

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
(CVMC)

REGULAR MEETING
73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 101
Palm Desert, California

APPROVED MINUTES

February 10, 2025 - 3:00 p.m.

Teleconference locations:

State of California, Resources Agency
715 P St.
Serpentine Room on the 20th floor (NRHQ 20-103)
Sacramento, CA 95814

3602 Inland Empire Blvd. Suite C-220
Small Conference Room
Ontario, CA 91764

MEMBERS PRESENT: Enrique Arroyo, California State Parks
Patricia Cooper, Riverside County
Madeline Drake, CA Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)
(Remote)
Gary Gardner, City of Desert Hot Springs
Grace Garner, City of Palm Springs
Beatriz Gonzalez, State Assembly Appointee
Bjana Jefferson, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
(Remote)
Rita Lamb, City of Cathedral City (*Chairwoman*)
Deborah McGarrey, City of La Quinta
Margaret Park, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Brian Penna, City of Indian Wells
Christopher Tracy, University of California, Riverside (UCR)
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee
Evan Trubee, City of Palm Desert

MEMBERS ABSENT: Stephen Benson, Department of Finance
Denise Delgado, City of Coachella
Steve Downs, City of Rancho Mirage (*Vice-Chair*)
Elaine Holmes, City of Indio
Jennifer Norris, Wildlife Conservation Board

Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee

CVMC STAFF PRESENT: Elizabeth King, Executive Director
Diana Rosas, Associate Director
Maximiliano Ochoa, Project Coordinator
Abriana Elms, Administrative Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT: William Brent Felstead, Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains
Recreation and Conservation Authority
Tammy Martin, Friends of the Desert Mountains
G. Patrick O'Dowd, Salton Sea Authority
Oscar Ortiz, Friends of the Desert Mountains
Will Steichen, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission
Jack Thompson, The Wildlands Conservancy

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Rita Lamb declared a quorum with 13 voting members present and called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Subsequently, one additional Board Member (Jefferson) arrived after the roll call bringing the attendance to 14 voting members.

2.0 Approval of November 18, 2024, Meeting Minutes

A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/McGarrey) to approve November 18, 2024, minutes; the motion passed with one abstention (Tracy).

3.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

Tammy Martin, Executive Director, Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM) introduced herself to the new Board Members and invited the board to the upcoming Coachella Valley Wildflower Festival on March 1, 2025.

4.0 Closed Session

No closed session was scheduled for this meeting.

5.0 Action/Informational Items- Public Hearing

Action Item 5.1 Approval of New Meeting Location for 2025.

Chair Lamb gave a brief overview of the proposed new meeting location.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Park/Gardner) to approve the proposed new meeting location at the Palm Desert Council Chamber (Address: 73-510 Fred Waring Drive, Palm Desert, CA 92260). The motion passed unanimously.

Action Item 5.2 Election of Officers 2025.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Park) to elect Deborah McGarrey as Chair. A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Gonzalez) to elect Rita Lamb as Vice Chair. The motion passed unanimously.

Informational Item 5.3 Presentation by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission on Ordinance Development for a Ranger Program.

Chair Lamb introduced Will Steichen, Ranger Coordinator, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC), who gave a brief informational update on the Ranger Program.

Board Member Lamb asked if the CVCC was the funding source for the grant and if CVCC was to be the Human Resources Department for the personnel hired. Steichen clarified that CVMC awarded a grant to CVCC for the development of an ordinance for a ranger program which will cover the project for the first three years. Executive Director King added that the housing of the ordinance is yet to be determined but CVCC has committed to funding the Ranger Program in perpetuity. Board Member Gardner expressed the importance of the Ranger Program. Board Member Penna asked if the grant has already been funded. Steichen confirmed that the grant has already been awarded. Executive Director King added that the Ranger Program contributes to the efforts of the State of California's 30x30 Program that aims to conserve 30% of state land by the year 2030.

Informational Item 5.4 Friends of the Desert Mountains Presentation on Native Plants.

Chair Lamb introduced Oscar Ortiz, Deputy Director, FODM, who gave a brief presentation on Native Plants.

Board Member McGarrey disclosed that she serves as an unpaid Board Member on the FODM Board and that per the Attorney General no conflict exists therefore recusal is not required. Board Member Gardner commented that he appreciates the progress reports on awarded projects. Board Member McGarrey suggested that the Native Plant Guide be presented to the local cities. Ortiz responded that FODM is open to suggestions and meeting with cities to discuss. Board Member Penna suggested that the Native Plant guide be provided to the Planning Commissions as well. Executive Director King asked about information on where to purchase the native plants. Ortiz responded that the native plant guide includes a page with a list of local nurseries. Board Member Tracy added that UCR is looking into seed collection within their properties. Board Member Arroyo mentioned that State Parks likes to use local native plants as well. Board Member Park also commented

that the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Tribe work with and recommend to always use native plants.

6.0 Reports

6.1 Written reports from staff.

Associate Director Rosas and Project Coordinator Ochoa gave a brief update on acquisitions and land management updates.

Board Member Gardner asked if grant funds may be affected by the current state budget deficit. Associate Director Rosas responded that local assistance grants from bond programs are not being affected by the budget deficit, rather general and special funds are being considered by the state's administration but because the Conservancy does not have general funds, staff is hopeful that an exemption from future budget cuts will be considered for the Conservancy's budget.

6.2 Executive Director Report.

Executive Director King reported on the following:

- Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. A copy of the rules was provided to all board members for review.
- Welcome to new Board Member Brian Penna, City of Indian Wells.
- Welcome to incoming Board Chair Deborah McGarrey and exploring new practices such as board subcommittees.
- Goals for 2025, including:
 1. Creation of the Proposition 4 Grant Program, development of grant guidelines, and potentially announcing some awardees by the end of 2025.
 2. CVMC will be moving offices, likely to the Berger Foundation building on Cook Street in Palm Desert.
 3. Developing an ordinance for a CVCC led Ranger Program to help protect desert lands.
 4. Continuing with acquisition work in advancing the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan.
 5. Updating Strategic Plan goals and potentially hosting a Board retreat.

6. Update on the creation of four new trails. West Deception trail is underway, a group hike was suggested after project completion.
- Introducing CVMC to the Cities at local council meetings and sharing individual projects funded through CVMC.
- Conservancy's budget and the State's budget deficit.
 - Overview of the Conservancy's operating budget and essential work.
 - Statewide budget deficit drills: 7.95% cut and vacancy elimination potentially affecting the Conservancy's operating budget.

Chair Lamb commented that the budget condition is alarming. Board Member Gardner asked about the status of the new lease and if the lease rate increased. Executive Director King confirmed that the new lease rate will increase. Board Member Penna suggested that the Cities come together to help the Conservancy with the budget deficit. Board Member McGarrey encouraged board members to reach out to and talk with local partners. Board Member Trubee noted that he would personally reach out to the City of Palm Desert, City Manager to see if the city can provide moving assistance for the Conservancy. Board Member Tracy inquired about the statewide budget deficit drills and the possibility of the Conservancy being exempt. Executive Director King responded that staff have been in communications with State Parks who manages the Conservancy's budget and with CNRA to address the erroneous proposed amount to the Conservancy's budget deficit. Board Member Drake commented that CNRA is doing their best to help support the Conservancy and that other departments are also suffering from budget cuts.

6.3 Board Member Comments and Reports.

Board Member Gardner commented about the Chuckwalla National Monument in Washington and what an honor it was to attend the celebration. Board Member Trover also commented on the importance of the monument and potential setbacks that may be faced with the new administration.

7.0 Adjourn to the May 12, 2025, meeting.

Chair Lamb adjourned the meeting without objection at 4:30 p.m.