

MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

January 8, 2024

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District was held on Wednesday afternoon, January 8, 2025, at 1:02.

Chuck Bell, Eldert Van Dam and Paul Johnson were sworn onto the district board after appointment from the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors.

Directors in attendance where:

Chuck Bell
Eldert Van Dam
Meredith Hergenrader
Neville Slade
Paul Johnson

Directors absent/excused:

None

Others in attendance were:

Dana Raponi, District Manager
Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager
George Sandoval, RCD Conservation Technician
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist
Becca Everett, Admin Assistant
Susan Kennedy, Chairman of the Cadiz Board of Directors
Allie Anderson, Land Steward, Transition Habitat Conservancy
Maggie O'Neill, Farm Bureau Executive Director, UCCE Master Gardener Coordinator
UCC Cooperative Extension

Item 1. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance: The regular meeting was called to order by Chuck Bell. The pledge of Allegiance was led by Meredith Hergenrader. Minutes were recorded by Dana Raponi and Becca Everett.

Item 2. Self-Introduction of Guests(s): Susan Kennedy, Chairman of the Cadiz Board of Directors.

Item 3. Public Discussion /Invited Guests: Susan Kennedy, Chairman of the Cadiz Board of Directors, thanked the board for making time for her on the agenda and stated she would like to give an update on the Mojave Groundwater Bank project. Kennedy stated the project includes the Northern Pipeline which Cadiz purchased from El Paso Natural Gas that runs through Barstow, Antelope Valley and Kern Water District. Kennedy reported there is space along the California Arizona Railroad to build a new pipeline system to reach the Colorado River Aqueduct. Kennedy stated Cadiz has purchased 180 miles of steel pipeline from the T Stone Xcel pipeline that was abandoned in North Dakota and is moving forward with plans to begin converting the Northern pipeline to adapt to water by building pumping stations in

2025. Kennedy stated the goal is to have the entire project in operation, including storage in 2027. Discussion followed on the cost of the project, with the majority of equity investors being Native American Tribes, grant funding and Cadiz being uniquely eligible for the Prop 4 bond. Kennedy stated Cadiz is working closely with VVWRA (Victor Valley Wastewater Reclamation Authority) and signed on to the One water concept to integrate their pipeline system into the Baja and Centro basin, thereby freeing up dollars and water for infrastructure improvements in the Alto basin for recycled water, stormwater capture, recharge basins and water storage. Kennedy stated she is currently in Sacramento, meeting with legislators to ensure that the South Lahontan district, where MDRCD is located, obtains a high priority of infrastructure dollars. Kennedy stated the other bond measure she wanted to share is Prop 1 that was passed in 2014. Kennedy reported that one of the major projects that was funded with this is the Northern California Storage Project where one of the major projects was to increase the size of the Los Vaqueros Dam in Northern California. Kennedy stated the Vaqueros Dam project was awarded 500 million dollars but fell apart last September, opening \$450 million dollars that will be eligible to be reallocated into several areas including regional storage, regional conveyance and climate resiliency which mimics projects VVWRA are a part of, in the One water concept. Kennedy stated Cadiz will be asking legislators to make sure those bond dollars are redirected into the pots of money that make Victor Valley eligible for them where they should be available early this year. Kennedy summarized that the key breakthrough for Cadiz was finding the right public entities to come in as project owners. Discussion followed on the tribes being majority owners of the project, two major action reviews or environmental prophesies needing to be completed, project financing needing to be closed and due to Cadiz's projects controversial history a full environmental impact statement for BLM will need to be prepared. Kennedy explained that this BLM application being used to change the use of the pipeline to water, will be the same documentation used to submit to state lands and U.S. Airforce Base for the leases across those lands. Kennedy stated this is one process expected to be completed this year. Kennedy stated there will be an environmental review that will study everything regarding using the pipeline for conjunctive use. Kennedy reported this will be done in 2025 stating the studies are already complete. Discussion followed on pipeline and construction design updating and monitoring, aqueduct storage, adding an addendum to the existing FDIR and working with VVWRA and MWA. Kennedy stated MWA are not being asked to do anything right now but will need to agree on allowing discharge of water. Kennedy stated Paulson, VVWRA, would like to work with MWA regarding better use of the Mojave pipeline which is currently empty. Kennedy summarized that MWA is not opposed but their budget depends on the sale of water on the state water project and cannot be negatively impacted by this plan. Discussion followed concerning Cadiz presenting to the MWA TAC, communication between VVWRA and MWA in terms of engineering and the possibility of Cadiz bringing all of the financing including grants. Bell inquired if a permit needs to be obtained from Lahontan to put wastewater into the Mojave pipeline. Kennedy stated they don't need a permit to put water into the pipeline, but she is sure there are discharge permits stating Golden State Water has an agreement with Lahontan for water delivery in Barstow. Kennedy believed this will include a combination of the ATEC filtration stating Lahontan will be involved in any discharge. Bell inquired what is being grown at Cadiz. Kennedy stated Cadiz is currently growing Alfalfa and has also signed an agreement to build a green hydrogen production facility. Kennedy reported that Cadiz is working with RIC Energy to build the largest hydrogen production facility in California and one of the largest on the West coast and the County. Kennedy explained Cadiz is the perfect location for green hydrogen, because of the land for solar, water availability and its location

next to two railroads to load liquid hydrogen on railcars. Kennedy summarized Cadiz is also located at the major junction of all the major gas networks, stating SoCalGas, Kinder Morgan and PG&E lines all cross Cadiz land to enable a blended product into the project. Kennedy stated after announcing the hydrogen production facility, Cadiz was approached by a Japanese company interested in building a larger hydrogen plant and the possibility of combining solar and the infrastructure which is very attractive. Kennedy believed Cadiz will be one of the largest green hydrogen production areas in the world. Holly Shiralipour inquired what the hydrogen be used for. Kennedy stated 65% of the capacity of this project is under contract for industrial transportation in California. Shiralipour inquired if that would include semitrucks, locomotives and tractors, ultimately taking the place of diesel fuel. Kennedy answered that she is unsure but has been told that it will be used for the transportation market for trucks in the L.A. basin and other parts of Southern California. Bell inquired if there is a residue for making hydrogen. Kennedy stated not when using water for green hydrogen. Slade stated that oxygen is the residue from H₂O so there is a great advantage with no impact. Slade stated there is a very rapid movement towards hydrogen power in transportation. Bell asked the board if they had any other questions for Kennedy. The board thanked Kennedy for the good update. Kennedy stated having the tribes on board in the financing and ownership has changed the political dynamic.

Item 4.) Approval of Agenda: **Paul Johnson moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Meredith Hergenrader. Chuck Bell- Yes. Neville Slade - Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Meredith Hergenrader – Yes. Motion passed.**

Item 5. Consent Calendar:

- a. Approval of Minutes: December, 2024
- b. Approval of Financial Report: December, 2024
- c. Approval of Bills: January, 2025

Dana Raponi summarized the SBCo tax revenue for the district. Paul Johnson moved to approve the consent calendar. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell– Yes. Neville Slade – Yes. Meredith Hergenrader – Yes. Motion Passed.

Item 6. **District Conservationist's Monthly Report:** Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist, reported that NRCS is in quite a state of flux and summarized the change of administration that will come in the next few weeks. Shiralipour summarized the NRCS high number of retirements and the various areas that will be needing administration assistance. Shiralipour summarized the EQIP program applications, fund pools and practices. Shiralipour stated she is interested in speaking with the RCD about the possibility of doing a companion soil testing program for those who don't want to go through NRCS EQIP's funding program. Shiralipour reported she had attended the CARCD conference and spoke with Nancy Wahl-Scheurich, CARCD Executive Director who stated if MDRCD is interested in becoming a regional soil hub, there may be funding available to assist. Shiralipour reported NRCS is very happy with the work that MDRCD is doing with the agreements. Shiralipour reported that NRCS California has a total of 360 positions and there are currently 100 positions vacant consisting of all levels from Soil Conservationists to District Conservationists to state office positions. Shiralipour is thankful for the team in the Victorville office, that includes NRCS, MDRCD, Soil Survey and Point Blue. Bell thanked Shiralipour for being the messenger for MDRCD at the CARCD conference and for her

support. Shiralipour reported that NRCS had a 10-year lease with GSA that was extended for 5 more years. Discussion followed.

Item 7. **ReLeaf Project:** Nagy's report was in the directors' books for review. Bell summarized that Nagy is looking for grants to pay her salary in our area to extend the life of her IERCD grant.

Item 8: **Irrigation Management/AWAC/Meteorological Stations:** Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager, reported he is working on his mid-year report to send to Raponi and share with the board. Walters reported a total of 23 IWM field visits. Walters reported of the 23 visits, 10 were paid from the RCD portion. Walters reported there were 3 visits in Phelan, 5 in Hesperia, 2 in Lucerne Valley, 6 in Apple Valley and 3 in Newberry Springs. Walters stated he has been receiving a lot of calls inquiring about wells. Walters stated he and his team had an opportunity to join NRCS to talk with individuals about IWM and obtaining different monitors and soil sensors. Walters stated he has not been asked to visit any weather stations because they are in areas MWA visits. Walters stated he and his team are focusing on the AWAC program at this time and will be hosting Seed to Salad at the end of the month. Walters stated registration for this workshop is high. Walters reported he will also be hosting an ADA gardening course being held via zoom. Bell inquired the number of attendees vs. the number of registrants. Discussion followed.

Item 9. **Mojave Weed Management Area:** Raponi stated the district had hosted a MWMA initial meeting with 13 attendees. Raponi reported the RFP (Request for proposal) for the CDFW weed management grant had finally been released and wanted the MWMA members to meet to discuss it. Raponi reported the grant is non-competitive and for weed management areas only. Raponi stated the grant funding is for \$40,000 per year for 3-years. Raponi stated the MWMA group is currently looking into Halogeton and Stinknet. Discussion followed on pepperweed being eligible for this grant, the potential cost to attempt to control pepperweed, including CDFW in the grant discussions and the possibility of treating pepperweed at the Palisades Ranch. Raponi stated Aaron Echols, IERCD, informed Raponi the IERCD weed crews can be available for work on this grant if needed. Raponi stated the next weed management meeting will be held on January 16th at 1pm. Discussion followed on the California Conservation Corp, spraying weeds must be done under a spraying license and if the Urban Conservation Corp has a license to spray weeds.

Item 10. Old Business:

a) **Mojave Water Agency FY 2024-25 Work Plan:** Raponi stated she had received a call from the CDFW contractor who will be working on the restoration of the ponds at Camp Cady. Bell inquired if this was under CDFW funding or Biofund funding. Raponi stated it will be paid through the Biofund. Bell inquired about the funding for the Harvard RD field. Discussion followed on the various Bio fund projects and their funding status.

b) **Air Quality:** Nothing new at this time

1. California 30x30 Plan: Nothing new at this time.

c) **Dairy Issues – District Lead in Dairy Co-Op:** Bell stated there was a presentation at the MWA TAC (Technical Advisory Committee) meeting that he will listen to the recorded audio and report back. Eldert Van Dam stated Dutch Dairy and Desert Oasis Dairy were also in attendance. Van Dam believed it was the same presentation that was given 5 years ago.

d) **Update on Camp Cady:** This item discussed earlier in meeting.

e) **Raven Issues:** Bell stated the raven will not be able to be removed from the migratory bird list but believed that because of their increase of population and the damage they do, U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service should support a type of designation for control. Bell will bring this topic to Obernolte, San Bernardino County congressman. Van Dam inquired what it takes for an animal to be removed from the endangered species list and stated the Raven should not be on this list. Discussion followed.

- f) **Grant funding Opportunities:** Shiralipour stated Hung Doan's position with, UC ANCR, Small Farms Network may be cut and is asking for support letters to help save his position. Raponi stated that she spoke with Chris McDonald, UCEE who hadn't heard anything about Hung Doan losing his position. Discussion followed with the board consensus that a letter could be written if needed.
- g) **Tamarisk Bio Control:** Paul Johnson reported the tamarisk trees are dormant at this time. Discussion followed on the BLM's tamarisk treatment, population of the tamarisk beetle in certain areas and the lack of Mojave Weed Management Area members concern to include tamarisk in the CDFA weed management grant program, being applied for.
- h) **CDFW Mojave Narrows Wildlife Protection:** Raponi reported that right now the pastures are dormant, and it is a wait and see what moisture the weather brings. Raponi stated Colton Johnson, CDFW, is working on completing an application for spraying the pastures using information AgriServ gave him. Raponi stated Darryl with AgriServ had suggested to spray in March. Bell inquired if that is CDFW money. Raponi answered yes.
- i) **Composting Operations:** Bell stated there is still free delivery of compost to the Lucerne Valley area. Johnson inquired if the compost is being used properly. Discussion followed.
- j) **DOC and Natural Resources Agency Forestry Grant Through Inland Empire RCD:** This item discussed earlier in meeting.
- k) **Assistance for MDLTs Palisades Ranch Restoration Plan/Project:** Johnson stated the tumble weed seeds got irrigated with the rain yesterday on the Palisades ranch and is perfect for tumbleweeds. Bell stated the Agricultural field was not monitored well enough and the weeds were allowed to get too large again this year thereby losing some of the value of last year's Biofund funding. Discussion followed on what process should have taken place last year to control the weeds on the Palisades Ranch Ag Field. Johnson stated the tumbleweeds are now 5-6 feet tall and very thick. Raponi stated she has spoken to Lee Graham who stated his company was scheduled to go out on the 20th with MDLT contractors who would give them guidance on where to mow. Discussion followed on the source of funds being used and the importance of proper guidance for the weeds mowed. Bell stated it is not MDRCD's money, but MDRCD is responsible for allocations of Biofund money, even though MDRCD is just the passthrough. Aaron Johnson, CDFW, is responsible for using the Bio fund funding that is paid into for the Watermaster. Bell stated he could email Cody Hanford, Mojave Desert Land Trust, and Sarah Bliss informing them if they need help monitoring, MDRCD can do so, but cannot afford to lose the value of past Biofund money expenditures. Discussion continued regarding the Palisades ranch caretaker that completes the fence and field monitoring and lives onsite. Bell inquired if we could get the caretaker to keep in contact with MDRCD. Bell will send the email and CC Aaron Johnson on it. Johnson stated he can also look at it.
- l) **Stabilization of Fallowed AG Fields:** Bell agreed with Johnson about using the term abandoned or idled, rather than fallowed fields. Johnson stated in some cases in the Midwest a fallowed field is considered tilled. Bell inquired if the field has tumbleweeds on it, is it fallowed. Johnson answered yes, explaining that if the conditions are right, it can grow weeds. Hergenrader asked if it was the description or the intent of the field. Bell answered that the intent right now is abandoned and idled. Bell stated that it is abandoned, in terms of

AG but not abandoned in terms of ownership. It is decided to change the word from Fallow to Abandoned.

- m) **Native Seed Increase Projects:** Slade reported the Cadiz seed increase project is ready to go being a little over an acre with raised beds. Slade reported the drip line is installed and has been running to get the weeds taken care of in the fall. Slade stated he had approached Cadiz regarding the use of their row mulcher which creates rows to grow at the Copi Mumford project in Newberry Springs. Slade stated Cadiz is going to use the row mulcher and one of their GPS, RTK tractors for the Copi Mumford project, and has offered to install the fence using some old fencing they have and or pay for new fencing if needed. Slade pointed out the alignment because Newberry Springs Economic Development Group is part of the stakeholders for the Northern pipeline through Cadiz stating they are being extremely helpful. Discussion continued regarding John Summers with the consulting company AGMED and their work at Cadiz. Slade stated planting is scheduled for March and all volunteers are welcome. Slade stated Dakota Brooks is the lead investigator for this grant on the Victor Valley College side.
- n) **Sandy Valley Agriculture Issues:** Shiralipour confirmed that they have submitted an application.
- o) **Ethics Training:** Raponi stated MDRCD was planning to complete this training through MWA, but MWA is not currently offering it. Discussion followed.
- p) **Conservation Strategic Partnership:** Raponi stated per the board consensus, she had sent Paul Deel a check for \$7,500 for the Copi Mumford Strategic Partnership project. The check has been cashed and Deel has sent \$3,000 in receipts to Raponi. Discussion continued regarding reimbursements to Deel. Raponi inquired if she should continue to contact him to obtain additional receipts. Discussion followed.
- q) **BLM Partnership:** Bell stated that MDRCD made an offer to assist at the BLM Discovery Center in Barstow. Raponi inquired if Adrianna Holguin has heard anything back regarding the offer. Holguin stated she has not received a response yet. Bell suggested waiting until the next fiscal year. Allie Anderson, Transition Habitat Conservancy, stated has a meeting with the Discovery Center's outreach and recreation coordinator next week and will see if she can obtain more information. Bell stated if the BLM would like to apply for the Conservation Strategic Partnership funding with MDRCD it would start in our fiscal year. Raponi agreed stating that would be for the district's partnership funding, but if they had money from other areas and would like assistance from MDRCD to design or plant, this would be the place for the funding.
- r) **District Outreach:** Holguin report is in the director's book behind Nagy's report. Holguin stated she is working on a project with the Wellness Center in Victorville. Holguin stated she has spoken with the outreach team for CMEX who are interested in working together on the native garden portion of the Wellness Center. Bell inquired if CMEX is going to be one of the Conservation partnership grants with MDRCD. Raponi explained that CMEX has an outreach coordinator who has offered to lay cement for free for outreach at the Discovery Center. Holguin stated she and Hergenrader had an appointment with the Outreach Center, CMEX and Cal-Fresh scheduled for today, but it was cancelled due to weather. Discussion followed. Holguin reported she has obtained native plants from Dolores in the AG department of VVC and stated Laura from the VVC AG department has agreed to build soils tables from pallets supplied by the Wellness Center. Holguin reported one table will be ADA accessible, and one will be non-ADA. Discussion followed on funding, Conservation partnerships, the Wellness Center budget and approving funding for the Wellness Center.

Holguin distributed business card samples and Raponi asked the board to give Holguin any changes they would like to be made.

11. New Business:

- a. **Remote Attendance Policy:** Bell stated he had sent information to the board from an MWA board meeting regarding their remote participation policy. Bell suggested MDRCD adopt and comply with a concept of the policy for state requirements regarding remote participation in board meetings. Bell stated MDRCD has all the information from MWA documentation which describes the process. Raponi reported that MWA's policy is 16 pages and includes laws and bonds including The Brown Act, including what you can and cannot do. Bell asked if MDRCD can incorporate it by reference as an example of MDRCD's policy agreeing to comply with all state requirements for remote meetings. Discussion followed. Johnson inquired if this permits a director to remotely participate. Bell stated as long as there is an agenda posted that lists where that director will be during the meeting. Bell explained that without giving these details a director who is physically absent from the meeting, may not vote. Raponi stated a lot of the details listed in the policy are for larger entities. **Paul Johnson moved to adopt the remote attendance policy as is used by Mojave Water Agency. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Meredith Hergenrader – Yes. Motion passed.**
- b. **High Desert Regional RCD Meeting:** Raponi stated there are a few participants from Tehachapi and Kern County, along with Nancy Walsh-Scheurich from Davis who are interested in attending the meeting. Raponi shared that the meeting will be held at Transition Habitat Conservancy in Pinon Hills. Sam Easley, Executive Director, Transition Habitat Conservancy will be available to give a presentation. Raponi asked the board if they would be willing to pay for lunch and refreshments. Bell stated that if MDRCD is hosting it, they should pay for it. Bell suggested including a donation to the conservancy. Discussion followed on previous meeting registration charges and what time the meeting would begin. **Paul Johnson moved to pay all reasonable costs to host the upcoming regional RCD meeting. Meredith Hergenrader seconded. Chuck Bell inquired if they should amend to include a donation. Chuck Bell added an amendment to include a donation of \$200 Paul Johnson stated that the motion is amended. Meredith Hergenrader Seconded. Roll Call - Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Neville Slade – Yes Motion Passed.**
- c. **Pay Raises** –Raponi had sent the information regarding pay raises to the board via email and was also distributed to the board at the meeting. Raponi stated the information highlighted in yellow is what MDRCD is proposing. Raponi reported COLA for 2025 has been calculated as 2.5%. Bell stated that parity within the RCD's has been discussed in the past. Raponi stated that NRCS is 2.2%, depending on locality. Hergenrader inquired if Raponi would like to stick to what the Federal COLA is. Raponi stated that it is up to the board stating historically, MDRCD has raised salaries annually 3% until inflation went crazy and MDRCD raised it 6%. Johnson inquired about the NRCS salary steps. Raponi answered that the steps increase in increments of 2.5%. Discussion followed. Allie Anderson stated Transition Habitat Conservancy just raised by 3%. Van Dam stated MDRCD has good employees that should be compensated well and suggested raising 3%. **Meredith Hergenrader motioned to increase pay by 3%. Paul Johnson seconded. Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Motion passed.**

12. Correspondence (Discussion items only) No discussion items.

- 13. Directors Reports and Comments:** Johnson stated he has some concerns and would like to make some progress in obtaining assistance in the field for moisture sensor funding that is being

spent and equipment that is being installed. Johnson stated he would like more guidance in the field and interpretation on data that is being collected. Johnson stated he understands the office is without an engineer, but he does not want to go back on all the good work that has been done. Shiralipour stated NRCS currently has six open engineering positions in area 4, and explained NRCS has a hard time keeping engineers because of the higher paying opportunities found in the private sector. Shiralipour inquired if MDRCD would entertain hiring an engineer or an engineering tech if NRCS increased the existing agreement amount to cover the cost of one of these positions. Walters stated he is the one who originally signed off on the soil sensors because he was the only one having JAA at the time. Walters informed Johnson he is available to help with anything he may need. Johnson stated the soil sensors are very important tools and a lot of money is being spent on them. Walters stated he was unaware Johnson was struggling, or he would have offered his assistance earlier. Johnson stated they are having both mechanical and data problems. Discussion followed regarding engineering techs not needing to possess a bachelor's degree in this field, if the position would be an RCD employee and if the position would be completely or partially reimbursed by NRCS. Bell suggested this be added to the agenda.

14. Closed Session (Litigation and Personnel): No closed sessions held.

15. Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 3:22pm

Dana Raponi, District Manager.