

MINUTES OF THE  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

June 5, 2024

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation District was held on Wednesday afternoon, June,5 at 1:07.

Directors in attendance where:

Chuck Bell  
Meredith Hergenrader  
Eldert Van Dam  
Neville Slade

Directors absent/excused:

Paul Johnson

Others in attendance were:

Dana Raponi, District Manager  
Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager  
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist  
Becca Everett, Admin Assistant  
Pat Flanigan, Associate Director  
Senia King, NRCS Pathways Student

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): Holly Shiralipour introduced Senia King, a Pathways student through NRCS, and stated she is a college student from Mississippi working here in the Victorville field office for the summer learning NRCS programs. The RCD board introduced themselves and stated how long they have resided on the RCD board. Shiralipour stated this is King's second summer interning in California for the program.

Item 3. Public Discussion/Invited Guest(s): No Public Discussion/Guests Scheduled.

Item 4. Approval of Agenda: **Eldert Van Dam moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Neville Slade. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes, Meredith Hergenrader – Yes. Motion Passed.**

Item 5. Consent Calendar:

- a. Approval of Minutes: May 2024
- b. Approval of Financial Report: May 2024
- c. Approval of Bills: June 2024

Raponi summarized the financial revenues for the district so far this year including tax revenue and invoices sent for ReLeaf, MWA and Biofund programs. Raponi reported the district had been approved for Emergency funding from MWA as the programs through MWA

were out of funds. Raponi stated NRCS has funded an amendment to add \$15,000 to the existing agreement to last until the end of September 2024. Raponi stated she and Shiralipour are hopeful the \$75,000 “Boots on the Ground” NRCS grant the district submitted will be approved and can start in October 2024. Raponi stated Jackie Lindgren is currently clearing trails in the forested area at the Mojave Narrows Regional Park using funding from the CDFW grant. Raponi stated CARCD is updating bylaws and may not require regional meetings due to the amount of time and energy it takes to host the meetings. Raponi stated there are five RCD’s (Riverside/Corona, San Joaquin County, San Jacinto Basin, North Santa Clara and Loma Prieto) that are asking to schedule a special meeting of RCD’s regarding California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) business practices and transparency. Raponi stated these RCDs are requesting records, minutes, agendas, annual reports and budgets questioning the transparency of (CARCD). Raponi stated there is an entity called PPG who is working with CARCD in the capacity of lobbying legislature to assist all California RCD’s in receiving base funding and to keep up to date on current legislature affecting RCD’s. Discussion followed. **Eldert Van Dam moved to approve the consent calendar. Seconded by Neville Slade. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes, Meredith Hergenrader –Yes. Passed.**

Item 6: **District Conservationist’s Monthly Report:** Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist, stated the \$15,000 additional funding will not be received until August and expressed her appreciation for Diana Waller, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Management and Strategy, who was instrumental in obtaining a special authorization to approve the additional \$15,000 in funding. Shiralipour acknowledged the excellent relationship between NRCS and MDRCD and stated there are not many offices that share this relationship. Discussion followed. Shiralipour stated she feels these relationships are very beneficial and have led to MDRCD employees becoming NRCS employees. Shiralipour summarized the NRCS EQIP status on funding, contracts both obligated and pre-approved, the new NRCS staff being hired, and more focus being placed on healthy soil practices. Shiralipour stated Inland Empire RCD had received a grant and are currently conducting free soil testing. Discussion followed on the cost of a soil test, doing more with soil health and speaker subjects for the Local Work Group meeting. Hergenrader stated Desert Springs Community Church in Hesperia had received a \$10,000 grant from MWA to establish a community garden on their property and is also teaching classes at MWA. Discussion followed regarding the possibility of working with the Desert Springs Community Church regarding tree giveaways, the possibility of tree demonstrations, and the summarization of NRCS practices including soil moisture sensor’s, well testing and mulch application. Shiralipour stated Maggie O’Neil is now in the Victorville Service Center once per month. Shiralipour stated O’Neil is funded by IERCD and manages San Bernardino County Farm Bureau and is in charge of the Master Gardeners program through Cooperative Extension. Shiralipour is hopeful having O’Neil in the office will open new avenues.

Item 7. **ReLeaf Project:** Nagy’s report was in the directors’ books for review. Slade inquired if Nagy’s salary is reimbursed by IERCD paying MDRCD back for payments made to Nagy. Raponi summarized the ReLeaf funding through the IERCD grant, the areas Nagy is doing outreach within both IERCD and MDRCD boundaries and the core source of the IERCD grant funding. Slade stated he had attended the Society for Ecological Restoration California Convention in Redlands and had spoken with members of IERCD. Slade stated he was impressed with the work they are a part of including multiple partnerships and how they structure their restorations. Raponi stated IERCD is closely following Nagy and her work

with restoration and sharing information. Slade expressed the importance of keeping the ReLeaf program going because of the work being completed on both sides of the watershed. Shiralipour stated Twentynine Palms Marine Base has a project called Mojave Desert Sentinel Landscape which involves improving the environment around the base. Discussion followed on the Marine Bases' application process and project focus. Bell stated Twentynine Palms Marine Base has a good conservation program.

Item 8: **Irrigation Management/AWAC/Meteorological Stations:** Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager reported he and Raponi have been working on additional emergency funding for the MWA programs to last until the recently submitted new fiscal year 2024/25 workplan has been approved. Walters reported he and the team conducted 33 IWM visits in the month of May and have spent a significant amount of time "Community Building" in Joshua Tree, which has been very successful. Walters reported through the Seed to Salad course three separate groups have begun working together, which led to land being donated by the Metaphysic Center, where the community is now growing a Community Garden. Walters stated during the Seed to Salad program, the course spends four weeks on soils, using material that comes directly from NRCS healthy soils information which been a great resource. Bell inquired about the weather stations. Walters stated the weather stations have been very low maintenance. Hergenrader inquired if Walters had any information regarding the seed swap/exchange at Joshua Basin Water District. Walters will put Hergenrader in contact with Kathleen Radnich who can give her more information.

Item 9. **Mojave Weed Management Area:** Nothing new at this time.

Item 10. Old Business:

- a) **Mojave Water Agency FY 2023-24 Work Plan:** Bell stated MWA had approved the additional funding for the MWA programs to finish this fiscal year. Bell stated he and Raponi had discussed MDRCD contributing \$20,000 to the MWA IWM program for the FY 2024-25 workplan. Bell stated he would like to show MWA that MDRCD is also willing to assist in this area. Discussion followed on the projected amount of the IWM program for the FY 2024/25, the MWA program being restricted to only the adjudicated areas and the possibility of IWM funding being allocated for areas outside the adjudication. Bell inquired if the \$42,000 projected for IWM, would still only cover the adjudicated area and if the board would be interested in allocating an amount to cover areas outside of the adjudicated areas. After discussion Bell summarized that MDRCD would be funding a portion of the adjudicated area for IWM, along with additional funding to be used for work performed by Walters outside of the adjudicated area but within MWA boundaries. Discussion followed on MWA boundaries and when the FY 24/25 workplan would be presented to MWA for approval. Slade suggested obtaining detailed monthly reports regarding location sites of visits in and out of the adjudicated areas so it can be determined where the growth is taking place. Slade stated this will be beneficial in determining if this funding is appropriate for next year. Discussion followed on detailed monthly reporting, submitting the reports to MWA and the MDRCD board for review and the educational outreach portion of the MWA programs not being restricted to adjudicated boundaries. Bell inquired how much the board would like to commit. After discussion **Meredith Hergenrader moved to allocate \$20,000 in funding toward the IWM program in MWA's FY 2024-25 work plan, and \$5,000 for IWM work to be used outside MWA/Adjudicated boundaries. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Neville Slade - Yes. Passed.** Raponi reported the Bio fund portion of the FY 24/25 workplan has been approved.

Discussion followed on the source, control and allocation of the Biological Trust Fund (Bio fund). Raponi summarized the projects and allocated amounts within the Bio Fund portion of the workplan.

- b. **Sand Blow/Fugitive Dust/solar Air Quality:** Pat Flanagan reported there are two projects posing a sand blow issue. One project is located outside of Twentynine Palms and one outside of Desert Center. Flanagan stated there is not much attention being paid to either one.
  - 1. **California 30x30 Plan:** Flanagan stated the California panel for the 30x30 initiative are beginning to understand that the desert has a lot of biodiversity and is sequestering carbon, but still want to put the area under the same vegetation as Chaparral. Bell inquired if a letter from MDRCD would be beneficial. Flanagan will ask Arch McCulloch, Chair of Mojave Desert California Native Plant Society and let the board know. Bell thanked Flanagan for her work on this project.
- c) **Dairy Issues – District Lead in Dairy Co-Op:** Nothing new at this time.
- d) **Update on Camp Cady:** Item discussed earlier in the meeting.
- e) **Raven Issues:** Nothing new at this time.
- f) **Grant funding Opportunities: FY2024 UAIP Competitive Grants Program USDA:** Item discussed earlier in the meeting.
- g) **Tamarisk Bio Control:** Nothing new at this time.
- h) **Mojave Narrows Management Plan:** Item discussed earlier in the meeting.
- i) **Composting Operations to Deal with Manures:** Slade stated he would like Burrtec to attend an MDRCD meeting as a guest speaker to present and explain what their facility specializes in. Walters reported he had assisted Joshua Tree in obtaining free mulch from Burrtec for an event. Hergenrader stated the Master Gardeners had also obtained mulch from Burrtec at no charge and distributed it at their tree giveaways. Discussion followed.
- j) **DOC and Natural Resources Agency Forestry Grant Through Inland Empire RCD:** Item discussed earlier in the meeting.
- k) **Assistance for MDLTs Palisades Ranch Restoration Plan/Project:** Raponi stated MDLT had been allotted \$60,000 for Palisades for fiscal year 2024-25 through the bio-fund. Raponi stated she had received an invoice from Lee Graham for the last fiscal year 2023-24 mowing of the agricultural field at Palisades. Discussion followed.
- l) **What if Any is the RCDs Role in Working with Farmers Throughout the Adjudicated Area if Ramp-Down of Water Rights Continues-Native Seed Establishment:** Bell stated he had sent an article on native seed to Raponi that was published in National Wildlife Federation. Raponi will forward the article to the board.
- m) **Local Work Group Meetings:** Shiralipour stated there will be two separate meetings, one in conjunction with IERCD for forestry to be held in the San Bernardino County mountains, and the other meeting, hosted by the MDRCD, will possibly be held at MWA. Both meetings will be hybrid allowing in person attendance and an additional zoom option. Raponi stated MDRCD will host the meetings and NRCS will chair them. Shiralipour discussed possible topics to include, such as native seed, healthy soils and farming.
- n) **Native Seed Increase Projects:** Item discussed earlier in the meeting.
- o) **Cadiz Water Project:** Nothing new at this time.
- p) **Mojave Desert Land Trust River-Wide Invasive Weed Treatment-** Nothing new at this time.
- q) **Purchase of a 4x4 District Vehicle:** Raponi stated the biggest issue would be where to store the vehicle. Raponi will look into other RCDs vehicle policies and report back to the board. Discussion followed regarding possible locations to park vehicles.

- r) **Sandy Valley Agriculture Issues:** Van Dam visited farmers in the area and shared Raponi's contact information with them.
- s) **Pond Turtle Survey in the West fork/Las Flores Region for FY 2024/25:** This item discussed earlier in meeting.
- t) **Grant Program Planning:** The item discussed under New Business below.

#### 11. **New Business:**

- a. **Project Suggestions for RCD Funding:** Slade stated when he attended the So. Cal Seed Conference, there was a non-profit group in the Central Valley who started their own seed production group called Heritage Growers.River Partners. Slade stated they are partnering with CARCD and explained they collect and grow the seed for increase and will work hand in hand with RCDs to get those seeds into the hands of farmers. Slade reported the BLM seed strategy project hasn't been as successful as anticipated, stating they have a contract for 11,000 lbs. of seed that will only produce 300 lbs. Holly stated MDLT (Mojave Desert Land Trust) was featured on CNN for their large native seed bank. Slade stated these seed banks are small compared to the amount needed. Discussion followed. Shiralipour suggested collaboration with MDLT regarding their seed collections. Shiralipour stated MDLT has over 800 seed collections representing 200 species with 5 million seeds. Slade stated those numbers are high compared to the actual weight of the seed it produces. Bell stated there will be need for native seed for the Ag fields in Lucerne Valley once the water is gone. Slade agreed and stated S&S Seeds purchased the majority of the small seed companies. Discussion followed. Shiralipour suggested the possibility of assisting individuals with soil testing, stating this could possibly compliment the seed increase project. Slade inquired if the \$50,000 approved for seed increase projects included any type of conservation practice that supported mini grants. Slade used High Desert Keepers as an example, stating they recently obtained a \$250,000 grant for their tire abatement program, but they do not have any funding for operations. Discussion followed on who would possibly apply for the mini-grants, what kind of projects the mini-grants could fund, how to advertise the grants availability, the need for set guidelines and choosing a sub-committee of the board to review the applications. Once applications are submitted the committee would review them and then decide which submitted applications would be approved. Slade distributed a template of a possible grant application outline he adapted from MWA's website. Slade referred to it as the Mojave Desert Resource Conservation Implementation Grant Application. Slade suggested outlining a reporting system to be implemented within the mini grant to help track work being completed on each grant. Bell stated the board would need to vote on each project before it was approved. Discussion followed regarding writing this into the next fiscal year's budget. Raponi stated the grants could come in throughout the year and the funding could be used as they are approved or until the funding is depleted. Raponi stated MWA has a deadline for their strategic partnership grant applications and also requires projects to be completed within a certain period of time. Discussion followed on having a deadline for applications, the amount of funding that would be needed for the mini grants and stressed the importance of approving applicants that are both qualified and have the time to commit to and complete said projects. Slade inquired if this will be tabled until the next meeting. After discussion **Meredith Hergenrader moved to approve \$50,000 for the "mini grants" for FY24-25. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Neville Slade – Yes. Approved.**

#### 12. **Correspondence (Discussion items only): No correspondence discussed.**

13. **Directors Reports and Comments:** After discussion **Meredith Hergenrader moved for the board to go dark in July and resume again in August. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Chuck Bell – Yes. Neville Slade – Yes. Passed.** Discussion followed regarding the mission of the Mojave Desert RCD, what they consider to be conservation work, and that trash removal is a benefit towards conservation. Raponi stated Paul Johnson has a list of entities he would like to have the MDRCD's land clearing pamphlets sent to. Everett will contact Johnson for the list and work on mailing them. Discussion followed on the administration of the mini grants, the criteria for funding distribution of the mini grant awards to the recipient's and bringing the item discussion back to the board next month. Shiralipour expressed the importance of accountability and proving how the money is being used. Slade stated he will work on an outline of what the application, preapproval and implementation process for the mini grants will look like and will bring this information back to the board for August's meeting. Shiralipour reminded the board to check their emails regarding information on the upcoming local workgroup meetings.

14. **14. Closed Session (Litigation and Personnel:** No Closed Session was held.

15. **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 3:39

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Dana Raponi, District Manager.