

**COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
REGULAR MEETING
73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 115
Palm Desert, California
March 10, 2014 - 3:01 p.m.**

A P P R O V E D M I N U T E S

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John J. Benoit, Riverside County Supervisor, District IV
Jean Benson, City of Palm Desert
Buford Crites, State Assembly Appointee – (*Chairman*)
Kathy DeRosa, City of Cathedral City
Kathy Dice, California State Parks
John Donnelly, Wildlife Conservation Board
Jim Foote, Bureau of Land Management
John Ladley, U.S. Forest Service (Non-voting Member)
Scott Matas, City of Desert Hot Springs
Karin Messaros, National Park Service
Allan Muth, University of California
Larry Olinger, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Eraina Ortega, California State Department of Finance
Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kristy Franklin, City of La Quinta
Patrick Kemp, Natural Resources Agency
Eddy Konno, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Chris Mills, City of Palm Springs
Mary Roche, City of Indian Wells
Ted Weill, City of Rancho Mirage – (*Vice-Chairman*)

STAFF PRESENT:

Jim Karpiak, Executive Director
Diana Rosas, Staff Services Analyst

OTHERS PRESENT:

Britt Wilson, City of Rancho Mirage

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chairman Crites declared a quorum with 14 voting members present at 3:01 p.m.

Kathy De Rosa arrived after Chairman Crites called the meeting to order, thus bringing the quorum to 15 voting members present.

2.0 Approval of Minutes of January 13, 2014 meeting

Chairman Crites asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes; there being none, Chairman Crites moved to approve the minutes as distributed.

3.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

There were no comments on items not on the agenda.

4.0 Action Items – Public Hearing Agenda Items

Chairman Crites proposed to handle items 4.1 through 4.4 on one roll call, Jim Karpiak explained that there would be a staff report discussed for each of the items and unless anyone opposed there would be one vote at the end. Chairman Crites added that if anyone wished to pull any of the items for separate discussions they may do so but otherwise there would only be one roll call. There were no comments or objections.

4.1 Resolution 2014-03 approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for acquisition of approximately 20 acres in the Edom Hill Conservation Area.

Jim Karpiak discussed the grant to the Friends for the purchase of 20 acres in the Edom Hill Conservation Area. The grant is for \$68,000, purchases important habitat and sand transport parcels that are adjacent to BLM land. No questions or comments.

4.2 Resolution 2014-04 approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for acquisition of approximately 10 acres in the Indio Hills/Joshua Tree National Park Linkage Conservation Area.

Jim Karpiak discussed the grant to the Friends for the purchase of 10 acres in the Indio Hills/Joshua Tree Park Linkage Conservation Area. The property is near the former Cathton acquisition and State Park lands, and is surrounded by already-owned Friends lands which is good for efficiency of management and continuity. The grant is for \$20,000 and meets many of the planning objectives of the joint management agreement with State Parks. No questions or comments

4.3 Resolution 2014-05 approving a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for acquisition of approximately 310 acres in the Dos Palmas Conservation Area.

Jim Karpiak discussed the grant to the Friends for the purchase of 310 acres in the Dos Palmas Conservation Area in section 7 and 29 adjacent to BLM land. The grant is for \$147,000, provides continuity for habitat and completes other acquisitions in the area such as Wu and Inland parcels. Ellen Trover asked if there was any public access to the site. Jim answered that he thought there was an old road that gave access to the property. Chairman Crites concurred that there was an old road alongside the aqueduct.

4.4 Resolution 2013-01-A2 approving an amendment to a local assistance grant to the Friends of the Desert Mountains for appraisal and acquisition of identified parcels in the project area known as the East Valley Canyons Protection Project.

Jim Karpiak stated that this as an amendment to a prior grant to the Friends, the EVCPP grant that was structured differently than most Conservancy grants when it was approved in January of 2013. The original grant was for \$850,000 which was amended to \$450,000 in hopes of acquiring a specific large number of parcels. Friends has been working on picking up the estimated 100 parcels and has spent approximately \$100,000 to date. Recently, the Friends found a couple other parcels totaling 40 acres which have the same habitat attributes as the parcels on the approved list but since they are not on the list they cannot spend the grant on purchasing these properties. These parcels are important habitat in the Desert Tortoise Linkage Conservation Area and are also adjacent to BLM property near double canyons. Additionally, the parcels meet all objectives of the EVCP Project and there is plenty of remaining funds in the grant. With this acquisition, Friends will only have spent \$128,000 of the \$450,000 and the grant expires at the end of June.

Chairman Crites pointed out on the map the location of the parcels. John Benoit asked for staff to use bolder colors to identify the parcels on the maps. There were no objections or other comments.

Chairman Crites asked if there were any objections to voting on the four items as one. A motion was made and seconded (Benoit/Trover) to approve items 4.1 through 4.4. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote of the Board members present.

4.5 Discussion of potential use of Conservancy resources to develop a recreational trail improvement project.

Jim Karpiak discussed the statute under which the Conservancy exists that provides the authority to work on recreational, scenic and preservation activities, and other things in addition to the acquisition of conservation land. Historically the Conservancy has not significantly funded recreation projects but has cooperated with nonprofits, cities and public agencies to support trail development and monitoring. When Jim took over as director last year in conversations with staff, community members and public officials this issue came up a lot and it was brought to his attention that it would be a good idea for the Conservancy to put some of their resources into trail development or other recreational use of the property that is already being acquired. There has also been interest that he learned about from other organizations such as FODM, various hiking clubs, Mohave Desert Land Trust, some public agencies, and Joshua Tree National Park in maybe doing something to enhance recreational use of public lands where it is appropriate and will not interfere with the habitat. Furthermore, the 2010 Trails

Plan for the northern Coachella Valley, done by CVMC staff under contract to the FODM, who got a mitigation grant from SCE developed a very interesting survey of potential trails on what they call the northern valley which is the area in Indio Hills along the National Park. Geary Hund, at the time biologist for CVMC, came up with 25+ conceptual trails, 14 trailheads which are a variety of existing social trails while others are OHV roads, washes, and old mining access roads. The survey is very comprehensive and talks about what would need to be done in terms of the real estate, the regulatory or the environmental review, and the construction aspect of building trails around these 25 locations. Needless to say, with the costs and the amount of time that it would take to complete the work in its entirety, the project came to a halt. Recently, during a brainstorming meeting that staff held with Chairman Crites and Mohave Desert Land Trust, CVCC, and FODM staff members, the consensus was that there are five trailheads and associated trails that may be easy to formalize sue to existing use. Jim went on to describe the five trailheads and their locations.

Trailhead one is on Corkhill road on land owned by FODM, Chairman Crites pointed out that it is at the very western end of the Indio hills near DHS where there currently is no trailhead and that the trail has a potential loop trail that recreational users tend to like which gives it an advantage.

Trailhead two is in Indio, is owned by the City of Indio and is part of that City's trail plan. Jim said he understands that that the City had developer dedications of some property and he believed that there is a possibility of working cooperatively with them.

Trailhead three is at Long Canyon and has an existing trail corridor into Joshua Tree National Park. The Mohave Desert Land Trust is interested in doing a trailhead at the top of the trail and Chairman Crites pointed out that MDLT is currently in the process of purchasing the land that would be on top of the canyon and that DHS for a long time has wanted to have a trail corridor down at the lower elevation of long canyon as it would be at the eastern ridge of their community.

Trailhead four is in the Pushawalla Canyon; Jim and Chairman Crites visited the site and found that not only it is beautiful but there is already an existing trail. Signs, parking and regulatory approvals have to be achieved but it would be very easy to complete a project in this area.

Trailhead five is near fan canyon and runs up to Joshua Tree National Park making it another national park corridor. Park staff has been interested for a while in having a connecting trail and they would focus on this project first. The consensus is there would be little expense from conservancy to start this project and hopefully we could catalyze some of this energy and resources from other organizations through OHV grant programs, SCE mitigation obligations, volunteer groups, etc.

Jim pointed out that some of the trailheads would only require clean-up which would improve the quality of the area and protect the habitat as clean up, signage and fencing certain areas would occur. He explained that the experience through the monitoring visits is that where there is signage and fencing there is no dumping but otherwise the property gets dumped on. Jim proposed to look into feasibility from real estate and regulatory perspective to what is required to move along with this project and get more specific trail routes and then come back with a project budget to have an idea of what kind of money would be required along with any other potential sources. He requested Board direction and recommendations. Chairman Crites added that the idea of this project is to get to the trailheads before there are people using the trails and secondly, regarding the trails into Joshua Tree, the Conservancy will have to sit down with Metropolitan Water District as the aqueduct runs directly underneath so access would be an issue. Joan Taylor said it was a great idea. Allan Muth said he had a philosophical objection as he would spend funds on acquisitions rather than development of trailheads. Jean Benson said it is a good idea especially in the eastern side of the valley and at DHS. She pointed out the success of the Whitewater Preserve and how much it is used proves for a good use of the land.

5.0 Closed Session – No matters scheduled.

6.0 Reports

6.1 Written Reports from staff.

There was no discussion.

6.2 Executive Director Report

Jim Karpiak briefly discussed his meetings with the Cities of Coachella and Indio. He said City of Indio passed the resolution requesting to be added to the Board while Coachella had a workshop on the item and has it scheduled for action later this month. Jim believes that both Cities want to join the Conservancy Board as both showed a lot of enthusiasm when approached. Jim also pointed out that he has made outreach to the tribes in the eastern valley and met with some people but still has no clear sense of whether there is interest there or not, but that he had a few more people to meet and network with. He proposed that once Coachella acts and there is better resolution from the tribes he would bring the item back to the Board in May where a motion could be made on whether or not to formerly request legislation to expand the board. Larry Olinger suggested that Jim contact the tribal chairwoman at the Torrez Martinez Tribe. John Donnelly asked if it would take additional legislation to expand the board, Jim said yes and that he did talk to the assistant secretary from Natural Resources who indicated to go ahead and have these consultations.

On another note, Jim announced the good news on the Shadowrock project that the appraisal was approved by DGS and unless other issues come up it should

close at the end of June or early July. He pointed out that the Federal agencies want to use as much Federal funds as possible so the Conservancy's contribution will be about \$800k instead of the \$3M as approved at the January 2013 meeting. Ellen Trover asked about the bond fund status and Jim responded that the written staff reports at each meeting initially consider that all funds committed by the board will be used, but once we get a more specific amount, they are adjusted in the next meeting's report.

Jim also announced that the Conservancy's website has been redesigned for a more user friendly approach and encouraged the Board members to visit the site. He acknowledged Kerrie Godfrey as the Conservancy's in-house website designer and said she did an excellent job.

Jim further announced that Kerrie would provide an overview of the expanded monitoring program under the MOU between CVCC, CVMC & FODM at the May meeting. He mentioned that staff has been doing site visits to the 5,000 acres of CVMC-owned properties looking for fencing and signage needs. Hence, staff is already working with CVCC on fencing projects to stop illegal off highway vehicle usage on conservation property and is also working on signage as it is a requirement of Prop 84 acquisitions. By doing so, we are not only complying with state requirements but also deterring illegal dumping.

As a last note, Jim reminded the Board that Form 700's are due by April 1st.

6.3 Board Member comments and reports from Conservancy member agencies.

There were no comments or reports from any member agency.

7.0 Adjourn to the May 12, 2014 meeting

The meeting was adjourned without objection at 3:31 p.m.