RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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MINUTES OF THE MARCH 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 **6:40PM on March 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 (Zoom)
	Robert Ketley
	Howard Liebenberg
	Mike Manfre, Vice President (Zoom)
	Jim McKenna, President
	John Ricker
Directors Absent:	Kelley Bell
RCD Staff Present:	Lisa Lurie, Executive Director
	Lily Ruderman, Administrative Assistant
NRCS Present:	Drew Mather, District Conservationist

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:40PM, Jim McKenna chaired the meeting. Mike Eaton and Mike Manfre joined the meeting via Zoom due to illness. The roll was called; Mike Eaton present via zoom; Robert Ketley present, Mike Manfre present via zoom; Jim McKenna present; John Ricker present; Kelley Bell absent. Due to a lack of a quorum, the Board proceeded with non-action item related agenda items until Howard Liebenberg arrived at approximately 7:30pm. Upon his arrival, a quorum was present.

2. INTRODUCTIONS & WELCOME

Jim McKenna welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting. Members of the Board and RCD staff introduced themselves to Iwalani Faulkner, who was present at the meeting.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Iwalani Faulkner, candidate for the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), addressed the Board during the public comment period. She spoke about her background and experience, both personally and professionally. Ms. Faulkner is running for a LAFCO seat as a board member for Central Fire. As a candidate for LAFCO, she spoke about the importance of collaboration between organizations like LAFCO and the RCD. Board members and RCD Executive Director Lisa Lurie discussed a variety of issues with Ms. Faulkner, focusing on subjects related to LAFCO including municipal water and fire departments, and environmental concerns. Ms. Faulkner departed after her public comment.

4. NRCS REPORT

Drew Mather gave the NRCS report covering February 13, 2025, to March 12, 2025. Noteworthy events during the past month include Brooke Rollins' confirmation as the Secretary of Agriculture. The NRCS has been in the

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process of reviewing funds granted under the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) and the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA). Now that Secretary Rollins has been confirmed, she will have the opportunity to assess these reviews and make determinations. NRCS staff have received and responded to emails from the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and ongoing responses have been requested. The Federal hiring freeze is still in effect, and telework agreements continue to be rescinded, therefore all NRCS employees are working in their respective duty stations as of February 2025.

Staffing Updates:

- Despite widespread changes affecting federal employees, the local Capitola NRCS office has not lost any staff members.
- Dillon Beatty continues to assist with engineering related tasks, as well as being the Government Representative for the City of Santa Cruz's Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) projects.
- Jennifer Nowark continues to assist the Capitola office along with Petaluma, Hollister, Templeton, and Half Moon Bay offices with various program support requests.
- Rich Casale, Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services (ACES) Contractor, continues to assist both the NRCS and the RCD of Santa Cruz County (RCD) with his expertise in erosion control and wildfire preparedness.
- Jackie Chaboneau, acting Biologist and Bay-Delta Ecologist stationed in Livermore, continues to assist the Capitola NRCS office with EWPP and in reviewing the biological practices in the RCD's Partners in Restoration Permit Coordination program.

Additionally, Drew Mather gave further updates on the status of NRCS programs. Applications are being ranked for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP); there are currently nineteen applications submitted. For the EWPP program, due to the pause in funding there was some risk involved for the County of Santa Cruz and landowners to go forward. Following that period of risk, the funding has now been released, and there are 13 EWPP sites ready to proceed with participation in the program.

(Howard Liebenberg arrived and a quorum was then present)

5. CONSENT AGENDA

The Board considered the consent agenda. The consent agenda items included the February 12, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes, the February 2025 Vendor Expenditures, and a Memorandum regarding an amendment to the Restoration Design Group (RDG) contract to increase the total amount above $100,000. John Ricker moved approval of the Consent Agenda Items. Robert Ketley seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6.1. Consider and vote for Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regular and alternate member seats

The board reviewed the candidates for the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). RCD Board President Jim McKenna gave a recap of the public comment given by LAFCO candidate Iwalani Faulkner. Robert Ketley spoke about the complex issues LAFCO will be addressing over the next few years. The board discussed what type of candidate would be best suited to work in partnership with

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the RCD to increase connections and interaction between agencies. Board members considered selections of candidates for both the regular and alternate seats. After discussion, the Board selected Iwalani Faulkner for the regular member seat and Jim Anderson for the alternate member seat. Robert Ketley moved approval. John Ricker seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

6.2. Consider approval of resolution RCDSCC 2025-02 approving the application of grant funds from the Wildlife Conservation Board for Restoring Wildlife Corridors for the Endangered Santa Cruz Long-Toed Salamander and Other Native Wildlife

Lisa Lurie introduced the resolution and described the location where the restoration work would be performed. The proposed project would restore the Trabing property prior to the construction of the planned Buena Vista Wildlife Undercrossing. The goal is to create sustainable long term habitat for the endangered Santa Cruz Long Toed Salamander and other endemic species. This will be a collaborative partnership between the RCD, Caltrans, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County. Board members asked questions about grants and partner organizations for this proposal, and whether any funding sources or personnel could be affected by potential changes. The Board considered the resolution, and after discussion, Robert Ketley moved approval. John Ricker seconded the motion. The ayes included Mike Eaton, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, Jim McKenna, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

7. CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

8.1 Per Government Code § 54757(b)(1) – Personnel Matters
The Board of Directors invited the Executive Director Lisa Lurie to stay for the closed session.

8. OPEN SESSION AGENDA

9.1 Reporting of action taken in Closed Session
During the closed session, the Board met with Lisa to discuss her employee performance review and to confirm that she remains in good standing and should receive her annual performance increase upon her upcoming advancement date.

9. DISCUSSION ITEMS

9.1. Board Secretary Admin Update

The Board Secretary, Lily Ruderman, addressed the board and inquired about the location for upcoming Board meetings. Board members discussed preferences for either the RCD's local office, or alternate locations. Lily also checked in with the members of the Board regarding ethics and harassment prevention training, and the form 700 filing required for Board members.

9.2. Executive Director's Report

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Executive Director Lisa Lurie gave updates for the month, including updates on funding, meetings with local officials, and Measure Q.

Due to two grants affected by the federal spending freeze, there were immediate funding gaps for the RCD's Spring chipping program slated to start April 1, 2025. The Santa Cruz Office of Response, Recovery, and Resilience (OR3) has agreed to help bridge the funding gap for the Spring chipping program. In addition, two other sponsors have provided financial assistance, including a community member who gave a $10,000 donation specifically earmarked for this program and the CA State Coastal Conservancy. Lisa shared that thanks to funding from these three sources – OR3, the Coastal Conservancy, and the support from a generous community member – we will be able to proceed with the Spring chipping program. She expressed gratitude that these funders have stepped in to ensure the program can go forward as planned.

The Fall chipping program could also face impacts due to changes in federal funding. The Fire Safe Council of Santa Cruz County has two grants which include funding for the chipping program and could potentially assist with the Fall program. Additionally, Lisa shared with the Board that she has met with County Supervisors to discuss funding gaps resulting from the federal funding freeze.

As well as meeting with County Supervisors, Lisa informed the board she has also been meeting with local fire chiefs. The focus of these meetings is to better understand their needs and priorities, and the importance of the role the RCD can play in addressing fire-related concerns by increasing community connections and land management for wildfire resilience. Lisa emphasized collaborative efforts between the RCD and other fire agencies and organizations, such as a recent prescribed burn in the Zayante fire district that involved extensive partnerships and received considerable positive feedback.

Lastly, an upcoming meeting has been scheduled between the RCD and the County of Santa Cruz regarding measure Q funding.

9.3. Director/Associate Director Reports

Howard Liebenberg shared a director's report. He made remarks regarding the status of the Graham Hill Road Acacia removal project. Howard described that surviving invasive acacia in the area has been increasing in number. He emphasized that the new growth needs to be removed while it is still young, before it becomes infeasible. Lisa will follow up with RCD staff about the maintenance of the project. Board members suggested various avenues for addressing these concerns.

John Ricker gave a brief update regarding the Watershed Restoration Program specialist position. The RCD is currently in the hiring process for this role.

10. CALENDAR DATES

March 19, 2025 – Farm Bureau Luncheon

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March 29, 2025 – Community Bridges/Puente Wildfire Preparedness Event
April 30, 2025 – Salmonid Restoration Tour of the San Lorenzo River

11. COMMUNICATIONS

11.1. SDRMA Nominations and Elections Packet

12. ADJOURN

The next regular meeting of the RCD Board will be hybrid April 9, 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. Robert Ketley moved to adjourn. John Ricker seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:45PM.

(LR:JM)

James J. McKenna