



## **DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors**

**Thursday, April 17, 2025**

**4:00 – 6:00 pm**

**Location: 80 Stone Pine Road, Suite 100, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 and via Zoom**

Directors: Barbara Kossy (virtual), Michelle Weil, Steve Stielstra, Troy Guy (Absent: Adrienne Etherton)

Associate Directors (all virtual): Denise Phillips, Zahra Kassam (Absent: John Wade, Helen Wolter)

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Amy Kaeser, Clifton Hermann, Kati McHugh, Joe Issel (virtual), Jarrad Fischer (virtual), Timothy Federal (virtual), Christina Kelleher (virtual), Lindsay Edelman (virtual), Caileen Viehweg (virtual)

NRCS staff: Jim Howard, Dylan Beatty, Wendy Rash

Guests (virtual): Michelle Dragony

### **1. Call to Order**

Weil called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

### **2. Approval of Agenda**

- Item 9.4 (Update about Moore Foundation funding with Jarrad Fisher, Water Resources Program Director) was moved above 9.2 to accommodate staff availability.
- **ACTION:** Guy motioned to approve agenda as amended, Stielstra seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

### **3. Convene Closed Session**

**3.1.** Real Property Negotiation Pursuant to California Government Code §54956.8

### **4. Adjourn Closed Session**

### **5. (4:28 p.m.) Convene Open Session and Report on Closed Session**

Weil reported that no action was taken during the closed session.

### **6. Introduction of Guests and Staff**

All in attendance introduced themselves.

### **7. Public Comment**

Nelson stated that Director Adrienne Etherton was taking medical leave for a few months. Nelson would contact the appropriate individuals to see if an Associate Director would be able to serve as a voting Director during Etherton's absence to ensure the RCD Board was able to reach quorum.

## 8. Consent Agenda

- Weil noted that on the April 9, 2025 Draft Special Meeting Minutes, her name was misattributed as Etherton and requested that the Minutes be updated to correct this.
- **ACTION:** Stielstra moved to approve the consent agenda reflecting this correction. Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

## 9. Regular Agenda

### 9.1. Directors' connection and reports

- Nelson reported back on questions that came up during the April 9<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting regarding the grading exemption site's soil quality- test results showed the soil quality was clean and the County approved it.
- Stielstra announced the Central Coast Regional CARCD Spring meeting on April 29 in Santa Maria. He was assisting with the planning and agenda building, and reported lower than expected attendance so far. He invited Directors and RCD Staff to attend the meeting or donate silent auction items.
- Kossy expressed continued appreciation of the RCD as a highly-functioning, intelligent, caring, inclusive form of local government which performed on-the-ground restoration projects to benefit the locality. She is grateful for the example set as a government entity and proud of the collective participation of the Directors and staff and personally honored to be involved.
- Guy planned to attend an open house in Fortuna for a dam removal on the Eel River and will report back on it at the next meeting.
- Weil had nothing to report
- Phillips had difficulty accessing the Special Meeting by Zoom and expressed concerned it might have affected others. Nelson confirmed that no issues had been reported. There was discussion about preventing broken links in the future and how to report access issues.
- Phillips knows someone at Nicholas School of Environment at Duke University pursuing an advanced degree in Environmental Management with a concentration in Energy, Environment, and Economic Policy and inquired about internships that anyone in the meeting was aware of that might be a good fit.
- Kassam had nothing to report.

### 9.4. Update about Moore Foundation funding with Jarrad Fisher, Water Resources Program Director (informational/ discussion item)

- Nelson explained:
  - RCD's operations are almost entirely grant funded, primarily through reimbursable grants. This requires the RCD to incur and demonstrate expenses prior to being reimbursed by funders, up to millions of dollars. Delayed reimbursement from state and federal grantors can affect RCD cash flow and reduce pool of willing high quality contractors.
  - Some state grants offered options for advance payments, but this is administratively onerous, can still be delayed, and are often limited to smaller grants.
  - We worked with the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) to pilot a funding tool in which SVCF donors provided a reimbursable grant structured similarly to a zero-interest loan. The RCD received funds up front and later

repaid the grant, with the only cost to donors being the opportunity cost of potential investment returns on those funds. Following the successful pilot, SVCF and Nelson presented the model at a CARCD conference for other RCDs and their community foundations.

- We reached out to the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation asking to partner for a similar funding opportunity, which was overseen by Fisher. We had two previous rounds that were very successful, and now this round is a larger funding commitment.
- Fisher introduced the strain placed on contractors to take out a loan to cover expenses for their work on grant funded projects with delayed payments. Those costs are passed on to the RCD and the state. He estimates the increased costs of doing business to be around 10%.
- Based on the success of the prior bridge funding agreements, the newest agreement is a four-year \$5 million recoverable grant that we will use like a revolving loan as payments from grants are received and the funds are replenished over the four-year term.
- At the end of the four-year grant period, the RCD will retain \$75,000.
- The foundation's board was very impressed with the proposed work and indicated they anticipated partnering with the RCD to continue the same type of agreements in the future.
- Discussion included RCD contractual payment terms, contractor expectations, how anticipated costs or cost reductions are included in contractor bid amounts, that contractors often bid lower on our projects because of trust and our reputation for paying on time and working collaboratively, how we address this topic in the bid process, treating our contractors as true partners, whether the Moore Foundation funds can earn returns and how the funds are booked in QuickBooks, and the need for liquidity.

## **9.2. First Flush 2023 and 2024 presentation by Clifton Herrmann, Water Quality Specialist (informational/ discussion item)**

- Herrmann presented the attached PowerPoint.
- First Flush program is a community science program in which volunteers collect water samples from waterways entering the ocean during the first heavy rain after the dry season.
- First Flush is a snapshot of a "worst case scenario" for water quality, when accumulated pollutants wash into waterways. Herrmann emphasized its value for identifying contaminants of concern, tracking trends and changes in these values over time, and connecting the data with broader coastal water quality efforts.
- Herrmann encouraged attendees to sign up to volunteer.
- Discussion included: interpreting the charts in the presentation, that "exceeding water quality objectives" meant, that exceeding water quality objectives is a negative finding (mount of pollutant is above desirable thresholds), year-to-year variability (due to rain intensity, length of dry season, lighter storms before First Flush, multi-year drought conditions, etc.), that the trends over time are more analytically valuable than year-to-year comparisons because of the variables, that First Flush provides information about whether and where contamination exists but does not provide certainty about the source or the total amount.

### **9.3. Update about completion of Butano State Park Forest Health Project with Timothy Federal, Senior Program Manager (informational/ discussion item)**

- Federal presented the attached PowerPoint, an overview of recent landscape-scale forest health and fire resilience work completed in southern San Mateo County within the scope of the Butano State Park Forest Health Project.
- The project was funded through the CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant.
- Federal highlighted the progression of the 2.5 year project, which built on approximately 40 acres of work at Girl Scout Camp Butano Creek, the first project completed under the California Vegetation Treatment Program, a statewide environmental impact report that had been designed to streamline projects of this type.
- About 500 acres were treated within Butano State Park. An additional 1,000 acres were included in the La Honda Fuel Break, Pescadero Creek County Park, and YMCA Camp Jones Gulch projects, along with other related projects that were currently in the project planning stages.
- Federal showed the 2020 CZU fire burn severity areas on the map in relation to the treatment project areas.
- The 2020 CZU fire was contained at Old Haul Road because RCD contractors certified by CAL FIRE were working in the area on a road repair. RCD, County Parks, and CAL FIRE pivoted the contractors to construct a fuel break that contained the blaze. Without this intervention, CAL FIRE said the fire would have continued to spread through Woodside and potentially up into Half Moon Bay.
- Another recent project in the area at Middleton Tract was not indicated on the map. This community was surrounded on three sides by State Parks land. This project marked complete another important portion of resiliency work at the landscape scale for this region.
- The Butano State Park project goals included ecosystem recovery post-CZU Fire, and preparing the landscape for safe prescribed fire. Federal likened the treatment area to a “catcher’s mitt” that would help contain future burns.
- Preparatory work leading up to the prescribed burn included mastication to reduce ladder fuels, clear dense understories, and mimic low-intensity fire, which allowed the subsequent prescribed burns to be completed in a controllable manner.
- In October, State Parks and CAL FIRE successfully conducted a prescribed burn on the site because of the previous years of treatments.
- A primary driver is ecological: restoring pre-colonial oak woodland conditions by selectively managing Douglas fir encroachment.
- Conditions look stark immediately following mastication, as they would following a low-intensity fire. Ferns and trilliums returned within a year, which underscored how native vegetation is adapted to recover after low-intensity disturbance. Soil and vegetation impacts were well managed.
- Discussion included how these projects have utilized new permitting tools and successful partnerships; appreciation for the opportunity to hear about these projects, goals for mastication (reducing fuel loads so that the future prescribed fires could proceed at beneficial intensities for nutrient cycling and plant regeneration without catastrophic outcomes of uncontrolled wildfire); the important ecological role of diverse, mixed-severity fires; the risks to habitats and human communities of high-intensity burns; and how RCD projects aim to balance community resilience and biodiversity.

#### **9.5. Conversation with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Water Quality Specialist regarding National Water Quality Initiative (informational/discussion item)**

- Rash introduced herself as playing an interim role for Jim Howard's vacant position and explained that she visited the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) work in the Pescadero-Butano watershed.
  - NWQI is a nationwide, watershed-scale initiative of NRCS, designed to move beyond scattered "random acts of conservation" toward targeted watershed planning and implementation.
  - Under NWQI, a formal watershed assessment was completed by the RCD in partnership with NRCS, identifying sediment and fish habitat (including stream temperature issues) as primary resource concerns.
  - Once assessments were done, dedicated EQIP funds (NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program) could be allocated to address these priorities within the watershed.
  - She highlighted current projects, including soil health improvements on a farm and corridor work tied to an off-stream reservoir helping maintain stream flows — citing this as a strong example of the RCD's broader landscape work.
- Howard shared details of the day's field visits, which included stops at Butano Farms, where they could see extensive conservation work spanning from the marsh to the uplands, including the new reservoir on Fifth Crow Farm, as well as discussions at Root Down Farm about ongoing and upcoming projects.
- He emphasized how meaningful it was to see in person the cumulative conservation achievements of the last 10-20 years, much of it made possible through deep partnerships among NRCS, the RCD, POST, and committed landowners.
- Howard acknowledged upcoming NRCS staff transitions (both he and Beatty are departing at month's end) but said he hoped Rash's introductory visit and direct engagement with landowners and RCD staff would help maintain continuity at the state level.
- Nelson underscored how valuable it was to have dedicated funding for this watershed — providing security and focus for local projects which allowed farmers and landowners to access conservation dollars without competing nationally — and praised the collaborative work as creating a kind of "living map" of integrated conservation.
- Stielstra commented on the impact it had to see the work completed through the partnerships for farms and small towns.

#### **9.6. Final report, farewell, and transition plan - Jim Howard, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**

- Howard shared that Beatty had taken the second round of deferred resignation plans offered to federal workers a week earlier and would be leaving the NRCS at the end of April.
- Dillon commented that it was a difficult decision to make after eight years at the NRCS and within the RCD offices. He found the experience bittersweet and hoped to stay in the conservation field locally.
- Beatty explained that under the "Deferred Resignation Program (DRP) 1.0" in February 2025, 17 people took up the offer, for an average of one person per

county. The second round resulted in around 53 resignations. Combined, a total of 70 individuals, or around 20% of California's NRCS agency staff, represented a huge loss for the federal conservation program. He considered how these numbers might have been extrapolated across the country, and lamented the losses that the agency faced as a result.

- Nelson commented that a number of RCD offices are hosted by NRCS and they are losing their spaces. In San Mateo County we host the NRCS.
- Howard recounted starting as the district conservationist with NRCS in 2005, reopening a local office that had lacked direct NRCS staff for 15 years.
- He described how, early on, the RCD was just rebuilding, with little staff or structure.
- Over the last 20 years, Howard and Nelson shaped a close local partnership, deciding no landowner should need to navigate separate bureaucracies alone — instead, they would collaborate to find solutions together.
- He reflected on how rewarding it was to apply his technical and relational skills in conservation on the ground, as the RCD evolved to take on larger-scale work, policy relationships, and partnerships.
- Howard expressed pride in seeing the landscape-wide impacts of their projects and looked forward to retirement, grateful for the partnership and shared achievements with the RCD.

## **10. Adjourn Meeting**

- Meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.
- The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors will be June 19, 2025.