

Date: July 21, 2020
To: RCHCA Board of Directors
From: Rick Bishop, Executive Director
Subject: Activities Update

The following provides an “in between meetings” update on activities underway within the Agency for your information and use in the event needed.

SKR monitoring to occur at two reserve sites

On August 17th RCHCA staff, utilizing specialized State and Federal permits, will begin monitoring the status and trends of Stephen’s kangaroo rats (SKR) within the SKR Reserve system at Sycamore Canyon Wilderness Park in the city of Riverside and Lake Perris State Park in the city of Perris. Each of these Reserves function as a regional recreational hub for outdoor enthusiasts which makes monitoring SKR challenging.

Sycamore Canyon is primarily owned by the City of Riverside with a small southern portion owned by the State. It features excellent SKR habitat in the south and eastern portions of the park and, as the name implies, is bisected by a large canyon with a year-round stream with fish. The Lake Perris Recreation Area is owned and managed by California State Parks and, several thousand acres within the flat valley are ideally suited for SKR occupation with grassland habitat and loamy soils. Unfortunately, the area has recently been invaded by stinknet, a highly invasive weed that is not conducive to SKR health.

It is imperative to conduct the survey during the highest probability of detecting these rare animals, including accounting for the lunar cycle, nighttime low temperatures, and geographic features among other variables. The monitoring process will begin with staff pre-baiting traps to get the animals adjusted and interested in the bait seed, then on the evening of monitoring, just prior to dusk, staff will bait the traps. A few hours later, RCHCA-permitted biologists will check the traps and measure captured SKR for weight, ear length, sex, age class, and reproductive status. After the data is collected for each individual, that animal is then marked on its belly to identify if that individual is subsequently recaptured during the remainder of the survey. The 1st trap opening ends around 1:00 AM. Around 2:00 AM the grids are then re-checked and subsequently closed for the night around 4:00 AM. The trapping continues in this manner for 3 consecutive nights. By the third night, most caught animals are “recaptures” and therefore we can deduce that there is a high probability of estimating population status and trends.

Data collected from these surveys will be used to influence adaptive management practices for the species. For more information please contact Brian Shomo at (951) 840-8070 or bshomo@wrcog.us

Fire maps being developed

The Lake Mathews Reserve is within proximity to many residences and businesses as well as home to many rare and sensitive species that may be impacted by wildfire or by the activities carried out to combat a wildfire. Often in areas with natural communities the impacts associated with fighting a fire may be more detrimental than the fire itself. In order to minimize potential impacts to natural resources and maximize CalFire response times within a conservation area, it is prudent to create a plan that provides emergency fire personnel with a guide to fighting fire to protect human life, structures and natural resources.

The Reserve Management Committee recently authorized the Metropolitan Water District to contract with the RCHCA in order to create a fire response plan for the Lake Mathew Reserve. The plan will be developed mutually by reserve management staff, emergency first responders and the landowner in cooperation with Cal Fire and other area stakeholders. The RCHCA will collect and compile various sets of geospatial data in order to develop a response plan that identifies areas suitable for water drops, sensitive area buffers, pre-installed fuel breaks, water sources, Incident Command Centers, and access in order to expedite any emergency response to a catastrophic wildfire. All information shall be compiled into a comprehensive map that can be distributed to local fire stations and reserve management personnel in various formats.

SKR downlisting

There are three major category listings for animals and plants under the Endangered Species Act. SKR is listed at the highest and most protected level, Endangered. Delisting of an endangered species occurs when a species is considered “recovered” from the critical levels that lead to that species listing as endangered with population numbers and low level of threats to maintaining or increasing populations in the future. The RCHCA is pursuing downlisting of SKR because it demonstrates successful conservation efforts have been completed in western Riverside, and aligns the federal listing with the state listing for SKR.

RCHCA staff continues to work with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and we are awaiting notification of the results from the Species Status Assessment. This notification will approve or deny the reclassification of the species.

Conservation conversation videos

The RCHCA is committed to environmental education, including hosting events such as community clean-up's, educational outreach, Earth Day events, and other outreach activities to raise awareness about protecting the earth's natural resources. In these times it is important to continue our work of sharing important information about endangered species and the work that is being done by the RCHCA.

We have prepared a series of videos titled, “Conservation Conversation” that will be shared via YouTube. The first set of videos focus on SKR and habitat management. These short (about 1 ½ minutes) video lessons will be expanded on with future topics to broaden our connections in classrooms and to the public at large. Please visit:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1DC715DGDyKz8IX4CF_GycA9E8bBPPvZ

Podcasts

You are probably aware that WRCOG has its own podcast series, called the WRCOGcast. The podcast features 20ish-minute episodes on a variety of topics and issues relevant to the Western Riverside County subregion. We explore agencies, issues, and programs in the area to inform, discover, and learn more about the wide range of projects and people who are working to improve the quality of life in this fast-growing subregion.

The WRCOGcast is accessible on SoundCloud, Spotify, Google Podcasts, PodBean, and Apple Podcasts. RCHCA completed the first in a series of episodes that will provide information on conservation efforts. It's called “The One About Rats.”

Click <http://wrcog.us/283/WRCOGCast> to access the episodes recorded to date stored on the WRCOG website. We hope that you might share information about the WRCOGcast with your constituents so that they can use this resource to learn more about activities underway in Western Riverside County.

On a related note, we would love to schedule a podcast with you if to discuss important issues/activities/initiatives that are underway or recently completed in your community. Please contact us and we will work with you to schedule your episode.

Next RCHCA Board Meeting

The next RCHCA Board Meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 17, 2020, at 11:30 a.m.** Via Zoom. Complete agenda packets and meeting links will be sent prior to the meeting along with a request for your commitment to attend the meeting.