



AG + OPEN SPACE
SONOMA COUNTY

SONOMA COUNTY OPEN SPACE DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPROVED MINUTES

**Virtual Meeting Due to Sonoma County's Shelter in Place Order
April 27, 2023 | 5:00 pm**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Thembi Borrás	Paul Martin	Angel Lopez	Jan McFarland
Josh Proctor	Bill Smith	Mark Stapp	Jesús Guzmán
Steve Rabinowitsh*	Michelle Whitman	Wendy Eliot	

* AB2449 Teleconferencing Participant

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Kristina Tierney	Cary Fargo	Don McEnhill	Curt Nichols
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STAFF PRESENT:

Misti Arias, General Manager; Amy Ricard, Community Resources Manager; Jennifer Kuszmar, Acquisition Manager; Monica Delmartini, Stewardship Specialist; Sara Ortiz, Administrative Aide; Michelle Nozzari, Administrative Aide; Aldo Mercado, County Counsel; Mariah Robson, Advisory Committee Clerk

Call to Order

Chair Thembi Borrás called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. Chair Borrás took roll call. Steve Rabinowitsh, in accordance with AB2449, notified the legislative body that he was participating remotely as he was traveling on official business.

Public Comment

Susan Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network and Madrone Audubon Society, commented on an Ag + Open Space DEI blog regarding the role of grazing in combatting climate change. Ms. Kirks also commented on the Paula Lane Open Space Preserve and her concern for the American badger habitat on the preserve.

Approval of Minutes from March 23, 2023

Chair Borrás asked for any comments or revisions to the March 23, 2023 minutes. There were none. A vote took place, and all were in favor and the minutes were approved. Jan McFarland, Jesús Guzmán, Mark Stapp, and Wendy Eliot abstained as they were not present at the March Meeting.

General Manager's Report

- A Burn Boss is being contracted to assist with Saddle Mountain Vegetation Management projects.
- Outings and Education Contracts and Forever Forestville Conservation Easement Second Amendment go to the Board on May 16, 2023.
- Soda Springs Open Space Preserve will go to the Board on May 23, 2023
- Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve, the Ayers Addition, Chanslor Ranch, Regional Conservation Partnership Program Vital Streams and Forests, Denner Ranches Conservation Easement, Environmental Services Contract and the Lafranchi project will go to the Board on June 6, 2023.
- The recruitment for two Community Relations Assistants is ongoing and 148 applications were received.
- Sonoma Land Trust is hosting a sign unveiling ceremony at Sonoma Mountain Vernal Pools next Thursday, May 4, 2023.
- Ag + Open Space will be presenting at the Together Bay Area conference on Wednesday, May 10, 2023.
- We received 35 proposals requesting \$7.5 million in the latest grant cycle for the Vegetation Management program and we have \$3 million in funding this year. Recommendations will be presented to the Board on June 6, 2023.
- The 2023 Living with Fire – Sonoma County Forest Conservation Conference is taking place June 23 and 24, 2023 at Shone Farm. The aim of the conference is to support our community's wildfire resilience and forest health through collaboration and sharing best management practices to protect our communities, land, and natural resources.
- Ms. Arias discussed that Ag + Open Space work is not always shared with the Advisory Committee until projects are complete. Going forward, updates about projects in process will be presented to the Advisory Committee more regularly. Currently two projects have closed, four offers are in negotiation, nine appraisals are in process, and there are 36 active acquisitions. However, real estate projects are protected. Therefore, due to confidentiality laws, some transactional information related to projects cannot be shared without landowner consent. Ms. Arias also highlighted the Appraisal Model developed by Acquisition Specialist Pierre Ratte. This predictive model assists in estimating the cost of land.

Chair Borrás opened the meeting for questions and comments from Advisory Committee members and members of the public.

Ms. Kirks, representing Paula Lane Action Network and Madrone Audubon Society, brought awareness to the Together Bay Area Conference happening on May 9-12 and that Ms. Arias will be a speaker.

Update on Fuels Management at Saddle Mountain

Monica Delmartini, Stewardship Specialist, provided an update on fuels management and prescribed fire planning and implementation on Saddle Mountain Open Space Preserve. Saddle Mountain OSP is a 960-acre property located in Rincon Valley, originally inhabited by the Mishewal – Wappo people who stewarded the land. Ag + Open Space finalized the Management Plan for the preserve in 2019; at the time, one of the main concerns on the Preserve was the potential for



encroaching Douglas-fir to out-compete diverse native hardwood species. The preserve burned in the 2020 Glass Fire, prompting a prioritization of removal of fire-killed Douglas-fir saplings in otherwise healthy oak woodlands and hardwood stands to reduce hazard fuel loads. The planning process for this work included extensive collaboration with consultants, a Wappo Tribal representative, and CAL FIRE, all of whom remain involved with project planning and implementation. A 120-acre understory thinning project and two shaded fuel breaks were planned, and funding secured via a Coastal Conservancy grant. To date, approximately three quarters of the project has been completed with the remainder expected to wrap up this summer. 20 timber and 7 grassland burn units have been delineated with burn plans currently in development, and broadcast burning with either CAL FIRE or Audubon Canyon Ranch's Fire Forward program may be possible as early as fall 2023. CAL FIRE has been burning piles associated with the thinning work at no cost to Ag + Open Space, and this work is nearly complete. These projects have provided rich opportunities for community engagement and collaboration, public outings, and information sharing with conservation partners, and serve as an example of multi-benefit vegetation management that balances ecological health with hazard reduction goals. Additionally, a strong partnership with Sonoma State University has created numerous opportunities for research on the preserve, focused mainly on forest stand structure mapping and analysis, tracking pre- and post-fire changes, and testing the effectiveness of thinning treatments via fire modeling. Publications associated with this research are available to the community and may help guide appropriate forest stewardship by private and public landowners.

Chair Borrás opened the meeting up to the members and the public.

Member Jesus Guzman asked if the Mishewal-Wappo Tribe had been engaged in the fuel management objectives of this project and if so were individuals being compensated. Ms. Delmartini explained that yes, the tribe had been engaged and were being compensated.

For more information, please feel free to contact Ms. Delmartini at Ag + Open Space. The PowerPoint presentation is available upon request.

Recreational Fee Lands Transfers & Public Access

Ms. Arias discussed recreational fee lands transfers and public access. This is the beginning of the conversation and a look at the role Ag + Open Space is playing in providing public access. Ms. Arias gave an overview of what we have done to this date: purchased 26 new parks and preserves (which do not include park additions or Matching Grant Projects), 17,000 acres of land that are open to public access, and \$140 million contributed. Some of the most popular properties include Sunset Beach, Mom's Beach, Taylor Mountain, North Sonoma Mountain, Laguna Trails, and Fitch Mountain. Twelve of the properties have not been opened yet to the public. They have been bought and held for various reasons. Ms. Arias outlined different projects, the issues involved, and several scenarios of transferring and public access in the future.

For more information, please feel free to contact Misti Arias at Ag & Open Space.

Matching Grant Project Review Subcommittee

Chair Borrás explained that currently there was only one active member on the subcommittee and asked for volunteers. Ms. Ricard explained the time commitment of this subcommittee and



reminded the Committee that members who may have a conflict of interest in a property should refrain from joining.

Member Jesús Guzmán volunteered to join. Chair Borrás took a roll call. A vote took place, and all were in favor.

Projects in Negotiations

Chair Borrás asked for any comments or questions on the Projects in Negotiations spreadsheet. There were none.

Announcements from Advisory Committee Members

Chair Borrás asked for any announcements from Advisory Committee members. There were none.

Adjournment

Chair Borrás adjourned the meeting at 6:22.

Next Meeting: May 25, 2023

This meeting will be in person with an option for members of the public to join via zoom. The meeting place is: 747 Mendocino Ave, Ste 100, Large Conference Room, Santa Rosa

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Nozzari
Advisory Committee Clerk in Training

