RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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MINUTES OF THE MARCH 15, 2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING OF THE RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

The Meeting of the Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Santa Cruz County Board of Directors was called to order at **6:30PM on March 15, 2022,** the meeting was conducted virtually per AB 361 and Executive Order N-35-20 via Zoom, Meeting ID: 708-386-048.

Directors Present:	Kelley Bell
	Robert Ketley
	Howard Liebenberg
	Mike Manfre, Vice President
	Jim McKenna, President
Directors Absent:	Mike Eaton
	John Ricker
RCD Staff Present:	Tangi Chapman, Recorder
	Lisa Lurie, Executive Director
	Matt Abernathy, Program Specialist
	Angela Richman, Program Specialist
Ascent Environmental Presenters:	Lily Bostrom
	Heather Blair
Public Present:	Six Interested Citizens
Skylark Girl Scout Camp:	Michelle McCormick, Executive Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM, with a quorum present. Jim McKenna chaired the meeting. Roll was called and connectivity confirmed; Kelley Bell present; Mike Eaton absent; Robert Ketley present; Howard Liebenberg present; Mike Manfre absent; Jim McKenna present; John Ricker absent.

2. INTRODUCTIONS & WELCOME

Jim McKenna welcomed everyone to the meeting, each attendee introduced themselves. Jim then explained that this meeting provides a forum for the Board to review and consider approval of two Forest Health projects, Skylark Ranch and Last Chance Road. An overview of the Santa Cruz County Forest Health and Fire Resiliency Public Works Plan (PWP), the California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) and Project-Specific Analysis (PSA) will be given before considering each of the specific project action items. Board discussion and public comment regarding the plans will be heard for each project prior to voting on the action item.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments given

4. ACTION ITEMS

A PowerPoint presentation was given by Lisa Lurie, Lily Bostrom and Matt Abernathy (see attached). Lisa began her presentation with a summary of the PWP which the Board adopted in June of last year and which was then approved by the California Coastal Commission. The PWP is a programmatic permitting process, like the RCDs Partners In Restoration Program, that provides efficient permitting for CEQA and Coastal Act Compliance for projects that meet the CalVTP standards while also considering the sensitive nature of working within the coastal

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zone. The Project Specific Analysis, Coastal Vegetation Treatment Standards, and supporting documents are the means through which CEQA and Coastal Act Compliance is demonstrated. Upon Board approval of the PSA and supporting documents, Lisa explained, the Coastal Commission will be notified and post the Notices of Impending Development for each project for public comment and consideration for approval at their April 7th meeting. Lily gave an overview of the CEQA compliance and Matt gave specifics on each of the two projects.

4.1. Consider approval of Resolution RCDSCC 2022-05 to approve the Project Specific Analysis and supporting documents and authorize submission of a Notice of Impending Development for the Skylark Ranch Forest Health Project

Matt Abernathy gave specifics of the Skylark Ranch Project. He presented that the plan outlines specific measures and a hierarchy of treatments. This was a collaborative process. The project will remove dead and dying vegetation and thin understory and will be species specific. There may be some herbicide use with regard to invasive species removal on the property; future use would be minimal and as a direct result of monitoring. Matt said they will be managing for shrub cover and a mosaic across the landscape to encourage wildlife and provide habitat. Lily Bostrom explained that the CEQA findings were related to the generation of pollutants from the mechanical removal of vegetation. Taking into account Coastal VTS guidance on forest health and fire protection in coastal zone, the PSA includes mitigation measures and summarizes information into the PSA.

Robert Ketley moved to approve the Resolution RCDSCC 2022-05 as presented. Kelley Bell seconded the motion. Jim McKenna then opened the item for discussion. Questions were asked of the presenters by the Board of Directors. Questions included the process by which projects were identified, what type of ongoing maintenance would be required of the projects. Matt explained that there were many agencies involved in the identification process. The RCD is the lead on the project and collaboration included: CalFire, Coastal Commission, County Planning, USFWS, CDFW, forester advisors, and collaborating landowner. The project will be monitored annually, and maintenance requirements will be identified. Michelle McCormick the Skylark Ranch Manager says they are committed to ongoing maintenance of the project, the have purchased a masticator and have volunteers who help with maintenance and operation requirements. It was asked how much of the grant that is funding this project is for maintenance. Matt replied that most of the current grant is for implantation and there will be ongoing efforts to identify and secure maintenance funding. Through the PWP there will be reviews of the projects after 5 years and again at 10 years. Ms. Montana asked about Red-Legged Frogs and asked if there were any take permits that were required. Matt responded, saying that they had consulted with USFWS and CA Department of Fish and Wildlife to identify treatments that would benefit the federally listed species, so no take permit was required. The panel explained that in all cases the group sought treatments that would avoid take; one of the benefits of a collaborative approach. Additionally, Robert Ketley asked about invasive species and what would be done to target them. Matt said that the main goal is to target the Eucalyptus on the property, and reduce the risk of new invasives colonizing the property through protocols. There were no public comments received regarding the project. **Being there was no further discussion or public comment, the vote was made by roll call; Kelley**

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Bell aye; Robert Ketley aye; Howard Liebenberg aye; Mike Manfre aye; Jim McKenna aye. The motion passed unanimously.

4.2. Consider approval of Resolution RCDSCC 2022-06 to approve the Project Specific Analysis and supporting documents and authorize submission of a Notice of Impending Development for the Last Chance Road Forest Health Project

Matt Abernathy presented the Last Chance Road Forest Health Project. This project was in process before the CZU Lightening Complex Fire of 2020. Most of the property burned resulting in huge tree mortality. The project focus switched to focus on encouraging healing of the land and aiding in recovery. Matt said that there is an endemic stand of Monterey Pine on the property that due to fire suppression has over time had progressive encroachment of Douglas Fir. The project will encourage the regeneration of the Monterey Pine, remove invasives, and dead and dying trees. The project will manage for Monterey Pine by reducing crown connectivity, lower understory vegetation and remove ladder fuels. Annual Monitoring will inform future maintenance. Lily Bostrom shared that the CEQA finding were similar to the Skylark Ranch project with unavoidable impacts from gas powered mechanical removal of dead and dying wood and vegetation. The Coastal VTS Collaborative process identified specific treatments to reduce impacts.
Howard Liebenberg moved approval of Resolution RCDSCC 2022-07. The motion was seconded by Mike Manfre. Jim McKenna then opened the meeting for discussion. Jim McKenna was encouraged by the opportunity to reestablish Monterey Pine, noting that it is a fire adapted species and that often this leads to even aged stands. Matt said that the goal is to lift of the vegetation to decrease the fuel load and reduce the likelihood of crown fires. A board member asked how many landowners were involved in this project. Matt responded that there is one large private property owner participating. It also provides the main artery into the Last Chance Road community. There were no public comments made. **Being there was no further discussion or public comment, the vote was made for the motion by roll call; Kelley Bell aye; Robert Ketley aye; Howard Liebenberg aye; Mike Manfre aye; Jim McKenna aye. The motion passed unanimously.**

5. ADJOURN

The next meeting of the RCD Board will be April 13, 2022, at 6:30PM via Zoom. Jim McKenna adjourned the meeting upon approval of the final action item.

(TC:JM)

James J. McKenna