

**HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
Stakeholder Advisory committee
November 2, 2005 3:00 – 5:00pm
Arizona Game and Fish Department Conference Room
555 North Greasewood Road
Tucson, Arizona 87545-3612**

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Emily Brott (Sonoran Institute), Carolyn Campbell, Mima Falk (USFWS), Brooks Keenan, Karen LaMartina, Greg Hess, Leslie Liberti (City of Tucson – City Manager’s Office), Jessica Lee (SWCA)

1) Update on Recent TAC Meetings/Upcoming Meetings

a. *Scheduled SAC Meetings:*

- **November 16**, 3-5 pm, @ AGFD. Tentative Topics: Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program and implementation/funding options; Next steps – beginning Phase 2 of the HCP process.

b. *Scheduled TAC Meetings:*

- **November 15**, 1-4 pm, @ AGFD. Tentative Topics: Begin developing framework monitoring and Adaptive Management Program; feedback from SAC on conservation program, especially funding and implementation issues.
- **November 29**, 1-4 pm, @ AGFD. Tentative Topics: Critical questions and approaches to resolving data gaps in the draft HCP; Next steps – beginning Phase 2 of the HCP process.

Leslie reviewed where the TAC is in the HCP process. She said that at their next meeting they would continue to refine the draft conservation strategies for the Southlands and hopefully will be finalizing their preliminary recommendations.

2) Old Business

a. *Meeting Minutes – August 17, 2005 Minutes*

Leslie suggested postponing approving the meeting minutes until the next meeting because several SAC members were absent. The group agreed.

b. *Report on Action Items Identified in the Previous Stakeholder Advisory committee Meeting*

Leslie said the point of today’s meeting was to discuss next steps in the HCP, including expansion of the planning area and how coordinate with other planning efforts. She said that this would be a good time to discuss critical gaps and outstanding questions that need to be addressed in Phase 2 of the HCP.

3) New Business

- a. *Next steps – Beginning Phase 2 of the HCP Process Discussion*
- *Expanded HCP Planning Area*
 - *Regional Coordination*

Leslie said there are a couple of considerations that may impact the future of the HCP. Leslie said that a proposal for a new Natural Resources Advisory committee would be presented to Mayor and Council for approval in a couple weeks. She said that this is the first committee of this type in the City, and it will provide integration between all the other existing committees that have a natural resource focus. She said that the new committee would deal with not only natural resource issues, but also environmental sustainability and quality of life issues. Leslie said that the Natural Resources Advisory committee will not only advise and assist City staff, but will make recommendations to Mayor and Council. Emily asked if all the various City committees advise Mayor and Council. Leslie said there are currently nine City committees in existence, and that while they all deal with environmental issues at some level, there is no committee to oversee environmental issues at a City level. Greg noted that most City departments have an advisory committee. Leslie noted that advisory committees are a good way to have formal community involvement. Leslie said she hopes to organize the Natural Resources Advisory committee to have ex-officio members from all these various community and City committees including the HCP advisory committees, the landscape advisory committee, storm water advisory committees, the citizens' water advisory committee, environmental services committee, Tucson Clean and Beautiful, the metropolitan energy committee, City infill committee, and Pima Association of Governments (PAG) (both in transportation and environmental planning). Leslie said that this is a good way to ensure effective communication between the different committees. Mima asked if this group could make recommendations to Mayor and Council. Leslie said yes, but that they could also make formal recommendations to City staff. Leslie said that this would help the City HCP committees because the Natural Resources Advisory committee could be the mechanism to present HCP recommendations to Mayor and Council. Leslie said she envisions 17 voting members, and a number of ex-officio members from other committees, agencies and jurisdictions. Greg said that he thinks this is a great idea.

Emily asked if the SAC committee was included in the list of nine existing advisory committees Leslie mentioned. Leslie said yes. She explained that the idea for a natural resource committee came from the City exploring the idea of adopting the Urban Environmental Accords that were developed by the United Nations Environmental Program, and signed by 50 cities in May. She said that an advisory committee was being recommended to oversee the development and implementation of a Tucson-specific sustainability program.

Leslie said that coordination would be different for the three HCP planning areas because they are such distinct areas. She started by discussing said the Santa Cruz River (SCR) planning area. She said that a thirty mile stretch of the SCR is currently covered by eight different plans including the three U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects, the three habitat conservation plans (City, County, Marana), and a number of local plans, not to mention the City downtown redevelopment plan. She said that there has not been effective coordination between the plans. She said that, for example, coordination between the Army Corps restoration plans and the HCPs has not worked well.

Leslie said that the Army Corps has a very inflexible process that does not for effective input from the locals. She said that there are also certain factors they are emphasizing in the restoration, but other local goals are undervalued such as cultural resources, water supply, and recreation. Leslie also noted that not all of the Army Corps proposed projects will be fully implemented, thus the Army Corps wants the local jurisdictions to identify priorities for restoration. Leslie said that there has not been a concerted effort to look at the SCR as one system, so it is difficult for the locals to make these recommendations. Leslie noted that if the Army Corps plan is not funded or is partially funded, the local jurisdictions could be ready to make recommendations of what should be the priorities on the SCR. She said that both the war on Iraq and the hurricanes has affected the Army Corps' budget. Greg mentioned that the Tucson Basin Management planning group that was organized by Sherry Barrett (USFWS) has been meeting again. Leslie noted that this is could be a good mechanism for taking information out to the federal agencies. Leslie said that, however, the groups represented are at such different points in the planning process, have different mandates and goals, it has been difficult to come up with an action plan. Leslie said that the group has only been largely informational at this point. Greg noted that their next meeting is in January 2006. She said that it is important to the SAC because what comes out of a local river planning effort could affect decisions in the HCP. Carolyn asked if it would make more sense for the HCP to drive the SCR planning effort, rather than the other way around. Leslie said that the HCPs are part of the plans that we are trying to integrate, and that depending on the ultimate goals of the HCP they could drive the coordination. Leslie said that the challenge is going to be integrating the goals of the HCP into the Army Corps restoration approach. Leslie said the proposed natural resource Advisory committee will have the task of figuring out what to do with the SCR. Carolyn expressed concern about the Army Corps setting the biological goals and objectives for the SCR, rather than permitting the HCPs to take the lead. Leslie said the County is in a better position because they already have the goals and objectives for the riparian areas. She said that as that process of integration occurs in between the committees and a scope of work is proposed, then that information can come back to this committee to help create more concrete goals and objectives for the SCR. This will not necessary drive what the SAC ultimately recommends, but rather the SAC can wait for the Natural Resource Advisory committee to compile the baseline information, which can then be used for the SAC's ultimate biological goals and objectives recommendations. She said that when it comes to endangered species act recommendations from the HCP, the SAC will still take the lead role.

Greg asked about the formation timeline of the natural resources Advisory committee. Leslie said that the committee would likely not be formed until the end of the year or the beginning of next year. She said that a proposal to create this advisory committee is going to Mayor and Council in two weeks. Leslie noted that the natural resources Advisory committee could help find ways to fill the critical information gaps that the SAC has identified.

Leslie suggested the discussion switch over to the Avra Valley planning area. She presented two maps that show land ownership, including Pima County acquisition properties, and the possible conservation areas that the TAC has proposed. She pointed to the maps while she noted property ownership in the area. Leslie explained the intent behind the TAC's conservation strategy for Avra Valley. She said that the TAC looked individually at each City-owned parcel, including its habitat quality and importance for connectivity. She said that the TAC has raised concern about maintaining east-west

corridors, in additions to the north-south corridor provided by Brawley and Blanco Washes. She said that the TAC identified that the highest east-west connectivity priority should be the area where there can be a linkage between Ironwood Forest National Monument and Saguaro National Park West. Leslie said that earlier discussions suggested having an east-west linkage along Mile Wild Road, but that the existing recharge basins made this a less feasible option. Leslie pointed to the suggested corridor further north. She noted that much of the area is degraded, and would need restoration. She said that the CAP canal is above ground at this point, but that there are a couple of crossings in the area. She said that there is a possibility for regional transportation authority (RTA) funding to create a more wildlife friendly corridor across the CAP at this point. Emily asked what else would need to be done to provide connectivity. Karen noted that Tucson Water's future development depend on what the community wants in the future. Karen noted that one of the difficulties in Avra Valley is that there are some isolated parcels that are being developed around the City-owned lands, making connectivity difficult. The SAC members asked about the possibility of acquiring lands owned by the Arizona State Lands Department (ASLD). Leslie said that ASLD's priorities for disposition are lands that are in the future urban area, especially those for which there is a conceptual land use plan. Leslie said the other problem associated with municipalities trying to obtain State Trust land is that it has to be sold by auction, and both the City and County has limits on how much money they can offer.

Leslie said that the TAC has identified where the most important wildlife corridors are located in Avra Valley. Leslie said that now that the corridors have been identified, Tucson Water said they will try to avoid developing within those corridors, but if they have to, there will be appropriate mitigation requirements. Carolyn asked if there is coordination with different jurisdictions to make this happen in Avra Valley. Leslie said that yes, that not only is the TAC dealing with this issue, but USFWS, the City, the County, and Marana are all coordinating about the future of the entire Avra Valley. Leslie noted that there have not been any discussions with the Tohono O'odham Nation. She noted that much of the Nation lands in Avra Valley are currently agricultural lands. Greg said that a Tribal representative is on the regional council on PAG. Greg noted that there might be cultural and trust issues. Mima said that USFWS has a good relationship with them, but it took years to build. Mima noted that their policy processes are different than the City. Mima suggested talking to the director of natural resources. Carolyn asked if USFWS might want to take the lead on coordination. Mima said that the Tribe's natural resources department is just getting organized. Mima said the Tribe has signed on as a cooperator on the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP). Leslie noted that a problem with coordinating with the Tribe is that there seems to be little benefit to them from the proposed conservation effort. Leslie noted the City-owned properties within Blanco Wash, which is a high priority area for the ground snake. Because of the habitat pattern and land ownership, the only way to effectively deal with the snakes is a coordinated approach. Leslie said that the snakes have been taken off the County's MSCP, which makes it difficult to have a coordinated regional effort to protect the snakes. Leslie said that most of the land in Avra Valley is so degraded much of it is not considered to be suitable habitat; although Leslie noted that Phil Rosen believes some of the land could be restored. Leslie said there has not been a documented Tucson shovel-nosed snake in Pima County since 1979. She said that the snake might have been extirpated from the area. According to Phil Rosen, mitigation would be more effective in Pinal County where there are documented snakes. She said that the TAC has talked about taking it off the list, but that no decision has been made. She said that Phil has been looking at habitat potential in Avra Valley by evaluating habitat elements,

including vegetation and presence of a food base. She noted that Phil is discouraged because Brawley Wash is so channelized in many areas.

Greg mentioned Pima Natural Resource Conservation District is working on Avra Valley restoration. Leslie noted that ASLD is doing a conceptual land use plan in northern Avra Valley. Leslie said that some of this land includes the last remaining areas of natural desertscrub upland in Avra Valley. She said that Phil Rosen felt that those areas might be the best areas to find Tucson shovel-nosed snakes. Leslie told the SAC that, at the last TAC meeting, there was a presentation by Travis Bean, with the UA Desert Lab, about the buffelgrass problem around Tucson. She said that the City is concerned about the problem, especially from the liability standpoint. She said that some of the Avra Valley holdings areas have been taken over by buffelgrass, creating a high fire possibility. Leslie said the City is working with the UA and the Tucson Audubon Society to start a buffelgrass eradication test case in Avra Valley. She said that the only feasible option is to use herbicides. She said that any adverse effects of herbicides are not known. She said that this would require close coordination with adjacent landowners. Leslie said that buffelgrass management would be a good topic for the new proposed City natural resource advisory committee. Leslie suggested to Brooks that there be coordination with the City's Department of Transportation. Carolyn asked if the City commented on the draft alternatives on the Ironwood Forest National Monument Management Plan. She suggested to Leslie that the City should write a letter to BLM about the buffelgrass problem and efforts the City is planning to make.

Leslie suggested the SAC move on to discussing the Southlands. Leslie passed out a packet of information about planning efforts in the Southlands area. She said that there are draft scopes done for both the Lee Moore Basin Watershed Management Study and the ASLD's conceptual land use plan. Leslie noted that it is a concern how the City HCP would fit into the other regional plans. Leslie said that there might be more the HCP will need to cover in order to fill in the data gaps between all the plans and studies. Leslie passed out two maps, one that shows the boundaries of the Lee Moore Basin Watershed Management Study, and the second showing ASLD land within the greater Southlands. She said ASLD's draft conceptual land use plan includes lands from Interstate 10, down to the Santa Rita Experimental Range, and from State Highway 83, to Interstate 19. Emily asked about this plan because she thought it was already completed. Leslie said that they are updating the old plan. She said that there is 73,000 acres of land in the conceptual land use plan area. She said that she believes ASLD is planning to incorporate the clustered desert village concept. She noted that ASLD planning process would be looking at groundwater yield from wells in the study area, regional water reservoirs, regional wastewater facilities, major roadways, and wash corridors needed to accommodate 100-year floodwater concerns and Clean Water Act 404 requirements Leslie said that ASLD's first phase involves baseline data collection. She said that they will be also be doing conceptual drainage plans, street master plans, and water plans. She said that ASLD is basing the initial study off a baseline mapping effort of archaeological and cultural constraints. She said the second constraint involves U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' managed waters of the United States. She said that ASLD does not plan to not do a formal delineation of those waterways, but rather use topographic maps and aerial photographs to identify potential waters of the United States, as well as any areas that fit the criteria for wetlands. Leslie noted that at this time, the ASLD planning scope is not yet public information so she cannot distribute it. Greg asked if ASLD is using the Southeast Arterial Study. Leslie said she is not sure, nor is she sure how ASLD's draft plan will tie into the Lee Moore Watershed Basin

Management Study. Leslie said ASLD is also proposing an traffic study and roadway infrastructure master plan. Leslie said that the drainage study also includes looking at natural constructed or manmade waterways and basins. Brooks said development in this area would be difficult because there are broad, shallow flood plains. Greg suggested that getting an ASLD consultant to come to a SAC meeting and present the scope of their study, and maybe invite the County to attend.

Leslie discussed the language about wildlife safe roadways that the TAC suggested be formally recommended for the Southlands. She said that the City has requested that this language (in the handout) be included in the Southeast Arterial Study because the TAC was concerned that the road alignments be consistent with the goals of the HCP.

Leslie explained that the City is proposing to expand the Southlands HCP planning area to almost four times the original area. She said that the new planning area would extend south to Coronado National Forest and the Santa Rita Experimental Range, and east to Cienega Creek and along Saguaro National Park East. Leslie noted that Sahuarita is working on an open space and recreation plan. She said that the project area is defined by their ultimate city annexation area. She said that the City also wants to expand the planning area to the north due to the situation with PPC. She said that the City is coordinating with the University of Arizona, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and Tucson Airport Authority (TAA) to include them within the HCP planning area. She said there is good PPC habitat on the base and that they are interested in preserving land within the flight paddle. She said that the base could get federal money for the paddle if it is also important habitat. Greg asked if the City could also get mitigation credit for habitat preservation on the base. Leslie said no, not if there is federal money; however every area for PPC preservation helps. She said that land in the paddle could connect PPC populations to Pima County Regional Park and the areas the City will set aside in the Southlands. Carolyn noted that \$10 million dollars of the open space bond money could be used for Davis-Monthan lands and wondered if any suggestions have been made for the County to acquire land. Leslie said that the discussions have just begun, but that the representative from Davis-Monthan also sits on their open space board. Greg said that expanded area goes into area that would affect the Cienega Creek Conservation Council. Leslie noted that the TAC has yet to see a map of the expanded planning area. Leslie said that the expanding planning area had not yet come up for discussion before the Phase 2 HCP grant was written.

Leslie noted that the Lee Moore Watershed Basin Management Study includes 213 square miles of land, and the focus of the study is to provide critical hydrological information and policy guidance for the area in order to discourage development in flood-prone areas. She said that, not only will the study help establish potential solutions to flood, erosion, and sediment transport problems, but that it will also organize a set of development guidelines that will lessen the impact of development to the hydrology in the study area. She said that Pima County hopes that local jurisdictions would adopt these recommendations. Leslie noted that the expanded planning area will also allow the City to develop a more informed annexation policy that references environmental considerations. Leslie noted that coordination with Sahuarita would be critical.

Leslie went over Pima County's conceptual growth areas map. Carolyn said that Pima County said that anything outside the conservation land system (CLS) is considered the future growth areas. Leslie said a concern is the conceptual growth areas extend further south than the proposed Southlands planning area. Leslie said that this will require

coordination with the County, and Sahuarita to preserve linkages between proposed reserve areas in the City's Southlands and existing protected areas. Carolyn said that unless the City and County have the same conservation measures, they would be in conflict. Brooks asked how the County developed their model. Leslie said that it was a combination of the land absorption area, as well as modifying it to keep it out of the CLS. She said that she believes that Pima County used PAG's population projections. Leslie noted that there is development, with significant densities, beginning to go in south of the Southlands. She said that the TAC's main focus in the Southlands is to protect the two southern watersheds in order to capture PPC habitat and known populations. She said that currently there are two populations of PPC, one in Altar Valley and a second that is centered over the Santa Rita Experimental Range. She said that in order for the watershed reserve strategy to be successful in the Southlands, there needs to be connectivity between the Southlands and these two population centers. She noted that at this point there are no assurances that this can happen.

Leslie said that the City met with ASLD to talk about the HCP, and ASLD hinted that there might be a possibility of ASLD joining the HCP as a joint partner.

Carolyn said she is concerned about the low attendance at the SAC meetings by non-City committee members and local citizens. She suggested that maybe the SAC could take a lead on Native Plant Preservation Ordinance (NPPO) and environmentally friendly roadway coordination with a subcommittee.

Leslie said that Phase 2 of the HCP would involve a greater level of multi-jurisdictional coordination, and likely revising the baseline conditions in the Southlands due to the expanded planning area. Leslie said that until the TAC gives their biological conservation recommendations, there is not much the SAC can do. She asked the SAC members what they envision their role to be in the next phase of the HCP. She said some possibilities could be for the SAC to meet less regularly, expand the committee, but not meet formally but establish subcommittees when appropriate, or brainstorming topics that the proposed natural resource advisory committee could help with. Brooks said that he thinks that the private stakeholders will start showing back up to the SAC meetings when some decisions are starting to be made. Carolyn suggested encouraging all the committee members to come to the meetings when critical decisions need to be made. Leslie suggested that the SAC members could split up attending meetings of other coordination efforts, then reporting back to SAC meetings that are held less regularly.

4) Call to the Public

No members of the public were present.

5) Next Steps/Future Meetings

Due to a scheduling conflict, Leslie requested to the SAC to reschedule the November 16 meeting until after the last TAC meeting at the end of November. The SAC agreed to reschedule the meeting for December 7. Leslie said that she would contact the entire SAC committee and encourage all members to be present. The SAC should expect biological conservation recommendations from the TAC, as well as discuss Phase 2 of the HCP.