



## Board Meeting Minutes September 2, 2021 – Virtual Meeting

### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m.

### 2. Roll Call

Present:

- Terry O'Brien
- Aaron Albaugh
- Heather Bernikoff
- John Brissenden
- Richard Gillihan
- Ron Hames
- Bob Johnston
- Nathan Magsig
- Jessica Morse
- Lori Parlin
- Susana Reyes
- Paul Roen
- Rosemarie Smallcombe
- Elizabeth Berger
- Christopher Heppe
- Jim Richardson

Absent:

No Boardmembers were absent.

### 3. Approval of June 3, 2021, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe noted, June 3, 2021, Meeting Minutes, Page 8 of the complete package, the last sentence in paragraph 3 should read, "Covich said that there are multiple upcoming opportunities to weigh in on state policy as it relates to natural and working lands."

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff requested that the Boardmember comments noted in June 3, 2021, Agenda Item 11, reflect her comments thanking the Board and staff for welcoming her and that she is looking forward to working with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) in the future.

### **Action**

Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe moved, and Boardmember Heather Bernikoff seconded, a motion to approve the June 3, 2021, Meeting Minutes, as amended.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 12, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

## **4. Approval of July 15, 2021, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)**

### **Action**

Boardmember Lori Parlin moved, and Boardmember Rosemarie Smallcombe seconded, a motion to approve the July 15, 2021, Meeting Minutes.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 12, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

## **5. Board Chair's Report**

Board Chair Terry O'Brien provided a thank you to all the first responders who are helping to fight the current fires. O'Brien continued by stating that California is facing a huge crisis which needs to be addressed at all levels, local, state, and federal.

## **6. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

### **Executive Officer Update**

Executive Officer Angela Avery presented a 2021 fire season update. The presentation highlighted projects and work done in the Sierra Nevada within fire boundaries. Avery said that two to three of the Early Action funding projects that were awarded in July have been impacted by fire and 11 previously funded SNC projects have also been affected.

Avery also provided an opportunity for SNC Boardmembers to discuss the impacts of the 2021 fire season within their counties. Boardmembers shared fire activity updates relevant to their county and engaged in conversation around fire suppression, project work within fire boundaries and the benefits that it provided, and next steps for the Region.

Boardmember Bob Johnston recommended that the Conservancy host a Forest Workshop following the fire season. Johnston also suggested that the SNC provide an economic analysis that looks at the cost of fire suppression and the effects of fire

on tourism. Johnston also felt that it was important for the SNC to get people out on educational tours in the fire-affected areas in the Region.

Avery told the Board that as soon as the conditions are safe for SNC staff to get out on the ground they will. Avery also told the Board that SNC will be gathering data and will report to the Board the impacts the fires this season had on the current grants.

Avery provided the Board with an update on Senate Bill (SB) 208 saying that the bill is moving through the legislative process. Avery said, if enacted, the bill will expand the SNC boundary to add portions of Siskiyou and Shasta counties, which were intended to be included in the original SNC legislation but were not. This expansion will also include a portion of Trinity County, which means that all the watersheds that feed the State and Central Valley water projects would be included in SNC's Region. This bill, once signed, would be effective January 1, 2022, and recommended changes would need to be presented to the Legislature as part of the SNC's Annual Report, by the end of 2022. Avery said the SNC has formed a "strike team" in response to this bill. This team will address the potential impacts of the boundary expansion to the SNC.

Avery also discussed the logistics and ability to have the December Board meeting in person. Avery informed the Board of the restrictions in place for state agencies and the many requirements SNC must abide by to keep staff and members of the public safe.

Avery shared a frequently asked questions state guidance document with the Board that provided clarity on the requirement for Boardmembers to provide vaccination verification or submit to COVID-19 testing. Avery said that as Boardmembers to a State board, they are required to show proof of vaccination, or a negative COVID-19 test prior to participating in person at SNC-related activities. Avery also shared the current issues with the Executive Order (EO) allowing government agencies to legally hold virtual Board meetings and said that the EO will expire at the end of September. Once expired, the existing law would govern, which would make it very difficult to hold virtual meetings and comply with Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act without having to publicly notice each of the Boardmembers' locations. Avery said that, given the logistical uncertainties and participation requirements, she is leaning towards holding the December meeting as a virtual meeting.

Deputy Executive Officer, Administration, Amy Lussier provided further clarification and told the Board that SNC would aid Boardmembers in finding central locations for purposes of public notification.

Avery also provided a National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) Grant project and lawsuit update. Avery stated that SNC is not a party in this lawsuit and

has been advised that a decision on this lawsuit will not be provided until October or November. Avery told the Board that they will be providing an update to the Board in December if things progress.

Avery continued to update the Board on the project work completed as part of the Forest and Watershed Health pillar of the NDRC project by saying that over 6,500 acres of fuel reduction work, with about 800 more acres under contract to be complete by September. To date, over 1900 acres have been replanted and an additional 2,600 new acres of forest will be replanted by 2022. Under the Biomass Utilization pillar of the contract, a Biomass Utilization Fund was created, and two projects have been tentatively approved. Overall, Avery said that this project work is ongoing and exceeding expectations.

Avery wrapped up her presentation by stating that SNC is constantly reviewing where it is and how to move forward to continue to make a difference across the Region. Avery encouraged staff and Boardmembers to bring forth “big ideas.”

Boardmember Jessica Morse said that this upcoming budget builds on past successes. Morse stated to expect to see \$1.5 billion this year to assist with projects that will make a huge impact in the Region.

**Public Comment:**

Lindsay Wood, Executive Director of the Plumas County Audubon Society – Wood addressed the Board to share a previous benefit and potentially negative outcomes from the inability to use prescribed fire on the ground. Wood said that they have a current project within the Dixie fire area and is asking the Board for consideration of an extension for this current project to allow work to continue in the area. Wood said that at this time they would like to redirect the funding to ensure that the maximum amount of funding is applied.

Wood also requested that a new grant fund be created that supports post-fire recovery and that it be designed in a way that does not create competition among partners. Wood also asked the Board to provide Executive Authority that would allow the SNC Executive Officer to approve funding for post-fire activities. Wood suggested that this would allow partners to be empowered to do the necessary work on the ground.

Both Board Chair O’Brien and Executive Officer Avery encouraged Wood to reach out to her local area representative, Kristy Hoffman. Avery followed up these comments by saying that SNC encourages partners to continue to come forward with this sort of input.

## **Administrative Update**

Deputy Executive Officer, Administration, Amy Lussier provided the Board with a brief Administration Division update.

Lussier announced the recent hire of Emily Blackmer who will be working in the Policy & Outreach Division.

Lussier provided the Board with updated COVID-19 Cal/OSHA guidelines and state recommendations for masking and other safety protocols related to the pandemic. Amy provided a quick overview on the vaccine verification and testing policy.

Lussier gave a budget update and reviewed the Board packet budget information. Lussier also told the Board that the state Personal Leave Program ended June 30.

## **Policy & Outreach Update**

Policy & Outreach Division Chief Brittany Covich shared a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted current legislation that the SNC is tracking. This legislation includes SB 208 (boundary expansion), Assembly Bill (AB) 9 (codify Regional Fire and Forest Conservation Program), AB 642 (prescribed fire and proposal for a prescribed fire training center), and SB 624 (establish the Environmental Equity and Outdoor Recreation Act).

Covich also updated the Board on state policy activities, noting two current areas of focus: Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, and the Pathways to 30x30 strategy. The SNC has been tracking and participating in state workshops and are contributing to the State's Adaptation Climate Strategy.

Boardmember Susana Reyes asked about the current federal infrastructure bill and asked if the SNC is anticipating funding from this bill. Boardmember Elizabeth Berger said that the United States Forest Service is currently looking at how these infrastructure funds would be disbursed and at a plan to work with SNC to get this money on the ground. Berger said she will send out funding information as it is received.

Covich shared an update on SNC Communications activities. Covich said that the development and utilization of the Sierra Spotlight has provided an excellent outlet for SNC to disburse information and has created a great resource for others to gather information. Covich shared a short SNC video that was produced to help promote the work of the partners and the projects that SNC has funded with the "Early Action" dollars. This video, and others like it, will be released when the fire season comes to an end or as projects hit various milestones.

### **Public Comment:**

Laurel Harkness, Board President, Siskiyou Outdoor Recreational Alliance (SORA) – Harkness addressed the Board regarding the SB 208 legislation that would expand the SNC boundary. Harkness provided background on the legislation saying that SORA developed this legislation with unanimous support from the Siskiyou Board of Supervisors and Senator Dahle. Harkness said that plans are already underway in Siskiyou and Trinity counties to begin community outreach and education workshops once the legislation has passed. Harkness also provided thanks to the SNC staff for the support and coordination on this boundary expansion.

Siskiyou County Supervisor Edward Valenzuela – Valenzuela addressed the Board and stated that he looks forward to working with SNC in the future.

## **7. Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grants Program Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)**

Field Operations Manager Luke Hunt provided a PowerPoint presentation with a brief program background followed by a review of the project summary and staff recommendation. Staff recommended one Forest and Watershed Health Directed Grant Award for a total of \$282,380.

### **a. Grant #1278**

#1278, the Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange project submitted by the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West in the amount of \$282,380 with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

### **Public Comment**

William Deverell from Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West – Deverell addressed the Board to acknowledge the hard work of the SNC staff. Deverell also shared his support for this project and stated that the process to develop this grant has been “delightful” which he attributed, in part, to the SNC staff.

Boardmember Bernikoff asked Deverell to elaborate on tribal engagement, specifically, the leadership structure and how they involved the tribal leaders to provide direction, insight, and leadership decisions on how to allocate dollars. Deverell responded that the group works very closely with the tribal partners in both the land choices and training locations.

### **Action**

Boardmember John Brissenden moved, and Boardmember Nathan Magsig seconded, a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Sierra-Sequoia Burn Cooperative Prescribed Fire Training Exchange project (#1278), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$282,380 to the Huntington-USC

Institute on California and the West, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a roll call vote the results were: Aye – 11, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

## **8. Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

Partnerships & Community Support Manager Alex Vance provided the Board with a Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) update. Vance provided a brief background of the RFFCP and a status update that highlighted just a few of the many collaborative efforts that are working under the RFFCP.

Highlights from this presentation included a chart of Early Impacts of Funding summary and lessons learned. Vance also acknowledged the Department of Conservation and California Natural Resources Agency for their investment and commitment to this program. Vance also called out the Partnerships & Community Program support team and all the partners and organizations that have worked so hard to make this program successful.

Boardmember Heather Bernikoff acknowledged the amazing work and many benefits of this capacity-building program. Bernikoff encouraged SNC to follow up with partners and ask grantees to provide the actual dollar amounts that have been awarded beyond SNC funding as a result of this work. Bernikoff also thanked SNC staff working on this program.

## **9. Science Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

Regional Scientist Nic Enstice updated the Board on the latest science related to changes in the Sierra Nevada Region, how these changes may be affecting key species, and how treatments may also affect them. Enstice stated that the best available science suggests recent trends are putting important species at risk noting that there are ways to approach proactive management that can mitigate impacts to species.

Enstice shared photos and drone footage along with informational graphics to demonstrate the impacts climate and fire are having on species in the Region. Enstice summarized his presentation by stating, "...it is clear that the status quo is negatively impacting native species in ways that have long-term consequences we cannot quickly undo. No one-size-fits-all approach for treatments will work either. We will need robust communication and coordination across the scientific community, land managers and planners, to help us understand the short- and long-term implications of how we manage, where we treat, the time of year we treat, and how much we treat. If we are successful with that, we will be successful in protecting our native species and our forests and watersheds."

## **10. Boardmembers' Comments**

Boardmember Nathan Magsig told the Board that several of his district's Local Conservation Corps have contacted his office and, as a result, a meeting to discuss funding opportunities with SNC has been scheduled.

Boardmember Susana Reyes emphasized the opportunities that exist with the Sierra Corps for cost-share funding and asked staff to explore these options when moving forward with capacity-building activities.

## **11. Public Comments**

Kimra McAfee, Executive Director of the Alpine Watershed Group – McAfee addressed the Board to express the concerns that she and her board have regarding securing the resources her county needs to recover from the Tamarack Fire. McAfee told the Board that the Alpine Watershed Group will need to expand their capacity to obtain these funds for recovery.

Board Chair Terry O'Brien encouraged McAfee to consider different project ideas and contact the SNC for application process.

## **12. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 12:27 p.m.

## **Additional Board Materials**

- Key Meetings and Presentations
- Letters of Support
- News Articles