



## Board Meeting Minutes

December 7 & 8, 2023 – Central Subregion – Marysville, CA

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### **Board Meeting**

Yuba County Government Center  
915 8<sup>th</sup> Street  
Marysville, CA 95901

#### **1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 9:01 a.m.

#### **2. Roll Call**

Present:

- Terry O'Brien
- John Brissenden
- Lisa Lien-Mager
- Dwight Ceresola (present after roll call)
- Jeff Griffiths (present after roll call)
- Cindy Gustafson
- Bob Johnston
- Brian Oneto
- Michele Perrault
- Victoria Rome
- Ed Valenzuela
- Alan Olson

Absent:

- Heather Bernikoff
- Phillip Peters
- Christopher Heppe

### **3. Approval of June 1, 2023, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)**

#### **Action**

Boardmember Ed Valenzuela moved and Boardmember Cindy Gustafson seconded a motion to approve the June 1, 2023, Meeting Minutes.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 9, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

### **4. Approval of September 7, 2023, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)**

#### **Action**

Boardmember John Brissenden moved and Boardmember Victoria Rome seconded a motion to approve the September 7, 2023, Meeting Minutes.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 8, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

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

Board Chair Terry O'Brien provided thanks to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Area Representative Chris Dallas and the other staff responsible for putting together the presentations provided the previous day. O'Brien stated that there is an ongoing urgency to address the needs of the forest.

Chair O'Brien acknowledged and provided thanks to Amador County Supervisor Brian Oneto, Plumas County Supervisor Dwight Ceresola, and Kern County Supervisor Phillip Peters for their service on the SNC Board.

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

#### **a. Executive Officer Update**

Executive Officer Angela Avery provided thanks to the departing Boardmembers and emphasized the importance of the County Supervisors who serve on the Board and represent the SNC Subregions. Avery also acknowledged Alan Olson, United States Forest Service (USFS) Boardmember (alternate), and congratulated him on his upcoming retirement.

Boardmember Jeff Griffiths arrived at 9:10 a.m.

Avery also provided a quick update addressing the state budget/revenue decline. Avery told the Board that despite the state budget decline the SNC is in a good position to continue serving the Region.

Avery told the Board that SNC does not expect any updates on the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) Concepts submitted to the USFS until the budget is signed at the federal level.

Avery reported to the Board that staff believe SB 841 (Dahle), a second boundary expansion bill, will not be reintroduced in the new session.

Boardmember Dwight Ceresola arrived at 9:16 a.m.

Avery continued to acknowledge the resiliency of SNC staff and provided the Board with added assurance that despite state budget issues she is confident that the SNC will continue to support the Region.

#### b. Administrative Update

Deputy Executive Officer, Administration Amy Lussier reviewed the Administrative Staff Report provided in the Board materials. Lussier stated that the SNC has been busy preparing the 2024-25 budget, which involves calculating the amount that the SNC will receive as an augmentation to pay for the General Salary Increases and Special Salary Adjustments that many staff received as part of bargaining agreements. Increases in the cost of state-paid benefits will also trigger an augmentation, for a combined total increase of \$406,000 this fiscal year. Lussier referred Boardmembers to the detailed budget provided in the Board meeting materials package. Lussier did note that the table does not reflect the salary increases and augmentations at this time. Lussier continued to say that the SNC is on target to spend its entire budget.

Lussier announced the official retirement of Lynda Young who served as a business services analyst for over 14 years at the SNC. Lussier announced the hiring of Trinity Stirling who will be working in the Field Operations Unit assisting with grant management and invoicing.

Lussier also provided a COVID-19 update stating employers are no longer required to maintain a stand-alone COVID-19 prevention plan. In October of 2023, the SNC released a revised Injury and Illness Prevention Plan that incorporates the non-emergency COVID-19 prevention regulations and completed staff training on the changes.

#### c. Policy & Outreach Update

Policy & Outreach Division Chief Brittany Covich provided a PowerPoint presentation with a summary of 2023 accomplishments by the Policy & Outreach Division including legislative outreach and relationship development, eight 2023 high-profile events and speaking engagements, and media milestones.

Covich's presentation also included a 2023 fire-season review. Covich said the Communications Team has focused on the benefits of prescribed fire stating the team was able to track over 63,000 acres of prescribed fire and the benefits to the landscape in 2023.

Covich provided a high-level review of the 2024 Policy Platform outlined in the Board Meeting materials provided to the Board. Covich reviewed the 2024 Regional Policy Themes, which included sustained investment, funding coordination for landscape-scale initiatives, beneficial fire, workforce housing, and wildfire insurance. Covich referenced the SNC Policy Platform for 2024, which was included in the Board package.

Covich also provided the Board with a look at some 2024 SNC activities that included additional Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) Investments, organization and design of a Regional Priority Plan for RFFCP, 2024-29 Strategic Plan support, and more.

Covich announced the March 7 & 8, 2024, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration to be held in conjunction with the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Summit.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around the presentation, including Boardmember feedback on the 2024 Policy Platform document and approaches to address issues associated with wildfire and wood-processing infrastructure.

Avery responded to the Board noting the California Wildfire & Forest Resilience Task Force (Task Force) is working on some of these difficult issues. Avery also told the Board staff would share information regarding a UC Davis Workshop and encouraged the Board to look to the Task Force Biomass strategy that will be released in 2024. Avery also suggested inviting a Task Force member to present to the Board once that strategy is released.

Boardmember Alan Olson summarized some of the significant work completed by the USFS. Olson stated the USFS was able to treat/prescribe controlled burns on over 330,000 acres in 2023. This treatment consisted of various approaches but utilized a pilot program to move logs around to facilities with capacity. Olson also said he sees an uptick in grants and investment in Region 5, specifically.

#### d. Field Operations & Grants

Field Operations & Grants (FOG) Division Chief Andy Fristensky reviewed information provided in the Board materials. This information included workload adjustment, Board membership, website updates, and other issues that are impacted by the boundary expansion and the realignment of the Subregion.

Fristensky addressed the recent increase in workload in FOG and provided the Board with a review of workload-management ideas that are being implemented. Fristensky said that due to the inequity of grants in each of the Subregions, the team has come up with shared workload ideas and hired new staff to help manage grants. Shared workload with a focus on grant management regardless of Region location allows for the Area Representatives to engage with collaboratives and focus on other beneficial activities that are not specifically related to grant management.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around capacity and lack of funds to distribute.

Boardmembers also discussed the equity of fund distribution. Fristensky responded to concerns raised by Boardmembers and said that while it is unfortunate many applicants who had competitive scores could not be funded due to a lack of funding, the SNC continues to provide those applicants with additional resources and possible other funding sources. Both Fristensky and Avery also highlighted the RFFCP administered by the SNC as another option to assist grantees that did not receive funds.

## **7. Election of Board Chair and Vice-Chair (ACTION)**

Boardmember Brian Oneto nominated Terry O'Brien to serve as the Board Chair for the 2024 calendar year.

### **Action**

Boardmember Brian Oneto moved and Boardmember Bob Johnston seconded a motion to approve the election of Terry O'Brien as the Board Chair.

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

### **Action**

Boardmember Jeff Griffiths moved and Boardmember Cindy Gustafson seconded a motion to approve the election of Ed Valenzuela as the Board Vice-Chair.

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

## **8. 2024 Board Meeting Schedule (ACTION)**

Executive Officer Angela Avery presented the Board with the proposed Board Meeting schedule for 2024.

## **Action**

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson moved and Boardmember Ed Valenzuela seconded a motion to approve the 2024 Board Meeting schedule as follows:

- March 7 & 8, 2024, Sacramento
- June 5 & 6, 2024, Southeast Subregion – Inyo County
- September 4 & 5, 2024, Northwest Subregion - Siskiyou County
- December 12 & 13, 2024, North Central Subregion – Placer County

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

### **9. North Yuba Forest Partnership Presentation (INFORMATIONAL)**

Members of the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) presented the landscape-scale approach of achieving forest resilience and community protection in the North Yuba River watershed. Panel Members included: JoAnna Lessard, Yuba Water Agency; Zach Knight, Blue Forest Conservation Group; and Eli Ilano, USFS.

Lessard presented the Board with an overview of the Yuba Water Agency's Watershed Resilience Program, which was created in 2018 to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, protect local communities, and safeguard water supply. Lessard described the geographic area of the Yuba River watershed and highlighted the risks posed to a watershed that is not resilient. Lessard also said that to further the Yuba Water's missions and programs (including the Watershed Resilience Program), the Yuba Water Community Impact Grant Program was created in 2020. This program has invested over \$10.8 million in Watershed Resilience projects, which have leveraged \$172 million in external funding.

Lessard's presentation included maps outlining project areas and listed the many partners making up the North Yuba Forest Partnership, including Yuba Water Agency, the National Forest Foundation, USFS, Sierra County, Blue Forest Conservation, Camptonville Community Partnership (CCP), Nevada City Rancheria, South Yuba River Citizens League, and The Nature Conservancy.

Lessard co-outlined additional Yuba River watershed resilience efforts that are not part of the Yuba Watershed Resilience Program. Efforts include working with the CCP to provide grants for biomass-utilization infrastructure planning and support assistance. Lessard said funding has also been provided to the Yuba Watershed Protection and Firesafe Council executive director position as part of a capacity-building grant.

Lessard highlighted several Yuba County Forest Health grants, which included the CAL FIRE-funded 2019 Foothills Healthy Forest Grant, the Yuba Foothills Healthy

Forest Grant, and the 2023 New Bullards Bar (NBB) Healthy Forest Grant. Lessard also said the California Vegetation Treatment Program (Cal VTP) Project Specific Analysis funding was utilized to cover all treatment areas designated in the NBB Forest Health Grant. Additional efforts include Yuba Community College Watershed Resilience Program and the Sierra Fund-Meadow Restoration and Mine Remediation Impact Bonds.

Lessard summarized the Watershed Resilience Program successes to date, which included collaborating with 19 partners, developing and funding 14 projects in Yuba County and the upper watershed, and treating more than 6,100 acres.

Zach Knight from Blue Forest Conservation spoke to the Board about forest-resilience financing. In his presentation, he talked about Blue Forest Finance, Inc., and gave an overview of timeline and key partners who played a role in the Blue Forest Foundation work with the Forest Resilience Bond (FRB) in the North Yuba Forest Partnership.

Knight's presentation defined the FRB as "a first-of-its-kind conservation finance tool that brings together stakeholders that benefit from forest restoration to share the cost of reimbursing investors as projects' environmental and social benefits are realized."

Knight included highlights of the Yuba I Pilot project, stating this pilot project is leading to multiple larger-scale projects.

Knight emphasized the added value of these kinds of pilot projects stating they are larger and faster projects, which provide capacity-building opportunities.

Knight also provided an overview of the California Wildfire Innovation Fund. Highlights include a unique climate-solutions strategy that blends private credit and equity strategies in a single fund. Knight noted that having CSAA Insurance Group as a \$25 million anchor investor is supporting targeted investment, the establishment of a forest restoration project pipeline, hiring in-house science experts, and creating an extensive industry network.

Eli Ilano, Tahoe National Forest Supervisor, provided background information on the North Yuba Pilot Project. Ilano outlined the phases of partnership formation and spoke about the innovation that resulted from bringing together a diverse group of people. Ilano noted the innovative ideas included use of a historic range of variability study, the Tahoe-Central Sierra Resilience Framework, and Lidar, as well as completion of acoustic surveys. The data used and collected was translated by Vibrant Planet and Pyrologix to complete an analysis of higher risk areas.

Ilano also spoke about respecting the diverse opinions and ideas of other groups.

Panel presenters stressed the importance of the role the SNC Governing Board and staff played in encouraging the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) and creating a real opportunity to test the use of the FRB. The SNC's efforts in telling the story of need and rallying potential partners at all local, state, and federal levels, were critical and deeply appreciated.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation with panel members discussing various ways to replicate the innovation and successes of the NYFP program.

#### **10. Draft 2024-2029 Strategic Plan (INFORMATIONAL)**

Chief Deputy Executive Officer Julie Alvis presented the status of the Draft 2024-29 Strategic Plan, providing the Board with the opportunity to discuss the working draft and share comments and guidance to staff on its development.

Alvis reviewed the current Strategic Plan and the current five Regional goals. Alvis outlined and noted where staff are in the planning process for development of the 2024-29 Strategic Plan. Alvis also provided Boardmembers with an overview of the 2024-29 Strategic Plan discussion draft included in the Board materials.

Alvis provided the Board with discussion topics and asked for Board guidance. Boardmembers engaged in conversation and provided feedback on the Strategic Plan discussion draft.

Topics and themes highlighted in Board discussion included: the plan's use as a policy platform for SNC activities in the Region; how the SNC might address Regional needs, such as home hardening and community protection, that may fall outside SNC authorities; that strategic land conservation should be broadened, kept "strategic" and focused on cost effectiveness considering active management versus only conservation; increasing environmental regulations that have affected the management of healthy forests and local economies; that the plan should be kept high-level and be flexible to support a variety of actions; that the plan be intentional about adaptive management; ways the SNC could work with community colleges or high schools to address workforce issues; advising against a plan that involves SNC in political issues that make progress difficult, such as affordable housing, but also how the SNC can offer support by working with sister agencies or other steps; clarity as to what's meant by SNC equitably serving its Region; recognizing increased visitation to Sierra places as a result of climate change; conveying a sense of urgency and need to underscore the importance of collaborative efforts between agencies to reach landscape-scale work getting done.



## **11. Boardmembers' Comments**

Boardmember Griffiths reported on the Vibrant Recreation & Tourism initiatives funded by the SNC, in Inyo County, that are making a positive difference in the eastern Sierra.

Boardmember Oneto provided thanks to the Board and staff stating he has enjoyed his service on the Board.

Chair O'Brien provided thanks again to the three departing county supervisors.

## **12. Public Comments**

Annie Cunial, Division Director, STEM Programs, Educational Services – San Joaquin County Office of Education provided a written statement, which was read aloud to the Board.

## **13. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:29 p.m.

## **Additional Board Materials**

- Key Meetings and Presentations
- Letters of Support
- [Sierra Spotlight](#)