

## MBCA BOARD MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Thursday, January 13, 2022 / 5:00 – 7:00 pm Via Zoom

**Black Bold Italics = Board vote**    *Blue Italics = action commitment*

### Regular Meeting Called to Order at 5:05 P.M.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steve Bardwell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brian Hammer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gary Stiler
<input type="checkbox"/> Stacy Doolittle (prior notice)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Janet Johnston	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laraine Turk
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> David Fick	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sarah Kennington	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cathy Zarakov
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pat Flanagan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Arch McCulloch	
<u>Social media consultant:</u>		<input type="checkbox"/> Aimee Buyea

### Introduction of Guests and Board Directors

Steve noted this is MBCA's 53<sup>rd</sup> year! We again welcomed visitor Anita Petke, 29 Palms Business Association and [Desert Beacon STR Property Management](#) (local focus); and Paul Chakalian of [Joshua Tree Distilling](#), who will later make a presentation about a potential partnership with his business. Board members briefly introduced themselves.

### Agenda approval

Pat asked to move the Cadiz issue earlier as she'll have to leave early. Steve added it to Conservation issues and noted he switched around our agenda areas this time to give more time to Conservation issues earlier in the agenda. ***Laraine moved to approve the revised agenda. Pat seconded, and all were in favor. (10-0)***

### Minutes from December 9, 2021 BOD meeting

Laraine will correct the spelling of Gary Stiler's last name and also add to the Cannabis item that it's 10 acre feet per year. Steve also commented on the reference to the dual names of the Document Review/Letter Writing Committee and there was consensus for his preference to call it the Letter Writing Committee. Members are Arch, Pat, Steve, Brian, Gary and Janet. ***Steve moved to approve the minutes with the noted revisions. Pat seconded and all were in favor. (10-0)***

### Treasurer's Report

Cathy sent the current reports to Board members and noted there is a new category under earned revenue: "Gifted memberships." There was good activity in December; 3 new memberships, 7 renewals, and 3 donations. There was some technical difficulty with one large donation but it was finally settled. There is \$22,766.23 in our CD, and \$56,564.54 in checking. *Sarah said she'd send 50th anniversary books to the new members.* We accepted the Treasurer's report by consensus.

### Conservation Issues

#### 1) Stagecoach solar – PF

Pat recently sent us the link to a 25-minute [video](#) made by her nephew Matthew Smith about the Stagecoach Solar area, highlighting the botany and natural environment. *Laraine will create a link to it on the website.* There is a comprehensive comment letter on Stagecoach spearheaded by Steve Mills that we are signing onto; *Laraine will post it online when available.* Pat worked on it with help from Brian and from Dave Miller.

#### 2) MCAGCC Raven 'abatement' – PF

In response to the Draft Programmatic Environmental Assessment by MCAGCC on behalf of raven problems in the desert military bases, Ed LaRue of the Desert Tortoise Council sent a comment letter that approves of the raven abatement project so far as it's necessary to protect desert tortoise, but also recommends a number of changes. *Pat will send Laraine*

[both the initial government document and Ed's comment letter to post on the website](#). We know that it is human development that has been providing conditions for raven populations to grow tremendously in recent decades. Ed's letter references some of these issues. The desert military installations are trying to control conditions that entice the ravens but their infrastructure provides nest sites, among other problems.

### 3) Update on JT listing as candidacy for threatened – DF

The topic of our annual meeting with Brendan Cummings and Chris Clarke will be *The Last Joshua Tree? Climate Change and the Future of this Iconic Species*. David mentioned that the Fish & Game Commission will revisit the issue in June to decide whether to make the status permanent or not.

### 4) Air Quality Monitoring: See these 3 links: [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) –AM

The three links provided by Arch are articles from 3 different cities reporting on air quality monitoring, relating also to the use of Purple Air monitors, education, and environmental justice. Arch would like to encourage us to develop a local educational program or curriculum at the high school level combining science and social science focused on air quality issues, perhaps with assistance from UCR professor Cam Barrows. [Gary volunteered to investigate a niche in current middle and/or high school curriculum standards where such a program might fit in.](#)

While government officials don't generally accept Purple Air records as evidence because they are not approved commercial monitors, such records are useful to start conversations with governments. Steve summarized for our guests the dust problem created by large scale solar projects. Arch continued, suggesting that MBCA provide "situational awareness," that is, public notice when some local conditions are toxic, alerting to areas with less severe conditions. He has noted fairly significant differences in readings from his monitor and another one nearby with only a 300-foot elevation difference. Having a density of Purple Air stations can enhance awareness and provide very specific local data.

Monitors are about \$250 and easily installable with electricity and Wi-Fi.

### 5) Light Trespass Ordinance – SB

The new ordinance is in effect as of January 6; all exterior lights have to be shielded. [Laraine will post the final ordinance](#). There is a two-year window for compliance for residential users and 18 months for commercial. More outreach locally will be necessary, including encouraging local stores to provide the right fixtures and bulbs.

### (Reordered) Cadiz - DF

David summarized the current situation, that Cadiz is still trying to pump 50,000 acre feet per year of water from the desert aquifer at Fenner Gap to convey to users in Bakersfield or Orange County. The state has been in opposition. Under the Trump administration Cadiz acquired an unused gas pipeline to provide conveyance but permission has been rescinded by the Biden administration because there was no environmental review. Their stock has gone from \$14 to \$3.50 a share in 3.5 months.

David further spoke about the Eagle Crest Project, in which he is involved as President of the Desert Protection Society, which is in litigation over the Project. Timelines for legal actions have been impacted by Covid, but actions are scheduled over the next few months. It's been a 20-year project, fighting about BLM land and the right of way to the I-10 electrical corridor.

Also regarding water, David is running for a seat on the Joshua Basin Water District Board for the district on the east side of Joshua Tree. He has passed the preliminary interview, along with a second candidate, Barbara Dell.

6) 30x30 Carbon sequestration in the desert. – PF, BH

Pat spoke about how the California Natural Resources 30x30 Draft report continues to overlook the importance of carbon sequestration in the desert, which holds about 10% of the state's stored carbon. Nor is there recognition of the Inland Desert Region's biodiversity and native plant communities. Pat is with a group planning to update the report with more accurate information. *Pat asked Arch and Gary to look at and comment on the 30x30 document and invited them to a Zoom meeting tomorrow.* (Pat left our meeting at this point.)

7) Scenic 247 – SK

Sarah reported that the project is still waiting for state action. Jim Harvey and Sarah have been discussing improvements to the draft that LUS posted for the Planning Commission. Karen Watkins will continue to work with them despite her retirement. Sarah plans to talk with someone in CalTrans to discuss why their general guideline that visual intrusions along a scenic byway should be screened by plantings along the highway obviously doesn't work in the desert.

8) Save California Solar NEM 3.0 –SB

CPUC will be voting this month on their current NEM 3.0 plan that would drastically discourage rooftop solar because of the 80% cut in rates for providing electricity and other disincentives. Governor Newsom hasn't yet weighed in but acknowledges the need for some changes. Steve will suggest in the upcoming Eblast that people call the Governor to oppose NEM 3.0. Petitions are going forward from several groups.

9) HR 5355 Desert Community Lands Act - BH, SB, PF

This topic related to transfer of land from BLM to various jurisdictions will be continued to next month's meeting.

10) Cellular Tower in Morongo Valley – GS

Former Director Meg Foley worked on this for several years. Gary has learned that there's been no initiative by the developer since 2019. BLM is waiting for payment of fees and more information for approval. It's in the middle of Sand to Snow Wilderness area, would be unsightly, close to the community, and would add a graded road bisecting wilderness. Gary will keep an eye on it.

11) Enquiry from [Joshua Tree Voice](#) re: Wildlife vs autos –PF

Pat was planning to talk with a writer from this new local entertainment/education magazine regarding the killing of a bear last month in Morongo Valley.

## **Outreach & Communications**

1) Cannabis cultivation environmental impacts – BH

MWA is still working on grows over 10 acre feet per year. Steve wondered how that amount of water was chosen as the threshold. Brian said it was set years ago to allow homeowners and small ranchers to have vegetable gardens and small orchards. The state now uses a threshold of 2 af per year, but MWA keeps the 10.

2) Short Term Rentals and SBCO Housing Element– JJ

Janet reported that the Housing Element part of the general plan is scheduled for the County Planning Commission meeting on February 17. Every city and county has to have a housing element, and it's the only part that is overseen by the state. There's a new task

force on housing. The big issue is how the scheme of counting doesn't accurately include STRs. STRs and "vacation homes" are counted as vacant and therefore "available" houses but they are NOT available. They should be recognized as commercial lodging instead of homes. Definitions haven't caught up with reality. The state needs accurate data to analyze and make decisions.

Redistricting will affect these issues especially for unincorporated areas. District 3 is huge in unincorporated communities while other Supervisors have very different situations and comprise a majority vote. They don't understand or prioritize unincorporated issues such as corporate vs. local ownerships of STRs. Districts are created to prevent urban redlining but what happens to us is we have no vote for things we should. Brian referenced the voting rights act, and how population is the primary driver intended to prevent breakup of communities, although that does happen. A problem with at-large districts is that they tend to lean white and rich. Redistricting is supposed to provide some equity.

Supervisor Rowe has been working hard on revisions to STR code. Steve suggests sending suggestions to Janet and we'll send a cumulative letter to Heidi Duran in LUS. Steve reiterated that we emailed to Attorney General's office [our letter](#) about discrepancies and inconsistencies in Housing Element process. There have been some communications from Sacramento indicating there is some attention to this. Gary reported that there is a lot of local anger about problematic STRs in Morongo Valley, and he's trying to help.

3) Re-Districting – JJ - see Item 2) just above.

4) Cadiz, DF – reordered to Conservation section above.

5) Info sheet to Realtors-CA welcome center – GS,SD,SB

Steve thanked Gary for the valuable and extensive draft he recently sent, and we will continue to work on developing it. Laraine expressed the opinion that creating "short" and "long" versions would be helpful to get more attention from different audiences. Paul asked to see Gary's draft document and [Steve will email it.](#)

6) MBCA advertisements Desert Moon Pictorial – SD,

A meeting is scheduled next week to develop ads based on the Desert-Wise Top Ten Tips.

7) Proposal from JT Distilling to donate % to MBCA-SB

Steve talked with Paul about supporting us and pushing our mission. Paul gave an overview of his academic and research background in science and social science, including a Ph.D. in environmental studies. He's learning that our issues are similar to things he's worked on and is interested in. Climate change heat vulnerabilities was the topic of his dissertation. He has developed his distilling hobby into his own [craft distillery company](#). He would like to help mitigate the impacts of incoming tourists who bring problems. For STRs, he'd like to see quotas per census block, and zoning restrictions. He has created a draft MOU with MBCA, with the goal of mutual benefits in visibility, financial benefit, volunteer work, and real partnership. Steve thanked him for his interest and the Board will review and consider it. While open to the possibility, David noted that Joshua Tree Distilling is actually in Yucca Valley. Paul said he very much wants to be in JT and owns JT land but has to wait to have the resources to build on it.

## **Capacity Building & Organizational Issues**

1) Retirement of Ruth Rieman, Passing of Esther Herbert

Ruth has submitted a resignation letter. Laraine has alerted her that we plan to honor her long service at the Annual Meeting. We'll also note the recent passing of long-time member/secretary/treasurer Esther Herbert.

2) Lifetime membership level

Steve had a phone call from Eric Linnert who asked about lifetime membership. Laraine said she has been in some discussions about this in the past and suggests spending time looking into the pros and cons and value of setting up a lifetime membership category.

3) Social Media Website update– Aimee / Stacy

Stacy informed Laraine she couldn't attend today. Laraine noted that Stacy has been doing a great job of posting on Facebook, especially about the annual meeting.

NationBuilder upgrade to Leadership Plan– SB, LT, CZ, SK – nothing new.

4) Events Committee reports:

2022 landscape tour – DWL committee

While the committee is planning for both virtual and in-person activities, we'll consider whether to go virtual-only instead.

Topic for annual meeting – *'The Last Joshua Tree? 'CC & the future of this iconic species'*

Brendan Cummings and Chris Clarke have confirmed as speakers.

Thank you to water agencies – SB, AM - Nothing new.

Potential Fundraiser with Ken Layne – SD

Stacy sent Laraine a note saying there is some progress on this.

5) Educational support

Scholarships – LT, JJ, SK, SB

Laraine summarized the plan to offer two \$1000 scholarships for the 2022-23 academic year, one MBCA and the other honoring Karin Messaros' mother, to local high school graduates (public or private schools) and the intent to advertise more widely.

Field trips CSA 20- JJ

While Covid has slowed down progress, Janet noted that some people she's shared the idea with at local schools are very supportive. She explained the idea of taking all middle schoolers annually to experience the local outdoors (hiking, biking, rock climbing) in Section 6 aka [Desert View Conservation Area](#). The JT Community Center is on board; MBCA's role would be to support the costs of transportation. Other partners might be Copper Mountain College, local recreation companies, HDNM, MDLT, etc. Diversity would be part of it, helping BIPOC kids feel comfortable in nature. Gary mentioned that he has certification for certain middle school and high school programs and will be glad to help.

**Letters created / signed onto:**

Coalition letter opposing Stagecoach Solar; MBCA letter opposing Stagecoach

**Adjourned at: 7:21 PM**

**Next Regular Meeting:** Thursday, February 10, 2022, 5:00 – 7:00 PM. **Zoom? stay tuned.**