

Board Meeting MINUTES

September 3, 2015
Paradise Elks Lodge
1100 Elk Lane
Paradise, CA 94969



I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: Jerry Bird, Louis Boitano, John Brissenden, Burt Bundy, Pam Giacomini, Ron Hames, Allen Ishida, Bob Johnston, BJ Kirwan, Jennifer Montgomery, Este Stifel (Bob Kirkwood and Todd Ferrara joined the meeting after it was called to order.)

Absent: Eraina Ortega and Woody Smeck

III. Approval of June 4, 2015, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

ACTION: Boardmember Louis Boitano moved, and Boardmember Pam Giacomini seconded, a motion to approve the June 4, 2015, meeting minutes. The minutes were approved with 9 aye votes from the voting members (Brissenden abstaining, Kirkwood and Ferrara not present).

IV. Public Comments

Mike Peevers of Terra Fuego Resource Foundation introduced himself to the Board and stated he was looking forward to hearing about all the good work the Conservancy is doing.

V. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair BJ Kirwan commented on the field tour held the previous day and thanked everyone for their participation. Kirwan announced to the Board that they will perform an annual performance review of Executive Officer Jim Branham in closed session at the December Board meeting and asked for Boardmember participation in the review process.

VI. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham introduced new members of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff: Andy Fristensky, the Mt. Lassen Area Manager, and Randi Jorgensen, the Mt. Whitney Area Manager.

a. Administrative Update

Administrative Services Chief Amy Lussier announced the hiring of new Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff: Patrick Eidman, Grants Coordinator in the Auburn office; Michael Pickard, South Central Subregion Area Representative working out of the Mariposa office; and Kristy Hoffman, North Region Area Representative, to be located in Quincy, CA. One last vacancy

will be advertised in October, and this position will be a policy position located in the Auburn office.

The current fiscal year budget has been passed and SNC will be complying with a cost-savings reduction of \$310,000, due to the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF) shortfall. One area cost savings could be found is SNC's contract with the Department of General Services for accounting services, which has increased to \$176,000.00 per year. In response, the Department of Finance and the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) will be working on behalf of all the State Conservancies to reduce the contract amount spent for accounting services.

Branham added that additional resources were pursued through the state budget change proposal process to support the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP), but were not successful. The SNC continues to get positive messages from CNRA about resolving the ELPF budget issues with the hope of eliminating the need for annual budget savings.

b. Policy and Outreach Update

Angela Avery, Regional Policy and Programs Chief, provided an update on policy activity within SNC. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) released a White Paper and an associated policy document in early August titled *The Carbon Implications of Fuel Reduction and Ecological Restorations in the Sierra Nevada*. The SNC and partners are reviewing the paper and developing responses to ensure that the policy issues important to the SNC and the Region are represented.

Avery provided a brief legislation update noting that staff continues to track state and federal legislation relevant to the SNC, and any major developments will be reported to the Board as they come up. Assembly Member Brian Dahle's bill AB590, dealing with biomass, died in legislation earlier this week - a disappointment to the SNC. Also, the SNC has signed on as a non-voting member to the Sierra Climate and Adaptation Mitigation Partnership (CAMP). Avery reported Assembly Concurrent Resolution 22-Sierra Watershed Protection Week - passed, designating the third week of September as Sierra Watershed Protection Week. The Sierra Watershed Protection week will overlap with the Great Sierra River Cleanup.

Brittany Covich, Public Information Officer for SNC, provided the Board with the communications portion of the report. Covich displayed a picture of the WIP logo and shared a series of Virtual Billboards that were created in partnership with the United States Forest Service (USFS). Covich noted that the billboards have been tied to the SNC WIP Web page and have increased traffic to the site by 50%. Covich also shared that The National Weather Service and other organizations have been using virtual billboards to shift

their messaging to focus on forest conditions and weather impacts on severe damage fire areas.

The Board engaged in a brief discussion of other online apps and functionality, and acknowledged the virtual billboard campaign as an excellent messaging tool.

Branham recognized Covich for her tremendous effort in improving SNC communications.

c. SNC Tribal Consultation Policy

Julie Griffith Flatter, Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) and Tribal Coordinator, provided background on the SNC Tribal Consultation Policy which was developed in response to an Executive Order issued by Governor Brown in 2011. Working closely with the Governor's Tribal Advisor, as well as CNRA, SNC developed the policy to meet the needs and requirements of the Executive Order. The policy was distributed to the 42 tribes in the Region for comment. The SNC received two "no comment" responses.

Griffith-Flatter reported that the Tribal Consultation Policy was utilized in seeking tribal input on the SNC Strategic Action Plan currently under development. She also noted that moving forward, the development of tribal policies and initiatives would take place in coordination with the Grant Program.

The Board engaged in a brief discussion about the degree of involvement tribes have historically had with SNC grant programs and had a short conversation about the changes in eligible tribal applicants between the Proposition 84 and Proposition 1 statutes.

d. Proposition 1 Grant Update

Assistant Executive Officer, Bob Kingman, gave a Proposition 1 Grant Program update, noting that SNC's Proposition 1 Grant Guidelines, approved by the Board in June, had been reviewed and approved by CNRA and were now available on the Bond Accountability and SNC Web sites. Kingman reminded the Board that the first solicitation period for Proposition 1 Grants ended September 1 and that funding recommendations would be brought forward at the December 2015 and March 2016 Board meetings. He informed the Board that the SNC had received a total of 20 applications representing \$5.5 million in requests and that the evaluation and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) processes would begin immediately. Kingman also provided a breakdown of the applications received: 13 of the 20 applications were for Category 1 projects and the remaining were for Category 2 projects; 14 applications are from the Mt. Lassen Area and six from the Mt. Whitney Area.

The Board engaged in a discussion about pros and cons of state-level efforts to coordinate Proposition 1 grant applications. Boardmember Burt Bundy asked if there is any effort to coordinate the various deadlines, as each agency has established different deadlines. Kingman responded that there is some coordination happening between the various agencies and that this issue has been raised. Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery responded to the question of timing by stating Placer County is going to apply for Proposition 1 funds and they actually see a benefit to the staggering of due dates.

e. Miscellaneous Updates

Branham apprised the Board that SNC continues to have issues funding projects on Federal lands due to challenges with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and CEQA requirements. He noted that Kingman is working with state agencies, our Deputy Attorney General, and CNRA legal counsel to develop solutions.

Branham then described an effort lead by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the State Housing and Community Development Department. The two, working with partners, are seeking a Housing and Urban Development Grant from the Federal government to restore resiliency in the Rim Fire burn area. SNC has been participating in the effort, which could yield a large grant with tremendous opportunity.

Branham reminded the Board that communications with the State Insurance Commissioner and insurance companies continue and noted that the companies are looking for opportunities to be advocates for state and federal agencies on watershed health issues.

VII. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul has been working closely with Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman and CNRA on CEQA/NEPA issues. Sproul further stated that the USFS has done quite a bit of NEPA work done by the USFS in relation to the Rim Fire Restoration Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will assist in CEQA compliance for projects funded by SNC and other state agencies. Boardmember Bob Johnston asked Sproul to update the Board on the draft Office of Planning and Research (OPR) CEQA Guidelines. Sproul has not yet had time to review these guidelines. She plans to provide an update to the Board in December.

VIII. SNC Strategic Action Plan (INFORMATIONAL)

Angela Avery, Policy and Outreach Division Chief, presented a draft SNC Strategic Plan for Board review, feedback, and guidance noting that staff will bring the final Strategic Plan and a draft Action Plan for Board approval in December. The Board was given an update on the four proposed programs:

Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program, Proposition 1 Grant Program, Abandoned Mine Land (AML) Program, and Recreation and Tourism, and Avery described the processes used to identify those programs. Avery posed two questions to the Board regarding the Strategic Plan: 1) Are the four proposed programs the appropriate programs for SNC over the next four years? 2) Are the strategies identified for the four proposed programs appropriate?

Boardmember Pam Giacomini asked why the preservation of ranch and agriculture lands was no longer a program focus area. Avery assured the Board that although ranching and agriculture would not be a specific area of focus, it would remain an ongoing activity likely addressed in more detail as the WIP takes more shape. Executive Officer Jim Branham added that as the WIP develops at the watershed level, ranch and agricultural lands issues will be incorporated. Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery noted that the Strategic Plan and WIP take a holistic approach and these issues will be addressed. Boardmember Burt Bundy indicated he would like to see ranching and agricultural lands called out in the implementation portion of the Plan.

Boardmember Bob Kirkwood indicated he would like to see a more emotional appeal in the document rather than using "state and bureaucratic" wording.

Boardmember Allen Ishida asked if the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program would fit under forest restoration programs. Avery advised that while it was a program of its own, there was no funding currently dedicated to this area.

Boardmember Louis Boitano indicated that AML issues are very important in his county, given the high number of abandoned mines.

The Board was informed that the draft Strategic Plan would be revised to incorporate Boardmember and public comments and brought back to them for review and approval in December, for implementation beginning in January 2016.

IX. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the CNRA, SNC, and USFS. The purpose of this MOU is to communicate the working relationship all signing Agencies will have to carry out the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program. Boardmembers Jerry Bird and Todd Ferrara provided acknowledgement and thanks to Angela Avery and staff for their instrumental role in getting the MOU signed. Branham stated that this document will be shared with partner agencies and used as a marketing tool.

The WIP Project Coordinator, Mandy Vance, updated the Board on coordination efforts with partner agencies. As part of these efforts, SNC will host a WIP Webinar on October 8. Vance asked the Board to forward this invitation to

anyone who may be interested in participating in this event. We will use the webinar time to update partners and provide an online WIP endorsement. Vance thanked absent Boardmember Woody Smeck for the coordination of conversations with the National Park Service (NPS). As a result of these conversations with NPS, SNC received an invitation to present the WIP at the Southern Sierra Land Managers meeting this fall. Vance also thanked Boardmember Este Stifel for coordination efforts at the Bureau of Land Management to conduct a pilot assessment in the Mother Lode District.

Boardmember Jerry Bird provided an update on a Meadows Restoration collaboration underway between USFS, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Sierra Pacific Industries. This opportunity is a Proposition 1 grant opportunity with the group looking at two types of grant proposals they can submit. Bird provided the group with a handout that provided a summary and review of grant opportunities that the collaboration group will consider.

Boardmember Ron Hames noted the exclusion of USFS Region 4 in our WIP efforts, stating that half of his county falls in the Region 4 Area. Executive Officer Jim Branham responded that he had been in contact with the Forest Supervisor on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest to ensure that they will be included in WIP efforts

Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery thanked Vance for her work on “getting the word out about the WIP.” Montgomery also encourages SNC to reach out to Alliance of Regional Collaboratives for Adaptation.

X. Policy-Related Science and Research Overview (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham introduced SNC’s Regional Science Coordinator, Nic Enstice. Branham provided a brief summary of the work that Enstice has been focused on over the past few months. Branham let the Board know that these science reports will be ongoing items presented to the Board from time to time.

Enstice presented an overview of his staff report to Boardmembers. Topics discussed in the presentation included: comparison of carbon emissions between low- and high-severity fires and relationships to air quality, challenges of forest regeneration after intense fire, the majority of emissions from high-intensity fires will come over the future years, smoke plume activity and predictions of where smoke will travel, and water quantity and forest management.

Boardmembers Bob Johnston and Este Stifel asked if any conclusions had been drawn from these studies and how they could be used. Stifel concluded that the value of the Sierra Nevada is in its trees. She also indicated that many of the images and facts shared in the presentation should be widely shared among the public. Boardmembers Bob Kirkwood and Jerry Bird commented on the effects

on snowpack and about studies being undertaken by the Bureau of Reclamation and Professor Roger Bales.

Public Comment – Chris Wright, Calaveras County Supervisor, asked Enstice if PG&E had been consulted during the hydro-electric capacity study. Enstice indicated not directly by SNC.

XI. Boardmembers' Comments

Boardmember Allen Ishida acknowledged the ongoing issue of dead trees in Sierra forests. Ishida stated that with over 10 million dead pine and cedar trees in the forests, there is a real problem, especially on private lands where the cost to remove these dead trees cannot be covered. Ishida talked about the substantial erosion damage that will occur when the state finally receives a significant amount of rain. Boardmember Bob Kirkwood asked Ishida if he thought the science study information presented by SNC may be useful information to share with water agencies so they can understand the impacts of these fires on their watersheds.

Boardmember BJ Kirwan complimented SNC staff for the outstanding work and presentations.

XII. Public Comments

Butte County and Paradise Fire Safe Council Boardmember Tom Kelly addressed the efforts of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), which is working with local fire departments and fire safe councils to coordinate efforts with local property owners for cleanup of property to prevent catastrophic fires.

Tuolumne County Supervisor Sherri Brennan provided an update on the Rim Fire restoration efforts, noting that significant harvesting of burned material has occurred on private lands, while little has been removed from public lands. At this time the infrastructure has been saturated which has contributed to over 70,000 acres of moderate to extreme burned forests being left untreated. She encouraged the Board and SNC to continue to assist in finding the nexus between the NEPA and CEQA processes, as it is a real issue relating to Rim Fire restoration efforts.

XIII. Adjournment

Board Chair BJ Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 11:50 a.m. The next meeting will be in Tuolumne County on December 2 & 3.

NOTE: the December meeting was later rescheduled for December 9 & 10.