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# Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency

*City of Corona* ◇ *City of Hemet* ◇ *City of Lake Elsinore* ◇ *City of Moreno Valley*  
*City of Murrieta* ◇ *City of Perris* ◇ *City of Riverside* ◇ *City of Temecula* ◇ *County of Riverside*

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## MINUTES

Thursday, August 17, 2006 - 9:00 a.m.

Riverside County Administrative Center  
4080 Lemon Street  
Board Hearing Room – 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Riverside, CA 92501

- PRESENT:** Ms. Robin Lowe, Chairperson, City of Hemet  
Supervisor Bob Buster, County of Riverside  
Mr. Dom Betro, City of Riverside  
Mr. Eugene Montanez, City of Corona  
Mr. Kelly Seyarto, City of Murrieta  
Mr. Mark Yarbrough, Vice-Chair, City of Perris
- ABSENT:** Mr. Bill Batey, City of Moreno Valley  
Mr. Steve Brown, City of Temecula  
Mr. Bob Schiffner, City of Lake Elsinore
- STAFF:** Carolyn Syms Luna, RCHCA  
Gail Barton, RCHCA  
Kristi Lovelady, RCHCA  
Karin Watts-Bazan, County Counsel
- GUEST:** Mike Butler, Sycamore Canyon Reserve  
Christine Moen, Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve

### 1. ROLL CALL

Robin Lowe called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. Roll call of the RCHCA Board of Directors showed six member agencies present with the Cities of Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, and Temecula absent.

### 2. PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments were offered.

### 3. CONSENT CALENDAR: Presented for Block Approval. Board Members have the option of

excluding discussion items from a master motion.

**3.1 Minutes from the May 18, 2006, Meeting**

The minutes from the May 18, 2006, meeting were presented for approval.

**3.2 Status of Mitigation Fee Transfers from Member Agencies**

The Stephens' Kangaroo Rat Mitigation Fee Collection report for FY 2005/2006 was presented for review.

**3.3 RCHCA Financial Report through June 2006**

The fund balance as of June 30, 2006, is \$12,417,126.92.

**MOTION for approval of items 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3: Kelly Seyarto  
SECOND: Eugene Montanez**

**Motion Approved  
Ayes-6  
None Opposed**

**4. POLICY CALENDAR:**

**4.1 Verbal Report on Status of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan**

Carolyn Syms Luna reported that currently there is no CVMSHCP as Desert Hot Springs has elected not to participate in the plan. Therefore, we are working on a new EIR/EIS.

**4.2 Report on Reserve Management Committees for the Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve and the Lake Mathews Reserve**

Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve: Gail Barton stated that the Reserve Management Committee (RMC) has had two meetings that she will be reporting on today. The RMC has worked on the establishment of a plan to address both the immediate and long-term needs of the Reserve office facility. They also continue discussion and evaluation of portions of the Management Plan that is currently under preparation. The RMC has approved the FY 2006/07 Reserve budget, has considered a preliminary plan to provide interpreter functions, along with an offer on the sale of MWD excess property. The RMC has also clarified the procedure for completing the wheelchair ramp for the Alamo School.

Chairperson Lowe asked how long the RMC has been working on the Management Plan for the Reserve.

Ms. Barton stated that this has been ongoing for approximately 10 years.

Chairperson Lowe stated that we have some very serious problems with the RMC at the management level. She stated she has asked RCHCA staff to bring a report to the next RCHCA Board meeting with recommendations for this Board to move forward

with meeting the responsibilities we have to our Plan. Chairperson Lowe reported that with the information that was provided to her, she does not feel that our responsibilities are being met.

RCHCA staff will be coming back to this Board with some action items at the next meeting. Board members may be receiving some updates over the next few months, along with background information, so that the Board will be able to move forward at the next meeting. Chairperson Lowe stated that she may call a special meeting, prior to the scheduled meeting in November, in which to discuss and move forward with matters at the Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve.

Lake Mathews Reserve: Ms. Barton stated that the RMC is reviewing past documents and data that may lead to the development of a new management plan for MWD owned RCHCA easement lands.

#### **4.3 Replacement of Southwestern Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve Management Facility at Lake Skinner**

Ms. Barton stated that at the last RCHCA Board meeting, the Board recommended that the Reserve Manager immediately be relocated to the Alamos School and that RCHCA staff should explore cost sharing possibilities for other items that may be needed in conjunction with the relocation of the Reserve Manager to the school. Ms. Barton stated she took the Board's recommendation to the RMC. She reported that the RMC agreed to an immediate and a long-term plan of action. Due to health concerns, the immediate action was to remove the carpeting, clean the floor and lay inexpensive vinyl flooring as a stop-gap measure.

Ms. Barton stated the Reserve Manager and RCHCA staff have assessed the long-term needs for this facility, defined the requirements, and sought cost comparisons. At the August meeting of the RMC, Ms. Barton presented the recommendation to the Committee. Their conclusion was that the cost estimate of approximately \$200,000 for a new facility was more than some of the Committee members were willing to commit to. They agreed to take the recommendation back to their respective directors and will again consider the options at the October RMC meeting.

Carolyn Syms Luna reported that she is concerned with the way the RMC's are set up to manage the reserves. They must have a uniform consensus (100%) in order for any recommendation to move forward. Ms. Luna reported that it is nearly impossible to acquire a unanimous decision on a recommended project as each Committee member's mission on the RMC is very different.

Ms. Luna reported that the concern at this particular reserve is that Christine Moen's office (the reserve manager) is in a mobile home that is rat infested; therefore, there is much concern with the hanta-virus.

Ms. Luna stated that the reserve manager now has vinyl flooring in her office; however, this does not meet her needs as a manager. As far as her moving into the school, the debate could go on for several years before a final decision is made to relocate her.

Ms. Luna asked the RCHCA Board to allow her to look at RCHCA property within the reserve, locate a suitable place on the reserve for placement of a mobile/modular building to house the reserve manager's office. Ms. Luna stated that the RCHCA's permit is in jeopardy if we are not running the reserve as we should be. She feels that it does not seem as though the RMC can come to some consensus regarding the relocation of the reserve manager's office. Ms. Luna stated she would like to come back to the November Board meeting with a report that will list what parcels can be used and what the cost would be to place a new unit on the land and run water/electricity, etc., to the building.

Karin Watts-Bazan concurred with Ms. Luna's recommendation to move forward with relocating the reserve manager's office on the reserve.

**MOTION to direct the RCHCA Executive Director to move forward with her recommendation to relocate the reserve manager's office: Bob Buster**

**SECOND: Kelly Seyarto**

**Motion Approved**

**Ayes-6**

**None Opposed**

#### **4.4 Virtual Reserve Tour: Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve**

Gail Barton introduced Christine Moen to the Board. Ms. Moen conducted a virtual tour of the Southwest Riverside County Multiple Species Reserve at Lake Skinner.

Ms. Moen stated that the Reserve was created in 1992 as mitigation for Diamond Valley Lake. It is approximately 14,000 acres in size. There are four land owners: RCHCA, Metropolitan Water District, Riverside County and the Bureau of Land Management.

The mission of the Reserve is to provide for the preservation of habitat and wildlife as part of the natural heritage indigenous to Riverside County through conservation, research, education, and stewardship.

There are five major habitat types on the Reserve: riparian (which is becoming more rare in Southern California); grassland (which supports SKR's, badgers and hawks); chaparral (which support deer and mountain lion); oak woodland (which is comprised mostly of live oaks); sage scrub (which comprises the majority of the Reserve – this supports California gnatcatcher, whiptail lizards, and the Dulzura kangaroo rat).

There are 31 species covered under the Reserve's HCP. There are very small animals (i.e., young horned lizard and SKR), as well as very large animals (i.e., mule deer and mountain lion).

There are approximately 2,000 acres of RCHCA land within the Reserve. The Reserve is committed to managing SKR and will include the methodology for that management in their Management Plan.

The Reserve supported an interpretive program for approximately 12 years; the last seven years of that was out of the restored schoolhouse which is located at Lake Skinner. Recently, funding was exhausted for that program; therefore, the program

was suspended.

Other activities at the Reserve include tamarisk removal, restoration for species such as the Quino checkerspot butterfly and Munz's onion, cowbird trapping, and non-native grass removal whenever possible. The grass removal benefits the SKR.

There has been much research on the Reserve over the years. Since 1992 they have conducted over 80 research projects. The Reserve also maintains a library of all the research results. This information is available to anyone who is interested. One of the longest running research projects is a study being done by Edie Allen at UCR where she is examining the methods to control the invasive non-native grasses.

Some of the challenges at the Reserve include trash dumping, trespass, wildfire and urban encroachment. There have been at least 17 wildfires on the Reserve since 1970.

A Fire Response Plan has been developed for the Reserve. This is different from a Fire Management Plan. The Fire Response Plan is developed to protect native animals, plants, cultural resources, and private property in the event of a fire. It divides the Reserve into response units which identify which firefighting methods the Reserve would like to see CDF use in each area. Having this Plan in place is important in the event that the Reserve Manager or the Patrol Ranger is not available. CDF has this Plan in their system. CDF can pull it up and know the specific needs of the Reserve in the event of a fire.

Work is being done on the Reserve Management Plan. This Management Plan will guide future management at the Reserve, including the management for SKR (it will include the SKR methodology). Once the Plan is finished, work plans will be developed and they will be submitted for funding.

There are 4 employees on the Reserve.

Chairperson Lowe thanked Christine Moen for her very comprehensive virtual tour of the Reserve.

#### **4.5 Status Report Concerning a Grant to Abate Mustard and other Non-Native Weeds at Sycamore Canyon Reserve**

Kristi Lovelady introduced Ranger Mike Butler to the Board. She stated that Mike devotes much of his time to the Sycamore Canyon Reserve.

Ms. Lovelady reported that Supervisor Buster alerted RCHCA staff to the possibility of grant funding for the removal of Mustard in the Sycamore Canyon area. Staff pursued this lead and found a grant with WCB, then coordinated with the City of Riverside to produce the grant proposal. Ms. Lovelady stated that the RCHCA will be asking for approximately \$1.1 million from WCB for the abatement of the Mustard. RCHCA staff will pursue matching in-kind services, and possibly some additional funding to show that there is a local match. RCHCA staff is fine tuning the funding figures and will come back to this Board in November with the final documentation. The target area for this grant will be the Sycamore Canyon Reserve. The purpose is to eradicate

approximately 1,200 acres of non-native weeds and the Mustard on the Reserve. This will assist with the return of the SKR habitat that has been gradually diminishing in this area. The grant proposes to use several tools that have been successful elsewhere (i.e., controlled burns and grazing). The City of Riverside agreed to take the initiative to work with surrounding residents and use lessons learned with the Santa Rosa Plateau and carry them into Sycamore Canyon.

Ms. Lovelady stated that we are working on the local match and will need to develop CEQA documentation, along with a Resolution. We will also be working with CDFG in the coming months as they are a major component to facilitating this grant through the Wildlife Conservation Board at the State.

Mike Butler reported that a controlled burn in the Sycamore Canyon area appears to be a big challenge to the City of Riverside Parks Department, as well as to the City of Riverside Fire Department due to concerns by the surrounding residents. The initial planning stages (i.e., setting up community meetings, meeting with residents, etc.) will be critical if this concept is to be successful. Mr. Butler anticipates this will take time to coordinate and put together. Some planning will be needed for cutting additional fire breaks throughout the canyon and conducting the burn in sections in order to maintain control.

Mr. Butler thanked the Board, on behalf of the City of Riverside, for the opportunity to work with the RCHCA in attempting to acquire this grant.

Ms. Lovelady requested that the Board approve, in concept, and direct RCHCA staff to complete the final negotiations for the in-kind match, and bring back to the Board in November the CEQA document, and the Resolution for consideration (this will also be presented to the City of Riverside in that timeframe as well).

**MOTION for approval of item 4.5: Bob Buster**

**SECOND: Dom Betro**

**Motion Approved**

**Ayes—6**

**None Opposed**

**4.6 Status Report Concerning SKR Management Plan and Coordinated SKR Trapping Efforts Throughout Western Riverside County**

Kristi Lovelady reported that in October 2005, the Board approved a contract with DUDEK and Associates to write the SKR Management Plan at Lake Mathews and Steele Peak (including a Fire Management Plan and a Monitoring Strategy). The draft Plan is under review by staff and comments should be submitted by the end of the week. The first series of SKR trapping is underway and nearly complete. She stated the RCHCA is pleased to report that after many years of coordination, we now have a uniform strategy to monitor SKR that includes the San Diego State University information we received years ago. We have coordinated that with the RCA's monitoring team who is doing trapping in accordance with their MSHCP requirements. We have also coordinated this approach with several of our Reserve managers.

Ms. Lovelady stated that RCHCA staff hopes to bring a final plan to this Board at the November meeting.

**5. CLOSED SESSION**

With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Government Code §§ 54956.9:

A. Conference with Legal Counsel – Anticipated Litigation

1. One potential case.

Karin Watts-Bazan reported that the RCHCA Board has directed staff to convene a meeting with Robin Lowe, Mark Yarbrough, Karin Watts-Bazan, Carolyn Syms Luna, Kristi Lovelady and the Bureau of Land Management.

Ms. Watts-Bazan reported that RCHCA staff will report back to this Board in November regarding the outcome of the above meeting.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m. The next meeting will be held on November 16, 2006.