

# Board Meeting MINUTES

June 7, 2018  
Cero Coso Community College  
Eastern Sierra Campus  
4090 W. Line Street  
Bishop, CA 93514



## I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:02 a.m.

## II. Oath of Office for New Boardmembers

The Oath of Office was administered to Supervisor Elizabeth Cavasso.

## III. Roll Call

Present: Jacqueline Wong-Hernandez, Terry O'Brien, Bob Johnston, Jeff Griffiths, Este Stifel, Todd Ferrara, Tom Wheeler, Elizabeth Cavasso, Susana Reyes, Sherri Brennan, John Brissenden, Doug Teeter, Jerry Bird (for Bernie Gyant), Randy Fletcher, Danny Wan,

Absent: Woody Smeck

## IV. Approval of March 8, 2018, Meeting Minutes (ACTION)

**ACTION: Boardmember Tom Wheeler moved, and Boardmember Sherri Brennan seconded, a motion to approve the March 8, 2018, meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.**

## V. Public Comments

Board Chair Terry O'Brien advised the public that there were a large number of requests for public comment and asked that each speaker be aware of the time.

### **John Wentworth, Mayor, Town of Mammoth Lakes**

John Wentworth announced his reelection on Wednesday and congratulated the Board on the passing of Proposition 68. Wentworth welcomed the Board to the Eastern Sierra and expressed the importance of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) to his region.

Wentworth said the work being done together has a significant implication for public lands and for a variety of different initiatives across the state. He looks forward to continued engagement with the SNC. Wentworth mentioned that the Eastern Sierra has established an Eastern Sierra recreation partnership with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Mono County, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes.

The following list of public comment speakers addressed the Board concerning the Rim Fire burn area and, specifically, they expressed their opposition to the work being done under the National Disaster Resilience Competition (NDRC) grant. The speakers specifically expressed concerns about impacts to a variety of species as

the project goes forward and cited various scientific studies, observations, and opinions in support of their position.

**Public Comment Speakers:**

Chad Hanson – John Muir Project

Maya Khosla – Wildlife Biologist

Craig Swolgaard – Retired State Parks Biologist

Mark McReynolds – Southern California A Rocha

Tonja Chi – Independent Contractor Biologist

Christy Sherr – Audubon

Alison Sheehey – Sequoia ForestKeeper

Oscar Mace – United States Geological Survey (San Francisco Bay Project)

Boardmembers engaged in brief conversation with staff and members of the public. Boardmember Sherrie Brennan stated that there is a wide range of information and varying opinions on this topic and suggested that the item be agendaized for a future meeting. Upon request from Boardmember Randy Fletcher, Executive Officer Jim Branham provided a brief response to Chad Hanson's comments with several clarifications.

**Jonathan Kusel - Sierra Institute for Community and Environment**

Kusel remarked on the previous public comments and suggested that there be a discussion about the Moonlight fire which burned at a 60 percent high severity. There were significant implications and lessons to be learned from this fire that took place eleven years ago.

Kusel thanked the Board and the SNC for stepping in and helping the Sierra Institute complete a project in Plumas County which houses a bioenergy facility in the first all cross-laminated timber building in California. SNC money helped to bring that project home.

Boardmember Danny Wan asked Branham about the previous comments related to the snag forests and asked for clarification from Branham on what role SNC plays in administering this NDRC grant. Branham summarized the role of SNC as basically an administrative role.

Boardmember Doug Teeter asked if the Board should agendaize this item. O'Brien requested that staff prepare a memo for the Board and public, outlining the role of the SNC and addressing the issues that those in opposition brought forward at the meeting, including a recommendation on placing the item on a future Board agenda.

Boardmember Jaqueline Wong-Hernandez commented as a board member of the California Alternative Energy and Advanced Transportation Financing Authority (CAEATFA) and said the CAEATFA did some financing for the project

in Plumas County mentioned by Jonathan Kusel. Wong-Hernandez expressed excitement about the project on behalf of the CAEATFA and hopes it will serve as a model that can be used in other places.

Boardmember John Brissenden said that “in the context of fifteen or sixteen years of being a small part of creating this organization, we've never had this kind of contentiousness ... In the thirteen years of being on the Board, we've worked towards building consensus, and I think that the public needs to understand that's how we go forward.”

## **VI. Board Chair's Report**

Board Chair Terry O'Brien said that he was happy to report that a couple of days ago, the voters of the state of California approved Proposition 68 which will provide \$55 million to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. This includes \$30 million in direct funding support of SNC Programs as well as \$25 million from a forest health allocation.

O'Brien also said that on May 10, Governor Brown issued Executive Order B-52-18 that directs state agencies to increase efforts to restore the health and resilience of California's forests. Yesterday, a meeting was held with several state agencies to discuss roles and next steps. He believed Bob Kingman attended the meeting and would provide additional details later in the meeting.

O'Brien continued by stating that the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) released the Forest Carbon Plan. The SNC was active in the plan development, and the plan identifies the Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) as a model for implementation efforts. Another notable mention of the WIP was made by the Little Hoover Commission, and the Legislative Analyst's Office pointed to the WIP as a model to follow.

On May 11, the Governor released his May Revision to the 2018-19 budget. It included an expedited appropriation of Proposition 68 funds to the SNC for implementing the WIP, provided funding to CNRA for emulating the WIP in other regions of the state, and funded CAL FIRE to implement prescribed fire projects. O'Brien commented that all of this aligns well with the work SNC has been doing and it's an affirmation of issues SNC has raised and worked on over the past several years.

O'Brien reported that, in May, he and Executive Officer Jim Branham met with Saul Gomez, Deputy Cabinet Secretary for Governor Brown, who highly praised the work of the SNC. O'Brien pointed out that the work undertaken by SNC and the WIP are having a significant positive impact, not only in the Region but for the entire state.

O'Brien directed Boardmembers to the first page in the Board materials – a memorial for two former SNC employees, Marji Feliz and Eileen Pope. O'Brien recognized the passing of these two former employees of SNC and acknowledged the commitment and the contributions each of them made as public employees and employees of SNC.

Branham told the Board he wanted to provide his presentation and overview early in the meeting because there were a number of items to be discussed that reference bond funding and budgeting. He wanted to be sure the Board had a foundational understanding of the current status. Branham directed Boardmembers to Agenda Item XIIa in the Board materials package and presented a PowerPoint presentation which gave a brief overview of the Proposition 68 funding sources. He said that this should prove very beneficial for projects and activities consistent with SNC's mission in the Sierra Nevada.

Branham summarized bond allocations that are specific to the Region. The SNC total of \$55 million includes \$30 million to carry out activities consistent with SNC's mission and is less restrictive than past funding has been under either Proposition 1 or Proposition 84. This will allow SNC to think about supporting activities that are important parts of its mission but didn't qualify for a grant program in the past.

The other SNC allocation within Proposition 68 is \$25 million for general forest health and for implementation of WIP to be awarded through competitive grant programs.

There's also a \$60 million allocation for the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to carry out activities for protection and restoration improvement of upper watersheds in the Sierra Nevada Cascade Region. SNC staff is working closely with WCB to talk about how those funds might hit the ground.

Branham also mentioned the Meral Water Bond has been qualified and it will be on the November ballot. That proposition would provide a total of \$250 million to the SNC.

Branham advised the Board that staff will come back to them in September to discuss these funds and how they tie into the Strategic Plan, which will also be brought forward as a draft in September.

Branham said that one of the benefits of not making final decisions until December is that we'll know the outcome of the November election. If the Meral Bond passes in November, and SNC has significantly more funding, it may cause SNC to think somewhat differently about how quickly the Proposition 68 funds can be encumbered.

**VII. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program Proposition 1 Grant Award Recommendations (ACTION)**

Area Manager Andy Fristensky presented an overview of the staff report and a brief background for recommended projects. Fristensky directed the Board to the Board packet for individual project information.

Boardmembers engaged in brief conversation regarding applicant grant information such as location, funding partners, past and future funding sources, and project priority. They also asked staff several questions regarding the scoring of grant applications.

Fristensky requested the Board take action to approve seven projects for a total of \$3,489,472 as outlined in the action item below.

Public Comment:

**Steve Wilensky, Chair, Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions –**

Wilensky said that these projects are critical to people downstream and believes that it is SNC's job, and his, to be stewards of this great range of light. He thanked the SNC for considering these projects and said that, without the support that SNC is giving to this, none of these projects would have happened.

Regarding the previous public comments, Wilensky said there are lots of contentious issues and there is a wide range of people in industry and environmental interest groups, and community interests that must somehow come together and figure out what should be done. He encouraged the group to work collaboratively.

**Leana Weisberg, Stewardship Forester, Sierra Institute for Community and Environment –** Leana Weisberg thanked the Board for the March Board meeting approval of a Category Two grant with the Lassen National Park and the Sierra Institute for Community and Environment. The purpose of that grant is to facilitate future fuels reduction and prescribed fire, and to manage wild fire activities within the park. Weisberg provided the Board with a brief status update on this project which included the hiring of a biological and archeological technician to begin survey work.

**ACTION: Boardmember Randy Fletcher moved, and Boardmember Tom Wheeler seconded, a motion to (a) approve findings concurring with the Negative Declarations and authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the Lakes Basin Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (SNC1016) and the Cabbage Patch Restoration Project (SNC1033); and (b) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Sagehen Forest Project – A Watershed Improvement and Forest Health Initiative (SNC1003), Little Grass**

**Valley Watershed Protection Project (SNC1012), the South Fork Mokelumne River Watershed Restoration Project (SNC1030), the Butterfly Twain Fuels and Forest Health Project (SNC1032), and the Improving Landscapes and Watershed Health through Restoring Fire Regimes in Lassen Volcanic National Park Project (SNC1045), with mitigation measures, may have a significant effect on the environment and adopt the Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declarations and related Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Programs; authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Determination as a Lead Agency on these projects; and direct staff to maintain in the SNC office the record of proceedings upon which this decision is based; and (c) authorize a grant award to each of the projects listed above and in Agenda Item VII - Exhibit A for the amounts recommended by staff, and further authorize the staff to enter into the necessary agreements to move forward with these projects.**

**VIII. Updated Grant Guidelines (ACTION)**

Shannon Ciotti, Grant Administrator for SNC, presented the Board with an overview of the proposed Watershed Improvement Program Grant Guidelines. Ciotti told the Board that the Guidelines included provisions relating to Proposition 68, which passed on Tuesday. She said that the grant guidelines were updated to enable the administration for a grant cycle this coming 2018/2019 fiscal year with a pre-application process beginning this summer. Full proposals will be due in the fall for grant awards in March and June 2019.

**ACTION: Boardmember Susana Reyes moved, and Boardmember John Brissenden seconded, a motion to approve the updated Sierra Nevada Conservancy Watershed Improvement Program Combined Proposition 1 and Proposition 68 Grant Guidelines and authorizes staff to implement the Grant Program.**

**IX. Strategic Assessment and Plan Update (INFORMATIONAL)**

Executive Officer Jim Branham introduced this agenda item saying that, as SNC continues to interact with stakeholders up and down the region, he is pleased with the strategic planning engagement and enthusiasm from many partners.

Branham said this will be the plan that guides this organization for the next five years. He indicated that the SNC can't achieve the stated goals alone, and that SNC will need to work to incorporate contributions from all partners throughout the Sierra Nevada Region, including state and federal partners.

Branham provided the Board with recent activities that SNC has engaged in to complete the strategic planning process. He noted that SNC has worked hard to understand the work that is being done in any given landscape or watershed and

has been thoughtful to chart a course to move all watersheds to a state of health and resilience.

Branham complemented the SNC team again for the work that everyone is doing and said that while a lot of effort has gone into the plan, there is a lot of heavy lifting to do between now and the final plan in December. He indicated that he looks forward to the Board's thoughts and comments moving forward.

Policy and Outreach Division Chief Angela Avery provided the Board with a status update on the state of the strategic planning process. Avery said that the WIP is being recognized as a model for watershed and forest health. Her presentation highlighted the WIP elevation goals and provided a review of the proposed strategies. These strategies focused on SNC fiscal and personnel resources as well as staff experience and expertise. The strategies that have been developed reflect potential partnering opportunities that have been taken into consideration, noting that detailed information can be found in the Board materials provided. Avery played a video for the Board which reviewed and highlighted the Strategic Plan goals and their relation to one another. The purpose of this video was to demonstrate the elevation of the WIP and the proposed approach to address watershed health holistically.

Boardmember Todd Ferrara stated that it is critical that SNC identify connections to broader statewide initiatives. He noted that connections with other organizations such as CAL FIRE and Fish and Wildlife will make everyone more effective – that pulling together will cause a greater impact.

United States Forest Service (USFS) representative Boardmember Jerry Bird said that the USFS is a strong partner with SNC in implementing the WIP and that the USFS provides full support and backing to the SNC. He noted that the inclusion of Recreation and Tourism is critical in the holistic approach and agreed that the SNC has a particular role in convening and initiating collaboration.

Boardmember Susana Reyes said that she supports the elevation of the WIP and is in favor of the holistic approach that SNC is taking, including the emphasis on education and awareness and, in particular, working with communities and other stakeholders.

Agreeing that the WIP has a solid base, Boardmember Este Stifel commented that the focus on building partnerships and understanding across the Region makes the perfect solid foundation from which the Strategic Plan can build.

Additional Boardmember conversation took place with questions on incorporating an educational component as part of the tourism strategy. They also discussed public comments and input and effective SNC messaging.

Branham addressed the Board saying that development of the strategies is a starting point, and that, as the plan progresses, it will become more complete. He said that there will be strategic decisions that will need to be made as SNC develops the full plan and identifies the first-year actions. He noted that staff is expecting the Board to provide guidance for those actions that will continue to provide flexibility in implementing the plan.

Avery provided clarification to the Board on next steps and pointed to the questions before the Board for discussion at today's meeting.

Boardmembers and staff engaged in conversation regarding the public comment period. Avery confirmed the deadline for public comment as June 20 and encouraged Boardmembers to submit comments at any time.

Board Chair Terry O'Brien said that he is deferring public comment for this item until the last public comment session.

**X. Environmental Compliance for projects under the CAL FIRE California Climate Investment Grant awarded to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in 2017 (ACTION)**

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman provided a brief presentation and summary of the staff report and the recommendation for the Board.

Last year, SNC was successful in applying for and receiving a grant from CAL FIRE for the climate change investment projects grant program. SNC received a \$5 million grant to implement seven on-the-ground projects. He said part of the requirements for SNC administering those funds is to ensure projects are CEQA compliant. He noted that there were two projects before the Board today. Upon action by the Board, final sign-off will occur from CAL FIRE.

Kingman told the Board that the recommendation to complete SNC CEQA compliance will assist in projects getting started this field season. Kingman read the recommendation to the Board aloud for the record and asked for an action on this item.

**ACTION: Boardmember John Brissenden moved, and Boardmember Randy Fletcher seconded, a motion to (a) approve findings concurring with the Mitigated Negative Declaration and authorize the Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination as a Responsible Agency for the Fuels Reduction and Understory Burning, Burton Creek Project; and (b) make findings that there is no substantial evidence that the Tobacco Gulch Ecological Restoration Project and Biggie Vegetation Management and Fuels Reduction Project, with mitigation measures, may have a significant effect on the environment; adopt the Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declarations and related Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Programs;**

**authorize the Executive Officer to file Notices of Determination as a Lead Agency on these projects; and direct staff to maintain in the SNC office the record of proceedings upon which this decision is based. The motion passed unanimously.**

**XI. Good Neighbor Agreement with the Plumas National Forest and Administration of Fire Settlement Funds (ACTION)**

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman began his presentation by acknowledging Plumas National Forest representative Ryan Tompkins and other project partners in the audience. He then provided some background on the development of the project concept and directed Boardmembers to the materials and map provided in their Board packet.

Kingman reminded Boardmembers of the scope, scale, and severity of the 2007 Moonlight Fire and explained that the fire ultimately led to litigation and the payment of settlement funds to the Forest Service.

Kingman explained that, over the course of many discussions with the Plumas National Forest, use of a Good Neighbor Agreement was identified as a potential mechanism to ensure that effective restoration work was being completed on the ground using local contractors, consistent with the desires of the Forest and the conditions of the settlement funds. Under this kind of agreement, the SNC would receive funding from the Plumas National Forest and would be responsible for implementing projects and completing CEQA. The SNC Governing Board would authorize grant awards for local partners to carry out restoration activities as well as any required, discretionary CEQA decisions.

Kingman reminded Boardmembers that this agreement will result in increased pace and scale and a restored capacity of the Plumas National Forest.

**ACTION: Boardmember Doug Teeter moved, and Boardmember Bob Johnston seconded, a motion to authorize, finalize details, and execute a Good Neighbor Agreement with the Plumas National Forest, and to accept and administer approximately \$7.2 million of Fire Settlement Funds for restoration projects in the Moonlight Fire area. The motion passed unanimously.**

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

**a. Executive Officer Update**

Assistant Executive Officer Bob Kingman briefed the Board on a meeting he participated in at the Governor's office on June 6, 2018. The meeting was organized to announce a new task force – the Forest Management Task Force – being formed as a result of the Governor's Executive Order B-52-18 which was issued to combat tree mortality, increase the ability of forests to capture and store carbon, and to improve forest management. The SNC is

expected to play a role on one of the regional networking teams, though the details of what those teams will look like were not yet available. The official announcement of this task force will be released on Monday.

**b. Administrative Update**

In the spirit of saving time, Executive Officer Jim Branham indicated that Admin Chief, Amy Lussier, would forego her verbal presentation, but that she was available to answer any questions they might have regarding the Administrative staff report and materials provided in their Board packets. He also highlighted the hiring of Matt Driscoll as the new East Subregion Area Representative and recognized the promotion of Andy Fristensky to Regional Manager and his new role overseeing all Area Representative staff.

Boardmember O'Brien acknowledged the staff who organized this field tour the day before and recognized the East Subregion partners who participated to make the tour, reception, and this meeting a great success.

**c. Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program Update**

Executive Officer Jim Branham provided the Board with a brief overview of the preliminary analysis on funding contributions made by other state agencies in the Sierra Nevada Region which was included in the Board materials.

**d. Policy Update**

Policy and Outreach Division Chief Angela Avery provided the Board with details on Assembly Bill 2849 and gave an update on the status of that bill.

Boardmembers discussed the bills that SNC has been tracking. Avery and Branham provided additional details on each of those bills.

Avery also shared details with the Board on two upcoming events that staff are helping to coordinate: a prescribed fire tour and a resilience workshop. Both events will be co-hosted with other state agencies.

Finally, Avery reminded the Board that the third week of September is Sierra Nevada Watershed Protection Week, a week designated by the legislature to highlight the benefits that the Region provides to California.

**e. Communications Update**

Branham asked the Board for questions on materials presented to them and advised the Board that email links of presentations and videos that were planned to be shown at today's meeting will be emailed to them.

**f. Proposition 84 Grant Award Report**

Branham provided quick highlight and directed the Board to the Board materials provided to them.

**g. Tribal Forum Discussion Report**

Branham introduced Julie Griffith-Flatter, announced her planned retirement, and said that Mandy Vance will be taking over Julie's role in the organization as Tribal Liaison. Griffith-Flatter provided the Board with an overview of the previous day's meeting and a short summary of the seven meetings that SNC has held throughout the Region over the past two years. She noted yesterday's meeting was the second in the East Subregion approved by the Board due to its isolation and hardship for the tribes to get to the previously held Alpine County meeting (September 2016).

Two tribal members that previously attended the Alpine County meeting also attended this meeting. Griffith-Flatter acknowledged that this gave SNC the opportunity to follow up with those members about previous discussions. A representative of the Bishop Paiute Tribe was a first-time participant in this meeting.

Griffith-Flatter reported common themes have emerged from the series of tribal meetings. Tribes are interested in increasing their capacity through workforce development and would like to increase awareness of cultural history and practice as it relates to resource and recreational management.

Boardmembers engaged in brief conversation regarding the relationships established from these forums and encouraged an outlet for future conversations.

Conversation took place about current grants held with tribal organizations. Branham stated that SNC is continuing to look for opportunities to work with tribal organizations and has more work to do to encourage them. Griffith-Flatter also pointed out that there is a level of hesitation into entering agreements with the state and that there is an opportunity to explore ways to address these concerns.

**XIII. Boardmembers' Comments**

Boardmember John Brissenden acknowledged the passing of former SNC staff members Marji Feliz and Eileen Pope and noted the tremendous loss to SNC. Brissenden also acknowledged the ongoing commitment and dedication of SNC staff to the Region.

Boardmember Jeff Griffiths and Board Chair Terry O'Brien thanked the Board and staff for traveling to Bishop and gave a special thanks to the staff involved in planning and organizing the June Board meeting.

**XIV. Public Comments**

The following public speakers addressed the Board with concerns and objections to the work being done under the NDRC Grant in the Rim Fire area.

Patty Thompson – Christians Caring for Creation  
David T. Hanson – Christians Caring for Creation  
Connie Hanson – Christians Caring for Creation  
Daniel Barad – Sierra Club CA  
Christy Sherr – Audubon  
Alison Sheehey, Sequoia ForestKeeper

**Jeff Brown, Director, UC Berkley Central Sierra Field Research Stations –**

Brown commented on the positive work that has been done at Sagehen Creek Field Station in partnership with SNC and on the importance of continuing to work towards big picture goals.

**Steve Wilensky, Amador Calaveras Consensus Group, and Calaveras Healthy Impact Product Solutions-Cabbage Patch Project –**

Wilensky provided comment on the resilient communities goal under the SNC's Strategic Plan. He expressed concern about the sustainability of funding in the Sierra Nevada and urged the Board to support the inclusion of small sustainably scaled infrastructure as one way to secure stable funding in the resilient communities goal of the Strategic Plan. Wilensky stated that creating this infrastructure will allow these small businesses to thrive economically, environmentally, and will provide broad community benefit.

**Wendy Schneider, Executive Director, Friends of the Inyo –** Schneider encouraged SNC to support additional resources for meadow restoration and to assist the U.S. Forest Service with maintaining infrastructure needed for recreation and tourism.

**Hannah Hepner, Feather River Stewardship Coalition –** Hepner thanked the Board for grant awards received and staff for being open to acting as the lead agency on CEQA for a NEPA-completed project.

**XV. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:11 p.m.