

# Board Meeting MINUTES

September 7, 2017  
Sierraville School  
305 Lincoln Street  
Sierraville, CA 96126



## I. Call to Order

Board Chair John Brissenden called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

## II. Oath of Office for New Boardmembers

Board Chair John Brissenden advised the Board that there would be no Oaths given at this time.

## III. Roll Call

**Present:** John Brissenden, Jacqueline Wong-Hernandez, Terry O'Brien, Bob Johnston, Jeff Griffiths, Doug Teeter, Jack Garamendi, Bernie Gyant, Ruben Leal, and Randy Fletcher

Boardmembers Todd Ferrara, Tom Wheeler, and Danny Wan arrived shortly after the meeting began.

**Absent:** Elizabeth Cavasso, Woody Smeck, and Bob Kirkwood

## IV. Approval of June 8, 2017, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

**ACTION:** Boardmember Randy Fletcher moved, and Boardmember Terry O'Brien seconded, a motion to approve the June 8, 2017, meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

**The June 8, 2017, meeting minutes have been published with minor, grammatical edits as submitted by Boardmember Bob Johnston via email on August 29, 2017.**

## V. Public Comments

Holly George, representing the Lost Sierra Collaborative, introduced the Board to the Lost Sierra Collaborative – an informal group working to bring together agriculture, arts, recreation, and tourism to facilitate improved community and economic vitality in Plumas and Sierra counties. Ms. George provided the Board with an overview of the Collaborative's partners and efforts, many of which have been facilitated by SNC.

## VI. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair John Brissenden deferred to Executive Officer Jim Branham for the Board Chair's Report.

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

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided the Board with an update on SNC's efforts to seek funding to implement its mission, and recognized the Administrative Division staff for their effort to receive and manage those funds.

**a. Administrative Update**

Administrative Services Division Chief Amy Lussier provided the Board with a brief update on budget and accounting. Lussier outlined the SNC's budget and explained the new funds coming in to the budget to support important programs. Lussier also reported that SNC had received the first check for the Natural Disaster Resilience Grant (NDRC).

Lussier noted that SNC received approval to take on budgeting in-house, and explained that this change will save SNC \$23,000 this year and \$30,000 the following year. It also provides the SNC with more control and more timely budget information to assist in fiscal decisions.

Board Chair John Brissenden recognized Lussier and Boardmember Jacqueline Wong-Hernandez for their work to support SNC's budget and accounting activities.

Boardmember Bob Johnston and Lussier discussed the NDRC grant and the process for reimbursement.

**b. Policy and Outreach Update**

Branham advised the Board that a deal has been reached in each of the legislative houses and the Governor concerning SB 5. The latest version has the SNC allocated a total of \$55 million, \$30 million to generally support its mission and \$25 million for forest health projects.

Branham said two other initiatives are still being developed: the first initiative is sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, and the second is sponsored by Jerry Meral. Both of these initiatives have SNC written in for significant funding and, with the likely passage of the Park Bond, it is unclear if either or both will proceed.

Branham announced to the Board that the Governor's 2017-18 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) proposal was released. He indicated that the most relevant information to SNC is the \$80 million backfill of the State Responsibility Area fees using GGRF monies and another \$200 million that would be allocated to CAL FIRE for the use of fire prevention. The SNC will be working with CAL FIRE should this funding come to fruition.

Policy and Outreach Manager Angela Avery advised the Board that the Sustainable Funding Committee has continued to meet to focus on current bonds and initiatives and discuss GGRF. This committee is comprised of Boardmembers Jack Garamendi and Bob Johnston.

Avery highlighted SB 623, the Water Quality: Safe and Affordable Drinking Water bill and noted that this bill would include a public goods charge. Avery said this bill landed in the suspense file and is not sure if it will be active in the future, however, its model is of interest to the sustainable funding committee.

Avery reported on the Governor's Executive Order designed to bolster California's response to the bark-beetle epidemic. This amendment to the original executive order confirms and extends the original proclamation signed in October 2016. She said that this order provides timber operators with the flexibility to carry out operations necessary to address the die off.

Avery acknowledged members of her staff, Brittany Covich, Theresa Burgess, Ali Sambucetti, and Belinda Gutierrez who did an amazing job of organizing the launch of the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI) at the Annual Tahoe Summit in August. Avery said that social media response was enormous.

Avery announced the upcoming Great Sierra River Cleanup (GSRC) and encouraged Boardmembers to participate. She said that the GSRC will kick off the Watershed Protection Week and SNC will publish videos captured by the communications team of various legislative members discussing the importance of watershed protection and the connection to the Sierra Nevada.

**c. Sierra Nevada 2017 Fire Season Update**

Branham provided an overview of the 2017 fire season in the Sierra. He highlighted the graphic provided to the Board that shows that the amount of wildfire on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada in the current decade now easily exceeded any decade in the past, dating back to 1910.

Branham pointed out that while the extent of wildfire this year has not matched Rim and King Fire size, the Region continues to see large, severe wildfire and all the negative consequences of such events. Branham provided an overview of the Detwiler Fire in Mariposa County, noting how up close and personal this fire was to the SNC where several staff had to evacuate from their homes, and the SNC Mariposa office was evacuated.

Boardmember Tom Wheeler discussed fire activity in his area and predicted that the damage caused by rains this winter could be devastating.

Boardmember Terry O'Brien asked about quantification of not only fighting the fire but the environmental consequences. He discussed the increasing economic consequences to local communities, and state and federal government. O'Brien proposed using the increased costs as a way to engage these organizations and increase investment. Branham responded to O'Brien and advised that some of these costs have been identified, however, the fire model used to identify these costs has turned out to be extremely conservative. Branham continued to say that using this model has shown a great benefit to taxpayers, and using the better models and information available today may be able to generate information that is more accurate.

Boardmembers engaged in brief conversation discussing the fire trends of the past and future using the graph provided in the staff report as a reference point. Boardmember Barnie Gyant provided the Board with some recent numbers of resources currently being utilized in the Region to contain fire activity. He emphasized the total dollars spent in 2016 by USFS and CAL FIRE for fire suppression reached nearly \$2 billion.

Boardmember Doug Teeter suggested a timber harvest comparison to the fire graph to see if there is a relationship to the fire increase to the decrease in harvesting. Wheeler stated that the numbers are out there to run the comparisons. Branham did say that measuring board feet is not the only indicator; the waste in the forests that is not harvestable needs to be considered as well.

**d. Tribal Forum Discussion Report**

SNC Tribal Liaison Julie Griffith-Flatter provided the Board with a summary of the Tribal Forum that took place prior to the Board tour, informing the Board that the meeting focused on forest health and watershed management, and included a discussion about the SNC grant application process and ways the tribes might more actively participate in the SNC program. Griffith-Flatter also notified the Board that the SNC is pursuing a revision of the Tribal Organization definition in SNC statute such that non-federally recognized tribes would be allowed to participate in the Prop. 1 grant program.

Griffith-Flatter went on to describe additional topics discussed at the meeting including the success of various organizations working in the Feather River. She highlighted the example of Ken Holbrook, a representative from the Maidu Summit Consortium, and Greenville Rancheria member Trina Cunningham working together to improve planning and decision-making processes. Griffith-Flatter told the Board that topics in SNC's Tribal meetings are similar to topics that Tribal Forums have covered in the past.

The Board engaged in brief discussion about the value of the SNC tribal meetings, confirming an interest in having the SNC continue to host them, and talked about whether the process was resulting in identification of long-term goals the tribes may be striving for. They also discussed tribal efforts to define an overall vision for themselves which might include economic development and forest management.

**e. Miscellaneous Updates**

Branham provided the Board with an update on the Tahoe Summit, and the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative (TCSI) noting that the Tahoe Summit was used to launch the TCSI by having Partners sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

Branham introduced the California Tahoe Conservancy Executive Director Patrick Wright, acknowledging Wright's participation and partnership with SNC on the TCSI. Wright provided a brief overview of the work the TCSI has been

doing and emphasized the successful grant application which resulted in the award of \$5 million dollars in Cap and Trade funds to work on TCSI projects. Wright also stated that along with successful grant applications comes a very tedious and intricate administrative process to accept and share funds, staff, and resources between the two conservancies.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara acknowledged both conservancies for finding a way to work together.

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided an update on the recent round of Prop. 1 Grant Pre-Applications received to date. Pre-Applications were due September 1, 2017, and there are \$8 million available in funds. Kingman shared that 34 applications were received, that every Subregion submitted applications but that not every county was represented. The 34 applications totaled \$10 million dollars in requests, with most of the applications for Category 1/site improvement projects. Kingman noted that final applications will be due November 1, 2017, and that this round was the first on-line grant process the SNC had undertaken. He then acknowledged the grants and IT teams for making this a successful launch.

**VIII. Consideration of The Nature Conservancy's Intent to sell, with Reserved Conservation Easement, Fee Title to Rudnick Ranch, Kern County, Previously Acquired by TNC under SNC Agreement #434, awarded March 2011. (ACTION)**

Grants Coordinator Shannon Ciotti provided a history of this project, summary of the Board report, and action before the Board. Ciotti stated that in 2011, SNC awarded \$500,000 in Proposition 84 grant funds toward the purchase of Rudnick Ranch. The SNC was one of several organizations who provided funds to TNC for purchase of this land including a \$5.2 million loan from the Packard Foundation. Ciotti stated that in February 2017, TNC had expressed interest to transfer fee title ownership, with a conservation easement in place to a conservation buyer.

Ciotti introduced Sharon Wasserman, Associate Director of Conservation Investments for the California Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Wasserman engaged in brief conversation with Boardmembers to address questions and concerns. Wasserman also provided history of the ownership and selling of the property as well as past transactions. Wasserman assured the Board that this property will be monitored annually as part of the conservation easement agreement requirements. Wasserman stated that these requirements are in alignment with the original intention of the land purchase. Wasserman stated that depending on the proposed sale transaction, some monies from the Grant will be returned to SNC.

Boardmembers engaged in brief conversation regarding the ramifications of the proposed action, including terms of the property sale in which a conservation easement would be in place once the sale takes place. Boardmember Doug Teeter asked Wasserman what would happen if the majority of the Board voted

against the sale of the property. He asked if SNC would retain a portion of the property or receive any proceeds from the buyer, or perhaps enter into a lease agreement of any sort. Wasserman responded by stating that TNC would continue to own the property and grant funds given to TNC would not be returned to SNC. Kingman also advised the Board that part of the initial grant agreement had stated that the SNC would not “unreasonably” withhold the right to sell the property and that the sale had been anticipated as part of the original grant agreement. Boardmembers engaged in further conversation regarding the terms of the sale of the property and the specific conservation easement. Ciotti advised the Board that the original agreement did not require a conservation easement unless the grantee sold the property. Ciotti further stated that the original agreement has been fulfilled noting that the conservation easement does not take full execution until the property has been sold.

Member of the public, Holly George, questioned the Board about what a conservation buyer is. Wasserman answered by stating that a conservation buyer obtains the property after the land has been obtained by TNC and conservation easements have been put in place. As such, the buyer is willing to purchase the property and keep the conservation values in place.

**ACTION: Boardmember Tom Wheeler moved, and Boardmember Bob Johnston seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to take all steps necessary to assess the proposed sale and proposed conservation easement and to execute the documents necessary to proceed with sale of the underlying fee title to the Property, subject to a reserved conservation easement, provided all parties determine there is reasonable assurance that the property will continue to be operated and maintained for the purposes for which the grant was awarded and public funds, interests, and conservation values are appropriately protected.**

**The motion passed with Boardmembers Tom Wheeler, Bob Johnston, Randy Fletcher, Jack Garamendi, Jeff Griffiths, Danny Wan, Terry O’Brien, Todd Ferrara, John Brissenden, Tom Wheeler, and Jacqueline Wong-Hernandez voting in favor, and Boardmember Doug Teeter voting against.**

**IX. Proposition 84 Grant Award Report for French Meadows Project #914 (INFORMATIONAL)**

Mt. Lassen Area Manager Andy Fristensky provided the Board with an overview of the French Meadows Project and highlighted the multiple agencies that are working together to increase the pace and scale of restoration in the project area. Fristensky then introduced guest speaker Ed Smith, a Forest Ecologist for the California Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, who provided a presentation on the French Meadows Project.

Smith explained to the Board that the Proposition 84 funds granted for the French Meadows Project by the SNC would be used to develop the draft and final environmental assessment, a public involvement strategy, and the Project work plan, timeline, and budget. Smith indicated that the project partners plan to begin implementation in 2019.

Boardmember Barnie Gyant discussed the value of the project and explained the reasoning behind why this particular project was proposed for funding. Boardmember Randy Fletcher requested additional information on a future tour of the project site.

**X. Modification of Delegated Authority to Expend Remaining Proposition 84 Funds (ACTION)**

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided the Board with a brief overview and background of the proposed action. Kingman advised the Board that it has been common for unused grant funds to be returned to SNC after completion of projects. Kingman stated approximately \$250,000 of Prop. 84 funds have recently been returned in addition to the \$175,000 previously estimated for the Board. Kingman added that after consideration and review of proposed TCSI pilot projects and others within the Region, staff believes it is appropriate to expand the authority for delegation of remaining Prop. 84 funds to the entire Sierra Nevada Region.

Boardmember Terry O'Brien asked for the expectation of the distribution of these funds and whether it would be spread over a larger amount of projects or would the money be focused on one or two larger projects. Kingman said the current expectation would be to distribute the money to multiple projects.

Kingman provided the Board a summary of a past authorization delegating authority to the Executive Officer to execute grants using remaining Proposition 84 funds. Boardmembers engaged in further conversation with Kingman and asked what would determine whether or not to conduct a competitive grant round for disbursement of remaining funds as opposed to delegation to a few projects. Kingman responded that staff would likely recommend another competitive grant round if substantially more funds than are expected were returned.

**ACTION: Boardmember Tom Wheeler moved, and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded, a motion to approve the modification to existing authority delegated to the Executive Officer to include the entire SNC jurisdiction for consideration of awarding grants of remaining Proposition 84 funds, consistent with all other remaining criteria. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XI. Strategic Assessment/Plan Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

Policy and Outreach Manager Angela Avery provided information to the Board on the process and plan for the Strategic Assessment/Plan development. She outlined the three-track process described in the Board staff report.

The audience for Track 1 would consist of approximately 100 individuals made up largely from the membership of the California Water Action Collaborative (CWAC). Additional participants would include people representing recreation, economic development, water, climate, and tribal groups.

Boardmember Terry O'Brien suggested that communication should be sought from those individuals who can have a positive impact as decision makers on the SNC and the Sierra Nevada. O'Brien continued by saying he would like to show the issues in the Region that need to be addressed, and that they have impacts far beyond the Sierra Nevada. Avery concurred and added that input from the CWAC members represents views from outside of SNC's Region from those who have become active water stewards.

Track 2 will include a substantial number of partners and participants from within the SNC Region, including workshops throughout the Region. Avery noted Track 3 will be focused on reviewing comments received in the first two tracks and collecting additional input from SNC staff and Boardmembers.

Boardmember Bob Johnston requested that the Board have the opportunity to comment on questions being asked during Track 1 and Track 2. Avery clarified the process and said that Boardmembers will have an opportunity to review and provide input on the policy questions that will be brought to stakeholders in Track 2. She also clarified that Boardmembers and staff would have an opportunity to provide their own, direct feedback in Track 3.

Boardmember Bernie Gyant suggested that the California Conservation Corps and AmeriCorps groups should be included in this process, and could possibly assist with outreach. Avery responded by noting that these partners will be included in the Track 2 process.

Executive Officer Jim Branham reminded the Board of the limitation of the staff, and that outreach will be ongoing to achieve quality input from a wide range of parties.

**XII. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

WIP Coordinator Mandy Vance provided the Board with an update on recent activities related to the WIP and the TCSI.

Vance advised the Board that the Watershed Information Network (WIN) is nearing launch readiness and updated the Board on the current status of the WIP assessments. The USFS WIP assessments are completed and USFS is currently working on maps and summarizing information that can be integrated into the WIN. Vance also stated that a few assessments have been received from the Bureau of Land Management but are currently still missing several and have not received any assessments from the National Park Service. Vance said that all of the assessment information received is being processed and incorporated into the WIN and the Board will be kept up-to-date on the progress.

Vance provided the Board with an update on the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that captures the intent and commitment of the group to the TCSI. Vance shared with the Board a complete list of the signatories of the MOU and said that there is interest from CAL FIRE in signing on to the MOU in the future. Vance said that she will continue to work on a specific action plan. Vance acknowledged the excellent work of the Communications Team for the work on the TCSI messaging and showed the newly developed and distributed TCSI video which was released and shown in conjunction with the launch of the TCSI at the Tahoe Summit.

Vance continued to provide the Board with recent activities underway as part of the TCSI. She said that the Communications group will be working with TCSI partners to develop messaging for policy makers that could result in increased pace and scale of forest health projects. Vance reported that the TCSI was successful in competing for a \$5 million GGRF grant from CAL FIRE. The funding from this grant will be used to implement forest health projects on three national forests, and also has a science and monitoring component to help identify what forest resilience in the Sierra Nevada truly means.

Boardmembers and staff engaged in brief conversation concerning the TCSI.

**XIII. Update on Efforts to Establish New Biomass/Wood Processing Infrastructure in the Sierra Nevada Region (INFORMATIONAL)**

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman and guest, Angie Lottes from the Watershed Center, provided the Board with information on the current status of wood processing infrastructure in the Region.

Kingman highlighted items from Board materials, Agenda Item XIII, and directed Boardmembers to Attachment A, a Wood Products Primary Processing & Biomass Energy Facilities Map.

Kingman's update shared recent feasibility study findings and highlighted potential policy changes such as easing the prohibition of exporting logs taken from federal lands. Kingman suggested solutions may include attracting entrepreneurs to manufacture a wide range of products made from biomass

including mass timber products, biochar, wood shavings, mulch, and blue-stained lumber. Kingman said that there is a growing worldwide interest to use mass timber, including use in constructing high-rise buildings.

Kingman announced the partnership of Sierra and Plumas counties, Sierra Business Council, The Sierra Institute for Community and Environment, Woodworks, and the American Wood Council, to host a Mass Timber Utilization Workshop on October 23 in Quincy, CA.

Kingman continued to provide several examples of biomass utilization opportunities and discussed the development of “campuses” that can support a range of businesses focused on utilizing every portion of harvested trees and is currently being explored in several counties within the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Region.

Lottes provided an overview of bioenergy facilities using the map included in the Board materials. She showed both operating and active plants, plants that have a developed infrastructure, new construction projects, idle plants, and inactive plants.

Lottes also highlighted and briefly explained BioRAM power purchase contracts for existing bioenergy facilities, and highlighted a number of proposed facilities with funds for construction that are ready to move forward.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation concerning the presentation.

Boardmember Jack Garamendi said that the primary issue is with funding to build infrastructure and suggested that the state should consider assistance to these partners to finance the infrastructure to get up and running. Kingman said that the Tree Mortality Task Force and others are trying to address the obstacles of developing and financing new infrastructure.

Boardmember Bob Johnston endorsed the use of Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) agreements and engaged in conversation with Boardmember Terry O'Brien concerning the growing trend in California for rural counties.

Public Comment – Amy Horne, member of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, representing Saving the West group, discussed the biomass concerns that this particular group has. Horne pointed out that looking at “economic-sheds” in addition to watersheds is helpful in bringing projects along and considering how to overcome barriers.

#### **XIV. Boardmembers' Comments**

Boardmember Johnston has requested that Branham send Kirkwood a card letting him know that he is missed and wish him well.

**XV. Public Comments**

**XVI. Adjournment**

The Board meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m.