

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Wednesday, August 17, 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: 826 6538 8746, in accordance with AB 361 due to state or local officials recommending measures to promote social distancing.

2. ROLL CALL

Members/Alternates Present

Kevin Jeffries
Jeff Hewitt
Natasha Johnson
Jonathan Ingram*
Kevin Bash*
Crystal Ruiz

Members Absent

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chair Johnson.

At this time, Board Member Bash joined the meeting.

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 (Hewitt/Ruiz) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. AB 361 DETERMINATION

- 1) Reaffirm the findings in 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”*. The findings are as follows:
 - a. The Governor proclaimed a State of Emergency on March 4, 2020, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to exist today; and
 - b. State or local officials have recommended measures to promote social distancing.

6B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MAY 18, 2022

6C. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORTS FOR APRIL, MAY, AND JUNE 2022

- 1) Receive and file the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) Fee Collection Reports for April, May, and June 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6D. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

- 1) Receive and file the acquisitions status report as of June 30, 2022; 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) monthly status report as of July 31, 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6F. QUARTERLY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT METRICS REPORT, APRIL-JUNE 2022

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

6G. SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY REPORT

- 1) Receive and file the Single Signature Authority report for the fourth quarter ended June 30, 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

6H. ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 2022-007 RELATED TO DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY TO SIGN INSTRUMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ABSENCE

- 1) Approve the delegation of authority to sign instruments on behalf of the Executive Director in the Executive Director's absence;
- 2) Adopt Resolution No. 2022-007, "*Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Delegating Authority to Sign Instruments on Behalf of the Executive Director in the Executive Director's Absence*"; and
- 3) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

At this time, Board Member Ingram joined the meeting.

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Tyler Madary, Legislative Affairs Manager, provided an update on state and federal legislative affairs. Governor Newsom and legislative leaders agreed to a record \$300 billion budget before the start of the new fiscal year. Of the enacted budget, thus far, approximately \$400 million has been allocated to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) from which RCA will be able to compete for project funding. As with previous budget cycles, legislators continue to negotiate outstanding budget details past the June 15th deadline, to be incorporated into budget trailer bills that implement the topline spending programs per agency.

One of these outstanding items is the Climate and Energy Package. While staff continues to monitor this closely ahead of the bill deadline at the end of the month, RCA staff has reasons for optimism that the advocacy may pay off. The Climate and Energy Package could include even more funds for WCB, and there may be a carve out in funding to the Department of Fish and Wildlife for Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCP) land acquisition.

Senator Feinstein has unveiled S. 4669, the Western Riverside National Wildlife Refuge Act. This bill, co-sponsored by Senator Padilla, would set an acquisition boundary in which a new Wildlife Refuge may be created in Western Riverside County. The bill would designate it as an Urban Wildlife Refuge, which would allow for U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) to engage communities to increase access to nature, enhance recreation opportunities, and provide greater research opportunities. This follows a year and a half of direct engagement between RCA staff, RCA legislative advocates, the offices of Senator Feinstein and Representative Calvert, national environmental stakeholders, and USFWS. RCA staff and legislative advocates have worked tirelessly to encourage progress of legislation, facilitate discussion with stakeholders, and ensure that the structure of the legislation would support the continued implementation of the MSHCP.

To this point, S. 4669 includes language that calls for the USFWS to prioritize acquisition within criteria cells so the federal government may expedite the fulfillment of their commitment to

acquire 28,000 acres of Additional Reserve Land (ARL) in the MSHCP. This benefit is central to RCA's effort to advocate for the establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge in Western Riverside County. S. 4669 builds on Representative Calvert's tireless work to establish a wildlife refuge through his bill H.R. 972 and improves the chances of establishing a wildlife refuge in Western Riverside County by creating a legislative vehicle in the Senate. As with most bicameral legislative efforts, the language is not identical and there is an open process to reconcile differences. As conversations continue, RCA staff looks forward to the house and senate coming together with stakeholders to settle on the ultimate legislative vehicle that will establish a wildlife refuge and allow the federal government to meet its' commitment to the MSHCP.

H.R. 972 by Representative Calvert would set a process to establish a refuge foundry anywhere within the MSHCP. S. 4669 would establish a similar process but narrow the geographic scope by setting an acquisition boundary in which a new wildlife refuge may be established. Mr. Madary shared a slide showing the acquisition boundary that Senator Feinstein has proposed in S. 4669.

Stakeholders continue to express support for the establishment of a wildlife refuge. Just this morning, the Hispanic Access Foundation and Defenders of Wildlife ran an ad on page 3 of the LA Times, thanking Senator Padilla, Senator Feinstein, and the delegation for their efforts toward a wildlife refuge.

Staff recommends the RCA adopt a support position for S. 4669 by Senator Feinstein, as the Board did for H.R. 972 by Representative Calvert on April 5, 2021. Supporting this legislation is in alignment with the adopted 2022 State and Federal Legislative Platform, particularly in two provisions: to support the efforts by state and federal governments to meet the lands conservation requirements as initially intended by the MSHCP, and to support establishment of the Western Riverside County National Wildlife Refuge to expand partnership with USFWS and thereby provide for public recreational access. Staff will continue to closely monitor the establishment of a wildlife refuge in western Riverside County, and keep the Board apprised of opportunities to advocate and engage.

Board Member Ingram wanted to know if this bill would have public quasi property, or property from a city or municipality that could be taken into federal conservation. Mr. Madary noted that he would check on this, but the understanding is that governments would be able to donate land for consideration to USFWS.

Lisa Mobley, Administrative Services Director/Clerk of the Board, noted that written correspondence was received from Dan Silver.

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

- 1) Receive and file an update on state and federal legislative affairs;**
- 2) Adopt the following bill positions:**
 - a. S. 4669 (Feinstein) – Support; and**
- 3) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.**

8. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS

Board Member Jeffries noted that he had just learned of A.B. 1717, which is on the third reading in the Senate. This bill would impact all fuel abatement conservation at the fire line areas, where vegetation gets thinned out. Any agency that does this is now going to have to comply with the public works project requirements as well as prevailing wage requirements. According to the Riverside County Fire Chief, this would likely double the cost of all fuel abatement efforts going forward.

Board Member Bash wanted to know if that would include prisoner crews that go out from the California Rehabilitation Center.

Board Member Jeffries was not sure if they would be affected as well, but there has been a push to disband inmate firefighting crews in the state. This bill is being pushed by the International Operating Engineers Union. Non-profits would be exempt from this requirement.

Board Member Ingram confirmed that was correct, if a government agency contracts out to a non-profit, they are exempt from the requirement. This bill becomes extraordinarily punitive to HCPs with respect to the overwhelming fuel loads.

Chair Johnson asked that staff bring back an impact analysis to the Board for consideration specific to this bill.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, stated that RCA was invited to attend a conservation roundtable with California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot on August 1st. The Secretary was joined by California State Parks Director Quintero, as well as members of the governor's office. This was exciting opportunity as they came to town to host a roundtable to talk about the Governors' 30x30 plan to get additional lands into conservation by 2030. RCA was able to share the proactive things being done in Riverside County. There were around 25 attendees, some from governmental agencies, including Riverside County Parks, City of Riverside, and a number on non-profits who handle conservancy issues.

At the end of the roundtable, RCA was able to share just what the MSHCP is and how it was established. From the perspective of RCA, Riverside County is poised to be able to achieve the goals that have been set, with the infrastructure already being in place from an organizational standpoint. RCA made it clear that if there was a need to spend money on conservation in the state, Riverside County was the place to do so. The representative from USFWS stated that Riverside County was the gold standard.

RCA was able to get contact information for all the non-profits in attendance and will use that information when the next round of Stakeholders Committee recruitment opens. The fine work that the RCA has been doing for many years is finally getting some attention.

An item was brought forward several months ago on the Lake Elsinore Back Basin, and RCA has been working closely with the City of Lake Elsinore staff. They are working to propose a solution to the long-standing issue related to the need to conserve 770 acres in the Back Basin near Lake Elsinore. RCA and Lake Elsinore staff have been meeting weekly since February to try and craft a proposal. This complex issue has gone unsolved since the early 2000's as it is tough, but staff is on a path to work out something. When the best path is identified, it will be brought back to the Board.

Chair Johnson announced that the RCA would be going back to in-person meetings starting in October, calendars should be updated as such.

Chair Johnson also asked that input be sent to staff for the upcoming Stakeholders Committee. If there is anything the Board would like the Stakeholders to review or discuss, it should be sent to staff so they can prepare accordingly.

9. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Wednesday, September 21, 2022.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Manager/
Clerk of the Board