RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 12, 2025 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 February 12, 2025.** The meeting was conducted in person at the City of Capitola Community Room, 420 Capitola Avenue, Capitola, 95010 and virtually via Zoom, Meeting ID: 708-386-048.

Directors Present:	Mike Eaton Mike Manfre, Vice President Jim McKenna, President John Ricker
Directors Absent:	Kelley Bell Robert Ketley Howard Liebenberg
RCD Staff Present:	Lisa Lurie, Executive Director Lily Ruderman, Administrative Assistant Angie Gruys, Senior Program and Communications Specialist
NRCS Present:	Drew Mather, District Conservationist

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31PM, with a quorum present; Jim McKenna chaired the meeting. The roll was called; Mike Eaton present; Mike Manfre present; Jim McKenna present; John Ricker present; Kelley Bell absent; Robert Ketley absent; Howard Liebenberg absent.

2. INTRODUCTIONS & WELCOME

Jim McKenna welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were none given.

4. NRCS REPORT

Drew Mather gave the NRCS report covering January 9, 2025, to February 12, 2025. He spoke about the changes which occurred this month, including the Executive Order that placed a freeze on spending authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) and the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA). This includes payments under NRCS conservation program contracts that are funded through the IRA and IIJA. Due to the funding freeze, some forestry projects that were due to start soon have been delayed. Once Brooke Rollins is confirmed

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as head of the USDA, she will have the opportunity to review the affected programs and work to make determinations as quickly as possible.

Staffing Updates:

- Drew Mather conducted interviews last month for a new soil conservationist position. Unfortunately, due to the current hiring freeze, Capitola NRCS will not be able to hire a new soil conservationist at this time.
- The "Fork in the Road" Directive issuing the Deferred Resignation Program ended on February 12, 2025.
- Telework agreements have been rescinded for all Federal government employees, and all NRCS employees have been instructed to return to work in office.
- Dillon Beatty continues to assist with engineering related tasks, as well as being the Government Representative for the City of SC's Emergency Watershed Protection projects.
- Jennifer Nowark is now the official program support specialist for the Capitola NRCS office.
- Jackie Chaboneau, acting Biologist and Bay-Delta Ecologist stationed in Livermore continues to assist the Capitola NRCS office with Emergency Watershed Protection Projects (EWPP) permitting issues and biological reviews for the County of Santa Cruz. Additionally, she has agreed to assist in reviewing the biological practices in the RCD's Partners in Restoration Permit Coordination program.

Additionally, NRCS staff members conducted a number of forestland site visits in January with Area Forester Jeff Kelly. There were 20 new applications for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and 6 new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications. Two new vehicles are awaiting telematics installations and will be available for use soon. Drew fielded a question from the Board about the CSP program, describing it as a five-year program that pays a set amount for conservation efforts. Lastly, members of NRCS gave a presentation at the recent Eco Farm conference, which was a highlight of last month.

5. STAFF PRESENTATION – Rural Roads Program, Angie Gruys

Lisa Lurie gave introductory remarks about the rural roads program and the accomplishments this program has achieved over the past four years. She introduced Angie Gruys, who gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Board on the Rural Roads Program. The Rural Roads Program focused on improving water quality by preventing erosion and reducing sediment in local watersheds. The program was funded by two grants, the first grant was from the Department of Water Resources through the Regional Water Management Foundation (RWMF) and its focus area included the entire County of Santa Cruz. The second grant was from Federal Clean Water Act through the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and focused specifically on the San Lorenzo River watershed.

Angie explained that there was a strong education and outreach component, over the course of the program more than 622 Roads and Home Drainage Guides were distributed and updates to the guide were completed. Two workshops were held, with 42 attendees at the first one and 150+ attendees at the second. A Rural Roads technical training and tour was completed in December of 2024. The December Rural Roads training and tour was extremely well received, and registration filled up in one day. Due to the popularity of this offering, a second Rural Roads workshop was hosted in January of 2025.

Overall, the Rural Roads Program met or exceeded its goals with 91 regular site visits, and 477 post-disaster site visits completed, 42 voluntary Best Maintenance Practices (BMPs) completed by homeowners, as well as five additional BMPs by contractors and maintenance personnel. Project implementation goals were to reduce sediment loads from roads by 250 to 500 tons per year as measured by the existing load model. This was

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accomplished: Road BMPs reduced excessive sediment by 500.66 tons/year. Another goal was to implement 12 rural roads BMPs, and 7 home drainage BMPs. The program implemented 19 rural roads BMPs at four project locations and 8 home drainage BMPs at 3 locations.

Projects completed as part of this program were ranked by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and selected based on ranking and interest of the community/landowner. Criteria included hydrologic connectivity, and estimated sediment reduction. Projects included design, permitting and construction.

There was discussion by the Board about how these projects will age over the years, and Angie spoke to monitoring and follow-ups as needed for maintenance. The board asked about grants and matching funds for this program and Angie addressed how the RCD was able to meet grant requirements including budgets, matching funds up front, and exceeding required amounts for matching funds. Discussion also touched on what grant funding might look like for similar projects in the future.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

The Board considered the consent agenda. The consent agenda items included the January 8, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes, and January 2025 Vendor Expenditures. John Ricker moved approval of the Consent Agenda Items. Mike Eaton seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1. Review and consider approval of the 2025 Cost of Living Adjustment to take effect beginning PP 05

Lisa Lurie explained that the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is based on consumer price index/bureau of labor statistics. This year the RCD's Director of Finance Arianne Rettinger worked with Candice Elliot from Fortress and Flourish on best practices. Going forward the RCD will be making an annual CPI comparison, rather than prior practice of using the December CPI comparison. The board discussed the numbers presented and the difference between basing the COLA on the December CPI and annual cumulative CPI. The new method takes the average change over the year vs a specific point in time. Historically we have approved the COLA based on the December CPI, the recommendation this year is to switch to the annual CPI. The recommended amount for this year is 2.76%. There was discussion between Lisa and the board about the current budgeted amount of 4.5% for COLA. This has typically exceeded the actual amount approved and Ari Rettinger has suggested we consider adjusting the amount budgeted to 3.5%, which would be closer to the average COLA amounts in recent years. There was further discussion of how this affects billable rates for grants. The board cautioned about the variability of financial matters and the potential for the COLA to be a higher percentage in future years. Board members advised that they would defer to staff's decision on how much to budget for the COLA, however they also addressed that it might be fiscally prudent to leave some allowance in the budget for variability. After discussion, John Ricker moved approval of the 2025 Cost of Living Adjustment of 2.76% to take effect at the beginning of pay period 05. Mike Eaton seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

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7.2. Review and consider approval of updates to the Organizational Chart

Lisa Lurie shared updates to the Organization Chart. The updates reflect staffing and structural changes, including changes to the Forest Health Program, adding the Operations Manager Position, and showing supervision for the Administrative Assistant role. Lisa also outlined some of the background organizational structure that the chart is based on. After discussion, Mike Manfre moved approval of the updates to the Organization Chart. Mike Eaton seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

8. CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

8.1 Per Government Code § 54757(b)(1) – Personnel Matters

9. OPEN SESSION AGENDA

9.1 Reporting of action taken in Closed Session

No action was taken in the closed session. Jim McKenna and John Ricker reported that they will continue discussion of this item at the next Meeting of the Board of Directors and will hold another closed session next month. They will also schedule a meeting with Lisa Lurie to complete the annual performance evaluation.

*Mike Eaton left at 8:01pm due to an incoming storm and the possibility of severe weather. Following his departure, there was not a quorum present. All remaining items are informational.

10. DISCUSSION ITEMS

10.1. Executive Director's Report

Lisa Lurie gave updates concerning the RCD's funding from federal sources. She emphasized impacts at the local level due to changes in the availability of federal funding. Based on her research the federal funding freeze affects two grants for our organization. One is a Forestry Technical Assistance grant from the USDA via the California Association of RCDs (CARCD). Another significant grant which is impacted is our USDA Community Wildfire Defense grant, which was awarded (but not yet contracted) through bi-partisan infrastructure law, and is frozen indefinitely. The Community Wildfire Defense grant was set to fund five years of the RCD's popular chipping program. The upcoming Spring chipping program was 40% funded through that grant. The Santa Cruz County Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3) has stepped in with $75,000 in funding to cover the immediate shortfall. This allows the RCD to move forward with the Spring program, however, we are still looking at funding options for the Fall chipping program and beyond.

The Board inquired about other impacts from changes to Federal funding. Lisa Lurie spoke about potential effects on budget and staff. Board members strategized how Measure Q could

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assist with potential funding shortages. The Board asked about the relationship between State and Federal funding. Lisa answered by highlighting how State and County budgets could be affected by potential Federal cuts. She also addressed increased scrutiny of indirect costs, and how the financial stability of our organization is reliant on recovery of these indirect costs.

Mike Manfre discussed our annual budget for this year, and how that will be impacted by the funding freeze. Lisa expressed how staff will continue to track impacts to grants included in our budget for this year. For the Ag Team, their work with socially disadvantaged growers is mandated under the farm bill and won't be affected by these changes.

Board members also discussed ethics and harassment prevention training, which some members have recently competed via CSDA webinars.

Mike Manfre asked questions about San Lorenzo River barrier removal project. Lisa spoke about recent efforts to do landowner outreach.

In hiring news, the RCD is currently recruiting for a job opening for a Watershed Restoration Program Specialist. More information about this position is available on our website.

Additionally, the County of Santa Cruz is recruiting community representatives for oversight for measure Q. Details are available on the county's website here: https://www.santacruzcountyca.gov/MeasureQ.aspx

10.2. Director/Associate Director Reports

None were given.

11. CALENDAR DATES

March 10, 2025 – Pajaro Watershed Visioning Event hosted by Pajaro Valley Water Management
March 19, 2025 – Farm Bureau Luncheon

12. COMMUNICATIONS

12.1. LAFCO Letter regarding Election for Special District Regular Member on LAFCO and associated nominations and qualifications for candidates – this will be on the agenda for March.

13. ADJOURN

The next regular meeting of the RCD Board will be hybrid March 12, 2025, at 6:30PM at **City of Capitola Community Room 420 Capitola Ave, Capitola, 95010** and via Zoom meetings: https://zoom.us/, Meeting ID: 708-386-048, Meeting PW: 599600. Mike Manfre moved to adjourn. John Ricker seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:34PM.

(LR:JM)

James J. McKenna