



**DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors
Thursday, February 12, 2026
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 (virtual), (Absent: Zahra Kassam, John Wade)

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Lau Hodges, Barb Kipreos, Kati McHugh

NRCS staff: Drew Mather

1. Call to Order

Kossy called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Agenda

- Items 5.2 (Fiscal Year 2025 Draft Financial Statements) and 5.3 (Fiscal Year 2026 Second Quarter Draft Financial Statements) were moved to the Regular Agenda for further discussion.
- **ACTION:** Weil motioned to approve agenda as amended, Stielstra 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

The Board confirmed that the Consent Agenda was adopted as amended as part of Item 2, Approval of Agenda. No further action was taken.

6. Regular Agenda

5.2. Fiscal Year 2025 Draft Financial Statements

- The Board reviewed the FY 25 financial statements, including changes to vehicle depreciation and the separation of the operating reserve as a subset of assets.
- **ACTION:** Guy motioned to approve the FY 25 Financial Statements, Weil seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

5.3. Fiscal Year 2026 Second Quarter Draft Financial Statements

- FY 26 second quarter financial statements were reviewed. Discussion included how the operating reserve, an error in the operating reserve amount, direction to show depreciation for the current year, a recommendation to establish a standard monthly depreciation journal entry to ensure consistency and accuracy.
- Weil moved to defer consideration of the FY 26 second quarter financial statements to the next Board meeting to correct the operating reserve amount and include depreciation. Stielstra seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

6.1. Board will consider rotating presidency

- Discussion included that the Board had previously agreed to rotating the presidency in concept but had not established the mechanics, whether to confirm the next president through a formal vote, and criteria for rotating presidency.
- It was determined that the presidency should be rotated annually, in order of tenure, subject to the discretion of the individual being asked to serve. If that individual does not wish to serve, the role would be considered by the person with the next tenure.
- Stielstra was identified as having the longest tenure after Kossy and asked if he was willing to serve as president. He confirmed his willingness.
- **ACTION:** Weil motioned to adopt criteria for the presidency to rotate annually, be based on tenure, be discretionary, and be confirmed by a Board vote, Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
- **ACTION:** Weil motioned to appoint Stielstra as the next President, Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Stielstra assumed the role of President and took over as chair of the meeting.

6.2. Presentation about implementation of the District's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Plan by Barb Kipreos, Equity and Engagement Officer

- Kipreos and Nelson updated the Board on implementation of the plan they had adopted to integrate DEIJ values across programs and internal.
- Highlights and discussion included accommodations for staff with neurodiversity and mental health concerns; practices to foster a culture of learning, including a standing DEIJ item at all-staff meetings, a monthly DEIJ committee, and weekly office hours; that the RCD did not remove website content in the current political climate and has prepared to decline funding that conflicts with organizational values; personnel manual designation of Cesar Chavez Day as a day of service to the farmworker community; potential for Board participation in service activities; efforts to include traditionally marginalized voices in priority setting, project design, and funding; ongoing work with tribes; development of a tribal consultation standard operating procedure; incorporating plans for farmworker housing in creek restoration design;

Spanish language outreach; technical assistance to farms and urban gardens associated with food sovereignty; conservation workforce development and recognizing laborers on our projects as conservation professionals; Kipreos's role in convening equity officers regionally and statewide and participating in emerging leadership initiatives to lower barriers and improve retention of underrepresented groups in conservation; and the lack of negative reaction to the DEIJ Plan.

6.3. Executive Director's report

- Nelson discussed observations from her recent travel to Antarctica including climate change impacts, tourism pressures, and biosecurity practices. She reported that the Antarctic Treaty would come up for renewal in approximately twenty years and risk to the continent from resource extraction.
- Nelson reported a serious family health issue and stated that unplanned leave might be necessary. Stielstra asked about coverage processes and Nelson stated that existing signers and staff would maintain operations.
- Nelson reported concerns about additional lease management fees for RCD office space and stated that staff requested itemization and would evaluate options.
- She reported plans to travel to Washington, D.C. in late March for National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) meetings and to discuss a federal earmark request.
- She reported a March 6 Water and Fire Tour with Senator Josh Becker, Assemblymember Marc Berman, and Supervisor Ray Mueller's staff to view projects and regional needs as outlined in the Regional Priority Plan (RPP).
- The budget process has begun with a goal to meet with the Finance Committee before the May meeting, present a draft budget in May, and present a final budget in June. She reported process refinements to increase direct staff data entry for budget development which would be trialed in this timeline.
- Stielstra raised Finance Committee role changes and Nelson stated that committee leadership changes did not require Board action and that signer updates would be handled administratively.
- The Coastal Santa Cruz Mountains State Parks Forest Health Initiative notice of intended development for approximately 12,000 acres item was pulled from the prior Coastal Commission agenda, and is expected on the March 11-13 agenda, to be held in Ventura. She reported public concern from a South Coast landowner regarding prescribed fire and stated that staff would meet with community members to review the item. Directors discussed possible opportunities for board members to support staff.
- The January 30 Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN) Science and Stewardship Symposium was a sold out event; approximately 250 people attended with ecstatic feedback. The event brought together people directly doing land stewardship and those directly involved in research and science about stewardship, to get more science to focus on stewardship, and for land stewardship to be science informed. Our RCD was a sponsor of the event and RCD staff made four presentations or posters.

- She will be facilitating an interagency summit on permitting efficiency with statewide regulators in Santa Rosa in March via her involvement with the California Landscape Stewardship Network and Cutting the Green Tape initiative.
- Senator Becker introduced a bill to designate the Santa Cruz Mountains region as a landscape of special statewide significance. Stakeholders contributed revisions to include private and working lands, tribal knowledge, and to avoid unintended signals about property acquisition or regulation.
- Senator Becker introduced a bill to continue state funding for county wildfire coordinators, She discussed with his staff alignment with existing Regional Priority Plans and the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program to avoid conflicts.
- She is developing a webinar series with the California Council of Land Trusts on partnering with RCDs for climate resilience on working lands.
- She reported ongoing participation in San Mateo County's drought resilience planning with emphasis on South Coast vulnerabilities and implementation resources.
- Kossy asked about current construction activity and Nelson reported ramp-up for the next season.
- Nelson reported efforts to report out on projects. Directors discussed software options including Smartsheet, Asana, and Monday, and Nelson confirmed that staff continue exploring options.

6.4. USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) report

- Program Support Specialist Jennifer Noer has returned to the office following medical leave.
- Didi Soto, acting pollinator partner biologist, is based in Merced and will assist with projects in San Mateo County, including support for new EQIP applicants.
- Soto will be conducting field visits and that RCD staff will participate in shadow days.
- The federal hiring freeze remains in effect, with discussion that it may be relaxed under a four-positions-released to one-hire rule.
- Telework agreements remain rescinded.
- Regenerative Pilot Program: \$400 million allocated through EQIP and \$300 million through CSP, with participating applicants qualifying through standard EQIP or CSP applications for eligible practices. Qualifying practices include cover cropping and irrigation water management and are soil and management focused, aligning with work already underway locally.
- Explained the role of qualified individuals as an alternative to technical service providers, which may create new opportunities for conservation districts following previous conflict-of-interest restrictions on co-located services.
- The office is managing approximately twenty EQIP and CSP applications and anticipates meeting the ranking deadline by the end of March, working collaboratively with RCD staff.
- No updates on cooperative agreements; Carlos Suarez has not received new information and will continue tracking the issue.
- Successful site visit with RCD staff; Dillon Beatty may become an NRCS affiliate, which could enable access to CAD licensing through NRCS, based on guidance from Area Engineer. Producing CAD drawings in-house could significantly expand project capacity and that precedent exists in another conservation district.

- All vehicles are operational.
- Shared observations from a recent ranch visit, including a paddock with abundant yarrow and native species and potential benefits from planned livestock water and cross-fencing projects to encourage increased grass diversity.

6.5. Directors' connection and reports

- Kossy reported attending a Ray Mueller event in Princeton, where she distributed summaries of the recent funding appeal letters and discussed the District's work with attendees, including Mueller's assistants. She noted that the RCD was well regarded at the event and shared positive feedback from community members, including a flax grower involved in textile work and Patrick Corem, who spoke highly of the District's efforts. She reported creating a shared acronym list in a Google spreadsheet and stated that it has been shared with Lau for broader distribution to Directors.
- Guy reported tagging along on a spawning survey, walking the creek and observing several RCD projects. He noted that the survey occurred between coho and steelhead seasons and that he observed multiple redds and early steelhead, expressing appreciation for seeing the cumulative impact of RCD projects in the field. He reported that the survey was physically demanding and took a full day, involving navigating woody debris along the creek. He also reported hiking on Butano Ridge, where he observed the Butano subspecies of cypress, flannelbush, and numerous RCD vegetation and fuels projects across the landscape. He shared observations from attending a Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Council salon focused on risk and reward, noting the strong regional participation and the visible leadership role the RCD plays in coordinating and informing work across institutions and agencies.
- Phillips reported attending a California Parks Tour Foundation insider tour at Año Nuevo, her first visit in approximately fifteen years. She shared highlights from presentations by two UC Santa Cruz researchers, including research on unique acoustic calls of bull elephant seals that reduce unnecessary fighting and studies examining elephant seal feeding behavior and rapid weight gain at sea. She reported that the tour also included a docent-led visit to observe elephant seal bulls, females, and pups and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to revisit the site.

7. Adjourn Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.