

HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
Technical Advisory Committee
November 29, 2005 1:00 – 4:00pm
Arizona Game and Fish Department Conference Room
555 North Greasewood Road
Tucson, Arizona 87545-3612

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Ralph Marra, Rich Glinski, Guy McPherson, Cathy Blasch (AGFD), Marit Alanen (USFWS), Bruce Prior (City of Tucson – Tucson Water), Leslie Liberti (City of Tucson – City Manager’s Office), Jessica Lee (SWCA), Amanda Best (Westland)

1) Update on Recent SAC Meetings/Upcoming Meetings

a. *Scheduled SAC Meetings:*

- **December 7**, 3-5 pm, @ AGFD. Tentative Topics: Discussing TAC’s recommendations for Avra Valley and Southlands; Critical questions and approaches to resolving data gaps in the draft HCP; Next Steps – Phase 2 of HCP process.

b. *Scheduled TAC Meetings:*

- a. **January 25**, 3-5 pm, @ AGFD. Tentative Topics: Begin Phase 2 of HCP process.

Leslie said the last SAC meeting is on December 7. She said that the SAC will be discussing what happens at this TAC meeting and talking about Phase 2 of the HCP.

2) Old Business

a. *Meeting Minutes – Outstanding Minutes: October 15, November 15 and November 29*

Leslie said that these meeting minutes will be sent out by email and can be approved by email by the end of the year.

b. *Action Items Identified in the Previous Technical Advisory Committee Meeting – Ground Snake and Tucson Shovel Nosed-Snake Discussion*

Leslie noted that Trevor had requested this action topic and he was not present. Leslie noted that Carolyn Campbell said that the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan STAT group is talking today about what species they think should be covered in the Multi-species Conservation Plan (MSCP). Carolyn said that she is going to raise the issue of the two snakes at this meeting because it will require both jurisdictions to work together to protect the snakes.

3) New Business

a. *Review Conservation Measures Summaries and Maps*

- *Southlands*
- *Avra Valley*

- *Santa Cruz River*

Leslie asked if the TAC members had reviewed the conservation measures for each species. She passed out the conservation programs for cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (CFPO), Pima pineapple cactus (PPC), pale Townsend's big-eared bat (PTBB), yellow-billed cuckoo (YBCU), and burrowing owl (BUOW).

Guy asked if Leslie if she found out any more information about the presence of lesser long-nosed bats in the City. Leslie said that she has not spoken with Sandy Wolf yet. Cathy said that she talked with Tim Snow, former bat expert with Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) and that he thinks Sandy Wolf is jumping to conclusions. Tim Snow said that Tucson sees lots of bats migrate through that stop to feed at hummingbird feeders, and that their presence does not necessarily correlate to there being an undocumented bat colony. Leslie said this is an issue that we will follow up on in Phase 2 of the HCP.

Leslie began the discussion with CFPO, and said she met with Scott Richardson (USFWS) this morning and discussed the preliminary draft HCP CFPO conservation program. She spent time going through the structure and layout of the conservation program, and explained where the information was derived from. She said that the conservation measures were derived from the biological goals and objectives for each species. She said that, for most species, habitat protection and restoration is most important. For other species, dispersal corridors are more important. She mentioned that all the conservation programs deal with promoting an integrated regional approach. Leslie said that the conservation measures were broken out by planning area to make it easier to follow. Leslie said that Scott's comments were mainly focused on lack detail. He said that, for the Southlands, the City is in an interesting situation because the City does not have complete control over all the planning, rezoning, and other development activities in the Southlands because Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) owns the majority of it. She said that what is done in this area needs to be in partnership with ASLD. She said the level of detail is due to on the unknowns that cannot be resolved until ASLD's land use planning is completed. Leslie stressed that each of the listed conservation measures will require more detail on how to implement them. Rich said that the Marana HCP team also ran into this issue. Rich said the details would come later, but that the trick involves the adaptive management strategy. Leslie said it is important to know if there are any gaps or strategies that are missing before we enter the discussion with ASLD. Leslie asked the TAC if they want both alternatives in the Southlands approached (Harris riparian and watershed reserve strategy), or if they felt comfortable just focusing on the watershed approach. Cathy asked if both of the strategies need to be included for the NEPA process. Leslie said there has to be alternatives, but that the Harris riparian model does not necessarily need to be one of them. Marit said that the general sentiment with USFWS is that they are more comfortable with the watershed reserve approach. Leslie said that she has gotten the sense that the TAC favors the watershed reserve approach. Cathy said that the Harris riparian model could be a fall back strategy. Leslie said that she thinks we will get more out of the watershed approach because the northern washes are still protected by the ERZ ordinance. Rich said that he does not care for the Harris riparian model because some of the mapped riparian habitat is artificial habitat. Leslie said that Scott liked the watershed reserve model because it captures the entire CFPO dispersal habitat. Leslie noted that enhancement of CFPO dispersal and over-wintering habitat could be achieved through coordination with Pima County on the Lee Moore Watershed Basin

Management Study and through the Native Plant Preservation Ordinance (NPPO). She said that since there are so few saguaros in the Southlands, Scott said that the goal should be 100 percent protection of this species. Leslie said she talked with Scott about why there are few saguaros in the Southlands and how the City could perhaps increase the number of them. Leslie noted that some people in town feel that saguaros do not do well in newly formed alluvium soils. She said another theory is that limiting sheet flow could help saguaro recruitment. Marit noted that STAT said that Pima County is planning to modify their NPPO within three years of receiving their HCP their permit application. Leslie noted that Mima Falk (USFWS) said that the NPPO would be written to preserve habitat, rather than individual plants.

Leslie talked about the conservation measures that would provide for the long-term protection of CFPO dispersal corridors in the Southlands. Leslie said the key is going to be figuring out patch size and the distance between patches. Leslie said that until we know what the land use and storm water management needs will be, it will be difficult to establish those stop-over points. Scott said that there need to be more detail about when fencing is appropriate or not on a parcel. Leslie said that working with Pima County on the plan for regional retention and detention basins will be essential. Scott said that current survey protocol is tailored for breeding birds, but suggested that a revision of the fall protocol could be used to do surveys in the dispersal areas. He said that the CFPO dispersals happen between mid-July to mid-October. Scott suggested the utilities companies go through all the recommendations in the HCP, as well being required to revegetate areas they clear outside the immediate right-of-way corridor. Leslie said the recommended TAC guidelines for wildlife-friendly roads have been included in the text of the Southeast Arterial Plan. Leslie said that the City would work with all local landowning whether or not the City could get mitigation credit for any actions taken by other jurisdictions. In Avra Valley, Leslie said that the key is to permanently protect the suitable habitat that was identified in the City-owned lands. Leslie said that Scott said he likes the approach the TAC has taken by attempting to preserve dispersal corridors in Avra Valley. Leslie said any mitigation that is required in Avra Valley needs to be done with similar vegetation, size, and configuration. Leslie said that the mitigation would be a parcel-by-parcel approach. Scott said that there should not be any net loss of priority dispersal habitat. Leslie said some of these priority areas may be impacted and there would need to be mitigation guidelines for those situations. Leslie said that with respect to dispersal corridors, revegetation parameters needs to be detailed. Scott suggested using revised fall protocol for CFPO surveys in Avra Valley too. Scott noted that he wanted a statement in the conservation measures about controlling invasive species and fire issues.

Leslie noted that there are not explicit conservation measures for the Santa Cruz River because of the lack of detail in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers river restoration projects. Scott said that what is important in this planning area for CFPO are effluent, large trees, buffers of the corridor from urban land use, management exotic species, and coordination with the other projects.

Leslie stressed that Scott is comfortable with the approach to the conservation program, and reiterated that it needs a much greater level of detail. Leslie said, however, that Scott felt that the document was not missing any critical gaps.

Rich asked about critical habitat for CFPO. Leslie said it depends on the upcoming ruling on the delisting. Rich suggested that edits to the biological goals and objectives should prioritize impacts to dispersal habitat, rather than emphasizing breeding habitat.

Leslie continued the discussion by switching to PPC. She said that aside from protecting the populations of PPC, connectivity would need to be preserved by maintaining corridors for pollinators. Leslie said that the City might have to obtain a mitigation bank because the reserves in the Southlands and the NPPO alone may not provide adequate coverage for the species. Leslie noted that not only could NPPO be used to protect PPC, but also other cacti species that benefit pollinators. Leslie pointed to section "5a" that discussed the City's effort to use PPC as a landscaping plant on public and private lands. She said that using PPC in private landscaping could help provide connectivity for pollinators. She said that this approach would not be the focus of the mitigation, or accomplished easily. She said that she has been talking to Mima Falk (USFWS), and they believe it will be possible to come up with a plan that both USFWS and Arizona Department of Agriculture (ADA) will approve of that would allow for the integration of PPC into landscaping. Leslie said that it is a fact that some areas of the Southlands will be developed. She said that rather than writing off that area, we should do what we can to salvage the individuals that are displaced and plant them in such a way within the urban area to provide connectivity. She said that this approach would be more focused in the northern portion of the Southlands where urban development would be most extensive. Leslie said that this approach would have to be done carefully and be well managed, paying attention to how the cacti are moved, where they are transplanted, and the care of them post-transplanting. Leslie said that there are some people who feel that transplanting PPC can be done successfully. Leslie said that this would be part of the adaptive management plan and may only be done on a trial basis. She said that this is not a primary mitigation strategy, but rather a positive action beyond the required mitigation. She said that this could be done with safe harbor agreements (SHA). Leslie said that she would like to see connectivity to the northern populations, which could be tried through his approach. This way the northern area is not being written off entirely. Guy suggested transplanting cacti with similar equipment to the saguaro scooper. Guy noted that other cacti needs to be protected in this area as well. Rich said that cacti transplanting requires stewardship and care, and believes that local residents in the Southlands could handle the responsibility. Leslie said that she has not received comments from Mima about the preliminary draft HCP PPC conservation program. Leslie said that the City is looking at working with Dr. Michael Rosenzweig (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Arizona) to design a set of managed experiments for attracting certain species to the Southlands, and to get residents more involved in efforts such as native plant landscaping and rainwater harvesting. Leslie said the hope is to build a strong ethic in the community to want to participate, and for the City to help provide the resources they need. Leslie said that incentives could be set up to reward Southland residents for the best native plant garden or rainwater harvesting system, for example. Leslie reiterated that integrating PPC into urban landscaping is not the core mitigation strategy, but rather actions that would go above and beyond the mitigation requirements.

Leslie moved on to discussing the burrowing owl. Leslie said the concepts are the same as the Marana HCP, but that the TAC has not yet discussed burrowing owl management areas (BOMAs). Leslie noted that much of the BUOW language was taken out of the Marana HCP. Leslie said that, in general, there would be a certain number of BOMAs established in each of the planning areas. Leslie said that the BOMAs are managed, and

that the habitat characteristics are protected and/or enhanced. She said that artificial nesting structures might be necessary. Leslie said the Marana approach was to let BUOW inhabit the burrows naturally. If the burrows are put in and no owls move in, then they can be used as homes for displaced owls. She said that to the best extent possible, BOMAs would be integrated into washes, parks, and open space. She said in the Marana plan, the BOMAs had to be at least 20 acres in size and had to have both breeding and foraging habitat. The BOMAs had to be non-contiguous. Rich suggested that two BOMAs would be appropriate for both the Southlands and Avra Valley. Leslie said that his comments would be noted, but would prefer to wait until more information is gained from the on-going BUOW surveys in Avra Valley. Bruce asked if “good foraging habitat” for BUOW had been defined. Rich said that it is variable, and should be evaluated individually with consultation with the wildlife agencies. Leslie said it could be mapped two ways: either list criteria that are important, or actually go out and survey and designate areas. Leslie went through the other conservation measures including education. Guy asked about the level of detail needed in the education program. Leslie said that USFWS feels that education is not a core piece of the conservation program, and thus believes it could be a section of the document that could have less detail. Rich noted that in Marana, the Tucson Audubon Society was included as an educational vehicle, to help with the stewardship necessary to protect species. Guy asked Leslie what level of detail USFWS is looking for in the draft. Leslie said that USFWS is looking for well-articulated evidence that the conservation program will adequately mitigate impacts to the covered species. The City needs to be able to demonstrate that if they follow the action items in the conservation strategy, and follow through with the various implementation measures, that the biological goals will be met.

b. *Review Conservation Measures Summaries and Maps*

- *Avra Valley*
- *Southlands – former and expanded planning area*
- *Santa Cruz River*

- *Meeting Frequency*
- *Interaction with SAC*
- *Other TAC requests (time, location)*

Leslie passed out copies of the revised Avra Valley map showing landownership and habitat conservation priorities. She said the only change from the last iteration of the map is that it now includes the Simpson Farm site as a high priority conservation area, which could provide a corridor between Brawley Wash and the Santa Cruz River. Leslie noted that riparian habitat was not mapped along the Santa Cruz River because it was not in the Pima County riparian layer that was provided to Tucson Water. The group talked about the map, especially areas marked in dark blue that indicated conservation potential on City-owned land. Leslie noted that specific plans would need to be developed for each of these parcels. Leslie said that there is a need for buffelgrass management in the Avra Valley planning area. Leslie said that before February, the City will have a buffelgrass management plan for some of the City-owned lands and then we will have an idea of how we want to integrate it into the HCP. Leslie noted that everything that is cross-hatched in red is set to be protected, but that a set of mitigation possibilities should be outlined in case Tucson Water needs to build into those priority areas. Leslie said that the TAC is still waiting for results from both Phil Rosen’s (University of Arizona) snake study and AGFD burrowing owl survey. Leslie noted that

SAVSARP is not included in the HCP because Tucson Water is going through the ESA Section 7 consultation process for that project.

Leslie switched the conversation to the Southlands and passed out a map of the Lee Moore Watershed Basin Management Study. She said that Pima County has a draft scope of work out for the study, which is focused on hydrology and hydraulics in order to develop a storm water management strategy for the region. She added that there is an opportunity for these retention and detention basins to enhance habitat in the Southlands. Rich asked if a hydrologic study has been done in Avra Valley. Leslie said no, but that she would like to talk to Pima County more about hydrology issues in Avra Valley. She mentioned that Stu Bengson (NRCD) has proposed a Brawley Wash restoration project. Rich suggested that this information would be helpful for Tucson Water in their future water development plans. Leslie mentioned that the Petty and Fagan Ranch Washes, the proposed watershed reserve strategy in the Southlands, are in the middle of the Lee Moore Watershed Basin. She said that the study has not officially started. Leslie believes that Pima County would keep the City involved at some level. Leslie said that, at the next meeting, there would be an update on this study.

Leslie passed out a map showing ASLD ownership in the Greater Southlands area, which would be included in their draft conceptual land use plan. Leslie explained the process of ASLD's draft conceptual land use plan. She said that the first phase in their land planning process is to identify the physical land constraints in the area are physical including slope, hydrology, and infrastructure. She noted that they are not concerned about local land use plans, zoning, or conservation plans at this stage. Leslie said that ASLD's second planning phase involves land use planning. This second step will not start until July. She said that the City has been meeting monthly with ASLD and can provide an update to the TAC at their next meeting.

She said that the Southeast Arterial Roadway Plan has been sent to jurisdictions for approval. Leslie said that language addressing the TAC's recommendations for wildlife-friendly roadways has been drafted by the City and sent to Pima Association of Governments (PAG). Leslie said that PAG was open to inserting TAC recommended language in the document.

Leslie said the planning area for the Southlands is going to be expanded, increasing the planning area by approximately three fold. She said that the Tucson Airport Authority (TAA) is starting a NEPA process for constructing a new runway. She said that they are willing to coordinate with the HCP. She said that the University of Arizona is interested in being a partner in the HCP for their Science and Technology Park north of Interstate 10. She said that Davis Monthan Air Force Base are interested in coordinating with the HCP planning effort as well because they are looking into open space land acquisition for their paddle. She said that since federal funds are involved in that land acquisition, the City could not receive mitigation credit for any conservation efforts in this area. However, this land could help maintain connectivity of PPC populations to the north.

Leslie said for the new Greater Southlands planning area, the TAC will have to go back to square one with the target species list. For example, lesser long nosed-bat, the talus snail and several fish might now need to be included. Leslie asked the TAC how they wanted to go about doing this, if they wanted to follow the same process. Marit suggested Leslie take the first stab, then let the TAC review this list at the next TAC meeting. Guy suggested that if there are any species are in question, to include them.

Leslie said that she wants to do a presentation to USFWS and AGFD at the beginning of the year in order to generate new ideas and tap into local expertise. Leslie said there have been suggestions to do presentations to the Cienega Creek Conservation Council as well. Leslie said that with the expanded planning area, it might be a good idea to increase the number of seats on the TAC. Leslie suggested that the TAC take another field trip to see the expanded area next year. Karen Sims was suggested as a good contact to include on the tour. Leslie said that she would gather the Cienega Creek species lists and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lists. Leslie said the TAC should provide comments to the preliminary draft HCP conservation programs.

Leslie moved on to discussing the future of the Santa Cruz River planning area. She said the future of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers river restoration projects is uncertain. Leslie said the three Army Corps plans are in three different planning stages. Leslie passed out copies of the preferred alternative for the Paseo de las Iglesias project. She said that the Army Corps recently released the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Paseo de las Iglesias. Rich noted that Congress would also be looking at designating the Santa Cruz River as a natural heritage area. Leslie said that the Tres Rios restoration plan is mainly in Marana. The Army Corps is working on draft EIS for this plan. She said that the El Rio Medio restoration plan was kicked off this summer and just had a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment completed. Leslie said the City would hold a public involvement meeting on January 18. Leslie said that many are frustrated due to the lack of local involvement in the Army Corps plan. Leslie said the proposed natural resource Advisory Committee could work on developing a local alternative in case the Army Corps does not get funding. Leslie said that the intent is for the HCP committees to have an ex-officio seat on this committee. Leslie said would provide updates on this committee at the next TAC meeting.

Cathy asked about the HCP timeline. Leslie said the preliminary draft HCP will be wrapped up at the end of the year and presented to Mayor and Council at the beginning of next year. Leslie said that Phase 2 would go to June 2007. She said the goals for Phase 2 would be to get close to finalizing the Avra Valley HCP planning area. Leslie suggested inviting Karen to give a presentation to the TAC about the Cienega Creek National Conservation Area.

4) Call to the Public

No call to the public was made

5) Next Steps/Future Meetings

Leslie said she would email out to the TAC a list of items that will be the focus in Phase 2 of the HCP. The TAC decided to shorten their meetings, but continue meeting twice a month in Phase 2. They opted to change to meeting on Wednesdays at 3-5pm. The next meeting is scheduled for January 25 at the AGFD Conference Room.