WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Monday, August 3, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the Executive Committee was called to order by Chair Kevin Bash at 11:31 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	**Members Absent**
Karen Spiegel	Julio Martinez
Chuck Washington	Crystal Ruiz
Dale Welty	
Kevin Bash	
Joseph Morabito	

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 (Spiegel/Welty) to approve the following Consent Calendar items.

6A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MAY 4, 2026

7. UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Cody Bear Sutton, Reserve Management and Monitoring Manager, provided a presentation on the Master Wildfire Management Plan (WMP) update. Dudek was awarded a contract in November 2024 to develop the Wildfire Management Plan for the MSHCP reserve system.

The purpose of the plan is to formalize existing wildfire management methods across the reserve, giving RCA and its partners a consistent, program-level approach to wildfire prevention, fuels management, and support and collaboration with first responder agencies. Rather than addressing wildfire response reactively on a property-by-property basis, the WMP is meant to establish a single framework that guides decision-making that will help eventually develop tailored wildfire management strategies for each habitat management unit in the future. Throughout the plan, priority is given first to human safety, and second to the protection of MSHCP covered species and their habitats, recognizing that both fire management and conservation goals need to be balanced together rather than treated as competing priorities.

Since our last update, Dudek has completed the core hazard and risk modeling that forms the technical foundation of the plan. This model evaluates burn probability and wildfire hazard across the reserve system, along with risk to structures and potential impacts on sensitive species and habitats. It also assesses the potential for post-fire vegetation type conversion. This happens when native habitat burns too often or too intensely, so instead of recovering to its original vegetation type, it is replaced by non-native grasses. This is a real threat to the MSHCP because many of the covered species depend on those native habitat types to survive. A map was presented, provided by Dudek, that showed an example of some of the completed modeling. To build it, Dudek first mapped wildfire risk and frequency across the reserve system. They then looked at MSHCP-covered species and identified which ones are most sensitive to vegetation type conversion. From there, they layered type conversion risk against areas where those most sensitive covered species overlap to identify the priority areas shown on the map. The black areas represent RCA-managed lands. Within those lands, purple indicates high priority, meaning a high risk of type conversion but a lower likelihood of future fire, and blue indicates very high priority, meaning both a high risk of type conversion and a high likelihood of future fire occurrence.

As part of plan development, Dudek and RCA staff met with CAL FIRE to present the WMP framework and the modeling approach described on the previous slide. That meeting provided valuable feedback on CAL FIRE's goals, priorities, and management considerations for the plan area. That feedback is being incorporated directly into the WMP's recommendations, helping ensure the plan aligns with how the state's lead fire agency approaches wildfire risk in this region.

Beyond CAL FIRE, RCA has also been conducting targeted coordination with Tribal governments and their local fire agencies. This has included outreach to Tribal representatives and fire chiefs from the Morongo, Pechanga, Soboba, and Cahuilla Bands to gather their input on plan development, risk modeling, and management considerations specific to their areas. This outreach is intended to make sure the plan reflects local, on-the-ground knowledge, not just technical modeling.

With the technical modeling complete, the project has moved into the early administrative draft phase, where Dudek is translating those results into management strategies and recommendations for the plan document. Looking ahead, RCA is planning a broader

stakeholder meeting on August 19. That meeting will expand participation beyond the agencies and Tribal partners already engaged, with invitations going out to county and city fire chiefs, wildlife agencies, the Stakeholders Committee, and other interested partners. Staff will use that meeting to walk through key components of the administrative draft, including the wildfire risk and vegetation type conversion modeling, and to gather feedback on the management approach before the plan moves to its first public draft. This outreach is an important step, since the broader input received in August will directly shape the content of that public draft. RCA is targeting release of the public draft this winter, heading into 2027, with the plan finalized and brought back to the Board in early 2027.

Board Member Morabito asked whether, when there is an intense fire and species are replaced by non-native grasses, that would mean that the grasses we now call native would have been non-native hundreds or thousands of years ago.

Aaron Gabbe, Regional Conservation Director, stated that the intensity and frequency of fire have changed, so shorter fire cycles make it more challenging for the original vegetation type to recover. Some of the grasses respond more quickly, so they can take over and prevent the current vegetation type from being established.

Harry Sandoval, Regional Conservation Deputy Director, added that Board Member Morabito was correct and that those grasses we see now would have been non-native a couple hundred years ago.

Board Member Washington stated that, over the last year and a half, the Third District has invested about $500,000 to clear out vegetation on either side of power lines that are managed by the Anza Co-op as a preventative measure. It was suggested that this could be coordinated into the WMP.

Aaron Gabbe shared that this was the type of question that staff had anticipated; however, this plan is really for reserves and areas that might become reserves. There is an entire community wildfire protection planning process that happens at the county or city level that addresses issues beyond RCA specifically. Ideally, that would happen and RCA would then coordinate to integrate those efforts. This WMP is not at the level of a community wildfire protection plan process. There is grant funding available for developing those as well.

Board Member Washington stated that the funding that was invested was a commitment to the Anza Valley community, and there is some reserve land in the region. Efforts to prevent wildfires might not be in those areas, but they would likely be adjacent.

Aaron Gabbe thought it was relevant because the biggest challenges in Southern California for wildfire prevention and management is the likelihood of ignitions. If there are ignitions happening off the reserve, or where RCA might have management authority over, it has potential to affect our land. The comment was relevant because one of the biggest challenges facing wildfire prevention and management in Southern California is the likelihood of ignitions. If there are ignitions occurring off the reserve, or in areas over which RCA might have management authority, they have the potential to affect RCA-managed lands.

Karen Cleary-Rose, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, shared that agencies responsible for vegetation maintenance, particularly flood control agencies, routinely clear channels and remove vegetation. Once removed, there is a choice to remove the vegetation entirely or use the less expensive option of grinding it up and leaving it in place, which can cause some vegetation to resprout. With Flood Control being concerned with the hassle of having to work around these new species, they are not upset when new weeds grow in the river. With the permit that Flood Control has, they do not need to worry about impacts to protected species.

Board Member Welty wanted to make sure RCA staff would be engaged with federal agencies, not just wildlife agencies.

Harry Sandoval stated that staff have had preliminary discussions with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which has its own Fire Management Department. BLM staff will be reviewing the final draft and have already made some initial recommendations. Staff also plan to speak with the U.S. Forest Service, as well as essentially any fire agency that would have a shared border with the reserve system.

Chair Bash asked how RCA could coordinate differing regulatory requirements, noting that restrictions associated with power lines, including limitations on flying over or within 600 feet of them, differ from California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and CAL FIRE requirements for protecting power lines.

Harry Sandoval said it was challenging to navigate the differing regulatory requirements, and that this issue is relatively new to the region.

Aaron Hake, Executive Director, added that this effort is complex and multi-jurisdictional and thanked staff for their efforts. RCA is taking the time to ensure the appropriate stakeholders have adequate time to review and provide input. Within the last month, a jurisdiction reached out to RCA about fuels management on a conservation property that is not owned or managed by RCA. RCA staff did their best to facilitate a conversation between the jurisdiction and the nonprofit organization that owned the property, but this highlighted broader wildfire management issues that other entities are also facing. This plan focuses on what is and could come into the RCA reserve system, but RCA staff will do their best to coordinate with other entities and nonprofit organizations.

Aaron Gabbe stated that the comments and concerns shared during the discussion have been valuable input. Ultimately, these are public lands that RCA is helping to protect on behalf of the public.

M/S/C to:

This item is for the Committee to receive and file an update on the development of the Wildfire Management Plan (WMP), including upcoming stakeholder outreach and engagement.

8. BOARD OF DIRECTORS / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORTS

Aaron Hake shared that the work to complete the Major Amendment to the MSHCP to include Crotch's bumble bee continues. In a few months, staff will have an update to present to the Executive Committee.

9. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for consideration by the Executive Committee, Chair Bash adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m. The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled to be held on **Monday, October 5, 2026**.

Respectfully submitted,

Melonie Donson

Melonie Donson
Deputy Clerk of the Board