

## Board Meeting Minutes

December 4, 2014  
Grass Valley Elks Lodge  
109 South School Street  
Grass Valley, CA 95945



### I. Call to Order

Board Chair BJ Kirwan called the meeting to order at 8:47 a.m. and reminded attendees that the Board would be entering a closed session as noticed on the agenda.

### II. Roll Call

Supervisor Hank Weston and Supervisor Ron Hames were sworn in to represent the Central and East Subregions, respectively.

**Present:** BJ Kirwan, Bob Kirkwood, Bob Johnston, John Brissenden, Pam Giacomini, Sharon Thrall, Hank Weston, Ron Hames, Louis Boitano, Allen Ishida, Bernie Gyant, and Este Stifel. Todd Ferrara arrived after roll call was taken.

**Absent:** Eraina Ortega and Woody Smeck

### III. Closed Session (This Portion Of The Meeting Is Not Open To The Public)

Evaluation of the performance of the Executive Officer by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Board. (Government Code, Section 11126, subd. (a)(1))

#### **RESUME OPEN SESSION APPROXIMATELY 9:15 a.m.**

Chair Kirwan reported that the Board met in closed session to conduct a performance review of the Executive Officer.

### IV. Approval of September 4, 2014, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

**ACTION:** Boardmember Giacomini moved and Boardmember Brissenden seconded a motion to approve the September 4, 2014, meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

### V. Public Comments

John Amodio, representative with the Tuolumne River Trust and fiscal officer for Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS), commended the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) staff on their work with the YSS. He said that staff has helped YSS make progress on their efforts, especially around the Rim Fire. Amodio said that YSS discovered common ground among stakeholders and also realized that challenges and problems that the group face are being faced by others throughout the Sierra Nevada Region. Amodio thanked the SNC for the financial and technical support.

**VI. Board Chair's Report**

Board Chair Kirwan expressed her regret that she was not able to attend the presentations that were given in place of the tour on Wednesday, December 3, but said that she heard from other Boardmembers that they were excellent.

Boardmember Este Stifel commented on the quality of the presentations and information shared about projects, particularly on the Hirschman's Pond project.

**VII. Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2015 (ACTION)**

Boardmember John Brissenden nominated BJ Kirwan to serve another term as the SNC Board Chair.

Boardmember Sharon Thrall nominated Boardmember Pam Giacomini to sit as Vice Chair.

**ACTION: Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Ishida seconded a motion to elect BJ Kirwan as the 2015 Sierra Nevada Conservancy Board Chair. The motion passed unanimously.**

**ACTION: Boardmember Brissenden moved and Boardmember Ferrara seconded a motion to elect Boardmember Giacomini as the 2015 Board Vice Chair. The motion passed unanimously.**

**VIII. Executive Officer's Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

a. Administrative Update

Executive Officer Jim Branham introduced Amy Lussier, SNC's Chief of Administrative Services Division. Lussier gave the Board an update on the SNC's recent information technology, safety, and budget activities. Lussier thanked staff member David Madrigal for his hard work as SNC's sole IT person.

Board Chair Kirwan thanked Lussier for her assistance in facilitating the Board's performance evaluation of the Executive Officer.

b. Policy and Outreach Update

Branham introduced Angela Avery, Regional Policy and Programs (REPO) Manager, and acknowledged the work that she and her staff have done to raise the visibility of the SNC in the media.

Avery updated the Board on staff activities around the release of the State of the Sierra Nevada's Forests report, and on the upcoming activities that will support the SNC's efforts to release the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP). She noted that the REPO team would be planning activities around the March 2015 Board meeting such as a forest summit, a press conference, and possibly a legislative hearing to further highlight the WIP. Avery highlighted meetings and tours that the staff has had with partners and legislators on Sierra

Nevada issues, and opportunities to increase investment in the Region. Avery also updated the Board on the release of the SNC's fiscal year 2013-14 Annual Report and provided each member with a copy.

c. Great Sierra River Cleanup Update

Avery introduced Marji Feliz, project manager for the Great Sierra River Cleanup (GSRC). Branham thanked the South Yuba River Citizens League for their contributions to the start-up of the Great Sierra River Cleanup, and commented that the event has been a great success for the SNC. Feliz presented the results of the 2014 GSRC, highlighted legislative and sponsorship contributions, and shared images from the event. Some interesting facts that Feliz shared included that over 700 tons of trash have been removed over the past six years, with 800 pounds being taken out by helicopter this year. Sixty-six groups participated in this year's GSRC.

d. Miscellaneous Updates

Branham updated the Board on efforts to select projects to be funded by the \$1 million that the SNC Board set aside for Rim Fire restoration at a past meeting. Branham said that no new projects are being brought to the Board yet, but that discussions about project development are still in process.

Branham also updated the Board on staff's involvement in the Forest Carbon Action Team (FCAT) and the associated efforts to develop a plan to maximize forest sector opportunities to store carbon and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Branham said that the team anticipates having a plan in place in 2016.

e. Discussion Relating to Forest Health Issues

Brett Storey from Placer County gave a presentation on the county's efforts to develop a biomass facility, noting that the county's biomass efforts started with an SNC grant. Storey updated the Board on the county's progress and noted that Placer County and its partners at the Placer County Water Agency expect to spend \$2-10 million for cleanup following the King Fire.

Boardmembers and Storey engaged in a dialogue on topics including the comparison between greenhouse gasses released as a result of pile burning and burning biomass in an enclosed facility. Storey indicated that newer biomass gasification systems are more effective in reducing emissions than the technology identified in Placer County's analysis. There was also discussion relating to the difference in emissions from biomass facilities compared to other energy processing facilities, and it was noted that Placer County's operating area for the Cabin Creek biomass project includes parts of Nevada. Storey stated that they do not have an agreement with Nevada yet, but would be moving forward with that agreement soon. In addition, Storey mentioned that their operating areas will be based off of the priority areas for the National Forests, and that those areas may be in Nevada.

Branham closed the discussion, thanking Storey and noting that the Forest Carbon Action Team (FCAT) that SNC staff is part of will be working to calculate the benefits from forest treatment and utilization of biomass-to-energy facilities on reducing future wildfire.

### **Public Comments**

Kerri Timmer, Government Affairs Director for the Sierra Business Council (SBC) thanked the SNC for helping to sponsor SBC's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary event in October, 2014. She shared information about a cap and trade investment opportunities webinar that SBC would be hosting, and introduced SBC's Sierra Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Partnership (Sierra CAMP), sharing information about efforts that members have engaged in to address climate change in the Sierra.

Izzy Martin from the Sierra Fund updated the Board on efforts that The Sierra Fund has been undertaking to put together a 10 year anniversary celebration for the SNC in March.

### **IX. Deputy Attorney General's Report (INFORMATIONAL)**

Christine Sproul updated the Board on California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) reform legislation, most of which did not pass in the last session. Two CEQA bills did reach the governor's desk: AB52 has new requirements for consultation with American Indian Tribes that may affect some of SNC grantees; and AB543, which was vetoed by the governor, had new requirements to translate CEQA documents into other languages. The CEQA cases on exemptions that will help guide SNC in future actions have not yet been scheduled for argument by the CA Supreme Court.

### **X. 2015 Board Meeting Schedule (ACTION)**

Jim Branham presented the 2015 Board meeting schedule. It follows the normal pattern of meetings: the first Wednesday and Thursday of March, June, September, and December. The March meeting will be in Sacramento, with other meetings rotating between Subregions. Branham noted that the Labor Day weekend is after the Board meeting in September this year.

**ACTION: Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Hames seconded a motion to approve the 2015 Board Meeting Schedule. The motion passed unanimously.**

### **XI. Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative Action Plan (ACTION)**

Jim Branham presented the draft Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI) Action Plan, and noted that the plan is a contributing piece to a larger Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP), which will be modeled to some degree off of the Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program (EIP).

Branham introduced Mandy Vance, Mt. Whitney Area Representative for the SNC, who gave a presentation on the SNFCI Action Plan. Vance discussed efforts

involving pilot project activities that the SNC will be undertaking in partnership with the Tahoe National Forest. Vance also discussed efforts that will be made to address funding and policy impediments.

Branham commented that identifying solutions for the policy and infrastructure impediments will be a very important component of the WIP, and cited the lack of wood processing infrastructure available and limitations on using fire on the landscape as examples.

Boardmember Allen Ishida mentioned watershed restoration research that had been done by a university professor out of the state of Washington that may be of help on the WIP.

Boardmember Bob Johnston suggested that there could be a large federal funding program created to address watershed issues and that it would take support from a broad coalition to establish this kind of a program.

Boardmember Thrall thanked staff for their efforts around the creation of the State of the Sierra Nevada's Forests Report and the WIP, and urged staff to make sure the work doesn't get shelved as can often happen with research. Branham agreed that continuing to promote the urgency of the situation will be key.

Boardmember Giacomini commented that the WIP would actually give the SNFCI action plan more strength.

Boardmember Bernie Gyant noted the importance of re-opening existing wood processing facilities and establishing new facilities to handle both burned logs from fires that have occurred and green logs that need to be removed during restoration.

Ishida noted that Boards of Supervisors, regional groups, and legislators need the base information incorporated in the WIP to help advocate for increased investment.

Gyant commented on the efforts that SNC staff would be undertaking in partnership with the Tahoe National Forest would help build a platform for the USFS to address many of the issues the USFS faces when trying to implement ecological restoration goals.

Boardmember Stifel commended the effort that SNC staff has invested to support those collaborative efforts.

Boardmember Kirkwood said that SNC is making great progress with the development of the WIP, and that creating a sales document that helps a broad array of stakeholders see their role as part of the solution will be key.

Branham recognized Kirkwood and Giacomini for their contributions to the SNFCI Action Plan and requested that they continue to be involved in a Board committee for the development of the WIP.

**ACTION:** Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Giacomini seconded a motion to approve the Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative Action Plan and authorize staff to continue with its implementation including the development of a Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program, noting Boardmembers Kirkwood and Giacomini will continue to work with staff to review actions, agreements, etc., necessary to implement this action. The motion passed unanimously.

- XII. 2013-14 Healthy Forests/Abandoned Mine Lands Grant Awards (ACTION)**  
Jim Branham introduced Bob Kingman, Mt. Lassen Area Manager for the SNC, and informed Boardmembers that the three grants up for consideration would likely be the final grants awarded through SNC's Proposition 84 grants program.

Kingman described Project #809, the Wood Chip Hydraulic Mine Restoration Project, which would complete remediation of abandoned mine lands using wood chips from forest thinning activities on the Tahoe National Forest.

Julie Bear, Mt. Whitney Area Manager for the SNC, described Project #811, the Stockton Creek Preserve Vegetation Removal Project, which would conduct fuel reduction activities on 350 acres of land, revegetate previously burned slopes in the project area, and monitor water quality both before and after implementation. Bear also described Project #812, the Mono County Thermal Biomass Project. This project would remove and replace old boilers with a thermal biomass boiler system that would utilize forest-sourced biomass being removed off of the local national forest lands.

Boardmember Kirkwood questioned whether Mono County might have considered a gasification system as opposed to a thermal system. Bear responded that the feasibility study indicated that the feedstock for the area may not be able to sustainably support a gasification system, but that over time the County would continue to consider options.

**ACTION:** Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Brissenden seconded a motion to (a) authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Exemption for the Wood Chip Hydraulic Mine Restoration Project (SNC 809) and the Mono County Thermal Biomass Project (SNC 812); (b) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Stockton Creek Preserve Vegetation Management Project (SNC 811) with mitigation measures may have a significant effect on the environment and adopt the Initial Study/Mitigated Negative

**Declaration with mitigation measures and authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination for this project; and (c) authorize a grant award to each of the above listed projects for the amounts recommended by the staff, and further authorize staff to enter into the necessary agreements for the recommended projects.**

### **Public Comments**

Bridget Fithian of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) communicated that the original SNC grant for the acquisition of the Stockton Creek Preserve resulted in a great partnership between the local utility agency and the SFC, and that the partnership has resulted in increased forest restoration work in the watershed. Fithian also commended SNC staff for all of their work and commitment to SNC's mission.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara congratulated staff on establishing a great process for the Proposition 84 grants program stating that he sits on another board that will be looking to utilize the SNC's process as they develop their Proposition 1 grant program.

### **XIII. Discussion of Proposition 1 Allocations for the SNC (INFORMATIONAL)**

Jim Branham introduced SNC's proposed process for distributing Proposition 1 funds should they be appropriated by the legislature in the next fiscal year.

Branham also mentioned that funding was identified in Proposition 1 that was not allocated to the SNC, but that could be spent in the Sierra. He noted that staff would be working hard to play matchmaker between projects, potential grantees, and other granting agencies to maximize the amount of funding invested in the Region. Branham recommended that the focus of SNC's grant program be on forest health and forest restoration to remain in line with the agency's priority set forth in past Board meetings.

Branham introduced some of the different requirements laid out in Proposition 1 as compared to Proposition 84, and went over SNC's proposed grant guidelines development schedule.

Boardmember Kirkwood asked whether there was language in Proposition 1 that would limit SNC from being a grant re-distributor for other agencies. Branham said he wasn't aware of any language that would prohibit that, and that staff would continue to pursue those opportunities. Kirkwood asked whether SNC would seek to ask legislators to co-host the grant guideline development workshops required to help connect with other constituencies, specifically those in Los Angeles. Branham said that the staff is having conversations with other Conservancies about partnering where possible.

Boardmember Giacomini commented that the timeline was very aggressive and asked whether staff felt it was realistic. Branham responded that it is an aggressive timeline, but that staff felt it would be achievable.

Boardmember Johnston commented that SNC could be helpful to other agencies with funding in Proposition 1 by offering to run their grant process for them, but still allowing the agency to make the award decisions. Branham noted that this could be done through an interagency agreement, but noted that such an approach is uncommon in state government, although staff would continue to make the SNC available if there is interest from other departments.

Boardmember Ferrara asked whether SNC could identify where projects may get funding from other agencies and offer technical assistance or other types of support to help those grantees in the region be more successful getting funding from other agency programs. Branham said that SNC has helped partners in the Region apply for other funds and will continue to provide technical assistance when available.

Boardmember Stifel commented on Kirkwood's suggestion to hold Proposition 1 grant guidelines meetings in Los Angeles, and suggested that SNC send staff to other agencies' public meetings to help engage new partners. Branham agreed that that would be a great idea.

**ACTION: Boardmember Giacomini moved and Boardmember Kirkwood seconded a motion to approve the proposed focus and plan for development of Proposition 1 Guidelines. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Public Comments**

Kerri Timmer, SBC, said that SBC has been tracking other agencies who might have funding that could be spent in the Sierra and would be following those agencies' grant guidelines development processes.

Izzy Martin of the Sierra Fund said that there has been new information developed in an attempt to boost the availability of funds to disadvantaged communities. Currently Sierra Nevada communities are not included as eligible for those funds. Martin also commented on SNC's proposed grant program focus, reminded Boardmembers about the influence that mining had on forest health, and encouraged Boardmembers to keep mining projects as eligible for funding in future grant programs.

#### **XIV. Revisions to the 2014-15 Action Plan (ACTION)**

Joan Keegan, Assistant Executive Officer for the SNC, presented the revisions to the 2014-15 Action Plan. Keegan noted that major changes are not being proposed at this time, but that actions related to the WIP development and the Proposition 1 guidelines development have been added. Keegan noted that additional focus has

been placed on communications activities around the WIP, but that workload will continue to be monitored and that staff would notify the Board if additional changes are needed.

**ACTION: Boardmember Kirkwood moved and Boardmember Johnston seconded a motion to approve the revisions to the SNC 2014-15 Action Plan. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XV. Potential Legislative Proposal (ACTION)**

Branham introduced a legislative proposal that SNC submitted to the Natural Resources Agency to establish Senate and Assembly members as liaisons to the SNC Board. He noted that the language mimicked statutes guiding other state conservancies. Branham explained that the SNC was awaiting word from Agency as to whether they go forward with seeking an author for the proposed legislation.

Boardmember Kirkwood commented that expanding the Board can't hurt, but recommended that SNC would have to be more active about incorporating legislators in activities than other conservancies have been.

**ACTION: Boardmember Johnston moved and Boardmember Brissenden seconded the motion to continue to pursue the legislation identified in the December 4, 2014, staff report. Boardmember Ferrara abstained from the vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XVI. Boardmembers' Comments**

Board Chair Kirwan recognized Boardmembers Thrall, Briggs, and Hunt for their service on the Board, noting that the December meeting was their final one. Thrall said that it had been a pleasure getting to know the Board and staff and said that she would remain engaged with SNC in her Subregion.

**XVII. Public Comments**

Kerri Timmer, SBC, shared that their organization was recently awarded a grant to run the Small Business Development Center for north eastern California and recommended Kristin York with SBC as a resource for more information about the program.

**XVIII. Adjournment**

Kirwan adjourned the meeting at 12:08 p.m. and welcomed attendance at the March meeting in Sacramento.