

Minutes of June 26, 2025 LCRCDD Board Meeting

CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Randy Krag of the LCRCDD Board of Directors, called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m., Jing Wang will take the Minutes.

Directors Present: Randy Krag, Harry Lyons, Kate Schmidt-Hopper, Shula Shoup, Merry Jo Velasquez, Steve Campbell, Joseph Sullivan

Directors Absent: none.

Others Present:

In Person: Julia Sullivan (Executive Director), Jing Wang (Bookkeeper), Erica Lundquist (NRCS District Conservationist), Wren Ward (Forestry Technician), Noah Cornell (Soil and Water Specialist), Taylor Nelson (NRCS Soil Conservationist), Emilie Winfield (North Coast Regional Soil Hub Director), Mary Mayeda (Area 1 NRCS Forester)

1. INTRODUCTIONS and consideration of extra items not appearing on the posted agenda.

- Emily Winfield from the North Coast Soil Hub was introduced.
- Randy proposed adding an action item to swear in a new board member, Joseph Sullivan.
 - Board secretary Merry Jo Velasquez administered the oath of office to Joseph Sullivan, who was officially sworn in and seated as a voting member of the board.

2. PUBLIC INPUT - Anyone may speak for three minutes on a subject not on the agenda; no action will be taken by the Board.

- None

3. BOARD REVIEW AND UPDATES

3.1 UPDATE on staff activities by Executive Director - Julia Sullivan

- Julia presented an update on staff activities and apologized for the delayed distribution of the staff report. She highlighted several key points:
 - Middletown Phase 1 has officially wrapped up with Caltrans approval.
 - The SALC proposal is progressing well with strong partner engagement in Lake County; further updates will be provided by Noah Cornell during this Board meeting.

- o Federal EQIP funding disruptions have been mitigated by channeling into other funding sources (such as CARCD-NIPFL and Cons Works-RCPP).
 - o New and reactivated funding sources such as CARCD-Forestry TA 23, and CFSC-CC have been helpful.
- Randy asked for a rough breakdown of staff time spent on “boots on the ground” implementation vs. office-based planning/reporting. Julia estimated a 50/50 split, noting the line is often blurred due to the integrated nature of project work.
- Jing and Julia confirmed that existing time tracking includes detailed classifications.
- Joe raised concerns about the rescheduling of the June board meeting, noting that the change was not easily discoverable by the public.
 - o Julia explained that the rescheduling was decided in March and confirmed that going forward, the website should be kept up to date with schedule changes.
- Merry Jo expressed concern about the tight timeline for fall 2026 implementation of the Kuulanapo project.
 - o Julia confirmed she and John will be meeting with LACO to discuss permitting and funding applications for CDFW and WCB grants.
- Randy, referencing the RCD’s annual report event, inquired about the feasibility of planning a public event multiple times a year for different projects.
 - o Julia expressed support for quarterly or semi-annual site visits to key project locations to help board members and partners better understand on-the-ground work.
 - o Emilie noted that Gold Ridge RCD holds an annual project tour in December, which could serve as a model.

3.2 ROLL CALL on ongoing projects with Board Hosts

- Randy Krag
 - o Asked about the Weed Management Area meetings.
 - Julia reported that staff members Larry and Greg have been participating.
 - o Inquired about a recent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) related to the Goat's Rue project.
 - Julia noted that the project has gained momentum. RCD staff will be in the field with TERA next week conducting invasive species removal.
- Harry Lyons
 - o Presented the Meisenbach Scholarship at Lower Lake High School. The presentation went well; a photo was taken and shared. The scholarship recipient was a strong academic achiever.
 - o Harry also received voting materials for upcoming elections from CSDA (California Special Districts Association) and SDRMA (Special District Risk Management Authority), and inquired about how he should proceed. The RCD Board decided to agendize the vote for next month’s Board meeting.
- Kate Schmidt-Hopper
 - o Delivered promised Popsicle party to students at Coyote Valley and Minnie Cannon Elementary Schools following the ‘Kids in the Creek’ event.
 - o She then shared with the Board “Thank You” notes from 4th graders for different projects. Kate will make sure to distribute these notes to the event presenters.

- Shula Shoup
 - No updates
- Merry Jo Velasquez
 - No updates
- Steve Campbell
 - Noted the Putah Creek debris as mentioned in a previous Board meeting is still there. Erica responded that she may have missed a follow-up action and will reconnect with Steve and revisit the matter.
- Joseph Sullivan
 - No updates

3.3 UPDATE on NRCS activities - Erica Lundquist

- Erica provided a comprehensive update on current NRCS activities and collaborations with RCD staff:
 - RCD staff have prepared forest management plans and are assisting with mapping and technical work for RCPP.
 - Erica currently has 12 active forestry inquiries and 26 total inquiries, including rangeland and agricultural projects.
 - State funding received by the RCD is being used to assist with older EQIP contracts that had stalled due to funding gaps, contractor availability, or other barriers.
 - Taylor Nelson (NRCS Soil Conservationist splitting time between the Ukiah and Lakeport Field Offices) has been instrumental in retrieving necessary records and files.
 - RCD staff, including Nicole and John, are reviewing these legacy contracts to determine ranking feasibility.
 - Erica noted that landowners in Lake County face more financial and logistical barriers than those in places like Mendocino County.
 - Erica thanked Wren for creating a new flyer explaining the EQIP process.
 - Erica and Julia will follow up regarding the Local Working Group meeting, which ideally should be held in July or August.

3.4 UPDATE from President and Directors

- Randy Krag
 - Shared that the Farm Bureau is surveying ranchers on predation issues, likely in anticipation of wolves reaching Lake County (noting their presence in Tulare County).
 - Randy inquired if the RCD can be a positive force in this issue, and encouraged the board and staff to stay alert for relevant funding opportunities or outreach programs, especially if tied to state or federal wildlife initiatives.
 - Julia shared that she and Noah have been attending Lake County Farm Bureau meetings, where predation has been a topic of discussion. She and other RCDs are also exploring work related to wildlife habitat conservation.
 - Kate noted that mountain lion predation on livestock is already a major concern in her area and that changes may be coming to Endangered Species Act protections.
 - Joe suggested the RCD could support public outreach to reduce practices that inadvertently attract predators.

- o Randy clarified that while direct intervention may not be the RCD's role, they could participate in conservation-based grant programs.
 - o Julia agreed and noted that the RCD could integrate education or outreach elements into future proposals (e.g., the current SALC proposal).
- Harry Lyons
 - o Harry attended the Konocti Fire Safe Council community event and spoke with various collaborators.
- Kate Schmidt-Hopper
 - o Kate attended a Lake County–Calistoga Chamber of Commerce event that included a presentation by the Guenoc Valley Resort project.
 - o The resort is moving forward in a scaled-down form, but there are ongoing fire evacuation and biodiversity concerns.
 - o Kate encouraged project representatives to connect with local resource conservation and land trust organizations and offered to help coordinate communication.
- Shula Shoup
 - o No updates
- Merry Jo Velasquez
 - o Merry Jo requested an update to the staff directory and organizational chart on the shared Google Drive, noting it still lists outdated information.
 - Julia responded that the team is currently migrating to a new Drive, which includes updated documentation. She will ensure current materials are shared with the board.
- Steve Campbell
 - o No updates
- Joseph Sullivan
 - o No updates

3.5 UPDATE from Strategic Planning Committee

- The Strategic Planning Committee, consisting of Kate, Steve, Julia, and John, met with consultant Amy Stork to begin the stakeholder outreach process for the district's new strategic plan.
- The committee developed a list of 10 external stakeholders for interviews to provide input into the plan. Interviews are being scheduled over the coming month or two.
- Board members should have received communication from Amy to schedule their own interviews. Several members confirmed they had done so.
- Amy facilitated a productive meeting and was praised for her effective facilitation and structured approach. Steve noted her experience stands out positively from other strategic planning consultants he's worked with.
- The committee discussed whether to include tribes in Amy's interview list but ultimately decided not to (Not wanting to include just 1 or 2 tribes, but not all of them). Julia explained

that RCD staff, particularly she and Noah, have already been conducting direct and ongoing outreach with local tribes as part of the SALC planning process.

3.6 UPDATE from Finance Committee

- Report by Randy and Julia
- The Finance Committee met the prior week to review the first draft of the FY2024–25 budget. This draft was prepared using a top-down budgeting approach. A bottom-up version will follow in the next phase of development, with a bottom-up incorporated budget anticipated for presentation at the next board meeting on July 17.
- The budget development process was reviewed in detail with the finance committee.

3.7 UPDATE from Executive Director Review Committee

- The committee, consisting of Kate and Merry Jo, reported that they are continuing to work on Executive Director personnel matters and will be ready to present items in a closed session at the July Board meeting.

4. ACTION – Includes discussion.

4.1 VOTE on Prescribed Burn Job Approval Authority (JAA) (Erica Lundquist/Mary Mayeda)

Discussion Highlights

- Mary Mayeda, Area 1 Forester with the NRCS, and Erica Lundquist provided an informational presentation on Job Approval Authority (JAA) for prescribed burning, including the implications for RCD staff and the proposed authorization for Wren Ward, RCD Forestry Technician.
- Job Approval Authority allows qualified NRCS or partner staff to design and sign off on certain conservation practices. Wren has met the qualifications for Level 1 (planning and advising on prescribed fire) and Level 2 (low-complexity pile burning) JAA, but final authorization requires submission of a formal letter from the RCD to the State Conservationist, Carlos Suarez.
- Mary emphasized on the importance of having staff with JAA to support slash treatment through pile burning, but made the clarification that **liability remains with the RCD** for partner staff actions, and not with NRCS.
- Concern was raised by Board Member Kate about potential liability exposure for the RCD, and Board Member Joe Sullivan expressed a need to further explore risk mitigation measures, including insurance adequacy.
- A future discussion may be held regarding legal liability and insurance coverage related to prescribed burn work conducted under JAA.

Motion to Approve: Harry Lyons

Seconded: Merry Jo Velasquez

Ayes: Unanimous

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: None

Result: Passed

4.2 VOTE on approval of May 15, 2025 meeting minutes

No Discussion .

Motion to Approve: Kate Schmidt-Hopper

Seconded: Merry Jo Velasquez

Ayes: Randy Krag, Harry Lyons, Steve Campbell, Joseph Sullivan, Kate Schmidt-Hopper, Merry Jo Velasquez

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: Shula Shoup

Result: Passed

4.3 VOTE on acceptance of monthly financial report

Discussion Highlights:

- Merry Jo inquired about grant profit margins appearing above 50%. Jing explained that these figures reflect timing differences due to the accrual basis of accounting, where payroll expenses may not yet be fully recorded.
- Randy noted a net income of \$392,700 year-to-date and asked why the RCD still experiences cash flow constraints. To which Jing explained that accrual revenue does not equate to cash received, and that the RCD will continue to receive cash reflected in the stated FY24-25 net income for some time to come.
- Despite delayed payments, Jing noted the RCD continues to pay all bills on time, and accounts payable are current with nothing over 30 days.

Motion to Approve: Merry Jo Velasquez

Seconded: Joseph Sullivan

Ayes: Randy Krag, Harry Lyons, Steve Campbell, Kate Schmidt-Hopper, Merry Jo Velasquez

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: Shula Shoup, Joseph Sullivan

Result: Passed

4.4 VOTE on adoption of *Injury and Illness Prevention Program*

Discussion Highlights:

- Julia provided an overview of the IIPP, describing it as a high-level policy document tailored to the RCD's current programmatic and field exposure risks.

- Nicole led the development of the policy, in collaboration with the Special District Risk Management Authority (SDRMA), as well as staff from Napa RCD and other regional partners.
- Julia noted that the field safety protocol is not a formal policy but will be made available to the board for awareness. Additional policies, such as for wildfire smoke exposure and heat illness prevention, are forthcoming and will be separate documents, not appendices to the IIPP.
- The board agreed that this version of the IIPP serves as a foundational document, subject to updates as the organization's risk profile evolves.

Motion to Approve: Kate Schmidt-Hopper

Seconded: Merry Jo Velasquez

Ayes: Unanimous

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: None

Result: Passed

4.5 VOTE on adoption of *Personnel Manual/Employee Handbook*

Discussion Highlights:

- Julia presented the updated Employee Handbook as the final major policy document in a months-long policy drafting process. The manual is based on CSDA's sample policies and includes elements from existing RCD policies, tailored to the Lake County RCD's operations.
- The manual includes several new or clarified benefits, notably:
 - o Jury Duty Pay – up to 40 hours paid leave.
 - o Bereavement Leave – up to 40 hours paid leave.
 - o Both benefits are prorated based on employee FTE status and are included in the upcoming budget.
- Julia emphasized that portions of the handbook marked in yellow highlight indicate internal language (e.g., welcome message, procedures) that do not require board approval. The board agreed to approve the policy as-is with the understanding that minor content will be completed by staff.
- Kate asked to replace “mission” with “organizational purpose” or “purpose statement.”
- Steve noted that the non-discrimination section includes a specific clause on gender identity, and asked if this item is not already covered in the broader non-discrimination policy, and its potential impact on federal funding. Julia explained the intent is to ensure inclusivity and staff belonging.
- Steve suggested including “no vaping” in the smoking policy.
- Steve inquired about paid holidays, highlighting Cesar Chavez Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, and Native American Heritage Day. Julia explained the rationale behind each, emphasizing alignment with RCD values and tribal partnerships, and that they are reflected in budgeted personnel costs.

- Julia Introduced a variable COLA model: Employees below the salary midpoint receive a 2.5% COLA; employees above the midpoint receive the equivalent dollar increase (max of dollar amount below midpoint), not a percentage.
- General feedback from the board included appreciation for the comprehensive nature of the manual, thoughtful benefit additions, and alignment with organizational values and budget capacity.

Motion to Approve: Harry Lyons

Seconded: Kate Schmidt-Hopper

Ayes: Unanimous

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: None

Result: Passed

5. **DISCUSSION** – Does not include action.

5.1 Update on SALC proposal (Noah Cornell)

- Presented by Noah Cornell, RCD Soil and Water Specialist
- Lake County RCD is co-developing a \$500,000 planning grant application through the Department of Conservation's SALC Program.
- The grant spans three years, with a focus on agricultural land conservation, greenhouse gas reduction, and infill development planning.
- RCD submitted a pre-proposal in January, which was accepted; staff have since developed the full proposal with intensive stakeholder engagement.
- Stakeholder Engagement:
 - Outreach conducted to a wide network of local organizations and agencies, including:
 - Lake County Farm Bureau, Lake County Land Trust, Middletown Rancheria, County Agricultural Commissioner, North Coast Opportunities (NCO), and Department of Community Development, UC Davis, NRCS, among others.
 - Several letters of support and letters of commitment have been received.
- Planned Work Components:
 1. Community Engagement
 2. Mapping & Economic Analysis
 3. Evaluation Tools & Incentives
 4. Integration with County Conservation Goals
- Kate noted that UC Davis Ag Extension is opening a new Middletown office in partnership with the Middletown Tribe.
- Randy emphasized the importance and challenges of preserving farmland amid political and economic pressures, voicing strong support for long-term agricultural viability in the county.
- Joe raised questions about integration with local area plans and the list of committed partners.
- Julia noted that the RCD is the primary project implementer, while the County serves as lead applicant for eligibility.

- A full proposal will be submitted on Thursday, June 26th.

5.2 Presentation on North Coast Soil Hub (Emilie Winfield)

- Emilie Winfield provided an in-depth power point presentation of the North Coast Soil Hub, a regional collaboration formed in 2016 among RCDs to support soil health, climate-smart agriculture, and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers.
- The Soil Hub is governed through a Memorandum of Understanding and Memorandum of Agreement among North Coast RCDs, supporting joint fundraising, outreach, and administration.
- Board members expressed strong support and appreciation for the collaboration.
- Noah Cornell shared how the Soil Hub has been as a vital resource and an essential part of his RCD experience.
- Randy stated his appreciation for the current RCD Ag program, which was not an RCD program before.
-

6. AGENDA ITEM REQUESTS

- *See 3.2 ROLL CALL on ongoing projects with Board Hosts/Harry Lyons*

7. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to Adjourn: Merry Jo Velasquez

Seconded: Joseph Sullivan

Ayes: Unanimous

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstained: None

Result: Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

The next LCRCDD Board meeting will take place on July 17, 2025