COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY
(CVMC)
REGULAR MEETING

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

APPROVED MINUTES

May 11, 2026 - 3:00 p.m.

Teleconference locations:
State of California, Resources Agency
715 P St.
2nd floor (Conference Room 02-310)
Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Fish and Wildlife
39400 Clinton Keith Rd.
Murrieta, CA 92562

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Patricia Cooper, Riverside County 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 Beatriz Gonzalez, State Assembly Appointee Rita Lamb, City of Cathedral City *(Vice Chair)* Sara Lockett, California State Parks Deborah McGarrey, City of La Quinta (*Chair*) Brian Penna, City of Indian Wells Savanna Saubel, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Joan Taylor, Governor's Appointee Ellen Lloyd Trover, Senate Rules Committee Appointee Evan Trubee, City of Palm Desert
MEMBERS ABSENT:	Stephen Benson, Department of Finance (Remote) Denise Delgado, City of Coachella Benjamin Guitron, City of Indio Richard Kim, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Remote) Christopher Tracy, University of California, Riverside (UCR) John Walsh, Wildlife Conservation Board (Remote)

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Shane Bogner, The Living Desert
Lee Ann Carranza, Center for Natural Lands Management
Lucas Haralson, Center for Natural Lands Management
Geary Hund, Mojave Desert Land Trust
Elizabeth Jachens, U.S Geological Survey
Diana Navarre, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Jennifer Pesnky, U.S. Geological Survey
Luis Ramirez, The Living Desert
Mary Thomas, The Living Desert
Jedi William, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians

1.0 Call to Order & Introductions

Chair Deborah McGarrey declared a quorum with 12 voting members present and called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. Subsequently, two additional Board Members (Garner, Taylor) arrived after the roll call, bringing the attendance to 14 voting members.

Pursuant to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, a state body may remove, continue, or decline hearing an itemized agenda item during a meeting, provided such action is taken openly and consistent with the posted agenda and public comment requirements. Chair McGarrey advised that Action Item 4.6, Adoption of Resolution 2026-04 consenting to and approving Proposition 84 Local Assistance Grant to Oswit Land Trust, be rescinded from the agenda to allow the involved parties additional time to review the matter. Public comment on the procedural motion was taken. No public comment was made. A motion was made and seconded to rescind Item 4.6 (Cooper/Gardner). The motion was approved unanimously by the Board.

2.0 Public Comments on Items Not on the Agenda

No public comments were made.

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 February 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Lamb/Gardner) to approve February 9, 2026, minutes; the motion passed with two abstentions (Gonzalez/Lockett).

Informational Item 4.2 Proposition 1 Grant Program- Notice of Funding Availability Update.

Executive Director King provided a brief update on the Proposition 1 Grant Program Notice of Funding Availability, information regarding the grant process. Under the most recent Proposition 1 grant solicitation in 2026, four applications were received, two of which were eligible to move forward for Board consideration under later agenda items. Two applications were determined not to be eligible for Board consideration at this time due to CEQA readiness requirements.
Board Members requested copies of the presentation slides and shared positive feedback on the presentation. Executive Director King commented that copies of the presentation slides will be emailed to the Board.

Action Item 4.3 Adoption of Resolution 2026-01 consenting to and approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management (CNLM).

Associate Director Diana Rosas gave a brief overview of the proposed Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management for its Groundwater–Surface Water Monitoring Project at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve. She recognized CNLM staff, Lee Ann Carranza and Lucas Haralson, who were in attendance along with Elizabeth Jachens and Jennifer Pesnky with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and opened the floor for discussions or questions on the project.

A Board discussion ensued regarding water level conditions and the relocation of the desert pupfish to the upper pond within the Simone Pond area. Lucas Haralson, CNLM, responded that emergency conditions are declared when water levels drop to just below two feet. It was clarified that the grant funds are intended to determine the cause of the water loss and drying conditions, rather than to develop methods for replenishing the water supply. Further discussions occurred regarding the long-term sustainability of the pond and whether sensors are utilized to monitor conditions. Elizabeth Jachens, USGS, responded that the grant is intended to better understand the pond's dynamics and support evaluation of its long-term sustainability and monitoring needs.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Penna) to approve a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to the Center for Natural Lands Management in an amount not to exceed $695,751 for its Groundwater Surface Water Monitoring at Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve Project. The motion passed with one abstention (Lockett).

Action Item 4.4 Adoption of Resolution 2026-02 consenting to and approving a Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens (TLD) / Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI).

Associate Director Rosas provided a brief overview of the proposed Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to The Living Desert for its Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project on land owned by the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (TMDCI). She recognized Diana Navarro and Jedi William with TMDCI, along with Luis Ramirez, Mary Thomas, and Shane Bogner with TLD, who were also in attendance, and opened the floor for Board discussion and questions regarding the project.

A discussion ensued around questions regarding the location of the new ponds, reasoning for two different liners, and the functionality of the ponds. Jedi William, TMDCI, responded that there are currently seven one-acre cells. He explained that three of the cells will be tested: one control cell will remain unlined to establish a baseline for comparison, the second cell will be constructed with a plastic or fabric liner, and the third cell will be constructed with bentonite clay. It was further explained that the control cell is necessary in evaluating the effectiveness of the various lining methods. William further explained that in 2012 the site operated as a fully functioning wetland, with water conveyed from the Whitewater River through the wetlands and discharged back into the Salton Sea. The wetland project later experienced significant setbacks when a storm damaged the pipeline supplying water from the Whitewater River, leaving the wetlands without a sustainable water source. TMDCI has obtained federal funding from Bureau of Reclamations to construct a water borehole which will be the water source for the proposed new ponds project.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Penna/Trubee) to approve a conditional Proposition 1 Local Assistance Grant to The Living Desert in an amount not to exceed $863,450 for the Desert Pupfish Conservation Refugia Project on Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians' Land, pending completion of CEQA review and, if triggered, NEPA clearance, and Bureau of Reclamation commitment confirmation. The motion passed unanimously among Board members present. Board Member Taylor was temporarily absent during the vote.

Action Item 4.5 Adoption of Resolution 2026-03 consenting to and approving Proposition 4 Local Assistance Planning Grant to Mojave Desert Land Trust (MDLT).

Executive Director King gave a brief overview of the proposed Proposition 4 Local Assistance Planning Grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust for its State Route-62 Wildlife Crossing Project. She recognized Geary Hund, MDLT, in attendance and opened the floor for discussions or questions on the project.

Board Member Gardner commented in support of the project and encouraged Board approval, noting its importance for protecting wildlife in the surrounding Highway 62 area. Board Member Taylor expressed support and noted the safety importance and how this project advances the Coachella Valley Multiple Habitat Species Conservation Plan priorities. Board Member Penna asked for clarification on how wildlife movement is accommodated and what measures are in place to allow animals to safely cross the roadway. Geary Hund, MDLT, explained that wildlife crossings will include fencing extending some distance on either side to guide animals toward the designated crossing structures. Hund, MDLT, further noted that, over time and across generations, wildlife is expected to learn and adapt to using these crossings. Board Member Trubee noted the project's relevance in light of the Wallis Annenberg wildlife crossing opening. Hund confirmed the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing is officially opening in December 2026 but wildlife have already started using it. Board Member Penna noted the project's relevance to research being done by the Wildlands Network with Caltrans (in compliance with the Safe Roads and Wildlife Protection Act, Caltrans identified over 100 priority wildlife crossings across California that will be incorporated in transportation projects and plans).

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Gardner/Taylor) to approve a Proposition 4 Local Assistance Grant to the Mojave Desert Land Trust in an amount not to exceed $512,000 for its State Route-62 Wildlife Crossing Project. The motion passed unanimously.

Action Item 4.7 Consideration and possible action to establish a Board Finance Subcommittee.

Executive Director King gave a brief overview of the Consideration and Possible Action to Establish a Board Finance Subcommittee to support fiscal sustainability and strategic financial planning, including efforts to diversify the conservancy's financial portfolio, build reserves, and collaborate with partners to identify revenue streams.

Board Member Beatriz Gonzalez volunteered to sit on the subcommittee.

Vote: A motion was made and seconded (Penna/Trubee) approving to Establish a Board Finance Subcommittee and appoint Beatriz Gonzalez as a member of the subcommittee. The motion passed unanimously.

5.0 Reports

5.1 Written reports from staff.

Associate Director Rosas gave a brief update on acquisitions, local assistance grants and land management updates. Associate Director Rosas noted the Conservancy's monitoring requirements of grant projects for 15-30 years, and shared a recent site visit she completed that showed the long-term success of a tamarisk removal project in Willow Hole.

There were no questions or discussions from the Board.

5.2 Executive Director Report

Executive Director King reported on updates for Fiscal Year 2025/2026. Executive Director King shared recent public engagement, including the City of Indio's ribbon cutting for CVMC's Badlands Trailhead Improvements. Recent Conservancy news includes Palms Springs Life Magazine's article about the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (ACBCI) Legacy and denoted the land returns between CVMC and ACBCI and Palm Springs Post's article about a grant funded by CVMC to UCR for its climate tool. Executive Director King shared theCVMC Year-In-Review for 2025 with a special thanks to team member Max Ochoa for all his work on the review.

Chair McGarrey congratulated the CVMC team for all their work. Chair McGarrey asked whether the Board was amenable to continuing with quarterly meetings or preferred a more frequent meeting schedule. The Board concurred with maintaining the current quarterly meeting schedule.

5.3 Board Member Comments and Reports.

Board Member Saubel, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, shared that ACBCI is hosting their 150-milestone event on Friday May 15, 2026, at the Cultural Plaza. it starts at 4:00 pm and is open to the public.

6.0 Adjourn to the meeting August 10, 2026.

Chair McGarrey adjourned the meeting without objection at 4:16 p.m.