

CALIFORNIA FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

Board of Directors Meeting November 9, 2010: Ontario, CA

Board members present: Bruce Turbeville (Chairman), Wally McCall, Troy Whitman, Kate Dargan, Pat Kidde, Pat Frost, Niel Fischer, Dave Bischel, Jay Watson, Joanne Fites, Jerry Davies, David Horne, Frank Stewart. Absent: J. Lopez

Staff present: Margaret Grayson, Cathy Brooke, Denise Carrington, Diane Wells, Katie Ziemann.

Guests present: Trudie Mahoney (US Forest Service), Mike Harris (California Fair Plan), Joanne Drummond (Fire Safe Council of Nevada County), Jerry Newcomb (Arrowhead Communities FSC), Laura Dyberg (Mountain Rim FSC/Inland Empire Fire Safe Alliance), Dennis Cisneros (Rancho Cucamonga FSC), Mike Esnard (Mountain Communities FSC), Meg Foley and Richard Brewer (Morongo Valley FSC), Rod Ballard (Big Bear Lake Fire Protection District).

Chairman Turbeville called the meeting to order at 1:17 PM. Prior to self-introductions, he announced that he is retiring as Chairman, effective the end of the year. Mr. Kidder will be taking over as Chairman.

Nominating Committee Report: Mr. Bischel announced that applications to serve on the CFSC Board are now being accepted; they should be submitted to Mr. Lopez. There was some Board discussion about representation from various groups on the Board, including federal and state government. Ms. Dargan has a candidate she would like to recommend from CalFire, and will provide the information to the Nominating Committee. Mr. Kidder commented that the BOD will continue to examine the CEO position during the coming year; he will be assuming the role of Chairman only, not Chairman/CEO.

Public Comment:

Mr. Esnard reported that his group is very happy with the communications between Mountain Communities FSC and Denise Carrington and the CFSC. He also commented that meeting the requirement for matching funds has not been a problem for his FSC.

Chief Ballard discussed the very effective curbside chipping program funded by the Clearinghouse in Big Bear. They have had over 4,200 requests for service, and have to date removed over 900 tons of biomass. When asked what they were doing with the biomass, Chief Ballard responded that they are now sending it to the cogen plant in the area – they do not have to pay to have it hauled away, and are being paid a small amount by the company using it for energy. Their program has merged with the Big Bear City chipping program, they have an 800# for residents to call in requests, and are pleased with the results of their team effort and also the support they receive from CFSC.

Mr. Harris said that the Fair Plan's business has increased by 30% since October, 2009. The most recent increases have been in Orange, San Diego and San Bernardino Counties, a result of the tightening up of the insurance marketplace. He shared a document that was recently created as a collaborative project by the Santa Monica Mountains Fire Safe Alliance, "A Road Map to Fire Safety: How to Create Defensible Space in the Santa Monica Mountains." This has been sent to 45,000 homes. He also expressed his deep thanks to Mr. Turbeville, calling him "a guiding light, a Renaissance person" for his leadership of the CFSC.

Ms. Dyberg also expressed her appreciation to Mr. Turbeville, with whom she has worked since 1999. She commented that the Rim Communities have also been working with the Big Bear Lake fire agencies so that the chipping project can be extended to the entire mountain area. She reiterated her previously-expressed belief that CFSC should operate as a foundation. She is involved with the RAST group and doesn't believe that CFSC should represent all local FSCs in this group as she believes this creates an inaccurate perception that CFSC is a parent organization.

Ms. Drummond encouraged greater collaboration between the CSC and local FSCs and increased transparency in business dealings and the grants process. She would like to see a resumption of the regional meetings that used to be held prior to BOD meetings. She thanked Mr. Stewart for his work with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

Ms. Foley described her community of Morongo Valley as a small town in the desert that has been threatened twice by wildfire and survived, largely due to several CFSC grants they have received. Without these grants, she said their town would have a very different shape. She said she was surprised to hear comments about lack of collaboration, as her experience has been very positive. She commented about the benefits Morongo Valley has received as the result of educational efforts and services provided by CFSC. Mr. Stewart commented that he agreed that communication does occur between the CFSC's BOD and local FSCs.

Approval of August 31 minutes: Mr. Bischel moved that the minutes be approved as mailed. Mr. Watson seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Dr. Horne noted that, as the BOD has requested for some time, the financial statements now include a comparison with one year ago. He reported that increases, such as revenue and subawards are in line with previous reports. Expenses are proportionate to income, notably having added additional staff to handle additional grant dollars. Mr. Whitman moved approval of the Treasurer's Report, Mr. Kidder seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Audit Report: Dr. Horne reminded the BOD that our audit is carried out by Martin, Werbelow & Co., a separate accounting firm from our CPA. The report was reviewed by our Audit Committee, which consists of the Finance Committee, Ms. Grayson, and our auditor from Martin, Werbelow. Of particular note is our status – we have moved from being a high-risk auditee to now being a low-risk auditee. The audit contained no findings. As regards recommendations from last year's audit, we have improved our file maintenance and updated our data bases. As in the past, the audit recommends that we pursue additional non-federal funding; the lack of other funds could present a problem if accounting interpretations change at some future time. The auditor said he had enjoyed working with the CFSC staff and Mr. Moline, our accountant. Although the audit itself is an internal document, Dr. Horne would like to post a notice on our Website that once again we have been given a clean audit. Ms. Grayson will work with Dr. Horne to post the Auditor's letter that indicates these facts. (Notes do not indicate a motion to accept)

Unpaid surplus grant funds owed to CFSC: At Dr. Horne's request, staff compiled a report of recent grants and found that, with the exception of a couple of lingering situations, we were not owed substantial amounts of unspent grant funds by our grantees. Nonetheless, Mr. Kidder moved that we withhold progress payments on open grants if the organization has a closed grant where surplus funds have not been returned. Mr. Turbeville seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Update on meeting with Regional Forester: Mr. Kidder, Mr. Stewart and Mr. Watson met for an hour yesterday with Randy Moore, the Regional Forester, with a particular emphasis on funding. Funding is likely to be impacted by the recent election and a different fiscal year. Mr. Kidder said that the Interior Agencies have backed away from funding for the CFSC, and that the Forest Service may provide \$5 million as an earmark from Senator Feinstein. The government is currently operating under a continuing resolution. Mr. Moore believes a federal budget will be passed in the next few months, but thinks a new budget is not likely to contain CFSC funding. The ongoing continuing resolution might or might not retain the \$5 million – the situation is very uncertain.

Mr. Kidder emphasized that we're "speaking with local FSCs, not for them." He also commented that the numbers of unfunded grant requests are likely to get worse. Mr. Moore has agreed to let us know how the budget situation develops. Mr. Kidder also said that we are challenging the Interior agencies to restore CFSC funding. The local FSCs and other grantee groups need to highlight their successes to their legislators. Mr. Stewart agreed that we need to look at other ways to find funding to facilitate the work at the local levels moving forward. Ms. Dargan pointed out that there is a shift in priorities toward forest restoration and away from groups like CFSC; it is important to push our local groups toward self-reliance and increased matching funds. Also, job creation is an important point to make, as well as the reverse point that reduced funding results in job loss.

Mr. Turbeville moved that we prepare a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture similar to that which we sent to the Secretary of the Interior. Mr. Whitman seconded and the motion carried unanimously. Mr. Stewart would also like to send a letter to Senator Feinstein, emphasizing the success of our collaborative effort in California and the role of the local FSCs. (He would like to work with Mr. Kidder to draft this letter.) Mr. Stewart also asked Mr. Watson to look into the possibility of a follow-up meeting with Senator Feinstein's Sacramento staff member. Mr. Kidder wants to encourage the local FSCs to support our efforts, remembering that it is important to position any calls or letters as a way of educating the legislators regarding the gravity of the situation, not as lobbying. Ms. Grayson will work with the BOD regarding a message to be posted on the CFSC website.

Executive Director's Report: Ms. Grayson reported that Farmers Insurance has selected two local FSCs to receive a grant of \$2500 each. These are Arrowhead Communities FSC, where a check presentation ceremony will take place Nov. 15, and El Dorado FSC, where the check presentation will occur on December 2.

Regarding Firewise, she commented that we now have two potential donors to support our administration of the Firewise Program statewide. These are Farmers and USAA, although we don't expect to hear a response from USAA until after the beginning of the New Year. Our role with Firewise would be marketing, holding community meetings, coordinating hazard assessment, serving as a liaison and providing technical assistance. We would also implement recognition events, coordinate applications, and work with existing Firewise communities who need to be recertified. We would also develop support materials as needed. Our goal would be to double the number of Firewise communities within the next year. Although there appeared to be some confusion as to CFSC's role and the function of the funds that are being sought, these funds would be used to cover CFSC's administrative costs and direct program costs to operate the program; we would not be making grants for Firewise start-ups.

Facebook update is that our activity has been minimal to date; we are mostly using our Facebook page to list dates for workshops and BOD meetings. We have no marketing budget to allow us to do more, although we do benefit from some of the postings the Fire Alliance has been doing on their Facebook page that highlight the CFSC.

Web master situation is that we are in the process of converting from our previous programmer to a local firm located in the Bay Area. We are at this time converting the Clearinghouse and our Intranet data base; we are not presently revising our website, primarily due to a lack of funding to accomplish that task. Ms. Grayson says this changeover will save money. Mr. Stewart believes strongly that our website is outdated, but that we will need a minimum of \$50,000 in non-federal funding to make this happen. He suggests we contact local FSCs with good websites to see who created their website. Dr. Horne also offered to talk with some of his students at CSULB to see whether they might be able to help.

Special Guest Comments: Trudie Mahoney, USFS: Ms. Mahoney expressed her thanks for the opportunity to talk about the Forest Service. She oversees SFA and VFA projects in the Regional Office in Vallejo. Regarding earmarks, she said, "I believe the sky is not falling. Funding will come, but it will look differently. We just don't know when it will arrive." She said these funding crises are cyclic and "We will get through this."

She said that government has become "lean to the point of anorexia." She said there are only two people in her office, and that her work also involves extensive travel in the Pacific. She has a \$62 million portfolio of grants to manage, and the CFSC has the lion's share. Ms. Mahoney commented, "If we didn't use the Clearinghouse, we would be turning the money back. We HAVE to have somebody like CFSC to handle these grants. CFSC meets our needs." She reported that, in a recent series of statewide assessments, CFSC "came out great."

One question Ms. Mahoney said she hears repeatedly is, "Where's my check?" She responds that the Forest Service is "good at reimbursements, bad at advances." Their payment system is complicated, and one little error can bounce a funding request. This system is not likely to change. Another question she hears is, "Why are the Clearinghouse applications so complicated?" Her answer: because of Federal rules. Local groups have to comply. She said there is very little flexibility in matching funds any more: "Match is meant to enhance programs, not to be the program." The 50/50 match is likely to continue; however, if a local group cannot achieve the dollar-for-dollar

match, it usually all works out because it's a big pool and other groups are substantially exceeding the match goal. With regard to the possibility of a simple application for small grants, she said this is not possible, since the rules are the same for grants of all sizes and all locations. Finally, she is often asked about trends. She said use of biomass is a hot new topic. She also said "fire-adapted communities" is another hot topic, and that the Cohesive Strategies Document is currently being discussed.

BOD Work Plan Discussion: Ms. Dargan asked that a column be added in the Work Plan for "status."

- **Strategic Relationships:** Senator Feinstein or her staff will advise us the best time to approach her. With regard to the Fire Alliance, Mr. Moore said it will continue, maybe on an upward trajectory. As indicated in the Work Plan, BOD members have been attending local FSC meeting and the Farmers workshops. Ms. Grayson said that the Grant Managers could supply the BOD a schedule of local FSC meetings in their region. Regarding the local FSC survey, Dr. Horne said there has been no response from Dr. Everett, so no progress.

- **Funding:** The Forest Service sent a packet to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy including information from some of our CFSC BOD meetings. Mr. Stewart and Mr. Watson have met with Gina Banks of Senator Feinstein's staff and discussed the extension of the National Fire Plan. Mr. Stewart believes we should write Senator Feinstein to express our concerns. He also mentioned that discussions are ongoing regarding funding for Secure Rural Schools, since Proposition 40 funding has expired. The SNC still has \$17 million in Proposition 84 funding. Mr. Stewart said he had not done anything further regarding obtaining funds. Ms. Grayson is still working on a list of prospects for non-federal funding; a few look good. Mr. McCall has some suggestions for Ms. Grayson to add to this list and will get this information to her.

- **Organizational Operations and Administration:** Dr. Horne, Mr. Whitman, Mr. Kidder Mr. Turbeville and Ms. Grayson will develop a plan for the February BOD meeting. Mr. Frost would like a discussion of content in open vs. closed sessions added to the February agenda.

- **Marketing and Communications:** Dr. Horne has located the marketing plan he created a couple of years ago and has sent to all BOD members. He has not received any comments to date. He noted that his plans were based on having sufficient funding to accomplish them. He asked BOD members to get their comments to him prior to the February meeting so that he can have a draft to be discussed at that time. Ms. Dargan commented that we should have line items for desired actions in our budget even if there is currently no money for them (i.e. website overhaul). Dr. Horne asked Ms. Grayson to include a line item for the next budget for communications plans.

- **Business Plan:** Ms. Fites will work with Ms. Dargan. Ms. Dargan said that our business model needs to be reworked due to our single source of funding. Therefore we need more unrestricted funds. She commented that other successful non-profits (e.g. Rotary, Red Cross, etc.) have carved out a place for themselves. The message of self-sustainability must also go forth to local FSCs. Mr. Frost inquired where the Advisory Council fits into the future plans, and would like to see it discussed at the next BOD meeting.

BOD Meeting Schedule for 2011:

February 9: Sacramento (Mr. Stewart will work with Mr. Kidder to devise a way to invite local FSCs to attend the meeting and also have a longer time for discussion as was done in previous years)

May 11: Trudeau Center, Oakland

August 10: Santa Barbara (same location as previous S.B. meeting if possible)

November 9: San Diego (same location as previous S.D. meeting if possible)

Adjournment: Chairman Turbeville adjourned the meeting at 4:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted: Cathy Brooke, Senior Grant Manager