

**SAN DIEGUITO RIVER PARK
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Minutes of May 1, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Chris Khoury
Rich Risner
Bob Byrnes
Candice Bowman
Kelly Clemshaw
Udo Wahn
Polly Wheatley
Liz Gabrych
Dorothy McLin
Patty Heyden
Victoria Touchstone
Beatrice Darimont
Jennifer Disser
Julie Klein
Peter Shapiro
Pam Heatherington
Jim Smith
Jonathan Applebaum
Kristina Leyva
Bill Adelson

REPRESENTING

CAC, Chair
American Society of Architects
California Native Plant Society
Carmel Valley Planning Board
Del Dios Town Council
Del Mar Lagoon Committee
Friends of San Dieguito River Valley
League of Women Voters
Lomas Serenas Property Owners
Ramona Trails Assoc.
Rancho Bernardo Planning Board
San Diego Bird Alliance
San Diego Mountain Biking Assoc.
San Diego Trails Alliance
San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy
Sierra Club
Torrey Pines Community Planning Group
Volcan Mountain Foundation
Coastal Property Owner
Eastern Property Owner

VISITORS/STAFF PRESENT

Shawna Anderson
Dewanda Vandermost
Nathan Lacy
Rob Hutsel

San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Dieguito River Park JPA
San Diego River Park Foundation

Roll Call and Introductions

Chair Khoury called the meeting to order at 10:34 AM. A roll call was taken with a quorum of 20 committee members present to begin the meeting.

Approval of Minutes – 2/6/2026

No amendments or changes were requested for the draft minutes. Pam Heatherington made the motion to approve the minutes and Candace Bowman seconded the motion.

All members were in favor.

Abstain: None

Chair's Report –

Chair Khoury summarized the April 3, 2026 JPA meeting:

The JPA unanimously approved sending a letter to the City of San Diego, as recommended by the CAC, requesting evaluation of an interim reservoir level of approximately 295 feet, application of a

holistic, risk-balanced approach in coordination with the Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD), recognition of increased wildfire and environmental risks associated with low water levels, and transparent coordination with relevant stakeholders. The JPA's letter was provided to the CAC.

Chair Khoury also noted that the JPA approved the JPA's FY26-27 annual budget.

Chair Khoury further provided an update on the Executive Director Search Committee, which conducted a nationwide recruitment effort and received approximately 30 qualified applications. Seven candidates were interviewed via Zoom, and two finalists were selected for closed-session board interviews scheduled for May 15. The Chair expressed confidence in identifying a strong successor.

Executive Director's Report –

Executive Director Anderson announced the annual Volunteer Appreciation Party, scheduled for May 31 at 12:00 p.m. at the La Valle Coastal Club, and invited all CAC members to attend. She also reported the acquisition of SDRP's first electric vehicle, funded through JPA reserves, a donation from Chair Khoury, and support from the Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley; the vehicle will be based at the lagoon ranger station for coastal operations.

She further provided updates on projects and programs, including new and updated interpretive panels at the Grand Avenue Overlook, featuring a forthcoming Kumeyaay heritage panel and revised lagoon restoration signage, along with plans for a future unveiling event. Recent outreach efforts included educational programs at Sikes Adobe, ethnobotany workshops, and participation in local Earth Day events. She also noted that the Coast to Crest Trail would be closed on May 3 for the Belgian Waffle Ride, an annual cycling event that supports the River Park with approximately \$15,000 in funding.

Public Comment –

- Jonathan Applebaum of the Volcan Mountain Foundation provided an update on forest resilience efforts supported by a Wildlife Conservation Board grant. Approximately 90 of 181 acres have been treated, and over 1,800 native seedlings have been planted. Positive detections of California spotted owl were noted, prompting a temporary pause in work through the nesting season, with activities expected to resume in the fall. He also highlighted volunteer opportunities, participation in the JPA's Watershed Explorers program, and the Foundation's annual Dinner Dance at Camp Stevens.
- Polly Wheatley (Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley) and Kristina Leyva (Coastal Property Owner) provided an update on the legal challenge brought to Surf Cup by the local homeowner's association concerning the Polo Fields property. Implementation of the City Council's decision to remove deed restrictions is currently on hold due to the pending homeowners association lawsuit seeking enforcement of existing lease limitations. The case remains ongoing and has been delayed due to judicial reassignment. A separate Sierra Club lawsuit challenges the project's CEQA exemption and raises concerns regarding environmental impacts and public access restrictions.
- Patty Heyden of the Ramona Trails Association provided an update on the Santa Maria Creek Greenway and trail project, which is planned to eventually connect to the Coast to Crest Trail. While the project recently received a merit award, concerns were raised regarding slow County

progress, particularly in property acquisition. She also highlighted ongoing community efforts, including cleanups, coordination with agencies, funding efforts to address invasive species and fire risk, and a private donor's interest in acquiring and donating key parcels. She stated that a trail route to the CTC Trail is yet to be determined.

DISCUSSION/ACTION

1. Presentation – Rob Hutsel, CEO – San Diego River Park Foundation

Rob Hutsel, CEO of the San Diego River Park Foundation, provided an overview of the organization's mission, history, and current initiatives. He described the Foundation's role in advancing stewardship of the San Diego River watershed through conservation, restoration, education, and community engagement, including removal of significant amounts of river debris and management of over 3,000 acres of land across more than 100 conserved properties.

Mr. Hutsel highlighted recent accomplishments, including acquisition of key properties such as Mildred Falls, expansion of habitat conservation efforts, and development of educational programming serving local students. He also reviewed progress toward implementing the San Diego River Park vision, including trail development and major projects in Mission Valley such as the newly completed Grant Park.

He emphasized shared challenges and opportunities between the San Diego and San Dieguito watersheds and expressed interest in strengthening collaboration, particularly regarding regional trail connectivity. Discussion included potential opportunities to connect the two regional trail systems, the Coast to Crest Trail and the San Diego River trail, south of Santa Ysabel in the Pine Hills area of Julian.

2. Project Updates

Executive Director Anderson provided updates on several active SDRP projects. The Sikes Adobe Pavilion project has completed an extensive permitting process and is moving toward construction once a partner is secured; the pavilion will serve as a shaded structure for educational programming and volunteer use, with potential future enhancements including solar and seating.

Significant progress continues on the Osuna segment of the Coast to Crest Trail, including advanced design work (approximately 90% complete), permitting, and easement coordination. The project includes a complex bridge crossing over the San Dieguito River, requiring careful design due to floodplain conditions and nearby infrastructure constraints. Rising design costs have resulted in a funding gap, and additional grants are being pursued to support construction.

Updates were also provided on other Coast to Crest Trail segments. The Reach the Beach Trail along the north riverbank of the Fairgrounds property has been incorporated into the City of Del Mar's Living Levee project. The City of San Diego's El Camino Real CTC undercrossing project, is currently anticipated for construction around 2030. , The San Dieguito Road Pathway project that would connect the Osuna segment to segments further east at Lusardi Preserve continues under County leadership.

Progress is being made on the Sutherland segment, with ongoing coordination with County staff on trail alignment, road crossings, and design elements, including a crossing at Bloomdale Creek utilizing low-impact features such as stepping crossings rather than a full bridge. Planning also includes development of a primitive campground with water access. The East San Pasqual Valley segment remains in early

design coordination, with ongoing coordination with Caltrans and the agricultural leaseholder to address right-of-way constraints and user safety.

JPA environmental planner Nathan Lacy provided a brief update on the Rio Run CTC segment adjacent to the soccer fields, noting that coordination continues with the lead consultant, Recon Environmental. Construction and restoration activities are anticipated to resume in the fall following the nesting season. In the interim, minor erosion control repairs and weed management are being conducted.

3. Committee Reports

Project Review Committee – Vicki Touchstone reported no major updates regarding the Rancho Guejito Winery permit and noted the Silvergate Assisted Living project at Via de la Valle in Rancho Santa Fe has received design approval by the RSF Association and will proceed to further review and a County development application. The committee also discussed potential participation in coastal microplastic monitoring efforts and the ongoing refinement of PRC design standards.

Trails Committee – Candy Bowman reported that the Trails Committee has not met since the last CAC meeting but shared feedback from a recent Rio Run site visit, noting that trail construction and restoration work seemed to be proceeding nicely. She asked about potential impacts from the Belgian Waffle Ride, with staff indicating that the event has been held annually along SDRP trails for several years and no significant impacts have been encountered. Director Anderson explained that BWR representatives work with SDRP rangers on the proposed routes, safety, signage, and trail closures during the race. She noted that this year's BWR event utilized most of the SDRP trail system and beyond and trails were closed to the public for several hours. The JPA receives a substantial donation from the BWR organization to compensate for ranger efforts to accommodate the annual race. Candy also mentioned recent water quality notices at the river mouth, possibly related to storm runoff.

Interpretation Committee - Liz Gabrych reported that the committee has not met since the last CAC meeting. Recent activities included a field visit to Mule Hill and efforts to secure funding for interpretive signage. A suggestion was made to incorporate artistic, nature-themed elements into future undercrossing designs, which staff supported for consideration.

INFORMATION

Correspondence – None

Chair Khoury adjourned the meeting at 12:13 PM.