

WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Monday, April 6, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Executive Committee was called to order by Chair Kevin Bash at 11:30 a.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

Karen Spiegel
Chuck Washington
Julio Martinez
Dale Welty
Kevin Bash
Crystal Ruiz
Joseph Morabito

Members Absent

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Morabito.

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/Welty) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DECEMBER 1, 2025

7. RIVERSIDE COUNTY PARKS RESERVE MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Harry Sandoval, Regional Conservation Deputy Director, provided a presentation on Riverside County Parks Reserve Management. Riverside County Parks and Open Space District, or RivCoParks for short, manages MSHCP land under contract with the RCA. The RivCoParks contract costs RCA about \$2 million annually, funded by Local Development Mitigation Fees (LDMF). RivCoParks is responsible for the management of approximately 48,000 acres of the 71,000 acres that have been acquired so far as Additional Reserve Lands (ARL). RivCoParks does not manage all reserve lands as some are owned and managed by other entities. Currently, 11 RivCoParks staff are responsible for the management of MSHCP ARL lands.

Access control includes the maintenance and installation of fencing, barriers, and gates. Access control is vital to the MSHCP Reserve System as many of our covered species rely on fragile habitats or may be sensitive to human activities. During 2025, staff repaired 172 sections of fence, installed approximately three quarters of a mile of new reserve fencing, and repaired or replaced 85 breached gates. Access Control also includes staff working on solutions to prevent or remediate land encroachment issues that may occur on ARL.

Habitat restoration and management include a variety of adaptive management actions such as restoring, establishing, or enhancing habitat for MSHCP covered species by removing invasive species, planting and seeding native species, or designing and installing new features such as seasonal pools for toads or artificial burrow complexes for burrowing owls. During 2025, RivCoParks enhanced, restored, or established approximately 172 acres of habitat.

Wildfire management includes fire prevention, active fire response, and post-fire activities. In preparation for fires, staff comply with local fire agency abatement notices and maintain fuel modification zones, particularly on ARL that are adjacent to residences or other structures. During active fires, RivCoParks staff will help firefighters by facilitating access and conveying site-specific information such as the location of nearby water sources, potential hazards, or sensitive habitat areas. After fires, staff will evaluate impacts and carry out any restoration or remediation actions that are necessary.

RivCoParks regularly coordinates and cooperates with local and state law enforcement agencies. Common issues that require law enforcement coordination include Illicit cannabis grows on MSHCP ARL, homeless encampment resolutions, and wildlife poaching. One of the most common calls to law enforcement is for the recovery and removal of stolen vehicles that are typically abandoned or dismantled on reserve lands.

Due to the somewhat isolated locations of ARL, they are attractive areas for illegal dumping. Cleanup of illegal dumping is a very common problem that RivCoParks staff must deal with on a regular basis. Prompt cleanup of illegal dumping is important as wildlife may suffer from ingesting refuse or hazardous waste, such as automotive coolant that is left exposed. The dumping of green waste may not seem to be harmful; however, green waste can introduce new invasive species into sensitive habitat areas.

Equally important to all the activities that RivCoParks carry out is public outreach. Often, RivCoParks staff must act as ambassadors of the MSHCP. Staff are responsible for educating the public about the habitat and species that occupy reserve lands. Staff must convey information to the public about allowed and restricted use of reserve lands. Along with the informal interactions that are carried out daily, RivCoParks also helps organize and participates in a variety of community events. Recent happenings include educational events and habitat restoration projects that our communities can participate in.

The MSHCP included staffing projections for Reserve Management staff. Staffing levels in the MSHCP correlate to the number of acres currently in conservation. The MSHCP projected a total management staff comprised of 28 individuals, once 50,000 acres of ARL have been acquired. The 28 positions include 8 Rangers, 8 maintenance workers, a Natural Resource Manager and various support staff, also contemplated by the Plan was law enforcement to assist management staff. As presented earlier, 11 RivCoParks staff are currently responsible for the management of approximately 48,000 acres. Additional non-dedicated staff outside of those 11 members share administrative tasks for the management team. Considering what the MSHCP projected and the number of acres currently in conservation, we are slightly below projected management levels. It is also important to consider that staff are also responsible for long-term management and monitoring of permittee sponsored mitigation projects on reserve lands, which was not contemplated by the MSHCP but helps permittees achieve mitigation requirements for individual projects. We anticipate mitigation on reserve lands becoming more common as mitigation opportunities within the MSHCP plan area dwindle. Staff recommend that any future Nexus Study analysis consider increased management needs associated with regular increases in total reserve system acres and other associated responsibilities.

Board Member Dale Welty wanted to know with the acres now under conservation and the projection of needing additional staffing, if the trust account was going to be enough. Aaron Gabbe, Regional Conservation Director, shared that the endowment fund was currently being built for long-term fund management. The targeted goal is \$153 million. The fund is high enough to fund what the Plan had anticipated for long-term management needs after the assembly reserve is completed.

Board Member Ruiz asked if RivCoParks responded to the recent Gillman Springs wildfire. Harry Sandoval stated that ranger staff were out there monitoring, there has not been a full report yet, it is still a little too early.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, asked staff to briefly describe the response from ranger staff. Harry Sandoval explained that typically when there is a fire, rangers are the first to show up because they are out in the field. They help provide access and have a good relationship with CalFire. Rangers have also helped with finding landing zones for helicopters and other coordination.

Board Member Morabito wanted to know if the illegal dumping was everywhere and whether staff have determined how much it costs to clean it up. Harry Sandoval explained that there is

a tonnage for how much illegal dumping is cleaned up, and there is a cost associated with the removal.

Board Member Morabito thought the cost should be examined as it might be less expensive to institute free dumping days as this is an issue across the county and it is only getting worse. Also, if there was a goal as to when the staffing would be increased to the projected 28 positions needed.

Harry Sandoval stated there currently was not a goal to increase staffing to the projected level, this is something that would need to be analyzed through the Nexus Study to determine actual need and funding. It should be noted that not all 28 positions would be required as some of the administrative duties are currently being shared with other RivCoParks staff.

Board Member Martinez took a different approach to illegal dumping and wanted to know if the fines or consequences of dumping had been updated. The consequences could be shared as part of the public outreach that was performed. Using drones could also be helpful to increase the monitoring of the farther away areas.

Harry Sandoval shared that part of the concern with illegal dumping is that there are no enforcement capabilities for RivCoParks staff currently. This issue has been raised by staff and is part of the reason why the MSHCP contemplated the addition of law enforcement authority or a contract in place. There are no ramifications of illegal dumping, only public outreach and education.

Board Member Martinez wondered if illegal dumping was caught via a drone and it was reported to law enforcement that they would be able to issue a citation. Harry Sandoval noted it was possible, but also not a very high priority for law enforcement agencies.

Harry Sandoval added that RivCoParks does operate one drone currently and are looking to upgrade the system. The drone is utilized for monitoring encroachments, not for illegal dumping or other operations.

Vice Chair Spiegel stated that illegal dumping is not just an RCA issue, all city and county unincorporated areas have issues. There are opportunities available to dispose of waste, people just are not taking advantage of them. Regardless of what the fine may be, there are not enough people in the cities or the county to control it, let alone RCA.

Aaron Hake added that several years ago, RCA did talk to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) about adding game wardens to the area specifically in the MSHCP area. With the state having budget issues now may not be the time, but RCA could revisit this in the future.

This item is for the Executive Committee to receive a presentation on the work that the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District (RivCoParks) carries out to protect and manage lands conserved by the Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP).

8. UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THE MAJOR AMENDMENT TO THE MSHCP

Aaron Gabbe provided an update on the status of the major amendment to the MSHCP. At the RCA Board Workshop, on September 5, 2025, the Board directed staff to amend the MSHCP to add Crotch's bumble bee (CBB) as a covered species.

Progress to date includes:

- Coordination meetings with the consultant, ICF, and the wildlife agencies;
- Development of an interim permitting pathway for CBB;
- Evaluation and identification of sensitive species in addition to CBB to consider for coverage under the MSHCP;
- Preparation of draft species accounts; and
- Development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CDFW to permit incidental impacts to CBB from management and mitigation actions on MSHCP reserves.

The project team developed an interim permitting process to guide permittee planning staff on how to align the standard MSHCP permitting process with the separate CBB permitting process. While this interim permitting process does not provide streamlined permitting benefits, as each applicant must secure its own permit, it provides guidance to planning departments and applicants to make the permitting process easier until the amendment is complete. The RCA also offers applicants that need to mitigate for impacts to CBB the MSHCP reserve lands for habitat uplift. This type of mitigation includes habitat enhancement or restoration on the RCA's land. The RCA offers similar mitigation opportunities for applicants to comply with separate state and federal water permitting regulations.

Providing this service is becoming more time consuming and inefficient for the RCA, as each mitigation project is processed administratively as a separate project with its own conservation easement and separate endowment to fund long-term management. RCA staff are in the early stages of evaluating options that we could undertake to streamline these processes, which could include incorporating them into the MSHCP programmatic permitting and mitigation processes. This will be feasible and part of the amendment for CBB once the permits are amended and CBB is covered by the MSHCP. Integrating separate waters permitting processes into the MSHCP will require negotiating programmatic permits with water resources agencies, which can take a very long time. This has only been done twice in the last five years, so this is a recent development.

At the RCA Board Workshop, the Board expressed concern that additional species not covered by the MSHCP could become listed in the future. To address this concern, the project team evaluated a range of non-covered, sensitive species, with a potential likelihood of listing within the MSHCP permit term that expires in 2079. After careful vetting, staff elected to consider

three additional species to add to the MSHCP permit under this amendment process. These three species are: American bumble bee, under review for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS); monarch butterfly, identified by USFWS as a Candidate with listing warranted, but final listing is precluded by higher-priority actions; and ringtail, which is a State Fully Protected species, under the Fully Protected Status, take cannot occur without coverage under an Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) such as ours. ICF prepared draft accounts for these three species, plus CBB, to begin informing the amendment process. Species accounts were developed to gather information on the ecology, life history, distribution in Western Riverside County, threats, and conservation needs.

The American bumble bee was one of the broadest ranging bumble bees in North America. Although still present across portions of its historical range, the American bumble bee has experienced sharp population declines. American bumble bee occurs in the Plan Area. Given statewide declines between 40 to 50 percent and extirpation from the Central Valley, it is likely that the species' population in the Plan Area has also declined. The species typically nests on the ground surface among tall grasses. Overwintering sites are in undisturbed substrate such as coarse, decaying woody debris near spring floral resources. The American bumble bee uses a variety of open habitats, including grasslands, farmland, and other open areas where sufficient floral resources are available. The species is a foraging generalist, using a diversity of flowering plants throughout the growing season for pollen and nectar. Suitable habitat consists of areas with adequate floral resources throughout the growing season, nest sites, and overwintering habitat for queens. The American bumble bee faces multiple, interacting threats including habitat loss and degradation, pesticide exposure, pathogens and parasites, climate change, and competition with non-native western honeybees.

In North America, monarch butterflies range from central and southern Canada south through nearly the entire continental U.S. There are two primary migratory populations, eastern monarchs overwinter primarily in large aggregations in central Mexico, while western monarchs overwinter along the California coast into Baja, Mexico. The western North American adaptive capacity unit occurs in the Plan Area. Monarchs occur throughout much of California, with greatest abundance historically reported in the Central Valley, the Coastal Ranges, and lower-elevation areas of the Sierra Nevada. Western monarchs typically arrive at coastal overwintering sites in late October or early November and remain there through winter. Monarch butterflies occur in the Plan Area during migratory movements and the breeding season. Suitable larval host plants are present in the Plan Area, and monarchs may breed wherever milkweed plants occur. Suitable habitats include natural and semi-natural habitats that support milkweed used for egg laying and larval development, and other species of flowering plants that provide nectar resources for adults. The butterfly has experienced substantial declines over the past several decades and faces multiple threats throughout its range. Loss and degradation of habitat are primary threats due to agricultural intensification, pesticide use, disease, and parasites.

The Southern California ringtail occurs across a broad geographic range extending from Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, and Kansas southward through the southwestern United States into southern Mexico including western Riverside County, with observations primarily in the

San Jacinto Mountains and the southwestern portion of the county. Ringtail occupies a variety of habitat types, including oak woodland, chaparral, conifer forest, riparian, and desert palm oases. They are typically associated with areas with structural features such as rock outcrops, cliffs, or large trees, and are frequently found within approximately 0.6 miles from a reliable water source. Ringtail is an opportunistic predator whose diet is dominated by small mammals, including mice, rats, rabbits, and squirrels but also includes birds and their eggs, reptiles, invertebrates, and fruits and nuts. Ringtail populations are primarily threatened by habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation caused by development.

Staff are developing an MOU with CDFW that will enable the RCA and MSHCP reserve managers and the biological monitoring team to incidentally impact CBB while conducting routine management and monitoring actions on MSHCP ARL. This MOU will provide incidental take coverage for the RCA and MSHCP reserve managers and the Biological Monitoring Team until the Major Amendment is completed and the MSHCP permit from CDFW is amended.

In this amendment process we have learned from the Wildlife Agencies that they are hopeful that we can rely on the existing conservation strategy with some additional land management actions to meet permit issuance criteria for CBB and other species. For this approach to work, it is necessary to demonstrate that reserve assembly is functioning as intended by the MSHCP. We are aware of areas with reserve assembly shortfalls and staff are working with the Wildlife Agencies to quantify the amount of these shortfalls. The Wildlife Agencies have committed to working with the RCA and other Permittees to address these shortfalls.

Vice Chair Spiegel wanted to confirm that the main focus of the Major Amendment was the CBB, and these other three species are also going to be included.

Aaron Gabbe clarified that the primary concern was to amend the permit to add CBB. The direction from the Board was to complete a due diligence to see if there were any other species that should be included, to avoid amending the Plan a second time. Staff are currently proceeding as if the other three species will be added to the MSHCP, but it is possible as more information becomes available it will not be feasible or necessary to include them with CBB.

Vice Chair Spiegel was disappointed as it was thought that mentioning a Major Amendment meant making a major change to the MSHCP, and if a change was being brought back for discussion. Aaron Gabbe stated staff are first starting with CBB, and it has become apparent that if RCA is going to gain more flexibility, there are places that have shortfalls. Staff expect to be done by the end of May with the spatial analysis to identify where the shortfalls are, and how they can be made up.

Board Member Welty wanted to know when staff would be able to report on other sections of the amendment and the re-mapping of the area. Aaron Gabbe shared that staff will know how much needs to be made up and where it is available, though it is not a straightforward GIS analysis. This summer is when staff are going to start discussing this because the trades need to be in-kind for species. The goal is by late summer or early fall to have a solid understanding of the numbers and what is needed.

Aaron Hake added that the Strategic Improvement Assessment and Action Plan (SIAAP) was generated from concerns with the Habitat Acquisition Negotiation Strategy (HANS) process with RCA being forced to buy properties and not having any flexibility. The study found that the HANS process is not the problem, it is the way the Plan has been developed since permitting began. The CBB amendment is allowing staff to complete the analysis, to look at where the Plan is behind and creating some inflexibility. Through this process, RCA can also open some more flexibility. This is going to be very difficult; it will cost more money and will force RCA to buy more land to add CBB and make up any shortfalls in areas of the Plan that are overdeveloped. Part of this process will be to identify where RCA is behind and then develop a strategy for how we catch back up, providing some flexibility.

Aaron Gabbe stated that RCA is really hoping to not have to buy additional land, or to require additional conservation above and beyond the current obligation of 153, 000 to cover these other species.

Vice Chair Spiegel took issue with the players that try to play RCA, and we must find a way to push back against it.

Aaron Hake shared that another element of the solution is RCA needs to partner more with member agencies land use planning departments. RCA has found inconsistencies in general plans between where conservation and development should be. Having helped in setting up these designations first, RCA could avoid some of these issues. This is something that RCA will struggle with as they do not have land use authority. When a city makes a zoning change on a property that is supposed to be conserved, the HANS process says RCA needs to buy it but is now doing so at the industrial value rather than open space or rural residential.

Board Member Washington stated that there was push back when these issues are brought up that conservation does not follow common sense rules. What is being forgotten is that when this plan was set-up 20 years ago, everybody applauded the effort because it streamlined development. As we have grown over the last 20 years, and space has become more of a commodity, people are starting to push back or manipulate. The original message needs to be brought back, and cities need to get on board to become disciples of the MSHCP.

Board Member Welty shared that the concern for cities in downgrading areas is having property owners complaining and the financial burden now falling on the city not RCA.

This item is for the Executive Committee to receive and file an update on the status of the Major Amendment to the MSHCP.

9. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS

Aaron Hake introduced new staff Maria Garcia, Financial Budget Manager, and Cody Bear Sutton, Reserve Management/Monitoring Manager.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Bash adjourned the meeting at 12:18 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Monday, May 4, 2026**.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Mobley".

Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Director/
Clerk of the Board