

# **WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES**

**Monday, May 4, 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**

Jose Medina*	Jocelyn Yow
Karen Spiegel	Bob Magee
Chuck Washington	Dan Temple
Colleen Wallace	Ron Holliday
Jeff Cervantez	Kevin Bash
Dale Welty	Crystal Ruiz
Tony Daddario	Joseph Morabito

#### **Board of Directors Absent**

V. Manuel Perez  
Yxstian Gutierrez  
Julio Martinez  
Connie Howard-Clark  
Veronica Sanchez  
Ulises Cabrera  
David Starr Rabb  
Patricia Lock Dawson  
Jessica Alexander

\*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

### **3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Daddario.

### **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 (Morabito/Cervantez) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.**

#### **6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – APRIL 6, 2026**

**6B. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2026**

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 February 2026.

**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 March 31, 2026.

**6D. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of February 28, 2026.

**6E. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2026**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended February 28, 2026.

**6F. SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY REPORT**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Single Signature Authority report for the third quarter ended March 31, 2026.

**7. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Andrew Sall, Senior Management Analyst, Legislative Affairs, provided an update on state and federal legislative actions. As previously mentioned in the January budget proposal, Governor Gavin Newsom proposes the permanent elimination of 164 vacant positions at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Notably, the Joint Legislative Budget Committee disagrees with the elimination of 77 of those positions, including:

- 3 positions for California Endangered Species Act Permitting Activities;
- 12 positions for Streambed/Lake Alteration Activities;
- 14 positions for Oil Spill Prevention and Response;
- 45 positions for Law Enforcement – Wildlife and Resource Protection; and
- 3 positions for Cutting the Green Tape Initiative.

While the committee disagrees with cutting these vacant positions, they remain at risk. If filled, these positions would support permitting activities related to the implementation of the MSHCP. At this time, the duties and roles of the remaining 87 positions slated to be eliminated are unknown. RCA in coordination with the California Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Coalition

provided comments in support of retaining these positions during a hearing of the Assembly Budget Sub-Committee on Climate Crises, Resources, Energy, and Transportation on April 22. Staff will keep the Board informed of efforts to protect these positions vital to the implementation of the MSHCP, as the budget process continues.

At this time, Board Member Medina arrived.

On April 23, staff submitted a letter of support for Senate Bill (SB) 1250 by Senator Dave Cortese (San Jose). The bill seeks to include wildlife connectivity into regular transportation planning to improve public safety, reduce costs, and accelerate project delivery. Improving connectivity will help reduce genetic isolation and steer wildlife away from highways, supporting state and local conservation goals. The bill is sponsored by the Nature Conservancy and has support from the California HCP Coalition of which the RCA is a member.

Supporting SB 1250 is consistent with the Board's adopted 2026 State and Federal Legislative Platform, under the following sections: *The Co-Benefits of Habitat Conservation* - support state and federal policies and funding that incentivize the development of wildlife crossings in HCPs and Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCP). SB 1250 passed out of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee and is now in the Appropriations Committee.

RCA staff developed and submitted two programmatic requests to members of congress for FY 2027 to increase Section 6 funding that the RCA competes for to fund land acquisition. The first requests that Section 6 HCP Land Acquisition Program be funded at \$100 million annually, up from the current level of \$26 million. RCA and the National HCP Coalition continue to submit this request every year, recognizing the significant need for funding as the program has diminished over time and is severely over-subscribed.

RCA's second request is for \$10 million in discretionary funding for the Section 6 HCP Land Acquisition Program above FY 2026 levels, with accompanying report language to direct this funding only to HCPs with federal commitments. RCA believes this funding request may be more appealing to congress and provides an avenue for RCA to compete for these funds, as the state and federal governments have a commitment to fund the acquisition of 56,000 acres of land to meet the goals of the MSHCP. This request builds on previous work of the RCA to secure language in FY 2026 Appropriations legislation directing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to fulfill its commitments to large-scale, programmatic HCPs, such as the MSHCP.

Staff will keep the Board updated on the status of these requests as the FY 2027 Appropriations process continues.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, shared that two months ago, Tyler Madary, Legislative Affairs Manager, and Aaron Gabbe, Regional Conservation Director, went to Washington, D.C. with the National HCP Coalition to advocate for the RCA and habitat conservation plans around the country. Similarly, The Monday Morning Group, which is a civic leadership group of Western Riverside County, went to D.C. recently and carried some of RCA priorities to the delegation as well. There has been a follow-up meeting with Congressman Mark Takano, to talk about MSHCP

needs. Staff are not only monitoring what is happening in D.C. they are going there with advocates in our region to carry the MSHCP message.

Chair Bash asked if staff were meeting with Norma Torres, who is now Norco's congresswoman.

Andrew Sall stated that the coalition did not meet with Norma Torres during the trip in March, but staff are planning a meeting soon.

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

## **8. PRESENTATION - RESERVE OF THE MONTH**

Cody Bear Sutton, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, provided a presentation on the reserve of the month, the JPR INC Reserves. Early in the implementation of the Plan, the RCA acquired the JPR INC Reserves using primarily Section 6 federal grant funding. These parcels now referred to by the RCA as Anza Knolls, Winchester 700, JPR INC, JPR INC (6), and Silverado Ranch are located in unincorporated Riverside County, in the southeastern portion of the Plan area, east of the city of Temecula, generally between the communities of Aguanga to the west and Cahuilla to the north. In addition to the Section 6 acquisitions, the RCA has also acquired Additional Reserve Lands (ARL) through MSHCP Local Development Mitigation Fees. These reserve lands are comprised of gently rolling hills of chaparral, grassland, and desert scrub with scattered rocky outcroppings.

The JPR INC and associated reserve properties contribute to Proposed Habitat Core 6 (known as Silverado Ranch). When fully assembled, Proposed Core 6 will comprise approximately 4,300 acres. As the RCA continues to acquire habitat, gaps within the Core will be filled, allowing conserved lands to expand westward. This expansion will use Proposed Linkage 16 in the Tule Creek area to connect Proposed Core 6 to Proposed Core 7, which includes the Vail Lake, Sage, and Wilson Valley areas. Proposed Linkage 16 also provides a connection south to the Beauty Mountain Wilderness, identified as Existing Habitat Core L. These connections will provide permanent protection, live-in habitat and landscape-scale movement and connectivity across the southeastern Plan area. This will support Plan species such as Quino checkerspot butterfly, Golden Eagle, Stephens' and Aguanga kangaroo rats, Los Angeles pocket mouse, mountain lion, and bobcat.

Several MSHCP Covered Species have been documented at the JPR INC Reserves: Quino checkerspot butterfly which is named after Padre Kino, a 17th-century Jesuit missionary and explorer in California; Payson's jewelflower which is named after Edwin Blake Payson, an American botanist known for his early 20th-century work on western North American plants; Granite night lizard; and the golden eagle. These species represent only a small sample of the area's biological diversity.

The JPR INC Reserves also support a less commonly known species, the mountain quail. Mountain quail is the largest quail species in the United States, slightly bigger than the more

familiar California quail. It has a round body, short tail, and sturdy legs built for life on steep slopes. It's a boldly patterned quail with rich chestnut, blue-gray and olive brown colors with bold white highlights and bars along its sides. They sport two long, straight plumes that stick up off their head like an old-fashioned quill pen. Mountain quail have distinctive vocalizations, though they're often soft and easy to miss.

Mountain quail prefer mountainous landscapes of dense chaparral and shrublands, ranging from dry slopes to moist, brushy stream corridors, where vegetation provides cover from predators. They are seasonal movers, occupying higher elevations in summer, sometimes as high as 10,000 feet, taking advantage of cooler temperatures and abundant insects and plants. In the fall and winter, they move downslope where they gather into small groups called coveys along foothills and desert edges.

Breeding season begins in the spring; males select the nesting site which is typically a shallow scrape hidden at the base of shrubs or saplings on hillsides. The female lines the nest with nearby grasses or pine needles and lays 9 to 15 small, cream-colored eggs. When the chicks hatch, they are fluffy and mobile, able to follow their mother almost immediately. Mountain quail are secretive and hard to spot, if you're a stealthy bird watcher you may spot them quietly feeding near trails or scurrying across back country roads. They eat mostly seeds, and other plant material with insects being important for growing chicks and females in summer. They are ground foragers and scratch through leaf litter to find snacks or dig up small underground plant bulbs; they may also leap up into shrubs for berries or leaves.

Mountain quail face a variety of predators including hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, snakes, and feral cats. Eggs and chicks are especially vulnerable to snakes and small mammals. They rely heavily on dense shrub covers to move safely between elevations to reduce their predation risk. Habitat connectivity is critical for these seasonal movers. Fragmentation from roads, development, and fuel breaks can isolate coveys, limit access to resources, and increase exposure to predators. The MSHCP addresses these needs by conserving over 235,000 acres of interconnected blocks of suitable habitat across western Riverside County, supporting seasonal movement, genetic diversity, and the persistence of the Mountain quail.

Vice Chair Spiegel asked how many of the laid eggs live or mature. Cody Bear Sutton stated that most fertilized eggs would hatch, but maturing is another story.

## **9. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT**

Chair Bash shared the experience of taking a tour with RCA staff and Board Member Dale Welty. Board Members were encouraged to go on a tour of RCA lands, they are incredible. The only thing that will continue for our kids and grandkids is the land that RCA is preserving, making RCA the most important Board to serve on.

Board Member Welty added that it was a great trip, the top of the peak was between Wildomar and Canyon Lake, with an amazing view. This was a quick trip with amazing views that only took about half an hour.

**10. CLOSED SESSION**

At this time, Ward Simmons, legal counsel, announced the Board will be going in to Closed Session to discuss the two property items on the agenda.

**10A. 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	580-510-001, 580-520-001, & 583-310-002	Sycamore Falls, LLC, a California Limited Liability Company	RCA

**10B. REPORT OUT FROM CLOSED SESSION**

Ward Simmons announced the Board considered and approved the following closed session items:

Item 1: Acquisition of the property was approved for \$850,000

**11. 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 12:58 p.m. The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled to be held on **Monday, June 1, 2026.**

Respectfully submitted,



Melonie Donson  
Deputy Clerk of the Board