

Santa Cruz NRCD and Education Center

Santa Cruz Regular Meeting November 8, 2023 Final Minutes

Location: Wild Horse Restaurant, Patagonia, AZ

Board Supervisors & Clerk: Present – Stephen Williams, Bill Schock, Dan Bell, Andy Jackson. Absent – Chris Postel (Clerk).

Agencies & Guests: Nick Schobinger, AGFD, Tucson. Mynesha Holliday and Cora Thomas, NRCS, Tucson. Christin Peterson, Red Rock Ranch.

Called to Order: 12:02pm

Review/Approval of Minutes, September 6 and November 1: The minutes were reviewed. Bill moved to approve the minutes as presented. Andy seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Treasurer's report: Dan presented the Treasurer's Report, which included the State Account, the Ed Center Account, and the District Account. Andy moved to file the Treasurer's Report as presented. Bill seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Administration Update: None was submitted.

Agency Updates:

Arizona Game & Fish Department: Nick Schobinger introduced as the new Region V Landowner Relations Specialist, replacing Gerry Berthelette. He has a wildlife biology from the UofA and has interned with the AGFD prior to obtaining this position. He is anxious to meet landowners and visit with them about their improvement project needs.

NRCS: Cora Thomas, a soil conservationist from Tucson, gave the NRCS Team 7 update. Funding through the Inflation Reduction Act will provide direct climate mitigation benefits. This funding is limited to specific Climate Smart Mitigation Activities. EQIP Act Now is a funding process for specific practices where applications will have a shorter turnaround time than the traditional process. A new position for a Rangeland Management Specialist is being filled for Team 7.

OLD BUSINESS

2022 NRCS Monitoring Report Narrative: No update was provided.

Signs: No update was provided.

Conservation Action Plan: Kyle Thompson interviewed 2 District Cooperators on November 2 in Patagonia. Kyle will be paid from District funds to write Chapters 5 and 6 of the CAP. A new agreement will be prepared between the AACD and the NRCS in 2024. After that Agreement is finalized the AACD will be assisting with funding for the CAP.

CBD Lawsuit Update & Board's Potential Action: Attorney Norm James filed for intervener status on behalf of the Southern Arizona Cattlemen's Protective Association and forest permittees. Funds are being raised for the legal work associated with this filing. It may be Spring, 2024 before a decision is reached on this request. If the District chooses to contribute funds toward the lawsuit it will need to use non-state funds.

Brush Management Workshops (CCAST/UA/AVCA Series): Stephen stated that he forwards announcements about this series of workshops to District Cooperators, and noted that with prior notice this would have been a perfect opportunity for Tyler Bowen, of Azelis, to participate with his knowledge of chemical brush control.

Board Vacancies: Christin Peterson from the Red Rock Ranch was present at the meeting and expressed an interest in serving on the Board to fill one of the vacancies for an elected position. Stephen had prepared the paperwork for Christin's Nomination To Fill The Unexpired Term Of Office for Andy Jackson's vacant position. Bill moved to forward this Nomination form to the ASLD. Dan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

NEW Business

Sentinel Landscape Request for Monitoring Locations: Stephen had been contacted by Amber Morin of the Sentinel Landscape to provide the locations of monitoring locations where data is gathered by our District contractor, Jim Koweek. Since the NRCS works with Jim to collect this data NRCS proprietary information guidance comes into play. It is only when the involved landowner grants permission for the release of this information that such information could be released to an outside party. AACD contractors will be working within the Sentinel Landscape area and gathering natural resource information and Amber wanted to try to alleviate any overlap of data collection.

Commit Funds for 2024 SCNRCD Election Notice: With 2024 being a District election year it will be necessary to advertise the May election in March. The legal notice, which ran twice in the Nogales International in 2022, cost \$361. Stephen requested that \$400 be allocated to pay for the 2024 election legal advertisement. Dan moved to commit the \$400 for the legal advertisement. Andy seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Wildfire Workshop: Bill Schock spoke with Evan Weaver of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire Department about a potential fire planning meeting for the community emphasizing rancher participation. The strategy for fighting wildland fire, with rancher provided equipment to assist the agency firefighters, would be the theme. Proposed dates are late November to early December. Our District could possibly provide a lunch catered by Cory Moreno.

Water Smart Cooperative Watershed Program for Sonoita Creek: Stephen referenced an email from the UofA Water Resource Center announcing an effort to submit a grant application to the Bureau of Reclamation for the development of a watershed plan for the Sonoita Creek drainage. Phase 1 of the grant would be formulating the structure of the group including a board of directors, bylaws, a strategic plan and other organizational functions. Phase 2 would be development of the actual management

plan. After discussion by the Board it was decided that we will observe the Phase 1 process and offer assistance in areas of our natural resource management as needed.

US Forest Service Outreach to the District: Sean Lockwood from the Nogales Ranger District was not present, so we will schedule his presentation for a future meeting.

Call to the Public: None present.

Supervisor Reports:

Andy Jackson reported that work is progressing on his irrigation system on the farm and that due to the dry summer he is feeding cattle. He also mentioned that the Sonoran Land Trust did a fish survey of the Santa Cruz river on his property and found three fish species that had not been seen recently, and that the water quality was much improved.

Bill Schock reported on a recent Sentinel Landscape meeting where he learned that the Willcox-San Simon NRCDC received a \$10 million RCCP grant for project work. The Legacy Work Group, a consulting firm from Massachusetts, is working in the Sentinel Landscape and wants to visit with landowners in the area. The BLM has finished its NEPA and will now be able to release money for project work. He attended a meeting hosted by County consultants to discuss a Wine and Cuisine Tourism District for the Sonoita-Elgin area. The purpose was to solicit residents' vision for developing the area around the crossroads of Highways 82 and 83. Ideas included bike paths, a motel, multi-family housing, retail shops, a market, a park, a playground, sidewalks, a short term RV park, and a food truck court. Attendance at the Empire Ranch Cowboy Festival was down this year.

Stephen Williams suggested that since the NRCWAY camp was not held this summer, and since our scholarship donation remains in the bank for future camps, that an alternative for 2024 would be to fund scholarships for the Arizona Envirothon. This is also designed to encourage high school students to consider careers in natural resource fields.

Next Meeting Date: To be determined.

Adjournment: 1:35pm.

Final Minutes Submitted by: Chris Postel

Date: February 28, 2024

Approval of Minutes: _____

Date: _____