

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 7, 2022

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 835 0346 4977, 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
Tony Daddario
Clint Lorimore
Linda Krupa

Lorena Barajas Bisbee
Lesa Sobek
David Marquez
Jonathan Ingram
Kevin Bash
David Starr Rabb
Patricia Lock Dawson
Crystal Ruiz
Maryann Edwards
Ben J. Benoit

Board of Directors Absent

V. Manuel Perez
Larry Greene
Natasha Johnson

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Lock Dawson.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Susan Nash, President and Attorney for Friends of the Northern San Jacinto Valley, requested that the current fee credit policy be amended. This issue should be placed on the next Executive Committee agenda for public suggestions on how the fee credit policy must be amended to go forward, instead of hindering, MSHCP land acquisitions. It was also requested that this issue be forwarded to the agenda for the Advisory Committee meeting. The results of these discussions should then be placed as an action item on the next Board meeting.

Lisa Mobley, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk of the Board, noted the only public comments received were from Susan Nash and they were forwarded to the Board.

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 6H be pulled from the Consent Calendar for further discussion.

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

6A. AB 361 DETERMINATION

This item is for the Board to adopt Resolution No. 2022-003, *“A Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Authorizing Virtual Board and Committee Meetings Pursuant to AB 361”*.

6B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – FEBRUARY 7, 2022

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

6D. QUARTERLY INVESTMENT REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Quarterly Investment Report for the quarter ended December 31, 2021.

6E. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

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

6F. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) status report as of January 31, 2022.

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

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file report summarizing the Quarterly Public Engagement Metrics.

6H. CONSULTANT REPORTS - FISCAL YEAR 2022 SECOND QUARTER

Board Member Sobek wanted to call attention to the monitoring that is done by the consultants in the field, working to preserve the land. The reports provided are thorough and informative. The consultants work closely with staff, and it's a very positive thing that they do for the RCA.

Vice Chair Hewitt noted that the RCA has quite a few acres that not only need to be monitored, but also not taken for granted.

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

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the consultant reports for Fiscal Year 2022 Second Quarter.

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. Each year, the California Habitat Conservation Planning Coalition (CHCPC) coordinates an advocacy trip to Sacramento for coalition members to educate decisionmakers about Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and Natural Communities Conservation Plans (NCCPs) and advocate for increased funding. As a part of the legislative strategy, last week RCA staff participated in a series of virtual meetings coordinated by CHCPC with agency representatives, legislators, and staff based in Sacramento. The CHCPC coordinated 27 meetings in all, 16 of which RCA staff participated in or led.

In addition to advocating for increased funding for the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) for land acquisition programs to implement the State 30 by 30 and climate action goals in each meeting, the CHCPC has taken RCA's lead in promoting HCPs and NCCPs as tools to sustainably streamline development specifically for housing. Legislators have taken an interest in the nexus as they endeavor to address the state's housing shortage while pursuing climate action goals. To be clear, the CHCPC would not have taken this strategy which the urging of RCA. This approach will expand outreach and messaging while increasing legislative interest and the many benefits that HCPs and NCCPs provide.

Thanks to the virtual advocacy trip, RCA received great news from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Director, Chuck Bonham, and gained critical insights from others that will inform the pursuits of different funding sources. In meeting with Director Bonham, RCA was informed that CDFW has resolved the delayed implementation of the Fiscal Year 2022 Local Assistance Grant (LAG) and will expeditiously fund the awards, including RCAs, while extending the performance period to three years. Additionally, staff gained insights regarding the advocacy for increased funding to WCB, as well as the exploration of funding opportunities tied to housing and climate policy.

Assembly speaker Anthony Rendon's staff affirmed the shared belief that increased funding to WCB is a path to implementing 30 by 30. Housing Committee staff understood and appreciated the roles that HCPs and NCCPs play in streamlining housing development in an environmentally sustainable manner, particularly at a time when the state is grappling with a housing shortage and climate action goals.

Lastly, RCA was informed by the chief of staff to Assemblymember Richard Bloom, who chairs Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3, that ongoing funding requests will be a challenge due to the volatility of the general fund and the greenhouse gas reduction fund year over year. It was suggested that it would be more feasible to pursue one-time funding requests that are allocated over a few years. This offer was an important reminder to be measured in RCA's state funding requests but does not limit the interest in other sources of funding such as the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund as suggested by Board Member Ingram. The California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Deputy Secretary Amanda Hanson, who covers climate issues, expressed interest in exploring how HCPs and NCCPs may broaden their roles in nature-based solutions to climate change. RCA staff viewed last week's virtual advocacy trip as a resounding success and have several follow-up items on many strategic leads.

Finally, RCA's advocacy is not limited to the work of CHCPC. In the past month, RCTC provided comments to a Request for Information from the US Department of Transportation on the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, in which it was requested that greater weight and consideration be given to proposed wildlife crossings projects if located within HCPs. RCA staff also submitted comments on the CNRA's Draft Pathways to 30 by 30 document to ensure that HCPs and NCCPs were included as part of the strategy with an emphasis on the need for the state to fund more land acquisition through programs like WCB. RCA submitted a public letter and provided oral comments to pitch such WCB funding to the Assembly Budget Subcommittee for Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation, also known as Assembly Budget Subcommittee 3. The actions RCA staff has taken are the direct result of the leadership and input from the Board.

Board Member Edwards thought this was the perfect example for RCA to continue to broaden its influence in Sacramento. It was requested that staff provide each Board Member a sample letter and/or thank you that could be sent to those people who have helped in elevating RCA to the example being set for HCPs. Mr. Madary stated staff would investigate this request and will follow-up with the Board.

Vice Chair Hewitt thanked staff for the report and noted that whether the funding was a one-time request spent over two or three years or on-going, RCA should get the funds where they can.

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

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 reviewed 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 Martinez thanked staff for the excellent presentation and asked if a copy of presentation could be forwarded to the Board Members.

Board Member Edwards asked for clarification on what a domestic dog was. Ms. Campbell clarified that domestic dog is a formal term, but it is people's dogs.

Board Member Daddario also requested that this presentation be sent to the Board Members.

Vice Chair Hewitt asked about the relocation of the San Bernardino Kangaroo Rat and the transponders that were used, when some were eaten by owls, if RCA was then able to track the owls. Ms. Campbell noted that the collars weren't ingested, birds of prey are good at picking off those kinds of things.

Board Member Ingram asked Ms. Campbell to explain the backpacks and how they work. Ms. Campbell noted that the backpacks are little collars with a radio transmitter on the back. It was assumed the rat was eaten by an owl because the rat was moving around on the ground, and it suddenly went straight out to a branch and that's where the transmitter stopped. The transmitters allow the RCA to understand how many of the animals stay once they are trans-located. The transmitters don't last for a long time, because the battery isn't strong, but the RCA has seen good results and are provided a wealth of information.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan 2020 Annual Report.

9. PROPOSED AMENDED BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING SCHEDULE

Lisa Mobley, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk of the Board, provided information on the proposed meeting schedule, amending the start time of the Board Meetings. In consideration for those Board Members who serve on multiple boards that meet on the same day, staff was asked to bring forward an item to consider changing the Board Meeting start time from 12:30 p.m. to 12 Noon. Attached to the staff report is an amended meeting calendar, changing the start time. A yes vote on this item will result in the start time changing to 12 Noon.

Vice Chair Hewitt noted that there are a lot of Board Members who are on another JPA that follows the RCA Board Meeting. As RCA gets more work, it puts those Board Members in a tough spot.

Board Member Starr Rabb noted that changing the meeting start time to noon would impact his ability to attend the meetings. With his current job, he is sometimes stuck in the courtroom until noon. If AB 361 is ever repealed and the Board must attend meetings in person, it would affect his ability to attend.

Board Member Ruiz shared that she is on another board that meets after RCA, and it has been difficult recently as the RCA meetings have gone on much longer than expected, moving the start time to noon would allow for more of a quorum at the end of the meeting.

Board Member Washington thought considering the two comments made, one against and one for, RCA may find that some Board Members are lost on the front end of the meeting to gain members on the back end of the meeting. When the RCA was established, the meeting time was set with the understanding that many of the Board Members would also be attending the WRCOG meeting the same day. WRCOG moved the start time of their meetings to compromise with RCA. This arrangement had worked for many years, so perhaps the issue is the Board needs to be more efficient with their time.

Board Member Spiegel noted that as chair of WRCOG, there were only a couple Board Members who left the last meeting early and WRCOG was understanding for those who stayed. The challenges come in when closed session issues go long, but that has only happened a couple of times the past year. The bigger concern is for people who are on both Boards, that extra half hour to grab lunch may come into jeopardy. Before making such a dramatic change, the RCA should ensure they are not doing more damage by changing the start time.

Board Member Martinez thought this matter should be viewed as if the Board Members were going back in person, which most likely will be occurring soon. Board Members that are coming from far away, might view the extra half hour as an advantage. WRCOG uses the same chambers as RCA, so once the meeting is moved to in-person it would cause delays if RCA went long.

Board Member Jefferies noted that to be more concise with its' meetings, perhaps RCA should become more efficient in running the meeting. Items that don't require action should be taken off the agenda, so they don't jeopardize the ability to have discussion on closed session items since members are jumping off. This issue is self-inflicted, the RCA is causing the meetings to go long by taking items that don't require votes. Agenda management issues should be reviewed before the RCA loses members by changing the meeting time.

Board Member Sobek proposed that the meeting start time be monitored and brought back later, if necessary. This could be reviewed at the end of the year, that way when Board

Members are making a commitment, they know what time the meeting will be instead of changing the meeting start time in the middle of the year.

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

Deny staff recommendation and keep the current meeting calendar with the 12:30 p.m. start time.

10. PRESENTATION – SPECIES OF THE MONTH

Leslie Levy, Senior Management Analyst Management and Monitoring, provided a presentation on the species of the month, the White-tailed Kite.

11. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Board Member Sobek, who is also a member of the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, shared that the Stephen's kangaroo rat was recently down listed and wanted to know if that would affect the RCA in any way. Anne Mayer, Executive Director, noted that from RCA's perspective the down listing of the Stephen's kangaroo rat is a good thing. It is a demonstration that conservation and preservation of habitat works in helping to protect species. This is important evidence that conservation works and does not have any impact on what the RCA is doing with the MSHCP. Board Member Sobek asked that the press release on the down listing be shared with the other jurisdictions as this is good news for all Riverside County.

Ms. Mayer added that as shown in the Annual Report there is a lot of land that is currently under the management of RCA and there are a lot of good things happening out in the field. Many Board Members have suggested that the best way to become familiar with the lands that RCA owns and manages is to be able to go out in the fields and look at them. Next month, staff will have more details on the planning of some spring tours that will be accessible to all so that Board Members can go out and look at RCA properties.

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 1:28 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, April 4, 2022.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Manager/
Clerk of the Board