



Santa Cruz Natural Resource Conservation District

Santa Cruz Regular Meeting April 21, 2021 Final Minutes

Location: Teleconference: (515) 604-9099, access code: 645264651

Board Supervisors & Clerk: Stephen Williams, Daniel Bell, Bill Schock, Fox Johnson (Absent), Andy Jackson, and Chris Postel (Clerk).

Agencies & Guests: Alisha Phipps & Tom Reis (Natural Resource Conservation Service -NRCS), and Josh Grace (Arizona State Land Department - ASLD).

Called to Order: 1:21 pm

Review/Approve February 24, 2021 Minutes: The minutes were reviewed. It was moved by Andy Jackson to approve the minutes as amended. Bill Schock seconded it. The motion carried unanimously. 3-0.

Treasurer's Report (See Attached Report): Per Dan, the checking account balances are: \$7,234.19 (State), \$3,315.26 (Education Center) and \$120,025.91 (Local). Bill Schock moved to accept and file the Treasurer's reports. Andy Jackson seconded it. The motion passed unanimously. 4-0.

Administration Update (See Attached Invoice): The Clerk's invoice for February-March was reviewed. It was moved by Bill Schock to approve the invoice, \$800.00. Andy Jackson seconded it. The motion carried unanimously, 3-0. No one was interested in MS Office 2019 for \$39/user.

Agency Updates:

NRCS (Alisha Phipps and Tom Reis – See Report): In terms of EQIP, 17 applications were received and 1 application was from the Santa Cruz NRCD (rangeland). These applications will be ranked by April 30th. Their team (#7) consists of Douglas, Sells and Tucson. \$548,498 in funding will be split between Douglas and Tucson. In total, 68 EQIP applications are requesting about \$3.5 million. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) deadline was April 5. The Tucson field office (TFO) received 7 applications, 2 were from Santa Cruz. The deadline for determining which applications are eligible is April 30th. In terms of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE), NRCS is finalizing a 5,000-acre easement with Arizona Land and Water Trust on a ranch within the SCNRCD. No new updates on the submitted Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Tom Reis is the new supervisor and Alvaro will be out until September, 2021. In Douglas, a Soil Conservation Tech and a Soil Conservationist will be starting on May 9th and a Rangeland Management Specialist will be receiving an offer this week. NRCS offices are still under restricted use due to COVID19 and safety protocols. Bill Schock has questions on conservation easements.

Arizona State Land Department (ASLD - Josh Grace): Per Josh, not much has changed. The Range section is processing applications for projects. The Arizona Section of the Society for Range Management (AZSRM) will not hold a NRCWAY (Natural Resources Conservation Workshop for Arizona Youth) camp this summer. Josh sent the draft AZSRM and SCNRCD Memorandum of Agreement (to comply with the AZ gift clause statutes) to Jackie Thomas (ASLD NRCD Program Manager) for review. It was also sent to the Attorney General's office. No updates have been received. Kim McReynolds, ASZRM NRCWAY Chair, would sign the contract.

OLD BUSINESS None.

Update Monitoring Report Comments: Per Andy Jackson and Dan Bell, they were fine with the existing report format and no changes need to be made. Bill Schock will review the report again.

District Correspondence & Mail Process: Per Dan Bell, he will scan & email the pertinent documents to Stephen Williams. Then, the documents will be put into a notebook binder.

NEW BUSINESS

Conservation Easement Resolution (See Attached Resolution): Per Stephen Williams, the Whitewater Draw NRCD resolution was drafted by Frank Krantz. Stephen wanted the SCNRCD to take a position on the resolution so that he can represent the District position at the summer AZ Association of Conservation Districts' meeting. During the discussion, Bill Schock brought up the following concerns:

- Only 60% of the development rights value is paid; then, Arizona Land & Water Trust (ALWT) takes a 10% fee. He questioned what happens to the other 40%. He thought that Oregon is increasing to 80% compensation value. Overall, he is concerned about appropriate compensation. The 40% that you retain could be worthless.
- All deals are written differently and the big ranchers are better able to protect their resources. So, smaller landowners could enter into a bad deal.
- The Santa Cruz County Assessor's office should maintain a listing of conservation easement parcels but has not created this list.
- It has been difficult to get answers to his questions from ALWT and other ranchers about their easements.

Per Tom Reis, Devon Cunningham is the NRCS state specialist and Bill should put together a list of questions for Devon for the next meeting. Per Andy Jackson, the 40% is the residual value that the rancher retains but can't be sold. He is overall in support of Conservation Easements for conserving land as good public policy but this is a controversial issue with cascading consequences. Per Dan Bell, it is a contract between a willing buyer and seller, custom tailored to each situation. It results in a less than full tax value for the land and will lower the overall tax base. Per Stephen Williams, the goal of this resolution is to give AACD a position on Conservation Easements. We will carry over this discussion until the next meeting to determine whether the District conceptually supports Conservation Easements.

Education Center Update: Per Stephen Williams, the report (Drafted by Dean Fish, SCNRCD Ed Center Director on April 21, 2021) covered the following items:

1. Continued maintenance on garden area
2. School Field Trips: Still on hold since COVID. He has not had any requests for elementary trips since last year. Santa Fe Ranch hosted an ROTC Orienteering competition on the Ranch last month for 5 southern Arizona High Schools. Activity should be picking up.
3. Other Ed Center/Ranch Visits: A regular group of developmentally disabled clients come to the ranch on a daily basis. The Ag Fraternity Alpha Gamma Rho was hosted for a field day.
4. Project WET is going virtual again this year and has requested funding. The event is May 12. Per Dean Fish's email, the overall cost estimate is about \$2,700 and he suggested a \$1,000 donation. It was moved by Dan Bell to fund \$1,000 for Project WET with the Santa Fe Ranch Foundation. Bill Schock seconded it. The motion carried unanimously, 4-0. Bill Schock is wondering what other funding sources does Project WET have.

Supervisor & Clerk Reports:

- Dan Bell: The western portion of Santa Cruz county hasn't had any rainfall; so, water is scarce. Mechanical water systems are being fixed and used. This is very little tank water. The Ground Water Advisory meetings are on-line.
- Andy Jackson: Very little range grass is left and he is buying cows from other ranchers. He is updating water systems. He bought feed trying to maintain the herd. The cattle and farming industries are just trying to hold on.
- Bill Schock: He is on the Technical Monitoring Committee. Below is a link that shows a drought a map from Crop Condition and Soil Moisture Analytics (Crop-CASMA) using data from a satellite database of soil moisture. This map shows that we are 40-70% below average in soil moisture and could be used to help influence drought relief programs. He has visited other ranches and the satellite map confirms that we are suffering. <https://cloud.csiss.gmu.edu/Crop-CASMA/>
- Stephen Williams: He has completed the NRCWAY agreement and forwarded it to Josh Grace for AZSRM to review. The Water Umbel citizens group April meeting was postponed because the Water Umbel are immature now and difficult to identify.

Call to the Public: None

Adjourn: The Meeting adjourned at 2:59 pm. Andy Jackson moved to adjourn the meeting. Bill Schock seconded it. The motion carried unanimously, 4-0

Next meeting on June 17 1:15 p.m.

Final Minutes Submitted by: Chris Postel, Santa Cruz NRCD Clerk

Date: June 17, 2021

Approval of Minutes: _____

Date: _____