

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

REGULAR MEETING

73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 115

Palm Desert, California

September 12, 2016 - 3:01 p.m.

Tele-conference location:

State of California, Resources Agency

1416 Ninth St., Suite 1311

Sacramento, CA 95814

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John J. Benoit, Riverside County Supervisor
Richard Balocco, City of Indian Wells
John Donnelly, Wildlife Conservation Board
Kristy Franklin, City of La Quinta (*Vice-Chairman*)
Shelley Kaplan, City of Cathedral City
Patrick Kemp, Natural Resources Agency
Eddy Konno, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
John Ladley, U.S. Forest Service
Glenn Miller, City of Indio
Allan Muth, University of California
Larry Olinger, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Eraina Ortega, California State Department of Finance
J.R. Roberts, City of Palm Springs
Betty Sanchez, City of Coachella
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee
Ted Weill, City of Rancho Mirage – (*Chairman*)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Buford Crites, State Assembly Appointee
Kathy Dice, California State Parks
Karin Messaros, National Park Service
Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee
Susan Marie Weber, City of Palm Desert
Anayeli Zavala, City of Desert Hot Springs
Vacant, Bureau of Land Management

STAFF PRESENT:

Jim Karpiak, Executive Director
Kerrie Godfrey, Associate Director/AGPA
Diana Rosas, Staff Services Analyst
Bob Gossman, Project Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT:

Sharon Keeney, CA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
Bob Pence, CV Resource Conservation District
Jennifer Prado, Friends of the Desert Mountains

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chairman Ted Weill declared a quorum with 12 voting members present at 3:01 p.m. Subsequently, four additional members arrived, bringing the quorum to 16 voting members.

2.0 Approval of July 11, 2016 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made and seconded (Olinger/Kaplan) to approve the minutes of the July 11, 2016 meeting; the motion passed with three abstentions.

3.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

There were no comments or questions on items not on the agenda.

4.0 Closed Session

No matters were scheduled for the closed session on the agenda.

5.0 Action Items – Public Hearing

5.1 Adoption of Resolution 2016-10 approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for the acquisition of approximately 110 acres of land located in the Dos Palmas Conservation Area.

Chairman Weill asked if there were any objections to hearing items 5.1 and 5.2 as one report and then using one motion and one roll call for both resolutions. There were no objections.

Jim Karpiak reported that item 5.1 is a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM) for the acquisition of four parcels located in the Dos Palmas Conservation area. The parcels consist of approximately 110 acres and are near or adjacent to parcels already owned by FODM, CVCC and BLM, making for efficient long term management. Furthermore, the parcels are within the BLM Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and thus a potential for future transfer to BLM. If approved, the local assistance grant would be for an amount not to exceed \$47,500, or \$438 per acre, plus reasonable closing and transaction related costs.

5.2 Adoption of Resolution 2016-11 approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for the acquisition of approximately 120 acres of land located in the Thermal Canyon Conservation Area.

Item 5.2 is also a local assistance grant to FODM for the acquisition of three parcels located in the Thermal Canyon area. The parcels consist of approximately 120 acres and are near or adjacent to parcels already owned by FODM and BLM.

Furthermore, the parcels are in a significant wildlife movement corridor and habitat linkage between federal wilderness areas and Joshua Tree National Park. The area is also hydrologically important for the benefit of water flow to the Salton Sea. If approved, the local assistance grant would be for an amount not to exceed \$42,000, or \$350 per acre, plus reasonable closing and transaction related costs.

Jim noted that Jennifer Prado, Conservation Lands Manager, with FODM was present and could also answer any questions. There were no questions or discussion.

A motion was made and seconded (Trover/Roberts) to adopt: (i) Resolution 2016-10, approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for the acquisition of approximately 110 acres of land located in the Dos Palmas Conservation Area; and (ii) Resolution 2016-11, approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains in the Thermal Canyon Conservation Area. The motion passed with one abstention.

5.3 Adoption of Resolution 2016-12 approving matching funds to the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission for acquisition of approximately 305.35 acres in the Coachella Valley Stormwater and Delta Conservation Area for USFWS Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plan acquisition grant.

Jim Karpiak reported that item 5.3 is a matching funds request by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) for the acquisition of seven parcels located in the Coachella Valley Stormwater and Delta Conservation Area. The parcels consist of approximately 305.35 acres near the Salton Sea and are adjacent to parcels owned by the Coachella Valley Water District and the Imperial Irrigation District. Historically, CVCC has not focused acquisition efforts in this area but recently they have added this area as a priority. Some of the parcels contain water which is important for riparian bird species, and overall the parcels are within an area of significant biological, cultural and hydrological resources. The total purchase price for the parcels is \$2,138,000, of which 65 to 70% will be paid with US Fish and Wildlife Service Section 6 Program funds. One requirement of the Section 6 Program is that matching funds of 30 to 35% be provided by a local source. The Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) has expressed interest in participating in the transaction, thus if WCB approves, it would split the matching funds cost making the Conservancy's share approximately \$375,000.

John Donnelly asked where the property was located in the Coachella Valley. Jim clarified the property is situated north of the Salton Sea in the Mecca unincorporated area of Riverside County. John and Allan Muth also inquired on the plans for the Coachella Valley Water District and the Imperial Irrigation District properties. Jim noted that the property is near the Coachella Valley Stormwater Channel but that he is not aware of either water district's plan for

their individual properties which surround the proposed acquisition parcels. Kerrie Godfrey added that she is aware of some water district's flood control and restoration projects in the area but has no details of the projects. J.R. Roberts inquired on the status of the WCB contribution. Kerrie responded that Conservancy and WCB staff has been coordinating and currently submitted the property appraisal for review with the Department of General Services; once the appraisal review is approved the item will go to the WCB for approval at the next board meeting which is scheduled for November. Larry Olinger questioned the total amount the Conservancy would contribute should WCB not approve. Jim responded that the proposed Resolution in this agenda would authorize the Conservancy to match up to \$750,000, which would be the amount the Conservancy's cost should WCB not approve their participation. Ellen Trover added that the area is known for duck hunting but the best use for property in that area is for conservation and restoration. Betty Sanchez asked if there were any restoration plans with the proposed acquisition property. Jim responded that there is no current restoration project for this property but it is possible in the future.

A motion was made and seconded (Olinger/Franklin) to adopt Resolution 2016-12 approving matching funds to the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission for acquisition of approximately 305.35 acres in the Coachella Valley Stormwater and Delta Conservation Area for USFWS Section 6 Habitat Conservation Plan acquisition grant. The motion passed with two abstentions.

5.4 Adoption of Resolution 2016-13 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for the Palm Canyon Watershed Restoration Project.

Jim Karpiak reported that this grant was requested by the Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM) during the first round of the Proposition 1 program. When this Board considered it in January of this year, the CEQA analysis was not completed. It has recently been completed and FODM is requesting a local assistance grant in an amount not to exceed \$147,174.40 to restore water sources within the Palm Canyon Watershed. The project complements an ongoing restoration project being conducted by FODM and the US Forest Service (USFS) that includes removal of invasive vegetation such as Tamarisk. Additionally, the project meets several Proposition 1 objectives making it a "multi-benefit" project. With the removal of mature tamarisk trees in the area water use will be reduced, ground water quality and soil will improve, and habitat for endangered Peninsular Bighorn Sheep and other sensitive wildlife species will be enhanced.

Thus, the project also supports the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) and the FODM has demonstrated staff and volunteer capability to successfully assist USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff. Furthermore, FODM's environmental consultant

prepared a Biological Resources Assessment after reviewing the NEPA Environmental Assessment that was previously prepared for the part of the project on federal land by the BLM and the consultant determined that the project is Categorical Exempt pursuant to CEQA guidelines.

A motion was made and seconded (Muth/Balocco) to approve the adoption of Resolution 2016-13 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for the Palm Canyon Watershed Restoration Project. The motion passed with one abstention.

5.5 Consideration of Grant Proposals submitted for the Proposition 1 Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability No. 2016-01.

Jim Karpiak reported five proposals were received from the second Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the Conservancy's Proposition 1 Grant Program which were due by June 17, 2016. The five proposals total approximately \$1.03 million in funding requests. The proposals were reviewed by a panel consisting of Conservancy staff and three outside independent experts. After review of the proposals the panel scored each application and categorized them into four groups: 1) Priority for funding, 2) Priority for funding, with conditions, 3) Potential fundable elements, but funding not recommended at this time, and 4) Funding not recommended.

As background, so far the Legislature has appropriated \$4.45 million to CVMC for Proposition 1 grants, and to date a total of \$676,000 in Proposition 1 funds has been awarded leaving, approximately \$3.77 million available for new grants. Additionally, there are approximately \$850,000 in applications from the first NOFA which are currently undergoing environmental review.

Recommended for funding are projects from the Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District for agricultural irrigation monitoring and from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for watershed habitat improvement. Both of these projects are included in the agenda for approval of funding and will be discussed further in each agenda item.

One project is recommended for funding with conditions: the City of Coachella is requesting \$300,000 to fund improvements to an existing storm drain system located in the central business district of the city. The new storm improvements would provide a subterranean collection system below the existing basin to collect and filter runoff, which would then be conveyed to a storm drain line flowing into the Whitewater Stormwater Channel. The project is a "multi-benefit" project as it meets several Prop 1 objectives and serves a City with a significant number of disadvantaged residents. Coachella has identified \$60,000 in leveraged support toward the project, which is expected to be eligible for a CEQA Categorical Exemption. However, CEQA compliance, and work on cost estimates, schedule, and construction methods are required before a grant

award can be considered. Staff proposes to continue working with city staff and return to the Board in November for consideration of a grant.

One project has potentially fundable elements but funding is not recommended at this time: the Wildlands Conservancy (WC), which manages the Whitewater Preserve, seeks \$445,055 for the permitting and design work of a flood control structure to replace the earthen levees currently protecting the Preserve. The earthen levees were constructed by the property's previous owners over 70 years ago hence the construction of a permanent flood control structure would protect the visitor's center improvements and prevent debris from contaminating habitat and main river channel.

Review panel concerns include the overall benefit to the habitat value of the area, the feasibility of permitting, the undetermined construction amount, and the unidentified potential funding sources. As a result, the WC is completing additional research to address the concerns and staff proposes to return to the Board at a later date. J.R. Roberts asked if a matching funds grant would be possible instead of funding the full amount for the project. Jim said that was a good suggestion and would consider that approach when working with WC staff. Glenn Miller asked what the panel's score was for the project and if there were other projects available to fund that met the Proposition 1 objectives. Jim responded that this project received a 78/100; so far, no other proposals other than those being discussed in this item have been presented to the Conservancy. Shelley Kaplan noted that there have not been enough projects submitted to utilize all of the Proposition 1 funds and asked if there is a better way to market the Notice of Funding Availability. Jim responded that staff is looking into different ways to get more project proposals that meet the Proposition 1 objectives. Additionally, when compared to other Conservancies, the amount of funds awarded to date is similar to what other Conservancies have awarded. No further questions or comments were made.

One application is not recommended for funding: the College of the Desert (COD) seeks \$129,030 to create more environmentally responsible landscaping in large medians on the campus by replacing turf with decomposed granite and installing locally native vegetation. Although the project would reduce water use and therefore meet a Proposition 1 objective, in the first round of funding, the Board considered these types of projects to be of low priority and thus the project received a score of 56/100. Furthermore, in the process of CVMC staff review, COD staff reported that they were not in a position to make firm plans for this project until the status of its proposed capital improvement bond is resolved this fall. As a result, staff proposes to invite COD to apply for future funding with the assistance of CVMC staff in developing a reconfigured project that would meet additional Proposition 1 objectives. Chairman Weill asked how many artificial turf projects had been awarded. Jim and Robert Gossman replied that there have been no artificial turf projects awarded from Proposition 1 funds and clarified that

the COD project was for turf removal and replacement with decomposed granite, not artificial turf. No further questions or comments were made.

5.6 Adoption of Resolution 2016-14 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District for its Agricultural Groundwater Protection Project.

Jim Karpiak reported that the Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District (CVRCD) is requesting \$7,178 for expansion of the CVRCD “Root Water” Project, which helps to protect groundwater quality. The Root Water project began as a pilot project to aid 10 economically disadvantaged community farmers in managing their use of water through tensiometers that can reduce the amount of over-irrigation by measuring soil moisture. If approved, the Proposition 1 grant funds would be used for the purchase of tensiometers and costs directly related to the installation and initial farmer training regarding their use. The majority of the total project cost of \$40,000 is being covered by a \$25,000 cooperative grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Furthermore, the project is exempt from CEQA review and qualifies as a “multi-benefit” project as it would improve ground water quality, reduce water use, benefits targeted disadvantaged community, and will have long term impacts as farmers learn and continuously apply better irrigation techniques. Jim introduced Bob Pence, Executive Director for the CVRCD and asked if he would like to add a comment or note anything further on the project. There were no comments or questions made by Bob or the Board members.

A motion was made and seconded (Trover/Roberts) to approve the adoption of Resolution 2016-14 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District for its Agricultural Groundwater Protection Project. The motion passed with one abstention.

5.7 Adoption of Resolution 2016-15 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for its Habitat Infrastructure Improvement Project.

Jim Karpiak reported that the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is requesting up to \$150,000 to restore or replace an existing artesian well at its Oasis Springs Ecological Reserve. The Reserve contains two oases, with each containing a pond that is habitat for a population of the Salton Sink’s only native fish, the desert pupfish. Currently, only one pond supports desert pupfish. Thus, CDFW is proposing to evaluate the condition of the lower well and then restore or replace it. The project is Categorically Exempt pursuant to CEQA guidelines and is “multi-benefit” as it would improve watershed health to support endangered species, enhance water supply to native wildlife, preserve ground water quality, supports the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHP) implementation, supports collaboration with other governmental agencies, and helps increase economic benefits of tourism and wildlife education

supported by the Reserve. Jim introduced Sharon Keeney from CDFW and Board member Eddy Konno, noting that because Eddy is a CDFW employee he must abstain from the vote of this Resolution. No comments or questions were made.

A motion was made and seconded (Trover/Kaplan) to approve the adoption of Resolution 2016-15 approving a Proposition 1 local assistance grant to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for its Habitat Infrastructure Improvement Project. The motion passed with two abstentions.

6.0 Reports

6.1 Written Reports from Staff.

Jim Karpiak reminded the Board of the State required Ethics Training. The current compliance period runs from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016, so he encouraged those who have not taken the course to do so by December 31, 2016. Several Board members asked if a list of who has completed the training could be sent out to all members, staff agreed that the list would be sent out later in the week.

Jim also noted that the bond balances in the report reflect the use of all funds approved by the Board, including those not yet expended. For example, the \$1.5 million that was allocated for Shumway is not included in the balance, so if the project does not happen the balance would increase by \$1.5 million. He also noted that the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission is purchasing property from the Friends of the Desert Mountains which the Conservancy funded with grant funds; therefore the purchase amount will be returned to the Conservancy, and the bond balance will increase by approximately \$750,000.

6.2 Executive Director Report.

Jim Karpiak reported that the Friends of the Palm Springs Mountains (FOPSM) have submitted a grant application for \$54,000 to complete a fencing project for the Angel Cove property. Staff is currently working with FOPSM on conditions of the project such as resolving the transfer of the Angel Cove property to the City of Palm Springs prior to granting any funds for the project. Staff proposes to return to the Board in November with further information on the status of the project.

Jim provided an update on the Trails Project, stating that the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) signed off on the informal Section 7 consultation and that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The next steps are to obtain consent from some property owners (Coachella Valley Water District, CVCC, and Bureau of Reclamation) and sign-off from CVCC in accordance with

CVMSHCP requirements. Discussions are scheduled with the Friends of the Desert Mountains for a potential cooperative grant to implement the project.

Jim also reported that the Parks Bond proposal mentioned at the last Board meeting is not likely to be approved by the Legislature for the ballot this year; however, Assemblyman Garcia is looking to bring it back in the following session in 2018.

6.3 Board Member comments and reports from Conservancy member agencies.

There were no member comments or reports.

7.0 Adjourn to the November 14, 2016 meeting.

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 3:56 p.m.