

**Minutes of the
Newport Bay Conservancy
Board of Directors Annual Meeting
Thursday, November 2, 2023
Peter and Mary Muth Center + Zoom**

2022-23 Board Officers and Members:

Cassandra Radcliff, President

Julie Ferguson, Vice President

Ramraghi Fuller, Treasurer

Susie Onate, Secretary

Derrick Ankerstar, Kim Bick, Peter Bryant, Mario Cuevas, Cesar Gallo, Susan Jarratt, Taylor Sais, Saam Shams, Stacey Tutt

7:07 pm **Call to order** by President Cassandra Radcliff

Cassandra welcomed all in attendance in person and on zoom and thanked everyone for their volunteer efforts in the past year and making 2023 a spectacular year.

Approval of Minutes of 2022: Highlighted one change to have the minutes reflect a start time at 7 p.m. not 6 p.m. Julie Ferguson moves to approve the minutes from 2022; Saam Shams seconds; approved by acclamation.

Mission: Newport Bay Conservancy is dedicated to protecting and preserving the Upper Newport Bay and its Watershed through education, restoration, research, and advocacy.

Also listed on the slide was the land acknowledgement that we acknowledged that our work takes place on the ancestral lands of native peoples, original inhabitants and stewards of this territory. We respect their continuing connection to these lands and waters.

NBC Staff:

Heather Cieslak, Operations Director

Hilary Cunningham, Community Programs Administrator

Alys Arenas, Restoration Manager

Zac Flores, Restoration Coordinator (until July)

David Banuelas, Restoration Technician

Jacob Donaldson, Restoration Technician (until Oct)

Mariah Sabo, Education Specialist

Alex Sasikumar, Outdoor Activity Leader

Special congratulations to Restoration Technician, David Banuales for completing his PhD from UCI and Operations Director, Heather Cieslak for her ten years of service to NBC.

Volunteers: From October 2022 to September 2023, 156 volunteers submitted hours. Among the 156, 55 qualified as voting members.

Over 7,400 hours of volunteer service were documented in 2022-23. Listed 22 volunteers that contributed over 100 hours of service including the top five contributors being Randall English

(829 hours), Linda Barker (443 hours), Don Millar (374 hours), Jay Matchett (265 hours), and Jean Savage (206 hours). Maggie Batara won the 47th Annual OneOC's Spirit of Volunteerism award representing both Newport Bay Conservancy and Orange County Parks. Norman Lacourciere and Jean Savage received the OC Parks Excellence in Volunteering Award for UNB.

Cassandra recognized that the Board is all made up of volunteers who lead a variety of committees including Bylaws, Board Development, Finance, Fundraising, Education, Community outreach, Research and Advocacy, Restoration and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. If anyone wants to get involved at a committee level it is recommended you get in touch with Hilary to connect you to the committee chair. There was one question from the audience with regards to how often committees meet which was answered that most committees meet about once a month with most of them being on Zoom.

The meeting then turned to highlight some of the great work the committees have done throughout the year including:

Education: Got to meet 50 new volunteers who took the 1-day volunteer training, with 16 participating in Naturalist Training. Nine people graduated in 2022 fall Naturalist Training. New Naturalists was expanded to provide opportunities to build their leadership skills and become our next generation of tour guides. Cassandra highlighted two new programs conducted by new Naturalists including a Full Moon Hike event and two Biking the Bay tours so far.

Last fall we went back to full field trips for all ages and by last Spring we educated 1,200 students at the Muth Center and reopened Community Day at the Back Bay Science Center which has seen over 300 visitors so far.

We continued to bring high school and college students out on the water as part of our Boating & Safety grant seeing 862 students through June 2023.

Community Outreach: While outreach focused quite a bit on digital and print materials including social media, our website and TRACKS newsletter.

In person we hosted a water station at mile 12 of the OC Marathon, and volunteers cheered on all the runners right by the Muth Center. Our organization also participated at various outreach events at UCI, OC Archives Bazaar, OC Authors Night, OC Green Expo, and the Subaru Jazz Festival at the Hyatt Regency.

Our front desk volunteers saw a decade-high of volunteers this year. 53,000 people came through the Muth center, and we saw record sales of over \$21,000 at the gift shop!

Research: On February 4, the Research Committee held its annual symposium honoring World Wetlands Day with speakers and tours. Our partners for the event were Sea & Sage Audubon, Amigos de Bolsa Chica and the Irvine Ranch Water District.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: As part of the committee's objectives, staff and key volunteers participated in Implicit Bias Training with Orange County Human Relations. The committee has

updated surveys and organizational assessments to help us with our grant writing and to fulfill Guidestar categories, which can help us get funding for our programs.

With some of our newer Naturalists and the DEI committee, we hosted two new events being Accessibility Day at the Bay and a pilot program at the Muth Center and at the Newport Aquatic Center with disadvantaged youth.

There were additional field trips and outreach events, including hosting the Santa Ana Unified School District FACE group's monthly meeting, as well as scholarships being made available to attract and support diversity among our Naturalist Training participants.

Restoration: Our restoration efforts are spearheaded in the most part by our staff, including Alys Arenas, Restoration Manager.

This was the third year of the long-term maintenance and monitoring for **Phase 2 of the Big Canyon**. The goal of this huge restoration project is to remove all invasive plants, restore hydrology, and reestablish native communities; 11 acres of peppertrees and infested shot-hole borer trees were removed and 26,000 plants planted into four different habitat types. The team regularly takes photos which were shown highlighting the progress courtesy of Don Millar. Also thanks to Don wildlife camera footage was shown.

We are looking forward to **Phase 3 Big Canyon Restoration** showing maps of what is existing today including conditions Brazilian Pepper Trees which will be restored to coastal salt marsh to adapt to coastal climate change. Also removing the stagnant pond including a large mosquito breeding habitat will be converted into a riparian corridor, alkali meadow, with saltwater and tidal exchange. This phase will also address the selenium contaminated vegetation from runoff that was naturally occurring from the watershed.

The next image showcased the implementation of Phase 3 which we won't see implemented until 2024 once all permits and funding are solicited. \$6 million in funding is needed to complete the project. NBC submitted a \$1 million grant with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, a \$2.6 million grant with the California Ocean Protection Council, and will be submitting another application for \$2.5-3 million with the Wildlife Conservation Board.

Moving onto other restoration, specifically the monitor and maintenance phase, there are other important areas around the Bay like the **Big Canyon Easement** which we are contracted by the city to monitor this easement, which is a mitigation project for construction of the Fletcher Jones car dealership, and we are working with the city on encroachment issues from residential areas.

Maintenance & Monitoring for the **Bayview Heights Project** includes quarterly monitoring, erosion control efforts, native plant installation, invasive species removal. OC Parks has been crucial in helping with the erosion control and planting efforts.

NBC received a \$30,000 grant from United States Fish and Wildlife Service to survey and **control invasive limonium** in the Bay. With volutaria, we are still seeing a decrease, due to

diligent surveying and treatments over the last few years. NBC will continue to survey and treat as needed in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and OC Parks.

There are limited resources to survey the whole bay, so the idea of the **Weed Warrior program** is to map weeds around the bay on designated trails. This can be used to solicit funding or provide partners with maps of weeds to help prioritize treatment or host a volunteer event. Diagrams were displayed showcasing the 193 observations, with around 2 acres of infested areas documented which will resume in 2024.

Other restoration included joining Second Sundays events with OC Parks, Sow & Grow Fridays at the nursery by the Back Bay Science Center to Monthly Bird Surveys every third Thursday of the month, and the adopt-a-plot program. Photos were shown of the adopt a plot program, volunteers work their designated plots weekly in Bayview and in Big Canyon to monitor.

Some highlights of the Restoration team's outreach efforts, which aim to **inform** the public about the projects we lead across the Bay included speaking to media, attending conferences, and hosting group events more specifically UCI Networking Event, CNPS BIPOC Kayak Tour, San Bernardino Community College Tour, Teachers Conference Tour and partnering with the Santa Ana Art Collective, regular removal of cattails.

We all teamed up this year to put on some **major public events**, with the fundraising committee heavily involved in many of these to raise money for our organization. Earth Day at the Bay was Saturday, April 22 at the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center. More than a thousand people attended to enjoy live music, food, animal presentations, a recycled art display and more fun activities. We held the expanded 10-day Back Bay Plein Air Art Festival in July. More than 1,000 people enjoyed a gallery show, outdoor artist demos and kids classes. 70 paintings sold during the 10-day exhibition, raising \$20,000 supporting local artists and \$10,000 going to support the Conservancy's programs. Hosted Gourmet by the Bay on Saturday, August 19, just one day before Hurricane Hilary hit our area, 55 people participated in an intimate evening on the Muth Center patio. Coastal Cleanup Day on September 23 at multiple meetup locations around the Bay with the help of multiple sponsors and our main partner for this event, OC Parks. A total of 875 public volunteers, NBC volunteers & staff and partners volunteers & staff came together to remove 14 tons of trash! Also, on September 15, Newport Beach City Council, state and county representatives broke ground to kick off construction of the Newport Bay Trash Interceptor.

As for **other programs** that we've held the past couple years besides the pandemic was the FiiN (Fostering interest in Nature). This is in partnership with the City of Newport Beach kicked off the week before Coastal Cleanup Day. Pictures showed the seasonal outdoor activity leaders with other volunteers providing support. It was a lot of work to host 5th grade students, 24-7, Monday through Friday for 8 weeks straight. So we appreciate everyone's support to inspire around 550 students this Fall to take more of an interest in nature.

Then we have our Saturday morning kayak tours to the public. We hosted other larger groups other days of the week ending up with more than 750 people enjoying the water. That's up from 640 last year.

Recognition of partners: City of Newport Beach (FiiN & Big Canyon); Orange County Parks (Coastal Cleanup Day and any other activity at the Muth Center); California Fish and Wildlife (planning and permitting for Phase 3 Big Canyon).

Treasurer's report: Ramraghi Fuller was unable to attend the meeting so Operations Director Heather Cieslak spoke to the financials. Heather took a moment to reflect on the past ten years of starting with one grant contract, expanding to almost a dozen different contracts to carry on the good work we do.

Heather highlighted the financial numbers for fiscal year ending December 31, 2022. Noting that we've had to dip into our reserves and restricted accounts to finish out the year due to the fact that we are spending more money on these projects, doing the work before we get paid for the project, and retention can be withheld before the project is over. This is which an example of funds ~~were~~ being withheld since 2020. We see that the Conservancy raised almost \$60,000 of unrestricted funding but has paid over \$50,000 out of pocket for some of the larger grants without reimbursement. There was a question asked eding if there was a way to break down the membership and general donations which for the purposes of the financial statement presented was combined but that number would be about \$25,000 in membership donations and the other half is additional donations, random tips from kayak tours or general donations from free events. Heather Tthank Board members like Taylor Sais and Chuck Gleason whose corporate companies match donations based on their volunteer service. There was a question withabout the small amount of interest received which was from a dividend with our insurance.

For the large grant contract, using public funds, we need to make sure that all the backup demonstrates the appropriate use of funds. For 2022-23, we continue to reconcile high revenues and expenses for 10 ongoing education and restoration grant projects. Since the Conservancy receives state funding for the Big Canyon Phase II Restoration but the retainage (withholding 5-10%) makes it hard to manage cash flow which ismeans dipping into our reserves. For 2023-2024 we will look to apply for bridge/financing funding to complete the final phase of Big Canyon (~\$5.5M) and look to build our reserves to \$250,000+ to maintain our regular programming while taking on larger restoration projects.

In memoriam: We honored the lives of Jean Watt, instrumental environmental leader in Orange County and Newport Beach as well as Volunteer Naturalist Drew Kosicki who logged over 2,500 hours of volunteer service to the Bay since 2016.

Outgoing Board Members: We honored the service of three outgoing Board Members, Kim Bick (2017-2023), Julie Ferguson (2018-2023) and Tailor Sais (2017-2023).

7:48 pm **Presentation of board candidates for 2024.** Taylor Sais, outgoing Board Member and Board Development Chair thanked everyone for their support over the past six years of participating on the Board and moved on to announce the slate of Board Nominees including Bryan Tsu, Bettina Eastman and Rubi Garcia (Ontiveros). We established that there was a

quorum need for voting and tallied mail-in and on-site votes. All old and new candidates received a majority of the votes.

8:07 pm **Adjournment:** Susan Jarratt moves; Stacey Tutt seconds. Annual meeting was adjourned

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Cieslak, Operations Director
for Susie Onate, Board Secretary