
**SAN DIEGUITO RIVER PARK
JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY
Minutes of July 18, 2025**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Jill MacDonald - Chair
Chris Khoury – Vice Chair
Brian Elliot, Alternate
Consuelo Martinez
Andrew Hayes, Alternate
Jenny Maeda
Terry Gaasterland

MEMBERS ABSENT

Terra Lawson-Remer
Marni von Wilpert
Dustin Fuller

VISITORS/STAFF PRESENT

Shawna Anderson
Dewanda Vandermost
Nathan Lacy
Wayne Brechtel
Lizzy Bendrick
Kristina Leyva
Karen Lare
Udo Wahn
Polly Wheatley
Beth Nelson
Rick Leyva
Jeff Carmel
Trista Garcia Silvia
John Davis
Jeff Meyer
Barbara Casino

REPRESENTING

City of Solana Beach
Citizens Advisory Committee
City of San Diego District 1
City of Escondido
County of San Diego Dist. 2
City of Poway
City of Del Mar

REPRESENTING

County of San Diego Dist. 3
City of San Diego Dist. 5
22nd Agricultural District, Ex Officio

REPRESENTING

San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Dieguito River Park JPA, General Counsel
County Parks & Recreation Department
Friends of San Dieguito River Valley
Del Mar Lagoon Committee
Del Mar Lagoon Committee
Friends of San Dieguito River Valley
San Dieguito Planning Group
Resident
Friends of San Dieguito River Valley
San Diego ASLA
Rancho Santa Fe Resident
Southwest Strategies Group
Del Mar Resident

Introduction and Announcements:

Chair MacDonald convened the meeting at 11:08 a.m. A roll call was taken and a quorum of six board members were present to begin the meeting. Chair MacDonald dedicated the meeting to the memory of Maggie Brown, a long-time member of the Citizen's Advisory Committee and the President of the Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley.

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of the Minutes of June 20, 2025

Board Member Martinez moved to approve the minutes and Board Member Khoury seconded the motion. All in favor.

Yes votes: MacDonald, Khoury, Gaasterland, Martinez, Elliot, Maeda, Hayes

No votes: None

Absent: Lawson-Remer, von Wilpert

Abstain: None

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Anderson reported that the 22nd District Agricultural Association resumed the Fairgrounds 2050 Master Plan according to the newspaper and that public outreach efforts have started with presentations being scheduled with local city councils, including those of Solana Beach and Del Mar.

Anderson stated that the JPA has a vested interest in the outcomes of the Master Plan and recommended that the JPA formally invite representatives from the 22nd District Agricultural Association to present at a future JPA meeting. Chair McDonald and other Board Members expressed strong support for this recommendation, emphasizing the importance of the JPA's inclusion in ongoing discussions and outreach efforts related to the Master Plan.

The Board agreed that a presentation from the 22nd Agricultural District representatives during the fall would be beneficial and will inquire about scheduling.

CAC Chair's Report – Board Member Khoury stated that the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) did not meet in July due to the Independence Day holiday; therefore, no report was presented.

Public Comment – None

DISCUSSION/ACTION

1. Potential Termination of Open Space Easement Grant Deed on Polo Fields

Recommendation: Oppose City of San Diego's proposed termination of Open Space land use restrictions on Polo Fields site and authorize Executive Director Anderson to testify at Council hearing.

Chair McDonald introduced the item regarding the City of San Diego's potential termination of the Open Space Easement Grant Deed for the area commonly known as the Polo Fields, also referred to as the Surf Cup Fields. The property lies within the JPA's Focused Planning Area and includes a segment of the Coast to Crest Trail alignment adjacent to the river.

City of San Diego Board Member Alternate Brian Elliot, representing the City of San Diego, disclosed that due to the item being subject to active litigation and pending City Council action, he would recuse himself and temporarily exited the meeting. Meeting resumed after Elliot's exit.

Executive Director Anderson presented a report recommending that the JPA oppose the City of San Diego's proposed termination of open space land use restrictions on the City's open space property including the Surf Cup lease area (formerly Polo Fields) and adjacent open space designated in the Fairbanks Ranch Country Club Specific Plan. Anderson further recommended that the Board authorize the submission of a formal letter of opposition and public testimony at an upcoming City Council hearing.

The 616-acre site, located within the San Dieguito River Park planning area, is designated for natural and recreational open space. The proposed termination is linked to ongoing litigation and would remove long-standing protections without meaningful public input. Executive Director Anderson emphasized the JPA's consistent advocacy for preserving the site's open space character, noting that the property has been the subject of multiple investigations and lawsuits due to land use violations and that lease restrictions aren't being enforced. The City's current proposal contradicts commitments made in 1983 and may undermine CEQA mitigation tied to surrounding development.

A visual presentation illustrated the site's location and its proximity to sensitive habitats, including 1.3 miles of river frontage and a critical wildlife corridor. Anderson noted that public access remains limited, and the Coast to Crest Trail is still incomplete nine years after the Surf Cup lease was signed and alignment is subject to erosion and exposure adjacent to noise and pollution.

Anderson also referenced a 2012 City action to dedicate City owned open space property as parkland, including the subject site, which failed despite broad support, due to a City Attorney opinion regarding previous lease terms. Anderson warned that without the deed restrictions, the land could be used for many uses not open space, or rezoned for future development,

Executive Director Anderson recommended that she be authorized to:

- Submit a formal letter of opposition to the City Council and Mayor.
- Provide public testimony at the scheduled hearing.
- Advocate for a transparent public process and long-term vision for the site consistent with the San Dieguito River Park Concept Plan.

Executive Director Anderson concluded that removing the land use restrictions would eliminate enforcement authority, reduce public accountability, and jeopardize the ecological integrity and recreational value of the site.

Public Comment-

Public comment was received from several community members and organizational representatives, all expressing strong opposition to the City of San Diego's proposed termination of open space land use restrictions on the open space property.

Karen Lare, local resident and member of the Del Mar Lagoon Committee, thanked the Board for addressing the issue and described the proposal as a "land grab." She supported the JPA's position and criticized the City's failure to enforce grant deed restrictions, citing excessive use of the site incompatible with its open space designation.

Beth Nelson, member of the San Dieguito Planning Group and Rancho Santa Fe resident, described the transformation of the site into a commercial sports venue. She raised concerns about the lack of environmental review, traffic congestion, and public safety risks, referencing a recent Surf Cup event that coincided with a brush fire.

Jeff Carmel, board member of Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, condemned the City's actions as a "backroom deal" and alleged collaboration between Deputy City Attorney and Surf Cup Sports to bypass legal protections. He emphasized the original intent of the 1983 deed and called for the JPA to defend the open space designation.

Polly Wheatley, also representing Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, urged the JPA to oppose the termination in the strongest terms and requested authorization for the Executive Director to testify at the upcoming City Council hearing. She spoke in memory of Maggie Brown and reaffirmed the organization's commitment to protecting the River Valley.

Kristina Leyva, board member of Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, echoed concerns about the lessee's repeated violations and questioned the City's motivations. She highlighted public safety risks, including emergency access limitations during large events, and supported the JPA's opposition and Executive Director testimony.

John Davis, Rancho Santa Fe resident, expressed personal and historical ties to the area and opposed any changes to the 1983 deed. He cited environmental and safety concerns, including flood risk, habitat sensitivity, and zoning protections. He warned that removing restrictions would breach public trust and enable incompatible commercial activity.

Dr. Udo Wahn, Del Mar resident, frequent user of the Coast to Crest trail, and member of the Del Mar Lagoon Committee, supported previous comments and emphasized the need to hold Surf Cup Sports accountable for trail improvements and open space commitments. He voiced strong support for the JPA's position.

Beth Nelson returned to the podium to provide an additional comment. She noted that while CEQA protections had been discussed, there is pending legislation in Sacramento that could significantly weaken those protections making it even more critical to uphold the existing grant deed restrictions on the Surf Cup Fields property.

A local resident inquired about the impact of a proposed El Camino Real realignment on Coastal Commission jurisdiction. It was clarified that the coastal zone boundary is fixed and does not change with road realignments unless formally amended.

Another speaker raised concerns about flood risk and recommended delaying changes to the easement. They also suggested submitting a letter to the editor to raise public awareness about the potential public cost of removing deed restrictions.

Chair MacDonald thanked all attendees for their participation and thoughtful input. She emphasized the significance of the discussion and the shared commitment to protecting the San Dieguito River Valley. Chair MacDonald announced that she would attend the upcoming City Council hearing to formally oppose the City of San Diego's proposed termination of the Open Space Grant Deed land use restrictions.

Board Member Martinez moved to authorize the Executive Director to prepare and submit a letter opposing the potential termination of the Open Space Easement Grant Deed restrictions by the City of San Diego to the City Council and provide public testimony at the Council hearing. Board Member Gaasterland seconded the motion. The motion was amended to add that the JPA grant the Executive Director and Board Chair MacDonald discretion to issue a letter to the editor if deemed appropriate, without requiring further board action. The amended motion was accepted by both the original mover and the seconder.

All in favor.

Yes votes: MacDonald, Khoury, Gaasterland, Martinez, Maeda, Hayes

No votes: None

Absent: Lawson-Remer, von Wilpert, Elliot

Abstain: None

2. **Update on Coast to Crest Trail at Horsepark (Oral Report)**

Recommendation: None

Executive Director Anderson provided an update on the Coast to Crest Trail at Horse Park. The previously washed-out section has been repaired, and native vegetation will be replanted along the riverbank to restore lost habitat.

A separate issue remains with a sinking trail bridge caused by a failed culvert that undermined the bridge foundation. A temporary detour, approximately three feet wide, has been implemented in coordination with the Horse Park operator (HITS) and is now open to the public. New signage has been installed, including messages encouraging respect for equestrian operations.

Executive Director Anderson reported that the culvert remains a concern due to ongoing erosion. The JPA is exploring two potential solutions:

1. Full bridge replacement with a longer span not requiring foundations.
2. Connecting two existing bridge segments to bypass the damaged area.

Cost estimates are being developed, and the JPA plans to present options to the 22nd Agricultural District, which is responsible for the failed culvert, and seek full or partial funding.

Legal counsel noted that the JPA is shifting to a proactive approach by presenting specific solutions to facilitate cooperation. Future erosion along the trail may require relocating the trail within the HITS leasehold, which will involve further coordination.

Public Comment- None

INFORMATION

3. **Project Status Updates**

- a) **Osuna Segment of Coast to Crest Trail** –Executive Director Anderson reported that the project is experiencing delays due to complications involving an underground recycled water pipeline. The pipeline is located approximately 50 feet below ground, and its exact location is unknown, complicating the placement of bridge piers, which must reach a depth of 90 feet. JPA Staff is working with Olivenhain Municipal Water District to explore solutions.
- b) **Reach the Beach Fairgrounds Trail** – No report
- c) **San Dieguito Lagoon Phase II Restoration (aka W-19)** – No report
- d) **CTC Trail – East San Pasqual and Sutherland Gaps Project** – Progress continues on planning and design for the two trail gaps. JPA Staff are preparing CEQA documentation and have held multiple meetings with stakeholders and County officials regarding permitting and process requirements. Updates will be provided as plans become more defined.

6. **Coordination Reports (oral)**

- a. **San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy** – No report
- b. **Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley**- Jeff Carmel reiterated concerns regarding the absence of a state-mandated disaster evacuation plan for the Surf Cup Sports operation. He noted that the issue had been raised with City staff multiple times over the past six months without receiving a response. Mr. Carmel emphasized that Surf Cup hosts thousands of visitors

daily and are located in both flood and fire zones, making the lack of an evacuation plan a serious public safety issue.

JPA San Diego Board Member Alternate Brian Elliot confirmed that the Fire Department had been contacted about the matter and a response was still pending.

- c. **Volcan Mountain Foundation** – No report
- d. **San Dieguito Lagoon Committee** – Karen Lare reported ongoing coordination with the City of Del Mar and partner agencies to address illegal fishing, trash, trespassing, and habitat impacts. The Committee plans to recommend updated fishing regulations and signage to the City Council. Ms. Lare encouraged use of the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy's hotline to report violations.

7. **Jurisdictional Status Reports** –

City of Escondido: Condolences were expressed for Maggie Brown; commitment made to share JPA updates with City Council and subcommittees.

City of Poway and others: Members echoed appreciation for Maggie Brown's legacy.

City of Solana Beach: Emphasized transparency and public awareness regarding Surf Cup Fields discussions.

Citizens Advisory Committee: Expressed condolences and support for continuing Maggie Brown's legacy through JPA efforts.

8. **Correspondence** – None

Chair MacDonald adjourned the meeting at 12:38 p.m.

These minutes were approved by board action on September 19, 2025



Shawna Anderson, Executive Director