

MINUTES
ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP
BORREGO SPRINGS INTERIM WATERMASTER
Meeting Conducted In-Person at:
Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center
Monday, March 21, 2022, 9:00 a.m.

Part 1: Field Tour (9 am – 12:30 pm)

- **Start (9 am) – Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center:** Mr. Malone provided an overview of Field Tour and distributed handouts and directions for field tour stops.
- **Stop 1 (9:30 am) – Mesquite Bosque near Borrego Sink:** The EWG took a short walk to observe Mesquite trees and tree mortality. Mr. Jorgensen gave a talk on botany of Mesquite trees, their biological value in the desert habitat, the history of groundwater-level declines, groundwater dependency and shallow roots that can access surface water, and the history of Mesquite tree mortality in the Borrego Springs Subbasin.
- **Stop 2 (10:30 am) – Seley Ranch:** Zane Smiley from Seley ranch gave an overview of an area recently fallowed near the Coyote Creek floodplain that could potentially be used as a case study for biological restoration of fallowed lands. Travis Brooks of Land IQ presented an overview of a scope of work that was included in the Prop 68 grant application to conduct the case study.
- **Stop 3 (11:30 am) – Viking Ranch:** Geoff Poole gave an overview of the history of the Viking Ranch and the fallowing of these lands that are located within the Coyote Creek floodplain. Trey Driscoll discussed how the lands have been gradually returning to their native state after the northern berm was breached and flood flows have re-seeded the lands.
- **End (12:30 pm) – Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center.** Lunch was provided before the regular meeting.

Part 2: Regular Meeting (1:30 pm – 5 pm)

I. Opening Procedures

- Andy Malone (Lead Technical Consultant, Borrego Springs Watermaster) called the meeting to order at around 2:00 p.m.
- Mr. Malone confirmed that all six Environmental Working Group (EWG) Members were present at the start of the meeting:

Environmental Working Group Members	Jim Bennett, County of San Diego (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Jim Dice, Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center
	Mark Jorgensen, Community Rep. (and Watermaster Board Member)
	Danny McCamish, Senior Environmental Scientist for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks
	John Peterson, retired County Groundwater Geologist, California Professional Geologist and Certified Hydrogeologist

	Dr. Michael Wells, retired District Superintendent for the Colorado Desert District of California State Parks (arrived at 9:48 am)
Watermaster Staff	Andy Malone, Lead Technical Consultant (West Yost)
Others Present	Trey Driscoll, Dudek
	Travis Brooks, Land IQ
	Diane Johnson, BWD
	Geoff Poole, BWD
	Robert Staehle, Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy (Field tour only)
	David Garmon, Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy (Regular meeting only)

II. Public Comments

No public comments.

III. Biological Restoration Workplan

Mr. Malone introduced the topic of biological restoration as a method to avoid adverse environmental impacts associated with the planned fallowing of lands in the Borrego Springs Subbasin. Mr. Malone made available an E-sized map of the northern agricultural area in the Basin to assist in identifying specific fallowed lands that could be rehabilitated/restored.

Mr. Brooks from LandIQ presented the scope-of-work that was the basis for the Watermaster’s project description in the DWR Prop 68 grant application. The EWG asked questions and provided feedback to Mr. Brooks. Mr. Malone explained that if the Project is approved by the DWR for inclusion in the grant agreement, then the Watermaster will have a three-year period to implement the Project.

The EWG was in general agreement that:

- The scope of work presented by Land IQ was appropriate to explore the feasibility of biological restoration and to identify/rank lands for biological restoration.
- The scientists at LandIQ and UCI are the logical sub-consultants to conduct the scope of work under the guidance and supervision of the EWG and the approval of the Watermaster Board.

IV. Groundwater Dependent Ecosystem (GDE) Monitoring Workplan

Mr. Malone explained that the Watermaster scope of work for WY 2022 included the development of a GDE Monitoring Workplan to verify or refute the conclusions in the Groundwater Management Plan that the historical GDE in the Borrego Sink (the Mesquite Bosque) is no longer dependent on groundwater. He explained that two GDE Monitoring Workplans were prepared for the DWR Prop 68 grant application—one from the EWG and one from the Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy. The Tubb Canyon proposal was the only proposal accepted in the spending plan for the DWR Prop 68 grant application.

David Garmon from the Tubb Canyon Desert Conservancy presented and overview of its proposal to the EWG. The Tubb Canyon proposal includes the development of a detailed “workplan” to kick off the project. The consensus of the EWG was that an appropriate role is to provide the Tubb Canyon

Desert Conservancy with review and feedback on interim and final work products during the development and implementation of their GDE Monitoring Workplan, and to report to the Watermaster Board on progress and recommendations.

V. Grant Funding Opportunities

Jim Bennett provided an overview Department of Conservation Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program grant opportunity and the County of San Diego's intention to submit a grant application. The purpose of the grant application will be to support efforts for biological restoration of fallowed lands adjacent to the Anza Borrego State Park. Mr. Bennett gave this overview at the conclusion of the Field Tour at the Viking Ranch stop.

Geoff Poole from Borrego Water District provided a progress update on the DWR Prop 68 SGM Grant Program application process.

VI. Public Comments (time permitting)

- No public comments.

VII. Adjournment

Mr. Malone adjourned the meeting at about 5:00 p.m.