

MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MOJAVE DESERT RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

October 2, 2019

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District was held on Wednesday afternoon, October 2, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. at the Victorville Service Center at 15415 W. Sand St., #103, Victorville, CA 92392.

Directors in attendance were:

Chuck Bell
Paul Johnson
Neville Slade
Bobby Boytor

Directors absent/excused:

Eldert Van Dam

Others in attendance were:

Dana Raponi, District Manager
Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist
Elizabeth Bickham, NRCS Soil Conservationist
Tony Walters, Conservation Specialist – IWM
Becca Everett, Admin Assistant

Item 1. Call to order, pledge of allegiance: The regular meeting was called to order by Paul Johnson at 1:04 pm. Minutes were recorded by Dana Raponi. Flag salute was led by Neville Slade

Item 2. Self-Introduction of Guests(s): No guests in attendance.

Item 3. Public Discussion/Invited Guests: No guests in attendance.

Item 4. Approval of Agenda: **Bobby Boytor moved to approve the Agenda. Seconded. Passed.**

Item 5. Consent Calendar:

- a. Approval of Minutes: September 2019
- b. Approval of Financial Report: September 2019
 1. Review of Bank Statements: September 2019
- c. Approval of Bills: October 2019

Raponi distributed the monthly bank statement to attending board members for review. Raponi stated the application for the LAIF investments must be signed. After discussion **Bobby Boytor moved to accept the Consent Calendar. Seconded. Passed.**

Item 6. District Conservationist's Monthly Report: Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist: Shiralipour reported the process to replace engineer Ernesto De La Riva has begun with engineers from Oxnard and Indio will be filling in until the position is filled. Shiralipour reported Elise Miller, engineer in Indio, will retire at end of year. Shiralipour reported the office security system is not yet complete but should be by the end of the month. Shiralipour summarized the challenges in completing the office security system and recent activity recorded on the video

feed of the installed cameras. Shiralipour reported Rich Campbell, a former NRCS District Conservationist in Lancaster as well as other conservation positions, had recently passed away. Discussion followed. Shiralipour reported Farm Bill and software changes are underway, as well as a new system for evaluating and ranking applications and should be implemented this year. Shiralipour summarized the farm bill contracts, funding amounts and acres served from the Victorville Field Office this year and since 2014. Shiralipour stated some producers located in the same area had found high levels of Boron in their water, which was not conducive to growing crops. Discussion followed on basic principles required before a crop is even planted and the desire to educate new farmers on the basics of farming. Walters stated he covers some basic farmer education in his workshops.

Item 7. ReLeaf Project: Cheryl Nagy's report was in the director books for review. Raponi stated she will let the board know when the NFWF grant is officially announced.

Item 8. Irrigation Water Management / Las Flores Ranch: Tony Walters, Irrigation Water Management Specialist, reported he had attended the MWA board meeting where the workplan was approved. Walters reported he had been asked to work with residential community Del Webb to perform a full-scale irrigation audit. Discussion followed. Walters reported there were upcoming IWM visits scheduled for Newberry Springs. Walters summarized the workshops and outreach events he and Luis Cortes had presented and attended. Walters summarized a list of upcoming outreach events, including the Pistachio Festival in Newberry Springs, a Spanish workshop at the city of Victorville that will be led by Luis Cortes, Del Webb workshops and the VVC plant sale. Walters reported the swamp cooler study is on hold because of the change in seasons. Walters stated he is still working with Earl Graham to get the new parts ordered for the infrastructure at Las Flores.

Item 9. Mojave Weed Management Area: Raponi stated she had received an article from Bell regarding a hybrid tumbleweed. Discussion followed.

Item 10. Old Business:

- a. RC&D Program Update: Nothing new at this time.
- b. Conservation Easements/Mitigation: - Raponi reported the latest mitigation area being negotiated had been defoliated by the bark beetle. The district had suggested the mitigation area be relocated to just north of the forks dam in Hesperia, where the tamarisk beetle was not present. The client had informed the district the 1600 application in the HMMP contained extensive avoidance measures and would not allow the mitigation area to be relocated to Hesperia. Consequently, the mitigation has fallen through. Discussion continued regarding the bark beetle. Raponi stated Ken Lair believes there is a hybrid Tamarisk in the riverbed that may be causing some of the resistance.
- c. Mojave Water Agency FY 2019-2020 Weed Removal Program: Bell summarized the funding allotted for the tamarisk removal in FY 2019-20 and stated it most likely will not be used due to the tamarisk beetle presence. If the tamarisk beetle is not present in the next spraying year the funding will be re-budgeted.
- d. Sand Blow/Fugitive Dust-Erosion Control: Raponi distributed a power point handout to the board members created by Pat Flannigan, associate director, regarding the possibility of the RCD becoming a sponsor of distributing air quality monitors in proposed solar project areas. Bell stated this was an action item under new business. Raponi called Flannigan and put the phone on speaker. Flannigan explained the first slide in the handout showing an example of the regular dust problems in the Mojave River Valley which is located East of Barstow, between I 15 and I 40. Flannigan summarized she has become aware there will never be any onsite monitoring for fugitive dust on any solar projects East of Barstow. Flannigan stated she has been informed it is possible to request California Air Resources Board (CARB) to install PM2 monitoring stations. Discussion followed on who would determine the locations of the

monitors and who would install them. Flanigan discussed the use of the air basin wide threshold used in the Environmental Impact Report. Discussion followed on the need to know particulate point source instead of using non-point source in this instance. Flanigan summarized the existence of Creosote rings in the area proposed for the solar plant, and how removing them would remove function, and once function is disturbed, dust occurs. Bell stated this information needed to be in the solar plant appeal to the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors. Discussion followed. Bell inquired if the RCD helped in determining where the monitors are placed, and CARB installed the monitors, who would read the data? Flanigan stated it was telemetry data and will be available on the CARB and other websites as well as saved and backed up. Discussion followed on the possibility of using this data for future projects in these areas, requiring two years of baseline data, requiring upwind and downwind monitors and monitoring for the life of the project. Slade stated other entities have been collecting data from upwind and downwind monitors. Discussion followed on reviewing other entity's monitoring data. Bell inquired about other sponsoring entities for the letter to CARB requesting to use their monitors. Discussion followed on what entities will be sponsoring the letter to CARB and what format will be used for the letter. Johnson stated the consensus was for the district to be a sponsor for the Air Quality monitors and it will be formalized under new business. Discussion followed on the need for historical air quality data and the use of it for code enforcement and regulation violations.

- e. Dairy Issues: Johnson stated he has not heard anything new from Lahontan on the animal confinement order. Johnson stated local dairies are continuing their monitoring and reporting to Lahontan. Discussion followed.
- f. Update on Camp Cady: Elizabeth Bickham stated the spring monitoring report has been completed and sent to Bruce Kenyon, Quail Unlimited, but she has not heard back from him yet. Bickham stated the fall monitoring visit is planned for November 2019. Bell inquired about the bio fund request for updating the older water pipes at Camp Cady. Discussion followed regarding the aging infrastructure at Camp Cady.
- g. Raven Issue: Bickham stated she had attended a demonstration by Hard Shell Labs using drones to deter Ravens at a jujube farm in Lucerne Valley, and stated the drones showed a lot of promise. Bickham reported the actual species identified eating the jujubes was a house finch. Discussion followed. Bickham summarized the length of fly time of the drones, the reaction of the birds to the drone and the quest to make them affordable to the growers. Discussion followed on the future development of the drones and their eventual affordability.
- h. Grant Funding Opportunities: Raponi reported the technical support grant through NRCS has been extended for an additional year, and the existing NRI grant has been finalized, with a new three-year grant put into place.
 - 1. 2019 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program: Raponi stated Luis Sierra had informed her the award for the 2019 Specialty Crop Block Grant, is generally announced in September, however she has not heard from Sierra concerning the grant.
- i. Tamarisk Bio Control: Raponi stated tamarisk beetles had been found on tamarisk at Harper Dry Lake. Discussion followed. Raponi distributed pictures of the tamarisk beetles to the board.
- j. Regulations for Standards for Different Levels' of Mulch/Compost: Neville Slade reported John Davis, Mojave Desert & **Mountain Recycling** Authority, had informed him they were moving ahead with a composting facility located near the Victorville dump, and scheduled for 2020.
- k. Ramp down in Baja to 30% -Possible RCD Assistance with Relation to the Old Baja Plan: Bell stated he and Raponi spoke about combining items k & u on the agenda. Johnson stated he would like to see the RCD board make a formal request to NRCS, to come up with alternate crops and downsizing management and to bring anything to the table to assist with technical assistance and guidance to Baja producers. Discussion followed on possible alternatives for adding water to the Mojave River to help basins downstream. Bell stated the

Lakes Association in Newberry Springs has obtained an attorney and are pushing for a new analysis of the subsurface flows making their way to Baja. Discussion continued regarding alternative crops. Bell stated that hemp and marijuana are probably the only crops that can pay for state water. Discussion continued regarding the status of the adjudication and the amount of time it may take for basin areas to reach safe yield standards. Walters summarized the technical and educational assistance the IWM program has offered to the Baja area over the last three years. Discussion followed on the amount of assistance NRCS is able to give with some of the alternative crops, the length of NRCS practices and the reluctance of established farmers to change crops. Bell stated that some of the farmers in Baja are looking at solar for a way out. Discussion followed on water rights, people pumping outside the adjudication judgment and the education of new property buyers in the Baja Basin. Slade stated Victor Valley College has just received a three-year grant renewal from Bureau of Land Management for the national seed strategy. Discussion followed on agricultural scale pilot plantings for native seeds, restoration of fallowed lands and the possibility of using restoration funding to combine the two strategies. Bell stated the field restoration would help to keep farmers from going fallow and contributing to sand blow. Shiralipour stated Luis Sierra had found, during the recent cover crop demonstration, that cover crop seeds are extremely expensive and there was much more success when they were mixed with conventional cover crop seeds. Slade stated Judy Perkins with the Bureau of Land Management would like to attend an RCD meeting to brainstorm these ideas. Slade will share Perkins' email with Raponi. Discussion followed on possible options to assist the Baja area farmers. Shiralipour suggested contacting Ken Lair about the project he was involved with in Antelope Valley where farmers were growing native seeds. Bell suggested creating a bullet point list of ways the RCD could help the farmers in the adjudication area. Johnson suggested using the bullet points to write a synopsis and begin to prepare something to present to the farmers. Discussion followed on garnering enough knowledge to put on a workshop. Bell stated he would make a list and give it to Johnson and try to bring a rough list to the next meeting.

- l. Industrial Hemp: This item covered in item 'k' above.
- m. Mojave Narrows Management Plan: Raponi stated cattle have been allowed in portions of the Mojave Narrows Regional Park to control weeds. Johnson stated there has been an issue with the homeless population, cutting gates and fences which allow the cattle to run loose in the park. Discussion followed.
- n. Assistance to MDLT for Weed Removal/Restoration at its Palisades Ranch: Nothing new at this time.
- o. Composting Operations to Deal with Manures: Nothing new at this time.
- p. FY MWA Workplan: Raponi reported Alisa Ellsworth, Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), had submitted her letter with requests for the bio fund where it was approved by the Water Master. Subsequently the bio fund requests and the Workplan was approved by the MWA board.
- q. DOC and Natural Resources Agency Forestry Grant Through Inland Empire RCD: Raponi reported she had received the MOU signed by the Inland Empire RCD board president, Paul Williams.
- r. EQIP Options for Cattle Ranchers: Shiralipour stated NRCS had received a few applications. Discussion followed on working with BLM range improvement recipients. Bell invited Elizabeth Bickham to the next Range Improvement Advisory Meeting.
- s. CARCD Annual Conference – November 12-15-Redding: Raponi stated she had made a hotel reservation, but Slade had a conflict in his schedule and is unable to attend so she had cancelled the reservation. Raponi reported the registration for the conference is full and there is now a wait list.
- t. RCD as CEQA Lead Agency for MDLTs Palisades Ranch Restoration Plan/Project: Nothing new at this time.

- u. What if Any is the RCDs Role in Working with Farmers Throughout the Adjudication Area if Ramp-Down of Water Rights Continues: This item discussed under item (k) above.

Item 11. New Business:

- a. CARCD High Desert Regional Meeting October 18, 2019 – Independence: Raponi reported the CARCD High Desert Regional meeting will be located in Independence and held at the Indian Reservation. Raponi stated she will be attending. Discussion followed on who else from the office was going and the logistics of going together.
- b. MOU with USGS on the Pond Turtle Survey: - Raponi had emailed the MOU between the USGS and the district concerning the Pond Turtle Survey to the board to review before the meeting. Raponi explained to the board the portions of the MOU she had completed. Slade inquired about the term “economic conservation” and stated it should be replaced with environmental conservation. After discussion the term will be replaced with “resource conservation”. Bell explained the concern with the amount allotted to the survey in this FY workplan and how this MOU will allow the RCD to be reimbursed throughout the year. Slade inquired about #5 on the MOU stating it sounded as if the funds will be coming from the RCD. After discussion, verbiage will be added stating the “source of the funds will be the biological trust fund with initial payment coming from the RCD, then being reimbursed by the bio fund”. Discussion followed on the reports required from USGS, if the invoices will include work completed and if there will be a final report. **Chuck Bell moved to approve the pond turtle survey MOU between the USGS and the Mojave Desert RCD, with modifications. Seconded. Passed.**
- c. Mojave Desert RCD Becoming a Sponsor of Distributing Air Quality monitors in Proposed Solar Project Areas: Johnson stated this item was discussed under item 10(d) above. **Bobby Boytor moved for the Mojave Desert RCD to become a sponsor of distributing Air Quality monitors in proposed solar project areas. Seconded. Passed.**
- d. Riparian Restoration & Tamarisk Beetle Workshop – Oct. 23-24, 2019 – Palm Desert: Raponi reported there is a Riparian Restoration & Tamarisk Beetle Workshop in Palm Desert on October 23 and 24. Raponi reported this workshop is being held by the Riversedge West. Raponi summarized the agenda and stated registration was \$30.00 to attend. Discussion followed. Slade stated the Las Flores project is in its next stage to introduce some riparian restoration and inquired if Walters would be available to attend the workshop. After discussion **Neville Slade moved to register Walters and him to attend the workshop and leave the registration open if someone else would like to attend on October 23 or 24, 2019. Seconded. Passed.** Raponi will pre-register for two and determine if you can pay at the door on the day of the event if needed.

Item 12. Correspondence (Discussion items only) Raponi reported that Don Woo, the website maintenance administrator, is inviting RCD administration to “Like” the Mojave Desert RCD Facebook page.

Item 13. Director Reports and Comments: No comments.

Item 14. Closed Session (Litigation and Personnel): No closed session took place.

Item 15. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 3:17pm

Dana Raponi, District Manager