

# Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency

## Minutes

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### 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 May 20, 2021, on the Zoom platform.

### 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Board member Joseph Morabito led the Board members and guests in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 3. ROLL CALL

- City of Corona - Tom Richins
- City of Hemet - Russ Brown
- City of Lake Elsinore - Steve Manos
- City of Menifee - Lesa Sobek (Chair)
- City of Moreno Valley - David Marquez
- City of Murrieta - Lisa DeForest
- City of Perris - Michael Vargas
- City of Riverside - Andy Melendrez
- City of Temecula - Maryann Edwards
- City of Wildomar - Joseph Morabito
- County, District 5 - Jeff Hewitt

### 4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

### 5. CONSENT AND POLICY CALENDAR

**RESULT:** APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED

**MOVER:** Lake Elsinore

**SECONDER:** Temecula

**AYES:** Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, District 5

#### A. Summary Minutes from the February 18, 2021, Board of Directors Meeting

**Action:**

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

**B. Status of Mitigation Fee Transfers from Member Agencies Through March 31, 2021**

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**C. Financial Report Through March 31, 2021**

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**D. Status Report on the Attendance Roster**

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**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. Status Report Concerning Reserve Management Coordinating Committee**

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**G. Approval of a First Amendment to the Professional Services Agreement between RCHCA and Conservation Biology Institute for a Range-Wide Management and Monitoring Plan for Stephens' Kangaroo Rat**

**Actions:**

1. Approved a First Amendment to the Professional Services Agreement between RCHCA and the Conservation Biology Institute for a Range-wide Management and Monitoring Plan for Stephens' Kangaroo Rat.
2. Authorized the General Manager to execute and administer the terms of the Amendment.
3. Authorized the General Manager to execute any future amendments to the Agreement, if necessary, so long as such amendments do not result in an overall monetary increase, and as long as such amendments are approved as to form by legal counsel.

**6. REPORTS / DISCUSSION**

**A. Status Update on Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Recovery Efforts**

Princess Hester, WRCOG Administrative Services Director, reported that in September 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) published to the Federal Register a Proposed Rule to Reclassify Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) from Endangered to Threatened with a Section 4(d) Rule.

The final rule has been reviewed by USFWS Carlsbad Office Management and public comments have

been updated; additionally, the technological advances done by RCHCA has been added. The document has been sent to the regional office in Sacramento for Spectator (legal) Review. After review and approval, the final rule should publish no later than September 30, 2021.

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**B. Conservation Appreciation Month - May 2021**

Princess Hester, WRCOG Administrative Services Director, reported that this year marks RCHCA's 25th Anniversary. Member agencies were asked to also recognize May 2021 as Conservation Appreciation month to commemorate RCHCA's 25th Anniversary.

There are many virtual activities planned during the month of May 2021. To view the calendar of events please visit <https://rchca.us/calendar.aspx?CID=26>. This week's events have led up to Endangered Species Day of May 21, 2021.

RCHCA is hosting an upcoming Future Forward episode, "The Past, Present, and Future of Conservation in Riverside County" scheduled for May 27, 2021; register at <https://iercc.glueup.com/event/the-past-present-and-future-of-conservation-in-riverside-county-36703/>.

**Action:**

1. Adopted Resolution Number 2021-02; A Resolution of the RCHCA Board of Directors recognizing May 2021 as Conservation Appreciation Month.

**RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED**

**MOVER:** Temecula

**SECONDER:** Moreno Valley

**AYES:** Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Temecula, Wildomar, District 5 (The City of Riverside representative did not respond)

**C. Approval of the Fiscal Year 2021/2022 Agency Budget**

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, reported that current revenues are exceeding last years' projections. Expenditures covered under the RCHCA General Fund obligations include administration, educational and community outreach, and land management of RCHCA-owned lands; anticipated revenues are projected at \$1.5M against expenditures of approximately \$1.5M.

The Lake Mathews Endowment funds land management and research for the Lake Mathews Reserve; anticipated revenues are projected at \$532k against expenditures of approximately \$507k.

RCHCA will be hiring an Open Space Habitat Technician to support the Lake Mathews Reserve and assist in implementing the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) Range-Wide Recovery, Management, and Monitoring Plan.

Highlights of projects to be completed this year include the Steele Peak Public Access Plan and implementation of the Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) Range-Wide Recovery, Management, and

Monitoring Plan.

**Action:**

1. Adopted Resolution Number 2021-02; A Resolution of the RCHCA Board of Directors adopting the Fiscal Year 2021/2022 Agency Budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED**

**MOVER:** Perris

**SECONDER:** Lake Elsinore

**AYES:** Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Menifee, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Perris, Riverside, Temecula, Wildomar, District 5

**D. SKR Range-Wide Management and Monitoring Plan**

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, reported that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in partnership with the Department of Defense, issued RCHCA a contract in the amount of \$600k to develop a Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) Range-Wide Recovery, Management, and Monitoring Plan. RCHCA then partnered with Conservation Biology to coordinate and manage a working group of scientists, land managers, and more, in order to identify the various challenges of managing and monitoring SKR throughout its range.

BLM has recently approved year two of the 4-year contract and staff anticipates year three to be approved as well, which will cover the implementation phase of the Plan. Staff continue seeking additional funding for the Plan.

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**E. Contracted Land Management and Monitoring Activities Update**

Brian Shomo, Director of RCHCA, reported on the various contracts between RCHCA and others:

- U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management: Planned and will implement in June 2021 a comprehensive SKR survey of the Lake Mathews / Estelle Mountain Reserve. Expected revenue will be \$194,000.
- Mariposa Biology / Waste Management, Inc., at the El Sobrante Landfill Conservation Area: RCHCA will restore .25 acres of riparian habitat to comply with the landfill's obligations under the Army Corps of Engineers 404 and CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife 1600 permits. Expected revenue will be \$13,000.
- Metropolitan Water District (MWD): Developed FY 2021/2022 annual work plan and \$150,000 budget in order to provide MWD biological and land management services for 6,000 acres and 65 covered species.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service: This contract is closing and included the removal of Arundo and the restoration of a section of stream on RCHCA property.
- California Conservation Corps: This contract and all its tasks have been completed.

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

#### **F. Steele Peak Public Access Plan Activities Update**

Riana Fisher, RCHCA Program Manager, reported that RCHCA is in the process of obtaining a CEQA evaluation with Ruth Villalobos & Associates. Staff held a site visit and tour of the Steele Peak Inaugural Trail in April 2021 to finalize seating and signage placement and identify any direct and indirect impacts for CEQA. RCHCA was awarded a grant by the California Natural Resources Agency to fund trail amenities.

The Inaugural Trail completion date is still on schedule for March 2022. The final plan with amenities can be found at <https://rchca.us/DocumentCenter/View/816/Steele-Peak-Inaugural-Trail-Plan>.

#### **Action:**

1. Received and filed.

#### **G. Report on RCHCA Innovation**

Harry Sandoval, RCHCA Natural Resources Manager, reported that RCHCA has developed a system to attract and protect burrowing owls while deterring predators in an effort to develop the requisite number of owls required at the Lake Mathews Reserve under the Western Riverside MSHCP. RCHCA will seek regulatory agency approval prior to conducting the research.

RCHCA is required to maintain five pairs of Burrowing Owls at the Lake Mathews Reserve. It is difficult to retain Burrowing Owls as either they do not migrate here naturally, or they just do not stay in the area. Those that do stay are under predation stress.

RCHCA's Scott Curry designed an artificial Burrowing Owl to attract live Burrowing Owls and deter predators. The decoys have the ability to defend themselves by deploying a chemical when attacked. The chemical is the main component of grape flavored Kool Aid. Staff will approach the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to obtain any necessary approvals or permits to use the decoys.

#### **Action:**

1. Received and filed.

#### **H. Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Reserve Management and Monitoring Efforts Activities Update**

Harry Sandoval, RCHCA Natural Resources Manager, reported that RCHCA recently burned approximately 120 acres of Stephens' Kangaroo Rat (SKR) habitat by prescribed burning in association with CalFire's FI-210 class to train fire investigators. An additional 50 acres of SKR habitat was mowed near residences adjacent to the Reserve that will also function as a fire fuel break.

RCHCA used its Unmanned Aerial Vehicle to detect and map approximately 450 acres of stinknet for treatment. RCHCA's efforts have successfully controlled large patches of stinknet and future efforts will concentrate on smaller but more widely distributed occurrences.

California Conservation Corps members have removed over 200 cubic yards of green waste that was

deposited many years ago to a drainage on RCHCA property using Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds; native shrubs and trees were planted to restore the area.

Approximately 50 acres of SKR-preferred habitat was mowed to reduce grass density and thatch abundance. Staff will continue mowing as long as conditions stay safe.

Staff recently provided GIS data to Southern California Edison to update its database in order to demonstrate conserved land boundaries within the SKR plan boundary in order to avoid future impacts to sensitive areas.

**Action:**

1. Received and filed.

**7. REPORT FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER**

Chris Gray, WRCOG Deputy Executive Director, reported that WRCOG has recently undergone staffing changes, one of which is Princess Hester, who now serves as WRCOG's Administrative Services Director. Brian Shomo is now the Director of RCHCA. Riana Fisher is now RCHCA's Program Manager.

**8. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS**

There were no requests for future agenda items.

**9. GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mr. Gray reminded the Board to register for the upcoming Future Forward webinar, "The Past, Present, and Future of Conservation in Riverside County."

**10. NEXT MEETING**

The next Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 16, 2021, at 11:30 a.m., in WRCOG's office at 3390 University Avenue, Suite 200, Riverside, 92501, for Board members. Members of the public are encouraged to join virtually on the Zoom platform.

**11. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting of the Board of Directors was adjourned at 12:49 p.m.