

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
Regular Meeting – January 8, 2024, 3:00 PM

73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Conference Room 101
Palm Desert, CA 92260

Tele-conference location:
State of California, Resources Agency
715 P St.
Mojave Room on the 20th floor (NRHQ 20-104)
Sacramento, CA 95814

AGENDA

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

2.0 Approval of November 13, 2023, Meeting Minutes (See Attachment 1.)

3.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

At this time, any member of the public may address the Governing Board on any item not on the agenda. The Board cannot act on an item not on the agenda, but it can place it on the agenda for a future meeting. For items on the agenda, there will be an opportunity to speak when that item is heard. The Chair may limit the time for each speaker. Any written material may be submitted to the person taking minutes.

4.0 Action Items - Public Hearing (if there is any member of the public who wishes to address the Governing Board before action is taken, testimony from the public will be taken prior to a vote.)

4.1 Election of Officers for 2024. (See Attachment 2.)

4.2 Annual Review of Acquisition Priorities and Report on 2023 Acquisition Activity. (See Attachment 3.)

4.3 Presentation by Friends of the Desert Mountains on CRCA & Prop 68 Projects. (See Attachment 4.)

4.4 Annual Review of Implementation of Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Policy. (See Attachment 5.)

5.0 Reports

5.1 Written Reports from Staff. (See Attachment 6.)

5.2 Executive Director Report.

- Trail Project Status
- State Budget Update

5.3 Board Member comments and reports from Conservancy member agencies. This is an opportunity for any of the Governing Board Members to present a report on matters of interest regarding the agency he or she represents.

6.0 Closed Session

Pursuant to Government Code sections 11126 (a)(1), 11126(e)(1) and 11126.3(a) the Board may hold a closed session to discuss and take possible action on personnel matters and or receive advice of counsel on pending or potential litigation. In addition, pursuant to Government Code section 11126(c) 7(A) the Board may meet in closed session with its negotiator prior to the purchase or sale of real property by or for the state body to give instructions to its negotiator regarding the price and terms of payment for the purchase or sale. Confidential memoranda related to these issues may be considered during such closed session discussions. The matter scheduled for closed sessions is:

- Recruitment of Executive Director

7.0 Adjourn to the March 11, 2024, meeting at 3:00 pm.

This Agenda is available on our website at <http://cvmc.ca.gov>. Anyone with questions about any item on the agenda may contact the Conservancy by phone at (760) 776-5026 or by visiting our office located at 73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 120, Palm Desert, CA 92260.

ATTACHMENT 1 – January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 2.0

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY REGULAR MEETING

73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 101
Palm Desert, California
November 13, 2023 - 3:00 p.m.

Tele-conference location:

State of California, Resources Agency
715 P St.
Farallon Room on the 20th floor (NRHQ 20-105)
Sacramento, CA 95814

DRAFT MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrew Ahlberg, California State Parks
Stephen Benson, Department of Finance
Rebecca Fris, Wildlife Conservation Board
Gary Gardner, City of Desert Hot Springs (*Chair*)
Beatriz Gonzalez, State Assembly Appointee
Bjana Jefferson, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Kathleen Kelly, City of Palm Desert
Rita Lamb, City of Cathedral City (*Vice Chairwoman*)
Deborah McGarrey, City of La Quinta
Margaret Park, Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee
Christopher Tracy, University of California, Riverside
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee

MEMBERS ABSENT: Denise Delgado, City of Coachella
Steve Downs, City of Rancho Mirage
Elaine Holmes, City of Indio
Christy Holstege, City of Palm Springs
V. Manuel Perez, Riverside County
Andrea Scharffer, CA Natural Resources Agency
Bruce Whitman, City of Indian Wells

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Karpiak, Executive Director
Diana Rosas, Associate Director
Maximiliano Ochoa, Project Coordinator
Abriana Elms, Administrative Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT: Katie Barrows, Chuckwalla Nat'l. Monument Coalition
 Kathleen Brundige, Coachella Valley Conservation
 Commission
 Vincent James, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
 Tammy Martin, Friends of the Desert Mountains

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Gary Gardner declared a quorum with 11 voting members present at 3:04 p.m. Subsequently, 2 additional board members arrived after the roll call bringing the attendance to 13 voting members.

2.0 Approval of September 11, 2023, Meeting Minutes

A motion was made and seconded (Ahlberg/Lamb) to approve the September 11, 2023, minutes; the motion passed with 2 abstentions.

3.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

No public comments were made.

4.0 Closed Session

No closed session was scheduled for this meeting.

5.0 Action items – Public Hearing

5.1 Approval of Meeting Schedule for 2024.

With no objections, the chair declared the schedule approved.

5.2 Consideration of Requests for Proposals Wildfire Resilience Local Assistance Grants.

Jim summarized item 5.2 as presented in the staff report.

Andrew Ahlberg asked whether funding can be used for training. Jim responded that funds can be used for training. Gary Gardner also commented in favor of the RFPs.

A motion was made and seconded (Kelly/Park) approving issuance of the three RFPs for the Wildfire Resilience funds to be awarded as part of the Climate Resilience & Community Access Grant Program. The motion passed unanimously.

- 5.3 Adoption of Resolution 2023-17 consenting to and approving the donation by the Friends of the Desert Mountains of one parcel in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area to the Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

Margaret Park, Aqua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians board member, recused herself and did not participate in the consideration of this item.

Diana Rosas summarized Item 5.3 as presented in the staff report.

Andrew Ahlberg asked what the Desert Riders Property was. Margaret responded that is a nonprofit equestrian organization.

Staff noted that two members of the Friends of the Desert Mountain Board, Joan Taylor and Deborah McGarrey, are also Conservancy board members but as volunteer board members of a nonprofit organization, the attorney general has advised that there is no conflict and thus no need for recusal.

A motion was made and seconded (Taylor/Kelly) consenting to and approving the donation by the Friends of the Desert Mountains of 280 acres of land (APN 686-110-021) in the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area to the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. The motion passed unanimously; Margaret Park did not participate.

- 5.4 Adoption of Resolution 2023-18 in Support of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument and expansion of Joshua Tree National Park.

Jim Karpiak summarized item 5.4 as presented in the staff report. Katie Barrows was also in attendance and available for questions.

Gary Gardner reported that he was invited to Washington to lobby for this with the California Delegation. It was a successful trip and well received. Kathleen Kelly asked about the utility infrastructure and if related rights are protected. Katie Barrows responded that the coalition working on the proposal worked on numerous issues with the utilities. Gary also added that existing uses within National Monuments are always protected. Andrew Ahlberg expressed his support for the National Monument and its borders.

A motion was made and seconded (Taylor/Tracy) in support of the Chuckwalla National Monument Establishment and Joshua Tree National Park Expansion Act of 2023, or in the alternative, the designation of the Chuckwalla National

Monument through executive action pursuant to the Antiquities Act. The motion passed unanimously with two abstentions.

5.5 Presentation on CVMC social media.

Maximiliano Ochoa described the new social media program that the staff has launched.

Gary Gardner and Ellen Trover both commented that social media will help promote the Conservancy to show more audiences who we are and what we do.

There were no further questions or comments from the board.

6.0 Reports

6.1 Written reports from staff.

There were no questions or discussion from the Board.

6.2 Executive Director Report.

Jim Karpiak reported on the following:

- All Conservancy Meeting - CVMC hosted the annual All Conservancy and WCB conference last month in Palm Springs at Margaritaville. It was very successful and allowed us to promote Coachella Valley and highlight our partners and some of our projects.
- Existing Trails- The existing trails project grant is wrapping up at the end of the year. Future trail work will continue with coordination through the Land Management Services project.
- Six New Trails- With no progress in BLM reviewing the EA for the six trails, to allow work to begin on the four trails not on federal land, a CEQA MND has been drafted, which will be brought to the CVMC board at the January or March board meeting. The 2 trails (Blind and Fargo Canyons) that are on Federal land will remain in the EA document awaiting BLM review.

There were no board comments or questions.

6.3 Board Member comments and reports.

There were no further questions or comments from the board.

7.0 Adjourn to the January 8, 2024, meeting at 3:00 pm.

Chair Gary Gardner adjourned the meeting without objection at 3:56 pm.

ATTACHMENT 2 – January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 4.1 Elections of Chair and Vice-Chair.

BACKGROUND

The Board needs to elect officers for the calendar year 2024. The terms of the Chair and Vice-Chair positions are one year, pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 33506. Also under that statute, the only Board members eligible to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair are the City, County and Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians representatives, and the appointees of the Governor, the Senate Committee on Rules, and the Speaker of the Assembly. By state law, the representatives of the various state agencies are not eligible.

Gary Gardner and Rita Lamb have served for the past two years as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively. The recent custom has been for the Board Chair to serve for two years and then step aside in favor of the Vice Chair, although there is no rule to that effect. Staff has spoken to Councilwoman Lamb, who is willing to serve as chair.

In addition, the Board appoints a representative to the five-member board of the Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (CVDMRCA). The CVDMRCA's joint powers agreement establishes a board consisting of the Executive Director of the Conservancy, the General Manager of Desert Recreation District (DRD), appointees of the boards of the Conservancy and DRD, and an appointee of the Executive Director of CVCC. Gary Gardner has served as the Conservancy Board's representative for approximately a year and a half and has indicated that he is willing to continue. The CVDMRCA board does not have fixed terms, so no action is required unless the Board wishes to make a change.

ATTACHMENT 3- January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 4.2 Acquisition Priorities Review and Annual Update

BACKGROUND

On an annual basis, the Board reviews the Conservancy's Acquisition Priorities and prior year's acquisition activity to determine whether revisions to the Priorities are desirable. The Priorities are designed to summarize Board policy guidance on specific areas of the Coachella Valley for acquisition with Conservancy funds. The staff rely on the Priorities in its day-to-day acquisition work, as the Priorities set forth the analysis for considering which parcels to acquire. The Priorities are also available to grant applicants, partner agencies, the media, and anyone interested in the Conservancy's acquisition program.

DISCUSSION

The Conservancy staff has been actively spearheading efforts to conserve more land for habitat and cultural protection and recreational purposes using funding from the Conservancy and other sources. Although the Conservancy made no grants for land acquisitions in 2023, under its Acquisition Manager Services Contract staff coordinated acquisitions for the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) which resulted in 1,266.82+/- acres acquired in many of the priority areas. Fortunately, CVCC's Land Acquisition Fund is in good status due to the amount of development activity in the last few years, so generally CVCC can fully cover the cost of most acquisitions that are within CVCC Conservation Areas.

The Conservancy has been working with several landowners on potential large acquisitions; several of those involve sites where development had been contemplated but never moved forward, or where some other non-intensive use previously occurred (e.g., golf courses, parking lots, etc.). None of those deals came to fruition in 2023, but the efforts continue and may yet result in significant acquisitions in the next couple of years. For information on some of those negotiations and transactions in progress, please see Section 5 of the agenda packet.

Concerns about funding future acquisitions exist. While the Conservancy currently has several million dollars that can be used for acquisition (mostly Prop 84 and Prop 68 funds), one or two large acquisitions could consume most of that amount. Whether there will be a bond issued on the ballot in 2024 is unknown. Should that occur and be approved by the voters, the earliest that funding could be available would be mid to late 2025. If there

is no 2024 bond, there may be no additional funding until 2027 or later. The likelihood of new state general fund appropriations is extremely low.

The Conservancy continues to look to other sources such as the federal Section 6 program and the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), although recent changes have made both of those sources more difficult to access. The Section 6 program previously allowed applicants to qualify for funding based on a list of target parcels, but it now requires willing sellers for specific parcels before an application can be considered. From experience, it is very difficult to convince a seller to wait a year and a half or more to complete a sale while the grant process moves forward. WCB also has a lengthy process for grant consideration, and recently has been targeting larger projects— in 2022 Conservancy staff had a consultation with WCB staff about a \$10 million dollar project for several hundred acres but were discouraged from continuing in the application process because WCB had limited capacity and thus needed to focus on larger projects.

The bottom line is that staff will need to explore new avenues for accessing funds, including not only other government programs but foundations and corporations. Due to the steady flow of state bond funds over the last two decades, the Conservancy has been spared the burden of fundraising work, but that may need to change soon.

Nonetheless, the Conservancy's traditional acquisition program needs to move forward aggressively, not only to complete acquisitions under the CVMSHCP but also to meet other objectives, such as creating more locations for outdoor recreation, preserving culturally significant sites, and contributing to the State's 30 by 30 goals. For 2024, staff recommends revisions to the Acquisition Priorities to focus use of Conservancy funding on specific areas that CVCC is not able to fund, or that other local conservation partners are not focusing on, such as "buffer zones" that abet conservation areas or "donut holes" that were left out of conservation areas due to circumstances that have changed since 2008.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends revisions to the Acquisition Priorities for 2024 as shown in Exhibit A and invites Board comments and direction on the acquisition program generally for the coming year. Note: Additions to the Priorities are shown by underlining and deletions are shown by strikethroughs.

EXHIBIT A

Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Acquisition Priorities ~~2022~~2024

The Conservancy's mission under state law is to protect lands with "open-space, wildlife, scenic, environmental, anthropological, cultural, scientific, educational and recreational resources", including both mountainous lands surrounding the Coachella Valley and natural community conservation lands as identified in the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan ("CVMSHCP"). The priorities set forth here update and revise the Acquisition Priorities set by the Conservancy Board ~~in January 2020~~as last revised. The priorities establish initial criteria for evaluating potential acquisitions (or applications for grants for acquisitions), with the understanding that ranking properties can be a subjective exercise and that the circumstances surrounding the availability of willing sellers or funds to support purchases will necessitate careful analysis of each ~~site~~property.

~~All acquisition properties~~Properties being considered for acquisition must be within a CVMSHCP Conservation Area or if outside, must directly support the CVMSHCP or significantly assist in fulfilling California's 30 by 30 objectives, and must preserve or promote one or more of the following conservation objectives:

- Biological resources, such as important plant or wildlife habitat or hydrologic features or potential to enhance carbon sequestration
- Cultural resources
- Recreational options consistent with habitat values
- Significant scenic attributes.

In general, properties that fulfill more than one of the conservation objectives will be preferred for acquisition to those that meet only one objective. However, each ~~potential acquisition site~~property is unique and the ultimate decisions on acquisition will rest with the Conservancy's board.

Other attributes or factors in establishing priority:

- Likelihood of imminent or future development
- Potential to expand access to open space for historically underserved communities
- Importance for responding to climate change, such as sites for vegetation projects to enhance carbon sequestration
- Partnership, ~~or~~ fund leveraging opportunities or matching fund availability specifically for properties that are outside or adjacent to the CVMSHCP Conservation Areas

- Potential for future transfer to federal or local agency or non-profit organization
- Adjacent to or near other conservation holdings where cooperative monitoring and management is feasible
- Availability of public agency or nonprofit entity to take and hold title
- Funding options for future management and monitoring
- Rising land values in area
- Potential for use as part of other Conservancy program, e.g., habitat restoration or trail or other outdoor recreational projects
- Other special circumstances, e.g., seller motivation, foreclosure or tax sale offering, property condition, presence of improvements or hazardous materials.

The Conservancy's jurisdiction, which matches the CVMSHCP territory, includes 1.2 million acres, stretching from the Banning pass on the west, to the top third of the Salton Sea on the east, to Joshua Tree National Park (JTNP) on the north and to the Santa Rosa & San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (SRSJNM) on the south. The CVMSHCP has designated 21 habitat conservation areas (map attached as [Exhibit Attachment 1A](#)) and protects [40-27](#) covered species throughout the Coachella Valley. Under the CVHSHCP, approximately 747,000 acres will eventually need to be conserved.

The following [updated](#) list highlights recent progress the Conservancy and its partners have made in key conservation areas ~~and shows where our priorities will be in the coming years:~~

- ♦ San Jacinto Mountains (including the Chino Cone area) and Santa Rosa Mountains alluvial fans (in La Quinta, Oasis, Thermal, Vista Santa Rosa, Snowcreek and Palm Hills) – contain cultural resources, scenic resources within and adjacent to the SRSJNM and significant habitat values for Peninsular bighorn sheep, along with future recreational options. ~~Major~~ [A major](#) recent acquisitions [in this area](#) have included the 640—acre Shumway Ranch, 114+ acre—Oswit Canyon, 560 acres known as Shadowrock and Angel Cove, 640 acres known as the Schlesinger property, 481 acres in the San Jacinto Mountains above Snowcreek, and a 42+ acre site in Palm Springs known as the Rimrock property. ~~was~~ [238 acres known as the Palm Hills property which was acquired at the same time that CVCC purchased the adjacent acres.](#) Efforts ~~are will continuing~~ [continue in this area](#) to acquire the remaining critical properties ~~in or near the SRSJM.~~
- ♦ Lake Cahuilla shoreline – protects this unique historical shoreline and important cultural resource area from potential development and connects it to other conservation areas. The Conservancy board has approved several acquisition grants to ~~our~~ partners [herefor this area](#). While most major private holdings ~~here~~ have been

conserved, efforts are continuing to acquire the remaining critical properties in or near the shoreline.

- ♦ Stubbe Canyon corridor – includes the significant wildlife corridor between the San Jacinto and San Bernardino Mountains, sand transport essential areas and high-quality riparian habitat, as well as trail alignment opportunities. Due to the threat of development, the Conservancy has been very active in this area. As the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail passes through and is adjacent to several of the conservation parcels, there are future trail alignment opportunities as well. ~~We continue to negotiate~~ Negotiations with willing sellers in this area will be ongoing.
- ♦ ~~Sand transport areas in Upper Mission Creek/Big Morongo Canyon, Willow Hole, Thousand Palms and Edom Hill areas – where many parcels provide excellent habitat for the Coachella Valley Fringed-Toed Lizard (CVFTL), Coachella Valley milkvetch, Coachella valley round-tailed ground squirrel, and Palm Springs pocket mouse. The Conservancy has focused heavily on acquisitions in these areas, succeeding in acquiring a good portion of the “low hanging fruit” to date. Many remaining sites contain cultural resources and could provide trail alignment opportunities. As there remains a significant threat of development, we are always open to opportunities to acquire additional properties in this area will remain a priority. Recently, using Federal Endangered Species Act funds along with Conservancy bond funds, we facilitated the conservation purchase of 481 acres adjacent to this conservation area and the Sand to Snow National Monument that had been proposed for a major housing development.~~
- ♦ Thermal Canyon/Mecca Hills/Orocopia Mountains Wilderness areas, including portions of the Desert Tortoise/Linkage, West Deception Canyon and the Indio Hills/JTNP Linkage Conservation Areas - which contain significant desert dry wash woodland and significant historical resources due to their proximity to the Colorado River Aqueduct. They also serve as potential ~~as~~ linkages for wildlife movement corridors among several significant canyons, and some represent future trail opportunities. Efforts are ongoing as willing sellers approach ~~us desiring with a desire~~ to sell their properties in this area. We especially hope that eventually the Paradise Valley site will become available.
- ♦ Indio Hills/JTNP- Linkage Conservation Area – contains core habitat, public access to future State Park facilities and quality “wilderness” area and was the location of the Conservancy’s largest partnership acquisition project of approximately 8,881 acres. In recent years, the Conservancy has continued ~~our~~ acquisition efforts in areas bordering

JTNP. The long-term goal is to transfer ~~many~~ properties to the Park Service for inclusion into JTNP. The Conservancy is also working to connect trails from the valley to existing JTNP trails.

- ♦ Dos Palmas Conservation Area – contains existing valuable habitat as well as future potential linkages for wildlife movement and connects to other publicly owned land in the Dos Palmas ~~ACEC~~Area of Critical Environmental Concern. Due to the location near the Salton Sea, parcels ~~here in this area~~ may host future cooperative restoration projects using water bond funding. In the last several years, this has been an active area for acquisition work, which is expected to continue.
- ♦ Stormwater Channel and Delta Conservation Area – features rare wetland habitat and serves protected riparian birds and other species, provides opportunities for habitat restoration or water quality cooperative projects near the Salton Sea and enhances the CVMSHCP efforts to acquire a large area of continuously conserved parcels. Since 2014, ~~we have acquired~~ several hundred acres ~~here~~have been acquired in this area, many of which contain wetlands areas that are now being restored with Conservancy water bond funding.

On the attached Exhibits B and C, the conservation areas and conserved lands are shown as of 12/31/2023.

The following areas are where the Conservancy will focus its efforts in the coming years:

- ♦ Indio Hills Palms and East Indio Hills Conservation Areas and buffer zones which include larger in-holdings that are adjacent to the conservation areas.
- ♦ Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area and buffer zones which include lands that are adjacent to the conservation area.
- ♦ Stubbe and Cottonwood Canyons Conservation Area and buffer zones which include lands that are adjacent to the conservation area.
- ♦ Willow Hole Conservation Area and buffer zones which include lands that are adjacent to the conservation area.
- ♦ Whitewater Floodplain Conservation Area and buffer zones which include lands that are adjacent to the conservation area.

~~On the attached Exhibits B and C, the areas in dark green portray the areas in the East and West Valley conserved up to 9/30/21.~~

EXHIBIT B

Conservancy Boundary/MSHCP Conservation Areas

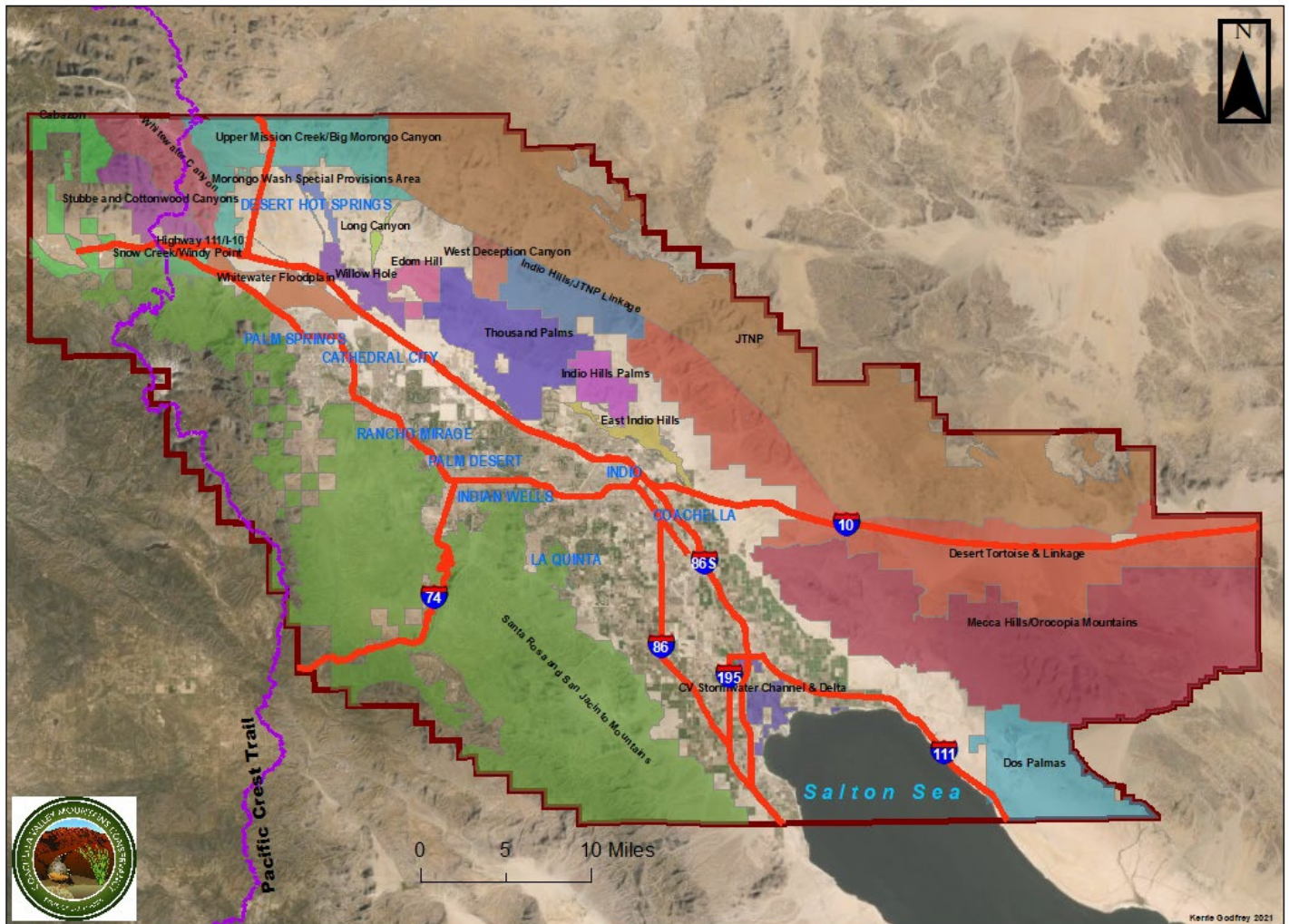
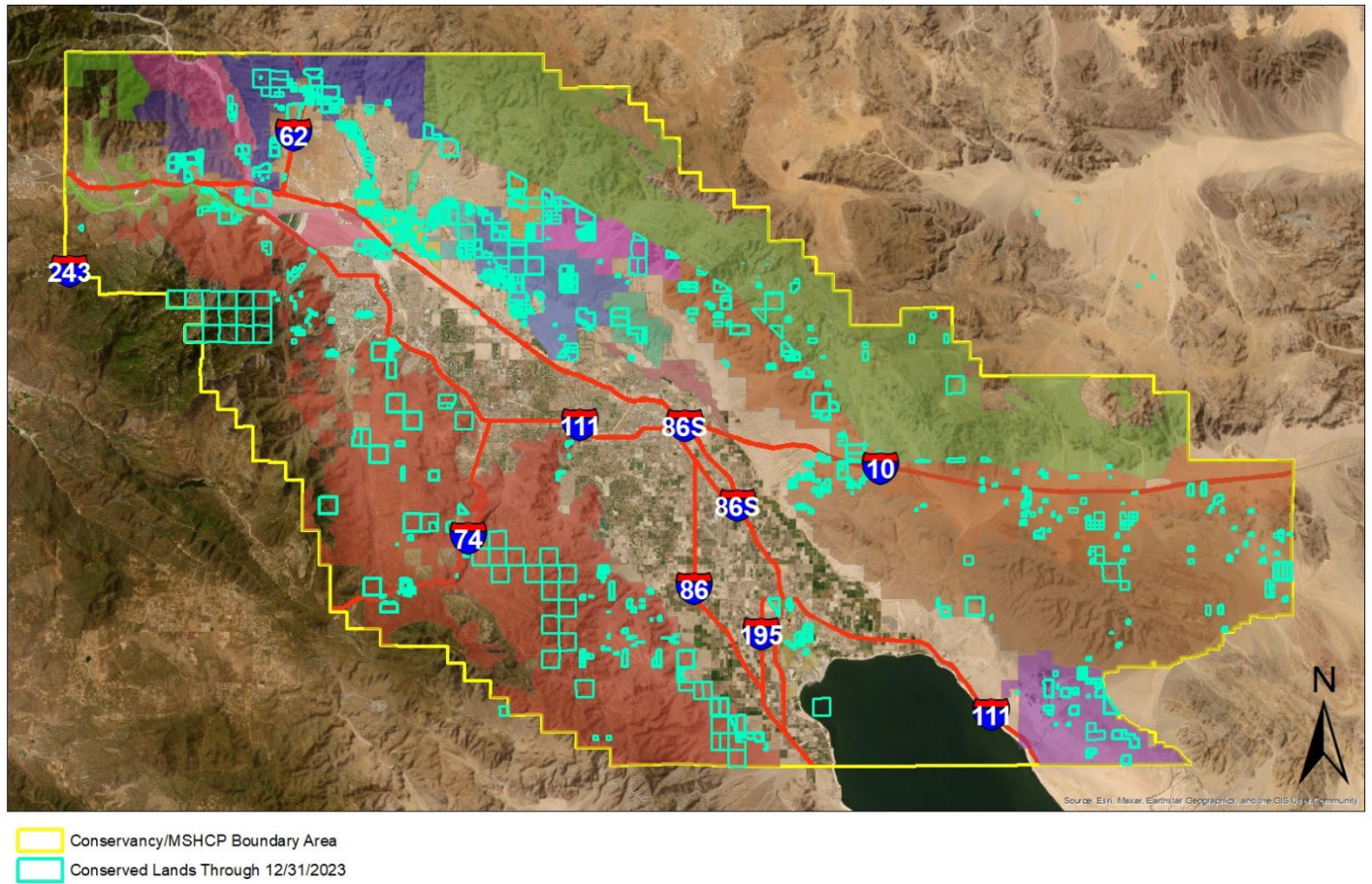


EXHIBIT C

Conserved Parcels as of 12/31/2023



ATTACHMENT 4 – January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 4.3 Presentation by Friends of the Desert Mountains on CRCA & Prop 68 Projects.

See attached.

Desert Lake Shore



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

Staff

- Director of Education - Oscar Ortiz
 - 25% salary funded
- Indigenous Community Liaison - Alyssa Johnson
 - Full salary funded
- Translation Specialist
 - Full salary funded



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

Biological Survey

- Conducted by WSP
 - Cost: \$8,200
- Found no areas of legal concern
- Recommends removal of invasives, including Bermuda Grass
- Recommends protecting cryptobiotic soil present on property
- Recommends nesting survey if construction is done during nesting season



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

Community Engagement/Conceptual Design

- KDI Hired as consultant
 - Price
- Monthly meetings with Torres Martinez Cultural Committee
- Presentation and listening session with following tribal councils:
 - Youth Council
 - Elder's Council
 - General Council
 - Tribal Council



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

Conceptual Design

- Includes feedback from meetings with tribal councils
- Includes feedback from FODM board

design feedback

site design concerns

How will the site be protected after hours?

Will the fish traps be visible with the elevated platform?

Protecting the fish traps and other archeological artifacts

Controlled visitorship and guided tours

Involving tribal youth during design process

design preferences

The first concept gives more opportunities to engage with the surrounding landscape

The elevated platform might not be helpful to view the fish traps

The second concept focuses more on the mountainside

Include more cultural aspects to the overall design



Friends of the
Desert Mountains

site plan







educational kiosk



ATTACHMENT 5 – January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 4.4 Review of Implementation of Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

BACKGROUND

In March 2023, the Board adopted the Conservancy's Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (the JEDI Policy) as a step toward enhancing its abilities to serve economically disadvantaged communities and populations historically underserved by recreational and educational opportunities. The JEDI Policy calls for an annual board review of the status of policy implementation to monitor the Conservancy's progress and determine whether any changes in program operations are desirable. A copy of the policy is attached as Exhibit A for your reference.

DISCUSSION

Conservancy staff takes the JEDI Policy implementation very seriously and meets internally on a regular basis to discuss making sure that all programs and activities further the Policy's objectives. Staff also participate in CNRA policy working groups that allow learning from other agencies and communities around the state.

2023 has already resulted in a good deal of progress in several areas:

- Grant Programs: Most of the Conservancy's CRCA Program and Prop 68 grants last year targeted historically underserved populations or communities, including:
 - Southern California Mountains Foundation's urban conservation corps by supporting and training 3 new corps members;
 - Native American Land Conservancy's project of supporting tribal communities in dealing proactively with climate change;
 - The Living Desert's Native American Workforce Program, which seeks to recruit young tribal community members for careers in conservation;
 - Friends of the Desert Mountain's Desert Lake Shore planning and design project, which is developing a re-use plan for the culturally significant site in active collaboration with the Torres Martinez tribe;
 - Center for Natural Land Management restroom replacement project that facilitates public access to the Coachella Valley Preserve, located in an economically disadvantaged community; and

- City of Indio's Badlands Trail parking and trailhead expansion project, which will expand the capacity of one of the few official trails in the east valley that is convenient for residents of nearby disadvantaged communities.

The Conservancy aims to expand this progress by targeting more than half of the funding in the current Wildfire Resilience funding round for economically disadvantaged and tribal communities. Finally, the Conservancy is undertaking active outreach to potential grantees that have not previously received Conservancy funds, and web-based workshops as well as an in-person session in Indio on January 9 will be held to explain the various grant programs and offer technical assistance on the application process.

- **Social Media Program Launch:** This year the Conservancy created a social media program to facilitate interactive communication within our large territory with a goal of reaching the audiences like younger people who do not follow local newspapers or television stations. It will make it much easier to reach audiences without having to create events or travel long distances. It will also improve the quality of communication by allowing the Conservancy to share pictures of community-benefitting events, successful restoration or acquisition projects and even trail maps to facilitate access to public lands. Critically, the program allows the Conservancy to target portions of the Valley or groups of residents with culturally relevant information. Perhaps most importantly, the Conservancy is obtaining continuous input from community members about meeting the needs of all areas that the Conservancy serves.
- **Diverse Workforce:** The Conservancy continues to diversify by hiring staff that reflect the communities it serves. In the goal of a diverse workforce, the Conservancy took great strides in supporting professional development by appointing an immigrant bilingual Latina to an executive position for the first time in the history of the Conservancy. Additionally, recruiting a highly qualified trilingual (English, Spanish, and P'urépecha) Native American/Indigenous (P'urépecha Tribe) and immigrant candidate for the Project Coordinator role. Both are longtime residents of the Coachella Valley with strong histories of community involvement. Furthermore, all staff participate in ongoing educational, cultural, and technical trainings that emphasize organizational outreach to establish community partnerships while promoting the Conservancy's mission.

In the coming year, the Conservancy contemplates focusing on three areas: (i) developing better relationships with Spanish language media outlets, (ii) creating a tribal outreach program and (iii) undertaking a survey of grantees and local organizations to assess the Conservancy's grant programs and consider what improvements can be made to expand the ability to serve the entire community.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests comments, additional ideas and direction from the board on Policy implementation.

Exhibit A

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY



Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Policy

Approved by CVMC Board March 13, 2023

Introduction

All Californians have the right to access the Coachella Valley's deserts and mountains and to live in a healthy environment. The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy's mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley: the scenic, wildlife, cultural, geologic, and recreational resources that make this such a splendid place for people and wildlife with which we share this special place. The Conservancy is an exceptional example of local communities, other state agencies and local elected officials, non-profit organizations, business and environmental interests all working together to protect and preserve the Coachella Valley's diverse natural resources for the good of all.

The Conservancy recognizes California's Native Americans, Black people, non-native English speakers, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, LGBTQ communities, and economically disadvantaged groups ("frontline" or "underserved" communities) have experienced a history of injustice, exclusion and displacement.

Frontline communities frequently experience and disproportionately bear the most immediate and worst impacts of climate change. At the same time, they are impacted by the environmental burdens caused by toxic pollution wrought by development and industry. While environmental preservation and restoration have primarily benefitted the affluent, underserved communities experience inequitable access to the deserts, mountains, and their natural resources.

The Conservancy recognizes that more needs to be done to address inequities in the Coachella Valley and commits to addressing injustices and inequities. Striving to move forward in an equitable, inclusive manner, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will:

- Create a welcoming environment where people's differences are represented and respected; which embraces multicultural and indigenous histories and presence, and cultivates community empowerment, care of natural resources, personal connections, and a sense of ownership.
- Improve its policies, programs, and practices to advance equitable access to the environmental, social, and economic benefits of the Coachella Valley.

- Regularly evaluate and modify program priorities, grant funding, contracting, hiring practices, communications, and community engagement practices, to address existing inequities and prevent additional inequities.
- Increase the involvement and role of underserved and/or frontline communities in decision-making by the Conservancy.

Influencing Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Programs

State legislation establishes the Conservancy's mission and provides funding for programs set by the Conservancy board. Through these programs, the Conservancy can strive to promote more equitable outcomes for all Californians, especially under-served and/or frontline communities.

- **Explore the Coachella Valley and surrounding Mountains:** Increase access to the desert and mountains for all Californians, especially economically disadvantaged and historically underserved communities, and provide outdoor experiences for youth and adults that may face challenges getting to or enjoying the mountains and desert.
- **Protect and Restore the Desert and Mountains:** Ensure the benefits of healthy ecosystems, clean water, flood plains, riparian areas, deserts, mountains, working lands, urban parks, and open space are provided to all Californians.
- **Prepare for Climate Change:** Increase both social and ecological resilience to climate change and reduce its impacts on underserved and/or frontline communities within the Conservancy's jurisdiction.

Guidelines

1. Partnerships

- Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve underserved and/or frontline communities.
- Support people and organizations that are advocating for equity by ensuring fairness for achieving outcomes for all groups, and that no one factor, such as race, can be used to predict outcomes.
- Advance environmental justice so that all people have access to healthy, safe, livable communities, and environments.
- Work with community-based organizations to co-vision desired future conditions and provide technical assistance to build their capacity to plan, fund, and implement projects aligned with the CVMC's program areas.
- Provide assistance to community-based organizations in applying for and managing grants.

2. Funding Programs

- Fund programs and projects that increase equity and environmental justice throughout the Conservancy's jurisdiction.
- Prioritize funding for projects that benefit underserved and/or frontline communities.
- Develop and implement grant programs with input from communities.
- In grant programs, include funding for education, workforce development, and jobs related to conservation.

- Expand access to Conservancy grant funding by reducing barriers to the grant application process, such as providing technical assistance and community outreach.
- Remain flexible throughout the grant process to support the needs of grantees and communities.

3. Meaningful Community Engagement

- Engage with communities collaboratively by working with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations and ensure they have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health.
- Engage in active and empathetic listening, striving to learn from the experiences of underserved and frontline communities to build trust and strengthen relationships.
- Hold public outreach events within underserved communities and educate them on the opportunities provided by the Conservancy.
- Ensure underserved and/or frontline communities have meaningful input into decision-making about Conservancy-funded projects.
- Engage with communities in public co-visioning processes before projects are developed to generate community-ownership and project ideas anchored in community expertise.
- Value and invest in community expertise. Ensure funds go to community-based organizations to lead community engagement to promote equitable project processes and outcomes.

4. Working with California's Tribes

- Ensure consultation with tribal governments and communities occurs early in project development and throughout project implementation.
- Ensure tribal concerns are respected and archaeological and cultural resources are protected.
- Seek solutions to state contracting issues that affect the sovereignty of tribes.
- Assist tribes to regain access to their ancestral lands through the Conservancy's land conservation or access programs.
- Work with tribes to enable traditional stewardship and cultural practices on ancestral land and co-management of their ancestral lands and natural resources.
- Ensure programs include indigenous voices, leadership, and perspectives, including traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous stewardship, and educational programs.

5. Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Staff and Board

- Strive for a staff that reflects California's diversity, whether it be such characteristics as race, ethnicity, culture, education, age, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, or socioeconomic status, social identities, and lived experiences, thereby cultivating an inclusive culture within the Conservancy.
- The Conservancy is governed by a twenty-member Board consisting of local elected officials and appointees of the Governor, Legislature, and several state agencies. To the extent possible, advocate for appointments that reflect California's diversity.
- Articulate equity and environmental justice values in the Conservancy's Strategic Plan.
- Ensure that the Conservancy participates in ongoing workshops and dialogue about equity and environmental justice to improve cultural humility.

- Ensure Conservancy project staff prioritize equity and environmental justice in their work and are supported by management.

6. Accountability and Transparency

- Include accountability metrics for equity and environmental justice objectives in the Conservancy's Strategic Plan; track and report on these metrics annually.
- Regularly assess where the Conservancy has and has not invested funding. Evaluate the impacts of our grant programs in advancing equity.

Conclusion

This work is not easy, and this is just the beginning. As noted throughout the document, this effort is intended to ensure all Californians have equitable access to the Coachella Valley's deserts and mountains. To that end, the Conservancy reviews its policies annually and is open to comments and suggestions for improvement. Collectively, we can make the Conservancy more just, equitable, diverse, and inclusive for all.

ATTACHMENT 6 – January 8, 2024

Agenda Item 5.1 Written Reports from Staff

ACQUISITION AND LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATES

CVCC/CVMC/FODM Management – The Conservancy continues to perform monitoring inspections on properties owned by the Conservancy, staff sends reminders to grantees where local assistance grants have been provided in support of the CVMSHCP. In particular, FODM is working to catch up to its monitoring and reporting obligations required under its grants with CVMC.

COACHELLA VALLEY CONSERVATION COMMISSION (CVCC) ACQUISITION MANAGER PROGRAM - The Conservancy continues to contract with CVCC as Acquisition Manager. Current acquisition efforts include:

Long Canyon Conservation Area: In November, the CVCC board accepted a donation of a property consisting of 0.63+/- acres, escrow is expected to close by end of January.

Willow Hole Conservation Area: In November, the CVCC board accepted a donation of a property consisting of 5.0+/-acres, escrow is expected to close by end of January. In November, the CVCC board approved the acquisition of six parcels consisting of 78.65+/- acres, escrow is expected to close by end of January.

Tax Default Properties: In October 2022, CVCC applied to purchase 48 tax defaulted parcels. In February 2023, CVCC received notice from the Riverside County regarding the tax sale, CVCC is awaiting purchase price quotes for parcels that it applied for and have not been redeemed. The acquisition process through the tax default program has proven to take anywhere from 3 to 5 years from the application to when the properties are recorded under the vesting of the applicant.

In October 2023, CVCC received a list of parcels eligible for acquisition under the Tax Default program. In December, CVCC applied to purchase 12 tax defaulted parcels. CVCC is awaiting a response to the application from the Tax Sale Operations Unit.

Appraisals Completed and/or in Process:

1. Cabazon Conservation Area – In February 2023, an appraisal was completed on 12 parcels, consisting of 970.90+/- acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent to property owners, but none have been accepted yet. Appraisal expires March 2024.

2. Long Canyon Conservation Area – In March 2023, an appraisal was completed on 26 parcels, consisting of 354.82+/- acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent to property owners. One owner of two parcels (totaling 10.6+/- acres) accepted the offer and the CVCC board approved the acquisition in June. Appraisal expires April 2024.
3. Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Conservation Area – In February 2023, an appraisal was completed on 7 parcels, consisting of 353.55+/- acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent to property owners, but none have been accepted yet. Appraisal Expires March 2024.
4. Willow Hole Conservation Area - In June 2023, an appraisal was completed on 49 parcels, consisting of 312.41+/- acres, representing separate ownerships. Contingent offer letters were sent to property owners, three separate owners consisting of 59.96+/- acres combined accepted CVCC's offer and are in the process of signing Purchase and Sale Agreements to take to the CVCC board on September 14th. Appraisal expires July 2024.

PROPOSITION 1 GRANT PROGRAM - PROJECT STATUS

City of Indio

Infrastructure Grant – Jackson St. and Ave. 50 Flood Prevention Project: The City is preparing engineering plans, right of way acquisitions, and procurement of qualified contractors before construction can begin. Construction is expected to begin February 2024.

Coachella Valley Water District

Infrastructure Grant – DHS and Mission Creek Subbasins Groundwater Monitoring Wells Project: Drilling and construction of monitoring well 1 was completed in September. Drilling of monitoring well 2 began in September, but monitoring logs determined that the borehole that was drilled had not encountered groundwater at that location. As a result, CVWD was advised to not move forward with construction of well 2 and instead move forward with borehole deconstruction. A final well construction documentation report is expected by the end of January.

Southern California Mountains Foundation Restoration Grant – Palm Canyon Watershed Restoration Project: The UCC of the Inland Empire completed 6.8 acres of tamarisk removal during the 2022 season, for a total of 11.41 acres of initial treatment and 2.26 acres of re-treatment. The goal is to complete 60 acres of initial treatment and

15 acres of re-treatment by the term of the grant. The UCC is in full season with field work or “spike” days through end of January.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – San Felipe Creek Desert Pupfish Pond Project: The site and plans for the new pond have been approved, construction activities of the pond commenced in October with an expected completion date by end of November. Once construction is complete, aging of the pond will occur before introducing pupfish into the refugia which is expected to occur by March 2024.

The Wildlands Conservancy

Planning Grant - Whitewater Preserve Flood Control Improvement Project: TWC’s consultants have revised project permits in response to the Wildlife Agencies comments during the Joint Project Review process. Revised project permits were submitted in November with a 16-week review period. TWC is keeping the Conservancy updated as updates are received from the agencies on the permits, TWC expects to have the permits approved by March 2024.

PROPOSITION 1 GRANT PROGRAM – COMPLETED PROJECTS

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians - Infrastructure Grant – Section 33 Groundwater Monitoring Wells Project

Center for Natural Lands Management - Restoration Grant - Desert Pupfish Refuge Habitat Restoration Project

Center for Natural Lands Management – Restoration Grant – Dos Palmas Controlled Core Marsh Burn and Restoration Project

City of Coachella - Planning Grant - Citywide Stormwater Resource Plan Project

City of Palm Springs – Restoration Grant - Tahquitz Creek-Triangle Parcel Restoration

City of Palm Springs – Restoration Grant - San Jacinto Mountains Watershed Restoration

Coachella Valley Public Cemetery District – Infrastructure Grant – Water Management System Project

Coachella Valley Conservation Commission – Acquisition Grant - Snowcreek and Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains Watershed Acquisition

Coachella Valley Conservation Commission - Restoration Grant - Willow Hole Canyon & Wash Restoration Project

Coachella Valley Conservation Commission - Restoration Grant - Wetlands Restoration, Tamarisk Control and Rail Habitat Enhancement at North Shore Ranch Project

Coachella Valley Resource Conservation District – Infrastructure Grant - Root Water Project

Coachella Valley Water District – Infrastructure Grant – Groundwater Monitoring Wells Project

Department of Fish & Wildlife – Infrastructure Grant - Dos Palmas Reserve Well Improvement

Desert Recreation District – Infrastructure Grant – Flood Control Project at North Shore Park

Desert Recreation District - Infrastructure Grant - Flood Control Project at Oasis Park

Friends of the Desert Mountains - Restoration Grant - Palm Canyon Restoration Project

Friends of the Desert Mountains – Restoration Grant – Santa Rosa Wilderness Restoration Project

Mission Springs Water District – Infrastructure Grant - Willow Hole Groundwater Monitoring Wells

Palm Springs Cemetery District – Restoration Grant - Invasive Species Removal Project

Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Indians – Restoration Grant – Santa Rosa Horse Creek Dam and Wetlands Restoration Project

Southern California Mountains Foundation - Restoration Grant - Dos Palmas Restoration Project

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens - Restoration Grant - Desert Pupfish Refugia and Native Habitat Restoration Project

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens - Restoration Grant - Dos Palmas-Middle Salt Creek Restoration Project

Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians – Planning and Restoration Grant - Phase 1-Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration

Torres Martínez Desert Cahuilla Indians – Planning and Restoration Grant - Phase 2-Salton Sea Wetlands Restoration

The Wildlands Conservancy – Planning Grant - Planning & Feasibility for Whitewater Preserve Flood Control

University of California/Riverside – Planning Grant - Salton Sea Crust and Water Quality Remediation Project

PROPOSITION 68 GRANT PROGRAM – PROJECT STATUS

City of Coachella – Planning Grant – *Environmental Analysis for its Grapefruit Boulevard Urban Greening Project*. Utility Coordination is ongoing. 1st submittal with 50% plans has been submitted and is under review. Environmental studies have started and are ongoing. Project is on schedule.

City of Indio – Infrastructure Grant – *Parking Lot Improvements at the Indio Hills Badlands Trail*: MSA Consulting Inc. has provided the City of Indio Conceptual Designs. The City is now in the process of reviewing options before moving forward with the bidding process. The project is behind schedule due to recent MSA Consulting turnover. A revised schedule will be developed once the City has reviewed the concept designs.

Center for Lands Management – *Restroom Replacement Project*: The project is on schedule. Asbestos testing and removal were complete. Contract work, removal of old restroom facility, and the installation of the M54 Clivus restroom has been complete.

Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority – Infrastructure Grant - *Existing Trails Project*. The project term expired December 31, with the project only partially complete but fortunately significantly under budget. To enhance efficiency, CVDMRCA, and Conservancy and Desert Recreation District staff have agreed to have the CVDMRCA Land Management Capacity project funded by the Conservancy's CRCA program handle the remaining work. The balance of funds (about \$175,000) remains in the Conservancy's coffers and is available for other grant awards.

Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority – Planning Grant – *Trails Environmental Assessment*. Aspen Environmental has completed separate CEQA and NEPA documents – one for a project containing two trails

that cross federal land, the other for a project consisting of four trails that do not lie on federal lands). The CEQA document is a draft Mitigated Negative Declaration that will be released later this month for public review and be brought to the Conservancy board for consideration in March or May. The NEPA document is awaiting BLM review, which is expected to take a year or more.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – Infrastructure Grant – *Greening the Desert Project.*

Car chargers: Installation of the vehicle chargers was completed in November, and all are in position on the south side of the Zoo's newly expanded parking lot, although they will not be powered up until later in 2024. This component of the project is now complete. Replacement signage for the East Valley Signs of Nature component has arrived, the grantee has a contractor who expected to complete installation in early 2024.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens - Infrastructure Grant - *Signs of Nature Project -*

Connecting DHS to Nearby Nature. The text and design for the signs have been completed and fabrication is underway. The grantee expects the signs will arrive in early 2024 and will proceed with installation using the same contractor that is installing the East Valley signage referenced above.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – Infrastructure Grant - *East Valley Pollinator*

Pathway Demonstration Project. The grantee has developed the school curriculum and obtained plants for the gardens; preparation of the ground and laser leveling is underway for the first garden at Cesar Chavez Elementary School in Coachella.

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens – Infrastructure Grant – *Conservation Greenhouse*

Project. Permit applications for the emergency water line for the fire hydrant and the construction have been combined into a single submission to the City of Indian Wells. The grantee understands that combined applications will be approved shortly. If so, excavation of the line for the hydrant will begin immediately. The greenhouse is a duplicate of another that the grantee previously installed, so that process should be quick and easy. The grantee expects total construction time of less than six months once they obtain the permit.

Riverside County Parks and Open Space District – Planning Grant – *Coachella*

Valley Regional Park Feasibility Study. After a long delay caused by staff changes, grantee has contracted with a consultant and County staff and the consultant are working to kick off the project.

PROPOSITION 68 GRANT PROGRAM – COMPLETED PROJECTS

Center for Natural Lands Management – Infrastructure Grant – C.V. Preserve Fencing Grant.

Coachella Valley Desert and Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority – Planning, Design, and Infrastructure Grants – Shumway Restroom and Pavilion Improvements.

Friends of the Desert Mountains – Planning Grant – National Monument Visitor Center Interpretive Improvements.

Friends of the Desert Mountains – Design Grant – Signage/Interpretive Improvements Project - National Monument Visitor Center.

Friends of the Desert Mountains – Planning Grant – C.V. Trails Facilities and Signage Inventory and Assessment Grant.

Kounkuey Design Initiative – Planning Grant – SDAC - Restoration of the Salton Sea-State Recreation Area.

Oswit Land Trust – Planning Grant – *Biological Resources Assessment and Environmental Review for the Prescott Preserve.*

Shumway Ranch.Org – Planning Grants – Master Plan and Shumway Ranch Historic Structure Preservation Plan.

Southern California Mountains Foundation – Planning Grant – Concept Design and Strategic Plan for C.V. Conservation Corps Center Project.

CVMC FUND STATUS

The Conservancy's available funding balances are as follows:

Proposition 1	\$3,029,358.45
Proposition 68	\$4,014,004.42
Proposition 84	\$5,840,790.86
CRCA FY22/23	\$ 830,864.00
Wildfire Resilience FY 23/24	\$8,550,000.00
Total Remaining Funds	\$22,267,017.73

Coachella Valley Federal Endangered Species Act – Section 6 Grant Balances:

In 2022 the Coachella Valley received a commitment of \$456,420 to partially fund a proposed acquisition adjacent to the Indio Hills Palms Conservation Area which is being spearheaded by the Oswit Land Trust. The project does not yet have an approved appraisal, so it is uncertain whether it will proceed. No applications for Coachella Valley projects are pending or in process due to a lack of sellers willing to participate in the program, which can take a year or more to complete.