

# **WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Wednesday, October 19, 2022**

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting of the Executive Committee was called to order by Chair Natasha Johnson at 12:05 p.m., in the March Field Conference Room at the County of Riverside Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon Street, Third Floor, Riverside, California, 92501.

### **2. ROLL CALL**

#### **Members/Alternates Present**

Natasha Johnson  
Jonathan Ingram  
Kevin Bash  
Patricia Lock-Dawson\*  
Crystal Ruiz

#### **Members Absent**

Kevin Jeffries  
Jeff Hewitt

\*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).***

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

#### **6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – SEPTEMBER 21, 2022**

**6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR AUGUST 2022**

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

**6C. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT**

- 1) Receive and file the acquisition status report as of August 31, 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

**6D. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT**

- 1) Receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) monthly status report as of September 30, 2022; and
- 2) Forward to the Board of Directors for final action.

**6E. SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY REPORT**

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

At this time, Board Member Lock Dawson arrived.

**7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Tyler Madary, Legislative Affairs Manager, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. The state is facing a revenue shortfall, and the trend is continuing which is currently at a \$4.8 billion revenue shortfall. Thought there are one-time increases in investments in the state budget for the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) for Habitat Conservation Programs (HCPs) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCP) for land acquisition.

The process for the Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations is on-hold until after the election. The President signed a continuing resolution that is keeping the government funded through December 16<sup>th</sup>, giving Congress time to finish negotiations. RCA has been very involved with the National Coalition for advocacy to Congress as part of the appropriations process, advocating for increased funding for Section 6 grants and process improvements. Both the House and Senate Appropriations Bill have not been finalized, but they both have language in them that acknowledges the discussions that have been on-going with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regarding the Section 6 grants. The Senate bill currently includes a requirement for the USFWS to report within 90 days of its enactment suggestions of reform changes.

Next week, Anne Mayer and Aaron Hake will be flying to D.C. for some meetings, including a meeting with Martha Williams, USFWS Director.

RCA was notified today that the Section 6 Grant request was successful and have been awarded \$6.7 million between the federal funding and the state match.

Board Member Ingram wanted to know if RCA staff would also be meeting with Senator Feinstein or Representative Calvert while they were in D.C. Mr. Madary noted that there would be a meeting with Senator Feinstein's staff. RCA staff is in constant communication with Representative Calvert's office, but they will not be meeting with them in D.C.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, noted that part of the grant request was based on what RCA could demonstrate they were able to buy. A list of willing sellers was submitted with the grant request along with the dollar amount. This grant was based off what RCA knew they could spend within the time frame.

Chair Johnson thought this may have been the largest grant received to date for RCA. Aaron Hake, Deputy Executive Director, noted that staff would investigate that to confirm.

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

## **8. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN 2021 ANNUAL REPORT**

Tricia Campbell, Regional Conservation Deputy Director, provided a presentation on the RCA Annual Report for 2021. As part of RCA's responsibilities to the MSHCP an annual report is prepared. The annual report provides a formal opportunity to assess the progress of the Plan and to address potential problems. This 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 2021, a total of 1,321 acres was acquired (96 acres with state funding, 101 acres with federal funding, and 1,129 acres through local funding and processes). From inception of the MSHCP thru 2021, 64,123 acres of Additional Reserve Lands have been acquired. RCA's Mustang Lane property, acquired in August of 2021, located just south of State Highway 79 and east of Highway 371 in the Aguanga region of Riverside County is the first property under RCA ownership that may support Arroyo Toad and has been confirmed to support Arroyo Chub, both species are very rare to the Plan Area.

The additional reserve assembly goals for local are 97,000 acres, and state and federal sources are 56,000 acres combined. Local acquisitions are at 44% of the 97,000-acre goal. If the 56,000-acre goal for the state and feds is split equally, then thru 2021, the state is at 45% of their goal while the feds are at 33% of their goal. Total acquisition thru 2021 is at 64,123 acres which is equal to 42% of the 153,000-acre goal.

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 and the project is shovel ready and removal of habitat can occur. In 2021, 5,428 acres were approved for loss within the MSHCP Plan Area. Approximately 4,610 acres of this was for development outside of Criteria Cells, where additional reserve assembly does not occur. Approximately 818 acres 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 the MSHCP show that 81% of the development is occurring outside of the criteria cells with 19% occurring within the cells.

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 annually and runs it through the rough step formula.

The analysis shows that at the end of 2021, RCA is out of rough step in three units. As provided in the staff report, Rough Step Units 3, 7, and 8 remain out of balance. Through focused acquisition efforts, Rough Step Unit 5 is now in balance and Rough Step Unit 3 is only marginally out of balance by 0.03 acre. RCA is currently pursuing land acquisitions to rectify the issues in Rough Step Units 7 and 8, as soon as feasible.

A considerable portion of land management activities is devoted to gate/fence installation/repairs, unauthorized activities including OHV riders, illegal dumping, homeless encampments, target shooting, unauthorized trail creation by mountain bikers and OHV riders, and the interdiction of illegal marijuana grows on RCA lands. In 2021, RCA contacted 121 OHV riders or groups of riders. An estimated 5.5 tons of trash was removed from RCA lands; a decrease from the 14.9 tons of refuse removed in 2020.

Part of the passive recreation allowed on RCA lands is equestrian use. The Parks staff worked with equestrian riders of the Rancho California Horseman's Association on OHV access controls/horse-step over designs to better keep OHV riders out but allow horse riders in. Parks staff also accommodated the Inland Empire California Conservation Corps women's crew who needed an area for chainsaw training. There has been routine coordination with California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the County Sheriff on illegal cannabis grows on RCA properties. Weed abatement as well as coordination with local fire department and Cal Fire staff has also occurred.

RCA continues to perform the stinknet exotic plant removal study at the Hemet Vernal Pool complex. Five pairs of burrowing owls were welcomed to the El Sol property. And in 2021, a native plant grow operation began to help with restoration/rehabilitation efforts.

The RCA contracts the Santa Ana Watershed Association (SAWA) to perform the monitoring program. With a staff of fifteen, the program monitors 146 species throughout the MSHCP reserve system that includes both Public Quasi-Public (PQP) and Additional Reserve Lands (ARL)

lands. In 2021, the activities included: focused monitoring for the Burrowing Owl, California Spotted Owl, California Gnatcatcher, Purple Martin, and Tricolored Blackbird; Quino checkerspot butterfly and Delhi Sands Flower-loving Fly surveys were conducted; and rare plant surveys were conducted that included the Engelman oak tree recruitment analysis at the Santa Rosa Plateau. Although not found during a focused survey, the first-time detection of Parish's Brittle scale in the MSHCP Plan Area also occurred in 2021 where MSHCP parks staff found it and it was confirmed by specialists at the UC Riverside herbarium and SAWA botanists.

The monitoring program also performs monitoring of the Clinton Keith Road overcrossing that was built in support of the Clinton Keith Road Realignment project. Completion of the overcrossing was in fall 2018. The year 2021 marked the third year of monitoring that is to go for a total of five years. This monitoring is supported by the Riverside County Transportation Department. 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. Several species of butterflies have been detected but no Quino Checkerspot yet. The MSHCP covered species most regularly detected were coyote, bobcat, and black-tailed jackrabbit.

Chair Johnson asked about the illegal dumping that went from 14.9 tons of trash to 5.5 tons, and what contributed to the decrease. Ms. Campbell stated that she had inquired about the big change, but the reason is not known.

Board Member Ingram wanted to know if the RCA was monitoring to make sure the Team Resource Conservation District (RCD) was in compliance on the PQP lands, and if they weren't, if it would impact RCA's permit. Ms. Campbell noted that even with all those properties there is not a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Team RCD. RCA does have MOUs with Riverside/Corona Resource Conservation District and the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District. All the lands that were put into conservation have even higher requirements than the MSHCP, which is why only certain lands that they hold that fit the needs of the MOU. Since the requirements are so much higher, RCA has yet to have a problem, but if there was an issue there would need to be a conversation about it.

Board Member Bash wanted to know where the illegal marijuana was being grown, as going on tours they are typically highly visible. Ms. Campbell stated that there are expansive lands with zero ability to access. What usually happens is people come in through another landowner and are granted access RCA does not have. There does not have to be water access as the RCA has found growth with miles of piping used, including leading back to the house providing the water. There are a couple of growths that RCA cannot get to but used Google Earth to identify. As part of the vegetation monitoring, RCA is looking at using drones in the future for better access.

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

## 9. MEETING FORMAT OPTIONS

Chair Johnson noted that this item was to talk about our meetings going forward and the suggestions that have been brought forward.

Lisa Mobley, Administrative Services Director/Clerk of the Board, stated this this item was placed on the agenda to discuss meeting format options. This legislative session only one bill was signed by the Governor, AB 2449, which does not provide much flexibility for hybrid meeting options.

However, pre-pandemic Brown Act rules still allow teleconferencing as long as certain criteria are met. Staff has received requests to provide teleconference locations at the County Supervisor's French Valley office. It is important to note that AB 361 rules are still currently in place, though the Governors recent announcement that the state of emergency will come to an end in February 2023, will mean at that time the findings in the current resolution will no longer be valid.

This item is for the committee to discuss and advise staff on the meeting format moving forward.

At RCTC's last Commission meeting, it was decided that moving forward, all committee meetings would be fully Zoom and the full Commission meetings would be fully in-person.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, added that when the AB 361 authority is no longer valid, RCTC committees will revisit going to satellite locations – the CAC Board Room, the French Valley office, and one in Coachella Valley.

Chair Johnson stated that it was nice to meet in-person, and there was value in meeting in-person. RCA could follow suit with what RCTC has done or consider a hybrid option with the understanding it will be ending in February; it just depends on what makes the most sense for RCA.

Board Member Ingram thought RCA should follow suit with what RCTC was doing, as staff know what they are doing. Executive Committee meetings could easily be done via Zoom, and the Board meetings should be in person.

Chair Johnson confirmed that the intent was to have the Executive Committee virtually and the Board meeting in-person.

Board Member Bash agreed that the bigger body meeting should be in-person.

Steve DeBaun, legal counsel, clarified that this would need to be revisited in February when the state of emergency ends.

**M/S/C (Ruiz/Ingram) to have the full Board meetings in person and hold the Executive Committee via Zoom under AB 361.**

## **10. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS**

Chair Johnson welcomed Patricia Lock Dawson to the Executive Committee.

Board Member Lock Dawson stated that she was part of setting up the MSHCP back in 2000-2003. She is a Wildlife Biologist by training and a former National Park Ranger.

Board Member Bash noted that the City of Norco would be honoring Aaron Hake tonight.

Board Member Ingram has had conversations with the police and fire departments regarding the Flock system they use that is expanding online and has areas covered that are parallel to open space which could possibly be included. This something that should be discussed with RCA staff to see how it can be implemented.

Board Member Ingram stated that there is map that shows the coverage areas of the Flock system, which he will forward to staff to see where the cameras may cover RCA lands.

Anne Mayer, Executive Director, announced that in the next couple of weeks, RCA will be adding two new members to the Regional Conservation Department. With Aaron's promotion to the Deputy Executive Director, there was a Regional Conservation Director position open. Tricia Campbell was promoted to Deputy Director of Regional Conservation, leaving a Regional Conservation Management and Monitoring Manager position open.

The Regional Conservation Management and Monitoring Manager position will be filled by Zackry West. Zackry comes to RCA with 18 years of experience in this field, with a bachelor's in environmental studies, working in both the public and private sector and 15 years with the MSHCP.

The Regional Conservation Director position is being filled by Dr. Aaron Gabbe. Dr. Gabbe comes to RCA with a PhD in environmental studies from UC Santa Cruz, and a BS in wildlife psychology. While Dr. Gabbe has not served in a public agency, he has worked in the private sector assisting in the establishment of other Habitat Conservation Programs (HCPs) and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCP).

RCA has gotten feedback from partners around the state complementing the new hires, which is reassuring and rewarding.

Aaron Hake, Deputy Executive Director, noted that tomorrow Congressman Calvert is having a roundtable at Corona City Hall where he is hosting Congressman Bruce Westerman, Arkansas, a ranking member of the House Natural Resources Committee, who has the potential to become the chairman, pending the outcome of the election. Congressman Calvert is bringing Congressman Westerman here to discuss the permit streamlining process and what can be done

to accelerate project approvals. The invitation to attend was extended to RCTC leadership as well as to Chair Johnson. This is going to be a great opportunity to showcase what the MSHCP does.

Chair Johnson added that staff will be giving her talking points to make sure to highlight the great things the RCA is accomplishing. The Stakeholders Committee will be right after this meeting, and hopefully they will be able to come up with some things that the RCA can start focusing on for next year.

## 11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:56 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Wednesday, November 16, 2022**.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Lisa Mobley  
Administrative Services Manager/  
Clerk of the Board