RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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MINUTES OF THE MAY 14, 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 **6:32PM on May 14, 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:	Kelley Bell Robert Ketley Howard Liebenberg Mike Manfre, Vice President John Ricker
Directors Absent:	Mike Eaton Jim McKenna, President
RCD Staff Present:	Lisa Lurie, Executive Director Tangi Chapman, Operations Manager Lily Ruderman, Administrative Assistant
NRCS Present:	Drew Mather, District Conservationist

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:32PM, with a quorum present; Mike Manfre chaired the meeting. The roll was called; Kelley Bell present; Robert Ketley present, Howard Liebenberg present; Mike Manfre present; John Ricker present; Mike Eaton absent; Jim McKenna absent.

2. INTRODUCTIONS & WELCOME

Mike Manfre welcomed everyone to the hybrid meeting.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were none given.

4. NRCS REPORT

Drew Mather gave the NRCS report covering April 10, 2025, to May 14, 2025. He shared staffing updates and reported on NRCS programs.

Staffing Updates:

- Dillon Beatty, the former shared Field Office Engineer, has accepted a Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) offer, his last day with the NRCS was April 30, 2025. Dave Krietemayer is the sole remaining local Area Engineer, located in the Fresno office.

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- Desi Ramirez, Area 2 Engineer, is developing an engineering request system for all NRCS field offices to utilize. Additionally, Desi Ramirez is now the sole Government Representative for Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) for both the City and County of Santa Cruz.
- Rich Casale, Agriculture Conservation Experienced Services (ACES) Contractor, continues to assist both the NRCS and the RCD of Santa Cruz County (RCD), as well as other offices and RCDs throughout the state.
- Jim Howard, District Conservationist for the Half Moon Bay NRCS office, retired from 30 years of federal service as of April 30, 2025.
- Karen Lowell, Area Agronomist stationed at the NRCS Salinas Service Center, continues to assist the Capitola office with agronomic and soils related requests. Former area Resource Soil Scientist Phil Smith has also taken the DRP offer, his last day was April 30, 2025.
- Drew Mather, District Conservationist (DC), continues to assist the Capitola office with day-to-day operations and field visits, and is now the acting DC for the NRCS Vacaville Field Office.

In addition to staffing updates, Drew shared technical and financial assistance updates for various NRCS programs. Several forestland site visits were carried out with the Area Forester, Jeff Kelly, on May 13, 2025, for the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program. The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) has thirteen total project sites and seven active construction sites. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) currently has five preapproved applications, including cropland, forestland, rangeland, and animal feeding operations. The NRCS has also received a total of eight Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications, which will be ranked by May 30, 2025.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

The Board considered the consent agenda. The consent agenda items included the April 9, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes, and the April 2025 Vendor Expenditures. John Ricker moved approval of the Consent Agenda Items. Robert Ketley seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

6. CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

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

7. OPEN SESSION AGENDA

7.1. Reporting of action taken in closed session

During the closed session the Board gave direction regarding Retirement Plan administration.

8. ACTION ITEMS

8.1. Review and consider approval of Resolution RCDSCC 2025-05 for the Resource Conservation District 457b Plan Adoption and Trustee Agreement

Operations Manager Tangi Chapman introduced the resolution and described the 457b plan and trustee agreement. The new 457b retirement plan will replace the RCD's previous retirement plan, with minor changes. The changes include reducing the length of employment required to participate from one year to three months; additionally, the new plan allows the RCD to set the percentage

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amount for matching company contributions by Board action. The trustees for the new plan were listed, with a brief description of what their role entails.

The Board asked questions about the 457b plan, including questions about changes from the prior plan, and about retirement investment options. After discussion, Robert Ketley moved approval of the resolution. Kelley Bell seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

8.2. Review and consider approval of revisions to Employee Handbook, Policy 110: Hours of Work, Timesheets, Overtime, Compensation and Advancement

Executive Director Lisa Lurie spoke about updates to the Employee Handbook, and shared that these policy revisions are based on the outcomes of the recent Compensation and Benefit study conducted by the RCD. Changes to Policy 110 include updates to payrates and additional articulation of the advancement policy. The Board gave feedback on implementing the new advancement policy, and Lisa and the Board engaged in a detailed conversation regarding the Level Step Chart and the differences between Annual Performance Increases and Promotions. After discussion, John Ricker moved approval of the revisions to Policy 110. Kelley Bell seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

8.3. Review and consider approval of updates to Employee Handbook, Policy 118: Telework

Lisa Lurie introduced the revised Telework Policy and Voluntary Telework Agreement. She shared that updates to Policy 118 reflect the RCD's experience with remote work stemming from the instatement of an emergency Telework policy during COVID 19. In creating this new policy the RCD acknowledges that telework is effective for our organization, and these updates formalize the emergency policy which we operated under for five years. Policy 118 outlines expectations for employees performing telework and defines three types of telework: full-time, hybrid, or sporadic. Lisa highlighted language worth noting, such as requirements for remote work spaces. There was discussion by the Board regarding the details of the policy. Board Member Kelley Bell proposed changes to the policy and agreement as written. In section 118.2 Telework Expectations, language was updated to read "Remain accessible and responsive during regular work hours." Section 11 of 118-A the Voluntary Telework Agreement, was changed to read "Employee will be provided with reasonable advance notice, when possible". After revisions to include the Board's feedback, Robert Ketley moved approval. John Ricker seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker. The motion passed unanimously.

8.4. Consider approval of Resolution RCDSCC 2025-04 Measure Q Temporary Funds Transfer Request

Lisa Lurie gave background on Measure Q and outlined how this Resolution enables the RCD to receive a temporary funds transfer from the County of Santa Cruz in anticipation of Measure Q

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funding becoming available. This Temporary Funds Transfer allows the RCD to move forward with preparation and planning for programs anticipated to be funded under Measure Q, and helps fill near term funding gaps in aligned priority programs, such as the RCD's fall chipping program. Lisa further described that while the visioning process for Measure Q is still under way, this can assist with laying the groundwork until the visioning process is complete in the Fall of 2025. After Lisa's description of how the process works, the Board asked questions and Lisa responded. Discussion centered around a cost vs benefit analysis of the temporary funds transfer. Lisa clarified that this is an advance, since Measure Q funds have not yet been received by the County of Santa Cruz. John Ricker described his experience with similar revenue anticipation loans, and shared that this is standard practice for Special Districts. Overall the Board concurred that this funding would be used in a way consistent with the purpose of Measure Q. Following discussion, John Ricker moved approval of the resolution. Howard Liebenberg seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker.

9. DISCUSSION ITEMS

9.1. Board Secretary Admin Update

The Board Secretary, Lily Ruderman, spoke about final steps to secure the location for next month's meeting at the Capitola Branch Library. Lily also addressed the Board regarding the Brown Act and Board Members attendance via Zoom, which is limited to twice a year with a valid cause like illness.

9.2. Executive Director's Report

Lisa Lurie gave the Executive Director's report. Considering the administrative and policy related nature of much of the meeting, she focused her report on topics including community outreach and networking, highlighting three recent events that underscore the value of connection.

This month the Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network (SCMSN) convened; Lisa Lurie was in attendance. This year marks the ten-year anniversary of the SCMSN. The topics discussed included how we are approaching cultural resources management, the role people play in the Santa Cruz mountains, and what a healthy relationship between people and nature looks like.

The RCD's Watershed Restoration Program Manager, Daniel Nylen, and Executive Director Lisa Lurie have started a training course called Walking the Path of Right Relations, held by the Collaborative for Right Relations and supported by the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation and Monterey Bay Climate Adaptation Action Network. This year-long training includes multiple facilitated sessions with Indigenous and non-indigenous participants and focuses on relationship building. Lisa and Daniel will be working with the RCD staff and Board to help engage our whole organization in this learning.

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Additionally, Lisa attended the Together Bay Area conference. TOGETHER Bay Area is a regional coalition that includes the 9 San Francisco Bay Area Counties + Santa Cruz, supporting land conservation and stewardship through relationship building, regional planning program development, and collective advocacy. Several of the RCD's partners, fellow RCDs, and Land Trusts participated. Lisa shared that this was a great opportunity to create deeper connections, set goals, and measure progress for conservation in the region.

The RCD's Spring Chipping Program has been well received so far, reaching capacity, with four hundred forty people participating and fifty on the waitlist. RCD staff is also planning a public tour to be held at the Olympia Watershed property in July, details to follow. The team at the RCD completed work on three separate CalFire grants in March. Lisa congratulated everyone and acknowledged the work on the ground made possible by our dedicated team, landowners, partners, and funders.

9.3. Director/Associate Director Reports

Howard Liebenberg shared excerpts from his family's history in the Santa Cruz mountains. He also spoke about his concerns surrounding potential sources of tree mortality from causes other than fire, such as stress from drought years and sudden oak death.

Members of the Board inquired about salmonid monitoring, and Lisa confirmed she will inquire about levels with RCD Environmental Consultant Kelli Camara and follow up.

10. CALENDAR DATES

June 10, 2025 – Pajaro River Watershed Resilience Planning workshop (hosted by PVWMA)
July 12, 2025 – Olympia Watershed Tour

11. COMMUNICATIONS

There were none this month.

12. ADJOURN

The next regular meeting of the RCD Board will be hybrid June 11, 2025, at 6:30PM, at **Capitola Branch Library Ow Community Room 2005 Wharf Rd, Capitola, CA 95010** and via Zoom meetings: https://zoom.us/, Meeting ID: 708-386-048, Meeting PW: 599600. Robert Ketley moved to adjourn. Mike Eaton seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:39PM.

(LR:MM)

James J. McKenna