



Gavin Newsom, Governor
NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION BOARD
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Meeting Minutes

Lower American River Conservancy Program
Advisory Committee

May 13, 2020
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Consistent with Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-29-20, the public and Board members participated in the meeting via Skype or teleconference. Public comment was accepted per the agenda.

AGENDA ITEMS

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Committee Chair Jeff Harris called the meeting to order and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

WCB staff member Mary Ahern performed the roll call and observed a quorum was established.

Present were:

*Susan Peters
Don Nottoli
Jeff Harris
Julia Burrows
Donald Terry
Kevin Thomas
Jennifer Lucchesi
Stephen Green
Corey Brown
Casey Gilson
Phil Serna*

WCB Executive Director

John P. Donnelly

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Harris asked if anyone present wished to speak or comment, there was no one.

PROCEDURAL ACTION ITEMS

1. Elect Chair and Vice Chair for 2020

Chair Harris opened the discussion up to the committee members to elect a Chair and Vice Chair for 2020. Chair Harris began with stating that he is happy to continue as Chair. He then opened it up to the committee for nominations.

Mr. Corey Brown nominated Mr. Harris for Chair. Mr. Stephen Green seconded the motion.

*Phil Serna – Yes
Susan Peters – Yes
Don Nottoli – Yes
Jeff Harris – Yes
Julia Burrows – Yes
Donald Terry – Yes
Kevin Thomas – Yes
Jennifer Lucchesi – Yes
Stephen Green – Yes
Corey Brown – Yes
Cassie Gilson – Yes*

Mr. Donald Terry nominated Mr. Don Nottoli for Vice Chair. Chair Harris seconded the motion.

*Phil Serna – Yes
Susan Peters – Yes
Don Nottoli – Yes
Jeff Harris – Yes
Julia Burrows – Yes
Donald Terry – Yes
Kevin Thomas – Yes
Jennifer Lucchesi – Yes
Stephen Green – Yes
Corey Brown – Yes
Cassie Gilson – Yes*

2. Approval of Minutes [May 29, 2019 Draft Minutes \(PDF\)](#)

3. Approval of Minutes

[October 17, 2019 Draft Minutes \(PDF\)](#)

Chair Harris asked the Advisory Committee (AC) if there were any concerns with the minutes. He said if no one had corrections, the minutes could be moved.

Ms. Susan Peters motioned for the minutes to be approved. Mr. Brown seconded the motion.

*Phil Serna – Yes
Susan Peters – Yes
Don Nottoli – Yes
Jeff Harris – Yes
Julia Burrows – Yes
Donald Terry – Yes
Kevin Thomas – Yes
Jennifer Lucchesi – Yes
Stephen Green – Yes
Corey Brown – Yes
Cassie Gilson – Yes*

INFORMATION ITEMS - WRITTEN

4. [Funding Summary](#)
5. [Program Overview](#)
6. [2020 Proposal Solicitation Notice and Timeline](#)

Chair Harris stated the information items provided a good history and overview of what has been accomplished so far. There were no questions about the written information items.

INFORMATION ITEMS – ORAL

7. Form 700 (Donnelly)

Executive Director Donnelly wanted to remind the AC about the Form 700. They were due April 1, 2020, but due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission has extended its filing deadline until June 1, 2020. If the AC has any questions, WCB's contact is Leo Hamm with the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

8. Committee Member Updates (Advisory Committee)

Chair Harris opened the floor up to AC members who wished to provide an update.

Mr. Brown spoke on three measures that propose relevant funding to the Lower American Conservancy Program (Program) and the Wildlife Conservation Board. The Assembly Natural Resources Committee is hearing AB 3256 that would place

a \$7 billion climate resilience measure on the November ballot, which includes substantial funding for WCB. There is no specific funding outlined for the Program, but WCB would have the flexibility to allocate some funds for projects along the Lower American River. Additionally, the Senate has approved SB 45, which is now with the Assembly. SB 45 does include \$30 million for the Program. The Governor has proposed a third version of the climate resiliency measure, a \$4.7 billion measure which does not include money specified for WCB or the Program. It does include money for the Natural Resources Agency. Mr. Brown noted that there will be a better understanding when the Governor's May Revision is released, determining whether the Governor is supportive of placing a measure on the November ballot. These measures may increase the amount of funding for the committee to work with. Mr. Brown also noted that a survey conducted in late April by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates showed public support for these measures.

Mr. Brown also wanted to call attention to a recent report released by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute that stated the \$7 billion measure could create 120,000 jobs in California. He stated that the committee might want to look into securing more funding for restoration given the unemployment in the region, to create jobs for conservation corps and other types of workers.

Chair Harris mentioned that voters are going to face a hard choice this fall given that the election is going to be very unusual compared to what we are used to. The measures can be looked at two ways: greater hardship for those who are already suffering due to the coronavirus outbreak, or they can look at it as a way to get back to work, a way to generate employment and economic stimulus. Chair Harris stated he is hopeful that people will see the benefit of these important measures as they can mean great things for the Program and the river.

9. Update: Where Are We on the Parkway Project (WCB May 2020 Meeting) (Allen)

Ms. Cara Allen provided an update regarding the Where Are We on the Parkway project. Ms. Allen worked with the Foundation on the details of this project. The project as proposed and recommended for funding will include the design, fabrication, and installation of 23 double-sided directional signs. Each sign will be unique and appropriate to the approaching areas, and signs will be placed on the right side of the trail, when heading eastbound or upriver on the bike trail. An exciting development will include 14 in-person or virtual meetings with Parkway stakeholders and neighborhoods located around the Parkway; these will review the content to be included on each sign. Lastly, the signs will be ADA accessible per the county's standards. The project is on the agenda for the May 20th WCB meeting.

10. Sacramento Regional Parks Update (Bellas)

Ms. Liz Bellas, Director of Sacramento County Regional Parks, provided her update to the committee. Through April 20, the County has removed 177 tons of

garbage out of the parkway. County staff are following CDC and public health guidance regarding homeless encampments for COVID-19, which is basically to leave people in place as much as possible to prevent the spread of the virus. The County is continuing to clean up abandon camps and areas of trash and debris.

Ms. Bellas stated that the fire fuel reductions are underway. The plans for 2020 can be found on the County's website and will be presented at the May Recreation and Parks Commission meeting, which will be held virtually on May 28. Typical activities are grazing, maintenance of fire breaks, and prescribed burns where and when feasible. As in years past, the County is still offering free annual permits to homeowners with lands adjacent to parklands, which allows them to control grasses up to 50 feet beyond their personal property line.

County Parks would like to thank WCB for grant funding for the Soil Born Farm's parking lot, and the Discovery Park picnic structures. The County is working through the permitting process for those projects and expects that construction will begin this summer. The County is also working on permits to dredge the boat launch at Discovery Park, due to accumulation of silt and trees at the opening of the boat launch. The Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps are currently working on a signing and stenciling project along the Jedediah Smith Memorial Trail. The Conservation Corps started redoing stenciling that has become faded on the trail at Discovery Park and are working their way upstream. The County is very excited about this project. In conclusion, Ms. Bellas stated there is some bad news, as events and picnic reservations are currently on hold due to COVID-19, but there is also good news in that the County's parking lots, restrooms, trails, and open space areas remain open at this time. Per Ms. Bellas direction, staff's priority is to clean facilities twice a day, and then follow through with the other regular maintenance duties.

10a. [Natural Resources Management Plan: Current Status and Updates \(Bellas\):](#)

- [Status of Work Plan and Schedule](#)
- [Public Outreach Activities](#)
- [Proposed NRMP Task Force](#)
- [Table of Contents](#)
- [February 2020 Administrative Draft Overview](#)

Ms. Bellas provided an update on the Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP). Ms. Bellas pointed out that the chapter structure of the NRMP has changed slightly from the earlier draft, and it will include new chapters to address the elements of the United States Army Corps of Engineers' (Army Corps) conservation strategies.

Mr. Daniel Iacofano and Mr. Bill Spain from MIG presented the PowerPoint and attached documents.

Mr. Brown thanked the County and MIG for their work on this project. This is a way to make sure we are leaving kids and future generations with a better Parkway than we found it. It is very helpful to incorporate the Army Corps restoration projects and get broader coordination from the city and others. This work could help raise additional funding for the Parkway and guide WCB in allocations for it. Mr. Brown recommended that the NRMP include a comprehensive look at past damage and potential future impacts and develop strategies around those. This would help ensure a net improvement to habitat. Over the last ten years, there has been significant degradation of habitat in the lower river, resulting from a variety of sources including from PG&E vegetation cuts, invasive plants, fires, illegal uses, and others. Mr. Brown also noted the inclusion of numerical benchmarks to determine whether restoration goals are being achieved. Mr. Brown noted that the COVID pandemic has numerous economic and health impacts. There will be a need for investment back into communities to create jobs and more projects to become ready for implementation – raise money (federal or state funds) for people to work on improving the Parkway.

Chair Harris concurred with Mr. Brown's comments. Chair Harris stated that the Lower American River is deeply impacted by human activities, lawful and unlawful, and there is a lot of work ahead to deal with that. Chair Harris appreciated the emphasis on agency coordination, as it is extremely important. The Parkway is bounded by levees, and flood protection is imperative for the Sacramento region. At times, there has been a lack of coordination between SAFCA and the Army Corps. In interfacing with the County and the management of the Parkway, it would be great to have not only the task force, as well as the NRMP as a focus. Chair Harris stated that this could be a turning point for the Parkway.

Mr. Daniel Iacofano thanked Mr. Brown and Chair Harris for their comments. Mr. Iacofano felt very positive about the working relationship with SAFCA, as they have excellent consulting help with ICF. The hope is to create a document to tie all these things together - one central place to see direction and what recommended future action is.

ACTION ITEMS

11. [Consider Sacramento County Department of Regional Parks' \(Regional Parks\) Request for Scope of Work Change and Budget Shift for Lower American River Natural Resource Management Plan \[WCB Grant Agreement WC-1806CA with Regional Parks\] \(Bellas\)](#)

Ms. Bellas provided a memo requesting a modified Scope of Work and to shift funding between line items. This change is due to a lower level than anticipated environmental review required for the project, and the County would like to move additional funds to the interagency coordination task. The change is supported by recommendations from the consultant, conversations the county has had with the

Army Corps' permitting staff, and initial conversations with the County Division of Planning and Environmental Review. The County is not requesting any additional funding, only to move money between line items.

Ms. Cassie Gilson asked if the shifting of funds would affect any of the implementation activities that would flow from the NRMP, e.g. the activities that would be using the NRMP as an environmental document in lieu of doing their own?

Ms. Bellas stated that this will be a supplement to the environmental document that was used for the American River Parkway Plan, therefore a full analysis of the NRMP would not be required. Army Corps staff provided an alternative process to the full 408 that the County is grateful for.

Mr. Brown reiterated that one of the advantages of this NRMP is that if something is in the NRMP, it will make getting approval from the Army Corps easier. Currently, any significant changes require a fairly extensive process with the Army Corps and the Flood Board. He stated that it reinforces a need to make sure the NRMP is as comprehensive as possible in terms of where restoration activities can be implemented, to ensure that those types of projects can receive all possible assistance. He shared concern with Ms. Gilson that a narrower Environmental Impact Report may limit the document to a narrow set of restoration activities.

Ms. Bellas stated that they are taking that into account, and the Army Corps said the County could utilize what is called a Categorical Permission. The County has initiated conversations with their Division of Environmental Review because the Army Corps will be the lead on preparing the environmental document.

Chair Harris stated this was a great discussion, as this is one of the reasons for the creation of the Program and putting funds toward the NRMP is money well spent. NRMP was the first project funded by the Program and will provide the AC focus.

Chair Harris asked if there is any public comment regarding this item.

Ms. Crystal Tobias added that the homelessness issues within the parkway is a sensitive issue, but it's also one of the biggest. Ms. Tobias is hoping for a willingness to tackle it and do what is necessary, because if it is not addressed, it will come back.

Chair Harris stated that he shares Ms. Tobias' angst, as the AC is aware of impacts of human use on the Parkway. There are legal roadblocks, and now with COVID-19, it is an even more difficult scenario, with the constraints that people stay in place to weather the virus.

Mr. Serna encouraged the audience to consider working outside the context of this group and to carry concerns and advocacy to their cities and counties. Mr. Serna mentioned working very hard previously to get a modest increase in the County's General Fund Budget dedicated to the Parkway and make it safer for everyone to

enjoy. In addition, he worked on finding resources for those in need so that they don't feel that they need to live by the banks of the river.

Chair Harris mentioned that your elected officials need your back up when going to bat for these bills. He went on to say that COVID-19 has given us a unique opportunity to move some homeless populations into transitional housing in motels through a joint city-county effort with federal funds. There is a scramble right now to try to create permanent housing opportunities, so that individuals who have gained a little stability in this motel scenario and don't go back to the Parkway. These issues are being worked on, but they are costly and political.

Ms. Susan Peters pointed out that the Courtyard Inn Housing Project opens for occupancy on Monday, and it will take about 175 homeless people into permanent supportive housing.

Chair Harris mentioned there are a few motels within the county and city that are being looked at and stated how much that is appreciated.

Mr. Serna moved item; and Chair Harris seconded.

Phil Serna – Yes

Susan Peters – Yes

Don Nottoli – Yes

Jeff Harris – Yes

Julia Burrows – Yes

Donald Terry – Yes

Kevin Thomas – Yes

Jennifer Lucchesi – Yes

Stephen Green – Yes

Corey Brown – Yes

Cassie Gilson – Yes

DISCUSSION

12. Developing Project Priorities for Future Proposal Solicitation Notices (Allen)

Ms. Allen wanted to discuss ways to engage the committee in developing priorities for future grant solicitation notices and the method by which WCB engages the committee. She provided one idea that includes sending an online survey to the committee with multiple choice questions that would help WCB identify the types of projects important for the Parkway. Some questions might relate to specific areas in the Parkway, what Program goal should be advanced, or where opportunities exist for each program goal. Ms. Allen welcomed the committee's thoughts.

Chair Harris asked the committee for any additional ideas. Mr. Harris liked the survey idea as it is a good platform for jogging people's ideas and getting them to think about the subject matter. Mr. Harris also reminded the committee that they are welcome to email Executive Director Donnelly and Ms. Allen with ideas.

Executive Director Donnelly offered WCB's participation in the committee's meeting with groups in the community to explain the Parkway and the Program.

Chair Harris mentioned it would be great to include a presentation at a City Council meeting.

13. **Points of Interest for Parkway Tour #2 (Mid-Section: Cal Expo To River Bend)**

Ms. Allen asked the committee if they had any points of interest that they would like to recommend for the next Parkway Tour. A date has not been set yet, as staff are waiting to get a better idea of when it would be possible to host the second tour, which would cover the area from Cal Expo to River Bend. Ms. Allen's ideas included Bushy Lake, Soil Born Farms, Cordova Creek, and the decommissioned Girl Scout camp at River Bend area that is now being used by Sacramento County Office of Education for outdoor learning programs.

Ms. Peters recommended for consideration the property owned by Regional Sanitation District that the Sacramento County's Sheriff uses as a training facility.

Chair Harris said further recommendations could be emailed to Ms. Allen. Mr. Harris stated that the last tour was fun and informative.

Ms. Tobias also mentioned that the salmon migration might be of interest to the committee.

PRESENTATIONS

14. [Steelhead Creek \(Brady/Tobias\)](#)

Mr. Roland Brady and Ms. Crystal Tobias presented on Steelhead Creek.

Chair Harris thanked them for their illustrative presentation. Chair Harris asked about the location and potential sightings of anadromous fish.

Mr. Brady responded that it includes the reach between El Camino Bridge and the confluence with the Sacramento River.

Ms. Tobias stated that she has not, but she knows for a fact that steelhead have been spotted in Dry and Arcade creeks, and the only way to reach those creeks is up Steelhead Creek. Ms. Tobias mentioned that it has become more and more difficult for them to get to the spawning areas due to the fish passage issues discussed in the presentation.

Chair Harris commented on the robust restoration process and noted that the Water Forum was interested in this project as well, which is a good thing. He noted that the Program supports restoration projects, and this seems like a viable place to focus a project that benefits the Parkway. There are significant benefits to restoring this area, but there are political issues as well.

Ms. Tobias noted that the neighborhood is considered a severely disadvantaged community, and they have done outreach to the neighborhood association regarding the impacts. Ms. Tobias stated they have been very mindful of the issue. Homelessness is not the problem, but the bad behavior of a group of the homeless. They have also discussed having the camps a hundred feet away from the banks, which would make it a lot easier to clean. Every year, as the water rises, the homeless have to move back. She noted that when they go out and hand out garbage bags, a lot of the campers are willing to bag up their trash. Mr. Nottoli began by thanking them for their presentation. He commented on the stark picture, but that it was not without hope. He had a few questions for the presenters. Would the seasonal clean out of the streambed help with the flow? What benefits would accrue from just the work with a draft horse? What would be estimate of cost?

Ms. Tobias stated they work in the channel, removing everything, not just legacy trash. That alone would have a significant positive impact on fish passage and fry survivability because we will be removing the dams caused by mattresses and shopping carts. They have already contacted a man with draft horses who has been to the site and thinks it is very doable. It would take the horse five minutes to do work which might take staff up to an hour. Additionally, this is not using any heavy equipment which would have a host of other requirements that are hard on the environment. The estimate for a team of draft horses and Conservation Corps workers is slightly under \$80,000, which also includes Ms. Tobias and Mr. Brady being the principals - going in the water ahead of time marking and tagging the trash to be removed.

Ms. Crystal stated that she hopes that the AC and WCB would be willing to work on a small-scale restoration at the confluence of Arcade Creek and Steelhead Creek. The area is very badly impacted, and it is known that salmon spawn upstream at Arcade Creek.

Ms. Allen asked how far have surveys been done up the creek? Is there a place where the density of camps goes down?

Ms. Tobias stated that the camps stop before you get to Arcade Creek, but there are some active camps near Arcade Park. The Save the American River Association is very active in that area, working on the issues caused by campers. There is a lot of debris in the confluence from the camps further up the stream.

Mr. Brown encouraged looking at the AB1617 statute and making recommendations to WCB about projects on Steelhead Creek. The Program can fund projects up to El Camino. For projects above, maybe AB 1617 would be appropriate since there are storm water capture benefits. He noted that WCB also has other funding available.

Chair Harris encouraged Ms. Tobias and Mr. Brady to think about a restoration project within the Parkway.

Ms. Tobias stated that they will take that into consideration. They had chosen Arcade Creek because there is easy access for any heavy equipment that might be needed.

Mr. Kevin Thomas (CDFW) stated that the benefits of the tributary to anadromous fish is negligible relative to the overall Lower American River. Money is better spent restoring the actual American River itself, as it supports thousands and thousands of salmon and steelhead. Those small tributaries support maybe 30 fish a season, which is very minor in the overall production of the system. He asked for that to be kept in mind as when thinking about how to spend funding and where to restore fisheries habitat in the lower American River.

Ms. Tobias stated that may be true, but perhaps it is because conditions are so dire in the creek. She also noted the CDFW is very supportive of the project.

Mr. Thomas stated that this is because the creek is at a lower elevation. He explained why it is not prime habitat for either of fall or spring run. He further explained that he was not saying this was a bad project but wanted to state the importance of getting the best bang for your buck with limited restoration funding.

Ms. Tobias commented that the addition of the gravel to the river upstream saw a large improvement, as she had never seen so many salmon as this year. She stated her understanding of the desire to get the most bang for your buck and emphasized that other wildlife would also benefit from this creek project.

Mr. Thomas noted that corridors are valuable for movement of animals in the city area as well.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Chair Harris noted the time and asked Executive Director Donnelly about the timing of the next advisory committee meeting.

Executive Director Donnelly stated that it is not scheduled yet, and staff would be sending out a poll out shortly for this fall.

Ms. Allen also noted that the Proposal Solicitation Notice will go out on June 1. There is a 60-day application period, and the committee should expect presentations in November. The earliest recommended projects could go to the Board would be February of 2021.

Chair Harris thanked everyone who participated today and said he is looking forward to next meeting, and if conditions allow, a Parkway tour.

Executive Director Donnelly thanked participants, those that attended the Skype training sessions, and staff.

Chair Harris adjourned the meeting at 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

John P. Donnelly
Executive Director
Wildlife Conservation Board