



DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

Thursday, July 17, 2025

4:00 – 6:00 pm

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

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

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

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Lau Hodges, Kati McHugh, Timothy Federal, Amy Kaeser (virtual), Ryan Silsbee (virtual)

NRCS staff: Annie Edwards

Guests (all virtual): David Cowman (Sempervirens Fund), Gina Quiney (of Sup. Ray Mueller's Office)

1. Call to Order

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

2. Approval of Agenda

ACTION: Stielstra motioned to approve agenda, Weil seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

All in attendance introduced themselves.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

5. Consent Agenda

ACTION: Weil moved to approve the consent agenda. Stielstra seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Regular Agenda

- Item 6.3 (USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) Report) was moved above 6.2 to accommodate staff availability.
- **ACTION:** Weil motioned to approve agenda as amended, Stielstra seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6.3. USDA NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service) Report

- Edwards introduced herself as an Urban Agriculture Conservationist with the NRCS. In addition to her normal full-time duties, she has been serving as Acting District Conservationist for San Mateo County following the retirement of Jim Howard. She enjoyed the opportunity to see what Howard had done and drew upon the similarities between urban agriculture and San Mateo County agricultural farming operations, including a lot of diversified growers and people with a strong passion for conservation.
- She is at the San Mateo RCD one day per week, maintaining NRCS presence and keeping forward momentum on projects in the area.
- She appreciated the strong RCD presence and working relationship with the NRCS, which she was excited to continue.
- She shared about a recent combined NRCS and RCD site visit to provide technical assistance to a San Mateo County grower.
- There is a hiring freeze until October 15, the earliest date the open position for the District Conservationist could be posted.
- Critical vacancies were being filled internally by moving NRCS staff who applied for lateral positions (supervisors could apply for other supervisor roles), according to state-identified “critical” vacancies. The list had been posted the morning of July 17, and she reported that the Half Moon Bay District Conservationist role was not included on that list. These critical roles were scheduled to be filled prior to October 15, and NRCS staff were also waiting on news about a reorganization following the early retirement and deferred resignation program to reduce the overall staff numbers and create a new staffing plan to identify which positions would be filled. She was not aware of how this would ultimately impact the Half Moon Bay office.
- Another NRCS staff member will take over the coverage of this office in August. She is happy to assist with the transition.
- Nelson shared how the RCD Board’s strong advocacy had led to the full-time District Conservationist position which Howard had held. She anticipated a near-future need for the current Directors to maintain this local position. She recognized that the NRCS had shifted more towards demonstrating and articulating their value in terms of numbers of contracts, acres, and dollars such as those of Central Valley farmers. Comparatively, San Mateo County’s small family farms generated low numbers, and she anticipated that the hiring freeze may last longer than it was currently slated to, and even after it is lifted, that the vacancy could take over a year to backfill the position. She was concerned that in the interim period between now and the position being filled, there would start to be gaps in between the NRCS staff who would come in to cover the vacancy, and that this could lead to as-needed coverage from District Conservationists in the adjacent counties, and local office coverage would continue to decline to less than a day per week. Eventually, she thought it could lead to the position disappearing.
- Nelson was ultimately concerned for the San Mateo County farmers who had benefitted from having a full-time District Conservationist and half-time Ag Engineer, and wanted the Board members to also stay aware of how farmers access NRCS resources.

- Kossy shared one of the concerns she recalled Howard and others sharing: once a farmer feels betrayed or that they were not understood by the government, it required redoubled efforts to gain their trust back. She expressed gratitude for Edwards stepping into the role.
- Stielstra agreed, and added that he understood that employees filling in for vacant roles would need a break, while also finding it counterintuitive to limit the length of time a single employee could cover these positions, since they would develop more efficiency in their role and relationships as time progressed. He found that this would be detrimental both to the customers who would continuously need to reconnect with new temporary NRCS staff, or for the NRCS replacement employee who would take over the position.
- Nelson pointed out that Edwards had been trained by Howard, and that the next person to take over the temporary coverage role would do so without the benefit of onboarding from the person who had been in that role and performing the duties associated with it.
- Stielstra understood that the end of the hiring freeze would only signal the beginning of the next step in the process of advertising and possibly filling the District Conservationist role. He expressed his willingness to provide the support necessary to effectively advocate for Coastside agriculture.
- Edwards would share the thoughts from Nelson and RCD Board members with her supervisors. She anticipated that the next placement in the temporary position might be Mather, because he was geographically close and had history at the office and in the community. She reported that Mather was currently covering a secondary office in Vacaville and was therefore stretched thin, and recently lost another staff member out of his office in Capitola.
- She reported that since the Vacaville position was on the critical vacancy list, she anticipated that position being filled by the end of July and that Mather might have more bandwidth to cover the Half Moon Bay office. She was going to speak with her supervisor to see if she and Mather could both provide support to the office, which might be deemed too complicated for leadership decision-making, but she thought might provide some more continuity without placing the high demands of the coverage onto a single individual.
- Stielstra expressed appreciation on behalf of the Board that in addition to covering both jobs that Edwards was additionally advocating, and understood the energetic demand that this placed on her.
- Edwards reported that the NRCS was aware of the issues presented by the “revolving door,” and felt that her supervisor valued this office and wanted it to be served to the best of their abilities. She looked forward to hearing more of his ideas as the timeline progressed.
- Nelson appreciated Edwards advocacy and asked her to share that the RCD had an interest in the continuity. She shared that Mather had been a soil conservationist in the Half Moon Bay office, and that the RCD staff therefore knew him, and that he knew some of the local farmers and RCD partners already. Additionally, the adjacency to Santa Cruz County and the projects which crossed the San Mateo-Santa Cruz County border in partnerships with RCD of Santa Cruz County made her feel that it would be a

right-fitting interim measure to have Mather step in to assist with transitioning Edwards out of the coverage role.

6.1. San Mateo County Forest Health and Fire Resilience Public Works Plan Project Specific Analysis for the Coastal Santa Cruz Mountains: State Parks Forest Health Initiative

- Federal shared the [attached presentation](#)
- Discussion focused on understanding CEQA and permitting tools, pathways, and strategies for forest health and fire projects; the complexities of the regulatory compliance; uncertainties moving forward with this project related to a recent legal decision that is not right-fitting for our local ecosystems; ecosystem type conversion; and that this agenda item was informational for the Board to understand the ins and outs of the RCD's work.
- Discussion about science-informed forest management included the January 2026 Santa Cruz Mountain Stewardship Network Science Symposium and the forest health research grant with University of California to create a monitoring protocol tailored to the Santa Cruz Mountains forest.

6.2. Executive Director's Report

- Project on Little Butano Creek along Cloverdale Road will remove a barrier to fish passage, in week 3 of implementation. Findings of around 200 trout from different age classes above the barrier indicated very good habitat upstream. Below the barrier were a number of Coho, which would not have been present in the watershed without previous RCD projects. The current project goal was to remove two barriers and restore the access into Butano State Park, which provides some of the best existing habitat for Central Coast Coho Salmon.
- North Marsh North Pond project is nearing completion in Pescadero. The earthwork had been completed, lowering and shaping the levee, and current tasks included installing the large wood structures, allowing for freshening of the system and providing quality freshwater habitat.
- Seining in the lagoon, part of an ongoing research study to determine quantity and species of fish in the lagoon at this time of year. She reported findings of hundreds of steelhead, along with a Coho.
 - Guy also participated in the seining, including finding an adult Coho as well.
- Three different large wood projects will soon begin—two in San Gregorio Creek, and one in Butano. They were delayed from last year due to the complexities with NOAA's tribal engagement.
- Pescadero Arts & Fun Festival, August 16-17: Nelson asked for Board volunteers to help out at the RCD booth at the festival on both days, between 9 AM and 6 PM, and would follow up with Board members via email.
- Minor updates to the DEIJ Plan coming to the Board for approval in August.
- Website redesign is nearing completion, with designs nearly finalized, staff drafting new content, and improvements underway to enhance visual accessibility and enable automatic translation.

- Developing a Tribal Consultation SOP that outlines our values and approach, supports staff in navigating legal requirements and on-the-ground complexities with additional support from a UC Santa Barbara student focused on law and environmental justice.
- Working on an interactive mapping tool to help staff identify disadvantaged and low-income communities in our district using various data to support work in areas where key information is often missing or undercounted. In our district billionaires and farm workers live within the same census tract, causing the data to average out in a way that doesn't adequately show the needs that exist. The tool will help make the case to bring resources to people who are vulnerable within the district.
- La Honda Fuel Break project is 85% complete. Remaining work is on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District property, is set to start on October 1.
- The Regional Priority Plan (RPP), a regional approach to identify and prioritize forest health and fire projects across the Santa Cruz Mountains for state and other funding pathways, received a total of 108 project submissions across the three counties: 56 from San Mateo, 50 from Santa Cruz, and 4 from Santa Clara Counties.
- Upcoming fuel reduction project in the eucalyptus grove on the Wavecrest property between Cameron's and Seymour Street, including the farm field and the Coastal Trail near the Seymour Ditch. Coastal Conservancy funded it as a demonstration project for how to do fuel load reduction in eucalyptus groves that have monarchs. The project was developed with the Xerces Society, a scientific and advocacy group for invertebrates. It will clear understory, removing small eucalyptus trees that are under 8 inches in diameter, removing limbs up to 8 to 12 feet. It is the only RCD project running through the Governor's emergency proclamation and will utilize CEQA exemptions for emergency work.
- Kossy asked if there were any updates on the wetlands restoration in the Wavecrest area. Nelson shared that it was brought to the Coastal Conservancy for funding of the next phase. She reported that the Coastal Conservancy wanted to focus on clean closure of the landfill near the wetlands, whereas the RCD had planned to do wetlands restoration first and during the restoration work, scope out the requirements to do a clean closure, estimating that the clean closure work would likely be at least \$100 million to complete. Staff is looking to advance the more actionable habitat restoration portions of the project. There was discussion about clean closure of landfills and right-fitting roles for the RCD: soil protection, erosion, water quality, and habitat; not waste management; strengths as a convener and facilitator for holistic, integrated work would help in ensuring that a clean closure project would not be siloed.

6.4. Directors' Connections and Reports

- Stielstra reported that he was planning to attend Pescadero Art & Fun Festival (PAFF), the October 23 Regional Fall Meeting, hosted by Coastal San Luis RCD at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and the Annual CARCD Conference, November 18-20, in Sacramento. He invited Board members and staff to also attend the Regional Fall Meeting in San Luis, and noted that it would include a
- Weil reported that she planned to volunteer for PAFF, and was considering attending the annual CARCD meeting in November. She noted that she had been dropped off the email for website redesign updates. She asked if there was an update on the

accountant. Hodges shared that the contract with the RCD's accountant would not be renewed. Nelson added that they were reaching out to people in their network and had received a number of responses that they would be pursuing.

- Kossy reported that she had been traveling around in open spaces and parks, and appreciating California, Oregon and Washington. She shared that when traveling, she realized how hard-hit California was early on that created a lot of invasive plant problems. She recognized that the history of California brought a lot of damage which brought invasive plants, and this gives the state an added load that other areas don't have quite as much of the same kinds of ubiquitous weeds that are present locally. She expressed gratitude for the RCD and work being done, and the chance to see good things working when so many things are broken all the time.
- Guy reported visiting RCD project sites and other projects where there were RCD people. He reported learning a lot over the last year about the RCD and that he is getting a lot from his participation on the Board.
- Nelson provided an update on behalf of Etherton, who was going through chemotherapy and doing well, and had a surgery planned for October. Nelson was staying in touch with her a bit, and wishing her well wishes, and reported back that Etherton was fighting a good fight right now, and that she had some choice words for cancer.

7. Adjourn Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 5:38 p.m.
- There will be a Special Meeting of the Board of Directors on August 8, 2025.
- The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors will be August 21, 2025.