

Board Meeting MINUTES

Lassen Community College
Board Room
478-200 Hwy 139
Susanville, CA 96130



I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Board Chair Kirwan welcomed the alternate non-voting Boardmembers: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Eagle Lake Field Manager, Ken Collum; and United States Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Southwest Regional Office Director of Ecosystem Management, John Exline.

II. Roll Call

Present: BJ Kirwan, John Brissenden, Pam Giacomini, Bob Johnston, Bob Kirkwood, Todd Ferrara, Ron Hames, Doug Teeter, Randy Fletcher, John Exline, Ken Collum, Terrence O'Brien, Eraina Ortega, and Christopher Wright

Absent: Allen Ishida and Woody Smeck

III. Approval of March 2, 2016, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

Action: Boardmember Bob Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion to approve the March 2, 2016, meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Public Comments

No public comment at this time.

V. Board Chair's Report

Board Chair BJ Kirwan acknowledged that the spending reductions we have endured the past two fiscal years will not be in effect for the 2016-17 Fiscal Year and will allow the SNC to undertake activities in support of the Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) and other priorities. She provided thanks to Boardmember Bob Kirkwood and Boardmember Pam Giacomini for their involvement with WIP activities.

VI. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham pointed out an attachment included in the Board meeting materials packet which is a correspondence written to Secretary Laird to express concern over the issues SNC has been experiencing related to Contracted Fiscal Services (CFS).

a. Administrative Update

Administrative Services Division Chief Amy Lussier provided the Board with an overview of the May Budget revise and the current status of the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF). Lussier noted the slight increase

of \$79,000 in SNC's budget to assist in paying for the cost of CFS, pointing out that this is a one-time augmentation. She stated that the California Natural Resources Agency and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) are working with the Department of Finance (DOF) to determine if fiscal services can be brought in-house to provide cost savings for future years. Lussier added that CFS has made some coding errors which have resulted in a delay in closeout of the books for the current fiscal year.

Lussier added that the May Budget Revise included the National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) Grant funding. In order to support administration of this money, SNC has submitted a Budget Change Proposal (BCP) to the DOF to add two full-time positions. The BCP asked for an increased reimbursement authority of \$400,000 for a total reimbursement authority of \$450,000 a year.

Lussier advised the Board that SNC currently has one vacancy within the Policy and Outreach Division and they hope to have the vacancy filled by August 1, 2016.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara inquired as to the short-term contracting agreement SNC has with California Conservation Corps (CCC) noted in the staff report and how this will assist in solving the Contracted Fiscal Services (CFS) issues. Lussier responded by stating that the immediate hope is that the CCC staff person will take on the extra workload associated with the issues between FI\$Cal and CFS, and as a result, ease the workload burden for SNC staff. Lussier added that a request has been submitted to CalHR for permission to hire the CCC staff person as a Retired Annuitant to assist with accounting issues. Boardmember John Brissenden noted that it would make sense to bring these transactions in-house to resolve the issues that Lussier had described.

b. Policy and Outreach Update

Branham provided an update on the formation of the Sierra Consortium and stated that it is a welcome voice for the Sierra. Branham noted that the Consortium has a primary focus on legislative issues and is hoping to grow the Consortium to build a stronger voice in the Capitol.

Branham updated the Board on efforts at the congressional level to address the federal fire borrowing issues and broader forest health concerns. Branham advised that there are recent legislative proposals to streamline budget and NEPA processes. Boardmember John Exline stated that this is an issue that the US Forest Service (USFS) has been working on for two years. Exline further noted that the USFS field offices have been instructed to obligate all the monies they have by June 1 so funds would not be subject to fire transfer.

Branham updated the Board on Governor's Budget proposals regarding the use of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction funds for forest sector projects. Branham told the Board that the current Governor's proposal is to provide a total of \$150 million to CAL FIRE for forest health issues, with \$140 million of that going towards a variety of forest management activities.

Angela Avery, Regional Policy and Programs Chief, provided updates on several legislative bills that may have relevance for SNC.

- AB2444 (Garcia) – Parks Bond – Amendments have been added to this bill over the last month. The amendment allocated about \$25 million to SNC. In addition to line items that have been identified for specific Conservancies, \$50 million has been identified to go to forest restoration projects. The \$50 million dollar addition has been identified as funds that will be administered jointly by SNC and CAL FIRE.
- AB2480 (Bloom) – This bill would establish state policy that source watersheds are recognized and defined as integral parts of California's water system. Avery added that SNC sees this as an avenue to recognize source watersheds in the SNC region as an important part of the water system.
- AB2029 (Dahle) – This bill will expand forested areas eligible to be harvested with the intent of decreasing wildfire risks. Avery continued by stating that the bill has passed this week in the Assembly and is moving onto the Senate.

Avery notified the Board that Assembly Members Brian Dahle and Frank Bigelow, and Senators Tom Berryhill and Ted Gaines have been appointed to the SNC Board as legislative liaisons. Avery said SNC is working on a strategy to engage the liaisons.

Avery provided an update to the Board regarding upcoming tours scheduled. The SNC has organized a tour to the Teakettle Experimental Forest on June 23 and 24 to study the impacts of forest thinning treatments on long term carbon storage. Stops on this tour will provide an overview of forest management opportunities and highlight the importance of large landscape projects. Another tour, scheduled in July, will be co-sponsored by the Placer County Water Agency and will focus on fire history and restoration, as well as water storage and biomass issues.

Avery acknowledged the outstanding work performed by newly promoted Outreach and Communication's Manager Brittany Covich. Covich will now take on a supervisory role with a staff of three.

Avery provided a brief presentation to show the Board what SNC is doing to promote the Conservancy through social media. The presentation included examples of social media posts as well as story map slides.

Avery provided the Board with a brief overview of social media numbers stating that SNC has just received 1,000 “likes” on our Facebook site and an overall increase in activity through our various social media outlets.

c. Tree Mortality Task Force Update

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Randi Jorgensen provided a brief background about the Tree Mortality Task Force (TMTF) and highlighted an attachment in the Board materials that identifies the various TMTF work groups established by the Governor’s proclamation. She provided the Board with recent USFS mortality numbers of 40 million trees and stated that 80% of the trees in the Sierra National Forest are dead or dying. The TMTF is addressing this issue with several approaches including innovative issues incorporating biomass utilization. Jorgensen said the Sierra has begun to suffer from the economic downside as a result of the tree mortality issues.

Boardmember Bob Kirkwood would like to see research and information shared concerning treatment areas and impact of drought, along with mortality rates. Branham responded stating that SNC will continue to gather data on this issue to shed light on some of the true contributing factors and underlying conditions.

The Board engaged in a brief conversation asking about any effects of the Governor’s proclamation on PG&E and the PUC, as well as any recent legislation that could draw these two organizations together. Branham indicated that there has been dialogue between the Governor’s Office and the PUC and that PG&E has requested Sierra Pacific Industries to modestly increase generation from their biomass plants, but very little additional progress has been seen.

d. NDRC HUD Grant Update

Avery provided Boardmembers with a timeline highlighting significant dates and updated the Board on recent activities including the hiring of staff to support administration of the grant funds. Avery reviewed the areas of support for grant funds and said there has been a working group created to determine how funds will be allocated in each of the five different categories.

Brissenden asked Avery for an actual dollar amount that will be spent for on-the-ground projects. Avery explained that SNC would receive five percent of the amount for the forest health and biomass areas to cover administrative costs, with the remainder going to on-the-ground project implementation.

e. Miscellaneous Updates

Branham provided the Board with a handout listing key SNC meeting participation. This will be a document provided to Boardmembers at each meeting moving forward.

VII. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)

Deputy Attorney General Christine Sproul provided the Board with a brief update on legislative activity stating that there is currently no legislation moving that would affect the SNC operations.

Sproul updated the Board that CAL FIRE has produced for public comment a Program Environmental Impact Report on a proposed vegetation management plan for the state. Sproul will continue to monitor this document and report back to the Board. Boardmember Terrence O'Brien requested that Sproul report back to the Board on any comments that will be made by the California Air Resources Board.

VIII. 2015-16 Proposition 1 Grant Awards (ACTION)

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman opened the grant awards discussion by informing the Board that the SNC received an abundance of outstanding applications in the current round. Kingman acknowledged applicants and SNC staff for the effort that goes into developing these applications. Kingman also acknowledged the many applicants that traveled to attend the Board meeting.

Mt. Lassen Area Manager Andy Fristensky reminded the Board that, to date, the SNC has awarded seven Proposition 1 grants for a total of over \$1.4 million. Fristensky also summarized the status of applications received in the current round: 29 received, six withdrawn or not recommended, 15 still under review, and eight recommended for Board consideration at this meeting. Fristensky mentioned two applications from a previous round are also being recommended for a total of 10 applications in the amount of approximately \$3.2 million.

Fristensky then provided overviews of seven projects from the Mt. Lassen Area: Barry Point Fire Ecosystem Restoration Project (#867); Lookout/Upper Pit Watershed Restoration Project (#865); Diamond Mountain Watershed Restoration Project (#866); Wolf and Grizzly Creek Municipal Watershed Protection (#837); Sierra Buttes/Gold Lakes Basin Properties Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan (#864); Scotts Flat Reservoir Fuels Treatment, Phase III (#873); and the American River Headwaters Improvement Project (#841).

Boardmembers discussed the amount of money necessary to complete a Negative Declaration noting that money spent on environmental review is money taken away from work on the ground. The Board recommended that staff take special note of the cost and workload associated with the environmental review process while developing future recommendations.

The Board recognized the American River Headwaters Improvement Project (#841) for raising additional funding to perform very expensive restoration work and demonstrating a high-level of commitment to the project.

The Board engaged in a more detailed discussion regarding SNC application scoring criteria. Boardmembers addressed issues including the merits, costs, and values of funding projects on public and private lands, as well as the value and importance of including Community Wildfire Protection Plans in evaluation criteria.

Kingman reported that if the grants recommended for approval at this meeting were awarded, the SNC will have allocated \$4.7 of the \$10 million dollar Proposition 1 grant allocation, noting that the SNC is on track to allocate the entire dollar amount in the time frame provided.

Mt. Whitney Area Manager Randi Jorgensen provided overviews of three Mt. Whitney Area projects: South Fork Mokelumne River Watershed Restoration (#885), Clarks Valley Wildfire Reduction Project (#887), and Long Gulch Watershed Enhancement Plan (#888).

Public Comment:

Rem Scherzinger, General Manager, Nevada Irrigation District, expressed his appreciation for consideration of Project #873, Scotts Flat Reservoir Fuels Treatment. Scherzinger told the Board that this specific project is much more than a fuels reduction project and said that it will allow for consideration of biomass utilization and create a firebreak for the Cascade Shores homes.

Lloyd Keefer, President of the Lassen County Fire Safe Council, expressed appreciation for Board consideration of the Project #866, Diamond Mountain Watershed Restoration Project, indicating it will provide a tremendous value to both public and private lands.

Lauren Hubert, Conservation Project Manager of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, expressed appreciation to the Board for their consideration and time on past and current projects.

Autumn Gronborg, American River Conservancy, provided thanks to the Board for consideration of the American River Headwaters Project #841. Gronborg also provided thanks to SNC staff for the technical assistance provided.

Michael De Lasaux, UC Cooperative Extension and Boardmember of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council, along with Ryan Tompkins, Plumas National Forest, expressed gratitude to SNC staff for assistance with the application process for this grant. Tompkins also expressed gratitude to the Board for the consideration of this project.

Lee Fledderjohann, Collins Pine Company out of Lakeview, Oregon, expressed his appreciation for consideration of Project #867, Barry Point Fire Ecosystem Restoration Project. Fledderjohann informed the Board that this project is in conjunction with the Modoc National Forest and is an all-encompassing project to restore the Barry Point fire project.

Action: Boardmember Bob Kirkwood moved, and Boardmember Pam Giacomini seconded, a motion that the Board (a) authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Exemption for the Sierra Buttes/ Gold Lakes Basin Nonindustrial Timber Management Plan (SNC #864), the Lookout/Upper Pit Watershed Restoration Project (SNC #865), the South Fork Mokelumne River Watershed Restoration (SNC #885), the Clarks Valley Wildfire Reduction Project (SNC #887), and the Long Gulch Watershed Enhancement Plan (SNC #888); and (b) approve findings concurring in the Negative Declarations and Timber Harvesting Plans, and authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the American River Headwaters Improvement Project (SNC #841), the Diamond Mountain Watershed Restoration Project (SNC #866), the Barry Point Fire Restoration Project (SNC #867), and the Scotts Flat Reservoir Fuels Treatment Phase III (SNC #873); and (c) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Wolf and Grizzly Creek Municipal Watershed Protection Project (SNC #837) may have a significant effect on the environment and adopt the Initial Study/Negative Declaration and file a Notice of Determination for this project; and (d) authorize a grant award to each of the above listed projects for the amounts recommended by staff, and further authorize the staff to enter into the necessary agreements for the recommended projects. The motion passed with all members voting in favor, with Boardmember Christopher Wright abstaining.

IX. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Update (INFORMATIONAL)

Sierra Nevada WIP Program Coordinator Mandy Vance acknowledged all of the work by partners and staff that has been taking place in conjunction with the WIP and stated that involvement will be ramping up as the current watershed assessments are completed.

Vance stated SNC is anticipating on receiving the bulk of the data from the ongoing assessments by mid to late summer. Once that information is received, the data will be compiled and taken to partners at the watershed level.

Vance updated the Board on the status of the criteria currently being developed for the WIP pilots. SNC staff will continue to work closely with Boardmember Bob Kirkwood and Boardmember Pam Giacomini to refine these criteria.

Vance also stated that, to date, SNC has received a total of 21 comments regarding the WIP Regional Strategy from a wide variety of stakeholders. Staff is working with other agency partners to obtain specific feedback on the strategy and hopes to post the edited strategy to the SNC website soon.

Vance highlighted a recent Capitol Public Radio Interview featuring SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham; a link to the audio for this interview was shared with the Board. She also shared an International Day of Forests sound clip.

Boardmember Kirkwood expressed his appreciation for SNC staff and the forward progress.

X. Tribal Forum Discussion (INFORMATIONAL)

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided an overview of the tribal meeting that took place the previous day. Representatives from the Pit River and the Fort Bidwell tribes were in attendance, along with Boardmembers Terrence O'Brien and Pam Giacomini. Branham stated that it had been a good opportunity to open dialog with tribal communities. SNC will continue holding meetings with tribal members at future Board meetings in each of the Subregions.

Boardmembers Giacomini and O'Brien both stated they are encouraged that SNC is working to engage the tribes and believe the effort should continue.

XI. Overview of SNC Coordination Efforts with Other Funding Programs (INFORMATIONAL)

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided an overview of the funding coordination and work that has been ongoing with other agencies and partners. Kingman reviewed presentation slides and highlighted Prop. 84 and Prop. 1 investments, highlighting the fact that the Sierra Nevada Region does not get an appropriate share of state funding and SNC is trying to change that disparity. Kingman's presentation also covered SNC technical assistance that is provided to partners, particularly those applying for other state agency funding. Kingman encouraged Boardmembers to visit the SNC website and review the funding opportunities and calendar. Kingman reported that this technical assistance has helped various partners in obtaining funding and serves as an important part of the SNC mission.

The Board provided SNC positive comments, acknowledging the contribution that SNC staff has made with the funding coordination efforts.

XII. Boardmembers' Comments

No Boardmember comments at this time

XIII. Public Comments

No public comments at this time.

XIV. Adjournment

Board Chair BJ Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 12:20 p.m.