California Association of Resource Conservation Districts High Desert Region Fall, 2023, Meeting

Date: October 27th 2023

Location: Inyo County Building, 1360 N Main St Bishop CA 93514

In attendance: Graham Meese, Kristen Pfeiler, Mikhala Bornstein, Harold Singer, Cheryl Casdorph, John Hammond, Julia Barraclough, Arnelis Crespo, Andy Lyu, Curtis Tarver, holly Shiralipour, Dana Raponi, Nancy Gooch, Karen Sanders, Vickie Rausch

Welcome and opening – Mikhala Bornstein (USDA-NRCS) and Graham Meese (Inyo-Mono RCD)

Introductions around the table

Karen Sanders moves to approve minutes from the spring meeting on May 5th 2023. Dana Raponi seconds the motion. All I’s. Motion passes.

NRCS agency report by Curtis Tarver

* Now we are in FY24. There were some challenges in FY23. There will be record funding in FY24 so NRCS may be able to fund projects they were unable to in the past.
* Spoke about outreach and how the RCDs can help share information about programs
* There have been lots of new employees onboarded
* New and old employees have been attending lots of trainings, local training can include RCD staff
* Urban conservation is high on NRCS’s list with new offices in Oakland and Compton coming
* Agreements for districts are coming out, these are 25,000 to 75,000 dollar agreements, smaller agreements are also possible just contact your local NRCS staff
* Applications are now open for FY24 programs
* Funding is doubled in FY24
* Victorville and Lancaster are at full staffing levels. Bishop will be onboarding new staff soon.

CARCD agency report by Harold Singer

* CARCD is going through a transition because Cam (executive director) has left
* They have an office in Sacramento, but everyone is mostly remote
* Board is all two year positions that are soon up for re-election
* For the CARCD conference you can register and attend virtual events
* CARCD wants to learn about and improve how RCDs and NRCS can work together
* CARCD has a revolving loan fund that has no interest, there is a cap of $50,000, but this is not a hard cap. This loan can help with cash flow issues. The CARCD website has how to apply.
* CARCD is having cash flow issues and is “running a little behind”
* CARCD budget last year was 4 million dollars, this year it will be 12 million dollars
* Mary is the new fiscal manager
* CARCD has the pacific policy group on retainer
* There is a bond on Nov 24th ballot for water and climate change making sure RCD are listed as a potential funding entity. This funding is specifically for projects.
* Baseline funding is hard to get, they’ve been trying for 2-3 years
* Some RCDs have a tax base, others have no baseline funding
* CARCD did not get the capacity building grant
* National Association of RCD will be in San Diego in 2024

Questions

Do they know if there is any habitat funding for cemeteries available?

Is there funding for mergers of RCDS?

* Not sure, mergers can be 20,000 each and need to go through LAFCO

HDR Member Reports

Antelope Valley RCD

* Fall native plant sale is tomorrow
* They do contract growing for projects and work with Caltrans to do restoration
* They have a grant to improve their conservation garden
* They have a lawn rebate program for areas that do not have a current lawn rebate program. This offers design assistance and plants from the nursery. Interest in this program dropped off after the drought
* They provide money for the Rich Campbell scholarship
* They have a small staff and 5 board members

Questions

Can you collect seed on a contract basis? Yes

Are you having farmers who are fallowing fields grow native plants? No, farmers lost interest and are hesitant to reintroduce natives.

Eastern Kern RCD

* Sat Nov 4th at the Desert empire fair grounds there will be a desert adapted plant sale
* They are restoring habitat near wildlife guzzlers in El Paso, BLM did surveys of potential restoration sites
* Hoping to do vertical mulching, horizontal mulching and planting with plants provided through BLM seeds of success
* They want to do a native plant nursery for N Mojave
* Putting together a strategic plan

Tehachapi RCD

* Received an NRCS grant to get an employee and strengthen partnership
* Working on merging with Kern Valley RCD
* NACD has a poster contest every year they participated in – they want to strategize how to do it better
* Want to start a native plant nursery, they have started collecting seed. Want specifically Tehachapi Mountain Seeds. There is a shortage of native trees including oaks.
* Did a project called “trees for schools” where the RCD had 30 trees planted at 6 schools

Mojave Desert RCD

* Did tamarisk removal along 50ft of rive, all private land, they have taken out all the tamarisk that they can, they are doing biocontrol for the beetle
* They have a native seed pilot program where farmers are able to grow natives on fallow fields. They have two plots currently
* Two to three years ago they did a study on evaporative coolers and how much water they use. NWA is using this data to show that alotted water per household wont work