RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
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MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 14, 2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING OF THE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

The Regular Meeting of the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Santa Cruz County Board of Directors was called to order at **6:31PM on October 14, 2026.** The meeting was conducted in person at the Resource Conservation District Office, 2425 Porter Street Suite 19, Soquel 95073, and virtually via Zoom, Meeting ID: 708-386-048.

Directors Present:	Kelley Bell Robert Ketley Howard Liebenberg Mike Manfre, Vice President John Ricker
Directors Absent:	Don Croll Jim McKenna, President
Associate Directors Present:	Adria Arko (via Zoom) Emily Steffenhagen
RCD Staff Present:	Laurel Bard, Forest Health Project Manager Lisa Lurie, Executive Director Lily Ruderman, Administrative Assistant
NRCS Present:	Drew Mather, NRCS (via Zoom)
Others Present:	Michael Miller (via Zoom)

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31PM, with a quorum present; Mike Manfre chaired the meeting. The roll call was taken, and a quorum was confirmed. Kelley Bell present; Robert Ketley present; Howard Liebenberg present; Mike Manfre present; John Ricker present. Don Croll absent; Jim McKenna absent. Remote participants confirmed clear audio and visual connection.

2. INTRODUCTIONS & WELCOME

Mike Manfre welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting. Introductions were made between Laurel Bard and Emily Steffenhagen.

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3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were none given.

4. NRCS REPORT

Drew Mather, NRCS District Conservationist (DC) with the Capitola/Soquel Local Partnership Office (LPO) and acting DC with the Half Moon Bay LPO, gave the NRCS report covering the period from September 10, 2026, to October 14, 2026. He began by announcing that after more than 20 years of service, he will be taking the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) offer from NRCS with his last day scheduled to be December 31, 2026. Drew thanked those present, stating that the individuals he has worked with have made his time with NRCS meaningful. Drew has offered to return as an Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services (ACES) Contractor to complete the transition if needed.

Many requests continue to come in regarding El Niño winter preparedness. RCD and NRCS staff are ready to provide assistance for winter storm related concerns. Also, regarding storm cleanup efforts from past winters, the final project under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) is nearing completion, with a final inspection scheduled for October 5. Weekly meetings with the County of Santa Cruz have been attended by Acting State Engineer Desi Ramirez, and DC for the Capitola/Soquel LPO Drew Mather. The project is expected to be completed by the end of October.

November 6, 2026, has been designated as the due date for new financial assistance applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). An organic flower farm operation installed two high tunnels, and a cost share payment is expected as the tunnels were installed according to NRCS specifications. Drew summarized recent site visits assisting agriculture and forest landowners.

Drew Mather and Rich Casale presented at the RCD's Conservation Planning Training on September 23, on using the Conservation Practices Physical Effects (CPPE) Spreadsheet. Drew also attended the RCD's Living on Rural Properties Workshop. The photo moment of the month was an image used in the Conservation Planning Training, discussing water quality resource concerns.

On the conclusion of his report, staff and board present responded to Drew's announcement of his retirement and expressed their appreciation for his years of service to NRCS and the community.

5. STAFF PRESENTATION

5.1. UCSC Demo Site: A Successful Start – Laurel Bard, Forest Health Project Manager

Forest Health Project Manager Laurel Bard presented on the UCSC Demo Site Forest Health Project, a twelve-acre project utilizing various forest management techniques on the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) campus. UCSC has developed a wildfire vegetation management plan, and part of that plan is to recommend forest health treatments for wildfire resiliency. The initial twelve-acre demonstration project gives an opportunity for outreach to the public and university staff and students, and tests ecological effects of certain treatments in preparation for future work on the UCSC campus.

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Laurel described the location of the demonstration project area and the different treatments used. In some portions of the project trees up to 8" in diameter were removed; in other areas trees up to 12" in diameter were removed. The materials were processed either by chipping or mastication. The results of these treatments will be monitored, and data collected will be added to the Stewardship Monitoring Plot Network, a database which is part of the Santa Cruz Mountains Long-Term Forest Monitoring Program.

In addition to the new data which will be collected from this demonstration project, the Santa Cruz Mountains Forests Data Explorer was also used to prepare for the project, comparing the demonstration site conditions to other forest conditions in Santa Cruz County. The comparison showed very high density in UCSC stands, which created interest in larger diameter removal. The goal was to create healthy second growth vegetation, using forest stands in Henry Cowell and Fall Creek as examples.

The demonstration site represents initial work on the larger forest health treatment project at UCSC scheduled to start in June of 2027. The work planned for next year will include a larger project area approximately 150 acres in size. A tour of the completed twelve-acre demonstration project site will be held on October 24, 2026.

The Board asked questions and Laurel answered. Director Howard Liebenberg shared insights from his experience working in the Santa Cruz Mountains, describing the dynamic nature of forest ecosystems, with succession of species shifting between chapparal and redwood ecosystems. He illustrated this point by describing "a moving redwood forest". Members of Board engaged in a discussion with Laurel Bard about the project and how the collection of data from this demonstration site adds to our understanding of forest ecosystems in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

The Board considered the consent agenda. The consent agenda items included the September 9, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes, the September 2026 Vendor Expenditures, and the FY 25-26 Q4 Financials. Robert Ketley moved approval of the consent agenda, and John Ricker seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1. Consider and approve updates to the RCD organizational chart

Executive Director Lisa Lurie introduced the item and gave an overview of the organizational chart. She described that changes to the org chart are prompted by the hiring of new staff members, as the RCD looks to add administrative capacity to keep pace with programmatic growth. New hires will include a Finance Specialist and a Director of Programs. The revised org chart accounts for changes to the structure of the organization once these roles are in place. Howard Liebenberg moved approval, and Kelley Bell seconded. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker.

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8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1. RCD Measure Q Annual Accomplishments FY 25-26

On Wednesday, October 21, 2026, Lisa Lurie will present to the Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board (COAB) on the RCD's accomplishments in the first year of Measure Q. Lisa gave the Board a preview of what she will share with the COAB, beginning with an introduction on the RCD's presence within the County and our role in Measure Q. The presentation will highlight the impact the RCD has had in the first year, and how Measure Q is creating an opportunity for stable and consistent funding – allowing us to provide new services and sustain and expand existing services.

Accomplishments described in the presentation include delivering services County-wide under several different project areas, including the chipping program, and no-cost site visits to assist landowners in addressing natural resource concerns. Site visits are taking place at locations all over the County, and technical assistance was provided to dozens of landowners. Types of assistance people are seeking include water resource management, roads, drainage, irrigation efficiency, wildlife and habitat protection, and forest health. Lisa also emphasized the value of leveraging Measure Q funds to secure other funding sources, creating even more impact from each dollar received from Measure Q.

The goals and visions of Measure Q align perfectly with the purpose of the RCD, our goals, and the reasons why our organization exists. The RCD is here to help people help the land, water and wildlife in Santa Cruz County, and funding received from Measure Q is increasing that impact.

8.2. El Niño Readiness and Response

Lisa Lurie updated members of the Board on the work being done to prepare for El Niño. The RCD's website now features additional information on El Nino readiness, with items including a winter preparedness checklist, presentations from our workshops, and links to other helpful websites. The RCD is mobilizing team members and working closely with NRCS and partner agencies. We are receiving an increased level of requests for assistance with specific property concerns and neighborhood concerns. Site visits will be available through the winter, and Lisa encouraged those present to share these resources with their networks.

8.3. Executive Director's Report

Lisa Lurie gave a few additional updates for the month in the Executive Director's report. The Governor's Emergency Declaration for the developing 2026-2027 El Niño event is included in the Communications section of the meeting agenda. A few policy updates were shared, including that an AI Policy will be developed for RCD staff. Lisa asked if any Board members would like to participate in the development of that policy and Director Kelley Bell offered to follow up with an example policy.

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The RCD will host a Board Tour on November 4, 2026, from 9:00 to 12:00pm, followed by a Board meeting at 1:00pm. There will be Board Recess in December. Lisa concluded her report and opened the floor for any Director or Associate Director reports.

8.4. Director/Associate Director Reports

Director Howard Liebenberg gave a report. He began by stating his appreciation for the RCD's Watershed signs, which are blue, circular signs posted near creeks and watersheds throughout Santa Cruz County. Howard also shared feedback he received from residents who attended the Living on Rural Properties Workshop. He provided some of his own tips and advice on rural roads and culvert maintenance during winter months, advocating for the use of culvert locator pins.

Director John Ricker provided a follow-up to a report given previously by Director Robert Ketley. In response to Robert's description of seeing fish at Nisene Marks in Aptos at the site of the Large Woody Debris project, John reported that he had seen fish in Soquel Creek for the first time in many years.

Board Secretary Lily Ruderman, on behalf of Director Jim McKenna (absent), shared that Jim McKenna confirmed he will attend the CARCD Conference and serve as the RCD's delegate at the annual CARCD Business Meeting.

9. CALENDAR DATES

October 15, 2026 – Area RCD Meeting, Monterey County
October 21, 2026 – RCD Presentation to Measure Q Citizens Oversight Advisory Board
October 24, 2026 – UCSC Demo Site Public Site Walk
November 4, 2026 – RCD Board Tour and Meeting
November 17-19, 2026 – CARCD 81st Annual Conference – Conserving California: Local Solutions, Shared Future

10. COMMUNICATIONS

10.1 Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency due to the developing 2026-2027 El Niño Event
10.2 Robert Ketley, "Local Watershed Heroes," Catchy Ideas, *California Fly Fisher Magazine*, Fall Issue

11. ADJOURN

The next regular meeting of the RCD Board will be **November 4, 2026**, at 1:00PM, **Anna Jean Cummings County Park, 461 Soquel San Jose Road, Soquel 95073,** and will be an in-person only meeting. Robert Ketley moved to adjourn. John Ricker seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:23PM.

(LR:MM)