

DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

Thursday, December 18, 2025

4:00 – 6:00 pm

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

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

Associate Directors: Denise Phillips, John Wade, Zahra Kassam (virtual)

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Lau Hodges, Joe Issel, Jarrad Fisher, Eliza Milio, Amy Kaeser (virtual), Maaya Hensman (virtual), Kati McHugh (virtual)

NRCS staff: Drew Mather

Guests: Laura Silvestri (Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)), Dan Olstein (POST), Koren Widdel (SMC Agriculture, Weights & Measures, virtual), Lindsay Dillon (POST, virtual)

1. Call to Order

Kossy called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

2. Approval of Agenda

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

3. Introduction of Guests and Staff

All in attendance introduced themselves.

4. Public Comment

There was no public comment. Kossy noted that Helen Wolter stepped down from her position as an associate director due to her new employment and expressed appreciation for Wolter's contributions.

5. Consent Agenda

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

6. Regular Agenda

6.1. Board will consider Resolution 2025-4 Expressing Appreciation and Gratitude for Laura Silvestri

- Nelson introduced the resolution. Several RCD staff reflected on their experiences working with Silvestri, highlighting her wisdom, energy, mentorship, and ability to navigate difficult situations through close-knit community ties, noting that many

projects would not have been implemented without her involvement, expressed appreciation for her no-nonsense approach and how she has pushed the RCD to be better, appreciating how deeply she knows the region, and described her as kind, thoughtful, highly effective, often working under the radar, and making collaboration feel easy and enjoyable while setting a high standard.

- Olstein spoke to Silvestri's instincts, mentorship, and leadership and expressed gratitude for the partnership with the RCD and the transformative impact of our collective work to protect agricultural and natural resources.
- Directors appreciated that much of the complex work behind successful inter-organizational collaboration is not always visible to board members and appears seamless, reflecting significant effort behind the scenes.

ACTION: Guy moved to approve Resolution 2025-4. Weil seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6.2. Staff Showcase: Maaya Hensman, Field Ecologist, will share some photos from the field.

- Hensman works across all programs conducting monitoring, fieldwork, habitat assessments, and wetland delineations. She showed some recent photos from her work in the field conducting habitat assessments in redwood forests owned by State Parks for an upcoming fish passage project; monitoring a previously constructed pond; and monitoring a butterfly habitat restoration project on San Bruno Mountain.
- Discussion included appreciation of the perspectives and the absence of observed frogs at the pond.

6.3. Board will consider approval of the purchase of the property located in Pescadero at 0 Pescadero Creek Road for a price not to exceed \$247,275.

- Kossy opened the item and noted that the Board discussed the property in closed sessions at prior meetings.
- Issel presented Resolution 2025-05 authorizing purchase of the property referred to as 0 Pescadero Creek Road and provided background information:
- The RCD is in contract to purchase the property contingent on Board approval, which would be formalized upon adoption of the resolution.
- He summarized prior Board discussions regarding the conservation value of the property in its current form and the intent to transfer the property to State Parks for inclusion in Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve, noting potential opportunities to improve community resilience to flooding along Pescadero Creek Road, increase ecological function, and potentially improve public access.
- Funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service supported evaluation of these locations.
- POST has been an invaluable partner and the Wilder Trust is funding costs related to acquisition, interim property management, potential improvements, and eventual transfer to State Parks.

- Results of a land boundary survey, Phase I environmental site assessment, and title review supported a recommendation to authorize purchase.
- Directors Guy and Kossy discussed their site visit, including how the property fits into the broader landscape, that the property seemed relatively uncomplicated, and described the habitat as diverse but relatively homogenous
- Discussion included an encroaching fence on the eastern boundary; interest in the site's agricultural history; ecological changes associated with fallow agricultural land adjacent to a creek; habitat condition; opportunities to address flooding and build on the RCD's Reconnection Project; funding for acquisition, interim management, restoration or designs, and transferring the property to State Parks; legal identification of the property (APN and street address); appreciation for partnerships involved; and appreciation for Issel and other staff.

ACTION: Weil moved to approve Resolution 2025-05 authorizing purchase of the property. Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6.4. USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) report

- Mather, Acting District Conservationist in Half Moon Bay, reported that he is no longer responsible for Solano County and the Vacaville Field Office, and is now responsible for two offices instead of three.
- Mather and Nelson met and will continue to meet monthly.
- NRCS has a new partner biologist, DeeDee Soto, who is willing to assist with pollinator projects.
- Pollinator projects can include cover crops with flowering species and other practices supporting pollinator insects, typically hedgerows and related habitat enhancements, and referenced monarch and milkweed-related work.
- The NRCS area biologist is Jackie Charbonneau, based out of Livermore.
- NRCS is just over a month out of the shutdown and is currently down approximately 50% of engineers statewide, creating capacity constraints.
- NRCS implemented a statewide engineer tracker, and that projects requiring engineering support are now routed through the tracker.
 - Nelson asked whether the tracker is a single statewide list rather than region-based. Mather confirmed the tracker is statewide, reported that approximately 30 engineers are assigned through the system, and stated that engineers are deployed based on data pulled from applications and contract software and may not be connected to specific regions or growers.
- Area engineer is Desi Ramirez, based in Salinas. Nelson reported that the RCD hired a former NRCS agricultural engineer, Dillon Beatty, who will serve as a liaison to help access NRCS resources given current staffing limitations.
- Upcoming application due dates for EQIP and CSP, and referenced the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

- He asked the Board and staff to identify potential landowners who may be interested in easements or conservation work through CSP and noted that CSP typically reflects a longer-term commitment than EQIP.
- Stielstra asked about Mather's role in easement applications. Mather stated that he does not directly manage easement evaluations and instead connects interested parties with State Office leads who carry the process forward, often coordinating with a land trust or other entity.
- Nelson asked whether NRCS holds the easement while funding acquisition. Mather confirmed that NRCS can fund easement acquisition and may hold an easement in some cases.
- Mather requested that staff and Board members contact him if growers seek assistance and noted that he and one additional staff member, Jennifer Nowark, are supporting the office.
- There was discussion about how conservation easements work, including acquisition, monitoring, valuation, and affirmative easements
- Mather recognized Milio and staff for hosting an irrigation workshop and noted appreciation for the irrigation technology demonstrations and the team's engagement with producers.
- He met with Issel and program managers and plans to meet monthly going forward.
- NRCS cooperative agreements are shifting to a competitive process and may include language regarding shared resources such as vehicles and technical assistance staff.
- Nelson explained that cooperative agreements have been an important tool to support development of NRCS Farm Bill-funded projects and emergent technical assistance work that is not typically supported through program contract dollars, and stated that increased competitiveness may make it more difficult to secure baseline funding for this type of work.

6.5. Directors' connection and reports

- Kossy raised the concept of a rotating Board President position on an annual basis to broaden engagement and shift perspectives on responsibility.
 - Directors discussed the responsibilities of the role, including chairing meetings and potentially assisting with board compliance tracking (e.g., ethics certificates), working with Nelson on agendas and emerging items, occasional representation of the RCD, and periodic signing needs (e.g., check batches) when Nelson is traveling.
 - Directors discussed potential methods for choosing a president.
- ACTION:** Nelson will agendize for further discussion at the next meeting.
- Kossy is creating an acronym list to support directors, and asked what format would be easiest to access without creating staff workload. Discussion included where to host it as a living document and how to share it.
 - Kossy reported on a recent trip to China, noting large work crews doing landscaping and litter removal, widespread electrification of cars and scooters with some internal-combustion restrictions, which she correlated with the quieter streets which had less odor

and visible oil. She also observed market gardens that she compared to those in Bakersfield, with mandarins, sugar cane, bananas, nut trees, vegetables, and poultry grown in areas the size of a parking lot. She noted observing that farmers tended to be older with younger people moving to cities; Kossy described that planning patterns were significantly different from here. She gave examples of “small towns” with populations of 2 million people, and multi-story residences directly adjacent to agricultural and fish-farming areas; she raised questions about how pesticide use and water quality are addressed.

- Phillips reported attending an Anza-Borrego State Park superbloom trip, which included paleontology, archaeology, and botany labs. She described a partnership between their local RCD and State Parks that helped develop a Native American Conservation Corps; Nelson noted the RCD’s partnership with the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band’s Native Stewards program at Quiroste Valley Native Stewards and an interagency agreement with State Parks used to build tribal stewardship capacity. Phillips reported seeing a “double-tusked elephant-type” fossil and later identified it as a gomphothere.
- Phillips distributed annual appeal materials and encouraged directors to donate to achieve and report 100% board participation. She encouraged directors to share appeal letters with community members who have not previously donated. Nelson encouraged directors to speak from personal motivation and noted the pitch is included in the letter.
 - Phillips suggested making donations in someone’s name in lieu of gifts. Phillips asked about the ability to donate in someone’s honor via the RCD’s donation platform, and staff indicated they would check whether this is available.
 - Nelson asked whether directors are receiving and opening the RCD newsletter, noted that some recipients had not opened the most recent issue, and encouraged directors to both read and share newsletters as an outreach tool.
- Stielstra reported participating in CARCD regional meetings and monitoring upcoming ballot measures; he reported the next regional meeting is planned for Spring 2026 in Santa Cruz and noted CARCD board election and bylaws activity, including that a prior vote did not proceed due to lack of quorum.
- Wade reported interest in restoration work associated with the Pescadero Marsh parcel acquisition, including later transfer to State Parks as well as potentially addressing flooding issues in the area.
- Kassam reported a hypericum removal effort on her land supported by the RCD, including four separate test plots with different treatment approaches; she reported goats were used to graze hypericum and appeared healthy. Nelson reported the hypericum control project was declined for a grant, and noted concerns about whether the project would be considered competitive for grant funding.
- Weil described family camping at Costanoa and progress on the RCD website redesign with a target launch in February. Kossy requested a presentation after launch. Nelson appreciated Weil’s substantive input informed by professional experience, which resulted in real improvements that will bring the RCD’s website into the modern age.
- Guy reported many recent hiking activities, including in Marin County and Bishop Pine forests along with Santa Lucias, Big Sur, and seeing the bristlecone firs. He expressed appreciation for recent rainfall and salamanders. He described attending a California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) meeting in Butano Canyon with Kaeser and local neighbors and interest in fisheries work, including the Little Butano Chute removal project.

He reported that residents expressed interest in seeing the increasing number of steelhead trout along with the habitat work accomplished. He commended Kaeser and CDFW Fisheries Biologist Sean Cochran for both doing a great job presenting at the tour. He recalled that he and Cochran had previously met while doing seining and tagging fisheries surveys. Guy also mentioned interest participating in spawning surveys. He described a King Tides community tour related to the North Marsh North Pond Restoration Project in Pescadero, and noted that the large presence of construction equipment on the dunes signaled work was going on, and that this provided a valuable opportunity to explain the expected flooding that will occur due to heavy rainfall.

- Nelson gauged interest in developing a steelhead and salmon festival in Pescadero. She noted that it would honor the town's namesake. She reported having discussed the idea previously with community members, local artists, and South Coast schools. She described early outreach to potential partners including State Parks, local organizations, and Ramaytush tribe. Nelson described potential welcoming ceremony, community art elements (e.g., fish-themed artwork, screens showing resident-submitted fish footage, and fly-tying demonstrations). She reported that Lynn Bowman had offered to host an initial meeting in her home. Stielstra reported knowing a muralist working at Pescadero High School who could support a salmon mural concept; Nelson reported Jonathan Cordero (Chair of the Ramaytush Tribe) is also a muralist and could support mural work.

6.6. Board will determine its vote on ballot items in the California Association of RCDs election, including officers, resolutions, and proposed amendments to bylaws.

ACTION: Weil moved to vote for Gomez, Braudrick, and Hurley; adopt the bylaws as rewritten by the CARCD bylaws committee, and vote on the resolutions consistent with the October board discussion and as recommended by the Executive Director (yes on resolutions 1 and 2, not on resolutions 3, 4 and 5). Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6.7. Board will decide whether to change the date of its January 2026 meeting.

The board agreed to reschedule the January 2026 board meeting to 4:00 PM on Tuesday, January 13, 2026.

7. Adjourn Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 6:09 p.m.
- The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors will be Tuesday, January 13, 2026.