
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*

MINUTES

Thursday, September 18, 2008 - 3:00 p.m.

City of Perris
101 North "D" Street
City Council Chambers
Perris, CA 92570

- PRESENT:** Mr. Mark Yarbrough, Chairperson, City of Perris
Supervisor Bob Buster, County of Riverside
Mr. Eugene Montanez, Vice-Chair, City of Corona
Ms. Robin Lowe, City of Hemet
Mr. Mike Gardner, City of Riverside
Mr. Gary Thomasian, City of Murrieta
Mr. Bill Batey, City of Moreno Valley
Ms. Maryann Edwards, City of Temecula
- ABSENT:** Mr. Bob Schiffner, City of Lake Elsinore
- STAFF:** Carolyn Syms Luna, RCHCA
Gail Barton, RCHCA
Princess Hester, RCHCA
Brian Shomo, RCHCA
Larisa McKenna, County Counsel
- GUEST:** Dr. Debra Shier, Center for Conservation & Research for Endangered Species

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mark Yarbrough, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 3:11 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Roll call of the RCHCA Board of Directors showed eight member agencies present with the City of Lake Elsinore absent.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

No comments were offered.

4. BOARD MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

5. ADDITIONS/REVISIONS

There were no additions/revisions to the agenda.

6. CONSENT CALENDAR: Presented for Block Approval. Board Members have the option of excluding discussion items from a master motion.

6.1 Minutes from the May 15, 2008 Meeting

The minutes from the May 15, 2008, meeting was presented for approval.

6.2 Status of Mitigation Fee Transfers from Member Agencies through June 30, 2008

The fees collected as of June 30, 2008, for FY 2007/08 total \$759,601.00.

6.3 RCHCA Financial Report through June 30, 2008

The fund balance as of June 30, 2008, is \$16,018,504.82.

6.4 Report on the Attendance Roster

The roster, which shows the attendance of each Board member, was presented.

**MOTION for approval of items 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4: Robin Lowe
SECOND: Bill Batey**

**Motion Approved
Ayes—8
None Opposed**

7. POLICY CALENDAR:

7.1 Presentation on the Lake Mathews Reserve

Mr. Shomo discussed the Lake Mathews Reserve and shared the following:

Long-Term Goals

- Maintain or increase the amount of SKR and/or their habitat
- Ultimately, our objective is to achieve the delisting of the species
- Community Involvement and Outreach Programs

Short-Term Goals

1st Year

- Security
 - Complete fencing and signing

- Increase patrols
- Clean up
 - Remove excess debris and litter

Illegal Dumping

- 28 dump sites removed and/or consolidated
- 8 abandoned vehicles removed
- 70 tires removed and disposed of

Security

- Phase 1 Fencing Plan
 - Repair existing fencing and facilitate the installation of new fencing
- Increased Patrols
 - R.O.V.E. Cooperation, Manager patrols, coordination with other agencies

Short-Term Actions

- 2nd Year
 - Begin habitat restoration and management practices to increase habitat quantity and quality
 - Increase Habitat Quantity
 - Orchard Consolidation and Removal Project
 - Vineyard Restoration and Enhancement Project
 - Increase Habitat Quality
 - Controlled Burns
 - Grazing

Controlled Burns

- BLM appropriated \$235,000 in funding to generate 2,500* acres of biological and cultural surveys
- Fulfills NEPA requirements that will simultaneously expedite CEQA review
- CalFire will use report to generate a VMP

* Includes a portion of MWD land

Grazing

- Initially 5,000-7,000 head of sheep
 - Reduce invasive grass density to enable efficient SKR foraging behavior
 - Reduce herd to maintenance levels appropriate to annual precipitation and vegetation fluctuations
 - All sheep are currently grazed locally minimizing the transfer of new invasive plants between locations
 - WMWD to supply fire hydrant meter to fulfill the grazer's water requirements (approximately 1,000 gallons per day)
- Grazing Contractor
 - Indacochea Sheep Ranch

- Pedro Indacochea – owner/operator
Perris, CA

Orchard Consolidation and Removal Project

- Approximately 540 acres of potential SKR habitat
- Labor provided by Community Service Volunteers
 - No cost to the RCHCA
 - Benefits the community by providing opportunities to pay back their debt to society, increases Reserve value, and increases SKR habitat availability
- Citrus trees will be consolidated into piles and eventually burned
- Enables management practices, such as grazing or mowing
- In kind contribution to facilitate USFWS funding Vineyard Restoration Project

Vineyard Restoration & Enhancement Project

- Working with the USFWS to assist with funding the removal of vineyard debris (8 sites/5 acres each)
 - Potential Department of Agriculture Funds (“producer” dependent)
 - Potential for Federal end of year money
 - Potential for Partners Program
- Debris severely restricts management options thereby reducing the quantity of habitat available to SKR

Summary

- Tools to stock the toolbox
- Moving on multiple fronts
- Short-Term Actions → Long-Term Goals

At this time, Chairperson Yarbrough introduced Larisa McKenna to the Board. Ms. McKenna is our acting general counsel for today’s meeting.

7.2 Presentation on the Mitigation Fee Audit of Member Agencies

Ms. Hester discussed the audit of mitigation fees that is currently being conducted by Mayer Hoffman McCann, PC (MHM). She stated that the field visit portion of the audit is complete and MHM has begun preparing the individual city reports which will be submitted to the RCHCA Board for review at the November Board meeting.

7.3 Approval of RCHCA Resolution No. 2008-004 Authorizing the Correction and Recording of a Conservation Easement Grant Deed

Ms. Barton reported that on September 19, 1991, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, acting for the Riverside County Park Facilities Corporation and the RCHCA, approved a conservation easement in favor of the RCHCA over Park Facilities land located in the Lake Skinner area. The document was recorded on November 12, 1991, as Document Number 390813. At that time, Exhibit “B”, which was the map that defined the easement area, was omitted from the document.

On September 2, 2008, the Board of Directors for the Park District approved the corrected document. The new document incorporates the following changes:

- Includes Exhibit “B” that was omitted from the original document.
- Acknowledges the successor interest of the “Grantor” (Riverside County Park Facilities Corporation became the Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District).

Ms. Barton requested the Board do the following:

- Approve Resolution No. 2008-004 and the amended Conservation Easement Grant to include Exhibit “B”.
- Authorize the Chairperson to execute two (2) copies of the documents to complete the transaction.
- Direct staff to administer all necessary documents to complete and record the transaction.

MOTION to approve Resolution No. 2008-004 and the amended Conservation Easement Grant to include Exhibit “B”; authorize the Chairperson to execute two (2) copies of the documents; and direct staff to administer all necessary documents to complete and record the transaction: Eugene Montanez

SECOND: Robin Lowe

Motion Approved

Ayes–8

None Opposed

7.4 Report on Reserve Management Committees for the Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve and the Lakes Mathews Reserve

Ms. Barton gave an update on the Reserve Management Committee (RMC) meetings as follows:

Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve:

Discussion included the following:

- Workshop
 - Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (RCRPOSD) has completed a preliminary cost estimate for the workshop.
 - Specifications will be reviewed by RCRPOSD and Metropolitan Water District (MWD).
- Meeting Schedule
 - The RMC plans to meet quarterly on a schedule consistent with work product demands.
 - It is understood that if additional or special meetings are needed, they will be scheduled.
- Management Plan
 - The latest draft of the management plan was distributed.

- September 3, 2008, was set aside to meet to discuss the draft and to determine the next steps.
- Conservation and Research for Endangered Species (CRES)
 - Approval was received by MWD and preliminary work has begun on Dr. Shier's translocation project.
- Budget
 - The Committee adopted the 2008/09 budget.

Lake Mathews Reserve:

Discussion included the following:

- Management Plan Update
 - Wendy Picht, from MWD, is working through the MWD system to prepare the Request for Proposal.
- CDFG Volunteer Assistance Program
 - As an extension of CDFG, the volunteers assist the reserve by providing patrol.
 - While the volunteers have no enforcement capability, they have access to Sheriff and wardens who do have this capability.
- BLM Management Assistance
 - BLM has money appropriated for the preparation needed in order to perform a controlled burn.
 - About 2,500 acres in the reserve (including RCHCA land targeted for management) has been designated to have the necessary biological and archeological studies completed with the BLM funds.

7.5 Report concerning the Art Contest that was a Follow-up to the RCHCA Sponsored National Endangered Species Day Event

Ms. Barton reported that in conjunction with the 2008 Endangered Species Day event, students that attended the event were encouraged to participate in an art contest in which they were asked to illustrate the meaning of the topic "Where our World and the Natural World Meet".

The RCHCA received more than 60 entries from the three schools. Trophies were presented to each school's Grand Prize winner and to the school to be placed in the school's trophy case. Awards were also presented to the first runner up, along with the most creative and most original illustrations from each school. Every participant received an award for their participation in the contest.

Ms. Barton reported that the Riverside Art Museum exhibited the winning art in the Taylor Family Education Gallery between August 4th and 29th. *The Press Enterprise* also wrote an article outlining the event and the art contest.

Ms. Luna reported that the panel of judges for the art contest was comprised of three local artists.

7.6 Report Concerning the City of Wildomar's Request to Join the RCHCA JPA and Approval of Direction for Staff to Take the Actions Necessary to Add Wildomar to the JPA.

Ms. Barton reported that the newly formed City of Wildomar has formally requested that the RCHCA allow the City to be a part of the RCHCA JPA.

Ms. Barton stated that if it is the decision of this Board to pursue the addition of the City of Wildomar to the JPA, the following procedure, as outlined in the SKR HCP, will be initiated:

- Staff will be directed to work in conjunction with legal counsel to draft amendments to the RCHCA JPA, Memorandum of Understanding, HCP Implementation Agreements with USFWS and CDFG, and other pertinent documents.
- Following approval by the RCHCA Board of Directors, the amended agreements will be forwarded to the RCHCA member agencies, USFWS, CDFG, and other parties for approval.
- Upon execution of all agreements by all parties, Wildomar will become a member of the RCHCA. Upon execution by USFWS and CDFG of permit amendments and HCP Implementation Agreements, Wildomar will be covered by the Federal and State take permits.

Ms. Barton asked the Board to do the following:

- Approve pursuing the addition of the City of Wildomar to the RCHCA JPA and direct staff to work with legal counsel to draft the appropriate documents to bring back to this Board for their approval.

MOTION to approve pursuing the addition of the City of Wildomar to the RCHCA JPA and direct staff to work with legal counsel to draft the appropriate documents to bring back to this Board for approval: Bob Buster

SECOND: Bill Batey

**Motion Approved
Ayes—8
None Opposed**

7.7 Report on the Donation to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Ms. Barton reported that following the Endangered Species Act Day event, RCHCA staff sought out a deserving organization for which to donate leftover backpacks that carried the date of the 2008 event. On August 21st, RCHCA staff went to the Hemet location of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. The backpacks were presented for the benefit of grandparents who are raising grandchildren in an effort to help them send the children back to school better equipped to learn. Both grandparents and grandchildren were thrilled to receive the gift.

Ms. Barton stated that Jennifer Dean, staff writer for *The Press Enterprise*, wrote a

story regarding the presentation and ran the article and picture of a grandmother and her grandchildren on September 7th, National Grandparents Day.

7.8 Report on the SKR Translocation Project at Lake Skinner

Ms. Barton reported that at the February 21, 2008, meeting of the RCHCA Board, Dr. Debra Shier presented a proposal regarding the translocation of SKR at Lake Skinner. Dr. Shier has moved forward with the project and is here today to give an update on the project.

Dr. Shier thanked the Board for allowing her to conduct a study in the translocation of SKR at Lake Skinner.

Dr. Shier stated that the outcome of previous SKR translocation projects has been mixed. With this project, Dr. Shier stated that she wanted to relocate the animals with animals they are already familiar with and to locations that look familiar to them.

The SKR were caught and held in their new location for a period of 7-10 days and then released. Upon their release, the following measures were used to assess success:

- “Stress”, by obtaining fecal samples. The Endocrine Department at CRES will be looking at the fecal samples in order to monitor the stress level of the SKR.
- “Settlement”, by fitting the animals with radio transmitters so they can be tracked daily. This also provides detailed information on survivorship of the animals.

The original plan was to move the animals from MWD land to an area (a plateau just behind the school house) on the Lake Skinner Reserve. When Dr. Shier surveyed the MWD land in the spring, it looked like an excellent location for trapping SKR. However, in June, when Dr. Shier went out to do the trapping, the ground was covered in very high grasses and not at all conducive to SKR.

Dr. Shier reported that all of the SKR’s that were trapped were found on the edge of the roads where there was no brush or grass. That was where their burrows were located.

The release site had to be mowed before relocating the SKR’s as it was full of invasive grasses as well.

Dr. Shier showed pictures of the release site. She separated the release site into four quadrants to see if the animals 1) “moved with neighbors or not”, to see if that affected survivorship, and 2) to see if having “scent placed at the acclimation cage or not”, helped them settle in the area.

Dr. Shier stated that they trapped all of the animals they could locate on the MWD monofill site, took fecal samples to acquire base line stress just before they were moved, and took genetic tests for all of the animals.

By the end of July, only 24 animals had been caught on the MWD land. Therefore, Christine Moen, Manager for the Lake Skinner Reserve, searched for another site for

Dr. Shier's trapping. Ms. Moen was aware of a development site adjacent to the Reserve that used to be a vineyard and was now overgrown. Ms. Moen contacted the developer and received permission to place traps on the property. Those traps netted 30 animals, but again, the burrows were along the road, because the land was overgrown with invasive grasses.

In all, 54 animals were moved to the new habitat. Dr. Shier developed tiny "backpack" transmitters for the SKR for easy tracking and monitoring. This is the first time transmitters were placed on juveniles because they were not using "collars".

Dr. Shier stated that radio telemetry will be done daily for the first three months to monitor settlement and survivorship. Fecal samples are being taken weekly and burrow counts are being done to monitor how quickly new burrows are being developed as the animals move out of their acclimation cages.

Dr. Shier reported that she wants to re-trap all of the animals in the spring to look at survivorship post winter, but also to look at the reproduction of the animals. The reproduction data will be critical for determining if that population will be viable in their new habitat.

Dr. Shier stated that she is very excited with the outcome she is seeing as 89% of the animals have settled (they have been in the same location for seven days); 73% have moved into their own new burrows, and not living in the acclimation cages any longer. Only 11%, which equates to six animals, have left the area. Two animals left the area, but returned on their own and have "moved in".

Dr. Shier stated that she envisions this as a long-term project, if the Board agrees. She stated that translocated populations need to be monitored over multiple years in order to assess long-term population viability. Some previous studies have looked at things at one year post-release and those populations have failed and no one knows why. If this should happen, Dr. Shier stated she would like to understand "why".

Dr. Shier thanked the Board for giving her the opportunity to work on the Lake Skinner Reserve. She stated she hopes to be able to provide them with much more valuable information in the future.

Maryann Edwards asked if she could accompany Dr. Shier on one of her trapping expeditions.

Dr. Shier encouraged Ms. Edwards to accompany her one night. She stated that Brian Shomo (RCHCA Natural Resources Manager) and Michael Richard (Environmental Programs Department employee) assisted her with trapping last night.

Chairperson Yarbrough asked RCHCA staff to meet with Dr. Shier to determine what is needed to continue the translocation study for an additional year.

Ms. Luna stated to Dr. Shier that RCHCA staff will meet with her to determine what additional funding would be needed to continue her work, develop a work program that can be reviewed by the Board, and if the Board then so desires, adjustments can

be made to the RCHCA budget to accommodate some additional funding for the study.

Chairperson Yarbrough stated that he would also like to accompany Dr. Shier on one of her trapping expeditions.

7.9 RCHCA Fiscal Year 2007-2008 Budget Review

Ms. Hester discussed the following regarding last year's budget:

Fiscal Year Highlights:

- The budget for FY 2007/08 was \$1,979,353. It included operating, administrative, and reserve management costs.
- The RCHCA collected \$759,601 in Mitigation Fees, \$778,021 in Interest, for a total of \$1,537,622 in revenue.
- There was a 75% decrease in Mitigation Fees collected from the prior year.
- There was a 4% increase in Interest collected over the prior year.

Projects Undertaken:

- Weed abatement on RCHCA lands.
- Member agency audit.
- Natural Resources Manager hired to manage RCHCA lands at Lakes Mathews and Steele Peak Reserves.
- Fencing projects at Steele Peak and Lake Mathews Reserves.

Ms. Luna thanked the Board for giving her the ability to hire employees and manage the RCHCA.

7.10 Introduction to the Revised RCHCA Website and New Logo

Ms. Hester reported that staff has redesigned the RCHCA's website to improve its visual image and to provide a more appealing site to the public. During this process, it was discovered that the current logo is difficult to duplicate both on the new website and in print. Due to the variation in color, it was extremely costly to recreate the logo on marketing materials.

Ms. Hester shared the new and improved website with the Board, along with the newly designed logo.

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

Ms. Luna reported that the CVMSHCP permit should be issued on October 1st.

8. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. Luna stated that the RCHCA still has not received the signed 10th Amendment to the JPA from the following cities:

- Hemet
- Moreno Valley
- Murrieta
- Temecula

Ms. Luna asked for the Board's assistance in getting the signed Amendments returned to the RCHCA as quickly as possible.

9. CLOSED SESSION

No items were scheduled for closed session.

10. ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING

No items were suggested for the next meeting.

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m. The next meeting will be held on November 20, 2008. The Board agreed to hold the meeting at the Perris City Council Chambers, beginning at 3:00 p.m.