

Board Meeting MINUTES

March 2, 2016
Sacramento, CA



I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m.

II. Oath of Office for New Boardmembers

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul administered the Oath of Office to Calaveras County Supervisor Christopher Wright to represent the South Central Subregion.

III. Roll Call

Present: BJ Kirwan, John Laird, John Brissenden, Bob Kirkwood, Pam Giacomini, Terrence O'Brien, Jennifer Montgomery, Christopher Wright, Burt Bundy, Este Stifel, Bernie Gyant, Ron Hames, Bob Johnston, Eraina Ortega, Woody Smeck, Todd Ferrara (replaced John Laird upon his departure).

Absent: Allen Ishida

Boardmember John Laird opened the meeting with comments directed to the Board.

IV. Approval of December 10, 2015, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

ACTION: Boardmember Pam Giacomini moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to approve the December 10, 2015, meeting minutes with revisions as suggested by Bob Kirkwood. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Public Comments

No public comments at this time.

VI. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair BJ Kirwan reported to the Board that support is increasing for the Watershed Improvement Program.

VII. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided introductory remarks for the Executive Officer's report. He stated that SNC continues to deal with issues relating to Fi\$Cal payments and acknowledged the great work that the Administrative Services staff has been doing to keep SNC up and running.

a. Administrative Update

Administrative Services Chief Amy Lussier reported that SNC is beginning to draft the next year's budget and expects to spend all current fiscal year funds.

Staff is working with Plumas County to secure an office space for Mt. Lassen Area Representative Kristy Hoffman, and continues to work hard to address payment issues associated with the new Fi\$Cal system.

- b. Status of Proposed Water Bond/Park Bond/GGRF Funding
Legislative Liaison Brandon Sanders updated the Board on items SNC is tracking related to funding for the organization and the Region. If the 2018 Water Bond continues to move forward, the SNC is currently slated to receive \$150 million. The 2016 Park Bond, SB 317, which did not include the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, failed and is effectively dead; however, SNC continues to work with legislators and the environmental community within and outside of the Region to ensure that the Region will be included in any future Park Bonds. Finally, Sanders provided an update on the GHG Reduction Fund and stated that significant amounts of money are being directed to CAL FIRE and other programs to address tree mortality issues. A task force has been developed and SNC is participating.

Boardmember John Laird stated that the Governor is not inclined to back any further bond money, but that the Green House Gas (GHG) money is a very “real” source of funding. He encouraged SNC to be interactive in all of the diverse issues that are being funded in the Sierra.

Boardmember John Brissenden asked why all of the GGRF Funding is going to CAL FIRE. Branham stated that SNC is working closely with CAL FIRE to ensure the money is spent in the Sierra Region, but that the Governor’s budget continues to provide the funding to CAL FIRE.

Upon questions by Boardmember Christopher Wright, Laird provided an update on the CalEnviroScreen 2.0 program, and suggested SNC arrange for a demonstration of the CalEnviroScreen. He indicated that this was a tool developed by CAL EPA to identify communities that are most affected by economic conditions and pollution. Branham acknowledged the demonstration of CalEnviroScreen as a “next step” and stated that SNC will look into the arrangements for a Board demonstration. There was further Board discussion regarding disadvantaged criteria for the CalEnviroScreen program. Boardmember Johnston pointed out that the multiplication of the two factors is what causes Sierra communities to be excluded. Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery noted she had provided Branham with a link to criteria definitions and guidelines for CalEnviroScreen. Branham will forward this link to the Board.

Branham notified the Board that Brandon Sanders has recently taken a position with PG&E and will be leaving SNC. He acknowledged Sanders’ instrumental role in the Amador Calaveras Consensus Group which was a key initiative for SNC.

c. Forest Climate Action Plan

Branham updated the Board on the latest actions of the Forest Climate Action Team (FCAT) which is in the process of developing a Forest Carbon Plan under the umbrella of AB32 and the State's GHG reduction efforts. The FCAT developed and will release a discussion document to serve as an introduction to key forest policy issues. The FCAT will hold a public workshop on March 23 to solicit public comment and input on the Carbon Plan which is designed to guide future funding and policy decisions related to GHG.

d. Rim Fire Grant Notification

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided the Board an overview of the grant awarded for the remaining funds allocated by the Board for Rim Fire restoration activities. This final grant was awarded over \$842,000 to the Tuolumne River Preservation Trust. Kingman added that the scope of this project consists of completion of treatment to over 200 acres of severely burned forests in the Rim Fire burn area, including restoration of seven springs and two roadway culverts.

e. Overview of March 3 Summit

An agenda for the March 3 Summit was distributed to Boardmembers for review. Branham briefly described the focus of the summit and mentioned various presentations that will be provided.

f. Miscellaneous Updates

No miscellaneous updates for the Board at this time.

VIII. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul reported to the Board that she is tracking new bills that have been introduced to amend CEQA. At this time they include minor changes to the process and not broad reform. Sproul added that she is also tracking CA Natural Resources Agency's proposed amendments to CEQA guidelines to address AB52 and to provide tribal consultation on projects that may affect tribal homelands or cultural sites.

IX. 2015-16 Proposition 1 Grant Awards (ACTION)

Staff provided recommendations for Board awards to two Proposition 1 grants. Mt. Whitney Area Manager Randi Jorgensen provided the Board with an overview of Project #829, the Markleevillage Fuels Reduction Project. Mt. Lassen Area Manager Andy Fristensky provided the Board with an overview of Project #846, Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project (Phase II).

The Board acknowledged the value of the projects to improve watershed health, the thorough work of SNC staff on the presentation of the two grants, and staff efforts to assist applicants through the entire application process. They also recognized the value and benefit of utilizing Proposition 1 dollars for the types and kinds of projects that SNC is recommending for funding.

The Board engaged in a short discussion about the average cost per acre for projects and whether or not the price SNC is paying is a normal price as compared to the cost that the US Forest Service (USFS) pays on a per project basis. Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman indicated that staff does review cost per acre of projects and considers this during evaluation. He noted costs can vary significantly due to a number of factors and that is likewise taken into consideration.

Kingman provided an update on Proposition 1 Grant applications received for the March 1 deadline, sharing that staff has received 29 applications for a little over \$9 million. Kingman further stated that this is a testimony to the need for Proposition 1 dollars which far exceeds the dollar amount available.

ACTION: Boardmember Bob Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion to (a) authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Little Butte Creek Forest Health Project – Phase II (SNC 846); (b) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Markleevillage Fuels Reduction Project (SNC 829), with mitigation measures, may have a significant effect on the environment, and adopt the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration and the related Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program; and (c) authorize a grant award to each of the above listed projects for the amounts recommended by staff, and further authorize staff to enter into the necessary agreements for the recommended projects. The motion passed unanimously.

X. Proposition 1 Apportionment for Tree Mortality (ACTION)

Executive Officer Jim Branham introduced the item to the Board and relayed information about the scale of the tree mortality issue. He called attention to the Governor's proclamation, and updated the Board on SNC's participation on the Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF) as well as most of the working groups created within the TMTF. Branham indicated that staff is recommending a \$1 million apportionment of available Proposition 1 funds for projects addressing the tree mortality issue.

Boardmember Woody Smeck asked whether there are specific guidelines for the scoring of those grants which may receive apportioned tree mortality money, specifically how projects will be selected and prioritized to ensure money will be spent efficiently. Branham replied that SNC will continue to use the Proposition 1 guidelines, which take into consideration the applicant's ability to manage a project and to leverage funds.

Boardmember Chris Wright asked whether Tree Mortality funds would be spent beyond the six High Hazard counties in the southern Sierra. Branham advised the Board that the funds are available for the entire Region.

Boardmember Burt Bundy asked if there will be any work focused on prevention. Branham responded that SNC will continue to focus attention on improving overall forest health through the Proposition 1 and related programs.

Public Comment:

Supervisor Sherri Brennan, Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, addressed the Board to share information on work taking place in the county to address tree mortality issues. She expressed the urgency of this problem and encouraged the Board to appropriate any funds necessary to address these issues.

Steve Haze, representing the Yosemite-Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council as well as the Sierra Resource Conservation District, stressed that additional funding opportunities and support is strongly needed for projects in the Mt. Whitney Area, specifically Madera and Fresno counties. Haze also urged the Board to approve money to address biomass issues.

ACTION: Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery moved, and Boardmember Ron Hames seconded, a motion to apportion \$1 million of the existing \$10 million available in the Proposition 1 Watershed Improvement Program to support projects that align with all existing requirements of the adopted Grant Guidelines and also achieve objectives of Governor Brown's Emergency Proclamation on Tree Mortality.

XI. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Coordinator Mandy Vance provided the Board with an update on the USFS/SNC co-branded stand-alone Web site for the WIP which will be officially launched tomorrow in conjunction with the WIP Summit. Vance provided the website address to the Board: www.restorethesierra.com.

Vance also updated the Board on the prescribed Fire Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) developed by state and federal land managers as well as non-governmental organizations, and prescribed Fire Councils. The MOU captures a commitment to increase use of prescribed and managed fire for ecological restoration and other purposes.

Vance also provided two science updates prepared by Nic Enstice of the SNC staff. Copies of the PowerPoint slides with presentation details were provided to Boardmembers. The presentation focused on emissions, and carbon loss and disturbance as a result of wildfires.

Boardmember conversation took place discussing success stories of how prescribed burn worked to control wildfires. Branham acknowledged that the fire MOU does address both prescribed and managed fire.

Vance also provided an update regarding the WIP Regional Strategy, reporting that the Strategy has been posted for public comment and is available for review through March 18.

XII. Update on National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) Grant (INFORMATIONAL)

Policy and Outreach Division Chief Angela Avery provided an update on the NDRC Grant that was reported to the Board in December. The original grant application amount was \$117,000 million divided into three pillars of activity: a community resilience center, a biomass facility and wood products campus, and forest and watershed health projects. In January of this year, the state of California received just over \$70 million in all three pillars of activity. The community resilience center was awarded \$19.8 million, biomass and wood products campus received \$22 million, and the forest and watershed health projects received \$28.6 million. The two pillars of activity that SNC will have a role in implementing are the biomass facility and wood products campus, and the forest and watershed health projects.

Avery said the grant awarded to the Department of Housing and Community Development will result in an interagency agreement with SNC and the USFS to distribute the money. The SNC is in the process of identifying the mechanisms and scope under each of the pillars of work.

Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery asked if SNC has developed a general concept for the biomass facility portion of this work. Avery responded with a general outline of a three-megawatt facility combined with a wood campus, with Phase I of this process to include a feasibility study.

XIII. 2014-15 Action Plan Accomplishments (INFORMATIONAL)

Policy and Outreach Division Chief Angela Avery directed the Board to the accomplishments provided in the Board handouts.

Avery highlighted accomplishments for the time period from July 2014 through December 2015. These accomplishments included the approval of the SNFCI Action Plan and WIP implementation. Avery said that all other actions in the revised Action Plan were implemented except the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery action, which was out of SNC jurisdiction. Avery described next steps: staff will continue looking for opportunities to share information about SNC contributions to the Region; implementing the new Action Plan for January 2016 – June 2017; and reporting new accomplishments in September 2017, with interim updates as needed.

Boardmember Kirkwood acknowledged the staff's work in achieving the actions identified and questioned whether such success suggested that the organization should "stretch" a little further. Branham indicated that the staff is always quite aggressive in developing the Action Plan.

XIV. Conservation Easements Discussion (INFORMATIONAL)

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided background and introduced the conservation easement discussion and panel members.

The panel members included: Loren Clark, Assistant Director of the Placer County Community Development Resource Agency; Bridget Fithian, Executive Director of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy; and Darrell Wood, Owner of Leavitt Lake Ranches. All panel members have a considerable amount of experience working with conservation easements representing a range of interests. Panel members made presentations addressing issues identified in the staff report prepared for the Board.

Boardmembers provided positive comments about the presentations and the general value of conservation easements.

Boardmember John Laird provided some background and offered advice to get local politicians involved in restoring the Williamson Act.

Public Speaker Paul Mason, Pacific Forest Trust, offered thanks to SNC for providing work and support for two land trust projects they worked on.

XV. Boardmembers' Comments

No Boardmember comments at this time.

XVI. Public Comments

No public comments at this time.

XVII. Adjournment

Board Chair BJ Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 4:34 p.m., announcing that the next meeting will be on June 1 and 2 in the North Subregion.