



DRAFT Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

Thursday, May 21, 2026

4:00 – 6:00 pm

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

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

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

RCD staff: Kellyx Nelson, Lau Hodges, Kati McHugh, Amy Kaeser, Joe Issel (virtual)

NRCS staff: Drew Mather

Guests (all virtual): David Cosgrove (San Mateo County Supervisor Mueller's office, District 3), Krystle Reneer (Brush Hog Tree Care; virtual), Michelle Miller (virtual)

1. Call to Order

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

2. Approval of Agenda

- **ACTION:** Kossy motioned to approve agenda, Guy 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:** Guy moved to approve the consent agenda. Weil seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6. Regular Agenda

6.1. Board will consider updates to Personnel Manual

- Nelson presented a proposed update to the mileage reimbursement policy intended to address inequitable impacts on field staff. She explained that the current policy does not reimburse for mileage to work sites that are on the way to the office, which has resulted in staff who perform frequent fieldwork paying hundreds of dollars per month out of pocket. The proposed change would pay for work-related travel based on the distance between the employee's home or the office and the work destination, whichever is shortest, and is comparable to policies of many other RCDs.

- Discussion included: the reimbursement rate- benchmarked annually to the IRS; how the proposed policy is less generous than some private sector practices; that commuting to the office would not be reimbursed; how the proposed policy addresses inequity because much office work can be done remotely, while field staff lack that flexibility and bear higher costs; concerns about potential abuse and scenarios where staff might stop at a site between home and the office to claim mileage; how that would be addressed through supervisor approval and performance management rather than maintaining the current policy; cautions against assumptions about remote work flexibility; how no perfect solution exists but the proposed change reduces known harm; efforts to mitigate mileage costs by expanding access to RCD and NRCS vehicles, including storing vehicles in Pescadero and Santa Cruz to reduce reliance on personal vehicles; other agencies, including NRCS, that require use of agency vehicles and reimburse personal mileage only when government vehicles are unavailable; the minimal fiscal impact to the RCD because nearly all mileage is billed to grants; how mileage reimbursements are approved, documented, and audited; and equity issues.
- **ACTION:** Kossy moved to approve the mileage reimbursement update. Weil seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
- Nelson presented a proposed update to change the recognized holiday in the Personnel Manual from Cesar Chavez Day to Farmworkers Day, noting the allegations and evidence of sexual abuse, and following the lead of other farmworker support organizations who have adopted the new name.
- Discussion included whether “Farmworkers Day” is a commonly used term; the status of state or federal action; the importance of recognizing other laborers in addition to farmworkers; and staff appreciation for the speed of the proposed change.
- **ACTION:** Weil moved to approve the holiday name change. Guy seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

6.2. Executive Director’s Report

- Staff participated in their annual Farmworker Day of Service by helping with maintenance projects at Puente.
- We hosted Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot’s first Restoration Roundtable that brought resource agency leaders into the field to see restoration projects and discuss Cutting Green Tape and regulatory efficiency, trust between regulators and practitioners, and multi-benefit outcomes. It followed an earlier discussion at TomKat Ranch with Secretary Ross and Senator Becker focused on climate-smart and regenerative agriculture, the importance of funding technical assistance, and aligning agricultural investments with state climate and resilience priorities.
- We hosted a Pescadero watershed field trip for TOGETHER Bay Area’s annual conference. People liked it and requested that we repeat the tour annually.
- We hosted a Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN) Spotlight Stewardship tour that showcased watershed restoration and collaboration. RCD directors who attended commented that it effectively demonstrated land stewardship,

collaboration, and tangible outcomes in forest management, water supply, and habitat restoration, and noted the strong engagement of participants from diverse agencies.

- Nelson is helping coordinate a four-part statewide webinar series with the California Association of RCDs and the California Council of Land Trusts to help advance partnerships between RCDs and land trusts. She brought in guest moderators for the first two sessions-State Senator Josh Becker and Secretary Crowfoot- and the next one will include Jen Norris, the Executive Director of the Wildlife Conservation Board.
- Staff (Amy Kaeser) presented on our local work at a community dinner at the Loma Mar Store with Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.
- We have offered a summer internship focused on science communication to a Columbia University college student from San Mateo County.
- The op-ed she co-authored with Senator Becker was well received and shared on state platforms, and the model may be replicated for other RCDs.
- We have begun working on the spring newsletter, the three-year impact report is nearing completion, and that the redesigned website is structurally complete with final content uploads underway following a brief pause due to competing priorities.
- We are entering the construction season with projects in our water resources, habitat restoration, and agricultural stewardship programs.
- SCMSN team and POST completed a regional biomass utilization study to address growing constraints around what to do with biomass from forest management projects and to identify feasible markets and next analytical steps.
- The water quality team has begun a "State of the Coast" effort to synthesize existing datasets into a comprehensive assessment of trends, priorities, and strategic investment opportunities.
- FY '27 budget and the salary survey are on track and near completion.
- Nelson and Joe Issel attended the Central Coast RCD regional meeting, which was well attended with productive small-group discussions including groundwater recharge and monitoring, and effective coordination among RCDs.

6.3. USDA NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) report

- NRCS remains under a federal hiring freeze, with the primary staffing pathway currently limited to converting existing Pathways interns into full-time federal employees.
- Evelyn Avalos, a CSU Monterey Bay student in agricultural and plant sciences, will begin her internship in June. She is local to Watsonville and will be shared with the Salinas NRCS office. Mather invited the RCD to coordinate if there are field projects that would benefit from Avalos observing or participating, particularly during the upcoming busy project season.
- The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) received 11 applications in San Mateo County, with eight farms pre-approved. The approved contracts span cropland, forestland, rangeland, and one animal feeding operation, with a total pre-approved funding amount of \$336,441.

- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is a longer-term, five-year commitment compared to EQIP's typical one-to-three-year term. Four CSP applications were received, with three pre-approved as of the report date, totaling nearly \$100,000 in funding across cropland fields for practices including cover cropping, compost application, hedgerows, and windbreaks. Windbreak practices involve planting native trees to create or repair windbreaks.
- He joined a meeting of the RCD's forest health team and found it a valuable opportunity to connect with partners and discuss potential NRCS assistance for forestry projects.
- He attended the regional RCD area meeting, describing it as well organized and productive, and congratulated Nelson on her 20th work anniversary event, noting the milestone was closely shared with his own 20th anniversary.
- He closed with a "moment of the month," highlighting a photo and shared moment recognizing Nelson and Kossy, which he described as a meaningful and positive reflection of long-term service and partnership.

6.4. Directors' connection and reports

- Kossy shared a personal reflection about the recent loss of a close friend who made her feel like a better version of herself, noting that she has lost several similarly meaningful people in recent years and has responded by intentionally reaching out to reconnect with people who matter to her, encouraging others to do the same.
- Guy reported that Nelson's anniversary event was well attended and that the Spotlight Stewardship tour reinforced themes of risk-taking, collaboration, cutting regulatory barriers, and process-based restoration. He raised the question of how Board members might better support outreach and storytelling given limited grant funding for communications. Nelson responded that earlier planning for the annual appeal could provide Board members with clearer talking points, specific asks, and a shared outreach window, and she noted that a future board manual with onboarding materials and messaging guidance had been planned with Etherton before her leave and may resume when she returns.
- Weil reported that spending extended one-on-one time with Nelson is valuable but not scalable, expressed enthusiasm for the new communications capacity to support one-to-many outreach through PR, email, webinars, and web content, and emphasized the importance of establishing awareness of the RCD before communities encounter projects that may be controversial. Nelson suggested leveraging Board members' personal and professional networks for outreach, citing past examples of presentations to equestrian groups, political organizations, and community associations, and noted that Board-supported speaker efforts have previously been effective. Weil added that she attended the Spotlight Stewardship tour, provided feedback on the nearly complete website redesign, and participated in a finance committee meeting to review the draft FY27 budget, which will be presented at the next Board meeting.
- Phillips shared that she is staying close to home during treatment, reported positive health news with minimal side effects, and described a personal gratitude practice focused on recognizing what she is thankful for during this period.

- Wade reported that he is undertaking a personal reset, clearing out distractions and refocusing his time and energy, with an ongoing commitment to conservation work and plans to seek advice from fellow Board members.
- Stielstra reported briefly on a recent CARCD Board meeting, noted that the CARCD annual meeting will again be held in Sacramento in November with RCD support for Board attendance, and shared that the regional chair role remains a work in progress. He also described completing Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, encouraged others to learn about CERT as a community resilience program, and highlighted the value of preparedness training, coordination, and leadership within the local program.

6.5. Board will consider setting special meeting for early June

- Nelson explained that several projects are ready to move into construction but could not complete all procurement steps in time for the regular meeting, and delaying until the next scheduled meeting would risk construction timelines. She requested that the Board set a short special meeting in early June to consider and approve construction contracts so work can proceed without interruption.
- **ACTION:** The Board reached consensus to schedule a special meeting on June 2 at 4:30 p.m. to consider approval of construction contracts; no formal vote was taken.

7. Adjourn Meeting

- Meeting adjourned at 5:47 p.m.
- The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors will be June 18, 2026.