

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, September 9, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors Meeting was called to order by Chair Kevin Bash at 12:31 p.m., in the Board Room at the County of Riverside Administrative Center, 4080 Lemon Street, First Floor, Riverside, California, 92501.

2. ROLL CALL

Board of Directors/Alternates Present

Kevin Jeffries*
Karen Spiegel
Chuck Washington
Yxstian Gutierrez*
Colleen Wallace
Julio Martinez
Jeff Cervantez
Mark Terry
Tony Daddario
Jocelyn Yow

Carole Kendrick
Natasha Johnson
Lesa Sobek
Ron Holliday
Kevin Bash
David Starr Rabb
Crystal Ruiz
James Stewart
Joseph Morabito

Board of Directors Absent

V. Manuel Perez
Leslie Altamirano
Ulises Cabrera
Patricia Lock Dawson

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Washington.

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

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JULY 1, 2024

6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR MAY 2024

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 May 2024.

6C. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR JUNE 2024

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 June 2024.

6D. JOINT PROJECT REVIEW STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Joint Project Review (JPR) monthly status report as of July 31, 2024.

6E. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of June 30, 2024.

6F. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR MAY 2024

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended May 31, 2024.

6G. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR JUNE 2024

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended June 30, 2024.

6H. CONSULTANT REPORTS – FISCAL YEAR 2024 FOURTH QUARTER

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the consultant reports for Fiscal Year 2024 Fourth Quarter.

6I. QUARTERLY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT METRICS REPORT, APRIL - JUNE 2024

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

6J. SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY REPORT

This item is for the Board to receive and file the Single Signature Authority report for the fourth quarter ended June 30, 2024.

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Andrew Sall, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. RCA staff recommends the Board take a support position for Proposition 4, known as the Parks, Environment, Energy, and Water Bond Measure which will appear on the November 5th ballot. Proposition 4 authorizes the state to issue \$10 billion in bonds for related programs and projects, including \$870 million for the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). With these funds, WCB could fund land acquisition in support of habitat conservation, funds that RCA would be eligible to compete for.

The Board may recall staff's efforts over recent years to increase state funding to advance the assembly goals of the MSHCP, including unsuccessful efforts to advance a similar bond in 2021/2022, as well as new dedicated funding paths in 2022/2023. However, calls for a climate and natural resources bond continued to heat up in 2023, these efforts took shape in Senate Bill (SB) 867 by Ben Allen and Assembly Bill (AB) 1567 by Eduardo Garcia which the RCA Board supported in May 2023. RCA and partners across the state advocated in support of both bills, however, they were held in 2023 to give the Governor and Legislature additional time to negotiate final bond language.

As negotiations continued, and in the face of the State's projected budget deficit, Governor Newsom stated his support for limiting the number of bonds and their total cost on the November 2024 ballot. These negotiations and factors resulted in the Legislature amending SB 867 and the final bond measure vehicle, limiting the bond to \$10 billion and including \$870 million for WCB, allowing entities, such as the RCA, access to those funds that would otherwise not be made available. For these reasons, staff recommends the Board support Proposition 4. This position is consistent with prior support for SB 867 and AB 1567 and the Board's 2024 State and Federal Legislative Platform:

Regional Control

- Support efforts to preserve, stabilize, leverage, and increase state and federal funding for implementation of the MSHCP.

Alignment of Responsibilities

- Support state and federal policies and increased funding that enable them to meet their commitment to conserve 56,000 acres, or one-third of Additional Reserve Lands (ARL), as initially intended by the MSHCP.

Land Acquisition, Management, and Species Monitoring

- Support policies, programs, and increased funding that protect, expand, or streamline RCA's ability to acquire and manage reserve lands, monitor habitat loss, and review applications for infrastructure or development projects.

At this time, Board Member Jeffries arrived

M/S/C (Wallace/Ruiz) to accept staff's recommendation was cancelled.

Board Member Holliday stated that while the bond does provide a small piece that could potentially come to RCA, most of the spending is ill-advised looking at the financials of where this money is allocated to go. The chances are slim that RCA will see any of this money, based on the State's history of other bonds and where the money has gone. It does not represent RCA well to take a position on this, and an alternate motion was presented to remain neutral on the proposition and let voters decide.

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

No: Wallace, Martinez, Daddario, Yow, Bash, Starr Rabb

- 1) Receive and file an update on state and federal legislative affairs; and**
- 2) Adopt the following bill positions:**
 - a. Proposition 4 – ~~Support~~–Remain Neutral**

8. AUTHORIZATION TO ACQUIRE TAX-DEFAULTED PROPERTIES FROM THE RIVERSIDE COUNTY TREASURER-TAX COLLECTOR AND ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION NO. 2024-008 OBJECTING TO THE PUBLIC SALE

Angela Ferreira, Senior Management Analyst, Right of Way, provided a presentation to Authorize the Acquisition of Tax-Defaulted Property and Adopt Resolution No. 2024-008. On April 1, 2024, staff brought before the Board Resolution No. 2024-002, which objected to the public tax sale of 2 parcels and approved the purchase of the parcels from the Riverside County Tax Collector. Since then, one parcel has been redeemed by the owner and the County has provided the full redemption value of \$3,762, for the remaining parcel. The County has notified staff that since one parcel has been redeemed and the full redemption value of the other has been provided, a new resolution is needed. To comply with the County's request, RCA staff plans to rescind the previously approved resolution and request the Board to adopt a new resolution to move forward with the process.

The property that is available is owned by Earl Jones and the Jones Family B Trust, is approximately 5 acres in size. It is located near Pyrite Street in the City of Jurupa Valley, within Criteria Cell 9, and will contribute to Rough Step Unit 1. The sale price is approximately \$3,762, plus any related fees. In the past year, RCA has successfully acquired 21 parcels through this process, which resulted in 241 acres added to the reserve.

Adopting Resolution No. 2024-008 and formally objecting to the public sale of the property, the RCA is initiating the Chapter 8 Tax Sale Process, which pulls the parcel from the public sale list and allows for a public agency to purchase the property. It is important to note that the property owners can still redeem the property, by bringing their tax status back to current.

The County will notify RCA any time in the next year if the owner should redeem the property. For a property to fall under the County's tax sale process, the tax payments need to be in arrears for a minimum of 5 years. The County attempts to contact the property owners through mail, public notices, and recordation of tax default on the property.

At this time, Board Member Gutierrez arrived.

Board Member Spiegel wanted to confirm that the property owner has a year to redeem their property and whether they would have to pay the same as the RCA.

Angela Ferreira noted that the property owner would have until the State inks the agreement for the property to come to RCA, they can redeem at any time. The redemption amount would be the same as the amount given to RCA.

Board Member Washington wanted clarification on the explanation of the cost of the property.

Angela Ferreira stated that the \$3,762 was the taxes that were owed along with any clerical fees. If there are any additional publication fees, they would be added to the total.

At this time, Board Member Daddario left the meeting.

M/S/C (Spiegel/Wallace) to:

- 1) Authorize the acquisition of tax-defaulted properties from the Riverside County Treasurer-Tax Collector for open space for wildlife and plant life conservation in an amount not to exceed \$3,761.35; and**
- 2) Rescind Resolution No. 2024-002 and Adopt Resolution No. 2024-008, "*Resolution of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Objecting to the Public Sale and Approving the Purchase of Tax-Defaulted Property from the Riverside County Treasurer-Tax Collector*".**

9. PRESENTATION – WILDFIRE UPDATE

Zack West, Manager of Reserve Management and Monitoring, provided a presentation on the 2024 Fire Update affecting RCA-owned lands and high-profile fires during this fire season.

The Round Fire, located in the Badlands, burned 350 acres, including roughly 250 acres of RCA-owned lands, as well as 75 acres of other MSHCP conserved lands. Impacted RCA-owned land consists of the recently acquired Wolfskill property, which is occupied by Coastal California Gnatcatcher. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

The Eagle Fire, southeast of Corona, burned 1,700 acres, including 40 acres of RCA-owned lands and 1,200 acres of other MSHCP conserved lands. Affected conserved lands include the Olsen Canyon property, which supports Stephens' Kangaroo Rat, Coastal California Gnatcatcher, and many other MSHCP covered species. The cause of this fire also remains under investigation.

The Nixon Fire near Anza burned 4,900 acres, including 1,400 acres of RCA-owned lands and 2,600 acres of other MSHCP conserved lands. Impacted RCA-owned land included the Winchester 700 Reed Valley property. These properties contained high quality occupied Quino Checkerspot Butterfly habitat and supported Stephens' Kangaroo Rat and MSHCP covered plant species. This fire is reported by Cal Fire to be human caused.

At this time, Board Member Daddario returned to the meeting.

The Alamos Fire in Murrieta burned 70 acres of occupied Coastal California Gnatcatcher and Western Spadefoot Toad habitat, including roughly 10 acres of RCA-owned lands and 60 acres of other MSHCP conserved lands. Impacted RCA-owned lands included the Calvary Chapel property. The cause remains under investigation.

Although the Hawarden Fire, which occurred here in Riverside, did not affect RCA-owned lands, this fire was consequential because several homes were lost. Roughly 1 acre of non-RCA-owned MSHCP conserved land occupied by Least Bell's Vireo was affected. Other affected lands were occupied by Coastal California Gnatcatcher and Stephens' Kangaroo Rat. This fire is reported to have been caused by illegal fireworks.

The Record Fire, located near San Jacinto, burned 500 acres, including roughly 40 acres of RCA-owned lands and 200 acres of other MSHCP conserved lands. Impacted RCA-owned land included the Soboba Donation property, which is occupied by Least Bell's Vireo and Coastal California Gnatcatcher and supports several MSHCP covered species. This fire is reported by Cal Fire to be human caused.

Since 2019, the RCA and MSHCP Parks staff have identified RCA lands adjacent to structures and roads and have been in coordination with Cal Fire. Fuels management methods currently employed include tractor mowing and string trimming. MSHCP Parks staff respond to weed abatement notices sent from County and local fire authorities and have established a good working relationship with these agencies. Fuels management zones follow County and local ordinance and is typical 100 feet for structures and between 30 to 100 feet for roads, unless otherwise specified by the local fire authority.

During active fire incidents, MSHCP Parks staff responds to RCA properties to assist Responder Agencies. Activities carried out include reporting to Incident Command daily, actively coordinating access routes across RCA lands with Cal Fire and other Responder Agencies, opening gates to provide access, and coordinating with Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Advisors on species occurrence locations, Resource Avoidance Areas, and recovery practices.

MSHCP Parks Staff has performed an assessment of the affected properties. The affected RCA lands associated with these, and other fires, support several rare species and their continued presence is needed to meet the MSHCP species objectives. The affected species include Quino Checkerspot Butterfly, Least Bell's Vireo, Coastal California Gnatcatcher, Stephens' Kangaroo Rat, Western Spadefoot Toad, Peninsular Spineflower, and Payson's Jewelflower. RCA will be

reaching out to burn and restoration ecologists to best determine next steps and to identify what grant opportunities may support the rehabilitation that is needed. It will be important to support the repopulation of native plants in the burn areas so that non-native plant species do not invade. RCA has had success with these practices, including the recent restoration of Quino Checkerspot Butterfly habitat in the years following the 2022 Fairview Fire. This involved collaboration with University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources ecologists, who specialize in fire recovery of native ecosystems following fire impacts. The restoration was achieved through control of invasive plant species and seeding of Quino host plant species. Two years on, the affected habitat is now functioning at a similar level as before the fire occurred.

In July, the RCA released a Request for Proposal for a qualified consultant to develop a Master Wildfire Management Plan. Proposals are currently under review and RCA staff will make a recommendation for selection of a consultant at the October Executive Committee meeting and bring the selection to the RCA Board for approval at the November RCA Board meeting. This Master Wildfire Management Plan will recommend methods of wildfire management including wildfire prevention, fuels management, and activities to support Responder Agencies during wildfire suppression on RCA-owned and other conserved lands. The wildfire management methods will prioritize human safety and the protection of MSHCP covered species and their associated habitats. The RCA Fire Response and Suppression Policy will be reviewed and recommendations for updates will be included as a part of this effort. The Master Wildfire Management Plan will serve to inform future Wildfire Management Plans that will be developed specific to the Habitat Management Unit levels.

Board Member Yow wondered how long the fire investigations take, as there are two fires that occurred in July that are still under investigation, and if there is more information on the two that were human caused.

Zack West stated that the investigations greatly depend on the fire in question, some never have a conclusion as to what started the fire. They can sometimes conclude that there were some human related items that were found, but not exactly what started the fire. In terms of the two that were found to be human caused, they have not indicated what that cause was.

Board Member Holliday mentioned that after the Alamos Fire there were several residents that reached out wanted to clear brush from RCA land that was close to their homes. A resource that those property owners could contact would be helpful so they can reach out to RCA staff to have their concerns addressed.

Zack West noted that RCA has a general email box on the RCA website, where those questions can be sent. The emails are received by the Public Affairs group who forwards them to the appropriate people.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, added that the email address is info@wrcrca.org. The link is also on the website. While this is a generic email, it does go to a staff member who is responsible for triaging the emails and making sure they are addressed.

Board Member Jeffries stated that a conservation authority directing the creation of a fire suppression plan, where the agency is going to tell the firefighters how to fight the fire, usually goes badly. It typically means waiting for the fire to finish consuming the protected lands and then when it leaves those lands it can be put out. RCA should not be proposing anything close to that.

Zack West stated that the Master Wildfire Management Plan will look at what activities the RCA can do to support responder agencies while they are on-site, not directing the firefighters or responder agencies on what they should do. RCA is looking for information on how to support the process.

Aaron Hake wanted Zack West to clarify the scope of the plan, and whether Cal Fire and local fire authorities were included in the development of the plan. The plan should go beyond consultation and include collaboration.

Zack West confirmed that was correct. One of the items in the scope is the consultant selected will do interviews with Cal Fire and other local fire authorities, MSHCP parks, and the wildlife agencies.

Board Member Johnson asked that the total acreage of RCA lands that were affected by all these fires and the list of species that were impacted be emailed to the Board.

Chair Bash inquired where these burn areas were tiered by Cal Fire.

Zack West stated that part of the Wildfire Master Plan will also be to do complete updated modeling. There has been modeling that was previously done that shows the tiered danger or intensity areas, but included in the scope is an update of that modeling. The modeling is used to determine what the fuel load is and the average climate for the year to determine how much combustible material there is and how the climate would interact with it.

10. PRESENTATION – RESERVE OF THE MONTH

Tricia Campbell, Regional Conservation Deputy Director, provided a presentation on the Boonklun Reserve and how it supports MSHCP covered species. The 80-acre Boonklun Reserve was acquired in May of 2023 and conserves high quality movement and live-in habitat for MSHCP wildlife species in the very south-central portion of the plan area. Habitat types include coastal sage scrub, chaparral, grassland, and riparian. The acquisition cost of the property was \$265,000 funded by RCA Local Development Mitigation Fees.

The Boonklun Reserve facilitates species movement between habitat cores, connecting 8,600 acres of protected habitat in the Agua Tibia Wilderness to the south and west with the Wilson Valley and Aguanga areas to the north and east. Temecula Creek and Long Canyon Creek flow seasonally through the property, enhancing the reserve's ecological richness and providing a movement corridor for aquatic and terrestrial species.

Several MSHCP Covered Species have been documented on the property, including the Arroyo Toad, Western Pond Turtle, Mountain Lion, Yellow Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Southern California Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Coyote. The Boonklun Reserve provides live-in and breeding habitat for each of these species. The occurrences of Arroyo Toad and Western Pond Turtle are of particular importance, as these species are rare and declining in Southern California. For the Arroyo Toad, this is the first and only RCA property that supports the species.

At this time, Board Member Jeffries left the meeting.

The Arroyo Toad is listed as endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act and is a MSHCP covered species. These medium-sized toads, measuring 2-3.5 inches in length, have plump, stocky bodies with blunt snouts and greenish-brown skin. As their name suggests, Arroyo Toads depend on sandy, cobbly washes or arroyos. Primarily nocturnal, they spend their days burrowed under the sand, emerging at night during their active season to wet their skin and feed on small insects like moths, crickets, snails and the occasional caterpillar. During the hot, dry summer months, they retreat to upland habitats like sycamore-cottonwood woodlands to estivate, a hibernation-like state where they bury themselves in moist soil or clay to prevent dehydration. They live for 4 to 5 years.

During the breeding season, Arroyo Toads produce a beautiful courtship call - a high-pitched, fast, musical trill lasting about 8-10 seconds. An audio example was shared with the Board. Breeding occurs in shallow water, with eggs laid in exposed shallow pools with stable terraces and slow-moving water. Females lay over 4,000 eggs in long strings which hatch in just 4-6 days. In 2 to 2 ½ months, tadpoles metamorphose into young toads where they stay in the damp sand until they eventually move into the upland to estivate. When temperatures become cold in winter, they go into brumation.

The Western Pond turtle is petitioned for listing as Federally Threatened or Endangered under the Endangered Species Act. It is a California Species of Special Concern and is a MSHCP covered species. The permittees will receive the same project streamlining benefits if the species is listed by the Federal Government. The MSHCP provides assurances that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will not require additional mitigation beyond what is required by the MSHCP if the permittees are properly implementing the MSHCP, Implementing Agreement, and Permits.

This species is the only native freshwater turtle in Southern California, inhabiting streams, wetlands or man-made ponds. Western Pond turtles are opportunistic eaters and enjoy a varied diet of aquatic vegetation, carrion (dead things), aquatic invertebrates like worms, snails, and small insects, tadpoles, frogs, and fish, and perhaps an occasional Arroyo Toad tadpole. Unfortunately, they are declining throughout much of their range due to habitat loss and competition or predation from invasive species such as red-eared sliders, red swamp crayfish, and bullfrogs. Red-eared sliders are ubiquitous in Southern California and can be mistaken for Western Pond turtles.

In the wild, Western Pond Turtles have a life span of up to 40 years, though there are records of turtles living up to 70 years in captivity. Once they reach 8-10 years of age, they lay 1-2 eggs in each clutch. In comparison, the invasive red-eared slider reaches maturity in about 5 years and can lay up to 20 eggs. This is an example how an invasive species can overcome their native counterparts. Females nest in upland habitats as far as 300 feet from the water.

These turtles require basking habitat to regulate their body temperature throughout the day, and they often travel over land for nesting, foraging, finding new mates, or to reach other bodies of water. They can hold their breath under water for weeks before they go into hibernation, or more correctly called brumation. Only mammals hibernate where they go into a deep slumber and don't eat or drink. Cold-blooded animals like the Western Pond turtle go into brumation where they can still drink and have low levels of activity while their metabolism slows way down during the cold months.

To meet the species objective, the species needs to be detected in 6 out of the 8 Core Areas. RCA has confirmed the species in only four areas. It is important to understand that not all the lands that are expected to support the species have been brought into the MSHCP reserve yet. Also, the survey period for this species is every three years, so it is possible to have the species in a Core Area one survey period and not during the next, but with species detected again in the future. As discussed, the presence of exotic species that outcompete or prey on the young of this species takes a serious toll on the population. Surveys for the species are time intensive with traps being placed in the waterways. Most of the time we find the invasive species but no pond turtles. Almost every year, RCA select areas to perform exotic species removals which is also very time consuming. Just this month, a young Western Pond turtle was captured in French Valley Creek. This is the first juvenile captured for many years.

While critters like toads and turtles may not be as cute as some of the other animals on RCA lands, they do play an essential role in the ecology of the area and water quality.

Board Member Spiegel wanted to know how many of the 4,000 eggs that the Arroyo Toad lays mature. Tricia Campbel stated it depended on the area, but due to invasive species, it is possible that a lot of the eggs get eaten. They can lay eggs at least once a year, but more likely several times a year.

11. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Board Member Spiegel stated that 23 years ago, one of the worst attacks on U.S. soil happened, 9/11. Everyone should take some time on Wednesday to attend one of the several observances around the County or take a moment of silence.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, stated that there was an Executive Committee meeting this morning prior to the Board meeting where they had a very substantive discussion on Crotch's Bumble Bee, which will be on the agenda for the Board soon. This is a species that is being considered for listing as a new endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act. The Executive Committee gave RCA some direction on how to approach that potential

listing for a species that is not part of the MSHCP's 146 covered species. If any jurisdictions have development or transportation projects come across this bumble bee, please let RCA know so we can facilitate the conversation with wildlife agencies and provide whatever support needed.

The Board should have received a Save the Date for October 11th, at the Hidden Valley Wildlife Preserve, for the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the MSHCP. Congressman Calvert has confirmed his attendance and will be speaking. Other state and federal dignitaries will also be invited. This will be a time to reflect on all that has been accomplished, and all the challenges ahead, having spent 2 decades working on this plan.

Today's meeting featured the best of this agency and staff that have been working hard all summer. Although RCA went dark for a month, we presented legislative advocacy, real estate experts, land management expert, biology expert, and the wide range of all the professionals here that have been working through the summer and all year to support the Board and the MSHCP. The Board will start to get notices when RCA closes on properties, during the summer RCA closed on 4 properties from all over the County. Staff is hard at working getting things done, with the big task ahead, dealing with wildfires, species in decline, and grant funding that may or may not come through.

12. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors, Chair Bash adjourned the meeting at 1:15 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, October 7, 2024.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Director/
Clerk of the Board