



Board Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2024 – Northwest Subregion – Mount Shasta, CA

Board Meeting

*Mount Shasta City Park – Lower Lodge
1315 Nixon Road
Mount Shasta, CA 96067*

1. Call to Order

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

2. Oath of Office for New Boardmembers

Board Vice Chair Ed Valenzuela welcomed and introduced three new Boardmembers: Governor Appointees Nathan Voegeli and Bernie Gyant, and Department of Finance alternate Stephen Benson. Boardmember John Brissenden, Governor Appointee, administered the Oath of Office.

3. Roll Call

Present:

- Bernie Gyant
- Stephen Benson
- John Brissenden
- Elizabeth Cavasso
- Jack Garamendi
- Jeff Griffiths
- Bob Johnston
- Lisa Lien-Mager
- Victoria Rome
- Nathan Voegeli
- Ed Valenzuela
- Elizabeth Berger
- Chris Heppe

Absent:

- Cindy Gustafson
- Dennis Townsend

4. Approval of June 6, 2024, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

Action

Boardmember Jeff Griffiths moved and Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso seconded a motion to approve the June 6, 2024 Meeting Minutes.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye –10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

5. Board Chair's Report

No Chair Report provided.

6. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

a. Executive Officer Update

Executive Officer Angela Avery began by welcoming the newest Boardmembers and recognizing Tuli Potts, Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) Area Representative, for the great tour content of the previous day. Avery also thanked the whole SNC team for its hard work pulling the event together.

Avery updated the Board on recent legislative action, beginning with a reminder that during the budget presentation at the March 2024 meeting, the SNC stated that the remaining Prop 68 funding of approximately \$10 million had not been disbursed yet to prioritize spending General Fund appropriations. Avery continued by stating there is now a "budget bill junior" (AB 157) that includes a \$5 million Prop 68 appropriation to SNC specifically for a grant to the 40 Acre Conservation League. Avery said the notification was received by SNC from the Department of Finance and came as a surprise. The SNC is expecting the bill to be signed by the governor and once signed, it will work with the 40 Acre Conservation League to determine the project elements. A project will be brought forward to the Board for approval, but it is not yet known when.

Avery then provided some background on the 40 Acre Conservation League and noted that the SNC had previously awarded funding of \$750,000 to the organization to help with fee title to purchase property. Avery also said a separate request for grant funding submitted by the 40 Acre Conservation League was declined because the project was not fully ready to proceed at that time. Avery expressed the importance of the work the 40 Acre Conservation League does and the opportunities it will create.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around the project, including an inquiry on touring the location at the December meeting. Avery noted the request.

Avery also noted staff is watching to see what happens with Proposition 4, which has funding identified for the SNC. Avery also said staff is watching other pots of monies within the bill that could be available to SNC and giving thought to the ways SNC might partner with California Natural Resources (CNRA) and other agencies to utilize those dollars in the Region.

Avery provided the Board with an update on amendments to existing grant agreements that have been processed under the Executive Officer's (EO) Delegated Authority. Avery summarized by saying 11 existing grant agreement amendments have been approved. These amendments do not include Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFCP) grants or reimbursement grants and none had additional dollar amounts added to them. Avery also offered to provide the Board with a detailed list of these amendments, if requested. A list of amendments that are approved between Board meetings will be added to Board materials for future Board meetings.

b. Administrative Update

Acting Chief Deputy Executive Officer Amy Lussier presented the Administrative Staff Report provided in the Board materials. Lussier announced the recent departure of Emily Blackmer from the Policy & Outreach Unit and Tori Weber from the Board Unit. Lussier also said that Amy Nelson has now taken on the role of Board Services Manager and Tristyn Armstrong has reduced her hours.

Lussier also updated the Board on the Auburn headquarters construction project. Lussier reminded the Board that construction is being completed with funds from previous fiscal years that are held in an Architectural Revolving Fund (ARF) and cannot be used for anything else.

Lussier provided a budget update to the Board saying that as of July 1, 2024, the state fiscal year began and SNC had resumed normal daily operational duties, which included travel and training; however, under Budget Letter 24-24 issued August 16, 2024, all special funds including the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF) could receive a 7.95 percent budget cut. Lussier informed the Board that 7.95 percent is a significant cut so SNC will seek exclusions in an attempt to lower the percent cut, which the letter allows. Because SNC's biggest cost is staff, this is particularly difficult and unlike past drills, these funds will be removed permanently from SNC's budget. Boardmember Benson of the Department of Finance (DOF) stated the drill is intended to identify efficiencies while keeping core functions and emphasized that layoffs are not intended.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around funding cuts including activities taken to determine the final percentage to be cut and whether attrition can be used as part of the funding cuts. Lussier noted that ways to meet the cut are different for small departments like the SNC, and Avery clarified for the Board the various drills released by DOF to address the state's budget deficit. Avery and Lussier stated they are both working diligently to look at all avenues to reach the goal without staff layoffs.

c. Policy & Outreach Update

Policy & Outreach Division Chief Brittany Covich provided a legislative update stating the SNC has been tracking three bills: SB 867 (Allen) that passed and was signed so will now be on the November ballot as Proposition 4; AB 2465 (Gipson), which would require the SNC and other departments prioritize social disadvantages when making grant awards (this bill had significant changes made to refine the definition of "disadvantaged" and while the bill passed in the legislature it was placed on hold by the author and is anticipated to return next year); and AB 3023 (Papan), which would direct the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force to develop an interagency funding strategy amongst CNRA and its other departments. This bill passed and is awaiting the governor's signature.

Covich provided a summary of the field tours the SNC held or participated in over the summer, including a tour with the 40 Acre Conservation League. The tour was attended by Assemblymembers Gipson and Santiago, and several local elected officials, including Supervisor and SNC Boardmember Cindy Gustafson. Covich continued that SNC participated in the Water Education Foundation Headwaters Annual Tour, which had a strong focus on SNC-supported projects and partners within the Highway 50 and Highway 80 corridors. A highlight of this tour was the Healthy Eldorado Landscape Partnership, which was the project selected for the SNC Landscape Grant Pilot Program.

The SNC hosted a Nature-Based Climate Solutions tour in August 2024, which was attended by legislative staff from Senator Dahle, Assemblymember Dahle, Senator Gonzalez, and Senator Alvarado-Gil's offices, as well as DOF and CNRA staff. Covich said great feedback was received from this tour and a beneficial outcome was video recorded and posted to Instagram. Covich played the video clip for the Board.

Staff also returned to the Rim Fire footprint to look at work that had been done under a \$70 million federal grant the SNC was a partner in administering. Photos were provided to show progress of the work from 2018 to 2024. Covich told the Board the SNC is tracking this project and hopes to continue sharing its successes.

Covich provided a 2024 fire season update stating that over a half million acres have burned within the Sierra-Cascade Region already. Covich pointed out the Park Fire is responsible for about half of the total acres burned in 2024. Covich highlighted the SNC-funded fuel break work performed within the fire footprint that saved some homes. She also noted the SNC will continue to track outcomes of the fire.

Covich said the SNC will continue to advance concepts around landscape investments and updated the Board with other activities it has been performing associated with the Landscape Investment Strategy. Covich said the SNC is sharing lessons learned from implementation of the pilot and is also incorporating readiness concepts into the RFFCP Regional Priority Plan.

Covich provided additional updates on the RFFCP, sharing the SNC recently launched the Tribal Capacity Program and has made offers to the first cohort of tribal members participating in the program. The SNC is currently in the process of getting these 12 grant agreements together, with more information to come. Covich added that the SNC continues to track the ability to leverage funds through the RFFCP grant program and, to date, \$9.6 million has been leveraged into \$217 million.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around the presentation provided by Covich, asked clarifying questions regarding Proposition 4 fund distribution limitations and, suggested the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force's interagency dashboard might be a valuable resource to staff in evaluating grant applications once it's made available.

Public Comment

Tehama County Supervisor Pati Nolan addressed the Board to share her experience with the Park Fire. Nolan said she has 21 landowners in her county that are asking for assistance to rebuild because they did not have insurance.

7. Grant 1692 Alpine Meadows and Olympic Valley Fire Protection Project Amendment (ACTION)

Field Operations & Grants Division Chief Andy Fristensky provided a review of the grant agreement amendment along with a PowerPoint presentation. This presentation provided project background, location map, and original and revised project scope information. Fristensky summarized the amendment being brought forth, which allows removal of live trees up to 30 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) if material is accessible by mechanical equipment and that the 16-inch diameter limit is not adequate to reduce wildland urban interface (WUI) threat.

Boardmembers engaged in discussion about the amendment and the project.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Action

Boardmember Stephen Benson moved and Boardmember Elizabeth Cavasso 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) Amendment, approve the revised project scope per the Exhibit A, and authorize staff to amend the grant agreement with National Forest Foundation.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 10, Nay – 0, Abstain – 1. The motion passed.

8. Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Program CEQA Determination and Award Recommendation (ACTION)

Field Operations & Grants Division Chief Andy Fristensky provided a presentation that included a RFFCP grant program overview and program goals. Fristensky’s presentation also included a summary and overview of project #1722-RFFCP (RFFCP2022) WIP Capacity Subgrant – California Heritage: Indigenous Research Project (CHIRP) Nisenan in Nevada County, brought to the Board because the SNC is relying on the Mitigated Negative Declaration rather than an exemption under CEQA. (As was presented by SNC staff to the Board on December 9, 2022, “any grants requiring CEQA environmental review and documentation beyond a Categorical Exemption would be brought to the Board for authorization.”)

Boardmembers engaged in discussion about the project and made remarks in support of this project.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Actions for CEQA and Project Determination

Boardmember John Brissenden moved and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded a motion to certify the Board independently reviewed and concurs with the information in the DCTT Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (2023) and accompanying Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

After a Board vote the results were: Aye – 11, Nay – 0, Abstain – 0. The motion to certify the Board independently reviewed and concurs with the information in the DCTT Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (2023) and accompanying Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program passed; and,

Boardmember John Brissenden moved and Boardmember Jeff Griffiths seconded a motion to authorize the executive officer to file a Notice of Determination as a responsible agency for the 1722-RFFCP (RFFCP2022) WIP Capacity Subgrant – CHIRP Nisenan project, approve a grant award in the amount of \$250,000 to the California Heritage: Indigenous Research Project, and authorize staff to enter into agreements necessary for project implementation.

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

9. Boundary Expansion Geography Overview (INFORMATIONAL)

Area Representative for the SNC Tuli Potts provided the Board with an overview of the SNC “expansion area”: an addition of two new counties, Siskiyou and Trinity, plus additional acreage in Shasta County, in January 2022. This area of 1.3 million acres brought SNC’s total Region to 27 million acres and includes multiple watersheds. Potts described the landscape and resulting biodiversity. Potts said approximately 20 percent of this landscape—250,000 acres—has burned in the past 10 years. Potts described the multiple jurisdictions within the expansion area and its isolated location in California and noted that 64 percent of this area is managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) in a largely checkerboard landownership pattern. Potts described the limited financial resources provided to the area in the past and highlighted the SNC impact in this region over the last 2.5 years, stating that there has been a \$17.9 million investment, with a large investment in collaboratives.

Kari Otto, Shasta-Trinity National Forest Deputy Forest Supervisor, provided a brief overview of the Shasta-Trinity Forest’s planned 2025-2029 program of work.

Jennifer Womack, Planning and Implementation Manager in the Shasta-McCloud Management Unit within the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, continued this presentation by providing details on three SNC-funded projects in the area. Womack also described future project plans and potential partners for these projects.

Pete Schmidt, representing the Shasta Lake District and National Recreation Area Management Unit of the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, provided details on the Trinity Center Ballpark Prescribed Fire project funded by the SNC and future projects currently in development.

Boardmembers engaged in conversation around the working relationships of the many different state, local, and federal agencies treating the landscape.

Nick Goulette, Executive Director of the Watershed Research & Training Center, described some of the SNC-funded grants to his organization and partners, and provided the Board with an overview of the land management work that his organization does in Trinity County. Goulette said his organization works to bring multiple organizations together and provide landscape-scale restoration. Goulette also touched on threats to the land, including climate change, what is being done in preparation, and the work still to be done.

Kathleen Hitt, Executive Director of the Siskiyou Land Trust, discussed the entity's relationships with partners and how it leverages those relationships. Hitt also provided figures on acres conserved and future conservation goals, along with the progress made in Siskiyou County, specifically with SNC funds. Hitt also discussed the need for continuing education on issues facing the area and collaboration among entities, and the cost effectiveness of doing work in Siskiyou County.

Public Comment

Laurel Harkness welcomed SNC to Mount Shasta and Siskiyou County and discussed her involvement in the SNC boundary expansion.

Boardmember Johnston recognized Harkness for her participation as a public citizen in the boundary expansion.

10. Regional Priority Plan Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Sarah Campe, Regional Scientist, provided an update on SNC's draft Regional Priority Plan (RPP). The SNC is a block grant recipient of the Department of Conservation's (DOC) RFFCP, a requirement of which is to create an RPP that can aggregate projects across the entire RFFCP. Campe provided details on what SNC's RPP will include: a spatial depiction of who is working on the landscape, and the projects being developed. She also emphasized the RPP is still in draft form and provided a preview of what it could look like when it's complete. Campe noted the RPP and associated database will be used to support partners and the Region throughout all steps to readiness.

Avery provided a follow-up to Campe's presentation by saying that SNC's RPP is holistic and takes the Region towards large-scale investment, connecting the dots between different sources of funding.

Boardmembers engaged in discussion and asked clarifying questions about the RPP.

11. California Jobs First Program Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Brittany Covich, Policy & Outreach Division Chief, provided an update on the California Jobs First Program activities across the Sierra-Cascade Region. This program, launched in 2021, is administered by the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency, the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. Covich relayed details of the program including the areas within SNC's Region, funding availability, processes, and Regional strategies. The SNC has noticed there is overlap with Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force priorities and SNC's Strategic Plan; this could enable the SNC to have a support role in some of the projects identified. Covich added the SNC will continue to track this program and apply support where appropriate.

Boardmembers engaged in discussion on the potential for this program.

12. Boardmembers' Comments

Boardmember Brissenden inquired about the Tahoe-Central Sierra Initiative and if an update will be forthcoming. Avery responded that an update will be on the agenda at the December meeting.

13. Public Comments

There was no public comment.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:21 p.m.

Additional Board Materials

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