

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY  
(CVMC)  
REGULAR MEETING

73-510 Fred Waring Drive  
Administrative Conference Room  
Palm Desert, California 92260

APPROVED MINUTES

February 9, 2026 - 3:00 p.m.

**Teleconference locations:**

State of California, Resources Agency  
715 P St.  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor (Conference Room 02-310)  
Sacramento, CA 95814

MEMBERS PRESENT: Enrique Arroyo, California State Parks  
Stephen Benson, Department of Finance (Remote)  
Denise Delgado, City of Coachella  
Steve Downs, City of Rancho Mirage  
Madeline Drake, CA Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) (Remote)  
Gary Gardner, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Grace Garner, City of Palm Springs  
Benjamin Guitron, City of Indio  
Richard Kim, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Remote)  
Rita Lamb, City of Cathedral City (*Vice Chair*)  
Deborah McGarrey, City of La Quinta (*Chair*)  
Brian Penna, City of Indian Wells  
V. Manuel Perez, Riverside County  
Savanna Saubel, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians  
Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee  
Christopher Tracy, University of California, Riverside (UCR)  
Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee  
Evan Trubee, City of Palm Desert  
John Walsh, Wildlife Conservation Board (Remote)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Beatriz Gonzalez, State Assembly Appointee

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

Abriana Elms, Administrative Coordinator

OTHERS PRESENT: Patricia Cooper, Riverside County  
Tammy Martin, Friends of the Desert Mountains  
Arin Sain, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission  
Will Steichen, Coachella Valley Conservation Commission

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Deborah McGarrey declared a quorum with 14 voting members present and called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Subsequently, three additional Board Members (Delgado; Perez; Taylor) arrived after the roll call bringing the attendance to 17 voting members.

2.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

Tammy Martin, Executive Director of Friends of the Desert Mountains (FODM), commented that Wildflower Festival is on March 7, 2026, at Civic Center Park in Palm Desert, and noted that if anyone would like to donate a gift to their raffle, they could reach out to her directly. FODM is also holding a shoe drive fundraiser, if anyone is interested in donating or would like to set up a box for shoe donations, people can reach out to Tammy . Vice Chair Rita Lamb commented on the former Board Member Buford Crites bench dedication, noting that it was a fantastic event. Board Member Gary Gardner acknowledged CVMC Staff and Max Ochoa specifically on increased CVMC social media presence and public outreach.

3.0 Closed Session

No closed session was scheduled for this meeting.

4.0 Action/Informational Items- Public Hearing

Action Item 4.1 Approval of November 17, 2025, Meeting Minutes.

**Vote:** A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Penna) to approve November 17, 2025, minutes; the motion passed unanimously.

Action Item 4.2 Approve the Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials, authorize the submission of all necessary documents to the Office of Administrative Law pursuant to the Emergency Regulations Process, and authorize the Executive Director to make any minor, non-substantive revisions requested by OAL.

Executive Director Elizabeth King gave a brief overview of the proposed Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials for submission to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) pursuant to the emergency regulations process. It was further recommended that the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Governing Board authorize the Executive Director to make any minor, non-substantive revisions requested by OAL. Should OAL request substantive changes, staff would return to the Coachella Valley Conservancy Governing Board for further review and approval of the revised guidelines.

Board Member Gary Gardner asked about additional outreach strategies. Associate Director Diana Rosas stated that the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) will be posted on the CVMC website, shared on social media and distributed through the partner email list. Executive Director King added that staff are available to attend City Council and Tribal Meetings to share the information. Stephen Benson, Assistant Program Budget Manager Department of Finance, asked about coordinating with other conservancies. Executive Director King responded that staff worked closely with the San Joaquin River Conservancy (SJRC), using its guidelines as a template and adapting them to the CVMC's regulations.

**Vote:** A motion was made and seconded (Trubee/Gardner) to approve the Conservancy's Proposition 4 Grant Program Guidelines and Grant Application materials for submission to the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) pursuant to the emergency regulations process. The motion passed unanimously.

Informational Item 5.1 Presentation by the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC).

Chair McGarrey introduced Will Steichen, Conservation Ranger Coordinator for the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC). Conservation Ranger Coordinator Steichen gave a brief informational presentation on the Ranger Program and draft ordinance for conserved lands.

Board Member Gardner expressed his excitement to see how the Ranger Program has evolved. Board Member V. Manuel Perez, Riverside County, commented that while the County is excited about this Ranger Program, there is a concern about sustainability of the program. He expressed the request to carefully consider how long the funding will support these positions and what the plan will be once the grant period ends. Long-term financial stability is critical to ensure continued employment of rangers without disruption. Supervisor Perez also asked if there is data identifying the areas of highest concern, such as recurring encampment locations or hotspots, and further inquiring

what systems are in place to track high concern areas over time. He also questioned what steps are being taken to ensure individuals in encampments are being connected to appropriate resources and services. Board Member Joan Taylor also commented that it may be beneficial to have a discussion with the Coachella Valley Conservation Commission (CVCC) to better understand the scope of how management funds are currently being allocated. Chair McGarrey commented that, in past experiences, Code Enforcement has played a role in coordinating with other agencies when dealing with encampments.

Conservation Ranger Coordinator Steichen, responded regarding sustainability and funding, noting that his role in developing the program is supported through grant funding by the Conservancy. CVCC is prepared to transition CVCC funding to support the contract moving forward. Once a tentative budget is established, there will be a clearer understanding of how many ranger positions can be sustained. At that point, staff will evaluate supplemental funding opportunities, including additional grants, to support or expand the program as appropriate. From a data perspective, countywide information exists, and CVCC also maintains its own data to specific CVCC managed lands. Regarding encampments, many individuals relocated approximately 1,000 – 2,000 feet away onto private property during a recent CVCC cleanup funded by CalRecycle. While this does not resolve the broader issue of homelessness, it was considered a success in terms of clearing high-resource or environmentally sensitive areas. The cleanup efforts effectively moved individuals out of those priority areas. However, it is important to recognize broader strategies beyond site cleanups alone. One potential approach worth exploring is identifying responsible individuals within encampments who may be interested in land stewardship roles or other structured opportunities. Finding ways to positively integrate individuals into stewardship or workforce pathways could provide mutual benefit. As it relates to Code Enforcement, CVCC meets regularly with County Code Enforcement, and there is ongoing coordination with partner agencies.

Board Member Richard Kim, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), commented that CDFW encounters similar challenges and currently lacks the authority to issue citations. Exploring ways to provide or expand enforcement authority could improve coordination and effectiveness for both agencies in managing these areas. Board Member Dr. Christopher Tracy, UC Riverside (UCR), highlighted the importance of sustainability in moving forward with this program. It was noted that partnering with an agency that has trained and certified personnel is an effective way to hit the ground running. This approach allows the program to quickly generate data on personnel needs, recurring issues, and the cost of ongoing maintenance. Using a short-term program in this way provides clear demonstration of the scope and resources required

for long-term, sustainable maintenance. Overall, this strategy was seen as a practical and effective method to both address immediate needs to inform future planning.

#### Informational Item 5.2 CVMC Photo Contest- Protecting Public Lands.

Associate Director Rosas gave a brief overview of the Photo Contest process and presented the results. Board Member Perez presented certificates to the top five awardees. Will Steichen received fifth place with the Burrowing Owl in Flight in Upper Mission Creek/Big Morongo Canyon Conservation Area in Desert Hot Springs. Shannon Dean received fourth place with her photo of Lupine and Yellow Thistle in Sky Valley. Associate Director Rosas acknowledged Bryan Newman, Owner of Pedego, Electric Bikes in La Quinta, for sponsoring the third place prize of bike rentals for four. Scott Collins received third place with his Bighorn Ram Overlooks Mountain Terrain at Sunrise image in Palm Springs. Associate Director Rosas thanked Board Member Tracy as the sponsor for the second place prize, a private tour for four at the Desert Boyd Deep Canyon Preserve. Erica Diaz received second place with her Calm Water Reflection image at Whitewater Preserve. Associate Director Rosas thanked Board Member Trubee for sponsoring the first place prize, a Big Wheel Tour. Shelley Westall received first place with a Bighorn Sheet Jumping Over a Creek image at Andreas Canyon. Shelley's photo will also be featured in CVMC's Annual 2025 Report. Associate Director Rosas concluded by thanking the Board for their participation and our team member Max Ochoa who organized the contest. Board Members expressed interest in displaying the images in their offices, and CVMC staff agreed to explore the possibility of printing and sharing the images with permission.

#### Informational Item 5.3 Community Engagement Update.

Project Coordinator Maximiliano Ochoa gave a brief Community Engagement update.

Board Member Savana Saubel thanked Executive Director King for attending the Speaker Series at Agua Caliente. Board Member Tracy commented the first-place photo looks fantastic on the draft 2025 Annual Report cover.

### 6.0 Reports

#### 6.1 Written reports from staff.

Associate Director Rosas gave a brief update on acquisitions, grant and land management updates.

There were no questions or discussions from the board.

## 6.2 Executive Director Report.

Executive Director King reported on the following:

- Reminder – all Board Members must complete their Form 700s by April 1, 2026, and a new Ethics Training this calendar year.
- A few educational Bighorn sheep pop-ups are scheduled with our partners to educate the public.

There were no questions or discussions from the board.

## 6.3 Board Member Comments and Reports.

Board Member Enrique Arroyo, California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks), announced that State Parks will be hosting a series of meetings in support of the Salton Sea General Plan as posted below:

Salton Sea General Plan Meeting Dates:

- **Wednesday, Feb. 18, 6–7:30 p.m.**  
Bombay Beach Community Center  
9590 Avenue C, Niland, CA
- **Thursday, Feb. 19, 6–7:30 p.m.**  
North Shore Beach and Yacht Club  
99155 Sea View Drive, Mecca, CA
- **Tuesday, Feb. 24, 6–7:30 p.m.**  
Virtual Workshop via Zoom; can register at [saltonseasragp.com](http://saltonseasragp.com)  
Stakeholder meeting March 11, 10 am-noon at Mecca Boys and Girls Club

Chair McGarrey commented that bighorn sheep were observed near the course during the annual PGA Golf Tournament and expressed appreciation for the presence of wildlife.

## 7.0 Adjourn to the meeting May 11, 2026.

Chair McGarrey adjourned the meeting without objection at 4:14 p.m.