARTERLY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT METRICS REPORT, OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2021

- 1) Receive and file report summarizing the Quarterly Public Engagement Metrics; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Tyler Madary, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on the Legislative Affairs team state and federal advocacy. As a part of RCA's legislative strategy, informed by the Platform, as well as guidance of the Board, last week staff submitted a public comment letter and provided oral comments to the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation, also known as Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3. Among other items, the Subcommittee received a presentation on the implementation of the \$3.6 billion, three-year Climate Resilience Package, which was included in last year's budget. RCA provided comments on the package's \$768 million set-aside for nature-based solutions to climate change, \$593 million of which is expected to be appropriated this year.

In addition to plugging Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Natural Communities Conservation Plans (NCCPs) as shelf-ready tools to implement the State's climate action and conservation goals, RCA requested the Subcommittee's support for increased and ongoing funding in the state budget for land acquisition programs, such as those administered by the Wildlife Conservation Board.

Earlier this week, the Team submitted RCA's comments to the California Natural Resources Agency's (CRNA) draft Pathways to 30 by 30 document. This caps off months of engagement on

RCA's part to make sure that HCPs and NCCPs were included, with an emphasis on the need for the State to fund more land acquisition. Once CNRA finalizes the Pathways to 30 by 30 document, staff expects the agency to provide a more specific budget change proposal for the Climate Resiliency Package, which staff will monitor and weigh in on, accordingly.

Switching to the federal side, the Legislative Affairs team continues to monitor implementation of the bipartisan \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, or IIJA, to determine how HCPs may be eligible for climate resiliency funding programs in the new law. Earlier this month, RCTC submitted comments in response to a broad Request for Information, or RFI, from the U.S. Department of Transportation regarding how to best implement the IIJA. RCTC's response to this RFI included comments on the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, in which we requested that greater weight and consideration be given to proposed wildlife crossing projects if they are located within HCPs.

Board Member Sobek noted that reading over the report, it stated that the advocacy of RCA to make on-going funding increases a reality is one of the goals. With that goal, would there be any plans for the Chair or Vice Chair to go advocate in Sacramento. Anne Mayer, Executive Director, noted outside of the COVID environment the answer would be yes, of course. Currently Sacramento is mostly operating on a virtual basis and the capital is under construction, so offices are scattered. RCA is actively looking for opportunities in the Assembly or Senate Transportation Committee hearings to volunteer the Chair or Vice Chair for testimony. The same would go for Washington, DC.

Board Member Ruiz thanked Mr. Madary for his report and asked that the information be sent to the Executive Committee members for them to share with their city councils.

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

8. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

Tricia Campbell, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, provided a presentation on the RCA Annual Report, 2020. The annual report provides a formal opportunity to assess the progress of the Plan and to address potential problems. The annual report, once received and filed by the Board, will be available to all MSHCP Permittees, Wildlife Agencies, and interested public on the RCA website.

In 2020, a total of 981 acres was acquired, donated, or obtained through the local development process. From inception of the Plan thru 2020, RCA had acquired 62,798 acres of Additional Reserve Lands (ARL). The Dawson Creek property that was purchased in 2020 is located south of the Lake Mathews/Estelle Mountain Reserve and east of Temescal Canyon. This was an important acquisition in Rough Step Unit 7 that brought in Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub to help offset the current imbalance in this vegetation community. It also brought in important watershed features that support covered species and drain into Temescal Wash.

Habitat losses are reported to the RCA once a year. Losses are reported when projects go through their final processes at the City or County once the project is shovel ready, removal of habitat can occur. In 2020, 3,510 acres were approved for loss within the MSHCP Plan Area. Approximately 2,733 acres of this was for development outside of Criteria Cells, where additional reserve assembly does not occur. Approximately 777 acres of this was for development inside Criteria Cells where the development was proposed outside of lands needed for additional reserve assembly. As there is much more area outside of cells, it is important for more development/losses to occur outside of the cells than inside the cells. Cumulative habitat losses since adoption of Plan show that 81% of the development is occurring outside of the criteria cells with 19% occurring within the cells.

New lands came into conservation during 2020 in the cities of Hemet, Jurupa Valley, Lake Elsinore, and Temecula and the County of Riverside. Each jurisdiction has a goal range and as of last year this information is on a public Dashboard on the RCA website that is updated in real time as acquisitions occur. This was an initiative of Chair Johnson.

Losses and gains are evaluated through what the MSHCP calls Rough Step Analysis. The plan area is split into nine rough step units. The RCA takes the acquisitions and the losses data provided by each Permittee (city/county) annually and runs it through the rough step formula. The analysis shows that at the end of 2020, RCA is out of rough step in four units: Rough Step Units 3 and 7 have had too much loss in Riversidean alluvial fan sage scrub (RAFSS) habitat, a very rare habitat type; Rough Step Unit 5 due to riparian scrub, forest, woodland; and Rough Step Unit 8 due to grasslands.

Being out of rough step calls for action. For Rough Step Unit 3 RCA continues to look for willing sellers who own lands that supports RAFSS. For Rough Step Unit 5 RCA is in escrow on a property that supports 0.57 acre of riparian scrub and continues to look for other willing sellers of properties with this vegetation community to get back into rough step. For Rough Step Unit 7 RCA is working with several entities on acquiring 24.5 acres of RAFSS which would put it back in step. Rough Step Unit 8 grasslands has been out of step since plan inception. However, the RCA is currently working with several property owners and if these lands are acquired, then they would bring in a little over 59 acres of grassland.

Another large part of MSHCP compliance is to manage the ARL. With a staff of 10, RCA reserve managers manage over 43,000 acres with 42,360 acres being RCA-owned lands. The RCA does not manage all ARL. Management is occurring by the feds and state as well as a suite of long-term management entities like the Resource Conservation Districts, Rivers and Lands Conservancy, Center of Natural Lands Management, etc. RCA reserve managers continue to focus on fire abatement, property protection/security; perform initial site inspections of every parcel during acquisition; remove invasive, non-native species and restore natural habitats; coordinate with other reserve managers that oversee non-RCA lands; and perform long-term management of 15 Clean Water Act/Endangered Species Act properties.

Activities performed by RCA's management team include: persuading riders to leave the KB San Jacinto River donation property; removing 100 gallons of illegally discarded used motor oil from the Kisling Enterprises property; removing a large homeless encampment from the Oak Valley Partners property; completing an access closure on the Palmryita Donation property; removing a mountain bike bridge illegally being constructed on the Cornerstone property; and debris removal from an illegal marijuana grow on the Aqua Tibia property.

An eradication program for an invasive plant known as Stinknet began on the alkali playa properties including the Carlsbad property and the Sey property. The progress is slow but working. Also, during 2020, RCA worked in collaboration with the San Diego Zoo conservation group on a translocation project that moved the very rare San Bernardino kangaroo rat (not to be confused with the Stephens' kangaroo rat) from sites proposed for development in San Bernardino County to San Jacinto River Ranchos Meadows at Lone Cone property. Some of the animals were fitted with telemetry collars and movements were tracked to study how successful the translocation effort was. It was met with mixed results but overall, it has been successful. Some stayed, some moved onto other lands, and a few were eaten by predators.

RCA contracts the Santa Ana Watershed Association to perform the monitoring program. With a staff of 15, the program monitors 146 species throughout the MSHCP reserve system that includes both Public/Quasi-Public (PQP) and ARL lands. In 2020, activities included: focused monitoring for American Bittern, Burrowing Owl, Least Bell's Vireo, Mountain Plover, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, and even a winter raptor survey for Ferruginous Hawk, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon - three species that only occur in the area during migration and winter. Quino checkerspot butterfly and Delhi Sands Flower-loving Fly surveys were conducted, these two species are surveyed every year. Rare plant surveys including a focused study on Brandt's phacelia a species of plant that only occurs in one location in the MSHCP reserve, on County Parks properties along the Santa Ana River. The monitoring team is working with researchers in San Diego County on the ecological needs of this species.

The monitoring program also performs monitoring of the Clinton Keith Road overcrossing that was built in support of the Clinton Keith Road Realignment project. The purpose of the overcrossing was to support movement of Quino checkerspot butterfly as well as providing movement habitat across the roadway by the threatened coastal California gnatcatcher, a small bird that does not migrate from the area and instead is a low flying species that lives in sage scrub. There are also many other species that have been confirmed using the overcrossing including: several species of butterflies, bobcat, coyote, black-tailed jackrabbit, Audubon's cottontail, California ground squirrel, opossum, domestic dog, kangaroo rats, and 5 species of birds. The year 2020 marks the second year of monitoring that is to continue for a total of five years. This monitoring is supported by the Riverside County Transportation Department.

Major actions taken in 2020 include: 981 acres of ARL acquired within the calendar year, with 62,798 acres of ARL acquired thru 2020; a total of 13,842 acres currently designated as future ARL conservation dedications that will occur from development; and processing 32 JPRs from permittees.

Board Member Sobek thanked Ms. Campbell for a great, informative report.

Chair Johnson asked that the Executive Committee be sent a copy of this presentation.

- 1) **Receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan 2020 Annual Report; and**
- 2) **Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

9. **BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS**

Board Member Sobek shared that Menifee has a new police department, and after three years the Chief will be retiring at the end of June, so a recruitment process will be opened.

Chair Johnson shared that former Council Member Daryl Hickman from Lake Elsinore passed away last evening.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, followed up on three things from the February Board Meeting. The first item to follow-up on, as directed by the Board, is staff starting to evaluate potential options related to a policy for Board consideration for offsite donations in lieu of fees. Staff plans to spend the next month doing some research and coming up with information to have a discussion with the Stakeholders Committee, who will be meeting on March 31st.

In addition, staff is looking at an issue that was raised by a member of the public related to fee credit considerations related to JPRs. There are concerns that the RCA policy and MSHCP have a time challenge for the development stakeholders. Staff is researching this matter, and it will also be a topic of discussion at the upcoming Stakeholders Committee.

Staff is excited for the first Stakeholders Committee Meeting and has begun reaching out to members. The Stakeholders Committee will be Brown Act Meetings, following all Brown Act requirements. As such, mandatory ethics training will be offered by RCA.

Finally, if it is the pleasure of the Executive Committee, staff could bring an item to the March Board Meeting to change the start time of the Board Meetings. The Executive Committee starts at Noon and the Board Meetings start at 12:30. While it doesn't happen very often, there have been times when RCA is discussing important items and bumps against 2:00 p.m., which is WRCOG's start time. Last month, with very significant conversation and a vote taking place at RCA, several members had to leave to attend the WRCOG Meeting. This also happened during the Nexus Study approval process. One way to prevent this issue would be to move the RCA Board Meetings to Noon, minimizing the potential for conflict.

Board Member Ingram thanked Ms. Mayer for bringing up changing the Board Meeting start time. This is something he would be in support of.

Board Member Ruiz stated she would also be in favor of changing the start time.

Ms. Mayer confirmed the start time change would be on the March Board Agenda for consideration.

Board Member Hewitt wanted to know if changing the Board Meeting time to noon would include lunch. Ms. Mayer noted that both the Executive Committee and Board are still virtual, when it changes, RCA will address the tight schedules the Board Members have without the opportunity to eat lunch.

Chair Johnson shared that today was National Almond and Do a Good Deed for a Grouch Day.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:35 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Wednesday, March 16, 2022.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Manager/
Clerk of the Board