

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, January 5, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Board of Directors Meeting was called to order by Chair Kevin Bash at 12:30 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

Karen Spiegel
Chuck Washington
Yxstian Gutierrez
Colleen Wallace
Julio Martinez
Jeff Cervantez
Dale Welty
Tony Daddario
Mike McMinn

Bob Magee
Ulises Cabrera
Ron Holliday
Kevin Bash
David Starr Rabb
Patricia Lock Dawson
Crystal Ruiz
Joseph Morabito

Board of Directors Absent

Jose Medina
V. Manuel Perez
Connie Howard-Clark
Veronica Sanchez
Dan Temple
Jessica Alexander

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice Chair Spiegel.

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).

Board Member Washington noted that the minutes had incorrectly listed the Chair and Vice Chair election results were for 2025, instead of 2026.

**M/S/C (Wallace/Ruiz) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.
Board Member Welty did not register a vote for the Consent Calendar.**

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DECEMBER 1, 2025

6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2025

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 October 2025.

6C. 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 November 30, 2025.

6D. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of October 31, 2025.

6E. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2025

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended October 31, 2025.

6F. QUARTERLY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT METRICS REPORT, JULY – SEPTEMBER 2025

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Quarterly Public Engagement Metrics Report for July - September 2025.

6G. ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION NO. 2026-001 RELATED TO REVISED INVESTMENT POLICY

- 1) Approve the revised investment policy for the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA); and
- 2) Adopt Resolution No. 2026-001, *“Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority Adopting a Statement of Investment Policy.”*

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Andrew Sall, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. The State Legislature will reconvene today for the second year of the two-year legislative session and later this week, Governor Gavin Newsom is expected to unveil

his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026-27. In November, the state's independent Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) released a budget outlook, projecting a deficit of nearly \$18 billion. While the LAO acknowledges that state revenue is expected to grow, spending requirements and increasing costs for state programs are the primary factors for the projected deficit. Notably, the LAO projects the structural deficit to grow to \$35 billion in FY 2027-28. Staff will closely monitor the Governor's budget proposal and inform the Board of potential impacts to funding programs of interest including those related to land acquisition in support of habitat conservation.

RCA staff met with professional staff from the House Appropriations Committee – Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee in support of proposals included in the Subcommittee's FY 2026 appropriations bill to enable the increase of funding for programs that support the land acquisition goals of the MSHCP. While RCA will continue to advocate for these proposals, Congress has yet to approve the full-year appropriations funding or another Continuing Resolution to fund the government, which they must do before January 31 to avoid a shutdown. Staff will continue to monitor progress of the federal budget and keep the Board apprised of updates.

Board Member Lock Dawson wanted a reminder of the items there were in the federal budget that would support the goals of the MSHCP.

Andrew Sall stated that the RCA submitted as part of the process last year to increase funding for habitat conservation and land acquisition grant programs to \$100 million. While \$100 million is a dream, RCA is also requesting a gradual increase each year. There is currently a Senate proposal that is around \$22 million and a House proposal that is about \$18.7 million. This would be for a discretionary program that would be separate from the mandatory funding that is included every year. There is another proposal that RCA submitted this year that would change report language to direct the Federal Government to meet its land acquisition targets.

Board Member Tony Daddario shared that they would be meeting with local, state, and federal representatives soon and it would be helpful if the Board could have a one-pager that outlines RCA's requests so they could include them in the conversation. Andrew Sall stated that staff would put that together.

Board Member Martinez asked if staff were anticipating anything that would affect RCA in terms of the anticipated state funding shortfall. Andrew Sall stated that it was something that staff are monitoring, but currently, there is no information on what may be cut.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, added that staff are always anticipating that the Governor of Finance will backfill existing programs with bond funding that was approved in the last election, including Proposition 4 that was to provide money for conservation. Another concern is staffing for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the employees that process our permits, if they cannot fill vacant positions, it could slow down the process.

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

8. STAKEHOLDERS COMMITTEE INPUT ON THE STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN (SIAAP)

Italia Garcia, Community Engagement Manager, provided a presentation on Stakeholders Committee Input on the Strategic Improvement Assessment and Action Plan (SIAAP). Acquisition costs have exceeded assumptions in both the 2004 MSHCP and 2020 Nexus Study. These escalating acquisition costs raise concerns regarding the long-term financial feasibility of achieving MSHCP objectives, particularly those related to reserve assembly. In response, the Board directed staff to undertake the SIAAP to evaluate policies and improve MSHCP implementation with a focus on the Development HANS process.

Staff used both external findings and implementation experience to develop recommendations intended to increase flexibility, strengthen financial stewardship, and maintain permit compliance. During the Board workshop in September 2025, the Board received the draft SIAAP and considered staff's proposed outreach. At the workshop, the Board directed staff to refer the draft SIAAP to the Stakeholders Committee for further review and input. With that direction, staff implemented a targeted outreach approach to ensure the Stakeholders Committee had meaningful and multiple opportunities to review the draft SIAAP and provide input.

Two Stakeholder Committee meetings were held, one in September 2025, the other in November to formally present the SIAAP and facilitate discussion. Staff solicited verbal and written feedback and invited members to identify ways to strengthen permittee, stakeholder, and public investment in the MSHCP. All committee members were notified via email and were provided with the opportunity to submit written comments, regardless of meeting attendance. Staff also offered follow-up support including office hours for one-on-one discussions and clarification of technical aspects of the SIAAP. Through this process, staff received robust in-person feedback, one written public comment, and two written comments from Stakeholder Committee members, with no requests for additional meetings.

Key themes from the feedback received were:

1. Permittee Engagement, Education, and Interagency Collaboration
The key takeaway from this theme was that education and early coordination are critical for effective implementation.
2. Financial Sustainability, Funding Strategies, and Cost Management
Feedback under this theme reflected an emphasis on long-term fiscal sustainability including concerns related to land acquisition costs, mitigation fee assumption, and exploring diverse funding strategies.
3. Appraisal and Land Valuation Practices
Feedback under this theme reflected concerns that appraisal practices over-value conservation land and emphasized the need for greater consistency, clarity, and transparency in the valuation processes.

4. Zoning Alignment and Legal Framework Considerations

Comments under this theme supported zoning alignment with reserve design while recognizing legal constraints and the importance of coordination with local jurisdictions to ensure balance implementation.

5. Criteria Refinement Process

The final theme reflected support for the use of the Criteria Refinement Process to maintain flexibility while emphasizing the need for clearer guidance, consistent application, and continued scientific integrity.

Overall, the input from the Stakeholders Committee and the public reflected a shared interest in bringing clarity, coordination, and financial sustainability while maintaining flexibility and compliance with the MSHCP.

Vice Chair Spiegel thought this effort confirms many of the Board's comments, particularly the costs of projects and the overvaluation of land. This also confirms that these issues are a known problem.

This item is for the Board to receive and file the Stakeholders Committee input on the Strategic Improvement Assessment and Action Plan (SIAAP).

9. RATIFICATION OF CHAIR'S APPOINTMENT OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chair Bash appointed Board Member Welty, Board Member Ruiz, and Board Member Morabito to the Executive Committee.

M/S/C (Cabrera/Holliday) to ratify the appointments to the Executive Committee.

10. SELECTION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

A motion was made by Vice Chair Spiegel and seconded by Board Member Lock Dawson to select Board Member Washington for the Executive Committee.

A motion was made by Board Member Wallace and seconded by Board Member Cervantez to select Board Member Martinez for the Executive Committee.

M/S/C (Wallace/Cervantez) to select Board Member Washington and Board Member Martinez for the Executive Committee.

11. PRESENTATION – RESERVE OF THE MONTH

Carol Thompson, Senior Management Analyst Reserve Management and Monitoring, provided a presentation on the reserve of the month, Reynold's Phase 1 & 2. The 642-acre Reynold's Reserves are situated in unincorporated Riverside County, within the western region of the Plan Area, north of the city of Lake Elsinore. These two parcels were acquired by the RCA in 2008

and 2009 for approximately \$3.4 million, funded through MSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fees.

The Reserves feature gently rolling hills and support a variety of habitats including grassland, sage scrub, and chaparral. An ephemeral drainage that leads to Temescal Creek runs through a portion of the Reserves, creating areas of willow scrub.

Comprising a portion of Proposed Core 1, the Reynold's Reserves provide essential live-in habitat for several Planning Species like the coastal California gnatcatcher and facilitates wildlife movement by connecting large blocks of habitat for species such as bobcats. As the RCA continues to acquire habitat, existing gaps and fragments within the Core will be filled, expanding the Core eastward to Proposed Linkage 3 and westward to Existing Habitat Core C. These adjacent areas will ultimately connect the Lake Mathews and Estelle Mountain regions with the Gavilan Hills and Alberhill areas of the Plan.

Several MSHCP Covered Species have been documented at the reserves, including the California gnatcatcher, Coulter's Matilija poppy, the Belding's orange-throated whiptail, and Bell's sage sparrow. Each of these species with last names mentioned also comes with a bit of history. For instance, Coulter's Matilija poppy, honors Thomas Coulter, an Irish botanist and explorer who first collected the plant in California back in the early 1830s. The Latin name for this species genus, *Romneya*, pays tribute to Coulter's friend John Thomas Romney Robinson, an Irish astronomer. The "Matilija" in the common name ties the plant back to the name used by the local Chumash people and Matilija Canyon, in Ventura County, where this dramatic flower is especially common. The Belding's orange-throated whiptail is named after Lyman Belding, a 19th-century American ornithologist who spent much of his life studying the wildlife of California and Baja California. Lastly, Bell's sage sparrow is named after John Graham Bell, another naturalist of the same era. Bell worked as a taxidermist, collector, and collaborator with many early American scientists, and several bird species now bear his name in recognition, including one you may be more familiar with, the least Bell's vireo.

The Reynold's properties also support another notable resident, the long-tailed weasel. The weasel is an energetic and charismatic member of the Mustelid family, which also includes skunks, otters, badgers, ferrets, and minks. Like other Mustelids, long-tailed weasels have a musk gland which produces a strong-smelling secretion that they use to mark territory and deter predators. Although they do not spray their musk like a skunk, they certainly have their own distinctive "perfume," so to speak. Long-tailed weasels are widespread throughout Canada, the U.S., and Mexico and are found in a diversity of habitats where small mammals are abundant, as these make up the bulk of their diet. This includes habitats such as grasslands, woodlands, scrub habitats and areas in close proximity to water. Their bodies are small and extremely slender, about the width of a soda can, and they measure roughly 15 inches in length, including a five-inch black-tipped tail that accounts for a third of their body length. Their fur is usually brown above and creamy white below, however in colder climates they may turn completely white in winter.

Despite their size and cute, curious expressions, these animals are fearless, aggressive, and highly skilled hunters. Incredibly agile, they have been known to take down prey larger than themselves, including rabbits. Their preference for small mammals plays a key role in controlling rodent populations, but they do also enjoy eating birds, eggs, reptiles, insects and even seasonal fruits and berries. Their bodies are perfectly designed for the hunt—slender, flexible, and built for maneuvering through dense vegetation and slipping into burrows and tight spaces pursuing prey. They often rise up on their hind legs to survey their surroundings before darting back into action and, although mostly nocturnal, they are active during the day when needed.

In addition to the Reynold's Reserves, this tiny carnivore has been spotted at a few locations within the Plan area, including the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, the Badlands, San Timoteo Creek, Lake Skinner-Diamond Valley Lake, Alberhill, and a few others. Even though the species is fairly stable throughout its range, it still faces a number of pressures. Natural predators like owls, snakes, and coyotes pose a threat, and they are also vulnerable to disease, parasites, and road mortality. Habitat loss fragments populations, which leads to reduced genetic exchange, and their numbers can rise and fall depending on how abundant their prey is in a given year. Maintaining habitat connectivity is especially important, since it helps reduce isolation and supports healthier, more resilient weasel populations across the Plan area. The MSHCP will conserve upward of 475,000 acres of suitable habitat for this species.

Long-tailed weasels are one of the most widespread carnivores in North America, but you would hardly know it because they are incredibly elusive and rarely seen. In almost 20 years as a wildlife biologist in Western Riverside County, Carol Thompson has only seen two or three, the most recent being along Salt Creek a few years ago. Despite the weasel's reputation for bringing bad luck or misfortune, we like to think the opposite is true. If you are able to spot one of these secretive little hunters, that makes you pretty lucky.

Vice Chair Spiegel asked what the mating season was like for the long-tailed weasel. Carol Thompson shared that they reproduce once a year, with four to nine in the litter.

Vice Chair Spiegel also wanted to know whether the female or the male was the dominate for the species. Carol Thompson was not sure of the answer.

Board Member Morabito asked about the litter and what the babies were called and what their life span was. Carol Thompson stated the young are called pups but was unsure of their span. Staff will investigate this and report back to the Board.

12. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Chair Bash welcomed everyone for the new year and wanted the Board to know that they play a very important role in getting development done but also protecting habitat for generations to come. It is an honor to serve as the Chair of this Board.

13. CLOSED SESSION

At this time, Steve DeBaun, legal counsel, announced the Board will be going in to Closed Session to discuss the property item listed on the agenda.

13A. CONFERENCE WITH REAL PROPERTY NEGOTIATORS

Pursuant to Government Code Section 54956.8

Agency Negotiator: Executive Director or Designee

Item	Property Description	Property Owner	Buyer(s)
1	366-310-002	Lynda C. Borchert, as Trustee of the Decedent's Trust established under the Terry Family Trust U/D/T dated September 12, 1997	RCA

13B. REPORT OUT FROM CLOSED SESSION

There were no announcements from Closed Session.

14. 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 1:25 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, February 2, 2026.**

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Director/
Clerk of the Board