

Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the RCHCA Board of Directors was called to order by Chair Lesa Sobek at 11:30 a.m., on February 17, 2022, on the Zoom platform.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Director Russ Brown led the Board members and guests in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

- City of Hemet - Russ Brown
- City of Menifee - Lesa Sobek (Chair)
- City of Moreno Valley - Ulises Cabrera
- City of Murrieta - Lisa DeForest
- City of Perris - Michael Vargas
- City of Riverside - Steve Hemenway
- City of Temecula - Jessica Alexander*
- City of Wildomar - Joseph Morabito
- County of Riverside - District 5 - Jeff Hewitt

*Joined after Roll Call

4. WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Chair Sobek welcomed new Board of Directors Ulises Cabrera, City of Moreno Valley, and Jessica Alexander, City of Temecula.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

6. CONSENT AND POLICY CALENDAR

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

MOVER: County of Riverside - District 5

SECONDER: Perris

AYES: Hemet, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside - District 5

The City of Murrieta did not respond.

A. AB 361 Findings

Action:

1. Adopted Resolution Number 2021-04; A Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency authorizing virtual Board meetings pursuant to Assembly Bill 361. The resolution includes the following findings:
 - a. The Governor proclaimed a State of Emergency on March 4, 2020, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which State of Emergency continues to exist today; and
 - b. State or local officials have recommended measures to promote social distancing.

B. Summary Minutes from the November 18, 2021, Board of Directors Meeting

Action:

1. Approved the Summary Minutes from the November 18, 2021, Board of Directors meeting.

C. Status of Mitigation Fee Transfers from Member Agencies Through December 31, 2021

Action:

1. Received and filed.

D. Financial Report Through December 31, 2021

Action:

1. Received and filed.

E. Contracted Land Management and Monitoring Activities Update

Action:

1. Received and filed.

F. Status Report on the Attendance Roster

Action:

1. Received and filed.

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

Action:

1. Received and filed.

H. Status Report Concerning Reserve Management Coordinating Committee

Action:

1. Received and filed.

7. REPORTS / DISCUSSION

A. Election of Leadership for Calendar Year 2022

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, reported that in accordance with RCHCA policy, Vice-Chair Joseph Morabito shall automatically move up to the Chair position, and Vice-Chair Morabito has expressed interest to do so.

The Board is being requested to nominate and elect a new Vice-Chair for 2022.

Director Michael Vargas expressed his opinion that it is not appropriate to list a specific person on the agenda for nomination and selection, even if it has been common practice.

Actions:

1. The Board of Directors nominated and elected Joseph Morabito, City of Wildomar, to serve as Chair for 2022. **RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED**

MOVER: County of Riverside - District 5

SECONDER: Perris

AYES: Hemet, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside - District 5

2. The Board of Directors nominated and elected Lisa DeForest, City of Murrieta, to serve as Vice-Chair for 2022.

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

MOVER: Hemet

SECONDER: Perris

AYES: Hemet, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside - District 5

Newly elected Chair Morabito continued the meeting.

B. Status Update on Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Recovery Efforts

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, reported that as of February 17, 2022, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has officially downlisted Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) from endangered to threatened. This has been a nearly three-decade long endeavor.

RCHCA will continue efforts towards large scale regional population monitoring with the goal to demonstrate full recovery of SKR by continuing grazing, population management, habitat restoration activities, and survey and monitoring work.

The Range-wide Monitoring Plan will be finalized by the next Board meeting. RCHCA currently monitors approximately 60 grids over the course of three years, and this will increase to approximately 150 grids. Monitoring can only occur during mid-lunar cycles; 2 weeks out of the month. It will take approximately eight weeks to monitor all 150 grids. RCHCA is seeking assistance from partner agencies.

Board members congratulated staff on the downlisting.

Action:

1. Received and filed.

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

Harry Sandoval, RCHCA Natural Resources Manager, reported that under a contract with Mariposa Biology, staff carried out a small mammal survey within habitat restoration sites of the El Sobrante Landfill.

Under a contract with the Southern California Metropolitan Water District, staff also carried out the restoration of 30 acres of grassland habitat and one acre of coastal sagescrub habitat at the Lake Mathews Reserve.

Staff has been working with Cal Fire to update the Lake Mathews / Estelle Mountain Reserve Vegetation Management Plan (VMP). During this renewal, over 4,000 acres of burnable land will be added to the Lake Mathews / Estelle Mountain VMP. What is unique about this VMP is that the Lake Mathews Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the El Sobrante Landfill HCP, and the SKR HCP will all be combined into the VMP.

Cal Fire conducts regional fire training at the Lake Mathews Reserve. This is beneficial to the firefighters as well as the SKR species, and reduces fuel loads in the area.

The first prescribed burn for this year will take place late spring / early summer. Sheep grazing is currently in effect and will continue for approximately one more month. If any Board members are interested in a tour, please reach out to staff.

Action:

1. Received and filed.

D. Steele Peak Public Access Plan Activities Update

Riana Fisher, RCHCA Program Manager, reported that staff held two meetings with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in November 2021 and December 2021 to discuss the Mitigated Negative Declaration in further detail regarding the Steele Peak Inaugural Trail's compatibility with the SKR Habitat Conservation Plan and biological resource management. The Trail will be located adjacent to the City of Perris in unincorporated Riverside County at RCHCA's Steele Peak Reserve. The Trail will provide passive outdoor recreation to the community, and will have full time patrol of the Trail and Reserve during daylight hours, which will hopefully deter unwanted trespassing and dumping.

The Trail CEQA document was distributed for review and comment; 17 comments were received via a joint letter by the USFWS and CDFW (the Agencies). A meeting was held to discuss in detail.

RCHCA requires the Agencies' concurrence in order to move forward with the Trail's construction. On January 27, 2022, staff requested a decision from the Agencies and is awaiting their requirements for moving forward.

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, indicated that the Agencies' issues are not about this particular trail. Their concern is that if this Trail is allowed in this Reserve, it will be used as a method to create trails in all the open space areas. RCHCA staff believes this is a flawed determination and interpretation of

RCHCA's Habitat Conservation Plan, in which the Plan directs the Agency to seek public access. Hiking is a managed activity that can be compatible with biological resources of the Reserve.

Action:

1. Approved the final Steele Peak Inaugural Trail Plan.

RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

MOVER: Perris

SECONDER: Hemet

AYES: Hemet, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, County of Riverside - District 5

8. REPORT FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Dr. Kurt Wilson, General Manager, congratulated and thanked the Board and staff on their work and persistence which led to the downlisting of SKR. Dr. Wilson congratulated the new leadership.

Director Lesa Sobek asked how the downlisting announcement will be distributed to the public.

Mr. Shomo responded that a press release has been shared with the Public Information Officer at each member agency as well as being broadcasted through RCHCA's media platforms. The USFWS will also be broadcasting the information widely.

9. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

There were no requests for future agenda items.

9. GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Director Sobek announced that the City of Menifee recently broke ground for a new justice center which will serve the subregion.

Director Brown announced that the Ramona Pageant is scheduled for April 23, 24, and 30, and May 1, 2022.

11. NEXT MEETING

The next Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 19, 2022, at 11:30 a.m., on the Zoom platform.

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting of the Board of Directors was adjourned at 12:22 p.m.