

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Monday, February 2, 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
Colleen Wallace
Julio Martinez
Jeff Cervantez
Dale Welty
Wes Speake
Jocelyn Yow*
Connie Howard-Clark
Bob Magee

Dan Temple
Ron Holliday
Kevin Bash
David Starr Rabb
Patricia Lock Dawson
Crystal Ruiz
Jessica Alexander
Joseph Morabito

Board of Directors Absent

Jose Medina
Chuck Washington
V. Manuel Perez
Yxstian Gutierrez
Veronica Sanchez
Ulises Cabrera

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Speake.

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/Wallace) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JANUARY 5, 2026

6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 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 November 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 December 31, 2025.

6D. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of November 30, 2025.

6E. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2025

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended November 30, 2025.

6F. SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY REPORT

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Single Signature Authority report for the second quarter ended December 31, 2025.

6G. QUARTERLY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT METRICS REPORT, OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2025

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

7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Tyler Madary, Legislative Affairs Manager, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. Earlier this month, the Governor released the budget proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27. The nearly \$348.9 billion budget proposal projects a shortfall of \$2.9 billion this fiscal year, increasing to more than \$22 billion for next fiscal year. The proposal does not appear to cut funding levels for programs of interest to RCA or California Department of Fish and Wildlife staffing. The proposal includes an allocation of \$123 million in Proposition 4 climate and natural resources bond funds to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to, in part, support wildlife conservation activities. While there is a backlog of habitat conservation projects in need of funding across the state, these would be funds that RCA would be able to compete for.

With the budget proposal now released, the Legislature will begin to hold budget committee hearings over the coming months, and the Governor will release a revised outlook to be included in the May Revise. RCA staff will continue to advocate to maximize funding opportunities and minimize potential cuts in the state budget.

The Continuing Resolution (CR) funding the federal government at FY 2025 levels, lapsed on Friday night and the government has partially shut down. The House is expected to vote on a deal by tomorrow that would fund the remaining appropriations bills with the CR for government agencies. With this deal, the President is anticipated to sign the package of already passed appropriations bills, including the bill that funds the Department of the Interior. RCA staff are closely monitoring progress, as RCA secured a significant victory within this bill.

In addition to continuing the funds of Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP) land acquisitions at \$26 million, the bill contains report language that would direct U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to fund its' commitments to HCPs like the MSHCP. This was half of what was requested by RCA. RCA had advocated heavily for the bill to enable discretionary funding above the annual \$26 million for HCP land acquisition so the USFWS could fund its' commitments to the MSHCP. Since that did not get included in the bill, the fight continues for federal funding to fund the balance of acres the USFWS have committed to acquire for the MSHCP.

To be clear, the report language is a strong message from Congress that adds to the momentum of advocacy. This is momentum that has been building since the RCA secured report language with the help of Congressman Ken Calvert in FY 2024 to direct the USFWS to provide accounting for the land acquisition commitments it has made to HCPs across the country, and their progress towards meeting those commitments. This was how RCA learned that the USFWS had made commitments to ten large-scale HCPs, including the MSHCP, and still has over 150,000 acres left to acquire or fund to meet those commitments. RCA's case for increased funding for Section 6 HCP land acquisitions is only strengthening.

Board Member Magee asked if RCA could expand their wish list for the USFWS and increase staffing for game wardens. The game wardens in the area are stretched extremely thin, and we should also be asking that their mission be expanded. If their true mission is to protect the resource, they should be working with all local jurisdictions on habitat degradation that is caused daily by the homeless community.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, stated that it could be included in the advocacy as it is already covered in our platform under the broad language that was included. It was also pointed out that there were some big wins here, even though it has not resulted in money. The fact that RCA has report language in bills passed by Congress, which creates transparency and accountability is important. Thanks were given to our congressional congregation, Congressman Calvert, and RCA's legislative team.

Board Member Speake thought these were fantastic steps forward in getting what RCA needs. While this has been painfully slow, it is great to see us taking the next step. Congressman Calvert

has been a steadfast supporter in assuring this money comes forward. The homelessness issue brought forward is something that jurisdictions should not face alone, and we should continue to advocate for that.

Chair Bash added that there is now a new member of Congress, Norma Torres, in our district and wondered if any effort had been made to schedule a meeting. Tyler Madary shared that having represented part of Eastvale already, Norma Torres has been a part of RCA's outreach for a few years now. When the new lines become active, the district will now include a larger portion of Northwest Riverside County, so efforts will be continued and doubled.

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

At this time, Board Member Yow arrived.

8. CITY OF MURRIETA FEE CREDIT REQUEST FOR THE MURRIETA HILLS SPECIFIC PLAN AMENDMENT PROJECT

Aaron Gabbe, Regional Conservation Director, provided a presentation on the city of Murrieta Fee Credit Request for the Murrieta Hills Specific Plan Amendment Project (Project). The RCA received a request for a Local Development Mitigation Fee (LDMF) credit for the Project from the city of Murrieta (City), in exchange for transferring to the RCA approximately 615 acres of lands that are described for conservation by the MSHCP which will count as Additional Reserve Lands (ARL). The Project is a 965-acre development project proposed by Pulte Homes. It is located south of Keller Road and west of Interstate 215.

The project proposes a maximum of 1,585 single family residences, a 10-acre commercial/office center, and approximately 59 acres of roadway development. Lands proposed for conservation are within the Lower Sedco Hills subunit of the Southwest Area Plan and Cell Group C. Conservation within this Cell Group will contribute to Linkage-8 and Proposed Linkage-16.

The RCA Board adopted MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual provides criteria for fee credit. The request complies with the requirements in the Board's Policy.

Specifically:

- Fee credit cannot be awarded for conservation areas that are not considered developable land in the absence of the MSHCP.
- No fee credits are requested for conservation areas that are not considered developable land in the absence of the MSHCP. This includes approximately 69 acres of the 615 acres that will be protected as ARL that are not developable for reasons other than the MSHCP.
- Lands proposed for conservation are within Criteria Cells and will contribute to Reserve Assembly.
- Lands proposed for conservation are of appropriate size, configuration, and location to be managed as part of the MSHCP Reserve. This land is located within areas described by the MSHCP for conservation.

- Lands proposed for conservation do not include fuel modification areas, manufactured slopes, storm drains or other areas incompatible with conservation.
- The fee credit will “only be provided to the underlying property owner or development company at the time the fee applies and is not transferable to other entities, individuals, or development projects.”

The City’s fee credit request included an MSHCP-conforming appraisal of the conservation lands that the RCA agrees to accept and a letter of justification for the appraisal. The appraisal concluded a valuation of the land at \$62,435 per acre. The total value of the 546 acres that qualify for fee credits is \$34,095,753. The City estimates that LDMF for the project will total approximately \$3,000,000. Per the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual, the fee credit will be applied only to the project as described in the corresponding Joint Project Review document.

Per the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual, “Conservation land associated with approved Fee Credits shall be conveyed in fee title to the RCA or another entity or organization that can hold conservation easements. The conservation land shall be free of encumbrance that could adversely impact the ability to manage the conservation land in accordance with the MSHCP. Conveyance of the conserved land must occur prior to the point in time when MSHCP Fee payment is due for the Project, and the Member Agency shall not issue occupancy permits for the Project until the conservation land has been conveyed and any fee balance has been paid to the RCA. If a non-member agency holds title to the land, the entity must enter into a Management Memorandum of Understanding with the RCA agreeing to manage the land in accordance with the MSHCP prior to issuance of a grading permit for the Project.”

The City estimates that the LDMF for the Project will total approximately \$3,000,000. The actual amount cannot be determined because the City does not have the final development plans to calculate the LDMF fee. The fiscal impact is estimated to be a positive value of approximately \$31 million (approximately \$34 million in value of the land, minus approximately \$3 million in uncollected fees). Once timing of the land donation is known, staff will determine if a budget adjustment is needed to recognize the donation.

Per the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual, this fee credit shall only be applied to this Project.

Board Member Holliday acknowledged the work that went into this on behalf of RCA and city of Murrieta staff, but mostly the developer who agreed to what ends up being a generous donation to the RCA.

Jarrett Ramaiya, city of Murrieta, echoed the thanks already given to RCA staff, they have been a privilege to work with.

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

This item is for the Board of Directors to approve the fee credit request from the City of Murrieta for the Murrieta Hills Specific Plan and authorize the Executive Director to enter into a Fee Credit Agreement with the City of Murrieta on behalf of the RCA. Per the MSHCP Mitigation Fee Implementation Manual, this fee credit shall only be applied to this project.

9. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN RESERVE DESIGN

Harry Sandoval, Regional Conservation Deputy Director, provided a presentation on Fundamentals of Reserve Design. The MSHCP Reserve System is made up of six main components which are:

- Existing Cores - Large blocks of habitat that were already under public control or quasi-public ownership at the conception of the Plan.
- Proposed Cores - Large block of habitat identified for future reserve assembly.
- Extensions of Existing Cores - Blocks of habitat contiguous with an existing core, which will add onto existing core.
- Linkages - A connection between core areas of adequate size and configuration.
- Constrained Linkages - A constricted connection for movement between core areas.
- Non-contiguous Habitat Blocks - A block of habitat not connected to other habitat areas via a linkage or constrained linkage.

Each component that makes up the MSHCP Reserve System was crafted using the fundamental tenets of reserve design. The fundamental tenets of reserve design that are commonly used when determining what areas should be conserved include:

- Conserving target species and habitats;
- Size;
- Shape;
- Connectivity; and
- Preserving species diversity.

A primary factor in reserve design is consideration of the species that are intended to be protected. The MSHCP covers 146 species, some with similar habitat requirements and some with unique requirements. Habitat requirements of the various species to be conserved will dictate the location, size, configuration, and connectivity needs of a proposed reserve. The MSHCP Reserve System was designed to include a variety of habitats, some of which overlap such as in cores. Non-contiguous habitat blocks are not connected to other reserve areas and typically represent areas that contain unique habitat types.

Size is a fundamental component of reserve design. Larger reserves function better than smaller ones. Smaller habitat blocks typically have less habitat and diversity and less individuals of any given species. Larger core areas are more resistant to environmental changes and catastrophic events such as fires and floods. For example, only a portion of a larger reserve may burn during wildfire while a smaller reserve may burn entirely. Size is not just a concern when

considering cores but is also critical in linkages. The dimensions of a linkage, particularly the width, are vital to the functionality of a linkage. By conserving Proposed Cores and Extension of Existing Cores, the MSHCP will create a larger, more functional, resilient Reserve System than one comprised of smaller cores.

Connectivity is vital to the overall success of a regional reserve system. Linkages and corridors not only facilitate movement within a reserve system; they also help with gene flow. Gene flow reduces the risks of inbreeding within populations and avoids the risk of creating biological islands, which may ultimately not have long-term viability. Movement within conserved areas can also aid in resisting localized extinction events, as linkages and corridors can provide evacuation routes to safe areas in the event of catastrophic events such as fires. The MSHCP contemplated a vast network of linkages and corridors to connect core areas. Because of their reduced size, linear nature, and limited pathways, linkages and corridors are proving to be challenging to assemble.

When designing a Reserve System, it is important to consider habitat and species diversity. The MSHCP covers a great number of species and therefore requires conservation of diverse habitats. The goal of reserve design is conserving areas with great functional diversity. Functional diversity is a measure of the roles, traits, and functions that organisms perform in an ecosystem. Functional diversity supports ecosystem functions, such as nutrient cycling, carbon storage, and water cycling and purification, all of which humans rely upon. Different habitats and species contribute in different ways to the overall reserve system. Often, we find that some habitats or species perform critical ecological functions, such as kangaroo rats' significant contribution to seed banks or oak woodlands, which provide food and shelter for countless birds, mammals, and insects. Ultimately, the human communities of Western Riverside County will benefit from this protection of ecosystem functions, as will the MSHCP covered species and the habitats that they rely on.

The various components that make up the MSHCP Reserve System demonstrate that the fundamental tenets of reserve design were considered when planning out the Reserve System. The MSHCP provides Conservation Criteria, commonly known as Cell Criteria, which guides the assembly of the MSHCP Reserve System that when fully assembled, embodies the fundamentals of reserve design. The Plan provides criteria for each Criteria Cell or Cell Group that describes the amount of land, habitat types, and areas to be conserved. Fully assembling the Reserve System may take upwards of 40 years. The process of reserve assembly is like building a 500,000-acre puzzle, parcel by parcel, that when complete will form a regional, contiguous, functional ecosystem.

Vice Chair Spiegel wanted to know how big Coachella Valley Association of Governments' conservation area was compared to the MSHCP. Harry Sandoval did not recall, but it was smaller than the MSHCP. Staff will investigate this and report back to the Board.

Board Member Welty asked since this was developed 25 years ago, have there been changes in the system that the RCA would need to review and adjust the Criteria Cells. Harry Sandoval stated that there have not been any major changes, however, the amendment the Strategic

Improvement Assessment and Action Plan (SIAAP) contemplated will be looking at that, considering what has changed since the Plan's inception.

Board Member Lock Dawson appreciated staff bringing this forward, having been there at the beginning, the creation of these cells was very scientifically based on regional species. There was also some very robust genetic analysis that went into the creation of these linkages.

Board Member Speake thought this was the perfect way to present this to the Board.

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive a presentation on the concepts employed in Reserve Design, which are utilized by the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).

10. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Aaron Hake thanked the Deputy Clerks for running the meeting in Lisa Mobley's absence.

Board Member Magee wanted to announce that on Wednesday, the Riverside County Planning Department will be having a workshop, their first step towards modifying the General Plan Amendment Process. They should be commended for that, the development community will be thrilled, and the eight-year cycle may be a thing of the past. It was asked if RCA staff had heard from Dan Silver or any of the resource agencies in relation to the proposal.

Aaron Hake stated that staff had not heard anything yet but would monitor the situation.

11. CLOSED SESSION

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

11A. 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	308-140-008	PLH Vineyard Sky, LLC, a Florida Limited Liability Company	RCA

11B. REPORT OUT FROM CLOSED SESSION

There were no announcements from Closed Session.

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 1:13 p.m.

The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, March 2, 2026.**

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melonie Donson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M" and "D".

Melonie Donson
Deputy Clerk of the Board