



Board Meeting Minutes

June 6, 2024 – Southeast Subregion – Bishop, CA

Board Meeting

Cerro Coso Community College – Bishop Campus – 4090 W. Line Street, Bishop, CA 93514

1. Call to Order

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

2. Oath of Office for New Boardmembers

No new Boardmembers were present, and no oaths were administered.

3. Roll Call

Present:

- Ed Valenzuela
- Elizabeth Cavasso
- Lisa Lien-Mager
- Jack Garamendi
- Cindy Gustafson
- Jeff Griffiths
- Chris Heppe
- Bob Johnston
- Michele Perrault
- Victoria Rome
- Dennis Townsend
- Elizabeth Berger
- Cicely Muldoon

Absent:

- John Brissenden

4. Approval of March 7, 2024, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

Boardmember Victoria Rome suggested a correction in the Policy & Outreach Update, amending AB 867 to SB 867.

Boardmember Jack Garamendi moved and Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso seconded a motion to approve the March 7, 2024, Meeting Minutes.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye –10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

5. Board Chair's Report (ACTION)

Board Vice Chair Ed Valenzuela read SNC Resolution Number 06-24-02 into the record.

Boardmember Ed Valenzuela moved and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded a motion to adopt 06-24-02: Honoring former Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Board Chair Terry O'Brien for his years of dedicated service and contributions to the SNC.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

6. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

a. Executive Officer Update

Executive Officer, Angela Avery, began by thanking four presenters and attendees for joining the previous day's Board Tour and for their patience with the hot weather during the event. Avery emphasized the uniqueness of the eastern Sierra and the need for critical work in the Subregion. Avery followed by thanking Supervisor Jeff Griffiths for helping to organize June's Governing Board dinner and the Board for approving Terry O'Brien's Resolution 06-24-02. Avery reviewed that Terry O'Brien and Heather Bernikoff have departed from the Governing Board, opening two governmental appointee positions. She announced that Nathan Voegeli was recently appointed by the governor to fill one of those two vacancies. Avery gave a background of Voegeli's experience with the state of California as Deputy Legal Affairs Secretary, Senior Advisor for tribal negotiations, and his multiple roles within the Department of Fish & Wildlife. Avery will schedule a time to meet, welcome, and introduce Voegeli to the SNC Governing Board. Avery stated that there is one remaining vacancy on the Governing Board.

Avery informed the Board of the departure of Julie Alvis, who returned to the California Natural Resources Agency as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration. Avery complimented Alvis's critical work to the SNC and acknowledged the valuable mentorship she provided to the Executive Office. Next, Avery reviewed the organizational impact the departure has on the SNC, including Amy Lussier taking on the role of Acting Chief Deputy Executive Officer and Division Chief's temporary reporting reassignments.

Avery announced that on March 29, 2024, a hybrid workforce memo was released to SNC staff that was based on an April 10, 2024, governor's office memo that clarified hybrid workforce expectations. She then updated the Board on the current implementation of the mandatory two days in office, hybrid work schedule, listing SNC staff return-to-office dates.

Avery informed the Board of the release of the May Revise, describing the impact of the budget on grant proposals. On April 29, 2024, the Department of Finance released Budget Letter 24-07, which placed a freeze on one-time appropriations of General Fund dollars for projects over \$1 million dollars (among other criteria), affecting some of SNC's grant projects. The SNC responded by adding conditional approval language to the affected grant projects, allowing affected grants to move forward upon passage of the 2024 Budget Act. One final project is still to be brought to the Board in September 2024 for consideration, which will then fully award SNC's General Fund local assistance funding.

Avery updated the Board on three bonds also being considered by the Senate and watched by SNC, until June 27, 2024, the deadline for getting initiatives onto the November ballot. The SNC will continue to explore investment opportunities and partnerships to continue to serve the Region. Avery stressed that having funding to support important project work is key, but the SNC is thinking creatively to continue to support the Region.

Avery acknowledged the hard work of the SNC and its ability to award \$129,249,352 in General Fund to 114 projects since 2020, not including the projects currently before the Board. Avery celebrated the work and impact that the SNC has made in the Region.

Avery ended by introducing Budget Analyst Amy Nelson to give the Administrative Update.

b. Administrative Update

Budget Analyst Amy Nelson presented on behalf of Deputy Executive Officer, Administration Amy Lussier. Nelson presented the Administrative Staff Report

provided in the Board materials and noted key events related to the preparation and upcoming release of the 2024-25 budget. Nelson summarized important California budget release dates and key events, describing their purpose and impact on the SNC. She explained that the grants before the Board were the only grants impacted by the language of Budget Letter 24-07. Nelson updated the Board on the expected release of the state budget, May Revise solution totals, and that the SNC is not currently included in reductions in the May Revise. She elaborated that the 2024-25 budget is what the SNC expected, including SNC's base fund (Environmental License Plate Fund) and reimbursement authority.

Nelson concluded that the SNC will report any further budget solutions to the Governing Board.

Nelson stated that the Budget Unit, Accounting Unit, and Business Services were working on fiscal year-end and that the new fiscal year begins July 1, 2024.

Nelson invited Department of Finance Boardmember Michele Perrault to provide additional budget information.

Boardmember Perrault added that the SNC was not the only Board impacted by the freezing of grant funds. Perrault said that ultimately boards and commissions will be able to move forward with their work and consider and conditionally approve grants that might be contained within the freeze letter. Perrault continued to explain that if the budget is passed and the dollars are still included in the fund, conditional approvals will allow for the work to be moved forward without coming back to boards. The Department of Finance continues to meet and believes a three-party deal, which includes the Administration, will move forward. She did not anticipate the budget being passed late. Perrault stated that the Administration is seeking space where solutions are least impactful on people and projects and that, with the Internal Revenue Service having no pushback on filing deadlines, a better forecasting picture is expected for the next budget year. She announced that while there is an anticipated budget shortfall in the upcoming budget years, the state is working to be as efficient as possible to address it. Perrault complimented the lawmakers' ability to tap into the reserves and California for having healthy reserves.

c. Policy & Outreach Update

Emily Blackmer, Policy Analyst, provided supplemental updates to the Policy & Outreach Update staff report provided in the Board materials. Blackmer started with a State Legislative update, summarizing relevant bills being tracked by the SNC and elaborating on their impact, including AB 2465, AB 3023, climate bond bills AB 1567 and SB 867, AB 1284, SB 1101 and unspecified bills related to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and state administrative processes.

Blackmer described the efforts of the SNC Communications Team in developing a media wall in the CNRA building, the SNC Impact Report's usage by Sierra Day, and Secretary Wade Crowfoot's compliment of the report.

Blackmer updated the Board on the Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program (RFFCP) agreements, funds, and Tribal Empowerment and Mentorship Program launch.

Blackmer updated the Board on the SNC Science Unit work, including a co-hosted forest and watershed field tour for the Beijing Academy of Forestry, participation in a post-fire restoration work group by the SNC Regional Scientist, Sarah Campe, and a pilot program to be developed and modeled after the concepts of the work group.

Boardmember Lisa Lien-Mager commented on the media wall, stating she sees it daily in the CNRA building and it's an example of good story telling.

7. *Wildfire Recovery and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program Award Recommendations (ACTION)*

Field Operations & Grants Division Chief, Andy Fristensky, provided the Board with a PowerPoint presentation that included a brief background on grant funding and grant criteria guidelines established in December 2021, followed by a review of the project summaries and staff recommendations for each grant provided in the Board materials. Staff recommended four Wildfire Recovery and Forest Resilience Directed Grant Program projects totaling \$6,053,198.

a. #1637

Little Deer Creek Landscape Resilience Project in Nevada County in the amount of \$823,500 to the Yuba Watershed Institute with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Boardmember Victoria Rome asked for clarification on the implementation schedule of the approved staff recommendations. Fristensky elaborated on the schedule.

Boardmember Robert Johnson inquired if there were letters of support or opposition submitted. Fristensky responded that only letters of support had been received and no letters of opposition.

Boardmember Chris Heppe shared his appreciation for partners pulling the project together, giving the Yuba Watershed Institute special recognition. He thanked the Board for considering the project on behalf of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and explained that due to limited resources, the BLM is unable to pay for the project. He stated this project does tie to a programmatic National Environmental

Protection Act (NEPA) document and is an efficient way to get the planning and compliance completed.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Action

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson moved and Boardmember Dennis Townsend seconded a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Little Deer Creek Landscape Resilience Project (1637), authorize a grant award in the amount of \$823,500 to the Yuba Watershed Institute, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

b. #1663

Northwest End Royal Gorge Fuels Reduction project in Placer County in the amount of \$1,280,200 to the Truckee Donner Land Trust and authorize the filing of a CEQA Notice of Determination as a responsible agency.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson commented on the Truckee Donner Land Trust doing an amazing job of managing the property. Gustafson emphasized the critical infrastructure close to the project and supported the need to protect this infrastructure with the proposed project work.

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson asked if there was an attempt made to reduce the requested funds to under a million. Angela Avery responded that a reduction was discussed, but the SNC wanted to ensure the project was implemented at a scale that maintained maximum impact.

1. CEQA Determination

Boardmember Jack Garamendi moved and Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso seconded a motion to certify that the Governing Board independently reviewed and considered the information in the Timber Harvesting Plan No. 2-23-00120-PLA, adopted by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and all mitigation measures required within, and if the Board concurs with the Timber Harvesting Plan No. 2-23-00120-PLA, find that the Timber Harvesting Plan complies

with the conditions contained within CEQA Guidelines, section 15253, subd. (b) allowing the SNC to rely on the Timber Harvesting Plan for its determination as a responsible agency under CEQA.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

2. Action- Project Determination

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson moved and Boardmember Ed Valenzuela seconded a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a responsible agency for the Northwest End Royal Gorge Fuels Reduction project (1663), conditionally approve, based on funding availability as of the 2024 Budget Act, a grant award in the amount of \$1,280,200 to the Truckee Donner Land Trust, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

c. #1689

Hat Creek Lumber project in Shasta County in the amount of \$1,500,000 to the Pit Resource Conservation District and authorize the filing of a CEQA Notice of Determination as a responsible agency.

Public Comment

Todd Sloat from Pit Resource Conservation District & Hat Creek Lumber: Sloat offered to answer any questions from the Governing Board and thanked SNC staff for its reliable communication since March 2024. Sloat updated the Board on pieces of the project already in motion and reiterated the key points of the grant proposal, the need for the unique work being provided, and the possibility of expansion into other areas of California.

Boardmember Johnston commented on his excitement for the project, commending the integration of business interests. Johnston asked Sloat to elaborate on how this project is considered thinning rather than logging.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation surrounding selective removal, forest thinning, and logging with Sloat.

1. CEQA Determination

Boardmember Dennis Townsend moved and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded a motion to certify that the Governing Board independently reviewed and considered the information in the Eastside Aggregates Project Environmental Impact Report

(2000), with Addendum 1 (2016) and Addendum 2 (2023), and accompanying Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, and SNC's CEQA Findings; and the Board concurs with the Eastside Aggregates Project Environmental Impact Report and Addenda, and adopt the SNC's CEQA Findings.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

2. Action- Project Determination

Boardmember Dennis Townsend moved and Boardmember Cavasso seconded a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a responsible agency for the Hat Creek Lumber project (1689), conditionally approve, based on funding availability as of the 2024 Budget Act, a grant award in the amount of \$1,500,000 to the Pit Resource Conservation District, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye –10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

d. #1692

Alpine Meadows and Olympic Valley Fire Protection Project in Placer County in the amount of \$2,449,498 to the National Forest Foundation with a CEQA Notice of Exemption.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Boardmembers engaged in a discussion surrounding the details of the project's boundaries and location, impact, and staff considerations made.

Action

Boardmember Cindy Gustafson moved and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Alpine Meadows and Olympic Valley Fire Protection Project (1692), conditionally approve, based on funding availability as of the 2024 Budget Act, a grant award in the amount of \$2,449,498 to the National Forest Foundation, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

8. Grant 1289 Graham Landscape Planning Project Amendment (ACTION)

Field Operations & Grants Division Chief, Andy Fristensky, provided the Board with a PowerPoint presentation that included a brief background, followed by a review of the project summary and staff recommendations for the grant amendment provided in the Board materials.

Public Comment

Leana Weissberg, California Director for American Forests, thanked the Board for its time and offered to answer any questions regarding the project. Weissberg gave context of the project's development and how the adjusted scope would provide further value to the landscape. Weissberg voiced her commitment to seeing the project completed and shared her opinion that it would be a large asset to the ranger district. Weissberg concluded by thanking the Governing Board for its consideration and the SNC staff for its recommendation.

Action

Boardmember Dennis Townsend moved and Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso seconded a motion to authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Exemption for the Graham Landscape Planning Project (1289), approve the revised project scope per the Exhibit A, and authorize staff to amend the grant agreement with American Forests.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

9. 2024-2029 Strategic Plan (ACTION)

- Attachment A: Draft 2024-2029 Strategic Plan

Policy & Outreach Division Chief, Brittany Covich, thanked the core staff who worked on the development of the Strategic Plan: Julie Alvis, Andy Fristensky, and Amy Nelson. Covich then thanked the Strategic Plan Board Committee, consisting of prior Boardmember Heather Bernikoff and current Boardmember John Brissenden, for its feedback during the plan's development, and shared appreciation for the work of the final document writing and design team, including staff members Emily Blackmer, Sarah Campe, Isaac Silverman and Ali Sambucetti. Covich presented the plan development process, public comment process, estimated timeline of adoption, and work completed on the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. Covich presented the final draft of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan for Board consideration and approval.

Boardmembers complimented SNC staff on the hard work and flexible Strategic Plan, suggesting it as a good model for other agencies. They voiced appreciation for

the plan's development process, sharing approval of the consistent staff updates, number of opportunities to ask questions, implementation of Boardmember feedback, timely completion, and carefully considered language and definitions. Boardmembers encouraged staff to continue the momentum and to keep capacity levels and education moving forward.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Action

Boardmember Jeff Griffiths moved and Boardmember Ed Valenzuela seconded a motion to approve the draft 2024-2029 Strategic Plan and direct staff to take the necessary actions for its successful implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

10. Action Plan Update (ACTION)

- Attachment A: Draft 2024-2025 Action Plan

Policy & Outreach Division Chief, Brittany Covich, reported on work and accomplishments completed under the 2023-2024 Action Plan and presented the key actions and draft of the 2024-2025 Action Plan for Board consideration and approval.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Action

Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso moved and Boardmember Jack Garamendi seconded a motion to approve the draft 2024-25 Action Plan and direct staff to take the necessary actions for its successful implementation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion passed.

11. Boardmembers' Comments

Boardmember Ed Valenzuela acknowledged former Mono County Supervisor Stacy Corless and thanked Corless for attending the meeting.

12. Public Comments

There was no public comment.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:44 a.m.

Additional Board Materials

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