# *WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY*

## *BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES*

**Monday, October 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** | | **Board of Directors Absent** |
|---|---|---|
| Karen Spiegel | Dan Temple | Jose Medina |
| Yxstian Gutierrez* | Ulises Cabrera | Chuck Washington |
| Colleen Wallace | Ron Holliday | V. Manuel Perez |
| Julio Martinez | Kevin Bash | Dale Welty |
| Jeff Cervantez | David Starr Rabb | Veronica Sanchez |
| Tony Daddario | Patricia Lock Dawson | |
| Jocelyn Yow | Crystal Ruiz | |
| Connie Howard-Clark | Jessica Alexander | |
| Bob Magee | Joseph Morabito | |

*Arrived after the meeting was called to order.

**3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chair Bash.

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

**6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – AUGUST 3, 2026**

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

**6C. WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY MULTIPLE SPECIES HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN FEE COLLECTION REPORT FOR JULY 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 July 2026.

**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 August 31, 2026.

**6E. ACQUISITIONS STATUS REPORT**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the acquisition status report as of July 31, 2026.

**6F. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR JUNE 2026**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended June 30, 2026.

**6G. MONTHLY INVESTMENT REPORT FOR JULY 2026**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the Monthly Investment Report for the month ended July 31, 2026.

**6H. CONSULTANT REPORTS – FISCAL YEAR 2026 FOURTH QUARTER**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the consultant reports for Fiscal Year 2026, Fourth Quarter.

**6I. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file the preliminary fourth-quarter financial statements for the year ended June 30, 2026.

**6J. STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

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

**7. 2026 WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT UPDATE**

Cody Bear Sutton, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, presented the 2026 Wildfire Management Update. Seven fires affected RCA-owned or MSHCP conserved lands in 2026. Together they burned roughly 9,200 acres. About 1,400 of those acres were on RCA owned lands and Additional Reserve Lands (ARL), and about 5,900 were Public/Quasi Public (PQP) conserved lands, with the remainder on private or other ownership.

At this time, Board Member Gutierrez arrived.

The Spring Fire ignited on the morning of April 3, on private property along Gilman Springs Road, just north of Mystic Lake. It grew to roughly 4,180 acres, including about 740 acres of reserve lands managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and 3,260 acres of other MSHCP conserved PQP lands. Most of the fire burned within the San Jacinto Wildlife Area, Davis Road Unit, and Lake Perris State Recreation Area. When the fire started, RCA ranger staff traveled to the RCA Nuevo Donation property to alert firefighting crews to the Burrowing Owl resource avoidance area on that property. Staff coordinated with CDFW law enforcement at the Davis Road closure and stayed on-site until it was clear the fire had moved west, ensuring that neither the fire nor suppression activity would affect the Nuevo Donation.

The Vista Fire ignited on the afternoon of April 17, on private property and moved quickly onto conserved lands before being contained at about 180 acres. Roughly 100 acres of RCA-owned lands were affected, including the North Peak and Gritton properties, along with about 50 acres of conserved Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. Staff inspected the fire over the following days, mapped the perimeter, and documented three dozer lines that crews had cut inside the property. Staff also re-secured a 20-foot section of fencing along Vista Road that had been cut for fire access.

The Bain Fire ignited around 11 a.m. on May 19, near Limonite Avenue, on the north side of the Hidden Valley Wildlife Area. It first spread south and west, but by early afternoon it had jumped containment lines. Winds shifted to the east and pushed the fire upstream through riparian habitat toward the Natural Resource Management headquarters, where the land management team's offices are located. County Parks staff conducted structure protection operations at the Hidden Valley Nature Center and at the headquarters, neither of which sustained any damage in the fire. By that evening the fire had grown to roughly 1,500 acres. No RCA-owned lands or ARL were burned in this fire, but approximately 950 acres of PQP conserved lands were affected. Our staff assisted responding agencies with mop-up over the following two days.

The Blackburn Fire started in the early morning hours of June 5, along the shoulder of Bautista Canyon Road. It was contained quickly at about 17 acres, roughly 13 of which were RCA-owned

lands. No dozer lines or retardant were used on RCA lands, and there was no damage to RCA infrastructure. Staff verified the fire location and coordinated with the CalFire Battalion Chief on scene to assist with response.

The Shore Fire ignited on the afternoon of June 15, north of the Badlands Landfill and south of San Timoteo Canyon Road. It was fast-moving, growing past 1,500 acres the first evening and reaching about 3,270 acres in total. The fire affected roughly 2,192 acres of MSHCP-conserved lands, most of which was within the Norton Younglove Reserve, with about 1,675 acres burned. Another 517 acres were spread across three properties: the San Timoteo Canyon Badlands, owned by County Parks, at about 512 acres; the Hurd Gift property, owned by the state, at nearly 4 acres; and the RCA-owned Morring property, at just over an acre. Eleven days earlier, on June 4, staff attended a 120-acre prescribed burn on the Norton Younglove Reserve. That burn created an effective fuel break that held the northeast flank of the Shore Fire. It was a clear example of proactive fuels work slowing a real wildfire.

The Wilson Fire was reported around 5:45 p.m. on July 13, along Wilson Valley Road, north of Aguanga. Crews established a perimeter and held it at about 18 acres, essentially all of which was on RCA-owned lands on the Sunland Donation property. There was some ground disturbance from suppression, since fire crews cut line on RCA property to bring the fire under control. Staff worked with CalFire to remedy the disturbed area and repaired all fence cuts.

The Taffle Fire ignited on the afternoon of August 14, near the community of Sage, about three miles east of Sage Road and eight miles south of Valle Vista. It moved with a critical rate of spread and burned about 45 acres. Preliminary mapping showed it spreading north onto the RCA's S.S.R. Investment Company property, affecting roughly 14 acres of RCA-owned lands. Staff mapped a dozer line on the property and repaired a cut fence.

Since 2019, RCA and County Parks staff have worked with CalFire to identify RCA lands adjacent to structures and roads to reduce fuels on them. Routine work includes mowing and trimming, largely of invasive species, and reducing ladder fuels that are especially dangerous near adjacent structures. Like any landowner in the County, the RCA responds to fuel abatement notices from County and local fire agencies, and County Parks staff carry out that work under County and local ordinance. Fuel management zones are typically 100 feet around structures and 30 to 100 feet along roads, unless a local fire authority specifies otherwise. This year we also saw the value of some of this proactive work firsthand. Staff participating in a 120-acre prescribed burn on the Norton Younglove Reserve in early June created a fuel break that later held one flank of the Shore Fire.

During active fire incidents, County Parks staff respond to RCA properties to assist the responding agencies. That work often includes reporting to Incident Command daily, coordinating access routes across RCA lands with CalFire and other agencies, opening gates to provide access, and coordinating with BLM, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and the Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Advisors on species locations, resource avoidance areas, and recovery practices.

Once a fire is out and it is safe to enter, County Parks staff assess the affected properties and continue coordinating with CalFire on cleanup, which often includes recontouring dozer lines. Burn areas are evaluated for any mitigation needed to protect the sensitive species that live there. These areas are especially vulnerable to invasive plants after fire, because there is open ground and little competition from natives. In some cases, staff bring in restoration ecologists to help set the next steps. This year staff joined Rivers and Lands Conservancy and County Parks for a volunteer restoration event at the DR Horton conservation easement, within the 2025 Keith Fire burn scar. About 30 volunteers removed invasive stinknet and mustards across roughly five acres and filled 34 bags of material. Controlling invasive species in a burn scar like this is exactly the kind of post-fire work that helps native habitat recover. There have been successes with larger scale restoration, including the recovery of Quino Checkerspot Butterfly habitat after the 2022 Fairview Fire, working with University of California ecologists to control invasives and reseed host plants.

In November 2024, the RCA selected the firm Dudek to develop a Wildfire Management Plan for the entire MSHCP reserve system. The plan will formalize how the RCA manages wildfire across conserved lands, covering fuels management, fire agency collaboration, resource protection, and post fire recovery. Its top priorities are human safety and the protection of MSHCP covered species and their habitats. This plan primarily incorporates existing RCA practices into a comprehensive, high-level planning document.

Significant progress has been made since the project began. Dudek has built a GIS database for the plan area and completed extensive field assessments of conserved lands, wildfire hazard modeling, and community risk assessment paired with habitat type conversion risk modeling. This progress was presented to the Executive Committee in August, and staff held a Stakeholder meeting on August 19. Staff have also met with several fire agencies and tribal governments to gather their input. Dudek completed the first internal draft, and the RCA is currently reviewing it now.

Looking ahead, staff will continue the outreach efforts with tribal governments and fire agencies. The next step is to submit comments on the first internal draft, after which the wildlife agencies will review a second internal draft. The input gathered from stakeholders will continue to be incorporated throughout the drafting phase, with a public draft ready for release in early 2027.

Board Member Magee wanted to know now that nesting season is finally over, whether staff has a punch list of areas that need to be maintained, specifically drainage areas, as they get closer to El Niño. Cody Bear Sutton stated this was something staff had been talking about prior to this meeting. This is something staff would like to see developed to provide a better way to track the facilities. The job would fall to County Parks staff to check those areas that saw fire activity this season.

Vice Chair Spiegel asked what happens when the protected species cross over into other areas. Cody Bear Sutton explained that in Dudek's modeling their approach was to review all covered species and determine what they were sensitive to, identifying those that are most sensitive to

type conversion, and then prioritize them. Dudek developed a short list of the highest-priority species and focused on those, overlaying areas where the wildfire risks are the highest. This would provide a scenario where RCA could focus efforts on any type of fuel reduction.

Vice Chair Spiegel asked if RCA would relocate species after a fire to an area where they would be able to flourish. Cody Bear Sutton stated that this is not something that RCA has done in the past, but staff have talked about areas that have experienced fire and have not rebounded, taking the opportunity to reintroduce a species that had previously been eradicated.

Board Member Lock Dawson wondered whether with Congress recently passing the Fix Our Forests Act that this would be something RCA would look into to see if there are additional funding opportunities available for fuels management.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, stated that RCA has not looked into that particular bill yet, but staff will review it and report back on what opportunities may be available.

Board Member Holliday wanted to know when working with the city fire departments, if there were discussions on mitigation of RCA lands located right next to homes. Cody Bear Sutton shared that RCA responds to all weed abatement requests as well as requests from cities for mitigation on RCA owned properties.

Aaron Hake added that staff hopes to have a draft of the Wildfire Management Plan presented to the Board in early 2027 following a comment period among staff.

Board Member Ruiz wanted to know if the number of fires this season was above average. Cody Bear Sutton shared that in looking at the previous two years, there were more fires this season, but some were smaller fires than those previously experienced. The cause of these fires has not officially been determined yet.

Board Member Martinez asked if the Blackburn Fire brought up any issues with access. Cody Bear Sutton stated that, this time, there were no issues with coordinating access as staff were nearby during this particular fire. The Wildfire Management Plan will address how RCA interacts and coordinates with other agencies and the benefits involved.

**This item is for the Board of Directors to receive and file an update on wildfires that have affected RCA conserved lands and an update on the progress that has been made on the Wildfire Management Plan during 2026.**

## 8. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Aaron Hake shared that the Wildlife Conservation Board came to Riverside County in August to visit a couple properties in Calimesa and Lake Elsinore to look at some grant opportunities. RCA staff continue to work with our funding partners to look for more funding for MSHCP acquisitions.

RCA Regional Conservation Director, Aaron Gabbe, was recently a speaker at the California Natural Resources Agencies final 30x30 summit. Dr. Gabbe led a statewide conversation on habitat conservation plans with the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Governor in attendance.

Kevin Cunningham was introduced as the new MSHCP Compliance Manager, bringing to the RCA nearly 20 years of experience in environmental planning and regulatory compliance.

Board Member Daddario shared that RCA coordinated a meeting with Secretary Crowfoot in the city of Corona, which included a tour and hike of B Canyon. Listening to Secretary Crowfoot explain some of the ways the state is trying to marry development and conservation was very important. It did come across as though the Secretary understood the need that existed and the plight of RCA.

Chair Bash added that Secretary Crowfoot was down to earth, very personable, and knowledgeable on habitat conservation plans.

**9. CLOSED SESSION**

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

**9A. 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 | 555-280-008 (Portion of) | Dave Pillow | RCA |
| 2 | 555-280-005, 555-280-007, 555-280-011, & 555-280-012 | Keith Draxten, et al. | RCA |
| 3 | 964-070-002 & 964-070-003 | David P. Ziony, et al. | RCA |

**9B. REPORT OUT FROM CLOSED SESSION**

Mr. DeBaun announced the Board considered and approved the following closed session item:

Item 3: acquisition of the property was approved for $3,893,000

**10. 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, November 2, 2026**.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Mobley
Administrative Services Director/
Clerk of the Board