

MINUTES OF THE
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

June 4, 2025

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District was held on Wednesday afternoon, June 4, 2025, at 1:00pm

Directors in attendance where:

Chuck Bell
Meredith Hergenrader
Paul Johnson
Eldert Van Dam

Directors absent/excused:

Neville Slade

Others in attendance were:

Dana Raponi, District Manager
Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist
Becca Everett, Admin Assistant
Adrianna Holguin, RCD Program Outreach
Maggie O'Neill, Farm Bureau Executive Director, UCCE Master Gardener Coordinator
UCC Cooperative Extension
Kayla Hettinger, UCANR

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 Chuck Bell. Minutes were recorded by Dana Raponi and Becca Everett.

Item 2. Invited Guests: Kayla Hettinger, UCANR.

Item 3. Public Discussion /Invited Guests: Maggie O'Neil introduced Kayla Hettinger stating she is the new person our funding helped UCANR to hire to work on programs and outreach. Kayla Hettinger, UCANR, introduced herself and stated she has worked in detail with grass communities that are experiencing shrub encroachment. Hettinger stated she had spent a few field seasons in USDA-ARS Jornada, New Mexico's ecosystem experimental range. Hettinger stated most of her research has been on dust and its effects. Bell stated MDRCD is currently working on reprinting their Illegal Landscapes brochures. Discussion followed.

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

Item 5. Consent Calendar:

- a. Approval of Minutes: May, 2025
- b. Approval of Financial Report: May, 2025
- c. Approval of Bills: June, 2025

Raponi reported she had just sent out \$80,000 in invoices. Bell inquired if they were all expected. Raponi answered yes. Raponi reported there should be another invoice coming

in June from MDLT to exhaust the bio fund funding for Palisades for FY 2024/25. Discussion followed on current bio fund project amounts. Meredith Hergenrader moved to approve the consent calendar. Seconded by Paul Johnson. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Motion passed.

- Item 6. **District Conservationist's Monthly Report:** Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist, reported the Victorville Field office has more contracts than in previous years with over 60% of these contracts for soil and water testing. Shiralipour stated this year there are 47 preapproved contracts with 7 left to obligate, which is the earliest the office has ever had them obligated. Shiralipour summarized the USDA staff and office status throughout the state. Shiralipour summarized that NRCS is in a holding pattern, and she is unsure of how things will be reorganized. Shiralipour stated that the budget the white house gave USDA shows 4,000 fewer NRCS employees than last year which includes resignations. Shiralipour stated that NRCS is extremely short of engineers. Shiralipour and Johnson have discussed the issues with producers who have soil moisture sensors and how to use them and correct problems with them. Shiralipour reported that it appears the EQIP and CSP budget this year will be the same as last year, but she is unsure how many people there will be to help implement it. Shiralipour discussed ideas that may include MDRCD and MWA to help support more irrigation assistance. Shiralipour is meeting with Charlene Engeron, MWA tomorrow after the TAC meeting to discuss partnership opportunities and mutual interests. Shiralipour summarized the expected funding and employee cuts. Shiralipour stated that NRCS has not filled Curtis Tarvis' position (previous California Assistant State Conservationist) due to hiring freezes and are currently having NRCS employees temporarily fill this role in "Acting Positions." Shiralipour reported that once hiring opens again, NRCS can only hire 1 new employee for every 4 employees that left. Shiralipour stated that the Victorville Field Office lost one position in the soils department. Shiralipour stated that Doug Myers, RCD, is currently assisting the Oxnard office who has many contracts obligated and are also moving their office but do not have an office to move into. Shiralipour stated that it looks like NRCS will have manpower to conduct soil sample testing through Matthew Ballmer and Russell Plumb, NRCS Soil Scientists. Shiralipour is interested in sharing the information that is gathered from the water testing with MWA if all names can be withheld. Shiralipour asked if anyone has any questions. Shiralipour stated that MDRCD employees are all doing a great job and thanked MDRCD for the assistance they have provided NRCS. Bell thanked Shiralipour and NRCS. Shiralipour reported that Carlos Suarez, California State Conservationist, is hoping to make more agreements in the future stating that over the last 12 years she has been with NRCS, RCD has always had an agreement with NRCS.
- Item 7. **ReLeaf Project:** Nagy's report was in the directors' books for review. Bell inquired how much time Nagy is working with IERCD. Raponi answered that half of Nagy's time is with IERCD and the other half is with MDRCD
- Item 8: **Irrigation Management/AWAC/Meteorological Stations:** Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager's report is in the director's books for review. Walters let the board know he can answer any questions they may have.
- Item 9. **Mojave Weed Management Area:** Raponi stated this is currently on hold, and she hasn't heard anything regarding the grant that was submitted through California Food and AG specifically for weed management. Details will be provided once the grant is obtained.

Item 10. **Outreach:** Adrianna Holguin's, RCD Program Outreach, report was distributed to the board members for review. Holguin reported that Doug Myers, RCD, had attended the Spring Valley Lake Water Conservation Fair, and Myers and herself had attended a Wellness Fair at Serrano High School. Holguin stated that she has been in contact with BLM (Bureau of Land Management) at the Discovery Center and attended a clean-up day there with VVC's (Victor Valley College) AG club. Holguin stated she has been in contact with a Master Gardener who had obtained a seed grant for the Wellness Center. Holguin stated the native seed from this grant will be used to plant at the Discovery Center. Bell inquired why Holguin is working with VVC rather than Barstow College. Holguin replied that Barstow College does not have an AG Department. Holguin stated that Carlos Ruiz, VVC AG Professor, may have additional volunteers from an AG class that he teaches at Cal State Fullerton.

1. **UCANR Outreach:** Raponi stated Chris McDonald had wanted her to ask the board if they want to keep the same parameters or add other things to the partnership agreement for the next fiscal year with UCANR for O'Neil's time, as it will need to be approved and sent for signature for FY 2025/26. Discussion followed regarding a small portion of funding that will be reimbursed as it wasn't used due to a salary adjustment. Bell asked if the board had any changes they would like to make. The board did not have any changes. Raponi stated she hasn't received the agreement for the coming FY and will bring it before the board at the July board meeting. Discussion followed. O'Neill will continue to work but be paid retroactively.

11. Old Business

- a) **Mojave Water Agency FY 2024-25 Work Plan:** Bell reported that the bio fund portion of the workplan is done and has been approved by the Water Master. Bell stated that the MWA portion of the workplan is to be determined but will need to be finalized soon.
- b) **Sand Blow/Fugitive Dust/Solar Air Quality:** Bell stated he and Raponi worked on the 4-page brochure and asked Raponi if it was ready to go to the printer. Raponi answered no. Discussion followed on what is left to do before the two-page brochure goes to print, a one page versus a two-page brochure and the possibility of printing it in house. Bell asked about what to focus on for the one-page brochure. Kayla Hettinger suggested several options including native gardens, dust control, illegal grading, pollinator gardens and habitat restoration for yards. Holguin suggested Hettinger and herself work together to create this. Bell summarized that the district staff will focus on a 1-page (double sided) brochure with color photos. O'Neill stated that if there is more information than a 1-page (double sided) brochure can handle, they can decide whether to make a separate brochure and divide them into separate topics. Hergenrader stated fire information is important also because so many people are not aware.

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

- c) **Dairy Issues – District Lead in Dairy Co-Op:** Bell inquired if anyone had attended the Lahontan Board hearing held in Barstow and Lake Tahoe where the Confinement Order was discussed. O'Neill stated she had attended the one in Barstow and the only people that were present were the ones who had issues. O'Neill reported that everyone seemed happy, and Lahontan had stated there had been several responses from the community, including MDRCD. Bell stated that Lahontan had made some changes. O'Neill stated that one of the changes was giving the dairies more time to submit work they have done. Bell stated he is grateful that O'Neill attended. Johnson reported that Lahontan did an inspection on Dutch Dairy & Harmsen Dairy the day before. Johnson hasn't spoken with Dutch Dairy, but Harmsen Dairy said that it had gone well. Bell inquired if either of the dairies knew

Lahontan was coming. Johnson answered yes, stating that both visits were planned. Johnson stated that he spoke with one of the engineers from Green Valley Foods who stated one of the big concerns at Oasis Dairy is the implementation of monitoring wells because of the cost of installing and monitoring them. Van Dam stated his concern with the flow of the water as some data shows that it flows towards the river and other data (PG&E) shows that it flows away from the river. Johnson stated the Water Master have hydrologists on staff who may have information on this. Discussion followed. O'Neill reported that the two official updates after the hearing were the change from 90 to 180 days to report a workplan and the change of the language regarding who can work with them as an NRCS certified planner with Job Approval Authority in 590-Nutrient Management. O'Neill explained that prior wording authorized work with a person with certification but not necessarily an NRCS employee.

- d) **Update on Camp Cady:** Discussed earlier in the meeting under item 11. a)
- e) **Raven Issues:** After discussion O'Neill will forward information that Bell sent to his congressman about a special raven designation under the Migratory Bird Act to her legal team and follow up and report back to the board.
- f) **Grant funding:** Nothing new at this time.
- g) **Tamarisk Bio Control:** Johnson reported that the beetles are working their way South of the Hinkley bridge and were taking on a brown tinge a week ago.
- h) **CDFW Mojave Narrows Wildlife Protection:** Raponi reported she had contacted Agriserve to spray the pastures, and he is planning on spraying this Friday. Discussion followed.
- i) **Composting Operations:** Shiralipour asked Johnson if Kenny Harmsen is still active with his composting operation. Johnson answered that Harmsen just spread compost on their PG&E property, and they are going to begin on a new batch. Discussion followed regarding any assistance the board may know of that would help encourage them.
- j) **DOC and Natural Resources Agency Forestry Grant Through Inland Empire RCD:** Raponi reported that planting will begin in the Spring of 2026.
- k) **Assistance for MDLTs Palisades Ranch Restoration Plan/Project:** Bell stated \$30,000 will be allocated from the Bio Fund for next year. Shiralipour inquired about what the funds will be used for. Bell answered that the funding will be used towards invasives. Discussion followed. Raponi asked Johnson if they had been in contact with Lee Graham. Paul answered yes. Discussion followed on the Master Plan for Palisades and a cleanup day that is planned at the ranch. Raponi stated MDLT has secured additional funding to be used to complete the mowing of the Palisades Ag field and spray if necessary. Discussion followed on the current status of the mowing of the Ag field.
- l) **Stabilization of Fallowed AG Fields:** Nothing new at this time
- m) **Native Seed Increase Projects:** Nothing new at this time.
- n) **Sandy Valley Agriculture Issues:** Nothing new at this time.
- o) **Conservation Strategic Partnership Funding Program FY 2025/26:** Raponi stated there have been some applications turned in for the next fiscal year. Raponi would like to determine a deadline for review and funding dates. Bell inquired if there were specific dates chosen for last year. Raponi answered yes. Discussion followed on the guidelines for the Strategic Partnership Funding for FY 2024/25, the need for traditional guidelines and the possibility of having a rolling application period until the funding is exhausted. Holguin, RCD Program Outreach, inquired if all the funding from the Conservation Strategic Partnership Funding Program FY 2024/25 had been used. Raponi answered no. Holguin inquired if that funding would roll over. Raponi answered no. Hergenrader expressed her

concern about the advertising/promoting for this program stating if people don't know it is available, they cannot apply for it and MDRCD will continue to have unused funding each year. Hergenrader suggested leaving the application deadline open until funding dwindles. Bell suggested allocating \$50,000 (\$10,000 per project) on a first come, first serve basis, starting in July 2025 on a fiscal year basis or until the project is completed, whichever comes first. If the project is over \$10,000, the applicant will need to apply for additional funding in the next fiscal year. Bell summarized that the full \$10,000 funding will not be disbursed up front but once receipts and verification have been submitted. Shiralipour inquired about the status of the seed increase project, including the project at Copi-Mumford. Bell answered that he is unsure. Shiralipour reported that NRCS had recently met with Paul Deel at Copi Mumford in Newberry Springs. Shiralipour stated NRCS observed 3-4 rows that were planted with a 6-foot fence around it that Cadiz had installed. Shiralipour reported that Cadiz had also done some plowing and seeding. Shiralipour reported that Dakota Brooks has been visiting the site every other day to start the generator in the morning and Deel would start the generator at night to water the plants. Bell inquired if the generator was being used to pump ground water. Bell stated that if there was no power there, this project would be difficult. Discussion followed. The board summarized the two current Conservation Strategic Partnership Funding Programs for FY 2024/25, which are Copi-Mumford and Big Morongo Canyon Preserve. Discussion followed on the current requirements of the partnership agreements. Raponi stated she is having a difficult time obtaining the reports. Bell stated that if applicants don't submit reports, they should not receive money. Hergenrader suggested using the members of the approval committee to oversee this area. Discussion followed regarding how to oversee these projects. Holguin offered to conduct site visits to applicants/awardees. Hergenrader stated that receipts can be submitted but proof of work is important, and site visits would be beneficial. Bell stated that MDRCD is relying on the applicant to provide photos and proof of actions taken with the money. Bell stated that site visits can occur, but it will complicate the process. Raponi stated that originally, it was decided that the applicant submit a breakdown of funding they would need to complete certain parts of the project, money would be disbursed upfront, the work would be completed, and a report would be submitted then funding for the next stage of the project would be disbursed. Hergenrader stated that she does not think disbursement of funds should be broken up into more than 2 stages. Bell summarized that each project would have to go through the process of being approved then once they are approved, the committee/board will have to rely on the applicant to send proof. **Hergenrader moved to earmark \$50,000 for Partnership Agreements and upon approval they can receive 50% of the funds up front, upon proof of progress, they can receive the rest of the funding, up to \$10,000 per project, \$50,000 per fiscal year. Seconded by Paul Johnson Roll Call- Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Motion passed.**

- p) **BLM Partnership:** Holguin stated she had emailed BLM but has not heard back. Holguin reported she had new points of contact for the Discovery Center in Barstow and stated she will contact them to inquire if they are still interested. Discussion followed regarding installing a fence or planting cacti to help keep vandalism down. Holguin reported that all the windows in the building were recently replaced but have been broken already. Bell inquired if BLM is planning to keep employees onsite. Holguin stated BLM is hopeful the public will see the work happening outside of the building and will take more interest in keeping the building safe and reporting any incidents they see. Hergenrader inquired if it is possible for BLM to have someone onsite, in a trailer. Holguin is unsure.

q) **Board Approval of Streamline:** Raponi stated Hergenrader had contacted Don Woo, DW Designs, who had reviewed MDRCD's website and stated it is currently ADA compliant. Woo had stated when asked that he is not aware of anyone who has been sued for being out of compliance. Raponi stated Woo is confident he can keep the website up to date and in compliance, by reviewing it regularly. Raponi summarized the cost to the district for two websites per year. Raponi stated that MDRCD currently pays Woo \$300/ year for him to keep the websites ADA compliant and up to date with anything that Raponi asks to add (including Minutes and Agendas) Bell inquired if the Weed Management website is necessary. Raponi answered yes and explained that it is necessary for the upcoming grant. Raponi stated it would be less expensive to stay with Woo, who currently maintains the websites. Raponi pointed out that "it would not be insured" which is what Streamline is selling. Raponi stated that if MDRCD went with Streamline, someone would still have to access the site to add documents and make changes. Raponi stated Streamline would only ensure the website stays compliant. Raponi summarized that she feels Streamline is pushing/ selling insurance. Bell inquired if MDRCD's SDRMA (Special District Risk Management Authority) policy covers compliance. Raponi answered that it does not. Shiralipour suggested looking into other companies that insure. Discussion followed regarding ADA compliance. Hergenrader inquired if the total for Streamline overseeing both websites is an estimated \$6,000/ yr. Raponi answered yes. **Hergenrader moved to continue to use Don Woo to oversee both websites in addition to maintaining their ADA compliance. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Paul Johnson – Yes. Motion Passed.**

r) **NRCS Local Work Group Meetings:** Shiralipour stated a local work group meeting needs to be held by the second week of August. Shiralipour will ask Charlene Engeron if the work group can be held at MWA. Shiralipour will work with Raponi to plan the details. Shiralipour stated this meeting should be sponsored by MDRCD. Discussion followed regarding possible work group meeting topics. Bell inquired if the work group meeting is mandated. Shiralipour answered yes. Bell inquired who the mandating comes from. Shiralipour answered that it comes from the NRCS State Office. Shiralipour stated the meeting can be simple, pointing out that it may be hard to plan something definitive due to the uncertainty of the state of the agency. Shiralipour stated the importance of holding the meeting is to inquire what priority resource concerns producers/community/farmers are interested in. Shiralipour suggested hosting another Pizza for Producers meeting in November. Bell inquired if the Local Work Group Meeting and Pizza for Producers can be combined and held together. Shiralipour answered no, stating that it is currently too hot to host Pizza for Producers and the local work group meeting needs to be held by the second week of August. Discussion followed regarding agendas and discussion items. Shiralipour suggested local legislators as possible speakers and/or so they can hear the farmers' concerns. O'Neill suggested inviting the Rural Crimes Task Force Deputy (John Francis), who is based out of Victorville. Bell commented that was a great idea. Shiralipour asked about the BSNF Barstow project and what the impact may be on farming. Hergenrader inquired if a date and location needed to be chosen. Shiralipour stated she would ask Charlene Engeron when she sees her tomorrow at the MWA TAC meeting. Johnson asked if the AG producers invited to this meeting will include jujube, alfalfa and dairy farmers. Shiralipour stated attendees should include all AG producers and partners. O'Neill suggested inviting the three local FFA's (Future Farmers of America) Shiralipour commented that this was a good idea. O'Neill will obtain FFA contact information. O'Neill will bring what is left of the illegal land clearing brochures. It was decided that MDRCD will host this event and

Shiralipour will inquire about borrowing the Meeting OWL to allow attendees to meet through Zoom. O'Neill offered assistance with setting the OWL up.

12. New Business:

- a. **Revision to MDRCD Policy RE: Overhead Rates:** Bell inquired if the board members saw the policy that was sent out. All board members answer yes. Raponi stated the policy is also in the director's books. Raponi explained this revision is for clarification on the already approved policy. Johnson inquired if it needed to be adopted. Bell answered yes and asked if the board has any questions. Board members are clear on the policy. **Paul Johnson moved to approve the revision of 12% overhead policy, i.e. MDRCD's cap is 12% on paying – out of its own funds – overhead rates for services/contracts/etc. that we pay using other entities' funds may be over 12% depending on what they have negotiated. This can be negotiated under certain circumstances. Seconded by Meredith Hergenrader. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Passed.**
- b. **MDLT Project Name: State Route 62 Wildlife Overpasses:** Bell stated that Geary Hund with MDLT is available if needed. Bell stated that MDLT has applied for a grant with the California Wildlife Conservation Board to build two wildlife conservation overpasses on state Route 62. Bell stated MDLT is looking for a lead agency to assist with the Northern Route and is working with Coachella Conservancy for the Southern Overpass which is in Riverside County. Bell asked the board if they had read the information he sent them. The board answered yes. Bell stated that Caltrans must have a local agency involved in a Wildlife Overpass, over a Caltrans California overpass, over a Caltrans Road. Bell stated that MDRCD would be involved with the Northern overpass near Yucca Valley. Bell stated that MDLT owns the land on each side of the overpass so there will not be any issue with easements. Bell stated that if Hund does not get assistance from either of the Coachella Valley Conservancies for the Southern route in Riverside County, Raponi can provide him with a contact from IERCD who may be able to assist. Bell will assist Raponi with this project. MDRCD summarized that there will be no "pass through" but there may be an opportunity to contract with a professional to perform the necessary functions for MDRCD as the local agency. Bell stated this would give MDRCD more exposure to the Morongo area. Bell stated he is interested in this project. A decision will need to be made by July. Bell stated that the responsibilities have been outlined and will be similar to the role MDRCD had in the Palisades Restoration Project but with less CEQA work. Discussion followed regarding the benefits and importance of wildlife corridors. Bell stated MDLT is 80% sure they will obtain the grant. Bell stated that MDLT's funding comes from Prop 4 for Wildlife Conservation that has been specifically earmarked for wildlife crossings. Bell stated that each local agency will receive \$110,000 allocated for work, which can be used to contract the professional. Hergenrader inquired if MDRCD would write a contract for someone who was an expert in the field and the money would go to pay him. Bell answered yes and added that he and Raponi are working together to do this. Bell stated the individual representing MDRCD would be doing 90% of the work. Bell summarized that the individual would be paid by MDRCD on a contract basis, with the funds that MDRCD receives from the grant. Bell stated that this will only happen if the grant is approved, stating it currently has a 95% chance of approval as the state also wants these corridors. **Paul Johnson moved for the MDRCD to peruse involvement in this proposed startup of State Route 62 Wildlife Overpass project. Hergenrader seconded. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Passed.**

- c. **Set Deadlines for Partnerships Funding Applications FY 2025/26: Discussed earlier in meeting under Old Business item o)**
- 13. **Correspondence (Discussion items only):** Nothing new at this time.
- 14. **Directors Reports and Comments:** Raponi will RSVP for 2 tickets for Hergenrader for the Association of The San Bernardino County Special Districts Membership Meeting held on June 16th at The Old Spaghetti Factory in Rancho Cucamonga. The topic is Increasing Community Engagement through Culturally Relevant Events. Raponi inquired who her guest will be. Hergenrader stated she will bring her husband.
- 15. **Closed Session (Government Code 5457(b)(1) Personnel): Discussion of staff personnel items. No actions taken.**
- 16. **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 3:10pm

Dana Raponi, District Manager