County of Santa Cruz

Health Services Agency - Environmental Health

Fish and Wildlife Advisory Commission

(831) 454-2022 TDD/TTY - Call 711 http://www.scceh.org

Meeting Minutes
September 3, 2026

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – 6:32 pm
2. **ROLL CALL**

District	Commissioner	Status	Commissioner	Status
I	Chris Berry	E	Kevin Butler	P
II	Brian Woodward	P	David Somerton	P
III	Liz Alter	P	Jon Jankovitz	P
IV	Brooke Sampson	P	Daniela Suarez	P
V	Jenni Gomez	R	Joanne Brown	P

P = Present R = Remote E = Excused A = Absent

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES/2025 GRANT STATUS REPORT:** Com Brown requested her report in the minutes be revised to state the potential harm to CEQA identified in the webinar. Com Sampson requested that the Marine Mammal Center send an update once the project was completed, Com Brown was impressed with the completed by Coastal Watershed Council.
   - **Approve Minutes with Amendment from Com Brown**
     - **Motion**: Sampson, **Second**: Somerton,
     - **Abstain:** Woodward, Suarez
     - **All Other Ayes:** Minutes approved

   - **Accept the 2025 Grant Status Report:**
     - **Motion**: Woodward, **Second**: Somerton,
     - **All Other Ayes:** Minutes approved

4. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:**
   - Commissioners requested an agendized item be created for the November meeting to discuss the public comment received regarding drone disturbance to nesting ospreys.

5. **PRESENTATION BY COASTAL WATERSHED COUNCIL ON 2025 GRANT:** Patrick Lopez, River Ecologist, presented on the work completed. The project used 355 community members, including 19 members experiencing homelessness to clear highly invasive species around the San Lorenzo River Levee. The goal was to remove 1,000sqft of invasives and ended up exceeding that goal at 3,109sqft. The work with homeless community members had to be relaunched in June 2026, after the Downtown Streets team program ended in October 2025. Commissioner comments are as follows:
    - **Com Somerton:** Do the non-natives start taking over again?
        - Lopez: Constant work is required to maintain the areas, which is part of the work of community members. In addition, there is work done to help establish the native plantings by mulching and watering.

6. **PRESENTATION BY WOLF SCHOOL ON 2025 GRANT:** The representative from WOLF School had to cancel and was unable to attend the meeting. Instead, Phil Kohlmetz from International Bird Rescue (IBR) presented on work of their project. Reported that patient load has been consistent with previous years, which average 300+ birds cared for from Santa Cruz County alone. IBR is still dealing with avian influenza, and their protocol has become a standard of care.
    - **Com Somerton:** I have been seeing many Common Murre's that are ill or dead. Are those being sent to IBR?
        - Kohlmetz: We are seeing them and they are a common bird to receive care. The ones that make it to our facilities often recover well.
    - **Com Alter**: Are you planning for the large El Nino predicted for this year?
        - Kohlmetz: We are not actively planning but feel well positioned to respond to any emergency that happens.

7. **GENERAL STATUS UPDATE FROM CDFW WARDEN:** Lt. Juarez, Supervisor for Santa Cruz County, reported on the active work being done. It has been a busy deer season, and several deer poaching cases are being filed, including a large one that came in as a CALTIP. CDFW have been working on the Santa Cruz launch ramp and ticketed individuals with infractions such as unlicensed Bluefin Tuna take, and over limits for rockfish. CDFW have also been working with Pajaro Flood Control district to clear out homeless encampments in the flood zones prior to the rainy season. One case of a deer fawn being brought from Colorado as a pet, which was released to Native animal rescue. Unfortunately, the fawn had to be euthanized due to potential for spread of chronic wasting disease, which is not yet widely spread to California. CDFW is currently understaffed in the region, with several members having recently moved to work in less expensive regions. Currently just two wardens are active, but

one new warden will be coming out of field training soon, as well as a new Santa Cruz Harbor officer.

- **Com Gomez:** Regarding the fawn, is there any action that could be taken preemptively to protect against spread before the testing comes back?
  - Juarez: The drop off was anonymous, so staff do not know specifically where the deer was being kept. Should the fawn be positive for wasting disease, additional investigation will be completed.

- **Com Brown:** Do you anticipate more staff filling the empty positions?
  - Juarez: Likely not until 2027, but we can draw from neighboring offices should there be a high staffing demand situation.

8. **2026 PUBLIC GRANT PROGRAM:** Staff provided an overview of the current FWAC Grant Trust Fund and offered recommendations to both end the grant pause for 2026 and avoid unnecessary pauses in the future. In future grant cycles, Staff will bring a budget summary to the September meeting. That will be used to make two decisions, 1) determine if full budgeted amount should be issued, and 2) what budget should be requested for next year. Those decisions were voted as follows:

   - **Approve the Removal of the Pause on 2026 Grants**
     - **Motion:** Somerton, **Second**: Woodward,
     - **All Ayes:** The pause for the 2026 Grants has been removed.

   - **Approve Release of 2026 Grant Request for Proposals for $10,000 in grants, with Habitat Restoration as the area of interest.**
     - **Motion:** Butler, **Second**: Alter,
     - **All Ayes:** RFP approved for release on 9/4/2026

   - **Recommend Budget for 2027 Grants be $35,000**
     - **Motion:** Alter, **Second**: Sampson,
     - **All Ayes:** Staff will request a budget of $35,000 for the 2027-28 Fiscal Year.

9. **STATUS UPDATE FROM WILDLIFE CROSSING PROJECT:** Staff and Com Gomez provided an update on Safe Passage Santa Cruz. A County Press Release was completed, and the project currently has 6 participants. Com Brown suggested notifying Public Works and Animal Control about the project. Commissioners will be provided with a digital flier to distribute.

10. STAFF AND COMMISSIONER REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- **Staff Reports:**
  - Staff attended a training on identification and treatment of Invasive Shot Hole Borer with the intention of incorporating the training into work done for the Streamwood Program.
- **Commissioner Reports:**
  - **Com Somerton**: Recently visited Moss Landing and counted 11 dead bull sea lions, which were likely killed by Domoic Acid poisoning. Also found a dead Northern Fur Seal near Seacliff that was tagged. He notified National Marine Fisheries regarding both.
  - **Com Suarez**: Will be moving and will no longer be a commissioner.
  - **Com Sampson**: Will likely be ending role as a commissioner in the new year.

11. ADJOURN. **Motion to Adjourn:** Butler, **Second:** Somerton
All Aye: meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.