

# Board Meeting MINUTES

June 4, 2015

North Fork Rancheria Community Center

56900 Kunugib Way

North Fork, CA 93643



## I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

## II. Roll Call

**Present:** Jerry Bird, Louis Boitano, Burt Bundy, Todd Ferrara, Pam Giacomini, Ron Hames, Allen Ishida, Bob Johnston, Bob Kirkwood, BJ Kirwan, Ruben Leal, Jennifer Montgomery, Eraina Ortega, and Woody Smeck

**Absent:** John Brissenden

Maryann McGovran, Tribal Council Chairperson for North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians, introduced newly elected Tribal Council Member Gary Walker, discussed a number of projects that the tribe has been working on in the area, and welcomed the Board to North Fork.

## III. Approval of March 5, 2015, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

**Action:** Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Hames seconded, a motion to approve the March 4, 2015, Meeting Minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

## IV. Public Comments

No public comment.

## V. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair BJ Kirwan thanked everyone involved with the previous day's tour, with a special thanks to Elissa Brown, and called attention to the current budget challenges the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is facing. Kirwan congratulated Bob Kingman on his promotion to the Assistant Executive Officer (AEO) position.

## VI. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham welcomed Bob Kingman to the AEO position and discussed a few of the programs that Kingman will be responsible for in his new role. Branham also noted that staff member, Tristyn Armstrong, would be taking on the role of Board Liaison, in place of Theresa Burgess. Branham recognized the work that Burgess has done as Board Liaison and thanked her for her efforts.

### a. Administrative Update

Branham introduced Administrative Services Chief Amy Lussier, who gave an update on SNC's current Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF) budget reduction requests noting that staff has been working to focus efforts on SNC

priority projects, and would continue to adjust activities and staffing to meet available funding.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara confirmed that SNC and many other departments who receive funding from the ELPF were being asked to reduce spending to achieve a savings target. The Board discussed the current status and future of the ELPF, with particular interest in impacts to SNC programs and activities and re-emphasis on the need to pursue other funding opportunities. Staff assured the Board that the Grant Program and the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) would remain the SNC's top priorities, adding that efforts under the WIP would provide opportunities for additional funding conversations with other agencies.

b. Policy and Outreach Update

Branham introduced Angela Avery, Regional Policy and Programs Chief, who provided an update on SNC's policy and outreach activities. Avery discussed efforts by staff to meet with a variety of state agencies to discuss addressing funding and policy challenges needed in the Region. Avery also mentioned the work that staff has been doing with the United States Forest Service's (USFS) communications team to brand and promote the WIP, and the work staff has been doing to support other media opportunities for the SNC. Avery updated the Board on the status of legislation that SNC has been tracking, including the status of two pieces of legislation that will directly impact SNC activities. Avery also provided the Board with an update on sponsorship and promotional materials for the 2015 Great Sierra River Cleanup.

Boardmember Pam Giacomini asked about SNC's engagement with CAL FIRE's Forest Climate Action Team (FCAT). Avery and Branham responded that SNC has been closely involved in the development of the FCAT's report, but noted that there are still some challenges the Team is facing related to biomass.

Branham updated the Board on a meeting that Boardmember John Brissenden helped to arrange with the California Insurance Commissioner and several representatives from the insurance industry on the current conditions within the Sierra Nevada Region. Branham noted that the insurance representatives were interested in the work that SNC has been doing, and that SNC will continue to engage with the insurance industry as appropriate.

Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery and Avery discussed a Climate Change symposium being hosted by the California Natural Resources Agency in August.

Boardmembers discussed the challenges that the forests in the Region are facing due to the lack of biomass infrastructure in the Sierra Nevada Region.

Branham noted that the support within the state for biomass is growing, even though a number of biomass plants in the valley have been closing. Branham highlighted a bill by Assembly Member Brian Dahle that is focused on supporting biomass infrastructure and noted that it is currently being considered by the legislature. Branham also mentioned efforts being undertaken by the Association of California Water Agencies to support healthy forests in California's headwaters.

c. Strategic Plan Revision Update

Branham and Avery provided the Board with a proposal for the SNC's next strategic plan and action plan update. Avery proposed combining the strategic plan and the action plan into one complete document and requested a Board Subcommittee work with SNC staff to provide input on the proposal. Avery noted that staff is recommending that a draft proposal be brought to the Board by the September Board meeting

Board Chair BJ Kirwan said that Brissenden has offered to be on the Subcommittee, and asked that Montgomery also serve on the Subcommittee.

d. Rim Fire Grant Report

Branham gave the Board an update on the projects that staff has been considering for funding through the \$1 million Proposition 84 funds that the Board set aside for Rim Fire restoration in 2013. He noted that he had approved a second project under the authority delegated to him by the Board. The project will lead to a number of on the ground restoration projects in the burn area.

e. Miscellaneous Updates

Branham reported to the Board that he had received awards this year from both the California Forestry Association and the Motherlode Chapter of the Sierra Club on behalf of the work that SNC has been doing in the Region.

He updated the Board on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that SNC and the USFS signed with the Sierra Resource Conservation District. Work under the MOU will further efforts in North Fork and allow the key next step of developing a ten-year Stewardship Contract with the Sierra National Forest to take place.

Branham also recognized Chris Nota of the USFS for her efforts with the WIP noting that she would be retiring at the end of the month, and expressed condolences to Izzy Martin of the Sierra Fund for the recent passing of her husband.

**VII. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul gave the Board an update on proposed legislation and work by the Attorney General's Office to provide Proposition 1 Grant Guideline interpretations.

**VIII. Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines (ACTION)**

Bob Kingman, SNC Assistant Executive Officer, reported on the development of SNC's Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines and outlined three alternatives for Board consideration related to incorporating easement and acquisition projects as eligible projects. These project types had previously been eliminated from the eligible projects list by Board direction.

Boardmembers deliberated the three alternatives. Concerns about the appearance of biomass processing facilities as being once removed from watershed health and the ability of biomass facility funding to result in construction and implementation were raised and addressed. Boardmembers also considered whether incorporating acquisition for support of biomass facilities would provide the highest value, and best support the purposes of SNC and Proposition 1.

Questions about the more limited alternative recommended as a result of the limited funds available to SNC through Proposition 1 were discussed. A summary of Proposition 1 funding available from other agencies was shared together with assurances that staff considered those opportunities when developing the recommended alternative. Staff also confirmed that a variety of project types would be eligible through the Grant Program.

Board Chair BJ Kirwan recommended agendaing a discussion around SNC's support of acquisitions and conservation easements at a future meeting.

**Public Comment:**

Kerri Timmer of the Sierra Business Council commented that Conservancies are typically viewed by decision makers in Sacramento as funders for acquisitions only, and cautioned the Board that having the appearance of not being interested in funding acquisitions may make it hard for decision makers to see the value of providing funding to the SNC in the future.

Calaveras County Supervisor Chris Wright commented that it would be important for the SNC to continue to maintain the ability to use acquisitions as a tool in the toolkit and encouraged the Board to trust staff and applicants to bring the highest value projects forward.

Kingman read for the record a letter from Lisa Wallace of the Truckee River Watershed Council, encouraging the Board to consider funding for meadow restoration as well as stormwater management projects.

Bridget Fithian from the Sierra Foothill Conservancy encouraged the Board to maintain acquisitions as an eligible project type in the Grant Guidelines, and allow the staff and applicants to prove the benefit of the project. She also noted that acquisition grants received from the SNC have leveraged additional funds for forest health projects, and that they play a critical role in encouraging additional work in the Region.

Boardmembers noted that not including acquisition funding in this round of the Proposition 1 Grant Program did not mean that the SNC would be pulling away from supporting acquisitions in the future. They also emphasized that the amount of funding received from Proposition 1 was simply too small to include everything.

**Action: Boardmember Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember Montgomery seconded, a motion to approve the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Proposition 1 Fiscal Years (FY) 2015-16 and 2016-17 Grant Guidelines, incorporating Acquisition Alternative #1, authorizing staff to make non-substantive changes as needed, and to take actions to implement the FYs 2015-16 and 2016-17 SNC Grant Program. The motion passed, with ayes 7 (Kirwan, Kirkwood, Montgomery, Giacomini, Hames, Ferrara, and Ortega), nays 4 (Johnston, Bundy, Ishida, and Boitano).**

**IX. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (INFORMATIONAL)**

Executive Officer Jim Branham gave the Board an update on the WIP since the launch of the program in March, noting that the WIP is starting to pick up momentum and support in Sacramento, and introduced Mandy Vance, project coordinator for the WIP. Vance thanked the Board, SNC staff, and the U.S. Forest Service Region 5 staff for their support of the WIP. Vance provided the Board with updates on the internal organization of the WIP, and presented the first restoration assessment completed by the Tahoe National Forest.

Vance clarified some of the terms included in the Tahoe National Forest's analysis for the Board, and also responded to a comment by Boardmember Bob Kirkwood about the funding needs and priorities identified in the analysis. Branham stated that the purpose of the analysis was to identify what level of work the Tahoe National Forest could accomplish if there were no funding constraints, and noted that the funding need may be considerably greater than originally anticipated. Boardmember Jerry Bird stated that the Tahoe National Forest's analysis was the pilot and that through the process they have established the template for other forests. Bird also stated that there is interest in making this foundational level of analysis part of the larger regional forest planning effort.

Boardmembers Burt Bundy and Jennifer Montgomery commented that competing priorities, watersheds that cross National Forest boundaries, and a

lack of understanding by people outside the watershed will be challenges for analysis. Branham and Vance stated that part of the goal of the WIP will be to assess the real constraints, and propose potential solutions to those constraints.

Boardmember Ron Hames requested that staff bring U.S. Forest Service Region 4 in to the conversation, as portions of the Eastern Sierra have lands in Region 4, while the rest of the Sierra Nevada is in Region 5.

Boardmember Woody Smeck thanked staff for their efforts on the WIP, and requested that staff consider pulling the National Parks Service and Army Corps into the conversation. Vance and Bird both noted the goal is to expand the WIP to additional partners, and clarified to the Board that efforts so far have been focused on establishing a process.

Vance and Bird also responded to a question by Boardmember Bob Johnston about whether analysis completed through the WIP would incorporate private lands.

**X. Joint Powers Agreement with the State Coastal Conservancy (ACTION)**

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided an update to the Board on the Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) entered in to between the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) and the SNC to have the SNC act as the covenant holder on a property in Mendocino County on the SCC's behalf.

Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery asked about costs associated with the JPA that would affect existing projects. Branham responded that SNC would be reimbursed for any costs associated with the required activities.

**ACTION: Boardmember Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember Johnston seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to enter into the joint powers agreement with the State Coastal Conservancy to implement their common powers to accept grants and undertake projects for the protection of the Eel River Property through Sierra Nevada Conservancy's Conservation Covenant Project. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XI. Boardmembers' Comments**

Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery updated the Board on her participation in the Sierra Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Program and offered to provide additional information to any Boardmembers interested.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara congratulated staff on their great work putting together the Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines and encouraged staff to incorporate watershed language that would put a focus on forest health in watershed improvement and restoration.

Boardmember Ron Hames thanked Jim Branham for his presentation at the California State Association of Counties event. Hames also commented on the need to reframe the perspective around fuels reduction such that it takes on the same perspective as fire.

**XII. Public Comments**

Kerri Timmer of the Sierra Business Council (SBC) updated the Board on SBC's being named the Small Business Development Center for Northeastern California which means they have received a federal grant to provide small business development services to the northeastern location for California. In addition, Timmer noted that SBC has been working with SNC, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research, CAL FIRE, and the U.S. Forest Service on a federal program called the Natural Disaster Recovery Competition which is a one billion dollar nationwide effort to help build resilience and restore communities effected by natural disaster. Also, Timmer mentioned that the Sierra is being considered as an area for designation by the USDA's Resilient Lands and Waters Initiative.

Steve Hayes from the Sierra Resource Conservation District thanked staff for their support of the bioenergy facility in North Fork. Hayes noted that without the support of SNC and the U.S. Forest Service the project wouldn't be as far along as it is.

**XIII. Adjournment**

Board Chair BJ Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 12:00.