

Board Meeting MINUTES

September 8, 2016

Turtle Rock Park Community Center
17300 State Route 89
Markleeville, CA 96120



I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 9:18 a.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: BJ Kirwan, John Brissenden, Pam Giacomini, Bob Johnston, Bob Kirkwood, John Laird, Ron Hames, Jennifer Montgomery, Burt Bundy, John Exline, Terrence O'Brien, Este Stifel, and Christopher Wright

Absent: Allen Ishida, Eraina Ortega, and Woody Smeck

III. Approval of June 2, 2016, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

ACTION: Boardmember John Laird moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion to approve the June 2, 2016, meeting minutes. The minutes were approved with 10 aye votes, with Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery abstaining.

IV. Public Comments

David Griffith, Alpine Biomass Committee, addressed the Board. He took the opportunity to thank the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC), and in particular, two individuals, Danna Stroud and Jim Branham. Both were instrumental in assisting with the startup and support of the Alpine Biomass Committee.

V. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair BJ Kirwan welcomed Boardmember Secretary John Laird to the December meeting and invited him to say a few words to the Board. Laird started by acknowledging his regular alternate, Todd Ferrara, for the outstanding job he does representing the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) to the SNC and the SNC to CNRA. Laird took a few minutes to identify Agenda Items upon which he felt he would add perspective and additional detail as the meeting progressed. Among these, he called out biomass and the final greenhouse gas reduction fund legislation as important opportunities for the SNC to engage more deeply with members of the Legislature. Laird described the Governor's aversion to debt as one of the reasons he believed the Park Bond didn't get passed by the Legislature this year and encouraged the Board to talk through a new idea to try to shift funding natural resource and parks-related activities from bond indebtedness to more ongoing stable funding sources.

Board Chair Kirwan announced that she will be retiring from the Board following the December 2016 Board meeting. She thanked fellow Boardmembers and SNC staff and indicated she will have more to say in December.

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

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided a brief update on the Prop. 84 Grant Program sharing that the SNC has received approximately \$175,000 in returned grant funding for which staff would develop a spending plan and recommendation for Board consideration at the December meeting.

Boardmember Bob Kirkwood inquired as to whether the returned money might have fewer limitations than originally required, based on his experience on the Coastal Conservancy. Kingman agreed to look into the matter.

Kingman described the current status of the Proposition 1 Grant Program, summarizing applications received and funded to date. He noted that the next application deadline of September 1 has passed and that staff anticipates bringing recommendations for Board grant awards to the December 2016 and March 2017 meetings, which will conclude this round of Proposition 1 grants.

Mt. Lassen Area Manager Andy Fristensky provided some background on the SNC Proposition 1 Grant program stating that, in total, the SNC has received 49 applications, of which 17 have been awarded for a total of \$4.7 million.

Fristensky then gave an overview of three projects from the Mt. Lassen Area being recommended to the Board for approval: Webber Lake/Little Truckee River Headwaters Timber Management Plan (#852); Bucks Lake Project (#857); and Butte Forest Thin – Doe Mill Ridge Watershed Project (#882).

There were discussion and questions from Boardmembers that ranged from other funding contributions to additional details on project locations. Boardmember Burt Bundy inquired as to PG&E's involvement in the Bucks Lake Project and Fristensky confirmed PG&E's participation. Boardmember Jennifer Montgomery provided the Board additional information on the Webber Lake/Little Truckee River Headwaters Timber Management Plan stating that this project is really a watershed project and an example of a project that will benefit so many of our downstream neighbors. Montgomery also stated that, for full disclosure and transparency, she is a member of the Truckee Donner Land Trust.

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Randi Jorgensen then gave an overview of the two projects from the Mt. Whitney Area being recommended for funding: Pumpkin Hollow Restoration Project (#851) and Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project (#884).

The Board engaged in a detailed conversation concerning work being done on private and public lands surrounding the Pumpkin Hollow Restoration Project

area. Kirkwood reiterated his desire that the grant evaluation should consider, and accompanying material clearly identify, what is occurring on adjacent lands. He inquired as to the activities occurring adjacent to the Pumpkin Hollow project. Boardmember Christopher Wright provided an overview of the project location for clarification stating that this project is located in a rural, wildlands area and is not considered residential.

Kirkwood requested a separate motion to approve the Pumpkin Hollow Restoration Project.

Public Comment:

Katherine Evatt, Board President of the Foothill Conservancy and 37 year resident of Amador County, addressed the Board to provide support for the Pumpkin Hollow Project, emphasizing its importance in the Mokelumne Watershed which provides 90 percent of the water for the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Evatt urged the Board to approve this project.

Steve Wilensky, Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions (CHIPS) program, provided the Board with detailed background information for the Pumpkin Hollow project which addressed the specific concerns that Boardmembers expressed regarding activities on private lands surrounding the project area.

Boardmembers engaged in further conversation about private landowner participation, and the importance of including collaborative efforts in project documents provided by the SNC.

Karen Quidachay, Upper Mokelumne River Water Authority, provided thanks to the Board and acknowledged water agencies for stepping up and setting an example to other agencies in the Sierra.

Anthony Castanos, Save the Redwoods League, expressed his appreciation for consideration of Project 884 and other projects of this type in the Sierra.

Rachel Norton, Plumas County Fire Safe Council, addressed the Board in support of the Bucks Lake Project. Norton shared the support of this project by the Plumas County Fire Safe Council, the Plumas County Board of Supervisors, and multiple other groups. Norton also noted that the project area is the main hub for tourism in the area.

Ray Comblin, United States Forest Service, spoke to the Board on behalf of the Pumpkin Hollow project and expressed support for this project on behalf of USFS.

ACTION: Boardmember Bob Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion that the Board (a) authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Exemption for the Webber Lake Little Truckee River Headwaters Timber Management Plan

(SNC #852), the Bucks Lake Project (SNC #857), the Butte Forest Thin – Doe Mill Ridge Watershed Project (SNC #882), and the Beaver Creek Watershed Improvement Project (SNC #884); and (b) authorize a grant award to each of the above listed projects for the amounts recommended by staff, and further authorize the staff to enter into the necessary agreements for the recommended projects. The motion passed unanimously.

ACTION: Boardmember John Laird moved, and Boardmember Pam Giacomini seconded, a motion to approve findings in the Negative Declaration, and authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the Pumpkin Hollow Restoration Project (SNC #851), and authorize a grant award for the amount recommended by staff, and further authorize the staff to enter into the necessary agreement for the recommended project. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham started his report with an update about ongoing Department of General Service (DGS) Contracted Fiscal Services (CFS) issues and costs for services. He noted that the SNC and several other state conservancies are working with the Natural Resources Agency and the Department of Finance to find a permanent solution to the problem.

a. Administrative Update

Administrative Division Chief Amy Lussier updated the Board on the status of the SNC budgeting process and informed them that we closed out our 2015-16 fiscal year having spent 99.7% of our total allocation. Lussier reiterated some of Branham's points confirming that the SNC is receiving non-payment complaints from vendors and grantees and that CFS informed SNC that they will be raising their fees next fiscal year by another \$29,000 – an astounding 200% increase over two years in fees for their services. Lussier assured the Board that the Administrative Division would work with CNRA and other State Conservancies to find a solution as quickly as possible.

Boardmember John Laird added that DGS has experienced a change in leadership and has started working through some of the problems that have plagued the organization.

Lussier informed the Board that the SNC Procurement and Contracts Analyst, Donna Martinez, is retiring and SNC has advertised a position to fill behind her. The vacancy will be filled over the next two weeks. An update on the position will be provided at the December Board meeting.

b. Policy and Outreach Update

Branham engaged the Board in a discussion about biomass, highlighting the legislative success of Assembly Member Brian Dahle in getting legislative language passed that will create an opportunity for existing biomass energy facilities to operate for another five years. The legislation was awaiting signature by the Governor.

The Board engaged in conversation related to newly proposed legislation, the broader issues relating to biomass utilization tree mortality issues.

Branham provided an update on the development of the Forest Carbon Plan stating that the Plan is in the review stages and the team will have a final public review draft out prior to the December Board meeting.

Angela Avery, Policy and Outreach Division Chief, provided updates on several legislative bills that may have relevance for the SNC.

- AB2444 – Parks Bond – Expends \$3.12 billion for natural resources and parks throughout California. The bill did not make it out of the legislature, though the staff feels that is the last version is a good starting point for new Park Bond discussions in the future.
- AB2029 – Timber Harvest Plan Bill – Expands an exemption already in place, effectively dismissing the need for a timber harvest plan under certain scenarios, and increasing the diameter of trees eligible for harvest by two inches (to 26 inches) under the exemption. The bill passed through the legislature, though, at the time, it was unclear what the Governor's position would be.
- AB2480 (Bloom) – Source Watershed Bill – Identifies source watersheds as integral components of California's water infrastructure system. The bill passed and is awaiting action from the Governor.
- SB32 (Pavley) – Would require the State Air Resources Board to set a statewide limit of greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 40 percent below 1990 levels. Avery reminded the Board that Senator Pavley confirmed that the Governor would sign the bill at yesterday's reception.

Avery informed the Board that staff is developing a Policy Agenda, which will outline all of the issues that SNC is actively tracking or interested in and will be shared at the December meeting. She also reminded the Board that Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection week would be kicked off by the Great Sierra River Cleanup on Saturday, September 17. She announced that Ali Sambucetti, who was working as an SNC Student Assistant, has joined the Communications Team as an employee. Finally, she shared a communications video developed to provide a status update from the communications team.

c. NDRC HUD Grant Update

Avery provided the Board with an update for the National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant and said SNC currently does not have a signed agreement but has been working very hard to move this project forward. Avery stated that the team continues to refine metrics for the forest and biomass health and biomass utilization pillars. HUD is looking for something that is considered shorter term and is “defensible” to Congress. Avery continued by saying that there is a lot of interest in the grant itself but until there is a signed agreement no work can be completed.

Boardmember John Brissenden and Avery engaged in brief conversation discussing up front cost reimbursement and messaging associated with the NDRC HUD grant.

d. Tribal Forum Discussion Report

The SNC’s tribal liaison, Julie Griffith-Flatter, provided the Board with a summary of the tribal meeting held the previous day. Griffith-Flatter stated that Boardmembers Ron Hames, Terrence O’Brien, and SNC staff were joined by the Bridgeport Paiute and Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California including the Hung-A-Lel-Ti community representatives. Griffith-Flatter stated that items of discussion consisted of the state, the watershed, areas where forest restoration work is taking place, abandoned mine lands, and policy. The group also discussed the need to establish planning processes that include cultural practices that will work for all groups involved.

O’Brien found this forum to be a positive meeting and he found it to be more informative than the previous one. O’Brien feels that this is an excellent idea and will be looking forward to these moving forward.

Branham indicated that O’Brien will be the consistent Board representative and with each Subregion meeting the local Board representative will be asked to attend.

The Board engaged in brief conversation with Griffith-Flatter to review factors that contributed to increased participation at this meeting.

e. Tree Mortality Task Force Update

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Randi Jorgensen provided the Board with updated data shared at the Governor’s Tree Mortality Task Force workgroups, stating that an additional 28,551,517 trees have died from drought and bark beetle infestation since October 2015. This brings the statewide mortality level to over 66,000,000 since 2010. Jorgensen provided an overview and several maps which were used to illustrate the severity of the issue, the progression

of tree mortality, and the need to build resilience in those forests not yet overwhelmed by the drought and beetle.

Jorgensen provided a video with tree mortality and carbon storage issue highlights.

f. Miscellaneous Updates

Branham reported that he presented at a special meeting of the Tree Mortality Task Force in South Lake Tahoe the day before the Tahoe summit. He mentioned that Netflix is doing a six-part series on climate change and tree mortality and that the Tahoe meeting will be featured. Branham also informed the Board that the December Board in Placer County will honor Board Chair BJ Kirwan's service.

VIII. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul reported that the legislative session ended without the adoption of any major bills to reform the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). However, Senate Bill 122 (Jackson) (Chapter 476) was enacted, and provides for the Governor's Office of Planning and Research to establish and maintain an electronic, publicly available database of CEQA documents, and provides in some circumstances for the concurrent preparation of an administrative record of proceedings while a lead agency is preparing a CEQA document.

IX. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided the Board with an overall status update, advising the Board that SNC is not where they would like to be with the WIP program. Branham stated that the tree mortality issue in the Southern Sierra has become an overwhelming issue, and we are currently working to identify how the WIP needs to be adapted in light of that.

The WIP Program Coordinator, Mandy Vance, advised the Board that work has continued toward the formation of a WIP Steering Committee with members that will strengthen the working relationships and develop formal engagement between partners. Vance said SNC will hold the 2nd annual WIP Summit in March of 2017. Vance provided the Board with activities that have taken place since the Board last convened, such as the June Teakettle Tour. Vance also stated that the communications team, which is made up of SNC and USFS staff, is continuing to work to develop messaging and informational materials.

The Board engaged in brief conversation to discuss the status of WIP pilot projects including the Tahoe National Forest watershed assessment. Boardmember Bob Kirkwood inquired as to the status of additional USFS assessments and Branham indicated no other assessments had been completed and were long overdue.

The SNC Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analyst, Liz VanWagtendonk, provided the Board with an introduction to the SNC ARC GIS online account which contains critical mapping information related to WIP. VanWagtendonk demonstrated the newly developed GIS tool that will assist in the planning for WIP pilot watersheds, and a WIP external investment tracker that will address questions related to natural resource questions and project needs. The Board engaged in brief conversation with several follow-up questions. VanWagtendonk was able to show the Boardmembers an example of a project area with various layer options. VanWagtendonk will provide the Board the access link, user id, and password information to access the tools she demonstrated.

X. Boardmembers' Comments

Boardmembers engaged in conversation regarding the outstanding work of staff at the SNC and particularly those staff at Sorensen's who assisted in putting together this meeting.

Boardmembers also expressed special appreciation for the GIS presentation and the quality of the maps generated by the program.

XI. Public Comments

David Griffith, Alpine Biomass Committee, provided an update on the Alpine Biomass project. Mr. Griffith shared the concern that there are no investor-owned utilities in Alpine County and on the east slope. Even if they have biomass to sell, they have no one to buy it. He would like to see support from the Natural Resources Agency in addressing this concern and Secretary Laird invited follow-up communication.

XII. Adjournment

Board Chair BJ Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 12:48 p.m.