RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
Soquel, CA 95073
831.464.2950
www.rcdsantacruz.org

MINUTES OF THE MAY 13, 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 **6:30PM on May 13, 2026.** The meeting was conducted in person at the Resource Conservation District Office, 2425 Porter St 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 (via Zoom)
Directors Absent:	Don Croll Jim McKenna
Associate Directors:	Adria Arko
RCD Staff Present:	Lisa Lurie, Executive Director Laurel Bard, Forest Health Project Manager Lily Ruderman, Administrative Assistant (via Zoom)
NRCS Present:	Drew Mather, NRCS
Others Present:	Nonnie Coelho, Member of the Public Ore Ganin-Pinto, Interfaith Chaplain and End of Life Doula Emily Steffenhagen, Swanton Pacific Ranch

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM, 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 via Zoom. 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. Those present in person and on Zoom introduced themselves.

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
Soquel, CA 95073
831.464.2950
www.rcdsantacruz.org

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ore Ganin-Pinto, Interfaith Chaplain and End of Life Doula, shared their vision for a conservation burial sanctuary in Santa Cruz County. Ore spoke about the environmental impact of burial and described how greener burial practices align with conservation work. They described that conservation burial is a practice which works to conserve the natural habitat and can create a relationship between land trust organizations and burial grounds. RCD Executive Director Lisa Lurie thanked Ore Ganin-Pinto for attending the meeting and expressed interest in following up to see where there might be intersections between our work.

4. NRCS REPORT

Drew Mather, NRCS District Conservationist (DC) with the Capitola/Soquel Local Partnership Office (LPO), gave the NRCS report for the period from April 16, 2026, to May 13, 2026. He began with a brief introduction and overview of NRCS, followed by updates on staffing and internships. NRCS Pathways internships provide an opportunity for graduate student interns to do a conversion following their internship and become full time employees with NRCS. This conversion program remains active despite the ongoing Federal hiring freeze.

NRCS continues to receive requests for information about the Regenerative Pilot Program, as well as general erosion control assistance requests. Preapproval selections are still being made for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications. As of May 13, 2026, eight EQIP applications have been moved to pre-approved status. Preapproval selections will also be made for Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications over the coming weeks. The Livermore LPO and the Oakland Urban Agriculture Field Office have offered to assist the Capitola/Soquel LPO with the processing of a high number of applications submitted for funding consideration this Fiscal Year.

Jennifer Nowark, NRCS Program Support Specialist, and Drew Mather, DC, attended first aid/CPR/AED training put on by Outerlands Medics and Rescue and the RCD on April 27, 2026. Drew Mather also attended a planning meeting for the third installment of the Conservation Planning Training Series being held by the RCD with support from NRCS. Additionally, Drew attended the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) Area Meeting held in Aromas on April 30, 2026.

5. STAFF PRESENTATION

5.1. Oak Woodland Restoration Program – Laurel Bard, Forest Health Project Manager

Laurel Bard presented to the Board on the Oak Woodland Restoration Program, developed in response to the need for a eucalyptus removal and oak woodland restoration program for sensitive habitat areas in the Southern part of Santa Cruz County including Larkin Valley and the Aptos Hills. The program will address concerns about the density and prevalence of invasive eucalyptus species in the area. The importance of this work is evidenced by the Trabing Fire in 2008, which was largely driven by eucalyptus.

This part of Santa Cruz County was once home to an endemic ecosystem called the San Andreas Oak Woodland, an important habitat for the endangered Santa Cruz Long Toed Salamander

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
Soquel, CA 95073
831.464.2950
www.rcdsantacruz.org

(SCLTS). Eucalyptus is encroaching on oak woodland and native plant communities that were once habitat for the SCLTS, and one of the goals of this program is to restore habitat for the SCLTS in this area.

Work completed thus far includes mapping the program area and identifying where eucalyptus is present, completion of the initial CEQA study, and the development of a framework to systematically approach the management of eucalyptus stands. The program aims to work with private residential property owners on a cost-share basis to remove eucalyptus from their properties and restore native habitat. The RCD aims to have multiple sources providing matching funds to facilitate the work, including funding from Measure Q. Together these will create cohesive restoration funding for a project with multiple complimentary goals including fire hazard reduction and habitat restoration.

Board members expressed enthusiasm about eucalyptus removal, and asked questions about the program. Laurel Bard and Lisa Lurie answered.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

The Board considered the consent agenda. The consent agenda items included the April 15, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes, and the April 2026 Vendor Expenditures. Robert Ketley moved approval of the consent agenda, and Kelley Bell seconded the motion. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1. Review and consider approval of Resolution 2026-04 to enter into reimbursement agreement with the City of Santa Cruz Water Department and designate a representative to negotiate and sign the agreement, and any amendments and work authorizations thereto, for the Non-Flow Conservation Fund

RCD Executive Director Lisa Lurie introduced the resolution. This Resolution pertains to a five-year agreement with the City of Santa Cruz Water Department (City) to implement priority salmonid restoration projects under the Non-Flow Conservation Fund (NFCF). The NFCF was developed as part of the City of Santa Cruz Anadromous Salmonid Habitat Conservation Plan to offset residual impacts of their water program and advance priority salmonid restoration projects. This partnership started under a short-term agreement and now enters a new phase with this five-year agreement. Under the agreement, the RCD will carry out priority salmonid restoration projects identified by the RCD, vetted by the Non-Flow Conservation Fund Technical Advisory Committee, and approved by the City. The Resolution appoints RCD Executive Director Lisa Lurie, or designee, as a representative of the District to conduct negotiations and sign documents necessary for the completion of the agreement and associated Work Authorizations. Robert Ketley moved approval, and Howard Liebenberg seconded. The ayes included Kelley Bell, Robert Ketley, Howard Liebenberg, Mike Manfre, and John Ricker.

8. DISCUSSION ITEMS

8.1. Strategy Session – RCD Growth Plan

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
Soquel, CA 95073
831.464.2950
www.rcdsantacruz.org

Mike Manfre introduced the discussion item, and Lisa Lurie expressed that she wanted to engage the Board around the subject of staffing, and the growth trajectory of the organization. Lisa likened the growth of the RCD to a stair step, describing that when she came on as Executive Director, there were approximately ten staff members, which grew to fifteen, and now is stepping up again as we are looking at having a staff of around twenty people in the future. Many of the RCD's programmatic areas are at a place where they can support growth, and with the addition of new personnel, programs can scale based on capacity. With programmatic growth comes the need for administrative and managerial growth as well. Board members and Lisa engaged in discussion around this subject; considering roles to prioritize in the hiring process.

8.2. Executive Director's Report

Lisa Lurie gave the Executive Director's report, which included updates on pending legislation, funding proposals being developed, and recent events. AB 1548, the Monterey Bay Area Stewardship Authority, sponsored by Assemblymember Pellerin, has passed through the Local Government Committee, and now moves to the Appropriations Committee process. In other legislative news, Assemblymember Hadwick has submitted a budget request for baseline funding for Resource Conservation Districts. Locally, FEMA has approved the Santa Cruz County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan 2025 Update.

Proposition 4 funding for programs focusing on climate resilience, wildfire prevention, and natural resources is now rolling out, and the RCD could submit grant proposals under Proposition 4 in the future. Proposals for the next round of block grant funding for the SWEEP program, administered by the RCD and funded by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, are also being developed by the RCD Ag Team and regional partners.

Lisa Lurie concluded with a report back from the CARCD Area Meeting, held in Aromas in April and hosted by the RCD of Santa Cruz County. This was a gathering that included members from fellow RCDs around the Central Coast Region, as well as NRCS staff and partners from state agencies and other organizations. The RCD of Santa Cruz County's work on groundwater recharge efforts in the Pajaro Valley through the Recharge Net Metering Program (ReNeM), in collaboration with the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency and UCSC, were highlighted at the event. The day wrapped up with a tour of the Kelly Thompson Recharge Basin, which is part of the ReNeM program. The Board asked questions about the CARCD Meeting and Lisa Lurie answered.

8.3. Board Secretary Report

Board Secretary Lily Ruderman inquired about upcoming meeting dates in July and August and discussed the subject with Lisa Lurie and the Board.

8.4. Director/Associate Director Reports

Robert Ketley expressed his support for the eucalyptus removal planned in the South County as part of the Oak Woodland Restoration Program.

2425 Porter Street, Suite 19
Soquel, CA 95073
831.464.2950
www.rcdsantacruz.org

Mike Manfre shared a brief report on his experience attending Earth Day Santa Cruz in April. The RCD booth at the Earth Day event is popular with kids and families, offering fun games and conservation themed outreach to the community.

9. CALENDAR DATES

May 30, 2026 – Bonny Doon Fire Fair
June 6, 2026 – Disaster Preparedness Event
June 10, 2026 – Pajaro Valley Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program Info Fair

10. COMMUNICATIONS

10.1. We're Hiring! Career Opportunities with the RCD
10.2. Letter of Support for AB 1548 (Pellerin)

11. ADJOURN

The next regular meeting of the RCD Board will be hybrid June 10, 2026, at 6:30PM, **Resource Conservation District Office, 2425 Porter St Suite 19, Soquel 95073,** and via Zoom meetings: https://zoom.us/, Meeting ID: 708-386-048, Meeting PW: 599600. Howard Liebenberg moved to adjourn. Kelley Bell seconded the motion. All were in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:15PM.

(LR:MM)

James J. McKenna