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## Wildlife Linkages Working Group

### Minutes of September 12, 2008, Meeting

#### **Committee Members**

Ann Audrey, COT Office of Conservation & Sustainability  
Charles Barclay, ADOT  
Rafael Cancino, Town of Sahuarita  
Jennifer Christelman, Town of Marana  
Rick Ellis, PCDOT, Chair  
Janice Przybyl, Sky Island Alliance  
Janine Spencer, Town of Marana (alt.)  
Phil Trenary, Town of Oro Valley

#### **Public/Agencies**

Lisa Hayes, UA  
Mark Holden, PC Planning  
Shawn Lowery, AZGFD  
Ray Schweinsburg, AZGFD  
John Windes, AZGFD

#### **Staff**

Dick Davis  
Dennis Dickerson  
Jim DeGrood  
Joan Reedy  
Steve Matthews

#### **1. Call to Order and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order by Rick Ellis at 9:02 a.m. and introductions were made.

#### **2. Approval of Minutes of Aug. 8, 2008**

**Motion was made by Jennifer Christelman, seconded by Phil Trenary, to approve the minutes of Aug. 8, 2008. Approved unanimously.**

#### **3. In-Kind Contribution Form**

Dennis Dickerson passed around the in-kind form for member participation.

#### **4. RTA Update**

Jim DeGrood, Pima Association of Governments' (PAG), Director of Transportation Services, distributed a letter for information from a concerned citizen regarding the wildlife that would be affected due to the La Canada project.

Through a PowerPoint presentation Mr. DeGrood reviewed updates of the RTA projects. He reported that to date the Board approved 241 projects with \$273.9 million project funding. A total of 48 projects are now completed and of those completed they came in 18.2 percent under the requested amount. Mr. DeGrood said they have 28 projects currently under way.

In terms of where the overall RTA categorical projects are, Mr. DeGrood said they have programmed only 2.92 per cent of the transportation-related Critical Wildlife Linkages. Mr. DeGrood said the RTA 2010 categorical program fund allocation for Wildlife Linkages is \$8 million.

HANDOUTS: Peggy Genova, letter re: Wild Life Corridor at Orange Grove and La Canada, Ranch House Estates lot 6, Aug. 16, 2008

POWERPOINT: "RTA Projects Update," Jim DeGrood, Sept. 12, 2008

## **5. Remarks from the Chair**

Rick Ellis reported that no proposed projects were brought forward for this meeting. Ann Audrey said the City of Tucson met with AGFD this week to talk about roadkill surveys with relation to the southern part of Houghton Road widening area. The City of Tucson may be bringing a proposal to this group in October.

## **6. Proposal Review and Updates**

NONE

## **7. Wildlife Workshop Update**

Janice Przybyl shared her observations of the Paul Beier wildlife workshop. Mr. Beier presented the Tortolita Linkages from Santa Catalina to the Tortolitas. Mr. Beier came up with five alternative linkage designs to the initial proposed design and wants to present those and get more feedback. Ms. Przybyl said the Pima County region was well represented at the meeting.

There will be a follow-up meeting on Monday, Oct. 27, from 2 – 4 p.m. at the Pima County Natural Resources building on River Road. (Anyone interested in attending this meeting needs to contact Janice Przybyl).

Ann Audrey said the feedback from the City of Tucson was that there is a need for more information that would be useful to planners, like plat and subdivision areas; the trajectory of the land use was not incorporated in the first cut of the model. Ms. Przybyl said Mr. Beier, a biologist, was glad to receive that point of interest.

Ray Schweinsburg mentioned the need to assess a wildlife choke point at Hwy. 77.

Phil Trenary would like to present information about the choke point at Hwy. 77 at the October meeting. The Town of Oro Valley has been studying the proposed annexation area of Arroyo Grande and how it reflects on wildlife. Phil would like to invite Scott Nelson, the main person in charge of the Oro Valley study, to brief the Working Group. Jim DeGrood remarked that the chock point on Hwy 77 might be an ideal location for a constructed wildlife crossing project funded by the RTA. Mr. Trenary said it could be a joint Town of Oro Valley, ADOT, Pima County project.

## **8. Informal Technical Group Comments**

Mr. Ellis skipped this item due to the absence of Kerry Baldwin.

## **9. Presentation by Lisa Haynes**

Lisa Haynes, University of Arizona, works at the Wildcat Research and Conservation Unit within the School of Natural Resources. Ms. Haynes gave a presentation on her research and identified the goals of the research. Ms. Haynes noted that she has submitted a grant request to the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) Wildlife Conservation Fund and is considering a proposal to submit for RTA Wildlife funding.

Ms. Haynes noted that Florida Panthers are constrained by urbanization to the point where roadkill is their highest source of mortality. Ms. Haynes said that might be a template for what might happen here.

Ms. Hayes explained that mountain lions have extremely large range areas, especially in this eco-system. Home ranges are as large as 600 square miles for an adult male. Intact landscapes are needed to ensure their survival. Juvenile male mountain lions are programmed to leave their group, often traveling very long distances. If they don't leave, they may be killed by the dominant adult male.

Ms. Haynes said they are interested in determining where these big cats go, how they move across this landscape and understand the genetics of the cats to conserve the gene pool. Another aspect is to look at design and construction of structures; taking measures like fencing, testing and adaptive management.

Ms. Haynes concluded her formal presentation and responded to questions.

Rick Ellis questioned the appropriateness of using RTA funds for research studies.

Jim DeGrood also conveyed that there is some frustration that no projects are being recommended by the Working Group. If we look at the amount of money that has been programmed, there hasn't been much programmed to date in terms of dollars. \$45 million dollars are available over the 20-year plan and we programmed 2.92 percent. For all of the other categories, there is substantially more programmed at this point. There is a real desire to see construction projects

moving forward. A research concept with design and construction elements in it would be better received by the RTA Board than a research-only project. It is recognized that there is high animal mortality on corridors such as Picture Rocks Road, yet there are no project plans advancing at this point.

Ann Audrey said that she feels that \$45 million is a drop in the bucket over a 20-year period compared to what some of these other projects are allocated and that going slow and making sure that money is well spent is conservative and a justifiable way to proceed. There will be more projects than there is money to pay for the project coming forward in the next 20 years. Ann would like this group to give a formal presentation to the higher level RTA groups to communicate issues that are unique to this pot of money compared to other pots of money.

Dennis Dickerson commented that there is probably an opportunity to do some research as long as it melded in with some practical benefit. Dennis gave an example of a mountain lion trying to get from point A to point B. You don't have to build a \$20 million overpass if that particular mountain lion may never use because it doesn't know it's there. You can alternatively use active intervention, e.g., where roadkill is happening at a very high rate for certain species. It may be possible to replenish those species actively through breeding programs.

Phil Trenary noted the void with what we know and what we don't know. He supports studies at crossings. However, there needs to be a strong link to transportation to support use of RTA funds.

Janice Przybyl stated that she would like to see us be more proactive. For specific projects the RTA has already identified, research may be needed before we even get into the design phase.

Jennifer Christelman agreed that the RTA should be doing those studies now so projects can be built and not have barriers. Ms. Christelman asked Ms. Haynes if they have some information on the existing areas where there are obstacles? Ms. Haynes said both UA and AGFD have bits and pieces of roadkill data, as well as the local people and wildlife managers, but it needs to be compiled.

Dennis asked if there was anything unique about the area where the young lion was killed that would have predicted that outcome? If that location was not special in some way, then it would have been very difficult to change the outcome by installing some physical structure to promote connectivity. Ms. Haynes responded by indicating that information is what is needed.

Ray Schweinsburg added that animals select specific areas for crossing so there are definable areas that you can place structures. However, the bigger picture is being missed. We don't know how mule deer and mountain lions are moving across the landscape relative to the connectivity, and research hasn't even been on the radar until the last 2 to 4 years. The problem is immense if you look at the population growth.

Ann Audrey noted that this is feedback on how we can make this more practical and acceptable to the RTA committees. We have to push the scientific community and force short-term feedback that we can start to use.

Rick Ellis said we need to stop saying I need a little more time and just go with it. Ann Audrey said she wants this group to be involved with the presentation to RTA and possibly help to do it.

Dennis Dickerson said the Environmental Planning Advisory Committee (EPAC), a PAG committee, at its Sept. 5 meeting, authorized the establishment of a Wildlife Task Force to discuss wide-ranging issues regarding wildlife. The first meeting will likely be Friday, Oct. 3. It is specifically non-RTA project oriented. Anyone interested in participating is welcome.

POWERPOINT: University of Arizona Wild Cat Research and Conservation Unit, School of Natural Resources, by Lisa Haynes.

## **10. Future Agenda Items**

Standing Item for Proposals  
Update on the Working Group – Kerry Baldwin  
Scott Nelson Presentation on Proposal on Arroyo Grande  
Status of RTA Wildlife Projects  
Summary of Town of Sahuarita Research Findings: What species were found and where they are crossing – Rafael Cancino

## **11. Call to the Audience**

On behalf of the Town of Sahuarita, Rafael Cancino thanked the committee for providing them with funds to do the study of Sahuarita Road. They have received the final report on the study and are in the process of evaluating it. Once they provide those finding to their engineers, they can incorporate some of those changes. For phase II they are partnering with Pima County as well as ADOT to include additional roads so it will increase the size of the study. They will bring a request to the Working Group once they come to an agreement.

## **12. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Rick Ellis at 10:37 a.m.