

MINUTES OF THE  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

May 1, 2024

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

Directors in attendance where:

Meredith Hergenrader  
Eldert Van Dam  
Neville Slade

Directors absent/excused:

Chuck Bell  
Paul Johnson

Others in attendance were:

Pat Flanigan, Associate Director  
Dana Raponi, District Manager  
Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager  
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist  
Adrianna Holguin, NRCS NRI

Item 1. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance: The regular meeting was called to order by Neville Slade. The pledge of Allegiance was let by Meredith Hergenrader. Minutes were recorded by Dana Raponi.

Item 2. Self-Introduction of Guests(s): Dana Raponi introduced Adrianna Holguin as MDRCD's newest employee who is working with Peter Fahnestock and funded by NRCS/NRI. Slade congratulated Holguin.

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 Meredith Hergenrader. Roll Call –Neville Slade – Yes. Motion Passed.**

Item 5. Consent Calendar:

- a. Approval of Minutes: March 2024
- b. Approval of Financial Report: March/April 2024
- c. Approval of Bills: April/May, 2024

Raponi summarized the balance of the LAIF account after the first quarter interest was applied. Slade inquired about the San Bernardino County revenue the district receives. Discussion continued regarding how often funding from the County is received. **Neville Slade moved to approve the consent calendar. Seconded by Eldert Van Dam. Roll Call – Meredith Hergenrader –Yes. Passed.**

**Item 6: District Conservationist's Monthly Report:** Holly Shiralipour, NRCS District Conservationist, summarized the EQIP application and obligation progress the NRCS staff is currently working on. Shiralipour stated Rita Clemmens (University of California Cooperative Extension) is planning to visit the office with the new Master Gardner Coordinator. Discussion continued. Shiralipour stated agriculture in San Bernardino County is changing from large agriculture to small AG and urban farming, and she would like to partner more with Cooperative Extension and other entities that work closely with urban AG. Shiralipour suggested working with MWA (Mojave Water Agency) to host field days for soil health and soil testing. Discussion followed on a possible small garden collaborative, the RCD helping small farmers with the cost of soil testing and help with soil health. Shiralipour explained that currently NRCS has a list of soil labs that can be shared with individuals but stated soil testing in California is much more expensive than in other states. Shiralipour stated there are a large number of grants available for urban agriculture and the growing number of RCD's that are assisting with the subsidization of soil testing. Raponi will reach out to IERCD (Inland Empire Resource Conservation District) and report back. Shiralipour summarized the difficulty with onboarding volunteers due to the fingerprinting process through NRCS allowing government computer access. Raponi summarized it is a lengthy process that keeps volunteers from logging onto the USDA internet until the volunteer is completely vetted. Raponi stated the process often takes 4-6 months to complete. Shiralipour stated without a Linc Pass, the USDA internet cannot be accessed. Raponi will research Wi-Fi through Verizon. Shiralipour stated the office will be hosting a Pathways student for the summer and NRCS has also made an offer to an individual for the open Soil Scientist position.

**Item 7. ReLeaf Project:** Nagy's report was in the directors' books for review. Raponi summarized the grant funding from IERCD for the ReLeaf program and stated the seconded year of funding is in place, with the first year's final invoice submitted. Raponi stated the tree seedlings are growing and should be ready for planting this fall. Discussion followed.

**Item 8: Irrigation Water Management/AWAC/Meteorological Stations:** Tony Walters, RCD Program Manager, reported a large increase in the number of IWM (Irrigation Water Management) visits. Walters stated the team has completed 285 IWM visits this fiscal year, compared to a total of 34 visits completed last year. Walters summarized the work that has been completed in the Joshua Tree area including the community garden at the Cultural Center. Walters reported there are seven additional workshops on the calendar for June 2024. Walters is working on obtaining new participants for the Seed to Salad workshop in the coming fiscal year. Walters reported he had attended Helendale CSD's Earth Day event and presented to 250 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students on Ecosystems. Raponi stated because of the pay increases and the dramatic increase in IWM visits and AWAC presentations, the funding for IWM and AWAC programs is running low for this fiscal year. Raponi stated she and Walters have approached MWA to add additional funding to finish the IWM and AWAC programs for this fiscal year. Raponi explained the process needed for additional funding to be added to the FY 2023/24 workplan and stated the item is on the MWA board agenda for May 23<sup>rd</sup>.. Discussion followed.

**Item 9. Mojave Weed Management Area:** Raponi stated there are several grants available and it is possible to have employee Doug Myers research some for application. Raponi reported MDRCD is partnering with IERCD's Weed Management crews to work on the Garlic Mustard by Arrowhead Lake which is funded by a grant from the State of California through the San Bernardino County commissioner's office.

Item 10. Old Business:

a) **Mojave Water Agency FY 2023-24 Work Plan:** This item covered under item 8 above.

b) **Sand Blow/Fugitive Dust/solar Air Quality:** Pat Flanagan reported there is a project notice for a 30-acre solar project that will be located North of the Lucerne Valley High School. Flanagan stated this is a bad plan because of the sand blow that will occur with it. Flanagan stated the Inland Desert Working Group will be commenting on it. Flanagan stated Chuck Bell had mentioned speaking with Gubler Orchids regarding their interest in building a solar project on a property adjacent to their facility in Lucerne Valley. Bell had stated that based on a study that had been completed, due to the lower income bracket of the majority of residents in Lucerne Valley they receive a lower rate for electricity, therefore any solar projects meant to be for local power would not be lucrative. Discussion followed on the existing glut of electricity and the need for battery storage. Flanagan stated if Brian Hammer, MWA, would not have received the notice regarding this project and passed it on no one would know the deadline for commenting, as it is not posted on the county website.

1. **California 30x30 Plan:** Flanagan summarized that in the past, the state understood the desert to be categorized with sparsely vegetative land and sand dunes which is not true. Flanagan stated the report completed by the Inland Desert Working Group, that was shared with the board members at last month's meeting, has convinced California who is now on board. Flanagan summarized an example from California's recently released documents, dated April 22, 2024, that describe California's nature-based solutions climate targets and are finally getting it right. Flanagan is thankful for the strides that have been made in this area. Raponi inquired about a letter from the last board meeting that she and Bell were going to write and if it had been sent. Flanagan apologized and stated she does not believe there is need to send the letter now.

c) **Dairy Issues – District Lead in Dairy Co-Op:** Van Dam reported he had attended the Lahontan meeting in Lynwood stating the information and pictures were the same ones that had been used at the meeting over a year ago. Van Dam reported that Southern Cal Water spoke about the nitrogen in their Bradshaw Well Fields, explaining they had installed a treatment system but hauling the brine cost them over 2 million dollars a month. Van Dam stated that B&E Dairy was mentioned again stating the nitrates were coming from B&E Dairy. Van Dam stated a letter had been sent asking to not blame B&E dairy as this information was not scientific. Discussion followed. Slade inquired what the purpose of the meeting was. Van Dam believed it was to satisfy a promise Lahontan had made last year to improve the nitrate situation. Discussion followed. Van Dam stated there is talk of making sure each dairy has their own individual plan. Raponi stated Bell had sent her an email stating Lahontan had rescinded the clean-up order for M&N Dairy. Discussion followed.

1. **Comments on Lahontan Livestock Confinement Order:** Raponi inquired if the board would like to take this off the agenda as there is no longer a confinement order. The board agreed to take this off the agenda.

d) **Update on Camp Cady:** Raponi stated she is working on project requests for the bio fund request letter from CDFW to the Water master for the new FY 2024/25. Raponi stated the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has hired a seasonal employee to stay on the Camp Cady proper and are in the process of hiring a full-time employee who will stay at and work on the Camp Cady property. Shiralipour asked what Bruce Kenyon's plan was. Raponi stated Kenyon is under the impression that Fish and Wildlife wanted him out and explained that she is going to meet with him on Thursday, May 2, 2024, to discuss what the

future will look like. Slade inquired if Archibec is farming anything on the Harvard road field property. Raponi stated he was growing Milo and Sudan grass.

- e) **Raven Issues:** Raponi stated Bell had seen a PBS special featuring Tim Shields, Hardshell Labs, Inc. Van Dam stated he had run into Shields, who let Van Dam know that he had recently trapped and placed trackers on twelve ravens to help determine where they sleep at night. Discussion followed.

- 1. **Support Letter for Hardshell Labs, Inc.:** After discussion the board agreed to take this item off the agenda.

- f) **Grant funding Opportunities: FY2024 UAIP Competitive Grants Program USDA:**

Raponi reported there were two available grants, one that had a match and one that did not. Raponi stated the district had applied for the grant that did not have a match. Raponi stated she had communicated with Diana Waller, NRCS Management Analyst, who had informed her the district should hear back the first to the middle of May and that MDRCD would be a priority. Discussion followed.

- g) **Tamarisk Bio Control:** Raponi reported an amount will be requested from the bio fund for weed eradication or Tamarisk bio control in case any will be needed in exhibit H areas. Raponi stated that Tom Dudley had told her he will be conducting a survey but would not be requesting any funding be put aside for it.

- h) **Mojave Narrows Management Plan:** Raponi stated the 3-year grant for this plan was approved. Raponi reported she and Jackie Lindgren had met Joe Frazier and his crew at the park and Frazier mowed the pasture areas while she and Lindgren spent six hours clearing trails. Raponi stated the first year will consist of mowing the pastures and clearing the trails as many times as it is necessary. Raponi stated the second year of the plan will include mowing, spraying, and determining what will need to be done during the third year. Hergenrader inquired if a preemergent can be used. Raponi stated she is unsure and will be in contact with AgroServ to inquire what can be used. Discussion continued regarding the possibility of contacting local ETI (Equestrian Trails Inc.) corrals to schedule a “clean-the-trails” day at the park. Discussion followed. Raponi stated there is just one trail left that needs to be cleared at this time.

- i) **Composting Operations to Deal with Manures:** Raponi asked Shiralipour about a card from a representative from the Burrtec Waste and Victorville MURPH and had come into the office to inform entities they were offering delivery of free compost and mulch for community gardens. Shiralipour expressed her concern regarding the quality of the mulch. Walters stated he had contracted with Burrtec to have free compost and mulch delivered to Joshua Tree for their event and had spoken with the representative there regarding sharing information on this program with our office. Walters stated the compost and mulch delivered to Joshua Tree was of good quality. Slade stated there is confusion between Burrtec’s fairly new facility at the MURPH in Victorville on Abbey Lane, which is a proper facility, and American Organics who receives unclean waste from Athens in Los Angeles. Discussion followed on green waste, having the compost tested by The American Compost Association and the Burrtec company being community conscious. Walters stated Burrtec will provide free delivery of compost as long as the garden is open to the public. Discussion followed.

- j) **Doc AND Natural Resources Agency Forestry Grant Through Inland Empire RCD:**  
This item discussed under item #7 on the agenda.

- k) **Assistance for MDLTs Palisades Ranch Restoration Plan/Project:** Raponi stated spraying and restoration is taking place at Palisades Ranch. Yani Aldao Galvan, MDLT, is planning to visit the site and contact Raponi with an update. Raponi stated she and CDFW is expecting a request proposal from MDLT for the bio fund for next year at Palisades Ranch. Discussion

followed on Biological Trust Fund funding requests, the number of entities obtaining pass through funding with the district and the adjudication Bio Fund restrictions on the funding.

- 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:** Slade stated Dakota Brooks and his team planted native seeds at Copi-Mumford, but germination wasn't great, so they had re-planted. Slade reported that there is a 2-acre plot at Cadiz, that will be planted on Friday May 3, 2020. Hergenrader inquired what they will be planting. Slade answered Ambrosia and Desert Needlegrass. Discussion followed on contacting the NRCS Lockhead Plant Materials center, if there will be enough seed from the Cadiz project to be harvested and given back to BLM. Slade stated there is not enough seed supply to create an adequate farm project, so they are just working on seed increase. Slade stated Cadiz is doing this as a favor and explained the seed will more than likely be stored at VVC (Victor Valley College). Slade is hopeful that in the future, if a farmer is interested in growth of either of the two species there will be enough available to do so. Discussion followed.
- m) **Local Work Group Meetings:** Raponi asked Shiralipour if she had received emails from the state, requiring all NRCS offices and RCDs to hold a local workgroup meeting by the end of August. Shiralipour stated no and asked Raponi to forward her the emails. Discussion continued regarding details of a meeting, possible topics that may be covered and who would host it. Raponi stated some RCDs have hosted meetings that are geared around farmers schedules and include presentations in the morning, having lunch and then having field visits in the afternoon. Discussion followed.
- n) **Native Seed Increase Projects:** This item discussed under item 1 on the agenda. The board agreed to keep this item on the agenda.
- o) **Cadiz Water Project:** Nothing new at this time.
- p) **Mojave Desert Land Trust River-Wide Invasive Weed Treatment-** This item covered under item k on the agenda. this time.
- q) **Purchase of a 4x4 District Vehicle:** Slade inquired about the district's possible purchase of a 4x4 vehicle. Raponi reported she emailed Earl Graham with the details he requested on the district van to see its value but has not heard back from him. Discussion followed regarding purchasing new vs. used and from where.
- r) **Sandy Valley Agriculture Issues:** Raponi stated she had spoken with Paul Johnson who planned on contacting Eldert Van Dam regarding a visit. Van Dam reported that they have not planned a visit yet.

## 11. New Business:

- a. **Grant Program Planning:** Slade inquired if this included MDRCD's mini grants. Raponi explained this item is on the agenda because of the number of grants that are available and the fact that the district does not have a grant writer or the staff for the implementation for grants. Raponi stated the district needed to work on some planning to perhaps hire a grant writer and project manager for each grant. Shiralipour suggested the grant writer and project manager possibly being the same person/position. Hergenrader stated she knew a grant writer but asked what specific knowledge the individual would need for this particular position. Slade stated in his opinion, the grant writer would need to be versed in conservation. Shiralipour stated it is important to look very closely at each grant requirement and answer them exactly as requested. Shiralipour is impressed with Myers and believes him to be very trainable in this area. Slade stated it wouldn't be wise to obtain grants without the resources to manage them. Raponi asked if the district should look to hire a program manager who writes grants. Shiralipour stated the first step should be for the board to

determine what the goal for applying for grants is. Walters stated MWA is willing to assist in the writing of a grant, if MDRCD fits into and can expand from them. Walters stated the board should determine what direction they would like to move into. Slade suggested Raponi share any grants that would fit into the realm of MDRCD with Myers to complete some initial research on to determine if they may be a good fit. Shiralipour stated she would also be happy to assist with ideas.

- b. **Project Suggestions for RCD Funding:** Slade stated there are minimal seed projects due to the lack of seeds from BLM, and the idea now is to expand native seed increase projects to cover more conservation projects. Slade stated most grants that he has written pay for infrastructure and equipment but not day-to-day operation costs. Slade stated High Desert Keepers is a great organization that is very reliable and in need of funding for operations. Slade stated High Desert Keepers received a great grant from the state, but it did not include any funding for operations, and they are in need of funding for gas for their vehicles and to pay a small number of people to collect discarded tires. Shiralipour inquired if High Desert Keepers receive any county funding. Slade answered no. Slade shared the idea of a waste trash task force including the county, the sheriff's department and the task force, all working together. Slade suggested the board visit the thought of mini-grants and determine how much they would like to put towards them. Slade stated the mini grants would not need MWRCD management, rather a small group or sub-group within the board could review applications to bring back to the district board for possible approval. Slade stated his idea is to begin accepting applications for these "mini grants" in the new fiscal year. Slade distributed a form similar to the MWA partnership grant applications. Raponi inquired the maximum amount for the mini grants that MWA oversees. Discussion followed on projects ranging from small grassroots projects to research projects, what could determine a research project, the possible limit of each mini grants and a possible sub-committee of the board to review the mini grant applications. Hergenrader stated MWA just approved a \$10,000 grant for Desert Springs Community Church in Hesperia. Raponi asked what they are doing with the funding. Hergenrader stated the church owns 10-acres, and they are planting a large garden with raised beds and will be adding fruit trees. Hergenrader stated they may be someone who would be good to work with as they do a lot of different projects and have a lot of community people involved. Hergenrader stated that this may be a good option for a roll off bin of compost that would be available to the public. Slade believed this is a good example. Slade suggested tabling this item for the next meeting when Chuck Bell and Paul Johnson are in attendance. Discussion followed on being good stewards of funding, how the mini grant funding would be advertised to the public and how much total funding would be good to start with.
- c. **Pond Turtle Survey in the West Fork. /Las Flores Region for FY 2024/25:** Raponi summarized the USGS Desert Pond turtle survey proposal being requested from the Bio fund and the particulars surrounding its approval with the Watermaster. Raponi stated if the proposal isn't approved through the Watermaster then the district could donate the amount needed for the pond turtle survey. After discussion **Neville Slade moved to donate towards the Pond Turtle Survey in the West Fork/Las Flores Region, if the bio fund is unable to meet this need. Meredith Hergenrader seconded. Roll Call – Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Passed.**
- d. **Approval of Draft of FY 2024-25 MWA workplan:** Walters reported that funding for the current workplan is running out due to the expansion of programs. Walters stated he has noticed an increase in requests for the IWM and AWAC programs/workshops since covid-19, when many individuals had extra time on their hands. Walters stated he did not

change any responsibilities in the workplan but increased the funding allotments due to the increase in demand for services. Walters stated he had altered funding for weather station installments because all weather stations have now been installed. Walters explained the workplan is identical to last fiscal year in responsibilities for him and his team. Slade inquired what is included in weather station maintenance (listed in the workplan) Walters stated the manufacturer suggests monthly inspection so he and his team inspect the weather stations monthly, making sure the rain catchment is clear and functioning and the batteries are working. They also clean the solar panels and make sure there is no graffiti or weeds growing on or around them. Shiralipour inquired what the total is. Slade answered approximately \$85,000. Discussion continued regarding competitive wage increases, the addition of a weather station and the increase in demand for services. Discussion followed. **Meredith Hergenrader moved to approve the draft for FY 2024-25 MWA workplan. Neville Slade seconded. Roll Call. Eldert Van Dam – Yes. Approved.**

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

- 13. Directors Reports and Comments:** Raponi stated that VVC (Victor Valley College) hosted their bi-annual plant sale and Hergenrader had purchased three varieties of trees to give away to attendees. Hergenrader reported that she worked with her contact at High Desert Nursery to purchase 25 trees for a total of \$425.00. Hergenrader explained the application process and how the information for the tree giveaway was shared with the public. Hergenrader stated part of the tree giveaway process included planting instructions and a trimming demonstration given by her. Hergenrader stated that after one month, Master Gardeners call the recipients to inquire how their tree is doing. Hergenrader summarized that the area has lost 40% of its tree canopy, due to incorrect planting placement or species planted, wind and climate change. Raponi inquired if all 25 trees were given away. Hergenrader answered yes and shared that most trees were given away within the first hour of the plant sale.

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

**15. Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 3:48

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Dana Raponi, District Manager.