

Riverside County Habitat Conservation Authority

4.A

Regular Meeting ~ Minutes ~

Thursday, February 20, 2020

11:30 AM

WRCOG Citrus Conference Room

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Michael Vargas at 11:34 a.m., at WRCOG's office, 3390 University Avenue, Suite 200, Riverside, CA.

Jurisdiction	Attendee	Status	Arrived
City of Corona	Jacque Casillas	Present	11:30 AM
City of Hemet	Russ Brown	Present	11:30 AM
City of Lake Elsinore	Tim Sheridan	Present	11:30 AM
City of Menifee	Lesa Sobek	Present	11:30 AM
City of Moreno Valley		Absent	
City of Murrieta		Absent	
City of Perris	Michael Vargas	Present	11:30 AM
City of Riverside	Steve Hemenway	Present	11:30 AM
City of Temecula	James Stewart	Present	11:30 AM
City of Wildomar	Joseph Morabito	Present	11:30 AM
County of Riverside	Jeff Hewitt	Present	11:30 AM
RCHCA Director	Rick Bishop	Present	11:30 AM

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board member Tim Sheridan led members and guests in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

4. WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Chairman Vargas welcomed new Board members Russ Brown (City of Hemet) and Steven Hemenway (City of Riverside).

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

6. ELECTION OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS LEADERSHIP FOR 2020

Action: 1. *Elected Michael Vargas, City of Perris, as Chair, and Lesa Sobek, City of Menifee, as Vice-Chair.*

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER: County of Riverside
SECONDER: City of Wildomar
AYES: Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside
ABSENT: Moreno Valley, Murrieta

7. MINUTES

A. Summary Minutes from the November 21, 2019, Board of Directors Meeting are Available for Consideration.

Action: 1. *Approved the Summary Minutes from the November 21, 2019, Board of Directors meeting.*

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER: City of Wildomar
SECONDER: City of Corona
AYES: Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside
ABSENT: Moreno Valley, Murrieta

8. CONSENT AND POLICY CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER: County of Riverside
SECONDER: City of Temecula
AYES: Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside
ABSENT: Moreno Valley, Murrieta

A. Status of Mitigation Fee Transfers from Member Agencies through December 31, 2019

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

B. Financial Report through December 31, 2019

This item was pulled for discussion by Board member Lesa Sobek who asked about expenditures that were not budgeted.

Princess Hester, RCHCA Director of Administration, indicated that when the budget was prepared RCHCA was still matriculating from the County's financial system to WRCOG. Accounting numbers are not the same, so where there are discrepancies, they are actually categorized under different accounting numbers. Going forward with the new budget everything will be consistent.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

RESULT:	APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED
MOVER:	City of Menifee
SECONDER:	City of Temecula
AYES:	Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside
ABSENT:	Moreno Valley, Murrieta

C. Status Report on the Attendance Roster

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

D. Approval of the Schedule of Board Meetings for 2020

Action: 1. *Approved the Schedule of RCHCA Board Meetings for 2020.*

E. Status Report Concerning Reserve Management Committees for the Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve and the Lake Mathews Reserve

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

F. Fiscal Year 2019/2020 3rd Quarter Budget Amendment

Action: 1. *Approved the 3rd Quarter Budget Amendment for Fiscal Year 2019/2020.*

9. REPORTS / DISCUSSION

A. Status Update on Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Recovery Efforts

Princess Hester, RCHCA Director of Administration, reported that staff continue to work on items identified in the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) Habitat Conservation Plan to demonstrate recovery of SKR. RCHCA contracted with Conservation Biology Institute (CBI) in 2019 for the development of a Habitat Suitability Model. The Model is published for review on a platform called Data Basin, which allows for review and feedback by researchers, land managers, etc. This platform also allows for updating spatial or spectral imagery. This Model will be used as a guide future changes.

RCHCA received a grant from Bureau of Land Management (BLM), a portion of which will be used for the development of a Range-Wide Managing and Monitoring Program. Currently there are many other agencies which manage and monitor SKR utilizing a variety of methodologies. Staff would like one, succinct methodology for all to use. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) agrees. Staff is working with CBI to develop the protocol. The working group includes RCHCA, wildlife agencies, San Diego Institute for Conservation Leadership, BLM, the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA), and military personnel in northern San Diego County.

Once complete, staff will work with the USFWS, which has to adopt this Model and implement it amongst the agencies which manage SKR.

RCHCA is in the process of downlisting SKR from Endangered to Threatened. Currently, the Species Status Assessment has been updated and is now at headquarters under review in

Washington, D.C. Once the proposed rule for downlisting is published, it will be forwarded to the Federal Register for posting; staff's goal is to have this complete in 2020.

Board member Yolanda Carrillo asked who else monitors SKR.

Mrs. Hester responded that the RCA, private landowners, smaller biological entities, BLM, and others. The collector app created by RCHCA is accessed online, so viewers can see the most

up to date data for SKR.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

B. Steele Peak Public Access Plan Activities Update

Princess Hester, RCHCA Director of Administration, reported that the Steele Peak Reserve was chosen for a Public Access Plan because this land is owned by RCHCA and the community would benefit from recreational activity opportunities. Alta Planning + Design will develop the Plan.

Two community meetings have been held; community members present expressed an overwhelmingly support of this Plan. However, there was a low response to a survey which was mailed to community members. A post card will be created and mailed to property owners most adjacent to the Plan area.

Funding has been identified to support managing and patrol and endowments have been set up.

Staff is working with the Riverside County Department of Waste Resources on a specific area to be used for parking. Potential trails were shared with the Board.

Chairman Vargas indicated that the unincorporated area near the Reserve is not a very big area and suggested expanding the survey area.

Board member Lesa Sobek asked if the types of recreational activities have been determined.

Mrs. Hester responded that the exact types has not yet been determined and is the purpose of the survey; however, hiking, biking, and equestrian use has been voiced as desired.

Next steps include finalizing a draft map, funding, and concurrence with the wildlife agencies.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

C. Riverside Communities Partnership Project Activities Update

Princess Hester, RCHCA Director of Administration, reported that RCHCA applied for a grant for community volunteers through the AmeriCorps National Civilian Communities Corps (NCCC) Program; RCHCA was awarded two rounds of volunteers. We are currently in Round 2; RCHCA's new Community Services Specialist Intern, Diana Vaca, is leading the AmeriCorps team.

Ms. Vaca reported that the Riverside Communities Partnership Project (RCPP) is a collaboration of 11 partners working on a wide range of activities to support social infrastructure resources needed in the community.

The AmeriCorps team has learned to manage the land and the benefits of giving back to the community. The team has accomplished invasive plant species removal and participated in the Pint in Time homeless count.

The RCPP has received recent recognition by way of a member of the team being interviewed in a local newspaper. NCCC representatives from the Sacramento and federal level will be visiting in April to meet staff and discuss the RCPP.

Ms. Vaca indicated that prior to coming to RCHCA she was enrolled in the California Conservation Corps for three years, working two years in trail work and the last year was working with wildlife with the Bureau of Land Management.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

D. Contracted Land Management and Monitoring Activities Update

Brian Shomo, RCHCA Director of Natural Resources, reported that the Bureau of Land Management had contracted with RCHCA for the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) Management and Monitoring Plan, fencing access control, and remote sensing, to name a few services.

RCHCA also contracts with the Metropolitan Water District for various wildlife surveys, weed management and mapping, and meso-carnivore surveys, to name a few services.

Mariposa Biology has contracted with RCHCA to perform a small mammal survey, herpetological survey, aerial drone weed mapping, and riparian mitigation restoration.

RCHCA performs the removal, control, and maintenance of wild weed, and restoration of native species for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

E. Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Reserve Management and Monitoring Efforts Activities Update

Brian Shomo, RCHCA Director of Natural Resources, reported that Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) is a small rodent related to the squirrel family and prefers open grassland for its environment. SKR is federally listed as Endangered and as Threatened with the state in 1988.

Non-native grasses and other weeds have dominated California's open spaces for decades. The primary focus over the years is to reduce these non-native grasses and weeds. Staff graze, mow, burn, and apply herbicide; grazing is the preferred method. Sheep are brought in for grazing. SKR prefer burning; however, the public perception is not very good for this process. Two groups of 700 sheep were brought in for grazing this year.

Once the removal of non-native grasses and other weeds have been, restoration begins. Staff are working to put native plants back in place by seeding by hand and mechanical equipment.

A herder is brought in to watch and rotate the sheep and is with them 24/7. Herding dogs are also brought in to protect the sheep from coyotes. The biggest threat to the sheep is pneumonia.

SKR monitoring is done in a 3-year cycle and requires a permit issued by the state. Basic monitoring includes detecting population changes and assisting Reserve managers with annual work plans. Years ago, staff took ear snips from SKR and created a database for genetic comparison – if inbreeding is discovered that is a problem.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

F. **Innovation in Management and Monitoring Activities Update**

Harry Sandoval, Senior Ecological Resources Specialist, reported that RCHCA is responsible for the management of vast amounts of land; the Lake Mathews Reserve is approximately 12,000 acres.

In spring 2017 staff realized that globe chamomile (stinknet) had begun expanding its range from its historical area at Lake Perris into the Lake Mathews Reserve area. Stinknet is an invasive plant species which originated from South Africa and can out compete other plants. While the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) will eat stinknet seeds, it will only do so as a last resort. Studies have found that in places where stinknet is prolific, the body weight of SKR is lower. This is a concern because if their body weight is lower, they are not likely to reproduce.

It was determined that, due to the terrain and vast amount of land, remote sensing would be the best solution to quickly identify and map stinknet so that infestation could be stopped. Each plant contains hundreds of seeds and could therefore create thousands of plants. Satellite imagery is not instant, is very costly, and the images are not very clear at the level staff needs.

Staff has been utilizing a drone for remote sensing, which has been very successful. The process for mapping is very unique. The more the drone is flown, the more the software learns. While one biologist can survey approximately 5 acres in one day by walking the lands, the drone can very accurately survey approximately 400 to 700 acres per day.

A flight plan is programmed, the drone flies the route and collects images. The data is input into a program to analyze species and plants. Plants are identified by different colors which staff can use to create vegetation maps. Location of species can be accessed via a mobile device within three feet of the species.

Riparian restorations can be time consuming and costly. Staff have been experimenting with Air Layering, which has determined to be very successful. Air Layering is currently use in the agricultural industry to produce hard to root plants. Plats grown via Air Layering are larger and acclimated to local climate conditions, the genetics of plants are identical to those already in the area, restoration projects will mature faster, and there are reduced costs associated with plant replacement.

Action: 1. *Received and filed.*

10. **REPORT FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER**

Rick Bishop, RCHCA General Manager, reported that the transition of RCHCA from the County of Riverside into WRCOG is complete and creates significant budget savings as anticipated.

11. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

There were no items for future agendas.

12. GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Board member Joseph Morabito announced that the Wildomar Trail has been named and signs will be posted soon.

Chairman Vargas announced that the Southern California Railway Museum is having a swap meet on March 7, 2020.

13. NEXT MEETING

The next RCHCA Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2020, at 11:30 a.m., at WRCOG's office located at 3390 University Avenue, Suite 200, Riverside.

14. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 1:03 p.m.
